

# A Study of *The Loons* from the Perspective of Post-colonialism

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**Abstract:** *Post-colonial theory is a multicultural theory that focuses on the "after" of the colonial period, the relationship of cultural discourse and power between the sovereign and the colonized, as well as new issues related to racism, cultural imperialism, national cultures, and cultural power identities. The short story *The Loons* written by the famous Canadian female writer Margaret Laurence contains the post-colonialism ideas. The work reveals the racial and gender discrimination that exists in Canadian mainstream society under the colonial influence through the writing of the survival predicament of an ethnic minority girl named Piquette. The reasons behind the survival dilemma of the protagonist, Piquette, as well as the embodiment of post-colonialism in it are worth exploring.*

**Keywords:** *Margaret Laurence; *The Loons*; post-colonialism*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction to Margaret Laurence and Her Achievements

Canadian contemporary female writer Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) is one of these writers. With her rich experience, broad perspective, and sharp and profound observation of things, she expressed a series of grand themes in her works, such as opposing war, racial and gender discrimination, safeguarding women's rights, advocating environmental protection, etc. She won Governor General's Literary Awards twice and became a famous contemporary Canadian female writer. She was one of the pivotal writers of the renaissance of Canadian literary in the 1960s and 1970s, with a wealth of works throughout her life, including novels, essays, and children's stories. Margaret Laurence uses a unique female writing style in the Manawaka series novels to depict a group of female characters who are persistent in exploring the meaning of existence and self-worth. In 2018, she was recognized by the Canadian government as a significant figure marked on the history. The ten years of living in the UK were the peak of Laurence's creative career, and her representative works such as *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), and *The Diviners* (1974) were almost all completed during this period. Her novels almost all take place in the town of Manawaka, a fictional town based on the hometown of female writer Neepawa. In addition, how to eliminate social inequality, cultural barriers, and racial problems in a country deeply influenced by colonialism is also a topic she often ponders in her writing.

### 1.2 The Background Information of *The Loons*

Margaret Laurence's famous short story *The Loons* portrays the tragic fate of Piquette, a Metis girl from an Indian tribe, under the dual oppression and discrimination of race and gender. It exposes the oppression and discrimination of white mainstream society against minority groups and men against women within minority groups under the influence of colonial psychology. The Tonnerre family in this tribe fled to the Wachakova Valley in this context and struggled to survive there. Until the 1930s, although Canada had become an equal Commonwealth country with Britain, the survival situation of the Tonnerre family remained unchanged and they still struggled to survive in a marginalized situation.

Founded in 1867, Canada is a young country with less than 200 years of history. Canada is the continuation of the French and British colonies, and therefore has long pursued a policy of immigration, which is destined to inevitably be a multi-ethnic country. In fact, however, Canada pursued a traditional colonial suzerainty-type monolithic policy for quite some time, and it was not until the mid-twentieth century, when the issue of Quebec's independence was in the air, that Canada's ethnic policy began to transform. Canada's ethnic policy has gone through an evolutionary process, from Monoculturalism in

the colonial period, to Biculturalism in 1969, to Multiculturalism in 1971, which has gone through many ups and downs. The enactment of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1988 has effectively protected the status of multiculturalism as the dominant ideology in Canadian ethnic relations. However, looking at the formation of the multiculturalism policy and the resulting ethnic problems in Canada, the Canadian "Cultural Mosaic" is not a panacea for ethnic problems, and there are still some negative problems that need to be solved in the multi-ethnic immigrant society of Canada.

There is nothing wrong with the fact that each ethnic group has its own unique culture and traditions, which characterize and reflect its ideology and way of life and are the source of its cohesion. However, the question of how to respect the unique culture and traditions of each ethnic group while at the same time maintaining their strong centripetal force towards the country is a fundamental issue of governance that must be taken seriously by politicians in every country, and also by politicians in Canada. Secondly, the Quebec issue is a shadow that has never been erased. Since the founding of the country, the French community has occupied a special place in the mainstream of white Canadian society. For a long time, they have been pursuing the preservation of their own ethnic traditions and identity rather than integration, and there is a deep contradiction between them and the Anglo-Canadians. Thirdly, the policy of multiculturalism cannot eliminate all the subjective and objective conditions that cause ethnic differences. Despite the many measures taken by the government of Canada with a view to guaranteeing fairness and reducing discrimination, members of ethnic minorities are still subject to greater discrimination in such areas as employment and housing.

## **2. The Post-colonial Theory and the Post-colonial Feminist Criticism**

Post-colonial theory is a theory that questions the rationality of Western economy, politics, morality, and reflects on the subjectivity root of the Western knowledge system after the end of the historical stage of colonial rule.

### **2.1 The Post-colonial Theory**

In the 1980s, post-colonial theory, which focuses on identity, criticizes cultural hegemony and racial supremacy, took the stage of history, and the main representatives of post-colonial theory are Edward Said, Spivak, and Homi. Bhabha, who are known as the "Holy Trinity", and whose theories constitute the main line of post-colonial theory. Homi. Bhabha is different from the first two. Unlike the previous two, Homi. Bhabha is no longer obsessed with narrating the colonizer and the colonized as being in total opposition to each other; instead, he understands the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized "in terms of a correlation and an interaction", and believes that the two cannot be completely separated, but on the contrary, they should be closely linked, and that the collision of cultures offers the possibility of subverting the colonial discourse, and that this collision of culture can be achieved through "mimicry""hybridity", and the construction of a "third space". This cultural collision can be realized through "mimicry" "hybridity" and the construction of a "third space", which are the three main concepts of Homi. Bhabha's post-colonial theory. These are the three major concepts of Homi. Bhabha's post-colonial theory.

In colonial discourse, "mimicry" is a means adopted by the colonizer to control the colonized people, who are forced to accept the colonizer's way of life and values, and in this process, they gradually alienate themselves from the native culture. However, when mimicry reaches a certain level, the imitators, i.e. the colonized people, will discover the weaknesses and loopholes of the colonial culture, and at this point, what Bhabha said, "simulation emerges as an expression of difference, which is itself a process of rejection".

The concept of "hybridity" is an important part of Homi. Bhabha's post-colonial theory. Bhabha's theory of post-colonialism. In the field of post-colonialism, Bhabha divides culture into two categories, namely, the culture of the colonizer and the culture of the colonized. He believes that the process of colonization is not simply a matter of the colonizer's culture, which occupies a strong position, devouring the culture of the colonized, which occupies a weaker position; in his view, the process of colonization is extremely complex, and in the process, the colonizer and the colonized are involved together. In his view, the colonization process is extremely complex, in which the colonizer and the colonized participate together, and although the two cultures are in an unequal position, the culture of the colonized is by no means passive and powerless, and to some extent it has challenged the lofty position of the culture of the colonizer.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces the concept of a "third space": The "third space" is not a grand conjunction of differentiated or resistant positional positions; rather, it is neither this nor that, but something "after". According to Bhabha, the culture of the colonizer and the culture of the colonized are by no means in a simple relationship of dichotomy; on the contrary, they are supposed to influence and integrate each other. The "third space", on the other hand, is an eclectic concept, which is intangible and abstract; it is a third party formed by the combined effects of two or even more cultures, and when one is in this space, one usually spontaneously adopts a more objective and critical view of the dominant colonizer's culture, which is conducive to the dissolution of cultural hegemony and the realization of cultural diversity.

## **2.2 *The Post-colonial Feminist Criticism***

Post-colonial feminist criticism is an emerging academic genre that emerged in the 1980s with the rise of feminist movements and post-colonial theory. Post-colonial feminist criticism combines feminism with postcolonial discourse, with the main purpose of criticizing colonial ideology, questioning Western middle-class feminism, and considering it a product of Eurocentrism or imperialism; And it emphasizes the multifaceted or multi-level nature of women's existence, examines the special characteristics of third world women and minority women, and fight for their interests<sup>[5]</sup>.

Feminist critic Spivak has pointed out that women have suffered more from the repression of colonial culture than the "third world" or "minority men". The woman loses her subjectivity and is reduced to an instrumental object, she loses her power to speak, and is reduced to a mere empty reference, a powerful counter-evidence of patriarchy and imperialism. Third world and ethnic minority women remain in a state of "aphasia" where "the subordinate does not have the right to speak", where the marginalized women lost their right to speak.

## **3. The Post-colonialism of *The Loons***

The dilemma that Piquette encounters comes from two sources: a cultural identity that has been marginalized by mainstream society and a female identity that has been oppressed by the males within the family.

### **3.1 *The Post-colonial Perspectives of The Loons***

The white settlers' controlled exploitation of the colony's land and resources, their constant hegemonic political and spiritual control over the colony, and their constant destruction of the social relations that existed in their homeland have created in the depth of their souls an inexorable complex of inferiority and the psychological orientation of an inferior people, and have superimposed an even greater catastrophe on the distorted hearts and minds of the indigenous peoples by turning them into the so-called "marginalized people" who have no cultural status, no spiritual cultivation, and no autonomy or national self-esteem. To add even greater havoc to the distorted minds of the indigenous peoples, they have become so-called "marginalized people" with no cultural status, no spiritual cultivation, and no autonomy or national self-esteem. Through a system of strict social differentiation, dividing indigenous and white peoples into inferior and superior, idealizing and exalting the white ruling class, and subjecting indigenous peoples to cultural education under their control, ideological indoctrination and "mind-switching", the indigenous people were subjected to the kind of mental and physical shaping of the consciousness desired by the white rulers, "imprinting on their minds the pain of being colonized, thus paving the way for their cultural colonization' of racism and ethnic discrimination". Culture is the foundation of the existence and development of a nation. Cultural colonization is undoubtedly eliminating the cultural individuality of indigenous peoples step by step, and even devouring their cultures, while the indigenous people in such a state of affairs, deprived of the support of their own national cultures, seem to have lost the foundation on which they depend for their survival, and are filled with a sense of fear and inferiority.

#### *a) Cultural Discrimination*

Piquette, the protagonist of *The Loons*, are belong to the indigenous people who have long been disregarded and discriminated against, without any social status or even identity<sup>[6]</sup>. White settlers ruthlessly appropriated their ancestral Indian lands without granting them the rights they deserved, and their resistance was repeatedly suppressed until their voices "fell into a long silence". Long-term forced relocation and evacuation, as well as the racial alienation brought about by their own mixed-race status,

has made them gradually lose the Indian indigenous culture, and at the same time, even more incapable of integrating with the white culture, and are in a cultural sandwich, where their own culture may be squeezed out at any time.

The white government has long implemented the "Anglicization" "melting pot" and other national assimilation policies, in essence, a serious racial discrimination and cultural discrimination, the whole society presents an "upright mosaic" state<sup>[3]</sup>, and the Metis people are at the bottom of the "upright mosaic", the members of this group will feel a sense of oppression and inferiority at times. As mentioned earlier, the tragic fate of Piquette is a social tragedy. The cultural discrimination brought about by cultural colonization makes Piquette have a strong sense of inferiority at a young age, she is dissatisfied with and unwilling to accept her own marginalized status, all her self-esteem and indifference come from the sense of inferiority of the "inferior" status deep down in her heart. All her struggles against fate are aimed at getting rid of this identity, hoping to eliminate this inferiority complex from the root. This inferiority complex, fear of her own identity, and strong desire to get rid of her inferior status are in fact the root causes of a series of tragic fates, and cultural discrimination is the "main culprit" that leads to Piquette's ultimate death.

#### *b) Cultural Colonization*

The Indian scholar of Persian descent, Homi. Bhabha, refers to the concept of postcolonial discourse, which is the sowing and infiltration of the colonized culture and language by the language and culture of the colonizer, which compels the colonized natives to identify themselves in the discursive manner of the colonizer. In this way, the process of colonization of the psychological, spiritual, and real world is accomplished in a distorted cultural atmosphere, thus transforming the antagonistic relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor into a relationship of cultural penetration and identification. This can be described as the colonized turning external compulsion into internal self-consciousness, thus wiping out the so-called cultural differences and chasing after the cultural value standards of the white dominant culture, making cultural colonization possible. Under this colonialist approach to economic, political and cultural aggression, indigenous peoples have undoubtedly become inferior people, a group of people who are humiliated by themselves and struggling with the agony of their souls. In order to get the white man to look at them differently, to break away from the shackles of their inferiority and squeeze into the superior society, and to erase the shame of their innate indigenous identity, they inadvertently hate their own identity, and thus are in a pathetic situation of inferiority and self-destruction, both spiritually and physically.

Throughout her life, Piquette longed for belonging, not just physical belonging, but belonging to her soul, her culture, and her identity. What she seeks is to earn a place for herself in society through marriage. This idea stems from the colonizer's long inculcated values of white cultural supremacy and white superiority, which, fundamentally, digs away at the soul of the Aboriginal people's recognition of their own ethnicity. Piquette's desire to escape her unjust fate and pursue a better life is not wrong, but her starting point of getting rid of her own ethnic identity is wrong. What she aspires to throughout her life is a sense of belonging, love and self-esteem, but this pursuit is based on self-denial, severing the psychological bond between the individual and the group, just like a dandelion floating over a river, with neither its own roots nor soil to fall into and take root in, and ultimately can only fall into the water.

### ***3.2 The Post-colonial Feminist Criticism of The Loons***

As a minority cultural identity, Piquette is discriminated against in the white mainstream society. This is evident in the attitudes of "my" grandmother, "my" mother, and "myself" toward her. My grandmother miraculously didn't go on vacation with "us" to Diamond Lake that summer because of Piquette's company; "my" mother tried to stop Piquette from going with her on various pretexts, but finally agreed to let her go only because she could serve as a shield for the bad relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; and although "I" was a classmate of Piquette, I treated her with indifference, neither friendly, nor unfriendly. Although she lived and moved within "my" sight, "I" didn't actually notice her until the arrival of that particular summer when "I" was eleven years old. The only thing "I" knew about her was the fact that she was sick, which "I" had gotten from "my father", who was treating Piquette well. In other respects, she seemed to "me" to be an embarrassment to the people. In short, white women of all ages and classes show extreme indifference and discrimination towards Piquette as a minority group. Obviously, what the author narrates here is not only the discrimination against minority groups by the mainstream society under the colonial mentality, but also expresses the deviation of the direction of the western feminist movement influenced by it. The original

intention of the women's movement was to look at the world with a non-binary mindset, dismantle the traditional logic of patriarchy, and advocate for women's rights and interests. However, because the members of the women's movement were almost exclusively white women, as the movement grew, the rights they fought for were only those of white middle-class women, ignoring the existence of minority and third world women. White western feminists have undoubtedly repeated the basic theory of the colonialists. By ignoring the existence of women of other races and excluding race, geography, class, etc., from the feminist field of vision, white Western feminists have unconsciously manifested the imperialist feminism.

#### 4. Conclusion

The racism and sexism of the colonial consciousness undoubtedly acted as the killers that took Piquette's life. M. Lawrence, through the tragic end of the characters in her works, implicitly expresses the strategy that the government of Canada should adopt to govern the country and protect the people: to eliminate the colonial influence, to implement the multicultural policy, to realize the equality and co-prosperity between races and genders, and to build a harmonious society together, which reflects the humanistic concern and the colonial feminist viewpoint of her works.

Margaret Lawrence is truly a master, and she has written extensively, including novels, essays and children's stories. In her novels, she utilizes a unique female writing style to portray a group of women who are obsessed with exploring the meaning of existence and self-worth. Her writing language is profound, and she describes the characters' characteristics and storylines vividly, which makes people read the novels in a real and intimate way, and have the feeling of being there, with a strong sense of being in the world. In *The Loons*, Margaret uses a lot of comparisons to highlight the impact of multiculturalism after colonization. Through reading these simple languages, readers are gradually drawn into the storyline and continue to realize the deep meaning expressed in the author's narration, which makes people want to finish the book. As the author realizes through the mouth of "I": Perhaps Piquette is the only one who can understand the wail of the loons. Piquette's life is full of sadness, and this sadness is just like the wail of the loons, which no one really understands, and this is also the characteristic of her rootless and marginalized identity in her tragic life.

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