

THE CANADIAN FICTION OF MARGARET LAURENCE :A STUDY

By

LINDA MARIA FERNANDES

A thesis submitted to
Goa University
For the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH**

Supervised by:

Dr. A.K. Joshi
Professor and Head
Department of English
Goa University

Goa University
Taleigao Plateau
Taleigao



SEPTEMBER 1999

813
FER/LAN
T-175

T-138

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis "The Canadian Fiction of Margaret Laurence: A Study" submitted by Miss Linda Maria Fernandes, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, of Goa University, is completed under my supervision. The thesis is a record of research work done by her during the period of study and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma to her.



Joshi AK

Dr. A.K. Joshi
Professor and Head
Dept. of English
Goa University
RESEARCH GUIDE

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or other similar titles.



**Miss Linda Maria Fernandes
Dept. of English
Goa University
Taleigao Plateau**

CONTENTS

1. PREFACE.....	1
2. CHAPTER I.....	3
MARGARET LAURENCE: THE WOMAN BEHIND THE WRITING	
3. CHAPTER II.....	18
THE THEMATIC WEB OF LAURENCE'S FICTION	
4. CHAPTER III.....	40
THE STONE ANGEL	
5. CHAPTER IV.....	123
SISTERS' NARRATIVES: A JEST OF GOD AND THE FIRE DWELLERS	
6. CHAPTER V.....	179
A BIRD IN THE HOUSE	
7. CHAPTER VI.....	216
THE DIVINERS	
8. CHAPTER VII.....	275
MANAWAKA	
9. CHAPTER VIII.....	301
CONCLUSION	
10. APPENDICES.....	307
11. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	334

PREFACE

Margaret Laurence, a Canadian writer is a historical as well as a regional novelist who is peculiarly conscious of a personal need for the imaginative revision of history. Her work can be divided into two parts according to its setting: African and Canadian. This thesis is on her Canadian fiction which is also known as her Manawakan fiction. Accordingly, her works have been examined in chronological order (with the exception of *Jason's Quest*, her novel for children). I have employed a combination of critical methods to analyse aesthetic, textual and historical problems.

Chapter I and II comprise Laurence's biographical information, the influences on her Canadian works and the themes behind her fiction. Together, these chapters show the links between her African and Canadian writing, the unity and continuity of her work, and the maturation of her socio-political concerns. Her basic vision is seen as religious and humanistic.

Travel played an important role in Laurence's life. It helped shape her literary vision, and provided her with a central metaphor: the psychic journey towards inner freedom and spiritual maturity. The themes that shape her Canadian fiction- roots, ancestors, human complexity, acceptance of the Other and the search for inner freedom- these concerns first emerged in her African writing.

Chapters III, IV, V, VI, focus on the value of Laurence's work and its relevance to contemporary literature and society. The five works set in Canada in Laurence's fictional town of Manawaka are meant to be read together. This cycle of fiction constitutes a remarkable gallery of vital individuals, a composite portrait of women's experience in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the imaginative recreation of an entire society.

town of Manawaka are meant to be read together. This cycle of fiction constitutes a remarkable gallery of vital individuals, a composite portrait of women's experience in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the imaginative recreation of an entire society.

The last chapter 'Manawaka' shows that Laurence has turned the Manitoba town of her youth into a metaphor of universal human experience.

The epic quality of Laurence's fiction and her ability to give symbolic form to social or collective life, has earned for Laurence a justified comparison with Tolstoy, while her literary vision of the two-way flow of time places her among philosophical novelists like Proust. Laurence's art builds upon the fiction of Canadian writers such as Sinclair Ross and greatly advances that tradition.

No work of this scope would be possible without the help of others. My thanks go out to Professor A. K. Joshi for supervising the thesis, for offering valuable insights and clarifications, and for steadfastly refusing to hurry me, insisting instead that I take all the time necessary to write the best thesis possible.

To Shastri Institute of Indo-Canadian Studies, Delhi, University of Baroda, University of Toronto, Canada, Centre of Canadian Studies Goa University, S.N.D.T. Bombay, for research material

To Principal Bhaskar Nayak, Govt. College, Quepem, my parents, brother, other members of the family and friends for extending cooperation during various stages in the completion of my thesis.

Linda Maria Fernandes

CHAPTER I

MARGARET LAURENCE : THE WOMAN BEHIND THE WRITING

A. A Biographical Sketch

B. Influences behind her fiction

CHAPTER I

MARGARET LAURENCE: THE WOMAN BEHIND THE WRITING

It is but appropriate that a study of Margaret Laurence's Canadian fiction should begin with a discussion of Laurence's life and work, both of which are inseparable from her Manawakan or Canadian fiction. I have divided this chapter into two parts. The first section will provide a biographical sketch of Laurence, while the second will delve into the many influences on her fiction. This chapter will provide us with the necessary background material that is required to comprehend Laurence's larger themes.

A: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss in Neepawa Manitoba. Her father was of Scottish ancestry; her mother, nee Simpson, was Irish. Both branches of the family were Protestant which meant that the religious and cultural traditions of Puritanism were prominent features of the author's upbringing.

Laurence's work can be divided into two parts according to its setting: African and Canadian. Five books are the product of Laurence's seven years in Africa and her continuing interest in that continent: *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* (1954), *The Prophets Camel Bell* (1963), *The Tomorrow - Tamer* (1963), *This Side Jordan* (1960) *Long Drums and Canons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists* (1968). Laurence's Canadian works, also known as Manawakan works also number five: *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire - Dwellers* (1969), *A Bird in the House* (1970), *The Diviners* (1974).

Born on 18th July 1926, Jean Margaret Wemyss was brought up in a small town in Neepawa, Manitoba. Her father, Robert, belonged to the Scots family of Wemyss and they had their own motto "Je Pense"¹. After her mother died in 1930, and her father in 1935, she was raised by her maternal grandfather, John Simpson and by her aunt, Margaret Simpson Wemyss, who had married her widowed father. Both were strong influences on the young girl.

As a child, Margaret was a great fantasizer. 'Pretend this. Pretend that'. It was all 'Pretend'. Mind you this is the way her writing is ² from an early age, Laurence would say "I'm going to be a writer", ³ and she would write in scribblers she always carried, 'Oh, she always carried those scribblers. She was always jotting down something.' ⁴ Her stepmother encouraged her to read ⁵ and she did and saw things which broadened her out, living at the old funeral parlour and through her reading ⁶. From the time she could read, she was interested in doing some writing. This was her hobby.. Margaret liked to write stories. ⁷

Laurence lived in Neepawa through the depression and World War II until 1944, when she attended United College in Winnipeg. This arts and theology College was affiliated to the University of Manitoba. Clara Thomas discusses its founding institutions, Methodist and Presbyterian and its tradition of liberal thought, a tradition "particularly sympathetic to her positive affirming temperament." ⁸. There she studied English, published her first poems and stories "Callipoe" and "Tas des Waldes" in the college journal 'Vox', and later worked as a reporter for the Winnipeg Citizen. In these formative years, she responded to the powerfully positive, liberal idealism of the college and to the optimism of the Winnipeg Old Left with its confidence in reform, brotherhood and social justice ⁹. Laurence later questioned her easy liberal attitudes, which were sorely tried in Africa, but she retained her indignation with forms of injustice, exploitation and depression. Though she grew sceptical of social solutions, she retained the compassionate, moral outlook that pervades her novels.

In Winnipeg, Laurence met her husband, Jack Laurence, a civil engineer. They married in 1948 and proceeded first to England and then in 1950 to the British Protectorate of Somaliland in East Africa.

She wrote book reviews, a daily radio column and covered labour news. Jack Laurence was engaged to create a chain of artificial lakes on earth dams in the deserts of the British Protectorate of Somaliland. The British Colonial Service felt that Somaliland was no place for a woman but Jack described his wife as a handy Canadian girl, "a kind of female Daniel Boone", and Laurence was permitted to go. For the next two years she lived in isolated desert camps, sometimes in a tent on land rover, and came to know and admire the nomadic tribesmen whose lives depended on courage, endurance and religious faith. Out of this soujourn came her first published work, a translation of Somali poetry and folk tales.

Here she immersed herself in Somali culture. At this time her main project was to study the oral tradition of Somali and to prepare a book of translations, *A Tree for Poverty* (1954). This was her first published volume. Between 1952 and 1957, the Laurences lived in the Gold Coast, later Ghana, where they had two children, Jocelyn (Born 1952) and David (Born 1955). Her career as a writer of fiction began at this time as she wrote stories about the life that she observed around her, she published her first African story "The Drummer of All the World", in *Queens Quarterly* in 1956 and wrote several others later, included in *The Tomorrow - Tamer* (1963). She also began her first and only African Novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960). Her critical study of Nigerian novelists and dramatists *Long Drums & Cannons : Nigerian Dramatists and novelists 1952 - 66* (1968) while valuable in itself, is also interesting because it offers insight into her own books and displays her views of the art of fiction. Out of Africa, came Laurence's maturity and a deep understanding of her own roots : "I learned so much from that experience".¹⁰

In 1957, the Laurences moved to Vancouver. During Vancouver years, Laurence taught Sunday school, first for the United Church and then for the Unitarians. She attended Unitarian services in Vancouver for some time and wrote a christmas nativity story for this church. Her interest in the Unitarians did not last, since "ancestors" meant nothing to them and a great deal to Laurence. She offers a wrong definition of a Unitarian as one who believes in "one God atmost". After many years of absence from church services, Laurence began in the late 1970s to attend the United Church, "the Church of my ancestors".¹¹

In Vancouver, she completed *This Side Jordan*, and then began *The Stone Angel*. In her second novel, she returned to her native ground. In her own life, however, she had not yet come home. She seems to have needed a more distant view of herself, her country and her art and so in 1962, after separating from her husband she took her manuscript and her children to England. Here she created the world of Manawaka completing *The Stone Angel* (1964) and writing *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) and *A Bird in the House* (1970). She also wrote her first children's book *Jason's Quest* (1970). It was in England that she established herself as a major Canadian novelist and as a woman of letters, reading widely in Canadian literature writing reviews, essays and articles and meeting other Canadian writers.

This Side Jordan won the Beta Sigma Philosophy Award, and *A Jest of God* won the Governor General's Award.

Gradually, she was lured back in Canada. Through the 1970s, she was awarded honorary degrees from eleven Canadian Universities; in 1971 she became a companion of the order of Canada; She served as writer-in-residence at Trent University and at the Universities of Toronto and Western Ontario. she returned first in summer to a cottage on the Otonabee River in Ontario, where she wrote much of the *The Diviners* (1974) which won the Governor General's Award. "The Shack", as she called her small cedar cabin was destined to play an important part in her life for the next decade and provided the setting for *The Diviners*. Margaret called this cabin the most loved place of her later years : "every time I lift my eyes from the page and glance outside, it is to see some marvel or other."¹² During these years Laurence took to letter writing like never before. She was as "inverterate letter writer", self styled and "an addicted receiver of letters".¹³ Mail provided vital links to beloved friends, a lifetime which was necessary to her well-being. Margaret answered twenty-five hundred letters a year.¹⁴ Letters meant communication, always a major theme in Laurence's writing. She wrote three more children's books : *The Olden Days Coat* (1979), *Six Dam Cows* (1979), and *The Christmas Birthday Story* (1980). In 1981 she was appointed chancellor of Trent University. Laurence died on 5th January 1987.

Lt [Literature] must be planted firmly in some soil. Even works of non-realism make use of spiritual landscapes which have been at least partially inherited by the writer. Despite some current fashions to the contrary, the main concern of the writer remains that of somehow creating the individual on the printed page, of catching the tones and accents of human speech, of setting down the conflicts of people who are as real to him as himself. If he does this well, and as truthfully as he can, his writing may sometimes reach out beyond any national boundary.¹⁵

Margaret wrote no more adult fiction after *The Diviners*. The reason why is given near the end of the novel itself. Like the protagonist, Morag, she had received the gift and feels that the gift is leaving, is being transferred to others. "The gift or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else". "Morag returned to the house to write the remaining private and fictional words and to set down her title". By this she meant that someone else would write the next book, the next novel. She was leaving things all set up and waiting for the next writer.¹⁶ The novel includes a heart-rending description of what writing meant to Morag, and to Margaret : the wrenching up of guts and heart, to be carefully set down on paper in order to live.¹⁷

Laurence's fiction is neither autobiographical nor confessional, though it does incorporate many features from her own life, her youth, family, heritage, an upbringing in Manitoba; her travels through Canada, Europe and Africa, her struggles as a Canadian woman writer.

Local villagers and British culture do not appear to have played much part in Laurence's life. Seven years in Africa led to five books, but contemporary British life is reflected only in *Jason's Quest*, the novel for children which Laurence wrote near the end of her decade in England.

Laurence always worked retrospectively, drawing from the deep wells of remembered experience. The African years took literary shape in Canada during the five years that followed; the Manawakan portraits of Laurence's grandparents and parents and of herself were created in England in the sixties; and material from her years in Vancouver goes into Stacey's

experience, half a decade later. Only with *The Diviners* does Laurence confront Canadian life that is contemporary with the time of writing.

Laurence's African writing and her Canadian based fiction are closely related. Together they represent a seamless fabric a steady growth and maturation of a way of seeing which was first formed in Neepawa, Manitoba.

In the Manawaka cycle, the beauty and writing of Laurence's language and the use of setting as human analogue, serve to develop character. Laurence's special talent in the creation of vital individual characters within a vividly realized social group. Laurence can be called "a Canadian equivalent to Tolstoy", not in terms of "literary gigantism", but rather "in such terms as a writers relevance to his time and place, the versatility of his perception, the breadth of his understanding, the imaginative power with which he personifies and gives symbolic form to the collective life he interprets and in which he takes part".¹⁸

B. INFLUENCES ON LAURENCE'S CANADIAN FICTION

Margaret Laurence has created her Manawaka world out of a gigantic complexity, reaching back from her own place and time through four generations of men and women in a Canadian western town. All the strands of her ancestral past have interwoven with her own life and the power of her own gift impelling her to write her people down to the pages of her fiction. The people, the circumstances and the places of her past are important to an understanding of both the "why" and the "what" of Margaret Laurence's writing. She does not always write from within a circumference that contains the imaginative experiences and perceptions congruent with one of her place, her time and her life.

Laurence's Canadian fiction reveals that besides other factors travel played a major role in Laurence's life. It helped shape her vision and literacy provided her with a central metaphor. The psychic journey towards inner freedom and spiritual maturity. Because journeying and strangerhood have played an intimate part in Laurence's life, it has been given to her to see their meaning in human experience and to penetrate "the pain and interconnectedness of

In the Manawaka cycle, the beauty and writing of Laurence's language and the use of setting as human analogue, serve to develop character. Laurence's special talent in the creation of vital individual characters within a vividly realized social group. Laurence can be called "a Canadian equivalent to Tolstoy", not in terms of "literary gigantism", but rather "in such terms as a writer's relevance to his time and place, the versatility of his perception, the breadth of his understanding, the imaginative power with which he personifies and gives symbolic form to the collective life he interprets and in which he takes part".¹⁸

B. INFLUENCES ON LAURENCE'S CANADIAN FICTION

Margaret Laurence has created her Manawaka world out of a gigantic complexity, reaching back from her own place and time through four generations of men and women in a Canadian western town. All the strands of her ancestral past have interwoven with her own life and the power of her own gift impelling her to write her people down to the pages of her fiction. The people, the circumstances and the places of her past are important to an understanding of both the "why" and the "what" of Margaret Laurence's writing. She does not always write from within a circumference that contains the imaginative experiences and perceptions congruent with one of her place, her time and her life.

Laurence's Canadian fiction reveals that besides other factors travel played a major role in Laurence's life. It helped shape her vision and literacy provided her with a central metaphor. The psychic journey towards inner freedom and spiritual maturity. Because journeying and strangerhood have played an intimate part in Laurence's life, it has been given to her to see their meaning in human experience and to penetrate "the pain and interconnectedness of mankind." Africa taught Laurence to look at herself. The themes that shape her Manawaka fiction are roots, ancestors, human complexity, acceptance of the Other and the search for inner freedom. The growth these concerns first emerge in her African writing. The way home for Laurence was through Ghana and the searching desert sun of Somaliland. Laurence's grandparents, her teachers, her upbringing in the prairie land of Neepawa, her Scottish

northern lights,²¹ became the Wachakwa River, while Ridding Mountain on clear Lake where the Laurences has a summer cottage, some hundred miles north of Neepawa, models for Galloping Mountain on Diamond Lake. Neepawa was already well settled by the time of its incorporation in 1883. With the railway, it became a major grain outlet and the centre of a rich agricultural district from Riding Mountain in the North to the Assiniboine land in the south. It was also rich in dairy products, wood and salt. Neepawa was originally settled in 1870's by the Scottish pioneers trekking westward from Ontario in search of land. These founding families formed a tightly woven, predominantly Scottish group that Laurence describes with biting accuracy in *The stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, and *The Diviners*.

Sixty years earlier, a shipload of destitute corfters from the north of Scotland had been brought by Alexander Selkirk to found the Red River Colony, in the area of the red and Assiniboine rivers where Winnipeg now stands. The Scots thus formed one of the strongest elements in Manitoba settlement. The Scottish side of Laurence's ancestry has loomed larger in her imagination than the Irish, doubtless because of the Scottish culture of Neepawa. Laurence thinks of herself as Scots – Canadian and identifies sympathetically with the Highlanders. As a child she was extremely aware of her Scottish background. Scotland inhabited Laurence's imagination as a bold, dramatic country of high atrocities of the clearances after the battle of Culloden. During a visit of Scotland in the 1960s, she realized that her true ancestors and cultural heritage were Canadian.

Laurence's discussion of what Scotland meant to her reveals the twofold temper of her imagination, its social realism and its romanticism. It also reveals her capacity for sympathetic identification with people whose experience has been strikingly different from her own. The clearances devastated the highlanders because they were betrayed by their chieftains, the symbolic king/father figure with almost mystical powers in a tribal culture.

To be betrayed by one of these must have been like knowing... that one's own father intended... to murder you. The outcast highlanders must have arrived psychically in ways they could not possibly have comprehended.... Their hearts had been broken... I had known of course... of the external difficulties

of the early Scottish settlers, the people of Glengarry Red River,. What I had never seen before, was a glimpse of their inner terrors, a sense of bereavement they must have carried with them. What appeared to be their greatest trouble in a new land- the grappling with an unyielding environment – was in fact probably their salvation. I believe they survived not in spite of the physical hardship but because of them for all their attention and thought had to be focused outward. They could not brood. If they had been able to do so, it might have killed them.²²

Neepawa was indeed a strong influence on Laurence's writing. Laurence states that Neepawa and its Scots-Presbyterian pioneers, not Scotland, represent her real past. "My true roots were here".²³ Neepawa provides "elements" of Manawaka but this town of the mind, her own private world, is "not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns".²⁴

Place means land and people and Laurence writes of the ambiguity she felt towards both. To Cameron, she spoke of the stultifying aspects of local culture which, along with respect for individuality and independence, helped to nurture her love of freedom. Here she acknowledges the welcome security of that admittedly repressive atmosphere. The land was lonely, isolated, yet very beautiful. Its inhabitation evoked similarly complex emotions :

how difficult they were to live with, how authoritarian how unbending, how afraid to show love... and how willing to sow anger. And yet they had inherited a wilderness and made it fruitful. They were in the end great survivors and for that I love and value them.²⁵

The theme of survival with human dignity and warmth is termed as an almost inevitable theme for a writer who came from a Scots – Irish background of stern values and hard work and puritanism, and who grew up during the drought and depression of the thirties and then the war. The most readily identifiable western Canadian quality about Margaret Laurence is her early dedication to social reform and the continued, basic, social awareness that is part of the foundation of all her work. Growing up with a troubled knowledge that the depression had

cramped or defeated her parent's generation and coming to maturity with the knowledge that everywhere in the western world their general choices were predetermined by the Second World War, she and her associates saw concerted social action as the hope and the only protection for mankind. Her statements of concern were to become a part of the fabric of all her fiction.

The generation of Canadian writers who preceded her, influenced Laurence to a great extent. Exhibiting a strong sense of kinship, Laurence calls these writers "God busters" and "literary heroes", who revealed their particular Canadian communities and whose writings influenced her own.

One important literary influence was the fiction of Sinclair Ross. Laurence first read his *As for me and My House* when she was eighteen. Laurence comments on the realism that is nevertheless "illuminated with compassion".²⁶ His treatment of the land, "violent and unpredictable", sometimes suggests a harsh and vengeful God; his concern with the problems and difficulties of human communication is also hers.

There are close links between Laurence's African writing and her Manawaka cycle or Canadian based fiction. In Africa, exposed to puzzlingly different peoples and cultures, Laurence's understanding of herself and her own culture took a great leap forward. In Africa she was a stranger, subject to the alienation that she depicts as central to human experience everywhere. It was in Africa that her recurring themes of strangerhood, exile, bondage, freedom and human dignity and concern for women first took shape.

It was a circuitous path, however that took her from the real Neepawa to the literary Manawaka, the town which appears in her novels, and which she has built into an elaborate imaginative world. She had to be shocked and stimulated by the very different worlds of Somaliland, Ghana and England before she could write about her home. She found Africa totally alien and strongly familiar. Paradoxically, this exotic milieu allowed her to take a leading place within a Canadian literary tradition. Africa inspired her to write, first of all, by providing her with the rich and ever fierce details that are the first elements of fiction. Africa

also posed, in a particularly acute form the dilemma of understanding and portraying character. This was to become the goal for her novels. Finally, Africa offered Laurence her the major themes for her novels.

Her African stories, essays and articles explore the issues of tribalism, colonialism, racial intolerance, betrayal, independence, the clash of generations, self-sacrifice, and survival in a harsh land. All are subjects which recur in the Canadian novels. These themes were first expressed in non-fiction: "I began to write out of my own background only after I had lived some years away."²⁷ Above all, Africa deepened her appreciation of human differences and of shared individuals in a world of people whom she describes as being both different and similar to themselves. Africa was catalyst and crucible for much of Laurence's work.²⁸ Africa cauterized Laurence's youthful naivete & liberal optimism. Laurence shares in the world view she ascribes to these African writers (Wole Soyinka and Amadi) who see mankind as vulnerable, paradoxical, struggling, growing with "mystery at the centre of being" (*The Diviners*, p.184). Africa also developed Laurence's interest in and sympathy for the Canadian Indian. His degraded situation has been observed in her youth. It is treated peripherally in *The Stone Angel* and *The Fire-Dwellers* and becomes a significant theme in "The Loons" and *The Diviners*. Finally, the phenomenon of imperialism, along with exposure to different cultures in Africa, bred in Laurence that sensitivity to human difference, that compassion for alienation and misunderstandings of a social as well as a personal type, that mark all her writings. Africa confirmed Laurence's intuition that "it was not a matter of intelligence but of viewing the whole of life through different eyes" (*New Wind*, p.99). The exposure to the African tribal systems had given her an understanding of the Scottish clans. *The Prophets Camel Bell* (1963), is based on diaries from the early fifties, but is written out of a later maturity which judges and frequently scorns the initial reactions.

Laurence's conclusion to the Nigerian study reiterates that neither Elichi Amadi nor Wole Soyinka are liberal humanists, that they never suggest that man improves with the passing of time "and will ultimately be able to direct wisely and knowingly every facet of his life". Laurence shares in the worldview of these African writers who see mankind as vulnerable, paradoxical, struggling, growing, with "mystery at the centre of being".²⁹ Africa bred in

Laurence that sensitivity to human difference, that compassion for alienation and misunderstandings of social as well as a personal type, that mark all her writing. "It was not a matter of intelligence but of viewing the whole of life through different eyes".³⁰

Laurence read O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban. A study of the Psychology of Colonisation in Canada* in 1960. Literature clarified and confirmed her own experience in Africa. Like *The Prophets Camel Bell*, Mannoni's study stems from self-searching and the validity of the Other: "I saw that the problem for human beings... was to acquire not the ability but the will to understand each other".³¹ In Laurence's travel narrative she quotes Mannoni's reference to the colonials' lack of awareness of "the world of others, a world in which others have to be respected".³² Laurence places importance on the past. "Most Nigerian writers have in some way or other made an attempt to restore the value of the past, without idealising it and without being shackled by it."³³ "No one's past is to be dismissed by an act of will".³⁴ Moreover, the bond between past and present is inevitable, for the past within ourselves shows the present "its own face".³⁵ Laurence's African writing reveals her advances in self-acceptance and understanding, fostered by the United States. Every woman's struggle of the psyche to know, be, and act as and for herself, is a paradigm of the situation Canadians feel themselves to be in. Survival is not the point; endurance is not the point; resistance is the point, so that we know ourselves to be ourselves defined by our difference.³⁶ That is the Canadian existential situation. Margaret Laurence treats her own concerns and her works resonate with the concerns of all of us.

When Laurence returned to Canada in 1957, still engaged in writing *This Side Jordan*, she saw her own country in the light of her years spent abroad. In particular, she observed three dilemmas that now fell into alignment. The first, prompted by seeing Africans, faces an abrupt and bewildering transition from traditional to modern eras. It was the twin problem of freedom and survival, of gaining and maintaining "an independence which was both political and inner". How can individuals live freely, at ease with themselves, their past and the lives of others? This question immediately raised a second, for the private life responds to a thousand social pressures, some obvious, some insidious. How can individuals assess their lives fairly when standards of judgment are imposed on them? Canada, like Africa, was a land that had

been a colony, a land which in some ways was still colonial. The people's standards of correctness and validity and excellence were still at that time largely derived from external and imposed values; the problem of colonialism seldom appears openly or politically in Laurence's Canadian fiction. Instead, it is implied in the habits, instincts, even turns of speech of her characters, in their numbing sense that their lives are not their own, and in their recurring need to escape from "correctness", often by retreating into the Canadian wilderness, far from social pressures and prejudices. The colonial mentality corresponded to a third problem that became apparent when Laurence began writing *The Stone Angel*. This was her "growing awareness of the dilemma and powerlessness of women, the tendency of women to accept male definitions of 'themselves', to be self-deprecating and uncertain, and to rage inwardly." This is a different kind of colonialism that makes the issues of freedom and survival particularly acute for women. Laurence observed this condition in its starkest form in Somaliland, where women's lives are strictly scrutinized and directed by men, yet are romanticized elaborately in literature. The status of women in tribal and religious traditions is infinitely inferior to that of men: "The double standard is extremely strong."³⁷ She continued her observations in Canada, and while she has declared that she is "90% in agreement with women's lib", she is a thoroughly feminist writer in the sense that she explores sympathetically and critically the plight of women in 20th century Canada. Laurence's direct influences have been literature, myth and personal experience.

CHAPTER NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 145 - 46.
2. Ralph Phyllis, *personal interview*, 25th July 1984, pp. 1, 3.
3. Catherine Simpson Milne, *personal interview*, 24th July 1984, pp. 1 - 2.
4. Ralph Phyllis, *personal interview*, 25th July 1984, pp. 24 - 5.
5. Catherine Simpson Milne, *personal interview*, 24th July 1984, p. 1.
6. Wes Mc Ammond, *Personal interview*, 24th July 1984, pp. 16 - 17.
7. Milred Musgrove, *personal interview*, 21st July 1984, p. 29.
8. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto, 1975), p. 8.
9. Margaret Laurence, *New Wind in a Dry Land* (New York, 1964), p. 6.

10. Donnalù Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence. The woman Behind the Writing", *Chatelaine*, February, 1971, quoted in Hindi - Smith, *Three Voices*, p. 6.
11. Conversation with Patricia Morley, July 25, 1976, at Lakefield; and *Margaret Laurence. First Lady of Manawaka*, Director Robert Duncan, Producer William Weintraub; Distributor, National Film Board of Canada.
12. Margaret Laurence, "The Shack", *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 187 - 88.
13. Laurence, "Living Dangerously.....by mail", *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 179 - 80.
14. Joan Johnston, *interview with Patricia Morley*, Lakefield, Ontario, May 30, 1988.
15. Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons* (London : Macmillan, 1968), p. 10.
16. Helen Lucas, *interview with Patricia Morley*, King City, Ontario, May 29, 1988.
17. *The Diviners* Toronto : Mc Clelland and Stewart; New York : Knopf; London : Macmillan, 1974. p. 78
18. Woodcock The Human elements : Margaret Laurence's fiction. *The Human Elements Critical Essays*, David Helwig, etc.(Toronto, 1978), pp. 134 - 35.
19. Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 7.
20. Donnalù Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence. The Woman Behind the Writing", *Chatelaine*, February 1971, quoted in Hindi-smith, *Three Voices*, p. 6.
21. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 145 - 46.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
26. *Conversation with Patricia Morley* at Lakefield and at Laurence's cottage called "The Shack", July 25-26, 1976.
27. Adele Wiseman, *Crackpot*, New Canadian Library 144, Introduction by Margaret Laurence (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 3.

28. Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots" *The Novelists as Socio-political being, "A Political Art, Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, ed. William H. New (Vancouver, 1978), pp. 18-19.
29. Sinclair Ross, *"The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*, Introduction by Margaret Laurence, NCL 62 (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 7.
30. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p.11.
31. Patricia Morley, *Margaret Laurence : The Long Journey Home* (Montreal : McGill Queens's University Press, 1991), p. 44.
32. Clara Thomas, Margaret Laurence, *Canadian Writers Series*, (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 14.
33. Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons : Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952 – 1966*, (London, Macmillan, 1968), p. 184.
34. Margaret Laurence, *New Wind in a Dry Land* (New York, 1964), p. 99.
35. O Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban : The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland foreword by Philip Mason (London, Macmillan, 1956), p, 13.
36. Margaret Laurence *New Wind in Dry Land* (New York, 1964), p. 277.

CHAPTER II

**THE THEMATIC WEB OF LAURENCE'S
FICTION**

CHAPTER II

THE THEMATIC WEB OF LAURENCE'S FICTION

We have already noted that travel played a major role in shaping Laurence's literary vision. Journeys - geographic as well as psychological, contributed to her maturation and provided her with a central metaphor. An analysis of Laurence's thematic pattern shows that her primary theme is freedom. This is a complex concept which has psychological, political and spiritual ramifications. Aspects of this theme are human communication, isolation, the relationship of a past to present and future; roots, ancestors; acceptance of the Other, survival and growth. The long interior journey "back home" involves an increasing awareness of oneself and one's community. The psychic journey, back into roots and forward into change and growth is at the heart of human experience and Laurence's literature.

Laurence's primary theme of freedom in the political sense concerns the search for the Canadian identity and her concern for the Metis in Canada. Cultural nationalism and women's liberation (inner freedom), dovetail in Laurence's Canadian fiction and wilderness (Manawaka) provides the textual space for the imaginative revision of these traditional cultural dependencies. For a better understanding of these themes I have dealt with them at length in the Appendices (A, B, C, D). This section offers 1) a brief history of Canada's colonial culture and the preoccupation with the quest for identity 2) a background to the history of the Metis in Manitoba and Saskatchewan 3) The historical resonance of wilderness 4) Connections between nationality and the feminine gender in Laurence's Canadian fiction.

1. FREEDOM

In the broadest sense, Laurence's theme of freedom can be defined as political. Her sense of social awareness, her feelings of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarianism had begun in her childhood and developed through her African experience. She further related these experiences to her own land, which had been under the colonial sway of Britain and now under the psychosocial domination of America. These feelings in turn related to her growing awareness of the powerlessness of women, the tendency of women to accept male definitions of themselves, to rage inwardly. The quest for relationships of equality and communication, the quest for physical and spiritual freedom are themes that run through her Canadian fiction and are connected with the theme of survival, both physical survival as well as survival of the spirit with human dignity and the ability to give and receive love.

This is the theme that my life has made me, and I don't know why. It's an accumulation of every single thing that has ever happened to me; probably literature may also be a cultural thing. Having grown up in the prairies, in a fairly stultifying community in some ways, and yet having come from, on the one hand, Scots ancestors who certainly were extremely independent if not bloody-minded, and equally bloody-minded Irish ancestors.... It seems to me that these two things probably have worked in a kind of juxtaposition in my life: on the one hand a repressed community, on the other a community in which the values of the individual were extraordinarily strongly recognized if only sometimes by implication."¹

1.1. COMMUNICATION

Margaret Laurence spent seven years in Africa, in Somaliland and Ghana, and the experience was a catalyst to her own best writing. It was there that she recognised the universal congruence of important literary themes, and at the same time their endless variations according to individuals in their time and places. It was there too, 'a stranger in a strange

land', that she recognised the problems of communication as being of primary importance to people everywhere. Writing of Chinua Achebe she said:

In his novels, we see man as a creature whose means of communication are both infinitely subtle and infinitely clumsy, a prey to invariable misunderstandings. Yet Achebe's writing also conveys the feeling that we must attempt to communicate however imperfectly, if we are not to succumb to despair or madness. The words, which are spoken, are rarely the words, which are heard, but we must go on speaking.²

Laurence goes on to acknowledge that the theme of freedom for human beings is interrelated with the themes of human communication and isolation. Laurence recognized the problems of communication as being of primary importance to people every where. Thus we see that true to her credo, Laurence's work centres solidly on individuals and their dilemmas, but also true to her credo, 'catching the tones and accents of human speech' and transferring these to the printed page are of essential importance to her work as well. She has often said that each of her heroines came to being in her mind and imagination as an entire individual and that her challenge thereafter was to listen to each unique voice and set down the words. She has said that while writing down Hagar's story in Hagar's words. She realised that she was recapturing the idiom of her grandparents. It is an idiom whose rhythm of speech is heavily influenced by the Bible.

All of her novels have had the problems of communication between individuals as their primary concern, but in *The Diviners* Morag Gunn's search for her self-identity is particularly and inextricably bound up with her search for her own language. When her parents die, Christie and Prin Logan take her in. Christie is Manawaka's garbage-man; his language is the language of revolt and also, when he tells her the tales of her ancestors that she needs to hear, a language of the past and of the mythology of the Gunns. School and the town's ethos teach her the language of law; university frees her, she thinks, but actually her marriage to Brook Skelton brings with it another language of law, one that is quite alien to her but one to which she submits for ten years. Meanwhile, her friendship with Jules 'Skinner' Tonnerre and their

kinship as outsiders to Manawaka have made her aware of an entire other language, that of the Metis, one with its own history and its own mythology. When Morag begins to write she agonises over finding the proper voices and languages for her characters; when she is bringing up Pique, her daughter and Jules's she recognises her responsibility to pass on to Pique her father's language as well as her own, by telling her the Tonnerre as well as the Gunn tales; and finally, she recognises Pique's need to be set free, to find her own language, her own place, her own people. When she moved to McConnell's Landing in Ontario, Morag had set up Catharine Parr Trail, an early settler in the region, as her mentor. But by the end of *The Diviners* she is secure and free in her self-knowledge and confidence. She dismisses Catharine, claims her own garden, gives its plants her own names, and exults in finding peace in it: 'I'll never till those blasted fields, but this place is some kind of a garden, nonetheless, even though it may be only a wild-flower garden, Its needed, and not only by me. I'm about to quit worrying about not being either an old or a new pioneer' (*The Diviners*, p. 332).

The intense emphasis in *The Diviners* on words, their meaning, the importance of their context, on the intricacies of language, makes this novel a bridge for present-day critics between their former preoccupation with theme and characterisation and the present and growing concentration on the language of the text. Similarly, Laurence's experiments with form and voice move *The Diviners* into the critical domain of the 'post-modern'. At the same time Laurence clearly belongs to a lineage of earlier Canadian writers whose themes and attitudes she has shared, assimilated and by her practice of the art and craft of fiction, transcended. The fictional 'truth' of her works and their emotional impact do indeed reach beyond Canada's national boundaries.

1.2. METIS

Dispossession is one of her significant themes through the Highland Scots of Christie's tales and the Tonnerres.

"Like Love, like communication, like freedom, social justice must sometimes be defined in fiction by the lack of it. I believe this is to be so throughout my

fiction: the plight of the Metis; the town's scorn of such people as Lazarus Tonnerre, Christie Logan, Bram Shipley, Lottie Drieser... the depression years of the thirties; the way in which the true meaning of war comes to some of the town's men in the trenches of World War I, and again later to many of the townsfolk with the tragedy of Dieppe in World War II".³

Laurence fits her female heroines from the Manawaka cycle into this pattern and reemphasizes that freedom and survival are simultaneously social and spiritual states, hence both political and religious themes. Laurence's political development, through a greater self-consciousness of the rights of individuals, nations, and groups to possess their heritage and work out their own destiny seems inevitable.

The following section will be devoted to Africa. The themes of ancestors, roots, a sense of history will be dealt with here.

2. AFRICA

Africa was a stroke of luck allowing Laurence the necessary distancing from her prairie background.⁴ Laurence came back to Canada via Africa, both physically and spiritually.⁵ The quest for freedom, for relationships of equality and understanding, for the survival of the spirit with dignity and love – these Laurentian themes reflect the emotional involvement with socio-political problems. The themes of freedom and survival relate both to the social / external world and to the spiritual / inner one, and they are themes which I see as both political and religious. If freedom is the ability to act out of one's self definition, with some confidence and with compassion, uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, it is also a celebration of life and of the mystery at life's core".

Another of Laurence's central themes is the relationship of past to present and future. Laurence has observed that African writers found that it was essential to come to terms with their ancestors and their gods so that they could accept the past and be at peace with the dead.

She has since become aware of the same basic pattern in order to try to understand herself and perhaps those of her generation through seeing where they have come from.”⁷

Laurence feels strong affinities with Nigerian writers like Wole Soyinka and in particular Chinua Achebe. She found common ground and common purpose among the writers of these emergent nations. Laurence’s experiences of Africa issued in works that explored themes of exile, loss of mankind’s stubborn, valiant quests for home and freedom; they also led her to see that these themes were particularly urgent to her own people as well. For culturally Canada is also an emergent nation. The colonial temper of mind was hard to vanquish and the Canadians were doubly vulnerable to borrowed cultures, both Britain’s and America’s. They were still anxious and tentative about defining themselves by that land and that land only, and as much as Africans or West Indians they needed their writers to show them who they were and where they stood.

Laurence proclaimed herself a “Third world novelist”, because “Canadian writers, like African writers have had to find our own voices and write out of what is truly ours, in the face of an overwhelming cultural imperialism”.⁸ Laurence shares with the African writers a commitment so strong that it is really a mission to explore and illuminate the past of their peoples in order to bring a sense of dignity and continuity in the lives of men and women in the present. An “act of restitution” Gerald Moore calls it, speaking of the work of Achebe “is necessary both as a piece of social history and as offering a ground for some sort of cultural continuity”.⁹

Laurence’s work *Long Drums and Cannons* is a work of research into tribal rites and customs: In her preface, she stresses the importance of the attempts made by these Nigerian novelists to interpret Africa from the inside and to restore the value of the past without idealising it and without being shackled by it. At the same time no writer can allow himself to be disengaged from the events and problems of his own time:

“The clash between generations, the several and individual disturbances brought about by a period of transitions, the slow dying of the destructive

aspects of tribalism, the anguish and inadequacy of uncompromising individualism as an alternative to tribalism".¹⁰

Despite her travels and devotions to foreign literature, Laurence has become one of the most important and most Canadian of novelists. She argues that writers are native to a specific place because they root themselves in its soil. They must deal, not with political and social abstractions, but with local, sensuous particulars: the feel of place, the tone of speech, how people say things; the concepts you grow up with. All larger themes will grow from this soil. For this reason she considers herself, not just a Canadian novelist, but a prairie novelist. Neepawa remains the mainspring and source of her writing, and she counts as important influences, authors like Sinclair Ross and W. O. Mitchell who excelled in conveying the earthy feel of prairie life.

In Ross' fiction the outer situation mirrors the inner and the empty landscape reflects the inability to speak, to touch:

The patterns are those of isolation and loneliness, and gradually, through these, the underlying spiritual goals of an entire society can be perceived... Hope never quite vanishes. In counterpoint to desolation runs the theme of renewal... man emerges as a creature who can survive – and survive with some remaining dignity – against both outer and inner odds which are almost impossible.¹¹

In catching the tones and accents of human speech Achebe of Nigeria has transferred the Ibo language, its tales and proverbs and particularly its great artistry. The strength and impact of Laurence's work lies as surely in her language as does Achebe's. She too has listened to her people and in a very real sense. She has "made" their language and transferred it to paper. Its sounds, its idioms and its images are authentic to the speech and experience of Canadians and the richness of its texture and its interweaving and recurring image-patterns are Margaret Laurence's achievements.

Chinua Achebe has written his manifesto of the writer's purpose in words that also serve Margaret Laurence's purpose in all her works.

The most terrible thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost.¹²

Margaret Laurence had been painfully aware of the failures in dignity and self-respect among all men and women and particularly among her own people.

Laurence has been attracted to African writers and countries because she respected parallels between her own country and Africa. The link appears to run both ways. There are startling similarities between her views and those of many Africans, including her views of time as a vital continuum, of the physical world as penetrated by spirit of human life, as a quest of journey, and of life's goodness despite its tragic aspects. Writing of Nigerian drama and the African world view it contains, Wole Soyinka contrasts its spirituality with the Manichean nature of Europe traditions: "It merges into a larger universe of wind, rain and ocean, growth and regeneration of humanistic faith and affirmation which is the other face of tragic loss." "Life present life, contains within it, manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn...continuity for the Yoruba operates both through the cycle concept of time and the animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness".¹³

Laurence observes that the onus for choosing what time span should be selected and how it should be presented lie not so much on her, the author, as on the main character that is the narrative voice. Once the narrative voice has been established, the protagonist autonomously as it were, "chooses which parts of the personal past, the family past and the ancestral past have to be revealed in order for the present to be realized and the future to happen".¹⁴

One of essential lessons to be learned from the past namely, the idea of survival as the overriding imperative is another central theme. Given Laurence's Scots-Irish background with its stern puritan values as well as the harsh realities of droughts, depression and war, it is

hardly surprising that survival should be invested with such significance. However, it should be stressed that Laurence does not mean just physical survival, but also “the survival of some human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others”.¹⁵

2.2. SENSE OF HISTORY IN LAURENCE’S CANADIAN FICTION

In an essay written in 1978, Laurence famously proclaimed herself a ‘Third World Novelist’, because, Canadian writers, like African writers “have to find our own voices and write out of what is truly ours, in the face of an overwhelming cultural imperialism.”¹⁶ Laurence’s own comparison of herself with the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe is, therefore, of particular interest, since Achebe’s own stated intention in writing was to ‘put away the years of denigration,’ of colonial contact, by presenting African culture as not being ‘one long night of savagery’. What was involved was a full-scale salvage operation on African history which took the form of four novels covering the period from immediately before colonial intervention to the (temporary) destruction of the Nigerian state on the eve of the Biafran war.

The general scheme of history adopted by both novelists bears certain similarities. The scope is comparable; both writers cover broadly the same historical period of ninety years (circa 1880 to 1965). With the single exception of Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, similar small groups of characters and their descendants appear and reappear in both novelists’ works. Again with the exception of *Arrow of God*, both novelists write about the same historically insignificant figures, insignificant towns and villages of the imagination: Manawaka and Umuofia. Certainly the links with Achebe were felt sufficiently by Laurence for her to claim ‘a kind of kinship that one does feel with another writer who is working within some of the same broad human territories’.¹⁷ Yet it is not so much the similarities in design which prompt Laurence’s feelings of fellowship, but what she perceives as similar attitudes to history, ‘a similar sense of specific place and particular people’.¹⁸ She admires Achebe’s writings, making them like ‘anthropologically inclined tourist brochures’.¹⁹ It is surprising, therefore, to read in *Long Drums and Cannons* that Laurence does not regard Achebe as an historical novelist since neither of his ‘historical novels is concerned entirely with a re-evaluation of history’.²⁰

The kinship Laurence and Achebe share is in seeing history in terms of fabric, texture, weaving interrelated stories 'of people with names and conflicts and places of belonging'. Beyond that, Achebe's characters 'never cease from inhabiting the mind' because 'at the deepest level, Achebe is talking about the individual living within his own skull'.²¹ History passes beyond the realm of social fact in a continuum of time and enters a phase of awareness and perception. If one is writing, out of the subconscious, the voices of the characters must be trusted.²²

In *Long Drums and Cannons*, Laurence writes that, "In most tribal societies ... the present generations of living do not stand entirely alone, nor is the individual ever abandoned entirely to the limits of his own power, for the dead ancestors continue to watch over and guide their descendants."²³

Arthur Ravenscroft, comments on Morag's 'talismans' in *The Diviners* (the plaid pin and knife); that they act in ways by no means unlike the Yoruba belief in Nigeria 'that the dead, the living and the unborn literally inhabit the same time and same place'.²⁴ What Arthur Ravenscroft sees is the 'very physical conception of history', amplified through the 'Memorybank Movies' to produce a view of the past which is alive in the ever-present moment. Extended beyond that novel and embracing the whole of the Manawaka world, history proceeds simultaneously along the linear, horizontal and syntagmatic paths of the western consciousness of time and paradigmatically along a vertical African axis.

The writing and premiere performance, at the Nigerian Independence celebrations, of Wole Soyinka's play *A Dance of the Forests* anticipated slightly Laurence's short stories which later came to be collected under the title *The Tomorrow Tamer*. It is worth, therefore, dwelling on a comparison between the two works, for the stories bear some resemblance to Soyinka's plays. In *Dance of the Forests*, the past is evoked by the village elders who wish to celebrate their newly independent status by calling forth their glorious ancestors. Instead, two decayed and flea-bitten ghosts appear, victims of past African oppression; the one a castrated slave, sold into slavery by a treacherous monarch, the other a woman in a permanent state of pregnancy. Demoke, a carver and artist figure, admits to having murdered his apprentice while

possessed by his god, Ogun , by casting him from the top of a tree. The play ends with a mask drama, as the Yoruba gods and their devotees struggle for control over the future Nigerian State finally given birth by the pregnant ghost.

Soyinka's play is an immensely complex, baroque piece which presents Nigeria as a highly ambivalent creation; a half-child or abiku neither of this world nor the other, a childlike monstrosity. The abiku is a liminal spirit-child betwixt and between worlds returning again and again to its mother's womb only to die in infancy. In discussing the play in *Long Drums and Cannons*, Laurence quotes Ulli Beier on the abiku: 'Abiku symbolises man's incomprehensible fascination for causing extinction of his own image.'²⁵

There is much, which Laurence takes from Soyinka's plays. *The Tomorrow Tamer* contains a struggle between the past and the future, symbolised by the respective gods of the river and the bridge. The image of the sacrificial victim is reworked into the story in the shape of Kofi who like Demoke's apprentice, is cast from a great height to his death. Elsewhere, the image of the half-child, neither of this world nor the other, emerges in Jeremy, the child of a mixed marriage, neither European nor African, who longing for his own extinction, digs his own mock grave on the beach: "Philip finished the chapter on the role of the Queen Mother in the matriarchal Akam society. Beside him, dimly, he heard Jeremy's voice. Then he realized why it sounded muffled. It was a voice from under the sand."²⁶ Ironically, for all his reading of anthropological works on African matriarchy, his father fails to see the abiku in his own son. Yet the Yoruba attitude to an abiku is ambivalent. Soyinka, in his autobiography, *Ake*, tells of his childhood friend Bukola, an abiku: "She was so rare, this privileged being who, unlike Tinnu and me, and even her companions in that other place, could pass easily from one sphere to another."²⁷

Monstrosity and destroyer of mothers, the abiku is also a living miracle, a point of intersection between this world and the other, the present and the past. (The Yoruba, quite logically, argue that for there to be a world of living beings, there must have been an antecedent world of unborn children; the world of the unborn is therefore older than the world of the living.) Pique, in *The Diviners*, exhibits many of the traits of the Yoruba abiku, transplanted to a European

and Canadian setting. Her frequent illnesses and bouts of influenza nearly break Morag's spirit and underline her tenuous hold on life. But it is as Morag and Skinner Tonnerre's child, the point where the converging lines of a Canadian history of miscegenation meet—the bridge between Indian, Meti, Highlander, English – that she assumes her mundanely miraculous role as the optimistic centre of the novel. She comes and goes with the Canada geese, but her origin lies in the Yoruba child-spirit.

Laurence's motives for importing African spirits to the Canadian prairies, however masked and disguised, lack any single or simple design. At the root however, lies a desire to find materials untainted by the dead hand of an English, and later American cultural imperialism. She describes the Canadian writer's situation in the 1950s and 1960s as being 'like that of all people with colonial mentalities...not unlike that of women in our society.'²⁸ She turns specifically to Africa for the subject of her first novel, *This Side Jordan*, because it offered her the 'theme of an independence which was both political and inner. I was from a land that has been a colony, a land which in some ways was still colonial'.²⁹

Mannoni's work on the psychological effects of colonialism, *Prospero and Caliban*, was influential, not only for her travel writings on Somalia, but as a dualistic formal principle in the composition of *This Side Jordan*, where the alternating voices of coloniser and colonised form the basic structure of the novel. These formulae constitute the weakest elements in the African legacy, rather as if the creative context is given over to simplistic duality of response to a complex pattern of interrelated issue. In the story 'The Rain Child', for example, Ruth's nemesis with her African inheritance occurs when she is asked to 'Shoot a gun' at a young man. This common form of flirtation is glossed by the schoolteacher-narrator in the most unconvincing pseudo-mythic fashion:

I could have told her it used to be 'Shoot an arrow', for Mother Nature created the sun with fire, and arrows of the same fire were shot into the veins of mankind and became lifeblood I could have said that the custom was a reminder that women are the source of life.³⁰

It is in its one aspect- the areas gained mostly from Soyinka and Achebe- that the African dimension is most fruitfully employed' in helping 'to maintain the close and necessary relationship with the ancestors and gods'.³¹ "We stand in need of our gods, and we need links with our ancestors, partly in order to determine what we hope to become and to know what sort of society we will try form."³²

The voices of the ancestors are heard, not for their exotic colour, nor for slogans, but as in Soyinka's plays, as the means of creating rules for living and becoming. But their messages are not always easy, nor their gifts as benevolent as Pique. In the story 'The Drummer of all the World', death lives in a fetish hut on the Ghana coast. By the end of story, the belief in fetishes has declined in Ghana and Death has been let out of his confinement. 'A deserted hut on the shore is only a heap of mud and dried palm leaves. Death no longer keeps such a simple establishment.'³³ What Arthur Ravenscroft calls Laurence's society of outlook emerges from her meditation on death in Africa. It is a fascination which she shares with Soyinka. But whereas Soyinka incorporates death within a larger conception of a metaphysics transition,³⁴ Margaret Laurence is in awe of an image which haunts her imagination. The incident occurred in the Somali desert, when Laurence's party came upon a young woman dying of thirst by the side of the road:

She must have possessed, once, a tenderly beautiful face. Now her face was drawn and pinched. In her hands she held an empty tin cup. She did not move at all, or ask for water. Despair keeps its own silence. Her brown robe swayed in the wind. She carried a baby slung across one hip. The child's face was quiet, too, its head lolling in the heavy heat of the sun.³⁵

The encounter raises a question, meant more for Laurence herself than the reader or the dying woman:

To her I must have seemed meaningless, totally unrelated to herself. 'How could it have been otherwise?' The image returns in a later story, 'The Mask of Beaten Gold', but set, not in the Haud, but in water-abundant Ghana. An Englishman

suddenly sees his African wife in a different setting: He saw a gauntness, a skeletal woman with vacant eyes squatting in the red dust somewhere, by some roadside, not understanding the politics of famine, knowing only that her child and her own flesh were dying.³⁶

The chapter on Somali poetry in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*,³⁷ is remarkable for many things. A brief encounter with Andrzejewski's work and J. W. Johnson's unpublished thesis on the Heello genre in Modern Somali poetry presents rather a different picture.³⁸ What remains fascinating about much of Somali poetry is its topicality, its articulation of purely Somali concerns and, in common with much African oral art, of that sense of otherness to be gained from Laurence's presentation of these lyrical fragments. Rather, the admittedly unrepresentative selection seems to have been chosen for its proximity to western literary criteria with little sense of these poems' status within the society which created them. The power which this kind of language possesses, and the authority with which it is invested, originates not in Somali but is granted by the canon of English literature and its community of professional interpreters.

Similarly, Laurence's treatment of the contexts of Nigerian drama is often marked by a desire to efface its 'otherness'. The religious cults of the Yoruba are no more esoteric than the religious cults of the Methodist or High Anglican. All are a particular people's way of viewing themselves in relation to their world, past and present, and in relation to their god or gods.³⁹ The appeal to a fundamental transcultural humanity finds refuge in Laurence's writings, in a transhistorical comparison which collapses time, distance and cultural difference on to a common pool of fundamental relationships.

It is not necessary to be Yoruba to appreciate Soyinka's plays any more than it is necessary to be Greek to care about the plays of Euripides.⁴⁰ The world about which Sophocles and Euripides were writing was a tribal world, governed by gods, brooded over by ancestors. Precisely the same could be said of the traditional Ijaw society.⁴¹

Elsewhere, the appeal of African literature is to our sense of universal archetypal forms projected from the unconscious into literary shapes. On *A Dance of the Forest* Laurence writes: 'It becomes clear that we are interested in archetypes'. In common with 'literature everywhere, Nigerian texts offer insights into the human dilemma as a whole'. 'The best of Nigerian plays and novels reveal something of ourselves to us, whoever and wherever we are.' Thus Nigerian writings become 'a significant part of world literature' by its ability to transcend its specificity, its Nigerianness. Laurence's criticism reads from the text back into the culture, to propose shifts in cultural patterns of belief; a movement observed in a 'shift of affiliation from Earth Mother to Sky Father' in one particularly Frobenious-like example. Equally, tribal groupings are given specific qualities arising from their geographical settings; the Ibo, because of their forest homelands 'tended to be a tense, excitable and nervous people'. In an aside which owe more to a laconic view of history, Laurence bemoans the fact that 'men cannot any longer be cast in the heroic mould'.⁴² She surprises herself with the realisation that Soyinka, in writing about Ogun, is writing about a god who is real!'.⁴³

In her later years, she reflected on her first novel: 'I actually wonder how I had the nerve to attempt to go into the mind of an African man'.⁴⁴ The true complexity of the issue of Laurence's cross-cultural experiments appears to her as not being 'a matter of intelligence but of viewing the whole of life through different eyes. People are not oyster shells to be pried at'.⁴⁵ This lack of familiarity, accompanied by a strong sense of the dignity of African cultures, exercise a perpetual restraint on her writings.

Thus we see that Africa helped Laurence to maintain the close and necessary relationship with the ancestors and gods'.⁴⁶ "We stand in need of our gods, and we need links with our ancestors, partly in order to determine what we hope to become and know what sort of society we will try to form."⁴⁷ Although Laurence's fiction can hardly be said to be conventionally religious, there is running through her work a deep concern with what invests human life with meaning. Some scholars have noted that Canada, in much of its literature, would seem to be a country of the Old Testament, a country of exile, of alienation, of vindictive divinity, and Laurence concedes that this conception, derived from her Scots – Presbyterian ancestors, is to be found in her work. But she also points to a sense of hope as well which may be identified

with the New Testament and which is evidenced, not in formal Christian theology, but rather in the attaining through struggle of what might be termed a secular state of grace, a discovery of the self, a fresh awareness of the individual's relationship to the human community, an experience of freedom. However depressing some aspects of Laurence's work may be, there is always a sense of what is at the root of all true religion: an affirmation of the essential worth of human life. Her Manawaka cycle of fiction, moves with a "rhythm of reconciliation" which expresses a sense of design and of beneficent purpose in the universe.

3. SMALL-TOWN AND SCOTTISH MYTHOLOGIES IN LAURENCE'S WORKS

This section deals with the Scottish mythologies in Laurence's fiction. It also analyses Laurence's concept of Manawaka, the small-town mythology, her treatment of the city and agrarianism in her works.

The Canadian mythology of the Scottish was based, of course, on a solid ground fact: on the number of Scots who were prominent in the exploring and settling of the country in its fur trade, and later, on every level of government and financial enterprise; on the Presbyterian Church, the Established Church of Scotland and so, with its legacy of Calvinism, a prime and powerful institution to its people; and above all, on the pride of race and clan among the Scots, a pride that distanced from the homeland enhanced and fostered. Certainly the Laurentian thesis implies a great band of Heroes and Builders and certainly the Scots are paramount among them.⁴⁹ What Carl Berger says of the Loyalist is also true of the Scottish tradition: 'It began, as did all myths of national origins, with the assertion that the founders of British Canada were God's chosen people.'⁵⁰ The vastly popular novels of Sir Walter Scott, their heroes and their elevation of the common people, the Jeannie Deans of the world, were certainly a force in the propagation of the mythology. Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, for instance, acknowledges Scott's influence in the text of *Les Anciens Canadiens* (1863), and his work celebrates the two races, Scottish and French Canadian.

The work of Carlyle, his philosophy of Heroes and his doctrine of work certainly played its part as well. In his instructions for the teaching of history in Ontario schools, Egerton Ryerson,

the founder of the system, made a special point of the use of biography by the time Duncan wrote *The Imperialist* three generations of students were undoubtedly familiar with the Carlylean Hero and the Carlylean work ethic which dovetailed so neatly with the actual necessities and opportunities of an expanding nation. In *Novels of Empire* (1949), Suzanne Howe did not deal with Canadian works she did, however, deal with the influence of Carlyle on the novelists of British India.⁵¹

The social mythology of the Small Town is also based on a ground-work of historical fact, on a time when Canada was predominantly rural and towns like Manawaka were important centres of their agricultural districts; purveyors, for their areas of education, religion and culture as well as of the necessities of trade. The heyday of the small town was over by 1900, but for long after they were largely an urban people Canadians liked to think of themselves as farm-, not city-centred, and of the town as a centre of society and commerce.

Margaret Laurence has worked with both the Small Town and the Scottish mythologies in all of her Canadian works. Like MacLennan and Duncan before her she rejects superficial complacencies: Jason Currie of *The Stone Angel* is a builder indeed, but he has turned towards power, pride and the death of natural feeling. He is 'a fledgling pharaoh in an uncouth land'. The town of Manawaka symbolises constraint far more than opportunity for its young. But her devotion to the old heroic myth of the Scots is always evident too in Hagar's pride in her clan's rallying cry, 'Gainsay Who Dare' and in Christie Logan's series of tales about Piper Gunn and the coming of the Sutherlanders to Manitoba. Both MacLennan and Laurence write of a double Canadian heritage, however: French Canada has been prominent in MacLennan's work, and in the Manawaka works the Metis share the mythic background, especially in *The Diviners*, where Christie Logan's tales share their place with the tales of Jules Tonnerre.

For all of Laurence's exposure of Manawaka's limitations and constraints her characters carry Manawaka with them always, and finally accept that they do so. The Scottish mythology moves towards the separation of the individual from the group, towards an identity that is at once elite and egalitarian, based on hardships overcome or, at the very least, endured with pride in the endurance. It is a Canadian mythic and secular doctrine of the elect.⁵²

3.1. AGRARIANISM

With the small town mythology also goes a pervasive agrarianism. In Margaret Laurence's work the agrarian and the maternal ideals are implicit. In all of her work, *The Tomorrow-Tamer* and *This Side Jordan* as well as the Canadian works, the personalities of her adult women rest on motherhood or, in the case of Violet Nedden of 'The Rain Child' and Rachel Cameron of *A Jest of God*, on frustrated maternalism. Laurence, however, writes of the spoiling of the agrarian dream. *The Stone Angel's* tidy cemetery with its planted and pompous peonies is a garden of the dead, but the wild garden beyond still lives and pushes its stubborn growth within the cemetery's borders.⁵³

They were tough-rooted, these wild and gaudy flowers, and although they were held back at the cemetery's edge, torn out by loving relatives determined to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch a faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair. (*The Stone Angel*, p. 5)

Though Hagar Shipley sees herself as a rebel to her father's kind, she is one of the exploiters herself. She calls Bram's way with the land shiftless, and only briefly realises that he is a man from the agrarian past. When his horse, Soldier, is frozen in the blizzard she understands, for a moment, his grief, but 'Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke. I know that full well, although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise' (*The Stone Angel*, p. 88).

In *The Diviners* there is a new, young breed of agrarian - A OK. Smith and Maudie- who are determined to make their living from the land. Morag knows all about their difficulties and she recognises, too, that she depends on urban civilisation for much of her comfort and convenience. Pique's friend, Dan, is going to raise palaminos in the west and for Laurence, as for McClung, the horse symbolises freedom from the tyranny of machines. At the last, Pique is going back to her father's people at Galloping Mountain, whose lives combine an agrarian

ideal with social reform, for they make their farm a home for the children and dynamic centre of hope and renewal for the entire Tonnerre connection.

In Laurence's work, the city seems beyond hope, at best a necessary centre for education and the fuelling of the young for their work in the world. Stacey Cameron's Vancouver is like a bizarre, surrealistic hell where no one knows his next-door neighbour, where a good man like Mac is tied to a demanding and papistical job. Stacey dreams of the horror of the Apocalypse, the city in flames, and of a green island where she can take her children to safety. But she knows there is no escape from urban life for herself and her family. Though she comes to a hard-won peace within herself, there is no respite to be had from the ominous presence of the city around her. The last lines of the book express the fear and uncertainty that she knows she has to live with. 'She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?' (*The Fire-Dwellers*, p. 308). Morag Gunn escapes from Manawaka to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Toronto, Vancouver and London, but she finally finds her peace and her place in her house by the river in the Ontario countryside.

4. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that all the themes mentioned in this chapter are related to the theme of freedom. The search for inner freedom implies a quest-structure. Laurence says:

For it is the ancient quest which is the journey here, the descent into the dark regions where some special knowledge is gained, some revelation, before the return to the world of known creatures. The woman does return and will go back to the world of humans, but she has been given a knowledge of her own power, a power which has frightened her and which she has therefore denied and a knowledge of her previous willingness to be a victim, a willingness which had of course also victimised others.⁵⁴

The quester also achieves the knowledge that "the ancient gods of forest and lake are by no means dead". "Rites of Passage" becomes the title of the fourth chapter of *The Diviners* a

section where Morag descends into dark regions and returns with the knowledge of her own power. This chthonic experience underlies Nigerian drama and its world view.⁵⁵

All Laurence's protagonists make this journey and descent; and all return successfully. Laurence concludes that this theme, "Human-kinds" quest for the archetypal patterns, for our god, for our own meanings in the face of our knowledge of the inevitability of death "is central to mythology, religion and history."⁵⁶ Certainly, it is central to Laurence's fiction. Her protagonists struggle to achieve inner freedom, and all undergo rites of passage. Hagar wrestles with pride, Rachel, with fear; Stacey with frustration; Vanessa with her refusal to acknowledge her grandfather as part of herself; and Morag, with the fearful gift of creativity. The spiritual and psychological truth in Laurence's dramatization of these universal human experiences underlies the strength and beauty of her work.

NOTES

1. Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists Part I* (Toronto : Macmillan, 1973), p. 99.
2. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 124.
3. *ibid*, p. 25.
4. Patricia Morley, 'Canada, Africa, Canada : Laurence's unbroken journey', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol. 27 1980, p. 83.
5. *ibid*, p. 83.
6. Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots ? the novelist as socio-political being", in *A Political Art Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, William H. New, ed. (Vancouver : Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1978), pp. 24 – 25.
7. Margaret Laurence, "Sources", *Mosaic* III, 1970, 81.
8. Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower of Grassroots ? the novelist as socio-political being", in *A Political Art Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, William H. New, ed. (Vancouver : Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1978), p. 17.
9. Gerald More. *The Chosen Tongue*, p.151.
10. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.10.

11. Ibid.
12. Sinclair Ross, "The Lamp at noon and other stories", Introduction by Laurence, *NCL*, 62 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p.12.
13. Chinua Achebe, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation" *Nigerian Magazine*, 81, 1964.
14. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 59, 144-145.
15. Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice" in *The Narrative Voice*. Ed. L Metcalfe (Toronto: McGraw Hill: Ryerson, 1972), p. 127.
16. Laurence, 'Ivory Tower or Grassroots?', p. 17.
17. Ibid., p. 22.
18. Ibid.
19. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 64.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 117.
22. Margaret Laurence, 'Gadgetry or Growing: Form and voice in the Novel', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol. 27(1980)pp. 54-62.
23. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 13.
24. Arthur Ravenscroft, 'Africa in the Canadian Imagination of Margaret Laurence', in S. Chew (ed.), *Revisions of Canadian Literature* (Leeds: University of Leeds IBTC, 1985), p. 39.
25. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 40
26. Laurence, 'The Mask of Beaten Gold', p. 34.
27. Wole Soyinka, *Ake* (London: Rex Collings, 1981), p. 17.
28. Laurence, 'Ivory Tower or Grassroots?', p. 23.
29. Ibid., p. 22
30. Laurence, 'The Rain Child', p. 128.
31. Cited in Morley, 'Canada, Africa, Canada', p. 82
32. Laurence, 'Ivory Tower of Grassroots?', p. 16.
33. Margaret Laurence, 'The Drummer of All the World', in *The Tomorrow Tamer*, p. 19.
34. Cf. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
35. Margaret Laurence, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), pp. 65-6.
36. Laurence, 'The Mask of Beaten Gold', p. 31.
37. Laurence, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, pp. 190-202.

- 38 B.W. Andrzejewski and G. Innes, 'Reflections on African Oral Literature', *African Languages*, vol. 1 (1975) pp. 5-58; B. W. Andrzejewski, 'Poetry in Somali Society', in Pride and Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics* (Harmondworth, Middx: Penguin, 1972); J. W. Johnson Heellooy, *Heellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry* (Indian University: unpublished PhD Thesis, 1974).
39. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 16.
40. Ibid., p. 12
41. Ibid., p. 77.
42. Ibid., pp. 37,10,132,98,96.
43. Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 16.
44. Laurence, 'Gadgetry or Growing', p.55.
45. Cited in Morley, 'Canada, Africa, Canada', p. 85.
46. Patricia Morley, "Canada, Africa, Canada: Laurence's Unbroken Journey", *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol.27,1980, p.82.
47. Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grass roots? The Novelist as Socio-Political Being" in *A Political Art" Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*. William New, ed.. (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1978), p.16.
48. David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13, no. 3 Fall, 1978, p.13.
49. Sidney Wise, 'Liberal Consensus or Ideological Battleground: Some Reflections on the Hartz Thesis', *Historical Papers, Canadian Historical Association*, 1974, pp. 1-14.
50. Carl Berger, *Sense of Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 99.
51. Suzanne Howe, *Novels of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949) pp. 82
52. See also 'The Town – Our Tribe', Ch. 9 in Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975); Clara Thomas, 'Social Mythologies in Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1977) pp. 38 – 49.
53. See also Clara Thomas, 'Women Writers and the New Land', *In the New Land: Studies in a Literary Theme*, ed. By R. Chadbourne and H. Dahile (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), pp. 45-59
54. Laurence, untitled review of *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, *Quarry*, 22, no.2 , Spring 1973, p. 63.
55. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.153.
56. Laurence, untitled review of *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, *Quarry*,22,no.2 , Spring 1973, p.64.

CHAPTER III

THE STONE ANGEL

CHAPTER III

THE STONE ANGEL

*The Stone Angel*¹ is Laurence's first Manawaka novel. It is also her richest prairie novel, enabling the reader to get a clear glimpse of the concept of wilderness that Canada is always associated with. Not only is Hagar characterised in terms of the prairie but she lives as a struggling farmer's wife for some 24 years, a rugged kind of experience known by none of Laurence's other Manawakan protagonists. We also get our first glimpse of Manawaka, an amalgam of prairie towns and Laurence's own private world. It is a mythic territory, mapping universal human experience and a Scots-Canadian subculture in the Canadian West. In order to enhance a thorough understanding of the novel, I have divided this chapter into specific sections. Together they bring out the thematics of the novel. National identity, personal identity, redemption, lack of communication or miscommunication are some of the themes Laurence has dealt with in this novel. Also dealt with at length is the sin of pride and its disastrous consequences as well as causes; fear of loss of image, loss of family connections, loss of dynasty; fear of losing culture and independence; fear of isolation; fear of the condescending attitude of others in old age and the fear of losing material possessions are some of the fears that make Hagar Shipley, the main protagonist, a proud woman and which ultimately leads to her downfall. However the main theme is that of survival: survival with dignity. According to Laurence, survival is possible only with the recognition that total freedom is not possible; that a knowledge of roots is essential; that by nature human beings are different from what society compels them to be. In *The Stone Angel*, life is presented the way it actually is. Laurence believes that individuals need to recognize, understand and thereby accept the forces which govern us. This is essential if one is to survive with dignity despite the fact that it is not possible to be totally free from the shackles of dependency and empowerment.

We are also introduced to the Metis and the racial discrimination that exists between the half breeds and the others. Thus we see that *The Stone Angel* is very much a novel of middle-class aspiration and folly; all very well brought out through the character of Hagar Shipley. Proud descendant of a family that could claim clan connections, a lapsed Scottish baronetcy and self-made success in pioneering Canada, Hagar(Currie)Shipley has little time for the larger questions of social order and justice, a blindness that was deep rooted in many people of her generation.

The novel presents fate as an amalgam of character and circumstance, the two forces interacting complexly. The individual is certainly the victim. In the case of Hagar it is the pendulum like oscillation between impulses of order and disorder, respectability and passion, dynastic pride and individual need that dictate the unfolding of her life and characterise her 'blindness'. It never occurs to Hagar to ask the serious question 'why' when it comes to the tyranny of social circumstances. Hagar is preoccupied by the significance of her Scottish roots. She is deeply influenced by the Currie legacy of clan, nobility and self-made success, of familial significance in both the old world and the new. To the Currie grandeur she grafts, out of her own energy and need for self-justification, the lesser Shipley legacy just as she defies personal history by linking the family names on a single pedestal in the Manawaka cemetery. In attending so tenaciously to the tight fisted, unyielding and proud Scottish spirit, Laurence tapped a major nerve in the Canadian sensibility. *The Stone Angel*, as we shall now see is unabashedly middle-class, Scottish and small-town in its emphases. As such, it captures something essential about the energy, enterprise, mood and pattern of the settlement and development that have characterised not only the growth of Manitoba but of Canada as a whole. Though but one of Manitoba's and Canada's many cultural threads, the Scotts middle-class outlook incarnated in Jason Currie and passed on to his rebellious daughter is the firm base upon which, in her later Manawaka novels, Laurence was able, without inconsistency, to integrate her developing social concerns, particularly her empathy with the victims and the dispossessed who have been cast aside in the province's and the country's growth.

I shall begin by examining the plot.

1. PLOT

Laurence starts off her Manawaka sequence by setting the small town within well defined boundaries of geography and history underlining its materiality and placing at its centre the powerful 'I' narrator, 90 year old Hagar Shipley. Duplicity, concealment and dual vision are built into the novel's very form. The ninety year old Hagar tells two stories at once, though they are two aspects of the same story : her life. In the fictional present she runs away from her son and daughter-in-law after they try to deposit her in the Silver Threads nursing home. This is her last rebellion in a long, rebellious life. She escapes to an old cannery, where she has a confessional conversation with a stranger, Murray F. Lees. Then she is taken to a hospital where she makes two friends before she dies. Interwoven with this simple story are Hagar's memories of her life and of her strained relations with men: her strict Scottish father; her uncouth but affectionate husband, Bram; her unruly son John. All have died and she was survived in her loneliness to wander a wilderness of pride like her biblical namesake. Through her regular alteration of past and present, we see, contrasted, the impetuous girl and the willful old woman. We also get our first view of Manawaka, its light social hierarchy, its legacy of stubborn strength and scorn for weakness, its reverence for ancestry as represented by Scottish Tartans and war cries.

Through a clever orchestration of times, Laurence fuses the two story lines so that when after much self-deception, Hagar finally confesses her sins and asks pardon, she speaks to Murray Lees though she believes it is John. Out of kindness, Lees accepts the role asked of him and grants forgiveness. Later she is reconciled with her other son Marvin. But Hagar remains proud to the end and never fully accepts that the past is irrevocable. She continues to rage against fate and is admirable for the immense, selfish, unyielding strength that is her undoing. She is as Marvin says "a holy terror". Hagar's sequence of flashbacks like Rachel's debates, Stacey's montage of fantasies, fears and rebukes and Morag's "Memorybanks Movies" provides recurring structural units expressing the drift of the mind as she assesses her life. To assess one's life means to give it a logical pattern or

meaning. For Laurence, ties means to discover its emotional, intellectual and moral order. Therefore the orders of story, mind and life are all the same and all are governed by voice to the ancient Hagar. The shape of her whole life simply is a series of disparate memories which she seeks to connect.

2. NARRATIVE AND STRUCTURE

In this section, I shall examine the narrative and structure of *The Stone Angel*. 90 years old Hagar Shipley is the 'I' narrator. The structure consists of two parallel strands of narrative, one of which concerns Hagar's confrontation with the brutal facts of old age while the other returns, by means of a series of flashbacks, to her life in Manawaka; childhood, marriage to Brampton Shipley, the death of her favourite son John. The structure of the novel is a cinematographic one which interweaves two time sequences of greatly unequal length; the few weeks that lead to Hagar's death and the years of her long life, but of equal thematic importance, in so far as they are both necessary to an understanding of the characters spiritual struggle. Laurence expresses doubt about the way she handled the flashback method:

I'm not at all sure that flashbacks ought to be in chronological order, as I placed them in order to make it easier for the reader to follow Hagar's life²

However, despite this problem and the neat sequences of the novel *The Stone Angel* enjoys a central place in Canadian literature and also among novels wherein the story is narrated by an old protagonist. Besides the thematics, this is due to various reasons. There is a vitality and force in the character of Hagar which lends uniqueness to the novel. Hagar is conferred with immortality and it is achieved because we are made to see the character as something more than words. Laurence has made her seem like flesh and blood, perishable and poignant beyond words.

2.1.1. CHARACTER OF HAGAR

The captive exile, blind to herself and to the needs of others, is a fitting description of Hagar. Laurence has conceived of her heroine as a tragic figure, a woman who unknowingly brings about her own unhappiness. Her great flaw is her pride, her instinct to rebel. Her stubborn refusal to yield to the wishes of others proves as destructive to herself as to those around her. Her old age is a purgatory in which she is tormented by her memories of a wanted and unhappy life. For us, the readers, her life unfolds in a series of scenes in which she obstinately held herself apart from others, refusing to give or accept love.

Hagar tries to make sense of the emotional currents of her life. She has a stern ethical sense, fruit of her presbyterian upbringing, which insists that cause and effect can be calculated, responsibility can be assessed, blame must be assigned. She seeks justice. She reveals this desire to the reader, if not to herself, when at the cannery she fancifully constructs a courtroom from her natural surroundings; she concludes:

Now we need only summon the sparrows as jurors, but they'd condemn me quick as a wink, no doubt.³

In effect, Hagar puts herself on trial and argues for both prosecution and defence. Even a guilty verdict would be welcome because it would resolve the chaos of her experience into an ethical pattern. Unfortunately, she finds it impossible to assign responsibility or guilt. Hagar's strong 'reality' quotient is a function of her pressing need for some version of continuance, some species of immortality. Her need is a function of her old age as the proximity of death and the spectacle of ninety misspent years demand riposte. Indeed, Laurence has done a great job in the reation of Hagar Shipley.

Margaret Laurence defined herself as a writer whose fate or task or vocation was the creation of character. "Form for its own sake is an abstraction which carries no allure for me"⁴ what she has sought was "a form that would allow the characters to come through"⁵ "a form through which the characters can breathe".⁶ Laurence used a visual metaphor⁷ to describe

her ideal form: She has described her ideal form as "a forest, through which one can see outward, in which the shapes of trees do not prevent air and sun, and in which the trees themselves are growing structures, something alive."⁸ What seems to be at work here is the revision and reversal of an old cliché. We should not be prevented from seeing out of the forest by the trees, that is, the elements of form must not obscure our vision of that reality which lies beyond form, and animates it. And we should not be prevented from seeing the trees by the forest; that is, the form as a whole must not obscure our vision of that reality which continues to grow and change within it. Her concern, it seems, is to discover a form in which characters can breathe fresh air. And I think this follows from her interest in the dialectic between fixed or rooted elements of the human personality and the winds of change. She wants her characters to breathe not only in the sense of coming to life, and transcending the "gadgetry" of form, but also in the sense of 'growing.' Her exclusion of the metaphor of the house has a special bearing on the novel *The Stone Angel* because Hagar has throughout her life made the mistake of identifying herself with that 'enclosing edifice.' In old age, and in the 'growing' form of the novel that Laurence discovers for her, Hagar is able at last to emerge from the carapace of her 'house.' It is only in this departure from her accustomed form that Hagar can achieve the immortality of characters who are 'growing' still in the last chapter.

2.1.2. HAGAR'S MEMORY AND VOICE

Laurence spoke of her uncertainty over the chronological ordering of Hagar's memory and the 'poetic' quality of her voice. Laurence's question was whether the methods she had chosen 'diminish[ed] the novel's resemblance to life.'⁹ On the memory issue, she defended her choice by suggesting that 'writing however consciously unordered its method, is never as disorderly as life. Art, in fact, is never life. It is never as paradoxical, chaotic, complex or as alive as life.'¹⁰ We can conclude that her argument that art is never life, is an attempt to seize upon the difference, not to excuse the gap, but to exploit it.

The Stone Angel is an attempt by Margaret Laurence to redeem or perform a salvage operation on a character. The text is an arena in which Laurence exercises both her skill

and her love, for this imagined person, for whatever real persons may have contributed to the invention of Hagar, and for the human enterprise. A significant factor in our admiration or love for this novel is the presence of Laurence, accomplishing through art the feat of human salvage; the river flows both ways, and we associate Margaret Laurence's triumph with Hagar's own emancipation, so that each extends a kind of grace or power to the other. So Hagar's memories are invoked in chronological order; moreover, each memory is interrupted by a present event only when the past segment has yielded its relevant content. The effect of all this is to remind us of artifice. The threat to realism is contained by various artful dodges, including the credible triggers for memory which propel Hagar from the present into the past. A notable example occurs in the woods at Shadow Point, where Hagar sees the sparrows as "jurors [who would] condemn [her] quick as a wink, no doubt", (*The Stone Angel*, p.192.) and then remembers the locus of her 'crime', the scene in which she and Lottie had plotted to separate their children. Because this is a particularly long segment, Laurence also gives us a clump of moss and a blind slug which are sounded fore and aft to frame the memory; these are natural, probable signposts, to be sure-but they are also mutedly symbolic, and artful.

Therefore the gap between art and life which is revealed to Laurence by the necessarily greater disorder of life is a dynamic gap; from the energy that crosses to and fro both are enriched. The novel is splendid partly because art and life, or the author and the character, are allowed to reflect each other passionately across that gap.

2.2. THE STONE ANGEL AS VOLLENDUNGSROMAN¹¹

The interplay of life and art, and of the character with her author, is a necessary approach to *The Stone Angel*, a novel about old age. I shall now analyse *The Stone Angel* as 'The Vollendungsroman', that is the novel of "completion" or "winding up." *The Stone Angel* has become a central or prototypical example of this genre, for a number of reasons that I shall be sketching here. There generally is in the Vollendungsroman, and with great force in *The Stone Angel*, a kind of alliance between the elderly character and the author, as language itself becomes the agent of affirmation.

2.2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF A VOLLENDUNGSROMAN

A special intensity (resulting from the proximity to darkness) characterizes the Vollandungsroman. The writer's imagination is challenged by the prospect of the character's demise, and by the need to 'capture' a life before it vanishes. Behind this, and quite apart from the question of the author's own age, is undoubtedly the spectre of the writer's own aging and prospective death. Writing is always an act directed against death; it may become that more specifically and more urgently when the writer's subject is old age. Thus, we feel strongly the need that Laurence feels to let her elderly protagonist speak "before [her] mouth is stopped with dark" (*The Stone Angel* p.139.)

2.2.1.1. HAGAR AS THE ELDERLY PROTAGONIST

For reasons I shall continue to explore, Hagar the elderly protagonist has pronounced fictional clout. Elderly protagonists cannot engage our interest if "dealt within [their] subjective aspect." For this is exactly the "aspect" of old age that contemporary fiction chooses to reveal. When the closed subject becomes an open book, when the mask of stereotypical old age is torn away and the icon stirs, when the elderly character in fiction is allowed to reveal herself as subject, we discover that indeed there is "development to be looked for." In the case of *The Stone Angel*, that development is "looked for"- by author, character, and reader- all the more urgently because of the constraints that operate against it.

The Stone Angel gives us the elderly protagonist from inside. A cantankerous old woman, Hagar Shipley is an obstacle and a problem for her family; but we take her side to a remarkable degree, because we were given access to it. So we see what Hagar says, does and the effect she has on others and much of that we would judge harshly, but because Hagar is allowed to tell her own story, because we enter her consciousness and we live there, we can respond to her more fairly. We learn to value her rich sensuality and the free play of her wit; we see the other side of the coin, her capacity for youth, all the positive

qualities that have been so tragically denied in Hagar's presentation of self to the world. We come to understand as well the social forces; familiar, patriarchal, and puritanical which have led her to this distortion. And that very pride which we deplore in its outer workings, as well as for Hagar's sake is revealed to us as a means of survival. The subject of old age is a powerful one for other reasons too. The invisibility or marginalization of old people, their reduction to stereotype, their occupation of a zone behind the mask all of this may provide special impetus to one of the writer's most crucial drives, which is, to see other human beings clearly and may also stimulate the writer's most crucial drives, which is to see other human beings clearly. The indignities suffered by the elderly as their bodies betray them, as memory fails, as social power is stripped away and condescension mounts, may also stimulate the writer's need to proffer dignity through art. In *The Stone Angel* Laurence moves us inexorably from a puerile assumption of the "we": "Well, how are we today?" she inquires" (*TSA*, p.277.) to a truer sense of the tribulations of old people.

The elderly character is also attractive for a number of more "technical" literary reasons. To begin with, she makes available to the writer nearly the whole span of a life history- as opposed to just that truncated, glibly predictive bit before the heroine decides whom to marry. She picks up the human story at a pivotal and richly dramatic point, when the evaluation of life seems most urgent, and when the old dramatic question of what comes next is most especially poignant. She may also function for the writer as a touchstone (and victim or champion) of social attitudes that have shaped our past and that operate still even in a climate of radical revision. All of this, Hagar clearly does.

2.2.1.1 SPEECH

The act of speech operates in the *Vollendungsroman* in several ways. Broadly or metaphorically speaking, it is all of the writing performed on the protagonist's behalf by the novelist; more literally, it includes the inner (silent) discourse of the protagonist; finally, of course, it is all speech performed out loud by the elderly protagonist. Speech of this most literal kind may be divided further. Often, there is something that must be said to other characters, in order to free them from their own lives; this is illustrated by Hagar's

statement to Marvin that he has been "good to [her], always. A better son than John" (*TSA*, p. 304). And it is typical of the *Vollendungsroman* that the truth of this crucial speech act should be in question; what matters is that the thing be said, the gist of it, before the power of speech is gone. An imprecise formulation even a lie, though Hagar speaks more truly than she knows- is not only preferable to silence, but all that can be hoped for. If Hagar fails 'to speak the heart's truth', (*TSA*, p.221) she fails in part because we all necessarily fail and because language fails, always. Still, it is what we have. Through language, we communicate some portion or version of "the heart's truth" and so become visible, assuming a more or less reliable shape in one another's eyes so that Marvin, in his turn, can remark to the nurse that his mother is "a holy terror" (*TSA*, p.304.) and Hagar can feel this accolade as "more than [she] could... reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness". (*TSA*, p.305.) However imperfectly, Hagar and Marvin connect in time through language. Such moments have a heightened importance in the *Vollendungsroman*, where time is running out.

It is characteristic of the *Vollendungsroman* that the elderly protagonist is tormented by the memory of characters who have died before some vital message could be delivered or received. Thus, Hagar wants Bram to know she loved him and wants John to know that she regrets the plot to separate him from Arlene. And it is too late. But *The Stone Angel*, like other *Vollendungsromans*, supplies amelioration through delayed and displaced speech, as figures like Murray Lees appear to take the words that Hagar needs to give. None of this can change the damage she has done to others in the past; "Nothing can take away those years" (*TSA*, p.292.), as Hagar knows full well, unleashing the savage irony that she hears in the minister's words of comfort. Yet language can begin to repair the damage Hagar has done to herself. Speech acts, exchanged with surrogate figures, help her to see what might have been and what she is capable of being even now. They collapse time even as they enforce its tragic necessity, and reveal to Hagar her continuing potential for connectedness in the human family. Hagar thinks that she is "unchangeable, unregenerate. I go on speaking in the same way, always"; (*TSA*, p.293.) Thus her problem with speech is as much with what she says as what she fails to say; and her problem is that in both ways she separates herself from others. Following this self-accusation, however, Hagar withdraws her dismissive remark about the

minister- "We didn't have a single solitary thing to say to one another"- and admits to Doris that "He sang for me, and it did me good". Interestingly, the hymn that Hagar had requested of Mr. Troy is the one "that starts out All people that on earth do dwell"; (*TSA*, p.291.) thus, the "single solitary" state of alienation and failed speech is pierced by chords addressing all. Song here- as often in the *Vollendungsroman*- seems to leap the gap between silence and speech, bringing into consciousness the individual's yearning for community. It propels Hagar into the kind of recognition which occurs most frequently for the elderly protagonist, a need to shake off the "chains within" and welcome joy.

Words that are delivered to surviving characters, messages that are routed to the dead through intermediaries, talk in which the aged protagonist may exercise a freer version of the self; these are some of the speech acts that point toward affirmation in the *Vollendungsroman*. Always, they are imperfect or imprecise. But that is necessarily the case, since the *Vollendungsroman* negotiates between speech and silence, between the lived and un-lived life- and since desire is never satisfied. What seems to matter is that it be expressed. Hagar's life has been more mistaken than most- her story more unspoken and misspoken- but the distance she feels between what her life has been and what it should have been is entirely typical of the *Vollendungsroman*. *The Stone Angel* is a novel of old age; of "completion" or "winding up," and a characteristic of this text is the recognition that human projects are never completed. Time runs out, as pages do. Only rarely does such a text conclude with a ringing endorsement of what the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson refers to as the old person's "one and only life". But *The Stone Angel*, in which Hagar is struggling desperately to change and grow, in which categorically she refuses to gloss over her mistakes and deprivation, is a far more typical case. Art here reflects and seeks to compensate for the incompleteness of a human life. With the question of Hagar's 'poetic' voice, Laurence considers it as a possible lapse in verisimilitude. Laurence begins by recalling her anxiety when she read over certain of Hagar's more elaborate or 'poetic' descriptions: "Were these in fact Hagar's or were they me? I worried about this quite a lot, because I did not want Hagar to think out of character". But she justifies her decision to let this voice stand by appealing to her sense of conviction in the writing- "I could not really believe those descriptions were out of character", and to the notion that rescinding them "would be a

kind of insult" to Hagar. She argues further that "even people who are relatively inarticulate...are perfectly capable within themselves of perceiving the world in more poetic terms...than their outer voices might indicate."

This defense suggests Laurence's fervent advocacy of her character, her need to take Hagar's side and to arm her as fully as their shared humanity permits. Hagar's voice- with its high degree of rhetorical polish - even in the vernacular- is nonetheless very clearly a literary construct. However, the effect of Hagar's very literary panache is not of self-consciousness on her author's part, but rather of a desire (shared by author and character) that Hagar should express herself as well and as fully as possible before the lights go out. Margaret Laurence's fear was that to censor Hagar's 'poetic' voice "would be a kind of insult to her. And that, I wasn't willing to risk- indeed I did not dare"; it would seem, then, that Laurence herself believed in the spiritual authenticity of Hagar's educated voice.

2.2.1.3. IMAGERY

The Stone Angel is a prototypical example of the *Vollendungsroman* also in its extensive use of the most characteristic imagery of old age. For instance, the image of the house, with which Laurence plays so elaborately in using "Stonehouse" as Aunt Doll's surname and in having Marvin sell "housepaint". Laurence begins her manipulation of this image with the old woman's characteristic fear of dispossession. The house is then developed as an image of the self, the societal construct and the body. What Hagar must do in preparation for her death is, she must wean herself from that cocoon, that carapace of appearances, that entrenched idea of the self, and 'admit' the forces of nature. Understandably, she is afraid. Her fear of intruders in the house is the fear of death that Laurence explores in many strands of the novel's imagery. Other images that are typical of the *Vollendungsroman* include the sea and the transitional identification of Hagar as a gypsy (who makes her home in nature.) Angels as figures poised between two worlds, as messengers and mediators- are also surprisingly common. Another appropriate example here is the mirror, which Laurence uses in two opposing ways. On the one hand, she holds the mirror up to a literal and appalling truth - as Hagar sees in it "a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribbled over

the skin with an indelible pencil" (*TSA*, p.179) - and on the other hand, she permits Hagar to "feel that if [she] were to walk carefully up to [her] room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise,[she] would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair....". (*TSA*, p.42.)

2.2.1.4. LIFE REVIEW

Perhaps the most common form of the *Vollendungsroman* is the life review, in which narrative time is divided between past and present. The past in which the characteristic matter of the *Bildungsroman* is recapitulated is typically approached and controlled through the operation of the elderly protagonist's memory. The present 'mirrors' the past in a number of complex ways, as the protagonist's most basic identity themes are both reasserted and deconstructed in the final phase of life. The life review is more than a structural device. It has philosophical implications that take us to the heart of the *Vollendungsroman* and the lives of elderly people. "The universal occurrence in older people is an inner experience or mental process of reviewing one's life"¹⁴. Butler suggests that "the life review, Janus-like, involves facing death as well as looking back"¹⁵ and that "potentially [it] proceeds towards personality reorganization. Thus, the life review is not synonymous with, but includes reminiscence." It includes also, as *The Stone Angel* does, a vital concern with the possibility of change. Many of these insights and clinical observations are relevant to the case of Hagar, and to the process of the life review as it is depicted in fiction. Butler remarks, for instance, that "imagery of past events and symbols of death seem frequent in waking life as well as in dreams, suggesting that the life review is a highly visual process"¹⁶. Inherently, then, the life review is a kind of literary process as well; and Butler may be cited as supplying evidence for the interpenetration of life and art that helps to characterize the *Vollendungsroman*.

The verisimilitude of Hagar's 'poetic' voice, as a register of visually proliferating images - birds and eggs, for example, images that we associate with death and captivity and rebirth - is vindicated by Butler's work. His essay is also concerned with the question of therapeutic value in the process of the life review. Butler rejects the position of certain psychotherapists that old people should not be encouraged to engage in life review, since

they will only be devastated by their failures and their incapacity to repair them. He argues instead for the inherent value of 'truth', and for the possibility of change at any point in the life cycle; he believes, in any case, in the inevitability of the life review.

Yet Butler acknowledges the risk for three kinds of people: "those who always tended to avoid the present and put great emphasis on the future...those who have consciously exercised the human capacity to injure others...[and those who are] characterologically arrogant and prideful."¹⁷ Although harsh and incomplete, this might serve a wary therapist as a thumbnail sketch of Hagar Shipley. At risk in all these ways, Hagar profits nonetheless from her life review. She "proceeds toward personality reorganization". To suggest also how we profit, I shall turn to the work of two other gerontologists. Kathleen Woodward, in her critique of Butler's famous essay, argues that "his notion of plot is Artistotalian; that is, it ...possesses 'wholeness'...and thus unity"(1948). Butler is charged with assuming that the life story will be 'resolved' in an out-moded literary way; indeed, in Woodward's view, he uses such literature to construct his pleasing, but fallacious, sense of completion in life. But *The Stone Angel* does not actually 'affirm' Hagar's life in terms of unity or wholeness. Indeed, it seizes upon the open ending and upon filaments launched into the future; it discovers hope paradoxically, through the recognition of failure. Laurence in fact directs us toward what Harry R. Moody calls 'the public world'. First Hagar must go there; dramatically, this is signalled by Hagar's residence in the public ward, where she begins to think of others and to consider the possibility of social change. Thus, she contemplates (for example) a world in which her granddaughter's husband could accept her sturdy independence, a world in which women are acquiring knowledge of their bodies and knowledge that might lead to jobs that use their minds. She gets there, however- to Moody's "public world"- only because she has had the courage to persist in the life review. From that story she learns how other stories might be written better. Moody's idea is that the story should be told out loud. The life review process should transport the elderly person from a private and solipsistic space into a public one, in which the story can be heard. Thus, Moody is concerned less with the therapeutic value of the life review than with the importance for society at large; his interest is focused on the loss to society that is entailed by our narcissistic denial of the experience of the aged. Reminiscence, Moody suggests, is

not as Aristotle thought opposed to hope: "It is the otherway around since "old people live and remember for the sake of the future."²¹ But Moody recognizes as well the benefit that accrues to the old person whose story is heard: "The singing of the song and the telling of the tale must become public in order to shine through the natural ruin of time." "The public story is never finished. And neither is the private one, though it needs to be told before the story is cut off: "And then' , "It needs telling for its contribution to the public story, and because the elderly person must know that the communal realm is somehow real, if she is not to feel that her annihilation is complete. She can stand- Hagar can- the knowledge that "the plagues go on from generation to generation" (*The Stone Angel*, p.264.) and that "nothing is ever changed at a single stroke" (*TSA*, p.88.); she can stand to know that her own life has been a failure, in most of the ways that count. But she needs to speak. Hagar has only begun to speak "the heart's truth" when her time runs out; and she has little chance to review her life for others, although she makes a crucial start with Murray Lees. Her insistent voice was heard in the "Shadow Point" of Margaret Laurence's subconscious. There it grew, by nature and by art. It became at least the "forest" of Laurence's text, where the voice of Hagar Shipley speaks. It became "a forest, through which one can see outward, in which the shapes of trees do not prevent air and sun, and in which the trees themselves are growing structures, something alive." And it became that through the force of Margaret Laurence's compassionate imagination... Laurence was moved above all by the need to fight, for herself and others, a need to lend her womanly strength. She had a lot of Hagar in her , and as Hagar would have wished she wrote with her own life a better story. Thus we see that the success of the novel largely depends on Laurence's structuring of the main character, Hagar.

2.3. THE FORM OF THE NOVEL

Although there are two strands of narrative running through the narrative, it is interesting to note that connections between the two strands of the narrative are subtle and intricate. This gives the form a complexity which answers the complexity of Hagar's engagement with her past. This idea will be argued out in this section. However, in the course of the argument we will also get deep and valuable insights into Hagar's personality, her attachment to

worldly things and its consequences , her resistance to any kind of change, her puritanical attitude towards her body, her difficulty in communicating with others, her values of cleanliness, respectability and culture. All these characteristics have been weaned into the narrative.

The impetus behind *The Stone Angel* is retrospective, that is, events of the past are recovered from a point further on in time, and with the understanding which hindsight affords. But what is distinctive about *The Stone Angel* when compared with Laurence's other works is that the 'still' vision to which Hagar aspires is undermined insistently by a 'labile' tendency which dismantles coherence and refuses serenity. Hagar's immediate reaction to her son's proposal to sell the house is one of outrage even before she realizes that this would mean her going into Silverthreads, an old people's nursing home. Her resistance springs in part from her attachment to worldly possessions, a trait inherited from her father and reinforced, by the strong sense that the house was bought with her own hard-earned money. It springs from her refusal to face up to her deteriorating physical condition and the burden she has become to her son and daughter-in-law, themselves in their mid-sixties. Something more covert is at work too. Mentally reviewing her several belongings - her mother's photograph, the gilt-edged mirror and oaken arm-chair from her old home, the picture of herself at twenty, the cut-glass decanter which was Bram's wedding present - she is convinced that:

I couldn't leave them. If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purpose, then I do not know where I am to be found at all. (*TSA*, p.36.)

The key phrase is 'caught and fixed here'. The changes put forward by Marvin and Doris do not only threaten the immediate pattern of life but also those apparently settled interpretations of the past, which, projected to the visible 'shreds and fragments of years', have until this moment of crisis being seldom dislodged. If Hagar's sufferings in the short time left to her, approach the tragic, it is because they extend beyond the painful experiences

of the present - a disrupted routine, uncertain control of her bodily functions, fear of the unknown - to the loss of old securities and satisfactions. Driven back to her memories for comfort, she finds that contrary to her experiments the existing situation has altered the past in disturbing ways by producing unaccustomed perspectives and unwelcome turns. In general, the passage from one track of time and narrative to the other is smoothly and logically effected. Visiting Silverthreads with its hospital atmosphere, Hagar is reminded of the Manawaka hospital where her child was born. On a number of occasions, however, Hagar's memory works at a more obscure level and the way back is through recesses of landscape which continue to mystify even as they open out into new vistas and territory. Brought up to value cleanliness respectability and culture as the means by which the pervasive and vaguely associated forces of sex and death might be held at bay, her present self disgust becomes a reminder of her old aversion to Bram's ill bred habits and this, in turn, of her shame in encountering his desire. Furthermore, the narrative is held together by Hagar's keen awareness of life's reversal. The 'puffed face purpled with veins' in the mirror bears no resemblance to the handsome young woman of twenty who looks out of the picture frame.

Only when there is no turning away from the evidence of fleshly disintegration does she confess to her body's capacity in those days for joy, identifying this with the energy of trees, sparrows and sunlight.

His banner over me was only his own skin, and now I no longer know why it should have shamed me. People thought of things differently in those days. Perhaps some people didn't. I wouldn't know. I never spoke of it to anyone. (*TSA*, p.81.)

For so assertive a character, Hagar's narrative conveys throughout the enormous difficulty she experiences in communicating with other people, even those closest to her. It also carries a preponderance of phrases expressive of ignoring and doubt: 'I never knew', 'I don't know'. On the one hand, there is the Hagar who was early instructed in weights and measures, the importance of appearances, the worldly as well as heavenly rewards of

respectable living. On the other, there is the Hagar who, more and more, is driven by the need to penetrate beyond surfaces to 'some truer image infinitely distant'. (*TSA*, p.133.) The difference between the two is located in her split reaction when she learns of John's death and Arlene's: No one's fault. Where do causes start, how far back?'. (*TSA*, p.240.) First, there is the sensible view of what is after all a freak accident; then the submerged guilt which she is unable to assuage, neither by excuses ('I want your happiness ... you'll never know how much') – (*TSA*, p.237.) nor reproach ('Every last one of them has gone away and left me') (*TSA*, p.164.)- , nor defiance ('I can't change what's happened to me in my life, or make what's not occurred take place. But I can't say I like it, or accept it, or believe it's for the best') (*TSA*, p.160.) 'Where do all causes start, how far back?'

The novel may be said to answer the question by holding out the possibility of atonement. The explicit movement of the narrative is a steady progress across the upheaved terrain of the present to a past redeemed when, during the night spent in the old cannery, and in her delirium, Hagar mistakes Murray Ferney Lees for John and, bending her will, seeks a fresh understanding. In so doing she also takes upon herself the burden of guilt for his death. "I didn't really mean it about not bringing her here. A person speaks in haste. I've always had a temper ... You could come here in the evenings ... Wouldn't that be a good idea?"(*TSA*, p.247.) Following from this, the suggestion in the concluding chapters of the novel is that, reclaimed from the wilderness which was her pride, Hagar finds it thinkable now to restore her other son to faith in himself: 'You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John'. (*TSA*, p.304.)

Had she not withheld tenderness for so long, things might have been very different. To conclude thus, however, is to endow Hagar with the authority which, as 'I' narrator, she is continually claiming, and to ignore evidence that, as continually, the text contradicts this authority. One such evidence is that, carried along by the freer flow of feeling generated by her attempts at making peace with the world, Hagar leaves unexplained that tight knot of resentment she experienced when she parted from Lees. She associated him with treachery, yet it was not because he had betrayed her whereabouts to Marvin and Doris. Nor was it simply that she had confessed her secrets to him. The emotional tension was the greater

owing to her inability to remember the mistake she fell into in her delirium and the words which she had spoken. Otherwise she might have understood that his deception, while humanely entered upon, had revealed, without being able to satisfy, her longing for reconciliation with her son. It had offered, in a paradoxical way, the consolation of full responsibility, only to leave her in the dark once again as to where causes start. Other evidence that Hagar's authority as narrator is questionable includes the 'autonomy' of the secondary characters. She does not like Marvin; nevertheless he is a credible figure, 'pathetic, solid, deprived, unjustly unloved, and completely authentic'. Doris is despised for being dull, fussy, complaisant; she also appears to be genuinely kind and helpful in her unimaginative way.²² Not surprisingly, the ambiguity surrounding the character of John is deepened by his untimely death. Goaded by Hagar's determination that he should be a success and thereby vindicate her foolhardy marriage, he reacts by seeking desperate ways of compensating for his sense of helplessness - feats of bravado in the company of Lazarus Tonnerre, lies concerning his family's circumstances, retreat to the Shipley farm. His unhappiness, bred of Hagar's ambitions, is real. At the same time, there are undeniable signs of innate weakness, such as acute self-consciousness about the family's worldly disadvantages, and failure of nerve in the face of vicissitudes. Allowing for the biases of character, therefore, doubt lingers as to whether John would have proven himself in the long run, even if the accident had not occurred and his relationship with Arlene had been permitted to seek its own course. Finally, although Hagar learns to recognise the part which human pride and weakness have played in producing tragedy, she persists in regarding her share of loss and suffering as being excessive. Such defiance when it is translated into intimations of agencies at work other than the human, colours her narrative with mystery, so that an unscheduled train suddenly rounding the corner of the railway bridge, a poison flower furtively in bloom, a fierce snowstorm, the long drought, all strike like hostile fate. At times it seems that the one certainty human beings can rely upon is embodied in 'that land that was never lucky from the first breaking of the ground, all the broken machinery standing in the yard like the old bones and ribs of great dead sea creatures washed to shore, and the yard muddy and pud-dled with yellow ammonia pools where the horses emptied themselves'. (*TSA*, p.29.)

As if reinforcing this notion, images of soilage and dereliction recur in the novel. Laurence puts across all the ideas mentioned above with the help of imagery and metaphor which we shall now discuss.

2.4. IMAGERY IN THE STONE ANGEL

The novel's structure depends as much upon a web of interlocking images as upon its handling of time through flashbacks.

2.4.1. IMAGES

Images of soilage and dereliction recur in the novel, and perhaps nowhere are they more powerfully projected than on the occasion when, coming across the advertisement for Silverthreads, Hagar feels herself drained of all hope and vigour.

Quietly I lay the paper down, my hands dry and quiet on its dry pages. My throat, too, is dry, and my mouth. As I brush my fingers over my own wrist the skin seems too white after the sunburned years, and too dry, powdery as blown dust when the rains failed, flaking with dryness as an old bone will flake and chalk, left out in a sun that grinds bone and flesh and earth to dust as though in a mortar of fire with a pestle of crushing light. (*TSA*, p.54)

Woman, sea-beast, bleached bones and parched land are in that passage made one and indistinguishable. The two lines of narrative intersect. And for a brief moment, time stands still. Characteristic of the movement of this novel, this bleak vision is qualified consistently by images which point to other ways of looking, other possibilities. One example are the flowers which cling so close to Hagar's consciousness, in particular hardy native blooms like the cowslip and lilac which flourish undeterred in the grim settings of the cemetery and the Shipley farm, and by their scent and beauty dispel the atmosphere of failure and death. Small wonder then that Hagar is pleased when, lying in hospital and near to death, she is

refreshed with cologne by a young patient and told, 'now you smell like a garden'. (*TSA*, p.303.)

But without doubt, the most striking and complex image of all is the stone angel which James Currie imported at great cost from Italy to watch over his wife's grave. At once 'still' and 'labile', she is invested with meaning from the start and continues to multiply meaning. She is fixed in Manawaka and also extrinsic to it. Not surprisingly the transformations which she undergoes and from which she draws her potency, spring in the main from her close associations in the text with the 'I' narra-tor. She presides over Hagar's memory of her childhood in Manawaka in the 1880s just as, standing on the top of the hill, she used to overlook the town, its cemetery, and the little girl who took her walks along the paths among the graves. She is the angel of death, ruthless in her dictates and bitter in her jokes. At the same time, she shares Hagar's vulnerability. Both, for example, are James Currie's possessions. Life treats Hagar roughly and *The Stone Angel* too receives her portion of humiliations. Already weather-worn, she is discovered 'toppled over on her face, among the peonies'. As John struggles to raise the angel, Hagar is put in mind of the Biblical story of Jacob but out of the stone figure no blessing is forthcoming. In a curious inversion of this episode later in the novel, it is Hagar who finds herself 'strangely cast' when Marvin confronts her with demands for her approbation. But by then *The Stone Angel* occupies only the edges of Hagar's consciousness and, though she survives yet in the old cemetery, 'winters or lack of care had altered her. The earth had heaved with frost around her, and she stood askew and titled'. (*TSA*, p.305.)

2.4.2. AN INTRODUCTION TO *THE STONE ANGEL* .

In this first of the Manawaka novels, the splendour of the stone angel resides in that alienness which is never wholly tamed by her new environment and which is shadowed forth in the 'sightless eyes'. It is, of course, ironical, given the purblindness Hagar exhibits throughout her time that she should be concerned to stress the angel is 'doubly blind first, because made of marble and, secondly, because 'whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank.'*(TSA*,p.3.) This detail is never mentioned again but, together with the dismissive reference to some

masons, 'the cynical descendants of Bernini', it inscribes into the image a significance which escapes the narrator herself. Very likely, the angel was perfunctorily produced. Nevertheless even in her debased, late nineteenth century guise, she belongs to 'a tradition of sculpture stretching back from the Counter Reformation to Roman and Hellenic times. She claims, among her antecedents, images such as those which haunted Yeats's memory 'vague Grecian eyes gazing at nothing, Byzantine eyes of drilled ivory staring upon a vision, and those eyelids of China and of India, those veiled or half veiled eyes weary of world and vision alike'.²³ Positioned 'above the town, on the hill brow', *The Stone Angel* rises above the pettiness as well as the heroism of human lives. She stands outside Hagar's narrative which, constructed by one possessed of human sight, is necessarily trapped within limited perspectives. She inhabits that space which, at best, Hagar can only gesture towards by means of negative phrases, such as 'I never knew' and 'I don't know', and which remains 'a void not filled with words'.²⁴ Being the most important and complex image, I shall now analyse it in detail.

2.4.3. IMAGE OF THE STONE ANGEL

The Stone Angel erected in the memory of the protagonist's mother is the most striking and complex image in the entire novel. From the beginning she is invested with meaning and continues to multiply meaning. The novel opens with a reference to the stone angel and this early placing of the angel reflects the parallelism of her fate with that of human beings. It is evoked through Hagar's story and is one of the devices which Laurence uses to create her characters and their environment. Laurence herself asserts that *The Stone Angel* 'does dominate the book like an imposing symbol'.²⁵ Indeed Laurence brings out almost all of her major and important themes through *The Stone Angel*, all of which I shall discuss in this section. To begin with *The Stone Angel* symbolizes the blindness of pride, the malaise that inflicts Hagar, the protagonist. It also makes a statement on the Manawakan ethics: the Scottish - Presbyterian narrow-mindedness and the rigid code of respectability which prevailed in Manawaka. The angel represents the Currie family and the family's respectability and the image which Hagar wants to project for herself of the angel reflects the with the statue. It becomes the symbol of human helplessness in the face of mortality; of the

ever present limits to dynastic hopes. The angel can therefore be associated with whatever the character (Hagar) herself must struggle against in order to be blessed; that is, with the infinite mystery. Finally and importantly, *The Stone Angel* builds up a thematics of salvation and supports the idea that salvation is possible. Laurence believed that there is a 'mystery at the core of life.'²⁶ This sense of mystery, the writer weaves into the fabric of the narrative largely through the angel imagery. The angel among other things, is the symbol of that part of our nature which transcends nature, but cannot be separated from it. As the symbol of the mysterious, the spiritual, the angel is very remote from the conventional figure of purity. Thus, *The Stone Angel* straddles the animate and the non animate, the earthly and the heavenly, death and life and so on. The novel gathers these contradictions into a coincidental oppositorum in which the socially coded statue of the Manawaka world turns into an emblem of the human predicament. Eventually the stone angel stands for death and life-in-death. Thus, it serves as a symbol of the work itself, a verbal monument which representing life cannot but inscribe death and inscribing death, ultimately asserts life. In this view, the work itself appears a monument to Laurence's past, factual or phantasmatic, a monument which yields a spiritual depth.

2.4.3.1. CHALLENGES POSED BY THE STONE ANGEL

The stone angel confronts us with a challenge that is felt all the more clearly because of the oxymoronic quality of the phrase. Its prominence, both in the cemetery and in Hagar's memory and narration, the expansion of its oxymoronic features as in 'she viewed the town with sightless eyes', points to its being, more than an element of decor, a nexus of meaning.

The stone angel also has a story: it is the product of the cynical descendants of Bernini with both an aesthetic ancestry as well as a mercantile one. As I mentioned earlier, The Stone Angel is a very important fictional object in the novel. The marble monument is also one of the devices which Laurence uses to create her characters and their environment. No wonder then, that Laurence named her novel *The Stone Angel*. 'Titles', says Margaret Laurence, 'are important, as they should in some way express, the theme of the book in a rather poetic way.'²⁷ The title which she chose for her first Canadian novel certainly fits her

definition. Solid and ethereal, opaque and spiritual, the stone angel confronts us with a challenge. 'Above the town on the hill brow the stone angel used to stand'. (*TSA*, p.3) As the opening paragraphs describe the monument and the cemetery where, blind and superlative, it used to rise, the reader is taken on a tour of Manawaka's burial ground - and of the novel's major semantic polarities. This marble statue 'brought from Italy at great expense', is erected in memory of the narrator-protagonist's mother. *The Stone Angel* proves to be one of the most important fictional objects in the novel. Three major characters - the protagonist Hagar, her father Jason Currie her son John Shipley - are involved with the statue. What they do to or about it, how they respond to it, is interesting. The marble monument is one of the devices which Laurence uses to create her major characters and their environments. *The Stone Angel's* appearances in the novel are not numerous, but they recur throughout. On its first occurrence, the statue is the focal point of a lengthy and highly charged description of the Manawaka cemetery which, as an introduction to the lost world of the narrator's childhood, casts the long shadow of death over the ensuing narrative. (*TSA*, p. 3-5.) The second occurrence is also descriptive: Hagar remembers that, leaving Manawaka and her husband Bram for good, she has had a last glimpse, from the speeding train of the cemetery and the statue. (*TSA*, p.142.) Besides, it makes two other appearances. On a drive to the cemetery with John, the adult Hagar discovers that the statue lies 'toppled over on her face', and that it has been painted with lipstick. (*TSA*, pp.177-80.) Towards the end, on a parallel visit with her other son Marvin, the elderly Hagar observes alterations in the angel. "The earth had heaved with frost around her, and she stood askew and tilted. Her mouth was white." (*TSA*, p.305.) The memory leads Hagar to speculate on the future: 'someday she'll topple entirely, and no one will bother to set her upright again.' (*TSA*, p. 305) These occurrences bring to light a number of things. First, the stone angel has a story: the product of the 'gouging', 'gauging', cynical descendants of Bernini, it has both an aesthetic ancestry in the baroque tradition and a mercantile one in the commercialisation of religious art intended to fulfill the needs of fledgling Pharaohs. Brought into 'an uncouth land', the harsh environment of the prairie it experiences decline. If in our first sight of it, the monument stands in splendour 'above the town', Hagar's musing 'I wonder if she stands there yet' is more than a historical question, a foreshadowing of doom as later sequences show. The Stone Angel too, is subject to the vicissitudes of time, since winters and the earth have power over

this representative of celestial creatures. There is the gradual decline of the statue, which is also a fact of life. Thus, the early placing of the angel motif emphasizes, among other things, the parallelism of her fate with that of human beings. *The Stone Angel* is in fact doubly destroyed: as stone and as memorial; from the moment we encounter it with its wings 'pitted' by the snow and grit this emblem of eternal life bears the traces of death at work. Later, the angel is all the more easily overthrown because she is an alien artifact implanted in the harsh earth.

The statue's story is also the story of some characters' involvement with her, namely Jason Currie, John Shipley and Hagar Shipley. The symbolism and meaning of the statue is further brought out through these characters since it means different things to each of them and they all invest the statue with different meanings. What they do to it or how they respond will now be analysed.

First, there is Jason Currie, the Manawaka store-owner, who bought her 'in pride to mark his wife's bones.' (*TSA*, p.3.) He often tells his daughter that 'she had been brought from Italy at a terrible expense and was pure white marble'. (*TSA* p.3.) He stresses that she is 'pure white marble' - an indication which alerts us to the fact that the same object is designated in the text by two nominal syntagms: 'the stone angel' and 'the marble angel'. Currie's claims about the statue speak more of the man and his values and of the culture in which he lives than they do about the artefact. In contrast with the protagonist's father who had the statue erected, her son, it is intimated, is an iconoclast who defaces her with lipstick and overthrows her - an irreverent prank which bespeaks his need for rebellion - and then has to strive powerfully to restore her, on his mother's orders; for Hagar, the third character to be actively involved with the statue, cannot bear the idea of such profanation and cannot 'leave' the statue or her son alone at this point in her life. In all three cases, the characters' willingness to take action, whether to pay for, play with or restore the angel, testifies to the importance of the monument in the novel. Thus we see that, for Jason Currie, the statue is associated with the dead wife to the memory of whom it has ostensibly been erected. But if it 'marks her bones', it is also intended to 'proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day' (*TSA*, p. 3.) As it displays his respect for the departed angel of

his hearth, it also declares his own wealth, in a way acceptable to a 'Puritan' society, and his rank as one of Manawaka's foremost citizens. ('She was the first, the largest and certainly the costliest').(TSA, p.3.) Although it is supposed to be 'harking us all to heaven', what the grave marker encodes, in fact, is the place of the living in the world of the living' a symbol of the ultimate otherness, it is also a rich socio-cultural sign. Furthermore, inasmuch as to be a 'credit' to husband and father is one of the functions of women in Jason Currie's sphere, the statue serves him as well as the weak wife, once the latter has fulfilled her reproductive role. In the words of his daughter, it is 'his monument' 'more dear to him, I believe, than the brood mare who lay beneath because she'd proved no match for his stud.'(TSA, p. 43) Thus to Jason Currie, The Stone Angel is at one and the same time a satisfactory locum tenens, as it were, for his dead wife, a coded message to his fellow citizens, a metonym for his Self, and a token of his immortality. Hagar, on the other hand feels much more ambiguously towards the monument. To her, the associations of *The Stone Angel* are necessarily double. It is linked with the mother who so easily 'relinquished her feeble ghost', whose weakness Hagar openly despises, in repetition of Jason's attitude, and subliminally fears. *The Stone Angel* emblematises the meekness of 'that woman' whom she has never seen, the 'frailty' which has been passed to her son Dan who dies young, and which the child Hagar cannot 'help but detest'. (TSA, p.25.) That is to say that the stone emblem of the mother is a reminder both of values which Hagar rejects and of the mortality against which, at the age of ninety, she still keeps raging. Stone angel, mother, death are inextricably and circularly related. But 'her mother's angel' is also her father's monument, a symbol of his attitude towards his family, the community and life. To the extent that it is a reminder of his power and conventionality as well as of the struggles which she had to go through in order to assert herself, the statue is the repository of negative feelings and meanings. To the extent that it embodies paternal and societal values which she still shares, and to the extent that it is a symbol of Currie superiority, difference and triumph over oblivion, the monument cannot but have a positive dimension in Hagar's mind. When she discovers that it has toppled over, she is not only dismayed, she must set it up again. Hagar at first tries to help John, but feeling the stone straining at me as I pushed', and fearing, interestingly enough, for her heart, she lets John do the pushing and heaving. Yet she scrubs off 'the vulgar pink' of the lipstick herself (TSA, p.180). She rationalises her behaviour to her son, explaining that she does not

want the Manawaka people to know that such a 'wanton thing' could be done to the Currie monument, further suspecting that since 'the Simmons plot is just across the way' her childhood rival Lottie would tell everyone. She appears to be motivated only by her recurring worry about what people will think. And even at this level, her concern with appearances reveals how much she shares her father's attitude and small-town mentality and how she extends to *The Stone Angel* the function of representing the family and the family's respectability. Hence, the image which she wants to project of herself is bound up with the statue. Perhaps some dim awareness of the link between self-image and stone image is evinced in the compulsion which Hagar remarks on, to restore the angel: 'I'd have been glad enough to leave her. Now I wish I had. But at the time it was impossible' (*TSA* p.179) And evinced too in Hagar's reluctance to formulate the strong suspicion that John was responsible for the defacing of the angel. John has no reverence for the monument and the Currie greatness it represents. His disregard of respectability proves him a Shipley rather than a Currie, despite Hagar's insistence on the contrary. John tells his mother to leave the statue alone, thus hinting that Hagar should cast off the burden of respectability. While John is aware of the statue as a weight not only of marble but of propriety, there is also the symbolic adumbration of the character's fate: John is crushed by the burden of his mother's self-centered expectations and fear of life. From speculating on her son's part in the fall of the statue or on his feelings towards it, she nevertheless reports enough of his gestures and words to convey that what is to her a desecration is to him an amusing prank. 'Beside me, John laughed. "The old lady's taken quite a header." (*TSA*, p. 178) He repeatedly suggests that they should leave her lying on her side and painted, which he considers an improvement: 'She looks a damn sight better, if you ask me'. (*TSA*, p.179.) Obviously, he has no reverence for the monument and the Currie greatness it represents. Indeed, when he ironically agrees with his mother that to have Lottie spread the news about the angel 'would be an everlasting shame, all right.' (*TSA*, p.180) the antiphrasis echoes one which Bram Shipley had made in another context. (*TSA*, p.142) But there is perhaps more to John's attitude than unconcern about public opinion and general irreverence. In the cemetery scene, a verbal clue sets up a connection between the stone angel and Hagar, when John personifies the statue as 'the old lady'. The connection in itself would perhaps go unnoticed if it did not recall, and contrast with, an earlier designation when John called his mother 'angel'. Mother as angel, angel as old lady,

the two namings work together to establish a strong link between the living woman and the statue. In this view, the prank on the one becomes a displaced aggression on the other. Moreover, John's attempts to persuade his prim and proper mother to leave the statue alone can be regarded as hints that Hagar should cast off the burden of respectability. His warning that putting it back is not really worth the risk acquires metaphorical overtones 'Don't be surprised if she collapses and I break a bone. That would be great, to break your back because a bloody marble angel fell on you'.(TSA, p. 178-9) In this context, the epithet 'bloody' connotes rejection of polite language and social conventions and the young man's plebeian heritage.

To sum up, *The Stone Angel* certainly does not mean the same thing or even persons to the three individuals who have been discussed. The blind stone angel is a blank figure on which each projects his or her identifications and fantasies. Thus we see that the stone angel as seen by these three characters is much more than a symbol of Jason Currie,²⁸ of Manawaka Society, of Hagar's own pride.²⁹ It is also a symbol of the 'tolerant' and 'compassionate instincts' which the narrator-protagonist suppresses in herself.³⁰ just as it is important to compound the various meanings which the statue assumes in the narrated world, it is also important to comprehend *The Stone Angel* in the textual space which will now be investigated.

2.4.3.2. THE STONE ANGEL IN TEXTUAL SPACE

Having discussed the various meanings and interpretations that can be attributed to *The Stone Angel*, we go on to discuss the stone angel in textual space. The opening paragraph of the novel gives us a long and elaborate description of the Manawaka cemetery in which is placed *The Stone Angel*. The Stone Angel here becomes the nexus in which most of the semantic strands of the passage - themselves announcing the novel's thematics - meet together. In so doing, it plays a structuring role in the expansion of the narrative. From the start, Laurence's angel reverberates with imaginary resonances that go far beyond the immediate context. Because of the polysemy and resonances, *The Stone Angel* exerts a structuring role in the narrative even when the monument disappears from it. The Stone Angel magnetizes recurring notations and images into semantic and thematic patterns that heighten

the unity of the novel, and the angel motif with its inner tensions energizes the plot. The statue is eventually seen as partaking of both the natural and the supernatural. On one level, it is a form without spirit: a monument to purity and propriety. On a semiotic level, it is associated with things spiritual. As an image of supernatural being, it also attests to man's cultural efforts to manage death and control nature, thereby bringing together several dimensions of human experience.

There are three major figurative isotopies running through the narrative: rigidity, dryness and blindness. These isotopies will be examined in this section by tracing what could be termed as the petrification pattern, the pattern of angelism, the subsequent convergence of the two patterns and by finally making a reference to the Biblical angel. The rigidity of *The Stone Angel* is a statement on the helplessness of human beings in the face of mortality and of the everpresent limits to dynastic hopes. This isotopy will be discussed in the petrification pattern and the pattern of angelism. Hagar, in the very effort to keep the angel out of sight and out of mind, becomes exactly like her. Hagar's hardness is, in the overall context, largely induced by her milieu and upbringing, the Scottish Presbyterian ethics and the pioneer experience, putting a high premium, on courage, independence, 'character'; the development of the 'rigidity' isotopy underlines the personal psychic element in Hagar's obduracy. Overvaluing strength and pride, she makes herself tough rather than resilient in order to hide the elemental terror of death. To begin with, the stone angel is the first object mentioned.

'Above the town, on the hill brow, *The Stone Angel* used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one...'

Its appearance in the text coincides with the beginning of what proves to be an autobiographical relation, just as in the represented universe it is linked with Hagar's birth. Thus the I-narrator the I-narration and the I-actor arise from the blank of whatever precedes beginnings at the same time as the stone angel - this herald of a hoped-for after-life. The detour through the cemetery - makes the coded return to origins an index of the ultimate end, makes of the angel an annunciator of both life and death. From its first description, it is

clear that the role of the angel is going to be very important, in the construction of the novel's meanings. Because it so conspicuously marks a grave and seemingly operates a disjunction between the living and the dead, the sightless statue may blind us momentarily with the dark dazzle of death. At first one may be aware mostly of its negativity: its lack of sight or knowledge, in particular, is repeatedly indicated, often with words 'doubly blind', 'unendowed with even a pretense of sight', 'blank', 'without knowing who we were at all'. However, such negative features are counterbalanced by verbs which denote a contrary activity; 'she viewed', 'harking us all to heaven'. Hence, a nexus in which most of the semantic strands of the passage themselves announcing the novel's thematics, meet together. It plays a structuring role in the expansion of the narrative.

The opening pages of the novel - the description of the angel and its setting, the cemetery - are strongly organised on sets of binary oppositions.³¹ High vs low, upright vs bent, sight vs blindness, death vs life, other vs self, memory vs oblivion, male vs female, this world vs the other world, movement vs immobility, eternity vs time passing, reproduction (dynasty) vs virginity ('virginal Regina'), summer vs winter, animate vs inanimate, order ('neat and orderly') vs disorder ('disarray', 'disrespectful wind'), nature vs culture, native and non-native, silence vs language. *The Stone Angel* can be included in practically every set. It shares the features there selected either immediately (for example it stands upright /immobile /inanimate, it is a cultural artefact) or mediately through association (for example, it is pitted by the snow or the blown grit). Thus the stone angel appears a highly polysemic construct. It can often be slotted on either side of the paradigmatic bar. It may cut across the division in the surface chain of the text, as in the example, 'she viewed with sightless eyes' or in that of a lesser angel alternatively 'strumming in eternal silence upon a small stone stringless harp'. It may also be regarded as belonging to both sides of the bar by reason of its metonymical associations: the definition 'my mother's angel that my father bought', with its curious possessive case, links the statue to both male and female and to spiritual and material. Such a capacity to traverse the paradigmatic bar proceeds from the nature of the compound itself: stone angel, which conflates earth, solid, inanimate, and so on, and heaven, ethereal, animate, and the rest, generates two opposite series and, fusing two separate terms introduces a third series, man-made, aesthetic, socio-cultural, and so on. From the very beginning,

therefore, the stone angel emphasises the separation between the living and the dead, this world and the other, the pride of the survivors and the power of the dead, the 'dutifully cared - for habitations of the dead' and the disorder of nature, on the one hand, and the messiness of life (symbolised here by the disreputable old Mrs. Weese and her sick smelling sheets which foreshadow later conditions in Hagar's life), on the other hand. Eventually, the statue must be seen as partaking of both the natural and the supernatural. If, on one level of analysis, it is 'a form without spirit, a monument to purity and propriety,'³² at a semiotic level, it remains associated with things spiritual: the marble form 'harking us all to heaven', it has a message, socially coded, yet distinct from the more secular 'purpose' it assumes for its buyer. An image of a supernatural being, it also attests to man's cultural efforts to manage death and control nature, thereby bringing together several dimensions of human experience. As a matter of fact, all stone angels must share in a basic ambiguity; representing celestial creatures with material means, they can only attempt to suggest their ethereality in oblique ways but will inevitably have reference to the human body. One of the most arresting junctions is to link marble and flesh, purity and sexual reproduction. The pure white marble monument is contextually linked to death in childbirth and textually to a dynastic proclamation, all the more striking because in Christian angelology, angels are generally supposed, to be endowed not only with purity but with what was for a long time the *ne plus ultra* of purity, sexlessness. The lipstick with which John later paints the statue eroticises a sexuality that was from the first a *donnee* of the text. Throughout, we project the blank statue in the Manawaka cemetery against a background of angelic information - concerning the angels of the dictionary, 'ministering angels', 'angels of mercy' and the like, the angels of the 'encyclopedia' (Umberto Eco), scriptural and theological - angels as lesser breeds of powers and dominations, messengers of God and the divine - , but also literary - the angels of John Milton and others. Singularly, the opening description calls to mind the line from *Lycidas*, 'Look homeward, angel, and melt with ruth' which Thomas Wolfe used as the title of his first published autobiographical novel.³³ From her hilltop, the angel looks homeward towards the town and what turns out to be the bleak lives of its inhabitants. Though it certainly does not melt with ruth, the possibility has been sown in our minds, aware either of the Miltonic line or simply of the compassionate qualities ascribed to angels. That is to say, because of the vast intertext in which angels play a part, Margaret Laurence's angel reverberates from the

start with imaginary resonances that go far beyond the immediate context. We shall now analyse the rigidity isotopy by tracing the petrification pattern.

2.4.3.3. THE PETRIFICATION PATTERN

'Reminiscences of [Hagar's] times past chart for us a process of petrification', Sandra Djwa has observed.³⁴ The fitness of the phrase is guaranteed by the rigidity and immobility isotopies, the first of which I shall briefly examine. One of the occurrences is found in the scene of Dan's death. When Matt asks the adolescent Hagar to play the part of their mother to comfort the dying Dan, she refuses. 'I stiffened and drew away my hands', the narrator remembers, adding that she wanted to do what he asked but was 'unable to do it, unable to bend enough.' (*TSA*, p.25) With the denotative 'stiffened', and the metamorphic 'bend', the isotopy is being doubly set up. Clearly, stiffening is a defence against fear of weakness, of 'the frailty' which Dan has inherited from that mother whose part she refuses to act, and a defence against the less conscious dread of death. Another high point is reached when John, Hagar's favourite son, dies in an accident for which she is partly responsible. 'The night my son died I was transformed into stone and never wept at all.' The comparison introduces directly the underlying metaphor in the petrification pattern, also adding to the same 'stiff' the same 'dry' immediately picked up by the verbal syntagm 'I never wept' which joins the 'stone' isotopy with its opposite, the 'tear' isotopy. Although the narrator sees this as a metamorphosis, not so the reader, precisely because the isotopy has already been so well established that her transformation appears as a climatic phase in a process of petrification. On the occasion of John's death, the stone angel resurfaces again, as the narrator explains why she refused to go to the cemetery: 'I did not want to see where he was put, close by his father and close by mine, under the double named stone where the marble angel crookedly stood'. By not attending the burial ceremony, she for once defies propriety, though she is aware of public opinion: 'I guess they thought it odd, some of the Manawaka people did'. The angel, whose crookedness recalls John's attempt to overthrow it and announces its own perishability, has become an increasingly rich reminder. Of living (fictional) beings. Of human helplessness in the face of mortality. Of the everpresent limits to dynastic hopes. The protagonist, who cannot face the angel, becomes like her in the very effort to keep her out

of sight and out of mind. While Hagar's hardness is, in the overall context, largely induced by her milieu and upbringing, the Scottish Presbyterian ethics and the pioneer experience, putting a high premium on courage, independence, 'character', the development of the 'rigidity' isotopy underlines the personal, psychic element in Hagar's obduracy. Overvaluing strength and pride, she makes herself tough rather than resilient in order to hide the elemental terror of death. The transformation begun in the past of the I-actor has lasted into the present of the I-narrator. Here is how she describes herself, as she goes home on the bus after a visit to the doctor and the bad news that he wants more examinations: 'I sit rigid and immovable, looking neither right nor left'³⁵. The 'stone' connotations which the two adjectives acquire in the overall context are, the next instant, reinforced with a comparison: 'I sit rigid and immovable ... like one of those plaster-of-Paris figures the dime stores sell.' The analogy is interesting on several grounds. In the general unfolding of the 'stone angel' paradigm, the shoddy plaster statue (whose cheapness is doubly connoted in 'plaster' and 'dime store') is a substitution for the costly stone angel. Since, in the narrative, Hagar has just been thinking about her dead men, the reader is invited to make the connection between the two figures and thereby to realise that Hagar herself cannot make it. Moreover, the narrator's comparison is revealing in so far as, like marble, plaster connotes rigidity but also, unlike marble, brittleness.

Does it perhaps indicate some dim awareness in the locutor that her defences are fragile? The comparison, at any rate, is introduced just after she comments on the 'unseemly tears' that come to her eyes over a triviality - a weakness brought about by old age - which she contrasts with her lack of tears over her dead men. The tears, in fact, signal her falling away from her ideal of self-control and strength and are part of another nexus that goes counter to the petrification pattern. Before we come to this, however, we must take a brief look at the pattern of angelism which also develops from *The Stone Angel* figure.

2.4.3.4. PATTERN OF ANGELISM

In this section, I shall list the various possibilities - both positive and negative - which energise the growing identification which the text builds up between Hagar and The Stone

Angel. We shall see that the stubbornly erect Hagar will be brought low. In the narrative, this is programmed in the angel matrix. The angel motif in its positive aspect is foregrounded in the episode that shows best the regeneration of Hagar: that is the last meeting between her and her son Marvin. And finally I have analysed how *The Stone Angel* is associated with whatever the character herself must struggle against in order to be blessed. That is, the infinite mystery. I shall wind up the section on The image of the stone angel by highlighting the larger issues of the novel, the thematics of salvation, the idea of redemption, human predicament and spiritualism. Being part of the same oxymoronic matrix, the pattern of angelism combines with and conditions the pattern of petrification but it also necessarily deviates from it and possesses its own isotopies. Being more abstract, however, it has fewer surface manifestations and depends more clearly on the reader's 'encyclopedia', what knowledge of angels he brings to the text. Two illustrations may be selected: John once calls his mother 'angel'; he does so in a narrative context that is highly suggestive. Bram Shipley is dying on his wretched farm; it is depression times and there is no money for doctor or drugs so that John alleviates his father's suffering with homebrew. On a visit, Hagar sees John giving Bram his 'medicine' and asks: "Is this the usual thing?" I asked. "Why, yes", John said. "Don't frown like that, angel. He is getting what he needs." (*TSA*, p.172). The term of endearment - an unusual form of address for John - is a disguised sarcasm. It hints that Hagar lacks knowledge of basic human needs, that her outlook is abstract, irrelevant to his father's present predicament whereas his own attitude is pragmatic and effective. The term of endearment even as it contributes its wry note to the relationship between mother and son also supports the thematic pattern of Hagar's angelism which has been established in other ways, notably through insistence on the theme of order. Most critics, analysing the Scottish-Presbyterian narrow-mindedness and rigid code of respectability which prevail in Manawaka, underscore the notion of propriety and proper appearance. But the Manawaka ethics involves more than an outward respect for appearances, for it rests on an ideal of perfection and order, which we may call 'angelism', in so far as it is an attempt to keep human nature under strict control. Hagar is deeply committed to this ideal. On several occasions, for instance, she cannot stoop to deception or prevarication. Angels, of course, are truthful and do not lie. That she is self-deluded is obvious when we see her, for instance,

making a denial of her fear of death into an incapacity for role playing, making a token of authenticity out of a living lie.

2.4.3.5. THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWO PATTERNS

The patterns of angelism and petrification converge in one area of life, which angels are supposed to be free of: sex. In the following examples what surfaces is the 'petrification' isotopy but it corresponds to a more abstract thematic isotopy of angelism. In the cultural code of the times, men are allowed to indulge their animal instincts, women expected to be sexless like angels. Ashamed of her sexual urges, the Hagar denies her arousal through an attempt at immobility. Nor is it a coincidence if the narrator, when relating how she spied on John and Arlene's lovemaking, insists on her being unable to move. 'I couldn't move a muscle', 'I hardly dared to breathe', 'paralyzed with embarrassment', 'I couldn't budge' all occur on the same page. (TSA, p.208)

Although the immobility is narratively determined by the voyeur situation in which Hagar finds herself and narrationally by her desire to justify the voyeurism, it nevertheless contributes to the petrification pattern in a sexual context. If angelism as the denial of sexuality causes Hagar to feign or adopt the rigidity of *The Stone Angel*, conversely John eroticises the statue, turns her into a sexual being - and a female at that - by painting her lips and cheeks. The prank indirectly signals his own sexuality, lipstick not being a thing which a man on an outing is normally provided with. But to the extent that he may identify the stone angel with his mother, it shows his awareness that Hagar and the Currie tradition need humanising. Indeed, he insists that the make-up is not profanation but improvement: 'She looks a damn sight better, if you ask me'. The prank is a pranking. The message seemed clear. Human 'angels' must be brought down to earth, assume their physical identity. Moreover, the mischievous lark also conveys the idea that symbols lose their purpose, can be played with and thereby acquire new meanings. The stone angel, that monument to Currie glory and pride, ironically becomes, when toppled and painted, an object lesson in humility. But, as we have seen, Hagar at that point can neither accept the lesson nor change. Ironically again, when she refuses to take John's hints and has the stone angel restored, Hagar herself

extends the symbolic meaning of the statue which becomes the embodiment of the weight of conventions under which she labours and under which she wants those around her to labour. Thus she unwittingly confirms the identification between the stone angel and herself. Thus we see that petrified or angelic, Hagar has an increasingly destructive effect on her family. At first, she is unable to touch, which is again a property of both statue and angel. She cannot 'hold' her dying brother, and even withdraws from contact with Matt when he proposes such a thing. She cannot get close to Bram whom she robs of his laughter before she robs him of his sons, one through neglect, the other through too much possessive care. She destroys John well before she intervenes with such impact in his love affair - the love which was his second chance. Like the stone angel, she views things with sightless eyes and faces up to her destructive pride very late in life - and in her narration. For like the stone image, she too is 'doubly blind', blind as an actor in her own tragedy, blind as the narrator of her experiences, even though she is attempting to reassess her past by re-living it in memory. Petrified and angelic, she can only be petrifying in her turn, as she will finally realise in an epiphanic moment:

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. (*TSA*, p.292)

In this oft-quoted passage, the 'immobility/ rigidity' isotopies are implied in 'chains' and 'shackled', which convey impeded movement. The 'stone' paradigm is manifested again very obviously a few pages further, when Hagar describes her hair 'undone and and slithering lengthily around my bare and chilly shoulders, like snakes on a Gorgon's head' (*TSA*, p.300). Immobility is connoted by the statuesque quality of the head. Furthermore the comparison with the Gorgon's head enters into resonance with the 'stone' pattern since the head of Medusa, the most famous of the Gorgons and the only mortal among them, could turn men to stone. Throughout the major part of her life, Hagar the holy terror is a prairie Medusa as well as a stone angel, and indeed the image of the stone angel serves partly, in the I-narration, as a denial of Medusa, of the power of sexuality and of castration. Laurence counterbalances the pattern of petrification with an isotopy which enters into a relation of

contrariety with 'stone' namely the isotopy of 'tears' itself included in 'liquidity'. The weeping of angels - a mark of their infinite compassion - is well documented in literature. Witness the Lycidas line 'and the angel melting with ruth' or another Milton line, 'such tears as angels weep.'³⁶ And for the antithesis of liquidity to stoniness, we may recall the Old Testament verse: 'And Thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink'³⁷. From the first, crying as a sign of weakness is opposed to lack of tears as a sign of strength. Chastised by her father, Hagar says: 'I wouldn't let him see me cry. I was so outraged. He looked at my eyes in a kind of fury, as though he'd failed unless he drew water from them.' (*TSA*, p.9.) The episode is one of the early phases in the process of petrification, though the basic metaphor does not surface. When we meet Hagar, she has lost her former control over her body and her body fluids. She is incontinent and often sheds 'shameful', 'unseemly tears', feeling that 'they are like the incontinent wetness of the infirm' (*TSA*, p.31). Although they share tears of self-pity or idle tears, they do not undercut Hagar's self-image as a strong woman, a stone woman. But they also prepare for the breaking down of the stiff-backed woman, who after remembering John's death and her part in it, weeps at last the belated tears of her grief.

And, fitting in with the water paradigm, they prepare as well for the final episode of the glass of water, which the dying Hagar 'wrest[s]' from the nurse, 'full of water to be had for the taking'. This episode Margaret Laurence has used 'very deliberately' to indicate that, to the end, Hagar keeps a measure of 'spiritual pride' and to suggest 'a sense of redemption in her life'.³⁸ In the second place, Margaret Laurence manipulates the other element of the controlling image, the angel, which is intrinsically more dynamic. Whereas you can escape stoniness only through dissolution or metamorphosis, the angel matrix is rich in virtualities which Laurence exploits at various narrative levels. For instance, one of the abilities which angels enjoy and men lack is evoked, in passing, through a piece of folklore recorded at the end of Chapter 3.

If I had the wings of an angel
Or even the wings of a crow,
I would fly to the top of T. Eaton's

And spit on the the people below. (p. 106)³⁹

The childhood rhyme enriches, even as it debases to low comedy, the motif of the angel and encourages a critical reading of it. Chanted to the tune of *The Prisoner's Song*, it meshes into an overarching pattern of imprisonment/freedom. And it more specifically raises in the narration a contermotif to that of the angel with 'rigid wings' with which the narration begins, thereby enlarging the cluster of associations which the reader can play with. Furthermore, angels, being after all the lowest order in the celestial hierarchy, are apt to commit the sin of pride. And it was by that sin they fell. At one point, we are explicitly reminded of Satan: Hagar, who has fled from the threat of the nursing home to the deserted cannery at Shadow Point, takes a fall, is 'stuck like an overturned lady bug' and finally succeeds in yanking herself upright, when, pleased with herself, she playfully comments: 'I've done it. Proud as Napoleon or Lucifer, I stand and survey the wasteland I have conquered' (*TSA*, p.191)

Notwithstanding the verb 'stand', which denotes verticality and refers to the proud erectness of the victor, the double comparison also implies a reversal recorded in the encyclopedia, the fall of the emperor, the fall of the rebel angel. The situation of Hagar, momentarily overthrown and powerless to rise, is faintly reminiscent of that of *The Stone Angel* in the scene with John. Such dynamic possibilities - positive and negative- energise the growing identification which the text builds up between Hagar and the (stone) angel. That stubbornly erect Hagar will somehow be brought low in the narrative is programmed in the angel matrix. A foreshadowing of the ultimate fall into oblivion is even presented through yet a different version of the angel motif. After evoking her nights with Bram and how she 'prided [herself] upon keeping [her] pride intact, like some maidenhood' (*TSA*, p. 81) an example, incidentally, which illustrates the self-generating circularity of pride). Hagar comments on her present loneliness :

My bed is as cold as winter, and now it seems to me that I am lying as the children used to do, on fields of snow, and they would spread their arms and sweep them down to their sides, and when they rose,

there would be the outline of an angel with spread wings. The icy whiteness covers me, drifts over me, and I could drift to sleep in it, like someone caught in a blizzard and freeze. (*TSA*, p.81)

The juxtaposition of past and present nights seems to establish on the post hoc, propter hoc principle, some relation of cause and effect between the past pride and the present dereliction of the character. Her loneliness is bodied forth in a series of analogies and metaphors which compellingly fuse the horizontal position, the angel figure, sleep, winter and snow into a muted but clear adumbration of death. Here again, angel and death are joined, yet the angel stretched on the ground is a child-made silhouette. Although it is contextualised back into the familiar cluster of death symbolism, this angel appears also as a shadow figure, a sort of double. And thus, beyond the bit of Canadian folklore, we are referred to our angelic intertext - to the idea of the angel as guardian spirit, as the double that stands for the higher part of our nature.

If Hagar's 'fall' is programmed in the controlling image, it also proves a happy fall, for when, stripped of her mask of strength, she confronts her destructiveness and her fear of death, she can experience some sort of belated spiritual regeneration which Margaret Laurence presents very convincingly. The process that leads up to this is the retreat and descent to Shadow Point, the meeting with another liminal, and the confrontation of past ghosts, the apologies she deliriously makes to John, and so on.⁴⁰

Towards the end Hagar begins to unbend. Although she feels that Murray Lees has betrayed her by revealing her whereabouts to her family, she forgives him and uncharacteristically 'reach(es) out and touch(es) his wrist'. (*TSA*, p. 253) It is a minimal gesture but for the petrified woman, the contact of flesh is significant. In the hospital she plays the angel of mercy (the metaphor is not in the one of the two free acts of her life, though a joke, 'the paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach'. (*TSA*, p. 253)

The patterns mentioned above show Hagar's identification with the 'blind' stone angel. The regeneration of Hagar is seen when Hagar identifies with the Biblical angel.

2.4.3.6. THE BIBLICAL ANGEL

In the episode that shows best the regeneration of Hagar, the angel motif in its positive aspect is foregrounded again. Let us refer to the last meeting between Hagar and the son whom she had not wanted, whom she considered was none of hers (but who has cared for her in her old age). For once, Hagar, not knowing what possesses her, tells Marvin that she is 'frightened.' The unusual admission incites Marvin to apologise for having been 'crabby' with her. And the scene develops in this way" I stare at him. Then, quite unexpectedly, he reaches for my hand and holds it tight. Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by realising him. It's in my mind to ask for his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me. 'You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John.' (*TSA*, p.304)

To Hagar, this is 'a lie, yet not a lie' but her belief that it is a lie measures all the better how far she has come from angelism, from the girl who did not want to impersonate her mother. She has been humanised, and now understands the needs of Marvin, to the extent that she gives up the idea of asking him for his pardon.

I wish he (John) could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear, and swore. (*TSA*, p. 179)

In both cases, Hagar, whose imagination has been fed on the Book, casts her sons in the same biblical role of Jacob, who incidentally was his mother's favourite. But in the first, the analogy, which reveals that like her father and husband she is not without dynastic hopes, works by contrast to suggest her disappointment. John is no Jacob but a man engaged in an

awkward task, who grunts and slips, sweats and swears. Hagar's angelism is frustrated by the incident. In the context, the stone angel appears metonymically and metaphorically linked to Hagar, to the burden of the demands which, she makes on her family and on John in particular. On the other hand, though John, seems to identify symbolically *The Stone Angel* with his mother, he is not trying to wrest a blessing from her. Only the overthrow of the angel would be liberating, but because he is more Shipley than Currie, he complies with the wishes of the mother and restores the statue. Introduced only to be denied, the biblical analogy, however, cannot be fully neutralized. And the absence of the Angel of God who wrestled with Jacob until he could bless him creates a vacuum which the text later partially fills with the return to the Old Testament motif, in the scene with Marvin.

While the first occurrence of the motif displays Hagar's disappointed expectations and reveals her self-deception, the second signals a moment of understanding, consequent upon the recognition of the destructiveness of her pride. This time, Hagar perceives Marvin, her neglected, belittled son, as Jacob, as the heir of her dynasty and of God's promise. The realisation, however, is slightly ambiguous. 'Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob', she says. What with 'now' which may be opposed to then, and with 'is truly' opposed to 'I wish he could have looked like Jacob', it seems as if Hagar were confounding Marvin with John, mixing up her responses to her two sons into one recognition.

This time the son is 'gripping with all his strength, and bargaining'; not grunting, not yielding, he is wrestling with the messenger of God. This time, too, Hagar's use of the biblical metaphor implicates her: 'I see I am thus strangely cast.' She again is the angel But no longer unwittingly, no longer adhering to false ideal, playing instead a role she had never understood. No longer the stone angel, but the angel of God, and therefore able to release and be released. No longer a destructive victim of angelism but the embodiment of a force that is not hers alone, that has blocked Marvin's past life but can bless liberate him into his full identity as his mother's son. The angel here is not 'antipathetic to life'. On the contrary, it is life-enhancing. Hagar's recognition of her bond to her son and of her spiritual power comes to her when she has relinquished being a blind angel. The three-cornered relation Hagar/son(s)angel(s) eventually enables us to associate the stone angel

with whatever the character herself must struggle against in order to be blessed; that is, with the infinite mystery.

And so we are brought to the larger issues of the novel. In her interview with Michel Fabre and elsewhere, Margaret Laurence has spoken of the sense of redemption in the novel. The stone angel certainly builds up a thematics of salvation. True, there is no supernatural intercession, not even a fully realised 'conversion' on the character's part. Presbyterian born and bred as she is, Hagar often refers to God but she cannot believe in his mercy. Witness her conversations with the minister, or her refusal at the end to appeal to God: "Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father - no. I want no part of that. All I can think is - Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg." (*TSA*, p.307)

Towards the end, she seems to believe in the possibility of an afterlife. The prayer I have just quoted follows immediately upon a meditation on breathing, a condition of human life, and whether there might still be breathing 'elsewhere', in an after life. If it happened that way, I'd pass out in amazement. Can angels faint?' (*TSA*, p.1) This playful speculation hints that Hagar would like to believe in the existence of angels in heaven, of celestial hosts she might join. At any rate the speculation keeps alive the angel paradigm in the narrative. Whatever the characters notion, the novel supports the idea that redemption is possible. In this respect, Hagar is the first adumbration of the protagonist in Margaret Laurence's last novel. Margaret Laurence has said: 'I don't have a traditional religion but I believe that there's a mystery at the core of life. This is an important clue to her fiction and to *The Stone Angel* in particular. Hagar's regeneration is a coming closer to the God within, a result and a token of the mystery as the core of life. This sense of mystery the writer weaves into the fabric of the narrative largely through the angel imagery. The angel, among other things, is the symbol of that part of our nature which transcends nature but cannot be separated from it.

With this widening of the angel paradigm, we have left the referential stone angel far behind. As Margaret Laurence said to Michel Fabre, *The Stone Angel* in the cemetery is something she 'needed' for her introduction.⁴¹ We might add that she needed it for her whole novel.

In the same interview, the writer affirms that *The Stone Angel* in the novel is not the 'biblical angel of the myth' and while asserting that it does dominate the book like an imposing symbol' she limits its role to the symbolising of the blindness of pride - which I have, for that reason, not developed at length. There are direct echoes, of the *Bible*, and the motif as it invests the text becomes itself invested with more and more meaning. An oxymoronic figure, '*The Stone Angel*' straddles the animate and the non-animate, the earthly and the heavenly, death and life, and so on. Exploring some of these contradictions, the novel gathers them all into a coincidental opporitorum in which the socially coded statue of the Manawaka world turns into an emblem of the human predicament. Eventually, the stone angel stands for death-in-life and life-in-death. In the last analysis, it may also serve as a self-reflexive symbol of the work itself, a verbal monument which representing life cannot but inscribe death, and inscribing death ultimately asserts life. In this view, the work itself appears as a monument to the writer's past, factual or phantasmatic, a monument which the reader must deface, upset and restore before it can yield a spiritual depth.

3 . BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC AND FAMILY HISTORY IN *THE STONE ANGEL*

We shall now go on to see how Laurence was greatly influenced by the *Bible*. In this novel, she has incorporated Biblical hermeneutical models into the narrative which provide an aid at interpretation of the novel. The family device is used both as theme and structure, and this gives Canadians a sense of identity. In the ultimate analysis, by using Biblical hermeneutics, Laurence tries to handle the identity questions faced by individuals in general and Canada in particular. *The Stone Angel* proceeds from a conviction that what gives Canadian family experience its sense of identity is the relation of the vast place that is Canada to a spiritual journey. Laurence says that her country, as her story *The Stone Angel* has not found the place. It is still struggling, thus putting before us the responsibility of perpetual choice making. Here Biblical voices turn *The Stone Angel* toward cultural criticism begin an analysis of the novel to bring out the above mentioned arguments, by first dwelling on the family device, where in the idea of family history is used as a structuring device for the contemporary interpretation of cultural history.

3.1. BIBLICAL MOTIFS IN THE STONE ANGEL

It is not surprising, then that the Biblical motif plays such a prominent part in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. In the case of Laurence, the choice of Biblical types follows from a perceived correspondence, a central theme of Canadian culture is seen in fact to be a central theme of the whole *Bible*, Old and New Testaments taken together and the resulting reference can implicitly incorporate the hermeneutical model presented by Biblical literature as well as those methods of critical interpretation specially appropriate to it. Laurence sets out to compose a family history and in doing so she builds her novel. Hagar's name suggests her symbolic journey and the novel's theme. The Biblical analogues are found in the Genesis story of Abraham's twin dynasty, and in St. Paul's interpretation of it in Galatians 4:22-27. Genesis tells of the "free" wife, Sarah, and the bondswoman, Agar, "after the flesh". In St. Paul's version, the story of two wives and two sons becomes an allegory of human nature and destiny: "for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which engendereth to bondage, which is Agar.... But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice..." Agar's son Ishmael, being under the moral law, is self-condemned by his failure to obey it, while Sarah's son Isaac symbolizes the free gift of grace and release. The archetype draws on Laurence's Judeo-Christian background and on her years in Somaliland, which vividly recreated Old Testament narrative. Northrop Frye shows that the inner significance of Adam's expulsion from Eden is identical with that of the Israelites' desert journey in search of the Promised land where they could live as free men: "There are thus two concentric quest-myths in the *Bible*, a Genesis-apocalypse myth and an Exodus-millennium myth... Eden and the Promised Land, therefore, are typologically identical, as are the tyrannies of Egypt and Babylon and the wilderness of the law."⁴² This ancient affirmative myth of bondage, yearning, sojourning, quest, and release is at the heart of Laurence's work.

Laurence humanizes the religious myth, freeing it from its specifically Christian implications. In her work it becomes an analogue for the journey of the human spirit out of the bondage of pride, which isolates, into the freedom of Love, which links the lover to

the humans. *The Stone Angel* employs images of wilderness, chains, exile, the Egyptian, Pharaoh. The pattern culminates in Hagar's moment of truth, precipitated by the clergyman's song of praise, "Come ye before Him and rejoice." Hagar recognizes that this expresses her deepest need, her life-long desire.

The joys she might have held "were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances... Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear." (*TSA*, p.292.) For Laurence the virtue of a story is the creation of possible choices. The protagonist of Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, is of course really an antagonist. Her life is formed by series of rebellions, rebellions against the strictures of her merchant father's essentially immoral and rigid hypocrisy, against her husband Bram's amoral profligacy, and finally against her son and daughter-in-law's tediously moral charity. Her name suggests her exilic psyche - and as for her prototype, an important purpose of her story is to highlight another story, one in which the psyche is pilgrim and more peaceful. For the Genesis (17-21) story, told as it were from Sarah's point of view, is not the sole prototype of Laurence's characterization of Hagar. Rather, this novel like J. Gardiner's *Grendel*, is engaged from the outcast side, and its hermeneutical substructure derives from Paul's commentary on the Genesis story in Galatians 4:22-7: "Such things speak allegorically. For these women are two covenants, one from Mt. Sinai, bearing into bondage, which is Hagar (for Mt. Sinai is in Arabia.) This corresponds to the present Jerusalem which is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, she is our mother."

The point of Paul's exegesis, reflected in modern criticism and in contemporary preaching on the passage,⁴³ is that the two marriages relate to the two covenants, Old and New, and that Hagar expresses the experience of bondage to the old law, to Sinai, to the "present Jerusalem" that is in the world. That is, Hagar's covenant is from "Mt. Sinai, bearing children unto bondage." Figuratively, it is Sinai approached from one direction.

In another direction, it would be quite different: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." ⁴⁴

Hagar's association with Sinai comes from her travelling in the wrong way, out of the land of promise. Israel is not, in the Biblical story, ever intended to settle at Sinai: " He brought us out of there that he might bring us in, and give us the land promised to our fathers."⁴⁵

Sinai is en route, it is not the goal. It is mediate prospect of the Biblical typology which attracts Laurence for, as we can see from the uncompromising portrait of Hagar's husband Bram ("Abraham"), her use of the Genesis story is not simply as an allegory of the Genesis text.⁴⁶ In her borrowing of the larger typology, Laurence writes out of a perspective fixed on the Pauline exegesis, characterizing bondage of the old Covenant in terms of personal development.

Laurence portrays Hagar as a woman dominated by pride, who, if she wants perfection (or heaven) at all, wants it only on her own terms. Her every action is designed to demonstrate that her will is free, yet despite this her experience is continually of frustration. In the book's most quoted passage, she says:

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains with me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. (*TSA*, p. 292)

The persistent desert images of the prairie in drought are external correspondences to the harvest of her failed attempts to fructify the exile with love. Her relationship with Bram is only of the flesh: "his banner over me was his skin," she acknowledges.⁴⁷ And here, in this story of a woman who has failed to mother her family in peace; to know a husband in spirit, is the essential centre of the novel: the contradiction of stone and angel. Polarities which exclude human nature here index a morbidity of spirit which haunts a whole life, and which prevents even physical experience. The gravestone purchased by Hagar's father, to mark her "mother's angel", "bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day". (*TSA*, p.1) represents a hopeless conflation of spiritual and material values. And the reader comes to appreciate that it is this (derivatively British and)

contradictory petrification of dynasty which thoroughly dissipates the human spirit. When Hagar's son John wrestles to re-erect the fallen stone angel on the grave about the town, Hagar may want to see him as Jacob, but she knows the struggle is without meaning - it is with stone, not an angel, and there can follow from that no discovery of identity, no inheritance of a promise. For Laurence is all too aware that Jacob wrestled to know himself as Israel, as a whole family, a culture, and that John wrestles merely to accommodate his mother.

But the question of identity as posed in the interpersonal terms remains the principle question of this novel. "How can one person know another?" Hagar asks repeatedly, painfully aware that in her isolation from her family and the bondage of her pride she herself is not really known by the people around her, and as the novel progresses she begins to see that she has been unable to come to know others, to understand them.⁴⁸

One cannot really know oneself, the novel says, or others, without the reciprocating perspectives of 'family.' Thus, the resolution of the novel's final form for conclusion is precipitated by an encounter with a series of three additional nuclear families, or couples, whose development which is specifically hermeneutical.

The novel is written from the prospect of Hagar's last weeks of life, almost her dying reflections. The first of the three modular couples are observed by her while she is fugitive from her son and daughter-in-law's attempt to put her into a rest-home. The location is an abandoned cannery on a west coast beach, and the principals are about six years old, a young boy and girl, playing 'house' together with clam shells and driftwood for furniture. As she observes their friendship. She also hears the already acerbic self-assertiveness of the little girl threaten the friendship, and she longs to advise her against what has been, of course, Hagar's own lifelong sharpness. But she cannot.

The next couple comes into the narration through Hagar's somnambulant memory of listening, hidden in the next room, to her favorite son and his mistress making love with an abandon and physical gratification she has never known. Too embarrassed to be discovered,

she is unable to speak or to move. Later, she is embittered, incapable of responding affirmatively to their relationship.

The last couple is discovered to Hagar largely through the wife, who is dying of cancer in the bed across from Hagar during the last chapters of the novel. The room has other patients, but Elva Jardine, as her name suggests, is a garden of affection among them. Despite her recent crucial and painful operation, her every conversation records a life of joy with her husband Tom, joy made known in love and through grief, and a vital but unaffected confidence in her religious faith. When Tom comes to visit, the beauty and good of the relationship is confirmed. But the character of the love it represents is made known most vividly in a singular action, at one and the same time extravagant and mundane. The effect on Hagar is transformational, challenging everything she has thought, so that in the last few days of her life she almost comes to understand the love that has escaped her. With Elva as the active model, we see that *philos*, *eros* and finally a self-sacrificing love (*agape*) are modeled for Hagar as successive stages in the understanding of acceptance as both the meaning of marriage and family and the foundation of personal identity.

To this Christian hermeneutical expression Hagar makes no verbal, personal acknowledgment. There is no conversion in the book. But she does respond to Elva Jardine's exemplum in two decisive and interpretive actions which mark for the reader both the effect of Elva's influence and signal the relevance of the underlying Biblical model. The first occurs when, after she is moved to a semi-private room, her youthfully egotistical teenaged companion has a similarly urgent need for a bedpan. When no nurse comes, Hagar, almost despite herself, rises out of her own desperate fragility to imitate Elva's self-sacrificing act. The second event is prompted by the visit of her son Marvin. It is Marvin who, sensing the moment, speaks first, seeking forgiveness:

'If I've been crabby with you, sometimes, these past years,' he says in a low voice, 'I didn't mean it.' I stare at him. Then quite unexpectedly, he reaches for my hand and holds it tightly. Now it seems to me he is truly, Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and

bargaining. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him. It's in my mind to ask his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me. 'You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John.' (TSA, p. 304)

As Hagar reflects in her last hours, we hear her say: "I lie here and try to recall something truly free that I have done in 90 years," admitting that these two "acts" as she calls them ("a joke and a lie") are the only moments of release from the bondage of her pride that she can remember, actions which ironically bless but with words, and which sacrifice what, for all her tenacity, she could no longer keep. Hagar's spirit never obtains its psychic release. Conversion would involve a submission she cannot countenance: "Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father - no. I want no part of that. All I can thing is - Bless me or not, Lord, just as you please, for I'll not beg." (TSA, p.307)

A minute later she calls out for assistance, and the nurse (she thinks it is Doris) comes to give her a glass of water. Hagar demands to hold it herself, spiteful in her insistence.

I only defeat myself by not accepting her. I know this, I know it very well. But I can't help it - it's my nature. I'll drink from this glass, or spill it, just as I choose. I wrest from her the glass, full of water to be held for the taking. I hold it in my own hands. There. There. (TSA, 308)

It is her last act, her last word.

At first glance, Laurence's *The Stone Angel* seems to document family in an ordinary, almost gynecological way. But the documentation of Hagar's life-in-family is not for itself, or merely, even, for the sake of illuminating Hagar's "historical" character. Rather, it exists, as a context and a foil to Hagar's encounter with other personal possibilities, and in terms

of which her reactions can define alternatives and also highlight her own exilic psyche, her "spiritual" character. Hagar's identity question: "How can one person truly know another?" is, as in much contemporary Canadian fiction, interchangeable with the metaphysical question itself: "What does it all mean?"⁴⁹ In this novel both questions involve the hermeneutical model provided by the Bible as it is traditionally interpreted in typological preaching, and indeed they specifically invite an interpretation for the novel which will relate both the typology and the larger hermeneutic in the reader's understanding. It is by the point of the last two chapters that we move "ahead" of Hagar in our interpretation of Hagar's character, and it is at this juncture that we really begin to want to know where Laurence is taking us in her analysis of this proud, admirable, and now clearly defeated old reprobate. And Laurence appears to exacerbate the reader's natural desire by turning the initial night in the hospital to a welter of drugged and apparently unintelligible human cries de coeur, a chaos of non-communication and desperate pleas:

Oh my poor back –
 Where are you, nurse? I need a bedpan-
 Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten —
 Health of the weak, Refuge of sinners
 Queen of Apostles, Queen of Martyrs, pray for us –
 Tom don't you worry none –
 Mein Gott, erlose mich –
 Erlose mich von meinen Schmerzen –
 Bram! (*TSA*, p. 256-7, 275)

But this ostensibly incoherent litany of unanswered pleas frames the novel's sharpest questions, subtly articulating the reader's own sense of need for release, and it signals an opportunity for critical insight. First, the puzzle: a German song, sung by an old woman through the various other broken prayers, is a literary enigma, addressed directly to the reader. It stops us, demands interpretation. And then recognition: from the Lorelei sequence, it is Heine's song about the boatman who is so enraptured by the song of the siren that he must perish on the reef for his distraction. Yet the first verse, the song's "authorial

acknowledgement" bears a double burden in the context of Hagar's last reflections, her conversations with Elva Jardine, her children, and Doris and Marvin's minister, Mr. Troy:

I don't know what it means
That I have been so saddened;
A tale out of olden times
That I cannot fully understand

In fact, the "age old tale" which confounds Hagar, and the "story" she cannot fully understand, are really memories out of deep structure, a retrospective shaping to the "text" of her experience which looms up from another story. And that the structure is not only a narrative model but the design for interpretation is made clear in Hagar's response to the other "siren" song in the novel, the deathbed hymn of Mr. Troy:

All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with joyful voice, Him
serve with mirth, his praise forthtell; Come ye before him and rejoice." I
would have wished it. This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so
shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must
always, always, have wanted that - simply to rejoice. How is it I never
could? I know, I know. (TSA, p. 291-2)

This hymn, whose theme is the in gathering of the family of God to their Father, moves Hagar, against the flint of her own will, to remorse. Mirth, joy, and praise, have all been as far from Hagar's exilic bondage as her own remove from "all people that on earth do dwell". But the songs are complementary, a binary structure to make clearer the hermeneutic of the whole. While the Heine song speaks the lure of the siren to a dark mystery, to a story which cries out to be interpreted, the old hymn invites an acknowledgement of the Fatherhood of God, and participation of His family. The last lines of the preceding chapter provide an apt transition between the ostensible "poles" marked by the two songs, poles which are as powerful for Laurence, as for Hagar :

'Es zciht in Freud und Leide

Zu ihm mich immer fort'

[In joy and sorrow I am always drawn toward Him] (*TSA*, p. 281)

These lines are not from the Heine song; they are from the well-known folk-song, *Am brunnedn vor dem Tore*. Nevertheless, they are equally purposeful, for in their critical position and hymnic ambiguity, they suggest an axis of relationship between the age-old tale of personal poetry and another age-old tale which helps prepare us, the readers for the singing of Mr. Troy.

The second Mr. Troy passage is a moment of great risk for Laurence in this novel. We could not expect that Hagar should do anything other than refuse to pronounce the words "Our Father" at the last, and are almost gratified with her consistency as she grasps the glass of water on what she insists are her own terms. We have seen that submission would be fatal to her characterization. Yet for all that, (with or without a knowledge of the Genesis analogue to this aspect of Hagar's story,)⁵⁰ the reader of *The Stone Angel* has come to doubt more, by this point, than Hagar, and in appreciation of the novel's increasingly evident design sees her choice as a conclusive structural crux. For the structure to remain plausible, the singing of Mr. Troy and the actions of Elva Jardine have to embody a "real" alternative. That they do so, psychologically and structurally, is made evident in a design that sustains a viable choice for the protagonist right up until the last sentence of the book. The special triumph of will wrought by Laurence in Hagar's characterization makes one remember Hagar not only for what she chose, but for what she rejected.

Hagar's name suggests her symbolic journey and the novel's theme. The biblical analogies are found in the Genesis story of Abraham's twin dynasty and in St. Paul's interpretation of it in Galatians 4:22-27. Genesis tells of the "free" wife, Sarah, and the bonds-woman Agar, "after the flesh". In St. Paul's version the story of two wives and two sons becomes an allegory of human nature and destiny; "for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which engendereth to bondage, which is Agar..... But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice...." Agar's son

Ishmael, being under the moral law, is self-condemned by his failure to obey it, while Sarah's son Issac symbolizes the free gift of the grace and release. The archetype draws on Laurence's Judeo - Christian background and on her years in Somaliland, which vividly recreated Old Testament narrative. Northrop Frye shows that the inner significance of Adam's expulsion from Eden is identical with that of the Israelite's, desert journey in search of a Promised Land where they could live as free men: "There are thus two concentric quest - myths in the *Bible*, a Genesis-apocalypse myth and an Exodus-Milenium myth Eden and the Promised Land, therefore, are typologically identical, as are the tyrannies of Egypt and Babylon and the wilderness of the law⁵¹.

Laurence humanizes the religious myth. In her work, it becomes an analogues for the journey of the human spirit out of the bondage of pride, which isolates, into the freedom of love, which links the lover to other humans. *The Stone Angel* employs images of wilderness, chains, exile, the Egyptian Pharaoh. The pattern culminates in Hagar's moment of truth, precipitated by the clergyman's song of praise, "Come ye before him and rejoice". Hagar recognizes that this expresses her deepest need, her life long desire. The joys she might have held "were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances..." "Pride was my wilderness, says Hagar, and the demon that led me there was fear" (*TSA*, p. 292)

3.2. BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC AND RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

By the word "hermeneutic", one means simply an integral model for interpretation; the sense of interpretive structure within which exegesis or explication takes place. Biblical hermeneutic has two principal aspects. The first of these is an external narrative structure or model, a "family history" known as "the story of the covenant;" from it are drawn such types as Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, Jacob, and Esau, as well as the pilgrimage model for history itself. Its narrative structure is developed most thoroughly in the five books of Moses. The second aspect is an inner rhetorical structure which governs the psychology and narrative purpose of the story. This kind of structure is to be found highly articulated in individual portions of the *Bible*, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the Sermon on the Mount, but it governs as well the implicit structures of the whole Biblical anthology. The basic

rhetorical method of the inner structure can be described as a series of apparent analogues - actually a progress of refocussings - or a fugue of perspectives through which the reader comes, by dialogue, to recognize the significant interrelationship of all stories to a comprehensive and ongoing narrative.

The typical Biblical model is found in Isaiah, a book which is itself an anthology of oracles, poems, history, prophecies and songs, disparate voices whose collective structure is organized according to a basic inner rhetorical pattern which may be set out in brief as follows :

A. Human story in precis :

1. Rebellion against God's Fatherhood and Authority (Isaiah 1:2:3)
2. Result : Sickness and alienation in the Body (His people, family, etc.) (Isaiah 1:49)

B. The analysis :

1. What man offers (more rebellion and meaningless sacrifices) (Isaiah 1:9-15)

C. Purpose of the Book:

1. Dialogue (or conversation) to order perspective on God's authorship ("Come, let us reason together ..." Isaiah 1:1)
2. Response: personal choice (with respect to reconciliation and redemption of the family, etc.)

In Isaiah, this pattern is repeated, fugue-like, throughout the balance of the book (1:19 to chapter 5; 6-12; 12-24; 24-40; 41-66.)

The resulting series of analogues and amplifications calls on the typology of the exotic narrative of the old covenant, announcing the purpose of the book in terms which anticipate the structural denouement of the *New Testament*, the "new covenant."⁵² But this inner rhetorical structure governs narrative strategy throughout the *Bible*, and determines the use of "old covenant" typology and "new covenant" apologetics, even to the development of the Beatitudes in the Sermon of the Mount (Matt. 5) or the threefold rhetorical analysis of

love, which concludes with agape in the dialogue of Christ and Peter beside the Sea of Galilee. (John 21) The recurrence reflects, of course, the impact of *Old Testament* hermeneutic on the shaping of inner rhetoric in part of the Biblical anthology stylistically and chronologically far removed from each other, a shaping made explicit in the serial language of the *Bible* itself, and which is regularly celebrated in traditional Christian homiletics of the Sunday morning variety.⁵³

Magaret Laurence is evidently interested in the first aspect of Biblical hermeneutic, the narrative structural model of the Hebrew family history. But her brilliant artistry in *The Stone Angel* shapes typology, history, songs and poems in ways which also correspond to the second aspect, the inner rhetorical structure of Biblical hermeneutic. Thus, the point of Laurence's evocation of the Genesis story is its Pauline hermeneutical understanding, and her "old covenant" Hagar delineates a binary structure to which a "new covenant" understanding is the presupposed complement. While it would certainly be artificial to tie an overall analysis of *The Stone Angel* too rigorously to the model, some useful insights can be obtained from a comparison even with the limited example from Isaiah. Thus:

A. Hagar's story in precis:

1. Rebellion against Fatherhood and Authority
2. Result : alienation in the family, sickness in the "body"

B. The analysis :

1. What Hagar Offers - self-justification, further rebellion
2. What others ('God' family, "reader" etc.) suggest - submission, forgiveness (implicity building toward Mr. Troy's song and Elva Jardine's 'choice')

C. Purpose of the book :

1. Dialogue to order perspective (cf.three modular couples, Lees, hospital conversations, Heine song, hymn etc.)
2. Response : personal choice with respect to reconciliation redemption of the family, etc. It is to be appreciated that for elements of narrative substructure (such as the song and

hymn, or the three types of love) it would be possible to detail a comparison still more completely. It will be more fruitful here, however, to broaden the base of these observations to include another major contemporary work. For Margaret Laurence is far from unique among modern Canadian writers in her extensive use of Biblical hermeneutic.

To conclude, *The Stone Angel* makes it very clear that Laurence was largely influenced by the *Bible*. Even more importantly, is the fact that she has thoroughly incorporated Biblical hermeneutical models into the narrative and rhetorical structure of their works, and how they appeal to an appreciation of the models as a guide to interpretation. Part of the virtue of this literary relationship in the Canadian context arises from a strongly felt analogy between a central idea of Biblical story and of Canada's own contemporary culture: the paradoxical persistence of the family in the search for identity, the need for the perspectives of others to know the self. But novels evoke structures of meaning which interpret present historical experience as part of a much larger history, the text of which has been already charted. This creates a sense of *wierd Zeitgeist* (or Providence,) moving like a great wind over the landscape and its people - inexorably - marking its own path and rhythm. Yet if the wind has sometimes seemed bracing, it has moved easily over Canada affording little sense of particular before. *The Stone Angel* here proceeds instead from a conviction that what gives Canadian family experience its particular sense of identity is the relation of a vast yet present place - a beautiful, rough-edged balance of habitation and wilderness - to a spiritual journey whose storied character has been imagined before and beyond the sound of present voices.

This does not mean that the "place" is, by itself the center, therefore of Canadian literary identity. Nor does it mean that "the road is the place". Rather, the novel of Laurence seems to say that her country, as her story, has not yet finally found the place; it is still struggling, still en route. It says, assertively, but without pessimism, "We are not there yet," consistently putting before us the responsibility of perpetual choice making. And it is here that her Biblical "voice" turns fiction towards significant cultural criticism. Laurence seems to be saying that the crucial choice for Canadian culture might be described as

poised between the ostensible comfort afforded by a "Jerusalem which now is," and a better prospect, a "vision of peace" between the way of the self and the life of the family of Man .

4. ART, NATURE AND LIFE

In *The Stone Angel*, one of the most important one points that Laurence wants to get across is the contrast of conscious and unconscious experience. She opposes what is foreign and what is native, what is imposed and what is discovered. Right from the start, there is no doubt where Laurence stands. Those things which had "grown always" are iradicable, timeless and essential; those things which "civilization" makes are ephemeral, relatively superficial. They are also lifeless since the "clearly civilized" spaces are the "habitations of the dead",⁵⁴ filled with "funeral parlour odours". In *The Stone Angel*, things which are foreign, imposed artificial or conscious- all those things which are matters of art or civilization- often show a repudiation for life. Here, Laurence also puts forth the opposition between art and nature, art and life.

Finally the activities meant to subdue nature are both mistaken and heroic. Laurence elsewhere has paid tribute to pioneers' accomplishments in settling the West:

how mixed were my own feelings towards that generation of pioneers- how difficult they were to live with, how authoritarian, how unbending, how afraid to show love, many of them, and how willing to show anger. And yet, they had inhabited a wilderness and made it fruitful. They were in the end, great survivors, and for that I love and value them.⁵⁵

Throughout the novel, Hagar is torn between civilization and wilderness. She is divided between her inward and outward selves : the one natural and vital, the other acquired and life-denying. She has an overweening concern for respectability and learns constantly to check her innate energy. But mere survival is not enough. What is needed, Laurence argues, is "the survival of some human dignity and in the end the survival of some human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others." The failure to express such love afflicts all of

Laurence's Manawaka protagonists, none more than Hagar. Hagar's fresh language testifies to her vitality. To cite only a few examples: Mrs. Reilly, a huge patient in Hagar's hospital room, is, Hagar thinks, "lethargic as a giant slug," and Mrs. Dobereiner, on the same ward, sings "like the high thin whining of a mosquito." (*TSA*, p. 28) Another woman at Silverthreads nursing home, Hagar notices, "pats at her hair with a claw yellow as a kite's foot." (*TSA*, p. 101.) And, during prairie thunderstorms, Hagar recalls, "the lightning would rend the sky like an angry claw at the cloak of god." (*TSA*, p. 161.)

Hagar speaks with special imagination in describing Doris, her dull but decent daughter-in-law. Hagar's perverse inclination to criticize her takes the form of unflattering, often humorous, animal comparisons. Doris, she thinks, "heaves and strains like a calving cow," "gapes" at her husband, Marvin, "like a flounder," (*TSA*, p. 31.) and utters "a high hurt squawking, like an unwilling hen the rooster treads," (*TSA*, p. 95) "broody hen" that she is "in her dowdy brown, dandruffed on either shoulder and down the back like molting feathers." (*TSA*, p. 29) Such exuberance also appears in Hagar's teens, when she revels in dances: Lord, how I enjoyed those dances, and can hear yet the stamping of our feet, and the fiddler scraping like a cricket. My hair, pinned on top of my head, would come undone and fall around my shoulder in a black glossiness that the boys would try to touch. (*TSA*, p. 22.) On such occasions Hagar contemptuously tosses her dark hair, symbol of her budding sexuality, like a mane. (*TSA*, p. 46.) On the other hand, a stint at an Eastern Academy almost finishes her off. Upon leaving Manawaka, she is "Hagar with the shining hair, the dark maned colt off to the training ring." (*TSA*, p. 42.) Presumably that civilizing school tames the wildness in her, acting as yet another cemetery or antimacassar. The ring encircles and circumscribes her impetuous energy, just as her upbringing earlier has instilled an affected primness in her. Appearing as a little girl at the town dump, Hagar and some of her friends, she tells us, "tiptoed, fastidiously holding the edges of our garments clear, like dainty-nosed czarinas finding themselves in sudden astonishing proximity to beggars with weeping sores." (*TSA*, p. 26-7) In no time at all she learns to be "resplendent, haughty, hoity-toity" (*TSA*, p. 6) in politely skirting life. Hagar learns constantly to check her innate energy (except for her unbridled fits of pique as an old woman.) Raised as a prig, she soon becomes cripplingly inhibited and private. Her appalling sense of propriety prevents her from ever being at ease

with people or trusting them. She silently congratulates herself on having "manners" and avoiding "coarse" talk, readily equating acquired mannerisms with personal worth. She is so fastidious about such niceties, in fact, that when her neglected son, Marvin, faithfully writes each month from the West coast, her only response is the complaint that "his letters were always very poorly spelled." (*TSA*, p. 130) Interestingly, Hagar is so withdrawn that she, herself, rarely writes letters or, for that matter, seldom speaks to anyone, as the striking paucity of her dialogue in *The Stone Angel* indicates. Hagar's overweening concern for respectability makes her unusually conscious of audiences. Her expressions indicate as much: "They are no tears of mine, in front of her;" (*TSA*, p. 31.) "People are always listening;" (*TSA*, p. 89.) "I preferred possible damnation ... to any ordeal of peeking or pitying eyes;" (*TSA*, p. 90) "I can scarcely nod my thanks, fearing she'll see my unseemly tears;" (*TSA*, p.92.) "That damned outhouse bothered me most of all. It always looked so foolish." (*TSA*, p. 114.) Fittingly, the taciturn Bram Shipley eloquently exposes Hagar's obsession with appearances. Outraged when he pisses on the steps of her father's store, she tears into him, claiming: "I don't disgrace myself." "No, by Christ, " Bram answers, "you're respectable - I'll give you that." (*TSA*, p, 116.) Later, when Hagar says "They'd think we are hicks" for taking lunch onto the train, Bram replies. "That would be an everlasting shame, wouldn't it?" (*TSA*, p. 142.) He recognizes that, for all her strength, Hagar weakens in facing public opinion.

Concern about how things look also determines Hagar's attitude toward clothes. Except for a period when she is on the farm, she forever worries about being "decently" dressed. And she is, of course, always comparing her own "lilac silk" to Doris's "brown rayon" dresses. Laurence presents Hagar in strongly Jungian terms. The persistent effort to keep up a good front, according to Jung, can be damaging if a person starts to rely heavily on the disguises she assumes in presenting herself in public or if someone lives so often and so completely by masks that she confuses herself with them. Hagar definitely doesn't lack a rich inner state, and she doesn't assume she is what she wants others to think she is. Still, she does pour a lot of herself into manufacturing costumes and roles behind which she can hide. She lives by her persona, the archetype Jung says we rely upon in developing a social face. The persona, he argues, "is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and

society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the nature of the individual".⁵⁶ Hagar plays the role for those very reasons.

Clearly she is divided between her inward and outward selves : the one natural and vital, the other acquired and life-denying. Just as her father's stiff stout house stands "antimacassared in the wilderness," so she learns to wrap herself in her sanitary persona and to scorn the dark Metis from "the wrong side of the tracks." (*TSA*, p. 115) or the strange Ukrainians "beyond our pale". (*TSA*, p.46.) So, too, she learns to turn up her "dainty" nose at the "stain and stench" of the "festering" garbage dump. (*TSA*, p. 26-7)

For similar reasons she also draws back in fear and revulsion from farm animals, whereas Bram, uncultivated man that he is, accepts animals for what they are. Take their opposing attitudes toward bees, for example:

His damned bees sickened and for the most part died, looking like scattered handfuls of shriveled raisins in the hives. A few survived, and Bram kept them for years, knowing full well they frightened me. He could plunge his hairy arms among them, even when they swarmed, and they never stung. I don't know why, except he felt no fear. (*TSA*, p. 57.)

The degree to which Hagar has learned to hold back nature, both without and within herself, determines her response to the bees. Bram, in touch with what is local, natural and unconscious, and never part of Hagar's genteel world, feels none of her contempt or anxiety. Hagar doesn't find Bram's unreflecting farm life altogether insignificant or unattractive, but she carefully keeps it in hand. Her view of chickens shows as much:

Messy things - how I detested their flutter and squawk. At first I could hardly bring myself to touch them, their soiled feathers and the way they flapped in terror to get away. I got so I could even wring their

necks when I had to but they never ceased to sicken me, live or dead, and when I'd plucked and cleaned and cooked one, I never could eat it. I'd as lief have eaten rat flesh. (TSA, p. 126-7)

Hagar's very next thought tells the story of her retreat into polite culture:

I bought a gramophone with a great black cornucopia on top and a handle you had to crank incessantly, and records to go with it. *Ave Maria, The Grand March from Aida, In a Monastery Garden, Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms*. They had Beethoven's *Fifth* listed in the catalogue as well, but it was too expensive. I never played them in the evenings when Bram and Marvin were there. Only in the days. (TSA, p. 127.)

The immediate attempt to displace unbecoming realities with sentimental or inspirational music shows what Hagar's upbringing has done to her. The same behavior characterizes her view of horses:

"I have kept Rosa Bohnneur's *The Horse Fair* ... and still in my room the great-flanked horses strut eternally." But "Bram never cared for that picture," she says. "You never gave a damn for living horses, Hagar," he said once. "But when you see them put onto paper where they couldn't drop manure, then it's dandy, eh? Well, keep your bloody paper horses. I'd as soon have nothing on my walls." (TSA, p. 83.)

The key words, "living" and "paper", once more reveal Hagar's ambivalence. She's always drawn to life, especially at its most intense, though she can never quite admit its full power, almost as if she dreads being overwhelmed by it. Bram's accusations, she realizes years later, cut to the heart of her inner constraints. Her fear of horses discloses more than a fussy concern for tidiness:

I have to laugh now, although I was livid then. He was quite right that I never cared for horses. I was frightened of them, so high and heavy they seemed, so muscular, so much their own masters. I never felt I could handle them. I didn't let Bram see I was afraid, preferring to let him think I merely objected to them because they were smelly. Bram was crazy about horses. (*TSA*, p. 83.)

A good measure of how repressed Hagar has become in bridling the colt within her shows up in her avoidance of the powerful, even sexual, forces embodied in horses and in Bram, who identifies with them.

Art enables Hagar to evade or to control the dark side of life; to "handle" it, she says. There can be no doubt that, given her imagination and intelligence, she genuinely likes music and painting. Even so, the art she prefers tends to be stylized or mawkish- the very kind that quickly leads away from earthy experience or that puts it in its place. It's no accident, then, that Hagar says she "thought it was a bad thing to grow up in a house with never a framed picture to tame the walls." (*TSA*, p. 83.) In constantly seeking artificial ways of covering up those native things. She both admires and fears, she lapses into romantic reveries about elegant and fantastic scenes:

I always like the gauzy ladies performing Chopin in concert halls, proven by photographs to exist somewhere. (*TSA*, p. 126.) Oh, I was the one, all right, tossing my black mane contemptuously... and seeing the plain board town and the shack dwelling beyond our pale as though they'd been the beckoning illustrations in the book of Slavic fairy tales given me by an aunt, the enchanted houses with eyes, walking on their own splayed hen's feet, the czar's sons playing at peasant in coarse embroidered tunics, bloused and belted, the ashen girls drowning attractively in mere, crowned always with lilies, never with pigweed or slime. (*TSA*, p. 46.) Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets... (*TSA*, p. 80)

Those fancies again and again lead Hagar to distort the things that happen to her. At no time does that happen more dramatically than in her approach to Bram. Snob though she is, Hagar instantly takes an interest in him. It consists of both genuine excitement over his coarse sexuality and an evasive lacquering of him :

I reveled in his fingernails with crescents of ingrown earth that never met a file. I fancied I heard in his laughter the bravery of battalions. I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face. The black hair thrusting from his chin was rough as thistles. The next instant, though I imagined him rigged out in a suit of gray soft as a dove's breast-feathers. (*TSA*, p. 45.)

The extent to which Hagar whimsically wants to transform the man by imposing her will on him is evident in her verbs: "I fancied," "I thought he looked," and "I imagined." Bram's unrefined qualities make him desirable, but not quite so satisfying as a dark, hairy man clipped and perfumed into a perfect foreign gentleman fit for the castle which Hagar, as "chatelaine", (*TSA*, p.51.) plans to run on the farm. It wouldn't be long, she thinks, before "Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar," (*TSA*, p. 50) the proper bounds on dress and speech, before he became a Currie houseboy respectably and artfully antimacassared against the dirt of living. Hagar's marital expectations directly parallel her attempts to domesticate horses in her pictures and to avoid chickens in her music.

The opposition between art and nature finds its most sustained and symbolic representations in the long early section on the cemetery, as I've suggested. The Cree in the prairie landscape, are noteworthy for their hair. Now, in the section revealing Hagar's first feelings about Bram, we find that in her eyes "he looked a bearded Indian." Unseemly hairy creature, he, too, belongs "out there" in the dark "lower" space full of animals, instincts, dreams, unsettled and unsettling energies, forbidden and forbidding thoughts, all the unconscious powers corrected by civilized good manners and good sense, dangerous yet fascinating for sheltered and well-trained people like Hagar. Her mixed reaction to Bram's

direct sexual approach when they first met is completely in character, then. Offended though she may be, Hagar feels genuine desire for him.

A sense of lost life heavily weighs on her as, in old age, she reassesses herself. Despite her rich emotion she has never been able to let go with anyone, not even Bram. Hagar waits but she does not risk exposure, wanting to be impregnable in her emotional and mental garrison. Locked in her static spaces, she experiences something approaching death-in-life. The dash at the end of her mute appeal brilliantly expresses as much. The incompleteness of her thought registers her inability to act, something she is well aware of. The simple, painful words of recognition appear time and again, recording the disastrous restraint that keeps her alone and life at bay: "I wanted to say but I did not say that" (*TSA*, p. 85.) "I felt I must pursue him, say it was a passing thing and not meant. But I didn't." (*TSA*, p. 45.)

The refrain goes on and on. The most powerful expression of how tightly Hagar has bottled up her inner self occurs when Marvin comes to say good bye as he's going off to war: I didn't know what to say to him.

I wanted to beg him to look after himself, to be careful, as one warns children against snowdrifts or thin ice or the hooves of horses, feeling the flimsy words may act as some kind of charm against disaster. I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses...

"Mother - ""Yes?" And then I realized I was waiting with a kind of anxious hope for what he would say, waiting for him to make himself known to me. But he was never a quick thinker, Marvin. Words would not come to his bidding, and so the moment eluded us both. He turned and put his hand on the doorknob. "Well, so long, " he said. "I'll be seeing you." (*TSA*, p. 129-30)

Laurence catches the unvoiced feelings extremely well. The walls are up. Hagar consistently refuses closeness and openness. When her brother, Dan, dies, she "stiffened and drew away ... wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough." (*TSA*, p. 25.) On other occasions, rigid and armoured, she jerks her hand away from her father (*TSA*, p. 44.) and shoves aside Marvin's "paw". (*TSA*, p. 33) She keeps up her defences, fearing above all else to be vulnerable behind her protective persona of stern disapproval and respectable dress : "Aloof. Alert. Not to be taken in." (*TSA*, p. 34.) Retracted and concealed within herself, she speaks "guardedly" (*TSA*, p. 70) and steps "with a cautious foot" (*TSA*, p. 105.) whenever there's a chance someone might understand her.

Hagar's worry over property has a lot to do with her search for an emotional refuge. Her cranky insistence on referring to her house and her solid, heavy furniture in the first person singular doesn't derive from financial worry. It comes from her psychological need for a certain, immovable world. To her mind, her household fixtures "are mine. How could I leave them? They support and comfort me." (*TSA*, p. 59-9) "If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed her, eternal enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I am to be found at all." (*TSA*, p. 36.) she says to herself. "Contained", "caught", "fixed" - the language of renunciation, consciously warding off the dark flux of life. Hagar likes to barricade herself behind walls, characteristically wanting to lock her bedroom as an old woman. Fearing "violation", she seeks "concealment" in the house (*TSA*, p. 74.) Of course, she is trying to maintain a bit of human dignity in a place of her own, but the action reveals something less flattering and more profound. Without realizing it, she is shutting out the outer world and rejecting her natural inclinations. Suppression on the outside is repression on the inside.

Hagar can be at least as hard on others. Her sharptongued attacks, especially those she makes on Doris, are often unfair. In fact, she is opinionated, quick to think and to speak ill of people. In Jungian terms, Hagar is suffering from her animus, that archetype of maleness incipient in every woman which, if she allows herself to be possessed by it, will lead her to

take rigid and cantankerous positions.⁵⁷ That Hagar's obstinacy may have something to do with Jung's animus seems even more likely when we remember that Jung linked its appearance to the impact of a girl's childhood experiences with her father. In Hagar's case, she "takes after" her father. For all her own striking speech and dislike of worn words, she speaks in cliché only when enjoining his financial catechism to her son John. On those occasions she reverts to all the stubborn triteness her father had been able to muster in extolling the virtues of private initiative.

If Hagar has been afflicted with a fierce animus and persona, in the end she tenuously manages - unexpectedly and painfully - to shake them off and to find support in a fuller life. The persona, a partly conscious fabrication, finds its compensating counterpart in the unconscious; in what Jung calls the shadow.⁵⁸ As the word implies, Jung means the "dark" part of the human psyche which generates all the uncivilized passions and thoughts disturbing to an ideal public figure, or persona. But he doesn't think that the shadow is necessarily inferior or monstrous. As a matter of fact, Jung constantly stresses the need to unite the conscious and the unconscious minds, the light and the dark, what is "upper" and what is "lower" to bring together the very realities Hagar has separated. According to Jung, anyone who hasn't a shadow of doubt about the rightness of her aversion and preferences will suffer from psychic imbalance or disease.⁵⁹

It is therefore startling to read that when Hagar, distraught about her future, runs away to the cannery, where she experiences a personal breakthrough. She is off to "Shadow Point". The language describing Hagar's experience there is remarkably Jungian. To foreshadow and reinforce the significance of Hagar's trip to the seashore, Laurence allows her quietly to inform us that she is wearing a cotton beige dress printed with black triangles.

She has never before worn such a dress. What she does wear, day after day, as she proudly reminds herself, is a "silk" lilac dress. The black triangles offer a visual representation of Shadow Point, the place where Hagar meets and starts to assimilate her own lost shadow. The change of clothes alerts us to an imminent change in her life. But there's more to it than that. The switch from what Hagar likes to think is silk to the common, natural fabric, cotton,

is a sign of the humbleness she's about to fumble, unintentionally and reluctantly, toward. For the black and beige on the cotton dress are earth colours in contrast to the blues and purples Hagar has always preferred. Her favour-ite colours figure most noticeably in her lilac dresses, but the colour shows up whenever Hagar is describing things belonging to the Curries: their Limoges China, their rugs with "blue" roses, their family pitcher: a "knobbed jug of blue and milky glass." Laurence deftly sets the description of this heirloom near another section where Hagar talks about a Shipley jug:

There's the plain brown pottery pitcher, edged with anemic blue, that was Bram's mother's, brought from some village in England and very old. I'd forgotten it was here... It always looked like an ordinary milk pitcher to me. Tina says it's valuable. Each his taste, and my granddaughter, though so dear to me, has common tastes. (*TSA*, p.102.)

Laurence probably intends the proximity of these passages not only to show Hagar's mind at work associating related memories, but also to suggest a pattern of countering colour images, the browns, of course, belonging to the Shipleys. The distinction finds reinforcement throughout the novel. Take the selection where Hagar complains about Marvin's name:

Whoever chose Marvin for his name? Bram, I suppose. A Shipley family name, it was, I think. Just the sort of name the Shipleys would have. They were all Mabels and Gladyses, Vernons and Marvins, squat brown names, common as bottled beer. (*TSA*, p.32.)

It is surely no accident, then, that Doris dresses in brown as well. In her presumption Hagar finds brown, beige, and (usually) gray dull and undistinguished. Her purples and blues are the traditional colours of royalty and of the sky - symbols of the social and mental ascendancy she thinks matter. In repudiating simple things she has set her eye on "higher" matters. Now, as she approaches Shadow Point, here beige dress shows she is about to

accept the shades of common night and earth. She finally will come "down to earth" as she embraces what is "coarse" and "greasy" and as she begins to remove the antimacassars that have sanitized her mind.

In order to enter life fully, Hagar has to get off her "high horse". The shut bedroom she leaves in fleeing home is located on the top floor of her house, symptomatic of her mental state. Cut off as she is from the shadows deep within herself, Hagar has learned that decent ladies don't "stoop" to such life. They're "above" that sort of thing. Then, at the Point, she begins to descend "down and down",.. to the place I'm looking for," (*TSA*, p. 148.) "down the steep slopes to the sea," (*TSA*, p. 150) to realities no longer beside the point. I will quote in full Hagar's account of the stairwell since it stresses her mythic journey into the depths:

The stairway's beginning is almost concealed by fern and bracken, tender and brittle, green fish-spines that snap easily under my clumping feet. It's not a proper stairway, actually. The steps have been notched into the hillside and the earth bolstered at the edges with pieces of board. There's a banister of sorts, made of poles, but half of them have rotted away and fallen. I go down cautiously, feeling slightly dizzy. The ferns have overgrown the steps in some places, and salmonberry branches press their small needles against my arms as I pass. Bushes of goatsbeard brush satyr-like against me. Among the fallen leaves and brown needles of fir and balsam on the forest floor grow those white pinpoint flowers we used to call Star of Bethlehem. I can see into cool and shady places, the streaks of sun starfished across the moist and musky earth. (*TSA*, p. 151.)

The descent is a rite de passage, an entrance into new life:

To move to a new place, that's the greatest excitement. For a while you believe you carry nothing with you all is canceled from before, or

cauterized, and you begin again and nothing will go wrong this time.

(*TSA*, p. 155.)

The hint of Hagar's approaching character change gains emphasis from the fact that the stairway is rotting away and nearly over-grown from lack of use: few people have gone this way. By the same token, her dizziness on the steps indicates more than her old age and bad health. It also hints of the critical confusion she will pass through in losing her conscious hold on life. Finally, reference to fish, "satyr-like" goatsbeard, and the "moist and musky earth" draw our attention to the sexuality and fertility embodied in the shadows Hagar is now entering.

The risky descent is something she hardly expects or welcomes. She comes to Shadow Point wanting a "fortress" (*TSA*, p. 153.) where she can "feel somehow more barricaded, safer" (*TSA*, p. 155.) in "some sort of stronghold where nothing could touch me." (*TSA*, p. 161) Only gradually does she start to think: "Perhaps I've come here not to hide but to seek." (*TSA*, p. 19.)

The escape then turns into a quest couched in religious terms, a painful search for her essential whole self, long denied. Although Hagar, like Laurence, shows contempt for the "gimerack", "crammed", and "sequined" heaven of evangelical Christianity. (*TSA*, p. 120.)

Laurence effectively portrays her climb down the "two hundred earthen stairs" into "this pit and valley" in Christian symbols. Numerous expressions reinforce that fact. Initially, when Hagar struggles to remember the name of the place, she suddenly recalls it with what amounts to an unwitting prayer of thanks: "It will come. Just take it easy. There, there. Oh - Shadow Point. Thank the Lord." (*TSA*, p. 146.)

The expression says more than Hagar intends or recognizes. Later, on arriving at the deserted resort, Hagar enters one of the gray buildings thinking "my room has been prepared for me." (*TSA*, p. 155.) The words echo Christ's promise. "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you," What happens in the next few hours emphasizes the

religious theme. Suffering from thirst, Hagar thinks of the line, "Water water every where nor any drop to drink." (*TSA*, p. 186.) Like the ancient mariner, she has offended the natural order and needs salvation. Having long ago renounced her basic self, she is lost in an inner wasteland. Hence the scattered references to her as an Egyptian wandering in the desert, (*TSA*, p. 183.) portray her as someone living in exile from herself. Fortunately, Hagar, like her Biblical namesake, soon finds her "well in the wilderness," (*TSA*, p. 187.) in her case an old bucket that has caught the night rain. The phrase picks up the language she used upon first arriving at the Point, "what would a fortress be without a well?" (*TSA*, p. 153.) Once Murray Ferney Lees shows up, Hagar joins him in drinking a jug of red wine in a plastic "goblet" which Lees thoughtfully has provided for her, an action that becomes all the more meaningful when we remember that years before Hagar set aside the wine decanter Bram offered her as a wedding present. Their communal drinking released a flood of memories which Hagar for the first time shares. Talking in the middle of the night, she opens up to her own shadows. For the first time she begins to listen and to reach out. And, though she once sat rigid as a stone angel, unable to weep when John died, now, profoundly mortified, she surrenders to her passions and cries in telling Lees what happened to him. Hagar, who had shoved away people all her life, now gives in to Lee's presence:

"We sit close together for warmth, both of us... And then we slip into sleep." (*TSA*, p.256)

Worn down by her physical and emotional ordeal, Hagar begins to imagine she is speaking to John, though in her growing humanity she now learns to accept John's relationship with Arlene and to show her love for him. Finally, when Lees returns with Doris and Marvin and stands waiting for Hagar to pardon him, she breaks through her initial resentment and her crippling old tendency to hold back, and she impulsively touches him. Out of genuine affection and concern she actually apologizes to him. In keeping with the series of religious references prominent in this section of the book, Laurence tells us that Hagar begins to suspect "it was a kind of mercy I encountered him."⁶⁰ On a mimetic level, Lees, like all Laurencean characters, functions well. He is an ordinary person, slightly comical, a bit pathetic, whose job, marriage and family life have their ups and downs. But there's more to him. Lees provides an instance of the archetype Jung calls the wise old man, a father figure who always appears when the questing hero is in a difficult situation "where insight,

understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc. are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources." Lees certainly offers wise counsel. He speaks sanely and humanely about religion and sexuality. And, though he parodies the evangelical style, in a peculiar way he is the very ministerial figure he mocks. Hagar's language intimates as much:

I lean forward, attentive, ease a cramped limb with a hand, and look at this man, whose name I have suddenly forgotten but whose face, now turned to mine, says in plain and urgent silence - Listen. You must listen. He's sitting cross-legged, and he wavers a little and sways as he speaks in a deep loud voice. (*TSA*, p.232)

Certainly Lees speaks out of his own direct human need in a disarming and simple honesty that wins over Hagar in spite of herself. But in turn, when she, released in her dream state, tells her own painful story, he listens and responds as a spiritual comforter. Even before Hagar exposes her secret thoughts and emotions, she has sensed the special strength he brings to her. In fact, she comes to that recognition in remarkably mythic thinking:

If I were alone, I wouldn't find the sound [of the sea] soothing in the slightest. I'd be drawn out and out, with each receding layer of water to its beginning, a depth as alien and chill as some far frozen planet, a night sea hoarding sly-eyed serpents, killer whales, swarming phosphorescent creatures dead to the daytime, a black sea sucking everything into itself, the spent gull, the trivial garbage from boats, and men protected from eternity only by their soft and fearful flesh and their seeing eyes. But I have a companion and so I'm safe, and the sea is only the sound of water slapping against the planking. (*TSA*, p. 224-5)

Without Lees' guidance through what Jungians call the night sea journey, Hagar would be unable to cope with her immersion. In mythic terms, he enables her to face and then to escape the monsters protecting the dark unconscious world and threatening to engulf her

and hold her in that state. She needs to enter the depths, but she also needs to emerge from them whole. Hence her anxiety when Lees momentarily leaves her alone in the dark:

I dip and dart inside my skull, swooping like a sea gull. I feel ill at the sensation. I feel I may not be able to return, even if I open my eyes. I may be swept outward like a gull, blown by a wind too strong for it, forced into the rough sea, held under and drawn fathoms down into depths as still and cold as black glass. (*TSA*, p.235)

Appropriately, Murray Ferney Lees works for the "Dependable Life Assurance" company. Laurence's choice of names is as deliberate as it is fortuitous. She could just as easily have spoken of an "insurance" company. The point is that Lees offers Hagar reassurance in her growing acceptance of all life, not just her cosmetic version of it. Lees' own names work equally well. That Hagar is in the "Lees" of life makes his surname appropriate. "Murray" is a Scottish name meaning "by the sea" and "Ferney", of course, refers to some of the plants found in the forest around the cannery. The Christian names indicate the "wilderness". Hagar is on the verge of leaving the closed, safe, and life-denying spaces she's always preferred. The sea, in particular, alerts us to the undercurrent of water images moving toward Hagar's spiritual rebirth. Several incidents at the Point anticipate the still greater maturity Hagar will find when she is dying a few days later in the hospital. The sea gull trapped in the cannery vividly denotes Hagar's position.

A sea gull is flying in this room. I feel the brush and heat of its wings as it swoops and mounts. It's frightened, trapped and flapping. I hate a bird inside a building. Its panic makes it unnatural. I can't bear to have it touch me. A bird in the house means a death in the house - that's what we used to say. Nonsense, of course. (*TSA*, p. 217)

But in the novel the omen is not nonsense, whatever people of "good sense" believe. When the wounded bird escapes, stray dogs kill it. The bird's fate shows what is about to happen to Hagar. Her tenuous escape from the crippling mental prisons she has built about her

barely precedes her death. The appearance of the trapped bird does not come without warning. Laurence skillfully slips earlier references to caged birds into the book always showing Hagar's association with them. In one instance, Hagar catches and holds a wren in a white cage for John, (*TSA*, p. 69) the action revealing both her personal repressions and the inordinate claims she makes on her family. In another case more directly related to the appearance of the gull at Shadow Point, Hagar describes her panic as Doris and Marvin take her to see Silverthreads Nursing Home: "My heart is pulsing too fast, beating like a berserk bird. I try to calm it, I must, I must, or it will damage itself against the cage of my bones. But still it lurches and flutters, in a frenzy to get out." (*TSA*, p.95) Finally, the berserk wounded bird within Hagar, does manage to break loose and awkwardly tries to fly.

As Hagar's carefully constructed garrison begins to fall at the hospital, the shadow archetype powerfully emerges, nearly displacing the persona and the animus. Hagar comes closer to what she genuinely is when she starts to shed her acquired or distorted selves. Her animus and persona never wholly disappear because such transitions are never sudden or complete. Hence Hagar's many lapses into bad temper and pretense when she goes to the hospital. Temporarily reverting to her mulish solitude there, she doesn't want to be in a public ward, she prefers to have her bed curtained off, and she turns her face away from the other patients.

The retreat doesn't last long, however. Soon she is relating to the others with insight and sensitivity. She comes close to Elva Jardine, the tiny woman she at first found distasteful, apologizes silently to those she offends and tries to please others. She also expresses gratitude for almost the first time in her life, wonders what troubles a young nurse on her ward, recognizes others' points of view, develops some tact and consideration, and faces disturbing truths about herself. An indication of how far she has come can be found in her wish to tell a nurse about dying: "Listen. You must listen. It's important. It's - quite an event." (*TSA*, p. 282)

This desire to share her innermost thoughts is radically new for Hagar, but the source of her increasing sense of knowledge and community is also important. Her speech directly

repeats, word for word, what Lees has said to her only a few days earlier at Shadow Point. (*TSA*, p. 232.)

The disastrous curbs she's proudly kept on herself continue falling away. As a result, she throws over what she now sees as her "absurd formality," which in the past has left her insisting on addressing people by their last names and sniffing over bad spelling and "impermissibles" in language. Now she arrives at the point of using personal names and even of saying "Okay". Those expressions will not seem like much to a contemporary reader, but they mean a lot to Hagar and to our awareness of her. Her rigidity crumbles as she learns to respond to situations more immediately and personally, to "bash on, regardless." She now enters life, instead of officiously judging it at an immunized distance. Another illustration of her greater capacity to share experiences occurs when she and her young roommate, Susan Wong, laugh over a moment; "Convulsed with our paining laughter, we bellow and wheeze. And then we peacefully sleep." (*TSA*, p. 302.) The first person singular, with all its privacy, egotism, and possessiveness, has given way to the collective pronoun, implying Hagar's entrance into a human community. Now she laughs with someone instead of laughing at her. Perhaps the most moving indications of Hagar's recently found ability to accept and even to embrace life takes place between herself and Doris and Marvin. Just before she dies, Hagar finally blesses Marvin, who, never having received his mother's love as a boy, now wrestles as Jacob wrestled with his angel. (*TSA*, p. 304.) Marvin's powerfully understated goodbye duplicates in every word what he said to his mother as a seventeen-year-old boy on his way to the war: "He turned and put his hand on the doorknob, "Well, so long," he said. "I'll be seeing you." (*TSA*, p. 130) The repetition depicts how much both partings mean to Marvin rather than how fastened to habit he is. His laconic speeches, true to a prairie voice, are so charged with unspoken emotion that he expresses what he does not say.

As for Doris, Hagar does little, if anything, to show her any change of heart. But indirectly Laurence does reveal how much Hagar had edged toward her daughter-in-law without knowing it. Laurence carefully indicates what Doris says when, shortly before Hagar ends up in the hospital, Marvin finds it impossible to tell his mother how hard she has been on them :

Then frighteningly, his voice, so low and solid, goes high and seeking. "What will I say to her, Doris? How can I make her see?" Doris does not reply. She only repeats over and over the mother-word. "There, there. There, there." (*TSA*, p. 66)

Having sown these words early in the book, Laurence brings them to fruition in the end. Hagar, we remember, refused as a girl to mother her dying brother. However, as she herself is dying many years later, and as she is thinking her last words, we are reminded of what Doris has said in soothing her husband:

"I wrest from her [the nurse whom Hagar thinks is Doris] the glass,
full of water to be had for the taking. I hold it in my own hands.
There. There." (*TSA*, p. 308)

She now can speak the mothering words, simply, a little stubbornly, but as a mother, virtually for the first time in her life.

The water she seizes picks up and closes a long series of references, all of them suggestive of Hagar's spiritual drought and of her need to submerge herself in the depths. Mentally Hagar lives her last days under water. Therefore, the nurse's needle slips into her "like a swimmer sliding silently into a lake," (*TSA*, p. 303.) her room at night is "dark and deep" while she lies "like a lump at the bottom of it," (*TSA*, p. 298.) and she is "hauled out of sleep, like a fish in a net." (*TSA*, p. 257) Hagar drifts "like Kelp," (*TSA*, p. 286.) flowing through the shadow world she's recently entered. Now she is getting to the bottom of things, lying there waiting for release, and, though once more she doesn't realize it, waiting for transformation and rebirth, which may come with the promised metamorphosis of the pupa Hagar sees herself as having become.

Ironically, as Hagar is dying, she is coming to life. She strays from her deliberate normal paths and static, impregnable garrisons, wandering toward the "wrong" side of life which the deep, dark, unconscious, fluid world around her and within her, the very world she's been taught to view as subordinate or wrong. Once moved but unmoving, she now manages to

surpass her fumigated version of life by flowing with it instead of resisting it. In shaking off her fabricated masks and tenacious stranglehold on life, Hagar finally moves toward personal wholeness. Jung calls that transformation individuation, the realization of one's entire self, partly hidden when someone becomes fragmented as a result of taking on a "civilized" self. People recover authentic realities only by overcoming the false selves they have acquired. In doing so, they throw over the persona, the exclusive and repressive social archetype detrimental to an individual's development. Hagar's process of maturation consists of abandoning the specious version of herself she has received from her society. She no longer denies what she is out of fear for what people might think.

5. THE METIS IN *THE STONE ANGEL*

The Canadian Metis and their problems occupy an increasingly important place in Laurence's fiction throughout the Manawaka cycle. The whole tragic area of Canadian history which encompasses the struggles, against great odds, of the prairie Indian and Metis people in the 1800's is one which has long concerned and troubled me.⁶¹ Laurence sees Somalis and Metis as victims of technology, in the form of vastly superior weapons.⁶² Laurence notes that many of the settlers who came to Canada came as oppressed or dispossessed people. She urges readers to become aware of the "soul-searching injustices" done to the Indians and Metis.

The Metis story leads deep into the heart of Canadian history and the Canadian psyche. Laurence's fiction accurately depicts the general contempt with which the metis were regarded in the latter part of the 19th century, and the 20th. In her Manawaka fiction, along with the injustice done to Metis and the necessity of redressing that injustice, Laurence stresses their "rediscovered sense of self-worth" and the ability to tell and teach the things needed to be known"⁶³. By the latter, Laurence means the Indian respect for and closeness to the earth and its creatures, an intimacy lost by the greed and exploitative nature of industrial culture. We have forgotten, she says, our need to pay homage to the earth and its creatures. Pre-industrial societies were not ideal, "nor can we return to them, but they know about living in relationship to the land, and they may ultimately be the societies from

whose values we must try to learn⁶⁴. In *The Diviners* the haunting ballads of Jules Tonnerre, Lazarus and Piquette catch the pain of this prairie people, while through Pique, child of Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre, Laurence expresses her belief that white Canadians are inextricably joined to Indian and Metis in Canada's future as in her past. In *The Stone Angel* however, the Metis appear as challengers and ultimately, as destroyers. Hagar's brother, Matt, wishes to go with Jules Tonnerre to set traplines on Galloping Mountain. His father, old Jason Currie, refuses permission because "he wasn't having any son of his gallivanting over the country with a half-breed." Later on Matt, who has obsessively saved his dimes and nickles to fulfill some boyhood goals, spends his nestegg on a fighting cock; pitted against Jules Tonnerre's cock, it is destroyed. Hagar's own most beloved son, John Shipley, later becomes involved with the son of Jules Tonnerre: Once when I was out picking saskatoons near the trestle bridge, I saw him with the Tonnerre boys.

They were French half-breeds, the sons of Jules, who'd once been Matt's friend, and I wouldn't have entrusted any of them as far as I could spit. They lived all in a swarm in a shack somewhere—John always said their house was passably clean, but I gravely doubted it. They were tall boys with strange accents and hard laughter. The trestle bridge was where the railway crossed the Wachakwa river a mile or so from town. The boys were daring each other to walk across it. There were great gaps between the beams, so they teetered along on the thin steel tracks as though they were walking a tight rope. Hagar yells at John, and not only almost scares him into falling, but humiliates him in front of the Metis boys. But the fatal link between John and Jules Tonnerre's son Lazarus continues, for one day John tells Hagar:

After you told me not to walk the trestle bridge, we dreamed up another game there, I and the Tonnerre boys. The trick was to walk to the middle and see who stay longest. Then, when the train was almost there, we'd drop over the side and climb down the girders to the creek. We almost meant to stay there while the train went over. We figured there'd be just enough room at the very edge, if we lay down. But no one ever had the nerve. John is

doomed by his relationship with the Tonnerres, for he dies when he makes a bet with Lazarus to run his truck over the trestle bridge and collides with a special relief freight which nobody in Manawaka knew was coming through. So the bridge, which seems at first a symbol of reconciliation, becomes a place of death.

Thus we see that, in *The Stone Angel*, links with the Metis are indirect, for we always see them through Hagar's eyes when she is considering the fate of her menfolk. Matt and John are drawn towards them, although the element of male challenge is always there, and the result is, in Matt's case, defeat for the white man, and, in John's case, his actual destruction. In this novel, it is hard to regard the Metis as else than them, the Other, carrying out some unconscious and undeclared campaign of revenge.

6. CONCLUSION

The Stone Angel marks the beginning of the Manawaka cycle. According to Patricia Morley, the universality of the theme and the intricacy of the images, makes this novel, a work that readily lends itself to textual analysis along New Critical Lines. Students are sometimes surprised by questions on Hagar's prairie environment, as if it were irrelevant. But Hagar is a Scots-Presbyterian from the Canadian West, and her perceptions grow from these roots. Manawaka (Manitoba) becomes the analogue for her conflicts.⁶⁵ George Woodcock calls Laurence "a Canadian equivalent to Tolstoy", not in terms of "literary gigantism" but rather "in such terms as a writer's relevance to his time and place, the versatility of his perception, the breadth of his understanding, the imaginative power with which he personifies and gives symbolic form to the collective life he interprets and in which he takes part."⁶⁶ Both writers, Woodcock argues, have a panoramic sense of space and history, an ability to preserve lost times and worlds so that outsiders can imaginatively apprehend them:

...Their characters are as impressive as their settings, and their best revelations are achieved not ... by the explicit statements of historic themes, but rather by the vivid,

concrete yet symbolic presentation of crucial points of instinct in individual lives, such as... the moment in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* when the despised minister, Mr. Troy, sings the first verse of the Doxology to Hagar Shipley during her last days in hospital...

Woodcock concludes that Hagar's recognition of her need to rejoice and her inhibiting pride are intensely possible, yet at the same time one can generalize her situation into a description of the state of mind of a whole generation of English speaking Canadians. *The Stone Angel*, though a piece of stunning realism, is also profoundly mythic. But it is not sentimentally or gratuitously so, certainly not in its attitude toward the christian mythology it incorporates. "Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg." Hagar says as she nears the end of her spiritual journey. The magnificent assertion shows she has not become less, she has become more.

Hagar Shipley is the first in a series of memorable women. In five closely connected weeks of fiction Laurence presents universal concerns in terms of Canadian experience over four generations. She allows us to see into the hearts of her individual characters; their society; and ourselves.

NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, Introduction by William H. New (Toronto, 1968).
2. William New (ed). *Margaret Laurence*, p.21.
3. *ibid.*
4. Margaret Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing: Form and Voice in the Novel" *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 27.1,1980, p.55.
5. *ibid.*, p.54.
6. *ibid.*, p.55.
7. *ibid.*, p.55.
8. *ibid.*, p.55.
9. *ibid.*, p.56.
10. *ibid.*, p.56-57.

11. Constance Rooke, "Hagar's Old Age: The Stone Angel as Vollendungsroman", *Crossing the River*, p.27.
12. Margaret Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing: Form and Voice in the Novel" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 1980, p.57.
13. *ibid.*
14. Butler Robert N., "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." *Psychiatry*, 26.1, 1963, p.65.
15. *ibid.*, p.67.
16. *ibid.*, p.68.
17. *ibid.*, p.70.
18. *ibid.*, p.67.
19. Moody Harry R. "Reminiscence and the Recovery of the Public World." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 7.1/2, 1984, p.158.
20. *ibid.*, p.160.
21. *ibid.*, p.161.
22. Sara Maitland, 'Afterword', in Virago edition of *The Stone Angel*
23. W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1937), p.277.
23. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Picador, 1979), p.32.
24. Margaret Laurence, interview with Michel Fabre, p. 16.
25. Margaret Laurence quoted by Valerie Milner in 'The Matriarch of Manawaka' *Saturday Night*, May 1974, p.17.
26. Margaret Laurence on 'The Stone Angel', interview with Michel Fabre, *Etudes Canadiennes* vol.77 (1981), pp.11-22.
27. Ann Thompson, *The Wilderness of pride, Form and Image in The Stone Angel*, pp.95-110.
28. Sandra Djwa, 'False Gods and True Covenant: Thematic continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross' *Etudes Canadiennes*, Vol. 1, No.4, Fall 1972, p.44.
29. Paul Cappon (ed) *In Our Own House: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p.121.
30. Pierre Spriet, 'Narrative and Thematic Patterns in *The Stone Angel*', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol.11, 1981, pp. 89-113.

31. Sandra Djwa, 'False Gods and True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross' *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol 1,no.4, Fall1972, p.47.
32. Douglas Kilam gives the immediate context of Lycidas in his essay 'Notes on symbolism in *The Stone Angel*', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol 11, 1981, pp.89-113.
33. Sandra Djwa, 'False Gods and Covenants', p.46.
34. Anon., 'Self -imprisoned to Keep the World at Bay', *New York Times Book Review*, 14 June 1974.
35. John Milton,*Paradise Lost*, 1.1.
36. Exodus, 17.6.
37. Laurence, interview with Michel Fabre, p.19.
38. The children's song is an adaptation of an Irish traditional song, 'If I had the wings of a blackbird'.
39. author of essay, 'Structure and antistructure in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft fur Kana-da- Studien*, Vol.4.no.2, 1984, pp.11-20. What is of concern here is the result . The (unconscious) realization of angelism and the breaking of the petrification process.
40. ' I did not even know whether there was a statue of an angel in(the Neepawa cemetery). I simply needed it for that passage. But the interesting thing is that in my hometown there is a stone of which the local people now say:" Oh, that's the one she was thinking of". It's the old Davidson stone, they say....'(Laurence, interview with Michel Fabre, p.16)
41. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (New York,1967), p.191).
42. See theInterpreter's *Bible* on Galatians 4:22-7; also note to the New English or King James versions; see also the discussion by Anne Thompson in 'The Wilderness of Pride; Form and Image in *The Stone Angel*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1V.3 (1975), 95-110, p.97.
43. Exodus 20:2.
44. Deut. 6:23.
45. except in the sense , perhaps, that Abram was the name Abraham bore before he was "called out" and given the covenantal imperative (Genesis 17)
46. cf. "His banner over me is love", Song of Songs 2:4.
47. see Margaret Laurence's own remarks in John Metcalfe, ed., *The Narrative Voice* (Toronto, 1972), p.129.

48. This can even be, as D. Forman and Una Parameswaran have noted with respect to Laurence, a "search indirectly to know... relationship with God," ("Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian novels of Margaret Laurence.") *Centennial Review*, 16 (1972), pp.233- 253,237.
49. In which God provides water in the desert for Hagar just at the moment she thinks she is about to die. (Genesis:21: 15-19)
50. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism Four Essays* (New York, 1967), p.191.
51. These rhetorical divisions are largely followed in the *Jerusalem Bible's* editing of the text.
52. For some typical Protestant formulations see Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (New York, 1954); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (New York, 1941); A.H.Strong, *Systematic Theology* (London, 1907); Albertus Pieters, *The Seed of Abraham* (Philadelphia, 1950), etc.
53. "Sources", *Mosaic* 3, No. 3, Spring 1970, 82.
54. *Mosaic*, 83.
55. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel* p. 281.
56. Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. R.F.C.Hull (New York, 1956)), p.203.
57. Jung explains; "Animus opinions very often have the character of solid convictions that are not likely shaken, or of principles whose validity is seemingly unassailable... But in reality the opinions are not thought out at all; they exist ready made...The animus is rather like an assembly of fathers or dignitaries of some sort who lay down incontestable, 'rational', ex cathedra judgments." "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology," p.218.
58. "By shadow, Jung explains, "I mean the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and contents of the personal unconsciousness." *Two Essays*, p. 213.
59. Jung writes: "Seen from the one-sided point of view of the conscious attitude, the shadow is an inferior component of the personality and is consequently repressed through intensive resistance. But the repressed content must be made conscious so as to produce a tension of opposites, without which no forward movement is possible. The conscious mind is on top, the shadow underneath, and just as high always longs for low and hot for cold, so all consciousness, perhaps being aware of it, seeks its unconscious opposite, lacking which

it is doomed to stagnation, congestion, and ossification."Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, pp. 63-4.

60. Still, the growth does not come easily. The inscription, "No Cross No Crown," which Hagar recalls having seen on a piece of petit-point sewn by Clara Shipley, [193] says as much. Though it never occurs to Hagar, the adage applies to her own anguished transformation at Shadow Point.

61. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto, 1976), p.204

62. The use of the gatling gun by Canadians in their suppression of the Metis uprising in 1885 corroborates Laurence's claim. The first successful machine ever devised, an American invention, was operated in Saskatchewan by Lieut. Arthur Howard of New Haven, Connecticut, who used the Metis uprising as a test-ground for his weapon: see Joseph Kinsey Howard, *The Strange Empire of Louis Riel*, Swan edition (New York, 1965), pp.380-81.

63. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p.201.

64. *ibid.*, p.212.

65. Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence, *The Long Journey Home*, (McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston), p.82.

66. George Woodcock, "The Human Elements: Margaret Laurence's Fiction," *The Human Elements. Critical Essays*, David Helwig, ed. (Toronto, 1978), pp.134-35.

CHAPTER IV

**SISTERS' NARRATIVES: A JEST OF GOD, THE
FIRE-DWELLERS**

CHAPTER V

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

CHAPTER IV

SISTERS' NARRATIVES : A JEST OF GOD, THE FIRE-DWELLERS

*A Jest of God*¹ and *The Fire-Dwellers*² are the only pair of novels in the Manawaka cycle. I have treated them together since the heroines in these novels are both sisters and both present questions that are central to the feminine predicament- the presentation of female subjectivity, about women's relation to their cultural inheritance and whether the autobiographical form which has become the staple of women's fiction can be made sufficiently expansive to contain wider social and political issues beyond personal self-scrutiny. Rachel Cameron's and Stacey MacAindra's narratives are "inner-space fiction." This chapter has been divided into two sections wherein I have attempted to make a study of each of the novels separately. Questions and issues common to both the novels will be discussed at the end of the chapter. *A Jest of God*, like all other Manawaka novels is set in Manawaka, while *The Fire-Dwellers* is Laurence's only Manawaka novel which is set in the city of Vancouver.

Laurence works within the tradition of realistic fiction and the stories of these two women's lives offer no radical departure from traditional patterns of what women do. Rachel the unmarried schoolteacher is still unmarried and still caring for her mother at the end of the narrative, and Stacey the wife and mother-of-four looks forward to 'mutating into a matriarch' as she lies in bed beside her husband at the end of her story. Their stories do allow Rachel and Stacey to 'breathe' as fictional characters by registering contradictions between their outer and inner lives. At the same time, they focus the woman's dilemma: caught within the inherited codes, how is a woman to express her deepest desires and fears? The answer is 'Never openly'. Both sisters are imprisoned within the social decorum of silence and they both feel very embarrassed when, on occasions, they transgress those rules. Such narratives are bound

to be double-voiced, with their registration of the ordered surfaces of these women's daily lives, disrupted by their silent discourse of resistance through fantasies, daydreams and nightmares.

The fantasy narratives within Rachel's and Stacey's interior monologues are structured as direct imaginative responses to their social situations, for, to Laurence the possibilities of subversion and revision lie within individuals and existing structures. She uses the conventions of autobiographical fiction which privilege subjectivity in order to create the spaces for her character's dreams and fantasies and such breathing spaces in their turn expose the limits of realist fiction as a construction of private or social reality.

A. *A JEST OF GOD*

As in *The Stone Angel*, the primary theme is survival. Survival continues to be the basic theme in *A Jest of God*- the attempt of the personality to survive with some dignity, tilting the load of excess baggage, that everyone carries, until the moment of death. Connected to this theme are a set of interrelated themes- the incompleteness of human relationships resulting in aloneness, the ambivalence between human relationships, miscommunication or lack of it, human alienation, personal identity and the case of women in a male-dominated world- all of which result in isolation.

The theme of isolation will be elaborately analysed in this chapter. Since 'death' isolates and 'love' is an attempt to cross the barriers of isolation this concept of 'Death' -a concept which figures prominently in the novel is juxtaposed with love and is therefore shown as a recognition of isolation. The next point is that isolation involves separation from other human beings as well as separation from God. Rachel felt herself separated from both human beings as well as from God. Interestingly, Manawakans, with their small-town mentality evaded both, 'Death' as well as 'God'. Towards the end of the chapter, Laurence's theme of ancestors, the recognition of our roots and our past come into the forefront. The strengths that were built into Manawaka by its pioneers and the terrible inhibiting power of the town's constraints are at battle in the person of Rachel Cameron. Rachel

realizes that despite the fact that Manawaka was the cause of her ordeal, at the same time, without them she has no identity at all. When she finally leaves for Vancouver, she realizes that Manawaka must and will go with her always.

However, *A Jest of God* is not only a psychological study but a representation of socio-historical forces within Canada and of that country's relation to Great Britain. The tyrannical Mrs. Cameron is the mother country in its role as imperial power; Rachel is symbolic of "a Canada seeking to free itself from an authoritarian colonial past and to make its own future"; her tumor represents that colonial past and its authoritarian values, while its removal is the end of the colonial state of mind.³ Women's problems and the old identity question 'Who am I' plagues Rachel. In the end, Rachel's partial victory is due to her "beginning to learn the rules of survival". Rachel's questions point to the central issues of the novel. How can a person feel "real" or authentic when she is divided within and against herself, when she speaks in conflicting voices, when she resents the family roots which support her, when she cannot communicate with those to whom she is most intimately joined? Her desire for, yet fear of, true intimacy - "constant communication" shows that for Laurence the notion of voice implies the whole intricate, painful enterprise of personal and literary communication. When Rachel says, though only to herself, "Nick - listen", she is calling for the attention of a sympathetic audience. Hagar, in *The Stone Angel*, made the same silent appeal: "Listen. You must listen its important". (AJG. p.282)

A.1.PLOT

A Jest of God is a vividly realized but claustrophobic novel, narrated by a woman on the edge of hysteria;⁴ Rachel's life, conducted always under the watchword of "proper appearances," is exceedingly narrow. She is isolated from most human contact by the bond of duty to her mother.⁵

The novel is in many ways the reverse of *The Stone Angel*. Rachel is younger (thirty-four years old), has not yet left Manawaka, has never rebelled against her family. The novel is the story of this spinster schoolteacher who lives with her widowed mother. The portrait of Rachel Cameron is almost a casebook study of an "old maid" obsessed by her fears and inhibitions.

Rachel Cameron, daughter of Niall Cameron, an undertaker in Manawaka, lives in uneasy misery with her widowed mother. Rachel and Mrs. Cameron live in a cosy flat, decorated to her mother's tastes. Rachel feels a mixture of resentment and envy towards her sister Stacey - married, with four children - living in Vancouver. Fourteen years ago, she had come back to Manawaka to teach and to support her mother. At this present crisis-point in her life, she cannot find any dignity at all, either in what she has done or in what she is doing. Her Principal Willard Siddley, seems a sadist to her; at the same time she is sickened because she is so aware of his physical presence; she envies Jimmy Doherty's mother Grace, and beats herself with guilt because of her frustrated maternalism. The fact that she is teaching, that she manages to get through each day and night, that she does manage to support, pamper and feel some indulgence for her mother, mean nothing to her. Rachel fears being thought eccentric, queer, a fool locked within her own fears and inhibitions, her strength constantly sapped by a self-debasing humility as destructive as Hagar's pride and the mirror image of that pride. Rachel is desperate with the need to reach out and touch some life outside her own, and yet she is bound by the negative imperatives that make up her own emotional life: the chafing ties of duty to her mother, the frustration of her surrogate maternal affection for young James Doherty whom she teaches and the guilt of her obsessive sexual fantasies. She is full of fear of everything within her claustrophobic circle of hell and of anything outside of it.

She lives in a female world and has not, like Hagar, defined herself through opposition to men. Her father is dead. She is dominated by a possessive, manipulative mother. Rachel is timid, passive, self-effacing, diffident; all that Hagar despises. She has never fully grown up, and the story is about her maturing. The novel is limited to only one summer though there are memories stretching into the past. A crisis forces her to act. She has a love affair with a former acquaintance, Nick Kazlik, and faces the possibility that she is pregnant. An odd joke,

A Jest of God, is being played on her. It is ironic that so timid and chaste a woman should find herself in this state. In view of her character, her family, her town, it is a catastrophe. It is doubly ironic that she is not really pregnant but has a benign tumour.

The plot of the novel describes a brief affair which Rachel has during the summer holiday with Nick Kazlik, a teacher from Winnipeg staying at his father's farm near Manawaka. Rachel's need for love is so strong that she overcomes all her fears and self-doubts and enters a passionate physical relationship with Nick, hoping that she will become pregnant. "If I had a child, I would like it to be yours." This seems so unforced that I feel he must see it the way I do. And so restrained, as well, when I might have torn at him - Give me my children." [AJG, p. 181]

But Nick withdraws from the relationship when Rachel confesses her desire for children. Ironically, this man who might have delivered Rachel from the tyranny of her mother and her own inhibitions is similarly bound to his parents. He is fettered by his brother's death and his guilty refusal to carry on his father's farm. He shows Rachel a snapshot of a boy, which she concludes is his son, but is actually of himself. Both Rachel and Nick are trapped by their need to seek out and establish their own identity in relation to their parents. But Rachel believes for a time that she has become pregnant and undergoes a desperate struggle deciding whether to accept or reject the child; a conflict waged between her deepest needs and desire and her instinct for social self-preservation. Her conviction that she is pregnant coincides with the discovery that Nick has left. This precipitates Rachel's crisis, her turning point, and eventual release. The idea of abortion is repugnant. Manawaka calls the abortionist "angel-maker". Yet birth would be only the beginning of difficulties, of eighteen years of financial, physical and emotional responsibility. (AJG, p.169.)⁶ The present, the past, the questionings and the fantasies of Rachel are all woven together and their strands join in the aftermath of her affair with Nick Kazlik. She does not lose Nick because she never had him in any committed sense and she does not bear his child as she hoped and feared she would do. (AJG, p.293). The struggle she endures has a powerfully liberating effect. As she comes out of the anaesthetic after the operation, she says, "I am the mother now." Rachel's real salvation and significance is that she is not a tragic figure, but just an

ordinary human being. In her despair at her possible pregnancy, when the time comes to make the final grand gesture to take the whiskey and the sleeping pills and throw it all away she does not defy and reject life. She adapts to its blows and its demands.

“At that moment when I stopped, my mind wasn’t empty or paralyzed. I had one clear and simple thought. They will all go on in some how, all of them but I will be dead as stone and it will be too late then to change my mind.” (AJG, p.170)

Rachel does learn to accept to live with her limitations and life’s. “I am the mother now” . These words are her key to freedom and an acceptance of herself as he is. As Nick could not be God for her, so she must not be God for her mother. Her choices are human and humanly limited and she makes one of them - the decision to move out Manawaka. The finding of decision and spirit, the affirming of the future, is in Rachel’s context a great victory.

A.2.NARRATIVE

The entire narrative of *A Jest of God* centers round the character of Rachel Cameron. As such, a major part of this section will be focussed on her character, a study of which will throw light on the major thematics of the book. These have already been mentioned in the introductory sections of this chapter. Fear is the dominant force and the true subtext of Rachel’s narrative is the fear of death.

Isolated within her own mind and body, she is most of the time estranged from other people and she is sometimes estranged from herself. In this section, I shall also investigate Rachel’s odd splittings of consciousness. Manawaka has also contributed to the personality of Rachel Cameron. The strengths that were built into Manawaka by its pioneers - and also the terrible inhibiting power of the town’s constraints - are at battle in the person of Rachel Cameron. *A Jest of God* is the story of Rachel’s ordeal and of her limited victory.

Thus we see that Rachel begins totally in chains, some of her own making, but others of her parents, her ancestors and the town of Manawaka's. She resents the chains, but at the same time without them she has no identity at all. She could not stand on her own strength. When the book ends, she has shaken free the binding - supporting chains and she realizes the pitiful smallness of her strength. But she also realizes that what strength she has, she must use and that Manawaka an inheritance and the source of her identity - must - and will - go with her always.

A.2.1. RACHEL CAMERON'S NARRATIVE

Rachel Cameron's narrative opens with herself as subject engaged in an act of simultaneous translation of what she hears in the world outside :

The wind blows low, the wind blows high .The snow comes falling from the sky, Rachel Cameron says she'll die. For the want of the golden city

.....

They are not actually chanting my name, of course, I only hear it that way from where I am watching at the classroom window. (*AJG*, p. 1)

In this interior monologue there is no harmonious relation between subject and object. As Rachel stands inside the classroom she is haunted by the discontinuities between her inner and outer worlds and at the same time. She is conscious of the doubleness of perceptions. She leads 'a strangely pendulum life'⁷, oscillating between the world of social convention and her inner fantasy life. Confined within the boundaries of her role as decorous unmarried school teacher and dutiful daughter, Rachel's silent monologue insistently questions that image and registers her deep dissent and self-division.

Though set in Manawaka and surrounded by the spaces of the prairie, Rachel's narrative takes no account of vastness, for the spaces she inhabits are all interior - the schoolroom, the

apartment she shares with her mother above the Japonica Funeral Chapel and the space inside her own skull. There are a few significant excursions outside and a final leave-taking but this narrative is in every way an interior monologue.

Laurence described Rachel as 'a potential hysteric who does not for quite a while realise this about herself'⁸. If hysteria has to do with 'the mind's internal divisions, self-alienation, self-estrangement and a splitting of consciousness'⁹, then Rachel displays many of these characteristics. Her consciousness is dominated by gaps in comprehension and by the untranslatability of language. In her mind words separate themselves from meaning or at best exist in unstable relationships, so that language becomes the agent not of human communication and self-expression but of alienation. Her images of 'the blue-painted dogmen snarling outside the walls, stealthily learning 'the words of the childrens' skipping rhymes (*AJG*, p.2) or of Dr. Moreau's beastmen prowling and waiting, 'able to speak but without comprehension' (*AJG*, p.32) suggest her apprehension of the sinister threat within words. This perception is linked with St. Paul's text, 'Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian unto me' (*AJG*, p.135) It is not so much the fear of open utterance that deters Rachel when she is invited to go to the Manawaka Tabernacle of the 'Risen and Reborn' where some of the congregation have received the gift of tongues, but rather a fear of the incomprehensible.

Rachel's language does not issue from a unified centre of consciousness; rather, it issues through a rift in consciousness as words deformed and fragmented rise unbidden to her lips. As speaker she is not responsible for her words, and yet their origin is within herself. Rachel's outburst is similar to Breuer's account of Anna O's hysterical symptom of speaking in a polyglot language which simultaneously encoded and hid her repressed desires and fears.

10

It is the fear of death which is the true subtext of her narrative. As the daughter of an undertaker living above the mortuary, Rachel is obsessed by the forbidden place of her childhood and its mysteries continue to haunt her dreams:

The stairs descending to the place where I am not allowed. The silent people are there...He is behind the door I cannot open. And his voice- his voice- so I know he is lying there among them, lying in a state, king over them. He can't fool me.(AJG, p.19)

Death is a subject forbidden by her father and excluded from the house by her mother. Rachel's mother had an interesting fear of the touch of both death and life, a double fear that her daughter has picked up.¹¹

George Bowering makes the connection between sex and death which Rachel's narrative makes without comment and its transition from erotic fantasy to the death dream quoted above. In Manawaka ' death is rude, unmannerly, not to be spoken to in the street(AJG, p.13). 'Unmannerly ' and 'forbidden' are words applied both to sex and to death, and Rachel's narrative enacts her exorcism of the one through the other. Nick Kazlik with his memories of his dead twin brother offers a shadowy parallel to Rachel's obsession, though they are both too enclosed in their private places even as lovers to give any kind of mutual rescue.

Thus we see that Rachel is the "old maid" humanized and dignified . "This is a person, certainly flimsy and perhaps gutless, no heroics, no promethean pride here, but a living human being capable of growth and demanding respect"¹².

Rachel is not brave. She is plummeted and buffeted by every fear she conjures up and yet even her range of fearing is narrow. Her cruel self-portraits constitute an attempt to deal with the limbo she inhabits. Rachel sees herself as a skinny sapling servicing a dog, a scampering giraffe, gaunt crane, lean grey-hound on a beach, cross of bones and inhibited ostrich walking carefully through a formal garden.

This fearful suspension between other states perceived as real is depicted in grotesque and macabre images as Rachel tries unsuccessfully to sleep. The night is a gigantic carnival wheel turning in blackness; glued to the wheel, Rachel is powerless to stop its pointless circling; "I see scratch of gold against the black and they form into jagged lines,

teeth, a knife edge, the sharpened hackles of dinosaurs (*AJG*, pp. 18, 15). Rachel, “tries to break the handcuffs of her own past, but she is self-perceptive enough to recognize that for her, no freedom from the shackledom of the ancestors can be total. Her emergence from the tomb-like atmosphere of her extended childhood is a partial victory. She is no longer so much afraid of herself as she was. She is beginning to learn the rules of survival.”¹³

Her colleague Calla offers friendship but Rachel is embarrassed by Calla’s differentness, by her uninhibited sloppiness and by the fundamentalism of her Pentacostal religion:

“If only Calla wouldn’t insist on talking about the Tabernacle in Mother’s hearing. Mother thinks the whole thing is weird in the extreme, and as for anyone speaking in a clarion voice about their beliefs - it seems indecent to her, almost in the same class as what she calls foul language. Then I get embarrassed for Calla, and ashamed of being embarrassed, and would give anything to shut her up or else to stop minding.”

Rachel turns back to her friend in time of trouble. Calla’s non-judgmental acceptance, unqualified offer of help, and shared strength help Rachel to discover her own strength. We could draw the conclusion that, like other protagonists in the Manawaka cycle, Rachel perceives three worlds with herself caught in the middle, “a weak area between millstones.” (*AJG*, p.94) The remark has psychological and social analogues. Psychologically, the first world (Rachel’s world) belongs to her pupils and the apparently self-confident teenagers they so rapidly become. The third world belongs to her mother and the mores of Manawaka. Both worlds exclude Rachel and isolation generates fear.

We shall now analyse the techniques in the novel.

A.2.2. TECHNIQUES IN *A JEST OF GOD*

Laurence's interest in multimedia techniques culminates in the record which accompanies *The Diviners*. In *A Jest of God* it takes the form of children's chants, folk-songs, hymns. The chant that introduces the novel evokes time passing, change and yearning : a yearning for admiration, respect, power, sexual fulfillment, all things denied to Rachel in her view. The cryptic advice to Spanish dancers to get out of town is prophetic with regard to Rachel's decision to leave Manawaka. It hints at her need to transcend the psychic prison of local attitudes. The golden city, Zion or New Jerusalem in Biblical typology, suggests a fulfillment which is both physical and spiritual. This is picked up in the Anglican's solo, "Jerusalem the Golden" and in the Pentecostal rendering of Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel/shall come to thee, O Israel". Rachel's fears are excluding her from this joyful state.

The metaphors in the opening scene are largely demonic. Time is imagined as a process leading to confined boxes (the school, her classroom) which suggest prisons and coffins. Power is arbitrary (the "thin giant She" can pick any colored chalk, write anything at all on the board) and is ultimately illusory. Growing up is a grotesque distortion of the child's body, leading to the final distortion of the undertaker's act. Conversely, the images at the end are full of hope and affirmation. Heading west, the bus flies smoothly and confidently like a great owl. The possibilities imagined by Rachel are comic, whimsical, but largely pleasurable. Time in Laurence's comic fiction, is seen to play a redeeming role. Orientals, in Manawaka, fare worse than Ukrainians. The Regal Cafe is owned and run by Lee Toy, a dried shell of a man who seems ageless. Laurence's implicit comment on Toy's heroism and on two contrasting cultures, Oriental and Western, is caught in the two pictures which hang on the walls of the Regal Cafe. One is a Coca-Cola poster, the other, a Chinese scroll with a mountain and solitary tiger. Laurence discovers "the extraordinary within the pedestrian".¹⁴ Nick's inner demons, Toy's lonely pain, reflects Rachel's fears and grounds them in a specific soil.

A.2.3. JESTS

A Jest of God hints at a dark god whose ways are not only mysterious but cruel. Rachel thinks that God, if he exists must be some kind of brutal joker. She sees her plight as a “Knifing” reality, “grotesque, unbearably a joke if viewed from the outside”. (*AJG*, p.151) Her life is one long fight with God; she prays with no certainty of being heard; and speaks of God to her mother, wondering if this is a partial triumph or the last defeat. (*AJG*, p.151) The fool pattern modulates from the demonic to the apocalyptic form. Calla reads from St. Paul: “If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” The word God recurs four times in the novel’s last short paragraph, composed of thirteen words. The last sentence identifies God with mankind as Divine fool. Mercy/Grace/Pity are the three verbs of the closing sentences. This is the culmination of an intricate pattern on the folly of fear and the fear of folly. Wreathing with it, Rachel is ready to smile at “The fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools”; I should be honoured to be of that company. (*AJG*, p.151) Rachel’s quest like Hagar’s is a search for freedom and joy.

The title, rich in ambiguities, relates to an image- pattern of fools, clowns, jesters. The silent dead on Cameron’s first floor wear clowns masks. Mrs. Cameron and her bridge playing friends have clown voices. Rachel continually sees her tall, awkward body as clown-like grotesque. Nick’s father was Nestor the Jester to the local children when he delivered milk; senile and mourning for his dead son, Nestor’s plight suggests the black joke of a cruel deity. Rachel thinks that God, if he exists must be some kind of a brutal joker. She sees her plight as a “knifing reality”: grotesque, unbearably a joke if viewed from the outside”. (*AJG*, p. 151) Her life is one long fight with God.

Variations on jests-cosmic and human- include the speaking in tongues at the Tabernacle. The speaking in tongues, which has been an object of terror, broadens out into a symbol of the difficulties of human communication, the mystery - yet important- of what Mannoni calls the Other. Rachel calls it “God’s irony - that we should for so long believe it is only the few who

“speak in tongues” (AJG, p.134). St. Paul speaks of many kinds of voices in the world, none without significance : a statement, Rachel thinks, not of what should be but what is.

A jest of history is reflected in Manawaka’s cultural composition, half Scottish, half Ukrainian. Both groups came because of poverty and hope. Rachel sees the two as oil and water : “The Ukrainians knew how to be better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God”. (AJG, p.65) Pride and anger sustained the first few generations of Scots in Manitoba, but by Rachel’s time the backbone has “splintered”. She thinks that pride is not her problem, but her fears stem partly from a pride of appearance that acts to isolate her.¹⁵ In that, Rachel’s problem is similar to Hagar’s : “Because anyone who is desperately afraid of having human weakness, although they feel very unself-confident, as Rachel did, is in fact suffering from spiritual pride”. Nick remembers the alienation felt by Ukrainian children in a town where the power structure, the hegemony, was Scottish. To Mrs. Cameron, Ukrainians and Galicians or Bohunks are unfit companions for her children.

We could conclude this section with the knowledge that Rachel is not a tragic figure like Hagar, who was the knowing, willful agent of her own thwarted existence; rather, she is an ironic figure like Eliot’s Prufrock, repressed and self-conscious. The closing lines of the novel direct us to the same achievement of self-knowledge and wry self-acceptance that Eliot gives to his protagonist.

A.2.4. THE TWIN MOTIF IN A JEST OF GOD

In this novel Laurence has used the twin motif very generously. Laurence’s focus on the twin motif reflects both the circumstances of her own life in the early 1960’s and also a ‘Zeitgeist. Much of mid-1960’s thought seems to have been directed toward speculation about doubleness. An ambidextrous universe, a bihemispheric brain, a double helical structure of DNA, the fundamental genetical material ; all these concepts were being popularized, generally discussed and absorbed into the contemporary 1960’s.

Several much discussed books which appeared around the time, Margaret Laurence was writing *A Jest of God* showed interest in the twin phenomena. An example is, Martin Gardner's *The Ambidextrous Universe*.¹⁶ The physicists came out with the hypothesis that two chains in complementary relation running in opposite directions as a double right handed helix, form an acceptable model of essential substance. In the 1960's major experiments on right - and left-handedness had led to a cognate vision of twining - this time within the brain. Concepts in general circulation were summarized in papers such as R.W. Sperry's *Hemisphere 'Disconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness'*, and J. Lery's *'Differential Perception capacities in major and minor Hemisphere'*.¹⁷

These concepts moved from the formal prose of science into the popular stream of thought as a concept of twinship, metaphors of equal and opposite identities.

In *A Jest of God* Laurence uses the twin-motif subtly but persistently. From the time we meet the 'Venusian twins, - blonde images of seductive young femininity, through the moment when we hear about the unmarried girl who has given birth to twins, we move towards a central focus on the mystery of Nick Kazlik's twinship, a correlative of the doubleness in Nick and in many other aspects of the rich mysterious world created in this novel.¹⁸ Nick Kazlik is literally a twin. The death of his brother Steve has damaged his self-sufficiency and his self-image. Rachel Cameron's link with her sister Stacey is looser than twinship, but this relationship, seen in conjunction with Nick's, similarly suggests the power of an over close sibling relationship. Nick's troubling twinship is echoed in the hurtful way Rachel contrasts herself, and is contrasted by her mother, with Stacey. Not only in their sibling situations are Rachel and Nick 'twined'. As alien in town, trained teacher, grown up child in strained relation with one parent, devoted to the other, bedeviled by remembered webs, Nick is Rachel's double.

Critical moments in Rachel's life are marked by allusions to twins. In an early scene Rachel, on River Street, encounters the two 'Venusian ... like twins from other space. Their fantastic silvery beehive hair-styles draws Rachel into defensive thought about her own molebrown hair. Their twins' names Carol and Clare, clearly call Rachel into a first sharp consciousness

of her own duality. She is a double being, her external drabness belying the opulence of her dreams. Again, near the end, in a scene set in the 'Ladies' at the bus station another pair of giggling girls appears or rather, are heard, for one is hidden, while the other peers obsessively into the mirror. Rachel is hurt into distress over what is now a more serious disparity between her inner feelings and her outward position in society. This is the moment when she recognises the probability that she is pregnant, caught, in the consequences of romantic desire.

A linked use of the twin motif begins when Rachel's mother gossips about Cassie, the unmarried Stewart girl who has had twins. Near the end of the novel, when Rachel faces her pregnancy she thinks of Cassie, who has kept her twins. Cassie's twins have helped Rachel actualise her dilemma and accept her lonely responsibility for the child she presumes she is carrying.

Like Nick, Rachel too is partially deformed, psychologically, by her relationship with her sister. Throughout the novel, she thinks resentfully of Stacey, who escaped from Manawaka and who has found a husband and produced children. Nick and Rachel both move out of town, out of unbearable situations, but they move in opposite directions. 'Nick and Rachel are equally narcissistic, apparently equally unable to achieve the self-integration necessary for a truly free life;¹⁹ Rachel and Nick, equal in professional commitment, in strong sexuality and in seriousness, are set inexorably against each other, in spite of their equality or perhaps because of it.

Here again Laurence reflects the Zeitgeist of 1960's of all the polarities of the period, such as the radical setting of young against old, of have-nots against haves, of black against white, of drop-outs against establishment and the sharpest and tensest of apportions came between men and women. The militant feminists inculcated awareness of a long subordination. The message percolated that women must move away from dependence, through flight, self-discovery and female network. Rachel is a powerful, funny, embarrassing study of womanhood in the double-edged 1960's.

A.3.THE THEME OF ISOLATION

An analysis of this chapter would be incomplete without an elaborate analysis of the theme of isolation. Although on a superficial level, *A Jest of God* appears to be a love story with an unhappy 'ending', the central relationships in the novel are not confined, static, but multiple and ambivalent. This section is an attempt to prove this fact by focussing on the main relationships: Rachel's relationship with her father, with her mother, with her pupil James Doherty, with Nick, her lover, with her "child", and with God. What emerges is the fact that relationships are sought after in order to escape from a sense of isolation. Rachel searches for permanent relationships in order to reach out, to escape out of herself into another's identity. The dominant relationship in the novel between Rachel and her child is also an attempt to find the elusive personal identity.

Death as the recognition of isolation is the subject matter of the next subsection. The true nature of our individuality is revealed through death, the reason why its truth is evaded by the people of Manawaka. Rachel however is fascinated by Death; it both obsesses and frightens her. Rachel's encounter with the concept of death, and the juxtaposition of love and death will be discussed in detail. Towards the end we understand that despite her fascination with death, Rachel fights for survival. Hence we see that while death isolates, then love is an attempt to cross the barriers of isolation. But isolation may involve not only separation from other human beings but a separation from God, a discussion of which will be provided in this section.

The sub-section on God is an attempt to understand Manawaka's treatment of the God figure. Manawakans evade a real recognition of God as they do of Death. Laurence's title *A Jest of God* in itself suggests that the novel is concerned with something beyond human limitations, with a God all-powerful but mocking; who as an outsider and looks down upon a world which is "distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearably a joke." Rachel is of the opinion that the congregation uses religion to escape from isolation into a relationship with those in their circle and with God. Like all her other relationships, Rachel's relationship with God is also ambivalent. Doubting the reality of God she demands his existence and finally realises that

even God cannot solve her problems. In the end Rachel is forced to face the essential isolation of the individual: "We mortal millions live alone."

A.3.1. IDENTIFYING ISOLATION IN THE NOVEL

Let us begin by identifying the sense of isolation that pervades the novel, a malaise that afflicts not only Rachel, but all the characters in the novel. In this novel Margaret Laurence suggests that every man is an island, a theme more typical of the twentieth century. All the characters in the novel, minor as well as major, are isolated. Only the young seem to be unaware of this and Rachel envies their surface sophistication, their otherworldliness. The girls of sixteen are "from outer-space. Another race. Venusians"; The young lovers in the cemetery exist in and for themselves, and James Dougherty pulls away from his mother, wanting "to be his own and on his own." The old huddle together pathetically, to evade a sense of their own isolation, their subjection to time. The old men sit in the sunlight on the steps of the Queen Victoria Hotel, or gather by the oak counter in twos and threes to recall the past, their faces crinkled and unshaven, their throats scrawny with prominent adam's apples. The old ladies play bridge and gossip, yearning for the days of Claudette Colbert and Ruby Keeler, their voices "shrill, sedate, not clownish to their ears but only to mine, and of such unadmitted sadness I can scarcely listen and yet cannot stop listening." Mrs. Cameron at first seems shallow in her martyred and predatory coyness, but later to Rachel's sharpened perception she becomes pathetic too, fearing the outside world as a child fears a dark cellar; Rachel has always blamed her mother for her father's withdrawal from life, but the rejection, she comes to see was on both sides, and Mrs. Cameron mumbles in halfsleep, "Niall always thinks I am so stupid". And the middle generation too are alone. Calla lives with a songless canary, who does not even notice her, for she finds comfort in listening to some movement in the darkness of the night, and Rachel asks herself at the Tabernacle, as she sees her in new circumstances, "Don't I know her at all?" Willard Sidley, the self-possessed Principal who has both attracted and repelled Rachel, she now views in a new light as asking her for something, perhaps condolence and she wonders: "if he's asked for it before, and if at times he's asked for various other things I never suspected, admiration or reassurance or whatever it

was he didn't own in sufficient quantity." And even funny little Hector, her father's successor in the Japonica Chapel, she sees for a moment of truth "living there behind his eyes".

In his own way Nick also faces the same problem of loneliness. He is ambivalent about his Ukrainian heritage; he both resents and admires his father; he feels a threat to his identity, as he shows by alluding to his dead, twin brother:

"I used to be glad we weren't the same, that's all. How would you like there to be someone exactly the same as yourself?"

"I've never thought about it. Would it make a person feel more real or less so? Would there be some constant communication, with no doubt about knowing each other's meanings, as though you yourselves were invisibly joined?"

Thus we see that human relationships are a reaching out, an attempt to cross the barriers of the "unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea." But the contact is spasmodic, momentary. After a while, each draws back into its separate world and the moment is lost.

A.3.2. AMBIVALENT NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Having identified loneliness and isolation in the novel, we see that relationships become essential in order to combat isolation. Let us analyse this by making a study of Rachel's relationships and their ambivalent nature. The central relationships in this novel are not confined, static, but multiple and ambivalent. Rachel both protects James and threatens him; she loves her mother "as much as most children", yet wishes her dead. She longs for a child, yet she hesitates. Even the relationship between twins is complex and shifting. Rachel considers Nick and Steve and wonders if twinship itself is an insurance against loneliness: "Would it make a person feel more real or less so? Would there be some constant communication, with no doubts about knowing each other's meanings, as through your selves

were invisibly joined?" But Nick denies this: Rachel comes to realize that the Nick she knows, like her father, exists only in her mind.

But the dominant relationship of the novel is not between lovers, but between mother and child where, for a period of several months, two human beings do exist within one skin. The child, Rachel thinks, "is lodged there now. Lodged meaning living there. How incredible that seems,".

Even in part II, the summer with Nick, the desire for this child to replace her loneliness is strong. Nick's reply, "I'm not God, I can't solve anything," is primarily a protection of his own independence, his ego, but it is also recognition that Rachel demands too much of human relationships. Like her sister Stacey and Gracey Dougherty, she seeks a child for her own fulfillment, to escape her isolation as a separate being, and God alone can grant her freedom.

In the first part of the novel, Rachel satisfies her maternal instincts through her classes of seven-year-olds, although even then she realizes that the phrase "my children" is a threat to her as it is not to Calla. She faces the summer with regret, for "this year's children will be gone then, and gradually will turn into barely recognized faces, no connection left, only hello sometimes on the street." Later she tries to explain to Nick:

I see them around for years after they've left me, but I don't have anything to do with them. There's nothing lasting. They move on, and that's it's such a brief thing. I know them only for a year, and then I see them changing but I don't know them any more.

Her affection for James Dougherty, her "exasperated tenderness", her belief in his uniqueness and her contempt for the moronic mother who doesn't deserve to have him", are clearly the result of such a substitution. For after the summer, as she watches the children entering her classroom, "two by two, all the young animals into my ark", she realizes that there will never be another James, "no one like that, not now, not any more".

Yet it is in Part I that she learns the true nature of the mother-child relationship. She has despised the possessiveness which leads her sister Stacey to rush home to Vancouver and her children after only a week's visit: "I know they're quite okay, and safe, but I don't feel sure unless I'm there, and even then I never feel sure – I don't think I can explain – its just something you feel about your own kids, and you can't help it." After observing Grace Dougherty with James, Rachel comprehends.

But while she understands this in principle, she has not accepted it in fact; she too wants a child to shelter and be sheltered by, and the discovery that she carries not a child but a tumour she attributes to "*A Jest of God*". Her wail is like that of the other Rachel "wordless and terrible", and Rachel "weeping for her children ... [who] would not be comforted because they are not." The children of Rama were real; their destruction was real. Rachel Cameron's child is an illusion; yet it is Rachel's recognition of this illusion which ironically frees her. "I am the mother now," Rachel's apparently cryptic remark under anesthesia, indicates her acceptance of her role as adult and mother to her aging child. She comes to see that under her mother's foxiness, her calculated emotional appeals and demands, lies a terrible fear of isolation and desertion which is the lot of every human being, even mothers. Her mother is like a child, totally dependent, totally trusting: "She believes me because she must, I guess. If I came back late a thousand nights, I now see, and then told her I'd be away an hour she'd still believe me." And while Rachel resents her mother's dependence, even wishes her dead, she concedes, "I do care about her. Surely I love her as much as most parents love their children. I mean, of course, as much as most children love their parents." She agrees that, to take her mother to Vancouver, away from home and memories, is cruel, unfair, and may even cause her death. But she also realizes "It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive." Her present child is elderly; her future children may be only her school-children, yet she comprehends at last that tie of motherhood does not ensure immunity from isolation: "It may be that my children will always be temporary, never to be held. But so are every one's."

While human relationships are an attempt to counter isolation, death is a recognition of it, and thus it plays a central role in *A Jest of God*. Donne's statement, "any man's death diminishes

me, because I am involved in Mankind” approaches death as a destruction of human community. In Laurence, however, death merely accentuates our consciousness of an isolation which already exists. Nick and Steve, though twins are separate identities and the death of Steve does not effectually alter the personality of Nick. Rachel’s father and mother are separated not by death but by life, and similarly, Rachel lost her father long before he entered the world of the dead he had always preferred. Rachel’s “child” is lost, yet it has been not living but dead, a symbol of Rachel’s negation of life. It is only in facing death we are able to assess life, and to recognize our own isolation.

It is because death reveals the true nature of individuality that its truth is evaded by the people of Manawaka. Hector changes “Japonica Funeral Chapel” people do not die; they “pass on”. When Rachel suggests that death is unmentionable, Hector replies: “Let’s face it, most of us could get long without it.” He succeeds as a business man because he understands the human psychology of death. “What am I selling?” he asks Rachel, and answers himself: “One” Relief. Two: Modified Prestige.” He alleviates the panic of the bereaved when faced with the body, and handles all the details according to three price ranges, to simplify problem of choice concerning oak or pine, velvet or nylon: “They want to know that everything’s been done properly, of course, but the less they have to do with it, the better... you take your average person, now. It’s simply nicer not to have to think about all the stuff”. This refusal to face death reaches its extreme in the cosmetic skills of the undertaker who paints and prettifies “the last dried shell... for decent burial” It is not merely a denial of reality for appearance but an attempt to make death look like life, to negate the difference. The ultimate form of his denial is seen in Mr. Kazlik who, in his senility, asks after Rachel’s father and calls Nick by the name of his dead brother.

Yet this denial of death is healthier than Rachel’s fascination with it which both obsesses and frightens her. She emerges out of a background of death, as the daughter of the local undertaker who prefers his silent companions downstairs to friends or family. As a child, Rachel was not allowed to go down into the funeral parlour, and she came to believe that there must be some power of the dead which might grasp and hold her as it had held her father. Her mother is morbidly concerned with death, saving the pink nylon nightgowns sent by Stacey

every Christmas “for hospital and last illness, so she’ll die demurely.” Even the house itself, with the Japonica Chapel downstairs, represents a world of shadow and nightmare; the dense growth of spruce trees surrounds Rachel and separates her from the world outside:

No other trees are so darkly sheltering, shutting out prying eyes or the sun in the summer, the spearheads of them taller than house, the low branches heavy, reaching down to the ground like the green black feathered strong-boned wings of giant and extinct birds.

From the beginning of the novel, Rachel is caught between the world of dream and the world of nightmare and death, as indicated by the childish jingle she overhears and remembers: “Rachel Cameron says she’ll die/ For the want of the golden city.” Here the contrast is accentuated between the real world of wind and snow and the illusory world of the child and adolescent. “She is handsome, she is pretty, / she is the queen of the golden city.” The choice is simple: the dream or death, and it is her failure to move from the simple alternatives of the child to the more complex understanding of the adult which marks Rachel’s delayed development.

In part I, Rachel’s world is alternated between dream and nightmare, love and horror. The images of the night are Poe-like, demonic. Night brings “Hell on wheels”; it becomes “a gigantic ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly... interminably slow. And I am glued to it, or wired, like paper.” The essence of Hell is its isolation, its annihilation of humanity by sucking it into meaninglessness or tearing it part, skin from bone:

The slow whirling begins again, the night’s wheel that turns and turns, pointlessly when I close my eyes, I scratches of gold against the black and they form into jagged lines, teeth, a knife’s edge, the sharp hard hackles of dinosaurs.

Countering these horrors are scenes of love: the dream lover with blurred features, under the sheltering wall of pine and tamarack, or the Egyptian girl and Roman soldiers, banqueting on

oasis melons, dusty grapes and wine in golden goblets, and copulating sweetly under the eyes of slaves.

A.3.3. The JUXTAPOSITION OF LOVE AND DEATH

This occurs not only in the dream world but in the real one. The sequence of Rachel's first visit to the Kazlik house and her conversation with Hector in the Japonica Chapel is central to the structure of the novel. But earlier, Rachel comes upon the young lovers in the cemetery, as spring replaces winter and the crocuses bloom palely against the grass of the last year "now brittle and brown like the ancient bones of birds". Despite her fascination with death in Part I, Rachel fights for survival even here. She wears a white raincoat so that she can be seen by a driver on a dark night; she worries that she might set fire to the house by smoking in bed. The turning point in her movement away from death and back to life occurs in the scene with Hector in the Japonica Chapel, where she relinquishes her hold upon the past and the dream of her father, not as she was but as she wanted him to be: "Nothing is as it used to be, and there's nothing left from then, nothing of him, not a clue." She recognizes in her voice a bitterness, "some hurt I didn't know was there", and concedes the truth of Hector's claim "I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most." Her father had chosen his own path in life, isolation from human contact and communication with the dead. In turning away from this, Rachel comes to accept both her father's right to his choice and his rejection of her:

If my father had wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different. Did he ever try to alter it? Did I, with mine? Was that what he needed most, after all, not ever to have to touch any living thing? Was that why she came to life after he died?

She refuses suicide – "They will all go on in somehow, but I will be dead as stone and it will be too late then to change my mind"- and faces life, with resignation" "Everything is no more possible than it was. Only one thing has changed : I'm left with it." And she accepts too a limited form of free will: "I will have it [the child] because I want it and because I cannot do anything else." Laurence's "modified pessimism", as she calls it in "Ten years sentences", is

the recognition with Edgar in *King Lear* that life must be endured, that we are not free to determine the manner of our death any more than our birth.

While death isolated, then love is an attempt to cross the barriers of isolation. But isolation may involve not only separation from other human beings but a separation from God. The modern doubt of God which implies too a sense of loss is conveyed by Arnold's lines: "Who renders vain their deep desire? / A God, a God their severance ruled!" and the vagueness of "a God" suggests the vain searching for some power of justice and order beyond human life, a theme more explicit in "Dover Beach". Laurence's title "*A Jest of God*" in itself suggests that the novel is concerned with something beyond human limitations, with a God all-powerful but mocking who as an outsider looks down upon a world "distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearable a joke".

The people of Manawaka evade a real recognition of God as they do of death. The church which the Camerons attend is tasteful and controlled, essentially unreal like the scene on the stained glass window of "a pretty and clean-cut Jesus, expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga." The minister is "careful not to say anything which might be upsetting," for the large part of the congregation is like Mrs. Cameron: "If the Reverend MacElfrish should suddenly lose his mind and speak of God with anguish or joy, or out of some need should pray with fierce humility as though God has to be there, Mother would be shocked to the core." The superficiality of this view of God is underlined when Rachel invokes Him as the only authority on her mother's heart, in place of Doctor Raven: "God? She shrills, as though I had voiced something unspeakable," and then, as an ex-choir member, she hastens to concede "Well, certainly, dear, of course, all that goes without saying".

Specially contrasted with this empty ceremony are, on the one hand, her father's professed atheism and on the other, is the flamboyant exuberance of The Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, with its pictures of Jesus "bearded and bleeding, his heart exposed and bristling with thorns like scarlet pin-cushion." Its pulpit is draped in white velvet, and the wood is

“blossoming in bunches of grapes and small sharp birds with beaks uplifted”. While the congregation of the Reverend MacElfrish denies sensation and a direct communication with God, the people of the Tabernacle suggests a Hell, dark cold and “foetid with the smell of feet and damp coats. It’s like some crypt, dead air and staleness, deadness, silence.” The room becomes claustrophobic, “swollen with the sound of a hymn macabre” and the people “crouching, all of them, all around me, crouching and waiting”. Their exhibitionism is, to Rachel, indecent: “ People should keep themselves to themselves – that’s the only decent way.” Yet the congregation of the Tabernacle uses religion to escape from themselves and their own isolation into a relationship with those in their circle and with God. Their escape may be momentary; Calla must return to her room and her songless canary. It may be unreal, for the speaking in tongues too is illusionary. Yet Rachel is horrified not because she understands the unreality, but because she fears public exposure of her inner self. It is not only Calla’s admission of love for her which makes her feel violated’ it is her denial of commitment, not only to Calla but to God. She cannot share Calla’s religious experience for she will not accept its premises.

Rachel’s relationship to God is ambivalent. She observed the Sunday ritual of church to save argument with her mother she does not believe: “I didn’t say God hadn’t died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago, longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive.” Yet she cannot accept his non-existence. After her exposure in the Tabernacle, she marks, “If I believed, I could have to detest God for the brutal joker He would be if I existed.” And later, when she learns of the “child”: “I could argue with you (if you were there) until doomsday. How dare you? My trouble, perhaps is that I have expected justice. Without being able to give it.”

Doubting the reality of God, she demands His existence. She comes to admit the exaggeration of both her “monstrous self-pity” and her self-abasement, indeed her uniqueness to God among millions of beings. And she confesses her deep need:

‘Help- if You will- me whoever that may be. And whoever you are, or where...we seem to have fought for a long time, I and you... if you have spoken, I am not aware of having heard. If you have a voice, it is not comprehensible to me. No omens. No burning bush, no pillar of sand by day or pillar of flame by night”.

Yet even when she turns to God, not through “faith, or belief, or the feeling of deserving anything” but through desperation, she has not yet renounced her own desired. For having accepted life instead of death, the child instead of abortion, she is not prepared for the final irony, the tumour: “Oh my God. I didn’t bargain for this. Not this.”

Thus she finally faces her own isolation. Even God cannot solve her problems. She admitted earlier that she imagined horrors and exaggerated them, to make the real ones seem lesser. Now there are no more horrors, or she no longer needs them. She has feared to be a fool, but now she has no more fears, for “I really am one.” Like King Lear she achieves wisdom though folly; as St. Paul has said: “If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” Her reply to her mother’s question that God may know her future surprises Rachel herself, although she does not yet know whether this is “some partial triumph... (or) only the last defeat”. But her new wisdom brings compassion, not only for men, isolated and alone, but for God Himself, isolated from man: “God’s mercy on reluctant jesters. God’s grace on fools. God’s pity on God.”

Thus *A Jest of God* represents Rachel’s descent into the world of nightmare; the “Everlasting No,” and suggests too a return to life, a modified “Everlasting Yea,” as anticipated in the quotation from Sandburg’s “Losers”: “[With Jonah] I was swallowed one time deep in the dark / and came out alive after all.” The tone is more bitter, more ultimately pessimistic than either *The Stone Angel* or *The Fire-Dwellers*, for both Hagar and Stacey affirm the importance of human relationships to give meaning to an unstable universe. Yet despite adverse criticism, the novel is on the whole more universal than *The Fire-Dwellers*. Rachel’s world is no more confined than our world; it has the same potentialities, the same failings. Her thoughts, however trivial and self-concerned, reflect our thoughts and momentary reflections if we record them impartially. Her view of Calla, her mother, Nick, is one-sided, uncorrected by an omniscient narrator; Laurence rejects what is, after all, only a fictional device for a technique closer to reality. For this is indeed her primary message, that we can never truly know another human being, never penetrate behind their façade, since words which reveal also conceal. Yet be free to stand alone.

Thus we see that *A Jest of God*, like *The Stone Angel*, deals with a universal human problem and the protagonist is close to the primitive essentials of love, birth and death. In the moment of facing death, both Hagar and Rachel affirm life. While Rachel's predicament is essentially feminine, it is also human. If the child were real, Rachel would become dependent upon another human being for her existence; she would live for the child. But the "child" does not exist, and Rachel is forced to face the essential of the individual: "We mortal millions live alone." In Laurence's handling, Rachel's plight becomes an analogue for human alienation and isolation, a crisis which finds its solution in the woman coming to terms with the jests of God, coping with difficulties, and growing stronger in the process.²⁰ Rachel matures, not by rejecting responsibilities but by transforming them so that she can accept them on her terms. She escapes not from society, but into more dynamic forms of community life

CONCLUSION:

A Jest of God makes a great affirmation of life and living, happiness in spite of terrible muddle, anxiety and confusion. Rachel does not grandly go mad or tragically die like those who would break life to their wills: she bends to life's blows, as most mortals have done before her, and life plays its amazing, everlasting trick once again for her, bringing vitality and at Rachel's story and all the Manawaka works, dramatize the plight of women in a male-oriented chauvinistic society where both sexes are often unconscious of bias and social conditioning. Hagar's experience could be transposed into a male key with relatively minor alterations, but Rachel's is inescapably female. Her basic insecurity and passivity, her financial anxiety, her sexual vulnerability in the event of pregnancy, and her responsibility for her mother are all traditional female dilemmas.²¹

B. THE FIRE-DWELLERS

Stacey's narrative, like Rachel's is also an interior monologue, but it is Stacey's lack of repression which makes the difference between the two. In the course of our analysis of *The*

Fire-Dwellers, we shall see that actually Stacey's narrative is by far the more hallucinatory of the two with its kaleidoscopic mixture of science-fiction fantasy, adolescent memories and nightmarish visions of destruction which challenge the limits of domestic realism. Yet it is evident that Stacey's narrative is a structure of containment and might well have been called *Memoirs of a Survivor*.

Statistics indicate that in real life the number of women who are enacting what was a traditionally women's role—that of a home-centred wife and mother—is diminishing rapidly, and it is the same in fiction. In fiction as in real life, the external characteristics of the role are changing radically. In this chapter I have attempted to show that Laurence's portrayal of a maternal figure in *The Fire-Dwellers* testifies to the continuing power of the archetype as distinct from its societal and time-conditioned image. Though radical protest either of the peace march kind or of domestic rebellion may not figure in this novel, yet the themes of survival and social outrage pervade the narrative as they are assimilated into Stacey's interior monologue and modulated in the dramas of her family life. For her, apocalypse comes to have its strongest resonance in personal realisation.

B.1.PLOT

Stacey MacAindra is Rachel Cameron's married sister who has grown up in Manawaka but escaped early. The novel covers several months in Stacey's thirty-ninth birthday, ending on the eve of her fortieth birthday. Events include her husband taking a sales job with Richalife, the death of Mac's best friend, Buckle and Stacey's brief affair with Luke, a young writer. Much of the action takes place inside Stacey's head as she struggles with herself, her husband, their four children, and their society, to wring a modified victory from besetting difficulties. The narrative is thick with irony and honesty of vision.

B.2. NARRATIVE

Like the narrative of *A Jest of God*, Stacey's narrative, proves that interior monologues can be expanded to contain wider social and political themes beyond personal self-scrutiny. The

significant contours of Stacey's imagined worlds are progressively mapped in her narrative. We shall see that Stacey's fantasising has given her the necessary inner space to come to terms with the world constituted for her by human relationship as mother, wife, friend, sister and daughter.

B.2.1. THE ELEMENT OF FANTASY IN STACEY'S NARRATIVE

Stacey's narrative like Rachel's begins with a nursery rhyme which signals some of her major anxieties, though unlike her sister Stacey stands not at a distance from the outside world but is enmeshed in a cluttered domestic scenario:

Ladybird, Ladybird,
Fly away home;
Your house is on fire,
Your children are gone.

Crazy rhyme. Got it on the brain this morning; That's from trying to teach Jen a few human words yesterday. Why anybody would want to teach a kid thing like that, I wouldn't know. (Fire-Dwellers, p.1) This is Stacey's distinctive voice commenting on her daily activities as mother and housewife.

The inner monologue, is strictly in Stacey's voice, and it was through this, largely, that I hoped to convey her basic toughness of character, her ability to laugh at herself, her strong survival instincts.²² In a life characterised by multiple demands from her husband, her four children and her friends, Stacey's responses are a contradictory mixture of resentment, guilt and acceptance:

What's left of me? Where have I gone? I've brought it on myself, without realizing it. How to stop telling lies? How to get out? This is madness. I'm not trapped. I've got everything I always wanted. (FD, p. 62)

If Rachel suffered from defective hearing then Stacey suffers from distorted vision, for her inner world is a strange place full of visual transformations of the ordinary into the extraordinary, where hairdressers' assistants become 'butterfly priestesses' and supermarkets are seen as temples filled with

Mounds of offerings, yellow planets of grapefruit, jungles of lettuce, tentacles of green onions, Arctic effluvia flavored raspberry and orange, a thousand bear-faced mouse-leg-ended space-crafted plastic-gifted strangely transformed sproutings of oat and wheat fields. Music hymning from invisible choirs (p.64)

Such fantasising is Stacey's most creative form of escape from the boredom of her daily routine, though it also forms a significant counterbalance within her psyche to her more threatening scenarios of apocalypse. A Vancouver street can also be transformed by her distorted vision in a more sinister way. The buildings at the heart of the city are brash, flashing with colours, solid and self-confident. Stacey is reassured by them, until she looks again and sees them charred, open to the impersonal winds, glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people frog-splayed on the stone like in that other city. (FD, p.8)

As a fantasist Stacey is, unlike her sister, in touch with the way her imagination works:

Everything drifts. Everything is slowly, philosophies tangled with the grocery list, unreal-real anxieties like rose thorns waiting to tear the uncertain flesh, nonentities of thoughts floating like plankton, green and orange particles, seaweed – lots of that, dark purple and waving, sharks with fins like cutlasses, herself held underwater by her hair, snared around auburn-rusted anchor chains. (FD, p. 27)

This is Stacey's version of the sea-change wrought by the imagination upon reality, and it is also her version (in prose) of herself as frowned poet, a figure which frequently recurs in Canadian poetry—for example, A.M. Klein, 'Portrait of the Poet as Landscape' (1948), Gwen

MacEwen, 'Dark Pines Under Water' (1969), Margaret Atwood's 'Procedures for Underground' (1970).

Stacey is, in one of her multiple selves, the mermaid lurking under a chapeau, and the 'Merwoman', as Luke playfully names her when he finds her alone at night beside the waters of Vancouver Sound. Yet it is not Stacey who drowns; it is her son Duncan who nearly does in the major crisis of the narrative, where images of fantasy surface terrifyingly into the real world.

His head is bleeding and the sea pours from his nostrils. His mouth is open, and his eyes. But he is not seeing anything and he does not seem to be breathing. His seven-year old body is heavy in Stacey's arms, a dead weight. She flounders through the water and weed-netted mud, back to the damp exposed sand. She puts Duncan down. She cannot think what to do. She cannot seem to think at all.
(p.250)

Underwater fantasies and visions of destruction are translated into the scenario of family nightmare, where in a condition of total helplessness, Stacey re-enacts the agony of the Vietnamese mother holding her dead child (p. 238) However, Duncan is restored to life by a bronzed lifeguard and Stacey is rescued by her husband who takes over 'unequivocally' his male protector role, and the fabric of domestic life is undamaged. Stacey continues to watch the televised images of burning streets in ravaged cities within the comfort of her sitting room, and her dreads continue in their familiar pattern:

'I see it and then I don't see it. It becomes pictures. And you wonder about the day when you open your door and find they've been filming those pictures in your street.' (p.261)

For Stacey, apocalypse comes to have its strongest resonance in personal realisation: 'Will the fires go on, inside and out? Until the moment when they go out for me, the end of the world. And then I'll never know what may happen in the next episode.' (p. 263) The novel ends quietly as family romance, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, with Stacey in bed and her husband and children asleep:

Temporarily, they are all more or less okay. She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow? (FD, p. 264)

The world outside is much the same as it was in the beginning, and the conclusion focuses on personal and family survival within the nightmare world. It is a precarious position but the only one available outside the self-enclosed worlds of fantasy which Stacey has successively inhabited. Yet her fantasising enables her to have the inner space which is required to come to terms with the world. Rachel's 'I will be different. I will remain the same' is echoed less solemnly by Stacey:

It would be nice if we were different people but we are not different people. We are ourselves and we are sure as hell not going to undergo some total transformation at this point. (FD., p.247)

The truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I'll always be her, because that's hoe I started out. But from now on, the dancing goes on only in the head. (FD., p. 259)

Thus we see that throughout her narrative, realism is interspersed with a vivid subtext of fantasy, which provides the breathing space for Stacey and is indeed the means by which she survives, coming to terms with herself and the world which she inhabits.

B.2.2. THE COMIC NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

In this section we shall see that Laurence's wit and love of humour runs throughout the novel. The comic narrative structure is buttressed by many techniques for humour., from puns to juxtaposition. Jen suggests genuine Polyglam, synthetic or false glamour; "fishwife.fleshwife; "No recriminations. No unmerry-go-round of pointless words." Something unendurable is not to be borne. Not to be born would be not to have to die."(FD, p.21) Science fiction is used to suggest grotesque, macabre aspects of society.

The comic narrative structure is buttressed by many techniques for humour, from puns to juxtaposition. Jen suggests genuine; Polygam, synthetic or a false glamour; fishwife, fleshwife, sagging guttily"; "No recriminations. No unmerry-go-round of pointless words." Something unendurable is "Not to be borne. Not to be born would be not to have to die". (*FD*, p. 21) Laurence's wit and love of language runs throughout her work, but *The Fire Dwellers* is perhaps her funniest novel.

Science fiction is used to suggest grotesque, macabre aspects of society. Stacey perceives supermarkets as a temple with long aisles and chromium side chapels. Votive offerings include dead fish, strawberries on ice... of grapefruit, jungles of lettuce, "a thousand bear-faced mouse-legged, space-legged space crafted plastic-gifted strangely transformed sproutings of oat and wheat fields". (*FD*, p. 74) At the hairdresser, mauve-clad priestesses with talonless claws set off one of Stacey's SF sex fantasies. Thor is a wizard, and the polyglam lady "a slickly sleight-of-handing magician." Convoluted language suggests social deviancy. Luke's SF story of the Greyfolk in North America, some thousand years hence, is a neat reversal of white colonial policy in Africa. In this connection, we are given the unnecessary hint that SF is an allegory for contemporary human life. (*FD*, pp. 180, 200)

An imaginative use of typography indicates Stacey's different voices and separates these from third-person narration. The latter, represented by ordinary type, advances the narrative, and sometimes provides oblique commentary. Stacey's practical thoughts, factual and ironic, are introduced by a long dash, whereas her poetic and romantic daydreams are in italicized passages with regular margins. Memories of newspaper events are in ordinary type, with deep indentation. Snippets of radio news come in unpunctuated capitals like telegrams. Open-ended remarks, without terminal punctuation, accurately reflect verbal patterns, while Stacey's longer inner monologues are in stream-of-consciousness form. As Allan Bevan notes, in his Introduction to the New Canadian Library Edition, the introductory dash is essential in conversations and interlaces with Stacey's thoughts and there is constant interaction of memories, thoughts, fantasies, conversations, and actions.

Laurence made three or four false starts on *The Fire-Dwellers* over a ten-year span. She was seeking a form to convey a sense of simultaneity and complexity: "Narration, dreams, memories, inner running commentary, - all had to be brief even fragmented, to convey the jangled quality of Stacey's life."²³ (No single voice could convey the disparity between the inner and outer aspects of her experience, and the frequent contrasts between her thoughts and speech. Problems of voice, Laurence adds, were compounded by the multiplicity of interlocking themes, all inherent in Stacey's situation: the marriage relationship after many years; the relation between generations; the relation with an incendiary world; and the relation with Self, which includes coping with aging and death.

Laurence acknowledges the effect of television on her technique, and her desire to capture sharp visual images, "the effect of voices and pictures".²⁴ She suspects that readers conditioned by film and television need visual variety on the page, hence her typographical innovations. Curiously she aspired in this novel to write a sparser, more "pared down" prose than she had previously written. Yet *The Fire-Dwellers* is weakened by unnecessary repetition, boring exchanges, and occasionally blatant symbolism. None of Laurence's other work, with the possible exception of *This Side Jordan*, suffers from these weaknesses. Some of the dialogue (such as the conversation between wives at the Richalife parties, or Stacey's bedtime talks with her tired, harassed husband) is realistic but dull. The technical problem of depicting a boring exchange without boring the reader remains unresolved.

Some dialogues sound like a Harold Pinter play, but there are too many relatively futile exchanges. There are repetitions that add nothing, such as the second reference to Katie's long hair which looks as if it has been ironed (*FD*, p. 12, 13). We do not need so many examples of fear, anxiety, and noncommunications. The heavy-handedness here is unlike Laurence's usual style; examples might include Tess Fogler's comment that Jen is "determined not to communicate"; and Jake's fondness for talking about the breakdown of verbal communication. Laurence's theme suffers from overkill.

Stacey's individual crisis, however, requires a social setting, and this necessitates some repetition. The structure in the first three-quarters of the novel is virtually static, with multiple

repetitions illustrating a central theme. The kinetic movement of comedy begins near the end of the novel: as she learns from her experience, Stacey grows inwardly. Her growth is paralleled by similarly affirmative movements in other family members. In a very real sense the protagonist in *The Fire-Dwellers* is postwar Western society.²⁵ Stacey is a female version of the "little man" in contemporary antiheroic fiction. She is atypical only in her strongly ironic sense of humor. Stacey's final short soliloquy is comic. She decides that trivialities may be acceptable distractions; that she is unlikely to become thinner, and that this is ludicrous but not tragic: "Give me another forty years, Lord and I may mutate into a matriarch." The time span is that of the Israelites' desert exile en route to the Promised Land; mutate suggests an evolution of species; alliterations adds a comic touch; and matriarch suggests a family clan or a dynasty, along with a shaping power for its female founder. This mutant joins her family and city in peaceful sleep.

Stacey is one of Laurence's survivors. She wrestles a modest victory from a society which she finally accepts on her own terms.²⁶ she enjoys debunking hypocrisies propagated by Richalife, Polygam, and other advertisers. Violence remains but "there is nowhere to go out but here" (*FD*, p. 259), Stacey learns that the trap is the world, not her four walls, and that it is not without its compensations and pleasures.

Let us now analyse the dominant themes of the novel: violence and lack of communication.

B.3.3. THEMES OF VIOLENCE AND LACK OF COMMUNICATION

We have seen that Stacey's external world is the frighteningly familiar one of a post-war North American city. This is a manipulative society characterised by brutality and deception; masked violence. Stacey's fears, both personal and social, are generated largely by her society. This section revolves round the major theme in this novel which is violence. Through Stacey's narrative Laurence puts across the fact that while violence represents one type of violence, it also represents the failure of other types. One of Stacey's chief fears is of being unable to communicate, or of remaining trapped in her skull. The difficulty of peaceful

communication, the alternative to violence becomes a dominant theme. The problem preoccupies Stacey. She moves from the naïve view that it can be solved by an honest voicing of thoughts and feelings to the understanding that whereas this may be a partial solution, silence and concealment are also necessary in human relations, and communication does not simply depend on words. Besides the above mentioned themes, this section also deals with Deception, the demonic form of communication which goes hand in hand with the anxieties of modern life. For Stacey the breakdown in communication extends to religion. Stacey yearns for a transcendent reality and communicates with a God in whom she does not believe.

Two year-old Jen's refusal, or inability, to speak belongs to this pattern, and one of several optimistic events at the novel's end is Jen's first speech-social words, significantly: "Want tea, Mum?" Stacey's relief, to our amusement, is most immediately replaced by a new fear, that Jen may never say anything else. The novel opens with Stacey thinking of her efforts to teach "a few human words", followed by her half-conscious recognition that words conceal more than they reveal, and that nursery rhymes are full of horrors.

After nearly twenty years of marriage, Mac and Stacey find it difficult to communicate. Stacey resents Mac's silences. After a day spent alone or with children (the typical situation for the housewife), she looks to Mac to bring her something of the outside world. But he responds to questions with the demand to be left alone. Stacey fears he no longer takes her seriously or finds her attractive" "can you imagine what it's like to live in the same house with somebody who doesn't talk or who can't or else won't and I don't know which reason it could be". (*FD*, p. 197) Her imagination connects Mac's willed isolation with his fear of pain.

Stacey's memories of her childhood in Manawaka revolve around failures in communication. She remembers the "tomb silences" of her parents; her mother's unsuccessful attempts to force Niall Cameron to conform to Manawakan standards; and the pattern of deception between her mother and herself as she placated her mother's fear with false assurances about boys and liquor. Stacey half-knows, half suspects Mac's similar difficulties with his father Matthew. They are all moulds: "Once I thought it was only people like Matthew and my mother who has that kind of weak eyes. Now I know its me, as much" (*FD*, p. 164).

Tess and Jake Fogler, the MacAindras's childless neighbours, provide another variant of concealed violence fear, and failed communication. Ironically, Jake is part of the euphemistically named communications industry. He is a radio actor, fond of talking of the breakdown of verbal communication. Jake knows nothing of his beautiful wife's fears that he finds her stupid or that he may be attracted to a radio actress, while Tess is equally ignorant of Jake's self-consciousness about his ugliness and short stature. Tess copes with fear by purchasing objects for which they have no use, and cosmetics designed to vanquish the ravages of time. Her pet goldfish, who devour one another, image her society. Tess forces Jen to watch this cannibalism. Her suicide attempts comes as no surprise, but Stacey blames herself for her failure to see the fear behind the glamorous mask.

Private fears echo public horrors. The epigraph from Carl Sandburg's "Losers" speak of fiddling to a world on fire, and hints that action is meaningless. This epigraph, and the children's rhyme ("Ladybird, ladybird, / Fly away home; / Your house is on fire, / your children are gone") reflects the character's fears. In Stacey's society, death takes many forms: suicide, automobile accident, police bullets, bombing, maiming. Her city assumes, for an instant, the form of "that other city" (Hiroshima), "glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people frog-splayed on the stone" (*FD*, p. 11). A gull is admired for its simple knowledge of survival. Stacey thinks her children will need to know the violence of the city's core.

Newspaper headlines chase through Stacey's mind as backdrop to family activity: "Seventeen-Year Old on Drug Charge." "Girl Kills Self, Lover." Homeless population growing, Says Survey." The radio blares disaster at frequent intervals: NINE O'CLOCK NEWS: PELLET BOMBS CAUSED THE DEATH OF A HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE CIVILIANS MAINLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN ...". A story of an ex-soldier with murderous reflexes suggests we have been conditioned into monsterdom. Everyone lives dangerously, Stacey tells Luke; we are all fire dwellers in a word gone mad. Niall's revolver provides an escape fantasy which she finally abandons. Even the children fear death having lost one friend in an auto accident.

Lesser anxieties concern the need for a university education; the need to look beautiful and elegant the need to be "free" in some unspecified way; and the need to be a perfect spouse. Popular journalism feeds the "tapeworms of doubts" in the social body: "Nine ways the Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter"; "Are you Castrating Your Son?"; "Are you Emasculating your Husband?" Conversations at parties reveal the fear of many women at the prospect of an empty house after the children are all at school.

Since people prefer not to see the disasters they help to create, society develops deception to a fine art. The conman is king. Mac's new employer illustrates our will to be deceived. Richalife, promising rejuvenation through vitamin pills, is a secular parody of the religious vision of the promised land: "Both Spirit and Flesh Altered." The parody extends from the obvious pun in the name to evangelical testimonials at rallies by those who believe the pills have altered their lives. Thor Thorlakson is the prophet of this pseudo-religion, preaching the good news that the shackles have been lifted" (*FD*, p. 39). Richalife promises to cure anxiety, depression and lack of energy. Thor is unaware of the irony that he proposes to replace old addictions (to caffeine, liquor, tranquilizers) with new. His suggestion that they are selling not just pills but themselves sits oddly with his vaunted freedom. Laurence's parody of high-pressure religious evangelism is extremely funny.

Modern business methods and language are also subject of Parody. Thor sprinkles his conversation with jargon such as "alert wise" and "Caffeine-wise." He sees no hidden intent when Stacey uses this jargon in the mock approval in her parody of a testimonial: "caffeine wise I'm like a new woman." The forms of systems analysis and psychological testing are parodied in the Richalife Quiz designed to identify guilt feelings, goals and family relationships, and in the individual programs based on self-assessment. Mac is shocked when Stacey asks if lies are permitted. However, he and Thor have put themselves on Richalife programs which identify them as younger, happier and less anxious than they are. The confessional element in the quiz parodies the religious confession. Stacey says it is naïve to expect truth on a form and that the quiz, like much of modern life, "Communicates" an attractive lie. The quiz and the individual charts are manipulation masked on helpfulness.

Laurence's portrait of the intrusion of corporations into private lives (The Big Brother is Watching You syndrome) is black comedy: Stacey has trouble with the word intrusion when she is drunk. Beneath a jolly, fatherly veneer, Thor is mean and vindictive. He has a "court" of simpering henchmen. The thundergod is all wind, no substance. But the fears he generates are real.

Deception the demonic form of communication, goes hand in hand with the anxieties of modern life. Lies, not pills or alcohol, are the chief sedatives and the basis of many relationships. Stacey cannot bear to think of Matthew living in the MacAindra household because his need for constant reassurance necessitates her lies. The "Human words" of the opening paragraph modulates into "talking sounds" exchanged amid anxieties. The Polyglam party is an even broader farce than the Richalife rallies and on the same theme. The "plastic lady" is oracle and trickster magician. She masks her fear of aging beneath garish makeup. Her parlor game fosters anxiety in the housewives, who dutifully follow instructions. Stacey wonders what they are frightened of. "Making a scene? Finding out we're alone after all" (*FD*, p. 87), Like the Richalife material, the Polyglam booklet offers the attractive lie of peaceful, happy families. Ployglam understands the importance of packaging, as does the hostess, Tess.

Laurence's ironic techniques includes Stacey's silent dialogue with a God in whom she does and does not believe. This dialogue is at the core of Stacey's personality. The image of God fluctuates from an authoritarian, omnipotent being to one who shares in our helplessness. (*FD*, p. 11, 212) Talking with God is also talking to the unmasked self; questions remain largely unanswered but can be faced with some degree of honesty. God is connected with the destructive aspect of time passing: contemplating her present shape, Stacey decides God has "a sick sense of humour." She attempts to bargain with Him for the safety of her children, like Jacob wrestling with the angel.

The breakdown in communication for Stacey's generation extends to religion. Since she envisages Matthew as a man with no religious problems, Stacey is touched when he reveals lifelong doubt. She pretends to faith for the sake of her children, but suspects that they are not deceived. Like Laurence, she "mourns" her disbelief. Stacey's yearning for a transcendent

reality, like Rachel's, is suggested by her singing hymns beloved in childhood, where God is the theme too high "for mortal tongue."

Time, as humans experience it, is one of Laurence's continuing concerns. In *The Fire-Dwellers*, she examines the breakdown in communication in terms of the ways in which we experience time. Stacey wonders if time has imposed layers of masks over too tender truth (like the circles that tell the age of tree), or stripped them away. Time passing has turned Mac from a confident extrovert into an anxious, silent person. Throughout much of the novel, time appears to Stacey as a negative, hostile phenomenon. Her inner self is masked by fat; stretch marks on thighs and belly appear as silver worms, an image of death and putrefaction. Her intelligence has also altered for the worse. Evening courses bore and humiliate her: "Where have I gone?" "Once I was different" (*FD*, p.72-73).

Personal relations also change. Mac and Stacey, once compatible, have acquired mutually irritating habits. The metaphor of invisible garbage recurs. Problems have ancient roots. Time alienates people, introduces guilt, or becomes a treadmill where one communicates one's own unchanging awfulness to oneself. Like Rachel, Stacey has a sense of inhabiting a middle world, a limbo frightening and unreal:

"I stand in relation to my life both as child and parent, never quite finished with the old battles, never able to arbitrate properly the new, able to look both ways, but whichever way I look, God, it looks pretty confusing to me" (*FD*, p. 47).

With Luke, the young stranger encountered after a bitter quarrel with Mac, Stacey hopes to shed her accumulated baggage. This escapist interlude is Stacey's last attempt to be eighteen again, and to leave behind the encumbrances of town and family.

The basically optimistic temper of Laurence's vision shows in a series of events late in the novel, where Stacey accepts herself, her responsibilities, and the changes wrought by time, the 'Black Joker'. Eventually, time plays a redeeming role. One of the first of such events

involves Jen's frightening experience with Test Fogler. In their mutual concern for Jen, Katie and Stacey encounter one another as persons, without the role-playing structures of mother and daughter: they say "we", like Hagar and the Oriental girl in the hospital bedpan incident.

Other affirmative events include Duncan's narrow escape from drowning, and the accompanying role reversals among the Mac Aindra males. Ian now exhibits love for Duncan, not jealousy; and Mac is released to demonstrate the affection which his father has taught him to conceal. Duncan is able to face the sea again. Jen begins to talk. Stacey finds she can talk to Mac, as to Luke but all genuine communication is difficult.

Thus we see that *The Fire-Dwellers* points implicitly to the force of social conditioning on women's consciousness. Stacey has no thought of getting work outside the house; she has neither time nor strength for such aberrations. There is no irony in this encounter, no suggestion that the woman has needs beyond those which might be satisfied by marriage and a family.

We see that Stacey shares Rachel's obsession with death as she shares her recognition of the untranslatability of human words and gestures. However, it is Stacey's lack of repression which makes the difference between their interior monologues.

There are interesting similarities between *The Fire-Dwellers* and Lessings's *Children of Violence* (also written during the 1960s) with their scenarios of the late twentieth-century urban nightmare, their fears of nuclear catastrophe and their mixture of realism and fantasy. In Laurence's only city novel, Vancouver is transformed momentarily by Stacey's narrative into a vision of Hell and the future into an apocalypse of flame: "Anyway, I probably exaggerate. Do I? Doom everywhere is the message I get. A person ought not to be affected, maybe." (FD., p.50)

But Stacey is affected by the images of war and violence shown on television and by newspaper headlines of disaster which interact with her maternal fears for the safety of her own children to create the hallucinations of burning buildings, forest fires and Roman centurions which flash across her inner vision. She is caught within the same twentieth-

century nightmare as Lessing's protagonists and shows the same inclinations towards science fiction in her fantasies.

Science-fiction images of apocalypse and extra-terrestrials are an important strain in Stacey's imagination, as she tells Luke Venturi in her escapade to Vancouver Sound:

I sometimes you know can imagine that kind of a situation, SF, I mean
(*FD*, p.155)

Once again there is a shadowy parallelism between characters, and it comes as no surprise to find that Luke writes science fiction himself, 'Not space opera with sex. Allegory more, and all happening on this planet' (p. 154); nor is it any surprise when Luke tells Stacey one of his stories to find that he cannot think of an ending. This surely is Laurence's comment on the limitations of the genre, the conventions of which do not allow enough breathing space for individual human complexity. Stacey's own science-fiction fantasies collapse as soon as they are confronted by the resistant unaccommodating details of her daily life. As imaginative spaces they give her room to express her intuitions and her deepest fears, but they are not translatable into the context of realism which is the structural base of this novel.

B.3.4. CO-RELATION BETWEEN THE FIRE-DWELLERS AND THE STUDY OF ARCHETYPES

The presentation of Stacey's inner as well as external world is a perspective that corresponds and illuminates previous work done on the study of archetypes. In this section, Stacey's character shall be examined on the basis of studies made by Eric Neuman, Joseph Campbell and other followers of Carl Jung. The section will also offer a deep insight into Stacey's character. Despite all her struggles, Stacey does emerge as the survivor.

In Stacey MacAindra, the only protagonist in Laurence's Manawaka novels enacting the traditional role, Laurence creates a remarkable portrait of the life of a middle-aged mother-of-four with all its horrors, its impossibilities and its absolute centrality to feminine experience. A

sensitive and challenging definition of the maternal emerges that renews the concept for modern times and yet links it with the Biblical women whose children rise up and call her blessed. Laurence's focus encompasses not only an external, forceful and easily recognised social reality, but also a rich and sensitive internal perspective that often corresponds to and illuminates work done by Eric Neumann and Joseph Campbell .

In primitive societies and matriarchal times, the force of the maternal mystery was biological. Increasing knowledge of humans as physical and also spiritual/psychological beings leads Eric Neumann²⁷ to conclude that there are two basic patterns to the so-called mysteries of religion, myth and legend that correspond to pattern within the individual self. Whether the initiates are male or female, the masculine mysteries, Neumann suggests, are based on 'heroic labours' such as those of Jason or Hercules and represent active struggles of the ego to conquer and vanquish. The feminine mysteries (such as the Elusinian ones), again, whether the initiates are male or female, are described as rituals of birth and re-birth whose labours are not to conquer but to transcend, to achieve a new union and a new identity. The experience of motherhood is an acted parable of this latter rite.

The psychic results of the feminine mysteries may not be as obvious as those of the masculine rites, despite the symbol of the child (often a God) which so powerfully represents them. The contrast is analogous to the difference between the two Laurence novels that focus on the Cameron sisters. Stacey's sister Rachel, at the end of *A Jest of God*, is seen to be triumphing through a change in milieu and attitude. Though she is still represented within an external determining force, that force (the bus) is in motion, whereas in the first scene of the novel she was seemingly held a static prisoner behind the schoolroom windows, looking out on life as its activity passed her by. Her conquest of herself has been heroic and demonstrably what Laurence herself has been heroic and demonstrably what Laurence herself terms a 'partial victory'.²⁸ In contrast, in *The Fire-Dwellers*, to open and close the novel, Laurence uses passages which are identical in setting and even phrasing except for the change from morning to night and for the final paragraph is the omniscient voice in the present tense.

Stacey heaves over on her side. The house is quiet. The kids are asleep. Downstairs in the ex-study Matthew has been asleep for hours, or if not asleep, mediating, beside her she can already hear the steady breathing that means Mac is asleep. Temporarily they are all more or less okay.
(*FD*, p.7)

The emphasis on quiet peace and intimate closeness in a continuum of past, present and future is the consequence of Stacey's victory in the feminine mysteries whose centre is, in Jung's terms,²⁹ the feminine Eros-relatedness. Such a victory is undramatic and endlessly to be re-won but of greater magnitude than the masculine Logos battle she must have fought years before to escape Manawaka. The tremendous energy produced by the conflict of conscious and unconscious in the interest of feminine wholeness creates confusion within Stacey as wild as the bedlam of her external life. She feels, however, that there is one who understand her problem, namely, God. One of her early conversations indicates:

Are the kids okay? Damn, I wish I didn't always have to be home at the right time. At the Day of Judgment, God will say Stacey Mac Aindra, what have you done with your life? And I'll say, Well, let's see, Sir, I think I loved my kids. And he'll say, are you certain about that? And I'll say, God, I'm not certain about anything any more. So He'll say, To hell with you, then. Then again, may be He wouldn't. May be He'd say, I'm not all that certain, either. Sometimes I wonder if I even exist. And I'd say, I know what you mean, Lord. I have the same trouble with myself.
(*FD*, p.11)

The forcefulness of Stacey's narrative, like the bold familiarity of her arguments with God, is indicative of the power that- according to Jung- the self possesses when the God-image resides within. The amusing passage in which Stacey argues that God should return to earth in the likeness of herself is an example. This inner dialogue occurs just before Stacey meets Luke. She argues:

Listen here, God don't talk to me like that. You have no right. You try bringing up four kids. Don't tell me you've brought up countless millions because I don't buy that. We've brought our own selves up and precious little help we've had from you. If you're there. Which probably you aren't, although I'm never convinced totally, one way or another. So next time you send somebody down here, get it born with a large family and a rotten boss, eh? Then we'll see how the inspirational bit goes God, pay no attention... I'm nuts. I'm not myself. (FD, p.168).

Stacey is, nevertheless, much closer to being herself than she realises. The novel does not record the process whereby Stacey has come to the point of individuation, Jung's term for the wholeness of the integrated self. *The Fire-Dwellers* takes place in a narrower time span and a more confined space than any of other novels and involves its protagonist in establishing relationships with the figures of her real and immediate presents, her husband and her children. Somehow, in the past, Stacey has dealt with the parental forces, especially that of her mother. Although from seeing in her daughter Katie her own response to her mother, Stacey develops an increasing awareness and sympathy for Mrs Cameron. Her troubling and more frequent memories are of her father. The seriousness of the father image to Stacey is stressed by the inner monologue that immediately precedes her approach to the sea on what is clearly her dark night of the soul. After being falsely accused by Buckle and Mac of being unfaithful to her husband, Stacey, in despair, drives out by herself. In this crisis of the novel, placed at its structural center, Stacey is horrified at the possibility of a relationship between her long-dead father and her husband and herself. She reflects:

Okay, Dad. Here's looking at you. You couldn't cope, either. So I married a guy who was confident and (in those days or so it seemed) outgoing and full of laughs and free of doubts, fond of watching football and telling low jokes and knowing just where he was going, yes sir, very different from you, Dad. Now I don't know. Perhaps it isn't that the masks have been put on, one for each year like the circles that tell the age of a tree. Perhaps they've been gradually peeled off and what's there

underneath is the force that's always been there for me, the unspeaking eyes, the mouth for whom words were too difficult. No. No. No I can't take that. I won't Hush. How to get through, just this minute, to the shore? What if there are dogs? Alsatians, Dobermans? Come on Stacey. (I'm sacred. What am I doing out here alone?) (FD, p.170)

The unconscious world reflected here is that of the underworld Hell whose entrance is guarded by the dog Cerberus. Stacey has moved into what Jung felt was the more fateful and consequential second stage of life described by Jolande Jacobi as 'the realm of the "Mothers", the unconscious, on whose threshold the shadow stands'.³¹ The shadow self no longer appears (as in *A Jest of God*) as a projection of the personal unconscious but in the alternative form Anjela Jaffe suggests of injustice and suffering in life and the world'.³² Far from freeing her of pain and suffering, Stacey's progress towards the individuation goal of wholeness involves her fully in what Jung refers to as 'the passion of the ego'.³³ Stacey's memories and fantasies are indicative of unconscious health and vitality but at the same time they increase her awareness of the multiple selves that go to make up one individuality. Without a firm sense of self there can be no relationship and communication with others, yet the consciousness of her own multiplicity makes her sometimes fear a lack of self. She says:

Listen, God, I know it's a worthwhile job to bring up four kids you don't need... I'm converted. But how is it I can feel as well that I'm spending my life in one unbroken series of trivialities? The kids don't belong to me. They belong to themselves. It would be nice to have something of my own, that's all. I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kids' mother. And yet I'm getting now so that I actually prefer to have either Mac or one of the kids along. Even to the hairdresser, I'd rather take Jen. It's easier to face the world with one of them along. Then I know who I'm supposed to be. (p. 95)

What Stacey is worrying about here are the changing masks or personae that she must wear. The real self which underlies the diverse personae is one that she must come to know and

understand. One part of that self is, of course, her strong maternal nature. Though at times she appears to herself and her children as the dark or devouring Mother, her nature shows an instinctive and spontaneous ability to enact the nurturing and protective values associated with the Great Mother. To protect her son's need for privacy she will not back down as she usually does into passive resistance with Mac. Her maternal concern, far from being limited to her own children, extends not only to Buckle's mother, but to Mac's father, whose confession she hears and to whom she can open both heart and home in a truly generous and life-enhancing way. Though Stacey resembles her father in her fondness for the gin bottle, and though she asks for his gun as her inheritance, it is essentially because of her children that she throws the gun in the lake and remains untempted by the solution of suicide that her neighbour Tess adopts.

But the world that Stacey's children inhabit is shown in the novel as the destructive fire world in which we all dwell, a world lacking, as Manawaka did, qualities of culture and art, but worse than the Manawaka did, in its closeness to death and destruction by violence. The media reports force themselves into Stacey's consciousness and increase her sense of powerlessness. Because of her children she cares about the external world but because both, of her children and the inadequacy of her formal education, she has no realistic hope of ever changing or giving direction to her concern. Consequently her dreams are of escape to a new world or of the destruction of her children by atomic explosions. Nevertheless, while Stacey is at present deprived of a way to change the external world, Laurence creates in her a character who clearly has potential far greater than that of those currently in control.

As the Polyglam lady and the Richalife Thor comically demonstrate, the world deprived of Eros values is a vacuous place lacking all spiritual power. Its energy is either material or dependent on the pseudo-spiritual gods of psychology and science. Nowhere in the Manawaka works are masculine Logos values demonstrated as in *The Fire-Dwellers*, with comic and satiric force in Thor, and with pity in Buckle, the Fogles and the Garveys. The qualities Stacey shows would be assets for any woman in any role. Her lack of a public voice and identity is not as great a failure as that her society suffers when it fails to sustain and to incorporate women like her.

Stacey's undeveloped potential is clearly not dependent on her rational function- *The Golden Bough* remains unread, and she has lost patience with the male professor's interpretation of Clytemnestra. Instead, her intuitive wisdom is focused on the personal world around her, and its strength here is demonstrated in her instinctive distrust of Mac's Richalife's job and in the support she gives him to free himself. Demonstrated, too, in her relation to Matthew as well as to Mac is her ability to 'inspire others to become conscious of their own psychic contents and those of others'.³⁴ Stacey finally acknowledges that verbal communication is not essential when she muses about Mac and Ian. She says:

They're not like me, either of them. They don't want to say it in full technicolor and intense detail. And that's okay, I guess. Ian gets the message. It's his language, too. I wish it were mine. All I can do is accept that it is a language, and that it works, at least sometimes. (p. 296)

But then she goes on to admit that this non-verbal, intuitive language of communication is hers, too more than she likes to admit. As she says: 'Whatever I think that I think of it, it's the one I most use.' Instead of mutating into a matriarch as Stacey thinks she might, it is more likely that she will, in later stages of her life, develop powers of expressing her intuitive wisdom. Stacey's instinct for the verbal communication which she cannot use within her own family is that of a writer. The strengths she shows are often attributes of a novelist as, for example, the clear-sighted realism; the sense of humour; the awareness of what lies behind the mask; the recognition of the simultaneity of existence and the difficulty of plotting a defined course. As a woman, Stacey fulfills Virginia Woolf's demands of women writers in *A Room of One's Own*: 'to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life'.³⁵ She lacks what Woolf thought necessary for the writer, the ability to earn money and to have a room of her own. Whatever may lie in the future for Stacey, Laurence emphasises that her struggle in the present is to maintain the real and erotic part of her self that Manawaka society had tried so hard to destroy, but that is essential, according to psychologists, if a woman is to be able to value individual relationships and the fulfillment of personality, rather than simply subordinate personal identity to family and social norms.³⁶

The special significance of Stacey's relation to her daughter Katie illustrates Adrienne Rich's contention that 'until a strong lien of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness.'³⁷ The extended time frame achieved through sequences of memory, dream and fantasy is essential to the novel's technique and equally essential to Stacey's ability to be herself. Only if Stacey Cameron stays alive in memory as a part of the present Stacey MacAindra, will the present self be able to include the wife/lover of the early days of her marriage. What Stacey has fought for in the past is not a grotesque clinging to fantasy and youth. Rather it is an indication of Stacey's intuitive instinct for wholeness. Stacey recognises that 'the truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now', but she also knows that in some ways I'll always be her, because that's how I started out' (*FD*, p. 303). Because Stacey Cameron did once dance, Stacey Mac Aindra can accept that from now on, the dancing goes on only in the head'. However, she notes: 'the head isn't such a terrible place to dance. The settings are magnificent there, anyhow. I did dance at one time, when I could. It would be a lot worse if I never had.'

By keeping alive within her the erotic self, Stacey supports her instincts to treat her children as individuals. This keeps her from the excessive domination and possessiveness that is one danger for the Maternal woman. It also frees her from the Maternal tendency to regard the male as simply the father of her children. By the end of the novel Stacey is closer to Mac than she has ever been since those honeymoon days when she could say: 'you know something, Mac? I like everything about you' (*FD*, p.37). Now she sees behind his mask and helps to free him from it. Her growing perception of Mac's hidden needs and real strength offers fresh hope for their marriage.

What Stacey accomplishes in extending the mother archetype to include the sensual is to reunite the Demeter (Mother) and Kore (Maiden) figures so long kept apart by patriarchal and Western culture, thus depriving us, according to Adrienne Rich, of the mother-daughter passion and rapture.³⁸ The mystery of the mother who is at the same time a maiden was central in primitive matriarchal societies.³⁹

Neumann points out that the sculpted figures of Demeter and Kore could often not be distinguished from one another except for the typical symbol that each held : wheat for the mature woman and flower for the maiden. He describes one 'wonderful relief in which the two look smilingly and knowingly into each other's eye, both holding flowers'.⁴⁰ The psychic consequence for the woman of such a union, he suggests, was release of life-giving and transformative energy leading beyond the 'guaranteeing (of) earthly fertility and the survival of life' to a 'union on a higher plane in a spiritual aspect of the Feminine, the Sophia aspect of the Great Mother'.⁴¹ Neumann points out that 'Sophia, who achieved her supreme visible form as a flower', does not vanish in the 'nirvanalike abstraction of a masculine spirit;... her spirit remains attached to the earthly foundation of reality', exhibiting 'a wisdom of loving participation'.⁴² For this reason the spiritual power of Sophia is living and saving'. In *The Fire-Dwellers* the Sophia archetype is represented not only in Stacey but also by the elemental and spiritual symbols of fire and water that are central to the novel. Though both elements are shown to contain archetypal ambivalence as death-life forces, the final orientation is to life.⁴³ The rebirth symbols, though they are not directly connected to Stacey, are strong-Jen the flower-child's sudden willingness to speak; the re-birth from the sea of Duncan, the child undesired by his father, into the arms of his father; Mac's release from the war-like Thor (perhaps, as Stacey to bank (p.212). No matter how much more comfortable life would be without the transformative fire of conflicting values within, Stacey recognises its presence is essential to life. Her inner voice muses: 'Will the fires go on, inside and out? Until the moment when they go out for me, the end of the world' (p. 307)

Although the fire within Stacey is clearly a sexual one, her inner flame is also closer than she realises to being a spiritual light, illuminating the darkness of others. Nevertheless, she herself still feels the need of a 'blinding flash of light' that would leave her 'wise and calm knowing how to cope with everything'. Then she thinks, her 'kids would rise up and call [her] blessed' (p. 299). Instead of the hoped-for flash of light, Stacey is granted a miraculous meeting with a man who bears the name of the Biblical physicians, and, appropriately, a name which sounds like luce or light. Luke is to Stacey a lover as well as a spiritual healer. He appears suddenly when in her dark night of the soul she has sought out the sea ready to abdicate from being 'a

good wife and mother' (p.179). The challenge that Luke represents is not a call to the confession of inner truths preciously rejected but rather to the full acceptance of the demands of the individual self.

Luke's youth prevents his being in any sense a father-figure, and indeed, because he is, as Stacey recognises, young enough to be her son, there arises a suggestion of the mother-son incest motif so often found by Neumann in his study of the Great Mother, as 'the secret background of the spiritual experience' of feminine transformation.⁴⁴

Luke appears as a nocturnal and sinister figure, and only because Stacey's own strength and inner knowledge is great enough for her to break her tie to his temptation does he function in the novel as a positive Friend and Healer.

In contrast, the association of betrayal is placed instead on Buckle. Unlike Luke, Buckle is clearly not a projection of Stacey's inner self. While Stacey herself drives to Luke, she does not actively seek out Buckle; when she is in his truck she is carried along by the force which he alone commands, in a direction which he admits is orientated to death. His grotesque mother and aberrant sexuality render him pathetic until his apparent harmlessness becomes active evil in his malicious lie to Mac that he had made love to Stacey. Stacey's inability to counter his lie parallels her helplessness in Buckle's cab. This enforced passivity in Stacey's relation to Buckle marks the nadir of her despair, a point that finds its cleansing opposite in her affair with Luke.

Luke (like Hector Jones in *A Jest of God* and, to a lesser extent, Jules Tonnerre in *The Diviners*) represents a weakness in characterisation unless, we are aware that Laurence often dramatises her women's inner truths through projection in specific male characters. If the reader is misled by what appears to be the traditional and non-symbolic mode of the novel, then Luke seems to be a novelistic trick, a fortuitous intervention which however, destroys the verisimilitude of Stacey's characterisation. If, on the other hand, he is seen in terms of the internal self of the protagonist as an animus, Luke is a completely realistic figure, albeit a rare one, since so few of the traditional animus images in western literature have been positive.⁴⁵

The appearance of Luke is the most forceful example of the way chance (or coincidence) seems throughout the novel to work for Stacey: it is not Stacey's son but Peter Challoner who is killed by a car on their street; Buckle's death frees Mac from his divided loyalties; Mac is given a new job, so on. It is certain, however, that Stacey will not be lulled into passivity by her luck. She will continue to worry over the large and small irritants of her life. As the novel's last line suggests, she will never be sure of the morrow.

Nevertheless, the novel is not as pessimistic as Maeser suggests because it 'ends on a note of repetitive monotony'.⁴⁶ As we leave Stacey we leave a woman of remarkable strength who resembles those Ann Ulanov describes when commenting on the individuated woman:

If [a woman] knows herself, she can avoid developing her own stereotypes of women and avoid having those of others foisted upon her. She falls neither into the trap of thinking and acting as 'just a housewife,' of being unable to accept the pluralism of the contending forces within her that might lead her to be more than one kind of woman. If she responds to the archetypes underlying her nature, then she can respond to the deep motivations that the archetypes provide, which can only enrich her life, her relation to others, and her contributions to her society.⁴⁷ Such a woman as Stacey has the potential to break what Rich calls the cycle of women's lives lived too long in both depression and fantasy while our active energies have been trained and absorbed into caring for other'.⁴⁸

Laurence's portrayal of what Rich calls 'courageous mothering' is a remarkable achievement of characterisation. Never does the universal psychological validity of the character intrude upon the vitality, individuality and spontaneity of the particularised protagonist, and yet never is the accuracy of the psychological realism betrayed. The colloquial, comic and ironic understatement of the narrative voice does not relieve the reader of an obligation to enter into an often painful yet liberating comprehension of what the experience of being both a mother and a woman entails.

At the end of this chapter we may conclude that both these women, Stacey as well as Rachel, in common with the narrators of the other Manawaka novels, share the double sense of the discontinuities within their lives at the same time as they perceive them to be a continuum, for there are unaccountable connections just as there are gaps and unanswerable questions in any narrative sequence. They come to acknowledge their own limits of understanding, of sympathy, of power, just as they recognise the limits imposed on them by language, social conventions and family obligations. These Manawaka novels are social protest novels of a subtler kind than overtly 'feminist' novels as they chronicle the changes within an individual consciousness and construct from the available fictional conventions a variety of discourses for women's personal survival.

NOTES

1. *A Jest of God*. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart; 1966.
2. *The Fire Dwellers*. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart; London; Macmillan; New York; Knopf, 1969.
3. Hughes, "Politics and *A Jest of God* , pp. 50-51.
4. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, p.71.
5. see C.M. McLay, "Everyman is an Island : Isolation in *A Jest of God*", *Journal of Canadian Literature* 50, Autumn 1971, 57-68.
6. cf. Elizabeth Smart, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.122.
7. G Bowering, "That fool of a Fear' (1971), repr. in Woodcock (ed.), *A Place to Stand On*, pp. 210-26]
8. Laurence, 'Gadgetry or Growing'; Form and Voice in the Novel' (1969), for in G Woodcock (ed.), *A Place to Stand on : Essays by and About Margaret Laurence* (Edmonton, Alta; Newest, 1983) p. 85

9. Ibid.
10. Jacobus, *Reading Woman*, IV: 'Anna (Wh)O'S Absences; Readings in Hysteria' (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 211-212.
11. George Bowering, 'That Fool of a Fear (1971), repr. in Woodcock(ed.), *A Place to Stand On*, p.213.
12. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, p.79.
13. Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years Sentences" in *Margaret Laurence*, p.21.
14. John Watt Lennox, "Manawaka & Deptford : Place & Voice", *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13, 3, Fall, 1978, 24.
15. Laurence told Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto, 1973), p. 202.
16. Martin Gardener, *The Ambidextrous Universe*, (New York:Basic Books, 1964) played with ideas of mirrors, anti-worlds and enantiomorphs. James Watson's *The Double Helix* (JW, TDH (New York,Athenian, 1968), R.W. Sperry, 'Hemisphere Disconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 23 (1968) pp. 723-33 popularized the story about dualities.
17. JL, DPCMMH, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, Vol. 62, 1968, p. 1151.
18. Elizabeth Waterston, "Double is Trouble, Twins in *A Jest of God*" ed. Colin Nicholson, *Critical Approaches to the fiction of Margaret Laurence* (Great Britain Macmillan Press Ltd), (1990, p. 83)
19. Nancy Bailey, ML and the psychology of Re-birth in *AJG journal of popular culture*, Vol. 15, 1981, pp. 62-7.
20. F.C. M.McLay, "Everyman is an Island", in *Margaret Laurence*, William, p.177.
21. Keneth James Huges, "Politics and *AJG*.", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13,3 Fall, 1978, p.46.
22. Laurence, 'Gadgetry and Growing', p.88.
23. Laurence, "Gadgetry or Growing?" p. 10.
24. Ibid. p. 12.
25. The minor motif of Sophoclean tragedy supports this emphasis on society. Stacey thinks of her husband as Agamemnon, and has attempted a course in Greek tragedy. William Rose Benet speaks of Sophocles' portrait of the individual's search for truth and self-knowledge

- in relation to the existing moral order: *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., II (New York, 1965), p. 947.
26. Laurence told Gibson (*Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 202) that Stacey's real self-discovery was that she was a survivor who has come to term with her past. Cf. Allan Bevan: "The novel, then, ends on note of low-keyed optimism"
 27. Eric Neumann, *Amor and Psyche* (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1971).
 28. Margaret Laurence, 'Ten Years' sentences', *Canadian Literature*, vol. 41 (1969) pp. 10-16.
 29. C. Jung, *Alchemical Studies (Collected Works, vol. 13)* (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1967) p.41.
 30. J. Jacobi, *The Psychology of Carl Jung* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973) p. 46; H. Blodgett, 'The Real Lives of Margaret Laurence's Women', *Critique*, vol. 23 (1981) pp. 5-17.
 31. Jacobi, *The Psychology of Carl Jung*, p.112
 32. A. Jaffe, *The Myth of Meaning* (New York, Penguin, 1975),p.100.
 33. C. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Collected works, vol. 11) (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1967) p. 157.
 34. A. Ulanov, *The Feminine* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971) p. 208.
 35. V. Woolf, *A Room of One's own* (New York: Penguin, 1974)p.109; see also M. Packer, 'The Dance of Life; *The Fire-Dwellers*', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, Vol. 27 1980, pp. 124-31.
 36. Ulanov, *The Feminine*, p. 203.
 37. A. Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1976) p.246.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
 39. C. Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Images of Mother and Daughter* (New York: Pantheon, 1967).
 40. Neumann, *Amor and Psyche*, p.307.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 325
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
 43. S. Nancekivell, '*The Fire-Dwellers*: Circles of Fire', *Literary Criterion*, vol. 19, 1984 ,pp. 158-72.

44. Neumann, *Amor and Psyche*, p.312.

45. M. von Franz, 'The Process of Individuation', in C.Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York:Dell,1964).

46. A. Maeser, 'Finding the Mother: the Individuation of Laurence's Heroines', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol.27, 1980 ,pp. 151-66.

47. Ulanov, *The Feminine*, p.210.

48. Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 247.

CHAPTER V

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

CHAPTER V

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

INTRODUCTION

While Margaret Laurence was writing novels, she was also producing a number of short stories that appeared in a variety of magazines including *Chatelaine*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Atlantic Advocate*. Eight of these stories, were collected into one volume and published under the title *A Bird in the House*. The eight stories that compose *A Bird in the House* reveal a society through its precocious product and critic. They trace Vanessa MacLeod's growth to maturity, depicted as an understanding of herself and her heritage. The collection forms an unconventional novel, linked by character, setting, narrative.¹ voice and structure. Vanessa is ten in the first three stories, and eleven or twelve in many others. In briefer incidents she is a small child, an older adolescent, or young adult.

A Bird in the House is an integral and necessary part of the pattern of the Manawaka works as they have evolved. The descriptions of ordinary peoples and ordinary things, street stores, houses, rooms in houses, and the everyday life of people in them, evoke the quality of life in Manawaka. They also make a unique contribution to Canadian literature in a particular Canadian time and place, under the deadening blows of the Depression and drought of the 30's, and into the early years of the Second World War.² Place and time have been appropriately evoked and the importance of the Depression has been emphasised.

The stories are unified by a steady progression in the type of suffering depicted. The first deals with social exclusion and loneliness; the second, with a past death and painfully aborted dreams. The birth of a baby boy, a new Roderick, effects a bitter-sweet mood. The third concerns Grandmother Connor's death, the family's grief, and Aunt Edna's lost love. The death of Dr. MacLeod in the fourth story precipitates Vanessa's loss of religious faith. The fifth, sixth and seventh stories relate individual suffering to massive social failures: economic breakdown, world war, poverty, class friction, and racial discrimination. Laurence shows a development in Vanessa's ability to comprehend both human suffering and the limitations of her understanding in this regard.

By predicament as well as by place the people of *A Bird in the House* are united and ... the sense of alienation is crucial, though here it is not the transformation of a society so much as the failure of a society that sets the tone. Society, in general, having failed, the natural social units become important again, and families are willy-nilly reunited. Aunt Edna coming home from jobless Winnipeg, Dr. Macleod moving in with his widowed mother because his patients can no longer pay him in cash; the Depression removes the pioneer intensity of relationships within small and threatened groups and that intensity Laurence mordantly evokes.³

As a feminist statement, *A Bird in the House* is subtle, never didactic. It shows three generations of women coping with inherited myths and changing conditions. Vanessa's mother, who stood first in the province in high school graduation, was denied a college education. She and the indomitable Aunt Edna remain admirable models. 'Escape' for this generation usually meant marriage. In the last story, we see that Vanessa sets out for college and the city feeling *less free* than she had expected: higher education is no panacea. Laurence's female protagonists continue to wrestle with difficulties in the battle that is life. When the book ends, we see that the real freeing is still in process. In order to bring out the concept of freedom, Laurence uses the bird imagery which I have discussed in a separate section entitled 'Cages and Escapes.'

1.NARRATIVE

Laurence says that the stories were conceived from the beginning as a related group and that the net effect is “not unlike” a novel. She describes themes and events in the average novel as a series of wavy, interlocking, horizontal lines:

The short stories have flow lines which are different. They move very close together but parallel and in a *vertical* direction....Nevertheless, the relationship of time and the narrative voice can be seen just as plainly in the stories, as in a novel⁴.

Laurence describes her handling of voice as follows:

The narrative voice is, of course, that of Vanessa herself, but an older Vanessa, herself grown up, remembering how it was when she was ten..... this particular narrative device was a tricky one..... what I tried to do was definitely not to tell the story as though it was being narrated by a child. This would have been impossible for me and also would have meant denying the story one of its dimensions, a time - dimension, the viewing from a distance of events which had happened in childhood. The narrative voice had to be that of an older Vanessa, but at the same time the narration had to be done in such a way that the ten year-old would be conveyed. The narrative voice therefore, had to speak as though from two points in time, simultaneously.⁵

In the subsections to follow we shall see that Margaret Laurence has used the narrator to a number of clear advantages. For one thing, she has employed the device of the double perspective. The actor is telling these admittedly autobiographical short stories from the point of view of an adult who was once a child named Vanessa. By her

complete control of the method, Margaret Laurence has avoided the usual dangers of this method — the danger of betraying the child's perspective by imposing judgments and thereby rewriting history and the danger of betraying the present by nostalgia — and has accomplished the virtues inherent in the method. That is, the adult narrator learns from what the child experienced and failed to understand. Vanessa sees things but Margaret Laurence sees the significance of things. And she has wisely chosen to call the child "Vanessa" rather than "Margaret" because Margaret Laurence is here not writing autobiography, but fiction, and using fictional methods to evoke significance. And by being the teller telling the tale, Margaret Laurence has involved both the verbal range and the judgements which a camera, recorder of pictures, cannot. The significance of the story is as much in the telling as in the story.

A Bird in the House would also seem to indicate a development in the little-used genre: the short story collection as whole-book. These stories re-examine the same chronological period as other stories, but examine them with a new focus and a different pattern of events.

It has been the failing of the short story form that it is based upon a false premise, that one set of events implies a lifetime. But against this psychological inaccuracy there has also been the virtue of the short story form: that it can invoke significance by means of its sharp, limited focus. *A Bird in the House*, by being a series of short stories, achieves the breadth of scope which we usually associate with the novel (and there by is as psychologically valid as a good novel), and at the same time uses the techniques of the short story form to reveal the different aspects of the young Vanessa. By using this kind of series, Margaret Laurence has escaped the imposed sequence, which is the psychological failing of the novel form that is, the novel — by its very adherence to chronology — is as false to the ways in which humans develop as the short story form — by its dependence upon the implication of the whole from the part — is to human-time). In the same period of time different things occur in the life of Vanessa. She does not recognize their significance. However, the narrator —by looking at different patterns in that same sequence of time — does.

At the same time, the stories of *A Bird in the House* are not written in the usual short story form. With one or two exceptions, they do not employ the revelation of epiphany which we have come to expect since James Joyce. That is, Margaret Laurence is not particularly interested in revealing a point or an idea ; she is interested in revealing a reevaluation of a character. Therefore once again the necessity of a series of short stories is stressed. Grandfather Connor for example, may be seen in one story as a domineering bully but is in fact reevaluated in the last story in the book. This throws a great deal of stress upon the narrator, who has been learning throughout the book by the very process of reevaluating Vanessa's judgements. Therefore it is the voice of the narrator which is of final importance in reading *A Bird in the House*.

Vanessa's love of writing is another ingenious aspect of the voice. Because she thinks of herself as a writer struggling to understand people, Vanessa is a "Professional Listener" who eavesdrops unashamedly in plain view or from various posts such as bed room air-register. This helps to solve one of the problems of first-person narration, the need for the observers omnipresence. Vanessa's writings are tragic, romantic and melodramatic. As she begins to understand the real passions around her, she despises her compositions. Her stories and flamboyant fantasies are ironically juxtaposed with family events so as to serve as indirect commentary.⁶

1.2. ELEMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN *A BIRD IN THE HOUSE*

Margaret Laurence calls these stories "fictionalized autobiography. Her own growth from a child's awareness of the small, tight world of family to an adolescent's understanding of the widening circles of the world around her is paralleled by Vanessa MacLeod's. The deaths of the heroine's parents, the changes made first by loss and grief and then, inevitably and relentlessly, by the practical circumstances of her life, are present in Vanessa's story.

Basic to this work and linking it to the genre of autobiography is the continuum of time as an integral part of its structure. The stories move through ten years of Vanessa's life from about 1935 onward. As she grows, she is aware of the landmarks which have had their continued bearing on her own life and on Manawaka: the emigration of the pioneers to Manitoba, the First and Second World Wars, and the tragedy of Dieppe where so many Manawakan boys, recruits to the Cameron Highlanders were killed. But only as the adult Vanessa, looking back at her child-self, can she begin to understand her history and all history as "the past", with all its powers over the present in both its challenges and chains.

The peculiarly introverted but powerfully dramatic development of *A Bird in the House* is illustrated by its approach to a subject which was to become of increasing concern to Laurence: the history of the Metis and the memory of their cultural dispossession in favour of a new generation of English-speaking settlers of Protestant background. Perhaps the main motivation behind these stories was to exorcise the powerful demons of Laurence's own past, particularly the figure of her grandfather who had inspired in her so much bitterness while growing up.

I came to write about my own background out of desire, a personal desire to come to terms with what I call my ancestral past..... My family began in Scotland and I was brought up with a great knowledge of my Scots background, but it took me a long time - before I recognized that these ancestors were very far away from me and that Scotland to me was just an ancestral memory, almost in a Jungian sense. And that if I came from anywhere, I came from a small prairie town of Scots- Presbyterian stock. I had to come to terms in some way with that environment which I had, at the time rebelled against - I wanted very much to get out- I couldn't wait to get out of that town. Then, years later, I found I had to come back and examine all those things, examine my own family, my own roots and in some way put to rest the threat that had been there. I think that, in a sense, this is what I have done. (BH, p. 66)

I shall now go into the details of the autobiographical elements as well as the realism in *A Bird in the House*.

1.2.1. THE REALISM OF LAURENCE'S SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

In this section I have shown that Laurence conveys a deep respect for realism, for the novel as a medium which continues to represent the ordinary experiences of daily life. Perhaps her strongest conviction and most emphatic claim is represented by the simple statement that, there is a lot of history in my fiction.⁷ The distrust of 'theorising' and the assimilation of fiction to history indicates an uncompromising commitment to a realistic procedure. This commitment, which deserves closer analysis, is most evident in this collection of stories, described by the author as 'the only semi-autobiographical fiction. I have ever written'.⁸

Realistic fiction, David Lodge has argued, 'works by concealing the art by which it is produced and invites discussion in terms of ethics and thematics rather than poetics and aesthetics'.⁹ Margaret Laurence's attitude towards her own writing tends to confirm this view. Her work leaves the critic uneasy over the problem which Lodge's statement implies: that such a mode of vision appears to grant a higher priority to the content of a novel than to its form. Laurence has characteristically asserted that 'theorising, by itself, is meaningless in connection with fiction.'¹⁰ But she has been ready to comment in detail on the ethical and thematic interest of her novels. Laurence's whole approach to narrative fiction may appear the inevitable extension of her strong sense of regional identity. In conversation with fellow Western Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch, she chose to speak of a 'compulsion to set down our background'.¹¹ Laurence continues to emphasise realism as a criterion of her business as a novelist. She remarks that, 'Fiction is related to life in a very real way'. One fact is confirmed: that she was 'involved in making a new literature out of a new experience'. The insistence on a new approach appears especially in emphasis throughout their

fiction on the 'rediscovery' or 'retelling' of kinds of stories which have already become traditional to prairie life. Her renewed commitment to realism represents the new writing. The compulsion to find a new standpoint from which to present western experience informs her realism, even when its limits seem most sharply restrictive, as in the special case of *A Bird in the House*.

The story of a child growing up on the prairies during the Depression has been so often retold that it has become part of an assumed tradition of western writing. A paperback blurb quotes the Vancouver Sun's recommendation: 'When Mrs. Laurence approaches this oft-told tale she breathes fresh life into it.' But the cliché of resuscitating a dying tradition conveys a misleading and discouraging idea of the book. The stories as Laurence actually tells them propose anything but a resigned acceptance of regional myth. On the contrary, the narrative as a whole demonstrates an icy comprehension of the types of stories people often like to tell themselves or others: Stories of an assumed popular interest which have to do with pioneering; Scots or Irish ancestry; the outdoor life, Indians; the Depression; and the two World Wars. This material is predictably part of the narrative, but the medium through which these aspects of regional history are presented is not one of an easily assumed, transparent realism. Very much part of the experience that the stories convey is the sense of deliberate effort of reconstruction, by the narrator, which goes into the telling. Predictable features of prairie life are given only grudging recognition. Laurence's style of narrative shows itself constantly hostile to the oft-told tale.

The stories carefully avoid any attempt at a large narrative sweep. Instead, they persistently foreground gaps in knowledge, inconsistent reports and breaks in narrative continuity.

1.2.1.1.DEPRESSION

In *The Bird in the House*, Laurence has commented at length about the Depression of the 30's.

The Depression did not get better, as everybody had been saying it would. It got worse, and so did the drought. That part of the prairies where we lived was never dustbowl country. The farms around Manawaka never had a total crop failure, and afterwards, when the drought was over, people used to remark on this fact proudly, as though it had been due to some virtue or special status, like the children of Israel being afflicted by Jehovah but never in any real danger annihilation. But although Manawaka never knew the worst, what it knew was bad enough. Or so I learned later. At the time I saw none of it. For me, the Depression and drought were external and abstract, malevolent gods whose names I secretly learned although they were concealed from me, and whose evil I sensed only superstitiously, knowing they threatened us but not how or why. What I really saw was only what went on in our family. (*BH*, p. 136)

Thus we see that the force of the Depression impinges on all the stabilities of Vanessa's life. The Depression forced her Aunt Edna back from Winnipeg to keep house for Grandmother and Grandfather Connor; her father cannot collect bills or hire a nurse or a girl to help with the housework because of the Depression; she and her parents have moved in with Grandmother MacLeod "when the Depression got bad", and the Depression ruined her cousin Chris' bright dreams of education and success"¹²

The child Vanessa is a sensitive observer of the individual lives and relationship around her: the range and power of the stories is enhanced by the fact that her field of vision is shaken by disturbances she could not have explained at the time. Even so, scenes included in 'The Loons', 'The Half-Husky' and the title story show that what is referred to here simply as personal or family experience is strongly marked by the general crisis of the times. The narrative point of view incorporates a strong sense of historical irony arising from the gradual realisation of what differences the Depression had made to people's lives.

The text plainly deals with an environment and form of received wisdom already familiar in prairie literature: a Scots-Irish Protestant morality with its classic opposition between duty and love, work and sexuality, the 'upright' good and the 'downright' bad. Laurence's attitude towards this frame of mind is suggested in one of the stories by the ironic application of the title 'To Set Our House in Order'. Vanessa's narrative questions this conception of order and the sources of authority which dictate it. From the opening description of Grandfather Connor's Brick House onwards, as the Manawaka scene is set, the images of that order are nakedly exposed. The concluding story, 'Jericho's Brick Battlements', connotes by its title the end of an era. The effect of Laurence's writing is not to perpetuate a traditional view of prairie life but to show where the sequence of experience put together in the course of Vanessa's recollections comes into the conflict with what used to pass as received opinion. Jarring particulars are remembered as well as the kind of general statements which reflect traditional or anonymous source of authority. The older Vanessa, herself now a mother, catches herself out in using the proverbial sayings or 'cliches of affection' (*BH*, p.207) which her own mother had used to her. The effects most strongly foregrounded in the language of the stories suggest the brash, colloquial realism of a child's point of view. Sometimes metaphor is used to dramatise this point of view, as when Vanessa reports: 'I felt, as so often in the Brick House, that my lungs were in danger of exploding, that the pressure of silence would become too great to be borne' (*BH*, p. 66). In the final story, the same metaphoric pressure arises in the incident of the furnace fire which, to the perception of everyone but Grandfather Connor, threatens the house itself. The style is consistently deflationary and yet capable at the same time of generating strong tension.

A Bird in the House shows a strong novelistic potential but the volume actually achieves a form which comes somewhere between the compact dramatic expression of a series of short stories and the more extended narrative interest of a novel. The stories were conceived from the beginning as a series, Laurence has told us. On the other hand, each story is self-contained: 'definitely a short story and not a chapter from a

novel. Yet the total effect becomes 'not unlike a novel'.¹³ The ambiguity of this conception accords with the tentative and exploratory nature of the work. Nevertheless the selection of thematic material included in *A Bird in the House*, though centred on domestic scenes and developed on the basis of the oft-told tale, anticipated the wider social and historical scope of *The Diviners*, the novel which follows next in order of composition and Laurence's most ambitious work. The narrative voice of Vanessa MacLeod, like that of Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*, recalls and revises the history of her own experience, looking back over a period of twenty years' absence from Manawaka. In the stories, the significance of events is essentially realised at a subliminal level in the consciousness of the narrator as the child she then was, while a more critical adult perspective is implied rather than stated. Vanessa's attitude to her own early experience is no less strongly revisionary than Morag's, though her presence as a character is reserved until the point where she directly intervenes at the end.

1.2.1.2 METIS

We shall now see how Laurence approaches the question of the Metis and their cultural dispossession. The album of Metis songs collected at the end of *The Diviners* testifies to the sincerity of the tribute which the author pays to a people whose way of life once represented a radically different form of society from the one which the eventual settlement of the prairies had created. However, *A Bird in the House* deals most directly with the experience of those belonging to the social order which had conspicuously triumphed. Vanessa MacLeod, the narrator and subject of these stories, is seen as the restless child of a family in which standards are still set by the founders of Manawaka itself, the grandparents' generation. When reminded that Grandfather Connor was a pioneer, Vanessa at once abandons her juvenile attempt at writing a romance of pioneer life: the prospect of romance is spoiled by this confrontation with the known reality. Vanessa's subsequent contact with the Metis girl Piquette Tonnerre then further undermines her confidence in her own background and outlook without providing the new friendship for which she naively hoped: the difference between them is such that Piquette cannot begin to respond to the advances of a middleclass

child such as Vanessa. In a review of George Woodcock's biography of the Metis hero Gabriel Dumont, Laurence herself acknowledges the barrier of prejudice which had still to be overcome in the attitude of her contemporaries:

There are many ways in which those of us who are not Indian or Metis have not yet earned the right to call Gabriel Dumont ancestor. But I do so, all the same. His life, his legend, and his times are a part of our past which we desperately need to understand and pay heed to.¹⁴

In the story, this enlargement of experience occurs only in the narrator's retrospective view of her relationship with the unlucky Metis girl. But this suggestion of desperate need provides a key to the romance which underlies the realism of these stories. The Metis connection in this particular story brings into focus a pattern of romance of which variations occur throughout the volume and which illustrates a psychological compulsion.

In the *Loons*, Piquette is described as a 'half-breed'. The narrative introduces the Tonnerre family as a familiar part of the local scene, though they are treated as outcasts by the rest of the community:

They were as my grandfather MacLeod would have put it, neither flesh, fowl nor good salt herring.... Sometimes old Jules, or his son Lazarus, would get mixed up in a Saturday night brawl, and would hit out at whoever was nearest, or howl drunkenly among the offended shoppers on Main Street, and the Mountie would put them for the night in the barred cell underneath the Court House, and the next morning they would be quiet again. (*BH*, p. 115)

The narrative code which introduces the Metis always soon relapses into silence. The proposal that Vanessa's doctor-father makes to take Piquette on holiday with his own family, to their cottage at Diamond Lake, is an attempt to alter the predicted course of

Piquette's life. Inevitably Piquette is seen with mixed feelings by the young Vanessa. The story confirms the authenticity of Piquette's suffering and the strength of Vanessa's fascination with this untouchable girl who is finally perceived as the true aristocrat of Diamond Lake. The place is ironically later renamed Lake Wapakata, 'for it was felt that an Indian name would have a greater appeal to tourists' (*BH*, p.126). 'The Loons' is an evocation of atmospheric stillness, a momentary glimpse of a way of life belonging to the past which has almost completely disappeared. Vanessa's holiday plans for Piquette quickly fade; her curiosity about Piquette's origins appears impertinent. 'It became increasingly apparent that, as an Indian, Piquette was a dead loss' (*BH*, pp. 120-1). The emotional content of the scene remains high, however: the death of Vanessa's father has been anticipated in the previous story, though he is still alive in this one. Vanessa is both drawn to and repelled by the crippled Metis child temporarily adopted by her family. The narrative induces a vision of a different order by her family. The narrative induces a vision of a different order of things from that represented in the course of the story: not simply what it might have been like to grow up as Piquette Tonnerre instead of Vanessa MacLeod; but an intimation of the repressed history of the Metis and the way it still remains to be realised as a vital part of Vanessa's own background and cultural heritage.

Copious psychological observations stress the remarkable role played by Red Indians in North America and especially Canadian Family Romances where they presumably replace the historically non-existent aristocrat. The characteristics traditionally associated with them would favour such a substitution: the Red Indian is proud, noble, indomitable, a generous and the rightful owner of the land. Compared to those who exterminate them the Indians can easily be seen as superior beings and thus replace Kings and Nobel Fathers who occupy the most exalted position in the European Romance.¹⁵

The autobiographical impulses is there not only in the incidental detail of realistic presentation but even more decisively in the strong but strongly controlled element of romance. 'The Loons', for example, is part of the imaginative design of *A Bird in the*

House because the evocation of a lost world of Metis ancestors offsets the mediocrity of present reality. The opening recalls the moment at which the Metis, who might well have been considered the rightful owners of the land, 'entered their long silence' (*BH*, p. 114). The stillness of Diamond Lake just survives at the time of Vanessa's childhood, though the close of the story retrospectively acknowledges that Piquette 'the only one' (*BH*, p. 127) to whom the former spirit of the place was perhaps still recognisable.

It is clear that for Laurence herself, the wish to identify with these silent Metis ancestor is immensely strong. However, to speak of an element of 'romance' in her fiction is not to deny her true concern with the actual history of the Metis, which is a commitment firmly resumed in her last novel, *The Diviners*. To be fully understood, the special appeal of the Metis cause must be measured against the kind of reality it opposes within the story: the view of the world embodied especially by Grandfather Connor, whom the author frankly described as based on her own maternal grandfather. The opposition between romance and reality provides access to the symbolic code of the narrative. The narrator, for examples, recalls her juvenile disgust at the off-recited 'epic' story of the day Grandfather Connor first arrived in Manawaka: 'Unfortunately he had not met up with any slit-eyed and treacherous Indians or any mad trappers, but only with ordinary farmers who had given him work shoeing their horses, for he was a blacksmith' (*BH*, p.10). None of Vanessa's many childhood stories and daydreams, including the romantic misconception about Indians which affects her relationship with Piquette, allows her for a moment to triumph over given reality. But the writing clearly illustrates the psychological compulsion to question that reality.

Once the element of romance is given its proper emphasis, the other stories in *A Bird in the House* confirm Vanessa's inner struggle to find a richer meaning in the prosaic facts of her daily life. Young Vanessa's imaginings are presented as a defensive strategy. They are both an attempt to relieve the atmosphere for herself and a recognition of the capacity for self-repression in adult life, of which her bear-grandfather is by no means the only example. One can appreciate the force of

Laurence's acknowledgement of her own autobiographical investment in the book. Marthe Robert's argument entails the proposition that, by the very nature of the genre she employs, the novelist is dominated by a 'dialectic between the acceptance and the negation of reality'. This proves to be 'not only the source of endless original ideas' but also an indication of 'the actual pressure of creation' in the novelist's own circumstances.¹⁶ Laurence, it may be remembered, is the novelist who at one time thought that she 'had written herself out of that prairie town' but later felt compelled to revise this statement, acknowledging that her mental horizons necessarily still centred on her conception of Manawaka: whatever I am was shaped and formed in that sort of place and my way of seeing... remains in some enduring way that of a small-town prairie person'.¹⁷ The same ambivalence is reflected in the persona of the narrator Vanessa MacLeod.

There is an unmistakable power in Laurence's presentation of those elements of romance which constitute the 'negation of the reality' in her writing. Vanessa's wayward inner development keeps this imaginative dimension of the work constantly before the reader. She confesses her naïve proprietary interest in her cousin Chris, who comes from shallow Creek: the place is still unknown to her but her imagining of it illustrates again a psychological displacement of the present order of things in the house, a continuing reaction against the only kind of family life she knows:

His sisters - for Chris was the only boy - did not exist for me, not even as photographs, because I did not want them to exist. I wanted him to belong only here. Shallow Creek existed, though no longer filled with ice mountains in my mind but as some beckoning country beyond all ordinary considerations. (*BH*, p. 134)

No doubt the foremost of Laurence's writing is her deliberate insistence on common experience: her style is ultimately grounded on that. But her realism incorporates a fierce rejection of the commonplace and a distrust of what Robert Kroetsch calls 'certain traditional kinds of realism'. Vanessa experiments in composing stories until

she is finally ready to tell the story of that childhood and its prolonged internal exile. It is clear that story as eventually told transgresses the cultural code which is supposed 'to set our house in order' at the Brick House.

1.2.1.4. BREAKING DOWN OF METANARRATIVES IN *A BIRD IN THE HOUSE*

Kroetsch's theory of narrative proves to have strong bearing on Laurence's writing after all. The favourite strategy of contemporary Canadian writers, Kroetsch has argued, is the breaking down to 'metanarratives'. This implies a refusal to accept certain kinds of 'shared' or rather 'assumed' stories which had come to acquire a privileged status in the community's cultural life.¹⁸ Such stories would include the epic of Grandfather Connor's arrival in Manawaka, since that story represents a tradition which holds good of three generations and has to be celebrated once more at time of his death. In a significant passage near the end of *A Bird in the House*, the narrator recalls how her grandfather's death changed her perception of the story she herself had to tell:

What funeral could my grandfather have been given except the one he got? The sombre hymns were sung, and he was sent to his Maker by the United Church minister, who spoke, as expected, of the fact that Timothy Connor had been one of Manawaka's pioneers... Then he had built his house. It had been the first brick house in Manawaka. Suddenly the minister's recounting of these familiar facts struck me as though I had never heard any of it before (*BH*, p. 204)

From the moment of his death, the inevitable 'recounting of these familiar facts' no longer represents the same threat to her. In her own narrative she is free to use the same facts and yet to refuse them the privileged interpretation which they had always seemed to carry.

Metanarratives are conveyed through recorded history as well as through literature and other sources. It is certain that Laurence considered herself more deeply engaged with the history of her own province than with any theory of fiction. The future of Manitoba itself has been subject in a peculiar way to rival views from its very beginnings. At the time of the Province's entry into the Dominion, a contemporary observer even suggested that:

Manitoba has been to Canadians on a small scale what Kansas was to the United States. It has been the battle-ground for their British and French elements with the respective religions, as Kansas was the battle-ground for Free Labour and Slavery. Ontario has played a part in contests there analogous to New England, Quebec to that of the southern states. The late government... was, with respect to the Riel affair, in the position... an American government, resting at once on Massachusetts and South Carolina, would have been with respect to Kansas.¹⁹

The origins of conflict are not forgotten in the small world of *A Bird in the House*. Grandfather MacLeod, for example, 'looked down on the Connors because they had come from famine Irish'. (*BH*, p.63) Vanessa's last meeting with Piquette reveals to her the full extent to which her own experience of life in the same small town has been divided from that of the Metis girl, whose different future is already clearly marked in her face:

For the merest instant, then, I saw her. I really did see her for the first and only time in all the years we had both lived in the same town. Her defiant face, momentarily, became unguarded and unmasked, and in her eyes there was a terrifying hope. (*BH*, p. 124)

The instant of recognition is convincingly reported though the distance between them can never be overcome. Points where the narrative falters, where divisions suddenly become apparent within the generally unquestioned reality of everyday experience,

continually recur. The stories which Vanessa has to tell contradict conventional wisdom even as they are moulded by its pressure. Conceived at once as a whole book and as a series of stories, *A Bird in the House* hesitates to assume the pattern of the oft-told tale, resists the formation of metanarrative.

There is a particular example of metanarrative which seems especially relevant to Laurence's fiction. This is 'the so-called nation-approach to the Canadian past.'²⁰ Carl Berger outlines this approach in his examination of the career of the Canadian historian W. L. Morton, whose *Manitoba: A History* deeply impressed Laurence herself. Berger shows how Morton had felt compelled to challenge a certain type of reading of Canadian history which appeared to marginalise events in the West. The statement of 'the Laurentian theme', for example, rested on an economic interpretation of history and implied a homogeneous view of Canadian experience; it relegated the history of the West to a peripheral question; and, above all, it was indifferent to the question of justice and equitable relations between the four sections and two races in Canada.²¹

Morton's profound opposition to such a view led him to wish for, in Berger's words, 'a history of the west written with such fidelity to the inner texture of local experience and so evocative of the sense of place that it would immediately trigger a recognition in those who had been moulded by that tradition'.²² There is no doubt of the close correspondence between Morton's history of Manitoba as it came to be written and Laurence's expanding conception of Manawaka. Having been moulded by the same tradition, Laurence was to appreciate the strong revision of Western history that Morton's approach implied. Morton has already praised the author of *The Stone Angel* in his book. She herself read *Manitoba: A History* during the summer in which she began writing *The Diviners*. But the coincidence of views between them goes back further. Commenting on this at the time of Morton's death, Laurence chose to emphasise their shared commitment to the idea of a multicultural society in Manitoba; and their realisation that the 'many and varied histories' of its people must be strongly foregrounded: 'what I share, most of all with Morton is the sense of my place, the prairies, and of my people (meaning all prairie peoples), within the context of their

many and varied histories and the desire to make all these things come alive in the reader's mind.²³ Neither the historian nor the novelist was satisfied with previously assumed stories of provincial life.

Morton's revised account of Manitoba's history acquired an even stronger emphasis in the section 'Epilogue: New Growth', which he added to the second edition. He envisaged a potentially 'prosperous, rational, humane and vivid society' which must be achieved by overcoming 'the mediocrity of survival as it was and had been'.²⁴ The community history which the stories of *A Bird in the House* relate is the imaginative record of an insider to that struggle during a critical period. The household is touched by the general crises of the period, as they affected Manitoba. The Battle of the Somme is part of living memory to Vanessa's father, though Vanessa herself is embarrassed by the annual parade of veterans; the Battle of Britain and the raid on Dieppe are recent events as the narrative closes. The question forced from Edna near the opening of the book has by then accumulated more significance for Vanessa's herself. 'Won't this damn Depression ever be over? I can see myself staying on and on here in this house-' (*BH*, p. 14). Vanessa's stories suggest in domestic detail how the general pressure of the times is transmitted locally into 'the mediocrity of survival'. But the text as written can never be reconciled with that prospect as the complete reality. Laurence herself can be seen as a committed but realist, but as being deeply opposed to a form of realism which could appear to take for granted the conditions it described. Here it represents one of the strongest revisions of western experience in contemporary Canadian writing.

1. CHARACTER SKETCHES

In this novel there are some personalities with strong characters. A study of these characters would add to a better understanding of the plot.

2.1 GRANDFATHER MACLEOD

A Bird in the House begins by suggesting that the father is subject to various undefined psychological constraints and captivities. What Vanessa, at seventeen, can see is that,

though alive, he had been dying all along. What she does not yet see is that his death was perhaps a paradoxical attempt at life and the only later escape that he could allow himself.

Paradigms image the protagonist's situation. Vanessa, in one story, "The Mask of the Bear", sees her grandfather callously subvert his daughter's romance. Later he will similarly try to tyrannize over her or, in "Horses of the Night", Vanessa tells of a cousin, whose problems, she recognizes, are much greater than hers. He plans to escape the narrow limitations of his life by going to war but then evades the dehumanization of that war through the still more desperate one of insanity.

Grandfather Connor is the hero in *A Bird in the House*. In Canadian literature Grandfather Connor is the most powerfully realized portrait of the patriarchal pioneer, the self-made man. He is proud, tough, self-disciplined, and demands obedience from others. In Laurence's imaginative world he is the archetypal parental figure who inspires fear, guilt, and rebellion in her heroines.

In the cycle of stories, Laurence gives the grandfather figure exactly the mythic proportions of the Old Testament God exacting obedience and respect from the members of his family, but never showing them love. The only emotion he exhibits is anger. To the young Vanessa the old man's angry refusal to help his never-do well brother Dan and his rude, peremptory treatment of his youngest daughter's "gentlemen callers" seems outrageous. But from the outset the portrait of the grandfather is a complex one, for we are made to realize that the old man's concept of an authoritarian, patriarchal society was one that was valid for his generation. He plays a role, wears a mask, which Vanessa only sees through once - when she finds her grandfather crying after his wife's death. But as he grows very old and Vanessa begins to mature herself, she sees him in more human terms. There is however, a final showdown between the old man and his granddaughter when, during the war, she comes home late one night with a young man from the air force. The grandfather not only reprimands them for being out late but surmises that the young man is already married. Eventually the old

man's guess proves correct. It is infuriating to the girl that he is right, but it is also the author's way of accrediting him with wisdom. When he dies, the members of the family reflect on his life — his coming from Ontario to Manitoba by steamer, his walking from Winnipeg to Manawaka, earning his way by shoeing horses, building up his house and business by long years of hard work — but they cannot cry. They are just amazed that he is gone.

I was not sorry that he was dead. I was only surprised. Perhaps I had really imagined that he was immortal. Perhaps he even was immortal, in ways which it would take me half a lifetime to comprehend. (*A Bird in the House*, p 177.)

Years after, Vanessa realizes the extent of that immortality. She herself has become like her grandfather: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins." Laurence's emphasis on the necessity for coming to terms with one's ancestors and gods finds its most powerful expression in this symbolic remark.

In "The Sound of Singing" Grandfather Connor is respected as an upright man: hard-working, thrifty, a strict observer of Sabatarian laws. His brother Dan, is a downright man, like others whom the town folk despise. They were described as 'downright worthless' or 'downright lazy'. "These shadows of wastrels, these flimsy remnants of past profligates, with their dry laughter like the cackle of crows or the crackling of fallen leaves underfoot, embarrassed one terribly..... yet I was inexplicably drawn to town, too." (*BH*, p. 9)

The two brothers suggest Jung's persona and shadow archetype. The shadow, the repressed part of the personality, is feared by the conscious public self. It is usually dark and threatening, immoral in conventional terms. In Laurence's comic version, Grandfather's shadow is profligate, gay, happy as a child - all characteristics that a Puritan culture tends to repress. Grandfather and his brother Dan serve as an effective introduction to Vanessa's family, to the town, and to its Puritan values and attitudes.

Brick House, beam, battle, bird, horse, song: the key images are central to the collection. Grandfather's house, like his person, is dwelling place, monument and embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness. The opening metaphors hold the ambivalence Laurence has frequently expressed towards her heritage. It is "sternly protective (with the sweeping spruce branches), yet also threatening and inhibiting. Warlike images include a lawnmower beheading stray flowers. In the last story, opposing Grandfather is like batting one's head against a brick wall.

Grandfather is introduced as "some great watchful bear waiting for the enforced hibernation of Sunday to be over". *Bear* suggests his impatience, temper, strength and ability to survive. Timothy Connor's early life is sketched in the first and last stories. He has left school early, and come west from Ontario to Manitoba by Red River steamer, like Laurence's Grandfather Simpson. He walked the hundred - odd miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka finding work as a blacksmith along the way. He saved money, started a hardware business, and built the town's first brick house. He is fond of noting that no one helped him, is proud of the financial responsibility he continues to shoulder, and puzzled that thrift and prudence do not earn love.

Grandfather looms as some Old Testament Jehovah, while his gentle wife is mercy incarnate. The image patterns converge in the last story, where the brick battlements are invaded by suitors, grandfather's auto becomes Vanessa's retreat for writing, and the bear of a man is laid to his final rest. The Brick House is prison, and fortress against winter storms. "The absolute worst wouldn't happen here, ever. Things wouldn't actually fall apart". (*BH*, p.187)

The MacLaughlin - Brick is an amusing variant on horses. This form of power, connoting money and pride, suits Grandfather. At twelve, Vanessa remembers riding with him when he was very young. The horn bannered their conquering presence: "A - hoo - gah! I was gazing with love and glory at my giant grandfather as he drove his valiant. Seven years later, Vanessa returns for his funeral and remembers herself

remembering driving with him," in the ancient days when he seemed as large and admirable as God." The incident evokes the dominant metaphor of Laurence's work, of journeying in search of freedom and joy. It reminds us, too, of her insistence that our local roots, our direct ancestors, provides our myths.

"Mask of the Bear" depicts love and death through relationships in the Connor household. The story is unified by the bear mask metaphor, a symbol of lonely, bewildered rage literally, the mask is thoroughly approximate: not only are bears indigenous to Manitoba, but the bear is a totem for the Canadian Indian and his socio-religious art. Grandfather's heavy bear coat suggests the family responsibilities he has shouldered for half a century and his stern Puritan culture. Vanessa thinks of him as the Great Bear, not simply because of his surliness but because he is caged by his unbending personality and his strict code of ethics.

Sabbath laws reduce grandfather to the level of a caged bear and unwanted visitors drive him to his basement lair where his displeasure is expressed by growling rockers. Grandfather Connor estranged himself from his children and his grandchild, but his concept of a rigid, authoritarian, patriarchal society was as valid to his generation's vision as it was alien to theirs. Throughout the course of these stories, there is a cumulative accretion to the character of grandfather; he moves away from Vanessa's childish conception of him as an over-bearing, domineering old man to take on a mythic proportion. Finally in the last story, Laurence intends - and achieves - a real catharsis of pity for the man and admiration for his type:

What funeral could my grandfather have been given except the one he got? The sombre hymns were sung, and he was sent to his maker by the United Church minister, who spoke, as expected, of the fact that Timothy Connor had been one of Manawaka's pioneers.... He looked exactly the same as he had in life... the same handsome eagle-like features. His eyes were closed. It was only when I noticed the closed eyes that I knew that the

blue ice of his stare would never blaze again. I was not sorry that he was dead. I was only surprised. Perhaps I had really imagined that he was immortal, in ways which it would take me half a lifetime to comprehend.....

"You know something, Beth?" Aunt Edna went on, "I can't believe he's dead. It just doesn't seem possible".

"I know what you mean", my mother said.

"Edna, were we always unfair to him?"

My aunt swallowed a mouthful of rye and ginger ale.

"Yes we were", she said. "And he was to us, as well". (*BH*, p. 204).

Aunt Edna's ironic voice implicates us all. Here, finally Laurence has fanned out beyond Vanessa's story. She encloses us all in recognition of the inevitability of estrangement and the possibility of understanding between generations and among all men and women. In 'The Mask of the Bear', the associations provided by her grandfather's coat generate an imaginative landscape remote from the atmosphere of the Brick House and illustrative of the metaphoric limits of a brick establishment:

In my head I sometimes called him 'The Great Bear'. The name had many associations other than his coat and his surliness.... In some unformulated way... I associated the secret name with Great Bear Lake which I had been only on maps and which I imagined to be a deep vastness of back water, lying somewhere very far beyond our known prairies of tamed fields and barbed-wire fences. Somewhere in the regions of jagged rock and eternal ice, where human voices would be drawn into a cold and shadowed stillness without leaving even a trace of warmth. (*BH*, pp. 61-2)

2.2 GRANDMOTHER MACLEOD

Grandmother MacLeod's character is brought out through the story of the birth. "To Set Our House in Order". The event is placed within a web of interlocking images which contribute to the central theme: of life amid death, and renewed hope amid failed dreams. The removal of Vanessa's mother to hospital leaves the child with her

stern, aristocratic paternal grandmother and her practical Aunt Edna. The child's fears are expressed; the grandmother's repressed, as the culture dictates. Grandmother tells Vanessa that the MacLeods do not tell lies; that they accept what happens as God's will, and that she has survived the loss of her son Roderick, killed at the Battle of the Somme. The story reveals that living involves, lying and lies can be loving.

Grandmother MacLeod wishes to live as an aristocrat, like her Scottish ancestors. In pioneer conditions, and a depressed economy in the 1930s, she struggles to maintain her imagined world of silver, lace and tea parties. Her husband, a country doctor, read Greek tragedies in their original languages. The thwarted scholar's son, Vanessa's father, wanted to enter the merchant marine. His library is filled with travel books and copies of National Geographic Magazine. Vanessa's final thoughts about order link these failed dreams with the new born life.

The strangeness of these diverse viewpoints, is suggested in the circular rose window in the MacLeod house. Its many coloured glass permits the viewer to see the world under very different aspects, "as a place of absolute sapphire or ... a hateful yellow". The multiple colours (all components of light), the perfect shape and the traditional Connotations of the rose in Christian Iconography combine to make the window the kind of image Northrop Frye calls anagogic, an image which seems to contain the cosmos. Vanessa rejects Grandmother's version of God's will, yet the image patterns point to some transcendental order, suggested by the rose window and the golden poplar leaves in the bluff.

The themes of inner freedom is represented by bird imagery. Grandmother MacLeod's hair is "bound grotesquely like white - feathered wings in the snare of her coarse night-time hairnet" (*BH*, p. 40). Vanessa's dream of a captive bird mingles with the sound of her mother crying and the voices of dead children. The reference is to an earlier baby born dead; metaphorically, it evokes the failed dreams and stillborn hopes of the fictional characters and of people every where. Human ambivalence is expressed

through Vanessa's reaction to her new brother, towards whom she feels "such tenderness and such resentment".

The depression had earlier forced Dr. MacLeod to move himself and his family into his widowed mother's home. No one, including Vanessa's Grandmother MacLeod, found that living arrangement comfortable. But with the demise of the father, "everything changed". At the end of "*A Bird in the House*", the MacLeod house is sold. Grandmother MacLeod is taken in by a daughter in Winnipeg. The mother, with her two children, goes to live with her father.

Vanessa, who found her grandmother MacLeod difficult and forbidding soon discovers that her autocratic grandfather Connor is even less appealing. The young girl exchanges one house where she does not really belong for another one that is still more constraining. Vanessa, in her Grandfather's house was so disturbed by the sparrow's plight. But the child protagonist could only sense what the adult narrator can show - that the bird's predicament symbolised her own.

Grandmother MacLeod, Vanessa's paternal grandmother, is obsessed by the past and at her family's cost, tries to live in terms of a past that no longer exists.

"When I married our Grandmother MacLeod", she related, "he said to me, 'Eleanor, don't think because we're going to the prairies that I expect you to live roughly. You're used to a proper house and you shall have one'. He was as good as his word.

Before we'd been in Manawaka three years, he'd had this place built. He earned a good deal of money in his time, your grandfather. He soon had more patients than either of the other doctors. We ordered our dinner service and all our silver from Birks' in Toronto. We had resident help in those days... and never had less than twelve guests for dinner parties. When I had tea, it would always be twenty or thirty. Never any less than

half a dozen different kinds of cakes were ever served in this house”.(BH, P.45)

Grandmother MacLeod also romanticized the remote ancestral past, Vanessa found her Grandmother difficult and forbidding. “I’m sorry”, Vanessa early realized was the password to Grandmother’s house.²⁵

I was not astonished that my grand-mother thought the bloody death of Jonathan was very nice, for this was her unvarying response, whatever the verse. And in fact, it was not strange, for to her everything in the Bible was as gentle as she herself. The swords were spiritual only, strokes of lightness and dark, and the wounds poured cochineal.(BH, P.7)

And again, “My grandmother was a Mitigated Baptist. I knew this because I heard my father say “at least she’s not an unmitigated Baptist”.(BH, P.17)

3. THEMES : TIME, COMMUNICATION

In this section we shall see that as Vanessa grows her judgements are reevaluated. Only as an adult can Vanessa understand her history as “the past”, with all its powers over the present in both its challenges and chains. Roots, ancestors, the past, problems of communication continue to be the themes in *The Bird in the House*. All these themes will be studied by making a study of the characters .

In this section we shall study the theme of time and communication.

Vanessa’s burden is not heavy as Hagar’s or Stacey’s, because she is younger and her life has been less catastrophic. Vanessa reveals the power of time to both heal and hurt when she recalls how she was jilted by her first boy friend. Her mother can offer only ambiguous comfort: “...I know you won’t believe me, honey, but after a while it won’t hurt so much. And yet in a way I guess it always will, to some extent. There doesn’t seem to be anything anybody can do about that.”

As it happened, she was right on all counts. I did not at the time believe her. But after a while it did not hurt so much. And yet twenty years later it was still with me to some extent, part of the accumulation of happenings which can never entirely be thrown away.(BH, pp.201-202)

This incident combines the pain and disillusionment of the moment with the wisdom and regret of retrospection. It illustrates how the narrative voice can speak from two points in time simultaneously. Most important, it shows how Vanessa's effort to communicate her life-story reveals in the very process of speaking the historical nature of both, life and story. First, it displays how her life is conditioned and complicated by the flow of time. Her personality is not static: it evolves, accumulates, and alters with age. The notions of inheritance and survival, which Laurence says are central to all her novels, implicate a character in time, binding her to past and future. David L. Jeffrey argues that Laurence's fascination with time is peculiarly Canadian because it reflects our belief in the existence, utility, and necessity of historical meaning. People cannot understand themselves or their plight in isolation; they need the context of larger cultural forces. When Vanessa complains, "I wanted only to be by myself, with no one else around", (BH, p. 25) she does not yet realize that even her most solitary concern with personal identity requires that she see her own life as part of something larger and older.

However, she too must communicate as both a means of understanding and a ritual of expiation. She must speak in order to make peace with her past. In particular, she must come to terms with her grandfather, Timothy Connor, the patriarchal figure whom she regarded as the domineering villain of the family. Yet in the final story - "Jericho's Brick Battlements" - it is from him and the family past he embodies that she receives a kind of blessing. She has an involuntary memory: "... I remembered something I didn't know I knew. I remembered riding in the MacLaughlin-Buck with my grandfather. It was a memory with nothing around it, an unplaced memory without geography or time." She recalls flying triumphantly through Manawaka: "A-hoo-gah! A-hoo-gha! I

was gazing with love and glory at my giant grandfather as he drove his valiant chariot through all the streets of this world". Later, when he dies, this "memory of memory" returns of its own accord and becomes an emblem of the whole book, which is Vanessa's triumphant tour of her life. Through it she confirms the intensity and the intricacy of her feeling for her family, her past, and especially for her grandfather, whom she had feared and rejected, but whom she finally acknowledges as her ancestor.

Thus we see that Grandfather Connor was first considered as a bully by Vanessa. His character was later reevaluated.

4. BIRD IMAGERY

In *A Bird in the House*, the bird was a sparrow that had managed to get itself "caught between the two layers of glass" of a storm window.(BH, p.100) Vanessa MacLeod, the child protagonist and retrospective adult-narrator of each story "could not bear the panic of the trapped bird".(BH, p.101) She rushed to free it. But by opening the inner window she merely released the captive creature into a larger cage, whereupon "it began flying blinding around the room, hitting the lampshade, [and] brushing against the wall". "Petrieved" and "revolted", Vanessa was afraid that she would soon see the bird "lying broken on the floor" and angry that Noreen, the servant girl, might make some typical religious comment such as "God sees the little sparrow fall". The actual comment, however, was more perturbing than the anticipated one; "A Bird in the House means a death in the house' Noreen remarked".(BH, p. 102) Even more upsetting, the prophecy soon proves correct. Later, the protagonist's doctor father dies from the same flu that he had cured in others, including his daughter.

Even Grandfather Connor, the protagonist's chief antagonist, is trapped in his own concept of himself as a self-made man. Raging in the cage of his retirement he only confirms the trap. All the characters are caught up in parallel captivities and engaged in divergent flights.

The most significant of these flights is Vanessa's. Vanessa's first captivity is her constrained childhood, which encourages imaginative escapes and sets her on the road to her vocation as a writer. Then, as an apprentice writer, she encounters even more clearly what she has already experienced as a confused child. The most basic "Cage" in the book is the immediate limitations of self. The youthful Vanessa is trapped by what she is, by her inexperience as well as by her limited experiences, particularly those experiences with which she has not yet fully come to terms. One of Laurence's most persistent themes is the problem of "time and the personal and ancestral past".²⁶ Characters are all, to a degree, prisoners of their past. But that condition can be a final self-defeat, as with grandfather Connor, a "pioneer" still surviving beyond his time, or as with Vanessa, the beginning of a personal liberation. The child endures Manawaka; the adolescent about to leave for university can look with some magnanimity on some of what she has experienced; the older adult narrator can more fully review Manawaka. Through these somewhat different characters, Vanessa makes - and retrospectively maps - her course to self-determination. In effect, she frees herself psychologically by remembering a place she earlier left physically and by then restructuring or recreating those memories into meaningful stories.

The young Vanessa reacts passionately to her life's story; the somewhat older Vanessa re-examines sympathetically; the author, a mature Vanessa, writes analytically, with an objectivity impossible to the "trapped" child. But the adult narrator too is trapped in a new cage, in the subtler cage of memory that makes youth look grander in retrospect as age limits possibilities and admits to compromise where once was only promise. The child, rebelling against one's cage, is, in some ways, freer than the mature writer who, ultimately, has turned life into fiction, categorized emotions, confined what was fluid for her earlier self into narratives as balanced and structured as autobiographies tend to be.

But Vanessa - the naive child, the rebellious adolescent, the mature writer - is not Margaret Laurence.²⁷ Beyond the narrator who delimits her life's story, is the fictional who frees it. If in one sense the author is the exhibition of cages, the proponent of the

human condition, with all its limitations, then she is also the master of escapes. The last escape is art, the achievement of an extra dimension. The young Vanessa is an aspiring writer who composes conventional romances. As an adult, she is a promising writer who explores the partly fictitious realities of her past and does so by conjoining her present voice and her former ones. Yet the author, a better artist, can underscore and emphasize the tones of those voices and regularly speaks both more and less than she knows.

Vanessa has written herself out of dispossession into her inheritance, but the ending where so much is left unaccounted for offers no solutions to the enigmas of history or of the self. Her consciousness of identity does not reveal an authentic core of selfhood but rather an awareness of multiple selves at different ages. Her last story, with its selection of those different selves, writes in her sense of reparation from that past yet also her awareness of her mature self as continuous with them. Interestingly, Vanessa leaves Manawaka twice, first as a girl of eighteen leaving for college, when she is surprised to find that, "in some way which I could not define or understand I did not feel nearly as I'd expected to feel." (BH, p. 208) And then again twenty-three years later. When she drives away for the last time, no longer expecting to be free, knowing that there is certain amount of baggage which one is stuck with. Her resistance of the past is transformed into a revision of the past as she comes to accept her role as inheritor as well as accepting the multiplicities within herself. She is both successive and continuous.

4.1. CAGES AND ESCAPES IN A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

Vanessa, who found her grandmother MacLeod difficult and forbidding soon discovers that her autocratic grandfather Connor is even less appealing. The young girl exchanges one house where she does not really belong for another one that is still more constraining. Vanessa, in her Grandfather's house was so disturbed by the sparrows plight. But the child protagonist could only sense what the adult narrator can show - that the birds predicament symbolised her own.

Mysteries surround Vanessa not only the fears and puzzles of all the things she does not understand in the present, but also the mysteries inexplicably hanging-over from the past. The immediate past of the first world war impinges on her family, a looming factor in her fathers decision to become a doctor, in his helpless regret over the death of his brother Roderick and his half resentful, half-guilty subservience to his mother on that account. Vanessa feels these stifling shadows around her in grandmother MacLeod's house where the touchstone-words are always "I'm sorry".

Vanessa MacLeod, at age nine, is already an obsessive writer. Vanessa's writing is her obvious destiny at so early an age. But more importantly, it shows how the child was jostled towards perceptions and understandings of the people for instance. In "The Mask of the Bear", Vanessa is writing the story of a barbaric queen "beautiful and terrible, and I could imagine her, wearing a long robe of leopard skin and one or two heavy gold bracelets, pacing an alabaster courtyard and keening her unrequited love." (*BH*, p. 64). Not only a process of emotional matures is being shown throughout these stories, but also Vanessa's growing awareness of appropriate and inappropriate modes of fiction of the insufficiencies of the high romantic mode for the actual presentations of life's losses and agonies.

Vanessa's world is a small circle, constantly impinged upon or threatened by death, the depression, fears and the effects of two world wars. It is the world of harsh edges, muted colours or no colours. Its surfaces are all rough and it is dominated by grandfather and the Brick House, symbols of the roughness of all the elements that buffeted Vanessa into maturity. Each story ends with some recognition that is a stop towards maturity; sometimes we finish with a limited child's point of view as in "To set our House in Order";

I could not really comprehend these things, but I sensed their strangeness, their disarray. I felt that whatever God might love in this world, it was certainly not order (*BH*, p. 59).

And sometimes the adult Vanessa's perceptions finally beam through to lighten the gloom of grandfather Connor in her background:

Many years later, when Manawaka is far away from me, in miles and in time, I saw one day in a museum the Bear Mask of the Haida Indians. It was a weird mask. The features were ugly and yet powerful. The mouth was turned down in an expression of sullen rage. The eyes were empty caverns, revealing nothing. Yet as I looked, they seemed to draw my own eyes towards them until I imagined I could see somewhere within that darkness a look which I know, a linking bewilderment. I remembered that in the days before it became a museum piece, the mask had concealed a man. (*BH*, p.87).

Basic to this work is the continuum of time as an integral part of its structure. The stories move through ten years of Vanessa's life from about 1935 onward. As she grows, she is aware of the landmarks which have had their continued bearing on her own life and on Manawaka: the emigration of the pioneers to Manitoba, the first and second world wars. But only as the adult Vanessa, looking back at her child-self can she begin to understand her history and all history as "the past" with all its powers over the present in both its challenges and chains. Vanessa exhibits personal responsibility and qualified free will. Qualified because of heredity and environment. Each story is unified by a dominant image. The theme of inner freedom is represented by bird imagery.

A Bird in the House begins by suggesting that the father is subject to various undefined psychological constraints and captivities. What Vanessa, at seventeen, can see is that, alive, he had been dying all along. What she does not yet see is that his death was perhaps a paradoxical attempt at life and the only later escape that he could allow himself. Paradigms imagine the protagonist's situation. Vanessa, in one story, "The Mask of the Bear", sees her grandfather callously subvert his daughter's romance. Later he will similarly try to tyrannize over her or, in "Horses of the Night", Vanessa

tells of a cousin, whose problems, she recognizes, are much greater than less. He plans to escape the narrow limitations of his life by going to war but then evades the different dehumanization of that war through the still more desperate one of insanity. Even grandfather Connor, the protagonist's chief antagonist, is trapped in his own concept of himself as a self-made man. Raging in the cage of his retirement he only confirms the trap. All the characters are caught up in parallel captivities and engaged in divergent flights.

The most significant of these flights is Vanessa's. Vanessa's first captivity is her constrained childhood, which encourages imaginative escapes and sets her on the road to her vocation as a writer. Then, as an apprentice writer, she encounters even more clearly what she has already experienced as a confused child. The most basic "Cage" in the book is the immediate limitations of self. The youthful Vanessa is trapped by what she is, by her inexperience as well as by her limited experiences, particularly those experiences with which she has not yet fully come to terms. One of Laurence's most persistent themes is the problem of "time and the personal and ancestral past."²⁸ Characters are all, to a degree, prisoners of their past. But that condition can be a final self-defeat, as with grandfather Connor, a "pioneer" still surviving beyond his time, or as with Vanessa, the beginning of a personal liberation. The child endures Manawaka; the adolescent about to leave for university can look with some magnanimity on some of what she has experienced; the older adult narrator can more fully review Manawaka. Through these somewhat different characters Vanessa makes - and retrospectively maps - her course to self-determination. In effect, she frees herself psychologically by remembering a place she earlier left physically and by then restructuring or re-creating those memories into meaningful stories.

The young Vanessa reacts passionately to her life's story; the somewhat older Vanessa re-examines sympathetically; the author, a mature Vanessa, writes analytically, with an objectivity impossible to the "trapped" child. But the adult narrator too is trapped in a new cage, in the subtler cage of memory that makes youth look grander in retrospect as age limits possibilities and admits to compromise where once was only promise. The

child, rebelling against once cage, is, in some ways, freer than the mature writer who, ultimately, has turned life into fiction, categorized emotions, confined what was fluid for her earlier self into narratives as balanced and structured as autobiographies tend to be.

But Vanessa - the naive child, the rebellious adolescent, the mature writer, is not Margaret Laurence. ²⁹Beyond the narrator who delimits her life's story, is the fictional who frees it. If in one sense the author is the exhibition of cages, the proponent of the human condition, with all its limitations, then she is also the master of escapes. The last escape is art, the achievement of an extra dimension. The young Vanessa is an aspiring writer who composes conventional romances. As an adult, she is a promising writer who explores the partly fictitious realities of her past and does so by conjoining her present voice and her former ones. Yet the author, a better artist, can underscore and emphasize the tones of those voices and the regularly speaks both more and less than she knows.

Vanessa has written herself out of dispossession into her inheritance, but the ending where so much is left unaccounted for offers no solutions to the enigmas of history or of the self. Her consciousness of identity does not reveal an authentic core of selfhood but rather an awareness of multiple selves at different ages. Her last story, with its selection of those different selves, writes in her sense of reparation from that past yet also her awareness of her mature self as continuous with them. Interestingly, Vanessa leaves Manawaka twice, first as a girl of eighteen leaving for college, when she is surprised to find that in some way which I could not define or understand I did not feel nearly as I'd expected to feel (*BH*, p. 203), and then again twenty-three years later. When she derives away for the last time, no longer expecting to be free, knowing that there's certain amount of baggage which one is stuck with. Her resistance of the past is transformed into a revision of the past as she comes to accept her role as inheritor as well as accepting the multiplicities within herself. She is both successive and continuous.

One of the traits which Vanessa inherits as a storyteller is her family's sense of decorum. Unlike Morag Gunn whose fragmentation is signaled from the beginning of the *The Diviners*, Vanessa's sense of her own self-divisions is written far more discreetly into her narrative through her need to memorialize her father and her grandfather and through the fragmented form of her story sequence with its breaks and its supplements. What emerges is Vanessa's consciousness of a self always incompletely understood existing in a world order where order is insistently disrupted and meaning is consciously deferred.³⁰ *A Bird in the House* offers us different portraits of a future artists as various young women.

NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart; 1970.
2. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. p. 106.
3. *ibid.* p. 22.
4. Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice", in *Margaret Laurence*, ed. New, p. 158.
5. Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice", in *Margaret Laurence*, ed. New, p. 158.
6. Pat. Morley, *The Long Journey Home*.
7. George Woodcock (ed.), *A Place to Stand On: Essay by and about Margaret Laurence* (Edmonton: Ne West Press, 1983), p.208.
8. *Ibid.*, p.4.
9. David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 52.
10. Robert Kroetsch *A Place to Stand On*, p.156.
11. Robert Kroetsch, 'Conversation with Margaret Laurence', in *ibid.*, pp. 46-55.
12. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka. World of Margaret Laurence*, p. 97.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
15. Marthe Robert, *Origins of the Novel*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Brighton:Harvester Press, 1980) p. 235.

16. Ibid. p. 144.
17. Woodcock, *A Place to Stand On*, p.19.
18. Robert Kroetsch, 'Disunity as Unity: a Canadian Strategy', *Canadian Story and History, 1885-1985*, ed. Colin Nicholson and Peter Easingwood (Edinburgh: Centre of Canadian Studies, 1986), pp. 1-11.
19. See Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 99-100.
20. Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 99-100.
21. Ibid., p. 241.
22. Ibid., p. 246.
23. Margaret Laurence, 'W. L. Morton: a Personal Tribute', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 15:4 (1981) p. 134.
24. W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 502.
25. Arnold and Davidson, 'Cages and Escapes in Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, p. 93.
26. Sherill E. Grace, 'Crossing Jordan: Time and Memory in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence', *World Literature Written in English*, 16, 1977, p.328.
27. Leona Gom, 'Laurence and the use of Memory', *Canadian Literature*, No. 71, 1976, pp.48-58 .
28. Sherrill E. Grace, "Crossing Jordan: Time and Memory in the fiction of Margaret Laurence", *World Literature Written in English*, 16 (1977), p. 328.
29. Leona Gom, "Laurence and the use of memory", *Canadian Literature*, No. 71, 1976, pp. 48 - 58.
30. Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Worlds: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970's and 1980's* (Methuen - London and New York), p. 44.

CHAPTER VI

THE DIVINERS

CHAPTER VI

THE DIVINERS

*The Diviners*¹ culminates and closes the circle of the Manawaka works. It is a complex and a profound novel, an exploration of the meaning of a life, a quest and finally the affirmation of a life's meaning. Its pattern is a diagram of the interweaving of the past into the present and on into the future. The shape of its flowing together of past and present is that of the ancient Yoruba symbol of the endless continuum of time, the serpent swallowing his tail. Margaret Laurence demonstrates that the continuum moves inexorably, but she also demonstrates that the present and the future are not relentlessly and totally predetermined by the past. They may be modified and ameliorated by the force of faith acted out in love. The perception is the final statement of affirmation in what is a profoundly hopeful book: the past is inevitably a part of us, but not the dead hand of the past; rather, by faith, by grace, translated into acts of love, the inheritors may inch upwards, though still within the enclosing coils of the present.²

The novel is intimately concerned with voicing the problems of Margaret Laurence's generation as it emerged from the 1960s. It provides a drawing of Canada as a whole, a country then searching for a past in other people's stories. Laurence does this in *The Diviners* by pointing to issues that have since indeed preoccupied the country: gender, the family, native rights. It is a book very much of its time yet speaking firmly and surely about all times to come.

The thematic web of *The Diviners* is intricately bound up with the structure and narrative of the novel. We shall therefore be well familiar with all the themes in the sections dealing with narrative and structure. However, I have dealt with each of the themes separately since an understanding of these themes will mean an understanding of the Manawaka cycle itself.

The Diviners overflows with ideas about life, about life in Canada, and about life in Canada as experienced by a woman. One can almost feel the pressure on its author to make a final

statement about Life and Art. The novel, dense with themes and symbols, complex in structure, but meandering in plot, not only clarifies the ideas expressed in her earlier books but also expresses all those ideas for which Laurence never previously found a suitable fictional embodiment. *The Diviners* comes to grips with currently debated issues much more explicitly than the previous novels: the search for a Canadian identity; the discrimination encountered by women; the unjust treatment of native people; ecology; psychic and economic alienation; struggle, growth, hope.

It is the story of a profoundly religious pilgrimage, the affirmation of faith and the finding of grace. In this sense, the novel is the culmination of the Manawaka works; not only do ravelled strands from the lives and events of the other books come together here, but *The Diviners*' final statement encircles, encloses and completes them all and then rays timelessly outward from their circle.

The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.369)

“Now the wheel seems to have come full circle - these five books all interweave and fit together”.³ The Tonnerre family members of which have appeared in *The Stone Angel*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, and *A Bird in the House*, play a major and thematically defensible role in *The Diviners*. Julie Kaslik (sister of Nick Rachel's lover in *A Jest of God*) and her husband Buckle Fennick (Mac's tormented friend in *The Fire-Dwellers*) are present here. Stacey Cameron and Vanessa MacLeod, Morag's contemporaries play together.

Not only characters but obsessive images recur in *The Diviners*: disemboweled gopher, which Stacey of the *The Fire-Dwellers* like Morag, saw as child: the grotesquely fat woman imprisoned by her bulk (Hagar, Buckle's mother in *The Fire-Dwellers*, and now Prin); the burning shack that trapped Piquette Tonnerre and her children, which Laurence has described

twice before; and the greatest catastrophe Manawaka ever experienced, the departure of the Cameron Highlanders for Dieppe, mentioned in all Laurence's Canadian fiction.

1.PLOT

In this section I shall present a brief summary of the plot. Since the entire novel centres round Morag Gunn, I shall introduce her in this section. However all the intricacies of her character will be unfolded in the sections to follow.

The Diviners is the last of the Manawaka novels and is the story of Morag Gunn of Manawaka. It follows the familiar pattern of the *Kunstlerroman*. On one level the story unfolds the process of Morag's life from the death of her parents when she was very young, to today, the novel's present when she is 47, long since divorced from Brooke Skelton, her English professor husband and caught up in a tormenting concern for the 18 year old Pique, the daughter of Morag and Jules Tonnerre. At the same time Morag is coping with the exacting, frustrating, but inevitable process of her own work, the writing of her fifth novel. Bound up in the story of Morag's life is the story of a writer's struggle to be born and to grow, an explicit and diverse explanation of one woman's experience of the craft of fiction in our time and in our society. Implicit in Morag's story is also the explanation and the insistent ratification for the whole enterprise of fiction - as an essential illumination of individual experience and a flashing out of history into wholeness, from the life of an individual to a complex of lives and events and then to an entire culture, its myths and legends.

Morag shares with all Laurence's misfits, problems of identity, injustice and betrayal, but she views them in a broader perspective. Through her imaginative sympathy, she sees her own misfortune as a fragment of something much more grand and terrible. She does so not with Stacey's confused sense of disaster, but with a deeper, more informed insight that discovers a tragic dimension in her story. She is an everyday heroine much like Stacey, but her story reveals heroism of a larger order. Tragedy and heroism were suggested in Laurence's African fiction, but were restrained in her more domestic Canadian novels. Hagar rejects divine comfort; Rachel does not know she echoes the Bible; Stacey belittles her own courage; Vanessa has only a glimpse of her grandfather as a glorious Charioteer. The chariot returns

triumphantly in *The Diviners*, where it is driven by legendary figures such as Piper Gunn, Rider Tonnerre, and the Celtic hero, Cuchulain.

The entire plot centres round Morag Gunn whose first clear memories begin at age five with Mrs. Pearl looking after her as her parents die. She knows only that it is her father's voice. There is no sound of her mother's voice, no sound at all. Morag terrified, scuttles back to the kitchen like a cockroach - she is a cockroach; she feels like one, running, scuttling."(*THE DIVINERS*.p.69)

Morag is at the opposite end of Manawaka's social scale from Hagar Currie as a child. On their first day at school, Morag and Christie are greeted with condemning laughter:

"Look at her dress - it's down to her ankles!" Her dress? What's wrong? Prin sewed it. Out of a wraparound which Prin is now too stout to wear. What means scavenger? Morag cannot ask. Christie's face is stone". "Phew ! Can't you smell him from here? "Gabby little turds," Christie mutters. (*THE DIVINERS*, pp. 25-26)

The grotesque Prin, simple in every sense, is almost entirely static, acted upon, not acting, a fool of God. Much later in life, however, Morag realizes that Prin has actively loved her. Morag goes back to Manawaka because Prin is dying.

When Prin dies her grotesque death Morag realizes that she has become her child and Christie's. Proximity; that day-to-day loving is more important than bloodliness. Towards the end of the book we realise that she maintains similar patterns with Ella, her college friend and with Eva Wrinkler, her elementary school friend. Morag realises that her real home is Christie's home.

We shall now move on to the narrative.

2.STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE

I shall now analyse the narrative of the novel. In a novel narrative is important since it reveals structure: and structure reveals theme and vision. In the course of the narrative we will also be introduced to the major issues in the novel, principally that this novel is a story of attentive social consciousness.

A much longer work than the other Manawaka novels, "*The Diviners*" is structured in five parts. The first and the fifth, 'River of now and then' and '*The Diviners*', are brief chapters of introduction to Morag's present crises and their resolution about two months later. The three interior sections, 'The Nuisance Grounds', 'Halls of Sion' and 'Rights of Passage' are of the same basic dramatic structure, rising gradually to a climactic event which marks off one stage and heralds one major change in Morag Gunn's life and growth in sensibility.

In this novel, Margaret Laurence uses separate headings 'Snapshot', 'Memorybank Movie', 'Innerfilm', 'Skinner's or Christie's Tale', 'Pique's Song', and even conversations with Catherine Parr Trail, along with the usual devices of letters and lists to convey the many experiences and influences that merged to form Morag. Laurence's Memorybank Movies are not simply the result of her effort to distance herself from her material, but are meant to illustrate her belief that every person, writer and non-writer alike makes a fiction of his past truth, and by doing so, transmutes it into new truth. And the new truth is myth.

The folk songs have special appeals and give yet more evidence of Margaret Laurence's multiple talent. The contemporary time sequence of *The Diviners* is from one of the warm weeks at the end of spring to the beginning of autumn; in the interim, Morag recalls her past in chronological snatches. These memories build on one another and gain in power through repetition as Morag first relives an event, then comments on it from her current perspective, and then recounts that incident for Jules, Ella or Pique.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF THE PAST AS SEEN IN THE STRUCTURE

In the entire novel we find Morag the chief protagonist attempting to recall her past. In this section, I have shown that the structure of the novel is intricately bound up to the concept of the past, the fact that it is absolutely important to know one's past, that the past is inevitably a part of us, that the past plays a major role in shaping our present and that the knowledge of the past helps us to move forward in life though within the enclosing coils of the present.

Morag's efforts to reconnect ... 'time lost and time continuing' and transmit 'inheritable wisdom' to the future make *The Diviners* exemplary of the fundamental motive of narrative: the recovery of the past, transformation of the present, and transmission of inheritable wisdom to the future.⁴ The past is 'replayed to a more successful outcome'⁵; it is repeated 'in order for there to be an escape from repetition, in order for there to be change or progress'.⁶ Laurence's writing is certainly an 'attempt to come to terms with past', 'partly in order to be freed from it'; Laurence refers to 'the explorations' inherent in the writing itself 'as a way of changing' the patterns of the past.

The structure of the novel- in which time present alternates with time past until, in the final section, the past catches up with and becomes the present- similarly suggests the interdependence of past and present and foregrounds Morag's efforts to transmit something of value to the future.

The sections, which take place in the past, concern (young) Morag's relationship with a father and those, which take place in the present, concern (older) Morag's relationship with her daughter Pique. The alteration of past action with present action shows the influence of past upon present. It demonstrates that the past has made Morag and Pique what they are; but the structure also shows the present acting upon the past, as Morag's remembering and narrating the past alters her sense of it and thereby *changes* the present, enabling her to make terms with herself and her daughter, to let go of her guilt about the way she has raised her and to let go of her, sending her on her way with the best wisdom she has gleaned from her own past. The test of what Morag achieves is in what she passes on to Pique, 'the inheritor' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.452); and Morag's legacy is not a 'nightmare repetition', but in the words of the epigraph, 'a place to stand on'.

Reconstructing the past however is not easy and Morag does encounter problems. In *The Diviners*, Morag contemplates problems related to reconstructing the past. She tries to remember 'what really happened' and to understand the powers of language. 'I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.5); she ponders the meaning of photographs and the 'memorybank movies' in

her head. She faces problems of memory and knowledge; in fact, the technique 'memorybank' movie implies an image of the artist as 'projectionist'. As regards point of view, Laurence's use of italics to mark shifts from third-to first-person pronoun is a way of rendering the movement of the mind as it interprets and revises experience. Thus we see that the 'creative process' is so deeply worked into the narrative, that all Morag's efforts to remember, reconstruct and revise the past are problems relating to narrative which I shall analyse below.

2.2. NARRATIVE

This section will show that Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* is a novel of attentive social consciousness examining the interaction of the individual and the constructions of Canadian society in the mid-twentieth century. The narrative will also throw light on issues like Laurence's exploration of the man/woman relationship, national identity, ecology and environment through the character of Pique. We also watch Morag learn about the conventions of communication and its gateway into society; we understand her gift of tale telling and story telling by using the form of letters, forms, poems and dialogues.

Unusually for its time, the novel presents a relentless refusal to be heroic or to search for determinist patterns. The issues are many, but the focus is upon women and men, children and adults, minority and powerful, pivoting around history and writing both as means of articulation but also topics in themselves.

The Diviners presents history initially as legend, something that provides a pattern and an inevitability because it had happened, is in the past and is possible to recount. But a substantial part of Morag's life is concerned with recognising the changes in the re-telling of legend, and learning the techniques and strategies needed to construct and make history. In the context of the re-telling, we see that each person has to find the points of difficulty, the parts that do not work smoothly in her life, at the same time as resisting the urge to fabricate a version of events where all things do work smoothly. The techniques and strategies to be learned are intimately part of the skills of oral and written communication. We also see in the narrative a tentative

split between the articulation of the construction of gender in the re-telling of Morag's past, interleaved with the articulation of the familial, the child/adult relationship in the telling of the present interaction between Morag and Pique. Yet the story of the re-telling gives the reader Morag as a child, then Morag the adult defined as a child by Brooke, followed by her rites of passage into defining herself as an adult, and superimposes this past on the present. In what follows I study the re-telling separately from the telling, so that the formal characteristics of each may be thrown forward.

The first section, 'River of Now and then', has at least four formal structures: present description, present commentary, snapshots and memory movie. The present description is largely anticipatory, densely filled with imagery, techniques, narrative strategies, and parts of stories that will later be developed. Present commentary is found in Italics that focus the reader's eye. The first one is about words, 'I used to think words could do anything. Magic Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 4). The second is about the photographs seen both as tokens of the past and as a 'jumbled mess of old snapshots' kept not for what they show but what they hide. The snapshots themselves are split between description in roman type and comment in italic, graphics that separate what they show from a criticism of what they appear to show. Their importance or what they hide lies in the border area between description and comment.

Snapshot one presents the 'couple by the gate', almost a parody of classic frontier picture but for the statement made here about the reality beyond the cliché. The couple stands not 'firmly' but 'stiffly', the choice of word indicating the viewer's sense of their embarrassment or unease; they are not touching but they stand close in an implied formal intimacy. Broadening the interpretation the describer notes that the house behind them has a 'gracelessness' which 'atones'. There is the projected action of the man having run his fingers through his hair 'an instant before' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 6); the dog beside her is called Snapdragon, 'as one would not guess from the picture' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 7); and the child is 'not like Prin'. In all of this there is a growing sense of questioning. Who is saying these things? Is it the 5-year-old? a child? an adult? Who provides the 'presumed' knowledge; who is the 'one' who gives us external factual information? And immediately we are told 'I am

remembering composing this interpretation in Christie and Prin's house' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 7).

The narratorial voice develops the extraordinary complexity of attempts to record memory throughout the following snapshots, as it shows 'what is not recorded in the picture', or notes, 'I don't recall when I invented that one...'; and the reader asks why does this narrator remember the things she does? What do these details mean? By snapshots we have come to the end of the 'totally invented memories' and are moved to the more leisurely recalling of the young child's 'invisible creatures' that peopled her imagination. The kind of characters they are, indicate the child's cultural background; they speak of her isolation but at the same time affirm her contentment. Having done all this implicitly, the narrator then uses them to comment on her present, saying, 'I remember those imaginary characters better than I do my parents. What kind of a character am I?' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 11) – which question will take over the whole book.

The final structure in section one is a memorybank movie. This one is called 'Once Upon a Time There was'. The story is told in the historical present, a tense conveying a sense of fatalism as if everything is known before it happens: 'Mrs. Pearl...has come to Morag's house' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 11). The character description, dialogue, internal commentary is firmly distanced and in the past, but is followed in italics by extensive present commentary on the practical details of Morag's parents' death, a flashback which seems in context like a flash forward about visiting their grave, anger at not knowing them, guilt at forgetting them. snapshot, no purely visual memory to trigger it. With the death of her parents, we sense the resulting emptiness. Yet her mother and father, like the river with its strong current, are flowing 'unknown in my blood, and moving unrecognized in my skull' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 15) as this first section ends.⁷

Each of the central three sections articulates part of Morag's learning, her entrance into society. Each portrays her learning about communication, both written and spoken, practicing it and articulating through it. The memorybank movies work like colons in punctuation. They both evade responsibility and leave open to interpretation. There is an enormous range of

stylistic variation in the memory bank movies, as they tell forth the mind and the world of the child growing into woman. Each mirrors the vocabulary and grammar development, control of expression, use of colloquialism and literary genre appropriate for the time of life. In section two, 'The Nuisance Grounds', there is an intense artificiality of narrative presentation with tales, conversations, lists, songs, innerfilms, as well as considerable typographic play with capitals, italics, space and verse layout. 'The Thistle Shamrock Rose Entwine the Maple Leaf Forever' is a lengthy memorybank movie with colloquial vocabulary and structure outlining the child's age and social context. The section also yields up the beginnings of Morag's wordplay, which she learns from Christie, as they read Wordsworth who was a 'pansy', or rather, 'daffodil', and Ossian whose great (fake) Gaelic stories mean so much to Morag's sense of language and history. Later memorybank movies indicate the importance of lists titles and indexes as ways not only of sorting factual detail but also of organising fictional presentation. The other devices include the innerfilms of Morag's adolescence, which point the fantasies/daydreams of fame and success in unashamedly 'corny' prose (*THE DIVINERS*, pp. 101-2).

Throughout the three chapters in 'The Nuisance Grounds' Morag is finding out what teachers, adults, parents, friends expect of her and schoolmates: the establishments or institutions of education, religion, commerce and peer hierarchy. To a child they have equal status, equal calls on action. Gradually, we watch her learning about the conventions of communication and its gateway into society through reading, writing, speaking and telling. Christie always has a handle on language. Early on he teases her, saying, 'Did they learn you much today' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 29) and Morag immediately recognises that 'He says it like that on purpose. A joke. Prin would say it not on purpose.' The first memorybank movie of the second chapter in this section has a lot to do with language, with Morag correcting herself from 'feed bad' to 'feel badly' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 89), or with her recognising that Christie is addressed as such by lawyer Archie McVitie, while he calls the lawyer 'Mr. McVitie' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 96). She is learning not only the rules but also the essential flexibility of language.

Morag's early standoff between Wordsworth and Ossian (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 51) is doubled in her adolescence by that between Wordsworth and Browning (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 99). It is

Miss Melrose who encourages Morag to write, who recognises that something is wrong with her eyes, and who focuses Morag on 'What she has to do', which is to learn to communicate in writing. This first section also shows her starting off as a journalist on the local paper and finding out that while not all people are 'verbal' they often know much more than she does. Having a 'knack of words' gives one power, but it is power that should not be abused, should not encourage you to 'look down on others'.

But the most important communication Morag learns is that of telling 'tales', story-telling. It begins for the reader with Christie's 'First Tale of Piper Gunn' from which Morag tells in her head the 'Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman', his apostrophes, rhetorical question and epithets.

Morag's other close relationship with a man is with Jules, and that too begins as an exchange of stories, although his way of telling is quite different from Christie's. Gone are all the polished epithets, gone the conventions of phrasing. Instead, we have the opening 'anyway, there is this guy...', connections such as 'see', 'I dunno', 'Another thing is' and 'Okay'.

When Dieppe happens and Morag reads the lists of the dead, she questions the truth of the stories of 'bravery, courage, camaraderie, initiative, heroism, gallantry, yet says, 'probably it does not matter. They may console some' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 117). The only certainty is that they are dead. The final memorybank movie of 'The Nuisance Grounds' underwrites this probing of truth, history and story, at first with Christie's ranting recounting of the legendary past which Morag now says is a 'fraud'.

The procedure of the memorybank movies in 'The Nuisance Grounds' is to work like discrete units of memory, standing alone partly because they are the first in the book. They are to do with the sense, with things that children do not understand but recognise as important, such as 'law'. Although there are few resonances at first, these build swiftly so that there are parallelisms of topic, of motif and of social event. The procedure is partly because a child's life is often unconnected and fragmented. For Morag it is Christie who sets the standards of behaviour. Jules provides a kind of positive alternative for life, while Eva Winkler is the negative. Each memorybank movie also presents the elements of verbal communication appropriate to the maturing Morag, from the fascination with oral techniques and history to the journalistic handling of the elements of the news.

In contrast, the memorybank movies of section three, 'Halls of Sion', are quite different. At first, Morag opens up to an entirely new world with new ideas and social structures. There is a lot of extended description as she meets women with positive alternatives: Ella, Mrs. Gerson with their Marxism and socialism. On the whole, the memorybank movies units are far more coherent as narrative than in section two. They trap of demanding present attention and activity (existentialism) while denying the past and history (social construction) and lead to the positive ability to construct oneself while negatively denying the social institutions around one. In turn, this generates a stylistic alternation between existential emptiness and the sentimental romance of private desire. The first chapter retains some of the elements found in the memorybank movies of section two. Morag and Ella exchange letters, songs, and poems. The fourth memorybank movie (*THE DIVINERS*, pp. 151-66) is a long, coherent, lightly interrupted but not fragmented piece. It concentrates on forging the connections across emptiness by simple spaces or the occasional asterisk, rather than separate units of memorybank movie.

Many of the shifts in character and time are carried by dialogue, interleaved with increasing resistanceless, more conventional prose because what Morag says is usually socially acceptable, it's what lies unsaid that is not so, and the unsaid is here diminished. The fourth memorybank movie begins with lists, songs, colloquial vocabulary and expression, but gradually moves to the pattern of dialogue and occasional commentary. The alternation between dialogue and innertalk is about being caught into social structures and about how difficult it is to recognise and break away from them. 'Halls of Sion' speaks largely about question of gender – the alternative definitions offered by Ella, Prin or Eva, and the actual road taken by Morag in her relationship with Brooke; and these questions are largely mapped on to those of family, parent and child. The importance of words to Morag is underlined early in her relationship with Brooke when she says, 'Words words words. Words haunt her, but she will become unhaunted now, for evermore' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 168).⁸

Writing is again a key topic. Brooke uses the position of literary critic professor to control her expression and herself. He sees her both as a child and as an incompetent writer. The

child/parent separation is mapped on to the woman/man gender issues from the start but only becomes explicit in the second chapter of this section. There are only three memorybank movies in this chapter and in each the relationship between adult and child is explored in terms of past and present. We first find Brooke selectively recalling some of his past while other parts remain repressed until Morag shocks them out of him in the final memorybank movie. Meanwhile, Morag is consistently denying her own past while exploring and developing that of Lilac, the character in her novel.

For Morag, writing is the only way to hang on to her past amid the insidious taking over by Brooke. Lilac, like herself, is 'inchoate', and the novelist's difficulty is to find a way of allowing her character to express.

The child/adult and woman/man concerns are superimposed on to native issues, again by means of Brooke who says, 'I thought it was supposed to be illegal to give liquor to Indians' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 220) when he sees her with Jules. The section is concerned with gender and family but is also shot through with the metaphors of race and imperialism. The question is how does one deal with oppression without creating further oppression? Morag's time with Jules returns her to earlier delight with words; she likens him to 'a dandelion seed carried by the wind' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 223). Language is history; the two rephrase each other.

'Halls of Sion' function oddly. There can be huge dissatisfaction because the richness of childhood is suddenly negated. Substituted for the freethinking, obstinate, quirky child is a broken frustrated, strangely submissive woman playing into the hands of man and of social ideology. But it is easy to forget the intensely historical role of the novel, to forget the position of North American women in the late 1940s and early 1950s whose suburban lives were captured so biting in McLuhan's *Mechanical Bride*.⁹

The fourth section of *The Diviners*, 'Rites of Passage', focuses on the coming to consciousness of one's complicity. At the same time the section is also about the process of fiction making and its relation to fact, and about the serious business of writing. Morag has to find words before she can act, for her communication is necessary propulsion to action. The three chapters of this section each have a different geographical location: Vancouver, Britain and

Ontario. They generate a sense of serial fiction, self-contained short stories intimately related to each other. The memorybank movies gradually accumulate variety again in reported conversation, italic commentary, signs, songs, reviews and most of all in letters. The new device in chapter 8 is the incorporation of snapshots, this time of Pique, which underline the way that Morag's memory from this moment on, although about her own life, is punctuated by what happens to her daughter at these times. The first snapshot reports the content of the picture but notes Pique's eye looking 'trust' at her mother. The second is Pique at 3 ½ and generates Morag's question 'will she remember' the time. Other snapshots of Pique, and Pique and Morag, serves to raise many of the questions that surfaced in section one. In a way, these are the beginnings of another story, which eventually surfaces into the present telling while they convey the start of another life. Pique's life, presented here, centres around the use of tales and her meetings with Jules.

This other life provides a background to Morag's own, which continues to be linked to questions of sex, gender and power. These questions arise quite specifically from Morag as she sets about constructing her own life. Looking at her landlady Fan and comparing her with Lilac, she asks, 'Does fiction prophecy life?' But Fan is a mirror image of Lilac, in real life the character finds 'terrifying innocence' in her total knowledge of the world (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 254). Morag also asks, 'How much is foisted upon a person and how much is self-chosen to mesh gearlike with what is already there?' While she learns from Fan, Maggie and Julie Kaslik, Morag's experiences with men are more to do with learning against them.

The overall key to Morag's progress is how she writes, how she constructs her fictions. The first memorybank movie of section four is titled 'Bleak House' and begins, 'some of the mountains beyond the city are called snow mountains because the snow is perpetual upon those far off peaks' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 239). Following this introduction the memorybank movies pick up pace with ordinary conversation, description and more letters from Brooke, from Ella, from Christie and later from Jules, prompted by a photo of the newly-born Pique. The memorybank movies are intensely literary recalling more overtly the literary history within which Morag places herself: 'Bleak House', 'A Room of One's Own', 'Portrait of the Artist as a young Skivvy'. Partly, they ironise the picture, allow her to present her troubles at

one remove; but they also implicitly recall the sweeping social background of nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction as a necessary context to the personal.

These stylistic techniques are set against the literary as topic and Morag's own new fiction, 'Prospero's Child'. She comments that the book takes *The Tempest* and uses it to explore the woman/man relationship. His Excellency on his island, like the prince in the halls of Sion, has to be rejected so that the character can 'become her own person' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 207). The central question is whether Prospero the magician will give up his powers, which disguise the limits of his knowledge and hide from despair. Significantly, Morag moves on from the necessary escape from the island, to questions of making construction. Having realised that one has the ability to change and make, both in life and in fiction, one also has to learn how to handle that power, how not to impose how to achieve balanced activity.

These literary elements continue in parody of the opening of Bleak House at the beginning of the first memorybank movies. Coming to terms with Christie and this part of her past ends when Morag returns to Canada to see Christie die in the memorybank movie 'The Ridge of Tears'. Having had a stroke, Christie the taleteller is left with garbled speech except in the final 'Well I'm blessed' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 323). The images surrounding Christie tie the past re-telling into the telling of the present. His voice like the croak of a bullfrog, and his words, belong to the set of Morag's present vocabulary. They pull the reader into present consciousness, preparing us for the last chapter in this section where the Pique and Morag story comes to dominate and introduces a number of other elements from the present telling, such as the character of Royland or images of the long grass and the Canada geese.

Pique and Morag become the centre of the re-telling mainly because as a family unit they provide a constant in a changing life, and also because they are thrown in each other's company so much. The family focus points to all the 'old patterns' emerging from Morag and Jules into Pique: the eccentric parents, a half-breed and a woman writer; the isolated rural school filled with prejudice and bigotry.¹⁰ Again, issues of family and gender are startled into Pique's consciousness primarily by issues of race, made more difficult for her than for Morag because of her Metis blood. When Jules comes to visit, he clasps Morag's hand in their 'consolation against time'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 346) He gives both women the songs of his

family, even one of the death of Piquette which he says he has to tell Pique. This necessary telling of these songs about his story is his way both of becoming aware of the relations involved in society's consolations and of using them effectively by articulating the contradictions. The chapter ties up loose ends in the novel¹¹ as if carefully finishing with the past yet also allows Morag to adopt from the past a motto 'My Hope is constant in 'Thee' and a war cry 'Gainsay who Dare'. They would have meant little if simply copied when she was young, but to the mature woman they seem to be a gift. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 353)

In a similar manner the tales change their role, as Morag grows older. At first, they provided a fixed history; then she questioned them and moved on to knowing that they were important primarily because of the people who told them. The next step was to understand that it is the historical context within which they are told that is important; further, that it is necessary to recognise that to make a legend out of someone (like Christie) somehow denies his actual existence. Finally, Morag sees the tales as a sign of the 'inner truth' of people: bodied forth in a context of the historical that provides a guide to understanding them. The manner in which tales are articulated is intimately bound up with the relationship between the history of the teller and the history of the tale. Parallel to this understanding and in part a voicing of it, Morag writes her novel *shadow of Eden*. She tells Ella that she needed to know the 'inner truths' of Christie's tales, that Piper Gunn's factual existence was not as important as the emblem of spirit and fight he became in Christie's mouth. Her novel also tries to deal with the concept of 'Infactuality' which she finds in Jules's story of Rider as Gabriel Dumont, or the tale of how Rider got his horse which was 'from a Cree legend (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 341). The tales come to be seen as 'history and fiction interweaving', social and personal constructions questioning each other and trying to find a voice for the present.

The ends of the past and of the re-telling begin to be tidied up in this section, of the present summer, which is the duration of the novel-writing time, and the whole past. The past of Morag's life has been defined by questions of gender, although the child/adult relationship is important, and all is underlain by race. But the present is focused on family relations. The final section, 'The Diviners', attempts this by combining a tentative visual structure with no memorybank movies and a lot of blank space, and a series of resolutions in image and topic.

The beginnings of the present have their own variety of techniques and strategies which connect then indissolubly with those of the past.¹² There are the continuing dialogues with the Cooper family who owned Morag's farm with Catharine Parr Traill, which outlines the dominant fantasy/innerfilm of her present: the myth of the self-sufficient farm which A-Okay and Maudie try to realise. The broadest interconnections between the re-telling and the telling are in structure and character. Each recounting of Morag's past life parallels an event in Pique's present¹³ several significant characters move between both, and all the women in the present narration, Sarah Cooper and Catharine Parr Traill, Maudie, Ella and Royland's wife, parallel all those from the past providing the gallery of Morag's examples. In the last section, the death of Jules brings to an end one of the prominent story lines of the past re-telling. The death resolves at least one contradiction: that of why Morag's own parents, presented in the very first memorybank movies of the book, did not want to see her when they were dying: they had wanted to see her; they has not wanted her to see them. The gaps in understanding...?' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 365). This ending also tells the story of Pique coming to some consciousness, of her going off to Galloping Mountain; an action filled with potential sentiment that both Morag and Laurence have to retard if Pique, and the novel, is to be left with any balance. The point being underlined is the repetition of pattern from one generation to the next. The problems of the 1970s are not those of the 1950s, so Pique has to work out her own awareness.

Lifted out of context, the beginnings of each chapter tell the story of Royland, the fisherman and diviner, who divines, who loses his ability to do so, yet who does grieve because although the divining is a 'gift' it is also learned. It is 'not something that everybody can do, but ... quite a few people can learn to do it' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 369). This is what Morag has been waiting to learn from Royland, that despite the withdrawal of her gift of writing there will be inheritors; and in the end even that does not matter so much, it is 'The necessary doing of the thing-that mattered'. Like the epithet 'the strength of conviction, that Christie used of Piper Gunn and that the child Morag used in her first tale, at the same time asking, 'what means the strength of conviction' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 42), it is necessary to use the words even without knowing their meaning because they speak to experience beyond the private. When Pique,

years later, asks the same question, Morag interprets it as the 'belief that the people could make a new life for themselves' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 307).

We now look into the question of voice in the narrative.

2.2.1 VOICE

Laurence has rejected the first person voice, which serves for Hagar's, Rachel's and Vanessa's narratives. Voice, the most difficult problems for a writer,¹⁴ is a primary consideration for a novelist. In *The Diviners*, a third person voice combines Morag's thoughts and language with those of another narrator. "We are captured by the illusion of Morag describing herself."¹⁵ Morag's voice is distanced, with no loss in intimacy.

"Although Morag does not technically speak in her own voice, the third person narrative voice, in the past tense for the fictional present and in the present tense for remembered sequences, is always extremely close to her, presenting events through her eyes, constantly adopting her mannerisms until we feel we are listening to her thoughts. Laurence uses this third person voice brilliantly ... The third person allows a minimal distance from Morag creating, in addition, the sense that there are two Morag's one who experiences and remembers while the other writes, a doubling phenomenon quite common in artist hero novels"¹⁶

The third person voice emphasizes that this is the story of a people and a country not simply an individual. A first person voice, Morag's, is used less frequently, usually signalled by Italics. There are also two major variations on the flashback narratives that form much of the novel: "snapshot" and "Memorybank Movie". Laurence flanks her organic green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river - watching...

Pique had gone away. She must have left during the night. She had left a note on the kitchen table, which also served as Morag's desk ...(*THE DIVINERS*, p.30.) river metaphor with mechanical metaphors, computer and camera suggesting 20th century forms of man, toolmaker

and wordsmith. Language is itself the Memorybank Movie upon which our survival depends. The movies may be introduced by the third person voice before a subtitle and the shift to dramatic form. The subtitles are usually ironic and frequently blackly comic. In 'The Law Means School', Morag learns the authoritarian and hypocritical structure of society, power and justice are not synonymous and courage is needed for survival.

"River of now and then" (Part I), gives the polar points of Morag's experience - her foreground, its river setting, her present combination of personal and professional concerns, and her background, the beginning of her life outside of Manawaka. She has been established through the variety in her own voice and the major narrative techniques that Laurence uses throughout the novel. It establishes the middle - aged Morag, loving, anxious, ironic, defiant, "born bloody - minded", the succeeding generation rebellion, the preceding generations battle with poverty, drought and disease; their ancestor's trials in the Scottish highlands, and the river metaphor, identified with the generations, genes, instinct, blood, memory, cultural values and individual experience.

Morag's own voice and ends "The River of Now and Then", contemplating in herself the flow of generations, Morag's - and *The Diviners*' - deepest concern: "I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they are inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognised in my skull". (*THE DIVINERS*, p.15).

The image of the river is one of the most important images in the novel and calls for a detailed analysis.

2.2.2 RIVER IMAGE

The river image unifies the novel. *The Diviners* starts and ends with the description of the river. In this description, there is both acceptance and affirmation of the flux of time and energy through all the generations of mankind.

At the beginning: ¹⁷ The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south.....

And as the novel ends:

The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways.

Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 37).

The river seen from Morag's desk also becomes a central metaphor for the way in which we experience time and life itself. As the novel opens, this phenomenon introduces Pique's departure and the apparent contrast between her daughter's way of life and Morag's own. Laurence stresses the impossibility of the river's act, and by juxtaposing the note from the 18-year old, suggests that it too pose impossibility for Morag.

The image also develops into the comment on river slaying, which would destroy the current by drying up the river. Morag is speaking of the need we have for these streams of life, a deep running history and biology without which the winds of daily change have no effect, no role, without which they can produce no contradiction. From the start Morag stakes her claim to the importance of history and expresses her unease at the swiftness with which it can be lost and destroyed.¹⁸ The river seen from Morag's desk becomes a central metaphor for the way in which we experience time and life itself. As the novel opens, this phenomenon introduces Pique's department and the apparent contrast between her daughter's way of life is linked with Morag's sense of order and Pique's reversal of this order by staying up at night and sleeping by day. Pique's reversal is also expressed through her unsettled nature, her difficulties in finding a vocation and her lack of ambition.¹⁹

At the novel's end the river has accumulative force. The water at its edge is clear, while beyond it, deeper and keeps its life hidden. River depths suggest mysteries in time for individuals, generations and nations. The novel's ending like its beginning evokes the mysterious loss of human experience and its unity in diversity. For individuals, the two-way flow means that relationships are being continually altered as events are reinterpreted. Though this can be frightening and painful it carries with it creative possibilities for growth.

3. DIVINERS

Gradually, we see that there are many diviners; the writer who selects from the chaotic complexity of events to give certain moments and certain processes meaning and permanence for a person - or a people - is one of these. This section will provide an analysis of 'The Diviners' and the divining process.

1. Christie Logan is the first and greatest character from Morag's past and her first and greatest diviner, though it takes her most of her life to recognise this. He had fought in the First World War with Colin Gunn. Christie, Manawaka's garbage man - by his own choice, has his own way of divining people's lives by their garbage: "By their garbage shall ye know them"... "They think muck's dirty. Its no more dirty than what's in their heads or mine (*THE DIVINERS*, p.32).

Christie is a splendid mentor who teaches her qualities unbecoming to a lady: a disrespect of respectability gained from his long acquaintance of the town's 'muck'. "You don't want to believe everything them books say". (*THE DIVINERS*, p.83) He also teaches her never to say sorry', (*THE DIVINERS*, p.209) or to make herself a 'doormat'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.107) Morag disowns Christie, spending years trying to be normal, (*THE DIVINERS*, p.81) before finally coming to recognize him as 'my father to me' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.369) and to know her 'home', as 'Christie's country, where I was born'. (*The Diviners*, p.391)

Christie is Morag's mentor in that it is he who gives her a past and teaches her the power of the creative imagination. Since her parents died when she was a child, Morag's past is blank. Christie gives Morag a heritage with his stories of Piper Gunn and his woman Morag and her conquest and settling of a new land. Part legend, part history, but mainly spun 'wholecloth', 'out of his head - invented'. (*The Diviners*, p.367) These are tales of action and adventure of the sort more customarily associated with boys than with girls; and unlike the romantic fictions that shape the consciousness of other female protagonists, they do not teach Morag to expect that her 'end' will be a man. Identifying with male action and potential, Morag has more freedom than heroines customarily have; for women may gain by 'Look [ing] at the male

protagonists who have until now stood as models for human action and say [ing], that action includes me'.²⁰ Christie's stories provide Morag with the inspiration for her first literary creations.

2. Royland is another diviner in the novel. He is Morag's neighbour, confidante, counsellor and friend. His gift of divining water is mysteriously important to Morag. Royland is a kind of shaman to her, and she can see the actual evidence of his power whenever she watches him divine a well. Through knowing him, Morag gradually recognizes other "diviners". Royland and his gift form the hinge on which the book's deepest meaning turns: Morag had once tried divining with the willow wand. Nothing at all had happened. Royland had said she didn't have the gift. She wasn't surprised. Her area was elsewhere. He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for? You couldn't doubt the value of water....

The tip of the willow wand was moving. In Royland's bony grip, the wood was turning, moving downwards very slowly, very surely. Towards the earth.

Magic, four yards north of the smith's clothesline (*The Diviners*, p. 83).

3. Jules Tonnerre is the third diviner. Morag Gunn, was a fellow student of Vanessa, Stacey and Piquette in the school at Manawaka, but she lived there in a middle ground between the children of respectable homes and the metis. It is between her and Skinner Tonnerre, the young Jules who is the son of Lazarus and brother of Val and Piquette, that a bridge of understanding is built that is not, like the trestle bridge of *The Stone Angel*, a way to destruction. Morag, in the beginning is half frightened by Jules and half fascinated by him; he represents a kind of freedom which complements the defiance of convention personified by Christie Logan, the man so embittered with the world after World War I that he deliberately chooses the occupation of scavenger and the contempt that goes with it.

The fact that Morag and Jules are both outsiders draws them together. Once ineffectually, they try to make love, and then Jules goes away to fight in the way and narrowly escapes death at Dieppe. Morag obsessed with writing becomes the only reporter for the Manawaka Sentinel, and this leads her back towards Jules and his family for she is sent out to report on the burning

of the shack in which Piquette and her children have died, and the scene eats itself into her mind, as the memory of Jules has done, for when she meets him in Toronto as her marriage to the English professor Brooke is lurching to an end, they immediately become lovers, and their relationship is cemented by the memory of tragedy in a terrible scene in which Jules more or less forces her to tell what her sense recorded at the scene of Piquette's death.

Morag and Jules do not remain together. Each lives in his own half world. Both have come out of the isolations of their childhood, Morag as a well-known novelist and Jules as a folk singer. Yet neither is accepted entirely into the respectable white world for the artist is in a different way as much an outsider as the Metis. Each belongs to a peculiar tribe. And while their difference as well as Jules's nomadic habits make any established relationship impossible, and their intermittent contacts are broken by vast gaps of time, Morag and Jules are bound to each other by deep emotional ties and their daughter Pique becomes the image and the concrete fact of their relationship which in its turn is an image of reconciliation.

4. Morag compares her skills as those of Royland, the professional diviner- 'He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for?' (*The Diviners*, p.102)- and wonders if her gift, as mysteriously conferred, maybe as mysteriously taken away, *The Diviners*, p.452). Her divining is, like his, related to water in that she spends time 'river watching' (*The Diviners*, p.3), contemplating the river she lives by- which suggests symbolically her interest in time and the processes that make people. Also like a diviner (in the sense of soothsayer or seer), Morag watches birds, though she observes them for information about seasons and life cycles (*The Diviners*, pp.404, 411), for natural rather than for supernatural significances. Yet her skills as diviner may actually give her a kind of 'second sight', in that they help her to understand the future, an understanding suggested by her epiphany of a 'Great Blue Heron' (*The Diviners*, p.357). Whereas Stephen's epiphanies of a hawk-like man and a bird-like girl beckon him to flight (*Portrait*. 171-2) Morag's heron suggests equanimity about the future: its 'sweeping serene wings' and 'the soaring and measured certainty of its flight' signify 'certainty', 'serenity', 'mastery' even in the face of extinction. (*The Diviners* p.357). Laurence's use of 'diviner' draws in a full range of meaning: water finder, reader of omens, one who has the skill in the reading of character and events, seer, soothsayer, prophet. The artist-diviner looks

into 'the river of now and then' to fathom life, time and the passing of generations, and through her understanding of the past, gains equanimity about the future. Morag compares her skills to those of Royland, the professional diviner. Her divining, is, like his, related to water. She spends time 'river-watching' (*The Diviners*, p.3) which suggests symbolically her interest in time and the processes that make people. Also, like a diviner, Morag watches birds (*The Diviners*, pp.404-411) for natural rather than supernatural significance. Yet her skills as diviner actually give her a kind of 'second sight'. They help her to understand the future, an understanding suggested by her epiphany of 'Great Blue Heron' (*The Diviners*, p.357).

Laurence's diviner also has powers, which suggest a Joycean analogy of the artist to God: in giving life to stories that would otherwise die, the artist-diviner performs acts, almost of resurrection. In her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, Morag seeks a way of expressing an 'inchoate' character; and this problem in some sense, mirrors Laurence's, for though Laurence's protagonist is not inchoate many in *The Diviners* are. Laurence gives voice to those who cannot speak for themselves: outcasts, 'unmentionables', half-breeds and poor, those for whom living is so difficult that many prefer not to. Most of the Jules family- Lazarus, Piquette, Val, Paul - 'die before their time,' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.430). Prin burries herself in her mound of flesh; Lachlan MacLachlan, and Nail Cameron the undertaker find oblivion in drink, giving up the 'battle in the mind-field, the mine-field of the mind' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.399); Royland's wife drowned herself (*THE DIVINERS*, p.241); Eva lives on but is 'beaten by life'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.113) Morag's husband Brooke also denies life in refusing Morag a child and insisting that she remain one.

Not introspective or educated, 'not very verbal people' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.155), the characters in this novel do not have language to speak their experience. 'Loners and crazies' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.301), they express their pain and rage in cries like Lazarus's 'dere mine dere, dem' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.159) as he rushes into the burnt stack to claim the charred remains of his daughter and grandchildren.

All in this novel are shut into themselves²¹; as in *The Wasteland*, 'each locked in a prison, each confirms a prison'.²² As diviner, the artist speaks for those who cannot speak for

themselves, fathoms the unfathomable, communicates the incommunicable, mentions the unmentionable. In this, her art has affinities with Christie's gift of the garbage - telling (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.74-75). Making arrangement for Christie's funeral, Morag recalls Christie joke 'who buries the undertaker? Whoever will undertake it' (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.314, 399). The answer to the riddle is that it is the artist who 'undertakes the undertaker': Morag does this in undertaking the story of Naill Cameron and other buried lives. This artist also resurrects the dead: Lazarus is 'born again' in Jule's songs: Jules songs live again in Piques songs, and all are made to live in Laurence's *The Diviners*.

Laurence's artist remains compassionately involved with her creation. The conception of art and the artist that emerges from *The Diviners* suggests an aesthetic, which includes the processes of its own creation. Unlike the Modernist aesthetic implied by Joyce, which is separate and apart from the processes that creates it, Laurence's aesthetic is 'both fabricated from and immersed in... temporal, social and psychic conditions'²³, and 'charged with the conditions of its own creation (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.97, 103); it is a poetics of domestic values: nurturance, community building, inclusiveness, empathetic care that resolves the dichotomy between 'artisanal' works and 'high art' and 'counters the modernist traditions of exile and alienation'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.103)

4. THEMATIC WEB OF *THE DIVINERS*

In the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I mentioned that *The Diviners* contains all of the themes that Laurence wishes to put across. They will be discussed separately in the sections to follow.

4.1. LANGUAGE AND THE MAKING OF FICTION

The making of fiction is one of the important themes in this novel. This section will prove that Laurence has commented at length on words and their power to both make as well as break. Intertwined with this theme is theme of gender. The fact that literature written by men is taken more seriously than that written by women is aptly brought out by Laurence through this novel.

Some aspects of Morag's personality and development are deftly and convincingly portrayed, particularly her sensitivity to the power of languages, both in its inhibiting aspects, as a social indicator, and its liberating aspect, as an exquisite medium through which an artist can communicate. Even at the age of seven, Morag notices the grammatical lapses of her guardian, Prin: She was the only child and wasn't none too bright. She relishes vivid colour and rich texture, even though they are found in bizarre forms in Christie's hovel, and puzzles over the proper way to describe them:

When she peers close (to the flies), she can see their wings are shining, both blue and green. Can they be beautiful and filthy?
.... a blue plush (pl-uush - rich-sounding, but really it is like velvet only cheaper and not so smo-ooth on the fingers) cushion.

Both aspects of languages continue to play an important part in Morag's life. Her concern for "Proper usage" epitomizes her feelings of inferiority in her relationship to Brooke her English Professor husband.

"Shall we have some sherry?"

"Please," Morag says, having recently learned to say, simply, Please, instead of Oh yes thanks I'd just love some, or worse, Okay that'd be fine.

While her convictions about the beauty of the poetic "mot juste" are strong enough to allow her to combat Brooke's patronizing influence: "... almost always if you get inside the lines, you find he's saying what he means with absolute precision. 'Sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine' — I am not sure it really does, but it couldn't be expressed more concisely and accurately."

The mature Morag of the novel's present is no longer concerned with the social niceties. She has also come to doubt her earlier belief that languages can accurately convey sensual experiences, although she remains convinced of the value of the effort:

How could that colour be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach colour, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate.

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

Laurence has been quoted as saying, "...it's one of the most difficult things to do, writing about a writer. But I had to. At first I made her a painter, but what the hell do I know about painting?"²⁴ However, her believable portrait of the artist as harassed Canadian woman is one of the most successful aspects of *The Diviners*. Morag experiences many of the barriers that can stand between a woman and creativity, including a husband's ego, morning sickness and sleeping children. But in her presentation of the internal doubts that beset Morag as a writer (and which surely afflict Laurence as well), Laurence comes perilously close to sinking her novel under the weight of its self-consciousness. Six-year old Morag conveys fear, courage and defiance in her "Hang onto your shirt and never let them know you are scared" (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 28). The adult Morag's explosive anger, when her husband insists on treating her as a child, issues in some of Christie's choicest terms. Just prior, her grief and guilt over Prin's death and Christie's loneliness induce in Morag "the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein on them, the protean oaths upon which she was reared" (*THE DIVINERS*, p.209). Normally, Morag's language is strong and ironic, but far from obscene.

From believing Christie's tales, Morag comes to disbelieve them and then to 'believe in them again in a different way' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.367). To Pique's questions about 'the truth' of Christie's stories and Jule's songs, whether they 'really happened', Morag says, in language like Christie's:

Some did and some didn't. I guess it doesn't matter. Didn't you see? "No, Pique said, I don't see. I wasn't to know what really happened".

Morag laughed. Unkindly perhaps. 'You do, eh? well so do I. But there's one version. There just isn't. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.350)

Morag understands that the past, present and the self in its 'many versions' (*THE DIVINERS* p.396) are comprised of tales we tell ourselves and one another, constructs of the fictionalising imagination and that these fictions are constantly revised. Even the past undergoes revision. These realisations are related to her profession as writer. Morag agonizes, in true Calvinist fashion, about whether spinning tales may not simply be a form of telling lies: A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications.

Elsewhere, Morag wonders whether, as a writer, she most resembles Christie Logan the scavenger or Royland the diviner. Does she simply "tell the garbage", by fictionalizing other people's pain, or is she, like Royland, the possessor of a special gift, which allows her to reveal to others basic truths that they could not see without her helps? She comes to the tentative conclusion that fictions her truth: Yet, with typical ambiguity, (Morag was) convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.250.) "What is a true story? Is there any such thing? (*THE DIVINERS*, p.144). That the tales lead back not to 'real things' but to other tales suggests a post modern sense of referentiality, a sense of the fiction of truth and the truth of fiction, and a conception of the self as comprised of self fabricated fictions.

Laurence shares Morag's concern about telling the truth in fiction:

There's not only the talent in writing well.... The greatest problem of all is to try and tell enough of your own truth, from your own viewpoint, from your own eyes, to be able to go deeply enough... It sounds easy just to tell the truth. There isn't anything more difficult.²⁵

And she seems to have concluded that this truth telling is impeded by some of the ordinary conventions of novel writing. Although this realisation does not make Laurence's distancing" narrative devices any more successful, it helps us to understand why she chose them.

Laurence has further expanded this theme through the person of Catherine Parr Traill- one of Canada's pioneer women-, which shall be discussed below.

4.1.1. LAURENCE AND CATHERINE PARR TRAILL

This section will show that while Morag's relationship with the tradition of English literature finds Morag pitting herself against dead fathers, her relationship with the friendly matriarch Traill is presented in a conversational mode as dialogue rather than in the written forms of epic and drama, hence opposing high canonical literary forms to more practical and ephemeral creations, letters. It also sets in play the oppositions of sexual politics when Ella, Morag's poet friend and constant correspondent, and Catherine Parr Traill, famous for her botanical studies, her recipes and practical advice for emigrants in letters, are summoned forth. In this, Laurence raises the question of artistic illusion, the shifting boundaries of life and art as explored through a female perspective.²⁶ By drawing on non-canonized genres and naming non-canonical figures in their works, these women writers are both revalorising the work of their predecessors and creating a collective female tradition, grounded in the realities of women's work and in the material conditions for textual production as women's domestic labour. Remarking the traces of this hidden life in the high literary genres of poetry, drama and novel they provide evidence of the tessera, the antithetical completion. Anomorphic, these texts provide a vision of women's lives and textual production that distorts the fictional representation of women in the Great Tradition.

Language as the expression of character is illustrated by Morag's dialogue with Catharine Parr Traill, the 19th century Pioneer who lived and wrote in the Peterborough - Lake field area. Catharine's formal language, innocent of humour, contrasts comically with Morag's inner voice. "In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing."²⁷ Traill serves as a model of women's experience in an earlier century, just as Pique suggests future generations. Again myth and history join hands. Morag takes what she needs from "C.P.T.", mythologizing the historic character.

Morag's temptation is to see herself as a weak successor to the tradition of strong Canadian women represented by Traill: "Morag Gunn, country woman, never managing to overcome a quiver of distaste at the sight of an earthworm.... Detestor of physical labour. Lover of rivers and tall trees. Hatter of axes and shoves. What a farce" (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 46). Morag prefers to buy food from supermarkets and travel by taxi. She worries incessantly about Pique and suffers from sexual loneliness, a problem unmentioned by the venerable Catharine. Morag's version of Traill's energetic pursuits, in the form of directions for filming, is pure slapstick':

Scene at the Traill Homestead, circa 1840. C.P.T. out of bed, fully awake, bare feet on the silver - hazardous floorboard no, take that one again. Feet on the homemade hooked rug. Breakfast cooked for the mutilated. Out to feed the chickens, stopping briefly on the way back o pull fourteen armloads of weeds out of the vegetable garden & perhaps prune the odd apple tree in passing. The children's educational hour, the umpteen little mites lispng enthusiastically over this enlightenment. Cleaning the house, baking two hundred loaves of delicious bread, preserving half a ton of plums, pears, cherries, etc. All before lunch (*THE DIVINERS* , p.79).

Morag's life would be considered easy by the formidable C.P.T. In her second dialogue Morag describes herself as caught between the old pioneers and the new. Morag envies "Saint Catharine", her religious faith and the unspoiled land, which in her day was a visible analogue for Jerusalem, the Golden. Pollution threatens the very survival of Morag's world. Her third dialogue with the ghost indicates an advance in self-acceptance. Morag promises Catharine that she is going to stop feeling guilty. She has her own work and her garden of wildflowers and human relations: "I'm not built like you, Saint C. or these kids, either. I stand somewhere in between" (*THE DIVINERS*. p.332). Morag bids Catharine farewell.

Thus we see that the pioneer matriarch is a friendly adversary, a means of self-testing and reminds us of Laurence's belief in the importance of assimilating local history. Ontario's past is "equally necessary" for Morag's patriation.²⁸

4. 2. METIS

The theme of Metis has been discussed in all of Laurence's Manawaka works except *The Fire Dwellers*, a novel in which they do not figure. Below is a discussion of the treatment of the Metis in *The Diviners*.

In her Manawaka novels, Margaret Laurence has ideas of the relationships between peoples of different origins, which she wishes to work out in her fiction, and this she does successfully. But she never loses sight of her characters as human beings, she is always observing them from within in their own rights, for their own sakes, she sees the problems of a people like the Metis not in terms of the action within a community of a faith larger than either the community or its members, but rather in terms of human relationships of the erosion of prejudice through experience and understanding and ultimately empathy. Piquette is suffering humanity calling for compassion at the same time she is an individual caught up in the collective fate of her people.

In Margaret Laurence's tiny Ontario cottage on the Otonabee River two huge posters of Louis Riel and Dumont at once catch the eye of the visitor and remind one of the Metis rebellion in Manitoba and Southern Saskatchewan, which tragically ended with the hanging of Riel in Regina in 1885. She was very critical of the British imperial attitude back home in Manitoba. The grand daughter of an Irish Scots Presbyterian pioneer had lived close to the half Cree, half-French Metis and had soon come to resent the "colonial" outlook of her own people.

Thus it is not surprising that the French Indians should appear as one significant feature of her works set in Manawaka, the fictional embodiment of her own birthplace, Neepawa. The Tonnerre family provides the link between the different books, just as do the recurrent "white" characters. Through this one family Laurence exposes the socio-economic plight of the half-breeds. The Metis functions in her fiction mostly on a symbolic level as means for the writer, who has never really been reconciled to her heavy Irish Scot Presbyterian heritage to face her own inner conflict and to end an old feud.

Old Jules Tonnerre had fought with Riel and Dumont in the 80's and had retired after their defeat at Batoche into the Wachakwa Valley. There he had intended to build a temporary shack, but that same old shack was later also to shelter his son Lazarus and his son's children, Jules ("Skinner"), Piquette, Valentine, Paul and Jacques. A few references to the Tonnerre family are made in *The Stone Angel*. The moving short story "The Loons" is centered around Piquette. Valentine appears in a brief but significant episode in *The Fire Dwellers* but it is in *The Diviners*, Laurence's last novel, in which Skinner plays a decisive role in the heroine's life. It is in this novel that the Metis theme is treated most extensively.

4.3. MYTH MAKING: A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

A major theme in *The Diviners* is the process of mythmaking, and in particular, the application of this process to the needs of the Canadian imagination. This section will highlight Laurence's concern with the past and also show that she attaches importance to myth making, an exercise that helps us to understand our pasts.

Morag realises that "everyone is constantly changing their own past." Morag's personal growth illustrates the need to come to terms with one's ancestors, to understand their experience in order to be released from its bondage. Christie introduces Morag to the ballads of Ossians in Galeia as an antidote to the cultural imperialism of Wordsworths' "Daffodils". Ossian stimulates Morag so that she is able to imagine Piper Gunn's woman building a chariot with materials and motifs drawn from the Canadian prairies: her imagination has been repatriated. Folk literature becomes myth when it is deeply accepted by an individual as personally relevant (ibid). It then assumes power to shape that individual's identity.

In the past Laurence has given mythic dimensions to otherwise rather sketchy characters by suggesting that their relationships to the protagonist re-enact a biblical situation. Thus *the Stone Angel's* Hagar (like the biblical Hagar) lives in exile from her husband Bram (Abram), and her son John, like Ishmael, is also an outcast. In *A Jest of God* Laurence developed the parallels between Nick Kaslik and the biblical Jacob, not only in his relationship to Rachel

(who, like her biblical namesake, demands of him, "Give me my children"), but also in his relationship to his twin brother Steve, the brother who (like Esau), was disinherited.

In *The Diviners*, Laurence takes the essential elements in these myths: exile and dispossession, and reworks them in Canadian terms. These experiences are not limited to Canadian: Brooke has lost his boyhood India forever, and Dan McRaith, the Scotsman, knows no Gaelic. But Brooke retains his language; he still has an identity as an Englishman, and McRaith retains the land, journeying back to Crombruch to renew his creative powers. The Canadian characters have lost both their languages: [Gaelic was] just a lot of garbled sounds to her. Yet she played the records often, as though if she listened to it enough, she would finally pierce the barrier of that ancient speech....

Jules, with two languages lost, retaining only the broken fragments of both French and Cree, and yet speaking English as though forever it must be a foreign tongue to him and their land:

I'd like at some point to go to Scotland [writer Morag to her friend Ella] where my people come from.....it haunts me, I guess.

The Metis, once lords of the prairies, were now refused burial space in their own land.

Morag's life is an illustration of what will and will not heal the pain of these losses. Morag loves, in turn, three men: the Englishman, Brooke Skelton; the Scot, Dan McRaith, and the Metis, Jules Tonnerre. Only the relationship with Jules bears fruit, a child who carries the blood of the two people who possessed the land before them. Brooke represents the cultural inheritance that attracts many Canadians to England ("I guess there's something about London, as a kind of centre of writing", says Morag), but makes them feel that their own country is inferior. Dan McRaith represents the country from which Morag's ancestors, too long ago for her to know their names, set out for Canada. But the value of these cultures for her, Morag comes to realize, is mystic and not literal.

The Diviners contains 3 sets of myths: Christie's tales of the Highlanders and of Morag's father in World War I, Jules Tonnerre's tales and songs and the adult Morag's imaginary reconstruction of Catherine Parr Traill. Christie Logan, Morag's guardian, is the first spinner

of tales in the novel, and his stories of Piper Gunn, Morag's mythic ancestor, are set both typographically and stylistically from the rest of the text. Although Christie is always a colourful speaker, the language in the tales has an archaic sonority:

Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn:

It was in the old days, a long time ago, after the clans were broken and scattered at the battle on the moors, and dead men thrown into the long graves there, and no heather grew on those places, never again, for it was dark places they had become and places of mourning.

Although as Morag enters adolescence, she begins to correct Christie's storytelling from her history books, she later gives up the chance to enter Sutherland, the home of her ancestors, saying to Dan.

"It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality....And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what I had to learn there....I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."

"What is then?"

"Christie's real country. Where I was born."

That is Christie's tales were valuable to Morag as myth, and not as history.

Jules Tonnerre, Morag's lover, is also a teller of tales, about his Metis ancestors, Rider Tonnerre and Old Jules. As with Christie's tales, the point is made that their value does not lie in historical accuracy.

Rider was called Prince of the Braves, Skinner said [writes Morag to Ella], and his rifle was named La Petite. In factuality (if that isn't a word it should be), those names pertained to Gabriel Dumont, Riel's lieutenant in Saskatchewan, much later on.

Jules' stories stand even farther apart from the text than Christie's. After Morag first goes to bed with Jules, they have a brief conversation about his family as he walks her home.

Although we are inclined to assume that Jules told Morag his stories then, they are grouped together, each with a title, several pages later.

When Morag incorporates these tales as well as Christie's into her mythology, she has come to terms with what Margaret Atwood calls the "ambiguity" of Canadian history, for in Christie's tales Riel is a villain, and in Jules' he is a hero. "Canadians," writes Atwood, "don't know which side they're on." So, the proper response is Morag's when in relating these stories to her small daughter Pique, she takes neither side.

The gift of myth making, like the gift of divining, is "finally withdrawn to be given to someone else." There comes a day when the adult Morag requests a story about Piper Gunn and Christie is unable to remember one; when Jules, whose myths had reached a further stage of refinement when he recast them as folk songs, develops throat cancer and sings no more. But Pique is also a folk singer and will continue the myth.

At the end of the novel, Pique, whose restless search for identity has, as the time scheme of the novel allows us to see, paralleled Morag's own, is making a journey back to her father's people, with her grandfather's knife as a talisman. But she also wants to carry a Scottish plaid pin of her mother's, and Morag assures her that, when she is "gathered to her ancestors, "Pique may have it as well." And then, symbolically, Pique will recover the birthright that Lazarus Tonnerre and John Shipley, the original possessors of the knife and the pin, and both exiles in their own land, had traded away.

Behind Jules, his poverty and despair, stands Rider Tonnerre. The settling of the Canadian West and the founding of Manawaka required the dispossession of the Metis, symbolized for Morag by the fire that destroyed the Tonnerre home. Behind Christie and his bitter self-reproach stands Piper Gunn. He belongs to another tale of dispossession in which the Scots were driven from their homes to Canada by the Duchess of Sutherland. Dan McRaith's painting of their burning crofts provides Morag with a corresponding symbol. Similarly, Christie's war cry, "The Ridge of Tears," at first seems just another of his colourful oddities; but she gradually realizes that it expresses the pathos of human fate. She feels herself

mysteriously caught up in history and fate when she and Jules exchange gifts. He gives her a plaid pin, which had originally belonged to Hagar in *The Stone Angel*; she gives him a knife, marked with the letter T, which had belonged to Lazarus Tonnerre. As these items pass back and forth between the Curries, Shipleys, Tonnerre, and Gunns. They stitch together the ancestral pasts in a common fate.

As these items change hands, they become relics offering the blessing of the past. They become signs of the deepest past of all, in which opposing individual, families, and tribes are reconciled through the ancient stories and places that they share. "Beyond your great-grandparents," Laurence explains "...the ancestors become everybody's ancestor's". Eventually the long lines of western Canadian families inhabit a common past, which, from the vantage of the present, appears legendary rather than historical. At this point, "their past has misted into myth". The mythical past is history reviewed by the imagination. Just as Morag half recalls and half creates her own past, and the resulting invented memories are true for her, so, through a "collective cultural memory",⁴⁰ we mythicize history and give it the passionate truth of art. It is a marvelous coincidence that pin and knife should find their way into Morag's and Jule's hands, but the relics are signs of a coincidence and marvel of another kind. The histories of their antagonistic families coincide by exhibiting the same epic pattern, following the parallel lives of Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre, both real people transmuted into legendary heroes. Their marvelous tales gain the permanence of art in Morag's novel and Jule's songs.

We could conclude this section by saying that beyond the rebukes and disputes of time lies a shared, mythical timelessness, which, in all her novels, Laurence invokes through literary and Biblical allusions. Myths are timeless in the sense that they are universal, endlessly repeating the human drama of origins, banishment, and homecoming.

4.4 THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

Laurence tells us that the search for a national identity should first begin with a search for a personal identity. The four heroines in the Manawaka works that I have already discussed are engaged in the search for personal identity. However, it is *The Diviners* that Laurence discusses this issue in the political sense of the word. Laurence has provided a way out for the

much elusive Canadian Identity. Tracing and knowing one's origins and coming to terms with the past is a solution to this. Since this theme has been extensively brought out in this novel, I have divided this section into various subsections for the purpose of clarity. All the sub themes discussed here are interrelated and are ultimately connected to the theme of national identity

4.4.1. LAURENCE'S COMMENT ON THE ENGLISH TRADITION, TREATMENT OF GENDER

This section will show that in *The Diviners*, Laurence works against wider and older traditions reworking epic quest and Shakespearean romance in a revision of a central myth of Canadian culture, that of the 'fortunate fall', and proposing an alternative conception of 'paradise' and 'the artist'. Laurence also defines herself against Modernists James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, drawing on *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* for her portrait of the artist as a young woman, and on *The Wasteland* for its concern with the uses of the past.

The Diviners also has affinities with feminist quest novels published in the early 1970's. These novels follow a pattern: Woman seeks 'freedom' from conventional roles, looks to her past for answers about the present, speculates upon the cultural and literary tradition that has formed her, and seeks a plot different from the marriage or death that are her customary ends.

Morag Gunn uses her fiction to make her way in the world and to make sense of the world: Morag says, 'If I hadn't been a writer I'd have been a first class mess.' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.4) Morag is also a reader, a reader of Shakespeare, Milton and Donne. Thus we see that unlike most women, Morag reads- and Laurence writes against- works which centre on male figures, concern male experience and are at the heart of a male-defined cannon. *The Tempest* with its one bland and conventional female character,²⁹ and *Portrait* which registers women only as idealisations or sexual objects seem odd and unlikely models for the development of a strong female protagonist. The epic quest, which concerns a young man's search for his father as part of his search for himself, seems similarly inapplicable; for since women 'must assume their husband's name' as well as their husband's home, and 'identification with the father can only interfere with development.'³⁰

. But Laurence shows Morag engaged in a question for the father and shows her maturing from an identification with 'Prospero's Child' into the power of Prospero himself.³¹ In the course of this section, we shall see that, far from accepting the values of these works, Laurence critiques them: her artist as 'diviner' suggests an alternative to Joyce's 'artificer' and her adaptation of epic quest and 'fortunate fall' redefines 'paradise' as a process, 'the doing of the thing' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.452), rather than something tangibly and finally won.

For her portrait of the artist as a young woman, Laurence draws on Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This section is an attempt to prove that by the re-writing of canonical texts which expose the phallogocentrism of the tradition by displacing the hero, Laurence also makes a statement about the conception of Art, Artist and Life itself that emerges from *The Diviners*. The connection to *The Tempest* is even more glaring in Morag's latest novel *Prospero's Child*. This fable has implications within the authoritarian structure of the family and also has resonances in the political sphere, nationalist liberation struggles against colonialism.³²

There are similarities between Laurence's Morag of *The Diviners* and Joyce's Stephen of *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*. Joyce's Stephen, the exemplar of the 'monstrously isolated, monstrously narcissistic, pedestalled paragon' dominates the modernist imagination. Both Laurence and Joyce suggest that selfishness is a necessary part of the development of self which is required of an artist, and the name 'Gunn' suggests Laurence's ambivalence toward these strengths. Both Morag and Stephen are determined to escape the provincial communities that have shaped them. Morag develops defences like his, turns her back on the claims of others, refusing- as he does- to return home except for a funeral (Prin's) and death. (Christie's). But the young woman artist, Morag, faces greater difficulties, though she emerges stronger on account of them. She also experiences a more radical alienation from self, suffering the self-division and self-doubt which are part of growing up female and which leave her more vulnerable. Morag can never be as ruthless as Stephen can because she forms a tie of a sort that Stephen never does, to a child. In her relation to Pique she must reconcile the conflicting claims of the other and self, of being a mother and an artist - the conflict at the heart of the female *Kunstlelroman*³³

The earliest memories of Morag and Stephen show young minds acquiring knowledge through sense impressions and language. Both are nearsighted children who develop interest in language to compensate for their visual handicaps. But whereas near-sightedness is a little more than a physical inconvenience for Stephen, it strikes to the heart of Morag's self-esteem. Though she is not particularly vain Morag knows that 'wearing glasses' means a girl's life is over'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p 123) Stephen and Morag learn similar ways of defending themselves against the authority of elders and the pressure of peers: they learn ways of concealing their intelligence and never to 'apologize'. Whereas Stephen turns his sense of difference into a conviction of his own superiority, Morag remains more dependent on the opinions of others: 'work like hell... Although not letting on to the kids... (they) would be dead set against you'(*THE DIVINERS*, p.120). Though for both education is the means of escaping stifling circumstances, Morag remains divided between impulses to conform and to rebel and is less certain of her course. And whereas girls exist for Stephen only as objects to be idealised or lusted after, boys are to Morag a constant presence and threat.

Boys are generally mean. Those girls who have a hope of pleasing them, try. Those who haven't a hope, either stay out of their way or else act very tough and try to make fun of them first' (*THE DIVINERS*. p.68).

Although both Stephen and Morag find their ways out of town, Morag, like Laurence, realises the value of what she has left behind. She leaves only to realise that she has taken the town with her, that 'the town inhabits you' (*THE DIVINERS*. p.227); 'the whole town was inside my head, for as long as I live'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.353) However, it is *The Diviners* more than *The Portrait* that gives a clear and generous rendering of the community (Manawaka) that the protagonist flees and takes with him.

The difference in their conception of artist is suggested by the figure each writer uses to symbolise the artist. Stephen's conception of the artist is Dedalus, the 'artificer' who escaped the labyrinth of the Minotaur and constructed a means of flight, a symbol of the art he aspires to in order to escape the Ireland he despises, Morag develops the skills of a diviner - insight or

intuition or 'some other kind of sight' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.4) - in order to 'fathom' what goes on in people's mind. Since water is a traditional symbol for consciousness, 'divining' is an apt symbol for what Morag tries to do in writing: to fathom people and the processes that make them what they are. Whereas Stephen is concerned with developing escape arts that will allow him to flee Dublin and become a 'creator' with power like God's, Morag is concerned with developing qualities of insight and understanding that will enable her to understand Manawaka and to make its people live.

The Diviners is thus –besides other things- an attempt to overthrow the English tradition . It is also one way of ridding Canadians of their English colonial past.

4.4.2. COLONIALISM: SHAKESPEARE AND MILTON

In this section we shall see that *The Diviners* revises Milton's *Paradise Lost* to show Eve making her way through the world once the gates of paradise have been closed behind her. It rewrites Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to attack the possessive paternalism of the tyrannical father on behalf of independent and active daughters who, like Miranda with Caliban, have a high linguistic competence and can become facilitators of exchange among different cultures so shaping a new world through dialogue, not power and magic.

Laurence tells us that finding an identity is opening up the Self to the Other. Besides being his last play, *The Tempest* is also Shakespeare's version of the 'fortunate fall': Prospero, whose name means 'I make to prosper', recreates a world, restores what is lost, restores the creatures of the world to themselves. In both, Shakespeare's play and Laurence's novel, art is the means of redemption and art is compared to magic; and in both works, the future is represented by a daughter. But Laurence's revisions empower the female, replacing the patriarchal with a matriarchal line. Whereas in *The Tempest*, Prospero's daughter Miranda is merely 'chaste, silent, and obedient', a receptacle for the future. In *The Diviners*, Pique is an artist in her own right: power passes from father (or step-father) to daughter and thence to daughter, through a female line, to a female 'inheritor'.

Laurence grafts *Tempest* allusions on to a pattern of loss and recovery which is her version of the fortunate fall, and suggests in her reworkings a sense like Shakespeare's and Milton's that redemption involves the loss of fragile innocence and a recreation from painful experience, and that this process requires faith. And that Laurence no more values a 'cloistered virtue' than Milton does is clear from her portrayal of the innocents of this novel, the childish Prin(*THE DIVINERS*, p.17), and Birdie(*THE DIVINERS*, p.373). But Morag's powers are considerably more attenuated than Prospero's, which makes it more difficult for her, since her purposes are not sanctioned by God or a providential plan .

As her English professor husband Brooke represents the authority of the cultural and literary tradition Morag reveres, but as she herself becomes a writer, her authority comes into conflict with his and destroys the marriage. But her writing also becomes a means of regaining the self she has suppressed to be with Brooke, the means of 'regaining paradise'- and the publisher's representative who arrives at the Vancouver boarding house where she takes refuge after leaving Brooke is described as 'angel of the Lord... come to explain how paradise can be regained'(*THE DIVINERS*, p.297). Her writing is also a means of exploring the questions of innocence and experience that she confronts in life. Morag's first novel 'Spear of Innocence' which portrays innocence as damaging (*THE DIVINERS*, p.225), is a repudiation of Brooke's ideal of her; and her second novel, 'Prospero's Child', similarly repudiates the person she was in the marriage, the child-wife in awe of male authority. Morag describes this novel to a friend, as having certain parallels with *The Tempest*, 'which may be presumptuous' but is ' the form the thing seems to demand':

It is called 'Prospero's Child', she being the young woman who marries His Excellency, the Governor of some island in some ocean very far South, and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to become her own person. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.330)

Morag allies herself definitively with her past and her 'darkness' when she flees Brooke and becomes pregnant by Jules, a half-breed who, like herself, grew up on the margins of

Manawaka society, and who represents not only 'her immediate Manawaka past, but the historical Indian and French roots of Canada' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.60). Bearing his child, a daughter who has the dark skin of the Metis, Morag burns her bridges back to the respectable world. Her departure from the 'doll's house' occurs in the middle rather than at the end of her story, with the rest of the novel 'a writing beyond' this ending. In presenting her protagonist a choice between two men, Laurence evokes what Jean E. Kennard terms the 'two suitor convention', according to which the growth of a woman is marked by her choice of the right suitor over the wrong suitor, the right suitor embodying the goals the protagonist aspires to. In the contemporary version of this, the husband has become the "wrong" suitor, the representative of patriarchal restrictions; the lover represents freedom.³⁴ But Laurence revokes this convention only to subvert it, for Jules does not provide a resolution or even a resting place. Having outgrown the role of child-wife Morag must become an adult herself: 'If she is to have a home she must create it.' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.291) The association of the home she makes, the farm at McConnell's Landing, with 'some kind of garden' (*THE DIVINERS*, p'406) suggests that the creation of home is the means of regaining paradise; though since 'the state of original grace ended a long time ago' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 196), this paradise is a mere approximation- or 'shadow'- of Eden (Shadow of Eden is the title of one of Morag's novels). And that this home is near a small town like the one she fled and represents a return to a place which is 'different, but...the same' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.354) suggests that regaining paradise requires coming to terms with the past. The home Morag makes for herself and her daughter is 'different' from her Edenic childhood and the false haven of her marriage: it is a new order wrested from adult experiences and pain.

While Miranda teaches Caliban to speak and maintain hierarchy, European culture being inculcated in the aborigine, Morag listens to the natives' talking and learns from them.

As artist ordering her new island paradise at her own disposition, Morag is repeating the gestures of that great fabulist Prospero. To the epic quest for a new world home with its spiritual overtones, is added the plot of the pastoral romance with its escape from city to 'green world' outside social convention where a new order may be created.³⁵ However, Laurence's Miranda leaves the Manawaka she has been living with to start a life as a modern

bard. Her achievements no longer come through the agency of a man but by her own efforts. In this, Laurence revises the heroines' plot, staple of the novel since the 18th century³⁶, to describe the marriage plot, concerned with marriageship, (the heroines being chosen in marriage by the hero), in which the heroine gains her power by being chosen as wife of the hero. Laurence's new order is an order of one in which the 'Shero' makes the choice and works hard for her own success. Laurence like Shakespeare is concerned with the question of the illusion of art. Morag's actors, like Shakespeare's are 'all spirits' melting 'into thin' air. Hers, too, is an 'insubstantial pageant', a vanishing 'vision'.³⁷ Morag differs from Prospero in that she is suspicious of the way the words automatically write themselves on the page (*THE DIVINERS*, p.330). Morag has magic too - her power is the word. But no, only occasionally (*THE DIVINERS*, p.4). She too, has an Ariel in the person of Catherine Parr Traill. "So farewell, sweet Saint" - henceforth, I summon you not (*THE DIVINERS*, p.332). *The Diviners'* connection to *The Tempest* is made explicit when Morag Gunn talks about her latest novel in a letter to her friend, Ella.

Its done in a semi-allegorical form, and also it has certain parallels with *The Tempest* It's called 'Prospero's Child,' she being the young woman who married His Excellency, the Governor of some Island in some ocean, very far south and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to 'become her own person'. It's as much the story of H.E. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.270)

Here Morag abandons the role of Prospero to Brooke, taking on the role of Miranda. Through her involvement with Caliban, i.e. Jules Tonnerre, a relationship grounded in the activities of language, the creation of novels and songs, Morag develops her resistance to Prospero's power and plots. The critique of patriarchal authority is effected through a contrast between these two male figures. Morag's quest is achieved when she practises abnegation with her daughter. Pique is free to become her own person. Finding identity paradoxically comes in opening up the Self to the Other.

The above mentioned ideas of finding an identity, of freeing oneself from the colonial past, first germinated in Laurence's mind on reading Mannoni's work. Laurence was tremendously influenced by his work.

4.4.2.1. THE INFLUENCE OF MANNONI'S WORK ON LAURENCE'S

In the introductory chapters of this thesis, I have dealt in detail with the various African influences which can be traced in Laurence's fiction. Octave Mannoni's work, in particular has helped Laurence shape her last novel *The Diviners*. Laurence's interpretation of the relationship of Prospero and Caliban has been filtered through her reading and misreading of Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*:³⁸ a study of dependency relationships of master and slave in the context of imperialism. Here Brooke Skelton, is son of British colonial officer in India. When the Empire broke up there, he brought a form of cultural imperialism - the Great Tradition - into Canadian Universities, an indoctrination, as Morag learns that can stifle any indigenous expression. Caliban is played by a North American Indian. Through this clash of cultures Laurence stages her version of the *Battle of the Books* of the European centred cultural tradition which exerts its hegemony in Canada and valorises high culture, letters over an indigenous oral culture. According to Mannoni, to revolt against this system is not sufficient: a conceptual change must take place in a radical rethinking of the concept of universalism used to attack racism.

The question then is what will human beings do with differences? Confronting this question creatively, rather than hiding behind the traditional liberal screen of universal sameness will lead, Mannoni suggests to the 'decolonization of the self'³⁹ to the split subject continually oscillating between sameness and difference, self and other, the subject in process. It is the emergence of the creative response to the question of difference - political, racial, sexual, as well as class differences - which is Laurence's subject in *The Diviners*.

Thus, in slamming the door on Brooke Skelton, in combining the role of Miranda and her empathy for the Other, Morag/Laurence rewrites the canonical story. Her version involves the abdication of absolute authority the abandonment of identity and sameness, the undercutting

of magical powers of the word, in order to allow for the play of differences, to permit voices and other knowledge to circulate. When H.E is removed from power, they speak out.

4.4.3. THE IMAGE OF EUROPE IN *THE DIVINERS*

My primary concern in this section is with the image of Europe in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and to explore aspects of the Celtic legacy in Canada. But I should like to begin by attempting to place her work within this border context of genealogical investigation in contemporary Canadian writing.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the upsurge of nationalism that characterises Canadian writing is particularly manifest in a quest for origins, an attempt to identify the distinctive specificity of Canadian culture by employing discourses of the past to examine the ancestral heritage. This process of exploration takes various forms, most of which are based on historiographical or archaeological models of investigation. Thus Rudy Wiebe, in *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *The Scorched Wood People* (1977), redefines the parameters of the Western Canadian experience by upending received version of Prairie history, which have largely been constructed by outsiders to the region, and replacing them with a version which emanates from Western sources, while Margaret Atwood and Robert Kroetsch have rejected the model of history entirely preferring an approach that is more appropriately viewed as archaeological. In *Surfacing* (1972), Atwood's unnamed protagonist's quest for identity involves laying bare her personal past and is enacted through her search for her missing father, whom she comes to view as 'an archaeological problem'.⁴⁰ Here are numerous references to prehistoric animal life, which is linked to her parents and appears to represent a conception of a unitary 'natural' self existing before the divisions occasioned by the pressures of culture and civilisation beginning a process of fragmentation. For example, her reference to her parents as 'mammoths frozen in a glacier'⁴¹ her saying they are 'from another age, prehistoric ... remote as Eskimoes or mastodons' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 144), and her likening of a blue heron to a pterodactyl (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 63). Gradually the protagonist unearths her own personal origins and aspects of the national past, until she arrives at a point where she is presented as psychologically whole again and the various binary

division, which the text sees as typifying contemporary Canadian society, have been broken down.⁴² Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975) is more overtly archaeological in that it actually details the progress of an expedition to uncover dinosaur bones, while at the same time using this literal digging-up as a paradigm for a quest for representatives of two ancient cultures, the Chinese and the Amerindian.

The historical and archaeological models are by no means the only ones employed in this quest for origins. Myths of personal and family origins provide another obvious focus for such investigation, with genealogy, another discourse of the past, providing the model for this kind of search, and the tracing of individual ancestry and the construction of family trees assuming representative significance as the ancestors being traced are located as archetypal figures in the Canadian consciousness.

Recent Canadian writing frequently invokes ancestor figures in this attempt to reassess the national past. Al Purdy, Eli Mandel and George Bowering have all written poems about grandfathers.⁴³ The grandfather figure emerges as a larger than life creation who challenges the conventional conception of Canada's Victorian past as stuffy and Presbyterian. Purdy, in poems like 'The Country North of Belleville'⁴⁴ and Atwood, in poems like 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer',⁴⁵ have taken the settler-past as a reference-point and attempted to show how the formation of Canadian psychologies can be related to the physical environment of Canada. More specifically still, numerous writers in the contemporary period have looked back to the settler-past to find literary precursors. Thus Atwood turns to Susanna Moodie,⁴⁶ and Kroetsch invokes Frederick Philip Grove,⁴⁷ while Margaret Laurence, in *The Diviners* summons up the ghost of Catharine Parr Traill, Mrs Moodie's sister and author of the *Canadian Settler's Guide*, as an ancestor figure with whom her protagonist Morag Gunn can engage in dialogues. In each case the delving back into a bygone age light suggests a purely retrospective perspective, but the response to the past is very much a current issue, since it provides a platform for a reassessment of Canadian identity in the present. The genealogical paradigm is employed in a dynamic rather than a static way; instead of simply asserting the existence of 'reality' of a supposedly pre-existing line of inheritance, it transforms existing notions of identity and essays the construction of new one.

This is the context out of which *The Diviners* is written. Laurence's novel is less obviously a post-modernist fiction, but with its constant stress on the mechanics of writing its polyphonic narrative method and its multiple representations of versions of Canadian cultural identity which deviate from Eastern orthodoxies as to what constitutes Canadianness, it is equally metafictional. And it is equally concerned with transforming notions of ancestry by using the genealogical paradigm. In both texts there is an absorption with myths of place in which 'Europe' figures prominently.

4.4.4. SEARCH FOR ANCESTORS AND THE PAST

According to Laurence the search for one's identity should begin with a search for one's roots, one's past. In the course of this study we have already noted that this is one theme that Laurence is most preoccupied with. Laurence tells us that the only way to freedom is by identifying one's past. Much has been said about ancestors and the importance of the past in this chapter. This section tries to give a more complete understanding of the theme of national identity and its relevance to the concept of the past.

In *The Diviners* 'Europe' mainly takes the form of Morag's Scottish origins. As an orphan who feels she has 'come from nowhere', (*The Diviners*, p. 289) Morag may be seen as a typically Canadian protagonist. She feels she has 'no past' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 257), but paradoxically constantly searches for one. As she gets older, she becomes increasingly absorbed by images of the settler-past and in the present of the novel, the moment in which she is writing – and implicitly involving herself in another discourse of the past, autobiography – she sees herself as 'caught between the old pioneers and the new' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 170), between the Catharine Parr Traills of the original settler-past and exponents of a new variation of this experience, the counter-culture generation who are returning to the land who are represented in the text by A-Okay and Maudie Smith.

Each of these elements is important in Morag's exploration of her own past and that of Western Canada. The image of Europe occupies a particularly complex position within this process of exploration since, while on the one hand there is the suggestion of an essentially transplanted culture, Morag's Scots origins also represent something of an alternative to the received 'European' constructions of Canadian identity which Morag is taught. She learns to sing 'Oh Canada' and 'The Maple Leaf Forever' and particularly loves the latter song, singing it 'with all her guts' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 70) and taking particular cognisance of the lines in which the thistle, the shamrock and the rose – the various strands of British cultural identity – are seen as entwining the maple leaf. So, on this level, Scottish culture is allowed a central place within the Canadian mosaic, while in the same section of the novel the Metis are seen as being beyond the social pale.

Elsewhere, however, the suggestion is that English and Scottish cultural traditions are poles apart and the Celtic world finds no place in the Canadian myth. Thus, when Christie finds Morag learning Wordsworth's 'Daffodils',⁴⁸ he opposes it with James MacPherson's Ossian poems, showing her the Gaelic text and lamenting that he cannot read the language himself, while castigating the English for not admitting the authenticity of the Ossian verse. More generally, his tales of Piper Gunn present an alternative to school learning in the sense that they are an expression of a vibrant oral storytelling tradition. In this respect Scottish culture is seen as having an affinity with the Metis culture in that both are presented as having been marginalised by mainstream Canadian Establishment values. Christie's tale of Piper Gunn are paralleled by Jules's tales of Rider Tonnerre, a mythological ancestral figure from the Metis past. This connection is confirmed by a number of thematic correspondences, of which dispossession is perhaps the most significant. The dispossession of the Metis is conveyed in various ways: on the historical and public level, in comments on the fate of Louis Riel and the status of rebel and traitor accorded to him in official version of Canadian history; on a more personal level, in the denial of a burial place in the town cemetery to Jules's father Lazarus, which leads Morag to comment: 'The Metis, once lords of the Prairies. Now refused burial space in their own lands'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 268) The dispossession of the Scots is most obviously seen in the way the text portrays the events which led many of them to migrate to Canada, the Highland Clearances. These form the starting point for Christie's tales about

Piper Gunn and the theme of dispossession is explicitly underscored when Morag refers to one of the paintings of Dan McRaith, her Scottish lover while she is in London, by the title 'The Dispossessed'.

Not surprisingly, then, Morag's background as an orphan, her early awareness of the repression of aspects of Scottish and Metis culture and her absorption as a writer with the way language constructs identity, an important motif from the opening pages of the novel onwards, all create the desire to explore her ancestry. The genealogical quest comes to a climax when she decides to go to Britain and it continues to be important in the final sections of the text, which describe her life after her return from Britain.

She goes to Britain, partly attracted to London as 'a centre of writing' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 331) and partly to visit Sutherland, the area of Scotland from which her ancestors came, though she is unsure what she may 'learn' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 331) from this. She thinks of this journey as a 'pilgrimage'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 369) Once in Britain, she procrastinates over going to Scotland and eventually when she does go with Dan McRaith, her decision to do so is motivated as much by desire to see what his family is like as to visit Sutherland. She stops short of her goal, unable to give a precise reason for so doing, but saying it has something 'to do with Christie' and concluding, 'The myths are my reality' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 390). So the ancestral homeland is seen to be important as a mythic notion, a mental construct rather than an actual geographical location and the coming to terms with this mythic part of oneself becomes more crucial than any actual completion of the roots journey. She leaves Scotland saying, 'It's a deep land here... but it's not mine except a long, long way back' (*THE DIVINERS*, pp. 390-1). She decided that her home is 'Christie's real country. Where I was born' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 391) and when, shortly afterwards, she learns that he is seriously ill, she decides she is going 'home'. 'Home', then, comes to signify the place of one's Canadian origins, in this case the small prairie town of Manawaka, not the European place from which one's ancestors came. And when Morag tells tales to her daughter Pique, they are tales about Christie, not Piper Gunn. She too values the oral tradition, but creates her own version of it and it is a distinctively Canadian one.

So the legacy of the Scottish experience is explored and rejected on a literal level, but its mythic significance is still valued and continues to inform the remainder of the novel after Morag's return to Canada. The final sections of *The Diviners* are concerned with a fusion of Scottish and Metis heritages, most obviously in the way in which Pique, Morag's daughter by Jules, attempts to embrace both sides of her ancestry. Significantly, Morag's marriage to the English Brooke has been a sterile one, but she has a child by Jules. The text suggests the union of Scottish and Metis strands holds out the possibility of a new multi-cultural identity for Canada in which English origins will no longer play a major role.

4.4.4.1. SCOTLAND

In the touchstone passage in Canadian writing',⁴⁹ Morag Gunn, still looking for a centre of origination, goes to Scotland, wondering where she might find a sense of her true 'home'. This is where I shall begin my exploration of this subject again connected to the subject of national identity, a search for the past.

'Away over there is Sutherland, Morag Dhu, where your people came from. When do you want to drive there?' Morag considers. 'I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't after all'. Why would that be?' 'The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here.' What is that?' 'It's a deep land here all right,' Morag says. 'But it's not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not.' 'What is, then?' 'Christie's real country. Where I was born.' McRaith holds her hand inside his greatcoat pocket. Around them the children sprint and whirl.⁵⁰

Of that decisive moment of her subsequent repudiation and identification within and against Scotland, Kroetsch comments: 'Morag Gunn is there but she isn't there, she isn't there but she's there.'⁵¹ It becomes interesting, then, to consider the nature of the relationship between Laurence's elaborate registration of Scottish reference and allusion and this final mark of recognition and reorientation. But before we do so, it is worth reminding ourselves that such

figurings of Scottish, or more accurately Highland, antecedent in process of self-definition is far from being solely a Canadian phenomenon. George Orwell recalls how, at this appalling preparatory school, his younger self was subjected to a carefully nurtured rich man's cult of Scotland: Ostensibly we were supposed to admire the Scots because they were 'grim' and 'dour' ('Stern' was perhaps the key word), and irresistible on the field of battle.⁵² More significantly, the face which Scotland itself turns to the rest of the world is frequently a Highland face. Given the ethnic and geographic composition of Scotland, it is quite extraordinary that a Scottish identity is more often than not invoked in terms of Highland ways and Highland virtues. And yet 'the history of Scotland since the Reformation reads in many ways as a sustained confrontation of the Highlands and the Lowlands'.⁵³ While it may be true that every country has its minorities, its lost opportunities and its disappearing traditions, it is also undeniable that few cases match the ways in which the Scottish imagination is so dominated by the figure of the Highlander. From her North American perspective, Laurence challenges this dominance, imagining a Canadian processual memory, first, in terms of the Highland myth, and then in terms of a more immediate and domestic imaginative archaeology.

Some characteristics of these Highlands extensions into Laurence's Canadian territory are made explicit in her classic essay 'Road from the Isles'.

No one could ever tell me whether my family had been Lowlanders or Highlanders, because no-one in the prairie town where I grew up seemed very certain exactly where that important dividing line came on the map of Scotland. I decided therefore that my people had come from the highlands. In fact they had not ... Whatever of the Old Country had filtered down to me could roughly be described as Mock Scots. The Scotland I had envisaged as a child had been a fantasy....⁵⁴ This experience is in some sense as true for the home-dwelling Scot as it is for the emigrant diaspora. Walter Scott himself, in a series of articles of the *Quarterly Review* was compelled to acknowledge the spuriousness of the historical basis claimed for the Scottish origination myth:

[Scotland's] inhabitants believed themselves, and by dint of assertion persuaded others to believe them to be one of the most ancient nations in the world... This error was no mere transitory ebullition of vanity, but maintained and fostered by reference to diverse respectable tissues entitled *Histories of Scotland*.⁵⁵ The more recent creation of an independent Highland tradition, in which Scott was to play an important role, and the imposition upon the whole Scottish nation of the new tradition, with its outward show of badges and the related paraphernalia of a tartan gallimaufry, was the work of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

We could conclude by saying that Laurence's prolonged evocation of the traditional apparatus of the Scottish romance of origins was itself triggered by a radical act of existential decentring. 'I always knew', she wrote in 1970, 'that one day I would have to stop writing about Africa and go back to my own people, my own place of beginnings'.⁵⁶ In a retrospective prefatory note to 'Road From the Isles' she adds the reflection", 'I came to a greater understanding of the Scot's clan system through a certain amount of knowledge of the tribal system in Africa. In Margaret Laurence's transatlantic intervention we witness a successful challenge to, and to a greater or lesser degree, represent the Victorian past that has exercised such an important influence on the shaping of modern Canada, and in each case the escape from, the bondage of a historicism in which Canadians became the validation of somebody else's history. Laurence's historical fiction looks, rather, to an act of severance and to a literary declaration of Canadian independence.⁵⁷

4.5. THE CREATION OF PIQUE: AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS DISCUSSED IN *THE DIVINERS*

Pique, Morag's child, is the child of Canada's founding races and symbolizes Canada's future. Challenges for a new generation of women are also suggested through her. Pique is sometimes sentimentalized. Her search for self and identity seems narcissistic at times and is in fact symbolic of Canada's search for identity. Pique's restlessness reflects contemporary problems like ecology and environment.

Morag's conviction that conditions for her daughter's generation are infinitely more difficult than they were for herself is convincing:

“When I was her age, beer was thought to be major danger. Beer! because it might lead to getting pregnant. Good god, Royland... The word seems full of more hazards now. Doom all around (*THE DIVINERS*, p.22).

Laurence's statement that Neepawa was “Beben writ small, but with the same ink”, or Hagar's that the plagues go on from one generation to another is close to the vision found throughout the Manawaka cycle.

Pique's restlessness reflects contemporary social problems. Morag links it with threats to the environment from pollution and other man-made horrors: “No wonder the kids felt themselves to be children of the apocalypse” (*THE DIVINERS*, p.4). River-slaying now appears to Morag's imagination as a crime worse than murder. Pique, who lacks the ambition Jules noted in Morag, mocks her mother : “Do. do. Always that. Do I have to do anything? Don't worry I'll get a job” (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 195). Her freedom is a catalyst for the repressed anger of solid citizens, who resent her life style. Pique feels their anger, when she hitch hikes with a guitar. In Ontario , she has been taunted for having Indian blood, and for having a mother who fails to fit a conventional social slot. The old patterns recur, Morag thinks. She remembers similar humiliations and wishes she could spare Pique.

Like the river, Pique is drawn in two directions. She inherits two mythologies. Her ancestors, represented by Jules's songs and by Christie's tales as retold by Morag, contain her future and her past. Music is the medium for Pique's generation. She treasures the Metis ballads from her father and writes one of her own that begins with “There's a Valley holds my name”.

She was named after Jules sister Piquette, who dies in the shack fire. At the novel's end, Pique intends to join the communal life of her Metis uncle's family at Galloping Mountain. This journey “Home”, like the rest of life, is backwards/forwards process. Pique hopes to share in their life and contributes to it for an unknown period. Her generation accepts unstructured

situations. Pique is the child of Canada's founding races (Indians, French, Scots and English) and symbolizes Canada's future.

Thus we see that *The Diviners* spans three generations. The Puritan workethic homilies continue in this fifth book to influence the characters into feelings of guilt or failure which result in remarks addressed to God. Hagar Shipley's Scottish tie pin and motto "Gainsay who Dare", which she thought were lost in John's trade to a Tonnerre, now get valued by Morag. Lazar Tonnerre's hunting knife is restored to his grand-daughter, Pique, who will one day inherit that pin, too, and Christie's book, 'The Clans and Tartans of Scotland'. Pique leaves her mother to settle near the Galloping Mountains to help her Uncle Jacques Tonnerre raise orphan Metis children. Morag attempts to have Pique avoid being hurt in the ways that she had been as a child.

This impossible task leads Morag to conclude that:

"One of the disconcerting aspects of middle age was the realization that most of crises which happened to other people also ultimately happened to you."(*THE DIVINERS*, p.44)

Morag troubled child of two cultures emerges as a budding artist who can create songs and give love. Pique can be seen as a symbolic answer to reconciliation for Canada, which should treasure and preserve what it has.

The Diviners ends on a decidedly optimistic note with Pique accepting her twin ancestry, having found her place in Canada. Morag has an Ontario farm home where friends can visit and yet has enough solitude in which to keep writing. Morag is left, then, in an ideal type of writer's location, similar to Margaret Laurence's own home.

"Tomorrow the weekend will begin, and friends will arrive. We'll talk all day and probably half the night, and that will be good. But for now, I'm content to be alone,

because loneliness is something that doesn't exist here, in this best place of mine.”

58

The novel concludes with Morag ready to 'set down her title', and ready to write the novel, and the links between 'title' as 'claim', deed to property, and 'authorship' - an 'author' is one who gives existence to something, a begetter, father or founder - suggest that making a home is part of gaining authority.

Morag attains an authority which is customarily male and which authorises her to originate - in Laurence's conflation of epic pattern and *Kunstlerroman* - to make 'something new'. By creating Pique Morag has proved that there is hope for individuals in particular and for nations in general. Through this novel she is specifically talking about Canada's future. Laurence concludes that although our present and our future is governed by our past, it is not the dead hand of the past. Survival with hope, grace and dignity is possible.

The Diviners is one of the most criticised works. Novelist Marian Engel, who reviewed *The Diviners* for *Chatelaine*, remembers reading the proofs with the excitement that is generated by a major work... its greatness was there like an object... Unlike the Vanessa MacLeod stories, *The Diviners* is untidy...⁵⁹ Clara Thomas also finds the structure epic in intention and techniques. Laurence's longest, most complicated prose narrative incorporates traditional epic conventions such as stories of heroic battles, lists, heightened descriptions, oral techniques.⁶⁰ The essential unity of technique and vision has been discussed by critics as diverse as Jean-Paul Sartre and Wayne Booth. *The Diviners* illustrates this literary axiom particularly well. The creative vision that underlies the work is located in Laurence's understanding of the way in which humans experience time. Simple-minded notions (such as the one-way flow of time, or the idea that individual pasts consist of clearly verifiable sets of events) are invalidated. In *The Diviners*, the technical brilliance of voice and place, the handling of narrative, and the structuring of human experience are correlatives for the vision: an understanding of time as a living river incarnate in human generations, *a river which flows two ways*.

Although *The Diviners* is Laurence's most political work , it is also her most spiritual one. With this novel , Laurence closes the Manawaka cycle.

NOTES

1. *The Diviners*,
2. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, p. 168
3. Margaret Laurence, quoted in Marci MacDonald, "The Author: All the Hoopla Gets her frazzled", interviews with Margaret Laurence in *The Toronto Star*, 18 May 1974, p.5.
4. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* pp.xi, 63, 235, 285.
5. *ibid.*, p.228 .
6. *ibid.*, p.134.
7. See also M. Ondaatje, *Rat Jelly* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1973), p. 15, 'blood searching in his head without metaphor' for an extension of the image.)
8. Not without its own melodramatic leaning to E. A. Poe's 'The Racen'.
9. See M. McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride* (Toronto: Vanguard, 1951).
10. A blindness evident in some of the residents of Laurence's own area who tried to ban *The Diviners* itself; see Patricia Morley, *Margaret Laurence* (Boston: Twayne, 1981)p. 133.
11. And indeed, in the exchange of the plaid pin and the knife, ties up loose ends in Laurence's Canadian novels.
12. For an illuminating article on another of Laurence's interweaving of 'narrative frames', see S. Vautier, 'Notes on the 'Narrative frames'', see S. Vautier, 'Notes on the Narrative Voice(s) in The Stone Angel', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol. 11, 1981.
13. This counterpointing is well documented in Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), esp. p. 148.
14. John Fowles, "Notes on an Unfinished Novel," *The Novel Today*, Malcolm Bradbury, ed. Glasgow, 1977, p.13.
15. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka world of Margaret Laurence*, p.134.
16. *Journal of Canadian studies* 13, No.3, Fall, 1978, 66.
17. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, p.133

18. Lynette Hunter, consolation and articulation in M. Laurence's *The Diviners* in critical approaches to the fiction of M. Laurence ed. Collin Nicholson UBC Press Vancouver 1990, p. 134.
19. Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence, *The Long Journey Home*, McGill Queen's University Press Canada 1991, p.121.
20. Carolyn Heilburn, *Reinventing Womenhood*, (New York: Norton 1979), p.124.
21. Theo Quayle Dombrowski, 'Word and Fact : Laurence and the problem of language', *Canadian Literature*, vol. 80, spring 1979, pp.50-62.
22. T.S.Eliot, *The Waste Land* and other poems (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958) l.243).
23. Du Plessis in *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.103, 'immersed in human relations', p.97.
24. Margaret Atwood, "Face to Face", *An interview with Margaret Laurence in MacLean's*, May 1974, p. 44.
25. Graeme Gibson, ed., "Margaret Laurence", in *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 189.
26. Audrey Thomas in one such letter in her novella *Munchmeyer, and Prospero on the Island* (New York :Bobbs Merrill, 1971) (Audrey Thomas, 'A Broken Wand?' *Canadian Literature*, vol.62, Autumn 1974, pp. 89-91.
27. *The Canadian settlers' Guide*, 1855.
28. Thomas, "The chariot of Ossian", p.5, 'Tempest, in *The Woman's Part' : Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, (ed.) Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, III : University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp.285-94.
29. see Lorie Jerrell Leininger, *The Miranda Trap : Sexism and Racicism in Shakespeare*.
30. Mary Ann Ferguson, *The Female Novel of Development and the Myth*.
31. 'Study of the Psyche', in Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland(eds.) *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover, N.H., and London; University Press of New England, 1983), p.228.
32. Michel Fabre, Words and the World: *The Diviners* as an exploration of the Book of Life' *Canadian Literature* vol.93, Summer 1982, pp.60-78
33. see Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, pp 84-104.

34. Jean E. Kennard describes the 'two suitor convention' in *Victims of Convention* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), pp.10-11,14. and discusses its contemporary version in 'Convention Coverage', p.79.
35. see Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Pattern in Women's Fiction* (Bloomington, Ind:Indiana Univ. Press, 1981).
36. the term is used by many critics including Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York, 1979)
37. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, iv.i.148-58.
38. A Study of the Psychology of Colonialism , Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban* (New York :Praeger, 1951).
39. Title of Octave Mannoni, *Race* April 1966 rpt in his *Cle's Pour L' imaginaire* 04 "autre scene (Paris Seuil, 1969), pp 290-300.
40. Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (London: Virago, 1979) p. 46.
41. *ibid.*, p. 9.
42. This theme is discussed in the article 'Beyond History: Margaret Atwood's surfacing and Robert Kroetsch's Badlands', in Shirley Chew (ed.), *Re-vision of Canadian Literature* (Leeds: Institute for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, University of Leeds, 1985), pp. 71-87.
43. All three poems are included in Jack David and Robert Lecker (eds), *Canadian Poetry*, Vol. 11 (Toronto: General Paperbacks, and Downville: ECW Press, 1982); Al Purdy, 'Elegy for a Grandfather', pp. 45-6; Eli Mandel, ' " Grandfather's Painting": David Thauberger', pp. 68-9' and George Bowering, 'Grandfather', pp. 154-5.
44. Al Purdy, *Being Alive Poems, 1958-73* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978) pp. 22-3.
45. Margaret Atwood,, *The Animals in That Country* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 36-9.
46. Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970).
47. Robert Kroetsch, 'F. P. Grove: The finding', in *The Stone Hammer Poems* (Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1975), pp. 46-7.
48. A symbol of English cultural imperialism across the Commonwealth. For a discussion of this pattern in Canadian writing, see Diana Brydon, 'Wordsworth's Daffodils: a Recurring Motif in Contemporary Canadian Literature', *Kunapipi*, vol. IV, no.2 (1982).

49. Robert Kroetsch, 'Disunity as Unity: a Canadian Strategy', in C. Nicholson and P. Easingwood (eds), *Canadian Story and History, 1885-1985* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Centre of Canadian Studies, 1985), p.5.
50. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974; rpt. 1982) pp. 390-1. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text.
51. Kroetsch, '*Disunity as Unity*', p. 6.
52. George Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, vol. IV, in *Front of Your Nose, 1945-50* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1970), pp. 409-10.
53. Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 9.
54. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart), p. 159.
55. Sir Walter Scott, *Quarterly Review*, Edinburgh 1829, pp. 120-1.
56. Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p. 3.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
58. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings; Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p.83.
59. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto, 1975), pp.132,169.
60. Marian Engel, "Steps to the mythic: *The Diviners* and *A Bird in the House*", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13; no.3, Fall, 1978, 72,74.

CHAPTER VII

MANAWAKA

CHAPTER VII

MANAWAKA

As mentioned in the preface, Laurence's Canadian fiction is also called the Manawakan fiction. We have already noted that Manawaka, the small prairie town in Manitoba, has emerged through the five books, which have been discussed. The creation of Manawaka- besides being an unique artistic achievement- acquires importance and significance since it provides the textual space for the imaginative revision of Canada's cultural dependencies namely, the search for Canadian Identity (political freedom) and women's search for inner freedom (women's liberation). These are concerns which are shared by many peoples of the world. The notion of Manawaka enabled Laurence to recreate her regional roots. By celebrating her region, she helped us better understand our own.

Through the town of Manawaka, Laurence was able to talk about her country's political and social situation and it is through this fiction that Laurence puts forth the view that the denial of "international" standards of excellence does not mean a denial of the tradition of language and literature, a tradition affirmed by Laurence. It is a refusal to bow to foreign idols, read irrelevant comparisons and criticisms that ignore the conditions and traditions that have helped to create a particular national and regional literature. Laurence fits her female heroines from the Manawaka cycle into her thematic pattern and reemphasizes that freedom and survival are simultaneously social and spiritual states, hence both political and religious themes. Her political development towards a greater self-consciousness of the rights of individuals, nations and groups to possess their heritage and work out their own destiny seems inevitable.

Psychic survival is linked with one's ability to come to terms with the past. The pattern involved the attempt to assimilate the past, partly in order to be freed from it, partly in order to try to understand myself and perhaps those of my generation through seeing where we had come from.¹

According to Laurence, the novelist is by definition, a socio-political being; the writer of serious fiction is inevitably a social historian, because 'our perceptions and therefore our interpretations are formed by the communities in which we grew up.'²

Laurence describes history and fiction as twin disciplines: implicit here is the corollary that the interpretation of history is a political act. Margaret Laurence's Manawaka is a 'modest town of the mind'. Yet certain profound characteristics are observed. First there is the desire to draw near the past and through the workings of memory, to locate it in a familiar place. According to Marco Polo, 'Every time I am describing a city, I am saying something about Venice'.³ Similarly Manawaka contains 'elements of Neepawa' the small prairie town in which Laurence grew up,' especially in some of the descriptions of places, such as the cemetery on the hill or the Wachakwa valley through which ran the small brown river of my childhood.'⁴ Secondly, there is the concomitant struggle for a distancing view that will set the intimacies of place within broader perspectives. Just as Polo was persuaded that his sojourns in strange cities had led to a better understanding of 'the surroundings of home', so Laurence - a traveller herself- had laid special emphasis upon journeys which acted as correctives to her previously 'prejudiced and distorted feelings about the town she had known as child and adolescent. Displayed like a piece of jade delicately chiselled and beautifully translucent, Manawaka teases the mind with a rich variety of meanings. The city itself is 'woman, past moments, doctrines, jokes, **things**'. The site where past and present are juxtaposed or overlap, it is memory itself with its capacity to preserve, order and remake as well as to deceive and stultify. Manawaka is another way of talking about the art of fiction.

Manawaka is based on Laurence's hometown of Neepawa, yet it is not Neepawa for the real town has been remembered and reinvented in fiction. Manawaka is a fictional world

structured through the stories the characters tell. Yet it is more than a realistic chronicle, and though it is possible to construct a map of Manawaka from these stories, its multiplicity is striking. Manawaka is reinvented by every narrator in her own idiom, from ninety year old Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel* to the middle aged narrators of the other fictions, all of whom are engaged in coming to terms with the past, recalling a childhood place from which they have moved away. For them, Manawaka has become a place of the mind. Her protagonists are aware of the discontinuity in their relation to the past and also of their strong need for connection with that lost community and its history. In Laurence's Manawakan novels, a sense of place pervades the novels, where the prairie, depicted as either wilderness or garden provides a focus for opposing values. The landscape, by its very nature, suggests a moral or psychological drama in which characters and the town itself engage.

Margaret Laurence's Manawaka world is Everyman's and Everywoman's, but its particularities are emphatically Canadian. Grounded in a small western town, her people move out into the wider world, but they carry Manawaka with them, its constraints and inhibitions, its sense of roots, achievements and its tragic errors.

Before embarking on a full-length discussion on Laurence's fictional Manawaka, I should like to begin with some background information on the towns of Canada. The town with its corporate personality exerted tremendous influence on its people and has enjoyed a central position in both Canada's history as well as its literature. Manawaka is also specifically, historically and geographically authentic, dense with objects and true to its place and its development through time.

1. THE TOWNS OF CANADA

The town holds a central place in Canada's political history and its literature. The town's corporate personality exerted a great influence on its people.

The towns of Canada were in the beginning, forts in the wilderness, not walled, armored with guns and policed by red-coated troops, but bulwarks all the same, civilization and supply centres for a raw, young country and the focal point for the dispensing of its trade. The earliest villages grew up around mill-sites where the settlers brought their grain to be ground, or around a traveller crossroads where an inn and then a store had been built, or, in the west, along the railway lines. The towns developed from villages according to the demands made on them by the farmers around; a thriving town in 1880 meant a fertile agricultural land at its back. The towns grew according to various combinations of good land, good fortune and the politics of railroad building. Their stars were in the ascendant during the last quarter of the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th century, their brightest constellations beaded along with railway networks; After The First World War, many of them gradually declined, reeling under the impact of the depression of the 30's and drained of the young who got out when they could. Some towns are still backwaters of decline, some have become city suburbs and dormitories and some, infused with life and direction by prosperity and new emigrants to Canada, have begun new cycles of change and growth. But historically, all literature is thick with their representations, memorials to their centrality in Canada's history and to the remarkable power of their effects, bad and good, upon their people.

The towns of Canadian literature provide illuminations of a major strand of the Canadian tradition, which is both historically and artistically true to Canada's experience. For many Canadians a town was the matrix of social growth, the point of departure into a wider world, and, for many, a point of no return. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, writers such as Adeline Teskey in *Where the Sugar Maple Grows* and Patrick Slater in *The Yellow Briar* focussed on the village or small town as a sentimentalised Utopia. Between 1900 and 1914 Sara Jeanette Duncan in *The Imperialist* and Stephen Leacock in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* recorded with their unique combination of realism, affectionate irony and satire the small Canadian town at the very peak of its corporate power and influence over its people. Later in the 20's, when, after the First World War, the dream of an innocent world was irrevocably lost, the satire became bitter and the details darker. Writers were propelled towards revelations of individual loneliness and defeat or satires on the

hypocrisy, vulgarity and general meanness of life in small closed communities. Margaret Laurence has given us portraits of the ambivalence of human experience within the small town Manawaka.

The town provides writers with a setting that is both authentic and manageable and also highly complex, highly dramatic and ripe for explorations in the ironical distance between man, as he seems to be and man as he really is. For example, in *The Diviners*, Christie Logan plays the part the town expects of him up to the hilt and every town had its clowns, but the energy that brings Christie to life on the page lies in Margaret Laurence's successful fusing of his public and his private voices, clown and seer.

All writers were however certain about one thing: the power and the influence of the town's corporate personality on its people be they its heroes or its victims. The isolation of small groups of people in a vast land was one of the factors in the growth of a town's personality; in English Canada the other factor was the drive to build a progressive, successful and Protestant community; ideals of godliness and business enterprise were inextricably meshed and individuals were expected, both by commitment and from need, to adapt and to give evidence of their partnership in the community ideals by unremitting work, or to fall short of the corporate ideal at great personal loss and social peril. The town was Canada's tribe, not, primarily, a network of kinship and family, but a powerful structure of hierarchical social relationships. The fact that everyone knew all about everyone else provided the framework of common knowledge, common interest, and gossip that held the town together. Talk, resented or enjoyed, malicious or concerned, both feared and welcomed, was the strong human communication-fabric of the town and was often stronger than the individuals communication lines through love or duty, trust or even hate. The community assigned roles to its people too; in the eyes of the town, individuals were often seen only in relation to their assigned roles.

2. LAURENCE AND THE CONCEPT OF MANAWAKA

After five books, the town of Manawaka can be specifically mapped. Its geography is precise and consistent. Through Manawaka Laurence has come to terms with her ancestral past, a task she believes essential for every human being. Through this notion of Manawaka, she was able to achieve a sense of direction, identity and roots. Laurence feels that in a similar manner, nations need to know their past if they want a national identity.

Because each of these five women - Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa and Morag - is uniquely herself, each sees Manawaka through her own set of fears, hopes and biases, thus reacting in a distinctly individual way. They all recall their childhoods. Thus the reader can vicariously experience what it was like to be both, the message and the medium, the shaper and the shaped, of a small prairie town in the first half of this century. Hagar fights life, blinded by her own stubborn pride. Rachel cowers with self-doubt; Stacey is searching for a solid centre. Vanessa recounts stories of her growing awareness of the pains and perplexities of life. Morag copes with adjustments to her youthful and romantic expectations of the world and of herself.⁵

The centrality of the land in prairie fiction, a land of extremes provokes deep emotional responses.⁶ "Though Laurence concentrates on people, the prairie emerges as an essential background to her portraits of them. The sensual appeal in the landscape is always felt."⁷ In Laurence's writing the theme of the conquest of the land is linked with the theme of the imprisoned spirit.⁸ "Manawaka is a mythic territory, mapping universal human experience, and a Scots-Canadian subculture in the Canadian West. Laurence has emphasized that societies need their own myths, generated by their own artists in order to understand and fulfill themselves as communities."⁹

Of Manawaka, Laurence says:

...In raging against our injustices, our stupidities, I do so as family, as I did, and still do, in writing about those aspects of my town which I hated and which are always in some ways aspects of myself.¹⁰

It is true that her writing gives voice to what she has called Canada's 'cultural being', 'roots', and 'myths'.¹¹ Laurence describes herself as trying to convey a "strong sense of place and of our own culture...to give Canadians a...sense of who they are, and where they may be going".¹²

The novelist "must be involved emotionally with the world he inhabits"¹³ and Laurence does just that. Through five works of fiction, Manawaka has grown as a vividly realized, micro-cosmic world, acting as a setting for the dilemmas of its unique individuals and also exercising its own powerful dynamic on them. Manawaka is also specifically, historically and geographically authentic, dense with objects and true to its place and its development through time.¹⁴ Places in Manawaka, things like the stone angel and characters - the Camerons, Shipleys, Tonnerres, and MacLeods - interconnect the novels.

3. DESCRIPTION OF MANAWAKA

In Laurence's Canadian fiction, Manawaka is the supply centre for a farm region that is well cultivated and fruitful, except for the years of drought in the thirties. Even as it was described in *The Stone Angel* and *A Bird in the House*, the area was never completely barren:

That part of the prairies where we lived was never dustbowl country. The farms around Manawaka never had a total crop failure, and afterwards, when the drought was over, people used to remark on this fact proudly... But although Manawaka never knew the worst, what it knew was bad enough.

However we shall see that basic to Laurence's description of Manawaka and to its deepest meaning is Laurence's demonstration of the dichotomy between the works of man and nature. Throughout the works, Manawaka and Vancouver are polarized. Manawaka is "Town" as Vancouver is "City" and all the complications of rural and of urban life reside within the framework and the connotations of each respective place. To many Manawakans, Vancouver is escape and opportunity for life, but Stacey comes to see the place not only as a spiritual death-in-life but also as the site of imminent and global destruction. The drive of the men whom Hagar called "fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land" has taken them right to the western rim of the continent and "The City" is their last, greatest, but most monstrous and inhuman monument.

Manawaka's railroad runs through the town and west to Vancouver, the city that is the goal of hope and escape for many of the townspeople and for some a place of final despair. Hagar went to Vancouver when she left Bram Shipley, and in a Vancouver hospital she finished her life. John Shipley faced himself in Vancouver in a way that his mother could not yet do, and he realized that his real place was in Manawaka with his father. Stacey Cameron couldn't wait to leave Manawaka for Vancouver, but at forty, trapped and desperate as she feels, Vancouver has become the very epitome of "The City of the End of Things" to her. To Rachel, Vancouver represents hope and a positive decision. She takes her mother and goes there to take her chances at living independent of the physical familiarity of Manawaka, at the same time recognising that she carries the town always within her. Valentine Tonnerre, whom Stacey meets on the beach in *The Fire - Dwellers*, dies of drink and drugs on the streets of Vancouver. Thor Thorlakson, who in Manawaka was Vernon Winkler, beaten and bullied by his father, and Nick Kazlik's sister, Julie, are likewise refugees in Vancouver from Manawaka. Morag Gunn goes from Toronto to Vancouver to have her baby, to learn to accept her loneliness, and to support herself.

Manawaka has neither the flatness nor the unvegetated bleakness of Sinclair Ross' fictional Saskatchewan town of Horizon. The river, the hill on which the cemetery stands, the poplar buffs, and the mountain in the distance provide major diversifications to its landscape and its entire natural surroundings. Galloping Mountain to the northwest symbolized a kind of

frontier of civilization and cultivation, and the possibility of freedom. It is there that Pique Tonnerre goes at the end of *The Diviners* to stay with her Uncle Jacques who has made a home for his own and all the other lost children of the Tonnerre family. Beyond the mountain is “up north”, a land that belongs to another geography and seems as different as another country or another planet. This is Shallow Creek country where Vanessa MacLeod visits her cousin Chris: “Shallow Creek seemed immeasurably far, part of the legendary winter country where no leaves grow and where the breath of seals and polar bears snuffled out steamily and turned to ice”.¹⁵

Manawaka’s climate is one of extremes, the enervating heat of Rachel Cameron’s summer holidays, or the blizzard in which a man might lose his life or lose, as Bram Shipley did, the horse that might have meant the fulfillment of his dreams. Ordinary weather is rarely described and almost never seen as being compatible to human comfort, though a mellow day can be used to point up the granite qualities of such a character as Grandfather Connor: “It was a warm day, the leaves turning a clear lemon yellow on the Manitoba maples and the late afternoon sun lighting up the windows of the Brick House like, silver foil, but my grandfather was wearing his grey-heather sweater buttoned up to the neck”.¹⁶

Powerful though the town is in its effects on its people, Manawaka has no power over the cataclysmic events that batter them. The Depression and two wars simply and starkly happened to its people. Control is not in their hands, but as remote, as ominously and terrifying mysterious as the God of Wrath himself. People leave Manawaka and the land around it to go to ‘the West Coast,’ to go to ‘the city,’ to go to the world wars, to go to the ladies college in Ontario. Each of these destinations seems equally remote, as if on another planet. There is no idea or imagining, no warm encircling dream that joins Manawaka to any place outside, nor any important physical manifestation of joining in the way that the railway-networks are triumphant, almost magical, physical symbols of uniting far distances in the work of Thomas Wolfe and of Willa Cather.

After five books, the town of Manawaka can be specially mapped. Its geography is precise and consistent, and there are now many landmarks in the town. At least two-score

businesses and institutions have accumulated, some of them-Doherty's stables, Jarrett's bakery or the Queen Victoria Hotel - are simply reference points necessary to the setting, and others-Currie's General Store or Cameron's Funeral Home, later the Japonica Chapel - are essential focuses for the action of the various books. River Street runs south to the Wachakawa and north to the CPR tracks and Main Street intersects it. The Camerons live on Japonica Street, and Rachel, walking home from school, turns at River Street:

(I) walk past the quite dark brick houses, too big for their remaining occupants, built by somebody's grandfather who did well long ago out of brickworks or the first butcher shop. Long ago meaning half a century. Nothing is old here but it looks old. The timber house age fat, and even the brick looks worn down after fifty years of blizzard winters and blistering summers. They're put to shame by the new bungalows like a bakery's pastel cakes, identical, fresh, tasteless. This is known as a good part of town.¹⁷

The cemetery, the garbage dump, and the valley where the Tonnerres have their shacks are all on the outskirts of Manawaka. The stone angel stands in the cemetery on a hill overlooking the town. Christie Logan is garbage collector for Manawaka and his "Nuisance Grounds" are not so very far from the cemetery. This dump is the repository of the town's rubbish, its discards and, sometimes, its awful secrets. In the cemetery, death is set apart, kept within bounds in "the beautifully cared-for habitations of the dead," as firmly and regularly as rubbish is cast out and dug under in the "Nuisance Grounds." Like death and garbage, the Metis family of Tonnerres is outside the pale of Manawaka. The valley near the dump where Pique Tonnerre burns to death with her children is a place of horror for Morag Gunn, who was sent there by Lachlan McLachlan to cover the story for the 'Manawaka Banner'. But earlier, in her encounter with Jules (Skinner) Tonnerre, the valley was also its own world apart; an exotic places where Morag and Skinner explored making friends and making love.

Out over the railway tracks is the trestle bridge where John Shipley and Arlene Simmons died in a dare, and further out from the town to the southwest, is the Shipley farm. There,

Bram Shipley dreamed of founding his dynasty and establishing his horse ranch, and there Hagar worked, loved, despaired and dreamed of changing Bram into the mould of her father Jason Currie, a founder and pillar of Manawaka. About three miles to the west of the town is the prosperous dairy farm of Nestor and Teresa Kazlik, Ukrainian immigrants whose past is almost lost to their children as Rachel Cameron's Scottish past is almost lost to her. Morag Gunn's parents, Colin and Louisa, also had a farm outside of Manawaka, but when they both died of polio in the thirties, the farm and all their other possessions had to go up for auction to pay off their mortgage.

When Hagar Currie was a child in the 1880's, Manawaka was still close to its beginnings, with boards sidewalks, oil lamps, a few successful business houses such as Jason Currie's store, institutions such as the well-cared for cemetery, the ever present undertakes and the churches, especially the Presbyterian church:

I'd be about eight when the new Presbyterian Church went up. Its opening service was the first time Father let me go to church with him instead of a Sunday school. It was plain and bare and smelled of paint and new wood, and they hadn't got the stained glass windows yet, but there were silver candlesticks at the front, each bearing a tiny plaque with Father's name, and he and several others had purchased family pews and furnished them with long cushions of brown not bothered by hard oak and a lengthy sermon.

"On this great day," the Reverend Dougall MacCulloch said feelingly, "we have to give special thanks to those of our congregation whose generosity and Christian contributions have made our new church possible".

He called them off, the names, like an honour role. Luke McVitie, lawyer. Jason Currie, businessman. Freeman McKendrick, bank manager. Burns MacIntosh, farmer. Rab Fraser, farmer.

Father sat with modestly bowed head, but turned to me and whispered very low.

“I and Luke McVitie must’ve given the most, as he called our names the first.”¹⁸

Jason Currie certainly prided himself on being one of Manawaka’s leading citizens.

Not only Presbyterians came to towns like Manawaka. The Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and all the other sects, who established their churches in the small towns of Canada, carried with them religions that balanced far more towards fear than love. Certainly, everything men and women found in pioneer experience would confirm an impression that their God required hard service before rejoicing, as the land demanded battle from them and did not repay love. The God who presided over such a bleak experience must have seemed to the pioneers remarkably analogous to the Old Testament Jehovah, ‘God of War and Wrath and Judgement’.

The Manawaka works are dense with objects seen and described; this is particularly so of houses, which are shown as the shelters, the symbols and the prisons of those who live in them.

We had moved in with Grandmother MacLeod when the Depression got bad and she could no longer afford a housekeeper, but the MacLeod house never seemed like home to me. Its dark red brick was grown over at the front with Virginia creeper that turned crimson in the fall, until you could hardly tell brick from leaves. It boasted a small tower in such Grandmother MacLeod kept a weedy collection of anemic ferns. The verandah was embellished with a profusion of wrought-iron scrolls, and the circular rose-window upstairs contained glass of many colours which permitted an outlooking eye to see the world as a place of absolute sapphire or emerald, or if one wished to look with a jaundiced eye, a hateful yellow. In Grandmother MacLeod’s opinion, their features gave the house style.¹⁹

After her father's death, Vanessa, her mother, and her brother have to go to live with Grandmother and Grandfather Connor. The yellow brick house, so solid, strong, and without ornament, but in itself so hard and plain, is a symbol of Grandfather's place as a "upright man" in the town, of his attitude to all those around him and to life itself.

Hagar, beleaguered by age and sickness, "can think of only one thing":

The house is mine. I bought it with money I worked for, in this city, which has served as a kind of home, ever since I left the prairies. Perhaps it is not home as only the first of all can be truly that, but it is familiar and mine. My shreds and remnants of years are scattered though it visibly in lamps and vases, the needle-point fire bench, the heavy oak chair from the Shipley place, the china cabinet and walnut side board from my father's house. There'd not be room for all of these in some cramped apartment. We'd have to put them into storage, or sell them. I don't want that. I couldn't leave them. If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, external enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I am to be found at all.

The language in which Vanessa recollects her grandparents houses directs our responses and sets up these places as symbols of different, though equally constricting, value system. Mrs. Macleod's house is "grown over with Virginia creepers." It "boasted a small tower" with a "weedy collection of ferns", the verandah was 'embellished' with a "profusion" of wrought-iron scrolls, and out of the rose window you could not see daylight, but 'the world as a place of absolute sapphire or emerald.... Or a hateful yellow". Grandmother MacLeod lives in the world of the past and of her own superficial illusions, and her house matches and reflects her. On the other hand, Grandfather Connor's house was "plain as the winter turnips in the root cellar," "sparsely windowed as some crusader's embattled fortress," its rooms "in a perpetual gloom except in the brief height of summer," and the whole, "part dwelling place and part monument." The dualism of Vanessa's years with her grandfather

and of her feeling for him is established in her description of the spruces outside, whose branches swept down to earth "like the sternly protective wings of giant hawks." Here, as in the description of the cemetery in the first pages of *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence sets up the dichotomy between what man undertakes to order and civilize and the marginal but insistent freedom of the works of nature. The planted snapdragons are "helmeted" and they "stand in precision," but violets dare to grow on the lawn despite the "guillotine" lawnmower. And the creeping Charlie moves "its deceptively weak-looking tendrils" right up to the edges of the ordered flowerbeds.

Manawaka's was a swiftly forming social system, based on thrift, hard work, and, above all, financial success. In the beginning there were a few men, like the lawyer Luke McVitie and Jason Currie, who were "God-fearing," as Aunt Doll Stone House impressed upon Hagar, but who were even more emphatically "self-made." Jason Currie's pride impelled him to have Hagar educated in the faraway Ladies' College in Ontario and then to refuse to allow her to teach, insisting instead that she stay at home and be his lady-housekeeper. There were many other citizens of the town who emulated such pattern, Lottie and Telford Simmons, for instance, who tried to wrap up their daughter Arlene in a cocoon of polite appearances and so lost her to John Shipley and death.

It was in the early days that the social map of the town was made with the "right" people and "the others" and, in geographical fact, a right and wrong side of the tracks. On the side farthest away from the railroad tracks there were a few big houses like the Currie's and many more modest, but eminently respectable ones. Near the tracks where land was cheap, or had been climbed simply by squatters' rights, were the houses and shacks of the poor, those who, like the Winklers, the Shinwells, and the Logans, were what the town called "shiftless" or simply unlucky. Three generations after its founding in the twenties and thirties, when Stacey, Rachel Vanessa, and Morag were children, the old standard in Manawaka remained. Rachel and Stacey Cameron lived above the funeral parlor where their mother, desperate to keep up appearances, had become a harping hypochondriac, and Niall Cameron, their father, drank to forget that he lived more closely and more easily with death than with life. At the beginning of *A Bird in the House*, Vanessa and her mother and

father are living with Grandmother MacLeod whose house is among the few big houses of Manawaka. Grandmother mourns ceaselessly for the relatively luxurious and, by Manawaka's standards, even ostentatious way of life that vanished with the twenties.

There are five major and interacting family connections in Manawaka and these now stretch over four generations: the Curries and the Shipleys; the Camerons and the Kazliks; the Connors and the MacLeods; the Gunns and the Logans; and the Tonnerres. Many other's Henry Pearland Luke McVitie, Doctor Cates and Lachlan McLachlan, Lottie Simmons and Eva and Vernon Winkler among them, come in and out of two or more of the works with brief but vivid impacts. Manawaka's time span comes up from the early 1880's the childhood of Hagar, to the present; Pique Tonnerre is four generations on from her great-grandfather, Jules Tonnerre. In *The Diviners*, however, it is made clear that the townspeople incorporate in their young ones and blood a far longer span of history than the town's, one that comes down from the time of the Highland Clearances and from before the settlement of the West, and is landmarked by battles - Batoche, Bourlon Wood, and Dieppe.

4. NEEPAWA AND MANAWAKA

There are striking similarities between Laurence's Neepawa and her fictional town of Manawaka. I will describe in some detail these points of similarities between Neepawa and Manawaka as depicted in the novels. Places, objects as well as persons in Manawaka have correspondences in real life.

Laurence's Neepawa, the slightly rolling treed area of the prairie in Southern Manitoba, is set on a flat hill overlooking a river valley. Neepawa has a grid pattern of residential and business streets intersected by two railways at right angles. Thus, on the right (or wrong) side of the tracks is not relevant to Neepawa ²⁰ but Laurence applies this distinction metaphorically: Morag Gunn thinks of Hill street as "The Scots - English equivalent of the other side of the Tracks, the shacks and shanties at the north end of Manawaka." ²¹

Along with the main street are the cemetery at the north end, overlooking the valley the Presbyterian, and further down the United Church's funeral parlour; hotel, Chinese, cafe, theatre, stores, residences and, at the south end. Park Lake where the old Nuisance Grounds were but now are two miles to the east on the flat plateau. On the other streets are the old Arcade Dance Hall, elementary and high schools, hotel, houses where Margaret Laurence lived, and other cafes.

One mile west of Neepawa was the Air Force Training Base. The high school, as indeed the whole town, was greatly influenced by that airforce base.²² From Britain and the Commonwealth, these men were entertained and some lived, in Neepawa homes.²³ Friendship continued for example, Gerald Murray exchanges greetings with a Scottish friend whom he had also visited while stationed in Britain;²⁴ Some girls, like Viola Radford's Elizabeth Irwin²⁵ married airmen. The fellows at the base became rather important to Margaret Laurence and other high school girls since very few young men were in grade eleven and only one (too young to sign up) in grade twelve.²⁶ As editor of the *Annals of the Black and Gold*, Margaret encouraged others to write on whether these airmen should be invited to the graduation dance, over the local boys' objections. Yet Margaret's grandfather didn't altogether approve of Margaret's friendship with some of these men.²⁷ Similarly, in *A Bird in the House*, Grandfather Connor clearly disapproves of Vanessa MacLeod's young man who she met at the Arcade Dance Hall, and brought to the Brick House.

You ought to know better than run around with a fellow like this' he said, his voice even and distinct and full of cold rage... I'll be a nickle to a doughnut hole he's married. That's the sort of fellow you've picked Vanessa.²⁸

Neepawa girls met airmen and others at the Flamingo Dance Hall at Clear Lake in Riding Mountain National Park. Called Diamond Lake near Galloping Mountain in the Manawaka novels, Clear Lake had (and still has) around it cottages of many Neepawa families; Margaret describes Clear Lake 'so beautifully'.²⁹

The family cottage at Clear Lake in Riding Mountain National Park was known to us simply as The Lake. Before the government piers and the sturdy log staircases down to the shore were put in, we used to slither with an exhilarating sense of peril down the steep...homemade branch and dirt shelf-steps, through the stands of their tall spruce and birch trees slender and graceful as girls passing mossy-hairy fallen logs in the white promise of wild strawberry blossoms until we reached the sand and hard bright pebbles of the beach at the edge of the cold, spring-fed lake where at night the loons cried eerily before too much human shriek made them move away north.³⁰

The descriptions in the Manawaka fiction are equally vivid.

At night the lake was like black glass with a streak of amber, which was the moon... Then the loons began their calling. They rose like phantom birds from the nests on the shore, and flew out onto the dark still surface of the water.³¹

Like Vanessa MacLeod who returned to the lake, the attraction of it stayed with Stacey MacAindra wherever she went; she remembers: "Diamond lake, fifty miles north of Manawaka. At night the spruce trees held themselves intensely still, dark and immutable as old Indian gods, holding up the star-heavy sky..."³² She recalls the lyrical joys of swimming there at ten. When Stacey imagines a place. I want to get away to ... it always looks like Diamond Lake.³³

A remarkable building in three Manawaka novels- *A Jest of God*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, *The Diviners* - is Niall Cameron's Funeral Chapel, its Neepawa counterpart quite clearly the Simpson Funeral Home. The family residence on the second floor was where Cousin Catherine Simpson Milne's father was born. He, as was expected of the eldest son, later took over the funeral business though he hated business life.³⁴ Margaret Laurence would visit Catherine or play at Virginia shore Sanburn's. "The funeral parlor was right next door to my home ... This was a very mysterious house to all of us because it was the undertakers.

did not help Lottie kill baby chicks. She and Lottie and some other girls were walking about.

Here were crates and cartons, tea chests with torn tin stripping, the unrecognizable effluvia of our lives, burned and blackened by the fire that seasonally cauterized the festering place. Here were the wrecks of cutters and buggies, the rusty springs and gashed seats, this skeletons of conveyances purchased in fine fettle by the town's fathers and grown as racked and ruined as the old gents but not afforded a decent concealment in earth. Here were the leavings from tables, gnawed bones, rot-softened, rinds of pumpkin and marrow, peelings and cores, pits of plum, broken jars of preserves that had fermented and been chucked reluctantly away rather than risk ptomaine. It was a sulphurous place, where even the weeds appeared to grow more gross and noxious than elsewhere, as though they could not help but show the stain and stench of their improper nourishment.

Then we saw a huge and staggering heap of eggs, jarred and broken by some wagoner and cast here, unsaleable. July was hot that day ...we saw, with a kind of horror that could not be avoided however much one looked away or scurried on that some of the eggs had been fertile and had hatched in the sun. The chicks, feeble, foodless, bloodied and mutilated, prisoned by the weight of broken shells all around them were trying to crawl like little worms, their half-months opened uselessly among the garbage. I could only gawk and retch, I and the others all except one.

Lottie, light as an eggshell herself... took a stick and crushed the eggshell skulls, and some of them she stepped on with the heels of her black patent leather shoes.⁴⁶

Even more vivid descriptions occur in Morag Gunn's list of garbage which she finds, of old car pieces, tinned goods, moth-eaten sweaters, rotten fruit covered with 'a ZILLION crawling flies.'⁴⁷ However, even more striking is the 'reading the garbage' by Christie Logan when he goes into a spiel:

'By their garbage shall ye know them', Christie yells, like a preacher, a clowny preacher. 'I swear by the ridge of tears and by the valour of my ancestors, I say unto you, Morag Gunn, lass, that by their ... garbage shall ye christly well know them. The ones who eat only out of tins. The ones who have to wrap the rye bottles in old newspapers to try to ride the fact that there are so many of them. The ones who have fourteen thousand pill bottles the week now. The ones who will be chucking out the family albums the moment the grandmother goes to her ancestors.... I tell you girl; they're as close as clams and twice as brainless.... They think muck's dirty. It's no more dirty than what's in their heads. Or mine. It's Christly clean compared to some things.'⁴⁸

Along with places and objects in Manawaka that have correspondences in real life are persons.

Drawing on experiences like her own, Margaret Laurence creates Vanessa Macleod and Morag Gunn as imaginative writers. They pretend and write plays and stories in *Scribblers* as Margaret did. 'We played up in her attic. She fantasized a lot... imagination. They were doing business together... Margaret was a great fantasizer. Pretend this Pretend that. It was all 'pretend'; mind you, I think this is the way her writing is. Her father built a little playhouse in the backyard for her. It was very little just like a little house ... It had everything in it ... It had dishes and stuff...'⁵⁰ Similarly, Hagar watches a little boy and girl, both about six, playhouse. Clamshells are bowls.... Food is moss bits, 'a flower or two for dessert'⁵¹ She remembers some other children in a different manner.⁵² Phyllis Ralph regards this novel as 'explicit of years we were in Neepawa.'⁵³ Her books... are fiction... she says she is not talking about Neepawa, but I can see it where she is talking about all the different places.'⁵⁴

From an early age, Margaret Laurence would always say, 'I'm going to be a writer'.⁵⁵ and she would write in 'Scribbles'. She was always jotting something down.⁵⁶ 'She would write a whole play voluntarily. She'd bring in a scribbler.'⁵⁷

Her stepmother an English teacher and librarian encouraged Margaret to read.⁵⁸ and she did and saw things, which broadened her out living at the old funeral parlour and also through her reading⁵⁹ (From the time she could read (she) was interested in doing some writing. This was her hobby ... Margaret liked to write stories.⁶⁰ Writing in high school finds a place in Manawaka; (Morag) "worships" Miss Melrose because of what she says about the composition.⁶¹ Like Margaret always writing, Morag writes: lists of things at the Nuisance Grounds, at home or at the store, dialogues of overheard teachers' conversations, of imagined playets with the pioneer Catherine Parr Traill, and stories about, Morag's Tales of Piper Gunn's Woman. Vanessa MacLeod also imagines stories about a beautiful half-breed lady or a story about love and death, which she was writing in her 'five-cent scribbler' at night.⁶²

As Margaret Laurence wrote for newspapers, so does Morag. The Neepawa Press is the 'Manawaka Banner'. United College literary magazine *VOX* is *Veritas*; *the Winnipeg Citizen*, (a small socialist organ which had its roots in the lack of jobs for returning Great War Veterans) *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* are fictionalized. Like Laurence herself, Morag publishes her novels written in Vancouver, Toronto, London and Ontario. Laurence fictionalises aspects of her life in the creation of Morag Gunn as a maturing independent person.

Close resemblances show up between fictional characters and those in Laurence's own life. Her mother died when she was four. Margaret's aunt became her stepmother and very much loved. Later, they moved in with Grandmother Wemyss, daughter of a doctor who had been premier of Manitoba briefly. Her caring was the model for Hagar because she thought more than she spoke, favoured one son (Margaret's father) more than the other and had a great deal of pride, especially in her Scottish ancestry. 'The Wemyss thought they

were a little bit better than the Simpsons because if you go back in Scottish history, the Wemyss were a very superior clan There were two or three counts and Mrs. Wemyss was very conscious of it'.⁶³

Grandma MacLeod, the literary counterpart of Margaret's grandmother Wemyss, has 'stern dignity', does not lie and has classy style.⁶⁴ It's mainly a question of management and 'God loves order'.⁶⁵ She is so proud and a little aloof about whom she would associate with. Margaret Laurence felt her father's death very much; Morag, Rachel, Stacey and Vanessa speak of their fathers. Grandmother Simpson was very, very sweet.... Very placid. We all adored her. We thought she was marvellous.⁶⁶ Manawaka's Grandmother Connor is similar for she 'often sat quietly and apparently at ease'.⁶⁷ Grandfather Simpson is Grandfather Connor. After the death of Margaret's father, her brother and mother moved into Grandfather Simpson's big Brick House on First Street.⁶⁸ He would not allow her mother to unpack or use any of her dishes or things. Likewise, Vanessa's mother is not allowed to unpack her china; the barrels go into storage in the basement. Then Grandfather Connor insults Aunt Edna's men friends even when one saves the reddened pipes from going on fire; he calls him a fool.⁷⁰ To the grand nephew Chris who came to go to Manawaka High School, Grandfather Connor made it clear to all that he is paying for his education, Vanessa is embarrassed.⁷¹ Even though Margaret talks of being a little bit afraid of him, she had a great admiration for the old man.⁷² After she finished writing *A Bird in the House*, Laurence found that it was dominated by her maternal grandfather. Interestingly, the portrayal of Hagar also came from Laurence's own relationship with her grandfather.

Two Manawaka characters are based on Neepawa persons who lived in the valley near Nuisance Grounds.

Mr. Willarton lived there; There's a valley just there. Mr. Willarton was the man who collected the garbage...⁷³ Also Pat the Breed lived in a shack down there.⁷⁴

Mr. Willarton and Pat the Breed and their fictional counterparts Christie Logan (Manawaka's scavenger) and Skinner Tonnerre (Metis) are representative of the history of Neepawa and

Manitoba, indeed of Canada. In the Tonnerre family, Laurence is particularising her knowledge of the deplorable conditions of many of the Metis.

At the end of the chapter, we see that Manawaka becomes one of the most interesting literary regions in recent novels. Places, things and people in this town bear resemblances to their counterparts in Neepawa. The voices of Manawaka speak a Canadian vernacular, retained and recalled by Laurence and heightened according to the demands of her characters, but retaining its typical idioms and figures of speech and particularly its irony of tone.

On reading Laurence's fiction, we can orient ourselves to its social structure, as to its streets and buildings. Through the stories of its people we can make connection with the present and past of the people of Canada- their aspirations and failures- and our own. Manawaka also possesses, implies and constantly reveals beneath its surface the fourth dimension of time and the timelessness of men and women as the victims and prisoners of the institutions they have made for their own survival and of the endless stumbling pilgrimage of the Tribe of Man towards God. Manawaka is indeed Laurence's vision of human nature. As a symbol of human divisiveness whose inhabitants are separated by pride and greed, Manawaka is an inner and outer world and an inescapable one. The achievement of each of Laurence's protagonists is that finally she stands and faces and so triumphs over the Manawakas within.

NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p. 14.
2. Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots? The Novelist as Socio-political being", in *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, William H. New ed. (Vancouver, 1978), p.15.
3. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Picador, 1979), p.69.
4. Margaret Laurence, 'Sources' in William New (ed.) *Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: MacGraw Hill Riverson, 1977), p.130.

5. Bernice Lever, "Manawaka Magic", *Journal of Canadian Fiction* Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 1974, p.93.
6. Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie; A State of Mind", *Canadian Anthology*, 3rd ed., Carl F. Klinck, ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p.621.
7. Donald G. Stephens, ed., "Sisters of the Prairies", *Canadian Literature Series* (Vancouver: Vancouver University Press, 1973), p.1.
8. Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind", pp.625-26.
9. Patricia Morley, *A Long Journey Home*, (Mc Gill's Queens University Press, 1991), p.77.
10. George Woodcock, "The Human Elements: Critical Essays," David Helwig, ed. (Toronto:McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p.138.
11. Thomas Clara, "The Chariot of Ossian: Myth and Manitoba in *The Diviners*", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol.13, no.3, Fall, 1978, pp.55-63.
12. Bernice Lever, "Literature and Canadian Culture: An interview with Margaret Laurence", in William New (ed.), *Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence*, (Toronto: McGraw- Hill, 1977), p.27.
13. The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan, Cameron, ed., p.270.
14. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p.174.
15. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p. 128.
16. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p. 157.
17. Margaret Laurence, *A Jest of God*, p. 10.
18. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, p. 15.
19. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p. 43.
20. Wes McAmmond, *personal interview*, 24th July, 1984, p.12.
21. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*, (Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1964), p.28.
22. Mildred Musgrove, *personal interview*, 12 July 1984, p.12.
23. Margaret Murray, *personal int.*, 20 July 1984, p.3.
24. Gerald Murray, *personal int*, 23 July 1984, p.3.
25. Musgrove, *personal int*, p.12.
26. *Ibid.*, p.1. & Laurence, *The Diviners*, p.132.

27. Mildred Musgrove, *personal interview*, 21st July 1984, p.2.
28. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p.199.
29. Dorothy Campbell, *personal interview*, 20th July 1984, p.28.) 29. Dorothy Campbell, *personal interview*, 20th July 1984, p.28.
30. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, (Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 187-8.
31. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p.121.
32. Margaret Laurence, *The Fire-Dwellers* (Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p.74.
33. Margaret Laurence, *The Fire-Dwellers*, (Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p.74
34. Catherine Simpson Milne, *personal int*, 24th July, 1984, p.7.
35. Virginia Shore Sanburn, *personal int*, 24 July 1984 pp 4-5.
36. Catherine Simpson Milne, *personal interview*, 24th July 1984, p.11.
37. *ibid.*, p.64.
38. *ibid.*, p.13.
39. Margaret Murray, *personal interview*, 20th July 1984, p. 13.
40. Dorothy Campbell, *personal interview*, 20 July 1984 p.14.
41. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, p. 142.
42. Phyllis Ralph, *personal interview*, pp.4-5.
43. Phyllis Ralph, *personal interview*, 25th July 1984, p.19.
44. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*, p.70.
45. Margaret Murray, *personal interview*, p.35.
46. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, pp. 26-28.
47. Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*, pp.70-71.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
49. Ralph, *personal int.*, pp. 1,3; F. Musgrove *personal int.*, p.24.
50. Ralph *personal int.* pp.12-13.
51. Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, p.188.
52. *ibid.*, pp. 187, 189, 192.
53. Ralph, *personal int.*, p.3.
54. *Ibid*, p.4.
55. Milne, *personal int.* pp. 1-2.

56. Ralph, *personal int.*, pp. 24-5.
57. Wes McAmmond, *personal int.* pp. 16-17.
58. Milne, *personal int.* p.1.
59. McAmmond, *personal int.*, pp. 16-17.
60. Musgrove, *personal int.*, p.29.
61. Laurence, *The Diviners*, pp. 122-3.
62. Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, pp. 64-5.
63. Milne, *personal int.*, pp. 24-5.
64. Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, pp.111,45.
65. *ibid.*, p.46.
66. Ralph, *personal int.*, pp. 14-15.
67. Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p.6.
68. Catherine Simpson Milne, *personal interview*, pp.3-4.
69. Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, pp. 175-6.
70. Laurence, *A bird in the House*, p. 91.
71. *Ibid.*, pp.131-2.
72. McAmmond, *personal interview*, p.8.
73. Musgrove, *personal interview*, p.9-10.
74. McAmmond, *personal interview*, p.11.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This study 'The Canadian Fiction of Margaret Laurence brings out the value of Laurence's work and its relevance to contemporary literature and society. Laurence's novels are paradigmatic of the concerns of all Canadians, male and female. The search for an individual identity is paradigmatic of the constant search for the elusive Canadian identity. The fictional prairie town of Manawaka is created through the five novels wherein wilderness is present as a feature of environment and available as metaphor or symbolic space for the exploration of her protagonists.

The first chapter in the thesis has dealt with the biographical sketch of Margaret Laurence and the influences that shaped her fiction. Laurence is a Canadian writer solidly rooted in SouthWestern Manitoba, which is the setting of Neepawa, her hometown and Manawaka, her fictional one. This chapter elaborates on the social influences that helped to form Laurence, from her early exposure to anti-colonialism through the students' politics of her Winnipeg period and the culture shock of Africa, to the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s.

Chapter two 'The Thematic Web of Margaret Laurence' refers to the themes that inform her fiction. Although Laurence concentrates on people, the sensual appeal in the landscape is always felt. The theme of the conquest of land is linked to the theme of the imprisoned spirit. Laurence's primary theme is freedom, a concept that has psychological, spiritual and political ramifications. The quest for freedom, the relationships of equality and understanding, for the survival of the spirit with dignity and love. These Laurentian themes reflect the emotional involvement with socio-political problems, which Laurence believes to be essential for the

novelist. The themes of freedom and survival relate both to the social and external world and to the spiritual inner one. They are themes, which Laurence sees as both political and religious. The relationship of the past to the present, roots, ancestors are some of the other themes which inform Laurence's fiction. Her theme of freedom in the political sense concerns the search for the Canadian identity and her concern for the Metis in Canada.

Laurence's first Canadian novel is discussed in the third chapter. Laurence starts off the Manawaka sequence by placing at its centre ninety year old Hagar Shipley. Hagar's great flaw is her pride, her instinct to rebel, and her refusal to give or accept love, her inability to communicate. Hagar's problems are universal and as such she stands for Everyman. The theme of freedom and the subthemes of communication, survival, pride as isolating wilderness and redemption are brought out through the character of Hagar Shipley. We also get our first view of Manawaka, its tight social hierarchy, its legacy of stubborn strength and scorn for weakness, its reverence for ancestry. Throughout the novel Laurence contrasts things natural with things artificial, foreign or imposed by civilisation. The former are irradicable, timeless and essential while the latter, are ephemeral, superficial and lifeless. In psychological terms, she contrasts conscious and unconsciousness experience.

The fourth chapter entitled 'Sisters' Narratives' is the continuation of the psychological dilemma fundamental to *The Stone Angel*. In *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*, Rachel Cameron and Stacey MacAindra are the next set of women protagonists. The theme of freedom, communication, division of selves, human alienation and isolation, personal identity, and the case of women in a male-dominated society are brought out through the character of Rachel Cameron, a spinster school teacher. Besides being a psychological study, *A Jest of God* is also a representation of the socio-historical forces in Canada and Canada's relation to Great Britain. While Hagar is old and ugly and Rachel is neurotic, self-obsessed, Stacey of *The Fire-Dwellers* is a housewife and mother who is prey to myriads of threatening horrors which are both real as well as imagined. She is a fire dweller trapped in the flames of modern society. The dilemmas of personal identity knowledge and assurance of oneself and of communication as the fragile but precious means of confirming identity continue in *The Fire-Dwellers*. Stacey is Everyman and Everywoman in North American urban society.

The eight stories that compose *A Bird in the House* are the subject matter of chapter five. The stories reveal a society through its precocious product and critic. They trace Vanessa McLeod's growth to maturity depicted as an understanding of herself and her heritage. The main motivation of these stories was to exorcise the powerful demons of Laurence's own past, particularly Grandfather Simpson who had inspired in her so much bitterness when she was growing up. As such the autobiographical element is dominant in these stories. Inner freedom is again the dominant theme here. *A Bird in the House* is an integral part of the Manawaka works as they have evolved. The stories make a unique contribution to Canadian literature, in a particular Canadian time and place, under the deadening blows of the Depression and drought of the thirties and into the early years of the Second World War.

Chapter six *The Diviners* is an analysis of the last of the Manawaka novels. The novel culminates and closes the circle of the Manawaka works. It overflows with ideas about life, about life in Canada and about life in Canada as experienced by a woman. The novel clarifies the ideas expressed in the earlier books and also expresses those ideas for which Laurence never previously found a suitable fictional embodiment. *The Diviners* comes to grips with currently debated issues: the search for a Canadian identity; the discrimination encountered by women, the unjust treatment of native people, ecology, psychic and economic alienation, struggle, growth and hope. With *The Diviners* the wheel comes full circle. The five Manawaka works all interweave and fit together. *The Diviners* is the story of a people and a country and not simply and individual.

Manawaka, the small prairie town in Manitoba which has emerged through the five books, has been discussed in chapter seven. The creation of Manawaka- besides being an unique artistic achievement- acquires importance and significance since it provides the textual space for the imaginative revision of Canada's cultural dependencies namely, the search for Canadian Identity (political freedom) and women's search for inner freedom (women's liberation).

Laurence fits her female heroines from the Manawaka cycle into her thematic pattern and reemphasizes that freedom and survival are simultaneously social and spiritual states, hence both political and religious themes. Her political development towards a greater self-consciousness of the rights of individuals, nations and groups to possess their heritage and work out their own destiny seems inevitable. Manawaka is reinvented by every narrator in her own idiom, from ninety year old Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel* to the middle aged narrators of the other fictions, all of whom are engaged in coming to terms with the past, recalling a childhood place from which they have moved away. Manawaka also possesses, implies and constantly reveals beneath its surface the fourth dimension of time and the timelessness of men and women as the victims and prisoners of the institutions they have made for their own survival and of the endless stumbling pilgrimage of the Tribe of Man towards God. Manawaka is indeed Laurence's vision of human nature. As a symbol of human divisiveness whose inhabitants are separated by pride and greed, Manawaka is an inner and outer world and an inescapable one. The achievement of each of Laurence's protagonists is that finally she stands and faces and so triumphs over the Manawakas within.

Laurence's theme of freedom in the political sense concerns the search for the Canadian identity and her concern for the Metis in Canada. Cultural nationalism and women's liberation (inner freedom) dovetail in Laurence's Canadian fiction. For a better understanding of these issues the Appendices will offer some background information on the following. A) The Canadian Quest for Identity B) The Metis C) The concept of Wilderness D) Connections between cultural nationalism and Women's liberation.

Thus we see that the points argued in this thesis centre round the principal concerns in Laurence's Canadian fiction. Broadly speaking, Laurence's Canadian fiction concerns the Canadian search for identity. The old identity questions 'Who am I', 'Where did I come from?' 'Where I am going?' are translated in terms of the search for an interpersonal understanding of the self. Family, roots and ancestors are the sub themes.

Margaret Laurence having witnessed the naked effects of colonization through her African experience is able to better understand her culture's dilemma of identity consequenced by Canada's colonial experience. In the fictional quests for self-discovery and self-actualization of her women protagonists, she metaphorically problematizes Canada's similar quest. As Laurence resolves her protagonists' dilemma of identity through the process of their coming to terms with their past, she provides, in fictional terms, a viable mode to resolve the Canadian dilemma which like that of her protagonists, issues from a fractured and conflictual relationship which is caused by the colonial experience.

The multiplicity and heterogeneity of Canadian cultures give rise to an attempt to look for regional identities as an alternative to the goal of seeking a homogeneous national identity. Laurence creates the fictional prairie town of Manawaka through five books. A sense of place pervades the novel, where the prairie depicted as either garden or wilderness provides a focus for opposing values. The landscape by its very nature suggests a moral or psychological drama in which characters and the town itself engage. In Manawaka, wilderness is present as a feature of environment and available as metaphor or symbolic space for the exploration of female difference. In Manawaka, the enclosed community defines itself against the surrounding wilderness. Laurence's heroines who are brought out in such borderland territory retain their doubleness of vision in their adult lives. Their perceptions that the wilderness as place or state of mind is not something that can be entirely shut out. Although they try to find escape into the city, they realise that they carry Manawaka within them.

Laurence's novels are paradigmatic of the concerns of all Canadians, male and female. The search for an individual identity is paradigmatic of the constant search for the elusive 'Canadian Society'. The alienation and fear of domination of a woman in a patriarchal society is paradigmatic of both Canada's residual colonial legacy and Canada's fear of social, military and cultural domination. Laurence has chosen women protagonists to put across her points of view since close parallels can be seen between the historical situation of women and of Canada as a nation for women's experience of the power politics of gender. Their problematic

relation to patriarchal traditions of authority have affinities with Canada's attitude to the cultural imperialism of the U.S as well as its ambivalence towards its European inheritance.

The colonial mentality and Canada's recent emergence from it have close affinities with women's gendered perceptions of themselves for the revivification of the feminist Movement since the 1960s has created the conditions for a change in women's consciousness as they struggle to find their own voices through which to challenge traditions, which have marginalized and excluded them from power. Looked at from the outside, there is a strong connection between the preoccupation of nationalism and Laurence's fiction. The ideological coincidence coupled with the fact that women's stories provide models for the story of Canada's national identity makes Laurence's Canadian fiction meaningful. The feminine resistance on a need for revision and a resistance to open confrontation or revolution might be said to characterise Canada's national image at home and abroad, while women's stories about procedures for self discovery which are as yet incomplete may be seen to parallel the contemporary Canadian situation.

Laurence's Canadian novels are centred on a series of striking individuals. Out of the Manawaka background, common to many of us and within the imaginative range of all of us, is a timespan of almost a century. Each of these women is battered by events, but also moves of her own free will towards self-recognition, self-acceptance and the awareness of a limited freedom. They endure and they grow, gradually shaking off debilitating guilts and fears and learning to accept themselves as well as others with tolerance and love. That same journey is, of course, the necessary primary foundation of any individual's liberation. Margaret Laurence's gift to us is that they come indomitably through the pages; with laughter, with bravery and with reassurance, our ancestors, our sisters and our friends.

APPENDIX A : THE QUEST FOR CANADIAN IDENTITY

APPENDIX B : THE METIS

APPENDIX C : THE CONCEPT OF WILDERNESS

**APPENDIX D : CONNECTION BETWEEN CULTURAL
NATIONALISM AND WOMEN'S
LIBERATION**

APPENDIX A

THE CANADIAN QUEST FOR IDENTITY

The word 'Canada', it is believed, comes from two Spanish words 'aca' and 'nada' meaning 'nothing here'. This notion of 'absence' innate in the name has haunted the Canadians throughout its socio-cultural history. Therefore the preoccupation with self-definition and the search for a distinctive Canadian identity has been a central aspect of the Canadian imagination and the discourse on identity is the Canadian discourse.

Although it is more than a century since Canada attained its sovereign status as a confederate country by the British, the search for a national identity continues. What might be called the essential act of 'naming' is (still) incomplete."¹

After the treaty of Paris in 1763, Britain gained control over most French possessions in the northern New World. Thereafter, for a little over hundred years, Canada remained a colony of the British Empire until it was granted a sovereign status by the British North America Act in 1867. The colonial experience engendered first ambivalence and subsequently ambiguity regarding the self and the other because of the conflicting desires to come to terms with the new reality and the simultaneous nostalgia for the (m) other culture. Since the initial immigrant population was largely from the British Isles, ties with the (m) other culture were deep rooted and tenacious. As a result, the colonial outlook continued to persist in Canada long after the imperial connection was severed.

While earlier it was the British colonial experience that engendered the colonial outlook, it is now the psychosocial and economic colonization of Canada by the U.S.A. that accounts for its existence. Cultural pluralism and disparity contribute to the continuation of the Canadian

enigma of identity. The multiplicity and heterogeneity of Canadian cultures give rise to ex-centric attempts to look for regional identities as an alternative to the goal of seeking a homogenous national identity.

The adoption of the multi-cultural approach was a political need at the time of the Confederation. The Quebec Act of 1774 granted Quebec a separate status. Because of the widely spread and heterogeneous population and the presence of a powerful and expansionist US culture south of the border, it was a pragmatic choice to bring about a merger of the various provinces to form the Confederation. This would allow the provincial/ethnic difference to exist in a constitution that sanctioned the maintenance of the cultural or ethnic plurality. With the influx of immigrants from all parts of the world in recent times, Canada has become even more multicultural than before and the increasing multiplicity, owing to the multicultural ethos, confounds the question of a national identity even more.

What engage the Canadian writers' psyche are the Jungian internal quest and the search for modes of relating oneself to the community and the communal heritage. Besides the colonial outlook and the American presence, its geography and its regional/cultural plurality render the Canadian quest for identity problematic. Vast distances, enormous regional and cultural difference and sparse and heterogeneous population disallow a sense of organic unit and a monolithic identity. "The question of Canadian identity, so far as it affects the creative imagination is not a 'Canadian' question at all, but a regional question."³

The French-English divide also constitutes the most destabilizing of all regional and cultural divisions obtaining in Canada. This divide has frustrated the image-projection of Canada as one nation both within and without the national borders. In spite of being a confederate member of Canada, Quebec, the French-speaking province, has vehemently persisted in stressing its separate identity and has also resisted efforts to bring about a rapprochement of a kind that can help obviate or nullify the sense of these being two nations in Canada.

Given such constraints, the Canadian quest for identity assumes a high degree of complexity. For Canadian writers intent on inventing the nation, the problem is:

How do we lift an environment to
expression? How do we write in a new country? ⁴

The discourse precipitates most visibly and vociferously in the post 1960's. Writers seek particular means and modes to resolve the Canadian enigma of identity. The fictional narratives of these writers metaphorically problematize the Canadian quest – motif and their fictive structures, as metaphoric analogues, provide viable strategies to cope with the destabilizing sense of the absence of an adequate identity.

Margaret Laurence, having witnessed the naked effects of colonization through her African experience, is able to better understand her culture's dilemma of identity consequenced by Canada's colonial experience. In the fictional quests for self-discovery and self-actualization of her women protagonists, she metaphorically problematizes Canada's similar quest. In as much as Laurence resolves her protagonists dilemma of identity through the process of their coming to terms with their past, she provides, in fictional terms, a viable mode to resolve the Canadian dilemma which, like that of her protagonists, issues from a fractured and conflictual relationship which is caused by the colonial experience.

Fiction is the form of literature most directly concerned with the image of man in society.⁵ An overview of the growth and development of the Canadian novel helps to examine the dialectics of the Canadian quest for identity obtaining in the post 1960s a dialogue with enhanced vigour. The post-1960 period is significant because of the pan-Canadian nationalist sentiment and the unusual literary and cultural ambience. This period marked the new beginnings in Canadian writings – figuratively known as the Canadian "Renaissance".

Before 1900, there is little Canadian fiction of intrinsic literary worth. Besides Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, Major John Richardson's novel *Wacousta* is a powerfully written frontier adventure thriller and a Canadian "gothic" romance. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montagne* (1769) has academic and historical interest from the pictures of Canadians' life of her time.

Other novelists which embodied the grim and dour accounts of rural family life in the prairies are Margaret Laurence, Wiebe and Kroetsch. Among the most noteworthy of the time are Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925) and Robert Stead's *Grain* (1926). Followed by Sinclair Ross's *As for me and my House* (1941) W.O. Mitchells' *Who has Seen the Wind* (1947), And Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959).

In the second quarter of the 20th Century, Morley Callaghan and Hugh MacLennan dominated the literary scene in *Such is My beloved* (1934). *They shall inherit the Earth* (1935). *More Joy in Heaven* (1937) and *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), Callaghan explored human relationships of ordinary people in urban environments to produce moral fables. MacLennan's novels *Barometer Rising* (1941), *Two Solitudes*, and *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959). Explore the web of human inter-personal relationships against a rural milieu. *Two Solitudes* provides in fictional terms a resolution of the Anglo-French conflict towards acquiring a holistic Canadian identity and embodies the essentially Canadian quest archetype and constitutes an important proportion the Canadian Identity quest.

Sinclair Ross, W.O. Mitchell and Sheila Watson contributed to the evolution of the prairie fictive tradition and moved away in their novels from the realistic to the symbolic modes. This is indicative of the Canadian novel's progressive growth and development marking new beginnings, which later culminated in the experimental fiction of the post 1960s years.

Significant events occurred in the second half of the 20th century, which helped accelerate the development of Canadian literature. On the political front, Canada broke the British Imperialist connection by the statute of Westminster (1949), thus asserting complete supremacy to its own parliament and adopted a Canadian as its Governor General in 1952. Canadians now acquired a better sense of independence and national pride. The Canada Council was set up in 1957, which later became a significant agency and catalyst to create a body of Canadian Literature. Robertson Davies, Ethel Wilson, Ernest Buckler, Mordecai Richler, Sheila Watson and Adela Wiseman began writing in the 1950s and enriched the evolving Canadian literary tradition.

Thus we see that there were three periods in the literary history of Canada. 1. Pre – 1943 period 2. Post 1943 period (ending 1968) . 3. The post 1968 period.

The 1960s are the most significant and decisive decade in Canadian cultural and literary history. Since the decade saw the centenary year making the completion of the 1867 confederation, there was a resurgence of nationalistic sentiments across Canada. The quest for identity became a national objective. The election of Pierre Trudeau in 1968 provided Canada with a Prime Minister in whom the French-English duality and dichotomy merged and metaphorically provided a hope for an eventual acquisition of a unitary and historic Canadian identity. The Expo'69 at Montreal became a symbol of national greatness.

It was against this background of resurgent nationalism that the Canadian Literary 'renaissance' took place in the post 60s. The climate was conducive to the flowering of Canadian literature. Frye, who in his Conclusion to the first edition of Klinck's *Literary History* has castigated the critical evaluation of Canadian Literature as "a debunking project" (p.213), had to revise his opinion in the second edition of *Literary History* and admit that it was now "no longer a gleam in a paternal critic's eye."

Two broad patterns emerged in the post 60s to assert the Canadianness of the literature and acquire a place on the literary map of the world. One was to define the innate Canadian identity with reference to some or the other archetypal themes to motifs, experiences and images that in being specifically 'Canadian' served to establish a distinctive Canadian identity of the culture as well as literature. The other was to acquire a Canadian 'Classic' and thus have recognition for Canadian literature on the world literary map. These 'longings of the post 60s belonged to a long-standing tradition that sprang from the early beginnings and precipitated more vigorously in the ongoing quest for a Canadian identity in the post 60s. Impelled by the desire to 'define' the Canadian identity, "critics of the early seventies, more than ever before asserted Canadian nationality as both the object of critical inquiry and its beneficiary".⁶ It became important to recover distinctive Canadian archetypes. Themes and content, rather than modes and methods of articulation became vital indices to establish a

distinctive identity. As a result “thematic criticism”⁷ gained prevalence and credence towards delineating and defining ‘proof-typical’ Canadian themes to recover an organic sense of a distinctive identity. It was also inevitable in a literature that lacked an adequate sense of an organically evolved and established literary tradition.

The novelists in the post sixties were increasingly concerned with the basic functions of returning over time, of examining the foundation of history, of exorcising ancient guilts and celebrating ancient heroism, of giving spirit to the land.⁸

Margaret Laurence posits writer specific modes to reckon with the Canadian problematic and at the same time typifies the dominant cultural and literary preoccupations in the post sixties stage of the Canadian quest. In the course of this study, we have seen that Laurence has used viable modes to reckon with the Canadian dilemma of identity at the post 60s stage of the Canadian quest.

NOTES

1. Dick Harrison. “The search for an Authentic voice in Canadian Literature.” *Ambivalence : Studies in Canadian Literature*. Ed. Om P. Juneja and Chandra Mohan. New Delhi: Allied, 1990), p. 64.
2. Margaret Atwood. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970), p.11.
3. Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*,. Toronto: Anansi, 1971, p. ii (preface).
4. Robert Kroetsch. “On being an Alberta writer”. *The New Provinces : Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980*. Ed. Howard Palmer and Donal Smith. Vancouver: Tantalus research, 1980. Rpt. In Open letter 5th ser. 4 (spring 1983). p 75.
5. (Robert L. MC Dougall, “The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature,” *Canadian Literature* 18 (Autumn 1963). Rept. In Mandel, *Contexts*, p.217. 5. Robert L. MC Dougall, “The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature,” *Canadian Literature* 18 (Autumn 1963). Rept. In Mandel, *Contexts*, p.217.
6. John Moss : “Bushed in the Sacred Wood”, *The Human Elements*. 2nd ser. Ed. David Helwig. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1981. P. 162.

7. Frank Davey, *Surveying the Paraphrase : Eleven essays on Canadian Literature*, (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983) p.4.
8. George Woodcock. "Possessing the land : Notes on Canadian Fiction". p.94.

APPENDIX B

THE METIS

A short background to the tragic history of the Metis in Manitoba and Saskatchewan would go as follows: Indians originally provided much of the labour force for the fur trade in the Canadian west. Gradually white traders and voyagers began to marry with the native population principally the Cree the salteaux and Assinibione. The mixed blood population increased and acquired a sense of cohesiveness. When fur – traders were discharged , many remained in the North west with their Indian wives and families. Generally the French group was referred to as Metis and the English as half breeds. The Metis were largely migratory or nomadic whereas many of the English half-breed settled down to agricultural pursuits. ¹

For nearly two hundred years prior to 1869, Rupert's land the vast drainage basin of Hudson Bay was ruled like a feudal fiefdom by the Hudson Bay company, the company an incubus which had buried the area in apathy. By 1869, a sizable group of half breeds, French and English, lived in the valley near Fort Garry (now Winnipeg), their livelihood centered on the buffalo hunt, an enormous enterprise.

Indian and Metis had common bonds, including languages and both claimed territorial rights as aboriginal people. But the Metis were never accorded legal status by the Canadian Government. Their tragedy "climaxed and epitomized the whole struggle of red man or brown against white".³ In 1869 the Hudson Bay Company without informing the people of the area surrendered their Charter and sold the Canadian West to the Government in Ottawa (newly confederated two years before). White settlers had been slowly increasing for half a century and trade between the Metis and the Americans just to the South, was rapidly increasing in the 1860s. The Metis feared for the security of title to the lands on which they lived on the banks

of the Red and Qu' Appelle Rivers, while the Canadians, in central and eastern Canada, feared for the security of Ruperts' land against American encroachment. Louis Riel led the Manitoba Metis first in passive resistance to the Canadian surveyors, and finally in an armed rebellion. His provisional government stopped entry of the Canadian representatives in December, 1869 and seized Fort Garry and composed a list of constitutional demands most of which were made law the next year when Manitoba became the fifth province to enter the Dominion of Canada.

For Riel and his people it was a pyrrhic victory. His provisional government had executed Thomas Scott an Ontario Orangeman, after a court – martial. This act and Riel's unfortunate links with American supporters were largely responsible for the military force which took Fort Garry in the spring of 1870 and forced Riel into exile in the United States. As for the Manitoba Metis some received title to their farms and subsequently lost it to unscrupulous land speculators and white settlers. Ontario settlers (Laurence's ancestors among them) poured into Manitoba in the next few decades and altered its social make-up from a large proportion of French – speaking majority. The Metis were the tragic heirs to centuries of hostility between these groups in Canada.

After 1870, many of the Manitoba metis moved westward to the area of Batoche on the South Saskatchewan, where the Dumont family had lived, and helped lead the buffalo hunt. Between 1870 and 1885 (the second rebellion and the one which sealed the fate of this people). The Saskatchewan group was enlarged by Metis who had lost their land in Manitoba. It was a tortured time for Metis.⁴ The disappearance of the buffalo and the inevitable spread of white settlement westward doomed the way of life of Metis who depended on the buffalo for food and other necessities. By the late 1870s and early 1880s the Saskatchewan Metis were in fear for their land rights while pleas on their behalf from white intermediaries and their own petitions went unanswered by Ottawa.

Donald Creighton's two volume biography of Canada's founding father and greatest political leader explains the forces in central Canada which doomed the Metis to extinction as a people for the next eighty years.⁵ As a lawyer, Macdonald had played a leading part in the military

trials which followed the 1838 invasion and battle near Kingston; as a politician he had felt the weight of American pressures through two generations. The Metis fell between the Scylla of a vision of a British North America and the Charybdis of American Manifest Destiny.

Laurence's fiction depicts the general contempt with which Metis were regarded in the latter part of the 19th and the 20th century. In a primitive or frontier society their invaluable abilities won the Metis a fair degree of social acceptance. As the fur trade declined, white civilization spread west ward, and the buffalo became almost extinct. Metis' usefulness to white society declined and with that change came a growing contempt for an illiterate, nomadic group.

The whites saw the Metis as not merely uneducated but improvident. The Metis maintained a strong sense of individual liberty and egalitarian democracy. Woodcock describes the Metis attitude as one of anarchic egoism towards the weak. The "uneducated" Metis could often speak half a dozen languages (French, English, and different Indian languages). They could ride and shoot and were superb hunters, tappers, guides.

In the 1960s the Metis reappeared as an ethnic group in Manitoba. The political climate was favourable to the kind of pressures the group could bring to bear and group cohesiveness could be used to improve conditions for its members. Joe Sawchik, who worked with Metis in Manitoba in the 1970s objects to the kind of social Darwinism that sees European culture as superior to primitive cultures and thus entitled to pre-empt as "inferior" people's land sawchuck speaks of a "white settler mentality" which helped to destroy the Metis sense of self worth. Laurence's fiction depicts their struggle against this psychic aggression.

Laurence sees Somalis and Metis as victims of technology in the form of vastly superior weapons. (The use of the gatling gun by Canadians in their suppression of the Metis uprising in 1885 corroborates Laurence's claim that first successful machine gun ever devised, an American invention was operated in Saskatchewan by Lieu. Arthur Howard of New Haven, Conecticut who used the Metis uprising as a test ground for his weapon [see Joseph Kinsery Howard, *The strange empire of Louis Riel* swan edition (New York, 1965); its massacre of the remnant that survived belongs to this pattern.]

Laurence's review of Woodcock's biography closes on three main points. Along with the injustice done to Metis and the necessity of redressing that injustice, she stresses their "rediscovered sense of self-worth and the ability to tell and teach the things needed to be known".⁷ We have forgotten she says our need to pay homage to the earth and its creativeness. Pre-industrial societies were not ideal "nor can we return to them but they knew about living in relationship to the land, and they may ultimately be the societies from whose values we must try to learn."⁸ In *The Diviners* the haunting ballads of Jules Tonnerre, Lazarus and Piquette catch the pain of this prairie people while through Pique child of morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre, Laurence expresses her belief that white Canadians are inextricably joined to Indians and Metis in Canada's future as in her past.⁹

NOTES

1. Joe Sawchuk, *The Metis of Manitoba: Reformulation of an Ethnic identity* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 19-21.
2. W.L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, (Toronto, 1957), p.9.
3. Howard, *Strange Empire*, p.22 .
4. *ibid.*, p. 21.
5. Donald Creighton, John A Macdonald, *The Young Political*, (Toronto 1952), p. 309.
6. Sawchuck, *The Metis of Manitoba*, pp. 12-70.
7. Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p.211.
8. *ibid.*, p. 212.
9. cf. The symbolic union of English and French Canada suggested by the marriage in Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*.

APPENDIX C

THE CONCEPT OF WILDERNESS

When the first Europeans came to Canada in the 16th century, they confronted an alien landscape of silent forests in what is now Quebec and Ontario. Inevitably those first European responses were male ones recorded through the accounts of explorers and trappers, soldiers and missionaries. Canada was a hostile terrain with an implacable climate and filled with hidden dangers from indigenous Indians and wild beasts where the European settlers felt their existence to be a heroic struggle for survival against multiple natural threats. The male response was either one of fear and recoil or an adventurous challenge to the unknown in journeys of exploration and later colonial exploitation and settlement. The Canadian myth of wilderness as alien and 'other' is the male myth of wilderness but if we analyse women's writings as in Laurence's writing, there are important differences in female versions of the wilderness reflecting their very different experiences of colonization. Small numbers of European women came to Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries (Frenchwomen as early as 1604 to Acadia and 1617 to Quebec) and they came as military wives, settlers, temporary visitors or in the case of some French – women as missionary nuns. Laurence's fiction consists of stories of settlements as she rewrites male pioneer myths from the women's points of view. The differences in many respects conform to stereotype gender difference, focusing on women's domestic and private experience as they tried to establish homes for their families under harsh pioneer conditions. Her fictions record the facts of settlements with its dangers and their responses to the challenge of the wilderness. There is an interesting doubleness of response to the wilderness. For the vast Canadian solitudes, provided precarious conditions of existence where women were forced to redefine themselves and where the self was discovered to be something far more problematical than feminine stereotypes. The wilderness of environments seems to have evoked a corresponding awareness of unknown psychic territory within, so that the facts of settlements provided the conditions of unsettlement as the

wilderness became a screen on to which women projected their silent fears and desires. The wilderness as the pathless image beyond the enclosure of civilized life was appropriated by women as the symbol of unmapped territory to be transformed through writing into female imaginative space. It provides the perfect image for the 'wild zone' the 'mother country' of liberated desire and female authenticity.

Hence we see that right from the time of the earliest Canadian creative writing up to the present time, a female character type can be found in English-Canadian fiction. By virtue of her historical origins, this character type is labelled "The Pioneer Woman", since her creation was in fact grounded in the actuality of the pioneer experience, and on details of the experience that were reconstructed and reinterpreted in fiction, often through a moralistic or idealistic filter. The pioneer woman has made the transition from being a "mythical concept",¹ evident in the work of the pioneer writer Catharine Parr Triall as in her *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) and *The Canadian Settler's Guide* (1855), to being an accepted and essential aspect of female characterization in Canadian fiction. The longevity of the pioneer woman as character type in English-Canadian fiction and her recurrent use as a metaphor for Canadian femininity indicates that the character appeals to some common perception of a woman's role in Canadian society and that the role for women proposed by the early emigrants was indeed an appropriate choice for the Canadian frontier.

The direct antecedents of the pioneer as literary character were the real pioneers who settled in Upper Canada during the early nineteenth century and who created a new life and a new social mythology for themselves. Pioneering in Canada must have been a disorienting experience for the nineteenth century female emigrants. Far from Home, separated from friends and family, such emigrants as Catharine Parr Traill who documented her pioneer experiences in *The Backwoods of Canada* and *The Canadian Settler's Guide* faced daunting new tasks in a strange and occasionally dangerous environment. In order to cope with their situation, women were forced to learn new domestic skills and to redefine their feminine role within the family unit and within the society around them. Virginia Rouslin defines Canadian pioneer women as "heroines",² drawing attention to a small group of highly educated and articulate settlers – Susanna Moddie, Mary O'Brien, Catharine Trail and Anna Jameson –

women who were able not only to cope with their new environment but also to provide suggestions for others. Drawing upon her academic background and upon her social training as an English gentlewoman, each woman outlines a new role for women, a role suited to “a new land who had not yet had the time to make social prescriptions as who should do what”.³ The picture of the typical pioneer woman which emerges from these is of a self-assured confident woman, one who adapts cheerfully to adverse circumstances, one who is capable and active in an emergency, one who plays a vital role in pioneering. In the course of their pioneering endeavours, women like Traill and Susanna Moodie outlined a new feminine ideal, ‘the Canadian Pioneer Woman.’

Traill becomes one of the single most important contributors to the creation of this new Canadian concept of women in both an historical and literary sense; in *The Diviners* Laurence’s heroine Morag has extensive conversations in fiction such as *Canadian Crusoes* (1852) as well as non-fictional works such as *The Backwoods of Canada* and *The Canadian Settler’s Guide*.

In the latter two non-fictional works, Traill was very accurate in her depiction of Canadian settlers, life because she was attempting to help other emigrant women to master the difficulties encountered and develop the skills required in the course of the pioneering experience. Yet Traill offsets her basic pragmatism with a strong moral bias and obvious tendency to colour real events with a cheerful idealism. She transposes the highly idealized figure of the Canadian pioneer woman resulting from the combination of realism and idealism into her fiction and creates a new fictional character type. Traill’s pioneer heroine in *Canadian Crusoes* is a mixture of fact and fancy, an idealistic reinterpretation of real life on the frontier of nineteenth century Upper Canada.

Various versions of the pioneer woman have appeared in English-Canadian fiction throughout the hundred years following Traill’s development of the character type in the middle of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, frontier days in Canada were rapidly coming to an end and the pioneer woman as she had been identified by Traill, was becoming a figure from the past. The time of the century, then, constitutes a turning point of the sorts in

the settlement of English Canada. Yet, the pioneer woman continued to appear in such English-Canadian fiction as Sara Jeanette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904) and Ralph Connors' *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) and *Glengarry School Days* (1902). They document the period of transition from frontier to civilization in their fiction. Consequently, their novels echo back to the past in featuring pioneer women who cope with a new type of frontier environment, one grounded in social and personal concerns rather than in the physical landscape.

The longevity of the pioneer woman as character type is further demonstrated in the twentieth century fiction of Margaret Laurence. The frontier here is an internal, personal one. The protagonist of the first of Laurence's Manawakan novels, Hagar Shipley of *The Stone Angel*, is the daughter of Manitoba pioneers. Hagar is torn between two opposing views of her self and her social role and she is unable to reconcile them. On the one hand, Jason Currie wishes to recreate in his daughter a model of femininity which is appropriate to a Canadian frontier context, whether that frontier territory is the physical wasteland encountered by Hagar's mother or the emotional wasteland that Hagar creates for herself. On the other hand, following the example set by her pioneer father, Hagar epitomizes the New World freedom and strength of mind which is common to Canadian pioneers. During the period in which she cannot see her frontier, Hagar behaves inappropriately and cannot begin the pioneering process. When she is dying she finally identifies her frontier "Pride was my wilderness".

Rachel Cameron of *A Jest of God* has the introspective power that Hagar must learn, but she lacks Hagar's ability to act, to speak out and to make decisions. Hagar's wilderness is her false pride; she must learn humility and with humility comes freedom. Rachel's wilderness is her uncertainty, her lack of pride and self confidence; she must learn to act decisively and with the ability to act comes a sense of true humility. Rachel identifies her wilderness: 'that fool of a fear' and the recognition of the frontier leads to the protagonists' ability to act correctly on the frontier; she learns to act decisively and competently in order to effect change and improvement.

Similarly Stacey, Vanessa and Morag are all pioneers. Morag Gunn of *The Diviners* is a 20th century pioneer woman in fiction. As Morag reviews her life, this protagonist achieves a level of self-awareness and self determining activity. On the one hand, Morag faces a personal crisis which causes confusion; the departure of her daughter Pique is the event which forces Morag to re-examine her past decisions and actions in an attempt to understand her present confusion.

The term "pioneering process" used in connection with Trail's fiction, refers to the pioneer woman's interaction with a real, physical place. In the later fiction, such as that of Duncan and Connor the pioneering process also becomes a metaphor for social and religious conflict. In the contemporary fiction of Margaret Laurence, the pioneering process is internalized referring to a personal dilemma to be solved by the protagonist. Despite the shifting nature of the frontier territory, however, the pioneer woman as character type remains readily identifiable. Certain essential qualities are retained; the ability to act decisively and quickly in cases of emergency and the strength to accept adverse circumstances on the frontier combined with the courage to attempt an improvement of these frontier conditions.

Laurence's protagonists in her Manawakan fiction are contemporary versions of the pioneer woman. The frontier has been recreated as a state of mind rather than as a place. Laurence's ideas echo back to Traill's concept of the dual nature of the interaction between the frontier and the frontier woman. Although the pioneer woman must accept adversity with equanimity, humility and pragmatism, she must also begin immediately to improve her situation.⁴ The positive results of the successful tackling of the frontier (whether that frontier is expressed in the physical context of Traill's nineteenth century Ontario Backwoods or in the metaphoric context of Laurence's twentieth century existential angst) are numerous. The pioneer woman may discover a previously hidden or unexpressed sense of independence, a feeling of freedom from fear, restraint and social criticism, a sense of pride in her accomplishment of distasteful or difficult tasks. While none of Laurence's protagonists is an ideal character, there is an awareness of some elusive ideal towards which each is working. The recognition of this frontier and the successful tackling of the process of pioneering on that frontier lead to the protagonists' discovery of her own strengths and help her to move closely to approximate

that ideal of femininity defined as the pioneer woman. As she pursues her new activities, each of these contemporary pioneers, discover hitherto unguessed reserves of strength and courage.

In Margaret Laurence's prairie town of Manawaka the wilderness is there as a feature of environment and available as metaphor or symbolic space for the exploration of female difference. In Laurence's Manawaka, the enclosed community defines itself against the surrounding wilderness; the edges of town signalled by the spots where the sidewalks and streetlights cease to provide the wasteland occupied by the more marginal members of the community and by the public rubbish dump. Laurence's heroines are brought up in such borderland territory and they retain their doubleness of vision in their adult lives. Their perceptions that the wilderness as place or state of mind is not something that can be entirely shut out are written into their stories resulting in those moments of instability where cracks open in the realistic surface to reveal dark secret places within social enclosures. Her stories look like mosaics of secret alternative worlds that co-exist with ordinariness as everything presents a double image of itself. This kind of doubleness exists for Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*, where coming to terms with the past as an adult involves a journey through the wilderness of memory to a homecoming in a log farmhouse in Ontario far from the prairie town where she grew up. As Laurence knows wilderness living should be updated to fit the needs of women in the late 20th century. Her fictions do not aspire towards androgyny but rather towards the rehabilitation of the feminine as an alternative source of power. Wilderness provides the textual space for such imaginative revision.

NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, *Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada*, in *The Bush Garden*, p. 232.
2. Rouslin, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Pioneering in Canada*, p. 1-47.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
4. Traill, "Introductory Remarks", in *The Canadian Settlers Guide*, pp. 1-47.

APPENDIX D

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

In Margaret Laurence's fiction connections between nationality and gender in her fiction have produced a literature that is distinctive. There are interesting similarities between the search for visibility and identity very characteristic and Laurence's Manawaka fictions and the Canadian search for a distinctive cultural self-image. The works of Margaret Laurence are paradigmatic of the concerns of all Canadians, male and female. The search for an individual identity is paradigmatic of the constant search for the elusive 'Canadian identity', the alienation and fear of domination of a woman in a patriarchal society is paradigmatic of both Canada's residual colonial legacy and Canada's fear of social, military and cultural domination.

Laurence's 'partiality' for her own sex also appears in her particular view of woman. Woman, she presents, essentially as both a victim and a survivor – a dual aspect. Attitudes in the victims range from acceptance of their victim role to consciousness that salvation lies inside the self and outside traditional and recognized society patterns for the female. The victims range from those who remain locked into their victim role to the survivors.

Laurence, is more emphatic on women's difficulty in asserting herself in a man's world. At the beginning of the 20th century, although the battle for emancipation had started a few decades earlier, women were still maintained in a state of dependence, especially in such small prairie towns as Manawaka. A middle – class girl received such education that could teach her "good manners", "how to look smart"¹ how to dress and behave like a lady.² That education taught her the Victorian cult of the true women who loved domesticity and

prepared her for the acceptance of the "woman's sphere"³ to which she was to be confined apart from the bustle of real life.

However, things have changed for women over the years covered by the narratives. Laurence's purpose however, is not to advertise the progressive improvements of the Canadian woman's condition nor to call for more; her approach is neither sociological nor political but purely psychological; her intention is to present the survival process in a human being, more particularly in a woman, who might have been born to be a victim, but in fact, was born a survivor.⁴

There are close parallels between the historical situation of women and of Canada as a nation for women's experience of the power politics of gender and their problematic relation to patriarchal traditions of authority have affinities with Canada's attitude to the cultural imperialism of the United States as well as its ambivalence towards its European inheritance of English and French language and culture is complicated by the multiple origins of the Canadian population as a result of multi-ethnic pattern of immigration and settlement. While Canadians have strong loyalties to racial and cultural origins outside Canada, they also have a strong sense of marginality in relation to those cultures which have disinherited them as immigrants. So a question of inheritance frequently becomes a questioning of inheritance in Margaret Laurence's fiction, where attempts at revision are problematized by the knowledge that self-definition can take place only within the very traditions that are being questioned. The colonial inheritance of a postcolonial culture like Canada's includes an 'inescapable doubleness of vision'. Given the parallels, it seems entirely appropriate that Laurence should choose a woman as subject for her meditation on the Canadian psyche.

The colonial mentality and Canada's recent emergence from it have close affinities with women's gendered perceptions of themselves for the revivification of the feminist movement since the 1960s has created the conditions for a change in women's consciousness as they struggle to find their own voices through which to challenge traditions which have marginalized and excluded them from power. Looked at from the outside there is a strong connection between the preoccupations of nationalism of women's fiction. The ideological

coincidence coupled with the fact that women's stories provide models for the story of Canada's national identity makes Laurence's Canadian novels meaningful. The feminine resistance on a need for revision and a resistance to open confrontation or revolution might be said to characterize Canada's national image at home and abroad while women's stories about procedures for self discovery which are as yet (as always?) incomplete may be seen to parallel the contemporary Canadian situations.

Canadian arguments for co-existence and national policies that take into account its own multicultural diversity may be translated into the arguments of feminism, for the power politics of imperialism and of gender have much in common. The nature of power relationships between the sexes and the social and literary consequence of this have been brought to the forefront of public attention by the feminist movement. Margaret Laurence is aware of herself as an inheritor of a female literary tradition which includes both European and Canadian predecessors.

Laurence's Canadian fictions are in no sense theoretical statements about feminism though they are all written out of a conviction of the worth of women and the necessity for women to be critically conscious of their own roles in conventional social structure.

Novels and short stories do what theory cannot do, for they deal with particularities of individual experience problematizing theoretical issue by writing in the instabilities which are the very conditions of knowing. Laurence's stories about the lives of girls and women between the 1950's and the 1980's are concerned with exploration and survival, crossing boundaries, challenging limits and glimpsing new prospects. Yet these stories do not sound like male heroism but like uneventful private lives. The main reason for this difference is that heroism is redefined in her fictions for these are stories about inner adventures which are often invisible to other people. The limits they challenge are cultural and psychological and their discoveries are of no importance to anybody but the characters themselves. Two of her novels have women writers as protagonists engaged in a struggle with language and inherited literary conventions to find more adequate ways of telling about women's experience, fighting their way out of silence to project more authentic images of how women feel and what they do.

In her Manawaka cycle, Margaret Laurence uses the ancient doctrine of the four elements and their corresponding humours to illuminate in mythical terms the life journeys towards self-knowledge of women of widely various types. Hagar the earth-bound in *the Stone Angel*, Stacey the fire-threatened in *The Fire Dwellers*, the airily insubstantial Rachel in *A Jest of God*, and fluid Morag in *The Diviners*, present an elemental pattern of Canadian life in all its aspects. In her final novel, the reconciliation comes through relationships of Morag (water) with her three lovers, the evasive Brooke Skilton (air), the earthy painter of rocks Dan Mc Raith, and the fiery Metis Jules Tonnerre, whose own sister was burned to death in the kind of combustion that Stacey MacAindra feared for herself and her children. Fire and water coming together to produce the ultimate reconciliation of the elements are shown in the child, Piquette born of the union of Moreg and Jules, the novelist and the singer the two truly creative beings in Margaret Laurence's vast gallery of characterizations.

Laurence's novels are centred on a series of striking individuals, and if they are not strictly Bildungsromans, tracing the development of the central figure from youth to maturity, they resemble them to the extent that they show the central characters at some crucial time in their lives coming to terms with their pasts and in doing so moving out of ignorance and indecision into awareness and confidence. Sometimes the moment of self-recognition comes at the end, as it comes to Hagar Shipley a brief time before death and sometimes it comes when there is life ahead in which to apply it, as happens to Rachel Cameron in *A Jest of God*, but whenever it does arrive, it brings, not an assurance of happiness, but a possibility of serenity unknown before.

Women readers of the Manawaka works feel a special gratitude for Hagar, Rachel, Stacey and Morag. As Margaret Laurence has often said, in America, Hagar was considered the archetypal North American old woman, in Canada she was everybody's Grandmother. Out of the Manawaka background, common to many of us and within the imaginative range of all of us, is a timespan of almost a century, each of these women is battered by events, but also moves of her own free will towards self-recognition, self-acceptance and the awareness of a limited freedom. They are all intensely and introspectively aware of themselves, but the

demons of self-dramatization, self-pity and the sentimentality do not obscure their vision or block their progress. They endure and they grow, gradually skaking off debilitating guilts and fears and learning to accept themselves as well as others with tolerance and love. That same journey is, of course, the necessary primary foundation of any individual's liberation.

These women do not come through as larger-than-life mythic figures or as tragic heroines, elevated and distanced from our ordinary experience. All of Margaret Laurence's women are strong and strongly maternal. They also feel the imperatives of emotion, of guilt and desire and individuality that all women share. And they live, as we do among the tensions set up between their individual, inner need and the demands that society imposes on them from the outside. They achieve only the precarious balance that might conceivably issue from their temperaments and their situations. But they do issue as individuals and as members of the human race with dignity and potential, rights and responsibilities, which are insistently shown to be equal to men's. Margaret Laurence's great gift to us is that they come indomitably through the pages, with laughter, with bravery and with reassurance – our ancestors, our sisters and our friends.

Laurence made a radical change in the whole literary tradition by re-telling from a woman's point of view traditional and archetypal feminine life patterns that have been portrayed hitherto by male authors only. Laurence 'revisions what it means to be a woman' and her heroines are 'changing the very structure of characterization, in world literature'.⁶

In depicting her woman characters Laurence's first muse is "psychological realism", the largely twentieth-century infatuation with writing towards the individual experience and the rarefield moments of self-awareness. One of the aesthetic dictates of this fictional form is its demand for absolute honesty to character. All fiction is built from a character, an event and an idea about how the two fit together. The idea of psychological realism is its fusion of character with event, so that the character increasingly becomes the event.

The extent to which Laurence applies this idea is testimony to the "psychologying" of society to which her generation of the 1950s were first witnesses. Theories and therapies

previously little known outside of university departments swept out into the public consciousness. Psychologists, began outpacing most other professionals in the growth of their prestige, their incomes and the power of their explanations of the human condition. Under the shadow of a nearly terminal war, the 50s became a time to turn inwards, to grasp the structure and meaning of the inner experience and begin documenting the murmurs of the stream-of-consciousness voice. For a neophyte writer, character assumed a new primacy. Fiction increasingly existed less as plot and narration moved along by the device of character and more as the exegesis of character accomplished through a skillful minimization and manipulation of plot.

There were many psychological theories vying for public acceptance in the post-war era. One especially appealed to Laurence's upwardly mobile, educated and socially critical generation: humanist psychology, later referred to generically as the human potential movement. This movement, with its powerful individualistic philosophy, can be considered Laurence's second muse, and its influence on her writing is primarily evident in her concept of character, the way in which she constructs personality.

Laurence portrays personality as a constant movement towards a unity of an individual's two halves: self as subject and self as object. The whole Manawaka mindscape is about the characters' abilities to wrench themselves free from the prison of the self as object, the self as experienced only through the perception of others. Laurence recognizes the social origin of this "existential cleavage" (what Durkheim called 'anomie' and what Fromm called 'alienation') and progressively documents the landscape of past ties, conditioning and circumstances that accounts for our acting the way we do. With each Manawaka novel the "outside" world becomes larger and more forceful, the women become more feminist in their awareness, and the reader is thrown deeper into her or his own volatile memories.

Yet even as Laurence does this, she does not exploit fully the social consequences of such a process. Solutions remain personal, even though the problems might originate in "social" time and place – mutual and social – fixed firmly, within their skulls. This is consistent with humanist psychologist's epistemology, their "theory of mind" ⁷. Despite its personally

liberating potential, there is a very conservative element permeating the humanist model of mind and personality: the belief that people everywhere and anytime can, indeed, self-actualize and attain their full potential, if only they can identify and transcend the barriers within themselves that stand in the way of their bridging their dual nature. Social conditions that may impede this process are either ignored or considered irritating but trivial diversions.⁸ Laurence, perhaps partly a result of her individualist-oriented Presbyterian background, and certainly because of the pervasiveness of individualism in North American culture which the human potential movement merely enshrined as psychological theory, incorporates this view in constructing her characters. Mind is posed as the greatest and final liberator of the human quandry; it is that which allows us to divine our own paradoxical essence.

Paradox, in turn, figures prominently in Laurence's writing, particularly in *The Diviners*. It is also a feature that distinguishes humanist psychology from most other psychological theories. Not surprisingly, many of Laurence's writing peers who utilize other epistemologies in their characterization - e.g., Blais, with her transformational eclecticism; Munro who uses what can best be called a "behaviourial/learning" model; and Atwood, with her developing feminist consciousness - are notably less enamoured with the transcendence of apparent opposites. These later models allow the authors to explore the social world more exhaustively than does Laurence's model. They allow for irony, distance, objectivity: those very things that Harlow, for one, found lacking in *A Jest of God*.⁹ There is, and can be, little irony in Laurence's characterization. Instead, there is a constant knot of ambiguity which her characters attempt to unravel. There simply is no distance from her characters' intense mental struggles. Laurence's first-person voice, while effectively placing us in her characters' reality, also constrains us to the singularity of one person's perception of events. The first-person chronicle is hand in glove with the psychological paradigm: the internal resolution of social experiences and contradictions.

Viewing her theme, structure and characterization¹⁰ as an out-growth of the humanist "idea" gives some understanding of why - despite Laurence's increasing interest in social, as well as personal, intercourse and her use of multiple narrative tones and devices to accommodate - her fiction always reads like a first- person monologue. It also clarifies why the fiction works

best when the reader reciprocates the process of the characters. It is dull, voyeuristic and unrewarding to watch someone in the throes of a primal scream; it is cathartic and moving to join the person in the scream. The strength of the human potential movement is its focus on individual process; its weakness lies in its intellectual and social superficiality. The same can be said of Laurence's novels.

The incompleteness we experience with Laurence's writing comes from the fact that her characters remain so adamantly self-reliant. Their awareness of their contradictory essence is kept locked up within themselves, because Laurence places the resolution of that contrariness within the individual psyche rather than in the dynamics of social interchange/change. The experience of these "opposites" is potentially revolutionary, allowing the characters and ourselves to see in simultaneous sharp focus the antithetical beliefs our society creates for us all, and particularly for women. But as the English critic John Berger once wrote, such revolutionary consciousness when confined to the self becomes madness. Laurence's characters, within their fictional world, do confine that part of their consciousness to themselves. They are also, in varying degrees, "mad", both in the extent to which they rebel against and try to alter their own experiences of the fictional reality, and in how they perceive the way in which they are seen by other characters.

This madness, this "fear of the fool", diminishes with each new character that Laurence creates from the fulminating Stacey to the uneasily fulfilled Morag. Each novel demonstrates a movement away from the conservative personality model Laurence first adopted, becoming ever more articulate of the particular events and social phenomena that create the character. Laurence herself has described her work as an attempt "to try and get down some of the paradoxes of the human individual with everything that has gone to influence their life: their parents, the whole bit about history, religion, the myth of the ancestors, the social environment, their relationship with other people and so on..."¹¹

The unfolding Manawaka world is a tribute to the rigour with which she pursued that objective. It is also an artistic expression of the human potential movement itself, as it railed progressively against its own limitations in explaining the human drama, and slowly expanded

from a narrow solipsism to a broader social definition. Neither Laurence nor the human potential movement, however, took their last step out of the individual mind and into the collective social consciousness.¹² Both have become arrested in a milieu of paradox, unable to leap over that final philosophical wall dividing the individual from the social mind. In their own fashion, their works are, in turn, more ambitious and unsuccessful, as Laurence and humanists both progress towards a social analysis while retaining an almost Hegelian-like individualism.

Yet Laurence's characters never really surrender to that individualism; they do not succumb fully to their personal madness. It is this feature that can be considered to be Laurence's artistic achievement and the answer to the question: why can such traditionally constructed stories be so evocative and moving? Indeed, it is the very traditionalism of her story-telling form, her enslavement to her first muse of psychological realism- with its emphasis on creating real characters, women and men who assume an identity independent of the writer's conscious intent- that allows Laurence to construct a world rich in its humaneness. Her characters are intensely alive; they are more than mere soap-boxes for a psychological theory. They strain against the confining personality models from which they were cast, just as Laurence herself struggled to reconcile a limited theory of self with her own experiences of broader truth, i.e. that the social is personal and the personal is social.

Perhaps what silenced her muse's voice are the insurmountable differences between Laurence's idea of character and her actual creation of character, one stemming from a psychological paradigm, the other from an artistic form. But it is these differences that have created the most delicately disquieting fiction in Canadian Literature.

NOTES

1. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 154.
2. Ibid., p.36.
3. Ibid., p.3.

4. Marcienne Rocard, "Women and Woman in *The Stone Angel*", *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol.11, Dec. 1981, p.84.
5. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, 'Laurence's Fiction: A Reviewing of Feminine Archetypes', *Canadian Literature*, vol. 93, summer 1982, p.42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
7. Cf. S. Stanley Sargent. "The Humanist Approach to Personality", in Benjamin Wolman, ed. *The Handbook of General Psychology* (New York : Prentice-Hall, 1973),
8. In the apathetic and downward- spiralling seventies, this epistemology ultimately mutated to become the new psychological school of victimology; the art of holding victims responsible for their repressive social conditions. Laurence may not approach character in this way, but it is inherent in her construct of personality: cf. William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
9. Robert Harlow, "Lack of Distance", in New, op. Cit.
10. For discussion on Laurence's theme and structure, cf. Laurence, *Gadgetry or Growing : Form and Voice in the Novel*, and Judy Kearns, *Rachel and Social Determinism : A Feminist Reading of A Jest of God*, both in JCF p.27.
11. Quoted in Donald Cameron, ed. Margaret Laurence: "The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto : Macmillan, 1973), p.114.
12. For a discussion on the topic of 'social mind', cf. Plekhanov, "The Role of the Individual in History", and Adam Schaff, "The Individual in Society" both in *Gould and Truitt, Political Ideologies*, (New York, 1973). Also Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The struggle for a Science of Culture*(Vintage: New York, 1980).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Stone Angel, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; London: Macmillan; New York: Knopf, 1964. Introduction by William H. New. NCL. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

A Jest of God. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; London: Macmillan; New York: Knopf, 1966. Introduction by G.D. Killam, NCL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1852-1966. London: Macmillan, 1968. New York: Praeger, 1969

The Fire-Dwellers. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; London: Macmillan; New York: Knopf, 1969. St. Albans, Herts: Panther Books, 1973. Introduction by Allan Bevan, NCL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.

A Bird in the House. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; New York: Gibbs, NCL Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Jason's Quest. Illustrated by Staffan Torell. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart; New York: Knopf; London: Macmillan, 1970.

The Diviners. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; New York: Knopf; London: Macmillan, 1974, New York: Bantam, 1975, Introduction by David Staines, NCL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

A Tree for Poverty : Somali Poetry and Prose, published for British Protectorate of Somaliland. Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1954. Rpt. Dublin: Irish University Press, 1970; Hamilton: McMaster University, 1970.

This Side Jordan. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; London; Macmillan: New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960. Introduction by G.D. Killam, NCL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories. Introduction by Clara Thomas, NCL, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

The Prophet's Camel Bell. Toronto: McClelland Stewart; London: Macmillan, 1963. Under the title *New Wind in a Dry Land*, New York: Knopf, 1964. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.

Heart of a Stranger. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976. *The Olden Days Coat*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.

Six Darn Cows. Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979.

The Christmas Birthday Story. Pictures by Helen Lucas. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980.

Dance on the Earth. A Memoir. Edited by Jocelyn Laurence. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

"Ivory Tower or Grassroots? The Novelist as Socio-Political Being."

In a Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock, ed. William H. New, pp. 15-25. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1978.

"My Final Hour." *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring, 1984), 198- 97. See also essays and stories by Laurence in the following anthologies or special editions: *A place to Stand On*, ed., George Woodcock; *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 27, (Summer, 1980); Margaret Laurence. The Writer and Her critics, ed. Willian Nes; and Margaret Laurence. An Appreciation, ed. Christ Verduyn.

OTHER BOOKS REFERRED TO:

Bailey, Nancy. "Margaret Laurence, Carl Jung and the Manawaka Women." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2, no. 2, Summer, 1977.

Buss, Helen. *Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Novels of Margaret Laurence*. Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1985.

Cameron, Donald. *Conversation with Canadian Novelists, Part One*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973, pp. 96-115.

-"The Many Lives of Margaret Laurence." *Weekend Magazine* 24, no. 29, July 20, 1974.

Duncan, Robert, film director. *Margaret Laurence, First Lady of Manawaka*. Produced by William Weintraub, distributed by the National Film Board of Canada, 1978.

Gibson, Graeme, *Eleven Canadian Novelists*. Toronto: Anansi, 1973.

Grace, Sherill. "Crossing Jordan: Time and memory in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence." *World Literature Written in English* 16, no. 2, November, 1977.

Gunnars, Kristjana, ed. *Crossing the River . Essays in Honour of Margaret Laurence*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1988.

Hegner, Barbara. "River of now and Then. Margaret Laurence's Narratives." *Canadian Literature* 74, Autumn, 1977.

Hind-Smith, Joan. *Three Voices. The Lives of Margaret Laurence*. Gabrielle Roy, Frederick Philip Grove. Canadian Portrait Series. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1975, pp. 1-60.

Mccourt, Edward A. *The Canadian West in Fiction*. Toronto: Ryerson, rev. 1970, pp. 108-18.

Miner, Valerie. "The Matriarch of Manawaka." *Saturday Night* 89. no. 5, May, 1974, 1720.

Morley, Patricia, "The long Trek Home: Margaret Laurence's Stories," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 11, no.4, November, 1976.

- Review of Heart of a Stranger in *Quill and Quire* 42, 15 November, 1976, 30.

- "No Mean Feat," *Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women* 7, no. 2, July, 1978, 25.

- "Margaret Laurence's Early Writing: 'a world in which others have to be respected,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13, no.3, Fall, 1978, 13-18.

- "Canada, Africa, Canada: Laurence's Unbroken Journey," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 27, Summer, 1980, 81-91.

- "Margaret Laurence: Feminist, Nationalist and Matriarch of Canadian Letters," *Laurentian University Review* 14, no. 2, February, 1982, 24-23.

- Margaret Laurence. *Twayne's World Authors Series*, no. 591. Boston: Twayne/G.K. Hall, 1981.

New, William, ed. Margaret Laurence. *The Writer and her Critics: Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series*. Toronto: McGrawHill Ryerson, 1977.

-“Every Now and Then: Voice and Language in Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*,” *Canadian Literature* 93, Summer, 1982, 79-96.

Rooke, Constance. “A Feminist Reading of *The Stone Angel*.” *Canadian Literature* 93, Summer, 1982, 26-41.

Sorfleet, John R, ed. “The Work of Margaret Laurence,” *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 27, 1980.

Stephens, Donald G., ed, *Writers of the Prairies. Canadian Literature Series*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973, pp. 132-74.

Thomas, Clara. “The Novels of Margaret Laurence.” *Studies of the Novel* 4, no.2 Summer, 1972, 154-64.

“A Conversation about Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton.” *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1, no.1, Winter, 1972, 65-68.

-Margaret Laurence. *Canadian Writers Series* 3. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969.

- *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975.

-“Towards Freedom: The Work of Margaret Laurence and Northrop Frye,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 30, Winter, 1984-85, 81-95.

Verduyn, Christl, ed. Margaret Laurence. An Appreciation. Peterborough. Ontario: *Journal of Canadian Studies/Broadview Press* 1988.

Warwick, Susan J. Margaret Laurence: An Annotated Bibliography. *Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press*, 1979.

Woodcock, George. Gabriel Dumont: The Metis Chief and His Lost World. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975. ger.

- "Many Solitudes. The Travel Writings of Margaret Laurence." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13, no. 3, Fall, 1978, 3-12.

- "The Human Elements: Margaret Laurence's Fiction." In *The Human Elements. Critical Essays*, ed. David Helwig, pp.134-61. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1978.

- ed. A Place to Stand On. Essays by and about Margaret Laurence. *Western Canadian Literary Documents*, no. 4. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983.

M. Allott, ed., *Novelists on the Novel*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.

E. Auerbach. *Mimesis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

M. Bloomfield, ed., *The Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970.

W.C. Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

J. Halperin, ed., *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

D. Lodge. *Language of Fiction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

R. Scholes and R. Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

P. Stevick, ed., *Theory of the Novel*. New York: Free Press, 1967.

D. Cohn. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

W. Iser. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

U. Eco. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979.

G. Genette. *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

F. Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen, 1981.

S.S. Lanser. *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

H. Ruthrof. *The Reader's Construction of Narrative*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

H. Bonheim. *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1982.

G. Prince. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1982.

Adele Wiseman, *Crackpot*, New Canadian Library 144, Introduction by Margaret Laurence
Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

Sinclair Ross. *"The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*, Introduction by Margaret Laurence,
NCL 62. Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

O Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban : The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela
Powersland foreword by Philip Mason, London, Macmillan, 1956.

Chinua Achebe, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation" *Nigerian Magazine*, 81 ,1964.

Wole Soyinka. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arthur Ravenscroft, 'Africa in the Canadian Imagination of Margaret Laurence', in S. Chew (ed.),
Revisions of Canadian Literature, Leeds: University of Leeds IBTC, 1985.

B.W. Andrzejewski and G. Innes, 'Reflections on African Oral Literature', *African Languages*, vol.
1, 1975 , pp. 5-58.

B. W. Andrzejewski, 'Poetry in Somali Society', in Pride and Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics*
Harmondworth, Middx: Penguin, 1972.

Wole Soyinka. *Ake* .London: Rex Collings, 1981.

O Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban : The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela
Powersland foreword by Philip Mason, London, Macmillan, 1956.

David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13, no. 3 Fall,
1978, p.13.

Sidney Wise, 'Liberal Consensus or Ideological Battleground: Some Reflections on the Hartz Thesis',
Historical Papers, Canadian Historical Association, 1974, pp. 1-14.

Carl Berger. *Sense of Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970, p. 99.

Suzanne Howe. *Novels of Empire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.

Butler Robert N. "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." *Psychiatr.* 26.1 ,1963.

Marcienne Rocard, "Women and Woman in *The Stone Angel*", *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol.11,Dec. 1981, p.84.

Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, 'Laurence's Fiction: A Reviewing od Feminine Archetypes', *Canadian Literature*, vol. 93, summer 1982.

S. Stanley Sargent. "The Humanist Approach to Personality", in Benjamin Wolman, ed. *The Handbook of General Psychology*, New York : Prentice-Hall, 1973.

William Ryan. *Blaming the Victim*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Judy Kearns, *Rachel and Social Determinism : A Feminist Reading of A Jest of God*, in JCF.

Donald Cameron, ed. "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom, in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, Toronto : Macmillan, 1973.

Plekhanov, "The Role of the Individual in History", and Adam Schaff, "The Individual in Society" both in *Gould and Truitt, Political Ideologies*, New York, 1973.

Marvin Harris. "Cultural Materialism: The struggle for a Science of Culture, Vintage: New York, 1980.

Northrop Frye. *Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada, in The Bush Garden*. Rouslin, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Pioneering in Canada*.

Trill, "Introductory Remarks", in *The Canadian Settlers Guide*.

Joe Sawchuk. *The Metis of Manitoba: Reformulation of an Ethnic identity*. Toronto, 1978.

W.L. Morton. *Manitoba : A History*. Toronto, 1957.

Donald Creighton. John A Macdonald, *The Young Political*. Toronto 1952.

Dick Harrison. "The search for an Authentic voice in Canadian Literature." *Ambivalence : Studies in Canadian Literature*. Ed. Om P. Juneja and Chandra Mohan. New Delhi: Allied, 1990.

Northrop Frye. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Robert Kroetsch. "On being an Alberta writer". *The New Provinces : Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980*. Ed. Howard Palmer and Donal Smith. Vancouver: Tantalus research, 1980.

Robert L. MC Dougall, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature," *Canadian Literature* 18, Autumn 1963. Rept. In Mandel, *Contexts*.

John Moss : "Bushed in the Sacred Wood", *The Human Elements*. 2nd ser. Ed. David Helwig. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1981.

Frank Davey. *Surveying the Paraphrase : Eleven essays on Canadian Literature*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983.

Dick Harrison. "The search for an Authentic voice in Canadian Literature." *Ambivalence : Studies in Canadian Literature*. Ed. Om P. Juneja and Chandra Mohan. New Delhi: Allied, 1990.

Margaret Atwood. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Bernice Lever, "Manawaka Magic", *Journal of Canadian Fiction* Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 1974.

Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie; A State of Mind", *Canadian Anthology*, 3rd ed., Carl F. Klinck, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Donald G. Stephens, ed., "Sisters of the Prairies", *Canadian Literature Series*, Vancouver: Vancouver University Press, 1973.

Margaret Laurence, quoted in Marci MacDonald, "The Author: All the Hoopla Gets her frazzled", interviews with Margaret Laurence in *The Toronto Star*, 18 May 1974.

M. Ondaatje. *Rat Jelly*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1973.

M. McLuhan. *The Mechanical Bride*. Toronto: Vanguard, 1951.

S. Vautier, 'Notes on the 'Narrative frames'', see S. Vautier, 'Notes on the Narrative Voice(s) in The Stone Angel', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol. 11, 1981.

John Fowles, "Notes on an Unfinished Novel," *The Novel Today*, Malcolm Bradbury, ed. Glasgow, 1977.

Lynette Hunter, "Consolation and Articulation in M. Laurence's *The Diviners* in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of M. Laurence* ed. Collin Nicholson UBC Press Vancouver 1990.

Carolyn Heilburn. *Reinventing Womenhood*. New York: Norton 1979.

Theo Quayle Dombrowski, 'Word and Fact : Laurence and the problem of language', *Canadian Literature*, vol. 80 , spring 1979.

T.S.Eliot. *The Waste Land* and other poems . New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958.

Margaret Atwood, "Face to Face", *An interview with Margaret Laurence in MacLean's*, May 1974.

Graeme Gibson, ed., "Margaret Laurence", in *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, Toronto: Anansi, 1973.

Audrey Thomas. *Munchmeyer, and Prospero on the Island*. New York :Bobbs Merrill, 1971.

Audrey Thomas, 'A Broken Wand?' *Canadian Literature*, vol.62 ,Autumn 1974, pp. 89-91.

28. Thomas, "The chariot of Ossian" in 'Tempest, in *The Woman's Part* : *Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, Urbana, III : University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Lorie Jerrell Leininger, *The Miranda Trap : Sexism and Racicism in Shakespeare*.

Mary Ann Ferguson, *The Female Novel of Development and the Myth . Study of the Psyche*, in Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland , eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, Hanover, N.H., and London; University Press of New England, 1983.

Michel Fabre. *Words and the World: The Diviners as an exploration of the Book of Life*' *Canadian Literature* vol.93, Summer 1982.

Jean E. Kennard, *Victims of Convention*, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978.

Annis Pratt. *Archetypal Pattern in Women's Fiction*. Bloomington, Ind:Indiana Univ. Press, 1981.

Ellen Moers. *Literary Women*. New York, 1979.

A Study of the Psychology of Colonialism , Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban*, New York :Praeger, 1951.

Margaret Atwood. *Surfacing*. London: Virago, 1979 .

'Beyond History: Margaret Atwood's surfacing and Robert Kroetsch's Badlands', in Shirley Chew ed., *Re-vision of Canadian Literature*, Leeds: Institute for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, University of Leeds, 1985.

Jack David and Robert Lecker, eds., *Canadian Poetry*, Vol. 11, Toronto: General Paperbacks, and Downville: ECW Prés, 1982.

Al Purdy. *Being Alive Poems*. 1958-73, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

Margaret Atwood. *The Animals in That Country*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Margaret Atwood. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Robert Kroetsch, 'F. P. Grove: The finding', in *The Stone Hammer Poems*, Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1975.

Diana Brydon, 'Wordsworth's Daffodils: a Recurring Motif in Contemporary Canadian Literature', *Kunapipi*, vol. IV, no.2, 1982.

Robert Kroetsch, 'Disunity as Unity: a Canadian Strategy', in C. Nicholson and P. Easingwood, eds., *Canadian Story and History, 1885-1985*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Centre of Canadian Studies, 1985.

George Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, vol. IV, in *Front of Your Nose, 1945-50*, Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1970.

Malcolm Chapman. *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture*. London: Croom Helm, 1978.

Sir Walter Scott. *Quarterly Review*. Edinburgh 1829.

Edward W. Said, *Beginnings; Intention and Method*, New York: Basic Books, 1975.

Marian Engel, "Steps to the mythic: *The Diviners* and *A Bird in the House*", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13, no.3, Fall, 1978.

Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Carl Berger. *The Writing of Canadian History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Margaret Laurence, 'W. L. Morton: a Personal Tribute', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 15:4, 1981.

Arnold and Davidson, 'Cages and Escapes in Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*', *Journal of Canadian Studies*.

C.M. McLay, "Everyman is an Island : Isolation in A Jest of God", *Journal of Canadian Literature* 50, Autumn 1971.

- Elizabeth Smart, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, London: Macmillan, 1978.
- G Bowering, "That fool of a Fear", 1971, repr. in Woodcock (ed.), *A Place to Stand On*.
- Jacobus, *Reading Woman*, IV: 'Anna (Wh)O'S Absences; Readings in Hysteria', London: Methuen, 1986.
- George Bowering, 'That Fool of a Fear (1971)', repr. in Woodcock(ed.), *A Place to Stand On*.
- John Watt Lennox, "Manawaka & Deptford : Place & Voice", *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13, 3, Fall, 1978, 24.
- Martin Gardener, *The Ambidextrous Universe*, New York: Basic Books, 1964.
- James Watson. *The Double Helix*. New York, Athenian, 1968.
- R. W. Sperry, 'Hemisphere Disconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 23, 1968.
- Elizabeth Waterston, "Double is Trouble, Twins in *A Jest of God*" ed. Colin Nicholson, *Critical Approaches to the fiction of Margaret Laurence*, Great Britain Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990.
- Nancy Bailey, 'Margaret Laurence and the Psychology of Re-birth in *A Jest of God*' *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 15, 1981.
- F.C. M. McLay, "Everyman is an Island", in *Margaret Laurence*.
- Keneth James Huges, "Politics and *AJG*.", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13,3 Fall, 1978.
- Eric Neumann, *Amor and Psyche*, (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1971).

- C. Jung, *Alchemical Studies, Collected Works*, vol. 13, Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1967.
- J. Jacobi. *The Psychology of Carl Jung*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 1973.
- H. Blodgett, 'The Real Lives of Margaret Laurence's Women', *Critique*, vol. 23 (1981)
- A. Jaffe. *The Myth of Meaning*. New York, Penguin, 1975.
- C. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, Collected works, vol. 11, Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen, 1967.
- A. Ulanov, *The Feminine*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971, p. 208.
- V. Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Penguin, 1974.
- M. Packer, 'The Dance of Life; *The Fire-Dwellers*', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, Vol. 27 1980.
- A. Rich. *Of Woman Born*. New York: Norton, 1976.
- C. Kerényi, Eleusis. *Archetypal Images of Mother and Daughter*, New York: Pantheon, 1967.
- S. Nancekivell, '*The Fire-Dwellers*: Circles of Fire', *Literary Criterion*, vol. 19, 1984 .
- M. Von Franz, 'The Process of Individuation', in C. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, New York: Dell, 1964.
- A. Maeser, 'Finding the Mother: the Individuation of Laurence's Heroines', *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol. 27, 1980 .

Constance Rooke, "Hagar's Old Age: *The Stone Angel* as *Vollendungsroman*", *Crossing the River*.

Butler Robert N., "*The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged*." *Psychiatry*, 26.1, 1963.

Moody Harry R. "Reminiscence and the Recovery of the Public World." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 7.1/2, 1984.

Sara Maitland, 'Afterword', in Virago edition of *The Stone Angel*

W.B. Yeats. *A Vision*. London: Macmillan, 1937.

Italo Calvino. *Invisible Cities*. trans. William Weaver, London; Picador, 1979, p.32.

Ann Thompson, *The Wilderness of pride, Form and Image in The Stone Angel*.

Sandra Djwa, 'False Gods and True Covenant: Thematic continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross' *Etudes Canadiennes*, Vol. 1, No.4, Fall 1972, p.44.

Paul Cappon ed., *In Our Own House: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

Pierre Spriet, 'Narrative and Thematic Patterns in *The Stone Angel*', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol.11, 1981.

Sandra Djwa, 'False Gods and True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross' *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, vol 1, no.4, Fall 1972, p.47.

Douglas Kilam, 'Notes on symbolism in *The Stone Angel*', *Etudes Canadiennes*, vol 11, 1981, pp.89-113.

Anon., 'Self -imprisoned to Keep the World at Bay', *New York Times Book Review*, 14 June 1974.

Northrop Frye. *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, New York, 1967.

Anne Thompson in The Wilderness of Pride; Form and Image in *The Stone Angel*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1V.3, 1975, 95-110.

D.Forman and Una Parameswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian novels of Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, New York, 1954.

Louis Berhhof. *Systematic Theology*. New York, 1941.

A.H.Strong. *Systematic Theology*. London, 1907.

Albertus Pieters. *The Seed of Abraham*. Philadelphia, 1950.

Joseph Kinsey Howard. *The Strange Empire of Louis Riel*, Swan edition
New York, 1965.

