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THE MEN OF MANAWAKA
AN ENTRANCE TO THE WORKS OF MARGARET LAURENCE

by
Shawn Everet Hayes

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of
English in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
of Masters of Arts at
The University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1987

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ABSTRACT

THE MEN OF MANAWAKA: AN ENTRANCE TO THE WORKS OF MARGARET LAURENCE

by
Shawn Everet Hayes

Any student of Canadian literature is bound to come in contact with the works of Margaret Laurence. Her five major Canadian works have come to be collectively known as the Manawaka series. Set in a fictional town in Manitoba, the series tells of the lives of five very unique, very memorable women. The Stone Angel (1964), A Jest of God (1966), The Fire-Dwellers (1969), The Diviners (1974), and the short story collection A Bird in the House (1970) have become a vital and significant part of Canada's literary identity.

An examination of the criticism of the Manawaka series reveals a profundity of opinion on many aspects of the series. However, there is a decided lack of any critical, collective study of the men of Manawaka. Much of the criticism only briefly mentions the men in the works, often choosing to treat them as secondary characters who are dispensable to the development of theme, or are relevant only to certain metaphoric values found in the stories. The men of Manawaka play a vital and significant role in the lives of the five protagonists of the series, and an examination of this role is long overdue.

By classifying the men in a straightforward manner, it is possible to discuss them in terms of certain, standard roles that men occupy in society: men as fathers, sons, husbands and lovers. Such a classification allows for a discussion of the

men as individual characters as well as relating them thematically to the protagonists. This approach will hopefully provide another entrance by which one can enter the Manawaka world and discover Laurence's ability to create viable and realistic characters.

For my father and mother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the English Department of the University of Windsor, particularly my advisor, Dr. Louis K. MacKendrick, and Dr. Richard Hornsey, Also, special thanks to Dr. Vito Signorile of the Sociology Department for his perspective on the men of Manawaka.

I am indebted to Jennifer Cole for the use of her typewriter to type the final copy of my thesis.

And finally, my gratitude goes out to the two women who are forced to tolerate the never-ending problems of the English Grad students, Beth Proctor and Bev Stahlbrand.

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I'm 90% in agreement with Women's Lib. But I think we have to be careful here . . . for instance, I don't think enough attention has been paid to the problems men have and are going to have increasingly because of the changes taking place in women. Men have to be reeducated with the minimum amount of damage to them. These are our husbands, our sons, our lovers . . . we can't live without them, and we can't go to war against them. The change must liberate them as well.

Margaret Laurence

INTRODUCTION

Any student of Canadian literature is bound to come in contact with the works of certain Canadian writers. Names such as Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Morley Callaghan, Alice Munro, Leonard Cohen, and Hugh MacLennan often appear on the booklists for survey courses in the subject. To this list of esteemed writers, one further name is almost always included: Margaret Laurence. One must search to find a student of literature in Canada who has not read a novel or short story by this gifted and sensitive writer. Her five major Canadian works have come to be collectively known as the Manawaka series. Set in the fictional town of Manawaka, Manitoba, the series tells of the lives of five very unique, very memorable women. The Stone Angel (1964), A Jest of God (1966), The Fire-Dwellers (1969), The Diviners (1974), and the short story collection A Bird in the House (1970) have become a vital and significant part of Canada's literary identity. Through the characters of Hagar Shipley, Rachel Cameron, Stacey MacAindra, Morag Gunn, and Vanessa MacLeod, Laurence has established herself as an author who is capable of writing realistically yet uniquely about ordinary people and ordinary experiences, while revealing significant human truths to the reader. The didactic aspect of her writing is of great importance to an understanding of her work, but does not lessen the simple aesthetic pleasure of entering into the world of Manawaka.

Much criticism has been written on the Manawaka series as a collection, as well as on each individual work. An examination of the criticism shows a profundity of opinion on such topics as symbolism, religious imagery and metaphor, and narrative technique in Laurence's five works. A great deal of the criticism approaches the Manawaka series from a woman's perspective: that is, the majority of critics choose to narrow in on the five female protagonists. This is understandable, since each of the works is told from a woman's viewpoint. In fact, all of the works have some or complete first person narration. One cannot help but be overwhelmed by Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa, and Morag. They are strong, unforgettable women. Criticism dealing with their growth and awareness of themselves as women is valid and necessary. However, there is an inherent danger in approaching the Manawaka series from a strictly feminist perspective, a danger that can result in what can be considered a great sin of omission.

In the five protagonists of the series, Margaret Laurence has created women who are very identifiable by certain women readers. Laurence's ability to capture universal female experiences and translate them into fiction has earned her much praise. That the bulk of criticism chooses to emphasize this fact is a solid indication of her success. What has been lacking in Laurencian criticism, however, is a collective study of the men of Manawaka. Much of the feminist criticism only briefly mentions the men in the works, often choosing to treat them as secondary characters who are dispensable

to the development of theme, or are relevant only to certain metaphoric values found in the stories. It is true that the female protagonists are able to grow and learn as individuals, but this growth does not occur in a vacuum. The men of Manawaka play a vital and significant role in the lives of the women, and an examination of this role is long overdue.

I have chosen to classify the men in a straightforward manner, discussing them in terms of certain, standard roles men occupy in society: their symbolic or figurative functions are material for another study. Men as fathers, sons, husbands and lovers seemed the most logical classification, allowing for discussion of the men as individual characters as well as relating them thematically to the protagonists. The last chapter of my argument, men as diviners, needed a certain amount of clarification, but the end result is somewhat self-explanatory.

In no way does such an examination suggest or imply that previous criticism of the Manawaka series is invalid or unimportant. Indeed, an extensive study of the men of the series would not be possible had it not been for the abundance of criticism already written about the series. It is next to impossible to deal with a select group of Manawakans if there is not a solid base from which to build upon. I am indebted to those who have come before me, and do not intend to deny or negate the validity of their theories. Rather, I question their approach, and have attempted to expand and criticize where necessary, thereby providing another level

or entrance to the series as a whole. No doors are being shut, but, hopefully, a new one is opening. Before entering through it, however, a brief examination of previous criticism is necessary.

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MANAWAKA SERIES

[Laurence's] books are not polemics. Though they deal with the injustices of double standards, inequality of opportunity, and sex role stereotyping, they do so because these affect the daily lives of her characters; her concern, by probing their need for liberation, is to celebrate the liberation of the human spirit.¹

Perhaps the major theme of the Manawaka series is the importance of growth, the need to avoid emotional stagnation. The five protagonists of the series all have one major element in common; by the end of the respective works, each woman is able to admit to some form of emotional or intellectual growth. These women know something now that they did not know before: Hagar Shipley, the proud old woman who faces herself honestly before she dies; Rachel Cameron, the 34-year old woman who is frightened of life but soon comes to accept whatever it presents to her; Stacey MacAindra, approaching middle age, yearning for both stability and excitement, but eventually settling for exactly what she has; Vanessa MacLeod, who writes in retrospect of her childhood, and recognizes the influence of her family on her life; and Morag Gunn, the sensitive author who embraces her past and learns to live for the present. As individual characters, the five protagonists are clearly detailed and revealed to the reader by Laurence. As women, the protagonists tend to act and react to universal female dilemmas, and this becomes quite apparent when one studies the criticism of the series.

There is an abundance of criticism that deals with

Margaret Laurence's Canadian works and her talent as a crafts-person. Because this study of the men of Manawaka deals with Laurence's five works as a series, the majority of criticism used for this thesis has been chosen because it, too, deals with the series as a whole, rather than dealing with only one or two of the works. The preclusion of such specific studies does in no way suggest a lack of their importance or an unawareness of their content. A certain amount of selectivity was needed to shape the criticism into a manageable, workable size. The result is a narrowing in on four major works: Clara Thomas' The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (1976), William New's Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence (1977), Patricia Morley's Margaret Laurence (1981), and Helen M. Buss' Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence (1985). An examination of these works show a decided neglect in any substantial collective examination of the men of Manawaka and their interaction and involvement with the protagonists of the series.

Mention should be made of two articles that provide overviews of the Manawaka series: David Blewitt's "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," and Harriet Blodgett's "The Real Lives of Margaret Laurence's Women." Both are cited in this thesis, and are of benefit to anyone interested in Laurence's work in general, and the Manawaka series specifically.

It is safe to say that the most well-known critic and biographer of Laurence is Clara Thomas. She is not only responsible for The Manawaka World, but also for the earlier

Canadian Writers Number 3: Margaret Laurence (1969). It is The Manawaka World that is of prime concern for a student of Laurence's work, since it is all-inclusive and full of insight and great thought. However, this particular work deals mainly with the five protagonists, while only briefly commenting on the men who (as will be demonstrated) are so important to theme:

Among them, the five women, Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa and Morag, are pre-eminent. These characters did not happen because Margaret Laurence set herself a special goal of writing novels about women, and certainly not because she has not been successful with male characters (Archipelago, Johnny Kestoe, Bram Shipley, Grandfather Connor, Jules Tonnerre and Christie Logan are a creditable gallery!).²

It goes without saying that the five protagonists are pre-eminent. We see the Manawaka world through their eyes, and must be continually aware that this view can and is biased. Thomas' study narrows in on the women, and their involvement with men receives a certain emphasis. Thomas recognizes Laurence's ability to create credible men, but chooses not to detail how or why. Her main emphasis always returns to the women:

[The women of the series] do issue as individuals and as members of the human race, with dignity and potential, rights and responsibilities, which are insistently shown to be equal to men's.³

Thomas tends to stress this equality between men and women, but one must question its validity. Stacey and Morag do seem aware of the need for equality, but Thomas neglects to discuss this equality in reference to Hagar, Rachel, and Vanessa. Their concerns seem less tied in to this need to equate them-

selves in feminist terms.

Thomas emphasizes the ultimate strengths of the five female protagonists, thereby suggesting that any growth on their part occurs in isolation, that they are each singularly responsible for any of the insights or truths they discover. Men play a significant role in this growth, which validates them as thematically important. That the men can stand successfully as individual characters, whether as fathers, sons, or husbands, is further validation:

Through five works of fiction, [Manawaka] has grown as a vividly realized, microcosmic world, acting as a setting for the dilemmas of its unique individuals and also exercising its own powerful dynamic on them.⁴

Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence is edited by William New. A compilation of various articles, it offers the reader various examinations and interpretations of the works of Laurence. Contributors include Margaret Atwood, Phyllis Gotlieb, Clara Thomas, Henry Kriesel, and George Bowering. In his introduction, New notes the path which Laurencian criticism so often follows:

Laurence's major characters - Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa, Morag - are all women seeking liberation, and much of the criticism of her work has been preoccupied with this fact.⁵

New is presumably aware of the lack of extensive study of the men as a collective group. But to continue this absence of critical attention, most of the articles in his book deal with the protagonists and their journeys. Articles such as Marge Piercy's "Gritty places and strong women," and C.M.

McLay's "Every Man is an Island: Isolation in A Jest of God" stress the feminist approach to the works. Even New sums up the importance of the women and their effect of the reader:

Still, Morag, Rachel, Hagar, and Stacey are women, living out female psychological, sexual, and social lives. This affects their perspective; it gives them the particularity of their experience; and the particularity in turn gives them a power of presence in the reader's mind.⁶

Patricia Morley's study of Margaret Laurence is another, all-encompassing examination of the Manawaka series. Each work is discussed in a separate chapter, but Morley does emphasize the connectedness of the five works. Morley's thoughts are presented in a clear and logical manner, and she does devote some space to the study of men. Like Thomas, however, the focus of Morley's study is the women. Morley does recognize Laurence's ability as a concerned writer:

The quest for freedom, for relationships of equality and understanding, for the survival of the spirit with dignity and love - these Laurentian themes reflect the emotional involvement with socio-political problems which [Hugh] MacLennan and Laurence believe to be essential for the novelist.⁷

Morley's summation of the series typifies the attitude of most critics: "all the Manawaka works dramatize the plight of women in a male-oriented, chauvinistic society where both sexes are often unconscious of bias and social conditioning."⁸

A recent major study of the work of Margaret Laurence is Helen M. Buss' Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka

Works of Margaret Laurence. The very choice of topic prevents major discussion of the thematic importance of the men, although Buss is forced by necessity to touch on some of the more prominent male characters. Because her study deals with the importance of the maternal connection in a woman's life, much of Buss' discussion centers around the protagonists, leaving little room for the men. Her approach is valid, in that it opens up new areas of thought regarding the series.

The discussion of the men of Manawaka that follows provides further and more specific examples of the criticism mentioned briefly in this chapter. Specific points are challenged, allowing for a better understanding of the men, as well as providing a new entrance to the works of Margaret Laurence.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER ONE

¹William New, ed. Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977) 5.

²Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 192.

³Thomas 193.

⁴Thomas 174.

⁵New 5.

⁶New 6.

⁷Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 149.

⁸Morley 91.

CHAPTER TWO

FATHERS

The plagues go on from generation to generation.
(The Stone Angel, p.254)

For most of the women in the Manawaka series, their first involvement with men is as daughters. Men as parents affect the view that women have of other men in later relationships. Whether as examples of morality or barometers by which to judge husbands and lovers, the fathers, grandfathers, and guardians of the Manawaka series do leave some impression on the female protagonists of each work.

Hagar's father, Jason Currie, is crucial in sharing Hagar's life. Because she is without a mother, Hagar is forced to turn to her father for guidance and instruction in her early years. Consequently, many of the attitudes and affectations seen in the older Hagar can be traced directly back to her father:

Deprived of feminine influence, Hagar was raised by her father in his own image. A masculine figure, with a will of steel and a temper to match, he despised softness of any kind, equating it with weakness.

Jason is a self-made man; a successful merchant in Manawaka, he is able to provide a comfortable existence for his daughter and two sons. "He never believed in wasting a word or a minute" (p.5), and Hagar receives the most of his attention. Jason sees his sons as "graceful unspirited boys," and often wishes that Hagar had been born male (p.5). After all, it is she who is the most intelligent and strong-willed of his three children (pp. 7, 11).

One particular incident perhaps best describes Jason's feelings for Hagar. After embarrassing her father in his store, Hagar is taken into the backroom and punished by means of a foot ruler:

He looked at my dry eyes in a kind of fury, as though he'd failed unless he drew water from them. He struck and struck, and then all at once he threw the ruler down and put his arms around me. He held me so tightly I was almost smothered against the thick moth-ball-smelling roughness of his clothes. (p.7)

Jason has the ability to react to Hagar in many different ways. Upon her return to Manawaka after two years of schooling in Ontario, Hagar is treated as an object by her father, who simply "nods and nods as though [she] were a thing and his" (p.37). Jason takes much pride in the lady that Hagar has become, but this pride manifests itself in some form of ownership. Jason believes that Hagar is a "credit" to him, and that "it was worth every penny for the two years" (p.37). For Jason, it seems that Hagar's value is dependent on how she can benefit and elevate him in the eyes of the citizens of Manawaka. Jason's concern regarding proper appearances becomes a crucial element in Hagar's life after her marriage to Bram Shipley; Jason's near obsession with the external world soon becomes Hagar's, and eventually prevents her from any enjoyment that could be found in a life with her husband Bram and their two sons.

It is Hagar's engagement and marriage to Bram that eventually destroys Jason's relationship with his daughter. He refuses to acknowledge her or her marriage, believing

Bram to be nothing more than "common dirt" (p.42). Within the confines of Manawakan society, Jason is correct in his assumption of Bram. As a parent, Jason has invested time and money in creating an educated and superficially genteel daughter. For Hagar to marry a crass, ill-mannered, and unsuccessful farmer would bring not only shame but failure to Jason as a father. By turning his back on Hagar, Jason refuses to acknowledge any contribution to Hagar as an adult, and so takes no responsibility for the outcome of her life:

The pride that destroyed [Hagar's] relations with others is established in the first paragraph of the novel as her father's error also; like her father's enormous will, Hagar's was directed also toward mean objects and 'getting ahead' and being a name and a force in the microcosmic, claustrophobic world of Manawaka.²

It is this pride of Jason's that eventually causes him to leave most of his fortune to the town, rather than to any of his children (p.55). Even with Jason's death is Hagar able to feel her father's wrath and unwillingness to forgive.

As a father, Jason is hard and demanding. He becomes for Hagar the singularly most important adult role model in her life. His pride becomes Hagar's pride, and both leave life having missed opportunities for satisfying the need for sincere and effective human contact. As a man, Jason refuses to acknowledge any weak or feminine side in his two sons, but revels in the determination and stubbornness of his daughter, until it is turned against him. It

is Hagar, not Dan or Matthew, who is deeply affected by the war cry of the Clanranald MacDonalds- "Gainsay who Dare" - even though as a child, she "hadn't an inkling what it meant" (p.12). The war cry passed on from father to daughter becomes a verbal symbol of the Currie pride, a pride which prevents any opposition to Hagar, as is seen in her marriage to Bram.

The only hint we are ever given of Jason's personal life is his somewhat clandestine meeting with No-Name Lottie Driesser's mother at the Manawaka cemetery, a meeting witnessed by Hagar:

I thought he was going to hit her, perhaps say 'hold out your hands, miss' as he'd done to me. I didn't know why. But through the leaves I could see destruction printed on his face. He didn't touch her, though, nor say a word. He turned and walked away, his boots crunching on the fallen twigs, until he reached the clearing where he'd left the buggy. (p.15)

Jason's meeting with Lottie Driesser's mother is open to interpretation: on the one level, we can assume that Jason and the woman are having an affair. On another level, however, the relationship reveals to us Jason's need for contact away from his family and his store. Jason's reactions to the woman's death sum up his attitude about those less fortunate than he: "she couldn't have had much of a life"; "her sort isn't much loss to the town, I'm bound to say"; "consumption? That's contagious, isn't it?" (p.15). Jason is compassionate yet judgemental; he pities the woman and sees her as of little value to the town. In much the

same way as Hagar can serve Jason's public and social needs, Lottie's mother can serve Jason's sexual needs: his comment regarding the contagious aspect of consumption does suggest some form of close contact with Lottie's mother. Both Hagar and Lottie's mother can be regarded as personal objects by Jason, and both feel his wrath when they do not jibe with his view of the world. Although Hagar is on the receiving end of Jason's wrath, it does not prevent her from inculcating his attitudes; for Hagar, Bram becomes the sort that "isn't much loss to the town." Bram, like Lottie's mother, is good enough to sleep with, but not good enough to be seen with. Laurence clearly sets up this parallel between the two generations so that a certain amount of understanding is possible when we witness Hagar's treatment of Bram.

With A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, we are introduced to Niall Cameron, a father very different from Jason Currie, yet no less influential in the lives of his two daughters, Rachel and Stacey. At the time in which we meet and come to know the two sisters, their father has been dead for many years, yet for both women, Niall remains a faded yet felt presence.

In life, the ghost-like quality of Niall Cameron impresses itself upon his family. He is Manawaka's undertaker, a career that allows him a certain amount of peace: "it was in those rooms on the ground floor there . . . that father lived away his life" (A Jest of God, p.16),

"capable only of dressing the dead in between bouts with his own special embalming fluid" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.5). For much of his life, Niall chooses to remove himself from his family: physically, he remains downstairs, keeping company with corpses; emotionally, he uses alcohol to distance himself from a nagging wife and two young daughters who are dependent on him as a parent. Consequently, Niall can be seen as weak and submissive, a necessary part of life and death in Manawaka, but visibly ineffective as a father. However, his presence lingers in the lives of his daughters long after he has departed.

For Rachel, Niall appears as a man moulded by circumstances, a man who passively sits and lets life slip away. There is a constant fear for Rachel of becoming like her father; upon contemplation of getting sleeping pills from the doctor, she thinks "they frighten me. What if one became addicted? Does it run in the family? Nonsense, not drugs. It wasn't drugs with him" (A Jest of God, p.20). With the help of Hector Jonas, Rachel is able to recognize the possibility that Niall's life was one of choice:

If my father had wanted it otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different Was that what he needed most after all, not ever to touch any living thing? If it's true he wanted that life the most, why mourn? Why ever cease from mourning? (p.153)

Niall becomes for Rachel an example. Her sudden understanding that perhaps Niall lived his life in exactly the manner in which he wanted shows Rachel the importance of a con-

scious decision regarding the quality of one's own life. The father who teaches Rachel how to make a drinking cup out of a paper towel (p.180), also teaches her, by example, to live life by choice. In contrast to Niall, however, Rachel chooses not to retreat from the world, but to move away from Manawaka and begin again.

In The Fire-Dwellers, we see another side to Niall. Like Rachel, Stacey is aware of Niall's alcoholism, and seems to feel a certain amount of anger because of its effect on her childhood, a childhood replete with a ghost-like father who was "down among the dead men, bottles and flesh" (The Fire-Dwellers, p.40). Because Stacey is the older sister, and because she is less passive than Rachel, her memories of Niall seem more concrete and, at times, more bitter. Perhaps she is more bitter because it is she and not Rachel who inherits Niall's love of liquor. Stacey is constantly nursing a gin and tonic, and recognizes this connection with her father:

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 [May, Niall's wife]. I only thought people ought to be strong and loving and not make a mess of their lives and ought to rear kids with whom it might be possible to talk (p.151)

Clara Thomas believes that Niall "drank to forget that he lived more closely and more easily with death than with life."³ One could agree that Niall did live more closely with death, but the fact that he drank suggests that his existence among the dead was anything but easy. Liquor

became for Niall a numbing agent, suggesting a need to escape from an awareness of those he chose to spend his days with, and those upstairs who possibly could have benefited from his presence. Niall's alcoholism is a denial of responsibility to his two daughters, in much the same way that Jason denies Hagar after her marriage to Bram.

The amount of pain experienced by Niall is witnessed in a scene recalled by Stacey. Niall is telling of his war experience:

He told me about a boy of eighteen - hand grenade went off near him and the blast caught the kid between the legs. My dad cried when he told it, because the kid didn't die. My dad was drunk, but then he wouldn't have spoken of it if he hadn't been. (p.4)

This scene is the only indication we are given of the memories that haunt Niall. There is no justification for Niall's distancing from his family, but there is a certain degree of understanding of the thoughts that prevent him from effectively relating to his family.

For Stacey, Niall becomes a man by which to judge other men:

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. (p.151)

Stacey marries Mac thinking he is the antithesis to Niall. When such proves not to be the case and Mac begins to show a certain amount of vulnerability and pain, Stacey is at a

loss as to how to deal with him. Niall never truly allowed his daughters to witness his deep pain and suffering, and so, for Stacey in particular, the daughters are uncomfortable and ill-prepared for dealing with such emotion in other men.

In the collection of short stories A Bird in the House, Laurence writes of the early life of Vanessa MacLeod, a life that is influenced by two men who share partial responsibility for parenting: Vanessa's father, Ewen MacLeod, and her maternal grandfather, Timothy Connor. Both these men influence Vanessa, even though both are as different as Jason Currie and Niall Cameron.

Ewen MacLeod is a sensitive and active father. Like Niall Cameron, Ewen must live with internal ghosts that cannot willingly be shared with his family. However, this inability to share does not force him to retreat from his loved ones. Ewen seems to exert much emotional energy towards making a comfortable life for his family. His inherent sensitivity and the events of his early life combine and seem to affect much of what he does.

Ewen's guilt over his brother, Roderick, is a major part of his total being. When the two were children, Roderick damaged an eye in an accident with an air-rifle, a rifle that belonged to Ewen. It is Ewen's wife, Beth, who states that Ewen's guilt over the accident is self-imposed. It is not Ewen's mother who made him feel guilty, but "it was how he felt himself" ("To Set Our House in Order," p.47).

When both brothers go off to fight in the war, it is Ewen who survives; it is Ewen who writes the letter to his mother describing the falsity of his brother's death, "saying how gallantly Rod had died" (p.48). When Beth gives birth to a son, Ewen's mother requests that the child be named Roderick, and Ewen is unable to deny this gesture, since it seems somehow a payment for his part in his brother's life and death.

Of all the members of his family, it is his daughter Vanessa who seems able to share some of Ewen's personal thoughts and beliefs. In "A Bird in the House," Vanessa refuses to attend the annual Remembrance Day Parade. In discussing her decision with her father, she comes to some understanding of what he experienced during the war:

He had had to watch his own brother die, not in some antiseptic calm of some hospital, but out in the open, the stretches of mud I had seen in the snapshots, He would not have known what to do. He would just have had to stand there and look at it, whatever that might mean. (p.79)

Vanessa and Ewen share a moment similar to the moment experienced by Stacey and Niall. However, Ewen does not need alcohol to express his emotions. Without actually verbalizing his memories, Ewen is able to connect with Vanessa, and the two share this one painful memory, due in large part to Vanessa's sensitivity and imagination. Ewen recognizes the upsetting effects these thoughts have on Vanessa, and proceeds to point out some of the more positive aspects of his war experience, such as the chance

to escape from Manawaka and see some of the world (p.79).

Ewen also shares his religious beliefs with Vanessa. After attending a church service one Sunday evening, Vanessa questions her father about heaven and hell. Ewen's response indicates much about his feelings towards life:

'Well, I don't know. I don't think they're actual places. Maybe they stand for something that happens all the time here, or else doesn't happen. It's kind of hard to explain. I guess I'm not so good at explanations.' (p.88)

Like Niall Cameron, Ewen MacLeod has chosen a profession that brings him into contact with the pain and suffering, the "hell" of life in Manawaka. As a doctor, Ewen cannot delude himself into believing that life runs smoothly for all. In "The Loons," we see that, unlike Niall, Ewen refuses to be defeated by life's misery, and chooses instead to take some positive action to help someone less fortunate. By inviting Piquette Tonnerre, a young Métis girl suffering from tuberculosis of the bone, to share the summer with his family at the MacLeod cottage on Diamond Lake, Ewen takes a step towards improving the quality of one person's life, rather than hiding away and letting the suffering go on. Four years after Ewen's death, Vanessa meets Piquette, who tells her that "your dad was the only person in Manawaka that ever done anything good to me" ("The Loons," p.104). It is perhaps a tribute to Ewen MacLeod as a man that, in the stifling atmosphere of Manawaka, he was able to lessen the "hell" of another person's life, even if only for a brief time.

Timothy Connor can be considered an important parent figure. Vanessa spends a great deal of time with her grandfather; she, her mother, and her brother become part of the Connor household after Ewen's death. Timothy is an essential character in A Bird in the House. Clara Thomas goes so far as to call him the hero of the collection of short stories.⁴ Whatever label one chooses to place on Timothy, his importance in Vanessa's life, and his role in the Manawaka series, cannot be ignored.

Timothy, like Jason Currie, can be considered a prairie patriarch. In his discussion of prairie fiction, Dick Harrison describes the characteristics of such a figure:

He is an absolute temporal leader of his family, a tyrant, but he also pretends to a divine commission to carry out his purposes, like the patriarchs of old.

Harrison's definition is cited in reference to Caleb Gare, the patriarch of Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, but the definition fits closely to the characters of Jason and Timothy, although these two men seem less ruthless than the patriarch of Ostenso's novel.

In "The Sound of the Singing," Vanessa relates Timothy's history:

. . . he had come out west by sternwheeler and had walked the hundred-odd miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka . . . He had been the first blacksmith in Manawaka, and finally had saved enough money to set himself up in the hardware business. (p.7)

Like Jason Currie, Timothy is a self-made man who has worked very hard to provide a good life for his family; the Brick

house in which the Connor family lives was the "first of its kind" in Manawaka (p.1). While capable of providing the material comforts necessary for a good life, Timothy also emotionally tyrannizes his family. He orders his brother Dan out of the house when Dan asks for a loan of some money (p.27); he compares his daughter, Edna, to a hired girl (p.12), and treats one of her gentleman callers like a "blood-sucker" (p.63); Timothy disapproves of Beth and Ewen's decision to have another child, and believes his whole family is "picking away, picking away, wanting something for nothing" (p.27). Timothy is a strong, hateful, cranky old man who treats everyone except his wife with disdain. For Agnes, his "gentle and unworldly" wife, Timothy is able to garner a certain amount of civility; Agnes is directly spared his sharp tongue and opinionated philosophizings, although she is audience to his interactions with the rest of the family.

It is Agnes' death that allows Timothy to drop his bear-like façade for a moment and finally show an emotion other than anger. In "The Mask of the Bear," Timothy breaks the news of her grandmother's death to Vanessa:

Then, as I gazed at him, unable to take in the significance of what he had said, he did a horrifying thing. He gathered me into the relentless grip of his arms. He bent low over me, and sobbed against the cold skin of my face. (p.67)

Timothy's show of emotion is short-lived, and he quickly regains the "carved face" so familiar to Vanessa. This is the only true moment grandfather and granddaughter share,

which accounts for Vanessa's reaction to it as a "horrifying thing." Vanessa does not expect tenderness from Timothy, and is quite incapable of reacting to it in a positive manner.

In "Jericho's Brick Battlements," an older Vanessa becomes involved with a married man. Timothy surmises that the man is married before Vanessa discovers this fact, and Vanessa hates him because of it. The two are never truly reconciled, and Timothy's importance as a man and as an influence on Vanessa's life does not become apparent to her until Timothy's death at age ninety-four: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins" (p.179). Although Timothy was cruel and insensitive, he is part of Vanessa's emotional upbringing, and she cannot deny his importance to her life as an adult.

A Bird in the House is structured so that the female protagonist is influenced by two male parent figures. With the characters of Ewen and Timothy, Laurence is able to explore two very different approaches to parenting; with Ewen, we see the sensitive, giving father who is capable of emotional support and insight. With Timothy, we see the authoritarian businessman who is given the last word in his own home. At times, it is difficult to accept either man as realistic figures. Ewen seems almost too caring and too good-hearted, and Timothy seems too tyrannical. Within the confines of the collection of short stories, it is Vanessa who realizes the median between these two apparent

extremes. She is a product of both these men - sensitive yet strong willed - but refuses to either extreme. Vanessa becomes a compromise between her father and grandfather, seemingly possessing the better qualities of each of these men.

The final work of the Manawaka series, The Diviners, introduces the reader to perhaps the most unusual and multi-faceted male parent figure of the series, Christie Logan. As Patricia Morley states, "Christie - grimacing clown, fool, hero, and religious prophet - is a complex creation, one of Laurence's best."⁶ Indeed, Laurence's ability as a writer is best exemplified in the character of Christie, a man who is both repulsive and compelling, idiotic and prophetic. He is not Morag Gunn's biological father; he is in no way related to her by blood or marriage. Yet his influence on her life is great, and he becomes as significant to her as a father as Jason, Niall, Ewen, and Timothy are to the protagonists of the other works. Before Christie's death, Morag tells him that he has "been" her father, and there is perhaps no better compliment one can give to a guardian (The Diviners, p.396).

When Morag's biological parents die, she is sent to Manawaka to live with Christie Logan, the town garbage collector, and his obese wife, Prin. From the first moment, Christie becomes known to both Morag and the reader. Christie looks silly to young Morag, and she is offended by the way he smells (p.36). Christie's table manners

leave much to be desired:

Christie chews with his mouth open so you can see the mushy slop of pink meat and greeny mush cabbage and gummy potatoes in there. Morag wants to hit him so hard his mouth will pour blood. She stares at him, but he does not notice. Or if he does, he doesn't let on. (p.65)

Not only is Christie personally offensive, he also deals with garbage, a career choice that causes Morag to be teased by the other children of Manawaka, those children whose fathers are considered better than Christie simply because of their jobs. However, Christie is wise enough to realize why he is looked down upon: "I see what they throw out, and I don't care a shit, but they think I do, so that's why they cannot look at me" (p.39). For a man lacking in social graces, Christie has an unusual insight into the nature of man, and it is this insight that is shared with and passed on to Morag.

Christie's philosophy is a simple and pragmatic one: "if you expect things to be fair, you'll be waiting until hell freezes over" (p.81); "you make your own chances in this world, or else you don't make them" (p.88); "if you want to make yourself into a doormat, there's a christly host of them that'll be only too willing to tread all over you" (p.107); "don't ever say [sorry] again - not to me nor to anyone, for it's a useless christly awful word" (p.209). Morag is constantly exposed to Christie's musings, and his talk of independence, pride, and self-reliance seem to have an effect on Morag. Christie's tales regarding Piper Gunn

give Morag some sense of the past, some history to hold on to, even if it stems from Christie's vivid imagination. Perhaps unintentionally, Christie provides Morag with what is needed to survive a troublesome marriage, a rocky career as a writer, and a tense relationship with a proud and stubborn daughter. More importantly, Christie shows Morag that men can also feel pain (p.187).

The compassion of Christie (his name is, of course, significant) is a life-giving force, a means of grace which offers the only true alternative to the spiritual death of Jason Currie and the world he represents.

It is this grace, manifested in the character of Christie, that supplies Morag with an abundance of truths from which she can draw in her adult life.

The progression of fathers is quite apparent in the Manawaka series. From Jason Currie to Christie Logan, Laurence reveals the various ways in which a man can parent, culminating with Christie. It is perhaps significant that the most effective father of the series is not biologically related to the protagonist, a fact that suggests that, although a blood connection may be important, it is the daily interaction between parent and child that is most effective. Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, and Vanessa recognize the blood of their fathers that flows through their veins, but it is Morag, most of all, who is unable to deny the importance of the emotional and philosophical connection to the man she comes to regard as her father.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER TWO

¹Denyse Forman and Uma Parmeswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence," Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977) 91.

²Clara Thomas, Canadian Writers Number 3: Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969) 40.

³Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 184.

⁴Thomas, Manawaka World 100.

⁵Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977) 111.

⁶Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 126.

⁷David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," Journal of Canadian Studies 13 (Fall 1978): 35.

CHAPTER THREE

SONS

I stand in relation to my life as both 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.40)

Of the five female protagonists of the Manawaka series, only two have sons; Hagar is mother to Marvin and John, and Stacey is mother to Ian and Duncan. The sons in The Stone Angel and The Fire-Dwellers play similar roles for their mothers; as sons, they allow the mothers to recognize the importance of lineage and the importance of recognizing mistakes in themselves; as men, the sons tend to assist the women in coming to some understanding of the other men in their lives, particularly their husbands. The emotional connection between mother and son is often a strong one, and, especially in the case of Hagar and John, one that can lead to misunderstandings and recriminations. For a more extensive view of Laurence's treatment of sons, one must look to men who are not related to the protagonists. It is through the characters of James Doherty in A Jest of God, Buckle Fennick in The Fire-Dwellers, and Jules Tonnerre in The Diviners that we see a more complete overview of the men as sons in the series.

When we meet the ninety-year old Hagar in The Stone Angel, she is living with her sixty-four year old son Marvin and his wife Doris. Marvin is a paint salesman,

and he and Doris have two children of their own, a son and a daughter. To say that Marvin's assumption of his mother's care in her own home is akin to entering a lion's den is something of an understatement. However, Marvin has tolerated the situation for seventeen years, and even Hagar is wise enough to question how all three have been able to bear it (The Stone Angel, p.31). From the moment that Marvin was born, Hagar chose to identify him so closely with her ignorant husband Bram that anything Marvin did was judged harshly by her. Hagar's thoughts during labour reveal this connection between father and son:

What could I say? That I'd not wanted children? That I believed I was going to die, and wished I would, and prayed I wouldn't? That the child he wanted would be his and none of mine? That I'd sucked my secret pleasure from his skin, but wouldn't care to walk in broad daylight on the streets of Manawaka with any child of his? (p.88)

Hagar's prejudice towards Marvin remains with her for the rest of her life, and she is almost totally unaware of Marvin's need for some sign of affection or recognition from his mother. As a child, Marvin would do his chores, and then "hang around the kitchen" waiting for some word of praise from Hagar (p.99). However, no praise was ever forthcoming, and Marvin soon grew accustomed to this lack of attention. When Marvin enlists in the army to fight in the First World War, the good-bye scene between mother and son typifies Hagar's reserve towards her eldest son:

I wanted all at once to hold him tightly,

plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses. (p.114)

It is the Currie pride, inherited from Jason, that prevents Hagar from revealing her true feelings to Marvin. Consequently, a potentially rewarding exchange between mother and son is missed, and Marvin leaves home with no real knowledge of how his mother feels.

The rift between mother and son continues into Marvin's adult life, manifesting itself in the internal comments made by Hagar: "he has never had a facility with words" (p.29); "he was never much of a conversationalist" (p.99); "he's such a slow thinker" (p.103); "tact was never his long suit" (p.235). Hagar's criticisms of Marvin are so easily applicable to Bram, who is somewhat inarticulate and less than tactful. This constant juxtaposition of Bram and Marvin, even if occurring on a subconscious level, prevents Hagar from acknowledging the benefits of such a son as Marvin. Her unresolved feelings towards Bram manifest themselves in her dealings with Marvin, and it is not until she is dying that Hagar is able finally to give Marvin a sign of recognition. She considers asking Marvin for his pardon, a thought that indicates that Hagar is aware of the mistakes made in her life with her son; however, she simply tells Marvin that he has been a better son than John, but "it doesn't occur to him that a person in [Hagar's] place would ever lie" (p.272). This lie seems to

satisfy Marvin, perhaps because he, like Hagar, is able to see that "it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love" (p.274). At times, Hagar may have been overly critical and harsh with Marvin, but it is very doubtful that she would totally ignore the fact that Marvin was giving up a great deal by taking on the responsibility of caring for his elderly mother:

. . . Hagar Shipley, in The Stone Angel, despite (or perhaps because of) her own experience of ordered and disordered homes, finds it difficult to recognize the true character of her two sons, the apparently weak, middle-class Marvin and the dashing and 'masculine' but scarcely liberated John.¹

Marvin may seem weak in his dealings with Hagar, but we see somewhat of a different Marvin in relation to his wife, Doris. Marvin is aware of the extra work Hagar makes for Doris, who is not very young and in less than perfect health. It is for Doris' sake that Marvin finally demands that Hagar enter a nursing home. His overriding concern seems to be the well-being of his wife, the mother of his children. He cares for Doris, but refuses to be led around like a horse by her. With Doris, Marvin is not the little boy so easily neglected by his mother, and can stand up for himself. Because Hagar is the narrator of the novel, it is sometimes difficult to recognize that Marvin has a role other than as her son.

If Hagar's assessment of Marvin can be considered negative, her assessment of the younger son, John, is positive, yet perhaps more inaccurate than that of Marvin. From the

moment of his birth, John becomes for Hagar her golden boy, the son Hagar believes Jason Currie had wanted (p.55). In actuality, John is more like Bram than Marvin ever could be, but Hagar is oblivious even to the possibility that John could be anything like her common, farmer husband. When John is born, Hagar claims his black hair is her own, "forgetting for the moment that Bram was black-haired too" (p.108). Hagar chooses to continue to identify John with herself, especially after the mother and son leave Bram and Manawaka, even when it becomes quite clear that John does not share the dreams for his life that Hagar has created:

Sometimes he would grow keen, and plan with with me, embellishing what I'd said, improving on it, telling me how it would be. And other times he'd listen, lulled and wordless, his restlessness ceasing for a moment, as though I'd been humming him asleep as I used to when he was small. (p.139)

When John announces his decision to return to Manawaka and Bram, Hagar is incapable of understanding his motivation. She is too consumed with her own idealized version of John's life to admit to the possibility that Bram and John have more in common than she and John, and that John might like to lead a life similar to the life that Bram has led; Hagar cannot comprehend John's statement that Manawaka and his father's farm just might be the place for him (p.148).

In much the same way that Marvin takes on the responsibility for the elderly and sick Hagar, John takes on the

care of the dying Bram, "performing rites with such a zeal and burning laughter they seemed both sinister and absurd" (p.153). Both Marvin and John deserve recognition for the difficult tasks they take on, but in both cases, praise from Hagar is almost non-existent. The mother who believes John can do no wrong is unable to give praise to him for the one act in which he deserves such acclaim, that of caring for his dying father. As with Marvin, it is Hagar's feelings for Bram that influence an aspect of her relationship with John.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the relationship between this mother and son is Hagar's deep awareness of John as a sexual being. Because Bram is the only man that Hagar has ever known in sexual terms, her awareness of John's sexuality closely connects father and son in the mind of the mother. As an adolescent, the "stifled storming of [John's] breath in the night" makes Hagar "unquiet and edgy," possibly because it reminds her of her lack of sex since her separation from Bram (p.141). On two separate occasions, Hagar eavesdrops on John while he is with a woman, one incident resulting in Hagar having to remain quiet while John and his girlfriend, Arlene, have sexual intercourse on Hagar's Toronto couch at the Shipley farm :

Nothing to bless themselves with, they had, not a penny in the bank, a gray shell of a house around them, and outside a grit-filled wind that blew nobody any good, and yet they'd closed them-

selves to it all and opened only to each other. (p.185)

Hagar seems transported by John and Arlene's lovemaking, possibly thinking of her physical relationship with Bram. Whatever thoughts go through Hagar's mind, it cannot be denied that Laurence is stressing the connection between father and son. On two separate occasions, father and son respond to Hagar with the same comment - "that would be an everlasting shame" - and both Hagar and the reader are unable to ignore the similarities between Bram and John (pp.125,159).

Perhaps the most obvious symbol showing John's identification with his father rather than his mother is the Currie plaid-pin. For Hagar, the plaid-pin seems to represent the strong and sturdy Currie stock from which she has descended. It is not surprising that she chooses to bestow the pin upon John rather than Marvin. For John, there is no emotional attachment to the pin, and he eventually trades it to Lazarus Tonnerre for a knife, a knife that becomes very significant in the last work of the series, The Diviners. John's disregard for the pin exemplifies his lack of concern for his mother's strong belief in lineage, especially when regarded in relation to John's actual concern for his dying father. Hagar's thoughts of family seem idealized, and it is the pioneer past that attracts her attention; John seems to reject the past and chooses the day-to-day task of living and "getting by"

as an alternative. Hagar might believe John to be a dreamer, but in fact, he seems quite pragmatic.

It is John's death and Hagar's role in it that eventually turns Hagar to stone (p.216). Hagar's attempt to separate John and Arlene result in John getting drunk, answering a dare, and dying from injuries resulting from an accident on a railroad track. Unfortunately, Arlene is killed as well, and Hagar must live with the guilt of their deaths. Not until her confession to Murray Lees in the old fish cannery can Hagar come to some understanding and reconciliation with her part in the death of her favourite son. She mouths the words to Lees that she should have said to John, but it is too little, too late:

I didn't really mean it, about not bringing [Arlene] here. A person speaks in haste. I've always had a temper You could come here in the evenings. I wouldn't say a word. I could go into the front room, or upstairs, if you liked. I'd not get in your way. Wouldn't that be a good idea? (p.220)

Hagar finally learns that she has been too harsh and that she has had to pay a dear price for her mistake. One could argue that Hagar was made of stone before John's death; attempting to separate the two lovers seems the act of a woman with no heart, even if her motives are in the guise of concern for her son's welfare. Towards the end of her life, Hagar hears Marvin call her a "holy terror" (p.272). Hagar regards this remark as a compliment, but her relationship with John is proof that she has been less than

compassionate and calm in her dealings with her sons.

In The Fire-Dwellers, Stacey's two sons are Ian, who is ten, and Duncan, who is seven. Because of their ages, the two boys play only a small role in the novel, and we are not afforded the opportunity of seeing them as adults. However, as sons, Ian and Duncan do help Stacey to come to a better understanding of her career as a mother, and also eventually lead her to recognize that parenting is a task equally shared with her husband, Mac, even if he is not always present or supportive.

Stacey has a recurring and rather idyllic memory of her two sons that stresses their brotherhood:

Duncan and Ian last summer at the beach, wrestling and wisecracking, brown skinny legs and arms, the shaggy flames of their hair, their skin smelling of sand and saltwater. Sea-children, as though they should have been crowned with fronds of kelp and ridden dolphins. (The Fire-Dwellers, p.67)

Although born into and raised in the same environment, Ian and Duncan are different boys. "Duncan rarely hurries, and is largely unaware of other people. Ian guards himself at every turn" (p.12). Ian is the son with enough mechanical know-how to build a go-cart; Duncan is the son with enough imagination to draw elaborate pictures of spaceships on his Sunday school quizzes. Ian is logical and unemotional; Duncan is sensitive and insecure. As one would expect, there is the usual amount of sibling rivalry between the two, partially due to their very different per-

sonalities. There are two incidents, however, that reveal that the brothers are more alike than their parents have perhaps recognized.

Early on in the novel, Stacey is returning home from a morning of shopping. Near her home, she comes upon an accident; a young boy has been hit and killed by a car. Stacey rushes home to check on Ian and Duncan, who are both safe. It is not until much later that Stacey discovers that the boy who was killed was a friend of Ian's. When Stacey questions Ian about his feelings regarding the death of his friend, "he turns upon her, a flame-furred young fox cornered, snarling, self-protective" (p.103). Ian's remarks show that he is not as unemotional as Stacey believes:

Can't you just shut up about it? He was dumb, see? Nobody but a moron would run out into the avenue after a football. It doesn't happen that easy unless guys are pretty dumb. (p.103)

When Stacey finally comes to the understanding that Ian is aware of death and that he can show emotion, she must acknowledge that Ian is much more than he appears. He may "guard himself at every turn," but this does not mean that he feels the impact of events any less than her other children. Much like his father, Ian has a façade of strength, but behind this façade lies a ten-year old boy who "knows he's going to die" (p.192). When Stacey becomes aware of this, she is also acknowledging that, as a mother, she has a very important task, and realizes

that much of what happens to children early on in their lives can shape and mould their thoughts and actions into adulthood. The woman who jokingly calls herself a slut because she does not have a cooked dessert for her kids soon realizes that motherhood consists of more than just meals.

It is Duncan's near drowning that helps Stacey come to a further understanding of the importance of motherhood. This particular incident occurs after Stacey's affair with Luke Venturi, and initially, Stacey feels that she is being punished. When Mac insists on carrying Duncan to the car and Stacey protests, Stacey sees "that she has not really wanted to admit Mac to full and equal parenthood with her."² Duncan helps Stacey come to a better understanding of her husband and both their roles as parents.

The study of the sons of the Manawaka series cannot be limited to the female protagonists and their male children. Laurence's most effective and interesting examples of men as sons can be seen in certain of the secondary characters of the works.

In A Jest of God, the relationship between Rachel and her pupil, James Doherty, reflects not only a major need of Rachel's, but also a somewhat idealized picture of a young boy who, to Rachel's way of thinking, could be her son. Rachel is very aware of James in her class, but does not want the other students to notice. Her thoughts and feelings towards James are internalized:

That boy is the slowest thing on two feet when he's going into the room. Leaving, he always seems about to take off like a sparrow and miraculously fly. Looking at his wiry slightness, his ruffian sorrel hair, I feel an exasperated tenderness. I wonder why I should feel so differently towards him. (A Jest of God, p.4)

James seems to possess similar characteristics to Ian and Duncan MacAindra. James appears independent and able to keep his emotions in check: James does not cry when he is injured by another student in the school playground (p.9). When Rachel has her class draw pictures, James, like Duncan, draws an elaborate spaceship, complete with various dials and panels (p.7). Rachel is attracted to James because he is a boy who exhibits certain traits that are typically associated with boys. Although Rachel feels more comfortable with the girls in her class (p.6), it is James who she is drawn to because of his maleness: he exhibits a certain amount of emotional strength, yet is sensible and vulnerable. However, Rachel is aware of James as a mother is aware of a son, and it is difficult to agree with George Bowering, who believes that none of us is unaware of the sexual attraction Rachel has for James.³ Much of the rest of the novel deals with Rachel's desire for and fear of pregnancy, and one could argue that Rachel's attraction to James stems from her maternal instinct rather than from her long-repressed sexuality. When Rachel strikes James across the face with a ruler, she is reacting to her own frustration and confusion: James is NOT her son, and she

cannot change this fact simply by wishing or dreaming it so. In typical Laurencian style, Rachel regrets the incident after it has occurred, but refuses to take a positive step towards James:

If I could put my hands upon him, and comfort him. If I could say something. It is not for me to say or do anything. How can one retrieve anything at all? Is it always past the appointed hour? (p.66)

To the reader, James appears to be just an average seven-year old boy. To Rachel, James seems to epitomize how a son should act. When James' mother visits Rachel to explain about his absences from school, Rachel is very quick to internalize criticism about the woman. Rachel concludes that mothers "think they are making a shelter for their children, but actually it is the children who are making a shelter for them" (p.63). This is a key to Rachel's idea of James as a son. Rachel looks to the young boy as a haven from her own life, in much the same way as Hagar looks to John when her life is unsatisfactory. The idea of sons as a comfort to parents is very important in the Manawaka series, although John and James are eventually unable to provide anything substantial to Hagar and Rachel.

Perhaps one of the most interesting sons of the series is Buckle Fennick, who is Cliff MacAindra's best friend in The Fire-Dwellers. Buckle spends a great deal of time at the MacAindra home, much to Stacey's annoyance:

Buckle is a trucker. He drives a diesel dinosaur, a steel monster, innumerable great tires,

as heavy as a mountain, roaringly full of crazy power. Buckle loves it. It is his portable fortress, his moveable furnace. It is his lover and himself all in one.

(The Fire-Dwellers, p.44)

Buckle is uncouth and ill-mannered, yet Stacey is very aware of him sexually. When Buckle offers Stacey an afternoon away from her house and kids, she accepts. They eventually end up at Buckle's apartment, which he shares with his blind mother. The description of Buckle's mother reflects not only Laurence's precision for detail, but also gives the reader some idea of what Buckle returns home to everyday:

The woman is gigantic, outspread like rising dough gone amok, swelling and undulating over the stiff upholstery of the chair, gaping body covered with tiny-flower-printed dress huge and shroud-shaped, vastly numerous chins trembling eel-like separate but involved, eyes closed (p.139)

Buckle has an unusual yet effective way of keeping his circus-freak mother sedate: he provides her with cheap port, which she pours from a teapot which is always within her reach. Buckle has no apparent respect for his mother. He tells Stacey that they can have sex in front of her because, by the afternoon, "she's away to hell and gone" (p.141). However, Buckle is very much like John Shipley: as sons, both John and Buckle take on the responsibility of caring for a helpless parent. Buckle may mock and ridicule his mother, but he nonetheless provides for her a home and other necessities of life. Patricia Morley points out that many feminists deal with the "compassion trap,"

a term used to describe a daughter's responsibility for her mother, such as we see in A Jest of God. Morley states that the "compassion trap" is usually a traditional female dilemma.⁴ However, in the Manawaka series, we see several examples of this "trap" where the child is a son rather than a daughter, and the parent is a father rather than a mother: Marvin is responsible for Hagar, John is responsible for Bram, and Buckle is responsible for his mother. Laurence's re-working of a typically "feminine" dilemma and adapting it for male characters suggests that such dilemmas should be considered as human rather than feminine or masculine ones.

When Buckle Fennick is killed in a truck accident, Stacey reflects on his relationship with his mother. Stacey's "requiem for a truck driver" neatly sums up the more positive aspect of this particular son and his parent:

She may not have been much, but she didn't abort him all that time ago, at least not before his birth. She had him and brought him up. She did that. What could have been in her mind the day I came here with Buckle? Or any of the days, for that matter. But he never turned her out, whatever else he may have said or done. (p.235)

To conclude a discussion of the men as sons in the Manawaka series, we must look to The Diviners and Jules Tonnerre and his father, Lazarus. As a son, Jules is tied to Lazarus; Lazarus passes on to his son a strong sense of what it means to be Métis. Like Christie and Morag, Lazarus passes along a mythology to Jules that affects both

his life and his songwriting:

Lazarus, he lost some of those children,
 Some to fire, some to the City's heart of stone.
 Maybe when they went, was the worst time that was sent,
 For then he really knew he was alone.
 (From the song "Lazarus," The Diviners, p.463)

When Skinner is a child, he and his father often go off together to trap for furs (p.69). When Skinner is older, the two don't get along, and their disagreements often become violent (p.128). What is important to note is that, as a son, Skinner knows he is always welcome at the home of his father. Lazarus would never turn any of his children out (p.135). However, Skinner chooses to live his life away from Manawaka and his family, and Lazarus respects his decision. Perhaps Skinner represents many of the ideas regarding sons that we see in the series. Skinner learns about his past from his father, but is given the freedom to live away from him, free from any sense of duty or responsibility. In essence, Skinner exemplifies the notion that parent and child are separate entities. Throughout the series, the sons who face problems with parents are the ones who allow their parents to become dependent on them: Marvin, John, Buckle. Skinner is lucky enough to have a parent who respects his son's freedom, apart and away from the family. As a son, Skinner is able to learn about his heritage, yet refuses to become personally entangled in the day-to-day life of his father. There is a strong sense of lineage that we see lacking in

Hagar and her sons. Perhaps sons need not be tied to a parent for them to come to some understanding of their family history and the importance of lineage.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER THREE

¹William New, introduction, Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977) 1.

²Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 121.

³George Bowering, "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on A Jest of God," Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977) 166.

⁴Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 91.

CHAPTER FOUR
HUSBANDS AND LOVERS

I talk to him, when he is not here, and tell him everything I can think of, everything that has ever happened, and how I feel and for a while it seems to me that I am completely known to him, and then I remember I've only talked to him like that when I'm alone. He hasn't heard and doesn't know.

(A Jest of God, p.170)

The husbands and lovers of the Manawaka series are perhaps the most interesting group of men found in Laurence's work. Unquestionably, the husbands and lovers are the most visible and influential men in the lives of the female protagonists. Ideally, there is no closer involvement between two people than the decision to share their lives with each other. Whether within the confines of a legal marriage, or the bonds of a less formal relationship, the connection between this group of men and the female protagonists involves not only an emotional commitment but a sexual commitment as well. Of the women of the series, three are married: Hagar to Bram Shipley, Stacey to Clifford "Mac" MacAindra, and, for a time, Morag to Brooke Skelton. Three of the women have lovers: Rachel and Nick Kazlik, Stacey and Luke Venturi, Morag and Jules "Skinner" Tonnerre and Dan McRaith. An examination of the series leads one to conclude that, while the husbands may be more dedicated to the relationships, it is the lovers who appear to be somewhat more effective as partners. The husbands are part of the daily routine and sameness of the women's lives, but it is the lovers who offer the

excitement and spontaneity the women so often need. Laurence stresses this point by writing of the lovers as more sensitive and more aware of the needs of the women, and more able to teach the women worthy lessons about life than the husbands of the series.

In The Stone Angel, Hagar is married to Bram Shipley. Previously, it has been established that a major reason for Hagar's attraction to Bram is her father's intense dislike for him:

[Hagar] marries below her, selecting the crude and unambitious, disreputable but sexually vital farmer, Bram Shipley, for what proves to be a disastrous conflict of wills - because Hagar immediately wants her dignity back.¹

Hagar's first encounter with Bram occurs at a dance; she is impressed by "his fingernails with crescents of ingrown earth that never met a file," and believes that, in his laughter, she hears "the bravery of battalions" (p.39). Bram is so unlike Hagar's father and brothers that she almost immediately decides to become his wife. Their marriage becomes a sign of Hagar's independence from her family, even though it costs her the love and respect of her father.

Bram is a farmer, but is not successful at his work, mainly because he is not particularly dedicated to it: inertia seems to be a major aspect of his personality. Early in their marriage, Hagar believes that Bram will someday be a success, yet the years prove that this is not to be:

Oh, he could work all right, and when he did,
he worked like fury and would come in at supper

time smelling of sweat and sun. But then the moment would come when he would recall the brown Wachakwa, the easeful grass on the sloping banks, and he'd be off, like Simple Simon, to fish for whales, maybe, in six inches of creek water. (p.100)

Bram seems constantly searching for a scheme to become successful. When all the other farmers in Manawaka are making money from wheat, Bram decides to invest his money in horses (p.73). Bram's love for the animals is very apparent, and Laurence uses the horse as a symbol of Bram's virility and passion, in much the same way as do Robert Kroetsch in The Studhorse Man and D. H. Lawrence in "St. Mawr."² In Sinclair Ross' short story "A Field of Wheat," it is a horse and not his wife whom John turns to for comfort after his crop is destroyed by a storm, and Bram is similarly unable to ask or get any comfort from Hagar when he requires it.³

At one point in the novel, Bram criticizes Hagar because she dislikes real horses, yet has a painting of "great-flanked horses" adorning a wall of the Shipley farm. Bram points out to Hagar that the horses in the painting cannot drop manure, and so they are dandy (p.73). Hagar's attitude to the horses in the painting is similar to her attitude about Bram before their marriage. Like the imaginary horses, Bram's physicality is unknown to Hagar, and he is acceptable. Once they are married and Hagar and Bram relate on a physical level, Hagar is somehow repulsed by Bram as a man, particularly because of her reaction to their lovemaking. The unreal quality of the horses in the painting is comparable to the unreal quality Hagar assigns to Bram before their marriage: for example,

his destiny with success. However, as with real horses, the real Bram frightens Hagar.

When Bram loses his favourite stallion in a blizzard, his pain is recognized by Hagar, and for the only time in their marriage is she ready to comfort Bram. However, it is Bram who turns away from Hagar:

When we went to bed that night, he started to turn to me, and I felt so gently inclined that I think I might have opened to him openly. But he changed his mind He thought, of course, it was the greatest favour he could do me. (p.77)

Bram is never emotionally touched by any human being. Neither his daughters from his first marriage nor his sons from his marriage to Hagar provide him with any joy, and he certainly does not shed a tear because of any living person, yet he is deeply moved by the loss of a horse. One can say that the loss of this horse is representative of the loss or lack of true and shared passion in Bram's marriage to Hagar. What is disappointing in the marriage, and what becomes known to Hagar too late in life, is that her marriage to Bram could have been filled with joy, if only Hagar had allowed her true feelings to come to the surface: "every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances" (p.261).

In public, Bram Shipley is a boor. His speech is sprinkled with profanities, and he uses his fingers as a handkerchief. He is repulsive and offensive to everyone he meets, and there

is not a decent person in Manawaka who would respect or admire him, including, it seems, his own wife. Hagar eventually refuses to go into town with Bram because he regularly chooses to embarrass her in front of other people. Conversations between Hagar and Bram most often turn into arguments, and effective verbal communication between husband and wife is non-existent. However, at night, when the two share a bed, Bram becomes the only man who is able to truly move Hagar. Hagar derives much pleasure from the sexual union, although she refuses to reveal this pleasure to Bram. Thus, Bram never knows that Hagar's "blood and vitals rise to meet his" (p.70). Hagar states that Bram's banner over her was only his own skin (p.70), and this becomes more apparent when Hagar leaves Bram to move to Vancouver. When Hagar's son John reaches adolescence, thoughts of his sexuality cause problems for Hagar:

I suppose it reminded me of the things I'd sealed away in daytime, the unacknowledged nights I'd lie sleepless even now, until I'd finally accept the necessity of the sedative to blot away the image of Bram's heavy manhood. I never thought of Bram in the days anymore, but I'd waken, sometimes, out of a half sleep and turn to him, and find he wasn't beside me, and then I'd be filled with such a bitter emptiness it seemed the whole of night must be within me and not around or outside at all. (p.141)

This "bitter emptiness" that Hagar recognizes is more than elementary physical longing for Bram. Too late in her life does Hagar learn that if she had allowed herself to show her true feelings to Bram, the two would have been able to have a happier life together. For Bram was not only a competent

lover, he was also a man who respected Hagar as a woman:

I was Hagar to him, and if he were alive, I'd be Hagar to him yet. And now I think he was the only person close to me who ever thought of me by my name, not daughter, nor sister, nor mother, nor even wife, but Hagar, always. (p.69)

Bram's refusal to label Hagar indicates his awareness of her as an individual rather than as a woman fulfilling one or more of society's characteristically feminine roles. To suggest that Bram is a liberated man is to complicate his basic simplicity; after all, Bram is a man who reads the Eaton's catalogue to improve his mind (p.99). In the character of Bram, Laurence seems to suggest that basic respect for a woman as a person need not necessarily come from someone with social grace and a formal education. Bram may be coarse and vulgar, but these qualities do not influence his underlying respect for Hagar. Without realizing it until it is too late, Hagar had married a man who would have allowed her to retain the Currie pride without feeling threatened by it.

The relationship between Rachel Cameron and Nick Kazlik in A Jest of God is a very different one from that of Hagar and Bram Shipley. Rachel's involvement with Nick spans only a few months during the summer, and although the two are not married, the intensity of their involvement is crucial to Rachel's growth as a woman:

Like Hagar, Rachel is attracted to someone who possesses a liveliness and boldness which sharply contrast with her own restrained, but 'respectable,' family background.⁴

There are similarities between Rachel and Nick, even if their

family backgrounds are different. Both are teachers, and both can be considered loners: within the confines of the novel, neither Rachel nor Nick seem to have any close or successful relationships with friends or family, a not uncommon occurrence in Manawakan society. It is not surprising, then, that the two begin an affair that is essentially secretive. The only people who seem to have any idea of Rachel's involvement with Nick are her principal, Willard Siddley, and her mother, May Cameron. However, no-one is aware of the sexual aspect of their involvement which, for both, becomes the most important part of the time they spend together. It soon becomes clear that Nick is looking for a sexual partner to lessen the tedium of a summer spent in Manawaka while Rachel is looking for someone to lead her out of the tedium of her life. Surprisingly, both receive exactly what they are looking for.

Perhaps moreso than any of the other protagonists of the Manawaka series, Rachel experiences a drastic change in attitude during the span of the novel. Rachel moves from a neurotic, frightened and passive woman to become a still frightened but active controller of her own life. Her decision to pull up roots and move to the West coast is a positive sign of the change in her attitude. Rachel's involvement with Nick, her understanding of her father's life, and her experience with her illness all contribute towards her eventual self-awareness. Her life does change, and Nick is partly responsible for this change. However, any assistance that

Nick gives to Rachel in her journey is simply an accidental by-product of what seems most important to Nick: his own sexual satisfaction. Clara Thomas believes that Laurence was aware of the need to provide the reader with more details regarding Nick's personality, thereby preventing Nick from becoming a stereotypical "casual seducer."⁵ One can assume that, by detail, Thomas is referring to the often verbose, often rambling monologues that we see when Nick and Rachel are together. Yet these revelations made by Nick are overshadowed by their tendency to show Nick as a self-involved and selfish man. What to some may be considered the shading of Nick's personality can also be considered the furthering of the man as casual, uncaring seducer.

It is important to note that Nick and Rachel's sexual involvement begins on their second date, and that Rachel is by no means tricked into the affair. She is a willing partner, although her inexperience does suggest a certain degree of naiveté. At present, it is not the physical aspect of the relationship but the form of the conversations before and after that need examination.

There appears to be only one topic of conversation with Nick, and that is Nick himself. Nick spends a great deal of time telling Rachel about his family: his relationship with his father, his twin brother Steve, who died of polio at an early age, even his Ukrainian grandmother who could not speak English. Rachel is the dutiful listener, interrupting only to ask pertinent questions. Nick uses Rachel as an

emotional receptacle: he pours many of his doubts and problems into her listening ear. He seldom asks any response of her, and she soon becomes aware of a problem with their conversations:

Neutral territory - that was what he needed then. Some place that was neither one side nor the other. (p.108)

Neutrality implies inaction and non-participation, and on an emotional level, this is exactly what Nick is looking for. He fails to realize that Rachel cannot become his lover and remain uninvolved. She doesn't know how to "make it unimportant enough" (p.176). Rachel eventually states what has already become apparent to the reader:

Nick isn't looking at me, and again I have the feeling that he's talking to himself; and yet, obscurely, he reaches out and moves his hand along my arm. (p.134)

The last meeting between Nick and Rachel reveals Nick's true character. When Rachel voices her desire to bear his child (p.181), Nick states that he is not God and cannot solve her problems, and proceeds to show Rachel a picture of a six-year old boy, whom Rachel assumes is his son (p.182). The episode with the picture is an ambiguous one. Rachel asks if it is his, and he replies that it is. And Nick is not lying. When Rachel discovers that Nick is not married and without children, his answer to her question becomes clear: it is his picture. We can assume that Nick uses the picture as the avenue by which to extricate himself from his involvement with Rachel, and this assumption presupposes a knowledge by Nick

of the reaction that Rachel will have to the picture. It seems that Laurence is testing the reader with the picture incident. We are not only presented with the enigmatic quality of the picture, but are also asked to believe that Rachel is incapable of distinguishing a photograph that is almost twenty years old. If the picture is of Nick at age six, surely she would be able to see by the quality of the photograph that the picture is not a recent one. Even to assume that Nick needs an excuse to push Rachel away is to bestow upon the man a degree of consideration for Rachel that is not visible in the relationship. The Nick who leaves town without a word of good-bye is the real Nick: selfish and inconsiderate. He has used Rachel both emotionally and physically, and returns to his life in Winnipeg, leaving Rachel alone with a possible pregnancy.

It is with the character of Stacey MacAindra in The Fire-Dwellers that we meet the first of the two protagonists to have both a husband and a lover. An examination of the relationship between Stacey and her husband, Clifford "Mac" MacAindra, provides some explanation for her involvement with Luke Venturi.

Mac MacAindra is a forty-three year old man who is the sole breadwinner of his family. He is a salesman who quits one job to take on another, that of selling Richalife vitamins. Like Nick and Rachel, Mac and Stacey often do not effectively communicate: Stacey sees Mac as having "gone underground, living in his own caves" (p.18). She also believes

that Mac "finds his exit where [she] can't follow and [doesn't] understand" (p.24). There is an element of staleness in this marriage, suggested by Mac's lack of interest in discussing anything relevant with his wife. It almost seems as if the sixteen years Mac and Stacey have been together has allowed each to come to know the other so well that it is not necessary to verbalize their feelings. Consequently, the conversations between husband and wife often take the form of verbal shadow boxing. Both seem to be striking out, but the anger seems to stem from their own inability to express what they truly feel. Mac refuses to be open with his emotions, and Stacey is incapable of dealing with his reserve:

Mac, her husband, is less prone to physical violence, but his icy calm is a different (and perhaps worse) form of rage Mac's Puritan restraint has been bred in him by his clergyman father, who used the whip of iron will and moral superiority to shame his son's exhibition of rage.⁶

As an adult, Mac does not exhibit any signs of a violent nature. He never strikes his children in anger, and is able to restrain himself from striking his boss, Thor Thorlakson, when Thor throws a beach ball directly into Mac's face, causing Mac's nose to bleed (p.228). However, as a husband, Mac exhibits a certain tendency towards physical violence, manifested in his sexual relationship with Stacey:

When he is inside her, he puts his hands on her neck, as he sometimes does unpredictably. He presses down deeply on her collarbone.

Mac please

That can hurt you not that much that's not much.

Say it doesn't hurt.

It hurts.

It can't. Not even this much. Say it doesn't hurt.

It doesn't hurt. (p.24)

The recurrent physical violence in these "making hate" episodes suggests that Mac needs some outlet upon which he can vent his suppressed anger and tension, and one must question the choice of his wife as recipient of his pent-up emotion. The distinction between Mac's business and personal lives is clear, yet the pressure from the former spills over into the latter. Coupled with his refusal to communicate in a positive manner with Stacey, Mac becomes the negligent husband who is so quick to believe his best friend's accusation of Stacey's infidelity.

When Buckle Fennick phones Mac to tell him that he has slept with Stacey, Mac is quick to react. It is true that Buckle and Mac are very close, but Mac's belief in Buckle's story rather than in Stacey's version highlights Mac's chauvinistic tendency: one questions if Mac believes Buckle's story simply because it comes from another man. Buckle and Mac were in the war together, yet Mac is married to Stacey. Her possible infidelity is a challenge to Mac's masculinity, and this challenge he cannot bear. Mac wants men to be strong, dependable, independent, and good providers. His friendship with Buckle the trucker allows him the male camaraderie to further strengthen this view of men. We also see Mac's need to promote this view of men in his constant fear that Stacey is emasculating their two sons by showing a degree of sensitivity to their emotional needs (pp.23, 104, 193). What is so puzzling about Mac is that, although he presents a façade of strength and insensitivity, he also reveals an ability to

care and be concerned for himself and his family:

It is ironically clear that this inability on both sides is a failure of the will because we can plainly see in Stacey and glimpse in her husband Mac talents for intelligence and compassion decaying from too little use.⁷

There are several examples of Mac's compassion and sensitivity. These are times when Mac steps from behind his apparent reserve and reveals true emotion. When Mac was selling encyclopedias, he refused an order from a pensioner who was willing to buy a whole set of the books, only to see a picture of Piccadilly (p.18). Mac refuses to sell Richalife vitamins to his neighbour, Julian Garvey, and tells him they would be of little benefit to him (p.195). Also, we see Mac's concern when his son Duncan almost drowns. However, it is the series of events that occur after Buckle Fennick's death that best reveal Mac's sensitivity.

After Mac and Stacey return from the morgue where Mac has identified Buckle's body, Mac is physically ill. Later that evening, he asks Stacey if she would mind him telling her how Buckle looked (p.212). The conversation leads to Mac's revelation of how he saved Buckle's life during the war, and so felt somehow responsible for him. Mac admits to believing that Stacey did not sleep with Buckle, and even entertains the possibility that perhaps Buckle was sexually attracted to him (p.216). Mac confesses to having a one-night stand with a young woman at his office, and Stacey says she doesn't mind (p.217).

Because of the emotional upheaval of Buckle's death, Mac

is vulnerable, and so turns to Stacey for support. He openly and honestly reveals to her two incidents that are very important to a better understanding of him as a man. What Stacey learns about Mac this night is learned because Mac is dropping his façade of total emotional control and admitting to pain. When Mac lets himself be honest, both he and Stacey benefit and continue to learn more about each other. Unfortunately, these times are rare, and the tension in both husband and wife continues. By the end of the novel, Stacey has come to accept that, more than likely, Mac will retain his "icy calmness," and their life will go on much as before. Within the novel itself, however, Stacey turns away from Mac and towards another man because she needs comfort and understanding.

Stacey's lover, Luke Venturi, is the antithesis to her husband. Luke is very young, very relaxed, and very accepting. His treatment of Stacey is different from the treatment she receives from Mac:

[Luke] sees her quite simply and exclusively as a woman; therefore, he helps her to see herself momentarily as a singular being, freed of the Kaleidoscopic wife-mother-housekeeper roles in which others see her and with all of which, simultaneously, she constantly tries to identify herself.⁸

In her essay on the lives of Laurence's women, Harriet Blodgett argues that the character of Luke is unbelievable.⁹ His unconditional acceptance of Stacey, and the ease with which he opens up to her are unrealistic, as is the brief but successful sexual relationship the two experience. Luke is almost perfect. Only with the knowledge that he is twenty-four

years old does Stacey see the improbability of a life with Luke. It is understandable that Laurence wanted Stacey's lover to be as different from her husband as possible. By making the husband so realistic and intense, the need arose to make the lover more easy-going and accepting. Laurence further distances Luke from Mac by placing Luke in an idyllic setting, an unfinished cottage by the ocean, which is about as far away from BlueJay Crescent as one can get. Luke himself states that perhaps he is not real (p.160), and the fantastic qualities of his personality compound this image. Nevertheless, Stacey's involvement with Luke does help her come to a better understanding of herself and her life. Like Rachel's understanding, however, Stacey learns these new truths after her affair is over. Luke does not desert Stacey in the manner that Nick leaves Rachel, but both relationships do end abruptly.

It is interesting to note that The Fire-Dwellers makes a strong moral statement about the dangers of adultery. Laurence deals with this notion in A Jest of God: Rachel is left with a possible pregnancy and an actual tumour after her affair with Nick, and experiences much emotional upset. After each of Stacey's encounters with Luke, she returns home to some event or incident that is upsetting to her. After their first meeting, Stacey returns home and argues with Mac, and is overheard by her daughter Katie, who tells her mother never to bawl her out again (p.163). This is the mildest of the

incidents, but Stacey seems to believe it will change her relationship with her daughter forever. The second time that Stacey is with Luke, she arranges for her neighbour, Tess Fogler, to babysit her two year old, Jenn. When Stacey returns to her home, she finds that Tess has forced Jenn to watch a large goldfish devour a smaller one (p.186). The third and last incident presents Stacey with returning home to find Mac saying "he's dead" (p.207). Stacey believes it is her son Ian, but it is actually Buckle who is dead. All three incidents deal with one of Stacey's children, and all three seem like some form of punishment for Stacey's adultery. One could see these three incidents as simple contrasts between the two aspects of her life, but their intensity and frequency suggest deeper meaning.

In A Jest of God, Rachel's tumour is the only incident that can be considered punishment for her actions. However, with Stacey, the apparent punishment becomes more emphatic for the reader because it involves Stacey's children, which is perhaps Laurence's manner of signifying the strong bond between parent and child, and the responsibility the former holds towards the latter.

In the final work of the series, The Diviners, we see a switch in attitude regarding husbands and lovers. Morag is never punished for her affairs outside marriage. The only single incident occurs after Morag's sexual encounter with a man who is the occasional lover of her landlady and friend, Fan, the exotic dancer. Morag's encounter with Chas occurs

when Pique is four years old. Morag leaves her upstairs while she and Chas are together: Morag and Chas "screw like animals all over Fan's livingroom, and it is, quite truthfully, fine" (p.326). Their encounter ends in a violent manner:

He brings up one hand, and before she can move away, he hits her with full force across the breasts. He walks out while she is still paralyzed with pain. (p.327)

The blow that Morag receives seems to further intensify the idea of great responsibility a parent has for a child. Morag comes to the conclusion that she will never have sex with a man whose child she couldn't bear to bear (p.329), so the incident does seem to affect her morality somewhat. However, as a whole, the novel does not look upon sex outside of marriage as wrong. Rather, Morag's most satisfying and lasting relationship occurs with a man whom she never marries, Jules "Skinner" Tonnerre. In fact, it is Morag's actual marriage to Brooke Skelton that is the most hateful and painful relationship she experiences. Unlike Hagar and Stacey, Morag is able to experience a long-term and successful "marriage" without being legally wed, although her involvement with Skinner is sporadic and unconventional.

Brooke Skelton is a thirty-four year old English professor at the university Morag attends in Winnipeg. Their relationship begins with Brooke's interest in Morag's writing, and Morag has her first real sexual experience with Brooke. The two soon marry and move to Toronto.

Almost from the beginning of the relationship, Brooke treats Morag as if she were a helpless infant. This treat-

ment is witnessed in his choice of endearments: little one, child, good girl. Morag states that she feels young and ignorant with Brooke (p.205). This does not prevent her from marrying him, however, and for a time she is willing to be subservient to her husband. Morag's innate intelligence and her destiny to write soon cause her to realize that the marriage is a mistake. Both Morag and Brooke are aware of the differences in their backgrounds: Brooke states that it is as though Morag were starting a new life with no ties to the past (p.195). Brooke then takes it upon himself to mould his wife into what he believes she should be, even going so far as to suggest what clothes she should wear and how she should fix her hair. Like Mac, Brooke believes that a wife's appearance reflects not only on herself but on her husband as well. Eventually, Brooke works out a system of payment to Morag for her co-operation. In bed, Brooke asks Morag if she has been a good girl:

It has become his game, his jest, before going into her, and indeed before permitting his arousal or hers. If she protests the sentence, he will withdraw all of himself except his unspoken anger. She has to play, or be prepared to face that coldness. Either way she feels afraid. Yet he cannot help it, and she knows this. There can be no talk of it, for it is, after all, only a joke. (p.245)

Like Mac, Brooke reveals much about his personality when he and his wife are in bed. It is during such an episode that Brooke tells Morag about his Indian ayah and how she used to comfort him as a child by stroking him all over and bringing him to "an orgasm or whatever is the equivalent in a child"

(p.228). This revelation, combined with Brooke's fondness for treating Morag like a child, suggests that Brooke has some difficulty with the distinction between childhood and maturity:

As deep a reason for Morag's alienation from Brooke as the fact of her writing is his unwillingness to have a child. At first he postpones the decision; later Morag knows that he will never agree - he is too insecure in himself to wish to share responsibility for a child.¹⁰

More importantly for Brooke, childhood and adulthood are blurred, possibly because of his sexual (adult) relationship as a child with his ayah. His need to see Morag as child-like and his refusal to accept the adult responsibility of parenthood suggest a confused and immature personality, longing for youth and lack of responsibility. His early sexual experience at the hands of his nanny has somehow scarred him emotionally, and a young, insecure Morag is easily malleable and deeply manipulated by him.

Clara Thomas believes that Brooke is "obviously, a loser in Morag's life."¹¹ One is led to believe Thomas; after all, the marriage between Brooke and Morag does end in divorce, due in some part to Brooke's warped personality. However, Morag does benefit from her years spent with Brooke. He is an educated, cultured man, and reveals to Morag many of the finer things in life. She is exposed to classical literature and art, and this exposure would have been highly unlikely had she married Skinner Tonnerre. Brooke meets a Morag who is fresh off the train from Manawaka, and divorces a woman who has grown and expanded her interests. The Diviners is no Pygmalion, but Morag's years as Mrs. Brooke Skelton are

not totally without merit, and Brooke is more than a simple loser in both the novel and in Morag's maturation process.

The character of Jules "Skinner" Tonnerre is perhaps one of the most interesting and controversial men of the Manawaka series. A man who flits in and out of Morag's life and fathers her only child, Jules appears to be both crucial in Morag's life as well as uncaring and irresponsible. Because of his refusal to enter a legal and binding relationship with Morag, Jules is often simply considered Morag's lover. However, the relationship that develops between the two is much more than sexual, although many of the novel's critics choose to look only at the explicit descriptions of the lovemaking, disregarding the fact that Laurence uses the sexual relationship to amplify the intensity of the emotional connection between Morag and Skinner.

Skinner Tonnerre is a Métis who was born and raised on the outskirts of Manawaka in a shack made of "old planks, tarpaper, the lids of wooden crates, some shingles and flattened pieces of tin" (p.137). Like the Logans, the Tonnerres are not accepted into Manawakan society; rather, Skinner and his family are looked down upon because of their ethnic origin and their poverty. Because of Christie and Prin, Morag is an outsider in Manawaka, and early on, she recognizes this similarity to Skinner. Their first encounters, as adolescents, are awkward and uncomfortable to Morag, but she is unable to deny her strong sexual and emotional attraction to Skinner. She finds it natural to sit on the riverbank and talk to him.

She also recognizes his physical nature: she "wants to touch him, to touch the black fine hairs on his arms, the bones of his shoulders, his skin smelling good, of fresh sweat" (p.128). Morag's strong sexual attraction to Skinner remains constant throughout the novel. Her first reaction to seeing him at various times throughout her life is almost always physical, and they maintain a satisfying albeit sporadic sexual partnership for many years. Their first sexual encounter, however, is incomplete, suggesting that, thematically, Skinner and Morag are not yet ready to embark on this important level of their involvement.

After a ten year separation, Skinner re-enters Morag's life at a time when she is dissatisfied with her marriage to Brooke. Morag spends three weeks in Toronto with Skinner before she leaves for Vancouver: "they speak little, and make love not at nights when he comes home late, but in the mornings, late mornings, when he wakens" (p.279). It is during this period that Morag conceives her daughter. Skinner is aware of Morag's desire for a child, and Morag is aware of Skinner's wish not to be held financially or emotionally responsible for either mother or child. After Pique's birth, Skinner visits his daughter twice. Pique's rearing is left completely up to Morag, who accepts the fact that Skinner will never be a constant figure in anyone's life:

Morag has known that she will always live with Jules' sporadic rejection and resentment towards her, because to him she represents the dispossessors of his people.¹²

It is viable that Skinner's brief forays into Morag's life are dependent upon and affected by the fact that he is Métis and she is white. However, his refusal to play an active, on-going role in the lives of Morag and Pique indicate a lack of responsibility and sincere caring on his part. Skinner has never held down a real and lucrative job for any length of time, and has never established permanent roots in any location. He has never married, but has been "shacked up" with several women (p.272). In certain respects, Skinner is very much like Nick Kazlik: both reap the benefits of relationships with women, but refuse to assume any of the responsibilities such involvement with another person entails. What distinguishes Skinner from Nick is that Skinner is paired with a woman of equal emotional strength rather than a dependent and inexperienced novice. We see this equality between Skinner and Morag in one of the novel's most explicit sexual scenes. Both of these incidents occur during the same night:

They make love urgently, both equal to each other's body in this urgent meeting and grappling, this brief death of consciousness, this conscious defiance of death. Only at the final moment does Morag cry out, and he stops her cry with his mouth.

So she mounts him. He holds her shoulders and her long hair, penetrating up into her until she knows he has reached whatever core of being she has. This time it is he who cries out. (p.342)

Laurence uses the sexual relationship between Skinner and Morag to stress several points. The intensity and satisfaction of the act indicates that Skinner and Morag are well suited for each other. More importantly, in the instances

mentioned above, the almost identical "crying out" of both man and woman establishes an equilibrium and reinforces the similarities between the two. Although both Skinner and Morag can be considered people on the fringes of society, isolated from most others, it is in their coupling that they experience a sense of unity and belonging. Rather than an escape, sex becomes for them a reality, a concrete example of their ability to relate to other human beings without the need for defense mechanisms. For Morag, Skinner is "someone from a long long way back, someone related to her in ways she cannot define and feels no need of defining" (p.267). The two are comfortable together, even though Skinner moves through the world "like a dandelion seed carried by the wind" (p.272). Their intermittent yet successful involvement offers both a continuity in their lives, and whatever Skinner's shortcomings, his importance in Morag's life is vital to a more complete understanding of the novel.

The second and less important of Morag's two major lovers is Dan McRaith, a painter whom Morag meets during her time in Britain. The two meet in the bookstore in which Morag works:

A peculiar way for a relationship to begin, a relationship which is plainly going to be sexual, by talking about one another's offspring. And yet Morag is drawn to him now both by sex and spirit, and senses this is true for him as well. It is as though both of them, not being young and new and uncommitted, must sound each other out about their areas of commitment. (pp.373-374)

Dan plays only a minor part in both the novel and Morag's life. Their relationship as lovers is successful

until Morag visits Dan, his wife Bridie, and their brood of children in the Scottish village of Crombruach. Morag's sudden and actual awareness of Dan's other life changes her view of him, and permanently ends their physical involvement. The two remain friends after their affair ends, suggesting that their attraction to each other's spirits rather than each other's bodies was the more magnetic. Also, both Morag and Dan are artists, a commonality that must weigh heavily in their relationship. Dan is so unlike Skinner that one wonders at Morag's attraction to him. Then again, Brooke is very different from Skinner as well, yet it is Skinner who remains the one constant lover in Morag's life.

A study of the husbands and lovers of the Manawaka series indicates a progression in thought on the part of Laurence. From the staunch and problematic marriage of Bram and Hagar to the relaxed yet intense involvement of Skinner and Morag, Laurence moves the reader through cultural and emotional changes. All these men are not carbon copies of each other; most of them are far from one-dimensional characters. Skinner Tonnerre is not an amalgamation of all the husbands and lovers that have preceded him in the series. By no means is he Laurence's portrait of the perfect man. Skinner is, as all the other men and women of the series, human and prone to weakness. In the end, perhaps Laurence's message is as simple as this, that the human condition prevents perfection, and we must learn to accept it.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

¹Harriet Blodgett, "The Real Lives of Margaret Laurence's Women," Critique 23.1 (1981): 9.

²See Kroetsch, Robert, The Studhorse Man (Markham: Paperjacks Ltd., 1980) and Lawrence, D.H., "St. Mawr" (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

³Sinclair Ross, "A Field of Wheat," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968).

⁴David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," Journal of Canadian Studies 13 (Autumn 1978): 33.

⁵Clara Thomas, Canadian Writer Number 3: Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1969) 51.

⁶Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 100.

⁷Phyllis Gotlieb, "On Margaret Laurence," Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977) 41.

⁸Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 123.

⁹Blodgett, 13.

¹⁰Thomas, Manawaka World 154.

¹¹Thomas, Manawaka World 150.

¹²Thomas, Manawaka World 160.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIVINERS

Royland came shuffling and crunching through the sundried grass. Old Man River. The Shaman. Diviner. Morag, always glad to see him, felt doubly glad now. He would, of course, not tell her what to do. Not Royland's way. But after a while she would find she knew.

(The Diviners, p.286)

The final group of men who are of importance to the female protagonists of the Manawaka series are an odd lot. Neither emotionally or biologically connected to the women of the works, these men are of great thematic importance to the series as a whole, as well as being significant to each of the separate works. It is difficult to classify these men, since, for the most part, they are only briefly involved with the protagonists. What these six men have in common is their ability, whether overtly or unintentionally, to make known to the protagonists some significant truth. Ultimately, it is the women who recognize this truth, but this recognition would not be possible without the assistance of the men. Because of this ability to make known something to the women, it is possible to label this group of men as diviners.¹ Murray Ferney Lees in The Stone Angel, Hector Jonas and Willard Siddley in A Jest of God, Thor Thorlakson in The Fire-Dwellers, Chris in the short story "Horses of the Night" from A Bird in the House, and Royland in The Diviners: all assist the protagonists in locating within themselves some hidden but significant truth about their lives.

Perhaps the most written about diviner of the series is

Murray Ferney Lees, whom we meet in Chapter Eight of The Stone Angel. Hagar has run away from her son and daughter-in-law, fearing they will lock her away in Silverthreads Nursing Home. She eventually arrives at Shadow Point, and establishes herself in a dilapidated fish cannery. She is totally alone with her thoughts, until Murray Lees arrives:

I look at him suspiciously. One candle is hardly sufficient to size a person up. He's wearing a loose and floppy herringbone tweed coat, and at his feet he's set the large paper bag he was carrying. He has a rodent face, uneasy eyes. Above his mouth grows a ginger-colored mustache, and he sticks out his lower teeth and nibbles at it persistently. (p.197)

At first, Hagar is afraid of Mr. Lees, but after several glasses of wine, the two begin an important and cathartic discussion of their histories.

Hagar soon learns that Murray Lees has worked for Dependable Life Assurance for many years. She also learns that he was once a member of the Redeemer's Advocates, a fundamentalist church in which his grandfather was a preacher. Murray met his wife, Lou, at a Bible camp. Hagar takes offense with Murray's description of his feelings for Lou: "when she lay down on the moss and spread those great white thighs of hers, there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world" (p.203). When Hagar mentions that "prayer and that" are an odd combination, Murray responds by saying "God is Love, but please don't mention the two in the same breath" (p.203). Hagar's comment reflects her attitude towards sex: she cannot even say the word.

Murray's involvement with Hagar delves much deeper when

he begins to tell of the loss of his young son, Donnie, in a fire. Lou and Murray were at church, praying for the exact time of the end of the world:

'It's a funny thing,' he says. 'She thought it would come from so far away. The Almighty voice and the rain of locusts and blood. The moon turned dark and the stars gone wild. And all the time it was close by.' (p.208)

The combination of the wine (with its connotations of communion and sharing) coupled with Murray's similar story allow Hagar to relive the death of her favourite son, John. Hagar is able to come to some degree of understanding and acceptance of her role in John's death, "as though it were worms, to be purged" (p.218). Hagar's confession to Murray is accidental; she is not aware that she has spoken the words aloud. Eventually, Hagar mistakes Murray for John, asks forgiveness for her attitude towards Arlene, John's girlfriend, and receives it from Murray. She falls asleep, and is found the next day by Marvin and Doris, who have been tipped off by Murray.

Murray Lees is a diviner by accident. The fact that he, like Hagar, has lost a son allows Hagar finally and irrevocably to tell her story to a virtual stranger. Clara Thomas sums up Laurence's ability to create a real and valid character such as Murray:

Murray Lees is more than an agent for [Hagar's] release, however; his identity remains autonomous with the grotesque and pitiful reality of a person who, astonishingly, has suddenly emerged from behind the lines of a sordid, pathetic newspaper story.²

Within the span of one chapter, Laurence is able to give the

reader enough information about Lees to make him a real and well-defined character. We see his humour, his spirituality, his guilt, his pain. We learn more about Murray than we do about Hagar's shadowy brothers. Murray is a man who carries a great burden, and perhaps Hagar is able to recognize this similarity to herself. In her confusion, she mistakes Murray for John, and her role in John's death is made known to her. When she awakes the next day, she feels bereaved, as if she had "lost someone only recently" (p.222). Murray's sensitivity to Hagar's need for forgiveness eventually leads to her purging of the repressed emotions surrounding John's death. Initially, Hagar is mad when she discovers that Murray has called Marvin, but she is able to see the truth when Doris says that Mr. Lees saved Hagar's life: "an additional memory returns, something more of what he spoke to me last evening, and I to him, and the statement no longer seems so ridiculous" (p.225). Murray has allowed her to confess and rid herself of guilty feelings. Hagar's involvement with him may be brief, but it is of major significance to the novel as a whole. It is as if Hagar's refusal to come to some understanding of her part in John's death prevents her from dying in peace. Unintentionally, Murray guides her to this understanding, and she is able to die with some degree of peace and self-recognition.

In her study Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence, Helen M. Buss states that Hagar receives maternal comfort from Murray: "Murray Lees would seem an unlikely mother-figure but Hagar relates to him as if

he were a female, or at least a non-male figure."³ Buss is overlooking several important facts about Murray and Hagar that make such a statement invalid. Hagar has been surrounded by men since her birth; her father, her husband, and her sons have been important in her life. She has never had a close relationship with another woman. Consequently, we must assume that Hagar is more comfortable in the company of men, so it is justifiable and perhaps essential that her diviner should be male, and that Hagar should relate to him as such.

Also, Buss disregards the fact that Murray's story about his life is the story of a man who feels guilt over the death of his son. Murray's feminine middle name (Ferney) might suggest that he has balanced the feminine side of his personality with the masculine, but does not imply that he is a "non-male" figure. Hagar's mistaking of Murray for John indicates that she does recognize him as a man, albeit the wrong one. By trying to place The Stone Angel in some sort of feminist context, Buss has lost sight of Laurence's intention to present the episode between Hagar and Murray in the most realistic and believable light possible.

Like Murray Lees, Hector Jonas in A Jest of God plays a brief but significant role in the life of the female protagonist. Unlike Murray, Hector is a diviner by choice: he intentionally makes known to Rachel a truth about her father and his life.

After Rachel begins her affair with Nick Kazlik, she finds she is unable to sleep one night. She walks downstairs and

knocks on the door of the Japonica Funeral Chapel, once run by her father, and now run by Hector:

Hector squints around the edge of the door, and all I see of him is an anxious green eye and a pate like a pink stone, smoothly bare and vein-mottled. Then he opens the door and stands there in dubious welcome, a short rotund man in brown wrinkled trousers and shirtsleeves and indigo suspenders with brass adjusters. (p.141)

Like Hagar and Murray, Rachel and Hector share drinks, relax, and converse. For a time, the two sit in the workroom once occupied by Niall Cameron, a room that is full of "the cluttered paraphernalia and the cosmetics of death" (p.147). The setting is appropriate to the conversation: Hector explains the two things he believes he is selling, relief and modified prestige. Eventually, Hector tells Rachel that her father had the kind of life he wanted, and she is able to accept this fact. Hector then shows Rachel the renovations he has made to the chapel, and Rachel returns upstairs.

Laurence does not give us many details about Hector's life; we never know as much about him as we do about Murray. What is interesting about the scene between Rachel and Hector is the humour with which it is presented, and how neatly the humour works in opposition to the seriousness of the conversation. Initially, Rachel thinks Hector might misunderstand her motives: "maybe he thinks I've long admired him from afar and now at last have gone beserk enough to declare my burning spinster passion" (p.146). When Rachel begins to cry in the chapel, Hector makes a rather humorous confession about his sexual habits:

'Listen,' he is saying. 'I don't know why I should say this, but you know what happens to me? At the crucial moment, my wife laughs. She says she can't help it - I look funny. Well, shit, I know she can't help it, but - ' (p.156)

For Rachel, Hector is neither an emotional or sexual threat. What the two achieve is a moment of kinship, of friendship. The humour in the scene and Hector's clownish manner allow Rachel to do something she so seldom does, and that is to relax. With this relaxation comes her willingness to accept Hector's statement about her father. That the scene in the chapel ends with Rachel breaking into tears is further proof that she is in a relaxed state. The woman who so often internalizes her emotions is comfortable enough to let herself go:

Comic prophet Hector Jonas believes that Niall had the kind of life he wanted. Through his oblique and blackly comic encounter, which is almost a parody of a ritual descent or rites of passage, Rachel realizes that everyone has fears and hopes, that things change, and life moves on. As she must do.⁴

There is another, less obvious diviner for Rachel in A Jest of God: Willard Siddley, Rachel's school principal. The relationship between Rachel and Willard is an unusual one, and, for Rachel, it goes beyond the boundary of employer-employee. What Rachel learns from Willard is a subtle truth about men and women.

Willard is a short, somewhat overbearing man who takes his job very seriously. He is a strict disciplinarian with the students, and Rachel questions his eagerness in using the strap to punish young boys. When Willard informs Rachel that he must punish James Doherty for truancy, Rachel interprets

the look on Willard's face: "his eyes seem covered with a film of respectable responsibility, grave concern, the sadness of duty's necessity, all to conceal the shame-burning of pleasure" (p.31).

Her principal. Willard Siddley, seems a sadist to her and, at the same time, she is sickeningly aware of his physical presence and confusedly certain that he is, after all, a good principal.⁵

Rachel's awareness of Willard's physical presence manifests itself in her obsession with his hands, hands with which "he touches his wife, and holds the strap to strike a child, and —" (p.55). The sado-sexual aspect of Rachel's thoughts regarding Willard reflect not only her own repressed sexuality, but also her tendency to confusion about the proper way in which to relate to men. How can she be sexually attracted to a man who, on the surface, repels her? Eventually, Rachel reaches what amounts for her a simple explanation for Willard's regular visits to her classroom: " he might, quite simply, think I am attractive, and want, in a mild way, some exchange" (p.194). Rachel's involvement with Willard allows her to see that not all men are threatening, and that, like women, men oftentimes need some form of comfort and reassurance. The truth that Rachel realizes through Willard might not be as grandiose as the truth Hector reveals, but it is as important to A Jest of God as is Rachel's understanding of her father's life.

The diviner in The Fire-Dwellers is Thor Thorlakson, Mac's boss at Richalife vitamins. Thor reveals to Stacey a truth about her past in Manawaka, and she eventually understands Thor's

cruel needling of Mac. However, one can argue that Thor is even more important as a diviner within the context of the Manawakan series as a whole. It is Thor who seems to epitomize the attitudes of those who have been born and raised in the town of Manawaka, and that his role in the novel is less effective than his role in the whole series. By making known to the reader a truth about the town of Manawaka and its inhabitants, Thor becomes an important character, and transcends his role which has been described by Phyllis Gottlieb as "caricature."⁶ Thor very much belongs in both the individual work and the Manawaka series.

Stacey first meets Thor shortly after Mac begins working for him. Her first impression of Thor sums up the direction in which their relationship heads:

He looks as though he just stepped out of The Venusian Warlock, that SF movie I rushed off and saw once when everything got too much. I thought warlock was something like deadlock, but no, and when I saw the movie I thought brother things have come to a fine pass if I can learn from a piece of garbage like this. Thor's the wizard. (p.33)

The method by which Stacey chooses to describe Thor does suggest something of a caricature: his mane of grey hair, his suits like luminous uniforms, the manner in which he carries himself. Everything is larger than life, exaggerated. There is also a sense of surrealism in Thor, and Stacey picks up on this immediately. Thor is a wizard, offering to society a panacea for troubled times. He has his salespitch down pat. Stacey wonders if he just presses his navel and the record switches on (p.129). What lurks behind Thor's salesman-wizard

exterior is something both Stacey and Mac discover: a cruel, yet frightened individual who fears his cover will be blown.

It is at a Richalife staff party that Thor makes his feelings known. By throwing a beachball directly in Mac's face, Thor indicates that he is not particularly fond of Mac. It is not until Stacey meets Valentine Tonnerre that she learns the truth about Thor: Thor is really Vernon Winkler from Manawaka, a person Stacey remembers only as a snot-nosed kid who was picked on by others (p.239). With this knowledge comes the sudden realization that Thor is venting his fear of discovery on Mac, when it is really Stacey of whom he is afraid. Mac has been frightened by a strawman (p.241).

In The Fire-Dwellers, we learn very little about Vernon, alias Thor. However, when we reach the last novel of the series, The Diviners, we are filled in on Vernon's childhood and upbringing. The victim of physical and verbal abuse by his father, young Vernon is weak and unable to defend himself. Most of his childhood is spent following his sister Eva, who is Morag's best friend. With this glimpse into Vernon's childhood in The Diviners, one automatically thinks back to Vernon the man as seen in The Fire-Dwellers. Thor and the path by which he has chosen to live his life become more understandable to the reader. With the extremes of plastic surgery and a new name, Thor is trying to eliminate Vernon's childhood in Manawaka. Stacey is a reminder of that past, and also a definite threat for the present and future.

Thor epitomizes Manawakan mentality. We see in him the

desire recognizable in so many of the female protagonists of the series: the need to escape from and deny one's own history. Unlike Stacey and Morag, Thor is unable to accept as fact the notion that one cannot escape one's past, and that only by accepting the past can one effectively make use of the present and future. In an essay entitled "A Place to Stand On," Laurence recognizes the importance of coming to terms with the past:

I see this process as a gradual one of freeing oneself from the past, while at the same time beginning to see its true value - which in the case of my own people (by which I mean the total community, and not just my particular family), was a determination to survive against whatever odds.⁷

Thor may be an extreme example of one who refuses to see the "true value" of the past, but his importance to both The Fire-Dwellers and the Manawaka series as a whole cannot be overlooked.

Perhaps the most powerful short story in A Bird in the House is "Horses of the Night," Vanessa's recollections of her second cousin, Chris, and his life as a boy and man. The story follows Chris through high school, the war, and his eventual mental breakdown. As a diviner, Chris makes known to Vanessa several important truths about life and the antithesis between reality and fiction. These lessons benefit Vanessa in both her life and her work as a writer, and Chris, the "respector of persons," is important to her growth as a woman.

Chris arrives in Manawaka from Shallow Creek, a small community that lacks a high school. For three years, Chris stays

in the brick house owned by Timothy Connor, Vanessa's cranky and domineering grandfather. From the first moments spent with Chris, Vanessa is able to see that he is quite adept at dealing with her grandfather: "he would not argue or defend himself, but he did not apologise, either. He simply appeared to be absent, elsewhere" (p.113). This sensitivity in dealing with others makes Chris an enigma to Vanessa, who is used to the timidity of her father and the abruptness of her grandfather.

During his stay in Manawaka, Chris spends a great deal of time with Vanessa. Because he is nine years older than she, he often babysits her when her parents go out. It is during these times that Vanessa comes to know more about Chris' philosophy of life. He is a dreamer, with definite plans for his future as an engineer:

'I got this theory, see, that anybody can do anything if they really set their minds to it. But you have to have this total concentration. You have to focus on it with your whole mental powers, and not let it slip away by forgetting to hold it in your mind. If you hold it in your mind, like, then it's real, see?' (p.119)

Vanessa is impressed with Chris' theory, but later on she is able to see that it can be a form of self-deception. Chris tells Vanessa about two beautiful horses he owns up at Shallow Creek, Duchess and Firefly. When Vanessa goes up to visit Chris after her father's death, she realizes that Duchess and Firefly are not real horses, "that the pair had only ever existed in some other dimension" (p.124). This revelation weakens Chris' theory for Vanessa, as she soon realizes that what

is actual and what is imagined is real only for Chris, that his view of the world is illusory and somewhat self-serving. Chris' petty employments - selling vacuum cleaners, magazines, knitting machines - coupled with his lack of success at them suggests that he is more able to sell his dreams (to a young Vanessa) than his actual wares, suggesting his strengths lie in the imagination rather than the actual world.

While Vanessa is at Shallow Creek, she and Chris camp outdoors one night. They have a discussion about life, God, and the death of Vanessa's father. This discussion is more of a monologue on Chris' part: he talks and asks questions of Vanessa, but does not allow her to respond. It seems that Chris' world is becoming more internal, that he is holding on to it with his "whole mental powers." Vanessa senses this, but is unable to articulate it more fully until she is an adult.

Chris eventually leaves Shallow Creek to join the army, and shortly after, Vanessa receives a letter from him. She refuses to tell her mother what is contained in the letter until she is much older and Chris' fate is determined. Six months after his enlistment, Chris experiences a complete mental breakdown and is institutionalized for the remainder of his life. When Vanessa discovers this fact, Chris' letter comes into her mind, and she finally tells her mother what it contained: "what it said was that they could force his body to march and even to kill, but what they didn't know was that he'd fooled them. He didn't live inside it anymore" (p.131). Vanessa realizes that Chris' letter was "only the final heart-

breaking extension of that way he'd always had of distancing himself from the absolute unbearability of battle" (p.131).

As Buss states,

'Horses of the Night' diagrams what happens to a sensitive young man as he attempts to block out his emotions in order to become the success that the materialistic and belligerent world demands and wherein manhood is equated with material success and the ability to kill.⁸

More importantly, Chris' involvement with Vanessa reveals to her the fragile nature of the human psyche. Like Rachel in A Jest of God, Vanessa learns from Chris that both women and men have fears, and that each person chooses his or her own way of coping with the battle called life. Chris also makes known to Vanessa the fact that women as well as men can be anything to which they set their minds. "Horses of the Night" may be the most intense story in A Bird in the House, and with the character of Chris, Laurence shows her ability to create male characters in a manner which remains with the reader long after the book is returned to the shelf.

It is not until the last novel of the Manawaka series that we meet an actual, literal diviner: Royland, Morag's 74-year-old friend and neighbour. Royland divines wells for people in the area surrounding McConnell's Landing. His ability to make known the location of water is matched by his ability to indirectly make known to Morag certain truths about herself: "Morag always felt she was about to learn something of great significance from him, something which would explain everything" (p.4). The time the two spend together leads

Morag to a better understanding of her life and her relationship with others.

It is important to note the similarities between the first diviner of the series, Murray Lees in The Stone Angel, and the last diviner, Royland. Both men were greatly influenced by fundamentalist religions; Royland was even a preacher, "one of your real ripsnortin' Bible-punchers" (p.240). Both men lost their faith after the death of a loved one: for Murray, it was the death of his son, and for Royland, it was the suicide of his wife. These similarities are not coincidental. Laurence seems to be framing the series by connecting the last work with the first in this manner, thereby validating the series as a complete entity.

Morag learns very little about Royland's past until the day he chooses to explain it to her. Because of his strong religious beliefs, Royland was very strict with his wife:

'I even quit making love with her. I burned, yeh, but virtuously. I thought it was wasting my powers if I - - well, you know. She hated it all, but she never stood up to me. If she tried, I brought her down like shot sparrow, with my speech and also with the back of my hand. Yep. I thought it was a blow for the Lord.' (p.240)

Eventually, Royland's treatment of his wife causes her to run off to Toronto and become a waitress. Royland catches up with her, she agrees to return to him, leaves for a moment, and throws herself off a bridge. Royland, like Murray, leaves the church and carries a guilt within him for the remainder of his life.

The telling of his story is the only time in which Mor-

ag learns anything truly personal about Royland. In trying to explain his past behaviour, Royland utters what becomes for Morag an important truth, and is also one of the major themes of The Diviners: "you don't know how it is for other people, or how far back it all goes" (p.241). Morag must (and soon does) learn that the past can affect the present, and that she cannot always understand the motives and driving forces of those around her. Unlike Thor Thorlakson, Morag learns this important lesson in enough time for it to make a significant difference in her life, and Royland is partially responsible for this. Royland has finally found some degree of peace with the past, as Morag must do. Royland tells Morag that she should try and rest her soul (p.100), that only through calmness can some degree of rational and beneficial thought occur.

Royland is something of an example to Morag. In much the same way that Royland divines for water, Morag divines for truths in her past and in her work. When Royland loses the ability to divine water, he is accepting, and Morag recognizes the importance of appreciating the gift while one still has it.

* * * * *

Looking back on the men and women of the Manawaka series, one element becomes apparent: whatever form the relationships take, the men and women learn from each other. In many ways, the world of Manawaka is inhabited by many diviners. Margaret Laurence's talent as a writer allows her to create a small, stifling community that, in its own way, produces in its members a need to depend on those around them for guidance and

support. One of Royland's last statements in The Diviners sums up the view of diviners in the Manawaka series:

'It's something I don't understand, the divining,' Royland said slowly, 'and it's not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don't usually let on about is that quite a few people can learn to do it. You don't have to have the mark of God between your eyebrows. Or if you do, quite a few people have it.' (pp.451-452)

No less than Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa, and Morag do the men of the Manawaka series exemplify a major theme of the work of Margaret Laurence: that the ability to interact with others, to teach them and to learn from them, is a necessary part of life. That the women are able to respond to the men and benefit from their interaction with fathers, sons, husbands and lovers and diviners reflects Laurence's recognition of the importance of society.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER FIVE

¹The Oxford English Dictionary lists, as possible definitions for the verb 'divine' "to interpret, explain, disclose, make known." See The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary - Volume I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 776.

²Clara Thomas, Canadian Writers Number 3: Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1969) 41.

³Helen M. Buss, Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence (University of Victoria: English Literary Studies, 1985) 18.

⁴Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981) 95.

⁵Thomas, Margaret Laurence 47.

⁶Phyllis Gotlieb, "On Margaret Laurence," Critical Views on Margaret Laurence ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977) 41.

⁷Margaret Laurence, Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart - Bantam Limited, 1976) 5-6.

⁸Buss 61.

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