Character or Circumstances:
A Psycho-sociological Approach to Laurence's Fiction

by

Marion Choy

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

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Marion Choy

to those who loved

to those who encouraged

to those who endured with patience

my love and gratitude always

ABSTRACT

This thesis contends that the cultural constructs of Laurence's imaginary town of Manawaka shape the lives of the characters in all of Laurence's "Manawaka" novels. The ethos of Manawaka, its codes, its values, its aspirations and its restrictions limit and define individuals. At the same time character's individual egos interact with their circumstances. The thesis will show to what extent it is character or ego which determines a protagonist's fate and to what extent the protagonist's circumstances shape her identity.

The introduction of this thesis illustrates how other critics have examined and defined Laurence's "Manawaka" novels. The first chapter defines the past as the environment in which Laurence's characters were raised, and also depicts the ethos of Manawaka. The second chapter examines the character of Hagar Currie Shipley in The Stone Angel. The third chapter examines the juxtaposition of two sisters, Rachel Cameron in A Jest of God, and Stacey MacAindra in The Fire-Dwellers. The fourth chapter examines the pioneering roots of Manawaka through the eyes of Vanessa MacLeod in A Bird in the House. The fifth chapter examines Morag Gunn in The Diviners, and shows how an understanding and acceptance of the past is achieved.

The thesis argues that though Laurence's characters are created by circumstance, they are not fatally and irrevocably bound by it. Each character has an ego, a responding self that permits her to alter

and change circumstances so that she can grow. Though the ethos of Manawaka shapes Laurences's characters and remains important to them, each character moves into new circumstances and in fact begins to alter circumstances. It is the inter-relationship of character and circumstance that drives the characters in each of Laurence's novels.

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I

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this thesis is to explore the past as the environment in which Laurence's characters were raised. The thesis will show how the cultural constructs of Laurence's imaginary town of Manawaka shape the lives of the characters in all of Laurence's "Manawaka" novels. In my analysis of the development of Laurence's characters, I hope to show that the ethos of Manawaka, its codes, its values, its aspirations and its restrictions limit and define individuals. At the same time I will examine in what ways character's individual egos interact with their circumstances. Finally, I will assess to what extent it is character or ego which determines a protagonist's fate and to what extent the protagonist's circumstances shape her identity.

Most studies of the "past" in Laurence's fiction have tended to be concerned with narrative technique or with ancestral/archetypal motifs rather than with the past as the environment in which her characters were raised. The degree of individuation and self-realization of Laurence's characters is dependent on their understanding and acceptance of their pasts. Many of Laurence's critics deal with the subject of individuation and self-realization in the Manawakan works, separately rather than conjointly. In dealing with the subjects of individuation and self-realization conjointly, one is impelled to recognize the importance that is placed on "the past" of the characters

lives. For Margaret Laurence "the past" has a (Scots-Irish) system of human values because she chose the Scottish and the Irish as the forefathers for her fictional town of Manawaka.

Judy Kearns one of Laurence's critics focuses on the novel, A Jest of God, in her article "Rachel and Social Determinism: A Feminist Reading of A Jest of God". Kearn focuses on a masculine value-system within the society rather than on the systems of convention as a whole. She too mentions the limitations that are imposed by society but the limitations she is referring to are those set by a society that upholds a masculine value-system. Kearn sees Calla instead of Nick as the catalyst that awakens Rachel to the reality of her non-progressive existence. Kearn sees Rachel as a woman trapped by the stereotypic roles that masculine conventions have created.

Angelika Maeser in her article, "Finding the Mother: The Individuation of Laurence's Heroines", comments on only four of the Manawaka novels, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers, and The Diviners. Maeser deals with the exploration through a central female protagonist of the process of individuation. Maeser's article like Kearn's article has a strong feminist accent, emphasizing the male principle and seeing Laurence's protagonists as victims of masculine conventions. Maeser focuses on society as a whole rather than on the fictional society of Manawaka as an ethos that molds the lives of the protagonists. Maeser also sees each heroine's struggle for individuation as a spiritual quest for worldly affirmation. Maeser comments on the conflict with the social conventions and the myths of the culture that the protagonist encounters in her search for individuality. How-

ever, Maeser deals with the social forms and the myths in context with the protagonist's present, rather than as a culmination of the past and the present.

Leona Gom in her article, "Laurence and the Use of Memory", criticizes Laurence's narrative technique and she shows how the use of memory enhances or deflects from the flow of the story. Gom comments on Laurence's use of past and present, but in the context of different narrative levels.

> Hagar,Rachel, Vanessa, Stacey, and Morag each are deeply defined by their Manawaka pasts, and they plunge frequently into these pasts; their memories, particularly those of Hagar, Vanessa and Morag, become as important as their presents.[1]

Gom comments on the importance of the Manawaka pasts of the protagonists. However, the "pasts" to which Gom refers are the memories of the protagonists, and not the town of Manawaka as their environmental past.

Barbara Hebner, another of Laurence's critics deals with the recurring images and themes within Laurence's works.

> Not only characters, but obsessive images familiar to Laurence's readers recur in The Diviners: the disemboweled gopher, which Stacey of The Fire-Dwellers, like Morag, saw as a child; the grotesquely fat woman imprisoned by her bulk (Hagar, of course, Buckle's mother in The Fire-Dwellers, and now Prin); the burning shack that trapped Piquette Tonnerre and her children, which Laurence has described twice before; and the greatest catastrophe Manawaka ever experienced, the departure of the Cameron Highlanders for Dieppe, mentioned in all Laurence's Canadian fiction.[2]

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1 Leona Gom, "Laurence and the Use of Memory", Canadian Literature, No.71(1976), p.48.

2 Barbara Hebner, "River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's

Hebner deals with the recurring images in Laurence's works as narrative devices that reveal the characters. As well, these recurring images serve to tie Laurence's works together. Hebner cites the first-person, present-tense narrator as Laurence's most recurring narrative device.

> Margaret Laurence has said that she would like the five Manawaka works to be read, essentially, as one work. They are all infused with movement, processes of living, adapting, aspiring, achieving, and dying. Their characters are intense and believable men and women. They are recognizable through the energy of their voices, the urgency of their dilemmas, and the sheer dynamic power of their personalities.[3]

Clara Thomas, a prominent critic of Margaret Laurence, refers to the unification of the Manawakan novels. Thomas also refers to the ethos of Manawaka, but she does not elaborate on it as a force that inhabits the protagonists' lives.

> Manawaka also possesses, implies, and constantly reveals beneath its surfaces the fourth dimension of time and the timeless, of men and women as the victims and prisoners of the institutions they have made for their own survival, and of the endless, stumbling pilgrimage of the Tribe of Man towards God.[4]

Clara Thomas criticizes each Manawakan novel separately while occasionally referring to the other works. She deals with Laurence's main themes, such as the theme of a quest, or the theme of survival. According to Clara Thomas in her article, "The Wild Garden and the Manawaka World":

Narratives", Canadian Literature, No.74(1977), p.40.

[3] Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), p.131.

[4] Ibid., p.187.

> The basic underlying theme of all Margaret Laurence's fiction, not only of the specifically Manawaka works, but of the African works as well, has been the search for home, the journey of a stranger in a strange land, the seeking of the outsider for his true place in the tribe of man. This quest has been signified overtly in the texts by the spiritual pilgrimages of her characters.[5]

Clara Thomas also reviews the narrative devices that Laurence employs in her Manawaka works. Thomas shows how Laurence utilizes different narrative techniques to expose the lives and the facets of her various characters.

Kenneth James Hughes in his article, "Politics and A Jest of God", focuses on a socio-political interpretation of A Jest of God, as opposed to a psychological approach.

> Because the dominant assumption about the nature of character in the psychological approach is that of the isolated individual in the bourgeois tradition, psychology quite naturally seems the most applicable key to understanding. But such an assumption isolates the individual, in life and in literature, from society by making society a background against which the individual acts out a personal role. In Laurence's account of her novel, society tends to be reduced to "the ancestors," ghosts of the past who haunt Rachel's mind in the present. In the case of Rachel's mother, a very real ghost of the past in the present does the haunting. A careful reading of the novel, however, does not reveal society to be retreating into the background. Rather, society keeps up on centre stage with and through the main characters, and it is this feature, what I shall call the political side of A Jest of God, that causes the work to transcend the psychological while yet taking it into account.[6]

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5 Clara Thomas, "The Wild Garden and the Manawaka World", Modern Fiction Studies, No.2(1972), p.409.

6 Kenneth James Hughes, "Politics and A Jest of God", Journal of Canadian Studies, No.3(1978), p.40.

Hughes' article takes Laurence's A Jest of God, and translates it into a real historic political context. He interprets Rachel's movement from subjugation to individuation as a political move.

> The rejection of the grand heroic and the exultation of the ordinary and everyday as heroic not only defines Canadian character but is political in its anti-imperialist opposition to hierarchy and authoritarianism and in its upholding of the values of egalitarian democracy.[7]

In his discussion on prototypes for characters, Hughes makes biblical comparisons to Laurence's characters, while keeping in focus the socio-political division of the masses. While Hughes' article is informative and strongly biased, it does not promote the purpose of this thesis. To analyse Laurence's works from a socio-psychological perspective one must keep in focus the fact that Manawaka and its inhabitants are fictional, rather than historical.

Frederick Sweet's criticism of Margaret Laurence is in the form of a summation of her works. He deals with the central themes that pervade Laurence's fiction. Sweet also comments on Laurence's use of the narrative voice and her orchestration of point of view.

> In another essay, Laurence observes that the onus for choosing what time-span should be selected and how it should be presented lies not so much on her, the author, as on the main character who is the narrative voice. Once that narrative voice has been established, the protagonist autonomously, as it were, "chooses which parts of the personal past, the family past and the ancestral past have to be revealed in order for the present to be realized and the future to happen".[8]

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[7] Ibid., p.42.

[8] Frederick Sweet, "Margaret Laurence", Profiles in Canadian Literature, Series 2 (Dundurn Press Ltd., 1980), p.50.

Although Sweet mentions each of the Manawakan works in his article "Margaret Laurence", he deals with each one separately rather than conjointly. He deals with each protagonist on a separate level, and in relation to literary devices.

II

A PROFILE OF MANAWAKA

One of Margaret Laurence's major concerns in the Manawakan novels is with the way in which the past impinges on the present and in so doing contributes to or thwarts an individual's development toward self-realization. In Margaret Laurence's Manawakan novels, the past that concerns all of her major female protagonists is the town of Manawaka itself. Manawaka is the geographical and cultural nexus from which Margaret Laurence's Manawaka protagonists emerge. The ethos of the town of Manawaka pervades the lives of its inhabitants.

One must distinguish between fictional reality and the verbal reality of the town of Manawaka. Margaret Laurence constructs the town of Manawaka within her imagination and bestows upon it a verbal reality. Manawaka, therefore, does exist, but its existence is dependent upon the reader. Only through the reader's acceptance of the town can it assume an existence of its own. Margaret Laurence's construction and structuralization of the town of Manawaka is a continually nurturing process that is developed throughout her five Manawakan novels. Within the confines of the text, Manawaka progresses from a simple pioneering town with its one main street into a rural metropolis.

Margaret Laurence first introduced the town of Manawaka in her novel, The Stone Angel. As is revealed by Hagar Shipley, the primary female protagonist in The Stone Angel, Manawaka was initially a pioneering town founded by its Scots Presbyterian fore-fathers.

> How bitterly I regretted that he'd left and had sired us here, the bald-headed prairie stretching out west of us with nothing to speak of except couchgrass or clans of chittering gophers or the gray-green poplar bluffs, and the town where no more than half a dozen decent brick houses stood, the rest being shacks and shanties, shaky frame and tarpaper, short-lived in the sweltering summers and the winters that froze the wells and the blood.[9]

As created by Laurence, the town of Manawaka consisted of no more than a few brick houses and an assortment of tarpaper shacks and shanties. This however, is merely an indexical depiction of the town at the time of its origin. What are unrevealed are the cultural and the moral fibres which constitute the ethos of the town.

When the Anglo-Saxon Presbyterian pioneers staked out and branded the land upon which the town was built, they stamped upon it the code of ethics and the christian morality that constituted the backbone of their existence. Their fear of God, and their puritan beliefs in hard work and good clean living are reflected thoughout the Manawakan novels. Among the characters created by Laurence to populate the Manawakan novels, the two most prominent protagonists embued with the ethos of the town are the strong-willed figure of Jason Currie, Hagar's father in The Stone Angel, and the equally determined figure of Timothy Connor, Vanessa MacLeod's grandfather, in A Bird in the House. These two men extol the virtues and the rewards of their beliefs and use their respective successes within the community as examples to reinforce their viewpoints.

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[9] Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), pp.15-16.

(All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text).

What Margaret Laurence has created in her Manawakan novels is a town of constructs. The social conventions of the town of Manawaka are best described in Clara Thomas's description of a town as a "tribe". Thomas, in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence says:

> The town was our tribe - not, primarily, a network of kinship and family, but a powerful structure of hierarchical social relationships. The fact that everyone knew all about everyone else provided the frame-work of common knowledge, common interest, and gossip that held the town together. Talk, resented or enjoyed, malicious or concerned, both feared and welcomed, was the strong human communication - fabric of the town and was often stronger than the individual's communication lines through love or duty, trust, or even hate.[10]

In her first Manawakan novel, The Stone Angel Margaret Laurence focuses the reader's attention on the social hierarchy of Manawaka. Hagar Currie Shipley, the primary female protagonist in The Stone Angel, is indoctrinated early into her position in society. Her father, Jason Currie, is a wealthy enough man to allow his children to hold parties.

> When we were in our teens, Father used to let us have parties sometimes. He went over the list of intended guests and crossed off those he thought unsuitable. Among those of my age, Charlotte Tappen was always asked - that went without saying. Telford Simmons was allowed, but only just. Henry Pearl was an awkward one - his people were decent but being farmers they wouldn't have the proper clothes, Father decided, so it would only embarrass them for us to send an invitation, Lottie Drieser was never invited to our parties, but when she'd grown a doll-like prettiness and a bosom, Dan sneaked her in once and Father raised cain about it. Dan was fond of clothes, and when we had a party he would appear in something new, the money having been finagled from Auntie Doll. (St.A. p.22)

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[10] Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), p.176.

Jason Currie's discriminatory authorization of his children's guest list is representative of the social elitism of Manawaka. The guests were either approved or rejected on the basis of their parents' positions in the town's social hierarchy. "Charlotte Tappen was always asked - that went without saying" because she is the doctor's daughter, and a doctor is essential and necessary in almost any community. The morality of the town is such that it does not allow for infractions of the mores which have been established. Lottie's mother defies the moral boundaries set by the town by conceiving and bearing Lottie out of wedlock. As a direct consequence of her mother's indiscretions, Lottie is discriminated against and ostracized by the social elite of Manawaka. Henry Pearl is excluded from the Currie's parties because he is culturally stereotyped as a poor farmer's son.

The result of social elitism and cultural stereotyping is a fear of the community's opinion. The inhabitants of Manawaka are afraid and conscious of what everyone else does say or will say about them. The moral judgement of Manawaka is illustrated in Laurence's novel, A Jest of God, when Mrs. Cameron comments on the unwed pregnancy of one of the local girls:

> 'Twins,' she says sepulchrally. 'What a heartbreak for her mother. Imagine. Twins.'
>
> I have to resist some powerful undercurrent of laughter. Twins. Twice as reprehensible as one.
>
> 'Is she going to keep them?'
>
> 'That's the awful thing,' Mother says. 'Apparently she refuses to have them put up for adoption. I can't fathom the thoughtlessness of some girls. She might consider her mother, and how it'll be for her. It was Mrs. Barnes that told me. I said to her, I thank my lucky stars I never had

a moment's worry with either of my daughters.'[11]

Margaret Laurence emphasizes the class consciousness of Manawaka's inhabitants by having Hagar descend from an upper class household into a decidedly lower class household. Hagar deviates from the constructs set by society and as a result of her impetuosity is cast out from her natural habitat into an alien one. The machinations of the social conventions allow Hagar to descend into decadence without impediment. However, when Jules Tonnerre, a Metis native of Manawaka, in The Diviners, tries to ascend the social hierarchy he is discouraged before he even begins to try.

> "Well, it was this way. 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, but he kinda covered his mouth with his hand to hide the smile. 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, and he will ask Macpherson at the BA Garage to take me on as an apprentice mechanic after Grade Eleven.[12]

Jules is discouraged in his aspirations to become a lawyer not only because of his social status but also because of the racial prejudice in Manawaka. The importance that is attributed to ancestors is

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[11] Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), p.58.

(All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text).

[12] Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), p.109.

(All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text).

emphasized over and over again in Margaret Laurence's works; but what is of even more significance in a small town such as Manawaka is the respectability of one's ancestors. Because everyone knows everything about everyone else in Manawaka, common knowledge is common gossip and is often carried on into the succeeding generation. Jules has been branded by the town with his father's and his forefathers' misdeeds. Their good deeds are seldom remembered because they are not prominent upright citizens. The prejudice in Manawaka against the Tonnerre family is the result of shared assumptions and conventions that have been generated by the elite of the town. Prejudice in Manawaka is uniform and the "no-goods" are always given credit for the worst instead of being given the benefit of the doubt. This mode is so ingrained into the society that even those who are being discriminated against come to believe it of themselves and of what is theirs. However, there are those such as Jules Tonnerre who conform to the role which the town has assigned them not through a defeated resignation but through defiance and a deep sense of anger and injustice. Because the town will not allow him to become what he wants to be, a lawyer, Jules plays the part of a no-good half-breed to the fullest to justify the town's treatment of him. If he is to be branded, then there is no escape within the town's dimensions, so he defies the town by mocking it with its expectations.

Margaret Laurence directs the reader's attention to the dichotomy of the town by emphasizing the importance of the social constructs. The very wealthy and the very poor of the town are juxtaposed. The dichotomy of the town is illustrated through economic and social

means. Nothing in the town is exempt from the manipulation of its inhabitants. Even the church is evidence of the town's more affluent members' promptings:

> I'd be about eight when the new Presbyterian Church went up. Its opening service was the first time Father let me go to church with him, instead of to Sunday School. It was plain and bare and smelled of paint and new wood, and they hadn't got the stained glass windows yet, but there were silver candlesticks at the front, each bearing a tiny plaque with Father's name, and he and several others had purchased family pews and furnished them with long cushions of brown and beige velour, so our few favored bottoms would not be bothered by hard oak and a lengthy sermon. (St.A. pp.15-16)

Not only is Manawaka's new Presbyterian church an object of economic manipulation it is also an arena for social differentiation as is illustrated in The Diviners, when Morag is recounting her experiences of attending church:

> When church is over, and they're all filing out, chattering, the Camerons and MacLeods and Duncans and Cateses and McVities and Halperns and them, no one will say Good Morning to Morag and Prin. Not on your life. Might soil their precious mouths. Maybe they're just embarrassed, like, and don't know what to say? Not a chance. They're a bunch of -- well, a bunch of so-and-so's. (Div. p.109)

The economic dichotomy of Manawaka is emphasized by the geographical division of the town by a set of railroad tracks. On the north side of the tracks, the "wrong" end of the town, are situated the shacks and shanties which Laurence initially created in The Stone Angel. On this side of the tracks, such characters as Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre in The Diviners, grow up. Because they attend the same school and the same church as the inhabitants of the south-end of town, the north-end residents are made doubly aware of their poverty and of their supposed inadequacies, as they are compared to the wealthy and the secure south-end residents.

> Hill Street was the Scots-English equivalent of The Other Side of the Tracks, the shacks and shanties at the north end of Manawaka, where the Ukrainian section-hands on the CPR lived, Hill Street was below the town; it was inhabited by those who had not and never would make good. Remittance men and their 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, washouts and general no goods, at least in the view of the town's better-off. (Div. p.28)

The south-end residents of Manawaka are socially superior to the north-end residents because of their economic status within the hierarchical constructs. Those who are able to manipulate the economic constructs are in a position to dictate constraints upon those who are less fortunate. The constraints that the town perpetuates generate a conformative attitude amongst the town's inhabitants. In an episode in her novel, A Bird in the House, Laurence demonstrates the conformative attitude of both the upper-class residents and the lower-class residents. The upper-class residents, in this case represented by Timothy Connor, assume an authoritative superiority over the lower-class residents, represented in this instance by Harvey Shinwell's aunt.

> "Well, if it ain't Mr. Connor," she said sarcastically.
> "Where's your boy, Ada?" my grandfather demanded.
> "What's he done?" she asked immediately.
> "Stole a telescope. I want it back."
> The door opened wider.
> "Come in," Harvey's aunt said.
> His aunt darted in like a giant darning needle.
> "All right, you. Where is it?"
>
> It seemed strange that she would ask him this question straight away. She never asked him whether or not he had actually taken it.[13]

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13 Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), pp.168-169.

(All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text).

Margaret Laurence introduces actual historical events that had major sociological and economical ramifications to disrupt the natural order of progression. Even though Manawaka is a fictional town, Margaret Laurence perpetuates the verbal reality of the town by meshing her characters with the conflicts that arise from real historical events such as the Depression and the World Wars. The Depression forces the inhabitants of Manawaka to take a closer look at themselves and at their neighbors. An event such as the Depression is all encompassing and forces the inhabitants of Manawaka to re-evaluate their priorities, as the rungs on the social ladder are decidedly shortened. The impact of the ramifications of the Depression are most graphically brought to the reader's attention in A Bird in the House. The World Wars affect the town collectively as well as its' occupants individually. Margaret Laurence utilizes war as an instrument to illustrate mortality; regardless of the constructs, everyone in Manawaka is vulnerable to death. Natural disasters such as drought also serve as intrusive reminders of the fragility of the constructs.

III

THE STONE ANGEL

The Stone Angel, Margaret Laurence's first Manawakan novel introduces the reader to the world of Manawaka. Through this novel the reader gains an insight into the ethos of the town of Manawaka.

Margaret Laurence's first Manawakan protagonist is Hagar Currie Shipley, an embittered frightened old woman. Hagar is bitter about her past and frightened by the present because the present holds so many unknowns for her. Margaret Laurence leads her protagonist, Hagar, on a soul-searching journey into the shadows of her past. Before Hagar can travel the last stage of her journey through life, she must come to terms with what her life has been and how she can reconcile the ghosts of her past. She must resolve her past.

Hagar is the daughter of Jason Currie, owner of "the second brick house to be built in Manawaka". (p.6) As a child Hagar's position in the town is defined by her father's position. Her behavior is modulated by the position that she holds in society and in the naive younger days of her youth she acts accordingly:

> 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. (St.A. p.6)

Hagar's self is identified by her relationship to her father. She is Hagar Currie, Jason Currie's daughter. Hagar's self is manipulated and modulated by the constructs of the town of Manawaka.

> And as it is displaced from its function as centre or source, the self comes to appear more and more as a construct, the result of systems of convention. The discourse of a culture sets limits to the self; the idea of personal identity appears in social context the 'I' is not given but comes to exist, in a mirror stage which starts in infancy, as that which is seen and addressed by others.[14]

Hagar's self or in Freudian terminology, her ego, is 'displaced from its function as centre or source' by her environment. According to Ilham Dilman, the environment or:

> influence of the external world' is meant to comprise the young child's contact and interaction with his parents and later other people in contexts provided by the culture of the society in which he grows up. It is through such contact and interaction that he acquires speech, thought, the capacity for intentional action, self-consciousness, self-control, and everything else that goes to make him an individual person.[15]

Hagar becomes the product of the systems of convention which comprise the town of Manawaka. Margaret Laurence emphasizes the reality of her fictional town, Manawaka, by orchestrating the social contexts that comprise the systems of convention throughout the Manawakan novels.

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[14] Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.29.

[15] Ilham Dilman, Freud and the Mind (Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1984), pp.101-102.

Hagar's social position is defined not only by her family's background but also by those with whom she associates. Hagar's best friend is Charlotte Tappen the daughter of the town's doctor, another prominent Manawakan family.

> Quite a number of us started school that year. Charlotte Tappen was the doctor's daughter, and she had chestnut hair and was allowed to wear it loose, with a green bow, when Auntie Doll was still putting mine in braids. Charlotte and I were best friends, and used to walk to school together, and wonder what it would be like to be Lottie Drieser and not know where your father had got to, or even who he'd been. (St.A. p.10)

Hagar's and Charlotte's speculations on the whereabouts of Lottie's father is a reflection of the gossip which they have heard their elders discussing. Ironically Hagar's and Lottie's social status will be reversed when they are older and married. Their reversal of social positions within the town is a graphic illustration of the rewards and the punishments that are available within the social constructs of the town. Hagar's and Lottie's societal positions are dictated by the social constructs of the town. They do not possess their own identities; rather, they are mirror images of those who have nurtured them. With mirror images, when one steps away from the source the image fades and disappears. This concept is analogous to what happens to Hagar when she moves away from her original source of "self". Hagar loses her identity and dons another persona that is more harmonious with her existing environment.

> The ego, then, has the capacity to reflect, evaluate and revaluate, the demands that are made on it by the id, the super- ego, and the environment - circumstances, social conventions, other people. It can face these demands from a position of strength or from a position of weakness. In each case there are two alternatives open to it. From a postion of strength it can endorse or repudiate such a demand. When it endorses it, it acts on its own behalf. When it repudiates it, it does so on the basis of values or long-

> term goals which it has made its own. From a position of weakness it complies with such a demand in a placatory way or hides from it - by resorting to repression or reaction-formation.[16]

When Hagar is displaced from her father's home and cast into the role of Brampton Shipley's wife, her self, or her ego, revaluates its environment. The development of the self is a gradual and on-going process. Hagar's self must also deal with and accomodate the different social conventions which accompany her new social status as Mrs. Brampton Shipley.

> "I'll try to get in," I said guardedly, for something had changed between us, and I was not certain why. Perhaps Charlotte and her mother had repented giving me my wedding reception and had decided to accept my father's assessment of Bram after all. Or perhaps, from what they'd seen of Bram, they'd not been impressed. I found myself nervous, all at once, with the girl who'd been my best friend, or so I thought, all my life. (St.A. p.70)

In the transition from one social level to another, Hagar's self is besieged by demands which she handles both strongly and weakly. Initially, Hagar's position is one of strength as she endorses her action of marrying Bram. Ultimately, however, Hagar's self reclaims basic values which she learned from her father when she was a child.

As Jason Currie's daughter, Hagar had been cocooned from the harsher realities of life and had always been well provided for. As the wife of Brampton Shipley, Hagar was thrust into a world that was alien to her. Just as her father's society had previously formed her, so her husband's society has formed Hagar.

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[16] Ibid., p.113.

"Hello, John," she said. She turned and screeched "Mother! The egg woman's here!"

I went in and found what I needed, a mirror. I stood for a long time, looking, wondering how a person could change so much and never see it. So gradually it happens.

I was wearing, I saw, a man's black overcoat that Marvin had left. It was too big for John and impossibly small for Bram. It still had a lot of wear left in it, so I'd taken it. The coat bunched and pulled up in front, for I'd put weight on my hips, and my stomach had never gone flat again after John was born. Twined around my neck was a knitted scarf, hairy and navy blue, that Bram's daughter Gladys had given me one Christmas. On my head a brown tam was pulled down to keep my ears warm. My hair was gray and straight. I always cut it myself. The face - a brown and leathery face that wasn't mine. Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant. (St.A. pp.132-133)

Hagar is mortified by the image that the mirror presents to her. Cast into a semi-seclusion on the Shipley farm, playing the role of wife and mother, she has lost sight of the social graces that had been so much a part of her life before her marriage. Hagar is shocked into realization of how far she had descended in the social ladder. As a result, Hagar attempts to flee the life that has dragged her down. In her naivety, Hagar believes that she can sever the ties that bind her to Manawaka by moving to another place:

To move to a new place - that's the greatest excitement. For a while you believe you carry nothing with you - all is cancelled from before, or cauterized, and you begin again and nothing will go wrong this time. (St.A. p.155)

By moving to Vancouver, a new environment, Hagar hopes to purge herself of the environment of the Shipley farm and also of the stigma which the upright citizens of Manawaka have placed upon her because of her association with the Shipley farm. What Hagar does not realize is that the values that she enforces in her life in Vancouver are merely

a resurfacing of the values that were taught to her when she was a child. She did not lose the values which were so much a part of her. She merely lost sight of them when she was submerged in the decadence which Bram created for her. Removed from the stifling atmosphere of the Shipley farm, Hagar regains the pride that she has as Jason Currie's daughter. Ironically, Hagar finds herself teaching her son, John, the same principles that her father has taught her. She tries to instill into John a sense of pride through describing her ancestors and their industriousness to him.

> "Not everyone can start with money. Many a man's pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, as your grandfather Currie did. And you will, too. I know it. You'll do well, just you wait and see. You've got his gumption. We'll have a house finer than this, one day." (St.A. p.157)

The qualities which are instilled in Hagar as a child, and which she tries to instil in John are those qualities of pride, industriousness, responsibility and endurance. These qualities are synonymous to those which form the moral fibre of the town of Manawaka. It is significant that Bram is not associated with any of these qualities and that no mention is made throughout the novel of his ancestors. There is a sense of impermanence and inconstancy that cloaks Bram.

> One morning we found him dead. He'd died in the night, with no fuss and no one beside him. At the time, I thought it mattered that someone should be there, and reproached myself that I hadn't wakened. I know better now. In death, he didn't resemble Brampton Shipley in the slightest. He looked like the cadaver of an old unknown man, and that was all. (St.A. p.183)

The environment which Bram creates for himself is an unhealthy one that permeates everything around him. Bram's lack of good management is reflected in all of his endeavors, whether it is his horse

raising scheme or his honey-bee farm. His initial enthusiasm always waned after the newness of the adventure wore off. Bram's failure and lack of responsibility towards his family and towards his farm serves as the perfect foil to Hagar's strong-willed determinism. Bram is a figure of disorder and chaos, Hagar a figure of pattern and order. Margaret Laurence manipulates both Bram and Hagar to illustrate how a person's upbringing can effect one in one's later years.

> "You'll never get anywhere in this world unless you work harder than others, I'm here to tell you that. Nobody's going to hand you anything on a silver platter. It's up to you, nobody else. You've got to have stick-to-itiveness if you want to get ahead. You've got to use a little elbow grease."
>
> I tried to shut my ears to it, and thought I had, yet years later, when I was rearing my two boys, I found myself saying the same words to them. (St.A. p.13)

Hagar's primary battle in obtaining absolution for herself is in accepting and in acknowledging her pride.

> Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years. (St.A. p.292)

Hagar must learn to reconcile with the truth and the reality of her past. She must learn to accept the fact that she is more like her father than she wants to believe she is. She must forgive herself for her youthful folly of marrying Brampton Shipley and also for never really seeing Marvin for what he is, the son which she has always wanted. However, Hagar's pride plus her past mistakes inhibit her from reaching out to Marvin.

> I wanted to ask him, then, where he had walked in those days, and what he had been forced to look upon. I wanted to tell him I'd sit quietly and listen. But I couldn't very

well, not at that late date. He wouldn't have said, anyway. It seemed to me that Marvin was the unknown soldier, the one whose name you never knew. (St.A. pp.181-182)

Unfortunately Hagar does not realize Marvin's true worth until it is almost too late and even then she cannot accept the truth of reality.

> And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him.
>
> It's in my mind to ask his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me.
>
> "You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John."
>
> The dead don't bear a grudge nor seek a blessing. The dead don't rest uneasy. Only the living. Marvin, looking at me from anxious elderly eyes, believes me. It doesn't occur to him that a person in my place would ever lie. (St.A. p.304)

Restraint, a quality which Hagar learned from her father becomes a major obstacle between Hagar and those whom she loves. Hagar belatedly realizes that she has never really had her own identity. Throughout her life Hagar has been ruled by the constraints and the moral and social mores of the town of Manawaka. The chains which fettered Hagar in childhood and adolescence remain with her throughout adulthood and old age.

> I lie here and try to recall something truly free that I've done in ninety years. I can think of only two acts that might be so, both recent. One was a joke - yet a joke only as all victories are, the paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach. The other was a lie - yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love. (St.A. p.307)

Hagar must redeem and forgive herself for her pride. Through her introspective journey into her past, Hagar learns to accept her pride. However, she cannot make peace with herself and it is this aspect which embitters her and creates her "wilderness".

IV

A JEST OF GOD AND THE FIRE-DWELLERS

In her two novels, The Fire-Dwellers, and A Jest of God, Margaret Laurence introduces two more female protagonists born and bred in Manawaka. These two protagonists, Stacey MacAindra and Rachel Cameron are unique in the Manawakan series, as they are sisters.

In The Stone Angel, Manawaka was represented as a small pioneering town. In A Jest of God, and The Fire-Dwellers, Manawaka is represented as a rural metropolis. Although Margaret Laurence allows the town of Manawaka to grow and to progress, she retains the original ethos of the town. The societal ladder and the moral constructs that were so prevalent in The Stone Angel, are also noticeably evident in A Jest of God, and The Fire-Dwellers.

Although Rachel and Stacey's stories are not the same, they are rooted in the same fears and insecurities that were generated in their youth in their home town of Manawaka. The main difference between the two sisters is that Stacey is married, has four children, and has moved away from Manawaka to the city of Vancouver. Rachel, meanwhile, lives a spinster's existence in Manawaka with their mother, Mrs. Cameron. Both sisters have their separate inner fears and both sisters have assumed roles that they have been familiarized with since childhood: the role of mother and housewife and the role of schoolteacher.

John Moss in Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present, says of Rachel:

> She has been cast into these and other stereotypes partly through her own doing and partly because she has been pushed by the myriad hands of an aggressively insensible society. They provide role-masks in which the world sees her and in which she so often sees herself.[17]

Rachel's fears and insecurities are the result of surrendering to the systems of convention.

> But once the conscious subject is deprived of its role as source of meaning - once meaning is explained in terms of conventional systems which may escape the grasp of the conscious subject - the self can no longer be identified with consciousness. It is 'dissolved' as its functions are taken up by a variety of interpersonal systems that operate through it.[18]

According to John Moss and Jonathan Culler, Rachel's self becomes defined by the role-masks which the town assigns to her. The constructs of the town are such that Rachel is thoroughly entrenched in her role as schoolteacher. Her mother's friends see her in relation to her job and even those students who have long since passed through her classroom continue to relate to her as Miss Cameron, schoolteacher.

Rachel is envious of her sister Stacey, who occupies the role of housewife and mother, and whom Rachel believes is happy with her life. Rachel envies Stacey her children, yet in a sense Rachel too has her

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17 John Moss, Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel The Ancestral Present (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1977), p.72.

18 Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.29.

own brood of children in the children who populate her classroom. However, Stacey's children are of her own flesh and she is free to love them openly while Rachel cannot for fear of alienating them. As well, her "children" are transient, coming and going with the school years.

> 'Maybe it doesn't affect you. Your classes are older, and when they move on, they soon move right away and you don't see them any more. But mine are only seven, and I see them around for years after they've left me, but I don't have anything to do with them. There's nothing lasting. They move on, and that's that. It's such a brief thing. I know them only for a year, and then I see them changing but I don't know them any more.' (J.of G. pp.107-108)

Rachel's frustrated maternal longings are intensified whenever she develops a particular fondness for a specific student. However, Rachel's "children" have already defined her as schoolteacher. Immersed in the primary role which the systems of convention have assigned to her, Rachel is unable to recognize the fact that she does have a "child" to look after. With the progression of years, Mrs. Cameron has become Rachel's "elderly child". It is ironic that Rachel can recognize that mothers such as her sister, Stacey, and Grace Doherty draw strength and a sense of security from their children and yet she is unable to perceive that same quality in her own mother, Mrs. Cameron. Not until the end of the novel does Rachel realize that she has become her mother's keeper. Rachel's own insecurities blind her to the fact that her mother draws strength from Rachel herself.

> Her voice is filled with capability. She gains strength from his presence. This is what happens. I've seen it with my sister. They think they are making a shelter for their children, but actually it is the children who are making a shelter for them. They don't know. (J.of G. p.50)

Laurence creates circumstances so that Rachel is conditioned into relying upon another person. Rachel gradually comes to fear being left alone should anything happen to her mother. She fears a lonely existence and yet she is also tremendously resentful that her mother treats her as if she were still a child. Rachel's fear of being left alone is an echo of her mother's identical fear. Both Rachel and Mrs. Cameron have been conditioned by the constructs to rely on one another. Rachel and Mrs. Cameron have become dependent upon one another through the roles which the town defines them by. In the fictional town of Manawaka, the family unit is strongly emphasized and family ties are all-important. Both Mrs. Cameron and Rachel are locked by the inhibiting power of the town's constraints.

> How strange it is that I do not even know how old she is. She's never told me, and I'm not supposed to ask. In the world she inhabits, age is still as unmentionable as death. Am I as far away as that, from the children who aren't mine? She's in her seventies, I can guess with reasonable accuracy, as she bore me late, but the exact positioning is her wealth, a kept secret. And it matters. It means something. Does she think someone cares whether she's sixty or ninety?
>
> She doesn't have much to interest her these days. She never reads a book and can't bear music. Her life is very restricted now. It always was, though. It's never been any different. Just this house and her dwindling circle of friends. She and Dad had given up conversing long ago, by the time I was born. (J.of G. pp.15-16)

Rachel realizes and is aware of the facade that her mother creates for society, yet she does not condemn her for it because the constructs of the society that they live in are responsible for Mrs. Cameron's behaviour. However, what Rachel does not realize is that she herself is following in her mother's footsteps.

> They are not actually chanting my name, of course. I only hear it that way from where I am watching at the classroom

> window, 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 brown brick building, only a new wing added and the place smartened up. It would certainly have surprised me then to know I'd end up here, in this room, no longer the one who was scared of not pleasing, but the thin giant She behind the desk at the front, the one with the power of picking any coloured chalk out of the box and writing anything at all on the blackboard. It seemed a power worth possessing, then. (J.of G. p.1)

Laurence shows how the roles which Rachel's mother and the systems of convention have created for her have stifled her growth. Rachel has become accustomed to functioning within set limits. However, she is discontent with the pattern of her life, and yet she is too inhibited and scared to take responsibility for her own actions. Her failure to take responsibility was evidenced in her return to Manawaka after the demise of her father.

> My great mistake was in being born the younger. No. Where I went wrong was in coming back here, once I'd got away. A person has to be ruthless. One has to say I'm going, and not be prevailed upon to return.
>
> But how could I? I couldn't finish university after Dad's death. The money wasn't there. None of us ever suspected how little he had, until he died. He'd had a good business, or so we thought. Mother said, 'I hate to say it, but there's no doubt where it all went'. If she hated to say it, why did she? Then it was - 'Only for a year or so, Rachel, until we see.' See what? She couldn't be the one to move - I do see that. She'd be lost any place else. Stacey was already married, and with a child, and Mac selling encyclopaedias at the west coast. She said I must see how impossible it would be for her. Yes, I saw, I see. Seesaw. From pillar to post. What could I have done differently? (J.of G. p.12)

Rachel blames circumstances for her return to Manawaka; whereas this may be true, her failure to leave Manawaka was her own decision. Margaret Laurence manipulates Nick Kazlik as the catalyst that moti-

vates Rachel to take responsibility for her own actions. For Rachel, Nick is a symbol of freedom, not only in the present but also in the past. Because they lived on the wrong side of the tracks, Rachel used to envy the Kazliks their freedom of emotional expression:

> 'I don't know how to express it. Not so boxed-in, maybe. More outspoken. More able to speak out. More allowed to - both by your family and by yourself. Something like that. Perhaps I only imagined it. You always think things are easier somewhere else. I used to get rides in winter on your dad's sleigh, and I remember the great bellowing voice he had, and how emotional he used to get - cursing at the horses, or else almost crooning to them. In my family, you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon. (J.of G. p.88)

Rachel finally organises the priorities in her life, putting her own expectations and considerations before those that the town imposes upon her. The realization that she has been merely existing and not living her own life in Manawaka prompts Rachel into deciding to move away from the town. Rachel's new-found determination gives her the strength to face her mother's opposition to moving to Vancouver. Rachel firmly deals with her mother's pleadings and accusations, thereby reversing their roles of subservience and dominance. Rachel finally learns how to take charge of her "elderly child" and leads her towards a new life. Rachel realizes that nothing is solved by moving away and that the future is still ambiguous, but the move is symbolic of Rachel's emotional growth .

> The silence between us seems to spread like dusk. It is up to me to speak, and I have prepared some words for this, but now I am afraid to use them. Afraid of what? Not only of damaging her. Perhaps not chiefly that. Afraid, more, of the apparent callousness her ears will hear and mine can't bear to listen to or admit. Do it, Rachel. Or else quit. (J.of G. p.194)

Rachel has been awakened to the temporality of life and is no longer content to sit quietly and let it drift by her without asserting something of her self into it. Clara Thomas in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, effectively sums up Rachel's decision to move. She states that:

> Her choices are human and humanly limited, but she does have choices and she makes one of them - the decision to move. She is no longer afraid to leave Manawaka, for she is no longer dependent on her fear of the town for a kind of tortured security of identity. She is free of the geographical place, Manawaka, while still knowing and accepting that in the deepest sense the town will be with her forever, both its strengths and its constraints. These she will always carry within her to deal with as she is able.[19]

Part of Rachel's new life in Vancouver will be an extension of her life in Manawaka in that she will still take care of her mother. However, Rachel's sister Stacey will once again become an active participant in their lives.

Geographically distanced from her sister, Rachel believes that Stacey's life is well-ordered and that she is content with her roles of mother and wife. It is exactly because she becomes so immersed in her two roles, that of mother to her four children and wife to her husband, that Stacey becomes so discontent with her life. In her novel, The Fire-Dwellers, Margaret Laurence reveals to the reader the extent of Stacey's discontent; a discontent that stemmed from her life in Manawaka.

> Stacey Cameron, nearly nineteen, expert typist, having shaken the dust of Manawaka off herself at last. Stacey, five foot three, breasts like apples as it says in the Song of

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[19] Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), p.87.

> Solomon. Stacey in scarlet dressmaker suit, fussy lace blouse. Good-bye, beloved family. Good-bye to the town undertaker, her father, capable only of dressing the dead in between bouts with his own special embalming fluid. (Dad? I'm sorry. But I had to go.) Good-bye to her long-suffering mother. (Now I'm not sure any longer what lay behind your whining eyes.) Good-bye to Stacey's sister, always so clever. (When I think you're still there, I can't bear it.) Good-bye, prairies.[20]

Stacey MacAindra is Laurence's first protagonist whose detailed description of the present reveals how her past has affected her present. In his interpretations of Freud in Freud and the Mind, Ilham Dilman states:

> There are many different ways in which what a person came into contact with and lived through in the past makes a difference to the way he develops and influences what he becomes in the future. There are also different senses in which a person may be said to be the same as he was before. Whether what he meets in his childhood contributes to his development or arrests it, it will have influenced what becomes of the child in the future.[21]

Stacey cannot leave behind her the knowledge of her origin. She is conscious of being a small-town girl in a big city, and is paranoid at being labelled as such by the city residents. However, even after Stacey is married and has lived in the city for many years she still does not feel as though she belongs. She does not feel truly comfortable living in the city. Its anonymity frightens her. But just as the city frightens her, she also cannot tolerate the systems of con-

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[20] Margaret Laurence. The Fire-Dwellers (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973), p.8.

(All subsequent quotations will be identified in the text).

[21] Ilham Dilman, Freud and the Mind (Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1984), p.27.

vention which make up the town of Manawaka.

Laurence depicts Stacey as a naive and impetuous young adult who believes that she is leaving the town behind her. Laurence shows how the systems of convention have remained with Stacey by allowing her to step into the very roles which she thought she was escaping from.

> Oh, I been working for these importers, but my boss makes horoscopes for people. I think it's some kind of a racket - think I oughta quit? Stacey went home for supper with Julie, to talk it over, and one of Buckle's friends was there, Clifford MacAindra. Six months later she thought how fortunate, to have her whole life settled once and for all, so ideally, at twenty-three. (F.D. p.54)

Stacey's marriage to Clifford MacAindra catapults her into the very stereotypic roles that her mother personified in Manawaka, and from which Stacey has been trying to escape. Thus, Stacey comes to assume the same role as Mrs. Cameron, that of housewife and mother. Although Stacey's roles as wife and mother consume her energy and her time, she is not completely satisfied or fulfilled by these roles. Stacey is frustrated in her maternal role as she tries to be more understanding than her own mother is; and yet she discovers parallels in the way that she herself was brought up and the way that she is bringing up her own children.

Stacey's responsibilities with her own children allow her to understand her own mother better. Manawaka and its inhabitants, including her own family are incomprehensible to Stacey because she never really tries to understand them; she is concerned only with trying to escape. Ironically, not only does the town inhabit Stacey's thoughts and her memories but it also moves with her to Vancouver in the form

of various people who she knew in Manawaka. Not only do Rachel and Mrs. Cameron move to Vancouver, but Stacey also encounters Julie Kazlik, Vernon Winkler alias Thor Thorlakson, and Valentine Tonnerre.

Stacey's pressures all originate in Manawaka in the girl who was Stacey Cameron. She has been longing for too many things in her past which she cannot change. With the full realization and acceptance of what her life has been and of which direction she is headed, Stacey can understand her own children better.

> I was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. It's the world. The truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I'll always be her, because that's how I started out. But from now on, the dancing goes on only in the head. Anything else, and it's an insult to Katie, whether or not she witnesses the performance. Well, in the head isn't such a terrible place to dance. The settings are magnificent there, anyhow. I did dance at one time, when I could. It would be a lot worse if I never had. Funny - I recall one of my mother's bridge cronies in Manawaka, and everytime she came over, she'd ask my mother to put on a record, and Mother would play the old-time one with a polka on one side and a schottische on the other, and the old dame would sit there as though under heavy sedation. Maybe she was dancing in her head. (F.D. p.303)

Laurence shows how Stacey must accept her past before she can look with conviction towards the future. Stacey's realization of her self-imposed displacement from her natural habitat, which was the town of Manawaka enables her to readjust to her adopted habitat, the city of Vancouver. At the end of the novel, The Fire-Dwellers, Stacey has learned to accept her responsibilities towards herself, her family and towards Rachel and their mother.

> Yes. I know. But the fact remains that Rachel has had her all alone all these years. We can have them over for Sunday dinners, I guess, and pray it won't be much more than that. (F.D. p.303)

V

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

In her novel, A Bird in the House, Margaret Laurence gives a different perspective of Manawaka from the perspective offered in The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, or The Fire-Dwellers. Through the protagonist Vanessa MacLeod's eyes, the reader is given a deeper insight to the pioneering roots of Manawaka, for Vanessa's Grandfather Connor was one of Manawaka's first pioneers.

> With Grandfather safely occupied, one danger for me was temporarily over, for if he could think of nothing else to do, he would sit me down on a footstool beside his chair and make me listen, fidgeting with boredom, while he talked of the past. To me there was nothing at all remarkable in the fact that he had come out west by sternwheeler and had walked the hundred-odd miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka. Unfortunately, he had not met up with any slit-eyed and treacherous Indians or any mad trappers, but only with ordinary farmers who had given him work shoeing their horses, for he was a blacksmith. He had been the first blacksmith in Manawaka, and finally had saved enough money to set himself up in the hardware business. He frequently related the epic of that significant day. (B.H. pp.9-10)

Inherent in Vanessa's story is the importance of the family unit in a small town such as Manawaka. In A Bird in the House, Laurence describes Vanessa's close and continuing interaction with her grandparents. This allows her to develop a story with a different dimension from Hagar's, Rachel's or Stacey's stories. Their stories were focused primarily on the protagonists themselves. Vanessa's story reveals the thoughts and emotions of her family as well.

Although in reality A Bird in the House, is a collection of short stories, for the purpose of the argument of the thesis, it shall be viewed as a collective whole. Through her protagonist, Vanessa, Margaret Laurence reveals a child's candid interpretation of the ethos of Manawaka. Grandfather Connor with his authoritarian manner and his staunch belief in hard work, epitomizes the ethos of the town. He is quick to judge those who do not conform to the constructs and is unbending in his judgements:

> Grandfather did not believe, either, in smoking, drinking, card-playing, dancing, or tobacco-chewing. But unlike my grandmother, he did not permit any of these things in his presence. If someone coming to the Brick House for the first time chanced to light a cigarette when Grandfather was home, he gave them one chance and that was all. His warning was straightforward. He would walk to the front door, fling it open and begin coughing. He would then say, "Smoky in here, ain't it?" If this had no effect, he told the visitor to get out, and no two ways about it. (B.H. pp.18-19)

Reflected within Vanessa's interpretation of the structure and the constructs of Manawaka is the effect that these systems of convention have on Vanessa herself. Jonathan Culler in his argument on structuralism states:

> But though Structuralism may always seek the system behind the event, the constitutive conventions behind any individual act, it cannot for all that dispence with the individual subject. He may no longer be the origin of meaning, but meaning must move through him. Structures and relations are not objective properties of external objects; they emerge only in a structuring process. And though the individual may not originate or even control this process - he assimilates its rules as part of his culture - it takes place through him, and one can gain evidence about it only by considering his judgements and intuitions.[22]

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[22] Culler, p.30.

In accordance with Culler's argument, Vanessa assimilates the conventions and the rules of Manawaka. She becomes an instrument of the structuring process whereby she inherits her culture from not only her family but also from the town. Unlike Margaret Laurence's other protagonists Vanessa, was never confused or in doubt as to her ancestry and her roots. Because she grew up in the presence of her grandparents, Vanessa not only knew her ancestry but was constantly reminded of it. Vanessa had always been at variance with her Grandfather Connor, and yet he proclaimed himself in her veins.

> "You know quite well what I mean," Aunt Edna replied. "Not one of us could go any other way. And what's more, for all you're always saying Vanessa takes after Ewen, you know who she really takes after." (B.H. p.36)

It appalled Vanessa when she caught echoes of her grandfather in her own speech. Yet she did not always think of her grandfather in that vein, for she once thought of him as a giant of a man:

> I remembered riding in the MacLaughlin-Buick with my grandfather. It was a memory with nothing around it, an unplaced memory without geography or time. I must have been exceedingly young, four at most. I was sitting small and low on the front seat, hardly high enough to see out through the windscreen. My grandfather was sitting straight and haughty behind the steering wheel. And the car was flying, flying, flying, through the wide-spread streets of that enormous town, and its horn was bannering our presence as we conquered. A-hoo-gah! A-hoo-gah! I was gazing with love and glory at my giant grandfather as he drove his valiant chariot through all the streets of this world. (B.H. pp.178-179)

For Vanessa, the MacLaughlin-Buick along with the brick house became part of the culture that her Grandfather Connor represented. The car and the house were his rewards for his hard work and industry, and through trying to understand what the car and the house represented

for her grandfather, Vanessa comes to a greater understanding of her grandfather.

> I wondered what the car might have meant to him, to the boy who walked the hundred miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka with hardly a cent in his pockets. The memory of a memory returned to me now. I remembered myself remembering driving in it with him, in the ancient days when he seemed as large and admirable as God. (B.H. p.206)

Vanessa's conception of her grandfather has been partially shaped and influenced by her Aunt Edna. Vanessa's defiance of her Grandfather Connor is an echo of her Aunt Edna's. Both Vanessa and her aunt rebel against Grandfather Connor's authoritative ways:

> "I don't know why you waste your time on that rubbish, Edna," he would say, for the only music he considered worthy of the name were hymn tunes and "God Save the King."
>
> She would ignore him and keep on playing. He would sink heavily into his oak chair.
>
> "A man can't hear hisself think," he would announce.
>
> No response. She would begin pounding out "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate."
>
> "Edna, cut it out this second before I lose my patience!"
>
> Only then would my aunt stop. She would wink at me, maybe even laugh, but she would stop.
>
> "Lose his patience indeed," she would mutter as we went into the kitchen. "Kindly inform me when he ever found it." (B.H. pp.180-181)

Vanessa's problem in understanding her Grandfather Connor is not that she did not know of her heritage. Rather, it is that she did not comprehend it. Grandfather Connor's funeral is the first funeral that Vanessa has ever attended. Awakened by the stark reality of the event, Vanessa is surprised at the minister's recounting of her grandfather's life, details with which she is familiar and yet unfamiliar. She has feared and fought her grandfather for so long that she did not fully comprehend or appreciate the man that he was.

> What funeral could my grandfather have been given except the one he got? The sombre hymns were sung, and he was sent to his Maker by the United Church minister, who spoke, as expected, of the fact that Timothy Connor had been one of Manawaka's pioneers. He had come from Ontario to Manitoba by Red River steamer, and he had walked from Winnipeg to Manawaka, earning his way by shoeing horses. After some years as a blacksmith, he had enough money to go into the hardware business. Then he had built his house. It had been the first brick house in Manawaka. Suddenly the minister's recounting of these familiar facts struck me as though I had never heard any of it before. (B.H. p.204)

In contrast to Grandfather Connor is Vanessa's Great Uncle Dan. Vanessa likes her Great Uncle Dan because he always seems such a cheerful and care-free spirit in comparison to her Grandfather Connor's dourness.

> Uncle Dan was Grandfather's brother, but he was not upright. He had a farm in the South Wachakwa Valley, but he never planted any crops. He raised horses, and spent most of his time travelling around the country, selling them. At least, he was supposed to be selling them, but Aunt Edna said he had horsetrading in his blood and couldn't resist swapping, so he usually came back to Manawaka with the same number of horses he had started out with, only they were different horses, and no money. He had never married. I liked him only when none of my friends were around to see, however. In the presence of the other kids, he embarrassed me. He was older than Grandfather, and he did not keep himself very clean. (B.H. p.25)

Vanessa likes her Great Uncle Dan but at the same time she is aware of his decadence. Her Great Uncle Dan is at variance with those principles she has grown up with, such as a belief in hard work and industry. In fact, Vanessa's Great Uncle Dan is the complete antithesis of her Grandfather Connor, both in their personalities and in the principles which they upheld.

By revealing Vanessa's embarrassment at her Great Uncle Dan when her friends are around, Margaret Laurence once again emphasizes the social hierarchy of Manawaka.

> What I did know, however, was that if he had been any other way he would not have passed muster in Manawaka. He was widely acknowledged as an upright man. It would have been a disgrace if he had been known by the opposite word, which was "downright." A few of my friends had downright grandfathers. They were a deep mortification to their families, these untidy old men who sat on the Bank of Montreal steps in the summertime and spat amber tobacco jets onto the dusty sidewalk. They were described as "downright worthless" or "downright lazy," the two terms being synonymous. These shadows of wastrels, these flimsy remnants of past profligates, with their dry laughter like the cackle of crows or the crackling of fallen leaves underfoot, embarrassed me terribly, although I did not have any idea why. Walking down main street, I would avoid looking at them, feeling somehow that they should not be on view, that they should be hidden away in an attic along with the other relics too common to be called antiques and too broken to be of any further use. Yet I was inexplicably drawn to them, too. (B.H. p.9)

Vanessa's reflections of her Great Uncle Dan illustrate the mixture of the society of the town. Laurence reveals through Vanessa, the pressures that are inherent in families. Vanessa's family must all conform to the standards set by the town,

endorsed by Grandfather Connor.

> When we got to the Brick House, my mother stopped hurrying, knowing that Grandfather would be watching from the bay window. She tidied my hair, which was fine and straight and tended to get in my eyes, and she smoothed down the collar of the white middy which I hated and resented having to wear today with my navy pleated skirt as though it had still been winter.
>
> "Your summer dresses are all up to your neck," my mother had said, "and we just can't manage a new one this year, but I'm certainly not going to have you going down there looking like a hooligan." (B.H. pp.4-5)

Although they are living through the era of the Depression, both the MacLeod and the Connor family keep their houses in order and conduct themselves accordingly. Although Vanessa is protected from the ugliness of the Depression, she is still aware of the current of ten-

sion that it has caused within her family. For Vanessa the most important incident that was a direct cause of the Depression was the return to Manawaka by her Aunt Edna. Previously employed in Winnipeg, Vanessa's Aunt Edna is forced to return home after she loses her job.

> My Aunt Edna, who was a secretary in Winnipeg, returned to Manawaka to live because the insurance company cut down on staff and she could not find another job. I was intensely excited and jubilant about her return, and could not see why my mother seemed the opposite, even though she was as fond of Aunt Edna as I was. Then my brother Roderick was born, and that same year Grandmother Connor died. The strangeness, the unbelievability, of both these events took up all of me. (B.H. pp.140-141)

The birth of her brother and the death of her Grandmother Connor consume Vanessa's young life.

Vanessa grows up during the Depression, yet her life is not complicated by it. She is shielded from the external reality of the Depression by loving parents.

> But although Manawaka never knew the worst, what it knew was bad enough. Or so I learned later. At the time I saw none of it. For me, the Depression and drought were external and abstract, malevolent gods whose names I secretly learned although they were concealed from me, and whose evil I sensed only superstitiously, knowing they threatened us but not how or why. What I really saw was only what went on in our family. (B.H. p.136)

By introducing real-life historical events such as the Depression, Laurence enhances the reality of the town of Manawaka for the reader.

For Vanessa, both the MacLeod house and the Connor brick house were never true homes. Instead, they represented what her grandparents had achieved in their lifetimes; the houses were monuments of their successes. Vanessa's references to the Connor Brick House were always in terms of a fortress that symbolized her Grandfather Connor's achievements.

> THAT HOUSE in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me. Known to the rest of the town as "the old Connor place" and to the family as the Brick House, it was plain as the winter turnips in its root cellar, sparsely windowed as some crusader's embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness, its rooms in a perpetual gloom except in the brief height of summer. Many other brick structures had existed in Manawaka for as much as half a century, but at the time when my grandfather built his house, part dwelling place and part massive monument, it had been the first of its kind. (B.H. p.3)

It is interesting to note how Laurence promotes the reality of Manawaka by interweaving her protagonists into the different Manawaka books. Having a protagonist from one book mention another protagonist in another book lends both the characters greater credibility. In The Diviners, Morag Gunn relates to the reader how Vanessa is one of five who try out for a solo for a school christmas program.

> Next Sunday, the verdict. Vanessa MacLeod will sing the solo.
> Vanessa MacLeod! A crow with a sore throat could sing better than what she could.
>
> On the night, Morag decides to go and be in the choir after all. Vanessa, all gotten up in a pleated tartan skirt with straps over the shoulders and a white blouse with a frill at the front, rises to sing. Her hands, Morag sees, are trembling. She's nervous. Ha ha. Morag hopes that something really awful will happen to Vanessa. But it doesn't. She sings a crappy song but she never misses a note. (Div. pp.81-82)

Morag also comments on the death of Vanessa's father, and mentions at the beginning of The Diviners, that it was Dr. MacLeod who drove out to the farm to treat Morag's parents when they were sick with Polio.

At the end of A Bird in the House, Vanessa is portrayed as a mature, independent individual. The grown-up Vanessa displays a depth of understanding and of acknowledgement which Hagar, Rachel and Stacey did not. In a sense Vanessa is freer of the town of Manawaka than the

other protagonists were because she always accepted its ethos as a part of the make-up of her life. She has assimilated the town as a part of her culture.

> I drove out to the town one day, when I was visiting in Winnipeg. I went alone. It would have no meaning for anyone else. I was not even sure it would have any meaning for me. But I went. I went to the cemetery and looked at the granite and the names. I realised from the dates on the stone that my father had died when he was the same age as I was now. I remembered saying things to my children that my mother had said to me, the cliches of affection, perhaps inherited from her mother. (B.H. pp.206-207)

However, as with Hagar, Rachel and Stacey, Vanessa is embued with the ethos of the town and will always carry a part of it with her.

VI

THE DIVINERS

Of all of the protagonists in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka series, Morag Gunn, the primary protagonist in the culminating novel, The Diviners, is the most complete character. Morag Gunn is both like and unlike the others. She too grows up in the town of Manawaka, but Margaret Laurence handles Morag's progress through The Diviners, as a phenomenological progression. Morag is the only protagonist in the Manawaka series who comes full circle in her understanding and acceptance of the town.

A very basic difference between Morag, and Laurence's other protagonists is that Morag grows up without either of her natural parents, having lost them at a very young age. Morag's childhood misfortune of losing her parents catapults her into the heart of Manawaka. Laurence's treatment of her character, Morag is more intense than that of her other characters. Jonathan Culler's observations on the subject of character are that:

> Character is the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating. Although for many readers character serves as the major totalizing force in fiction - everything in the novel exists in order to illustrate character and its development - a structuralist approach has tended to explain this as an ideological prejudice rather than to study it as a fact of reading.[23]

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[23] Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.230.

Taken in context with Culler's observations and the main argument of the thesis, The Diviners, shows how the ethos of Manawaka pervades the lives of its inhabitants.

Morag is scarred at a young age by her foster-father, Christie Logan's occupation as town garbage collector. The day that Morag starts school she is immediately and cruelly made aware of the surface differences between herself and the vast majority of the other children of the town.

> She and Christie walk up the cement steps. Forty miles.
>
> LAUGHTER? Why? She turns. Many laughers. All around. On the steps and on the gravel. Large and small kids. Some looking away. Some going ho ho har har.
>
> "Lookut her dress - it's down to her ankles!"
>
> "Oh, it isn't, Helen. It's sure away below her knees, though."
>
> Her dress? What's wrong? Prin sewed it. Out of a wraparound which Prin is now too stout to wear. (Div. pp.30-31)

With the exceptions of Eva Winkler and Jules Tonnerre, the rest of the children mentioned come from more affluent and respectable families. The other children reject and taunt Morag and Eva because they, Morag and Eva, cannot afford to dress as the other children do. Never having interacted with children other than Eva, Morag is at first mortified and then angry at the other children. Laurence emphasizes the division of the town into the rich and the poor to illustrate the division of the constructs. Morag's introduction into her peer society molds Morag's behavior throughout her school years. Initially Morag pathetically tries to be like the other girls by cutting off the hems of her dresses so that they will be of a more fashionable length. Unfortunately for Morag, the social structure of the town

dictates that she cannot be accepted by the other girls such as Stacey, Vanessa, and Mavis, solely on the length of her dresses.

Morag is ostrasized by the other girls because of her association with Christie, the town scavenger. To Morag's delight, her early physical maturation lends her a superiority over the other girls.

> Morag is twelve, and is she ever tough. She doesn't walk all hunched up any more, like when she was a little kid. Nosiree, not her. She is tall and she doesn't care who knows it. Her tits have swollen out already, and she shows them off by walking straight, swinging her shoulders just a little bit. Most of the girls are still as flat as boards. She has started her monthlies, too, and occasionally lets kids like Mavis or Vanessa, who haven't started, know it by a dropped remark here and there. She is a woman, and a lot of them are just kids. (Div. p.61)

Because Morag is taught that social acceptability and one's personal appearance are linked factors in Manawaka's society, she obtains a job at Simlow's department store as soon as she is old enough. Morag spends her initial earnings on new clothes for herself and also purchases new clothes for Prin so that she can be respectably attired for church.

> Morag is dressed nicely. Nobody could deny it. She spends on clothes everything she earns Saturdays working at Simlow's Ladies' Wear. Her hair is done in very neat braids, twisted around her head, and her hat is that very pale natural straw, with just a band of turquoise ribbon around it, in good taste. Her coat also turquoise, matches the ribbon exactly and is princess-style, fitted, and flaring at the bottom. It shows off her figure, which is a goddamn good one - that is, a very nice one. But all this makes no difference. (Div. pp.108-109)

Morag learns that she cannot manipulate Manawaka's society. Morag's efforts to appear more respectable earn her a partial recognizance but not an acceptance.

> Mrs.Cameron smiles, friendly, at Morag.

> "I just wanted to say to you, dear," she says, "I think you've done really quite well since you started working here. You've smartened yourself up a whole lot." (Div. p.115)

Morag submits to the social entrapment of trying to please others in the hope that she may be accepted as one of the others. Morag feels that she must hide even her scholastic achievements from the other kids for fear of rejection.

> Grade Nine is lots harder than Grade Eight, but then it is High School. Morag's new policy - work like hell, that is, like the dickens. Although not letting on to the other kids. If you answered questions in class too much, the others would be dead set against you. Morag does not care about most of the kids, but she does not want Julie to be against her. She is not Julie's best friend, but she is a friend of Julie's all the same, and has been out twice to the Kazlik's place for supper, and it is a lovely place, the dairy farm, there, a big house with real lace curtains and piles of delicious food, and Mr.Kazlik roaring at them all but not meaning it, and Julie's younger brothers, the twins, laughing and making fun of everything, and Mrs. Kazlik very short and stoutish and very motherly, which Julie resents but Morag likes. Mrs. Kazlik made a blouse for Morag this spring, very full long sleeves and all embroidered at the top with tiny cross-stitch birds and flowers in all colours, and this is a really fantastic thing, and Julie isn't very interested in school so Morag has to watch it and never show off. (Div. p.120)

However, by submitting to the social constructs of Manawaka, Morag is going against her true nature. Morag's suppression of her true nature becomes an automatic reflex even after she has left Manawaka. Her resentment of the systems of convention surfaces in the latter days of her marriage to Brooke. Morag begins to neglect her appearance, and her own life begins to assume a greater importance than her life with Brooke. Morag begins to resent the superficial trappings that she has strived her whole life for. In her distraction, and dis-

content with her marriage to Brooke, Morag subconsciously travels back to her roots, which consists of Christie and Prin, and the town of Manawaka.

Before she understood the complex man that Christie Logan is Morag resents him because she is looked down on by the towns-people because of her association with him. She also resents him because of the facade that he presents to the rest of the community. However, when Morag is old enough to understand him, almost too late, she realizes that it is Christie who gave her her roots.

Laurence cleverly manipulates the character of Christie Logan, using him to reveal to Morag and to the reader the moral fibre of the town. Christie is an honest character in that he did not have anything to hide from the town. For those who are willing to listen to him, he can tell more about the townspeople than their neighbors would know.

> "Now you see these bones here, and you know what they mean? They mean Simon Pearl the lawyer's got the money for steak. Yep, not so often, maybe, but one day a week. So although he's letting on he's as hard up as the next - he ain't, no he ain't though it's troubling to him, too. By their christly bloody garbage shall ye know them in their glory, is what I'm saying to you, every saintly mother's son. And these chicken bones right here, now, they'll be birds which have been given to Doc MacLeod for services he's rendered to some farmer who couldn't pay a bill if his life depended on it so he takes it out in poultry, well it's better than baloney which is what a jesus lot of us gets served up on the table. And the huge amount of apple peels from the Reverend George McKee, now, means he gets a crate of apples from his Okanagan sister so they eat a lot of applesauce each summer at the manse, there, but they don't put in a garden or they'd use the peels for compost, so the preacher really means it when he says the Lord provides. Now the paint tins from the Connors' means the old man's on the rampage and he's painting like a devil all the kitchen chairs and such like, showing all of them around him that they're lazy worthless sinners, but he's pointing out his anger, for he thinks this life is shit." (Div. p.75)

Laurence uses Christie's rantings to lend a credibility to the other characters by making them human and fallible. He reveals the other inhabitants' secrets and foibles. Christie not only illuminates the town's inhabitants but he also directs and guides Morag's thought processes.

Morag proves to be ambitious enough to rise above the town's constraints, and eventually leaves Manawaka to attend university in Winnipeg. Never having had any true friends in Manawaka with the exceptions of Eva, Julie and Jules, Morag is conscious of her friendless state when she first starts university. Morag's defensive barriers are a product of her life in Manawaka.

> A year older than almost everyone else in her class - this does make a difference. There are four men who are even older, returned veterans, but they are all married. Or does the difference reside more in the fact that so many of these kids went to High School together in the city? Or is it Morag's own goddam fault, being both proud and humiliatingly shy? Thinking she looks gawky, not knowing half the time whether other people are kidding or not.
>
> The others flow in and out of classrooms and cafeteria, and she does, too. Usually by herself. So what? This is what she's wanted, to be here, and now she's here. (Div. p.174)

Ella Gerson entered Morag's life at a time when she was both vulnerable and yet hopeful.

> In the Veritas office, she finds herself standing awkwardly beside a short rather stocky girl with auburn hair. The girl, who is Ella Gerson, is in Morag's year but they have not spoken before. Ella is holding a copy of Das Kapital nonchalantly under her arm. (Div. p.178)

Morag and Ella are drawn together by their aspirations to literary greatness and are kept together by a genuine liking of each other.

They have no secrets from each other and surprisingly right from the start of her relationship with Ella, Morag divulges her life in Manawaka to her. What endears Ella to Morag is that even though she possesses knowledge of her past Ella does not reject Morag. Ella becomes the first person to accept Morag as an individual and who does not judge her by her home and family circumstances. Laurence manipulates her character, Ella, to act as a catalyst for Morag. Ella continues the lesson which Christie had started in Manawaka, that of being true to oneself. A great factor in Ella's and Morag's friendship is that they can be honest with each other.

> "I don't know," Ella says gloomily. "It just seemed so phoney, somehow, all that whole mutual flattery bit. And why should I pretend to be brainless? I'm not brainless."
>
> "I know," Morag says. "And yet I envy girls like Susie Trevor so much that I damn near hate them. I want to be glamourous and adored and get married and have kids. I still try to kid myself that I don't want that. But I do. I want all that. As well. All I want is everything." (Div. p.182)

The Gersons' unconditional acceptance of Morag is a revelation to her. While living in Manawaka, Morag was constantly striving to be accepted, even at the expense of compromising herself. Morag's acceptance in Manawaka was so hard for her to attain because she had to prove herself not just to one or two people, but to the whole town. In the city everyone does not know everyone else and therefore prejudices are not as easily handed down from one generation to the next, as is the case in Manawaka. Therefore, when Morag is introduced to the open-minded generosity of the Gerson family she is both overwhelmed and grateful.

> Morag has never know anything like this kind of house before. Its warmth is sometimes very much harder to take

> than any harshness could be, because it breaks her up and she considers it a disgrace to cry in front of anybody. When she finally admits this, out of necessity, the girls leave her tactfuly alone. Not so Mrs. Gerson. (Div. p.185)

There are many references throughout the novel, The Diviners, to the "black celt" within Morag. Significantly the references to the "black celt" within Morag are made in conjunction with the various men who are important to her and who contribute to her growth. Each of the men in Morag's life: Christie, Jules, Brooke, Dan and Royland reveal Morag not only to the reader, but within the context of the book, to Morag herself. Christie was the most important man in Morag's life because he constituted her past. Morag did not recognize this fact until she was close to the land of her ancestors, Sutherland, to which she had always thought that she needed to make a pilgrimage.

Jules Tonnerre encompasses many aspects of Morag's life, including being the father of her child, Piquette. Initially, Morag notices Jules because she realizes that he too is an outcast among their classmates. As the novel progresses, Jules intermittently reappears in Morag's life. Jules' and Morag's most significant encounter occurs when they meet on the streets of Toronto and Jules helps Morag to free herself from the sterile life which she has been leading with Brooke Skelton, her husband.

> She reaches her hand across the table and puts it very lightly on his hand. He does not move. He neither withdraws nor responds. She does not know, herself, why she has done this. She is not making a play. She wants only to touch him, someone from a long long way back, someone related to her in ways she cannot define and feels no need of defining. (Div. p.267)

Jules plays the shaman who divines the true reality of Morag's situation for her. Jules, more astute than the town of Manawaka believes he is, realizes Morag's need to be released from the sterile world which she inhabits and which inhabits her. In trying to hide her true nature from Brooke, Morag represses and denies her past. Jules, with his strong cultural roots, eventually reveals to Morag the importance of the past. The harsh realities of Morag's past belong to a different realm from the life that she leads with Brooke. Morag was honest with herself in that she acknowledged her own strengths and weaknesses. Because of this inner knowledge she knows that she must do something irrevocable to break the chains which hold her to Brooke.

> There is, however, no way back. Would she have gone back if she hadn't been pregnant? At this moment, she feels she would have. Was it only for that reason, after all, she had wanted to get pregnant, so her leaving of Brooke would be irrevocable? So she would not be able to change her mind? And had chosen Jules only so there wouldn't be the slightest chance of pretending the child was Brooke's? How many people had she betrayed? Has she even betrayed the child itself? This thought paralyzes her. Or is she only interpreting herself, now, in the worst possible ways? (Div. p.295)

While residing in London, England, Morag meets Dan McRaith. Dan, an artist, serves the purpose of exposing Morag's artistic temperament and soul to the reader. Dan shows Morag that it is better to accept what one cannot change. Manawaka will always inhabit Morag and she begins to realize this as Dan reveals to her the hold that his home has over him.

> "It's not big enough," he says, "but it's my place. You might not think anyone could work here. How is it I can't work anywhere else? Maybe you'll begin to see, Morag Dhu. When I look out there, I see the firth. It's the place that's important to me. The surrounding circumstances - well, they have happened and they are here." (Div. p.388)

Royland becomes another friend of Morag's. He teaches her that everything must be passed along and that nothing is one's to hold forever.

> The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else. (Div. p.452)

In order to cope with the present and with the future, Morag must first lay to rest her past. Morag's last novel-within-the-novel, The Diviners, is a fictionalized autobiographical account of her life. By reflecting upon and dissecting her past in this manner, Morag is able to purge herself of the past. She is finally able to accept those factors of her life which she has always tried to deny and in that acceptance is her freedom.

Morag is Margaret Laurence's fullest character in the Manawaka series because Morag is the only protagonist who delves into and resolves for herself the ties that bound her to Manawaka. Morag ultimately is the only protagonist who is content with what she sees in her future and is at peace with her past.

VII

CONCLUSION

Viewed collectively and comparatively, Margaret Laurence's fiction can be seen as an exploration of whether it is character or circumstances that is responsible for the direction one's life takes. This thesis is concerned with the past as the environment in which her characters were raised. The past impinges on the present and in so doing contributes to or thwarts the individual protagonist's development toward self-realization.

Hagar Currie Shipley, the primary protagonist in the Manawakan novels, was enslaved by her past. The chains which bound Hagar to Manawaka were invisible ones and subsequently only she could unlock the bolts which held the chains together. As is demonstrated in Chapter 2, Hagar's environment molded her and supplied the roles which she was to occupy through the duration of her life. In living the roles supplied to her by Manawaka, Hagar was arrested in her development toward self-realization. Only towards the end of her life does Hagar achieve a modicum of self-realization, and even then it comes too late for her to fully appreciate it.

Rachel Cameron, Stacey MacAindra, Vanessa MacLeod, and Morag Gunn are all concerned and affected by their pasts. As with Hagar, each of these protagonists had to psychologically purge themselves of their pasts. Rachel and Stacey come to an acceptance of their pasts and of

their presents, and with this acceptance comes a willingness to face their futures. Vanessa's wrestle with her past was not so much an acceptance of it, but rather a more mature understanding of it.

Morag is the only Manawakan protagonist who fully develops towards self-realization. Through her introspective journey Morag discovers that the past and the present are inextricable. Enlightened with this knowledge, Morag achieves an inner peace and freedom which allows her to serenely face the future.

Though Laurence's characters are created by circumstance, they are not fatally and irrevocably bound by it. Each character has an ego, a responding self that permits her to alter and change circumstances so that she can grow. Though the ethos of Manawaka shapes Laurence's characters and remains important to them, each character moves into new circumstances, and in fact begins to alter circumstances. It is the inter-relationship of character and circumstance that drives the characters in each of Laurence's novels.

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