THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

# NARRATION IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S MANAWAKA CYCLE

BY

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Dedicated with respect to the memory of

Jean Margaret Laurence (1926-1987).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................ 1

I The cycle as a synchronic (spatial) construct .. 11

II The cycle as enunciation ........................ 39

III The dynamics of structure ...................... 65

Conclusion .......................................... 99

Notes ............................................... 105

Bibliography ........................................ 117

## Introduction

During the decade 1964 to 1974, Margaret Laurence produced five books of fiction, four novels and a collection of short stories, all of which centre upon her fictional Canadian prairie town of Manawaka: The Stone Angel (1964), A Jest of God (1966), The Fire-Dwellers (1969), A Bird in the House (1970) and The Diviners (1974). My thesis is concerned with the Manawaka books as a cycle--a narrative whole--a unity that transcends their viability as individual novels. Any analysis of the complete cycle as narrative entails recognition of the texts collectively, as "narrative discourse" in Gerard Génette's sense of the term (Narrative 27), that is as a treatment of the cycle in its entirety as one signifying statement. Such analysis must necessarily be concerned with an intricate set of structural relationships: those within each novel between what contemporary critics call 'story' on the one hand and 'narrative' on the other,[1] and those that link the novels as synecdochal units in a narrative superstructure. The internal and recurring structure of the cycle, therefore, is my focus of investigation.

The new strategy should prove complementary to existing criticism of Margaret Laurence's fiction, since some interpretive critics have found the structure of the Manawaka novels from their earliest date of publication to

be problematic. Controversy has centered around a puzzling conflict in each novel between conspicuous patterning of narrative time and, simultaneously, realistic portrayal of the central character. Why is an interpretive critic troubled by enigmatic tone, and why does he fault 'form' when form is at odds with characterization? The answer lies in the philosophic roots of interpretive thought. Interpretive criticism tends to privilege idea over expresssion in all literature, including narrative. In this view, language is a vehicle, or mode, that transmits pre-conceived abstract concepts. Form, to the interpretive critic, is in service to vision; it is a container for content. Laurence's narrative technique is thus, even to its kindest interpretive critics such as William H. New and Clara Thomas, difficult to defend. Other reviewers, even more intent upon assessing thematic content, reject Laurence's choice of 'form' entirely.[2]

A structuralist reading offers a strategy that enables us to by-pass the dilemma by reconceptualizing the notion of 'form.' When 'form' is no longer perceived to be part of a form/content dichotomy, the notion of separable 'content' dissolves. For the structuralist writing is discourse, the written equivalent of speech, in which ideas have no tangible shape before articulation. Structuralist thought, beginning with Ferdinand de Saussure, maintains that only an enabling set of conventions in language exists prior to enunciation, and that those codes are transformed into

meaning by the act of speaking/writing at the time the act occurs (Scholes 14). A field of meaning opens in that moment; the range of semantic and phonetic possibilities arises out of an author's specific word choice (diction) and word arrangement (syntax). To structuralists, therefore, the structure of discourse is inseparable from meaning, indeed is constitutive of it.

Mindful of this basic premise, a structuralist begins analysis by accepting the author's choice of narrative form. Then one goes on to investigate the significance of that choice. A repeated choice one learns to see not as random but as intelligible--the beginning of pattern. Accordingly my reading of the Manawaka cyle, informed as it is by structuralist thought, treats Margaret Laurence's recurrent features as signifiers of its internal structure. She consistently uses, we note, first-person narration in all the books despite disapproval of her efforts, and more importantly despite technical difficulties which she admits are serious.[3] We recognize too her consistent use in all the books of a synchronic temporal pattern, and thirdly, her consistent placement of all the books in the same geographical and historical space. A structuralist reading would not construe such authorial choice as the equivalent of authorial intention, at least insofar as that intention may be located prior to the text. Rather, one considers the moment of writing to be the moment of narrative choice. In this view therefore the internal structures of discourse

will hold surprises for the author as well as for the reader.

Structuralist notions on the nature of narrative as an opposition between a system of conventions, or "langue," and a written or spoken narrative event, or "parole," are strikingly similar to Margaret Laurence's own conception of "form" and "voice" in her work.[4] Her four essays on narrative, which were written concurrently with her composition of the Manawaka cycle, all focus upon structure and the inseparable nature of her work. Her novels, she insists, begin with "voice" ("Time" 156), not themes--which are a debatable afterthought even to her own mind, as she explains in "Ten Years' Sentences" (32). Further, Laurence disallows the application of any form/content dichotomy to her own fiction by dramatically relating her writing to the structure of a human body, thereby signifying the possibility of such a metaphoric development within the cycle itself. In "Time and Narrative Voice" Laurence writes

> Theorizing, by itself, is meaningless in connection with fiction, just as any concept of form is meaningless in isolation from the flesh and blood of content and personality, just as a skeleton is only dry bone by itself but when it exists inside a living being it provides support for the whole creature. (156)

Seven years after publication of The Diviners Michel Fabre recorded Laurence's claim that the five books, which are

themselves individual wholes, constitute a larger whole, "indeed. . . a cycle," one that she had not at the outset consciously conceived as such ("Interview" 200).[5] Her conviction on that point remarkably echoes structuralist thought.

My reading of the Manawaka cycle is informed in the main by Jonathan Culler, a structuralist whose theory emphasizes the critical importance of ambiguous nodes in a text. Secondly, Jacques Derrida's deconstructive emphasis on the play of meaning in language, his "différance,"[6] challenges me to explore the language of the text more adventurously. Walter J. Ong's concept of expression as voice, and Paul Valéry's view of poetry as "dance," a view which I extend into narrative, also inform my thinking.[7]

Before proceeding with an outline of my analysis, I should make one final clarification of a seeming inconsistency in my application of theory. Whatever its advocates may say, a structuralist approach cannot avoid becoming interpretive. The irony of such practice does not escape other critics, nor structuralists themselves. "We are all New Critics," Culler admits in The Pursuit of Signs (3-5), and inheritors of New Criticism's "insidious legacy" that the critic's function is to interpret literary works. All the same, there are important differences between the two schools, differences in purpose, in emphasis, and in the eventual disposition of interpretations. The closed meanings of interpretive criticism reach toward a cognitive

goal. The structuralist sees each interpretation rather as a play in a field of meaning with its own observable purpose, a field in which internal ambiguities and paradoxes transform their own signification, but do not disappear.[8]

To focus this thinking on Laurence, we might note that a first reading of the Manawaka cycle invites an exploration of the text's basic opposition between its system and its realized expression at the surface level of narrative in _each_ novel, because the novels are indisputably individual works of fiction. A second reading of the books, this one attentive to possible relationships between them, can discern a second, figurative, level of discourse--one that is meta-literary. On that level the code/event opposition centres upon narrative discourse itself. It does so, not by creating a parallel level of expression which is separate from realist narration, but by working through it.

Overseeing the meta-narrative is a master-narrator, one we might think of as a composite of the five narrating personae who speak separately in each novel. The master-narrator, who serves as one transcendent figure, works in the cycle at a level that co-ordinates what Genette calls "voice." Genette makes a distinction between narrative point of view and voice, between "who sees?" and "who speaks?" (_Narrative_ 162,185-6). Hagar Shipley (_The Stone Angel_), Rachel Cameron (_A Jest of God_), Stacey MacAindra (_The Fire-Dwellers_), Vanessa MacLeod (_A Bird in the House_), and Morag Gunn (_The Diviners_), the cycle's

protagonists, are the characters who _see_, the ones whose point of view orients perspective ("focalizes" it, in Genette's terms). But--and it is here Genette's distinction becomes telling--theirs are not the only voices that speak, despite their first-person narrations. I contend that the voices of protagonists, which are subject to the narrator of each individual work, are finally answerable to the master-narrator's more subsuming though less conspicuous voice. The author of course is clearly distinct from the work she creates and therefore not identical to any narrator, even the most directive one.

Voice at all levels in Laurence's cycle is determined by the complex web of relationships which Genette terms "the narrating instance," the moment of enunciation in discourse.[9] Additionally voice is determined by the narrating "level," and by the narrator's degree of "presence" (_Narrative_ 227-231, 245).[10] In _A Bird in the House_, for example, double temporality (between the narrator's moment and the protagonist's moment) in effect splits the narrating instance between the younger Vanessas who speak as "I," the older Vanessa who remembers, and the narrator who, on a higher level, co-ordinates omisssions and parallels. _The Fire-Dwellers_ and _The Diviners_ split the narrating instance by another means--by establishing a free-floating relationship between narrator and protagonist, one which is established by the texts' oscillating use of first- and third-person pronouns. Yet the polyphony of narrating

voices in concert is not discordant. In the cycle, in the universe conducted by the master-narrator, multiple narration in individual novels becomes an "orchestration" of "parole."[11]

This thesis, then, examines the Manawaka cycle at its figurative level--where the master-narrator functions. Under that jurisdiction, narrative's basic opposition between system ("langue") and enunciation ("parole") informs one primary symbolic set which I am calling the 'plaid' and the 'piper,' and which I analyze in chapters one and two, respectively. Supplementary sets, that arise out of the internal dynamics of a narrative figured as animate, I explore in chapter three.

A passage in A Jest of God, which I read as instructive for approaching all of the novels, directs my perspective and enables me to bring the structural symbols into focus: "I have no middle view. Either I fix on a detail and see it as though it were magnified. . . or else the world recedes or becomes. . . an abstract painting" (85). In keeping with this perspective my own study alternates between close-up investigation of language patterns and panoramic over-views of the cycle's design, using as general strategy a focal distance sufficiently removed from characterizations and themes to detect narrative structure and movement.

Accordingly in chapter one I focus upon the synchronicity of each work, most apparent in the

interlocking grids of discourse. This approach renders story and narrative present in a "now" that is occurring outside of time--on a temporal plane which includes each protagonist's past and future. The grids of intersecting story-lines and of narrative time-lines become concretely visual through print variations and sub-titles in the cycle's later novels: The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners. In both works "anachronies," as Genette calls temporally displaced segments in a discourse (Narrative 35), are visible as juxtaposed blocks of narrative. When we view the texts together as a cycle, the grid design of each novel does not extend laterally, or sequentially; it layers over one historical and geographic space--Manawaka. The cultural and literary codes framed by Manawaka, the layered grids of narration, and the text's countless references to "plaid"--all of which I soon will speak more fully--serve collectively to identify 'plaid,' a seemingly static configuration, as the text's primary symbol for "langue."

The 'piper,' as a symbol of the cycle's enunciation, acting inside of time, derives from 'plaid' in the same way that "parole" derives from "langue." "Parole" thus "transforms" system into embodied voice (I am adopting Jean Piaget's sense of "transformation"),[12] into a human figure that, as we have noted, Laurence's essay does present as a possibility. Consequently, each work becomes synecdoche, as the 'plaid's' substance and the colours of its spatial lines re-form into the piper's shadow (in The Stone Angel), into

her bones (in _A Jest of God_), into her flesh and blood (in _The Fire-Dwellers_). _A Bird in the House_ foregrounds the 'piper's' developing imagination, and _The Diviners_ sees her at work.

The conclusion of this thesis summarizes the synthesis achieved in the Manawaka cycle through its subsuming structure. In my reading, Margaret Laurence's work primarily manifests the actual artistic process in her kind of story-telling. But through the verbal play within it, and the narrative movement of that process, her narrative extends beyond existence as autonomous art to encompass her own authorial identity, and her social and ethical concerns.

## Chapter One: The Cycle as a Synchronic (Spatial) Construct.

Analysis of the Manawaka cycle from a synchronic perspective places the whole system, as a functioning totality, into view at one point in time. In this approach, diachrony is minimally significant; temporality of the story-line, narrative causes and effects, and historical concerns about evolution of the cycle as a series of novels are not at issue. This treatment of texts--as synchronic--historically received an impetus when anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss first recognized that methods used in geological observations are applicable to cultural phenomena. He demonstrated that a synchronic reading allows the analyst to see clearly, as a spatial construct, the network of relations at work within narrative discourse (Culler, Pursuit 26-30). Structuralist notions about the value of a synchronic view derive, of course, from Ferdinand de Saussure's earlier work on linguistic theory. Saussure initiated the structuralist concept of a basic opposition between the text as "langue" and the text as "parole" (Norris 25), the former a synchronic system, the latter a diachronic act within that system. This chapter explores my first perspective on the internal structure of the cycle's text as "langue," and its corresponding figuration as 'plaid.'

We note at the outset that there is a sense in which the temporal arrangement of narrative within each of Margaret Laurence's novels invites a synchronic perspective.

The duration of 'first narrative,' which in Gérard Genette's sense refers to the level of narrative that establishes a temporal base-line from which anachronies occur (Narrative 48), is brief in all five books, and almost non-existent in A Bird in the House. Even Vanessa MacLeod's return visit to Manawaka "twenty years later" is anachronic. Yet remembered time is present in each book, a phenomenon that has intrigued W.H. New, George Bowering, Barbara Hehner and other Laurence scholars.[1] Through recollections, the personal histories of Hagar Shipley, Morag Gunn and Vanessa in a way become immediate or coterminous, that is, removed from time into a spatial dimension that in a sense includes a live past and an active future. Similarly, in the novels focalized through Rachel Cameron and Stacey MacAindra, brief 'first narrative' expands synchronically through interpolated interior monologues that narrate the protagonist's present fears and dreams. Laurence herself is well aware of such structuring in her books for she stresses the importance of "immediacy" ("Gadgetry" 83), or of what I am calling 'synchronicity,' to her work. She writes that her technique of using recollections is "an expression of the feeling which I strongly hold about time--that the past and the future are both always present, present in both senses of the word, always now and always here with us" ("Time" 156).

To Laurence then "presence" is synchronic or spatial. Working from that premise, I am arguing that the novels, as

works within the cycle, align as a layered whole upon <u>one</u> synchronic plane, pinned there by one historic moment. Through each protagonist's recollections some twenty-five to thirty years later, each work makes present the moment in time when the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders paraded through the streets of Manawaka, the moment just before that regiment (the one to which many Manawaka boys belonged) shipped out to face disaster at Dieppe. Margaret Atwood has noted the thematic significance of this event in all the Manawaka novels as it runs "like a tragic leitmotif through the lives of her [Laurence's] characters" (22). In my reading the event forms a juncture or a pivotal point which anchors the cycle's structure, temporally and spatially.

At both levels of narrative discourse--as stories, and as particular <u>tellings</u> of those stories--the master text structures into a grid of interlocking narrative threads. The cycle's spatial construct of woven tales is readily apparent at the first level. In each novel, the protagonist's dominant story line is intersected by the secondary story lines of characters with whom she interacts; and the same characters reappear, as if from some actual world, in the differing perspective of other protagonists in other novels in the set. A synchronic approach to the cycle enables us to catch a panoramic view of the entire network of interactions that occur between generations of families--such as the Camerons, the MacLeods, the Tonnerres, and the Kazliks. Critical responses to the network differ.

Allan Beven in his interpretive introduction to The Fire-Dwellers notes that Manawaka's complex interrelationships compare to the ones existing in William Faulkner's created world, his Yoknapatawpha County. My structuralist perspective disregards entangled chronology to focus instead upon junctures between the cycle's story lines.

Junctures (that is, significant encounters between characters at the points where their story lines cross) prove to be visually comparable, regardless of their kind or intensity. Intersections are consistently brief and sharply delineated; and, more importantly, do not (or cannot) substantially alter the characters. Exchanges among Laurence's characters, whether hateful, indifferent or loving, seem only to accentuate their innate personalities. To illustrate the point, we follow one typical secondary storyline as it weaves through the main story lines in four books. Piquette Tonnerre's life (her line) intersects with that of Hagar in The Stone Angel (through Piquette's grandfather), with that of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers (through Piquette's sister Val), with that of Vanessa in A Bird in the House (Dr MacLeod treats Piquette's tubercular leg), and with that of Morag in The Diviners, for it is she who witnesses Piquette's death. We note, however, that neither Hagar's kind of disdain, nor Stacey's indifference, nor Vanessa's friendly overtures, nor Morag's compassion have the capacity to alter Piquette's course. Just as the

lines that enter junctures in plaid emerge intact out of brief and sharply defined intersections, so secondary characters encounter primary ones, interact briefly, and then proceed along unchanged paths.

The larger text or meta-text weaves its second grid of interlocking narration more subtly than the threads of its interwoven stories. Laurence explains part of her construction in "Time and the Narrative Voice," in which she visualizes the dominant flow-lines in her novels as "horizontal" (157). She differentiates their direction from the flow-lines of the short stories in A Bird in the House. Those she sees as moving "very close together but parallel and in a vertical direction." In Laurence's words, "Each story takes the girl Vanessa along some specific course of her life and each follows that particular thread closely, but the threads are presented separately, and not simultaneously" (157). In the logic of Laurence's argument, the collection of short stories centered upon Vanessa becomes visible as an incomplete grid, as self-sufficient lengthwise threads only--the warp without the woof--since the text consists solely of "vertical" lines. The "horizontal" base-line of narrative in Vanessa's present, one that might stitch them together, is absent.

The novels, unlike A Bird in the House, are structured by the presence of both kinds of "flow-lines" in Laurence's sense, indeed creating a grid. In each novel the dominant flow-line is bisected by "anachronies" (recollections,

dreams, interpolations) which function as the short stories do in A Bird in the House--as the warp or "vertical" threads of narrative fabric. Both Hagar and Stacey comment upon the corresponding linear quality of the lives (lines) of those around them. "Parallel lines that never met," Hagar thinks as she listens to John converse with his half-sister Jess (Stone 195); and Stacey recognizes, as she watches the "unbending" males in her family, that stripes or "parallel lines" are not enough because they "cannot ever meet" (Fire 265, 176). The cycle's narrative discourse as an entity, with its five books layered synchronically, becomes a grid of immeasurable complexity, but one that retains its precise linear arrangement. The presence of such linearity in The Stone Angel's arrangement of memory segments distressed some early critics of Laurence. Leona Gom, for example, in 1976 charged Laurence with misuse of the associative memory process, unfair criticism, I note, in light of the structural imperatives upon the novel.

Recognition of the spatial construct formed by interlocking stories and narrative leads us away from such distress to the next step in analysis of the cycle as "langue," which is to investigate the systems within the text that shape and characterize its design. We note that two codes are at work--one cultural, the other literary--each supporting and restricting the cycle's macrostructure (the pattern of narrative) and its microstructure (the language in use). The cultural code, I

contend, is the leading convention in Laurence's cycle, and one whose roots lie deep in Manawaka. It is that connection which leads me to identify the text's figuration of "langue" as plaid.

In so identifying the construct, I do not discount disparate views in other studies about the shape of individual novels. Clara Thomas for example sees time and the river in The Diviners as a continuum, a "Yoruba Symbol" (Manawaka 132), and Ildikó de Papp Carrington sees narration within that novel as "labyrinthine" (163). For Thomas narration in The Fire Dwellers works like an "eye," or a "fast-shuttering camera" ("Novels" 63, 65); and S.E. Read sees The Stone Angel wrestling with "the Minoan maze that is life" (44). Diverse interpretations of design do enrich the play of meaning that emerges when we examine the five books as one discourse. More importantly however concrete structural details can give substance to generalized interpretive insights such as David Blewett's assessment of the Manawaka world as the "primary unifying feature" in the cycle (31). Blewett's observation has structural as well as thematic validity.

Margaret Laurence describes Manawaka as a fictive Canadian prairie town--"a town of the mind. . . an amalgam of many prairie towns" (Heart 3)--and two features of the town, she explains, influence her work: its geography and, more importantly, its people. From a structuralist perspective, how does the importance of "place" as geography

translate into a cultural code that shapes the cycle's synchronic structure? For one thing, the physical appearance of the prairie, as seen by an eye in the sky, resembles plaid. The flat plane is neatly sectioned into blocks of black soil and green fields, or into black fence-lines and shelter belts on white snow, depending upon the season. This notion is not wholly fanciful, for we have the following passage from Heart of a Stranger in which Laurence describes her view from an aircraft: "[Y]ou. . . know you are above the prairies, because you look down and see how vast the farms are, the great sweep of that land divided into sections and quarter sections, and the soil that rich true black. . ." (140).

But "place" is more than physical features; geography also relates to the history and economics of a community. When we view historical and economic events panoramically rather than sequentially, the stark contrasts we have noted in the prairie landscape parallel the swiftly changing extremes of prairie climate that in turn bring swiftly changing swings between prosperity and depression. The one swift change that fixes Manawaka into history (even as it anchors the cycle in time) comes in the shift from peace to war, the contrast between a ceremonial parade and the aftermath of Dieppe.

One can scarcely separate the more important influence exerted by Manawaka's people upon the text's cultural code from the secondary influence of place. The prairie's

extraordinarily harsh beauty demands an equally paradoxical temperament from its people in order that dwellers might survive in it with what Laurence, in "A Place to Stand On," calls "dignity" (Heart 6). Accordingly, her Manawaka fiction works internally to develop a perspective on its people. As an individual, each protagonist looks outward from a place within the set of conventions and values held by one cultural group--the Scots-Presbyterians of Manawaka. The beliefs and temperaments of individuals in that group, embodied in the text's characters, parallel the demanding and rewarding quality of Manawaka, as place, a parallel discussed in some detail by Patricia Morley (Margaret 82-83).[2]

In varying degrees each central character is bound and strengthened by her heritage as that code makes itself available to her in a system of knowing or valuing. Shaping the lives of Hagar, Rachel and Vanessa, especially, is a restricting code of "manners" and "masks." When Hagar is too tired to "fence" verbally, she retreats into "manners": "Stalemate. Politeness is the only way out. What would we do without these well-thumbed phrases to extricate us?" (Stone 121). Such masks enable various members of Laurence's world to play the tense game of family ritual: the bearish presence of Vanessa's grandfather, Mr. Connor, for instance, seems to keep family members in line as he presides over Sunday dinners. Artificial manners within Vanessa's family, and the family's "fortress" mentality

(<u>Bird</u> 3), parallel the tensions that prevail in Manawaka's cemetery--a cultivated garden that must be pruned and tended as prairie weeds encroach upon its neat borders. The "mannered" family and the "mannered" cemetery are in turn analogous to the neatly sectioned, fenced prairie soil and to the grid's orderly, disciplined design.[3]

A second code arising from a pervading consciousness of death binds each protagonist into isolation. This consciousness links to a puritan belief in personal responsibility for one's own salvation--if one is fortunate enough to be of God's elect. There are no compromises, no soft edges, in such belief. Each individual life is perilously isolated, a condition explored by C.M. McLay in her study of <u>A Jest of God</u>. Such detachment is structurally analogous to each character's separate narrative thread, and also to the loneliness and danger of existence on the prairie (Piquette and her children burn in their shack in winter, Bram Shipley nearly dies in a blizzard, and Dan Currie dies as a result of falling through river ice).

Characters cannot change the fact of essential isolation and peril, but they can alter the quality of their own lives by re-sorting the mix of fear, courage, pride, generosity and willfulness within them. Structure manifests the characters' personality differences in the varying width and texture of each narrative thread. For example, the isolated lives of Rachel and Hagar are bound in story and in figure by "barbed wire," just as Manawaka as place is so

bound. But Rachel's line is narrow ("inturned" is Laurence's word) and taut ("Ten Years'" 32), restricted by her own inhibitions.[4] Stepping through a "barbed wire fence" (of fear and pride) for a sexual encounter with Nick Kazlik symbolizes for Rachel the magnitude of her effort to breach her puritan code (Jest 84). The tension is enacted again narratively in Rachel's unwilling submission to her own fearful fascination with Calla's ecstatic religious practice. In contrast, aggressive Hagar's flow-line is broad and bold. Yet fear fences Hagar, too, into her own unbreachable isolation and she sees herself (in a code that Rachel figuratively transgresses) as "a fenced cow meeting only the barbed wire which ever way she turns" (Stone 53).

In further contrast, it is the texture rather than the dimensions of Stacey's flow-line in The Fire Dwellers that distinguishes it from Hagar's. Stacey's band broadens through her inherent loving generosity, not through combative pride and rage. Yet the same puritan fear of imminent doom that fences Hagar and Rachel also constrains Stacey, a fear made concrete by the immanent possibility of destruction in Stacey's violent world.[5]

The awareness of mortality that underlies each protagonist's inherited beliefs produces a second structural characteristic which further differentiates narrative threads. In the face of 'present' crisis,[6] individual threads toughen to varying degrees within the fact of restricted bounds and essential separation. A spirit of

independence, a battling spirit, strives to create a survival zone where each can live, "temporarily" (<u>Fire</u> 277), with dignity. Characters with productive lives (signified by strong narrative threads) are shaped so by adherence to a code that stresses enterprise and hard work. That code is at work when Morag succeeds in earning a living as a writer, and when Hagar earns a house; and, ancestrally, when Hagar's father, Mr. Currie, and Vanessa's grandfathers, Mr. Connor and Mr. MacLeod, pioneer successful businesses.

The negative side of entrepreneurial aggression shows clearly in its effect upon weaker members. Dominant personalities (dominant and therefore horizontal narrative threads) tend to overpower subordinate characters (vertical story-lines) at junctures that are brief and confrontational. Throughout the series breaks that occur at junctures are cutting and decisive: Hagar leaves Bram abruptly; and Morag severs her marriage suddenly to Brooke Skelton. The break is equally swift, but amiable, between Morag and Dan McRaith, and Morag's contact with Jules Tonnerre is significantly intermittent--that is, subject to a series of clear breaks.

However, Mr. Connor's battling against Vanessa indicates that the "vertical" flow-lines of subordinate characters in the 'plaid' of narration can on occasion be as broad and bold as the dominant "horizontal" flow-lines of battling protagonists, such as Hagar and Morag. As a second instance of this, a multiplicity of references to the Tonnerre family

signifies that their "vertical" flow-lines are prominent in the cycle's set of priorities, a sign confirmed at one point by a structural pun in which Jules participates: Morag and Jules take turns in the physically dominant sexual position (Diviners 342), forming a visual parallel to their story lines which interweave throughout The Diviners.

The particular juncture between Morag and Jules in Vancouver, one which The Diviners calls "a conscious defiance of death" (342), signifies further by the fact that it is a pun. The Manawakan sense of humour made spatially visual here--a particular wry jesting humour which Morley analyzes in some detail in her book Margaret Laurence--is a convention firmly grounded in Presbyterian belief, and spelled out for us in a line of the hymn Hagar chooses: "Him serve with mirth" (Stone 292). A "mirthful" attitude, like its equally effective alternate--anger--serves as a well-spring for the courage each protagonist needs to battle and to work for survival, and to bear the accompanying isolation, fear and pain. Visual puns in the 'plaid' possess "langue's" potential to erupt into the important jesting notes in the text as "parole," a dimension in discourse we will explore at greater length in chapter two. In "langue," punning as a convention takes its place among other features of a cultural code that indeed, as we see at this point, determines the larger design of the text, as plaid.

When we view the texts synchronically, we recognize that the separate and sharply contrasting straight lines of narrative, lines which vary in width and dominance so as to form distinctive blocks of discourse, arrange themselves in an interlocking pattern which resembles plaid. I contend that in every respect 'plaid' fittingly symbolizes the Manawaka cycle as "langue." We have noted that 'plaid' fully embodies the cultural values of Scots-Presbyterians and the demanding realities of a prairie landscape, as well as the layered grids of the cycle's discourse, and that the text pins all of these emphatically into place on one narrative plane by a parade of plaid-clad Highlanders. We will shortly discover that a second set of conventions (literary ones), and the language which underlies both codes, further substantiate my contention that the cycle's ordering system forms a 'plaid.'

Before pursuing the corroborating role of language, however, we must examine an opposing tendency within the cultural code. I have noted that threads in the narrative grid tend to remain separate and isolated except for brief intersections. A countervailing force tends to tighten the weave into 'fabric' in which contrasting lines juxtapose or, as Laurence phrases it, lives "reach out and touch others" (Heart 6). Paradoxically, it is the same cultural system which works to delineate the essential isolation of its members that also serves to enforce community cohesiveness. A strong sense of duty unites the staunchly independent

Scots-Manawakans into a "tribe" ("Ten Years'" 31), one that includes cautious association with Irish, English, Ukranians and Métis. Exercising of one's tribal duty toward other Manawakans does not depend on physical presence in Manawaka itself; the code prevails wherever Manawakans meet. It requires more than clan loyalty; members must offer assistance when needed, share pain, and comfort one another.

Observing this code, Skinner shelters Morag in Toronto, and Valentine Tonnerre helps Stacey in Vancouver by identifying an imposter--Thorlakson, alias Winkler, of Manawaka. Stacey in turn reaches out to welcome her ailing father-in-law into the MacAindra household; and, also in Vancouver, a neighbourly Manawakan, Elva Jardine, reaches out to Hagar in hospital: "We gotta stick together, us old prairie farmers, eh?" (Stone 273). It is structurally significant that orphaned Morag, a dispossessed Scottish-Canadian who is linked in a social and historical chain of misfortune and oppression with the crofters of the Highland Clearances, and with the prairie's Métis,[7] is the protagonist least bound into isolation by the Manawakan code of "manners," and paradoxically the most able to extend neighbourly assistance.

Recognition of the 'plaid' at the text's figurative level, and secondly, recognition that, as fabric, the 'plaid' symbolizes the duty of the Manawaka community to cohere, illuminates the significance of seemingly chance meetings between characters. Unselfish encounters, such as

those between Morag and Jules, serve to strengthen the weave; conversely, hostile interactions that defy the tribal code, such as Stacey's joy-ride with her husband's friend Buckle Fennick, threaten to destroy structure (of Stacey's family at the realist level of narrative, and of the 'plaid' at the figurative level).

The cycle's clearest manifestation of the 'plaid's' systemic role is achieved through Hagar. As an individual text, The Stone Angel synecdochally illustrates the structuralist precept that "parole" has the capacity to disrupt and reshape "langue," but "parole" does not have the power to usurp the set of rules from which it derives. When Hagar decides to over-emphasize parts of her cultural code ("manners" and individuality) while refusing to act upon her code's requirement that she comfort others, at a figurative level her actions challenge the power of "langue." Hagar's heritage (like "langue") is an interrelated set of conventions which strengthens her when she, as a Manawakan, aligns her will with the town's best values and attacks her when she denies those virtues. Linguistically, a "parole" that denies its "langue" is unintelligible; similarly, Hagar's denial of her culture traumatizes her and undermines her acts of communication. Whether she has chosen to live in exile, or whether she is the victim of a given prideful personality and the tragic butt of one of the "jokes of God" (Stone 60), she cannot change structural priorities. Hagar's creator, her culture, pre-exists her. Paradoxically,

she also cannot remain silent, as we will discover in my later analysis of enunciation. "Aporia" is what Jonathan Culler calls this textual impasse of irresolvable tension between "langue" and "parole," and "différance" is Jacques Derrida's term for it [On Deconstruction 97-97].

The text of The Stone Angel establishes at a figurative level "langue's" unpre-emptible power by its account of the transformation of Hagar's 'plaid.' Hagar recalls that, as a girl, she could not "bend enough" (figuratively, a reference to both the cultural code of "manners" and to the lines of the narrative grid) to comfort her dying brother Dan by wearing their late mother's "old plaid shawl" (25). In Hagar's place, Matt shouldered the plaid to hold his brother, indicating that the duty of mothering or comforting is not restricted by gender. Hagar remembers too that, as a wife, she withheld assurance from her husband Bram in sexual union, remaining silent and secretive always beneath the "banner" of his love (80).

In Hagar's present, at age ninety, her continuing denial of conventional duty transforms her misused plaid/blanket/banner into figurative mental cages--all of which are grids. One analogy I have already noted: Hagar feels herself enclosed in "barbed wire." In addition, the "black iron gate," with "wrought-iron letters" naming "Silverthreads" nursing home, becomes a prison gate to Hagar's mind (95). She feels herself to be hemmed in by "a shroud" of pillows in the car" (95) and by "a soft web of

sheets and pillows in her own bed" (139). In one poignant moment, emphatically positioned near the end of the text, Hagar confronts her own imprisoned self. She recognizes fully that her bindings are self-inflicted and destructive: "I carried my _chains_ within me, and they spread out from me and _shackled_ all I touched" (292).

In contrast, Hagar's cages become life-enhancing when she stops rebelling. The shift occurs in the cannery, where for warmth she sees the nets as "Not much of a blanket, but better than nothing" (215). A fishing net (the empty outline of a grid) can, in the cannery (by the punning potential of "langue") be folded sufficiently to become a blanket/comforter. Her acceptance too of Murray Lee's "comforting" (224) transforms his coat into a comforter/blanket. In Hagar's words, "I sigh content. He pulls the _blanket_ up around me" (248). Hagar's 'plaid' transforms again, deceptively, during her last days; physical pain tightens her mental and physical bindings further--into a "cocoon" that is "almost comfortable" when she is "lulled by potions" (306-08).

The grid of figurative discourse also tightens at this point. Accidental contiguity, because of narrative order, places in sequence two temporally unrelated events. When Hagar sees Silverthreads as a mausoleum--"I, the Egyptian, mummified with pillows and my own flesh" (96)--her thoughts turn to the terror that she felt at the time of Marvin's birth. Mummy/mommy/mother are metonymically linked in

Hagar's mind, and phonetically linked in discourse. Hagar's past rejections of her mothering/comforting role (mothering Bram's child, assuring Bram, comforting Dan) return in her present to bind her. Viewed synchronically, the plaid/banner/comforter remains a grid, one transformed through Hagar's denials into a cruel mummy-cloth or cocoon. Both of the latter logically associate with the change of state which analysts interested in Hagar's spiritual quest would call "salvation."[8]

Death and metamorphosis, however, also parallel the vivifying and revivifying potential of language as system. Accordingly, a change of state from plaid in a realist sense to 'plaid' in a figurative sense, as the structural symbol of a cultural code, occurs repeatedly throughout the cycle. Explicit references become covert signifiers. Hagar wears a red and green "plaid pinafore" at age six; the plaid, like her mental state, disintegrates into red and green flecks in a "hell" of darkness as she endures X-rays at the age of ninety (Stone 6, 110). In another instance in The Diviners, after Morag has looked at Dan McRaith's painting of the plaid-shawled crofter, Morag and Dan touch compassionately. In the process, their flow-lines bisect; her "black hair" covers his red chest hair, creating a tableau of "straight" lines, a 'plaid':

> She puts the canvas carefully back. She straightens, straightens herself, straightens her own back. Then she walks over to where

> he is lying on his bed. Kneels on the floor
> and puts her head with its black hair onto
> his chest with its course copper hair, and onto
> the double bow of his ribcage. McRaith puts
> his hands on her shoulders and does not move
> them from there for a while. (378)

When Rachel lies on the "green and black plaid" car rug in Calla's apartment, in A Jest of God, interaction between the two women is less "divine" than the juncture between Morag and Dan, yet it too forms a 'plaid.' Initially Rachel feels fearful as a result of speaking in tongues, but that fear turns to rage at Calla's intimate kiss. Rachel's thin flow-line cannot sustain contact: "my drawing away is sharp, violent. . . . Once I am outside, I can begin running" (Jest 36-8). Both narrative levels, realist and figurative, are at work in that sharp break.

The method of shifting narrative focus from an overtly realist to a covertly figurative presentation also structures the text's second, and secondary, set of conventions--the cycle's particular manifestations of its literary roots. Two major literary influences enter that structuring--the Bible and Milton--an observation that, for interpretive purposes, many Laurence scholars, particularly Clara Thomas ("Towards" 81), note frequently.[9] My study however, in this chapter's focus upon "langue," relates those influences to the cultural code we have identified.

The Bible's shaping effect upon the Manawaka set is the most fundamental of the set's literary codes and deserves the closest analysis, but before undertaking it I turn for a brief look at conventions Laurence derives from Milton. His influence reaches all levels of the cycle's structure. In the overt language of The Diviners, Morag works at "The Agonistes Bookshop, J. Sampson, Prop."(360); and, at a figurative level, The Stone Angel recalls images of Paradise Lost's "darkness visible" in Hagar's spiritual "darkness absolute, not the color black, which can be seen, but a total absence of light. That's hell all right" (PL 1.63; Stone 110). Although Milton's cultural code stems from the same Calvinist roots as the faith of Manawaka's Scots-Presbyterians, it is in his capacity as innovative epic poet that Milton has his strongest influence upon the cycle as "langue." For one thing, each of the novels can be perceived, technically, as prose epic: each novel begins "in medias res" and works as does epic by flashbacks (Genette's "analepses") and by interpolations; and each novel's protagonist is, despite clearly recognizable differences, like a Milton figure in that she is uniquely, not classically, heroic.[10] The unique heroes in Laurence's fiction, Sherrill Grace has noted, are Canadian "builders," and posssibly even form a "collective hero" (65). More generally the scope of the cycle and its grand design give it the necessary magnitude to be considered "epic." Milton's conventions are incorporated into the cycle's

"langue" by the same assimilative process that enables Vanesssa to embody within her the physical and spiritual presence of her grandfather (Bird 207). The cycle is not a "monument" to its literary fathers; rather, that heritage is "proclaimed" in the text's internal structure.

The Bible is the major literary influence on the structure of the meta-text's 'plaid' design. Although each novel draws on the Bible, A Bird in the House makes the most explicit reference to biblical structure (64). Young Vanessa notes that the Song of Solomon is "useful" to her as a writer, and as available as "Eaton's Catalogue." She further sees that the presence of "explanatory bits in small print at the beginning of each chapter" of the Song is a practice that creates two levels of discourse. Vanessa prefers the romantic "song" of the Song's poetic fiction; its second level of enunciation, the explanations, she assumes were put there for pious folk, "so that they could read the Holy Writ without becoming upset" (64). The narrative's chance association of Eaton's Catalogue and the King James version of the Bible, which Vanessa quotes, points however inadvertently to the 'plaid' as a visual construction. Both books do feature visually distinct blocks of discourse. Vanessa's Bible is a collection of many books (sixty-six), energized (if we recognize the orthodox view) by one voice, with a text that is divided and sub-divided by titles, sub-titles, numbered chapters and numbered verses and by use of double columns per page--a

paradigm (at some remove) for the 'plaid' of narrative discourse.

Confirmation of the Bible's key role lies in the repeated reference it receives throughout the cycle. Each novel moves from explicit reference toward covert incorporation of a biblical convention into text as "langue," identifiable for our purpose as the 'plaid' of its cultural code. For instance, the passage from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians on speaking in tongues is quoted in A Jest of God ostensibly to illuminate the realist level of discourse. Figuratively, the same passage speaks profoundly about the presence of distinct levels of communication and intelligibility in narrative. We have already noted the way in which the biblical names of Bram and Hagar "the Egyptian" (Stone 96) work to establish that "langue" pre-exists "parole." Additionally, a sense of present danger analogous to Biblical apocalypse signals in The Fire-Dwellers that narrative is at risk in both its cultural and literary dimensions. Equally significantly, the title of The Diviners recognizes the Bible's St. John the Divine and his visionary gift, indicating the mystery and the power of discourse as a system and as expression. The word "diviners," in its plurality, corresponds to the plurality of the Trinity, and of 'plaid' as a composite symbol of the set of codes in a cultural community, and of "langue" theoretically as a literary code that comprises a set of inter-relationships.

What particular aspects of the Biblical model are applicable to the cycle's spatial structure? Where design is most visible, in _The Diviners_ and less definitively in the _The Fire-Dwellers_ as we have noted, narrative is sectioned into blocks like the Bible by the use of titles, sub-titles and variations in print, with some pages actually modelled upon the King James version. Less obviously perhaps, narrative supplements the basic biblical model with a journalistic one in which blocks of discourse located on one plane are analogous to the 'plaid's' synchronic grid. We can find encouragement for such speculation by turning once more to Laurence's own comments on her writing. In "Gadgetry or Growing," she explains that in writing _The Fire-Dwellers_ she had a newspaper format in mind--"three or four columns. . . with three or four things happening simultaneously" (86-8). The "pictures" of fragments of Stacy's "jangled" life, "short, sharp visual images" written in "spare and pared down" prose (86), Laurence consciously juxtaposes into what I am calling a plaid arrangement.[11] Nevertheless, I contend that the Bible's language (prose that is spare but also rich in polysemous meaning) and the Bible's double-columns, provide Laurence's primary model, while related techniques of journalism modify it.

In a second parallel between the cycle and the Bible, the Bible's mix of genres--psalms (poetry and songs), history, parables (narrative), exposition, and dramatic dialogue--indicates the potential of "langue" as a literary

system. The same eclectic mix of genres, a "nuisance ground" of literary forms, works to structure the cycle into yet another "grid." In the pattern so formed we note that the novel form acts as the dominant flow-line. That line is bisected, in The Diviners for example, by poetry (nursery rhymes, ballads, hymns); by quotations from history, natural science, journals and letters; by verbal "snapshots" and "innerfilms" and "memory-bank movies"; by drama, by legends, and by music--including addended lyrics and musical scores. The visual presence of interlocking literary forms declares its source and serves to supplement the plaid design of narrative.

The most significant influence of the Biblical model upon the Manawaka cycle is the Bible's own structure as narrative discourse. The Bible's "langue" or ordering principle is symbolized by God as Creator, Law, "the Word" (John 1.1); the Bible's "parole" or active principle is symbolized by Christ as teacher, healer, Redeemer, the Word made flesh. The Holy Spirit, Love, Comforter (John 14.16, 26) exists in both "langue" and "parole"--for the Trinity is One. Surprisingly, while Clara Thomas in her recent comparative study on the work of Margaret Laurence and Northrop Frye recognizes Frye's discovery of metaphor in the Bible,[12] she does not see the same process at work in Laurence's fiction. Recognition of the existence of symbolism in biblical discourse and textual reinforcement of it by Christ's practice of telling parables that have dual

meaning, and recognition too of the Bible's formative role in Laurence's work, and of the paradigmatic potential of all language--all of these allow expansion and redefinition of the plaid/banner/comforter connection we noted earlier.

The 'plaid's' function as "comforter" is evidently modelled upon the "divine" function of the "Comforter." Additionally, the plaid as "banner" (The Stone Angel's biblical symbol of Bram's love for Hagar) links to print through the newspaper's name in The Diviners, "The Manawaka Banner," and to "the Word" as print in another Laurence story that I read as a supplement--"Upon a Midnight Clear" (Heart 213-21), published after The Diviners in 1974. In that story, Laurence tells that as a child on Christmas eve in her prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba, she experienced a kind of epiphany when she witnessed the play of northern lights in the night sky.[13] She saw the waving luminous banner as "a blazing eerie splendour across the sky, swift-moving, gigantic, like a message. It was easy then to believe in the Word made manifest" (215). In her Manawaka novels, "The Word" as banner becomes structurally inseparable from the 'plaid' of place and people, and from the 'plaid' as comforter/Comforter. The cycle's literary and cultural codes become one "langue."

To maintain the unity of "langue" as one set of interrelated codes, the colour of flow-lines in the plaid must correlate with the system as a cultural code and as a literary one, and those colours must be applicable at both

realist and figurative levels of discourse. The colours most visible are the bold dominant black, grey, and red of Hagar's, Morag's and Stacey's flow-lines, respectively, interwoven with Rachel's fine white "chalk line" (Jest 29). Hair colour reinforces this pattern; the covert plaid of Morag's black hair on Dan's red chest hair is a coloured image. All the cycle's protagonists have black hair when young; diviners, older and wiser (including Morag, Jules, Royland, and Christie) are grey; and Stacey MacAindra's family are all red-heads. The colours reapply, respectively, to each protagonist's personal vision of her cultural code. Hagar is in a black "hell" of spiritual blindness; and a younger Morag is called Morag Dhu by Dan McRaith in recognition of her depressive "Black Celt" moods. An older Morag's wider vision makes her world grey as she tempers her sense of doom and her compassionate sorrow for human suffering with hope. Stacey's world is afire with violence; and Rachel's world brightens with determined optimism. "Anything may happen," thinks Rachel (Jest 201), despite disappointments and grief, and the continuing burden of her only "child"--her mother.

These associations between 'plaid' colours and the conventions of Manawaka's people are reinforced by colour associations with Manawaka, as place. Black is the colour of its prairie soil; its prairie snow is white, its prairie fires--in furnace fires, house fires and grass fires--are red; its smoke, ashes, mist and storm clouds are grey. The

colours apply with equal validity to the texts' "langue" as a literary code. A Jest of God notes that grey "smoke signals" are "prairie drums" (81), a means of enunciation. Moreover, the black on white of print, and the black of fences in a white blizzard, function like a map to orient the 'reader' and to enable communication.[14] The cycle also offers white print on black, an inversion of usual practice: Rachel in her white raincoat, for instance, sees herself, teacherly, in window reflections as "a stroke of white chalk on a blackboard" (Jest 29). Furthermore red (or "read," as in the past tense of the verb "to read") signifies the violence inherent in reading. Plainly perception of a colour code serves to illuminate the 'plaid's' pattern, to make legible the complex set of relationships that structures the entire cycle.

This chapter's exploration of the text's cultural and literary roots ("langue"), symbolized by a colour-coded synchronic spatial construct ('plaid') reveals that conventions of narrative discourse in Laurence's fiction are developmentally structured, shaped by a process that is, at once, enabling and limiting. Discussion of the enunciation that arises from such a figuration of the work's ordering principles follows in the next chapter. In light of findings here, it is perhaps predictable that enunciation will transform discourse at its figurative level into a related symbol, doing so by the same kind of process visible in this chapter's analysis of the text as system.

## Chapter two: The Cycle as Enunciation

The power of voice in the separate books that comprise the Manawaka cycle has caught the attention of a number of Laurence scholars. W.H. New, for instance, in a recent essay focuses upon "voice and language" in The Stone Angel ("Every" 171-92); earlier, in 1971, George Bowering responded sensitively to Rachel's voice in A Jest of God ("Fool" 210-26); and J.W. Lennox, in a 1978 comparative study of The Stone Angel and Fifth Business, concludes that "the Manawaka voices. . . articulate. . . the Canadian imagination with the most authentic resonance" (29). However, my study, as I noted at the outset, considers the cycle to be narrative discourse, that is, one signifying statement. Consequently, we listen attentively in this chapter not only to individual narrators but to the larger text's orchestration of narrating voices.

The introduction to my thesis has outlined the phenomenon of utterance in the Manawaka cycle, as I read it: a master-narrator orchestrates five major narrating voices, each of which speaks separately through a different protagonist.[1] The master conducts the cycle's multiple sound tracks: Hagar's voice in The Stone Angel, Rachel's voice in The Jest of God, Stacey's voice in The Fire-Dwellers, Vanessa's voice in A Bird in the House, and Morag's voice in The Diviners. The master-narrator thus functions in the texts, and also between them in a role that exceeds the physical limits of print. In the process,

seemingly silent intra-textual spaces become as eloquent as the gaps, or "ellipses" to use Genette's terminology (Narrative 106), between the juxtaposed scenes which comprise the narrative sequences inside individual books. Expression resonates in the silences to make audible a chorus of voices within each text.

There are many voices: Simone Vauthier's study of The Stone Angel notes that the novel is told in at least four voices, a phenomenon of expression that re-echoes in A Jest of God in which Patricia Morley hears four distinct voices subsumed within Rachel's "first-person point of view" (Margaret 90). Laurence herself notes Vanessa's many voices in an essay that discusses "time and narrative voice" in her own fiction generally ("Time" 155-59). The Fire-Dwellers foregrounds another kind of vocal variety, one which links to "parole's" transformational capability rather than to narrative time: Stacey speaks about her own "placating voice," her "good-wife-and-mother voice," her "harpy voice" and others (43,49). By subsuming all utterance inside one vocative symbol, a piper, the cycle as narrative (in which "parole" necessarily derives from "langue") coheres intelligibly. Thus the Manawaka cycle not only tells the story of five separate individuals, but makes a meta-literary statement about the nature of "parole" itself.

This study's focus upon structure requires that we look first at the cycle's enunciation as it relates to its ordering principle. Change is by definition disruptive; and

the force therefore by which any narrative expression reshapes its own underlying conventions unavoidably resists and violates system, even as it regenerates it. The essentially ambivalent nature of "parole"--both constructive and destructive--becomes audible in the sound of Laurence's written text when we hear it as utterance. The 'piper' simultaneously mourns and jests in 'her' speech acts,[2] a practice this chapter will examine closely. Moreover, such contradictory tendencies in expression reverse. The cycle foregrounds the phenomenon at times through verbal somersaults: Morag musing in The Diviners for example about "Wordsmith. . . convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction" (25).[3]

Theoretically, the primary source of structural tension between "parole" and "langue" lies in the opposing relationship of each to time. "Langue" or system, as we have noted, exists intangibly as a spatial construct outside of time, whereas "parole," because of the syntagmatic or sequential and essentially "evanescent" nature of utterance (Ong, Orality 31, 71), occurs in time. Tension in all narrative arises from the play of force between diachronic enunciation and synchronic conventions. However, the strategy by which Laurence uses expression to disrupt convention is unique. In Laurence's work, the pre-emptive force of a present synchronic system, symbolized by the 'plaid,' remains, and "parole," correspondingly figured as a 'piper,' counters it. In enunciation, the text expands upon

the meaning of 'present' as a synchronic <u>now</u> in two ways: by adopting the sense of 'present' as <u>being</u> in time, that is, existing or having presence, and adding too its sense as a <u>gift</u>. All three meanings for 'present,' my argument contends, apply to the text's temporal construction.

In the first sense--'present' as 'now'--the 'piper,'as a human figure, is mortal, with a temporarily present life-span; the duration of the cycle as enunciation lies between <u>The Stone Angel</u>'s opening page, through that book and four more, to the final lines of <u>The Diviners</u>. The 'piper' is 'present' in the second sense (as existent) in one instance in <u>The Diviners</u> as a being who lays a "strong hand" on Morag's shoulders--"strong and friendly. But merciless" (122). Morag feels doomed to write by "someone [who] is walking over her grave" (122), and later, while writing, she hears in her mind the 'piper's' directive voice, a voice that Theo Q. Dombrowski dismisses as "melodramatic" ("Word" 57): "Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. . . . Where was the character, and who?" (404). Thirdly, the 'piper's' presence as a gift is implied by <u>The Diviners</u>' word play on "presents" and "presence," first in relation to Christie, signified by a Memorybank Movie title (87); and second in the title <u>Presences</u> for an offering that remains under wraps. (The title is significantly all that Morag reveals about her short story collection.) "Presence" as "presents" becomes explicit in the final exchange between Morag and Royland

about divining as a gift that is temporary, a present which exists (has presence) in the present but is easily withdrawn (451-52).

When we listen to the Manawaka cycle as enunciation, voice in the text seems to re-enact the role of Christ as the disruptive redeeming force in the Bible, the voice that breaks the law. Such echoes are not surprising, since "parole" occurs within "langue," and the biblical model, as we noted in chapter one, is a working cultural code within the cycle. Christ and the 'piper' (the vocative agents in their respective texts) generate three structural parallels with implications for the cycle as "parole" which I will explore in a moment. Those parallels are: first, a shared notion, not uncommon in literature and noted specifically about Laurence's work by Joan Hind-Smith (Three 46), that one particular voice can become truly universal. The Bible tells that Christ's acts redeem all mankind, individually, if one has ears to hear his message, just as the cycle through its unique voice renews the whole art of narrative for those readers who hear the signification of the 'piper's' many narrating voices. Secondly, the disruptive piper figure, like Christ, is self-effacing; and thirdly, the figure is an embodied voice, just as Christ is the Word made flesh.

When we pick up on the first of such structural parallels--the notion that one particular voice has the capacity to become universal--the particularity of the

'piper's' identity becomes a primary concern. The novel-ty of enunciation in Laurence's fiction immediately disrupts the Bible's established convention that creative power at a potentially universal level is most fittingly symbolized by a male figure. The 'piper,' as we have noted, subsumes the narrating voices of five female protagonists, all of whom, at some remove, are the creations of a female author. Laurence speaks about identity in another fictional work that is external to the cycle, but significant here in that it presents a rationale for identifying her "parole" as a female figure. In "The Merchant of Heaven," artist Danso interprets the Word that Brother Lemon has given him through the vision of his own eyes. He conceives of his God as physically like himself--muscular, male, African, with "eyes . . . capable of laughter." The problem as Danso sees it is: "Could anyone be shown as everything? How to get past the paint. . . ?" (Tomorrow 76). In the Manawaka cycle, it is the 'piper's' gender, rather than her colour, that is disruptive. Significantly, when Robert Kroetsch in 1970 questioned Laurence about the sisterhood of Rachel and Stacey, Laurence chose, like Danso, to relate the characters to herself; in her words, "one in a sense, divides onself" (Kroetsch 51).

My contention that one particular female voice subsumes all utterance in the Manawaka series expands upon a key finding made by Kent Thompson that the stories in A Bird in the House serve to "revaluat[e]" a character (233). Ronald

Labonte extends that point to say "on one level there is only one central character in all the Manawaka novels" (181). And both views expand upon New's earlier note that the contradictions of a many-sided personality are not "irreconcilable," since they "war [internally] with each other only if that is what. . . [the individual] wants" (Margaret 2).

What I note particularly about the cycle's one voice, in addition to its capacity to become universal, is that all five vocal manifestations of it relate directly to a general characteristic of utterance that Walter Ong calls "interiority" (Orality 71). Ong writes "All verbalization, including all literature, is radically a cry, a sound emitted from the interior of a person" ("Dialectic" 1160). Laurence's text speaks self-consciously at times about the interiority of its contradictions. In The Diviners for instance, it speaks implicitly through Morag's remarks about Gerard Manley Hopkins' obscurity: "almost always, if you can get inside the lines you find he's saying what he means with absolute precision" (224); and more openly in A Jest of God when Rachel's voice speaking in tongues is "dragged from the crypt" of her being (36).

A related feature of sound which Ong calls "forever something mysterious" ("Dialectic" 1160) more specifically characterizes the enigmatic interiority of the 'piper's' speech. Laurence's protagonists surprise themselves in spontaneous utterance: Rachel thinks, "I couldn't really

mean that. . . . You mean it all right "(Jest 114); and Hagar often startles herself in speech--"How is it my mouth speaks by itself, the words flowing from somewhere. . . ?" (Stone 68). The mystery of voice, and its interiority, is grounded structurally in the "aporetic" relationship, the tug, between "langue" and "parole" that animates narrative (Culler, On Deconstruction 96). Theoretically, even the most radical vocative disruption feels the force of convention; or, to re-state theory in terms of the cycle: the 'piper's' acceptance of her bounds ("langue" structured as 'plaid') paradoxically allows her voice to transcend the boundaries of inscribed text; or again in terms of the cycle's biblical parallel: Christ's power lies paradoxically in his perfect submission to his Father's will (to the Word as "langue").

To pursue the second parallel in enunciation between the cycle and its biblical model--the point that the 'piper's' and Christ's speech events are similarly self-effacing--we begin by listening most intently to the silences in the text. Choosing not to speak, as The Stone Angel demonstrates through Hagar's inappropriate silences, carries the same assertive power as vocalizing. Ellipsis in "parole," whatever its duration, signifies. The Diviners reminds us repeatedly of the expressive power of silence. In one instance, when Prin tells Morag that her only child was "'strangled on the cord. . . . Dead when born'" (44), Morag's repetitious thoughts surely signal an aporetic node

of meaning: "What? What cord? What means _Cord_? . . . How could you be born and dead at the same time?" (44). But her next choked words are even more eloquent in their silence: "Morag doesn't say, Doesn't say, Doesn't say, Doesn't say." What is the text implying about "parole" in such utterance? I venture to hear Morag's word play on "cord" and "chord" (words which phonetically equate when uttered by vocal "cords") to say that the very harmony of expression between the cycle and its model the Bible has the same paradoxical power to strangle new narrative life as does the symbiosis between mother and child. Enunciation must declare its resistance to "langue," and do so innovatively. Laurence's "parole" innovates with telling effect throughout the text by verbally foregrounding silence.

Another way in which the 'piper' declares emancipation from the biblical model lies in her choice not to speak meta-fictionally through allegory and parable. At times she omits instruction entirely and lets characters, Murray Lees in _The Stone Angel_ and Royland in _The Diviners_ for example, tell their own stories about the folly of "Bible-punching" oratory, while at the same time 'preaching' in disguise. The text's enigmatic preaching, like its ambiguous silences and denials, paradoxically exceeds the eloquence of a direct message. Through Stacey's voice in _The Fire-Dwellers_, the 'piper' self-consciously approves her own innovations: "The silences aren't all bad" (260), in that they are not actual lies as statements may be in fiction.

The silences that surround and punctuate the text, however, as we re-consider the point, are no more self-effacing than speech itself. As Ong reminds us: "Sound exists only when it is going out of existence" (Orality 71), an observation that provides a startling parallel to the Bible's structural statement. In that text the redemptive power of enunciation depends upon Christ's physical death. As we listen to the dual sound of the 'piper's' voice in the cycle, her simultaneous jesting and mourning, we become aware that within the continuous oscillation of sound that comprises this chord one note or the other is momentarily silenced. Accordingly, we might say that inside each node of ambiguous reversal in "parole" jest dies in mourning, and mourning dies in jest. 'Piping' is audible therefore as a dynamic processs that alternates between sound's self-effacement and its resounding with fresh meaning.

When we recall that the 'piper' figures the voice of narrative--discourse which is fiction, that is, fabrication--it follows that her words lie whichever note they sound. The truth in Laurence's fiction, if "fiction. . . [is] more true than fact "(Diviners 25), cannot be found in either vocal stance, but in the reverberations between jest and mourning. Audiophiles know that to hear the finest stereophonic sound, one must position oneself at a critical point between speakers. The text emphatically directs the reader to listen to both sounds--to jesting and mourning notes simultaneously. One such sign is a paradoxically

silent image of flowing water. The strategically important opening and closing passages of The Diviners speak of the river that moves in an "apparently impossible contradiction" of "currents" (sound waves) that flow "both ways" (3, 453).[4]

Specific textual corroboration for the phenomenon that is the cycle's "parole" echoes on every page. I will limit illustration, for the moment, to two instances, one that shifts from jest to mourning, and a second that mourns with an underlying mocking jest. In the first, jest begins in The Diviners when Morag and Royland banter about Brooke's keeping her "on the straight and narrow for a long time," in voices that are "not uncomfortabl[e]" despite Morag's "stiff" reply (27). Jest seems to turn harmlessly on sexual innuendo that relates in turn to "sword, proper" embossed on the 'piper's' reappearing plaid pin (432), and also to the rigid cultural and literary codes of the 'plaid' itself. But cruel undertones dissolve the banter when we recall the "stiffs" that haunted Rachel in A Jest of God (124). Resounding in the silent space between the two novels, the larger text declares that the corpses in Hector Jonas's embalming room, and Niall Cameron among them in Rachel's memory, transform into multiple images of a trickster's penis--that is, the poised pen-s of ancestral "fathers." The 'piper's' and Rachel's "laugh," as A Jest of God establishes at a later point, are "shudderingly, light-years away from laughter" (140).

On the other hand, a passage in The Stone Angel expresses poignant mourning on first reading. At the moment of Hagar's seeming self-realization, she thinks:

> This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly. . . . I must always, always, have wanted that--simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? (292)

What is "concealed" in those rhythmic repetitions of the word "know"? A denial? "Know" and "no" are the same word, phonetically. In that contradiction Hagar is audibly recanting her repentance, even as she utters it. Hagar's voice in this instance is typical of the cycle, for each moment that foregrounds noble sentiment into audible splendour dissolves helplessly into word play--even "mourning" resounds as "morning," and loss gives way to promise, when Vanessa and Morag grieve (Bird 108, Diviners 403).

Conversely, each bit of humour, the kind that Anthony Appenzell dismisses as "cornily clownish" (Appenzell 282), carries what New has termed, in his analysis of voice in The Stone Angel, a "burden or refrain. . . that sabotages her [Hagar's] acts of speech" ("Every" 183). A wary listener will hear emphatic utterance ('piping' fortissimo) as something special. Blatant obscenities, for example, are

probably benign, and harmless-sounding jokes likely carry a sting; but, one must not underestimate the 'piper's' turns of phrase, nor their complex resonance.

Two kinds of emphatic utterance in the cycle merit closer attention: entitling or naming, and apostrophe. Such speech acts amplify a function of all speech--which is to create identity. As Sherrill Grace puts it, "Through our speech we are. Christie, for example, is his ranting" ("Portrait" 67). Naming and apostrophe therefore are acts of 'piping' that foreground not the lexical so much as the phonetic. They stress the power of "parole" to create a sound event. As Dombrowski has pointed out ("Word" 59), The Diviners speaks of that power explicitly in Morag's apostrophe to Catherine Parr Traill: "Imagine naming flowers which have never been named before. Like the Garden of Eden. Power! Ecstasy! I christen thee Butter-and-Eggs!" (170). The 'piper's' power to "christen" and to apostrophize is verbally rooted here as we might expect in a biblical code.

When we consider these two speech acts separately, apostrophe reverberates more self-consciously than naming. Invocations (including Rachel's and Stacey's uncertain dialogues with God, as well as Morag's exchanges with C.P.T.) rebound upon the calling voice, declaring the caller's own visionary power to commune with spirits. Mindful of the counter-currents in the 'piper's' speech, we might wonder what subversive undertone underlies sublime

invocation. Culler reminds us that a "sinister reciprocity" underlies any apostrophe to the dead in fiction (Pursuit 153). He cites Paul de Man's note that, when the dead speak in "prosopopoeia," the "'symmetrical structure of the trope implies. . . that the living are struck dumb'"; and so, the trope threatens "'not only [as] the prefiguration of one's own mortality but of our actual entry into the frozen world of the dead'" (Pursuit 153). Therefore, beneath the bantering notes (humour which Thomas underestimates in calling it a "leavener" for thematic statements ["Chariot" 58]) the cycle's apostrophes sound the 'piper's' sinister undertone of power.

Additionally, apostrophe in the cycle disrupts literary convention by exceeding the visual dimension of voice that lies in poetry--specifically the image of sound, the "O" which figures the psalms and Milton's work with what Culler would call the power of the "pure O of undifferentiated voicing" (Pursuit 143). The 'piper' expands poetry's rudimentary visual image of voice into a moving account of other fixed and silent images, those found in painting and in the masks of drama. On McRaith's canvas in The Diviners, the mouth of "the dispossessed" crofter is "open in a a soundless cry" (378). The speech act that tells of that "O" re-echoes the "'O' of a soundless wail" of panic which Hagar "almost see[s]" like a mask in her mind at the moment she is "speared" by pain (Stone 54). The 'piper' is conceivably

declaring the inclusive superiority of narrative as an art form.

Though less self-conscious, naming is an equally disruptive and innovative speech act. The novel in which 'piping' is most fully audible, The Diviners, proclaims the power of "parole" by expanding the opportunity to name beyond fiction's conventional act of naming characters. The novel's many chapter titles, sub-titles, the entitled Memorybank Movies, Innerfilms, legends and other interpolations, and its epigraph from Al Purdy, as well as the boldly entitled songs in the album beyond story's end--all these serve as more than exercise points. Titles distill enigmatic meaning into one phrase which announces the kind of jesting and mourning voiced in the passage so named. For example, the Memorybank Movie title "Raj Mataj" in The Diviners (214), puns upon "the British Raj" (217) and Brooke's lordly ways; and also upon Razz Matazz by verbally poking fun at the Skeltons' low-key bookish existence and at the masked deceptions in their intimacy; and thirdly, upon Taj Mahal to counteract Brooke's painful story by announcing the greater "horror story" (218) of Morag's present danger. Submission to Brooke's "Victorian" (216) code threatens to entomb her, implying that, since Morag is a version of the 'piper,' "langue" threatens to stifle "parole" into a lifeless, albeit beautiful, form of expression.

Laurence scholars who are intent upon thematic analysis respond quite differently to The Diviners' wry sub-titles.

Barbara Hehner, for instance, calls the Memorybank Movie titles "irritating" and "obtrusive" (Dombrowski and Michael Peterman would agree), and Laurence's humour to Hehner's mind is "distancing and unpleasant": "'Raj Mataj'. . . is witty, but to what end?" ("River" 49). If we extrapolate the profound significance Laurence attaches to her book titles to include titles within them, we can be assured that sub-titles contribute vitally to her narrative.[5]

The names of characters in the cycle have proved more intriguing than titles to analysts, particularly names with biblical echoes. The secular associations of names draw attention as well. Joan Coldwell, for example, informs us that Morag is Gaelic for Sarah (99); while Carrington traces Morag's name to Mhorag of Gaelic legend--a "polymorphous. . . water monster" who could appear as a mermaid ("Tales" 159-60). Does Morag, as one version of the 'piper,' first appear perhaps in Stacey, as Luke's "merwoman" in _The Fire-Dwellers_ (161)? Speculation upon conventional name associations, however, serves only to confirm an obvious link in structure. We can make greater progress by examining innovative names which disrupt convention.

Accordingly, when we listen to Christie Logan's surname as well as to his telling given name, we may hear Christ-ie Low-Again. In such 'piping,' sound oscillates between serious expression and jest. Through Christie's use of 'stable' language, "parole" plays verbally upon the place of Christ's nativity and the 'stability' of meaning inherent in

oaths and crude language. Thirdly, The Diviners re-echoes a parallel play in The Stone Angel--in Bram's frequent "Christly" oaths (71, 84, 116), and in the "funny" fact (which of course is really fiction) that he had been born "in a barn. Me and Jesus" (125).

The most innovative act of "parole" in the Manawaka cycle relates to the third parallel between the cycle and one of its models in the Bible. We noted earlier that particular expression in Laurence's cycle has the capacity to become universal, and that its silences and its voices, like any event in time, are self-effacing in nature. We turn now to the third similarity--"parole" figured as a physically embodied voice in the 'piper,' just as the Bible's voice is animately figured in Christ. By the unique strategy of using each novel in the cycle to manifest a different dimension of her body and mind, Laurence's 'piper' declares her physical presence. Not surprisingly, the figure enunciates these self-defining narrative statements by sounding, at once, two familiar notes--jesting and mourning.

Enunciation in the cycle's second novel, A Jest of God, declares that lies and shifting meanings comprise the 'piper's' bones which are the elemental fictive core of narrative. The novel does so by playing verbally, in Rachel's voice, on three key words: "bones," "lies," and "mean." Through the natural biological relationship between bones and chalk, the 'piper' implies that her 'bones' do

indeed derive from the thin white chalk-line that characterizes Rachel's flow-line in the 'plaid,' but in "parole" chalk is transformed into a living means of communication. Although the text's simultaneous jesting and mourning about the sense of the three signifying words (bones, lies, mean) is an utterance specific to this novel, the sound of Rachel's words and their rhythmic phrasing are audible, when we listen carefully, as one characteristic sound of 'piping' in the cycle as a whole. In passages where mourning notes dominate, long vowels imitate the drone of pipes, repetitions play a sad refrain, and measured rhythms echo the 'piper's' steps.

One such passage in A Jest of God sounds a typical lament in its cadences and in its repeated long vowels. But just as typically, jest surfaces in the meaning of the passage. Rachel lies (deceives herself) about her bones as she lies in the tub, just as surely as she was "lying" earlier in both senses with her shadow prince (19): "I look thin as a thighbone. Naked, I am so bone-thin and long. . . . Underwater, this cross of bones looks weird, devalued into freakishness. My pelvic bones are too narrow, too narrow for anything" (139). Paradoxically, Rachel's lies are, of course, the truth. Her false notes are indeed the very lying essence, the "bones," of narrative; and as a version of the 'piper,' Rachel mourns like her biblical namesake that her children (creations) are not real. "Parole," as we have noted, is evanescent, a quality of sound that reflects

visually in the thinness of Rachel's bones and in the connotations of her cruciform body, and audibly in her self-mocking voice that seeks to erase her own existence as though it were a chalk mark. The lie that mourning is necessary reverses in the fact that thin, long, narrow bones (like the lies of fiction) are structurally very strong when they are articulated, that is, joined together in a living body (or spoken coherently in narrative).

Through Stacey's jesting and mourning voice in The Fire-Dwellers, the 'piper' puts flesh on the lying bones of Laurence's narrative. At one level Stacey's ample flesh--"Not flesh. Fat. F.A.T." (15)--manifests the abundant mix of fiction and fact that the 'piper' incorporates through a talent for hearing only too well the sensational news of her time, the 1960's. The flesh of embodied voice burns as Stacey's sensitivity (in her role as 'piper') flays that information over-load into a mass that is barely coherent in its jumble of incoming messages.[6] The excessive input Stacey receives threatens to relay into excesssive utterance, both of which are fired further by her over-active imagination. Flesh, then, figures the substance of "parole" in two ways--as stimulus and as response.

Tension within "parole" in this novel becomes palpable as Stacey's voice moves perilously close to uncontrolled expression. Like a fire, such excess would consume its own meaning. Stacey learns, by getting burned on occasion, that undisciplined rehetoric and the wrong choice of words are

not "okay," but "dynamite" (_Fire_ 253). The 'piper' reveals through Stacey that one side of her desires to speak "in full technicolor and intense detail" (_Fire_ 265), yet the 'piper' knows that a language of spare words and silences is the one she most uses and that it works, "at least sometimes," allowing her to survive (as evanescent "parole") for a time in time--"temporarily" (_Fire_ 266, 277).

The 'piper's' jesting voice again over-rides its undertone of mourning in _A Bird in the House_ to declare through Vanessa the nature of the cycle's vocal power embodied within particular bones and flesh. The jest turns on "pipes" and piping--upon Vanessa's imaginative capacity to fire the chimney pipes of her ancestral House and its restrictive conventions ("langue") and, at the same time, upon her ability to fire her own vocal cords into consciously disruptive speech ("parole"). Vanessa's voice and the chimney roar as one: "The pipes are on fire!" (189).[7]

It is entirely fitting then that word play on "pipes" and "fire" signifies importantly throughout the cycle as "parole." For instance, in Manawaka's cruel climate ("langue"), potentially beneficial and destructive fires of the imagination must be carefully controlled if one is to pipe effectively, that is, to make "prairie. . . smoke signals" (_Jest_ 81). The play on "pipes," we note, revolves around vocal cords and chimneys, but by association with the 'piper's' identity and vocation the meaning of the word

extends to include bagpipes. Bagpipes resound, not only in the text's drone of mourning with its overtones of false notes, but in such diverse turns of phrase as "baggage," "garbage," and oddly in the initials of Manawaka's "B.A. Garage" (Bird 179). Bagpipes resound too in the word "burden," a word that links to chimneys when we hear A Bird in the House phonetically as "a burden, the house." The burden of pipes becomes heavy indeed, for speaker and listener alike, as the larger text resonates among countless puns on "bear," "born," and "borne."

The audible burden of pipes and plaid (which of course is pinned in place by the Currie pin) implies that a counter-weight within "parole" is at least as restricting as the conventions which encase it. The text identifies three ways in which the latent silence of vocal and instrumental 'pipes' burdens the 'piper.' 'Pipes' grieve the temporality of their own expression, as the sound they make fades into silence; and they grieve most mournfully for the irrecoverable loss of the voices of earlier performers, that is, for the silence in death of "fathers." Thirdly, the 'pipes,' as we learn in The Fire-Dwellers, must carry a burden of silence or secrecy in withheld speech, and do so paradoxically in order to preserve communication between speaker and listener. For instance, Stacey addresses Mac silently about her indiscretion with Luke,

> You don't know that and I can't tell you because would it do any good to tell you? I don't think

so, I want to, but I can't. Maybe it'll come out. . . [later]. In the meantime, we carry our own suitcases. (Fire 216)

The physically substantial image of enunciation as someone carrying burdensome pipes comes alive when we listen to her voice in action. The 'piper' recalls her past in methodical steps that move between three points geographically in Canada. Each serves as a station ("a place to stand on") on her 'piper's' beat: "The West" (Manawaka and Winnipeg), "The Coast" (Vancouver), and "Down East" (Toronto and McConnell's Landing), all terms which Laurence explains in her essay "Down East" (Heart 173-80). Protagonists travel on trains, and on trains of thought,[8] to become what Laurence would call "perpetual traveller[s]" (Heart 173), ones whose "inner journeys" of recollection become speech events. My study of those journeys (unlike the work done by Clara Thomas, Melanie Mortlock, or Angelika Maeser, for instance, work which regards them as spiritual quests focused upon a goal) watches the 'piper's' steps as they "dance" in Valery's sense--as "actions whose end is in themselves" (922).

Because 'piping' is an act of "parole," it disrupts the conventions from which it derives. Such expressive performance corresponds of course to the actual piping in narrative and to the "fine sound. . . [of] the lies the pipes tell" (Jest 57) when they lead the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. The 'piper' however innovates in two ways.

The first innovation she shares with the Manawaka regiment: all are Canadians performing in Scottish costume. The 'piper' jests about those assumed identities--Jules Tonnerre, in his own words, "is some sight. . . in a kilt" (Diviners 139); but jest dissolves into mourning as fiction turns to fact. Not only fictional but real Canadian Highlanders die at Dieppe. The 'piper's' second innovation--pleating her 'plaid' into a kilt--manifests an ability to alter the large figures. A kilt pleats the vertical lines of plaid, hiding them, and foreshortening horizontal lines; just so, Hagar in The Stone Angel encloses ninety years within the few weeks of a sequential story in her present. All Hagar's memories are "folded in like a paper fan" (90), or a kilt, and Morag consciously reprises the same speech act in The Diviners. By 'piping' while pacing her beat, the 'piper' animates her kilt, outfanning its pleats to expose what is hidden.

It is more than coincidence that Hagar in The Stone Angel and Morag in The Diviners structure their enunciation in the same way. They are counter-images in the cycle as "parole." We have noted that the 'piper' who emerges as physically present in A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers and A Bird in the House, becomes fully operational in The Diviners. But, while the 'piper' is in action in those four books the ambiguous shadow of the first novel follows her. The Stone Angel's primary images of light and darkness, which parallel sight and blindness or insight and

misunderstanding, foreground biblical and Miltonic convention. However, when the cycle so relates its link between convention and expression to the link between shadow and object, the text subverts itself through its implication that the 'piper' is indeed an object. Such an identity would counter the notion of voice as a cry from the interior (Ong, "Dialectics" 1160). We hear the contrariness in Hagar's nature as she complains about her unique connection to, and her separation from, the composite governing figure: "I've never had a moment to myself. . . . Can God be One and watching? . . . Or no--He's many-headed, and all the heads argue at once, a squabbling committee" (<u>Stone</u> 93). Hagar's jesting redefinition of voice in this instance gives fair warning of other reversals in the text. She undermines the 'piper's' careful construction, and even mocks the voice that subsumes her own by echoing the 'piper's' mournful jests.

Jesting tones dominate, for example, when <u>The Stone Angel</u> conspicuously links Hagar to shadow in signs that are, in Hagar's words, "To the Point" (149). Laurence scholars, including Dennis Cooley and Angelika Maeser, respond by doing Jungian studies on Hagar as a character questing for "individuation." Such psychoanalytic focus upon Hagar as an individual cannot be extrapolated into a reading of Hagar as the 'piper's' subconscious, although it is her task structurally as shadow to oppose expression in the other four books.[9] When we place <u>The Stone Angel</u> in a temporal

context as the first book or the Genesis of the cycle, we note that Hagar's voice introduces the ambivalence at the core of all 'piping.' It is more likely, therefore, that her role as a shadow in the larger text figures "parole's" opacity and ambiguity, rather than the dark side of a psychoanalytic division.

The opacity of the 'piper's' shadow thickens when we recall that the governing figure is the embodied voice of a work of fiction, one whose "bones" are made of lies. What then might constitute the shadow of such a creature? Truth? More lies? Or elusiveness? The text only poses more questions: if Hagar's contempt for "gutless" Regina Weese (Stone 4) is valid, to what extent are Doris's efforts to care for Hagar (that is, to shoulder the 'plaid') invalid? And when Hagar carries Sandra Wong's bedpan, and almost begins to 'pipe' as she joins Sandra in laughter--"we bellow and wheeze" (Stone 302)--is Hagar betraying her true identity or finding it? Ambiguity thickens even further in light of the 'piper's' doubts about herself: Rachel is uncertain about "how many bones need be broken before I can walk" (Jest 201), and Morag is equally uncertain about whether her "magic tricks" have worked (Diviners 452). How can a doubtful figure cast a definitive shadow? New analytic strategy is indicated since my attempts to come to terms directly with Hagar's enigmatic identity reduce to shadow-boxing. Chapter three shifts into fresh focus, into an oblique perspective; one that begins to penetrate the

obscure surface of The Stone Angel. This new focus allows us to reach a fresh assessment of expression, and of its figuration in the Manawaka cycle.

## Chapter three: The Dynamics of Structure

"I've got a collection of motives like a kaleidoscope-- click! and they all look different." (Jest 176)

Calla voices this riddle in conversation with Rachel. When we read it as meta-literary, her words point to the meta-text's abrupt shifts in perspective: from wide-angle views to close-ups, and from one set of symbols to another. In using a corresponding reading technique, we recognize that the cycle's basic configuration as system and as enunciation is that of a 'piper' bearing her 'plaid.' However, the text in its structural complexity supplements that pattern with another important set. The tangential relationship between them highlights the structure we have noted, and indeed parallels the Laurence technique which W.H. New has detected in "The Merchant of Heaven," of mixing text and subtext ("Text" 19).

The presence of a second set opens up the possibility that additional sets exist. That possibility is important in two ways. First, verbal plays in meaning inevitably rebound between them and allow narrative to "dance," in Valéry's sense, with the same grace as poetry. Secondly, Laurence's sets allow for development of the non-verbal language of colour that we observed at work in the primary set. My observations of the "kaleidoscopic" movement among figurations of the basic opposition is informed in part by post-structuralist theory. Jacques Derrida argues for an acceptance of writing as more than alphabetical linguistic

notation, and against structuralism's, particularly Saussure's, phonocentric bias.[1] Derrida's stance will lead me in due course to pursue the functioning of colour as a non-verbal language in the cycle.

The piper's primary mode of enunciation, however, as we have seen in chapter two's analysis of "parole," is verbal; and a primary act of enunciation is her naming, or entitling. We have noted the significance of a phonetic link between A Bird in the House and 'a burden, the house,' for the 'piper' bears the burden of cultural and literary heritage. The book title however foregrounds the obvious--'birds' and 'houses.' This seemingly unrelated duo when viewed as parts in a textual kaleidoscope, one that re-sorts its own structural components, becomes recognizable as a magnification of the 'piper's' source of energy--her particular imagination. The text structures figuratively and doubly the tension that exists between a creative mind and its controls. 'Birds' correlate with 'fire' in "parole" as metaphors for imagination; similarly 'houses' become images in "langue" for perilous or secure frames of mind. At the text's figurative level, correlation between the two sets of symbols works thus: when Vanessa, one of the caged birds in the Brick House, projects, in her imagination, her grandfather's repression, her "pipes" (voice, and the Brick House chimney) catch on fire (Bird 189).

As working symbols of imagination, 'birds' are not restricted by the text to avian species, although the range

of such reference is wide--canaries, cranes, herons, ravens, sparrows, swallows, meadowlarks, pheasants, seagulls, geese, loons and more. Reference contracts to include synecdochal parts--feathers, giblets, claws and eggs--and expands to encompass whatever has the capacity to fly. Signifying the unlimited diversity of imaginative minds, 'bird' symbolism in its widest sense, textually, extends from angels ("stone" and otherwise) to insects (fireflies, ladybirds and blue-bottles), and by association, even to man-made structures: The Flamingo Dance Hall, and "Tiger Moths" (<u>Bird</u> 197). Airman Michael, bearing the archangel's name, "lies" (in both senses of the word) in the "nest" he makes with Vanessa, as he watches "the sky, where even now the training planes were skimming around like far-off blue-bottle flies" (<u>Bird</u> 197). In Laurence's set of novels the signifying relationship that exists between 'bird' references becomes a distinct metaphoric language,[2] a refiguration of "parole" that requires, for intelligibility, a view of individual 'birds' in the context of their own 'houses.'[3]

<u>A Bird in the House</u> offers the cycle's primary collection of 'houses' as symbols of a limiting/enabling frame of mind. Each 'house' in the stories is a structure that, like the 'plaid,' continues to shape, and be shaped by, the imagination within it. Very young Vanessa, tucked inside the romantic shell of her imagination, is housed in the same formal elegance that encases her Grandmother MacLeod. Mrs. MacLeod's chivalric notions are fixed within

her orderly museum of closed rooms (42-3). Vanessa however must emerge from fantasy and move on to the Connor Brick House, a fortress which, unlike a romantic frame of mind, is strong enough to withstand Vanessa's storms of present (in all three senses: 'here,' 'now,' and 'given') emotion and to contain her early griefs and joys. The less ceremonious Connor 'house' permits an occasional assertive act of "parole" by all the 'birds' within it: by Mrs. Connor, an "angel" (84); by Birdie, Mrs. Connor's canary; and by the builder's disreputable brother, songster Dan. The 'house' will even tolerate "Bye Bye Blackbird" pounded out on the piano by Vanessa's Aunt Edna (180).

But like the 'plaid's' distinctly bounded flow-lines (at times fenced with "barbed wire"), cages (for 'bears' or 'birds') can simultaneously shelter and debilitate spirits they contain. Edna sees the Connor 'house' as a "dungeon," and is tempted to imprison herself within it (187). The text narrates figuratively through Vanessa and Edna that the healthy imagination does venture forth from its nest or cage, but carries its formative 'house' along, mentally. Narrative order foregrounds the idea in A Bird in the House; the emphatic opening sentence of the first story announces: "That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me"(3). In a wide-angle view of the cycle, the bird/house symbols imply that it is difficult, but necessary, to leave a secure 'home,' that is, to break out of a literary and cultural tradition, and yet remember

it in expression. In close-up, the pattern repeats; narrative must first be framed in figurative language strong enough to bear extensions in meaning (such as the 'plaid' and the 'piper'). Yet, narrative must shift to new figurations ('houses' and 'birds') in order to remain vital, and must do so without abandoning the primary set.

The same work, A Bird in the House, articulates the risk of seduction that lies in mental flight into figurations, and also tells of the cruel reversal that occurs when imagination (as 'bird' and as 'fire') goes too far and becomes dissociated from its frame of reality. Vanessa's cousin Chris escapes into insanity during the war by refusing to "live inside it [his body] any more" (151-3). His trip is modelled on earlier escapes from the reality of a dirty shack home and a quarrelling family into fantasies of race-horses pointedly named Firefly and Duchess, the latter relating to a romantic world that an older Vanessa "gently and ruthlessly" rejects (154). In the book's second example, Piquette as a young girl looked "blank, as though she no longer dwelt within her own skull" (118). Vanessa finds a parallel between Piquette's despairing suicide and "the crying of the loons" at Diamond Lake (127). In story it is similar dispossession of territory that triggers such identification of the Métis girl and the loons, but at a figurative level, the text links Piquette's uncanny ability to understand the loon's language to her suicidal despair. The flimsy shack 'housé' in which Piquette lives compounds

her peril; a firetrap with faulty "pipes" cannot protect her (126). She is lured to her death by a "cry" (in Ong's sense of the word), just as Manawaka's Cameron Highlanders are lured into war by the 'piper's' call. By relating both sets of symbols for imagination ('fire' and 'bird'), A Bird in the House links fiction's enchantment to madness, and madness to gifted uncanny reading.

The inseparable relationship between 'birds' and 'houses' in the story collection, and the link within its "parole" of fire-roar, birdsong and piping, alerts readers to a corresponding symbolic relationship in the novels. Accordingly, we note in The Fire-Dwellers that Stacey's home on Bluejay Crescent is built of highly flammable shakes and shingles (Fire 26), a construction so susceptible it parallels the hovering panic in Stacey's imagination. We also note the contrast when, in The Diviners, a calmly domestic Bridie McRaith ("Bridie" is an anagram for "Birdie") makes a nest for her brood in a weather-resistant stone row cottage, one that is not seriously threatened by the migratory habits of her flame-haired/feathered mate (Diviners 385-90).

Through the bird symbolism of its characters the cycle makes the additional point that each piper, or singer, must sing its own song, whatever is assigned to it as one of a distinct species in a natural order. Vocalizations therefore prove to be assortive behaviour, the exercise of a given talent, and praiseworthy as enunciation or "parole"

only when uttered in a strange or hostile environment. On the other hand, the texts establish through their primary symbols that peril is systemic in Laurence's Manawaka novels. It follows therefore that _all_ utterances in them act as "parole." By focusing upon the verbal play surrounding three key "birds"--Hagar, Morag and Christie--we are rewarded with a revealing close-up of the text's narrative dynamics.

The first bird lies camouflaged among _The Stone Angel's_ many analogies. Hagar calls herself a "hawk" (251), a bird of prey. She is not a songbird, nor a domesticated fowl, but a canny pitiless hunter who deals in death with no criminal intent. The hawk, a fierce dominant bird, attacks other birds tellingly. It is in such spirit that Hagar throws a crate at the wild gull in the cannery (217), and refuses to share water with the very sparrows who lead her to find the rain-filled bucket (186). A hawk's shrieks or its silences, like Hagar's, are unpredictable; and, the female may trample her young underfoot or abandon her mate. There can be no doubt Hagar treats young Marvin as a nuisance, and she continues to be suspicious of his footsteps, saying pointedly in one instance "I'll claw him" (72). In a further analogy, Hagar's livelihood depends for a time upon chickens, birds that are a prairie hawk's fair game. She watches unflinchingly as Lottie, another more rapacious (or more merciful?) bird of prey, squashes eggs and hatching chicks at the nuisance grounds (28). Hagar and

Lottie reprise the event twice: Hagar becomes the "egg woman" (132), trading with Lottie for money, sustenance; and they conspire again as "hawks" to stomp upon their children's futures (213).

A hawk's behaviour may hasten the death of its victims, but it does not invent death. "Birds" of prey as symbols of "parole" therefore naturalize the sinister tones in the cycle's foregrounded statement: "A bird in the house means a death in the house" which is voiced by Hagar (Stone 217), and repeated in the book title, story title, and the text of A Bird in the House. But contradiction resounds through Noreen in Vanessa's story. As a "sorceress" who can turn snow into "eggs" (100), Noreen reintroduces mystery to the experience of death, thus allowing deconstructive play to oscillate irresolvably between the benign and the sinister.

The primary winged configuration of The Stone Angel, Hagar as "angel," embodies the text's ambiguity. Only in death can mortals achieve the ideal state of angels, or free spirits, unhoused imagination. As Cooley notes, the location of the stone angel in the novel, housed within the Manawaka cemetery, serves as a paradoxical image of "death-in-life" ("Antimacassered" 36). The "stone barn" (Stone 155), or mausoleum which is the Oatley house, likewise contains Hagar and fixes her as though she has been harvested and stored (much like oats) along with the possessions she has accumulated and the joys she has hoarded (36, 292). Her actions, which are an attempt to preserve

life, paradoxically destroy it. Contrastingly, Bram's attempts at communication with his sons, in handwriting that looks "like sparrow tracks on snow" (166), signify that compared to Hagar he is alive, however precariously. The text figures her imagination as an immobilized (frozen) 'bird,' a stone angel/hawk--silent, blind and deaf: "I lie here huge and immovable, like an old hawk caught, eyes wide open, unblinking. I won't speak. Let them gabble" (251). The destructive side of 'angels,' a ruthlessness which links them to birds of prey, reappears in A Jest of God. Rachel recalls "Angel-makers--that's what they used to call abortionists" (116). Therefore, at the text's figurative level Hagar's 'bird' attributes begin to clarify her role as the 'piper's' shadow by declaring that narrative at its most angelic is most deadly, and at its most vicious is possibly most benign.

Manawaka's angelic "birds" of prey in The Diviners find Christie Logan's nature to be a likely target. Like a gull, Christie survives by scavenging for a simple living. Because he exists outside the pecking order of the powerful, he is prey to their distrust, to their envy of his freedom, and to their disgust when he is trapped (Stone 217, Diviners 37-8). Christie is a gull that not only fishes for useful bits at the dump; he screams and rants as "Human Bagpipes Logan" (Diviners 162), "spiels" his discoveries (75), by proclaiming like the gulls through his strange "gift of

garbage-telling" whatever he divines as waste's significance (70).

Christie, the second 'bird' under our surveillance, lives in double jeopardy; the lowly 'chicken' side of his nature makes him the 'hawks'' natural prey. Athough he is the shell-shocked victim of others' wars, peaceable Christie is a decent, wholesome 'bird,' but one who lives, of course, in a chicken coop--a 'house' or frame of mind that is "stinking and chaotic" (393), fouled verbally with his obscenities and profanities. To naturalize his behaviour, the text explicitly assigns to Christie a 'chicken' appearance. Young Morag thinks Christie "looks peculiar. His head sort of comes forward when he walks, like he is in a hurry" (35); she notes his "squashed. . . red skin face" that sprouts greyish stubble (39), and the sparse sandy hair and speckled brown skin that covers his older bony frame (395). Like a chicken, Christie works spasmodically, "swallowing his spit with the effort. . . , his Adam's apple yo-yoing in his throat" (74); his vocalizations are either 'yak-yak-yakkity-yak or dead silence" (74), and he "laughs with a kind of cackle" (38). Yet Christie Logan, whether seagull (scavenger) or common (foul) fowl, masks another given identity. Christie's "rough rough" hand (30), which Morag clasps on her first walk to school, becomes an "eagle claw" that grips her when much later he lies on his death-bed (395).

Christie's best defence against his hostile world is "clowning," acting like a "loony" (38). The text's terms correlate an opposition that emerges in "parole," as we have noted, between jesting as self-effacement on the one hand and the same "loony" behaviour as sinister power on the other. Christie's domain burns continuously, creating even greater ambiguity. Christie's "loony" identity oscillates deconstructively between his personae as firebird and as master of 'Gehenna,' and his third role as Manawaka's strangest communicator--through his smoke signals. We note too the more obvious link between Christie's loon calls, his gull shrieks and cackles, and the ranting of Bagpipes Logan's vocal cords (162). Loons however belie their trickster image by the steadiness of their habits; they mate for life, behaviour that is reflected in Christie's loyalty to Prin. Christie's 'bird' attributes, in all their complexity, relate directly to the 'piper's' mind through Morag, who recognizes Christie as her "father" (396). Morag, however, is an individual who modifies what Christie gives her to sing a song of her own.

When Morag, who is the third 'bird' we must watch closely, finally does acknowledge her complex kinship to Christie, the loon in both of them surfaces and she shares a last "loony" laugh with him, "their protection. . . as always" (395). For Morag, looniness surfaces again in solitude when she feels the "need to talk" (212), to _call_ on a lonely evening to friends and kin. Just as a 'piper'

finds comfort in reaching out to clan members, Morag discovers that an answering call from Pique leads "incredibly, unreasonably, [to] a lightening of the heart" (108).

The Diviners, while not discounting Morag's loony 'fathers' (Christie and Royland) identifies her more particularly as a blackbird, one of a flock that includes Jules and Pique.[4] It locates that designation strategically at the core of Morag's fictive existence, "concealed" on The Diviners' centre page at the point in narrative where Morag reveals the "real" but "invisible" red "blood" of pain that she, as author, shares with her invention Lilac Stonehouse, there "among the black" printed words (230).

> Red-winged blackbird. You would not guess their concealed splendour, seeing them on a branch with their wings folded. Only when they took off, the outfanning of those scarlet feathers hidden among the black. (213)

Appropriately, blackbirds are wild prairie songbirds, pipers, who trill alone and in concert. We note the significance then when Morag 'sings' in the cycle as a 'piper' with four other narrators; and when, in The Diviners, she explains pointedly that blackbirds are akin but not identical to common grackles. Grackles, Morag sighs, have "disgusting living habits" (54), and march, by implication without a 'piper's' grace, on her farmhouse roof

where their "heavy-footed ballet. . . [sounds] like carthorses, TRAMP TRAMP TRAMP" (93).

Morag's unique characteristics as a blackbird revaluate her nature as a 'piper' (and therefore the text as "parole") by making some fine distinctions. For one thing, although blackbirds are not timid (Morag calls Pique a "born. . . scrapper" [308]) they are not birds of prey. Nor are they fishers; Morag dissociates her kind of divining from Royland's fishing talent (25, 452). Furthermore, blackbirds do not scavenge indiscriminately like Christie, like seagulls. By nature, blackbirds (and novelists) are gleaners who gather particular kernels.[5]

Moreover, the <u>wild</u> side of a blackbird's nature serves to link the text's figurations of "parole." Morag, we note, finds her jewel of a mate, songster Jules, at the nuisance grounds,[6] an act that links blackbirds to the black sheep and outcasts in the 'piper's' heritage: to Vanessa's Uncle Dan (<u>Bird</u> 25), and to Bram Shipley of <u>The Stone Angel</u>. Secondly, wild blackbirds pace their territory just as pipers do, by migrating. Like the loons, geese and swallows with whom Morag feels kinship, she instinctively waits "for the right moment to go" to London (347) and to return to Manawaka in response to a call (391). Moreover, when Morag does choose to 'nest,' she selects a 'house' that is her natural habitat as a blackbird--a country spot in "long grass" (416). She senses that the "old," "rough," "sound. . . farmhouse" at McConnell's landing is home (93), a 'house'

and barn with "bats" in it (415), analagous to her mellow frame of mind.

In a third parallel between blackbirds and pipers, the "splendour" of Morag's red wings is visible only when she is in action--piping (Diviners 231), just as there is a splendid flash of 'plaid' when her 'piper's' kilt outfans in full stride. As an adult diviner, Morag knows her nature, and therefore "prefers her own long straight black hair to Fan's. . . arrangement of auburn whorls" (316). She rejects Fan's exotic artificial plumage, which, like the name that Fan has chosen (Princess Eureka), is fantastically visible, 'outfanned' to excess. In so doing Morag repeats her earlier rejection of what for a blackbird is an unnatural habitat. She "took off" once ("Bye Bye Blackbird" [Bird 180]) to escape a sterile city apartment where her mate expected her to crop and "perm" her hair (220), to become a pet. At its figurative level, narrative in The Diviners stresses the need for a piper to find the 'frame' of mind ("langue"), and the style of expression ("parole"), that works most harmoniously with her own nature.[7]

The text implies also that each writer working within a chosen genre must reaffirm that choice through a process of self-realization. Forefathers, or mothers, cannot smooth the path. Just as the 'piper' bears the burden of derivation from two sources (the cultural and literary codes of "langue"), and mourns the deceptions and cruel jests that comprise her fictive nature, Pique, a fledgling blackbird,

must mourn not only her dual heritage but also the taunts she hears in the present--"dirty halfbreed" (Diviners 421). Correspondingly, Pique cannot separate her own pain from self-discovery for it is out of her hurts that her songs and her awareness arise: "Pique listens to groups, too, but it is the solitary singers, singing their own songs, who really absorb her" (426).

Although The Diviners declares that the songs of blackbirds and of sparrows ("Pres-pres-près-Presbyterian") are "unambiguous" (96), we cannot count on it. Language in the text is a multiple signifier, or as Marcienne Rocard puts it (echoing Roland Barthes some twenty-five years earlier) "Nothing is gratuitous in Margaret Laurence's novels" ("Dispossession" 241).[8] In a close-up look at the passage on Pique's songs we might wonder, for instance, what The Diviners means when it says "the. . . singers. . . really absorb her" (426). The paradigmatic potential of 'absorb' includes along its axis the words 'ingest' and 'swallow' leading to the possibility that 'absorb' links covertly to the novel's most ubiquitous bird?

The connection seems less unlikely when we recognize that the text parallels the action of 'swallows' and 'novels' in another passage:

> The swallows were positively dangerous, as always at this time of year, dive-bombing anyone who came within eye-shot of the nest. . . .
>
> Imagine dying from a fractured skull

delivered by a hysterical parent swallow.
A novel death. In a novel, who'd believe
it? NOVEL. Odd word. (232)

The link between them strengthens as Morag continues her admittedly anthropomorphic observations about swallows. "To see them take off is a marvel," she thinks (242), but no more marvellous than the expanding meaning of her operative word, 'swallow.' Almost immediately the narrative shifts to Prin's death-bed--to her "flaccid hugeness" (249), pointing to the kind of swallowing that leads to such overgrowth. As Morag looks at her, she is "reminiscent (unbearably) of the dead half-bald baby birds fallen from the nests in the spring of the year" (250).

When one listens to the resonance in the meaning of the word, 'swallow' oscillates between three denotations, two as noun and one as verb. The text deconstructs sense further by opposing those meanings to a third kind of 'swallow'--"NOVEL" or narrative. As teachers and parents, 'birds' can be over-indulgent and ruthlessly over-protective. Is The Diviners perhaps articulating a risk in writing narrative, saying in effect that writers also tend to over-research, over-read, and then vociferously defend their work as it goes to print? The textual parallel has a certain logic since novelists and birds feed their young to ready them for flight, and the sequence of events is a regular, repetitive movement that climaxes in each solo launch. The movement becomes two-phased, swinging between

"swallowing" (feeding, reading) and "expressing" (in flight, in writing). With a shake of the kaleidoscope structural patterns shift in this passage from focus upon 'bird' imagery to a seemingly abstract concern with ingestion--doubly strange in that all the novels avoid conventional dinner scenes, an absence that signifies strongly in work focalized through female protagonists.[9]

The text's word play upon "swallows" and "expression" becomes concrete in light of the tendency in Laurence's fiction to embody theoretical concepts in animate symbols. Only by the regular ingestion of nourishment, by "swallowing" food, and by the regular excretion or "expression" of body wastes can the physical body sustain life and health. The text makes the point figuratively in abundant references to both kinds of bodily functions. For example, it is necessary for the 'piper's' well-being not only to "swallow" (that is, to take on a load of experience, a burden of knowledge gained by reading, watching, listening and doing) but to "express" it (that is, to write, speak, sing, regurgitate tales, weep, lament, handout a few "humbugs" [Bird 25], labour/sweat and give birth to narrative, and most essentially, to drop the daily accumulation of toxic despair, guilt and self-deception so that writing is purged of irrelevance and ornamentation). The rhythm of movement, physical and narrative, its regularity (a time to swallow, a time to express) finds a parallel in the structure of Ecclesiastes' lines: "A time to

weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (3.4).

Echoes of the Bible are not surprising as we focus upon the <u>operational</u> side of the narrative, where discourse animates basic structural opposition into a three-dimensional unity analagous to the Trinity. We recall our first glimpse of the meta-text in action: in the 'plaid' as comforter, a role that parallels the Bible's Comforter or Holy Spirit. The 'plaid,' as we saw in chapter one, figures the Manawaka cycle as "langue" in the same way that God symbolizes Law in the Bible. We noted also that the text's full potential for action materializes in "parole" in a physically complete figure, a 'piper' whose paradoxically regenerative and self-sacrificing acts parallel those of Christ the Redeemer. Particular novel-ty enters Laurence's discourse at this point, as the Word made flesh in "parole" becomes physiologically functional, figured as working narrative.

The text develops the analogy fully between a functioning body and a functioning narrative. The pain of a writer's ills, his failure to overcome weaknesses, and his neglect of "lost languages" (<u>Diviners</u> 244), underlies the text's assertion that the physical body requires more than food; it needs, on occasion, to "swallow" strong medicine--unpalatable truth. Jules Tonnerre, for example, must 'swallow' the thought that in his absence his sister's body was reduced to "roasted meat" (<u>Diviners</u> 159). The

Tonnerre family's ills contrast totally to those of the over-solicitous swallow family but their young are equally at risk. The MacAindras, mothered by another flyaway, "ladybird" Stacey, are saved from Piquette's fate "temporarily"; Stacey's strong medicine is dispensed by Luke "the Physician" Venturi (_Fire_ 1, 127, 158). The text allows that medicine may become more palatable in time, for when Morag accepts ('swallows') the fact of her kinship to Christie, her pill is no longer bitter.

Paradoxically, to renew growth in an animate body, and thereby stave off decay, 'swallowing' of nourishment or medicine is not enough--one needs to be 'swallowed,' that is, one must 'die' spiritually. The text's references to Jonah make the point metaphorically. In one instance it does so by foregrounding Jonah's and the poet's experience in the epigraph to _A Jest of God_; in another by naming Hector Jonas (Manawaka's undertaker) and by entitling Morag's novel "_Jonah_"; and again in _The Diviners'_ by referring to Prin as "unwholesome. . . whalewoman" (208)--a Leviathan of innocence and childish simplicity.[10] "Being swallowed" in textual terms involves the loss of innocence and ignorance, and a gain in knowledge and experience. It also can require a return to one's ancestral roots in order to come to terms with whatever "disreputable" fathers (skeletons) are in the closets (_Diviners_ 366). Morag, the writer, _must_ therefore become intimate with her literary heritage as the wife of Professor Skelton. Similarly,

Margaret Laurence in her essays repeatedly comments upon her own roots as a writer; and among structuralist theoreticians, Harold Bloom wrestles with the problem of literary fathers. Not surprisingly, all of the cycle's protagonists struggle with enigmatic dead "fathers" in narrative. Hagar, of course, is the exception. Not only does she sever relations with Jason Currie, she declares "If God's a crossword puzzle, or a secret code, it's hardly worth the bother, it seems to me" (Stone 119).

"Swallowing" and "being swallowed," however, are only the first steps in the two-phased movement of "swallowing" and "expressing." The epigraph to A Jest of God reads:

> If I should pass the tomb of Jonah
> I would stop there and sit for awhile;
> Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
> And came out alive after all.
>
> Carl Sandburg, "Losers"

If diviners/narrators hope to "come out alive,"[11] that is, to 'express' vibrant truth,[12] each must go to the places of death--to cultural and literary graveyards, and to the places where we dispose of outmoded convention. The practice of examining waste for diagnostic purposes is itself conventional: physicians test body fluids and waste; soothsayers and seers examine entrails; and diviners/ narrators seek figuratively for truth in places of accumulated "expression." Each would-be 'piper' must search in the family cemetery: unearth dead letters (Bird 112), or

photograph albums,[13] and historical myths--such as Culloden and Batoche; and search too in the nuisance grounds of performance--in the "Fig Leaf" nightclub and in the pubs on Jules Tonnerre's circuit (Diviners 309, 236). A 'piper' must go to the outhouses, the "lockable" sanctuaries which the text calls "johns" (Diviners 122, 181), a phonetic link to the Book of John and so to the entire Bible; to asylums where expression is cancelled, X-pressed, "Criss-Cross[ed]" (Bird 154); to museums of romantic idealism (such as Mrs. MacLeod's musty mansion in A Bird in the House); and, finally, to "prisons" of pride, Hagar's kind of "mausoleum." All are places where what was once fresh and meaningful has deteriorated into cliché.

The text notes specific "lost languages" (Diviners 244): classic Greek in A Bird in the House (51), the "tongues" of early Christian teaching in A Jest of God (135), and Gaelic, French and Cree in The Diviners (244). The search for fresh 'expression' among wastes, when figured as biologic process, signifies that success is not impossible, since organic regeneration is paradoxically sustained by seemingly worthless material (the paradox parallels the very kind of tension at work in narrative). In one significant moment in The Diviners, young Morag feels totally disillusioned, for she has discovered Christie's tales are fiction and not historical fact; she mourns silently "It's all a load of old manure" (162). Although Morag does not recognize it at the time, her blackbird

nature offers a splendid consolation, for in a blackbird's habitat old manure is the best fertilizer but functional of course as new growth only by assimilation into the food chain. As Morag matures, she learns the value of myth by a process of absorption which then unfolds in the sequence of her novels. Ildikó de Papp Carrington has traced that process fully in her study of "tales in the telling" in The Diviners (154-69).

The text is even more explicit in the analogies it uses for the second phase of movement, as it parallels the expressive functions of a physical body and the expressive functions of narrative. Bram's non-verbal "expression" of urine on the steps of Mr. Currie's store, for example, becomes non-verbal apostrophe, "parole" that speaks with the same "soundless" cry voiced by old Hagar in her pain and by the "dispossessed" crofter in The Diviners (Stone 115, 54; Diviners 378). No physiological system is neglected by the text since all are interrelated functions. Indeed Laurence carefully makes reference to virtually all body fluids and by-products: odors, sweat, tears and blood; respiratory excretions--phlegm, mucous, and smoke-laden exhalations: digestive ones--saliva, gas, vomit, feces, and urine; and reproductive ones--semen and menses.

Perhaps because "vomiting" as motion reverses the act of swallowing, the text foregrounds that form of physical "expression." Regurgitation, like swallowing, can be life-restoring and life-sustaining as well as

life-threatening. When the sea water "swallowed" by Duncan MacAindra nearly drowns him, he must express it in order to survive (Fire 261-4), just as each set of Morag's experiences must "come out" physically at first (she vomits before telling Jules of Piquette's death, and on the train after leaving Brooke). Later she finds fuller "expression" in her novels. Whether we see Morag's expression as emetic or as "cathartic" (Dombrowski's term ["Word" 56]), 'coming out' is clearly beneficial physiologically.[14] As if in confirmation of that point, the text's bird imagery relates vomit to sustenance, for very young nestlings are fed on regurgitated food just as children thrive on repeated nursery rhymes, songs, and bed-time stories (Morag loves Christie's tales, and Pique loves Morag's tales of Christie).

Hagar is The Stone Angel's and the cycle's structural embodiment of the physical ills associated with a delay or a blockage of "expressive" movement. She is not only "stone" blind and deaf (97), she refuses to weep for Bram or for John (184, 243), and as she sounds denial again (in knot/not) her "bowels knot" with constipation (191). All Hagar's "expressions"--her utterances, her involuntary tears (31, 244), her flatulence (58) and incontinence (73), and her nausea (246)--are irregular functions that are physically unsynchronized. Structurally then, her dysfunctional "expressions" relate to the 'cages' that bind her as she rejects the "plaid"; and secondly, such

expression is symptomatic of unhealthy writing, that which is inappropriate, unco-ordinated and over-inflated. Images that relate to function and to dysfunction serve concretely to affirm the animate nature of the "piper" in the text's primary set of structural symbols.

In both kaleidoscopic shakes of the text's patterns in this chapter ("parole" and "langue" symbolized respectively by "birds" in "houses", and by the "expression" that follows "swallowing"), functional _good_ health in narration becomes visible by focusing upon the diviners, in _The Diviners_. Their ability to divine, like birds' capacity to sing, is instinctive, and like physical good health or like life itself is a gift which is given and taken away inexplicably. Improper curiosity about function deters performance: A-Okay Smith, an okay "wordsmith" (25), can learn to water-divine says Royland, "if he can just get over wanting to explain it" (452). Divining entails response to one's instincts, just as birds sing, migrate, and nest; and it requires an uninhibited awareness and acceptance of the harmony of one's own physical functions. Diviners enact healthful activities like a "rite of passage" (283), or a sacrament. For example, Morag and Jules mutually 'express' their love in Vancouver (342), and Morag inspects, while nude, McRaith's painting (377).

_The Diviners_ distinguishes such behaviour from what is destructive. In so doing, the novel implies that narrative which treats the sexual expression within it sensationally,

as flesh dissociated from thought, is headed for the same critical disrespect and cruelty that Morag, the novice writer, receives from Chas (326-9), or that Stacey receives from Buckle Fennick (Fire 137-44). Morag, as diviner, learns from her experience and vows to avoid potentially abortive performances in the future (Diviners 329). She can only pity the fate of non-diviners: Eva Winkler, Lilac Stonehouse, Prin Logan, and Fan, individuals whose naiveté and ignorance produce grotesque miscarriages of creativity (152, 230, 44, 309).

The text, as dynamic narrative capable of physiological movement and changes in health, correlates its non-verbal enunciation with audible metaphoric piping, birdsong and physical expression. We have noted that one of the key languages it uses to correlate the two levels of discourse (realist and figurative) is that of colour. This auxiliary language makes legible the verbal interplay between "langue" and "parole." We recall that black, grey, and red, together with a fine white chalk line, comprise the 'plaid,' and that those colours remain, transformed, in the bones, the flesh and blood, and the black or grey hair of the 'piper.' Bird/house symbolism retains the basic colours, in part by foregrounding odd exceptions: Royland, unlike distinctively marked black and white loons, is a "Greybeard" (Diviners 25);[15] and Christie, unlike most white-feathered gulls, is a "redskin" (Diviners 39). In line with her 'fathers'' oddities, Morag's 'loon feathers' are unconventional:

"black slacks which need dry-cleaning, and a white turtleneck neck sweater which sags all over. . . . Circus freak" (Diviners 336). As a 'blackbird,' her plumage flashes red only when she 'flies,' and she prefers the grey of an old, weathered 'house.' Hagar, contradictory as always, thinks that "Gray. . . unpainted houses" (like Bram Shipley's) are inferior, and then changes her mind at the cannery (Stone 40, 153).

But shifting patterns of symbols, in constructs that focus first upon "parole's" link to imagination and then upon narrative as process, highlight two other colours--blue and brown.[16] The shakes of a 'kaleidoscope' cannot, by definition, produce new material but they can foreground, through new ("novel") patterns, what at first appears to be insignificant.

The blue of Manawaka's prairie sky is present from the outset as an integral thread in the 'plaid,' and present too in the 'piper's' blue eyes: Vanessa inherits her Grandfather Connor's "Irish blue eyes" (Bird 16); and although Morag's eyes are brown, she relates by adoption to Christie's "clear," "blue blue" eyes (Diviners 394, 45). 'Sky blue' gains structural significance as the domain in which 'birds' fly free, where "parole" as imagination soars. Textually, the colour signifies highest (sky-high) thought, a truth which is timeless in quality as opposed to cyclical earthy realities. The Diviners makes the point conventionally in

its references to "Blue Sky Mother" (12), and to the "ancient-seeming" Great Blue Heron (357).

Less conventionally, the text signifies that work is timeless, by noting the presence of the same blue colour in work clothes. Christie's overalls and workshirt are blue (36); Royland wears a <u>blue</u> plaid windbreaker (417); Pique, and Jules when he is not in costume, wear blue jeans (232, 265-6). And most significantly, Scotty Grant wears a "blue open-necked workshirt" when he plays the pibroch over Christie Logan's grave (403). In the language of colour then the text makes the point that the <u>endless</u> work involved in piping/narrating is one of its <u>finest</u> aspects.

The cycle's text makes a second point through the changes it notes in colour tones. When Mr. Conner is coldly calculating and judgmental, his eyes are "ice-blue" (<u>Bird</u> 182); when Christie is by turns fearful, or sad and confused, his eyes are "blind" or "watery" and clouded (<u>Diviners</u> 45, 86, 250). Laurence is saying colourfully that intellect dissociated from fulfillment becomes cold, or ineffective. The text insists paradoxically that the opposite is also true--that the 'blue' of excessive imagination burns, for the "ugly" and "beautiful" bluebottles (blue angels) live by the "zillions" in the fiery nuisance grounds (<u>Diviners</u> 40, 71). In either instance, the text is highlighting the danger that lies in dissociating the mind from physical reality, a stance that parallels "the link approaching the closeness of symbiosis

between the creative sensibility and the living environment" that George Woodcock finds in Laurence's travel writings ("Many" 12).

Brown, the textual complement of blue, associates with the body's and narrative's physical nature. Significantly, Hagar dislikes brown and blue in combination. To her mind "the plain brown pottery pitcher, edged with anemic blue" is ugly (Stone 62). However Royland, a "true diviner" (Diviners 452), wears both colours together by choice--"brown corduroys" and a blue plaid windbreaker (Diviners 417). Brown and its accompanying shades of bronze and amber, like the colour blue, exist throughout the cycle as minor narrative threads in the 'plaid.' The "clear brown" water of Manawaka's Wachakwa River runs through all the novels; The Diviners adds the brown creeks ("burns") of Scotland (384), and the "bronze-green" river that flows past McConnell's Landing (3). Brown is also present from the outset in "parole" as the colour of a necessary part of the 'piper's' healthy physical 'expression.' Oaths, profanities and obscenities are dropped as regularly as excrement throughout her performance.

'Brown" gains in signifying power in both the second and third shakes of the 'Kaleidoscope.' Things that are good and common Laurence connects with brown--those things associated with 'common good,' and especially with love. Care-givers, "broody hen[s]" (Stone 29), healers and pastoral types invariably wear brown. Doris Shipley prefers

"brown rayon" (Stone 28); Bridie McRaith "wears her brown hair cropped short. Her brown tweed and brown polo-necked pullover are clean and sensible" (Diviners 385); the minister in Calla's Tabernacle "welcomes one and all. . . spreading brown-sleeved arms and smiling trustingly" (Jest 31-2); and Luke Venturi, like Royland, wears "brown corduroy pants" (Fire 157).

The goodness of brown relates to 'swallowing' as well as to 'expressing.' In his cramped room, with a "brown linoleum" floor, Jules "brews very strong tea and serves it to her [Morag] with three spoonfuls of brown sugar. . . . 'It's good for what ails you. Drink up'" (Diviners 270). And 'expressively,' Christie's signature oath, "Cold as all the shithouses of hell" (Diviners 84) provides a satisfying 'brown' magnitude. His repetition of the 'expression' reinforces the coded meaning of 'blue' through words that reek with all Christie's (and the 'piper's') "strength of conviction" (Diviners 52) to say that hell (thought dissociated from body) is cold.[17] The text, as we have noted, asserts with equal force elsewhere that such a 'hell' is on fire. The Diviners, through the adolescent Morag, calls Christie's kind of half-truths "crap" (24), lies, and therefore paradoxically the essence (like the 'bones' in A Jest of God) of fiction.

The text's continuing verbal play on 'brown' manifests the danger of dropping earthy 'expressions' into narrative. At times, for example, brown beer bottles are benign in the

text. Morag herself is indifferent to beer (Diviners 270); and Hagar's scorn when she sneers at Shipley names--"squat brown names, common as bottled beer" (Stone 32)--can be read structurally as an inadvertent endorsement of bottled beer's 'common goodness.' However, bottles, whether brown or blue, quickly lose their innocuity and become malignant when out of place. The winged blue-bottles who live naturally at the Manawaka nuisance grounds are the same flies the text calls "obscene" when they crawl on food at the table (Stone 170, Bird 146, Diviners 40, 42).[18] Similarly, brown bottles transform themselves: "the broken beer bottles. . . flew like birds" (Stone 239) during John Shipley's fights at the Flamingo Dance Hall, and they 'flew' at Pique when she walked along a Manitoba Highway. The word Pique uses is "heaved" (signifying as well vomiting? or shovelling manure?): "he heaved it at me, meantime yelling all kinds of shit" (Diviners 106).

In a fitting place, excrement and obscenities evidently are benign.[19] Through the language of symbols and colour the text makes a distinction between Pique's accurate use of the word "shit" in this instance and the double obscenity of the oaths "heaved" at her. The Oxford dictionary definition of "oath" reads: first, a "solemn appeal to God. . . that a statement is true," and second, "a piece of profanity in speech, curse." The "local businessmen" (who belong to the same species as Hagar and Manawaka's other 'angelic' birds of prey) not only misplace 'expression' (curses and brown

bottles), they do so self-righteously, unaware that faulty digestion of knowledge ('swallowing') leads to dangerous bias. The text's colour language implies that narrative containing obscenities runs the serious risk of being misread, that is, of being destructively taken out of context, out of place, by righteous critics, in an act that becomes a greater obscenity than the writer's necessary fictive expression. Ironically, both 'obscene' acts deconstruct in the coincidental meta-structural statement that "lies" (fiction) as bones (skeletons) endure long after voice is silent and the flesh (of narrative content) has turned to dust; and similarly, "lies" as droppings 'lie' long after the 'piper' has paced on, thereby achieving a real fictive immortality.[20]

The text signals that non-verbal language, functioning like the music of a song or paint on a black and white sketch, runs an even greater risk of being misread than seemingly frank profanities and obscenities. In the very act of signing with colour words the text warns that those words must camouflage hidden meaning. When Luke is telling Stacey about his novel "The Greyfolk" he stops short, "I haven't given away much" (Fire 179); and when Morag looks at her "dark brown" eyes in the mirror she thinks "somewhat concealed (good)" (Diviners 28). Vanessa learns early that "The best concealment. . . [is] to sit quietly in plain view" (Bird 11). The 'plainly' visible (but non-verbal and therefore safely non-declarative) language of colour serves,

however paradoxically, to code and transmit verbal narrative at its figurative level. Colour illuminates shifting patterns of "langue" and "parole" symbolized variously by the piper and plaid, by birds and hourses, and more; and it more tellingly differentiates the functions of narrative--'swallowing' (reading, experiencing) and 'expressing' (speaking, writing).

The Diviners locates a most expressive instance of coloured imagery on the novel's final pages in a passage that speaks implicitly about its own opaque meaning. Morag sees "little lights skimming along the green /bronze surface" of the river, and thinks:

> How far could anyone see into the river? Not far. Near shore, in the shallows, the water was clear. . . . Only slightly further out, the water deepened and kept its life from sight. (453)

When we note that Morag's expression is colour coded, and simultaneously recall that this novel begins with swallows, ambiguity begins to "clear."

Two kinds of 'swallows,' in fact, begin the novel as Morag watches the same "bronze-green" (3) river in its two-way movement (the motion parallels the 'piper's' physiology as well as her speech and her paces). The first 'swallows' (wearing Morag's own blackbird colours--"blue-black wings and bright breastfeathers" [4]) are searchers that spiral "upward" to blue and then dart "low"

over brown water, repeatedly (3). The second kind are the 'swallows' of worry that Morag cannot avoid, knowing that her nestling has 'taken off' again (3, 231). Significantly as The Diviners ends "There were no swallows" in any sense (404). The migratory birds vanish (404); Morag lets Pique go with a blessing (450); and the diviners inexplicably lose their source of power: Jules dies of throat cancer, Royland loses his gift, and as Morag admits to "Writer's cramp--joke" (404), the 'piper' produces only the "remaining private and fictional words" of expression to close the cycle (453).

As a gifted master-narrator, the 'piper' saves her best shot for the cycle's most poignant moment--the launch of the final novel of the set. An outrageously "funny expression" (450) ends The Diviners, one that as we have noted is "greenbronze" on its "surface" (452), that is, "shitlike" and tinged with the green "gall of a thousand" (6, 49), exceeding even Christie's magnificent oath. The 'piper' implies absurdly that Morag, a fictional diviner, is her own author with the capacity to write the "remaining. . . words" (453). In effect, Morag's concluding 'expression,' viewed as synecdoche since she is one version of the 'piper,' asks the reader to 'swallow' or accept the entire book, and the cycle, and the act at its core--the divining of narrative--as "crap" (24). Jest becomes magnificent in its audacity and in its humility; or, as Margaret Laurence put it, in 1970, "Comedy now is extremely serious. It is almost

the only way in which you can be serious enough" (Kroetsch, "Conversation" 53).

The source, then, of the Manawaka cycle's dynamic energy lies in the tension that structures the 'piper's' contradictory nature. As jester and mourner, as ruthless liar and comforting diviner, and as profaner and splendid songster, she embodies fiction's own ambiguity. The 'piper's' account of her own anatomical nature, of her burden of cultural and literary conventions, of her particular imagination and functional narrative systems, becomes a 'splendour' that is perceptible only in structural <u>movement</u>, in deconstructive verbal play, in the <u>act</u> of "piping" (<u>Diviners</u> 143), just as such "splendour" exists in the scarlet flash of a blackbird's wings <u>in flight</u> (<u>Diviners</u> 231), or in the "dance," in Valery's sense, of poetry.

## Conclusion

The major reward of a structuralist reading of the Manawaka cycle is a beginning sense of the generative energy behind Margaret Laurence's fiction. The text, like the particular piper who figures its narration, is simultaneously demanding and kind to its reader. The signs the 'piper' bears are to the point: Vanessa lives in a "fortress," "battles" go on continuously inside Morag's head, and work is a by-word for all the cycle's protagonists. A reader must expect to struggle with such texts, before they release even the grudging "lying" kind of blessing Hagar gives to Marvin (Stone 304).

Yet the need to do battle deconstructs into contrary messages, ones that advocate almost phenomenological non-interference with the text, and some form of non-resistant, even uncanny, receptivity to its hidden meanings. We have noted Royland's comment that A-Okay could become a diviner "if he can just get over wanting to explain it" (Diviners 452). Vanessa too learns most by disregarding the specific words in speech. While listening to Edna's voice, "high and fearful, burdened with a terrible regret, as though she would have given anything not to have spoken," Vanessa thinks: "I was hardly aware of her meaning. I was going instead by the feel of the words, the same way the faithful must interpret the utterances of those who rise up and speak in tongues" Bird 37). And Stacey sees the futility of her struggle to dance when she looks "unnoticed"

at the gracefulness of Katie's "unfrenetic" movement (Fire 121). Katie is dancing to music that resounds with the same ambiguous undertones that characterize the entire cycle as "parole"--music with "a strong and simple beat, slow, almost languid, and yet with an excitement underneath, the lyrics deliberately ambiguous" (Fire 121).

The text resolves the impasse by advocating balance, and a necessary oscillation between two opposing approaches. In this spirit Morag speaks as a mature diviner: "Although you needed to do battle, you didn't always need to, every minute. . . . The thing now was not to interfere, not to enter fear. She would, of course. It was her nature" (Diviners 444). Directed by such textual signs, my analysis has shifted its perspective repeatedly between engaging at close range with the cycle's ambiguous language, and applying wide-angle or synchronic over-views to the work in order to sense its larger patterns.

Those patterns resolve themselves into figurations that embody the source, the act, the very "motion of the machinery" to use George Bowering's words (225), of narrative in action. The primary set of symbols (the 'piper' and the 'plaid') makes tangible not only the basic opposition that comprises any fictional work--vocative expression arising from and within a particular set of conventions; the set incorporates as well the identity and values of the cycle's author, Margaret Laurence. The 'piper' figure succeeds in synthesizing, through the

synchronicity of a 'plaid' of recollections, Laurence's humanitarian concerns and the many facets of Laurence's Scots-Presbyterian ancestry, and also her own temperament and beliefs, and her 1940's Canadian prairie roots.[1] And the 'piper' does more; through this unique figure, Laurence is able to make a strong statement--what Ong would call a "cry" from the interior--about the nature of narrative and narrating. The 'piper' mourns in Laurence's particular voice the necessary ambiguity of all fiction. The physicality of the 'piper's' body vivifies narrative function in a set of symbols ('swallowing' and 'expressing') arrived at by supplementary figures ('birds' and 'fires' in 'houses') that symbolize the very imagination which creates this fictional ambiguity.

The cycle's symbols, its verbal and non-verbal languages, and its structural priorities cast new light upon the disparate findings of interpretive criticism. Objections to an inconsistency in tone because the work features both a highly stylized pattern of narration and a strongly realist presentation of its central character lose validity in light of narrative structure figured by an _inclusive_ symbol, a strongly animate master-narrator who bears a formally designed 'plaid' of cultural and literary conventions. Secondly, structural priorities reveal the partiality that lies in feminist readings in which political bias tends to interpret as sexual battles the struggles of Laurence's female characters to survive.[2] The 'piper,'

although functional as female, achieves the universality of a <u>human</u> figure. Like all humankind, she is subject to her creator; and she is a fictive construct who carries a burden of hardship and neighbourly concern that is common to all her clan--a clan of other narrators at the text's figurative level of discourse, and a clan of Manawakans (of both sexes) at the realist level. It is this larger sense of community that figures in Laurence's extension of the meaning of "neighbour" in an address in 1982: "I believe that the word 'neighbour' in our present world cannot have any limited geographical, racial, national or religious meaning" ("A Statement of Faith" 60).

Structure throws light, thirdly, upon interpretive studies that see Hagar as an 'heroic' character, one admirable for her rebellious nature. As the 'piper's' shadow, Hagar transcends such evaluation for she embodies the contradictions inherent in Laurence's fiction. Her strong presence functions as a contrast to diviners, illustrative in a sense of Paul de Man's deformational reading theory, which proposes that "blindness" or misreading, is inseparable from moments of greatest "insight."[3] Hagar serves dialectically to reveal the depth of ambiguity in narrative.

Fourthly, the structural symbols for function and imagination, all illuminated by the text's non-verbal language of colour, make telling progress in resolving a difficult question for Laurence scholars arising from

another puzzling dissonance in tone--that of explaining the presence of seemingly gratuitous obscenity, profanity and sexual explicitness. Tension on the point is evident within the text; all protagonists profess to hate "scenes": "Why put yourself through more harrowing scenes than necessary?" asks Morag (Diviners 449). With these words Morag not only says a quiet goodbye to Pique, but the 'piper' delineates the text's structural balance. The scenes that are present are necessary; for, as Morag explains to Pique, healthy fiction is made up of "whole cloth" (Diviners 367). The cycle as a created and creating entity constitutes one signifying statement, modelled upon the Trinity's indivisible identity as an ordering principle, disrupting force, and comforting spirit. Physiological symbolism in the text reinforces the point that the denial or omission of any one aspect leads to unhealthy narrative 'expression.'

The mystery, power, and 'splendour' of Laurence's fiction lies in the dynamic ambiguity of functions within her narrative 'trinity.' Role reversals explicitly deconstruct fixed interpretation. For instance, atypical wisdom underlies Hagar's question "Who will she [Doris] have to wreak salvation upon when I'm gone?" (Stone 293); and Morag holds on to "unwholesome. . . whale-woman," to Prin's "awful fat belly wrapped around in the brown wraparound," and cries "Prin's good good good" (Diviners 208, 44); and further Morag as a mature diviner knows that "Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to

understand" (*Diviners* 418). There is special direction for the reader of the Manawaka cycle in Morag's words. By "beginning to understand" structural formations we can continue to follow the piper, cautiously of course, into further discoveries in narrative pattern, voice and meaning.

NOTES

Introduction

1

In Narrative Discourse, Genette identifies 'narrative' as the text of discourse, the signifier: "'Narrative' refers to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event." 'Story,' on the other hand, is what he terms narrative content when successive events are treated as the subject of discourse without regard to the medium of expression, "linguistic or other" (25). I use these terms in Genette's sense throughout this thesis.

2

On publication, The Stone Angel drew mixed reviews by Barry Callaghan, S.E. Read and others, negative valuation reinforced ten years later by Leona Gom. In 1967-68 Robert Harlow and H.J. Rosengarten debated the technical merit of A Jest of God. Diana Loercher, in 1969, termed The Fire-Dwellers a "pompous panorama" (204); and in early reviews of The Diviners, Barbara Hehner and Marge Piercy rated it seriously flawed. Less vitriolically, Theo. Q. Dombrowski calls the final novel merely "clumsy" ("Who" 24).

3

Laurence speaks specifically about the technical problems posed by A Jest of God: "The present tense of the novel naturally presented problems in terms of the narrative continuation--getting from point A to point B, as it were. . . . On the other hand, I felt that present tense was essential. . . " ("Gadgetry" 85).

4

When we read Laurence's essays as parallel signifiers to her fiction, as products of the same imagination and sensibility rather than as statements of intention, the seeming contradiction between citing them and contending that "the moment of writing is the moment of narrative choice" disappears. Laurence's essays on narrative are essentially, I believe, attempts to explain what she feels is a gift, one that remains as puzzling to her as to her critics.

5

Laurence's first assessment of the cycle thus stands the test of time. Barbara Hehner cites Laurence's statement to Marci McDonald in the year The Diviners was published: "Now the wheel seems to have come full circle--these five books [the Manawaka fiction] all interweave and fit together" ("The Author: All the Hoopla Gets her Frazzled," interview with Margaret Laurence in The Toronto Star, 18 May 1974, H5).

6

Culler explains Derrida's term "différance" to mean "difference-differing-deferring," or spacing. He quotes Derrida's contention that "one must. . . recognize, prior to any dissociation of langue and parole, code and message. . . a systematic production of differences, the production of a system of differences--a différance. . . [Positions (Paris: Minuit, 1972) 39-40/28]," and Culler then defines the term in his own words as "this undecidable, nonsynthetic alternation between the perspectives of structure and event" (On Deconstruction 96-97). In work published in the same year as Culler's On Deconstruction (1982), Christopher Norris attempts to clarify the meaning of Derrida's deliberately ambiguous term. The word 'différance,' he notes, even at the level of signifier, graphically resists (by means of its irregular spelling) reduction into any single meaning. In Norris's view, Derrida breaks new ground only in the "extent" to which 'differ' shades into 'defer,' since Saussure had previously established the structural dependence of language upon differences between expression and code. Derrida's "différance" works to prevent any acceptance of ultimate meaning. In practice, Derrida opens to question the inconsistencies and contradictions he finds operative within all 'writing.' In his extended sense of the term, 'writing' is not limited in its definition to inscribed statement which might then be opposed to oral expression (Derrida deconstructs the phonocentric emphasis in Saussure's theory). 'Writing' refers rather to a radical activity involving the endless displacement of meaning in languages, verbal and other (Norris 28-32).

7

Valéry draws parallels between walking and prose, and opposes them to dancing and poetry: "Walking, like prose, has a definite aim. . . [and its] movements. . . are abolished and. . . absorbed. . . by the attainment of the goal"; dance, on the other hand, pursues no object, for it is a "system of actions. . . whose end is in themselves" (921-22). I contend that the movement of Laurence's narrative, as creative writing, more closely resembles poetry than expository prose.

8

Culler assures readers that indeterminancy of meaning is not cause for despair, since "an opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed" (On Deconstruction 133). Meaning therefore is only incomplete, and it calls continuously for renewed scholarly effort.

9

Genette defines 'the narrating instance' as the "narrative matrix--the entire set of conditions (human,

temporal, spatial) out of which a narrative statement is produced" (Narrative 31).

10
Genette distinguishes between three narrating 'levels', namely: extradiegetic, diagetic or intradiegetic, and metadiegetic. We may apply these terms to The Diviners, for example, by calling its interpolated stories 'metadiegetic,' the events which Morag experiences during her present 'intradiegetic,' and the telling of Morag's story by the novel's narrator 'extradiegetic.' As part of a cycle, however, the novel has one further level of narration, one that co-ordinates it with the other texts. That level exceeds Genette's classification, but could logically be called 'extra-extradiegetic.'

11
My use of the term "orchestration" differs from that of Margaret Atwood (26), John Lennox (27) and others who use the word non-specifically in the course of discussion about content.

12
In Six Psychological Studies (New York: Vintage, 1968), Jean Piaget defines structure, Robert Scholes notes, as "comprising the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation." Scholes notes further that "by transformation Piaget means the ability of parts of a structure to be interchanged or modified according to certain rules, and he specifically cites transformational linguistics as an illustration of such processes" (185).

Chapter One

1
Two minor studies, for instance, are those of J.M. Kertzer, who relates the idea of causality in The Stone Angel with the concept of responsibility, and Allan Bevan who traces Laurence's handling of time in The Diviners at the level of realistic narrative.

2
Morley finds her examples in The Stone Angel: "The starkly beautiful Manitoba land becomes the analogue for her [Hagar's] conflicts. . . . By juxtaposition, Laurence establishes subtle parallels between the town's social hegemony (shanties and brick houses), its harsh climate (sweltering summers, and winters 'that froze the wells and the blood'), and human pride, masked as meekness and charity" (82).

3

My analysis of parallels and contrasts in Manawaka as system focuses upon structural tensions, differing therefore in its objective from two 1978 studies on contrasts in Laurence's fiction. In the course of his thematic essay, Dennis Cooley examines symbolic binaries in The Stone Angel ("Antimacassared" 30); and David Blewett's later work explores the cycle's "contrasting pairs" to conclude that "the continuity of paired images. . . [is one] means to an end"--a "device" to achieve thematic unity (39).

4

By reading the novel as political, K. Hughes recognizes that a psychological interpretation of Rachel's character "leave[s] so much unexplained" (40). Accordingly he prefers to "transcend the psychological" and sees Rachel as "individual, as woman, and as the symbolic representative of a new Canada. . . [one who] reject[s] the old authoritarian family and society. . . [and one who] struggle[s] in order to recreate herself and the world in which she lives" (47). Remarkably, since Hughes arrives at his assessment of Rachel by an alternate approach, his statement does apply to some degree to the ambiguous 'piper' figure, whose composite identity I analyze in chapter two.

5

In his The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode discusses the changing view of apocalypse in contemporary literature (3-31). The Fire-Dwellers' sense of perpetual crisis removes the novel from what Kermode would call 'chronos' or passing time, into a "season of significance" he calls 'Kairos,' in which what was "simply successive becomes charged with past and future" (46).

6

Although I do use the word 'present' in all its senses here, I refer the reader to chapter two for discussion of the full significance of the three meanings of 'present' in Laurence's Manawaka fiction: as 'being in space,' as 'now,' and as a 'gift.'

7

Essays published in 1978 contain mixed reaction to the socio-political content in Laurence's fiction. Michael Peterman, for example, is 'uneasy' about what he calls "the didactic elements, the political explicitness of The Diviners" (104). Stirring controversy at the time perhaps was Laurence's own essay "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 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978). In the same year, David Williams published his comparative study on 'The Indian our Ancestor.' More recently, Marcienne Rocard has revived debate by stating

that the central question in The Diviners is surely "how do the main characters, the victimized individuals, react to their own alienation?" (Dispossession 242).

8
I refer the reader to essays by Clara Thomas, Patricia Morley, Sandra Djwa, and J.M. Kertzer.

9
Not at issue in my study is the observation that other authors have influenced the story content of Laurence's fiction: S.E. Read sees Shakespeare's influence in Hagar's "Lear-like" figure (41), and Laurence herself in "Road from the Isles" calls Shakespeare "that famous Scot" and "near kin" (Heart 159). Clara Thomas reminds us of Joyce Cary's influence ("Pilgrim's" 163); Morley traces the influence of O. Mannoni ("Margaret" 14-16); Blewett draws parallels to the imagery of T.S. Eliot; and Thomas and Hehner explore the influence of Gaelic myth.

10
Walter Swayze disparages unfairly Laurence's "common-place" heroes. Disregarding Milton's influence, Swayze attempts to relate Laurence's fiction directly to classical epic--to Homer's Odyssey (7).

11
Marcienne Rocard has analyzed what she terms the audio-visual effect of The Fire-Dwellers' voice and pictures.

12
"Specifically, Frye discovered in the Bible the reality of metaphor, a gigantic myth of identity: 'a narrative extending over the whole of time from creation to apocalypse, unified by a body of recurring images that freezes into a single metaphor cluster, the metaphors all being identified with the body of the Messiah, the man who is all men, the totality of logoi who is one Logos, the grain of sand that is the world (GC, p.224)" (Thomas, "Towards" 88). In this passage Clara Thomas is quoting from Northrop Frye's recent book The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (Toronto: Academic, 1982).

13
In his review of Laurence's travel writings, George Woodcock remarks upon her ability to recognize the "epiphanic quality" of brief encounters: "it is a measure of Margaret Laurence's artistry that she recognized their value as revelations" ("Many" 6).

14
Kermode's perceptive reading of Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes discovers a similar secret:

We may think of Conrad as painfully finding out in the writing of Under Western Eyes what the novel was; he did so by writing it, black on white, as if it were Russia, and by meditating on eyes, phantoms, and devils, as surely as by deciding to cut all the American material from the final version; it was Russia he was writing on. . . .

There is a relatively clean, well-lighted plot. . . . But this novel contains another plot. . . of which the passage about the blank page of Russia forms a part, as would be manifest if anybody considered it in relation to the large number of allusions (they even look, when one is looking for them, obtrusive) to blackness and whiteness, paper and ink, snow and shadow--and to writing itself. ("Secrets" 89-90)

## Chapter Two

1

Leona Gom has noted that Laurence's choice of first-person narration necessarily places emphasis on the perceptions of the narrator, and that "mirror images" in the five works alert the reader to the narrator's unreliability, thereby allowing him to accept contradiction, for he is in "secret communion with the author" ("Margaret" 235-51). I am arguing that another level, that of master-narration, intervenes in the relationship between author and reader.

2

The term "her" at this point in my discussion is an arbitrary choice of pronoun for what I recognize as a human figure.

3

Laurence recognized, but did not find remarkable, her ability to juggle contradictions: "I'm capable as most novelists are. . . of holding two mutually exclusive points of view at the same time" (Cameron 98).

4

'Thunder' is the cycle's omni-present sounding image which parallels that of the silent 'river' that runs both ways. Word play upon Tonnerre and Thor, for example, echoes and re-echoes across the expanse of the cycle, just as thunder sounds and resounds across Manawaka's wide prairie sky. Both images are "parole's" innovations upon the system established by Manawaka as place ("langue").

5

In "Living Dangerously. . . by Mail," the essay in which Laurence declares "I've defended my titles [to

publishers] more often than a middleweight boxer," she goes on to say: "A title should, if possible, be like a line of poetry--capable of saying a great deal with hardly an words. The title of a novel should in some way express the whole novel. . . . It should all be there, in a phrase" (Heart 203).

6

Caught by narrow focus upon content, Patricia Morley, for one, objects to what she sees as The Fire-Dwellers' "unnecessary repetition, boring exchanges, and occasionally blatant symbolism." Morley does not recognize as significant her own finding that none of Laurence's other works suffer from what she is calling "weakness" and "heavy-handed. . . overkill" of theme (Margaret 108).

7

The play on 'pipes' and 'fire' becomes complex in light of the narrative fact that Edna's friend Wes fights fire with fire--with a "magic blackish powder" (Bird 191). The pipes respond like fading bagpipes: "The voices of the pipes dwindled to a few chuffing wheezes and then fell silent" (Bird 191). If Wes's magic powder is indeed charcoal, enunciation is recalling the 'plaid' and Milton's influence: in the mock-heroics of Paradise Lost V1, Christ's decisive action similarly over-rides Satan's cannon. The fictional gunpowder involved in Milton's War in Heaven enters further into the play of the cycle (as "parole") through the names of Piper Gunn and Morag Gunn. In Vanessa's story, however, we note that the pun turns specifically on the name given to Wes; he is a westerner with a gift (like a diviner) for handling magic black powder: charcoal is not only the residue of fire, it is an element in gunpowder, and more importantly it is a writing tool. Through Vanessa's experience, 'piping' declares its own trickery, mystery and violence, and gives fair warning that practitioners need self-discipline and courage.

8

"Parole" innovates upon "langue" by converting the parallel lines/lives of the 'plaid' into the rail lines upon which each protagonist journeys. We note all long trips are train trips, an innocuous fact until we hear the cruel jest that is implied in John Shipley's death. Although he was 'derailed' in his final juncture with the Tonnerres, Morag does succeed in getting a relationship with that family back 'on track.'

9

Hagar tries to make indelible, in one instance, her mark as a shadow upon snow: "I am lying. . . on fields of snow. . . [to make] the outline of an angel with spread wings" (Stone 81). In the cycle's first novel, "parole"

innovates repeatedly upon the black and white oppositions of "langue," discussed in chapter one, p.38 and its note 14.

## Chapter Three

1

In Deconstruction and Practice, Christopher Norris distinguishes clearly between Derrida's view that "writing is in fact the precondition of language and must be conceived as prior to speech," and Saussure's contention that a "natural bond" exists between sound and sense, a belief which leads Saussure to treat writing conventionally --as a transcription of the elements of speech (28-29).

2

My use of the word 'distinct' does not imply that Laurence's parallels between bird characteristics and character traits are unique in literature. In allegory, for instance, the technique is common. We recall Chaucer's birds in his "Parliament of Fowls," Ben Jonson's animals in Volpone, and, more specifically relevant to the work under study, we note the Bible's allegorical use of bird and animal imagery. Laurence, however, has denied consciously constructing allegory (Fabre, "Word" 198), and my reading confirms that her bird imagery finds its greatest significance internally, in narrative structure.

3

Patricia Morley begins analysis of birds and 'houses,' in fact juxtaposes discussion of them, in her book Margaret Laurence; but she limits her comments to noting their use thematically as prominent image patterns (86-87).

4

The text thus echoes Laurence's own sense of her characters, thoughts which she voices in conversation with Rosemary Sullivan, that Morag sees Jules not as a muse, but as a "tribal brother" (75).

5

The text insists however that its own 'fine distinctions' are deceptive. Morag thinks about scavengers and diviners at one point and wonders "which was Morag, if either, or were they the same thing?" (Diviners 212). In so doing, the text foregrounds question, ambiguity, rather than any definitive solution.

6

We note in this act the textual distinction between Morag's ability to discern figuratively authentic 'jewels,' and Hagar's inability to do so. The June bugs Hagar selects as jewels are unpleasantly real (Stone 220). Hagar is equally incapable of distinguishing a pattern in the "mosaic

of greens" in the forest--she can only "marvel at such variety" (Stone 186). Both instances of Hagar's non-discernment confirm the opposition at work between Hagar as shadow, and Morag as a version of the 'piper.' For divining, as Fabre reminds us, means "the ability to discern a design or pattern" ("Words" 64).

7

Laurence speaks out strongly in "Gadgetry or Growing" about her personal aversion to "trying forms and means of expression which are new. . . simply for their own sake or for the sake of doing something different." Even the word "style" is "odious" to her (81).

8

Roland Barthes words, in translation, are: "Narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in it signifies. This is not a matter of art (on the part of the narrator), but of structure; in the realm of discourse, what is noted is by definition notable" (Sontag 261).

9

The rare instances in which actual food is at issue indicate strongly that food, and the act of ingesting it, signifies. Note the 'piper's' mourning jests about her own inherited nature, voiced through Morag's reaction to the Logans' eating habits. Angry young Morag "wants to hit him [Christie] so hard his mouth will pour with blood" as she watches him openly chew "baloney" (Diviners 65). 'Baloney' (lies) gives him the nourishment he needs to spin his tales. On the other hand, the 'piper's' pity seems to dominate the account of Prin's mindless swallowing of "jelly doughnuts" (Diviners 34); but pity scarcely masks a merciless undertone that links Prin's addiction (to sugary confections: romances, dreams) to her retarded mind, and both to her excessive "fat." "Parole" thereby reveals another dimension in Stacey's (and therefore the 'piper's') struggle. See chapter two, pp. 57-58.

10

The Diviners reiterates its equation between innocence and spiritual death in Morag's discussion of her first novel, Spear of Innocence: "Lilac's staggering naivete is never presented as anything but harmful, and in fact it damages not only herself but others. Innocence may well be the eighth deadly sin" (225).

11

Blewett notes the importance of "coming out," specifically in relation to Stacey (and her "incipient alcoholism") and to Rachel (and her binding "social conventionality"): "The cure for. . . [Stacey's condition], as for Rachel, is to come out of herself, to come out, as

Luke says to her, 'From wherever your're hiding yourself' (p.181)" (34).

12
As Michel Fabre expresses it, in The Diviners "The writer. . . is defined as an interpreter of the past, a transmitter of tradition in a relevant and usable form to new generations, as well as a diviner of the pattern of the world" ("Words" 267).

13
The text pointedly notes that Morag's photographs are "sepia shadows," still interred in Christie's brown envelope which "stank. . . shitlike" of the Nuisance Grounds (cemetery) at the time Christie handed it to her (Diviners 18, 6). The significance of colour here will become apparent in the course of this chapter's analysis.

14
Dombrowski has noted (in an extension of Blewett's findings--see chapter three's note 11) that The Stone Angel treats speech as a physical necessity (245): "'Do you good to tell it,' says Murray Lees. . . prompting Hagar's grimly wry observation that he is treating the need to speak "As though it were worms, to be purged" ("Word" 51).

15
The correlating power of the colour 'grey' is extensive. All the diviners, as we have noted, have grey hair, hair which is genuinely silver as opposed to Thor's false plumage in The Fire-Dwellers (33). The text's variety of grey/silver 'birds' relates perhaps to another strange silver bird, one that serves as a parallel signifier. Laurence's reference to it in "Road from the Isles" has the potential to connect the diviners in The Diviners to the 'piper's' plaid pin, and most remarkably, to link all references to the author herself. In that essay, Laurence writes of "certain [family] trophies from the past, which I used to handle with curiosity and reverence, as though they had been religious relics. One of these was a silver plaid pin which bore our family crest. This crest was a bird that remained mysteriously unidentified. My father believed it to be a cormorant and my mother believed it to be an undersized emu" (Heart 159).

16
In another context, Cooley has noted the contrasting connotations of The Stone Angel's colour imagery, particularly of 'blue' and 'brown' (39).

17
The Diviners' repetition of expression in Christie's rhythmical voice signifies once more that the cycle as "parole" is distinguished by its orality. Ong reminds

readers of the "mnemonic base" that underlies oral patterns of speech and memory. Rhythms and set expressions aid recall (Orality 34-35).

18
Ambiguity returns in the explicit designation of a "matriarchal" fly as "obscene" (Stone 170), and casts a sinister light upon the seemingly admirable ambition of Stacey to "mutate into a matriarch" (Fire 277).

19
The Diviners repeats the point explicitly in its account of Eva's misfortune on her first day of school, and in Morag's ringing statement (Diviners 34).

20
Carrington addresses this point. After noting that Jules says of his songs "Maybe they're crap. . . but at least it's my own crap" (Diviners 265), she writes: "Through repetition, this vulgarism becomes symbolic: Jules' songs, like Morag's novels, are about his indestructible accumulations, his personal and historical past, events in his own life and tales about the Métis narrated to him by his father, Lazarus (162). (Emphasis is mine.)

## Conclusion

1
Two instances of the intimate connection between Laurence and the 'piper' are particularly relevant to my structural findings. Joan Hind-Smith notes Laurence's personal habit of "pacing the floor, a nervous habit which accompanies the completion of all her work" (26). Furthermore, Clara Thomas in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, and Susan Warwick in her log, make note of the biographical fact that Laurence's ancestors came from Burntisland in Fifeshire, Scotland. Narrative in The Diviners links 'Burntisland' to the Métis: "Burntwood, Bois-Brûlés" (159), through Piquette's fate, signifying that Morag (and therefore the 'piper') indeed sees the Métis as tribal brothers. 'Burntisland' resounds again as two separate words: as the fire of imagination explored in The Fire-Dwellers and A Bird in the House, and also in the tendency of narrative threads (in the cycle as "langue") to remain separate, "islands" within a fixed code.

2
See essays by Constance Rooke, Judy Kearns, and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos.

3
See Culler's The Pursuit of Signs, p. 14 and also Norris's more detailed analysis of Paul de Man's Blindness

*and Insight* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (22-24).

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