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Divining Place in the Manawaka Fiction of Margaret Laurence: A Study of the Five Female Protagonists

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DIVINING PLACE IN THE MANAWAKA FICTION OF MARGARET LAURENCE: A STUDY OF THE FIVE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

by

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To the memory of

Margaret Laurence,

who has spoken to me as

a scholar, a woman, a Canadian,

and a sojourner on this earth

ABSTRACT

The problem to be explored is to discover the reason(s) some of her readers find connections to place in the Manawaka fiction of Margaret Laurence. The problem also includes the determination of the meaning of place to Laurence, her female characters, and her readers, both casual and critical.

This exploration includes the examination of her five Manawaka works of fiction, the review of critical analyses of her work, a consideration of reader-response and feminist theories, and a visit to Neepawa, Manitoba, the physical place after which the fictional Manawaka is modeled.

Laurence defines place by geography and people. The physical place of Manawaka becomes a place of entrapment for the five female protagonists through its patriarchal institutions. They attempt an escape from the entrapment by leaving Manawaka and seeking a freedom to achieve individuation and to find their own voices. They, in fact, find freedom by making connections to others, particularly through their maternal heritage, and by returning physically or metaphorically to Manawaka, where they are able to reconcile themselves with their pasts. They are able to survive, to achieve a degree of individuation, and

to find their own voices. In the process, they discover new meanings of place, including Alcoff's "woman as positionality"--a place within, from which they can move forward and beyond.

The connection some readers make to place in the Manawaka fiction of Margaret Laurence is derived from a response of recognition by readers from a variety of backgrounds and education to the readily identifiable places, people, and situations presented in her work. As one of her enthusiastic readers, my response has been enhanced with new insights by adding life experience and the study of critical analysis and feminist theory to my transaction with Laurence's narratives. It can be concluded that the reason many readers make a connection to place in Laurence's narratives is that everyone has a Manawaka--a place within, a place to be divined and a divining place. The meaning of place must be discovered by each person, and each person has a place where discoveries are made.

CHAPTER 1

THE ATTRACTION OF PLACE IN THE MANAWAKA NARRATIVES FOR CASUAL AND CRITICAL READERS

> A strange place it was, that place where the world began. A place of incredible happenings, splendours and revelations, despairs like multitudinous pits of isolated hells. A place of shadow--spookiness, inhabited by the unknowable dead. A place of jubilation and of mourning, horrible and beautiful.
>
> It was, in fact, a small prairie town. . . . When I was eighteen, I couldn't wait to get out of that town, away from the prairies. I did not know then that I would carry the land and town all my life within my skull, that they would form the mainspring and source of the writing I was to do, wherever and however far away I might live. (237, 241-42)

These passages from Margaret Laurence's essay "Where the World Began" manifest the significance of the place of her childhood to her life and her art. The harkening back to one's roots and the coming to terms with one's past are not uncommon themes of writers, but the fact that these

passages are frequently quoted by critics, reviewers, and interviewers demonstrates the attraction to place in Laurence's work. Much criticism has been written on the subject; even criticism not directly related to it touches the idea of place in some way. Why is there such an attraction to place in the works of Margaret Laurence, particularly her Manawaka fiction? How do readers make connections to this place?

In an attempt to answer this question, answers to other questions will have to be explored. What does place in the Manawaka series mean to Margaret Laurence? What does it mean to the critical and the casual reader? How has place influenced her female protagonists? How does place represent entrapment for them as she says it did for her? On what journeys do these protagonists embark to escape these entrapments? How are her protagonists displaced? What is the resolution of their journeys, or what reconciles the protagonists to their meanings of place?

To answer these questions, it is essential to explore the place, its geography and its people--the characteristics that combine to make it readily identifiable to readers of varied backgrounds, experience, and education. An exploration of these characteristics will reveal the patriarchal institutions within this fictional society, making Manawaka a place of entrapment

for the five female protagonists. Each protagonist attempts to escape the place, and thus the entrapment, by leaving Manawaka physically and attempting to achieve individuation and to find her own voice. The escape begins a journey of survival that will lead the protagonists back, physically and/or metaphorically, to the place from which they tried to escape. By making connections with others, particularly their mothers or surrogate mothers, they discover other meanings of place. This discovery helps them to reconcile themselves to place and gives them strength to move beyond it. In the progression of Laurence's novels, each protagonist repeats the pattern of reconciliation with the place of her past, but each one successively reaches a greater degree of individuation in the process.

As casual readers and literary critics alike encounter the place of Laurence's Manawaka novels, a transaction occurs between the reader and the narrative. The characteristics of the place and the protagonists' struggles with them are recognized by many readers at all levels of response. Laurence achieves this recognition by showing, in a narrative, the struggles and situations of particular individuals in a particularized time and place. Her narrative allows her views to reach beyond this particular time and place to solicit responses and recognition from readers of other times and places. For

some readers, narrative achieves this recognition more effectively than the explication of the issues in essay form would.

As an enthusiastic reader of Laurence's work, I have experienced a transaction with her narratives as both a casual and a critical reader. Some of the influences on my changing responses to her work will be explored within this thesis. Since the protagonists are all female and Laurence illustrates female issues, it is valuable to consider the effect of feminist criticism on a reader's response to the narratives.

Some clarification of reader-response theory and its relevance to the narratives is useful here. Louise M. Rosenblatt, a proponent of reader-response theory describes it as a transaction between the reader and the text as an active process.

What does this transactional view of reader-response include? According to Rosenblatt, the reader experiences a "dialogue . . . with the text as he [or she] creates the world of the work" and "the concurrent stream of reactions to the work being brought forth" (69). The reader brings to the reading his or her past experience and knowledge which determines the kind of transaction that occurs between the reader and the text and the creation of what Rosenblatt calls "evocation," referring to "the lived-through process of building up the work under the

guidance of the text" (69). This evocation is a "doing" process. There is not only a difference between the knowledge and experience that different readers bring to a reading, but there is also the change that occurs in any individual reader's knowledge and experience throughout his or her life which will change the transaction between the reader and the text:

> Readers bringing to the text different personalities, different syntactical and semantic habits, different values and knowledge, different cultures, will under its guidance and control fashion different syntheses, live through different "works." . . . [O]ver the course of ages or over the course of an individual's biography, the "life" of the work resides in the history of individual reading-events, lived through experiences, which may have a continuity, but which may also be discontinuous with only a varying "family" resemblance. (122-23)

These continually transforming transactions between reader and text are particularly relevant to the works of Margaret Laurence. Her novel The Diviners as a whole is concerned with life's stories and the change that occurs in the perception of them over a lifetime. The protagonist, Morag, is a writer who is well aware of the influence of her experience and knowledge on her life and her art. She

is also well aware of the participation of the reader of life and books. Michel Fabre, a French scholar and critic, emphasizes this element in The Diviners:

> [W]ords and books are not enough. There exist dictionaries, catalogues, lists of recipes and sets of tools and terms, but these must be reinterpreted, put in context, recreated by reader and writer alike. More interesting than Margaret Laurence's attempt at "audio-visual fiction" in The Diviners is her repeated reaffirmation that reading and writing are not only complementary but also homothetic or homologous activities. Just as a professional writer encodes in a text his reading of other books, including the Book of Life, so does a reader recreate the book he reads, or rewrite it in his specific idiom. From the genesis of fiction, the emphasis is thus displaced to reading as an active form of communication, most textual incidents in The Diviners being evident metafictional reflections on and hints at this process. (69)

As a reader, both critical and casual, I am "rewriting" Laurence's books in my own "specific idiom" within this thesis.

What is the difference then between reader-response and interpretation? Rosenblatt claims: "The tendency is to speak of interpretation as the construing of the meaning of the text. This conceals the nature of the reader's activity in relation to the text" (69). The "lived-through evocation" of reading the text occurs first, and then the "[i]nterpretation involves primarily an effort to describe in some way the nature of the lived-through evocation of the work" (70).

In her view of reader-response, Rosenblatt does not ignore the value of knowledge of authorial intent or other background information. She also values the opinions "of what others have made of the text" (146). She therefore does not negate any background knowledge, literary criticism, research, and discussion with others that could enhance the reader-response in the study of literary works. Rather, she advocates the complementary responses of the literary scholar and the ordinary reader:

> [D]o not critics and literary scholars tend to represent a rather narrow spectrum of response? Readers may bring to the text experiences, awarenesses, and needs that have been ignored in traditional criticism. [She cites the example of women and minority writers and critics.] . . . The aim should be to widen the range of critical voices--not to reject the contributions of the

> professional students of literature but to strengthen the affinities between them and ordinary readers. (142-43)

Within the exploration of place in this thesis, then, the critical analysis of other scholars, particularly femininst critics, will be considered as well as my own responses and interpretations. The views of others have enhanced my own lived-through experience with Laurence's narratives. When I note the frequency with which I have written "Yes!" in the margins of her novels, I realize the relevance of considering reader-response in a study of place in the Manawaka fiction of Margaret Laurence.

In the Preface to Crossing the River: Essays in Honor of Margaret Laurence, Kristjana Gunnars comments:

> The native speaker of Manitoba English will presumably find reverberations in Laurence's language that outsiders do not see or feel. Those reverberations constitute undercurrents of reading which exist for those who understand them. (xiv)

My own reading evokes familiar images and similar experiences in response to words such as "wicket," "nuisance grounds," and "Mum." As Gunnars states: "Perhaps her greatest gift has been the way in which she showed us the depths and passions of the place in which we

are living: Manitoba, through her, had taken full part in the human drama. We no longer needed to look elsewhere" (viii).

Laurence's five novels connect with two clearly different audiences. Despite their specificity, they appeal to many different kinds of readers, but because of their specificity, they elicit a distinctive response from Manitoba readers. Laurence is conscious of both responses and their apparent paradox. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, she comments:

> The feel of place, the tone of speech, how people say things, the concepts you grow up with, the things that have been handed to you by your parents and your grandparents and so on--I have to measure the truthfulness of what I'm saying in these areas against my own people's response. (194)

She realizes that she elicits a response from other readers because she has the ability to express and illustrate their experiences and thoughts for them.

> I have the feeling that it isn't that novelists or writers in general know that much more or even different things about the world and about one another. What we're saying is what everybody knows or a great many people know, but hardly anyone says. (189)

Clara Thomas, both a friend and critic of Laurence, also comments on this paradoxical appeal to a variety of readers: "Manawaka is fictionally real, with the hard surfaces and sharp outlines of a place and time and space, furnished with a density of sense-gratifying detail fitting to its time and its seasons. Beyond that, it is timeless in its reference" (Margaret Laurence 57).

Laurence's concern for the reader's response to place possibly stems from her experience in reviewing African writers. She saw in them the attempt to present "their place" to readers of other cultures in a way that these readers could comprehend and to which they could respond. In a tribute to Laurence's critical analysis of African literature Long Drums and Cannons, G.D. Killam comments:

> [Laurence] was alert to the demands of "reader-response" criticism before it was popularly called by that name. That is to say that she understood, likely by virtue of her long experience of living in Africa, but equally because of her intuition and comprehensive sympathy, that rapprochement was necessary between writer and reader, that writers--those before us in Long Drums and Cannons, for example--in choosing an international language were accepting the problems of presenting their unique cultures to a world audience; in doing so

> they were in danger of being misunderstood when what they wanted, obviously, through their choice of language, was to be understood. That being the case, they made concessions to the readers--but not so many as to discredit their work in the eyes of their own people. The reader beyond the national boundary had [sic] the obligation to seek out the clues and concessions the writer gives him/her, and to discern the meaning even in the strangeness of the culture he/she confronts through the writing. (33)

In writing about "her place," Laurence makes it authentic for readers also from that place, but she also presents it so that it reaches beyond the boundaries of that place to readers from other places, backgrounds, and experience.

With some consideration given to the reader's response and his or her attraction to and connections with place in Laurence's fiction, the other questions must be asked and explored. Like the protagonists who search either to escape a place or to find a place, this discussion will embark on a journey to discover place and divine its meaning for the writer, the characters, and both the casual and critical reader. As Laurence wrote about her journey to Somaliland in The Prophet's Camel Bell, this journey may be similar: "Our voyage began some years ago. When can a voyage be said to have ended? When you reach the place you

were bound for, presumably. But sometimes your destination turns out to be quite other than you expected" (10).

CHAPTER 2

ENTRAPMENT: HOW PATRIARCHAL INSTITUTIONS DEFINE THE FEMININE

> I may not always write fiction set in Canada. But somewhere, perhaps in the memories of some characters, Manawaka will probably always be there, simply because whatever I am was shaped and formed in that sort of place, and my way of seeing, however much it may have changed over the years, remains in some enduring way that of a small town prairie person. (Laurence, "A Place to Stand On" 7)

Since the emphasis on place is so prominent in her writing, what is the significance of place to Margaret Laurence? In her essay "A Place to Stand On," the title taken from a poem "Roblin Mills, Circa 1842" by Al Purdy, Laurence states:

> When one thinks of the influence of a place on one's writing, two aspects come to mind. First, the physical presence of the place itself--its geography, its appearance. Second, the people. For me, the second aspect of environment is the most important, although in everything I have written which is set in Canada, whether or not

> actually set in Manitoba, somewhere some of my memories of the physical appearance of the prairies come in. (4)

Laurence admits that the physical setting of Manawaka is patterned in many respects after her childhood hometown of Neepawa, Manitoba, and its surrounding area. This similarity is immediately obvious to the native Manitoban reader, who readily equates "Manawaka" to Neepawa, "Galloping Mountain National Park" to Riding Mountain National Park, and "Diamond Lake" to Clear Lake. A visit to the town of Neepawa acquaints the reader with the models for some of the houses, churches, and commercial buildings (the Roxy Theatre, the Court House), the cemetery, the river, and even the "nuisance grounds" of her Manawaka fiction. Standing in front of the cenotaph at the Court House, which figured prominently in her fiction because of the impact the World Wars had on her generation, I recall my own memories as an elementary school child, marching two-by-two to the Remembrance Day service at the cenotaph and the Town Hall. She refers to such services in her works, for example in the beginning of her short story "A Bird in the House" from the collection of short stories of that same name (87-88). Greta Coger, President of the Margaret Laurence Society and another native Manitoban, writes in her article "Mississippi-Tennessee Tribute Manawaka--A Canadian Yoknapatawpha" about the importance of

the World Wars on the "Canadian psyche": "One has only to travel in western Canada to see the centrality of war in the culture: each village has a big cenotaph for those in both World Wars: the rosters are in disproportion to local populations" (33).

Laurence's creation of Manawaka is not, however, representative of only one small town, but it has a more generally identifiable quality and character, and therefore, it arouses a response from readers from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Laurence explains this general identification with this place thus:

> In almost every way, however, Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all, I like to think, it is simply itself, a town of the mind, my own private world, as Graham Greene says, which one hopes will ultimately relate to the outer world which we all share. ("A Place to Stand On" 3-4)

Perhaps the correlative nature of responses to place can be illustrated by Laurence's reaction to the Highlands of Scotland in comparison to her Scottish great-aunt's reaction to Clear Lake in Manitoba:

> She . . . spoke with such a thick Scots' burr that I was never able to understand a single word she uttered. But her reaction to Clear Lake was in some way translated even to me. It was the

> closest thing to Scotland, she said, that she had ever seen. Perhaps some kind of ironic historical wheel had now come full circle. The Highlands of Scotland struck a chord in me because they reminded me of Clear Lake in Manitoba. ("Road from the Isles" 171)

My own hometown, Killarney, Manitoba, is named such as the result of an Irish Land Guide who was reminded of the lakes of his homeland. Laurence's fictional character Morag in The Diviners experiences the connection between the Old World, her past worlds, and her present place through her trips to Scotland and back to Manawaka and, finally, her settlement in Ontario. These examples illustrate how places are connected and arouse responses in observers.

Physical setting, according to Laurence, is only one aspect of place; people comprise the most important aspect of place. Although she admits that Neepawa is a physical model for Manawaka, she contends, in all personal interviews, that her characters are strictly fictional. But here too, her characters are universally identifiable, and the reader responds to them with the recognition of people from his or her own experience. These characters are real people. What small town does not have a "character" like Christie, the garbageman in The Diviners, who appears somewhat eccentric and is teased by the children? My own childhood memories recall an elderly

gentleman who walked around town periodically and spontaneously shouting, "Ninety-nine!" Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos acknowledges this universality: "It is this constant sense of feeling with her characters, yet moving outside them to the universal human condition, that gives all of Laurence's works their archetypal depth, their numinosity" (44). Women in particular respond to Laurence's female protagonists as speaking to them about prevalent women's issues. It is the female protagonists of her Manawaka fiction with whom the rest of this exploration of place will be concerned. These protagonists include the following: Hagar Shipley, The Stone Angel; Rachel Cameron, A Jest of God; Stacey Cameron, The Fire-Dwellers; Vanessa MacLeod, A Bird in the House; and Morag Gunn, The Diviners.

The physical setting and the people together combine to make this universally local place, which holds such fascination for critics and readers alike. Not only do they recognize the reflection of real life in fictional life, but the critics and readers respond to the identifiable traps represented in this created place. B. A. Legendre notes that "because of her thematic emphasis on openness, freedom and growth, Laurence implies that small towns are sterile, claustrophobic, and destructive" (67). How has this place--both setting and people--become a place of entrapment for the characters, particularly the female characters in Laurence's Manawaka fiction? More

specifically, what traps for the female protagonists have been the result of the patriarchy and its influence on language, and how have these two created a third--alienation--which makes Laurence's characters feel displaced?

Although Margaret Laurence does not identify herself closely with the Women's Liberation Movement, she writes about women's issues by illustrating them in her novels. Because of this articulation of the female experience, many feminists and feminist critics have embraced her. In an interview on "Open House," a CBC radio program, Jamie S. Scott, a religious instructor, states:

> For many Canadians, especially Canadian women, reading Margaret Laurence's novels gives them a sense of themselves--of where they came from, their past, and where they are going, too, insofar as Margaret speaks for many women today who are discovering themselves over against generations of patriarchy. (37)

It is not only for Canadian women that Laurence's fiction signifies women's issues and dealing with the patriarchy. Her experience in Africa and observations of the situation of the women in that society add to her feeling of connectedness with women everywhere, and as Demetrakopoulos states, "Typically feminine, she internalizes the plight of these people" (43). The study of her works by feminist

critics in other nations is indicative of her speaking for and to many women.

How is patriarchy as a trap for women illustrated in her Manawaka fiction, and how is this illustration viewed by the critics? It is useful to address Laurence's presentation of the patriarchy and its traps for her female protagonists by examining the patriarchy's control over society's institutions of religion, education, and marriage and/or other female roles in society in her Manawaka fiction.

Before such an analysis is attempted, it is useful to define the terms patriarchy and patriarch, which will be used in this discussion. According to Gerda Lerner in The Creation of Patriarchy, female subordination has been propagated by traditionalists throughout history on the basis of biology--the female ability to give birth. This concept has been reinforced through time by religion, science (Darwinism), and psychology (Freud). Feminists have argued that:

> the limited number of proven biological differences among the sexes has been vastly exaggerated by cultural interpretations and that the value put on sex differences is in itself a cultural product. Sexual attributes are a biological given, but gender is a product of historical process. The fact that women bear

> children is due to sex; that women nurture children is due to gender, a cultural construct. It is gender which has been chiefly responsible for fixing women's place in society. (21)

Lerner also explains how Marxist-economic and maternalist theories trace how history has created the dominance of the patriarchy. In short, Lerner observes that the term patriarchy, as used by feminists, has evolved through history from a narrow meaning, referring "to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members" (238-39), to a wider definition:

> the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does <u>not</u> imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources. (239)

Even though women have gained civil rights from the nineteenth century to the present, male dominance continues, even though modified or changed. Lerner's wider definition of patriarchy is then relevant to the analysis of Laurence's Manawaka fiction.

Also relevant to this fiction is a definition of patriarch, which in this analysis will refer to a dominant male who imperiously imposes his will on the females within his household. Laurence's protagonists are trapped and become victims of both patriarchy and/or a patriarch.

It is little wonder that the protagonists are trapped by the patriarchy and a patriarch as their worlds are each dominated by the presence of a strong patriarchal figure. Hagar's father, in The Stone Angel, clearly molds her and influences all her relationships with men and women throughout her life. Vanessa, from Laurence's most autobiographical work A Bird in the House, lives in an atmosphere dominated by her maternal grandfather. Having lost both parents, Morag in The Diviners is raised in a foster home in which the substitute father Christie is the more influential parent, and she marries a domineering patriarch in Brooke. Rachel and Stacey Cameron, although fatherless during the time of the novels (A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers), are influenced by their mother May, a woman very much shaped by a patriarchal society. Helen Buss in her extensive study Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence indicates that the absence of mothers as strong female role models has a profound influence on the protagonists. The traps of these protagonists are the result of the interaction of the control by the previously noted

patriarchs in their lives and the societal institutions of the patriarchy.

The first societal institution to be considered is religion. The Scots Presbyterian background of all the female protagonists, as well as of Laurence herself, is founded on patriarchal principles. This Scots Presbyterianism is also founded on Calvinism, as Clara Thomas describes:

> Calvinism, as understood by many practitioners, shifted the balance of the Christian gospel from a message of hope, love and redemption, to one of guilt, death and damnation, backwards from the Christ of the New Testament to the Old Testament God of wrath and retribution. It was also particularly compatible with the entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism. ("Pilgrim's Progress: Margaret Laurence and Hagar Shipley" 65)

The Calvinist view of God as a fearful, punishing father reinforces the patriarchy. All the protagonists seem to be at odds with traditional religion and churches, although they do find spirituality elsewhere.

Hagar's (Angel) role model is a domineering proud father, Jason Currie, whose values in religion are materialistic as represented by his donations to the church, the large monument erected for his dead wife, and his concern for proper appearances. As a result, Buss contends:

> Both [Hagar and Jason] accept an external material world as the only reality. It is a world-view that works for Jason Currie, shopkeeper, church stalwart and good citizen, but in the world of the personal, the realm of relationship and emotion to which Hagar is destined by reason of her sex, the values of her father can mean only a profound psychic incompleteness, a split between the spirit and flesh. (Mother/Daughter 13)

According to Buss, "Hagar Currie grows up and grows old schooled in a patriarchal religious tradition . . . to which her unconscious need for maternal values makes her hostile" (23-24). She directs her hostility toward the Reverend Troy, "but the reader is aware from the beginning that Hagar blames her God, exactly in the way she has been taught that ethics and morality consist primarily of finding appropriate places to lay blame," and "she absorbs her father's need to project all guilt onto some external cause and his desire for proper appearances . . ." (24). Hagar connects God with her father and sees Him as "a punishing, unmerciful father-figure" (24). As a corollary to this perception of religion, Hagar also has internalized that "[t]o keep oneself pure, away from darkness, without blame, demands constant vigilance on the part of the Christian, resulting in an accompanying fear that leads

easily to the self-protective sin of pride" (26). Pride and concern for appearances inherited from her patriarchal religious upbringing become traps for Hagar which affect her personal relationships throughout life.

Both Stacey (Fire) and Rachel (Jest) Cameron grow up in a household not headed by a patriarch, but by a woman much shaped by patriarchal tradition. Their mother's church is of the same heritage as Hagar's. May Cameron, like Hagar and Jason Shipley, is concerned with keeping up appearances, and in her church, silence and rigidity are the norm. One does not succumb to overt emotional expressions of spirituality. As Buss suggests, "The character of the church she attends is a reflection of her attitude toward the inner life--spiritual and emotional" (34). Buss then refers to Rachel's reflections of this church, her perceptions influenced by her mother's attitudes. The church "is beautifully furnished. Nothing ornate--heaven forbid. The congregation has good taste," and even the stained glass window has a "clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience . . ." (A Jest of God 41). Although Rachel thinks that her mother considers herself a believer, May would be shocked if the minister broke out in an emotional expression of faith. May's inner life then is a reflection of her church life--respectable and without fervor.

Rachel rejects this traditional religion, and although uncomfortable with the idea of the Pentecostal speaking in tongues, her attendance at the Tabernacle with her friend is symbolic of rejecting the trap and the trappings of mainstream patriarchal religion. Even so, Rachel is influenced by it. Buss refers to George Bowering's analysis "that the Manawaka setting, with its Scottish Christian background, is a major influence in Rachel's life because 'the town teaches not only repression but also the desire to put on a good appearance'" (32).

Out of direct contact with May, Stacey rejects the patriarchal traditional church even more. Even though her father-in-law Matt is a United Church minister, the family does not attend church regularly, and she is often chastised by Matt for not making her teenage daughter, Katie, attend. Even though Stacey appears not to have faith, she has an overt dialogue with God and recognizes that the female principle is missing in the traditional view of God. She hopes that if God comes to earth again, it is in the form of a woman with seven children.

Vanessa Macleod, narrator of the short stories in A Bird in the House, is also raised in the patriarchal tradition of the church. Vanessa describes her church and religious experiences as being "made to go to Sunday School" where there were "pictures of Jesus wearing a white sheet and surrounded by a whole lot of well-dressed kids

whose mothers obviously had not suffered them to come unto Him until every face and ear was properly scrubbed" (95). Like Rachel's view of the church, Vanessa sees the clean, presentable picture of the church that puts on a good front. She also says their family says grace at meals, "running the words together as though they were one long word" (95). She contrasts her family's religious observances to those of the hired girl, Noreen, and her mother's reaction to the differences illustrates again the staid, unemotional, silent style of religion in the traditional patriarchal churches:

> My mother approved of the rituals [those of the MacLeod family] which seemed decent and moderate to her. Noreen's religion, however, was a different matter. Noreen belonged to the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, and she had got up to testify no less than seven times in the past two years, she told us. My mother, who could not imagine anyone's making a public spectacle of themselves, was profoundly shocked by this revelation. (95)

When Vanessa's father dies, she "loses the one positive male character that tied her to patriarchal values" (Buss 60), and she "has lost her faith in the traditional patriarchal religion of her father's world" (Buss 59-60), and declares that "there is no Heaven" ("A Bird in the

House" 105). Vanessa thinks that she has discovered the meaning of the line from a hymn, "Rest beyond the river": "I knew now what that meant. It meant Nothing. It meant only silence, forever" (105).

Religion for Morag is represented by Prin's attendance at church and Christie's rantings that "By their garbage shall ye know them" (The Diviners 32). Morag is looked down upon by other church people like Mrs. Cameron, and she is embarrassed by Prin's appearance in a church where appearances are everything. But Morag is perhaps luckier than the other protagonists in her connection to Christie, although she does not recognize it at the time. Buss declares:

> Morag, after the primary fall occasioned by the death of her parents, experiences what it is like to live in the least favored level of patriarchy. The Nuisance Grounds is an appropriate symbolic setting because, like Christie reading the garbage, Morag must sort through the end products of the patriarchal experience to begin the creative rediscovery of her own mythology. (68)

Christie's version of patriarchal religion will lead Morag to searching for a divinity within herself. "Much like John the Baptist, that rough and bedraggled prophet who lived on the fringe of society, calling for repentance, Christie, in his crude way, acts like a Biblical prophet

for us, pointing to our inner evil and challenging us to repent" (Penhale 13).

The religion of the protagonists is one of silence, particularly for women. The patriarchal influence on the church has kept women from finding their voices, and thus, religion becomes a trap for Laurence's protagonists:

> [T]he image of God which their church gave Laurence's protagonists is distinctly masculine. Russel observes that "We call these strong male figures images of God, but it would be more accurate to speak of God as the projection of these men and their values. The life-denying church is the institutionalization of the fearful father." (Buss 51)

Like religion, education has been controlled by the patriarchy. Laurence herself is well aware of this control. Her own aunt, who had received the highest grades in Manitoba, was not allowed to attend university because her father, Laurence's Grandfather Simpson, thought an education for a female was unnecessary (Laurence, Dance on the Earth 27,46). Laurence herself made her first submission to the college newspaper under the pseudonym Steven Lancaster (96), probably hoping to be taken seriously if thought a male student. The only education a woman needs in the patriarchy is that which prepares her to be a good wife, hostess, and mother--above all, subservient

to a man. Without an education, the female protagonists are trapped in situations out of which it would be difficult to escape. Diane Brydon declares:

> All of Laurence's women wish to escape their small town and their dependence on husbands, fathers or grandfathers, yet they have limited financial freedom because as women their options are even more curtailed than their men's. The need to escape and the need to re-affiliate are equally strong. (186-87)

It seems that Laurence presents fictionally what Virginia Woolf advocates in her exposition A Room of One's Own--that women need space of their own and financial independence to create or fulfill their own ambitions and be independent persons (84).

Because Hagar (Angel) appears to have more potential than her brothers, Jason sends her to study in Toronto for two years. But what kind of an education does she receive? She returns with the appearance and the manners of a "lady" so that she is equipped to be the hostess and housekeeper of the Currie household. Rooke explains:

> Jason had little use for women, and little reverence for those feminine virtues which inspired men like John Ruskin or Coventry Patmore to such absurd heights of idolatry; but he shared their more significant belief in male

> superiority, and he accepted their notions of what behaviour and education were appropriate for a lady. . . . Hagar is courageous, proud, brainy--everything her father admires; and she is also female, so that these virtues are perceived as useless. ("Feminist Reading" 28)

Hagar, therefore, does not receive the kind of education that would prepare her to make an independent living, and it is when she suggests that she might teach that Jason wields his patriarchal power, making Hagar feel even more trapped and eventually causing the total break with her father. Rooke elucidates:

> Hagar's education has been as close as possible to that of a Victorian young lady: "I know 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." . . . Very little of what Hagar learns in Toronto would have served her as a teacher, still less in the life she chooses after three years as Jason's hostess [i.e. life with Bram]. . . .[A]n education which aims at making a woman decorative will keep her dependent upon men. Later Hagar will envy young women like the nurse who have been equipped for autonomous survival. (Rooke 32)

Because of her lack of a useful education, Hagar's escapes lead her to similar traps in roles subservient to a man. She flees her father's household to become a hardworking wife and mother with Bram, and her escape from that situation leads her to the role of housekeeper, albeit paid, for Mr. Oatley in Vancouver. Brydon observes:

> The sole employment she can find is as a housekeeper, for a man [Oatley] whose work reminds her of her female status as an object to be traded by men. She is fascinated and horrified by his stories of the Chinese brides smuggled into the country in the holds of his ships. (192)

Rachel Cameron (Jest) has some education and a paying job, but she does not have a degree. In contrast, her male counterpart, Nick, has both a degree and a high school teaching job in Winnipeg. She too is trapped in the nurturing role of caring for her mother, so she has never really been able to pursue her education further. Within her job as a teacher, she is also subservient to a patriarch in Willard, the Principal. He, like Jason, provides a punishing father figure. Rachel feels that he actually enjoys physically punishing wayward students, and like a mother of paternally abused children, she is torn between protecting them and reporting them. "Willard will never know that he yearns to punish. And I will hardly ever

be certa ' whether I am imagining it or not. Only sometimes, when I've betrayed one of them. Then I will be afraid. As I am now" (A Jest of God 159). Her interaction with him is subservient. Because she is taller than he, he always manages to speak with her while one of them is seated so that there is no comparison (7). She feels discomfort in his presence: "It's that pompous manner of his, I think, the way he has of seeming to insist that his slightest word has significant meaning, and if you aren't able to see it, the lack is yours" (6). Rachel's experience then with education has been to feel the patriarchal control of it.

Rachel's sister Stacey (Fire) escapes the small stifling town by going to Vancouver. Without much education (Grade 11 and a business course taken in Winnipeg), she becomes trapped in a subservient role in a business office, and she soon exchanges it for another such role as a wife and mother. Her experiences with education then take the form of night classes to improve herself, but to which she cannot relate because she interprets what she reads from her female experience and encounters the wall of the patriarchal control of education. Helen Buss explains:

> At a university night class she quarrels briefly with the professor's patriarchal interpretation of the Agamemnon-Clytemnestra story. . . . Stacy's angry defense of outraged motherhood is

> quickly dropped, not only because she lacks the personal confidence or knowledge to press her view in such an open forum, but also because she has never articulated the feminine values that lie behind her automatic defense of Clytemnestra's conduct. Stacey does not know that she is trying to defend the sanctity of the mother-daughter relationship. (Mother/Daughter 31-32)

Education in this light has not presented any possibility of fulfillment for Stacey either.

Vanessa's (Bird) mother and aunt, like Laurence's own, are denied an education. Vanessa is not denied that same right because her mother confronts the grandfather for the first time when she approaches him for the finances for Vanessa's university education. As most of the stories take place in her childhood, the reader does not see the results of this education, unless one were to make a literary leap to Laurence's own life in which she eventually gives up a marriage to fulfill her need to write. The reason for this leap is that A Bird in the House is considered Laurence's most autobiographical work of fiction.

Morag (Diviners) discovers early that education can be a benefit:

> [S]tatus is attached to the proper wielding of words. . . . Those who master the prevailing linguistic usage are rewarded at school and and [sic] placed in a special category; an "educated" elite is thereby granted status. Even in Manawaka Morag can acquire as a novelist the recognition she had been refused as a poor girl of the people. (Fabre 66)

Morag can see that "education is a means of escaping stifling circumstances" (Greene 152). From Christie she gets an untraditional education, but one of value. According to Greene, Christie "teaches her qualities unbecoming to a lady--a disrespect of respectability . . . a skepticism concerning the value of any authority," not to "make herself 'doormat,'" and "the power of creative imagination" through which he gives her powerful female heroes in his stories as role models for her (150). This education would have provided her with the power that a traditional one does not, but Morag rejects Christie and his unorthodox education for a more "normal" and "respectable" educational role model in the form of her husband. Due to the thriftiness of Christie, Morag has the financial means to pursue an education, but before she completes it, she finds herself in a stifling marriage to Brooke Skelton whose patriarchal expectations of her are as a "good" wife and hostess, denying her even the fulfillment

of her desire to have a child. Brooke represents traditional patriarchal education.

> As her English professor, Brooke represents the literary tradition Morag reveres, but as she herself becomes a writer, her authority comes into conflict with his. Though this destroys their marriage, her writing becomes the means of regaining the self she has suppressed to be with Brooke. . . . (157)

Morag's encounter with traditional education and its role models, like the other protagonists' experiences, is also a negative one.

Laurence's fiction illustrates the control the patriarchy has over the institutions of religion and education, which has also helped to define female roles, but the patriarchy defines female roles in other ways which also become traps for Laurence's protagonists. Brydon discusses the mirror image in the fiction with respect to the heroines' roles:

> [A]s in the paradigmatic fairy-tale "Snow White" and the Victorian poem "The Lady of Shalott," each of these women has her own special relationship with the mirror, which underlines visually the dichotomy between role and real definitions of self, between what one sees and what one feels, between what one wants others to see and what one wants to see oneself. (187)

Often the reflection that the women see is the one that the patriarchy wants them to see--an extension of the male, who puffs his ego. Virginia Woolf uses this image of the mirror in A Room of One's Own: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man as twice its natural size" (35).

Brydon notes that Hagar (Angel) gets her identity from being Jason's "daughter, his property" (191), and as Rooke says, she chooses "to mirror her father's pride" (27). She loses her father's status when she marries Bram, but she thinks "she can confer her father's status on him, forgetting that a woman's status, in the society Laurence depicts, depends on her husband's" (Brydon 191). Hagar then becomes trapped in the roles of wife and mother to which she is ill suited.

> [S]he carried her chains within her, internalizing her society's judgements about what was and was not proper, but even if she could have escaped such indoctrination, there was little she might have done beyond being a better wife and mother, and hers was not a nature suited to such roles. (192)

Rooke proposes that another role expected by Jason Currie is that of "the Victorian image of woman as 'The Angel in the House'" ("Feminist Reading" 28). Hagar's mother had

been such a "ministering angel," but Hagar sees that this role probably drove her mother "to an early grave" (28), losing her life in childbirth. Rather than feeling compassion for her mother, Hagar mirrors her father's "contempt for the biological slavery of women," and Hagar intends to avoid the "straitjacket" of life that "requires of women that they live to please others" (29).

Hagar, rejecting the idea of the "ministering angel," does fall victim to the image of the angel as a lady. Rooke argues that Hagar is "lured" by the doctrine of John Ruskin, who

> sugar-coats the pill of servitude to men by describing woman as queen of her own household. Ruskin appeals covertly to a sense of class in his audience, an eminence which women achieve through the standing of their fathers and husbands. In this way women are to be compensated for the inferior position they hold in relation to men . . . . Jason <u>wants</u> the angel of his house to be proud, requires her social arrogance as an extension of his own--although he naturally expects obedience within doors. (31)

Hagar becomes trapped in this role and her own pride. When she escapes to become Bram's wife, she is still trapped as the angel in this house. Bram has been attracted to Hagar's "lady-like ways," and "like the Victorian male, he

aim[s] at procuring an angel for his house--some gentle compensation for the roughness which the male endures in his role as provider" (33). As such a refined lady, Hagar is trapped within her own sexuality. Bram's sexuality had attracted her, but she must deny her own because of the "chastity of the Victorian angel. The root cause of Hagar's dilemma is religion, by way of Jason--for her father's dour Presbyterianism holds that sexuality is evil" (33). She substitutes the traps of marriage for the role of a servant in a refined house, a house fitting for a Currie (35).

The father figure is absent from the lives of the Cameron sisters (Jest and Fire), but their mother, May, shapes herself to the patriarchy, so the sisters are influenced indirectly. Buss affirms May's molding: "If a woman's chief way of defining herself is through the relationship with a man, as in the case of May Cameron, then it is inevitable that her desire to be loved by him will lead her to shape her personality to suit him" (36). Therefore, Buss claims that May shapes herself to be "a well made-up corpse" because her husband Niall, the funeral director, "seemed to prefer the dead to the living" (37). As a result, "A lifetime of living up to an image of woman that is essentially male-defined has left May Cameron with no life of her own to give as an example of womanhood to her daughters" (38). As an "Angel in the House" and a

product of Calvinist religion, May is concerned with keeping up proper appearances, and therefore:

> The moral message of such a woman to her daughters is that her approval of them is contingent on their keeping quiet about real feeling and thought as her church does and that they form proper relationships with approved males. In a sense Stacey has won that approval but labors under the necessary hypocrisy of such a situation. Both daughters crave a validation from their mother that is unrelated to their male contacts. (Buss, Mother/Daughter 35)

The traps into which the sisters fall are the "ministering angel" role of Rachel for her mother and the stifling mother/wife role of Stacey in which she attempts to live through her children. Both women are in the trap of either dealing with or denying their sexuality.

Helen Buss refers to Signe Hammer's argument that daughters often get a "'double message' from the mother, one in which the daughter is encouraged to obey the patriarchal definition of her womanhood and another message which pushes the girl toward defining her identity in more achievement-oriented ways . . . " (55-6). According to Buss, this is the situation for Vanessa (Bird). Her mother, Beth, and her more rebellious aunt, Edna, encourage her to pursue an education while still being obedient to

the resident patriarch, Grandfather Connor. Buss contends that "[w]hile Beth and Edna represent two potentially positive but imprisoned versions of womanhood, the two grandmother figures can be seen as the two traditional modes by which women adapt and hide their true selves to meet the demands of the patriarchy" (57). While Grandmother Connor represents the ministering angel, Grandmother MacLeod represents the materialistic, lady-like angel concerned with appearances. Vanessa hates her grandfather, but she eventually is reconciled with her past memories of this patriarch.

As a child, Morag (Diviners) observes women in traditional roles; her "experience of woman's real place in the patriarchal world is largely that of victim as illustrated by such characters as Eva Winkler and Piquette Tonnerre" (Buss 69). Eva has been abused as a child, gets pregnant and aborts herself, and settles for a loveless marriage because she is made to believe by society that no one else would want her. Piquette, already a victim of white society as a Métis, is deserted by her husband and returning to her father's home is burned to death with her children in a fire. Morag herself is a victim in her marriage to Brooke in which he calls her "child" and asks her if she's been a "good girl" before he will bestow sexual favors upon her. In this relationship, she is both angels--virginal and catering to his every need. Because

Morag's early patriarchal example in Christie is less "proud" and because he has given her good examples of women in his tales, she is able to begin a discovery of her own place more easily that the other protagonists.

Because of the overpowering influence of the patriarchy on society and, therefore, the entrapment of women in certain roles, women have lost their voices, and the inability to communicate becomes another trap for them. This trap of silence is very much evident in Laurence's novels, which, Brydon claims, "seek to attune their readers to woman's hesitant attempts at speech in a male-dominated medium within a male-dominated world" (188). All the protagonists struggle to articulate their experience and an authentic self; their inability to communicate affects all their relationships. In her essay "An Open Letter to the Mother of Joe Bass," Laurence emphasizes the importance of communication:

> I have had, if any faith at all, a faith in the word. <u>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God</u>. The kind of belief that many writers have--the belief that if we are to make ourselves known to one another, if we are really to know the reality of one another, we must communicate with what is almost the only means we have--human speech. There are other means of communication, I know,

> but they are limited because they are so personal and individual. We can make love; we can hold and comfort our children. Otherwise, we are stuck with words. We have to try to talk to one another, because this imperfect means is the only one we have. (225-26)

How does Laurence, through her "words" of fiction, illustrate her protagonists' struggle with communication?

Unlike Laurence's other heroines, Hagar (Angel) is outspoken: "Refusing the self-censorship that is the traditional role assigned to women, she speaks without thinking, just like a man," modeling herself after her father (Brydon 191). Modeling the pride of her father and rejecting anything feminine, which she sees as weakness, Hagar's speech is aggressive and abrasive, but it does not express anything that is inside her. As a result, she is unable to tell or communicate to her husband Bram that she responds to him sexually at a crucial moment in their relationship, a moment which could have made a difference in their marriage. She also cannot tell her brother Matt that he should have been the one to go away to school, and she cannot tell her son Marvin and his wife Doris that she appreciates all the care that they have given her. Although Hagar is outspoken, she is still bound by the pride of appearances that will not show emotion. She is trapped in her inability to communicate: "The tragedy is

that she has never said what she felt or needed, only what she knew her father or her community would have expected her to say. The entire novel ruminates over what she comes to see as 'the uncommunicable years'" (Brydon 191). Her artificial language, produced by a "proper" education for a lady, impedes her ability to communicate any real feeling in her relationships.

Having been raised by a mother who, like Hagar, is concerned with proper appearances, Rachel (Jest) is trapped within her language and can only iterate "nice" words, not what she may really be thinking and feeling. Barbara Powell examines Rachel's problem by contrasting Rachel's two voices--"one, strong true inner voice struggling to be heard over the censoring, censuring voice of Rachel that maintains proper appearances" (22). Drawing upon linguistic studies, Powell asserts:

> This pleasant voice, learned by Rachel at her mother's knee and reinforced by the ladies of Manawaka, features repression and rationalization. It is deferential, and is marked by the use of linguistic patterns that question, minimize, judge, and negate. Its function is to maintain, with self-effacing politeness, Rachel's relationships of her assumed powerlessness. This deferential politeness has been termed "negative politeness" in studies of

> functional linguistics, and is a linguistic strategy that maintains distance through the speaker's respect for and unwillingness to impose upon a hearer. This voice criticizes the voice of Rachel's other, more dramatic, reality. (23)

Powell cites examples from the novel that illustrate the linguist Robin Lakoff's markers of women's speech such as "tag questions," "hedges," "superpolite forms," and "endearments" (29). Rachel's situation can be summarized from a statement in Lakoff's Language and Woman's Place:

> [T]he overall effect of "women's language"--meaning both language restricted in use to women and language descriptive of women alone--is this: it submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it. . . . (7)

Rachel is trapped in the polite speech of Manawaka; her own voice is "distanced" from others and she cannot communicate with them.

Laurence's concern for communication is especially made evident in Stacey's obsessive worry throughout The Fire-Dwellers over her small daughter's lack of speech. Stacey's "small talk serves the same function as Rachel's awkward silences: both deny speech to their thoughts, to

what their town has taught them must not be spoken" (Brydon 190). Buss agrees that although Stacey is more apt to say what isn't "nice" to say than Rachel is, she is ever conscious of the training by her mother and is aware when she has overstepped the boundaries of "niceness" (34). She also notes that "Stacey struggles to understand her place as mother and to articulate its positive aspects. Indeed, the need to articulate has been her concern since she first became a mother" (47). Buss cites the example of Stacey's wonder at the birth of her daughter and her comment "You have to keep quiet about all that" (The Fire-Dwellers 14). Stacey is representative of women's need to articulate and thus affirm their experience, something not acceptable in a patriarchal society. The sisters' situation is summarized by Buss. Rachel and Stacey "are raised in a world where patriarchal values are losing their former power but where what D. H. Lawrence calls 'the struggle for verbal consciousness' on the part of woman remains an extremely difficult task" (31).

Vanessa (Bird), growing up in a rigid patriarchy under the rule of Grandfather Connor, is also in a trap of silence.

> When Grandfather Connor speaks, everyone is forced to listen. He has the privilege of free speech. The women can only speak covertly. Vanessa writes: "I felt, as so often in the Brick

> House, that my lungs were in danger of exploding, that the pressure of silence would become too great to be borne. . . . But I did not say anything. I was not that stupid." . . . Silence is a survival technique mastered young. She listens to the adults and writes her stories, finding her freedom in the silent and private world of writing. Her family training in reticence makes it hard for her, as for all of Laurence's characters, to communicate her feelings. (Brydon 193)

Vanessa, receiving the "double message" mentioned earlier, learns that woman's place in the patriarchy is one of silence, but as a writer, like Morag and Laurence, she is able to write her experience and is better able than the other protagonists to reconcile herself later in life with her past and the hatred she has felt for her grandfather, the resident patriarch. As an adult, she will be better able to escape the traps of the patriarchy and let go of the ones that hold her in her youth. At the end of the book, she describes a return to the Brick House as an adult. Her release from the traps there is symbolized in her writing. "But it was their house now, whoever they were, not ours, not mine. I looked at it only for a moment, and then I drove away" (191).

Morag's main experience with the suppression of speaking her feelings due to patriarchal prohibitions is in her marriage to Brooke Skelton. After reading her first attempt at a novel, Brooke criticizes it:

> Brooke believes the novel "suffers from having a protagonist who is non-verbal, that is, she talks a lot, but she can't communicate very well." Morag responds that this "was part of the problem." . . . The professional male reader, Brooke, is blind to the woman's point of view, to her <u>way</u> of saying. (Brydon 188)

His response to her novel is characteristic of their marriage, in which Morag is unable to express her feelings. In her youth, Morag's only female role model is Prin, and "she is a figure for silence, for women written by the discourse of patriarchal narratives" (Hjartarson 51).

As a writer, Morag is fascinated with words. Michel Fabre discusses her fascination with "lost" languages--the Ossian of ancient Gaelic and Jules Tonnerre's loss of both the French and Cree languages, the influence of which are still evident in his English. According to Fabre, "language creates kinship and a sense of belonging, tradition and identity" (68). Women's language can be considered one of the lost languages, or rather one that has never been found, and as a result, women like Laurence's protagonists have a difficult time in finding

their place. The struggle with communication and its entrapment for the heroines in the Manawaka fiction is described by Brydon:

> Each of Laurence's narrators is in search of her own voice, troubled by the ambiguous relations between language and silence, speech and thought, words and power. . . . Their stories reveal their entrapment in these assigned roles and their efforts to find a way out of them through a new way of using words. (185-86)

Manawaka provides another trap for its characters--the alienation of displaced people. In the Foreword to her collection of essays Heart of a Stranger, Laurence quotes a verse from the Bible: "Also, thou shalt not oppress a stranger:/for ye know the heart of a stranger,/seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). This passage has special meaning for Laurence: "I have spent a good many years of my adult life as a stranger in strange lands, in some cases as a resident, and in others as a traveller" (vii). As a stranger in other countries, particularly the African ones, Laurence saw and experienced alienation. From this experience, she understands the concept of "tribalism":

> [Tribalism] is an inheritance of us all. Tribalism is not such a bad thing, if seen as the bond which an individual feels with his roots,

> his ancestors, his background. It may or may not be stultifying in a personal sense, but that is a problem each of us has to solve or not solve. Where tribalism becomes, to my mind, frighteningly dangerous is where the tribe . . . is seen as the "people", the human beings, and the others, the un-tribe, are seen as sub-human. This is not Africa's problem alone; it is everyone's. ("Ten Years' Sentence" 31)

Laurence's concern for the "un-tribe" is evident in all her Manawaka fiction, where those of the Scots-Presbyterian background are "the people," and the members of the un-tribe include the Ukranians (Nick Kazlik), the lower class from "the wrong side of the tracks" (Lottie Dresser, Eva Winkler, and Morag), the lowest economic class of the patriarchy (Christie and Bram), even the aged (Hagar), and the Métis (the Tonnerre family). Although Laurence speaks for many outcasts, it is with her protagonists that the concentration is here, and they too, no matter what their background or status, are a part of the "un-tribe" as women.

> Tribalism is a reality in Manawaka. There are many "un-tribes" in that hierarchical community: the poor, the Métis, the Natives. There is also another "un-tribe," however, whose existence even as an "un-tribe" is denied: women, Simone de Beauvoir's 'other.' (Fulton 106)

The patriarchy and its institutions have made women outcasts. Their world of silence in particular makes them lonely and isolated. Even after these protagonists have escaped their patriarchal traps, they remain isolated and alienated, because they have no other society but the existing one. In a sense, they cannot ever completely escape these traps.

> [I]n the Laurence fictional world the woman again appears as a lonely island, forced through the inadequacies of her chosen mates into an isolated independence which is the price of developing her consciousness to the full and achieving individuation. (Bailey 319)

Sometimes the protagonists cause their own alienation. Hagar's (Angel) pride in her privileged status "alienates her from herself, from those she loves, and even from her ability to love" (Fulton 106). Rachel's (Jest) "isolation is self-induced; there have been hands stretched out to her, but through fear, snobbery, or insecurity, she has pushed them away . . ." (Thomas, Margaret Laurence 48). This alienation may appear to be self-induced, but the characteristics causing the alienation--pride, fear, snobbery, and insecurity--have been clearly the result of coping with the patriarchy.

Laurence uses birds as symbols of female entrapment in the Manawaka fiction. Calla's canary in A Jest of God

"never does learn to sing" (Brydon 190), just as the women are caged in their silence. The symbolism is particularly evident in Vanessa's stories (Bird) in which Grandfather Connor has a caged canary, about which Grandmother Connor says that it "wouldn't know what to do with itself outside" (14). Buss (Mother/Daughter) notes the examples of birds trapped in flight in Grandmother Mcleod's Chinese carpet and the haunting cry of the loons associated with the displaced Piquette, trapped in her minority status (62).

Manawaka then, with its hierarchical, patriarchal society, is a place of entrapment for Laurence's protagonists. Her depiction of the female place within this fictional society has inevitably associated her with the feminist movement. In an interview with Margaret Atwood in 1974, Laurence explains:

> Of course I was writing about the situation of women; I was dealing with a lot of the stuff Women's Lib is talking about now. But at the time I was doing it I didn't realize how widespread some of these feelings were. I used to be surprised when I got letters from women saying, 'Right on.' My generation of women came to a lot of the same conclusions, but they did it in isolation; you weren't supposed to say those things out loud, to question the assumption that the woman's only role was that of housewife. (44)

Herein lies one important area of reader-response to the Manawaka fiction, in the transaction between the text and the reader. Regardless of Laurence's intent, the commonality of women's issues exemplified within her fiction arouses a response from women and feminist (male and female) critics alike. Laurence shows rather than tells the female experience in the patriarchy to which female and feminist readers respond. Fulton explains this transaction:

> The imagination is a political faculty we cannot afford to ignore. Richness of imagination, the intelligent quality of empathy, is not the responsibility of the writer alone, however. The question here is not whether Laurence is a feminist writer, but whether we are feminist readers, able to recognize and understand the vision Laurence communicates and able to locate that vision within a historical tradition in which it makes sense. (118)

CHAPTER 3

ESCAPE AND QUEST: HOW THE PROTAGONISTS ESCAPE THE PATRIARCHAL DEFINITIONS OF THE FEMININE AND SEARCH FOR INDIVIDUATION AND VOICE

> The pattern of flight from Manawaka marks all the novels which begin in that little town, and A Bird in the House as well. All their heroines depart to seek themselves in the broader world, and so departure and willing exile are elements that help to shape the action and determine the themes of all these books. (Woodcock 31)

The female protagonists in Laurence's Manawaka fiction are in a place of entrapment, and they seek escape from the stifling town and its hierarchy and patriarchy. In their escape to freedom, where do they go, and what do they seek? What is their quest?

The heroines seek freedom from the actual physical place of Manawaka and from the social traps of its inhibiting atmosphere of class and religious snobbery as well as the traps for women in their patriarchal society. In the escape from this place and their pasts, they seek individuation by looking for their "selves" and their own "voices."

When the protagonists physically escape the small town, the ultimate destination for most of them is Vancouver, which is such a contrast to the prairies that it appears to be a Promised Land for the escapees. Woodcock confirms this thought:

> So all the heroines eventually depart, and the destination they share . . . is Vancouver. Here the lush and temperate coast with its cosmopolitan populations and its easy lifestyle is the most extreme contrast in Canada to the aridity, the climactic rigours, the closed society, and the social and ethnic prejudices of Manawaka and the prairie communities it represents. (49-50)

Hagar (Angel) at first escapes the patriarchal control of her father through marriage, but when life with Bram becomes stifling and her lower-class position has alienated her from the town, she leaves Manawaka for Vancouver, where she hopes to make a better life for herself and especially for her favorite son John. Ironically, in Vancouver, she again is in the position of servitude in the home of Mr. Oatley. Of the two Cameron sisters, Stacey (Fire) escapes Manawaka and the overpowering control of their mother early, by taking a train to Vancouver, seldom returning. She begins a life of her own in marrying Mac and having her own family, but she discovers that she has exchanged one

kind of trap for another. It is not until the culmination of A Jest of God, when Rachel takes responsibility for herself, that she too leaves for Vancouver with her mother to begin afresh. Vanessa (Bird) escapes Manawaka, like Morag and Laurence herself, by going away to school. It is her mother who, after the death of the domineering grandfather, escapes the town by selling the Brick House and moving to Vancouver. Nothing is explained about her life there, but her body is returned to Manawaka for burial. Morag (Diviners) first escapes Manawaka physically by attending university in Winnipeg and socially by marrying the respectable English professor, Brooke. Together they move to Toronto, but when her situation in a patriarchal marriage becomes unbearable, Morag too escapes to Vancouver to begin her own life as a writer and a mother.

Each protagonist not only seeks to escape her situation by moving, but also through a sexual liaison with a man. With reference to Jung's theories of mother and particularly the mother/daughter relationship, Buss suggests that "Laurence dramatizes not only the necessary male connection but also emphasizes the necessary psychological leap from maidenhood to womanhood that takes place only through the agency of the mother's acceptance of the daughter's growth . . ." (43). It will be illustrated later how, in the absence of acceptance by a biological mother, acceptance is achieved through surrogate mothers.

Hagar (Angel) is attracted to Bram's sexuality in addition to his attraction as someone of whom her father would not approve; therefore, Hagar escapes from her father through a sexual liaison. Unfortunately, because of her pride inherited from her father, Hagar cannot give in to sexual pleasure with her husband and denies her own sexuality. "Because of this denial it is impossible for her to admit her sexual response. To show response would be to accept some part of the feminine" (Buss, Mother/Daughter 15), and this to Hagar would be an admission of weakness. By escaping one trap through sex with a man, Hagar sets herself in another trap of non-communication. When she escapes again to Vancouver, she admits to missing the sexual side of her relationship with Bram. Had she been able to respond openly to Bram, her marriage might have become the freedom she seeks.

Rachel (Jest) also seeks to escape the trap of her life with her mother and to become a woman through a sexual relationship with Nick Kazlik, who as a Ukrainian is on a lower level of the Manawaka strata. Again with reference to Jung, Buss states:

> Jung observes the importance of this myth [Demeter-Kore] in connection with women who have too strong an identification with the mother and notes the psychological-mythic connections that

> make it necessary for such maidens as Rachel to escape the mother's hold through sex with a man. (43)

On the other hand, her sister Stacey (Fire) leaves Manawaka early, and by getting married and thereby entering a sexual relationship, she enters womanhood earlier than Rachel does. Buss suggests, however, that because of May's influence, she cannot see "her sexuality as an expression of her self," and seeks to escape her mother's hold and to accept her sexuality through an "affair" with Luke (46). Luke, an academic "hippie"-type, is also out of the mainstream of social norms.

Since the reader sees Vanessa (Bird) mainly in her childhood, a sexual encounter does not enter her escape patterns, but it certainly enters her adult-writer counterpart in Morag. Morag (Diviners) also enters an extramarital relationship with Jules Tonnerre, who as a Métis is also an outcast from Manawaka. With this sexual liaison, Morag attempts to escape her stifling marriage with Brooke. After her break with Brooke, she attempts finding another connection through an affair with a married man, the artist Dan McRaith--another outsider. It is interesting to note that the heroines not only seek escape through sexual relations with men, but these relations are also with men who would be considered outcasts by the rigid norms of Manawaka society.

In their voluntary exile from Manawaka and their sexual escapes, the protagonists attempt to find their "inner selves." Many critics present this idea as the real quest of the heroines, evident in Buss's comment on Hagar:

> Hagar instinctively feels such a need to salvage a part of herself left undiscovered that she determines to "find some place to go, some hidden place." She is not just speaking of running away from the perceived indignity of being put in an old folk's home; she is also seeking unconsciously the hidden place inside herself that will allow her finally to "get used to" some things that have happened to her but which she has never truly felt. (17)

In her discussion of the Manawaka women, Nancy Bailey relies heavily on Jung's concept of the self. The outer self or "persona" is the one that the world sees, and indeed, concern for appearances is uppermost in most of the heroines' minds. But, Bailey asserts:

> Jung stressed that while one can achieve individuality through the persona alone, nevertheless, because this mask-like personality centres on the ego and the conscious part of the self, its area is perforce extremely limited, cut off as it is from the richer and more creative area of the self that is the unconscious. . . .

> The unconscious areas of the self have to be recognized and opened up before the goal which Jung termed "individuation" can be achieved. Individuation he regarded as an event spread over the whole of life. (309)

The quest of the protagonists, therefore, is to find this "inner self"--the "hidden place"--or in Jungian terms, to release the unconscious, and they continue their search throughout the life of the novels to achieve individuation, about which Bailey states:

> Individuation is a goal because it involves the integration of inner and outer worlds. It is a blending of complementary elements which allows the realization of the whole self, whose conscious sphere will be enriched and enhanced by its access to the unconscious. (310)

About Rachel (Jest), Legendre contends:

> Rachel's quest in the novel is to find herself and her proper relationship with herself, other human beings, and with God. She is not merely a neurotic woman; she, like Jonah, is a person struggling with an important concept: the problem of free will and determinism. (66)

Morag deliberately conceals her inner self when she marries Brooke. Not only does she not tell him of her past and her inner thoughts and dreams, but she never lets him have

access to her unconscious, to which she refers as the "Black Celt" in her. Bailey elaborates: "Morag's denial of her inner self . . . is a conscious choice. She vows to conceal everything about herself which he might not like (D, 159), although she knows that she is being untrue to herself in never letting Brooke see the 'Black Celt' in her (D, 186)" (311). In a footnote, Bailey explains: "Progroff [Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning] points out that 'the typical Celtic tale portrays the struggle of the psyche for individuation' . . . " (311). Bailey concludes that "To be Brooke's anima, Morag must live totally in the present and deny completely the Black Celt in her that is associated strongly with sensation and intuition and with the past" (311-12). The division between Morag's persona and her inner self grows until she returns to Manawaka for Prin's funeral. Here it becomes clear to her that "she hates it all, this external self who is at such variance with whatever or whoever remains inside the glossy painted shell. If anything remains. Her remains" (Diviners 203). Finding life like this unbearable, she breaks from Brooke to find who she is, to become whole--to achieve individuation. Buss contends that all the women in The Diviners "offer an epic view of all the ways in which women are imprisoned and imprison themselves and the ways in which they are struggling for that very 'inner freedom' that was so important to Laurence" ("Autobiographical Impulse" 165).

Because of the domination of the patriarchy, the female protagonists have been silenced and are not able to speak their experience; therefore, a part of their quest for self will be a search for their voices. Hagar (Angel) is an example of a conflict between an inner and an outer voice. Her formal education has given her the ability to articulate with an "artificial" correctness that alienates her from the colloquial voice of her own generation, spoken by Bram (New 85). This conflict is symbolic of her struggle throughout her life to speak with her inner voice, and therefore, truly communicate with her husband, her sons, and, before their deaths, her brothers. She has trouble in "voicing her deepest self, or in translating, as it were, her wishes and needs rather than her biases and defences into effective speech" (New 88).

Rachel (Jest) also struggles with her inner voices. One is the judgmental voice that criticizes, even in her own mind, the world and herself. Her other inner voice is stronger and more poetic, and it "tries to maintain physical and emotional control through the use of the performative commands. Her strong voice can also joke, as this side of her sees the visual humor and pathos in her physical aspect" (Powell 31). Rachel's inner self has two voices which "can't agree on what to say to the outside world" (22).

Stacey (Fire) has smothered her "self" in the role of wife and mother, living for and through her children. Buss explains the loss of her unconscious self in Jungian terms:

> Jung explains that such a woman [one "whose goal in life is childbirth"] tends to live through her children, to treat her husband as a child, to be conscious of her Eros as a personal part of herself and to express it through maternality. Her unconsciousness of her own personality leads to insistence on her maternal personality and leaves her mind uncultivated. (Mother and Daughter 45)

Stacey's attempts to cultivate her mind and to "voice" her views on literature and philosophy have been thwarted. When she does speak out, it is usually under the influence of alcohol, after which she is reprimanded by her husband.

Vanessa (Bird) and Morag (Diviners), the artists among the protagonists, attempt to find their unconstrained selves through writing, and in finding their voices through their writing, they are more successful than the others at achieving individuation.

It is significant to note that the images of descent and water are used symbolically in literature to represent a descent into the unconscious or "inner self," often resulting in a rebirth of the self. Laurence uses these devices in her Manawaka fiction, evident in the

protagonists' escape to the ocean coast by moving to Vancouver.

In getting in touch with her unconscious, Hagar (Angel) descends by stairway to the cannery by the water. Here, she learns much about herself and what she has destroyed by her pride (Demetrakopoulos 51). Rooke elaborates:

> [S]he must descend a stairway to arrive at the place where her genuine freedom will begin. There may be echoes here of that staircase she climbed up in Jason's house to begin her tenure as his chatelaine. Now as the stone angel topples, as a lady would come down from her pedestal, so Hagar laboriously descends the half-rotted steps which lead to the beach. (37)

Here she experiences a rebirth in her confessions to Murray Lees.

Rachel (Jest) also descends stairs to the mortuary to visit the undertaker, Hector:

> Here Rachel symbolically begins her confrontation with her beloved, yet distant, father and with her fear of death and rejection--both necessary confrontations for emotional growth. Here Rachel also begins to learn how to act on her own life. (Legendre 62)

It is also significant that in her search for freedom and her sexuality, Rachel's first sexual encounter with Nick is by the river.

"Like all Laurence's women, she [Stacey] goes to a body of water to connect with her own deepest self" (Demetrakopoulos 48). Stacey (Fire) also has her sexual, liberating encounter with Luke, who is living temporarily by the beach. "There she finds her 'flower boy,' whose offer of fleeing responsibility with him makes her realize how deeply committed she is to her children and Mac" (48). Her son's near drowning also helps Stacey to see that Mac truly does love Duncan, whom he has considered a "Mama's boy."

Morag (Diviners), of course, has her first sexual encounter with Jules at the Tonnerre shack by the river, and she eventually finds her "self" at her cottage by the river in Ontario. It is here also that Royland, the diviner of water, helps her discovery of "self." Greene agrees: "Since water is a traditional symbol for consciousness, 'divining' is an apt symbol for what Morag tries to do in her writing: to fathom people and the processes that make them what they are" (153). Bailey interprets some of the other descent and water symbolism:

> [S]he [Morag] completes two novels, Prospero's Child and Jonah, the titles of which indicate the stages of her development. The first suggests

> the rebirth she undergoes as she frees herself, along with her protagonist, to "be her own person," and the second hints at the downward plunge she must take to engage the deepest levels of her psyche before she can return like Jonah from the whale's body. (315)

All the protagonists seek freedom from traps in search of their "inner selves" and to achieve individuation. They look for this self through encounters with men and through escape from Manawaka and their pasts. Bailey comments:

> The women [in Laurence's world] consistently respond to animus figures of sense and intuition, and are themselves complex mixes of Jungian male and female with a slight dominance in the logos qualities of thought and duty. Such women thus have little temptation to try to realize themselves spiritually in a man, but little hope, either, of being able to find fulfillment through a man. The salvation for the Manawaka woman lies inside the self and outside traditional and recognized societal patterns for the female. (320)

Although much of the critical analysis of Laurence's Manawaka fiction, including recent criticism, emphasizes this search for the "inner self" and Jungian theory, there are problems with the dichotomy that this theory

professes--maleness and femaleness, inner and outer selves, and the conscious and the unconscious. The wholeness of a person is not the mere coming together of two opposites, but a combination of many factors and influences by which individuation can be achieved; therefore, there are other questions which must now be considered in the next chapters. Have the heroines been looking in the right places for freedom and individuation? What does their journey encompass? Is their destination what they had assumed? What "place" do they find?

CHAPTER 4

THE JOURNEY: HOW THE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS REDEFINE THEMSELVES

> "I am the mother now" . . . Rachel's words under anaesthetic, repeated in full consciousness later when she recognizes her mother's need for reassurance, represent the claiming of responsibility that all Laurence's women come to when they have sorted through their lives. Silence hurts them because it represents their impotence, their powerlessness to reach out to others to establish the connections they need. (Brydon 194)

The female protagonists in the Manawaka fiction seek escape from the constrictions and entrapments of the patriarchy and the patriarchs in their lives. To the protagonists, the place of Manawaka becomes a symbol of their entrapment, and their attempts to escape it and their pasts connected to it are symbolic of their attempts to escape the influences of the patriarchy and the patriarchs. In gaining their freedom, they hope to achieve individuation. They embark on a journey of discovery that does not necessarily lead them to a destination they

expected--independence. This independence suggests to the protagonists a lonely "island" type of existential existence, alluding to John Donne's famous sonnet (Greene 162, Bailey 309). Instead, they make connections with a maternal heritage through their biological or their surrogate mothers; they confront and are freed from their past and are able to make connections with others in their present; they find their own voices through the connections with voices of their past; and they take responsibility for what happens to them in the future. In this way, they become whole, and in achieving individuation, they can return to the place of the past, and by connecting with it, they find a "place within" that for them is a "place to stand on." What happens on this journey? How does this connecting happen, and why could it not have happened earlier?

Helen M. Buss in her study Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence asserts that for most of the protagonists there is an absence of a mother or of a positive, reinforcing "mother" role model, and as a result, they are trapped in childhood. She states:

> Signe Hammer, in Daughters and Mothers/Mothers and Daughters, describes the mother's nurturing and protecting influence in early life as an "enabling" one. This aspect of mothering

> "involves support for the child's developing autonomy in which a mother encourages a child to grow and develop as an individual in her own right." If the "enabling" influence of the mother is missing from the girl's life she cannot then become a truly adult woman able to offer love to those around her. (15)

Much of the journey on which the protagonists embark is to make a connection with their "mothers." Buss describes this journey as "Laurence's exploration of the phenomenon of women reacting to and reaching for a concept of the feminine which is at odds with that which their society and their biological heritage provides [sic]" (10). Buss also quotes Erich Neumann who in his The Great Mother describes how a matriarchal heritage has been hidden by "patriarchal development" (10). Since anthropologists question the actual existence of a true matriarchy, the term maternal heritage seems more appropriate.

A concentration on the maternal heritage of the protagonists could lead to the assumption that there are only two sides to human beings, male and female, and that the dominant characteristic is masculine. If this maternal heritage has been obscured and overshadowed by the patriarchy, it is important for women and especially Laurence's protagonists to recognize and discover that

maternal heritage of their make-up so that it can be integrated into their process of individuation.

It is also important to qualify Buss's "concept of the feminine"; therefore, a review of some aspects of feminist theory can illuminate the discussion of the protagonists' maternal heritage and their final discovery of a "place within." Such background information enhances the reader's transaction with Laurence's narratives. Since Laurence effectively "shows" what many feminists expound, it is valuable for the reader to examine the narratives through some feminist concepts. The "concept of the feminine" could be conceived as essentialism (i.e. there being a female essence), a postulate challenged by feminist theorists. Cultural feminists have a structuralist view in that the female essence can be defined, but only women are qualified to define it. Linda Alcoff notes that according to the cultural feminist view this female essence "is not simply spiritual or simply biology--it is both. Yet the key point remains that it is our specifically female anatomy that is the primary constituent of our identity and the source of our female essence" (410). Such theorists advocate that the subordination by the patriarchy can be overcome by "rediscovering our essence and bonding with other women" (410). While such a view gives value to female traits, Alcoff warns that there are dangers in that it may establish "the belief in an innate 'womanhood' to

which we must all adhere lest we be deemed either inferior or not 'true' women" (414).

On the other hand, post-structuralists argue that there is no essential core, but that human subjects are constructed by the culture and ideology in which they exist (415-16). Alcoff rejects this "totalization of history's imprint" which leaves no "room for maneuver by the individual within a social discourse or set of institutions. . . . [P]ost-structuralists deny the subject's ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations" (417).

A third view is one argued by Teresa de Lauretis who proposes "that subjectivity, that is what one 'perceives and comprehends as subjective,' is constructed through a continuous process, an ongoing constant renewal based on an interaction with the world, which she defines as experience" and it's the subject's "engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance . . . to the events of the world" (qtd. in Alcoff 423). Lauretis defines experience as "a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world,' the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality" (424).

Alcoff furthers this view by suggesting a "concept of positionality" whereby "the concept 'woman' is defined not by a particular set of attributes but by a particular

position" (433). Alcoff elaborates: "The positional definition . . . makes her [woman's] identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on" (433). She also notes that "one's identity is taken (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action, and a delineation of one's politics" (431-32). In summary, Alcoff:

> assert[s] that the very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's position. However, this view should not imply that the concept of 'woman' is determined solely by external elements and that the woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, she herself is part of the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated. . . Seen this way, being a 'woman' is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context. (434-35)

The connection to the feminine through the protagonists' "mothers" (a maternal heritage) will be

viewed in light of the above feminist theories, enhancing the reader's lived-through experience with the narratives. Although a sisterhood, espoused in cultural feminism, is implicit in Laurence's narratives, Alcoff's "concept of positionality" is more appropriate for Laurence's characters. Although their position has been influenced by the patriarchy, they are active participants in the events of their own history, and through connections with their "mothers," their maternal heritage, they are able to make choices and changes in their lives. From their "points of departure," they are able to move outward and forward and be an active part of their lived-through experience, shaping their identities. The reader too is an active participant in the process of creating the characters' identities by responding to the lived-through experience from one's own experience and knowledge, choosing how to read the novels.

That connection to the feminine, a maternal heritage, is important to Laurence is evident in the structure of her memoirs Dance on the Earth, published after her death. In it she describes her own journey of life through connections with her three mothers--her biological mother, who died when Margaret was a child; her maternal aunt, who became her mother through marriage to her father; and her mother-in-law. She shows in the memoirs how these strong female role models, in spite of the influence of the

patriarchal society of their times, gave Laurence the foundation for her own individuation. She extends the connections of the mother to the connectedness of all women--a sisterhood so to speak--in a beautiful poem in the appendix of the book. The concluding stanza from "For My Sisters" illustrates this connectedness:

> My daughter, woman as I am,
> You who have no sisters
> Have many and close, as I have.
> You are my sister--sojourner here
> As all my mothers were
> And in memory remain. (296)

In a review of Dance on the Earth, Helen Buss says:

> [T]he publication of Margaret Laurence's memoirs is an important moment in the history of a genre, as well as an emotional homecoming in terms of female wholeness. Laurence gives us back our mothers while claiming her own in a way she never could in her various experiments in novelistic representations of mothers. (46)

Specifically, then, how do the protagonists make connections with their "mothers"--their maternal heritage?

Jung's negative side of the mother, which may "connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (Buss,

Mothers/Daughters 9), is illustrated in the domineering influence of May Cameron over her daughters by keeping Rachel (Jest) within her grasping control and by making Stacey (Fire) escape physically, but remain mentally dependent in her continual concern about being a good mother. But it is the positive side of the feminine connection that is important for the protagonist's individuation, or becoming whole. Again, there must be a qualification here. Although Jung divides motherhood into a positive and negative side, it should be noted that motherhood and mothering cannot be so easily divided into being wholly good or wholly bad. There are many aspects to and degrees of mothering and motherhood. Rather than being described in terms of black or white, they involve varying shades of grey. This discussion will emphasize the nurturing aspect of the feminine, which is positive and which is presented as a strength in the characters who possess it, whether male or female.

Having lost her mother in childbirth, Hagar (Angel) patterns herself after her father, and having inherited his pride, she is unable to connect with others through her femaleness. This inability is evident in her refusal to don her dead mother's shawl and pretend to be her to give comfort to her dying brother, Dan. It is, in fact, her brother Matt who plays the role and is more connected to femaleness than Hagar, who sees it as a weakness.

After her struggles through life, Hagar does make connections with surrogate mothers who help her to make connections to others. In the infirmities of old age, Hagar is dependent on her daughter-in-law for care. Her pride makes her abrasive, and she rebuffs Doris, but there are times such as "when she wishes to reach out and touch Doris," that "are emblematic of her need to overcome her fear of the female and accept her own womanhood" (15). After she flees the possibility of going to a nursing home and is in the haven of the cannery, Hagar recalls Keats' poem about "Meg Merrilees," whom critics consider another surrogate mother:

> Meg Merrilees is an outcast, one of the dispossessed highland Scots from whom Hagar is descended. The sense that Hagar has been deprived of her birthright, her maternal inheritance, is strengthened by this comparison. Now she searches for what she has lost and realizes that she has perhaps "come here not to hide but to seek." (Buss, Mother/Daughter 17)

Meg provides her with a role model "representing a womanly strength based on a female tradition rather than a denial of femininity" (17). When she is joined in the cannery by Murray Ferney Lees, who is identified with femaleness by his "eunuch"-like voice and a middle name inherited from his mother (18), he serves as "a catalyst by which she is

released from her guilt into a more blessed state. He offers Hagar a communion of wine and crackers which unlocks her grief and guilt from her past lack of motherliness" (18) with her brothers and her own sons. It is finally in the public ward at the hospital that she makes real connections with a maternal heritage through her three roommates--Elva Jardine, Mrs. Dobereiner and Mrs. Reilly, who

> represent the three qualities of womanhood that Hagar gains in her last days. Elva's ability to respond to each individual's special need . . . Mrs. Dobereiner's instinctive need to find joy at the center of living in order to be released from pain . . . [Mrs. Reilly's] ability to hold on to a maternal religious sense in her moment of need, and as a result to be able to relate positively to her daughter. . . . (20-21)

As a result of their example, Hagar is able to make the connection with her femaleness, and she is able to tell Marvin the "lie that is not a lie but a mother's blessing" (20), which is that he has been her better son; she asks for the perfume that her granddaughter Tina had given her; she asks for her ring to give to Tina, saying that she should have offered it to Doris; and extends herself to help the young patient Sandra Wong, a "surrogate-daughter" (20-21). Although it has come too late in life, Hagar's

becoming in touch with her femaleness or a maternal heritage offers the hope that anyone can change.

> We may measure Hagar's growth in her last days by her changing attitudes toward women, her increasing ability to receive mothering love and to offer love in return. With her accepting attitude toward her own granddaughter, Hagar begins a process whereby she allows other women to touch her life in a sacramental as well as a psychological sense. (12)

Rooke refers to this connectedness as a sisterhood: "After a lifetime of despising women, Hagar is at last compelled to join the ranks of her own sex" (39). Through seeing them help one another, the reader has "a sense of many women joining together to admit the realities of the body, and to deal with the indignities that oppose them" (40). It is through Elva, who also comes from Manawaka, that Hagar encounters her roots, and in facing death, she "confronts her human fate simultaneously with her identity as woman, which she recognizes through Elva and the other women in the hospital. It is important for Laurence that Hagar should make this connection before she dies" (40).

Rachel and Stacey have a mother, but she has served as more of a trap for them than a connection to their femaleness. Rachel (Jest) finds a surrogate mother in her friend Calla, whose "love for Rachel makes her more

sensitive to Rachel's emotional and psychological immaturity than is Mrs. Cameron, who puts 'appearances' and her own needs before the welfare of her daughter" (Relke 41). Relke suggests that Rachel rebels like a child to Calla's mothering, especially after Calla intimates that her love may have a lesbian aspect, but it is to Calla that Rachel turns and from whom she gets support when she thinks she may be facing the social humiliation of being pregnant with Nick's child (43). It is Calla who brings Rachel home from her surgery and does not pressure her to talk, a sacrifice on Calla's part. Relke also notes that it is through Calla that Rachel reaches maturity because "[a]t last she realizes that, in their relationship, Calla has always sacrificed her own needs to the needs of her friend" (45). Buss concurs with this view of Calla's role in Rachel's growth into womanhood:

> [I]n making the relationship between Calla and Rachel such an important part of her plot . . . and in refusing the conventional ending for Rachel (marriage), Laurence is making a psychological statement about the nature of female growth, one which stresses the importance of a satisfactory mother-daughter relationship, a "heuresis" of mother and daughter, even of a surrogate type in helping the woman reach her feminine maturity. (Mothers/Daughters 40)

In becoming mature, Rachel is able to "become the mother," freeing herself from the guilt-ridden relationship with her biological mother, and to take responsibility for herself and her mother. It should be noted also that in taking this responsibility, Rachel goes to Vancouver where she can also become more connected to her sister Stacey.

Stacey (Fire) escapes dependence on her mother by leaving Manawaka and developing into womanhood by being a wife and mother. Buss quotes Jung in her claim that Stacey represents "the exaggeration of the feminine side [which] means an intensification of all female instincts, above all the maternal instinct. The negative aspect is seen in the woman whose only goal is childbirth" and thus Stacey lives "through her children" (44). Buss goes on to say that "as she enters mid-life, Stacey needs to define herself and her maternality in a more positive sense. Lacking a mature mother, believing her sister to be too controlled and intellectual to sympathize, Stacey also finds herself without female friends to help her" (45). Buss further suggests that it is through her mature teenage daughter Katie that Stacey receives mothering and in turn is able to "finally . . . view herself psychologically as 'the mother'" (45). By accepting her role as mother, she too seeks a connection with her sister, prepares for Rachel and May's arrival, and invites Mac's father to live with them (Brydon 195). Bailey agrees, saying that these acts

are possible because "her identity is strong enough for her to recognize that her life cannot deny the past . . . but must affirm and include it . . ." (314).

In her essay "Margaret Laurence and the Autobiographical Impulse," Buss quotes from Virginia Woolf's Moments of Being: "It is perfectly true that [my mother] obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was thirty-four" (147). Like Virginia Woolf, Vanessa (Bird) says about her mother's death in "Jericho's Brick Battlements," "Of all the deaths in the family, hers remained unhealed in my mind the longest" (Bird 190). Vanessa has positive female role models in her mother, Beth, and her Aunt Edna, even if they give her "double messages" because of the overbearing patriarch Grandfather Conner. She sees a world of female imprisonment, and it is significant that it is the somewhat bizarre, but strong, Noreen, a female, who frees the bird that is trapped in the house. "Indeed, in this book 'womanhood' does imprison all the female figures, a womanhood that must be either weak but approved or strong but unacceptable" (Buss "Autobiographical Impulse" 158). In her study of mother-daughter relationships, Buss elaborates on this idea:

> Laurence means us to see the uncaging as something more than a simple gaining of personal freedom. The attention she has given to the

> symbolic significance of Noreen and her influence in Vanessa's life suggests that the "release" is the feeling of previously caged feminine feelings and values. These have been present in the youthful Vanessa's writing in the figure of the barbaric queen. The more conscious dimension of these feelings and values takes the form of a changed consciousness of the older Vanessa narrator who is now able to write the victim stories and who is able finally to see the "tigress" in her own mother. (63)

Beth's strength becomes evident to Vanessa when she seeks the means to obtain a college education for her daughter, including the support from the grandfather. In making these connections with her mother as both victim and "tigress," Vanessa, like Virginia Woolf in her fiction, is able to write her stories as "a way of healing and freeing herself" (62). As Demetrakopoulos asserts about A Bird in the House, it not only "portrays the significance of woman's often unquestioned and unconscious feminine ground of being," but it also "reflects in Vanessa's mother our collective mothers asking their daughters to go forth as their delegates, to break the umbilical cord away from the solely feminine sex-typed role in life" (47).

An orphan at an early age, Morag (Diviners) is also deprived of a mother connection. Through Christie's

attempt at giving her a heritage, he tells the tales of Piper Gunn and his wife Morag. Morag, the budding author, rewrites the stories with Morag as the strong central character, thus providing herself with a strong female role model (Buss 68). In her later life, Morag converses in her mind with Catherine Parr Trail (69), another strong model in the form of a pioneer woman who also wrote while raising a family and struggling in the wilderness. Although Prin, a "figure for silence," seems an unlikely role model for Morag, Buss and Hjartarson both see her as a catalyst for Morag's search for identity and voice. As a child, Morag begins to write the "Morag" stories as her attempt to "redefine" womanhood as she sees it in Prin, who "unwittingly stimulates the beginning of Morag's creative process and her search for her archetypal identity" (Buss 68), and it is after she returns from Prin's funeral that Morag begins "to stand up to Brooke, to find her own voice, and to feel confident in her own abilities as a novelist" (Hjartarson 52).

Morag's search for maternal connections and individuation, like Stacey's, includes the connection with her daughter Pique, who "is integral to Morag's identity as woman and as artist, just as Morag, a mother, is essential to Pique's identity as woman and artist" (Buss 64). In reference to Erich Neumann's description of the artist's product as a "child," Buss states:

> In the case of the female artist, the word "child" must be taken in more than a symbolic sense. This does not mean that the female artist must literally become a mother, but it does mean that she must find the mother within herself to become a whole woman, and she must be a whole woman to be an artist. (64)

Both mother and daughter, in making connections with their pasts, begin to take responsibility for themselves and move toward individuation in their own creative arenas--Morag, through writing novels, and Pique, through writing songs. As Morag comes to terms with her past, Pique begins her journey to the past to seek her identity. Buss suggests that as Morag watches the heron take flight (here the bird symbolizes release rather than being trapped), it

> marks an artistic, spiritual and personal integration that realizes her full womanhood. The narrator says that "Her quest for islands had ended some time ago, and her need to make pilgrimages had led her back here." . . . There is a strong sense that "back here" is not just back to Canada but back to a sense of maternal spirit that like the Heron is "something out of the world's dawn." (72)

In connecting with the maternal past, Buss also suggests that the mood of The Diviners can be considered a

"realization for the mother of divinity within the self" (73), which she explains further:

> We sense that Morag has a much larger concept of "ancestor" than at the beginning of this book and that her God is one that incorporates a sense of herself as the maternal principle, one that can now truly offer a mother's blessing to her child knowing that the gesture contains more than the personal mother's blessing. (74)

In looking for connections to their suppressed maternal heritage, the female characters, Vanessa, Morag, and Pique, try to reconcile their patriarchal past with their maternal past. When Vanessa returns to the Brick House, she hears her mother's voice in her own. "I remembered saying things to my children that my mother had said to me, the clichés of affection, perhaps inherited from her mother" (Bird 190), but she also acknowledges the claim of her grandfather in her wholeness. Brydon notes that Vanessa realizes this when she comments, "my own voice carried some disturbing echoes of my grandfather's" (Brydon 194). In the end, Vanessa concludes: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins" ("Jericho's Brick Battlements" 190). Through her writing, Vanessa has found her own voice in integrating the past maternal-paternal voices and in accepting them both as a part of her heritage and construct.

Morag (Diviners) has had positive male figures in her life--Christie, Jules, and Dan McRaith--and her acceptance of them "is important to Morag's experience of herself as a woman" (Buss 72). With Morag's confronting her shame of Christie, she has accepted him also as a part of her inheritance. It is interesting to note that when Morag finally makes her break with Brooke, her rampage is punctuated with the epithets of Christie's vocabulary. Through his voice, she begins to find her own (Buss, "Autobiographical Impulse" 161). There is a similarity here for Pique in that she makes a connection with her father, Jules, when she sings his songs, and in turn she sings them as a part of her. After accepting their patriarchal heritage and releasing their suppressed maternal heritage, both Morag and Pique, like Vanessa, can find their own voices in writing their own stories and songs. "[Both] have in the past told stories and sung songs of their paternal heritage, Morag in her books, Pique through singing her father's songs. Now they have created stories about themselves, about being woman and emerging from a patriarchal past" (Buss, Mother/Daughter 75). By merging both their male and female heritages with an acceptance of their pasts, Vanessa, Morag, and Pique find their own voices, a kind of androgyny that Virginia Woolf advocates, and they are able to move closer toward a wholeness or individuation than Laurence's other protagonists are able to achieve.

Not being artists, Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey find it more difficult to find their voices. Hagar admits at the end, "When did I ever speak the heart's truth?" (The Stone Angel 292), but it is through the connection with the women in the hospital that she begins to find her voice--telling the "mother's lie" to Marvin that he needed to hear, requesting that the Reverend Troy sing the song of rejoicing, and unconsciously calling Bram's name in her sleep, thereby making the connection she could not previously.

Rachel and Stacey speak out dramatically at the beginning of their stories, when Stacey (Fire) attacks the professor, and when Rachel (Jest) speaks in tongues at the tabernacle. These occasions may seem like symbolic release from their traps into voices of their own, but they are not really voices of their wholeness. For Rachel, it is at the end of her story, as far as it goes, that she is truly able to speak as a whole person in her feminine connection to her surrogate mother Calla:

> Rachel's last conversation with Calla leads to an acceptance of each other in which Rachel is as much the maternal figure as Calla. Calla speaks aloud her real sorrow that Rachel did not become a mother; Rachel expresses her own regret that she could not offer Calla the kind of woman-love that she believes Calla wanted. (Buss 44)

Stephanie Demetrakopoulos thinks that "Stacey has the hardest job of self-actualization of all Laurence's women," since "[b]y keeping her protagonist at home, Laurence is . . . affirming the need and worth of feminine values in a masculine world" (49), but she does show that it is possible that such a woman "who chooses wifehood as a major source of her identity can individuate and become a friend and companion to her husband" (49). Brydon says that "[s]he has listened to others too long; she needs to tell her own story now, but in telling it she remains the mother" (199). Stacey does this by accepting her role as mother to her children, her father-in-law, and possibly her mother and Rachel upon their arrival. She is ready to use her voice to make a connection with her sister Rachel by wanting to tell Rachel about her female experience, whereas earlier in the novel, she did not think that Rachel could comprehend it. In her acceptance of her role and her comfortableness with it, Stacey no longer expects the males in her life to articulate all their thoughts and feelings. It is significant that at the end, Jen the silent toddler begins to speak, and as Demetrakopoulos says:

> [S]peaking comes the hardest to the side of the feminine for which Stacey stands. It is hard for the feminine in a masculine patterned world to speak, to name herself, to find herself. But

> when she does she not only establishes self but also gives self and connection to those around her. (49)

Herein lies the difference between traditional male heroes and Laurence's female "heroes." Brydon summarizes this difference:

> [A]lthough each novel focusses on a central female character in search of her identity, that identity is ultimately determined by her relations with others. As feminist theorists have noted, the female hero, unlike the traditional male hero, does not separate herself from others to mature. Instead, she defines herself in relation to others. But Laurence shifts the focus of the traditional female story from the heterosexual couple to the parent/child relation. . . . the mother/child relation is dominant. . . . (186)

Brydon furthers this concept:

> In Laurence's fiction, taking on motherhood means taking on responsibility, not just for one other life, but for the continuity and development of humanity. . . . motherhood in these novels provides an alternative definition of adulthood to that traditionally found in male fictions of

> development. Instead of affirming independence from the claim of others, as male heroes tend to do, these women learn to accept and even affirm the claims of others on them. They find independence in affiliation rather than in separation, but they choose their affiliations. (197)

As Alcoff's "concept of positionality" indicates, the protagonists make connections with their ever-changing world, their pasts, and their mothers, and they choose how those connections will affect them. She states: "The concept of woman as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values" (434). This positionality becomes the "place within," from which the protagonists function and view their world.

Laurence uses mirrors as symbols of the protagonists' view of their world and their place or position in it. Her mirrors have symbolized her protagonists' reflecting the puffed up images of their male counterparts, whether they be fathers, mates, or sons. These mirrors have also symbolized the reflections of how the protagonists see their outer selves, what their inner selves are, and how others see them. In the "Preface" to a collection of essays, Kristjana Gunnars states:

> The image of the mirror is interesting: it has a history coming down to us from its prominence in Medieval times, when the image of the woman holding a mirror was focal. But that is only an image: it is a silent image which cannot sound any voice. (xv)

Again, here is the reflection of the inability of women to speak their experience. Brydon asserts:

> For all Laurence's women, the relation with the mirror is an ambivalent one. Their reflection in the mirror confirms their reality while reminding them that the image in the mirror fails to match their ideal selves. The mirror provides confirmation of selfhood and scope for self-flagellation. (198)

When Hagar (Angel) looks in the mirror, Brydon contends that she can still see the child "self" within the haggard body. She adds that it is her "sense of self" that helps Hagar survive old age through "the forced recognition of herself as an egg woman to others" (199). It is after she has been called the "egg woman" that she looks in the mirror and sees: "Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant" (The Stone Angel 133). After seeing this image, she is moved to action and takes responsibility for herself, leaving Bram and taking her son John to Vancouver (Woodcock 38-39).

For Stacey (Fire), Brydon suggests that the mirror "frames her physical appearance as if this were her only reality. She knows that neither her literal image in the mirror, nor the articles written for housewives like her reflect her own complex reality" (198-99), but unlike Morag and Vanessa, "she hasn't the courage to challenge their version of reality" (199) to speak of her own experience.

Her sister Rachel (Jest), according to Drummond, always sees herself in others or as she thinks others see her:

> If Rachel feels threatened, as she says, by watching people make fools of themselves, it is because she sees a reflection of her own poor self-image in them. This distorting mirror of the other person is symbolized by the reflection Rachel sees of herself in the store display windows. . . . (401)

Drummond then refers to Karen Horney's concept that "in order to survive . . . and win approval, the child will turn from this despised real self to an idealized image of the self she should be" (403). As a result, Rachel succumbs to what Horney calls "tyranny of the should," especially with regard to what she should know and do about Nick (403). The same can be said of Stacey who feels she "should" lose weight, and she "should" stop drinking.

Brydon argues that because they are writers, "[p]hysical mirrors are less important to Morag and Vanessa because they have the power of creating their own mirrors through words, mirrors which reflect more than surface appearances or societal prescriptions for feminine behaviour" (200). Through their writing, the women find their own voices and are the most successful in shattering the societal mirrors. Morag insists to Brooke that, although the heroine of her first novel hasn't said anything different from what has been said before, it is significant and different that "she says it" (Diviners). Brydon concludes that: "Here finding a voice and shattering the mirrors that have confined women to passive roles come together in the female artist's insistence that her books will mirror the female experience as voiced and shaped by women" (201).

All the protagonists, especially Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, have been concerned with appearances--society's mirrors. By viewing the protagonists from Alcoff's concept of positionality, however, the reader can respond to their ability to survive in their particular time and place. They have demonstrated their ability to discover their positionality, to actively participate in their changing positions, and to achieve some measure of individuation. In the process, they are able to find their voices and shatter some of society's mirrors. Brydon concurs:

> each of the characters comes to terms with the disparity between what she sees in her own mirror--what her eyes reveal--and what Society has told her she should be seeing. Finally, each woman shatters the societal mirror to project her own image onto the world around her and to begin to speak, however tentatively, in her own voice. (202)

For these protagonists, it is by means of the connection with the past through their mothers, their maternal heritage, that they have been able to confront, to accept, and to survive their situations in life, to make connections within their relationships, to take responsibility for themselves and others, to find their "places within"--their positionality, and to speak of it in their own voices. Buss quotes Virginia Woolf from A Room of One's Own: "We think back through our mothers if we are women" ("Autobiographical Impulse" 166).

CHAPTER 5

DIVINING THE PLACE: INDIVIDUATION THROUGH THE DOING PROCESS

"The river flowed both ways" (3). This opening sentence of The Diviners, the novel that culminates the Manawaka cycle of fiction, has been interpreted by many critics. Bailey asserts that it is symbolic of

> Laurence's Jungian concept of the self as process, as always in a fluid state of becoming as opposed to a frozen state of being. The ongoing nature of the experience of identity, which involves the self in a simultaneous relationship to time present, past, and future, is apparent in all Laurence's novels and is basic to her most central recurrent narrative relationship, that of mother and child. (307)

Gayle Greene also notes that this river--"its current pulling one way and the breeze rippling its surface the other way--suggests a similar interdependence of past and present. The backward and forward movement allows transformation and release . . ." (151-52). Paul Hjartarson argues against David Stains' comment that the "'central lesson of the novel and Morag's self-exploration'

is 'the inability to escape the past'" (44), and Leona Gom's declaration that the "past" Morag is more interesting than the "present" one who does not change (45). Hjartarson claims that these arguments ignore "the role of the present in shaping Morag's understanding of her past" and the fact that Morag is continually composing the stories of her past and interpreting herself through these stories which give "meaning and shape to the events in her life" (44-46). Blewett also notes that the river "is an emblem of a great paradox, the permanence and flux of existence, that is of the endurance of human kind through the ever changing generations" (189).

These critical analyses coincide with Alcoff's "concept of positionality." Each of the protagonists is influenced by and responds to the experiences of her life--past, present, and future--and the lives of those before her. The protagonists' identity is a part of a "fluid movement" (Alcoff 434) like the river, with the ability to change as their lived-through experience changes and their position and point of departure change. As the "positional perspective" (434) of the protagonists changes, so do the concepts of themselves change; they do not passively accept what the external forces create. For example, each of the protagonists leaves Manawaka, her entrapment, to search for her own self-concept and wholeness. They "do" something, even if this action does not necessarily resolve their situation.

The reader responds to being a part of this fluid movement and reacts to the stories from a different positional "place" with each reading. My own self-concept as a woman has changed over the years as my positionality has changed; therefore, my response to the characters and their stories has also changed. The response has been enhanced by the study of literary criticism and feminist theory, so that the response has grown from a personal "Ah, yes! I know what she means!" to a more insightful response, one from the place within, a place of positionality. My own view of my past changes as my lived-through experience changes. The "essence of me" is not constructed of one set of values, but it is constantly changing, just as the identities and self-concepts of Laurence's characters continually change according to their experience. This constant change does not insinuate chaos, but indicates that while both the protagonists and I retain some truths (e.g. roots, backgrounds, characteristics), we are able to add and discard each new development as we view it from the present and the past. The response of the critics also changes as literary and feminist theories change.

Through these interpretations it can be seen that the journey in search of individuation repeats a pattern, and this fact is as true for the other protagonists as it is for Morag. Each one has sought an escape from a physical place. Each one looks back to that place of her past, and

from her transforming positionality, she is able to reconcile herself with that place. She then moves forward or beyond to a new place. Woodcock states that when Hagar plans to leave for Vancouver, she vows that "nothing will go wrong this time" (The Stone Angel 155), and he contends that this evaluation of a new place is significant for all the heroines:

> Not "nothing will go wrong in this place," but "nothing will go wrong this time." For it is time, not place, that manifests itself in change, particularly since the real changes in Laurence's novels come from within, arising from a change of mind or heart rather than a change of place, and time is mind's dimension. (50)

Again, the characters are not defined by one set of unchangeable values. These women can and do actively contribute to changes within themselves, their positionality. The important place then is the "place within." The protagonists cannot necessarily change or control what happens to them, for example the influence of the patriarchy on their lives, but they can control and change how they respond to what happens to them.

All of the protagonists experience change in their "places within." They seek to uncover their maternal heritage, and through their "mothers," they are able to confront, to assimilate, and be released from their pasts,

achieving some measure of individuation or wholeness. In the successive progression of the novels, each protagonist achieves a greater degree of individuation. The pattern is repeated by each generation, exemplified by Morag's daughter, who, at the end of the novel, looks for her identity through her past, having made a connection with her own mother, Morag. Pique also must look backward to understand what shaped Morag and Jules, who together shaped Pique, so that she can move forward and define herself according to her place of positionality.

The continuation of the process can also be observed in the endings of the other novels. Brydon affirms this observation:

> These women live in process, through growth, change and discovery. The endings of their stories leave them in flux, with provisional resolutions established by a greater sense of potential yet to be released or of further metamorphoses yet to be imagined. Laurence's women are shaped by their town but they are not defeated. Their strength and imagination survive to inspire further generations. (203)

With Hagar's (Angel) death, the closing words are "And then--" (308), which indicates not finality, but what comes next. Rachel (Jest) leaves Manawaka not knowing what will come next in her new life in Vancouver, while her sister

Stacey (Fire) goes to sleep wondering if the city will return tomorrow. Vanessa (Bird), after a visit to the Brick House to become reconciled with her past, drives off to an uncertain future. It is not, then, the place or destination that is important for the heroines, but "the doing"--the search or journey and the survival during the process. Within the process, the heroines must take a final look back and set the past to rest in order to move forward. Though the place of destination is unimportant in this process, the changing "place within" becomes important. This "place within," then, is not defined as an "essence" of the characters, but a place of positionality, which changes as their lived-through experience changes. Also, this place of positionality changes according to how the characters react and change in response to the changes in their lived-through experience. Integral to the "doing process" is the protagonists' ability to survive their experiences and situations. Before Margaret Atwood wrote her thematic guide to Canadian literature, Survival, Laurence had written an essay on the survival theme, "A Place to Stand On," in which she states that this theme ran through her novels to that time, and it is evident in The Diviners written since then. About this theme she comments:

> 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 from 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. (6)

About Rachel (Jest) and Stacey (Fire) she says, "In the end, and again in their very different ways and out of their very different dilemmas, each finds within herself an ability to survive--not just to go on living, but to change and to move into new areas of life" (6). The same statement can be made about her other protagonists.

About Morag, Gayle Greene says: "She must resign herself to the ephemeral and uncertain consolation of process, the 'doing of the thing,' knowing that what has been created will need to be recreated" (162)--as will the lives and stories of all the heroines. In considering reader-response theory, each reader also recreates each story according to one's "lived-through experience" with the text at one's particular place of positionality at the time.

Greene explains the process in The Diviners as a Miltonian Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained phenomenon, whereby Morag rejects her past and Christie, gains

respectability with Brooke, falls from this marriage, but gains her freedom, and, through her union with Jules and reunion with Christie, finally regains her past and continuous future in Pique (156-58, 60). The same concept can be applied to the other protagonists.

There are also many kinds of "diviners" in Laurence's book of that name, but the one that is applicable to all the other protagonists is the one Greene applies to the writer: "The artist-diviner looks into the 'river of now and then' to fathom life, time, and the passing of generations, and through her understanding of the past, gains faith in the future" (154). All the heroines are diviners, as they search deep within and make connections with their mothers and their pasts. They have essentially "divined" a "place within"--a place of positionality, a place from which they can move and change.

Because of her illustration of women's issues and her apparent affinity to the solidarity and connectedness of women, Laurence has been considered a feminist writer or, at least, has been embraced by feminist readers. What sets her apart from other feminist writers is that her "writing is remarkably free of anger" (Brydon 203). Perhaps she has achieved that absence of anger that Virginia Woolf describes in A Room of One's Own, or perhaps it is simply that she has sympathy for men, who are also sojourners on this earth. Although she attacks the patriarchy in her

fiction, she also provides many positive male characters such as Christie, Royland, Jules, and Vanessa's father. As Woodcock notes, Laurence is a feminist but not "narrow or dogmatic." She depicts her male characters "with sympathy and understanding, and often [they] play crucial roles assisting the women in their search for self-knowledge" (13). In a review of her memoirs, Buss comments:

> Laurence's memoirs are an emotional homecoming for women. She offers us a way to begin our own stories by beginning with our mothers. She offers us a way to love our fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons while denying our imprisonment in the roles their stories write for us. (47)

In her memoirs, Dance on the Earth, Laurence again reinforces the active participation of women in delineating their positions--their places. A stanza from the poem quoted earlier perhaps explains Laurence's non-angry treatment of "man"kind:

> But there are paths of yours,
> My son, I cannot walk and maps
> Of your worlds I cannot read
> And grieve some times for this
> My necessary lack and yet I honour
> Your man-life your life-honouring self
> More than my words can ever say.
> I know you know. (Dance 296)

The feminist response to Margaret Laurence's fiction is clearly understandable, as is the regional interest, but why has there been such a response to her work from critics and readers alike from places such as England, Norway, and Japan? Perhaps it lies in the reader-response that Clara Thomas says Laurence herself experienced in reading another's work--"the shock of recognition one sometimes feels when another's words have a specific meaning in terms of one's own experiences . . ." (15). This situation is the same kind of transaction between the reader and the text about which Rosenblatt theorizes. Because the reader's experience is constantly changing, like the lives of the characters, the response to the work is not static either. Laurence's narratives particularly lend themselves to such transforming responses. Laurence illustrates the positionality of women during the fluctuating times of the twentieth century, particularly the first two-thirds. Readers who have experienced those times and places readily respond to their recognition in a casual reading, but as other readers gain knowledge through life experience and the study of critical analysis and feminist theory, new insights occur that can enhance the readers' response to the narratives. I have been such a reader.

The attraction to Margaret Laurence's "place" may occur because of its identifiable nature. Manawaka seems to have a character of its own. A part of that character

is the oppressive, stifling nature of the town, influenced by its patriarchal institutions and Scots-Presbyterian background. Much of this discussion has analyzed the response of the female protagonists to this characteristic. Just as readers respond to human characters, they also respond to the character of this place--Manawaka. There are traits of this town that are recognizable to male as well as female readers and to readers from the United States and India as well as readers from the Canadian prairies. Reader response is an integral part of evaluating the attraction to place in Laurence's Manawaka fiction.

Manawaka is not just a physical place, but "also the embodiment of Margaret Laurence's vision of the human lot" (Blewett 177), and the struggles of her protagonists to escape are everyone's struggles. Everyone has a Manawaka, and Blewett says that it is not the place that confines:

> [T]he town is an expression of the forces within human beings that lead to alienation and separation. . . . running away from Manawaka is like running away from oneself. The achievement of each of the protagonists is that, finally, she stands and faces, and so triumphs over, the Manawaka within. (178)

In an interview with David Allan, Laurence comments:

> You remember the title of the long ago novel by Thomas Wolfe. I guess it came out in the 30's, <u>You Can't Go Home Again</u>. I think you must go home again not necessarily to go back and live in the same town in which you were born but simply to come to terms with the past which I think happens some way or other to all of my characters. One has to try to come to terms with the past in such a way that one assimilates it without rejecting it because, after all, our past, both the good and the bad parts of it (it's always mixed) form our mental baggage which we carry along with us all our lives. If we manage to come to some kind of terms with it, so that it is not a stultifying influence, but that is something that we can accept and assimilate, then, it seems to me, this is a kind of homecoming. (7)

The protagonists will never totally escape their pasts and some of their traps, for example those within patriarchal institutions which still tend to subordinate women. The protagonists, however, have learned to accept and assimilate these parts of their positionality so that they can survive and move forward. The process, the struggle, and the survival are all common experiences, and thus there is a response to Laurence's Manawaka fiction that includes

more than the response of Manitobans. Yes, everyone has a Manawaka--the place within. It is a place to be divined and a divining place. The meaning of place must be discovered by each person, and each person has a place of discovery, that is, a place where discoveries are made.

The attraction and connection to place in Laurence's Manawaka fiction for casual and critical readers, then, is not to the actual physical prairie town, but to the other places it represents--the place within and the place of time, the people and the experience that influence one's construct--the place of positionality. "[A]nd this is the place," Laurence says, "we are standing on, for better and for worse" ("A Place to Stand On" 7).

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