

370

MARGARET LAURENCE'S ISOLATED HEROINES

THE ISOLATED HEROINE
IN
THE MANAWAKA NOVELS
OF
MARGARET LAURENCE

By
JENNIFER MARGARET MACLENNAN, B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
September 1982

MASTER'S DEGREE (1982)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Isolated Heroine in the Manawaka
Novels of Margaret Laurence

AUTHOR: Jennifer Margaret MacLennan, B.A.
(St. Francis Xavier University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. John Ferns

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 104

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the isolated heroine in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels. A number of factors contribute to her isolation, including her sense of separation from self, her sense of alienation from the environment in which she lives, and a struggle to come to terms with the influences which her sense of the past exerts on her personality. The pattern of personal development from a position of weakness and alienation to a position of self-understanding and responsibility is common to all four of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka heroines. Each heroine survives and achieves a sense of personal freedom, which Laurence has described as the central concern of her works.¹ This search for a significant life and a real sense of responsibility arise out of the experience of isolation, an experience which can be seen as Canadian, but at the same time universal, a frequent concern in works of the twentieth century.

The present study will investigate the phenomena of isolation and alienation and the resultant development of a 'survival' ethic, which is in some ways analogous to the existentialist concept of the outsider, which appears in much twentieth-century literature. It is almost inevitable that a twentieth-century writer will have come, at some time, under the influence of existentialist thought. Much twentieth-century literature, as well as philosophy, sociology, and psychol-

ogy, is concerned with the problem of isolation. There is no way in which Margaret Laurence could be unaware of isolation as a personal and literary problem, and while I do not intend to argue that her Manawaka novels are solely existentialist, they are works produced by someone whose childhood years were spent in an isolated town in the Canadian prairies, and whose crucial early years as a writer were spent as "an outsider who experienced a seven year love affair with a continent, but who in the end had to remain in precisely that relationship."² The concerns with isolation and alienation and the search for truth or meaning which produced the outsider in other literatures are certainly present in Canadian literature, so it is not surprising that Laurence's heroines exhibit characteristics typical of people who find themselves alone.

This thesis, then, concerns the psychological and emotional journey of the isolated heroine as she struggles with alienation from her environment and with personal loneliness and isolation to achieve a deeper understanding of life and a fuller appreciation of it. In a sense, what follows is a study of a vision of life which allows the protagonist to reach an understanding of herself as a culmination of her own personal past, her ancestral history, and her present situation. Laurence's isolated heroines learn to face life's sorrows and its beauties, and to use their knowledge to achieve a fuller and deeper appreciation of life, to act with courage and responsibility, and to survive with hope and dignity. Throughout I will consider other critical appraisals of Margaret

Laurence's work and will also indicate, where appropriate, similarities between the situations of her heroines and the behaviour and environments of the existentialist outsider.

Acknowledgements

For his kind and diligent overseeing of this thesis, I would of course like to thank Dr. John Ferns. For moral support, typewriters, and proofreading, my thanks as well to John, George, and Shaun. For things too numerous to detail, thanks and a bouquet to Jimbo.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to my students, past and present, especially those of English 1A6, 1978-79, who started the whole thing. You know who you are.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: THE STONE ANGEL	18
CHAPTER II: A JEST OF GOD	37
CHAPTER III: THE FIRE-DWELLERS	52
CHAPTER IV: THE DIVINERS	70
CONCLUSION	87
NOTES TO CHAPTERS	93

Introduction

A concern with isolation is common in twentieth-century works of literature and is particularly prominent in Canadian literature.¹ The present study concerns the isolated heroines of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels and the

① factors which produce their isolation -- ② their sense of separation from self and ③ alienation from their environments,

④ and their struggles to realize their potential in life by coming to terms with themselves. This requires a great deal of self-understanding, as well as a coming to terms with both their ancestral history and their personal pasts, to produce a kind of survival ethic² -- a fuller and deeper appreciation of life and an ability to act with courage and responsibility and ultimately to survive with hope and dignity. The isolated heroine is both a Canadian phenomenon and a character who appears frequently in twentieth-century literature as a whole.

Further, the isolated heroine is in some ways analogous to the ⑤ figure of the outsider often encountered in existentialist writings. There are a number of bases on which this comparison can be made, and they will be developed further in this introduction. The principal points which will be considered as forming a discernible pattern among Laurence's heroines include several which would allow them to be considered as outsiders in an existentialist sense.

Existentialism
 ①
 ②
 ③
 ④

All four of Laurence's isolated Manawaka heroines experience a sense of personal isolation and separation from the societies in which they live. All four are in one way or another dissatisfied with their present existences, and all must undertake a journey to self-discovery which involves a coming to terms with what Laurence describes as "the stultifying effects" of the past.³ All experience revelations (usually as a result of an experience of death) about life which allow them to reach a level of personal peace and satisfaction which was previously unattainable.

These concerns can be seen as existentialist in nature, and preoccupation with them is evident in both North American and European modern literary traditions. Such concerns as the isolation of the individual from modern society, the search for meaning and significance in modern life, as well as the need to discover personal identity, are pressing ones in the Canadian literature of this century. Concern with isolation in Canadian literature is not really surprising, considering even such basic elements as the sheer physical size of Canada and our relatively sparse population, together with the fact that most of our people have, as John Moss says, "come from abroad within the last few generations."⁴ Because of the similarity of the concerns which we find in Canadian literature to those which have produced the outsider in other modern literatures, there are grounds for comparing the isolated heroine in Canadian novels (in this case, those of Mar-

garet Laurence] to the figure of the outsider which will be described during the course of this introduction. As John Moss states in Patterns of Isolation (1974):

Laurence ... share[s] ... in a vision of individual isolation that is both universal and contemporary. [Her novels] participate in the traditions of Canadian fiction. That they are also continuous with the cosmopolitan tradition of contemporary literature written in English is not irrelevant.⁵

Moss goes on to say further that "the imminence of geophysical reality in relation to the patterns of human isolation evokes a profound response in the Canadian imagination"⁶ and that "by addressing ... the universal reader ... Laurence treat[s] Canadian experience as the valid continuation of a larger world."⁷ As well, Clara Thomas suggests that "the strong 'outsider' figure ... has been central to all [Margaret Laurence's] Manawaka novels in the persons of both women and men."⁸

Many outsiders may be found in Canadian literature.⁹ In order to discuss this figure in Canadian fiction, however, and particularly in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels, we must first obtain a picture of who the outsider is, discover what his concerns are, and determine the way in which he deals with them.

In modern European literature and philosophy, the outsider's abiding concern is a search for truth. This search for meaning encompasses all aspects of life for the outsider.

As Colin Wilson argues in his popular study The Outsider (1958), "this ideal, to 'stand for truth', is the one discernible current that flows through all twentieth-century literature."¹⁰ Because the search for truth is the central concern of the outsider and because it involves all aspects of his life, the outsider does not necessarily emerge from any one particular background. It is not unreasonable, then, to expect to find such a figure in Canadian literature, just as he is to be found in other literatures. All serious authors search for truth, each in her own way, and given the nature of twentieth-century literature and Margaret Laurence's avowed concern with the individual's search for self-knowledge and truth, it seems likely that such a figure will appear in her work. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Laurence discusses the importance of a search for truth to her work as a novelist, which she believes is to speak of "what everybody knows ... but hardly anybody says."¹¹

To be concerned with truth does not mean that the outsider is necessarily an intellectual, nor does he necessarily have any special wisdom to bestow. He is a person who seeks to come to grips with the reality of life in its suffering and seeming hopelessness. He has "awakened to chaos". (O, p. 15) This anticipates something of the "Victim Experience" described by Margaret Atwood in Survival (1972), her thematic guide to Canadian literature. To put the outsider's predicament in Atwood's terms,¹² he has moved

* David
was
wounded
Jag

from Position One (denial of his condition) through Position Two (acknowledgement of his condition, but belief in its inevitability), to Position Three (acknowledgement of his condition, and a refusal to accept it as inevitable). The appearance of the outsider as represented by the isolated heroine, and the theme of survival, at least in the spiritual sense that Laurence is concerned with it, are linked in very important ways. Laurence says of her heroines that "each finds within herself an ability to survive -- not just to go on living, but to change and to move into new areas of life."¹³ Further to this, in response to the question of whether "Canada is a country of the Old Testament -- one of exile and alienation and punishing gods -- or is there ... a sense of hope and expectancy of the New Testament in our literature?" she has replied, "I think there's both."¹⁴

The outsider, though not necessarily gifted with special insight, nor necessarily a genius, is "the one man who knows he is sick in a civilization which doesn't know it is sick." (O, p. 20) Such increased perception leads the outsider to feel like a stranger in the society to which he belongs, and this leads him to a feeling of alienation and a sense of the unreality of life. This sense of alienation is present to a large degree in all of the Manawaka heroines with whom we will be dealing, and will be discussed in more detail later. Laurence's preoccupation with isolation, Clara Thomas suggests, was intensified by the time she spent in

Africa, which "issued in works that explored themes of exile, loss, and mankind's stubborn, valiant quests for home and freedom; they also led her to see that these themes were particularly urgent to her own people as well."¹⁵ Margaret Laurence grew up in the small Manitoba town of Neepawa, of which she says "I felt the loneliness and the isolation of the land itself, and yet I always considered Southern Manitoba to be very beautiful, and I still do."¹⁶ Thomas elaborates upon this observation: "The isolation of small groups of people in a vast land was one of the factors in the growth of a town's personality"¹⁷ and many critics see Manawaka as an isolated environment.¹⁸

Both Atwood and Moss¹⁹ believe that a sense of unreality is common in Canada, due in part to our rather short history and occasional lack of a firm sense of Canadian identity. Such a sense of alienation forces the outsider to search for meaning in a life which has come to seem futile. He must overcome his sense of futility, change his perception of life, and reaffirm life's value. Although altering one's way of experiencing life is as simple as a change of perception, such a change is not easily achieved, for it involves facing and accepting the futility of one's present experience, a far too frightening prospect for many. The movement from Position One or Two to Position Three is extremely difficult to manage. Much of our bondage, then, is self-imposed. In Laurence's words, "a great many of the things that have to

do with personal liberation or freedom, it seems to me, involve labouring mightily against a door that is not locked."²⁰

Those who cannot face responsibility for their own lives, although they may in reality share the outsider's impulses, "keep up a pretense, to themselves, to others; their respectability, their philosophy, their religion, are all attempts to gloss over, to make look civilized and rational, something which is savage, unorganized, irrational." (O, p. 13) This withdrawal is strongly reminiscent of many of Laurence's characters, including Mrs. Cameron, Tess Fogler, Mac, Brooke Skelton, and Buckle Fennick. As David Blewett observes, the

David inhabitants [of Manawaka] are cut off from one another by pride, timidity, the awareness of social differences, and as a result are largely unable to communicate their feelings, or even to recognize their emotional isolation and imprisonment... they are spiritually dead and if they live in Manawaka long enough, like Rachel Cameron's mother, they prefer not to be disturbed.²¹

This situation parallels Atwood's "Position One". The outsider, in either "Position Two" or "Position Three" is not able to ignore or "gloss over" these impulses; instead, he must face them directly. If he is unable to transcend "Position Two", he will be caught in believing only in life's futility; his probable choice of action will be suicide. This is unacceptable to the "Position Three" outsider: he is a survivor, and he must proceed to a reaffirmation of the value and significance of life. Reaching the position of reaffirmation involves facing and accepting his condition and acting

to alter it.

The outsider's search is for meaning and freedom, the avowed theme of Laurence's novels,²² and a release from unreality. Because the desire for freedom involves a search for spiritual meaning, the outsider's search becomes a religious quest. The religious nature of the quest in Laurence's novels is reinforced by her use of religious symbolism, and in some cases, as in Hagar's, by an achievement of salvation in a spiritual sense. It is interesting, in this connection, to note Sandra Djwa's observation that:

Laurence, like Jung, seems to locate God in the human soul and to sometimes define religion in terms of the Jungian "numinous experience" which can lead to psychological change This sensibility does seem to emerge as a kind of latter day psychological puritanism in which salvation is redefined in relation to the discovery of the self and true grace is manifested by a new sense of life's direction.²³

The attainment of freedom is something which must be pursued actively. It cannot be bestowed upon us -- it must be claimed as a right, otherwise we are in danger of slipping into a lower form of life, a possibility which the outsider perceives and detests. As Wilson argues, "freedom lies in finding a course of action that gives expression to that part of [us]... that is not contented with the trivial and unheroic." (O, p. 33) It is this freedom that Laurence's protagonists seek. For many, their course of action arises out of a crisis in life when they must take a stand or be lost. This is the case for Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, and Morag, the isolated Manawaka

heroines with whom I will be concerned in this study.²⁴ What is involved for them is not necessarily a change in the outer forms of their lives, as Rachel and Stacey realize finally, but a change in perception (as would occur in a move from Atwood's "Position Two" to "Position Three"). This change in perception seems to involve a three-fold process -- a kind of dialectical movement. The outsider finds himself in a position of false security, which, though relatively stable and distinctly unthreatening, is nevertheless not enough to satisfy his deep need to live more fully. It is this need, as well as his heightened ability to see life's potential, which causes him to feel dissatisfied with the kind of life he is living. Only through action, the third step in his movement of perception, can he assume responsibility for his existence and affirm his sense of life's value. (It hardly needs to be repeated here that this three-part movement again parallels Atwood's Victim Positions). In a similar fashion, Margaret Laurence's isolated heroines progress from initially denying the condition of their lives to seeing themselves as they are. This places them in a position to begin acting to alter their conditions. They all experience this change in perception to some degree, though not all in the same measure or in the same form. Ultimately the responsibility for and control of life rests with the individual, as Laurence's heroines realize. Life requires an active way of seeing the world, not merely a passive observation of it. It requires involvement

and taking charge of one's destiny through positive acts of will. The outsider believes he can take charge of his life in this way and thereby gain control over his destiny.

Alienation, although a common concern in twentieth-century literature, is often thought to be solely the condition of certain easily identifiable groups of people in society: the elderly, the criminally minded, the socially aberrant, and others who do not fit the mold of conventional society. The outsider's belief, on the other hand, is that everyone in society experiences alienation from others but masks this from himself. Laurence's characters echo this belief, since, as Clara Thomas argues, Laurence "perceives individuals as strangers in a strange land, and her effort has been, throughout, to know and to show the 'heart of a stranger'."²⁵ As well, Laurence has told Donald Cameron that "this human loneliness and isolation, which obviously occurs everywhere, seems to me to be part of man's tragedy."²⁶ Wilson speaks of the impossibility of total communication between people (O, p. 57) as being of fundamental concern to the outsider. Margaret Laurence herself discusses this in a passage from Long Drums and Cannons (1968). Here she discusses "the impossibly complicated difficulties of one person speaking to another, attempting to make himself known to another, attempting to hear -- really to hear -- what another is saying."²⁷ This problem of communication, or, rather, the lack of it, is, as G.D. Killam says, "central to Margaret

Laurence's novels."²⁸ It is the main concern of all the women whose stories she tells, because, as she has told Donald Cameron, "I feel that human beings ought to be able to touch each other far more than they do."²⁹ Margaret Atwood sees the same "difficulty in communicating, or even acknowledging ... fears and hatred"³⁰ as being distinctly Canadian.

In her Manawaka novels, Margaret Laurence presents us with a variety of isolated, outsider figures, both characters whose isolation is obvious and others in whom it startles us somewhat. At first we are presented with the elderly Hagar, isolated from her society and from us as readers by her extreme age. Her position as an outsider is no surprise, but we may be inclined to put it down merely to her advanced age, although a close look at her life reveals that she has always been an outsider. Rachel, an unmarried woman approaching middle age, also suffers alienation. What we are not immediately certain of is the sense that this isolation is experienced by all. The circumstances of Hagar's and Rachel's lives allow us easily to distance ourselves from them. The next portrait of the outsider, however, is somewhat more disturbing: by all accounts (interestingly, even by her own), Stacey Cameron MacAindra, the happily married mother of four, ought to be content, but it seems that even marriage is no protection from the isolation that faces the individual. Stacey suffers torments similar to those of Hagar and Rachel, and Wilson's suggestion that "there is no communication with

Effie's
mommy
Rachel

David

other human beings, even those we love most" (O, p. 57) seems accurate in Stacey's case. The final heroine with whom we will be dealing seems, paradoxically, both the most and the least likely; surely if anyone can overcome the barriers against communication, it should be someone who has devoted her life to words. In fact, however, Morag is little more able than Hagar, Rachel, or Stacey to break the 'sound barrier' and her inability to communicate is a constant source of aggravation to her. As Clara Thomas puts it:

in the early novels Margaret Laurence was revealing the 'ordinary' woman as extraordinary; here the writer, the 'extraordinary' woman, the one with a gift that forces her growth and her choices, is being modulated into the ordinary.³¹

The point, of course, is that, as Thomas says, "no-one, it seems, is immune from the isolation that the individual experiences, and all these women, both ordinary and extraordinary, must undertake this 'double journey'."³²

All of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka heroines share in the problem of isolation, for Margaret Laurence maintains, in contradiction to John Donne, that every man is an island.³³ Other characters in her fiction also share this situation, but many are unable to transcend it. No matter what the age or situation in life, within marriage or without, each person is, in Laurence's view, ultimately alone. The outsider must face isolation, but must not be defeated by it. The futility of much of life must be accepted, but the outsider's challenge is to reaffirm the value of life despite

its seeming hopelessness. What this means is not that "life is of no value; on the contrary, life is the only value." (O, p. 38) The isolated outsider figure thus rejects suicide as a response to life. Instead, he may overcome the futility he initially sees in life "by knowing himself better. By establishing a discipline to overcome his self-division." (O, p. 245) It is this self-division which has, to a large degree, been responsible for his alienation in the first place³⁴ and what Patricia Morley calls "this psychic journey, back into roots and forward is at the heart of human experience and hence of literature."³⁵ The outsider becomes able to live fully and significantly and to escape the bonds forced on him by convention and superficiality. This is what happens, in some degree, to Laurence's protagonists -- Hagar is able to die with dignity, Rachel assumes responsibility for her own life and begins to make her own decisions, Stacey reaches a plane of honesty with herself and comes to realize her own strength and ability to cope, and Morag reaches a degree of peace and understanding of her artistic gift. Although the external circumstances of their lives remain largely unchanged, all experience a form of growth and understanding which allows them to live more fully within their circumstances.

Attaining a sense of meaning in life involves faith in the power of the individual to alter his experience of existence, but in the outsider's confrontation with his

world he is left with few vessels in which to place his faith. Before he is able to change his perception he experiences a trauma which brings home to him the paradoxical nature of life -- its fragility and futility as well as its significance. Often this experience involves a confrontation with death -- the individual's own (as with Hagar or Rachel) or that of someone he loves (as with Stacey and Morag). This process involves a move from externally centred life to the discovery of an internal centre, since, as C.M. McLay claims, death "reveals the true nature of individuality."³⁶ We are, Laurence shows us, ultimately responsible for our own lives. This lesson is learned poignantly by Rachel, as well as by the other Manawaka heroines. Life is too short and too precious to be consumed in superficiality. As Patricia Morley explains:

Laurence depicts an often agonizing struggle to break these bonds, to overcome alienation, to achieve an integration, both personal and social, which is imaged as a freedom to love and to accept love, to share, to meet, to touch.³⁷

Laurence's Manawaka novels provide in part a Canadian dramatization of the outsider, and her presentation of this figure is as forceful as any which has preceded hers. The isolated women that she presents in her Manawaka novels grow from an initial position of weakness and self-division to a new realization of self, in which they can live fully, with dignity and responsibility, and with a sense of personal freedom which was beyond their previous scope.

The concern in literature with isolation is age-old, but it is also a modern concern, and one which is fully present in Canadian literature. John Moss argues that "patterns of isolation in Canadian fiction provide one of a number of its distinguishing characteristics ... [and] reflect the progress of the Canadian imagination towards a positive identity."³⁸ Margaret Laurence feels that her own concern with the outsider arises from her Canadian experience of growing up in a small prairie town.³⁹ As well, her time spent as "an outsider who experienced a seven year love affair"⁴⁰ with Africa has intensified this concern. Her familiarity with the works of other Canadian novelists like W.O. Mitchell and Sinclair Ross is well known.⁴¹ Ross' novel As for Me and My House (1941), in which the main characters, the Bentleys, are readily identifiable as outsiders from their community,⁴² seems to have had a particular influence upon Laurence's own writing. Isolation, then, is a familiar theme and the isolated outsider figure a familiar character in Canadian fiction. It is interesting also that several critics have seen Laurence's books in these terms.⁴³ Robert Harlow, for instance, has this to say of A Jest of God:

The book is written in the first person and in the present tense, a difficult and demanding technique, but one used by many writers whose concern is alienation and whose antecedents are perhaps traceable to Camus and Kafka rather than to Dostoevsky, or perhaps, closer to home, Dickens, Hardy, Arnold Bennett.⁴⁴

Besides, Sandra Djwa maintains that "Laurence is also exis-

tential throughout her work in Sartre's primary sense in that her focus is on man's process of becoming, a process which reveals to him his essential spirit."⁴⁵ Laurence's Canadian concern with isolation and her simultaneous relationship to twentieth-century existentialist works are far from mutually exclusive: in fact, these interests are compatible and suggest the universality of Canadian fiction which makes it, as Moss maintains, "part of the cosmopolitan tradition of contemporary literature written in English."⁴⁶

I propose, then, to show that the characteristics of these Manawaka heroines and their experiences of what Patricia Morley calls the "alienation [Laurence]" depicts as central to human experience everywhere"⁴⁷ reflect the pattern of growth toward personal freedom outlined above, and also that her protagonists can be compared to the existentialist figure of the outsider. Chapter One will involve a close study of the story of Hagar Shipley, the ninety-year-old heroine of The Stone Angel, whose arrival at self-knowledge, though delayed until the end of her life, is nonetheless moving and revealing, for Hagar manages to redeem herself even on her death bed, by performing at least two acts of self-liberating generosity. The second chapter will treat the journey to self-knowledge of the unmarried school teacher Rachel Cameron, who is approaching middle age alone. She, like Hagar, comes to a knowledge of herself and acts to release herself from the bonds of a life which has for a long time seemed beyond her

control. In the third chapter I will discuss the journey of Stacey Cameron MacAindra, of The Fire-Dwellers, as she moves toward self-discovery. The final chapter will deal with the long and difficult inner journey of Morag Gunn, as it develops through the course of her lifetime.

All four women, though different from each other in many ways, have similar discoveries to make and similar strengths to draw upon. All move forward toward a fuller and more satisfying life. Clearly these isolated heroines share in the outsider's alienation from both social and familial environments and experience a sense of alienation from self. They also demonstrate a need to live more fully, and finally show a willingness to undertake journeys into self-knowledge. They discover a new awareness of life and self which ultimately allows them to achieve a measure of personal salvation through a reaffirmation of life's ultimate meaning.

Chapter One: The Stone Angel

In this chapter I would like to study the movement to self-realization undertaken by Hagar Shipley, as it is a manifestation of the pattern of growth and the development of the ethic of survival detailed in the introduction to this thesis.

The Stone Angel (1964), the first novel of Margaret Laurence's 'Canadian' period, may be argued to be the best of her Manawaka novels to date. Its excellence has been widely accepted and it has even been compared to Shakespeare's King Lear.¹ The novel is, Clara Thomas tells us, the story of Hagar's "unwilling, rebellious journey toward self-knowledge, and, finally, a limited peace."² It is her attempt to come to terms with her past, which is one of the steps in the pattern of growth followed by these isolated heroines. This move toward understanding and accepting the past is a process which is of frequent concern to Margaret Laurence, not just for Hagar, but for herself. "I see this process as the gradual one of freeing oneself from the stultifying aspect of the past, while at the same time beginning to see its true value."³ The past is inescapable, but need not be a negative influence upon us; indeed, the acceptance and understanding of the past can help the individual to reach a greater depth of self-understanding, which in effect, is what the journey to self-knowledge is about, and self-know-

ledge is the ultimate goal of the isolated heroine.

Hagar manages to put off this journey for most of her life. She remains trapped by her past without understanding it. She cannot break away from the mold in which she was formed and is unable to either communicate with others or understand their attempts to communicate with her.

Our sense of Hagar's loneliness and isolation is intensified by the form of the novel. We see ^{almost} everything through Hagar's eyes and always from her point of view. In this way we are able to sympathize with her, but we are also shown the limits of her vision. We are made aware of her isolation as a consequence of the circumstances of her extreme age; most of those who meant anything to her are long dead, yet it is only in the present, as the novel unfolds, that she begins to recognize their value to her life. Her folly lies in not having realized this value sooner. Margaret Laurence indicates Hagar's extreme rigidity first and most obviously in the novel's title, for Hagar truly is a stone angel. Laurence believes that the title of a novel should "in some way express the whole novel, its themes and even something of its outcome."⁴ This is certainly true here, for Hagar, like the monument, sees much of life "with sightless eyes."⁵ As well, she is as cold and emotionally unresponsive as stone. She plays the role of angel to Marvin's Jacob, and she is finally able to bless him in order to release him, and herself, from the chains of the past.

Hagar is isolated in the sense, first, that she has cut herself off from others. She is incapable of reaching out to and making contact with others, hence she remains both unknowing and unknown. Because of her background, she perceives her isolation as necessary, as a source of strength, which in some ways it is, but it is also a major factor in the barrenness of her life. *like things unspoken b/n Joseph + wife*

One effective way to begin a study of the isolation of a character is to investigate her relationships with others. By far the most influential force in Hagar's past, which retains its hold over her for so long, is the character of her father, Jason Currie, whose stern, strong-willed isolation and inability to communicate emotion determine Hagar's character and responses throughout her life. His influence on the young Hagar is manifest at an early age: *Joseph + wife*

I wouldn't let him see me cry, I was so enraged ... He struck and struck and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me. He held me so tightly I almost smothered... I felt caged and panicky and wanted to push him away, but didn't dare. Finally he released me. He looked bewildered, as though he wanted to explain but didn't know the explanation himself. 'You take after me,' he said, as though that made everything clear. 'You've got backbone, I'll give you that.' ... I did take after him ... God knows he wasn't wrong in that. (SA, pp. 9-10)

As is evident here, Hagar at this stage is already capable of using rage to veil her other emotions -- rage is the only emotion she feels it is fitting to experience or admit to, and it is what enables her to keep hidden her fear and pain

David of the ...

at being hit. Her father's attempt at closeness, his recognition of their spiritual affinity, is already too late -- Hagar has withdrawn emotionally from him, which expands the gap between them that will never be bridged, for both are too proud ever to make the first move toward reconciliation with the other, and Jason Currie dies without being reconciled to his daughter.

The next time an attempt is made by Hagar's father to bridge the ever-growing gulf which separates them, it is again she who pulls away:

He reached out and took my hand and held it. His own hand tightened painfully, and for the merest instant the bones in my fingers hurt.

'Stay,' he said.

Perhaps it was only the momentary pain made me do it. I jerked my hand away as though I had accidentally set it on a hot stove. He didn't say a word. He turned and went outside ... I felt I must pursue him, say it was a passing thing, not meant. But I didn't. (SA, pp. 44-45)

Neither Hagar nor her father is prepared to take the necessary step toward reconciliation; both are too bound up in stern pride to give expression to their emotions.

Even Hagar's marriage is based on her rebellion against her father's authority, spurred on by a slur to her pride by 'no-name' Lottie Dreiser. Her marriage is her first act of open defiance against her father and makes her feel "drunk with exhilaration" at her daring:

Without warning, he reached out a hand like a lariat, caught my arm, held and bruised it, not even knowing he was doing so.

'Hagar --' he said. 'You'll not go,

Hagar.'

The only time he ever called me by my name. To this day I couldn't say if it was a question or a command. I didn't argue with him. There never was any use in that. But I went, when I was good and ready, all the same.

Never a bell rang out when I was wed.
(SA, p. 49)

From this point on there is no communication between Hagar and her father, but his influence over her remains strong. Indeed, it is her father to whom her thoughts turn when her son John is born. She thinks of the boy in terms of her father's approval: "Jason Currie never saw my second son, or knew at all that the sort of boy he'd wanted had waited a generation to appear." (SA, p. 64)

The only opportunity Hagar had to glimpse the reality of her father occurred while she was still a child and had run home to tell him of the death of Lottie Dreiser's mother, with whom he had had a fleeting relationship:

He never let on at all that he's so much as exchanged a word with her. He made three comments. 'Poor lass,' he said. 'She couldn't have had much of a life.'

Then, as though recalling himself, and to whom he spoke, 'Her sort isn't much loss to the town, I'm bound to say.'

Then an inexplicably startled look came over his face. 'Consumption? That's contagious, isn't it? Well, the Lord works in wondrous ways His Will to perform.'

None of the three made much sense to me then, but they stuck in my mind. I've since pondered -- which was my father? (SA, p. 19)

If Hagar is ever to discover which of the three comments truly reveals her father (and it is only in a synthesis of all three that he is to be discovered) it is when she com-

pletes her journey to self-recognition and realizes and accepts how much of him is there in her. As she relives her past for us, she becomes more aware of the influence exerted on her by the past, and especially by her father. "I tried to shut my ears to [his words] and thought I had, yet years later, when I was rearing my two boys, I found myself saying the same words to them." (SA, p. 13)

The inability to communicate with others, or to perceive their troubles clearly, permeates all other areas of Hagar's experience, as well as her interactions with her father. It also manifests itself in her relationships with her brothers, with whom she is not close. Hagar takes after her father, and is his favourite child, while the boys lack his stern stubbornness, and take after their mother. Hagar feels that they blame her for her mother's death, which occurred at Hagar's birth. Hagar, who has absorbed her father's values, rejects the boys because of what she perceives as their weakness, and is able only to think of her mother as "that meek woman I'd never seen ... [whose] frailty I could not help but detest." (SA, p.25) She looks on those who share such a weakness as "flimsy, gutless ... bland as egg custard" (SA, p. 4) and is unable to sympathize with their suffering. The two acts of mercy that are demanded of her at this time she is unable to perform. She wants to comfort her dying brother Dan by pretending to be their dead mother, and later, to mercifully kill the suffering chicks, but she is "unable

to bend enough." (SA, p. 25) This is not the last time that she does not act in accordance with her true emotions. The freedom to do so takes a long time to come to her.

That she feels no spiritual or emotional affinity with her brothers is frequently underscored by her inability to perceive their motives and feelings. She is even surprised that Dan becomes ill enough to die, since she has believed all along that he was only feigning his weakness. "He cultivated illness as some people cultivate rare plants. Or so I thought then." (SA, p. 22) She is also unable to fathom Matt. When on her wedding day he almost sends as a present the shawl she would not wear to comfort Dan, she refuses her initial inclination to reach out to him, because she is unsure of his motives. It is not until long after this that she learns how little she knew of his childhood hopes and ambitions, how he had saved, in vain, to escape the oppressive life with their father. As with many things in her life, Hagar "never knew the truth of it until years later, years too late." (SA, p. 20)

It is not only her lack of natural affinity to her brothers which prevents her from becoming close to them; it is also her stubborn refusal to reveal her emotions to anyone. Many times she wants to talk to Matt, but finds herself unable to do so:

I wanted to tell Matt I knew he should have been the one to go east, but I could not speak of it to him.... Later, in the train, I cried, thinking of him, but, of course, he never knew

that, and I'd have been the last to tell him. (SA, p. 42)

Ultimately she is not able to bring herself to reach him, or to understand him, and when she learns of his death and of how easily he slipped away, she finds it hard to bear. "Why hadn't he writhed, cursed, or at least grappled with the thing?" (SA, p. 60) Matt lacks Hagar's pride and stubbornness, but he also is without her survival instinct, which keeps her going against seemingly insurmountable odds, while he is beaten down by life, unable to "rage, rage against the dying of the light." Paul Pickrel's comment that "what has prevented [Hagar] from living fully is what has enabled her to live at all"⁶ seems nowhere truer than here.

Hagar has not lived fully, and her isolation and the pride which keeps her chained inside herself extend also to her marriage to Bram Shipley, which ultimately fails. From the first her marriage has been a deed done in defiance of her father's authority, and she does not recognize Bram's true personality. "We'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, and I for his flouting of them." (SA, pp. 79-80) She is unable to move outside herself enough to perceive his point of view, and naively thinks that she will effect a change in him. Her ambitions for her marriage still reflect the stern Presbyterian values of her father, and it is he ultimately whom she aims to please and impress. She is certain that her father will "soften and yield, when he [sees] how

Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar." (SA, p. 50) It is pride which leads Hagar into this marriage and pride which prevents her from allowing it to work. She makes no attempt to reach Bram on his own terms and fails to recognize his attempt to approach her:

When we entered, Bram handed me a cut-glass decanter with a silver top.

'This here's for you, Hagar.'

I took it so casually, and laid it aside, and thought no more about it. He picked it up in his hands and turned it around. For a moment I thought he meant to break it, and for the life of me I couldn't see why. Then he laughed and set it down ... (SA, p. 51)

Only long after, when it is too late, does Hagar begin to realize something of the spirit in which the gift was given. "I never thought much of that decanter at the time, but now I wouldn't part with it for any money." (SA, p. 62) Though it is too late to use her knowledge now, Hagar hangs onto the decanter as if it were Bram himself. It is all she has left of him and the love that she failed to show him is now displaced onto his gift. It is like this with all of the objects in Hagar's house. It is in them that her life is revealed:

If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purpose, then I do not know where I am to be found at all.
(SA, p. 36)

She even wonders now, having never thought of it at the time, whether Bram "would have liked me to ask for a picture of himself; even once?" (SA, p. 69) But it is too late for this now, and this is what makes Hagar an outsider to life's

feast.

Hagar's pride never allows her, in any instance, to show her fears or weaknesses to her husband. "I never cared for horses. I was frightened of them ... I didn't let Bram see I was afraid, preferring to let him think I merely objected to them because they were smelly." (SA, p. 83) Her profound fear at Marvin's birth is also uncommunicated, although Bram gives her the opportunity to express it:

'You're not scared, Hagar, are you?'
he said, as though it had just occurred to him
I might be.

I only shook my head. I couldn't
speak, nor reach to him in any way at all.
What could I say? (SA, p. 100)

Further, she is astounded to discover that:

he wanted his dynasty no less than my father
had. In that moment when we might have
touched our hands together, Bram and I, and
wished each other well, the thought uppermost
in my mind was -- the nerve of him. (SA, p.
100)

This seems to Hagar an expectation appropriate to a man like her father, whereas in Bram it appears only as an incredible arrogance. She does not see, as John will later, that "they're only different sides of the same coin anyway, he and the Curries." (SA, p. 184)

Even in what should be their closest moments, in their marriage bed, Hagar hides her feelings from her husband:

It was not so very long after we wed, when I
first felt my blood and vitals rise to meet
his. He never knew. I never let him know.
I never spoke aloud and I made sure the

trembling was all inner ... I prided myself on keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead. (SA, p. 81)

She is shamed by Bram's love and by her enjoyment of it, and "never spoke of it to anyone." (SA, p. 81) Only years later when, near the point of death, she talks with Murray F. Lees, does Hagar finally realize the value of what she and Bram could have shared -- that Bram's banner over her, although "only his own skin" (SA, p. 81), was also the banner of love spoken of in the Song of Solomon, from where comes the line she so painfully recalls. "I never thought it love" she says, but later learns differently from Lees. "'You call that love?' 'Lady,' he says, 'if that wasn't, what is?'" (SA, p. 228)

Even when the opportunity presents itself for her to reach out to Bram and let him see her true feelings, she backs off and continues to hide:

I felt so gently inclined that I think I might have opened to him openly. But he changed his mind. He patted me lightly on the shoulder.

'You go to sleep now,' he said.

He thought, of course, it was the greatest favour he could do me. (SA, pp. 87-88)

It is Hagar's coldness, and her pride in her coldness, that stifles and eventually kills her marriage. Years later she still tries to console herself by rationalizing that even if she had opened herself to Bram on that night, it would not have changed things substantially. "Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke, I know that full well, although a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise." (SA,

p. 88)

The cold and proud Presbyterian influence of her father continues to exert itself in Hagar's life once her sons begin to grow up. Hagar falls into the authoritarian footsteps of her father, and finds herself regaling her sons with all the epithets he had thrust at her and her brothers. Just as she has been unable to reach out to her father, her brothers, or her husband, so she is unable to really establish contact with her sons. She cannot recognize them for who they are, and dotes on John while leaving Marvin, "a Shipley through and through" (SA, p. 64) in his father's hands or to his own devices. She does not recognize the boy's need for her approval when "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." (SA, p. 112) She does not recognize either that John is not the person whom she insists on believing him to be. He needs his father's approval and love just as Marvin needs Hagar's, but she is blind to this:

'You're talking just like your father,' I said. 'The same coarse way. I wish you wouldn't. You're not a bit like him.'

'That's where you're wrong,' John said. (SA, p. 174)

The similarities between Hagar and Marvin go unnoticed by her, but are perceived and remarked upon by John. "'Marv was your boy all along, but you never saw that, did you?'" (SA, p. 237) Marvin is, like his mother, also a survivor,

while the recklessly independent John is killed by his own carelessness. Hagar sees Marvin as "a boy who never gets upset, not even at what happened to his brother," (SA, p. 65) forgetting that she is the one who was "transformed to stone and never wept at all" (SA, p. 243) when John was killed. It is Marvin, she finally realizes, who "is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining." (SA, p. 304)

On her deathbed, Hagar impresses on her grandson, Stephen, that he, like his father, is "a Shipley through and through" (SA, p. 296) but this time it is seen by Hagar as a positive quality. Her values are no longer those of her father, and the stultifying chains of the past are being dropped, one by one. Hagar seems to be moving, in Margaret Atwood's terms, from a "Position Two perception to a "Position Three" viewpoint, as she begins to see her life from a different perspective.⁷

Hagar's role as an outsider is emphasized earlier in the novel, when John and Arlene make love in the kitchen while she, Hagar, rests on the living room chesterfield. Nowhere is she more sadly presented as a mere observer of and not a participant in life. This episode also serves to point out the barrenness of Hagar's love making with Bram. John and Arlene celebrate their love together as a shared experience; Bram and Hagar took their pleasure separately, and, in her case, secretly. The isolation that makes Hagar an outsider is self-imposed.

It is only by recounting her experiences and re-living her past that Hagar is finally able to gain a sense of freedom. She comes to an awareness of the value of the past, and begins to realize that her stubborn incommunicativeness has been a mistake. So many things have been left unspoken, and now "there is no-one to speak to." (SA, p. 81) As her perception alters, she becomes increasingly aware of her loneliness, and of the inability of others to understand her position, not only because of her extreme old age, but also because of her stubborn refusal ever to explain -- something she increasingly wants to do. But explanation is almost impossible; because of her long silence it is difficult for her to open up to others. She manages to express herself to Murray F. Lees, who

does for her what Nick Kazlik did for Rachel -- he makes her see herself and her life from the outside instead of through her own subjective and prejudiced viewpoint.⁸

This, however, is not the only path to salvation for Hagar. Others will also allow her an opportunity to act with freedom and dignity, and save herself at the end.

When Mr. Troy tells Hagar that she is not alone, she replies "'That's where you're wrong.'" (SA, p. 121) This is both true and false, and this problem will present itself again and again in Laurence's work. Mr. Troy's attempt at comfort implies that Hagar is not alone in her suffering, for others suffer too. However, Hagar's reply shows that she cannot yet appreciate shared suffering -- she is still as-

serting her proud independence even at this late date. "Who do you think you are? Hagar. There's no-one like me in this world." (SA, p. 250) At the same time she is growing more aware that perhaps there is a common element of experience which can be shared; others have suffered and felt the same feelings. "'Do you get used to life? ... It all comes as a surprise ...' I peer at her, thinking how peculiar that she knows so much." (SA, p. 104) Along with this growing awareness that life and experience can be shared, comes the realization that it should, indeed, be so. Hagar moves from thinking "Who would understand, even if I strained to speak?" (SA, p. 38) and her pride in keeping her feelings to herself, to the sudden regret of:

What does he know of me? Not a blessed thing. I'm choked with it now, the incommunicable years, everything that happened and was spoken or not spoken. I want to tell him. Someone should know. This is what I think. Someone really ought to know these things. (SA, p. 296)

But it is too late and now explanation no longer matters.

What Hagar must attend to is discovering a way of redeeming herself for all those years. She is alone, since the search for salvation and self-understanding is ultimately an individual effort -- something which must be sought alone. Because Hagar has spent all of her life alone, shut up within herself, the attainment of salvation under these circumstances is possible even at this late date.

Freedom for Hagar is initially achieved when she opens herself to Murray F. Lees and faces the most difficult of her

up
mountain
see
others
experience

David
Lums
the story
agitated

life's memories -- her responsibility in the death of John. After all the years of stern withdrawal, she is "glad [Lees is] here. I'm not sorry I talked to him, not sorry at all, and that's remarkable." (SA, p. 245) Having mistaken him for John, she achieves the forgiveness she has sought from him. She is even able to forgive Lees and offer him a blessing of sorts, of the kind she will shortly offer Marvin. In a setting of religious symbolism, in which Lees plays a kind of Christ figure to Hagar,⁹ Laurence allows us to see that Hagar receives a form of salvation; Lees really does, in a sense, allow her to save herself and acquire a beginning sense of meaning. Hagar's second experience of grace¹⁰ comes at the end of her life, after hearing the gift of Mr. Troy's song, when she suddenly reaches the brink of realization:

I must always, always, have wanted that --
 simply to rejoice. How is it I never could?
 I know, I know. How long have I known? Or
 have I always known, in some far crevice of
 my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too
 concealed? Every good joy I might have held,
 in my man or any child of mine or even the
 plain light of 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?
 (SA, p. 292)

"Hagar is an outcast in a wilderness," Margaret Atwood says. "She is also the wilderness."¹¹ Thus it is that the responsibility for Hagar's isolation is on her own shoulders. Her own view of the situation is not much different:

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. (SA, p. 292)

Hagar has faced her demons and grappled with them on her own as Marvin now grapples with her. "And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him." (SA, p. 304) It is only through this act and her act of kindness to Sandra Wong that Hagar is finally released from the chains of her past. She is still the proud and undaunted, "unchangeable, unregenerate" (SA, p. 293), but she is also more fully human and at peace with herself at last. It is significant that the salvation she has sought, as symbolized by the water she takes on her deathbed, she has always held "in my own hands." (SA, p. 308)

Hagar's arrival at such freedom, the most significant movement in the isolated heroine's pattern of self-discovery, occurs in consequence of her own impending death. Through her conversation with Lees and her acceptance of her involvement in the death of John, she comes to realize, painful though this is, that those things which entrapped her were of her own making. It is sad that much of the isolation which makes us outsiders to life is of our own making. In Hagar's case, the attempt that individuals may make, by sharing love, to overcome isolation, is denied her by her

always the best - lover
- scater
- actor

own pride. She does not really understand love or the ability to reach out to others, and so has been prevented all her life from living fully. Only at the very end of her life, by facing her demon and recognizing its existence, does Hagar come to the brink of self-realization. Her survival instinct and inner strength enable her to accept the sight that her new revelation gives her, and allow her to throw off the shackles of conventionality at last. This permits her to die with dignity and shows us that salvation for the isolated outsider figure is possible to the last.

Hagar Shipley, in her isolation, which is both circumstantial and self-imposed, in her increasing vision of this isolation and its effects on her life, in her realization of life's sanctity, her change in perception at the end of life, and her willingness at last to seek forgiveness and to act with freedom, follows the pattern of growth to self-realization set out in the introduction to this discussion. These things also show her to be, I believe, analogous to the existentialist outsider figure. That Hagar is able to find meaning and achieve salvation at the very end of life is a reaffirmation, both on her part and on Laurence's, of the value and significance of human life, and a fulfillment, at least in part, of the isolated protagonist's need to live more fully.

Margaret Laurence's next outsider deals with her particular situation in a different manner, but she is also

involved in gaining control of her life through positive action, and establishing a discipline which overcomes the sense of futility in her life. I would like now to discuss how Margaret Laurence presents the isolated heroine in the character of Rachel Cameron in A Jest of God.

Chapter Two: A Jest of God

The second of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels dramatizes the life of a neurotic, spinster schoolteacher named Rachel Cameron. At thirty-four years of age, she is trapped in a life of personal loneliness and isolation, caring for her obsessively dependent, hypochondriac mother. In this chapter, I will consider how Rachel meets the challenge of gaining control over her life and how she achieves self-understanding. I also propose to show how the growth of her personality follows the pattern of the isolated heroine's progress to self-knowledge established earlier in this discussion.

Rachel is alone in life, approaching middle-age without the comfort of a spouse or anyone really close to her, in whom she can confide. She feels keenly her lack of emotional security. She is made intensely aware of her loneliness by her sense of not being a true part of the world in which she lives, one of the first manifestations of her role as an isolated outsider figure. She has outgrown her place in the world and now feels alienated from it as she watches the young girls who "look like ... another race ... But that's wrong too. This is their planet. They are the ones who live here now."¹

Rachel feels powerless to deal with her loneliness

and frequently withdraws into daydreams. Consequently she becomes uncomfortable and is conscious always of not knowing what to do or say, how to act, or even what to wear. (JG, p. 68) She feels this lack too, and chastizes herself for her ignorance of things that "any seventeen-year-old would have known." (JG, p. 91) Her isolation, especially her lack of love, is reinforced by Laurence in a scene reminiscent of the one in The Stone Angel in which Hagar lies listening in the next room while her son and his girlfriend make love in the kitchen. This scene, in which Rachel comes upon two teenagers embracing on a hillside, is similar in effect to the scene from which Hagar remains detached. Rachel is, indeed, alienated from the world she glimpses here, and she knows this herself. "I was the intruder," she thinks (JG, p. 79) as she hurries, embarrassed, away. This realization is the first step in her path toward the development of self-understanding, responsibility, and ultimate survival.

Rachel's essential loneliness is reflected back at her by others, and the ultimate impossibility of communication with anyone else is repeatedly emphasized. As C.M. McLay, in his article "Every Man is an Island", says, "Margaret Laurence in A Jest of God suggests ... that every man is an island, a theme ... typical of the twentieth century."² Rachel's story, like that of other isolated heroines, is one of coming to grips with the realization of iso-

lation, facing it, and accepting it, and surviving in spite of it. She, like Hagar, is unable to communicate with others, for her demon, like Hagar's, is fear. Fear permeates Rachel's life and prevents her from forming a true relationship with anyone. Sandra Djwa notes that

just as The Stone Angel can be seen as a study in pride, there is a sense in which A Jest of God is a case study of a pathological fear, an all-pervasive anxiety that tends to choke the life out of all of Rachel's experiences.³

Rachel fears, for instance, to show her affection for James Doherty, for such affection she perceives as a weakness. She is afraid that to reveal weakness would be to appear "laughable ... That's worse, much worse" (JG, p. 19), for her greatest fear is of making a fool of herself. This thought frightens her not only for herself, but also on behalf of others:

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. (JG, p. 27)

Rachel is approaching the realization that she must take responsibility for her own life, but as yet is unable to face or accept it, and continues to retreat to the security, albeit false, of conventionality. She cannot face any such emotional exposure, believing that "people should keep themselves to themselves. That's the only decent way." (JG, p. 35) Later in the novel she will recognize a similar attempt

at retreat when she meets it in Nick Kazlik, with whom she has a brief affair. This is among the experiences which, finally, precipitate her action in taking control of her life. Nick, like Rachel, is at this point unable to face anything that demands a strong emotional response or commitment from him. He is able to accept a willful action on his father's part, but cannot look upon the weakness of senility:

Nick could bear to feel that Nestor was difficult, eccentric, even a giant buffoon, but not diminished. Not saying Steve because he no longer knew. Nick could look at everything. But not at that. (JG, p. 188)

The position of people like Nick or Rachel is precarious; neither is ready yet to encounter pain or responsibility, so must retreat from such sights, which might bring their knowledge of isolation to the surface.

Rachel perceives others hiding within themselves as she hides inside herself. For instance, she once detects the real Hector "living there behind his eyes" (JG, p. 128), and later realizes that all people remain hidden inside themselves, revealing little. She is unable to know them not only because of her own refusal to see, but because of their refusal to show themselves. "That's why I can't see them properly, because their eyes are closed." (JG, p. 165) Nick, she finally realizes, resembles the way he describes his father to be, despite the fact that she had thought him "more outspoken. More able to speak out" (JG, p. 88) than she. He is, in reality, more like Nestor, who "makes a kind of theatre

out of his life, and yet in the end he doesn't intend anyone to know how much of the act is real or if any of it is." (JG, p. 146) She also becomes aware of just how difficult it is to really perceive another. "I can't tell at all what he's thinking. I never can, not with anyone. Always this futile guessing game." (JG, p. 84) This guessing game is the result of the fact that Nick, like Rachel herself, and indeed like many people, has his own mysteries, which are not to be expressed. The thought of such exposure is terrifying, and leaves one open to injury and hurt. "He doesn't reveal much. He only appears to talk openly. Underneath, everything is guarded." (JG, p. 85) She cannot delude herself into taking for absolute truth all that he says, for she knows that her words are not absolutely reliable either. "I don't know why I take people's words at their face value. Mine can't be taken so." (JG, p. 63) Thus Rachel is not only unable to 'read' others, she is also unable to communicate her own pain; even her mother does not know her, in spite of her contentions to the contrary, and Rachel feels that she "wouldn't even want [her mother] to know." (JG, p. 65) Rachel ultimately realizes that her innermost feelings are incommunicable anyway -- "there isn't much to say about myself, nothing that can be spoken" (JG, p. 107), and for a long time she convinces herself, as does Hagar, that her silence is a virtue. Here we may once again recall her belief that "people should keep themselves to themselves -- that's

the only decent way." (JG, p. 35)

Rachel's mother typifies the kind of person who buries herself in the superficial concerns of daily life to prevent herself from facing the terrifying reality of total alienation and isolation. She suffers without recognizing the cause because she fears taking responsibility for her existence and clings instead to the dubious security of a conventional life. As C.M. McLay argues, "under her ... foxiness, her calculated emotional appeals and demands, lies a terrible fear of isolation which is the lot of every human being."⁴ Initially this is the model which Rachel tries to follow, but she is ultimately unable to be satisfied with this kind of life. As yet, however, she is not prepared to contemplate fully her sense of emptiness and continues "not buying her view but unable to act on my own." (JG, p. 90) How much of Rachel's insight is shared by Mrs. Cameron is unknown to us, as it is to Rachel, although we are aware that she suffers and is frightened and clings to Rachel for protection.

Rachel's fear of exposure develops into a kind of paranoia, which leads to a great deal of suspicion of others, for instance, of Willard Siddley:

I've nothing to be afraid of, with him. He has never given a bad report to the School Board on my teaching, as far as I know. I don't know why I should even think he might have. (JG, p. 7)

What is he looking for? What has he found?
Have I done something? (JG, p. 23)

Rachel is so involved with herself that she does not recognize a kindred spirit in Willard. He also feels a sense of loneliness and is as insecure as she is, and he enjoys the experience of being flattered by her attention. It is Rachel's demon, fear, which causes her to interpret such dependence as a threat. She is similarly unreasonably suspicious of her sister's thoughts about her and worries about what Stacey's letter might contain. "If it was a reference to me, Mother wouldn't let me see." (JG, p. 21) Rachel is at first unable to control this way of thinking, even when she realizes how unfounded it is. "I've no evidence, none, of any pitying or slamming phrase." (JG, p. 21)

It is in part Rachel's inability to deal with emotional intensity which leads her to reject the friendship of Calla Mackie, whose eccentric behavior and appearance embarrass Rachel and seem to her to expose too much of Calla's personality. Calla is also an outsider, but she appears to have come to terms with her existence. She does not fit into the world which surrounds her, but neither is she made uncomfortable by it. She leads a life that suits her, painting her apartment in odd colours and dressing as she pleases, despite what the town may say of her. Calla is a survivor, one of the few who sees in a land of the blind. Rachel is torn between Calla's flamboyant ways ("I wish I were more like that" [JG, p. 174]) and her mother's more conservative views ("I wish [Calla] looked a little more usual"

[JG, p. 37]. Rachel cannot decide which approach she prefers, rejecting at once the wild emotionalism of Calla's Tabernacle and the stiff-necked reserve of her mother's congregation. "I was neither one way nor another" (JG, p. 90), she says. This division of self is yet another aspect of the path to self-understanding followed by the isolated heroine as she is torn between accepting her experience or blinding herself to it. John Moss discusses this self-division in his chapter "Irony and the Individual Consciousness" in Patterns of Isolation.⁵ For Rachel to solve her problem, she must find her own way and not rely on imitating either her mother or Calla.

Part of Rachel's restraint, like Hagar's, is due to her Presbyterian background. "'In my family,' she says, 'you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon.'" (JG, p. 88) Also, like Hagar, Rachel finds that her memories of the past are dominated by her confusion about her father's life. He was an uncommunicative man, whose profession, undertaking, set him apart from others. Rachel regrets that she knew so little of the man who "felt at ease with them, the unspeaking ones." (JG, p. 13) She has yet to realize how little can be communicated, and grieves for the fact that she had not spoken to her father about his life. "By the time I knew the question it was too late, and asking it would have cut into him too much." (JG, p. 14) For Rachel, her father's mystery is the key to her association of love and death, which

are juxtaposed in her mind throughout the novel. Nick tells Rachel, for instance, that their place in the woods is "as private as the grave." (JG, p. 90) It is also in a place from which "you could see the cemetery" (JG, p. 149) that Rachel sees the two teenagers embracing. Later, in the funeral chapel, Hector takes her arm and leads her "like a bride up the aisle." (JG, p. 125)

Both love and death are, in some measure for Rachel, attempted solutions to the problem of isolation. Both of these means of resolving her conflicts are investigated by Rachel before she becomes willing to face her problems head on. Rachel tries to overcome her isolation through accepting Nick's love and through conceiving a child with him, which is an attempt "to escape her isolation as a separate being."⁶ Such an escape is not achieved, because Rachel asks too much of the relationship. She demands that Nick save her from her sense of loneliness, which is increasing, and with which she does not want to contend. Nick realizes the depth of her need and his inability to fulfill it. He gently tries to let Rachel know the impossibility of what she asks him. "'Darling,' he says, 'I'm not God. I can't solve anything.'" (JG, p. 148) The other possible 'solution' to her problem, suicide, is rejected because it signifies a total surrender to isolation. As McLay suggests, it "accentuates our consciousness of an isolation which already exists."⁷ The failure of these solutions to Rachel's problems rests on the

fact that both are external to her. Neither is an active affirmation of life on Rachel's part, but instead involve escape from her dilemma without actually solving it. Rachel must not be defeated by her isolation, but must accept it and allow it to become a source of strength which will lead her to ultimate survival.

Love and death are further united in the 'jest of God' to which the title refers. Rachel's 'child' turns out, ironically, to be a tumour, a dead thing, rather than a living being. In another sense, the 'jest' spoken of could be a reference to the view that life itself is an immense joke. The challenge facing Rachel, and indeed us, is to take such a joke and make it into something of value. She must "understand ... that if life is given in jest, the joke is hers to live," as Robert Harlow suggests.⁸

Rachel finally realizes that a child would not have been the answer to her dilemma anyway. The children may "make a shelter" (JG, p. 50) for their mothers, but they, like her school children, are "temporary, never to be held." (JG, p. 201) Ultimately, to have a child would not solve the problem she seeks an answer to anyway, since, as McLay suggests, "motherhood does not ensure immunity from isolation."⁹ Rachel seeks a child initially as a means of insulating herself from the pain of her isolation. It is the 'death' she experiences in discovering that her 'child' is not one at all which brings her to the verge of self-knowledge and the realization that

she must find her own way in life. With this realization comes a fuller knowledge and understanding of the role she must play in her mother's life. She recognizes and accepts the dependence of her "elderly child" (JG, p. 201), but will no longer allow herself to be manipulated and controlled by her.

The dawning of self-understanding shows itself in Rachel's thoughts. "I am not neutral -- I am not detached -- I know it. But neither are you, and you do not know it." (JG, p. 25) She does not try to speak her truths, however, and knows instead that they will remain hidden, but by the close of the novel she has also realized that life cannot, and indeed need not, be other than it is. It is her perception of her life and her ability to control her own life that matters. What has brought her finally to this realization is an experience similar to Hagar's with Murray F. Lees. Rachel's 'savior' in this case is Hector Jonas, the man who has taken over her father's business. Set apart initially by his chosen profession, Hector is another outsider who appears, like Calla, to have reached peace with himself. He is able to answer her questions about her father's life, and also, by extension, those about her own. "'I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most,'" Hector tells her (JG, p. 124), although at first she is unable to accept the contention that destiny is in the hand of the individual. "Hector Jonas said my father got the life he wanted most. I don't know what they're talking a-

bout. As though people did get what they wanted." (JG, p. 165) After considering the facts, however, she is forced to admit that there is something to what Hector says, for "If my father had wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different. Did he ever try to alter it? Did I, with mine?" (JG, pp. 124-25) She is now faced with the truth about her own situation, and must, as Robert Harlow says, "act now or be doomed."¹⁰ She is in the process of changing her perceptions about her situation in life, or realizing that she is responsible for her own life and capable of effecting change in it. This truth both sets her free and awakens a sense of regret for the life of her father, who was satisfied with so little. "If it's true he wanted that life most, why mourn? Why ever cease from mourning?" (JG, p. 125)

It is the combination of Rachel's encounters with Nick and with Hector which finally grants her freedom. It is Hector who teaches her that it is "absurd to hold back" (JG, p. 122) and Nick who teaches her to reach out to another human being for warmth and comfort, even though they do not ultimately answer her problem. As she loses her sense of guilt about the wasted life of her father, she realizes that the responsibility for her mother's life does not belong to her. "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 revelation." (JG, p.

195] Similarly, she is absolved of her guilt about her father's life:

I can't know what he was like. He isn't here to say, and even if he were, he wouldn't say, any more than Mother does. Whatever it was that happened with either of them, their mysteries remain theirs. I don't need to know. It isn't necessary. I have my own. (JG, p. 198)

Rachel is suddenly aware of what's happening in her life and is thus able to assume control over it. No longer, we believe, will she feel that "everything in my life seems a chance encounter, and everything that happens to me is permanent." (JG, p. 150) She will have, if not complete control, at least partial control over what will happen to her from now on. George Bowering notes that "Her early weakness and confusion, her thirty-five-year-old character traits are still there, at the end of the book. They are just not so bad now."¹¹

Rachel expresses the essence of her experience of growth to self-realization when she finally turns from her dream world to the sight of her "other eyes":

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 outside. (JG, p. 151)

After such a vision, Rachel is no longer able to retreat to her dream world.

I thought if the old game could be coaxed and conjured up once more, it would be a way of seeing the days through by not seeing them ... A gate closed, quite quietly, and when I tried

David sees total reality - so connected
in each leaf etc on mountain

50

to open it again, it wouldn't. There wasn't any way around it. No way in, not there, not any more. (JG, pp. 182-83)

But she realizes also that she hasn't so much need of the dream world now, either, for "there never was any reason to be afraid. It was only my nervousness ... conjuring up dragons to scare myself with." (JG, pp. 156-57) She has not, she knows, changed utterly ("I will be different. I will remain the same." [JG, p. 201]) but her new awareness and her willingness to face and cope with her isolation ("I will be lonely, almost certainly." [JG, p. 202]) will give her the strength she needs to survive. Rachel has succeeded in altering her perceptions of her life. Our realization of this gives us hope for her future. She has taken the actions necessary to gain control over her life and will live it with more dignity, just as Hagar is able to die with dignity. Although she will always remain sensitive to human loneliness, she will nonetheless be able to live more abundantly through her acceptance of the value of and responsibility for her own life.

Rachel Cameron exhibits all of the traits of the outsider described in the introduction to this study: the sense of social alienation experienced by all outsiders; the initial refusal to reach out to anyone to overcome what Patricia Morley calls "the bondage of pride, which isolates, into the freedom of love, which links the lover to other humans;"¹² the gradual dawning of awareness of her predicament; her experience

of death; the acceptance of the ineffability of life's experiences and her ultimate realization that she is responsible for her own life and no one else's; and finally, her move to take charge of her own life. Rachel moves from her initial situation as a "Position One" outsider to being a "creative non-victim"¹³ -- she is no longer trapped by her circumstances. Although Rachel's life is not fundamentally altered, her perceptions have changed as a result of the growth of her self-understanding, enabling her to live more fully, as each of these isolated heroines desires to do.

Margaret Laurence's next outsider, Stacey of The Fire-Dwellers, might seem initially less likely to be lonely than Rachel. She is Rachel's sister, a married woman with both a husband and children. Rachel, as we know, at first thought that being married and having children would enable her to escape her isolation. Because Stacey has achieved both, we might expect her isolation to be less severe than Rachel's, but Margaret Laurence insists that her isolation and inability to communicate, factors which plague and produce the pattern of life of the heroines I've presented, may be found everywhere, both within marriage and without.

Chapter Three: The Fire-Dwellers

In The Fire-Dwellers (1969), Margaret Laurence once again deals with the problems of isolation and the dilemmas of the outsider, this time from the point of view of Stacey Cameron MacAindra, Rachel's older sister. The difference in character between the extroverted Stacey and the neurotic introvert Rachel does not prevent Stacey from emerging, in her adult life, as just as isolated as Rachel. In The Fire-Dwellers we meet once again the dominant theme of A Jest of God: that every man is an island.

Stacey's isolation is perhaps even more frightening than Rachel's, because it occurs within marriage, the supposed security of which Rachel sought for a long time as a solution to her isolation. Stacey is married, but still burns -- marriage for her is not a protection from the isolation which engulfs the individual. Stacey, like Hagar before her, seems to believe that the constant demands placed on her by marriage are contributing factors to her loneliness. "I don't have any time for myself," she laments,¹ and indeed this is an important aspect of her feeling of being without identity. For this reason, The Fire-Dwellers, like The Stone Angel (1964) and A Jest of God (1966), is largely concerned with a journey to self-knowledge, which involves Stacey's coming to terms with her fundamental feeling of isolation as

an individual, which is caused by what she regards as the impossibility of her complete communication with others. These, as we have seen, are the fundamental concerns of the isolated heroine, and of her search for truth and meaning. Because hers is an inner quest, it must ultimately lead to self-knowledge if it is to be completed.

As is the case with Rachel and Hagar, an obsession with the past is one of the things that isolate Stacey from others, for part of her problem arises from the fact that that she cannot come to terms with her past. The Manawaka she remembers exists now only in her imagination, but still has a hold over her. She continues to feel like an outsider in Vancouver, even after having lived in the city for twenty years. "Nearly twenty years here, and I don't know the place at all or feel at home." (F, p. 8) Not only is Manawaka still 'home' to her, but she has never really come to terms with the period of life during which she lived there:

I stand in relation to my life both as child and as parent, never quite finished with the old battles, never able to arbitrate properly the new, able to look both ways, but whichever way I look, God, it looks pretty confusing to me. (F, p. 47)

Because of this inability to deal with the past and put it into a proper perspective, Stacey is unable to discover a clear perception of herself in the present. Instead, she persists in seeing herself in terms of the past. Like Hagar, who continues to see herself as the young Hagar Currie, Stacey is unable to realize the changes in herself brought on by the

passing of time. Her dual role as wife and mother continues to seem strange to her, even after all this time, since she attempts to derive her identity from her previous experience. "I'm not a good mother. I'm not a good wife. I don't want to be. I'm Stacey Cameron and I still love to dance." (F, p. 134) Despite her attempts to retreat to an earlier stage of life, when she was younger and less troubled, her acquired roles continue to thrust themselves upon her, and she begins to realize that these are not easily shed. Because she is having difficulty establishing for herself exactly who she is, she sometimes allows herself to be submerged in the lives of her husband and children:

I can't go anywhere as myself. Only as Mac's wife or the kids' mother. And yet I'm getting now so that I actually prefer to have either Mac or one of the kids along It's easier to face the world with one of them along. Then I know who I'm supposed to be.
(F, p. 95)

Yet she rebels against this situation, and it is her total rejection of it which leads her to look for herself in terms of her personal past. "I was myself before any of you were born." (F, p. 135) Her need to find her identity is legitimate. To do this she seems to feel that she must retreat into the past, to a time when she knew who she was, and retrace her steps from there to the present, for she seems to have lost herself somewhere along the way. She feels that her children, for example, do not understand or appreciate her as a person:

Okay, God, say what you like, but I damn well wish I could get away just sometimes by myself. But no. It's a criminal offense, nearly. What makes any of them think they've got the right to tell me own me have me always there not that they notice when I am only when I'm not. (F, p. 184)

This is, of course, consistent with Margaret Laurence's oft-stated premise that in order to achieve personal freedom or self-understanding, the individual must come to terms with the past.² Stacey feels that she is an outsider from contemporary life, much as Rachel did, and she is unable to communicate with those who now seem to possess the world. "I'm a stranger in the now world." (F, p. 301) Those who belong to the 'now world' cannot understand or relate to Stacey's generation, or so she believes. Because she cannot adjust to her new position in the world and cannot understand why she no longer fits into her old one, she resents the 'now world's' perception of her as outdated:

It doesn't matter about you, Stacey? Well, it shouldn't matter. Why not? Because I'm thirty-nine and I can't complain. But they haven't begun yet. That's not how you feel about yourself, though. It matters. Okay, but so what? I think of Katie -- maybe Ian, now, too -- thinking of me like I'm prehistoric, and it bugs me. I'm sorry, but it does. (F, p. 134)

Stacey, like Rachel and Hagar, feels out of touch with contemporary life, especially when she compares herself with her daughter Katie. This is nowhere more poignantly expressed than in the following scene:

Katie is dancing. In a green dress Katie MacAindra simple and intricate as grass is

dancing by herself. Her auburn hair, long and straight, touches her shoulders and sways a little when she moves. She wears no makeup. Her bones and flesh are thin, plain-moving, unfrenetic, knowing their idiom.

Stacey MacAindra, thirty-nine, hips ass and face heavier than once, shamrock velvet pants, petunia purple blouse, cheap gilt sandals high-heeled, prancing squirming jiggling.

Stacey turns and goes very quietly up the basement steps and into the living room. (F, p. 137)

Stacey feels she has lost her place in contemporary life, and she can no longer recognize herself in it. "It isn't me, it's somebody wearing my appearance, my face, takeover by aliens from out there." (F, p. 189) Stacey feels like an alien not because she is really a stranger in the world, but because she is still trying to fit herself in where she no longer belongs. However, it is the world she left behind from which she is truly an outsider.

Because of the discrepancy between her inner and outer realms of being,³ Stacey feels that she exists only within herself, a feeling similar to Rachel's feelings of alienation from and non-existence in the real world. Stacey feels the desire to "explain myself ... make myself real ..." (F, p. 204) This feeling of unreality arises from the fact that she is still searching for her identity in her now imaginary world of the past. She finds it difficult to identify with the present, since "it changes too rapidly for me to keep track. What do

town
car crash

"I know of it?" (F, p. 73) This contributes to her alienation from the world of the present and heightens her feelings of being an outsider.

Stacey is an outsider too in that she recognized the discrepancy between her inner life and her outer: "What goes on inside isn't ever the same as what goes on outside. It's a disease I've picked up somewhere." (F, p. 33) She is aware also, even in the beginning, that life is equally difficult for others; that real truth is never communicated. She is able to perceive her own problem as part of a problem-ridden society. As we have seen, it is this heightened awareness of her situation that sets the isolated heroine apart. Stacey, it seems, along with Hagar and Rachel, is an outsider, isolated in a world of many outsiders. Stacey also feels alone in life despite her marriage to the man she loves. Her marriage is limited by a lack of communication between her husband and herself:

He doesn't talk any more hardly at all can you imagine what it's like to live in the same house with somebody who doesn't talk or who can't or else won't and I don't know which reason it could be. (F, p. 197)

She is unable to guess what Mac is really like inside. "In God's name, what is Mac like, in there, wherever he lives?" (F, p. 126) "What does Mac think about?" (F, p. 130) She knows, however, that the problem of communication is not uniquely his. "It's the ones who say good-bye before they're dead who bug me. I start thinking -- it's Mac. Then I think

Hell no it's not Mac it's me and then I don't know." (F, p. 140) Trying to bridge the gap in their ability to reach each other seems almost too hopeless at times, and Stacey is not always sure she even wants to:

Should I tell Mac? Yeh, and have him say I'm making a fuss about nothing. He doesn't want to know. He doesn't want to know anything difficult about me or the kids. Nothing. Okay, and now I don't want to tell him, so we're even. (F, p. 211)

... whatever you're like, whatever you're going through, I don't want to know, see. I just don't want to know. Not anymore. (F, p. 217)

— In some ways, this withdrawal represents a false kind of security. It is the same source of 'strength' and self-protection drawn upon by Hagar and Rachel. At times, then, it is the fear of showing weakness that keeps Stacey from revealing herself. "I dread an uneasy lull or anything fringing on what I'm thinking about. I'm always afraid he'll guess." (F, p. 65) Stacey is also unable to volunteer information to others. She can't communicate with her daughter -- "from where she stands I look unreasonable, inconsistent, and immoral. And I'm certain I'm not ... I can explain everything. Sure, explainer of the year, that's me. How can I explain anything?" (F, p. 47) Things are no easier with her sons; with Ian she feels that she "can't reach him at all" (F, p. 117), and she feels "far from [Duncan] too." (F, p. 119) She is unable to explain herself to them, although it is often her urge to do just that:

Everybody should stop from time to time and explain what they mean. But none of us in this house do. (F, p. 69)

I wanted to explain myself. I still do. Wait, you! Let me tell you. I'm not what I may appear to be. Or if I am, it's happened imperceptibly I didn't used to be. Once I was different... (F, p. 73)

The barrier between Stacey and others is strongly felt in the case of Mac's friend Buckle; she is unable to guess either what he is really like, or what his perceptions of her might be. Despite the fact that she has known him for several years and, indeed, met her husband through him, Buckle remains essentially a stranger to her -- "His shrines are invisible. I wonder what they look like, and what fetishes and offerings lurk on those altars? ... What do you know of it?" (F, p. 53) and she is a stranger to him:

My good-wife-and-mother voice. I can't seem to talk to Buckle in any other way. I always sound so prim. I wonder what kind of person he imagines I must be. (F, p. 50)

Stacey is aware of the fact that others have their inner lives too, but she is unable to fathom them or guess their depths. She is therefore unable to reach her friends, for example, Tess, her neighbour, who is in fact suicidal. "Tess. What's the matter with us? ... I can't get through the sound barrier any more than I can with any of them." (F, p. 221) This 'sound barrier' prevents Stacey from voicing intimate thoughts to her friends, although she imagines that they might conceivably feel akin to each other -- "How strange if Bertha and Tess were thinking the exact same thing. We could unite" (F,

p. 87]), but Stacey opts in the end for the easier way out -- continued isolation:

We're too damn complacent. No -- we're not complacent one bit. We're just scared. Of what? Making a scene? Finding out we're alone after all -- better not to test it out? How do I know what Tess and Bertha think? (F, p. 87)

When Tess actually does attempt to take her own life, Stacey faults herself -- "How many things added up? But I didn't get the message either. Why didn't I? I always envied her for being so glamorous. I couldn't see anything else." (F, p. 271) Similarly, Mac feels guilt about Buckle when he hears of his friend's death, but in this case it is guilt not for the death of Buckle, but for having saved his life when Buckle, he believes, would have preferred to die:

... I never did that well by him ... I always kind of resented how much he came around.
 You never said. He didn't know. I didn't, either.
 Well, how could I say? It was something that happened a long time ago ... the bridge blew. Mined. ... I hauled him out ... But later on I thought maybe ... that I hadn't done him any favour. I hadn't done anything he wanted me to do. (F, p. 240)

The shared experience of Buckle's death brings Stacey closer to Mac, and helps her to deal with her own guilt about Tess. Stacey, like Rachel, learns here that the responsibility for life and death is not in her hands, nor in Mac's. "Mac -- stop beating yourself. You're not God. You couldn't save him." (F, p. 240)

Escaping isolation in life is impossible, and Matthew, Stacey's father-in-law, illustrates this point. He stands as

a signpost of the increasing isolation of age:

Matthew does not have enough people to talk to these days, and practically nothing ever happens to him. He still attends the church where he once used to preach, but the people he knew there are getting fewer. The young minister is painstakingly cordial, but cannot think of anything Matthew could usefully do, and Matthew himself is afraid of getting in the way. (F, pp. 66-67)

Her father-in-law also stands as a warning to Stacey to open herself to others before it is too late. He, like Hagar, has remained silent for too long, and now there is no one left to talk to. As he tells Stacey, "I always wanted to talk about it to someone, but I couldn't. I wish now that I had talked of it." (F, p. 283) In an encounter similar to Hagar's with Murray F. Lees,⁴ and Rachel's with Hector Jonas and Nick Kazlik, Stacey finally manages to open her heart to Luke Venturi, a young science-fiction writer whom she meets on a beach. As she herself is aware, he is the only person to whom she has ever spoken so openly. "With Luke, everything is simple. He doesn't complicate things. He says what he's thinking." (F, p. 211) "I can only break through with one person. LukeLukeLuke." (F, p. 221) As is the case with Rachel and Hagar, this man enters Stacey's life at a time of crisis, one in which she is forced to act or lose herself. It is he who first makes her aware of the "excess mental baggage" carried by others besides herself. "Everything looks both better and worse from the outside, I guess. You think -- How lucky they are or How in Hell can they stand

it? Maybe they're not so lucky, but they can stand it." (F, p. 98) It is also Luke who helps Stacey to recognize and to some extent accept isolation as everyone's plight, not just the plight of an unfortunate few. It is at this point in the novel that Margaret Laurence once again repeats her by now familiar "you're not alone" sequence, but this time with a new twist. Stacey, unlike Rachel and Hagar, is not allowed the last word:

Well go ahead and bawl. No shame in that.
 You're not alone.
 She lifts her head and looks at him.
 That's where you're wrong.
 Luke picks up her coffee mug and goes to
 refill it.
 No, baby, that's where you're wrong. (F,
 pp. 178-179)

Stacey is on her way to the realization that her experience of isolation is not unique. She may be alone in that she is isolated within herself, but there are many others who experience the same isolation. Thus, we, together with Stacey, find that isolation itself is something which forms a bond between ourselves and others -- a bond of shared experience. Stacey's triumph in this novel, like Hagar's and Rachel's in theirs, lies in learning to accept her plight and live with (or die with) dignity in spite of it; in short, her triumph lies in her capacity to survive. She will never be able to eradicate her isolation entirely, for this is not possible. Because of this everyone is indeed an island, and Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey are studies of isolation in different people in varying situations in life: old age, spinsterhood,

David Kaplan
 after play

and wife and motherhood.

What makes these three characters different from the mass of people is not simply their isolation, but their perception of it. They, like the outsider, are aware of their loneliness in a society that refuses to acknowledge the existence of such loneliness. The isolated heroine, as we have noted, is characterized by this "sense of strangeness, or unreality."⁵ Stacey and Rachel both feel ill at ease in worlds that they feel no longer belong to them, and speak of their feelings of alienation, but Stacey comes more and more to feel that the isolation she perceives has always been with her. It is merely her awareness of her isolation which is increasing:

Perhaps it isn't that the masks have been put on, one for each year like the circles that tell the age of a tree. Perhaps they've been gradually peeled off, and what's there underneath is the face that's always been there for me, the unspeaking eyes, the mouth for whom words were too difficult. (F, p. 170)

At any rate her isolation is certainly inescapable. For a long time, however, Stacey is still having trouble coming to terms with its inevitability, and longs for some answer.

"What's the matter with us that we can't talk? How can anyone know unless people say? How come we feel it's indecent?"

(F, p. 167) She finally realizes that preventing or changing her essential isolation from others cannot be achieved, that "nothing ever can come out. I sometimes see us like moles, living in our underground burrows, with eyes that can't

stand any light. Once I thought it was only people like Matthew and my mother who had that kind of weak eyes. Now I know it's me, as much." (F, p. 164) The only way we have of reaching through to others is haphazard and full of pitfalls, for we are "unable to gauge accurately, having to guess only." (F, p. 278)

However, by the end of her journey, Stacey is much wiser about many of the things which have plagued her. Her isolation is still with her, for her problem is her life, and to this there is no solution. It is her ultimate determination to go on, her survival instinct, which makes us admire her and believe in her, and which gives us hope for the outcome of her story. Stacey has learned to live with the fires of her inner life. Luke venturi has been able to help her arrive at a measure of understanding of her life, for which she is grateful:

Luke ... you showed me where I belonged, when you said Why can't you leave? I guess I should be grateful. I am grateful. Maybe not for that, so much. I guess I knew it anyway. For the way you talked to me and held me for a while -- that's why I'm grateful. I said unspokenly Help and you didn't turn away. You faced me and touched me. You were gentle. (F, p. 277)

What he has done for her is to enable her to reach out to someone. He has shown her that communication is possible, even if it cannot be complete. He has also made her realize that an escape from the problems of her marriage is not possible, as she thinks that "even if you'd been older, or I'd

been younger and free, it wouldn't have turned out any simpler with you than it is with Mac. I didn't see that at one time, but I see it now." (F, pp. 227-228]

Stacey is also able to see a little more into the isolation of others -- Buckle's death brings her closer to Mac, when both realize how lonely Buckle must have been, and how much Mac's friendship must have meant to him. It also enables her to begin to see what Mac suffers, and how much he, like Stacey herself, has his own burdens to carry. "In the meantime, we carry our own suitcases. How is it I never knew how many you were carrying? Too busy toting my own." (F, p. 241) She begins also to recognize the loneliness of Matthew. "poor Matthew. Too late now." (F, p. 283] She has begun to escape the bonds of the past at this point too, for she is finally able to call Matthew "Dad", a term she had previously reserved for her own father. Now she finds it no longer matters:

Strange -- it's only a name now, that, only a way of identifying Matthew. Niall Cameron has been dead a long time. If someone else needs the name, no point in not using it. It doesn't mean anything to me anymore. I never knew it until now. (F, p. 291)

When Stacey offers to have Matthew move in with them, she is also able, for a change, to see his suffering too. "If you think it'll be awful for you, doll, how do you think he'll feel about it? Matthew, who doesn't even like to admit he has any natural functions. Matthew, always so neat and so proud." (F, p. 282) She is also suddenly able to perceive

the pressure which has been weighing on Mac all along:

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. (F, p. 285)

In recognizing this hidden strength, Stacey is able to find the determination and the willpower to survive. "I can't stand it. I cannot. I can't take it. Yeh, I can, though." (F, p. 289)

She even comes to the realization that there are other forms of communication than her yearned-for discussions; Mac and Ian have established their own lines of communication in another way:

That's the most Mac will ever be able to say. They're not like me, either of them. They don't want to say it in full technicolor and intense detail. And that's okay, I guess. Ian gets the message. It's his language too. I wish it were mine. All I can do is accept that it is a language, and that it works, at least sometimes. And maybe it's mine more than I like to admit. Whatever I think that I think of it, it's the one I most use. (F, p. 296)

Stacey may not have succeeded in establishing totally new lines of communication herself, but she has, at least, recognized and accepted the validity of those already in existence, which will enable her to use them more effectively. This move from isolation to communication is symbolically represented in her youngest child, Jen, who does not talk throughout the novel, until the end, when she begins to speak whole sentences. Her sudden ability to make herself understood

seems to be symbolically related to her mother's new awareness and understanding of others.

Stacey, who, like Hagar, has until now continued to find herself identified with the Stacey of her youth, is also suddenly able to move into the present and escape the confusion which has previously upset her:

I was wrong to think of the trap as the four walls. It's the world. The truth is that I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I'll always be her, because that's how I started out. But from now on, the dancing goes on only in the head. (F, p. 303)

She has become reconciled to the fact that life is full of problems which are inescapable; she cannot retreat to the past and her younger, more carefree self, to solve them. Luke could not remove her isolation, only help her to live with it.

At the close of the novel we see that its circular motion has returned Stacey, in some ways, to where she began.

On the surface her life has not been radically changed:

On the bedroom chair rests a jumble of Stacey's clothes, off-cast stockings like nylon puddles, roll-on girdle in the shape of a tire where she has rolled it off. On another chair, Mac's clothes are folded neatly, a habit he acquired in the army, as he has remarked countless times. Two books are on the bedside table -- The Golden Bough and Investments and You, Hers and His both unread. (F, p. 305)

This is a repetition, almost verbatim, of a paragraph at the beginning of the novel (F, pp. 3-4), and it seems to belie the progression which has been made in Stacey's life. Her progress does not seem as great as that of Hagar or Rachel

because it is not accompanied, as theirs is, by a radical change in the surface structure of her life. Hagar dies and Rachel packs up and moves to a new city and a new job, altering her physical surroundings as she changes her perception of her inner dilemma. Stacey, however, is unable to make such a dramatic alteration in her way of life. She is still married to Mac and remains with him and their children. It is possible, however, for Stacey to make her inner life better, even if this cannot be represented by a dramatic change in her external existence. It is the change in her perception of her existence which is important. The repetition of this passage serves to focus the reader's attention on the inner progress which has been made. This change in perception, as we have seen, is characteristic of the journey to self-knowledge. It is not the actual, physical circumstances of Stacey's life which have changed. This is significant, because it points out to the reader just how much of the isolated heroine's progress is internal and that she need not experience a radical change in the external pattern of her existence in order to achieve a fuller and richer sense of life.

Although it might be argued that Stacey has not come as far in her journey as Hagar or Rachel may seem to have come, she has a greater awareness of herself and her situation at the end of the novel than she possessed at the beginning. We are reminded of Hagar's statement that "nothing is ever changed at a single stroke, I know that full well, although

a person sometimes wishes it could be otherwise."⁶ We cannot help but be convinced that, though Stacey's external life has not changed radically, she has made the first step toward gaining control over it in an internal sense; her progress, which is undeniable, has been made within. Because of the journey to self-knowledge on which she has embarked, Stacey is able to survive.

Chapter Four; The Diviners

The Diviners (1974), Margaret Laurence's fourth Manawaka novel, again deals with the themes present in her previous three Manawaka novels -- the isolation of the individual, the impossibility of total communication, and the importance of the past in determining the course of one's life. These themes are enlarged upon and dealt with in more detail in this novel, partly because of its length, and partly because the protagonist is herself a novelist, and is therefore endowed with the artist's heightened perception, in addition to her sense of herself as isolated. As Clara Thomas observes, "The Diviners is a complex and a profound novel, an exploration of the meaning of a life, a quest, and finally, the affirmation of a life's meaning."¹ These are all aspects of the journey to self-knowledge undertaken by all of the isolated heroines who are the subjects of this study.

These concerns can also be extended to include other characters in this novel; not only is the protagonist, Morag Gunn, an outsider from her world, but every other major character is as well. The threads which bind them all to the past, although intangible and finally untraceable, are nevertheless strong and inescapable. This novel, also, like the other Manawaka novels, involves a search for identity on the part of the protagonist, which, as we have already noted, is fundamental to the isolated heroine's search for meaning

in life. In these novels such a quest is inextricably related to the protagonist's past. In The Diviners, the search for self-knowledge is especially difficult for Morag, for she has been without parents or 'family' since the age of four. We may applaud Morag, as we do Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, for her toughness and ability to survive. She leads a difficult life, but continues to survive as she determined to do, as a child: "Eva seems like she is beaten by life already. Morag is not -- repeat not -- going to be beaten by life."² Morag must, like Margaret Laurence's other Manawaka heroines, come to terms with her past or remain forever unknown to herself in the present.

Morag Gunn is an outsider in every sense of the term. Clara Thomas sees her as having been an outsider for most of her life:

Morag was always an outsider to the social structure in Manawaka; and as she grew up, her hurt and resentment made her both consciously and defensively determined to preserve her own differences.³

Orphaned at an early age, she is sent to live with Christie Logan, the town garbage collector, and his simple-minded wife Prin. Morag's isolation arises from the loss of her parents, and the fact that she is unable to accept Christie and Prin as her real family. She is aware that they too are alienated from the Manawaka community, and "in an isolated town such as Manawaka, the watchword is conformity. Anyone who does not conform to the established code is cast into a limbo of social

ostracism."⁴ Yet, ironically, Morag is unable to really reach out to Christie and Prin for just this reason: "'Why should I know better, then? I'm only the Scavenger.' 'That's exactly all you are,' Morag says coldly." (D, p. 123] Morag has a keen sense of Christie's unusualness from the time she starts school. "He looks peculiar." (D, p. 35] "That is the worst. How silly he looks. No. The worst is that he smells." (D, p. 36] Prin, who grows increasingly fat and withdraws further into herself, is also essentially unknown to Morag:

Prin scarcely moves at all now, just sits in her chair, growing heavier and more silent all the time, living only inside her head, if anywhere. (D, p. 161]

She loves Prin, but can no longer bear to be seen with her in public. (D, p. 108]

Despite her inability or refusal to accept Christie and Prin as her family ("Christie's not my old man! My dad is dead." [D, p. 72/], Morag is still seen by the town as one with them. Consequently, she does not fit in anywhere, all of which contributes to and heightens her feeling of alienation. "No one will say Good Morning to Morag and Prin. Not on your life." (D, p. 109]

The place where they live also serves to mark their position in Manawaka:

Hill Street was the Scots-Irish equivalent of the Other Side of the Tracks ... below the town; it was inhabited by those who had not and would never make good. Hill Street -- dedicated to flops, washouts and general no-goods, at least in the view of the town's better-off. (D, p. 28)

Christie tries to console Morag with his philosophy that they are really all equal -- "They're only muck the same as any of us. Skin and bone and the odd bit of guts." (D, p. 30) But this has little effect on her, coming as it does from a surrogate father whom she despises. Christie has accepted his status as an outsider, but Morag is as yet unable to do so, and so she rejects his attempts at comfort. This reaffirms for the reader the necessary loneliness of the quest for self-knowledge: Morag must find her own path. Thus, Christie cannot impart his discoveries to Morag, for she must find her way for herself. Meanwhile, Christie continues to take great pleasure in "showing [the townspeople] what they thought they would like to see" (D, p. 35), to the horror of Morag, who, like Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey before her, "doesn't let on. If you let on, you're a goner." (D, p. 63) In spite of this fear of others, Morag does, somewhere inside, believe herself to be better than those who condemn her, although she is not fooled by this perception of their inferiority into losing sight of their strength. The best solution, she learns at a young age, is to "hang onto your shit and never let them know you are ascaired." (D, p. 34) It is not until much later that she is forced to recognize this as pride. "'A lot of people look down on me. I don't think of myself as looking down on anybody.'" (D, p. 155) Morag blames much of her isolation on the fact that she has no 'real' parents. In this way she effectively distances herself, in her own mind, from

implication in the actions and behavior of Christie and Prin. Although deep down Morag realizes how unfair this is, she sees them partly as the cause of her problems of isolation. "People with real parents sometimes have a lousy time too. She has known this all along, of course, but not really." (D, p. 115)

[Morag remains alone and hides her real feelings within herself. "Morag is very delicate-minded. She prides herself on it, although she never lets on, of course." (D, p. 35) "She can bear anything, she knows, really, but not for people to see." (D, p. 174) This is smugness and pride on her part, though she does not recognize it at the time. "Morag can read like sixty. Sometimes she doesn't let on in school, though." (D, p. 34) Later on, her daughter, picking this up, will tell her, "You're so goddam proud and so scared of being rejected." (D, p. 236) This is what keeps her silent about her ambitions as a writer. "She has known for some time what she has to do, but never given the knowledge to any other person, or thought that any person might suspect." (D, p. 122)

As she grows older, Morag comes to believe in her position of alienation, and hangs fiercely onto it with a kind of pride. "'You're not alone.' 'That's where you're wrong,' Morag says." (D, p. 157) When she is called a mooner, she likes to think of it as "some creature from another place, another planet. Left here accidentally." (D, p. 51) Clara Thomas refers to this as Morag's effort at "establishing her

outsiderdom."⁵ Even though in one sense she enjoys the feeling of being an outsider, distinct from the rest, ("She is rarely alone when alone" [D, p. 187]) she does not fit in with Christie, and there is a difference between her and the other isolated characters in the novel, who ironically seem to belong together. Morag has higher ambitions -- "nothing -- nothing -- is going to endanger her chances of getting out of Manawaka." (D, p. 153) Her one possibility of friendship in her childhood, with Eva Winkler, is rejected. Eva, unlike Morag, is not a fighter, and Morag fears being pulled down as Eva has been:

Wanting Eva to go. Right this minute. Not to be seen talking to her.... Eva hasn't smartened up any ... Eva seems like she is beaten by life already. Morag is not -- repeat not -- going to be beaten by life. But cannot bear to look at Eva very often. (D, p. 113)

Eva is an example of an isolated character who was unable to meet the challenge of her life, and could not gain control of it; instead she has chosen to live on a lower plane of existence. Morag feels that she must turn her back on Eva, because Eva signifies what Morag herself could become, if she does not actively resist. The survival instinct in Morag cannot allow her to fail like Eva is destined to do. Eva is unable to transcend her situation. Morag, although she will ultimately find her way to a reaffirmation to life, is not at this point in the novel able to accept her fate as Christie has done. Morag's pride will not let her see the wisdom of

Christie's rejection of those who look down on him. Even Skinner Tonnerre, another of the isolated characters who surround Morag, recognizes the difference between Morag and the others, including himself.

'I don't have to do anything all that much. I'm not like you.'

True. He isn't. She stiffens.

'You're just like Christie.' Disapproval in her voice? Disappointment?

'I'm not,' Jules says. 'I'm just like -- never mind. Well, you'll do okay.'

'Why do you say that?'

'You want it so bad I can just about smell it on you. You'll get it though.'

'What's it?'

... He grins but not quite in the old way, not conspiratorially. Not quite hostile, but nearly. To him, she is now on the other side of the fence. They inhabit the same world no longer.

'I wouldn't know,' he says. 'But I guess you do. Well, so long. See you around, eh?'

(D, p. 166)

The Tonnerres themselves are outcasts, "dirty and unmentionable." (D, p. 69) Lazarus, Skinner's father, was a "stranger in the place where he lived his whole life." (D, p. 338) They are set apart first and foremost by the fact that they are Metis. Morag is intrigued by Skinner, even though she is aware that, as far as the town is concerned, "he came from nowhere. He isn't anybody." (D, p. 70) In this, at least, they are alike, and she feels that there is a kind of understanding between them, a silent communion. They are "bonded by their recognition in each other of the everlasting outsider", as Clara Thomas puts it.⁶ Morag feels that Jules is "someone from a long long way back, someone related to her

in ways she cannot define and feels no need of defining." (D, p. 267) He is the only one in Morag's childhood with whom she feels this communion, and he is also the only one in her youthful experience who is able to appreciate Christie.

"'He's quite a guy, that Christie.' 'I'm glad you think so.'" (D, p. 134) Morag herself is unable to appreciate Christie until much later, when she realizes that "Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand." (D, p. 412) Christie has reached a point where the scorn of the town can no longer reach him; he is hurt only by the scorn of Morag, who has yet to reach a similar realization and acceptance of her own and, by extension, of Christie's worth. Skinner is similarly able, for the moment, to rise above the town's rejection, but is later defeated by the pain such isolation causes his family.

The adult Morag shares with Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey the feeling of having outgrown the world and the impossibility of being in touch with a world that is no longer hers:

We think there is one planet called Earth, but there are thousands, even millions, like a snake shedding its skin every so often, but with all the old skins still bunched around it. You live inside the creature for quite a while, so it comes as a shock to find you're living now in one of the husked-off skins, and sometimes you can touch and know about the creature as it is now and sometimes you can't. (D, p. 172)

She is made aware of the remoteness of the present world by her daughter, Pique. Pique experiences the same feeling of being divided from herself which Morag feels. "I don't want

to be split. I want to be together. But I'm not. I don't know where I belong." (D, p. 350) This duality of self, intensified in Pique's case by her dual heritage of Scots and Metis, is by now recognizable to us as part of the isolated heroine's dilemma. Just as Christie was unable to pass on to Morag his wisdom, Morag is unable, because of a lack of communication, to understand fully her daughter's dilemma, even though she can infer from experience what the girl is going through. She is aware, however, of the pitfalls involved in thus interpreting Pique. "Am I only interpreting her through my own experience? Maybe she doesn't feel that at all." (D, p. 237) In spite of this, and her consequent distance from Pique, she can recognize and identify with the girl's frustration at the reactions of many townspeople. "They think it's you that's wrong, just by being, and not being like them." (D, p. 233) This serves to underscore the contention that there is a unity in isolation -- ironically, we are, at least, not alone in being alone.

Morag's way of life extends her role as isolated heroine into later years. She returns to her former 'outsideness' in Jules' eyes, and regains his approval fully when he later finds her living alone in a remote cottage in rural Ontario. "'Hell, nearly everybody in McConnell's Landing knows you, Morag. They think you're crazy as a bed bug.'" (D, p. 424) He realizes that she has, at last, risen above the scorn of those who have rejected her and is making her

own way, no longer feeling the need to 'prove' herself to other people.

Morag's search for identity is also bound up with her past. At first, her desire to find herself forces her to reject Christie and Manawaka, to try to escape from the past which they represent. This is equivalent to Rachel's reluctance to face her isolation. Morag, like Rachel, tries initially to find solace in respectability, and in a way of life which she has imagined has made others happy. At first she tells Brooke, "'I just feel as though I don't have a past.'" (D, p. 194) "'Manawaka and that -- it's over. It doesn't exist. It's unimportant.'" (D, p. 198) She first attempts to find herself, outside Manawaka, in her role as Brooke's wife, denying her self entirely. "She will do whatever he wants her to do ... She will conceal everything about herself which he might not like." (D, p. 196) Initially, Morag is thrilled by Brooke's willingness to possess her and provide her with a ready-made identity. "'I think most men feel that way about their woman.' Their woman. Her clenched and doubting guts now dissolve with gratitude and care." (D, p. 200) She rejects her past and ignores Christie's warning that the past cannot be escaped:

'It'll all go along with you too. That goes without saying.'

... 'You mean -- everything will go along with me?'

'No less than that, ever,' Christie says.

'It won't, though,' Morag says, and hears the stubbornness in her own voice.

Christie laughs. 'Who says so, Morag?'
'I say so.' (D, p. 207)

Later, however, she becomes aware that his perception is more accurate than her own. She begins to feel the need to explain herself to Brooke. "'I think I should tell you about my childhood. All about it. I think I should.'" (D, p. 197) She begins, also, to see the error of her ways in having allowed Brooke to develop an image of her which "must forever be distorted." (D, p. 257) She, like Pique does later, feels "separate from herself" (D, p. 263), for, by denying the past, she has rejected an important part of herself. In vain, Morag tries to account to Brooke for the change he sees in her. "'I'm not the same as I was. Or maybe I'm the same, but it scared me, before.'" (D, p. 258) Christie was right; the past has all remained with her -- "'I never forgot any of it. It was always there.'" (D, p. 257) Finding herself, she realizes finally, is a process which "goes a long way back" (D, p. 262), and cannot be begun solely in the present. All of this comes as a shock to Brooke, who was unaware of all she had kept hidden, and who, Morag suddenly sees, "has believed he owns her." (D, p. 278) Brooke is not ready to accept these revelations of Morag's, for she is his escape route from confronting his sense of isolation, just as he has been hers. Her leaving him will destroy the fragile veil which protects him from recognizing that he too is alone. Morag will move on to face and conquer her isolation, but Brooke continues to retreat from isolation and finally manages

to make a life with another woman who will shield him from isolation as Morag initially did.

Even when Morag begins to realize the importance of the past in discovering her identity, she continues to reject Christie, and returns to an earlier time which is not really hers. She searches her memory for some fragment of her parents' influence. "I keep the photographs not for what they show but for what is hidden in them." (D, p. 6) She is unable to find much, so begins to create memories for herself, convincing herself of their validity. "I remember their deaths but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull." (D, p. 19) She justifies this process to herself by accepting that it is ultimately unavoidable; the past will always consist of a blend of fact and legend which, with time, will become inseparable. "A popular misconception is that we can't change the past -- everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it." (D, p. 60) "Who has been real and who imagined? All have been both, it seems." (D, p. 249) Morag goes back to Scotland, eventually, to search for her roots in the hills from where her parents' people came. She does not make this journey all the way back, because she is interrupted by a realization which re-directs her quest:

'I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't, after all. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here ... it's a

deep land, all right,' Morag says. 'But it's not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it's not.'

'What is, then?'

'Christie's real country. Where I was born.' (D, p. 391)

She sees her continuity with the past as well. She has thought that she would be able to prevent Pique from suffering as she did, or as Jules did. It is not possible, however, for "the old patterns, the ones from both Morag's and Jules' childhoods, the old patterns even in Pique's own life" (D, p. 421), keep repeating themselves, and Morag is later able to warn Dan of this. She has learned that it is impossible to turn one's back on the past, to reject it entirely; the past will, as Christie has told her, remain always with us:

'Your own place will be different, but it will be the same too, in some ways.'

'Not if I can help it,' Dan says angrily.

'I'm not sure you can help it. You can change a whole lot. But you can't throw [the past] away entirely.' (D, p. 354)

As Morag accepts this, she must face her guilt for her behaviour and her treatment of Christie. "Had she been wrong to want to get away? No, not wrong to get away, to make her getaway. It was the other thing that was wrong, the turning away, turning her back on both of them." (D, p. 248) She is stabbed with remorse for leaving Manawaka, for leaving Christie and Prin. She cannot thank Eva Winkler properly for her kindness or accept, without some shame, her simple explanation for it. "'It wasn't that much,' Eva says. 'She was always good to Vern and me.'" Sure. Prin gave them the

occasional jelly doughnut. She gave Morag her only home." (D, p. 252) Morag has come to realize the necessity of accepting the past, all of it, and of forging her identity from it. The past is not to be pushed aside or rejected. "You Can't Go Home Again, said Thomas Wolfe. Morag wonders if it may be the reverse which is true. You have to go home again, in some way or other." (D, p. 302) Morag shows her full acceptance of the past when she takes for her own the Clanranald MacDonald plaid pin and motto. "Adoption, as who should know better than Morag, is possible." (D, p. 432)

With this novel, as with the previous three, Margaret Laurence once more examines the impossibility of total communication between people, a problem which continually plagues the many isolated characters in modern literature. The problem is especially acute for Morag because of her profession as a writer. She is, at first, convinced of the power of words, of their ability to explain everything. "I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even Miracle. But no, only occasionally." (D, p. 5) Later she begins to doubt this god of words. "Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications. Yet, with typical ambiguity, convinced that fiction was more true than fact." (D, p. 25) Not only do the words not communicate fully and effectively, they sometimes serve to obscure. "Wordsmith, forging screens." (D, p. 245) Yet, somewhere in her words Morag can find herself. This is also true for her friend Ella, who is also a writer.

"It is the unspoken but real face under the jester's mask. They do not pry, nor do they invade each other's areas of privacy. They simply recognize the existence of these." (D, p. 188) Throughout the novel this concern with words is reinforced by the verbal nature of Morag's thinking. She constantly plays with words, inter-changing them or altering their form slightly to effect drastic changes in meaning: "the stringy lean oaths with protein in them, the Protean oaths" (D, p. 255), "clutches of cymbals, clichés of symbols" (D, p. 286), "angry ... at the composition of her composite self" (D, p. 257), "the two-way battle in the mindfield, the minefield of the mind." (D, p. 399) Yet when she needs them most, words seem to lose their effectiveness for her as a means of communication. "Words have lost meaning." (D, p. 278) What frightens Morag even more is not her inability to express herself as an artist, but the thought that her vision of life itself may be faulty:

Do I only pretend to see, in writing?
 What did I ever see about you, Christie, until
 it was too late? I told my child tales about
 you, but I never took her to see you. I made
 a legend out of you, while the living you was
 there alone in that mouldering house. (D, p.
 412)

Because of this fear, and the discrepancies between inner and outer life, as well as the fact that she for a long time denies this important aspect of her identity, Morag feels that her "flesh and herself are two separate entities." (D, p. 326) This division of self is typical of the Beginnings of the jour-

ney to self-awareness, as we have already noted. Morag is brought to a vision of life's duality by her profession as a writer, and she is forced to accept that communication, despite her art, is still extremely difficult, and no one can know fully how life is for anyone else. "Who has led a better life, Eva or myself? No doubt I think she has. No doubt she thinks I have." (D, p. 393) What Morag, like Stacey, must learn to recognize, is that there are other forms of communication than words, which can ease the burden of isolation.

Communication need not always involve a verbal exchange:

How unlike me. I would have had to say what I thought about it, analyze the words, probably. Yakkity yak. [Pique] doesn't have to, and neither does Jules. They do it in a different way, a way I can see, although it's not mine. (D, pp. 426-427)

Morag, like Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, can be admired for her strength and resilience. She has made a journey to self-awareness, and survived it. "I am okay. And in a profound sense, this was true." (D, p. 450) She is a spiritual descendant of the tough Hagar, having made the trek while still young enough to live out her revelations. She is made of the same stuff as Hagar, has the same determination and Scottish pride, and it is to her, fittingly, that the Currie plaid pin finally makes its way:

My Hope is Constant in Thee. It sounds like a voice from the past. Whose voice, though? Does it matter? It does not matter. What matters is that the voice is there, and that she has heard these words which have been given to her. And will not deny what has been given. Gainsay Who Dare. (D, p. 432-433)

Margaret Laurence, who, as Thomas says, "has always written of the dispossessed"⁸ has provided us with one last (perhaps) vision of the outsider -- a woman possessed of the artist's insights and talents, which set her apart from the mainstream of humanity while at the same time allowing her added understanding of it. She has travelled the road to the inescapable past, accepted its contribution to her sense of self, and laid her demons to rest. Laurence's own comment about the protagonists of the first three novels seems no less relevant here:

In the end, and again in their very different ways, and out of their very different dilemmas, each finds within herself an ability to survive -- not just to go on living, but to change and to move into new areas of life.

Morag, like Hagar, Stacey, and Rachel before her, has faced life's truth and has made her painful journey to self-knowledge and a reaffirmation of life without allowing herself to be defeated by it. All four protagonists have, like Hagar's Marvin, grappled with their angels and exacted a blessing from them. This blessing is the discovery of a fuller and more meaningful life than that experienced before true self-awareness dawned.

Conclusion

All four of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels concern heroines whose stories may be interpreted as studies in isolation and who may be related to the existentialist idea of the outsider. The outsider usually experiences isolation and failures to communicate, yet undertakes a search for identity and self-awareness in order to gain control of his life through positive acts of will. This pattern is present in all four of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels. Here she explores such concerns fully and from different points of view. Margaret Laurence is a Canadian novelist concerned with the typically modern themes of alienation and isolation. While her novels have a distinctly Canadian flavour, her central concerns can be seen to be shared by many works of modern literature.¹

Laurence presents portraits of four women, in different situations in life, who nonetheless share, among themselves and with us, problems common to life in the twentieth century. Isolation and an attempt to discover our true identity are among these concerns. Laurence demonstrates to us how each of these women handles her individual crisis in life by facing the seeming hopelessness of life, recognizing its paradoxes, and renewing her hold on life by gaining a firmer grasp of experience as she responds to the challenge of making a possible 'jest of God' into something meaningful and valuable

in spite of its difficulties.

Critics and readers who feel that the Manawaka novels are ultimately depressing are, I believe, missing important triumphs of the heroines over the apparent futility of their lives. Discussing how these women rise above hopelessness to find value in life has been one of the central concerns of this study. Some readers miss the element of hope in the conclusion to each Manawaka novel,² the promise of salvation and new vitality. For example, Hagar's life, spent alone in a prison of her own making, seems a barren wasteland to the reader, particularly in light of the fact that her realization of this comes to Hagar when it is too late for her to make amends to many of those whom she has wronged. This is indeed sad, but Hagar is not without hope. Even at the end she is able to realize the possibility of salvation, and she is able to make peace with herself and Marvin, at least, if not with those who have preceded her into death. Making amends with the dead is not as important as it seems in any case, for, as Hagar realizes, "the dead don't bear a grudge nor seek a blessing. The dead don't rest uneasy. Only the living." (SA, p. 304) If Hagar does not gain absolution from John, she gains it from Murray F. Lees, and her repentance is real enough when it finally occurs. That Hagar is able to gain a vision of life's significance even at the last and be thus undiminished in death is her triumph -- a final picture, surely, of hope rather than of despair.

For the others, there is the opportunity to live out

what they have gained by their journeys to self-awareness. Rachel Cameron is able to rein in her demons and take possession of her life. As she herself realizes, life may not alter dramatically in its outward manifestations, but, at least, it will be "otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different." (JG, pp. 124-125) It will be so because she now realizes that she has choices, that she can affect the way her life unfolds. This is a dramatic change for Rachel, and surely a step forward out of the fairy-tale world she inhabits at the beginning of the novel.

For Stacey, too, life after her journey to self-awareness does not appear to have altered much, on the surface (witness the repetition of the descriptive passages at the beginning and end of the novel), yet Stacey, like the others, is at the end better equipped to deal with life than she was at the beginning of the novel. She no longer sits passively by while life happens to her; she recognizes that her future will be difficult, but knows now that she has the strength to cope with whatever life presents to her. "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." (F, pp. 298-299)

In much the same way Morag also takes charge of her life and begins to control the way it unfolds, after recognizing herself through her inner journey. She is able to ac-

cept both what has happened to her and what will happen to her. She accepts willingly her legacy from Hagar, and, in a sense, will carry on, as Hagar's spiritual descendant, the latter's battle with life from where Hagar left off. These heroines, Margaret Laurence tells us, have faced their isolation and survived it; are better, indeed, for having so faced it. Perhaps the same is true for us.

Dramatizations of confrontations with the fundamental separateness and isolation of individuals in society are not always pleasing. The encounter with the realization of isolation is not a pleasant experience, and may, in fact, destroy those who are not ready to encounter what they see. Unfortunately for these people, isolation is an experience which cannot always be avoided, although some manage to avoid realizing this, with apparent success. What Margaret Laurence holds out to us is not continued despair, however, but a ray of hope and the possibility of survival for those who feel that their encounter with the despair of isolation is imminent. There is a lot to be gained if we can proceed beyond despair to accept life's paradoxes and perceive life's value. Laurence does not offer an escape from isolation; indeed there is none, for, in her view, every man is an island; but she does offer us a new way of perceiving this situation and of gaining advantages from deepened perception.

Inescapable isolation is hardly a blessing, but it too is paradoxical in nature. On the negative side, isolation seals us in unbridgeable loneliness, and cuts us off from

sharing fully with others. It means that we must bear life's burdens alone and condemns us to the fate of never being fully (or even partially) understood by others. On the positive side, however, an awareness of our isolation forces us to take responsibility for our own actions, to cherish our existence as the only thing that we have to value. It encourages us to become more aware of ourselves and to seek to discover the meaning of life. Finally, isolation as independence can become a source of strength. Strength and self-awareness can be ours if we manage to re-direct our attention and look without fear towards the truths which are sought by every outsider.

Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels, then, are concerned with isolation which is a frequent subject in Canadian literature. One of the ways in which she presents isolation in her Manawaka fiction is by dramatizing her four central characters as outsiders. These isolated heroines undertake a journey to self-realization which is characterized by a number of recognizable stages: dissatisfaction with life and alienation both from self and from the world, a struggle with the influences of the past, an encounter with the experience of death, and an ultimate development of a sense of understanding and responsibility, all of which lead to the development of a surviving self. Margaret Laurence's novels present a natural development from concerns with isolation and survival prevalent in earlier Canadian fiction. Laurence's Manawaka novels grow out of a developing Canadian tradition, but

they have a universal as well as an immediately Canadian concern.

*17. 1914. The... only in for
... ..*

Notes to Abstract

1. Margaret Laurence, "A Place to Stand On" in Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland, 1976), pp. 13-18.

2. _____, "Ten Years' Sentences", in W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: Mc Graw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 15.

Notes to Introduction

1. Isolation in Canadian literature has been the subject of a detailed study by John Moss entitled Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland, 1974). I will be referring frequently to this study in the remainder of this introduction.

2. Margaret Atwood's study, Survival (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) presents survival as a unifying theme in much of Canada's fiction; Laurence herself discusses the importance of this concept to her writing in her article "A Place to Stand On", which is included in the collection Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland, 1976).

3. Margaret Laurence, "A Place to Stand On", in Heart, p. 17.

4. Moss, p. 8.

5. _____, p. 237.

6. _____, p. 109.

7. _____, p. 228.

8. Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland, 1976), p. 57.

9. For a fuller outline of the outsider as alienated individual in Canadian literature, some useful studies are available, principally Moss' Patterns of Isolation, referred to earlier. The isolated or alienated protagonist is common and may be found in the novels of such authors as Sinclair Ross, W.O. Mitchell, Ernest Buckler, Robertson Davies, Hugh MacLennan, Mordecai Richler, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro, to name several examples.

10. Colin Wilson, The Outsider (London, Victor Gollancz, 1958), p. 15. This study outlines characteristics of the existential outsider which are common to Laurence's isolated heroines. Future references to this work, abbreviated as O, will be cited following quotations in the chapter.

11. Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi, 1975), p. 190.

12. Atwood describes the Victim Positions as follows:

Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim. Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea. Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. Position Four: To be a creative non-victim.

For a fuller explanation of these Victim Positions, see Survival, pp. 36-39. Although Atwood here discusses only victimization, I see her positions as useful for demonstrating the isolated heroine's attitudes toward her condition of isolation and alienation in general.

13. Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences", in *New*, p. 15.
14. Bernice Lever, "Literature and Canadian Culture: An Interview with Margaret Laurence", in *New*, p. 31.
15. Thomas, p. 188.
16. Laurence, "Sentences", in *New*, p. 14.
17. Thomas, p. 175.
18. See Thomas, p. 179; also Denyse Forman and Uma Parmeswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence", in *New*, p. 90, and George Bowering, "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on A Jest of God", also in *New*, p. 166. As well, see David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle", Journal of Canadian Studies 13, 3 (Fall, 1978), 31.
19. See Moss, Chapter I, pp. 11-15, and Atwood, pp. 35-36, 149-151.
20. Gibson, p. 198.
21. Blewett, "Unity", JCS 13, 3, 31.
22. Laurence, "Sentences", in *New*, p. 21.
23. Sandra Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross", in *New*, p. 81.
24. For the purposes of this study, only those four works which are novels have been included. A Bird in the House (1970), with the young protagonist Vanessa MacLeod, is

presented mainly from the point of view of a child in the world of adults, and so it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the protagonist can be considered an isolated heroine in the terms discussed here. A number of such characters can be identified in this work, however, such as Grandfather MacLeod, Chris, Uncle Dan, Harvey Shinwell, and Piquette Tonnerre, among others. A Bird in the House might well be included on this basis in a fuller study of the outsider in Canadian fiction.

25. Thomas, p. 20.

26. Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 105.

27. Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (Toronto: McClelland, 1968), p. 10.

28. G.D. Killam, "Introduction to A Jest of God", (Toronto: McClelland, 1974), p. i.

29. Cameron, p. 105.

30. Atwood, p. 209.

31. Thomas, p. 171.

32. Clara Thomas, "The Novels of Margaret Laurence", in *New*, p. 60.

33. C.M. McLay, "Every Man is an Island: Isolation in A Jest of God", in *New*, p. 183.

34. Moss discusses the dichotomy between inner and outer selves as being the source of much of the alienation these characters experience. See his chapter, "Irony and the Individual Consciousness" for a more fully developed explanation.

35. Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 15.

36. McLay, "Island", in *New*, p. 183.

37. Morley, p. 35.

38. Moss, p. 243.

39. Personal conversation with Margaret Laurence, Toronto, November 24, 1979.

40. Laurence, "Sentences", in *New*, p. 16.

41. See Sandra Djwa in *New*, pp. 66-84.

42. See Moss' Chapter "Irony and the Individual Consciousness" in Patterns.

43. In addition to those mentioned in the text, please refer to Dianna Loercher, "Her Price for Coping", in *New*, pp. 203-204, and Thomas, p. 50. David Blewett in "Unity", JCS 13, 3, discusses parallels between the Manawaka Cycle and T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland".

44. Robert Harlow, "Lack of Distance", in *New*, p. 189.

45. Djwa, "False Gods", in *New*, p. 82.

46. Moss, p. 237.

47. Morley, p. 44.

Notes to Chapter One

1. S.E. Read, "The Maze of Life: The Work of Margaret Laurence", in W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 51.

2. Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland, 1976), p. 61.

3. Margaret Laurence, "Sources", in New, p. 15.

4. Laurence, Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland, 1976), p. 183.

5. Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland, 1964), p. 3. All future references, abbreviated as SA, will be cited following quotations in the chapter.

6. Paul Pickrel, "Triple Debut", in New, p. 122.

7. Denyse Forman and Uma Parmeswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence", in New, p. 97.

8. In the fish cannery sequence, religious symbolism abounds: the fish itself, the storm which brings rain (grace); Hagar's diet of crackers (wafers) and water; Lees' appearance which transforms Hagar's drink from water to wine; his forgiveness of Hagar and her first move toward grace and salvation. See pp. 219-248.

9. In the February 1980 issue of the United Church Observer, Laurence discusses the writing of this scene:

The poor young minister, of course, was dreadfully embarrassed to sing aloud in the hospital ward, and yet he overcomes this. It does something fantastic for him too, because I had the sense writing down this scene -- it seemed as though it was almost writing itself -- that there was a kind of grace. (p. 11)

10. Margaret Atwood, Survival, (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 205.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: Mc Clelland, 1966), p. 12. All future references, abbreviated as JG, will be cited following quotations in the chapter.
2. C.M. McLay, "Every Man is an Island", in W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 177.
3. Sandra Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross", in New, p. 77.
4. McLay, "Island", in New, p. 182.
5. John Moss, Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: Mc Clelland, 1974), pp. 193-198.
6. McLay, in New, p. 181.
7. _____, p. 182.
8. Robert Harlow, "Lack of Distance", in New, p. 191.
9. McLay, in New, p. 182.
10. Harlow, in New, p. 190.
11. George Bowering, "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on A Jest of God", in New, p. 173.
12. Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 79.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland, 1969), p. 172. All future references, abbreviated as F, will be cited following quotations in the chapter.

2. There are many instances when Laurence discusses the importance to her of what Patricia Morley calls "this psychic journey, back into roots and forward", in Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 15. In addition to Morley's book, see also Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973); Margaret Laurence, Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland, 1976); W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977); Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi, 1975).

3. I would refer the reader once again to John Moss' chapter "Irony and the Individual Consciousness" in Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland, 1974), p. 193.

4. See Moss, "Fool Saints", in Patterns, pp. 239-243. A case could be made for many of these 'savior' figures being seen as similar to Moss' perception of this character in Canadian fiction, thus heightening the view that the outsider does indeed have a place in Canadian fiction.

5. Colin Wilson, The Outsider (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958), p. 15.

6. Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland, 1964), p. 88.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence. (Toronto: McClelland, 1976), p. 168.

2. Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland, 1972), p. 113. All future references, abbreviated as D, will be cited following quotations in the chapter.

3. Thomas, p. 150.

4. Denyse Forman and Uma Parmeswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence", in W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 90.

5. Thomas, p. 142.

6. _____, p. 143.

7. Once again, this sense of separation from self is of fundamental importance, as Moss points out in "Irony and the Individual Consciousness" in Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland, 1974). The reader might also consult F.W. Watt's "Review of The Fire-Dwellers" in New, pp. 198-199 for a discussion of "the discrepancy between private and public selves."

8. Thomas, p. 170.

Notes to Conclusion

1. A sense of the universality of Laurence's work has been maintained throughout this study and is also noted by others, including John Moss in Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland, 1974). Laurence herself feels that though her work is Canadian in origin and context, it also has universal application. See Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi, 1975), p. 193.

2. Laurence herself feels that these books, although not optimistic, do, in fact, and were intended to, portray a profound sense of hope. "Optimism in this world seems impossible to me. But in each novel there is some hope, and that is a different thing entirely." Quoted from "Sources" in W.H. New, ed., Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 15.

Bibliography

Primary Material

- Laurence, Margaret. The Stone Angel. Toronto: McClelland, 1964.
- _____. A Jest of God. Toronto: McClelland, 1966.
- _____. The Fire-Dwellers. Toronto: McClelland, 1969.
- _____. The Diviners. Toronto: McClelland, 1972.
- Moss, John. Patterns of Isolation. Toronto: McClelland, 1977.

Secondary Sources

Books

- Atwood, Margaret. Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- Cameron, Donald. Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 1. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.
- Gibson, Graeme. Eleven Canadian Novelists. Toronto: Anansi, 1975.
- Hind-Smith, Joan. Three Voices. Toronto: Clarke-Irwin & Co., 1975.
- Laurence, Margaret. This Side Jordan. Toronto: McClelland, 1961.
- _____. The Tomorrow Tamer. Toronto: McClelland, 1963.
- _____. A Bird in the House. Toronto: McClelland, 1970.
- _____. Heart of a Stranger. Toronto: McClelland, 1976.
- McCourt, Edward. The Canadian West in Fiction. Toronto: Ryerson, 1970.
- Morley, Patricia. Margaret Laurence. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.
- New, W.H., ed. Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977.

- Thomas, Clara. Margaret Laurence. Toronto: McClelland, 1969.
- _____. The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence. Toronto: McClelland, 1976.
- Wilson, Colin. The Outsider. London: Victor Gollancz, 1958.
- Woodcock, George. The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century. Toronto: McClelland, 1975.

Theses

- Boyd, Bonita J. "The Maze of Life: The Art of Margaret Laurence". M.A.: Acadia University, 1969.
- Darby, Clare A. "Novels and Short Stories of Margaret Laurence". M.A.: University of New Brunswick, 1971.
- Gom, Leona. "The Manawaka Fiction of Margaret Laurence". M.A.: University of Alberta, 1971.
- Hall, Rod. "A Double Vision: A Study of Symbol and Imagery in The Stone Angel and A Jest of God". M.A.: McMaster University, 1977.
- Pell, Barbara H. "Margaret Laurence's Treatment of the Heroine". M.A.: University of Windsor, 1972.
- Turner, Marion. "Manawaka Women: A Study of the Personal and Literary Development of Margaret Laurence as Revealed in Her Canadian Works". M.A.: McMaster University, 1970.

Articles

- Blewett, David. "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle". Journal of Canadian Studies 13, 3. Fall 1978.
- Killam, G.D. "Introduction to A Jest of God". Toronto: McClelland, 1974.
- New, W.H. Margaret Laurence: The Writer and Her Critics. (Coll. articles from numerous sources) Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977.
- Pesando, F. "In a Nameless Land: The use of Apocalyptic Symbolism in the Writings of Margaret Laurence". Journal of Canadian Fiction 2, 1. Winter, 1973.
- Thompson, A. "The Wilderness of Pride: Form and Image in The Stone Angel". Journal of Canadian Fiction 4, 3. 1975.