

A DOUBLE VISION

A DOUBLE VISION: A STUDY OF SYMBOL AND IMAGERY
IN
MARGARET LAURENCE'S
THE STONE ANGEL AND A JEST OF GOD

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the use of symbols and imagery in A Jest of God and The Stone Angel. It finds, simply stated, that there is a basic stress upon duality employed by Mrs. Laurence in those novels which gives her writing a good portion of the dramatic tension of real life.

The introduction attempts briefly to show cause for Mrs. Laurence's doubleness of vision with reference to her African experience and the basic, but colourful, conflicts between the Europeans and the Africans, and between Tribal Africa and Nationalistic Africa which she witnessed as a budding writer. In the first chapter, which deals with The Stone Angel, this dualism is shown to be generated by the two Hagars (i.e. the old lady and the flashbacks of her former self) and St. Paul's concept of two covenants: one old, one new. The importance of this second concept, which incorporates the contradicting tenets of Old Testament pride and fear, and New Testament freedom and hope, is reflected in the major role given to biblical imagery. For that reason the focus of my study of The Stone Angel concentrates upon those biblical symbols and images. This biblical examination is followed up in the chapter on A Jest of God, but, as the primary conflict represented in that novel's symbolism and imagery deals with Rachel,

the child, and Rachel, the emerging mother, and, as that primary dramatic spring is rendered in a manner which fits Carl G. Jung's description of neurotic dissociation, I have correspondingly shifted in that chapter to a more psychological emphasis in my analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this paper deals almost exclusively with Margaret Laurence's use of imagery in the genesis books of what has grown to be Western Canada's best known mythic village: Manawaka. It would be unconscionable, however, to consider Margaret Laurence's first Canadian novels without reference to the considerable impact upon her development as an author, caused by her seven year taste of the steaming, prenatal climate, which accompanied the labour pains of political independence in British colonial Africa. Clara Thomas writes that this experience "acted as a kind of dynamic culture shock, a catalyst" ¹ on her talents, and such an effect is easily comprehended. Few areas in the world have presented so remarkably visible a spectacle of the past in collision with the present, as the abrupt launching of such ancient and insular tribal cultures as the Somali, the Ashanti, and scores of lesser tribes in the same regions, into the rapidly changing stream of the twentieth century. Few lands have presented such a defineable historical allegory of Man's schizophrenic agonizing over his evolution from a creature governed by life instincts, to a slave ruled by an artificially imposed consciousness which, with a high paternal hand, commanded

the cessation of previous animist depravities, to a freer individual faced with the baffling task of synthesizing those two antithetical inheritances; an individual who would hopefully survive that dialectic to proceed with the next evolutionary conflict in the celebration of life.

None of the agony and ecstasy of this lesson was wasted on the young expatriate wife of Jack Laurence. From the pages of her African books (factual and fictional) emerge the Prosperos and Calibans² of the colonial world that was, clownish in their unfamiliar clothes of independence, but bravely getting on with their enforced diet of instant new world. Awakened herself to the hearts of strangers in a strange land, by experiences in the Old Testament world of the British-Somali desert, Laurence quickly acquired a sympathetic understanding of the basic irony in the lives of these African people, who, in a handful of generations, had become strangers to their own past.

Laurence displays numerous talents in communicating her portrait of Africa's version of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. She possesses the vision of a first-class documentary film editor who can recall and select from the miles of film on the cutting-room floor, those few scenes which are the essence of her theme. In a reference recording her own surprise at the intense love for Somaliland revealed by an administrator whom she had first misjudged

to be a cold imperialist, Laurence unintentionally (?) testifies to her power of description while still a novice writer:

Discussing it, all at once he pointed to one page and spoke with an unexpected intensity. "It would be worthwhile for this one passage in your introduction," he said, "even if there were nothing else in the book." The passage was a description of the Somali tribesmen's harrowing and precarious life in the dry Jilal.³

Most of us lack the background to share in an impassioned enthusiasm for Laurence's African work with those who have had direct contact with that continent. Notwithstanding this drawback, Margaret Laurence's African books, with their powerful images, are able to convey a picture of the new life energy which floods from Africa's peculiar brand of dualism, in a fashion which bridges the widest of cultural gulfs.

In the optimistically christened The Tomorrow-Tamer we are shown a steady parade of consummately African images streaming forward with all their contrarities in their wake. Like the passage in the introduction to A Tree for Poverty (1954) describing the harrowing subsistence of the Jilal, The Tomorrow-Tamer (1963) would be worthwhile if only for such composite pictures as this one from "The Drummer of All the World":

The country was to have its independence the following year, but the quality of the change was more than political. It was so many things.

It was an old chieftain in a greasy and thread-bare robe with no retinue -- only a small boy carrying aloft the red umbrella, ancient mark of aristocracy. It was an African night-club called "Weekend in Wyoming," and a mohogany skinned girl wearing white face powder. It was parades of a new sort, buxom market women chanting "Free -- dom!"⁴

Clara Thomas claims that Laurence, at her best, can realize an all-dimensional world, vibrant with colours and dense with sensual effects"⁵. Such passages as that describing Nathaniel Amegbe's return from work, (Nathaniel is the central African character in This Side Jordan), prove Miss Thomas does not overstate her case:

He walked quickly into the maze of streets, towards his home. The air was thick with the pungent smoke from charcoal pots and the spiced smell of food being cooked in the open, outside every roadside stall. Groundnut stew, bean stew, "mme-kwan" -- palmtree soup, with the rich sharp smell of the palm oil and the salt and wood-fire smell of the smoked fish. The moist yeasty odour of "kenky", fermented corn dough, steaming in black round-bellied cooking pots. The sweet half-cloying smell of roasting plantains. And over all, the warm stench of the sea....

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

Along with her talent for selecting meaningful

images, Laurence brings to her African writing a perspective on the struggle for Independence which concentrates on individual quests for freedom. Her tenet that "The individual is the only reality"⁷ is perhaps a legacy of her own Western Canadian pioneer ancestors, but it proves to be a useful tool in focusing on Africa. By intensifying her scope to the microcosmic study of the individual, "Human beings to be seen at all, can only be seen one at a time"⁸, Laurence often succeeds in laying open Africa's heart beat. Her central characters invariably have an almost seventeenth-century appetite for introspection. If, for example, Nathaniel Amegbe in This Side Jordan, or Laurence's own persona in The Prophet's Camel Bell, solemnly pronounced, "The world that I regard is myself; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on"⁹, it would be wholly in step with their characterization. Neither Amegbe, nor The Prophet's Camel Bell's narrator, nor any of Laurence's African characters ever quote Thomas Browne, but they do provide dynamic evidence that the need for individual dignity, freedom and growth, and the obstacles of generations of pride and fear opposing that need, pose a universal human dilemma; they do demonstrate the truth that "there is all Africa and her prodigies in us"¹⁰, and that is more to Mrs. Laurence's point.

As close as Laurence was able to get to the joy, the

suffering, the ironic soul of African life, she never lost her awareness that she "must always remain a stranger"¹¹ to it. In her critical study of principal Nigerian writers entitled Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952 - 1966, Laurence expresses her growing conviction that as an expatriate writing about Africa she can never match the depth of the indigenous writers. She realized that the Africans wrote from the inside about "People who were closer to them (as the Muslims say about Allah) than their own neck veins." To match that kind of depth Laurence had but one recourse, a return to her own Manawakan roots, and that was the path which eventually led to The Stone Angel and A Jest of God.

Laurence's apprenticeship in writing about Africa had its logical limitation, but it brought her back to the subject she knew best, Manawaka, with a developed sense of the bravery involved in the growth, the evolution, of her own prairie people out of their own conflicting inheritances. The message of The Stone Angel and A Jest of God, like that of Laurence's African stories, seems to be that in spite of odds, in spite of contrarities we progress, but there is one difference, the images come from the inside, grow from the inside, and that infuses Manawaka with its own magic.

A more acute word than magic for the dimensions

of life Margaret Laurence relays from experience to the pages of her first Canadian novels (The Stone Angel and A Jest of God) is the word Henry Kreisel chooses to express the feeling that The Stone Angel engendered in him. The word is celebration; "A kind of celebration" which Kreisel defines as:

...the honest rendering of a landscape, both physical and emotional, that made a powerful impact on the writer's imagination and...the act of recalling and shaping a timeless place.¹²

The definition seems most appropriate, for Margaret Laurence (to paraphrase her own brutally honest-dishonest heroine Hagar) is in her writing "rampant with memory"¹³ of her roots in Canada's West, and, in the effort to come to terms with that experience, she has created from "the clearly civilized"¹⁴ Scots settlement of Neenawa, Manitoba a series of evolving (a sense of evolution being an advantage of spanning four generations of one town) images as colourful, disrespectful and hardy as the life which somehow bloomed under the stays and corsets of small town respectability.

Individually Laurence's images of saucy wild flowers in the Manawakan cemetery encroaching upon the sanctified ground of cultivated peonies, or of a mongoloid child loudly announcing his intention to "pee" to the immortals gathered in the local Presbyterian Church speak eloquently the Manawakan saga of conflicts, growth and sur-

vival. Together, spun round the memories and experiences of characters like Hagar Shipley and Rachel Cameron, her images gather some of the motion, the animation of those lives.

All the Manawakan heroines from Hagar Shipley to Morag Gunn are in imitation of their author, attempting to grow in understanding of themselves by observing what they have been and consequently by discovering what they are. Due to this central thematic goal and to the numerous structural similarities (i.e. first-person female narrators, geographic and ethnic background, use of various flashback techniques) it would be useful to consider the relationships between the function of symbolism and imagery in all the Manawaka stories. But as the goal of this paper is mainly to establish the significance of the dualism in Laurence's symbolism and imagery, I feel that it is enough to limit my scope to the first two Manawakan heroines, Hagar and Rachel, who are, when juxtaposed, a study in contrast.

By way of a final note of explanation in this introduction I should mention that having pointed out the need for Laurence to return to the people, the background, the symbols of the Canadian experience, I largely overlook the Canadianism of her work. This is not to downplay the part the Manawakan stories have in shaping a sense of Canadian identity. The identification we are able to make with

characters like Hagar Shipley (Canadians can see her "as
their grandmothers.")¹⁵ and with images carved in her mind,
does as Robert Kroetsch claims, help to "make us real,"¹⁶
but Margaret Laurence's accurate representation of her
particular past is most important because it is a measure
of her accuracy in reproducing the larger human dilemma
and it is upon that dilemma that the true focus of study
belongs.

CHAPTER I

THE STONE ANGEL: SOMETHING OLD -- SOMETHING NEW

Whether seen as a universal old woman or as a Canadian grandmother, Hagar Shipley, reflected in the glass of her own dark, unchanging eyes, is a highly credible character. She draws her credibility from the duality of the world Laurence fabricates about her. The same struggle, the same battle of oppositions Laurence found at the heart of African life (particularly the conflicts between old worlds and new ones) is reproduced in the ancient daughter of Jason Currie whose story is one unceasing barrage of contradiction and irony. Through Hagar's eyes we see images of what Hagar has been, superimposed upon images of Hagar as she is. In her bedroom mirror the reflection of an aged, physically degenerating woman appears for a moment, only to be transformed into a young, vibrant, girl Hagar from another time and place. Laurence creates one Hagar who is supported and who survives by a tough shield of crusty pride coincidentally with a Hagar trapped and destroyed by pride. The appearance of what Hagar Shipley believes she is, together with the reality of what Hagar Shipley is, meets head on in The Stone Angel and from that collision an authentic woman emerges.

The characterization of Hagar Shipley provides more

than the air of realism in The Stone Angel; it provides a solid argument for that novel's flashback form. The criticism this form is apt to draw, and which in fact it has drawn in this case, is that it is "too neat and predictable."¹ Certainly the apparent convenience of Hagar's slipping back to her earliest memories at The Stone Angel's beginning, along with the habit she forms of keeping other spontaneous recollections in chronological order, does little to dissuade a person from that critical objection. Hagar's characterization, however, does much to justify Laurence's choice of form:

Any questions about a forced tidiness of form are hushed as Hagar takes shape and authority; this, we are convinced, is the way she would speak and remember, strongly biased in all her judgements, forcing order on her own mind as she had tried always to force her own order on all those around her. 2

Yet another advantage of Hagar's strong-willed character is that the images and symbols which have rooted themselves in the grey matter of Laurence's old prairie narrator seem almost to be imbued with a portion of her strength. Perhaps this is the reason they give the impression that Margaret Laurence did not:

...go through after putting in the symbols, but rather that they are organic symbols, that they grow there, [that] they belong there. 3

The very first of the symbols in Manawaka, the image which dominates, is especially marked with Hagar's

vitality:

Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day. ⁴

This angel ("unendowed with even a pretense of sight"), ⁵
blindly erected to the vanity of its purchaser rather than to the glory of God, is exactly the right kind of herald angel to greet the birth of Jason Currie's "haughty, hoity-toity, ... black-haired daughter." ⁶ Through the duality of its own nature (It ironically commemorates the spirit of humility with a monument to pride.) the angel indicates the blind course Hagar's life will follow, burying human frailties such as love and understanding 'neath stony pride. The words "stone" and "angel" themselves "suggest all the ⁷ oppositions we are caught up in." In opposition to the unbending, self-important, Curries of this world they suggest "the feeble ghost" of Hagar's mother and her ⁸ "graceful, unspirited" sons whose love is symbolized in their more pliable monument, an old plaid shawl of the (angel) mother's which Matt drapes across one shoulder, as the incarnation of her comforting spirit to his fevered and dying brother. The words also suggest the physical limitations Hagar's spirit futilely rages against fearing its opposition to her immortality:

...this figure seems somehow arbitrary and impossible, for when I look in my mirror and beyond the changing shell that houses me, I see the eyes of Hagar Currie. 9

Stone and angel suggest also the opposition of rootedness and motion: the need which Hagar, Margaret Laurence and most everyone else develops for the self-knowledge which comes from the close examination of one's background and the desire to escape the inescapable, to live free of the restrictions which memory and inheritance place upon us.

An indication of the depth of the stone angel as a symbol and of how naturally it appears to grow out of a prairie background may be demonstrated by examining the mythic framework of biblical allusion in the novel. This framework develops naturally out of the religious atmosphere of Laurence's own small, prairie town youth, but owes a debt as well to the influence of W.O. Mitchell and particularly Sinclair Ross whose As For Me and My House was the first novel Margaret Laurence recognized as coming from her own background.¹⁰ Laurence, like Ross, identifies the prairie community of years ago essentially within the framework of The Old Testament. They both make use of what was an already existing tendency on the part of the prairie people to equate their situation with that of the ancient Hebrews. We see this distinctly reflected in words Mrs. Bentley writes in her diary:

This is a fundamentalist town. To the letter it

believes the Old Testament stories that we wisely or presumptuously, choose to accept only as tales and allegory. ¹¹

The stern God of Egyptian plague and biblical deserts was an easily believable and adoptable creator for the survival oriented Scottish farmers of prairie drought with their own more recently mythicized heritage of Highland clearances, Knoxian thunder, and Culloden treachery. Ross recognized that the words of Joshua chastizing the errant children of Israel belonged equally to the children of Main Street with their small town golden calves Propriety and Parity:

And if it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. ¹²

Margaret Laurence, following in Ross' footsteps, saw that the story of Sarah's slave's pride provided another example of a false-god which flourished in prairie as well as Old Testament soil. Within this mythic frame the eyeless stone (angel)idol of Manawaka blindly directing traffic on the straight and narrow path to heaven seems as organically sound a key to the comprehension of Manawaka as the false-fronts idolized in Main Street were to Ross' fictitious town. Both serve as grotesque outward representations of real psychological problems developed in

the central characters. Mrs. Bentley admits that living in a series of false-fronted towns "taught [her] to erect a false-front of [her] own, live [her] own life, keep [herself] intact."¹³ She develops a shield or persona from which it becomes increasingly difficult for her real self to escape:

...for all my indifference to what the people here may choose to think of me, it was an ordeal to walk out of the vestry. ¹⁴

In the case of Hagar Shipley we witness a similar psychological transformation. Hagar symbolically turns into one of the ghoulish, tasteless breed of Manawakan stone angels, angels not created freely, with love, to celebrate beauty or life with an eye for form or detail, but angels roughly gouged out by the score with an eye for pride, parity and expense -- the trinity of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land. By piling image upon image Laurence captures for us the truly garish product this attitude created:

...petty angels, cherubim with pouting stone mouths, one holding aloft a stone heart, another strumming in eternal silence upon a small, stone, stringless harp, and yet another pointing with ecstatic leer... ¹⁵

Hagar does not at the beginning possess the enlightened awareness of a Mrs. Bentley regarding either the nature or formation of her personality. Nevertheless she is not handicapped in relating to us the processes which shaped her character. Large among the forces developing Hagar's attitudes, is her father. This is a fact supported by his

dominant role among Hagar's earliest memories. Jason Currie, as we encounter him, is a self-made, hard-working, and just plain hard (in the sense of being stern) Scot. The moments Hagar recalls of what passed in Jason for parental affection were sparse in the extreme and had nothing to do with sympathy or understanding. Affection from Jason Currie was born of self-love and was doled out only when he recognized his own inflexible toughness and hawkish eyes in his designated inheritor, Hagar. It is not surprising that at the age of six Hagar is already a stony-eyed cherubim daring the wrath of her father's foot ruler, and consequently it is no surprise at all that in her marriage bed we see her as an icy snow angel convincing Bram, but not herself, that she is too good to melt. It is, given Hagar's early training in the virtue of imitating stone, not even unusual that the premature death of John (her chosen inheritor of the Currie pride as symbolized in his inheritance of the Currie pin) leaves Hagar dry-eyed, dumb and distanced from humanity. Hagar's metamorphosis to stone seems unavoidable given her background. On the night of John's death it looks to be complete:

The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all. When the ministering women handed me the cup of hot coffee, They murmured how well I was taking it, and I could only look at them dry-eyed from a great distance and not say a single word. 16

Though the rigid marble form of the stone angel,

weathered by summer winds and winter's snow, provides an image of the spirit of compassion blinded and petrified by pride; it is not by itself sufficient to symbolize Hagar's condition. Hagar at ninety has lived to experience the greatest paradox for the self-made person. Proud defiance, contempt of "flimsy, gutless creatures"¹⁷ who sacrifice for others as did Regina Weese, is at least a tenable position for the young, strong and independent. But for Hagar, who sees in the mirror a body ravaged and crippled by years, feels the pains of a growing cancer and an outdated digestive system and suffers the indignities of incontinence and approaching senility, pride is not easily sustained.¹⁸ Like a "Job in reverse" Hagar's spiritual pride, which she substitutes for faith in God or Man, is put to a severe test. The results of Hagar's trial are less conclusive than those of Job's but the revelations she experiences in her last painful days open up a new vision of life which clearly effects a valuable change in Hagar even if her death bed repentance is not entirely convincing.

In examining these revelations and the changes they make in Hagar one finds that Laurence's images and symbols pile up interesting, if not always decisive clues. Often in The Stone Angel Hagar is linked not only with her weather-pitted, vandalized, alter-ego in the Manawakan

cemetery, but with "creatures traditionally linked with decay"¹⁹ -- the insect world.

In our first glimpse of Hagar walking primly "like prissy Pippa"²⁰ through the cemetery we encounter other frequent visitors of that place:

...upstart ants of an obviously unique breed
that sauntered through the plush petals as though
to the manner born.²¹

On the heels of that scene we are shown a tiny Hagar delighted with some scampering crawlies that flouted her omnipotent father by nesting in his sultanas. A relationship between Hagar and her wee scampering friends is neatly established when Hagar matches their impudence by announcing the boldness of these insects to all who could hear. A still more revealing connection with the insect world deals with the spiders which shared an unused portion of Hagar's bedroom when she was quite young. The closet which houses these spiders is at first identified in Hagar's imagination as the residence of "a slime coiled anaconda with a mockery of a man's head."²² This sinister and at the same time attractive creature with its "jeweled eyes" and "smug smile"²³ lends itself without much struggle to being interpreted as a symbolic expression of Jason Currie's relationship with Hagar. The anaconda-man's smug self confidence and larger than life appearance fit with the impression of Jason we receive from Hagar and Hagar's conflicting emotions

of attraction to and repulsion from the beast, parallel her attitude to her father. Upon facing the fear which fed and inflated her monster (her father?) Hagar is confronted with a comparatively disappointing, bleak reality. She finds in the closet, dust, a chipped chamber-pot, her mother's disintegrating shoes, and frantic spiders. The message here for Hagar and for us seems to be that behind the surface life of pride exemplified by Jason there is an enclosed world of darkness, webs and disintegration.

The most striking, most hideously effective example of insect imagery being used in The Stone Angel as a visual addition to the portrait of Hagar Shipley comes with Hagar's return to the location of her ruined marriage. The Shipley farm is a mess littered with broken machinery and filth. At her return Hagar finds the gap left by her absence filled by a matriarch whom one instinctively associates with corruption:

On a larded piece of salt pork a mammoth matriarchal fly was labouring obscenely to squeeze out of herself her white and clustered eggs. 24

True to her view of a dualistic, evolving world Laurence plants the seeds of new life even in this depressing picture but the overwhelming impression this image leaves is of the destruction wrought by Hagar's pride. These insect images all effectively underline the destructive ugliness of Hagar's defiant pride: pride which destroys her relation-

ship with her father cutting him cruelly from his dynastic dreams; pride which drives Hagar from Bram leaving him to lead an empty life because she was better than the barn-yard manners for which she married him; pride which literally crushed the son she loved because Hagar would not countenance his union with "Lottie No-Name's"²⁵ daughter, and pride which causes her to ignore and alienate her first born son because he was wanted by Bram.

The role of insect imagery is not simply limited to this. As Hagar ages she at first unconsciously and then with some awareness identifies herself with the insect world. This amounts to a declaration of humility and self-knowledge which is far from the attitude of the little, Scottish tyrant shouting her battlecry of: "Gainsay who dare!"²⁶ This identification begins with a startling and painful recognition by Hagar that the last visible evidence of her independence, her house and belongings, is about to be stripped from her by Marvin and Doris:

Breath goes. I cannot breathe. I am held
fixed and fluttering, like an earthworm impaled
by children on the ferociously unsharp hook of
a safety pin.²⁷

At Shadow Point the physical and symbolic place of refuge Hagar seeks out to avoid the indignity of the nursing home and very apparently the inescapable and final indignity of death, Hagar, for the first time becomes free to celebrate herself and quite correctly God's humblest

creatures are not excluded from the party. Feeling like a Lear of the prairies cast out by ungrateful children Hagar, with the aid of no fool but herself, is able to strip off propriety and place herself in a meaningful perspective:

If I've unearthed jewels the least I can do is wear them. Why not, since no one's here to inform me I'm a fool? I take off my hat -- its hardly suitable for here anyway, a prim domestic hat sprouting cultivated flowers. Then with considerable care I arrange the jade and copper pieces in my hair. The effect is pleasing... They liven my grey, transform me..., queen of moth-millers, empress of earwigs.²⁸

This mad queen seems wise indeed compared to the Hagar who a few years earlier was angered by the impiety of black ants scurrying among the white stone ringlets of the toppled Currie angel, and wiser yet than the Hagar so consumed with appearances that she foolishly risked her son's neck in setting that statue back on high.

Insects provide The Stone Angel with natural symbols for Hagar's ruinous pride, and her twilight revelations. They also serve to shed light on the third and related theme of redemption. Metaphorically we see Hagar turned into a pillar of stone by her pride. That is unmistakeable. But as perhaps suits the insignificance of an insect there is, overshadowed by the magnificence of the stone angel metaphor, another unob-

strusive metaphor comparing Hagar to the life cycle of the moth. Repeatedly Hagar is described in "real silk ...spun by the worms in China"²⁹ or folding hands "over [her] silk lilac belly."³⁰ In a vividly ugly portrait of Hagar lying on her bed eavesdropping in a combination of self-pride, fear and envy on the free love-making of John and Arlene, Hagar becomes a caterpillar:

I hardly dared to breathe thinking of what if they discovered me lying on my Afghan cocoon like an old brown caterpillar? Paralyzed with embarrassment, I was forced to keep my unquiet peace and listen while they loved.³¹

The last stage of this metamorphosis that Mrs. Laurence permits us to see is realistically ambiguous. We do not, cannot, see Hagar as a moth. Freed of the restrictions of the past it is no more likely we would recognize Hagar than we should a caterpillar turned moth. But the implication of the final transformation to freedom, possibly to redemption is there:

I lie in my cocoon, I'm woven around with threads, held tightly, and youngsters come and jab their pins into me. Then the tight threads loosen. There. That's better. Now I can breathe.³²

Hagar's escape from her spiritual cocoon and her rebirth into the unfamiliar air of some unknown angelic element is an event beyond both the restrictions of this world and of Mrs. Laurence's novel. But release,

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or grace to substitute Clara Thomas' term, must be suggested because it symbolizes the salvation of a greater human consciousness toward which Hagar moves. Hagar and all the characters of The Stone Angel are in their various degrees isolated by their inability to communicate because of pride or fear or a combination of the two. This is a tragedy which can only be relieved by the gift of understanding and acceptance: "If it's understood and accepted on both sides, then that is probably all right."³³ This is the human dilemma as Laurence sees it, and as the use of biblical allusion indicates, one of her favourite sources for expressing this dilemma is the Bible:

There's a great deal...in the Bible which hits me very hard; it seems to express certain symbolic truths about the human dilemma and about mankind. The expression of various facets of human life searching for a consciousness greater than its own -- that is in God -- some of this moves me in the way that great poetry moves you.³⁴

The truth of this statement is witnessed to by the Bible's impact on the symbolism and imagery of The Stone Angel.

Margaret Laurence's allusions to the Genesis story form the main thrust of the biblical influence. The story

*

Clara Thomas suggests "a strongly marked sacramental pattern moves" through The Stone Angel taking Hagar from a sense of sin and guilt "through repentance and confession towards freedom" which culminates in the symbolism of the final lines" -- a glass of water, the cup of life, the Grace of God".

of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian bondmaid, driven by Abram into the wilderness with the baby Ishmael as punishment for an unconcealed contempt of Sarah's weakness (sterility), seems to be a straightforward and reasonably effective exploitation of biblical archetype. The inexplicably spiteful Egyptian maid could hardly be improved as a model for the modern Scottish spitfire whose contempt, for what she perceived as weakness in others, was her only unchained quality. The fear which compels the biblical Hagar's flight into the desert and which makes her abandon Ishmael and shut her eyes to his plight ("Let me not look upon the death of the child."³⁵) is the same force which isolates Hagar Shipley from her family, from life:

...Every good joy I might have held, in my men
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 appear-
ances -- Oh proper to whom? When did I ever
speak the hearts truth?

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that
led me there was fear.³⁶

The only significant difference between the lives of Hagar Shipley and Agar would seem to be that God was determined to have his little jest with the former, refraining from opening her eyes and giving the saving water of life until her favourite (John) is dead and her own life all but spent.

Clearly this use of the Genesis story helps to

universalize Hagar Currie-Shipley's experience, but, as W. H. New suggests in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of The Stone Angel, it is not the simple exploitation of archetype which really concerns Margaret Laurence but rather St. Paul's reference to it in Galatians 4: 22-27:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid and the other by a free woman. But he who was born of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai which engendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above us is free, which is the mother of us all.³⁷

It is this dual image of bondage and of promise, of stone and angel, of what we are now and what we are struggling to become which hits with greatest impact in The Stone Angel. The Jerusalem which is now is the bondage of the flesh and with a zealous deference to realism Laurence's imagery reflects this. She does the job so well that on occasion one might suspect that such an excess of flesh could only have been achieved by loosing a branch of Weight-Watchers in the novel:

Throughout the course of The Stone Angel, Hagar is confronted with women of immense proportions. Doris is likened to a "broody hen," "a calving cow," "a sow in labour." Her body is plump and bulging under brown cloth, her sighs are brought straight from the belly"

and when nervous she rasps like a coping saw. Bram's first wife is "fat and cow-like, his two daughters are "like heifers, like lumps of unrendered fat." Murray F. Lees refers to his wife as "a big strapping girl...like a feather mattress," with great white thighs." Even Lottie becomes "a puffball of fat, looking as though she'd either burst or bounce if you tapped her."

All of these stout, ponderous women echo Hagar's own fate. Her body too, is becoming layered with fat. Yet it is not until she reaches the hospital in the final period of her life, that Hagar witnesses this physical distortion in its most extreme form. There she encounters Mrs. Reilly, "A mountain of flesh," and is told that, "They had to bring her in on a wheelchair, and it took three orderlies to hoist her into the bed." There, on a neighbouring bed, a woman lies helpless caged by her own "rolling and undulating fat," "larded inches deep." 38

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This plethora of "greedy guts" in The Stone Angel provides a nightmarish vision of this world's self-imposed restrictions which would indeed be difficult to miss.

The bondage of the flesh in The Stone Angel is not (I can't resist the pun) rendered exclusively in fat imagery. Relationships as well as the individual spirit are contained in the flesh. The closest communication, the moments which bring the most freedom of expression, are those of physical intercourse. Hagar and Bram are only close in the act of love:

His banner over me was only his own skin,
and now I no longer know why it should have
shamed me. 40

Hagar's self-imposed chain of pride and fear creates out of their greatest opportunity to rise above isolation,

a vision of inarticulate blindness:

He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud and I made certain the trembling was all inner...Didn't I betray myself in rising sap like a heedless and compelled maple after a winter? But no, he never expected any such thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead.⁴¹

The generation following Bram's and Hagar's though it too is heavily restrained by the bonds of guilt, progresses a shaky step toward a fuller understanding. Murray Lees and his wife freely enjoy sex prior to their marriage. For them it transcends the physical, unleashing their spirits. Lees' shocking association of "prayer and
⁴²that" points this out:

I was crazy about her. In those days she could have prayed the angels themselves right down from heaven, if she'd been so inclined, and when she lay down on the moss and spread those great white thighs of hers there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world.⁴³

The Lees' sexual freedom is of short duration. The bonds of physical appearance, the fear of being misunderstood and looked down upon by the self-righteous, ends the warmth of their relationship speedily and with irony. The birth of a robust son conceived out of wedlock instead of a sickly babe who might pass for premature and deceive the piercing eyes of the keepers of public conscience, is regarded by the mother as a disaster and a sign of God's displeasure. The result is immediate and permanent restraint

in their union. Appropriately the new relationship void of communication is the one blessed by the blind idol, public endorsement:

"I hugged her hard and told her it didn't matter a damn," he says. "But it was no use. God was punishing her that's what she thought... You won't believe it, but she was never the same. ...She held herself back. Her heart wasn't in it. 44

Closer to the covenant of spiritual freedom is the literally short-lived affair of John Shipley and Arlene Simmons. Described in a setting as bleak as any desert the ancient Jews wandered, they struggle to open their eyes to each other and to close them for a precious moment to the slavery of appearance:

Nothing to bless themselves with, they had, not a penny in the bank, a gray shell of a house around them, and outside a grit-filled wind that blew nobody any good, and yet they closed themselves to it all and opened only to each other. It seemed incredible that such a spate of unapologetic life should flourish in this mean and crabbed world. His final cry was inarticulate, the voice of the whirlwind. Hers was different the words born from the throat "Oh my love -- Oh my love --" 45

The words of consummation (or perhaps more accurately ecstasy --in its seventeenth century context) intentionally recall the imagery of The Old Testament. John's voice becoming the voice of the whirlwind does not suggest the awkwardness of speech the Manawakans are

plagued by, but instead a consciousness like Jehovah's beyond the confinement of words. A consciousness mirrored briefly in Murray Lees before "the end of the world" when he spoke at tabernacle "with the tongues of men and angels."⁴⁶ The measure of Arlene's and John's escape from the petty restraints of propriety is best demonstrated by their deaths. Their brief celebration of life is destroyed externally. Hagar and Lottie regard John and Arlene as their inheritors, as extensions of their selves, and as such it is intolerable to them to see their children struggling free of the restrictions which dictated their own lives. The concept that life's struggle might be valuable for its own sake is totally foreign to the thoughts of both Hagar and Lottie as we gather when, in words ironically injected with images of growth, Hagar visualizes her son's ruin if he were to attempt living on love:

...I saw them with a covey of young, like Jess had been, clustered like fish spawn, children with running noses and drooping hand-down pants four sizes too large. I couldn't face the thought.⁴⁷

The train accident which snuffs out the mad, irresponsible, free, love binding John and Arlene is perhaps the cleverest bit of symbolic manoeuvring in The Stone Angel. By daring the trestle bridge as he did as a child with the Tonnerre boys John gainsays the Currie pre-occupation with

appearance and proclaims his freedom. In itself the repetition of this (symbolic) childhood gesture adds a nice flavour of consistency, but the use of a train on a mission of mercy, recalling the "merciful" slaughter of helpless chicks at the Manawaka dump by Lottie and Hagar, adds a special dimension to this tragedy by subtly incriminating Arlene's and John's dutiful parents.

From Hagar's generation to John's there is definable movement toward less isolated relationships, but it is through Laurence's adaptation of the Genesis myth that we recognize real movement toward personal freedom. In The Stone Angel there is a merging of the traditional allegorical roles in Genesis. As Sandra Djaw writes in her article False Gods and The True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Laurence and Ross:

In traditional Jewish allegory Hagar is representative of Mount Sinai, ... and the covenant of the law while Sarah (Abram's legal wife) is... representative of the spirit. In Laurence's use of the myth, ... she merges the traditional allegorical functions of Hagar and Sarah. 48

The more Hagar merges her role into that of Sarah's the freer she becomes. When Hagar Currie becomes Bram Shipley's wife she is wed to a living lesson of freedom. Bram, born in a barn like Christ, is associated with the covenant of promise. He acts with more personal freedom than any character, excepting John, in the novel: swear-

ing in church, relieving himself on the Currie store steps, frequently expressing his opinion with "impermissibles",⁴⁹ but more significantly granting the same freedom to those around him rather than treating them as belongings. When Marvin, upon whom Bram relied for farm help, decides (though he has not reached his majority) to go off to war Bram does not interfere. Similarly when Hagar, deciding once and for all that she is too good for him, announces she is leaving Bram, he makes no attempt to stop her, clearly puzzling the authoritarian Hagar:

Bram sat there and swayed back and forth as I told him. He didn't seem surprised. He never even asked me to stay or showed a sign of caring about the matter one way or another.⁵⁰

This is not to say that Bram is unmarked by the pride and fears common to men, but he does not, unlike most, let his fears dictate to him. He has, as Hagar is astonished and galled to discover, patriarchal dreams not dissimilar to Jason Currie's; he tries to impress half-breed farm labourers with grand schemes for his place and launches a horse-breeding venture in an attempt to achieve them, but his visions of personal glory, unlike Jason Currie's, never consume his freedom.

The horse-breeding plan is a good example of this for in it he demonstrates more love for the horses than

regard for success:

He wasn't much of a man for bargaining. It didn't seem to worry him though. When I brought up the subject, he'd only shrug and say what was the use of bothering unless you were going to raise horses seriously, and he'd rather see the few he sold going to men he knew would look after them well. 51

The other side of the patriarchal coin in The Stone Angel is quite obviously Jason Currie. No one could better represent the old covenant. Stiff, humourless, self-made and full of his own justice, he is old Jehovah incarnate. But the Currie inheritance (the old covenant) is subtly merged with the Shipley (the new covenant) in the stone angel (Hagar Currie-Shipley) which becomes the Currie-Shipley stone. The significance of this merging is itself two fold. It testifies to the biblical truth, ironically put in the mouth of Jason Currie who judges lesser beings "as common as dirt,"⁵² and to Mrs. Laurence's truth that freedom as well as slavery is part of Man's inheritance.

The merging of allegorical roles, as was first mentioned, extends as well to Hagar and Sarah. Hagar, the direct Currie descendant, is unmistakably identified with Clara (Sarah) Bram's better half who inhabits The Stone Angel only in spirit. Appropriately Margaret Laurence relegates Clara and Bram's first-born, dead son (Isaac?) to the realm of Jerusalem above leaving the field

open for Hagar, as The Bible does not, to pick up the Sarah role as best she's able. This is accomplished first by having Hagar take up Clara's former position as Bram's wife and, more concretely, by Bram's confusion of the two wives shortly before his death when Hagar returns to the Shipley house:

Bram looked at me with recognition one day.
 "You've come to help out, ain't you" he said,
 "Funny -- you put me in mind of someone."...
 He seemed to find it difficult to ponder
 his face grayed with strain.
 "I dunno. Maybe -- Clara. Yeh her." 53

The merging of roles takes on a more complex aspect in The Stone Angel's next generation mainly because Hagar confuses our perspective, in good biblical fashion, by choosing up sides. As far as Hagar is concerned John is from conception the promised son. But Hagar's decision to award the birthright is made with the blindness of an Isaac or a stone angel and Hagar's inheritance goes to the wrong son. John's uncaring treatment of the inheritance, symbolized by the Currie pin which goes up in the smoke of cigarettes he receives in barter for it, speaks plainly of her errant choice. Ironically, Hagar, sharing the double blindness of the marble angel in Manawaka, is correct in treating John as an allegorical Jacob, but for completely incorrect reasons. Hagar in her pride mistakes the Currie inheritance of authoritarian independence for

the covenant of freedom when it is in reality that of bondage.

The confusion commences when Hagar arbitrarily decides that because Bram is looking for a Shipley inheritor Marvin is automatically tainted and unsuitable material for the Currie legacy. This conclusion Hagar unwisely arrives at before Marvin can make his appearance in this world to dispute it:

I only shook my head. I couldn't speak nor reach to him in any way at all. What could I say? ...That the child would be his and none of mine? That I'd sucked my secret pleasure from his skin, but wouldn't care to walk in broad daylight on the streets of Manawaka with any child of his. 54

John's role is also preconceived by Hagar prior to his birth. Hagar's daring, independent and incredibly foolish exclusion of Bram's aid on the ride to Manawaka's Hospital proves Hagar intended John to be hers alone. She is pathetically blind to her own motivations and expresses surprise that the baby should take after her:

I took to him at once, and was surprised. But there was no resisting him. He looked so alert, his eyes wide and open... He had black hair, a regular sheaf of it. Black as my own, I thought, forgetting for the moment Bram was black-haired too. 55

The lives of John and Marvin soon demonstrated that the gods had had their joke with Hagar, reversing the characteristics she expected for her sons. Even for

a Highland Scot the persistence Hagar displays in ignoring this twist of fate and her own error is an amazing exhibition of tenacity and self-righteous stubbornness. Marvin from the start is a hard-working, dutiful, inarticulate, inexpressive son. He is the image of Jason Currie. When chores are to be done Marvin does them; when patriotic wars are to be fought Marvin fights them; when opportunities present themselves to get ahead Marvin gets ahead, and when appearances are to be kept up Marvin is the boy for it. Marvin, as John tells her, was always Hagar's boy. She just never saw it.

John on the other hand was always Bram's boy, not Hagar's idea of Jacob or Jesus but the real child of the covenant:

John didn't take to music very much. He was wild as a mustard seed in some ways, that child. He'd come out with swear words that would curl your hair, and I knew where he'd got them. 56

Mrs. Laurence also pictures John as Bram's boy early on by remaking the near sacrifice of Isaac and at the same time symbolically severing John from Hagar:

Once I followed John out to the boxed bee village, and saw Bram taking out full combs, cut a slab of waxed honey and hold it out, and the child opened his mouth, afraid to do otherwise, and stand stock-still and white, while the honeyed butcher knife rammed in, his father's generosity, offering sweetness on a steel that in another season slit the pigs carcasses. I stood unmoving... The blade drew away with such

slowness it seemed to be drawn out of my very flesh, and when I screamed at Bram, he turned, holding in his hands the knife still drizzling honey like blood, and his beard and mouth drew up in a jester's grin. 57

Following this scene the evidence that John is not the Currie intended mounts. There is the brief interlude at Oatley's where Hagar attempts to make John her exclusive property by physically removing him from Bram. This attempt enjoys limited success because John is not simply an allegory of the new covenant but a flesh and blood character. Yet, Hagar's hopes crumble abruptly and forever with John's return to Manawaka to care for Bram which reveals that through the invisible means of the past John has never lost touch with his father. At this point John himself is aware that he is a Shipley and he makes no bones about disillusioning his mother:

"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. 58

It is through yet another biblical allusion to Genesis that Margaret Laurence enables Hagar to eventually straighten out her succession problem. The allusion is to Jacob wrestling his blessing from God's angel. Hagar wishes in vain that John would resemble her version of Jacob when he wrestles the stone angel; but there is no blessing to be received in raising a monument to pride;

there is only pain:

I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear and swore. His arm muscles tightened and swelled and finally the statue moved, teetered, and was upright once more. 59

John is not the only Jacob to receive a stony buffet from a deaf ear while endeavouring to wring a blessing from Hagar. Matthew, Jason, Murray Lees and Marvin all reach out for Hagar's blessing. All meet a proud rebuff. But Marvin, tenacious as his mother, determinedly hangs on until Hagar, near her death, relents and recognizes his birthright:

Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. "I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast and perhaps have been so from the beginning and can only release myself by releasing him. 60

This death-bed recognition of Marvin and the love and understanding carried with it, brings about a final and crucial transformation in The Stone Angel. For the ninety years Hagar refused to open up to human emotions, she was in fact a bonded slave and her true heir could only be an Ishmael or an Esau cast out and robbed of birthright. But Hagar, freed of pride, capable of extending the birthright of love even to Marvin whom she had always felt unworthy of it, no longer represents the covenant of the law but that of promise. Marvin, in consequence is freed

of the Ishmael role and able to move toward that of an Isaac, a Jacob or even a Christ as best he can.

The imagery and allusion drawn from Genesis are chief aids to Margaret Laurence in creating the sense of blessing, of promise, and of new beginnings in The Stone Angel. It follows naturally that Laurence, having drawn on Genesis for the imagery of creation, should also draw on Revelation, the biblical dream of destruction, for the imagery of death:

In the Book of The Apocalypse, when Saint John first sees the throne of heaven a sea of glass lies before it. This sea of glass represents the evil still present on earth, and throughout the Revelation, the sea is shown to be a reservoir of evil, synonymous with the abyss itself. It is the birthplace of dragons and the refuge to which the evil forces return when defeated by the force of heaven. So long as it exists, it is impossible to have a complete victory over evil. 61

Similarly Hagar, The Stone Angel's dragon, descends to the sea licking her ancient self-inflicted wounds seeking refuge from the indignity of death but longing for its peace. The sea in The Stone Angel, as in Revelation, is a place of darkness where shadows fall on the water even at noon. Hagar imagines it a world alive with monsters and death; a place to be greatly feared:

Outside the sea nuzzles at the floorboards that edge the water. If I were alone, I wouldn't find the sound soothing in the slightest. I'd be drawn out and out, with each receding layer

of water to its beginning, a depth as alien and chill as some far frozen planet, a night sea hoarding sly-eyed serpents, killer whales, swarming phosphorescent creatures dead to the daytime, a black sea sucking everything into itself, the spent sullen, the trivial garbage from boats and men protected from eternity only by their soft and fearful flesh and their seeing eyes. 62

The sea represents for her an actively evil force,
 63
 "chuckling" at defenceless beings while it inexorably draws them like some malevolent mother, to its chilling bosom:

...I feel an ill-sensation...I may be swept outward like a gull, blown by a wind too strong for it, forced into the rough sea, held under and drawn fathoms down into the depths as still and cold as black glass. 64

To the unseeing eyes of Hagar Shipley The Stone Angel's sea is not distinguishable from the black sea of Revelation, but the real refuge of evil in The Stone Angel is not the sea; it is the consuming darkness of refusal to face, understand and accept life and death. That is the monster-ridden, alien sea Hagar inhabits:

The darkness never bothered him, even as a child. It let him think, he used to say. I wasn't like that, ever. For me it teemed with phantoms, soul-parasites with feathery fingers, the voices of trolls, and pale inconstant fires, like the flicker of an eye. But I never let him, or anyone, know that. 65

The sea Hagar fears is simply the rhythmic symbol of life and death; an element of time in which she becomes an ancient mariner who, ironically, cannot accept the sea

as it is. As time passes, the irony increases, for Hagar grows to look more and more like a denizen of the deep:

I give a sideways glance at the mirror, and
see a puffed face purpled with veins as though
someone had scribbled over the skin with an
indelible pencil. The skin itself is the sil-
verish white of the creatures one fancies must
live under the sea where the sun never reaches.⁶⁶

The sea is at last revealed to Hagar when she faces death and experiences her greatest need for understanding. It is then she remembers the peace of the sea at Shadow Point:

Revelations are saved for times of actual need,
and now one comes to me, I can recall a quiet
place, I think, and not so very far from here.⁶⁷

Shadow Point, whether it exists as a geographic entity or as a place in Hagar's (drug affected) mind is a peaceful place where memory can function and life can be revealed. But Shadow Point by itself does not possess any power to restore life; it is the confessed admission of responsibility, the act of joining the fallible human race and of communing with it, that brings renewal and release from the torment of alienation. Hagar Shipley, while she maintains that her suffering is on a tragic, Promethean scale and that while others are responsible for her pain she is not for theirs, is like Coleridge's desolate Mariner, a monster of life in death:

Alone, alone all all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea,
And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony.

The many men so beautiful!
 And they all dead did lie;
 And a thousand thousand slimy things
 Lived on; and so did I.⁶⁸

This identification of Mrs. Shipley with the role of the ancient mariner is apparently one Margaret Laurence feels will help focus the understanding of Hagar for she reinforces it in plain terms:

...A long time. It's not the way I imagined thirst would feel. My throat doesn't burn or even seem particularly dry. But it's blocked and shut, and it pains me when I swallow. I can't drink sea water -- isn't it meant to be poisonous? Certainly. Water water everywhere, nor any drop to drink. That's my predicament. What albatross did I slay for mercy's sake? Well, well, we'll see -- Come on old mariner, up and out of your smelly bunk...⁶⁹

The seeming ultimate irony of the Ancient Mariner's predicament (surrounded on all horizons by the element he craves but, for a jest of God, cannot touch) is increased in Hagar's for she feels the weight of punishment, but cannot for the life of her remember the crime. To refresh everyone's memory Laurence recreates the scene of the crime in symbolic terms as a visual aid. Hagar's blind superstitious fears (a bird in the house, if you're its only occupant, means your death in the house) and her need to dominate her environment (which is spiritual arrogance at its height) destroys life; not only the lives of the innocent does Hagar wound in her rage to protect

herself from threatening phantoms of the dark but all life. Hagar and the gull (albatross?) she destroys at Shadow Point are so closely related by their mutual, unreasoning fear of darkness and their tenacious grip on life that we cannot avoid seeing the image of Hagar's own maiming in that of the gull's:

The sea gull has so much strength. It'll never drop. It flounders, half rises, sinks, batters itself against the floor in the terrible rage of not being able to do what it is compelled to do. Finally it drags itself onto a pile of nets and lies there, throbbing aloud. 70

This sensation of helplessness and helpless rage against insentient powers (the dying of the light) represents a common bond between herself and the gull which even Hagar cannot ignore and for the first time her interest in suffering extends itself to a center outside herself. This is far from an act of penance equivalent to the Ancient Mariner's spontaneous (unaware) blessing of God's creatures, but identification of the gull's plight with her own is, for Hagar, a first step in that direction.

In the darkness of Shadow Point it is an easy transformation from the image of one wounded sea creature to another. Murray F. Lees appears almost magically, clothed in herringbone tweed, and replaces the gull in the ancient, tangling fishnets at Shadow Point. Lees (whose Christian name, undoubtedly by some quirk of coin-

cidence, means sea friend) is wounded as grievously as Hagar and the gull. He has personally suffered the damnation of hell's fires and with a little fire-water to spark the blood of brimstone preaching Evangelists already in his veins, it is simple to imagine him with burning eyes, like the Ancient Mariner's, flaming with eagerness to confess his ghastly tale. His revelation is no far removed dream of a "sequined heaven,"⁷¹ but a first hand confession of responsibility for the terrible death of his son, for the fiery end of the world which (displaying a grim sense of humour) visits his abandoned home while he sits among the self-important at the tabernacle awaiting a more theatrical Armageddon:

"It's a funny thing," he says. "She thought it would come from so far away. The Almighty voice and the rain of locusts and blood. The moon turned dark and the stars gone wild. And all the time it was close by."⁷²

This communion of Hagar and Lees (he brings red wine; she the soda biscuits) amounts simply to the loosening of tongues and the willingness to understand human shortcomings. When Hagar admits to Lees that she "had a son,⁷³ and lost him," she is for the first and last time no longer alone.

The Hagar Shipley who emerges from the depths of Shadow Point is made of the same granite as the Hagar who submerged there, but there is a difference in her. She has

shed her fear and replaced it with vision. Ascending the steps of Shadow Point with the help of Marvin (The Guardian of the Ship) and Doris (The Sea Nymph) Hagar rises to a new heaven and new earth where the sea still exists but where its darkness fades before the acceptance of life.

For a sailor as ancient and set in her life as Hagar Shipley there is but little time for acts of penance, but in keeping with the archetypal pattern of Christian salvation which symbolically reinforces Hagar's new understanding, good works are a necessary addition to a contrite heart. Hagar is not quite equal to the task upon the occasion of Mr. Troy's return engagement to rescue her soul. His chances seem about as promising as those of an early Christian attempting the last minute conversion of a lion in Nero's circus when Hagar attempts to conjure up the stony restraint of their first meeting. But the experience of Shadow Point had shown Hagar the truth of Mr. Troy's seemingly clichéd message:

Sometimes, you know, Mrs. Shipley, when we accept the things we can't change in this life, we find they're not half as bad as we thought. ⁷⁴

Hagar can no longer dismiss Troy casually as some crazed cohort of John of Patmos who will greedily "spend eternity ⁷⁵ in fingering the gems" of heaven. She sees him for the first time, a mixture of fear and courage like herself,

and her tearful response to his singing of the old Presbyterian Call to Worship,

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with joyful voice.
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell.
Come ye before Him and rejoice, ⁷⁶

though it falls short of an act of penance is perhaps the novel's most moving scene of contrition.

The first truly free actions of Hagar's ninety years follow closely upon and come perhaps in response to this invocation. They appear as, Hagar points out, to be of small significance -- "One was a joke...The other a lie," ⁷⁷ but when one compares Hagar's joke shared with a young oriental girl whose innocence Hagar unselfishly protects (risking her tenuous old life to gain the girl the shining steel grail-bedpan) with Mr. Oatley's jest on Sandra Wong's celestial ancestors, the significance grows:

He'd been in shipping and said they used to bring Oriental wives here, when the celestials were forbidden to bring their women, and charge huge sums for passage, and pack the females like tinned shrimp in the lower hold, and if the Immigration men scented the hoax, the false bottom was levered open, and the women plummeted... And Mr. Oatley would shrug and smile, begging my laughter and my approbation. And I'd oblige, for who could help it? ⁷⁸

Likewise Hagar's lie to Marvin that he "was a better son than John" is spoken with "a kind of love", ⁷⁹ previously denied to both her sons and to her brother Dan, which

makes her worthier of "the water of life without price" 80
than any easy truth.

CHAPTER II

A JEST OF GOD: RACHEL, RACHEL, CHILD AND MOTHER

The celebration of Hagar Shipley and the generation of which she is partially representative is the route Margaret Laurence chose to return to her past. This is quite a natural point of departure as the early impressions of Laurence's own life were heavily influenced by her "tough and terrifying"¹ pioneer grandparent, John Simpson, with whom she lived during her teenage years. It is to the years spent with grandpa Simpson, deduces Clara Thomas, that Margaret Laurence owes her "imaginative perception of the burdens laid on one generation by another."²

Having focused on Manawaka's authoritarian, patriarchal generation and having captured its contradictory dualism in the flesh and spirit of Hagar Shipley, it is logical that Margaret Laurence should progress to those generations on the receiving end of their parents' "excess baggage."³ The story of the "flimsy and gutless",⁴ of the Dorises and the Clara Shipleys, of the Regina Weeses and their ilk, must also be told. In Rachel Cameron we focus on the counterpoint to a generation of self-made patriarchs. The second daughter to Niall and May Cameron who picks up Manawaka's narrative thread from the fallen Hagar Shipley (from whom one suspects death only could have wrenched it)

is thirty-four years of age, a grade school teacher, a virgin, and from all outward appearances, "as bland as custard."⁵ She is as unlikely a character to balance against the colourful heroine of The Stone Angel as one might imagine. However, a world of dualities such as Manawaka is, must have balance and therefore Laurence's task in A Jest of God is to demonstrate that the struggle toward freedom by mild-mannered Rachel Cameron is in its way as formidable as was the proud Stone Angel's (Hagar's) wrestle with death.

There is no single image or symbol in A Jest of God that dominates the Manawakan horizon with the force of the Currie Stone Angel, the monument which (like Hagar) so eloquently expresses the great strengths and weaknesses of its place and time. The symbols of A Jest of God are considerably less conspicuous, but they too possess an eloquence. They like its characters, are the inheritors and the inheritance of The Stone Angel and their creation and growth do much to unify and expand the Manawakan canvas. First among these symbols is the Cameron-Jonas Funeral Home with its flashing, chameleon-like sign which changes colour and constitution with the times in order to survive. Captured in this strangely animated home of death is Rachel Cameron who exists above in a suspended state of childhood: a sleeping beauty waiting for the kiss of a wandering for-

eign prince to break her enchantment and bring her to life. The catch is that Rachel, having been asleep far longer than any fairy tale could decently permit, is nagged by the claustrophobic sensation that her prince may not appear at all and in her anxiety and suspense Rachel seems determined to open at least one eye by herself. This child image Rachel projects symbolizes, harking back once again to Ross's false fronted Main Street, the small town prairie community's concern with artificial values rather than the growth of its people. Rachel in the footsteps of Hagar and the founding Manawakan fathers is a servant of the god Appearance, and in that small town milieu, aging, sex, death, religious enthusiasm and all natural functions of body and spirit are blasphemy against that god. Rachel presents herself in the imagery of her innermost thoughts as a captive child of this viewpoint. We view her watching little Manawakan girls skip (distanced from them by invisible almost unreal barriers of glass and time) and imagining A Jest of God's first words in the form of a song from the "secret language" of children:

The wind blows low, the wind blows high,
 The snow comes falling from the sky,
 Rachel Cameron says she'll die
 For want of the golden city.
 She is handsome, she is pretty,
 She is queen of the golden city. 6

Rachel too easily places herself in the context of a pretty child of seven. It is indeed difficult for her to imagine the real passage of years because so little in her life changes. The life she leads is a type of role playing reinforced by Manawakan players (Mother May especially) who possess their own self-preserving need to protect the long established identities in which they have immeshed their lives.

It is the dramatic ironic technique of wide discrepancy between "visible public life...and what she really thinks and feels"⁷ which informs us of Rachel's need to shed herself of her sterile role. But as with The Stone Angel it is through the imagery and symbols which the heroine fantasizes, or Laurence arranges, that we see the full depth and intensity of her conflict.

Names, and here the influence of Laurence's African experience appears, play significant symbolic roles throughout the Manawakan story. The names of the heroines in The Stone Angel and A Jest of God give a particular power over those novels for they provide essential keys to Manawaka's mythic framework:

Rachel Cameron...like the Rachel of the Old and New Testament, weeps for her children because they are not. In Genesis this is a lament by a barren wife; in the allegory of Rachel in Jeremiah it is the lament by the Israelites who have fallen away from the fruits of the spirit into the worship of false gods: both concepts are contained in

Laurence's presentation of Rachel's character. ⁸

The life of Rachel in Genesis repeats the archetypal pattern of the Sarah-Hagar history. Rachel, the wife of covenant, is, like Sarah, barren and in consequence she employs her handmaid (Bilhah) in order to have Jacob's children by proxy. In this the third generation of Israel's covenant (as by no coincidence Rachel and Stacey Cameron are Laurence's third generation of Manawakan spokeswomen), the allegory thickens with the element of jealousy, which formerly existed between slave and mistress (Hagar-Sarah), being updated with a new dimension: sibling rivalry between the two wives of Jacob. This sets both the wife of the spirit (Rachel) and that of the flesh (Leah) on a footing of parity better adapted than the mistress-slave relationship of Sarah and Hagar to the humour of God, for the pranks He plays on Sarah and Rachel, and on Hagar and Leah are of equal cruelty. He gives to the wives of promise their husband's love and to the wives of the flesh his children; therefore it seems more just and symbolically appropriate that they be sisters. Such a symbolic equality would particularly suit Hagar and Rachel for Rachel Cameron's proud insecurity proportionately counterweights the folly of blind human certainty which enslaved Hagar Shipley. In The Stone Angel we are shown life through the eyes of the allegorical servant of the

flesh. In A Jest of God we see it continued from the perspective of the child who serves, though not by her own will, what she believes to be the spirit. Ironically there is (as with a mirror image) little essential difference between the two.

By means of the images in A Jest Of God's opening words we see quite clearly that virginal Rachel is no closer to Laurence's promised land of personal freedom than her willful predecessor Hagar. The golden city of which Rachel Cameron is queen is later identified as "Jerusalem the golden":⁹ The allegorical Jerusalem of spiritual freedom. Unfortunately for Rachel she comes to the throne at a time when, to pirate the sentiments of a lamenting Jeremiah, the virgin's gold is badly tarnished. The images in the accompanying children's rhymes which Rachel hears at school, confirm this state of affairs. The visions conjured by the chanting school children of,

Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Jews,
[Selling] his wife for a pair of shoes,¹⁰

echoes the grim prophecies of Jeremiah of a Jerusalem plundered and Israel enslaved because of the worship of false gods. Also the rhythmic ritual lines requesting the immediate departure from town of improper "Spanish dancers"¹¹ is a solid indication that the worship of Propriety is inculcated in the mind's of Manawaka's race of children.

In these circumstances it is understandable that images of death should cascade unbidden into Rachel's skull. The worship of Appearance, the fundamental fear of appearing to be foolish, which dominates the Cameron home, negates the celebration of life and has its roots in death just as the Cameron household has its symbolic foundation upon the funeral home. Rachel's survival depends, as Hagar Currie's before her, not on dismissing her premonitions of death and destruction as the undignified symptoms of some approaching mental aberration, but in courageously descending into the pit of her own unconscious and accepting death and sexuality and whatever other monsters are revealed there as a part of life from which she cannot run, or live above, without denying life altogether.

The problem for Margaret Laurence in A Jest of God is to place the heroic descents into the self, made by awkward, timorous Rachel Cameron, on a basis of equal import with the last minute, grand descent of Hagar Shipley into her personal sea of revelation at Shadow Point. Fiercely outspoken pride, ruthless confidence in the rightness of her cause (self interest), the achievement of reaching a great age and a massive physical size, are all qualities which mark Hagar plainly as a classic, larger-than-life, heroic type. It is therefore sufficient

to develop Hagar's character within a framework of typically heroic allusions. Such images as those of Sarah's frightened, defiant bondmaid marching with the baby, Ishmael into the desert; of Jacob wresting a blessing from the Lord's angel; of the ancient mariner alone and unable to die on a wide, wide sea, and of a Christ-like descent into and resurrection from hell, work well to expand our understanding of Hagar. Obviously heroism in a character suffering from a lack of character to the extent that Rachel Cameron does, cannot be handled in just the same manner. Allusion, biblical allusion in particular is still employed by Laurence to illustrate Rachel's brand of heroism. The reference to Jonah and the whale in the epigraph to the novel is for example a very useful symbol for Rachel's growth from cowardice to responsibility. The fact, however, that the admirable qualities in Rachel which eventually liberate her from a permanent childhood exist below her level of consciousness makes it necessary for Laurence to present Rachel's heroism in more psychological terms, a circumstance

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Not Christ-like in terms of courage for Hagar is attempting to escape death by retreating to Shadow Point, but Christ-like in the sense that a single descent into the underworld (according to J. L. Henderson in Carl Jung's Man and His Symbols) distinguishes the Christian myth from other myths.

which is unavoidably reflected in A Jest of God's images and symbols.

The term Carl Jung used to describe cases like Rachel Cameron's is neurotic dissociation:

The more that consciousness is influenced by prejudices, errors, fantasies, and infantile wishes, the more the already existing gap will widen into a neurotic dissociation and lead to a more or less artificial life far removed from healthy instincts, nature and truth.¹²

The unconscious in this case according to Jung will spontaneously produce dream or symbolic messages to attempt "to restore our psychological balance," and re-establish "in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium".¹³ If one works from this premise the rich imaginative powers displayed by Rachel seem ample evidence that Rachel's is a frantic unconscious signalling to a consciousness on the brink of permanent imbalance.

These message-symbols which the psyche creates as a part of the process of self-realization or individuation prove also to be a convenient and realistic structural tool for Laurence, one that allows her at any time to signal symbolically Rachel's predicament simply by permitting the natural, usually unnoticeable, intrusion of Rachel's unconscious upon her conscious. The most striking instances of this subtle invasion of the conscious by unconscious imagery comes through Rachel's description

of her fellow Manawakans. For example she intuitively describes James Doherty leaving class as seeming "about to take off like a sparrow and miraculously fly."¹⁴ This imagery vividly expresses Rachel's secret admiration of James' independent spirit, but consciously she cannot fathom her preference for James over other young creatures "so anxious to please that they will tell lies without really knowing they're doing it."¹⁵ Calla Mackie, pictured in Rachel's mind, is "a sunflower, if anything, brash, strong, plain, and yet reaching up in some way."¹⁶ Nothing more wholesome could be imagined, yet ironically Rachel treats Calla like a leper because her strength and brashness allow her to be indifferent to Manawakan society's rigid standards of behaviour, as Rachel cannot. A considerably different message is transmitted by the nature imagery Rachel associates with Willard Sidley. Rachel constantly and without apparent reason, feels threatened by Willard. She feels:

There's something reptilian about the look of him. Not snakelike -- more a lizard, sleek, dry skinned, dapper, and his eyes now dartingly quick and sly, glinting at me, thinking he knows all about me. The skin on his hands is speckled, sun-spotted, and small hairs sprout even from his knuckles.¹⁷

The repulsion and attraction Rachel harbours for Willard, especially when his furry hands are juxtaposed with her manicured ones, is easily deciphered. Like the blue painted dogmen Rachel dreams of threatening the walled-in

smugness of little Roman girls, Willard is the unknown male. With his "blue dead eyes"¹⁸ he seems to embody sex and death and cruelty and all the animal instincts Rachel is too civilized and too afraid to associate with herself.

Not strangely, the most persistent warning of this dangerous dissociation comes to Rachel through self-examination. Being about as indifferent to physical self-examination as Pope's Belinda, Rachel is never far from her own reflection and the animals she imagines in her place (giraffes, geese and cranes are examples which come quickly to mind) speak plainly of awkwardness and imbalance. That is they speak plainly enough to all but Rachel's stunted consciousness and therefore Laurence's heroine is dunked unmercifully into the baptismal hell of her unconscious.

The first of Rachel's psychic descents takes place in her bedroom, a room, if one judges by furnishings, dedicated to the preservation of colourless, celibate taste and to the time-honoured Scottish sentiment regarding waste. It is, in every specification, correct for "a born teacher"¹⁹ who must be seen to keep Manawakan morality safe. Trapped in this stagnating little girl's room, the simplifying "voices of the girls, the old ladies,"²⁰ sounding as specters of a probable existence yet to come, Rachel's

nearly suffocated desire to live torments her unmercifully. She is forced by this skilled tormentor to imagine in symbolic terms (which are very useful to the reader) the cause of her torture:

...Tonight is hell on wheels again. Trite. Hell on wheels. But almost accurate. The night feels like a gigantic ferris wheel turning once for each hour, interminably slow. And I am glued to it, or wired, like paper, like a photograph, insubstantial, unable to anchor myself, unable to stop this slow nocturnal circling. 21

The message, like Rachel's throbbing pain, is simple. Life for Rachel has no animation, no depth, no colour, and worst of all no change. It is one grand monotonous circle; at best a tantalizing imitation of life from which death would be a release and a relief. An ominous bird with the likely name of Dr. Raven supplies temporary respite along that line for Manawakans unable to tolerate their strictured lives until death concludes his permanent arrangements for them. Dr. Raven provides this service by dispensing sleeping pills: an opiate for the masses of well regulated, sober society which effectively saves such artificial, constrained souls like May Cameron (a chronic insomniac) from the worry of abandoning her tightly bound mind to the free and natural processes of sleep.

Rachel, although not quite so unnatural that she depends on drug induced oblivion, clearly has not far to

go before reaching such a dependency. So pervasive is the influence of a role-playing Manawakan society, Rachel, in the privacy of her own bedroom desperately attempts to wrestle her being to sleep by force of reason and will. The resulting conversation she holds with herself could be a textbook example of dissociation:

Go to bed, Rachel. And hope to sleep...Stop.
Stop it Rachel. Study. Get a grip on your-
self now. Relax. Sleep. Try...

Now, then. Enough of this. The main thing
is to be sensible, to stop thinking and to go
to sleep. Right away. Concentrate. I need
sleep badly. It's essential. 22

This argument which Rachel holds with herself illustrates graphically the duality at odds within her. Reading it, one can almost picture the prim part of Rachel grappling (Stone Angel style) with the natural side of Rachel which desires freedom. In this instance Rachel's need to be free, using the relaxation of will and consciousness necessary for sleep to advantage, wins out over her maidenly better judgement and carries Rachel off into a world of erotic fantasy.

The terms of her Bacchic dream reveal a pathetic picture of the depths which guilt and fear have reached in Rachel's psyche. In an imagined act of freedom she seeks a natural haven "right away from everywhere"²³ where she can be free without being discovered by indignant society. All identity is submerged as Rachel acts out

bottled, natural desires with a shadow lover whose face cannot be seen though his body is in sharp focus. Union with this dark animus (the absence of facial features could indicate this male dream figure is an aspect of Rachel's own personality) carries Rachel deep into her personal underworld of revelation. The underworld Rachel's dream stairs lead to is easily identified by "the giant bottles and jars...in bubbled green,"²⁴ as Neil Cameron's workshop. Here the mute lover-prince is transformed into a vocal father-king. This second shade is plainly mistrusted by Rachel. The imagery of closed doors which figured largely in As For Me and My House reappears at this point in Rachel's dream to suggest the communication barrier which existed between Rachel and her father during his life -- a barrier made permanent by his death:

He is behind the door I cannot open. And his voice -- his voice -- so I know he is lying there among them, lying in state, king over them. He can't fool me. He says run away Rachel, run away, run away. 25

Frightening as the disembodied voice of Rachel's own Hades might seem, his warning (an adaptation we later discover of one of Rachel's rare conversations with her father)

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Sandra Djaw in her article "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Laurence and Ross" sees these descents into death in terms of Neumann's explication of the Psyche myth. The marriage of death and rebellion against it are essential steps in the individuation of the female.

is that of a benign animus. The "lipsticked and rouged, powdered...white clowns"²⁶ who were Mr. Cameron's subjects, differ only in their silence from May Cameron's bridge cronies, and are no more suitable company for a maturing young woman.

An optimistic note is hit in this first descent when Rachel instinctively flies from death, but the proportions of the struggle Rachel faces in becoming a person are at the same time made nightmarishly clear when that flight is cut short by grasping front yard spruce trees in unison with May Cameron's stylish, falsetto voice.

A more disturbing, more dramatic psychic descent occupies Rachel in the second chapter of A Jest of God. The episode is painstakingly created by Mrs. Laurence. Rachel, the virgin bride, primly arrayed in white (though not as luminously as she had hoped) braves the black, wet night on River Street and washes up (down really) at the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn. The Tabernacle, modestly announcing its presence in bloody crimson lights, is unashamedly a nest of lusting, raw evangelism. Caught there between ecstatic spiritualism and her own barely repressed natural instincts, Rachel's virginal consciousness appears to regard itself as the outnumbered candidate for sacrificial lamb to these basic and beastly life drives. Ironically Rachel compounds her own fear of losing her

dignified self among the scandalously unselfconscious Reborn. Through Rachel's eyes the Tabernacle is transformed into an eerie underworld (Mrs. Laurence employs the biblical connection between the sea and the pit in A Jest of God as she did in The Stone Angel):

The painted walls are heavy with their greenish blue, not the clear blue of open places but dense and murky, the way the sea must be, fathoms under.²⁷

The worshippers in that dark atmosphere magically become bestial predators:

They all seem to be crouching, all around me, crouching and waiting...It's not a zoo, not Doctor Moreau's island where the beastmen prowled and waited, able to speak but without comprehension.²⁸

As in a dream the Tabernacle congregation itself becomes a rhythmic sea of humanity, rising and falling with the swelling of the primal desire to penetrate death's and life's mysteries: a sea with an intense creative energy against which reasonable Rachel (drawn by her own need for growth) is helpless.

For Rachel this experience in the Tabernacle represents a considerable shock to her system. The secretive erotic fantasies of her own bedroom stir in Rachel much guilt and alarm, but being in reality forced to participate in the shameless, public baring of souls causes her somewhat more trauma one suspects, than being indecently assaulted at the corner of Portage and Main Street in

Winnipeg. Mrs. Laurence captures the frightening indecency the evangelistic service holds for Rachel by giving it patently sexual imagery and energy, coupled with images of impending destruction. The carefully inserted hymn verses could hardly be more sexually explicit:

In full and glad surrender,
I give myself to thee,
Thine utterly and only
And evermore to be. 29

It is the inescapable, frankly human presence which terrifies Rachel. Because life without pretense is unknown to her, Rachel perceives it and responds to it as a hideous danger. She imagines Calla "wail in a wolf's voice, or speak as hissing as a cell of serpents."³⁰ The preacher's voice Rachel hears as a husky, sensual growl and a sun-burned farmer at her elbow during the service she describes as a crouching, moaning animal. This farmer whose trade connects him with growth and life, is doubly tormenting to Rachel because he triggers a remembrance (a none too subtle, but still valuable flashback technique) of an opportunity for creative fulfillment rejected and forever lost. Lennox Cates a handsome, poorly educated, farmer was that lost opportunity and though Rachel cannot admit,

³⁰ Numerous associations of the male (Nick Kazlick particularly) with the sun suggest that Laurence is alluding to the ancient myth which equates man with the sun and the earth with woman. Frank Fesando looks at this in detail in his article "In a Nameless Land."

even to herself, that she was foolish to hold herself in pride above a mere farmer, the loss of Lennox and the chance of having borne his two fine sons is an ill-concealed tender spot.

From the moment Rachel enters the Tabernacle in her virginal attire, until she dramatically loses consciousness, the sheer volume of sexual imagery points to the ravishing of Rachel's artificially oriented faculties. The weight of imagery is probably necessary to convey a visual sense of Rachel's hysteric, drowning self-image of propriety, providing that was Mrs. Laurence's intention. If it was, then the repeated death images which foreshadow the event, also serve as useful creators of dramatic tension. Such a method as animating a childhood vision of Armageddon by associating the dream with the flesh and blood presence of the Tabernacle congregation is certainly a vivid aid in the mounting of terror:

The voices strengthen, grow muscular, until the room is swollen with the sound of a hymn macabre as the messengers of the apocalypse, the gaunt horsemen, the cloaked skeletons I dreamed of once when I was quite young, and wakened, and she said 'Don't be foolish -- don't be foolish Rachel -- there's nothing there.' 31

Still, one is tempted to charge Laurence with excess to the point of tedium for the number of times she symbolically submerges Rachel in this single chapter. Were it not for the pitch of excitement maintained through excellent

depictions of the forces conflicting within Rachel, like this one which occurs on page 34,

The muscles of my face have wired my jawbone so tightly that when I move it, it makes a slight clicking sound, 32

the whole tabernacle episode might have been better for a painless drowning itself.

The climax of this second symbolic descent, in which Rachel's pent up passions explode her own rigid self-discipline, follows a pattern Jung observes of which Mrs. Laurence is plainly aware:

What we call civilized consciousness has steadily separated itself from basic instincts. But these instincts have not disappeared. They have merely lost their contact with our consciousness and are thus forced to assert themselves in an indirect fashion. This may be by means of physical symptoms in the case of a neurosis, or by means of incidents of various kinds, like unaccountable moods, unexpected forgetfulness, or mistakes in speech. 33

Rachel's orgasmic utterance in tongues is, though admittedly a somewhat direct assertion of the unconscious, a fascinating incident of this kind. Its only flaw is that, following such sustained expectation, the release of tension borders on anticlimax. With all its chattering, crying, ululating, shuddering, breaking and grieving, the description of Rachel's break down lacks the drama one expects. Following the incessant expressions of anxiety at appearing foolish, even by association, which lead to

this scene, we could, with some certainty, expect more authentic and bloodcurdling screams from an out-of-patience critic.

Even so, the hysterical gift of tongues Mrs. Laurence bestows on her insensible heroine provides a nicely consistent symbolic touch to Rachel's second descent into her personal underworld. Like the glossalalia of *The Risen and Reborn*, and like the revelations of dream symbols (which figure in the prior descent), Rachel's unconscious cry is the gift of an ironic god. "The voice of Rachel,"³⁴ the ancient lament for the children, the life which is not, is an almost totally foreign sound to the modern ear of Rachel Cameron. It can frighten, but not by itself enlighten her. Just as the speech of tongues and the symbols of dreams, Rachel's utterance requires an interpreter and Providence provides one in the person of Calla Mackie. The choice of interpreter like the gift of tongues is an ironic one. Calla intuitively understands and responds to Rachel's feelings with an empathy which could only be possessed by an individual who has freely sought out life, and who has known and overcome the consequent, cruel rejection of being labelled a crank. In other words the experience which allows Calla to fathom Rachel, ironically serves to alienate her in Rachel's eyes.

Through Rachel's vision of the nightmarishly

animated spruce trees doing the bidding of May Cameron's falsetto voice, we first glimpse the awesome power which holds Rachel, but nowhere are the forces of good taste more faithfully, or frightfully, represented than in Rachel's frigid rejection of Calla Mackie. The obviously altruistic and unpremeditated kiss with which Calla (a new twist on the sleeping beauty story) attempts to awaken Rachel to a world of life and love that does not constantly judge, seems too pathetic for anyone (least of all a character chronically starved of affection and communication) to completely despise. So strong, however, is Rachel's indoctrination that any deviation from conventional behaviour must be sinister, that she blindly recoups her tattered dignity (at Calla's expense) and shuts the door in a cold and most civilized fashion upon the first venue for honest communication and growth opened to her.

Before (to employ a swimming metaphor) Rachel goes under for the critical third time, Laurence flashes before us an illuminating synopsis of Rachel's drab world; drab because it pivots on the philosophy that contact with clownish humanity, in its living colours, is not in keeping with good or even decent taste. "People [as Rachel submits] should keep themselves to themselves -- that's the only decent way".³⁵ One might logically improve this charming adage by adding, that the least possible acquaintance with one's own person, is as well, a commendably 'tasteful'

procedure. Luckily for Rachel it is a procedure with which the repressed and plebian mortal parts take great exception.

Two sets of images are used to display this colourless, odourless, joyless (--less almost everything but 'taste') world. One set condenses the exemplary relationships which steered Rachel's thirty-four years of (non) existence in Manawaka. The other set reflects, through Rachel, the degree of her distortion and thereby intensifies our comprehension of her need to escape, even at the price of self-destruction.

Dominating the guiding influences upon Rachel is her mother, May Cameron. May, in the springtime of her seventy plus years, is an allegory of the Coy Mistress civilized (with a capital C) consciousness. Her allegorical castle, the Manawakan Presbyterian Church, is a bastion of Propriety; a vision from which May Cameron, a self-made martyr, becomes inseparable. Its symbol suits May like a new Easter bonnet:

...a stained-glass window shows a pretty
and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with
absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain
...holding his arms up languidly to something
which might in other circumstances have been
a cross. 36

Society's blushing outrage with the effrontery of the publicly infirm also finds perfect expression in May Cameron. As May judges the indecent participation in life by the feeble in body and mind, her own guilt is ironically

revealed. Her anger at unashamed mortality contorts May into a demonic figure with burning face and hissing voice.

Bespectacled Willard Siddley stands out as another of the moulding influences in Rachel's insipid life. More precisely his spectacles stand out, for any personality supposed to be lurking 'neath his whitefish eyes, submerges under the weight of his "heavy navy-blue frames".³⁷ These multi-faceted glasses guard Willard's dignity, turn the natural disadvantage visited upon him of being human to gain (gain in Willard's context being the mechanical appearance of strength and efficiency) and, in charity, provide Rachel with a sterling model of how she might correspondingly dignify any visible taint of humanity about her person. Influential glasses indeed!

Last in this sequence of figures shaping the course of Rachel's life is her enigmatic parent, Niall Cameron. The image Laurence chooses to represent this connection is etched indelibly in Rachel's mind. It derives its power from its stone-cold brevity:

I came back and pounded on the door of his establishment, the only time I ever remember doing that. 'Dad -- come and see -- they've got pipers, and they're playing "The March of the Cameron Men".' He stood in the doorway, his face showing no feeling at all. 'Yes, I expect they are Rachel. It has a fine sound, the lies the pipes tell. You run away, now, there's a good girl.' 38

With these few words Niall Cameron is given, as much, or more character than his spouse, whose conversations with

Rachel are frequent, but, like May, Niall's importance is symbolic. We are meant to hypothesize that the iconoclastic experience of surviving the World War left Niall cruelly undeceived regarding Manawakan propriety. It is a short step from there to assume that in withdrawing from that deception Niall destroys himself with isolation and liquor. His effect on Rachel, though, is not so neatly gauged. It appears to be a conflicting one. His complete rejection of society evidently seeds some of Rachel's mistrust in that direction, but ironically, that same rejection helps confirm Rachel's belief that the chief end of Man is to keep himself to himself, forever.

Indispensable as the portrayals of Rachel's personal Pygmalions are as background development, the images which really communicate the growing sense of petrification she feels are those which focus directly on Rachel Cameron. Our perception of her world becomes most clearly formed when we witness Rachel transformed into "a clay figurine, easily broken, unmendable,"³⁹ or associated with Calla's caged, anti-social, unmusical canary (a bird under suspicion of being a bleached sparrow), or identified with the mechanical coldness of a robot. All these transmit to us the frustration building in Rachel with her stiff, restrictive style of living. Laurence cuts off Rachel's senses one at a time till finally, the most vital, sight, is gone and

the unconscious in desperation drags Rachel's conscious under.

This third symbolic assertion of Rachel's unconscious mind is considerably more difficult to analyse than the expressions of need for the stimulation of intercourse which occur in The Tabernacle and Rachel's bedroom. James Doherty is an undisguised symbol of youth, innocence, freedom and vision. He is the antithesis of the stone angel Rachel is becoming. What then, does Rachel hysterically express by striking James with a ruler? We are given a number of clues. Following the deed Rachel confusedly focuses upon "The Ruler"⁴⁰ (an article easily equated with a rigid, measured society), and not herself, as the cause of James' bleeding nose, an action which lends itself to the allegorical lesson concerning the forces conflicting within herself.

Another clue stems from the imagery reflecting Rachel's loss of insight immediately before she blacks out:

...His eyes are extremely blue, not the translucent blue of water or sky, but the assertive and untransparent blue of copper sulphate, opaque, not to be seen through. I do not know at all what is going on in those eyes.⁴¹

From this point of view Rachel's action could be seen as an expression of her need to penetrate the freedom and creativity she has lost. In any case the picture Mrs. Laurence creates of Rachel, out of control, striking a child she

loves and paralyzed in her desire to comfort him, signals an approaching crisis in Rachel's life which requires no explanation.

By the conclusion of A Jest of God's first three chapters in which Rachel's three messages from her unconscious mind occur, she is still dormant in a fantasy world. But a metamorphosis of sorts has occurred. Rachel, with the impetus of her revelations, has achieved a partially conscious awareness of her life's falseness, a foggy awareness, the nature of which presents obvious difficulties of presentation for an author employing the first person narrator. The problem is solved by Laurence's manoeuvring the imagery of Rachel's sleepless dreams in a subtle and revealing manner. We are, in effect, shown this emerging awareness in terms of newly edited film. "The slow whirling begins again".⁴² Rachel closes her eyes, and briefly the images of the three moments when the conscious Rachel Cameron disappeared, are recalled. We see the black and gold of the Tabernacle bible change to teeth and knives; the streaming blood of innocence that Rachel cannot forget, and an erotic feast from which Rachel and her prince are noticeably absent. All three images create the feeling that Rachel wishes the destruction of her life as it has been, and the final image of this episode confirms that impression:

The night is a jet-black lake. A person could

sink down and even disappear without a trace.⁴³

This clearly sets the stage for the handsome prince and his symbolic kiss which terminates the princess's evil enchantment. Enter Nick Kazlick. Nick is the demon-prince of Rachel's dreams. His face, no longer blurred like the visage in her erotic dreams, is distinctly that of a traditional romance lover:

Prominent cheekbones, slightly slanted eyes,
...black straight hair...a hidden Caucasian
face, one of the hawkish and long ago riders of
the Steppes. ⁴⁴

He is the ideal figure to bring Rachel out of her lonely fantasy world, because while he appears to her to be fascinatingly different, his association with the dark prince of her dreams makes Nick seem unreal to Rachel, and therefore not a threat. His first kiss does not disturb Rachel because "It's unreal anyway. If it isn't happening one might as well do what one wants".⁴⁵ Reinforcing Rachel's instinctive, childlike trust of Nick as a fantasy lover is the warm memory she associates with old Nestor Kazlick.

Rachel remembers him as a St. Nicholas figure:

I used to get rides in winter, on your dad's sleigh, and I remember the great bellowing voice he had, and how emotional he used to get, cursing at the horses, or else crooning to them. In my family, you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon. ⁴⁶

Nick, rekindling the half-forgotten spark of freedom and emotion in Rachel, is, as his sainted namesake, a bringer

of gifts. In appropriate fairy tale jargon one might say Nick Kazlick (whose name recalls another old Nick) brings the fruits of real life into the Camerons' static Eden, as a serpent disguised in Santa's clothing, a fact unconsciously perceived by Rachel, but consciously dismissed:

I don't want to watch him, although God knows he does it neatly, slithering out of his grey flannels like a snake shrugging off its last years skin. No, not a snake, of course. 47

No one, to borrow the concrete language of Genesis, can simply give Rachel her children. The ability to live freely must be earned. Nick is (and female chauvinists probably enjoy this) only a stepping stone in Rachel's metamorphosis into that elusive butterfly, the real individual. It follows from this that their relationship must perish, for the kind of Eden Rachel wishes to share with Nick would be as deadly to her spirit as the trite dialogue she imagines in the mouth of her Adam is for us:

... --'Crazy but I've always wanted -- and maybe its a better, investment, here, if the one inevitable hysterical moron yields to the seduction of knobs and dials or whatever in hell they are, and the cities are scorched to perdition. Maybe a few kids in scattered places like this will be the only ones who have ever heard of The Tempest or Moby Dick.' 48

This spectre of death surrounding Rachel's liason with Nick is a concept Laurence keeps carefully before us. The images which link Nick to Steven, his dead twin, to the demonic shadow prince, and to the suicidal Buckle

Fennick, "prince of the highway"⁴⁹, point unwaveringly to the fact that he embodies death as well as life. Death dogs their footsteps constantly. With a display of morbid humour Harvell could well have appreciated, Laurence encompasses Nick and Rachel's first love scene with an ambience of death by recalling the oft' quoted seduction lines from To a Coy Mistress and thereby suggests the grisly prospect of the lovers coupling in the grave. Correspondingly their final love scene closes with a comment by Nick which makes us see the shadow that loomed over their love: "...I never realized you could see the cemetery so well from here, did you?"⁵⁰

Shrouded as he is in these images of life and death, Nick, as numerous critics have complained, appears to be a total mystery. Dennis Duffy suggests that Nick is a "hard young man who takes what he wants from Rachel. A character not drawn in any depth".⁵¹ Joan Joffe Hall gushes that he is "as mysterious to us as he is wonderful to Rachel".⁵² And Clara Thomas despairs of anything beyond "a superficial understanding of Nick".⁵³

Sympathy with these sorts of comments comes easily. Nick does suffer from the loss of animation all characters share when forced into competition with a first person narrator, and Rachel's introversion dramatically compounds this weakness. Yet, however much one regrets Nick's lack of depth as a character, it should be noted that his char-

acterization is applaudably consistent with Laurencé's aim to concentrate upon an individual character. A narrator who hardly begins to understand herself, should not be expected to delve deeply into the complexities of natures apart from her own, but on the flip side of the coin Mrs. Laurence should be expected to develop the case study of her narrator by using major characters as foils. This she does exceedingly well, and because of this it is impossible to view Rachel in depth without thoroughly understanding that flat surface which represents Nick Kazlick.

His characterization reflects Rachel's with symmetry approaching that of a looking glass's and in so doing, reveals a total picture which is greater than its parts. This is most apparent in their family situations. The Kazlicks lived (though not quite in Wonderland) on the fabled 'other side of the tracks'. The family business of (the) Nestor, in contrast to Niall Cameron's, was growth. Mother Cameron was dictator in her castle and Father Kazlick in his. Both Rachel and Nick possessed favoured elder siblings of the same genders who gave the impression of being well adapted to cope with parental expectations. And both Rachel and Nick are saddled with the heavy responsibilities of preceeding generations when Stacy and Steve, the logical inheritors, are removed from the family bosom. Obviously then, their pasts are closely matched, but not,

as Dennis Duffy believes, to provide a realistic motive for sexual affinity. Nick's and Rachel's histories are mirrored to provide a comparison of reactions which visibly demonstrates the infeasibility of Nick as Rachel's soul mate, and to signpost the direction Rachel must follow to maturity.

If a single word were chosen to describe Nick Kazlick, it might well be rebel. He is a spiritual grandson of Hagar Shipley, cynical, tough and proud. His face like Hagar's is hawkish; but his problem runs deeper even than that old pillar of salt's. Simply defined, it is that he never attains a sense of place or belonging. He is like an uprooted cactus which must grudgingly wither.

The formative influences on Nick crop up often in his dialogues with Rachel. The flippancy of his remarks regarding his alienation from the language, customs and love of his parent's land, does little to hide (even from Rachel) his sense of rejection and loss. When he laughingly "but only just",⁵⁴ speculates for Rachel's benefit that the family samovar was traded en route from the Ukraine for a bottle of vodka, it seems he feels the joke was purposely on him.

Related to this, yet far more destructive to Nick than his bitterness over a misplaced birthright, is an underlying struggle with guilt. Guilt springing from his failure to understand Ukrainian; from his inability to be

a part of the anger his father feels over the Ukraine's incorporation into the U.S.S.R., and from his incapacity to weep for his parent's homeland. Nick, born of prairie soil, cannot be Ukrainian in the way Nestor Kazlick was and that is the heart of his guilt.

Ironically Nick's response to guilt runs true to the colours of his heritage. Taking into account the picture drawn of his grandmother, "a female warrior-type" who was "sour as a crab-apple",⁵⁵ (shades of Hagar!) Nick's decision to be his own man and to sourly reject his home, demonstrably argues that the absence of a linguistic connection is no impediment to genetic communication.

The obsession of Nick's childhood is unilateral independence. It is visible in the embarrassment he developed for his father's occupation, in his refusal to learn the simplest of farming chores, in his need to escape home and find neutral ground, and in his anger that Nestor would not allow him a rifle (a symbolic castration if one ever was). In all these childhood rebellions signs of danger are emerging. The desire for a gun, and the proximity of Manawka's cemetery to Nick's and Steve's neutral ground, both dimly foreshadow death, and the fulfillment of Nick's wish "to be completely on [his] own",⁵⁶ (accomplished through Steve's death by polio) makes death his unshakeable inheritance.

Viewed in its proper perspective, Nick Kazlick's

hard outer surface is hollow and pathetic. In the blindness of pride he fights for identity with the senile (Nestor) and the dead (Steve). Like a latter day incarnation of Milton's Satan, Nick's grand battle is all a self-deception:

It's this fantastic way he has, of creating the world in his own image. He knows perfectly well what's what. He's not senile, for God's sake. It's this crazy kind of guile he has...I'm buggered if I'll be manipulated like that. Anyway I'm no actor, and even if I were, that role wouldn't suit me. I'm not going to be taken over by a -...- a dead man. That's what he is, let's face it. After all this time. Not my brother, not anybody's anything. A dead man. ⁵⁷

As I have said, in creating Nick Kazlick Mrs. Laurence achieves a number of purposes. First she gives us a fairly explicit object lesson in the necessity of understanding, and coming to terms with one's roots. Second by tying him to Rachel, almost as her reflection, she makes us aware that Rachel must deal with her background more wisely than he if she is to survive. In achieving both these goals the use of matching sets of biblical allusion is an effective addition to the (paralleled) family situations.

Just as Rachel Cameron is identified with the second daughter of Laban, Nick, by virtue of his answer, "I'm not God"⁵⁸ (the biblical reply by Jacob to Rachel's plea for her children), to Rachel Cameron's wish for children, is ident-

ified with Isaac's second born son. This particular quotation serves as the first definite indication that Nick himself has some awareness of his being unsuitable for Rachel. Not until later though, when the irony and pathos which envelops Nick's life is more fully exposed by the Jacob-Esau relationship between Nick and Steve, can we really sympathize with his predicament.

This Jacob-Esau connection surfaces in an unmistakable fashion when near the novel's conclusion Nestor (The Patriarch), whose senility could be interpreted as mental blindness, confuses Nick (Jacob) with Steve (Esau) and harbours the intention of bestowing the Kazlick farm (birthright and blessing in one) upon Nick. The irony in this circumstance is that Nick, indirectly, by wishing to be a unique twin, has schemed in much the same way as his biblical original, to bring this moment about. The pathos in it is that Nick is too twisted to value, let alone accept the blessing of a blind old man.

The other biblical allusion connecting Nick and Rachel is their association with Jerusalem and the Israelites enslaved. Rachel is identified with the golden city, and has before her both the promise of, and the compelling need for, life: "Rachel Cameron says she'll die/ For want of the golden city".⁵⁹ Nick, in dismal contrast, finds his comparison with the prodigal Israel of Jeremiah

which had turned its face from Jehovah. He echoes his own prospects in the lugubrious tones of that most lugubrious prophet:

I have forsaken my house -- I have left mine
heritage -- mine heritage is unto me as a lion
in the forest -- it crieth out against me --
therefore have I hated it. ⁶⁰

Sandra Djaw suggests that Mrs. Laurence has omitted from these lines the phrase; "I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies",⁶¹ because it is too obvious a comment on Nick's relations with Rachel. But I rather think she has omitted it because it does not apply. Nick delivers himself into the hands of his enemies, and has the potential to do the same for Rachel, but the fact remains that he does not. Nick's twisted rendering of a psalm of captivity "Bloody hell. My right hand seems to have forgotten its cunning"⁶² (The original begins, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem",⁶³ not bloody hell.) tends to confirm the hypothesis that Laurence's concern in employing this biblical imagery lies in consigning Nick to an existence void of birthright and life, not in demonstrating any spiritual contamination Rachel may have contracted from him.

The clues Laurence gives to Nick's personality through biblical allusions and brief moments when his cavalier mask slips sufficiently to permit a peek at his emotions undisguised do much to soften our overall impression of his character. Our picture of him grows much

as Rachel's does, with the gradual accumulation of images, and, in the end, we are able to know that even his method of breaking loose from involvement with Rachel -- misleading her to believe an old photo of himself was a snapshot of his son -- is not the stereotyped deed of a clichéed cad, but rather the gesture of a confused child:

He had his own demons and webs. Mine brushed
across him for an instant, and he saw them and
had to draw away, knowing that what I wanted
from him was too much.⁶⁴

The quality which in the end sets these two grown children apart is their potential for growth. Nick, with his polio-twisted spine is pictured, in direct opposition to life's sustaining force, change. The chorus he hears when seeking the Podiuks (friends of the Kazlick family from the trying voyage of immigration), "dead, dead, dead,"⁶⁵ is a most suitable comment on the life of a boy whose only reaction to death is personal relief that he will escape meeting strangers. Nick, as we see from his conversations with Rachel, dwells almost wholly on the past and never, for even an instant, considers the process of change in himself. Neither for his parents, nor for Rachel, will he consider the slightest personal adaptation: "Nick couldn't make himself care about something, if he didn't. Nor about someone, either."⁶⁶ Like Calla's unmusical, anti-social canary who is given the name of Nick's biblical

archetype, Jacob, Nick appears in A Jest of God to be a "dead loss."⁶⁷

Rachel, in comparison to Nick, is, as May Cameron needlingly describes her, "a Cinderella."⁶⁸ Some undefined quality in her makes Rachel a survivor, and to survive Rachel, like all living things, must change. Nick, another child living in another kind of fantasy life, appears to be a safe change whom Rachel can adapt herself to with little anxiety. Ironically Rachel's new life with Nick turns into Rachel's closest contact with death (almost as quickly as the romantic prince of her pre-Nick dream changed into the underworld king) and drives her to seek out her father and an understanding of death.

Emphasizing Rachel's child-like state prior to this next evolutionary step, Mrs. Laurence couches Rachel's first real descent to her father's realm in the horror picture images of her earlier dream visitation:

The door into the Funeral Chapel is...fitted with wrought iron staves and loops and swirls, so it looks like the door of a keep or a castle prison, but false, a mock-up. Ye Olde Dungeon, as in a Disney film, where even the children know that the inmates are cartoons. And yet I hesitate to knock. ⁶⁹

The passing of Rachel through these cartoon-like doors which symbolize the limit of Rachel's extended childhood, brings Rachel a giant step forward in her unravelling of Manawakan, and consequently her own, existence. The odd and

animated little being Rachel discovers inhabiting her father's place, is an exceedingly wise child who knows life, and particularly that aspect of it which is his living, death, very well. In symbolic terms he is precisely the reality Rachel needs to find at the heart of the Manawakan mysteries of appearance. Heroically Hector Jonas (the name Hector suggests he is a hero) is capable of stripping the mask from Manawaka's grandest bogey-man, Death, with a practical explanation of the funeral business. We see him pronounce prophetically (the similarity of Jonas to Jonah who is named in A Jest of God's epigraph suggests Hector too has a prophetic inclination) a truth which lays bare the countenance of Manawakan society: "Presentation is All."⁷⁰ More significantly, in a prophetic line he can unveil with his own person the fact of life throbbing beneath the veneer of presentation. In a reversal of Rachel's and our own expectations of Undertaker behaviour, this dwarf communicates, "in his best coffin-side manner,"⁷¹ all the warmth, contradictions and heroism of survival. Through him the nightmarish ghouls of Rachel's fantasies concerning life and death are exorcised. Behind the "green slanted cat's eyes of marble"⁷² which link Hector with Rachel's earlier dream of Niall Cameron's underworld, Rachel sees that Hector, far from being another prop for the old horror movies which ran in her childhood imagination, is living and even lovable.

The beliefs Rachel held, and the ghosts which held her in thrall, are stood upon their heads by the encounter with Jonas. Laurence uses the imagery of the remodelled funeral home to externalize Rachel's confused assimilation of reality. Gone are all the symbols of deterioration. Bright light and surgical cleanliness usurp the places of the darkness, dust, and mysterious bottled potions which shrouded Rachel's memories of Niall Cameron's trade. In the funeral chapel itself, which Rachel expects to be a harbour for stagnation and decay, Rachel is overwhelmed to find life and its essential process, change:

The blue light, and the chapel purged of all spirit, all spirits except the rye, and the sombre flashiness, and the plump well meaning arm across my shoulders, and the changes in every place that go on without our knowing, and the fact that there is nothing here for me except what is here now --⁷³

Changed by this strange, midnight interlude are the very touchstones of Rachel Cameron's existence. Changed is the context of the key relationship tying the adult Rachel to her girlhood. Rachel's false image of her father as a totally unhappy man, somehow trapped against his will in his profession and in his marriage, is smashed by Hector. The truth is revealed by the "comic prophet, dwarf seer,"⁷⁴ that Niall chose: "The life he wanted most. If he had wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise."⁷⁵ This is the truth which sets Rachel free: The knowledge that she has within her the power to exercise choice and

alter her own destiny. Never having witnessed the exercise of choice by her parents, Rachel herself had not previously considered it a possibility, but, having commenced the purgation of the childhood demons in her mind (just as the old symbols and images are expelled from the funeral home's blue depths) a transfigured Rachel begins to materialize. We watch Rachel "pull herself together, gather the fragments,"⁷⁶ and ascend from death to the normal sphere of living, no longer a fearful, apologetic child, but now a mother figure, responsible for herself. To emphasize Rachel's transformation Laurence compares the thoughts of the woman ascending, with those of the girl who descended the rose staircase in darkness, petrified of waking her mother with the light:

The carpeted stairs have to be climbed one at a time, only one. If she wakes, all I have to say is hush. Hush, now, sh, it's alright, go to sleep now never fear it's nothing.⁷⁷

The symbolism of Rachel's midnight tête à tête with Hector Jonas deals primarily with life's basic dualistic formula: new life emerging from death. Rachel is after all (in symbolic terms) seeking death in her search for Niall Cameron, but in his stead finds healing and new life embodied in the animated, child-sized figure of Hector Jonas. Having then been swallowed up by death and spit out (cum the biblical Jonah), renewed and ready to cope with her

responsibilities, the next logical step which Mrs. Laurence has her heroine ascend is a return engagement with Calla Mackie.

Expressed in a Jungian term, which I believe is applicable here, Calla can be viewed as "the shadow" of Rachel Cameron. Jung used the term shadow to describe "those aspects of the personality which for various reasons one has preferred not to look at too closely."⁷⁸ It is certain, judging by Rachel's remarks, that at least in terms of being studiously avoided, Calla could be a personification of Rachel's shadow. In Rachel's very first notice of Calla this is borne out: "I shouldn't try to avoid her eyes".⁷⁹ And, in a series of similar expressions (eg. "Some portion of myself wants to avoid Calla for evermore."⁸⁰) following the devastating disintegration of Rachel's propriety at the Tabernacle, we find Rachel's fear of Calla irrefutably confirmed.

As Rachel's shadow Calla represents the spontaneous and natural participation in life repressed in Rachel because of the disdainful regard such behaviour drew from the self-esteemed pillars of Manawakan mores. Rachel, aware of her own rapidly growing symptoms of eccentricity, seems to fear that contact with Calla's extreme behaviour may in some way prove to be a catalyst for such idiosyncracies as her tendency to feel motherly affection for the

children she instructs. The hysterical outburst by Rachel among the risen and reborn, and the revelation following it of Calla's lesbian oriented love, are therefore all the proofs needed to cement Rachel's apprehension that sustained contact with Calla could only end in Rachel's becoming a socially unacceptable clown.

Running as an ironic current countering Rachel's naive perception of Calla as an energetic buffoon, is the very positive and natural imagery Laurence associates with Calla. The name Calla itself is no doubt intended to conjure a picture of the white Easter lily, and its symbolic tie with resurrection and new life. Physically Calla, who is perpetually clothed (beneath bright colourful frocks) in nature's brown and green, is a study in wholesome solidarity: "Calla is stockily built, not fat at all but solid and broad."⁸¹ She is constructed like the Slavs, square and strong, and we are led to suspect she has in common with them the ability to understand growth, not the worthless pride associated with the Scots:

The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God. ⁸²

Even the gifts which Rachel condescends to accept from Calla are pregnant with the force of new life and they indicate the healing effect Calla could have upon her. The fact that one gift is "a necklace of polished peach stones"⁸³

and the other "a hyacinth, bulbously in bud and just about to give birth to the blue-purple blossom,"⁸⁴ could as well be illustrative of Calla's role in Rachel's gradual maturation.

Mrs. Laurence makes use of Rachel herself to create an ironic portrait of Calla. While describing Calla the fool, Rachel inadvertently manages to employ a common figure of wisdom:

Calla is standing in the doorway looking like a wind-dishevelled owl, a great horned owl, her fringed hair like grey brown feathers every which way, her eyes ringed with the round brown frames of her glasses....⁸⁵

The final clue that Calla is emblematic of the maturity Rachel is in the process of attaining is Calla's unaffected habit of addressing Rachel as "child". This habit, along with various images of Calla shepherding flocks of youngsters, worshipping spontaneously and loving altruistically, establishes Calla as the kind of responsible, free, mother figure which Rachel might become.

Set in an atmosphere of deep mauve-blue paint (still wet), Rachel's return to Calla's apartment shares something of the dream quality of the blue lit Japonica chapel. However, where the imagery of Jonas' chapel is directed toward healing and birth, the imagery of Calla's home centers on the colour and confusion of active life:

Everything in her living-room seems to be piled in the middle of the room. The turquoise chesterfield; the glass-topped coffee table; a confusion of books and letters; two unthriving, rotted pink

geraniums; pictures done by her class last year
 on huge sheets of newsprint with poster paints
 -- clumsily intricate castles and ocean liners;
 a brown pottery bowl of coffee sugar with a
 brass spoon bearing a gargoyle's leering face
 and the words The Imp of Lincoln Cathedral;....⁸⁶

The comprehension or realization, to borrow Jung's term for the encountering of the personified shadow in dreams, of Calla's free and humble celebration of life is part of Rachel's transition from child to adult. That the significance of the words Calla garners from St. Paul to shield herself from conventional Manawakan wisdom ("If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.")⁸⁷ escapes Rachel during this re-examination of Calla shows that she is still a Manawakan child, but the will-power Rachel demonstrates in overcoming her urge to fly from Calla's madness (on page 132 Rachel notes she is perched and ready for instant take off) proves that even during the span of their brief communication the skin of Rachel's long childhood is being shed.

The last stage of Rachel's symbolic metamorphosis from child to mother relates mainly to what Dennis Duffy sarcastically refers to as "the real thumper"⁸⁸ among the symbols of A Jest of God. Duffy is referring in his criticism to that part of the novel "where Rachel turns out not pregnant but suffering from a cervical tumour. (Death instead of life, get it?)"⁸⁹ "Though one tends to agree that

this symbolic twist is more than a trifle obvious, it can be said in Mrs. Laurence's behalf that the groundwork for this turn of events is well prepared.

From a strictly realistic view the tumour should come as no surprise, being foreshadowed by a neurotic Rachel as early as page 18:

...This pain is not so much pain as a pulsing, regular and rhythmical, like the low thudding of a drum. It's nothing. How could it be a tumour? It's nothing....⁹⁰

From the point of view of symbolic consistency a tumour is a much more credible alternative than a live child fathered by Nick. The funereal atmosphere surrounding Nick and Rachel, and Rachel's tendency to fantasize all aspects of that relation in an attempt to live vicariously through Nick, in lieu of pursuing a real life of her own making, renders it a symbolic impossibility for Rachel to bear Nick a child. The surgical removal of a tumour on the other hand, coincides nicely with numerous images of Rachel's need to cut herself free from the excess baggage, the dead weights, which separated her from reality. Rachel's fantasies regarding both her father and Nick Kazlick are terminated with a surgical metaphor. The misconceptions she held regarding her father are cut away on the operating table of Hector Jonas and the dream world created around Nick Kazlick is shown to be cut away by reality's stark edge:

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, 91

It is the abrupt severance of the false hopes Rachel manufactures about Nick which in effect brings Rachel to maturity in A Jest of God. Confronted with the certain knowledge that Nick will not hand her a romantic new life, and having been awakened to the emptiness of her former condition by contact with Nick (contact which takes the symbolic shape of her apparent pregnancy), Rachel has in fact but two choices: death, or a new life of self-responsibility. Suicide (the ultimate artificially induced sleep), pointedly made available in the form of May Cameron's barbituates, seems by Rachel's Manawakan code of values to be an easy escape from the pointing finger of public humiliation which would find Rachel out as an unwed mother. But, as the drunken (unconscious?) action by Rachel of throwing May's sleeping pills out the window indicates, there is a quality deep in Rachel (perhaps related to Scottish thrift) which cannot tolerate the waste of good life any more than Niall Cameron could stand the waste of good whiskey.

By rejecting death as an option Rachel is left with the difficult task of coping with life for the first time, Simply in making that disturbing choice Rachel acquires,

also for the first time, determination and a mature understanding of herself. The prayer which accompanies that decision reveals a new found depth of character:

Help -- if You will -- me. Whoever that may be.
And whoever You are, or where. I am not clever.
I am not as clever as I hiddenly thought I was.
And I am not as stupid as I dreaded I might be.
Were my apologies all a kind of monstrous self-pity?...

I don't know what I've done. I've been demented, probably. I know what I am going to do though.
Look -- it's my child, mine. And I will have it.
I will have it because I want it and because I cannot do anything else. 92

At this stage where life is chosen we witness Rachel's evolution from dependence to responsibility, from child to adult. This is the choice that opens Rachel's eyes to the needless torment she inflicted upon herself for pride's sake. This is the choice which allows her to follow St. Paul's (and Calla's) paradoxical dictum of becoming a fool to gain wisdom. In Rachel's reaction to Dr. Raven's diagnosis of a tumour rather than pregnancy (which is certainly the grand jest perpetrated on Rachel in A Jest of God, this new found wisdom is specifically underlined for us:

All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque light-headedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one. 93

The result of Rachel's new found wisdom as Calla Mackie expresses it, is that she is "Home-free".⁹⁴ She is released. Just as the tight threads of Hagar Shipley's

cocoon loosened when time had taught her the absurdity of the Currie aloofness, Rachel Cameron is freed from the bonds of her home, freed to make the symbolic gesture of leaving Manawaka, and to face the people, the responsibilities and the changes of life (death included), because she releases herself from the foolish slavery of pretending to be super-human.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹
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²
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³
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⁷
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⁸
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⁹
Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, in Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (London: Chatto and Windus, 1942), 46.

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¹¹
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- 39
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- 41
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- 51 Ibid., 85.
- 52 Ibid., 48.
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- ⁵⁸ Laurence, The Stone Angel, 174.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 179.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 304.
- ⁶¹ F. Pesando, "In a Nameless Land", 54.
- ⁶² Laurence, The Stone Angel, 224.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 234.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 235.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 205.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 79.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 139.
- ⁶⁸ Coleridge, The Rime of The Ancient Mariner, IV,
232-9.
- ⁶⁹ Laurence, The Stone Angel, 186.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 218.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 120.
- ⁷² Ibid., 233.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 234.

⁷⁴ Laurence, The Stone Angel, 119.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 291-292.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 307.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 307.

⁸⁰ Revelation 22:17.

Chapter II

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⁴ Laurence, The Stone Angel, 4.

⁵ Ibid.

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