

IR/RECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES?: LAURENCE AND MARACLE

IR/RECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES?: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
MARGARET LAURENCE'S *THE DIVINERS* AND LEE MARACLE'S *RAVENSONG*

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Masters of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (1994)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

(English)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Ir/reconcilable Differences?: A Comparative  
Study of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and  
Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 99

## Abstract

This thesis compares the presentation of Native characters and Native voice in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*. The purpose of the project is twofold: to evaluate Maracle's claim that Laurence's portrayal of the Métis people is racist, and to describe how Maracle challenges the racism she perceives in White writing about Native peoples. The introduction addresses the theoretical challenges facing White academics who want to engage critically with Native texts.

The first chapter examines how each author's social affiliations and political priorities determine the way that she represents Native characters, and Native/White interaction, in her fictional writing. Particular attention is paid to the writers' perceptions of the relationship between feminist and anti-racist interests.

Chapter Two summarizes the history of linguistic tyranny that has threatened Native cultural voice in Canada. It considers Laurence's invention of Métis stories and songs in terms of current controversies over "appropriation of voice," and shows how *Ravensong* acts as a distinctly "Native" narrative that fuses storytelling tradition with the new Native language, English.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Roger Hyman, for introducing me to the words of Lee Maracle, and for administering generous doses of encouragement and humour. I am grateful to Dr. Sylvia Bowerbank, who shared her enthusiasm for scholarship and her wealth of knowledge about Native literature with me, and to Dr. Lorraine York, for so kindly agreeing to step in as Third Reader. I wish to extend a special thank-you to Dolores Wawia, of the Indigenous Studies department, for taking time from her busy schedule to talk with me and offer her perspective.

This thesis is dedicated to my family, whose love and support has never been more appreciated than it has been this year. Thanks for all the letters, phone calls, and visits, and for all the other ways you have boosted my spirits in moments of "thesis despair." To Rob, whose friendship and love has enriched my life immeasurably, and for whose seemingly endless patience I am so grateful. And to Irene Kelleher, who welcomed me into her home and gave me the priceless gift of her wisdom and her words, asking nothing more than that people should care to know "who she is and what she is all about."

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## Introduction

Imagine how you as writers from the dominant society might turn over some of the rocks in your own garden for examination. Imagine in your literature courageously questioning and examining the values that allow the dehumanizing of peoples through domination and the dispassionate nature of racism inherent in perpetuating such practices. Imagine writing in honesty, free of the romantic bias about the courageous 'pioneering spirit' of colonialist practice and imperialist process. Imagine interpreting for us *your own people's* thinking toward us, instead of interpreting for us, our thinking, our lives, and our stories....

Imagine these realities on yourselves in honesty and let me know how you imagine that you might approach empowerment of yourselves in such a situation. Better yet, do not dare speak to me of 'Freedom of Voice,' 'Equal Rights,' 'Democracy,' or 'Human Rights' until this totalitarianistic approach has been changed by yourselves as writers and shapers of philosophical direction. Imagine a world where domination is not possible because all cultures are valued.

Jeannette Armstrong, "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing," 209

Jeannette Armstrong's eloquent appeal to Euro-Canadian "writers and shapers of philosophical direction" can hardly fail to strike a sympathetic chord with those among us who like to think of ourselves as having a literary conscience. When expressed more bluntly, however, the demand that we confront the reality of racism in Canadian literature and literary studies is apt to seem suddenly less

palatable. We have recently been told, for example, by Métis writer Lee Maracle, in a television interview with Daniel Richler,<sup>1</sup> that Margaret Laurence's portrayal of the Métis people in her famous novel *The Diviners* is "racist." My own first reaction to hearing this accusation was, admittedly, one of surprise and shock. In the course of many years of schooling and independent study, during which time I had developed a special interest in Canadian women's writing, I had never heard Lee Maracle's name. Yet here she was, calmly asking me to consider the ideological flaws in the work of one of the most revered writers in Canadian history. Had I been missing something?

Several things took place as a result of my acquaintance with the words of Lee Maracle. First, I re-read *The Diviners*, seeking to evaluate the validity of the charge that had been levelled against Laurence. In fact, Maracle's complaint that Jules Tonnerre is depicted as "a dirty halfbreed who lives in a hovel" greatly oversimplifies Laurence's artistic presentation of the Métis. When compared to Maria Campbell's description of Métis poverty and property loss in *Halfbreed*, for example, the Tonnerre shacks on the outskirts of Manawaka (*Div* 151) appear realistic enough. Laurence is careful, too, to attribute the perception of the Métis as "dirty and unmentionable" (79) to social prejudice. Especially in comparison to depictions of Native people elsewhere in



Canadian literature, her writing about the Métis is unusually "respectful" (Campbell in Lutz 58), as even some Native critics have conceded. Any evaluation of Laurence's involvement in "racist" authorial practice must take into account, too, her sensitivity to the problems attending a White writer's attempt to convey a Métis viewpoint.

Although I continued to be struck by Laurence's genuine concern for the Métis, though, I began to see that her attitude of sympathy points toward the "imperialist assumptions" (Emberley 54) that often characterize White thinking about Native people. Among these assumptions are the belief that Natives lack the linguistic resources to express themselves literarily, and the conviction that the colonial process has rendered them utterly powerless to help themselves. Laurence's attempt to expose the victimization of Native people by colonizing forces is motivated by a desire to support their cause. However, she (like many other sympathetic White writers) does not seem to have considered whether her fictional presentations of Natives would be perceived by real Native people as helpful, or whether they even wanted her help.<sup>2</sup> This realization about Laurence's work was a difficult one, because it forced me to acknowledge that traces of these same assumptions had characterized my own social and literary perspective.

I also began to question why I had never heard of Lee Maracle. In retrospect, the silences and gaps in my

literary education seemed glaring. I read all of Maracle's books, from the autobiographical texts *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1976)<sup>3</sup> and *I Am Woman* (1988), to the short story collection "*Sojourner's Truth*" and *Other Stories* (1990), to the novels *Sundogs* (1990) and *Ravensong* (1993). Then, I began to read books by the many Native women authors -- Jeannette Armstrong, Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, and Ruby Slipperjack, to name just a few -- whose names had not appeared on the reading lists of Canadian literature courses I had taken over the years. The work of these women, as I discovered, is characterized by resistance; it challenges the stereotypical images of "Indians" in Euro-Canadian fiction and holds up mirrors to White racism. Told in the language (English) that the colonizers thrust upon those they meant to "civilize," Native women's stories both expose and ironically subvert the long history of linguistic oppression that has attempted to silence them. An especially important book, in terms of its concern with contrasting White and Native approaches to issues of representation and language, is Maracle's *Ravensong*.

This thesis has evolved out of the double critical process I have just described. Its first aim is to evaluate, through a re-reading of *The Diviners*, Laurence's implication in the damage that White writing about Native peoples can do to the Native image and voice. Its second is to describe how a Native text (*Ravensong*) corrects the mis-

representation of Native peoples in White texts and reclaims the Native voice; it considers how *Ravensong* operates as a narrative of resistance against the discourse of the dominant society. Chapter One focuses on the issue of representation, and Chapter Two on questions concerning voice and language.

Although there are many books by White and Native men that would bear consideration in such a discussion, I have taken two women's novels as my central texts because I want to consider the way in which Native women's anti-racist agendas interrupt the project of feminism as it is perceived by White women. The apparent priority given to anti-racism by Maracle and other Native women forces an evaluation not just of Native women's "place" within feminism in Canada, but also of their willingness to be associated with it, either as participants or as objects of investigation.

It has become customary for White feminists wishing to engage critically with the texts of women of colour to preface scholarly articles, books, or anthologies with anxious assessments of their right to address the topics they have chosen. In Canadian women's studies, Jeanne Perrault and Sylvia Vance's foreword to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada* provides a good example of our nervous need to justify our critical interest, and to anticipate and deflect the hostility with which it may be met. Painfully aware as we are of the many theoretical

traps (unwitting appropriation of voice, for instance) into which as yet un-deconstructed traces of our racist heritage may lead us, we can scarcely resist the urge to apologize in advance for the transgressions we may be committing at every turn.

For my own part, I have experienced more than once the sense of "White guilt" that underlies so many of the White-authored critical texts I have consulted. In *Ravensong*, however, I found embedded in Maracle's text a lesson that spoke to me about the difference between "guilt" and "shame" (RS 186). When confronted by Stacey (the protagonist) with his implication in racism, Steve (a White intellectual) reacts with a display of "the coercive force of guilt" (186). Stacey faults him for implying that she ought to feel sorry for him and accept the responsibility of teaching him how not to be racist; she observes contemptuously that he is "uncomfortable with his *shame*" (186, my emphasis). Guilt is expressed in relation to someone else, Maracle suggests, whereas shame involves a private, painful confrontation with one's own self.

I have attempted to confront my own "shame" honestly, and to accept the resolution of it as my own responsibility. I have grown to appreciate the barriers -- occasioned by differences in cultural and linguistic heritage, and by my own position within a (largely White) academic community -- that interfere with my ability to

comprehend fully a Native woman's perspective. I am convinced, though, that White feminists' unlearning of their own racial privilege cannot take place in isolation from the texts and voices of Native women. We should not expect them to teach us how to be non-racist -- in fact, it is imperative that we respect their desire, and need, to speak first to each other and to their own communities -- but there is much that we can learn from reading and listening to their words. We must not be afraid to engage critically with their fictional work simply because we are White.

I have been encouraged in this conviction by the words of a renowned post-colonial feminist critic and theorist, Gayatri Spivak. In an interview with Sneja Gunew, appropriately titled "Questions of Multi-culturalism," Spivak voiced her opinion on the role of academics in the field of post-colonial feminist study.

I call these things, as you know, somewhat derisively, chromatism: basing everything on skin color -- 'I am white, I can't speak' -- and genitalism: depending on what kind of genitals you have, you can or cannot speak in certain situations. From this position, then, I say you [the White critic] will of course not speak in the same way about the Third World material, but if you make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study, but also at the same time through a *historical* critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize ... I say that you have to take a certain risk: to say 'I won't criticize' is salving your conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework. (63)

For Spivak, the question of whether or not intellectuals --

even White, male intellectuals -- have the *right* to comment critically upon the work of women of colour is a moot point. Rather, these intellectuals have a *responsibility* to pay attention to "the texts of the oppressed," to "represent them and analyze them" (Spivak, *PCC* 56) rather than indulging in the easy convenience of claiming ignorance.

As a native of India and a scholar whose career has earned her international recognition as well as an established position in the North American academy, Spivak contributes a unique perspective to feminist post-colonial studies. Paradoxically, her Western education has both distanced her from the daily oppression experienced by "Third World" women, and enabled her to expose the sources of that oppression. She is acutely aware of the need to re-evaluate, constantly, her own implication in the inherent racism of the academy. She includes herself among those feminist intellectuals who must undertake "the careful project of un-learning *our* privilege as *our* loss" (*PCC* 9, my emphasis).

It is this call to perpetual self-awareness that makes Spivak's observations about post-colonialism invaluable to any discussion that touches upon the complex intellectual relationships between oppressor and oppressed. Because of her affiliations with both, she is able, as she says, to "use herself ... as a shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside)" (*IOW* 107), even as she

works to dissolve the boundary that separates them. The relevance of Spivak's work to the development of post-colonial theory in Canada has been demonstrated by Barbara Godard and by Julia Emberley, whose recently published dissertation *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory* owes a significant debt to Spivakian theory.

Of course, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Spivak's intensely academic discourse might be regarded as exemplifying the purely intellectual attempts to explain the Native condition that Maracle decries in *Ravensong* (RS 187).<sup>4</sup> I refer selectively to Spivak's theoretical interpretations only insofar as they have illuminated my own understanding of the novels I am discussing, and not as definitive revelations about the intentions of either Laurence or Maracle. Ultimately, of course, no externally imposed framework can legitimately claim to offer such truths.

More directly relevant to the study of Native women's fiction are the very important "theoretical" statements that have been issued by a (small) number of North American Indian women who, like Spivak, live the irony of having been enabled to speak about the condition of their people by their involvement in the university system. Probably the two most prominent women who occupy such positions are Paula Gunn Allen, in the United States, and,

in Canada, Emma LaRocque.<sup>5</sup> As well, the opinions expressed by Native spokeswomen who are not directly affiliated with the academic community, such as Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Marlyn Kane, Jeannette Armstrong, Anna Lee Walters, and of course Maracle herself, form a vital cultural backdrop to the fictional work discussed here.

Maracle's critical writing indicates that her political priorities concerning feminism and anti-racism are different from Laurence's. In the context of Spivak's and Godard's commentaries on the "politics of representation" (Godard, "Politics" 183), Chapter One examines how these priorities determine each author's approach to other- and self-representation in *The Diviners* and *Ravensong*. A White feminist agenda dominates in Laurence's novel; her sympathy for the Métis appears chiefly as a corollary to Morag's quest for identity and rebellion against White patriarchy. In contrast, Maracle gives precedence to working against racism, and insists upon highlighting cultural differences in her portrayal of her Native protagonist, Stacey. Maracle seems to share Spivak's opinion "that the emancipatory project is more likely to succeed if one thinks of other people as being different; [sic] ultimately, perhaps absolutely different" (Spivak, PCC 136).

Chapter Two explores how Laurence and Maracle differ in the ways that they experience and use language and



narrative voice. It begins with an examination (using illustrations from *Ravensong*) of the way that attacks on Native languages have been used to assist the suppression of indigenous peoples, then moves to a discussion of current controversies over the appropriation of Native voice by White writers. The chapter evaluates the degree to which Laurence participates in literary appropriation in *The Diviners*, and describes Maracle's creation of a counter-appropriative and distinctly Native (according to her own criteria) narrative in *Ravensong*. Chapter Two ends with some observations about the way in which Maracle both invokes and emulates the capacity to bring about social transformation that belongs to the trickster of Native stories.

Maracle discusses the role of the Native storyteller in answering "the need for transformation in the human condition which arises from time to time" ("Oratory" 11) in a very important article entitled "Oratory: Coming to Theory" (1990). In this essay, she issues very important messages to any academic who proposes, as I do, to speak critically about Native texts. She describes the intimate connection, in Native thought, between story and "theory," which she defines as "the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (3) or, broadly put, any collective social vision that fulfills "humanity's need for common direction" (8-9). Theory consists of a moral or intellectual message; story is

the vehicle through which that message is conveyed. Native "presentation of theory" (7) through story involves a fusion of rhetoric with humour and/or spirituality that is more "sensible" and accessible to audiences than are the sterile "demonstrable argument[s]" of Western academic discourse (3).

What is missing from Western scholars' theoretical discourse, Maracle points out, is the human element. "What is the point," she asks, "of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience: passion, emotion, and character?" (11) If theory is to be comprehensible to the real people whose experience it seeks to articulate and for whom its lessons are intended, it must show, and *be*, "some form of social interaction" (3). By her own definition, Maracle's *I Am Woman* -- which, with its interweaving of didactic statements, poetry, autobiography, and anecdotes, explodes conventional generic boundaries -- is "a theoretical text" (13), although White critics have been reluctant to label it as such. Maracle suggests that even in her fictional writing (including *Ravensong*), the actions and words of characters convey potent theoretical messages concerning "colonization and de-colonization" (13). Stacey's struggles to define her relationship to the White world, and the strength of character with which she challenges oppression, speak to audiences about de-victimization in a way that no textbook could accomplish.

The importance of recognizing the difference between Native and Western ways of presenting theory reaches beyond the valuable insights into Maracle's writing that such information provides to academic audiences. We, the inheritors of Western logic, are being asked to re-evaluate our approach to theoretical discourse in terms of the real-world dynamics of social power it reflects. For, as Maracle argues,

By presenting theory in a language no one can grasp, the speaker (or writer) retains authority over thought. By demanding that all thoughts (theory) be presented in this [Western] manner in order to be considered theory (thought), the presenter retains the power to make decisions *on behalf of others*. (11)

Such is the tyranny of "the inherent hierarchy retained by *academics*, politicians, law makers and law keepers" (13, my emphasis). Any university affiliate who fails to recognize herself in the pointed observations being made by Maracle is not paying attention. If we are not yet convinced of "the ridiculousness of European academic notions of theoretical presentation," Maracle asks us to consider the peculiarity of the fact that "In order to gain the right to theorize, one must attend their [White] institutions for many years, learn this other language, and unlearn our feeling for the human condition. Bizarre" (13).

Maracle's remarks, in "Oratory: Coming to Theory." call attention to the inaccessibility of Western theory in a general sense. It seems all the more important, however,

for women writing in the field of post-colonial studies to speak in a language that is comprehensible to those being spoken about, to avoid perpetuating hegemonic structures through our discourse in the way that Maracle describes. As Spivak says, "The academic feminist must learn to learn from them [women of colour], to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be *corrected* by our superior theory and enlightened compassion" (*IOW* 135). Both Maracle and Spivak acknowledge, with their use of the pronoun "our," their uneasy relationship with the academy: both have affiliations with the dominant feminist discourse, but continually question the integrity of its methodology.

One of the chief contributions we, as White women, can make to bridging the gaps within feminism is to re-think the way that we use language in defining our relationship to Native women. This means scrutinizing the way we have represented Native peoples in our fictional writing, recognizing the way we have presumed to speak, however sympathetically, on their behalf. It means analysing the way we have attempted to assure the preeminence of our voices by censoring and controlling theirs, both in the publication industry and at feminist conferences. It means that we must take the initiative in communication, neither waiting for Native women to build and cross the bridges to our side nor expecting them, themselves, to be the bridges

by means of which we enter their world. Should we wish to speak of what we have learned, we must "learn to speak in such a way that [we] will be taken seriously by that other constituency ... [and] to recognize that the position of the speaking subject within theory can be an historically powerful position when it wants the other actually to be able to answer back" (Spivak, *PCC* 42). As will become clear in the pages that follow, answering back is what Lee Maracle does best.

Race, Gender, and the Politics of Representation  
in *The Diviners* and *Ravensong*

"A novel," wrote Margaret Laurence in a 1978 article, "can scarcely avoid being ... a social commentary" ("Ivory Tower" 252). In this essay, called "Ivory Tower or Grassroots?: The Novelist as Socio-Political Being," she goes on to observe that "The writer's life view, the way in which people and ... their society are seen [by the writer], permeate any work of fiction" (253). Stories and novels always, she asserts, contains evidence of the author's understanding of "history," "belief," and "politics" (252). By way of example, Laurence explains that her own fictional writing has marked her as a supporter of both anti-colonial struggles and "the women's movement" (258), even though she has not involved herself with either of these political causes in any "active or direct" way (258). Her novels, especially *The Diviners*, convey important messages about her sense of the relationship between cultural and feminist politics, between "a whole history of imperialism" (257) and the traditional "powerlessness of women" (258).

Laurence's distinction between "direct" activism and writing corresponds to Karl Marx's delineation between the two modes of political representation he called *vertretung*

and *darstellung*. Subsequently, Marx's terms have been incorporated into feminist post-colonial discourse by Gayatri Spivak and, in Canadian criticism, by Barbara Godard. As Godard explains, *vertretung* involves an individual undertaking to act, "in the political arena," as a representative for a disadvantaged social group; the individual "speaks for," or on behalf of, that group in a public forum ("Politics" 200). *Darstellung*, on the other hand, is the kind of representation found "in art or philosophy where in writing or on the stage, by portraits or actors, the subjects of the oppressed speak for themselves" (200). More so than Godard, Spivak emphasizes that there is a complex interplay between *vertretung* and *darstellung* in any given text (PPC 108-09). It is difficult for a writer to speak as a member of a particular group without seeming to speak on behalf of that group, and nearly impossible for her to create a portrait of (to *darstellen*) a group to which she does not belong without revealing how her own social affiliations have shaped her perspective.

In statements Laurence and Maracle have made about their roles as novelists, they have both acknowledged (albeit somewhat reluctantly) that a writer can never simply represent herself. Laurence recognizes that her novels give voice to "political" themes ("Ivory Tower" 258), even though she insists that she does not set out to represent either women or colonized people in a political sense. Maracle

admits that she possesses the power to effect change on behalf of Native people even as she disclaims the authority to "speak for" them; she once told an interviewer that

Writers do not represent anybody. What they represent is a personal direction, a new humanity and a new sense of the world ... And *I* don't represent anybody either. But ten years from now, people are going to be different because I'm a writer, just like Chrystos, Jeannette Armstrong, Maria Campbell, etc. Every single Native person who writes is pointing to a road over there.  
(qtd in Williamson 172)

Because of the relative scarcity of Native authors, Maracle cannot escape being perceived as representing the political interests of her people, and she implicitly accepts a certain amount of responsibility for doing so. In addition, her focus on Native women writers in this comment is telling, for it reveals her interest in "the woman question" (Maracle, *IAW* 17) as it relates to Native women.

Laurence and Maracle both have stakes in two political concerns: the search for and protection of cultural identity, and the rebellion against women's oppression. The question remains, however, of how each woman positions herself within the matrix of race and gender that is formed when the two concerns are brought together: to which agenda -- anti-colonialism or feminism -- does she give priority in her fiction? How does she present herself through her characters (who is she speaking as), and whose interests does she, as a writer, seem to represent (who is she speaking for)? As I will argue, Maracle's adverse



response to *The Diviners* points to a fundamental difference between her writing and Laurence's, a difference which defines each author's relationship to social conflicts involving racism and sexism.

Because Maracle interprets the abuse of women within the Native community as a by-product of colonization, she suggests that Native women's liberation depends upon the deconstruction of racist social systems. She also sees the cultural mindset of racism as harmful to White women because of the limitations it places on their feminist perspectives. Thus, she gives thematic priority, in her fictional writing, to exposing and attacking the oppression of Native peoples. Although she is sympathetic toward the situation of White women, in *Ravensong* she suggests, through Stacey, that intercultural feminism should be postponed until the problem of racism has been addressed by both Native and White women.

Whereas Maracle's "Nativity" determines her views regarding feminism, Laurence's understanding of racism is filtered through a (White) feminist perspective. Like Maracle, she locates sexism and cultural tyranny at the same source: the White man, as represented in *The Diviners* by Brooke Skelton. As a White woman, however, Laurence does not conflate racism and sexism to the extent that Maracle does; she sees them, instead, as "parallel" ("Ivory Tower" 257) forces. Her suggestion that Morag's experience of patriarchal oppression gives her empathic access to the

victimization of the Métis is a valid one, and few would question the legitimacy of the portrait of White womanhood she has created in *Morag*. Because Laurence is not Native, though, the potential exists for her presentation of Métis characters to be perceived by audiences (especially Native audiences) as illegitimate or even racist. As Maracle would argue, White women's privilege bars them from fully comprehending, and therefore from adequately portraying, the situation of the oppressed Native.

Laurence's tendency toward ethnocentrism is well documented in the essay to which I have been referring, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots?: The Novelist as Socio-Political Being." Summarizing the correlation between the conditions of "cultural imperialism" (253) and the "powerlessness of women" (258), Laurence writes,

Our [Canadians'] situation at the time, like that of all peoples with colonial mentalities, was not unlike that of women in our society.

Perhaps I interpret it in this way simply because I am a woman, but to me the parallels seem undeniable. (257)

Immediately, it becomes apparent that there are some blind spots in Laurence's "social awareness" (258). When she talks of "our situation," her implicit reference is to *White* Canadians living in a former British colony. By "cultural imperialism," she means the judging of White Canadian literature by British and American standards. Comparing her work to that of Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, she even

refers to herself as a "Third World novelist" (253).<sup>6</sup>

If Laurence is a "Third World novelist," one must ask where that leaves the Native authors whose challenges to colonial discourse -- Gooderham's anthology *I Am An Indian* (1969) and Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973), for example -- began to appear in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Of course, Laurence cannot be held personally responsible for the invisibility of these authors at the time she was writing, but her apparent ignorance of their existence exemplifies White failure to pay attention to Native voices. Many of Laurence's Native contemporaries are still struggling for recognition today; their work is excluded from the canon in which Laurence's work has been enshrined, and they are repeatedly denied equal access to publication. As Maracle has observed, "There are *tens of thousands* of Canadian writers; there should be *thousands* of us. There are *thousands* of Canadian presses; there should be *hundreds* of ours" (qtd in Williamson 172).<sup>7</sup>

As in her discussion of colonialism, Laurence's comments on the subordination of "women in our society" ("Ivory Tower" 257) are ethnocentric. Her remarks about "the tendency of women to accept male definition of ourselves" (258) pertain solely to White, not Native, women. There is no evidence in the essay that she intends the term "woman" to be regarded as racially inclusive, or that it has occurred to her to consider the situation of Native women at

all. Although she is sympathetic toward "the Mtis," she tends to regard them as a homogeneous (male) group of "prairie horselords ... and their Indian brothers" (259). In *The Diviners*, the theme of their "dispossession" (259) by colonial forces parallels, but is not allowed to supersede, that of Morag's subjugation to Brooke's patriarchal control. Jules, along with the rest of Laurence's Métis characters, plays a supporting role in the drama of Morag's struggle to become "a strong and independent woman" (258).

As Laurence has suggested in an interview with Rosemary Sullivan, she intends Morag's relationship to Brooke, the "colonial man," to be read metaphorically as a process of colonization, with Morag as "the colony" (qtd in Sullivan 74). There is no doubt that Brooke appears as a representative patriarch and colonizer. As a British-born university professor, his affiliations are with the "Ivory Tower" elite of the traditional academy, and his persistent attempts to shape and judge Morag's progress as a writer allegorize the "cultural imperialism" ("Ivory Tower" 253) discussed by Laurence. The publication of Morag's first novel under her own name, and the realization that "she is able to defend her own work" (*Div* 280), symbolize a victory for "Canadian" writing. Significantly, Morag's next novel, *Prospero's Child*, plays on the theme of colonization from a feminist perspective. Prospero/Brooke's dual roles as invading ruler and father figure are merged in the character

of "H.E.", whom Mira/Morag must reject "in order to become her own person" (353). Laurence is clearly influenced, here, by her reading of Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: A Study of the Psychology of Colonialism* (Sullivan 74).<sup>8</sup>

Brooke's upbringing as a member of the imperial class in British India and his indifference to the attitudes of White superiority instilled in him as a child -- "Just one of those things. It was the custom in those days" (*Div* 234) -- highlight his equivalent role as a colonialist in Canada. Morag thinks it "horrible" that he was taught to regard himself as racially superior to the "the servants' children" (234) in India. However, she does not see how closely his Canadian "ivory tower" resembles his family's "whitewashed establishment" (234) in India until she violates an unspoken rule by bringing one of the "natives" into their apartment. Brooke's evaluation of Jules as a "freeloader" and his comment to Morag that he "thought it was supposed to be illegal to give liquor to Indians" (290) reveal his patronizing bigotry, which Morag suddenly connects to his oppressive chauvinism.

Morag realizes that she, too, has been a victim of the paternalism inherent in Brooke's racial slur. Brooke's condescending treatment of Jules, which positions him as the chastising colonial father, brings to the surface her own growing resentment at being regarded by him as a "child"

(217) in need of his continual care and supervision. Even in their sexual relationship, Brooke insists upon playing the role of Morag's father, forcing her to submit to his authority with a system of "rewards and punishments" (279) that comes to have increasingly incestuous overtones.

'Have you been a good girl, love?' Brooke asks.

It has become his game, his jest, before going into her, and indeed before permitting his arousal or hers. If she protests the sentence, he will withdraw all of himself except his unspoken anger. She has to play, or be prepared to face that coldness. Either way she feels afraid.... (265)

Morag is thus victimized, in a domestic context, by the same "need" (299) to dominate that characterizes Brooke's colonial mentality. Just as a colonizer regards Native peoples as uncivilized children whose behaviour must be regulated (hence laws such as the one forbidding the serving of alcohol to Indians), Brooke approaches Morag as if she were a naughty child needing to be disciplined.

Brooke's paternalism derives, in part, from a sense of his own intellectual superiority that mirrors the colonizer's usual belief in the inferior intelligence of Native peoples. By discouraging Morag from continuing her studies once they are married, he is able to justify his continued perception of her as a suitably non-threatening, semi-educated "idiot child" (217). This gesture of denying Morag educational equality has an echo in Simon Pearl's dissuasion of Jules from his dream of attending law school. Jules tells Morag,

So I asked old Simon how a guy would get to be a lawyer. He didn't actually laugh out loud, but he kinda covered his mouth with his hand to hide the smile. Then he tells me it's a fine thing to get an education, but a person like me might do well to set their sights a bit lower, and he will ask Macpherson at the BA Garage to take me on as an apprentice mechanic after Grade Eleven. (149)

Morag's situation differs from Jules's, however, in that racial privilege grants her access to an academic career, even if she is discouraged from pursuing one. Whereas Jules is advised not to set his sights past Grade Eleven, Morag has attended university and her writing, which documents her experience of sexist oppression, is recognized by her literary critics.

In contrast, Jules's work -- the performance of songs he has written about Métis history and the suffering of his people -- goes unappreciated by White audiences. Dressed in fringed shirts and feathers that make a mockery of Native traditional dress but appeal to "slumming" (287) businessmen, he becomes an emblem of the fetishization of indigenous cultural memory that accompanies the colonization process. The colonizers' perception of history as having begun with their arrival at the frontier is illustrated, in microcosm, by Brooke's encouragement of Morag to erase the memories of her past. He urges her to forget her Manawaka childhood: "When you first came to me," he tells her, "you said you had no past. I liked that. It was as though everything was starting for you, right then, that moment" (278). Morag's willingness to "conceal everything about

herself which he might not like" (213) indicates her susceptibility to the demand, issued by the White man to White women and to colonized people alike, that they "assimilate or get lost" (Armstrong, *Slash* 70). This assimilation process also involves the loss of ancient languages, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Not only does Brooke ask Morag to forget her history; he also denies her the continuance of her bloodline by refusing her a child of her own. His assertion of control over Morag's reproductive capacities is symptomatic of his belief that "he owns her" (299). Laurence draws clear parallels between male attitudes of ownership toward the female body and the possessive thrust of colonizing forces in the novel. Morag's transformation from "herownself" (218) into "[Brooke's] woman" (217) is accomplished through his first sexual penetration of her body, which she describes as an experience of being "*inhabited* by him" (218, my emphasis). His territorializing gesture is reflected in the land claims made by White imperialists driving their way across the Canadian prairies, dispossessing the Tonnerres, for example, of their property rights and pushing them to the outskirts of Manawaka.

Implicit in such a gesture, of course, is the colonizer's perception of the land as "virgin" territory; as Spivak suggests, "when you're talking about colonization you



are talking about settling a place which was unsettled before ... when the colonizers come to a world, they encounter it as uninscribed earth upon which they write their inscription" (PCC 129). Similarly, women are often expected, by even the most sexually adventurous males, to preserve their virginity until it is claimed by a husband. Laurence's critique of the sexual double standard runs throughout the novel, but the difference between Brooke's and Morag's access to contraception provides a particularly pithy example. While Brooke has a supply of condoms under his pillow, Morag's doctor refuses to fit her for a diaphragm until "the day after the wedding" (221, my emphasis). Brooke's assumption of Morag's virginity -- virginity which, as she knows, is only technically intact, given her previous sexual encounter with Jules -- serves as a metaphor for the colonizer's fantasy of being the first to chart untouched terrain and claim it for his own.

Recognizing in Jules a fellow victim of the various forms of tyranny to which Brooke has subjected her, Morag enlists him as an agent in her rebellion against patriarchal control. It is in Laurence's figuring of Jules as a sexual "shaman" (294) that her feminist priorities become most apparent. Morag's encounters with him are defined by her need to free herself from various oppressive situations. As a teenager desperate to escape Manawaka, she regards sex with him as having the potential to "endanger her chances of

getting out" (168); years later, when her marriage to "a rich prof" (286) has revealed itself to be a worse imprisonment, sexual intercourse with Jules and pregnancy with his child secure her release from Brooke's suffocating control. Jules acts as a catalyst to, as well as a foil for, the positive changes in Morag's life; by using Jules's continued social powerlessness to offset Morag's increasing strength, however, Laurence subtly reinforces White perceptions of the Native as socially helpless.

As well, Morag seeks, through her identification with Jules, to establish roots in the Canadian landscape, and to gain access to the freedom of spirit his people represent to her. Despite Laurence's awareness of the arrogance of colonial gestures of possession, she herself engages, through her portrayal of Morag's search for a place to belong, in what Margery Fee has described as a kind of "white 'literary land claim,' analogous to the historical territorial take-over" (Fee 17). Fee argues that

A variant of mainstream nationalism uses the First Peoples' position as marginal, yet aboriginal, to make a ... claim-by-identification for ... marginal groups. Those who do not wish to identify with 'mainstream' Anglo-Canadian culture, or who are prevented from doing so, can find a prior and superior Canadian culture with which to identify. (17)

To Morag, Jules's Métis culture, with its aura of excitement and bygone glory, is more appealing than the drab narrowness of the middle class Canadian society which rejects her, and which she eventually rejects.

In her desperate attempt to transfuse her Highland Scots ancestry into the context of the new world, Morag epitomizes the anxiety of the Canadian "immigrant" who, even if she is born here, finds that "there is no ... 'Canadian' identity ready for ... [her] to step into" (Atwood 150). As John Marlyn writes, all Canadians of European descent are "foreigners" (qtd in Atwood 147) who must consciously establish a place for themselves in the Canadian landscape. Fee includes *The Diviners* in her discussion of "the simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature [which] can be explained to some extent ... by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land. It also explains the general lack of interest in Native culture or history: we want to be them, not to understand them" (24).

Terry Goldie's coined word for this process of identification, which reflects the White Canadian's "need to become 'native,' to belong here," is "indigenization" (Goldie 73). A perfect example is contained in Morag's last sexual encounter with Jules. In the following passage, Jules is positioned as a mythological figure who can transport Morag into the aboriginal world of his ancestors:

After a while, she disentangles and he raises her until she is looking into his face in the grey-light of the room.

'Ride my stallion, Morag.'

So she mounts him. He holds her shoulders and her long hair, penetrating up into her until she knows he has reached whatever core of being she has ... (Div 365)

By casting Jules as a "stallion," here, Laurence evokes Morag's earlier fascination with his stories about his great Métis ancestor, "*Chevalier -- Rider*" Tonnerre (159). Morag is able to enter the romantic legend of the prairie horselord as "Rider," thereby gaining access to the freedom from social restraint and belonging to the Canadian landscape that this figure represents. Morag's appropriation of the role of "Rider" might also be seen as a feminist revision of the Métis myth, similar to her earlier re-writing of "*Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn*" as "*Morag's First Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman*" (60-1). While Morag acts the part of *Chevalier*, Jules plays the supporting role of Rider's "mythical beast. Signifying what? Many would say potency, male ego, but it seemed that a kind of freedom might be a better guess" (434).

Goldie also points out, citing *The Diviners* as an example, that the resolution of a White character's sense of alienation from her environment is generally "followed by the death of the indigene" who has assisted her to a new level of self-realization (Goldie 77). After this encounter with Jules, Morag's journey to England and Scotland convinces her that she "belongs" in Canada; she returns and takes up residence on a land claim homesteaded by early pioneers, thus asserting territorial rights in the new country. Once she has "Land. A river. Log house nearly a century old, built by a great pioneering couple, Simon and

Sarah Cooper. "History. Ancestors" (439), Jules, significantly, begins to fade into the background. Her subsequent meetings with him do not include sexual contact, and he eventually takes his own life rather than suffer a slow death by throat cancer.

Morag retains the legacy of Jules, however, in the person of their daughter Pique. In her portrayal of this interracial mother-daughter relationship, Laurence probes the limitations to Morag's, and her own, understanding of the Métis experience with increasing sensitivity. Though Pique is a part of Morag in a strictly genetic sense, Morag can never "be" -- to recall Fee's phrase -- Pique. Although she recognizes the importance of teaching Pique about her ancestry, "Morag's Tale of Lazarus Tonnerre" (392) is a faltering one. In answer to Pique's questions, she has to admit, for example, that she is "not sure what happened" to Lazarus's wife, Pique's grandmother (392). She cannot convey the essence of Métis-ness, the spirit of the "prairie horselords" (434) or the language they spoke. Pique has to book-learn French: "'From a book,' Pique said coldly. 'I learned it from a book. Somebody I know taught me to say the French. I only know how to make the sounds. I don't know what they mean'" (263); Morag, who cannot even pronounce Jules's name properly, is unable to be of much assistance.

More significantly, although she has suffered her

own kind of persecution, Morag cannot really understand the double oppression of racism and sexism that Pique endures. Morag's response to Pique's account of the social reality of being perceived as a "dirty halfbreed" (146) reveals her imperfect understanding of Pique's situation:

'Yeh. Well. It was just that this guy, a real smartass, came up and started making these passes at me, see? And when I more or less told him to get lost, he said *Aw come on, don't give me that shit -- you know halfbreed girls can't wait to get fucked by any guy who comes along.*'

Oh Jesus.

'Goddamn,' Morag says furiously. 'Who was he? I am going to go and see the principal.'

'No, Ma, don't. The guy's dad is on the School Board. It wouldn't do any good to see the principal. He'd be sorry and all that, but he couldn't do anything....' (447)

Pique is victimized by the social myth of the rape-ability of the Native woman,<sup>9</sup> which has been perpetuated in White literature by stereotyped images of her as sluttish and sexually available. Although Laurence is seemingly intent, here, on casting a critical light upon such stereotypes, her portrayal of Jules's sisters Piquette and Valentine -- both in *The Diviners* and, respectively, in "The Loons" and *The Fire-dwellers* -- calls her level of self-awareness into question. As Angelika Maeser-Lemieux correctly observes, "Both Valentine and Piquette appear older than their actual ages and are similarly depicted as coarse, cheap, sexy, and seedy" (Maeser-Lemieux 124).

Pique realizes that Morag's anger and indignation alone are insufficient defense against the institutionalized

violence she is experiencing; furthermore, she is resistant to the idea of Morag intervening on her behalf. Her earlier rejection of Morag's mothering is more hostile: "Pique, her long black hair spread over the hospital pillow, her face turned away from Morag, her voice low and fierce. *Can't you see I despise you? Can't you see I want you to go away? You aren't my mother I haven't got a mother*" (Div 111).

This statement embodies a silent indication of preference for and allegiance to her paternal -- Métis -- heritage. The passage invites interpretation as a rebellion against what Native critic Marlyn Kane has called White women's "maternalism" -- the desire to control that underlies their gestures of solicitude toward Native women (Kane and Maracle 15).<sup>10</sup> Kane does not distinguish maternalism from paternalism; the argument could be made, however, that White women's "maternal" gestures are marked less by condescension and more by genuine sympathy and protectiveness than are White men's patronizing attitudes toward Native people.

Laurence appears to be sensitive to the problem of maternalism, as she is to the colonial paternalism of men like Brooke and Simon Pearl. In her portrayal of Morag and Pique's relationship, she evaluates White women's implication in racism more closely than anywhere else in the novel. Morag realizes, albeit with difficulty, that Pique is right to resent the "mother knows best" attitude occasionally adopted by Morag; she reminds herself,

"Whatever is happening to Pique is not what I think is happening, whatever that may be" (Div 70). Initially, Morag views the conflict between them as primarily generational, and attributes Pique's angry repudiation of her to a "bad trip" (111) on hallucinatory drugs rather than to racial hostility; later, however, she becomes increasingly aware that Pique is frustrated by Morag's inability to relate to her adequately on a cultural level. Morag's sense of failure in her attempts to understand and record Pique's experience seems to point toward a feeling of authorial frustration on Laurence's own part.

The close connection between Morag-as-writer and Laurence-as-writer is indicated by Laurence's suggestion that "the novel ... [Morag] is writing is *The Diviners*" (qtd in Fabre 205). Both Laurence and her protagonist struggle with the White writer's dilemma of how to represent Native people in fictional writing adequately. Morag worries that she is interpreting both Jules and Pique "only through her own eyes" (469, 257), but asks herself (and the reader) a key question: "How else could you interpret anyone?" (469) In fairness to Laurence, the sensitivity of her interpretive vision has set her work apart from that of many other White Canadians writing about Indian people. Even a recent Native studies resource book published by the Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples, in consultation with Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, identifies *The*



*Diviners* as a "fine Canadian novel [which] provides valuable insight into the historical and contemporary situation of the Métis" (Verrall 59).<sup>11</sup>

Laurence's artistic presentation of the Métis subject is, for the most part, complex and perceptive, and Maracle's suggestion that it is blatantly "racist" seems unduly harsh. Nonetheless, the perception by more than one Native reader that Laurence "for all her perceptiveness, plays into some big stereotypes" (LaRocque in Lutz 187) in her portrayal of Métis characters in *The Diviners* must be considered seriously. Laurence's understanding of women's oppression may increase her sensitivity to the Métis experience of victimization, but her affiliation with a colonizing, rather than a colonized, racial group does colour her depiction of the Métis. Laurence is within her creative rights in attempting to portray Métis characters, but her decision to do so does render her novel vulnerable to criticism such as that offered by Maracle.

\* \* \*

Whereas Laurence uses a model of "parallels" to describe the similar situations of victims of colonization and patriarchy, Maracle, as a Native woman, perceives the relationship between racist and sexist oppression to be far more complex. In her afterword to *Telling It: Women and*

*Language Across Cultures*, a recent Canadian feminist conference, she identifies White feminists' unwillingness to acknowledge the extent to which racial privilege affects their critiques of sexism as a key factor contributing to the divisions among women. She observes that

Racism is layered between the sexism of this society and is connected to sexism. So intimately bound are they that sometimes their separation leads to confusion in the minds and hearts of women, even fear. The condition of white privilege delineates the nature of the cultural resistance of women of colour and demarcates the lines of authority, the hierarchy between women ... it is racism that shapes the condition of women. (Maracle, "Ramparts" 174)

From her point of view, and that of many other "women of colour," the kind of feminist liberation that Laurence depicts in *The Diviners* does nothing to erase -- in fact, it often seems to emphasize -- the "lines of authority" that separate White and Native women. The ethnocentrism of White feminism makes it both inaccessible and, to a large extent, irrelevant for Native women. Feminism will not be truly inclusive, Maracle argues, until White women unlearn racism (by examining and deconstructing the way that their own privilege colours their perceptions of Native women) and Native women learn not to be self-racist.

This is not to say that Maracle does not identify strongly with the oppression of women, both Native and White. The frequent demand upon Native women to make a choice between apparently conflicting loyalties is reflected in the titles of her first two book-length publications, the

autobiographical / theoretical texts *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* and *I Am Woman*. A clear split between anti-racist and feminist agendas seems to be indicated, here. Barbara Godard makes an interesting observation, though, about the hidden intertextual message in the latter title:

Through her autobiographical 'I,' Lee Maracle narrates herself as a political representative for women and for Métis. But this is a complex intertextual game, for interpellated in her title is *I Am an Indian*<sup>12</sup>, an anthology of some of the first Native writing to emerge from the Indian Movement in the sixties. Indirectly, then, she also represents Indianness. (Godard, "Politics" 201)

The stories, poems, and autobiographical anecdotes in *I Am Woman* reveal the degree to which Maracle's feminist perspective is grounded in her "Indianness." Although she no longer believes, as she once did, that "it was irrelevant that ... [she] was a woman" (*IAW* 16), she is critical of the way that the White women's movement perpetuates racist hierarchies (*IAW* 21). And, though she calls upon Native men to accept responsibility for the abuse of women within Native communities, she locates the origins of this abuse in White colonization; thus, she insists that the sexual emancipation of Native women depends upon the dismantling of racist systems.

The fact of Maracle's "Nativity" -- her own personal experience of racial persecution -- permeates her fictional writing as well, and obviously distinguishes her representation of Native peoples from Laurence's in

important ways. In contrast to *The Diviners*, Maracle's novel *Ravensong* operates as what Godard terms "an emancipatory discourse of/for red" rather than a "discourse of white on red" (Godard, "Politics" 193). Whereas Laurence attempts to interpret the circumstances of the Métis through her experience of a "different ... but ... same" (*Div* 447) kind of oppression, Maracle is legitimately qualified to speak on behalf of Native peoples.

Speaking as a Native woman, moreover, she is able to examine, through Stacey, the differences between her situation and that of White women. As the novel progresses, Stacey both confronts her own self-racist tendencies and challenges her White acquaintances to look critically at themselves. As if setting an example for White feminists, Stacey explicitly avoids making presumptions about White women's viewpoints, and scrupulously evaluates the contradictions in Native women's social perspectives. In this way, Maracle's narrative draws attention to the gaps and assumptions in White women's thinking about Native women; her novel calls, indirectly, for what Julia Emberley terms a "decolonizing of feminism" (Emberley 54).

The first priority of such a project is a general rebellion against colonization and its social aftermath. Battling institutionalized racism -- in Spivak's terms, "negotiating with structures of violence" (*PCC* 101) -- is not incidental to a White feminist agenda in Maracle's

novel, as it is in Laurence's. The dynamics of colonialism are omnipresent in Stacey's world. As a student in the high school in "white town" (RS 18), she is confronted daily with paternalistic, authoritarian White men such as Mr. Johnson, who has "the power to decide people's futures ... without the wisdom needed to guide them to their future realization" (67), and Steve, whose father refuses to treat Native flu patients "despite ... his intellectual recognition of racial equality" (187). Her classes, too, "bring to the surface the endless bigotry of both teacher and students" (65), as enlightened White students theorize about the situation of "Indians on reserve" (65). Meanwhile, at home in the village, Stacey lives the nightmare of battling a flu epidemic without medical supplies and watching relatives and friends die of a curable illness.

Maracle is also concerned, in the novel, with the way that Native women are victimized by sexist social hierarchies. However, her critique of male dominance is tempered by the suggestion that patriarchal violence against women was introduced to Native society with the arrival of the White man. The cultural memory of a time when strong women such as Nora and Rena -- who, Stacey's Grampa tells her, are descended from "a warrior woman of long ago" (97) -- has been stressed and reiterated by Native critics such as Marlyn Kane, Jeannette Armstrong, and Paula Gunn Allen.<sup>13</sup> Armstrong reminds us that

[Native] instruments of governance gave women voice and influence in process and decision. Our instruments of law were extreme in the protection of the dignity of the female. Rape was totally unheard of in the pre-contact culture.

("Cultural Robbery" 23).

With the arrival of colonizing forces, though, Kane tells us that "contact with that European male and the imposition of his ways on our people, resulted in our being assimilated into those ways. We forgot our women's responsibilities and the men forgot theirs" (Kane and Maracle 14).

Such a critique allows for a measure of absolution, as it rationalizes, if not excuses, abusive behaviour on the part of Native men by locating its source within White patriarchy. Kane explains this point of view as follows:

So our men are hurting, they are suffering because they're physically removed, they are locked out; their self-image issues around fulfilling their role cannot be met. The environment in which they have come to exist has caused them to turn to ways that are not particularly appropriate in terms of 'helping' forces, alcohol and drugs being the worst of them ... The woman is responsible for picking that man up and bringing him back to health. (Kane and Maracle 14)

This sympathy of Native women for the situation of Native men is frequently misunderstood by White feminists, as Julia Emberley notes. White women's appeals for cross-cultural feminism often take the form of "white-woman-feminist-saving-Native-women-from-Native-men" (Emberley 91) efforts that fail to account for their own implication in White destruction of Native community values.

Maracle deals explicitly with this issue of the

origins of domestic violence in Native communities in Ravensong, through the example of Madeline and her husband. Better known in the village as "the Snake", he brutally beats Madeline in alcoholic rages, and she attempts to kill him after discovering that he has sexually abused their young daughter. The Snake's behaviour is specifically attributed to the influence of White men on a culture that traditionally has valued and respected women:

The Yale gathering each year put men in touch with women and eventually the young men would leave and a new bunch of men would come to the village. The women of the village had a way of making these men aware that they were cherished sisters and daughters. They were kind to these men when they came, but the first week or two they teased them a great deal about the value of their wives and how fortunate they were to come to this village and become a part of the good people here. Only the old snake never left.

After the old snake returned from working with white town rail-workers he came back full of crazy notions about his wife's place. 'I am the head of my household,' he bragged to everyone in the village. He even thumped his chest. He said crude things to young boys about making women mind ..... The old snake had brought a piece of white town with him to the village.  
(RS 149)

Although the Snake is sent from the village in disgrace, he is redeemed both by the attribution of his behaviour to the poisoning influence of White men's misogyny and by the genuine shame he exhibits. Stacey reflects that "the old snake felt deep shame. Shame so deep he had not defended himself ... His assumption of dignity was to assure the people he had no quarrel with their decision. He had not wished to add the coercive force of guilt on top of his

crime against womanhood onto the shoulders of the community" (186). Steve, by contrast, is "uncomfortable with his shame" (186) when Stacey confronts him with his implication in the crimes committed by white town against her village, and she rejects him because of the "lack of dignity" (187) this represents.

The inappropriate manipulation of shame and guilt is also central to the novel's evaluation of White women's sexual victimization. Stacey's observations of social interaction in the White community lead her to the conclusion that

They [White people] set up morals no human could possibly follow, then established a judgement system based not on whether or not you actually lived within the moral code, but whether or not you could deceive people into thinking you lived by this code. (64)

Stacey's struggles to interpret the "code" of White morality center on her obsession with the death of her White classmate, Polly, who "killed herself because they knew she had enjoyed her body's passion" (39-40). From Stacey's point of view, White women's willingness to accept social rules that assign feelings of guilt to the natural expression of their sexuality is incomprehensible.

She is similarly unable to identify with her friend Carol Snowden's "Catholic" reaction to her mother's impending divorce: "Stacey ... was astounded by the nature of the religion. It was a sin to lust, a sin to divorce, a sin to want to be loved if you were a woman. Carol's mom



had dared to want to be loved and Carol was ashamed on her behalf" (132). She realizes that "Mrs. S. had no more rank in her own house than the children" (35), but cannot understand why this should be so. Although she is tempted to criticize White women for consenting to be the victims of a social system that devalues them, however, Stacey refrains from "unfair" (131) judgment of their behaviour. For example, she counters her observation that "White people learn nothing from their stupid merry-go-round of pretentious and fake morality" with a reminder to herself that "She didn't really know them well enough to say that. She didn't know Carol either. She told herself to watch her own arrogance" (131).

Stacey's analysis of her own people's sense of morality is also conscientiously fair and self-critical. Carol's description of Catholicism illuminates, for Stacey, "her [own] mother's angry words about the priest wanting to know her 'business.'" For years he had been trying to get her to come to church to confess her sin of lust. He was so sure she was guilty of it" (132). Momma's "Indian style" (132) of female sexuality is made all the more appealing, to Stacey, by the Church's disapproval of it. This preference is balanced, however, by Stacey's confusion over Momma's contradictory insistence that the "strict codes of [sexual] conduct" (106) in the village be upheld. Stacey perceives that the Native "order of things" (123) is subtly

patriarchal and overtly heterosexist, and she is troubled by this realization. She is especially bothered by Momma's anger at her for visiting unchaperoned with the lesbian couple, Rena and German Judy: "... law, Momma had called it. Law. Her understanding of this law confused her. What made it so important to be chaperoned if, as a wife, her momma could spend time with her husband's brother and not cause a stir of conscience inside herself? Where was the sense of morality?" (125).

Stacey's scrutiny of Indian ways includes, as well, a painful awareness of the negative image of herself mirrored to her in the eyes of "white town" (18). From "her obsessive contrasting of their own dingy little hall to white town's community centres with lavish stone floors, elegant large windows, foyers and flowered walkways" (18) to her embarrassment at the prospect of being "stared at by white passers-by, a car-load of Indians in an old Ford wagon loaded to the hilt" (171), she is unable to avoid examining herself through White stereotypes of Native people. Despite Momma's warning not to "use their [White] laws to judge" Native people (102), Stacey cannot stop herself from viewing Momma and others from the perspective of her White acquaintances.

This tendency toward "internalized racism" (Maracle, *IAW* 179) is a widespread and destructive phenomenon among First Nations people who have been systematically stripped

of their sense of self-worth and taught to despise their own customs and traditions. Maracle's *I Am Woman*, as well as several other prominent Native texts, have a didactic interest in contributing to the necessary, albeit painful, process of unlearning Native self-contempt.<sup>14</sup> Stacey's separation of her Native identity from the definitions given to her by "white town" marks one of the most important thematic developments in the novel. This development is exemplified by her rejection of Steve's theoretical interest in her situation, and by her conscious enjoyment of "Native" activities such as the salmon harvest or a "quiet smoke with Rena" (RS 194).

The success of cross-cultural interaction between women depends, in part, upon the question of whether or not White women are capable of confronting the reciprocal contempt with which they are regarded by many Native women. Laurence, for example, is generously critical of White pressure on Native people to view themselves according to stereotypes of their worthlessness, stupidity, and lack of self-determination. However, her treatment of relationships between White women and Native women (especially Valentine and Piquette Tonnerre) in *The Diviners* is characterized more by an outward-directed sympathy for the latter than by self-reflexive judgment. Laurence laments the self-deprecatory attitudes foisted upon White women by men ("Ivory Tower" 257); as regards racial conflict, though, Maracle sees a

White woman's willingness to consider how she might see herself as an object of ridicule, rather than a subject of power, as fundamental to the interracial healing process.

In *Ravensong*, Maracle provides an illustration of the positive potential of White women's self-criticism in a scene involving Stacey, Rena, and Rena's White lover, Judy. Judy becomes aware of how completely she is separated, by the fact of her White privilege, from the realities of Native life when she attempts to answer Stacey's inquiries about starting university in Vancouver.

'You're all right then,' Judy answered, 'but if you have any trouble call me at the office.' Stacey nearly burst with laughter at the card Judy handed her. Judy looked a little hurt. Rena told her to relax: neither she nor Stacey had any idea how to give anyone a call. Judy sat still, not responding at first.

She wore almost the same look of disempowered silence that the principal and Steve had had, only the reason for it was different. Judy had felt disempowered by the powerlessness of her girlfriend and this young woman ... (112)

A key distinction is drawn, in the latter half of this passage, between Judy's response, and that of two White men, to Stacey's challenges to their privilege and authority. Whereas Steve and Mr. Johnson are unable to conceive of themselves as "ex-master[s]" (75), Judy's humility indicates a truer comprehension of the need to dismantle the power hierarchies prescribed by her own privilege. As she, Stacey, and Rena continue to talk, the women reach a common (lack of) understanding: "The gulf between them ceased to be a threat. The absence of knowledge of the other world

was so vast that Judy could not conceive of its size. All three women sat in a complete state of unknowing. In an odd sort of way they were all equal in their lack of knowledge" (113). Maracle thus turns a critical moment of disempowerment into an *empowering* moment of possibility.

In the scene that follows, Judy goes on to offer a story about her own ignorance, as she recounts how, in the early days of her relationship with Rena, she "had decided to put some good European order to Rena's house, throwing out all the roots hanging from the ceiling or drying on the counters" (113). Maracle demonstrates, here, the power of humour to diffuse an uncomfortable silence between women. Judy's willingness to participate in the gentle mockery of her European ways seems, to Stacey, to have positive connotations of healing:

In the middle of German Judy's story, Rena was hardly able to stand she was laughing so hard. Staggering from one end of the room to the other she imitated German Judy cleaning up Rena's house. 'Look at diss dirt,' she said in a perfect imitation of Judy's German accent, scraping the dirt off the counter with the imaginary root and tossing it into the garbage ... When she [Stacey] had calmed down she realized this was the first time the difference between white people and herself had seemed funny ... They must really love each other, she thought, to have somehow climbed all the hills of complete misunderstanding. (113-4)

The passage provides an access point for White women reading the text, as they are invited to step outside the ideological trappings of their own subject positions and become, with Judy, the voyeurs of their own ridiculousness

in the eyes of Native women. In a very real sense, Rena's mimetic pantomime calls upon Judy to confront her own (White) self, and Judy appears to respond positively to the challenge.

Against Judy's apparent willingness to unlearn her White privilege, though, Maracle indicates the way in which the European woman is betrayed by her fundamental loyalty to her White roots. This loyalty is illustrated, in a subsequent scene, by Judy's sympathy for Carol and her reaction when Rena and Stacey laugh at Carol's ignorance about life in the village:

Rena couldn't stop laughing about her [Carol]. After the first outburst, Judy didn't think it was all that funny. Seeing Judy switch from laughter to offence on Carol's behalf reminded Stacey of what Momma had said about her whiteness. She began to see some truth in Momma's remark -- she's white so she don't count. (135)

Judy's behaviour also reminds Stacey of her father's warning: "Remember, if they [White people] ever have to choose between each other and you, they will always choose themselves" (89).

Judy's failure to sustain a self-reflexive critical stance, and her inability to relinquish her affiliations with "them people" (194), contribute to Stacey's diminishing interest in her as she prepares to leave the village for university. Like Polly and Carol, Judy disappears from Stacey's thoughts by the end of the novel. Stacey's struggles to decide whether or not, and how, she should

relate to White women are deferred indefinitely, as she realizes that she must find her own strength before she can engage with them in a meaningful way:

Stacey was sad, but then remembered Momma's words: 'she's white and so she doesn't count.' This time Polly did not come into view. Instead, Nora, bold and unapologetic, strode into her imagination: 'Momma is neither wrong nor right. Of course they count, but not right now.' (194)

With its simultaneous rejection of White women and invocation of Nora, the symbolic representative of a lost Native matriarchy, this statement ironically defines Stacey's position in separatist terms at the very moment of her entry into the violently bureaucratic White system that Judy represents. The failure of Stacey's attempt to work within inherently racist societal structures is documented in the novel's epilogue, which, with its catalogue of Native deaths and misery, indicates how little the Native condition has changed, even "some twenty-five years later" (197). Stacey's dream of opening a school in the village has never materialized: "'In the end, they would not let us build our school. No one in white town would hire me either.' She threw her hands up into the air. There was nothing else left to tell. 'Not allowed' seemed to be all there was left to their life" (198). With the same racial hierarchies of power and subordination still in place, the "right now" (194) for interracial women's solidarity remains in the future. As if to exemplify this continuing split, German Judy is conspicuously absent from the gathering of women

(Stacey, Celia, and Rena have come together to mourn the recent suicide of Celia's son) that marks the novel's close.

In *Ravensong*, then, Maracle clearly identifies racism, rather than sexism, as the primary source of oppression for Native women. Although she considers it important to attempt an understanding of the social situation of White women, she does not presume to "know them well enough" (131) to assess their social outlooks fairly, nor does she feel compelled to end *Ravensong* on the hopeful note of reconciliation between Native and White women that characterizes the closing exchanges between Morag and Pique in *The Diviners*. While both Laurence and Maracle speak as members of hierarchically subordinated social groups, Maracle is able speak about and *for* Native people, and Native women in particular, in a way that challenges the subtle racism that compromises White authors' -- including Laurence's -- attempts to present the experience of the Native in their writing.



A War of Words: Lee Maracle's "Native" Response  
to White Authoritarianism

As I have shown in Chapter One, Laurence's attempt, as a White writer, to represent Métis characters in *The Diviners* is marked by certain assumptions that betray her implication in the colonization process. In fact, her decision to make a social statement, in her novel, on behalf of the dispossessed Métis raises questions about the extent of her participation in a more serious literary crime: the appropriation of Native voice by Canadian writers. The "appropriation of voice" debate has reached a boiling point in recent years, as defensive White writers fling accusations of "censorship" at Native spokespersons who angrily oppose the "theft" of their traditional stories.

These are strong words, but they reflect the depth of feeling with which Native authors, in particular, approach this controversial issue. For White writers, requests that they not write about or try to simulate Native viewpoints represent a threat to their creative autonomy; many, like Anne Cameron, think "that a writer has a perfect right to write about anything under the heavens" (Maracle, "Moving Over" 9). Even Maracle agrees that "in the larger sense, this is true" (9); she objects, though, to the fact

that White writing about Native people detracts attention from real Native voices. For Native authors, White appropriation of their stories represents the most recent stage in a long history of linguistic tyranny that has assisted the colonizers' consolidation of power in North America. They are not prepared to tolerate another round of "cultural robbery" (Armstrong, "Cultural Robbery" 21), and they are gathering their powers of resistance.

Native women writers, for example, are insisting upon asserting their own agency at the feminist conferences they choose to attend or organize, and are refusing invitations to appear as token members of so-called marginalized groups. The "Women and Words / les femmes et les mots" (1983) and "Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures" (1988) conferences have marked important turning points in this regard. In terms of literary production, as well, Native women are fighting for control over their own work; Jeannette Armstrong's En'owkwin School of Writing and Theytus Books press (both in Penticton, B.C.) arose out of the perceived need for Native literary autonomy. Native women's fictional writing, itself, resists and subverts White authority in important ways, by appropriating the English language and using it to carry out projects of Native rebellion. It seems, Audre Lord's opinion to the contrary, that "the master's tools" can be used to "dismantle the master's house" (Lord 99), or at least to

considerably weaken its foundation.

It will be my objective, in this chapter, to determine to what degree Laurence can be said to appropriate Native voice in *The Diviners*, and to consider the ways in which Maracle, as a critic and novelist, has created narratives that both resist and challenge appropriating forces. In *Ravensong*, Maracle exposes the way in which entire systems of colonial oppression have been built upon Europeans' assumption of the superiority of their own (written) languages to those of Native peoples. This history of White colonizers' "literal" assaults on indigenous oral cultures has facilitated the literary appropriation of "Nativity" by White writers such as Laurence. It also provides the basis for Maracle's double project, which is to *reclaim* the traditions of Native storytelling and to *claim* English as the language of Native literary rebellion. Through her fusion of the contextual elements of Native oratory -- from physical metaphor to the presence of the trickster -- with the written Text, the legacy of colonial influence, Maracle enacts a powerful counter-appropriative discourse in *Ravensong*.

It is useful to begin by summarizing, briefly, the history of linguistic abuse that has facilitated the literary appropriation of Native voice. In her Preface to the anthology *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, Emma LaRocque traces this history, which began with

the colonizers' equation of the written word with "civilization":

... of course, the written word is advanced as superior to the spoken word. Oral traditions have been dismissed as savage or primitive folklore. Such dismissal has been based on the self-serving colonial cultural myth that Europeans (and descendants thereof) were/are more developed ('civilized') than Aboriginal peoples ('savage'). (LaRocque xvi)

In part, this colonial myth is derived from the centrality of a particular printed text -- the Bible -- to Western conceptions of morality. Because they were unable to read the Bible, Native peoples could not be regarded as living according to the Word of God; they were, therefore, regarded as "savage" heathens in need of religious instruction.

Hence, the enforced attendance of Native children at Catholic residential schools, where they were "not allowed to speak their Native languages" (LaRocque x). Neither, though, were they taught properly in English; "even into the 1990s," LaRocque notes, "the unconscionable failure of the Canadian education system to impart to Native youth basic reading and writing skills" continues (x). In turn, the high rate of Native illiteracy is used as an excuse for White Canadians' perception of Native people as "wordless" and lacking in intelligence (x). In fact, as LaRocque reminds us, Native peoples were, and are, "neither wordless nor illiterate in the context of their linguistic and cultural roots" (x). By robbing Native peoples of their oral communication systems, though, the colonizers attempted

to cut them off from those cultural roots.

The loss of Native language described by LaRocque is documented, from a Métis perspective, by Maracle in *Ravensong*. The novel focuses on one of the earliest threats to the preservation of Native oral traditions: the attrition of the keepers of Native culture by European illnesses. Stacey anticipates the coming flu epidemic with dread:

She could see the meaning of death to the village. She watched the numbers terrify everyone. The loss was total. An untimely death meant everyone lost a family clown, an herbalist, a spirit healer or philosopher who seemed to understand conduct, law and the connection of one family member to another. Every single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced. (RS 26)

In the absence of a written script, the survival of tribal knowledge and memory depends upon its oral transmission from one generation to the next, upon the special talents of each person being taught to a successor. With each death, the whole tribe is weakened, the whole community exposed to the threat of cultural extinction. Significantly, Maracle figures the illness that threatens the village as a strange "language" (94) that cannot be decoded even by Dominic, the wisest healer in Stacey's Native community.

The damaging effects of the colonizers' institutionalization of Native children in residential schools are also apparent in Stacey's village; "the only elder still alive

among them who had not been to residential school was Ella. The villagers who could wield the language in the fashion of Ella were few and far between" (140). For the children of Stacey's generation who are sent to residential school, such as her cousin Stella, the loss of Native language is symptomatic of a deeper split from the traditions and teachings of their people. Many of Stacey's peers, having left the village to attend school, never return; like another of her cousins, they "meet some white boy ... get married, divorced and end up on skid row" (138). Even Stella, who does return to her family, is in some way "divorced from her elders and her parents" (140).

Stacey, by contrast, shares a "friendship with the adults and old people in the village" (140) and still understands the language, but her education, too, although self-chosen, has separated her from the oral tradition. She describes her schooling in the public school across the river as an extended period of solitary wandering through a heavily encoded maze of printed words:

For almost twelve years she had moved beyond the indignity of school -- the insults, the loneliness, the silence of others who preferred the pretense of her non-existence -- and buried herself in their strange books. She had wandered about in their crazy sense of self and logic, memorized passage after passage of seemingly meaningless information so she could go to the place where millions of books resided. (26)

Stacey's transition from orality to literacy is represented as a literal death, a condemnation to silence and non-

existence that distances her from her communicative roots. I am reminded, here, of Barbara Godard's description of the thematic content of several autobiographies written by Native women; she summarizes, "These women tell of cultural conflict in which their traditional values and sense of self-worth have been destroyed by contact with white civilization. They describe the near *death of the self*" (Godard, "Talking" 76, my emphasis). To Stacey, the literalness of the White world, which threatens to stifle her efforts at self-expression, seems overwhelming.

In *I Am Woman*, Maracle refers to the European schooling system as a form of "incarceration ... the imprisonment of a Native mind in the ideology of the oppressor" (IAW 49). A poignant example of the impact of this ideology on Native thinking is contained in Stacey's attempts to teach Momma how to read silently:

'How can you talk inside your mind?' [asked Momma] They struggled with it for half a day before Momma clued in on what Stacey was trying to tell her. In desperation, Stacey resorted to their language, but that didn't work. (RS 177)

Momma's question reveals her connection of words with direct interpersonal communication; she cannot comprehend "talking" in isolation from an audience, nor does her Native language account for such a concept. The passage invites reference to Derrida's discussion of speech and writing, in which he contrasts the absence of speaker and listener from the printed page to the "presence," the immediacy, of the spoken

word.<sup>15</sup> The impact of print literacy on Native culture is to introduce a textual interruption (disruption) into the speech-based communicative process. Through her schooling, Stacey has been separated from the intimate nature of communication in her own language, so much so that she uses it, as in this episode, only as a last resort.

The colonizers' use of their written script to threaten and intimidate those being colonized into surrendering their traditions and identity is illustrated by the example of Benny, Momma's brother. Benny represents the many Indian men who were made into Naturalized Canadians so that they could be conscripted during World War II.

Stacey recalls,

There was a war -- a world war. Benny, her mom's youngest brother, had enlisted. He wrote her mom dumbfounded letters in jerky English about the 'ceremony' they had put him through. They had lined him up with three other Indians. They each held out their right hand, placed it reverently on a Bible, and swore allegiance to the King. Then this man in a grey uniform marched them to a desk where three neat piles of paper sat. He read them so fast that none of the three young men heard anything he said. They can talk really fast, Benny had said in the letter -- so fast that all the words seemed like one long word. Then they signed next to lines marked with an X. Benny told them he could sign his name. The man in uniform laughed, saying the X was to mark the correct spot to put his name ... They all signed. Benny wanted to know what the papers meant. About two or three days later ... Benny got 'Canadian Naturalization' papers. (46)

The bewildered Benny is forced through a bureaucratic ritual that travesties the concept of "ceremony" as it is



understood in the traditions of his own people. Having been manipulated and confused into swearing away their Indian status on the Bible, the textual underpinning of European tyranny, the three men are transformed from thinking, speaking human beings into faceless "piles of paper." As Stacey later tells the village women, the Naturalization papers declared Benny "not an Indian anymore," signifying a theft of identity that Maracle deconstructs through Kate's response: "You can give our people all the papers in the world. It won't make us one of them" (52).

The uniformed man's laughter at Benny is doubly disempowering. Benny makes a reasonable guess that the man assumes that he is illiterate, and he responds indignantly. Benny cannot win, however, because the White man translates his defiance into ignorance and proceeds to ridicule him for it. His contempt for Benny is echoed by the condescension of the immigration official to whom Momma inquires about the meaning of her brother's papers. Again, the colonizer's language is used to assert his perceived superiority over the Natives: "Momma was a bush baby. The man had secretly declared her unteachable even before he spoke. This unteachability inspired a disgust in him that oozed out through the pinched politeness of his voice" (49). As a bureaucratic representative of "King and Crown" (49), the official's mandate is to enforce the paper laws that legitimize the subordination of Benny and his people.

As LaRocque (along with many other Native spokespersons) has noted, the theft of Native stories is really just another stage in this process of linguistic colonization. One of the strongest objectors to the appropriation of Native culture by White artists, Ojibway poet and storyteller Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, describes this development as follows:

It seems a host of non-Native professionals (publishers, editors, producers, directors, and the like, [sic] have taken over the work of the missionary and the Indian agent. Like their predecessors, they now know best how to present the Native image, the Native perspective, never dreaming, of course, that it is really their own perspective. And so a few canoes, beads, beaver ponds, and a buffalo or two are used to prop up the whore, the drunkard or the shaman. (Keeshig-Tobias, "Magic" 174)

Several points are being made, here. In the first place, Keeshig-Tobias's reference to a professional culture network indicates the degree to which appropriation is a form of systemic violence; racism is as firmly entrenched in "mainline communication systems" (LaRocque xvi) as it is in the legal system and the education system. Second, the statement asks us to acknowledge that these professionals have something in common with missionaries and Indian agents: they all pretend to be acting in the best interests of Native people even as they are harming the Native's image and culture in myriad ways. Furthermore, Keeshig-Tobias tells us, the "romantic clichés and stereotypes" offered to the public by these professionals are "harmful" not only to

Indians but to "non-Natives truly wanting to understand more about Native people and the Native way" ("Magic" 176).

Aside from the cultural damage inflicted by wrongful and insensitive use of Native material, Native women such as Keeshig-Tobias and Maracle ask us to recognize "theft of voice" (Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop" A7) as the very real crime that it is. Keeshig-Tobias tells us that Native stories are so sacred that "in native culture, one storyteller cannot tell another's story without permission" ("Stop" A7). Moreover, White borrowers of Native stories are violating legal copyright principles and financially exploiting Native storytellers: "Our stories," Maracle reminds us, "had original authors; we are not dead. Someone told these stories to someone else who reaped copyright, royalties, credit and the dubious privilege of bastardizing them" ("Native Myths" 186). Keeshig-Tobias is more direct: in a 1990 article in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, she demanded bluntly that Canadians "Stop stealing native stories."<sup>16</sup>

Within the feminist movement, Native women have begun to express their resentment toward White women whose books (fiction or otherwise) about Native women detract attention from the many books being written by Native women. Marlyn Kane, for instance, writes, "Frankly, I'm very tired of having other women interpret for us, other women empathize for us, other women sympathize with us. I'm interested in articulating our own directions, our own

aspirations, our own past, *in our own words*" (Kane and Maracle 7). As Emma LaRocque points out, the example of the *Writing the Circle* anthology has shown that even White editorship of Native writing can be regarded as an unacceptable intervention into the process of Native literary self-determination.<sup>17</sup>

It is this desire, on the part of Native women, to claim control of their own literary destiny, that has been the impetus behind Maracle's requests of White feminists that they "move over" to clear a space for Native women's voices. In particular, Maracle has criticized Anne Cameron, who, in her 1981 book *Daughters of Copper Woman*, recorded Nootka women's stories of an ancient Native matriarchal tradition. In her essay "Moving Over," Maracle explains that, although she has great respect for Cameron as a friend and writer,

Anne is occupying the space that has no room for me. So few Canadians want to read about us that there is little room for Native books. There is little space for Native writers to trot their stuff. If Anne takes up that space there is no room for us at all. (10)<sup>18</sup>

Despite the fact that Cameron was given permission by these Native women to transcribe and publish their stories, and although she donated the proceeds from her book to support Indian land claims, *Daughters of Copper Woman* has come under well-justified attack as an example of appropriation of voice. Of primary concern is Cameron's failure to

articulate clearly, within the text, the true circumstances of her familiarity with the stories of Copper Woman. Her positioning of herself as a daughter with an established place in the kitchens and back porches of the tribe mothers allows for an assumption, by the undiscerning reader, that she herself is Native.

Whether or not it is intended to do so by Cameron, this "Native" persona acts as a decoy, distracting readers from the White feminist undertones of the text. By ignoring or denying White women's complicity in the crimes committed by White invaders, and by suggesting that Native women feel a kinship with White women, Cameron's text erases the real conflicts and differences that have caused Native women to respond with reluctance or outright hostility to White women's calls for a universal sisterhood.<sup>19</sup> Of *Daughters of Copper Woman*, Keeshig-Tobias has been recorded as saying emphatically, "I don't like, nor do I think it's right, how she [Cameron] has used these stories to give credence to her white feminist politics. Those stories were not created for feminists at all" (qtd in Lutz 80).

Unlike Cameron, Laurence, with her concern about "lost languages" (*Div* 264) -- the Gaelic of her own Scots ancestors included -- and her careful labelling of each "tale" recalled by Morag, seems dedicated to avoiding any confusion between the "White" and "Native" voices in her text. In Morag, she has created a character who seems

acutely aware of the problems attending her attempt, as a White writer, to record Jules's Métis stories and document the suffering of his people. Morag's project of writing an autobiographical novel involves a series of (frequently ironic) reflections about the roles she has played in an ongoing social drama of racial tension. At the same time, however, Morag's effort to present the Métis point of view alongside her own is undercut by our knowledge, as readers, that the Métis stories and voices in the novel have been invented by Laurence: the Métis perspective we are given is, ultimately, Laurence's "own perspective" (Keeshig-Tobias, "Magic" 174). This tension between Laurence's authorial self-awareness and her inability to avoid violating Native voice at some level is evident in *The Diviners*, and has been further illuminated by her own critical comments about the novel.

Laurence's experiments with dialogism and orality in *The Diviners* reveal her sensitivity to the impossibility of separating the strand of the storyteller's bias from the fabric of a story. She also recognizes, as Maracle does, that "should this country [Canada] succeed in breaking the thread of ... [Native] history, the fabric created will be bland, lacking in colour, wanting difference" (Maracle, "Ramparts" 166). The series of "tales" in the novel are obviously designed to acknowledge "difference" by highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives from which

history can be viewed. Confronted with three versions of prairie history -- Christie Logan's, Skinner (Jules) Tonnerre's, and that offered by her school history book -- Morag learns early that there may be no such thing as "a true story" (*Div* 159).

Through the young Morag's questions about "Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Long March" (94), for example, Laurence reveals a gap in Christie's Scottish immigrant account of Canadian history:

Och aye, it was hard. It was so hard you could barely feature it. Locusts. Hailstorms. Floods. Blizzards. Indians. Halfbreeds....

(Did they fight the halfbreeds and Indians, Christie?)

Did they ever. Slew them in their dozens, girl. In their scores.

(Were they bad, the breeds and them?)

What?

\*

The story is over. Christie's blue watery eyes look at her, or try to.

'Bad?' He repeats the word as though he is trying to think what it means.

'No,' he says at last. 'They weren't bad. They were -- just there.' (96-7)

Laurence thus exposes the ethnocentric perspective of the colonizers, as "Indians" and "Halfbreeds" are reduced to items in a catalogue of environmental hazards, obstacles to be eliminated for no better reason than that they are "there," impeding the progress of the White man across the prairies.

Morag's need for Christie to justify the slaying of "the breeds and them," to verify the details of his story,

arises out of doubts instilled in her by Jules during an earlier confrontation in the Nuisance Grounds. Jules opens Morag's eyes to the gaps and biases in Christie's stories:

'My family is named Gunn, see? And you better not forget it.'

Skinner's eyes grow narrow. Cruel. Mean.

'That so? You t'ink that means yer somebody? You're a little half-cunt, dry one at that I betcha.'

'Listen here,' Morag spits, 'my family's been around here for longer than anybody in this whole goddamn town, see?'

'Not longer than mine,' Skinner says, grinning.

'Oh yeh? Well, I'm related to Piper Gunn, so there.'

'Who in hell's he?'

'He -- ' She is afraid to speak it now, in case Christie has got it wrong after all ... (82)

The White arrogance signified in Morag's clannish defense of the Gunn name is subverted, here, as Skinner's claim to aboriginality interrupts -- quite literally -- the version of history that Morag has been taught to regard as "true" (83).

By the time that Christie tells his next tale of Piper Gunn's adventures on the prairies, Morag has studied Louis Riel and the Red River Rebellion in school. Her interruptions of "Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels" are now influenced by both her reverence for "History" (145) and her growing attraction to Skinner. She draws on the "facts" she has learned in school to inform Christie what really happened -- "The government Down East sent out the Army from Ontario and like that, and Riel fled, Christie. He came back, to Saskatchewan, in 1885" (145) --



and to point out discrepancies in his story. At the same time, she attempts to soften Christie's militantly pro-Scottish bias with a sympathy for Riel and the Métis that has evolved out of her acquaintance with Skinner. She remarks to Christie that "The book in History said he [Riel] was nuts, but he didn't seem so nuts to me. The Métis were losing the land -- it was taken from them" (146). Skinner reminds Morag that "the books ... lie" (161) about Riel when he tells her the Métis version of the Rebellion (159-64).

Laurence thus clearly recognizes, and seeks to deconstruct, the truth/lie dichotomy set up by the colonizers between their own written documentation of history and the oral preservation of cultural memory relied upon by the Tonnerres and other ancient peoples (among these she includes the dispossessed Scottish Highlanders from whom Christie and Morag are descended). Furthermore, her evaluation of her own implication in the colonizers' arrogant equation of the written word with truth is foregrounded early in the novel, with Morag's description of writing as "A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications. Yet, with typical ambiguity, convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction" (33).<sup>20</sup> Morag's problematic authorial relationship to the oral tales she is transcribing is made especially evident, by Laurence, in her positioning of Morag relative to Skinner's stories about Métis history.

Skinner's tales are introduced into the text as a narrative that challenges the ethnocentrism of Christie's Scottish yarns and Morag's English history books. "Skinner's Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet" (161) and other stories indicate, we are asked to believe, the presence of an authentic Métis voice in the text. Yet, the distance from which Morag, as a White woman, is removed from the original "truth" about the Métis people, if such a truth is even locatable, is emphasized by Laurence's delineation of the permutations each story has undergone. Morag's access to the Rider Tonnerre of "Skinner's Tale of Lazarus' [sic] Tale of Rider Tonnerre" (159), for example, is filtered through three generations of a Métis history that has evolved in counterpoint to that of her own ancestors. The suggestion that these stories do not really belong to Morag is emphasized by her blundering attempts to incorporate them into her own storytelling, as in the faltering "Morag's Tale of Lazarus Tonnerre" (392-3) that she tries to tell to Pique.

That Morag can be only an observer of, rather than a participant in, Jules's experience of Métis-ness is made painfully apparent during the pivotal scene in which Jules demands that she tell him about her witnessing of the fire at the Tonnerre shack:

'It was the coldest part of the winter,' Morag says, and now her own voice sounds oddly cold and meticulous, as though the memory of that chill had numbed her. 'The air smelled of -- of burnt wood.

I remember thinking -- crazy -- but I thought Bôis-Brulés.'

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

.....

'By Jesus, I hate you,' he says in a low voice like distant thunder. 'I hate all of you. Every goddamn one.' (296-7)

Morag's cruel (albeit unintentionally so) misuse of the Métis nomenclature taught to her by Jules illustrates the damage that can be inflicted by an indiscriminate exploitation of words that one has not earned or been given the right to use. To Jules, Morag's role as a detached observer of this scenario of death, a position from which she presumes to aestheticize the pain of his people using *their* metaphors, is intolerable. The flashback is wrought with dramatic irony, for the temporal distance that separates Morag-as-writer from this scene has allowed her to realize, in retrospect, her blunder.

Scenes such as this one point to Laurence's intellectual comprehension of the problems attending a White writer's attempt to articulate the Native imagination. Despite the level of awareness she exhibits in her critique of Morag's misuse of the French language, though, she was seemingly *not* aware that her own use of French in the novel has ironic reverberations until Michel Fabre questioned her about the name "Piquette" in a 1981 interview:

*Fabre:* Do you know the meaning of *piquette* in French? Do you know it means *cheap wine* -- something like the 'red biddy' in your book?

Laurence: Absolutely not. This is funny. A coincidence. For me the connotation of Piquette was that of *pique*, of mischief, piquancy. But then this adds poignancy to the death of the Métis in the fire after drinking too much ... (Fabre 209)

This revelation illustrates how thoroughly Laurence is caught in the paradoxes that complicate White authors' attempts to present Native cultural voice in their writing. Laurence distorts the Métis vocabulary even as she attempts to give space, in her fiction, to addressing the historical suppression and bastardization of it by the colonizers.

In this same interview, Laurence describes how she and a Scots-Canadian friend wrote the Métis songs attributed to Jules and Pique in *The Diviners*. Again, Laurence seems unaware of the implications of what she has done:

I wrote the words to the ... songs and Ian Cameron composed the music. It's a real tune. When Ian sang the songs, the interesting thing is he did it almost in the persona of Skinner, with a kind of rock voice, you know. As a matter of fact McClelland & Stewart ... had records made for publicity purposes and so on. A young friend sings Pique's songs at the end and Ian sings the other three on the record. (qtd in Fabre 205)

In the process of creating the Tonnerre family "Album" (*Div* 479-90), every kind of appropriation described by LaRocque, Keeshig-Tobias, and Maracle has been committed. In writing the songs, Laurence and Cameron have invented a "voice" for Skinner that reflects their own perceptions about Métis culture. The songs have been commercially recorded, by White people pretending to be Métis, and marketed as "Métis" music in order to increase sales of Laurence's book, thereby increasing her own profits. One can scarcely imagine such

promotional consideration being given to the real Métis voice offered by Maria Campbell in *Halfbreed*, which McClelland & Stewart had published a year earlier, in 1973.

In the final analysis, then, it must be remembered that the Métis voices, stories, songs in *The Diviners* are Laurence's own inventions. The filtering of Jules's stories through the narrative voice of Morag as writer is symbolic of a larger pattern of White authorial borrowing in which Laurence herself is participating. Although she demonstrates genuine concern for Canadians' failure to listen to Native people or allow them to speak, she is caught in the paradoxical position of being unable to call attention to the Native voice without distorting or exploiting it in some way. By creating voices for the Métis, she implies (however unconsciously) that they are unable to speak for themselves, thereby subtly affirming their social powerlessness. In this way, her writing contributes to the perpetuation of "notions that portray Indians as having taken no direct control over ... their art, their thoughts, or their knowledge" (LaRocque xix).

This kind of disbelief in Native peoples' ability to manage their own destiny, literary or otherwise, continues to drive the colonization process, as Keeshig-Tobias has pointed out. Not only individuals such as Laurence, but institutions as well, have insisted upon speaking for and about Native people rather than conceding Natives' ability

or right to speak for themselves. Not least among these institutions is the feminist movement, which has consistently denied agency to Native women in Canada. Although wishing to appear concerned about the oppression of Native women, the White women's movement wants to interpret that oppression through its own theoretical perspectives. Incredibly, as Marlyn Kane writes,

We [Native women] have even, in some fora, because we have actually stated *our own* positions on *Indian Act* amendments, for instance, been publically confronted by mainstream women's organizations who do not share our views. This *has* happened despite the fact that these 'others' claimed to want to support us 'in the struggle.' (Kane and Maracle 14)

Kane's statement indicates a widespread tendency, among White feminists, to regard Native women as objects of investigation rather than as investigating subjects. This tendency has been reflected in the organization of feminist anthologies and conferences. Native women asked to contribute to feminist collectives have been pressured to offer viewpoints that emphasize their membership in a "marginalized" group, to say what White women expect and want to hear. As Maracle points out, Native women in Canada have been allowed to participate in Anglo-feminism on a token basis only: "White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people in general. We are there to 'teach,' to 'sensitize them,' or to serve them in some other way ... We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of 'their movement' -- the women's

movement" (Maracle, *IAW* 21).

Tokenism, as Spivak explains it, consists of "the putative center welcom[ing] selective inhabitants of the margin" into its midst (*IOW* 107). The center-margin split is, of course, an imaginary one, but it is cherished by White feminists because it affirms their own centrality. Spivak offers a woman of colour's perspective:

In a certain sense, I think there is nothing that is central. The centre is always constituted in terms of its own marginality. However ... in terms of the hegemonic historical narrative, certain peoples have always been asked to cathect the *margins* so others can be defined as central. Negotiating between these two structures, sometimes I have to see myself as the marginal in the eyes of others. (Spivak, *PCC* 40-1)

The degree to which Native peoples have been asked to *inhabit* the margins is symbolized in the geographical settings of *The Diviners* -- from Manawaka, where the Tonnerres live in road allowance shacks on the outskirts of town, to Toronto, where Morag meets Jules in the poverty-stricken fringes of the city, far from her posh downtown apartment. The Native perspective is offered by Maracle's protagonist Stacey, who feels as if she lives "at the edge of the world" (*RS* 13).

The concept of the center-margin split belongs to a series of textual metaphors for hegemony that recur in post-colonial theory, reinforcing the fundamental role played by written language in the colonization process. "On a simple level of cartography," Spivak tells us, the original White

settlers "inscribed what was presumed to be uninscribed" (PCC 1); they made their mark upon what they assumed to be a blank space on the map. As they encountered the Natives already inhabiting this space, they sought to disempower them through written laws -- a nasty trick to play on non-literate peoples, who were unequipped to comprehend the discursive systems through which their relationship to the colonizer was being defined. Today, White academics continue to view this relationship in textual terms; we like to say that we have "erased" Native people from the pages of history, or that we have relegated them to the "margins," the sidelines and corners, of our Texts.

Spivak warns that "The Text" is "not just books"; it is impossible, she asserts, to "get away from ... the *textuality of the socius*" (PCC 120, my emphasis). It is, however, both possible and desirable to subvert textual models for the social world, especially "the current notion of marginality, which implicitly valorizes the center" (PCC 156). Spivak suggests that women of colour should re-define the margin as a position of social power from which to launch critical arguments against the so-called center, thereby overstepping the invisible boundaries prescribed by the guardians of the center (PCC 157). Subverting the center on its own terms, for Native women in Canada, involves turning the written language (English) thrust upon their culture by the colonizer into a vehicle for Native



communication and anti-racist resistance.

That Native women have begun to challenge the White center of the women's movement on the level of language is reflected in the roles they have played at two important feminist symposiums in recent years: the "Women and Words / les femmes et les mots" conference (1983) and the "Telling It: Women and Language Across Culture" (1988) conference, which Maracle co-directed. Particularly in the latter case, the published transcripts (1990) reveal an acute sensitivity to the need for discussion panels to be built upon the agency of women belonging to traditionally marginalized groups. As the titles of the conferences suggest, the participants were concerned with how "words" and "language" could be used *by* them, rather than *against* them, to define their gender and cultural identities.

At the "Women and Words" conference, Beth Cuthand summarized the Native position in a simple statement: "I fully believe that we can use English words to Indian advantage and that as Indian writers it's our responsibility to do so" (qtd in Dybikowski et al. 54). LaRocque, too, has commented upon the "poetic justice" of such an appropriation of the English language:

Colonization works itself out in unpredictable ways. The fact is that English is the new Native language, literally and politically. English is the common language of Aboriginal peoples. It is English that is serving to de-colonize and to unite Aboriginal peoples. (LaRocque xxvi).

In just measure for the theft of Native voice by the colonizers, Native women writers are beginning to claim the English language and the far-reaching communicative possibilities of writing for their own projects of resistance and liberation.

Maracle's theoretical writing positions her as one of the most important contributors to this de-colonization process. As she states in *I Am Woman*, the intended audience of her work is specifically Native:

My voice is for those who need to hear some truth  
... It is inevitable, European, that you should  
find yourself reading my work. If you do not find  
yourself spoken to, it is not because I intend  
rudeness -- you just don't concern me now. (*IAW* 11)

The deliberate indifference to White interest or opinion suggested by this remark cannot but be disconcerting to the European reader -- especially the White feminist reader who has complacently assumed her sisterhood with the "Woman" of the book's title only to be politely, but firmly, dismissed from Maracle's text. In a statement that subverts the textual gesture of colonialism on its own terms, Maracle asserts that "The [coloured] women of the world are re-writing history with their bodies. White women of America are a *footnote* to it all. I am not in the habit of concerning myself with footnotes" (*IAW* 182, my emphasis). She thus dramatically reverses the margin-center dichotomy within feminism.

In her fictional work, as well, Maracle works

simultaneously within and against textual systems, creating narratives that both critique and resist the appropriation of Native voice. The issue of linguistic politics is dealt with thematically throughout *Ravensong*, with Maracle devoting special attention to "context" (and con-text) in her exploration of cultural interfaces. Through Stacey, Maracle demonstrates the necessity of understanding that a particular social context determines every individual's perspective; further, she suggests that it is very important for Native people, in their interactions with the White world, to remember and remain true to their Native context.

At the outset of the novel, Stacey believes that her contact with White society has removed her entirely from the context of her elders: "Stacey longed for the simplicity of Nora's [an elder's] life, but her context was too different. She knew she could never be satisfied with village life now" (RS 22). Raven (the trickster), however, mocks her for "behav[ing] as though she did not share the context of her clanswomen" (22). Throughout the novel, Raven guides Stacey to a realization that her Native context marks her as different, in important ways, from White peers such as Carol. Reflecting on her friendship with Carol, Stacey sees that "She had given very little; Carol had not offered much either. The difference was that Carol was operating within the context of herself and her culture. Stacey had been the false face" (92). Similarly, Stacey comes to see that her

Native context does not allow for a relationship with Steve; she says to him,

'No context, Steve. There is no context for you and I.'

'I have been talking to Ella,' he argued defensively.

'And you can do so for the rest of your days, but until you have experienced the horror of an epidemic, a fire, drought and the absolute threat these things pose to the whole village's survival -- and care about it, care desperately -- you will be without a relevant context.' (186)

Stacey's rejection of Steve's theoretical interest in her situation reveals the particular relevance of the term "context" to her Native viewpoint. In a very literal sense, Stacey tries to understand, and then to position herself against ("con"), the "text" of White domination. She seeks an explanation for the prejudicial attitudes of the school principal and the other White townspeople in the printed codes of their language, as she "read[s] the newspapers over and over again, trying to figure out just where the problem with these people lay" (69). Even after finding her way through the obstacle course of the White school system and being accepted to UBC, Stacey continues to struggle to decode the bureaucratic communication system surrounding her. Her eventual rejection of the abstract language employed by Steve and others to explain the dynamics of her own experience to her signifies a refusal to be defined by Europeans who have "no context for seeing her as she really [is]" (185).

Maracle herself, as author, works both within and

against White textual systems. Her explicit designation of *Ravensong* as "A Novel" highlights the irony inherent in her choice of a traditionally European genre from within which to disseminate criticism of European institutions. Further, the reference to "song" in the title points to the fusion of elements of Native orality with European form that the book represents. Whereas Laurence's experimentation with orality is self-consciously contrived, the "voice" of Native tradition finds its way easily into the rhythm and structure of Maracle's text. In the scene in which Stacey teaches Momma and Madeline to read, for instance, the English language is harnessed to Native story to create new avenues of communication: "She [Stacey] concocted a story about a family named Alphabet, gave them names and work to do. She even threw in trickster behaviour for those moments when none of the Alphabets would do the right work" (175). The result is that the women "could go everywhere all at once now; through books they could see the world and they felt the power of this kind of vision" (176).

The unique interplay of "Alphabet" and "story" enacted here, and Momma's inability to decipher the printed page until its dynamics are presented as story, brings to a focus the crucial differences between European and Native narrative structures, as outlined by Maracle in her preface to *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories* (1990). In the European story, she suggests, plot line, climax and

conclusion are "held together by a single metaphor" that is, almost without exception, drawn from a finite set of metaphorical material: "Had I continued school long enough and taken enough European creative writing courses I would know what all the metaphors are and would be able to match metaphor to subject" ("Preface" 11). By contrast, the metaphoric content of Native oratory is rich and mutable, dependent upon and responsive to the dynamics of a Native audience: "When our orators get up to speak, they move in metaphorical ways ... Each facial expression, change in tone of voice, cadence or diction has meaning for us ... The silent language of *physical metaphor* is a story in itself" (12-13, my emphasis).<sup>21</sup>

In writing, Maracle says, she has to "substitute physical description for physical metaphor" ("Preface" 13). This strategy is evident throughout *Ravensong*, particularly in scenes such as the one discussed in Chapter One, in which Rena's imitation of German Judy is described in meticulous detail (RS 113-14) to capture the humour and didactic message it is intended to convey. The literary metaphors that provide the fabric of a text such as *The Diviners* play a far less significant role in the formation of Maracle's novel. The need for the reader to interpret certain images -- such as Stacey's daily journey over the bridge from her village to the White town -- metaphorically is precluded by Maracle's own careful and explicit "unpacking" of their

meaning.

The other significant difference between European and Native story-telling, according to Maracle, is that Native stories "don't have orthodox 'conclusions'; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story -- not necessarily the lessons we wish them to draw, but all conclusions are considered valid" ("Preface" 11-12). A reasonable objection could be made, here, that modernist texts, or those frequently taught in conjunction with reader response theory, might constitute exceptions to the European rule. As Maracle insists in her interview with Daniel Richler, though, even these texts contain subtle directions to guide the reader toward a particular resolution; "the answer to the question posed [always] lies within the lines of the story" ("Preface" 12). It is difficult for the Western mind to conceive of a story that is at once didactic -- intending to teach -- and uninterested in guiding those who hear it toward interpretive consensus. Yet it is precisely the open-endedness of such a story/text that allows for the audience to "remain central to the working out of the drama of life presented. As listener/reader, you become the *trickster*, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose" ("Preface" 13).

The "trickster," who may appear in any of several familiar forms -- including that of the Raven, as is the

case in this novel -- is a central figure in traditional Native stories. The complex and often contradictory permutations of the trickster defy finite categorization, but Lenore Keeshig-Tobias offers the following information:

One of the most loved personalities in our traditional stories is half-hero, half-fool. Stories about this character are at once admonition, instruction and entertainment. Some storytellers say this character, this Trickster, disappeared with the arrival of the white man. We believe Trickster is here still, having assumed other names ... Glooscap, Nanabojoh, Nanabush, Weesakejak, Napi, Raven, Hare and Coyote are just a few names by which Trickster is recognized [in North America]. (Keeshig-Tobias, "Magic" 173)<sup>22</sup>

It is Raven who orchestrates the action of Maracle's novel, initiating the "catastrophe" of the flu epidemic to "finally wake the people up, drive them to white town to fix the mess over there" (RS 14). It is Raven who imparts visions of the destruction of the Native community to the silent Celia (Stacey's younger sister) and prompts Stacey to consider the role she must play in rebuilding that community (191).

Through Stacey, Raven seeks to bring about "transformation from the deep" (83) -- fundamental and "gut-wrenching" (14) change in the condition of Native people. In this capacity to *transform*, the trickster acts to "disrupt" the order of things in human society and "take ... the human spirit to a higher place, a second becoming, a new humanity" (Maracle, "Native Myths" 184). The tendency to disrupt, to upset and to challenge is associated with Raven.



by the characters in *Ravensong*, and is viewed positively; the indulgently uttered refrain "Too much Raven" (RS 179) echoes through the novel as a promise of continued resistance to assaults on the Native spirit, even in the face of great oppression and difficulty.

Maracle herself, by creating a con-text against European linguistic dominance, by enacting a counter-appropriative discourse that reclaims Native voice and illuminates the colonial traces in White writing such as Laurence's, plays the provocative trickster. She also invites the readers of her stories to *become* the trickster, whose role it is "to render the text comprehensible" (Allen, "Border Studies" 307). Paula Gunn Allen suggests that there can be no adequate interpretive access to Native literature except through the trickster figure; this is because the concept of the trickster is absolutely fundamental to the Native "frame of reference -- a frame that extends all the way into the depths of consciousness that marks a culture, differentiating it from another" ("Border Studies" 308).<sup>23</sup>

As White readers, we might wonder if Maracle's invitation to "become the trickster" is extended to us, too. Are we considered capable of emulating the trickster in her/his role as interpreter? The answer, I suspect, lies in Stacey's words: "not right now" (RS 194). In "Native Myths: Trickster Alive and Crowing," Maracle tells us, "Your perception of my Raven, even when approached honestly

by your own imagination, is still European" (185).<sup>24</sup> As long as White writers and academics continue to steal or, like Laurence, to invent Native voices, they participate in the White literary community's failure to recognize the value and meaning of Native texts. They risk, as Keeshig-Tobias implies, appearing to be more like the trickster's incarnation as a fool, who

attempts to re-create the actions, the magic of another. Motivated more by laziness and incompetence in providing for his own family and his great need to impress these same friends with his handling of their magic, Trickster fails. Not only are the friends not impressed, but the magic always backfires.  
(Keeshig-Tobias, "Magic" 176)

## Conclusion

At the end of *Ravensong*, Stacey goes across the river to the White town, to catch the bus that will take her to university in Vancouver. Her mother, carrying her daughter's suitcase, insists that she and Stacey "walk over the bridge together -- alone" (RS 194-5). Standing on the bridge with Momma, Stacey has a view of both her destination and the "home" she is leaving behind:

White town glared at them from beyond the bridge, sterile white homes with bright colourful trims, roofs all in full repair. Automobiles trundled apathetically along the road, music from one or two of them wafted out the windows and hung about the women reluctant to move on. Down the side of the road to town was a concrete sidewalk. It was the only road in town which boasted such a thing. Stacey had watched the men working in the hot sun building it. They were planning to build more of the miserably hard things. Soon there would be no earth under their feet in town.

The picture of white town stood incongruous with the village. Behind the women stood the homes of people so familiar to them that no questions about their lives were ever exchanged. Ahead lay a land of strangeness -- a crew of sharp-voiced people almost unintelligible to the people behind them. (196)

Although she is "reluctant to move on," Stacey crosses the bridge as she has so many times during the course of the novel, entering the concrete jungle on the other side with courage and determination. In answer to Raven's desire that she should attempt to understand her relationship to White

society, she leaves the "familiar" behind to try to find her way in the "land of strangeness" beyond her village. She seeks to comprehend the "almost unintelligible" discourse of White people, and to assert her own voice among them.

In a sense this moment, in which Stacey is poised on the border of the Indian village and the White world, encapsulates Maracle's authorial stance in *Ravensong*. As a Native writer composing a text in English, she is using the colonizers' language to rebel against their historical use of it to suppress and/or distort Native cultural voice. Maracle combines key elements of Native storytelling with the power of the printed word, which allows her to reach widespread and diverse Native audiences, in a narrative that challenges what she perceives as the "sharp-voiced" discourse of White people. In *Ravensong*, she speaks as a Native person, but she also -- by emphasizing the resilience and potential of Native people -- represents their interests in a more political sense. As for her presentation of White characters, she admits that they are "strange" and "unintelligible" creatures to her. She offers readers her perceptions of White people, but explicitly refrains from trying to portray the White imagination.

There is a bridge in *The Diviners*, too -- a "rickety" suspension bridge that "swings like a dangerous hammock" (*Div* 140) across the ravine that separates a teenaged Morag from Skinner Tonnerre. Morag contemplates

the bridge fearfully:

Who made it? How long ago? Ropes across the ravine, fraying ropes but still strong, and the pieces of split poplar to walk across, each joined to each by the old old ropes, and if you really *did* walk across, the bridge would sway and shake and maybe you would plunge down into the shallow water and the stones. Morag has never crossed this bridge. She wants to make herself do it. She could do it if she had to. She puts a hand on the poplar pole at the end of the bridge. She will definitely do it this time. If she can do this, she can do anything. A sign. An omen. She has to make it come true.

She puts one foot on the bridge. It lurches. She leaps back onto safe ground. (140)

Eventually, it is Skinner who walks across the bridge to Morag's side, becoming thereafter her lover and Native informant, allowing her a glimpse of the Métis way of life through his stories. Morag-as-character never really crosses this particular bridge; she is too afraid of taking the "plunge," of the possibility that she will make a fool of herself. She is too afraid of Skinner's laughter, and later, of Pique's hostility, to venture too far into Métis cultural territory.

Nevertheless, Morag-as-writer still attempts to articulate the Métis perspective, to imagine and put into words how Jules and Pique might look at the world. In this regard, she differs significantly from Maracle's Native protagonist, who views putting words into the mouths of her White acquaintances as a form of "arrogance" (RS 131). Laurence herself, though obviously concerned about the well-being of those on the other side of the social ravine

created by Canada's colonial legacy, violates Maracle's guidelines for other-representation by trying to construct a representative Métis viewpoint in *The Diviners*. The sense of social responsibility that motivates Laurence's creative exploration of the Métis experience is commendable; in attempting to illustrate the victimization of the Métis, however, she cannot avoid being perceived, at some level, as perpetuating the negative image of the powerless Native in a way that is unacceptable to Native critics such as Maracle. Furthermore, by presuming to speak on behalf of Native people in invented Native voices, she contributes to the deflection of attention away from real Native voices -- a phenomenon that Maracle and others regard as deeply harmful to Native people.

For White feminist literary critics, there are two key ways to unlearn "the effect that racism has had on ... [our] consciousness" (Maracle, *IAW* 181). The first is to follow Jeannette Armstrong's suggestion that we look closely at the writing of White authors, including our own, and confront the evidence of racism that we find there. I have attempted such a project in my evaluation of *The Diviners*, prompted by Lee Maracle's adverse response to that text. The second is simply to pay attention to the critical voices and fictional texts of Native women such as Maracle, to seek out Native women's definitions of their own experience rather than accepting the commentaries offered by

White authors. Maracle's *Ravensong* is just one of the increasing number of Native women's texts available to us: it is time for us to begin doing our "homework" (Spivak, "Questions" 63).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Lee Maracle, interview, *Imprint II* Program 23, by Daniel Richler, TV Ontario, Toronto, 18 March 1991.

<sup>2</sup>I would like to illustrate this point by quoting Irene Kelleher, a St:olo/Nooksack woman I recently had the pleasure of meeting. Many years ago, Irene happened to meet Emily Carr while visiting friends in Victoria, B.C. Recalling Carr, Irene told me that "She was a nice woman ... She used to run a boarding house in Victoria ... But I never could understand why she wanted to write those stories [*Klee Wyck*] about us [Indians] ... What could she say about us?" Irene is not really interested in reading White stories about Indians; instead, she told me, she is "waiting for more Native people to start writing about themselves." (Quoted with permission from Irene Kelleher)

<sup>3</sup>An expanded version of *Bobbi Lee* was reprinted in 1990 by Women's Press, Toronto.

<sup>4</sup>Spivak has been criticized for her potential inaccessibility, as she notes in "Post-structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value." Benita Parry has charged her, along with Abdul JanMohammed and Homi Bhabha, of "not being able to listen to the voice of the native" (224). Spivak's response is that "When Benita Parry takes us to task for not being able to listen to the natives, or to let the natives speak, she forgets that the three of us, post-colonials, are 'natives' too" (225, my emphasis).

<sup>5</sup>Though I am focusing on "Canadian" writers in this thesis, I recognize that such categories of nationality are often perceived by those being defined as "political labels that have come from foreign governments" (Kane and Maracle 8). Thus, I refer to Native American critics where their commentary seems relevant to the works I am discussing.

<sup>6</sup>Laurence's views on colonialism evolved, to a great degree, out of the years she spent living in Africa. The insights she gained from this experience are by no means irrelevant to critical writing about her "Canadian" novels. I am specifically concerned, though, with Laurence's perception of colonialism in the Canadian context. For a detailed discussion of Laurence's "African" writings, see Fiona Sparrow, *Into Africa With Margaret Laurence*.



<sup>7</sup>Maracle's arithmetic, which implies that Native people comprise ten percent of the Canadian census, may seem somewhat exaggerated. Using the example of B.C., Paul Tennant estimates that status and non-status Indians make up roughly two percent of the population (Tennant 4-5, 9). Considering the long silence from which Native writers are emerging, however, one tends to applaud Maracle's erring on the side of over-compensation; there is a lot of catching up to be done. To date, the only all-Native presses in Canada are Pemmican (Winnipeg), Fifth House (Saskatoon), Press Gang (Vancouver), and Theytus Books (Penticton); a lot of Native writing is self-published or printed locally on reserves. Thanks are due to the staff of Longhouse Books, Toronto, for confirming this publication information for me.

<sup>8</sup>For a detailed study of Laurence's re-writing of *The Tempest* in *The Diviners*, see Barbara Godard, "Caliban's Revolt: The Discourse of the (M)Other."

<sup>9</sup>The White male fantasy of the rape-able Native woman is unflinchingly articulated, from the perspective of a Métis woman who has been the victim of a brutal gang rape, by Beatrice Culleton in *In Search of April Raintree*. Maracle also comments extensively on the violent misconceptions about Native women's sexuality in *I Am Woman*, stating that Native women "have been the object of the kind of sexual release of white males whose appetites are too gross for their own delicate women" (IAW 18).

<sup>10</sup>Anna Lee Walters also criticizes a White woman's "perfect guise of maternal love" (115) for a Native friend in her story "The Web" (in *Talking Indian*, 107-118). The story is a brilliant allegory of the barriers to friendship between White and Native women in a racist society.

<sup>11</sup>The strength of this commendation is highlighted by the criticism applied to the work of other White authors, notably W.P. Kinsella. About Kinsella's Indian stories, the authors note damningly, "Written by a non-Native who is not involved with Native people in their issues and their traditions. He tends to present surface stereotypes, with demeaning humour. The danger is that these stories are so cleverly written, they can convince even Native people that this is how they are. Kinsella's books are a hit with high school students, and must be balanced with a broader, more real view of Native people, particularly in books written by Native authors" (Verrall 58).

<sup>12</sup>Kent Gooderham (ed.), *I Am an Indian* (Toronto: Dent, 1969).

<sup>13</sup>See Allen's *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Tradition*.

<sup>14</sup>This is true of fictional texts, such as Armstrong's *Slash* and Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, as well as non-fiction documents (Campbell's *Halfbreed*, for example). In Culleton's novel, the process of self-acceptance is played out through the relationship of two Métis sisters, one of whom is dark-skinned and proud of her Native heritage (Cheryl); the other (April) is light-skinned enough to avoid identification as a Native person, and divorces herself from the problems of down-and-out Indians. Increasingly, Cheryl comes to emblemize the pain and unhappiness in the Native community, as well as the pride and hope that can save it. April is forced to incorporate both of these aspects of "Indian-ness" into her own sense of identity when Cheryl commits suicide.

<sup>15</sup>See Derrida's "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," especially p. 175.

<sup>16</sup>Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop stealing native stories," *The Globe and Mail* 26 January 1990: A7.

<sup>17</sup>The "appropriation controversy" (LaRocque xxiv) surrounding this particular anthology was a heated one, even causing some Native women writers to refuse to be involved with the project. LaRocque, however, gives credit to the editors, saying that they "have not appropriated this literature; instead, they have facilitated its possibilities and transmission" (xxiv). To contrast this opinion with Julia Emberley's criticism of Vance and Perrault -- she argues that "the 'hands off' approach they take does not solve the contradictions of their positions *vis-a-vis* the material they include" (Emberley 177) -- is to recognize the paradoxical position in which White women involved in the promotion of Native writing frequently find themselves.

<sup>18</sup>Cameron answers Native complaints about White appropriation of voice in a letter to the editor in the Summer 1987 edition of *Moccasin Line*, in which she agrees that "Perhaps the best way to counter the lies and the inaccurate appropriation and selling of the stories is to begin to actively publish and distribute the authentic" (11). She maintains, however, that *Daughters of Copper Woman* does not constitute appropriation of voice.

<sup>19</sup>Marlyn Kane has expressed a Native viewpoint on the subject of universal sisterhood:

We are expected to believe that because we are women, we can automatically share in the sisterhood with other women, regardless of the fact that we may have almost nothing else in common ... we encounter problems and obstacles that oftentimes go far beyond those that are referred to as 'women's issues' ... We have found ourselves considered difficult because ... we just could not believe in and uphold the slogan that 'Sisterhood is Global.' (Kane and Maracle 14)

<sup>20</sup>Laurence's reversal of the colonizers' distrust of the spoken word has a parallel in Native audiences' distrust of the printed word. Walters offers an anecdote in *Talking Indian*. Describing her transcription of an oral tale in her story "The Resurrection of John Stink," she writes: "I thought of my tale as simply another in the tradition of storytellers -- except that mine was *written* as fiction. In other words, I made most of it up!" (22)

<sup>21</sup>The inaccessibility of such physically expressed metaphor to non-Natives is illustrated by a comment made by Hartmut Lutz, in an interview with Ruby Slipperjack:

Things like that can be very puzzling for an outsider. Sometimes, if you are a non-Native person in a group of Native people, all of a sudden, they get up and go some place. Because they have communicated, and since it was non-verbal, or you are so out of it culturally, you are the stupid one sitting there. And you are the only one who doesn't know what is going on. It's happened to me!  
(Lutz 212)

<sup>22</sup>Keeshig-Tobias co-founded the Committee to Re-establish the Trickster, a Native writers' support group, to revive the spirit of these mythological figures.

<sup>23</sup>Allen observes that the role of interpreter is also given to trickster figures in other non-Western cultures. She quotes Henry Louis Gates, Jr., author of *The Signifying Monkey*, who notes that the African trickster Esu "rules understanding of truth ... Esu is the process of interpretation" (qtd in Allen, 307).

<sup>24</sup>The concept of the trickster is an extremely difficult one for non-Natives to grasp, and it is probably true that our best attempts to explain this figure deliver only approximations of an essence that seems to operate at a level beyond verbal language. In *Wisdom of the Elders*, David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson offer one such

approximation, which may be helpful for the reader who possesses a European imagination:

Raven acts as a principal creative force and culture-bringer ... and in some sense seems to be the living embodiment of *all* human human qualities, from wisdom and ingenuity to gluttony and wanton sexual desire. Like Coyote, the Great Hare, and other paleolithic trickster figures across North America, Raven is paradox incarnate, often ingeniously so. He is wise and foolish, compassionate and cruel, chaste and lecherous, potent and petty. (Knudtson and Suzuki 29)

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