

MYTH AND REALITY:  
The Religious Dimension  
in the novels  
of  
Margaret Laurence

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and  
Research in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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July, 1978

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an analysis of the novels of Margaret Laurence based upon an examination of the myth structures, or the forms of consciousness generated by Imagination, of the individual characters and their society. These forms determine psycho-social reality and are the basis of a culture pattern, tradition and belief system which may facilitate transcendence, liberation and integration for the individual. Myths, identities and power structures are closely interwoven in Laurence's novels, which reveal that the struggle for liberation and wholeness is a spiritual one that engages the characters in an initially disturbing but ultimately rewarding journey toward Self-discovery and renewal. In this process they acquire new, often critical, perspectives on their society and its underlying myths and are faced with the challenge of survival with integrity and wisdom. The social, not merely personal, aspects of Laurence's works are significant because it is through the individual's discovery of the links between form and reality that Imagination is freed to become the creator of its own forms. Such a progression is evident in Laurence's five novels.

The interaction between individual and collective consciousness over periods of time constitutes culture patterns and myth structures which may be difficult to break with or to transform; yet, it is precisely through the individual that traditions, the

collective forms of the Imagination, are revitalized and renewed as living forces capable of providing links from past to future which stabilize society. Laurence's characters undergo such transformations in their myth structure as they rise to the challenge of wrestling with and recreating their society's traditions. They re-form reality through Imagination and seek to discover that deeper "Ground of Being" which is the source of spiritual vitality. Thus Laurence's novels create larger patterns of wholeness in which the individual and society can experience integration with a dimension of Being that is perpetually PRESENT yet spread over historical time as the evolution of the forms of consciousness.

## RESUME

Cette étude présente une analyse des romans de Margaret Laurence basée sur un examen des structures de mythes, ou les formes de conscience, générées par l'Imagination, des personnages et de leur société. Ces formes déterminent une réalité psycho-sociale et sont à la base d'un modèle de culture, de tradition, de système de croyances qui peut faciliter la transcendance, la libération, et l'intégration de l'individu. Les mythes, les identités et les structures de force sont étroitement entremêlées dans les romans de Laurence, ce qui révèle que le combat pour la libération et la totalité est spirituel et qu'il engage les personnages dans un voyage, initialement troublé mais ultimement récompensé, vers la Soi-découverte et la renaissance. Dans ce processus, ils acquièrent des perspectives nouvelles, souvent critiques, de leur société et de ses mythes sous-jacents et font face au défi de survivance avec intégrité et sagesse. Les aspects sociaux, et pas simplement personnels, de l'oeuvre de Laurence sont significatifs parce que c'est à travers la découverte par les individus des liens entre forme et réalité que l'Imagination est libérée pour devenir créatrice de ses propres formes. Une telle progression est évidente dans les cinq romans de Laurence.

L'interaction entre l'individu et la conscience collective pendant un certain temps constitue des modèles de culture et



des structures de mythes qui peuvent être difficiles à surmonter ou à transformer; cependant, c'est précisément à travers l'individu que les traditions, les formes collectives de l'Imagination sont revitalisées et recréées comme forces vivantes capables de fournir les liens entre le passé et le futur pour stabiliser la société. Les personnages de Laurence expérimentent ces transformations dans leur structure mythique quand ils s'élèvent au défi de combattre et de recréer les traditions de leur société. Ils refont la réalité à travers l'Imagination et cherchent à découvrir ce "Nouveau d'Etre" plus profond qui est à la source de la vitalité spirituelle. Ainsi les romans de Laurence créent des modèles plus grands de globalité dans laquelle l'individu et la société peuvent expérimenter une intégration, avec une dimension d'Etre qui est perpétuellement ACTUELLE, mais à la fois, qui s'étend au-delà du temps historique en tant qu'évolution des formes de conscience.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the present time Margaret Laurence is undoubtedly one of Canada's most admired and widely-discussed writers, yet there does not exist, apart from Clara Thomas's The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, a detailed analysis and interpretation of her novels, ranging from This Side Jordan to The Diviners. The aim of this study is to explore from an epistemological viewpoint the structures of consciousness of Laurence's protagonists and to show how their identities have been formed along lines that require transformation in order for greater freedom of personal expression to result in their lives. Underlying all five novels is the quest for a spiritual affirmation or self-transcendence, and this signifies the religious dimension of Laurence's work. It cannot be claimed that her books are religious novels in the sense that they self-consciously present a certain belief or a dogma; they are, however, fundamentally concerned with religious questions which touch upon familiar existential and ontological issues such as ultimate meaning, fate, suffering, the relationship between the individual and the surrounding society, the universe, and God. In order for this underlying dimension of Reality to be discerned, it is necessary, first of all, to examine the structures or forms of consciousness which govern and condition the various protagonists who inhabit particularized societies and cultures. This study will therefore focus upon the complex interaction between individual and collective consciousness depicted in the novels and how the forms that consciousness has assumed over an extended period of time constitute

a culture pattern which may, or may not, facilitate integration and transcendence. The term I have used to refer to these forms of consciousness is myth structure, which is an epistemological framework for defining the self in relation to a succession of larger entities: society, world, universe, God.

Central to Laurence's novels is a conflict between old and new orders of being, between traditional metaphysical models, or myth structures, and the prevalent modern experience of these as unsatisfying, sterile, or obsolete. Man, in defining and re-defining himself through his inward and outward relationships, or subject-object experience, is continually creating his human universe and in so doing is a myth-maker. The human being who lives and suffers in his time-zone is historically embedded in certain assumptions about reality which might never be questioned, unless disaster or dislocation strikes and paves the way for a different perspective on the "givens", or the dominant myth-structures that support a society and its members. Generally these assumptions remain unquestioned and are unconsciously lived out; but in an age of transition, such as ours, pluralism, metaphysical disorientation, and psychic fragmentation are the consequences of the breakdown of traditional structures. Insofar as man expands his awareness, he refuses to be limited by the previous models or conceptual structures that condition his existence and that of society. He defines himself as a creative being whose cultural task is to re-shape, to re-form, the negative distorted and broken forms of social interaction; in this process he takes the role of a creator who gives new forms to developing

human consciousness and, in effect, forges out of his soul a myth of meaning.

The breakdown of the traditional myths of a people creates a dramatic crisis and tension in the lives of individuals who are faced with the creative challenge to go forward and bring to birth new forms of consciousness. Sometimes the older myth structures, externalized in the institutions of society and internalized as character formation, undergo a process of transformation in the characters' efforts to re-appropriate them meaningfully into their present existential context. The vacuum created in the lives of people who stand at such a cultural crossroad and who cannot find any satisfying self-definition compels them to begin anew the quest for a life-myth which will give their existence purpose and meaning. Laurence's novels often elaborate the tragic consequences for people who have lost their guiding myth and for whom life stagnates, falls apart, or fails to achieve centralization. In order to survive, the characters, as well as the group, need to face the darkness, the emptiness, or the chaos which surround them and courageously develop new forms of being that will authenticate existence spiritually and culturally. Given myths must be re-shaped in order for a new reality to emerge.

In traditional societies myth and religion carried the meaning-content for members. A primitive society is originally a sane one because it maintains a living contact and vibrant connection with an underlying Reality, believed to be sacred, which it symbolizes and celebrates in sensuous forms produced

collectively by that culture. Myth and ritual are the aesthetic forms that have not yet been separated into a class by themselves; aesthetic form expresses the spiritual imaginative pattern of meaning for the society. Myth and art still have a fundamentally religious function which is recognized; only later, when the breakdown of traditional societies is already in process, do the mythical, aesthetic, and religious components of the Self become separated and pose a problem of disunity among functions, each of which now seeks to have primacy over the others. Decay in societies is most obvious in the error of taking the forms for the thing-in-itself; when that stage occurs, which is always a danger of idolatry, then traditions become ossified and rigid.

In twentieth century secular pluralistic societies, on the other hand, individuals are thrown back on themselves for finding a larger pattern of meaning, or a life-support system. In an age of the dissolution of traditional forms the individual psyche rather than the tradition becomes the focal point of attention. Frequently the two become sharply opposed; sometimes, only mildly so. The degree of polarization depends upon to what extent the individual can risk breaking loose from collective myth patterns that sustain the equilibrium of the soul forced to mediate between the claims of self (conscience, will) and society. At this juncture the individual is compelled to carry a very heavy burden, a responsibility which in traditional societies is absorbed by the unbroken myth systems. As these break down, so unfortunately does the personality of the individual, and this is why psy-

chology and sociology have today so much to tell us regarding our predicament.

Laurence's novels continually deal with these problems, as the separate chapter analyses will reveal; they take the reader into the very heart of contemporary dilemmas. Her characters, as most, are socialized into a conditional reality, into a universe already symbolized (named and signified) by others in the cultural tradition to which they belong. Tragi-comically, while the first half of life is spent in becoming an initiated member of the tribe, the second half may be an effort to break out of this limiting circle; yet, how far one will dare to break away from a tradition and a society viewed largely in negative terms is problematic. How much of an "outsider", with an alternate vision and myth-structure, can one risk being? This is a question Laurence's novels pose and which each character answers according to her own best efforts and understanding of the total dilemma.

There is certainly a great progression in self-consciousness from Nathaniel, the first protagonist, to Morag, the last. The stages of crisis, growth, and insight are undergone by each leading character in turn as he or she begins to question and reflect upon the entire symbolic-structure, or social mythology, which legitimizes certain classes' power and authority, be it spiritual or temporal. Usually it is both. The dislocation between public myths and private needs for self-transcendence and affirmation is painfully evident in each novel and causes each character to go through a "dark night of the soul" - a journey

to renewal during which the unconscious is activated to produce its own images, symbols and myths of meaning. At that point, the mind of the character has worked itself out of the old conditioned universe and has glimpsed a new vision that may, or may not, be lived out acceptably in society. The tension between the private self and the prevailing society still exists and can only be surmounted in the creative act. Having seen through the dominant myth-structures and their frequent hostility toward a new vision or change, the individual characters still must continue living and making choices. Will they take seriously their Imagination's power to create myth structures that would serve as wider-ranging patterns of wholeness and provide a new sense of social direction? Or, will they remain poised on the borderline of the dominant structure, with all its inadequacies and injustices, and their own newly-gained, hard-won freedom and vision? Such are the questions Laurence's characters must answer in coming to terms with themselves and their culture. Individual and collective consciousness, self and society, intersect in every instance. Laurence's examination of the relationship between the two yields finally a sensitive insight into the epistemological fundamentals of human bondage and freedom, and in making the choice for the latter each character exercises Imagination. The liberation of the Imagination is the key to individual and social transformation and provides an aesthetic counterpart to the religious striving for spiritual wholeness.

The long-standing rationalistic bias of Western thinking which relegates myth to the level of the fictitious or unreal is



greatly inadequate for understanding the process of the human Imagination, which is finally responsible for the shaping of human reality. The theoretical division between mythical and rational thinking must be bridged because, practically, man is constantly using both functions of the higher mind to create a world and reference systems, or models of what is real. These models or symbolic maps change from time to time as mankind's consciousness changes and develops; therefore, myths are evidence of the continual transformation of the mind's powers, metamorphoses of the spirit of man. The history of the forms of consciousness constitute, as Cassirer has maintained in The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, the cultural anthropology of the human species; they are the means whereby the spirit in man can better know and understand itself and its unending creative urge to self-mastery and self-definition.<sup>1</sup>

To free the individual from the "mind-forged manacles" collectively created by man is only possible through an intuition of the Reality behind, within, and beyond the conditioned forms. Such an intuition has a profound effect on the individual ego, as will be seen in each of Laurence's character portraits. Through the symbols and myths of their society, or through private symbols and myths, they experience that "epiphany" which widens the dimension of their being. Seen from a religious perspective, such an encounter with the Ground of Being, or the greater Self, can be termed a "limit experience"<sup>2</sup> and has the effect of substantially transforming the experiencer who, afterwards, becomes the knower. Being the knower instead of merely

the known (i.e. the subject as well as the object of one's life process) confers new creative powers, the ability to make and to unmake; it also completes the journey toward Self-realization. On the aesthetic level, the sensuous form as art-work presents to man's intellect the process of his soul's Self-manifestation and the mastery of substance; it is the symbolic expression of the wider pattern of meaning, or the myth.

Only one more word needs to be added here, and that pertains to the Western cultural symbolization of ultimate Reality in the male gender. The drive toward transcendence and Self-knowledge in each of Laurence's major characters meets with extra obstacles because they are (apart from Nathaniel) women. Significant and detailed recent research on the history of female oppression and the origin of long-standing patriarchal myths in ancient culture patterns that post-dated a matriarchal era, wherein the Absolute was defined as woman in all the forms of her individuation (The Great Mother of the Life process from birth, death, to rebirth), indicates that sociological and psychological factors enter into the Imagination's symbolization of Reality.<sup>2</sup> As always, the tendency to idolatry of the form, of the myth-structure itself, exists and, if successful, prevents the realization of the function of form, not to say anything of the graver consequences for those people who must fill the role of the "Other", of the "out-cast", in the prevailing symbolic universe. Laurence's heroines struggle toward Self-affirmation and spiritual power but must first fight the battle against the patriarchal form of God, or ultimate Reality, in its traditional guises. They must find them-

selves as female selves before they can experience the transpersonal dimension in a supportive symbolic mode. The religious and secular representation of Reality in male-dominant symbols and institutions poses considerable threats to the self-affirmation of woman, and this is where collective and personal consciousness clashes. Finally, the "Other", or outcast, becomes the one in whom vision is vested, the bearer of an alternate myth, the artist - Shaman- prophet who has become the Subject, or the Imaginative I AM. The knower, the bearer of higher self-consciousness and creator of new forms, is eventually a woman. This point will be extremely important as Laurence's four Canadian novels develop in the direction of epistemological insight and self-reflexive mastery.

In the following chapters, each devoted to an analysis of one novel, the foregoing theoretical statements will be concretely demonstrated as they apply to Laurence's work, and the Conclusion will summarize her achievement and indicate the direction into which her concerns and vision lead.

## Introduction Footnotes

1

Cassirer's trilogy, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, has been used as a philosophical background to this study and as a starting point for my own speculations about the relation of the forms of creative mentation to the primary Imagination. It seems very clear to me that there is further opportunity for the development of this theme and the exploration of the relationship between what Coleridge called the primary Imagination, which participates in the nature of God or Ultimate Reality as form-giving Spirit or Logos, and what the theologian Tillich calls the Unconditional Ground of Being. Cassirer's philosophy also points to a pre-formal ground of knowledge; that which makes the forms of human knowledge possible, that which makes the possibility of mind's Self-realization possible in the sphere of phenomena.

2

Greeley, Andrew. The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 23-48.

In chapter two, "Religion, Experience, Symbols, Language", Greeley outlines the nature of "limit-experience" and asks: "What kind of experiences produce religious symbols?" (p. 25) He argues that the experience of life's limitations, its finitude, produces in the human psyche the urge toward transcendence and the creation of symbols and myths to embody those experiences meaningfully so that life acquires a larger meaning and vista. To quote briefly from the chapter: "These 'disclosive' experiences reveal to us a world of meaning beyond the everyday, and this world is that through which religious symbols come." .... "Limit-situations and limit-questions pose the fundamental religious issues, and, on occasion at least, they also suggest what the answers might be. Our thrust for self-transcendence - in scientific search, in moral and philosophical reflection, in celebration, in service, in love - runs up against Something Else (or Someone Else) which is perceived as having set boundaries to self-transcendence; and more than that, this Something Else is also perceived as responsible for both the self and the thrust for transcendence; or, alternately, it is the object of our longing for transcendence." (p. 26)

See also Tillich, Paul. What Is Religion? Ed. James Luther Adams (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 56-69.  
and Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 121.

3

The amount of material on this subject is staggering; please see the bibliography for selected entries. Space and focus of the dissertation unfortunately do not allow me to enter into a full account of the effect of patriarchal monotheistic religious

mythology on woman's condition. Here, then, I would like to stress the fact that clearly man has created images of deity that correspond to his own likeness as male, and that the historic-cultural victory of the male god over the female goddess has resulted in denigration of woman's power on the concrete level of existence. Whenever the Ultimate Reality is symbolized as male, as in the Jewish, Moslem and Christian religions, women have had an outcast position, an inferior function. The shadow side of the male is projected onto them and women carry the stigma and burden of irrationality, evil, and general inferiority. Archaeological, anthropological, and comparative religious researches have unequivocally demonstrated that once the Mother Power, or the Feminine Principle, was considered the primordial Life Deity. The matriarchal symbols of rulership corresponded to the agrarian phase of socialization; when the city-building stage began and the powers were re-distributed among the sexes, woman's place fell below man's and the gods now became masculine rather than feminine. Woman's temples were considered an "abomination" and her symbols of power, principally the Serpent, was made into the Devil in the religion of the Fathers and Sons. The psychological conditioning of thousands of years of patriarchal rule has penetrated so deeply into our civilization that it required an unearthing of the past to bring again to the forefront of modern consciousness the vital significance of the Mother Power for the wholeness of man's existence. The patriarchal myths which have conditioned people and shaped our cultures must themselves now be transformed through an understanding of mental processes. Laurence's work unmistakably reveals that below the surface layers of consciousness, the substratum of matriarchal symbols and experience exists, and that the contact with this deeper level of the psyche also connects the surface ego with the realm of Nature; that is to say the Universe. The hegemony of male god rulership in the psyche has prevented the vital contact between ego and universal Self. The novel analyses will make this point clear.

## CHAPTER 2

### This Side Jordan

Set historically in Africa at the time of pre-Ghanian independence from British rule, This Side Jordan<sup>1</sup> deals with two views of the Africanization problem: that of the colonial rulers and the colonized. It should not be overlooked, at the very start, that the definition of the problem as one of "Africanization" is itself ironic, since it must be asked, for whom is this a problem, and how is it that Africa needs to be "Africanized"? Only the initial theft of the country from its indigenous population and the ascendancy into power of the conquering people, and all that this process entails, could have brought about the ironic but tragic state of affairs which the novel attempts to probe and elucidate. Laurence is not writing a political manifesto of course, and she handles the plot and characterization with an almost overly-solicitous sense of balance and justice, allowing her sympathies to be spread over oppressed and oppressors alike, but it would be superficial to ignore the imminent instruction her social realism affords. What, and not who, is the villain of the drama is an unenlightened state of mind, an oppressed consciousness that because of its slavery to myths of one sort or another cannot help but oppress all that crosses its path. The old dichotomy of the mind that leads to polarizations must be discerned as the root-cause of the conflicts that are enacted.

Two mythologies, essentially, are in contention and tear apart the human universe: the native African and the Anglo-Euro-

pean Western myths. No where can it be better seen how myths and cosmologies and religion go hand-in-hand than when the pattern of historical conquests of peoples is observed; a new rule always imposes a new mythology on the conquered or absorbed race and becomes an even greater tool for subjection than do physical means. The latter could never work for long if the violence against mind were lacking. This is the real power of the conquering elite, a victory over the minds of others; for once that invisible territory has been won the other falls automatically. The new "gods" constitute the ultimate echelon of "chosen-ness" and banish all former idols to the oblivion of non-existence, or hell. Through the slow process of re-indoctrination the conquered become acutely self-alienated. In order to survive they must undergo a change of mythologies and accept the totally new cosmic Weltbild that now rules. In this new mythology of the conquerors the conquered and their gods and culture are invariably placed on the lowest rung of the hierarchic totem-pole and occupy the "outcast" position. It is only when the latter accept this alien definition of themselves, consent to the new mythology and come to believe its fictions that the subjugation becomes complete. Henceforth the difference between oppressor and oppressed becomes negligible, since the re-mythologization process has been internalized and the battle for mind has been won; or, it should be more accurately said, lost, because the real interests of mind - truth and freedom - have been sacrificed in either case. No one has seen through the collective fictions in all the pain and struggle of warring world-views, truly a conflict of

Titans, and new ones succeed the old as a matter of course; thus the panorama of heavenly (spiritual-mental) powers continues to hold sway over the earthly actions and fates of men and nations.

Nathaniel Amegbe is a twenty-seven-year-old school-teacher from the back-bush country of Ghana where his father was drummer to the local tribal chief. This was a status position in the native community as it was connected with the religious-social rites of "world-maintenance".<sup>2</sup> The god Nyankopon was the creator-deity of life and death and alongside him there flourished an animistic collection of other gods - water, earth, wind, spirits, etc. Nathaniel, representing the generation of Africans who stand between the native tribal and the Anglo-European orders of social organization, is a man caught in the throes of inner conflict. Raised in a Christian Mission school and re-mythologized into the religion of the conquerors, his mind becomes a battlefield of the old and the new gods. To survive in the new social structure of the conquerors, he knows he has to die to the past and the ways of his family and ancestors, yet these continue to maintain a powerful grip on his most vital part - his soul- or feeling-allegiance. On the level of reason he strives to become a City man, a "High life boy", a modern, educated, Europeanized African, but on the level of his vital bearings to life he remains a simple man, a man whose roots are in the village, the family and the land. The spokeswoman for his soul-side is his wife Aya, who is expecting a child. Through her and their begging and troublesome relatives, Nathaniel is yoked to the feeling-reality that underlies reason and continually undermines



its forward-pressing, cold thrust toward the horizon of tomorrow. The psychological and symbolic structure of the underlying conflict is one between the Mother attachment (soul, emotion, land, communal ties) and the Father command (mental, intellectual, City, mechanization, individual advancement at the expense of the community). This will be more fully evident as the heroes' conflicts are explored. The plural is used purposely because the novel's other leading character, Johnny Kestoe, who represents the Anglo-European interests, shares very similar problems, and the two men may be said to constitute each other's shadow. The irony of the situation is that neither recognizes this basic similarity.

Kestoe, like Amegbe, comes from a colonized class within the Empire. He is the son of poor Irish living in London and the memory of this sordid childhood world haunts his subconscious mind. The novel establishes his background at the beginning, and it continues to be one of the "sore spots" of his human development. Like Amegbe, Kestoe tries to become one of the "chosen" in the social order, only the colour of his skin makes his identity with the rulers more easily achievable. Again the irony implicit in the conflict between the two men as it develops in the plot must be noted; whereas they ought to be unified in their consciousness of having endured oppression at the hands of a single foe - an inhuman system that exploits people and ranges them in hierarchic levels of superiority - they instead perpetuate that oppressive mythology by striving to become top-dogs within it. Consequently, the oppression operates between

the oppressed groups themselves, as is seen in this account of Johnnie's childhood world:

In that gutterstreet of his childhood there had co-existed, but not peacefully, some Jamaicans. Children learned young there. Stick, stone, shod foot in belly, knee in crotch, and - when you had filched enough from shop or barrow to earn one - knife. The street-children's creed, more powerful and obeyed than that of the Apostles, did not admit the brotherhood even of siblings, but even in anarchy there must be some order. All despised all, but some were despised more than others. Those London Irish were low in the social scale, but lower still were the Jamaicans, blacks, heathens. They lived cheaper than anyone else could, a dozen to a room, big-muscled men with a crazy fear of being deported. A slow-witted Irishman, a halfman with a bone disease, a limping clown who went by the name of Dennis Kestoe and who earned his two quid a week slopping out the Men's lavatories in the tube stations with bucket and rag - he lost his job to a man-ape Jamaican who, being whole of bone, could swab down twice as many urinals in a given time. The Irishman's son was ten, and small, but he had his blade-friend. The buttocks of the Jamaican's son bled profusely like life turned to mere meat, and the nigger, who was thirteen and a head taller, bawled like a raped nun, each huge tremulous tear setting off an orgasm of laughter in the bitter Irish bellies of young bystanders. Put the big Jamaican had caught them at it, and the others fled girlish into the night. In a fury of paternal tenderness, the Jamaican had hit with his clenched fist, and when the white boy had finished spitting blood into the gutter, the black man had picked him up and he could feel the big dark body trembling. He had spat again, in loathing, and the black father dropped him abruptly onto the

cobblestones. The boy, crouching, terrified, had hissed - 'bastard, bastard, black black bastard - '.

This experience of double alienation, first from himself as a valuable human being within the social structure and second from those around him who either fall into the categories of his superiors or inferiors, early lays the psychological foundation of fear, mistrust, prejudice and sadism that characterize the later adult man. At the basis of his character is the survival instinct - brutish, fearful, and potentially cruel and ruthless - which he has learned to make his defense in order to rise out of that sub-human, chaotic and violent London sub-culture or ethnic underworld. Instead of becoming united in a common active purpose, the immigrant colony engages in strife or else becomes debilitated by the depression and vices of its surroundings. When Johnnie's wife naively wonders why he does not welcome the idea of Africanization since, after all, he had once been helped out of his own boyhood miseries by an immigrant Pole, Janowicz, he replies with the "survival of the fittest" credo:

'Why the hell should I?'

She hesitated.

'A few people helped you - to go ahead.'

'Did they? I don't think so.'

'What about that old man in the furniture store? Janowicz?'

'You're fascinated by him, aren't you? I wish I'd never told you.'

'You haven't told me very much,' Miranda said. 'Only that you went to work for Janowicz when you were fourteen, toward the end of the war, and that he taught you a lot - gave you books, made you practice proper speech, started you off at night school ---'

'I don't owe Jano anything - he'd be the first to admit it. Why, he was such an old soak, he was glad to find a kid willing to work for him. Anything he taught me, I'd have learned by myself, anyway.'

'You have to feel that, don't you?'

Johnnie tensed.

'That's right, Manda - get everything tidily analysed, and then you can read me like a report. I may turn out to be really weird - is that what you want?'

'I'm sorry,' Miranda said humbly. 'I didn't mean to hurt you.'

'Hurt me?' he cried. 'Don't talk bloody nonsense.'

Janowicz taught Kestoe the laws of survival, but he himself died of the masochism of the oppressed; in his case, alcohol. Cynicism builds on the repression of pain and despair, and results in the counterpart of self-mutilation: sadism and cruelty toward others. Kestoe therefore is a man who cannot, dare not, trust anyone, not even his British employers Allkirk, Moore & Bright for whom he has begun to work in the textile branch; indeed, his self-survival mentality eventually results in the "bad faith" action of becoming the betrayer of the group which counted upon his allegiance. Basic mistrust colours his relations with others; but whereas he is less prone to doubt himself and to be more bent on self-establishment within the power system, Amegbe, because of his colour, suffers the triple torment of being the witness to his own alienation. As Aya is a link between Nathaniel and the tribal community consciousness, so is Miranda Kestoe a cultural bridge for her husband, this time to the African world. Through her, what would otherwise have been separately-lived fates come together in a confrontation

of common destiny.

Neither Ameghe nor Kestoe really knows who he is. The question of identity thus becomes central to the novel's development. In their attempts to become powerful men of today's world, both men have tried desperately to repress their pasts and the identities that are part of that world. Those identities are scorned and spurned because they are considered to be weak and helpless and powerless, and also because both protagonists view themselves from a self-alienated perspective. Indeed, seen from the side of the power elite, they are nothing except the despised of the earth: Johnnie, the son of indigent Irish; Nathaniel, the son of an illiterate tribal drummer. Both are sons of a "primitive race", if viewed from the supposed superior heights of the dominant culture. If they accept the identity of the past, they will have no power in the present, so the past becomes the object of contempt; however, in that very process of trying to rise up through repression, the self-hate for the old identity that has been ineffectively buried comes to be projected onto outsiders. Only in moments of crisis, as in Nathaniel's case when he is confronted with painful choices, or, of half-waking and sleep, as in Johnnie's, do the men become acutely aware of this identity conflict.

Johnnie lay limp as seaweed.

In the limbo between reality and sleep, thoughts merged and melted and changed. Magic symbols - a rune, a spell, a charm - the thing that made him different from any other man on earth. His name. John Kestoe. What proved identity more than a

name? If you had a name, you must exist. I am identifies; therefore, I am. If they say 'who are you?', you know what to reply. It makes for convenience. It might as well be a number, but numbers are harder to remember.

Then follows the painful memory of his mother's death by self-inflicted abortion: her agonizing prayers to Jesus, Mary and Joseph as she lies bleeding in the ramshackle tenement room, his father's fear of calling the priest and immoral miserliness in refusing to summon a doctor, and afterwards the priest's questioning him if she had said her last act of contrition, are all part of this chaotic, incomprehensible and evil universe in which the child found no safety or security. His subsequent rigidity and need for imposed order in a mechanical working system, such as the Empire represents, are surely the defensive results of man's initial confrontation with chaos, a meaningless and un-ordered universe. Kestoe's rejection of his awful past and his own helplessness in the face of life's terrors propels him to seek a smooth and powerful identity as an organization-man; for, in the organization, in the Company, there is order, and all the functions of existence can be explained and accounted for in the machine's terms. In the course of the plot he has to confront two sides of his social self: the old guard at the textile Company, and the new guard from London headquarters, Cameron Sheppard.

Nathaniel's crisis springs to the fore not so much in isolated moments of solitude as in one long continuous stream of inner soliloquizing. He is a much more introspective and self-

conscious man than Kestoe, and it is this very trait of constant questioning that is his strength and weakness: his strength because it leads to emotional depth and an extended awareness of life's ironies, and his weakness because thereby he undercuts his ability to be a firm, assured actor on the social stage. He becomes a self-conscious bungler, a fool, one who shares an Eliotic consciousness: "No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be ... ". The inner torment of this state of mind (which is later explored again by Laurence in the feminine character of Rachel) is masterfully delineated in all its tortuous convolutions and anxieties, until Nathaniel's conflict and search for identity become a real part of every nerson's existential drama, though the specifics of the plot may naturally differ. His confusion about "who he is" and "who he ought to be" emerges in relation to his world and dealings with other people - all of whom appear to Nathaniel to have a certain knowledge of who they are and thus hold more power in his eyes than they really possess. He is conscious only of his powerlessness at Futura Academy, a run-down wreck of a school-house headed by a pompous and officious older African, Jacob Abraham Mensah. The boys do not attend his classes as often as they should; he has trouble getting respect, and wonders if it might be due to the fact that he is always shy, serious, poorly-dressed and penniless, whereas his fellow-teacher Lamptey bristles with confidence, city sophistication, money and casual charm in his costly colourful silken shirts. The bright superficial glitter of this "Highlife Boy", who supplements his teaching stipend by running city tours to

sexy hot-spots and clubs for the uninitiated boys from the back-country, annoys Nathaniel and arouses both disdain and jealousy.

But the boys liked Lamprey. They attended his classes. Half the time they didn't bother to attend Nathaniel's. Jacob Abraham Mensah, the headmaster, conscious only of fees, was afraid to discipline the boys in case they left, and Nathaniel did not have the knack of making students want to attend his classes.

Nathaniel glanced down at his shirt. It was mended. He had only two good enough to wear to school. Perhaps if he dressed better, he would impress the boys more.

--A silk shirt. A gabardine suit. Here endeth the first lesson. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher. All is vanity. Oh, Nathaniel.

His moral seriousness and awkwardness does not permit him to take part in Highlife frivolity, yet he feels the tantalizing polarization between City and country. The City represents modernity, the urbanized rootlessness of the masses, the technical proficiency of the white rulers, and the libidinal energies of men and women promiscuously unleashed in a tide of superficial enjoyment but fundamental lustrelessness and emotional despair. In contrast to this new Ghana, there is the racial memory of the once-glorious ancient Ghana, a civilization whose true features must remain ever obscure and shrouded half in myth of greatness; but this memory is precisely the one being stirred up as the people yearn for a voice in the present.

He had begun teaching African Civilizations of the Past. Victor Edusei, who was a journalist, made fun of him, claiming there were no African civilizations of the past worth mentioning. Victor was



wrong. But it made no difference. They were still right to teach the course, even if every word of it was a lie. In some way, this course was his justification. Nathaniel the Preacher. Nathaniel the Prophet. There must be pride and roots, O my people. Ghana, City of Gold, Ghana on the banks of the Niger, live in your people's faith. Ancient empire, you will rise again. And your people will laugh, easily, unafraid. They will not know the shame, as we have known it. For they will have inherited their earth. Ghana, empire of our forefathers, rise again to be a glory to your people.

The European-educated African, Victor Edusei, who is a London School of Economics graduate, cannot subscribe to the ancient glory-myth and finds nothing to believe in; he has been rid of the old gods and is cynical about nearly everything - even his need for manly assurance in the arms of a loose African girl, Charity Donkar, whom he nevertheless eventually decides to marry in an act of self-depreciation.

For Nathaniel, who he is becomes a part of the quest for what Ghana is: a glorious land and a proud self-respecting people or a fallen enslaved one. In this polarization of identities Nathaniel casts himself in the Biblical image of "the Preacher" and "the Prophet" - an intermediary figure who constantly reminds his people of their call to greatness and so acts as a social visionary, though he usually remains an outcast and mocked figure. The prophetic analogy is strengthened, although ironically, in this further self-description: "He did not have the gift of spoken words - only of imagined words, when he made silent speeches to himself." He is a preacher without a voice or an audience. This transitional self-image acts largely

as an inner compensation for the lack of any substantial identity confirmation in the world. Within himself, he is too painfully aware of the sharp contrast between the glory of a by-gone mythic Ghana and a negligible modern history. Looked at from the Europeanized standards of worth and excellence, the local scene seems to be a cacaphony of tribal mixtures; the streets spew forth an array of heterogeneous masses and wares. The people are not enlightened, educated and up-to-date, but in them he nevertheless sees the hope of the future. It is an uneasy hope that looks through tear-stained and anguished eyes as he surveys the present honestly and not in the suffused light of his poetic dreams.

Home, home, home, said the hum and whirl of the bus. It stopped and Nathaniel climbed out. He was in his own territory now. He had been born far inland in the forests of Ashanti, but he had lived for six years in this decaying suburb of Accra and sometimes it seemed almost his own. It was good to get away from the centre of the city, with its white shops and faces.

But he carried the encounter with him. He walked quickly into the maze of streets, towards his home. The air was thick with the pungent smoke from charcoal pots and the spiced smell of food being cooked in the open, outside every hovel, beside every roadside stall. Groundnut stew, bean stew, 'mme-kwan' - palmtut soup with the rich sharp smell of the smoked fish. The moist yeastly odour of 'kenkey', fermented corn dough, steaming in black round-bellied cooking pots. The sweet half-cloying smell of roasting plantains. And over all, the warm stench of the sea.

Peside the road, the petty traders' stalls sprouted, dozens of little ramshackle

tables made of old boxes and piled high with lengths of cloth, packets of sugar, mirrors, sandals, sweets, pink plastic combs, a thousand thousand oddments. Women minded the stalls, or children. One small boy slept, his charge forgotten, the goods arrayed for thieves. At another stall, a woman reached down to turn the half-done plantains on the charcoal burner at her feet, then glanced at the baby she held in one arm, her tired eyes growing momentarily rested as she watched him drink her milk.

The street was a tangle of people. Women in mammy-cloths of every colour, women straight as royal palms, balanced effortlessly the wide brass headpans. A girl bread-seller carried on her head a screened box full of loaves and cakes. Coast men strolled in African cloth, the bright folds draped casually around them. Muslims from the north walked tall and haughty in the loose white trousers and embroidered robes of their kind. Hausa traders carried bundles tied up in white and black rough wool mats. A portly civil servant in khaki shorts wore with dignity an outdated pith helmet. And everywhere, there were children, goats and chickens. Vivid, noisy, chaotic, the life of the streets flowed on.

Nathaniel was part of them, and yet apart. He did not any longer live as these slum-dwellers lived, and yet he lived among them. He was educated, but he was not so much educated that he had left them far behind. Sometimes they were his fear expressed, and he wanted to shun them lest they pull him back into their river. And sometimes, more rarely, they were his hope.

They lived in mud and thatch huts, but never mind. They sickened with damp and malaria and guinea worm and yaws and bilharzia, but never mind. They went to the ju-ju man to get charms for curing, but never mind. Most of them were illiterate, shrewd and naive, suspicious and gullible. Any political shyster could move them with luxuriant promises. But never mind. They were strong.

They would do something, do something --

This world is one of rival-tribal conflict as well, such

as the petty jealousy between Yiamoo the tailor and Ankrah the carver that leads to a night assault in which the tailor is nearly killed. It is the world of old hallowed customs and superstitions as represented by the Amedebe's relatives, Nathaniel's uncle Adjei who comes to urge him to accept a position as clerk to the village Chief, Aya's mother Adua and Aunt Akousa who put up a formidable opposition to Nathaniel's insistence that his wife have her delivery in the city hospital. All these forces work upon Nathaniel and produce his imaginative abreactions wherein the past and present fight for his allegiance. It is only as he allows the stream of moving images to flow through his inner being that he begins to be liberated from their unconscious grip on his soul. These passages are always presented in a poetic rhythmic style and occur at intense moments of crisis when Nathaniel is unable to decide who he is or what he should do. The long length of these passages would make it cumbersome to quote completely, but we should note that they have a terrifying power and are religious in their import. "All night long my soul wrestled with the devil", laments Nathaniel while he is undergoing the conflict between the modern City, pictured demonically as a tempter, and the old gods of forest, river and earth. The images of the little boy in his mother's womb, like the little fish in the sea, suggest the oceanic maternal security out of which he must break in order to live as a free mature man.

A later passage, when he is resisting his uncle's behests to return to the village, reinforces this association between

past, land, water and matrix:

--The drowning man would struggle for a little while and then he would be quiet, and the River would lap him around with its softness, the brown murky stillness of its womb.

'I can't go!' Nathaniel repeated desperately.

--How many times have I cut the cord that fed me? How many times have I fought with the Mother to give me birth? How many times has the fish, feeling his gills aflutter with the stars, dragged himself from the womb of water, painfully to breathe?

There the reproach is continually thrown up to him that he has forgotten his ancestors and the love of his land; finally, his inner tension releases itself in a flood of childhood memory in which the forest and the protecting mother are knit into one symbolic complex.

--When I was a boy, on my father's farm, the forest was peopled with a million ghosts, a million gods. Stone and tree and root, a million eyes. I was not brave. I was slight and small for my age, and my mother had protected me too much. I was not brave. Was anyone? I thought the other boys were, then, but now I am not sure. Perhaps they were afraid, too. The forest was enclosed, shadowy, like a room filled with green shadows. It was my home. The voice of the forest was shrill all day -- a million million bees, a million million cicadas, a million million screaming birds. And at night the silence of the snake.

His fragmented and identity-less self longs for the security of the mother and all that is associated with her - home, earth, love, land, and carefree innocence - but his other side denies him any easy comfort or refuge.

--I called upon my gods. I called upon my gods. But I knew they would not answer.

--I knew my gods would not answer, for they were dead. My gods were dead in me. They died long ago. How can a god die? What a great death, when a god dies. The death of a king is only the death of a small boy, when a god dies.

Despite the bitter knowledge that the past is alive only in shadows and cannot be revived, the soul cannot escape paying its dues of mourning for the by-gone great ones. They cannot be exorcised without pain, and even then they never die, but rather metamorphose into new forms. At the end of Nathaniel's nightmare passage, the metamorphosis of the ancient Ghanian divinity symbols into a Christian context has been rendered complete. When he awakens, "cold with sweat", he recalls only one thing: "Jesus, fantastically, had been arrayed like a king of Ashanti." These psychodynamic eruptions serve to coalesce and integrate his consciousness, but they also starkly pinpoint the fact that, as he tells his uncle, "I belong between yesterday and today." When Adjei smiles and replies, "Put that is nowhere," Nathaniel completes the circle of aching self-knowledge: "I know. Yes, I know."

A further elaboration of this process of re-mythologization as it occurs in the transformation of religious symbols that uphold a world-view is to be seen in the Evangelical parade episode in which his wife, Aya, wants to participate. For her, who has never broken the familial ties and to whom the adaptation

to the new order can only be done through emotional means not rational, the church parade combines the old African religious symbols with the Christian. Jesus is another "child-god" to her, and she understands Him in terms of her heritage. Nathaniel recognizes this and becomes increasingly frustrated and impatient at her inability to shed the need for this religious display conducted on enthusiastic emotional lines, and when he watches her in the parade, he feels embarrassed, particularly as Miranda Kestoe also appears and indicates her delight with native African customs. However, shortly afterwards, he consents to go to the Evangelist Church meeting with Aya and is carried away by the auto-suggestive rhythm of the Preacher's voice promising salvation. Again, he relives his painful childhood at the Mission school where a priest mocked and rebuffed the boys. He desperately tries to reconcile the stern primitive Father god of Christians with his guilt complex about betraying his own father's gods, and the combined force of both authorities is massively line up to crush his struggling independence. Something has to break:

There was a line from a funeral song,  
long ago:

'Thou speeding bird, tell father  
That he left me on the other side  
of the River ---'

Oh, my father, why did you leave me  
here? And what shall I do? Our Father --  
my father -- my father which art in Hell --  
You cannot tell me, either of you. There  
is no advice from you or You. Two silences.

The conflict is released in the emotionally-charged air of the prayer-meeting and mediated toward resolution by the culturally-shared symbol of the River: his native river and the Jordan merge in one releasing image of force and psychic transformation whose reality he can experience as a liberating power in his life. The preacher's re-telling of the story of Joshua crossing the Jordan finally breaks into Nathaniel's reserve and resistance, and at the end he throws back his head and joins in the song. Everybody can be saved:

Oh every man, every man, no matter what  
his trouble. I heard that You did not  
turn any away.

In the symbolism of Joshua crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, Nathaniel has at last found a tentative mythological construct into which his own experience can be poured. It is an excellent illustration of how the religious mythology of the past was able to be absorbed into the needs of the present and was able to serve both the oppressed and the oppressors. The ambivalent nature of the myth, lending itself to many uses and interpretations, thus secures the uneasy, but nevertheless successful, integration of the individual into a new frame of reference. His precarious self-image is given a more powerful identification with a hero and he, too, is able to visualize success as a conqueror. Nathaniel's identity crisis in terms of his socio-historical and psychological position runs parallel to Kestoe's, and the white English world of the ruling mythology.

Within the textile Company, where Johnny is a new-comer,



there exists a definitely structured social order based upon old-country protocol. The irony is that all of the power-men in the colonial outpost would naturally be nothings back in England; but here, on foreign soil, they reign like petty princelings and degenerate ones at that. If there is any sympathy aroused in the reader for the private closed White Club which comprises the administrative set of the textile branch, it is only one of pity for those unwilling and, often, unable to change. Their own imprisonment within the confines of the ruling myth of racial superiority and "White Man's Burden" makes these people immune to life and the forces of growth. James and Cora Thatcher, Pedford and Helen Cunningham, all have an aura of disease, decay, neurosis, and death about them. James, as head of the local branch, which he spent the greater part of his life building up, is the most severely rigid of the group and acts out the role of supreme paternal authority-figure. His mind can never accept even the suggestion that the natives are not bad children to be ruled with iron discipline.

'I don't dislike Africans,' James went on, 'but they're like children, and if we forget that fact, we're liable to wrong both ourselves and them.'

Without entering unnecessarily into an analysis of the prejudiced mind, suffice it to say that James is portrayed as the last weak whimper of a dying Empire; he would prefer to go out with a bang but not even that mercy is allowed him by the forces of necessity and change. He tries to sustain his diminishing power by surrounding himself with men whom he considers to be

his allies, Bedford and Johnny; but the former is too weak to sustain even himself, and the latter proves to be his Judas.

Bedford, referred to as the "massive knight" because of his military bearing and training and, symbolically, his imprisonment in an outmoded armor of conduct and thought, shows how the system he is dedicated to uphold is his own worst enemy and debilitates him slowly from within. Alcoholism becomes his way of coping with fear and the frustrations of his work and marriage. Although a more emotional and warm person than James, Bedford clings to the old structures because they are the only security - albeit a highly unfulfilling one - that he has ever known. Africanization is for him rather a personal threat than one of principle; if he loses his job to another man, where will he go? What outpost in the dwindling Empire will have use for an aging alcoholic with three dependents?

Bedford's world was dead, and he did not know the language or currency of the new. Nobody wanted gentlemen nowadays. They were like the beautifully carved monstrosities Johnnie used to see when he went to furniture auctions with Janowicz--cheap enough to get, but what could you do with them, who had room for them any more?

The plight of the Cunninghams, seen from Johnnie's frequently empathetic perspective, is highlighted by Helen's chronic anxiety about everything - children, house, disease, husband, and future. On a lower rung of the hierarchy than James' wife, Cora, she has had to settle for a smaller and delapidated bungalow against whose frail outer defenses the jungle plant and animal

life makes progressive encroachment.

Just as Helen tries to protect herself and her children from the elements of life, so also does Cora. With slightly more affluence and prestige, she is basically not safer, and her attempt to create a miniature England in her home, by strictly keeping out any trace of local African life, results in tragic social sterility - a symbolic motif reinforced by her childlessness. In his first private visit with Cora, Johnnie surveys her room:

'I always like this room,' Johnnie lied obligingly. 'It's so un-African.'

She began to unfold, like some pale Graveyard peony in the charitable sun.

'In the old bungalow, we had such a lot of African things about--ebony heads, fetish figures, goldweights--stuff that James had picked up. I simply put it all away when we moved in here. I sent to Harrods for the curtain material. James wanted mammy-cloth, but I said no, Africa shant enter here at all. Just this one small place--I felt I'd earned the right. Of course, James likes Africa.'

'And you don't.'

'No--' even her voice was pastel, 'no I don't.' She poured a cup of tea from a china teapot shaped like Ann Hathaway's cottage.

Having confided in Johnnie the hardships of her life and her deepest secret and trauma, namely the still-birth of a baby daughter long ago, she continues to live a lonely life collecting brocade swatches to store in boxes. The sense of arrested life is overwhelming and attaches in some way to the entire English cast.

In this cast Johnnie has a crucial but ambivalent role; he

is not one of the established circle but certainly expects to work himself up into such a position of authority. Because of his youth and inexperience, he is well-treated and assisted by the old guard. James is coolly in command; Bedford hopes to be admired and to conceal his weakness from the younger man. The wives confide to him their lonely and frustrated moments. Thus it comes about that he is the only one who is adequately informed about the management circle and in a perfect position to become the informant to Cameron Sheppard. Fully aware of the betrayal he is undertaking and initially hesitant to disclose anything, he nevertheless succumbs and tells all in a long evening's session with the London visitor. A secret agreement ensues whereby Kestoe agrees to try to arrange for suitable African boys to be admitted into the firm. Curiously enough, it is not because of any real personal liking for Sheppard or of dislike of his companions that Johnnie acts in bad faith; in fact, he feels guardedly uneasy about the visitor. Although his own tendency is to fit in with the old-guard style of thinking, he is shrewd and calculating and sees that there is no promise in going down with a sinking ship.

Cameron Sheppard had none of the qualities Johnnie had once admired in James and Bedford. He had to be admired for another reason; he knew exactly what he wanted and he was going after it, methodically, scientifically, and without the slightest scruple. He didn't ask whether a thing was right or wrong. He only asked if it could be made to work. Perhaps that was why Miranda didn't like him.

In Sheppard the impersonal intellect is epitomized. No emotional considerations, either of love or hate, enter into the executive's calculations. Business is to be conducted on optimal efficiency and politically pragmatic lines. This is the character of the machine-age man: bland and courteous and skilled in mass manipulation for another abstract ideal. Feelings, since they interfere with business, must be eschewed but in a practical common-sense manner. His is not the repressive style of James or Redford.

'Personally, I neither like nor dislike the Africans,' Cameron had said. 'There's been entirely too much emotion in our dealings with them in the past, and it's done no one any good. It's essential for our own self-preservation that we should understand them, though, but it must be an objective study, without the personal involvements of hate or love. We can't afford the luxury of such irrationalities in these lean times. Pritannia's no longer a buxom wench who can give or withhold her favours. She's a matriarch, and an emaciated one at that, and she'll have to be very sharp-witted if she's to hang onto her family and keep them from straying. Don't you agree, Johnnie?'

While he is not an evil man by any stretch of imagination, it is difficult to suppress the query whether this grey brand of progress will really be very much better than the unchanging reactionary order or whether it will not result in an alternate type of slavery. It is quite apt that Miranda, the feminine half, should be the one to feel uneasy about Sheppard, since he manifests man acting unemotionally and solely on the basis of a pragmatic, rationally-enlightened intellect.

As mentioned above, Johnnie is fundamentally identity-less; he seeks himself and blindly seeks confirmation of who he wishes to be by annexing himself to a power structure where, he hopes, eventually he will achieve a superior position. His background has predisposed him to distrust and to hate and to fear; his creed is the survival of the fittest and he feels scant remorse when called upon to betray feeling factors in human relations. This is because he actually does not dare to be committed to anyone or anything outside his own ego; he sees the world only in terms of its security or threat-inducing possibilities. Whatever course of action minimizes its dangers for him, that is followed. He will be an ally only so long as it suits his purposes, and for that reason cannot be counted upon to have strong personal allegiances of any kind. Thus he makes the perfect collaborator for Sheppard, but not before a brief tinge of doubt pricks his conscience: should he become an informant or not? Sensing his discomfort, Sheppard quickly puts him at ease and assures him that:

'We don't want anything underhanded, of course, but I don't think you need go into details with James just yet. I'll assume responsibility. It's merely--what shall we call it?--a pilot scheme. I can't give you any definite authority, you understand. But you go ahead with it. It's the first promising sign I've seen here.'

Despite the smooth placation of conscience, the moment of choice becomes one of Johnnie's crisis points because it will determine his character and identity.

Johnnie took the card. The dead voices were still. Now there was only his own voice, shouting inside him, shouting his identity.

Who a man is is not determinable without looking to his actions. Identity should not be considered a noun but a verb. It is not a ready-made thing to which one can point and say, "There I am; that is me"; rather, it is a flow of acts, a process of choosings, no more and no less. Those choices and actions alone constitute an identity because they reveal the motive spirit animating the external form. The following excerpt concludes Johnnie's moment of truth by casting the players into a symbolic relief; very appropriately, it is the animal kingdom which provides the best imagery...

When Johnnie went into the bedroom he found a dead gekko on the floor, belly uppermost. It was already covered with black ants. They swarmed around it in a loose organized army, and their combined strength was shifting it. Swaying from side to side, in jerky halting movements, the lizard corpse was being carried away to have its bones picked clean. The ants had not been obvious in this room before, but they must have been here, unobtrusively waiting. In its strength of life, the lizard had preyed upon them. Johnnie looked at the gekko coldly. Then he kicked it away, out of sight, and the ants with it.

... or, as Johnnie had mused earlier in regard to Cora's dim future, "The fall of a dynasty". In this fall, he has played an important part, but the manner in which he played it is morally questionable.

With the imminent collapse of the old guard at the firm,

Johnnie's future career is almost assured success, but not before he can quickly produce some African boys to be trained for the new positions. At this point the fates of the protagonists cross through the meddling and naive intervention of Miranda, who has spent her spare time like a junior anthropologist and amateur student of native culture. Nathaniel seems unable to avoid bumping into her wherever he goes, and to his annoyance, she sees everything native as quaint, overly-impressive, or as a choice relic and fascinating custom. Through her persistence the two men finally meet in an exchange of services: Nathaniel wants to find work for his students and Johnnie wants to find Africans. The whole affair ends in dismal failure from a practical point of view. The boys who are sent have bribed Amegbe with shirts and money and proved inept in the required skills. When Nathaniel goes to inquire about them at Johnnie's office, the white boss explodes in a fury of scorn at the ignorance and moral depravity of Africans, for the boys, in their disappointment with not having been assigned instantly to choice posts, told all about the bribes.

'Please--please, sir,' and through his panic he despised himself as much as if he had knelt, 'please--if you would allow me to explain--'

The whiteman leaned across the desk. 'You couldn't explain,' he said softly, venomously. 'Not to me. What a fool I was to imagine--'

Abruptly he broke off and turned away. Without looking at Nathaniel, he jerked one hand in a short contemptuous gesture towards the door.

'Get out of here. Go.'

Stumbling, half sobbing, Nathaniel went, his briefcase clutched in his hand.



After this humiliating episode, both men are in a rage; Johnnie because this spells his failure to find suitable African material to impress Sheppard and to elevate his own ego in the other's eyes, and Nathaniel because this failure has reconfirmed his alienated self-image as a bush-boy, a primitive, and thus an inferior being in all respects to the white man. Hatred and pain corrode his soul, and he is convinced the only alternative now is to go back to the tribe and accept the job of Chief's clerk. The worst suffering perhaps is that he will never be able to explain anything to anyone; he is doomed to be mute and misunderstood, like a wild beast that feels and suffers but cannot utter and explain its position. If Kestoe should inform the police as he threatened to do, who would believe Nathaniel or sympathize with his motives? Even conscience is powerless to break the grip of hate-humiliation.

Nathaniel, it is not good to hate, for it corrodes a man's own soul. My people wash their souls to keep them from harm, to keep them from hate. My people wash their souls to keep them whole. Wash your soul, Nathaniel, wash your soul. I cannot. Hate is a fire.

Wash your soul, Nathaniel. Your King commands it. Why do you hate? Why do you blame? Because it absolves you from blame?

I cannot think of that. Not yet. Not for a while. Let me hate in peace.

Wash your soul, Nathaniel.  
I cannot.

Nathaniel projects his hate upon the white oppressors, and Johnnie his onto the black incompetents. When Kestoe returns home after the office confrontation, he is still livid

with rage, worried that "Time's running out". When questioned by Miranda about what he means, the story of his complicity with Sheppard begins to unravel and reveal the true motive for his anger.

'Cameron Sheppard,' he said impatiently, 'he needs his showpieces quickly, to dangle in front of the Poard, before he'll be given a completely free hand here. The whole thing's got to be done before Independence. What the hell will I tell him now? What'll he think? It makes me look like a fool--'

He quickly returns to his former racial prejudices, harangues in the style of James, and rejects his wife's kindly excuses for the boys. But it is too late for him to prevent her intimating the deeper reasons for his fury, and this unnerves him to the point where he turns and literally walks out on her and drives away.

Now at this stage something very interesting happens which is important to note and to understand. Just when the two men feel lowest in their sense of worth and identity, when they are consumed by rage and busy laying the blame of their own failures onto the other race, they both seek an identical outlet for this feeling of personal impotence: rape. Sexual conquest is the first suggestion that offers itself to their minds as a means of revenge and masterful self-assertion. The normally duty-conscious and restrained Nathaniel immediately goes to the room of Lamptey, the Highlife Boy, and accepts his offer to go to the City for excitement. In his imagination he visualizes a sophis-

ticated City girl who will take away his inferiority feelings, transform him, and compensate for his loss of pride.

There would be only one night like this, all his life. Tomorrow the fear would descend again, and the long process of humiliation would begin. But just this once he would belong in the city and to the city, heart, muscle and soul of him.

Johnnie, who has previously toyed with the idea of having a black girl but always rejected this wish with a mixture of loathing and fascination, heads for "Weekend in Wyoming", a high-life club. The irony of this encounter serves to point out two things: first, that the protagonists are in some sense each others' shadow selves that need to be met and accepted, and second, that woman becomes the trading stamp between men, the last resort of the oppressed consciousness in its final desperate bid to regain power. If men cannot successfully subdue one another in the social apparatus of the world, then they turn their frustrated power-drive on woman. Naturally, the relation between the sexes then becomes totally dehumanized and a sado-masochistic affair. The woman comes to represent his inferior and despised self, his weaker portion, of which he has just been reminded in the power jostlings of the world; she is the symbol of what he rejects in himself. When he cannot gain confirmation of his masculinity among men, he turns to women for confirmation or else simply for release of hate and frustration through a sexualization of this energy.

The perverse quality of this relation is manifested in

the reactions of both men to their girls. Lamptey has been the go-between for them. Two poor uneducated country girls, Emerald and Sweet Sue, are fodder for the sacrifice. Emerald is the less sophisticated of the two and when Nathaniel sees her he loses his desire as a wave of sympathy for her obvious inexperience floods over his awareness.

How had she come here? He wondered if it was her own choice -- the land was poor and the people lived poor lives where she came from. Or had her father or her uncle made the deal? What kind of contract bound her and who was Joe-boy? Nathaniel would never find out. It was not intended that he should.

Instead of a hardened prostitute, this gem is unpolished, rude, but nonetheless real. Her similarity to his country awkwardness makes him angry; this is not the kind of girl he wanted.

Had Lamptey thought he wouldn't feel at ease with a city girl? Hadn't he seen that was what Nathaniel wanted above all else? Or had this one merely been an extra, someone who could be spared? He, Nathaniel, didn't have much money -- Lamptey knew that. Why waste a city girl on him?

Emerald only makes him more conscious of his own despised self and in a fit of revulsion he rushes for the washroom, but before he gets there, he bumps into the table where Johnnie Kestoe is sitting. An exchange of blows follows and Nathaniel flees back to his table in fear of police reprisal. Lamptey is the only one who can set things right for his friend because he holds the trump and that can make this dangerous game still

come out in Nathaniel's favour and end it.

Lamprey grinned.  
 'Easy,' he said. 'I tell him, my friend he got himself in trouble, small. And I say to him -- look here, you forget the whole thing. Forget the police, forget tonight, forget everything. If you do, I say, you won't be sorry. I can make some nice arrangement for you. He knows what I mean. So he says -- what if I do? So I say -- if you do, man, you better stick to it or true's God your wife gonna know every single thing.'

As Emerald is led away like a mute heifer to the slaughter, Nathaniel is aware of the irony and injustice of the deed and his own incompetent complicity in the chain of events.

Of all the people he had ever known, of all the people who had ever cared what happened to him, only the Highlife Foy could have saved him then. And in that way. With that one girl, out of all the girls who ever walked the streets. It seemed to Nathaniel that she was a human sacrifice. And he had allowed it. He had been relieved that there was someone who could be sacrificed.

Now his sense of worthlessness and impotence is complete and he tells Victor, who has just wandered into the club, of his decision to return to the village.

'You know where,' Nathaniel said. 'This isn't my home, this city of new ways, this tomorrow. You know where I belong, the village -- back there, far back, where a man knows what to do, because he hears the voices of the dead, telling him. Here, I spoil everything. And I don't know why --'

The sadistic element in the human encounter is starkly

pronounced in Johnnie's case. Whereas Nathaniel turns the rage against himself and manifests an outward masochism, Johnnie represses his self-hate and turns his fury outward in cruelty toward the weak: women and negroes. In the person of Emerald, then, he has the psychologically-loaded combination in one figure. He does not really want a sexual relation with a human being; this is made quite clear by his impersonal attitude to her. She is a thing, a projection screen for his tormented fantasies of power and degradation. She is the scapegoat on whom he can enact his soul-sickness. The question of her identity raises itself in his mind momentarily as they stand in the sordid little back-room of the club. Who is she? Of course, who she is must stand in basic relation to who he is, so he cannot allow himself to indulge his curiosity. He is a faceless, identity-less man on the run, on the way to power and success; he cannot afford to know this person who faces him awkwardly.

It occurred to Johnnie that he might be her first white man. Perhaps, like Whiskey's child-wife, she wondered if whitemen were like black in any way at all, even this way. But this girl could not refuse him.

She was very young, not more than sixteen, he guessed, perhaps younger. He wondered what her experience had been and where she had come from.

No. None of that was his concern. She was an African whore. That was all he needed to know about her, all he wanted to know.

If only she weren't so quiet. He took a step towards her and grasped her shoulders.

'What's your name?'

Why bother to ask that? What did it matter to him, her name? She was an unknown brown girl in the anonymity of this room, on a night that would be conveniently forgotten.

Like Nathaniel, Johnnie feels it is a personal affront to him that this creature is not a sophisticated City siren but instead a frightened child-slave who cannot even speak English. The woman ought to hide this very aspect of the man himself - his ignorance, powerlessness, and helplessness - and re-assure him in the illusion-generating folds of suave enticements. She ought to be the welcome mask for his own faceless child self from which he is hiding and running. But when she proves rather to resemble that outcast part of himself, he reacts with double resentment and fury.

Johnnie felt cheated. All at once he became positive that Nathaniel Amegbe and the spiv had arranged the situation. This was Nathaniel's revenge -- to find the most stupid, the most cowlike street-walker in all Accra, an animal, a creature hardly sentient, a thing. And they would be sitting downstairs now, laughing their hoarse laughter while the highlife blared and moaned.

The only thing that really mocks him are his own demons of delusion. He cannot, however, silence them before enacting his sadism of rape on the passive frightened girl whose inexperience stirs him to a pitch of savagery in which the cultural power/ domination parallel is evident.

She was a whore -- why should she look like that? But he was glad she did. Her slight spasm of fear excited him. She was a continent and he an invader, wanting both to possess and to destroy.

The ultimate irony is two-fold: first, the girl is virgin, and

second, Johnnie doubted that he could ever have pressed charges successfully against Amegbe. Both men have waged a war in their souls, in their imaginations ultimately, and yet the carnage is always manifest in outer human suffering.

Yet it is precisely through this experience that Johnnie is partially led back to himself and that he regains a lost portion of his being. After the sexual assault, he gradually realizes that she is bleeding, and the recollection of his mother in a similar position - "A clot of blood on a dirty quilt...." - helps to arouse a new tenderness in him. He sees the damage he has done to her body and admires her courage. Gradually she begins to have a face for him. Even though they cannot speak the same language, they can communicate by a touch of understanding, and it is noteworthy that the girl is the one to show her openness to forgiveness, partly out of fear and partly out of stoicism and inner depth of feeling.

He knew nothing about her, but she no longer seemed anonymous to him. He noticed for the first time that her face was fineboned, her hands slender and smooth as though they had not been coarsened by too much heavy work. Had she been sold by her family, or stolen, or had she elected to come here? He would never know. He could not speak to her. They had no language in common.

But it did not really matter who she specifically was. She was herself and no other. She was someone, a woman who belonged somewhere and who for some reason of her own had been forced to seek him here in this evil-smelling cell, and through him, indignity and pain.

He looked down at the girl. Her eyes pleaded with him. She knew she had not



been skilful, and she was afraid that he was not pleased. She begged him, silently, not to betray her to her employer. She saw from his face that she had nothing to fear from him now. She looked again, more closely, as though surprised. Then -- astonishingly -- she reached out her hand and touched his. She smiled a little, her eyes reassuring him, telling him she would be all right -- it was nothing -- it would soon heal.

Afterward, he covers her body and leaves to return home, but on the way he experiences an emotional release and a healing.

He drove his car to the edge of the city, beside the lagoon, and parked it in the grove of coconut palms. He put his head down on the steering wheel and sobbed as he had not done for nearly twenty years.

The remaining four chapters of the novel succeeding this climax move in rapid succession toward a resolution of the previous conflicts and show how the two factions manage to effect a compromise to these problems. Laurence as a writer is not prone to happy endings for the sake of satisfying the mind's hunger for absolute order in a world of experience which is always susceptible to chaos and randomness; in this she reflects Ezra Pound's observation: "Life for the most part does not happen in neat little diagrams and nothing is more tiresome than the continual pretence that it does." Possibly, as most of the reviewers and critics of this first novel conclude, the ending of This Side Jordan is too well contrived and promising, but it is true to imaginative requirements. Since she has been dealing with the psychological-mental oppressions of people -

as these are prior to physical-cultural ones and deeply interwoven with them - it is not surprising that the plot should take a turn towards improved relations between the races and the sexes after the passionate struggles and climax of the preceding chapter. Both Amegbe and Kestoe have achieved greater self-insight than they had formerly, although they are by no means over the hump; the climb is still upwards, but strength and insight for that journey can be achieved only by first going downward into the depths of buried, repressed, and rejected life. Old gods and demons must be confronted and rati-fied before new life and hope can be born. Johnnie and Nathaniel each have to deal with identity quests, with mother-land-blood-and-independence problems, and each one has to go down into an underworld where old terrifying ghosts lie awake and sirens of illusion tempt the male ego. Laurence's two heroes also achieve some measure of new-won freedom, and this is symbolized by the birth of a child for each man, Nathaniel's son and Johnnie's daughter. These children of the next generation will hopefully enjoy a happier future in Ghana.

The novel does make clear, however, that while men's capacity for faith is ever revived, even in the midst of suffering, it is not possible to be utopian about man's capacity for evil and oppression. An almost naive and lax optimism settles over Nathaniel once his life recaptures some order - his fears placated, his relatives removed from his doorstep for awhile, his job at the Academy ensured with a few changes made, a little more power to bolster self-esteem and a new baby

boy to carry on his name. The sins of the past are forgotten and their remembrance put aside in the affirmations of today.

What if things had gone wrong once? They need not again. Now he would have power here, power to change things. And he would change, himself. At heart he was an honest man.

It occurred to Nathaniel that if he returned the necklace and the shirts, it would buy back his honesty. That was what he would do. He would do it. And after this, he would not be foolish again, he would not make any more foolish mistakes. He would be the man he had been before. He would come back to the school with new authority.

Confusions, doubts, self-reproaches are cast aside as he imagines the future, his future, and its possibilities. The past is mythologically integrated into the present as he completes his "rites of passage" from one stage to another. With newfound confidence he tells his old Headmaster, Mensah:

'I will stay.' Nathaniel said at last.  
 --Let the grey parrot scream from the  
 'odum' tree and let the strangler vines  
 reach down to grasp at nothing. Forest,  
 you will not have me yet. And let the  
 River beat its brown waters on the banks.  
 Let it mourn for its child that has shed  
 its gills forever.  
 'I will stay,' he said again.

Even his position at the Academy can be viewed in a fresh mythological light now that he has more security and power. Mensah suggests symbolic overtones for their respective roles in the work to be done.

'Fine, fine, fine,' he said smoothly. 'We will work it out together. We will make people hear about Futura Academy. You will make suggestions, eh? You are in touch with these things. A new curriculum -- yes, yes, that's it. You are a sincere man, Amegbe. Not too clever, in some ways, perhaps, but a sincere man -- that's the thing. You will be Futura's "kra", eh? How is that?'

He laughed uproariously at his joke.

Nathaniel tried to laugh, too, but the laughter stuck in his throat. He was to be its soul, seeking perfection? Its guide in a new land, its ferryman across Jordan? All that, when he did not know the way himself?

'What does that leave you to be?' he asked.

Jacob Abraham chortled appreciatively.

'Yes,' he said, 'just what you are thinking.'

By the same sacrilegious comparison, Jacob Abraham would be the 'sunsum' of the school. Its personality, filled with self, greedy for life, but with an enormous vitality, an enormous will.

Nathaniel at first wonders if the analogy might be absurd but then is overtaken by enthusiasm and determination.

'We must have faith!' Nathaniel cried, in impulsive joy. 'We will do something, do something. It will be all right -- you will see!'

Here is demonstrated the power of mythology to carry souls forward to completion of their life tasks which otherwise would be too intolerably heavy and impossible to achieve. This is how it has always been in man's history - his faith and hope have outstripped his capacity to do, and only through their powerful impetus has man ever managed to achieve anything. Py

believing in the possibilities of things, in the heroic will, man makes his myths into realities.

Nathaniel's last respects must still be paid to the old gods, or rather to the goddess, before he can enter through the gates of tomorrow, and this he does after leaving Mensah's office. The passage in which he enters the Church and pays homage to the Mother is highly interesting and significant because it consolidates the central image pattern that has underlain his psychic structure and, by extension, the novel's.

On his way home, Nathaniel stopped in at his church. It was cool and quiet inside, away from the sun and heat. No one else was there. Nathaniel walked the length of the church to the niche where the ebony Madonna stood.

She was there, serene with love, the Mother of all men, her painted blue cloak around her black-gleaming shoulders. She looked at him from her calm eyes, and they became for him no longer wood.

He stood beside her, awkwardly, wanting to kneel but afraid someone might see him there in broad daylight and wonder what trouble he had that made him kneel here, now by himself.

--Mother, Mother -- forgive me. I am staying here. Forgive me, but I cannot go back. Never in my life. Let them understand.

--I have a new chance and I have a new name and I live in a new land with a new name. And I cannot go back. Let them understand. If I do something or if I do nothing, I must stay. A man must belong somewhere. If it is right or if it is not right, I must stay. The new roots may not grow straight, but they have grown too strong to be cut away. It is the dead who must die. Let them understand.

--In my Father's house are many mansions. A certain Drummer dwells in the House of Nyankopon, in that City of Many Mansions.

I know it now. It is there that he wells, honoured, now and always. It may be that I shall never see him again. But let him dwell there in peace. Let him understand. No -- he will never understand. Let me accept it and leave him in peace.

--I cannot have both gods and I cannot have neither. A man must belong somewhere. Mother of men, hear me --

--My God is the God of my own soul, and my own speech is in my mouth, and my home is here, here, here, my home is here at last.

--Let me wash my soul.

--And let the fear go far from me.

The conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy is well-established here, and in Western civilization as a whole of course. The values upheld by the Feminine Principle (Great Mothers) are those of feeling-tones, Nature, man in relationship to the Whole, and to himself as a part of a greater sharing community. On the contrary, those upheld by the Masculine Principle (the Father) are concerned with power, conquest, domination by mind and force, and authority. When these two principles are separated, they cause personal and cultural conflict and imbalance. Such a situation produces one-sidedness and discord. Only by coming to terms with the two forces and reconciling them to some degree within himself can man become more whole. Nathaniel attempts to be free from the mother influence but he cannot be entirely so because the Great Mother is a cosmic principle which can never be overcome by the ego. It must be recognized and respected as a psychic-cosmic power and lived in relation with, not against. Since Africa and its culture

have been cast in the inferior feminine position by patriarchal values and standards of excellence, Nathaniel has shared in her shame and ignominy and has tried to become identified with the white Father rulers. This was naturally a futile attempt. Mythology, the greatest power there is, was arrayed against him. In the end, therefore, he comes to some degree of accommodation amongst the many myths that claim his allegiance, and partially solves his dilemma by recalling the words: "In my Father's house are many mansions." He hopes that all the gods, old and new, may exist peaceably side by side and leave him alone.

Regardless of his wish to be a modern rational African, freed from the old myths of his tribal past and educated into the new myths of the Europeans, Nathaniel returns to Biblical myth in the concluding pages of the novel. He is sitting on the doorstep with his son in his arms when suddenly it strikes him to name the baby Joshua. Earlier the Jordan River image had served as a symbolic conductor of his consciousness at the Evangelic prayer meeting. Now he passes this myth onto his child via a name, because names have to do with identity-images, identity-expectations, and "Who Am I?" has been the crucial conflict all along. By naming his son after a hero, he expresses his own wish for conquest of the land, and in short, for all those patriarchal projects of world-conquest and glorious rule.

Nathaniel held the baby up again, high  
in his arms.  
'See--' he said, 'you're Joshua.'

--Someone saw it. Someone crossed  
that River and won that battle.

--Someone took that city and made it  
his.

'You'll know what to do with it, boy,  
won't you?' he said, softly, pleadingly.  
'You'll know how to make it work. You'll  
know how to make it all go well.'

With undoubtedly better persipacity than his father, the infant's response is unwittingly appropriate: "The baby began to cry." While Nathaniel is fermenting uneasy dreams of glory for Ghana and his heir ...

He glanced at his son, and the name kept  
beating through his mind like all the drums  
of Ghana.

--Joshua, Joshua, Joshua, I beg you.  
Cross Jordan, Jordan.

... the baby feeds peacefully at Aya's breast. Perhaps here is an image of contrasts which the reader ought to explore seriously, for is it not the child who enters the Kingdom of Heaven? And what does it mean to be a child if not the issue of both cosmic principles, the integrated progeny of a Mother and a Father?

Johnnie's inner life also changes somewhat after the catharctic experience at the road-side. His feeling-nature had to undergo a purgation before he could allow his emotions to surface. The coldness and irritability which had previously marred his relations with Miranda now begin to recede as he sees her individually and concretely, not merely as an annoying appendage with whom he has scant soul-contact. There is also a



suggestion that the masculine domination complex which had been so destructively operant in Johnnie's behaviour is not the peculiar vice of any race. At the beginning of chapter thirteen, Johnnie hears his servant's unjustified complaints about his wives, and the parallel between powerlessness and oppression is very clearly demonstrated.

The cockrels crowed the brash dawn, and Johnnie wakened. He lay very still and listened to the morning. The slow rusty groan of a door, then Whiskey's hoarse and irascible muttering as he cursed at his two wives for his own sterility. Pare feet shuffling across the compound. A key rattling in the lock, as the old man entered the bungalow kitchen. A cymbal-clashing of angry sound -- Whiskey attacking the kerosene stove, daring it not to burn. And all the while the low reiterated mourning -- 'Why God give pickin for all men and me He give none? Why God do so to me?'

From the servants' quarters came the clunk and thud of earthen bowls being unstacked and charcoal placed in the burner. The shrill quaver of the old wife as she scolded and nagged at the younger one. Then the girl, taking the water bucket to the outside tap and singing to herself in a high clear voice, patient and lonely, like a single bird lost from its forest.

Johnnie closed his eyes and tried to sleep again, but he remained awake.

Then Miranda was bending over him, her dark hair loose around her shoulders.

'You must have come in late last night,' she said. 'I didn't hear you.'

He reached out a hand tentatively to her face.

There follows a new exchange of tenderness between the two wherein both arrive at a deeper understanding of the mystery of life. Miranda, whose main efforts had been directed

toward mental knowledge just as her husband's had been toward mental power, finds herself willing just to "let be", not to pry into or to analyze the hidden recesses of the heart, but simply to stand in reverence and respect before the mysterious; that is the necessary balance to mental meddling and ultimately the intuitive path of knowledge. In that way, one does not seek knowledge and power through mental means, nor does one "murder to dissect"; instead, the mysteries of life and cosmos are allowed to unfold by themselves to the observant and humble mind. This is reminiscent of a Wordsworthian and Lawrencian approach to the world, and it seems that Miranda has learned her lesson. The birth of her daughter symbolizes no less a beginning for her than it does for her husband. A new feminine (receptive, intuitive, and wise) element has been added to them both. For Johnnie, the birth was another traumatic and cathartic experience. Blood, which he had always associated with terror and death, now becomes for the first time the conductor of life. This is a great emotional revelation to him. The old destructive memory of his mother's death is imaginatively purged by the witnessing of his daughter's entry into the world. Just as the image of the river had been a psychic conductor and transformation agent for Nathaniel, so does blood assume that function for Johnnie.

Then the blood. The placenta came away, and a torrent of bright blood followed. The sight of it did not sicken Johnnie, and for a moment he wondered why. Then he knew. Always, before, he had thought

of blood only in relation to death.

The indication that these soul-experiences have had a transformative effect on the couple, in the manner indicated above, is finally strengthened in this passage.

That afternoon, Johnnie and Miranda left the baby in the care of Whiskey's young wife while they drove out to Sakumono Beach. They walked along the sand, past a grove of palms, a sacred grove. A few old fishing boats rested on the shore near the palms. They were grey and cracked, husks of fishing boats like shells cast off by sea creatures. Beside them, the women of the village waited with their headpans for the evening boats to ride the wild breakers, bringing the day's catch to shore.

Miranda walked close to the fetish huts, little hives of woven straw, concealing their power and their fear from the casual eye.

Johnnie watched her. She would never know what was inside the huts, what collection of bones or tangled hair or freak sea-spine comprised their godhead. They were tightly tied at the top of the hive, sealed off as their worshippers were sealed, defying curiosity.

The green ragged leaves of the coconut palms rustled and whispered, ancient untranslatable voices.

But there was another voice on the wind. In the nearby fishing village, a young man was singing a highlife, a new song.

Laurence steers the narrative toward an optimistic conclusion, and the only ones who fall by the wayside are those who cannot or will not be reborn, those who refuse to cross over Jordan into a new tomorrow. The two English executive couples face a tragic fate, but they chose their own destiny

by clinging to a destructive and outdated myth. As the myths change, so does social reality, and those who resist the life-process must end by being inevitably swept away in the mighty current.

This Side Jordan is a beautiful and inspiring first novel by an artist who has indeed begun to probe the heart and mind of human beings in relation to society and the Imagination, and certainly they cannot be separated. Though the novel ends with a strongly-accented major chord, there are, nevertheless, undertones of questioning. Kestoe will become the new branch manager and Amegbe will resume his teaching with new dignity. Both feel happier personally because more power has accrued to them; but neither has come to any deeper understanding of the relation between myth, identity and power. Their stories end on a note of guarded optimism that the future will be brighter, that racial integration will occur on reasonable grounds, and that Ghana will be a civilized modern country. One closes the book with the feeling that if the Nathaniels of the Third World try to emulate the Western patriarchal system and to cut the umbilical cord with the Mother Power<sup>3</sup> that ever sustains all human life and establishes the laws of the heart of the species, then the progress they rapturously envision will result in another form of alienation, and true identity will again have been missed. In our civilization, identity is tied to power and both are determinants in one's social existence. The

world has thus become a battlefield for people working out their personal and collective myths of mastery or servitude, greatness or weakness. Only by becoming more fully aware of this process as it operates in individual lives can there be true grounds for hope. Personal integration must precede universal social integration, and toward this goal the novel has surely pointed and wisely led.

## Chapter 2 Footnotes

- 1 Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961).  
All subsequent references taken from this edition.
  
- 2 Berger, Peter, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 29-52.
  
- 3 This term, has, no doubt, a mythological ring; nevertheless, it will be used throughout this study to indicate the Feminine aspect of psychic differentiation which in the patriarchal phase is devalued and rendered powerless. In the patriarchal (fathers and sons) stage of psychic development, the self-conscious ego is identified with the male and the enemy to be overcome (the Monster) is the Mother. However, in the earlier phase of social and mythic organization, which paralleled the psychological stage of humanity, the Mother Power was supreme and represented a high level of culture. If we understand myths, ideologies and social systems to be outer expressions of inner developments in the spiritual evolution of mankind, then clearly an androgynous phase is now in process of development and exteriorization.  
For further reading in this direction, see:  
Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Human Consciousness, Trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 182-191.  
June Singer, Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), pp. 6-14.  
Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. ix-xxi.  
Andrew Greeley, The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 49-72.

### CHAPTER 3

#### The Stone Angel

The previous chapter examined the significance of myth in shaping the personal and national destinies of people, but particularly how this was experienced from a male point of view. Also noted was the paramount importance of the relation between power and identity in the masculine myth structures, and it was further suggested that a harmonization with the Mother or Female mystery would have to take place if the one-sidedness of the existent world order were to be rectified and balanced in a totally human manner. Although the ending of This Side Jordan was optimistic in its symbolic prognosis, there should be critical reservation from a mythologically-conscious stance. This is the myth of Empire-building, of a "chosen people" (regardless of their race) on the ascendancy from slavery to world-power, and the very fact that this myth actually does lend itself to use by almost any crushed or politically weakened people for the purpose of self-liberation and renaissance must make us cognizant of its negative and detrimental implications without necessarily weakening our sympathies for its positive and affirmative motivation. The fact remains that our Western Judaeo-Christian tradition is based upon this myth, that it is, moreover, a male-oriented, patriarchal myth whose basic concerns have to do with law, authority and power. It defines identity in terms of these attributes, and naturally leads therefore to an Ozymandian culmination: "look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair". Pride in this self-glorification through empire-

building thus becomes a hallmark of this guiding mythology and is always accompanied by the inevitable sneer upon the weak and powerless. The dialectic of power and weakness is inherent in this mythology and cannot be satisfactorily overcome except by a transcendence to a new level of understanding. Its power rose out of weakness, and it will always require another powerless entity or group to affirm it in its new condition. Without the latter to hold up the mirror of delusion and distorted greatness to it, power cannot survive.

In the following chapters the implications of this myth for woman, specifically four realistically depicted women who comprise the heroines of Margaret Laurence's next novels, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners, will be explored. To some extent, this point was already touched upon in the last chapter's discussion of the "Weekend in Wyoming" scene. Hagar, as well as Rachel, Stacey and Morag, all have roots in a recognizable historical setting and their situation and personal struggles can only be fully understood when the mythological structure of their world is comprehended. Indeed, their struggles are primarily due to the anguish of finding themselves imprisoned in a structure, without and within, that no longer answers their basic questions or fulfills their deepest needs. They do not live and strive within an imaginative vacuum, but rather within a very familiar world that has largely shaped all of us; for that very reason it is necessary to understand the implication of the patriarchal mythology for woman, and its alliance with Christianity, since that is the



symbolic universe, or "sacred canopy", under which Laurence's heroines live out their fates.

In This Side Jordan the Negro and woman became the models of weakness in the prevailing cultural mythology of the European. The association with the ancient Mother-based and communal-oriented social and religious structure had to be torn out of Nathaniel's mind and heart if he were to become a participant in the new world of the Fathers and eventually gain access to a degree of power himself.

In The Stone Angel the ethos of the Fathers reigns already as the novel opens and the Mother (both personal and collective) is dead and buried. On her grave, man has erected his monument, his seal of supremacy and victory - a stone angel marker symbolizing the cold transcendent heavenly power he identifies as his god.

The Biblical symbolism in The Stone Angel has been pointed out by reviewers of this novel, but no attempt has been made to situate it in terms of the underlying mythology and thereby extend the analysis to include a social critique. It is not sufficient to note that the heroine of this novel is analogically linked to her namesake, Hagar, in the Old Testament, and that she undergoes a type of conversion experience before her death, if we wish to gain a fully realistic insight into the life situation which she has struggled against all her life. We must find out what is the symbolic universe in which she has lived and what it is against which she has rebelled and erected the formidable barrier of pride which most readers consider her sal-

ient trait. It is not enough to say she is a proud old termagant, but admirable all the same; in fact, it does not drive to the heart of her fate at all because it does not account for the cause; it merely records the symptom.

The mythology or conditioned cosmos into which Hagar was born and continued to live out her life was the Christian Protestant one, more specifically, Calvinist-Presbyterian. Insofar as this structure has provided the common-consent universe for a majority of people growing up in the present age of history, Hagar is a cultural as well as a psychological forbearer to Laurence's other heroines, all of whom are influenced by and in rebellion against the same system. It is not until we reach Morag Gunn, in The Diviners, that the heroine attempts to create her own myth of meaning in a more fully conscious way. Hagar, Rachel and Stacey still are victims of the "Old Dispensation", and in this sense it is most appropriate that the starting point in the sequence of novels should be Hagar who is the cultural symbol of the "outcast" woman, the rejected Egyptian who represented the fertility cult (Great Mother) tradition with its emphasis on regenerative union with Nature which the Hebrew religion opposed and in whose mythology the Nile Serpent became the power of evil.

Woman's situation has consequently been like Hagar's - the slave-servant of Abraham, the "out" woman, mother of the Ishmaels of life, of those who do not belong lawfully and properly in the ruling mythology. She is the mother of peripheral wanderers, the oppressed, and the outcasts like herself. It seems to me that

Laurence has taken on this identification in her heroines, rather than the "inside" role of Sara, because she feels keenly the injustices and ironies inherent in the hegemonic mythology and because she genuinely searches for truth. In this way she is also in the line of Romantic protest, for Cain and Ishmael belong to the same type of borderline figure as Satan; half repulsive and damned, half attractive and liberated from the confines of imposed lawfulness. Laurence's Hagar must herself come to terms with the World of the Fathers, whose product she manifestly is, and also integrate the lost and suppressed Mother aspect of being. She must make the transition from a religion of law to love.

The Stone Angel is as much about Hagar's father, Jason Currie, as it is about the ninety-year-old protagonist. From the very opening paragraph, which sets the tone and symbolic identification of the heroine, the clue to Hagar's character and fate is given.

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

This marble monument, which "had been brought from Italy at a terrible expense", was more a testimonial to the father's pride and success than to his personal love or devotion. The blank vacant eyeballs of this decomposing foreign monument, around

whose base the cemetery weeds and flowers grow tenaciously and obliviously, testify to a moral blindness on the part of man's spirit, a flaw which became Jason's own legacy to his daughter. The spectacle of this incongruous transplant falling into silent ruin amid the sole omnipotent force of life presents us with a significant understated moral commentary in itself and is again allusive to Shelley's verses:

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that  
colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

or,

Rome has fallen, ye see it lying  
Heaped in undistinguished ruin:  
Nature is alone undying.

The "fledgling pharoahs in an uncouth land" brought with them from Europe if not wealth then that centuries-ingrained tradition of imperialism and cultural superiority which clashed defiantly with the indigenous native primitivism of the new world. Their conviction of cultural superiority had a powerful ally in the religious institution of the Church, and throughout the novel the relation between the Presbyterian faith and moral untenuousness is well-drawn.

During the first two chapters Hagar's reminiscences focus on her father and her transition from daughter to young-wife status. Lacking a mother, though raised by a kindly maiden Aunt Doll, Hagar's identification as her father's child came early and naturally. The qualities in her character and personality that were to cause her subsequent unhappiness and restriction

were introjected in childhood from the father so that she basically suffered from masculine one-sidedness. The death of the Mother then becomes a symbolic motif in the story which applies to Hagar's own psychological constitution and, on a wider spectrum, to the Protestant religious ethos which her father exemplified and passed on to his children. A staunch Scot-Presbyterian, Jason Currie is no doubt the best advertisement for the Weberian thesis that capitalism and the Protestant ethic form a complimentary religio-secular unit. Currie's religion is socially-functional; it exists not as a spiritual or mystical relationship to the world and people, nor even as a loving feeling-toned expression of faith, but rather as a practical man's guide to success and election both in this world and the next. It has nothing to do with the soul and its innermost Law of Love, but everything with a narrow moralistic application of the Law of Justice and Retribution. This religion belongs more to the Old Testament's stern precept pattern than to the New Testament moral order in which Love is raised to the pinnacle of ultimate divine revelation, and the soul of man becomes the bearer of that revelation which is nothing short of God. Quite fittingly, the first lesson Hagar remember from her father deals with "weights and measures".

"Two glasses, one noggin. Four noggins, one pint. Two pints, one quart. Four quarts, one gallon. Two gallons, one peck. Four pecks, one bushel." He'd stand there behind the counter, bulky and waist-coated, his voice with its Scots burr prompting me when I forgot, and telling me to concentrate or I'd never learn.

"Do you want to grow up to be a dummy, a daft loon?"

"No."

"Then concentrate."

When I repeated them all through, Troy Weight, Long and Lineal Measure, Imperial Dry Measure, Cubic Measure, he'd nod.

A Shylock quality of exactitude at the expense of the heart's demands adheres to his dealings with people, and it remains for Hagar to expiate the "sins of the fathers" by eventually learning the difficult lesson taught through human suffering: "The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven...."

Inability to demonstrate emotional warmth is concomitant with this utilitarian approach to life, and it too was the father's legacy to Hagar, who soon learned to imitate yet not totally accept his ways.

"Hayroot, strawfoot,  
Now you've got it."

That's all he'd ever say, when I got it right. He never believed in wasting a word or a minute. He was a self-made man. He had started without a bean, he was fond of telling Matt and Dan, and had pulled himself up by his bootstraps. It was true. My brothers took after our mother, graceful unspirited boys who tried to please him but rarely could. Only I, who didn't want to resemble him in the least, was sturdy like him and bore his hawkish nose and stare that could meet anybody's without blinking an eyelash.

The devil finds work for idle hands. He put his faith in homilies. They were his Pater Noster, his Apostles Creed. He counted them off like beads on a rosary, or coins in the till. God helps those who help themselves. Many hands make light work.

He always used birch for whippings. That's what had been used by his father on him, al-

though in another country.

The long lineage of man's conditioning reaches back further than can be traced, and it would be pointless to try; but it must be noted that the "hidden curriculum" in this education is that man's models of morality and sanctity reflect God's own will and nature.

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 favoured bottoms would not be bothered by hard oak and a lengthy sermon.

"On this great day," the Reverend Dougall MacCulloch said feelingly, "we have to give special thanks to those of our congregation whose generosity and Christian contributions have made our new church possible."

He called them off, the names, like an honour roll, Luke McVitie, lawyer. Jason Currie, businessman. Freeman McKendrick, bank manager. Burns MacIntosh, farmer. Rob Fraser, farmer.

Father sat with modestly bowed head, but turned to me and whispered very low:

"I and Luke McVitie must've given the most, as he called our names the first."

The people looked as though they wondered whether they should clap or not, ovations being called for, and yet perhaps uncalled for in a church. I waited, hoping they would, for I had new white lace gloves and could have shown them off so well, clapping. But then the minister announced the psalm, so we all sang mightily.

"Unto the hills around do I lift up

My longing eyes.

O whence for me shall my salvation come,

From whence arise?

From GOD the LORD doth come my certain aid,  
From GOD the LORD, who heaven and earth  
hath made."

Auntie Doll was always telling us that  
Father was a God-fearing man.

Jason Currie was not a reprehensible man or a villain,  
or course, and there is something pathetic about his life de-  
spite his earnest effort and conviction to conduct it on a  
strictly good-business and common-sense basis. The mythology  
of the Fathers has been Jason's inheritance from his own youth  
in Scotland and is transmitted in the Celtic tribal heraldry  
of the Currie clan. Passed on to his children, it was never to  
make much impact on his sons, ironically, but only on Hagar, who,  
like Morag subsequently, seizes on the romanticism of the High-  
lander myth and makes it an imaginative basis for a solidly-  
perceived identity.

"The Curries are Highlanders. Matt-  
sept of what clan?"

"Sept of the Clanranald MacDonalds."

"Correct. Pipe music, Dan?"

"Clanranald's March, sir."

"Right." And then with a look at me,  
and a smile: "The war cry, girl?"

And I, who loved that cry although I  
hadn't an inkling what it meant, would  
shout it out with such ferocity that the  
boys snickered until our father impaled  
them with a frown.

"Gainsay Who Dare!"

It seemed to me, from his tales, the High-  
landers must be the most fortunate of all men  
on earth, spending their days in flailing  
about them with claymores, and their nights  
in eightsome reels. They lived in castles,  
too, every man jack of them, and all were  
gentlemen. How bitterly I regretted that he'd  
left and had sired us here, the bald-headed  
prairies stretching out west of us with  
nothing to speak of except couchgrass or



clans of chattering 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.

The pathos of both father's and daughter's lives emerges more clearly as Hagar grows up, for neither of them can adequately express the repressed emotions, or the suppressed Feminine side of a complete human nature. Hagar has introjected the toughness, sternness, and practicality of the father in addition to the motto war-cry of the patriarchal clan. How her approach to people and the events life brings to pass - matrimony, motherhood, old age - is thereby conditioned one-sidedly constitutes the basic problem of her destiny.

Currie's inability to link himself sensuously to Nature and his emphasis on rigid self-control is evidenced in his reluctance to remarry and Hagar's only memory of him in the company of a woman dates back to her adolescence. On the town's outskirts, where she happened to be playing one day, she observed her father in pained conversation with No-Name Lottie Drieser's mother, a woman who had borne an out-of-wedlock child. Both stood "just outside the fence that marked the cemetery limits" and neither could surmount the emotional obstacles to true and joyous embrace. The encounter swiftly terminated in a stifled angry farewell as the ghosts of the past - hers and his - won the victory of the unseized hour. The shadow of death which hung over this scene represents the paralysis of on-going vib-

rant life. The instinctual claims of regenerative Nature, which we may link with the soul and love and the Feminine power, are thwarted by the masculinized ego-consciousness reared on the precepts of patriarchal lawfulness. The scene also depicts Eros as being "out-of-bounds"; it is not conventionally "within limits", neither the town's, which represents public-social moral standards, nor God's, as He is understood in the prevailing religious myth. The question, morally and socially highly significant, of what is actually "out of bounds" is one of the themes of The Diviners, but Laurence here presents it as a small episode within the present novel. Hagar will continue to stifle the Eros-aspect of God, just as her father had done, and this only results in a victory of the grave, of death and snow and cold marble.

Ironically, the very aspect which Jason Currie tries to cultivate in his daughter, lady-like and stylized femininity, and that which he has forbidden her to indulge, coarseness, becomes Hagar's own cross on which she is symbolically crucified. The type of femininity to which she is compelled to acquiesce under the patriarchal scheme of things is not the liberating one of the authentic Feminine, but a "good-little girl" copy of the masculine fantasy of ideal womanhood; a child-servant-slave-credit-to-his-ego. The son who should have gone to law college, Matt, was consigned to mind the store, while Hagar was shipped away to the Ladies' Academy in the East despite her protestations before leaving and upon return. Independence was considered a threat to feminine virtue, yet despite

the prohibitions of her father, Hagar retained a spark of the classic "Non Serviam". Unfortunately, she failed to turn it to her own advantage and to that of others.

When I returned after two years, I knew embroidery, and French, and menu-planning for a five-course meal, and poetry, and how to take a firm hand with servants, and the most becoming way of dressing my hair. Hardly ideal accomplishments for the kind of life I'd ultimately find myself leading, but I had no notion of that then. I was Pharoah's daughter reluctantly returning to his roof, the square brick palace so oddly anti-macassared in the wilderness, back to the hill where his monument stood, more dear to him, I believe, than the brood mare who lay beneath because she'd proved no match for his stud.

Father looked me over, my bottle-green costume and feathered hat. I wished he'd find some fault, tell me I'd been extravagant, not nod and nod as though I were a thing and his.

"It was worth every penny for the two years," he said. "You're a credit to me. Everyone will be saying that by tomorrow. You'll not work in the store. It wouldn't do. You can look after the accounts and the ordering - that can be done at home. You'd not believe how the store's grown since you've been away. I entertain now - just a few friends for dinner, nothing too elaborate. I find it's well worthwhile. It's good to have you back, and looking smart. Dolly's quite passable as cook, but as far as hostess - it's beyond her."

"I want to teach," I said. "I can get the South Wachakwa school."

Both of us were blunt as bludgeons. We hadn't a scrap of subtlety between us. Some girls would have spent a week preparing him. Not I. It never occurred to me.

The revenge she takes, unconsciously at first, against her father and all that he represents (the ego-values of the domi-

nant myth, moral pharisaism, cleanliness-next-to-godliness, worldly success of the pillar-of-society variety, repression of the instincts) turns out to be a revenge against herself as well, for, in choosing to marry a man like Bram Shipley, she is not really acting as a free conscious agent but rather as a rebel against paternal authority. Admittedly, what choice does she have at this stage? None, except to remain a dutiful daughter in the confines of her father's home, playing the impossibly difficult role of daughter-wife, or to marry someone eventually approved of by him, possibly a future banker like Telford Simmons. In Bram Shipley are constellated all those inferior functions that the father - as well as her conscious personality, he it noted - rejects. "'Lazy as a pet pig', my father said of him. 'No get-up-and-go.'" Indeed, the Lord works mysteriously His wonders to perform - only it usually comes as an ironic clout delivered in most unwelcome ways! Certainly there is much pathos in the show-down scene on the stair-landing between Hagar and Jason, now grown older and more physically and emotionally dependent on his daughter. His desperate bid to keep her from living her own life entails not only paternal concern for her genuine well-being but also a secret selfish motive to retain her for himself. He wishes to prolong her innocence in the stifling pseudo-paradise of home comforts, but to do so he realizes she must be kept from the "knowledge of good and evil", or, from biting the old forbidden apple.

He held tightly to the newel post, his  
hands working at the smooth golden wood.

"You know nothing," he said in an almost inaudible voice. "Men have terrible thoughts."

It never seemed peculiar to me then that he said thoughts, not deeds. Only now, when I recall it. If he had kept to his pattern then, laid down the law in no uncertain terms, I'd have been angry and that's all. But he did not. He reached out and took my hand and held it. His own hand tightened painfully, and for the merest instant the bones in my fingers hurt.

"Stay," he said.

Needless to say, Hagar does break away, becomes briefly spell-bound by all those suppressed instincts which had been forbidden to emerge before, and finds her shining knight in the cowherd! It seems almost superfluous to remark on the fatalistic precision with which her unconscious goes straight to its goal and fulfillment. Bram Shipley is truly the apotheosis of the father's shadow and the neglected portion of her soul. A kind of absurd defiance characterizes Hagar's emotional involvement with this lumbering bearded giant, a ne'er-do-well widower fourteen years her senior. The appropriate deus ex machina of love-at-first-sight takes over the dramatic action at the point of their meeting on a dance-floor one night, and a host of romantic images ascend to Hagar's bewitched brain.

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

Initially the disapprobation of her father and town friends spurs Hagar on to defiance, makes of Bram a romantic worthy cause to which she might devote her civilizing energies. Crudeness, poverty, dirt and ill-breeding are elevated in a reversal of the dominant value-system, and she becomes the champion saviour of a neglected cause. For the moment, the reality of who he is becomes obscured by the compensating mechanism of Nature, and she bathes sordidness in the imaginative aura of fairy-tale romances: "...the enchanted houses with eyes, walked on their own splayed hen's feet, the czar's sons playing at peasants in the coarse embroidered tunics, bloused and belted, the ashen girls drowning attractively in meres, crowned always with lillies, never with pigweed or slime". Unfortunately, she was not familiar with Keats' tempered romanticism, expressed in the lines:

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,  
Is - Love forgive us! - cinders, ashes, dust;

else she might have avoided, or at least forestalled, the crushing blows of reality which descended on her naivité in rapid succession soon after the ceremony. Whatever his merits as a person may have been, there is no question that he was loutish and a brute in many respects. Her father's estimation of his character was not wrong, only one-sidedly self-righteous. Bram had to be the fate-delivered blow to his religiously and culturally-set opinions about the "elect". Instead of accepting the underdeveloped and instinctually unrefined side of life,

Jason Currie and the town morality condemn him to an outcast position in the community - a role, however unfortunately, he is grimly determined to maintain by his appearance and behavior. Shortly after he brings the blushing bride to his house, "...a square frame, two-storied, the furniture shoddy and second-hand, the kitchen reeking and stale...", he informs her of his conjugal rights and Persephone is rapidly sped off to Pluto's underworld without so much as a permitted dalliance or good-bye wave to the world of maidenly idealism.

"Let's see what you look like under all that rig-out, Hagar."

I looked at him not so much in fear as in iron incomprehension.

"Downstairs-" he said. "Is that what bothers you? Or daylight? Don't fret - there's no one around for five miles."

"It seems to me that Lottie Drieser was right about you," I said, "although I certainly hate to say it."

"What did they say of me?" Pram asked. They - knowing more than one had spoken.

I only shrugged and would not say, for I had manners.

"Never mind that now," he said. "I don't give a good goddamn. Hagar - you're my wife."

Being "a very practical girl in many ways", she soon adjusts to the rigors of indigent farm-living and hard work, and begins her morning after with that most realistic and down-to-earth of wifely chores, floor-scrubbing. Thus have the gates of Eden closed forever firmly behind her, and she now knows how bitter the knowledge of the Tree of Life usually is; but she has not yet worked out her salvation with Bram, nor did she ever succeed.

During her married years, Hagar stiffened into resistance against the man she initially romanticized. One part of her being, the wisdom of instinct, may have chosen this unpromising mate for her in order that the opposites of their personalities might become blended and transcended, but her conscious character was unable to understand this. Although she rebelled against her father and the values he lived by and would impose on her, yet she herself was imbued by them and not until the end of her life could she recognize their common error. Throughout her marriage Hagar was unable to express her feeling-side, or to confide emotion to Bram.

It was not so very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain that the trembling was all inner. He had an innocence about him, I guess, or he'd have known. How could he not have known? Didn't I betray myself in rising sap, like a heedless and compelled maple after a winter? Put no. He never expected any such thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead.

She remained her father's child, and her real emotional link remained with him despite his rejection of her after the marriage. Her two sons, Marvin and John, were born just as they had been conceived, without much ado. It was a duty-prescribed, matter-of-fact, experience. She failed to bring the quality of love into her conjugal and maternal experiences, and thereby received no satisfaction, or pleasure, or joy from them.



When we got to the hospital, I told Bram to go. "You're not scared, Hagar, are you?" he said, as though it had just occurred to him I might be.

I only shook my head. I couldn't speak, nor reach to him in any way at all. What could I say? That I'd not wanted children? That I believed I was going to die and wished I would, and prayed I wouldn't? That the child he wanted would be his, and none of mine? That I'd sucked my secret pleasure from his skin, but wouldn't care to walk in broad daylight on the streets of Manawaka with any child of his?

"I sure hope it's a boy," he said.

I couldn't for the life of me see why he should care one way or another, except to have help with the farm, but as he only worked in fits and starts, anyway, even an unpaid hired man would have made precious little difference.

"Why should you care if it's a boy?" I asked.

Bram looked at me as though he wondered how I could have needed to ask.

"It would be somebody to leave the place to," he said.

I saw then with amazement that he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had. In that moment when we might have touched our hands together, Bram and I, and wished each other well, the thought uppermost in my mind was - the nerve of him.

Here the Biblical analogy becomes evident: Hagar's procreative function serves the Father-head (Abraham) to perpetuate his name and dynasty. As a woman she has been alienated from her own body and its powers. Her body existed to provide a male heir, to serve masculine needs, whether of work or pleasure. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine how her attitude might have been otherwise and still enable her to retain inner autonomy. Given the conditioning factors of her place and time, her stern defiance proved to be her only way of self-

assertion, however tragically it was a two-edged sword that cut both self and world. She did not possess the necessary understanding to cut through the real currit, the mythology of her time, and thus she turned her rebelliousness into an enemy rather than an ally. After the children's birth and a few embarrassing visits to town with Pram, Hagar becomes a recluse and an alien in her own community. Her tragic flaw is that she consciously accepts the judgement weighed against herself and Bram by her father's measure, instead of sensing emotionally the shortcomings of his weights and measures. Since Jason Currie is one of the town's patriarchs, the system of judgement he represents and enforces is that of the ruling myth. The whole force of conventional opinion and piety is arranged against her, and, moreover, rules in her mind, so that she consigns herself to oblivion on the farm, as if in self-punitive confirmation of her bad-child status, hoping inwardly for some token of acknowledgement and acceptance from the father.

Aunt Dolly thought that Father would want to make it up with me after Matt's death. I wouldn't go to the brick house in Manawaka, of course, but when Marvin was born I gave Aunt Dolly to understand that if Father wanted to come out to the Shipley place and see his grandson, I'd have no objections. He didn't come though. Perhaps he didn't feel as though Marvin were really his grandson. I almost felt that way myself, to tell the truth, only with me it was even more. I almost felt as though Marvin weren't my son.

But Jason Currie does not relent, and when he dies he bequeaths his fortune to the town, leaving his daughter with only anger,

sorrow, and regret.

Who could imagine a man doing such a thing? When Luke McVittie told me, I could hardly credit it. Oh, the jubilation when the town heard the news. Paean of printed praise in the Manawaka Banner. "Jason Currie, one of our founding fathers, always a great benefactor and a public-spirited man, has made a last magnificent—" It ce-  
tera. Within a year, Currie Memorial Park was started beside the Wachakwa River. The scrub oak was uprooted and the couchgrass mown, and nearly circular beds of petunias proclaimed my father's immortality in mauve and pink frilled petals. Even now, I detest petunias.

I never minded for myself. It was on the boys' count I cared. Not so much Marvin, for he was a Shipley through and through. John was the one who should have gone to college.

But Jason Currie never saw my second son or knew at all that the sort of boy he'd wanted had waited a generation to appear.

On this altar of the patriarchal mythology, she sacrificed all her "lost men" and her own fulfillment as well.

The key episode in her relationship with Bram that held the promise of an emotional opening for them and that symbolically reveals the fundamental problem is recounted in chapter three. This is the memory of their loss of the stallion, Soldier. As soon as they have a little money, Bram wants to spend it on a stallion from Henry Pearl; Hagar wants the home fixed up. All this seems quite mundane and scarcely worth mentioning, except for the fact that the horse and his subsequent death in a snow-storm provides a symbolic statement about the death of something far more deep and irreplaceable, the instincts or the phallic aspect of Nature. Hagar recalls how horses had always frightened

yet fascinated her but she had to keep them disembodied horses, controllable and impotent.

"You never gave a damn for living horses, Hagar," he said once. "But when you see them put onto paper where they couldn't drop manure, then it's dandy, eh? Well, keep your bloody paper horses. I'd as soon have nothing on my walls."

I have to laugh now, although I was livid then. He was quite right that I never cared for horses. I was frightened of them, so high and heavy they seemed, so muscular, so much their own masters - I never felt I could handle them.

Undeterred by her opposition, Pram is intent on the stallion and later that night attempts a reconciliation with his wife in bed. This, then, fortifies the symbolic link of the horse with phallic passion, and reveals the weakness in their marriage.

Wrangle, wrangle. It ended that night with Pram lying heavy and hard on top of me, and stroking my forehead with his hand while his manhood moved in me, "Hagar, please -" I wanted to say "There, there, it's all right," but I did not answer.

The further tragedy comes when the stallion goes after the wandering mare who has slipped out of the carelessly left-open barn door in below-forty-degree weather. Pram finds that "the mare had returned by herself and Soldier was nowhere in sight". He begins a long and painful search for his horse in the blinding snowstorm but cannot find him. When he finally returns home broken-hearted, there is a chance for Hagar to open the door of sensitive emotional communication and she partly succeeds, but

the night again ends in failure.

"Did you find him?" I asked.

"No," he replied brusquely.

Seeing Pram's hunched shoulders, and the look on his face, all at once I walked over to him without pausing to ponder whether I should or not, or what to say.

"Never mind. Maybe he'll come back by himself, as the mare did."

"He won't," Pram said. "It's blowing up for an all-night blizzard. If I'd gone any further, I'd never have found my way back."

He put his palms to his eyes and sat without moving.

"I guess you think I'm daft, eh?" he said finally.

"No, I don't think that," I said. Then, awkwardly, "I'm sorry about it, Pram. I know you were fond of him."

Pram looked up at me with such a look of surprise that it pains me still, in recalling.

"That's just it," he said.

When we went to bed that night, he started to turn to me, and I felt so gently inclined that I think I might have opened to him openly. But he changed his mind. He patted me lightly on the shoulder.

"You go to sleep now," he said.

He thought, of course, it was the greatest favour he could do me.

That a definite irreparable breach in the relationship has occurred at this point is consolidated in the next paragraph, which sets the tombstone on their marriage as well. The episode has been the symbolic culmination of the father's Nature-denial attitude as passed on to Hagar. Once more, the grave has final victory.

Bram found Soldier in spring, when the snow melted. The horse had caught a leg in a barbed wire fence, and couldn't have lived long that night, before the cold claimed him. Bram buried him in the pasture, and I'm sure he put a boulder on the place,

like a gravestone. But later that summer, after the grass and weeds had grown back, when I mentioned the rock curiously and asked how it got there, Pram only looked at me narrowly and said it had been there always. After that night in winter, we had gone on much the same as before - that was the thing. Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke, I know that full well, although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise.

Couched within Hagar's present experience of surveying the old-folks' home, this reminiscence connects well with her feeling that "Darkness has come, and now I realize I do not really know where I am going." The dark mare who rambled out recklessly into the snowstorm could only be brought back to safety by the stallion, and similarly Hagar can only be brought back to herself through following the guidance of her deeper instincts, Nature's innate wisdom.

Before finally coming to a reconciliation with herself and her fate, Hagar fled from domestic confinements three times: first from her father, then from Bram, and lastly from Harvin. In these escapes she sought to find herself in a better situation, but each time she came face-to-face with her original avoidance and problem, the Father, in both his social and religious aspects. Her first escape into matrimony did not solve anything, but only perpetuated the conflict on another level; neither does her second rebellion of leaving Bram really accomplish a basic change in her circumstances. After the stallion episode, the marriage continues but degenerates increasingly. With the instinctual bond broken, Bram has lost his center of meaning and

purpose. Like the father in Sons and Lovers, he becomes increasingly alienated from his family and home, and resorts to destructive, vindictive, or simply embarrassingly coarse behaviour. This has its unwholesome effects on the younger son, John, who must bear the brunt of social mockery which his father's actions elicit. It is John who confides to Hagar his mounting tension and shame over Bram's low-caste status in the town:

Once when they got home at night, and Bram was still in the barn, John, stuttering a little as though trying to make up his mind whether to tell me or not, finally burst out:

"Listen, you want to know something funny? You know what the kids call him? Bramble Shitley. That's what they call him."

I lowered my eyes to him, wondering - not for the first time - what he'd had to endure.

"That's a good one, eh?" John said.

And then he cried. But when I tried to put an arm around him, he pulled away, clattered upstairs to his own room and locked the door.

The final episode which casts the decisive vote in favour of Hagar's departure comes a little later when she goes into town with John to sell eggs, her only means to a private income and quasi-independence. Unknowingly they arrive at Lottie Simon's door and a crisis of social status and identity ensues when the little girl who opens the door giggles and yells: "Mother! The egg woman's here!"

The egg woman. I didn't look at John, nor he at me. I think we both looked blindly ahead at the lighted kitchen, like bewildered moths.

Hasty efforts to console John afterwards prove more painful than alleviating, and Hagar stumbles into a washroom in order to look at herself in a mirror. Who is she? Again, the crucial question of identity surfaces, especially when she has been objectified by others. The mirror cannot really tell the truth, and she seems to sense that it deceives in its naive realism.

I was wearing, I saw, a man's black overcoat that Marvin had left. It was too big for John and impossibly small for Pram. 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 Pram'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.

Leaving the place, she enters her father's old store only to be dealt the second blow to her pride: Bram is trying to buy lemon extract for a drunk buddy, Charlie Bean, and the proprietors embarrassedly dispute whether or not to continue this practise. Hagar, past pain at this point, walks over to lead Bram home, "...and that was the last time we ever walked anywhere together, Brampton Shipley and myself."

Later, she sells her china to Lottie and leaves on the train with John. She obtains work as a housekeeper for a retired elderly gentleman, Mr. Oatley, and at last has 'a room of



her own' and a passable income, but the irony is that once again she is a servant to an older man. Hagar cannot escape her fate; she has still not come into her true inheritance, even when the boss dies and leaves her \$10,000. Meanwhile, the problems of raising John alone and personal loneliness haunt her middle years and she seems to be more vulnerable than ever. She tries to compensate to John for the lack of a father by passing on all those tried and true Presbyterian mottos her father had once lived as gospel.

"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."

One feels the tragedy and pathos of this endeavour to rise to the top, to become rich or famous, which was part of the socially and religiously sanctioned mythology. The frail boy, in the face of reality's dark facts, resorts to fantasy, to utter despair, and at last to return to the homestead. He must find the father also, the lost part of himself.

Hagar does not see John or Bram again until a letter arrives informing her of the latter's illness. When she sees the old place it is totally in shambles, John has assumed his father's negative uncouth persona and flaunts it vindictively at Hagar, and Bram is being kept alive on whiskey.

"I wouldn't have thought you could afford to drink," I said.

"All you need in this world is a little ingenuity," he said. "A little get-up-and-go. You've often said so. We make it ourselves. At least, I do. There's not much else to do. It's my life's work. The berries weren't worth a damn this year, but I've evolved a vintage champagne from potato peelings. Care to try some?"

"Time for your medicine, Dad," John said. At first I wondered how he'd managed to pay a doctor or a druggist. But then I saw what it was. He refilled the glass from the gallon jug that stood on the floor, and put it into the old man's hands, helping him to drink it so he wouldn't slop too much over himself.

"Is this the usual thing?" I asked.

"Why yes," John said. "Don't frown like that, angel. He's getting what he needs."

"John -" I cried. "What's happened to you?"

"Hush. It's all right. I know what's best."

"You do, eh? You're sure of that, you think?"

"Were you?" John said, with fearful gentleness. "Were you?"

Only John looked after Pram, washed him, led him to the outhouse, cleaned up the messes that sometimes occurred, performing all these rites with such a zeal and burning laughter they seemed both sinister and absurd.

Before Pram dies, Marvin briefly appears and the conflict between the solid working type and the prodigal shows up in the brothers' relationship to one another. Both sons ended being tragically rejected; neither found the true father's love each one had in his own way sought. After Pram dies, John is still pursued by the inner urge to know who his father is; in the process of this quest, which takes him to his step-sister, Jess, he rejects his own mother and she indeed does behave as the Terrible Mother in thwarting self-realization, first by denying him the possibility of being Pram's son, not Jason Currie's, and

second by thwarting his love for Arlene. With cruel and heartless intent, Hagar spoils John's only chance for happiness at this stage in his life by conspiring with Lottie to have Arlene sent East. Money, or the weights and measures value system, becomes the ulterior motive for the opposition, but the real reason is fear of loss and the lust for possession of that which no one can possess - another life. Quite appropriately, the closing motif of Hagar and Lottie's visit during which they have plotted the overthrow of Eros is the memory of the baby-chicks which Lottie had long ago crushed in the garbage dump. Symbolically, both women have repeated that deed by snuffing out the hope of youthful life and love in their children. John and Arlene eventually die a type of Liebestod and become sacrificed to the elders' blindness.

As the novel draws to its conclusion the separate strands of meaning gradually weave into one pattern which discloses the paradoxical truth of the self-disclosure of Yahweh on Mount Sinai: "Yahweh, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression, sin; yet He lets nothing go unchecked, punishing the father's fault in the sons and in the grandsons to the third and fourth generation." (Ex. 34: 6-8) Justice and Love seem indeed irreconcilable to human minds - "Did He who made the lamb make thee?" - and Hagar has to find the Love aspect of this God who has chosen her; she did not actively choose to be born into a certain myth. All of us inherit a God-image, and unfortunately it is frequently

one-sided. In her Calvinist upbringing, the God of Love was absent and only the God of stern Justice shone forth. The Father of the Old Dispensation has to give way to the manifestation of the New Testament God before Hagar can experience personal wholeness or healing, which is originally the meaning of "salvation" (salus, to heal). She could not accept the religion of her father and the cultural norm, although she continued to be conditioned by its mythology. The scenes with the young minister, Mr. Troy, are among the funniest and most meaningful in the book, and it is important to understand how her rebelliousness has been waged around the problem of the collective representation of Father. Through him, and what he represents socially and cosmically, she was enslaved as woman. The patriarchal representation of deity condemned Eros, love and instinct, but the suppressed side which she had to discover demanded acceptance and integration. No wonder that her attitude toward the stone angel in the cemetery and to religion in general remained ambivalent. One aspect of the internalized God-image demanded respect and submission (Jason Currie's God whose symbol is the stone angel), and the other aspect struggled to surpass this by finding a gentler, more humane, expression in the God of Love. The ambivalence is illustrated in the scene where Hagar and John visit the Currie plot and find the angel toppled face-down. To John's dismay, she demands that he set it upright once more despite the fact that she admits to herself a revulsion for it.

I never could bear that statue. I'd have been glad to leave her. Now I wish I had. But at the time it was impossible.

The latter transition to the Love aspect of God only comes after Hagar's third and last escape from the home that has become her prison. Ironically, she had to live her final years with the son whom she had rejected on account of his resemblance to Bram, and once again she found herself without a penny. It seems that sometimes fate forces the hitherto unacceptable upon individuals. There is even a further irony, yet strange justice, in the fact that in the end Bram Shipley's ashes were laid beside Jason Currie's. Death knows no distinctions among human beings and is the great leveller of all myths. This is a justice higher than the kind understood by Currie or the townspeople.

Hagar's experience of personal salvation is not the official, prescribed sort, but comes in the most unorthodox manner. She has rejected the notion of God, heaven and salvation on the conscious level and actively resists the minister in a cynical fashion.

Even if heaven were real, and measured as Revelation says, so many cubits this way and that, how gimcrack a place it would be, crammed with its pavements of gold, its gates of pearl and topaz, like a gigantic chunk of costume jewelry. Saint John of Patmos can keep his sequined heaven, or share it with Mr. Troy, for all I care, and spend eternity in fingering the gems and telling each other gleefully they're worth a fortune.

"Don't you believe," Mr. Troy inquires politely, earnestly, "in God's infinite

Mercy?"

"In what?" I have some difficulty in picking up his thread, and he repeats, seeming embarrassed at having to say the words again.

"God's infinite Mercy - you believe in that, don't you?"

I blurt a reply without thinking.

"What's so merciful about Him, I'd like to know?"

We regard one another from a vast distance, Mr. Troy and I.

Deep within, nevertheless, these divine images continue to fascinate and exert a powerful spell on her. Life does not allow her to reject what has not been integrated, and fate keeps sending her ministers of one kind or another, Murray F. Lees and Elva Jardine. In the closing chapters of the novel, Hagar returns to the realm of Nature, of instinctual repressed life, and experiences the divine sacred symbols in the realm of the so-called profane. Within the dark wood, by the sea-shore, and in a fish-cannery she confronts herself as a basic creature among other forms of life. The civilized veneer of the upper social world is left behind as she descends to her own soul depths and undergoes a purgation. The albatross of Coleridge's famous Ancient Mariner poem comes to her mind and suggests the word "mercy" to her; later, a sea-gull is caught in the room where she is hiding and reminds her of death. The bird may be seen as a symbol for both the Spirit and her own indomitable will to become free and to throw off the imprisoning shackles of the past. This bird is wounded and eventually torn apart by dogs, perhaps an analogy to the death of the "wounded Healer" whose sacrifice is a pre-requisite for the soul's liberation. Shortly

thereafter, Mr. Lees appears and becomes the Good Samaritan to Hagar's wounded condition. He gives her bread (soda cracker) and wine (however cheap), his coat, and, above all, love. Significantly, he is a "wounded Healer", for he has lost his only son and even his wife's passion to the God of fire and brimstone, the Evangelical variety of deity. Recounting his own pathetic tale of religious mythology - how his grandfather was a pioneer circuit rider in the Cariboo, how he joined the Advocates and met his wife at Bible Camp, how he loved and lost her through the preaching of a hell-raiser, Pulsifer! - one is prompted to laugh but also to reflect how profoundly myth is lived as reality. Moreover, the limitations of the traditional Christian mythology as lived by the Protestant ethic are here again revealed. The totality of Love has not yet been accepted; Frodo is excluded from the paradise of the saved and consigned to the realm of sin and damnation. The paradox of the sacred and the profane is hinted at in the following exchange.

"I was fond of her," he says defensively.  
 "Did I say fond? I was crazy about her.  
 In those days she could have prayed the angels themselves right down from heaven, if she'd been so inclined, and when she lay down on the moss and spread those great white thighs of hers, there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world."

His plain words take me aback, and I'm embarrassed and can't look at him.

"Well, that's a mighty odd combination, I must say, prayer and that."

"There's thousands would agree with you," he says morosely. "God is Love, but please don't mention the two in the same breath. I loved that woman, I tell you."

"You call that love?"

"Lady," he says, "if that wasn't love, what is?"

"I don't know, I just don't know, I'm sure."

Through her inability to accept the phallic element as part of the sacred, Lou Lees suffered guilt and sought to find absolution for herself and Murray at a prayer-meeting. In the interim, their son died in a house fire. One of the "jests of God", as Laurence would say, but, let it be noted, these are ironies inherent in the human condition and mankind's perverse will (pulsiferian?) to limit its God according to relative notions of morality and good and evil.

Hagar experiences the emotional releases and integration necessary for her further growth in the orbit of the cannery, or, under the sign of the fishes. The transition has almost been made; her last days in the hospital are spent in greater acceptance and helpfulness to others. When Mr. Troy again visits her, she is able to find further release in his singing of the hymn, "All people that on earth do dwell". In that brief after-moment of insight, Hagar is truly re-born and finds her affective link with humankind.

"All right, then." He clasps and unclasps his hands. He flushes warmly, and peeks around to see if anyone might be listening, as though he'd pass out if they were. But I perceive now that there's some fibre in him. He'll do it, even if it kills him. I can admire that.

Then he opens his mouth and sings, and I'm the one who's taken aback now. He should sing always, and never speak. He should chant his sermons. The fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure.



"All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with joyful voice  
Him praise with mirth, His praise forth tell;  
Come ye before Him and rejoice."

I would have wished it. This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that - simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of the morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances - oh, proper to whom? When did I ever sneak the heart's truth?

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.

There is a nexus, a matrix, which underlies existence, a Mother-element or Nature which needs to be discovered. In the patriarchal consciousness this aspect of Reality is not given rights or powers in itself; the Feminine Principle is made to serve the Male. God is represented as masculine and thus inhibits the expression of the life of Nature which, in this mythology, must be mastered. After this experience, which must be called a deeply religious one regardless of the tainted associations this may have for modern ears, Hagar is later able to reconcile the antinomies of existence when she brings a bed-man to her young room-mate: "There now. I've reached the bathroom and gained the shiny steel grail." The despised body, in its frailty and mortality, which corresponds to the Feminine

Principle, is at last accepted and mediates for Hagar the Grail mystery - Body as Divine Vessel.

Her final intransigence and refusal to "appeal" to "Our Father" must be seen as an important assertion of her integrity and autonomy in the face of an overwhelming Divine Power which can crush mortals just as easily as save them. The Divine must be wrestled with, in the sense of Jacob and his angel. If Hagar were to succumb at this point to the over-powering force of the Father, it would be a loss of the most important factor of human life - individual consciousness. This alone can manifest the Divine, but it must not cease to uphold its end of the cosmic tension or chaos would ensue and all manifestation cease. One part of her, of course, wishes to succumb, to be absorbed into 'the bosom of Abraham', as is evident in these lines:

If I could, I'd like to have a piper  
play a pibroch over my grave. Flowers of  
the Forest - is that a pibroch? How would  
I know? I've never even set foot in the  
Highlands. My heart's not there. And  
yet - I'd wish it, as I'm gathered to my  
fathers. How could anyone explain such  
absurdity?

This can only be explained as the deep longing of every being to find its source, its Alpha and Omega. In Hagar's tradition, that source was identified both religiously and culturally in patriarchal myth terms. The Abraham to whom this Hagar belongs is represented as a Deity against whom she must struggle, yet serve, be in bondage to against her conscious will, and finally be gathered unto at death. She mysteriously fulfilled her fate,

which seemed so like a curse, and integrated the Love with the Justice aspect of the Father, and somehow managed to uphold the individual pride of the human spirit despite overwhelming odds to crush it. Her last act must be seen in this light, and she goes to her grave in the spirit of reconciliation.

Chapter 3 Footnotes

1

Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, New Canadian Library Series, No. 59 (1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968). All references taken from this edition.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Jest of God

The uncertain ending of the last novel left Hagar and the reader poised between life and death, reaching out for the glass of water that symbolizes everlasting life and a conductor from one stage of form or manifestation to another. Water is the element of transformation; more precisely, of change through dissolution. Hagar had successfully undergone a spiritual transformation during the final weeks of her life, a re-birth or baptism into the new covenant of love. The moral lesson implicit in this suffering was that the God of stern justice, enshrined in the religious and social ethos of her culture, alone was insufficient to save; the love aspect was necessary for wholeness. By her name she was linked to the old law, and the religious significance is further heightened when added to St. Paul's commentary on Sarā and Hagar, in Galatians 4, where he makes the point that the works of the law do not themselves effect justification. In Laurence's next novel then, A Jest of God, it appears most appropriate that she should thematically take up the problem where she had left it.

A Jest of God deals also with transformation through water and with the mystery of love and death. That mystery is essentially the problem of Eros, as shall be developed later. In this novel Laurence enters deeply into the question of death, spiritual and physical, and shows once more that re-birth must come via death and love, and also how very painful this process is. It is also a story about loss, and the grief which this

experience always entails, but again this becomes a necessary factor in the death and love (Eros) theme.

Perhaps at the outset of discussion it would be proper to cite the Biblical analogy to Rachel Cameron's name and psychic circumstance. In Jeremiah 31:15 we find the following account:

Thus speaks Yahweh:  
A voice is heard in Rama,  
Lamenting and weeping bitterly:  
it is Rachel weeping for her children,  
refusing to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.

The loss which the heroine undergoes is, like her namesake's, the loss of her men - sons and kinsmen. Laurence's Rachel is a thirty-four-year-old prairie school teacher who lives with her aged mother above the Japonica Street Funeral Parlour, once operated by her father, Niall Cameron, but now owned by Hector Jonas. The Biblical parallel need not be extended to include any character similarities, for this modern young Rachel definitely falls short of heroic stature until the close of the novel, and the only other feature they have in common is that each has a sister. It is significant, however, that the modern novel's quality of inverse-heroism, which both mocks the stature of contemporary man or woman when considered in relation to classical archetypes and yet elevates it in this inverse manner, appears in A Jest of God. Rachel is not a grand heroine, and her final words to herself at the novel's close are permeated with a sense of ironic self-distancing. Her greatness lies

in her anonymous smallness in the face of an alien large world and a still more alien and incomprehensible universe. Now

Rachel:

Where I'm going, anything may happen. Nothing may happen. Maybe I will marry a middle aged widower, or a longshoreman, or a cattle-hoof-trimmer, or a barrister or a thief. And have my children in time. Or maybe not. Most of the chances are against it. But not, I think, quite all. What will happen? What will happen? It may be that my children will always be temporary, never to be held. But so are everyone's.

I may become, in time, slightly more eccentric all the time. I may begin to wear outlandish hats, feathered and sequined and rosetted, and dangling necklaces made from coy and tiny seashells which I've gathered myself along the beach and painted coral-pink with nailpolish. And all the kids will laugh, and I'll laugh too, in time. I will be light and straight as any feather. The wind will bear me, and I will drift and settle, and drift and settle. Anything may happen where I'm going.

I will be different. I will remain the same. I will still go parchment-faced with embarrassment, and clench my pencil between fingers like pencils. I will quite frequently push the doors marked Pull and pull the ones marked Push. I will be lonely, almost certainly. I will get annoyed at my sister. Her children will call me Aunt Rachel, and I will resent it and find then that I've grown attached to them after all. I will walk by myself on the shore of the sea and look at the freefalls flying. I will grow too orderly, plumping up the chesterfield cushions just-so before I go to bed. I will rage in my insomnia like a prophetess. I will take care to remember a vitamin pill each morning after my breakfast. I will be afraid. Sometimes I will feel lighthearted, sometimes light-headed. I may sing aloud, even in the dark. I will ask myself if I am going mad, but if I do, I won't know it.

God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God.

Rachel has gone through the night-sea journey, through death to new life, as the Sandburg epigraph on the novel's front page indicates, and has come closer to the original archetype, Rachel. It should be remembered that in Jeremiah's account Rachel is not left in tears by Yahweh. On the contrary, Rachel is poetically represented as one who is to be compensated for her sorrow and exile.

Yahweh says this:  
 Stop your weeping,  
 dry your eyes,  
 your hardships will be redressed.

(Jer. 31:16)

A new promise lies in the womb of potentiality. Laurence has been tracking the soul journey from exile (Hagar, cast out into the desert, dispossessed of the heritage of the "chosen"), through alienation, to rebirth, by way of the "sign posts" (Jer. 31:21) of the Judaeo-Christian myth. It is necessary at this point, however, to backtrack and consider some of the stops along the way of Rachel Cameron's inner journey.

During the first three chapters Rachel is existing in a state of death; it is only in chapter four, when she meets Nick Kazlik, that this psychic condition begins to change. By death is signified a state of stagnation, of being confined in a mode of life which does not meet the requirements of mental and emotional health or well-being. Like Joycean Dubliners, Laurence's Manawakans are paralyzed in a socio-religious mythology whose roots have become darkly coiled and morally rotting through in-



stinctual repression, only in this case the artist's eye focuses on the social reality through the lens of Protestant coloration instead of Catholic. Death here has a nice refined and genteel odour about it; nothing must, at all costs, upset the measured danse macabre through which the local citizenry winds its righteous way to the grand finale, Death - or, Hector Jonas' Funeral Chapel. Religion exists not as a prophetic challenge to this grotesque mockery of life, but quite on the contrary, as the official stage-management for this dance. It provides the organ music, the conductor of the ritual, and ensures that the journey shall be smooth and unperturbed, with as little inconvenience as possible. It even ropes off the dancers from one another, so that no one will have to be discomforted by the touch of human flesh. And when the last hour strikes, and one of the dancers collapses on the way to Nowhere, he or she is scooped up as neatly and quickly as possible by the undertaker, so that the others may proceed onward like "Christian Soldiers" without so much as having had to take notice of the neighbour's demise. Gradually, out of the stupor of indifference, one of the congregation may be roused by the dignified passage of a flower-laden hearse to remark to the others: 'Someone among us has passed away'; and, after the momentary surprise and hushed bereavement, the citizens resume their positions in this rank-and-file movement to eternity. It is entirely fitting, therefore, that the changes in the funeral parlour sign, upon which Rachel comments, should be increasingly toward religious symbolisms:

When I was a child, the sign was painted on board, pale-grey background, black lettering, and it said Cameron's Funeral Parlour. Later, my father, laughing in some way incomprehensible to me then and being chided for it by Mother, announced other times other manners. The new sign was ebony background and gilt lettering, Cameron Funeral Home. After he died, and we sold the establishment, the phraseology moved on. The blue neon, kept lighted day and night, now flashes Japonica Funeral Chapel. All that remains is for someone to delete the word funeral. A nasty word, smacking of mortality. No one in Manawaka ever dies, at least not on this side of the tracks. We are a gathering of immortals. We pass on, through Calla's divine gates of topaz and azure, perhaps, but we do not die. Death is rude, unmannerly, not to be spoken of in the street.

The Church and the Mortuary have been unified in a socio-cultural merger! Religion has become dead and the dead have become religious.

Little wonder that Rachel should have a gruelling aversion to both, which really comes to the same thing; her conscious allegiance is to no God, but this covert atheism does not free her into "abundant Life". No, it too is part and parcel of the theophany of Death which paralyzes twentieth-century society. Raised in the atmosphere of restrained religiosity, Rachel can neither break out of its all-encompassing clasp nor submit to it entirely. Significantly, her mother is the carrier of this ethos.

Going to church is a social occasion for her. She hasn't so many. It's mean of me not to want to go.

I always do go, though. When I came back to teach in Manawaka, I told mother the first Sunday, I didn't think I'd go. She said "Why not?" I didn't say God hadn't died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago, longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive. No use to say that. I only told her I didn't agree on everything. She said "I don't think it would be very nice, not to go. I don't think it would look very good." But I didn't go. I held out three weeks. She didn't reproach me, not openly. She only relayed comments. "Reverend MacElfrish asked after you, dear. He said he hoped you were well. I suppose he thought you probably weren't, as he hadn't seen you." I thought what was the point in upsetting her, so I went. And have done, ever since.

She cannot break out of religion's ambiance because it rules everything,. It is the socio-cultural mythology upon which the earthly order is based; it is the oil in the machine of interlocking systems of repression that characterize social life: who are the elect, saved, righteous, chosen; who are the outcasts, the damned, the wrong-side-of-the-track people - all this is conditioned by the popular religious mythology. But, sadly, it is a form of the Christian mythology that lost contact with its authentic roots. We are faced by the ironic spectacle that the widespread religious-social establishment is disturbingly unchristian; that, to be precise, it is a bastardized form of the original faith. It is an abomination masquerading as piety, a hypocrisy of idol-worship: and these idols are comfort, security, an eternal insurance policy for the hereafter - success, fame and fortune. This form of religious myth-making is the

embodiment of the anti-Christ in the deepest sense. Rachel is understandably neurotic under these circumstances; she should not be seen as a neurotic spinster who needs only a tumble in the straw to be restored to normality, but rather as a woman who is struggling in her deepest being against a haze or fog which is so all-pervasive as to be nearly invisible, and one cannot help breathing it in, but gradually one loses one's sanity and sense of life and direction. The fog colours reality to such an extent that the original truth of life is totally hidden, and were she to assert that the fog is unreal, she would instantly be classed "peculiar", "eccentric", or insane. This is exactly what Rachel constantly wonders and worries about: what will they think of me? am I becoming queer? who is normal? "Stop it, Rachel. Stop it this minute." She gropes back to so-called social sanity by touching a desk, a door, anything to give her a sense of being in a solid world after all. But is this really the world to which she ought to return? Is there an alternative? The question is extremely debatable, but preferably solved outside the walls of an asylum.

Social reality in her town is extremely static and predetermined. The acceptable people belong to the Church of her mother, and these live on the upper side of the tracks, and the unorthodox people - immigrants and misfits - live on the lower side; beyond the pale, on Galloping Mountain, live the really distanced ones - the Indians. These do not appear fully delineated until The Diviners, but their shadow-presence has been felt lurking in the background. The only alternative to the

official church where everything is subdued, and life, death, old age, suffering and feeling are all taboo, is its compensatory counterpart - the Evangelical Tabernacle. Choosing between them is like opting for the Devil or the deep blue sea. The two are sides of one coin actually; the repressions of the acceptable Protestant denomination, which is aligned with the elite class (such as it is) make the alternative Tabernacle a social necessity. It serves as a preventive mental health measure to some extent. The life force that has been stifled in the one system is suddenly rendered quasi-acceptable in the religious setting of Evangelical euphoria and transport. Speaking in tongues becomes the new sign of having made it, or of being saved, just as sobriety, primness, and dedicated toil are the necessary marks of election in the other group. The difference between the two forms of popular piety are superficially striking, but, underneath, the same repressive force is in full operation. Here is Rachel's description of the official Church from which she and her mother have just returned:

I can hear the church chimes. They used to have a solitary bell there, summoning the faithful in plain clarity; recently they have acquired a carillon which tinkles The Church's One Foundation.

Here we are. Mother flicks through the Hymnary to look up the hymns in advance. I wonder what she believes, if anything. She's never said. It was not a subject for discussion. She loves coming to church because she sees everyone, and in the spring the new hats are like a forest of tulips. But as for faith--I suppose she takes it for granted that she believes. Yet if Reverend MacElfrish should suddenly lose his mind and speak of God

with anguish or joy, or out of some need pray with fierce humility as though God had to be there, Mother would be shocked to the core. Luckily, it will never happen.

Mr. MacElfrish's voice is as smooth and melifluous as always, and he is careful not to say anything which might be upsetting. His sermon deals with Gratitude. He says we are fortunate to be living here, in plenty, and we ought not to take our blessings for granted. Who is likely to quibble with that?

The wood in this church is beautifully finished. Nothing ornate--heaven forbid. The congregation has good taste. Simple furnishings, but the grain of the wood shows deeply brown-gold, and at the front, where the high altar would be if this had been a church which paid court to high altars, a stained-glass window shows a pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga, holding his arms languidly up to something which might in other circumstances have been a cross.

A brief look at the Tabernacle variety to which she had been reluctantly led by her fellow school-teacher and avid Pentecostal witness, Calla Mackie, is interesting. On the outside of the building beams a huge sign in crimson-illuminated lettering: Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn.

The room is larger than I remember it, almost as large as though the place had been a proper church. The chairs are in semi-circular rows, the same straight, thickly varnished chairs one used to find in every school auditorium, but replaced there now with lighter ones which can be stacked up, and the old ones probably sold to establishments such as this. The painted walls are heavy with their greenish blue, not the clear blue of open places but dense and murky, the way the sea must be, fathoms under. Two large pictures are hanging, both Jesus, bearded and bleeding, his heart

exposed and bristling with thorns like a scarlet pin-cushion. There is no altar, but at the front a kind of pulpit stands, bulky and new, pale wood blossoming in bunches of grapes and small sharp birds with beaks uplifted. The top of the pulpit is draped with white velvet, like a scarf, tasselled with limp silver threads, and on the velvet rests a book. The Book, of course, not jacketed severely in black but covered with some faintly glittering cloth or substance impersonating gold, and probably if the room were dark it would glow--or give off sparks.

In contradistinction to the high church, where the occasion of someone's hymn-singing produces acute embarrassment, at the Tabernacle everyone rises almost violently into full swing to the accompaniment of a crashing amateur band that includes piano, trombone, and guitars. The hell-fire which had been absorbed but repressed by the mother's congregation is here allowed a sanctioned explosion:

Day of wrath! O day of mourning!  
See fulfilled the prophet's warning!  
Heaven and earth in ashes burning!

There is really no choice which is sane, as Rachel instinctively knows; but the intuition is insufficient to free her from socially-sanctioned forms of death and insanity. She has herself become a victim of them and her only rescue is the split-level consciousness which lets her frequently realize the absurdity of the life around her, including her own. In the midst of the bacchic hymn-singing and sporadic glossolalia, she maintains a critical perspective.

All I can visualize are the dimly remembered faithful of Corinth, each crying aloud his own words, no one hearing anyone else, no one able to know what anyone else was saying, unable even to know what they themselves were saying. Are these people mad or am I? I hate this hymn.

Celebrate confusion. Let us celebrate confusion. God is the author of peace, not confusion. What a laugh. Let the Dionysian women rend themselves on the night hills and consume the god.

I want to go home. I want to go away and never come back. I want--

Her trouble is that this perspective alone is not enough to carry her to any new form of reality or to spiritual authenticity; it remains on the intellectual level where she is fighting with many voices at once. Finally, the mind has to collapse under the pressure and strain of these contending voices and layers of conditioned reality; she breaks down momentarily and, to her horror, hears her own voice merge with the rest into an unintelligible sob. Mercifully, she is instantly whisked outside by Calla who is nevertheless disappointed that Rachel does not consider this a "religious experience". In Calla's flat, she confides shamefacedly the reason for her embarrassment:

"Do you know what I detest more than anything else? Hysteria. It's so--slack. I've never done anything like that before. I'm so ashamed."

However, beneath the obvious cause of personal introjection of the mother's religious stance, which is spartan self-control, Rachel has a deeper reason for anguish, and that is spiritual emptiness, the fear of the Void or complete nothingness. This



explains her subsequent statement of irrational fear.

"Child, don't. Don't be so hard on yourself."

"I can't be hard enough, evidently. What will I do next, Calla? I'm--oh, Calla, I'm so damn frightened."

The scene closes on a cryptic point: Calla impulsively kisses her on the mouth after verbal efforts to give comfort have failed. Throughout the novel the reader is led to suspect Calla's sexuality, and Rachel herself thinks her a lesbian, but this suggestion is never made outright. It remains one of the many taboos within the Manawaka social and religious world. Rachel, because herself instinctually repressed and afraid of almost everything at this stage, cannot relate to Calla's compassionate or forthright terms. She does not even want the threat of knowledge, let alone the confrontation with it, and so she recoils in horror and runs away in panic. From Calla's point of view the Tabernacle affords a place for her socially-decreed misfit nature, and also an outlet for her feelings. There is a God Who, at least, accepts her kind. From Rachel's angle, her conditioning in the ruling mythology has instilled an imbalanced sense of propriety in her mind and left her with, as D.H. Lawrence said of Swift and his attitude to Celia's natural functions, weak physical sympathies and cold guts.

Rachel, then, at this stage, has no solid grounding in any instinctual sanity and this is what she must find before the word "salvation" can even be justly applied or properly understood. She has a divided consciousness which is, in one way,

very much in her favour because it confers a broader perspective and is necessary for growth, but which, in another sense, still keeps her from having a positive sense of humour. Existence is a terribly serious business for her, painfully so, and in this respect Calla is somewhat ahead of Rachel. In her friendly giantess fashion and outlandish eccentricity, Calla nevertheless has a warm heart that can laugh at itself sometimes. Her voiceless canary may be a "bleached sparrow", but she seems to have a special silent relationship with this bird all the same. In order to break through the many ingrained taboos of her society, Rachel has first to discover love; only then will her relationships with others improve.

Nick Kazlik, son of a Ukranian dairy-farmer and currently a high-school teacher in Winnipeg, has returned to his home-town for a brief summer vacation and quickly takes control of Rachel's empty heart. This is no idyllic love-affair or rustic romance Laurence depicts, but rather a meeting of lost souls who must each, in some way, find themselves through communication and self-disrobing. Nick is not a Prince Charming nor a Saviour by any means; he has his own problems with the past to settle, problems of identity and social acceptance, and to some extent he takes advantage of Rachel's vulnerability and loneliness. One of twin brothers who were struck by polio as youngsters, he remains the invisibly crippled surviving son of extremely conservative and old-country style parents. Nick is emotionally crippled as well: by his father's refusal to acknowledge his uniqueness and difference from the dead son, Steve, by his

socially-unsophisticated background, by his Ukranian stigma in a town where the Anglo-Scots constituted the higher echelon of acceptability, by his father's persona of town fool - "Nestor the Jester" - and by his own inability to follow the ways of his father.

Even Nick knows enough of the Bible to quote Jeremiah (a favourite source for this novel by now): "I have forsaken my house--I have left mine heritage--mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest--it crieth out against me--therefore have I hated it." Despite his unlikely qualifications for the saviour role, he nevertheless performs a necessary service for Rachel by initiating her into sex and, more importantly, into the art of human communication and interchange. From the beginning the reader senses more so than Rachel that this brief encounter is doomed to end because he has a casual approach to this affair whereas for her it becomes a matter of life and death. After a few meetings, he becomes her rescuer, the one hope in her hitherto-hopeless life. He is the suddenly visible door to her "No Exit" hell whose handle she becomes determined to seize in order to flee into life as the weeks progress. Daily routine at home with her guilt-inducing, dependent and emotionally possessive mother becomes increasingly unbearable. Serving dainty asparagus-roll sandwiches as hostess-helper to her mother's monthly ladies' bridge circle, while the silver-haired cronies click their tongues about the latest lurid flicks at the Roxie - Teenage Tigress and Doomed Women - soon seems an impossible fate to sustain. Rachel realizes that her matrimonial

fantasies are unrealistic, yet she cannot stop from "hoping against hope". She never really understood this familiar stranger, nor he her, and there is something ironically presumptuous in his calling her "darling" before even knowing her. His approach is swift, offhandedly sure, and yet kindly encouraging to her. The truth is that he is too wrapped up in his own inner problems of identity to be able to worry much about Rachel. He gives her what he can of himself, which, regardless of its ultimate insufficiency, is meaningful enough to bring her out of her prison of isolation.

The difference in their respective approaches to this sensual encounter is poignantly portrayed by Laurence. For the woman, once she is awakened into response and sexual fulfillment, her whole being changes; she is transformed into an alive and beautiful person. Her whole universe comes alive; suddenly dreams are not perhaps futile fantasies after all, and mere existence can become meaningful life. Now there is someone for whom she can live in loving communion, and all of Nature, her own nature most of all, is a miracle of rebirth. That is why birth means so much to a woman's being when she has been deeply touched; her own nature wills that something should objectively symbolize her subjective feelings. The necessity of separation from her lover after their brief union comes as a pained let-down, and her nature resists this in its desire to prolong the love through procreation. Nick, on the other hand, views the exchange from an entirely different angle. He is concerned that both should have as enjoyable a time together as possible;

he keeps repeating: "Relax, Rachel, relax", like a dog-trainer instructing his eager-to-please but awkward puppy to heel. Afterwards, he tosses the appropriate praise, albeit slightly undermined by a question mark: "You have nice small breasts, darling. You're very slender all over, aren't you?" and lights up the ever-ready cigarette, or turns his mind to coffee, casually but decisively hinting that she'd better "fix" herself for next time; and Rachel, like millions of foolish women before her, can only vainly struggle inside herself with mixed emotions of willing humbly to please, to be as perfect for this phallic demigod as possible, to cry, to plead for prolongation of the hastily-spiced hour, and to push her lover away as far as possible!

The world spinningly returns, the soft scraping of branches against one another in the darkness. Then I see there is no darkness, really, all around us. It's full moon. Anyone could see.

"Hey, what's the matter, darling?"

But I've shoved him from me with all my strength. Getting into my clothes again takes an hour, an aeon.

"What's the hurry?" he says. He is still lying there in the grass, grinning lazily.

"I've got to go home now, Nick."

"Oh, do you? All right, then."

As we drive back, the night seems unbearably warm, the air glutinous and sugary with the heat and the smell of grass and weeds that still clings around us. He drives with one arm around me, and I want to draw closer to him to have him hold me so reassuringly that nothing can ever go wrong again. But I must not move closer to him. He's driving. It would be dangerous. What if we were in an accident, and I were found with my hair all disarranged and my lipstick gone and my dress creased and crumpled?

"Here we are," Nick says. "I'll phone you, eh?"

"Yes." Without thinking, I've put my arms around him, held my face to his, asking to be kissed.

"Oh--Rachel, listen."

"What is it?"

"You'll--fix yourself, next time, won't you? It's better that way."

"Yes." But I can't look at him, can't speak of it like this. Not yet. Give me a little time. I'll get used to it, to this practicality, these necessities, this coldness. Why should this hurt? What do I expect? To have him say he loves me? That he'll never say. He doesn't like telling people lies.

"Are you all right, Rachel?"

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. You look a little strained."

"No, I'm all right. Good night, Nick."

"Goodnight, darling. I'll see you."

Life is indeed ironic. Who, in Rachel's shoes even for a moment, could not but wryly laugh and wonder if all this tremendous up-surge of emotion within her soul that began to transform the universe, and that now sinks back to nothingness in self-mockery of its own illusoriness, were not "a jest of God"?

It takes Rachel a little while to understand that Nick is, as he himself helplessly but accurately puts it, "not God"; she desires to wrest some sense of completion from this experience and to give it a continuation. For the first time in her life, she has summoned enough "courage" to speak "from faith, not logic" and to tell him: "If I had a child, I would like it to be yours." The great under-tone of passion in that innocuous sentence is only suggested in her private thought:

This seems so unforced that I feel he

must see it the way I do. And so restrained, as well, when I might have torn at him--GIVE ME MY CHILDREN.

Her children. Nature's eternal Motherhood. Eve - "Mother of all created things". This is the great power within her that has been awakened by Eros. However, she is in no position to guide her destiny now and he quickly departs afterwards, leaving her to believe that the picture of a young boy he shows her after she has taken her stand on "faith" and feeling is his son; in fact, as she only later finds out, it was a photo of himself as a child - the lost identity he has been seeking vainly all along. His relationship to her could never be anything but a form of narcissism, because he is seeking himself, no one else. Rachel, too, has recourse to a mirror (as did Hagar) at the crucial moment of discovery that he has departed without a goodbye. She looks at her reflection in the Ladies' room glass and stares stupefied until it is no longer certain who is herself and who is the other face of a teenaged stranger. Identity at this point is tenuous and quite indistinct; a fitting commentary is Shelley's lines:

Lift not the painted veil which those who live  
 Call Life: though unreal shapes be pictured there  
 And it but mimic all we would believe  
 With colours idly spread, - behind lurk Fear  
 And Hope, twin Destinies; who ever weave  
 Their shadows, o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.

Rachel's mixture of hope and fear regarding a possible pregnancy, her distaste for having to perform the necessary ablations on herself after each meeting with Nick, had driven her

to confront a mirror twice before in the silence of her upstairs room. What is reality? "I can't bear it" - that is, the probing is too unsettling; or again, "Women like me are an anachronism. We don't exist anymore. And yet I look in the mirror and see I'm there. I'm a fact of sorts, a fantasy of sorts. My blood runs in actual veins, which is as much of a surprise to me as to any one." To discover the truth about herself she has to descend to the "chasm", which is Death or Nothingness; she has to tear aside "the painted veil" of surface reality that has become a shadow-play of mockery and confusion. She has to peer beyond mirror-images of life to discover what is ultimately real; and this is not easy, especially since reality is the greatest taboo of all. No wonder, then, that it should be connected with death.

Rachel had never been permitted to enter the Funeral Chapel where her father used to embalm bodies, himself having become a living corpse to his family, a stanger from the underworld of death, an acquaintance to corruption and mortality. Thus, Rachel never knew her father; he remained the great enigma to her. Far too sheltered by her mother and by conventional religion, she was kept from discovering the great secret: "the skull beneath the skin". Only when she is at the end of her emotional rope, at the brink of mental collapse, wounded irrevocably by Eros, does she dare to descend into the underworld of Death. How ominous it had always seemed to her, this forbidden area of her house! How out-of-bounds and tabooed - like



Eros, of course. Now, as she stumbles frightenedly downstairs and taps on the door, a friendly, if surprised, face greets her and bids her welcome. Hector Jonas, the new mortician, leads her into the chapel, pours her a stiff drink, shows her the place where finally all bodies must come, and even jokes about it all in a natural, good-humoured way, then plays an organ piece for her and provides her with a loving shoulder to cry on.

There is a happy land  
Far far away  
Where saints and angels stand  
Bright bright as the day--

Jonas is a dealer in illusions. The entire death-trade is unmasked for her in quite a humorous manner. He is not in the least depressing. His impish sense of humour unmask the final illusion - death itself. The Parlour is the secret al-chemical workshop where life and death meet, and where what once was illusion of life is transformed into its corpse-state, and what is now a corpse is again transformed into the illusion of life. But to the daytime world and to the staid Manawakans, death continues to be a feared event, an unmentioned and unmasked calamity which religion must at all costs gloss over, thus perpetuating the pious illusion of a "happy land, far far away". What, then, is the reality, and what is the illusion? Are the images of life the ultimate reality, or does the mirror have to break asunder first before reality is found and experienced? Past this point society cannot be taken; each individual must

make the underworld journey himself and then rise up again as does Rachel, to the upper floor of daily living. Rachel has rediscovered her "father" symbolically through this episode. Something lost has been found, although she certainly could not articulate exactly what the mystery is; she simply has come away restored. The waters of dissolution have enveloped her and spewed her forth onto dry land again, like the reluctant prophet Jonah. At the end of the book she humourously says: "I will rage in my insomnia like a wild prophetess." Something has been metamorphosed in this underworld chamber of death which puts life in a new perspective eventually. She can laugh at the end, laugh even at her own irony - which means moving beyond despair into an authentically metaphysical vision of reality.

There is no escapism for Laurence's heroines, no "happy land..." except the one to which they must return, restored and strengthened in spirit through personal suffering. ("No Cross, No Crown"! as Clara Shipley once embroidered.) Rachel comes back to the upper world to confront her inevitable desertion and dejection, her crisis over the uncertain pregnancy that turned out to be only a small tumour, and to her mother... in short, to 'life as usual'. But, on another level, it is not as it was before all this happened - the stagnation, the frustration, the fear of madness, of feeling, of touch, of death, of so many things; life has been renewed in a subtle yet definite way through the combined mystery of life and death which Rachel had to experience first-hand. No one could add this knowledge

to her; no popular religious practise or salvation brigade could bring it about painlessly for her. Impossible! Hers was a transformation by water - the night-sea journey in the womb of death - and entailed a loss: that of her men - father, school-children (notably Jamie) and lover; but it can now be added that it was also a change wrought by fire - the experience of passion and love. Having passed through the waters of oblivion, through the void, she comes out "alive after all", affirmed in an authentically spiritual sense which is real.

I do not know how many bones need be  
broken before I can walk. And I do not  
know, either, how many need not have been  
broken at all.

Make me to hear--

How does it go? What are the words?  
I can't have forgotten all the words,  
surely, the words of the songs, the psalms.

Make me to hear joy and gladness, that  
the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.

Rachel, having incorporated Nature into herself, has also become the "mother" now, whereas earlier she was the overgrown child and victim of her own mother. She can take responsibility and carry on with the business of living, neither a pessimist nor an escapist.

Chapter 4 Footnotes

1

Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1966).

All references taken from this edition.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Fire Dwellers

Laurence's fourth novel, The Fire Dwellers,<sup>1</sup> marks the next step in her characters' soul journeys. Their inner development takes the form of a transition from the Father God of the Old Testament to a God resembling the spirit of the New Testament fourth gospel, Love. The redemptive pattern emerging in the lives of Hagar, Rachel and Stacey manifests in mysterious and unorthodox ways that are often at odds with inherited religious tradition which is too narrow in its structure and intolerant in its outlook to make room for further revelation. Each of these women is experiencing the power of grace outside the bounds of conventional religion through an encounter with the repressed, outcast or condemned element in the soul. As they re-appropriate the privately and socially alienated portion of their beings, they make contact with the Feminine dimension of existence and experience the revelation of Love. Through the mediation of an unexpected meeting with a strange man, Hagar, Rachel and Stacey are able to feel the supporting "Everlasting Arms". It is thus not through obedience to external institutionalized authority that these women are saved, but through achieving a deeper grounding in their own elemental nature which alone can support them from within amid outer conditions of dehumanization and violence.

The religious orthodox mythology as underlying structure of these novels gradually discloses a pattern of meaning which extends from the pioneer Hagar to the generation of women who

follow her. Both the negative as well as the positive features of myth become apparent. Each woman works out her destiny in terms of her own personal background and her society's structures. Individual and collective history are two strands braided together through the agency of cultural mythology. To become free within themselves the heroines must deal with this mythology as it has conditioned their consciousness and, what is perhaps more difficult, as it continues to shape society and history.

Whereas a laudable degree of inner liberation may be attained, society frequently views the more aware individual as a threat, a misfit, a joke, or a madman. In fact, once personal insight is awakened, however feebly, the situation becomes remarkably more painful for the person since she is now led to wonder in dismay whether the self or the society is insane. Hagar, being old, had only to contend with the accusation of senility; Rachel and Stacey must keep their doubts about what is sane to themselves. All three are extremely lonely women, despite the surface movements around them, because they have no one in whom to confide their pressing fears and doubts about life's meaning and their own identity. Each one wonders about the identity beneath the persona, the social and professional roles with which they are identified: grandmother, school teacher, spinster, housewife. "Under this chapeau lurks a mermaid, a whore, a tigress. She'd call a cop and I'd be put in a mental ward." quips Stacey sardonically. As these heroines look below the surface identity, the institutionalized and myth-conditioned

self, they fear the possibility of madness, which is essentially the state of being out-of-step with the prevalent reality-structure of one's society or the standards of defined normalcy. In The Fire Dwellers, Laurence depicts the social games and collective fictions from the viewpoint of the alternation experience of Stacey MacAindra who sees and suffers the mass-insanity of her society but who is unfortunately helpless to change it because she doubts herself and feels powerless in the male-oriented and administered social system.

Nothing would be easier, yet more mistaken, than to consider this Laurence's simplest novel. On the surface narrative level it deals merely with the staggeringly monotonous daily routine of an ordinary housewife in suburban Vancouver. Stacey's life is not in the least extraordinary if compared to the majority of working-class women who comprise the modern bourgeoisie. Laurence has achieved in this novel something akin to Eliot's concluding scene of "A Game of Chess" in The Wasteland, presented a disturbingly realistic portrayal of the working class and its alienation from a humanistic culture. The same accuracy of ear for language and the unfailing empathy mixed with irony for the "sweet ladies" upon whose lives the night is rapidly falling without hope of redress in a better tomorrow is evident in The Fire Dwellers. The style in which this novel is written - choppy, tense, broken or half-finished sentences, mundane and wry, yet combined with occasional passages of intense lyric sensitivity - itself mimics the quality of life in which the characters are absorbed.

The constant tumult and incessant stream of information and images that assail consciousness in contemporary life is a social factor that Laurence incorporates into her non-linear stylistic organization. She successfully captures the banality and complexity of modern urban society while maintaining the faint hope of personal transcendence and regained simplicity. Underneath the unceasing barrage of mass-media communication and the survival-directed activity of twentieth-century man, prowl the shadowy ghosts of the past and of dream, hope and fear, of cynicism and despair, and, above all, of desire. Below this subconscious mental layer floats the much-feared image of death and, beyond it, the Void, "the chasm dark and drear" as always. The final psychic level to which Laurence's heroines must descend is unconditioned Nature. Stacey, as did Hagar and Rachel, experiences the healing restorative moments of her otherwise frustrated life in the wilderness. In Nature all three are able to experience the "objective correlative" of their deepest inner being, their fundamental human nature in its primal wholeness (holiness). The moments of transcendence are sacramental and open up a realm of being wherein the contending multi-dimensional noises of the conditioned social sphere give way to silence, to instinctual release, and to reconciliation with the alienated aspects of the soul. A deeper unity of individual and universe is briefly experienced, but this basic oneness is soon shattered as they return to the realm of civilization and man's self-created stifling structures.

Thematically, The Fire Dwellers shows more complexity than



the previous novels and includes the motifs of death, violence, insanity, aging, identity, religion, secularization, mass manipulation and urbanization. The social reality in which these problems occur may best be described, in Harvey Cox's term, as "the secular city". Whereas Cox, however, is fundamentally optimistic about the future of the secular city, Laurence cannot be said to share this viewpoint. Cox traces the urbanization and secularization of Western man to its Biblical (Hebrew) sources, but sees in that irreversible world-conquering and history-directed process the ultimate liberation of man from Nature and the triumph of science. From a woman's most integral and intuitive understanding, such a liberation is a false one and she instinctively feels its dangerous consequences for the earth's species, mankind included. Laurence's Stacey and Morag articulate increasing anxious concern for the human being's capacity to survive "the epoch of the secular city" and its terrifying depersonalization and disregard for the many forms of life. The setting and atmosphere of The Fire Dwellers reflect our most immediate dilemma at this point in time.

The rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era and are closely related movements. Urbanization constitutes a massive change in the way men live together, and became possible in its contemporary form only with the scientific and technological advances which sprang from the wreckage of religious worldviews. Secularization, an equally epochal movement, marks a change in the way men grasp and understand their life together, and it occurred only when the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living exposed the relativity of the myths and traditions men

once thought were unquestionable. The ways men live their common life affects mightily the ways they understand the meaning of that life, and vice versa. Villages and cities are laid out to reflect the pattern of the heavenly city, the abode of the gods. But once laid out, the pattern of the polis influences the way in which succeeding generations experience life and visualize the gods. Societies and the symbols by which those societies live influence each other. In our day the secular metropolis stands as both the pattern of our life together and the symbol of our view of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Our world-view is conditioned by an original religious mythology that became history.

Secularization arises in large measure from the formative influence of biblical faith on the world, an influence mediated first by the Christian church and later by movements deriving partly from it.<sup>3</sup>

The chief consequence of secularization is urbanization, which further disrupts traditional patterns and creates alienation.

It means a type of impersonality in which functional relationships multiply. It means that a degree of tolerance and anonymity replace traditional moral sanctions and long-term acquaintanceships. The urban center is the place of human control, of rational planning, of bureaucratic organization and the urban center is not just in Washington, London, New York, and Peking. It is everywhere. The technological metropolis provides the indispensable social setting for a world of "no religion at all", for what we have called a secular style.<sup>4</sup>

Cox's division of socio-cultural history into three period styles - the tribal, the town, and the technopolitan - is useful in the case of Laurence's work and the direction it is taking

away from the "technopolis" toward the tribal form of community. Man's experience and articulation of the divine is conditioned by each period of socio-political organization; thus, in the tribal society, an "absorptionist type of mysticism" is dominant; in the town culture, which is a period of individualism, God is experienced as an authority figure and the symbolization of deity tends to be political; in the technopolis, both these patterns are disappearing and in their stead appears the concept of the work team and rational partnership.<sup>5</sup>

These models of tribe, town, and technopolis may be applied usefully to Laurence's settings. Hagar and Rachel live in the town framework where the social structure and local hierarchy are firmly linked and solidly established. At the conclusion of A Jest of God, the site of Rachel's new psychological horizon is Vancouver; but now, in The Fire Dwellers, the reader is quickly led to realize that the Promised Land does not lie West of the Rockies. The social sphere may possibly be less cramped and narrow in the metropolis, the rules of conduct and public morality non-existent or unapparent; but now an unstructured sort of alienation appears. Strangers from many regions of the country and globe are gathered into a loose heterogeneous mass in the city; many are rootless, drifting from nowhere to nowhere, pieces of flotsam and jetsam in the cold current of anonymity, or else are relics of a dead though recent past, veterans of the wars, who petrify into stone resembling the very memorials under which they sit silent and solitary.

The pigeons are shitting all over the granite cenotaph, she is glad to see. Stacey stops and reads the inscription. Their Names Shall Live Forevermore. And on the other side, Does It Mean Nothing to You. No question mark. Along the steps at the base, three old men sit in the feeble sunlight, coughing and spitting, clenching their arms across their skinny chests, murmuring something to one another, memories, perhaps, or curses against now.

Suburbia becomes the great ordering scheme of the middle class in this otherwise boundless expanse of sea, forest and concrete. There, upon convoluted streets and boulevards with quaint names like "Bluejay Crescent", that almost convey a sense of carefree happiness but are not entirely without irony, the houses of the average citizen stand to weary attention in regimented rows, while within their walls the chaos against which they were originally erected is barely kept in control. Each home and family is but a minor variation on the bourgeois cultural model: the "good life" for the average couple and their children, which is constantly being conditioned into the mind by every form of modern media - radio, film, television, advertising, magazines and papers. This mass indoctrination, done largely through the projection of chosen images, takes on a myriad of subtle and blatant shapes and is the mythology of the commercial state within whose deadly suffocating womb the individual is corporately reared from cradle to tomb and raised to the everlasting status of consumer. Such insidious mass-conditioning via the popular myths of suburban gracious living is deadly in its effects, as the novel shows. It has become the

imprisoning and dehumanizing factor in daily life, all the more dangerous to public and private sanity because it goes unchallenged and essentially ungraspable. Like any mythology, that of the commercial state, buttressed and constantly re-created by the advertising media, works on the mind like invisible poison gas. It envelops all of existence in a colourful smog, until only mirages and illusions of reality are seen; the authentic contact with truth and life becomes increasingly lost, and people relate to chimeras, roles and mirror-images. Suburbia is the epitome of this modern form of alienated consciousness and successfully serves as an innocuous method of social control.

Whereas religion provided the chief means of social organization until recently, the churches in modern society have largely lost their formerly necessary role of Grand Initiator into the religio-secular structure. With the waning of their importance, their mythology did not however disappear; rather, it was transferred to the secular state and its functions and various branch institutions. This curious reversal of sacred and profane, in which the secular sphere is sacramentalized and ritualized and the religious one is profaned and deflated, is one of the paradoxes frequently adverted to in The Fire Dwellers. The following passage taken from the beginning of the novel provides an example of this reversal and of the stylistic juxtaposition of lyricism and banality.

Stacey walks more quickly and uneasily.  
Then she finds that she is beside the harbor.  
The gulls are spinning high, freewheeling.

Wings like white arcs of light crescenting above the waterfront. Voices mocking piratically at the city's edges. But the city is doing too much shrieking itself to hear the gulls.

If they're prophets in bird form, they might as well save their breath. They aren't prophets, though. They only look it, angelic presences and voices like gravel out of a grave. Birds in prophet form. They couldn't care less. They scavenge from the city, that's all, and from those black rusty freighters doing their imitations of monolithic ghosts, clanking and groaning out there. If this city were gone, the wings would skim unmournfully away, off to deride and suck up to some other city, if there were any. Even if there weren't, the gulls wouldn't be too upset. Change of diet, that's all. No more sea-sodden bread crusts and waterlogged orange peel.

Two other instances of this "transvaluation of values" occur when Stacey goes to the supermarket and the coiffeur.

The long aisles of the temple. Side chapels with the silver-flash of chrome where the dead fish lie among the icy strawberries. The mounds of offerings, yellow planets of grapefruit, jungles of lettuce, tentacles of green onions, Arctic effluvia flavored raspberry and orange, a thousand bear-faced mouse-legended space-crafted plastic-gifted strangely-transformed sprouting of oat and wheat fields. Music hymning from invisible choirs.

.....

The priestesses are clad in pale mauve smocks. They glide and dart, the movements perfectly assured and smooth, no wasted effort. A heavy woman with heavy grey hair sinks down into a chair in front of the grapefruit-yellow basin. With a visible sign of pleasure, tweed-covered bosom lifting like hills in a minor earthquake, she leans back

her head to receive the benediction of shampoo. The priestess's plastic-sheathed hands administer to her scalp, the fingers updrawn like yellow talonless claws. In a chair facing the wall-to-wall mirror, a young woman laughs soundlessly up at her priestess, who is twirling the strands of black hair rapidly around yellow rollers. And ammonia whiff and a conglomeration of humid perfumes comes to Stacey's nostrils.

The central single metaphor for this transference of the religious function to the secular realm is RICHALIFE, the firm which Mac MacAindra joins after having been in the encyclopedia-selling business. RICHALIFE is one version of the secular Kingdom. All who join this company, sell or buy its products, can be promised eternal health and salvation; the evils of age, decay, sickness and mental anxiety can be miraculously abolished by taking a collection of pills. If the appropriate plan of redemption is scrupulously followed, a happy future life among the 'risen and reborn' can be expected. All the ingredients of the Tabernacle are present in the RICHALIFE business: euphoria about the salvation package, repressed anxiety concerning its ability to alleviate the ills it claims to cure, mass-gatherings or rallies with 'witnesses' and hymns or jingles, and the pervasive sense of doom beneath the surface jocularity. It prohibits the expression of the individual self by imposition of the rule of conformity to a mass-standard (Mac must have his hair chopped into a crew-cut), but promises thereby a newer and better self will be born. Thor Thorlakson, the managerial high priest of this cult-cum-company, assures his congregation of the wonder-working effects of RICHALIFE's salvific scheme. Dur-

ing Stacey's first meeting with Thor, he explains the new gospel.

I've gone off booze ha-ha. Never was a heavy drinker but used to enjoy a martini before dinner. That was in the P.R. days--before Richalife. Same with caffeine and nicotine--you could say the shackles have been lifted. Yes, you could definitely put it that way--the shackles have been lifted. Once upon a time I could barely face the morning without three cups of coffee and as many cigarettes. Then I started reaching for a Richalife instead. I think we've all got to remember that we're not just selling vitamin pills--we're selling ourselves. I mean ha-ha that sounded a little ambiguous but what I was meaning to say was we stand as living examples. What program you got the family on, Mac?

The "program" refers to a selected package of pill medications for each member of the enrolled household, and children are treated on the "Young Life Program". Stacey instinctively resents and mistrusts the company, Thor, and the product, and particularly the privacy-invading questionnaires which must be filled out for each person, but she is unable to articulate clearly or convincingly why she feels this way. Also, her instinctive dissent is continually being undercut and rendered futile by her allegiance to husband Mac who continually reminds her to be quiet and well-behaved. "Whatever else you do, Stacey, for God's sake don't get into an argument, will you?" Thus he acts as one of the chief repressors in her life with whom she has repeatedly to do battle for the sake of her own survival. Two RICHALIFE meetings are brilliantly and hilariously described by Laurence in a thick vein of satire throughout which Stacey



plays the reluctant part of Devil's Advocate, reluctant because she is torn two ways: between nervously wanting to please and to make a good impression for Mac's sake, and bizarrely breaking up the cultic charade with her inebriated antics. Unfortunately, this is the only form of protest she has, a spontaneous but insistent rejection of the phony solemnities and social game-playing, but because she has not got a firm grasp of the dynamics of social myth-making, she cannot challenge the party effectively. Her protest, therefore, inevitably takes on the mask of the buffoon, the clown who makes a fool of herself, despite her socialized good intentions, in order to reveal by implication the much greater common folly of the group. Authentic protest must remain stifled within consciousness and thereby produces the incessant cynical running commentary to the outward action on the social stage. She has not the self-confidence to overcome the nervousness conditioned into her by the game rules of the system, not the assurance of her innately diabolical 'I don't give a damn' attitude.

Outside the door of the hotel banqueting room, Mac touches Stacey's arm. Half surprised, she glances at him and finds that he is smiling.

Now just don't worry, Stacey. It'll be all right.

Gosh, I hope so. I'm kind of nervous.

There's nothing to be nervous about. Just don't argue or...

I won't I swear it.

The room is large, old-fashioned, plush, velvet-draped, and full of people. Stacey straightens her black cocktail dress with per-spining hands. At one end of the room there is a long bar, behind which three waiters are being kept busy. Stacey pats at her hair. In

the middle of the room is a bandstand, from which members of a small and bored-looking orchestra are dispensing waltzes and slow fox-trots. Stacey resists the desire to look behind her and make sure her waist-slip has not edged disastrously downwards. Across the room, corner to corner, stretches a white banner with one word in cerise, gold-edged.

#### RICALIFE

Standing with a group of laughing girls, all lissome and blond with good teeth and no waists, is Thor, dressed in midnight-blue evening suit and drinking tomato juice. His silver hair glimmers phosphorescently. Stacey checks by running one finger along her outer thighs to make sure her panties have not by any chance lost their elasticity and begun to descend. Thor waves and grins, and Mac lifts a hand in a return salute. Stacey unobtrusively puts one hand behind her and touches a thumb to the small of her back in case her bra has become unhooked. The orchestra goes into the droning circles of a Viennese waltz, and before Stacey and Mac can reach Thor, he is dancing with one of the girls.

After several hours and double scotches, during which Stacey has ambled between discomfort and playing along, she finally reaches the point of no return and confronts Thor. The unfortunate end of this otherwise liberating and exposing testimonial of the unquenchable energies of the self is that Stacey is regarded as the misfit and idiot, the one who must be laughed at and put away because her laughter is socially threatening and potentially revolutionary. Her tragedy, at bottom, is that she does not know the possibilities of her own self and so succumbs to the identity image of unacceptable which the social group projects onto her.

--Come on, doll, be sociable. Don't want

to be sociable. Don't know anybody. What did Thor mean, needling Mac like that? He was needling him. And saying just like that, Who have we here? Like I was something that just crawled out from under a stone. The bastard. Who does he think he is? How dare he talk to Mac like that? Listen, you thunder god, you double-dyed snake-in-the-grass, you refugee from the discards of Lucifer's army. Let me tell you one simple thing. Just one. Do you want to know why Mac didn't reply? Do you want to know why he didn't wipe the floor verbally with you? I'll tell you. I'll tell you straight. Because he is a gentleman, that's why. Because he cannot be bothered to stoop to your paltry jesting, you sick clown, that's why. Believe me, I'll say it to your face.

Thor's face. Immediately in front of her and somewhat above. His height. Very tall man. Surrounded by a circle of anonymous others. Stacey sees only Thor--the white opalescent skin, the eyes like turquoises, opaque blue, the silver mane. She realizes she has walked all around the room in search of him, and now she has found him.

Excuse me.

Why, hi there, Stacey. You enjoying the party?

Yes. Yes, thanks. There was only one thing I wanted to ask you about.

Go right ahead. What is it? It isn't--ah--private?

Oh hell no it's not private it's only about that quiz.

Quiz?

Quiz. Why'd you do it?

You mean the Richalife quiz? I don't think I quite see

I said why'd you do it? What can you gain? Who's gonna tell you anything on a thing like that?

You don't think so?

Hell I know so. I mean if I feel guilty or anxious, like let's say I stabbed my dear old grandmother in the back for her money or I find I got stigmata on both hands and I gotta wear gloves everywhere I go, you think I'm gonna say?

Titters of general laughter. Thor reaches out and takes Stacey's hands.

Here--let me see. No, you're all clear, Stacey, I'm glad to say. You didn't strike me like the type. Well, about the quiz now.

--I got to stop. Stacey, girl, shut your trap. Change subject. Now. Essential. Get a grip on yourself. Think of Mac.

No, it's only that it's an intrusion or do I mean infringement? I mean intrusion, that's what I mean but I guess I shouldn't have brought it up.

One of the circle, a slender man in glasses, puts a hand on her rump.

As long as that's all you bring up

Hey the party's getting rough

We've all got good manners here

Stacey lets the talk flow away from her. She glances around to find Mac, knowing she must focus on him. Finally turned away from her. He is talking with a tall brown-haired girl whose face is a medieval tomb carving, elongated, drawn in subtle lines of earnestness and prayer. Stacey quickly looks away.

Stacey is hemmed in by dead people; her spark of liveliness and Mephistophelian irony is tragically turned against itself and she becomes, like the Romantics, Cains, and rebels before her, a self-tormented and dissociated consciousness which has no other outlet for protest than gradual self-destruction. Yet, as in them, the spark cannot die in her.

The second time Stacey goes to a RICHALIFE rally she does so alone because Mac does not wish to risk embarrassment by his misfit wife. She follows him to the auditorium, surveys the people, and in the following scene experiences the secular combination of the two religious elements: controlled conservatism and evangelicalism.

The audience is mainly middle-aged, half

men and half women. They sit quietly, for the most part, not looking at one another.

--Maybe they'd all like to be incognito. I know damn well I would. I'd like to have a woolly muffler or a long trailing length of chiffon wrapped around my pan. If somebody like Bertha Garvey should chance to stroll in, I would crawl under the seat, so help me. Here we are--action at last.

The white velvet curtains part, revealing another section of stage on which six girls are gathered around a microphone. Their costumes are modest to a degree, long loose-fitting white robes, toga-like, with the Greek key design slanting diagonally across each bosom. The girls' hair ranges from white-blond to honey, all long and straight. The hall grows still, the whispers die, the ticking coughs are all subdued, the feet compose themselves. When the audience is ready, the girls begin to sing, not loudly or jazzily but in the clear treble voices of a clutch of meadow larks.

Richness is a quality of living  
 Richness quells the trouble and the strife  
 Richness is the being and the giving  
 Anyone can reach a Richalife.

Later, Delores Appelton, an emotionally lost young woman with whom Mac later has a brief liaison, gives her testimony to RICHALIFE'S power to save and restore life; then the meeting is over. Stacey sees Mac's arm tightly held around Delores, together making "a wall against the world".

Very appropriately, RICHALIFE is a drug company and thereby symbolizes the dazed, suppressed condition of modern social reality; one must be rendered ineffectual and lobotomized - painlessly of course, so that the individual will never suspect the violation of sanity. Each frightened ego is gradually desensitized to authentic life and forced to surrender its claim to kinship with it in joy and freedom, in order that the doped

mass-culture can thrive unchallenged and make a profit on this human carnage as well. To fit into the group one must be first initiated and mythologized into its sacred rites, and then skilled at returning the right liturgical response. Only after this conditioning process has been successful, and the mind has become almost entirely the property of the mass (although this mind belongs really to no one; that is just its danger, because what belongs to no one in particular also has no particular individual responsibility), then may the single, isolated, drugged ego assume the role of perpetrator of the myths. Or, as is more frequently and self-congratulatoryly stated, one has 'come of age'. It seems rather more accurate, however, to propose that this process is akin to cancer: the cell becomes infected by the already-deadly strain and then in turn infects other parts of the body politic. Stacey, to her credit, is not yet entirely conditioned; she struggles constantly against the invisible blight until she fears that she may have a "brain tumour". After the visits to Doctor Spender and the tests and x-rays have been dutifully taken, the data shows negative results. While this news comes certainly as a relief, conversely, it also leaves her in the acutely uncomfortable position of wondering if perhaps she may be going insane.

Stacey often reflects upon the drug-culture of which children, youths and adults are victims. Surrounded by acid-tripping youth in Vancouver, she fears for the safety of her own growing children. Her daughter Katie, aged fifteen, fumes because she may not see the movie, Psychedelic Sidewalk, leaving

Stacey to wonder what kind of advice she could give her when she herself does not know the answer and her own generation is caught in the drug-syndrome.

The streets are just beginning to waken. They keep late hours at night in this part of town. A few men in winter breakers and jeans are hanging around cafe doors. At Ben's Economy Mart, the windows are full of little penned cards--Get a Load of This Bargain Only \$10.95, How About This at \$4.75? We're Cheating Ourselves at \$9.95--and other pieces of folk literature, propped against suitcases, kithbags, lumberjacks' boots, hush knives, thermos flasks and shiny double-bitted axes. In the lobby of the Princess Regal Hotel, some yawning yellow-toothed fishwife, fleshwife, sagging guttily in a print dress sad with poppies, is sweeping up last night--heel-squashed cigarette butts, Kleenex blown into or hawled into, and ashes. Old men are sitting there, too, sitting in the red plastic-covered chairs, waiting for the beer parlour to open, so somebody can stand them a drink and they can accept haughtily, their scorn some kind of sop to their pride.

--What is it like, really? How would I know? People live in those rooms above the stores, people who go to the cafes and bars at night, who prowl these streets that are their territory. Men down from the forests or off the fish boats. Faithless loggers clobbering their faithless women. Kids gaming with LSD--look at me, Polly, I'm Patman--zoom from sixth floor window into the warm red embrace of a cement death. Ancient mariners tottering around in search of lifeblood, a gallon of Calona Royal Red. Whores too old or sick-riddled to work any classier streets. Granite-eyed youngsters looking for a fix, trying to hold their desperation down. Is it like that? All I know is what I read in the papers. "Seventeen-Year Old on Drug Charge." "Girl Kills Self, Lover." "Car Smash Decapitates Indian Bride, Groom." "Man Sets Room Ablaze, Perishes." All sorts of cheery stuff. What do I know of it? I see the dead faces in a mocking procession,

looking at me, looking again, shrugging, saying There's stability for you. Do I deserve this? Yes, and yet goddamn it, not yes.

The social reality devastatingly depicted in The Fire Dwellers is one of communal suicide. Death is the only reigning god. Stacey is a confused and questioning centre within a maelstrom of destruction; society is cheerily and obliviously exterminating itself by one means or another and she tries desperately to make sense of it and to find her own bearings. Each of her female friends, Tess and Bertha, try to cope within the prison-life of suburbia but neither is any real help to Stacey. If anything, they are even more desperate than Stacey because they have ceased to fight back; they have capitulated to the prison-keepers and signed their own death-warrants. Bertha is married to a man who continually berates her ability and human worth, yet shows a fair face without, and Tess masks her anxieties by becoming as nearly perfect-looking as possible. Both of them are, to paraphrase Eliot, 'dying with a little patience'. Tess actually does suffer the inevitable and unpostponable fate of all victims: she tries to commit suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills and a quart of liquor, but even when she survives that, she is only fit for the mental institution. As her uncomprehending, feeble and vain husband says to Stacey: "Yes, but why? Why would she? What's the matter with her? What did I do wrong? Was it me? What was it?" Stacey herself cannot articulate the causes consciously; all she knows is that "things start a long way back".



Ironically, this contemporary society is one whose ultimate fear is death. Yet violence obviously triumphs all around. The "Ever-Open Eye" beams the bloodshed of far-off battlefields into suburban living-rooms and on the home front bedlam rages from the morning reveille to the night-time truce, sleep. Vietnam is in flames, homicide, crimes, family feuds, children's screaming and arguments, radio broadcasts about global or local dangers to safety and peace, trips to outer space, bomb shelters being built to defend the populace against final cataclysmic calamity, Redeemer's Advocates pamphleteering house-to-house and on street-corners about Armageddom ("O day of wrath, day of mourning"!) ... all this and more is the spectrum of Stacey's world. She herself fears lest she should lose control one day and hit her children too fiercely in anger, or worse still, even kill them. "Pank your fires", her mother used to warn her, but this has not been wise advice, for, suppressed, anger and frustration only mount until the final explosion becomes a necessity, not at all an accident or chance mishap.

What if I slap Jen one day, suddenly, hard, without knowing I'm going to do it, just because she's here and young? God, don't let me. Stay my hand. I scare the hell out of myself when I think this way.

Come on, flower; time to get out of your bath. C'mon, that's it.

Newspaper story. Young divorced mother found in bathroom in catatonic state beside the body of her three-year-old son. A broken wine bottle had been plunged deeply into the child's chest. Photograph showed girl being led away, her face dull, absent, her hands

darkly blooded up to the wrists.

--She was a hophead, for heaven's sake, Stacey. Yeh. Nothing like that, nothing even remotely like that could happen here. And then again, anything that could happen to anybody. Anything. When I think that way, my guts turn over. Even if I never lay a hand on Jen in anger, never, I'm feeling the trap the worst, and yell and scream at her? Just because she isn't yet school age and she needs me. You want to know something, God? Sometimes all I want to do is sit down quietly in a secluded corner and hawl my goddam eyes out. Okay, so you don't want to know. I'm telling you anyway.

Whether applied to the individual or to society, suppression of sane life and energy always produces the same result: some form of suicide or homicide. Society has thus become a collection of victims and victimizers, of either masochists or sadists. It becomes a perversion of life in which death is openly or secretly courted with a sick fascination. Buckle Fennick is a case in point. Saved by Mac during the second World War, Buckle is still obsessed by violence, and continually plays games to outwit death in his diesel truck on the highway. Toward the novel's end, he is killed at this sport and Mac must go down to the morgue and identify the smashed body. The horror of violence and death, and yet the constant flagrant preoccupation with these pairs of negative forces, is deeply imbedded in the modern consciousness. War is only one largely-writ symbol of this fetish and taboo which constitutes the underlying bond between the 'brothers'. This masculine phallic symbiosis in which healthy life and love cannot flourish, into which the

feminine cannot successfully break because the bond is between men (man-to-man) and has nothing to do with women, is obvious in Mac and Buckle's relationships. It must be admitted that the pathology lies much more acutely on Buckle's part, but Mac is also affected. He has wife and children, but underneath the family provider and husband roles there exists the bond with death and man. That symbiotic death-clasp of the masculine consciousness is unprocreative; indeed, it must of necessity be a sterile, deadly rapport that degenerates into pathology of one form or another. Buckle can be viewed as a symbol of the deadly one-sided masculine control which governs private and social existence; in his self-masturbating, death-baiting obsession he is doomed to extinction. The bond between the 'brothers', which excludes the feminine from participation in its unspoken buddy-system, is the cult of war par excellence. War and death are man's domain and comprise the deepest psychic connection. We can now well-understand Stacey's instinctive reaction against Buckle, her jealousy of his subtle control over Mac, his manipulation of the death-bond, and his coarse flaunting of his sex in her presence. Into the male clique of death and destruction woman dare not enter and does not even wish to. It is as if her life instinct tells her that this bond will resist love and fertility because it is based upon their fierce negation. Woman can only be one of two things in this system: the servant or the victim. In any case, she must again play the masochistic side of the complex, while the male objectively takes on the sadistic role. But let us not deceive ourselves that the

encounter is ever with a real human woman, for the psychological drama is entirely inter-masculine. Man is playing with his own narcissistic obsession with death, and that is why the memory of the war must be ever-refreshed and tended - "lest we forget"! If the female consciousness of flaming life, so threateningly diabolical to the system, ever broke into this masculine consciousness and shattered its deadlock, man would be free from this fear of death and reborn into creative life, and woman herself would get in return living men. Since we are far from that stage of being at present, Laurence's depiction of the relationship between these three characters highlights the problem. When the men are together, Stacey's task is to serve them dinner and drinks and keep the children quiet, and the following passage is a telling commentary on the foregoing analysis.

--Pour on the Chanel Number Five.  
Drench yourself in it, woman. Go on.  
Mac and Buckle will spring to their feet.  
Gad, they will exclaim. Who is this apparition of delight. Who is this refugee queen from The Perfumed Garden? In a pig's eye, they will.

Mac and Buckle are not in the dining room or the kitchen or the living room. They are down in the basement, in the darkened TV room. Buckle is lighting two cigarettes, holding them both in his mouth at once. He hands one to Mac, who takes it without a word.

--I'd like to knock that damn cigarette to the floor and stamp on it hard. Yeh, that would be splendid. Mac would have me certified.

Stacey says nothing. She sits down and lights a cigarette for herself, crossing her legs so that her ankles, still slender, show. Or would have done if the room had been lighted and anyone had been looking.

--The Ever-Open Eye. Western serial. Sing yippee for the days of the mad frontier. Boys were sure men in those days all right and men were sure giants. How could they miss? Not with them dandy six shooters. Tak! Tak! Splat! Instant power. Who needs women?

The program ends, and then the News. This time the bodies that fall stay fallen. Flicker-flicker-flicker. From one dimension to another. Stacey does not know whether Ian and Duncan, when they look, know the difference.

--Everything is happening on TV. Everything is equally unreal. Except that it isn't. Do the kids know? How to tell them? I can't. Maybe they know more about it than I do. Or maybe they know nothing. I can't know.

It's depressing.

Don't look then, honey. Want a beer, Buckle?

Don't mind if I do. They oughta drop an H-bomb on them bastards.

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

What d'you mean, Stacey? It would settle them. It would settle a lot of things.

Yeh, so would slitting your own throat.

Stacey, would you kindly go and get a couple of beers for Buckle and me, if it's not asking too much.

I was only

I cannot stand these pointless arguments over nothing.

Nothing!

There isn't any use in talking. It doesn't change anything.

--True. And he really can't stand it when I argue with Buckle. God, Mac's terrible need for quiet, and my denial of it.

I'm sorry. I'll get the beer.

Buckle's obsession with death does not allow him to touch life or woman. Stacey discovers this shocking fact one afternoon at his derelict apartment when she makes a tentative gesture of reaching out to touch him physically. Instantly he recoils and screams, "Don't touch me", then proceeds to expose and alleviate himself in front of a stricken Stacey who now un-

derstands why his wife, the former Julie Kazlik, left him. Along with his mother, an acid-blinded decrepit prostitute who drinks liquor from a tea-pot, Buckle is both tragic and repulsive. He himself is his own worst victim, for ultimately his death catches up with him. Mac reacts with violent but controlled nausea to the news of his buddy's crash. He knows he must face the sight of death alone, but Stacey waits outside the Morgue and accompanies him home where, once in bed, Mac is initially silent, then vomits and breaks down.

Mac turns off the light on the bedside table. Then almost immediately, he switches it on again and walks very quickly to the bathroom. Stacey, lying stretched straight and stiff as a brass curtain roil, hears him vomiting, flushing the toilet to mask the sound. Mercifully, no child awakens. Mac returns, crawls into bed, turns to her and puts his arms around her. He is crying now, the lung-wrenching spasms of a man to whom crying is forbidden. Shocked and frightened, she can only hold him, stroke his shoulders. Finally it subsides and he gets up and gropes for kleenex and cigarettes. His voice is rough with self-condemnation.

Mac must work out the death-bond between himself and Buckle by recreating the war memory and confiding the realization that by giving his life he has not "done him any favour. I hadn't done anything he wanted me to do." The image of the war and the Cameron Highlanders haunts the peripheries of both Mac's and Stacey's mind, and it is one which must be exorcised before they can leave death behind and take up life. Stacey, it seems, had innately felt this before Mac and her parting with

the dead past is symbolized in her throwing away of her father's revolver after having kept it many years, hidden in the basement, as a souvenir of the war. Rightly, she brought this phallic death symbol up from the depths of the past and had the courage to throw it away into Timber Lake. Mac, with Buckle's passing, will hopefully have broken through the death-clasp also. Above all, it is necessary to note that Stacey, as woman, is the vital helpmate to man in this retching and painful transition of consciousness.

We must see the theme of death in its larger cultural context as well as on the personal level where Stacey encounters it in the physical dangers to children and friends. In the course of the novel, a friend of her son, Ian, has been run over on the street, Duncan nearly drowns in the sea, Tess has abdicated from life, Buckle departs. In the background lurks the shadow of the Cameron Funeral Parlour, her alcoholic father, and numerous strangers whose deaths are written up in the newspapers. Toward the end of the novel, when Stacey goes to visit Buckle's mother on the harbour front, she meets instead Val Tonnere, a Métis woman from Manawaka. She, too, is self-destructing on the skid rows of Vancouver ("Yeh. Long trip. The last one.") and tells Stacey that Pique Tonnerre and her family died in their shack by fire - firewater and fire. The references to death are nearly on every page of the story and consolidate to form one great thematic commentary on contemporary society. Without undue emphasis on morbidity here, it is necessary to connect the physical death theme with the spiritual

suicide of modern society. Death, like the drugs referred to earlier, is symptomatic of our fear of life. The repression of life in the individual through the various myths of religion and the state, becomes manifested outwardly in the physical organization of society; social existence is regimented, institutionalized, and violent. Now the bomb waits only to explode from within, and this explosion of the inner life in unremitting suicidal outbursts is witnessed to by the devastation in all sectors of society. On the surface, a formidable machinery of mass control exists: religion, education, communications media, corporations, prison, asylums, so-called service institutions; but underneath this modern empire of human regimentation, mental and physical, seethes a boiling brimstone hell of discontent, anxiety, derangement, illness and smoldering sadism waiting only for the appropriate hour to strike: "What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches to<sup>ward</sup> Bethlehem to be born?" The "Peast" is none other than humanity's collective death-wish, its terrible suicidal tendencies masked by the surface illusion of glitter, fun and glamour. Without overstating the point, it should be noted that a death-in-life society that relies on innocuous, anonymous, institutional repression must perforce take on a fascist character. In no conceivable way is it a free society - unless it be the freedom to choose what manner of suicide one would prefer: acquiescence and silencing of the Imagination, or any one of the numerous forms of self-destruction in which our age abounds. Laurence's heroine hears the ominous marching of the soldiers' boots in her twilight-zone between



waking and sleep. Just before turning off the lamp she had been leafing through a typical magazine or booklet such as occupy the shelves of stores everywhere; the modern myth-makers and the social controllers are identical.

Along with the Superware, families are shown on each page. Kids beam peacefully and undisturbedly. Mothers with young untired faces glow contentedly. Fathers with young untired faces smile proudly and successfully. Grandmothers with young untired faces gaze graciously and untroubledly.

--Shit.

The booklet skids and lies still under the coffee table. Stacey turns off the lamp and stands near the window, drinking and looking at the lights of the city out there. They flash and shift like the prairie northern lights in the winter sky here, captured and bound.

The tin panthers are stalking the streets of the city, their claws unretracted after the cages of time and time again. The Roman legions are marching--listen to the hate-thudding of their boot leather. Strange things are happening, and the skeletal horsemen ride, ride with all the winds of the world at their backs. There is nowhere to go this time

Anyone not genuinely moved to experience a 'metaphysical shudder' upon reading this and other passages like it which sporadically appear as dream or fantasy fragments does not appreciate the warning signs of our time. Stacey's subconscious vision ends with a cry of pleading, almost a prayer, for something that is not "unreal".

No other facet to the city-face? There must be. There has to be.

Out there in unknown houses are people who live without lies, and who touch each other. One day she will discover them,

pierce through to them. Then everything will be all right, and she will live in the light of the morning.

That, unfortunately, is an idle fantasy. To do Stacey justice, her longing for reality, her passion for life, her thirst for purity, do not let her become easily satisfied with the unreal; her greatest dilemma is that she has nowhere to turn nor does she know how to go about ameliorating her prisoner status. Thus far, she has turned her fears and criticisms back upon herself; her only release is in undirected imagination, free-floating fantasy, which nevertheless contains the key to unlocking that door of the private and collective asylum. Her science-fiction fantasies, if deeply understood, reveal that ultimate projection of fascist control is always aimed at the skies or the heavens. Modern man has swept away the pantheon of old gods only to project himself anew into space. Put he now is exposed to an even more frightening tyranny, that of masterminds in outer space who supposedly control his destiny and aim to subdue all earthlings under a universal system of oppression.

We will begin with one creature, Zug tells the assembled Council of Spirit Sires. He must of course look as nearly human as possible. He must have a bloodlike substance (red, mind, not the proper polka-dotted purple to which we are accustomed), a substance which will flow if he is accidentally cut. The control shaft, in order to escape possible detection in case of severe and unpredictable wounding, must be buried deeply in what would be his left lung if he were an earthman. The first transmitted messages from his--as it were--mouth

will be of a simple nature. We will then--I am speaking out of my many years of research and accumulated knowledge--we will then put into effect what I term the lemming syndrome.

Very far away, in a galaxy countless light-years from this planet, a scorpion-tailed flower-faced film buff is watching a nothing-shaped undulating screen. He decides he's seen enough. He switches off the pictures which humans always believed were themselves, and the imaginary planet known as Earth vanishes.

The final blow-up will be a mass-suicide of humanity, led by the "Spirit Sires", a masculine mental-phallic consciousness which builds its empires beyond time and space, ungrounded in the feminine earth of amor and humanitas.

Understandably, a death-oriented civilization which pays nominal lip-service to life while doing all it can to self-destruct is deeply concerned with survival. Stacey's social world is one of Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest. Birds, fishes, men, women, children, and even God, are involved in the business of surviving dangers, threats, and attacks from invisible or visible sources. At the beginning of the novel, the heroine recalls the sight of a sea-gull getting its food.

At the beach, once, Stacey watching a gull repeatedly dropping a closed clam-shell from a great height. Finally the shell cracked on a rock, and the bird landed and calmly fed. Stacey had to admire such a simple knowledge of survival.

Her friend, Tess Folger, who babysits little Ben, is obsessed by the big fish devouring the little fish in the gold-

fish bowl and forces the baby down into the high-chair seat to watch the deadly game with her.

She was saying the little fish doesn't want to get eaten up but she's silly isn't she? She doesn't run away and hide. So the big fish catches her, see? Watch now--look what he's doing to her. Nasty--he's nasty, isn't he?

Adults build bomb shelters and prepare to guard the entrance to their underworld caves with shot guns. Men compete in the business world; women compete against each other, and both of them try to survive the forced relationship of marriage and the prison of the home. God cannot even survive in this world and is, like people, dead, or at best, half-alive. To alleviate the constant anxiety generated by the threat of death or extinction, society invents preventive measures to prolong its collective repressive existence. Every disease must have a pill, after all, but the actual ill must itself never be healed. What are these ameliorants of the public psyche? The novel distinguishes four: education, entertainment, the body-cult, and extra-marital affairs. The extent to which these popular measures of escape from the frustrations of basic existence are merely other sanctioned forms of the control of leisure time by approved enjoyment is formidable. They seem different, exciting, challenging, or fulfilling because they are a change from the daily routine, but in their own way they are subtle means of quenching discontent. If society did not have a fine and impressive array of these steam-absorbers, its

member might take the lemming route much sooner. Stacey, like many suburban housewives or working women, is induced to believe, quite erroneously, that night school or continuing education will give her an outlet or a deeper appreciation of life when all that is really happening is that she is being more deeply socialized into accepting her prison. It may be a high-class, comfortably-and-culturally-furnished prison in the end, but she will not find peace in it. Stacey's account of some of these diversions is genuinely funny. On her night-table lies an unread copy of The Golden Pough and Investments and You.

Look at that Christly book--why do I keep it on the bedside table? I'll never get around to reading it. Essential background material, the guy kept saying. He has probably read it a thousand times. If I wanted to take yet another evening course, why did I have to pick Mythology and Modern Man? Sounded classy, that's why. I went twice. Fees wasted.

Last winter she enrolled in a course on Ancient Greek Drama.

I don't get out enough. My boundaries are four walls. Whose fault? Okay, mine. By the time the day ends, I'm too beat to seek rich cultural experiences, whatever they may mean. That babe in Varying Views of Urban Life. That's what she said. What we must seek is rich cultural experiences. I thought she probably meant she didn't get laid often enough. But I sat there nodding and agreeing with her. I swear I'll never take another one of those damn evening courses. What's left of me? Where have I gone? I've brought it on myself, without realizing it. How to stop telling lies? How to get out? This is madness. I'm not trapped. I've got

everything I always wanted.

As in A Game of Chess, where Eliot juxtaposes two levels of culture, one aristocratic and the other proletarian, and implies that both are suffering from the same problem of alienation and spiritual dearth, lower-middle-class Stacey and the academic class, which is the professional licensed carrier of the cultural tradition, are on a par. Perhaps Stacey in her rebellious discontent and sense of injustice is ahead of them because she can see through the pretenses, whereas the carriers of power are committed to prestige, not to genuine knowledge. Culture, in any case, cannot be learned. It is a consequence of the spiritual life of a living people, not a chronicle of corpses. Education is, in a sense, one of the many forms of popular entertainment when undertaken for escape from life, and, like the mass media outputs in magazines, it thrives on controlled anxiety. The articles which Stacey reads in women's popular magazines are all designed to raise hopes for a cure or a secret of successful living, and they sustain interest by the clever manipulation of anxiety, but finally no solution is given. Woman must return to her cage.

That article--"I'm Almost Ready for an Affair", which turned out to mean she wasn't at all, ending in an old-fashioned sunburst of joy, Epithalium Twenty Years After, virtuous while conveying the impression that dozens of virile men would be eager to oblige if she weren't. She was probably just like me--the only guys she knew were her husband's friends.

She is encouraged always to distrust herself and to fear some imagined evil for which she, as wife and mother, is responsible.

I'm making him nervous. "Art You Increasing Your Husband's Tensions?" More than likely. Why should I think he's worried? It's only me that's worried--only I who am worried. Compared with mothers of fifteen kids who are swallowing only air somewhere in India, have I got troubles? No. God, to tell you the truth, it's getting so I feel guilty about worrying. I know I have no right to it, but it keeps creeping up on me. I'm surrounded by voices all the time but none of them seem to be saying anything, including mine. This gives me the feeling that we may all be one-dimensional.

Or, regarding her children:

That other article, last week. "Are you You Castrating Your Son?" God, Sir, how do I know? It's getting so I'm suspicious of my slightest word or act. Maybe I shouldn't have ruffled Ian's hair just now.

When not being socialized through print, Stacey is duped into subscribing to the many variants of the body-cult. As long as women can be kept anxious about their youth, beauty, and figure, their leisure, or what remains of it, will be consumed with feverish efforts to fit one of the many images of Madison Avenue womanhood: sophisticated, homey, natural, girlish, vamp... the list is too banal to extend further. The Ponce de Leon search for the fountain of youth continues unabated and provides a diversion from the inevitability of life's natural processes. Stacey is continually worried about her extra fat and feebly

undertakes diet after diet.

Stacey goes upstairs to dress. No use in trying to compete with Tess, who would look splendid even if she were wearing an old potato sack tied with hindertwine. Stacey puts on her blue-silk dress. This is the first time she has worn it this spring, and the zipper on the skirt will hardly do up.

--Hell. I can't have put on that much. Oh heavens--look at me. Feast your eyes on those hips. Tomorrow--I swear it--the banana diet. I will buy half a ton of bananas and eat nothing else. I'll stick to it. So help me, I will.

Tess is the woman who goes berserk after having tried too long and too hard to sustain the image of bodily perfection with the help of "the HATSHEPSUT line of cosmetics". Cosmetics, like RICHALIFE pills, promise a happier tomorrow and require personal witnesses to their efficacy.

I think they've made a lot of difference to my skin. I really firmly believe they have. Don't you think so?

Yes--I think they probably have. I always thought you had a marvellous skin, anyway, though.

It takes a lot of looking after, believe me. I've got one of those skins that has a tendency to be dry. It needs nourishment. I just have to keep at it.

Yeh, well maybe I should try the night cream.

--Tess. What's the matter with us? Or maybe you really are only talking about the outer skin? I don't know. I can't get through the sound barrier any more than I can with any of them. Is it only me who wants to? (Is it only I who want to?) Goddam. I can only break through with one person. Luke Luke Luke.

The name of Luke brings up the fourth preventive measure



for survival - an extra-marital affair. This escape is possible for women in a very restricted and tabooed sense and may only be resorted to when all else has failed. There is, of course, such a thing as socially-sanctioned adultery. It is, like prostitution, the necessary correlative to the prison of the monogamous marriage-for-life. But, as in the above outlets, woman is not the party who gains anything by this choice of controlled fornication; she may fervently believe in this most time-resistant of all social myths - romance - but this is the last joker in the stacked card-deck. Beauty and romance are twin myths: to be love one must be beautiful, and to be both is not possible for everyone. Only a certain elite of womankind enjoy these hypothetical benefits; the rest, like Stacey, may vainly strive for the ideal figure and lover, but never obtain them. The trouble with all fantasies, no matter how socially approved and ingrained, is that they provide no real satisfaction, no real solution to the basic malaise of existence; they only prolong the anxious wish and hope that a cure is in the offing. Extra-marital affairs exist only to keep the institution of marriage intact. They either lead the stray back to the home-hearth, repentant and/or relieved, or result in a new marriage. Both effects are patently absurd when we stop to consider that the original problem is the repression of human life within the institution of legalized love. Stacey, despite her stern super-ego, cannot prevent herself from the inevitable curiosity and boredom and frustration of the years of marriage to Mac.

Why doesn't he get home? I want him. Right now, this minute. No, I don't. I want some other man, someone I've never been with. Only Mac for sixteen years. What are other men like? It's just as bad for him, maybe worse. He looks at girls on the street, all the young secretaries stepping lightly, the slim fillies of all the summers, and his face grows inheld and bitter. I want to comfort him; but can't, any more than he can comfort me, for neither of us is supposed to feel this way. Except that I know he does. I wonder if he knows I do? Sometimes I think I'd like to hold an entire army between my legs. I think of all the men I'll never make love with, and I regret it as though it were the approach of my own death. I'm not monogamous by nature. And yet I am. I can't imagine myself as anyone else's woman, for keeps. What does Mac do when he's on the road? He doesn't sell vanilla essence every evening, that's for sure. God, I'm unfair. Are small-town whores so glamorous? And anyway, it's only my conditioned reflex. I don't worry that much, whatever he does out there. It doesn't seem all that earth-shattering. It's jealousy, baby, admit it. He can and you can't. So okay. But apart from that angle, I'd like to be on the road. Not for anything but just to be going somewhere.

None of the options held out to Stacey can be liberating in an authentic manner because they are part and parcel of the social mythology, but she has had recourse to all four in her desire to be free. The fourth pseudo-option of the affair needs more careful examination because it becomes a focal point in Stacey's life.

To understand what made Stacey's short affair with Luke Venturi an inevitable page in the history of her psycho-social development and an ambivalent experience in its own regard, we must first examine the primary relationship between herself and

Mac which provides its background and to which it is the corollary. Stacey, in her daily relation to Mac, cannot obtain any basic satisfaction, neither erotic nor mental. Mac is married to work and to the masculine ethos; wife and children are his dependents, to be looked after, but not humanly related with. This gives Stacey her recurrent guilt feelings about being a drain on the male and results in constantly escalating self-abuse concerning her own needs and desires. God serves as a super-masculine reinforcer of this self-abasing and punitive guilt.

--God, Sir, do I know why? Okay, I've aged this man. I've foisted my kids upon him. I yak away at him and he gets fed up, and he finds his exit where I can't follow and don't understand. There are too many people involved in this situation, Lord, you know that? You don't know. Well, Stacey, for heaven's sake get some sleep. Tomorrow everything will look better. Or at least different. Optimist.

Examples such as this could be multiplied excessively but unnecessarily. Stacey is turned against herself, and the frequent self-castigation of "Bitch!" reinforces her masochistic servitude to husband and home, as does the uneasy feeling that she has no right to complain or to wish for more. This is her divinely-appointed and self-willed position, and she ought to feel only gratitude for her blessings. The slaves are required not only to serve but to smile and show respectful gratitude as well.

--Stacey, how dare you complain about

even one single solitary thing? Listen, God, I didn't mean it. Just don't let anything terrible happen to any of them, will you? I've had everything I've always wanted. I married a guy I loved, and I had my kids. I know everything is all right. I wasn't meaning to complain. I never will again. I promise.

Failure to evince the required gratitude for this prison-life might result in punishment. Rebellion, as Lucifer well knew, is punishable by eternal damnation. But as woman and mother, Stacey is in an even direr position than the arch-Fiend. "God" has a secret weapon with which to smite mothers: their children. Bacon believed that "He who hath wife and children hath given up hostages to Fortune", but this is obviously even more accurately said of women; it had never occurred to him, naturally, that for woman there should be any other fortune than the one she has had all along. Fear for her children's safety becomes Stacey's ultimate tie to Mac and household, and, most significantly, the greatest expression of the death-wish which is the logical end of self-inflicted guilt.

--Please. Let them be okay, all their lives, all four of them. Let me die before they do. Only not before they grow up, or what would happen to them?

Consolations of fantasized freedom and autonomy in this prison set-up quickly vanish under the stark light of economic realities. When Stacey's attempt at clearing the air with Mac fails and he prides himself in self-restraint - "If I did yell at you or beat you up would you really like that any better?" -

the rigged nature of the domestic game is revealed.

I only meant saying something, to clear the air. I didn't mean beating me up, for heaven's sake. I'd walk out on you if you did that.

--Would I? With four kids? How could you walk out on him, Stacey, whatever he did or was like? You couldn't, sweetheart, and don't you forget it. You haven't got a nickel of your own. This is what they mean by emancipation. I'm lucky he's not more externally violent, that's all. I see it, God, but don't expect me to like it.

As we know, however, her protests do not go to the source of the problem; they are deflected aggression from the cause to the self. Her protests take the only form she has available, sarcasm, and this is met with further repression from her husband and society until she herself feels BAD: feeling 'bad' in both senses, physically and emotionally upset, and morally evil. This is demonstrated in the morning-after-the-RICHALIFE-party exchange between herself and Mac.

Mac please don't look like that  
Oh Christ. Like what?  
Grim. Like ice. I can't stand it.  
Look, Stacey, it's nearly eight o'clock.  
Can we just get breakfast?

Mac, I'm sorry. Honestly, I'm terribly terribly sorry.

Yeh. So you said.  
I was kind of nervous anyway, and then you left me on my own.

Great. So now it's my fault.  
I didn't say that.

Stacey, there is absolutely no use in talking. I got to get to work. I don't want to discuss it.

I think we should. I think we should discuss everything.

Oh God. Look, Stacey, I'm not asking much. I'm only suggesting that breakfast would be a

good idea. Is that asking too much?

Okay okay okay I'm going downstairs right this minute. Mac, do you think you should tell Thor I'm sorry?

If he doesn't mention it, I most certainly will not bring up the subject. Now if you don't mind.

Okay okay I'm on my way

Clutching her housecoat around her, Stacey rushes down to the kitchen. The motions of getting breakfast are automatic. The minutes are eternal, the voices piercing.

--Hush. Please. Just be quiet for once. I tell you, my eardrums will crack. How'd you like to have a mother with cracked eardrums?

She says as little as possible. At last they are all out of the house, and Stacey is alone with Jen. She pours coffee cautiously and begins to sip at it.

--oh my guts. When this coffee hits them, they will rebel into convulsions. Slowly, that's it. There. That's a bit better. Why did I do it? I'll never live it down. Mac will never forgive me. I'll never forgive myself. It isn't as though it's never happened before. No, Stacey, girl, don't think of the other times. Not that many. No, but all dreadful. Don't think--I command you. You do, eh? Who're you? One of your other selves. Help, I'm schizophrenic. Oh God, why did I do it? I was so damn scared of not doing well, and then I didn't do well. Maybe if I hadn't been so scared--don't make excuses, Stacey. *Vea Culpa*. It must be wonderful to be a Catholic. Pour it all out. Somebody listens. Not me. I'm stuck with it, all of it, every goddam awful detail, for the rest of my natural or unnatural life. Mac scares me when he's like he was this morning. Why can't he ever say? Maybe if he ever did, he'd throttle me. I wouldn't blame him. My God, maybe he will throttle me one of these days. "Salesman Strangles Wife"--it could happen to anybody. Nobody is an exception. What would happen to the kids if that happened? Oh my guts, churning around like a covey of serpents. Covey? Nest? Medusa does in summer wear a nest of serpents in her hair. Joyce Kilmer. I can't seem to focus on anything. Whatsa-matter with my eyeballs? When I close my

eyes, something flickers across them. Jangled nerves. Feels like that tropical worm in that article--lives under people's eyelids and crawls over the eyes when so inclined. Charming. I'm sick. I'm ill. Have I ruined Mac's job? Was it as awful as I remember?

The tragedy of her life-situation is that it is suicidal. There is no other word for it and we must realize its awful implications. The desire for a humane form of life, for love, for communication, in short for sanity, has been defined insane by the social mythology and its objective historical product: the interlocking system of institutions that control life from birth to burial.

Her basic intuition, which is life-affirming, has no scope to manifest creatively in her circumstances so it turns into defeat; rebellion becomes self-punishable by the introjected claims of repressive society. To ensure her continual maintenance in this false sense of guilt, this false conscience, society holds up for her images of the less-fortunate in comparison with whom she, of course, ought to be counting her blessings.

Her only conclusion, under these circumstances, can be: "You're losing your mind, Stacey, girl." To be normal and happy she would have to become inhuman, a despirited and de-natured creature, "conditioned into monsterdom", as she says elsewhere in regard to the war veterans. The terrible transvaluation of values in this death-culture claims as its prize victim the woman. She is the symbol of the monster! And being forced into

suicide or monsterdom, she is henceforth effectively castrated as an authentic human being. She has metamorphosed into the passive but cheerful monster: myth-conditioned modern woman. The reduction to one-dimensionality has been a successful social operation: after her lobotomy, she can retire to suburbia and raise her children - preferably with Bible in right hand and "Good Housekeeping" in the left.

The novel makes perfectly clear that Stacey cannot look for emotional support from Mac. He is her keeper in the system of monogamous marriage, whom she frequently irritates by her sarcastic rejoinder of "Yessir!" to his demands. She is not permitted to register any form of protest whatsoever. Broken phrases remind one of Eliot's couple: "Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think." In the evening, the Ever-open Eye is on and competes with humans for attention; actually it is not any longer a question of competition, for the television has triumphed.

Mac's refuge from communication is the media and the study where he works. Stacey's guilt-ridden consolation is that he is working for his family and that she has no right to penetrate that study-barrier. At night, when he finally drops into bed beside her, she encounters further frustration because love has no opportunity to grow in this atmosphere. Mac is libidinally exhausted, or angry, and she is cut-off verbally and sensually. Nowhere is the sadistic-masochistic complex of modern social and private existence more evident than in the sexual relations.



between man and woman. Mac and Stacey's sexuality is pre-eminently non-erotic and can be seen as another symbol of the death-cult practised so expertly by society's members. Either they retire on a verbal impasse:

It's late.  
 You're right. It sure as hell is.  
 What now? Sardonic implications again?  
 Let's go to bed, Mac. Let's just go  
 to bed.  
 Yeh. Okay.

or she manages to break it by an advance of tenderness. But even this encounter is mechanical and abrupt. There is a decisive anti-climax to these scenes which the style captures supremely well.

When it is over, they separate his weight on her ribs always makes her cough after a few minutes, and anyway he always has to get up to go to the bathroom.

--Did I take that christly pill this morning? I was feeling so grim--can't remember. Yes, I did take it. Along with the blue Richalife and four aspirins, with second cup of coffee. All these considerations.

Tonight I'll sleep. Let us be thankful for mercies, whatever.

The mutilating impact of such unerotic sexual relations is alluded to in the dream passage directly following the release into troubled sleep.

The rain forest is thick, matted, overgrown with thorned berry bushes, the fallen needles from the pine and tamarack bronzing the earth. Smell of moss, wet branches, mellowly rotting leaves. It is very difficult

to walk through. The wild brambles stretch out their fish hooks to tear at exposed skin. The ground is spongy underfoot, for the moss tops centuries of leaf mold. She has to continue, bringing what she is carrying with her. The thing is bleeding from the neck stump but that cannot be helped. The severed head spills only blood, nothing else. She has tunneled at last through the undergrowth. Now she has the right to look. She holds it up in front of her. How is it that she can see it? What is she seeing with? That is the question. The head she is carrying of course is none but hers.

The suicidal result of this caged existence receives its metaphorical conclusion in the dream: the head must be severed in order for this kind of routine to continue.

Even more devastating than the occasional peaceable intercourse is the central metaphor of strangulation explicit in conjugal sexuality.

She gets into bed. Then Mac is not too tired, just when she is. He draws her between his legs, and she touches him sirenly so he will not know. When he is inside her, he puts his hands on her neck, as he sometimes does unpredictably. He presses down deeply on on her collarbone.

Mac please

That can hurt you not that much that's not much. Say it doesn't hurt.

It hurts.

It can't. Not even this much. Say it doesn't hurt.

It doesn't hurt.

He comes, then, and goes to sleep. The edges of the day are blurring in Stacey's head now.

Later, after Ruckle's death, the subject of her supposed indiscretion with the former comes up and provides an outlet for Mac's insulted possessive instinct.

I don't know what the hell to believe. I just don't see why you went to Buckle's place at all, that's all. It doesn't make sense. I would've thought I could've trusted both of you.

It would be the absolute end of the world even if it had happened?

I won't have anybody else touching you see

Stacey yanks away and looks at him, unbelieving.

--He's really hurt. And I'd like to comfort him but how can I--it's I who've caused it. And yet I hate him for feeling that way about me. I might as well be a car or a toothbrush. Damn him. Damn Buckle. Damn both of them. I want to go away by myself. Right away. Far away.

Concerning his own dalliance with Delores Appleton he is mute but rather self-righteous; he feels like the older paternal protector to the lost waif, and guilt would be the farthest emotion from his psyche. Stacey's questioning is clearly out of bounds and childish, he makes clear: "Leave her out of this, Stacey. Just leave her out of it. You don't know a damn thing about it, so shut up about it, eh?" Once again they end the exchange on the sado-masochistic tone. Death and drugs win.

That night in bed he makes hate with her, his hands clenched around her collar-bones and on her throat until she is able to bring herself to speak the release. It doesn't hurt. You can't hurt me. But afterwards neither of them can sleep. Finally, separately, they each rise and take a sleeping pill.

From the foregoing analysis it is indisputable that sexuality comes to bear the stigma of alienation. Love cannot survive under the death-blows of the social and domestic repressions, and sexuality itself is a deadly complex which mirrors a wide-

spread social alienation. The woman in this collective and private complex has the role of the masochist, and man plays the sadist. But in the wider social network of relationships, man may also be the victim. Mac, as male, is the sadist toward the weaker (woman and children, or dependents); but in male-to-male combat, or workaday society, he must maintain an unceasing struggle not to become the victim in the societal work arrangements. RICHALIFE, and Thor as its representative, acts as the sadist toward Mac. The socially-masked nature of this sadism is made very explicit in the ball-throwing game between the men, at Thor's party, described in chapter eight. The sexual connotation of this survival game is implicit.

Stacey stares as the game gets rougher. A number of other women are also watching. Some of them are clapping and cheering. Some are standing in silence. Then Thor bounds like an outsize faun into the middle of the group. He, too, is laughing. He picks up a beach ball as though it were the world and hovers for a moment with it, searching.

Mac has not been participating. He is standing with a glass in his hands at the extreme edge of the group, looking on. Thor makes as though to throw the ball directly ahead, then abruptly swings around and sends it in the opposite direction. Mac sees it coming too late. It catches him squarely in the face. His neck jerks back, and Stacey's guts turn over. A few men gasp and a few women shriek titteringly. Then the game goes on as before. Mac's head rights itself and Stacey can now see the dribble of blood from his nostrils. His fists clench and unclench and clench again. Stacey can see his jagged breathing.

Hey--sorry. You oughta been looking out, fella.

Mac's voice is low but steady.  
 Yeh. I'll know better next time.  
 You're not hurt, are you?  
 No. It's nothing.

The game breaks up and chatter fills the gaps. Somebody puts a record on, and dancing begins.

The gold-fish bowl is everywhere. Within the hierarchy of relationships, men and women are thus pitted fiercely against one another in an unending cycle of victim-victimizer. Woman carries the social stigmata for all humankind in that she is the symbol of the crucified at its deepest level. In her passive acceptance of the victim role she is the scapegoat of society, and if she does not acquiesce to her own immolation by various forms of suicidal compromise or surrender, she will be attacked from without and subjected to external repressive controls. The situation, as the novel shows, is by no means funny but woman's only means of surviving has been to laugh. Humour is the sole weapon left to her, yet even this she cannot employ indefinitely without going mad or heading for the final collapse. As a popular song cynically asks: "Is that all there is?" Stacey is left with the only answer society can give her: death.

--Sometimes a person feels that something else must have been meant to happen in your own life, or is this all there's ever going to be, just like this? Until I die. What'll it be like to die? Not able to breathe? Fighting for air? Or letting everything slide away, seeing shapes like shadows that used to be people, nothing real because in a minute you won't be real any more? Holy Mary, Mother of God, be with me now and in the hour of my death. If only I could say that, but no. My

father's dead face, looking no different except the eyes closed, and I thought his face had been dead for a long time before he died, so what did it matter, but I didn't believe that. Something should happen before it's too late. Idiot-child, what more could happen? What more do you want? You've got--yeh, I know, God. No need to write me a list. And I'm grateful. Don't take me seriously. Don't let anything terrible happen to the kids.

From such a background, then, Stacey ventures to flee one evening. She drives the car to the Sound until at last she comes to Nature, to the woods and the ocean. There at last she finds complete respite from the bedlam of her existence. In Nature there is a quietness and a peace. Like Hagar, she has to struggle against the resistant brushwood and dangers of the ground to arrive at the shoreline, and, moreover, against the fear of the unknown which is symbolized by the black dogs which may tear her apart. On the psychic level, we may say that she has to leave civilization and its so-called sanity in order to find the truth in Nature, the wisdom of instinct. Society has separated those two poles and she has been the victim of this split-consciousness. Only by contacting her instinctual basis in Nature does she find silence and the unpolluted presence of a deeper self beyond roles and images. Initially, the dialogue with herself does not cease, but at least she has made a space in the confusion. She sees how restricted her daily life is but wonders if there is an alternative.

How good to hear nothing, no voices.  
I thought you were the one who was screaming about nobody wanting to talk. Yeh.

Well. How good it feels, no voices. Except yours, Stacey. Well, that's my shadow. It won't be switched off until I die. I'm stuck with it, and I get bloody sick of it, I can tell you. Who is this you? I don't know. Shut up. I'm trying to be quiet and you won't let me. If only I could get away, by myself, for about three weeks. Joke. Laugh now. The only time I can ever get away is when all the kids are in bed. And this period of rationed time is rapidly diminishing. It's because we had the kids over so many years. Jen's there all day, and so okay she's in bed by seven, but then the boys and Katie are home and Katie doesn't get to bed until halfway through the night now or so it seems. You can't tell a fourteen-year-old to go to bed at seven. I don't have any time to myself. I'm on duty from seven thirty in the morning until ten thirty at night. Well. Poor you. Let's all have a good cry. What would you do if you weren't on duty, bitch? Contemplate? Write poetry? Oh shut up. I would sort out and understand my life, that is what I would do, if you really want to know. You would, eh? Well, you're alone now. You're off duty. Start sorting, brain child.

Luke Venturi, a young artist and part-time fisherman who lives in a hut near-by, finds her on the beach and invites her to share coffee. In him Stacey finds a patient friendly listener, a caring human being, to whom she can eventually open up. The first thing she does is simply break down and release the years of pent-up frustration that have become knit into the very texture of her nervous system. She, like the run-away mother in the Cariboo Luke has idly mentioned, has left her children and husband, and the combined guilt and despair is overwhelming.

She has put her coffee mug on the floor

and her head is in her outfolded arms.  
 She does not know where the crying began  
 or when it can end.

Luke, as the name suggests, is both a healer and a Christ symbol insofar as he brings love. He discloses to her his Italian Roman Catholic background, that his father makes wine and is an unconscious "Christ in concrete", and his science-fiction fantasies which he turns into books, The Grey Folk, aptly called. Luke may be viewed in line with Mr. Lees and Nick Kazlik as basically redemptive heralds of Eros. They allow the heroines to get into contact with their much-abused and repressed instinctual nature, with their unconscious oceanic life connection; but as for presenting a feasible solution to the heroine's problem in dealing with an intolerable life situation, the man cannot be called upon to save. He brings God insofar as he brings Eros into the life of the wounded woman; he helps to restore her to herself, but he cannot take her beyond that instinctual, tender encounter. On the level of affair-as-escape, Luke cannot give Stacey any final solution; in fact, as do all the men, he has his psychological handicaps to work out. It is suggested that Stacey serves as a temporary mother-figure for him. Through her, he was able, no doubt, to integrate some of his own tangled emotions. This much is positive. The passages of quiet dialogue between Stacey and Luke are written in an undertone of nostalgia and regret. Lyric sensitivity and poetic depth characterizes the style of writing and thereby focuses our attention on the contrast between so-called primitive and



modern ways of life.

A very important issue comes to the fore here, namely escape. Nature has traditionally carried the symbolic identification of freedom in Western civilization. To return to Nature has been the rallying-cry for over-civilized man, and it is obvious that Nature means both an internal and external space. As the outer realm of Nature has progressively been diminished with the encroachment of technological-industrial civilization, the inner mental space has grown in importance. As Stacey sits musing on the beach after her temporary break-away from the home, the cry of a water bird brings to mind the memory of her childhood family excursions to Diamond Lake. She recalls its former awesome beauty and the intimations of a darkly numinous past which the pre-Christian Indian culture remnants inspired in her. Then comes the contrast with the present, and, finally, a fantasy of the return-to-Nature variety.

Diamond Lake, that one year when Niall Cameron managed to take them all there for two weeks in the summer, Stacey ten and Rachel five. Stacey, sturdy-legged, curious, energetic, flashing along the shore day and night, gawking up at the spruces and down at the moss sprouting with wild-pink bells which looked like lilies of the valley but with no leaves only deep-pink stalks and mild-pink waxen flowers. Stacey listening at night on the beach alone, frightened but having to stay, listening to the lunatic voices of the loons, witch birds out there in the night lake, or voices of dead shamans, mourning the departed Indian gods, she not thinking of it like that then, only wholly immersed in the inhuman voices, the bygone voices that cared nothing for lights or shelter of the known

quality of home. But when she went back to Diamond Lake, eight years later, the birds had left. When the people came in numbers, the loon went away, always. She never discovered where they went, but she thought then, that eighteenth summer, of where they might be, somewhere so far north that people would never penetrate to drive them off again.

--There isn't any place that far north, that far anywhere. There must be. That's where I'd like to go, very far away from all this jazz. If only the kids could be okay.

The lake is not large, but in the daytime it shines a deep oil blue. It is somewhere in the Cariboo. The Cariboo country. Up there. Somewhere. The barns are made of logs (Mac has told her, so she knows; he has been there). The boat she owns is only a rowboat, but she can manage it very well, skillfully in fact, and Ian and Duncan are good with it, too. The house is made of logs, but tightly chinked so that it is extremely weatherproof. It is an old converted barn. Two floors. With careful planning, she has organized five bed-rooms. One for each of the kids, and one for herself. She teaches school. It is a small community, and naturally everyone knows everyone else, but the farmers and Indians and (?) etc. are glad that at last a teacher has come who wants to settle here and

Later, when Luke tells her about his summer plans to go fishing, the same nostalgia for Nature, for a lost paradise, surfaces. It is quite clear that the paradise of the past is lost to contemporary man. The Indians, a race of people who lived the instinctual life of unity with Nature, have themselves been detrimentally affected by civilization and lost their heritage. They too have succumbed to the death-drug syndrome of the whites. Only the area of inner nature, it is faintly suggested, remains as a possibility of purity. Charon, the ferryman, con-

ducts souls across the sea of death to the underworld. By consenting to the death-journey across the threshold of the unconscious psyche, as did Rachel when she descended to the basement funeral parlour, man could possibly rediscover life. Both levels of Nature are alluded to in the passage, thereby creating a very satisfying combination of realism and symbolism. The two aspects of existence, inner and outer, lie closely side by side and mirror one another.

I was going to sign on with a fish boat, but I think maybe I'll just hitch and see what happens. If I can finish this book for better or worse in a couple of weeks, I'd like to go north again. That's a great country, Stacey. Ever seen it? Up the Skeena River - Kispiox, Kitwanga, crazy names like that. In some parts, nearer the coast, you drive along the edge of a mountain and the trees are like a jungle, only it's mostly evergreen, but all this fantastic growth, bushes and ferns and moss and jack pine, all crowding each other, dark and light greens, northern jungle, rain forest, and the damn road's so narrow you swear any minute you're going to plummet over into some canyon or other.

I've never seen it.

There's this place where there's a ferry. Is it Kitwanga? Yeh, maybe. Anyway, this beat-up old raft crawls across the Skeena and it's attached to some kind of a cable and you think-man, if that cable goes, that's it-the river is wild as hell. But the old guy who runs it is calm as anything, probably been there forever. Charon. He talks very easy and slow, and you think-maybe it wouldn't be such a bad death, after all. And there's this village near there something dusty, even kids and the dogs covered with dust like they were all hundreds of years old which maybe they are and dying which they almost certainly are. And they look at you with these dark slanted eyes they've got, all the people there. They

come out and look at you with sort of inchoate hatred and who could be surprised at it? Because lots of people visit the place every summer, for maybe half an hour. The attraction is the totem poles. And there they are high, thin, beaked, bleached in the sun, cracking and splintering, the totems of the dead. And of the living dead. If I were one of them, the nominally living, I'd sure as hell hate people like me, coming in from the outside. You want to ask them if they know any longer what the poles mean, or if it's a language which has got lost and sometimes the howling of men who've been separated from themselves for so long that it's only a dim memory, a kind of violent mourning, only a reason to stay as drunk as they think. You haven't suffered enough. You don't know what they know. You don't have the right to pry. So you look, and then you go away.

That the external aspect of Nature will be a disappointment to man once he succeeds in reaching it, that it will be merely a collection of ancient hieroglyphics which he has forgotten how to decipher, a lost language of images, symbols and myths, is here made evident. The same feeling is echoed subsequently in one of Stacey's fantasies while in the midst of household clamour and longing to be back with Luke. In this fantasy the psychological or inner aspect of the Nature-quest is revealed, and also the fatal cause of civilized man's escapism: fear of the fulness of Life. The essential paradox of the whole matter lies here, the clue that is needed to understand thoroughly the cause of the death-triumph in society and in the individual: this is that Life, the great whole, includes death and every aspect of human existence. By incessant anxiety about death and attempts to evade or ward it off, mankind is doomed to

live and to express it outwardly. It becomes his habitual, though hated, mode of life. The great Life, which is the entire terrible yet sublime cosmic process, is both creative and destructive, and in fearing its negative-destructive side he consequently fears life as well. On the surface, this paradox is not grasped. Death is felt to be a hostile threat and everything is done to avoid coming to terms with it, but in so doing increasingly unendurable anxiety is generated. This attempt must fail and give rise to continuing frustration and eventual despair, because man could only find authentic life by consenting to go through the door of death. As it is, man wards off death by repressing it, drugging himself from sensitivity to pain and suffering, escaping farther and farther away from himself, and tragically carries on a living death which is many times worse than if he faced the spectre fearlessly.

The totem poles are high, thick, beaked, bleached in the sun, carvings of monsters that never were, in that far dusty land of wild grasses, where the rivers speed and thunder while the ancient-eyed boatman waits. Luke is walking beside her. Luke, I'm frightened to death of life. It's okay, baby--you're not alone--I'm with you there.

The escape motif runs through the novel as a corollary to the death theme and needs to be examined in more detail for its full relevance to be appreciated. The affair-as-escape episode concludes as it was doomed to do, in half-regret and half-gratitude. Luke has appropriately called Stacey "mer-woman", a hybrid of sea and land, and asked her to leave home and family.

This would have meant choosing the "mer" part of her hybrid identity; that is, her instinctual, oceanic, and unconscious self in favour of the "woman" or earth-bound, ego-social-conditioned part. Like Irving Layton's Swimmer, Stacey lives a schizophrenic duality; on the shore are the skulls - society is the place of death, and most notably the death of the Imagination - but in the ocean, where there is fullness of inner being and satisfaction of the instincts and Imagination, there is no social existence. It would have to be, under the present conditions of civilization, another form of self-annihilation, an escape from social and communal responsibility. Stacey, solid Protestant that she is at heart, pulls up her girdle and returns to the prison of home and society. Yet the frustration of her life is by no means resolved. After having witnessed a marchers' peace demonstration and Luke with a young girlfriend among the paraders, Stacey debates her choice inwardly and arrives, like Layton, at a form of compromise, but it is by no means a solution to her dilemma. She has realized that an affair provides no answers.

I might at least have seen it through.  
 For what though? It's like church-you  
 think maybe if you go, the faith will be  
 given, but it isn't. It has to be there  
 already in you, I guess. Or maybe you  
 have to persevere. I wish I'd stayed.  
 Despite Luke. Despite embarrassment. De-  
 spite no faith. But bravery has never been  
 my speciality. All I know how to do is  
 get by somehow. I'd like to talk to some-  
 body. Somebody who wouldn't refuse really  
 to look at me, whatever I was like. I'd  
 like to talk to my sister. I'd like to

write to her. I'd like to tell her how I feel about everything. No. She'd think I was crazy. Probably. She's too sensible ever to do this sort of thing, like today, or like with Luke and all that. She'd think I must be mad, not to be perfectly happy, with four healthy kids and a good man. I couldn't write to her. She'd never see. She'd think even worse of me than she already does. Luke? I couldn't let you see me. All right--you showed me where I belonged, when you said What can't you leave? I guess I should be grateful. I am grateful, maybe not for that, so much. I guess I knew it anyway. For the way you talked to me and held me for a while--that's why I'm grateful. I said unspokenly Help and you didn't turn away. You faced me and touched me. You were gentle. You needn't have been, but you were, and that I won't forget or cease being glad for, even if you'd been older, or I'd been younger and free, it wouldn't have turned out any simpler with you than it is with Mac. I didn't see that at one time, but I see it now.

There are several other allusions to the escape theme in The Fire Dwellers which merit attention since they amplify the above argument and set it into total focus. From the outset of the novel it has been present. Already in chapter two, after reflecting cynically on the fate of her night-course, Stacey recalls her girlhood dreams to escape from the Prairies. The railway becomes a highly interesting symbolic vehicle in Canadian literature. The train promises a great future elsewhere. Certainly the image of the freight train in rapid transit from coast to coast, moving through the dreary dusty towns with no sense of guilt or compunction to remain rooted in any one place for longer than a stop-over, excites the human fantasy. It is an image of unlimited freedom, of mobility, of mastering the

vastness of space by will-power, and also it is an image of the undying human desire for the limitless. The restless fever to be moving into an ever-widening horizon represents the thirst for liberty.

I couldn't wait to be on my own and out of Manawaka. Those damn freight trains-- I can still hear them, the way they used to wail away far off at night on the prairies, through all the suffocating nights of summer when the air smelled hotly of lilacs, and in winter when the silence was so cold-brittle you thought any sound would crack it like a sheet of thin ice, and all the trains ever said was Get on your way, somewhere, just so something will happen, get up and get out of this town. So I did. Business course in Winnipeg, then saving every nickle to come out here. And look at me. Self-educated, but zanily.

The triumph of diesel-power has not, however, led to the freeing of man. Rachel may dream of Vancouver as a natural paradise, but Stacey has proven that the great escape was to nowhere. Yet the desire cannot be stilled; it recurs in the most far-fetched oriental arabesque fantasies, the closing word or which brings Stacey back to her solitary self.

She is lying on a magic carpet. Must be a magic carpet, what else? It is moving very rapidly, in inward and downward swooshes. Each swirl leaves a color in its path jet-trails of colour smoke one for each day of the week pink purple peacock blue tangerine green leaves greensleeves bird-feather yellow raspberry no not respberry that's an essence the essence of the whole matter is is

Blackness.

Throughout her mental ruminations there are extremely sad



and hopeless statements about the impossibility of finding an exit to the hell of existence: "Anyway, what's the use of opting out? Maybe there is, but it's beyond me. I can't reach it. I'm in it for evermore, like it or not." "If I could only get out of here. If only I could get out. What if everybody is thinking that, in some deep half-buried cave of themselves? What an irony that would be. If that were so, you'd think we ought to be able to move mountains. But it doesn't happen that way."

In her night-time dreams the theme of freedom continues to haunt her and is juxtaposed to the reality of fascistic control with which she and Mac must contend in the waking state.

The place is a prison but not totally so. It must be an island, surely, some place where people are free to walk around but nobody can get away. The huts are made of poplar poles chinked with mud and they have flat roofs where the people sleep. There is a ladder leading up to each sleeping plateau and when she and Mac are safely on top, they pull up the rope ladder after them. The children are not here. They are in another place, grown and free, nothing to worry about for her at this moment. Lying together on the bed of leaves, she and Mac listen to the guards' boots. The legions are marching tonight through the streets and their boot leather strikes hard against the pavements and there is nowhere to go but here.

The island, like the image of "merwoman", is symbolic of a divided consciousness, a schizophrenic mode of being, wherein the demands of the private self and society oppose one another. The island is a halfway house of sorts; one is not entirely in the prison of collective madness but neither is one fully

liberated. From an island there is nowhere to go except back to the mainland or into the ocean. Both places may spell doom. There seems to be no resolution to the dilemma. The ocean, too, is a dangerous element in terms of human safety and survival. Stacey senses this acutely after Duncan has nearly drowned while swimming. The sea fascinates yet repels her, for in its depths she intuits a threat to mortal life. It may be concluded that, symbolically, the excursion to the sea-shore is a necessary journey for human beings because they are thus re-connecting with their instinctual and unconscious roots in Nature.

--I wonder how deep it is, at the deepest? How far out does it go? How many creatures does it contain, not just the little shells and the purple starfish and the kelp, but all the things that live a long way out? Deathly embracing octopus in the south water, the white whales spouting in the only-half-melted waters of the north, the sharks knowing nothing except how to kill.

At the novel's end, Stacey realizes that there is no escape for her.

--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.

Precisely: the trap is the whole world, and the dance, which has been another vibrant symbol of freedom stifled, can only be carried out in Imagination. In the dimension of external reality, it has no place. There only the boots of suppression claim rights to the ground or the earth. The four walls become a metaphor of the four dimensions of space. Illusion is the cosmic dance. Only those who have penetrated illusions have mastered the dance and, like Zorba, may live in freedom.

Stacey takes Jen and goes into the kitchen to start dinner. She turns the radio on and begins peeling the potatoes. The tune that is playing is "Zorba's Dance."

She is dancing alone. The cafe is in a village, a village of low whitewashed huts, surrounded by and threaded through with whatever kind of trees they have in Greece. Olive trees. Yeh, those. However they look. The cafe is small, and the band is only two or three men playing (unspecified string instruments). She starts slowly, following the beat of the music, her bare feet certain, confident. The sudden upswirling of the tune, and she is whirling, wrists gyrating, possessed by the god. Swifter, swifter, with the freedom of wild horses, the music races the wind. Then he is beside her the man who also is enabled to hear the music, who also is directed by the god.

Freedom, as is suggested here, belongs only to the gods; that is, authentic liberation is a divine attribute, an ecstatic fulfillment and opening out into the wholeness of universal Life. It is inclusive of the ego's life and of death. Indeed, death holds no terror for man once the dance has been mastered, and in going through his fear of death man becomes a god in his own right, fearless and sure and joyful. But this tre-

mendous energy, which is our godly birth-right, becomes feared and suppressed through a lengthy process of physical and psychic conditionings until, at the adult stage, man no longer reflects his innate divinity. He has become a stunted and castrated creature, a frustrated monster, a schizoid and troubled specimen of social constraint. This conditioning has its early beginnings, as Stacey resentfully knows.

Stacey Cameron, fourteen, dark hair set rigidly in rolls on top of the head, transference from movie star queen to a million clumsy-fingered small-town girls. Stacey with tomato-coloured mouth, regarded by mother more in sorrow than anger. You are certainly not going to a public dance hall, dear. You wouldn't want to be the sort of girl people wouldn't respect, would you? It's a dance mother, for heaven's sake, not an orgy. Mother sniffing into lace-edged hanky. I never thought a daughter of mine would speak to me like that. Your father's going to have to deal- (but he was down among the dead men, Bottles and flesh, and didn't hear when she called.)

During her pent-up days and nights she has often longed to dance again and indeed does so dramatically at one point. After a few drinks to lower her social consciousness, she dons tight black dress and golden slippers and descends into the basement to dance. For a while she can forget the upstairs life and its stultifying pressures to be a conformist citizen, staid housewife and mother, and she plays record after record while dancing alone by herself. In her fantasy, for that is her only refuge, the aforementioned images of liberation versus repression melt into one dynamic sensuous unity.

I love it. The hell with what the kids say. In fifteen years their music will be just as corny. Naturally they don't know that. I love this music. It's mine. Buzz off, you little buggers, you don't understand. No - I didn't mean that. I meant it. I was myself before any of you were born. (Don't listen God - this is none of your business.)

The music crests, subsides, crests again, blue-green sound, saltwater with the in-coming tide, the blues of the night freight trains across snow deserts, the green beckoning voices, the men still unheld and the children yet unborn, the voices cautioning no caution no caution no caution only dance what happens to come along until

The record player switches off.

Then it is back to upstairs reality. The dance has ended. But often, in the innermost recesses of her soul, she wishes that she could express her unsocialized self and communicate to the world that vital part of her being which must remain hopeless, existing only in Imagination.

Wait, you! Let me tell you. I'm not what I appear to be. Or if I am, it happened imperceptibly, like eating what the kids leave on their plates and discovering ten years later the solid rolls of lard now oddly living under your own skin. I didn't used to be. Once I was different.

Underneath the network of social controls there exists a great thirst for truth, simplicity and freedom. Stacey is testimony to this fundamental longing for a reality beneath the surface myths and institutions that govern life. Her dilemma is that she is a wanderer in a spiritual wasteland. The escapes offered by society and personal ingenuity are not feasible or satisfying. In her life, religion is perhaps the greatest

single subconscious controller. While she may, like Rachel, disavow belief consciously or at best express agnosticism, her past conditioning gets the better of her and God becomes the sole spectator of her private drama and tragedy. God, whom she conceives of in traditional patriarchal Protestant fashion, is Stacey's overseer, the supreme fascist tyrant among all the other overlords in her already over-crowded consciousness. Interestingly enough, she mentions having once begun a course called "Man and his God" and owns an unread copy of The Golden Bough. Typical of her fragmented condition, both endeavours were begun but never finished, thus indicating that the spiritual quest itself is uncompleted by modern man and woman. It has been cursorily begun but not rigorously pursued. What prevents its consciously undertaken continuance? Past religious conditioning by the Church, fear, and doubt. In regard to the first factor, Stacey would have to explore the traditional God-image critically and free her mind from the tyranny of the super-ego, which is all that this God amounts to. He is "Sir" to her, a judge to whom she must penitently present account for every natural impulse and mortal inclination, a tyrant who demands that she repress herself to conform to social expectations, a sadist who is omniscient and on the look-out for every slip of thought or deed and ever-ready to strike her or the family with punishments. This God is a Christianized Jupiter, a mountain and sky monarch who rules over the earthly subjects and rejoices in the hellish torments of his enemies. Stacey is inwardly racked by the guilt and masochism and the need for atonement.

After her first flight from the home, she spends the next three days in anxious and obsessive housecleaning - a sort of secular purgation. She may not be sinful or dirty or discontented. Yet, as we have seen, under this oppressive myth of God the true self must become identified with the rebel-demon. Within the confines of this Christian mythology, to be natural is to be sinful, and to be saved one must be the willing victim of this inhuman suppression. Stacey ponders the mysterious dogma of original sin but can make no headway in untangling the complex web of historical and mythic accretions. Who is ultimately responsible or guilty? What, even, was the guilt? The answer must itself be a mythical one since the problem has been stated in mythic terms.

Where did it start? Everything goes too far back to be traced. The roots vanish, because they don't end with Matthew, even if it were possible to trace them that far. They go back forever. Our father Adam. Leave me alone. And maybe Eve thought, Okay, Sahib, if that's the way you want it, and it was after that she started getting crafty.

Matthew is Mac's seventy-seven year old clergyman father who has preached and lived the gospel of self-control all his life, passing on to his son the ethos which Mac now practises with his sons. Stacey feels upset by Matthew's presence and subtle pressuring for Church attendance; secretly she nurses guilt about her inability to be a firm believer, just as after the youthful peace-march she feels morally deficient because she

cannot master the necessary faith in idealism as a means to social improvement. Yet, alongside this conscious dearth and sense of regret for a non-existent faith, Stacey evinces a profound susceptibility to the images and symbols of transcendence. These surface at the mundane level unexpectedly and act as pointers toward an authentic reality which is somewhere, though not immediately graspable.

Not the Stations of the Cross. Not any more. Whose fault? Mine? Or is it maybe better this way? I haven't done well by them. I've failed them by failing to believe, myself. I pretend to it, but they are not deceived. Yet I am the one who wakens them on Sunday mornings and shoves them off churchwards. One more strand in the tapestry of phoniness. I want to tell them. What? That I mourn my disbelief? I don't tell them, though. I go along with the game. It's easier that way.

Ye holy angels bright  
Who wait at God's right hand  
Or through the realms of light  
Fly at your Lord's command,  
Assist our song,  
Or else the theme too high doth seem  
For mortal tongue.

My God, Stacey, what's happened to you, warbling hymns all of a sudden?

Nothing. It just came into my head. Used to sing it when I was a kid.

You should tell Dad that. He'd be pleased to think you even remembered. Hey - what's up, honey? You're not crying?

No. Eyelash in my eye.

So why complain about Mac being guarded?

Within the novel it becomes gradually apparent that Stacey is herself a Christ-figure, but she - like Luke's father - would



not realize this consciously, and, even if she did, would depreciate herself ironically. She bears the marks of the Crucified in her "stigmata", as she contemptuously refers to her burn marks. But in a deeper sense, she has exemplified the suffering human being who mysteriously, in all the paradox of that hurting humanity, testifies to a life-force that remains indomitable, humourous and victorious despite suppression and condemnation from secular-social powers which would crush this spark of life. In her special way, Stacey testifies to the unsuppressable energy of life despite her entrapment in historical time with all its problems and limitations. Her final attitude to God does not undergo any change, but through the course of her rebellious and frustrated search for freedom she has found more strength within to cope. Nothing outwardly changes to any remarkable extent; rather, she has to absorb more responsibility, not less. Her father-in-law will move in and Rachel and her mother are heading West. Stacey has only her sense of humour and Calvinistic duty to fall back upon for strength to stay out of the mental hospital, but this will nonetheless pull her through somehow as it has until now.

Move over, Tess - I'll soon be out to join you. No, I damn well won't. I will not let this get me down. I just damn well will not.

Stacey accepts Mac anew, and he succeeds Thor as branch manager of RICHALIFE. He too has mellowed somewhat during his unhappy experience with the company under Thor's direction, and

as consequence of the sea accident of his youngest child. Their life will not be changed drastically but Stacey will remain the strength that holds the family together: "give me time and I may mutate into a matriarch". There is a pervasive sense of not being able to alter much in one's fate, and that the best one can do is to accept the invisible forces that mould human destiny. This feeling gives Stacey her warm sympathy for Mac and others, that no one is really responsible. Laurence seems to say that we must accept in the end, learn to laugh, and face the thought of death. She muses frequently on "life's games". Thor turned out to be Vernon Winkler, a poor, weak, wretched waif from Manawaka who used to be despised by the other fellows; Mathew, who prided himself on maintaining a show of strength and belief eventually revealed his secret religious misgivings and remorse about his method of raising Mac; and Mac himself was never an Agamemnon, King of men, except perhaps in Stacey's adolescent romanticism. She is herself the ultimate strength. One face, however, remains superior to her and to all beings, and that is death. This is the reality which cannot be evaded and inspires uneasiness and anxiety in her. Stacey does not adequately deal with this problem nor with the question of personal and social responsibility, but hers is certainly a remarkable life-affirmation, as far as she takes it. It would be foolish, however, to ignore the tone of recurrent anxiety in the novel that remains to the very last page.

She moves towards him and he holds her.  
Then they make love after all, but gently,

as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter.

Finally, Stacey disentangles.  
Mac, we better get some sleep.  
I know. Good night, Stacey.  
Good night, Mac.

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

Will the fires go on, inside and out?  
Until the moment when they go out for me,  
the end of the world. And then I'll never  
know what may happen in the next episode.

As she tries to settle herself for  
sleep, Stacey feels a nudging pain like a  
fingernail scrawling fitfully under her  
ribs at the left side.

There it is again. Should I phone Doctor  
Spender tomorrow? It's nothing. It'll  
go away. But what if it doesn't? What if  
it's the heart? Is the heart on that side?  
Well, so what? No one is indispensable.  
Maybe not, but it's myself I'm thinking a-  
bout, as well as them. If I could absorb  
the notion of nothing, of total dark, then  
it would have no power over me. But that  
grace isn't given. My last breath will be  
a rattle of panic, while some strange face  
or maybe the known one hovers over me and  
says Everything's all right. Unless, of course,  
it meets me with violent quickness, a growing  
fashion.

She lies stiffly, listening.

Maybe the trivialities aren't so bad after  
all. They're something to focus on. As I'm  
forty tomorrow, that would be a good day to  
start a diet.

One more point needs to be taken up before The Fire  
Dwellers can be left, and that is the symbolism of the title  
and the element of fire and burning. The nursery rhyme refrain

which opens the novel also recurs at its close.

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

Among Stacey's fantasies and nightmares is the image of a burning house wherein children are destroyed by the flames, or else it is an entire forest on fire from which she must lead the children to safety through terrible ordeals.

The house is burning. Everything and everyone in it. Nothing can put out the flames. The house wasn't fire-resistant. One match was all it took.

From the social sector, "Doom everywhere is the message I get", she says.

EVER-OPEN EYE BOUGAINVILLAEA PURGEONING,  
EDGING STREETS WHERE BEGGARS SQUAT IN  
DUST. A MAN BURNING. HIS FACE CANNOT  
BE SEEN. HE LIES STILL, PERHAPS ALREADY  
DEAD. FLAMES LEAP AND QUIVER FROM HIS  
BLACKENED ROBE LIKE EXCITED CHILDREN OF  
HELL. VOICE: TODAY ANOTHER BUDDHIST MONK  
SET FIRE TO HIMSELF IN PROTEST AGAINST  
THE WAR IN

In regard to her lack of sexual fulfillment, she quips: "Better to marry than burn, St. Paul said, but he didn't say what to do if you married and burned." Quite obviously this fire symbol operates on several levels of meaning. The fire is both representative of an enslaving and a salvific force. It further denotes libidinal energy, passion and Eros. As a symbol of imprisonment in an unredeemed state or condition, fire

is a form of hell.

Laurence's Fire-Dwellers are similarly linked to a religious or spiritual search for reality, though they may not know this consciously. Stacey, as the focal point of the novel, does realize these implications intuitively and embodies the fiery element in her character. She is fiery in her defiance of repressive authority, in her physical passions, in her humanizing love, in her social conscience, although the latter never becomes significantly mobilized. The Grail quest which each heroine has been undergoing unconsciously, may now be understood in connection with the fire: the Grail-cup is the pure womb of spiritual receptivity into which Eros has descended to give birth to God in the human heart. As woman, the heroine must herself come to embody that Grail; in other words, her salvation does not lie outside herself but in the depths of her innermost being, and she must integrate and transform her libidinal energy into the fire of redemptive love. In that way, she will indeed lead her "children", humanity, out of the burning house of destructive hellish existence. Moreover, the ladybird could be considered as the Holy Spirit who eventually fills the house with its fire of redemptive love. The very image of the burning house and the helpless children has a famous parable attached to it which extends the mystical level of significance. This is the parable of liberation which the Buddha told to the disciple Sariputra.

There was a householder who saw that his house was on fire, and that his numerous children were in danger of burning within

its walls. Thus he made the following reflection:

I myself am able to come out from the burning house through the door, quickly and safely, without being touched or scorched by that great mass of fire; but my children, those young boys, are staying in the burning house, playing, amusing, and diverting themselves with all sorts of sports. They do not perceive, nor know, nor understand, nor mind that the house is on fire, and do not feel afraid. Though scorched by that great mass of fire, and affected with such a mass of pain, they do not mind the pain, nor do they conceive of the idea of escaping.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, he persuades his children to come out of the burning house by promising them many rewards, and eventually they come out one by one, led by desire for their rewards. The householder then rejoices to see his sons safe and give them more than he had promised. The parable ends with this explanation:

He (Buddha) appears in this triple world, which is like a house the roof and shelter whereof are decayed (a house) burning by a mass of misery, in order to deliver from affection, hatred and delusion the beings subject to birth, old age, disease, death, grief, wailing, pain, melancholy, despondency, the dark enveloping mists of ignorance, in order to rouse them to supreme and perfect enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

The house, then, can be viewed as the personal psyche and as the entire human universe. Stacey personally and her social world are in the throes of suffering, in the prison-round or cycle of eternal returns which is samsara. Morning, night, morning: this is the chapter sequence of the novel, and it even

ends on the despairing sentence: "She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?" Seen in this light, the novel's titular symbol becomes extremely significant, multi-dimensional, and moving. Most profoundly, The Fire Dwellers may itself be regarded as a very complex work which can be read on several levels: realism, symbolic-mythic parable, social satire, and religious quest. It touches upon the most difficult and pervasive problems of modern living and, even if it does not propose any satisfactory answer to the question of human liberation, it at least arouses our own zeal to address ourselves to it carefully and thoughtfully.

Chapter 5 Footnotes

- 1 Margaret Laurence, The Fire Dwellers, New Canadian Library Series, No. 87 (1969, rpt; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1972).  
All references taken from this edition.
- 2 Harvey Cox, The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective (1965, rpt; New York: The MacMillan Co., 1966), p. 1.
- 3 Cox, p. 21.
- 4 Cox, p. 4-5.
- 5 Cox, pp. 262-64.
- 6 Max Mueller, ed., Saddharma-Pundarika, or The Lotus of the True Law, Trans. H. Kern. (1884, rpt; The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXI. New York: Dover Publications, 1963), p. 73.
- 7 Mueller, p. 78.



## CHAPTER 6

### The Diviners

Many of the themes developed by Laurence in the previous four novels are explored in The Diviners,<sup>1</sup> her most complex work to date. It is a summing up, in many respects, of the foregoing novels and yet becomes a higher order by subsuming the past and carrying it forward toward a transformed presence in the here and now. The epistemological focus is more sharply accentuated as Laurence applies a non-linear, processive approach to the novel form and, by extension, to existence itself as it is perceived through the consciousness of her heroine, Morag Gunn. Basically, The Diviners is about self-knowledge. The identity question with which her previous characters have been wrestling as they move through the maze of collective myths are again raised, but now they are specifically linked to the mind's conscious knowledge of itself as a creator. The reflexive technique of presenting the heroine as an author whose own writing parallels the novel being written by Laurence provides the structural basis of the exploration of the process of writing or the mind in the act of creation. Laurence tries to convey a vibrant sense of this process, but it cannot be fixed or expressed other than through taking the reader into the intimate workshop of Imagination.

The mind's knowledge of itself is the key to understanding the relationship between myth and reality. Once this self-reflective knowledge is attained, the continuum of time is essentially understood and transcended - not escaped, but viewed

from a non-linear perspective. As long as Laurence's characters were caught in the coils of time past, they were struggling victims of their collective conditioning, of myths, of imaginative forms, that they did not themselves create. Their minds were largely the products of their societies' collective myth patterns and lacked a vantage point from which to judge and to view the mindscape from a space of peace and freedom. Although they struggled fiercely to find some meaning within the bounds of collective fictions, they failed to understand the deeper nature of their bondage and its connection with consciousness.

Here it is useful to differentiate between psychological and chronological time. While the latter is measurable, the former is not. The past, as Laurence shows in dealing with the psychological dimension of time, is still the present on a psychic level; emotionally the break is not experienced as rigidly as the mental categorization of linear motion in successive stages.<sup>2</sup> The influence of the ancestors and their myths on the experience of the present in the life of any individual must be openly known and understood before one can either benefit from or transform their legacy which is part of the memory heritage of humanity. Only as the characters understand the relation of psychological time, an inner realm of continuous and simultaneous presence of events, to their existence in history, or measured and demarcated time, do they attain the possibility of freedom and experience of the transpersonal, transcendent dimension of their being.

Undoubtedly the most frustrating state of existence was

depicted by Laurence in the previous novel, The Fire Dwellers, wherein Stacey's awareness of oppression was acute but she was powerless to change the structures of oppression. Having no clear understanding of the epistemology of bondage, she could not break out of the myth-conditioned world; structure was her prison in both the inner and outer senses. However, she had begun to alter that structure somewhat on the inner side, on the fantasy level; but she had not yet achieved the self-consciousness of Imagination. That step remains for Morag to accomplish and, with the liberation of Imagination, the character has a new power at her disposal - the power to create. Whereas the fantasy excursions of Stacey are diversionary and only potentially freeing but cannot in actuality change anything in the realm of outer experience of social reality, Morag's power of Imagination is an ontological activity which has the ability to affect the minds of others and therefore to change significantly the formal structures of our perception.

The heroine as artist has power to shape reality and is not merely passively shaped by others' forms of understanding and perception. She becomes the active agent of her own liberation and gives new form and structure to the experiences of daily living, or the phenomenal flux. This is why she stands in the present, in the creative NOW, and why the novel opens and closes with Morag working on the novel in the present. The novel represents the new synthetic form which she is creating out of the discrete particulars of her existence. This new synthetic form can be seen as both myth and reality, for it is

only through the form, through the myth, that reality is disclosed and structured. The Imagination allows her to see the ever-present potential for restructuring any so-called given or fixed reality; it reveals the nature of the process of human consciousness and how it is the creator of its own forms of existence or being-in-the-world. Rather than feeling helplessly trapped in the existing structures of reality, as does Stacey, Morag takes an active stance in changing her life, inwardly and outwardly, and in changing others' perceptions of Being/Becoming through her art. She creates the possibility for other peoples' experience of new forms of consciousness; using language, she is a "wordsmith" who actively demonstrates that the psycho-social structures of human existence are changeable and that in this truth lies the key to emancipation and development.

Before Morag can become a shaper she must undergo a long and painful growing period during which she comes to understand what are the myths that give societies and human beings direction and self-identity. Morag critically explores the myths that guided and shaped her development, and from the vantage point of her present maturity looks back upon the spurious value system embedded in the religiously-sanctioned social myths of her younger days.

Laurence masterfully handles the Christian religious theme in The Diviners and makes a powerful impact on the reader's sense of justice, or his social consciousness at any rate. This theme provides the basic imaginative continuity in the novels and carries forward the spiritual content of her works to a level

of deeper integration. The secularization of religious forms in modern society, which was evident in The Fire Dwellers, here continues to be a focus of Laurence's interest. The prevailing religious mythology produced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition has not disappeared from the modern scene which, despite its consciously agnostic or atheistic protestations, still lives out unconsciously the pattern of the myth-structure in a secular mode.

The "saved" and the "damned", the "elect" and the "outcasts", constitute the poles of social caste-ing in Laurence's Manawakan world; it is a world whose social structures exhibit the type of consciousness conditioned by Biblical fundamentalism of a rigid and exclusive quality. The revision of the dominant myth and social structure cannot be made by the young Morag because she does not yet possess the tools of insight or maturity necessary; she can only escape from the place assigned to her in the accepted hierarchical formulation by leaving Manawaka and aligning herself with the "saved" or the "elect". Laurence, in analyzing a whole body of cultural mythology from This Side Jordan to The Diviners, finally presents us with the New Testament paradox, "The last shall be first"; that is, she has been working toward an integration of those "outcast" and rejected elements of society and the personal psyche which the prevailing mythological form cannot tolerate, accept, or incorporate. To do any of these things would entail a drastic change in the structure of thought, feeling, and social existence; the system as stands cannot incorporate the alienated elements with-

out being fundamentally altered itself, which means - in effect - a change in power relations on the concrete, sensuous level of existence.

The legitimization of an unjust but dominant power structure was made possible by its affiliation with Western religious tradition that provided the symbols of sanctification. The point which Laurence's novels underscore is that socially institutionalized oppression depends on a spiritual legitimization whose highest symbol is God the Father. We are thus confronted with the irony of an anti-Christ value-system existing within the boundaries of the Christian religious tradition. This accounts for Morag's rejection of the patriarchal God but her sympathies with Jesus, a tendency which links her to the Romantic rebels who battle for a higher form of ethical awareness than is contained within the prevailing religious consciousness.

In "The Nuisance Grounds" and "Halls of Sion" sections, Laurence describes Morag's early growing years and shows how the secularization of religious imagery has contributed to the reduction and banalization of the symbols of transcendence. It is therefore in the banal, in the low places, in the rejected aspects of human experience that modern man may hope again to find the sublime, or the spiritually meaningful elements he lacks in ordinary awareness.

As a child in Manawaka, Morag is acutely aware of the limits of respectability and acceptability. Hill Street is a boundary line marking off the "elect" from the "damned", or those who have made it within the prevailing social mythology and those

who can never be a part of it except in the role of the "out-cast". Hill Street, and the town areas that lie to either side of it, like Gabrielle Roy's St. Henri and Westmount areas in The Tin Flute, represent the spatially objectified structures of alienation.

Morag, as the adopted orphan of the garbage collector, Christie Logan, and his physically monstrous wife, Prin, suffers under the stigma of her low-status and is continually being reminded of it by condescending conventionally pious ladies such as Mrs. Cameron. The Memorybank Movies of the early years focus on the inter-dependence of the religious and secular structure and reveal a network of hypocrisy, deadly regulation and genteel oppression. "HOW SWEET THE NAME OF JESUS SOUNDS", "WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?", "SATURDAY NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME TOWN", and "PARSON'S BAKERY IS THE WORST PLACE IN TOWN" are ironic, funny and painfully sensitive renderings of this insidious social oppression from which Morag cannot escape as long as she remains in the town. Her only way of coping within the structure is to take up the non serviam stance defiantly and to wear the mask of toughness.

At this point she meets and befriends the Métis boy, Jules Tonnerre, with whom she shares the instinctual and social sympathy of outsiders.<sup>3</sup> He sits at the back of the class in school and is derided and rebuffed when he proposes to the lawyer, Mr. Pearl, that he would also like to learn the profession. This suggestion strikes the town elder as amusing and inconceivable, and he advises Jules to apply at the local gas station

for work. Morag and Jules know they will never fit into genteel society, and this forges a lasting emotional bond. Morag becomes a warrior and needs the support of an alternate mythology to sustain her survival. She and Jules require their own myths in order to offset the generally current social mythology in whose scheme of things they are forever to be cast as the inferiors. This is essentially the value and attraction of the Christie Highlander tales for Morag, and the Lazarus Rider Tonnerre saga of the Métis people for Jules. It can clearly be seen here how myths are culturally operative for good or ill and how the capacity for a peoples' survival and self-definition depends upon their imaginative vigor.

This point is well-made in the telling of the Celt and Cree sagas. Morag and Jules both have no foothold in the accepted social mythology and so seek their own self-definition through an alternate myth-cycle. Christie is the bard figure who re-tells the stories of the Sutherland ancestors who emigrated to the New World from Scotland and settled in Alberta. His tales of the hero, Piper Gunn, and his wife, Morag, are dramatic imaginative creations, as are Jules' stories of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet which recount the Métis' struggles and losses against the English colonizers. Their purpose is to keep alive a sense of cultural identity, self-respect and racial pride.

Christie, from a personal standpoint, requires the support of the myths because they are his inner identity. To the outside world his is just the "scavenger" and the "clown", the



pauper on welfare relief, and the town's scapegoat figure. The myths compensate for his socially down-and-outcast position and lift him to the plane of the heroic, although consciously he is too aware of failure. "CHRISTIE WITH SPIRITS" can be said to refer to three things: his whiskey-drinking, his connection with the ghosts of his ancestors, and his oracular prophetic gift. The only drawback and danger in Christie's obsession with his ancestor myths is that he thus lives predominantly in the unconscious. He cannot establish a secure foothold in the world of present reality and falls back upon "ranting" whenever the demands of the outer world become too heavy or frustrating. He preserves a valuable heritage for Morag, but remains himself diminished by the larger-than-life creations of his Imagination.

While Morag is still a youngster, the tales of Piper and Morag Gunn enthrall her and fuel her poetic nature with material to elaborate upon in the privacy of her room at night, but as she grows up the influence of official Canadian history as taught in school casts a shadow of suspicion upon them and their erstwhile captivating raconteur. "Fraud. Fraud. Who does he think he is kidding?" she mocks. With the passing of time, Christie becomes a fallen hero and an embarrassment to her.

"Mine was a great family, then," he declares. "The Logans of Easter Ross, by christ, they used to be a great bloody family. This Is the Valor of My Ancestors. That is a fine motto."

"Oh Christie."

"The Ridge of Tears," Christie roars. "That was the war cry. Oh Jesus. Think of it. The Ridge of Tears. And the crest, then. A passion nail piercing a human heart, proper. I always

wondered what the hell proper meant, and now I'll never know, for who is ther to tell me?"

"What does it matter, Christie? It was all so long ago."

The Gunns have no crest, no motto, no war cry, at least according to what it says in the old book Christie still hauls out from time to time. Just as well. It's all a load of manure.

Previously she and Jules had shared an intimate affinity in the exchange of tribal myths in the Nuisance Grounds, for he, being Métis, had even less social status than she. Canadian textbook history is exclusively one of "THE THISTLE SHAMROCK ROSE ENTWINE THE MAPLE LEAF FOREVER", and the rest of the ethnic population is either ranked in descending file or omitted entirely as unworthy of notice. Whose "CA-NA-DA" and whose "Maple Leaf Forever" is it that is being sung and honoured?

Morag loves this song and sings with all her guts. She also knows what the emblems mean. Thistle is Scots, like her and Christie (others, of course, too, including some stuck-up kids, but her, definitely, and they better not forget it). Shamrock is Irish like the Connors and Reilleys and them. Rose is English, like Prin, once of good family. Suddenly she looks over to see if Skinner Tonnerre is singing. He has the best voice in the class, and he knows lots of cowboy songs, and dirty songs, and he sometimes sings them after school, walking down the street.

He is not singing now.

He comes from nowhere. He isn't anybody. She stops singing, not knowing why. Then she feels silly about stopping, so sings again.

Only much later does Morag possess an awareness of the one-sidedness and frequent injustice of history-telling at the official level. The world war which intervenes and robs the town

of many lives has a sobering effect on everyone and leaves Morag wondering if the news-stories of Dieppe as recounted in the papers are fact or fiction. She sets down the question but leaves a blank space: "Skinner's Tale of Dieppe?" At this stage, prior to leaving town, Morag feels disenchantment and skepticism concerning the old sagas and tries to gain her freedom by rejecting myth as untrue. She leaves Manawaka endowed with a rationalistic spirit instilled partly by education and partly by writing journalism copy. She cannot yet be certain what is truth, so postpones the problem in her anxiety to be gone. Many years later, when she has matured and gained experience as a writer, she will marvel at the interdependence of myth and reality and respect the myths as culture-carriers and preservers of peoples' traditions. In a letter to Ella she writes: "I like the thought of history and fiction interweaving." When her daughter asks "to know what really happened" in the past, Morag can only laugh wryly and conclude: "You do, eh? Well, so do I. But there's no one version. There just isn't."

The Christie and Lazarus tales which the young Morag and Jules exchange in the Valley thus comprise a bond of self-affirmation in a hostile world where other myths reign. The garbage dump, or Nuisance Ground, which is ironically depicted as Christie's sacred precinct, his divining ground, his temple where auguries are performed on the refuse rejected by the towns' people, becomes an inverse Church and the place of alternate spiritual epiphany. It contains the offal of society and may be linked to Gehenna, the Jewish refuse site which came to represent

Hell. Morag's affiliation with Christie brands her as another untouchable within the local caste system. At first, she rejects "the garbage" but eventually comes to see the value of that which is considered inferior by status quo standards. The epiphanies may occur in the garbage; that is, in the least likely places, in areas where one had refused to look for the truth. Interpreted psychologically, the sorting of and incorporation of the garbage means confronting the shadow,<sup>4</sup> those aspects of reality that the ego one-sidedly throws aside or rejects as worthless and shameful. The artist, by looking at society's rejected elements, ego-delusions, and collective guilt for injustice, helps to incorporate the outcast parts and to effect a transformation of consciousness. In that sense, she performs an alchemical work, for the opus is a labor of Imagination that transforms unredeemed substances.<sup>5</sup> Laurence's focus on the shadow side of Christian religious and secular structures prepares for a positive shift in our social perceptions to occur.

From a spiritual perspective, the Nuisance Ground section compels acceptance of the fact that God's disclosures, or revelations, are hard to accept or see; superficial sight cannot illumine them. An alternate perspective or vision is needed, and Christie possesses this. The outcast figure here is both fool and prophet. As wise fool, he can accept the misfit image assigned by the dominant society. The outcast, like the prophets, is the catalyst for changing humanity's consciousness and perceptions of reality; he shows what people generally prefer not to see but rather try to deny or to bury. Thus the role of the

fool, the prophet, the shaman, the clowny preacher or the social outcast is an extremely important one in Laurence's novels. They are all diviners, penetrating to the depths of reality and disclosing the falsity of socially dominant myths and the standards embedded in them. These divining figures discern the truth beneath the masks and games and point toward self-transcendence through understanding. The divine element in humanity is itself born in the least acceptable place, according to the New Testament, and provokes the cynical query: "Can anything of value come out of Nazareth?" The Nuisance Ground, therefore, is an area that must eventually be examined and integrated by Morag, but in her younger years she temporarily rejects it and tries to become part of the "elect".

This section closes on a prophetic, if sad, note. Morag and Jules meet by chance outside the Regal Cafe after the war. He is again a civilian, and she has graduated from high school and tells him of her plans to leave for Winnipeg and college in the fall. Jules senses her driving ambition:

"You want it so bad I can just about smell it on you. You'll get it, Morag."

and prognosticates jokingly: "Go to college and marry a rich professor, how about that?" He does not have the same passion to achieve success, probably because he has lived too long already with the fatalism of those who have been denied access to society's doors of fame and fortune. Morag knows that education is one of those keys to success and to self-establishment in

the world and is eager to leave the town and her old image behind. Jules cannot enter into the life toward which she is heading but does not pursue his feelings on the subject beyond a wry parting comment.

Jules stops walking. They have reached Hill Street. He is not going to walk home with her. He grins, but not in the old way, not conspiratorially. Not quite hostile, but nearly. To him, she is now on the other side of the fence. They inhabit the same world no longer.

For the heroine the choice has already been made. Sentiment cannot interfere.

Morag does not think about him for very long. She will not. Will not. She has to think about getting ready to leave. Soon. Very soon now.

In the night, the train whistle says Out There Out There Out There.

At this stage of her development, Morag accepts the premises of the Protestant social myths of election and finds her "Prince", as Jules forecast, in the halls of the secular Sion, the university, and even carries the symbolic action as far as actual marriage to Brooke Skelton, her English professor. This, she feels at the time, is salvation. Her talent, native genius and drive have been vigorously channelled into her work and establish her claim to "election", to becoming part of the "chosen ones".

The Memorybank Movies "HIGHER EDUCATION - THE LOW-DOWN" and "ELLA" are written from an already-detached ironic distance,

for the older Morag no longer has the same perspective on life as the younger. To some extent, she has always had a degree of distance from the common crowd and her learning experience does not fit in with "the golden-appearing college kids" or "the walking wounded"; she remains lonely, shy, proud, yet inwardly sensitive to her new surroundings and seeks empathy with a kindred soul. She finds this companion in Ella Gerson, a Polish-Jewish girl who also stands apart from the majority due to her background, poetic talent and comic self-dramatization. They meet in the office of the college literary magazine where Morag has come with a short story concealed in Paradise Lost and Ella with poems hidden inside Marx's Das Kapital. Both are "daring the world of the elect", wearing their respective masks of flippancy and nonchalance while inwardly churning with youthful doubts and ambitions. Morag allows herself to express this feeling in an unguarded moment: "ALL I want is everything." This is the stage where she is torn between remaining her old misfit self and becoming a sophisticated successful young woman. Ella's beautician sister, Bernice, perms Morag's hair and prepares her to enter "Beauty's Temple" with a "New Image". Basically Morag is not altered by this surface transformation and continues to find life "bloody terrifying". There is no assurance that her dreams of writing a masterpiece "will ever see the light of day", and yet she is already aware and "frightened of a strength she knows she possesses." Mrs. Gerston's warm character provides the first respected mother-figure in Morag's life, and this woman's generosity and incongruous blending of Marxian

radicalism and belief in God helps to anchor her in a humanistic protest. For a brief time, however, Morag is quite eager to proceed cautiously with the "New Her".<sup>6</sup>

The relationship with Brooke Skelton is doomed to failure because it is based upon an off-center image and a false self. Morag is impressed by his English suavity and gentility, his literary persona; he is enamoured of what he thinks is her virginal innocence, rustic simplicity and light-hearted naiveté. Each is obviously entranced by erroneous images of the other and by what each needs the other to be rather than what he/she is fundamentally. Brooke does not wish Morag to have a past or to know her basic truth because that would shatter the illusions he requires her to embody for him. She should be the eternal child-bride, fresh, uncomplicated, and dependent on him for support and guidance. Morag intuitively at the start of this relation that her "innocence" is non-existent and that she is not the naive waif his literary fantasy desires: "The state of original grace ended a long time ago." She would like to confide her past to him, to dispel illusions and enter into a realistic and passionate encounter, but senses this is the way to lose him. Her major concern becomes: "Could she be exactly what he wants? What does he want? She will find out. She will conceal everything about herself which he might not like." She thinks she will be able to suppress and deny her past: "It doesn't exist. It's unimportant", and he encourages this lie:

"That's right, my love. Don't talk about



it - it only upsets you. I only want to know you as you are now, my tall and lovely dark-haired Morag, my love, with your very touching seriousness and your light heart. Never be any different, will you?"

"Never, I promise."

Thereafter she swiftly becomes his property, marries and moves to Toronto with him where he is offered a new university post. The inequality of the relationship is immediately brought out when he checks her desire to continue her education with the paternalistic statement:

"Well, you won't need the degree. My salary won't exactly be princely, but I can afford to keep a wife. Why don't you audit some classes? Or simply read. Education isn't getting a degree, you know. It's learning, and learning to think."

The next blow to her hopes comes when Prooke makes clear that there must be no "accidents". "Accidents. He means kids." Morag, as most of Laurence's heroines, is deeply maternal and strives to give birth to the Mother in herself as part of her total fulfillment. Motherhood contributes to these heroines' self-understanding and forms another major link among the novels. Morag muses on her Zodiac sign, Cancer, which is ruled by the Moon and represents the most maternal type of feminine influence. Her desire - "But to have Prooke's children - that is what she now sees is necessary in the deepest part of her being." - echoes Rachel's plea.

After eight years of childlessness and artificial existence in a well-manicured world where everything is narcissis-

tically ordered and sophisticated, Morag can endure the "Tower" life no longer, although she inwardly sympathizes with Brooke's problems and feels guilty about her rebellion. However, it was inevitable that she should, in growing up, have discovered the impossibility of building lasting relations on illusions, on contrived role-playing, and on inequality. Brooke does not wish to change nor to see Morag mature and become independent. He is too weak to withstand "the Black Celt" in her which, for his sake, she carefully tried to suppress and conceal until it was no longer possible. With the completion of her first novel, Spear of Innocence, she has surpassed him in talent and development and worked out symbolically the flaw in their own relationship. The innocence for which he loved her was, as pointed out, purely illusory and based on his need to maintain the fiction of painless existence. Had Brooke been able to go through his own pain, his own past, as Morag had undertaken to work through hers, he would also have come through to a new strength and life. Sadly, he had neither the will nor the courage to face his pain frankly and to suffer rebirth. The life he wishes to uphold is sterile, a walled existence wherein he has made his ego secure and unassailable. Morag cannot fight his defenses; her only alternative is reluctantly to leave him.

"Halls of Sion" concludes in a manner parallel to "The River of Now and Then". Jules Tonnerre is blown into Morag's life by chance and the two spend a night together after Brooke has insulted Jules and shown irritable displeasure with his brief afternoon visit to their apartment. This humiliation sets

Morag's resolve to leave Brooke and she once again takes a train toward a new horizon: "She has five hundred dollars and a one-way ticket to Vancouver."

Clunk-a-clunk-clunk. Clunk-a-clunk-clunk.  
The train wheels. Once again, going into  
the Everywhere, where anything may happen.  
She no longer believes in the Everything  
out there. But part of her still believes.

The departure is not an easy one for her, but necessary if she is to survive and grow. The eight years with the bridegroom in the secular city have been a combination of negative and positive elements, but the latter were not plentiful enough. At Prin's funeral she had sung the hymn, "Jerusalem the golden", and later wondered:

Those halls of Sion. The Prince is ever  
in them. What had Morag expected, those  
years ago, marrying Brooke? Those selfsame  
halls?

The next stages of Morag's development deal with rebirth, "rites of passage", and building community. At the conclusion of "Halls of Sion" she suffered an expulsion from the pseudo-Paradise of a life built upon shaky foundations and illusions; her own taste of increased self-knowledge expelled her consciousness from its former false security. Braving the unknown world beyond the "Tower" requires a combination of strength, tenacity, and regenerative capacity. These qualities are objectively symbolized in the landscape Morag views as she rides the train West.

... A gathering of trees, not the great hardwoods of Down East, or forests of the North, but thin tough-fibred trees that could live against the wind and the winter here. That was a kind of tree worth having; that was a determined kind of tree, all right.

The crocuses used to grow out of the snow. You would find them in pastures, the black-pitted dying snow still there, and the crocuses already growing, their greenery feather-stems, and the petals a pale greymauve. People who'd never lived hereabouts always imagined it was dull, bleak, hundreds of miles of nothing. They didn't know. They didn't know the renewal that came out of the dead cold.

In Vancouver, Morag continues to develop her artistic ability and gives birth to a daughter, Pique. Her various transitory encounters with unattached males are side-steps along her basic path of self development as a writer and mother. These unhappy experiences serve to reveal the considerable difficulties a woman alone with child faces; on the one hand, she would like the companionship of a man, and on the other, she realizes that the risks involved in accepting merely anyone are too great, as the unfortunate encounter with Chas proved. Her basic satisfactions at this time come from writing, mothering, and friendship with Fern Brady, an ageing snake danseuse who bills herself as "Princess Eureka".

Fern's presence in the Vancouver section highlights the loss of Eden and innocence for Eve's daughters.<sup>7</sup> Fern keeps a snake, inaptly named Tiny, locked in a cage in the basement of her home and uses it in her exotic dance show.<sup>8</sup> He has become a pet pressed into economic service. The symbolism of the snake

suggests that the life-force, or kundalini traditionally linked with the Great Goddess, if kept and used for exploitative purposes will die and leave the individual shrivelled and sterile. This, in fact, is what happens to Tiny and Fern; the snake lies dead in its cage one day and Fern suddenly realizes that she is too old to continue her act. This episode reveals her unconscious need to find and to live in relation to the Feminine power, but she is afraid that this may imply that she is a lesbian. It is an attraction which neither she nor the author fully explains, but it can only be understood as a psychic manifestation of woman's attempt - however distorted or banalized - to reconnect with the ancient symbol of her power, the Serpent, which in patriarchal times has become the symbol of her defeat and punishment and evil. Fern's last days will be lived on a chicken farm in the Okanagan, not an unfitting symbolic fate, since she needs to discover the repressed ovarian element of the Great Mother or the Feminine archetype.<sup>9</sup>

For Laurence's heroines, sexuality is deeply connected with mothering, nurturing, and preservation of life. Throughout her work there are references to abortion, sterility, and human degeneration, suggesting that unless man, and woman contaminated by male-dominant attitudes, reverses this anti-life orientation no spiritual re-birth can transpire. Whereas the split between sexuality and the creation of life has been fostered by the masculine bias of our civilization, Laurence's novels offset that dangerous division by stressing the pro-life and pro-humanity side. As such, she also restores the balance

in favour of the denigrated Mother Goddess in society. The Mother is the bearer of life, its protector and nurturer, and is deeply connected with the psychological domain of the unconscious where the hidden and repressed aspects of the soul await discovery. In the ego-dominated rational civilization of our day, the product of a long tradition of patriarchal values and emphases, the Mother remains a mystery, a suppressed dimension of existence, and so becomes the carrier of a negative image.

This would account for Morag's (as well as Hagar's) rejection of the prevalent feminine images as prissy, weak and spineless, and her gravitation toward male symbols such as spears and knives which express the phallic power channelled into self-assertiveness. Even Morag's surname, Gunn, reveals the masculine temperament that is part of Morag's entire individuality, and carries an association with the gun-scene in The Fire Dwellers where the revolver symbolized Stacey's emotional link with the world of the Fathers in its most destructive aspect, war and killing.

There is, however, a positive side to the masculine symbols of spear, knife and divining rod, and that is that they reinforce Morag's latent strength and power to prevail over difficult circumstances. When properly handled, the potentially destructive energies of aggression unleashed as various forms of violence become transformed into inner direction and purpose. The divining rod particularly belongs to the highest stage of transformation of the masculine symbols, for it signifies Imagination, healing, and magical powers.<sup>10</sup> The association of the

divining rod with Royland, who is presented as a type of magus, wise old man, Old Man River, and Christ figure, is pointing to the integration of masculine and feminine symbols. The wand is symbolic of that quality of mind called intuition which contrasts markedly with the rational, mentally aggressive dominance of the analytical function so stressed in our cultural development. The intuition is a higher quality of mind which is linked with the Imagination and which leads man to find the water of life, or the site for a well. In the Biblical sense, this finding of a site for a well is an extremely important event in the life of the community which would otherwise perish without this basic necessity for survival.<sup>11</sup> The religious aspect of this integration of masculine (wand, Royland) and feminine (well, water) symbols culminates in a synthesis, a unity of functions, and a rejection of the one-sidedness of our tradition in stressing exclusively male-dominant approaches (reason versus intuition) at the expense of the spiritual and Feminine.

The falsification of the Feminine in a patriarchal system has been thoroughly rejected by Morag, who refuses to become a victim. She instinctively rejects the victim-identity mapped into the self-consciousness of the oppressed - women, Indians, and other socially marginal groups or outcasts - and connects the heart symbol with victimization.<sup>12</sup> Laurence's heroines often reveal an ambivalent emotional attitude toward the heart in its religious manifestation as a symbol of the sufferers. Rachel's nauseous response to the pin-cushion bleeding Sacred Heart of Jesus picture that hung on the wall of the Tabernacle

is taken up again by Morag who first sees it in the home of Lazarus Tonnerre.

The main shack has a bigger stove but with shakier looking stovepipes. Val, Jules' younger sister, isn't home. The two younger boys, Paul and Jacques, are hopping around like sparrows, but when they see Morag they grow quiet and watchful, and take up silent positions in corners. There are some bunk beds, a mattress on the floor, cooking pots and pans on wooden boxes, a table containing half a loaf of bread and a quart pail of peanut butter. On one wall there is a calendar from two years back, with a colour picture of spruce trees at Galloping Mountain, black against a setting sun, and on another wall Jesus with a Bleeding Heart, his chest open and displaying a valentine-shaped heart pierced with a spiky thorn and dripping blood in neat little drops.

Much later, when Morag has moved to Winnipeg and is boarding with the Crawleys, she again sees this image.

Mrs. Crawley is a Catholic, although not all that devout. Above Morag's bed when she moved in, there hung the Bleeding Heart of Jesus. It looked familiar, and then she remembered - the Tonnerre place. Even without this, the picture would be hard enough to endure, Jesus with a soft, yielding, nothing-type face and a straggling wispy beard, His expression that of a dog who knows it is about to be shot. As usual in these pictures, the Heart itself is shown in violent purplish red, His chest having apparently been sawn open to reveal It, oozing with neatly symmetrical drops of lifeblood, drip-drip-drip. All tear-shaped.

She takes it down because "She would still have wanted to throw up every time she looked at the Heart."

To Morag's horrified annoyance, when her first novel, Spear of Innocence, is released, the dust-jacket "...shows a spear,



proper, piercing a human heart, valentine."

Morag is beside herself with embarrassment and fury, combined with the feeling that because they have published the damn thing at all, she ought not to experience quirks nor qualms about such trivia.

The heart also features prominently in the Logan's clan crest. In a passage already quoted, Christie proudly describes it to her: "A passion nail piercing a human heart, proper." Finally, at Christies's funeral, she recalls the legend of Piper Gunn and the soul qualities the hero possessed.

And Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, with the voice of drums and the heart of a child, and the gall of a thousand, and the strength of conviction.

The foregoing examples illustrate Morag's conscious rejection of the heart and the implications it contains. She associates it with the victims, the great sufferers, and the masochists; in short, with people who remain victims of an unknown but superior power and unjust social structures. The chief carrier of this negative association is woman, whose qualities of passive acceptance and suffering have conditioned her into acceptance of an inhuman lot.<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Crawley and Eva Winkler are two examples of this distortion of the Feminine which Morag resents and for which she over-compensates.

If Mrs. Crawley were tough, hard-spoken and angry, it would be easy. It is her flaccid lack of fight which makes it impossible. As with Eva Winkler, whom in some ways she resembles. Morag gags inwardly at the weak,

against whom she has few defences. Put she resents and fears them.

Morag fears and rejects the acceptance of suicidal tendencies in the oppressed; she senses that it leads to psychic paralysis and death. The social carriers of the scapegoat or out-cast identity have internalized the victimization of self first experienced at the hands of others, principally authority figures.

Morag's Memorybank Movie, "HOW SWEET THE NAME OF JESUS SOUNDS", amplifies this conflict between the victimizer and the victim, a conflict which is unfortunately contained in the God-image divided between a punitive Father and a suffering Son. Like William Blake before her, Morag loves Jesus but dislikes, dreads, and rejects Jehovah.

Morag loves Jesus. And how. He is friendly and not stuck-up, is why. She does not love God. God is the one who decides which people have got to die and when. Mrs. McKee in Sunday school says God is LOVE, but this is baloney. He is mean and gets mad at people for no reason at all, and Morag wouldn't trust him as far as she can spit. Also, at the same time, she is scared of God. You pray at nights, and say "Dear God -- ", like a letter but slipping in the Dear bit for other reasons as well. Does He really know what everybody is thinking? If so, it sure isn't fair and is also very spooky.

Jesus is another matter. Whatever anybody says of it, it was really God who decided Jesus had to die like that. Who put it into the head of the soldier, then, to pierce His side? (Pierce? The blood all over the place, like shot gophers and) Who indeed? Three guesses. Jesus had a rough time. Put when alive, He was okay to everybody, even sinners and hardup people and like that.

Morag's response to the heart and to religion generally is ambivalent because the Christian tradition has been passed down with distortions and unresolved authority conflicts. The Western secular tradition of oppressor-oppressed stems from this metaphysical uncertainty which has made God into a highly fearsome anthropomorphic patriarchal figure, at once a tyrant and a victim. As a distorted emblem of self-destruction, whether by alcohol, low self-esteem, or passive acceptance of fate, the heart is viewed negatively; there is, however, a clue to the positive meaning of the heart in Piper Gunn's epithet: "...he had the heart of a child". At a deeper level of meaning, then, the "heart of a child" signifies the affirmative, spontaneous and innocent manifestation of Being in its emotive capacity. An uncorrupted, strong and pure heart has always been associated with the most sublime human character. The image of the spear piercing the heart, which young Morag disdains, denotes that out of the pierced or wounded psyche a compassionate wisdom is born. The closed invulnerable heart remains dead and uninspired. A positive acceptance of pain is vital to a fully-lived existence, as Morag eventually discovers, and can itself contribute to self-transcendence. This significance of the heart and the spear is specifically alluded to in Luke 2:34-35 in Simeon's prophecy to Mary: "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare." Since Laurence's novels entail a progression from the Old Law or stern

patriarchal religion to the New Testament values of love and community (Eros and Agape), it is important to note that the pierced heart becomes a prominent symbol in The Diviners which is only generally understood in its positive aspect of compassion, wisdom, and the strength of longsuffering.

After Morag's "Halls of Sion" period and during her transitional stay in Vancouver, she begins her inner search for a different sense of reality than that presented by the dominant society. She returns to a centre of awareness within that has always existed and supplied the alternate vision. In the "Rites of Passage" section, Morag becomes a mature woman and an accomplished writer, one who is seeking to regain connection with that which seems to be lost. At this point the search for something authentic is connected with the search for origins, roots, and ancestors. Laurence's interest in the collective myths and histories of peoples is here pursued through Morag's preoccupation with discovering alternate mythologies, the "lost languages", the old gods who now speak only through their silence, the ancestors, and the link between tribalism and a new type of community consciousness. This stage of the heroine's development marks a consolidation of her character and identity around the archetype of the Mother Goddess; in other words, the pseudo-feminine self, which was a stage in her younger life and corresponded to the male-WASP-centered requirements of her society, is cast off and she affirmatively accepts the socially-defined negative self (the outcast) and values it. The "Plack Celt", whom she once tried to suppress, corresponds to the truer center

of her being and is symbolically linked to the Celtic triple Goddess or Feminine Trinity whose most familiar names are the Morrighan, the Macha and the Medb of Connacht; usually she is known simply as the Morrighan.<sup>14</sup> Here is a matriarchal equivalent to the better known patriarchal trinity. Each Goddess is really an aspect of the One Power, which is the Feminine Principle or the Great Mother of the Celts. The qualities manifested by the goddesses or the female deities bear a striking resemblance to Morag; they are warriors, transformational, endowed with magic power, supporters of heroes, independent, and protectors of horses and the land.

The older Morag's independent, matriarchal qualities are stressed in the novel in relation to Pique and the host of young settlers, or "new pioneers", who share the McConnell Landing homestead. Between the "Rites of Passage" and "The Diviners" sections, Morag deepens her understanding of the role played by myths in structuring personal and collective existence; she has explored her own ancestral heritage during her sojourn in England and a brief visit to Scotland during which time she realizes that her home is Manawaka, Canada. That was the site of her original experience. The Celtic ancestors left their marks on her subsequent life in time through an oral tradition as well as sacred rites and symbols passed down from one generation to the next. These ancestors' original experiences were enshrined in song, poem, legend and tradition. Christie has been the living link between the past and the present, the carrier of a memory-heritage which ensured the continuation of the ancestors

and thus conferred a type of immortality upon their lives. Her visit to Scotland is a somewhat anti-climactic experience because inwardly she has connected original experience with place. The site of the struggle or revelation became the sacred place or holy ground where the ancestors could be met; her struggles, however, took place not in Sutherland but in Canada, and that is why she knows she must return to her own site of revelation and

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weave her myths from there.

Laurence significantly juxtaposes the events of Morag's visit to Dan MacRaith's home in Crombauch and news of the imminent death of Christie. As the end of "Rites of Passage" nears, Laurence's heroine is coming full circle to herself and is almost ready to come home both symbolically and literally. Her relationship with the painter and fellow-Presbyterian, Dan, has been a supportive one for each but cannot have a future. He has helped Morag to bring to the surface the "Black Celt" in herself and calls her "Morag Dhu", or "Black Morag". With the dark subterranean side of her nature accepted and integrated, Morag has accomplished her mission: to find her ancestors. She discovers them in her blood, or in her consciousness, at last; the crossing to Sutherland is therefore unnecessary. The book she has just completed, incidentally, is entitled Presences, further corroborating that her inward sense is of the past culminating in a living present, in the presence of someone who enshrines those ancestral powers and traditions. She has come home to herself at this point and no longer needs to go in search of something "Out There" as in her youth.

McRaith points across the firth, to the north. "Away over there is Sutherland, Morag Dhu, where your people came from. When do you want to drive there?"

Morag considers.

"I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't after all."

"Why would that be?"

"I don't know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here."

"What is that?"

"It's a deep land here, all right," Morag says. "But it's not mine, except a long long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."

"What is, then?"

"Christie's real country. Where I was born."

The memory entitled "The Ridge of Tears" brings this exile-cycle to a close. Morag returns to Manawaka after receiving a telegram telling of Christie's illness. The emotional and spiritual homecoming takes place in his dying presence.

She wants to stay here with him, to keep watch beside him. She also wants to go, not to have to look at him like this. There is something she must say. She wonders if she can discover the words.

"Christie-- I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you've been my father to me."

His responding words are slurred and whispered, but she hears them.

"Well--I'm blessed," Christie Logan says.

Another way of indicating surprise would have been to say--Well, I'm damned. But that is not the phrase he has chosen. She sees from his eyes that the choice has been intentional.

The final chapters of the novel emphasize Morag's new-found sense of place in her native land, her relationships with

a younger generation of whom her daughter, Pique, is the most notable example, and her need to unite mindscape and landscape. These motifs run congruently and effect the symbolic integration of woman and Nature without thereby denying her the powers of the creative intellect. Indeed, much of what transpires in the last sections of The Diviners touches upon the central issues of our own time and the problem of man's relation to Nature.

Situated in the present, Morag is already well into middle age, the mother of a twenty-year-old and hostess-friend to various young local entrepreneurs. Another generation of people has grown up in the interim during which she was working out her destiny; now Morag realizes that although outwardly the face of the world has changed, inside the same life problems appear in new guises. As an older writer and matriarch she feels that she lives on the borderline between "then" and "now". The past is carried forward into the present and demands of the younger generation a resolution or at least a coming-to-grips with the issues that the forefathers left unfinished. Morag's pervasive sense of doom frequently springs from the realization that the acceleration of humanity's problems in the present age presents a great burden for the young who may not be able to shoulder this collective debt or responsibility and therefore seek escapes in drugs and other artificial Paradises.

My world in those days was a residual bad dream, with some goodness and some chance of climbing out. Hers is an accomplished nightmare, with nowhere to go, and the only peace is in the eye of the hurricane. My God. My God.



The farmhouse at McConnell's Landing represents a bulwark against the storm and provides the home and security Morag and her daughter require.

There is a pronounced tension between the city and the country, or civilization and Nature, which has been a perennial feature of our Western tradition.<sup>16</sup> Morag has never liked cities despite spending most of her adult life in them. The city "depresses her" and strikes her as potentially monstrous; the land, on the other hand, represents "a place to stand on". When she compares natural to civilized dangers, she prefers to take her chances with the former.

Morag, terrified of cities, coming out here, making this her place, her island, and still not going swimming because of the monsterweed. But at least she could somehow cope. City friends often asked her if she was not afraid to stay in the house alone, away out here. No, she wasn't. She was not lonely and not afraid, when alone here. She did not think that the log-house was about to be descended upon by deranged marauders. In New York, Morag's agent and his wife had three locks upon their door.

Throughout The Diviners there are echoes of Stacey's maternal fears. Morag is able to laugh at her "inner monsters" and to recognize them as exaggerations or projections of her acknowledged bloody-mindedness, but this does not imply that all her fears are irrational, unfounded, or unwarranted. Laurence is intuitively aware of the dark dangers in modern life - the disruption of natural and social balances, the threat of ecological destruction, the pathology and acutely neurotic condition

of so-called civilized existence - and expresses these well-founded misgivings through the thoughts and feelings of her heroine. Here she tries to achieve a realistic balance between morbid exaggeration of the global dangers and dilemmas confronting the species and naive back-to-Nature worship. This is one of the novel's most important and socially-relevant aspects. The entire question about the goodness of Nature versus the disease of civilization has occupied our Western tradition and is still not satisfactorily resolved. No doubt each generation must work out its own response and answer to this perennial problem. The trouble, as the novel suggests, is that our time for finding answers may be running out. Morag's vision of the world and the secular city is not an optimistic or a cheerful one. She frames her descriptions in prophetic Biblical and Classical imagery, and notes the difference between the older and newer generation's approach to the land.

"...Dan knows about horses but he doesn't know fuck-all about farming. Royland says Charlie Greenhouse can't get help--he's sixty-five and aims to retire and move into the Landing in a year or so, and would likely take us on. He's a mean old bastard, Royland said, and you won't like him, but he's been farming all his life and he knows what it's all about."

However dour and bad-tempered, and Charlie Greenhouse was certainly that, he could undoubtedly teach them things they couldn't learn from books. True, they wouldn't find him easy to get on with. Charlie hated trees, which he regarded as the natural enemy of man. He also appeared to hate the earth, but at least he knew enough not to fight it in impossible ways. Charlie reminded Morag of various prairie farmers--he wrestled with the land like Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, until

(if ever) it blessed him. A-Okay and Dan would not have Charlie's outlook. They were different--they had seen Carthage; they had walked the streets of Askelon; they had known something of Babylon, that mighty city which dealt in gold and silver and in the souls of men; they had walked in the lion's den and had seen visions such as the prophet Daniel had seen while Belshazzar feasted. They came to the land in ignorance, perhaps expecting miracles which could not occur, but at least with caring, seeing it as a gift and not an affliction.

Morag also has doubts about her decision to settle in the country and wonders if it is a form of escapism. What are the choices?

Maybe I should've brought Pique up entirely in cities, where she'd have known how bad things are all over, where she'd have learned young about survival tactics in a world now largely dedicated to Death, Slavery, and the Pursuit of Unhappiness. Instead, I've made an island. Are islands real? A-Okay and Maudie, and now Dan, are doing the same. But if they do raise horses, they'll have to sell them to the very people they despise. And, Morag Gunn, who rails against the continuing lies of the media, does not, it will be noticed, establish her own handset press. Islands exist only in the head. And yet I stay. All this, the river and the willows and the gronk-gronk-gronk of the mini-dinosaur here, until I die, and I couldn't elsewhere.

These passages reveal the deep-rooted alienation of man from Nature in patriarchal myths and society, and the alternative perspective of woman which exposes that dissociation of mind from Nature, strikingly symbolized in the polarity of city (rational, will-imposed, bureaucratized male structures) and wilderness (irrational, feeling-toned, primordial order of

Nature, feminine), as dangerous to common survival. In the prevailing patriarchal myth, Nature exists to be mastered in an exploitative fashion, for man's ego-needs and satisfactions; man must separate himself from the universe and become an alien, a stranger upon the face of the earth. Yet, in that very separation from Nature, the universe that is his source, man has created a destructive and alienated reality for himself that threatens to engulf him unless he quickly changes his conceptions or myths.

The image of the city has a two-fold symbolic association, one religious and the other secular. To some extent this point has already been noted in regard to Laurence's previous novels. As religious symbol, the city operates as a heavenly model or archetype image of the perfected humanistic order; in the New Jerusalem, Spirit and Nature are reconciled in the Divine Unity and human beings are the citizens of that Kingdom of Love and Justice. As secular symbol, the city has at various times since the Renaissance stood for the triumph of the earthly, de-sacralized, order ruled by men's intellect or reason, but the increasingly obvious failure of that intellectual enterprise to conquer Nature has resulted in the literary depiction of the modern city as Hell. Laurence's descriptions of city life fall well into the latter category but do not entirely posit a "return-to-Nature" philosophy as the requisite antidote to our present social dilemmas; rather, the novel points to a new order that is not as yet fully or clearly articulated by the heroine. Morag's is a borderline compromise. Another symbol for this is

the island: a half land (conscious rational values), half water (unconscious irrational contents) situation. What this polarization of city/country, land/water signifies is a consciousness still divided between the unconscious, the Imagination, the private world of hopes and dreams, and the ego-conscious, will- and mastery-directed, rationalistic approach to life. Morag is too aware of the deficiencies of a simplistic, one-sided approach to the solution of the problem. She cannot naively flee to Nature or play the role of the Earth-Mother; on the other hand, she feels that her instinctual bearings are on the land, in the heritage of the people who "left a place to stand on". Land and psyche, or Nature and soul, are an interdependent unity.<sup>17</sup>

A pronounced strain of Nature mysticism runs through The Diviners. Each episode centred in the present begins with Morag's description of her environment and its daily changes. The birds, trees, water and weather are lyrically and poetically rendered through Laurence's sensitivity to the physical universe. Here the Celtic and the Protestant traditions combine to produce a frequently paradoxical response to organic life. The Celt remains mystically conscious of death and darkness as necessary elements of the universal process in which Divinity is immanent at all phases,<sup>18</sup> and the Protestant maintains a utilitarian, pragmatic approach to life in which man and Nature and God are kept strictly separate and hierarchically ordered. Morag often reflects about the early pioneers such as the Coopers and Traills, especially the women, who came fortified

with backbones of steel and wills of iron. This character quality, probably indispensable at the earliest stage of taming the wilderness, was fostered and instilled by the Calvinist and Protestant religions generally. It produced tough-minded and rigid authoritarians, men and women who were suspicious of leisure, love and instinctual claims. Their ethos, as Weber's classic theory maintained, created the capitalistic state, an efficient technocracy of the elect.<sup>19</sup> Morag has considerable respect for these pioneers and still undergoes pangs of guilt because in her own eyes she falls so dismally short of their domestic accomplishments and steely puritanism. Even the younger generation is closer to the old-fashioned work and self-sustenance ethic than herself, who only looks on in amazement while steeped in the "vices" of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine. Her work in comparison with theirs seems like the Devil's idle business - and, of course, in an ironic way, it is. Despite inherited guilt and anxiety complexes, Morag manages to be quite solidly comfortable in her position.

Catherine Parr Traill, one could be quite certain would not have been found of an early morning sitting over a fourth cup of coffee, mulling, approaching the day in gingerly fashion, trying to size it up. No. No such sloth for Catherine P.T.

Catherine Parr Traill - "mid-1800s, botanist, drawing and naming wild-flowers, writing a guide for settlers with one hand, whilst rearing a brace of young and working like a galley slave with the other" - is Morag's conditioned Protestant conscience, the old ghost of her past and that of the country. She also

functions as a Protestant female model, an example of the ideal woman, a non-Catholic "super-Saint" who embodies all the virtues prized in patriarchal society. She is a throwback to the Virtuous Woman lauded in Proverbs, a model of commercial industry who never has one spare moment to herself and who is, even in the evenings, seeking work in order to be an asset to her husband in the marketplace and the home. Morag's attitude to C. P.T. is at once playfully devotional and ironic; she knows she is indulging in an imaginative game, but this is the only way the ghost can be exorcised. C.P.T. is alternately invoked and dismissed.

Catherine Parr Traill, where are you now  
that we need you? Speak, oh lady of blessed  
memory.

Morag's response to Nature is non-utilitarian and reminiscent of Wordsworth's "wise passiveness". She permits her garden to overgrow with weeds to Smith's chagrin. She has a meditative relation to her environment that feels the futility of efforts to save it from man's destructiveness and alienated commercialism. In one of the imaginary conversations in which C.P.T. admonishes Morag to cultivate the land, plant an orchard, and so forth, the latter replies:

You are right, Mrs. Traill. You are correct. Except I don't have your faith. In the Book of Job it says One generation passeth and another generation cometh, but the earth endureth forever. That does not any longer strike me as self-evident. I am deficient in faith, although let's face it, Catherine, if I didn't have some I would not write at all or even speak

to any other person; I would be silent forevermore, and I don't mean G.M. Hopkins' Elected Silence, sing to me or any of that-- I mean the other kind. The evidence of my eyes, however, does little to reassure me. I suspect you didn't have that problem just as I suspect you had problems you never let on about. The evidence of your eyes showed you Jerusalem the Golden with Milk and Honey Blest, at least if a person was willing to expend enough elbow grease. No plastic milk jugs bobbing in the river. No excessive algae, fish-strangling. The silver shiver of the carp crescenting. My grandchildren will say What means Fish? Peering through the goggle-eyes of their gas-masks. Who will tell old tales to children then? Pique used to say What is a Buffalo? How many words and lives will be gone when they say What means Leaf? Saint Catherine! Where are you now that we need you?

There is, however, a feeling emerging from these conversations with the ancestor that the old vision is no longer applicable to today's reality; in fact, it was the myth lived out to the fullest extent that produced the present reality in all its devastating aspects. Fired and supported by the cultural myth of the hard-working "elect" mastering an irrational and potentially evil Nature, these Europeans created the present situation in which man can no longer feel at home in the world or identify with the life around him in myriad forms. Morag's awareness of the vanishing life-forms is echoed in the following beautiful but implicitly tragic observation.

"Turn the motor off, quick," Royland said suddenly.

At first, Morag thought he had caught his line in some weed. Then she saw the huge bird. It stood close to shore, its tall legs looking fragile although in fact they were very strong, its long neck and long sharp beak bent towards the water, searching for



fish, its feathers a darkbright blue. A Great Blue Heron. Once populous in this part of the country. Now rarely seen.

Then it spotted the boat, and took to flight. A slow unhurried takeoff, the vast wings spreading, the slender elongated legs gracefully folding up under the creature's body. Like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out of the world's dawn. The soaring and measured certainty of its flight. Ancient-seeming, unaware of the planet's rocketing changes. The sweeping serene wings of the thing, unknowing that it was speeding not only towards individual death but probably towards the death of its kind. The mastery of the heron's wings could be heard, a rush of wind, the wind of its wings, before it mounted high and disappeared into the trees above a bywater of the river.

Royland reeled in his line, and by an unspoken agreement they took the boat home, in silence and awe.

Toward the end of the book, Morag has come to an inner reconciliation with the Presbyterian influence. In a letter to Dan MacRaith she jokes: "Do you remember you once told me--we were walking along the shore at Crombruch, and it was freezing and Easter--that a Presbyterian is someone who always looks cheerful, because whatever happens, they've expected something much worse?" Also she is able to dismiss C.P.T. with a balanced outlook stemming from an acceptance of her own situation and personality.

You're darned right I see imaginary dangers, but do you know why? To focus the mind away from the real ones, is why. Leave me to worry peacefully over the Deadly Water Hemlock, sweet Catherine, because it probably doesn't even grow around here. Let me fret over ravening wolves and poison-fanged vipers, as there is a marked scarcity of these, hereabouts. They're my inner demons, that's what they are. One thing I'm going to stop doing,

though, Catherine, I'm going to stop feeling guilty that I'll never be as hard-working or knowledgeable or all-round terrific as you were. And I'll never be as willing to let the seat of hard labour gather on my brow as A-Okay and Maudie, either. Even Pique, ye gods, working as a cashier in the bloody supermarket all day, and then going home and feeding those squawking chickens and washing dishes and weeding the vegetable gardens, etcetera. I'm not built like you, Saint C., or these kids, either. I stand somewhere in between. And yet in my way I've worked damn hard, and I haven't folded up like a paperfan, either. I'll never till those blasted fields, but this place is some kind of a garden, nonetheless, even though it may be only a wildflower garden. It's needed, and only by me. I'm about to quit worrying about not being either an old or a new pioneer. So farewell, sweet saint--henceforth, I summon you not. At least, I hope that'll be so, for your sake as well as mine.

The young around her resemble the old pioneer in their eagerness to be up and doing. The Smiths and Dan hope to raise and sell horses and to operate a farm; Pique decides to leave them and to find her own imaginative truth with her father's people on Galloping Mountain. Morag and Pique are distinct from the others in the sense that they can live from intuition as well as analysis. They thus represent something of the Romantic tradition in its preference for mystery and contemplative play above intellectual calculation and rationalistic explanation. A-Okay has been a computer programmer by profession before moving to the country, and underneath his analytical exterior he has a latent poetic talent. There is ground for optimism in Royland's observation that he, too, could learn to divine if only he would stop trying to find an explanation for it. The

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young generation, then, is a combination of modern intellectual alienation and old-fashioned self-reliance of the "resolution and independence" variety.

It may now be understood that the unifying metaphor of the novel, divining, signifies not only the immediate act of detecting water with the aid of a willow rod as practised by Royland, but also the creative process of the artist and of anyone who engages in the search for hidden springs of life. This metaphor links the practical, artistic, and religious dimensions in one single unity of expression and suggests that ultimately these three spheres are not separate. Divining means penetrating to the depths of existence and experience, of sinking one's consciousness down to regions normally hidden from sight and awareness. Laurence probes the mind and its working through memory, images, self-reflection and unconscious participation in the rhythms and designs of the universe. Royland is the chief carrier of this divining metaphor and reveals the further implications of it.

Morag calls Royland by three different names: "Old Man River. The Shaman. Diviner." Once he refers to himself as a "maverick". He is surrounded by an air of mystery and makes a calm quiet impression whenever he visits Morag, usually bringing both comfort and fish. His first appearance in the novel sets the symbolic association for the character.

Royland came to the door, looking as old as Jehovah. Wearing his plaid wool bush jacket and heavy denims--a wonder he didn't melt. Greybeard loon. Royland had

a beard for the only sensible reason for having one, because he couldn't be bothered shaving. Large and bulky as a polar bear, he filled the doorway.

"Morning, Morag."

"Hi. Come on in. Want some coffee?"

"I don't mind if I do. I brought you a pickerel. Went out earlier this morning. It's straight from the river."

Ancient myopic eyes mocking her, albeit gently. He knew she had not yet been able to bring herself to clean a fish. He was working on her, though.

"Oh, thanks, Royland. That's--wonderful."

Her face, no doubt, looked gloomy as purgatory. He laughed and produced the fish. Cleaned and filleted.

In subsequent passages where he appears, he comes bringing fish, or else to ask Morag and the youngsters to go fishing or divining with him. Psychologically he operates on intuition and has the power of knowing peoples' troubles before they even confide in him. He is at various times associated with the river, magic, Jehovah, and Piper Gunn. Whenever Morag expresses doubts and anxieties about her life or the decisions she has made, he brings the message of faith to her. "You should have more faith" is his primary word to her. Eventually the reader discovers with Morag that in his youth he was an evangelical circuit preacher. This further connects him with Christie, who was referred to as a "clowny preacher". In this complex symbolic character there are gathered several important motifs which recur in Laurence's novels and now culminate in "the diviner". Royland is a composite of many numinous aspects: a Christ-figure, a magus, a Nature-spirit, a wise old man, and a preacher whose message is "foolishness to the ears of men" - i.e. the word of faith.

As a metaphor for the artistic process, divining resembles "negative capability", a "wise passiveness", and a reconciliation between "the active and the passive powers of the mind", concepts of integration made familiar by the Romantics. Royland's emphasis is on faith as opposed to rational skepticism and on the value of remaining unanalytical when approaching the mysteries. Morag relates this to the novelist's method of creation.

Morag once tried divining with the willow wand. Nothing at all had happened. Royland had said she didn't have the gift. She wasn't surprised. Her area was elsewhere. He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for? You couldn't doubt the value of the water.

Both Royland and Morag feel that divining is a gift or a power that will be passed on to others, "the Inheritors". Anyone who wishes to be an "Inheritor" or a "diviner" may be one. The question is: what is there to be inherited and divined? Here an answer, based on the intrinsic symbolic direction of the novel, may be suggested. We are the Inheritors if we choose to become conscious of the great fund of symbolic forms, myths, cultural patterns going back as far as memory permits. The memorybank of humanity, or the collective unconscious, is the record of the mental and historical tracks left by our ancestors. This memorybank is both personal as pertains to the individual and his particular time, and universal as the person is influenced and shaped by the imaginative forms of previous generations which, through the individual in the present, continue to

exist and to give structure to lives today. Insofar as the individual becomes more highly conscious of these ancestral vestiges in the present, he is able to become both psychologically enriched and free, for now, rather than remaining the unconscious puppet of older imaginative forms, or myths, he can choose to learn from them, utilize them with awareness, and transform them into another form. This is actually what Pique will do with the imaginative forms she has inherited from Jules. Through her music, she will at once carry over into futurity the ancestors' lives and give them immortality, transforming their lives and legends into new forms.

In order to detect this universal inheritance we too must be "diviners". Our intuition must lead us where intellect refuses to go, into the repressed, the forgotten, the alienated parts of ourselves and of society. In so doing, we will find "water" - here, as elsewhere in Laurence's novels, a symbol of spiritual rebirth and refreshment. On the ground or land (psychic and spiritual), the ancestors meet us in one ever-present NOW. Toward this ground of existence, the divining rod points and leads the seeking mind in need of water: life, regeneration, baptism into a new order of awareness. At the end of The Diviners the ground and the water merge and are not really separate. The ground is the earthly base for the fluid river of life which no single person can fully fathom because the depths of Being are beyond conscious reach and intellectual verification.

How far could anyone see into the

river? Not far. Near shore, in the shallows, the water was clear, and there were the clean and broken clamshells of creatures now dead, and the wavering of the underwater weed-forests, and the flicker of small live fishes, and the undulating lines of gold as the sand ripples received the sun. Only slightly further out, the water deepened and kept its life from sight.

From a philosophical viewpoint, it can be said that this source from which the temporal and changing forms emerge is pre-logical, a fourth dimension underlying our three-dimensional experience of past-present-future. It is not the object of knowledge but the already total and undivided precondition of our rational knowing. Just as Miranda of Laurence's first novel had to learn to live in and with the mystery of things, and to set aside her habit of mental meddling, Morag has learned to make this faith-full attitude her own response to life.

There is a tragic element in The Diviners which must not be overlooked despite the tremendous creative victory won by the heroine, and that concerns the native people, the "enigmatic Cree" who were first mentioned in The Stone Angel and who re-appear in subsequent episodes of the Canadian novels. The Indians and the Métis are identified as victims and share with woman and Nature the lot of the repressed and silenced party in the dominant patriarchal power arrangement. Laurence exposes how the society of whites, buttressed by religious and secular mythology of "chosen-ness", has been guilty of racism and injustice.<sup>20</sup> The problem with which her native people must deal is similar to that confronting the heroines, namely, how to free

themselves from the victimization and the internalization of that victim-identity. Unfortunately, whereas the heroine of The Diviners succeeds, the native peoples do not. Laurence repeatedly portrays them as having been incapable of dealing creatively with the superiority mythology of the dominant society, and dying miserably due to the passive acceptance of their lot. The types of protest waged by the Indians and Métis is self-destructive and does not change anything in the dominant social structure or collective myth-patterns of WASP society. Self-pity, internalized rage and hatred, alcoholism, rejection of hope, bitterness and suicide are among the most graphic forms this unsuccessful response takes. The Tonnerres are exemplary figures illustrating the tragic magnitude of the social problem for which we share a collective responsibility. Laurence simply exposes the dilemma and attempts to effect an integration of the outcast elements in the course of her novels, but she does not present a native figure who successfully challenges and wins over the system.

Jules is a brooding presence always in the background of the novel, and he exerts a psychological influence upon Morag's development at crucial times in her life. Through his eyes she sees more clearly the injustices his people suffer and their helplessness; but whereas she is an active fighter, achieves her own place in the world, and makes an impact on public consciousness via her writing, Jules has not been able to achieve a comparable victory over dehumanizing forces. He originally believes that he can "live forever" on the strength of having survived



Dieppe; after many years he still jokes, but in ironic terms: "Yeh, I plan on living forever--didn't you know?" Jules, like his father Lazarus, only "lives forever" insofar as his blood-line is carried on in Pique and his peoples' stories are recorded in song and poetry. His songs about his ancestors enshrine his sufferings and present the other side of history - the dark, suppressed, forgotten side for which the price has not yet been paid by the dominant power-wielders.

Lazarus, he was the king of Nothing;  
 Lazarus, he never had a dime.  
 He was sometimes on Relief, he was permanent  
 on grief.  
 And Nowhere was the place he spent his time.

There is a tragic connection between this verse and the theme of death. "Nothing" and "Nowhere" are synonymous with death, with having no longer any place or voice in society. It is precisely the dead, the silent ones, who must be resurrected, as was the Lazarus of the Gospel. Within the context of the entire Manawaka series, it can be seen how Laurence has raised the repressed and outcast elements of her society and included them purposefully, meaningfully, into the imaginative structure of her work. The task of enlarging our sympathies can be done only via the Imagination, or "feeling intellect"; in so doing, the author has broken out of the old myth structures that imprisoned and deadened life, and has created a larger vision out of which a new social reality can be born. This new human order, or community-consciousness, would be an integrated whole that has come to its cultural renewal through suffering and love.

The Diviners points to this direction although it does not take the reader farther than that. This is reminiscent of Laurence's first novel ending, This Side Jordan, wherein the potential for entering a new type of integrated order exists, but the author can do no more than point toward it. Toward this possibility of wholeness, of a new imaginative order or form, Laurence has led us in the series of novels that culminate in The Diviners.

## Chapter 6 Footnotes

- 1 Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (1974; rpt. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975).
  
- 2 Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice", Margaret Laurence, The Writer and her Critics, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977), pp. 150-160.  
  
 See also Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, 2nd ed. (1963; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 226-239.  
 and  
 Helen Diner, Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture, ed. and trans. by Philip Lundlin (1965; rpt. New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 9-59.  
  
 The Great Mother, who is the cosmic egg, is also the goddess of time in all its stages and is therefore also connected to the moon. The parallels between the archetypal layers of Laurence's novels, particularly in this final one, will become clear as the analysis progresses.
  
- 3 Vivian Gornick, "Woman as Outsider", Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: New American Library, Signet, 1971) pp. 126-144.  
  
 For further parallels see also:  
 Rosemary Radford Ruether, Part Two: "Strange Pedfellows and Other Aliens", New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 87-133.
  
- 4 Throughout Jung's writings there are references to the "shadow", that is, to the underdeveloped, dark, suppressed, and inferior aspect of the individual - an aspect of himself which he keeps buried and alienated. In order for the person, or the entire culture, to advance morally in an authentic fashion this "shadow" content must be redeemed from its lost state and integrated into the consciousness; this is a process of psychic or spiritual transformation in which the projections of "evil" or of the "outcasts" or "scapegoats" are removed and the individual faces its own truth, thereby freeing himself and others. In one essay, Jung has a very telling line which ties in well with the direction of Laurence's work: "The gods whom we are called to dethrone are the idolized values of our conscious world." See: C.G.Jung, "The Modern Spiritual Problem", Modern Man in Search of a Soul, Trans. by W.S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes, 1st ed. (1933; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, n.d.), p. 212.

See also, The Undiscovered Self, Trans. R.F.C. Hull (1957; rpt. New York: Mentor, 1958), p. 95.

and

Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche", The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung, ed. Violet Staub De Laszlo (1938; rpt. New York: Random House, 1959), p. 78.

5

Laurence sometimes makes parallels between alchemy and writing, "word magic", which suggest the Symbolistes' legacy in modern literature. In alchemy, the opus consisted of an imaginative transformation of unredeemed substances into the purified soul state, or, symbolically, the Stone. An essential part of the work was dealing with the difficult, with the inherited distortions in the material; frequently the method applied was called "cooking", hence, the association of the alchemist's kitchen with the work of transformation.

6

For an interesting and pertinent essay read:  
Una Stannard, "The Mask of Beauty", Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 187-200.

7

Clara Thomas refers to this episode in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), pp. 158-9.

She writes:

"And of course, Margaret Laurence's ambivalent symbolism is clearly marked for us to read. Fan Brady is an Eve, both long-lost through the circumstances that destined her, and yet, in the deepest sense, forever incorruptible, grotesquely dancing with a harmless, drugged serpent."

Ms. Thomas is right to point out the Eve parallel, but does not go far enough in her analysis, I believe, by calling Fan a "grotesque". As the following footnote will clarify, the connection between woman and serpent has ancient relevance, and the "drugged" condition of the modern woman's serpent, which is caged in the basement, points to the lost power of woman in the patriarchal mythology and social system. This point also echoes the theme of the previous novel, The Fire Dwellers.

8

Snakes were the ancient symbol of the Great Mother; that is, the Universal Principle, God, as Great Mother, was symbolized as Serpent both in the Ancient Near East and in the Far East. In the later patriarchal form of religion, the Woman (the Goddesses) became the "outcast" and the Serpent became the symbol of evil: both were tirelessly and ruthlessly persecuted.

The Serpent and the Moon (ruler of time) have been deeply associated in the Mother mysteries, for the wisdom of the Serpent confers immortality - that is, the victory over time as past, present, and future perceptions. The Snake is furthermore associated with the egg, for the Great Mother is also the Cosmic Egg, or the "egg woman", out of whose womb the Serpent of time and eternity breaks forth. The uroborus is the Sacred Serpent of the Great Goddess who holds the secret of the mystery of immortality and renewal. Interestingly, Clara Thomas' book has an emblem on the frontispiece of the uroborus, but no connection with the source of the mystery is made.

There is even an interesting parallel between the detail of Fan's serpent being kept in the cage; in ancient Crete, the worship of the Serpent Lady took the form of keeping household snakes confined in clay tubes. In modern-day Shinto temples in Japan, the connection between the Serpent and the Egg is explicit; devotees come to the temple and offer eggs at the shrine of the Serpent. The fact that Laurence's "serpent lady" eventually moves to the chicken farm bears out the intrinsic archetypal connection and symbolism of the Feminine Principle.

For interesting reading on the Serpent-Woman symbolism, two books among others are suggested here:

Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (New York: Dial Press, 1976), pp. 198-223.

Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 268-69.

9

See above for connection between egg and serpent. Both are symbols of the Great Mother in her transformative and uroboric aspect. The egg as a symbol of world-creation is related to the womb, vessel of life. The motif of rebirth is accentuated in this particular section of The Diviners and elsewhere in Laurence's work. For further elaboration of these symbols see Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, pp. 42, 326.

10

Andrew Lang, Custom and Myth (London: Longmans Green, 1885), pp. 180-88.

Lang points out the connection between divining rods and magic wands, and how later they became identified with the caduceus, entwined with serpents. Frequently it was referred to as the wand of Hermes, or the rod of Jacob. In terms of a transformational symbol in Laurence's novel, the divining rod may signify the power of the Imagination - its wisdom and mastery over circumstances. Hermes was the god ruling communication, and there is no doubt a special link with the rod or wand as mastery over the word in Laurence's novel. There furthermore seems to be a parallel with Shakespeare's Prospero, whom

Laurence mentioned previously in connection with one of Morag's early novels; Prospero, as verbal magician, wields the wand or the rod of power. He, too, must relinquish that power eventually, a feeling Morag shares at the end of The Diviners.

- 11 The well, to which the divining rod leads the seeker for water, is a symbol of the Feminine in her nurturing and transformative capacity - Woman as life-giving water and vessel which contains the refreshing, renewing liquid. The Biblical uses of this symbol are numerous and generally occur in circumstances where a revelation is forthcoming. A renewal of consciousness through water as carrier of the Spirit is frequent in both Old and New Testaments. Particularly, the well points to the depth-dimension of human experience of Being; it is in his own depths that man encounters the divine.
- 12 Atwood, Survival, p. 16.
- 13 Ruether, "The Descent of Woman: Symbol and Social Condition", New Woman, New Earth, pp. 3-35.
- 14 John X.W.P. Corcoran, "Celtic Mythology", New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (1968; rpt. New York: Paul Hamlyn, 1973), pp. 224-229.  
  
Proinsias MacCana, Celtic Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1970), pp. 86-91.
- 15 Vine Deloria, Jr., God Is Red (New York: Delta, 1975), pp. 161-167.  
Deloria makes some very interesting and valuable comments on the linear thought-patterns of Western man as opposed to the non-linear and spatially oriented conceptual world of the aboriginal Indians for whom land (space) was sacred and the site of revelation, that is, the interconnection between the religious and the geographical dimension of men's lives.
- 16 The differentiation between city and country corresponds to the male-female polarity; in a very prevalent way, the former is the creation of man who has identified himself with the mental rational function and the ethical imperative of subduing Nature for the greater glory of the patriarchal god. Woman and Nature have consistently been identified with the land, the territory to be conquered and possessed. Hence, the land is always an enticement to the intellect, the "roots" to which it feels drawn to return for nourishment and self-aggran-

dizement; upon the land man then builds his own dynasty, embodied in the city, which is meant to be the triumph of the rational principle over the irrational. The city-builders, as a look at Western literature reveals, are the new myth-makers, the solar heroes or sons of the Supreme Male Principle - be it Jupiter or Jehovah. A transformation of this myth is necessary if the city is to become a true place of community and culture, but this is not possible as long as the Feminine element is outcast and identified with the soil, backwardness, and primitivism.

17

The deeply felt connection between mind and Nature, which is usually expressed as nostalgia for the Paradisical state before "fall", or disunity between the human and natural order, actually has a basis in the evolution of the psyche. Before the differentiation into higher consciousness of discrimination between self and not-self in man, the mind and Nature are one in a simple unity; Jung called this the "psychoid" state. Consciousness exists on the level of simple participation in the natural processes; it does not yet distinguish between the knower and the known in this unconscious condition. As the higher levels of consciousness appear, the separation between mind and Nature occurs and gradually widens, even to the point of destructive fragmentation and disunity; this would correspond to the stage of "alienation" of which existentialists speak. It is object-consciousness, but not unitive awareness. This latter stage is achieved not by simple regression to the previous stage of psychoid unity, but must be attained by the individual organism's higher striving for wholeness in which the union with Nature is no longer an unconscious one but a very rational and intelligent type of knowing. Here, then, the subject and object phase is again bridged in the self-knowledge of the organism that is both a universal and a particular.

For another statement of the psychoid stage, see: Ira Progoff, Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny: Noncausal Dimensions of Human Experience (New York: Delta, 1975), pp. 77-92.

18

Yeats, in his essay, "The Celtic Element in Literature", defines that element as one of fluidity and change and metamorphosis; in short, of transformation. The realm of Nature was not separate from the Imagination but the place of divine revelation, where man met his gods and lived with them passionately. In such a world, everything is alive and part of a sacred order. Yeats says of the Celts: "They had imaginative passions because they did not live within our own strait limits, and were nearer to ancient chaos, every man's desire, and had immortal models about them." (p. 178). See

Essays and Introductions (1961; rpt. New York: Collier, 1968), pp. 173-188.

In Laurence's work one can see the combination of rationalist Protestant attitudes and the Celtic or primitive imaginative approach to Nature. Sometimes it seems that this level of The Diviners provides the basis of the dialectic tension between Morag and Mrs. Traill.

19

Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons, 2nd. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 47-78.

See also Paul Tillich on the absence of love in the Protestant patriarchal law ethos; his analysis certainly is borne out in the development of Laurence's novels, which show the progression from the stern father-law with its puritan Nature-denying emphasis to the love or mercy affirmation of an androgynous Self. The following quotation indicates the nature of the breach between law and love that must be reconciled in order for the God-principle to be experienced in an androgynous (male-female) unity.

"It is a shortcoming of Protestantism that it never has sufficiently described the place of love in the whole of Christianity. This is due to the genesis and history of Protestantism. The Reformation had to fight against the partly magical, partly moralistic, partly relativistic distortion of the idea of love in later Catholicism. But this fight was only a consequence of Luther's fight against the Catholic doctrine of faith. And so faith and not love occupied the center of Protestant thought. While Zwingli and Calvin, by their humanistic-biblicalistic stress on the function of the law, were prevented from developing a doctrine of love, Luther's doctrine of love and wrath (of God and the government) prevented him from connecting love with law and justice. The result was puritanism without love in the Calvinist countries and romanticism without justice in the Lutheran countries. A fresh interpretation of love is needed in all sections of Protestantism, an interpretation that shows that love is basically not an emotional but an ontological power, that it is the essence of life itself, namely, the dynamic reunion of that which is separated. If love is understood in this way, it is the principle on which all Protestant social ethics is based, uniting an eternal and a dynamic element, uniting power with justice and creativity with form."

The Protestant Era, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948), p. xxv.



20

On the racist nature of white European patriarchal mythology, see Vine Deloria, Jr., God Is Red, pp. 273-287.

Also,  
Rosemary Ruether, Liberation Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), pp. 157-173.

### CONCLUSION

The foregoing study has indicated that Laurence's work reveals a progressive understanding of the epistemological link between myths and reality, and that it encompasses themes which are recurrent in the modern literary tradition and in Canadian literature. In order to clarify these connections and to determine the direction into which her viewpoint leads us, it is first helpful and necessary to review briefly the background of the problems with which her fiction deals. From this larger cultural perspective, then, Laurence's novels acquire a depth and scope which, while not removing them from their immediately local or "Canadian" sphere, gives them a universal applicability and situates them in the broader concerns of our time.

The "dissociation of sensibility"<sup>1</sup> between intellect and emotion which T.S. Eliot noted in regard to our Western cultural tradition since the seventeenth century, lies at the very base of modernism and must be understood in its social and literary ramifications if the questions which Laurence's work raises are to be placed in context and answered. The aesthetic separation of a literature of thinking (reason, analysis) and another of feeling (emotion, intuition) has had its parallels in the religious, philosophical and scientific spheres and goes back farther than the seventeenth century and the Cartesian two-substance theory. Western science and its mind over matter dualism itself grew out of an older Spirit-Nature polarization in Classical antiquity that was carried over into Christianity and became the false epistemological framework for

conceptualizing Reality which has lasted down to our day.<sup>2</sup>

Attempts to resolve the epistemological dualism of the Western intellectual tradition have been largely unsuccessful and the effects of this failure are visible when we turn to literature. The crucial question - "Why have mythologies become again important in a rationalistic scientific age?" - cannot be answered unless we realize that for the early Europeans Romantics in the late 1700's the lack of a holistic epistemology which could account for universals and particulars and for the relation between mind and Nature was frightening and demoralizing. In face of the apparent success of an empiricist mathematically-directed science to gain intellectual hegemony and to compartmentalize and fragmentize the universe, in addition to the value-toned separation of functions into reason and passions, it is not surprising to see them yearning for the past or the lost paradise of primordial unity. Their metaphors of childhood, the infancy of the human race, the Edenic Garden, or the Medieval religious world were the psychological reaction to this visibly destructive fragmentation of existence, but their response to that dilemma, unfortunately, was in the last analysis counter-productive and reactionary, for it sought in these metaphors of "return" (whether to Nature, the ancient past - Hellenic, Biblical, Medieval or primitive) the connection with a universal Whole that could not come again via regression, flight, or fantasy but only through the rigorous solution of the problem of self-consciousness or self-knowledge.

It is no accident that the Romantics began to delve into

myth-studies since they hoped to find patterns of wholeness lacking in contemporary life. For the Romantic artist, Imagination and mythology were to be the means whereby unity could again be restored to the psyche and the social world. Through the agency of the Imagination, man could once more hope to regain the oneness he had lost through the Judaeo-Christian concept of the Fall and the Classical scientific concept of a mind separate from the Nature it observed and catalogued and sought to master for its own purposes.

By the end of the Romantic era, however, these hopes in the universal renewal of man and society had given way to despair and reaction; the revolution was dead and most individuals now found themselves increasingly absorbed into the technological processes of applied science, industrialization and capitalization of Nature. The literature at this point reflects the retreat of the artist into the private world of the soul, spiritualized and aestheticized by the end of the Victorian age to the extent of constituting a flight from reality into the Tower. The private and subjective sphere became the artist's prime domain; the psyche, as emerging psychoanalysis proved, was the area of repressed life and dreams in the bourgeois world. Men's outer social and political existence was rationalized by Darwinian biological evolutionary theory to be necessarily and inescapably a struggle of the survival of the fittest. The combination of both factors - retreat from communal moral involvement to an internalized private sphere of hopes and dreams and external struggle to survive economically in the

competitive world of capitalistic production - led to an intensification of despair and interest in the so-called "irrational".

In the twentieth century, psychology with its scientific exploration of the irrational realm attempted to discover the subjective origins of the intellectual and social crises, which were now centered in the city. The wide-spread influence of Existentialist philosophy in this period attests to the self-image of man as a victim of uncontrollable and mysterious forces or of his fixed irrational nature. He faces the Void, the dark pit, death; effort produces no results and is absurd in an irrational world. The pre-occupation with the private self facing the world, or perhaps merely his own immediate society, in its increasingly threatening aspects while feeling helpless to change anything, let alone share in a humanistic universal self-conception with his fellows, has been dominant. The swing to what might be called the mythological Imagination is the outcome of the one-sided polarization of dominant Western attitudes and the absence of an integrative epistemology which gives man the conceptual tools necessary for understanding his relationship to the universe.

A model of the polarization of life-approaches which undergirds Laurence's novels could look like this:

Mother Goddess  
Country (wilderness)  
Earth/Body/Ecology  
Fertility/Biological  
creation

Father God  
City (urban civilization)  
Heaven/Mental abstraction  
Alienation from life processes

Immanence/Incarnation  
 Outcast/Victim  
 Primitives/Noble Savage  
 Colonial status  
 Space conscious  
 Non-linear process  
 Tribalism  
 Universal relatedness

Other-worldly/Asceticism  
 Chosen/Elect  
 Rational scientific man  
 Politics of Empire  
 Time conscious  
 Linear process culminating  
 in eschatological destruction  
 Technocracy  
 Isolated independent self

Laurence's characters embody these cultural crises and reveal the deadly effects of this engrained long-standing dualism. The recourse to myth as a means of shaping a new vision of reality demonstrates the Imagination's response to the crisis in which humanity finds itself. The Imagination aims to integrate, to build greater wholes, to restore the broken pieces into a total picture of universal coherence.

Within the Canadian context, we share these dualisms and the resultant problems because non-native North Americans came equipped - or perhaps handicapped would be a better word - with the European world-views and conceptual structures.<sup>3</sup> The same epistemological schizophrenia has characterized Canadians, as is evident from the literature. This is why preoccupation with the past and our ancestors has been an almost obsessive activity for Canadian authors seeking to explore and to discover not only their characters' identity but their country's as well, and why, in the long run, it is a beneficial and redemptive engagement. It is a type of collective psychotherapy or communal self-examination, perhaps even a communal penance rite, in which the lost, alienated and rejected parts of the individual and social sensibility are recognized and integrated into

a more complete spiritual imaginative human order.

Laurence's fiction is noteworthy not only because it entertains and throws light on the past, but because indirectly it also instructs. It runs the spectrum of modernist concerns and allows the critical reader to see the problems inherited from the past and to understand how these must be worked out by the serious individual. In the recent book of collected essays, Heart of a Stranger, Laurence's non-fictional observations add scope and weight to the interpretation of her novels here presented. They reveal her to be not only conscious of the social effects of "the gods of a people", which may be taken to mean the metaphysical model of Reality or myth shared by any group of people, but also concerned about the individual's role in re-shaping those models into a new imaginative vision that can be lived out creatively in one's own place and time.

The frequent failure of Canadians to know sensuously their connection with this land and indigenous spirits of place is emphasized by Laurence, and by Margaret Atwood as well when she writes ironically: "Now we're on my home ground, foreign territory."<sup>4</sup> The usurpation of the "home ground" by foreigners who are not the spiritual protectors and responsible custodians of the land and the people, but rather their looters and exploiters, is a serious concern in Laurence's fiction and essay prose. As the analysis of the novels has indicated, she has repeatedly examined the violent impact of the dominant Western patriarchal, imperialist, sexist and racist myths on the globe and expressed dismay and fear about the future of mankind

and the earth. In the essays, "The Poem and the Spear", "Man of our People", "Where the World Began" and "Road from the Isles", these focal concerns are further developed and related to her fiction in the introductory comments.<sup>5</sup> Basically, she draws the parallel between oppressed and colonized peoples, whether these be displaced Scot Highlanders, Africans, or North American Indians and Métis, and suggests that a new kind of tribal or kinship consciousness be developed among peoples of the world.<sup>6</sup>

The irony and injustice of the fact that the oppressed indigenous peoples have had to fight in the wars of their oppressors, and thus in a sense take a double beating, is lamented in The Diviners and in "Road from the Isles". Thus, a double alienation has occurred over the years: first, the alienation of Western man from his own complete Self, which would encompass Nature, woman, and the divine Ground of Being in a sacred Totality of experience, and, second, the imposition of this alienated ego-consciousness with its rationalized and religiously-sanctioned supremacy myths on others who then, in turn, internalize this dominant world-view and become the "outsiders" to their own personhood and environment.

The inability of the dissociated consciousness to know itself as part of a larger whole, a sacred cosmos in which "everything that lives is holy", as Blake said, is dismally evident from the contemporary global problems resulting from that conceptual structure. Today Western man faces the choice



of transforming the structure which has caused so much suffering and injustice, and learning from those he has oppressed and "cast out" of his guiding myth, or of maintaining a reactionary and suicidal allegiance to the established patterns of thought and action. The transformation is the task of Imagination; there is no doubt that unless Imagination is attuned to, and very basic changes made in our attitudes, structures, and ways of relating on both social and global levels, then survival in the widest sense may not be assured. Laurence's statements on this matter reveal her to have been concerned with survival long before Atwood's book by that title appeared; both women have made similar connections between man's alienation from Nature and the conceptual patterns that underlie it. Survival is defined in both physical and spiritual senses, for there can ultimately be no separation between inner and outer modes of existence; they mutually shape and reflect one another.

The theme of survival - not just physical survival, but the preservation of some human dignity and in the end some human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others - this is, I have come to think, an almost inevitable theme for a writer such as I, who came from a Scots-Irish background of stern values and hard work and puritanism, and who grew up during the drought and depression of the thirties and then the war.<sup>8</sup>

To survive, then, is not possible without change or transformation taking place within the individual and society. The basis of hope is faith in humanity's inner wisdom and Imagination to take those steps necessary for collective survival and,

beyond survival, toward celebration of the new vision. Judged according to Laurence's fiction and prose, survival is linked to greater self-knowledge. Identity is not a fixed or narrow definition of who we are; indeed, unless we are able to accommodate transformations of our self-concept, which may necessitate a painful breaking out of old myth structures and generating new forms of being in the world, we remain stifled, imprisoned and unfree.<sup>9</sup> Her characters have all undergone such gruelling but rewarding transformational processes; for this reason they are able to affirm proudly that they are "survivors" with a sense of humour and dignity.

A wider sense of identity is, however, impossible to achieve without examining one's personal and collective past - the realm of the ancestors and their traditions which constitute the basis of present forms of existence - and the places or lands to which human life is connected and from which it derives its instinctual nourishment. Laurence differentiates between the personal and the collective past, but views them existing inter-dependently.

I am inclined to think that one's real roots do not extend very far back in time, nor very far forward. I can imagine and care about my possible grandchildren, and even (although in a weakened way) about my great-grandchildren. Going back, no one past my great-grandparents has any personal reality for me. I care about the ancestral past very much, but in a kind of mythical way. The ancestors, in the end, become everyone's ancestors. But the history that one can feel personally encompasses only a very few generations.<sup>10</sup>

For Laurence, the ancestors are not only one's own family relations but, more broadly, the great collection of cultural forbearers who comprise the living tide of humanity - living in the sense of continuing to exert an influence through us who exist in this time. Obviously, time conceits become very flexible and fluid from such a standpoint; the present becomes a living now in which humanity's ancestors co-exist and are symbolically resurrected and living eternally. The past is never finished and dead; our ancestors live in our blood and consciousness, and yet we are not victims of their influence if we realize that our task is to share a continued dialogue with them. Laurence's concept of the ancestors does not imply a slavery to traditionalism and adherence to previous imaginative forms, but a creative addition to the project of world-creation. We only give life to the ancestors by transforming their creations, not remaining bound within rigid structures that make of our traditions a dead weight and burden.

This broader view of ancestry and "the Inheritors" may at first sound strange and incomprehensible to some readers, as, in fact, it obviously did to critic B. Lever, whose interview with Laurence is recorded in a recent collection of critical essays on Laurence.<sup>11</sup> Lever completely misunderstood the sense in which writers like John Newlove and Laurence use the term ancestors and considered it an absurdity to think that "...we could ever consider ourselves to be children of the Indians!"<sup>12</sup> She believed that we "should be willing to ac-

cept them, at least, as equals." Laurence's reply reveals that a wider understanding of humanity's cultural heritage is necessary for modern man if he wishes to survive, to grow, and to create newer and larger patterns of wholeness; moreover, the one-sided but seemingly tolerant and magnanimous notion that "we" should accept "them" still smacks of the old dissociated consciousness which tries to fit the "outcasts" into the "elect" categories.

Well, I'm not sure about that, but possibly what John meant was something like the fact that, hopefully, we might attain enough understanding of the Indian culture and way of life, so that we could, in a sense, not consider ourselves as the children of the Indians but consider that in a way (if you go back far enough) all mankind has common ancestors. Also, we have a lot to learn from them, and if we are able to do this, we may get a truer sense of the land - we may get accepted by the land. In that sense, they are our ancestors, we have to understand them a hell of a lot better than we do right now.

...I think that one thing that Canadian writing is doing is to define our roots, our ancestors, our myths, where we came from and it's only out of this that we can understand who we are. This, of course, has to be done in a very specific way and has to include all our ancestors which are a very varied lot of ancestors.<sup>13</sup>

A somewhat longer but fitting passage that amplifies this position is found in Laurence's essay on Gabriel Dumont, "Man of Our People".<sup>14</sup>

Has the voice of Gabriel anything to tell us here and now, in a world totally different from his? I believe it has. The

spirits of Dumont and Riel, of Big Bear and Poundmaker, after the long silence, are speaking once again through their people, their descendants. Will we ever reach a point when it is no longer necessary to say Them and Us? I believe we must reach that point, or perish. Canadians who, like myself, are the descendants of various settlers, many of whom came to this country as oppressed or dispossessed peoples, must hear native peoples' voices and ultimately become part of them, for they speak not only of the soul-searing injustices done to them but also of their rediscovered sense of self-worth and their ability to tell and teach the things needed to be known. We have a consumer-oriented society, and one which is still in many ways colonialist, because still other-dominated, now by America, a neo-colonialist power whose real and individual people (as distinct from governments and corporations) are our spiritual and blood relations, a fact which must never be forgotten, for we need one another. We have largely forgotten how to live with, protect, and pay homage to our earth and the other creatures who share it with us - as witness the killing of rivers and lakes; the killing of the whales; the proliferation of apartment blocks on irreplaceable farmlands. We have so much to learn and act upon, and time is getting short. Those other societies which existed before imperialism, industrialism, mass exploitation, and commercial greed were certainly far from ideal, nor can we return to them, but they knew about living in relationship to the land, and they may ultimately be the societies from whose values we must try to learn.

There are many ways in which those of us who are not Indian or Métis have not yet earned the right to call Gabriel Dumont ancestor. But I do so, all the same. His life, his legend, and his times are a part of our past which we desperately need to understand and pay heed to. <sup>15</sup>

From these selections it can be seen that Laurence's vision gives us new perceptions of individual and social reality;

ensured. In "Open Letter to the Mother of Joe Pass", Laurence speaks in the tone of such a Universal Mother to the unknown American lady with whom she shares identical fears and sufferings. The passage is reminiscent of her position in the novels, that of "matriarch" who feels a common kinship and ancestry with all life, and who seeks an awakening of moral responsibility among people.

I am not even sure who is responsible. Responsibility seems to have become too diffuse, and a whole continent (if not, indeed, a whole world) appears to be spinning in automation. The wheels turn, but no one admits to turning them. People with actual names and places of belonging are killed, and there is increasingly little difference between these acts and the fake deaths of the cowboys who never were. The fantasy is taking over, like the strangler vines of jungle taking over the trees. It is all happening on TV. ...I am afraid for all our children.<sup>17</sup>

The social vision embodied in Laurence's art leads to an integration of particular and universal in an enlarged imaginative pattern that relates the individual to a local and global community. Such a community of extended spiritual kinship ties is not yet a reality; it remains, at this stage, only a "myth", but this precisely illustrates the thesis of this study that myths are the imaginative forms which eventually become translated into social (externally real) structures of existence. Unless the older concept of myths as unrealities or pleasant fictions is abandoned, we will never understand the psychological processes whereby the human spirit realizes and

expresses itself in everyday reality. As Laurence has said, "...myths contain their own truth, their own strong reality."<sup>18</sup> Through an understanding of the myth-making process, we are empowered to express the "eternal I AM" in its form-creating capacity and to experience the basic unity and wholeness of Life. As individual i, each person is located in a particular time and place, has a unique history and ancestors; but as a universal I, he/she partakes of the entire history and ancestry of the race, of all the tribes of men, and lives in the universal consciousness of the Imagination which sees the continual structuring and re-structuring of human thought-forms, the rise and transformation and denouement of myths and yet knows the One Reality that underlies all these productions.

The process is always unfinished; the river always flows, as Laurence indicates, forward and backward, to the future and to the past, culminating in the Present/Presence of Imaginative Vision. The religious dimension is this process itself; it cannot be separated from the flux of the phenomenal world or the phenomena of consciousness, although it may not be reduced to any isolated aspect of that process. Imagination is essentially religious not in the particular form(s) it may take, but in its holistic direction; it creates patterns of wholeness and the possibility of the organisms' sensuous experience of that fundamental cosmic unity. Religion may often fail to mediate and to express the totality of the sacred order of the cosmos, may fall into separateness, limitation, and fanaticism, and thus give rise to more problems than it can ever solve from

a limited perspective; but, in the purest fulfillment of its task, it reveals the universal through the particular and vice versa. In Laurence's work, therefore, the mythical and religious dimensions are one, both express the Truth in various forms; as long as the mind is not caught in the stranglehold of a certain form, and remembers that "esemplastic power" it possesses, the possibility of realizing the inner Truth of the myth or the religious symbol exists. The experience of a traditional religious symbol - for example, water - on a sensuous and not merely conceptual level allows the character and the reader to enter through the door of the myth into a wider Reality than that which may commonly be lived. The heightened awareness which such a visionary, mythological art conveys is the same as that which religion hopes to produce in the worshipper through placing him in direct contact with the realm of the spirit and its many sacred forms. Art and religion are both manipulated environments; this should not be misunderstood negatively, but rather seen positively. The manipulation is, in its most skilful capacity, able to awaken in the participant the awareness of being part of the sacred order which normally he does not envision, know or experience. His sense of participation in the universal sphere, not merely in the conditioned, localized, and rigidly time-bound, is elevated and strengthened. For the modern individual, the ability to experience this connection with a larger order through formal and traditional religious forms may be diminishing, but cer-



tainly not his longing nor the capacity to do so. Laurence's characters experience greater personal integration and hope either through the traditional forms or through unorthodox channels; in either case, a "reconciliation" with God, or the deepest Self, is enjoyed.

Myth today is the vehicle through which the new forms of living will be forthcoming. Laurence's work is most relevant to contemporary problems and secular-spiritual concerns. It searches for improved forms of personal and communal life. The present necessity of humanity to develop a sense of universal kinship among different races and tribes, with the earth and its species, and an awareness of the Mother-aspect of a Divine Image that has been one-sidedly masculinized for too long, is now obvious. In her novels we can see the transition from a Judaeo-Christian patriarchal type of religious form to one which more fully realizes the New Testament Gospel vision of the new human community bound together by Agape. Gospel themes of Incarnation, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last", the universal fellowship of Love, are manifest in her work and affirm that the myth is reality to her. Perhaps most of all, the religious dimension and the imaginative vision are united in the quality of hope, which for Laurence continues to be strong, according to the motto: "My Hope is Constant in Thee". Her output to date confirms the indomitability of the human spirit in its evolution through the forms of history.

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# Conclusion Footnotes

1

T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Essays, 5th. ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964), p. 247.

A.M. Maeser, Romanticism and the Dissociation of Sensibility, M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1972, pp. 1-13.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 186-214.

2

This note amplifies the above citations, which could be expanded, and is intended to stress the nature of the philosophical problem as it affects all departments of life. Only today, with the gradual supercession of Classical epistemology and science based on that false conceptualization of universal processes, can we achieve an integrated and whole vision of man and the universe. This is the vanguard of the revolution in physics which will, I suspect, eventually filter down to the popular level and be the basis of a new world order and self-consciousness. In the sciences today this epistemological battle is being fought; it is one essentially between nominalist-empiricist forces which continue to perpetuate the two-substance theories, a mind-matter dualism in essence, and the humanist-idealist ones which deny that dualism and world-views stemming from that stance. For further reading along these lines, it would be helpful to consult the following:

Werner Heisenberg, "The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics", Symbolism in Religion and Literature, ed. Rollo May (New York: George Brazillier, 1958), pp. 220-232.

Carol White, Energy Potential: Toward a New Electromagnetic Field Theory (New York: Campaigner Publications, Inc., 1977), pp. 3-17.

Georg Cantor, "1883 Grundlagen: Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds", Trans. with Introduction Uwe Parpart, The Campaigner, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, (Jan.-Feb., 1976), pp. 69-102.

3

Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), pp. 111-125.

Contemporary North American Indian writing also addresses itself to the European myths and their dehumanizing effect on both oppressors and native peoples who were the first victims of these firmly-entrenched conceptual structures in the minds of the "new rulers". See, for example:

Vine Deloria, Jr., God Is Red (1973: rpt; New York: Delta, 1975), pp. 273-287.

George Manuel and Michael Posluns, The Fourth World: An Indian Reality (Don Mills: Collier MacMillan Canada, Ltd., 1974), pp. xi-xii.

- 4 Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (Don Mills: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1972), p. 11.
- 5 Margaret Laurence, Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 44-76, 204-212, 213-219, 145-157.
- 6 Laurence, Ibid., p. 44 and pp. 154-155.
- 7 Laurence, Op. cit., p. 152-155.
- 8 Laurence, Op. cit., p. 17.
- 9 Laurence, Op. cit., p. 14.
- 10 Laurence, Op. cit., p. 157.
- 11 William New, Ed., Margaret Laurence, The Writer and her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977), pp. 24-32.
- 12 Ibid., p. 30.
- 13 Op. cit., p. 30.
- 14 Laurence, Heart of a Stranger, pp. 204-212.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 211-12.
- 16 Op. cit., p. 218.
- 17 Op. cit., p. 203. See also p. 199.
- 18 Op. cit., p. 77.

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The Stone Angel. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, London: Macmillan, New York: Knopf, 1964.

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