

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

BAKHTIN'S CONCEPT of the CARNIVALESQUE :
A Dimension in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence

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BY

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WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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**BAKHTIN'S CONCEPT OF THE CARNIVALESQUE:
A DIMENSION IN THE FICTION OF MARGARET LAURENCE**

BY

LESLIE VICTORIA PRIZEMAN

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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I gratefully acknowledge my debt to the work of Margaret Laurence who saw herself as a member of the "tribe" and as an artist. Her work is her eternal monument as it is indicative of her commitment to life and her love for humanity. Margaret Laurence shares this dynamic energy with Mikhail Bakhtin with whom she now explores the "great perhaps".

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ABSTRACT:

Bakhtin's Concept of the Carnavalesque: A Dimension in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence.

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Bakhtin considers the carnivalistic to be a fundamental root of the novelistic genre. He sees the carnivalesque as having its roots in Socratic Dialogue and Menippean Satire. The novelistic genre has three fundamental roots and one of these is the carnivalistic. Bakhtin further traces the roots of the carnivalesque to folk culture where he sees the lower strata of culture as more important than the official culture in a social hierarchy.

One aspect of the work of the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, examines the concept of the carnivalesque as it is transposed into the language of the novel. A Bakhtinian analysis is applied to three novels of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka Cycle, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, and The Diviners. The carnivalesque resists certainty, often in irreverent ways, as do these works of Margaret Laurence. In essence, this resistance is achieved through a breaking of the harmonies of the language or the dialogue of the novel.

The first chapter is a presentation of the theories of Bakhtin as they apply to the carnivalesque and an examination

of the Bakhtinian paradigms of the carnivalesque. Chapters two, three, and four contain an application of the various paradigms such as grotesque realism, carnival laughter, and the other rituals of carnival to the Laurence novels.

The carnivalesque resists certainties as do the Laurence novels of the Manawaka Cycle. Laurence's vision encompasses the vision of Bakhtin and the ambivalent power of carnival laughter. The folk culture and the carnivalesque, both of which are central to Bakhtin's concept of art is paralleled in Margaret Laurence's cosmic vision. Laurence novel's, read in a Bakhtinian "dialogue" attest to a profound understanding of the eternal from another dimension, the carnivalesque. Laurence's novels, like Bakhtin, proclaim: "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future."

The echoes of Bakhtin's carnival laughter can be heard in the texts of three of Margaret Laurence's major Manawaka works: A Jest of God, The Stone Angel, and The Diviners.

A Bakhtinian analysis is not limited to certain kinds of text but these three Laurence novels seem the most fruitful and mature of her texts.

Only within the last twenty-five years have M. Bakhtin's major works of literary theory been available in English translation. Two of Bakhtin's major works, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and Rabelais and His World, contain the basis of a critical theory that might provide new pathways into the novels of Margaret Laurence. These texts do not include the entire scope and range of Bakhtinian literary theory. There are other ways in which he approaches text through themes and patterns that are not included in this particular focus. The carnivalesque and its influence upon the novel is only one way in which the work of Bakhtin might be used.

Bakhtin's texts attest to his interest in folk culture in which the "lower" strata of culture is regarded as more important than the "official" culture in what Bakhtin regarded as the social hierarchy of Europe. Folk culture and the carnivalesque are essential to Bakhtin's concept of art and

therefore to his concept of the novel. The carnival spirit is manifest in Bakhtin's idea that the novel represented the very essence of life. Further, Bakhtin argues that the Socratic dialogue is thoroughly saturated with a carnival sense of the world.

Carnival is, to Bakhtin, all diverse festivals, rituals, and forms of a carnival type and these, he argues are deeply rooted in the primordial thinking of man. Further, Bakhtin's paradigms and his interest in folk culture are connected to the study of modern anthropology as well as to literary theory. Bakhtin's awareness of folk culture and the "lower" strata of culture includes the carnivalesque as an intricate part of his concept of the novelistic genre. Bakhtin shows in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics how the novel, as genre which is essential to life, must include the carnivalesque:

Carnival itself (we repeat: in the sense of a sum total of all diverse festivities of the carnival type) is not, of course, a literary phenomenon. It is syncretic pageantry of a ritual sort. As a form it is very complex and varied, giving rise, on a general carnivalistic base, to diverse variants and nuances depending upon the epoch, the people, the individual festivity. Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms-from large and complex mass actions to

individual carnivalistic gestures. This language, in a differentiated and even (as in any language) articulate way, gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language. . . it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122)

To Bakhtin, the carnival is a life force whose influence can be seen in literature in general and the novel in particular. It is possible to see this carnivalesque life force as a dimension of Margaret Laurence's novels.

The carnival sense of the world is dynamic and no one is a spectator. Everyone is involved as all the inhibiting laws and rules of life are suspended for Bakhtin argues that:

Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators . . . everyone communes in the carnival act... Because

carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent "life turned inside out... the reverse side of the world" ("monde à l'envers"). (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122)

Bakhtin's carnival sense of the world and the novel requires the presence of several carnival rituals and traditions that must also transpose into the language of literature. Carnival hinges upon the suspension of all that is ordinary in life, and what must first be suspended is the hierarchical structure that deems itself to be official and superior and consequently, dismisses the "lower" strata or folk culture. In Bakhtinian terms, the carnival is characterized by a new way of interrelating among people:

. . . what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it--that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123)

Eccentricity is a key word in the carnivalesque for in this world of suspended hierarchical structures all the

official ranks and positions of a society appear to be eccentric in the carnival where there are no socio-hierarchical distances between people. The uninhibited and free side of human nature is given expression in the carnival world. This sense of the free and familiar permeates all aspects of life through what Bakhtin calls carnivalistic mésalliances:

. . . A free and familiar attitude spreads over everything: over all values, thoughts, phenomena, . . . All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123)

Bakhtin's fourth category of the carnivalistic is what he terms profanation or the use of carnivalistic blasphemies. Through the use of carnivalistic blasphemies and what he calls an entire system of carnivalistic debasings, Bakhtin argues that these carnivalistic debasing bring the language and the participants down to earth and into contact with the reproductive power of both the earth and the body.

Carnivalistic parodies of the sacred texts and sayings are a form of this profanation.

Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque is not a system of abstract thoughts about freedom and equality. Instead, argues Bakhtin, it is because the carnivalesque is a dynamic ritual-pageant that it has survived in folk culture for centuries. It is this dynamic force that has enabled the carnivalesque to influence the novel. These carnival categories, especially the free and familiar contact among people Bakhtin would suggest, led to the destruction of the epic and the higher genres of tragedy as the primary literary genres.

Bakhtin defines what he calls the "carnivalistic acts" as the rituals found in all carnival festivities. The mock crowning and decrowning of the carnival king is the primary "carnivalistic act". It is a ritual found in all carnival festivities because this ritual of the crowning/decrowning of a carnival king is central to the carnivalesque. It is often transposed to literature, argues Bakhtin, as a vibrant, concrete act:

crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position

. . . from the very beginning, a decrowning glimmers through the crowning. And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 124)

Other rituals of carnival which Bakhtin calls accessory rituals such as disguise, carnival wars, gift giving, and cursing matches were also transposed into the novel, where, Bakhtin argues, they provide a depth and ambivalence through symbolic value. These rituals also provide a sense of the carnivalesque to the plot.

It is essential that the images of carnival maintain their ambivalence for as Bakhtin argues, without this carnivalistic ambivalence the images are reduced to mere journalism. In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics Bakhtin writes:

. . . All the images of carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death (the image of pregnant death), blessing and curse (benedictory carnival curses which call for death and rebirth), praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom. Very characteristic

for carnival thinking is paired images. . .or. . . things in reverse. This is a special instance of the carnival category of eccentricity, the violation of the usual and the generally accepted, life drawn out of its usual rut. (126)

Carnival fire is also an important ritual image in the carnivalesque. Fire, as both image and symbol embodies destruction and renewal as forces. Finally, it is the image of the carnival laughter that is ambivalent and essential to the rituals of carnival. Carnivalistic laughter, argues Bakhtin, like the ancient ritual laughter is directed towards a higher order. In ritual laughter, the laughter was often directed towards the sun or other ancient gods in an effort to renew an earthly authority at a time of crisis. The ritual laughter was also linked to the ambivalent images of life and death and symbolic representations of the reproductive force. Carnival laughter, unlike the ancient ritual laughter, embraces a much more complex and ambivalent outlook on the world:

. . . -toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with crisis itself. Combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter). This is a

profoundly universal laughter. . . (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 127)

Parody is also an essential and ambivalent component of carnival laughter as ". . . everything " argues, Bakhtin, "has its laughing aspect, for everything is reborn and renewed through death" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 127).

Bakhtin's work, even though it focuses on the works of Rabelais and Dostoevsky, contains a literary theory and methodology that can be useful in analyzing the structure of the three Margaret Laurence novels. Bakhtin's method and its concern with structure is flexible as noted in the introduction to Rabelais and His World:

The method which Bakhtin introduces for an analysis of literary phenomena is largely based on the structure of the dialogues and the function of a word in a discourse. He applied the methodology elaborated by the influential linguistic trend that appeared in Western Europe and in Russia at the turn of the century. . . This current in turn greatly influenced literary studies. More directly, Bakhtin owes his method to the scholarly ferment which began in Russia about the time of World War I and which is connected with the so-called Russian Formalist school. (vi)

Many Laurence critics, among them Clara Thomas, agree that the five novels beginning with The Stone Angel and concluding with The Diviners form a harmonious cycle, the "Manawaka" works from which a pattern or structure emerges that renders the works whole and complete. As Thomas notes in her text, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence:

Margaret Laurence has created Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Morag and all the other people of her Manawaka world out of a gigantic complexity; reaching back from her own place and time through four generations of men and women in a Canadian western town. All the strands of her ancestral past have interwoven with her own life and the power of her own gift compelling her to write her people down, to liberate them from her imagination to the pages of her fiction. (The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence 5)

Laurence's creations from her own recent past and a European ancestral past also have interwoven within their structure a manifestation of Bakhtin's argument of the carnivalesque - the folk culture and humour of the Bakhtinian "marketplace" or "carnival square". In the Manawaka cycle Manawaka is the setting for much of the action of Laurence's plots and therefore, in the Bakhtinian argument for

carnivalized literature, Manawaka is the "carnival square":

. . . the square as a setting for the action of the plot, becomes two-levelled and ambivalent: it is as if there glimmered through the actual square the carnival square of free familiar contact and communal performances of crowning and decrowning. Other places of action as well . . . can, if they become meeting-and contact-points for heterogeneous people -streets, taverns, roads,. . . take on this additional carnival square significance. . .
 (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 128)

The carnivalization of literature is the result, argues Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, of ". . . a radically new relationship to the word as the material of literature" (108). This new relationship, the carnivalesque in literature, is present in the voices of the characters of Margaret Laurence in her Manawaka novels, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, and The Diviners.

A Jest of God is rampant with the carnivalesque. The title itself invites the reader to play with the possibilities of the carnivalization in Rachel's world. Bakhtin argues:

Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. Carnival is not contemplated and strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants live in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a carnivalistic life. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent "life turned inside out. . .the reverse side of the world" ("monde à l'envers"). (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122)

The novel begins with a childhood skipping song ringing through Rachel's school room and a reminder to her that she is locked in time and memory to those same Spanish dancers and to the same language of past and future generations of young skippers:

...because I remember myself skipping rope to that song when I was about the age of the little girls out there now. Twenty-seven years ago, which seems impossible, and myself seven, but the same brick building...It would certainly have surprised me then to know I'd end up here, in this room,... (A Jest of God 7)

Rachel is on a threshold as she recognizes, on some distant level, her classroom and the school building as a "coffin" that has ironically held her since childhood. Rachel is still, at thirty-four, poised on the threshold of life and full of morbid thoughts and fears of appearing eccentric. Ironically, Rachel does not recognize that her imagination is her salvation because it can pull her out of the rut and reveal to her a "... reverse side of the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) in which she does not fear eccentricity, a condition of the carnivalistic life:

...I mustn't give houseroom in my skull to that sort of thing. It's dangerous to let yourself...Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Jews, Sold his wife for a pair of shoes. I can imagine that one going back and back through time and languages. Chanted in Latin, maybe, the same high sing-song voices, smug little Roman girls safe inside some villa in Gaul or Britain, skipping rope on a mosaic courtyard, not knowing the blue - painted dogmen were snarling outside the walls, stealthily learning. There. I am doing it again, This must stop. It isn't good for me. Whenever I find myself

thinking in a brooding way, I must simply turn it off and think of something else. God forbid that

I should turn into an eccentric... (A Jest of God
8)

In her present state of torment Rachel does not recognize the claustrophobic effect of the hierarchical structures of Manawaka that keep her full of fear and suspended on the threshold of life. Rachel's release from torment can be traced through the structure of the carnivalesque as it has transposed itself into the carnivalization of the language and images of A Jest of God.

The hierarchical structures of Manawaka must be suspended in order to engage in the carnivalesque. Rachel must indeed turn into "an eccentric" (A Jest of God 8) and become what she fears most in order to escape the terror of her loneliness and isolation, thus breaking free of the hell in which she is held captive. Rachel's only liberation from the established order of things is her imagination. In imagination she can celebrate, in the carnivalesque, "...temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order..." (Rabelais and His World 10). Rachel's imagination, like the carnival or second life described by Bakhtin, "... marked the suspension of all hierarchial rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming change, and renewal" (Rabelais and His World 10). Carnival, like Rachel's second life, lived through

imagination, " was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (Rabelais and His World 10). It was only through Rachel's powers of imagination that she achieved a sense of freedom to do or say what she truly felt.

At the beginning of the text, Rachel has internalized Manawakan values and she was bound to a religious and social hierarchy not of her making. In the social hierarchy of Manawaka, Rachel is the dutiful daughter, dutiful teacher and ironically, almost perpetually the dutiful spinster/virgin of her prairie upbringing. Until the summer of Rachel's plunge from the threshold of a life of duty into a world that laughs at the completed and radiates in the becoming, Rachel exists in a state of tightly contained rage. All that is joyful in life has been denied Rachel. In part, it is denied her because of her paranoid fear of the town's power over her and her fear of stepping off the threshold and entering into the second world in which the possibilities for liberation exist. As Margaret Laurence suggests:

.for Rachel herself is a very inturned person. She tries to break the handcuffs of her own past, but she is self-perceptive enough to recognize that for her no freedom from the shackledom of the ancestors can be total. Her emergence from the tomb - like atmosphere of her extended childhood is a partial defeat - or, looked at in another way, a partial

victory. She is no longer so much afraid of herself as she was. She is beginning to learn the rules of survival. (W. New (editor) Margaret Laurence: Margaret Laurence "Ten Years' Sentence" 21)

Rachel learns those rules of survival in the carnival as she works out, or works through to a "...new mode of interrelationship between individuals" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) that is in direct opposition to the socio-hierarchical structures that stifle Rachel in the non-carnival life of Manawaka. It is through the release into the carnivalesque that Rachel reaches a sense of freedom and is finally able to survive.

At the beginning of the novel Rachel is drawn lovingly and maternally to her student, James Doherty, but, in the non-carnival life she thinks her behaviour would appear eccentric and inappropriate to those who do not participate in the carnival life. She is immediately repelled from her maternal fantasy with a vision of Willard Sidley, her principal, in the world of authority and rank. His tyrannical behaviour and attitude to authority brings Rachel back to the world of structure and rank where James must be treated just like all the other children:

James is the very last inside, as usual...Looking at his wiry slightness, his ruffian sorrel hair, I

feel an exasperated tenderness. I wonder why I should feel differently toward him? Because he's unique, that's why. I oughtn't to feel that way. They are all unique. What a pious sentiment, one which Willard Sidley would endorse. Certainly they're all unique, but like the animals equality, some are more unique than others. (A Jest of God 9)

Rachel desperately needs to express this "eccentric" side of her nature and enter into a state of familiar contact with another human being who is free of the socio-hierarchy of the gestures and language imposed upon her by the teacher - student structure. But Rachel cannot, as she is not able to enter into the free and familiar contact that has been likened by Bakhtin to the carnival square where all that is free and natural is encouraged.

Calla Mackie is Rachel's only true friend in Manawaka. She is the Bakhtinian gift-giver for she is always embarrassing Rachel with little tokens of her fondness for Rachel. Calla is free of the world of the socio-hierarchical structure of Manawaka. Her life is one of free and familiar contact in the Bakhtinian carnival square. She is not hindered by fashion and does not hesitate to think of her students as her own. Calla's loneliness and need are expressed openly. This embarrasses Rachel. Ironically,

at first Rachel abhors Calla's free and familiar ways and is pained to think how her mother would regard Calla and her Tabernacle. Rachel does not recognize Calla's indifference to style, manner, and public opinion as an indication of inner freedom and joy. As Rachel criticizes Calla, she does, however, recognize her mother's voice in her attitude of condescension. Rachel's own voice is lost in the hierarchy of values imposed upon her through both Mother Cameron and the town:

Calla Mackie is in the hall as I go in. I shouldn't try to avoid her eyes. She's kind and well-meaning. If only she looked a little more usual, and didn't trot off twice a week to that fantastic Tabernacle. She bears down, through the noisy school of youngsters pushing upstairs like fish compelled upstream. Calla is stockily built...Her hair is greying and straight, and she cuts it herself with nail scissors...She combs it back behind her ears but chops it into a fringe like a shetland pony's over her forehead. She wears long sleeved smocks for school...so she can wear the same brown tweed skirt and that dull green bulky knit sweater of hers, day after day without anyone noticing...Well poor Calla -- it isn't her fault that she has no dress sense. (A Jest of God 9)

Calla is the gift-giver as she is always giving Rachel little

gifts, much to Rachel's discomfort. Gift-giving is a carnivalistic act says Bakhtin and to Rachel, Calla and her behaviour viewed from non-carnival life, appear eccentric and inappropriate.

Rachel is, in effect, separated from Calla's warmth and generosity by "...impenetrable hierarchical barriers" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) and can therefore not enter into Calla's world of "...free familiar contact on the carnival square" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123). Rachel cannot suspend the hierarchical structures and risk a generous response to Calla's kindness, for she fears contact with other human beings so greatly. Rachel also fears a visit to Calla's Tabernacle where "...they sing hymns like jazz and people rise to testify, and I was so mortified I didn't know which way to look. How can they make fools of themselves like that, so publicly?" (A Jest of God 14). Rachel has committed herself to a visit to the Tabernacle in the future, for she does not have the cruelty to say "no" definitively to Calla. Perhaps Rachel's authentic voice, devoid of duty and appearance, is still able to trickle forth occasionally. Ironically, Rachel has not even visited "life turned inside out" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) on the other side of the Manawaka tracks, where there are no artificial divisions between the spectators and the participant in life, let alone risk another visit to Calla's Tabernacle:

...I don't know what it's like now. Half my children live at that end of town. I never go there, and know it only from hearsay, distorted local legend or the occasional glimpse from a child's words. (A Jest of God 15)

Rachel is distanced from herself, her community, her students, and from the one person who makes a genuine effort at offering friendship.

Rachel's visit to the Tabernacle is a waking suspension of the hierarchical structures that tie her to the forms of fear that manifest themselves in her dark despairing nightmare reminiscent of a carnival hell:

I can't. Tonight is hell on wheels again. Trite. Hell on wheels. But most accurate. The night feels like a gigantic Ferris wheel turning once for each hour, interminably slow. And I am glued to it or wired, like paper, like a photograph, insubstantial, unable to anchor myself, unable to stop this slow nocturnal circling. (A Jest of God 12)

Rachel's nighttime anguish is likened to a soul that is but a tiny particle in the cosmos, unable to anchor itself to earth until she succumbs to the fantasy. Only masturbation can release Rachel from her torment into the eccentricity of a carnival sense of the world, after which Rachel further

tortures herself with questions and accusations:

I didn't. I didn't. It was only to be able to sleep. The shadow prince. Am I unbalanced? Or only laughable? That's worse, much worse. (A Jest of God 22)

Ironically, to be seen as foolish in the eyes of others is still the worst thing that Rachel can imagine. Rachel fails to recognize the redemptive and healing power of masturbation as this act releases her into the carnival or a state of transcendence that provides Rachel with a temporary sense of freedom. Unfortunately, Rachel is immediately repelled by the vision of others laughing at her and retreats back into the "official" reality of her stifling existence in Manawaka. At least the peace of a sense of orgasmic transcendence enables her to sink ". . . at last into the smooth silence where no lights or voices are. When the voices and lights begin again in there where I am lying, they are not bright or loud" (A Jest of God 22).

In her dream, Rachel engages in the Bakhtinian sense of free and familiar contact (carnivalistic mesalliances) as distances are temporarily suspended in Rachel's dream world. Bakhtin's mock crowning/decrowning of the carnival king is a primary carnival ritual that ". . . lies at the very core of the carnival sense of the world--the pathos and shifts and

changes, of death and renewal. Carnival is the festival of all-annihilation and all renewing time" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 124). Laurence uses the pattern of the mock crowning/decrowning in Rachel's dream as she descends into her father's domain where he tends to the dead. In Bakhtinian carnival images Niall rules over as mock carnival king ". . . the silent people. . . lipsticked and rouged, powdered whitely little clowns" (A Jest of God 22). Niall is the mock carnival king who reigns over his subjects in Rachel's dream:

--Stairs rising from nowhere, and the wall paper the loose-petalled unknown flowers. The stairs descending to the place where I am not allowed... How funny they look, each lying dressed in best, and their open eyes are glass eyes. . . blue and milky, unwinking. He is behind the door I cannot open. And his voice--his voice--so I know he is lying there among them, lying in state, king over them. He can't fool me. He says run away Rachel run away.

(A Jest of God 22)

In Rachel's dream Niall cries to his daughter to run away and save herself from her stifling existence. In Bakhtinian terms, to experience a crisis is essential for renewal. Rachel's dream is part of the symbol system of carnival imagery used by Bakhtin to denote "crisis" in his text, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics:

In Raskolnikov's dream, space assumes additional significance in the overall symbol-system of carnival. Up, down, the stairway, the threshold, the foyer, the landing, take on the meaning of a "point" where crisis, radical change, an unexpected turn of fate takes place, where decisions are made, where the forbidden line is overstepped, where one is renewed or perishes. (169)

From this point forward, Rachel is in Bakhtinian crisis or at a threshold as her dream suggests. When she descends the stairway into her father's world and hears her mother's voice singing ". . . in a falsetto. . . the stylish tremolo, the ladies choir voice. bless this house dear Lord we pray, keep it safe by night and day (A Jest of God 23) the horror of her daily existence is clear.

Rachel lives essentially on a threshold and in crisis in Bakhtinian carnival terms: she is trapped in her home, in her classroom and into a set of false values imposed upon her by the official society of Manawaka. The accessory symbol of the carnivalesque, a coffin, as part of the Bakhtinian crisis imagery, is also part of the pattern in Laurence's writing of Rachel's dream sequences. There is no shelter or safety for Rachel until she abandons the structures of the non-carnival life and enters into a new understanding that is akin

to a sense of spiritual renewal:

the laws, prohibitions, restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is socio-hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it - that is everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square. The category of familiar contact is also responsible for the special way mass actions are organized, and for free carnival gesticulation, and for the outspoken carnivalistic word. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123)

A sense of the carnivalesque is again afforded Rachel on her second visit to the Tabernacle with Calla. The tabernacle and its members can be viewed as carnivalesque for their meetings are free of all the barriers and socio-hierarchical

structures that Rachel fears. Again, Rachel is torn between embarrassment over Calla and the horror of imagining what her mother would think of Calla and her Tabernacle of free and familiar contact between people and God. But, she is determined to go even though Calla has spoken to her of members receiving the gift of tongues. Rachel, in her non-carnival world, is horrified at the thought of a contact and communication that she views as eccentric:

... If I have to endure to be there, and see her rising, hypnotized, and hear her voice speaking gibberish, I think I will faint...I can't bear watching people make fools of themselves. I don't know why, but it threatens me. It swamps me, and I can't look, the way as children we used to cover our eyes with our hands at the dreaded parts in the horror movies. (A Jest of God 29)

Calla's words concerning the gift of tongues and Saint Paul's early church is part of the carnival sense of the world that Bakhtin has termed carnivalistic mésalliance in which a free and familiar atmosphere or attitude "...spreads over everything: over values, thoughts, phenomena..." (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123). The gift of tongues is not part of the traditional churches of Manawaka. For in the non-carnival world, the official life, even worship, must be contained within the hierarchical structure. Calla, on some

level recognizes the claustrophobic effect of this and says that "...We hold ourselves too tightly these days, that's the trouble. Afraid to let the Spirit speak through us" (A Jest of God 28). Calla also recognizes the peace that glossolalia brings to those who have received the gift. Rachel's horror at this is in part caused by her inability to enter into free and familiar contact with humanity on any level and in part by her fear of being seen entering the Tabernacle and being the object of laughter and ridicule. However, she recognizes that she has entered the carnival square (which, ironically, is called the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn) under false pretences:

... Now I'm ashamed to be here, as though I'd gate-crashed, come in under false pretences. Singing. We have to stand, and I must try to make myself narrower so I won't brush against anyone....I'm shaking with the effort not to giggle, although God knows it's not amusing to me. (A Jest of God 33)

Rachel then begins to let go of the "usual rut" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) and enter into "...the reverse side of the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) where her mind jumps from vision to vision and finally focuses on the words of the preacher. She is trapped in the carnivalesque for she cannot move and thus risk free and familiar contact with those she must climb over to escape, for

"...People should keep themselves to themselves - that's the only decent way" (A Jest of God 35). Then, the inevitable occurs as Rachel is forced to "celebrate confusion" as her voice rises in an ancient tongue:

That Voice! Chattering, crying, ululating, the forbidden transformed cryptically to nonsense, dragged from the crypt, stolen and shouted, the shuddering of it, the fear, the breaking, the release, the grieving ---Not Calla's voice. Mine. Oh my God. Mine. The voice of Rachel. (A Jest of God 37)

Rachel has been released into the carnivalesque but as in her dream, she draws back almost immediately in horror. Hysteria is what she detests more than anything, except, as she almost immediately discovers, the sexual advances of Calla. Ironically, Calla's free and familiar contact and her carnival sense of life defies sexual barriers as well as hierarchical barriers. The brief encounter leaves Rachel further trapped in the non-carnival world and feeling quite justified in running from Calla's proffered comfort and friendship:

My drawing away is sharp, violent. I feel violated, unclean, as though I would strike her dead if I had the means. She pulls away then, too, and looks at me with a kind of bewilderment, a pleading apology,

not saying a word. How ludicrous she looks, kneeling there, her wide face, her hand clasped anxiously. My anger feels more than justified, and in some ways this is a tremendous relief. (A Jest of God 38)

Rachel does not recognize that Calla has achieved an emotional maturity that is at present beyond the grasp of Rachel who is tightly wedged into the non-carnival world in which Calla is to be feared.

The concept of the grotesque is also a special category of the carnivalization of literature. It is an extension of the ritual of the crowning/decrowning of the mock carnival king as it includes the renewal and regenerative qualities of that carnival ritual except that grotesque realism is of the flesh, the body of the folk. It is the people, argues Bakhtin, who are constantly growing and renewing. This theme of grotesque realism manifests itself in images of a bodily life that emulates growth, fertility and abundance in what Bakhtin argues is a principle of the triumphant and festive nature of the carnival. It is the essential principle of grotesque realism, degradation, which in essence, brings the ritual to "earth", argues Bakhtin:

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer

to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. . . Degradation and debasement of the higher do not have a formal and relative character in grotesque realism. "Upward" and "downward" have here an absolute and strictly topographical meaning. "Downward" is earth, "upward" is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). . . To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level, it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (Rabelais and His World 19,20, 21)

Hyperbole is one of the dimensions of the grotesque, but Bakhtin stresses that one must be aware of the ambivalent nature of the grotesque, which is a world of becoming for it is always conceiving and regenerating. The structures of grotesque realism are intrinsic in Rachel's eventual renewal or rebirth into a world of possibilities.

Rachel's tormented dreams are rampant with images of grotesque realism:

I can't sleep. --A forest. Tonight it is a forest. Sometimes it is a beach. It has to be right away from everywhere. Otherwise she may be seen. The trees are green walls, high and shielding, boughs of pine and tamarack, branches sweeping to earth, forming a thousand rooms among the fallen leaves. She is in the green-walled room, the boughs opening just enough to let the sun in, the moss hairy and soft on the earth. She cannot see his face clearly. . . She sees only his body distinctly. . . She touches him there. . .

The shadow prince. (A Jest of God 21)

In Rachel's tormented dreams of the grotesque, images of "...a gigantic ferris wheel turning into branches" (A Jest of God 21) suggest the images of regeneration and phallic symbolism, also part of the grotesque. Further grotesque images are present in her recurring nightmare of "...scratches of gold against the black, and they form into jagged lines, teeth, a knife's edge, the sharp hard hackles of dinosaurs" (A Jest of God 58).

In a parallel to the grotesque imagery of the carnivalesque, which Bakhtin describes, Rachel is presented through various animal images which Patricia Morley notes in her text, Margaret Laurence: "...a skinny sapling servicing

a dog, a scampering giraffe, gaunt crane, lean greyhound on a leash, cross of bones and inhibited ostrich walking carefully through a familiar garden" (91). This combination and transformation of the animal and human is one of the most ancient forms of the grotesque. Rachel's cruel self-reflective observations are ambivalent as the grotesque image is grounded in fear, but it is the only route to regeneration; and ultimately a suspension of the socio-hierarchical structure that holds Rachel captive.

In the grotesque, argues Bakhtin, the stress is placed upon the parts of the body that are open to the world so that the world may enter into the body and the body may venture out to meet the world:

. . . This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on the various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecating. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development. . . From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other. (Rabelais and His World 26)

The grotesque body, in this case, the image of Rachel as a giraffe, is reaching out to the world. Rachel, the giraffe woman, is prepared to step off the threshold and enter into the carnival square. A giraffe, with its long neck and huge mouth, as the Bakhtinian argument suggests, is open to the outside world and in turn offers a path through which the outside world may enter the body:

The phone. If only I can reach it before Mother does. In the hall mirror I can see this giraffe woman, this lank scamperer. Slow down, Rachel. Yet I know now the phone is within my easy grasp, and I could pounce for it if I had to. I can't be thinking this way. It isn't like me. (A Jest of God 69)

Banquet imagery, according to Bakhtin, is closely interwoven with the imagery of grotesque realism for banquet food, drink, and swallowing. It is a popular festive-form that Bakhtin stresses is also transposed into literature for feasting is a part of the carnivalesque:

. . . This is no commonplace, privately consumed food and drink, partaken of by individuals. This is a popular feast, a "banquet for all the world." The mighty aspirations to abundance and to a universal spirit is evident in each of these images.

It determines their forms, their positive hyperbolism, their gay and triumphant tone. This aspiration is like yeast added to the images. They rise, grow, swell with this leaven until they reach exaggerated dimensions. They resemble the gigantic sausages and buns that were solemnly carried in carnival processions. (Rabelais and His World 278)

Ironically, when Rachel fantasizes the orgy of Cleopatra and Antony in order to achieve release from her "hell on wheels" (A Jest of God 21) it is with the banquet and grotesque body imagery of the carnivalesque. For, as Bakhtin stresses, "...The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking or defecating" (Rabelais and His World 26). Rachel's fantasy of the orgy of the Egyptian girls and Roman soldiers is the essence of the grotesque image of the body; for the purpose of the grotesque is to combine two bodies in one through conception, birth, or copulation. The grotesque body emphasizes the emergence of a new body from another body. In Rachel's fantasy the stress is on the phallus or genital organs as Bakhtin's dissertation on the grotesque suggests and Rachel's words, in turn, reflect:

...They used to have banquets with dozens there.
Hundreds. Egyptian melons, dusty grapes brought in

the long ships from somewhere. Goblets shaped like cats, cats with listening ears, engraven in gold, not serpents or bulls, not Israel or Greece, only golden cats, cruelly knowledgeable as Egypt. They drank their wine from golden cats and seeing eyes. And when they'd drunk openly as dogs, a sweet hot tangle of the smooth legs around hard hairy thighs. The noise and sweat - the looking on, having to stand itchingly immobile while they watched the warm squirming of those... (A Jest of God 56)

Rachel's imaginative fantasy is abundant with imagery of the carnivalesque. The abundance of the carnival banquet imagery is evident in Rachel's vision of melons, grapes and wine to be drunk - for the banquet images of food, drink and swallowing are likened to the banquet images and grotesque imagery of the carnivalesque. In the carnival, where the sacred and the profane are united, the food and body images are linked in Rachel's fantasy orgy as the barriers between hierarchical structures are suspended and a free and familiar contact prevails in Rachel's imagination. In Bakhtinian terms, Rachel's fantasy, through banquet, grotesque, and sexual imagery can be considered as an attempt by Rachel to taste her world, if only in fantasy at this point. Rachel's consciousness is struggling to awaken and hurl her from the threshold and into the carnival square where she can triumph

in the joy of experiencing life through abundance and sexuality, like the ancient Egyptians.

Through her relationship with Nick Kazlik Rachel enters into a topsy-turvy world where hierarchical structure is suspended. The milkman's son and the undertaker's daughter enter into a relationship free of the socio-hierarchical structure of Manawaka for one brief summer. Of course, it is a secret because Mrs. Cameron, deeply entrenched in the non-carnival world, would not see the humour in Rachel dating a Ukrainian. But, as the carnivalesque brings together the lofty and the low, Rachel is able to suspended the old hierarchical structure in her own mind, regardless of her mother's thoughts:

....Half the town is Scots descent and the other half is Ukrainian. Oil, as they say, and water. Both came for the same reason, because they had nothing where they were before...The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God. She was brought up that way , and my father too, and I, but by the time it reached me the backbone had been splintered considerably. She doesn't know that, though, and never will. Probably I wouldn't ever want her to know. (A Jest of God 61)

This image of Manawaka and the mentality of Rachel's mother is indicative of the non-carnival life, the life Rachel must abandon. Through her relationship with Nick she is able to work through to a "...new mode of interrelationship between individuals" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) and free herself from authority and live in the carnivalesque.

Nick Kazlik, the milkman's son, is a representation of the Bakhtinian "lower strata" and the world of carnival and sexuality. He is also the physical embodiment of Rachel's "shadow prince" of her nightmare world as he offers Rachel a genuine release from her torment through their sexual union:

We are kissing as though we really were lovers, as though there were no pretence in it. As though he really wanted me. He lies along me, and through our separate clothes I can feel the weight of his body, and his sex. Oh my God. I want him. (A Jest of God 85)

Rachel's newly found sexuality provides a sense of exhilaration and liberation for her. Through her journey with Nick Kazlik into the world of the low and the carnivalesque Rachel experiences an unknown freedom:

Right now, I'm fantastically happy. He did want me. And I wasn't afraid. I think that when he is with me, I don't feel any fear. Or hardly any. Soon I won't feel any at all. (A Jest of God 85)

As Rachel explores a newly discovered sexuality, the grotesque bodily images of her dreams and her self mocking decrease as she becomes less abusive toward herself. This new found freedom has made her at times foolhardy and even willing to risk what she fears most, that is, making a spectacle of herself. Such is the carnivalistic mésalliance in which all things and people are drawn closely together, devoid of a non-carnivalistic hierarchical world view.

Ironically, Rachel, overcome with the free and familiar attitude of the carnivalistic mésalliance, asks Nick to remain in Manawaka. Almost immediately Rachel recognizes a new sense of calm in this free and familiar contact:

No, I have no pride. None left, not now. This realization renders me all at once calm, inexplicably, and almost free. Have I finished with facades? Whatever happens, let it happen. I won't deny it. (A Jest of God 125)

Rachel's relationship with Nick is not debilitating for it leads directly to a renewal and awareness through the crisis of the imagined pregnancy.

Pregnancy and birth are an intricate part of the grotesque bodily processes of the carnivalesque. Rachel can imagine this life growing inside her only in her extra-

official life, where she does not fear the authority figures who would ridicule her and her unborn child:

I would like only one thing - not to have to consider anything except this, itself, by itself. When I think of it like that, away from voices and eyes, it seems more than I could ever have hoped for in my life. How I feel about it does not depend on how he might feel or might not feel. Whatever he felt, or anyone, it would be mine and I would want it to be. How could I do anything against it that would not kill me as well? (A Jest of God 139)

One facet of the Bakhtinian ideal of the grotesque image of the body is the image of one body born out the death of the older one: creating a continuous chain of birth, death and/or rebirth. Bakhtin also refers to this as a "double body" (Rabelais and His World 318) that is also cosmic and universal in nature for the chain of life is endless with each new body emerging from the death of the older body. The grotesque body stresses "...elements common to the entire cosmos: earth, water, fire air; it is directly related to the sun, to the stars. It reflects the cosmic hierarchy....It can fill the entire universe" (Rabelais and His World 318). Through bearing a child Rachel's movement in time or her relationship to the cosmos is guaranteed. For, in Bakhtinian terms, Rachel's immortality is assured through the grotesque

concept of the body and its relationship to death and birth. Rachel would be released from the Ferris wheel into a life of free of familiar contact. This free and familiar contact again, is achieved through a crisis which leads to a regeneration or a sense of renewal. In the Bakhtinian argument of crisis, a new life always emerges from the grotesque bodily image.

Laughter, argues Bakhtin is a special category of the carnivalesque. It is a category of grotesque realism that is fundamental to the bodily lower stratum of folk culture:

Not only parody in its narrow sense but all other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subjects into flesh. . . The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes. (Rabelais and His World 20)

The crisis does not produce a child but a tumour. Still, Rachel, like Jonah in Laurence's prologue, is thrown back alive after all. Rachel is released from the threshold of her coffin-like existence into the carnivalistic laughter from where she can laugh at herself and also laugh at God. She openly embraces a life in which her "non life" (A Jest of God

157) does truly signify growth. She can embrace the carnivalesque, and ultimately her mortality:

All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one. (A Jest of God 158)

Rachel's words, like the carnival laughter that Bakhtin describes, are ambivalent. For one can only acknowledge the ambivalence of life when crisis has occurred and one has emerged with, as Rachel has, "a profoundly universal laughter, a laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 127). Rachel understands that she will truly not be out of danger until she is dead, and that too is abundant with ambivalent laughter. Rachel was truly out of danger and bound by fear in Manawaka, in her room above the funeral home and in her classroom. She has broken free of all the coffins and sees the "joyful relativity" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 124) of a world in which she can acknowledge Calla's love and humanity, relinquish her responsibility for keeping her mother alive and acknowledge delight in the company of fools -- the carnivalistic life:

Where I'm going, anything may happen. Nothing may happen. Maybe I will marry...And have my children in time. Or maybe not...What will happen?...It may

be that my children will always be temporary, never to be held. But so are everyone's. (A Jest of God 175)

Eccentricity, a condition of the carnivalesque, is no longer a condition to be feared by Rachel; it is a quality to be welcomed. Ambivalent laughter and all forms of carnivalistic mésalliances permeate the closing paragraphs of A Jest of God. The words attest to the "the joyful relativity of everything" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) and the dualistic nature of the carnivalesque:

....Anything may happen, where I'm going. I will be different. I will remain the same...I will grow too orderly...I will rage in my insomnia like a prophetess...I will be afraid...I will feel lighthearted, sometimes light-headed...I may sing aloud...I will ask myself if I am going mad, but if I do, I won't know it. God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God. (A Jest of God 175)

Hagar's strength, like the strength of the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, looms magnificent in her story from beginning to end. The Stone Angel begins with Hagar's voice

proclaiming the hierarchical structure of the town above which the monument stood attesting to her father's dynasty:

Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day. (The Stone Angel 1)

Laurence's use of language immediately thrusts the reader into the carnivalesque with Hagar's reference to her birth and her mother's demise. The image of Hagar's birth is parallel to Bakhtin's grotesque bodily image, an image that is centrifical to the carnivalesque. Life, argues Bakhtin, is a ". . .two fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness" (Rabelais and His World 26). Hagar is born incomplete and unfinished into the world as her life emerges from her mother's death in a process that Bakhtin refers to as contradictory:

One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. This is the pregnant and begetting body, or atleast a body ready for conception and fertilization, the stress being laid

on the phallus or the genital organs. From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other... It is dying and as yet unfinished; the body stands on the threshold of the grave and crib. No longer is there one body, nor are there as yet two. Two heartbeats are heard; one is the mother's, which is slowed down. (Rabelais and His World 26)

As Hagar's heartbeat strengthens, her mother's heartbeat weakens until only Hagar is alive to validate her mother's shortened life.

Ironically, Hagar's father, truly blind, does not recognize that Hagar is his dynasty and her mother's monument as she begins a new and incomplete life as the new body emerging from the old. Further, Bakhtin stresses, death is contradictory also as the dying body is not separated from the world, but blends with the world for the unfinished and open body of the grotesque is now part of the cosmic:

The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with object. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave bosom,

as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout. (Rabelais and His World 27)

In her opening memories Hagar recognizes the bizarre principles that governed the socio-hierarchical structures of Manawaka as she remembers the stone angel and her father's tales of its monetary worth and the heavy formal perfumed flowers planted in the Manawaka Cemetery. Hagar, the prim and proper little girl of the "fledgling pharaoh" (The Stone Angel 1) had no choice but to travel the clean, clear paths of an orderly cemetery, so as not to damage her clothing: "... How anxious was I to be neat and orderly, imagining life had been created only to celebrate tidiness ..." (The Stone Angel 3). Hagar on some deeper level recognizes the free and familiar world of the carnivalesque in the smell of the wild cowslips growing eternally around the cemetery. They are kept at bay by the civilized structure of the non-carnival hierarchy. In her memory is a sense of the "... joyful relativity of everything " (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 125) in the carnivalesque, where:

... for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair.

(The Stone Angel 3)

A sense of the cosmic splendour of the relativity of all things overwhelms Hagar's consciousness as she retells the moment of her birth and this childhood reverie. But because of her unyielding pride she is forced to spend most of her life in a wilderness, unable to grasp this sense of cosmic splendour until her ninetieth year, the year of her genuine awakening into total consciousness.

Hagar was "to the manner born" (The Stone Angel 3) as the daughter of Jason Currie and the heir apparent to an already existent socio-hierarchical structure in Manawaka. In her childhood Hagar was stifled by this hierarchy and was like the biblical Hagar, born into a bondage in which she was denied free and familiar contact with the other children and citizens of Manawaka:

I'd be about six, surely, when I had that plaid pinafore, pale green and pale red - not pink, a watery red, rather like the flesh of a ripe watermelon, made by an aunt in Ontario and grandly piped in black velveteen. There was I strutting the board sidewalk like a pint-sized peacock, resplendent, haughty, hoity-toity, Jason Currie's black haired daughter. (The Stone Angel 4)

Further, as her father's favorite, Hagar was co-conspirator in the inequality that a hierarchical structure such as the one observed by Jason Currie imposed upon others who were lower on the social scale. Hagar learned at an early age the terror to be imposed upon her by her father, Jason Currie, if she temporarily suspended the powerful social-hierarchical structure of his world through a freely spoken or carnivalesque word:

Oh, look! The funniest wee things, scampering - I laughed at them as they burrowed, the legs so quick and miniature you could hardly see them, delighted that they'd dare appear there and flout my father's mighty moustache and his ire...Mind your manners, miss!.. The swipe he caught me then was nothing to what I got in the back of the store after she'd left...Have you no regard for my reputation ?

...But I saw them!

...Did you have to announce it from the housetops?

...I didn't mean- (The Stone Angel 6,7)

Reputation and pride are the values that Jason Currie sees to be worthy of protection above all else. Hagar's free and familiar speech in front of a customer, Mrs. McVitie, has threatened his pride and reputation. Hagar, as young as she is, can recognize her father's lack of business ethics when she must stifle both laughter and tears, as she realizes her

father will sell the sultanas regardless of what is growing in their midst. Thus, the socio-hierarchical inequality is imposed upon those of lesser position, his customers. Appearance can never be suspended or sacrificed, Hagar quickly learns. The non-carnival reigns supreme in the world of Jason Currie. These laws cannot be suspended even momentarily in the presence of others. Even when Jason Currie does show Hagar his love for her after brutally beating her hands with a ruler, Hagar is repelled by his confused unnatural display of tenderness. Hagar too is learning to distance herself from humanity and to find a human touch repugnant:

...He struck and struck, and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me. He held me so tightly I was almost smothered against the thick moth ball smelling roughness of his clothes. I felt caged and panicky and wanted to push him away, but didn't dare. Finally, he released me. He looked bewildered, as though he wanted to explain but didn't know the explanation himself. (The Stone Angel 7).

The Presbyterian Church, the house of God in Manawaka, was also a monument to the hierarchical structure of the town. Again, it serves as a tribute to Jason Currie's pride and the importance of the outward appearances that are manifest in the non-carnival life where all forms of terror including

reverence and piety are sustained. The Presbyterian church defines Jason Currie and all the other wealthy men in the community in terms of their social status and wealth in the non-carnival sense on the world:

Father sat with modestly bowed head, but turned to me and whispered very low: "I and Luke McVitie must've given the most as he called our names the first." The people looked as though they wondered whether they should clap or not, ovations being called for, and yet perhaps uncalled for in church. I waited, hoping they would, for I had new lace gloves and could have shown them off so well, clapping. (The Stone Angel 13)

In her memories Hagar twice recalls Jason Currie in situations where a suspension of the socio-hierarchical structure places him in a situation in which he attempts free and familiar contact with other people. Both are memories of ambiguous situations where he cannot quite break free of the hierarchical bonds and truly experience the carnivalesque. Interestingly, both recollections are connected to re-telling of his hypocrisy in religion and business, the two sources of his greatest sense of accomplishment and pride.

Hagar once observed her father attempting to allow a sensuous side, "the latent side" (Problems of Dostoevsky's

Poetics 123) of his nature, to reveal and express itself to No-Name Lottie Drieser's mother. Jason's attempt at fulfilling a sexual desire turns into open scorn for a woman whom he barely knows because she does not find him attractive. Upon hearing of the woman's death at a later time Hagar recalls three comments made by her father and wonders which one of them was really her father: a man of free and compassionate spirit, (carnavalesque) a man who judged and condemned (non-carnival), or one who recognized the ironies of life and the powerlessness of a man to determine his own fate (capable of temporary suspensions of the non-carnival world):

...Poor lass, he said...She couldn't have had much of a life. Then, as though recalling himself and to whom he spoke,..Her sort isn't much loss to the town, I'm bound to say.

Then an inexplicably startled look came over his face...Consumption? That's contagious isn't it? Well, the Lord works in wondrous ways, His will to perform. (The Stone Angel 15)

As Hagar continues her reverie of childhood the death of her brother Dan also comes to mind. As Dan nears death Hagar cannot disguise herself as her dead mother to comfort a delirious Dan in the last hours of his life. Hagar cannot suspend the false hierarchy even temporarily to enter into

free and familiar contact with her own brother. Disguise, accompanied with an appearance of even temporary weakness, is already impossible for Hagar. Such a gesture would establish what Bakhtin considered to be "...an ideal and at the same time real type of communication" (Rabelais and His World 16) that is impossible in the ordinary or non-carnival world. Hagar cannot risk this eccentricity and carnival familiarity, not even for her dying brother:

"Hagar - put it on and hold him for awhile." I stiffened and drew away my hands. "I can't. Oh Matt, I'm sorry, but I can't, I can't. I'm not a bit like her."...But all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. to play at being her - it was beyond me. "I can't Matt." I was crying, shaken by torments he never even suspected, wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough. (The Stone Angel 21)

Unlike Matt, Hagar could not step into the carnivalistic life in which fear is temporarily suspended and play at being mother to a dying brother. Bakhtin suggests that the "carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely

sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationship of noncarnival life" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123). Hagar cannot disguise herself in the shawl (disguise is an accessory ritual of carnival) and play-act the role of her weak mother. Even from memory at age ninety she does not understand why she could not comfort Dan.

The image of the Manawaka Nuisance Grounds presents a topsy-turvy world order in contrast to the town below. It can be likened to what Bakhtin refers to as a carnival hell with the deeply ambivalent image of fire that is akin to the carnivalesque:

... It was a sulphurous place, where even the weeds appeared to grow more gross and noxious than elsewhere, as though they could not help but show the stain and stench of their improper nourishment.

(The Stone Angel 22)

The grotesque image of the weak and suffering chicks affords Hagar a view of "...a kind of horror" (The Stone Angel 22) which Lottie destroyed with a little more pleasure than Hagar can comprehend:

She took a stick and crushed the eggshell skulls,
and some of them she stepped on with the heels of

her black patent-leather shoes. (The Stone Angel 23)

The nuisance grounds, or carnival hell, "...simultaneously destroys and renews the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 128). Bakhtin states that in European carnivals a vehicle that represented carnival hell was "...adorned with all possible sorts of gaudy carnival trash" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 126) and set afire, thus ambivalently symbolizing the destruction and renewal of the carnival rituals. The death of the chicks in that "...sulphurous place" (The Stone Angel 22) attests to the regenerative power of the garbage, lingering above the hierarchical structure of Manawaka in such disarray. The children enter the carnival hell, or the topsy-turvy world of the nuisance grounds, with its reek of mortality and eternal tribute to free and familiar contact on the most human level in a world of plenty:

....We tiptoed, fastidiously holding the edges of our garments clear, like dainty-nosed czarinas finding themselves in sudden astonishing proximity to beggars with weeping sores. (The Stone Angel 22)

Through her marriage to Bram Shipley, Hagar Currie flirts with the rituals and symbols of the carnivalesque. The roots

of the carnival festivals can be traced to the heathen agricultural festival of a pre-Christian world and it was originally a plowing and sowing festival. A union of the sacred and the profane resulted in the Christian observance of these pagan festivals. The carnivalesque, in life as in art, breaks the harmonies of appearance and presents a world in the process of becoming. Bram Shipley, the object of Hagar's desire, is an agrarian whose roots are in the earth, the source of abundance, eternally regenerative. It is one of God's jokes that Hagar's stubborn pride has forced her into marriage to a man who is on one level Bakhtin's carnival clown; a parody of the regenerative aspects of the ancient agricultural festivals:

...Even more, it's unpainted houses that strain and crack against the weather, leached by rain and bleached by the bone-whitening sun. The Shipley place was never painted, not once. You would think in all that time someone would have had the odd dollar to spare for a few gallons of paint. But no. Bram was always going to do it - in spring, it would be done at harvest, and fall, it would be done for sure in spring. (The Stone Angel 35)

Ironically, Hagar tumbles from her lofty status as Jason Currie's daughter into Bram Shipley's topsy-turvy world by her own choice as she longs for free and familiar contact with

humanity. Life as her father's daughter distanced her from all meaningful relationships, making her, like the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, a "credit to me" (The Stone Angel 37). Jason Currie's daughter is trapped in the hierarchy of Manawaka forever, blindly following her father's will like the cattle in her father's picture; the lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea; this was Hagar's destiny in the ordinary, non-carnival life.

Hagar steps into the carnivalistic life when she meets Bram Shipley for the first time. The hierarchical structure is suspended as Hagar is freed from the authority of social status and etiquette and joins into a "new mode of interrelationship" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) with Bram Shipley on the dance floor. Hagar romanticizes all the features and characteristics of Bram that the sensuous life temporarily frees her to admire. The sacred and the profane are temporarily united in a state of free and familiar contact:

We spun around the chalky floor, and I revelled in his fingernails with crescents of ingrown earth that never met a file. I fancied I heard in his laughter the bravery of battalions. I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face. The black hair thrusting from his chin was rough as thistles. The next instant, though, I imagined him

rigged out in a suit of gray soft as a dove's breast-feathers. (The Stone Angel 39)

In the non-carnival life, Hagar grows to detest what she admires in Bram at first meeting.

In imagination Hagar suspends the non-carnival and longs for the world of the "marketplace", the other side of Manawaka, for she does recognize the joyful life of the shacks beyond her own grand house in what to Hagar is "life turned inside out" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) beckoning her to join:

....the czar's sons playing at peasants in coarse embroidered tunics, bloused and belted, the ashen girls drowning attractively in meres, crowned always with lilies, never with pigweed or slime. (The Stone Angel 39)

Hagar's imagination is constantly toying with images of the carnivalesque. But in the non-carnival world in which Hagar is still quite firmly entrenched, Bram Shipley is "...Common as dirt, as everyone knows...and he's been seen with half-breed girls" (The Stone Angel 41). That is the image of the man that is dominant to Hagar throughout most of their marriage. Only in the carnivalesque, or the second life, does Hagar recognize her ambivalent relationship with Bram.

The new type of communication in the world of the carnivalesque demands a new form of speech that is familiar to the "marketplace" or carnival square. It is often abusive and full of curses and is known as billingsgate in the carnivalesque as it is in keeping with the free aspect of carnival, the second unofficial life. Billingsgate is a "...breach of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, and respectability" (Rabelais and His World 187). In a carnival atmosphere the language of profanity and oaths is ambivalent for it includes laughter and attests to a familiar and real communication between people. This genuine communication is not ambivalent when the free and familiar language of the marketplace is used by Bram before members of the non-carnival hierarchy of Manawaka. Bram's opinion of a performance of The Messiah is asked for by a friend of Hagar's from the opposite pole of the world:

...What do you think? Bram, trapped, hugged surliness like a winter coat around him...I don't know nothing about it, he said. And what's more, I don't give a good goddamn... A gasp, a gloved hand to a rounded mouth, a titter, and off went Charlotte, her chestnut hair bannered behind her. It would be all over town by morning, and the first ears it would reach would be my father's. (The Stone Angel 61)

But Hagar is not to be spared the language of the marketplace nor the earthy behaviour of Bram which is, ironically the "...sparks of the carnival bonfire which renews the world" (Rabelais and His World 17). The juxtaposition of the carnivalesque and the non-carnival world view provides a source of humour and empathy with Hagar's discomfort as Bram touches the women's undergarments in the store, a free and familiar gesture delineated to the carnival square, not the critical eye of Mrs. McVitie. Hagar's mortification is not in the act, but in the viewing of it through Mrs. McVitie's non-carnival, ordinary sight. This is what renders Bram's behaviour and his language inappropriate and eccentric. Bram, in his free and familiar attitude, is expressing himself and thus his nature:

Look, Hagar - this here is half the price of that there one. If there's any difference, you couldn't hardly tell.

Sh - sh -

What the hell's the matter with you? Judas priest woman, why do you look like that?.. Mrs. McVitie had sailed out, galleon - like, having gained her gold. I turned on Bram...This here! That there! Don't you know anything? (The Stone Angel 62)

Even in the intimacies of sex, Hagar could not enter into

a free and familiar contact with her husband. That joy too was confined to an inner trembling. Hagar could have shared in a state of joyful eccentricity in her sexual union with Bram, but so tightly held to convention was she that pride became the barrier in a part of their marriage that could have provided a union in the carnivalesque; a place for working out a free and loving relationship. Hagar recognizes the coldness and emptiness of her bed in her present and life long threshold existence:

My bed is cold as winter, and now it seems to me that I am lying as the children used to do, on fields of snow, and they would spread their arms and sweep them down to their sides, and when they rose, there would be the outline of an angel with spread wings. The icy whiteness covers me, drifts over me, and I could drift to sleep in it, like some caught in a blizzard, and freeze. (The Stone Angel 71)

At this point, Hagar is suspended in the cold, lifeless world of the non-carnival, caught up in the cold world of appearance without Bram and without the assurance of freely given love. From here she must be released into the carnivalesque.

Bram lives in the realm of grotesque realism which Bakhtin labels "degradation". Degradation, argues Bakhtin, is the process "of lowering all that is high, spiritual,

ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Rabelais and His World 19,20). As part of grotesque realism it shares the element of ambivalence with this concept for degradation is not a negative force. As a unifying force it transfers what is "official" and false to a bodily level. The mock crowning/decrowning of the carnival king is a ritual which, with its imagery of shift and renewal becomes part of the degradation of grotesque realism. Bram Shipley experiences such a Bakhtinian metamorphosis. Bram is indeed part of the grotesque, the down to earth aspect of the carnivalesque. The grotesque, like Bram, is ambivalent in nature since it is the world of becoming and therefore incomplete. Hagar is aware of Bram's decrowning as he descends from Bakhtin's carnival king concept to the role of the clown through a process of metamorphosis signified by a change of clothes (an accessory carnival ritual) as "...In ten years he had changed, put away the laughter he once wore and replaced it with a shabbier garment" (The Stone Angel 100). He has been ridiculed, beaten, and mocked in the tradition of the carnival clown and "...he has made himself a laughing stock" (The Stone Angel 100). Bram engaged in the act of urinating on Jason Currie's store, which is a "...traditional debasing gesture" (Rabelais and His World 148) of the carnivalesque. Tied to this act is John's declaration that the kids called his father Bramble Shitley. Bakhtin emphasizes

that this debasement of the clown or fool is an ancient gesture in which the clown was subjected to a barrage of "mudslinging" (Bakhtin states the term is derived from this act) in which urine and excrement are flung at the clown. In Bram's case the mudslinging was in the form of name calling.

As the carnivalesque is ambivalent and linked with birth and renewal Bakhtin acknowledges these images in the traditional gestures of debasement. These fertile images which parallel Bram Shipley's behavior attest to his mortality and power to also replenish the earth:

....the slinging of excrement and drenching in urine are traditional debasing gestures, ...We can find probably in every language such expressions as "I shit on you." ...This gesture and the words that accompany it are based on a literal debasement in terms of the topography of the body, that is, a reference to the bodily lower stratum, the zone of the genital organs. This signifies destruction, a grave for the one who is debased. But such debasing gestures and expressions are ambivalent, since the lower stratum is not only a bodily grave but also the area of the genital organs, the fertilizing and generating stratum. Therefore, in the images of urine and excrement is preserved the essential link with birth, fertility, renewal, welfare. (Rabelais

and His World 148)

Bram is denied neither his humanity nor his dynasty as both Hagar and John return to his side as death comes to claim him. Through a regenerative death Bram rejoins the cosmic cycle.

Interestingly, Bakhtin discusses a work written between the fifth and eighth centuries, the Coena, in which the Biblical Hagar is a major character. The author is unknown but Bakhtin sees the work as the root of the banquet imagery of the carnivalesque and states that the author "...combines all these images into the grandiose picture of a banquet, full of life and movement, presented with extraordinary carnivalesque, or rather saturnalian freedom" (Rabelais and His World 287). The figures from both the Old and New Testaments, Hagar among them, are seated at a great banquet. The banquet is in celebration of the marriage of the son of a certain king told of in a parable of Christ. (Matthew 22:1-14) (These may be the guests invited from the highways, for the invited refused to attend.) Hagar, the bondwoman, is accused of stealing the gifts and must atone with her life. Like Margaret Laurence's Hagar, "gifts" are hoarded, held within, and there is no celebration for the Biblical Hagar until she is released from spiritual bondage.

Bakhtin describes the work as one of absolute free play,

not to be viewed as a sacrilegious work. "The banquet had the power of liberating the word from the shackles and piousness and fear of God. Everything became open to play and merriment" (Rabelais and His World 288). Life held these same possibilities for Laurence's Hagar but she, like her Biblical counterpart in the Coena, covets her individuality and holds herself apart from humanity until her encounter with the grotesque image of her own body as she approaches death. Old age plunges Hagar into the grotesque as her bodily functions/dysfunctions are paramount in her life. Bakhtin argues that "Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (Rabelais and His World 303).

Hagar's language in describing herself is rich in animal imagery and the hyperbole of the grotesque as she sees herself in the distorted mirror imagery of the carnivalesque as "...an old mare, a slow old sway back," then "...like a fish on the slimed boards of a dock", and finally, "...like an injured dog" (The Stone Angel 26). In the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque, the facial features, particularly the nose and the mouth, can adopt the form of an animal. Such is the case after Hagar falls; she jerks her head, gasps and flounders, yelps and finally cries in rage against the body that has betrayed her. The dominant facial feature of all these sounds is the mouth and through the grotesque animal

imagery it is "...actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss" (Rabelais and His World 317). Hagar, through grotesque body imagery, is in the act of becoming. For, through the pain and discomfort of old age, Hagar finally recognizes that it is joy, simple joy that she longed for in life. Hagar's pride kept her imprisoned until the realizations of her last earthly days.

In youth, Hagar could ignore her heart, bowels, and other organs that become troublesome with age. This is not so as death approaches and the distances between the body and the world lessen:

...the grotesque, the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs.

(Rabelais and His World 318)

Hagar must gain awareness of the possibility that life before her death can release her into a sense of the cosmic in Bakhtinian terms, and an awareness of her own immortality.

As Hagar descends to her mock castle (the cannery) she has disguised herself, a ritual of carnival in which..." a

shift of clothing signifies a change in the position or destiny of life" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 169). Hagar has begun her journey, "...a coming down to earth, a contact with the reproductive and generating power of the earth and of the body...a continuation of the grotesque tradition" (Rabelais and His World 22). Hagar is surprised that she greets the morning "almost gaily" (The Stone Angel 166) from her mock castle in the "wilderness" (The Stone Angel 166). Through the joy of life pulled out of its rut, the carnivalesque surfaces as Hagar sheds her other life with its symbols of authority and order.

Hagar attempts to defecate in the forest, but as she is not yet part of the carnivalesque, her body cannot go out to enter the world, just as the world cannot enter into Hagar:

My bowels knot, and I'm reminded of why I came here. I squat and strain. Nothing. I never thought to bring a laxative with me, fool that I was. Now I'm locked like a bank vault with no key.

(The Stone Angel 171)

The carnival ritual of the mock crowning and decrowning will be the "key" to release Hagar from her bondage into a new freedom with her world. The mock crowning of the carnival queen, Hagar, takes place amid the banquet imagery as Hagar lays out her meal in the cannery, her mock castle:

I have everything I need. An overturned box is my table, and another is my chair. I spread my supper and eat. (The Stone Angel 193)

Again, the mock crowning/decrowning is a primary act of the carnivalesque, argues Bakhtin and is often part of a festive banquet. Banquet imagery includes eating, swallowing and drinking. The banquet imagery is often combined with the grotesque bodily imagery. Both rituals are part of the route through which Hagar reaches "...the inside out world of carnival" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 124). It is a ritual act but it must be truly experienced by Hagar:

...I see that half a dozen June bugs have been caught... Death hasn't tarnished them, however... If I've unearthed jewels, the least I can do is wear them. Why not, since no one's here to inform me I'm a fool? I take off my hat -- it's hardly suitable for here....I arrange the jade and copper pieces in my hair...the effect is pleasing. They liven my gray, transform me. I sit quite still and straight, my hands spread languidly on my knees, queen of moth millers, empress of earwigs. (The Stone Angel 193)

Hagar is immediately tired and pain reminds her of her mortality. Here, the decrowning or imminent death "...glimmers through the crowning. And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa.

Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth"
(Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 125).

After the mock crowning and Hagar's partial release into the carnivalesque she experiences a change or shift that is parallel to the grotesque body imagery in which the body and world merge in the process of metamorphosis:

...I've slipped from my box, and I'm sitting on the floor, my legs jutting stiffly out like fence posts and my hands pressing at my balloon belly as though it would escape and drift away if I didn't hold it down. (The Stone Angel 194)

Hagar enters into the free and familiar contact of the carnival square with Murray F. Lees. Together they "...listen for the terrible laughter of God" (The Stone Angel 208) for both have lost a son. Both are free in the carnival sense of the world to share their eccentricities. Through her relationship with Murray F. Lees in the mock castle the hierarchical structures are suspended and Hagar begins to lessen the distance between herself and her family as she tells Lees of John's death:

...I found my tears had been locked too long and wouldn't come now at my bidding. The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all...I could only look at them dry-eyed from a

great distance and not say a single word. (The Stone Angel 216)

Through her relationship with Lees in a carnival atmosphere with all hierarchical distinctions suspended "...an ideal and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life, is established" (Rabelais and His World 16). In a carefully drawn parallel to Matt's request to Hagar to step out of herself and be the mother, Lees, in the carnivalesque, is able to become John and offer Hagar the comfort and forgiveness she so desperately needs:

It's okay, he says. I knew all the time you never meant it. Everything is alright. You try to sleep. Everything's quite okay...I sigh, content. He pulls the blanket up around me. I could even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of Him some time or other. (The Stone Angel 221)

Freed into the carnivalesque Hagar engages in the carnival ritual of gift giving as she blesses Marvin, tells Doris the minister's words did do her some good, and passes her ring on to Tina.

In the decrowning ritual Hagar is released into the knowledge of her life long desire to simply rejoice and her denial of her need to experience joy. Through the ambivalent

crowning/decrowning ritual Hagar is liberated and experiences a metamorphosis that allows her to rejoice:

....This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that - simply to rejoice. (The Stone Angel 261)

Hagar's decrowning can be likened to James Joyce's concept of Epiphany as she recognizes that "...the heart's truth" (The Stone Angel 261) cannot be spoken from a life of spiritual imprisonment that removes "...Every good joy" (The Stone Angel 261) from the soul. Sadly, Hagar lived on the threshold of life until the few moments before she is released into death:

Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. (The Stone Angel 261)

Hagar acknowledges her fear to Marvin and feels the magnificent relief and release into the carnivalesque. Hagar does "...not go gently into that good night" (prologue) and the closing passages are rampant with Bakhtinian images of the grotesque:

On these last moments and in the language of the expiring organism, death becomes a moment of life, receiving an expressive reality and speaking with the tongue of the body itself; thus death is entirely drawn into the cycle of life. (Rabelais and His World 359)

There, Hagar dies incomplete, amidst uncertainties -- in the carnivalesque.

4

The Diviners is the last of Margaret Laurence's novels and the culminating work of the Manawaka cycle. The heroine, Morag, like Rachel and Hagar before her, exists in a world of uncertainties. There is a constant upsetting of false hierarchies throughout the novel concluding with Morag's final achievement, a sense of inner freedom and peace. Laurence herself defines this state:

The whole process of every individual coming to terms with your own past, with your childhood, with your parents, and getting to the point where you can see yourself as a human individual no longer blaming the past, no longer having even to throw out all the past, but finding a way to live with your own past, which you have to do. (xiii of David Staines' introduction to The Diviners)

The death of Morag's parents hurled her out of one life and into the world of Christie and Prin - an inversion of the life Morag imagines from Snapshots. In her "old films" (The Diviners 28) Morag can still "...smell the goddamn prairie dust on Hill Street, outside Christie's palatial mansion" (The Diviners 28).

After the death of her parents, Morag moves into the Hill Street house with Christie and Prin --- at the lower end of the socio-hierarchical structure in Manawaka:

...Hill Street was the Scots-English equivalent of the other side of the Tracks, the shacks and shanties at the north end of Manawaka...Hill Street was below the town; it was inhabited by those who had not and never would make good. Remittance men and thin draggled families. Drunks. People perpetually on relief. Occasional labourers, men whose tired women supported the family by going out to clean the big brick houses on top of the hill on the streets shaded by sturdy maples, elms, lombardy poplars. Hill Street - dedicated to flops, washout and general nogoods, at least in the view of the town's better - off. (The Diviners 28)

In contrast to the big brick houses, Christie Logan's house and yard are almost an extension of the nuisance grounds.

The carnivalesque or the "reverse side of the world" (The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) is apparent from Prin's first words to Morag:

You'll like living in Town, once you're used to it.

the Big Fat Woman says.

In Town? This does not seem like Town. Town is where the stores are, and you go in for ice cream sometimes, like Mr. and Mrs. Pearl yesterday or when. (The Diviners 29)

Morag has entered into the carnivalistic life with her two comic figures, Christie and Prin, both of whom, from Morag's childhood perspective, appear grotesque.

Prin and Christie, at the lower end of the socio-hierarchical scale in Manawaka, emerge as truly good and giving people, for they are able to suspend the false hierarchical structures that divide Hill Street with its "two sickly Manitoba maples" (The Diviners 28) from the "big brick houses on top of the hill on the streets shaded by sturdy maples, elms, lombardy poplars" (The Diviners 28).

Laurence begins her novel with a deliberate use of novelistic conventions and with a carnival travesty; a parody of the conventions of the novel. The reader is immediately thrust into a world of uncertainties and life from the inside out:

The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparent impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching.

The dawn mist had lifted and the morning air was filled with swallows, darting so low over the river that their wings sometimes brushed the water, then spiralling and pirouetting upward again. Morag watched, trying to avoid thought but this ploy was not successful. (The Diviners 3)

With Morag's discovering of the letter from Pique in her typewriter the order of the world is upset and Morag explores the carnivalesque through her memory and her immediate present.

Christie Logan can be seen as an example of Bakhtin's carnival-king. As the town Scavenger and keeper of the Nuisance Grounds, Christie is at the lowest step on the socio-hierarchical scale of Manawaka and often the object of ridicule as the carnival clown/king:

Christie Logan's the Scavenger Man -Gets his food from the garbage can! (The Diviners 38)

Christie is able to suspend the false barriers between people and "enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square" Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123).

The grotesque cannot be separated from Bakhtin's carnivalesque laughter. Christie Logan is an embodiment of both conditions of the carnivalesque and one who truly understands the principle of carnival laughter that Bakhtin describes:

Actually the grotesque liberated man from all the forms of inhuman necessity that direct the prevailing concept of the world. . . The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretence of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities. . . In the grotesque world the id is uncrowned and transformed into a "funny monster."

(Rabelais and His World 49)

Christie Logan is just such a "funny monster."

In Christie's case, this "carnival square" (The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetic 123) is represented by the Nuisance Grounds. He has no fear of those who live up the hill for he truly understands:

By their garbage shall ye know them, Christie yells, like a preacher, a clowny preacher. I swear by the ridge of tears and by the valour of my ancestors, I say unto you, Morag Gunn, lass, that by their bloody goddam fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them. (The Diviners 39)

Christie sees with the festive madness of the carnivalesque as it is manifested through grotesque forms and the language of the marketplace, or the carnival square. As the guardian of the Nuisance Grounds Christie sees the mortality of the citizens of Manawaka who make fun of him. He can laugh with ambivalent laughter at our topsy-turvy earth:

Some of them, because I take off their muck for them, they think I'm muck. Well, I am muck but so are they. Not a father's son, not a man born of woman who is not muck in some part of his immortal soul, girl. That's what they don't know, the poor sods. When I carry away their refuse, I'm carrying off part of them, do you see? (The Diviners 39)

Wayne C. Booth, in an article entitled "Freedom of Interpretation" makes reference to Rabelais' Gargantua from which Booth relates an episode involving a Lady of Paris whose gown is sprinkled "...with the ground up pieces of the

genitals of a bitch in heat and then withdraws to watch the sport, as all of the male dogs of Paris assemble to piss on her, head to toe" (Bakhtin Essays and Dialogues on His Work 161). The image is akin to Laurence's image of Christie Logan and the laughter he evokes from the children of Manawaka as he rides through town on his chariot:

That is the worst. How silly he looks. No. The worst is that he smells. He does wash. But he never gets rid of the smell. How much do other people notice? Plenty. You bet. Horseshit and garbage, putrid stuff, vegetables and that, rotten eggs and mouldy old clothes. (The Diviners 36)

Christie, like the Lady of Paris reeks of mortality and represents Bakhtin's grotesque realism. Christie can laugh at the muck that he sees as a product of all the Manawaka folk even though he does not recognize that the regenerative power of the muck and the smell of excrement and the urine of Rabelais Paris dogs is part of the regenerative process that renews our earth and evokes carnival laughter. Christie is able to laugh at the children who mock him with a laughter that transcends the false hierarchies that name him Scavenger and therefore of little value. Christie laughs with the true Carnival laughter of a man who sees. He divines beyond the false hierarchy and see the source of life and a joyful cosmic relativity in all things:

Oh. Christie is grinning. He is twisting his face, like different crazy masks. His tongue droops out like a dog's tongue. He crosses his eyes, and his mouth is dribbling with spit. Then he laughs. Oh. He laughs in a kind of cackle, like a loony. (The Diviners 38)

The term "loony" is particularly appropriate in the image of Christie's laughter since carnival laughter also embodies a festive spirit of madness that is characteristic of the carnivalesque. Christie's laughter encompasses Bakhtin's concept of carnival laughter throughout The Nuisance Grounds segment of the novel.

As the town scavenger Christie Logan has chosen to reject the official life of Manawaka and embrace the world from the view afforded through carnival laughter. Christie lives in the carnivalesque, for his suspension from the socio-hierarchical structures of Manawaka is purposeful and permanent. He is free to use the speech and gestures of the carnivalesque since he recognizes his mortality and state of incompleteness in a world where we are all only "muck" (The Diviners 39). As carnival laughter is ambivalent, it also embraces the mocking and deriding pole of laughter. This is an aspect of carnival laughter in which Christie also recognizes that:

Goddammit, you make your own chances in this world! he swears. Or else you don't make them. Like me. You have to work bloody hard at it, believe me, to be such a bloody flop as I stand here before you. In my one suit of underwear...Although that's not the truth of it, neither. It's all true and not true. Isn't that a bugger, now?... I don't understand you, Christie Logan, Prin says. I never have done...

you're not the only one. I don't understand myself. what a piece of work is man. Who said that?..Oh what a piece of work is man oh what a bloody awful piece of work is man enough to scare the pants off you when you come to think of it the opposite is also true hm hm. (The Diviners 88)

The character of Christie Logan encompasses what Bakhtin recognizes as the "complex nature of carnival laughter" (Rabelais and His World 11). Christie does not exclude himself from the carnival laughter, for he recognizes his incompleteness and his place in the cosmic cycle of "muck":

...they think muck's dirty. It's no more dirty than what's in their heads. Or mine. It's christly clean compared to some things. All right. I'll please them. I'll wade in it up to my ass. I could wade in shit, if I had to, without it hurting me.

I'd like to tell the buggers that. (The Diviners
40)

Another ritual of the carnivalesque that Bakhtin discusses is the "sacred parody" (Rabelais and His World 14) in which parodical liturgies such as Christie's "By their garbage shall ye know them...by their goddam fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them" (The Diviners 39) allowed carnival laughter to enter the institutions of the day. Christie's parodical liturgy of the garbage affords a carnivalesque vision of the world and also establishes Christie as a true "diviner", for he sees far beyond the superficial hierarchical structure of Manawaka.

Christie's language in The Diviners is the familiar language of the carnival marketplace freely sprinkled with abusive and insulting terms. It is the special genre of billingsgate that Bakhtin identifies as an important part of the carnivalesque. Christie's language, befitting a free and familiar attitude, also fulfills Bakhtin's requirements that it be proverbial in nature. Christie's abuses and praises were indeed ambivalent and embodied the spirit of carnival laughter:

If you want to make yourself into a doormat, Morag girl, I declare unto you that there's a christly host of them that'll be only too willing to tread

all over you. ---

Proverbs of C. Logan, circa 1936. (The Diviners 107)

Christie's speech, the familiar speech of the marketplace, is full of a carnival sense of the world, a sense that recognizes the ambivalence of the nuisance grounds as the topsy-turvy earth that both destroys and renews "...their bloody goddamn fucking garbage" (The Diviners 39).

Prin and Christie are dualistic carnival images of the grotesque in that they present contrasting images of fat and thin. Together they present an image of life that is eccentric and drawn out of the usual rut. They indulge in a mutual mockery that is allowed in the language of the carnivalesque. One recognizes an ambivalence in their relationship and a genuine love for one another:

...Prin married Christie when he came back from the Great War. The town said good job too; a pity to spoil two families. Which was mean. But funny too. Prin's real Christian name is Princess. Morag thinks this is the funniest thing she has ever heard. But once when she said so to Christie, he told her to shut her trap. (The Diviners 34)

Prin exists with Christie in the carnivalesque. She is part of a form of carnival communication that eliminates the

false distances between people. Prin genuinely loves and cares for Morag, the child she sees as replacing the one she lost. Her goodness is without qualification, and she is truly kind and giving to Morag.

Unfortunately Prin is destroyed by the false hierarchies of Manawaka and the cruelty of those members of its official society who relegate the Logans to the level of the trash which Christie collects:

...When church is over, and they're all filing out, chattering.... no one will say Good Morning to Morag and Prin. Not on your life. Might soil their precious mouths....In Christ there is no East or West, In Him no North or South ----Oh yeh? Like fun there isn't. (The Diviners 109)

The hypocrisy of the false hierarchies all but force Prin to literally hide herself in a bag of jelly doughnuts. Morag, as a child, has great difficulty sifting through her ambivalent feelings for Prin:

.....Prin is not really dirty. She just doesn't notice so much anymore. She sits and sits in her chair. Prin does. Is she dreaming with her eyes wide open? You can do this. It's easy. Morag knows. Maybe Prin is dreaming of being young and

pretty. And rich. Prin rich! Pretty! She can't be dreaming that. (The Diviners 41)

From her childhood perspective Morag cannot see beyond the false socio-hierarchical barriers of Manawaka that prevent Prin from enjoying free and familiar contact with people. Even at her funeral the false hierarchies cannot be suspended so that the choir can sing for Prin. The church choir can only sing for God's official citizens of Manawaka. It cannot sing for Prin who has died incomplete and in a state of grace:

The strange christly thing about it, Christie says, is that she always seemed old, from the moment I first laid eyes upon her, and yet she always seemed young. I don't mean happy young, you see...I mean, more, young like a young child who's yet to learn much speech... Maybe she was simple in another way, Morag says. Another meaning of the word. (The Diviners 250)

Ironically, it is Christie, the true diviner, who recognizes the regenerative element in death, for he knows the appropriate grave for Prin:

I would have buried her my own self, Christie mumbles, but strongly. In the Nuisance Grounds. (The Diviners 254)

Such is the ambivalent world of the carnivalesque and the

triumphant image of death that is encompassed in the grotesque bodily image of death/renewal/fertility:

....Its grossly carnivalesque traits are obvious.
The first death...renewed the earth's fertility.
...Death, the Dead body, blood as seed buried in the earth, rising for another life....A variant is death inseminating mother earth and making her bear fruit once more. (Rabelais and His World 327)

As Morag escapes the Nuisance Grounds for the Halls of Sion she begins to recognize the power of her past and the influence that Christie and Prin have exerted upon her life. The Nuisance Grounds will never be gone "forever and ever" (The Diviners 173). Those to whom Morag is genuinely close live in the carnivalesque and Morag learns that she cannot live in false hierarchies just as Christie, Prin, Jules and Ella cannot.

In the section entitled Halls of Sion Morag submerges herself into the stifling world of Brooke Skelton (even the name conjures images of parody!). The Tower, the apartment she and Brooke share in Toronto, comes to represent a place of captivity to Morag. It is a sterile life devoid of the richness of her years with Christie and Prin. It is a world devoid of uncertainties and mortality in which Morag begins to recognize that:

....Even the little worshipful group of Honours English students...argue in well-modulated grammatical voices, devoid of epithets, bland as tapioca pudding. Since Prin's death and the last sight of Christie, Morag has experienced increasingly the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared. But of course does no such thing. (The Diviners 255)

Morag longs to use the billingsgate oaths of the carnival square and to fill the room with a sense of carnival laughter. The world is not complete and she cannot bear to play "little one" (The Diviners 256) to Brooke's stifling/trifling needs any longer for Morag wants to shed herself of Brooke and re-enter the free and familiar world of the carnivalesque:

Little one. Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old, and I am five feet eight inches tall, which has always seemed too bloody christly tall to me but there it is, and by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land, I am stuck with it and I do not mind...for I've gone against it long enough, and I'm not an actress at heart, then, and that's the everlasting christly truth of it. (The

Diviners 256)

Brooke Skelton is not a part of the carnivalesque and Morag cannot survive within his world of false hierarchies.

Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre are drawn together in the carnivalesque. As children they are both outsiders in the hierarchy of Manawaka, Morag because she is orphaned and forced to live with the Logans, and Jules because he is Metis and the subject of scorn and ridicule from those in the official life of the town. They are drawn together through private pain into the carnivalesque, for:

....Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of inter-relationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life. The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all the hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life... (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123)

Jules and Morag can engage in a free and familiar relationship that is beyond the hierarchy of a town that scorns them. Morag is eventually able to conceive the child

she so desperately wants with a man who defies all the socio-hierarchical systems as he "moves through the world like a dandelion seed carried by the wind" (The Diviners 272). It seems only right that Jules should be the absent father of Morag's child.

Jules recognizes that Christie is "quite a guy" and "worth a damn sight more than a lawyer" (The Diviners 134) (a member of the official life) long before Morag recognizes Christie's true value.

Morag, because she is white, can hide in officialdom until she recognizes its shallowness, but Jules as a Metis, faces the barriers of rank and position at a very early age:

... I got some fancy notion I'd like to be a lawyer, see, on account of if you've always been screwed by people it seemed a good idea to do some of the damage yourself for a change. Right? So I asked old Simon how a guy would get to be a lawyer. He didn't actually laugh out loud....Then he tells me it's a fine thing to get an education, but a person like me might do well to set their sights a bit lower...I thought of breaking his jaw...(The Diviners 135)

At this point Jules returns to Lazarus and the free and

familiar atmosphere of the valley where he knows he will never be turned away or ridiculed.

Morag, on the other hand, takes longer to recognize her discomfort in the socio-hierarchy as she longs so desperately to appear normal, ignoring a voice that recognizes her deeper needs:

When asked to dance, Morag does not know how to flirt. How do girls learn? Does she really want to join the circus, be a performing filly going through her prancing paces? Pride says Hell, no. Longing, on the other hand, says Try anything. (The Diviners 150)

There are passages in The Diviners that suggest Margaret Laurence is anti-Empire and anti-British Imperialism. It is this concept of Empire that supports all the false hierarchies of Manawaka and prevents an awareness of the "joyful relativity of all things" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) from prevailing in the community. Essentially, Morag recognizes this when she realizes that Christie's stories, not a town in Scotland, are her true heritage. There is also a place in the carnivalesque for the tales of Lazarus Tonnerre, since they are the heritage of Jules. In essence, the tales of both Christie Logan and Lazarus Tonnerre are essential to an understanding of Bakhtin's grotesque realism as a force at

work within the structure of The Diviners. Essential to the concept of grotesque realism is an awareness of the process of degradation which brings everything down to earth and thus renders all as flesh and blood. An understanding of Christie, Lazarus, Morag, and Jules as true "diviners" is an intricate part of this elemental design.

Christie, as carnival clown, brings life to the material level and renders it accessible to ambivalent carnival laughter, which also "degrades and materializes" (Rabelais and His World 20) for the Nuisance Grounds, as part of our earth has its cosmic aspect:

..... Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breast). Degradation means coming down to earth....To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (Rabelais and His World 21)

Christie's "uncrowning" or death occurs amidst the joyful

relativity of death and life. He dies comforted with the knowledge that he is loved by Morag. Morag understands that Christie is dying with "eyes (that) are filled with such pain and such knowing that Morag can scarcely endure the sight of them" (The Diviners 394). Morag recognizes the ambivalent carnival laughter: " He has regained himself and is peering at her from his shroud of hospital linen, his eyes mocking and shrewd, his mouth in a soundless laugh" (The Diviners 395). They are both blessed, for they both recognize a diviner as one who is flesh and blood seeing beyond the false hierarchies and into the complexities of carnival laughter in which we are all incomplete and part of the regenerative process in "this vale of tears" (The Diviners 98).

Morag's release into the carnivalesque is complete with Christie Logan's funeral. Here she recognizes the value of all she has carried in memory for years and she is finally free to tell her tale of The Diviners and to accept the ambivalent carnival spirit of life. The metamorphosis is complete, for Christie, in the throes of death, has passed the gift to Morag. She and Jules in turn have passed the gift to Pique through their tales and songs as the grotesque concept of the body triumphs:

....the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world...it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits....This is the

ever unfinished, ever creating body...It is cosmic.

(Rabelais and His World 26, 27)

One can never leave this earth with all the threads neatly tied up. The Diviners, like our world, is ambivalent and incomplete. It is an affirmation of the "joyful relativity of all things" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123).

5

Bakhtin states that "this carnival sense of the world possesses a mighty life - creating and transforming power, and indestructible vitality" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 107). The three novels of Margaret Laurence contain "this carnival sense of the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 107). The vitality of her work is paramount in any critical approach and it is particularly apparent in a Bakhtinian analysis of the carnivalesque. The carnival rituals of carnival laughter, grotesque realism, crowning/decrowning are part of the carnivalization of literature discussed by Bakhtin.

Carnival laughter dominates all the rituals of the carnivalesque and is manifest in the essential principles of what Bakhtin believes comprises the genre of the novel. One

need not stretch Bakhtin's concept of the development of the novel far to find Margaret Laurence's work to be rooted in the carnivalistic:

....the deliberate multi-styled and hetero-voiced nature of all these genres. They reject the stylistic unity...Characteristic of these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres - letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; in some of them we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons...are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 106)

Margaret Laurence's vision of the world encompasses the transcendent power of carnival laughter. Carnival laughter mocks the official culture and all of mankind's claims to an eternity and certainty to which the official life of Manawaka, as a microcosm of officialdom, adheres. Bakhtin's theories, like Margaret Laurence's novels "project a vision which is also a faith and guiding assumption": (Bakhtin Essays and Dialogues On His Work xii)

....nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the

world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 166)

Rachel, Hagar, and Morag journey separately into a knowledge of the "great perhaps" ("Je m'en vais chercher un grand peut-être"....Rabelais alleged last words) where there is no finality and the potential for surprise, and thus freedom, is ever-present.

In A Jest of God Rachel Cameron finally rejects the stifling official life in which she has lived for thirty-four years and enters into a life of uncertainties: the carnivalesque. Rachel finally recognizes that "we will just have to take the risk" (A Jest of God 169). Ironically, her life was always filled with risks and fears that she attempted to repress within her official life. Ambivalent carnival laughter permeates the closing chapter of A Jest of God. Carnival laughter recognizes the jesting nature of God. This realization enables Rachel to shift the burden of responsibility for her mother's eternal welfare. It is also part of that ambivalent carnival laughter that it is both liberating and regenerating:

....I really wonder now why I have been so ruthlessly careful of her, as though to preserve her

throughout eternity, a dried flower under glass. It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive. There is, suddenly, some enormous relief in this realization. (A Jest of God 169)

Rachel's authority base has shifted and this shift in authority from the official to the "great perhaps" affords the uncertainties and ambiguities of life to renew Rachel's entire vision of the world. Rachel indeed "communes in the carnival act" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122) as she shares the news of uncertainties of life with her frightened mother, the "elderly child" (A Jest of God 174):

Rachel, you're talking so peculiarly. Doctor Raven has been my doctor for goodness knows how long. If he doesn't know what's what, dear, who does, I ask?...I don't know. I've no idea. God, for all I know, Is it some partial triumph, that I can bring myself finally to say this, or is it only the last defeat?

...God? she shrills, as though I had voiced something unspeakable. (A Jest of God 170)

Rachel Cameron has come down to earth and the ambivalent carnival laughter has broken all the false hierarchies that

prevented Rachel from rejoicing in the "joyful relativity of all things" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123):

I do not know how many bones need be broken before I can walk. And I do not know, either, how many need not have been broken at all. Make me to hear- How does it go?...the psalms. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. (A Jest of God 174)

Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel "...always, always, ...have wanted that- simply to rejoice" (The Stone Angel 261) and her false pride and false hierarchies have prevented her from rejoicing until the last days of her life. Through her impending death Hagar is brought down to earth, or degraded in the carnival sense of grotesque realism. The ambivalent carnival laughter is also a laughter that degrades and materializes the flesh while at the same time acknowledging the regenerative aspect of impending death:

Heaving, I pull myself up. As I slide my legs out of bed, one foot cramps and I'm helpless for a second. I grasp the bed, put my toes on the icy floor, work the cramp out, and then I'm standing, the weight of my flesh heavy and ponderous, my hair undone now and slithering lengthily around my bare and chilly shoulders, like snakes on a Gorgon's

head. My satin nightgown, rumpled and twisted, hampers and hobbles me. I seem to be rather shaky. The idiotic quivering of my flesh won't stop. My separate muscles prance and jerk. I'm cold... I shuffle slowly, thinking how peculiar it is to walk like this, not to be able to command my legs to pace and stride. (The Stone Angel 269)

Hagar wrestles with the uncertainties of life/death in her last hours and her last images are regenerative and mock the power of death to silence her forever. In the carnivalesque Hagar need not fear death because there is no death in the carnival world or in grotesque realism. Hagar's body is undergoing transformation:

When my second son was born, he found it difficult to breathe at first. ...He couldn't have known before or suspected at all that breathing would be what was done by creatures here. Perhaps the same occurs elsewhere, an element so unknown you'd never suspect it at all, until- Wishful thinking. If it happened that way, I'd pass out with amazement. Can angels faint? Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father - no. I want no part of that. All I can think is - Bless me or not, Lord, just as you please, for I'll not beg. (The Stone Angel 274)

Hagar accepts the "joyful relativity of all things" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) as she dies, holding firmly to the glass with both hands, her link with the cosmos complete and the fate of her immortal soul uncertain.

Morag Gunn, as the creator in The Diviners through her memories and her writing, has established a genuine type of communication that is not possible in the official life, but is only possible in the carnivalesque. It is she who recognizes Christie Logan as carnival king; laughing at all the claims of the "official" citizens of Manawaka to certainties and eternity. For Christie knows that the only certainty is that we are all "muck" (The Diviners 39) in the final arbitrary analysis of the "reverse side of the world" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 122).

Morag is liberated into the carnivalesque and into a world that embraces the elements of surprise which she recognizes as being ever present in the world of the topsyturvy. Morag embraces the world in which "...Everything is improbable. Nothing is more improbable than anything else" (The Diviners 431). One cannot ask or expect to see clearly into the essence of things unless one used "...magic tricks (that) were of a different order" (The Diviners 452). Life in the carnivalesque is of that order and it is a celebration

of the uncertainties that transcend the barriers of false hierarchies and leave Morag suspended in the "great perhaps" in which:

Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. This wasn't given to her to know. In a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of thing - that mattered. (The Diviners 452)

The carnivalesque is a celebration of the "joyful relativity of all things" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123) and this assertion is present in the three texts of Margaret Laurence; A Jest of God, The Stone Angel, and The Diviners. The echo of Bakhtin's carnival laughter is present in Margaret Laurence's texts. The Bakhtinian theory of the carnivalesque in literature attests to Margaret Laurence's affirmation that life is not a celebration of order, cleanliness, or tidiness. The carnival spirit of relativism transcends the false hierarchies that Margaret Laurence abhors and it embraces the "great perhaps" that liberates man into the carnivalesque. Laurence's vision of the world encompasses the transcendent power of carnival laughter that releases mankind into a life which is, at best, uncertain:

Carnival is the place for working out, in a

concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted from, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. The behavior, gestures and discourse of a person are freed from the non-carnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate. Eccentricity is a special category of the carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits - in concretely sensuous form - the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves. (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123)

Bakhtin and the carnivalesque enhances a reading of the work of Margaret Laurence and her cosmic vision gains another dimension. Her work, like the carnivalesque, is a celebration of life and its mysteries. Laurence shares with Bakhtin a faith in the individual who teeters on the brink of the "great perhaps" and maintains the gift of ambivalent carnival laughter.

The folk culture and the carnivalesque which is essential to Bakhtin's concept of art is paralleled in Laurence's cosmic vision. The carnival spirit is manifest in the three novels

of Laurence's Manawaka cycle. These novels also contain a knowledge crucial to the very essence of life and a profound understanding of the eternal as it is expressed in the carnivalesque:

The night river was dark and shining, and the moon traced a wavering path across it. Morag sat cross-legged on the dock, listening to the hoarse prehistoric voices of the bullfrogs. Somewhere far off, thunder. Incredibly, unreasonably, a lightening of the heart. (The Diviners 108)

The carnival is transposed into the language of the novels created by Margaret Laurence. Each novel concludes with language and a vision that points to a sense of the communal and the cosmic exclusive to the carnivalesque:

Morag walked out across the grass and looked at the river. The sun, now low, was catching the waves, sending out once more the flotilla of little lights skimming along the greenbronze surface. The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction, so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways. Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence.

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