

# LAURENCE'S FICTION

## *A Revisioning of Feminine Archetypes*

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MARGARET LAURENCE SAYS THAT SHE writes what she believes everyone has always known.<sup>1</sup> Yet she is making a radical change in the whole literary tradition by re-telling from a woman's point of view traditional and archetypal feminine life patterns that have been portrayed hitherto by male authors only. In this essay I will trace her delineation of feminine archetypes and culture in Africa, both native and colonial; her development of Stacey and Rachel as modern versions of Aphrodite and Artemis, of Hagar as a redeemed yet Medusan Crone, and of Morag as perhaps a new form of feminine individuation, a positive Arachne, weaver of truths: an artist on the move but grounded in the matrilineal roots of mothering. My analysis follows the chronological published order of her work except for *The Fire-Dwellers* and *A Jest of God* which I treat together as two sides of one coin.

It is Laurence's very ease and comfort at being a woman and an artist in the same skin that makes her work so remarkable, so trustworthy, so full of vision and compassion. Even her Somali travelogue, *New Wind in a Dry Land*, reflects this in her loving study of all the natives and especially her feminine insights concerning the women. By the end of the book, she has articulated the plight of the native women, as well as some of the problems of the wives of foreigners working in Somaliland. She makes us aware of the suffering of native women who "fail" to produce sons; the repression of individuation in the native women through enforced "modesty"; the plight of the young fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girls married to elderly men; and the low status of the women in tribal and religious traditions: "a woman's wits and her sharp tongue were often her only protection." We are also made aware of the terrible and "desperate boredom," "the sense of life being lived pointlessly and in a vacuum" suffered by the wives of the English stationed in Somaliland.

Because Laurence is a woman, the Somali women felt they could ask her for help with the considerable pain that menstruation, intercourse, and birth caused them, because of the clitoridectomy they underwent at puberty. The nomadic women who led the camels especially found this pain unbearable. Laurence had only aspirin to offer them and was obviously chagrined at having to commit "the

lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation. . . .” She tells them she has nothing and

The nodded their heads, unprotestingly. They had not really believed I would give them anything. Women had always lived with pain. Why should it ever be any different? They felt they ought not to have asked. They hid their faces in their cloths for a moment, then spoke determinedly of other things.

With this single passage, Laurence demonstrates what happens when a woman is available for women of other lands to approach; she also shows that the many people who defend these mutilations as mere “traditions” do not realize the pain these women undergo in their most purely female functions. Yet we see the courage and perseverance of the women in spite of it all. Self-pity is never part of Laurence’s own baggage, and she recognizes a certain heroism in these women who have so much to endure but complain so little.

Her sense of the plight of the children again reflects her feminine point of view. She learns that one of the camp followers “Asha . . . about eight years old with a curiously vacant and withdrawn look” is a child prostitute. Laurence gives the unkempt, dirty little girl a comb, the only thing she ever asked for; during the months the family travelled with their camp, she frets over how to help the child. She does nothing because there is no way to take the child out of the situation, and to interfere would only make things worse:

But Asha’s half-wild, half-timid face with its ancient eyes will remain with me always, a reproach and a question.

Typically feminine, she internalizes the plight of these people. Her response to the children of Africa is always maternal, womanly, and compassionate:

Malaria is the largest child-killer in all Africa . . . the children under six . . . are most afflicted, and it was these young ones whom I found hardest to look at. . . . I turned away, unable to meet those eyes. . . . To me, it seemed that these children died pointlessly, and vanished as though they had never been, like pebbles thrown into a dark and infinite well.

This is an especially feminine image, a Demeter sense of death as a devouring Hades or even Chronos — death is not so much a brutal antagonist as men tend to see it.<sup>2</sup> It is rather like a return to the unconscious or to non-being. The children seem to have flickered into consciousness only to sink back, to be re-immersed in the dark waters of origin.

It is Margaret Laurence’s response as a woman and a mother that gives the following passage its depth and poignancy:

Driving along the Awareh-Hargeisa road, we saw two burden camels laden with the crescent-shaped hutframes and the bundled mats. They were halted by the roadside, and as we drew near, we saw one of the beasts slide to its knees, sunken in the apathy of thirst and exhaustion. Beside them, squatting in the sand, was a

woman, a young woman, her black headscarf smeared with dust. She must have possessed, once, a tenderly beautiful face. Now her face was drawn and pinched. In her hands she held an empty tin cup. She did not move at all, or ask for water. Despair keeps its own silence. Her brown robe swayed in the wind. She carried a baby slung across one hip. The child's face was quiet, too, its head lolling in the heavy heat of the sun. We had a little water left in our spare tank, and so we stopped. She did not say a word, but she did something then which I have never been able to forget.

She held the cup for the child to drink first.

She was careful not to spill a drop. Afterward, she brushed a hand lightly across the child's mouth, then licked her palm so that no moisture would be wasted.

To her, I must have seemed meaningless, totally unrelated to herself. How could it have been otherwise? I had never had to coax the lagging camels on, when they would have preferred to stop and rest and die. But what I felt as I looked into her face, was undeniable and it was not pity. It was something entirely different, some sense of knowing in myself what her anguish had been and would be, as she watched her child's life seep away for the lack of water to keep it alive. For her, this was the worst that Jilal drought could bring. In all of life there was nothing worse than this.

I quote this haunting passage in its entirety because it not only shows her depth as a human being and as a woman but is also exemplary of her superb prose style, which keeps her vision from ever becoming sentimental. She emphasizes the complete fatigue and inertia of the small group through the details of the camel that "slides" and "sinks." This stillness and the poignant stasis of despair in the once "tenderly beautiful" face carry the first full paragraph. The starkly juxtaposed affirmation of the mother's love for her child, the self-sacrifice, is contained in the two one-sentence paragraphs which formally centralize the depth and beauty of the young woman's selfless devotion to her baby. I think this passage demonstrates John Baxter's assertion that Margaret Laurence is as much a master of the plain style as Shakespeare was of the Elizabethan.<sup>3</sup> In the last paragraph Laurence herself not only experiences this maternal anguish but also sees herself from the mother's point of view as a being light years away from her plight. It is this constant sense of feeling with her characters, yet moving outside of them to the universal human condition, that gives all of Laurence's works their archetypal depth, their numinosity.

Laurence thus brings to this male-dominated genre of the travelogue the freshness of a typically feminine sensitivity, what Nancy Chodorow calls the more "permeable-ego-membrane" of the woman, who wants not only to describe the natives objectively, but also to get actually into their skins, to feel with them their subjective and internal sense of reality. By filtering her experience through a finely honed analytical mind that rests on a rich, insightful, and sensitive feminine sensibility, Laurence takes the travelogue into an unexpected and new

dimension. We experience her portraits more complexly, more subjectively, and hence more fully.

**A**LTHOUGH HER AFRICAN FICTION features mostly male protagonists, the men's psychic ground of being is the world of women; feminine symbols usually carry the theme. In *This Side Jordan*, both male protagonists are driven away from and out of their pasts by fear of certain faces of the feminine. Johnnie Kestoe is repelled by the pregnancy of his wife Miranda, which seems to trigger in him the horrible memory of his own mother dying from an abortion. He rejects the world of the feminine — *eros*, relating, bonding, empathy. He prefers a hierarchical world that keeps women and the natives beneath him so he need not deal with their feelings but only with their role. He is most comfortable with the idea of the native women as low-level, faceless, interchangeable creatures of nature. When he actually has intercourse with a native girl, he sees to his horror that he has in essence mutilated her with his penis, ripped open her sewn organs. He has torn apart her clitoridectomy, and she becomes a metaphor of the suffering, voiceless, passive African continent, unavailable to the white man except through mutilation. This African woman also reflects the low-level anima of Johnnie, shows that his feminine principle is virtually undifferentiated. Johnnie's own wife Miranda (though blundering in her attempts) shows him the path that he must follow if he is going to relate with the natives other than as a hierarchical superior. Though naively Western, Miranda does at least somewhat connect with the natives and it is important that she gives birth to a girl; her husband must face the matrilineal, feminine values as they proliferate in his own house. The novel's ending foreshadows Johnnie's future; he will be pulled back from a proud, pathologically masculine and alienated self into a feminine matrix or ground of feeling.

Nathaniel Amegbe, on the other hand, needs to fight his way clear of a devouring mother in the form of his people and the African mother/river who call him back to his village. Laurence gives these forces feminine gender — metaphorically in that the pleading river is called his mother. His wife Aya reflects the pathological side of the matrilineal, Demeter/Persephone side of woman.<sup>5</sup> She pleads to have her baby delivered among the women folk, a desire that Laurence makes understandable but also irrational and dangerous by discussing the horrors of primitive delivery. Nathaniel's victory when Aya decides to go to the hospital is ambivalent; the feminine has lost some of its own more primordial alliances in order to go with the African masculine in its heroic ego/consciousness development as it assimilates Western masculine consciousness. The term "assimilates" is important here because Nathaniel seems the most developed of the male protagonists. He never loses his roots in his own culture, and that ground seems

healthier, sounder than Johnnie's. Nathaniel prays to a Black Madonna and his whole sense of reality seems richly syncretistic and polytheistic, reflecting, I believe, Laurence's own metaphysics.<sup>6</sup> Aya's giving birth to a son, of course, signals Nathaniel's own deeper connections with another type of masculinity that is highly futuristic.

The characters who are not part of the future (like Cora and James) have dead children, who highlight the meaning of the fertility of the two protagonists' wives. Children of course carry the archetype of the future, and the ending of the novel points towards a merging of traditionally separate realities that will ultimately constellate into a pattern that Laurence does not define. Nathaniel has changed a good deal; Johnnie's changes seem rather *in potentia*. The novel's values and open-ended form reflect what Ann and Barry Ulanov would call a highly developed "matriarchal superego":

Matriarchal clarities are found more than created, discovered in the joining of ambivalent responses to situations that require mixed reactions. We are far now from the certainties of determinism and universal law patriarchal values. We are in the indeterminate tonalities of lived experience . . . the "both-and" style of the matriarchal superego is characterized by its openness to a variety of conflicting viewpoints . . . and a widely inclusive judgment rather than a narrow discriminating one.<sup>7</sup>

*The Tomorrow-Tamer* also reflects a structure that sees the feminine as a ground of being. The first story, "The Drummer of All the World," features a young white man who longs for his beloved African nurse, who suckled him and soothed him in the dark when his own parents ignored his fears. His loss of her seems to cut him loose from his moorings forever, as he drifts about in Europe dreaming of "the beauty of African women." The last image in the book is beautifully archetypal — an older native woman through whom the goddess Demeter shows herself:

Mammii Ama straightened her plump shoulders. Like a royal palm she stood, rooted in magnificence, spreading her arms like fronds, to shelter the generations.

The tree whose roots grow deep and whose branches (arms) become as the brooding hen's is an image that many women are generating now to express the powerful endurance and protectiveness of older women.<sup>8</sup> It is an image of incredible beauty and naturalness, reflecting matrilineal connection and a sense of existential anchoredness that older women embody for themselves and the culture. The African matriarch is an unchanging source and future for her people. The book begins with a male cut off from and yearning for the mother and ends with an image of the permanence of the mother.

Thus Laurence gives tribute to the feminine principle throughout her works on Africa. Nor does she shrink from naming the negative aspects of the

feminine principle, such as the women of Aya's family who would more or less eat Nathaniel alive if they could. Also, the lack of education among the African women makes them a dreary and grim weight that the often lonely and more advanced African men must carry in their quest for national development. Nathaniel works at a school for only boys; and although he never directly sees the connection, the reader sees the ironies when he wonders why his wife is involved with an evangelical, ignorant religious group. Nevertheless, Laurence never lets us look away from the suffering of the African women, and for me an important part of her African works is that she speaks for a voiceless group, from the mute suffering of the child prostitute and the mutilated women of Somaliland to the puzzled, frightened wife of Nathaniel who is being scurried into Western civilization with no true understanding of it at all.

IT IS IN HER MANAWAKA NOVELS that the full breadth and scope of Margaret Laurence's sensibility most comes to life. For the sake of brevity, I will confine myself to configurations of adult feminine archetypes for the remainder of this essay. I would only point out that I think the stories in *A Bird in the House* accomplish several kinds of exorcism/revelation without which perhaps Laurence would not have been able to write her later novels. Vanessa looks squarely at the psychological brutality of her grandfather; he is the face of the negative World Father, the patriarchal mindset that all women fight against in some form and at some time. Vanessa is able to feel compassion for him finally — she comes even to admire his strength. Laurence develops his shadow figure of failure, Uncle Dan, and finally shows that the grandfather can and does change. He would not let her mother go to school although she had the highest marks in the province. He finally breaks his other daughter Edna, chiefly furious because she is just like him; she loses the man she most loved because she has so internalized her father's pride that she cannot reach out to her lover. Although he has crushed the psyches and blocked the development of his wife and two daughters, he in the end sells bonds so that Vanessa can go to school. This in no way lessens the crimes he has committed against the other women. Yet Vanessa does see him as a changing person and it is important for her animus development that she recognize the potential for change in even the most rigid personality. The collection of stories also portrays the significance of woman's often unquestioned and unconscious feminine ground of being, the Mother/Aunt/Grandmother faces from among which we choose our future. More than that the book reflects in Vanessa's mother our collective mothers asking their daughters to go forth as their delegates, to break the umbilical cord away from a solely feminine, sex-typed role in life. They ask us with their *lives*, as Laurence so poignantly portrays.

Perhaps the most fascinating amplification of an archetypal feminine that Laurence develops occurs in the polarities embodied by Rachel of *A Jest of God* and Stacey of *The Fire-Dwellers*. These two faces of women are present even in the earliest Greek myths.<sup>9</sup> They reflect woman defined as she relates to man. One type of woman orients herself entirely towards man and she becomes at varying times Aphrodite, Demeter, Hera: his lover, mother of his children, his wife. The other sort of woman flees from man and defines herself as Artemis or Persephone. Persephone is the eternal "puella,"<sup>10</sup> the mother's daughter; and Artemis lives in a purely matriarchal realm, killing men who enter her realm. Pluto and Actaeon are typical of the obtrusive role of men in the totally feminine world of Persephone and Artemis. Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* portrays twin sisters named Amoret and Belpheobe who are taken, respectively, to Aphrodite and Artemis to be raised. Amoret is raised only for wifedom as a sort of "anima" hook for male projection. She is too passive, fearful, does not know how to simply be a friend to men or women. She gets captured by a professional adulterer (a courtly lover) and must be rescued by a more balanced, active female figure, Britomart. Spenser shows that Belpheobe on the other hand is a sort of teaser, riding bare-thighed through the woods, never giving any favours to Timias who hopelessly follows her about. He, in fact, just sort of withers up. Belpheobe is cold, vain, and though Spenser gives typical Renaissance lip service to the glory of her virginity, he clearly finds her distasteful. This archetypal pair emerges again in modern male-authored literature in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. Ursula is the good woman, naturally formed for wifedom; she and her lover go south where she will warm him to her hearth. Yet he mourns for the more "true" friendship of another man — so Ursula like Amoret (and Aphrodite/Demeter/Hera) supposedly *cannot* provide the intellectual and moral companionship that a male friend can give. Lawrence makes his Artemis figure much darker than Spenser's. Ursula's sister Gudrun destroys Gerald, taking him north where he literally freezes to death. Her independence of men is seen as devouring, killing. Her art work is described as abortions. She is sterile, anti-life.

These are male fantasies. Spenser and Lawrence mainly treat these women in terms of how they affect men as types of anima figures. Laurence takes the same images and renders them from the woman's point of view. (She says that she knew somehow that these two women were sisters, Stacey and Rachel.)

Stacey is like the Aphrodite/Demeter/Hera faces of woman. She begins her love relationship with Mac as a type of Aphrodite; after their marriage, when we first meet her, she has slowly metamorphosed into the Demeter/mother and Hera/wife archetypes. Like all Laurence's women, she goes to a body of water to connect with her own deepest self. There she finds her "flower boy," whose offer of fleeing responsibility with him makes her realize how deeply committed she is to her children and Mac. As a resolution to the novel Laurence gives Stacey an

Athena kind of development. Athena is like a sister-anima, an often rather militant and helpful companion to man. Contrary to Spenser and D. H. Lawrence, Laurence shows that the woman who chooses wifedom as a major source of her identity can individuate and become a friend and companion to her husband. The novel does not fall into the weary pattern of so many feminist novels that insist the woman leave the home or take a job to become a person. I think Stacey has the hardest job of self-actualization of all Laurence's women. The constant distractions and interruptions that a housewife lives with make it easy for her to fall into a peculiarly feminine kind of sin. Many women theologians are insisting now that pride is more usually a masculine sin and that women sin oppositely through

triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center of focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason — in short underdevelopment or negation of the self.<sup>11</sup>

By keeping her protagonist at home, Laurence is, I think, affirming the need and worth of feminine values in a masculine world. Stacey is the connector, the harmonizer in a family consisting of three predominantly male generations in one house. The metaphor of fire seems an important one in delineating her place in a world dominated by masculine values — the news media constantly announce potential or actual destruction of Stacey's world by fire.

An alchemical fantasy deepens and helps explain the elemental basis of the human psyche as Laurence develops it. Alchemists identify the masculine elements as fire, air, and sulphur (a hot demonic substance); the feminine elements are water, earth, and salt (too much makes you bitter, but a little salt smarts and "wises you up").<sup>12</sup> Mercury is the element that connects salt and sulphur, the imaginative element that connects the masculine and the feminine in this scheme. The overweight Stacey perhaps begins with too much earth — she has become too much Hestia, the goddess of the hearth.<sup>13</sup> Stacey connects with her own watery depths through Luke, and the salty wisdom she derives from that connection helps her to imagine and understand Mac. Mac is burning up with frustrated ambition and must connect with little Duncan who has been delegated the "inferior" masculine principle in the family. Duncan almost drowns (too much water, he needs more connection with the father) and is carried, loved for the first time by his father at the end of the novel. The novel ends with Stacey's youngest daughter finally speaking, and speaking comes the hardest to the side of the feminine for which Stacey stands. It is hard for the feminine in a masculine-patterned world to speak, to name herself, to find herself. But when she does she not only establishes self but also gives self and connection to those around her.



Rachel, too, can be seen in archetypal terms as going finally, for the first time in her life, to the deepest waters of the self, there to take her chances, to take risks in Vancouver beside the Pacific Ocean. Unlike Spenser's and Lawrence's figures, she does not finally hurt anyone, except herself, with her cold, critical view of life. She carries the matriarchal world with her, taking her mother with her; but now she is no longer the Persephone/daughter,<sup>14</sup> but the mother herself, in command. Leaving Manawaka is in itself leaving a matriarchal realm of the known and comforting. Had she stayed, she would have risked falling more deeply into a purely feminine world, with Calla. It is important to see that Calla is *not* a repellent character. She is plain, even a little dull; but she does genuinely love Rachel other than erotically. But Rachel cannot stay in one place anymore; she needs to change more than just internally like Stacey. The novel is open-ended, but one feels that whatever happens, she has escaped the traps she made for herself.

Stacey has too much impinging on her life, and her task is to order and rank priorities. Like Psyche sorting the seeds,<sup>15</sup> this is often the task of a woman who orients herself to a man and her home. Rachel, on the other hand, is spiritually dying from lack of connections in the real world; she becomes pregnant with her own internality. One of the appealing things about Rachel is her rich inner life, but it is unanswered by her outer world. Interestingly, in each novel, the protagonist envies her sister's life. Each needs the balance the opposite other symbolizes.

**L**AURENCE'S DEVELOPMENT AND TURNING inside out of these polar feminine archetypes suggests that the right side of the brain (left-handedness, the feminine, the dark and irrational) suddenly after thousands of years of evolution has begun speaking, explaining itself to the left side. Just as Laurence spoke for the African women, she has spoken for two very "oppressed" archetypes of our culture and literary heritage. Stacey and Rachel also show how Laurence intuits the advent of middle-age as a "boundary" time of new identification for women. It is important to see that unlike two other protagonists of Laurence, Morag of *The Diviners* and Hagar of *The Stone Angel*, neither Stacey nor Rachel really take the risks of moving from one lifestyle to another. In contrast, Hagar and Morag both accept a lack of security and a life of hard work (supporting themselves both economically and emotionally) to secure the independence and autonomy that take them into new situations and give them opportunity for psychic expansion. Since neither Stacey nor Rachel essentially changes her life-style, her change must be internal so as not to jostle or worry her dependents. (Rachel does move, but takes her mother along.) Both make these internal changes through connections with dynamic animus figures that the women internalize although the men themselves are ephemeral figures in their

lives like Hermes, the messenger god. They are both typically feminine in the ease with which they assimilate the values/personalities of others. Hagar and Vanessa's Aunt Edna are antithetical in their tight hard ego boundaries which reflect the negative animus influence of their fathers.

A sympathetic rendition of the Medusa, Hagar of *The Stone Angel* re-tells an old story from a feminine point of view. She corrects the myopic masculine vision that tends only to see woman as she affects him and as he hence imagines she is. I will mention here only a few important distinctions between Hagar and such old women as Chaucer's Wyf of Bath or Joyce Cary's Sarah Monday. Older women have often been seen as revoltingly lecherous, spending their days and nights plotting how sexually to entrap various men. Male authors depict the women as feeling great sadness over losing their sexual charms. Hagar, however, still feels nice-looking in certain dresses, and clearly needs no man around to tell her so. In fact, independence and autonomy are her most impassioned desires. Hagar's problem is a sort of "animus-bound" pride that makes her reject feminine relatedness, as embodied by her daughter-in-law Doris who is truly concerned about Hagar. Again we see the image of water. Hagar has become not just earth but cold marble and too much salt, bitter. Afraid of being placed in a nursing home, she escapes to a deserted building by the sea where she learns how she has destroyed others through her pride; when dying, she wrests a cup of water<sup>16</sup> from Doris at the end. Although she is still quite stubborn and prideful, Hagar symbolically accepts feminine relatedness from the hands of a woman she sees as less beneath her than before. She has moved to a healthy Demeter role with her young female hospital room-mate shortly before her death. Laurence shows an old woman interested in metaphysics, younger women, her children, the meaning of the past. Cary's Sarah Monday dumps her children behind like Defoe's Moll Flanders. Chaucer's Wyf sees life only in terms of male/female relationships. This is not how women imagine old age for themselves.

Hagar is one face of the daughter with no mother. Hagar had no ameliorating feminine to save her from internalizing the harshness, severity, even cruelty of her father. She is Persephone trapped forever underground with the depressing, disconnecting masculine values of Hades. In some ways she is redeemed by becoming a daughter, a dependent to Doris. She signals her sudden awareness of a matrilineal alliance with Doris when she tugs off her family ring and gives it to Doris to give to Tina, the granddaughter.

Thus we see Hagar's metaphysical dilemmas, not just her assessment of outside forces like the Wyf of Bath's listing of lovers and her wistful hoping (through her story) that men will love her soul more than her body. Hagar's psychic quest is to break through to an affirmation of feminine values, eros, relatedness. She does not need a man to establish her self worth. In a sense she always has loved herself — her own ferocious wit and observations nourish her soul. She is remi-

niscent of the older Lillian Hellman, or May Sarton's Hilary Stevens — we see inside the face of Medusa or Hecate, an aged and not-to-be denied Fury. As her son says in despair and pride, "She's a holy terror." There is a holiness in her life energy and a kind of holy terror indeed in her impassioned expression of self. Like the protagonist in Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle," Hagar's consciousness is evolving; she is learning to her last breath — which is a truly marvellous affirmation of life. She embodies the older woman as Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* defines her, a self-proclaimed Crone.

Often one can recognize the worth of an artist by the quality and type of critics she/he attracts. As a Renaissance scholar, I can attest to the humane openness of Spenserians as opposed to the more hierarchical and elitist Miltonists. There are several brilliant and insightful essays on *The Diviners*.<sup>17</sup> As Thomas remarks, it is an epic work.<sup>18</sup> We finally have in Morag the feminine counterpart of Odysseus. She carries a lot more burdens than he does, including the whole metaphysical baggage of the twentieth century, but she comes home more surely and enduringly than he. Morag constellates a new archetypal feminine.

Morag, like Hagar, is motherless; but like Jane Eyre, she is fortunate enough to have some surrogate mothers. Prin is a fascinating study of a woman trapped into a purely Hestian or domestic role, but not by a man or society so much as her own limited intelligence and lack of will. She spins herself a cocoon of fat that slowly submerges her psyche into total non-individuation. She is one of the terrifying (especially for women) faces of the feminine and represents the way that the flesh itself can swallow up the feminine spirit. Buckle's mother in *The Fire-Dwellers* is blind, also hugely obese, and drinks wine all day from a teapot — another rendition of psychic nothingness that women fear. Women can retire from life into a domestic setting more easily than men and can slowly drift, slip into oblivion. Yet Prin is nevertheless a grounding force in Morag's childhood and her very fleshiness is an embodiment of the great good mother; Neumann says this figure is usually mostly torso with tiny legs and heads with no eyes.<sup>19</sup> Prin apologizes to Morag that she is not a more complete person, a better mother:

"But now — I don't know how to be any different, like. That's why I don't know, look after you better, sort of. I'm that sorry, Morag."

Morag is crying. Holding onto Prin's awful fat belly wrapped around in the brown wraparound, Prin's good good good.

"Prin — I never meant! I never!"

Prin wipes Morag's eyes with fat warm hands.

The earthy, brown, fat warmth here is typical of the Hestian image that grounds all children in their beginning years. Ella Gerson's mother provides the more individuated mothering that Morag needs and she realizes that she has missed her mother as profoundly as her father; Mrs. Gerson is important not only for

her "ability to reach out her arms and hold people, both literally and figuratively. It is also her strength." Mrs. Gerson also teaches Morag to read Russian revolutionary authors, and so she sows the seeds of rebellion that finally explode when Brooke insults Jules' Indian heritage.

Thomas finds Morag's ten years with Brooke amazing, marvelling that "such superficiality could hold her for ten years."<sup>20</sup> Yet Brooke is an extension of Morag's need to assume a Persephone role as she grows up. Brooke like Pluto holds her in a psychic underworld of depression. He treats her like a child with no past, and part of their split is asserting her own fathers against his fatherhood by speaking in Christie's rhetorical forms. It is important for a woman to have been a daughter, a Persephone, and in orphaned Morag's case her marriage with Brooke is rather like a protracted grounding in the father's underworld.<sup>21</sup> Jules is the dynamic, moving, loving animus who releases her to the roving, independent woman she becomes.

He releases her to become a Demeter figure herself, and it is this role that provides her with a continuity of roots for the rest of her life. One critic says that Morag hits rock bottom in the same way all Canadian protagonists do before rebuilding.<sup>22</sup> This is not true. Because she is a mother, she cannot and does not ever really give in and wallow in her despair as a male protagonist might do. She makes her despair for Pique's sake as when she visits her artist lover's home and sees his wife and children. Laurence's women are strongly enduring through an almost infinite flexibility that is probably the base of feminine strength and resilience. Vanessa's mother is the most quiet example of this. Matrilineal roots are the ground of being for women, and Pique is part of this matrix for Morag.

THE ENDURING CHTHONIC is imaged in the beginning of the novel by the river that flows both ways. Morag's form of water makes me hope that she will be the matrilineal antidote for Pique whose ancestress Piquette dies by fire, a sinister foreshadowing. But Laurence always insists that we must go *through* the fire to become whole. She in fact reiterates the idea of the Fortunate Fall that a redemptive growth and wholeness come from engaging in struggles and taking risks; from a feminine and psychological point of view, exposure to the fire of patriarchy hardens and articulates the self. Laurence shows innocence is at best a vacuous state (Morag's first novel on Lilac) and at worst is painful to others (Miranda of *This Side Jordan* embarrasses and alienates Africans in her lack of decorum and awareness). The fall is into hard work and complexity. But using the resources of the feminine principle can make the redemptive quest for achievement and self easier. Morag shows how one can sort of flow around obstacles; a good example is her stay at Vancouver when Pique

is born. She lets life eddy and push around her as she accomplishes her goal of becoming a mother; the spiteful landlady, the economic difficulties, none of this stops her. Laurence makes a point of Morag's astrological sign of Cancer, a sign of sensitive water. This flowing dynamism of Morag, her forward movingness, are perhaps the most important aspects of this feminine archetype of the woman artist. Morag embodies a type of soul development common to many modern women.

But the variation in her protagonists reflects Laurence's knowledge that feminine individuation is pluralistic. I suspect that Laurence's own openness to life is what gives each work its own breathtaking new and unique sensibility. So far she has never written the same novel twice; each of Laurence's novels traces a highly individual yet universal type of development. Laurence's polytheism is best expressed in *The Diviners*. Each critic finds new diviners within the novel, and it is important that Laurence gives mystical skill and vision *via* diverse routes to each character. The actual diviner is Royland who has left his fire-and-brimstone religion behind him as he searches for water in the ground (think alchemically here). Christie divines people through their garbage, and he knows more truths than anyone in Manawaka. The divining "medium" or stuff through which she/he sees reality becomes a sort of existential anchor for each character. Morag's sense of continuity is through her matrilineal roots and through her writing.

Laurence tells us a singular truth about the woman artist — that she must be alone to create — and answers an age-old query, "Why aren't there more women artists?" The child Pique's interruptions of and resentments towards her mother's writings, the many kinds of care that only that one child needs (stories to build past/soul/myth; nursing during illness; daily affection and care: time and energy consumers) demonstrate the difficulty a woman faces trying to find time and energy to create. Pique is necessary to Morag's own development; but like all existential anchors, there is the cost of commitment. She is glad that her lover Dan McRaith does not live with her and leaves periodically. But her life has great continuity internally. It is through her art that she remembers the past, makes connections.

*The Diviners* also establishes the kind of men that this type of woman connects with and needs. Margaret Laurence creates two of the more powerful and memorable portraits of men I have seen in literature by women. In different ways Jules and Christie are the garbage, the refuse of their society. The effervescent, mercurial artist Jules Tonnerre is totally unconcerned with immortalizing himself, even calls his work "crap." He teaches Morag that the drive to create is in its finest form unselfish, impersonal, an expression of love as deep and abiding as Jules' love for his father. Morag learns from Christie more than is possible to sum up. He teaches her for one thing that no matter how entrapped a person

may look to others, the mind need never stop questing. He teaches her the power of the analytical mind that can literally cut through garbage to meaning. I think he is the first layer of the dynamic animus that keeps her restless and moving. (Every woman needs an outspoken anarchist in her childhood!)

As an American I am curious as to what in Canadian culture is producing women writers like Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Gabrielle Roy. Several hypotheses occur to me. Canadian literature is not imbued with the American "go west" motif, the idea that geographic movement causes growth. The separation motif in American literature encourages concentration on the Oedipal complex, the act of severing oneself from one's roots as the primary way to find identity. To stay in one place, to return to that place, as is more possible in Canadian thought, is to insist that one can and must go home again.<sup>23</sup> This encourages what some psychoanalysts would call concentration on the pre-Oedipal concerns of the female child who cannot and does not separate from the mother so much or in the same way as the male child. Also, the Canadian woman author seems to create because she wants to and according to her own standards as she envisions life. Laurence, it is important to note, creates form to carry her vision. Perhaps since the various cultures in Canada have not amalgamated so much as in America, Canadians may have more respect for many ways of becoming; Canadian experience would allow the feminine sensibility more scope perhaps in expressing its "both/and," more polytheistic view of reality. Perhaps the lack of a strong, national image has discouraged the more narrow sexual stereotyping that American women fight against. No matter what the explanation, I think Margaret Laurence's body of literature will take its place among that of the great women writers of all time like Jane Austen, Colette, and Virginia Woolf. She is re-visioning what it means to be a woman, and her heroines are changing the very structure of characterization in world literature.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Clara Thomas, *Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 12.
- <sup>2</sup> For a good discussion of the difference between the way men and women view death see Kurt W. Back, "Metaphors as Test of Personal Philosophy of Aging," *Sociological Focus*, 5 (Autumn 1971), 1-8.
- <sup>3</sup> "The Stone Angel: Shakespearian Bearings," *The Compass*, 1 (August 1977), 15. Another critic who particularly appreciates this passage is George Woodcock in his helpful "Many Solitudes: The Travel Writings of Margaret Laurence," *The Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), 3-13.
- <sup>4</sup> "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," *Woman, Culture, and Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 43-67.
- <sup>5</sup> This mother/daughter bonding can become regressive, inward-turning, in its rejec-

- tion of masculine values. Or, in other words, feminine bonding can cause one-sidedness, a lack of balance.
- <sup>6</sup> David Miller, one of the more visionary of modern theologians, says that "A polytheistic theology will be a feminine theology (Rosemary Reuther), but in the manner of all the Goddesses — the thousand daughters of Ocean and Tethys, to name only a few. By being many, these Goddesses avoid a monotheistically chauvinistic view of the feminine," *The New Polytheism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 74.
- <sup>7</sup> Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 154.
- <sup>8</sup> A clinical psychologist who has studied depth images of female patients also finds that women identify their deepest selves with trees; see Katherine Bradway, "Hestia and Athena in the Analysis of Women," *Inward Light*, 41 (Spring 1978), 36.
- <sup>9</sup> An interesting analysis of how the Greek goddesses emerge in Canadian literature complements my study of Laurence's works; see the chapter "Ice Women vs. Earth Mothers" in Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), pp. 195-213.
- <sup>10</sup> Linda Leonard has authored a series of articles on what she calls the "puella" or woman fixated into the daughter role, an immature woman. Her article most relevant to my essay is "Puella Patterns," *Psychological Perspectives*, 9 (Fall 1978), 127-47.
- <sup>11</sup> Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine Viewpoint," in *The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective*, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 165.
- <sup>12</sup> A difficult but rewarding work that elucidates the connections between depth psychology and alchemy for women is Robert Grinnell's *Alchemy in a Modern Woman* (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1973). A complementary study to mine that examines the earth, air, fire, water elements in the novels is by David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), 31-40. I read this essay after finishing mine and find it interesting that he finds the masculine elements of air and fire predominantly in the Aphrodite/Artemis duality.
- <sup>13</sup> Readers will have recognized Demeter's name as the mother half of the mother/daughter Demeter/Persephone dyad on which the Eleusinian rites are based. The Hestia/Vesta archetype is not as well known. Hestia is the hearth fire goddess who warms, contains, and holds the family together. She is symbolic of the process that supports human life. The earth, the number four (wholeness), the circle — all these images are important to this archetype. For a fuller treatment of Hestia, see my article, "Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth: An Oppressed Archetype," *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (1979), pp. 55-77. See Bradway's excellent article cited in note 8 for an analysis of how Hestia manifests in modern women's psyches.
- <sup>14</sup> A short but very insightful essay on Rachel as Persephone is by Warren Stevenson, "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in *A Jest of God*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1 (1971), 120-23.
- <sup>15</sup> This is the first task Venus sets Psyche as she sets about seeking for Amor, her lover and animus figure; see Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956).

- <sup>16</sup> The cup is also a communion cup, part of the Christian imagery that underlies the novel as traced by several critics. Thomas in *Margaret Laurence* gives an inspired and thorough reading of this imagery; see especially p. 49.
- <sup>17</sup> Though I do not agree with all her ideas, Sherrill Grace's essay "A Portrait of the Artist as Laurence Hero," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), illustrates the polish and depth of the critics who write on *The Diviners*. Another excellent essay is Ildiko de Papp Carrington's "Tales in the Telling': *The Diviners* as Fiction about Fiction," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 9 (1977-78), 154-69.
- <sup>18</sup> She works this out through contrast and comparison to *Paradise Lost* in her chapter on this novel in *The Manawaka World*.
- <sup>19</sup> See his chapter on the great good mother in *The Great Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).
- <sup>20</sup> *The Manawaka World*, p. 151.
- <sup>21</sup> For an interesting discussion of Pluto/Hades as an animus figure who can hold woman trapped in a peculiarly feminine underground of depression, see Patricia Berry, "The Rape of Demeter/Persephone and Neurosis," *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (1975), pp. 186-99.
- <sup>22</sup> Sherrill E. Grace, "Crossing Jordan: Time and Memory in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," *World Literature Written in English*, 16 (1977), 335.
- <sup>23</sup> Morag actually says this in *The Diviners*, p. 302. The importance of the family, the Canadian emphasis on it as an ontological structure in self conception, also gives women writers access and perhaps permission to write about those things women have always known more about than men. David L. Jeffrey develops the importance of the family in *The Stone Angel* although like many male critics, he does not see that for women the health of the self concept seems to depend upon the extent to which she can affirm her matrilineal roots. The patrilineal roots are important, but not as emphasized in women's fiction or autobiographies. Jeffrey's article is otherwise very helpful, "Biblical Hermeneutic and Family History in Contemporary Canadian Fiction: Wiebe and Laurence," *Mosaic*, 11 (Spring 1978).

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