

# Genre and Gender: Autobiography and Self-Representation in *The Diviners*

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RECENT FEMINIST CRITICISM of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* explores the representation of female subjectivity and the politics of textuality. Clara Thomas, for example, has identified the novel's perspective as not only distinctively Canadian, but also distinctively female (14). Helen Buss, among others, identifies Laurence's project as a feminist revision of the "Bildungsroman" or "Künstlerroman" (149). Emphasizing contradiction, Christl Verduyn analyzes Laurence's use of language and genre for female self-representation: "The text includes a struggle against itself as formalized written language, with techniques like the use of memorybank movies and snapshots, and questions about the meaning of words, challenging the formalities of genre" (67). More recently, Barbara Godard and Gayle Greene have shown that *The Diviners* alludes to canonical texts, such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as well as modernist texts, such as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to revise male literary models. Also addressing the question of genre, Jon Kertzer and David Williams identify the confessional genre in Laurence's work, with its retrospective point of view and "need to invent an autonomous [female] self" (Williams 30). While these critics lay the groundwork for political and genre analyses, further analysis is necessary

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to demonstrate Laurence's use of genre to represent gender. The confessional genre, as she employs it, becomes a narrative strategy for female self-representation, for a genre is not only a signifying system, but also a signifying practice and means by which the text employs narrative structure to emphasize certain values over others (Cohan and Shires 78).<sup>1</sup> Further examination of *The Diviners* will reveal that the novel is a hybrid of realist, autobiographical and confessional genres to construct a female subject and establish the authority of a female perspective.

In the last line of *The Diviners*, the implied author suggests that Morag Gunn finishes her life story as Margaret Laurence completes her novel: "Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title" (477). This ending invites a reading of the novel as a fictional autobiography, the implication being that the novel in its entirety represents the process of Morag's construction of the fiction of her life story. The interior monologue resembles the editing of a narrative or film: "*A popular misconception is that we can't change the past—everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it*" (Laurence 70). The text therefore problematizes the narrative to emphasize female subjectivity (McLean 97), particularly the provisional nature of the self, for "I" designates no lexical entity, but rather a "dialectic reality" within the text's language (Benveniste 225). Christian Bök remarks that Laurence remains "aware of the degree to which subjects are produced ... by the discursive system within which they operate," and she participates in a project of "feminist rewriting," an adaptation of masculine genres to a feminist project (87).

In studies of women's autobiography, feminist critics have emphasized an understanding of the self as a fictive persona which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is constructed from the polyphonic voices of discourse (Smith 48). Leigh Gilmore argues that even fictional autobiography bears the "mark" of autobiography: "the always problematical deployment of the *I*" (6–7). Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenke add that women's writing often differs in this respect from the "(masculine) tradition of autobiography beginning with Augustine [that takes] as its first premise the mirroring capacity" or "universality" of the autobiographer:

the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from the lack of a tradition,

1 According to Cohan and Shires, a literary genre can be identified by the kind of events that it organizes in sequence, the principles of combination that it follows, the functions that actors perform, and the traits it draws upon to delineate characters.

her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation—social and political as well as psychic.... A feminist reconstruction of women's autobiography, against the backdrop of twentieth-century philosophical questioning of the self, can begin to use autobiography for the fertile ground it is. (1)

This statement illuminates the ideological project in Laurence's *The Diviners* to voice "feminine experience relegated by patriarchy to the margins of discourse" (Bök 80). The text constructs a female subject and interrogates ideologies of gender by heightening contradictions in the discourses of self-representation. Morag's conflicting identities as a mother and a writer, for instance, reveal the limited self-representational models that are available to women in the protagonist's socio-historical context.

By experimenting with genre, Laurence participates in the gender politics of self-representation, even in the selection of a protagonist. As a woman and author, Morag confronts a difficult task, for "women have historically hesitated to attempt the pen .... [and] the woman writer's self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text" (Gilbert and Gubar 15). In the twentieth century, the problematical attempt at self-representation becomes central to both the conflict and the ideological project of women's autobiography. Morag's life story dramatizes not only the exhilaration of artistic self-definition, but also the anxiety, alienation and fragmentation of many female authors: "Recording their own distinctively female experience, they are secretly working through and within the conventions of literary texts to define their own lives" (Gilbert and Gubar 58, 87). In addition to autobiographical conventions, Laurence works within realist conventions, particularly the "ostensibly objective third-person narrator" (Brodzki and Schenck 3), to authorize the self-representation of a female subject. The genres of realist fiction and autobiography are in fact skillfully blended to authorize Morag's life story.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, *The Diviners* relies upon the "Christian tradition of confession," for Morag's "authority is derived through autobiography's proximity to the rhetoric of truth telling" (Gilmore 57).<sup>3</sup> To authorize the protagonist's

2 For a fuller discussion of the narrator, see my article, "Authorizing her Text: Margaret Laurence's Shift to Third-Person Narration," in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 24.2 (1999): 64–78.

3 Confession may be defined as a subcategory of autobiography. For a detailed discussion of the genre's characteristics, see Judith Whitenack. I have also examined the genre in Laurence in "The Stone Angel as a Feminine Confessional Novel" in *Challenging Territory: The Writing of Margaret Laurence*, Christian Riegel, ed., pp. 47–66.

life story and to position her as a producer of “truth,” Laurence situates Morag in a discourse of “truth” as a confessing subject: “Foucault’s general historicizing approach yields this insight and also enables us to discern the crucial feature of ‘authorization’ which configures confessor/penitent, analyst/analysand, writer/reader, and, significantly, critic/autobiographer on the grounds of truth” (Gilmore 71). To examine questions of discursive authority, Sidonie Smith recommends suggestive, rather than prescriptive, critical analyses of women’s autobiography, even fictional autobiography, and “more inclusive and exhaustive” surveys of particular texts. I will, therefore, examine the relationship between genre and gender in *The Diviners* in a detailed, narratological analysis of Laurence’s representation of consciousness. To this end, I will borrow Dorrit Cohn’s classification of techniques for the representation of consciousness. It is my contention that in a narrative strategy that generates a maximal, figural representation of consciousness,<sup>4</sup> Laurence depicts the dramatized search for self of confessional fiction in a feminist reconstruction of an autobiographical form, in order to authorize the self-representation of a female subject.

In *Transparent Minds*, Cohn draws upon Gerard Genette to identify the narrative modes for presenting consciousness in fiction. She argues that the representation of consciousness distinguishes narrative fiction from drama, non-fiction and other genres. Psychological novelists, in particular, take as their task the depiction of the subjectivity of fictional characters, including thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Cohn 6–7). Laurence constructs a complex female subject in the character of Morag. As a convention of confession, the protagonist has reached a point in life from which to examine and reconstruct a life story. Although *The Diviners* is written in the third person, the confessional persona is Morag. In fact, Laurence uses the techniques that Cohn classifies as quoted monologue, psycho-narration, and narrated monologue in ways that maximize the representation of the figural mind while effacing the third-person narrator. In other words, the interior monologue of the female protagonist is embedded in a third-person narrative, but the dominant voice of the text remains that of the female protagonist.<sup>5</sup>

4 Figural narrative is defined by the use of “techniques that work toward the effacement of the line of demarcation between authorial and figural language,” as in Henry James; that is, the text effects a direct exposure to the mind of a character, without apparent authorial intervention (Cohn 139).

5 Split subjectivity is normative, according to contemporary theorists. Chris Weedon states that consciousness is the “fragmented and contradictory effect of a discursive battle for the subjectivity of the individual”; see “Language and Subjectivity” (in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, 74–106), especially pages 105–06.

The literary effect of Laurence's narrative technique is not only to present a female perspective, but also to create sympathy for that perspective. As Wayne Booth notes, the solution to the problem of maintaining readers' sympathy is "to use the heroine herself as a kind of narrator, though in third person, reporting on her own experience" (245).

Laurence frequently employs quoted monologue to give direct access to the figural consciousness as it shifts into the first-person and present tense, for the "most important single privilege [of perspective] is that of obtaining an inside view" of a character (Booth 160). From the novel's opening pages, the quoted monologue gives voice to the "I" of the subjective self. This mode also presents direct thought fragments. Morag's thoughts appear in quoted monologue when agitation or emotion breaks up her otherwise ordered thought: "*Yes yes when cannot remember the blood squirming entrails sheets what was it a dream*" (180). The thoughts are so fragmented that extra spacing separates the partial thoughts, and no punctuation is used, not even a period which would indicate a complete thought. Sometimes Laurence uses italics to emphasize the direct quotation of thought. At other times, she formulates the quoted monologue in the disjointed and incomplete syntax of the stream of consciousness: "Inner language as [James] Joyce conceived it is language freed from syntactical completeness, a language that suppresses elements that are customary, and often even indispensable, in language aimed at communicating meaning to an interlocutor" (Cohn 94). In addition to syntactical abbreviation, lexical opaqueness characterizes the quoted monologue with the "semantic enrichment of each individual word" (Cohn 96). In the example above, the words "blood," "squirming entrails" and "sheets" recall Morag's first Memorybank Movie when she thinks that her dead parents' "guts lie coiled like scarlet snakes across the sheets," resembling those of dead gophers (25). The words are given additional resonance by the immediate narrative context. Jules' question, "Ever seen a shot gopher?" and his description of the death of a soldier precede Morag's monologue. The words therefore suggest a psychic depth to generate sympathy for Morag's perspective, because "the deeper our plunge, the more unreliability we will accept without loss of sympathy" (Booth 164).

Laurence also uses this mode to represent some of the idiosyncrasies of her protagonist's subjectivity. The quoted monologue may offer thought fragments or complete sentences of discursive rhetoric and logical ordering. In the first chapter's long italicized passages, for example, Morag's thoughts eloquently depict the past, displaying an order that she has developed over time. Younger selves can be particularly idiosyncratic. In a Memorybank

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Movie in which the language oscillates between narrated and quoted monologue, a teenaged Morag rejects swearing:

no one will say *Good Morning* to Morag and Prin.... They're a bunch of—well, a bunch of so-and-so's. Morag does not swear. If you swear at fourteen it only makes you look cheap, and she is not cheap, goddamn it. Gol-darn it. (121–22)

However, a more mature Morag revises her opinion: “Fuck. Shit. Bloody bloody christly hell. And the hell with not swearing, too” (128). The inclusion of the word “christly” indicates an important source of some of Morag’s idiosyncratic language: she borrows language from Christie. Quoted monologues, even those of the mature Morag, demonstrate the integration of Christie’s words, proverbs, and tales, and their formative effect in the construction of the subject: “*If you want to make yourself into a doormat, Morag girl, I declare unto you that there’s a christly host of them that’ll be only too willing to tread all over you.—Proverbs of C. Logan, circa 1936*” (120). Christie’s language acquires the force of a personal mythology in the construction of Morag’s subjectivity. Monologic language is generally more idiosyncratic than speech, but this individualization of language resembles Morag’s speech enough that her self-talk appears to be in character (Cohn 89).

In contrast, under “Halls of Sion” Morag’s speech fails to reflect her monologues, identifying the female subject with the split subjectivity that problematizes the ideology of individuation in traditional autobiography. In the first dialogue with Brooke, for instance, Morag self-censors the prairie idiom “away to hell and gone” (211). Subsequently, a determination to “conceal everything about herself which he might not like,” particularly Christie’s swearing (213), creates a “feeling of being separated from herself” (284). However, she does not desire to suppress the language of subjectivity indefinitely: “Morag has experienced increasingly the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared” (276). Here the incongruity between speech and thought creates an unbearable tension that makes her “doubtful” and “angry” at “the composition of her own composite self” (277). This tension is relieved “only when secret thought becomes audible speech in the act of confession” (Cohn 83):

Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old, and I am five feet eight inches tall, which has always seemed too bloody christly tall to

me but there it is, and by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land, I am stuck with it and I do not *mind* like I did once, ... for I've gone against it long enough, and I'm no actress at heart, then, and that's the everlasting christly truth of it. (277)

The assertion of subjectivity marks an attempt to situate the subject in a discourse of "truth" and exposes ideologies of gender that suppress women's speech (Gilmore 71).

In the context of confession the quoted monologue, as it is used most frequently in *The Diviners*, becomes a discursive practice that produces "truth," "gender" and "identity" in two important ways (Gilmore 9). First, the quoted monologue differs from dialogue in the form of self-address, in which the first and second person pronouns "I" and "you" refer to the same subject (Cohn 90). For instance, Morag asks herself, "*So why complain?... You said they could move in here together*" (307–08). The gendered self takes itself as its audience and becomes associated with the "voice of conscience" (Cohn 91). These monologues explicitly dialogize the narrative (McLean 98), while associating the female subject with a figural mind that is as searchingly introspective as a male autobiographer's.

Second, the quoted monologue also takes the form of dialogue with an internalized addressee; in this case "you" refers to a character-narratee. In fact, addresses to absent narratees account for more of the quoted monologue in *The Diviners* than do instances of self-address. For example, Morag addresses her absent husband: "*I need you, too, Brooke. I care about you. I can't stand this [estrangement]*" (317). Even when he is present, the quoted monologue contains a plea for forgiveness which is articulated only silently: "*Brooke, forgive me. May we forgive one another for what neither of us could help*" (359). Similarly, addresses to Pique, Bridie, Jules, and Christie establish a desire to purge guilt (Stelzig 24). An address to Christie after his death, however, is not merely a venting of guilt, but rather a flurry of questions that inscribe a desire for female self-definition:

*You really could see, though. What about me? Do I only pretend to see, in writing? What did I ever see about you, Christie, until it was too late? I told my child tales about you, but never took her to see you. I made a legend out of you, while the living you was there alone in that mouldering house.* (437–38)

Sustained quoted monologues are presented in Morag's letters to Dan and Ella (311, 352, 443). The letters generate an immediacy of thought and fulfill a confessional function. Laurence generally uses the first-person form of

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the quoted monologue to recuperate “the technologies of self-representation present in the confession” and to “authorize and deauthorize certain ‘identities’” (Gilmore 9); in particular, she seeks to authorize the voice of a female implied author.

Laurence also experiments with this mode in monologues addressed to Catharine Parr Traill. In these passages, Laurence makes explicit the construction of the self from the polyphonic voices of discourse in a dramatic representation that identifies the “speakers,” scripts their dialogue, and in one case even gives the stage direction “voice distant now and fading rapidly” (431). These monologues appear three times (109–10, 186–87, 430–31), but they are mock confessions. Morag admits that they raise “imaginary dangers” to “focus the mind away from real ones” (431), and they purge false guilt for lacking the resourcefulness and self-assurance of a pioneer. Irony arises from both the form and content. Just as Laurence’s use of the epistolary form alludes to the earliest form of first-person narration, her use of a dramatic form plays upon the origins of the quoted monologue. It can be traced to the dramatic soliloquy and to the pre-realist novel *Tom Jones*, in which characters speak their thoughts audibly (Cohn 58–59). Laurence draws attention to this conception of monologue with Royland’s remarks about Morag talking to herself aloud (110, 187). Laurence’s experimentation with the quoted monologue creates a subtle intertextuality.

This intertextuality not only achieves irony, but also marks the discourses and tropes through which a woman writer may represent herself. Barbara Godard comments, “Laurence joins a number of Canadian women writers in raising the question of artistic illusion, the shifting boundaries of life and art as explored through a female perspective,” and she invokes a collective female tradition (217). Laurence uses the quoted monologue to explore Morag’s access to the language of self-representation, as Morag draws upon the culturally marked language of *The Canadian Settlers Guide* in the construction of her own subjectivity. A similar but distinctly confessional effect occurs when she draws upon biblical texts:

*Save me O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. Psalm 69. (438)*

*How to spare one’s children at least some kinds of pain? No way. Where in the Bible does it speak of a new heaven and a new earth? That’s what we need all right, Lord, but it looks to be a long time in coming. (447)*

This intertextuality associates the subject with powerful life scripts, such as those of the female religious; Morag thereby commits herself to a “matri-

lineal contract, tracing her story through a series of powerful foremothers” (Smith 55). In fact, the central trope of the title, *The Diviners*, generates an association with the “veracity” of women’s visionary experience (Gilmore 67).<sup>6</sup>

Quoted monologues are generally presented by Laurence without explicit signals of quotation, such as thinking verbs or quotation marks, although some are italicized for emphasis, as they are in preceding examples. At other times, thought fragments are woven into the third-person narration almost imperceptibly:

Pique was going by train this time, *thank God, not hitching*. The day she left, Morag decided not to go to the station after all. She preferred to say goodbye to Pique here. *Why put yourself through more harrowing scenes than necessary? A sign of advancing years, this, no doubt, but what the hell?* (474, emphasis added)

The text frequently alternates in this way between narration and monologue. Unsignaled quoted monologues create a consonance between the narrating and figural voices. Laurence’s use of unsignaled monologue contributes to the effacement of the narrator and the predominance of the figural consciousness that is female: “In figural narrative situations monologues are most effective when special devices are brought into play to insure the smooth blending of the narrating and the figural voices: omission or discreet use of inquit signals, espousal of the character’s vantage point on the surrounding scene, omission of psycho-narration, syntactic ambiguity, or coloration of the narrator’s language by a character’s idiolect” (Cohn 76). Some of these characteristics of a figural narrative are incorporated into the quoted monologue in *The Diviners*, while others become more apparent in the second mode for presenting consciousness, psycho-narration.

Although quoted monologue provides direct access to thought, psycho-narration further constructs the subjectivity of Morag. Psycho-narration is always third-person because it is part of the narrator’s discourse, unlike the first-person form of the quoted monologue. Laurence nevertheless shapes even the psycho-narration for a maximal figural representation. Although the mode is conventionally cast in the past tense, Laurence often uses the present tense to increase immediacy. The psycho-narration employs some thinking verbs, such as “she thought” or “she knows,” to attribute

6 Ken McLean thinks that divining is “a metaphor for the logocentric quest for hidden ‘truth’ and an invitation to interpretation (102–03). For a comprehensive discussion of the trope of the diviner, refer to Michel Fabre.

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silent words or mental processes to the figural mind but without drawing attention to the verb. The thought content is often presented first and the attribution follows at the middle or end of a sentence: “Maudie could not weigh more than a hundred pounds, at most, Morag estimated” (113), and “The day, she predicted, was going to be a scorcher” (106). Sometimes subjective verbs, such as “likes,” “wants,” “feels,” or “is afraid to,” make attribution less intrusive. Laurence also intertwines thought and feelings with sensations to present them indirectly: “Morag by now is frantic with worry, and Pique’s skin feels as though it were burning” (386). In effect, Laurence draws the least attention possible to the narrator and focuses attention on the subjectivity of Morag through reportorial indirection.

In fact, the psycho-narration in *The Diviners* is shaped by an inconspicuous, effaced narrator. Evaluative judgments about the character are absent. The narrator’s knowledge of Morag’s psyche appears to coincide with the character’s, recording thoughts and emotions as she experiences them: “Morag realizes, with some surprise, that she is able to defend her own work” (280). When Morag acts upon her emotions in a crisis, her behaviour is recorded without moral evaluation:

Morag, standing in the diningroom doorway, feels a spinning of blood inside her skull. She recalls having been as angry as this as a child, but seldom since. It acts upon her precipitously, like about six double scotches taken at a gulp. She picks up the peacock-blue Italian glass bowl ... and heaves it against the livingroom fireplace. Naturally, it shatters dramatically. (281)

If evaluations appear at all, Morag makes them: “Morag perceived that what she had taken to be hostility had been in fact self-reproach on his part” (257). The narrator readily fuses with the narrated consciousness and there is no indication of cognitive privilege on the narrator’s part (Cohn 26, 31–32). Once again, the effect Laurence achieves is sympathy, because the female perspective is presented as an “isolated, unaided consciousness,” seemingly without the mediation of an authorial narrator (Booth 274).

This consonance between the narrator and the female subject is achieved, in part, by consistent focalization, even when the thoughts of others are represented; consequently, the psycho-narration is limited to the perspective of Morag. Other characters’ thoughts are presented, not by a narrator who enters the minds of several characters, but who observes them through Morag’s eyes: Jules “will be sleeping, *she senses*, alone in the spare bedroom, by his own wish” (450, emphasis added); Pique is silent because “[a]pparently nothing needs to be spoken,” and “*Morag suspects* that Pique

would like to tell him she is trying to learn guitar” (451–52, emphasis added). Even character descriptions are focalized through Morag:

Dan meets them at Inverness station. He is wearing his ... fisherman's sweater. In London, *she now realizes*, these clothes looked slightly like what a painter might wear who was trying to look like an artist, although *it never struck her like that* at the time. Here, however, they look like what they really are, the local garb, worn because warm. (408, emphasis added)

The fusion of the narrating and figural voices creates an ambiguity about the vocal origin of the last sentence. The consonance is achieved by another convention of the stream-of-consciousness novel: a “stylistic contagion” that infects the narrator’s language with the subject’s. The words “worn because warm” reflect Morag’s idiom in diction and rhythm. Cohn borrows the term “stylistic contagion” to “designate places where psycho-narration verges on the narrated monologue, marking a kind of mid-point between the two techniques where a reporting syntax is maintained, but where the idiom is strongly affected (or infected) with the mental idiom of the mind it renders” (Leo Spritzer, qtd. in Cohn 33). Both stylistic contagion and focalization through the eyes of the protagonist shape the psycho-narration for a consonant figural narration. The consonance of narrating and figural voices creates a polyphonic or double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric that becomes a narrative strategy to authorize the female subject. The third-person narrator reinforces the point of view of the protagonist and lends authority to female self-representation:

Responding to the generic expectations of significance in life stories, she looks toward a narrative that will resonate with privileged cultural fictions of male selfhood.... Tracing or discovering a pattern of progressive stages, the autobiographer suggests how she has become who she is: the childhood that moved her toward some vocation, her educational and intellectual experiences, her entrance into the public arena, her successes and failures, her reflection on that achievement in later years.... She embraces, that is, the ideology of individualism—with its myth of presence and originary authority, reassuring her reader that women, and this woman in particular, can aspire to and achieve full “human beingness.” (Smith 52)

The narrator serves another strategic function by articulating subverbal awareness which Morag does not or cannot articulate to herself, thus expanding as well as authorizing the self-representation. Although the

psycho-narration usually corresponds to Morag's self-representation, this mode may have the capacity to bypass the limits of her self-understanding. For instance, psycho-narration elaborates childhood experience: "Something is happening. Morag senses it but cannot figure it out.... Morag is scared, and her stomach aches" (22). The child-Morag lacks the maturity to understand and articulate her mental state. Laurence also uses "psycho-analogies" to depict emotional states as metaphorical representations of mental processes (Cohn 46). The child-Morag, terrified by her parents' death, "scuttles back to the kitchen like a cockroach—she *is* a cockroach; she feels like one, running, scuttling" (24). The adult-Morag finds that anger "acts upon her precipitously, like about six double scotches taken at a gulp" (281). Sensations, dreams and erotic experiences are also summarized in psycho-narration, as in this passage which stresses the subverbal nature of sexual awareness: "The throbbing goes on and on, and she does not realize her voice has spoken until it stops, and then she does not know if she has spoken words or only cried out somewhere in someplace beyond language" (153). Here psycho-narration subtly makes a space for female desire and thereby inscribes it as part of female subjectivity within the empowering interpretation of autobiography (Smith 56). Psycho-narration is, however, used much less frequently than the monologic techniques that are favoured in a maximal figural representation.

Psycho-narration offers still another advantage: temporal flexibility. The mode can "as readily summarize an inner development over a long period of time as it can render the flow of successive thoughts and feelings, or expand and elaborate a mental instant" (Cohn 34). Psycho-analogies may arrest the progression of the narrative to elaborate a mental state. In contrast, a gradual change of mind may be quickly summarized: "Morag had, once upon a time, held that belief herself. One of the disconcerting aspects of middle age was the realization that most of the crises which happened to other people also ultimately happened to you" (63). *The Diviners* contains few summary psycho-narrations and most appear as recollections, maintaining the fiction of memory:

At this moment, she can remember only the good things that happened between herself and Brooke. Appalled, she wonders what has taken place and why she finds herself here, in circumstances which at this moment seem unreal. She half expects to waken and find herself back with Brooke, ten years ago. (329)

Laurence occasionally uses psycho-narration in this way to add the temporal sweep of a panoramic view to characterize Morag's consciousness,

but these passages are few in comparison to the novel's many narrated monologues, the third mode for presenting consciousness.

Laurence makes extensive use of the narrated monologue, the mode that is the "quintessence of figural narration" (Cohn 111). Narrated monologue is composed of narrative sentences which belong to the protagonist's rather than the narrator's mental domain. This mode is a form of interior monologue which introduces into the novel the subjectivity of the private experience, but not as direct self-narration (Cohn 115). Instead, the narrated monologue transforms the language of thought into the narrative language of third-person, realist fiction:

This had been the pattern of life for how long? Morag at this table, working, and people arriving and saying, in effect, *Please don't let me interrupt you*. But they *did* interrupt her, damn it. The only thing that could be said for it was that if no one ever entered that door, the situation would be infinitely worse.  
(372)

The passage contains no marks of quotation that might set off Morag's thoughts from the third-person narration. The thought is Morag's and it arises unmistakably from a limited perspective; however, the passage creates a coincidence of narrative and figural perspectives. Furthermore, the narrative sentences are in Morag's mental idiom; for example, "damn it" is Morag's wording, not the narrator's. Although these are Morag's thoughts, they are not signaled by mental verbs, such as "she thought." The passage also superimposes the narrating and figural voices. The monologue cannot be read as standard narration because it sounds the voice of a figural mind, and the effect is a "seamless junction between narrated monologues and their narrative context," allowing the text to weave in and out of the subject's mind without perceptible transitions (Cohn 102–03).

The narrated monologue also deviates from standard narration in the verb tenses that it employs and sometimes its syntax. In the preceding example, the simple past tense of narration is replaced by the pluperfect form in the opening sentence, and the question takes the form of direct, not indirect speech. In the following passage, the simple future tense is also replaced by the conditional "would": "Odd, now, though, to recall that she had come here in the first place partly because of a fantasy—Morag getting to know dozens of other writers, with whom she would have everything in common" (382). In addition to these tense changes, the participle "getting" appears without any auxiliary verb so that the monologue shifts into

The narrated monologues in the novel present a figural mind in the process of reaching backward and forward in time, creating a fluidity of time within the subject.

the continuing present and appears to take on the abbreviated syntax of direct thought.

The temporal flexibility creates some important effects. The pluperfect and conditional tenses are the standard tenses of memory and anticipation in the narrated monologue. The narrated monologues in the novel present a figural mind in the process of reaching backward and forward in time, creating a fluidity of time within the subject: “The narrated monologue is a choice medium for revealing a fictional mind suspended in an instant present, between a remembered past and an anticipated future” (Cohn 126–27). The language itself generates a convergence of time within the subjectivity that it constructs. The effect is simultaneously reinforced by the use of temporal adverbs or deictics, such as “now” and “here,” which clearly organize the narrative present around female subjectivity: “The consistent adjustment of temporal adverbs in narrated monologues is therefore one of the most powerful tools available to the novelist for locating the narrative perspective within the psyche of [her] characters. It is from their vantage point that we can then experience the past as a realm that can be reached through memory, and the future as a realm essentially unknown, open only to conjecture and fantasy” (Cohn 127–28). By using the narrated monologue in this way, Laurence inscribes the fiction of memory, a practice that is common in women’s autobiography (Smith 45).

Laurence, however, takes this mode even further. By narrating Morag’s memories under the heading “Memorybank Movie,” she is able to signal a time shift without maintaining past tense narration. The tense shifts immediately from the pluperfect to the present and from the conditional to the simple future, giving greater immediacy to these memories. The novel’s first Memorybank Movie opens with these lines:

Mrs. Pearl from the next farm *has come* to Morag’s house. She *is* an old woman, really old old.... She *makes* dinner and *swishes* around the kitchen. The stove *is* great big black and giant—oh, but good and warm. (22, emphasis added)

This passage resembles a standard narrated monologue but the tenses have shifted into the present. The pluperfect form becomes the present perfect “has come” and the subsequent sentences are in the simple present. The reportorial language is in the third-person but the idioms, “really old old” and “great big,” and some abbreviated syntax indicate that the source of these words is the figural consciousness. The Memorybank Movies are not solely composed of narrated monologue; they also contain dialogue, description, and the other two modes for presenting consciousness. Nev-

ertheless, they usually begin with or quickly move into narrated monologue to give the entire “movie” the quality of an interior monologue. The ambiguity of the vocal origin effaces the narrator. In addition to fusing the narrating and figural voices, the “movie” limits the perspective to Morag’s point of view.

Narrated memories present scenes that are wholly contained within the figural mind. In fact, the apparently embedded focalizations of the child and adult selves replicate the immediacy of an autobiographical narrative: “Morag is twelve, and is she ever tough. She doesn’t walk all hunched up any more, like when she was a little kid. Nosiree, not her.... She is a woman” (70). This passage could be autobiographical, if “I” were substituted for the third person references. The narrated monologue presents the thoughts of younger selves, such as Morag, the young mother: “Is she wrong to be leaving Pique alone? What if there were a fire? What if someone broke into the flat? Etcetera. And on the other hand, Pique is no infant, nor is she stupid” (396). The immediacy of embedded focalizations is further emphasized by the mature Morag. After recalling some of the earliest memories of childhood she thinks:

*Now I am crying, for God's sake, and I don't even know how much of that memory really happened and how much of it I embroidered later on. I seem to remember it just like that, and yet, each time I think of it, are there new or different details? I recall it with embellishments which don't seem likely for a five-year-old. (26)*

Of the three modes, the narrated monologue most effectively presents the polyphonic thoughts of the female subject. This mode contains the “felt or imagined presences of real and fictional people, *the many versions of herself*, combining and communing here, in her head” (421, emphasis added). The immediacy of the narrated monologue, with its blurring of the lines between thought, narration, and quotation, drives third-person narration into “the domain previously reserved for first-person (epistolary or confessional) fiction, and begins to focus on the mental and emotional life of its characters” (Cohn 113). In these ways, Laurence’s fictional autobiography draws upon the discursive authority implied by the immediacy of the eyewitness narrative (Gilmore 6).

Narrated monologue can also colour adjacent standard narration so that even descriptive language appears to reflect the female subject. The shading of this mode into the narration creates narrated perception: “She is walking along a street of flimsy board houses, boardinghouses, *Rooms Weekly or*

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*Nightly*, no curtains on windows, a greyness over all. The day also is grey, autumnal grey, or seems so until she comes out of herself to some degree and notices that in fact the air is crisp blue” (284). The first sentence begins with the narrative voice reporting the character’s action and setting but it shifts almost imperceptibly into interior monologue. The point at which the shift occurs is difficult to determine. Perhaps it begins with the word “flimsy,” which may be Morag’s word, or after the first comma with the first notice of details. It may begin with the third comma when the source of description seems to be Morag, who has already shown concern for curtains as an expression of social status in descriptions of her parents’ home and Brooke’s. The entire passage may be a narrated monologue. In any case, the text makes clear that the perception of greyness must be attributed to Morag’s state of mind because “the air is in fact blue.” The report of the character’s conscious perceptions resembles the reportorial language of a third-person narrator, but it is a transcription of consciousness rather than reality. This passage represents a conscious awareness, flickering between words and images, or “inner reflection and outer reality” (Cohn 134).

The conjunction of description and interior monologue has the same effect. The most prominent descriptive passages in *The Diviners*—those of the river—are connected to the figural consciousness by their proximity to narrated monologue and psycho-narration. The novel’s opening announces Laurence’s approach:

The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching. (11)

Within three sentences the narration shifts from the river to the psyche of Morag, and after only two short paragraphs, the narrated monologue begins with “Pique had gone away. She must have left during the night.” A trope that connects the description of the river with the consciousness of Morag is quickly established (Greene 184), and Pique’s departure is a crisis that provokes a “re-examination of the self” (Riegel 111). The novel’s opening continues with a description of birds near the river and then the description turns to psycho-narration and more narrated monologue. The coincidence of descriptive language and language that presents consciousness is clearly used to create a figural narrative: “Many novels that use the narrated monologue as the predominant technique for rendering their characters’ consciousness start from a neutral and objective stance—typically the

description of a specific site or situation—and only gradually, often by way of minimal exposition, narrow their focus to the figural mind” (Cohn 116). Laurence continues to narrow the focus. The fourth and fifth paragraphs are entirely monologic with little of the mediacy of narration. They oscillate between narrated monologue and quoted monologue:

Well, you had to give the girl some marks for style of writing. Slightly derivative, perhaps, but let it pass. Oh Jesus, it was not funny. Pique was eighteen. Only....

I’ve got too damn much work in hand to fret over Pique. Lucky me. I’ve got my work to take my mind off my life. (11-12)

The rest of the opening pages are cast primarily in narrated monologue, interspersed with quoted monologue until the first Memorybank Movie. Even the Snapshot sections, which are used to approach subjectivity in successive images that are “more disjunctive than synergistic” (Brodzki and Schenck 10), follow the same pattern. They begin with a tense shift into the present in the narrated monologue and end with a quoted monologue, emphasizing the immediacy of the first-person voice.

The novel is, in fact, framed with this shading of narration into monologue. Like the novel’s opening, the ending clearly establishes the river as a trope for consciousness:

Morag walked out across the grass and looked at the river. The sun, now low, was catching the waves, sending out once more the flotilla of little lights skimming along the greenbronze surface. The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction, so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways. (477)

To mirror the novel’s opening, this paragraph begins rather than ends with a reference to Morag’s perception. Even the description is inverted: the water is green-bronze instead of bronze-green; the counter-directions of the current and wind are mentioned in reverse order; and the river’s appearance of flowing both ways ends rather than begins the paragraph. Again, poetic description is placed in conjunction with narrated monologue, this time preceding it directly and following it two paragraphs later. However, in the closing paragraphs, a brief quoted monologue succeeds the river trope: “*Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence*” (477). The direct association of Morag’s subjectivity with the river “flowing both ways” emphasizes the displacement of the self, which “flows both ways”

into the past and present. The text also suggests “the generic contract [that] engages the autobiographer in a doubled subjectivity—the autobiographer as protagonist of her story and the autobiographer as narrator” (Smith 17). Through a doubled subjectivity Morag pursues the fiction of selfhood: she “brings to the recollection of her past and to her reflection on identity interpretive figures” (Smith 47).

The novel is not only framed with the river trope, which becomes a complex metaphor for subjectivity, but also structured by its repetition. Each chapter begins with some associated imagery. Chapter two begins with water imagery to describe the sleeping mind: “Morag, never an early or easy waker, *surfaced* groggily from the *submerged* caves in which she had been happily *floating* for some nine hours” (31, emphasis added). Chapters three, five, six and nine situate Morag looking out the kitchen window at the river before beginning to reflect. Chapter four employs water imagery and birds in its first three paragraphs. Chapter seven opens with references to the birds and the window. In chapter eight Morag walks down to the river, and chapters ten and eleven describe the autumn colours near the river.

The use of the river as a trope for consciousness extends to an association with time. The additional association is reinforced by the change of seasons from spring to autumn that parallels the chronological progression of Morag’s life story through the Memorybank Movies, moving from early childhood to the recent past of womanhood. Furthermore, each chapter begins in the narrative present before shifting to the narrative past of the Memorybank Movies, which occupy the majority of each chapter. Only the final chapter remains entirely in the narrative present. The novel’s poetic description, therefore, has not only the symbolic function of interpreting subjectivity, but also the structural function of re-establishing the figural consciousness in the narrative present after forays into narrated memories.

In these ways, even interpretive figures in *The Diviners* are so closely associated with the subject that the narrative text appears to be the adjunct of the narrated monologue rather than the converse (Cohn 115). The narrated monologue is pervasive, generating a highly figural narrative. Both monologic and narrative language adheres so closely to Morag’s mental idiom and perspective that a consonance between narrating and figural voices is achieved. The narrator is self-effaced, emphasizing female subjectivity while de-emphasizing the power of the ostensibly objective narrator, except to authorize the life story. It becomes especially difficult in the Memorybank Movies to distinguish third-person narration from narrated monologue. Consonance creates the impression of “a poetic monologue

from beginning to end ... because the narrative voice is tuned to exactly the same pitch as the figural voice,” and the narrated monologue casts the narrator in a role that coincides with the female subject (Cohn 124–25). Extensive use of the narrated monologue constructs the self with “the thought-thread” of character “most tightly woven into the texture of third-person narration” (Cohn 111), while the monologic language creates a fiction of memory to fulfill the generic requirements of autobiography. Laurence suffuses the novel with the character of the protagonist in a way that articulates a fiction of the search for the self through narrative memory.

In fact, all three modes for presenting consciousness are often interwoven in a way that assigns the bulk of thought to monologic language. A common pattern begins in psycho-narration to locate the reader’s subject position in the figural mind, and to move the narrative intermittently between narrated and quoted monologues that directly present subjective thought:

Staring at these key words now, she wondered what in heaven’s name they had been meant to unlock [p.n.].

*Jerusalem.* Jerusalem? Why? Gone. [q.m.] What had she meant by it? [n.m.]

The postcard from Pique yesterday. No address. Mustn’t think of it. [q.m.] Morag didn’t want to put the hooks onto Pique.... But a somewhat more newsy letter would be appreciated. Idiomatic. How many newsy letters had Morag written to Prin and Christie, after she left Manawaka? [n.m.] That was different. Oh, really [q.m.]? (185)

The predominant technique in this passage, indeed in the novel, is narrated monologue and, coloured by its proximity to quoted monologue, the psycho-narration assumes a heightened immediacy. The three techniques merge into a smooth flow of figural thought; therefore, it may be concluded that Laurence’s purpose is to display “not sincerity or authenticity or truth but consciousness deriving a remarkably ungendered sensual pleasure from the exercise of its own intelligence” (Brodzki and Schenck 6).

In *The Diviners* the three modes for presenting consciousness in fiction are simultaneously shaped for a maximal figural representation to give predominance to the thought of the protagonist in the tradition of Joyce. First, psycho-narration approaches the immediacy of quoted monologue (Cohn 138), for the psycho-narration is consonant with the perspective and even the idiom of Morag, while the narrator is effaced. Second, the quoted monologue is italicized to emphasize the immediacy of direct thought, or it is unsignaled and woven into the fabric of thought that is generated by

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a careful combination of techniques. Third, in the narrated monologue, as Laurence employs it, the narrator never intrudes with evaluative judgments of the female subject, but presents Morag's thoughts in accordance with the protagonist's self-representation. At the same time, these modes perform distinct, standard functions: "psycho-narration summarizes diffuse feelings, needs, urges; narrated monologue shapes these inchoate reactions into virtual questions, exclamations, conjectures; quoted monologue distills moments of pointed self-address" (Cohn 135). But most importantly to a figural representation, the psycho-narration is consonant, the narrated monologue is empathic, and the quoted monologue is largely unsignaled (Cohn 139). In *The Diviners*, each mode is consistently designed to these specifications. Laurence consistently uses these modes to create a maximal figural representation of the female subject and to create maximal sympathy for a female perspective. These become the means by which *The Diviners*, although it is cast in a third-person form, enters the domain of autobiography.

In the assertion that "*everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it*" (70), Laurence's text self-reflexively confronts the process of autobiographical and confessional narrative. This statement emphasizes the subject in process, while drawing upon the project of autobiography itself: to signify agency in self-representation (Gilmore 14). Furthermore, Laurence alters the autobiographical genre to the specifications of third-person fictional narrative, and specifically to a maximal figural representation, because "the struggle to find an autobiographical voice emerges in the play of reader expectations and narrative demands" (Smith 60). By drawing upon both realist and autobiographical conventions in a complex interweaving of narrative strategies, Laurence uses the voice of the third-person narrator to authorize the self-representation of the female subject. *The Diviners* therefore engages both the ideological voices of female difference and the generic contract of autobiography that is "androcentric." But in this case, the novel's representation of consciousness offers both the "representative female life" of a woman who defines herself in relationship to others, as well as the "representative male life" of a writer, thereby carefully constructing Morag's identity as a woman writer who "cannot place herself comfortably in conventional ideologies of gender" (Smith 61). Self-interpretation emerges rhetorically from the protagonist's engagement with these fictive stories of selfhood and inscribes a version of female subjectivity and difference that challenges the "naive conflation of male subjectivity and human identity" (Smith 17). Laurence creates, by blending the genres of realist fiction and autobiography, a gendered confes-

sion that claims the discursive authority of a patriarchal cultural practice to interpret the female subject.

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