

"FORM IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S THE STONE ANGEL"

By

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI LIBRARY
THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
IND A O MA 1996
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

H. O. OCHIDO

University of NAIROBI Library



0472362 3

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literature presented at the University of Nairobi.

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

September 1996

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	I
Declaration	II
Dedication	III
Acknowledgements	IV
Abstract	V
Introduction	VII
Chapter I - The Life and Works of Margaret Laurence	1
Chapter II - Form	19
Chapter III - Form in <u>The Stone Angel</u>	36
Conclusion	109
Bibliography	120

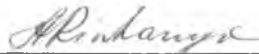
DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.



H. O. OCHIDO

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a University Supervisor.



MRS. ALINA MWANIRUA
SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents for always being there for me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to express my gratitude to the following:

To my Supervisor, Mrs. Alina Mwanirua for her guidance;

To Mr. D.H. Kiiru for his invaluable advice and encouragement; To Madrine Muthoni Njeru for her

patience in typing and deciphering my handwritten work;

and last but not least, to my parents for their constant support.

ABSTRACT

Form, which briefly defined is the manner in which a novel is structured for effect, is an important ingredient in the construction of any literary work. It is central to the novel's aesthetic appeal. Yet many critics have tended to take it for granted preferring to study what the novel is about (content) in preference to how the story is told and how this contributes to its overall impact form.

In keeping with the above tendency the criticism of Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel, has concentrated on its strong story line and its remarkable character the 90-year-old Hagar Shipley. Hagar's struggle for independence, a process that spans nearly a century, and her dramatic realisation that her greatest impediment to freedom has been herself, forms a compelling story that often seems to grab critic's attention to the exclusion of The Stone Angel's form. Scant attention has therefore been paid to Laurence's masterful construction of the novel and particularly how its remarkable portrayal of character is a direct result of skillful application of irony, symbolism and plot.

Form gives shape to the story in The Stone Angel, determining its flow and commenting on it. For instance the use of irony acts not only as a commentary on Hagar, but on the Manawaka community and mankind in general. Concurrently, the use of flashbacks gives the story an almost simultaneous forward and backward movement. Form therefore becomes not an imposition or an external embellishment but an indispensable aspect of the novel, crucial to its understanding.

The thesis seeks to show the symbiotic relationship that Laurence

ensures between form and content in The Stone Angel. We can indeed argue that it is the subtlety and therefore unobtrusiveness with which Laurence unites form and content that has led to the latter being inadequately treated.

In this thesis I highlight form as critical to the appreciation of The Stone Angel and as carrying Laurence's vision and worldview.

In the first chapter I carry out a survey of Laurence's other novels. In the process I seek to display her continued interest in form and how it informs her constantly widening horizons.

In the second chapter, we engage in a theoretical examination of form. We briefly trace its historical development. We also define, describe and evaluate form and its role in the novel. This forms a preamble to our study of form in The Stone Angel.

In the third and last chapter, we apply the critical assumptions we make in the previous chapter, to our textual analysis of The Stone Angel.

In conclusion, we comment on how form informs Laurence's vision, ideological standpoint and worldview.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses the form of Margaret Laurence's, The Stone Angel.

We see form as the overall structure in a novel: the totality of stylistic elements employed usually for effect. Form explores, develops and gives meaning to content in a novel.

From the above conception of form, we will examine its role as a source of cohesion and therefore aesthetic effect in The Stone Angel. At the same time we seek to display form as rendering Laurence's vision in The Stone Angel.

The Stone Angel is basically the story of Hagar Shipley who at 90, years old has her movements largely confined to her house. In view of her protagonist's sedentary existence, Laurence employs a narrative technique that not only ensures action in the novel, but credibility as well.

The employment of flashbacks is suited to character. In view of Hagar's age and her confinement it is only natural that she reminisces. Concurrently the use of flashbacks illuminate on Laurence's vision of time movement and the relationship between past and present. For Margaret Laurence, the individual exists simultaneously in the past and present. The past has a great bearing on the present, forming a basis for action in the latter. At the same time actions in the present frequently recall those in the past.

At the centre of the above is Laurence's vision on the enduring nature of human character and pre-occupations. Thus the basic conflicts that Hagar faces with her own children are similar to those she had with

her father, this despite the number of years that have gone by. In spite of advancements made in other aspects of human endeavour such as science and technology, human character remains basically the same.

Laurence is emphatic on the role of genetics in influencing character. Thus Hagar's attempts at escaping her father's legacy ironically confirms this inheritance. In marrying without her father's consent she is merely re-affirming the stubbornness that she has inherited from him.

In the light of the above, Hagar's attempts to escape are doomed to failure being based on the false premise that imprisonment is external to us.

Laurence shows through Hagar that we are imprisoned not by others, but by our very selves, by our values.

Since the point of view employed in The Stone Angel, is the first-person- narrator point of view, Laurence uses irony and symbols to provide an alternative point of view to Hagar's. The ironic treatment given to Hagar invites the reader to treat her with circumspection. We therefore do not accept what she has to say as the gospel truth.

In her use of biblical allusions, Laurence gives precedence to the familial conflict that is at the centre of The Stone Angel. In invoking the Genesis story of Jacob and incorporating it into the plot of her novel, Laurence traces familial conflict to a much earlier period in the process affirming the timeless nature of human relationship.

In the first chapter, we trace briefly Laurence's life history and her works. We seek in the process to establish a precedence for her interest

in form. We do this through a brief examination of her other novels.

In the second chapter we theoretically discuss form. We briefly trace the historical evolution of form and attitudes towards it particularly how various critics have regarded it (form) in relation to content.

We focus on the Marxist conception of the role of form in literature.

In the third chapter, we analyse form in The Stone Angel using the theoretical perspectives acquired from the second chapter.

We seek to show in this chapter, how the novel is structured to reveal Laurence's world view and consequently the role of form in giving meaning to the text.

In conclusion we indicate our findings and evaluation thereof.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF MARGARET LAURENCE

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemys in Neepawa, Manitoba in 1926. It is the rural town of Neepawa that she transformed into the fictional Manawaka, which is the background to her five works commonly referred to as the Manawaka cycle.

Laurence's early years exerted a great influence on her work. The death of her parents when she was young, coupled with a presbyterian upbringing left a deep impression on her.

Margaret Wemys married Jack Laurence in 1948 and moved with him to London in 1949 and later to Africa where they stayed till 1957. It is this period spent in Africa which marked the beginning of her career as a writer. Her first work, A Tree of Poverty(1954) was a translation and recasting of Somali poetry and tales. She later wrote a series of stories dwelling on her African experience. A major subject in these stories is that of a people in the throes of transition from traditional African ways to the modern. These stories were later collected in a book, The Tomorrow Tamer(1963).

Another book, This Side Jordan (1960) captures the period just before Ghana's independence and is Laurence's first novel. The Prophets Camel Bell (1963) is a memoir from her two year sojourn in Somali. In this book she treats the Somali and their culture with remarkable sensitivity and understanding. One can clearly discern in The Prophets, Camel Bell, the beginnings of Laurence's interest in the human condition, an interest which gains artistic display in her works of fiction.

Laurence also wrote a critical piece Long Drums and Canons(1968), a study of the English language writers in Nigeria.

In her African based works, Laurence displays an empathetic grasp of the African experience. This sensitivity is partly the result of her coming from Canada, a country which shares a similar colonial background with Africa.

On her return to Canada, Laurence separated from her husband and moved to England. It is from there that she wrote the first three of her Manawaka novels. The Stone Angel was published in 1966 and The Fire-Dwellers in 1969. Laurence returned to Canada in 1969 to become a writer in residence at the University of Toronto(1969-70). She had also published children's stories and some non-fiction pieces. Heart of a Stranger (1976) is a selection of essays from the 12 years previous to its publication.

Laurence has received several awards in recognition of her artistic achievements. In 1971 she was named a Companion of the Order of Canada. A Jest of God won the Governor General's award and so did The Diviners in 1974.

A theme that runs through Laurence's works is the search for autonomy amid forces that impede the individual's attainment of this goal. There is also a wide employment of symbolism, biblical allusions and use of irony especially in the Manawaka based works.

One clearly discerns a movement in the historical background to Laurence's novels. The Stone Angel is in this respect based on a much earlier period than The Diviners(which on the most deals with a much later period). The changes in time frame are not accidental and represent

Laurence's interest in the manner that humanity reacts to the whole process of existence through different periods.

There is also a noticeable change in the awareness and consciousness of her characters. From Mirandas naivety in This Side Jordan, to Hagar in The Stone Angel, full of the prudishness of her puritanical pioneering community to Racheal in A Jest of God, torn between rebellion and a sense of filial piety, running into the more sexually liberated Stacey MacIndra(The Fire-Dwellers) and Morag Gunn in The Diviners; there is a continuous shift in the perspective and attitudes of Laurence's characters.

This Side Jordan, is Laurence's first novel. It is also her only novel that is not based in Canada and consequently the only one that falls outside the Manawaka cycle.

This Side Jordan is set in Ghana on the eve of the country's Independence. Setting is however not the only factor that separates this work from Laurence's other novels. It is the only novel in which Laurence uses the omniscient 'eye of God' narrative perspective. This is necessitated by the need to display the perspectives of two diverse characters. There is Nathaniel Amegbe, a Ghanaian School teacher caught between past and present and at the same time unsure of the future. On the opposite side is Johnnie Kestoe, a British expatriate threatened by imminent Africanization which puts his position at risk (and uncomfortable with the emerging African clout).

The two, Nathaniel and Johnnie, are both not at ease with the unfolding events for different reasons. Nathaniel is uncomfortable because he is unsure just what independence would bring. Johnnie on the other hand realises that for a white person like himself, African independence

meant redundancy. Both these characters are also haunted by a past they have never been comfortable with. Nathaniel is interested in harmonizing traditional African culture with modern ways, a venture in which he rarely succeeds. Similarly, Johnnie seeks to exorcise the poverty and misery of his childhood and in particular the traumatic circumstances of his mother's death.

There are certain similarities between This Side Jordan and another works covering the same period, Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease. In the latter novel Obi like Nathaniel, is caught up in an attempted synthesis between his traditional African past and present beliefs acquired through education. Mr. Green just like Johnnie is also faced by imminent disaster in the form of Africanization. Laurence's view in This Side Jordan, as we are going to see later, is more optimistic as her characters make adjustments to the changes at hand. This is quite unlike in Achebe's No Longer at Ease where Obi's attempted sythesis of his traditional African heritage and acquired western lifestyle ends in disaster.

While the omniscient point of view employed in This Side Jordan gives us a picture of both Nathaniel and Johnnies perspectives, it also poses some problems. Unlike in the 'I narrator' point of view used in The Stone Angel, where the author is self effacing, it is always difficult to separate the narrative voice from the authorial voice in an omniscient narration. The above draw back is evident in This Side Jordan. This is exacerbated by the fact that of all Laurence's novels, it stands out as one in which the author's concern with the development of theme seems to preponderate over form. Thus some incidents appear contrived and the

symbols are not subtly weaved into the text as we are going to see in The Stone Angel.

One of Laurence's problems in This Side Jordan is to ensure some form of social intercourse between Nathaniel and the Kestoes. The reality however is that Europeans and Africans have their own social worlds in colonial Africa. The two groups therefore mostly meet at the workplace as superior and subordinate or at the European's home as employer and servant respectively.

Since Nathaniel does not relate to the Kestoes in either of the above contexts, Laurence had to consider an alternative way of bringing them together. Her attempted solution is, however, not successful. The accidental meetings between Nathaniel and the Kestoes and in particular with Johnnies naive amateur anthropologist wife Miranda often have an air of contrivance about them.

Laurence's interest in This Side Jordan is mainly the development of theme, and in particular the transition process in Ghana as it affects both Europeans and Africans. The development of character is therefore subordinated to theme. The result is that we do not have as memorable characters in This Side Jordan as we do in the Manawaka cycle novels.

This Side Jordan, like Laurence's other novels employs symbolism to enhance and develop themes. The title 'This Side Jordan' seeks a parallel between the Israelite exodus to the promised land and Ghana's path towards the new experience that is independence.

For Johnnie Kestoe and Nathan Amegbe this transition, inevitable as it may be, is far from smooth. This is because they have their roots in the

past from which they cannot make a clean break as it is still quite real for them.

It is therefore left to their offspring, significantly born on the eve of independence, to set in motion a new set of relations between whites and blacks in the new Ghana. Nathaniel's son appropriately named Joshua (to echo the biblical Joshua) represents the new generation expected to lead Ghana across the "river Jordan" to the new world.

Compared to The Stone Angel, the symbols in This Side Jordan are not as subtly incorporated into the story. They stand out as pretty obvious to the extent that one gets the impression that Laurence wants her message to be unequivocal. A case in point is the episode after Johnnie's decision to support the Africanization exercise. He discovers a dead gekko 'belly uppermost... already covered with black ants(174). This is a clear reference to the inevitability of black rule. Thus Johnnie's kicking away of the gekko shows his pragmatic if ruthless resolve to take the action that best ensures his survival. In using such an obvious symbol, it becomes apparent that Laurence's urge to state her message overcomes the artistic need for subtlety.

This Side Jordan shares a similar concern with The Stone Angel on the role of the past in the present. This theme is mostly developed through reminiscence by the two protagonists. Through interior monologue the struggles that Nathaniel undergoes as he attempts a reconciliation of his traditional African inheritance and his Western education(tinged with Judeo-Christian ideology) is made evident.

As in The Stone Angel, the use of irony is an attractive feature in This Side Jordan. This is achieved by contrasting the lives of Nathaniel

and Johnnie. The irony is heightened when we see these two responding to the same issues or to each other often interpreting the situation wrongly. Most notable is the incident where they meet at the 'Weekend in Wyoming' nightclub. Each one of them reads in the other's action more than there really is (218-34).

Laurence's use of irony in This Side Jordan demonstrates the uncertainties as regards the future that plagues both whites and blacks, this despite their mutual hostility and suspicion. The underlying message and a possible solution to the race problem therefore lies in a mutual recognition of the vulnerability of the two races, a vulnerability that their humanity confers upon them.

A Jest of God, is the story of Racheal Cameron, who at the beginning of the novel is 34, a spinster and a virgin. Racheal is hemmed in both by the interfering Manawaka society and by her hypochondriac mother who seeks to control her life. Racheal herself is also responsible for this stifling of her life because outwardly she conforms and lacks the courage to break with conventions. Her only means of escape is through fantasy. We are exposed to her mental processes through interior monologue, enabling us to contrast her outward behaviour and her innermost thoughts. Rachael's thoughts are in direct opposition to her actions. She epitomizes the hypocrisy of the society, a dishonesty manifested in her relationship with her mother to whom she rarely reveals her true feelings.

With the arrival of Nick Kazlik on the scene, Racheal puts her hitherto latent rebellion into action. She in the process engages in a journey towards self discovery. Although Rachael's rebellion is not

blatant (in the sense that she keeps her sexual liaisons with Nick a secret), it enables her to at least begin considering her desires as distinct from those of her mother and society. She is also able to come to terms with her sexuality. Ultimately, Racheal's victory is her courage to at last take a risk and move out of Manawaka (into the unknown) and at the same time stand up to her mother.

A Jest of God has a similar use as in The Stone Angel of the first person-point of view and interior monologue. This is suited to the protagonist Racheal, who is lonely and on the most part introspective.

The plot line in A Jest of God is linear unlike in The Stone Angel where flashbacks are a major feature. This does not mean, however that there are no references to the past. Racheal reminisces a lot as she tries to reconstruct images of her departed father, a parent she never quite understood.

A Jest of God is mainly based on what occurs in its protagonist's mind. To distinguish the various thought processes that Racheal engages in, Laurence adopts various devices. The episodes in which Racheal resorts to fantasy are hyphernated and told in the third person. These represent feelings and thoughts which Racheal represses externally, and which find expression in her mind through fantasy. Racheal's engagement in day dreaming is compensatory, and displays not only the lack of fulfilment in her life, but also her inability to express herself.

The key motif in A Jest of God is based, as in The Stone Angel, on a biblical allusion. The name Racheal is inspired by the Racheal in the book of Jeremiah, described as crying for her children. For Racheal in A Jest of God the children that she teaches and who she refers to as "my

kids", represent a welcome oasis in the barrenness that is her life in Manawaka. However her hold on them is not only temporary (since they always leave after one year), but in the final analysis illusory. They are in reality their parents children as Racheal realises in her encounter with James Doherty's mother(56).

Racheal's chance to get a child of her own is steeped in ambivalence. She is torn between the longing for a child that can truly belong to her and the potential disgrace that such an offspring born out of wedlock spells both for herself and her mother in puritanical Manawaka. Her imagined pregnancy ironically turns out to be a benign tumour apparently saving her from disgrace albeit causing her new worries as regards her health. The irony is however compounded by the fact that Manawakan's perceive the operation she undergoes to remove the tumour as an abortion.

It is in this background of one irony after another that the title 'A Jest of God' gains significance. God, if he exists, is conceived of in the novel as a figure hell bent on wreaking havoc on human aspiration and deriving no small amount of amusement from it. This conception of God as a jester, is one that as we are going to show, holds sway in The Stone Angel as well. The image of a God who plays jokes on humanity represents Laurence's preoccupation with the contradictions and uncertainties of human existence. This is a pre-occupation which finds expression in the form of Laurence's novels.

The Fire-Dwellers, comes after A Jest of God in order of publication. A study of both novels however, reveals that they are based on about the same period despite their different settings.

Stacey MacIndra nee' Cameron, as it turns out is a sister to Racheal in A Jest of God. Stacey shares Racheal's self-deprecatory approach and the latter's wry sense of humour. A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, contrast life in the rural town of Manawaka and the city where the latter book is based.

The Fire-Dwellers is the only one of Laurence's Canadian based novels that does not have Manawaka as part of its setting. Unlike Racheal, Stacey has already made an escape from Manawaka when we encounter her. This however, does not mean that Manawaka does not feature in the novel.

Stacey constantly reminisces on her Manawaka experience and part of her unease in the city is due to a failure to make a conclusive transition from her rural origins to the city.

Compared to The Stone angel, or A Jest of God, the narrative style in The Fire-Dwellers lacks the neatness and subtlety of the aforementioned novels. Despite this the form of The Fire-Dwellers is quite suited to the story. The novel deals with the anxieties of motherhood, apprehensions about ageing, communication between spouses, death and its implications, and crime and poverty as captured in the print and electronic media and in junk psychology. The Fire-Dwellers is in a nutshell, about life in the mid-20th century, life led at a frenetic pace as experienced by a harassed, 39 year, old housewife and mother of four.

Laurence adopts multiple points of view to aptly capture Stacey's condition. The story is told in the third-person present tense narrative but involves first-person present tense thinking by the protagonist. There are also reminiscence from Stacey's childhood in third-person past-tense.

are coupled with use of newsflashes which continually interrupt the story and which are written in capital letters.

The result of the foregoing techniques is a picture of life moving frantically. Stacey is caught in between trying to run a household (being a good mother and wife) and finding time to come to terms with the person she is, her desires and her past.

Concurrently, Stacey is faced by the trappings of modernity: the radio, television and newspaper headlines - all spewing out stories of poverty, war and human suffering. All these media proclaim what an unsuitable world it is.

Stacey's sense of insecurity is exacerbated by the popular psychological materials that she imbibes: materials which bring home to her real or imagined failings in her dual role as mother and wife.

A Nervous Breakdown Taught Me life's Meaning(15)

Are you Emasculating Your Husband?(55)

Like Racheal in A Jest of God, Stacey seeks to escape through daydreams and fantasy. Her fantasies are written in italics and denote her apprehensions and insecurity. We are also given in italics Stacey's private thoughts: feelings she would like to express but dare not out of a sense of propriety.

The past is not so much an area of focus in The Fire-Dwellers as in The Stone Angel. It is however, as important. Images of Stacey's

childhood and memories of her alcoholic father often intrude into the present further enhancing her state of harassment.

The almost cyclic nature of events that we are going to demonstrate in The Stone Angel is evident to some extent in The Fire-Dwellers. We here refer to Stacey re-enacting with her daughter Katie, a similar process of child/parent relationship that the former underwent with her own mother. Often in The Fire-Dwellers, Katie disagrees with her mother prompting Stacey to recall her own rebellion. This echoes The Stone Angel, where Hagar rebels against her father only to ironically treat her children in the same manner her father treated her and which treatment prompted her rebellion. In both The Fire-dwellers and in The Stone Angel, Laurence uses ironic reversals to point out the constant concerns of parenthood.

Like Racheal in A Jest of God and Hagar in The Stone Angel, Stacey is faced with communication barrier. She cannot adequately express her wishes and constantly articulates what she did not intend to. Thus she is acutely aware of the shortcomings of words in expressing one's feelings.

The meaning or lack of meaning in words often comes under scrutiny.

The communication breakdown engendered by the failure of words to adequately express human feeling is a theme that runs through Laurence's works and one which we intend to examine further in our analysis of The Stone Angel. At this juncture we would like to state that in The Fire-Dwellers (like in The Stone Angel) we are given an insight into the mind of the protagonist and are thus able to see the disparity between her intention and what she actually articulates.

The main symbol in The Fire-Dwellers is fire. At the beginning of the novel, Stacey mentally recites a nursery rhyme.

Lady Bird, lady bird
Fly away home,
Your house is on fire
Your children are gone(7)

The nursery rhyme captures Stacey's concern with imminent disaster. She lives in constant fear of tragedy befalling her family. Her fantasies of remote locations therefore represent a wish to escape to a place free from the world around her. The image of fire in the nursery rhyme is further reinforced by the glimpses of death, destruction and war that emerge from newspaper headlines and electronic media. We are thus exposed to a world aflame both literally and figuratively.

The fires are not however confined to the physical external world. Stacey also has her own internal fires raging which are expressed to us through interior monologue. These are her repressed sexual urges, her need to communicate with others especially her husband and, most importantly, her need to understand her place in the scheme of things and come to terms with her life. All these factors unite into the central image of fire in The Fire-Dwellers.

The Diviners is Laurence's last novel and the most innovative formally. It is a complex novel whose form calls attention to itself. It can justifiably be said that most of the issues that Laurence raises in her other novels converge in The Diviners. In this sense, the novel is both literally

and artistically Laurence's last statement on the themes that have preoccupied her in her earlier works.

Like The Stone Angel, The Diviners employs past and present narrative perspectives, with the past moving fast to catch up with the slower moving present right at the end of the novel. Unlike The Stone Angel, however, The Diviners employs multiple point of view. The present of the story is told from the third person limited omniscient perspective. This is to say that the focus is primarily on the main character Morag Gunn. Then there are those sections sub-titled 'snapshot' which are told in the third-person present tense. These episodes are important not for what the photographs themselves reveal: but rather, for what they hide.

Morag tries to add some flesh to the snapshot scene by adding details that are not discernible in the photographs. These details are not however necessarily true and Morag herself questions their validity. Her memories are in this respect a mixture of what actually occurred and childhood fantasy. Sifting the former from the latter is almost impossible. More important, however, is that Morag's mixture of fiction and truth in recreating her childhood is crucial to her portrayal as an artist. Simultaneously, it introduces the concern with the nature of truth and fiction and where they diverge if at all.

The ambiguity noticeable in this early section of The Diviners foreshadows the general air of ambiguity and ambivalence that permeates the novel. This ambivalence is part of Laurence's vision in the novel, a vision that she weaves into the structure of The Diviners.

The snapshots launch the journey into the past through the parts of the novel titled 'memory-bank Movie' and which in turn have sub-titles.

These flashbacks are unravelled from a third-person present tense narrative perspective.

The Diviners is divided into five parts. At the beginning of each part we are in the present with a forty-seven-year-old-Morag, with the image of the river that fronts her property forming the background. The river is an important image in the novel, one which we are going to revisit later.

We have so far briefly looked at the structure of The Diviners. It is now our intention to examine the structure of the novel in relation to how this illuminates on theme and character in the novel and in the final analysis, on Laurence's world view and vision.

The Diviners is concerned with growth both psychological and artistic. It is about the movement towards knowledge of the self and on the nature of existence. The Diviners is at the same time interested in the question of identity and personal history - the search for roots. It shares a similar concern with The Stone Angel on the role of the past in the present. This is reflected in the use of flashbacks.

Artistic production and the process it involves is also treated in The Diviners. Indeed the novel is centered around artists, Morag the literary artist, Jules the singer and Christie garbage man cum oral artist. Informing the above characters and leit-motif in the novel is the act of divining. All the characters enumerated are diviners in a figurative sense. We also have a diviner literally in Royland from whom Morag seeks to learn about divining.

To revisit the memory bank narrative technique it is evident that Laurence perceives the mind not only as a reservoir for past experience,

but also as cameralike with a capacity to focus on whatever it considers important. The memory bank technique, however, as Adalo Moga has argued in "Narrative Mode and significance in Margaret Laurence's; The Diviners", goes further than a camera does. Moga compares the narrative voice and Morag's memory to the commentary in films. Unlike motion picture films, however, he rightly points out, the technique in The Diviners enables a creative process even as it provides commentary.

The memory-bank technique is a flashback technique that reveals what occurs in Morag's mind. From the vantage of the present, we move into the past and then back again to the present. This movement is echoed by the image of the river that flows both ways. For Laurence, life is ' a river that flows in either direction: a simultaneous movement between past and present even as we move on into the future.

Similarly, activities in the past influence the present to the extent that the two (past and present) merge. This perspective on time is one that Laurence seeks to capture in the form of her works. The Stone Angel deals with time movement and the relationship between past and present.

The memory-bank technique is however not just crucial in rendering Laurence's vision: it is a practical solution to the need to explain the Morag that we encounter at the beginning of the novel.

Aesthetically, suspense is created by mention of certain characters whose background and future role(s) in the novel we are yet unaware of. For instance in the first chapter, Pique Royland and Pique's father are mentioned. Suspense is thereby created as concerns who they are and is only gradually satisfied in the story through flashbacks.

Concurrently, fresh allusions are made in the present whose explication we have to seek in the flashbacks. The above technique is also employed successfully in The Stone Angel.

A notable feature of The Diviners and indeed all of Laurence's Manawaka based novel is their focus on the individual's mind. The focus on the individual psyche is of course a characteristic of the 20th Century novel, a reflection of the existentialist philosophy that has increasingly informed its (novels) production. More specifically, however, the insight we are given into Morag's mind in The Diviners is important in so far as it displays Laurence's perception of history and the individual's relationship with their past. The story is told to us long after Morag has left Manawaka. What we learn of the town and the incidents we are exposed to are recapitulated in Morag's mind in the present. The message here is that history our past and identity are always with us in our mind. This implies then that one's identity does not reside in an actual physical place. Similarly, a physical escape from a place we associate with our past will not release us from this past. History is with us in our minds. Morag tries to put as much distance as she can (like most Laurence characters) between herself and her home town Manawaka. She also pursues her roots in Scotland, a past romanticised by Christie in his tales. She is largely unsuccessful.

Morag's salvation comes through her realisation that the Scotland she has envisioned all along does not really exist in the physical-Scotland but in her memories of Christie's tales and therefore in the stories themselves. Concurrently, she further learns that her roots will always be with her wherever she goes.

as a fact of nature: a condition from which she can still act with dignity and courage.

Related to the preceding, is Morag's newly found awareness that she cannot deny her immediate past in Manawaka despite some of its ignominies. After abandoning her search for a mythical past, Morag can now come to terms with her Canadianess. Her buying of a farm and a house built by pioneers becomes a symbolic act towards the re-enactment of pioneering and a consequent acceptance of Canada as her home.

The purpose of this survey has been to display the important function played by form as an expression of Laurence's worldview and vision. It becomes evident that Laurence is preoccupied in her works in employing formal approaches that adequately give shape to theme and character in her novels.

Laurence's expanding vision is therefore complemented by corresponding innovativeness in the form of her works.

Lastly, Laurence's aesthetic awareness is best exemplified by her use of form, a fact established by our survey.

In the next chapter, a theoretical examination of form is engaged in as a launching pad to the analysis of The Stone Angel.

CHAPTER II

FORM

Over the years, the question of the importance of form vis a vis content has been a major feature of literary criticism. The debate can be traced as far back as in the writings of Aristotle and Plato. The emphasis that different critics have given to either form or content has tended to be influenced by what they perceive to be literature's function. For those who see a didactic and utilitarian function in literature, the emphasis has been on content. On the other hand critics who view literature as only existing in the service of art, consider form as superior to content.

Thankfully, however, the definition of form has not been steeped in as much controversy as its role in art.

A Handbook to Literature, defines form as:

... the organization of the elements of a work of art in relation to its total effect...form being, the pattern or structure or organization which is employed to give expression to the content(192).

Mark Schorer, who uses the terms form and technique interchangeably, in The World We Imagine, sees form as:

...any selection, structure or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action, by means of which it should be added our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed(5).

From these definitions an emphasis on organization is evident. Form is the imposition of order to a work. It is the overall structure: a deliberate ordering of a literary work. Central to the preceding definitions, is the effect that such an ordering ensures. Form is therefore aimed at eliciting a response from the reader.

It can therefore be stated that form is the totality of stylistic elements employed in a literary work. It is the manner in which human experience (content) is explored, developed and consequently given meaning. It therefore follows that it is form that gives an artistic stamp to the novel.

From a general definition of form, we would now like to specifically survey the treatment of form by different critics. In so doing, we will examine how various schools of criticism have viewed the role played by form in literary works and the peculiar definitions that critics have attached to it (form). There will also be a brief look at the evolution of the novel as a form. In the process we will demonstrate that the factors that led to the rise of the novel are still actively influencing form within the same.

It is almost inevitable that a study on literary theory begins with one of Plato and Aristotle and ours is going to be no exception. The beginnings of the debate on the role of form in art are indeed traceable to Plato's The Republic.

Plato in his disputations on poetry dismisses it as having no role to play in his ideal state.

Poetry for Plato appealed to the irrational part of man and thereby elicited illogical behaviour and was as a consequence dangerous. Plato applied the utilitarian values of the physical sciences to his treatment of poetry. Thus poetry's usefulness to society was to be measured in terms of empirically

verifiable solutions to societies problems. The formal elements which embellished poetry, Plato declared, deceived the ignorant into believing they heard the truth when in reality poetry was third removed from reality and subsequently, the truth.

The only possible way Poetry could make itself useful to the state, was to tailor its content to suit its (states) needs. The only poetry admissible in Plato's state were consequently those dedicated to the gods and to famous men. The above kind of poetry, Plato distinguishes from those that seek to give pleasure.

Once you go beyond that and admit the sweet lyric of epic muse, pleasure and pain become your rulers instead of law and rational principles commonly accepted as best(437).

Plato would therefore subordinate the aesthetic to the didactic, form to be content. While Platos treatise dealt specifically with poetry his arguments are easily applicable to the novel. They in effect set into motion the debate on forms role in literary works.

With Plato largely dismissing creativity in poetry, it required Aristotle to state a case for the existence of poetry. The latter stood in complete opposition to the former. Whereas Plato sought to give poetry an instrumental function, Aristotle saw it as creative and existing on its own right.

From the onset Aristotle's The Poetics state his interest in various types of poetry and in particular the forms that best exemplify them.

Having affirmed Poetry's right of existence he launches into an analysis of the same.

The Poetics is not only a prescription on how to compose a great work of art, but a demonstration of how Poetry should be structured and its various elements arranged for the best form.

Form is seen as central to a successful work of art in The Poetics. While it is true Aristotle gave prescriptions on content as well (for instance when he requires that the work of art have a moral purpose), his emphasis is clearly on presentation and therefore form.

Aristotle focuses on tragedy which he believed to be the highest form of poetry. He therefore delineates the various elements which comprise tragedy commenting on how best these should be constructed for effective tragedy.

The elements identified by Aristotle are plot, character, diction, thought spectacle and song. Of these plot which is defined as "...the arrangement of incidents"(27) is described as the most important element in tragedy: "...the soul of a tragedy.

While it is clear that Aristotle's focus was on poetry it is an indisputable fact that modern criticism on the novel owes its origins to The Poetics. The definitions of form we adopted earlier in the chapter, in fact compare favourably to Aristotle's conception of form in poetry.

The ideas postulated by Aristotle on structural unity, cohesion in art and the concept of organic unity have been incorporated into the novel. The requirement by Aristotle that tragedy have a beginning, a middle and end, for a well constructed plot, is directly applicable to the novel. The contention in A Handbook to Literature, that form is ...the organization of

the elements of a work of art in relation effect..."102) obviously bears a strong relationship to Aristotle's view that the most effective tragedy is that one which has a "... plot and artistically constructed incidents(28). Thus when Aristotle declares that tragedy be constructed to arouse pity and fear we can instantly project this requirement for effect to the novel.

The other requirements enunciated by Aristotle for tragedy namely; the importance of a complex plot, employment of reversals in a plot and the need for focus also apply to the novel. It is for the above reasons that our survey of the critical approaches on form, begins with a study of Aristotle.

From a survey of the classical approach to form, it is our intention to examine how modern day critics perceive the same. Mark Schorer, whose definition of form has already been stated is the first critic we are going to examine.

For Schorer, everything in the work that is not experience is form. Experience here refers to content. Schorer sees form as containing both moral and intellectual preoccupations. It is an active force that not only contains moral implications but discovers them. It is important then, Schorer asserts, that the artist be in control of his material so that it is not seen to be controlling him as this can lead to excessive sentimentality and subjectivity. As he writes:

until the talent is controlled, the materials organized, the content achieved, there is simply the man and his life(17)

By achieved content Schorer refers to the organization of the novel (form) to effectively express theme. It is clear that Schorer sees form as removing the novel from the realm of mere documentation. Form gives shape to and moulds the content making the work, art.

The successful artist according to Schorer, is one who achieves a balance between form and content. He gives the example of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, in which form achieves an equivalence with its subject. The terseness of Hemingway's style complements his subject: the exhaustion of values. The barrenness of his style reveals the barrenness that he saw in life.

Form defines experience and evaluates it. It is basic to the work of art, being the tool that the artist has at his disposal to discover, to explore and develop his subject. Form then gives meaning to and evaluates content.

Schorer's analysis of form is an incisive study that is illuminating on the role of form in the novel. Its scope is however not as wide as one might hope. While it deals substantially with the manner in which form influences content, it gives little attention to how content in turn influences form. Schorer's stated aim is to put the focus on form as a basic ingredient for an accomplished work of art and as a viable subject of study in the novel. This is in itself a worthy course and one which we support in this study. However, in focusing on the role of form in the novel Schorer pays little attention to form/content dynamics. The relationship between form and content is such that even as the latter is organized by the former, it exerts influence on it and is primary to the former. Schorer at the same time does not display the role played by socio-economic and

ideological factors that form the background to any novel in determining form.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, in Theory of Literature, share Schorer's assertion that form be united to content. Thus they contend that when a work of art functions successfully "...the two notes of pleasure and utility should not merely co-exist but coalesce. The two critics see form as that:

...which aesthetically organizes its matter. In a successful work of art the materials are completely assimilated into form(241)

Wellek and Warren in the above quotation confirm Schorer's view that form gives expression to content and gives shape to a work. The two critics emphasize that form "...exists in the service of expression(241)". They point out the error of viewing literature as a passive reproduction of society and as a simple mirror of life. Discussing the relationship between literature and society would only yield positive results if the 'artistic method' of the novelist was studied. This is a view that we share. Our analysis of form in The Stone Angel is therefore aimed at ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the novel.

Wellek and Warren point out useful factors to be considered in the study of form. Like Schorer, however, they do not illuminate on form/content dynamics.

For a more profound understanding of form and how it operates in the novel, it is important that we grasp the manner in which it interacts

with content. Similarly, we have to acknowledge form as an expression of social and ideological viewpoints which historically form a background to the novel.

Marxist critics such as Leon Trotsky, display this awareness of form as evolving to express social reality. Trotsky is explicit on the role of content as a determinant of form. The constant changes in society and human experience as well as psychology that form the subject of art have an active influence on its form according to Trotsky.

Trotsky is more interested in tracing the genesis of form rather than defining it. Form according to him, is the result of a chain that emanates from the social environment. Without changes in the social environment form would remain static and there wouldn't be any movement in art. Trotsky's views are irrevocably tied to his Marxist conception of literature which sees art as a social servant and as 'historically utilitarian'. Trotsky's assertion that form is influenced by the social environment is not, however, peculiarly Marxist. Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel echoes the same sentiments as we are going to show later in the study.

Trotsky sees form not as a passive element in the novel (a view shared by Schorer), but as an active force with a capacity to influence content. Form and content are engaged in a mutual relationship and form can in some cases transform content.

Trotsky contends that a work should be judged from the point of view of its artistic achievement (form) an approach shared by Schorer as we saw earlier. On the other hand since form is influenced by its social environment, it is a must that it reflect the society that it has emerged from. To totally sever art from its social environment would be defective.

Art according to the Marxist conception, is a transformation of reality. Form is the mode of ensuring this transformation. No matter how fantastic a work of art is, it is merely a transformation of the material made available by the social environment. The idea here is that the artist is conditioned by the world he lives in. It follows then that whatever he writes, whichever mode of expression he adopts, be it surrealism or symbolism is by necessity a product of either his conscious or unconscious experience.

Trotsky's conception of art as a transformation of reality has a close affinity with the formalist idea of art as a 'defamiliarization of reality'. The basic idea behind defamiliarization is that art selects an experience common to us and then couches it in a form that is artistic and which removes it from its everyday conception.

This affinity in outlook between formalists and the Marxist Trotsky is ironical considering that the Marxists and formalists never saw 'eye to eye' and if we note that Trotsky's Literature and Revolution engages in a point by point lambasting of the formalist approach to literature. It can be contended, however, that the basic difference between Marxists and formalists lies in the emphasis each group attaches to form rather than in their definition of the same.

Terry Eagleton whose approach like Trotsky's is Marxist, devotes more time than the latter to the study of form. Eagleton takes off from Trotsky. He sees Marxist criticism as a concurrent study of the forms, styles and meanings in a work of art. The above study is done with a conscious awareness of the forms, styles and meanings in art as products of a particular history.

Understanding of a particular history by necessity involves an appreciation of the total social process of which it is part of. To grasp a work of art, we would therefore need to do more than just interpret symbolism or literary history. It would encompass an awareness of the complex indirect relations which emerge not just in a works themes and preoccupations but in its style, rhythm, imagery and ultimately its form..

Eagleton is at pains to disassociate himself from what he labels as the "vulgar Marxist" position which views the novel only in terms of its content and in particular how faithfully it represents the historical times.

For the vulgar Marxists, Eagleton contends, "...artistic form is merely an artifact externally imposed on the turbulent content of history itself"(547).

The vulgar Marxist approach which is basically conservative, fails to appreciate the dialects of form/content relations. As Trotsky rightly points out, form can in fact influence content.

On the other extreme is the position associated with the formalists. These emphasized form at the expense of content. To the formalists, an 'art for arts' sake approach sufficed, content they stated, was merely selected to reinforce form. The question of Literature's specificity could only be answered with reference to the formal properties of the literary text. Thus according to one of the leading proponents of formalism, Roman Jakobson quoted in Tony Bennets, Formalism and Marxism:

...the mode of functioning of the poetic word is such as to secure the primacy of its aesthetic over its communicative function.

It is between the vulgar Marxist and formalists (two extreme positions) that Eagleton stands. He sees both a communicative and aesthetic function in literature. He moves from the rather simplistic vulgar Marxist position that reduces a work, or rather explains it in terms of the mode of production and the immediate historical period that form a background to its writing.

Eagleton identifies a more complex relationship between form and content. He draws a parallel between form and content relationship with that between the base (infrastructure) and the superstructure in Marxist ideology. By this analogy the content forms the base from which the form springs. Content is consequently basic to form. However, form can react against content and influence it.

Change with regard to form Eagleton avers, does not always have to spring from the base. It (form) has its own internal dynamics which can also exert influence. He continues to add that form is historically determined by the content it embodies and is therefore changed, transformed, broken down and revolutionalized as the content itself changes.

Eagleton sees form as a complex merger of three components:

It is partly shaped by a relatively autonomous literary history of forms; it crystallizes out of certain dominant ideological structures,.. it embodies a specific set of relations between author and audience(548).

By stating that form is influenced by a literary history of forms, Eagleton refers to the fact that a new form despite its being historically determined by content does not break completely from older forms. It in fact establishes a continuity with the existing forms. Existing literary traditions therefore exercise some influence on form.

On the relationship between form and ideology, Eagleton rightly points out that the language and techniques available to the writer are already permeated by ideological viewpoints and attitudes. Words in themselves carry ideology. In this respect form is to a certain extent predetermined. This particular concept is quite useful when applied to The Stone Angel where the author's apparent lack of faith in Christianity does not prevent a permeation of Judeo-christian expressions, allusions and motifs in the novel. We can argue in this respect that in The Stone Angel, the author's form of expression is to a certain extent predetermined by a prevalence of Judeo-christian ideology in the society that produces her.

Eagleton's assertion that changes in form embody a specific set of relations between the author and his audience can be traced to Trotsky. The latter writes that the artist can only but give form to the spiritual point of view being formulated within the proletariat (Trotsky, 1971).

Eagleton develops further the Marxist concept of historical influence in literature. He refers to the famed Marxist critic George Lukacs who writes that the great realist writers were those who were present at the tumultuous birth of a historical epoch. Lukacs' assertion recalls the maxim that great times produce great writers. It would therefore follow that the artistic achievements of writers such as Walter Scott, Balzac and

Tolstoy were in part a result of the rich content provided by the historical times they lived in.

The Marxist contention that form is influenced by historical factors finds support in the work of Ian Watt. Watt's The Rise of the Novel traces the origins of the novel as a form with special reference to the 'avant-garde' of the form(novel), Richardson, Defoe and Fielding. The Rise of the Novel, gives valuable insights on changes in form within the novel despite its focus being on the genesis of the novel.

According to Watt, the novel arises with the decline of feudalism and the appearance of capitalism and a bourgeoisie middle class. With these historical changes and the new economic order that they engendered, there arose a clear need for a form that would cater for the changing perceptions of the new world.

From the universal and communal outlook of the pre-industrial societies, emerged a new individualism. The universal outlook embodied in previous literature was now replaced by the particular. Watt draws a parallel between this new outlook in literature and the developments in philosophy during the period. He in particular alludes to the work of realist philosophers, Descartes and John Locke.

According to Locke:

...the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions (Watt 22).

From the earlier worldview which conceived of life as moving in a linear fashion, Locke introduced the concept of causality. The individual according to this approach had the ability to summon the past through memory a fact that enabled him to appreciate the idea of cause and effect. This is a point of view which as Watt correctly points out, is characteristic of the novel. The novel in this sense evolves to express the viewpoint of the age as embodied in the philosophical thought of Locke and other realists.

The novel sought an "...exploration of the personality as it is defined in the interpretation of its past and present self awareness"(22-25). This view of the novel is borne out in The Stone Angel which as we intend to show is structured to convey the relationship, conflicts and tensions between past and present.

Locke's principle of individualization stated in part that the individual existed in a specific time and place and at a specific time. This is a concept that as Watt points out, is evident in the novel which also attempts to place its characters in a particular time and place.

The novel in portraying life in the context of time, marked a major shift from the previous position. The previous philosophy and literature of Greece and Rome, Watt writes, perceives the world differently. These were influenced by the platonic view that, "...the forms or ideas were the ultimate realities behind the concrete objects of the temporal world".(23)

These forms were seen as timeless and human action as independent of the passage of time. The novel however portrayed time not only as a:

Crucial dimension of the physical world, but as the shaping force of man's individual and collective history (Watt 23)

This new perception of time and place had a major influence on form in the novel in terms of plot and narrative technique. From the earlier timeless stories there was a move to more specificity in terms of time and place. Concurrently, past events were now seen as a basis of present action a factor that greatly influenced narrative technique.

In terms of characterization the new conception of time led to the development of techniques such as the stream of consciousness. These attempts to present what occurs in the mind of the individual for the duration of the story, or for a specific period of time ensures a gradual development of character in the novel.

Watt further adds that pre-novel literature tended to give characters type names. These were in most cases supposed to denote characteristics- this is an approach that is even recommended by Aristotle in The Poetics. Characters were usually given a single name. This meant that they were seen not as individuals in a contemporary situation, but as types who could not specifically be pinpointed to a particular contemporary situation.

The novel however sought to give characters individuality and portrayed them as existing in a specific time and place. From the previous single names, characters were now given a first name and a surname.

It is important to note, however, that the giving of names to characters that engendered characteristics did not stop with the emergence of the novel. There has been on the other hand a concerted effort to give individuality to characters instead of stocktyping them even in cases where

names are suggestive of character. In The Stone Angel, for instance, the protagonist is named Hagar, in an allusion to the biblical character by that name in the book of Genesis. While the name in this instance captures the essential Hagar Shipley, in The Stone Angel, it is in the final analysis only a symbolic reinforcement of character development in the novel. It therefore forms but one dimension of the characterization of Hagar.

Turning his focus to the treatment of time in the novel, Watt asserts that pre-novel literatures depicted values as unchanging. The novel however broke from this to focus on particularized time, in the process portraying events as changing over time. Causality, which was absent in previous literature took a key role in the novel as a source of cohesiveness. A causal connection was established between past and present in contrast to the pre-novel, reliance on disguises and redundancies - and in some instances the 'deus ex machina' as a means of resolution.

Of particular importance is Watts statement that change in narrative technique and we may add here form, denoted:

∴ the transition from the objective social and public orientation of the classical world to the subjective individualist private orientation of the life and literature of the last two hundred years(199).

The change in orientation is naturally attributable to historical changes in perceptions. An instance of this is the influence of capitalism and Christianity and in particular the protestant work ethic and its emphasis on individual enterprise.

While Watts' focus is on the evolution of the novel, The Rise of the Novel offers insight on the development of form within the novel.

Watts' treatise gains more importance for this study when it is considered that the forces he identifies as having influenced the rise of the novel (historical, socio-economic and ideological changes) are still an active influence on form within the novel. Watts' The Rise of the Novel delves into history giving documentary evidence to support the thesis that form is historically and socially determined.

The theoretical approaches to form that we have so far discussed and specifically the Marxist viewpoint are going to guide our textual analysis of The Stone Angel. Proceeding from our definition of form, we intend to identify the formal elements in our text of study, display their functions and finally demonstrate how they unite into the overall structure of The Stone Angel.

CHAPTER 111

FORM IN THE STONE ANGEL

In the preceding chapter we defined the form, moving from a general definition to more specific approaches by different schools of criticism. It is now our intention to apply the theoretical perspectives we identified earlier in a textual analysis of The Stone Angel.

In defining form we identified certain key features. Organisation was emphasised as central, form being seen as an imposition of order to the work of art. Form provides a cohesive structure to the disparate elements of the novel. At the same time it ensures the required effect while giving expression to content.

From what we have discussed so far it is evident that while form can theoretically be treated on its own, in practice such an approach is not possible. Form in The Stone Angel is therefore going to be examined in relation to the content it expresses. In the process we intend to demonstrate form and content dialectics.

While it is our intention to abstract the elements that make up form in The Stone Angel, this will nevertheless be for convenience to help us order our study. It is going to be evident however that in fact formal elements interact, give expression to each other and finally coalesce. In this respect our abstraction of formal elements (for ease of study) is to be seen as an artificial but necessary exercise.

We intend to examine five key elements in The Stone Angel. These are plot, characterisation, point of view, setting and the use of symbols.

We begin our analysis with a study of plot. Plot is the arrangement of events in a story. It reveals a conscious attempt by an artist to order

events in a manner that not only ensures cohesion, but also ensures the readers interest.

Our focus will primarily be on the ordering of events and the treatment of time in The Stone Angel. We will seek sources of cohesion in the construction of plot and the effect thus elicited. Finally we will examine how plot expresses Laurence's vision in The Stone Angel.

At a glance, The Stone Angel is about a ninety-year-old woman Hagar Shipley, on the verge of death haunted by a past she has to come to terms with before she can die with peace of mind. Laurence's choice of the flashback technique as the main vehicle for rendering the story is based on two ultimately related considerations.

Firstly, The Stone Angel has as its protagonist, a ninety-year-old woman incapacitated by age. She is physically immobile but her mental state is on the most part lucid (when it comes to reminiscence) and it is therefore fitting that most of the story be based on what occurs in her mind. If the story were based wholly in the present, there would be little action considering that Hagar's activities in the present are mostly of a sedentary and mundane nature. It is therefore in the flashbacks, in Hagar's reminiscence that most of the action lies. Secondly, the past is important for a resolution and understanding of the present. The past plays a major role in the events that unfold in the present.

The Stone Angel has two plot lines. One lies in the past, given impetus by the flashbacks (Hagar's reminiscence). The action in the past is fast and encompasses a period of more than half a century. The past moves quickly, clearly in an effort to catch up with the present before Hagar's impending death.

In the flashbacks we are exposed to a much younger Hagar, active and stubborn. In the present time drags slowly, uplifted on occasions by the conflicts between Hagar on the one hand and her son Marvin and his wife Doris on the other. Most of the action in the present is, however, not physical and constantly we see Hagar's reflections on other characters through the use of interior monologue.

The two plot lines that have been identified are united by the regularity with which events in the present are triggered off by those in the past. The two plot lines are further united by the protagonist, Hagar, who despite the different time periods on which the plots are based is at the centre of each. Both in the past and present Hagar remains essentially the same: stubborn and grouchy. The unity established by the central character Hagar and the connection ensured between past and present, are a source of credibility and cohesion in The Stone Angel.

An instance of how the past is triggered off by the present is seen when in the present, Hagar contemplates her property acquired over the years. Their physical presence bring memories of the past. Thus the daguerreotype of her mother brings a chain of associations and reminiscences. Hagar's thoughts move from her mothers delicate health to her father and what she considered to be his hypocrisy, then to the difference between herself and her mother, Hagar's robustness is contrasted to her mother's delicate physique.

Hagar's attention then turns to the gilt edged mirror an object which recalls how she used to avoid looking at her image in the mirror in the downstairs hall of her father's house. She remembers how the glance she used to get in spite of herself, used to make her wonder at her huskiness

and at her brother's daintiness. Hagar's reminiscence are here developed through a stream of consciousness.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the flashbacks are not an unjustifiable interruption of the story. They are in fact skilfully merged with the rest of the novel. Once we are in the past, one memory leads to another until the recollections are cut short naturally by a voice or event in the present.

A remarkable feature of The Stone Angel's structure is the manner in which it achieves a counterbalance between its two plot lines. Both have a discernible exposition and conflict which parallel the one in the other.

A strong relationship is thus established between past and present events. In the present we are exposed to Hagar, eighty years later and as she herself admits, being treated like a small child (old people are treated like small children according to Hagar). She is thus controlled by her son and daughter-in-law and she equally resents this as she resented her father's control in the past.

Hagar's resentment at the interference of others in her life, leads to rebellion both in the past and in the present. In the past she flees two times, once from her father and later from her husband. In the present she runs from her son's house. In drawing a parallel between the past and present of Hagar's life, Laurence makes three important achievements.

Firstly, she ensures a consistent portrayal of Hagar as a character despite the use of two plot lines. Secondly, Laurence projects her vision and perception of time movement. A connection is established between past and present. The past is viewed as ever active in the present. Time

then progresses paradoxically in a simultaneous forward and backward movement.

The third achievement is ensured through the presentation of two plot lines which invite the reader to draw contrasts between past and present. In comparing these two we see the difference between what Hagar seeks to achieve and the eventual outcome which confounds her expectations. Irony is thus ensured in The Stone Angel.

The two plot lines are finally resolved in the present of the story with Hagar's imminent death forming the background. Hagar has to finally come to terms with her past and in the process recognize her faults. The past moving faster than the present, finally catches up with the latter and with Hagar demanding a resolution.

We would now like to turn our attention to the effect produced by Laurence's peculiar treatment of time and in the ordering of events in The Stone Angel. The two major effects that are noticeable are suspense and irony. We begin by examining how suspense is achieved.

In The Stone Angel, suspense is achieved through with-holding information and then releasing it gradually at an appropriate time. Incidents and names are mentioned especially in the present of the story (these incidents and names infact express the present) whose explanations can only come to us in the past through flashbacks.

The flashbacks however follow a chronological order. We can therefore only ease the suspense gradually as we move between past and present the past unfolding gradually, triggered off by the present.

The Stone Angel begins in the past, with a recollection of the Manawaka cemetery (where Hagar's mother is buried) and the statue of

the stone angel that marked her grave. Hagar's remembrances inform us on the state of the cemetery recalling the changes wrought on it by the different seasons. We are introduced to a Regina Weese whose inordinate devotion to a hypochondriac mother, Hagar was contemptuous of.

The story then diverges to the present, to Marvin who is introduced as Hagar's son and to Doris whose status is as yet not stated. One can however surmise that despite the entry into the present we have not heard the last of Manawaka.

We therefore keep on reading buoyed on by Hagar's own admission: "Now I am rampant with memory"(5). Concurrently, something Hagar mentions in the present narration engages our curiosity further. She laments her: "lost men"(6) and despite her resolution not to think about them, we got the impression that she will come back to this obviously touchy topic.

By mentioning aspects of Hagar's experience and not immediately expatiating upon them Laurence mystifies Hagar's past life and the reader becomes interested in unravelling the puzzle.

The preceding examples are typical of how The Stone Angel engages the interest of readers and how expectation and suspense are thereby elicited. Names are mentioned, incidents broached, but only exposed by degrees.

A concrete example of these arrangements is in the treatment of John Hagar's son (The relationship between Hagar and John is crucial to the story in The Stone Angel).

John's first mentioning is prompted by Hagar's revelation that her eyes have over the years changed least(38). John's eyes, we are told also

never changed. It is apparent from this brief mention of John that something must have happened to him. We are not told what, and it is not as yet clear just how important he is in the scheme of things.

What is evident, however, is that John's name has not been mentioned for the sake of it and we read on seeking an explanation.

In the second mentioning of John(55), we implicitly gather that he is Hagar's son. What we are told explicitly at this juncture is John's habit of holding his breath.

The third time John is mentioned (64), more information is volunteered. Hagar expresses a wish that John had gone to college, the implication being that he did not. Secondly, Hagar feels he was the sort of son that her domineering father would have wanted.

The information volunteered at this stage raises questions. For instance why Hagar feels John should have gone to college, and just why she considers him to be the kind of son Jason Currie would have wanted. From what we know of Jason Currie so far, we can hazard a guess but this recourse does not satisfy our curiosity. In seeking answers to the questions that have arisen so far, we are further immersed in the story.

At this stage in the novel, John is unequivocally confirmed as Hagar's son. Simultaneously, John begins to gain more importance as we seek to know what kind of person he was and what happened to him. It is evident from the narrative structure, that the information will only gradually be revealed.

Later on in the novel Hagar admits that by telling Mrs. Steiner (who she meets at the old people's home) that John was killed in the last war, she has lied(104). That Hagar is ready to lie about what actually happened

to John further whets our appetite to find out the truth. When John is next mentioned, Hagar compares him to Marvin. She feels John was more quick witted compared to the latter(117).

At this stage in the novel what we know of John are snippets which prompt us to seek more information. A comprehensive rendering of just what role John has played in Hagar's life, begins as Hagar reminisces on his birth(112). This is a memory prompted by a discussion with Reverend Troy on God's infinite mercy. Hagar refutes Troy's point of view, contending she had a son and lost him. Within the organization of the novel, time is now ripe for a sustained narration of John's story. What we have heard previous to this, is a sort of sneak preview aimed at capturing our interest. For Hagar to have revealed more than we know so far would have been to jump the gun so to say.

Starting with Hagar's reminiscence on John's birth, we are exposed to one of the longest journeys into the past so far. The action is now quite fast in an attempt to catch up with the present where things are coming to a head, with the conflict between Hagar and Marvin. The conflict and imminent climax in the present, is therefore complemented by a parallel conflict in the past.

The suspense heightens as we feel we are approaching an unravelling of the John mystery. Concurrently we await anxiously for Hagar's impending escape in the present of the story. The main source of suspense here is whether Hagar is going to succeed in her escape plan.

It is noteworthy that this impending flight echoes two previous ones in the past which are juxtaposed with it. This juxtaposition is particularly

important in ensuring a cohesive portrait of Hagar's character. She remains rebellious now as in the past.

With Hagar's escape in the present to shadow point and through her confidence in Murry F. Lees we finally learn what happened to John and how this has a bearing on Hagar's life.

Due to Hagar's confession, the two plot lines finally come together: past and present are united. All along we have been reconstructing Hagar's life. The reconstruction complete, we move towards a denouement.

We can justifiably say, however, that suspense in The Stone Angel continues up to the very last in view of the novels' equivocal ending. It is not made explicit as to whether Hagar actually dies or not. The ambiguous ending is of course necessitated by the point of view in the novel: the first person point of view which is such that a direct declaration of Hagar's death is impossible.

The second effect that is generated by plot in The Stone Angel is irony. Irony pervades the novel. The two plot lines, past and present are skilfully manipulated by the author to ensure an ironic commentary on Hagar and on her relationship with other characters. Irony mostly arises as we see the difference between Hagar's and other characters' wishes and what actually transpires.

The structure of the novel in this respect encourages a comparison of the now (present), and the then (past). Hagar is in the process opened to our critical observation. Irony is however not achieved only through a contrast between the past and present.

Within the two plot lines, one can detect instances of irony which ultimately contribute towards the general atmosphere of the same that permeates The Stone Angel.

At the beginning of the novel, Hagar recalls Jason Currie's homilies to his family. She detests her father and by extension his principles. Consciously she tries to ignore them(13). Yet years later as a mother she finds herself repeating the same lectures that her father engaged in, to her children.

Hagar elopes rebelling against her father who true to his domineering nature, tries to run her life. Ironically years later, Hagar tries to model her son, John's life, on her own childhood and on the Currie values that she herself had apparently rejected as a young adult. To compound the irony, John like Hagar before him rejects the attempts to infringe upon his life.

In escaping from her father's house and marrying Brampton Shipley, who exists on the fringes of Manawaka society, Hagar rebels against her staid and strait laces background. She is attracted by the uncouth and careless Bram, who at the time represents freedom from the stifling mainstream Manawaka.

Brampton on his part is fascinated by the prospect of marrying from such genteel society (79). As it happens, years later, the very qualities they initially found attractive in each other are the very ones that later drew them apart.

- we'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, I for his flouting of them(79-90).

Hagar ironically had illusions of reforming Bram to suit the image of the man her father would want, in the process making nonsense of her earlier rebellion. Hagar's attitude towards her background at this stage appears ambivalent.

The Stone Angel is built around reversals and counter reversals. Hagar due to her upper class upbringing looks down upon Aunt Dolly their housekeeper. She is also part of a community that labels Lottie Dreiser, 'no name' because of her birth outside wedlock.

In a cruel twist of fate years later, Hagar ends up being labelled 'the eggwoman' by Lotties offspring. Lottie has finally risen up in society, while Hagar by virtue of her marriage to Bram has slipped down the ladder(132).

Hagar's downward slide continues when she has to beg for credit in the store her father used to own. She further plummets when she is engaged as a housekeeper (like Aunt Dolly), a status she used to consider inferior.

The reversal is masterfully completed in the relationship between Hagar's son John and Lottie's daughter Arlene. John feels that Arlene(just like Hagar formerly in her attraction to Bram) is only attracted to him because he is some kind of social pariah(174). The clock seems to have turned round.

After this reversal of roles, which culminate in Lottie becoming a lady and Hagar the wife of a social misfit, the two women are at last united in mutual opposition to the relationship between their children.

Citing motherly concern, they seek to curtail the relationship between John and Arlene their children. It is however evident that theirs is an attempt to live their ambitions through their children.

Lottie is worried that Arlene might conceive out of wedlock like her grandmother(Lottie's mother) thereby reverting the family to its earlier 'no name' infamy. Hagar on the other hand has never accepted Lottie's social ascension and is ironically opposed to John(who she considers a Currie and not a Shipley) marrying from 'no name' Lotties family. In the process Hagar disregards her own social downfall.

In the end, Hagar and Lottie succeed in not only destroying the relationship between their children but John and Arlene's lives as well. The latter are killed in an accident which is in part attributable to their parent's interference.

The ironic treatment of Hagar and Lottie displays the ridiculous and even dangerous (carried to its logical conclusion) nature of class and familial conflict.

In the use of reversals, Laurence displays unequivocally, the teetering foundations on which class society is based. Ultimately, the use of class and material wealth as a basis for human relationship can only lead to disaster.

The manner in which three generations of Currie's and Shipley's are later united under the same headstone, further ridicules the Manawaka class system. The three, Brampton Shipley considered a nonentity, John

son to Brampton and grandson to Jason Currie and lastly Jason Currie, pioneer settler and pillar of society, are interred together. This makes mockery of the divisions that kept them apart in life (especially Bram and Jason). In death they just confirm their sameness, that is their mortality.

Events in The Stone Angel do not often progress in a linear fashion. Occurrences in the present frequently inspire a throwback to the past. The past in turn re-enacts itself in the present albeit with some modifications. Thus Hagar's upbringing recurs years later in her upbringing of her own family. The irony is that Hagar creates the same climate for rebellion in her own home, that existed earlier in her father's house. One can therefore say that in The Stone Angel succeeding generations strive to do better than the preceding one, but end up falling prey to the same pitfalls. Clearly the peculiar problems of parenthood do not fade with the passage of time.

This brings us to the use of biblical allusions by Laurence to bolster plot in the novel. These serve to illuminate on the parental conflict that is evident in The Stone Angel. In her allusion to the Genesis stories of Hagar, Abraham's bondswoman and that one of Jacob, Laurence gives a historical dimension to the familial conflict in the novel.

Familial conflict is mostly developed through what we perceive as the 'favoured' child motif in The Stone Angel. This is done by establishing a relationship between the action in the novel, and the Genesis stories mentioned earlier. The favoured child motif is as we intend to demonstrate a source of irony in the text.

Despite borrowing from the book of Genesis in constructing the plot of The Stone Angel, Laurence makes no attempt to adhere faithfully to the

sequence of action in the Bible. She combines the story of Hagar and that of Jacob, merging them to explore the themes of conflict, rebellion, freedom and alienation at the family level. The result is that the biblical stories not only provide part of the movement in the novel, but also provide a symbolic commentary on the aforementioned themes.

The Hagar in The Stone Angel parallel's the biblical Hagar who is an outcast. By eloping, Hagar is also made an outcast as her father ostracizes her. The irony is that earlier on Jason Currie sees Hagar as the child who most resembles him. This is due to her physical strength and gumption. Hagar is therefore the favoured child. Jason's only regret, which is an irony, is that Hagar was not male.

To compound the irony, the Currie sons, Dan and Matt who should ideally be Jason's heirs turn out to be puny and effeminate.

In pinning his hopes on Hagar, however, Jason fails to realise that the very same-likeness that draws him to her is a potential source of conflict. The streak of pride and stubbornness that Hagar inherits from him is such that she has to try and free herself from his tyranny.

The paradox that marks the relationship between Hagar and her father is illuminating on the opposing forces intrinsic in human action leading to conflict. Laurence clearly wants to emphasize the ambivalence that marks human relations.

The sons that the elder Currie despises are naturally, as a result of their weakness and consequent pliability, the ones most amenable to his authority - though Jason does not realise it. The conflict between Hagar and her father is paradoxically due to their similarities, although they do not recognize this. As a consequence of her rebellion, the favoured child,

Hagar is disinherited and made an outcast. The less favoured child Mart (Dan dies) takes her place.

Having rejected her father's authority, Hagar re-establishes it in a different form by trying to inculcate his values in her household. Like Jason, she has her own favoured son John who she ironically considers to most resemble Jason. Her other son Marvin, she rejects for what she considers to be his Shipley and therefore non-Currie qualities: lack of refinement and dullness.

It can be justifiably said that in John, Hagar sees the possibility of emerging from the social wilderness that her father's rejection has thrown her into. For John to fulfil her hopes however, she has to take him away from his social pariah of a father's influence.

Hagar engages in flight for the second time in her life. This is a flight that shows remarkable resemblance to Hagar's flight in Genesis with her son Ishmael. While the Hagar in the Bible runs to save her son from possible death, Hagar in The Stone Angel flees to save her son from his father's influence - from his inheritance.

John spurns Hagar's attempts to make a Currie of him. In his crude language and careless attitude, he asserts his Shipley inheritance. As the favoured son, John is problematic. In the scene at the cemetery, where Hagar momentarily views him as a Jacob as he struggles to lift the statue of The Stone Angel, he disapproves the appellation. He curses and swears in his labours(179). He in effect as he curses, proclaims his Shipley ancestry debunking Hagar's basis for favouring him: his supposed Currie qualities.

It is ironically Marvin, the least favourite son, who by his patience and devotion to his cantankerous mother comes close to being a Jacob. Hagar is however, for most of her life blind to this fact. It is only much later, on her death bed that she changes her perception of Marvin.

In the affinity that Laurence draws between the familial conflict in The Stone Angel and the Genesis stories, we are shown the everlasting nature of consanguineous disagreement. Human nature clearly remains basically the same, even as the years go by.

Hagar's belated recognition of Marvin's positive qualities is symptomatic of how often she fails to interpret situations correctly. Realization often dawns on Hagar too late to be of any good.

Early in the novel, Hagar recalls what she considered to be her brother Matt's tight fistedness with money. For years, she carried the picture of him as a miser. It is only long after Matt's death that Hagar learns (courtesy of Aunt Dolly) that Matt had hopes of saving enough money to go to college(20). It finally dawns on her that for years she had carried the wrong impression of her brother. The second instance of understanding dawning too late, is made evident when Hagar returns to tend to the dying Brampton. Apart from the irony that Brampton does not recognize her, but in fact mistakes her for his first wife Clara (who Hagar held in contempt), it is what he murmurs in one of his reveries that captures Hagar's attention:

That Hagar I should of licked the living daylight's out of her, maybe, and she'd have seen I could what d'you think? Think I should of? (172-73)

Hagar realises that she had taken Brampton for granted and that she had not understood him as much as she thought she did. She captures her ironic predicament quite succinctly albeit bitterly:

I could not speak for the salt that filled my throat, and for anger - not at anyone, at God, perhaps, for giving us eyes but almost never sight(173)

Laurence here captures the paradox that is the plight of humanity. We are given a picture of a humanity blessed with eyes but rarely insight, with the potential for communication but seldom the ability.

From such a vantage point Hagar's life can be viewed as one long attempt spanning 90 years, to come to an understanding not only of herself but of others too. Ranged against her are not only her personal characteristics, but also the shortcomings that are her inheritance as a human.

It is natural and consistent with the irony that pervades The Stone Angel that after 90 years, through which Hagar looked for answers externally, she finally realises that it lies within her:

I would have wished it. This knowing comes upon me so forcefully so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always, have wanted that - simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know how long have I known? or have I always known, in some crevice of my heart. Some care too deeply buried too

concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances oh! proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?(292)

The irony is that despite the rejection of Manawaka implicit in Hagar's marriage to Brampton, she has lived her whole life shackled by the towns conventions and the pride that is her inheritance from a father she detested.

The belated realisations that mark Hagar's life are for Laurence life's ironies, jests of God. Part of the problem however, lies in the human propensity to go by appearances and make judgements made on that. There is an obvious need, despite our limitations, to seek a more deeper understanding of others for improved human relations.

So far, we have examined the use of plot in The Stone Angel with specific reference to how it achieves suspense and irony. It is now our intention to focus on interior monologue and stream of consciousness techniques, two narrative devices that are crucial not only in developing character but which also comprise a source of irony in the text.

Hagar who narrates the story in The Stone Angel, is 90-years-old and on the most part physically immobile.

The focus then is not on her physical activities in the present but on what occurs in her mind. Even the flashbacks that provide most of the action in the novel are reminiscences and therefore a product of Hagar's

mind. It follows then that the focus in The Stone Angel is primarily on its protagonist's mind.

Interior monologue is most effectively used in the present of the story where it provides an insight into the inner workings of Hagar's mind. The reader unlike characters such as Marvin and Doris, is privy to Hagar's thoughts and therefore her motives. We establish a camaraderie with Hagar who confides in us. In the process we perceive the irony and even humour that result from the contrast between thought and action in the novel.

At one level, we experience Hagar's thoughts and what she considers to be the ideal course of action to adopt. Ironically what she does in many cases is completely different from what she had in mind. Frequently she recriminates with herself for saying or doing the wrong things.

The most ironical and humorous situations, however, arise in relation to the other players in the present of the story, Marvin and Doris. These two often discuss Hagar assuming that she cannot hear. Their assumption which turns out to be misconceived, is based on Hagar's advanced age. The irony is that Hagar's senses are particularly sharp and as she informs us, her eyesight and hearing are particularly good. Thus we laugh at the other characters as they are exposed to Hagar's withering assessment and sarcasm - even as they underestimate her comprehension.

Laurence in the process ridicules the stereotyped manner in which people habitually relate to the old. Hagar rarely yields to this stereotype and often confounds those she encounters. A good example is her encounter with Reverend Troy:

A long and full life like yours it can be counted as a blessing. I make no reply. What does he know of it, one way or another? I will not ease his way. Let him flounder (41)

Hagar is here at her most formidable making mince meat of the bashful young minister with her irreligiosity and uncoventionality. Reverend Troy has stereotyped expectations of what old people are supposed to be and thus mutters the banalities he considers appropriate to the occasion. We on the other hand, from our vantage point in Hagar's mind, can see the folly of his judgement.

Apart from being a source of irony and humour, interior monologue and stream of consciousness techniques are crucial to Laurence's portrayal of Hagar as an old woman. Hagar's mind is made bare to the reader exposing the memory lapses which are consistent with her advanced age.

In the episode at shadow point interior monologue and stream of consciousness techniques are employed to effectively capture Hagar's confused state of mind. This confusion is a result of her advanced age and disturbed state of mind, as she finally has to face upto the tragic circumstances of John's death.

Hagar's thoughts flit between the present and the past as reality and illusion merge into one. Frequently, she is unaware of time and place. At one time she imagines she is back at the Shipley place - fifty years back in time, the next moment she thinks she is with her son and her daughter-in-law.

The use of interior monologue is important in displaying Hagar's growth as a character. From our vantage point in her mind, we trace her changing consciousness culminating in her recognition of the forces that have militated against her happiness(292).

We cannot, however, ignore the fact that the story in The Stone Angel is narrated to us by Hagar. What we have are her impressions and attitudes. The inevitable question then is whether she is levelling with us and particularly if we can trust her judgement.

The question we are posing is one of credibility. How are we supposed to view Hagar as a narrator for instance. Do we have a way of surmounting the limitations posed by the first-person-point of view.

The 'I narrator' first-person-point of view in evidence in The Stone Angel, has certain advantages. Its autobiographical mode creates an illusion of verisimilitude, inviting the reader to the narrator's confidence. It thus ensures a closer relationship between the reader and the narrative voice. Suffice to say, the first-person-point of view emerges as a natural way of relating a story.

Simultaneously, the narrative perspective in The Stone Angel allows Laurence to remain out of sight as a 'self-effacing author'. She in the process denies any connection between herself and Hagar the narrator. This means that while the narrative voice in the novel is subjective, the author by virtue of her self-effacement does not share in this subjectivity.

Despite the advantages enumerated, the first-person-point of view has obvious problems. This is in terms of identifying Laurence's point of view.

Secondly, the first-person-point of view limits a story to one narrative perspective. This gives the story a rigidity and subjectivity which can create problems of credibility.

The challenge for Laurence in The Stone Angel was therefore to make use of the advantages offered by her chosen point of view, and at the same time overcome its limitations. The success with which Laurence surmounts the problems posed by point of view are therefore important criterion for judging the formal achievements in the novel.

Sarah Maitland in "Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel" lauds Laurence's approach to the problem posed by point of view.

Laurence has solved this problem the only way it can be solved. In the creation of Hagar Shipley she has given us a character with exactly the right degree of self knowledge to make this form work (First-person-point of view) a character who is not, by her nature, either self-indulgent or easily fooled not even by herself, but who is also not so self knowing that the reader has to take her every observation as the ultimate and perfect truth indeed she is a character of such obtuse cruelty, whose life has been so badly managed at times that one is never tempted to feel that her view of the universe is the only one(44).

From the above, we can discern the dialectical relationship that exists between point of view and characterization in The Stone Angel. While the point of view employed informs on character, what we learn of the latter

in turn reacts upon point of view commenting on it and surmounting its potential limitations.

In Hagar, as Maitland points out, Laurence creates a complex character who defies a simplistic single dimensional approach. Hagar's very complexity ensures that we never treat her with complacency we believe her when she exposes the inner recesses of her mind and soul to us: that is in so far as we realise that what she says is what she believes to be the truth.

From what we see of Hagar, it becomes obvious that she has a keen sense of observation and description. These are bolstered by an acutely developed sense perception. Even at the age of ninety, Hagar's hearing and eyesight remain extremely sharp.

From Hagar's present position however, (the result of choices she has made over the years), and from her actions in the present, it becomes evident that Hagar judgement is not infallible. We are constantly treated to the contradictions in her life, thereby making us wary in our approach towards her.

The limitations posed by point of view are therefore surmounted by characterization as Maitland states.

What Maitland implies but does not develop, is the use of irony as an alternative to the narrative point of view in The Stone Angel.

The ironic treatment of Hagar encourages the reader not to accept wholesale her point of view. Irony provides an option to Hagar's perception constantly countering it. Thus when Hagar criticises Murray Lees' mother for being overly concerned with what other people

thought(227), we can hardly resist a smile. Hagar's life has hardly been any different even if she does not recognize it at this stage in the novel.

As the disparity between Hagar's aims and the ultimate results become evident, we are increasingly encouraged to form our own point of view and not to depend on her. Our involvement in the story is deepened as we join Hagar in interpreting situations in the process making our own judgements.

It is therefore in the ironic treatment of character, that we can detect Laurence's hand in The Stone Angel. In subjecting Hagar to irony, Laurence in effect recommends that the reader do the same. In the process we are exposed to the imperfections of humanity even as they seek perfection.

In her reminiscences, propelled by events or objects in the present, Hagar recalls the past in great detail. In the present however, she is subject to memory lapses. She sometimes forgets what has gone on before and the reader alerted by these memory lapses, jumps in to fill the gap generated by this forgetfulness. A case in point is at shadow point where Hagar at first fails to recognize Murray Lees when he arrives with Doris and Marvin(250).

Hagar's failure to recognize Lees is due to an unsteady frame of mind. The reader is alerted and becomes an active participant and not a passive recipient of Hagar's point of view.

Still at shadow point, as Hagar's new quarters become uncomfortable, coupled with her confused state of mind, she is increasingly subjected to ironic treatment.

She blames Marvin and Doris for not coming to her rescue and galivanting out somewhere. The reader can however recall that the decision to escape was Hagar's even if she momentarily forgets it.

Thus, despite the first person point of view employed in The Stone Angel, the reader at times has more awareness than Hagar.

Ultimately, Laurence ensures a credible and consistent portrayal of a 90-year-old woman who even as she paints a vivid picture of the past, is subject to memory lapses in the present. Simultaneously, Laurence uses this very fact of Hagar's advanced age, to surmount the problems posed by a first-person-narrative point of view.

Despite the ironic treatment Hagar is subjected to, she still emerges as a character with a remarkable capacity for self-deprecation. Her character flaw therefore lies in a lack of insight rather than conceit. Hagar is always searching within herself for the motives behind her actions. On some occasions she is even able to recognize the ironies in her life. She to her credit realises that her marriage to Brampton was based on qualities they both could not stand in each other later on - he for her gentility and she for his unconventionality.

The preceding example aside, The Stone Angel is replete with instances of Hagar questioning her motives and action.

Oh, but that was not what I mean to say at all. How is it my mouth speaks by itself(68)

Why is it always so hard to find the proper one to blame? Why do I always want to find the one(264)

Hagar's questioning nature encourages us to question as well. Since she does not smugly proclaim solutions, it means we have to seek beyond her point of view for an understanding.

Hagar's journey towards self-discovery therefore in turn involves a simultaneous journey undertaken by the reader towards the same end (an understanding of Hagar). By necessity, the readers parallel journey involves adopting an alternative point of view.

A potential problem posed by the first-person-narrative perspective is with regard to the portrayal of characters other than the narrator. Since the 'I narrator' is our only informant on other characters, we are bound to be suspicious that this information is tainted by possible prejudices.

Portrayal of character aside, the view of events and general rendering of the story are likely to be affected by the personal limitations of the narrator.

Laurence's solution to the above problems again lie in the kind of character she creates. Hagar's propensity to eavesdrop is just one characteristic exploited to ensure a convincing description of other characters in The Stone Angel. The second one is as we will demonstrate later, Hagar's sensuousness.

Eavesdropping is a technique which Laurence uses quite effectively in the collection of short stories, A Bird in The House. Here the narrative draws impetus from Vanessa Macleod's eavesdroppings. In the process Laurence gets around the problem posed by Vanessa not being allowed to listen to adult conversations. Consequently, we listen to conversations we would not otherwise have been privy to.

In The Stone Angel, Hagar's eavesdropping gives us an insight into the characters of Marvin, John, Doris, Brampton and Jason Currie. Jason Currie's secret liaison with Lottie Dreiser's mother is revealed to us courtesy of Hagar's snooping.

Hagar's eavesdropping enriches our knowledge of other characters. Credibility is given to these overheard conversations by the fact that the conversations being eavesdropped upon are not paraphrased but dramatised. We can therefore see characters speaking in their own idiosyncratic manner:

"I'd like to take you inside" John was saying, "but my uncle would raise Cain. He doesn't believe in girls."

"I'd love to see through the place" the avid little voice beside him sighed. "It looks just perfectly gorgeous from the outside. I'll bet it's full of gorgeous things eh? Would your uncle really be mad?"

Yeh, He's kind of a recluse(159).

It is not, however, only in the eavesdropped scenes that we get a dramatic rendition of other characters' behaviour. The dramatic element is given to the actions of characters as they relate to Hagar thus supplementing and giving credibility to what she has to say about the former. Jason Currie's character is developed in part in this manner:

"Oh, look! The funniest wee things scampering. I laughed at them as they burrowed, the legs so quick and minute you could hardly see them delighted that they'd dare appear there and flout my father's mighty moustache and his ire.

"Mind your manners miss!"

The swipe he caught me then was nothing to what I got in the back of the store after she'd left.

"Have you no regard for my reputation."

"But I saw them!"

"Did you have to announce it from housetops?"

"I didn't mean."

"No good to say you're sorry when the damage is done.

Hold your hands, miss"(9)

Here the young Hagar makes the mistake of alerting a customer to the vermin in her father's wares. Jason Currie's dishonesty is made evident. He is obsessed with keeping a proper image even if underneath all is not well. This particular incident captures the rot (represented by the vermin) that lies between the exterior of propriety presented by Manawakans.

Hagar's eavesdropping coupled with the dramatization of certain scenes in The Stone Angel, gives credibility to character portrayal in the novel. We are thus given a picture of characters in action rather than just Hagar's opinion of them. Our opinion is therefore based on what Hagar overhears and on conversations she has with these characters.

The second aspect of Hagar's character which lends credibility to her recollections and descriptions of past events in particular, is her sensuousness. From the onset, Hagar's acute sense perceptions be it olfactory, auditory or visual become obvious.

Most of the time she apprehends the reality around her in terms of how they appeal to her senses.

Even at age ninety, Hagar's senses remain as sharp as ever. This sensuousness combined with an ability for vivid description and sharp observation ensures that setting is captured competently.

George Woodcock in The World of Canadian Writing, succinctly observes on Hagar's sensuousness:

Hagar is an intensely visual but even more an intensely tactile person, concerned with what is evident to the sense of feeling whether it is sex remembered vividly and in detail into her nineties, or the texture of a dress she wears in old age(57).

Woodcock rightly points out that even as Hagar is incapacitated by age and her life tends to be characterized by the immaterial world of memory, these memories tend to be defined and initiated by material objects from the past that surround her. These are objects that she has sentimental attachment to. While Woodcock does not adduce textual evidence, The Stone Angel does in fact have numerous incidents to support his assertion.

From the first chapter it is evident that Hagar's memories, are triggered off and characterized by material objects, their smell and visual impressions.

Hagar's sensuousness is laid bare in the description of "...the funeral-parlour, perfume of the planted ponies(4) and in the "...musky dust tinged smell of things that grew unattended." The new Presbyterian Church is remembered in terms of its smell; "...of paint and new wood"(15).

Material objects also play their part in triggering of Hagar's memories. Her grey dress for instance recalls the Shipley's unpainted house, this leads to a description of Brampton's laziness. Again as Hagar eyes the various household items she has accumulated over the years, a string of memories associated with these material objects results.

It is our contention that Hagar's sensuousness and proclivity to appreciate the world in terms of material objects, ensures that years later she can still vividly recollect places and events. We can therefore rely on her to give us a picture of setting, action and even character. Hagar's very character therefore gives credibility to her descriptions. Potential problems posed by point of view are thus resolved through characterization.

We would now like to shift our focus to setting in The Stone Angel. Setting is particularly important in terms of what it informs us about character. It is also crucial in its contribution to the development of theme.

It is my intention to study setting in The Stone Angel with regard to how it reveals character, captures social reality, and provides symbolic

commentary. Lastly, we will display how setting gives meaning to our text of study.

The Stone Angel is set broadly speaking, in Manawaka and in Vancouver on the Canadian coast. It is from Vancouver that Hagar narrates the story to us. There are within these two major settings, minor settings which are basically going to be our point of focus. We allude here to locations such as the Currie house and the Manawaka town dump.

The Stone Angel begins with Hagar's recollection of the Manawaka cemetery and the statue erected by her father, ostensibly, in memory of her mother. In this very first scene, we quickly get a picture of Manawaka, of Jason Currie and of Hagar herself.

That the monument to Hagar's mother is the most expensive and the largest, reveals Jason's ambition and his wish to outdo others. The competitiveness and hierarchical nature of Manawaka society is also immediately established. The size of the statue erected on Mrs. Currie's grave clearly elevates the Currie's above lesser mortals whose statues are not quite as big. Compared to the stone angel, the other monuments we are told: "were a lesser breed entirely"(4).

In this first scene at the cemetery we also establish Hagar's attitude towards her departed mother, her father and towards Manawaka. Her reference to her mother's 'feeble ghost' reveals a disdain for physical weakness. This Hagar contrasts with her own stubborn constitution(3).

At the same time, we perceive Hagar's negative attitude towards her father and Manawaka. She describes them variously as: "fledgling pharaohs and an uncouth land", Hagar's description of the stone angel reveals her sense of the melodramatic.:

I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by masons who were the cynical descendants of Benini gouging out her like by the score, gouging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling Pharaohs in an uncouth land(3).

As we get a picture of the landscape in the cemetery, we are simultaneously exposed to Hagar's childhood love for orderliness and neatness. This is a characteristic that is noticeable even in her advanced age. Hagar's orderliness is an extension of Manawaka's inordinate emphasis on neatness.

Manawaka is clearly a society which is propelled by its protestant belief that 'cleanliness is next to godliness'. In the attempt to stop the spread of weeds in the cemetery we can at the same time detect the pioneering concern to tame nature(5) .

For Hagar, the cemetery represents a getaway. But it is also a secret rendezvous where illicit affairs are conducted. Its very location outside the town allows Jason Currie to engage in an illicit relationship with the dredges of society in the person of Lottie's mother. Once outside the town, Jason can abandon the facade of propriety that rules there. The hypocrisy of Manawaka is thus made evident.

The second site, that is important in so far as it informs on Hagar and Manawaka, is the town dump. The manner in which people react to their own refuse and to the people assigned to handle garbage, is a subject that appears to fascinate Laurence. The Manawaka garbage dump and

what it connotes is given extensive treatment in The Diviners with a focus on the dumps caretaker, Christie Logan.

It is Christie, the self declared garbage diviner, who declares with bizarre humour that: "By their garbage shall ye know them"(48) What Christie affirms is that even as Manawakan's try to disassociate themselves from their refuse, it is a product of their lives and each item of garbage informs on its producer. It would then follow that despising the garbage man - as Manawakans despise Christie - is just a projection of the societies' own embarrassment. Christie by virtue of his position, becomes knowledgeable on the secret lives of Manawakans as he goes through the process of 'divining' their garbage.

In The Stone Angel, the desire by Manawakans to repudiate the effluvia from their lives is clearly displayed. It is evident in the physical distance that they erect between them and the garbage dump and in their attitude towards the site.

The behaviour of Hagar and her friends at the dump is therefore typical:

We tiptoed, fastidiously holding the edges of our garments clear, like dainty nosed czarinas finding themselves in sudden astonishing proximity to beggars with weeping sores(27).

The irony is that while Manawaka ensures a distance from rotten matter, it remains blissfully unaware of the rot within itself. This is a rot represented by the hypocrisy and dishonesty epitomized by people like

Jason Currie. He thus does not see any contradiction between selling his customers goods infested with vermin, and his high standing in society(9). "Manawaka's, is a morality that is outward looking(in the physical manifestation at things) rather than introspective.

It is in keeping with the impression we are gradually building of Manawaka that the church where its denizens ostensibly gather to worship, becomes a setting for the deification of the towns patriachs in recognition of their wealth. This is where the class distinctions in the society come to the fore.

The purchased family pews and the candlesticks engraved with the names of the churches benefactors, evoke distinctly the materialist rootings of the society. It is in relation to the church that we get the most satirical picture of Hagar's father. In reply to Aunt Dolly's contention that Jason was a God fearing man, the young Hagar rejoins.

I couldn't imagine father fearing anyone, God included especially, when he didn't owe his existence to the Almighty. God might have created heaven and earth and the majority of people but father was a self-made man as he himself had told us often enough(17).

In the face of the formidable patriachs of Manawaka, even God recedes in the background. The church then becomes a monument to the hard work and benevolence of the town's pioneers.

For Hagar on the other hand, the Church represents a chance to display her "new white lace gloves"(16). She is in essence part and parcel of the pettiness and materialist orientation of her community. In the Church proper appearances, and the dishonesty it engenders, are even

more strictly kept. Thus when Brampton Shipley spontaneously utters his frustrations at the length of the service: "Won't the saintly bastard even shut his trap" (89). Everybody is scandalised. And for Hagar the embarrassment of Bram's interjections is worse than punishment in hell for not attending Church:

I never went to Church after that

I preferred possible damnation in some comfortably distant future, to any ordeal then of pecking or pitying eyes (89-90).

From the comfortable, if cloistered life in her father's house, Hagar moves to Brampton Shipley's house as his wife. Hagar's first impression of the Shipley place reflects just how different it is from her father's house.

The Shipley house was square and frame, two storied, the furniture shoddy and second hand, the kitchen reeking and stale for no one had scoured there properly... (50)

From Hagar's initial reaction it is evident that by marrying Bram she has gone down the social ladder. Her attitude is snobbish.: "the furniture shoddy and second hand..." At the same time we detect an over-riding desire for physical cleanliness and order, a testimony to her Presbyterian catechism.

The Shipley house reflects its owner, unpretentious and uncouth: a pariah from the mainstream Manawaka society. It is an indication of Hagar's naivety that she is originally untroubled by this grim facade, harbouring illusions of transforming the house and its owner. She does not perceive the wide chasm that exists between mainstream Manawaka (which she comes from) and Brampton, a chasm reflected in the very physical distance between Manawaka and the Shipley farm.

That Hagar was deluded to imagine she could change Brampton, becomes evident when after years of marriage all she can claim to have achieved is captured in the phrase: "At least nobody will ever be able to say I didn't keep a clean house(112)".

In spite of Hagar's efforts, Brampton does not acquire a taste for success. His laziness and cavalier, approach to farming is captured in the state of his property.

... the gray-bleached barn that settled a little more each year into the dungsoft loam, the hen house surrounded by chickenwire that sagged bunchily 'like bloomers without elastic the tip tilted outhouse looking like a child's parody of the leaning tower(114).

The decrepit state of the Shipley property eventually becomes a source of humiliation for Hagar. Worse is still to come however, the Currie store, for years a symbol of her father's wealth and success (which she shared) becomes her next scene of humiliation. The ownership having been acquired by somebody else on Jason's death, Hagar is forced to seek

credit from this new proprietor. Even as she begs for credit, she overhears her husband Bram begging for favour in the same store(134). Hagar's flight from humiliation is inevitable, appropriately by train - that symbol of escape and freedom in prairie literature.

Hagar's escape to Mr. Oatley's as a housekeeper however batters her already dented social standing. Of Mr. Oatley's gigantic house" - as Hagar describes it - she and John share two rooms. This is a far cry from her status in her father's house and a let down even in comparison to the Shipley house.

John weighed down by the indignity of living in someone else's home resorts to lies. Unable to bring his friends to Mr. Oatley's house, he can only relate to them outside in the expansive garden(159).

It is in her tiny apartment, high up in Mr. Oatley's edifice that Hagar acknowledges her physical need for Bram. This need however only manifests itself at night. In the day Hagar maintains a facade of imperiubability.

Unable to secure a job, John goes back to his father in Manawaka. This journey back reflects Hagar's failure in her attempt to make a Currie of John. In going back the latter affirms his Shipley roots.

Hagar returns briefly to Manawaka to visit the dying Bram. She returns to a Manawaka ravaged by drought. Nature has reduced even those farms owned by hard working farmers to the decrepit state of the Shipley farm. The pioneer pride in having conquered nature is brought to naught. Nature in its destructiveness, makes no distinction between those imbued with the work ethic and those bereft of it like Bram.

Bram himself has been ravaged by disease in the same way the land has been wasted:

The broadness of him was gone. His wide shoulders were stooped and his wide spade beard had become only tufted fringe along his face... his eyes were mild milky, absent of expression(171-72).

Nature has dealt the once proud Manawaka a big blow and more so the Shipley house where no attempts are made to resist its encroachment:

Dust grew like mould over every single thing - the golden ox armchair in which Jason Currie had once sat... the carved settee from the Currie house. My father's British rug... had been so spilled upon and dirt tracked(171).

The aforementioned items of furniture are manifestations of Currie pride and success. Theirs and the physical disintegration that we perceive in the layout of the land, foreshadow the imminent disintegration of Hagar's family and the proud Currie tradition. This familial disintegration occurs with John's death. With John's and Bram's deaths, Hagar's connection with Manawaka is more or less severed and she returns to the coast from whence she narrates the story.

It is from the coast (Vancouver) years later after the foregoing events, that Hagar reminisces. It is from this setting that we meet her unchanged in many ways except for the physical impact of ageing. Vancouver is the place where Hagar has to reconcile herself with the past, attempt a self understanding and finally move towards making the changes necessary to bring her a modicum of freewill, while simultaneously releasing those close to her.

The house that Hagar buys with money willed to her by Mr. Oatley (the house in which she lives in the present with her son Marvin and his wife), represents her most important worldly possession after ninety years. The pieces of furniture and other household effects clustered in the house become for Hagar, a link to the past. The knobbed jug, the daguerreotype of her mother and the gilt edged mirror all awaken memories of events and people long past(9). In an ever changing world, the house and furniture give Hagar a measure of stability:

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

After years of living in other people's houses; first her father's then her husband's and finally Mr. Oatley's, Hagar at last has her own house, an achievement of great significance for her.

It is no wonder then that Silver threads (the old people's home where her son and his wife propose to take her), acquires for her a hideous and

imprisoning character. From its black iron gate to its stout matron with a look of "... overpowering competence" (97) Silverthreads becomes negative in all respects.

Hagar's house symbolizes for her independence and its loss signals the loss of the same. It is therefore not surprising that she perceives Silverthreads in terms of a mausoleum and herself: "the Egyptian mummified with pillows and my own flesh through some oversight embalmed" (96). The cup of tea that she is given at the home tastes "like hemlock" and the rooms at the home become "little cells (98)".

Silverthreads connotes death and imprisonment for Hagar. Her staying there would at the same time mean being uprooted from a setting that gives her a sense of identity: her house. She sees no affinity between herself and the inhabitants of Silverthreads who loll:

...here and there in armchairs larger than themselves, several ancient women, white topped and frail as dandelion gone to seed (97).

Silverthreads denizens are a testimony as Hagar sees it, to the debilitating effect of old people's homes. To allow herself to be sequestered in a home would imply an acceptance of societies stereotypes of old people: that the best thing is to cart them off to homes where they can be with people their own age.

Hagar rejects Silverthreads refusing to sit back and succumb to her families, and societies recommendation on what is right for an older

person. The stage is set for an escape to Shadow point: Hagar's third flight in ninety years.

In contrast to her trepidation at the sight of Silverthreads iron gate, Shadow point draws forth from Hagar a desire to sing(151). Shadow point, despite its obvious discomforts, represents for Hagar an escape and an affirmation that she has the right to make her own choices.

However, it is also at Shadow point that Hagar's past and in particular the circumstances of John's death come forcefully to haunt her. The children that she sees playing by the beach(187) rekindle memories of John and Arlene and their tragic death, partly a result of her interference into their lives. It is at Shadow point that Hagar will have to face up to her role in this tragedy. The place that she thought provided her with an escape, ironically becomes the site of her trial. The story in The Stone Angel can indeed be seen as Hagar's testimony in a long trial culminating in the events at Shadow point. Ironic commentary in the novel therefore functions as a sort of cross examination frequently contradicting Hagar's testimony. The end result of this probing into the past is that Hagar ultimately realises the forces that have led her astray.

The objects that Hagar encounters at Shadowpoint evoke the atmosphere of a trial. The moss that covers the log she sits on, conjures up images of a judge's wig. The fungus she touches retains her fingerprints and the sparrows become her jurors(192).

All that is required is a confessor and Murray Lees arrives to fulfil this role. Lees himself prompts Hagar's confession by making one of his own. It is apt that a confession concerning events in the past be done at the cannery at Shadow point:

A place of Remnants and oddities this seems more like the sea-chest of some old and giant sailor than merely a cannery no one has used in years(215).

The cannery's evocation of past lives, therefore parallels Hagar's confession of the same.

Marvin and Doris trace Hagar to Shadowpoint in a poor state of health, they move her to hospital. Hagar's reaction to her new quarters is claustrophobic:

Lord how the world has shrunk. Now it is only one enormous room full of high white iron cots...(254)

Hagar loses the sense of control and independence that she so cherishes. She resents the lack of privacy that the public ward represents. Interestingly, the period she spends in hospital is significant in terms of the experiences it exposes her to. Just as Shadow point and Murray Lees prompt Hagar to make a confession, the public ward and its occupants help change Hagar's perspective on herself and others.

As Constance Rooke observes in "A Feminist Reading of The Stone Angel", this period in hospital sees Hagar coming to terms with her own frailties as a human being and consequently, the need to turn to others for help(40). She at last accepts her femininity, not as a sign of weakness, but

as a fact of nature: a condition from which she can still act with dignity and courage.

Hagar's interaction with Elva Jardine and the other inmates of the hospital thus gives her new perspectives on herself as a woman and on interpersonal relations. When she at last offers a helping hand to a fellow patient, Sandra Wong, "she proves that she has learned what Elva has to teach" Rooke observes.

Hagar's inheritance from her father has been pride and an overbearing need for self-reliance which precludes her asking for assistance. It is as she lies in hospital an infirm, that she has to accept that the human condition does not allow for absolute independence. Emotionally and physically, Hagar has to learn to give and accept help with a sense of dignity.

It is a testimony to Hagar's recognition of the need for other people that in the pitch darkness of the hospital, she joins the nightly chorus of patients calling out to their loved ones, thereby admitting their need

...you mind that time Tom? i mind so well

I am sorry for having offended thee because I love....

Enlose mich von MienenShmerzen Bram!(275).

With Hagar's move to a semi-private ward, her sense of claustrophobia deepens. All along she has displayed a love for spacious living quarters. The semi-private therefore further reinforces her feeling of being hemmed in. Related to this feeling of claustrophobia, however, is an awareness of her impending death:

The world is even smaller now, it's shrinking so quickly. The next room will be the smallest of all(282).

Hagar's confinement in hospital curtails her physical mobility. Her activities therefore become even more mental than ever before. This mental activity ensures a move towards even greater self-knowledge and with some help from Reverend Troy, she finally realises how her pride and stubbornness have interfered with her need for happiness.

It has been our intention in our study of setting, to display the evolution of Hagar's character alongside the changes in background that occur in The Stone Angel. We have at the same time demonstrated how setting functions as a symbolic commentary not only on human action and motivation in The Stone Angel, but also on theme.

So far, we have examined how symbolic commentary is ensured in relation to setting in The Stone Angel. The use of symbols in the text is, however, much wider. From the title of the novel 'The Stone Angel', to the biblical allusions that permeate it, the use of symbols spin a continuous web of connections and meanings which are crucial to an understanding of The Stone Angel.

The outstanding image in the novel and to which it owes its title is that of the stone angel that stands over Manawaka. The statue of the stone angel is commissioned by Jason Currie ostensibly as a memorial to his departed wife. At a superficial level, the statue is not only a memorial to Hagar's mother but celebration of her father's ego: "to proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever, and a day(3)". The statue then becomes

a testimony to the pretensions of the pioneering generation, a monument to their class ambitions.

The late Mrs. Currie in this regard pales into insignificance in view of the factors that motivate Jason to commission the statue. Jason Currie's motivations, as we are going to see later in this study, in fact provide the thrust for a feminist critique that see gender relations as being at the centre of the conflict in The Stone Angel.

The Stone Angel, we are told, has been carved without eyes the result of an oversight by its creators. The structural blindness of the statue however emerges as the physical manifestation of symbolic blindness which we perceive in Jason Currie.

More significantly, the sightless stone angel attests to the futility of human plans and actions in a world that seems to pay scant regard for man's endeavours. Jason Currie, buoyed by his edict that he is 'a self made man' sees himself in a larger than life mould. Having acquired(created) wealth, and having erected stone monuments to himself (his house included), he imagines he can shape the future course of events.

Events play a nasty joke on Jason, however, making nonsense of his exaggerated notions of himself. His sons who are supposed to be his heirs, turn out to be effeminate. The child who most resembles him Hagar, who is ironically female rebels. To cap it all years later Jason's grandson John irreverently makes nonsense of the Currie philosophy 'gainsay who dare' by exchanging the Currie plaid pin a family heirloom - for a jackknife.

The jest life plays on Jason is completed when he shares the same headstone with Brampton Shipley, a person he despised. Ultimately, Jason

is just as blind as the stone angel he erects. He has as it is, overestimated his abilities in the process failing to see the limitations that his being human confer upon him.

The symbolism of the stone angel and its attendant characteristic of blindness, does not however refer only to Jason Currie. More specifically, it is representative of Hagar. Hagar as we intend to establish, is a stone angel in her rigidity and incapacity to display warmth in her relationships.

Hagar's symbolic affinity to the stone angel is confirmed by her lack of insight both into her life and into the lives of those around her. Indeed the story is about Hagar groping towards enlightenment. The Stone Angel is fraught with incidence in which she either misjudges a situation or makes a realisation too late. A major preoccupation in the novel is the disparity between what we perceive things to be and the reality of what they really are. Most of the time the truth confounds the initial perception. This is an issue we intend to examine further in this study.

As we probe further into the symbolism of the stone angel, it is prudent to examine a fruitful study done by Constance Rooke on the same subject. Rooke considers the concept of 'angel' as representative of male stereotypes of females. Women she avers, are expected to be more or less spotless as far as morality and their general deportment is concerned. It is no wonder then that Hagar is shipped off to finishing school, where she learns to be a lady but where no practical experience is inculcated.

In their roles as angels, Rooke adds, young women are kept ignorant of life's realities. Sex for instance is a taboo subject. It is therefore not surprising that Hagar is wholly ignorant on her marriage as to what her conjugal obligations are. While women are to remain pure and untainted

by baser realities (being custodians of morality), the men can indulge in illicit and worldly pleasures with women who have fallen such as Lottie Dreiser's mother. Even this is done furtively, as we see in Jason Currie's case, to protect the man's reputation.

Rooke traces the genesis of the preceding arrangement to:

Victorian allocation of chastity to women! as angels they must compensate for the bestiality of men, keeping humanity as far as possible from Satan's grasp (34).

Rooke's point of view is borne out by Jason Currie who tells Hagar that "men have terrible thoughts" (44).

In Hagar's mother, Rooke sees the epitome of the female stereotype. We are given a glimpse of her in the novel:

...a spindly anxious girl, rather plain ring leted stiffly she looks worried she will not know what to do although she came of good family and ought not to have had a moment's hesitation about the propriety of her ways (59).

Hagar's mother is the archetypical angel, weak and anxious to please in a male dominated world. Hagar is conversely of a sturdy frame lacking the daintiness associated with femininity. She has nothing but contempt

her feminine qualities and consequently what she perceives to be her mother's weakness. Hagar is determined not to be weak and submissive. This decision however, places her in a conflict. In her refusal to be weak, Hagar ends up lacking qualities such as maternity. This despite the fact that she gets married and becomes a mother.

Despite Hagar's refusal to accept the feminine qualities prescribed by society, she remains in other respects subservient to societies dictates. She is particularly observant of the rules of propriety and consequently lady like behaviour. She is for instance not willing to display her enjoyment of sex to her husband because she considers this to be unladylike. Hagar as Rooke rightfully points out 'relinquishes her claim to full humanity always in order that she may remain a lady'(34).

Hagar's lack of tenderness is not only directed at her husband, but at her children to whom she does not provide maternal tenderness. This inability to display compassion is evident earlier on when she squeamishly declines to offer comfort to her dying brother Dan.

Hagar's problem as Rooke perceptively states, emanates from a conflict of roles. In rejecting the stereotype female role, she ends up lacking in feminine qualities. At the same time she remains female with the duties and obligations of her gender. Hagar's period in hospital therefore becomes a period of establishing contact with her fellow females before

she dies. She in essence comes to terms with her femininity. It is during this period that we see her act for the first time with tenderness.

It is Hagar's lack of tenderness, a result of her role and conflict and a stiff backed pride that makes her a stone angel. She does not weep at her son John's death due to a mixture of pride and a sense of propriety. To have done so would have been a sign of weakness:

I straightened my spine and that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my entire life, to stand there. I wouldn't cry in front of strangers whatever it cost me (242)

The stone image with regard to Hagar is reinforced by her comment that: "The night my son died I was transformed to stone and never wept at all(243)". It is only years later as an old woman, that Hagar can weep for John significantly after she has narrated his story (though unwittingly) to a stranger Murray Lees(244).

Rooke's study is an incisive examination of symbolism in The Stone Angel. This is particularly so with regard to how it bears out Hagar's role conflict. It is despite the above, however, limited by its focus which is primarily a perceived gender conflict in the novel. Rooke's feminist orientation ensures that she only studies symbolism in so far as it bears out her thesis of Hagar, as a woman on trial for her crimes against patriarchal society. While it is evident that a feminist approach to the text yields

positive results, we feel it is inadequate for a complete understanding of The Stone Angel. This is because it represents but one dimension.

Laurence, in The Stone Angel, makes a statement about the human condition and about life in totality. The Stone Angel does not only highlight gender, but also class conflict which is not necessarily gender oriented and the nature of freedom among other concerns.

It is our intention then to go beyond a gender outlook on The Stone Angel, to a more broad based approach to symbolism in the novel.

In rejecting the circumscribed role that society allocates to her, Hagar is thrown into a state of ambiguity in so far as interpersonal relationship is concerned.

Biologically she is a mother but in practice she rarely displays the necessary characteristics prerequisite for such a role. While her emotional frigidity is to a large extent traceable to the stoic presbyterian tradition she inherits, it does not wholly explain the kind of person she turns out to be.

Hagar's lack of tenderness and coldness are also attributable to her own personal stubbornness, pride and lack of insight. Even as she refuses to submit to her father as society demands, she is in other respects compliant. She is extremely class conscious and at the same time observes the rules of propriety to a fault. It would appear then that Hagar is not entirely a victim as Rooke claims, but also a proponent of societies values. In a nutshell, Hagar's relationship with her society is an ambivalent one.

Hagar in her lack of tenderness, in her inability to communicate and gain an insight into her life and into the lives of those around her, becomes a stone angel. Despite her remarkably sharp senses (even in old age), Hagar ironically fails to get through to those close to her. Constantly, she sends the wrong signals. Just like the stone angel which is inanimate and therefore dumb, Hagar might as well be dumb too for all the good her ability to speak does her. Simultaneously, Hagar is also symbolically blind in the sense that she never really gains an insight into what is around her. On the occasions when she is fortunate enough to perceive the real situation, it is always too late: "I never knew the truth of it until years later, years too late" (20).

It is John who perhaps best articulates Hagar's inveterate 'blindness' this time in relation to her choice of a favourite son: "You always bet on the wrong horse....Marv was your boy, but you never saw that did you?" (237).

Hagar's incapacity to really see others for what they are is in part due to the single mindedness and haughtiness with which she approaches issues. She rarely seeks to get close to those around her. In her portrayal of Hagar, Laurence indicates that in order to successfully relate to each other we have to get off our high horse, loosen up and listen to what others have to say.

It is therefore consistent with Laurence's vision, that the first time we see Hagar coming close to another person is when she relaxes her stubborn pride to accept Murray Lees' companionship. All along she has been blind to this fact, a blindness reinforced by the blind slug that inhabits her shoes at Shadow point.

A theme that is developed alongside Hagar's lack of insight is that of human communication and interpersonal relationships. Hagar puts trust in words and their proper usage as a means of communication. She cannot therefore countenance the improper use of language. She being an 'angel' demands perfection. She is embarrassed by Bram's ungrammatical constructs. She also constantly corrects her children Marvin and John and her dislike for her daughter-in-law Doris emanates largely from Dorise's ungrammatical use of language.

Hagar confirms Rooke's contention of the 'angelic' role ascribed to women as acmes of perfection when she comments on Clara Bram's late wife's use of language:

She was inarticulate as a stabled beast and when she mustered voice it had been gruff as a man's pebbled with impermissibles. "I seen and aint, even worse coming from the woman than from the man the lord knows why(40)

The irony is that despite Hagar's almost perfect grasp of language it does not aid her in communicating with people. Through most of the text we come across statements such as:

Oh! but that was not what I mean to say at all....(68)

I am barely aware of the words that issue from my mouth(93)

It is obvious in The Stone Angel that a grasp of language is not sufficient for human communication. Hagar despite her linguistic skills remains paradoxically as mute as the stone angel, in so far as ability to communicate effectively is concerned.

That Hagar's belief in words as the sole form of communication is based on false premises, is pointed out by W. H. New in "Every Now and Then voice and Language in Laurence's The Stone Angel". New indicates that other characters in the novel such as Doris and Marvin despite their linguistic limitations have a working relationship. Hagar's marriage on the other hand is not quite as successful. Unlike Hagar, Doris and Marvin can for instance communicate by sign and eyebrow(32).

New sees Hagar as hiding behind language in an attempt to conceal her true feelings. Hagar is contrasted with Bram who despite his uneducated language always declares his mind. He therefore leaves no doubt about how he feels. He is also not ashamed to show his appreciation for lovemaking unlike Hagar who is at pains to hide the same, hence her stone like facade.

Hagar's communication problem arises out of a desire to appear proper and unperturbed, the perfect lady. Her means of ensuring perfection in her relationship would involve correct speech patterns and at the same time, great poise and control of her physical person. Hagar would not like to display human weakness and would consequently like to say the right thing at the right time and for her, the right thing does not necessarily mean the honest thing.

What Hagar actually articulates, however (as distinct from what is in her conscious mind in terms of intent), seems to come from a sub-

conscious that she cannot control. It would appear that in her sub-conscious which reveals itself in her uncontrolled outbursts, Hagar's humanity and therefore vulnerability declares itself.

These outbursts, make nonsense of her attempts to keep an undisturbed countenance - her stone angel image.

One gets the impression that in these uncontrolled outbursts, the real Hagar, normally submerged beneath an exterior of self-control and imperturbability, tries to emerge. Words are therefore perceived as inadequate for sincere communication and subject to manipulation to present a false image. Hagar because her outbursts are involuntary and do not obey her (even when mentally she has constructed the right sentences) educated and proud sensibilities, often rejects them (outbursts) as if they are alien to her. She cannot bear to admit the weakness that the tone of her voice implies in many instances:

"Now I perceive too late, how laden with self pity my voice sounds"(37).

"I used to pride myself on my manners. How have I descended to this snarl?(98)

I hear my accusing voice and I am ashamed. but it won't stop(274).

Hagar detaches herself from her voice refering it as if it is a separate entity.

Similarly, she repudiates her body when it does not conform to her need for emotional invincibility and self-reliance. Old age makes her dependent much to her annoyance. It at the same time ensures that she is not in full control of her bodily functions.

My bowels are locked today I am Job in reverse, and neither cascara not syrup of tings nor milk magnesia will prevail against my unspeakable affliction(40).

My whole bulk shakes, the blubber bracing up and down upon my rib cage and I betray myself in shameful tears (76).

Hagar's reaction to these signs of weakness is to reject them:

Then terribly I perceive the tears, my own they must be although they have sprung so unbidden I feel they are like the incontinent wetness of the infirm. Trickling they taunt my face.

They are no tears of mine. In front of her. I dismiss them, blaspheme them let them be gone (31).

(Emphasis added)

In the light of the humiliations old age brings her, it is not surprising that the image Hagar wants to keep of herself is of her younger self:

I see the eyes of Hagar Currie the same dark eyes
as when I first began to remember and to notice
myself... The eyes change least of all(38)

Hagar's obsession with keeping her composure reveals itself even when she is done a good turn. When she is moved to tears by the girl who gives up a seat for her in the bus, she contrives to "...sit rigid immobile... like one of those plasters-of-paris figures" Lest the girl "see my unseemly tears"(92). The central image conjured here is one of stone.

The stone image is developed further when on the bus to Shadow point, Hagar feels humiliated at having to be reminded to pay fare and at the possibility that other passengers might be staring:

Rigid as marble I sit, solid and stolid to outward
view inwardly my heart thunders until I fear other
passengers may hear(146)

Hagar is a prisoner of appearances. The control that is exercised over her by an overriding concern to present a proper exterior is made evident in the next piece of imagery. She is pictured as a puppet:

"Buildings rush by and cars, and each time the bus stops and starts it jerks me like a puppet"(146).

Even as Hagar tries to maintain her stone like facade of imperturbability, her heart takes on a symbolic role as a declaration of free will stifled. Often when she is in distress her heart is described as beating against her rib cage as if seeking an avenue of escape.

The use of the word heart here goes beyond its literal meaning it becomes representative of Hagar's humanity and spontaneity, trying to assert itself inspite of the reining in by her strong belief in outward appearances.

Thus the beating of Hagar's heart is always described with imagery that evoke bird like qualities. Birds represent freedom and spontaneity in their ability to soar into the sky without hinderance. Hagar in reining in her emotions traps them like birds in a cage.

My heart is pulsing too fast like a berserk bird. I try to calm it...But still it lurches and flutters in a frenzy to get out (95)

The language used here, implies imprisonment. Later on we see a continuation of the bird imagery and implied entrapment:"I must, I must or it will damage itself against the cage of bones(95)". The word cage here acquires double implications. It both evokes images of a bird, and at the same time harps on the idea of incarceration.

In hospital, Hagar feels "the pain beating its wing against my rib cage"(256).

The beating of Hagar's heart is an assertion of the bird like qualities within herself: that is a need for spontaneity and free will which is, however, hemmed (caged) in by her physical person - representative of her rock like facade of proper appearances.

At another level, the bird imagery is expressive of a need for free emotional display and the need for companionship. Thus in hospital, Hagar's fellow patients who are in touch with their emotional side freely display their vulnerability.

Significantly, this is described with bird imagery.:

And endlessly, the breathing and the voices flutter
like birds caught inside a building

Oh my poor back -

Where are you nurse? I need a bed pan
ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten -

Tom? You there Tom?(256-57)

For Hagar, human dignity and free will can only be obtained through correct external appearance and physical well being. Freedom for her is a physical state. This inadequate understanding of what constitutes freewill is borne out by the flights she makes to exercise her independence, or so she imagines.

For Hagar to act freely, she has to debunk her false notion of what constitutes freedom. This necessary realisation comes most lucidly when Reverend Troy sings to her in hospital(292). But before this, her hospital experience goes along way in disabusing her off her previous view that a

strong physique was the ultimate indication of strength and that appearances were an absolute necessity in successful human relations.

The period spent in hospital demonstrates to Hagar that the stone image she has cultivated does not denote strength but in fact underlines spiritual weakness. In Elva Jardine, we see the physical weakness that Hagar is contemptuous of and rejects:

She's so scrawny, it's a wonder she can stand up at all. She looks a dwarf woman, such a measly little creature that if she shrivelled a trace more she'd disappear altogether(258)

Elva is a stark contrast to the stout Hagar. Yet she displays a spiritual strength that Hagar does not possess. Similarly, she is capable of physical activity that belie her frail appearance. Appearances, Elva reveals, do not always indicate reality.

Most importantly, however, Elva shows Hagar that it is not ashaming to seek help and need other people. The former freely admits her need for her husband. In coming to terms with her limitations as a human being and consequently reaching out for a helping hand from others, Elva attains a degree of freedom that Hagar lacks.

Elva in her uninhibited display of emotion and in her reconciliation to her vulnerability as a human, evinces bird like qualities. This is borne out in the imagery attached to her. She is described variously as: "light as a feather(261)" and her hospital gown "flaps open". Her husband says she never ate enough to keep a bird alive"(265). All these coupled with

her propensity to chatter and the fact that she sings (even if badly) complete the bird image. Elva is clearly at ease with the emotional side of her nature.

The other patients in the hospital, namely Mrs. Reily and the German woman Mrs Dobreiner, are also to a lesser extent characterized through the use of bird associated imagery.

Mrs. Reily, despite her massive frame and physical immobility, has a sweet voice; "...clear and musical"(259). Mrs. Dobreiner, inspite of her inability to speak English, expresses herself through song and is described as a regular meadow lark(260).

Music emerges as an alternative form of expression to Hagar's obsession with words. The power of music and its significance as an expression of human joy and freewill is made evident when Reverend Troy's singing brings home to Hagar what she has lacked in her life; namely the freedom to rejoice and be spontaneous. She concurrently realises that she has been wrong to look for freedom externally:

I must always, always have wanted that - simply to rejoice. How is it I never could?

I was alone never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched(292)

It is important to note that Reverend Troy who is inarticulate when it comes to speech, is an entirely different proposition when he sings:

Then he opens his mouth and sings and I'm the one who's taken aback now. He should sing always and never speak. He should chant his sermons. The fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure(291).

It is only after Hagar has come to a realisation of the forces that have imprisoned her, that she can move towards freeing herself and others in the bargain. It is only then that she can begin divesting herself off the stone angel image. Prior to her recognition, Hagar's life is characterized by struggle.

The theme of struggle is infact leit-motif in The Stone Angel. Hagar is locked in a struggle and exercises a stranglehold on almost all the characters she relates to in the novel. Hagar's struggle is developed through the core image and biblical allusion to Jacob and his wrestling match with the angel in the book of Genesis.

The struggle motif is developed at two levels. At one level Hagar is Jacob, struggling to be free of her father, at the same time trying to get some sort of approval for her action in marrying Bram. At another level, however, Hagar is the angel holding others in a tight embrace of disapproval and emotional frigidity.

There is Marvin who seeks her approval and blessing, Doris who would like her to accept her Christian outlook and Reverend Troy, (Dorise's troubleshooter) who finds Hagar a formidable opponent. There is also John who would like Hagar to release him, thus allowing him to make his own decisions.

At what could possibly be described as a third level is Hagar struggling with the person within herself, in a battle between natural inclination and learned behaviour. I here refer to the conflict between Hagar's devotion to appearances (and a facade of impassivity) and what might be described as the essential Hagar, locked within the former.

It is our intention to examine Hagar's relationship with key characters in the novel. In the process we will show how the motif of struggle and the attendant allusion to Jacob's struggle with the angel, characterizes relations in The Stone Angel.

To begin with Hagar's father Jason Currie, it is evident that the former resents the control he exercises over her. The elder Currie is portrayed as a dictator. Like Jacob who works for Laban to win Racheal, Hagar imagines that by serving her father for a period she will eventually earn her freedom. When she finally tells her father: "I've worked for you for three years"(49), one detects echoes of Jacob's plea to Laban that having worked for seven years he deserves Racheal. Like Laban before him Jason declines to give his permission and like Jacob, Hagar escapes.

Hagar escapes into the arms of Bram, deluded that under her guidance the world would see "...how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled learned cravats and grammar"(50). The failure of this romantic notion notwithstanding, Hagar is from the onset engaged in a struggle to change her husband. She not only seeks to improve his grammar but would also like to see him change his mannerisms and adopt Jason's work ethic.

Brampton is however set in his ways and is not willing to change. He is free from the dishonesty that passes for etiquette in Manawaka and

speaks his mind to Hagar's never ending dismay. It is noteworthy that Hagar seeks to change the one person who recognizes her individuality. As Bram tells her:

You know something Hagar? There's men in Manawaka call their wives 'mother' all the time. That's one thing I never done(80).

As Hagar later realises, Bram is the one person who saw her as a person with her own identity and consequently related to her not as a daughter, mother or wife but as a self-willed individual. Thus when she seeks to leave(in a move that reveals her failure to change Bram) Bram's reaction is predictable "when do you plan on going?"(14).

Hagar does not recognise Bram's admission of her individuality until it is too late. She struggles against him persistently and nowhere is this more evident than in the marital bed:

It was not very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud and made certain the trembling was inner.. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact like some maiden head(81).

Hagar's struggle with Brampton extends further to their children. She gives Marvin up as a Shipley but is determined to obliterate any

ShIPLEY qualities that John might have acquired as she sets about making a Currie of him.

It is in part to prevent John from falling under his father's influence that Hagar engages in her second flight. With Hagar's flight we are exposed to a third phase of struggle, this time the combatants being Hagar and John.

John does not turn out as Hagar would have liked. His speech is characterized by impermissible like his father's. He also pals with half-breeds to his class-conscious mother's chagrin. His going back to Manawaka to his father further disappoints his mother.

John by going back to Manawaka proclaims his Shipley roots making nonsense of Hagar's efforts to uproot him. John treats his Currie inheritance with irreverence. His interpretation of the Currie homilies 'gainsay who dare' is to exchange the Currie plaid pin for a Jack knife(143). He also sarcastically quotes his mother's and Jason's oft-repeated advice that all a man need is 'a little get-up and go' to justify his alcoholic concoction from potato peels(171).

It is significant that John refers to Hagar as 'angel': "Don't frown like that angel"(172), when she opposes his giving the sick Bram alcohol. This reference conjures up Hagar's stone angel image and therefore apposition to anything that might spell disgrace. John is obviously not subject to Hagar's sense of propriety.

In resisting Hagar's control John affirms that he belongs to a different generation, one that has little to do with the class pre-occupations of a previous age. This is made evident when Hagar asks him if it was right to bury Bram in the Currie plot with her father:

"I don't think it matters one way or another" John said wearily. "He's dead. He won't know or care. They're only different sides of the same coin, anyway he and the Curries. They might as well be together there(184).

The rules of Hagar's generation don't hold much sway with John. It is not surprising then that the statue of the stone angel that marks his grandmother's burial place does not awe him. When the statue falls down his reaction is as irreverent: "the old lady has taken quite a header"(178). Hagar is, however, concerned that other people might see this disgraceful occurrence.

Symbolically, the fallen angel signifies the demise of the values that Hagar and her generation stand for. The fallen angel also heralds Hagar's (the stone angel's) failure to exert her will upon John.

In a scene at the cemetery Hagar tells John to lift the stone angel. This scene evokes Jacob's struggle with the angel. Hagar would like to see John as her Jacob then, defending her values:

I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might(178).

John, unequivocally shows he is no Jacob:

He sweated and grunted angrily his feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear and swore(178)

In his swearing and reluctance John shows that he is his father's son rather than the mother's favoured son, thereby not a Jacob.

The climax of the struggle between Hagar and John comes as a result of the latter's relationship with Arlene, Lotties daughter. Hagar's opposition to the relationship is based on her class consciousness and consequent superiority complex. She has always seen Lottie as low class even after their roles have undergone an ironic reversal. Hagar's opposition is also a result of a long standing rivalry between her and Lottie as we are going to see later.

John and Arlene are however determined to resist their parents hold on them. They are as it is free of the values that motivate their parents. The struggle is therefore at one level inter-generational. Concurrently we see Hagar and Lotties opposition towards a possible John, Arlene marriage as an extension of a long standing struggle between the former two.

Their children are therefore just pawns in this long standing feud that has always simmered below the surface.

With both parties unwilling to loosen their hold, Arlene and John on the one side and Lottie and Hagar on the other, the result is predictably tragic involving the deaths of the latter two.

The struggle between Hagar and Lottie spans a generation. Nowhere in the novel is such a conflict explicitly pointed out yet it becomes more than evident as one reads through the text.

At the start of the story Hagar describes the young Lottie as: "... tiny and light with yellow hair as fine as embroidery silk...."(11).

Lottie is a stark contrast to Hagar who is "...tall, sturdy and dark and would have liked to be the opposite"(27). Lottie has the physical

qualities that Hagar lacks: femininity. The latter affects to dislike these feminine qualities, however, these are the qualities that men go for. Hagar's contempt for femininity can in part then be attributable to a case of 'sour grapes'. She herself admits that she resented Lottie: "I felt surly towards her littleness and pale fine hair (27)".

The first source of conflict between Hagar and Lottie is therefore based on one party's feminine qualities, and the other's lack of them. The second area of conflict is one based on class.

Hagar comes from the "creme de la creme" of Manawaka society. Lottie on the other hand is illegitimate a status that earns her the sobriquet: "Lottie no-Name". Hagar clearly gains some measure of vengeful glee from Lottie's ignominious background:

We never called Lottie: "No name though-only that the boys did that" but we tittered at it knowing it was mean, feeling a half excitement (11).

Lottie despite her physical frailty and her modest background, has the capacity to act where Hagar and the rest are squeamish. Two childhood incidents capture this clearly.

The first one is in the scene at the Simon's funeral parlour, of the children who sneak in Lottie is the only one brave enough to touch the in fact corpse they find there(12). Hagar and the others keep off.

The second incident is at the town dump where they encounter: "chicks, feeble, food less, bloodied and mutilated (27)". Hagar and company are nauseated and cannot relieve the creatures of their misery. Lottie on the other hand has the courage to destroy them.

At a literal level, the town dump is the site where Manawaka dumps what it no longer wants. In Hagar's and the other children's squeamishness, a reluctance to identify with what has until recently been part of their lives is made evident.

Lottie on the other hand is symbolically part of the 'refuse' of society and it is perhaps for this reason that she can act more decisively. Her action could also be representative of the decisiveness with which she will later work hard to obliterate the ignominy of her parentage by gaining respectability.

Hagar is resentful of Lottie's display of resolve:

I did not like to think that Lottie might have more gumption than I, when I know full well she did not(28).

It is remarkable that years later when they are both middle aged, Hagar still remembers this incident and talks to Lottie about it(213).

With Hagar's marriage to the lowdown Bram, we have a reversal of roles as Lottie marries Telford Simmons a banker. Lottie becomes respectable while Hagar becomes the "egg woman"(132). But even as Hagar is reduced to selling her family China to Lottie - to earn money to leave Manawaka - she never loses her snobbishness and still has the presence of mind to notice that Lottie's:

China cups were that poor bone China
that you buy for half a dollar piece"(136)

Matters however reach a head with the relationship between their two children. Lottie's opposition to Arlene's relationship with John is based on overwhelming fear that it might result in Arlent committing a social indiscretion (like Lottie's mother), and have a child out of wedlock. This could reverse the progress Lottie has made up the social ladder, in spite of illegitimate origins.

Hagar's opposition is on the other hand based on a feeling of superiority. For Hagar, Lottie remains 'No-Name' and the prospect of John and Arlene are therefore caught in the middle of a struggle older than themselves.

In an effort to thwart a union between their children, Hagar and Lottie are in an ironic twist bought together - two strange bed fellows. The tension that has always existed between them is however still evident. They engage in verbal fencing tinged with caustic innuendo (210-11). This encounter brings to the surface the conflicts we have already highlighted.

Hagar notes Lottie's physical state: "Lottie was podgy as a puffball" (209). In what is for Hagar a victory of her "big bonedness" over Lotties's earlier small boned prettiness, Hagar remarks:

I wasn't slim myself it's true but I was solid - never the flabby fat that seems to quiver and tremble by itself... (210).

The physical aspects of their rivalry dispensed with, they move to their respective families about whom they exchange broadsides (10-11).

Inevitably, they come to an admission of the ironic manner in which fate has dealt with them. Even as they conspire to curtail their children's plans, their hopeless position is evident:

two fat old women, no longer
haggling with one another,
but only with fate pitting our
wits against God's(212)

Obviously, the struggle between Hagar and Lottie has always been based on false premises: that they were in a position to absolutely influence their respective fortunes in life.

Fate has however, not finished with them. They are to suffer for their temerity in pitting themselves against "the gods" when Arlene and John are killed in a bizarre accident prompted by a bet.

With this tragedy, an equilibrium based on a sorrow shared and a common helplessness is finally established between these two old foes. Their struggle as it is ends in a disaster.

With John's death, Hagar is left with the least favoured son Marvin. For Hagar, Marvin has always been a Shipley rather than a Currie - an Essau rather than the mother's favoured son Jacob. Like Essau in the book of Genesis, Marvin is an outdoors man - outside intimate relations with his mother. Hagar describes him as: "... the unknown soldier the one whose name you never knew". Not only has Hagar never shown Marvin the tenderness of a mother, but she has never shown him any appreciation either.

The struggle between Hagar and Marvin is therefore characterized by Marvin's wish that he be appreciated for what he is, Hagar's son and Shipley too. Hagar on the other hand withholds her appreciation in a vice like grip. It is ofcourse in keeping with Hagar's lack of insight and stubbornness (stone angel) that she cannot appreciate that taken on his own terms, Marvin can also be a Jacob.

Marvin doggedly persists with his struggle for appreciation to the very end. In an incident that not only parallels John's earlier struggle with the stone angel but also evokes Jacob's with the angel, Marvin carries the sick and dazed Hagar (symbolically an angel) from shadow point: "He tugs and pulls, sweats and strains , tethers me aloft"(253). He does not curse in the manner that John did but carries out the task uncomplainingly.

This scene foreshadows Hagar's eventual capitulation in hospital. As Marvin grips Hagar's hand and holds it tightly, she fancies:

Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength and bargaining ' I will not let thee, go, except thou bless me And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been from the beginning and can only release myself by releasing him(304).

By at last loosening her hold of disapproval over Marvin, Hagar finally releases him. She at the same time releases herself from her inability to show tenderness and sacrifice for the sake of others. Hagar in this sense exorcises her earlier refusal to comfort her dying brother.

In describing Marvin as a better son than John, Hagar at last lets go the ghost of John that has always come between her and Marvin. Administering to the living clearly takes priority over the dead. Marvin in his patience and fortitude, finally confirms that he is truly a Jacob.

Hagar finally accepts Marvin on the latter's own terms, based on what he is rather than what she would have liked him to be. In doing this, Hagar recognises Marvin's double Shipley, Currie inheritance. In this recognition Hagar in effect ends the more than half a century of tension between the Currie's and Shipley's based on class distinction. This is a reconciliation foreshadowed by what the grave caretaker tells Hagar, Marvin and Doris when they visit the Manawaka graveyard:

This here is the Currie - Shipley stone. The two families was connected by marriage. Pioneering families, the both of them two of the earliest in the district...(305).

It is significant that in the final analysis, what is recalled of the Curries and Shipley's are their similarities rather than their class differences. Class distinctions are clearly displayed here as temporal and extinguishable with time.

It is important that Hagar's reminiscence of this last visit to Manawaka graveyard, comes immediately after her blessing of Marvin. It is an obvious indication that she at last puts to rest the Currie - Shipley conflict (before her imminent death) that has influenced her life and generated the struggle between her and her children. Indeed class

considerations are a major contribution to the tensions that we perceive in The Stone Angel.

It is clear from the preceding, that the struggle motif is important in delineating the tensions that exist in The Stone Angel. These tensions arise out of conflicts between parents and siblings, conflicts developed through an allusion to a classical biblical story of family conflict: the Genesis saga of Jacob. In alluding to the Jacob story, Laurence gives universal and one might add a timeless dimension to familial conflict.

Family conflict aside the struggle in the novel is also class oriented, based on the positions in society of the Shipley, Currie's and Lottie Dreisser.

The struggle motif informs on Laurence's vision of life as a constant struggle with others, with ourselves and with nature. Despite these struggles there is a necessity to recognize the need to relent at times.

Ensuring an equilibrium and therefore harmony between all these conflicts is the challenge we all have to face as human beings. It is as is made evident in The Stone Angel, a pre-occupation as old as mankind, one that never ends.

Our study of The Stone Angel has sought to show form as the vehicle through which thematic concerns are aesthetically explored in the novel. In the process we have displayed Laurence's keen awareness of aesthetics with regard to her use of form.

In the first chapter, we examined Laurence's continued exploration for a form that best explained the content in her works.

In chapter two, we focused on the nature of form displaying the dialectical relationship existing between it and content. We also averred that form has an aesthetic function in the novel and is the means through which content is explored and developed. It was also established that form, while it has an internal dynamics, evolves historically to express the times. It becomes evident then that form captures the philosophy, ideology and world view of the period.

The third chapter involved an analysis of form in The Stone Angel. In so doing we displayed form and content dialectics and in particular how form objectifies content. We also demonstrated how form expresses world view and vision in The Stone Angel.

We engaged in a practical demonstration of the validity of our postulates namely:

- (i) That form springs from content though it also reacts upon it.
- (ii) That form carries ideology and reveals the worldview and vision which influence it.

A notable characteristic of The Stone Angel is its evocation of certain key events which can be viewed as motifs in the story. The clock always seems to turn round to the extent that one gets the impression we are back where we began. Hagar re-enacts her relationship with Jason Currie with her own children. The rivalry and struggle between Hagar and Lottie goes on into adulthood culminating in tragedy. Hagar's life is at the same time punctuated by flights which continue even when she is in her advanced years.

From a cursory examination the plot line in The Stone Angel gives the impression that Laurence views human action as essentially cyclic, that is we always come back to the point from where we started. As in Hagar's case parents end up making the same mistakes their own parents made and similarly go through the same processes in inter-personal relationships. While it might be tempting to see Laurence's vision of human action as essentially cyclic, a closer look reveals this would be incorrect. Laurence does see a progression in human life and relationships. Hagar despite the recurring events in her life does achieve a modicum of change and The Stone Angel can be viewed as the story of a slow, but sure journey towards self-knowledge and greater understanding of others.

In the portrayal of John and Arlene, we can see a clear shift in societies attitudes. What is emphasized, however, is the enduring nature of the essential human character. Thus there will always be conflict between parents and their siblings and humanity will always aim at the unattainable.

In the end what we have is not a cyclic vision of humanity but an almost spiral like movement with an axis existing of enduring human characteristics. In the use of flashbacks and the events that are leit motif in the novel, there is a recognition of causality and consequently the role of the past in the present.

The issue of the past's role in the present, and that of inheritance from one's progenitors is of major concern to Laurence. In all her Manawaka cycle works, there is always an attempt to come to terms with the past by characters. In A Bird in the House, Vanessa Macleod seeks to escape from her grandfather's legacy to no avail. Racheal in A Jest of God is haunted by memories of her father while Stacey MacIndra lives in the past as much as in the present in The Fire-Dwellers.

It is however in her first Canadian based novel, The Stone Angel, and in the last one The Diviners, that this issue (past) is given most attention. It is also in these two novels that one is faced with a predominant use of flashbacks and reminiscences.

In The Diviners, Laurence's view of time movement and past present relationship is captured in the central image of the river that flows both ways. Life then for Laurence is a paradox of a simultaneous movement into past and present.

In The Stone Angel, the smooth movement between past and present (with the present always triggering memories of the past and events seeming to recur again) herald the symbolism of the river that flows both ways in The Diviners.

Change for Laurence is a sure process, but it does not involve a severing of the past. All of Laurence's characters realise this sooner or

ter. Hagar has to come to terms with her past for a measure of peace of mind. It is futile to deny or try to escape from the past. We have to recognize the past and accept it in order to have a sense of equanimity and if we are to move on with our lives.

Related to the above is the contrast drawn in The Stone Angel between past and present through the use of flashbacks. In employing flashbacks and motifs, Laurence as we have indicated remarks on the enduring nature of human character. Through a ninety-year-period, through varied experiences, Hagar remains basically the same. Even as she makes some allowances and changes in attitude and behaviour, she remains recognizably, the same Hagar we are exposed to at the start of the story.

From the plot line in The Stone Angel, it is evident there isn't much we can do to change the character that nature gives us. In making the preceding admissions, Laurence however shows that we can at least struggle against ourselves to accommodate others.

While Laurence does not give a conclusive solution on how to resolve the conflict that she identifies between human character and its inherent selfishness, and the need to accommodate others, she does not advocate a passive acceptance of what might be described as a natural order of things. She prescribes struggle until the very last moment.

Hagar's struggle is in the light of the above seen positively, in so far as it involves searching for the quintessential element within us and using it to improve our inter-personal relationships and the quality of our lives.

The pervasive mood in The Stone Angel is ironic. The novel is structured to ensure an ironic commentary on the lives of its characters.

Irony emerges as a tool for exploring certain key issues in the novel: the role of religion and the concept of a God in human life, the question of human communication and inter-personal relationships and lastly the nature of freedom. Related to the issue of God and religion is the underlying question of who is in control. Does man have control over events or his destiny for that matter?

• At the centre of all the above is the paradox that is the human condition, of a humanity caught between nature and the limitations it imposes on man, and man's aspiration for perfection and everlasting happiness. The paradoxical nature of man's plight is reflected across Laurence's works. From Rachel in A Jest of God, running into Vanessa in A Bird in The House, to Stacey Maclindra and Morag Gunn, in The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners respectively: we see a concern with the issue of man's place in the scheme of things. In all these works, the vehicle used to expose these overriding issue is irony.

In the story "To set our House in order" in A Bird in the House, the young Vanessa is baffled by the process of life, death and the forces that move events. She is non plused by the need to reconcile the concept of a God who as her grandmother says, loves order(48), and a world which in its disorder negates this very concept. The Stone Angel can in the same vein, be seen in terms of Hagar's attempts to bring some order into her life. For her this involves imposing her will over others and having things go her way. Whenever she fails to get her way she flees. What emerges in Laurence's works is the contrast between what people want and expect and what actually transpires.

For Laurence God, if he exists, must be a prankster playing jokes on man. This point of view is evident in the ironic twist that we encounter in The Stone Angel. The title of the novel A Jest of God is again quite revealing on Laurence's relationship with the concept of a God. At the centre of Laurence's portrayal of God as a jester, is a pressing need to understand and explain the predicament of a humanity seeking to impose order and stability to a world that seems to play by its own rules. How then does one fit the concept of God under these circumstances especially a God who supposedly stands for love, compassion and order.

In her use of irony to explore man's predicament, Laurence deals with a profound philosophical question; in "The Roots of Narcissism", Hans I Morgenthau and Ethel Person deal with the very same issue. The two view man's problem in terms of an 'existentialist dilemma' which transcends time and place(27). Man seeks to find meaning in a life which is finite while his aspirations and imaginations are not.

Man, Morgenthau and Person assert, is faced by an existentialist gap, the result of a general dissatisfaction with his natural condition and consequent desire to attain more than he has a capacity to

...man is set apart from both beasts and the gods, by the contrast between what he is and what he wants to be. His aspiration transcends the limit of his ability. A pig is a pig is a pig and, we can assume wants to be nothing else. A god by definition attained the perfection of goodness, wisdom and power; there is nothing to be aspired

to beyond that perfection. It is reserved for man to seek more than his nature allows him to have(27).

The above quotation succinctly captures the dilemma evident in The Stone Angel. Hagar aspires for perfection (an aspiration which can in part be traced to the societies desire that women be angels) which she never achieves. Hagar, again like her father before is filled with misconceptions on what she can achieve and on how much control she can exercise on the course of her life.

The existential dilemma in Hagar's life can be further seen in the manner in which she seeks to be self-reliant, even as old age renders her incapable of physical action. Yet for all her attempts at her perfection Hagar's weaknesses are evident for all to see, her human frailty declares itself at every step.

The irony in The Stone Angel captures man's existentialist dilemma. Hagar herself reveals the disparity between her aims and reality when she comments:

It was a becalmed life we led
there a period of waiting of
marking time. But the events
we waited for unknowingly turned
out to be quite other than
what I imagined they would
be (160)

For characters like Doris, there is an anchor in religion which helps them make sense of the world around them - born of an unquestioning need to believe.

For Hagar, however, the answer has to be sought elsewhere. She is avowedly irreligious and so is Laurence. The scene where Murray Lees and fellow adherents pray for knowledge on the apocalypse and resurrection while Lees' son perishes in a house fire, paints a powerful picture of what is apparently for Laurence a failure by christianity to provide answers - a world abandoned by God.

Coupled with the above is the ironic and ridiculous situation that Murray F. Lees finds himself in, selling life insurance for a living and simultaneously believing that the end is nigh. In Lees' predicament there is an obvious conflict between religion and its promises of future glory, and the existentialist need to earn a living. Religion therefore conflicts with the need for self-fulfillment and the need to sustain oneself.

What then is the answer for Laurence. There is no clear cut prescription in The Stone Angel on how to harmonize the conflict between man's aspirations for perfection and the stultifying role that his being a subject to the rules of nature plays in destroying his ambition. The problem as Morgenthau and Person point out is of a man created in the image of God without being given his divine attributes. It is a case of a being who is a product of nature but with a consciousness which ensures that he does not remain just that. According to Morgenthau and Person, the distance between man on one hand, and nature and divinity on the other, cannot be bridged. It cannot be eliminated without depriving man of his human nature(27). Therefore:

...Man is condemned by his
own nature to hang forever
suspended between heaven and
earth forever striving in vain
to join one to the other(27).

While Laurence in The Stone Angel recognizes the ambivalence inherent in man's condition, her view is largely optimistic. There exists in the novel an advocacy that we attempt to come to terms with our humanity. In the period that Hagar spends in hospital, she is made to realise that human weakness and the need to seek assistance from others is not only natural, but absolutely necessary. To seek self-reliance and perfection is in the light of the above approach unrealistic.

Having stated the above, however, Laurence does not hold the view that humanity succumbs entirely to the limitation of human nature. She recognizes that we will always try to surpass ourselves, that being the paradox of human nature. Indeed Laurence's quotation from Dylan Thomas which forms an epigraph to The Stone Angel, exhorts us to struggle:

Do not go gentle into that
good night.
Rage, rage against the
dying of light

The challenge of existence then is to recognize when to struggle and when to let go, when to take cognizance of our human limitations and when to ignore them. The balance can tentatively be attempted by an introspective look at ourselves in an attempt to understand the person within us. This is a process which yields for Hagar, an element of enlightenment as to her motives and longings.

In the use of flashbacks and the unity thus ensured between past and present, there is an assurance that despite the uncertainties of man's existence (of his present and future), there is a history and a past which confirms that man has survived and has continued to live inspite of the odds.

As Morgenthau and Person aptly point out, man:

...through understanding his past is reduced to the search for roots that is his individual ancestry. To know that his ancestors lived, achieved, suffered becomes a reassuring connection for an individual(29).

It is crucial then that we take cognizance of our past. This requirement is echoed in all of Laurence's works. The past is the one reality open to us and one which is important for not only understanding our present but in projecting the future.

We have examined the crucial role form plays in the treatment of theme and character and in the delineation of Laurence's vision in The Stone Angel. We have also sought to show that the novel's aesthetic worth lies in its use of form. Ultimately our aim has been to display the important role that form plays in the novel.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Achebe, Chinua. No Longer at Ease. Nairobi: Heineman, 1988
2. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art. S.U Butcher, London: Macmillan, 1932 Rpt as "The Poetics" in Criticism: The Major Statements. Charlse Kaplan, New York: St Martins Press, 1986. 1-53
3. Bennet, Donna and Russel Brown, eds. An Anthology of Canadian Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. Vol 2. 137-38.
4. Bennet, Tony. Formalism and Marxism. London : Methuen and Co.1979.
5. Coldwell, Joan. "Margaret Laurence". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature. 434-36
6. Eagleton, Terry. Marxism and Literary Criticism. University of California Press, 1976. Rpt. in Criticism: The Major Statements. ed. Charles Kaplan. New York: St. Martins Press, 1986. 21-53.
7. Holman, Hugh C. A Handbook to Literature. Indianapolis: Bobs - Merrilco, 1980.
8. Laurence, Margaret. A Bird in The House. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1988.
9. --- . The Diviners. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.
10. --- . The Fire-Dwellers. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.
11. --- . A Jest of God. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

12. - - - . This Side Jordan. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
13. - - - . The Stone Angel. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964.
14. Maitland, Sarah. "Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel". Canadian Womens Studies vol.8 No.3 (Fall 1987): 43-45.
15. Moga Adalo. "Narrative Mode and significance in Margaret Laurence's The Diviners". Paper in a seminar: Tribute to Margaret Laurence. 3-6 Dec. 1992. Nairobi. Africa Research Centre, 1992.
16. Morgenthau, Hans J. and Ethel Person. "The Roots of Narcissism". Dialogue 50 (1980) 26-29.
17. New, W. H. "Every Now and Then: Voice and Language in Laurence's The Stone Angel." Canadian Literature 93 (Summer 1982) 79-96.
18. Plato. The Republic. Middlesex: Penguin, 1987.
19. Rooke, Constance: "A Feminist Reading of The Stone Angel." Canadian Literature 93 (Summer 198) 26-41.
20. Schorer, Mark. The World We Imagine: selected Essays. Rexdale: Ambassador, 1968.
21. Trotsky, Leon. Literature and Revolution. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1971.
22. Watt, Ian. The Rise of The Novel. Middlesex: Penguin,
23. Wellek, Rene', and Austin Warren. Theory of Literature. Middlesex: Penguin, 1986.
24. Woodcock, George. The World of Canadian Writing: Critiques and Recollections. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre 1980.