EDEN LOST

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IN THE MANAWAKA NOVELS OF MARGARET LAURENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Margaret Laurence strongly believes that one can only know oneself if one knows one's roots, and her own roots are firmly imbedded in the Scots Protestant tradition. Her four female protagonists in the Manawaka novels share this tradition. However, neither Laurence nor her protagonists are able to wholeheartedly accept their religious heritage and must find alternative means of coping with their spiritual dilemmas.

This thesis begins by presenting Laurence's background and orientation and how they relate to her protagonists' lives. It then explores the traditional religious elements in the novels. Chapter Two deals with the single element Laurence finds positive—the Bible. She makes extensive use of Biblical allusions and parallels. The protagonists also make Biblical allusions and quote or refer to verses at moments of deep emotion. The Bible remains a vital source of succor and enlightenment. Not so the church, as Chapter Three illustrates. Institutionalized religion is depicted by Laurence and experienced by her protagonists as sterile and judgmental. The only strong feeling it is still capable of raising is guilt.

Chapter Four, the main chapter, focuses on Laurence's protagonists. They all feel they have lost Eden, having been banished to a spiritual wilderness and suffering from culturally imposed bondage. Gradually

they come to realize that much of their bondage is self-imposed. Hagar is bound by her upright pride; Rachel is bound by childishness and fear of life; Stacey is bound by her fear that she cannot always make everything all right for her loved ones; Morag, the social outcast, is bound by her desire for social acceptance. As they each learn to accept themselves and their lives, they relinquish their often denied belief in an Old Testament judgmental, patriarchal God. They develop instead a personal relationship with a New Testament loving, compassionate God who becomes a source of grace in their lives.

In the course of the four novels, then, there is a definite progression in the spiritual development of the protagonists from Hagar to Morag. The former does not gain any real awareness of her plight until she is on her deathbed. The latter, like Laurence, is a mature author who expresses her faith in God and life through her fiction.

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For my family

I Introduction

Religion satisfies the need and desire of man to have faith in, to commit himself to something outside of his individual self. Until at least the latter part of the nineteenth century, the dominant tradition in Western culture contained a belief in God as part of its foundation. In the last hundred years this fundamental belief has been challenged by a growing tradition which views the universe as a random creation, indifferent to man. In response to this new view, liberal, secular alternatives to religion such as political, social, psychological, and artistic movements have been sought.

Margaret Laurence is in touch with the modern tenor, but she cannot relinquish a belief in the spiritual reality of man. She finds the alternatives insufficient and unsatisfying. Her work manifests a belief in man's need for mythic, nonrational reality and faith in order to satisfy his deepest self.

Laurence explores our society in her four Manawaka novels,[1] a society that finds its belief systems and myth structures have become irrelevant, hollow forms without content. Following the historical pattern of such decay, the less living content in a structure, the more rigid the adherence to form at one extreme (the creation of stone angels) and the more rejection of form leading to anarchy, chaos and despair at the other. However, the rejection of the old myths or belief systems creates the chaos out of which new ones are created, ones that do give meaning and purpose to contemporary life. This rejection process is not simply an

internal struggle. The prevailing myth structure is externalized in the institutions of society as well as being internalized as super-ego, conscience, morality, or "character".

The dramatic action in Laurence's novels arises first from the clash between adherence to and rejection of old forms within her protagonists' own selves and secondly from the clash between their society's adherence to form and the protagonists' personal struggles for liberation and for integration and wholeness. The process of rejection, followed by chaos and despair, leading in the direction of spiritual renewal and personal fulfillment, is of course a profoundly painful one, requiring great courage and fortitude. Laurence's protagonists explore and progress in this process to a varying degree along several of the multitude of possible paths. With regard to both her characters and herself she states:

> I think that I see not only my characters but myself and everybody else in a world which is not devoid of religion. I don't have any feeling, personally, of loyalty to the traditional Christian religions, and I say religions advisedly. I think of myself as a kind of religious atheist, if you like, or religious agnostic, who knows? but I do not really believe that God is totally dead in our universe, you see. I don't know even what I mean by God, but I don't think, personally, that we do live in a universe which is as empty as we might think. A lot of my characters, like myself, inhabit a world in which they no longer believe in the teachings of the traditional church, but where these things have enormous emotional impact on them still, as they do on me. There's a great deal, for example, in the Bible which really hits me very hard; it seems to express certain symbolic truths about the human dilemma and about mankind. The expression of various facets of human life and of human life searching for a consciousness greater than its own—that is, in God—some of this moves me in the way that great poetry moves you. I'm particularly attached to the King James version of the Bible, because it is the poetry of it that really hits me. A great many of the characters feel as I do about it: there's

> an enormous emotional inheritance. I am a Christian in the sense of my heritage. I'm capable as most novelists are, perhaps as most people are, of holding two mutually exclusive points of view at the same time, so that I can absolutely detest, intellectually, the thought behind a hymn like 'Onward Christian Soldiers', while I still think this is one of the most stirring and wonderful hymns ever written. Part of the terrific impact of things like the hymns derives from the fact that you learned these things in a much earlier era of your life, an era of rock-solid faith. Now you lost this: and part of the impact is not that you believe it, but you mourn your disbelief. This is Eden lost.[2]

But as she so often shows in her work, the loss, any loss is never the final word. There is no final word. Life goes on; the process continues. And through the struggle of humans and the grace of God, some measure of peace and fulfillment can be attained.

Laurence herself is an example. Her mother died when Margaret was four years old. She was raised in a household dominated by her authoritarian grandfather who did not believe in education for women and denied it to her stepmother. However, according to Margaret Atwood, "it was also a household in which women were expected to be intelligent; by women, that is. Her aunts were lively women who had their own careers."[3]

Her stepmother helped run the local library. She ordered all the recent Canadian fiction she could, and Margaret read it. After high school she broke family tradition and attended United College in Winnipeg, from which she graduated in 1947 at the age of 21. She then went to work as a reporter for The Winnipeg Citizen for which she reviewed books, wrote a radio column, and covered the labor news. She married the same year. In the following years she had two children and went to Africa with her husband, an engineer. She writes, "I always knew I wanted to be a writer....

There was never any doubt in my mind about that. But for many years, when I first started writing seriously, I felt enormous guilt about taking the time for writing away from my family. My generation were brought up to believe you had to iron the sheets."[4]

Her early fiction, This Side Jordan and The Tomorrow-Tamer, was written and set in Africa. She lived there during a time of civil unrest and independence movements and witnessed firsthand a culture losing its traditional value system. Her book The Prophet's Camel-Bell is a collection of African legends, her attempt to help them preserve their heritage. Yet she could never be more than an observer there. It was not her real home. She writes:

> I always knew that one day I would have to stop writing about Africa and go back to my own people, my own place of belonging, but when I began to do this, I was extremely nervous about the outcome. I did not consciously choose any particular time in history, or any particular characters. The reverse seemed to be true. The character of Hagar in The Stone Angel seemed almost to choose me. Later, though, I recognized that in some way not at all consciously understood by me at the time, I had had to begin approaching my background and my past through my grandparents' generation, the generation of pioneers of Scots Presbyterian origin, who had been among the first to people the town I called Manawaka. This was where my own roots began. Other past generations of my father's family had lived in Scotland, but for me, my people's real past—my own real past—was not connected with Scotland, and indeed, this was true for Hagar as well, for she was born in Manawaka.[5]

All Laurence's other female protagonists are born there too. Morag even journeys all the way to Scotland before learning the same personal truth as Laurence, that her real roots are not there but in Manawaka. Now Laurence lives in a small Ontario town. Interviews indicate that she has found some measure of the peace and fulfillment for

which she and her protagonists search.

In the Manawaka novels Laurence explores the developmental processes of modern Canadian women. She starts with Hagar, a woman from her grandparents' generation, to establish and examine the place where Laurence feels her own and her other protagonists' roots really begin. The other three heroines are all contemporary. In fact Laurence frequently is asked how Rachel, Stacey, and Morag are progressing in their lives. Each of these women pursues a different path within a society that has lost its values and belief system just as surely, if less dramatically, than the Africans. Laurence tends to see their struggles in Christian terms. As mentioned earlier, her protagonists like herself "no longer believe in the teachings of the traditional church," but "these things have enormous emotional impact on them still," and like her, they are "particularly attached" to the Bible. With varying success these women struggle with their religious heritage and attempt to evolve their own belief systems and a direct, personal relationship with what they conceive as God.

Footnotes

[1]I am not dealing with the Manawaka short story collection, A Bird in the House, because my main focus is on the maturation process and spiritual development of Laurence's adult female protagonists. Although it is written from an adult point of view, A Bird in the House focuses on Vanessa's childhood reminiscences. Some additional comments will be made in footnotes when relevant.

[2]Donald Cameron, "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 111-112.

[3]Margaret Atwood, "Face to Face," Maclean's, May 1974, p. 43.

[4]Ibid., p. 44.

[5]Margaret Laurence, "Sources," Mosaic III: 3 (Spring 1970), p. 81.

II Positive Aspects of Traditional Christianity in the Manawaka Novels

Margaret Laurence's four Manawaka novels, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers, and The Diviners are all firmly grounded in the Christian tradition. Yet neither Laurence nor any of her female protagonists are Christian in a conventional sense. As Kenneth Russell states:

> It could be argued that she uses familiar allusions simply to suggest the spiritual dimension of reality which lies below the obvious, surface flow of life. But there is more to it than this. Not only are the language and imagery drawn from Christian sources, the moment of saving insight to which her heroines come bears a distinctly Christian character. Though her women are not religious in any conventional sense, they live in a world where the force Christians call Providence writes straight on crooked lines. They are alienated from what seems to them a cold, sterile church yet they discover that grace moves like a life-giving stream under the surface of existence.[1]

While the protagonists have no use for institutionalized religion, belief in and the institutionalizing of belief in a stern, paternalistic, judgmental, Old Testament God are seen as one of the major instruments of oppression in Canadian society. At the same time these characters carry their Christian heritage with them, and more than that they need God and sense that He does indeed exist in some form or other.

One of the more overt ways in which Laurence herself reflects this heritage is in her use of the Bible as a primary source of allusion and metaphor. She states:

> I suppose that the biblical references and allusions come into most of my work naturally, because, although I can't quote chapter and verse, and have to refer to the verses which hover

> in my mind, it has always seemed to me that my own frame of reference was very much a Christian heritage.[2]

The first of the Manawaka novels, The Stone Angel, most obviously follows this pattern of Biblical usage. The protagonist, Hagar, is named after the Old Testament Egyptian bondswoman who belonged to Sarai, Abram's wife. Sarai gave Hagar to Abram when she failed to bear children herself. According to the custom of the time, Sarai could claim Hagar's children as her own. However, "when [Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes."[3] When Sarai complained to Abram and asked for the Lord's judgment, Abram told her she could do as she pleased because her maid belonged to her. Sarai dealt harshly with her, and Hagar ran away into the wilderness.

There are several interesting points to note when comparing the story of the Biblical Hagar with Laurence's Hagar. In the first place the Genesis Hagar has initially to deal with Abram and Sarai not Abraham and Sarah. God does not make His covenant with Abram and change his and his wife's names until after Hagar's son Ishmael is born. Abram is a servant of God, but no special relationship exists between them. Laurence's Hagar marries Bram whose name reminds one of the precovenant Abram, not Abraham, the father of God's chosen people. Indeed there is another reference to Hagar in the New Testament in Galatians in which St. Paul writes that the son born to Abram and Hagar "was born after the flesh."[4] He goes on to say that Hagar "is in bondage with her children."[5] Laurence's Hagar refers to her marriage to Bram in the same terms, as a marriage of the flesh. She observes, "His banner over me was only his own skin,"[6]

in ironic contrast to The Song of Solomon which says, "His banner over me was love."[7]

Hagar remembers the verse but not the source. It is not proper that such poetry is in the Bible, and the contrast between the relationship described in Solomon and Hagar's relationship with Bram is too painful to consider. She says, "Where that line comes from, I can't now rightly say, or else for some reason it hurts me to remember. He had a banner over me for many years. I never thought it love, though, after we wed."[8] Both Hagars possess the same overriding trait, pride, and Hagar Shipley never lets Bram know that her "blood and vitals [rose] to meet his in rising sap, like a heedless and compelled maple after a winter... He never expected any such a thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead."[9]

The Biblical Hagar was rejected because her marriage was of the flesh, but Laurence's Hagar does the rejecting herself out of pride and banishes herself to a spiritual wilderness. She chooses a marriage of the flesh and then rejects it for the very reason she chose it, and by casting away what fulfillment her marriage might have had, she condemns herself to the life of a bondswoman in both her own home and later as Mr. Oatley's servant. But her need remains.

> I never thought of Bram in the days any more, but I'd waken, sometimes, out of a half sleep and turn to him and find he wasn't beside me, and then I'd be filled with such a bitter emptiness it seemed the whole of night must be within me and not around or outside at all. There were times when I'd have returned to him, just for that. But in the morning I'd be myself once more, put on my black uniform with its white lace collar, go down and serve Mr. Oatley's breakfast with calm deliberation, hand him his morning paper with hands so steady that he couldn't have known I'd been away at all.[10]

Finally, in her last days, floating in and out of consciousness, she allows herself to cry aloud her human need for her mate. "'Bram!' One voice has almost screeched. Some time elapses before I realize the voice was mine."[11] When fully conscious she never makes such slips.

Laurence's Hagar suggests another parallel with her Biblical counterpart by referring to herself not as a Hebrew's Egyptian slave but as "Pharaoh's daughter"[12] no less, and to her father as a "fledgling pharaoh in an uncouth land."[13] Even at age six Hagar is "strutting the board sidewalk like a pint-sized peacock, resplendent, haughty, hoity-toity, Jason Currie's black-haired daughter."[14] She recollects,

> My brothers took after our mother, graceful unspirited boys who tried to please him but rarely could. Only I, who didn't want to resemble him in the least, was sturdy like him and bore his hawkish nose and stare that could meet anyone's without blinking an eyelash.[15]

Unfortunately Hagar Currie defies her father just because she is so like him, unlike the Biblical pharaoh's daughter whose compassion and warmth lead her in defiance of her father to save Moses and lovingly raise him. When Hagar's brother Matt brings her their mother's shawl and calls upon her to show compassion and warmth to their dying brother Dan by impersonating their mother, she can only respond like her father even though her failure tears her.

> All I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her—it was beyond me.
>
> 'I can't, Matt.' I was crying, shaken by torments he never even suspected, wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough.[16]

In another use of allusion Hagar Shipley likes to think of her two sons Marvin and John as Esau and Jacob. Like Esau, Marvin is big, slow, plodding, his father's favorite. John is dark, slender, quick, a deceiver, his mother's favorite. Unlike Esau, however, Marvin craves his mother's love and approval—with no success.

> He was a serious and plodding little boy, and seemed to take to chores naturally. But when he'd finished them, he'd hang around the kitchen, and everywhere I'd turn, there he'd be, getting under my feet, until it got on my nerves... "Go and see if your father needs any help."[17]

Hagar superficially forces Marvin into the Esau mold. "As he got older, he was less underfoot, for he spent more time outside with Bram."[18]

Even superficially she fails to create a Jacob out of John, although she is determined to legitimize him, establish him as a descendant in the line of the chosen people by telling him he takes after his grandfather Currie and giving him the Currie plaid pin, but his grandfather refuses to ever lay eyes on him, much less give him his blessing, and even Hagar's description of him is more appropriate for an Ishmael, whom the angel in Genesis told Hagar would be "a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell ever against all his kinsmen."[19] According to Hagar John is "wild as mustard seed in some ways, that child. He'd come out with swear words that would curl your hair..."[20] And in the scene in which he struggles at Hagar's command against his will to right the stone angel, Hagar comments,

> I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear, and swore.[21]

In the end it is Marvin who achieves legitimacy in spite of his mother by fighting in the war, working for Britemore paints, being a responsible family man, and becoming an usher in the Presbyterian church. On his last visit to the Shipley farm he begs his father's forgiveness, and on his mother's deathbed he receives her blessing, traditionally a father's blessing, and what she was unable to give Dan in a mother's role, she gives Marvin in a father's role. She cannot be the feminine angel of mercy, but she can be the masculine angel at Bethel.

> ... quite unexpectedly, he reaches for my hand and holds it tightly.
>
> Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him.
>
> It's in my mind to ask his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me.
>
> You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John.[22]

The stone angel, whose ossification was completed on the night of her favourite son's death, has cracked.

Hagar is a rigid, culture-bound old woman. She rejected her father but lived her life according to the letter of his law in spite of herself. She bore and raised two sons hollowly performing the role of a mother without ever relaxing her spine and feeling the spirit of a mother. She sacrificed everything human to keep up appearances and lived in self-imposed culturally-supported bondage. As will be shown, her religious inheritance is primarily part of her problem rather than a solution. Only in her last days is she able to give up some of her resistance and negativity towards her heritage and move in a positive direction towards

some level of spiritual fulfillment.

In many ways Rachel, the protagonist of A Jest of God, is Hagar's exact opposite. Shy and controlled, she is victimized by her own feelings and the feelings she projects onto others. She mothers every child in town as it passes through her schoolroom and in the end becomes her mother's mother. Yet although their personalities lead them in opposite directions, Hagar and Rachel are reacting to the same cultural and religious heritage—a stern, paternalistic, judgmental society reflecting a belief in a stern, paternalistic, judgmental God. Both women struggle against these forces but live in bondage to them.

The Biblical Rachel also deals with the same culture and the same God as the Biblical Hagar. Both their stories are told in Genesis (and incidentally both the Biblical Rachel and Laurence's Rachel are one generation younger and belong to the same community as the respective Hagars).

Laurence's Rachel resembles the Biblical Rachel in both personality and circumstance. Both are shy, retiring but emotional women with an overriding desire for children. The Biblical Rachel is forced to wait years for a husband, and Laurence's Rachel is still waiting. After her marriage to Jacob, the Biblical Rachel remains childless and cries out to him, "Give me children, or else I die." Jacob replies in anger, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"[23] Rachel Cameron exercises all her restraint when she makes the same demand of Nick:

'If I had a child, I would like it to be yours." This seems so

> unforced that I feel he must see it the way I do. And so restrained, as well, when I might have torn at him—Give me my children.[24]

Nick, however, is in limbo and unable and unwilling to fill any role, certainly not that of Jacob for her or the Prodigal Son for his father. To Rachel he says (paralleling her restraint), "Darling... I'm not God. I can't solve anything."[25] In the Old Testament story it is clear that a child will be given when God wills it. Rachel and Jacob know their relationship to God. Rachel Cameron and Nick Kazlik are bound by their confusion about their relationships to themselves, each other, their families, their society, and God—whoever He is. Neither of them has even made a marriage commitment nor is Nick able to make a commitment to his family. Talking about his father's need for a son who would help him on the farm and to whom he could leave it, he says, "I wonder if a person could make themselves care about something. I guess that wouldn't be possible. It wouldn't solve anything."[26]

Like Hagar Shipley, Rachel and Nick suffer from self-imposed bondage. In Jeremiah God tells the Israelites that they too have put themselves in bondage and are enemies to themselves but salvation will come:

> Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.
>
> Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.
>
> And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.[27]

Rachel and Nick, like Laurence's other characters, also live in bondage.

Their salvation is uncertain, but the potential is there.

The characters of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers and Morag in The Diviners are not based on Biblical prototypes like Hagar and Rachel although there are some connections. Stacey called herself Anastasia as a child (we are never told her christened name) and 'anastasis' according to Miriam Lancaster "refers to both the representation in Byzantine art of Christ harrowing hell and the Greek word for 'resurrection.'"[28] Morag is the Gaelic form of Sarah, and she bears some resemblance to Abraham's wife in that she is a loving, committed mother if not wife. Like Hagar and Rachel, however, Stacey and Morag do turn to the Bible as a source of allusion and metaphor in their own lives, particularly at moments of great significance and emotional intensity.

Several such references that Hagar makes have already been mentioned. Others occur in the last section of the novel. In the abandoned cannery on the morning after the rain Hagar comments on finding a "well in the wilderness, plain as you please."[29] And in her flash of insight in the hospital she says, "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear."[30] Hagar's allusions to demons and wells in the wilderness indicate that she finally understands her kinship with the Biblical Hagar but that in her own case she has banished herself to a spiritual wilderness which is intensified by her banishment from family and community. Her insight is precipitated by Mr. Troy's singing of the "Doxology," which is based on Psalm One Hundred. He sings, "All people that on earth do dwell,/Sing to the Lord with joyful voice./Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;/Come ye before Him and rejoice."[31] Hagar's

and necessitated many long-winded, self-conscious rationalizations and allegorical explanations for its presence in the Bible. One can hardly imagine Rev. McElfrish or Rachel's mother and her friends ever quoting from it or even acknowledging its existence. Hagar does quote a line from it but represses the source.

Rachel's final reference is paradoxical as well as ironic and occurs when she reflects on the choice she has made to break free and leave Manawaka: Psalm Fifty-One floods into her mind.

> I do not know how many bones need be broken before I can walk. And I do not know, either, how many need not have been broken at all.
>
> Make me to hear—
>
> How does it go? What are the words? I can't have forgotten all the words, surely, the words of the songs, the psalms.
>
> Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou has broken may rejoice.[36]

The bonds that imprison us are part of ourselves and breaking them is therefore painful and of course being bound crushes other parts. Yet only when bonds and bones have been broken, can they and the human being they structure rejoice.

In The Fire-Dwellers Stacey looks at herself with irony as well, but her Biblical references tend to be rather grim, particularly those of fiery holocaust on the Day of Judgment in Revelations. She comments:

> I don't want to, but I seem to believe in a day of judgment, just like all my Presbyterian forebears did, only I don't think it'll happen in the clouds or elsewhere and I don't think I'll be judged for the same things they thought they'd be. Piquette and her kids, and the snow and fire. Ian and Duncan in a burning house.[37]

She lives in constant fear that death or disaster will overtake her and

her children and half believes she will deserve it and her children will suffer because of her failures:

> Spoiled brats. What have I done to them? Fighting over a square inch of frozen artificial cream. Not dying of hunger. Not even aware of the possibility. Squabbling over nil. Who made them so? What will happen when the horsemen of the Apocalypse ride through this town?[38]

But her next words are "Oh Stacey, enough."[39] Being a warm, loving woman she is able to feel some compassion even for herself and credits God with some as well.

> At the Day of Judgment, God will say, Stacey MacAindra, what have you done with your life? And I'll say, Well, let's see, Sir, I think I loved my kids. And He'll say, Are you certain about that? And I'll say, God, I'm not certain about anything anymore. So He'll say, To hell with you, then . We're all positive thinkers up here. Then again, maybe He wouldn't. Maybe He'd say, Don't worry, Stacey, I'm not all that certain, either.[40]

Morag, in The Diviners, relates to the Bible in a way similar to Stacey. It is a pervasive frame of reference in her life. Verses do not pop into her mind unbidden as they do into Rachel's, but then Rachel is the only one of Laurence's protagonists who still attends church every Sunday. (Stacey sends her children, and Rachel only goes to keep the peace with her mother.) The one verse Morag does quote when she is at her lowest ebb after Christie's death is the same one that moves Stacey to tears when her father-in-law repeats it—Psalm 69:1 "Save me O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul." In counterpoint to her need Morag adds her irony to Laurence's (and perhaps God's) by commenting "It is, however, not God who finally provides a solution of sorts, but the Goldenrod Realty Company. Or perhaps fate really does travel in strange

disguises."[41] In any case the realty ad "strikes Morag like the spirit of God between the eyes."[42]

For the most part the Bible is a metaphorical reality for her like the tales of Christie and Jules. For instance when comparing the nature of Charlie Greenhouse with those of A-Okay and Dan, Morag muses:

> ... he wrestled with the land like Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, until (if ever) it blessed him. A-Okay and Dan would not have Charlie's outlook. They were different—they had seen Carthage; they had walked the streets of Askelon; they had known something of Babylon, that mighty city which dealt in gold and silver and in the souls of men; they had walked in the lion's den and had seen visions such as the prophet Daniel had seen while Belshazzar feasted. They came to the land in ignorance, perhaps expecting miracles which would not occur, but at least with caring, seeing it as a gift and not an affliction.[43]

The Bible in its totality plays a role in the Manawaka novels as well. In the first place it is a cultural history, a family history, and by placing her characters within such a framework Laurence gives their lives a heightened sense of validity and scope. Her use of Biblical allusion reminds one that the accounts of their struggles are part of the same family and cultural history.

In the second place the major events of the Bible provide a macrocosmic metaphor for the microcosmic human life of the individual. The Bible begins with the creation of form out of chaos, light out of darkness. Then because of their presumptuous seeking of knowledge, humans are cast out of the garden-home, into the wilderness. But through the suffering, death and Resurrection of Christ, mankind achieves salvation. Indeed the life of Christ itself provides another parallel to the life of the individual. He was born and brought up in a rigid, established society

which he rejected. He dealt with his own temptations in the wilderness and then returned to his society as a teacher, giving them a new, relevant belief system founded on their old one. He was repaid with crucifixion, but his sacrifice led to his own Resurrection and the salvation of mankind. Human beings spend the first fifteen or twenty years of their lives learning the forms and patterns of their societies. During stable periods they may live out their lives within these patterns, but in periods of flux and transition many individuals reject the ways they have learned. They struggle to find a way out of their personal wilderness by developing or discovering new forms and patterns that are meaningful to them which they in turn pass on to their children.

Morag as a child senses this parallel and feels a kinship with Jesus.

> Morag loves Jesus. And how. He is friendly and not stuck-up, is why. She does not love God. God is the one who decides which people have got to die, and when. Mrs. McKee in Sunday school says God is LOVE, but this is baloney. He is mean and gets mad at people for no reason at all, and Morag wouldn't trust him as far as she can spit. Also, at the same time, she is scared of God. You pray at nights, and say 'Dear God-', like a letter but slipping in the Dear bit for other reasons as well. Does He really know what everybody is thinking? If so, it sure isn't fair and is also very spooky.
>
> Jesus is another matter. Whatever anybody says of it, it was really God who decided Jesus had to die like that. Who put it into the head of the soldier, then, to pierce His side? (Pierce? The blood all over the place, like shot gophers and) Who indeed? Three guesses. Jesus had a rough time. But when alive, He was okay to everybody, even sinners and hardup people and like that.[44]

Laurence's protagonists follow this pattern of creation, rejection, despair, and salvation on an individual mortal scale. As Joan Coldwell writes:

> We have all in a sense been dispossessed at some time (even the tyrants who drove out the Scots and Irish had themselves, as Ancient Britons, Angles and Saxons, been conquered and displaced) and there lingers in the general memory the image of a lost Eden from which our common ancestors were expelled and to which we all seek return. The search for the lost Eden, for Jerusalem the Golden, for 'the promised land of one's own inner freedom' is undertaken in one form or another by each of Laurence's heroines. Paradise is not attainable on earth, but each is led a little closer to it in moments of heightened self-knowledge and genuine reaching out to others.[45]

Laurence's protagonists are all born into an established society formed out of an earlier chaos of displaced immigrants to the real physical wilderness of Canada. While they are still children, they are alienated from their Eden, their home, and enter the wilderness. For Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey the transition appears to have been gradual, but for Morag it occurs suddenly when her parents die, and she moves from the farm to town. Even her imaginary playmates do not accompany her.

> The lowest and largest boughs of the spruce reach down and touch the earth, making a cave, a small shelter into which no one can see. She is not doing anything. Cowboy Joke and Rosa Picardy and the others are not here now. They have gone away. For good. Once and for all.
> .....
> Morag does not look back, but she hears the metallic clank of the farm gate being shut. Closed.[46]

Hagar remains in her personal wilderness all her days and only on her deathbed comes to the realization that "I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched."[47] Rachel and Stacey are much more aware that their exile is internally as well as externally imposed, but the best they can do is to come to terms with this state of affairs at least to a certain extent. They are no longer paralyzed by it. Morag is the only one of the four able to transcend

the wilderness within and without and create her own form out of chaos, if not a new Eden at least a garden of sorts, a home:

> The long sweep of infrequently mown grass down to the river. The elm outside the window, still alive although for how long who could say? The small cedars, spearing lightly featheringly upwards. The fenced-off patch, where once Sarah Cooper had begun a vegetable garden all those years ago. Now it had gone to wild high seed-headed grasses, what a variety, must be dozens. And purple thistles, regal, giant. And those flowers like pale yellow snapdragons, called Butter-and-Eggs. And in late summer, the goldenrod. And those little pink whatsernames and those bright orange and brown softly bristled flowers called—ha!—Devil's Paintbrush. The birds liked the place, especially the goldfinches—it was their restaurant, all those seeds. Morag regarded it as a garden of amazing splendours, in which God did all the work.[48]

She lives in her garden and fills her role as diviner.

The other protagonists may not be as successful in their quests to regain Eden as Morag is, but they are at least able to draw nourishment from the Bible along their way. It remains a deeply-needed source of meaning and inspiration in their lives.

Footnotes

[1]Kenneth Russell, "Margaret Laurence's Seekers After Grace," Chelsea Journal, September-October 1977, p. 245.

[2]Miriam Lancaster, Jacob and the Angel: A Study of Biblical Influences in the Work of Margaret Laurence, M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, B.C., 1976, ii.

[3]The Holy Bible (King James Version) (Toronto: Canada: Thomas Nelson & Sons), Genesis 16:4.

[4]Ibid., Galatians 4:23.

[5]Ibid., Galatians 4:25.

[6]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1964), p. 81.

[7]The Holy Bible (King James Version), Song of Solomon 2:4.

[8]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 80.

[9]Ibid., p. 81.

[10]Ibid., p. 160.

[11]Ibid., p. 275.

[12]Ibid., p. 43.

[13]Ibid., p. 3.

[14]Ibid., p. 6.

[15]Ibid., p. 6-8.

[16]Ibid., p. 25.

[17]Ibid., p. 112-113.

[18]Ibid., p. 113.

[19]The Holy Bible (King James Version) (Toronto, Canada: Thomas Nelson & Sons), Genesis 16:12.

[20]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 127.

[21]Ibid., p. 178.

[22]Ibid., p. 304.

[23]The Holy Bible (King James Version), Genesis 30: 1-2.

[24]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1966), p. 181.

[25]Ibid., p. 182.

[26]Ibid., p. 137.

[27]The Holy Bible (King James Version), Jeremiah 31: 15-17.

[28]Miriam Lancaster, "Jacob and the Angel:", p. 78.

[29]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 187.

[30]Ibid., p. 292.

[31]Ibid., pp. 291-292.

[32]Ibid., p. 292.

[33]The Holy Bible (King James Version), John 8:32.

[34]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 123.

[35]Ibid., p. 162.

[36]Ibid., p. 245.

[37]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, Ltd., 1969), p. 237.

[38]Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[39]Ibid., p. 49.

[40]Ibid., p. 8.

[41]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 413.

[42]Ibid., p. 413.

[43]Ibid., pp. 410-411.

[44]Ibid., p. 77.

[45]Joan Coldwell, "Margaret Laurence: In Search of Ancestors," Book Forum, 4, p. 67.

[46]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, p. 17.

[47]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 292.

[48]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, pp. 169-170.

III Negative Aspects of Traditional Christianity in the Manawaka Novels

While the Bible may retain its relevance for Laurence and her protagonists, institutionalized religion does not. As Russell writes:

> The church, whether mainstream or Pentecostal, points away from the world toward joys and punishments to be meted out elsewhere. In looking to the future, it misses the present. It seems, therefore, a separated, isolated place.[1]

Very little is said about the Catholic Church, but Protestant and Evangelical churches are heartily rejected, although with a certain degree of wistfulness.

The wistfulness is hardly apparent in Hagar, of course, until the very end of her life. Prior to that she primarily expresses ironic contempt. When she was a girl, she went to church as one of the obligations imposed by her social position and enjoyed sharing in the deference shown to her family. After she marries Bram, she continues to attend until he embarrasses her.

> I never went to church after that. I preferred possible damnation in some comfortably distant future, to any ordeal then of peeking or pitying eyes.
>
> But now, when time has folded in like a paper fan, I wonder if I shouldn't have kept on going. What if it matters to Him after all, what happens to us? That question should concern me most of all.[2]

It does not, however, although now she at least considers it. The more pressing question for her still concerns appearances—has she now embarrassed Doris as much as Bram embarrassed her on that occasion in church?

Hagar's father, Jason Currie, and Rachel's mother are prime examples of hypocritical, rigid, sexually repressed pillars of the church, stone pillars. Mr. Troy, who belongs to a subsequent generation, is presented more sympathetically. There is really nothing negative to be said about him. He is merely ineffectual, but even Hagar credits him with "trying his level best" although he is "bashful and youngly anxious." And she realizes that she herself, "the Egyptian, [is] not dancing now with rowanberries in her hair, but sadly altered."[3] Time has had a softening effect. Hagar regards Mr. Troy with ironic contempt, calling him "God's little man,"[4] and commenting that he is "plump and pink, and if he met John the Baptist in tatters in the desert, stuffing dead locusts into that parched mouth for food, and blazing the New Kingdom out of those terrible eyesockets, he would faint. But so would I, likely."[5]

Because on such occasions she is able to look at herself in the same light in which she looks at others, she has moments of fellow-feeling which make possible her flashes of insight. One of these occurs when she asks Mr. Troy to sing the "Doxology": "He clasps and unclasps his hands. He flushes warmly, and peeks around to see if anyone might be listening, as though he'd pass out if they were. But I perceive now that there's some fibre in him. He'll do it, even if it kills him. Goodfor him. I can admire that."[6] She senses his struggle and then is able to clearly perceive her own and how much like her father she is. She had said of him, "God might have created heaven and earth and the majority of people, but Father was a self-made man, as he himself had told us often enough."[7] Now she realizes at last that she has lived as a self-made woman. It is

critical to remember that Hagar's insight is triggered by a hymn based on a Psalm. The church retains some life and depth to the extent that it remains connected with the Bible.

The other person who helps Hagar the most in her semi-conscious quest for self-knowledge is a disillusioned Christian, Murray Lees, who belongs to the Pentecostal tradition. As a young man he had joined his Evangelist grandfather's sect. "The brand of salvation he sold was fire-water, nothing meek about it, believe you me. It might be hard to swallow but you sure felt good once it was down."[8] "It was better than Buck Rogers and Tom Mix rolled into one."[9] Hagar has "heard vaguely of the Redeemer's Advocates, but never at firsthand before. [She'd] never have dreamed of having anything to do with such people."[10] But his kindness and frankness attract her. "There's a plausibility about this man. I like him now, despite his rabbity face, his nervous gnawing at his mustache."[11]

He tells Hagar his story first. Initially his life had religion, and his religion had life. He had met his wife at a Bible camp.

> She was a big strapping girl, a redhead. Like a feather mattress, that woman was, and that's a fact....
> In those days she could have prayed the angels themselves right down from heaven, if she'd been so inclined, and when she lay down on the moss and spread those great thighs of hers, there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world.[12]

Hagar is aghast: "Well, that's a mighty odd combination, I must say, prayer and that."[13]

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

'You call that love?'
'Lady,' he says, 'if that wasn't, what is?'
'I don't know. I just don't know, I'm sure.'[14]

As soon as Lou becomes pregnant, they marry, and Lees is quite happy, but not Lou. "All of a sudden she's a worrier, too. She planned to tell everybody the baby was premature."[15] Unfortunately for her that baby was nearly ten pounds which she interpreted as a punishment from God.

'Some punishment, I said, a whopping kid like this, healthy, all there. He doesn't have two heads, does he, or an eye missing?... she was never the same... She held herself back. Her heart wasn't in it. She was twice as keen at the Tabernacle though. She still is. But not me... I lost my faith,' he says confidingly, 'I kind of mislaid it and when I went to look for it, it wasn't there.'[16]

Like the Baptists and Presbyterians Lou succumbs to the bondage of the world of appearances. Like them she stifles her life in the here and now and concentrates on praying for the revelation of the exact time of the end of the world. "It's a funny thing," says Lees. "She thought it would come from so far away. The Almighty voice and the rain of locusts and blood. The moon turned dark and the stars gone wild. And all the time it was close by."[17] She prays for forgiveness of her sins in the past and for her salvation in the future and ignores present reality. Lees has opted out of all responsibility for his secular or spiritual life and goes along with her. "I thought—what the hell, it's not worth making a scene about."[18] Ironically their son smothers and is consumed in an earthly fire.

Lees sees the irony in their tragedy, but five years later he is still burning in a hellfire of his own creation:

'I can't figure out whose fault it could have been,' he says. 'My granddad's, for being a Bible puncher in the first place?

> Mother's, for making me prefer hellfire to lavender talcum? Lou's, for insisting nothing could happen to him? Mine, for not saying right out, long before, that I might as well not go, for all the good it was doing me?'[19]

Both Lees and his wife became involved with one extreme of institutionalized religion and lost touch with that upon which it was founded because it had lost touch too. Lees realizes this and leaves the church, but he is unable to lose his guilt with his faith.

Rachel's attitudes towards churches resemble Hagar's. In particular she is horrified at the public display of themselves that Evangelical believers make. Calla invites her to a special service at what Rachel terms "that fantastic Tabernacle"[20] which seems "an odd way for anyone to choose,"[21] and Rachel hurriedly makes an excuse, remembering "They sing the hymns like jazz, and people rise to testify, and I was so mortified I didn't know which way to look. How can they make fools of themselves like that, so publicly?"[22]

On a later occasion when she has agreed to go, she is panic-stricken at the thought that Calla might rise and "speak in tongues."

> If I have to endure to be there, and see her rising, hypnotized, and hear her known voice speaking gibberish, I think I will faint. How to get out of it? I can't bear watching people make fools of themselves. I don't know why, but it threatens me. It swamps me, and I can't look; the way as children we used to cover our eyes with our hands at the dreaded parts in horror movies.[23]

Here Rachel is getting in touch with one of her most basic fears—losing control and making a fool of herself. And when she goes, she does lose control and speak and of course reacts violently: "Do you know what I detest more than anything else? Hysteria. It's so — slack. I've never

done anything like that before. I'm so ashamed... What will I do next, Calla? I'm — oh, Calla, I'm so damn frightened."[24]

Calla is able to release herself from the bondage of her own rigidity much sooner than Rachel but not without a profound spiritual struggle. Her religious faith has been "the rock of [her] soul,"[24a] but Rachel's reaction to her own outburst in the Tabernacle shakes Calla, and she stays away from the Tabernacle for weeks, because as she later tells Rachel,

> ... of how you felt. It was contagious... I know you didn't mean it to be. But I felt the same. As though it must be awful, in some way, the place and everything there. It was then that I reread Saint Paul.
> .....
> If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. I mean, there you are. I thought to myself—Calla, you old cow, there you are.[25]

It is partially through this insight of Calla's that Rachel is finally able to reach the same knowledge for herself. Rachel's immediate reaction to St. Paul's words is that he has "appallingly accurate sight. What he says isn't what should be. It's merely what is."[26] And gradually she learns to accept herself not as what she should be but merely as what she is.

On many levels including the spiritual, Rachel's internal struggles become externalized in her conflict with her mother, and when she finally resolves them internally, she resolves them externally as well. One aspect of this phenomenon is Rachel's battle to overcome her shame and embarrassment over her mother's reaction to Calla and the Tabernacle.

> I should care what Mother thinks of her. What does it matter? If only Calla wouldn't insist on talking about the Tabernacle

> in Mother's hearing. Mother thinks the whole thing is weird in the extreme, and as for anyone speaking in a clarion voice about their beliefs—it seems indecent to her almost in the same class as what she calls foul language. Then I get embarrassed for Calla, and ashamed of being embarrassed, and would give anything to shut her up or else to stop minding.[27]

Of course, the reason she is ashamed and embarrassed is because a large part of her shares her mother's view. She brings this fact into focus for herself in her family church when the congregation is subjected to an off-key solo. Her mother is greatly vexed:

> 'Why on earth do they let him?' Mother hisses softly... Inwardly, though, I'm as much on edge as mother... How can he do it? Doesn't he know how he sounds and how it makes him look?... Beside me, Mother squirms. I can't blame her. Surely one might reasonably expect not to have to be embarrassed in <u>this</u> church, at least.[28]

On the way home after church Rachel's mother calls it a disgrace and asks for and receives Rachel's agreement. "And yet," Rachel thinks, "with some part of myself, I am inexplicably angry at this agreement."[29]

She has an advantage over her mother in her struggle to break her own rigid self-control and her expectation of others to exert the same control over themselves. As she puts it, "The Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God. She was brought up that way, and my father, too, and I—but by the time it reached me, the backbone had been splintered considerably."[30] The process of relaxing her spine and accepting herself and others is slow for her, but at least she has enough self-awareness to know it is taking place.

Another issue in her struggle with institutionalized religion and her mother is her attendance at her family church. When she first came back from university in Winnipeg, she had refused to go with her mother.

> I didn't say God hadn't died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago; longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive. No use to say that. I only told her I didn't agree with everything. She said, 'I don't think it would be very nice not to go. I don't think it would look very good.' But I didn't go. I held out three weeks. She didn't reproach me, not openly. She only relayed comments... I thought what was the point in upsetting her, so I went. And have done, ever since.[31]

Now she accompanies her mother to church, but still religion is not discussed between them.

> I wonder what she believes, if anything. She's never said. It was not a subject for discussion. She loves coming to church because she sees everyone, and in spring the new hats are like a forest of tulips. But as for faith—I suppose she takes it for granted that she believes. Yet if the Reverend MacElfrish should suddenly lose his mind and speak of God with anguish or joy, or out of some need should pray with fierce humility as though God had to be there, Mother would be shocked to the core. Luckily, it will never happen.[32]

This church's sterility and lifelessness disturb Rachel almost as much as the Tabernacle's gaudiness and excess. Reverend MacElfrish is "smooth and mellifluous," and "he is careful not to say anything which might be upsetting." The church's decor is refined:

> Nothing ornate—heaven forbid. The congregation has good taste. Simple furnishing, but the grain of the wood shows deeply brown-gold, and at the front, where the high altar would be if this had been a church which paid court to high altars, a stained-glass window shows a pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain; just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga, holding his arms languidly up to something which might in other circumstances have been a cross.[33]

At the other extreme the minister at the Tabernacle has a voice as "creamy as mayonnaise... When he says <u>thr-ill-lling</u> it sounds like a Technicolor movie, one of those religious epics.[34] The Sanctuary is

> almost as large as though the place had been a proper church. The chairs are in semicircular rows; the same straight, thickly varnished chairs one used to find in every school auditorium, but replaced there now with lighter ones which can be stacked up, and the old ones probably sold to establishments such as this. The painted walls are heavy with their greenish blue; not the clear blue of open places but dense and murky, the way the sea must be, fathoms under. Two large pictures are hanging, both Jesus, bearded and bleeding, his heart exposed and bristling with thorns like a scarlet pincushion. There is no altar, but at the front a kind of pulpit stands, bulky and new, pale wood blossoming in bunches of grapes and small sharp birds with beaks uplifted. The top of the pulpit is draped with white velvet, like a scarf, tasselled with limp silver threads, and on the velvet rests a book. The Book, of course, not jacketed severely in black but covered with some faintly glittering cloth or substance impersonating gold, and probably if the room were dark it would glow—or give off sparks.[35]

There is no possibility of either place offering Rachel spiritual sustenance.

Stacey has little to do with any church, which is hardly surprising when one considers what it must have been like for her as a child being taken by her mother to church each Sunday along with Rachel. It is interesting to note that she never talks about it even to herself. As an adult she does not attend any church, although at one time she considered joining the Redeemer's Advocates, the sect to which Murray Lees belonged. She decided not to join, but she is still defensive about it. She tells Mac, "Serenity, I thought. I was going to give it a whirl. But I couldn't. Maybe it was the thought of your dad that stopped me even from going to a meeting. You know, having been a United Church minister and that. I thought he'd have a fit."[36] One also feels that, as Murray Lees observed, the firewater might feel good once it was down, but it was hard to swallow—too hard for Stacey. She settles for gin.

Yet she does send her children to Sunday school. Again, is it only out of deference to Matthew or is it complicated by her own confused spiritual need? She feels,

> I've failed them by failing to believe, myself. I pretend to it, but they are not deceived. Yet I am the one who wakens them on Sunday mornings and shoves them off churchwards. One more strand in the tapestry of phoniness. I want to tell them. What? That I mourn my disbelief? I don't tell them, though. I go along with the game. It's easier that way.[37]

Ironically, by not openly expressing her feelings to her children she is behaving in a way similar to Matthew's behavior bringing up his family which she tells him was wrong. Matthew says to her,

> I wanted him to grow up with some strong background of faith. But he didn't. The reason must be that I had so many doubts myself. I must have passed them on even though I never spoke of them... One should be certain. A minister should be. If he isn't, he must at least try not to put anyone else's faith in jeopardy. That always seemed to me to be the least I could do. But with Mac I failed. Perhaps there is something contagious about doubt. He must have known all along about that essential flaw in me.[38]

Stacey replies, "Mac would have been relieved if he'd known you weren't always certain. But he didn't know."[39] Her words fall on deaf ears, her own as well as Matthew's. And although they all suffer from doubt, unlike Matthew, Stacey, Mac, and presumably their children have avoided having their "Heavenly Father to strengthen [their] right arm[s] or resolve, to put the steel reinforcing in [their] spine[s]."[40] That lack increases their chances of breaking free without breaking up or at least that breaking up will only be the first stage in the process toward wholeness. George Grant writes:

> When one contemplates the conquest of nature by technology one must remember that that conquest had to include our own

> bodies. Calvinism provided the determined and organized men and women who could rule the mastered world. The punishment they inflicted on non-human nature, they had first inflicted on themselves.[41]

Morag also attends a nice, respectable United church as a child, but unlike Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey she is not among the "in" group.[42] This certainly increases her pain as a child, but perhaps gives her an advantage as an adult since she refuses to be defeated like Eva Winkler and begins early to develop herself as an independent woman rather than just an outcast.

Initially she longs for acceptance. As a young girl she even risks giving one of her poems to her Sunday school teacher (who is the minister's wife). "Mrs. McKee doesn't bawl people out, nor look at their clothes. Mrs. McKee's clothes are none too hot, if it comes to that... Should Morag show Mrs. McKee the poem she's brought to show her? Would Mrs. McKee laugh? No. Mrs. McKee isn't a laugher. Maybe."[43] Mrs. Mckee is distantly kind to Morag but cuts her off. She then confirms Morag's distrust by selecting the daughter of one of the prestigious families to sing the Christmas program solo. Now Morag does the cutting off: "Would Mrs. McKee think Morag would look okay, standing up there alone in the choir loft? Would Mrs. McKee be that way? Sure. You bet. Any of them would. Wouldn't they?"[44] She is still hanging on to a remnant of hope that someone might be different, might follow Christ's example.

By the time she reaches her mid-teens she no longer retains any such hope overtly, but she dresses and behaves in the most approved manner:

> Morag is dressed nicely. Nobody could deny it... But all this

> makes no difference. When church is over, and they're all filing out, chatting... no one will say Good Morning to Morag and Prin. Not on your life. Might soil their precious mouths. Maybe they're just embarrassed, like, and don't know what to say? Not a chance. They're a bunch of—well, a bunch of so-and-so's.
>
> In Christ there is no East or West,
> In Him no North or South—
> Oh yeh? Like fun there isn't.[45]

This is the last time she attends with Prin. "I'm not going to church anymore. I don't like it. It's—it's—."[46] She can only partially articulate her rage and frustration, but by the time of Prin's death Morag's bitterness and contempt are a well-developed armor. She judges the minister officiating at the funeral as a young and pathetic man who would not arrange for the choir to sing "unless the deceased is a well-known citizen."[47]

By the time Christie dies Morag is well started on her path towards internal security and integration and no longer has such a need for her armor which is after all a prison as well as a protection. This time the young minister is perceived as kindly and awkward, "whose brother Christie Logan manifestly was not, although this is by no means the minister's fault. Perhaps he even wonders who Christie was, and perhaps, if Morag could bring herself to express the years, he might even like to know. But it is not possible, not now, not here."[48] Her perception has matured sufficiently to enable her to accept responsibility for its subjectivity.

One of the pictures on the Sunday school room wall that Morag liked as a child was of the Good Samaritan. She has evolved into a similar role now. She lives outside the several institutionalized religions of her society, but although she does not follow the letter of any religious

law, she lives in the spirit of those laws. She regards her fellowman with compassion, understanding, and acceptance without judging them.

The only character we meet in the novel who comes from an Evangelical background is Royland, and his path has led him in a direction similar to Morag's. As a matter of fact she is one of the few people to whom he has ever told his story. He had been

> "one of your real ripsnortin' Bible-punchers... I thought," Royland continued, "that I had the Revealed Word. God was talking to me, sure as hell, and probably to no one else. At meetings I used to give 'em real fire-and-brimstone. Strongmen wept. I'm not kidding. Must've been a godawful sight, eh?
>
> I never saw it. I mean I never saw it that way."[49]

His fanaticism drove his wife to suicide. Like Morag after she ended her marriage (although in a less dramatic manner), he went off by himself.

> "Began to see—not all at once, mind you, but gradually—that I'd been crazy as a coot, before. Reasons for that, but too many to explain now. I was brought up by an aunt who—well, it wasn't really her fault, either. You don't know how it is for other people, or how far back it all goes. Anyway, I found I could divine wells, so I came back and settled here. Seemed better to find water than to—."
>
> "Raise fire," Morag finishes for him.[50]

Unlike Murray Lees who remains bound in his guilt and need to determine blame, Royland has learned acceptance of himself and others and has become a diviner.

Perhaps the single perception, conscious or unconscious, most common to the characters in all the novels is that institutionalized religion tends to stifle and kill spiritual life rather than nurturing it. Calvinist Protestantism and Evangelism are two sides of the same coin. The former is understated and severe. The later is overstated and

flamboyant. The former finds the heart distasteful, repugnant. The latter relishes it, exploits it. Neither inspires it. Appearance consciousness, being judgmental, guilt are all bonds to the spirit.

Russell writes:

> Both the church and revivalist's tent compress the mystery of God into a moral hammer and offer the ego strategies by which to cloak its hatred and fear of life in the mantle of God himself.[51]

Laurence's protagonists and some of the other characters reject the religion in which they were raised, but they sense that there is a God out there whether they believe in Him or not. Each of them struggles to evolve some meaningful, personal relationship to this Being. They feel a need to feel at home within themselves and their world, to regain Eden.

Footnotes

[1]Kenneth C. Russell, "God and Church in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," Studies in Religion, 7, (No. 4, Fall 1978), p. 439.

[2]Margaret Laurance, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1964), pp. 89-90.

[3]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[4]Ibid., p. 40.

[5]Ibid., p. 38.

[6]Ibid., p. 291.

[7]Ibid., p. 17.

[8]Ibid., p. 225.

[9]Ibid., p. 226.

[10]Ibid., p. 230.

[11]Ibid., p. 230.

[12]Ibid., p. 227.

[13]Ibid., p. 227.

[14]Ibid., pp. 227-228.

[15]Ibid., p. 228.

[16]Ibid., pp. 228-229.

[17]Ibid., p. 233.

[18]Ibid., p. 231.

[19]Ibid., p. 234.

[20]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1966), p. 4.

[21]Ibid., p. 11.

[22]Ibid., p. 11. Noreen, the hired girl in A Bird in the House, is another member of the congregation at the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn. She has testified seven times in two years. Vanessa's mother "who could not imagine anyone's voluntarily making a public spectacle of themselves, was profoundly shocked by this revelation." Her father remarks soothingly that, "She's all right. She's just had kind of a dull life, that's all." Vanessa recalls, "My mother shrugged and went on worrying and trying to help Noreen without hurting her feelings, by tactful remarks about the advisability of modulating one's voice when singing hymns..." Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 83.

[23]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 34.

[24]Ibid., p. 46.

[24a]Ibid., p. 12.

[25]Ibid., pp. 165-166.

[26]Ibid., p. 166.

[27]Ibid., p. 32.

[28]Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[29]Ibid., p. 54.

[30]Ibid., p. 81.

[31]Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[32]Ibid., p. 51.

[33]Ibid., p. 52.

[34]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[35]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[36]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1969), p. 32.

[37]Ibid., p. 62.

[38]Ibid., pp. 253-254.

[39]Ibid., p. 254.

[40]Ibid., p. 230.

[41]George Grant, Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), pp. 23-24.

[42]Morag and Prin are victimized by the Calvinistic social distinction which Vanessa in A Bird in the House understands as between the upright and the downright—"'downright worthless' or 'downright lazy.'" Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House, p. 6.

[43]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 78.

[44]Ibid., p. 82.

[45]Ibid., pp. 108-109.

[46]Ibid., p. 110.

[47]Ibid., p. 251.

[48]Ibid., p. 403.

[49]Ibid., p. 240.

[50]Ibid., p. 241.

[51]Kenneth C. Russell, "God and Church in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence", Studies in Religion, 7, (No. 4, Fall 1978), p. 445.

IV The Process of Spiritual Development in Laurence's Protagonists

Margaret Laurence has said:

> If I came from anywhere, I came from a small prairie town of Scots Presbyterian stock. I had to come to terms in some way with that environment which I had, at the time, rebelled against—I wanted very much to get out—I couldn't wait to get out of that town. Then, years later, I found I had to come back and examine all those things, examine my own family, my own roots and in some way put to rest the threat that had been there. I think that, in a sense, this is what I have done.[1]

For Laurence's protagonists as well, Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, and Morag, the past is a threat against which they rebel and from which they attempt to escape. One reason they find their pasts so difficult to deal with is the Protestant focus on pragmatism and the inability to contemplate. This state of affairs has been articulated by George Grant:

> Because the encounter of the land with the Protestants was the primal for us, we never inherited much that was at the heart of western Europe... the very nature of the primal for us meant that we did not bring with us from Europe the tradition of contemplation... it may perhaps be said negatively that what has been absent for us is the affirmation of a possible apprehension of the world beyond that as a field of objects considered as pragmata—an apprehension present not only in its height as 'theory' but as the undergirding of our loves and friendships, of our arts and reverences, and indeed as the setting for our dealing with the objects of the human and non-human world. Perhaps we are lacking the recognition that our response to the whole should not most deeply be that of doing, nor even that of terror and anguish, but that of wondering or marvelling at what is... and that such a stance, as beyond all bargains and conveniences, is the only source from which purposes may be manifest to us for our necessary calculating.[1a]

Hagar and her father perfectly exemplify this orientation. Jason

Currie sees himself as not created but made—by himself, presumably from noggins, pints, and pecks. "The devil finds work for idle hands. He put his faith in homilies. They were his Pater Noster, his Apostles' Creed. He counted them off like beads on a rosary, or coins in the till. God helps those who help themselves. Many hands make light work."[2] As Grant goes on to say,

> ... the Calvinists claimed to be freeing theology from all but its Biblical roots and cut themselves off from pure contemplation more than did any other form of European theology—Catholic or Jewish, Lutheran or even Anglican. For the Calvinist, theology was a prophetic and legal expounding of a positively conceived revelation, the purpose of which was to make its practical appeal to men. Thus being in our origins this form of Protestant, thrown into the exigencies of the new continent, we did not partake of the tradition of European contemplation. And as we moved from that Calvinism to modernity, what was there in the influence of liberalism which could have made us more open to that contemplation.[3]

What had once been a vital, living religion has been reduced to a series of 'rules to live by,' materialistic aphorisms extracted from a coldhearted, insensitive interpretation of Christian teachings. Jason regards his success in this life as a foretoken of his status in the next, and his estimation of himself as one of the elect is shared by the mainstream of his community. When the new church is opened Reverend Dougall MacCulloch "feelingly 'thanks those of our congregation whose generosity and Christian contributions have made our new church possible.'"[4] Jason whispers to Hagar, "I and Luke McVitie must've given the most, as he called our names the first."[5] It is noteworthy that he mentions "I" first, then "Luke McVitie" although in fact Luke McVitie's name was read first, then Jason Currie's. "The first" will always extend just

far enough to include Jason Currie, but no farther. And when the congregation then sings, "Unto the hills around do I lift up / My longing eyes. / O whence for me shall my salvation come, / From whence arise?"[6] the names that spring to their minds in response are not, one assumes, "the Lord" or "God".

Hagar is made in the image of her father. She seeks salvation, through her son John, in material terms, not by "spinning spiderwebs" as he does, and tragically, she demonstrates her belief in him by spouting maxims like her father, trying to force him into her father's mold as well. "Not everyone can start with money. Many a man's pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, as your grandfather Currie did. And you will, too. I know it. You'll do well, just you wait and see. You've got his gumption. We'll have a house finer than this, one day."[7] Even at ninety when she reviews her life, she does not contemplate. There is no sense of meditation, of reflection upon and even appreciation of what is. She re-evaluates, reassesses, weighing and measuring.

In an approach related to Grant's, Margaret Atwood breaks down her survey of the Canadian Calvinist tradition by differentiating three generations—the Grandparents, the Parents, and the Children. Jason Currie would fall in the Grandparent generation, Hagar in the Parent generation, and Rachel, Stacey, and Morag in the Children generation. (Actually if one is strictly chronological, there is another generation between Hagar and Rachel, Stacey and Morag. John Shipley trades Hagar's plaid pin to his friend Lazarus Tonnerre.)

Atwood describes them in the following manner:

> (the parents) are just as work-driven as the Grandparents but without the compensation of being able to believe that they are fulfilling the Will of God.
>
> Children try to escape both previous generations. They desire neither the Calvinism and commitment to the land of the Grandparents, nor the grey placelessness and undefined guilt of the parents. They want, somehow, to live, but they have trouble finding a way to do this.
>
> .....
>
> a certain amount of exorcism, acceptance and reconciliation is needed... Guilt, guilt and more guilt. But for the Children, even more than for the Parents, it is a guilt without final cause and therefore a guilt without final atonement or expiation. The further into the past the Calvinist God recedes, the more his legacy of guilt becomes separated from its objects: Children can feel guilty about everything... for literary purposes at least, the so-called relaxation of Puritan taboos could produce, not a race of guilt-free Canadians, but simply a wider field for the exercise of guilt... they may not even explicitly feel it, but it's like the air they breathe, and their self-destructive and nihilistic behaviour is merely an acting out of it.[8]

Jason Currie and Hagar are able to deal fairly effectively with their inherited sense of guilt. After all Jason is obviously one of the elect although even he admits a darker side as when he forbids Hagar to teach. "'You know nothing,' he said in an almost inaudible voice. 'Men have terrible thoughts.'"[9] Presumably they do not jeopardize his status as long as they remain, as Hagar notes, "thoughts, not deeds."[10]

Hagar, like her father, is well-defended by her internalization of the Clan war cry, "Gainsay who dare!" which she directs towards God as well as all humanity. But the defence is necessary because the guilt is present inside the stronghold. She shares the common ironic fate of imprisoning herself together with her enemy. She finally becomes aware of this shortly before her death.

At the times in her life when Hagar feels completely imprisoned, by what she perceives as external forces of course, her pattern is to rebel and escape. The first time, she rejects her father and the sterile respectability he represents and which he would perpetuate for her by forbidding her to teach and keeping her home in the role of lady of the house. When he finds a suitable husband to keep her, she can become lady of her own house which will presumably be built for her by her father and prospective father-in-law as was done for Matt. Understandably she rejects this role of "princess in the tower". She is attracted to Bram by his aliveness. "I fancied I heard in his laughter the bravery of battalions. I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face. The black hair thrusting from his chin was rough as thistles."[11] She longs to be connected with such natural life energy, but the development of her own energy has been so stunted by her upbringing that she can only relate to it on a fantasy level. Besides, she has internalized her society's values to a large extent and part of her quite enjoys playing the fine lady:

> I knew my mind, no doubt, but the mind changed every minute, one instant feeling pleased with what I knew and who I was and where I lived, the next instant consigning the brick house to perdition and seeing the plain board town and the shack dwellings beyond our pale as though they'd been the beckoning illustrations in the book of Slavic fairy tales given me by an aunt, the enchanted homes with eyes, walking on their own splayed hen's feet, the czar's sons playing at peasants in coarse embroidered tunics, bloused and belted, the ashen girls drowning attractively in meres, crowned always with lilies, never with pigweed or slime.[12]

After she marries Bram, she finds that living the life of a peasant makes it very difficult to play princess.

Hagar's stubbornness and pride keep her going for years, but eventually she rebels again and plans a second escape, this time to the "New Jerusalem" of the rural prairie citizen, Vancouver. For the third time her role is keeping house for a man and this time the house is grand, but she is neither daughter nor wife but mere servant. The man she serves, Mr. Oatley, epitomizes on a grand scale what her father represented on a small scale—control, arrogance, contempt, the logical extreme of the Calvinist tradition. Hagar imposes the full force of her will on herself and complies. When she discovered as a young child that her father was selling sultanas infested with bugs, she confronted him mischieviously, "delighted that they'd dare appear there and flout my father's mighty mustache and his ire."[13] His ire is then directed at her for having "no regard for my reputation,"[14] but she stands her ground. After all she is the princess, pharaoh's daughter and therefore has some status. With Mr. Oatley the situation is quite different.

> He'd been in shipping and said they used to bring Oriental wives here, when the celestials were forbidden to bring their women, and charge huge sums for passage, and pack the females like tinned shrimp in the lower hold, and if the Immigration men scented the hoax, the false bottom was levered open, and the women plummeted. They knew the chance they took when they began, he assured me. The husbands were always angry, both women and passage money lost, but who could help it? And Mr. Oatley would shrug and smile, begging my laughter and my approbation. And I'd oblige, for who could help it? Whatever he left me in his will, I earned it, I'll tell the world.[15]

Only her final comment reveals her bitterness. She laughs at what she might call one of "the jokes of God,"[16] but it is the irony of human perversity, not God, that can distort an ostensibly Christian society

to such an extent that not only can such things occur, but they can be regarded with amused fatalism. "Who could help it?"

Hagar only escapes from Mr. Oatley when he dies although he leaves her enough money to replace his cage with a more modest one of her own. In that sense she never escapes him, and eventually even that home is taken over by her son and daughter-in-law.

Her last attempt at rebellion and escape is more successful. This time she leaves the house Mr. Oatley has provided for her in order to prevent being sent to the Silverthreads Nursing Home by her son and daughter-in-law. The house has been deeded over to Marvin so she again has no control over her external home-prison, but this time she gains insight into the internal one she has constructed for herself (with the generous help of her society) and starts to realize that she herself has determined whether her home was a prison or a garden.

Each of Hagar's rebellious escape attempts has led her down and towards water. The first one led her down to the ramshackle Shipley farm in the riverbottom. The second one led her down to Mr. Oatley's Vancouver mansion near the sea. The third time she descends much further to an abandoned fish cannery by the sea at Shadow Point. The descent into chaos has an auspicious beginning. The steps, concealed by verdant growth, are "notched into the earth,"[17] and the ground is pinpointed with white Stars of Bethlehem pointing her way to spiritual release and salvation. "Then it strikes me suddenly, a stone pelted at my gaiety. I haven't brought any water... Oh, what was I thinking of? How could I have neglected that? What shall I do?"[18]

Hagar's need for water is spiritual as well as physical. According to Alan Richardson, "The image of water in Holy Scripture [has] been refined so that it may be used to convey pre-eminently the thought of God's activity in the world through the Holy Spirit, who as a living fountain cleanses, quenches thirst and refreshes the People of God."[19] Almost before she begins her spiritual journey, she reverts to expecting to fill all her needs herself. She should have planned better. But this time she is unable to retreat. Her body is too old and heavy to serve her will, and she cannot reascend the steps. She begins to gain some sense of her spiritual need and feels she is in a period of waiting. Physically and spiritually she longs for water and feels sure there must be a well. "What would a fortress be without a well?"[20] She does not find the water yet, but she does find that a brass bed complete with mattress has been provided for her to sleep. She tries

> ... a little, to pray, as one's meant to do at evening, thinking perhaps the knack of it will come to me here. But it works no better than it ever did. I can't change what's happened to me in my life, or make what's not occurred take place. But I can't say I like it, or accept it, or believe it's for the best. I don't and never shall, not even if I'm damned for it. So I merely sit on the bed and look out the window until the dark comes and the trees have gone and the sea itself has been swallowed by the night.[21]

She is still caught in the dilemma between the rigid, sterile Protestantism with which she was raised and an intuitive yearning for a fertile, nurturing, loving, life-giving God. She continues to reject the former. She is unable to pray as she has been taught or accept her life with 'Christian resignation.' Yet she is becoming more receptive to the latter concept of God.[22] She gazes out her window and

contemplates until together with the trees and sea she is swallowed by the night. For a time she ceases her raging and judging and quietly observes the natural world. The scene is reminiscent of Jonah who also was noteworthy for his stubbornness and defiance and escape attempt. When he is in the belly of the whale he prays,

> I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice... The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head... When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee...[23]

When Hagar is swallowed up by the night she says, "Now I could fancy myself there among them, tiaraed with starfish thorny and purple [still the princess], braceleted with shells linked on limp chains of weed, waiting until my encumbrance of flesh floated clean away and I was free and skeletal and could journey with tides and fishes."[24] Like Jonah she will later return to her defiant stance, but for the time being she responds to her sense of God, and He answers her.

It rains during the night, and in the morning she moves a step beyond observation and marvels at the freshness and beauty of the trees—real worship. She goes in search of water. "A raucous gang of sparrows with voices bigger than themselves flicker their wings, spin and dart in a burst and frenzy of high-heartedness, and I follow after them in envy and admiration."[25] They lead her to a bucket of fresh rain water: "I've always likedthe sparrows. And now they've led me here, and here's my well in the wilderness, plain as you please."[26] She gratefully accepts God's bounty but then takes the water from the sparrows and puts

it inside the house, reflecting that it is "too bad to deprive them, but if a person doesn't look after herself in this world, no one else is likely to."[27] God is not cutting her off. She is cutting herself off from him, and as in the children's rhyme she recalls: "The branches will wither, the roots they will die, / You'll all be forsaken and you'll never know why."[28]

Hagar has some sense of the process through which she is moving. Sitting on a fallen tree trunk in the woods, she again falls into contemplation.

> I'll rest awhile. I'm in no hurry now. I like this green blue-ceilinged place, warm and cool with sun and shade, where I'm not fussed at. Perhaps I've come here not to hide but to seek. If I sit quietly, willing my heart to cross over, will it obey?
>
> But I can't sit quietly for more than two seconds together. I never could. Although the place is right, the time may not be, and I can see as though in a mirror of neverending depth that I'd not willingly hasten the moment by as much as the span of a breath.[29]

Hagar still associates giving in to anything, even life, with surrender, and with death. She feels part of the natural world, of life, but being part of a whole necessitates dissolving the rigid boundaries of her self, and she is not ready to free herself from that prison. She stops herself from feeling and starts thinking again, this time about John and Arlene and her partial responsibility in forbidding their natural life.

Afraid to return to the house, that evening she prefers to sleep in the cannery, where she encounters two representatives of the living world. After exploring the manmade junk for awhile, she

discovers the June bugs, natural jewels but dead, and decorates herself with them. Then life enters the room in the form of a seagull. Hagar reacts in a way similar to her reaction to Bram's stallion: "The way the thing pulses—it scares and disgusts me."[30] The only horses she likes are in pictures on the wall, as Bram once sarcastically noted. She found real ones "high and heavy... so muscular, so much their own masters—I never felt I could handle them."[31] Both horses and seagull represent the same thing to Hagar—powerful, uncontrollable life, definitely not respectable. The closest she ever comes to having such an image of herself is as a girl, "the dark-mained colt off to the training ring, the young ladies' academy in Toronto."[32] Later, she sings an evening prayer, "Abide with Me," but again she finds it unsatisfactory for the same reason as on the previous evening. As she comments, "I might as well be singing the directions from a knitting book, for all the good it's doing me."[33] Hagar may think of religion as a set of instructions for attaining a place in a heaven to which she would not care to go, but the spirit of her hymn is answered by the appearance of Murray F. Lees.

Lees and Hagar fill the roles of penitent and priest/priestess for each other. They tell each other their stories and each receives from the other a measure of forgiveness for his or her degree of responsibility for the death of his or her son. Hagar provides the bread, Lees the wine, and they commune. She tells him, "No one's to blame."[34] He tells her, "These things happen."[35] Neither can take away the other's pain, but it helps them to share it. They "listen

for the terrible laughter of God, but can hear only the vapid chuckling of the sea."[36] Because of their religious backgrounds, although at opposite poles of Protestantism, both Hagar and Lees find it necessary to assign blame. As Hagar questions later in the hospital, "Why is it always so hard to find the proper one to blame? Why do I always want to find the one? As though it really helped."[37] As John Baxter writes, whatever belief they once had has been reduced to the belief that "God's order is in fact not order but caprice, and, of course, there is no point in trying to appease, or align one's will to the whim of a completely capricious deity. [Such an attitude] makes possible the attributing of unfortunate acts to the irresponsibility of God or of the gods rather than to the irresponsibility of human beings."[38] Hagar responded the same way to what her Aunt Dolly told her about Matt the day after he died. "I've often wondered why one discovers so many things too late. The jokes of God."[39] Sandra Djwa explains:

> The laughter of God would seem to be related to the irony of human existence: man, from his restricted vantage point, can almost never fully understand his own condition. Hagar, associated with the sightless stone angel above her mother's grave, rages blindly against circumstances until she finally comes to see her own tragic limitations.[40]

Until then she sees the irony and must blame someone so she creates an image of God as a cosmic joker whom she describes as "clad in immaculate radiance, a short white jacket and a smile white and creamy as zinc-oxide ointment, focussing His cosmic and comic glass eye on this and that, as the fancy takes Him."[41]

Because Hagar comes from a tradition which views religion as a "legal expounding of a positively conceived revelation" as Grant puts it, she has always felt that if something is unjust or causes distress, someone is to blame. Someone is guilty. If no person seems to be guilty, God must be guilty. Only now does she begin to realize that all her life she has been blaming God for distortions human beings have built into their religious belief systems instead of trying to apprehend some sense of God valid for herself. She could have been contemplating and meditating on the universe and God rather than judging and blaming her inherited religion and losing all faith in man and God. She has time to only barely begin the process.

Half delirious Hagar finally is able to ask John for his forgiveness and receives it through Lees. At peace with the world and herself, she can temporarily make peace with God. "I could even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of Him some time or other."[42] She is making progress in her quest, but she still has the fundamental relationship reversed. Her relation to God is dependent on her relation to man and the world, and further, whatever state she is in, she projects onto God. Most of the time, ensconced in her rational cynicism, she expects only to hear "the terrible laughter of God," although now all she does hear is the "vapid chuckling of the sea."

In the morning she is sick and exhausted, but again her only desire is for a drink of water. She is furious with Lees when he returns with Marvin and Doris, but after her initial inability to give him the pardon he seeks, "Impulsively, hardly knowing what I'm doing,

I reach out and touch his wrist. 'I didn't mean to speak crossly. I—I'm sorry about your boy.' Having spoken so, I feel lightened and eased. He looks surprised and shaken, yet somehow restored."[43] She is "left with the feeling that it was a kind of mercy I encountered him, even though this gain is mingled mysteriously with the sense of loss which I felt earlier this morning."[44] The stone angel is finally beginning to crack, but the process causes pain as well as lightness and ease.

At last in the hospital she is able to receive her revelation—through Mr. Troy, a minister who is only able to reach her by overcoming his own Protestant inhibitions. At first when she permits him to say a prayer, he drones in a monotone that likely means no more to him than it does to her. Then, on impulse, she asks him to sing "The Doxology". They both open up.

> He should sing always, and never speak. He should chant his sermons. The fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure.
>
> All people that on earth do dwell,
> Sing to the Lord with joyful voice.
> Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;
> Come ye before him and rejoice.
>
> I would have wished it. This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that—simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances—oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?
>
> Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from

> me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or mine? Nothing can take away those years.[45]

Hagar is able to partially translate her new knowledge into action. She tells Doris she appreciated Mr. Troy's visit. She gets a bedpan for her roommate and is able to laugh convulsively with her at the ludicrousness of the situation. This time she acts spontaneously in response to a human need and is looked at by the nurse, the representative of proper order, "as though [she'd] just done a crime."[46] Rather than tightening up with rage and bitterness and listening for God's laughter, she relaxes and laughs herself to sleep.

She tells Marvin that she's frightened. "I think it's the first time in my life I've ever said such a thing. Shameful. Yet somehow it is a relief to speak it. What can he say, though?"[47] He responds by asking for her forgiveness and her blessing and she gives it to him, with compassion and graciousness.

She lapses back into her habitual way of reviewing the past then pulls herself back into her present state of knowledge and what Laurence calls her state of "final, almost grace."[48]

> I lie here and try to recall something truly free that I've done in ninety years. I can think of only two acts that might be so, both recent. One was a joke—yet a joke only as all victories are, the paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach. The other was a lie—yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love.[49]

Shortly before she dies, Hagar remembers John's birth and his initial difficulty in breathing.

> He couldn't have known before or suspected at all that breathing would be what was done by creatures here. Perhaps the same occurs elsewhere, an element so unknown you'd never suspect it at all, until—wishful thinking. If it happened that way, I'd pass out with amazement. Can angels faint?
>
> Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father—no. I want no part of that. All I can think is—Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg.[50]

Hagar still refuses to be subservient, but she does acknowledge God's authority to dispense blessings and grace and expresses hope that there is an afterlife—in which she will be a living angel capable of fainting, not a stone one, doubly blind. And although she will not beg for a blessing, particularly in a traditional, memorized prayer, she does again ask for water saying,

> " Here, give it to me. Oh, for mercy's sake let me hold it myself!"
> .....
>
> I wrest from her the glass, full of water to be had for the taking. I hold it in my own hands. There. There.
>
> And then—.[51]

Hagar accepts the grace of God which has always been there to be had for the taking. She accepts it with her own hands and is released.

As unlike in personality as they are, Hagar and Rachel possess the fundamental similarity of being women in revolt against the same repressive, paternalistic Protestantism. Because she is so painfully introverted and neurotic, Rachel is self-destructive in her rebellion rather than other-destructive like Hagar. Nancy Bailey writes:

> Jung cautioned that the individual who is not furnished by his society with a meaningful social role or set of symbols on which to build a strong psyche will be prey to neurosis—a condition which he defined as ultimately consisting of absence of meaning. In his view, the whole of Western society was in this neurotic phase, from which it could be freed only by an effort to find new symbols which would surface in archetypes from the past.[52]

Rachel has progressed one step ahead of Hagar in that she is aware of her nature, but changing it in any constructive way, releasing herself from her particular bondage, is just as difficult for her as it was for Hagar. However, her awareness allows her to make some changes before she reaches her deathbed. She describes her neuroticism herself:

> Something must be the matter with my way of viewing things. I have no middle view. Either I fix on a detail and see it as though it were magnified—a leaf with all its veins perceived, the fine hairs on the back of a man's hands—or else the world recedes and becomes blurred, artificial, indefinite, an abstract painting of a world.[53]

As Grant suggests, she is unlikely to contemplate and marvel at what is. One senses a deep yearning for this capacity, however, by the way she responds to her school children and her long walks in the country. She blocks her growth in this direction through her fears and guilt. She is a prime example of one of Atwood's Children for whom guilt is "like the air [she] breathe[s], and [her] self-destructive and nihilistic behaviour is merely an acting out of it." She has rejected the religious tradition in which she was raised and feels estranged from the community which supports that tradition, especially her mother, although she left university and came back to Manawaka to live with her after her father's death. Her return was due to her guilt and sense of duty, however, and has been an increasing source of frustration to her.

She has sought meaning and purpose through her devotion to her school children, but they cannot fill her need. Nearly every year one of them becomes special, but her relationship with this child is too

limited and too transient. And although she intensely desires children of her own, she realizes that these too would be "temporary, never to be held."[54]

For the time being she seeks temporary solace in nightly sexual fantasies:

> Tonight it is a forest. Sometimes it is a beach. It has to be right away from everywhere. Otherwise she may be seen. The trees are green walls, high and shielding, boughs of pine and tamarack, branches sweeping to earth, forming a thousand rooms among the fallen leaves. She is in the green-walled room, the boughs opening just enough to let the sun in, the moss hairy and soft on the earth. She cannot see his face clearly. His features are blurred as though his were a face seen through water. She sees only his body distinctly, his shoulders and arms deeply tanned, his belly flat and hard. He is wearing only tight-fitting jeans, and his swelling sex shows. She touches him there, and he trembles, absorbing her fingers' pressure. Then they are lying along one another, their skin slippery. His hands, his mouth are on the wet warm skin of her inner thighs. Now—
>
> I didn't. I didn't. It was only to be able to sleep. The shadow prince. Am I unbalanced? Or only laughable? That's worse, much worse.[55]

Her fantasy forest is very erotic, filled with lush natural life but also unreal, as is the man who inhabits it and who remains faceless. Even with all these safeguards Rachel is unable to complete the experience for fear of being a fool.

Then Nick Kazlik returns to Manawaka, a shadow prince, known and unknown. This time the background is surreal and the face is clear.

> The darkening sky is hugely blue, gashed with rose, blood, flame pouring from the volcano or wound or flower of the lowering sun. The wavering green, the sea of grass, piercingly bright. Black tree trunks, contorted, arching over the river.
>
> Only Nick's face is clear. Prominent cheek bones, slightly slanted eyes, his black straight hair. Before, it seemed a known face because I knew the feeling of it, the male smell of his skin, the faint roughness along his jaw. Now it seems a hidden Caucasian face, one of the hawkish and long-ago riders of the Steppes.

> I'm dramatizing. To make all this seem mysterious or significant, instead of what it is, which is embarrassing, myself standing gawkily here with no words, no charms of either kind, neither any depth nor any lightness.[56]

She is beginning a sexual relationship with a real man now for the first time in her life, but she feels so threatened and afraid that she can only cope with the reality by turning it into one of her fantasies. Even so she cannot escape her feeling of being a fool which triggers her characteristically self-directed anger and criticalness. She forms a relationship with Nick in spite of all these self-imposed blocks, but it cannot satisfy her needs because it is based on fantasy not reality. As Laurence has said,

> To Nick, Rachel does not at first seem anything except a fairly attractive and intelligent woman, and it is only when Rachel reveals her deep uncertainties to him that he perceives how desperate is her need and how little he can fulfil it. No one could fulfil it—she needs too much...[57]

Clara Thomas describes Rachel's need in Biblical terms: "She was looking for an Old Testament's patriarch god, a father-figure who would direct and protect her, and she was also looking for a New Testament's Christ who would redeem her and, quite literally, make her new."[58] In an earlier historical period her need might have led Rachel to enter a convent, but she has no faith in Christian teachings about the Old Testament God the Father nor the New Testament Christ. Like Hagar, she has been unable to develop a meaningful sense of God for herself so she feels anxiety, pervasive guilt, and creates fantasy solutions. Like a child she wants Daddy or a handsome prince to rescue her from herself. But the only one who can resolve Rachel's struggle is Rachel.

As Nick tells her, "I'm not God. I can't solve anything."[59] He does, however, act as a catalyst for her. She does enter into a real relationship with him however much she may fantasize about it, and gradually the realities of her life become strong enough to override the fantasies.

When her period is late, Rachel concludes that she is pregnant. This belief forces her to begin to come to terms with herself and the real world. Up until the time she discovers (again falsely) that Nick is married, a large part of Rachel has been hoping to become pregnant (and in due course marry Nick) in her continued intermingling of fantasy with reality. Her weak attempt at preventing pregnancy makes her vomit, behaving as though she has aborted herself and even more fantastically as though the "equipment" itself has become the foetus: "I can't sleep. I have to get up and take the equipment in my hands as though it were a dead foetus, something to be rid of forever. I can't throw it out. It would be seen in the garbage can."[60]

At this point no aspect of what is happening, even her own existence, is real for her.

> Women like me are an anachronism. We don't exist any more. And yet I look in the mirror and see I'm there. I'm a fact of sorts, a fantasy of sorts. My blood runs in actual veins, which is as much of a surprise to me as to anyone.
>
> What would become of me? I can't believe it could happen, though. A thing like that—to grow a child inside one's structure and have it born alive? Not within me. It couldn't happen. I couldn't really believe it could ever happen.
>
> Nick, give it to me.[61]

She now begins her descent, which on a symbolic level is similar to Hagar's descent at Shadow Point. Hagar descended to a place of

lush, fertile, natural life in her quest to come to terms with the life in herself. Rachel descends to the Japonica Chapel in order to come to terms with the death in herself. Like Hagar she is assisted by an unlikely man, in her case Hector Jonas whose name reminds one again of Jonah. In this case Jonah is contentedly living in the belly of the whale. He is perhaps the only inhabitant of Manawaka who has come to terms with death. However, he uses his knowledge and skill to give the townspeople what they want, not what they need. He tells Rachel that the number one thing he is selling is relief. "They want to know that everything's been done properly, of course, but the less they have to do with it, the better."[62] The recalcitrant Biblical Jonah learned from his experience in the whale's belly. He prayed for and received deliverance, fulfilled his mission as prophet to Ninevah and saved the city. Jonas has learned from his experience too, but he has chosen to remain there and even further facilitate the blindness and error of his community. Only with Rachel does he fulfil his true role as prophet, and he does so in a very paternal manner. Rachel's real father as well as her mother had cut her off from death and therefore from the whole life process, leaving her in limbo. "He [Rachel's father] always said, when I hovered, 'This is no place for you.'"[63] Hector, on the other hand, welcomes her and is proud and eager to show her his domain and explain his philosophy. She is probably the only townsperson who seeks his knowledge. Rachel observes that he lets her in as "some exercise of faith."[64]

Rachel is seeking knowledge from Jonas about her father and

his livelihood, death. And sitting on his surgical table, he undergoes a transformation into a "comic prophet, dwarf seer" squatting "on the high altar."[65] He gives her the objective and subjective truth. Objectively, he tells her her father "probably did less harm than your average guy" and subjectively that he "would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most."[66] Rachel realizes her kinship with her father, accepts his choice for himself and rejects that same choice for herself. Consequently when in a parody of the creation of light out of darkness Jonas gropes, finds the switch, "and there is light," she discovers the chapel is as "unhaunted as it would be at high noon."[67] And when Jonas plays his favorite hymn, "There is a happy land/ Far far away," on his "really super-dooper automatic organ,"[68] Rachel is able to integrate her past and lay it to rest.

> The blue light, and the chapel purged of all spirit, all spirits except the rye, and the sombre flashiness, and the terribly moving corniness of that hymn, and the hour, and the strangeness, and the plump well-meaning arm across my shoulders, and the changes in every place that go on without our knowing, and the fact that there is nothing here for me except what is here now—[69]

Rachel cries; she accepts Jonas's comfort without shame; she stops apologizing and thanks him; she returns upstairs without fear of her mother and is able to give her a mother's comfort. Now that she has dealt with her past, she is ready to begin dealing with her present and future. She is ready to leave the whale's belly. As cited in the epigraph:

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

She has taken a major step, but as did Jonah, Rachel still has trouble dealing with her own nature and her relation to God and the universe. At this point she discovers that she is not pregnant because she gets "the curse". Although she feels relief, she realizes that on a deeper level she desires pregnancy even though "that would be disaster, from every point of view except the most inner one, and if you chose that side, you would really be on your own, now and for ever, and that couldn't, I think be borne, not by me."[70] Yet when she feels most isolated, stripped, and a fool, she paradoxically turns to God. When she discovers (mistakenly) that Nick has a wife and son, she rages at God for forcing reality on her:

> The layers of dream are so many, so many false membranes grown around the mind, that I don't even know they are there until some knifing reality cuts through, and I see the sight of my other eyes for what it has been, distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearably a joke if viewed from the outside.
>
> This I cannot take. This I could argue with You (if You were there) until doomsday. How dare You? My trouble, perhaps, is that I have expected justice. Without being able to give it.[71]

She rages at God, but she actually begins to fight against her illusions and fantasies. She decides she must protect herself against pregnancy and then, again mistakenly, believes she is pregnant. Irony enters her life again although she is still unaware of it. Now that she finally begins her determined struggle to live in reality, her lack of experience and customary mode of perception lead her to misinterpret facts such as Nick's boyhood snapshot and occurrences such as her missed period so the reality she deals with is, in reality, only another illusion. She has made a first step, however. Earlier, after

Nick rejected her request that he live in Manawaka, Rachel had reflected, "I have no pride. None left, not now. This realization renders me all at once calm, inexplicably, and almost free. Have I finished with facades? Whatever happens, let it happen. I won't deny it."[72] Now she begins to live in reality. Calla helps her by telling her that, triggered by rereading St. Paul, she has accepted that she is a fool and therefore "home-free". It is noteworthy that the Greek word St. Paul used for 'fool' was the one connoting 'rebel' rather than the one connoting 'witless'.[73] She is a fool because she will stand her ground against the stream, and it signifies her intelligence not her lack of it. Rachel recognizes "the apostle's appallingly accurate sight... What he says isn't what should be. It's merely what is."[74]

The first realities she does deal with are that Nick is gone and that school is starting again. She still fantasizes about Nick but tells herself, "That has to be abandoned. Some poisons have a sweetness at the first taste, but they are willing to kill you just the same."[75] Yet it is at school that her fantasies first show signs of losing their grip on her:

> I wonder who will be the one or ones, as it was James last year? All at once I know there will be no one like that, not now, not any more. This unwanted revelation fills me with the sense of an ending, as though there were nothing to look forward to.[76]

Losing her illusions is intensely painful, but she is coming to life not death. She still responds to the children. "I did not think I I could muster any interest at all, and yet I have. No—it isn't I.

They've drawn it from me, being as they are—present and unaccounted for, here in the flesh, with loud voices which irk and beckon."[77] She is relating to them as real flesh-and-blood children and not as a source of fantasy. Her fantasies about Nick die more slowly.

When she becomes convinced of her pregnancy, she shifts continually between fantasy and reality. Reality is unbearable but so is fantasy. She fears her mother's reaction; she wishes she could talk to her sister but feels too estranged. She combines her mother's form of death-in-life, sleeping pills, with her father's, whisky, in a suicide attempt, but she cannot carry it through. "I can't cope, and I can't opt out. What will I do? What will become of me?"[78] Again she turns to God:

> I am not praying—if that is what I am doing—out of belief. Only out of need. Not faith, or belief, or the feeling of deserving anything. None of that seems to be so.
>
> Help me.
>
> Help—if You will—me. Whoever that may be. And whoever You are, or where. I am not clever. I am not as clever as I hiddenly thought I was. And I am not as stupid as I dreaded I might be. Were my apologies all a kind of monstrous self-pity? How many sores did I refuse to let heal? We seem to have fought for a long time, I and You. [One senses that the 'I' comes first because the 'I' has been doing most of the fighting.]
>
> The ones who do not have anyone else, turn to You—don't you think I know? All the nuts and oddballs turn to You. Last resort. Don't you think I know?
>
> My God, I know how suspect You are. I know how suspect I am.
>
> If You have spoken, I am not aware of having heard. If You have a voice, it is not comprehensible to me. No omens. No burning bush, no pillar of sand by day or pillar of flame by night.
>
> I don't know what I've done. I've been demented, probably. I know what I am going to do, though.
>
> Look—it's my child, mine. And so I will have it. I will have it because I want it and because I cannot do anything else.[79]

She resembles Hagar in that coming to terms with God is part of coming to terms with herself. Rachel must free herself from her old conceptions of life, herself, and God. She must free herself from her culturally-internalized, self-imposed bondage in order to live. Russell writes:

> She states that, if God has spoken, she has not heard him. Yet she says, 'We seem to have fought a long time, I and You.' What she has in fact fought against is the common lot of mankind—man's fragility and his need to trust himself to life. She has been like a novice swimmer who resists the water's effort to hold him up and carry him along. Her liberation comes when she surrenders her rigidity, accepts that she is a fool like all the rest, and trusts herself to time's flow.
>
> How then has she fought with God? Indeed, since she seems to have a bifocal view of divinity, which God has she been resisting? There is the God whom the church and the tabernacle name. He seems clearly identified, and the rules of the relationship are well-known. He almost seems to be mystery tamed and domesticated. But beyond this God is a mysterious force without dimension, which seems to be Life itself. It is the Beyond, the Depth, the Ground, or whatever you choose to call whatever it is that supports us, sustains our existence, and guides it in providential ways toward fulfillment. It is the incomprehensibly gracious mystery we generally and most properly call God. It is this God, present in the wonder of life, whom Rachel has resisted out of fear.[80]

She feels unable to give up her fantasy contact with Nick unless she can find another human being to whom she can turn. She realizes she has such a friend in Calla, one of the nuts and oddballs who has turned to God, and Rachel's only real friend. Calla not only gives Rachel love and support but also demonstrates her own ability to recognize and accept her own needs and desires. And Rachel is no longer afraid of contact with her friend and is able to accept her loving support. When Calla asks if she is all right, she realizes,

> If I'd been asked that, yesterday, I wouldn't have known. Maybe even an hour ago I wouldn't have known.
>
> 'Yes. I'm going to be all right.'
>
> Maybe she'll pray for me, and maybe, even, I could do with that. But she hasn't said so, and she won't, and that is an act of great tact and restraint on her part.
>
> My mother's tricky heart will just have to take its own chances.[81]

Rachel is beginning to reap the rewards of her struggle. As she learns to accept herself, she is able to accept her friend. As she learns to accept the realities of life, she is able to accept her mother's mortality and give up her Calvinist guilt surrounding it.

When her doctor tells her that what is growing inside her is a tumor, the pain is terrible. "Oh my God. I didn't bargain for this. Not this... My speaking voice, and then only that other voice, wordless and terrible, the voice of some woman mourning for her children."[82] Rachel echoes the verse in Jeremiah, "Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." Yet there is hope for Rachel Cameron as there is hope for the Biblical Rachel whom the Lord promises will be rewarded by having her children return from bondage. Rachel Cameron is gradually freeing herself from the bondage of her own childishness, thereby increasing her chances of having children of her own.

Her grounding in reality is firm enough now so that she can bear what must be borne, and unlike the earlier occasion in the Tabernacle when the stifled life inside her cried out its pain against her will, she is able now to even accept this part of herself although she

still hears "some woman mourning," not herself. She is able now to contemplate all her recent turmoil. Contemplation was not possible while she was immersed in guilt, fear, and unreality. Now she can at least face "what is," and almost appreciate it. "All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one."[83] This is her revelation, and God grants her the grace of enough time to make use of it.

After the operation she finds that just as her fantasies about her school children were all at once gone, her fantasies about Nick are gone.

> You weren't there, after that. Something collapsed, some edifice. No—not so much that, not a breaking, nothing so violent. A gate closed, quite quietly, and when I tried to open it again, it wouldn't. There wasn't any way around it. No way in, not there, not any more. Visa cancelled. I don't know why. The gate just shut. I once used to try to stop myself going in there, but now when I tried to get in, I couldn't. I needed to and wanted to, but I couldn't.[84]

She has left her self-imposed prison and closed the door behind her. While still under the anaesthetic, Rachel has taken responsibility for her self and her life. She is no longer a child with no control over her own destiny who can only take recourse in fantasy to have some autonomy. She says then and later repeats, "I am the mother now."[85] Her only child may be her own mother, but she accepts the role. Receiving her revelation carries a responsibility with it. She can make decisions for herself such as the move to Vancouver, taking her mother's

feelings into account, but she is no longer ruled by them.

While recuperating at home, she at first falls back into her death-in-life pattern and prays that nothing will happen.

> This was all I prayed, to no one or to whoever might be listening, prayed unprayerfully, not with any violence of demand or any valiance of hope, but only sending the words out, in case. Do you read me? This message is being sent out to the cosmos, or into the same, by an amateur transmitter who wishes for the moment to sign off. Don't let anything happen.[86]

But then her mother becomes ill again, and she makes the choice to live. "That was the night I quit sending out my swaddled embryo wishes for nothing to happen. No use asking the impossible, even of God."[87] Rachel gives up her illusions, her fears, and her guilt, at least to a sufficient degree so that they are no longer incapacitating.

Her mother tries to use the same emotional blackmail she has used so successfully for years telling Rachel the move will kill her. Rachel replies,

> "Well, in the end—the end—it's in other hands."
> I've spoken so oddly and ambiguously, not knowing I was going to deliver this nineteenth-century cliche until I heard it, compelled out of some semi-malicious hope that she would be bound to be flummoxed by the phrase, and that she might not decently be quite able to deny some sovereignty, even though she still attempts to believe in her physical immortality which must be bolstered with huge doses of quiet, care, cups of tea, heart boosters and heart calmers, sleeping potions, and every available brand of sorcery. And yet, what I said was also meant, unintentionally intended, and I really wonder now why I have been so ruthlessly careful of her, as though to preserve her throughout eternity, a dried flower under glass. It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive. There is, suddenly, some enormous relief in this realization.[88]

Rachel is no longer willing or able to help perpetuate death-in-life for anyone. In place of this she offers her mother a nurturing climate and her grandchildren—a natural life. And she accepts her own natural life. She recognizes that she will not become a different person but will be able to accept the person she is, even to the point of being a fool and that she "should be honoured to be of that company."[89]

Finally she is developing a belief in God that arises from her own nature and contemplation after she has rejected the Calvinistic concept of God. Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran write:

> Her concept of a malicious God who humiliated people for His own amusement is merely an extension of her own fear of being ridiculed. Laughter, to her, had always meant scorn. Later, she realizes that laughter could be a cathartic agent, a cleansing process. God had played small jokes on Rachel but she had not laughed. Only after she learns that her hoped-for pregnancy is a mere tumor, that is, only when God has played His trump card, does Rachel learn that the humiliation and despair inflicted on her was not an act of malice but an act of mercy. With that realization, she rids herself of the spiritual tumor that had so long suffocated her whole being. She can then sing, Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.[90]

This stage in her development (as well as the novel) ends with her prayer for herself, all humans, and God: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God."[91]

On the surface Stacey appears to be a very different kind of person than her younger sister, Rachel, with very different problems. She is much more of an extrovert and clothes her fears in images of fire and Apocalyptic destruction. (Ironically Rachel is initially unable to face reality and escapes into fantasy while Stacey is unable to face her fantasies and escapes into mundane, everyday reality.) Yet basically

she and Rachel are children of the same repressive Protestant society and the same mother and father, and both of them go through a process of coming to terms with themselves, their families, their society, and their God, all of which are inextricably interconnected. They each envy and resent the other's supposed easier lot and comparative freedom from anxiety and neuroticism until, as part of their own process of coming to terms with reality, each realizes the other (and other people in general, even including their mother) suffers from rational and irrational fears and worries just as they do.

One of the aspects of Stacey's life that is very different from her sister's is the isolation and alienation she feels living in a metropolitan suburb. Rachel's community may be fatally flawed and dying, but in Vancouver the community is nonexistent, and the religious element has been completely secularized. "The long aisles of the temple" are in the supermarket. There are "side chapels with the silver-flash of chrome where the dead fish lie among the icy strawberries. The mounds of offerings... Music hymning from invisible choirs."[92] At the beauty parlor "the priestesses are clad in pale mauve smocks... [bestow] the benediction of the shampoo. The priestess's plastic-sheathed hands administer to her scalp, the fingers updrawn like yellow talonless claws."[93] The sterilization process is complete. The only contact is with plastic-covered hands. The consummate image of the debasement of religion is, of course, Richalife, whose gospel is preached by Thor. "I've gone off booze ha-ha. Never was a heavy drinker but used to enjoy a martini before dinner. That was in the B.R. days—before Richalife.

Same with caffeine and nicotine—you could say the shackles have been lifted... We stand as living examples."[94] Their hymn is "Richness is a quality of living,/ Richness quells the trouble and the strife,/ Richness is the being and the giving,/ Anyone can reach a Richalife."[95] Upon hearing this hymn for the first time, Stacey surreptitiously takes a tranquilizer, and in response to this religion's version of the confession of sins, the Richalife Quiz, Stacey confronts Thor. "Who's gonna tell you anything on a thing like that?" she questions. "I mean if I feel guilty or anxious, like let's say I stabbed my dear old grandmother in the back for her money or I find I got stigmata on both palms and I gotta wear gloves everywhere I go, you think I'm gonna say?"[96] Thor deftly defuses Stacey's inherent threat by checking her hands for stigmata, and the party goes on. The only stigmata one is likely to observe in this society are not those of Christ, but the ones exhibited by Stacey when she drunkenly burns her hand on the stove.

Stacey is appalled that Mac has become a priest in this religion but is somewhat reassured when he tells her, "I think it's a load of crap," and advises Julian Garvey not to buy any of it. Mac has sold his body to the devil to make a living but not his soul. (Later Stacey learns that Thor is a poor, abused child from Manawaka who assumed a devil mask.)

Both Stacey and Rachel struggle against the seduction of the parental, and indeed societal, pattern of a deathlike life—until Niall Cameron or Hector Jonas perform their function and give each member of the community a lifelike death. Rachel's life resembles her mother's

and father's in its passive, quiet routine although in her moment of desperation she combines her mother's sleeping pills with her father's whiskey, and when she chooses to live, she throws out the pills but stashes away the liquor. Stacey has also stashed away a legacy of her father, his revolver, to use "if anything happened." And she too chooses life no matter what happens, "even if I couldn't do anything except wait. I'd just have to do that and look at them [her children] and hold them whatever they were like or I was like because I couldn't do anything else. Maybe I'd have to keep telling them everything would be all right."[97] She throws the revolver in the lake. She does not throw out the liquor nor does she stash it away. Like her father she is quite dependent on this "special embalming fluid."[98] She is the most active, outgoing member of her family, but she needs this crutch to deaden her pain and allow her to reassure herself that everything is all right. Because of the chaos and confusion in her life, the life of a fire-dweller, one of her greatest needs and what she perceives as one of the greatest needs others have of her is reassurance that everything is all right. She finds this burden almost unbearable. With Matthew:

> —I know we ought to have him here. Don't tell me, God. I know. But when I think of it, I think—mental hospital, here I come. Following me around from room to room, desperate to make talking sounds, someone else who'd have to be told everything is all right.[99]

With Mac and the children:

> Mac, can't I ever say how it was with me or what happened at all? You don't want to know. You want everything to be all right. Is everything all right, Stacey? Yes, everything is all right. Okay. I get the message. If that's the way you want it, that's the way it'll be. From now on, I live alone in a house full of people where everything is always always all right.[100]

Even with Luke:

> He seems so damn young. And he wants me to say Everything's all right. He, too. Even though he knows I can't. How peculiar.[101]

Stacey recognizes her own and other people's need for security and cosmic certainty, but she tends to forget their just as powerful need for the opposite—reassurance that one is not alone in feeling terribly frightened and uncertain in a world one perceives as filled with confident, certain people. Luke tells her about his mother's faith and being blessed by the Pope.

> To hear her tell it, you could feel the radiance as though there were hosts of angels swooping around like so many pigeons. I never bought that, but then again, there could be something in it. So I plod along. It makes as much sense as anything else.[102]

What he needs is someone warm and loving, even maternal, with whom he can talk about his fears, uncertainties, insecurities and who will share their own with him. Stacey does this in their short time together. Towards the end of the novel one sign of her growing maturity is that she begins to show her own uncertainty to her family and they to her. Stacey tells Matthew, who has spent his life feigning the certainty and preaching the Gospel of the Evangelist for whom he is named, that Mac, and probably the rest of his family, "would have been relieved if he'd known you weren't always certain. But he didn't know."[103] She quits insisting the children go to Sunday school; she tells Katie she did not know how to handle the situation with Tess; she and Mac share their uncertainties about the future.

Within herself Stacey cannot feel any kind of certainty or

security until she works through her relationship with God. Like Hagar and Rachel, Stacey rails against God while simultaneously proclaiming her disbelief in Him. She tells Him,

> Listen here, God, don't talk to me like that. You have no right. You try bringing up four kids. Don't tell me you've brought up countless millions because I don't buy that. We've brought our own selves up and precious little help we've had from you. If you're there. Which probably you aren't, although I'm never convinced totally, one way or another. So next time you send somebody down here, get It born as a her with seven young or a him with a large family and a rotten boss, eh? Then we'll see how the inspirational bit goes. God, pay no attention.[104]

Unlike Hagar and Rachel, Stacey's tone with God is very casual. It is so casual in fact that one sometimes is unsure if she is casually swearing or casually addressing Him. For example when she is worrying about Mac working for Thor, she says, "God, to tell you the truth, it's getting so I feel guilty about worrying."[105] God's responses to her (as she imagines them) are almost always severely paternal and judgmental. He is the God of her childhood church. Angelika Maeser writes:

> While she may, like Rachel, disavow belief consciously or at best express agnosticism, her past conditioning gets the better of her and God becomes the sole spectator of her private drama and tragedy. God, whom she conceives of in traditional patriarchal Protestant fashion, is Stacey's overseer, the supreme fascist tyrant among all the other overlords in her already over-crowded consciousness. Interestingly enough, she mentions having once begun a course called "Man and his God" and owns an unread copy of The Golden Bough. Typical of her fragmented condition, both endeavours were begun but never finished, thus indicating that the spiritual quest itself is uncompleted by modern man and woman. It has been cursorily begun but not rigorously pursued. What prevents its consciously undertaken continuance? Past religious conditioning by the Church, fear, and doubt. In regard to the first factor, Stacey would have to explore the traditional God-image critically and free her

> mind from the tyranny of the superego, which is all that this God amounts to. He is "Sir" to her, a judge to whom she must penitently present account for every natural impulse and mortal inclination, a tyrant who demands that she repress herself to conform to social expectations, a sadist who is omniscient and on the look-out for every slip of thought or deed and ever-ready to strike her or the family with punishments. This God is a Christianized Jupiter, a mountain and sky monarch who rules over the earthly subjects and rejoices in the hellish torments of his enemies. Stacey is inwardly racked by the guilt and masochism and the need for atonement.[106]

She sees all men in these same terms. Matthew and Mac are paternalistic, rigid, judgmental. In Luke she seeks a compassionate, loving, forgiving saviour, a healer like the Evangelist Luke whose name means "light-giving." As she gives up these images of God, she gives up these images of the men in her life as well. And when she finally talks to Mac about throwing the gun in the lake, "She finds it neither easier nor more difficult to explain now than she did when she said the same thing to Luke. Mac is not Agamemnon, and Luke is not Jesus Christ. Both are men." On the opposite side she learns from Valentine Tonnerre that Thor, "God of thunder", is a man too, not the devil. It is a relief, but also deflating. "If we're scared, at least there is some dignity in being scared of genuine demons. Aren't there any demons left in hell? How in hell can we live without them?"[107] Valentine Tonnerre is the true possessor of thunder whereas Thor Thorlakson has just falsely assumed the name. Thor is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Val has shattered her own illusions and helps shatter some of Stacey's. Appropriately, she is a namesake of St. Valentine who was put to death by the Romans for refusing to worship the pagan god. Like Rachel, Stacey must learn to live with "what is." She tells herself:

> —Okay, Stacey, simmer down. The fun is over. It's been over for some time, only you didn't see it before. No—you saw it all right but you couldn't take it. You're nearly forty. You got four kids and a mortgage, and in just over three years Katie will be ready for university if she works hard enough, which is dubious. I guess the fun's been over for Mac for quite a while. It would be nice if we were different people but we are not different people. We are ourselves and we are sure as hell not going to undergo some total transformation at this point. That's right, doll. Mrs. C. MacAindra, by an overwhelming majority voted The Most Sensible Woman of the Year. We can save our money. When we've got all four kids through university or launched somewhere, and Mac retires and is so thin you have to look twice to see him and I'm so portly I can hardly waddle, we can go to Acapulco and do the Mexican hat dance. I can't stand it. I cannot. I can't take it. Yeh, I can, though. By God, I can, if I set my mind to it.[108]

And later she says:

> I used to think there would be a blinding flash of light someday, and then I would be wise and calm and would know how to cope with everything and my kids would rise up and call me blessed. Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell of a revelation that turned out to be.[109]

It may be a "hell of a revelation", but it is her revelation. Like Rachel, she learns to give up much of her guilt and accept herself and her life. At the end of the novel she can fall asleep knowing that at the moment "they are all more or less okay."

She realizes she has strength even though it is not earthshattering but just the strength to "get by somehow."[110]

> —A few more years of this life, God, and if I'm not dead or demented, I'll have a hide like a rhinoceros. Odd—Mac has to pretend he's absolutely strong, and now I see he doesn't believe a word of it and never has. Yet he's a whole lot stronger than he thinks he is. Maybe they all are. Maybe even Duncan is. Maybe even I am.[111]

She is mutating into a matriarch as she ironically observes. Fortunately

she shares Rachel's saving grace of self-irony. She also shares with Rachel the experience of God's grace. Russell writes:

> The book does not come to a spectular climax that can be marked with a capital G as a moment of grace. The insight which allows her to grow and to add to her burdens the care of her father-in-law is a quieter one—she is brought to accept herself and her situation. The dream which held back the commitment to life as it is really is surrendered.[112]

"Here, as in the preceding novels, grace is something intimate to the process of life itself—the extraordinary and unexpected met in the very ordinary."[113]

Stacey is learning to accept "what is," to understand the struggles of others. She may always relate to God as to a father, but at least now she perceives Him as a loving, merciful, compassionate father, not a severe, judgmental, punitive one. She can now communicate with Him with less fear and guilt.

Morag in The Diviners is much more aware of the process through which she is going and feels much less helpless and out of control than Laurence's other protagonists do in the face of the forces acting upon them. Morag comes two generations later than Hagar Shipley but from the same Protestant tradition. However, Hagar rebels against the Calvinist society (and herself) all her life without being able to free herself from it and accept God (and herself) until just before her death. Rachel and Stacey move in the direction of accepting and making the most of their lot in life, but neither one of them feels able to exercise much control over their destinies although Rachel does take a major step when she moves to Vancouver with her mother. She is hopeful that the move may change the direction of her life, but she basically feels more acted upon

than active. As she says,

> Where I'm going, anything may happen. Nothing may happen. Maybe I will marry a middle-aged widower, or a longshoreman, or a cattle-hoof-trimmer, or a lawyer or a thief. And have my children in time. Or maybe not. Most of the chances are against it. But not, I think, quite all. What will happen? What will happen.[114]

Morag has chosen another path (a path similar to Laurence's own path). She searches for answers and identity and God through her writing. As she says to herself, "Lucky me. I've got my work to take my mind off my life... If I hadn't been a writer, I might've been a first-rate mess at this point."[115] Her work is functional. Through it she can cope with her life and even escape from it. By transferring certain life problems and sources of chronic pain to her fictional characters, she is able to work through them with some degree of control and see where it takes her, but she has not found the answer for which she is searching. She observes, "I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracles. But no, only occasionally."[116]

Intuitively Morag has turned to a series of diviners and myth makers ever since her early childhood. She was shut out from her parents' death—their removal to Paradise—and when the farm gate closes behind her, she is shut out from what she perceives as her own earthly Garden of Eden, her childhood paradise. In a way similar to Rachel she feels cut off from a sense of the life (and death) process and spends a major part of the rest of her life trying to regain it.

Christie is her first diviner, and the garbage dump or Nuisance Grounds is his temple, where he reads the entrails of his society. "You know how some have the gift of the second sight?" Christie goes on. "Well,

it's the gift of the garbage-telling which I have myself, now, watch this... by their christly bloody garbage shall ye know them in their glory, is what I'm saying to you, every saintly mother's son."[117] One of the primary reasons the religiously upright community is so lifeless is that they have rejected and repressed so much of themselves.

> Some of them, because I take off their muck for them, they think I'm muck. Well, I am muck, but so are they. Not a father's son, not a man born of woman who is not muck in some part of his immortal soul, girl. That's what they don't know, the poor sods. When I carry away their refuse, I'm carrying off part of them, do you see?[118]

It is a society which will abort a shameful fetus and hide it in the garbage. It is refuse—refused. Its existence is denied literally and figuratively. However, Christie, a clowny Christ figure, focuses on what the "elect" deny or bury.

> "By their garbage shall ye know them," Christie yells, like a preacher, a clowny preacher. "I swear, by the ridge of tears and by the valour of my ancestors, I say unto you, Morag Gunn, lass, that by their bloody goddamn fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them."[119]

As Angelika Maeser writes, "The divine element in humanity is itself born in the least acceptable place, according to the New Testament, and provokes the cynical query: 'Can anything of value come out of Nazareth?'"[120]

Christie also gives Morag an alternate myth system in his tales of Piper Gunn and Morag, one which is parallelled by Jules' tales of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet, Louis Riel. These tales provide Morag and Jules with a myth structure which has meaning for them and gives them a sense of their own history, of belonging on the Canadian Prairies. Gradually, however, Morag accepts the school system's version of history and

rejects Christie's.

> Fraud. Fraud. Who does he think he's kidding?... The Gunn's have no crest, no motto, no war cry, at least according to what it says in the old book Christie still hauls out from time to time. Just as well. It's all a load of old manure.[121]

Morag is drawn to Christie, senses his earthbound truth, but at the same time she joins with the townspeople in rejecting him. Morag both does and does not want to hear him. She says,

> Why can't he shut up? Why can't he just shut up? Crazy Christie. But he can't shut up. He can't, at times, and she knows it. She knows it, all right. What was it, that time, here? She won't ask. Not her.
>
> 'What was it, Christie?' she asks, not wanting to know at all, no not at all...
>
> Skinner is sitting in the back part of the wagon, where all the awful stuff has been, just sitting there as though it didn't matter to him what had been there. And looking at Christie. Listening. Not letting on.[122]

Jules Tonnerre, Skinner, even more an outcast, is his only faithful disciple.

Morag leaves Manawaka for university and places herself wholely on the side of the "elect", the upright. She sees Brooke as her salvation, her key to the kingdom of the elect, a Prince Charming such as Rachel desires. She marries Brooke and cuts herself off from all life present, past, and future. She lives in a Toronto apartment tower, childless, with her husband who instructs her to avoid "accidents" and who refuses to acknowledge, or allow her to acknowledge, her past. When she initially asks him why he likes her, he replies, "Perhaps it's your mysterious nonexistent past... I like that. It's as though you were starting life now, newly."[123] Morag hides her past to please him but

realizes that "the state of original grace ended a long time ago."[124]

Morag's gradual realization of her need to be in touch with the process of her life, including the muck, to be part of her family, and to have a child herself, estranges her from Brooke, but she is too frightened of independence to leave him.

Two occurrences give her the impetus she needs. The first is Prin's death. She returns to Manawaka and suddenly realizes that Prin "gave Morag her only home."[125] At the funeral they sing Prin's (short for Princess) favorite hymn:

> Jerusalem the golden
> With milk and honey blest...
> They stand, those halls of Sion...
> The Prince is ever in them,
> The daylight is serene,
> The pastures of the blessed
> Are decked in glorious sheen.
> Those halls of Sion. The Prince is ever in them.

What had Morag expected, those years ago, marrying Brooke? Those self-same halls? [126] Prin progressively receded into her dream of the Prince as Rachel is tempted to do. Morag realizes, as does Rachel, that the dream is fatal but is still paralyzed. She prays, "Help me, God; I'm frightened of myself."[127]

Morag returns to the sterility of her tower and her Prince, who preaches to his "little worshipful group" of students. They "argue in well-modulated grammatical voices, devoid of epithets, bland as tapioca pudding."[128] Morag increasingly experiences the

> mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared. But of course does no such thing.[129]

She does, however, begin to yield to her desire to be "downright" rather than "upright." When Brooke tells her she "looks a mess" when "all he really wants is that his wife should look decent, a credit to him," and calls her "little one,"[130] Morag explodes:

> "Little one. Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old, and I am five feet eight inches tall, which has always seemed too bloody christly tall to me but there it is, and by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land, I am stuck with it and I do not mind like I did once, in fact the goddamn reverse if you really want to know, for I've gone against it long enough, and I'm no actress at heart, then, and that's the everlasting christly truth of it."
>
> "You," Brooke says, "are hysterical. Are you due to menstruate?"[131]

She calms down, tries to explain who she is, and apologizes. He paternally tells her, "Everything's all right... and we will cease worrying about things that don't matter, shall we?"[132]

The second occurrence, the one which enables her finally to break out of her bondage is her chance but Providential meeting with Jules Tonnerre, the person closest to "natural" life she has encountered and the only person who really appreciates Christie. Morag tells Jules, "I have got to talk to somebody, and you've known me forever...."[133] She expresses her need with her body not with words and eases some of her Protestant repression and guilt. Their lovemaking is "some severing of inner chains which have kept her bound and separated from part of herself."[134] Jules recognizes the depth and significance of her need even more than she does. "'Magic. You were doing magic, to get away... I'm the shaman, eh?' he says."[135]

Jules also is able to express his need for her this once:

> He watches her walk towards the door. Then speaks, the cry wrenched up out of him.
> 'No. Wait awhile, eh?'
> They hold to one another again, and make love or whatever it is, throughout the deep and terrifying night.[136]

She stays three weeks, long enough to conceive the child they both need and desire as a continuation of the life process, their individual life processes. Then Morag goes to Vancouver, still searching for another earthly paradise, "going into the Everywhere, where anything may happen. She no longer believes in the Everything out there. But part of her still believes."[137] She knows that the "anything" she most wants to happen is to become a writer, a wordsmith. She does not wait for it to happen; she makes it happen. And back in Ontario Jules continues to write his songs.

Morag's move to Vancouver represents a tentative new beginning parallel to Hagar's search for water, Rachel's move to Vancouver, and Stacey's invitation to her father-in-law to come live with them. She moves into an attic room in a boardinghouse, a room to which she grows attached. "The garret bit never appealed to Morag unduly, but by God, it is at least a room of her own."[138] She does not feel at home in Vancouver, however. She feels hemmed in and threatened by the perpetually snow-capped mountains.

> This is not to be her final settling place, obviously.... Insane to have come here. Would have been better to have gone back to Manawaka. Christie needs her, and she needs a home for herself and her child, when it is born. But there is no way she can return to Manawaka. If she is to have a home, she must create it.[139]

She does begin to write and even make some money thanks to "divine

intervention." "An angel of the Lord, probably St. Michael of the Flaming Sword, disguised as a publisher's rep, has come to explain how paradise can be regained."[140] She tells him of her circumstances. "'Things will change,' says St. Michael Masterson."[141] Of course, Morag is speaking tongue-in-cheek, but on the other hand she half believes in Providence, and she is heartened by his prophecy.

Vancouver is not her Eden, but while she lives there she does make the acquaintance of a snake, Tiny, who belongs to her friend Fern who is a stripper at The Figleaf. She feeds herself and Tiny tranquillizers. Tiny is appropriately named because all the religious and psychological symbolism of the snake has been diminished and debased. Morag, who has come to life since leaving Brooke, is terrified of the snake. Like the church, Tiny is pressed into the service of materialism. He is Fern's gimmick to keep her job. The snake dies. The name Fern, and the name of her place of employment, The Figleaf, suggest the Garden of Eden, but Fern is a tense, frightened woman "wary in the soul" who has had five abortions, and The Figleaf is "just another clipjoint" preying on sexually repressed men.

Like Hagar, Rachel, and to a lesser extent Stacey, Morag tends to be a loner. But unlike Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, she does not look for salvation through a man. She and Hagar each tried that once and are determined not to repeat that particular mistake. She does deeply feel a need for some sort of salvation, however. So she continues her search for her lost Eden and her roots, her home, by travelling to England with Pique. She tells Ella:

> I want to find a home, a real one, but I don't know where that would be. I've been feeling lately I'd like to go to England for a while—Britain, rather. Does that sound lunatic? I guess there's something about London, as a kind of centre of writing, or something like that, and maybe it would be a disappointment but I just feel I'd like to go and find out what I can find out there—something I need to know, although I don't know what it might be, yet. Also, and laugh at me if you will (okay, I know you won't), I'd like at some point to go to Scotland, to Sutherland, where my people came from. What do I hope to learn there? Don't ask me. But it haunts me, I guess, and maybe I'll have to go.[142]

What Laurence's other protagonists seek in a man, Morag seeks in a place—a sense of self, of belonging, of home. Morag goes to England, but she discovers she does not need to go to Sutherland after all.

> "The myths are my reality... and also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here.... It's a deep land here, all right," Morag says. "But it's not mine, except a long long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."
> "What is, then?"
> "Christie's real country. Where I was born."[143]

So she feels that she must go back to Manawaka, at least to visit Christie, and she must take Pique to see him. But she is still too fearful to go until she learns Christie is dying. Then she tells her daughter, "Pique, we're going back home.'/'Home?' (What means Home?)/ 'Yes. Home.'"[144] Morag does not even try to explain it, and Pique's knowledge of her grandfather remains mythical. It is noteworthy that Morag decides it is too late for Pique to meet him. She cuts Pique off from the reality of her grandfather's death in the same way she was cut off from her parents' death. She rationalizes, "He would not want the child to see him as he looks now."[145] Morag does see him and experiences

an emotional and spiritual homecoming. They have a last defiant laugh together, and she acknowledges him as her father. He responds, "Well—I'm blessed." She is reconciled to this Christ figure (who is also her true father) and is now ready to enter her earthly Eden.

After Christie's death, and unable to make plans for herself and Pique, "Morag's mind refuses to grapple with the problem,"[146] and she turns to God: "Save me O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. Psalm 69."[147] He answers via the Goldenrod Realty Company. Their farm advertisement "strikes Morag like the spirit of God between the eyes."[148] She responds and finds the farm—a true home—and Royland, another diviner, who is as "old as Jehovah," as well as other warm, responsive people including A-Okay, who may be the next diviner. For the first time she opens herself up to a community, not just an isolated individual.

It is in this home that she externalizes her Calvinist conscience, her guilt. She personifies them as Catharine Parr Traill, the ideal Canadian woman, "botanist, drawing and naming wildflowers, writing a guide for settlers with one hand, whilst rearing a brace of young and working like a galley slave with the other.... And so on. It did not bear thinking about."[149] And then finally she disconnects from Saint Catharine and what she symbolizes. She tells her,

> One thing I'm going to stop doing, though, Catharine. I'm going to stop feeling guilty that I'll never be as hard-working or knowledgeable or all-round terrific as you were.... I'm not built like you, Saint C.... And yet in my way I've worked damn hard, and I haven't done all I would've liked to do, but I haven't folded up like a paper fan, either.... I'm about to quit worrying about not being either an old or a new pioneer. So farewell, sweet saint—henceforth, I summon you not.[150]

She has found herself and is finally at home within and without. It is in this home that she writes Shadow of Eden, incorporating Christie's myths of Piper Gunn. And she acknowledges that "the place is some kind of a garden, nonetheless, even though it may be only a wildflower garden. It's needed, and not only by me."[151] She is now ready to receive Royland's essential message. When he loses his water-divining power, he tells her about A-Okay's potential to learn the art. Morag responds,

> "Really? Will he?"
>
> "If he can just get over wanting to explain it," Royland said, "maybe he will. That's up to him."
>
> The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else.
>
> "This that's happened to me—" Royland said, "it's not a matter for mourning."
>
> "I see that now," Morag said.
>
> When Royland had gone, Morag sat in her armchair looking out the wide window. Contemplating. Could this be termed an activity? It was to be hoped so. She certainly spent enough time doing it.
>
> At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt and tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked ot not, or to what extent. That wasn't given to her to know. In a sense it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing—that mattered.[152]

Royland was a true diviner because he had the faith in and the commitment to his gift from God and also the knowledge that he was part of a continuing process. His repeated advice to Morag is that she should have more faith. He has literally lived by his until it is time for him to retire.

Through contemplation of Royland's experience and her own, Morag is finally able to have faith in her gift and put it in perspective as her portion of the grace of God, something transcending a personal, rational ability to analyze. "Would there be a special corner of heaven, then, for scavengers and diviners? Which was Morag, if either, or were they the same thing?"[153] Christie was both, and Morag can be too. Laurence says of her, "Yes, Morag comes closer to what might be termed the god within. Religion is a frequent theme in the novels. I don't have a traditional religion, but I believe that there's a mystery at the core of life."[154]

Footnotes

[1]Clara Thomas, transcriber, "A Conversation about Literature: an Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I, i, 66.

[1a]George Grant, Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), pp. 34-35.

[2]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1964), p. 8.
Grandmother MacLeod in A Bird in the House is ruled by similar aphorisms. She passes her own father's wisdom on to Vanessa: "God loves Order.... You remember that, Vanessa. God loves Order—he wants each one of us to set our house in order." [Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 38.] Vanessa's own observation after contemplating her family and the natural world foreshadows Morag's: "I could not really comprehend these things, but I sensed their strangeness, their disarray. I felt that whatever God might love in this world, it was certainly not order." [Ibid., p. 49]

[3]George Grant, Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America, pp. 35-36.

[4]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 16.

[5]Ibid., p. 16.

[6]Ibid., p. 16.

[7]Ibid., p. 157. Hagar and Morag treasure and mythologize their Scots heritage. Hagar's son John and Vanessa MacLeod do not. John trades away the plaid pin, and Vanessa is bitterly disappointed when Grandmother MacLeod gives her The Clans and Tartans of Scotland for her tenth birthday. Most of it was "too boring to read," but Vanessa had read her own and her friends' mottoes. "Be then a wall of brass. Learn to suffer. Consider the end. Go carefully. I had not found any of these slogans reassuring. What with Mavis Duncan learning to suffer, and Laura Kennedy considering the end, and Patsy Drummond going carefully, and I spending my time in being a wall of brass, it did not seem to me that any of us were going to lead very interesting lives. I did not say this to Grandmother MacLeod." [Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House, pp. 38-39]

[8]Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), pp. 136-139.

[9]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 44.

[10]Ibid., p. 44.

[11]Ibid., p. 45.

[12]Ibid., p. 46.

[13]Ibid., p. 9.

[14]Ibid., p. 9.

[15]Ibid., p. 156.

[16]Ibid., p. 60.

[17]Ibid., p. 151.

[18]Ibid., p. 152.

[19]Alan Richardson, ed., A Theological Word Book of the Bible (London: S.C.M. Press, 1957), p. 281.

[20]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 153.

[21]Ibid., p. 160.

[22]Grandmother Connor, in A Bird in the House, a Baptist, is the only Manawaka character who seems to have found what the others seek, at least from Vanessa's naive viewpoint. "Acceptance was at the heart of her. I don't think in her own eyes she ever lived in a state of bondage. To the rest of the family, thrashing furiously and uselessly

in various snarled dilemmas, she must often have appeared to live in a state of perpetual grace, but I am certain she didn't think of it that way, either." [Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House, p. 60.] Her goodness is not an unmixed blessing however. No one else can hope to live up to her example. As her son Terence tells Vanessa's mother, "I think he [Grandfather Connor] honestly believed that about her being some kind of angel. She'd never have thought of herself like that, so I don't suppose it ever would have occurred to her that he did. But I have a notion that he felt all along she was far and away too good for him. Can you feature going to bed with an angel, honey? It doesn't bear thinking about.... Another person's virtue could be an awful weight to tote around." [Ibid., pp. 72-73.]

[23]The Holy Bible (King James Version) (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons), Jonah 2: 2-7.

[24]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 162.

[25]Ibid., p. 186.

[26]Ibid., pp. 186-187.

[27]Ibid., p. 187.

[28]Ibid., p. 188.

[29]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1966), pp. 191-192.

[30]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 217.

[31]Ibid., p. 83.

[32]Ibid., p. 42.

[33]Ibid., p. 218.

[34]Ibid., p. 234.

[35]Ibid., p. 245.

[36]Ibid., p. 234.

[37]Ibid., p. 264.

[38]John Baxter, "The Stone Angel: Shakespearian Bearings," Compass, 1 (1977), p. 5.

[39]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 60.

[40]Sandra Djua, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross." JCF 1, IV (1972): p. 45.

[41]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 93.

[42]Ibid., p. 248.

[43]Ibid., p. 253.

[44]Ibid., p. 253.

[45]Ibid. pp. 291-292.

[46]Ibid., p. 302.

[47]Ibid., p. 304.

[48]Clara Thomas, transcriber, "A Conversation about Literature:", p. 68.

[49]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 307.

[50]Ibid., p. 307.

[51]Ibid., p. 308.

[52]Nancy Bailey, "Margaret Laurence, Carl Jung and the Manawaka Women," Studies of Canadian Literature, II, p. 317.

[53]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, pp. 105-106.

[54]Ibid., p. 245.

[55]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[56]Ibid., p. 106.

[57]Miriam Ann Lancaster, Jacob and the Angel: A Study of Biblical Influences in the Work of Margaret Laurence, M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1976, p. 68.

[58]Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 90.

[59]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 182.

[60]Ibid. p. 144.

[61]Ibid. pp. 144-145.

[62]Ibid., pp. 149-150.

[63]Ibid., p. 147.

[64]Ibid., p. 146.

[65]Ibid., pp. 152-153.

[66]Ibid., p. 153.

[67]Ibid., p. 153.

[68]Ibid., p. 154.

[69]Ibid., p. 156.

[70]Ibid., p. 164.

[71]Ibid., p. 184.

[72]Ibid., p. 174.

[73]Miriam Ann Lancaster, Jacob and The Angel:, p. 72.

[74]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 166.

[75]Ibid., pp. 189-190.

[76]Ibid., p. 191.

[77]Ibid., p. 191.

[78]Ibid., p. 209.

[79]Ibid., pp. 209-210.

[80]Kenneth C. Russell, "God and Church in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," Studies in Religion, 7, (No. 4 Fall 1978), pp. 440-441.

[81]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 216.

[82]Ibid., p. 221.

[83]Ibid., p. 222.

[84]Ibid., pp. 224-225.

[85]Ibid., p. 225.

[86]Ibid., p. 227.

[87]Ibid., p. 228.

[88]Ibid., pp. 237-238.

[89]Ibid., p. 241.

[90]Denyse Forman, and Uma Parameswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence," Centennial Review, XVI, iii, p. 250.

[91]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 246.

[92]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, Ltd., 1969), p. 65.

[93]Ibid., p. 87.

[94]Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[95]Ibid., p. 127.

[96]Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[97]Ibid., p. 174.

[98]Ibid., p. 5.

[99]Ibid., p. 60.

[100]Ibid., p. 150.

[101]Ibid., p. 180.

[102]Ibid., p. 175.

[103]Ibid., p. 254.

[104]Ibid., p. 150.

[105]Ibid., p. 71.

[106]Angelika Maria Maeser, Myth and Reality: the Religious Dimension in the Novels of Margaret Laurence, McGill University Thesis, 1978, p. 188.

[107]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 241.

[108]Ibid., pp. 259-260.

[109]Ibid., p. 268.

[110]Ibid., p. 249.

[111]Ibid., p. 256.

[112]Kenneth Russell, "Margaret Laurence's Seekers After Grace," Chelsea Journal, September-October 1977, p. 247.

[113]Ibid., p. 247.

[114]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 245.

[115]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 4.

[116]Ibid., p. 5.

[117]Ibid., p. 75.

[118]Ibid., p. 39.

[119]Ibid., p. 39.

[120]Angelika Maria Maeser, Myth and Reality:, p. 211.

[121]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, p. 162.

[122]Ibid., p. 76.

[123]Ibid., p. 195.

[124]Ibid., p. 196.

[125]Ibid., p. 252.

[126]Ibid., p. 253.

[127]Ibid., p. 253.

[128]Ibid., p. 255.

[129]Ibid., p. 255.

[130]Ibid., p. 256.

[131]Ibid., p. 256.

[132]Ibid., p. 259.

[133]Ibid., p. 269.

[134]Ibid., p. 271.

[135]Ibid., p. 273.

[136]Ibid., p. 275.

[137]Ibid., p. 281.

[138]Ibid., p. 294.

[139]Ibid., pp. 290-291.

[140]Ibid., p. 297.

[141]Ibid., p. 298.

[142]Ibid., p. 331.

[143]Ibid., pp. 390-391.

[144]Ibid., p. 391.

[145]Ibid., p. 392.

[146]Ibid., p. 413.

[147]Ibid., p. 413.

[148]Ibid., p. 413.

[149]Ibid., pp. 95-96.

[150]Ibid., p. 406.

[151]Ibid., p. 406.

[152]Ibid., p. 452.

[153]Ibid., p. 212.

[154]Angelika Maria Maeser, Myth & Reality:, p. 18.

V Conclusion

For all Laurence's protagonists the search for personal fulfillment is very much a spiritual journey. They all feel they have been banished from Eden and cannot find their way back. They have lost all faith in the directions given by the church. Consequently, they feel they are dying in the wilderness. Gradually each one comes to the realization that they carry their bondage within. Hagar has bound herself with her pride and "uprightness." Rachel is bound by "that fool of a fear" the fear of being a fool. Stacey lives in a personal hell tormented by her estrangement from other people and her perpetual fear that everything will not be all right. Morag, the outcast, is enslaved by her goal of moving from the "downright" group to the "upright" group. Each one has inherited a generous portion of Protestant guilt for being imperfect.

They make many mistaken choices and may despair over their lack of control over themselves and their destinies, but they continue to struggle. Laurence writes:

> The quest for physical and spiritual freedom, the quest for relationships of equality and communication—these themes run through my fiction and are connected with the theme of survival, but a survival of the spirit, with human dignity and the ability to give and receive love. It will be obvious that these themes relate to Hagar, in The Stone Angel, who finally even in extreme old age can find something of that inner freedom; to Rachel in A Jest of God, who will remain nervous and neurotic to some extent but who does succeed in freeing herself from her mother's tyranny and from her own self-doubt and self-hatred; to Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers, who comes to terms with her life and recognizes herself as a survivor; ... and finally, to Morag in The Diviners, who, more than any of the others, is able to assimilate her past and to

> accept herself as a strong and independent woman, able to love and to create. The themes of freedom and survival relate both to the social/external world and to the spiritual/inner one, and they are themes which I see as both political and religious. If freedom is, in part, the ability to act out of one's own self-definition, with some confidence and with compassion, uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, it is also a celebration of life and of the mystery at life's core. In their varying ways, all these characters experience a form of grace.[1]

One aspect of the grace they experience is reconciliation with God. The characters as well as Laurence see the life process in religious terms but not within the established church. Russell writes:

> The life-supporting mystery which makes grace dwell in the shape of our days is not found in any vital way within the proud walls of the church. It is not found in the space and time set aside for the socialized pride of the self-righteous where fear of death emphasizes immortality, and fear of judgement makes morality a commercial transaction to be settled later. It emerges, rather, in the midst of life itself.... Margaret Laurence seems to look past the neatly packaged God of the church to an ultimate mystery which is beyond life, yet not separated from it.... Out of human respect the church, in her view, stultifies the life-word it contains and thereby becomes, paradoxically, a secular place in an essentially religious universe.[2]

The protagonists cannot relate to the church, but they can relate to the Bible and obtain inspiration and solace from it because it tells the stories of people whose problems (and sometimes names) they share. In moments of turmoil and despair they often remember verses that are meaningful to them and pray to God the Father although they have great difficulty in their search to discover some profound sense of Him other than as a judgmental, punitive, Old Testament God.

As they mature, give up much of their guilt, and learn to accept themselves, they develop more of a New Testament sense of God as being

loving, compassionate, and merciful, a dispenser of grace.

All four novels end on a deeply spiritual note. Hagar says, "Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg."[3] and drinks the water symbolizing her dispensation of grace. Rachel prays, "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God."[4] Stacey and Mac make love "as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help nor alter." She flippantly says, "Give me another forty years, Lord, and I may mutate into a matriarch," and then reflects, "Temporarily, they are all more or less okay."[5] Morag, who has journeyed the farthest, speaks with the deepest trust and conviction. She assures her daughter, "'I am okay.' And in a profound sense, this was true.... 'Go with God, Pique.'"[6]

Morag is the only character who progresses to the point of feeling she is really "with God:" Nancy Bailey writes:

> Jung considered that the symbol of God within, the mark of true individuation, might appear in dreams as a mandala, a wheeling magic circle with a centre. In the last Manawaka novel, the divining rod comes closest to this symbol. Its centre is the self holding the rod whose mysterious gift, Royland says, is inherited from others and passed on in turn to another. Morag, secure in her individuation, possesses the divining gift at least momentarily through her writing. Although the future for her is still mysterious, still requiring growth until the silence, in contrast to Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey (for whom God finally remains "out there"), the principle of unity which is divinity exists within Morag. Indeed, there may be a pun in the title of the novel. The special few are the divine ones.[7]

The key, her divining rod, is words, communication. She, like Margaret Laurence, affirms

> a faith in the word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 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 another, we must communicate with what is almost the only means we have—human speech.[8]

Laurence demonstrates her own faith by the act of writing itself. She states, "Writing itself is more than an act of will, it is an act of hope and faith; it says life is worth living."[9] Laurence and Morag translate their beliefs into fiction. Laurence writes:

> Fiction also may be viewed as belief, and by belief I mean something that has connotations both of faith and politics. Humans are social and spiritual animals; we are, in the broadest sense of the words, both religious and political, although many people may be neither in any conscious way. We stand in need of our gods, and we need links with our ancestors, partly in order to determine who and what we are, to decide what we hope to become, and to know what sort of society we will try to form. Fiction, in the political sense, both binds us to and frees us from our ancestors; it acknowledges our dilemmas; it mourns and rages at our inhumanity to one another; and sometimes it expresses our faith in growth and change, and honours our children and our trust in them.[10]

The four Manawaka novels clearly express such faith.

Footnotes

[1]Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots? The Novelist as Socio-Political Being," A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock, William H. New, ed. (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press), pp. 24-25.

[2]Kenneth C. Russell, "God and Church in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," Studies in Religion, 7 (No. 4 Fall 1978), p. 446.

[3]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964), p. 307.

[4]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1966), p. 246.

[5]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: Seal Books, McClelland and Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1969), pp. 275-277.

[6]Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 450.

[7]Nancy Bailey, "Margaret Laurence, Carl Jung and the Manawaka Women," Studies of Canadian Literature, II, p. 316.

[8]Margaret Laurence, "Open Letter to the Mother of Joe Bass," The New Romans, ed. Al Pundy (Edmonton: M.G. Hertig Ltd., 1968), p. 35.

[9]Miriam Ann Lancaster, Jacob and The Angel: A Study of Biblical Influences in the Work of Margaret Laurence, M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1976, p. 107.

[10]Margaret Laurence, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots? The Novelist as Socio-Political Being," p. 16.

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Eden Lost: The Spiritual Dimension in the Manawaka Novels of Margaret Laurence

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