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Kanadský literárny regionalizmus: Manitoba a južné Ontário v diele Margaret Laurencovej a Alice Munroovej

Canadian Literary Regionalism: Rural Ontario and Manitoba Prairies in the Works of Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence

BAKALÁŘSKA PRÁCE

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Abstrakt

Táto bakalárska práca sa zaoberá využitím regiónov v diele dvoch uznávaných kanadských autoriek 20. storočia, Margaret Laurencovej a Alice Munroovej. Na bližšiu analýzu som si vybrala Laurencovej román *The Diviners* (1974) *(Hledači pramenů*), ktorý uzatvára jej Manawaka cyklus piatich románov, a Munroovej prvú zbierku poviedok *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). Kanadské romány Laurencovej sa odohrávajú v malom fiktívnom mestečku Manawaka v manitobskej prérii, ktoré je podobné jej rodisku. Munroová, ktorá je spájaná s tzv. juhoontárijskou gotikou, nás zavedie do niekoľkých malých miest v južnom Ontáriu. Keďže obe autorky uspeli so svojou literatúrou aj mimo Kanady, je na mieste zvážiť či ich diela môžeme považovať nejakým spôsobom za zreteľne kanadské.

V súčasnosti kanadské štúdia považujú regionalizmus za jeden z charakteristických znakov Kanady. Úvod tejto práce hovorí o tom, že v tak etnicky a geograficky rôznorodej krajine ako je Kanada prirodzene neexistuje jednotná národná kanadská identita alebo záujmy. Prvé, čo nám napadá pri téme kanadských regiónov je geografické rozdelenie na provincie a teritóriá, avšak to nie je jediný možný prístup - ak by sme chceli skúmať jazyk alebo podnebie Kanady, vznikli by nám odlišné regióny. Kritička Beverly Rasporichová tvrdí, že umelci často interpretujú svoje regióny tak, že z nich vytvárajú mýtické, subjektívne a priam až imaginárne sféry, ktoré sú odrazom ich osobného pohľadu na svet.

V druhej kapitole sa práca zameriava na regionalizmus v kontexte kanadskej literatúry, konkrétne tým ako geografia krajiny ovplyvňuje fantáziu autorov. Tiež sa venuje porovnaniu tzv. formálneho regionalizmu, ktorý skúma región čisto z geografického hľadiska, a považuje ho za najvplyvnejší element na vývoj ľudskej identity. Druhý prístupom, ktorý je viac komplexný, zahŕňa iné aspekty, zároveň však trieští regióny na ešte menšie mikroregióny. Ďalej kapitola upozorňuje na to, že nie každý text spätý s nejakým miestom je regionálnym, a poskytuje krátky prehľad regionalizmu naprieč históriou kanadskej literatúry.

Tretia kapitola je venovaná Margaret Laurenovej a románu *The Diviners*. Analýza Manawaky sa zmeriava na to, ako jej topografia odráža morálne hodnoty a sociálnu hierarchiu mesta. Druhá časť sa zaoberá tým, ako Laurencová prezentuje Métis rodinu, ktorá býva na periférii Manawaky, preto stručne zhŕňam pár historických momentov, ktoré sú nevyhnutné pre porozumenie niektorých aspektov románu. Analýza skúma ako román zobrazuje pretrvávajúce problémy týchto ľudí, a upozorňuje na europocentrizmus v interpretácii kanadskej histórie. Štvrtá kapiola je venovaná Alice Munroovej a juhoontárijskej gotike, podžánru, ktorý je podobný Južanskej Gotike v americkej literatúre. Analýza jej poviedok,

Walker Brothers Cowboy," "A Time of Death," "Sunday Afternoon," "Boys and Girls," and "The Peace of Utrecht" nám ukazuje ako Munroová prepája južné Ontario s tradičnými gotickými elementmi v súčasnej literatúre.

Kľúčové slová: kanadská literatúra, regionalizmus, Kanada, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, juhoontárijská gotika

Abstract

The BA thesis deals with the use of region in the works of two renowned Canadian authors of the 20th century, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro. For my analysis I have chosen Laurence's novel *The Diviners* (1974), the final work in her Manawaka sequence, and Alice Munro's first published collection of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). Laurence sets her Canadian novels primarily in Manawaka, a small prairie town based her own hometown. Munro, who is largely associated with Southern Ontario Gothic, takes us to several towns in southwestern Ontario. Since both authors have successfully been published outside of Canada I also discuss whether their works are distinctly Canadian in any way.

Contemporary Canadian studies recognize regionalism as one of the defining features of the country. In the introduction, I touch on the lack of uniform identity, experience and interests in a country as ethnically and geographically diverse as Canada. Although the first thing that comes to mind in relation to Canadian regions, is the division of the country into provinces and territories, it is not the only way to approach regionalism - the country could be divided into different regions if we were to focus on language or climate. Beverly Rasporich proposes the view that artists serve as "active creators of place," and their depictions of a region can be "mythic," "subjective" or "imaginary constructs filtered through a personal vision".

In Chapter 2, the thesis focuses on regionalism in Canadian literary context. It comments on how the different Canadian regions can affect the imagination of a writer, and contrasts formal regionalism, which regards geographical location as the primary influence on one's identity, with its more complex counterpart that takes into account other aspects. It also explains that not every text associated with a place is regionalist by default, and then provide a brief overview of regionalist writing in Canadian literature throughout its short history.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to Margaret Laurence and her novel *The Diviners.* I analyze the prairie town, Manawaka, as a moralized landscape that mirrors the values and social hierarchy of the town. I provide a short summary of how the Métis emerged as a distinct ethnic group, and some information about the Red River Rebellion, essential to understand some aspects of the *The Diviners.* In my analysis, I examine the Tonnerre family that portrays ongoing issues of this peoples in Canada, and draws attention to Eurocentric accounts of Canadian history. Chapter 4 focuses on Alice Munro and Southern Ontario Gothic, a subgenre similar to American Southern Gothic. The analysis of her stories "Walker Brothers Cowboy," "The Time of Death," "Sunday Afternoon," "Boys and Girls," and "The Peace of Utrecht" shows

how she weaves southern Ontario landscape into her narratives, and combines it with some traditional Gothic elements.

Key words: Canadian literature, Canadian regionalism, Canada, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Southern Ontario Gothic

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1 Introduction

"Even if the world is shrinking, it is difficult to imagine a Canada without regional identities, however multifaceted and transformational."[1]

Discussing national identity of a country as vast and as diverse as Canada is a challenging task. In his essay "Visions of Canada: A Brief History of Writing on the Canadian Character and the Canadian Identity," Jack Bumsted traces the visions public figures have had for the country since its earliest days, and if one thing in this matter is clear, it is that there has never been any clear-cut, single version of Canadian nationalism or identity.[2] Moreover, Canada takes pride in being a diverse cultural mosaic, so overtime it has only become, and will likely always remain, a very peculiar matter of discussion. Back in 1995, journalist Richard Gwyn actually claimed that Canada is the first "postmodern state, a state without any defining national identity whatsoever."[3]

Beverly Rasporich's chapter in *A Passion for Identity* explains the two ways in which the question of Canadian identity can be approached: the first option is to consider the country as a whole, and focus on those matters that are pertinent to the national interest. The other option is to concentrate on individual problems and attitudes one region at a time. As Rasporich claims, the development of regional identities has led to a "contemporary postmodern reality"[4] where parts may be greater than the whole, for local culture, problems, and politics all play a major role in the shaping of citizens' sense of self.[5] One of the very first expressions of the consciousness of dual identity dates back to 1864 when Joseph Howe proclaimed: "I am not one of those who thank God I am a Nova Scotian merely, for I am a Canadian as well."[6] It shows that the sense of belonging to a specific region has been important since the country's early days, but it does not trump the sense of belonging to the nation as a whole. Rather, individual regional experience is what contributes to the diversity of Canadian national identity.

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[1] Beverly Rasporich, "Regional Identities: Introduction," *A Passion for Identity*, ed. Beverly Rasporich, David Taras (Scarborough: Nelson, 2001) 293.

[2] Jack Bumsted, "Visions of Canada: A Brief History of Writing on the Canadian Character and the Canadian Identity," *A Passion for Identity*, ed. Beverly Rasporich, David Taras (Scarborough: Nelson, 2001) 17.

[3] Bumsted, 32.

[4] Rasporich, 293

[5] Rasporich, 293.

[6] Rasporich 294.

Rasporich explains that since the foundation of the confederation in 1867, there has always been a certain amount of tension between nation and region. It became a pivotal question especially in the 1990's with the second Quebec referendum that could have broken up the country. Later, in the early 2000's, the Canadian Alliance emerged hoping to reduce the competencies of central government. In spite of this, Canadian faith in compatibility of federalism and regionalism has persisted.[7]

In her essay "Contemporary Canadian Art: Locating Identity," Christin Sowiak quotes a distinguished cultural historian, Maria Tippet, who expressed her concern about the state of contemporary Canadian arts at the beginning of this millennium: "It is virtually impossible for writers, artists, musicians, and others to speak with one voice."[8] Sowiak dismisses calls for a unified Canadian voice as "impossibly utopian and undesirable"[9] because with so much diversity, Canadian art offers many peculiar voices - whether related, clashing or overlapping, they complete the artistic mosaic of Canada. If we regard history as a tool that helps us define a nation, then art history, equally important as social and political history, should not attempt to teach a narrative common to all in a country like Canada, for it would be a very limited one. Rather, it should aim to chronicle "the courses and anti-courses of the nation's stories."[10]

Furthermore, Rasporich notes that the term region is very complex, and Canada can be divided into regions in various ways. Nowadays even Toronto can be regarded as a region unto itself. However, what comes to mind first is the geographical division of the country into 10 provinces and 3 territories. The study of these can be then also approached in several different ways, e.g. in relation to the environment and climate, culture or language.[11]

According to Rasporich, for artists specifically, a region may be "highly subjective," "mythic," even an "unconscious subject, or an imaginary construct, rooted in an actual place but filtered through a personal vision." [12] Thus, she concludes, artists serve as active creators of place, and we, as the receptors of their art, see Canada through their eyes but simultaneously, we gain our own experience of the country.[13]

The lack of a uniform national voice is related to Canadian literature as well. Since there is no single Canadian identity or experience, there cannot be a concise literary tradition. As

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[7] Rasporich, 294.
[8] Christine Sowiak, "Contemporary Canadian Art: Locating Identity," *A Passion for Identity*, ed. Beverly Rasporich, David Taras (Scarborough: Nelson, 2001) 251.
[9] Sowiak, 251.
[10] Sowiak, 251.
[11] Rasporich, 294
[12] Rasporich, 295.
[13] Rasporich 295.

the brief overview of regional writing in Chapter 2 shows, literary regionalism is a way of capturing the diversity of the country, and relating it to the wide spectrum of what it means to be Canadian.

This thesis studies the works of two respected Canadian writers of the twentieth century, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence. Both authors have created memorable, mythological settings inspired by their hometowns, for which they are commonly associated with regionalism. While most of Munro's short stories capture the realities of ordinary life in rural southwestern Ontario, Laurence's novels are set in an imaginary town in the Manitoba prairie. Yet they are realists whose focus is on truthful depiction of human, predominantly female, experience in the twentieth century.

Laurence's Manawaka cycle consists of five novels set in the fictional town of Manawaka, the home of Scottish and Ukrainian immigrants, and one Métis family. Laurence herself has referred to the town as a microcosm that is vividly complex despite its small size. Its complexity is most obvious in the final novel of the sequence, *The Diviners* (1974), which I have chosen to focus on in this thesis.

The Diviners is Laurence's most autobiographical novel, which follows the life of an orphaned protagonist, Morag Gunn. She grows up a social outcast in Manawaka, and then leaves the small town to find herself in cities in and outside of Canada, only to realize that the small prairie town is her true home. While I do touch on some issues related to Morag's search for identity, I focus largely on Laurence's representation of the Métis peoples. Morag's life intersects with the local family, the Tonnerres. Morag develops a relationship with one of the Tonnerre boys, which continues intermittently in their adulthood. Through the bond of these two characters, Laurence draws attention to the persisting prejudice against the Métis, who, though now living in communities across Canada, are typically associated with Manitoba because of the Red River Rebellion. Furthermore, Laurence raises questions related to Canada's colonial history, such as Eurocentric narratives of historical events, and the significance of cultural heritage that majority of Canadians carry with them.

Munro had acquired international readership even before the Nobel Prize was awarded to her in 2013, though it certainly made her even more popular. She is acknowledged as one of the best contemporary writes of the short story, and as one of the most prominent writers of the Southern Ontario Gothic, a subgenre of the Gothic associated with the portrayal of the dark side of seemingly mundane, small-town life. The subgenre emerged as the Canadian counterpart to American Southern Gothic.

In her fiction, Munro has founded several southwestern Ontario towns inhabited primarily by descendants of British and Irish settlers, and mythologized the region as Wawanash County. To analyze her use of region in her works, I have chosen 4 stories from her first collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968): "A Time of Death" portrays a domestic accident that kills a toddler, "Sunday Afternoon" shows class differences, "Boys and Girls," highlights social conditioning of children into desired gender roles, and "The Peace of Utrecht" depicts two sisters still anguished by their dead mother. Munro's protagonists are effectively modern-day Gothic heroines, haunted not by mythical menacing creatures, but the realities of their life.

Both authors are women, realists, and the works I have chosen for analysis were published only 6 years apart. My aim is to compare how the two authors use their native regions in literature, i.e. whether they are mere locations, or rather complex, social spaces that contribute to the narrative. Furthermore, since both authors have gained international readership that connects with their writing, it is apt to discuss how, if at all, their works manifest themselves as distinctly Canadian.

2 Regionalism in Canada

2.1 Regionalism in Canadian Literary Context

Many scholars view regionalism as a defining feature of modern day Canada. As Janice Fiamengo writes in "Regionalism and Urbanism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, George Woodcock voiced the assertion that Canadian literary tradition is rooted in regionalism, which allows it to evolve in different ways all over the country.[14] Northrop Frye, another influential Canadian critic and theorist, emphasized the effects of one's surroundings on the creative imagination. In Canadian context it means that the imagination of an author from the mountainous landscape of northern British Columbia is bound to be wired differently than that of someone from coastal Nova Scotia, or the prairie of Saskatchewan. Even though these are widely accepted views in contemporary Canadian studies, in periods when Canadian nationalism was intensifying, regionalism was thought to be negative, fragmentary, and, as E. K. Brown argued, favoring "the superficial"[15] over the universal. However, with globalization threatening national distinctions, and the faith in a united national narrative on the decline, the uniqueness of Canada's regions became a point of major critical interest.[16]

Fimengo explains the two main approaches to the study of regions. Proponents of the so-called *formal regionalism* believe geographical location to be the primary influence on one's identity. However, most contemporary literary theorists consider other aspects. By including historical, social and cultural dynamics, we are able to identify differences within regions, and understand them in a complex manner. At the same time, the second approach leads us to understanding regions as social spaces, rather than strictly geographical, but it also shatters them into more microregions. Prince Edward Island has very little in common with other regions of Atlantic Canada, and the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia is known for its fruit orchards and wineries, a contrast to the stereotypical picture of alpine wilderness.[17]

It is important to remember that not every text tied to a certain region is necessarily considered regional in literary theory. Fiamengo defines regional literature as one that depicts

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[14] Janice Fiamengo, "Regionalism and Urbanism," *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) [Online] *Literature Online*, ProQuest. No Page.
[15] Fiamengo.
[16] Fiamengo
[17] Fiamengo

regional experience while also employing "details of geography to assert the value of the particular."[18] For example, Fiamengo explains that Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) is concerned with the geography and customs in the area of modern-day Peterborough, Ontario. However, as an immigrant, she intended the book to serve as a guide for other Britons thinking of immigrating to Canada, and for that reason she is not thought to be an early regionalist writer. Similarly, despite its detailed focus on Halifax, Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941) is usually not categorized as a regional novel because, as Fiamengo explains, it portrays the city as a representative of Canada unable to free herself from the dominance of Europe.[19] As Fiamengo summarizes it, regional writing depends not only on the portrayal of place but a minute "accent of perspective"[20] plays a very significant role as well.

Beverly Rasporich provides another view on the use of region in literature. In her book on Munro, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro*, she proclaims that the power of region in literature depends on the author's ability to use it. She also warns that a literary representation of a region can never be a "literal transcription" but only its "reconstruction."[21] According to her, "regional" is merely "an outsider's term"[22] because the insider, i.e. the writer, can only write about life as they know it, and their home region is "the starting point of [her] human and aesthetic understanding."[23]

2.2 Regions in Canadian Literature Throughout History

2.2.1 Poetry

Fiamengo explains that Canadian landscape poetry of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries employed details of local geography and industry in an attempt to induce feelings of pride in local audiences. For example, one of the most important early poems is Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains* (1789), which connects the field on which General Wolfe died with freedom of French Canadians. Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* (1825) provides a history of agriculture as well as a summary of social problems of a village in Nova Scotia. While the earliest poems are still too attached to European literary traditions to be regarded as proper examples of Canadian regional poetry, they manifest another important trait of

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[18] Fiamengo.

[19] Fiamengo.

[20] Fiamengo

[21] Beverly Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1990) 138. [hencefoth, *Dance*]

[22] Rasporich, *Dance* 138.

[23] Rasporich, *Dance,* 138.

regional writing - to some extent, it is a form land claim, which can be manifested through the writer's political views or their use of language and imagination.[24]

Poetry of the post-Confederation sought emotional and spiritual fulfillment in nature, much like the poetry of European Romanticism. Charles G. D. Roberts contemplates the scenery of his childhood in *Tantramar Revisited* (1886), which is often regarded as the first masterpiece of Canadian regional poetry. E. J. Pratt's later poems attempt to be nationalist but in his early lyrics poetry, he portrays humans as "an extension"[25] of the land they inhabit.

2.2.2 Fiction

Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) is undoubtedly one of the most popular novels by a Canadian author - the spunky heroine remains a favorite of both children and adults worldwide. Yet, Montgomery and other writers of Canadian local-color novels have received little critical attention because of the strong association with juvenile literature and pop culture. *Anne of Green Gables,* Filamengo explains, is a local-color novel, or in other words a regional idyll - it presents a faraway rural place as ideal, emphasizing its relation to one's spiritual fulfillment, and character development. Perhaps she deserves more attention considering that both Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro refer to her as an important influence on their writing.[26]

From the 1920's on, prairie realism developed and sparked a great amount of academic response. It is a form of realism that uses recurrent images of the flat, grassy landscape with its sweeping wind, and distant horizon: "The literature of the Canadian prairies reflects the geographical nature of the west [...], geography and climate dominate the imagination of the prairie artist."[27] Martha Ostenso, Sinclair Ross, Frederick Philip Grove, Robert Stead and W. O. Mitchell have all been praised for their contemplations of how one's surrounding landscape imprints itself into human consciousness, and thus for producing literature that portrays the prairie as a state of mind rather than a simple geographical fact.[28] However, the recurrence of the melancholic image of a vast, empty and windy land has been a target of some critics such as Alison Calder who objects that the prairie in their novels was being uniformly presented as "oppressive, life-denying, and harsh," and its diversity obscured.[29]

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[24] Fiamengo.
[25] Fiamengo.
[26] Fiamengo.
[27] Colin Hill, *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012) 237.
[28] Fiamengo.
[29] Fiamengo.

Their successors, Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetsch, took Canadian prairie realism to new, experimental directions. Laurence's Manawaka cycle, that will be analyzed in more depth later, with its non-linear narrative techniques, and social as well as psychological complexity, is often regarded as the pinnacle of prairie realism. Kroetsch's novels of the so-called Out West Tryptych uses recognizable historical figures and events, parody of regional stereotypes, and typical symbols of the horse and the buffalo. He captures the mythical nature of Alberta landscape, and in his later works he even includes trickster myths of Canada's First Nations. The result is an intertext that makes it impossible for the reader to infer one uniform prairie identity.[30]

Experimental realism thrived throughout the 1960's and 1970's but since then referential approach with elements of the Gothic, magic realism and fable has dominated. Authors of Atlantic Canada in particular capture the tough realities of economic survival and social change brought about by the decline of fishing industry, while magic realism is associated primarily with British Columbia.[31]

2.3 Urbanism

Most authors mentioned above set their stories in remote, rural places with little economic or political power. Understandably, it may seem that Canadian regionalism stands against the main urban centers: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver. However, as we mentioned earlier, even Toronto can be examined as an independent region as cities, too, have their own centres and peripheries, and they contain a great variety of cultures and social classes.

Like small-town fiction, early urban texts often reflected the effects of the Depression. A frequent concern of contemporary urban fiction in Canada is the fast, shallow lifestyle and the anxiety caused by capitalism. Authors such as Zsuzsi Gartner or Douglas Coupland, who portray Vancouver of the 1990's affected by materialism, prove that a city does not guarantee the experience of centrality and influence.[32] Just like the vastness of the prairie, urban spaces can evoke strong feelings of geographical belonging but also alienation and powerlessness.

2.4 Small-Town Tales

As the brief overview of Canadian regionalist literature shows, Laurence and Munro are only two among numerous authors who use the small town setting in their works. In her study *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, Clara Thomas mentions the importance of

[30] Fiamengo.
[31] Fiamengo.
[32] Fiamengo.

small towns in Canadian history and literature. As she writes, the very first villages served as fortresses in the unknown vastness, usually on fertile land and along the railway. Up until the second decade of the twentieth century, new settlements thrived but the First World War and later on the Depression depleted them as the young fled away, and authors reflect these historical events in their writing. Those writing throughout the nineteenth and in early twentieth centuries, such as Adeline Teskey and Patrick Slater, present sentimental, utopian depictions. Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) combine realism with irony and satire, and literature of the 1920's steers toward dark and bitter representations of life marked by the violence of World War I.

Thomas points out that the formation of towns allowed for social growth but it also led to the assignment of social roles and a hierarchy of relationships. In closed communities, people are more likely to be seen from a particular, set-in-stone point of view. Stereotypically, everybody dies famous in a small town because people know one another to some extent, and this shared knowledge tends to carry more weight than an individual's own words. Writers seem to be drawn to this setting because it is "authentic and manageable, and also highly complex, highly dramatic, and ripe for explorations in the ironical distance between man as he seems to be and man as he really is."[33]

Thomas also quotes Robertson Davies' novel *Fifth Business* to demonstrate another key element of small-town literature. In the scene, in which the townspeople burn an effigy of Wilhelm II to welcome their men back from the war, the narrator proclaims: "Here they were, in this murky, fiery light, happily acquiescent in a symbolic act of cruelty and hatred. I watched them with dismay that mounted toward horror, for these were my own people."[34] This statement creates both a sense of belonging, and the desire not to, but the last three words - *my own people* - carry an important sentiment. Small towns may be conservative and confining but they have a charming sense of community. As Thomas puts it, being recognized as the local outsider is better than having no place at all.[35]

[33] Thomas, 176.
[34] Thomas, 176.
[35] Thomas, 177.

3 Margaret Laurence

Laurence was born as Jean Margaret Wemyss on July 18, 1926 in Neepawa, Manitoba to Robert Wemyss, a WWI veteran of Scottish decent, and Verna Simpson, a pianist and music teacher of Irish descent. At the age of four, Laurence lost her mother unexpectedly to a kidney infection and so her sister, Margaret Simpson, came over from Calgary to take care of the child. As a high school graduate, Simpson ranked first in the province with the highest grades; however, her father believed that university education was not for a young woman to pursue. She became a teacher, and a very respected one - according to an inspector's report, she was especially skilled in teaching literature. She also founded the Neepawa Public Library and did her best to maintain it during the Depression. It comes as no surprise that a special bond was created between the two Margarets - Simpson encouraged Laurence's talent early on, read her works and responded with honesty.

Just like her fictional heroines, Laurence could not wait to leave the small town, and she finally did in 1944 with a scholarship to United College in Winnipeg. She was committed to writing, literature and social causes - an interest interwoven into her fiction as well. The college's liberal environment fostered her rejection of restrictive social systems, and broadened her knowledge of other social issues. It was also a period of literary training that gave her broad understanding of forms and techniques that she would experiment with later. Thomas actually claims that Laurence's dedication to social problems is her "most readily identifiable western Canadian quality."[36]

Following her graduation in 1947, Laurence started writing articles for *The Winnipeg Citizen* - a valuable experience that kept her too busy to work on fiction. A year later, she married Jack Laurence with whom she moved to England in 1949, and then to Africa. They lived in Somaliland and then Ghana until 1957, and, as Thomas puts it, this period finally "released" Laurence's talent. Her African experience is captured in *A Tree for Poverty* (1954)*, The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963), *This Side Jordan* (1960), *The Prohpet's Camel Bell* (1963), Rather than particular events, Laurence paid attention to the harshness of local life, and the different points of view of the people. Furthermore, her fascination with the oral tradition of the Somali people inspired her to tackle the lengthy process of listening, transcribing, and translating their native tales and poetry. As Thomas points out, even then, Laurence must have possessed the discipline of a professional, for this task required adapting to the plain,

[36] Thomas, 16.

descriptive style, whereas Laurence's own has always been known for its richness and intensity.[37]

Writing about Africa might seem too distant from her later Canadian fiction but Thomas explains that it was a way of Laurence's characteristic interest in humanity, for she admired the brave spirit of the Somali and Ghanian people. Even in these works she deals with questions that are core in the Manawaka novels - those of home, exile, and community but she also manifests her curiosity for human endurance that keeps one going through a lifetime of failures and victories with an unchangeable past and an uncertain future.

The family moved back to Canada in 1957, and Laurence separated from her husband in 1962. She then headed back to the UK, where she spent more than 10 years, perhaps in hopes of connecting with the rich literary tradition of the country. Although she visited her homeland quite frequently, it was then and there that she connected with her prairie roots, and finally began writing about Canada.

In his interview with Laurence published in *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, Graeme Gibson asks what the social role of a writer is, if any. Laurence replies that writers should strive to "try and tell as much of [their] own truth as [they] can bear to tell,"[38] but the thing with social reality is that it is bound to vary. She adds that from this point of view, writing in fact becomes a very non-competitive profession as there is room for an unlimited number of truths from various points of view.[39] While she values her readership abroad, she tells Gibson that it is the response of her Canadian audience, *her own people*, she cares for the most because she writes for them, first and foremost.[40]

Still, Laurence herself points out that their reality is bound to be different because of different geographical and cultural conditions across Canada, and acknowledges the two layers of her writing: the universal and the particular. The human dilemmas her heroines deal with can be comprehended regardless of the reader's physical location but the particular, cultural aspects of her fiction are much more challenging for the reader as well as for her. As she says, the response of Canadians is so immensely important to her because it show how authentically her novels speak of reality:

> What you can't fool anybody on is the human dilemma which is totally international and without boundaries. But there is another dimension

[37] Thomas, 30.
[38] Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anasi, 1973) 190.
[39] Gibson, 191.
[40] Gibson, 193.

> of writing - the ancestral thing, the family background, the trueness of the idiom. This is something where only your own people can say yes, you've done it or you haven't done it. The feel of place, the tone of speech, how people say things, the concepts you grow up with, the things that have been handed to you by your parents and grandparents and so on - I have to measure the truthfulness of what I'm saying in these areas against my own people's response.[41]

The critical reception, two Governor General's Awards, a membership of the Order of Canada, and the fact that Laurence's novels are now deemed Canadian classics convey a general agreement that she has succeeded.

3.1. Welcome to Manawaka: A Moralized Landscape

"Margaret Laurence's Manawaka world is Everyman's and Everywoman's but its particularities are emphatically Canadian."[42]

While Canadian literature abounds with memorable small town settings, critics agree that none of them has been as meticulously developed as Laurence's Manawaka, modeled on her hometown of Neepawa, originally a settlement of Scottish pioneers about 200 kilometers northwest of Winnipeg. Nora Stovel writes in *Divining Margaret Laurence* that in 1976, Laurence published a travelogue titled *Heart of a Stranger* in which she chronicles her journey abroad, and emphasizes that Manawaka is not meant to represent Neepawa in particular: "Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all, I like to think, it is simply itself, a town of the mind, my own private world, which one hopes will ultimately relate to the outer world which we all share."[43]

Nevertheless, as Stovel notes, Manawaka actually mirrors the geography and landmarks of Neepawa but Laurence uses slightly different names for them - i.e. Manawaka's Galloping Mountain is actually Riding Mountain, and Clear Lake exists as Diamond Lake in the fictional world. Stovel explains that Manawaka essentially functions as a "moralized

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[41] Gibson, 194.
[42] Thomas, 177.
[43] Nora Stovel, *Divining Margaret Laurence* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2008) 155.

landscape where features of topography symbolize social or moral values,"[44] and compares Laurence to the likes of William Faulkner and Thomas Hardy who have created mythical fictional places out of their hometowns, universalizing human experience through their writing.[45]

As was mentioned earlier, when towns grew, social hierarchies emerged within them, and Laurence embeds them in the town setting. In the Manawaka sequence, Canadian Aboriginal population is represented by the Tonnerres living in the valley but the majority of the townspeople are of Scottish and Ukrainian origin. Rachel Cameron in *A Jest of God* describes the composition of the town as as oil and water, even though both are white Europeans: "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. The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God."[46] As this excerpt shows, differences in the town's cultural environment are felt and acknowledged. To analyze Manawaka as a moralized landscape, we need to focus on how Laurence reflects socio-economic status in the town's topography, particularly the hill, the valley, and Hill Street that links them.

Stovel points out how Vanessa MacLeod, the protagonist of *A Bird in the House*, and the daughter of the local doctor, illustrates the distinctions with the words downright and upright:

> What I did know, however, was that if he [Grandfather Connor] had been any other way he would not have passed muster in Manawaka. He was widely acknowledged as an upright man. It would have been a disgrace if he had been known by the opposite word, which was "downright." A few of my friends had downright grandfathers. They were a deep mortification to their families, these untidy old men who sat on the Bank of Montreal steps in the summertime and spat amber tobacco jets onto the dusty sidewalk. They were described as "downright worthless" or "downright lazy," these two terms being synonymous.[47]

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[44] Stovel, 161.
[45] Stovel, 160.
[46] Margaret Laurence, *A Jest of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 199) 71.
[47] Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 199) 16.

Railway runs through Manawaka, symbolizing the possibility of escape, and connecting the small town with the rest of Canada. According to Stovel, it also marks the class division in the town as Laurence often uses the phrase "wrong side of the tracks" when her characters describe someone's position in the community. In *The Jest of God,* Rachel Cameron says: “This is known as a good part of town. Not like the other side of the tracks, where the shacks are and where the weeds are let grow knee-high and not dutifully mown [...]"[48] The protagonist of *The Diviners*, Morag Gunn, provides the opposite view on the "downright" side of the tracks where she is adopted after her parents' death:

> Hill Street was the Scots-English equivalent of The Other Side of the Tracks, the shacks and shanties at the north end of Manawaka [...]. Hill Street was below the town; it was inhabited by those who had not and never would do good. [...] Hill Street - dedicated to flops, wash-outs, and general no-goods, at least in the view of the town's better-off"[49]

Rachel and Morag's descriptions of their environment demonstrate that the people of Manawaka all have a place in the hierarchy, and what is more, they are aware of it.

The hill overlooking Manawaka is the space reserved for death and decay - the cemetery is adjacent to the local dump, known as the Nuisance Grounds. These two settings frame the whole series, as well: the cemetery opens the first novel *The Stone Angel*, and the dump is an important element of the final one, *The Diviners*. The orphaned protagonist Morag Gunn grows up with a grotesque pair of characters, Christie and Prin Logan. Christie is the town's scavenger who collects garbage and takes it to the dump in the Nuisance Grounds. For the townspeople he is a smelly, "downright" man who is happy to collect their garbage. In her youth Morag, naturally, feels embarrassed but coming back to Manawaka in her forties when he is dying, she realizes that she loves him, and acknowledges that he mastered the role of her father.

In one of his most memorable moments, Christie declares: "By their garbage shall ye know them." (39) As a child, Morag writes down lists of things Christie collects. As Susan J. Warwick notes in *River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's The Diviners*, the lists emphasize the prevalence of British background:

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[48] Stovel, 164.

[49] Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners,* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1985) 28. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

> A blue plush (pl-uush-rich-sounding, but it is really like velvet only cheaper and not so smoo-ooth on the fingers) cushion, with a painted-on picture of Kind Edward the Seventh, a very good china saucer [...], books, old old old books, and one has real leather for the cover, and the letters are in real gold or used to be but now you can hardly see them, and you can't read the book because it is in another language, but Christie says it is the Holy Bible in Gaelic. (41)

Morag herself is a descendant of Scots that left their homeland during the Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries. The space she inhabits highlights her social status - she is an outsider, "on the wrong side of the tracks," but still less so than the Métis family living down in the valley: "Hill Street, so named because it was on one part of the town hill which led down into the valley [...] Christie Logan's house was halfway up the hill, and looked much the same as the other dwellings there." (28) Furthermore, Stovel points out in relation to the Nuisance Grounds that the town sees Morag as white trash and a nuisance so it is only natural that she is brought up by the local scavenger.[50]

Manawaka is confining, and stands in opposition to "the city" - the target of many townspeople, perceived as the space of freedom and opportunities. Morag spends her adolescence waiting for the moment she gets to leave Manawaka behind: "In the night, the rain whistle says Out There Out There Out There," (166) and by her forties, she has lived in cities all over Canada and beyond. In her determined pursuit of higher education, she ventures to Winnipeg, marriage leads her to Toronto, divorce to Vancouver, and finally the desire to take in the vibes of British literary history takes her to London. While in the United Kingdom, she travels to Scotland, the land of her predecessors, only to learn that Canada is her true homeland. Yet, after all of this, she is "terrified" (356) of cities, and settles in a remote farmhouse in rural Ontario.

As Thomas aptly claims, there are several peak moments in Morag's memories but her return to Manawaka is undoubtedly among the most significant ones. Visiting Crombruach, Scotland, she realizes there is no need for her to go to Sutherland, no matter how close it finally is:

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[50] Stovel, 162.

> "I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't, after all."
> "Why would that be?"
> "I don't know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here."
> "What is that?"
> "It's a deep land here, all right," Morag says. "But it's not mine, except a long, long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."
> "What is it, then?"
> "Christie's real country. Where I was born." (390-1)

Back in Manawaka, Christie is 76-years-old and dying. For the funeral, Morag requests a piper, who plays a Scottish folk song, "The Flowers of the Forest," over his grave. Morag's epiphany and this gesture affirm Canada's independence, while acknowledging its colonial ties to Britain.

3.2 The Métis

"The Métis, once lords of the prairies.
Now refused burial space in their own land." (268)

3.2.1 The Métis as a Distinct Ethnic Group

Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been fighting long and hard for their rights and visibility in the country's cultural mosaic. The Métis are one of the three distinct groups recognized nowadays, and, as Emma LaRocque states in "Native Identity and the Metis: Othehpayimsuak Peoples," they are the group that has been defined and redefined, neglected and misperceived the most. Up until the 1970's, the Métis were commonly treated from a narrow Eurocentric perspective as "unpredictable halfbreed individuals without a community who could either be romanticized or demonized."[51]

LaRocque then explains that the emergence of The Métis as a separate ethnic group in Canada is linked to the expansion of fur traders to western Canada during the eighteenth century. Relationships with Aboriginal tribes were crucial since the men needed information

[51] Emma LaRocque, "Native Identity and the Metis: Othehpayimsuak Peoples," *A Passion for Identity*, ed. Beverly Rasporich, David Taras (Scarborough: Nelson, 2001) 381.

and skills for survival. They began marrying Aboriginal women, and as the population grew, and children grew up and married within the community, they were no longer "half-white, half-Aboriginal," but a whole new ethnic group.[52] The word *métis* literally means "mixed-race" in French,[53] and, according to LaRocque, it was first used in the Red River region in Manitoba in the early 1800's.[54]

The Red River Métis are well-known for their political activity led by Louis Riel. Warwick explains that the conflict first erupted in 1811 when the Hudson's Bay Company granted a Métis territory to the Earl of Selkirik who wanted to establish a Scottish agricultural settlement.[55] By 1775, there was a significant number of the Métis population in the West, and by 1850, the land in the area was drained, and buffalo herds were diminishing so people started moving further west again. Moreover, in 1869 the Hudson's Bay Company sold the land to the government, and it officially became a province of Canada in 1870.[56]

To manifest their opposition to the events, the Métis started an organized resistance, led by Riel. They established a provisional government, seized Fort Garry, and executed a white Canadian, Thomas Scott, which fuelled the resentment against them. When the Canadian military reclaimed the fort, Riel fled to the United States but returned in 1885 with a list of the Métis' demands, and established another provisional government in Batoche. Here, however, the Métis and their allies were defeated in 1885, and Riel surrendered. Accused and convicted of treason, he was hanged in November that year.[57]

Around that time buffalo herds had disappeared from the Canadian prairie, a circumstance that propelled many people to move again. Those Métis who decided to stay in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were faced with new challenges relating to their unique racial identity. As Warwick states, they could not claim Aboriginal land because they were not even recognized as a distinct Aboriginal group until 1982.[58] For a very long period in history, the Métis were unwillingly put into an in-between position, sharing features of both white and Aboriginal population but not fitting in with either.

[52] LaRocque, 383-4.
[53] WordReference.com, French-English Dictionary <www.wordreference.com/fren/metis> 15 April 2017.
[54] LaRocque, 384.
[55] Warwick, 56.
[56] Warwick, 57.
[57] Warwick, 57.
[58] Warwick, 58.

3.2.2 Down in the Valley: the Tonnerre Family

The Tonnerres, whose ancestor participated in the Battle of Batoche alongside Riel, are present in *The Stone Angel*, and bits and pieces of their lives are revealed through Vanessa in *A Bird in the House* and Stacey in *The Fire-Dwellers*. In *The Diviners*, Laurence provides the most thorough depiction of their life through Morag who, as a fellow outsider, connects with Jules Tonnerre at school. The fate of his father and siblings is included in the novel, too, but Jules is as central to the whole novel as he is to Morag's character development. Their feelings grow beyond friendship early in their lives but the relationship remains an on-and-off romance though they end up having a daughter Pique. Jules' life ends prematurely, as he, suffering from throat cancer, commits suicide.

In her portrayal of the family, Laurence demonstrates the struggles of the descendants of the Red River Métis in Canadian society of the 20th century. To a large extent, *The Diviners* is a novel concerned with the flow of human life, the weight of one's past, and the meaning of history and myth amidst all of it. The tales that Christie tells Morag are juxtaposed with Jules', thus besides her depiction of socio-economic conditions and cultural aspects of the Métis identity, Laurence also challenges Eurocentric accounts of Canada's historical events. The tales they tell about the Rebellion are not identical, especially in their rendering of Louis Riel.

Once again, Vanessa, the narrator of *A Bird in the House*, provides the perspective of Manawaka's Scottish majority, affirming the Tonnerres' exclusion from both Manawaka and the Cree people in the surrounding area:

> The Tonnerres were French halfbreeds, and among themselves they spoke a *patois* that was neither Cree nor French. Their English was broken and full of obscenities. They did not belong among the Cree of the Galloping Mountain reservation, further north, and they did not belong among the Scots-Irish and Ukrainians of Manawaka, either. [59]

When Morag first ventures into the valley by herself, she describes the setting as a "spooky" (125) and "eerie" (125) "jungle of unnamed unknown bushes" (125). Their dwelling is a mere shack in a clearing:

> The Tonnerre shack is really a collection of shacks. The original one has now decayed and is used as a chicken house. The main shack has

[59] Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, 108.

> been put together with old planks of tarpaper, the lids of wooden crates, some shingles and flattened pieces of tin. Around it lie old tires, a roll of chickenwire, the chassis of a rusted car, and an assortment of discarded farm machinery. (137)

All of this creates a dimension of nature and disorder, a contrast to the otherwise organized town.

The mother has left the family to work as a housekeeper, so the children - Jules, Piquette, Valentine, Paul and Jacques - are brought up in the valley by their father, Lazarus Tonnerre, By the end of the novel, everyone except Jacques has died. The deaths of Piquette, Valentine and Paul occur under different circumstances, in different parts of Canada but all point to very common contemporary issues Aboriginal communities deal with. Paul disappears under suspicious circumstances, which leads the family to believe he was killed. Pique dies in the valley when the stove sets the shack on fire but she struggles with drugs and alcohol, just like Valentine, who dies on the streets of Vancouver as a prostitute. Laurence uses the character of Valentine to manifest how widespread the struggles of the Aboriginal peoples are since her death counters the notion of the city as the space of hope for a better life than the one possible in Manawaka.

In one his songs, Jules describes Lazarus as "the king of Nothing, [...] sometimes on Relief, [he was] permanent on grief." (427) Even though he spent his whole life raising children in the valley, the town confirms their exclusion of him from the town once again by refusing to provide space for his dead body. Jules wants to bury him in the valley but the town opposes the idea, claiming that "you can't just bury bodies anywhere" (268). At the same time, they do not permit his burial in the Manawaka cemetery, either, stating religious reasons. Protestants do not allow it because Lazarus was Catholic, and Catholics object because he had not actually attended mass in years. Nevertheless, Jules believes the town's objections are a matter of race, not religion: "Yeh, well, I guess I know why they really wouldn't have him. His halfbreed bones spoiling the cemetery." (268)

Galloping Mountain is located northwest of the town, and according to Thomas, it is a symbol of "civilization, cultivation - and the possibility of freedom,"[60] as well as a new home to Jacques, the novel's most hopeful representation of a modern-day Métis. Having gotten away from the misery of the valley, he lives with his family on a farm but "goes to Winnipeg sometimes, for Métis meetings" (439) and helps abandoned Métis youth. Warwick concludes

[60] Thomas, 178.

that in Jacques' character, Laurence creates a vision of the Métis that connects their admiration and respect for the land with communal values and "rediscovered political activism."[61]

As Warwick notes, the political engagement of the Métis was meant to better the conditions of their own people but led to years of systematic oppression instead. While Jules provides important insight into the Métis past, he is not tied to it.[62] In fact, his character encapsulates the complexity of the Métis struggle across all stages of life. Laurence covers the social, economic, physical and emotional persecution very well, to which Warwick argues that Laurence's portrayal of the Métis life borders on the risk of upholding stereotypes, especially Jules' failed dreams.[63] However, she does emphasize the role the dominant culture plays in it, whether it is prejudice or lack of cultural knowledge

Regarded as smart, during his high school days Jules is offered to stay with the Pearls, a local childless couple, because he "will never keep on going to school if he stays down in the valley with Lazarus and all, and [that] he is bright enough to keep on." (127) Jules ends up returning to the valley after his ambition to study law is ridiculed by Mr. Pearls, a lawyer himself: "He didn't actually laugh out loud, but he kinda covered his mouth with his hand to hide the smile. Then he tells me it's a fine thing to get an education, but a person like me might do well to set their sights a bit lower, [...]." (135) Mr. Pearls offers to help Jules get an apprenticeship at the BA Garage, which Jules refuses and leaves.

This interaction is reminiscent of the infamous residential school system that was established in Canada in the 19th century to assimilate Aboriginal children. Jules's family is portrayed as an inherently negative influence but the scope of what he is encouraged to learn is limited. The education in residential schools was not identical to that of white children - little time was devoted to academic subjects, the focus being on obtaining vocational skills. Although presented as practical for life in a new, progressive society, the education system was meant to create future laborers rather than to expand their intellect. We can contrast this with Jules' enrollment in the army during the Second World War, where he, in the national interest of Canada, is accepted as an equal.

Over the course of the novel, Jules is presented in various roles. For the reader, he is first unnamed, referred to as "Pique's father," in Morag's memories from Manawaka he is nicknamed "Skinner," and as their intimate relationship is established, he requests that she call him Jules:

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[61] Warwick, 60.
[62] Warwick, 85.
[63] Warwick, 59.

> "It was - oh, Skinner-"
> "Hey, could you call me by my real name, eh?" As though it were necessary to do this. By right. Does she understand what he means? [...]
> "Okay, I will. Jules."
> He laughs. "Jules."
> "Jewels."
> "You better learn French, kid."
> "Do you know it?"
> "No. Not that much, any more. Not that much, ever. Just a bit, mostly swear words. I guess we used to know a few things when we were kids, but it's mostly gone now. My old man grew up speaking quite a bit of French-Cree but he's lost most of it now." (138)

Warwick stresses the importance of this interaction because it highlights the cultural differences between the two, in some ways equal, characters. The scene takes place the second time Morag and Jules meet in the valley, outside of the organized structure of the town. Even when Jules calls 47-year-old Morag at the beginning of the novel, he teases: "Hey, Morag, do you still say my name wrong?" (60) According to Warwick, Morag's mispronunciation of the name proves the ostracization of Jules' culture, and his loss of languages emphasizes the dominance of the British. Moreover, his demand that she use his real name can be seen as a call for his true identity to be recognized and respected.[64]

Going back to the idea of the valley being the natural realm contrasting the order of the town, we can discuss Jules as the force that connects Morag with her sexuality. Warwick suggests that this is established early on in the scene when Morag goes to the valley for the first time. When she finally dares crossing the swinging bridge, Jules comes out of the bushes on the other side, and fearlessly steps onto it, thus demonstrating his lack of ties to social conventions, and his bond with "the rhythms of nature."[65] This is the first in a series of Morag's memories titled "Down in the Valley," and although she runs away the first time, she acknowledges that she "wants to touch him" (128). The following valley episode then begins their passionate relationship.

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[64] Warwick, 56.
[65] Warwick, 77.

Furthermore, Jules is the antithesis to Morag's husband, Brooke Skelton, whom she marries at the age of twenty and spends a decade with in Toronto. A Briton raised in India, now teaching English literature at university, Brooke personifies white, imperialist, and patriarchal values. These are reflected in his assumption that Morag is still a virgin when they meet, as well as his "need" (227) to have a "happy and cheerful" (227) wife at all times. While their relationship is sexually satisfying, Brooke does not treat Morag as an equal partner, which is well manifested in the diminutives he uses to refer to her, such as "little one" (256).

Morag suppresses her prairie background as much as she possibly can. Ashamed, at the very beginning of their relationship, she claims to be too young to have a past, and promises herself that she will never share anything about "the town, and Christie, and all. Scavenger Logan. No. Not ever" (194). However, as Brooke's patronizing behavior increases, she starts acknowledging that she carries Manawaka inside of her. When she finally confronts him for his constant use of diminutives, she does so in language similar to Christie's:

> Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old, and I am five feet eight inches tall, which has always seemed too *bloody christly* [emphasis added] tall to me but there it is, and *by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land* [emphasis added], I am stuck with it and I do not mind like I did once, in fact the goddamn reverse if you really want to know, [...] and that's *the everlasting christly truth* [emphasis added] of it. (256)

As Warwick writes, Morag's liberation from Brooke is a gradual process closely related to her evolving sense of self-esteem but it is important to note that its peak moment involves the re-establishment of her relationship with Jules, who does not limit her in any way. [66] Even in marriage, Brooke refuses to talk about having children, whereas Jules' reaction to Morag asking if he would mind if she did nothing to avoid pregnancy is: "Jesus. You're a crazy woman. Do you have to ask permission?" (279) Moreover, when they make love again, Morag feels "some severing of inner chains which have kept her bound and separated from part of herself" (271).

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[66] Warwick, 77.

3.2.3 Myths, Songs and History

Recollection of history, whether personal or collective, recurs in the Manawaka cycle but nowhere is it as intricate as in *The Diviners.* The novel entwines the past with the present, and human experiences with fiction, history and myth in Morag's search for her identity. Over the course of the novel, her experiences are transformed into fiction, history is re-invented, and presented from different perspectives. Moreover, as Warwick explains, the non-linear form of the text reflects Laurence's idea that the relation between past and present is based on continuity rather than closure. Her understanding of this relation shows in her exploration of history, fiction, and myth.[67]

Hence, Warwick delves into the definitions of myth, fiction, and history, only to conclude that one exact definition is not possible. Generally speaking, history is regarded as a factual account of events, while fiction is wholly invented by people. As for myth, Northrop Frye defines it as stories which "illustrate what primarily concerns their society. [...] Myths take root in a specific culture and it is one of their functions to tell that culture what it is and how it came to be, in their own mythical terms."[68]

To teach young Morag about her predecessors, Christie tells her tales about the first Scottish settlers on the prairie, led by Piper Gunn, and Morag accepts them as facts. She starts challenging them later when Jules' shares tales of his peoples, relating to the same historical events. Indeed, the difference in social and cultural background of the two becomes apparent, as the tales, and their understanding of them, differ. In "Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn," he describes the situation during the Clearances, and then moves to the actions of Piper Gunn, the central figure whose music inspired people to follow him to Canada. "Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Long March" follows, and Morag is introduced to the journey overseas to Churchill, and then York Factory, Manitoba. Warwick states that they are very similar in both style and function - the events themselves are historically correct but they are told in the language of legends, and slightly transformed to give Morag a sense of ancestral pride.[69] The second tale, too, emphasizes the actions of Piper Gunn, and takes the focus away from the actual leader of the Sutherlanders to the Red River, Archie MacDonald.[70]

"Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels" recounts the Red River Rebellion just like Jules' "Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet" does. While the tales agree on the particulars of the capture of Fort Garry by the Métis, they differ in their depiction of Riel. Christie describes

[67] Warwick, 37.
[68] Warwick, 37-8.
[69] Warwick, 39.
[70] Warwick, 39.

Riel as a "short little man, with burning eyes" (129), while Jules' Riel is a "very tall guy" (147), "Métis but very educated" (147), and even possessing superhuman abilities: "he can stop bullets [...], see through the walls and he can see inside a man's head and see what people are thinking in there" (147). What is more, Morag's reaction reveals that the "official" account taught in her history class does not correspond with either of these two: "the book in History said he was nuts, but he didn't seem so nuts to me" (132).

Interestingly, both Christie and Jules admit that maybe the events did not happen exactly the way they tell them. Telling Morag "Skinner's Tale of Lazarus' Tales about Rider Tonnerre," Jules mentions that every time he heard the story from his father, it was "kind of different," (144) but he knows that textbooks do not portray the events accurately, either: "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." (147) Both Christie and Jules focus on their own individual heroes, Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre. In doing so, they provide themselves with a sense of pride for their forefathers, and, like Frye's aforementioned definition of myth states, they construct the origin of their cultures in their own, mythical terms. Additionally, Warwick points out that these retellings of history from different perspectives portray the textbook version of the events only one among many. Nonetheless, it remains the authorized record of the Red River Rebellion, which upholds the portrayal of Riel as a traitor. Especially Jules' tales convey this idea, while the inclusion of history taught at Canadian schools emphasizes that every version "serves the interests of a particular audience."[71]

Morag quickly forms her own view, one that goes against the authorized account: "The Métis were losing the land - it was taken from them. All he [Riel] wanted was for them to have rights." (132) However, as an aspiring writer, she learns the importance of adapting to her audience when it is her turn to recount an event to the town. She is sent to the valley to write a report on Piquette's death for the local newspaper, and her inclusion of the fact that a Tonnerre was involved in the Red River Rebellion is rejected: "In her report, Morag mentions that Piquette's grandfather fought with Riel in Saskatchewan in 1885, in the last uprising of the Métis. Lachlan deletes it, saying that many people hereabouts would still consider that Old Jules back then had fought on the wrong side" (161). Once again, the Métis are silenced, and Morag, no matter how peripheral her position in the Scottish community is, is made aware of her place within the dominant culture, and the advantage that comes with it.

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[71] Warwick, 42.

When Morag and Brooke finally separate, she moves across the country to Vancouver, pregnant with Jules' child. With her dual heritage, the girl, Pique, not only adds to the diversity represented in the novel but she also reveals issues of cultural disparity specific to her mixed origin:

> "I don't want to be split. I want to be together. But I'm not. I don't know where I belong."
> "Does it have to be either/or?"
> Pique's eyes became angry.
> "I don't guess you [Morag] would know how it feels. [...]" (350)

She even considers dropping out of high school as soon as possible because of the remarks that are targeted at her. Born in Vancouver, Pique moves with her mother to London, and then back to rural Canada when she is in her early teens, and, as this excerpt shows, her racial background is pointed out to her by her peers only in Canada:

> "What do you now of it? You've never been called a dirty halfbreed. [...]" The old patterns, the ones from both Morag's and Jules' childhoods, the old patterns even in Pique's own life. The school in England, Morag sees in retrospect, was a more fortunate thing than she had recognized at the time - the primary school in Hampstead was full of Pakistani and African and West Indian Kids, [...]. Amongst that lot Pique was normal and accepted, nothing unusual. (421)

Being brought up only by Morag, who passes Christie's tales on to her, Pique complains that she "never got much of the other side" (350). Jules visits them only twice - first in Vancouver when Pique is 5-years-old and then a decade later, however, he manages to spike her interest in music. The last night of his two-month stay in Vancouver, Jules sings his "Ballad of Jules Tonnerre," telling the story of his grandfather who fought at Batoche. As Thomas writes, this is a climactic scene for a few reasons: it marks the first time Jules expresses pride for his ancestry, unites the three of them as a family, and concludes Morag's and Pique's Vancouver years.[72] During his second visit, Jules sings two more songs besides the ballad, "Piquette's Song" and "Lazarus," and tells Pique details about his siblings. It is a

[72] Thomas, 160.

very significant, intimate moment between the two of them, which Morag acknowledges: "They do it in a different way, a way I can see, although it's not mine" (426-7).

Wes Mantooth in "Margaret Laurence's Album Songs Divining for Missing Links and Deeper Meanings" analyzes how the songs help Pique and Jules open their guarded personalities, and find pride in their Métis origin. Jules' songs essentially function as "contemporary struggle songs"[73] that express complex emotions of "bitterness, hatred for the oppressor, of determination to endure hardships together and to fight for a better life."[74] Jules performs these to white audiences all over Canada, and the common response is indifference or laughter: "It's too long for a lotta people, and they can't listen right through. [...] Or they don't wanna know about it, and start yellin' why don't I sing 'Yellow Rose of Texas' or like that. Jesus." (346) Mantooth continues, arguing that Jules' willingness to repeatedly perform for those he holds responsible for the unjust treatment of his people reveals his deep convictions with underlying "potential for forgiveness and healing."[75]

Early on in Manawaka, Jules tells Morag that his grandfather had fought in "the Troubles" (73) but he refuses to share more with her: "Shit, I can't remember. It's crap. Anyhows, I wouldn't tell *you*." (73) In his younger years, he even expresses feelings of shame towards his "drunk" (128) family of "dumb brats" (128) but as he grows older, he becomes more sympathetic to the despair of Lazarus and Piquette. In his songs, he counters the accounts that demean and delete the Métis from history, manifesting newfound hope that "the truth outlives the lie" (345), and that white Canadians can still learn, and sympathize with the Métis.[76] His voice thus becomes one among many but, unlike Morag, Christie and history textbooks, Jules does not adapt to his audience.

Mantooh explains that the task of a storyteller in oral cultures is to "further the myths by inspiring the birth of another teller."[77] Despite very little time spent together, Jules succeeds in that, for his songs give Pique a legacy of her Métis heritage, and a new way to communicate her feelings. Furthermore, in her own songwriting, Pique merges Jules' oral traditions with Morag's love for words. At the end of the novel, she sings a song for Morag that makes her understand why Pique needs to go to Galloping Mountain to be with her Métis relatives: "When I think how I was born / I can't help but being torn / But the valley and the mountain

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[73] Wes Mantooth, "Margaret Laurence's Album Songs Divining for Missing Links and Deeper Meanings," *Great Plains Quarterly* 19.1. (1999): 174, University of Nebraska Lincoln <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2588&context=greatplainsquarterly> 4 May 2017.

[74] Mantooth, 175

[75] Mantooth 175

[76] Mantooth 175.

[77] Mantooth 176.

hold my name." (441) The song also makes it clear that her experience is different from her father's - she is not blaming anyone for what her life is like but rather coming to terms with her identity: "Pique was not assigning blame - that was not what it was all about. And Pique's journey, although at this point it might feel to her unique, was not unique." (441) Right after this scene, we learn that Jules is suffering from cancer. Thus, as Mantooth points out, Pique's song marks another climactic moment, which asserts that the culture of the Métis will live on in the next generation.[78]

[78] Mantooth 176.

4 Alice Munro

Alice Munro, born July 10 1931, spent her youth in Wingham, a small town in southwestern Ontario. Beverly Rasporich in *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro*, describes Munro's childhood as one characterized by the poverty of the Depression and the small-town ambiance of dead-endedness. Having bankrupted as a fox farmer, Munro's father worked as a foundry worker and a turkey farmer. Despite her mother's attempts to make the place appear more elegant with Victorian antiques, the family's ordinary brick house revealed "the terrific effects of poverty, both in and out."[79] Like Laurence, Munro is of Scots-Irish background - her paternal grandfather was Scottish, while his wife, and Munro's maternal relatives were Irish. She was brought up Protestant, however, began detaching herself from the values of her environment early in her life, abandoning faith at the age of twelve.[80]

Moreover, Munro became increasingly aware of the different social roles expected of men and women. Although she had a good relationship with both of her parents, she felt that her mother "had energy that couldn't be properly used."[81] As Rasporich puts it, it might have been despite or *because of* gender restrictions, that Munro became a very competitive student in high school. She received a scholarship, which allowed her to leave her hometown in 1949 to study journalism at the University of Western Ontario in London. Even so, she battled financial insecurity, and, realizing she a required economics class was too demanding, she switched her major to English literature. By the end of the sophomore year, she had sold one short story, and published three more, "The Dimensions of a Shadow," "The Widower," and "Story Sunday" in the university's magazine.[82] In 1951, she married James Munro and the two relocated to British Columbia where they spent the following two decades.

While living in the suburbs and taking care of three children, Munro kept writing. Twenty-one of her stories written in this period were published prior to her first collection, Governor General's Award-winning, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968). She looks back on this period of her career as essential for her to "find [your] real subject, [...] and [to] face it."[83] Dealing with her mother's loss in her art, Munro learnt she must write from experience.[84]

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[79] Rasporich, *Dance* 4.
[80] Rasporich, *Dance* 5.
[81] Rasporich, *Dance* 5.
[82] Rasporich, *Dance* 8.
[83] Rasporich, *Dance* 9.
[84] Rasporich, *Dance* 14.

In 1972, the couple separated, and Munro moved back to Ontario, taking her three daughters with her. In 1976, she took on the role of a housewife for the second time when she remarried, and settled in a rural Ontario town, Clinton. This is the landscape of Munro's youth, and the dominant setting of her collections. As Coral Ann Howells writes in her study of the author's work, *Alice Munro*, even though some of her later stories are set in Vancouver or even Australia, Scotland, and Albania, Munro is a staple of the small-town Canadian fiction, where "anywhere else is outside and alien, be it as near as Toronto or as far away as Sydney, Australia."[85] Yet, over the past five decades, she has acquired an international readership but rural Ontario has remained her ground base, mythologized as Jubilee, Carstairs, or Hanratty, to name a few.

Like Laurence, Munro captures the realities of human, primarily female, experience in her own minute way of writing. As Rasporich describes, Munro's talent includes "an acute social intuition,"[86] and "her method is not that of the didactic social critic, but that of the literary artist who filters and refracts society through the prism of her own imagination and experience."[87] Furthermore, Howells points out that Munro's realism is tied to the domestic sphere, uncovering that which is usually concealed within the order of the small town.[88] Munro deals with traditional subjects of women's fiction, and manifests thorough knowledge of what Howells refers to as "casualties of the female life - [of] love stories and failed romantic fantasies, [also of] adolescent girls' aspirations for more glamorous narratives than their everyday lives contain."[89]

As Howell writes, young Munro had no particular feelings for Canada - Prince Edward Island seemed to her as distant as Europe. She enjoyed reading L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and *Emily of New Moon,* as well as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*,[90] but, as she reveals in an interview with Rasporich, it is Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* that was the most significant book of her youth.[91] During the 1950's, her interest was piqued by women writers of the American South, such as Flannery O'Connor and Edora Welty, for Munro found that the country portrayed in their works was just like the country she comes from - i.e. "absolutely Gothic." [92]

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[85] Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) 2.
[86] Rasporich, *Dance* xii.
[87] Rasporich, *Dance* xii
[88] Howells 4.
[89] Howells 4.
[90] Howells 8.
[91] Rasporich *Dance* 25.
[92] Howells 12.

4.1 Canadian Gothic

Katrin Berndt's essay "The Ordinary Terrors of Survival: Alice Munro and the Canadian Gothic," explores the emergence of the Gothic in the new, colonized country. The word Gothic itself evokes images of the European tradition - eerie, isolated settings, supernatural beings and an entrapped damsel in distress, none of which are to be found in contemporary Canadian Gothic. Even in comparison to the American tradition of Edgar Allan Poe's domestic horrors, and later depiction of the impoverished South, Canadian Gothic is distinct. However, as Berndt puts it, if we regard Gothic writing simply as "the exploration of the fears which enlightened, rational understanding fails to comprehend, rather than with spooky medieval castles,"[93] its relevance for Canada becomes clearer.

. In her famous guide to Canadian literature, *Survival* (1972) Margaret Atwood discusses survival as the primary, "multi-faceted and adaptable"[94] symbol of the country. While physical survival is a prevalent concern of early Canadian texts, as Berndt writes, spiritual survival, as seen in Munro's stories, became dominant over the course of the twentieth century. This kind of survival is subjective, a matter of "elements in a person's own nature that threaten him from within,"[95] and the small-town setting, instead of providing refuge and safety, reveals horrors of its own.

4.2 Southern Ontario Gothic

Timothy Findley used the term Southern Ontario Gothic in 1973, in an interview with Graeme Gibson who compared his novel *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967) to the American Southern Gothic: "Sure it's Southern Gothic: Southern *Ontario* Gothic."[96] As Monika Lee says in a discussion with Steve Paikin, he was the very first one to use the term but we can trace the genre as far back as the novel *Wacousta* (1832) by John Richardson, a suspenseful gothic mystery romance, in which a former European soldier lives in disguise with the Native population of Ontario.[97]

Like Southern Gothic, the Canadian subgenre combines realism with feelings of terror induced by very common problems of the ordinary life, such as mental illness, dysfunctional

[93] Katrin Berndt, "The Ordinary Terrors of Survival: Alice Munro and the Canadian Gothic," *The Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online] 55 | Autumn 2010: 3. JSSE.REVUES.ORG <http://jsse.revues.org/1079> 1 May 2017

[94] Berndt 3.

[95] Berndt 3.

[96] Gibson 138.

[97] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, "Southern Ontario Gothic," Online Video. 2 min 12 sec *YouTube.com*, 3 Jun 2015. < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6U0FIDqWUA > May 15 2017.

families, or violence. Even at the time of Findley's interview, various Ontario writers had the tendency to focus on such dark topics as well, and the subgenre was established, giving the region a distinct, even mythological character.[98]

Some critics are still reluctant to accept Southern Ontario Gothic as a valid subgenre, which, as Lee explains, has to do mainly with the fact that the Gothic is originally an unrealistic genre. Being a form of realism, Southern Ontario Gothic thus stretches the term quite broadly.[99] However, she argues that the region has an intrinsically gothic character:

> Ontario is characterized almost by the presence of ghosts. [...] This is true of Canada as a whole, but particularly in southern Ontario, we are a history of people from a diaspora, and several diasporas. The early settlers all are haunted by their homeland, by the places they came from; and the land we inhabit was inhabited for perhaps 10 000 years or more by First Nations people, who have been largely displaced, and even [...] killed, and this is part of the repressed unconscious of Ontario. Our land is very much haunted by that history. [100]

Moreover, the literary genre is rooted in the region because European, predominantly British, settlers arrived in Canada in the prime of the Gothic tradition, and they brought those texts with them.[101]

Michael Hurley, another participant of the discussion with Paikin, refers to the quote from Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971): “People’s lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable—deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum”[102] Her reference to kitchen linoleum implies the importance of domesticity in the subgenre. Southern Ontario Gothic is essentially concerned with the dark side of the seemingly mundane life, and its "doubleness, contradiction, paradox."[103]

4.3 Wawanash County

Five of the fifteen stories published in *Dance of the Happy Shades* are set in Jubilee, a small town that recurs in *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971). According to Claire Omhovère's

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[98] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, 1 min 45 sec.
[99] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, 6 min 00 sec.
[100] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, 21 min 00 sec.
[101] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, 22 min 20 sec.
[102] Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 249.
[103] The Agenda With Steve Paikin, 5 min 02 sec.

essay "'For There Is No Easy Way to Get to Jubilee from Anywhere on Earth': Places in Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades,*" even without explicit naming, any other "little town close to the Lake" (44) with its brick houses, a café and a Main Street could be Jubilee. Munro's Wawanash County exhibits contours of towns that rose out of fur trade, and then expanded with the influx of British Loyalists after 1776, Scottish Highlanders and the Irish.[104] As Omhovère continues, many, if not most, stories have a setting just because the plot needs to be set somewhere. Few are like Munro's Wawanash County, "fully attentive to representing the environment"[105] beyond that. For Munro, Omhovère concludes, her home region functions as a "container" that helps her shape the whole narrative.[106]

Rasporich points out the split readers encounter in Munro's towns: "the good magic of the picturesque and the black magic of the gothic."[107] Her women may not be medieval maidens trapped in haunted castles, but at the very core, they face similar patriarchal idealizations in regards to morality, sexuality, and social roles. Rasporich explains that feminist critics established the Female Gothic as a gothic subgenre that works in a subversive manner, aiming to oppose the restrictions of patriarchy by imitating them.[108] Munro manifests her attentive detail to women's psychology and the region's social reality, which, changing slowly, still endorses some of the deeply rooted manners and values of the Confederation period.[109]

Additionally, Munro has exceptional visual perception, as manifested in her descriptions of the region's geography. The provincial landscape as the author remembers it from the 1930's and the 1940's is a dominant element of *Dance of the Happy Shades*, a collection that Rasporich considers her best in terms of unraveling feelings attached to the region. As she puts it, Munro captures the "poetic decay"[110] of the townscapes, as can be seen in the opening story of in the collection, "Walker Brothers Cowboy":

> No roads paved when we left the highway. [...] The land is flat, scorched, empty. Bush lots at the back of the farms holds shade, black-pine shade like pools nobody can ever get to. We bump up a long lane and at the end of it what could look more unwelcoming,

[104] Claire Omhovère, "'For There Is No Easy Way to Get to Jubilee from Anywhere on Earth': Places in Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades,*" *The Inside of a Shell*, ed. Vanessa Guignery (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) 27-8.
[105] Omhovère, 32.
[106] Omhovère, 43.
[107] Rasporich, *Dance* 134.
[108] Rasporich, *Dance* 136.
[109] Rasporich, *Dance* 136.
[110] Rasporich, *Dance* 127.

> more deserted than the tall unpainted farmhouse with grass growing uncut right up to the front door, [...]? [...] The nineteen-thirties. How much this kind of farmhouse, this kind of afternoon seems to belong to that one decade in time, [...]. No living things to be seen, chicken or cattle. [111]

Combined with her detailed accounts of the region's native flora of "milkweed and goldenrod and big purple thistles, [...] deep, harmonious woodlots of elm and maple [which] give way to a denser, less hospitable scrub - forest of birch and poplar, spruce and pine" (172), Munro creates the illusion of a moving camera.[112] This technique contributes to her realistic depiction of the region, and accentuates the gothic mood of her writing.

Munro captures the social and natural details of Ontario in a way that makes her Wawanash County feel realistic to both Canadian and international readers. Her towns are more than just a required location for the stories - they are the complex, dramatic social spaces that Thomas described. The towns provide room to explore "the distance"[113] between who their inhabitants seem to be, and who they really are. All of these aspects are well demonstrated in the opening story of *Dance of the Happy Shades*, "Walker Brothers Cowboy".

4.4 "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

Set in Tuppertown on the shore of Lake Huron, the story conveys the importance of geography and history in Munro's fiction. The young narrator, Del Jordan, becomes aware of the "doubleness" of life, and worlds previously unknown to her when her father takes her on a drive outside of their usual route. Like Munro, she is the daughter of a fox farmer who struggles during the Depression, and takes up another job as a door-to-door salesman for a company called Walker Brothers. As Howells puts it, the story is based on a pattern of centre and periphery, and it "traces the topography of home and then radiates outwards, tracing the child's efforts to comprehend layers of life beyond the orderly structure of her town's familiar street plan and family relationships."[114]

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[111] Alice Munro, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (London: Vintage Books, 2000) 8. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.
[112] Rasporich, *Dance* 128.
[113] Thomas 176.
[114] Howells 17.

In the beginning, the father, Ben, takes Del to the lake where he tells her about the Ice Age and the origin of the Great Lakes. With her limited knowledge of the world, the child struggles to understands the concept of prehistory: "[...] I am not even able to imagine the Lake when the Indians were there, before Tuppertown." (3)

Then he takes Del to Nora Cronin's house. She is his ex-girlfriend, whom he would have married, had she not been a Roman Catholic As Del watches him drink whisky with her, she remembers a conversation with her mother: "One of the things my mother has told me in our talks is that my father never drinks whisky" (15). She thus is faced with a new, unfamiliar vision of him, a person so close to her, that is as distant to her as the history of the Great Lakes.[115] The story concludes with Del's realization of the unknown, undiscovered aspects of life:

> [...] I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary, familiar, while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all its kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine. (18)

Munro's landscape, too, seems ordinary and familiar but it hides all kinds of terrors. In the following 4 stories from the collections, I explore her treatment of death, degenerative disorder, social class, and gender roles.

4.5 "The Time of Death"

Rasporich remarks that Munro's external scenery often mirrors the inner life of her characters," [116] as can be seen in "The Time of Death." It is a story about the unfortunate death of an eighteen-month-old child, Benny, who tips a pot of scalding hot water his sister Patricia boils on the stove, and consequently dies from the burns. Patricia is a talented singer, "the Pint-Sized Kiddie with the Great Big Voice," (89) and an unusually mature 9-year-old. On the contrary, the children's mother Leona is negligent, and disliked by other women in town: "I wasn't hardly out of the house, I wasn't out of the house twenty minutes... (Three-quarters of an hour at least, Allie McGee thought, but she did not say so, not at the time.)"

[115] Howells 18.

[116] Rasporich, *Dance* 129.

(89) Patricia's emotional reaction to her brother's death is not immediate but she eventually breaks down while playing outside with other kids: "Out there in the yard yelling, you'd think she'd gone off her head." (99) The final paragraph then concludes the story with a description of the setting:

> There was this house, and the other wooden houses that had never been painted, with their steep patched roofs and their narrow, slanting porches [...]. Snow came, falling slowly, evenly, between the highway and the houses and the pine trees, falling in big flakes at first, and then in smaller and smaller flakes that did not melt on the hard furrows, the rock of the earth. (99)

Like the house, which reflects the family's poverty, Patricia's inner life will never be complete or ideal. One page earlier, Munro opens the scene of Patricia's breakdown with the emphasis on snow: "It was the first week of November (and the snow had not come, the snow had not come yet) [...]," (98) and then she returns to the symbol of snow at the very end, confirming its symbolic meaning is related to Patricia's outburst. As Rasporich suggests, the snowflakes represent "innocence turned mean, of the hard, driving fury within the child's mind."[117]

4.6 "Sunday Afternoon"

"Sunday Afternoon" focuses on social class. The protagonist, Alva, is a high school student, working as a maid for the wealthy Gannetts during the summer. Alva becomes the imprisoned gothic heroine in the mansion that is so different from her family's modest home:

> [...]; those long, curtained and carpeted rooms, with their cool colours, seemed floating in an underwater light. [...]; here were such bland unbroken surfaces, such spaces - a whole long, wide passage empty, [...] Alva, walking down this hallway, not making any sound, [...] did not know if she was there or not. (164)

At the beginning of the story we learn that Alva is supposed to go to the family's private island in Georgian Bay in a week, however, she is not sure if she really wants to join them.

[117] Rasporich, *Dance* 130.

Feeling awkward, especially around Mrs Gannette, Alva keeps her distance, and eventually becomes lonely, and invisible. Her gothic fear, as Rasporich writes, is "muted and implicit"[118] but it is there.

At the end of the story, a seducer figure appears when Mrs. Gannette's cousin walks into the room where Alva is hiding, and kisses her. Before he leaves, he tells the girl that he will visit the family's island in August:

> This stranger's touch had eased her; her body was simply grateful and expectant, and she felt a lightness and confidence she had not known in this house. [...]. She saw it differently now; it was even possible that she wanted to go there. But things always came together; there was something she would not explore yet - a tender spot, a new and still mysterious humiliation. (171)

Considering Alva's summer-long isolation from her family and friends, and now her self-induced isolation within the Gannette's house, the feelings of lightness and confidence after this encounter are not surprising. Alva's young age also plays a part in how she perceives the situation. The new kind of humiliation Alva would eventually discover is that her social status will always interfere with her life, and a relationship with a man of Gannettes' wealth would not be realistically possible.

4.7 "Boys and Girls"

This story represents Munro's critique of gender roles. The 11-year-old narrator grows up on a fox farm, where she enjoys helping her father much more than doing housework. Her job is to water the foxes, and she does it "willingly, [...] with a feeling of pride." (115) She imagines herself as a local hero, who saves people from "bombed buildings" (113), and rides a horse on the main street of Jubilee as the town celebrates her. When a feed salesman comes to the farm, the girl's father introduces her as his "new hired man" (116), to which the man responds: "could of fooled me, I thought it was *only* [emphasis added] a girl." (116) After that, she becomes increasingly aware of gender expectations:

> The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not,

[118] Rasporich, *Dance* 135.

> as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. (119)

As the girl eavesdrops on her parents, she starts regarding her mother, who wants her to behave in a traditionally feminine way, as an enemy.

The story climaxes when the girl frees one of the family's horses that is about to be shot. When she admits it to her father, instead of anger, he responds: "Never mind," [her] father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humor, the words which absolved and dismissed [her] for good. "She’s only a girl." (127)

In this story Munro writes in the subversive manner of the Female Gothic, imitating patriarchy to emphasize its limitations. Rasporich even argues that Munro dramatizes Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the psychology of young girls in Western society, and their conflict between "a real human being and her vocation as a female."[119] At first the girl tries to resist by behaving as ungirly as she can but she realizes that it does not free her. She "adjusts her fantasies"[120] to a man rescuing her, aware that what she looks like will matter a lot in her life. By the end, she starts to succumb to the idea that she is less than boys as she does not object to her father's statement at all, "not even in [my] heart. Maybe it was true." (127)

4.8 "The Peace of Utrecht"

"The Peace of Utrecht" has received a lot of critical attention for its Gothic elements. The first person narrator, Helen, is back in her hometown, Jubilee, visiting her sister a few months after their mother's death. The sisters' tense relationship is clear from the first few sentences: "I have been at home now for three weeks and it has not been a success. Maddy and I, though we speak cheerfully of our enjoyment of so long and intimate a visit, will be relieved when it is over" (190).

Their mother, who remains nameless, had been ill for years, and the sisters had a deal: the older one, Maddy, would leave home for 4 years to go to university, and then Helen would be allowed to do the same. However, Helen got married and never returned. Although she has successfully established her own life outside of Jubilee, she cannot wait to escape again, while Maddy, who is single and "well over thirty" (193), has never had her own life.

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[119] Rasporich, *Dance* 38.
[120] Rasporich, *Dance* 38.

Howells points out that the Canadian critic Madeline Redekop regards the names of the sisters as hints at hell and madness, which remind the reader of the torment below the narrative surface.[121] Howells also comments on the title of the story that evokes very masculine connotations of wars, and international politics, yet it is the complete opposite, a domestic story of two sisters haunted by their dead mother.[122] Berndt explains the relevance of the title, referring to the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, which acknowledged Britain as the major colonial power, granted it considerable gains, and ended battles over trade monopolies. France had to cede the majority of their North American colonies to Britain, and put an end on any further explorations in the land. However, what the treaty did not solve at all was the built up tension between French and British settlers.[123] Berndt believes that Munro alludes to the undercurrent of tension and bitterness that continued to influence the lives of settlers. The sisters, too, find solutions to deal with reality - Helen leaves Jubilee, and Maddy eventually puts the mother in a hospital but the desired peace of mind does not come.[124]

The importance of the landscape becomes apparent again when Helen describes her impressions of the rural town upon her arrival, a decade after she left:

> I drove up to the main street –a new service station, new stucco front on the Queen's Hotel– and turned into the quiet, decaying side streets where old maids live, and have birdbaths and blue delphiniums in their gardens. The big brick houses that I knew, with their wooden verandas and gaping, dark-screened windows, seemed to me plausible but unreal. (196)

The narrator is aware of the difference between the public sphere of the main street, and the deterioration lurking in the privacy of side streets. As Berndt writes, the houses forebode the haunting atmosphere that is set over the entire story.[125] When Helen enters her childhood home, it is empty, and she is immediately overcome by the memory of her mother: "It seemed to me that I could not close the door behind me without hearing my mother's ruined voice call out to me, and feeling myself go heavy all over as I prepared to answer it." (198)

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[121] Howells 20.
[122] Howells 19.
[123] Berndt 5.
[124] Berndt 5.
[125] Berndt 4.

The absent mother is a traditional Gothic element, and a pivotal one in this story; Maddy even explicitly refers to their ill mother as "our Gothic Mother" (195). Her diagnosis is never specified but since the story is based on Munro's own experience, it is likely to be Parkinson's disease. The illness, as Howells writes, turns the mother into a town legend, a prisoner in her own house, and the daughters into both nurses and prison guards.[126] The typically Gothic fear that the dead and buried may come back to haunt the living is affirmed through Maddy and Helen's conscience, although they try to justify their behavior: "the demand on us was too great; we were only children when the disease took hold of her" (199). The sisters confront a range of feelings: sorrow, humiliation, disgust, impatience, anger. As the mother's condition gets worse, they begin to perceive her as a grotesque, non-human being, even though she experiences brief periods of recovery: "I let her be. I don't keep trying to make her *human* anymore." (195)

In the second part of the story Helen visits their old aunts, Lou and Annie. Aunt Annie takes Helen to the "darker parts of the house" (204), where she shows her a box of her mother's clothes, and explains that Maddy had tricked their mother into going to the hospital, saying it would be only a check-up. Aunt Annie claims that the hospital stay accelerated her death, and reveals information Helen had not known for sure, but sensed - mother had tried to escape her hospital imprisonment.

In the final scene, we return to the house, where the setting seems lighter than before - the women are in a large, sunlit kitchen, with Helen's children running around, shrieking. Yet, the mood of the story remains dark. It climaxes with the eruption of Maddy's emotions, emphasized by the sound of glass shattering on the floor as she drops a bowl:

> "I couldn't go on," she said. "I wanted my life."
> She was standing on the little step between the kitchen and the dining room and suddenly she lost her grip on the bowl either because her hands had begun to shake or because she had not picked it up properly in the first place; it was quite a heavy and elaborate old bowl. It slipped out of her hands and she tried to catch it and it smashed on the floor.
> "Take your life, Maddy. Take it."
> "Yes, I will," Maddy said. "Yes, I will."
> "Go away, don't stay here."

[126] Howells 21.

"Yes, I will." (210)

As Howells writes, the broken bowl highlights the irreversible damage the sisters have caused in their own lives as accomplices in their mother's death. She also points out that it is apt to describe "The Peace of Utrecht" as a story of "failed exorcism"[127] - Munro even repeats the phrase "no exorcising here" (191) twice in it. Maddy's final line "But why can't I, Helen? *Why can't I*?" (210) shows that once again no inner peace is made, the Gothic mother and human conscience will keep haunting her.

127 Howells 23.

5 Conclusion

My first goal in this thesis was to examine how Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro use their native regions, Manitoba and southwestern Ontario, in their fiction; whether, and if so how, they contribute to the narrative as a whole. In the introduction, I quote Rasporich's view that in the context of regionalism, artists of all sorts function as creators of place, whose representations of a region are so subjective they may even be expressed as "imaginary constructs [but] filtered through a personal vision."[128] This is undoubtedly true of both Munro and Laurence. Their fictional small towns go beyond formal regionalism, a theory which considers geographical location to have the most influence on one's identity. Manawaka and Munro's numerous towns are vivid social spaces, which depict social hierarchies, and the impact of gender, race and socio-economic status as well.

Fiamengo wrote that such a complex approach causes further division into smaller microregions, and the town in *The Diviners* can be viewed in this way. Manawaka consists of both Aboriginal people and European immigrants, and as my analysis shows, it is a moralized landscape that reflects their social status and moral values, and thus creates a socio-economic and racial microspace. The train tracks mark the "right and wrong" side of the town, and everyone from either side is aware of where they belong. The two microspaces are connected by the protagonist. Morag fits in with the white majority of European descent, but is excluded, and regarded "white trash" because she lives in poverty. The Métis family, on the other hand, does not belong anywhere, as emphasized by their shack on the very periphery of the town, characterized by disorder, natural elements, and an eerie atmosphere.

However, Manawaka is not the only setting of *The Diviners*. Morag moves Winnipeg to attend university, and soon after that she leaves Manitoba to go Toronto. A decade later she relocates to Vancouver, then to London, United Kingdom for several years before returning to Canada to settle down in rural Ontario. In each of these cities, Morag experiences some sort of epiphany, and Laurence might make a few references to their distinctive locations, but none of them functions as a moralized landscape. In cities, the focus is on Morag herself and her personal life rather than her identity as a member of a composite society.

Morag's adoptive parents, Christie and Prin, married each other because they knew no one else in Manawaka would. Their somewhat unconventional marriage does not teach Morag about traditional gender roles, and neither does her relationship with Jules, the Métis man she has a passionate relationship with through her whole life. It is Brooke, Morag's British

[128] Rasporich, "Regional Identities" 295.

husband, and the novel's embodiment of white, colonial, and patriarchal values who makes her feel unequal. As his superior behavior increases, she starts realizing that Manawaka is an inseparable part of her that has shaped her identity. Morag feels the strain of his behavior loosen only when she spends the night again with Jules.

Pique, Jules and Morag's daughter, blends the two worlds together. She grows up with Morag in Vancouver, London and McConell's Landing, Ontario, and only visits Manawaka once as an adult. Pique is not an overly optimistic blend of the two cultures - she is a developing character, who deals with her own issues. She still faces racial prejudice, and only in a Canadian school. At the beginning of the novel, Pique is travelling within Canada but Morag does not know where exactly she is. Her lack of belonging to a place reflects her confusion related to her mixed identity, which she eventually resolves. Jules successfully passes his songs on to her, and Pique decides to go see her uncle at Galloping Mountain, the novel's place of hope and prosperity of the Métis.

Southern Ontario Gothic is a subgenre of the Gothic, which focuses on the doubleness of ordinary lives, and shows orderly small towns as spaces of subjective, spiritual survival, as opposed to physical survival in Canadian wilderness that inspired many early writers. Munro's towns, too, work as complex spaces that contribute to the narrative but in a different way than Laurence's Manawaka.

Munro is very attentive to the landscape of Ontario. "Walker Brothers Cowboy," the opening story in her first published collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, captures the importance of the natural environment in her fiction very well. We move from an enclosed, domestic space into the town, towards roads previously unknown to the young narrator. The flat, empty land with its dirt backroads not only illustrates the Ontario environment in detail, it simultaneously captures the dark mood of the Depression. It is in the unknown house that the mere sight of her father drinking whisky makes Del realize there are realities unknown to her. Moreover, as "Time of Death" shows, Munro uses landscape to mirror the emotional world of characters.

"Sunday Afternoon," and "Boys and Girls," reveal different Southern Ontario approaches to the Gothic element of the trapped maiden. "Sunday Afternoon" shows a heroine whose low social status makes her feel imprisoned in the mansion of her well-off employers. The surprising encounter of the possible seducer emphasizes that her origin will always interfere with all her relationships. In "Boys and Girls" Munro uses the subversive approach of the Female Gothic to depict the toll gendered socialization takes on girls. "The Peace of Utrecht"

employs another Gothic element, the absent mother. The town is portrayed as a powerful confining space, which retains its power, its dismal side always lurking in the side streets.

My second aim was to discuss whether any of the works analyzed in this thesis manifest themselves as distinctly Canadian. Although Laurence in *The Diviners* tackles some universally relatable issues, her representation of the Métis is what makes it an emphatically Canadian novel. She uses the family to draw attention to the lasting impact of colonization of the country's First Nations, and that requires a reader with a certain extent of historical knowledge.

As an ethnic group descending from white French settlers and Aboriginal peoples, the Métis have never fully belonged to neither white nor Aboriginal Canadians. Their intermediate position is emphasized in the novel by the aforementioned location of their house, their imperfect English, and the town's refusal to bury Lazarus in the valley or the local cemetery. The deaths of Lazarus, Pique, Valentine and Paul are related to common contemporary issues of Aboriginal communities such as alcohol, drugs, and suspicious disappearances. For Morag, departure from Manawaka is connected with freedom and opportunity for a better life but Piquette and Valentine's deaths show that the Métis are likely to find the same misery in an urban environment.

The novel's concern with myth, history and fiction serves to highlight Eurocentrism of historical accounts. The leader of the Métis, Louis Riel, is described differently, depending on who tells the tale. Northrop Frye's idea that myths allow cultures to construct their origin on their own terms becomes clear when Morag shares that the authorized version taught at school is different from both Christie and Jules' tales. Laurence shows how perspective, and target audience can change a narrative. For Jules, the tales provide a sense of pride that he cannot find anywhere else, and sustain his connection to oral culture, which he also manifests in his own songs.

With the exception of the allusive title of "The Peace of Utrecht," which demands that the reader know colonial history, Munro's stories do not draw attention to any Canadian issues. In spite of her association with southwestern Ontario, her stories are very universal - very human.

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