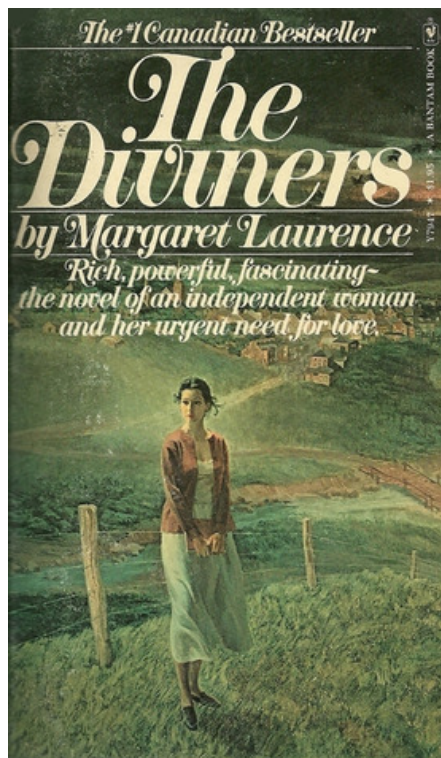




The Diviners

Margaret Laurence

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The culmination and completion of Margaret Laurence's celebrated Manawaka cycle, *The Diviners* is an epic novel.

This is the powerful story of an independent woman who refuses to abandon her search for love. For Morag Gunn, growing up in a small Canadian prairie town is a toughening process – putting distance between herself and a world that wanted no part of her. But in time, the aloneness that had once been forced upon her becomes a precious right – relinquished only in her overwhelming need for love. Again and again, Morag is forced to test her strength against the world – and finally achieves the life she had determined would be hers.

The Diviners has been acclaimed by many critics as the outstanding achievement of Margaret Laurence's writing career. In Morag Gunn, Laurence has created a figure whose experience emerges as that of all dispossessed people in search of their birthright, and one who survives as an inspirational symbol of courage and endurance.

The Diviners received the Governor General's Award for Fiction for 1974.

The Diviners Details

Date : Published 1978 by Bantam Books (first published 1974)

ISBN :

Author : Margaret Laurence

Format : Mass Market Paperback 453 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Classics

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From Reader Review The Diviners for online ebook

Laura Frey (Reading in Bed) says

As good as or better than The Stone Angel which is one of my favourite books of all time. Well now this is too.

kingshearte says

"The culmination and completion of Margaret Laurence's celebrated Manawaka cycle, The Diviners is an epic novel. This is a powerful story of an independent woman who refuses to abandon her search for love. For Morag Gunn, growing up in a small Canadian prairie town is a toughening process - putting distance between herself and a world that wanted no part of her. But in time, the aloneness that had once been forced upon her becomes a precious right - relinquished only in her overwhelming need for love. Again and again, Morag is forced to test her strength against the world - and finally achieves the life she had determined would be hers."

This book took me a LONG time to get into at all. I considered many times putting it aside because the first part of it was so unbelievably boring. I decided to tough it out though, and eventually, it did start to hold at least some of my interest. I still didn't much care for the writing style, with the bouncing between present and flashbacks, but it was OK, I suppose. I don't really have much else to say about it, though. I read it, but it didn't enthrall me. Time to move on.

OK, I lied. I do have one other thing to say about this book. While the fact remains that I wasn't overly enamored with the way it was written, I can appreciate why it was considered such an important book when it was written. Morag is a woman who decides to have a baby, and decides to have it alone. She's just left her husband, and has no intention of either staying with the father she chooses for the baby or finding some other understanding man who will be a father to her child. She deliberately makes herself a single mother. Nowadays, there's nothing really shocking, or even particularly interesting, about that, but when it was written? Pretty much the only reason to be a single mother would be if your husband had died. And if you got pregnant out of wedlock, you certainly didn't keep the baby. Either you aborted in a dark corner with a coat hanger, or you went away somewhere, had the baby, and had it adopted. The idea of keeping it, raising it yourself, and making no apologies for the fact that its father has little or no place in your life? Unheard of. Unheard of to the point where Margaret Laurence apparently got death threats after publishing this book. People were so appalled by her wanton disregard for the family and all that, and it was just generally a big deal.

Plus, let's not forget that in addition to deliberately becoming a single mother, the father she chose for her child was a Métis - a halfbreed, to many of the people then. So really, the whole damn thing was just a giant scandal. So for that reason, I can see why it was important. Although I think we've moved past the *intense* taboos surrounding this stuff, so I'm not sure I would really still consider it all that important. Anyway.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

I just finished this 1/2 hour ago with tears streaming. I have only a fragment of an idea of what I think, nor if

5 stars is right. I read her *The Stone Angel* at least 40 years ago before I moved here, and was very disappointed not to find her shelved in my library. When I picked this up at the library book sale (I think it was), I felt as if it must be a treasure.

This is told in such an interesting manner. Each chapter starts in the present, then Laurence takes the reader back in time - memorybank movies, she calls them. While Morag looks at some photographs, the reader is taken first to her birth, then her very young childhood. These first are "invented" memories, but eventually are the memories of Morag Dunn. We know only what Morag sees and thinks, what the other characters tell her - third person limited.

Morag is also told stories. This is the last of the group of Laurence's novels of Manawaka, and the stories are of the settlement, both of her ancestors and those of the Metis.

Morag, who is a successful writer in the parts told in the present, was raised in working-class poverty.

But if you work, really really work, and get educated, something will come of it, maybe. Like being able to get out of Manawaka and never come back. Morag listens at night to the long wailing of the trains crossing the prairies, their voices like the spooky voices of giant owls. She always feels warm and good at the sound, because she knows something which nobody else in this world knows. Which is, one day she will be on one of those trains, going to the city and maybe even further than the city. Going to the whole world.

Miriam says

I read this when I was about 16, and Christy's "by their garbage shall ye know them" speech was life changing. Love this book. I've read it multiple times, but haven't re-read it in about 15 years. I should again.

Thom says

Felt more like a feminist book rather than a postcolonial one (currently studying it for a postcolonial unit at university). Still, enjoyed it, little bit of a teary moment towards the end that I wasn't expecting and was a mixed emotion of joy/sadness. Certainly made me think about ancestry/heritage and how we don't tend to know where we actually come from unless we hunt for it, like Pique wishes to do. Is identity something borne from a past we know little of? Is our ancestors' past prior to our existence even relevant in shaping who we are today? - questions I don't generally think about..

Given how diverse family relationships have become since the time this was written, it's nice to know this novel exists to chronicle how split families may have been back then in the 70s. I'd also like to think men have come a long way since then too, the book's men include one that has affairs, one that has little contact with his own daughter and one that is extremely patronising and controlling - hardly shining examples!

K.D. Absolutely says

Feminist. Very strong female character in the person of **Morag Gunn**. Orphan at the age of four, she was taken into custody by the couple **Christie** and **Prin Logan**. Christie is the town's scavenger (garbage collector) and *divining* is scavenging. But don't get the notion that the female characters here are scavengers or loser. Morag rose from that sorry early years and made own life-altering decisions in her life so strong that she seems to have the biggest ball among the characters including her good-for-nothing professor-husband and even her subsequent lovers.

The most interesting part of this book for me is the first 50 pages. In the opening scene, Morag finds a note from her 18-y/o daughter **Pique** who has just left home to join her boyfriend and go to Morag's childhood town of Manakawa (a town in Canada. You see, Margaret Laurence was a Canadian). That note, plus the photographs that Morag keeps in the house trigger the memories of her past. This was followed later by a series of memory banks in her mind. For me, the use of those tools was so effective in telling Morag's back stories: short and succinct. Like patches or glimpses of the whole thing but enough for the reader to get the idea of who was the 47-y/o present-day Morag when she was young.

The reading is easy. The prose is engaging. The plot has enough interesting twists to keep you going. Laurence is also very effective in showing rather than telling. I have not been to Canada and my sister lives in Winnipeg for two decades now. So, while reading I was imagining the surroundings although I know that this was written in the 70's and things should have surely changed. Oh I just miss my sister and should visit her someday probably when I finally retire from my corporate job.

But if you decide to read this book, it is because you like strong female characters. For me this brought back for me the strong fictional characters of Jane Eyre, Helen Graham and Janie Crawford. Strong female creations of strong female authors.

The novel is old but its theme (feminist) and message (pro-choice: women have the right to decide what to do with their lives) still very much ring true today.

Jeanette says

"The Diviners" deserves to be a Canadian Classic. I first read this book in the 1970's and just finished re-reading it for book club. The strong female characters of Morag and Pique are believable and memorable as they each face the various challenges in their life. Margaret Laurence's women characters are strong and make a statement about the role of women in society and the strength women need to break through the barriers that society has set for women. Jules, Christie and Royland are the important male characters in this novel and each in their own way refuse the role society tries to give them.

The theme of prejudice is an important one throughout the novel as well as the themes of love and belonging. Another theme is choices a person makes in life.

The Diviner's is an interesting choice of title for the novel when only Royland is a diviner in the sense of locating water for well. However, Morag, Pique and Jules all seem to be searching for their place in the world and which may be another type of divining.

Allison says

An intelligent, slow read for me. I loved it. I don't really know why, except maybe that I appreciated its

honesty, and I think this level of honesty is rare. I imagine that Laurence was a rational, two-feet-on-the-ground type of person, and I wish I could have known her. I have people like this in my life, and I find them refreshing and easy.

My version of this book has a fantastic Afterword by Timothy Findley. At only three or four pages long, it does a much better job than me -- obviously -- at articulating this REALNESS of The Diviners. Regarding its history as a banned book, he says "it has been plagued by the dread fear of honesty." I couldn't agree more.

Carolina says

I haven't been much of a fan of Margaret Laurence's work in the past, mainly because I found many of her characters a little on the whiny side. And if there's one thing I refuse to do is spend substantial amounts of time with a whiner. But the fact is, Morag Gunn, heroine of The Diviners, grabbed me. Barring the brief period she spent spineless and married to the good professor, Morag's got balls. A lot of self-doubt inner-talk (who doesn't?) and balls. And, importantly, in a way that doesn't deprive any of her male counterparts of theirs. A number of big issues are tackled in this book but tackled gracefully, in the context of story and not for mere didactic purposes, and in a way that leaves you with more questions than before and grateful for it. Laurence is clearly a prose master and if she were alive today, I'd send her a strongly-worded letter saying so (leaving out the bits about me thinking Rachel Cameron and Stacy MacAindra were whiners). I laughed (out loud), I cried (out loud), I paused to stare into the middle distance while savouring a particularly astute observation or turn of phrase, I stayed up until 3:30 am to finish. A good thing to experience, this. A human thing.

Diane says

Margaret Laurence is one of Canada's most esteemed writers. The Diviners is one of 5 books that are about strong women living in or from small town Manitoba. Morag Gunn is the central figure in this book, an orphan that was brought up on the wrong side of the tracks in Manawaka by Prin and Christie who is the town scavenger. She always felt out of place and awkward, didn't fit in and now, a successful writer in middle age, she is reflecting back on her life as she waits for and worries about her teenage daughter Pique who has taken off and gone to the west coast.

Snippets of Morag's life are told as if watching a home movie or reading an excerpt from a journal and include Christie's tall stories, her love affairs, her marriage and other episodes from her life as she matches snapshots to those memories. I think it's about finding your place in life, both in middle age and when you're young. Experiences that shape you and show you what you want and don't want. Morag has to let Pique find out her own way, too, just as she had to.

The book is filled with colourful characters and Laurence's dialogue and descriptions are a joy to read.

Heather(Gibby) says

I am giving this book a rare 5 star review, partially because I had not expected to like it, and I loved it. If I was a writer, I think my style would be very similar to the writing in this book. I loved the "Memory Bank Movie" passages. It reminded me so much of several significant events in my own life, and I can vividly

remember them. I think the characters in the book were depicted very realistically and believable, flaws and all. The book was written in the 1970's and I hope our society has evolved somewhat beyond the cruel and thoughtless way humans can treat each other, but in many ways the challenges and prejudices depicted in the book are still going on today. As I have lived in Manitoba all my life, it was also a hoot to have all the familiar geography of my home province referred to. The book was not preachy at all, but showed some of the very complicated layers of human relationships in a very compassionate way.

Faye says

I did not enjoy this book. As a rule, I'm generally not a fan of books that focus on the more cynical, crustier side of life, but quite often I can stomach them if they have redeeming qualities such as enjoyable/relatable characters, beauty in the writing, clever dialogue, etc. This book had none of those things, in my opinion. I didn't care about the main character at all, and certainly didn't care about her sex life or her road to becoming an author that I would never read or the many and varied ways in which she screwed up her child or the wonderful stories and songs about things that her ancestors may or may not have done... which was basically all we were given. The author's style got on my nerves, too. Just didn't like it at all.

Krista says

This is really more like 3.5 stars for me, but I suppose it does belong a notch above my other 3 star ratings, so it will have to be a 4. After reading and loving *The Stone Angel*, I decided to try and read all of the Manawaka series of books and, although *The Diviners* is the last in the series, it was the next I was able to get, so it was the next I read. I think that it is mainly in comparison to *The Stone Angel* that this book left me a little cold.

I've been trying to figure out why I wasn't as impressed by this book, especially since it has a feeling of the epic, of a long and complicated journey, and I think in the end my complaint is that I didn't connect to the narrative on a personal or deeper level. This is especially odd since the character of Morag Gunn is a novelist and spends time explaining the complicated craft of writing literature, of trying to write a story on more than one level, so there must be something here I'm just not getting, because I'm certain the author took pains to put it in. I don't know much of Margaret Laurence's personal history, but even the author blurb shows that she has inserted much of her personal history into the character of Morag: born in a prairie town; orphaned young; wrote for the local newspaper; escaped to the University of Winnipeg; got married; moved away (Morag to Toronto, Laurence to Africa); got divorced; moved to the west coast; finally settled on a small farm in rural Ontario; enjoying success as an author along the way. Every time Morag mirrored what I knew about Margaret Laurence's history, I felt a bit taken out of the story, as though I had seen a little flag that said: these parts are true.

As writing a novel is a bit of alchemy I don't really understand, I liked these self-reflective bits on the process:

I used to think that words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally.

And:

Probably no one could catch the river's colour, even with paints, much less words. A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications. Yet, with typical ambiguity, convinced that fiction was truer than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction.

I also liked the introspective bits about who we are and what little we show of our true selves. It's true that we can no more imagine, or really want to know, the inner-workings of anyone else's mind, any more than we can help being shocked by seeing a teacher at the grocery store when we're little kids:

Whatever is happening to Pique is not what I think is happening, whatever that may be. What happened to me wasn't what anyone else thought was happening, and maybe not even what I thought was happening at the time. A popular misconception is that we can't change the past - everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer.

And:

The hurts unwittingly inflicted upon Pique by her mother, by circumstances - Morag had agonised over these often enough, almost as though, if she imagined them sufficiently, they would prove to have been unreal after all. But they were not unreal. Yet Pique was not assigning any blame - that was not what it was all about. And Pique's journey, although at this point it may feel to her unique, was not unique. Morag reached out and took Pique's hand, holding it lightly.

And I like this bit because not only did I also for some reason switch from calling my mother "Mum" to "Ma" when I was teen, but so has one of my own girls. Like my own Ma, I find it more amusing than distancing:

This Ma bit is new. It is as though Pique, at fifteen, has now decided that Mum sounds too childish and Mother possibly, too formal. The word in some way is a proclamation of independence, a statement of the fact that the distance between them, in terms of equality, is diminishing, and the relationship must soon become that of two adults. On balance, Morag is glad. But it will take some inner adjustment.

I liked the bits where Margaret Laurence references Susannah Moodie and *Roughing It In The Bush* because it's good to get the references. I still don't know if it makes me want to read the books of Moodie's sister, Catherine Parr Traill, though.

I appreciated how *The Diviners* took ideas from *The Stone Angel* full circle-- especially how it was discovered that the plaid pin from John Shipley was traded to Lazarus Tonnerre for a knife, then traded to Christie Logan for a pack of cigarettes, the knife given to Morag. Knowing that Pique would eventually be in possession of both the pin and the knife closes the circle on all of the families, uniting the Scots with the Métis and mocking the last of the small town's prejudices. I can also imagine how brave it was for Laurence to write about a strong woman who decided to have a baby without a husband, at a time when even the maternity nurses in the hospital told her she was lucky to be allowed to have her baby there. I understand Margaret Laurence received death threats over this fact and I salute her grit and honesty for writing it. Perhaps it was the experience of watching someone fighting a battle long won that prevented me from becoming fully invested. Perhaps, like old Royland, I had simply lost the powers to divine on this one.

PhebeAnn Wolframe-Smith says

A wonderful book with characters so richly rendered I easily became invested in them, and could readily identify with many of their doubts, wishes and fears. I loved in particular Christie Logan and his wisdom, which Morag appreciates too late (I, too, have had this heartbreaking experience of too late). I also appreciated the complexity of Morag's thoughts, feelings, and decision making, and the unique device of the "movie" memories, which really is how memories function (in my experience). It helped the story to unfold in a more gripping way than it would had it been structured in the linear fashion of most bildungsroman. For its time, too (and sadly, maybe still today), I can see how it would have been quite radical in terms of its depictions of sex, women's sexual pleasure, masturbation, abortion, birth control, sex work, homosexuality, and (especially given the author is white) the complexities of Métis identity. A beautiful book that I would read again.

Deodand says

Why do schools assign this book to teens? Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that it was assigned to my teenage self by 30- and 40-something women. If you've read the novel you'll know what I mean.

I had to explore this novel in extreme depth, I mean poring over every word of it for months. I wound up disliking it because the characters didn't really speak to me at that time. When a novel doesn't come alive for me, it's a real chore to listen to lectures about it day after day. I should start a shelf called "Spoiled by English Teachers".

Erin says

There are some things that enrich my life beyond all expectation or proportion: baths, bike rides, sex, and let me say it now: Margaret Laurence. I've long suspected she might be my favourite author (despite my discomfort with *A Jest of God*, I loved the book; *The Stone Angel* is near perfect in its characterization of Hagar), but on (re)reading *The Diviners* I'm ready to settle the matter: Margaret Laurence is my favourite.

I don't mean to suggest she's the best author out there (let's leave conversations of 'best' to another day), but when reading her books I feel uncanny feelings. I feel like maybe my fears and hopes and expectations for life have been somehow borrowed from a Laurence novel; put another way, I wonder whether Laurence doesn't anticipate and - perfectly - describe my feelings through her beautiful and flawed protagonists.

You're thinking, yes, but in *A Jest of God*, Rachel is nothing but a simpering pathetic woman who longs for sexual realization, freedom and above all the "strength of conviction," and in *The Diviners* Morag seems to embody this very strength (often describing her own strength, vivid in her eyes, and making difficult decisions that no doubt call upon this certain kind of strength). I do wonder though whether Morag's strength isn't a kind of yearning too, a recognition of "what means 'strength of conviction'" and a realization that she doesn't quite have it (though Christie does, and Jules, too). Maybe I most identify with and admire this yearning, and this imitable belief that you might - but haven't yet - take what you believe you deserve, or brave enough to be the person you believe yourself to be. Admire yes, but find heart-breaking, too. The recognition that sometimes/often women do not find the strength of their conviction, do not find their

strength at all. So when I find myself crying (sobbing) at the end of another Laurence novel, I say thanks to Laurence: thanks for recognizing in me (and presumably in countless others) the yearning and the nascent strength and for giving us characters who both do and do not meet their own expectations.

(If you haven't yet read anything by Laurence I demand that you go out and do so now. Even if you are not a young woman. Or an artist. Or a mother or father. Or a... She'll still shine a light into your soul, heart, mind , a light into you. Read. Oh, read.)

Mookie says

I found this book in the back of a Salvation Army and flipped through it. I bought it entirely because I was interested in the sheet music at the back, and I had no intention of actually reading the book. But after reading the lyrics of the songs, I wanted to know who was Lazarus, King of Nothing? Who was Piquette? This book is raw. The characters are flawed. You can't help but absolutely inhale this story as you follow Morag's harsh and bitter and somehow innocent life. The themes and hidden meanings are richly arranged, Bois Brulees, for example, after the burning of Piquette.

It's as if you know the characters, and love them, no matter how flawed they're portrayed. The romantic interest for example, is portrayed with a pot-belly and a sailor's mouth. But you couldn't help fall in love with him alongside Morag. You essentially become the main character, you love her daughter and you want to slap her senseless at the same time.

Bob says

This book captures the voices of its characters (and their change through time) better than almost anything I've ever read, and what makes this even more remarkable is that they are ordinary people, artistic but not particularly eloquent, marginalized by the rest of Canadian society, and living in a sort of rural Bohemia. It was written in the 1970's and focuses on the obstacles a woman (or really any independent spirit) faces in achieving their goals. The theme is set against fine natural description of the harsh prairie environment. "...the first of the swallow children had taken off and was now perched or rather huddled in feather-ruffled and uncertain fashion on a low branch of the elm. She kept on looking. Innumerable swallows (parents, aunts and uncles, cousins) veered in towards the nest and veered off again, squeeping in high-pitched voices, obviously saying *This is how you fly, kids! It's easy! Try it -- you'll never be immobile again!* The other four, one by one were lured out, finally, shakily, and landed beside their courageous sibling on the elm bough. All five sat there, looking dejected. *Hey, Mabel, what happens now?* Tomorrow they would all be flitting back and forth across the river, skilled already." (p. 242)

Lauren says

I was sucked into this book more than I expected to be. I was incredibly fond of Morag, the main character, who I found to be very three dimensional. I laugh now, but I was infuriated when she got married to a guy that I absolutely couldn't stand. (She seems to attract this sort of man.) The book was written a while ago, in the 70s, and its depiction of racism and sexism almost seemed too much at times. But I have a sinking

feeling that it wasn't as exaggerated as I was hoping it was,

My one complaint about the book has to do with its structure. In the main narrative, the main character is in her mid-40s, an accomplished writer with a grown daughter who lives in a log cabin in the wilderness. Her backstory is told as a series of "snapshots" from her past, which seems a bit sloppy. We know lots about Morag, because the story is told from her point of view. We learn about the other people in her life from their "I am just walking in the front door to say hi to you and to bare my soul to you" dialogs with Morag. I don't know, perhaps I need to open up more to the people around me, but some of the conversations between Morag and her neighbors, and her daughter seemed unrealistic, but necessary to tell the story. This grated on me a bit.

Anyway, highly recommended. This is my first book by Margaret Laurence and I look forward to reading more of her work.

Monika Havlasová says

Tohle není knížka, kterou p?etete na jeden zátah. Je pomalejší, ale o to intenzivnější. Dlouho jsem se te? nemohla do ni?eho za?íst, až jsem sáhla po téhle odepsané knížce z knihovny, na kterou jsem náhodou p?i výprodeji za 5 Kč narazila. Stylov? i obsahov? rozhodn? zajímavá.
