

Politics of Representation: Exploring the Metis Identity in Margaret Laurence's *Manawaka Series*

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Abstract

Ethnic/minority culture, over the centuries, has been much mutilated and defaced in writing as much as in political or geographic aggression. The disfiguring of the indigenous culture speaks the dominant politics of (mis) representation. The dichotomic frameworks of language, literature, culture and history deliberately construct a dominant set of ideologies and values where the stereotyped 'other' gets represented as powerless and hence devalued. The asymmetries in representation have led conscientious writers opt for a stance of re-presentation wherein they attempt at 'righting' the wrongs of such misrepresentations. The paper attempts to analyse such an act of re-presentation done through the *Manawaka series* of Margaret Laurence, the famous Canadian novelist. The paper aims to explore the way Laurence has produced texts displacing conventions and creating alternate discourses thereby re-establishing lost/missing voices. Truth as pre-established knowledge is dismissed here for truth as interpretation.

Keywords: Identity; Metis; Other; Reconciliation; Representation.

The settler culture of Canada while imbibing it with a multicultural identity, deprived the Aboriginals of their elemental 'space' and 'voice'. We find geographic possession extending to the much significant terrains of the physical, cultural, religious, moral, political and the historical, resulting in the sidelining and the gradual obliteration of the rights and even the very existence of the aboriginals of Canada – the Inuits, First Nations and the Metis. The indigenous people got politically represented by the dominant culture as savage and inhuman, their very existence being conceived a threat to civilization and the values it upholds and perpetuates.

The original settlers, thus once the lords of their own lands, now turned intruders on the fringes of civilization, displaced and dispossessed.

The latter half of the twentieth century strikingly witnesses many an attempt to rewrite Canadian history from the perspective of the vanquished. A marked shift was visible in the deliberate attempt at re-constructing the versions of written history by bringing to sharp focus the untold layers of historical truth, incorporating the tales of the aboriginals so long conferred a status of exclusion from the mainstream discourse. Thus, the minorities, their subjugation and alienation, and their ineffectual struggle to transcend their victim state get extensive expression in the treatment of many Canadian writers.

This goes in line with the theoretical engagements of many of the postcolonial writers and theorists like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft and the like who attempted to dismantle the hegemonies and hierarchies of representation on which the colonial empire was built. They aimed at a decolonization of the once colonized 'psyche' along with that of the nation. The paradigms of the postcolonial studies interpret the anti-colonial struggle as a binary – of 'the civilized, rational, superior 'self' versus the barbaric, savage, irrational 'other' – which needs to be repudiated so that the natives or the once colonised are never pictured as secondary figures as they used to be. Reconstituting the identity through resistance and through the reclamation of indigenous culture becomes imperative here.

African –American theorist W.E.B. Du Bois in his autoethnographic work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) elaborates on the predicament of "double consciousness" – the dual identity of Afro-Americans as "American" and "Negro" which forces one to constantly see oneself through the eyes of an oppressive and contemptuous racist society, framing the position of the oppressed in an oppressive society. Similarly, Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) documents the way identity is constructed in a racist society in such a way that the blacks, laden with the notion of their inherent inadequacy, desperately yearn for whiteness. He outlines a tripartite schema of anti-colonial struggle wherein the first phase of colonial assimilation leads to the second level of reconstitution of identity through the reclamation of native cultural traditions and eventually to the third level of resistance and retrieval (Waugh 345). Edward Said's ground-breaking study *Orientalism* (1978) explicates how stereotypes and prejudices determine the representation of the Orient. The imperialist representational politics builds up the image of the 'other' as weak-willed, sec-

ondary and effeminate, unable to rule themselves. For Said, Orientalism was a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient' (Waugh 351). The orientalist discourse thus depended on an absolute distinction being made between the dominant, powerful, colonizing West and the degenerate, disorderly, stagnant Orient/East. Said resorts to the strategy of resistance through subversive writing. The highly influential work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) was motivated by Said's arguments. Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'subaltern' and Homi Bhabha's notions of 'ambivalence' and 'hybridity' have greatly contributed to the studies regarding identity and representations permeating cultures.

In Canada, non-indigenous writers including W.O. Mitchell, Rudy Wiebe, Atwood and Kroetsch have joined hands with indigenous writers like Beatrice Culleton, Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong in exploring and recreating the experiences of their ancestors. They consciously re-write history and forcefully counter through their writings, the misconceptions generated against the natives by the dominant culture, thereby reconstructing reality and demanding the righteous place of the natives in the multicultural society of Canada. Begum in her "Multiculturalism and Canadian Literary Diaspora" contends that by giving voice to a people's journey that spans centuries, these writers are attempting to "right the wrong done to the Aboriginal peoples" (60). This revisionist approach has resulted in debunking Canadian national history and even national mythology. Louis Riel, central figure in the Red River Rebellion of 1870 and the Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885 and hanged at Batoche in 1885 as a criminal agitator, is now a national hero who courted death in his attempt at saving a dying nation from the colonial invaders.

The Rebellions were failed Metis attempts to resist the Canadian government from encroaching upon the Metis lands, culture and dignity. Though the Rebellion led to the creation of the province of Manitoba, it cost Riel his own life. Executed for high treason and for the murder of Thomas Scott, Riel was initially dismissed as a rebel by the Canadian historians but now the Metis leader and founder of the Manitoba province is recognised in the Canadian West as a wronged man—a martyr and a visionary who fought to protect his people from the Canadian government. Canadian historian and Professor Stewart Wallace in his article *The North-West Rebellion* presents Riel's execution as "a supreme act of cruelty against one whose only sin was to have stood up for the rights of his people...". Riel's home has now turned the Riel House National Historic Site and the road way which passes near the locations of the 1885 rebellion has been renamed Louis Riel Trail. Apart from statues commemorating him,

Manitoba even honoured him with a public holiday in 2007 and the day of his execution is a national public commemoration day for the Metis (Stanley). Narratives both historical and fictional now attempt to give voice and space to the wronged Aboriginals.

Margaret Laurence, a matriarch of Canadian literature, has been successful in portraying the underlying racism and ethnocentrism of Neepawa, Canada through her fictional terrain of Manawaka. In the Manawaka series we find the hegemonic discourse counterpointed with alternate discourses challenging the norms of the dominant culture. The different racial and ethnic groups and the consequent social undercurrents pertaining to that get depicted in Laurence's Manawaka series. The novels reveal the Manawakans' bias towards the Ukrainians, the Metis or the Natives—all of them social inferiors to the dominant culture. "The exclusion of others who are marked by difference (physical, cultural, racial, ethnic) forms the basis of socio-political reality in Manawaka" (Lemieux 182). The oppressive ideological domination as well as economic exploitation perpetuates further differences. Through the Manawaka world, Laurence deftly brings to the forefront the reality surrounding the minorities and the humanitarian concerns it arouses. Laurence is able to empathise with the underprivileged and the downgraded, and aims at an inclusion through representation when she portrays the struggle, the victim status and the dehumanization of the Metis, people with mixed indigenous and European ancestry, through the Tonnerre family.

In her essay "Man of Our People", she talks about the Métis leader Gabriel Dumont:

There are many ways in which those of us who are not Indian or Métis have not yet earned the right to call Gabriel Dumont ancestor. But I do, all the same. His life, his legend, and his times are a part of our past which we desperately need to understand and pay heed to. (167)

Her understanding of the real Canadian ancestry and her longing for the union of the cultures get reflected here. She wants the Canadians to be a part of the native people and their ancestry, eradicating the gap between 'Them and Us'.

In the Manawaka cycle which comprises four novels and one short story collection, the Tonnerre family represents four generations of Métis, novel, after novel, and also quite credibly they seem "Manawaka's so-

cial rejects" (Morley 83). It was more or less certain that in Laurence's home town Neepawa which forms the fictional background of her novels as Manawaka, there were no Metis at all. As it is, in the Tonnerre family, Laurence is particularizing her knowledge of the appalling conditions of many of the Métis.

It is interesting to note that in each of the Manawaka novels, the Métis occupy a prominent role in the life of the protagonist either as destroyers or as victims. Somehow or other, fate connects the Laurencian protagonists either directly or indirectly with the Métis family. It is the awareness of the indescribable and inconsolable pain, poverty and emptiness of the Tonnerre world that leads them to an understanding and endurance of their own limited disasters. Leslie Monkman remarks, "In each Manawaka narrative, the Métis family of Jules Tonnerre becomes the focus of suffering and death, acceptance and endurance that are integrally related to the experience of each of Laurence's heroines" (57).

Quite interestingly, representation itself becomes a site of struggle here. Marginality is implicitly constructed through the narrative in *The Stone Angel*, the first of the Manawaka series where the minority remains more or less 'invisible' in discourse, and depicted antagonistically as a challenge to civilization itself, a 'common threat' to be annihilated. The association with the Metis is to portend doom for the 'civilized'. They are destroyers of white values for Hagar Shipley, the protagonist. The "Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair," (SA 3) are to be kept on the borders, or it can be perilous. Their very presence is a reproach to the reputable citizens of Manawaka. Hagar can only think of them with disgust and revulsion. Jason Currie, Hagar's father had often prohibited his sons from associating with the Metis boys. The "half breeds" had strange accents and hard laughter. Hagar's son John's defiant nature is stated in part through his friendship with the Tonnerres. John deliberately involves himself in dangerous games with the Tonnerres, partly to irritate Hagar and to deflate her high notions of Scottish ancestry. Hagar tries her best to steer John away from the unrefined, boorish Tonnerres but in vain. We find that John is the only person to think of the Tonnerres as "we" but the fatal connection only leads to his own doom. In a drunken dare with Lazarus, John is hit by a relief freight which came unexpectedly, resulting in his death. Hagar's husband Bram's association with the "half breeds" too is viewed with repugnance.

On another context, we are shown how Matt, Hagar's brother loses a wager with Jules Tonnerre. Matt takes home the fighting cock upon which

he pitted the wager, mangles and kills it instantly, suggesting the end of his aspirations. In the novel the Tonnerres symbolically function as antagonists, destroyers of white values. Here we find a refusal to engage in dialogue with alternate discourses.

But we see a gradual transition in the treatment of the Metis in novel after novel in the Manawaka cycle. In *The Fire Dwellers*, Laurence makes us bluntly encounter the poverty, pain, disintegration and destruction that have befallen the Métis through pithy sketches. The novel is set mostly in Vancouver but Laurence introduces the Tonnerre family here too. It is through Stacey's reminiscences that Laurence starkly brings to us the gradual and forcible eviction and relegation of the Métis which led to their final decimation:

The Tonnerre family shack, originally built a long time ago by old Jules Tonnerre, who was a boy then, when he stopped off and stayed in the Wachakwa Valley on his way back from the last uprising of his people, from the last and failed attempt to save themselves and their land, the last of their hopeless hope which was finished the year Riel was hanged in Regina. After that the BoisBrules, the French-Indians, the Métis, those who sang Falcon's song, once the prairie horse lords, would be known as half-breeds and would live the way the Tonnerres lived, in ramshackledom, belonging nowhere. (240)

Here the dominant discourse gives way to the alternate one, exposing the fissures and cracks in the former. The desperate struggle of the natives is foregrounded rendering all the other voices mute. We witness the systematic marginalization of the Metis from their own land and their means of livelihood. Stripped of the land rights and the right to self government, the Metis are subjected to assimilationist policies of the Canadian government which treated the Metis and the First Nations with a spirit of vengeance, hostility and distrust. The Rebellion becomes a weapon to marginalizing the Metis and the First Nations, legitimatizing their suppression and consequent removal from the settler society. While the government protected the white settlers' homes and property they destroyed and looted that of the Metis. A systematic dispossession and eviction of the Metis from their own lands occur through the 'scrip' system—distribution of a nominal piece of land (or monetary allotment) to those who withheld from the rebellion—which the Metis had to sell back to the Canadian government in utter poverty. The dispossessed people either left the place retreating to further north in search of livelihood or ended up destitutes on the sides

of roads, gradually coming to live in shacks built of discarded lumber or logs. The Tonnerre family shack built by Jules Tonnerre but still inhabited, in a much more dilapidated condition, by the third generation of Tonnerres proves a living emblem of the deprived status of the Metis.

The racial hostility towards Metis and the other aboriginals continues even a century after the North West Rebellion. And the magnitude of the wound inflicted is beyond proportions, which is made clear through Stacey's accidental meeting with Valentine Tonnerre her old classmate. The meeting opens up the age-old boils once again. The limited attention given by the Canadian government – the social, economic, educational and political marginalization makes it impossible for the Metis to continue living, let alone living with dignity. When Stacey comes to know that Val has to sell herself to live, she finds it impossible to escape the pangs of guilt. Having lost their way of life and means of sustaining themselves amidst the racial hostility, prostitution is the only way that Val can keep her alive. Sitting opposite Valentine Tonnerre the half breed woman, Stacey tangibly experiences the depth of the wrong that she and her people had committed to the Metis.

The heavy make-up that Val wears too is another strategy, a failed one, at inclusion. The wretched plight of the Metis tears Stacey to pieces, but she can only remain helpless. She can never pose any queries to Val, it is evident that she has reached the end of the tether. Though they are sharing coffee, they inhabit two entirely distinct worlds – one a privileged white world and the other oppressed, threatened, nearing annihilation. Stacey, unable to cope with herself and her family, had often pictured herself as a fire dweller. But this encounter with alterity makes Stacey realize how blissfully privileged she is. The Metis world is one of emptiness, bitterness and desolation.

The alternate canon grows stronger in *A Bird in the House*. The protagonist Vanessa in *A Bird in the House* has a greater understanding of the Metis with her spiritual growth and emotional maturing. We find the Metis gradually assuming a status of inclusion in representation though only with regard to the protagonist. Through the words and thought processes of the young Vanessa, Laurence etches the plight of the people who cannot belong anywhere: "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. They were, as my Grandmother Mac Leod would have put it, neither flesh, fowl, nor good salt herring" (108-9). The mixed Indian and European origins and

ancestry of the Metis set them apart from both the worlds, making them double outsiders.

Valentine's sister Piquette appears as Vanessa's classmate here. Piquette has to face all the disadvantages of a Metis including poverty, racism, sexism, rootlessness and loss of identity. Her life, even as a young girl, is one long story of loss, pain and suffering. Her mother had taken off at a young age and her father a drunkard, and it is the young girl, inflicted with tuberculosis of the bones who has to take care of the family. Mostly absent in her classes due to her negligence, illness and her inability, Piquette is only an indistinct presence for Vanessa. And it is not unnatural that the Metis occupy only the sidelines, not just in the social spectrum but even in thought processes of the socially elite. To Vanessa, Piquette's rough voice, her long dresses and her limpy walk due to tuberculosis appear to be quite embarrassing. She gets a chance to notice Piquette closely when Vanessa's father Dr Mac Leod takes along Piquette with them to their summer cottage offering her a chance for cure. This is the only act of social generosity that Piquette experiences during the years of her stay at Manawaka.

But Piquette, socially and emotionally insecure, remains distant and unfriendly during her stay with them. Her deflating of the sand castle which she had built, upon seeing the arrival of Vanessa, evidently portrays how guarded she is and how as a Metis she never trusts one from the settler community. She can only scornfully react to Vanessa's attempts at trying to make friends with her. Her indifference and her coldness can also be understood as a defensive façade to avoid further humiliation. As a Metis girl, she has only lived the life of social rejection, and knows for certain that it will be the lot of people like her. Vanessa's references to Piquette's knowledge of the forests offend her too soon, the half breed girl is reminded of her ruined dwelling place which documents the pathetic living conditions of people like her, and parading the insufficiency is further mortifying.

Vanessa's conceptions about Piquette, assuming her to be an Indian, are all misconceptions and are highly romanticized. She feels that Piquette may be the prophetess of the wild, able to impart her with the mysteries of the wild. But she is disappointed when Piquette dismisses the loons as a "bunch of squawkin' birds" (115). Both Vanessa and her father were attracted by the loons' call, half mocking and half plaintive.

Though Dr Mac Leod hopes that Vanessa would be company for the alienated Metis girl, that doesnot happen. The naïve Vanessa comfortably en-

scorced in the warmth of family relations, social and emotional security and economic stability cannot possibly realise the chasm that separates them, the enormity and depth of their differences. Piquette remains surly and distant as ever, and Vanessa remains incapable of understanding her. The silences, rejections and refusals are the discourses through which Piquette fights for her survival in a callous ethnocentric universe.

Just as Stacey meets Val, Vanessa too meets Piquette years later. Piquette greets Vanessa as an old friend but both are palpably aware of the rift between their two worlds—the world of success and the world of failure. For Vanessa too, the presence of a Metis acts as a reminder of the wrongs their people had done to a race: “I was ashamed, ashamed of my own timidity, the frightened tendency to look the other way” (116-117).

Hope is the only thing that one can cling on to, and it is hope which makes Piquette tread unseen paths. Leaving Manawaka is one such attempt, and the effort at marrying an Englishman, yet another. Here we find the yearning for assimilation and recognition, the terrible need for a shelter, an asylum to protect oneself from tyranny and marginalization. Ironically, it proves to be the quest of the very things once rejected by her. While the young Piquette refused to be an insider, the older Piquette craves to be so. The social and emotional security needed for survival can only be gained in the world of the whites and Piquette is not at fault if she ever yearns for that. But the terrible plight awaiting the Metis woman in a deceptive world cannot be much different. Hopes of climbing the social ladder and enjoying the privileges of the white world remain just a dream as her marriage fails and she has to return to Manawaka with the additional burden of her kids. The psychological trauma of failure leads her to alcoholism and the beaten down woman meets her death quite early. The guilt-ridden silence with which Vanessa receives the news of the death points out how she had anticipated the tragic destiny of Piquette. We understand that this is not the plight of Piquette alone, but of any half breed girl who is socially, politically, economically and educationally marginalized.

We find a strange but powerful parallel between the loons of Diamond Lake and the Metis. Vanessa, yearning to hear the cry of the loons, revisits the Diamond Lake years later, but is disappointed to find almost none. More and more summer cottages in the area had led to their receding to further north. But she has a renewed understanding, of Piquette as the true aristocrat of Diamond Lake. She comprehends that Piquette might have been the only one who had heard the crying of the loons. The ‘crying of the loons’ is a heavily loaded term. The loons are a symbol of the

despair, uprootedness and loss of land faced by the Metis and the aboriginals. The onslaught of civilization forced the loons to retreat to farther north; they signify the vulnerability of a culture on the verge of extinction. Only the dispossessed understands the pain of the dispossessed. Forfeited their dwelling place and nearing annihilation, the loons signify the silence and the lost world of the Metis.

In *The Diviners*, the last novel of the series, the history of the Metis along with the memory of their cultural dispossession becomes a major thread. While in all the other novels the Metis is depicted from an outsider perspective, it is in this novel that Laurence has endeavored a full-fledged insider perspective of a Metis character through Jules Tonnerre, the son of Lazarus Tonnerre. Jules' portrait develops largely through the eyes of the narrator-protagonist Morag Gunn—an orphan brought up by the town scavenger Christie and his wife Prin, living in Hill Street which obviously means the other side of the tracks. Despised and humiliated by most of her friends and their parents for her low social status, she finds herself an outcast to the powerful social hegemony of Manawaka.

The rigid social hierarchy of Manawaka gets itself represented through the Manawakans whether they be young or old. Morag on her first day at school learns many things other than the alphabets. She internalizes the social hierarchy with the social superiors engaging power and authority, her own exclusion from that world entailed by her stature of orphanhood and poverty, the interconnections of knowledge and power, the scorn associated with the term 'SCAVENGER' which her foster father is, and also, the most important thing for Morag, the simple knowledge of survival—never to let on, never to let anyone know that you are scared.

She feels connected to Jules when the latter shares a conspiratorial grin with her when Morag is chided by her teacher. Unconsciously she grins back but immediately repents and reproduces the town's version of the Metis in her thoughts. The Tonnerres, "those breeds" as they are called, are "dirty and unmentionable" (60). "People in Manawaka talk about them but don't talk to them" (69). It shows how rigid the social compartments are. Talking to the Metis is demeaning, but talking about them is food for gossip. Everything associated with the settlers is deemed civilized or refined whereas anything associated with the Metis is savage or uncivilized. Morag thinks that the skinny, tall boy who is more muscular than all the other boys in the class, never pays heed to what the others talk about him or his limpy legged sister Piquette or his mother who took off years back. But it is clear that apathy or indifference is the only weapon

available to the Metis in a hostile world and it is just a strategy to avoid further indignity.

Laurence ironically portrays the underlying politics of the country where the natives become outsiders and the settlers become the insiders, through the symbol of the school anthem. Morag loves the school anthem. It celebrates and eulogises the strands of Scottish, Irish and English ancestry in Canada: "THE THISTLE SHAMROCK ROSE entwine / THE MAPLE LEAF FOREVER!" (70). Thistle stands for Scots like Morag and Christie, Shamrock for Irish like the Connors, and Rose for English like Christie's wife Prin. At school, when she sings the anthem full throated, she looks at Jules, who has the best voice in the class, to find him not singing. Morag is too young and naïve to presume that he comes from nowhere. She is ignorant of the dichotomy and politics at play which excludes the natives from the Canadian national anthem but includes the white immigrants.

The author's ironic narrative stance overtly showcases the deliberate ostracisation the Metis has to face. This outsider status, the position of the 'other' which is the fate forced upon the Metis sardonically strikes upon the reader with great force throughout the novel. Even a normal visit to the café becomes a hated experience to the Metis as he/she is meted with dead silence. Metis is trouble for the elite. Everything connected to Jules is beyond the fringes of civilization. The Tonnerre shack is on the 'other' side of the tracks, the nuisance grounds- the town garbage ground- where Jules frequents is beyond the limits of decency. Even in the photograph he takes of Morag and their child Pique, his position is marked only by omission. Culture or the lack of it gets problematized through the presence or absence of the Metis. Years cannot redeem the predicament of the Metis as is evidenced from the plight of the Tonnerres.

Laurence skilfully weaves the narrative strands of the novel by presenting to us the untold tales from the vantage point of the 'other'. Thus, we have Jules' tales narrated to Morag, recounting the heroic escapades of their warrior heroes making her aware of a past which cannot be brushed aside. Interestingly, the two hero ancestors in Jules' tales are his grandfather Jules and Chevalier "Rider" Tonnerre, a deliberate mythic construction to reinforce the Metis spirit. *Skinner's Tale of Lazarus' Tale of Rider Tonnerre, Skinner's Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet* and *Skinner's Tale of Old Jules and the War Out West* lay bare the Metis version of history. The first one recounts the Battle of the Seven Oaks (1816), the second one recounts the Red River Rebellion (1869-70) and the third one recounts the North West Rebellion (1885). In the Battle of Seven Oaks (1816) the Metis fought the

European settlers in the Red River Valley and killed Governor Semple. In Jules' tale, the Metis had to hunt like bufflaoes the *Anglais* (English) and the *Arkanys* (Scots) who were coming to take over the Metis land and prevent them from hunting. "Falcon's Song" a song sung as an early expression of Metis identity was composed by Pierre Falcon commemorating this Metis victory. But Jules' tale does not disclose the fact that the battle was also a part of the conflict between Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company, rivals in fur trade, where the Metis fought along with the North West Company, for asserting their Pemmican rights.

The second tale introduces the *Prophet* (Riel) who incites the Metis to stand up against the government which plans to measure and take away all the Metis land. When Jules gloriously narrates the powers of the *Prophet*—a highly religious and highly educated man with supernatural powers—who came to rescue the Metis and their land from the settlers, Morag instantly identifies him as Louis Riel. The third tale narrates the desperate attempts of the Metis along with the Indians and the Crees to regain their lost land. The Prophet is joined by the Indian chiefs Big Bear and Pound-maker (historical figures) and Gabriel Dumont but they could not resist when the government sent army from the Down East with rifles, cannons and machine guns while the Metis and others were still fighting with their old weapons and the old method of ambush. Obviously, it was a lost battle and Riel was hanged at the end.

In the tales, the narrative challenges pre-established truths and questions facts of history fixed in writing. Tales of Piper Gunn narrated to the young Morag by Christie celebrate the heroic exploits of the Scottish settlers in establishing their settlement in the new land near Red River including the slaying of the half breeds and Indians. The Red River Rebellion and North West Rebellion, the Metis attempts at reclaiming their land and rights, are introduced as needless moves by the half breeds to take over the government of the place under the leadership of the rebel chief Riel. Christie affirms that though Riel and his men killed one or two English men and took the Fort, the Sutherlanders valiantly retaliated and took the Fort back. Morag corrects Christie with the versions of written history that she had studied in her classes. The government Down East sent out the army from Ontario to suppress the rebellion, and Riel had to flee. The man came back to Saskatchewan in 1885 for the North West Rebellion. This is the only place where fact and history express the same truth. The background and the motives of the violent insurgencies and their suppression are all narrated politically, favouring and highlighting the dominant stance and falsifying the Metis standpoint. Canadian history of the times portrays

Riel as an insane traitor who killed the English man, Thomas Scott. Morag cannot perceive why history is so lopsided when all Riel wanted was to have the Metis their rights! In Christie's story, Riel is a 'short little man' with burning eyes whereas in Jules' tales, Riel is a very tall man, taller even than Rider Tonnerre. Ironically, tellings differ as perceptions differ. Here we find history rewritten with two parallel dichotomic versions asserting their own rights of existence. The tales, whether factual, constructed or remodelled, answer to the needs of a race. Apart from a larger historic significance, these tales have a symbolic significance too, strengthening and reassuring them.

When Jules, named after his grandfather Jules Tonnerre, skilled hunter and warrior, asks Morag to call him by his real name instead of his nick name Skinner, he is also letting on the secret of the legacy of his name, and the significance it holds for him. That also underlies his great need to be his true self in a society where his dignity is devalued. He secretly cherishes the need for acknowledgement. But Laurence is clear that there never can be a fairytale reconciliation to the burning plight of the Metis or the aboriginals. This is made clear through their relation where Jules and Morag act as two separate individuals, each going through his/her own trials. Their child Pique is the living emblem of their relationship but it is not that easy to bridge the cultural gap between the two individuals. A terrible scene where Morag is made to retell the events at the time of Jules' sister Piquette's death reveals this fact. As a reporter for 'Manawaka Sentinel', Morag is forced to witness the gruesome sight of Piquette's death by burning, and now she is compelled to recount to Jules, the harrowing incidents at the time of the tragedy.

"The air smelled of-of burnt wood. I remember thinking - crazy - but I thought Brois - Brules".

"Shut up!" Jules cries out in some kind of pain which cannot be touched by her". [...]

"It smelled of - well, like roasted meat, and for a minute I wondered what it was, and then -".

Jules lies across the table once more. Then slowly he raises his head and looks at her.

"By Jesus, I hate you," he says in a low voice like distant thunder. "I hate all of you. Every Goddamn one." (275)

The cry of sheer social and racial hatred – the condensed anger in Jules’ voice – infuses the relation between the natives and the whites. The heart-wrenching agony of a people tortured, treated as aliens in their own land and meted out the destiny of poverty and death denies any scope for a reconciliation or forgiveness. Also, when Jules narrates to Morag the news of his father’s death and the refusal of the town authorities to grant burial space for Lazarus in the town cemetery, Morag can only remain dumb. Morag, from the white world, can only be a silent witness to his misfortunes; she can never partake in it.

Valentine and Piquette, Jules’ sisters, miserably fail in their attempts to cope with and function in the white society, but Jules survives, his profession as a folksinger earning him his daily bread. Ironically, he must cast on the aura of the romantic or the Indian to survive and he is ready to cater to the whims of the white audience. He takes the masquerade as an essential condition for living: “One man circus. Satin shirt with a lotta beadwork, and sometimes a phoney doeskin jacket with fringes and a lotta plastic porcupine quills in patterns. That’s what they like. [...]. It’s a load of shit, but I don’t worry much as long as they let me do the singing” (266). The songs he composes are mostly on his grandfather and Louis Riel, his heritage surfacing in his lyrics. He derives a sense of personal freedom in the midst of all the discrimination and despair, the calm acceptance and resignation following from the knowledge that he can do almost nothing to alter his fate.

The presence of Pique in *The Diviners* can symbolically be taken as the author’s strategy of hybridity. A figurative reconciliation of the two cultures is enacted through the exchange of the talismans – the Scottish plaid pin and the Metis hunting knife – both to be inherited by Pique, the daughter of Jules and Morag. John in *The Stone Angel* had traded the precious Scottish plaid pin that his mother had handed over to him as a token of their proud Scottish ancestry, with the Metis hunting knife of Lazarus Tonnerre, Jules’ father. Generations past, now both come to rest in the hands of the rightful inheritor, Pique. Though an easy fusion of the two races is implausible the prospect of a shift in the power dynamics is envisaged.

As the novel ends, Pique is on her way to Galloping Mountain where her father’s family is. Leaving her mother’s home to know and be with her paternal relatives is a gesture highly symbolic. It is the next generation’s search for past and roots. Unlike Piquette’s and Vanessa’s failed attempts, Pique’s quest is more decisive, she is determined not to be beaten down. Pique stands on the solid base of convictions and self-acceptance. Hers is a

more deliberate and strong-willed attempt at reclaiming the lost past and ancestry of a race silenced by the powerful discourses. Here we find the other reexercising agency and retrieving self-hood.

Just as Pique's poem on Jules attempts to find him a permanent textual space, we find that the novels of the Manawaka series become Laurence's attempt to find a fictional space for the Metis, represented through the Tonnerre family of Jules. Through the Manawaka series Laurence addresses the problematic of ethnic identity and representation, and explicates how the interrelationship between the so called 'minority' and 'dominant' cultures creates the category of 'difference'- an oppressive site of struggle characterized by opposition and resistance. Through the fictional re-presentation of the entire 'other' world of the Metis, Laurence successfully initiates an alternate discourse wherein perspectives are revised and reality redefined. She locates the sources of resistance and dismantles the authority of the hegemonic discourse which refuses to engage in dialogue with alternate canons. Refuting and repudiating the constructed representations of the native, Laurence reconstitutes the ethnic identity giving them a voice.

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