

MARGARET LAURENCE'S MANAWAKA NOVELS

AND

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

TIME AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE
IN
MARGARET LAURENCE'S MANAWAKA NOVELS
AND
A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

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ABSTRACT

The relation between time and narrative technique in The Stone Angel, A Bird in the House and The Diviners is the relation between content and form. Margaret Laurence states in her lecture "Gadgetry or Growing? ... Form and Voice in the Novel", that she has no interest in form for its own sake:

I am not concerned at all about trying forms and means of expression which are new simply for their own sake or for the sake of doing something different...I am concerned mainly, I think, with finding a form which will enable a novel to reveal itself...

(The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, p.129)

The form of each of the three works that I have named is based on various uses of a flashback technique, and the form points to one of the most important themes in the works, which is that of the importance of an individual's past to the person^{she} he is in the present, and can become in the future. Laurence shows us over and over again that, as Morag, the most articulate of her narrators discovers, we have to go home again: "You Can't Go Home Again, said Thomas Wolfe. Morag wonders now if it may be the reverse which is true. You have to go home again, in some way or other." (The Diviners, p.248) The necessity of going home does not necessarily imply a physical journey to Manawaka, which is home for the narrators of the five

works that I discuss. The important journey is the imaginative journey through time to a past that must be relived and revalued until the traveller is content that he stands in a proper relation to ^{the} his past. In my analysis of the relation of time to narrative technique, I attempt to demonstrate the importance of the novel's means of expression to what it expresses.

I have included A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers because I see a similar treatment of time in them, even though the techniques of narration that Laurence uses in these two novels do not lend themselves to the same kind of discussion as do The Stone Angel, A Bird in the House and The Diviners. The five works, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers, A Bird in the House and The Diviners, invite discussion as a group because they all have as either an important setting or a point of reference, the fictional town of Manawaka. They are also linked by a similar treatment of the theme of time.

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INTRODUCTION

It first occurred to me to study the relation between the thematic treatment of time and the technical handling of narrative levels in Margaret Laurence's work after I read The Diviners. The form of the novel is that of flashbacks from the novel's present to the past - to Morag's personal past, to her ancestral past, to the past as imaged in Skinner Tonnerre's tales of his Metis heritage, to the past as Morag, Skinner and Pique recreate it in their art. The form of the novel alone points to its most important thematic concern, which is with the way in which Morag most importantly, but others as well, relate to their personal and ancestral pasts, and what this implies about their futures.

Further investigation revealed that, in The Stone Angel and A Bird in the House, the thematic treatment of time and the technical handling of narrative levels are similarly linked. I include A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers in my thesis because the thematic concerns of these two novels make their study a valuable extension of the study of the other two Manawaka novels and A Bird in the House.

A similar dynamic seems to be operation in each of the four Manawaka novels. In each of them, the narrator experiences some dissatisfaction with her present self, and searches for the key to this feeling in her past. With A Bird in the House, the process is slightly different, for Vanessa has already come to terms with her past when we first meet her. In the eight stories which make up the collection A Bird in the House, Vanessa shows us how she has arrived at this position.

For Vanessa, as for the narrators of the Manawaka novels, one's past implies limitation of one's human possibilities. At some point in their lives, each of the five women whom we meet in the Manawaka novels and A Bird in the House attempts to reject her past. Hagar flouts her father and the whole town by marrying Bram Shipley; Rachel chooses to ignore her father's profession because it embarrasses her; Stacey goes to Vancouver when she is nineteen, certain that she has "shaken the dust of Manawaka off herself at last." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.8) Vanessa struggles to be free of her grandfather, and Morag's greatest desire as a young girl is to leave Manawaka. But there seems to be at work an equal and

opposite force which draws each of them back to what she has rejected. To the extent that this force is ignored or suppressed, it gains a power over the individual which amounts to an obsession. It is only when each of them recognizes her inner need for return and reconciliation that growth towards a freer self begins. As long as any of Laurence's characters, the major figures and the minor ones as well, seeks to forget her past, there is a compulsive quality to her life and she is driven by forces she does not recognize, much less understand.

Almost all of Hagar Shipley's actions, for example, are compelled rather than free, as she finally comes to understand. Like the tormented mariner to whom she jokingly compares herself when she asks "What albatross did I slay, for mercy's sake?" (The Stone Angel, p.186), Hagar is compelled to tell her story. The mariner's description of his need to tell his story could apply equally well to Hagar:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghostly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", 1.582-585)

The moment when Hagar recognizes that Marvin is a Jacob, and, more importantly, that she is the stone angel, is an example of the kind of moment of insight that sets one free. At that moment, Hagar sees herself as she has been "from the beginning" (The Stone Angel, p.304) and the insight into her own limitation is what, paradoxically, extends the limits to her freedom.

The same cycle of bondage, painful acceptance of one's limitations and newly enlarged freedom, occurs in all four novels and in A Bird in the House.

THE STONE ANGEL

The Stone Angel, published in 1964, is the first of four novels and a collection of short stories that have either as an important setting or as a point of reference, the fictional town of Manawaka. The actual events of the novel are narrated in the present tense and take place in the few weeks which precede Hagar Shipley's death at the age of ninety, but we see most of Hagar's life in flashbacks that are narrated in the past tense. Before I begin to deal directly with Laurence's treatment of time in the novel, I will make some prefatory comments about the kind of narrative we are dealing with.

In The Stone Angel, the author seems to be effaced, and we travel with Hagar in a view that in real life we can have only of ourselves. The major effect of this kind of narrative is that of increased sympathy with Hagar: we feel about her flaws, because of our inside view, much as we feel about our own - as reprehensible as they are, we tend to be tolerant of them. This effect is an important one in Hagar's case, for without the inside view that we have of Hagar, it is difficult to see how one could feel much sympathy with her at all, because of the harshness that she metes out to others. One of Hagar's distinguishing

features as a character is that there almost always exists a discrepancy between her inner self and her outer self, between what she feels and what she says. If we were aware, like those around Hagar, only of her outer self, we would soon cease to care enough about her welfare to finish reading the novel. As Hagar herself points out, "Things never look the same from the outside as they do from the inside." (The Stone Angel, p.249)

This discrepancy between the inner and the outer, the thought and its expression, is a part of Hagar from the time she is a child; usually, her inner thoughts are more charitable than her expression of them. One example of this is Hagar's refusal to comfort Dan by playing the role of her mother for him when he is dying; her refusal would seem to us more unforgivable than it does, if we did not know the torment that accompanied the refusal:

To play at being her - it was beyond me.
 "I can't, Matt." I was crying, shaken by torments he never even suspected, wanting above all else to do the thing he asked, but unable to do it, unable to bend enough.

"All right," he said. "Don't then."
 (The Stone Angel, p.25)

The same split between her thoughts and her words tends to call forth our pity instead of our condemnation when Hagar responds brusquely to Bram's plea, on the night following their quarrel about how they should spend the extra money brought in by a bumper crop:

Wrangle, wrangle. It ended that night with Bram lying heavy and hard on top of me, and stroking my forehead with his hand while his manhood moved in me, and saying in the low voice he used only at such times, "Hagar, please -" I wanted to say "There, there, it's all right", but I did not say that. My mouth said, "What is it?" But he did not answer.

(The Stone Angel, p.85)

At the beginning of the novel when we first meet Hagar at age ninety, the schism within her is profound. The split between her thoughts and her words is so great that she frequently hears her own voice as the voice of another person:

Erlöse mich von meinen Schmerzen -
Bram!

One voice has almost screeched. Some time elapses before I realize the voice was mine.

(The Stone Angel, p.275)

Or she feels that she has no control over what she says:

"Leave me alone, for all I care. A fat lot you'd mind."

Oh, but that was not what I meant to say at all. How is it my mouth speaks by itself, the words flowing from somewhere, some half-hidden hurt?

(The Stone Angel, p.68)

Because of her age, Hagar is alienated from her body as well:

Yet now I feel that if I were to walk carefully up to my room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise, I would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt off to the training ring, the young ladies' academy in Toronto.

(The Stone Angel, p.42)

Yet I glance down at myself... and see with surprise and unfamiliarity the great swathed hips. My waist was twenty inches when I wed.

(The Stone Angel, p.56)

Hagar feels estranged from her feeble and aging body: it seems a betrayal of the true self that she feels herself to be, a self that is full of vitality. And since we travel with Hagar in an inside view, we experience her body as she does - we feel that the true Hagar is cruelly trapped in an alien body. There is so much vitality in the past selves that Hagar recalls that we can readily comprehend her estrangement from her present frail self.

Ultimately, the gap between Hagar's inner and outer selves, at least on a spiritual level, is healed when her inner, more compassionate self finds expression in her blessing of Marvin. But the gap between what Hagar feels is her true physical self, and the ninety year old body in which she is trapped, is not healed. Ironically, when Hagar has reached a high point in her spiritual life, as evidenced by what she calls her two free acts, her body betrays her with the final betrayal of death. Just as she futilely asserts her physical vitality by grabbing the glass from the nurse's hands, Hagar dies. Objective time triumphs over Hagar's subjective world.

Hagar's inability to remember the recent past, while she clearly recalls the remote past, is yet another reflection of her alienation from herself. The form

of the novel, which is that of repeated flashbacks, reflects Hagar's refusal to recognize her ninety year old self as her true self. Her past seems more real to her than the present, which is like a bad dream.

Many of Hagar's symptoms - her profound alienation from herself, her inability to recall the recent past while she lives vividly in the remote past, her hallucinations - are usually associated with old age. But they also point, in Hagar's case, to her very great dissatisfaction with the way her life has been, her sense of guilt about the pain she has caused other people, her need to understand and come to terms with herself. She cannot be free from her past until she stops deluding herself about it; as long as she refuses to see the truth, she will be "rampant with memory" (The Stone Angel, p.5), possessed by her past.

Guilt seems to be the most important motivating factor in the two incidents in which Hagar super-imposes the past upon the present to the extent that she confuses a living person for one of her dead men. At Silverthreads nursing home, she sees a man with a beard and a build like Bram's, and suddenly thinks that it is Bram, and expects the man to call her by name, as only her husband ever did. There is also the incident at Shadow Point when Hagar mistakes Murray Lees for John; she has just,

without being aware of doing so, told Lees the incidents leading up to and including John's and Arlene's deaths. Hagar's meddling in her son's affairs by conspiring with Lottie to send Arlene away, and more immediately, her telling John not to bring Arlene home in their last two weeks before she leaves to go East, are the causes of the deaths. John had been an alcoholic before he loved Arlene, and his relationship with her had put an end to his drinking, as he tries to explain to Hagar when she is attempting to convince him that Arlene's going is for his own good:

"I want your happiness," I said. "You'll never know how much. I don't want you to make a mistake, take on responsibilities beyond your means. I know where it leads. You think I don't, but I do. John, please try to understand."

He lost his anger, too, then, and his gray eyes grew baffled as he looked into mine.

"But that's crazy," he said. "You've got it all wrong. I was - well, I was just about okay, after a long time - didn't you know?"

(The Stone Angel, p.237)

On the night of his death, John is drunk for the first time in several months, and he takes the bet with Lazarus Tonnere that he can drive his truck across the trestle bridge. It is Hagar's order to John not to bring Arlene home that is the reason they are out driving around that night in the first place, and it is this error on Hagar's part that she seeks to correct when she mistakes Lees for John. Despite her claim that no-one can be blamed for the accident on the bridge,

Hagar does feel responsible for the accident. When she is speaking to Lees, whom she mistakes for John, she thinks of her smile as "a serpent's grin." (The Stone Angel, p.247) : she feels like the archetypal betrayer of men, Satan. In the moment of self-recognition precipitated by Mr. Troy's singing, Hagar consciously faces the possibility that she caused not only John's death, but Bram's too: "...I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years." (The Stone Angel, p.292) It is the sense of guilt that only reaches the level of conscious awareness at this moment that motivates Hagar in the Shadow Point incident. Thus, in her delirium, Hagar returns to a time prior to the accident on the bridge, and encourages John to bring Arlene home. From where we stand, Hagar's hopeful assertion, "If there's a time to speak, it's surely now." (The Stone Angel, p.247), seems cruelly ironic. There is not really a time to speak - that time is past, although Lees gives Hagar a temporary release from her guilt by playing John's part in a way that soothes her conscience. Hagar remains haunted by guilt, as her restless nights in the hospital, when she calls out the names of Bram and John, reveal.

Hagar does not so much recall her past, as the past recalls her, demands her attention whether or not she wants to give it. She does not want to go over the past: "Oh, my lost men. No, I will not think of that." (The Stone Angel, p.6) She denies vehemently the claim that old people live in the past: "Some people will tell you that the old live in the past - that's nonsense." (The Stone Angel, p.5) But just as she often cannot control what she says, or stop her unbidden tears, and is incontinent at night, Hagar cannot choose not to remember. The past, then, is a controlling factor in Hagar's life.

The stone angel that is the novel's central symbol is both the statue that presides over Manawaka cemetery, and Hagar herself: it is, among other things, a symbol of the deterministic factors in Hagar's past. At the climax of the novel comes Hagar's recognition that it is Marvin, not John, who is like Jacob; the corollary to that recognition is that it is Hagar who is the angel. "And I see that I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him." (The Stone Angel, p.304) The "beginning" to which Hagar refers must be her birth: "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..." (The Stone Angel, p.3)

It seems that Hagar's being, in some sense, a stone angel, must hinge upon the fact that Hagar's mother died giving birth to Hagar, a fact of which Hagar is intensely aware. She feels that her mother "saved her death for me [Hagar]." (The Stone Angel, p.59), and imagines that her father did not hold the death of her mother against Hagar because it was "a fair exchange, her life for mine." (The Stone Angel, p.59) Knowing the circumstances of Hagar's birth, and given the fact that she begins her story with the image of the stone angel, Hagar's protests that she is totally unlike her mother seem a little suspect. Hagar seems to feel the need to create as great a distance as possible between herself and her dead mother; the most striking instance of this is her refusal to play the part of her mother to comfort her dying brother. In her attempt to assert her freedom from her mother's influence, Hagar labours to be the exact opposite of what she conceives her mother to have been like. But surely this kind of rebellion is above all an implicit admission of the power of what one is rebelling against. At the moment when Hagar believes herself to be the most free, she is

the most compelled. The way to freedom, Laurence implies, is to accept the deterministic influences from one's past; to deny them is to ensure their continued power to control one's actions.

Throughout the novel, we are given innumerable hints that Hagar is a stone angel. Immediately after recalling her proud coldness when Bram makes love to her, Hagar returns to her present ninety year old self, and thinks of herself in bed:

My bed is cold as winter, and now it seems to me that I am lying as the children used to do, on fields of snow, and they would spread their arms and sweep them down to their sides, and when they rose, there would be the outline of an angel with spread wings. The icy whiteness covers me, drifts over me, and I could drift to sleep in it, like someone caught in a blizzard, and freeze.

(The Stone Angel, p.81)

Another time, Hagar images herself as an angel in a more comic way.

She sounds alarmed. Idiot - what does she think I've done, flown away? A verse the children used to chant to the tune of "The Prisoner's Song" -

If I had the wings of an angel,
Or even the wings of a crow,
I would fly to the top of T. Eaton's
And spit on the people below.

(The Stone Angel, p.106)

John calls Hagar, "angel" (The Stone Angel, p.172), just before the incident in which he and Hagar visit Manawaka cemetery, and find the stone angel toppled over and defaced with lipstick. Despite John's denial that

he knows who is responsible for pushing over the angel and marking her face with lipstick, it is quite clearly he who has done both deeds. There is also Hagar's admission that the night John died, she was turned to stone: "The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all." (The Stone Angel, p.243) Like the angel, Hagar has eyes, but cannot see, as she herself admits when she is watching her husband die: "I could not speak for the salt that filled my throat, and for anger - not at anyone, at God, perhaps, for giving us eyes but almost never sight." (The Stone Angel, p.173) The blind angel of stone seems an apt symbol for Hagar, who also is often blind to her own feelings and to those of others. Hagar is emotionally and spiritually as unfeeling and as dead as stone, and her spiritual sterility and blindness is somehow related to her guilt about having killed her mother by being born. Her attempts to assert that she is completely unlike her mother serve to underline Hagar's fears that she may after all be just like her mother - or just like the only image Hagar has of her mother, the stone angel. It is only when she blesses Marvin, and releases him, that she, Hagar is released: she is set free by her recognition of herself as an angel. Her acceptance of herself as angel, which is her acceptance of the influences from her past,

immediately has the effect of freeing her from that very role: she breaks her old pattern of proud and sterile behavior by blessing Marvin.

Hagar herself tells us that the effect of her bondage has been that she could not allow others to be free: "I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine?" (The Stone Angel, p.292) Hagar had chosen to believe that Marvin was a Shipley, and John a Currie. It is to John, her second son, that she gives the Currie plaid pin, which he trades with Lazarus Tonnere for a jackknife. She thinks of John as the kind of boy that Jason Currie had always wanted: "But Jason Currie never saw my second son or knew at all that the sort of boy he wanted had waited a generation to appear." (The Stone Angel, p.64) John himself protests that he is "a Shitley" (The Stone Angel, p.174); Arlene tells Hagar that she does not know her son, and she is quite correct. John is a Shipley, and Hagar's attempt to fit him into the Currie mould destroys him. Her machinations, which result in plans to send Arlene East, represent her deluded effort to impose on John the respectable lifestyle that she wants him to have, but which he does not

value. This leads fairly directly to the deaths of John and Arlene. In fact it is Marvin who is a Currie, and the kind of son Jason Currie would have wanted. He is hard working, a self-made man in the Currie tradition. Hagar refuses to see her sons as they are. The effect of her blindness was to destroy John and to hurt Marvin; as a boy, Marvin was always working hard and receiving no thanks or praise for it. Even the elderly Marvin whom we see in the present time of the novel still seeks the recognition that he has never received from his mother. By giving Marvin the blessing he seeks, Hagar frees him from the unfulfilled need that ties him to her, at the same time as she frees herself from her role as stone angel.

Hagar's relationship with her father seems less difficult to analyse, perhaps because she either accepts his influence or consciously rejects it, rather than trying to deny that it exists at all as a determining factor in her life, as she does with her mother's influence on her. Pride is one of Hagar's distinguishing characteristics, as she tells us frequently. It is a trait that she has inherited from her father, who bought the stone angel "in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty..." (The Stone Angel, p.3). Jason Currie's pride keeps him from marrying Auntie Doll because she

is only his housekeeper, and Hagar, like her father, sees herself as essentially apart from the likes of Auntie Doll, even when she herself keeps house for Mr. Oatley. It is Hagar's pride that prevents her from responding to Bram's love-making: she prefers to keep her "pride intact, like some maidenhead." (The Stone Angel, p.80) She thinks of herself in this way, in the present time of the novel: "Proud as Napoleon or Lucifer, I stand and survey the wasteland I've conquered." (The Stone Angel, p.191)

When the young Hagar marries Brampton Shipley, she believes that she is asserting her freedom from the values of her father, and people like Lottie Dreiser, to whom Bram is "common as dirt" (The Stone Angel, p.48). But it is an empty assertion since, as with her rebellion against her mother, she merely acts out the inverse of the image that she thinks she is rejecting. She is still motivated by pride, for she thinks that she will change Bram and show people up after all, and when she finally sees how utterly she has failed, she deserts her husband. It is only when Hagar hears Mr. Troy's song that she sees how false a value pride is, and how it has drained all the joy from her life.

The epigraph to the novel, which is taken from the Dylan Thomas poem, "Do not go gentle into that good

night", serves partly to focus our attention on a more positive aspect of Hagar's rebellion. If one asks whose voice the words of the epigraph may be thought of as representing, Hagar comes to mind immediately. One thinks of her rage for life, both for her own and that of others. For example, Hagar is more distressed by the manner of her brother Matt's death than she is by the death itself:

"He went quietly," she said, "He didn't fight his death, as some do. They only make it harder for themselves. Matt seemed to know there was no help for it, Mavis said. He didn't struggle to breathe, or try to hang on. He let himself slip away."

I found this harder to bear than his death, even. Why hadn't he writhed, cursed, at least grappled with the thing?

(The Stone Angel, p.60)

The attitude expressed in the words of the epigraph also seems to coincide with Laurence's values: Hagar's vitality, both for Laurence and for the reader, is one of her redeeming features. In the context of the poem, the words of the epigraph are addressed by a son to his dying father; the words both proclaim death's final dominion, and, paradoxically, point to the only way in which a man can undermine death's absolute sway, which is to refuse and fight it at the same time as one recognizes the utter futility of the fight. This is the attitude that Hagar advocates and that is embodied in her last moments of life. She is suffering intense

physical pain and is confused, mistaking the nurse for Doris. Yet despite the fact that she is sinking rapidly, Hagar snatches the glass of water that the nurse offers to hold for her, even as she admits to herself the futility of such a gesture. Then she dies. Her gesture of snatching the glass is a futile denial of the physical feebleness that is death's harbinger, but the very futility of the denial is what underlines its value as a gesture of rebellion.

A final issue that demands attention involves the Biblical allusions in the novel. Hagar's name, and her referring to herself as "the Egyptian" (The Stone Angel, p.40), invite us to place the modern day Hagar beside the Biblical figure of the same name. The Genesis story of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah seems to be the one to which The Stone Angel points, because of the importance of the hope of establishing a dynasty in both the Biblical story and Laurence's novel. Bram's name is like Abraham's before God tells him to change it from the original, Abram. Bram, like Abram, wants to establish a dynasty, and has not had any sons by his first wife, Clara, who corresponds to Abram's first wife, Sarai, later Sara. Abram goes to Hagar the Egyptian maid, and Bram goes to Hagar Shipley, to bear him a son. At this point, the parallel between the modern

and the Biblical story begins to break down. The Old Testament Hagar bears Abraham one son, Ishmael, while Hagar of Manawaka bears Bram two sons, though only one, Marvin, lives long enough to have children and establish the Shipley dynasty, if not in the manner Bram would have wanted. Bram wanted a son who would take over the Shipley place, and it is John, not Marvin, who is doing this while he is alive. The real point of the Biblical parallels is to underline the seriousness of the idea of the dynasty for not only Brampton Shipley, but Jason Currie as well. Hagar understands her father's hopes of establishing "his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day." (The Stone Angel, p.3), but is surprised that her husband aspires to the same goal: "I saw then with amazement that he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had. In the moment when we might have touched our hands together, Bram and I, and wished each other well, the thought uppermost in my mind was the nerve of him." (The Stone Angel, p.101) The parallel between Abraham and Bram Shipley helps to ensure that the reader will not make the same mistake as Hagar, and see Bram's humble social status as a reason to laugh at his hope for a Shipley dynasty.

Another effect of the allusions to the Old Testament is to underline the difference between the

modern world of Hagar Shipley, and the kind of world in which Hagar, the Old Testament figure, operates. However harsh the God of the Old Testament, He provides a meaning and order for human existence. Hagar Shipley's God, by contrast, is a malignant jester who gives men eyes but rarely sight, and allows men insights when they are no longer relevant: "I've often wondered why one discovers so many things too late. The jokes of God." (The Stone Angel, p.60) The night into which Hagar refuses to go gentle is not just death, but the despair that a world presided over by such a God as Hagar's encourages. In such a world, Hagar's final gesture of snatching the glass of water from the hands of the nurse seems truly admirable.

A JEST OF GOD

The second of the Manawaka novels, A Jest of God, was published in 1966. The epigraph for the novel recalls the Biblical story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale and survived. This story of a sort of death followed by a rebirth is an image of Rachel's spiritual development through the summer depicted in the novel. It is true, as Rachel herself admits, that in some ways she will remain the same person she has always been, despite her gesture of leaving Manawaka to go to Vancouver. But Rachel has changed in many ways by the end of the novel, perhaps the most essential change being that she no longer minds being a fool: "What is so terrible about fools? I should be honored to be of the company." (A Jest of God, p.172) Previously, she had dreaded being one.

The Rachel we see as the novel begins is obsessed with a fear of looking foolish in the eyes of others, and the passage of time seems to her to make this more likely to happen. The older a person is, Rachel feels, the more unforgivable any ignorance is: "But what beats me is how the Venusians learn to do all these things for

themselves. They don't have their hair done. Who teaches them? I suppose they're young enough to ask around. At that age it's no shame not to know." (A Jest of God, p.17)

Rachel experiences her virginity as a form of shameful ignorance, for she feels that she is too old to still be a virgin:

It would have been better for me if I'd wanted to keep myself withheld, or else could have rid myself easily of that unwanted burden with the first boy who asked. The first boy who asked wasn't very insistent, though. I wish he had been. I wasn't more or less afraid then. Just the same. Only then I had more time.

(A Jest of God, p.81)

Rachel also suffers from a sense that knowledge often comes too late; she was never able to formulate the question that she feels she ought to have asked her father, until it was too late. The incident in which Rachel loses control of herself and strikes James Doherty elicits from her these pessimistic questions: "How can one retrieve anything at all? Is it always past the appointed hour?" (A Jest of God, p.51) What Rachel learns in the course of the novel is that although it is impossible to relive past experience, it is possible to re-evaluate it and thus to arrive at a more satisfactory relationship to it than one had at the time of the experience.

Closely related to Rachel's fear of what the passage of time will bring is her frequently expressed fear of the future. Rachel perceives the fear that is behind her mother's anxious query about whether her involvement with Nick is serious as, essentially, the fear of what the future will bring: "She's wondering - what will become of me? That's what everyone goes through life wondering, probably, the one absorbing anguish. What will become of me? Me." (A Jest of God, p.101) Rachel's supposed pregnancy forces her to take a stand about her future. When she believes that she is pregnant, she has to decide whether or not to bear the child. She feels torn between two courses of action, each of which seems impossible: "It can't be borne. I can't see anyway that it could be. It can't be ended, either. I don't know where to go." (A Jest of God, p.147) The significance, for Rachel, of a decision to bear the child and raise it would be that she had chosen to live out the dictates of her inner self; a decision not to bear the child would mean that she had chosen to conform to the expectations of people in Manawaka. Unable to decide upon a course of action,

Rachel seeks to avoid the responsibility of making a decision by a suicide attempt. But she stops before she consumes a fatal amount of barbiturates and alcohol, because of this thought: "They will all go on in some how, all of them, but I will be dead as stone and it will be too late then to change my mind." (A Jest of God, p.148)

It is only after she faces the possibility of her own death that she begins to live: she chooses to bear her child and, though she later wavers from this decision, she always returns to it. She is unable to entertain for long the notion of aborting her child:

No delicate probing would ever dislodge it.

Dislodge. It is lodged there now. Lodged, meaning it is living there. How incredible that seems. I've given it house-room. It's growing there, by itself. It's got everything it needs, for now. I wonder if it is a girl or a son.

(A Jest of God, p.151)

The very fact that Rachel discloses her pregnancy to Calla suggests that she no longer seriously considers abortion as a possible course of action and Rachel's reaction when Doctor Raven tells her that she has a tumor is one, not of relief, but of mourning. Clearly her decision to bear the child that she believes she is pregnant with marks the birth of Rachel's inner self,

child

a self that she has previously sought to repress. Although she suffers through a period of death-like stillness after her operation, when she wants nothing to happen and no decisions to have to be made, this period of time seems to function as an incubating period after which a new Rachel appears, one who is able to make decisions despite the unpredictability of the future. Rachel now sees her mother's fear of fate as "unnecessary" (A Jest of God, p.171).

The Rachel we see early in the novel has a terror of the night that like the future, implies what Rachel most fears - loss of control. At night, Rachel has nightmares and sexual fantasies that she regards as shameful. She images the night as a jet-black lake in which "A person could sink down and even disappear without a trace." (A Jest of God, p.56) or as "a gigantic Ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly, turning once for each hour, interminably slow" (A Jest of God, p.21) to which she is glued or wired. Both images indicate that Rachel feels powerless in relation to the night. At the end of the novel, we see Rachel flying through the night towards her new life in Vancouver. Now, however,

she is relatively unafraid:

We watched until the lights of the town could not be seen any longer. Now only the farm kitchens and the stars are out there to signpost the night. The bus flies along, smooth and confident as a great owl through the darkness, and all the passengers are quiet, some of them sleeping. Beside me sleeps my elderly child.

(A Jest of God, p.174)

Another way of measuring Rachel's spiritual development in the novel is to look at her changing relationship with her mother. At the beginning of the novel Rachel's way of experiencing the world is very much like that of a small child: she feels helpless, not in control of her environment, is full of imaginary terrors of people, even those she knows, like Willard, her principal. As a result, she invites and receives parental behaviour from people. She meekly accepts her mother's constant prying, and usually does her mother's bidding rather than assert herself. For example, she goes to church rather than upset her mother by not going, even though God is not alive for Rachel. When Rachel does defy her mother by going to the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn with Calla, she lies to her mother and tells her that she and Calla are going to a movie.

Rachel's involvement with Nick Kazlik, which

can develop only to the extent that she lives out the dictates of her inner self instead of living according to other people's ideas, seems gradually to free Rachel from her childish behaviour. As the relationship between Rachel and Nick progresses, Rachel becomes more and more like a protective parent towards her mother, and Mrs. Cameron becomes more and more childish, frightened and dependant. The first time that Rachel is leaving to go out with Nick, Mrs. Cameron tries to stop her by threatening to do the laundry by herself while Rachel is gone. This would place a dangerous strain on Mrs. Cameron's weak heart, as both Rachel and her mother know, despite the fact that Mrs. Cameron offers to do the laundry under the pretense of being helpful, with "the innocent guile I've [Rachel has] so often seen on the faces of my [her] children" (A Jest of God, p.63). Rachel at first rises to her mother's bait, and pleads with her to not do the laundry, but finally, she tells her mother to do as she likes. This is the first time that Rachel rebels against her mother's tyranny openly, instead of in the underhanded manner that she has formerly practised.

When Rachel descends to Hector Jonas's Funeral

Chapel in an attempt to learn something about her father, she is unable to find any clues about him in the modern rooms which have replaced her father's workshop. But Hector Jonas offers her this insight into her father: "He probably did less harm than your average guy, I know that. But I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most." (A Jest of God, p.109) When she goes back upstairs, Rachel no longer feels the need to invent lies about her excursion to the basement, as she had felt when she was going downstairs. Now she feels in control, able to give comfort to her mother: "The carpeted stairs have to be climbed one at a time, only one. If she wakens, all I have to say is hush. Hush, now, sh, it's all right, go to sleep now, never fear, it's nothing." (A Jest of God, p.113) Prior to her descent to Hector Jonas's Funeral Chapel, Rachel felt impelled to lie to her mother: "If she wakens, I'll say I forgot to lock the downstairs door." (A Jest of God, p.104)

Rachel's comment while under anaesthetic for the removal of her tumor seems a true assessment of the direction in which her relationship with her mother

has progressed: "I am the mother now." (A Jest of God, p.160) Mrs. Cameron has degenerated as Rachel has become more adult, more honest, less fearful, more self-assertive. She is no longer able to control Rachel by making her feel guilty and this loss of control on Mrs. Cameron's part has the effect of reducing her to a frightened child. Mrs. Cameron has always been dependant upon Rachel's weakness and fearfulness, but this only becomes evident as Rachel grows in strength. Although Rachel continues to assume responsibility for her mother, whom she calls her "elderly child" (A Jest of God, p.174), she is playing a role quite different from the one that has existed earlier in the novel, for now Rachel chooses to take care of her mother, instead of, through fear and passivity, inadvertently providing the crutch which supports her mother's lifestyle. At the same time as Rachel assumes a certain amount of responsibility for her mother, she rejects the burden of feeling that it is up to her to keep her mother alive.

Early in the novel, Rachel is, like so many of Laurence's characters, possessed by her past, because she has not yet been able to establish a satisfactory relationship with it. She feels guilty about her father

because she always saw him only in terms of what he was doing to her image, by being the town undertaker, rather than as a subjective being:

It never occurred to me to wonder about him, and whether he possibly felt at ease with them, the unspeaking ones, and out of place above in our house, things being what they were. I never had a chance to ask him. By the time I knew the question it was too late, and asking it would have cut into him too much.

(A Jest of God, p.18)

Rachel's guilty feelings about her father are finally expressed in her visit to Hector Jonas's Funeral Chapel, where Hector gives Rachel the key she needs to solve the problem of her guilt, by reminding Rachel that her father chose his own life. Rachel sees that what Hector says is true, that "If my father wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different." (A Jest of God, p.110) Rachel's exploration of her father's old workshop seems to her to compensate for her earlier failure to try to understand him.

Nick Kazlik is in a position very similar to Rachel's: he too is in the process of trying to come to terms with his parents, his childhood, and his home town of Manawaka. But this activity seems to be a compulsive rather than a freely chosen one, for Nick.

Nick frequently finds himself talking about his childhood, despite the fact that he has not intended to:

I got on this track the last time I saw you, too. I certainly didn't mean to. Hardly a soul I used to know is left here now - you know? They've moved, and different people have come, and - anyway, that's no excuse for shooting off my mouth to you.

(A Jest of God, p.79)

Rachel catches the note of compulsion in Nick's confession that he has betrayed his heritage:

When he speaks again, his voice is low and unemphatic, and with an edge of self-mockery, as though he is warning me not to respond too seriously, and yet he cannot help saying the words aloud.

"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."

(A Jest of God, p.97)

Like Morag Gunn, who also searches into the past in order to establish her proper relation to it, Nick has a photograph of himself, which Rachel mistakes for a photograph of a child of Nick's.

Nick's attempt to come to terms with his past fails. He leaves Manawaka hurriedly, though he had planned to stay a few weeks longer. In his haste, he fails even to say good-bye to Rachel. These are not the actions of a man who has attained peace of mind. Rachel herself begins to see that the way Nick has responded to her is inseparable

arable from his relationship with his parents, his childhood, all of his problems and obsessions: "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."

(A Jest of God, p.165) Nick fails to come to terms with his demons: he does not even arrive at an elementary understanding of his father, but rather distorts the truth about his father's senility in order to protect himself from feeling any more guilty about him than he already does:

He smiles at me, confidently. Nick said "He's not senile or anything". Nick could bear to feel that Nestor was difficult, eccentric, even a giant buffoon, but not diminished. Not saying "Steve" because he no longer knew. Nick could look at everything. But not at that.

(A Jest of God, p.164)

Nick's inability to look at truths that are too painful is set against Rachel's more rigorous search for truth, and looks all the more ironic because it is her relationship with him which initiates Rachel's movement in the direction of a spiritual death and rebirth. Where Rachel begins to grow because of their relationship, Nick fails to use this opportunity to develop himself;

his final cruel desertion of Rachel measures the extent of his failure. Like Hagar Shipley, who cannot spare any pity for her son Marvin until she has come to terms with her past, Nick cannot afford the luxury of treating Rachel humanely because he has not yet learned to deal with his demons. Rachel, on the other hand, becomes more humane, more compassionate. She is able to comfort Calla, even at the risk of appearing to be a fool. Her final thoughts reflect her new tolerance: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God." (A Jest of God, p.175)

THE FIRE-DWELLERS

The Fire-Dwellers is the third of the Manawaka novels and was published in 1969, three years after A Jest of God. The events of The Fire-Dwellers take place in the few weeks before Stacey's fortieth birthday, and are related by Stacey in chronological order, with the exception of some flashbacks to her early years in Manawaka. Laurence makes use of several narrative levels to convey the frenetic quality of Stacey's experience and each of them is distinguished by its physical appearance on the page so that the reader can readily identify each one. This permits the reader to feel the chaotic nature of Stacey's life, while at the same time remaining essentially apart from it. The narrative technique is not, however, directly related to the kind of discussion of the meaning of time that I have undertaken. Therefore I will discuss time, as I did with A Jest of God, apart from any discussion of narrative technique.

The Fire-Dwellers is the most ironic of the Manawaka novels I have discussed so far. Unlike her sister, Rachel or Hagar Shipley, for each of whom the passage of time is accompanied by a growth in awareness and understanding, Stacey MacAindra moves towards no

moment of illumination in the time encompassed by the novel. The only recognition she comes to is that no moment of insight is ever going to come:

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

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.298,299)

It would be nice if we were different people but we are not different people. We are our selves and we are sure as hell not going to undergo some total transformation at this point.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.289)

By the end of the novel, some changes have taken place. Jen has begun to talk, and Mac is finally able to confide in Stacey about his fear that she was contemplating suicide. Stacey's painful isolation has been overcome, to some extent. But she still guards a number of secrets: she never tells Luke Venturi her real age, she does not tell Mac about her affair with Luke and she plans to remain silent about Thor Thorlakson's probable motivation for moving to a new position. These, it may be argued, are relatively harmless evasions of the truth. Still, they seem ironic in the light of Stacey's frequently expressed plea that other people open themselves to her.

In addition, the description that occurs in the first pages of the novel is recapitulated near the end

with few changes:

The double bed is unmade, and on a chair rests a jumble of her clothes, carelessly shed stockings like round nylon puddles, roll-on girdle in the shape of a tire where she has rolled it off. On another chair, Mac's dirty shirt is neatly folded. Two books reside on the bedside table - The Golden Bough and Investments and You, Hers and His, both unread. On the dressing table, amid the nonmagic jars and lipsticks are scattered photographs of Katie, Ian, Duncan and Jen at various ages. Hung above the bed is a wedding picture, Stacey twenty-three, almost beautiful although not knowing it then, and Mac twenty-seven, hopeful confident lean, Agamemnon king of men or the equivalent, at least to her.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.4)

On the bedroom chair rests a jumble of Stacey's clothes, offcast stockings like nylon puddles, roll-on girdle in the shape of a tire where she has rolled it off. On another chair, Mac's clothes are folded neatly, a habit he acquired in the army, as he has remarked countless times. Two books are on the bedside table - The Golden Bough and Investments and You, Hers and His, both unread. On the dressing table, amid the nonmagic jars and lipsticks are scattered photographs of Katie, Ian, Duncan and Jen at various ages. Above the bed is hung a wedding picture, Stacey twenty-three, almost beautiful although not knowing it then, Mac twenty-seven, hopeful confident lean.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.305)

This suggests that life remains, for Stacey, essentially the same. At the end of the novel, Stacey is still obsessed with her age and with the size of her hips, and the nursery rhyme with which the novel begins still runs through her head:

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

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.307)

The thought that ends the novel strikes the same note of anxiety that pervades the novel: "She feels the city receding as she slides into sleep. Will it return tomorrow?" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.308) Stacey also uses the word "receding" in one of her more self-revealing moments with her husband, as she describes her feeling of alienation:

Yeh. Well, okay. I feel very strange sometimes.
 What do you mean, strange?
 Like as though everything is receding.
 Receding?
 As though I'm out of touch with everything. Everybody,
 I mean. And vice-versa. If you see what I mean.
 (The Fire-Dwellers, p.79)

It is apparent, then, that the quality of Stacey's experience of her world has not been altered much by anything that has happened, although her attitude towards the world has shifted from one of rebellion to one of grim acceptance. Earlier in the novel, she has complained, in one of her talks with God, of the triviality of her life: "But how is it I can feel as well that I'm spending my life in one unbroken series of trivialities?" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.95) At the end of the novel, she rather wryly counts the triviality of her life as a blessing: "Maybe the trivialities aren't so bad after all. They're something to focus on."
 (The Fire-Dwellers, p.30)

In The Fire-Dwellers, more than in either of

The Stone Angel or A Jest of God, time is duration and ennui. It is time as J. Alfred Prufrock experiences it:

For I have known them all already, known them all:
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons
 ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", l.49-51)

Where Hagar's essentially tragic plight can be compared to the voyage of the ancient mariner, Stacey's dilemma is modern and ironic, like Prufrock's. Like him, she lives in a world of many words, thoughts and fantasies, but relatively few actions: "— Sometimes a person feels that something else must have been meant to happen in your own life, or is this all there's ever going to be, just like this? (The Fire-Dwellers, p.129) In such a world, an incident such as Duncan's near drowning comes almost as a welcome release from the tedious round of non-events that make up Stacey's experience. Stacey's and Prufrock's experience of time is comparable. Both feel burdened by the trivial and repetitious quality of their lives, and have occasional urges to squeeze "the universe into a ball/To roll it toward some overwhelming question" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", l.92-93), to seek some transcendent significance for their lives and both are conscious of death, "the eternal Footman" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", l.85), whose presence tends to undercut any resolution.

This consciousness of death is behind Stacey's obsessive concern with age. Like Hagar Shipley, Stacey feels that her age is an arbitrary fact which bears no relation to how she feels about herself. It is always with some surprise that Stacey catches her reflection either in a mirror or in someone's eyes, and sees how she must appear to other people. This is the self-image that is reflected to Stacey in the eyes of a young girl Katie's age, who sits beside Stacey on a bus:

— What's she seeing? Housewife, mother of four, this slightly too short and too amply rumped woman with coat of yesteryear, hemlines all the wrong length as Katie is always telling me, lipstick wrong colour, and crowning comic touch, the hat. Man, how antediluvian can you get? Is that what she's thinking? I don't know. But I still have this sense of monstrous injustice. I want to explain. Under this chapeau lurks a mermaid, a whore, a tigress. She'd call a cop and I'd be put in a mental ward.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.12)

Stacey is always having to remind herself that the beautiful, graceful girl who danced at the Flamingo Dance Hall on Saturdays, no longer exists. But the memory is so vivid that she, like Hagar Shipley, tends to doubt the reality of passing time:

Stacey Cameron, seventeen. Flamingo Dance Hall every Saturday night, jitterbugging...Stacey spinning like light, like all the painted singing tops of all the spinning world, whirling laughter across a polished floor. Five minutes ago. Is time? How?

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.12)

I'm not a good mother. I'm not a good wife. I don't want to be. I'm Stacey Cameron and I still love to dance.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.12)

Stacey alternates between standing apart in horror from her aging body, and grimly accepting herself as she is: "I need a state of unblemishment more as the years go by, but I have it less." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.36)

Stacey is not alone in her obsession with age. Her lover, Luke Venturi, is twenty-four, but he tells Stacey that he is twenty-nine. Stacey, thirty-nine, claims to be thirty-five. Both Luke and Stacey feel the distance that their age difference implies, and so both lie about their age. Ironically, the age difference between them remains an alienating factor despite their attempts to overcome and ignore it. Stacey is so distressed when she finds out that she is old enough to be Luke's mother, that she is unable to confess her real age. Whatever honesty and openness has existed between them is undercut by Stacey's final failure to tell Luke the truth about her age.

Stacey suffers from a sense that her present self, not only physically but spiritually as well, represents a decline from her past self, the young girl who was almost beautiful and who had hopes and ideals. She recalls her youthful certainty that she would not repeat her parents errors:

Okay, Dad. Here's looking at you. You couldn't cope, either. I never even felt all that sorry for you, way back when, nor for her. I only thought people ought to

be strong and loving and not make a mess of their lives and they ought to rear kids with whom it would be possible to talk because one would be so goddam comprehending and would win them over like nothing on earth, and I would sure know how to do it all. So I married a guy who was confident and (in those days or so it seemed) outgoing and full of laughs and free of doubts, fond of watching football and telling low jokes and knowing just where he was going, yessir, very different from you, Dad. Now I don't know.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.170)

She recalls her disdain for her mother's nagging and worrying, at the same time as she excites Katie's disdain by her own excessive fears for her daughter:

Katie got home at two in the morning and I was frantic and couldn't sleep despite sleeping pill and she was furious at me for getting frantic. What if she gets pregnant? What if some guy is really cruel to her, sometime, ditching her? What if she takes drugs? Whatifwhatifwhatif? Then I think I'm worrying needlessly, just like my mother did, and Katie isn't stupid and she was with a whole group of kids. And I think she's probably a damn sight more principled than I am at this point.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.163-164)

Stacey mourns not only her lost physical beauty, but her spiritual degeneration as well: "Oh Katie, you're dead right about me baby. I'm corrupt. Or was it immoral you said?" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.87)

In some ways, the past is over. Stacey is thirty-nine, and will never be eighteen again, either physically or spiritually. But it is also true that "The past doesn't seem ever to be over." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.258).. Stacey recognizes this paradox:

"The truth is I haven't been Stacey Cameron for one hell of a long time now. Although in some ways I'll always be her, because that's how I started out."

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.303) She still possesses Niall Cameron's flask, and she, like her father, drinks heavily. She has also kept her father's old revolver for some time after his death and she feels an affinity with her father, because he could not cope either.

When she wonders why she so frequently hides the truth despite her conscious desire to be honest, Stacey recalls an incident from her past in which her mother encouraged her to be quiet about things that are not nice:

Stacey Cameron, eight or nine, back from playing in the bush at the foot of the hill that led out of Manawaka. There was this gopher on the road, Mother, and somebody had shot it with a twenty-two and and all its stomach and that was all out and it wasn't dead yet. Please, dear, don't talk about it - it isn't nice. But I saw it and it was trying to breathe only it couldn't and it was. Sh, it isn't nice.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.168)

Mac too, Stacey sees, is a product of his past experience, especially his relationship with his father, whom she blames for Mac's inability to express any fears or self-doubts: "If he doesn't deal with everything alone, no help, then he thinks he's a total washout. Thanks, Matthew - you passed that one on all right..." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.257) Stacey seems quite right in

blaming Mac's father, Matthew, for Mac's tendency to hide his fears from his wife and children. Matthew admits to Stacey that he always strove to keep his doubts about his faith to himself, revealing them to neither his wife nor his only son, Mac, in the hope that Mac would grow up free from doubts about his faith. Instead, Mac has rejected his father's faith, and grown up with the same distorted notion that his father lived by, which is that any self-doubts constitute an "essential flaw" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.283), to use Matthew's words. Mac, like his father, tries to project a security and certainty about himself that he does not really feel.

Because Stacey sees that, to some extent, she and Mac are products of their respective pasts, she worries about how she and Mac are affecting their children. Katie reminds Stacey of herself as a young girl, and Ian is already showing signs of a tendency to be withdrawn, like his father. Duncan shares his mother's love of fantasy, which he expresses, as she does, in images of other planets and forms of life:

Around the edges, where there was a little blank paper, Duncan has put cramped and secretive pencil drawings - the various stages in the launching of a spaceship, its journey past moons and constellations, its arrival on a planet beyond our stars, where turning trees twist octopus-like and the stickmen are met by starfishmen.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.70-71)

Jen's inarticulate noises seem to Stacey to be a reproach

for her own lies and evasions.

The following thought of Stacey's seems to me to isolate one of the most important problems raised by the novel: "I stand in relation to my life both as child and as parent, never quite finished with the old battles, never able to arbitrate properly the new, able to look both ways, but whichever way I look, God, it looks pretty confusing to me." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.47)

One of the issues that the novel at least implicitly raises is that of the relation of the parent Stacey to the child she was, and the parents she had. As Stacey says, "The past doesn't seem ever to be over." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.258) Stacey is obviously the person she is because of the kind of parents she had, and Mac the person he is, for the same reason to some extent. Therefore Stacey seems justified in her fears for her children: she and Mac suffer from limitations imposed upon them by their respective pasts - and they are in the process of passing on those limitations to their children by everything they do or fail to do.

We are meant to share Stacey's intuition that a person's past limits his human possibilities. We immediately participate in Stacey's perception that Thor Thorlakson's impressive facade is completely undercut by her discovery of his past; we feel that a runny-

nosed Vernon Winkler still exists behind Thor's glittering front, however well he may be hidden. What is true of Thor is true of everyone else in the novel; the past is never over, but lives on within each individual. Although Stacey's fears for her children, particularly when she is away from them, are sometimes exaggerated, her pessimism about their futures generally seems well-founded. It seems entirely probable that Stacey's children will repeat many of their parents' errors, and become a third generation of fire-dwellers, living in a hell they themselves have made.

The Fire-Dwellers seems to offer no hope of change, of a better future, as The Stone Angel and A Jest of God do. In the latter two novels, we learn along with Hagar and Rachel that a person can extend the limits to his freedom by accepting the deterministic influences from his past. Both Hagar and Rachel begin with an immature notion that they are free, and arrive at a painful recognition that they are limited because of their respective pasts. This very recognition in turn gives way to increased freedom. A similar dynamic seems to be at work in The Fire-Dwellers, but in reverse. Thor Thorlakson is one of the most horrifying figures in Margaret Laurence's fiction: he is all glitter, all false front, but the false front thinly conceals the

whimpering Vernon Winkler. Thor is tied to the past which he seeks so strenuously to forget that he has changed his name. He is at the mercy of anyone who recognizes him, so that as pitiful a figure as Valentine Tonnere can threaten his existence as Thor Thorlakson, and reduce him to Vernon Winkler again. Whether Valentine actually calls on him, or whether Thor's terror of being recognized by Stacey simply gets the better of him, we never find out. All we know is that he is forced to move to a position at the head office in Montreal that will terrify him even more than one imagines his position as manager in a small city has. The failure to come to terms with one's past results in bondage to one's past.

Stacey, by her own admission, feels confused about how she stands in relation to her past. Unable to come to terms with it, she remains unfree. Her attitude towards her parents is mainly one of blaming them for what she has become. With respect to her own children, Stacey's attitude is one of guilt for what she is doing to them. This kind of thinking is encouraged by the magazine articles Stacey reads: "Nine Ways the Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.14), "Are You Castrating Your Son?" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.15) Despite Stacey's good intentions and constant worrying about her children, Rachel's comment on Stacey, in A Jest of God, seems an astute one:

"League of matriarchs. Mothers of the world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your children. Then they wonder why people want to leave home. Stacey's will do just as she did, quite likely, and she'll never know why." (A Jest of God, p,25) Instead of moving towards a moment of illumination like Hagar or Rachel, Stacey remains confused about her relation to her parents, her children, and her husband. The most that ~~she~~ she can say about her children and husband by the end of the novel is that "Temporarily, they are all more or less okay." (The Fire-Dwellers, p.308)

A BIRD IN THE HOUSE

A Bird in the House is a collection of eight short stories published in 1970. The first seven stories had been previously published in several different periodicals, but they were not gathered into a collection until "Jericho's Brick Battlements" was added. Although each story can be read and appreciated separately, the stories also invite study as a group. They are unified by Vanessa's narrating voice, as well as by recurring symbols, images and thematic concerns. One of the central themes is that of the importance of time past to the individual in the present and by extension, the future.

Any discussion of time in A Bird in the House must begin with the recognition that this group of stories is about the development of a girl who is in the process of becoming an artist. Many of the effects of the stories, both individually and taken as a continuous structure, come from the manipulation of time sequences. For example, the basic element in the structure of each story and of the collection as a whole, is the distance in time between the adult narrator and the Vanessa whom we see in various stages of childhood and girlhood. The reader shares the point of view of the mature Vanessa, who is always at some degree of distance from the girl we see developing in the stories. At least one of the things that these stories are is an enquiry into the nature of the artistic process; the tell-

ing of the stories is proof that the girl we see developing in the stories fulfills her promise by becoming an accomplished artist. In her later novel about the growth of an artist, The Diviners, Laurence's handling of time sequences is again a striking feature of the novel. Laurence seems to be implying through her techniques in both works, especially the technique of manipulating time sequences, that one becomes an artist because of the way that one relates to one's past, because of what one remembers, and how one remembers. The emphasis is on the origin and nature of the artistic impulse and its growth into a mature discipline.

Vanessa's stories begin and end with her recognition of the most powerful element in her past—her Grandfather Connor and, because it is his monument, the Brick House. The first story begins with a cinematic effect: Laurence's description works like the zoom lens on a camera. We see the Brick House at a distance, then move in to where the Creeping Charley and the snapdragon in the garden come into sharp focus. The last story ends with the same effect in reverse. We see, with Vanessa, the old Brick House, now inhabited by strangers and fallen into a state of disrepair. Then Vanessa, after taking one final look at it, drives away and the house recedes gradually into the background. The effect is the same for the reader as for Vanessa because we, literally, share her point of view. Vanessa's final

painful recognition that Grandfather Connor proclaims himself in her veins, is precipitated by her final visit to the old house: "I had feared and fought the old man..." ("Jericho's Brick Battlements") But it is a necessary recognition, and it sets her free-within certain limits that have been established by everything that has gone before this moment. As the opening sentence of the first story indicates, the adult Vanessa is still what she has been in the past, to some extent: "That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me." ("The Sound of the Singing", p.3) The past, then, implies bondage. But the final three sentences of the last story show how the past can imply freedom. Vanessa is drawn back to Manawaka as an adult and the expedition precipitates her recognition of the extent to which she has been influenced by the past. Paradoxically, this recognition frees her: her driving away is symbolic of her release. It is not a complete release, as her telling of the stories indicates, for the moment when Vanessa drives away precedes the beginning of the telling of the stories. The final sentence of the last story is in the past tense: "I looked at it only for a moment and then I drove away." ("Jericho's Brick Battlements", p.207) We are brought in a full circle back to the beginning of the first story; the eight stories both begin and culminate in the insight: "That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me." ("The Sound of the Singing", p.3) Although the

release is not complete, one feels that it is as complete a release as can be achieved. It is the artist, who deliberately attempts to establish a meaningful relationship with his past, who is most free from the past.

Many of the techniques that Laurence uses in these stories, then, are techniques of manipulation of time. The time scheme of each of the stories, and the arrangement in time of the stories as a collection, serves a symbolic function. The growing complexity of the stories in terms of levels of time reflects Vanessa's growth in consciousness; a look at the individual stories will show how this principle operates in each case.

The first four stories form a group because they follow one another in chronological order and culminate in the death of Vanessa's father in "A Bird in the House". His death marks the end of the world as Vanessa has known it up until that time. This shattering of the known world is reflected in the break in chronological order after "A Bird in the House". Within this group of four stories, there is a movement from a simple to a more complex handling of the material.

"The Sound of the Singing" takes place on a Sunday evening in spring, and spans only a few hours. When the story ends, Vanessa has not yet reached a new level of awareness, as she does in every other story in the collection. The story is built upon the same issue as "Jericho's

Brick Battlements"-Vanessa's acceptance of or rejection of her Grandfather Connor. The image that dominates the story is, as the title suggests, Uncle Dan's singing, which symbolizes the values that mock and threaten Grandfather Connor's upright world. Much as Vanessa is drawn to Uncle Dan, however, she does not really endorse his values. She claps while he sings, but will not sing with him even at home for fear of looking foolish, and she is embarrassed by her uncle when her friends are around. Yet she refuses to respond to her grandfather's appeal to her, even as she recognizes that he is right: "He was right. It was not fair. Even I could see that. Yet I veered sharply away from his touch, and that was probably not fair, either. I wanted only to be by myself, with no one else around." ("The Sound of the Singing", p.34,35) The last two sentences of the story seem to me to contain Vanessa's unconscious recognition that the values of the downright world of her uncle, which are embodied in his song, are not the ones she really believes in: "And I ran, ran towards the sound of the singing. But he seemed a long way off now, and I wondered if I would ever catch up to him." ("The Sound of the Singing", p.38) This recognition seems to be just below the level of conscious awareness. The first and last stories in the collection have to do with the same choice for Vanessa, and they are, respectively, the simplest and the most complex in structure; the relative complexity of structure reflects

the maturity of the choice in each case.

"To Set Our House in Order" takes place about three or four months after "The Sound of the Singing", and spans several weeks. This time Vanessa does reach a new level of awareness that she articulates to herself. She rejects Grandmother McLeod and her love of order, but this time, unlike in the previous story, we feel that she is justified in rejecting her grandmother. The extended time span of "To Set Our House in Order" is indicative of Vanessa's growth in awareness, just as the very short time span of "The Sound of the Singing" is indicative of Vanessa's failure to grow. I will deal more extensively with the second story later in the thesis.

The time gap between the second and third stories, like that between the first and second, is about four months. "Mask of the Bear", the third story, has a more complex structure than "To Set Our House in Order", the second story. The former is the first story in which the moment of illumination that clarifies all the events of the story for Vanessa occurs several years after the main incident of the story, during which Vanessa is ten and a half years old. This implies that the child we see in the main setting of the story must exist in a state of relative incomprehension. The entire scene in which Vanessa eavesdrops on the adults after Grandfather Connor goes alone to the basement is distinguished by a lack of any comment from

Vanessa, the ten and a half year old child. She hears without understanding what she hears, as she will frequently do throughout the stories, most notably in "The Loons". This is not to say that she understands nothing about the events which have taken place in the course of the story. But the final revelation that alters the meaning, for Vanessa, of all that has gone before, comes "Many years later, when Manawaka was far away..." ("Mask of the Bear", p.87). The most important revelation that takes place during the time of the main action of the story is Edna's. She, more than anyone else, is inclined to be unforgiving towards Grandfather Connor, until Terence throws new light upon the old man by telling the story of his marital infidelity and introducing the idea that everyone in the family wears a mask. Edna recognizes the truth of his assertion, and is able to forgive Grandfather Connor, since she too wears a mask. Earlier, Beth has asked Edna if she thinks they should ask Grandfather Connor to join them for tea, and Edna has refused. Now Edna volunteers to invite him to tea. It is not until many years later that Vanessa sees that her grandfather wore a mask of ferocity and rage to conceal an essential bewilderment.

Between "Mask of the Bear" and "A Bird in the House", there is a time gap of about two years. The former ends in late winter when Vanessa is ten and a half; the latter begins on November 11, Remembrance Day, when Vanessa is twelve. Both stories are about death. The experience

that takes place between the time when Grandmother Connor dies, and the time when Vanessa's father dies, has been skipped over, thus bringing into sharp focus the two events that struck Vanessa with the greatest force during that two year period of time. The story of the time depicted in "The Loons" occurs after "Mask of the Bear" but before "A Bird in the House"; or at least part of the story happens before the main action of "A Bird in the House". But the experience of Piquette and the loons does not get told until after "A Bird in the House", perhaps because it had less impact on Vanessa, and because Vanessa sees Piquette's story as bound up with her father's life and death. Although the events of "The Loons" and "Horses of the Night" actually take place during the same period as the events of the first four stories, no sign of this is given in the four earlier stories. Each of the first four stories is built simply upon one main narrative thread: all of the details in the story are relevant to that single thread. The effect of this for the reader is clarity and an increase in the impact of each story.

The title story, whose crisis is the death of Vanessa's father, marks the end of a phase in Vanessa's life: "After my father died, the whole order of life was torn. Nothing was known or predictable any longer." ("Horses of the Night", p.144) After the title story, the stories are no longer in chronological order. "The Loons"

has as its main time period the summer before the death of Vanessa's father. However, the death of Vanessa's father, which will not happen until the following winter, is a point of reference for "The Loons". This is the first story that uses the future as a point of reference in this particular way. "The Loons" marks the beginning, for Vanessa, of a new kind of perception, a new way of knowing. In "Horses of the Night", at a time prior to the death of her father, Vanessa remarks her tendency to protect the known world that can break down so fearfully: "Chris never seemed, like myself, to be holding back with a terrible strained force for fear of letting go and speaking out and having the known world unimaginably fall to pieces." ("Horses of the Night", p.133) The death of Vanessa's father, in "A Bird in the House", although we are not told this directly until we read "Horses of the Night", is the dissolution of the known world, that Vanessa has feared. This dissolution is reflected in the fact that we, the readers, no longer have a consistent rule of thumb to go by. We too are thrown into confusion. Like Vanessa, we must discover a new ordering principle, or get lost in the apparent disorder that has come into being with the death of Vanessa's father in "A Bird in the House".

It seems that the ability to cope with disorder is, for Laurence, an index to maturity. Like Keats, she suggests that one must not strive irritably "after fact &

reason" (Letters of John Keats, "To George and Tom Keats", p.43), but must be capable of living with doubts, mysteries and uncertain knowledge. This is the truth towards which many of the stories move. In "To Set Our House in Order", Vanessa moves towards the discovery "That whatever God might love in this world it was certainly not order."

("To Set Our House in Order", p.59) Her growth in awareness is set against Grandmother McLeod's inability to grow. It is clear that Vanessa's perception of disorder at the end of the story is meant to be seen by us as correct, to coincide with our own perception of what is going on in the story. Earlier in the story, Grandmother McLeod has quoted her father's dictum-"God loves Order" ("To Set Our House in Order", p.46)-as a truth. She too believes in an orderly God, and her personal attempt to set her house in order reflects her affirmation of her kind of God. But Grandmother McLeod's love of order is an obsession, and becomes a flight from reality. When reality does not conform to her orderly ideal, she retreats into an unreal order; thus, she is like the trapped sparrow which is the central symbol in the story. When Vanessa's mother introduces disorder into the house by going into labour prematurely, Grandmother McLeod's immediate response is to rebuke her son for not having hired a girl to help with the housework. She cites her reason for this misdirected advice as being that Beth would have rested more. However her uncon-

scious motivation seems to me to be the real reason for her advice: in some obscure way, she feels that the semblance of order in her house will ward off the more fearful kinds of disorder. On the day that Beth goes into the hospital, Grandmother McLeod hires a girl to do the housework, in an ignorant attempt to establish order on at least one level. This is a totally unsuitable response to the crisis, as even she must obscurely recognize, because her son cannot afford to pay a hired girl. When the attempt to establish order fails, she makes another attempt; she resurrects her old self-image as a lady by ordering two dozen lace-bordered handkerchiefs of Irish linen. She refuses to accept the fact of change, as Dr. McLeod explains to Vanessa:

"Vanessa," he said, "she's had troubles in her life which you really don't know much about. That's why she gets migraine sometimes and has to go to bed. It's not easy for her these days either--the house is still the same, so she thinks other things should be, too. It hurts her when she finds they aren't."

("To Set Our House in Order", p.52-53)

On the night after this explanation, Vanessa hears "the caught sparrow fluttering in the attic". ("To Set Our House in Order", p.53) This seems an apt symbol for Grandmother McLeod and her lack of awareness. She is trapped by her love of order, frozen in an imaginary past, just as the birds in her carpet are frozen in flight. She has always gotten other people to collude with her to produce an orderly image of reality; Ewen wrote her a letter describing the gallant death of her favorite son, Roderick,

in order to lessen the pain of her loss. Even death must be fitted into her courtly image of the world. The naming of the baby after her dead son is yet another attempt to revive the old, broken order.

In "To Set Our House in Order", Vanessa discovers and accepts disorder. She does so every time she learns something, since every really new perception changes the shape the world had before that perception was a part of it. Both "To Set Our House in Order" and "A Bird in the House" are about the discovery of disorder, the breaking down of the known world. Both have a bird in the house as central symbols and are meant to be seen as a pair for that reason. In "A Bird in the House", Vanessa regresses. She becomes the bird in the house, trapped and terrified in an alien world, like the sparrow that gets in between the two panes of glass in Vanessa's bedroom, and is released by Vanessa into her bedroom. When she does this, the sparrow flies around the room in blind terror. This is what Vanessa does when she attacks Noreen: her struggles recall the blind panic of the trapped sparrow earlier in the story. In "To Set Our House in Order", Vanessa has accepted chaos and disorder while Grandmother McLeod recoils from it into an unreal world of order. Noreen, like

Granmother McLeod, is another of the characters in the collection who substitutes a more pleasing version of reality for the real world; Noreen's superstitions and her crude religion are her compensations for a world which she finds unacceptable. Early in the story, Vanessa is succumbing to Noreen's influence: as always, Vanessa tends toward the exotic, finding the everyday world a little too drab. "I did not actually believe in Noreen's doctrines, but the images which they conjured up began to inhabit my imagination. Noreen's fund of exotic knowledge was not limited to religion, although in a way it all seemed related. ("A Bird in the House", p. 100) Vanessa senses the existence of unknown worlds, and of a potential within herself to reach new levels of knowledge: "I wanted to speak in some way that would be more poignant and comprehending than anything of which my mother could possibly be capable. But I did not know how." ("A Bird in the House", p. 93) Ironically, she gains access to the knowledge for which she longs only after her father is dead; she discovers a new aspect of her father's personality when she finds the letter from the French girl to her father hidden in an old desk that had belonged to him. Vanessa had wanted to be more comprehending than her mother, and now she is just

that.

It is not only the sparrow in "A Bird in the House" that is trapped and released; Vanessa too is trapped and released. Early in the story, she has been succumbing to Noreen's world of superstitions, of "violent splendours" ("A Bird in the House", p. 100); because of the incident of the trapped sparrow, which is followed not long after by the death of Vanessa's father, Vanessa is placed in the position of having to decide what side she is on. She must decide whether or not to accept Noreen's version of the world. Clearly, Noreen's version of the world is not endorsed by Laurence, and Vanessa is retreating into an illusory world to the extent that she believes in Noreen. One feels that Dr. McLeod's more complex kind of religion is closer to the one endorsed by Laurence: he says that heaven and hell may "stand for something that happens all the time here, or else doesn't happen." ("A Bird in the House", p. 105) Vanessa's attack on Noreen is both a confession of the power that Noreen has exerted over her, and a rejection of her. Vanessa chooses the more difficult but truer route of seeing the void that death is: "I went upstairs to my room. Momentarily I felt a sense of calm, almost of acceptance. Rest beyond the river. I knew now

what that meant. It meant nothing. It meant only silence, forever." ("A Bird in the House", p. 110) She rejects Noreen's superstitious view of death, thus refusing to distort the significance of her father's death. It is this refusal that opens the way to the new knowledge that comes at the end of the story, the knowledge which is Vanessa's longed for release from ignorance. One feels that if Vanessa had resorted to a superstitious view of death, she would have been distorting the significance of her father's death-and consequently, would not have been able to understand his life.

"The Loons" is the third story whose central symbol is a bird-or birds. This time the birds are most closely associated with Piquette. Appropriately, the loon is a wild bird, and a disappearing species. There is another parallel between this story and "To Set Our House in Order". Once again, Vanessa's growth in consciousness is set against the closed and static world view of Grandmother McLeod. Grandmother McLeod refuses to associate with Piquette because she is "that half-breed youngster" ("The Loons, p. 116), but Vanessa's perception of Piquette as an Indian who has sprung "from the people of Big Bear and Poundmaker, of Tecumseh, of the Iroquois who had eaten Father Brebeuf's

heart" ("The Loons", p. 119), is equally wrong. With Piquette as with Noreen, Vanessa seeks knowledge: she hopes to learn "the secrets which she [Piquette] undoubtedly knew" ("The Loons", p. 119). Vanessa does finally arrive at a knowledge that is imparted to her via Piquette—but it is a darker, more painful knowledge than she had anticipated. Her growth in awareness is measured by the way in which she responds to the loons' cry, which is associated with darkness, with whatever is eternally apart from civilization. Vanessa and her father are fascinated by the loons because they evoke a world that is apart from their experience; but Vanessa is further than her father from the world evoked by the loons' cry. Dr. McLeod, by Piquette's own admission, is the only person in Manawaka who has ever been good to Piquette; he neither rejects Piquette as his mother does, nor places her at a romantic distance from himself, as Vanessa does. He even sees that Piquette would be good for Vanessa. Vanessa senses that her inability to reach Piquette is a betrayal of her father's hope for Piquette, and for herself.

"Piquette and I remained ill at ease with one another. I felt I had somehow failed my father, but I did not know what was the matter, nor why she would not or could not respond... I could not reach Piquette at all, and I soon lost interest

in trying. But all that summer she remained as both a reproach and a mystery to me.

("The Loons", p. 122)

"The Loons" is placed after "A Bird in the House", although its action in the summer when Vanessa is eleven, is before the main incident of "A Bird in the House", when Vanessa is twelve. But the final incident of "The Loons" occurs when Vanessa is eighteen, while the final incident of "A Bird in the House" occurs when Vanessa is seventeen, at which time she discovers the letter to her father from the French girl, and mourns his death all over again. Perhaps the order of the two stories suggests that Vanessa had to experience her father's death as she did at age seventeen, before she could understand Piquette, and once again, as in "A Bird in the House", attain a higher level of knowledge that she had sought earlier and failed to find. In both stories, Vanessa's illumination comes long after she has ceased to seek it, and too late to allow her to communicate it to the people she would like to say it to. What Vanessa discovers at the end of "The Loons" is that Piquette felt no fascination for the loons because their song was familiar to her. Piquette, like the loons, comes from a world of darkness and despair; like the loons, Piquette died of not caring to live.

"Horses of the Night" has a longer time span than the five stories that precede it. A great deal of the story takes place before the main action of "A Bird in the House", when Vanessa is twelve. Some of it takes place before the events of "The Sound of the Singing". The story opens when Vanessa is six and her cousin, Chris, first comes to live at the Connor house. It ends many years later, when Vanessa is in college. "Horses of the Night" occurs in several phases, whereas the other stories have only a few phases: the only story with a greater time span is the final one. Chris is an obvious foil for Vanessa. He shares her vivid imagination and her love of the exotic; he is, in short, potentially an artist. But he fails where Vanessa succeeds.

The story is constructed around a central symbol, the horses; they are the horses of Chris' fantasy world, Firefly and Duchess, and the real horses at Shallow Creek, Floss and Trooper. They are also the horses of the night, Vanessa's symbol for Chris' madness, which she links to his deranged perception of time:

"Slowly, slowly, horses of the night"-
The night must move like this for him, slowly, all through the days and nights.

("Horses of the Night", p. 154)

As the story progresses through its several phases, Chris becomes less perceptive, and Vanessa becomes more so. Vanessa's growth in awareness proceeds in an inverse relation to Chris' growing self-delusion. It is her recognition of the distance between them, and of the dangerous fantasy symbolized by the little saddle that Chris made for her, that prompts Vanessa to "ruthlessly" ("Horses of the Night", p. 154) put the saddle away. It seems that this quality of ruthlessness is a necessary one for the artist. Vanessa characterizes Chris' nature as one that shrinks from "the absolute unbearability of battle". ("Horses of the Night", p. 153) In contrast to Chris' nature, Vanessa loves battle, a trait inherited from her grandfather. One recalls her love of the warlike lines from the bible, such as "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle" ("The Sound of the Singing", p. 7), and her description of Grandfather Connor's house as "some crusader's embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness". ("The Sound of the Singing", p. 3) Chris, unlike Vanessa or Grandfather Connor, has always refused to engage in battle, preferring to ignore its existence. Whenever Grandfather Connor's words were "bludgeoning" ("Horses of the Night", p. 133), Chris "simply appeared to be absent, elsewhere". ("Horses of the Night")

p. 133)

When Chris first comes to live at the Brick House, Vanessa is in complete sympathy with him, and is bewildered by Grandmother Connor's refusal to allow her to protect Chris from her grandfather's harsh words. When she is nine years old, and Chris is almost eighteen, Vanessa is not yet able to see anything wrong with Chris' assertion that if you hold something in your mind, then it is real. But when Chris returns to Manawaka after a two year absence, and Vanessa is eleven, their paths begin to diverge. Chris believes that he can work his way through university and fulfill his dream of becoming an engineer by selling vacuum cleaners. Vanessa encourages him at the same time as she sees that she does not believe her own words.

The summer after her father dies, when she is thirteen, Vanessa goes to Shallow Creek, where she meets Floss and Trooper. She sees that the racers, Firefly and Duchess, had only ever existed in another dimension, but Chris offers no explanation of the transformation of Firefly and Duchess into a pair of plough horses. Perhaps he still sees the plough horses in terms of his desire instead of as they are. During a conversation one night in the hayfields, Chris claims that he does not need anyone

to talk to, that he can always think about things by himself; it is not until some months later that Vanessa sees how great his need to talk that night must have been: "For the first time I recognized, at least a little, the dimensions of his need to talk that night. He must have understood perfectly well how impossible it would be with a thirteen-year-old. But there was no one else. ("Horses of the Night", p. 152) Chris refuses even to recognize his desire for someone to talk to, perhaps knowing that it would be thwarted because Vanessa is too young to understand and respond. But Chris is not the only one who is suffering that night; Vanessa is suffering because of her lack of comprehension and her inability to respond to Chris. She, however, unlike Chris, confronts and accepts the frustration of her need: "I could only feel how foolish I must sound, still unable to reply as I would have wanted, comprehendingly. I felt I had failed myself utterly. I could not speak even the things I knew. As for the other things, the things I did not know, I resented Chris's facing me with them." ("Horses of the Night", p. 151)

Chris writes a letter to Vanessa when he is in the army during the war, which says that although his body marches and kills, he does not inhabit it anymore; the letter seems

to Vanessa "only the final heartbreaking extension of that way he'd always had of distancing himself from the absolute unhearability of battle." ("Horses of the Night", p. 153). In a final ruthless gesture, Vanessa rejects Chris' way of shrinking from battle, and aligns herself with the necessary ruthlessness of Grandmother Connor, whose refusal to shield Chris from Grandfather Connor had once bewildered her.

"The Half-Husky" stands out among the last four stories because it returns to a simpler time scheme. In keeping with the principle that the extent to which Vanessa arrives at a new level of awareness is reflected in the relative complexity of the time scheme of each story, this story should represent a lesser degree of growth in awareness for Vanessa, as compared to "A Bird in the House", "The Loons", and "Horses of the Night", and it does. The ruthless gesture that Vanessa tells us about at the end of "The Half-Husky" seems to me to be of a different order than the one that ends "Horses of the Night"; the former is not an example of necessary ruthlessness, as is the putting away of the saddle.

Vanessa realizes that her refusal to answer Harvey's

aunt when she says hello to her on the street is "not fair, either." ("The Half-Husky", p. 172) The "either" refers to Nanuk's end: Nanuk was chloroformed because Harvey's brutality towards him brought out his potential viciousness and made him too dangerous to keep as a pet. But our glimpse of Harvey's environment reveals that the same treatment that made Nanuk turn vicious is behind Harvey's cruel nature; his aunt has brutalized him, and he in turn is brutal to Nanuk, and finally ends up in jail after beating up and robbing the old man who owns the Starlite Café. Vanessa sees that Nanuk's end is unfair, that he has only become vicious because he has been treated badly. But I do not think that she sees far enough to recognize that Harvey too is a victim of brutality, and his aunt before him. Even though she admits that her snubbing of Harvey's aunt is unfair, there is no evidence that she sees that she is perpetuating the brutality that led to Nanuk's having to be chloroformed. Admittedly, Vanessa's unfairness is of a very different order than the acts of physical aggression that Harvey and his aunt perform. On the other hand, it is difficult to see Vanessa's refusal to recognize the greeting of Harvey's aunt as a positive gesture, as her ruthless putting away of the saddle is in "Horses of the Night". The difference in

the quality of the two acts may once again be related to the events of the title story. The final phase of "The Half-Husky" occurs before Vanessa's discovery at the end of "A Bird in the House", when she is seventeen; the final phase of "Horses of the Night" occurs after the discovery that ends "A Bird in the House". Although there is no explicit reference in "The Half-Husky" to "A Bird in the House", we are made aware of Vanessa's age in this as in all of the other stories. It may be that we are expected to know without being told that because Vanessa is only sixteen at the end of "The Half-Husky", she is not yet as perceptive as she will become after the crucial release that occurs when she is seventeen.

"Jericho's Brick Battlements" has the most extensive time span of all the stories, going back in time to when Vanessa was four, and forward to when she is forty. This seems appropriate because it is the last story and contains the culminating recognition that has been implied in almost every story in the collection, which is that the past lives on within Vanessa, whether she likes it or not. And she does not like it, since this recognition implies that she is limited by the past. As I have indicated earlier, it is this very recognition of her limitations that

sets Vanessa free. The complex structure of the story is an image of Vanessa's expansion of consciousness. Although Grandfather Conner is a very important figure in most of the stories, it is only in "The Half-Husky" that Vanessa begins to see how much he has influenced her; she remarks that she has "no more tact than my grandfather himself" ("The Half-Husky", p. 158). But only in the final story does she admit the extent of his influence upon her: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins." ("Jericho's Brick Battlements", p. 207) This final recognition brings us in a full circle, back to the opening lines of "The Sound of the Singing": "That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me." ("The Sound of the Singing", p. 3)

THE DIVINERS

In order to talk about the meaning of time in The Diviners, it is necessary to talk about narrative technique. Like the narrators of the four Manawaka novels which I have already discussed, Morag Gunn is limited in perception, fallible and therefore not reliable. Margaret Laurence provides the reader with a second perspective from which to see Morag by manipulation of at least six different levels of narration, each of which is linked to a dislocation in time from the present time of the novel's telling, which is when Morag is forty-seven and lives at McConnell's landing.

The first dislocation in time from the present time of the novel occurs with the narration that tells the story behind Morag's photographs of herself as a child. Although this narration is in the present tense, we are aware that we are seeing Morag the child with the eyes of the adult Morag. The sections that are entitled Memorybank Movies invite comparison with the narration that accompanies the photographs, since movies are essentially the photographs in rapid succession. Although the Memorybank Movie sections are also narrated in the present tense, we are not immedi-

ately aware of the interference of an adult consciousness, because these sections are in stream of consciousness narration, the prose of which matures with the maturity of the observing consciousness. However the Movies are still a form of Morag's recollection of the past, and she herself warns us that her memory is fallible. This is what she says about her memory of her parents which is evoked by the snapshot of herself at age five:

But I remember it, everything. Somewhat ironically, it is the first memory of actual people that I can trust, although I can't trust it completely, either, partly because I recognize anomalies in it, ways of expressing the remembering, ways which aren't those of a five-year old, as though I were older in that memory (and the words bigger) than in some subsequent ones when I was six or seven...

(The Diviners, p. 11)

Morag also reminds the reader that distortion occurs as soon as one person's viewpoint dominates: "...it was only what was happening to me. What was happening to everybody else? What really happened in the upstairs bedroom?" (The Diviners, p. 11) We should not lose sight of the fact that the Memorybank Movie sections, like the descriptions that accompany the snapshots of Morag as a child, are recollections. As such, they are not reliable accounts of "What really happened". (The Diviners, p. 11) Rather, they are accounts of how Morag as a forty-seven year old woman thinks

she perceived things in the past. Also, as with the narration accompanying the snapshots, Morag's viewpoint is dominant, thus adding a further distorting element.

The Memorybank Movie is the most extensively used narrative technique in the novel, while the narration of the events that make up the present time of the novel takes up very little space. The novel breaks down into five parts; parts one and five have one chapter each; parts two, three, and four have three chapters each. In chapters one to ten, which includes parts one to four of the novel, the Memorybank Movie is the dominant narrative technique. Part five, which is chapter eleven, is the only chapter that takes place exclusively in the present time of the novel. As even a cursory glance at the form of the novel suggests, the novel is built upon a conflict between the past and the present. This conflict has been resolved to the extent it ever can be by part five, which uses only one kind of narration to suggest the resolution of conflict.

Part one is, in many ways, a paradigm for the second, third, and fourth parts. As I have already implied, it tells us how to read the rest of the novel: in part one, chapter one, the reader looks at Morag who looks at the photographs of herself and tries to see the world with the

eyes of the child in the photograph. All this implies distortion, which the reader must keep in mind in order to read the novel properly. Part one establishes the problems, issues, and conflicts that dominate the rest of the novel. Morag (the adult) seems to be in some way haunted by or obsessed with the death of her parents; she finds herself crying after looking at the photographs of herself as a child: "I remember their deaths, but not their lives." (The Diviners, p.15) It seems to me symptomatic of this obsession that Morag is unable to really release her daughter, Pique, to allow her to live the way she wants to live:

Something about Pique's going, apart from the actual departure itself, was unresolved in Morag's mind. The fact that Pique was going west? Yes Morag was both glad and uncertain. What would Pique's father think, if he knew?...Would Pique go to Manawaka? If she did, would she find anything there which would have meaning for her? Morag rose, searched the house, finally found what she was looking for.

These photographs from the past never agreed to get lost.

(The Diviners, p.5)

Here, Morag's fears for Pique are explicitly linked to the photographs that will not agree to get lost. Morag is caught between the past, as represented by her parents, and the future, as represented by Pique. Until she can come to terms with her past, she cannot free her daughter.

Morag recognizes that her parents, or perhaps her parents' deaths, are a powerful force in her life. "I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull." (The Diviners, p. 15) This image of the blood that flows unknown is also reflected in the image that begins the novel: "The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching." (The Diviners, p. 3) Morag's fascination with the river is significant; the river is "The River of Now and Then" for Laurence and for the reader. Morag does not know that the river is a symbol for what is happening in the novel-or at least, she does not know it yet. The whole action of the novel is a search into the past that is undertaken for the light that it sheds upon the present, and ultimately, upon the future. This search is personal and subjective. Morag describes the development of her response to Christie's stories in "Morag's Tale of Christie Logan", which she tells to Pique: When he told me the tales about Piper Gunn, at first I used

to believe every word. Then later I didn't believe a word of them and thought he'd made them up out of whole cloth... But later still, I realized they'd been taken from things that happened, and who's to know what really happened? So I started believing in them again, in a different way.

(The Diviners, p. 300)

This question is asked over and over again by the characters in the novel: what really happened?

The search for the meaning of her past, whether it is her ancestral past, or the past as pioneer heritage, or her own recent past, involving her parents, Christie and Prin, is linked to the theme of the nature of the artistic process. Throughout most of the novel (that is, the present time of the novel), Morag is not able to write anything. The materials of art are obviously taken from life; the novel that Morag is working on when she is in England bears a suspicious resemblance to her own girlhood: "The novel, whose title is Jonah, is the story of an old man, a widower, who is fairly disreputable...It is also about his daughter Coral, who resents his not being a reputable character."

(The Diviners, p. 300) In part one, chapter one, we see Morag balanced between two conflicting attitudes towards her past, or perhaps, two conflicting attitudes towards her own capacity to make sense of, or to perceive meaning in, her past. The problem of the inevitable distortion of the

past which occurs when we attempt to bridge the gap of many years, as well as that of the distortion which occurs by definition as soon as a single person's perspective is brought to bear upon a situation, is what undermines Morag's attempt to discover truth with the faculty of memory. The same problem underlies her shaken faith in her art. Morag thinks of the photographs in this way: "Perhaps they're my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit. Yeh, and perhaps they are exactly what they seem to be—a jumbled mess of old snapshots..." (The Diviners, p. 5) Morag is balanced between two attitudes towards her past as embodied in the photographs, an attitude of faith, and an attitude that is literal minded and reductive. If the form of the novel suggests anything, it is that the past is important, and that to take a reductive attitude towards it is wrong-headed, if not impossible. It seems to me that the Memorybank Movies unwind in Morag's head largely of their own accord, sometimes in spite of her resistance. As the river symbol suggests, the past is constantly flowing upstream, as it were, into the present, and the present into the past.

Between parts one and five, only about four or five months go by. The novel begins in mid-June, and ends some time in the late autumn of the same year. During that time,

only a few things actually happen: Pique comes home and in part five is leaving again. Now, however, Morag can let her go: "Let her go. This time, it had to be possible and was." (The Diviners, p.359) Skinner has committed suicide; Royland has lost his power of divining, and there is the implication that A-Okay Smith may be the next water diviner. Although very little in the way of external action has taken place, there have been some major changes in Morag: she can now let Pique go, and she can write. All of part five takes place in the present time of the novel. Evidently, Morag is no longer obsessed with her past; she no longer feels the need to pore over old photographs, and the Memorybank Movies have stopped. Only now does Morag see the river as a symbol of her own mental processes: "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence." (The Diviners, p.370) Morag is now almost as perceptive as we are.

Morag's problem as presented in part one is essentially this: she is unable to establish a satisfactory relation with her past because she knows that remembering necessarily distorts. Since for

her the materials of art are taken from the past, her loss of faith extends to her ability to express herself as an artist. In part five, Morag has regained her faith in the act of divining:

At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt and tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. That wasn't given to her to know. In a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing-that mattered.

(The Diviners, p. 369)

This is just another way of saying what she has already said to Pique in explanation of the level of truth upon which Christies's stories operate: "But later still, I realized they'd been taken from things that happened, and who's to know what really happened? So I started believing in them again, in a different way." (The Diviners, p. 300) What Morag was saying to Pique was that no-one knows what really happened, on the objective, impersonal, factual level, but that the level of truth that matters is subjective, personal, and, precisely because not a factual but rather an imaginative account, truer than historical truth. Christie was a diviner and an artist, and his stories were imaginative. This is something that Morag had learned as a young girl, but has lost when we see her in part one, chapter one.

What has happened in the course of the novel is that Morag has regained her sense of the truth of imaginative vision. Her anguish at realizing that to remember something is to distort it is misplaced, because her particular way of distorting the objective, impersonal fact leads to imaginative truth.

A few examples will demonstrate the way in which some of the kinds of narration seem to me to work. Each of chapters two to ten begins with the present time of the novel and moves into the past; this represents one direction in which the river flows. The flow of the present into the past, then, occurs within each of nine chapters. The flow of the past into the present is what bridges the gap between the chapters. For example, chapter nine ends with the Memorybank Movie, "The Ridge of Tears", in which Christie dies. Morag, although she feels slightly foolish about it, requests that a piper play at his funeral. The ceremony is awkward and painful until the piper begins to play:

He swings the pipes up and there is the low mutter of the drones. Then he begins pacing the hillside as he plays. And Morag sees, with the strength of conviction, that this is Christie's true burial.

And Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, with the voice of drums and the heart of a child, and the gall of a thousand, and the strength of conviction.

The piper plays "The Flowers of the Forest", the long-ago pibroch the lament for the dead, over Christie

Logan's grave. And only now is Morag released into her mourning.

(The Diviners, p. 329)

Chapter ten begins in the present time of the novel, and Morag for the first time is writing freely and rapidly:

She had been working through the day, the words not having to be dredged up out of the caves of the mind, but rushing out in a spate so that her hand could not keep up with them. Odd feeling. Some one else dictating the words...

(The Diviners, p. 330)

The sense of relief from the end of the previous chapter seems to have spilled over into the beginning of this chapter. In a sense, the two events-Christie's funeral, and Morag's sudden ability to write again-are far apart in time: at the time when Morag re-experiences the release that she felt at Christie's funeral, Christie has been dead for seven years. Even the remembering of Christie's death, and the release experienced by Morag in chapter ten, are a month or so apart. "The Ridge of Tears" Movie happens in August, and the sudden ability to write happens in the autumn. There is also a third level on which there is no gap in time at all between the two; this can be shown more effectively with another example.

The Movie that ends chapter ten is called "Gainsay Who Dare"; it is in this section that the exchange of Lazarus Tonnerre's knife, and the plaid pin, takes place. This

exchange seems to me to be the turning point in the novel. I am not quite sure what that exchange signifies to Morag, although it does seem to mean a great deal to her. Perhaps the coincidence of the knife, which so obviously belongs to Skinner because it had belonged to Lazarus, who has left Skinner nothing of his own, finding its way into Morag's hands when she is the only person who would have been likely to return it to him, makes her feel like an agent in a greater plan of some sort. Skinner has just made his gift to Lazarus in the form of a song about him, and since it is Skinner's drawing the conversation towards the plaid pin that has precipitated Morag's discovery of the meaning of the ↵ mark on Christie's long ago gift to her, the plaid pin too takes on a special significance. So Morag feels that the motto of the clan whose plaid pin Skinner has given her are words that in some special way are meant for her. She adopts the war cry "Gainsay Who Dare", and the motto, "My Hope is Constant in Thee", and the crest of the Clanranald Macdonalds, to compensate for the fact that the Clan Gunn does not have a crest or a coat of arms. The point is that she feels that the adoption is particularly meaningful rather than arbitrary. Perhaps her willingness to accept the fact of adoption also extends to 'an' acceptance

of Christie and Prin as her adopted parents, and a consequent sense of release from the feeling of homelessness that her parents' deaths gave her. The quality of the exchange is reflected in the language, and since this is a Memorybank Movie, what it in fact is, is Morag's representation to herself of the meaning of the event, rather than a strictly factual account. Once again, the time gap between the Memorybank Movie, "Gainsay Who Dare", and the beginning of chapter eleven, like the time gap between the Movie "The Ridge of Tears", and the beginning of chapter ten, must be perceived in three ways. The distance in time between that actual exchange and the events of chapter eleven is three years. The distance between Morag's remembering of the exchange, and the events of chapter eleven is at least a few weeks; when Morag is remembering the exchange, it is autumn and the geese are flying south; when we first see her in chapter eleven, the geese are all gone. But to the reader, there seems to be no time gap at all, at first glance, because of the physical proximity of the two moments in terms of words on the page: they come right after one another. Laurence is careful to exclude details from the end of the chapter that would make us realize immediately what the real relation of the two moments is. It

is only in retrospect that we see that the two times are relatively far apart from one another. This is exactly what happened in going from the end of chapter nine to the beginning of chapter ten.

This manipulation of narrative levels has the effect of demonstrating to the reader what Morag is learning, that time past is not necessarily time lost, that the imagination can preserve whatever was essential in the past, that the past flows into the present just as surely as the present becomes the past. Once Morag has learned this, she is no longer concerned with the past in an obsessive way as she was in parts one to four of the novel. She is able to write again, which is a positive and creative link to her past, and to release her daughter. One very important effect of the manipulation of narrative levels is that it makes the reader a participant in Morag's disorientation in time, and in her subsequent discovery of the means to reorient herself.

Christie Logan's stories form a third narrative level; they are at several removes from objective truth, because they occur within the Memorybank Movie sections, and therefore are what Morag, the adult of forty-seven, remembers of how Morag the child perceived Christie's telling

of stories. Also, it is Christie's desire to alleviate Morag's feeling that she has no roots, rather than any idea of being true to historical fact, that is the motivating force behind Christie's tales about Piper Gunn. Christie first tells Morag about Piper Gunn when she discovers, to her dismay, that the chieftanship of the Gunn clan is as yet undetermined, and that no arms have yet been matriculated: "When she first looked it up, she showed it to Christie, and he read it and then he laughed and asked her if she had not been told the tales about the most famous Gunn of all, and so he told her." (The Diviners, p. 40) It is not until many years after this moment that Morag is able to grasp the level of truth upon which Christie's stories operate. When Morag is writing her fourth novel, Shadow of Eden, which deals with the same period of Scots history about which Christie told his stories, she writes to her friend, Ella, to express the paradoxical notion that although on one level Christie's stories were lies, on a more sophisticated level they were true. Christie is not a historian, but a maker of myths:

Christie always said they walked about a thousand miles-it was about a hundred and fifty, in fact, but you know, he was right; it must've felt like a thousand. The man who led them on that march, and on the trip by water to Red River, was young Archie Macdonald, but in my mind the piper

who played them on will always be that giant of a man, piper Gunn, who probably never lived in so-called real life but who lives forever. Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand.

(The Diviners, p. 341)

Morag's recognition of Christie as a myth-maker rather than a historian is behind her decision not to go to Sutherland. She has been planning to see Sutherland, the home of her ancestors, for a long time, but when she finally goes to Crombruach, she decides that she no longer feels the need to travel the few remaining miles north to Sutherland, because it is not really her land:

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

"What is, then?"

"Christie's real country. Where I was born."

(The Diviners, p. 319)

Still, Christie's stories serve an important function, in precipitating the awakening of Morag's imaginative self.

Morag is Christie's pupil and successor, just as A-Okay Smith is Royland's:

The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else.

(The Diviners, p. 369)

Thus it seems appropriate that Morag's memory of Christie's

death, at which time she first pays a tribute to his imaginative world, is what immediately precedes the first major breakthrough of her period of artistic sterility:

She had been working through the day, the words not having to be dredged up out of the caves of the mind, but rushing out in a spate so that her hand could not keep up with them. Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. Untrue, of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking. Where was the character, and who? Never mind. Not Morag's concern. Possession or self-hypnosis-it made no difference. Just let it keep on coming.

(The Diviners, p. 330)

A fourth narrative level in the novel occurs when Morag, inspired by the images Christie has created in his first tale about Piper Gunn, of Piper Gunn's wife, Morag, composes "Morag's Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman" (The Diviners, p. 42). This attempt on Morag's part to create an imaginative world is quite clearly motivated by her sense of isolation and alienation. When Prin tells Morag that she is a mooner, Morag feels that the word has a special significance in her case: "Some creature from another place, another planet. Left here accidentally." (The Diviners, p. 42) Immediately following upon this thought, Morag tells herself "Morag's Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman" (The Diviners, p. 42). In her tale, Morag gives Piper Gunn's wife "the strength of conviction" (The Diviners, p. 42), a trait that

Christie has attributed to Piper Gunn in "Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn" (The Diviners, p. 40): "And Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, a man with the voice of drums and the heart of a child and the gall of a thousand and the strength of conviction." (The Diviners, p. 41) In her recollection of Christie's death in the Memorybank Movie, "The Ridge of Tears", Morag attributes to herself for the first time, "the strength of conviction":

He swings the pipes up, and there is the low mutter of the drones. Then he begins, pacing the hillside as he plays. And Morag sees, with the strength of conviction, that this is Christie's true burial.

And Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, with the voice of drums and the heart of a child, and the gall of a thousand, and the strength of conviction.

(The Diviners, p. 329)

The strength of conviction is the quality that Morag has been deficient in, and whose lack prevents her from writing; following upon her affirmation of Christie and his stories, Morag is released into her mourning. The memory of this release brings about a renewal of Morag's imaginative powers, so that she can write again.

On the same narrative level as "Morag's Tale of Piper Gunn's Women" are the stories that Skinner invents out of his father Lazarus' tales. Like Morag's tale, Skinner's tales of Rider Tonnere and Old Jules Tonnere are far

removed from objective truth. Skinner has taken the material for his stories from his father, who like Christie, is more interested in a story's personal significance than in its value as historical fact:

Well, my old man, he told me this about Rider Tonnere, away back there, so long ago no one knows when, and Lazarus Tonnere sure isn't the man to tell the same story twice, or maybe he just couldn't remember, because each time he told it, it would be kind of different.

(The Diviners, p. 117)

Like Christie's tales, Lazarus' tales are subject to constant revision to suit the mood and purpose of the teller or of his audience. Skinner's tales are attempts to compensate for his sense that he is a member of a dispossessed people, the Metis. Like Morag, Skinner develops into a mature artist, and continues to deal with his ancestral past in his adult art, for example, "The Ballad of Jules Tonnere." (The Diviners, p. 282)

Morag's conversations with Catharine Parr Traill form a fifth narrative level. From these conversations, we learn of yet another reason for Morag's period of artistic sterility: it is no longer a self-evident truth to Morag that "One generation passeth and another generation cometh, but the earth endureth forever." (The Diviners, p. 138).

Unlike Mrs. Traill, or at least, unlike the Mrs. Traill

whom Morag conjures up, Morag cannot feel any certainty that her writing is a valid activity. "I am deficient in faith" (The Diviners, p. 138), Morag confesses to Mrs. Traill.

In a world threatened with extinction, the writing of a novel seems to her to be a questionable pursuit: there may not be anyone around to read it, for one thing. Nevertheless, Morag cannot help but perceive Mrs. Traill's energy and industry as a reproach, and feels that she ought to be able to follow Mrs. Traill's example. By the time of her third and final conversation with Catharine Parr Traill, Morag is able to come to terms with Mrs. Traill. This is because Morag has finally been able to make her own act of faith by having a piper play at Christie's funeral. Morag's motivation in summoning Mrs. Traill in the first place seemed to be nostalgia for a life whose hazards could be dealt with in simple physical terms, but in the modern world that Morag inhabits, Mrs. Traill's advice no longer seems viable: "In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing." (The Diviners, p. 79) Morag's problems cannot be solved by doing, as Mrs. Traill's could, and so it is a step forward for Morag when she dismisses Mrs. Traill's example as being not pertinent to her own situation:

One thing I'm going to stop doing, though, Catharine. I'm going to stop feeling guilty that I'll never be as hard-working or knowledgeable or all-round terrific as you were ...I'm not built like you, Saint C., or these kids, either. I stand somewhere in between. And yet in my way I've worked damn hard...

(The Diviners, p. 332)

In the complex modern world with which Morag must deal, it is symbolic gestures such as having a piper play at Christie's funeral that have efficacy.

The narrative that accompanies and comments upon the snapshots of Pique, in chapter eight, part four, constitutes still another narrative level, because although it is a parallel to that accompanying the snapshots of Morag in chapter one, part one, there are also some differences between the two. The two narrative levels are distinct, despite the fact that they invite comparison, because the snapshots of Pique occur within the framework of a Memorybank Movie, and those of Morag do not. This means that the descriptions of the photographs of Pique contain an extra distorting element which must be kept in mind in order to appreciate the significance of the descriptions: they represent the way in which the forty-seven year old Morag thinks she perceived the photographs of Pique when they were taken several years previous to the present time. The point is that however Morag perceived the significance

of the snapshots many years ago when they were first taken, she now sees them as reminders of the difficulties she has imposed upon Pique by the independent lifestyle that Morag has chosen to live. In the Memorybank Movie, "Chas", Morag asks herself: "When Pique grows up, will she have any memory of the other things from this time, the things which the snapshot doesn't show?" (The Diviners, p. 266) It is clear that Pique will have memories from that time, of things not visible in the snapshots, just as Morag does of her childhood snapshots: "I keep the snapshots not for what they show but for what is hidden in them." (The Diviners, p. 6) In the description of the snapshot of Pique at age five, we are told that Morag and Pique are sitting together on the front steps, "both smiling hesitantly at the person behind the camera, who has just refused to have his own picture taken." (The Diviners, p. 276) The person behind the camera is Skinner Tonnerre, and the photograph is taken during his first visit with Morag since she became pregnant with Pique. Morag recognizes the validity of Pique's accusing cry: "Why did you have me?" (The Diviners, p. 193), and she understands that her daughter's quest will be as difficult as her own. Pique, like her mother, suffers from the lack of a father. In her recollection of Pique's child-

hood, Morag attempts to face the responsibility of bringing a child into the world.

The Diviners, like some of the other Manawaka novels, features a narrator who tells her own story without comprehending its significance; Morag does not understand what she has been saying to us until the end of the novel. By the end of the novel, the river has become for Morag what it has been for the readers since we started to read the novel, and learned from the title of part one that the river is the "River of Now and Then". The river has become, for Morag, a symbol of the complex relationship of the past, the present and the future: "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence." (The Diviners, p. 370), whereas at the beginning of the novel, it was only a fascinating physical phenomenon. This change in Morag's perception of the river is emblematic of the change in her powers of seeing, which occurs gradually in the novel. Throughout most of the novel, Laurence manipulates the narrative levels in such a way as to suggest that we share with her more insight into Morag than Morag has into her own words and actions. For example, we comprehend more about the Memorybank Movie, "The Ridge of Tears", in which Morag recalls Christie's funeral, and its relation to the begin-

ning of the next chapter, chapter ten, than Morag does. It seems probable that Morag does not know that she is echoing her own description of Piper Gunn's woman from "Morag's Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman", when in the Memorybank Movie, "The Ridge of Tears", she describes herself as having "the strength of conviction". (The Diviners, p. 329) Nor does she seem to realize why, in chapter ten, she experiences a dramatic release from her previous inability to write: she does not, as the reader does, associate this release with her recognition of Christie and his tales in "The Ridge of Tears". Morag does not consciously comprehend the significance of the events that she describes in the Memorybank Movie, "Gainsay Who Dare", while we do, because we see its relation to the beginning of the next chapter, chapter eleven. Morag, on the other hand, experiences and relates the events in the "The Ridge of Tears" Movie, and the events which begin chapter eleven, as though they were more or less unrelated events. Yet we see that Morag's final acceptance of the fact of adoption, in "The Ridge of Tears" Movie, releases her from her feelings of homelessness and alienation, so that having at last established a satisfactory relationship with her past, she

can feel enough faith towards the future that she can let Pique go, as she finally does early in chapter eleven:

"Let her go. This time, it had to be possible and was."

(The Diviners, p. 359) With her manipulation of narrative levels, Laurence permits us to know not only everything that Morag Gunn knows, but everything that Laurence knows about Morag Gunn.

CONCLUSION

A final issue that has significance for an understanding of Laurence's concept of time is that of the continuity among the four novels and A Bird in the House. Each of the five works has several points of intersection with some of the other works. Sometimes this connection takes the shape of a character who reappears, such as Niall Cameron or Dr. McLeod. Or it may be a place, such as the cemetery or the banks of the Wachakwa River. Key images and phrases reappear, as do certain objects, most notably the Currie plaid pin and Lazarus Tonnerre's knife.

These links make us feel the spiritual interdependence of the people of Manawaka, for we see that their lives are joined in countless ways, and that this joining is apparent not only among the living, but between the dead and the living. The consciousness of each individual contains recollections of the dead, perceptions of the living, and thoughts, themes, things and places common to the people of Manawaka. This new perspective which emerges as one reads the five Manawaka works seems particularly ironic in the light of the feelings of loneliness and isolation that beset all five of the narrators of the Manawaka works.

Because of the spiritual interdependence of Manawaka people, Margaret Laurence's imaginative world seems timeless, for regardless of what direction we approach that world from, whether through Hagar's or Morag's perspective, or any of the five narrators, the Manawaka world springs into being entire, and altered only by the fact that a different perspective is operating upon the same world.

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