

Displacement and Hybridization in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka Novels

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Laurence's Manawaka novels portray the condition of the Metis in Canada for they belong to the unprivileged section of society. Emma LaRoque in her "The Metis in English Canadian Literature" observes that the majority of the Metis were systematically coerced from their land which was not only a vast prairie full of buffaloes but also of settlements and farming strips. The issue of the Metis was colonization and eventual powerlessness. In another essay, "Metis and the Feminist" she draws our attention to the Metis's extreme poverty and alienation from financial and material privileges of the mainstream Canada" (58). Atwood says, "The Indian emerges in Canadian Literature as the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation" (116). The Indian as social victim may be found in George Ryga's play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. In Ryga's play, the Indian heroine is subjected to every possible form of exploitation-economic, cultural and sexual and is finally raped and murdered. In Laurence's novels, The Indians are represented by the Metis Tonnerre family (118). The socio cultural issues result in the displacement of its members.

Laurence writes with passion about the Metis in Canada. She has given space for the Metis family of Lazarus Tonnerre in her Manawaka novels. The family has three boys and two girls namely Jules, Jacques and Paul and Piquette Tonnerre and Valentina. Lazarus, Paul and Piquette die; Jules roams about as a singer; Val is found in Vancouver before her death, Jacques is in the Galloping Mountain. None of them stay in the Valley at Manawaka as it is obvious in *The Stone Angel*. All are displaced. *A Jest of God* records, "The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God" (65). This shows the domination of the Scots over the other ethnic groups. Canada is known for its multiculturalism. The Scots are the colonizers and they look down upon the Metis who are deprived of their land and privileges and are powerless. The mentality of the colonizer prefers to keep them in the marginalized condition by depriving them of their land, opportunities and education. And so they are compelled to live in poverty and alienation and in unhealthy conditions. Emma LaRoque observes in "The Metis and the Feminist" that the Metis are virtually penniless people and had

minimal access to doctors and hospitals...many people died often from tuberculosis or other diseases (58).

Shahjahan brings out Kempf's ideas on anti colonialism. Anti colonialism critically examines the presence of colonial relation in two major areas namely the plight of the indigenous people's struggle around the world and the globalization of whiteness (5). Kempf also says, "People are made foreigners in their own lands by way of the colonial encounter and that numerous markers of difference serve as the basis for exclusion from/by dominant pedagogical political and cultural practices" (26).

The Metis suffer oppression in Manawaka. Jules is denied the opportunity to be educated as a lawyer; he serves a term in the army, survives and becomes a strolling singer to earn his livelihood. When Lazarus dies, Jules finds it difficult to get a burial ground. He is denied a place in the graveyards of both the R.Cs and the Protestants. Jules says, "I know why they really wouldn't have him. Because his half breed bones spoiling their cemetery" (TD289). He also says, "The Metis, once lords of the prairies, now refused burial place in their own land" (289). Finally, he is buried in the Metis churchyard. The something happens when Jules dies of throat cancer. Manawaka is so oppressive to them that Jules leaves it and becomes a strolling singer. The dead have no place of burial and the living are made to flee the land because it is uncongenial for their lives.

Morag is conscious of her Scottish heritage right from her childhood. She says to Jules that she is related to Piper Gunn who came from Scotland. She also thinks that she is somebody (TD82). But after her bitter experience with Brooke, she finds an understanding companion in him who develops her creativity and she begets a daughter through him. Thus Jules Skinner Tonnerre enters the life and world of Morag Gunn. Jules' life is full of uncertainties as he compares himself to "a dandelion seed carried by the wind" (TD293). Laurence as an artist, filled with compassion and understanding transcends the cultural barriers and brings about a union between Morag and Jules who represent the colonizer and the colonized respectively. The term 'hybridity' is associated with Homi K.Bhaba. *The Location of Culture* analyses the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. It focuses on the interdependence and mutual construction of their subjectivity. The dominant culture and the indigenous culture have compacted each other resulting in a mixed culture which is a hybrid culture. This cross cultural concern is found in the Manawaka series which culminates in *The Diviners*. Hybridity refers to "the creation of new transcultural rather than multicultural (crossing and fertilizing rather than fragmented) forms within the space produced by colonization where people, indigenous, migrated, settlers,

colonizing and colonized, live and move' (Whisker 189). Pique is born of the union between the Metis hero Jules and the Scottish heroine Morag.

Jules develops Morag's creativity and Morag includes Jules's songs in her novels because the white audience is not receptive to his singing; thus there is mutual dependence. Jules respects her as a human being and never thrusts his views on her. Jules returns to Morag at the last stage of his life and dies of throat cancer. Their relationship is the most enduring one. Though it begins in resistance as opposition on the basis of cultural difference, the relationship leads to a transformation with mutual dependence, love and respect.

Piquette Tonnerre, Lazarus Tonnerre's daughter appears in "The Loons" in *A Bird in the House*. Afflicted with the tuberculosis of the bone that has left her with a limp, the thirteen year old Piquette who is motherless is in a position to cook for the Tonnerre family when she is badly in need of rest. Dr. Ewen MacLeod, Vanessa's father who treats her, feels that a few months' rest would do good to her bones. So he takes her along with his family to Diamond Lake for the summer. Vanessa meets Piquette after four years in the Regal café. By that time, the limp is almost gone. Piquette confesses to Vanessa that her father was "the only person in Manawaka that ever did anything good to me" (ABH124). She also tells Vanessa that she is going to marry an English Canadian Alvin Gerald Cummings and all the "Bitches and biddies in Manawaka will be surprised" (124). The Metis long for a better way of life, recognition and assimilation but they are not allowed to have any of these. Piquette tries to resist this through her marriage with Alvin. Vanessa, with a deep understanding of an artist ruminates over her great need to be assimilated (125).

However, the marriage fails and she returns to the shack along with her two babies and all the three die in a fire accident. Her being treated in a subhuman level is summarised by Jules Tonnerre in *The Diviners* when he says, "Her man picked her up when it suited him and threw her away when that suited him. She meant no more to him, that's for sure, than a dog you chloroform if it gets to be a nuisance" (295). The failure of the marriage signifies the failure of assimilation too. When Morag relates to Jules, the fire accident that caused their death, the immediate reaction from Jules is, "I hate you... I hate all of you" (297).

The Fire Dwellers introduces Valentina, the other daughter of Lazarus. She helps Stacey to identify Thorlakson as Vernon Winkler, a childhood acquaintance of theirs. Val's life is uncertain to the extent that she knows nothing of her children. When asked about her children, she says, "I got a couple somewhere I kind of lost track". (244) Stacey has a family of her own and she has four children. But Val, a Metis who has lost a place or home of her own, is forced to live with

uncertainty which is a predicament of the Metis woman. She is a broken down street walker; old before her time. *The Diviners* portrays a situation when Val is sick and she does not go to hospital. Because she does not want charity (363). Jules stays in Vancouver for two months. He gets Val to the hospital but two weeks later he tells Morag that Val has left hospital. Jules' drunkenness and depression suggest that she is dead.

Both Piquette and Valentine have led a life of uncertainty, affliction and insecurity. They have had less power and money than the rest of society. Pique is born of the union of Morag who is of Scottish origin and Jules who is a Metis. So Pique also is in a position to face challenges. Though Jules meets Morag and Pique at long intervals, he makes his visits memorable because of his love for them. As an affectionate father he sings to his daughter Pique. She inherits the talent of singing from her father and she does the same with the talent of writing from her mother and she composes songs of her own.

Dudek makes a valuable observation when he says that Pique's skin betrays her biological heritage. When a car load of businessmen see her wandering in the street, they throw broken beer bottles on her and one of those bottles hurts her arm. When they see her arm bleeding, they take off (TD118-119). Her skin provokes anger but her blood evokes fear. The authorities also give her a warning while dismissing the actions of the men. When Pique shares this incident with Morag, she inquires about her arm. But Morag is worried about the internal injury and harm caused by the hateful eyes that construct her difference as inferior (Dudek149). When Pique is in high school the boys pass derogatory comments on her and treat her badly by calling her 'half breed'. The treatment received by Piquette and Valentine extends to Pique also because the society looks at her not as a writer's daughter who is talented but only as a half breed. It is obvious that Pique has to fight her way in her life too. However, she is left with the only choice of joining her paternal uncle's family in their service to mankind.

Despite the differences and the resistance on the part of both the classes, Laurence with the deep insight and sympathy brings out the sufferings and the pathetic condition of the Metis who are marginalized by the oppressive social conditions. The mutual love, compassion, understanding and respect Jules the Metis hero and Morag the Scottish heroine have for each other pave way for the union of the colonized and the colonizer. The Manawaka series celebrate the union of the disparities and the irreconcilables.

While speaking about resistance as transformation, Jefferess says, it fosters a mutual interdependence between self and other rather than antagonism. Within this frame work, resistance "requires both the affirmation of human connection and the alteration of structures of

exploitation” (105). This has been accomplished through the interdependence of Morag and Jules. In *Pique* their daughter, one can find the union of two irreconcilables. She is to get the plaid pin that stands for the pride of the Scots and the Tonnerre knife that stands for the trade of the Tonnerres namely skinning buffalos. In chapter four of his book, *Post Colonial Resistance*, Jefferess argues that reconciliation demands an alternative structure of relations through recognition, redistribution and connection. Reconciliation requires recognizing the memories of the Past and acknowledging the abuse and violence.

In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Valentina shares with Stacey, the death of her sister Piquette; and Stacey feels guilty for the sins of her forefathers who were colonisers. She says “Even her presence is a reproach to me” (241). She calls the oppression of the Metis, ‘the town’s invisible stabbing” (240). In *The Diviners*, Jules makes Morag narrate what she knows about the death of Piquette. His immediate reaction is “I hate you... I hate all of you” (297). Commenting on the circumstances when Lazarus could not be buried in RC or Protestant graveyards, Jules says, “The Metis, once lords of the prairies now refused burial place in their own land” (289). The novelist says, “Morag cannot say anything, she has no right” (289). Both Stacey and Morag show the recognition of the memories of the past and the acknowledgement of abuse and violence done to the Metis.

Though the other members of the Tonnerre family are displaced, Jules enters into an enduring relationship with Morag. The union of the Scottish Canadian heroine and the Metis hero results in the birth of *Pique* and the creation of a new trans cultural being. This shows the transcendental perception of Laurence which ends in hybridity despite the displacement suffered by the characters.

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