

Water Symbolism
in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence

A Thesis
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degree of Master of Arts

by
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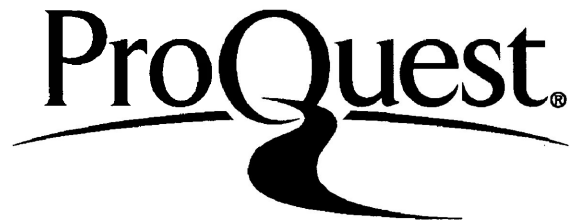
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Abstract

Margaret Laurence makes frequent reference to the element, water, and also uses water-related words in her fiction; often these convey symbolic meanings. This thesis is based on a study of Laurence's five novels: This Side Jordan, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners. In these novels fifty water-related words are used a total of over five hundred times. Frequently the symbolism involved in the use of many of these words is directed towards one of several specific functions. The purpose of this thesis is to present an analysis of these functions. Out of the more than twenty possible symbolic functions of water itself and water-related words in the five novels, three functions have been chosen for analysis because of their obvious predominance. Laurence's use of water symbols or water-related symbols to depict the four major periods in man's life is discussed in Chapter I. Chapter II emphasizes her use of this symbolism with regard to the survival and regenerative forces in man's life. In Chapter III Laurence's use

of similar symbolism to assist in the creation of characterization is emphasized. All these functions Laurence has incorporated successfully into the weaving of her fiction, making the symbolism intrinsic in the sense that it does not intrude upon the reader; however, the presence of the water symbolism and all the other symbolism in the novels stimulates the reader who either consciously, unconsciously or subconsciously interprets the symbols and so gains a new depth of understanding and appreciation for the writing.

Introduction

Margaret Laurence like Gabrielle Roy makes frequent reference to the element, water, itself and uses many water-related words in her novels. Perhaps the lack of lakes, rivers and the sea in the native environment of these writers has created in them an obsession with water images which appear so frequently in their writing. In Laurence's novels This Side Jordan, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners there appear fifty words such as "river", "water", "fish", "lake", "sea", "rain", "tears", etc., used over five hundred times. These words are employed mainly in descriptive passages and have both negative and positive connotations. About forty times they are used simply as literary devices, usually as similes and metaphors. Much more frequently they convey symbolic meanings. Thus water symbolism becomes a main ingredient in Laurence's novels with specific functions to perform.

To establish a frame of reference for the study of Laurence's water symbolism it is necessary to review some existing definitions of symbolism in general.

It must first be made clear that there is a definite difference between the terms "image" and "symbol". Herbert Musurillo in his discussion about "Poetry and Symbolic Communication" defines the two terms in the following way:

Any manipulation of the sensuous in the literature may, in general, be called symbolic, and when the term "symbol" is used, what is uppermost in one's mind is the further dimension or meaning implied, especially if it be of a philosophical or theological sort. The term "image", however, usually stresses the aspect of sensuous picture; at the same time, since in poetry images most often have a further reference (the vehicle is said to carry a tenor, in the terminology of I. A. Richards) it is easy to see how an image might be said to be symbolic. Again, symbols tend to be more explicit, whereas imagery may be "sunken" and barely suggested. The actual persons portrayed in a piece of poetry or literature are not correctly discussed under the heading of imagery; they may, however, be symbolic.¹

For the purpose of this study it can then be concluded that an image is simply a picture, or description that creates a representation of something in the reader's mind, but does not necessarily go beyond that. A symbol, however, has greater dimension and a range of meaning far beyond itself.

Other definitions develop the concept of the symbol. Webster's New World Dictionary, for example, states that "a symbol is something that stands for or represents another thing; especially, an object used to represent something abstract; emblem; as, the dove

is a symbol of peace, the cross is the symbol of Christianity." Philip Wheelwright declares that "a symbol, in general, is a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself."²

Goethe indicates that "in a true symbol the particular represents the universal, not as a dream or shadow, but as the living and instantaneous revelation of the unfathomable."³ When Coleridge speaks about symbols he does not mean "a metaphor or allegory or any other figure of speech or form of fancy, but an actual and essential part of that, the whole of which it represents."⁴

Conversely Edmund Wilson defines symbolism "as an attempt by carefully studied means - a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors - to communicate unique personal feelings."⁵ Northrop Frye begins the essay, "Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols", in his Anatomy of Criticism by stating that "a word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference (which is what a symbol is usually taken to mean) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis."⁶

All these definitions do agree that a symbol represents something else. This "something else" is

often abstract and has some larger meaning than the symbol itself. It can be universal, if the symbol conveying it is commonly known by all men. Northrop Frye who uses the term "archetype" for these universal symbols mentions "those of food and drink, of the quest or journey, of light and darkness, and of sexual fulfilment, which would usually take the form of marriage."⁷ For the purpose of this study a universally communicable symbol simply means a symbol that is generally understood, although not necessarily by all men. The definition given by Henry H. H. Remak provides the most useful and succinct frame of reference:

The symbol ... is a concrete object or, more rarely, a living being, organic part of the story, which suggests, however, one or more abstract, invisible elements or ideas giving the story a broader, more universal dimension - a Hintergrundigkeit - whether these rapports were intended by the poet or not.

The symbol is capable of linking up the general with the specific, the universal with the temporal, the eternal with the accidental, the infinite with the finite, the (in philosophical terms) realistic with the nominalistic. A successful, that is poetic, symbol will intimate this nexys through context; it will not articulate it.

Remak shows that in comparison with metaphor and allegory a symbol is more dynamic:

The metaphor remains on the same, usually pragmatic level; the allegory proceeds, in the intention of the author, from the abstract to the concrete, obliging the reader to retrace

the author's steps inversely to get at its meaning; the symbol tends to be born as a particular concretion which the reader may develop and create into an abstraction or abstractions, going in the same direction, most likely, as the author did.

Because the symbol requires an interpreter and because the reader who interprets is allowed to move relatively freely within the given framework, a study of symbolism is productive and satisfying, "making the thoughtful and sensitive reader a cocreator."¹⁰

In the Introduction to his Dictionary of Symbols J. Cirlot refers to the Jungian idea of two aspects of the interpretation of the unconscious: "what the symbol represents in itself (objective interpretation), and what it signifies as a projection or as an individual 'case' (subjective interpretation.)"¹¹ Cirlot himself takes the following position on this Jungian concept:

Objective interpretation is nothing more nor less than understanding. Subjective interpretation is true interpretation: it takes the widest and profoundest meaning of a symbol in any one given moment, and applies it to certain given examples.¹²

Cirlot does remind the reader, however, that in subjective interpretation it is necessary to take into consideration who the interpreter is, because each interpreter will bring his prejudices into the interpretation. He says that "it is here that symbols acquire secondary, accidental and transitory meanings, quite apart from their universal quality."¹³ For example, a Cana-

u

dian Christian could interpret Laurence's water symbolism from the viewpoint of the Christian religion, while a non-Christian from another society might interpret it with a different emphasis. Whereas a glass of water in Hagar's hand on her deathbed in The Stone Angel could relate to the Last Sacrament in Christian interpretation, it might have an entirely different meaning for someone from a different background.

Keeping Cirlot's cautions in mind, this study attempts to follow the previously established guidelines regarding the definitions of symbolism, and to apply objective interpretation through recognition and comprehensive analysis of universal symbols as well as utilizing subjective interpretation within the limits of the given literary context in Laurence's five novels: This Side Jordan, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers and The Diviners. The purpose of this thesis is to present an analysis of the functions of water symbolism in these novels. Out of the more than twenty symbolic functions of water or water-related subjects discovered in the research for this thesis, it has been necessary to restrict this study to three specific symbolic functions. Among those excluded were such symbolic functions as setting the mood through the aid of water symbolism, establishing the tone, and enhancing the presentation of values. As stated earlier,

the symbolic functions chosen for this work are the following: to depict the four major periods in man's life; to emphasize the survival and regenerative forces in man's life; and to assist in the creation of characterization.

Notes

Introduction

¹Herbert Musurillo, Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), p. 3.

²Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington, 1962), p. 26.

³Quoted in Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (New York, 1959), p. 161.

⁴The Statesman's Manual in Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1853), I, pp. 437 - 38.

⁵Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870 - 1930 (New York, 1931), pp. 22 - 23.

⁶Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 71.

⁷Ibid., p. 118.

⁸Henry H. H. Remak, "Vinegar and Water: Allegory and Symbolism in the German Novelle between Keller and Bergengruen," Literary Symbolism: A Symposium, ed. Helmut Rehder (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 37.

⁹Ibid., pp. 37 - 38.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 38.

¹¹J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. xlvi.

¹²Ibid., p. xlvi.

¹³Ibid., p. xlvi.

Chapter I

Functions of Water Symbolism:

Depicting the Four Major Periods in Man's Life

The major function of water symbolism in Laurence's fiction is to depict the four major periods in man's life. Man's life begins with conception and birth, grows to childhood and youth; matures at the midpoint of life into manhood, and declines in old age to death. This cyclic order is repeated over and over as new generations are born while earlier ones decline.

The dominant symbol representing this life cycle of man, which appears in four of the novels, is the river. In The Diviners the river actually flows both ways: backwards to the past and forward to the future. The present moment in the flux is determined by the situation of the person who watches the river. For example, in The Diviners, Morag's present is represented by that part of the river she observes from her kitchen window each morning or from her dock at night. Watching the ripples on the surface of the river move backwards in the wind brings back her past, and watching the flow of the current down the river suggests her future.

Closely related to the river symbolism and reinforcing the idea of the four periods in man's life are the symbols involved with the changes of the four seasons: the changing colours of trees and shrubs and the gradual aging of birds. In addition some of the river symbolism is used to portray the periods of life of an entire culture, for example, the three rivers in This Side Jordan. In this novel the River Niger on the banks of which the present civilization lives is seen as the river of the present, while the unnamed river flowing past the old village, inhabited by the old gods represents the past and the River Jordan which appears in the visions of the representative of the present civilization, Nathaniel Amegbe, suggests the future. Water-related settings are also used to symbolize specific stages in the life-cycle. Conception and birth are sometimes introduced in terms of prenatal fluids where the little "fish" swim, as in This Side Jordan in reference to the conception of the now grown-up Nathaniel Amegbe and in connection with the birth of Johnnie and Miranda Kestoe's baby daughter. In A Jest of God the same concept appears in connection with Rachel's imagined pregnancy. Childhood is symbolized by the pools and beaches where children play, especially the clear, green pools of Nathaniel

Amegbe's childhood in This Side Jordan, the beautiful unpopulated beach where Hagar in The Stone Angel observes the play of the little girl and boy and the ocean beaches in The Fire-Dwellers, where Stacey's children play. Youth is suggested by the lakesides where young couples make love: Stacey and her first boyfriend in The Fire-Dwellers and later Stacey and her husband, when their eldest daughter is conceived. Old age and the approach of death are connected with the ocean by which Hagar in The Stone Angel in her old age thirsts for the sweet water of life.

The two novels which utilize the river symbolism most are The Diviners and This Side Jordan. In both, the river has the specific role of giving structure as well as unity and cohesion to the novels. According to J. E. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols, the symbol of the river is understood to be ambivalent in that on the one hand "it signifies fertility and the progressive irrigation of the soil; and on the other hand it stands for the irreversible passage of time and, in consequence for a sense of loss and oblivion."¹ Although both symbolic implications are prevalent in Laurence's novels, it is the second meaning pertaining to the irreversibility of time that Laurence uses most to show the past, present and future of mankind in

general and of some societies in particular.

The main river in The Diviners is the unnamed river which flows both ways:

The current [moves] from north to south, but the wind usually [comes] from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction [is] made apparent and possible....²

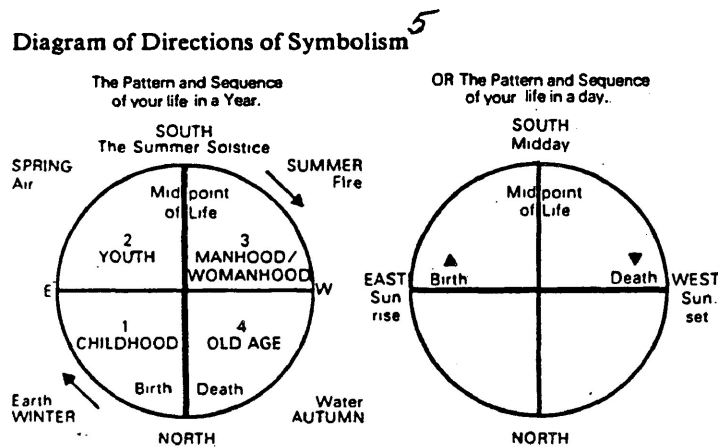
As Morag, the main character in The Diviners, watches the river rippling backwards, she delves into her past reliving each incident as far back as memory allows. While the ripples on the river symbolize Morag's futile attempt to go back in time, the symbol of the river moving directly in front of her without any impediment represents Morag's present. It is the strong current of the present which gives unity and cohesion as well as structure to The Diviners. At the beginning of each chapter Laurence invariably makes some comment about the river, tying together the two elements: the river as symbol and its symbolic meaning, the present.

As stated earlier, the entire river environment in The Diviners is used to symbolize the periods in man's life. The organization of the symbolism follows closely the universally recognized four directions: North, East, South and West, with South at the top, "because it corresponds with the sun at its zenith."³ Tom Chetwynd in A Dictionary of Symbols explains the four directions

as follows:

[they] not only correspond to the fixed pattern or structure of the psyche, but also to the dynamic sequence of life. They provide the digits on the Cosmic Clock, and measure the day, the seasons of the Year, and the periods of man's life.⁴

Chetwynd also introduces the following Diagram of Directions of Symbolism, which helps clarify Laurence's symbolic structure regarding the periods of man's life:



Morag's river follows the directions suggested on the diagram by running from North to South. North in the diagram relates to birth and childhood: the life dormant in the winter earth, slowly growing in response to the warmth of the sun, and bursting into bud at spring-time. Since the river symbolizes Morag's life, at middle age she has passed the zenith and is presently at her full womanhood, the end part of her summer. Even though the wind ripples allow her gaze to drift back toward

North and childhood, she is equally aware of the irreversibility of the river and the current which is taking her toward the autumn of her life. In the beginning of the novel Morag is watching the morning river. This corresponds with her memorybank movies about herself aged twelve and in the early morning of her life. Later on as she is again looking at the river, her memorybank movies are a flashback to the time when she says goodbye hurriedly to Prin and leaves Manawaka for the world, entering the mainstream of life. The river-watching continues as Morag, sitting in her McConnell's Landing kitchen at the oak table, momentarily stares out at the river. This time the related memorybank movies concern the period of Morag's life, when she and Pique first came to England, a young mother with her little daughter and already an established author. When the river-watching and the memorybank movies finally come together, the nature around the river reflects late summer:

The maples were turning to a million shades of russet, crimson, scarlet, pale red. The air was beginning to have a sharpness about it, the first suggestion of frost.... There were no swallows. Yesterday the air had been filled with₆ their swiftness. Now there were none.

The last memorybank movie shows Morag and Pique as they appear in their improved home:

Pique and Morag have been at McConnell's

Landing four years now. Vast changes. Pique nearly grown-up. The log house renovated in various ways as finances have permitted. A large window now enables Morag to look out at the river while writing at the long oak table in the kitchen. An electric stove. New furnace. The old linoleum removed, and the original pine floors sanded and restored.

After this there are no more memorybank movies; Morag is well-settled in her McConnell's Landing home, writing the last chapters of what may be her last book and still watching the river stream by:

Morag walked out across the grass and looked at the river. The sun, now low, was catching the waves, sending out once more the flotilla of little lights skimming along the greenbronze surface. The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction, so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways. Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence.... Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title.

Morag's memorybank movies have caught up with the present; she is no longer trying to delve into her past, but simply watches the river moving forward with the occasional backward ripple. If she gets close to the river, Morag when near the shore, is able to see in the shallows, through the clear water to the bottom of the river. She observes the miniature

world of fish and weeds and the play of light and shadows:

How far could anyone see into the river?
 Not far. Near shore, in the shallows,
 the water was clear, and there were
 the clean and broken clamshells of creatures
 now dead, and the wavering of the under-
 water weed-forests, and the flicker of
 small live fishes, and the undulating
 lines of gold as the sand ripples received
 the sun. Only slightly further out,
 the water deepened and kept its life from
 sight.

This corresponds with Morag's own life which she can accurately observe in her adulthood only. Her childhood on one hand and her future on the other are unfathomable as is the bottom of the river further out.

All around the river there are signs of the changing seasons. When Morag is just beginning her reminiscences she contemplates the river and notices the following:

Across the river, the clumps of willow bent silver-green down to the water, and behind them the great maples and oaks stirred a little, their giant dark green tranquility disturbed only slightly by the wind.¹⁰

The colours of nature are the colours of summer, the "silvergreens" of willows and "dark greens" of maples and oaks. Later on in the novel Morag walks "through the yellowing August grass and down to the river,"¹¹ and yet further on "the willows bowed down on either side of the river, low and globeshaped trees, their flickering silvergreen leaves now beginning

to turn yellow."¹³ Not only the river itself but nature around it symbolizes the passage of time, referring to the periods of man's life through the seasons.

The irreversibility of time as indicated by the river symbol is further emphasized by the family of swallows Laurence describes. These swallows are a part of the river environment and Laurence sets them in the time frame of the seasons. In the setting of the "silvergreen willows" and "dark green maples and oaks," the first stage of Laurence's progressive description of the seasons, the air is being filled with swallows "darting so low over the river that their wings sometimes brushed the water, then spiralling and pirouetting upward again."¹⁴ It is spring, and for the swallows the time of finding mates and building nests. The midseason of the chicks has not yet arrived and they can afford to "[dip] and [spin] over the water, a streaking of blue-black wings and bright breastfeather."¹⁵ The periods of Morag's life and of man in general are symbolized through the picturing of the stages of life of the swallows: the short life span of the swallows is effectively contrasted with the eternal nature of the river.

Laurence continues the life-cycle of the swallows through the stages of maturity, showing the swallow

parents "swooping and scooping up insects to feed their newly hatched fledglings."¹⁶ By the time summer arrives with "small red-branched dogwood bushes . . . in white cluster-flower" and "the purple and white wild phlox . . . rich and heavy with their July perfume"¹⁷ the fledgling birds are learning to fly, and Morag remarks to herself that "tomorrow they would all be flitting back and forth across the river, skilled already."¹⁸ As the willows along the river turn to autumn gold, Morag on her walk to the river suddenly realizes that the swallows are gone. "Here yesterday, gone today,"¹⁹ Morag muses as she experiences a sense of loss. The river and its environment including the swallows contribute to the symbolism of the passage of time, its incapability of being reversed and the sense of loss and oblivion that go along with it.

The human beings who share the environment of the river share its symbolism also. Morag herself is forty-seven years old, the author of several books. Her prime occupation in The Diviners seems to be river-watching. In fact, she is very much aware of time moving on, and questions the value of her contribution to life. As a writer, what has she accomplished? What is the source of her gift? How long will it last? Her serious attempt to find the answers to these questions

has prompted her to spend her days watching the backward ripples on the river, dealing with her past, searching for the power springs of life in the depths of her being. Her friend and neighbour Royland, the Old Man of the River, is a diviner of water. He searches for water in the depths of the earth with a willow wand. Morag feels a kinship to him and hopes to discover the source of his power in case it might have some bearing on her own. At the end of the summer Morag learns that Royland's divining powers are gone. However, for Royland this is not "a matter for mourning."²⁰ Instead he sees continuity in the fact that A-Okay will possibly learn to divine and so "the gift, or portion of grace or whatever it was, [is] finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else."²¹

For Morag this is the insight she has been searching for. She realizes that like Royland's life, her life too is passing by. The river of time incapable of reversing its onward course leaves no one within its environment untouched. When Morag has done her "divining," her gift, too, will be inherited by someone else. The unseen future is waiting around the bend of the river. Morag perceives her daughter, Pique, to be the "harbinger of [her] death, continuer of life."²² Pique will carry a part of Morag into that future, as she becomes the diviner of her own life through her

songs.

Although Laurence uses the river symbolism mainly to signify the irreversible passage of time, it is possible to see another symbolic meaning, that of fertility, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Even though the loss of the divining gifts of both Royland and Morag on one hand signifies the final stage in the life-cycle, death, the fact that there is continuity in life, that the gift will be given to someone else, possibly to A-Okay and to Pique, has a promise of birth in it, which presumes fertility.

Besides Royland and Morag, the other person whose life is symbolically most connected with the river is Pique. When she leaves Gord, her first boyfriend, in order to go out West on her own in search of her independence rather than getting married to him, she sends him a message that she has "drowned and gone floating down the river; crowned with algae and dead minnows like Ophelia."²³ Although Pique is consciously dramatizing her message, she is indeed saying that her relationship with Gord is now finished; it is dead and dispersed in the waters of their present experience like the algae and dead minnows. Like Ophelia Pique will float down the river, in her case the river of time, which will put some distance between her and Gord

and clear her confused mind. Gord's idea of marriage has been overwhelming for Pique to cope with - in a way it has drowned her, but at the same time she is moving on, away from Gord, toward her own identity, and the future just around the bend of the river. When Pique later makes her break for independence from her mother too, the river symbolism is again used. Pique first moves across the river to live at the Smiths' with her new boyfriend, Dan. The river symbolizes a boundary for Pique, separating her young adulthood from her childhood. Later, when she leaves McConnell's Landing on a more grown-up trip out West, Morag watches her after their farewells and sees her "[walk] across the meadow to the river and the boat."²⁴ It is Pique's new beginning, her initiation as a diviner, and the boat which according to Cirlot's dictionary is "in the most general sense, a 'vehicle',"²⁵ is here the obvious vehicle that carries her away along the river of time. The movement of the river as it flows from north to south symbolizes the never-returning onward movement of life, in this case Pique's life, as she goes on from childhood to youth and to adulthood.

The river is, indeed, a fitting symbol to depict the periods of man's life. The constant movement of the water portrays, in Pique's case and in general, the dynamic, even kinetic quality of life as it too

"moves on." Along the rivers in Laurence's novels boats move from one destination to another. In The Diviners she shows the ancestors of Morag entering a river with their "big, flat-bottomed boats" and going "down all the way to Red River."²⁶ Cirlot states also that "the boat is the cradle rediscovered (and the mother's womb)"²⁷ and these boats which symbolically represent the cradle or the mother's womb are taking Morag's people to a new beginning: a new life in a new country.

In Morag's life there has been another river, earlier in her life, the Wachakwa River in Manawaka, her home town. This river is not of the same calibre as her present river at McConnell's Landing. The Wachakwa River is in places very shallow, hardly more than a creek. The two rivers symbolize two different periods in Morag's life: the difficult, poverty-stricken Manawaka childhood and the later life of creativity and cultural depth. In spite of the murky shallowness of the Wachakwa, Morag learned to swim in it fairly well:

I used to be a fair swimmer, believe it or not. A miracle, considering I learned to swim in the Wachakwa River. There were bloodsuckers. You had to make them let go by applying lighted cigarettes.²⁸

Now, even though she is living by the water-rich river at McConnell's Landing, Morag feels reluctant to go into the water. To swim even under the best of conditions

is an obligation to her:

Yeh. I go out every morning and think - swimming is the best exercise there is, and what is the point in living on a river if you don't swim? Then I see all that benighted weed and I change my mind. If I do go swimming and run into a patch of it, I flail around in a panic, thinking it must be a river-monster, probably prehistoric, which has been hibernating down there in the mud for ten million years and has just wakened. Or Grendel, as in Beowulf, and me without courage or a sword.²⁹

If Morag runs into a patch of weed she panics and imagines herself being threatened by river-monsters. Here the water-related symbol of swimming is used within the context of the two rivers. Morag's attitudes to the two rivers show clearly the changes in Morag's life as time goes on. As a young girl in Manawaka Morag was strongly motivated by her environment of poverty symbolized by the shallow, muddy Wachakwa, to get ahead in life, to learn to swim regardless of the shallowness of the water, so she could move on to better things and deeper rivers. Now in middle-age Morag has indeed accomplished what she set out to do: she is an established writer, famous and respected. Both symbolically and literally she is living by a deeply flowing river. Getting ahead in life no longer has the same appeal to her as it used to have in the Manawaka times. Laurence's symbolism shows that since Morag has conquered her environment of poverty, the urge to get ahead in life

is no longer as demanding. She would prefer not to swim at all, that is, not strive to get beyond her present situation, because she feels safe when watching the river and being out of the water herself. Going into the river for a swim is now threatening to her, because of her fear of the dangers it might introduce. The young Morag, without any security, was not afraid of river-monsters, but the middle-aged Morag who has found a degree of security in life is afraid to endanger it.

To summarize the function of the river symbolism in The Diviners it can be said that it relates to Morag's past and present, portraying her life at different times. The two rivers reflect the changes in her life from her beginning by the nondescript Wachakwa River to her present situation by the river which is full of water and life.

In This Side Jordan several rivers are mentioned and they take on the symbolic elements of past, present and future for Nathaniel Amegbe, the main character. Whereas Morag's life is portrayed by two rivers, one of which includes all the elements of time, Nathaniel throughout This Side Jordan is involved with three rivers, each of which carries a connotation of time with it, as seen through the changing traditions.

The first river in Nathaniel's life is the "old river" which flows past his home village of Ashanti in the interior of Ghana. This river is invested with the paraphernalia of Nathaniel's childhood, including the old gods: Tano, God of the River and all the other nature gods. This first river symbolizes Nathaniel's African traditions, his past which he has left behind upon moving to the city of Accra on the coast of Ghana and assuming the new tradition influenced by the white-men. Nathaniel has not been able to forget the old river of his past. The traditions it symbolizes have a tremendous hold on him. In order to free himself to approach the future, Nathaniel tries to deal with his past which attempts to drown him at times.

The old river has so much hold on Nathaniel's imagination, because his childhood memories are governed by the river and its traditions. Nathaniel's father, Kyerema, Drummer to a Chief, "prayed to Tano, god of the River...."³⁰ When his father died, Nathaniel remembers the tremendous spiritual conflict his father's funeral provoked in him. Nathaniel, a youth then, educated at Mission Schools, is deathly afraid of God's punishment if he participates in his father's funeral according to the customs of his tribe. Taking his chances, however, he throws himself so totally into the rituals

that his uncles make special note of it commenting that "they have not stolen your soul, Nathaniel, the white priests."³¹ But Nathaniel in his mind keeps remembering the Biblical quotation which he learned at school, "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God,"³² and although he allows his uncles to think that he is sincerely involved in the old funeral traditions, "his aching body [sweats] and [trembles] lest the lie should strangle him and lest his father's gods should hear and slay him."³³

When he returns to the school after the funeral, Nathaniel goes to the chapel and spits on the Crucifix to avenge his father. In great fear he anticipates God's instant punishment. When nothing happens, Nathaniel can only be ashamed. He realizes that he is not able to shake the old religion from his mind nor fully believe in the new. "He had never been brave enough to burn either Nyame's Tree or the Nazarene's Cross."³⁴

Even though Nathaniel moves to the city and tries to fit into a different lifestyle from the one possible for him in the village, he is never free from his past. While living in Accra, his wife, Aya, pressures him to take her back to the old village to have her first baby. Nathaniel is determined not to go back. During the night he dreams that he is wrestling with the devil. The devil appears to lure him to city life,

but Nathaniel knows it is really the old life by the old river that tempts him:

'I know he lied. I'd seen him in the forest, old as shadows. I knew he was the River. But I was afraid and I wanted to run. I wanted to run back and back and back.'³⁵

Although Nathaniel perceives fairly accurately the distortions of his mind, he is overcome by the pull of the old life and thinks he is drowning in the River. In his desperation he calls on Jesus to help him:

'Jesus, my Redeemer, hear me (if you are there). Jesus, my Redeemer, be there. Hear me. For I am drowning. Save me. Jesus, I beg you (if you are there).'36

In his dream Nathaniel sees how "King Jesus rides, all in gold; He rides across the River, and His hands stretch out to the drowning men."³⁷ As he wakes, Nathaniel remembers that "Jesus, fantastically, had been arrayed like a King of Ashanti."³⁸ In his unconscious as well as his conscious struggles, Nathaniel does not allow the old river to pull him back. He does not want to drown in it. He wants to be rescued by new gods, not just Jesus, representing the white civilization and its religion, but Jesus arrayed like a King of Ashanti: the might of Nathaniel's own people resurrected.

The hold of the old traditions on Nathaniel is continually symbolized by the river. When Nathaniel's

uncle, Adjei Boating, comes to invite him to work as the clerk to a chief, Nathaniel again feels himself drowning in the old river:

The drowning man would struggle for a little while and then he would be quiet, and the River would lap him around with its softness, the brown murky stillness of its womb.

'I can't go!' Nathaniel repeated desperately.

How many times have I cut the cord that fed me? How many times have I fought with the Mother to give me birth? How many times has the fish, feeling his gills aflutter with the stars, dragged himself from the womb of water, painfully to breathe?³⁹

Laurence conveys to the reader in her elaborate water symbolism Nathaniel's struggle to deal with his past, making the River an entity, capable of drowning a struggling swimmer, capable of holding back the fish "from learning lungs."⁴⁰

Besides symbolizing Nathaniel's past the old river symbolizes the past of the African society. Like Nathaniel the society is struggling to be free from its past attitudes ingrained in the society by both colonial masters and slave masters. Furthermore, the people of the new society are trying to free themselves from the old superstitions of their own people. Laurence does not emphasize the River Niger as the symbol of the present except as part of the setting

for the present society, made up of such future-oriented Africans as Nathaniel Amegbe, Jacob Abraham Mensah, Nathaniel's boss at the Futura Academy, Victor Edusei, the journalist, and others. They live their present on the River Niger, under a variety of circumstances, but their minds are engrafted in the future. This creates a continual conflict between the past that pulls at them and the future which beckons to them.

Nathaniel teaches History in a second-rate private school and tries to enlighten the youth of Ghana about the present so they will be ready for their national future. He tries to show them that their future is not in the old ways of superstitions and primitive beliefs. Doom will remain along the rivers of Africa unless Africans take up their responsibility for their country:

Doom along the Niger and down to the sea.
Doom along the Congo and down to the sea.⁴¹
Doom to all the ports of golden Guinea.

This is the doom the whitemen have brought, the many centuries of clotted blood that lies between the Africans and the whitemen. Nathaniel's hate is like a fire when he thinks about it.⁴²

The present on the River Niger is not easy for Nathaniel Amegbe or any of the future-oriented Africans. The people he lives with, the uneducated, unenlightened people who recently moved to the coast from the interior

do not understand his idealism and efforts for the country's future. In his mind Nathaniel cries out to them:

There must be pride and roots, O my people.
 Ghana, City of Gold, Ghana on the banks of
 the Niger, live in your people's faith.
 Ancient empire, you will rise again. And
 your people will laugh, easily, unafraid.
 They will not know the shame, as we have
 known it. For they will have inherited
 their earth. Ghana, empire of our fore-
 fathers, ⁴³rise again to be a glory to your
 people.

But the people still live in what for Nathaniel is the past, and he feels that he is continually being pulled back by them, back to the old river of poverty and superstition. "Sometimes they [the slum dwellers of Accra] were his fear expressed, and he wanted to shun them lest they pull him back into their river."⁴⁴ In spite of his moments of weakness Nathaniel keeps looking ahead into the future, to the River Jordan which he must cross.

It is the River Jordan that Laurence emphatically uses to symbolize the future of Nathaniel and the African society. Like the children of Israel the Africans are on a quest for their "Promised Land," the land of their future. The Promised Land lies beyond the River Jordan. Like the children of Israel, Nathaniel and his African compatriots must cross the river with faith in their

future and capture the promised land, their own land:

In the warm night they sang, their voices
hot and hungry. And the drums beat, beat,
beat. The drums pulsed this hope, as they
had pulsed the hope and despair of a thousand
years, here, in this place.

"Joshua crossed the River to the Promised Land,
Joshua crossed the River to the Promised Land,
Joshua crossed the River to the Promised Land,
And The Lord gave the battle into his hand---"

And then triumphant, feet stamping, hands
clapping, bodies sweating, voices shouting,
triumphant---

"Jordan, Jordan, Jordan, shore,
I'm gonna walk up Jordan shore,
Live in the glory for evermore,
I'm gonna walk up Jordan shore!"⁴⁵

Crossing the symbolic River Jordan is no easy
task for Nathaniel. He has very little self-confidence
and is easily embarrassed and shamed by the white su-
premacy. While attending a black fundamentalist meet-
ing with his wife, Aya, Nathaniel hears a sermon on
the Biblical Joshua crossing the Jordan River:

Do you think Joshua was afraid, brethren?
Was that man afraid? Yes, he was afraid!
Yes, he was afraid! Joshua had a big battle
to fight and Joshua had a big river to cross.
Yes, he was afraid. Nobody ever got to
the promised land without a fight.... And
the Lord say "Be not afraid, Joshua. Cross
over. Yes, man, cross over that river and
win that battle."⁴⁶

Nathaniel listens with interest, because this sermon
has implications for his own life as well. He too is
afraid of taking action about his future and his country's

future. He too is afraid to go ahead in life for fear of failure, because he has failed before. He has "a big river to cross." He listens to the preacher again:

And Joshua say---"All right, God. I'll try."
 And he say "That's right, God, I'll try if
 You say so. Yes, sir, I'll try if You say
 so." And he tried. And when he got to that
 river, see what happened! Just see! Why,
 that river parted its waters. Yes, those
 waters rose up!.... And the children of
 Israel crossed over on dry ground.⁴⁷

In a moment of intense emotional release Nathaniel allows himself to believe in the future and joins in singing, "Joshua crossed the River to the Promised Land":

Nathaniel sang, his head thrown back,
 the look of him forgotten. He did not
 mind about his glasses, that they shone
 with his tears. He did not mind that his
 shoes needed polishing. The doubt and
 the shame, for the moment, were no more.
 Nathaniel sang, and his voice was deep
 and true.⁴⁸

Nathaniel begins to realize that what he has thought of as separate rivers, the old river of his past and the River Jordan of the future, are really just one. Like Morag in The Diviners, Nathaniel is watching the past blend into the present on its way to the future, as the two rivers meet:

Oh, the River was many things. Now he knew it. The River was the warm slimy womb of all, lapping around the little fish, holding him so that he might not learn lungs. And the River was Jordan.

The River was Jordan.

...The Kyerema had not known its name was Jordan. But perhaps, after all, when he set the boy's feet on that path, he knew it was goodbye. Maybe he knew his son would have a strange new river to cross.

The land was there. And the land was theirs. And the people crossed over into their land. The land was there, waiting for them, waiting for them to walk up the shore of Jordan. And the Lord gave the battle into their hands.⁴⁹

Nathaniel perceives suddenly that he is not in conflict with his father's traditions; he simply continues them on a different level. It was his father who initiated him on his journey to cross new strange rivers, when he sent him to the Mission School.

Nathaniel's emotional release and insight give him only momentary assurance and relief:

Then it was over. For a second there was silence. And in that second, Nathaniel wondered what Joshua had done once the walls of Jericho fell down. What had he done with the city, when it was his?

Then time began again. He must be crazy. He was going back -- had he forgotten? -- to the Forest and the dark River.

What was Jericho to him? What was Jordan to him?⁵⁰

Nathaniel has made the decision to go back to the old village and the old river, but, in fact, he has not acted on the decision yet. He has not told even his wife about it. The actual break from the present is not that simple after all. Nathaniel has stood long

facing the future, applying his energy for the future's sake, and his decision to go back does not immediately materialize in action. While he is still vacillating between the future and the past, two positive things happen to him: a son is born to him and he receives a promotion at work. He is to devise a new curriculum for the school to raise its standards. In effect he will be instrumental in guiding his people into the Promised Land of New Africa by helping them get a good education:

He was to be its [the Academy's] "kra", then, its soul, seeking perfection? Its guide in a new land, its ferryman across Jordan. All that, when he did not know the way himself?⁵¹

But even though he feels unsure of himself, Nathaniel takes the challenge, and decides to stay in Accra and not go back to the village after all. The river of his past will not hold him any more:

Let the grey parrot scream from the 'odum' tree and let the strangler vines reach down to grasp at nothing. Forest, you will not have me yet. And let the River beat its brown waters on the banks. Let it mourn for its child that has shed its gills forever.⁵²

When he embraces his newborn son in his arms as a symbol of rebirth, Nathaniel is finally able to look into the future rationally and confidently and see his son as the Joshua who crosses the river of

the future, the Jordan River. He lifts his son high to show him as much of the city as he can, talking to him while he does so:

"See--" he said, "yours, Joshua."

...Someone crossed that River and won that battle. Someone took that city and made it his.

"You'll know what to do with it, boy, won't you?" he said softly, pleadingly. "You'll know how to make it work. You'll know how to make it all go well."

Joshua, Joshua, Joshua. I beg you. Cross Jordan, Joshua.⁵³

In order to summarize the function of the river symbolism in This Side Jordan, the following observations can be made. In her descriptions of life in Africa, Laurence uses water symbolism to show the past, present and future of the black African society. The water symbolism is mainly conveyed through the symbolic rivers (the old river of the past and the River Jordan of the future to a greater extent; River Niger as the river of the present to a lesser extent). These are the rivers with which the main character, Nathaniel Amegbe, is involved. Since Nathaniel is shown as a representative of the new African society in which the experience of life spans across the not so distant primitive past and across the urbanized struggle of the present, with a glimpse into the future of black leadership, the periods in Nathaniel's life represent the periods in the evo-

lution of his African society. Whereas Morag's river of time in The Diviners reflects the life of mankind in general, the rivers of Nathaniel Amegbe in This Side Jordan reflect the periods of time in a particular society.

Laurence uses river symbolism to a lesser extent in her other novels, but there are some references to the Wachakwa River in A Jest of God, mainly to symbolize the past of some characters. Nick Kazlik, having just returned home to Manawaka for the summer, speaks with Rachel Cameron, saying, "I haven't been down around the river in years. I'd like to have a look at it again. My brother and I used to come here a lot when we were kids."⁵⁴ For Nick, the river is a part of his past which he would rather forget. His brother has died and Nick's childhood memories connected with the river are not all pleasant:

"Pointless to come here," he says.
 "I don't know why I wanted to see it, this particular place. There's nothing for me here now. I knew it, of course, but that never stops anyone. These treks back - they make me sick, to tell you the truth. I always swore I'd never do it."⁵⁵

Yet, when Nick wants to make love to Rachel, he asks her to go down by that same river with him. The river of past experiences becomes the river of the present with the renewing of Nick's and Rachel's acquaintance which now adds the new dimensions of affection and physical love to it. Even though Nick's and Rachel's ex-

periences as lovers are in the present, symbols of the past are a part of the love-making scene by the river. One such symbol is the "grave" to which Nick compares the riverside when Rachel is afraid to undress lest someone see her:

"Oh darling," he says, quite gently, but smiling some reproach, "it's as private as the grave. What more do you want?"⁵⁶

In Rachel's mind the word "grave" sets off a number of reactions. A verse surfaces unbidden from her memory, leading to other recollections:

The grave's a fine and private place
But none, I think, do there embrace.⁵⁷

Rachel, the daughter of Niall Cameron, Manawaka's undertaker, knows about death and graves. For years her father locked himself up in the Funeral Home as in a grave and drank too much. As Nick mentions the word "grave", Rachel remembers something else:

My mother said, "One thing about your father, he was never one to make many demands upon me, that's one thing you could say for him." And I thought how⁵⁸ terrible for him, the years and years.

Rachel knows that she wants to make love with Nick. His wish is not a "demand" to her but a privilege. The symbol of the grave nevertheless foreshadows from the beginning the end of Nick's and Rachel's love affair. It is a bleak and barren end for Rachel, reminiscent of the grave Nick refers to on their first time together

by the river. As mentioned earlier, although the love affair occurs in the present with the familiar riverside as its setting, the same river also symbolizes the past, a past which keeps crowding in on both of them with unpleasant memories.

In The Fire-Dwellers Stacey MacAindra's thoughts about the past are enhanced also by symbolism of wild untamed rivers of old that "speed and thunder while the ancient-eyed boatman waits."⁵⁹ The symbolism here pertains to the last river to cross, the river of death, referring to death in general and to the death of the North American Indian culture in particular, as the "high, thin, beaked, bleached" totem poles give way to the rivers and the boatman.

The river symbolism of Laurence, then, appears to be related to time through the discussion of the elements of past, present and future in connection with the rivers mentioned above. River symbolism dominates the symbols with which Laurence has chosen to depict the periods of man's life in general. She does not limit it to this purpose only; river symbolism is introduced in many situations throughout the novels. The symbolism depicting the life-cycle of man is not, on the other hand, limited to river symbolism. Many other kinds of water symbolism are used to describe the various

stages between conception and death.

Even when Laurence is not writing specifically about conception, she sometimes introduces life in deep dark settings from where it must be released into daylight and usefulness. Even the most elementary ingredients of life such as water and nourishment are hidden and must be found. Royland in The Diviners is a water-diviner, previously of the "living water," as a preacher of the Gospel, and later after his zeal for preaching cools down, the diviner of ordinary water. When the Smiths following Royland's advice have brought the well drillers to dig the well in the place designated by Royland, at first "clay and earth [spit] out in a steady stream."⁶⁰ A little later, however, Royland is able to say to A-Okay, "Well, you got enough water for a good-size town, here."⁶¹ Water, the source of life for an individual as well as for an entire community is not always easy to find, but once it is found and released, there is plenty for all. Water, such as the river water at McConnell's Landing is a veritable pool of plenty. Fish live there, and a fisherman can lure a meal whenever necessary. When Royland and Morag go out on the river in Royland's motor boat, they see a carp jumping - "a golden and fanged crescent, breaking the river's surface."⁶² The carp has to jump out

of the dark river to be admired and so acts as an affirmative to the life in the river. Royland frequently catches fish and brings some to Morag. "I brought you pickerel It's straight from the river."⁶³ Both the wells divined by Royland and the fish he catches in the river are signs of life and part of the life-cycle of man symbolizing nourishment and regeneration.

The beginning of human life in conception is in some ways related in the novels to fish and water symbolism. First, regarding the sexual union itself, Laurence uses quite descriptive water-related symbols as, for example, in The Stone Angel, when Bram is having sex with Hagar, "he [slithers] and [swims] like an eel in a pool of darkness."⁶⁴ The symbols pertaining to the fetus are also water-related. When Rachel in A Jest of God is afraid she might be pregnant, she reflects that "the tadpole might swim instantly to its retreat, and burrow in."⁶⁵ In The Diviners the unborn Morag is referred to as "buried alive...still a little fish, connected unthinkingly with life, held to existence by a single thread."⁶⁶ The same symbol is also used in This Side Jordan with Nathaniel's reflections that "[he] was a little fish in the place where his father poured out his life."⁶⁷ Also, in This Side Jordan Johnnie Kestoe whose wife, Miranda, is having their first baby, is present at the birth, and as he watches

Miranda go through the birth pains, his perceptions are related by Laurence in water symbols:

It seemed to him that pain was pouring over her like a wild river, snatching her into its whirlpool. It tore at her muscles, bent her spine to snapping point, tossed her like matchstick on its cruel and cunning surface. She had to bargain with it for each breath, and each breath won only racked her and seemed almost to split her lungs as though, drowning, she had breathed in water instead of air.⁶⁸

Some time later the birth waters break and Johnnie cannot but wonder how "a living creature [could] issue from that poisonous flood."⁶⁹ In A Jest of God Rachel, thinking herself pregnant, goes to see her doctor, and as her doctor confirms that she has a uterine tumour, Rachel suddenly feels sick. A scene from her childhood impresses itself upon her mind:

I looked down once through the water at the lake, and it trembled and changed, and still I could see, far below, the thousand minute creatures spinning in a finned dance, and my father said Fishes, only just spawned, and there were thousands of them, thousands. The waters are in front of my eyes.⁷⁰

The deep disappointment and shock at the doctor's diagnosis bring on Rachel's momentary physical ill-feeling, the description of which is enhanced by the conception and birth-related water symbols. Looking into a lake is, according to Cirlot, "tantamount to the mystic attitude of contemplation."⁷¹ The lake into which Rachel looks is full of newly spawned life, but in her brief

insight she realizes that for her there is an element of death in it. She has not conceived life, for in her womb she carries "non-life." Cirlot states that lake symbolism is also associated with the "symbolism of level," meaning that "all that is on a low level spatially [is equated] with what is low in a spiritual, negative, destructive, and hence fatal, sense."⁷² As Rachel looks down into the lake, "far below", and sees the minute fish in it, the more profound reason for her superficially perceived feelings of illness is revealed: it is the death sentence on her deepest dreams.

Through such water-related symbolism as the above examples show, Laurence introduces that part of man's life-cycle which pertains to sex, conception and birth. In addition, fish in Laurence's writing appears to be, generally, a sexual symbol. Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols confirms that "for some people the fish has a phallic meaning."⁷³ It may be that even the passage in The Diviners relating to the discussion between Royland and Morag about a whole fish he has given her has sexual connotations. It may actually suggest Royland's possible sexual interest in Morag, which she, however, has not reciprocated, but has discouraged by ignoring his signals:

Well, the last time I tried you with
the whole fish, you threw it back into
the river.⁷⁴

On the other hand, the fish may be interpreted as a sacred element. Cirlot suggests that "by virtue of the extraordinary number of its eggs, it becomes a symbol of fecundity, imparting a certain spiritual sense."⁷⁵ If the fish symbolism above is interpreted to convey a spiritual meaning as well, then Morag may be throwing away something very valuable in her inexperience to handle the whole fish -- she is not apprehensive of Royland just on the physical level but on the spiritual level also. The fact is that although there seems to be a close relationship between Royland and Morag, it never goes very deep, either to the spiritual or sexual level suggested by the fish symbolism.

The next stage in the life-cycle, childhood, is also introduced in water-related symbols, particularly through settings, such as pools and beaches where children play. Nathaniel Amegbe in This Side Jordan remembers his early boyhood as follows:

When I was a boy I used to swim in a green pool. The palms were green above it and around it, and the water was cool and green. The village goats came there to drink, stepping lightly, lightly, lightly, stepping lightly in the cool brown mud.... I laughed and swam like a little lithe fish, until my mother called me home.... "Is your belly empty, little fish?"

This delightful scene portrays the best of childhood: the carefree, light-hearted existence of an innocent

child who grows up as an integral part of his environment, cared for by his mother. There is nothing threatening in the passage, only the "cool and green" essence of the early youth. His only work is play: swimming in the green pool like a fish; his only need is for food which his mother provides. Much the same kind of water-related setting is introduced also in The Fire-Dwellers. Stacey recalls a happy moment from the previous summer involving her two sons:

Duncan and Ian last summer at the beach, wrestling and wisecracking, brown skinny legs and arms, the shaggy flames of their hair, their skin smelling of sand and salt-water. Sea-children, as though they should have been crowned with fronds of kelp and ridden dolphins.

Duncan and Ian are enjoying the carefree days of their childhood on the beach, appearing to have as much innocent fun as Nathaniel in his green pool. They too are seen as a part of their environment, "sea-children." Laurence generalizes on childhood, when she picks out children from two very different societies and makes her statement on the similar pursuits of fun of the very young. The water-related settings become symbolic of childhood through the close relationship the children have with their watery playground environment.

Laurence does not leave the reader with only the idealized picture of childhood. In addition to her very positive statements she also communicates

a threatening, dark view of what may belong to those supposedly halcyon days, and this message she also presents through water symbolism. As Stacey MacAindra watches her sons out in the ocean, she suddenly cannot see Duncan's head. "Through the dry sand and after that the wet heavy sand and the shallow water, until the water is halfway up her thighs,"⁷⁸ Stacey races to the rescue of her son whose foot has become lodged between some rocks in the bottom:

By the time she reaches Ian, he has pulled Duncan out of water, but only part of the way.. She kneels and manages to dislodge Duncan's foot, hauling him up and out of the now-brown muddied water.... He tripped --⁷⁹ I don't know how -- I guess the seaweed.

The life guard saves Duncan's life by resuscitating him, "kneading his body until the brackish water gushes from his mouth."⁸⁰ The life guard observes that Duncan has "swallowed quite a bit of sea."⁸¹ The ocean, symbolically the very source of life turns out to be a death trap for Duncan. Laurence's sea-symbolism is most appropriate, because the symbolic significance of the sea is that of "waters in flux,"⁸² having the aspect of transition and mediation between life and death.

In relation to the periods of man's life and Laurence's depiction of them through water symbols, it is possible to draw some conclusions pertaining to her presentation of childhood. Childhood is not only a time

of innocence and fun; even at that stage death is never far away. The transition from life to death is very swift. The same beach and the same ocean that provide Duncan during one summer with a playground, at another time almost become his grave.

In The Stone Angel Hagar observes two children playing on the beach. They are "playing house," imitating the adult world. "The boy is searching for clam shells.... He rinses them in water, paddling in a short way in his bare feet, and then returns."⁸³ The water-related object, the clam shell, here becomes the symbol of childhood. The children have found the shells in the ocean, the giant pool of plenty, and are happily playing on the beach until the girl begins to take the play seriously, introducing the impending loss of childhood through her imitation of wifely nagging which in turn precipitates the end of the game as the boy angrily destroys the shells as well as other manifestations of childhood. This could be interpreted as symbolizing the transitory nature of childhood, emphasized by the fragile shells: easily destroyed, swiftly gone. Another example of the shells connected with childhood occurs in The Diviners. Morag and Pique are visiting Dan McRaith and his family and Pique comes in with two of McRaith's sons, Ian and Jamie "with

a huge number of shells collected on the shore. 'Hey, Mom [Pique says], you should see -- you just walk along the beach and there are all these millions of shells -- can I take all mine back with me?'"⁸⁴ Although Morag answers Pique in the affirmative, the shells are soon discarded and do not become part of Pique's baggage when she leaves Crombruach. Childhood is after all only a transitory period in the life-cycle of man, leading to the next stage, youth, almost too swiftly.

Some of the outstanding examples of water-related symbolism dealing with youth are found in The Diviners and The Fire-Dwellers. Morag Gunn as a young high school girl in The Diviners has trouble seeing. She cannot see the board in her classroom and is finally persuaded by her teacher to have her eyes examined. At the doctor's office drops are put in Morag's eyes with the result that "the entire world swims and flounders in front of her."⁸⁵ This water-related symbol has the connotation of drunkenness, of not being in control. Morag in her youth is typically inexperienced, not in control of her perspective or even her perception of the world. Inexperience is, indeed, one of the obvious characteristics of youth and Morag too is afflicted by it until she matures in years and gains experience.

Another example of youth and its involvement with life is given in terms of water-related symbolism, when the young Morag approaches a rope bridge suspended over the Wachakwa River. She looks down and sees the river "flowing very far down there."⁸⁶ The river does not present a problem to her, but the bridge does. Never yet has she dared to cross the bridge, because as soon as she steps on it, it sways and shakes and Morag fears that she might "plunge down into the shallow water and the stones."⁸⁷ She wants to cross the bridge. The second she puts her foot on the bridge, however, it lurches. "[Morag] leaps back onto safe ground."⁸⁸ Morag is at a point in her life when she must face adult life. She wants desperately to go ahead and become an adult, but she is afraid it will hurt her. Like the river below, time is going on irreversibly and Morag must move on, crossing the bridge from youth to adulthood. According to Chetwynd, a bridge symbolically "links this side with the other side, conscious with unconscious."⁸⁹ This implies that Morag must accept herself as an adult in her unconscious in order to have the security to make the conscious crossing to adulthood.

As she dallies by the bridge, afraid to cross it, Morag hears someone else on the bridge. Skinner

Tonnerre "walks across the bridge, swinging it violently."⁹⁰ Skinner, not much older in years than Morag, nevertheless possesses self-assurance Morag does not possess. He does not seem to be afraid of life, and the bridge has become familiar to him by repetitious crossings. He feels he is an adult already, even though his father may not realize it:

Me and my old man, there, we don't get on now. He thinks I'm a kid, but he doesn't know what he's talking about. We had a fight, there, and I knocked four of ⁹¹his teeth out. It really surprised him.

Skinner attempts to convince Morag further that he is a man by making some lewd remarks and finally reaching for his fly buttons in order to expose himself.⁹² At that Morag runs home. Then, hating herself for her fears she locks her door and imagines how it would be to have sex with Skinner. Although in this way Morag is preparing herself for the sexual crossing to adulthood, she is not ready to act on it yet. That evening she retreats to childhood, wanting Christie to entertain her with his old stories. This surprises Christie who has thought of Morag in more grown-up terms. Morag herself is confused, but she wants to hear the stories, because "the time when she was a kid and Christie would tell those stories, everything used to seem all right then."⁹³ Morag's time to grow up into adulthood will

come, but at this point she is not ready for the crossing of the bridge or for Skinner's sexual advances.

Contrasting with this stage in Morag's life is that of Stacey Cameron, at age eighteen, whom Laurence introduces in The Fire-Dwellers. Stacey's "youth" scenes are set at two lakes, Diamond Lake and Timber Lake. Unlike Morag at the swinging bridge, Stacey is not afraid to cross from one side of the lake to the other. She is a strong swimmer and she has confidence in herself that she could swim right across the lake. She will not do so, however, not because she is afraid, but because even at the point where she turns back, she is already farther out than most of her friends. Laurence shows that Stacey is well-prepared to cross into adulthood, when the right moment comes.

As Stacey swims, her mind is tuned to her new sexual consciousness. She thinks of the dance later in the evening, "feeling already the pressure on her lake-covered thighs of the boys."⁹⁴ The lakes in Laurence's novels are often sexually related symbols. Diamond Lake, in particular, is connected with Stacey's first experiences of physical love. Laurence describes the lake as being away from civilization, "fifty miles north of Manawaka."⁹⁵ It is made for youthful romance: "The path of the moon lighted the black lake. The fishes

danced and the night birds dipped and pirouetted in obeisance toward the fallen light, the shreds of heaven...."⁹⁶ There is also a long sandy beach and beyond that "the leaf-blanketed hillside" where the lovers nestle. The setting is romantic with its emphasis on the moon and the dancing fishes and pirouetting birds. On one hand there is a youthful exuberance about the scene; on the other a slight spine-tingling apprehension portrayed by the black lake. This is the place of Stacey's first sexual experience, the revelation of some of life's mystery. Even when she and her lover "half [sleep] and [waken] tender... on the curled yellow-green moss of the spruce-screened slope," they are conscious of "the lapping of the lake in their heads."⁹⁷ The black lake with its connotations of passion is even after the consummation of their love very much in their consciousness. They are still young and filled with an undiminished capacity for romance.

The other lake which Laurence connects with Stacey's youth and her sexual experiences is Timber Lake. Timber Lake is the setting for pure, virginal love, with its "spruce trees darkly still in the sun and the water so unsullied that you could see the grey-gold minnows flickering."⁹⁸ In this paradisaical place Stacey and Mac first unite in love which continues into their marriage. Sixteen years later as Stacey has

the need for self-contemplation, she remembers Timber Lake exactly as it was at that time and meditates on its meaning in her and Mac's life.

Besides being the place of Stacey's and Mac's love, Timber Lake is also the place where Stacey throws away her revolver, the one she has inherited from her father and planned to use on her children in case of an emergency that could not be otherwise solved. After much thought she comes to the realization that she cannot use the revolver in that way and throws it into Timber Lake. The fact that Stacey throws the revolver in Timber Lake which has the previous connotations of love, symbolizes subtly her faith in the love between Mac and herself. She will no longer take the responsibility for her family's future on herself alone. Their union which started at Timber Lake is a love union and even though difficulties abound, Stacey, in particular, will live from day to day trusting that everything will go all right at the end.

There is one more lake mentioned in The Fire-Dwellers, but it does not have a name. By its description, however, it could be Timber Lake. It certainly conforms to the pattern of symbolism set by the earlier lakes. This lake is a place of sexual pleasure for Stacey and Mac. They have gone there in the early part of their marriage for a week's holiday they cannot afford. It

is here that Katie, their oldest child is conceived:

Stacey, naked with Mac three quarters of a year before Katherine Elizabeth was born. The cottage at the lake where they'd gone for the one week holiday they couldn't afford. The pine and spruce harps in the black ground outside, in the dark wind from the lake that never penetrated the narrow-windowed cabin. Their skins slippery with sweat together, slithering as though with some fine and pleasurable oil. Stacey knowing his moment and her own as both⁹⁹ separate and unseparable. Oh my love now

The love-making of Stacey and Mac carries overtones of earlier experiences. The mysterious darkness again surrounds them and even though the black lake is not visible, the wind from the lake is dark. This time there is no moon and the mood in general differs from the exuberance of the first love experience. Now the wind from the lake activates the trees which play like harps for the conception of Katherine Elizabeth. In addition to the sexual symbolism used also at other times by Laurence (the lake, the eel-like slithering) there is a fierceness about this love scene not perceived in the others, brought on by the darkness and the howling wind from the lake.

Some of the symbolism connected with lakes, according to Cirlot, focuses on their mirror-like quality, "presenting an image of self-contemplation, consciousness and revelation."¹⁰⁰ The moments Stacey spends near each of the lakes are meaningful in view of her personal

growth. It is also the image of a lake which becomes the mirror of Stacey's self-contemplation when she approaches a crisis in her life with Mac. The lakes connected with Stacey: Diamond Lake as the setting for Stacey's first love, Timber Lake as the setting for her union with her husband, Mac, and the third lake, the setting of Katie's conception; all these reflect the process of Stacey's maturing from youth to adulthood.

Like childhood and youth, the stages of middle age and old age are also strongly depicted by water symbolism in Laurence's novels. The process of aging is subtle; life flows like the river from one stage to the next without well-marked sections of transition. Morag in The Diviners is aware of changes around her, but does not really concern herself with them. The young Morag and her friend Ella sing a song about changes:

There'll be a change in the weather
And a change in the sea,
And most of all there'll be a change in me....¹⁰¹

They do not believe for a moment that the change in themselves would involve becoming old and grey. When the Smiths move from Morag's to live across the river, Morag does notice a difference in her life. Her house seems too quiet after the noisy exuberance of the Smiths. The river now separates them; the river of time is the boundary between the aging Morag and the youthful Smiths. Pique also moves across the river, as mentioned

earlier, severing her childhood from her newly discovered adulthood, and reminding Morag of her impending old age and death.

All the water symbolism pertaining to the periods of man's life and the related nature symbols of yellowing trees and departed swallows reflect the last stages of man's life. Even Royland, "the Old Man of the River, his powers gone,"¹⁰² is no longer able to find the hidden water of life for those whose "old [wells have] seepage."¹⁰³ Only the river of time seems to have permanence as it flows on. Morag finally questions even the permanence of the river: "Left to itself, the river would probably go on like this, flowing deep, for another million or so years. That would not be allowed to happen."¹⁰⁴ The present lords of the environment, the industrialized society, would among other atrocities toward nature also commit "river-slaying" which Morag perceives even worse than killing a person. Slaying a river would be, in fact, tampering with eternity itself and an unpardonable sin for a mere man of time. Furthermore, there would be precious little hope in an eternity that man could somehow affect or alter.

The earlier novel, The Stone Angel, also abounds with water symbolism depicting the last stage of the life-cycle before death. When Hagar first moves

to the house near the Cannery as she tries to flee her impending death, she realizes that she has not brought any water with her.¹⁰⁵ The lack of water which is the very symbol of life shows that Hagar is near death and cannot run away from it.¹⁰⁶ Her end, however, is not imminent; there are still matters to be settled before she is free to go. She looks for a well which would contain water, the ingredient necessary for her survival. She cannot find a well, but sees a short distance away, right beside the sea, a building which has "been washed and warped by salt water and the soft-water rain and some of its boards are loose."¹⁰⁷ She recognizes it as the Cannery "where the boats used to come in all weathers, bringing their loads of sealed and writhing creatures shining with slime, and the great clams with fluted shells pried from the sea."¹⁰⁸ This building she chooses for her refuge. The Cannery bears a strong resemblance to herself; in fact, symbolically it is Hagar. The well-known Biblical symbolism compares the body to a house, and the condition of Hagar's body and the Cannery have many similarities. Hagar too is worn by the tides of time; the salt of her many sufferings has "washed and warped" her, purified and humbled her, so she no longer stands as proud as in the early days of her youth. Like the Cannery, she has some

"loose boards," the manifestations of old age, in her body. While her body is deteriorating to the extent where looking at herself in the mirror she can recognize her eyes only, her spirit is not deteriorating, only changing. The soft-water rain symbolizing purification falls from heaven on the Cannery and softens its contours and colours, giving it a clean silvery sheen. Hagar's spirit too is becoming softer, readier to admit her inner guilt, readier to forgive and to help another human being. Laurence further reinforces her depiction of old age by introducing sexual and childhood symbols as part of the past. No more boats of "sealed and writhing creatures shining with slime," come to the Cannery, nor are there any fluted shells left. Hagar's sexual desires no longer press her. Childhood, the fragile fluted shell, is gone forever. Hagar's symbolic house stands on the brink of eternity, "right beside the sea," ready for the final dismantling. In fact, she likes to stay at the Cannery, because "[she'll] hear the sea."¹⁰⁹ She is listening to the sea voices and the intimations of death. Her thirst is momentarily satisfied by some rainwater in a bucket, symbolizing the limited life source at her disposal.

The Cannery for Hagar is a place of deep inner reflection. Laurence again uses water-related symbol-

ism to explore Hagar's mind, the treasure chest containing her past. Hagar observes the inside of the building she has chosen for her refuge and compares it to "the seachest of some old, and giant sailor."¹¹⁰ She looks around her, recounting the lingering evidences of how the cannery was used in the past, the "dark oil and the blood of fishes," the boxes marked "Choice Quality Sockeye" and "Best Cohoe." She observes "the discarded fishing nets" that look as if they had "been left by the last fisherman to come here with his catch."¹¹¹ The symbolism points to the days of Hagar's own usefulness, her productivity as wife and mother, and her attempts at quality life for herself and her son, John.

All that is past now and the nets that gathered in life's plenty are discarded. The skeleton of the fish-boat scares Hagar, because it reminds her of her last voyage, the voyage of death. Also, as mentioned earlier, there is a connection between the boat and the human body.¹¹² Laurence has introduced the decrepit vessel as further emphasis of Hagar's physical deterioration. Hagar ignores the boat and concentrates on some shells instead. They are beautiful, "coated with a silken enamel of diluted pearl,"¹¹³ the shimmering shreds of childhood. A little later on Laurence introduces the trapped seagull which also symbolizes Hagar, in

its death struggle. As Hagar watches the gull she wonders, "Did it find its way out, back to the sea, to be healed by the salt water or perish there in the gust of a single green-black wave?"¹¹⁴

The fear of the unknown is implicit in Hagar's reflections: What will the sea be to the seagull, a healer or a destroyer? Inside her skull Hagar too "[dips] and [darts]... swooping like a seagull."¹¹⁵ She feels she "may be swept outward like a gull, blown by a wind too strong for it, forced into the rough sea, held under and drawn fathoms down into depths as still and cold as black glass."¹¹⁶ Laurence's symbolism pertaining to the struggles of the seagull is superimposed on Hagar's own mental struggles. The sea becomes a deep grave, cold as the black glass of a tombstone. All these symbols foreshadow Hagar's death.

Later the symbol of sinking and drowning in the sea is repeated with descriptions of Hagar's drug-induced unconsciousness. "The drug is swirling me downward into the cold depths of a sea."¹¹⁷ When the nurse comes to take her temperature she is "hailed out of sleep, like a fish in a net."¹¹⁸ In the hospital ward at night "each of [the patients] lives in [her] own night, a drugged semi-sleep in which [they] darkly swim, sometimes floating up to the surface where the voices

are."¹¹⁹ When Marvin comes to see her, Hagar's "mind surfaces. Up from the sea comes the fish."¹²⁰

The symbols of sinking and drowning show the struggle of the old Hagar's last days, foreshadowing her eventual death.

In her other novels Laurence introduces the idea of drowning also, although not necessarily in connection with old age. In A Jest of God as Rachel fantasizes in the bathtub, she sees that "the water is clouded with soap and through the murkiness her flesh does have a drowned look, too pale, lethargic, drifting, as though [she] could nevermore rise and act."¹²¹ The water symbolism combined with the description of her body foreshadow the dead end of her fantasies.

Also in The Fire-Dwellers an example of drowning can be found. Stacey dissolves in troubled tears when her father-in-law, Matthew, quotes her the Psalm, "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul."¹²² Identifying with the symbol of drowning up to her very soul, she can only leave the room and lock herself in the bathroom where she after crying finally calms down and washes her face with cold water. The symbols of drowning as shown by these examples, encompass not only the idea of drowning in death and oblivion but also drowning in unconsciousness, illness, fantasies and life's problems.

Laurence has used a great deal of water-related symbolism to denote the foreboding of death in her three novels: The Stone Angel, The Diviners, and This Side Jordan. In The Stone Angel this symbolism centers around the symbol of the sea. The sea is mainly dark and cold and the nature around compliments the mood created by the sense-oriented descriptions of the sea. When Hagar is at the house near the Cannery, she looks from the bedroom window and sees "the darkening trees and beyond them to the sea."¹²³ Through the dark expanse, the valley of death, she is looking into eternity, the sea of oblivion, her eventual destination. To further the concept of total nothingness of death Laurence introduces the symbol of "the sea itself [being] swallowed by the night."¹²⁴

In The Diviners the main focus is on the river which in itself holds the past, present and future as well as life and death. As in The Stone Angel, nature symbolism compliments the water symbolism, foreshadowing the end of life through the end of the summer season and the approach of autumn with its yellow leaves. The people who live by the river go through the same changes as nature itself, and their aging is depicted in various ways: Royland's through the loss of his divining powers, Morag's through her need to reflect

on her past and her indecision about future. Often she plans to go swimming, but nothing comes of it: she is not at ease with the river - it poses a threat of drowning to her.

In This Side Jordan the main symbol is also the river which connotes both life and death. River-crossing is an act of life, but to be left on the other side of the river is death. Nathaniel knows an old song that reaffirms this conception of death:

Thou speeding bird, tell father
That he left me on the other side of the River --¹²⁵

The same idea of the river being a boundary between two stages of life or life and death, is introduced also in The Diviners where Morag, the aging parent, is left on the other side of the river.

Very often the water symbolism foreshadowing death, found in the novels of Laurence, either appeals to the senses or is otherwise graphically introduced. When Morag in The Diviners is waiting for the news of Christie's physical condition from the hospital, "a faint rain begins falling, and the open window channels in the smell of wet earth and grass and prairie lilac."¹²⁶ The almost hesitant sound of the rain and the smell of the basic wet earth, grass and flowers effectively symbolize the mortality of man and his end. When the phone rings, it summons Morag to the hospital where

Christie has already died. An example of a graphic symbolic illustration of death occurs also in The Stone Angel where Hagar thinks about it as follows:

I always feared for it [her heart] after I grew stout, thinking if I pulled too hard at it, it would be like a plug jerked from a sink and I'd gurgle and go out of life like washwater.¹²⁷

This symbol remarkably resembles that given in the words of the Psalm, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint."¹²⁸ Both symbols confirm the end of the life-cycle as the symbolic substance of life, water, is poured out of its vessel, the human body. Laurence's use of water symbolism to describe the end of life as well as the entire life-cycle of man is indeed quite varied and gives depth to her writing.

Notes

Chapter I

¹J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 262.

²Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 3.

³Tom Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982), p. 120.

⁴Ibid., p. 120.

⁵Ibid., p. 120.

⁶Laurence, The Diviners, p. 404.

⁷Ibid., p. 420.

⁸Ibid., pp. 452-53.

⁹Ibid., p. 453.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 285.

¹²Ibid., p. 355.

¹³Ibid., p. 404.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 405.

²⁰Ibid., p. 452.

- ²¹Ibid., p. 452.
- ²²Ibid., p. 290.
- ²³Ibid., p. 3.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 450.
- ²⁵J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 29.
- ²⁶Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 85.
- ²⁷Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 29.
- ²⁸Laurence, The Diviners, p. 356.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 356.
- ³⁰Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 28.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 30.
- ³²Ibid., p. 31.
- ³³Ibid., p. 31.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 32.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 74.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 76.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 77.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 77.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 100.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 247.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 209.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 212.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 22.

- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 247.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 245-46.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 246.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 248.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 247-48.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 248.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 273.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 273.
- ⁵³ Ibid., pp. 281-82.
- ⁵⁴ Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 83.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 86.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 90.
- ⁵⁷ Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," quoted in Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 90.
- ⁵⁸ Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 90.
- ⁵⁹ Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), p. 244.
- ⁶⁰ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 103.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 103.
- ⁶² Ibid., p. 104.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁶⁴ Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 116.
- ⁶⁵ Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 117.
- ⁶⁶ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 7

- ⁶⁷Laurence, This Side Jordan, p. 75.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 265.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 265.
- ⁷⁰Laurence, A Jest of God, pp. 180-81.
- ⁷¹J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 350.
- ⁷²Ibid., p. 167.
- ⁷³Ibid., p. 102.
- ⁷⁴Laurence, The Diviners, p. 26.
- ⁷⁵Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 102.
- ⁷⁶Laurence, This Side Jordan, p. 74.
- ⁷⁷Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 243.
- ⁷⁸Ibid., p. 291.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 291.
- ⁸⁰Ibid., p. 293.
- ⁸¹Ibid., p. 294.
- ⁸²Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 268.
- ⁸³Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 188.
- ⁸⁴Laurence, The Diviners, p. 389.
- ⁸⁵Ibid., p. 123.
- ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 126.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., p. 126.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 126.
- ⁸⁹Tom Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982), p. 60.
- ⁹⁰Laurence, The Diviners, p. 127.

- ⁹¹Ibid., p. 128.
- ⁹²Ibid., pp. 128-29.
- ⁹³Ibid., p. 129.
- ⁹⁴Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 174.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 74.
- ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 74.
- ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 75.
- ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 37.
- ⁹⁹Ibid., p. 138.
- ¹⁰⁰J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 168.
- ¹⁰¹Laurence, The Diviners, p. 188.
- ¹⁰²Ibid., p. 451.
- ¹⁰³Ibid., p. 451.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 4.
- ¹⁰⁵Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 152.
- ¹⁰⁶Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 422.
- ¹⁰⁷Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 153.
- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 153.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 214.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 215.
- ¹¹¹Ibid., p. 215.
- ¹¹²J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 29.
- ¹¹³Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 216.

- 114 Ibid., p. 219.
- 115 Ibid., p. 235.
- 116 Ibid., p. 235.
- 117 Ibid., p. 257.
- 118 Ibid., p. 257.
- 119 Ibid., pp. 273-74.
- 120 Ibid., p. 303.
- 121 Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 139.
- 122 Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 164.
- 123 Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 155.
- 124 Ibid., p. 160.
- 125 Laurence, This Side Jordan, p. 244.
- 126 Laurence, The Diviners, p. 396.
- 127 Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 179.
- 128 Psalm xxii, 14.

Chapter II

Functions of Water Symbolism:

Emphasizing the Survival and Regenerative Forces in Man's Life

The second dominant function of water symbolism in Laurence's fiction is to emphasize the regenerative and survival forces in man's life. Regeneration in this context implies improvement in man's condition after he has been ill in spirit or in body, or has lost hope. In Laurence's writing water appears to be the regenerative force that instils new life and spirit in man. The other force, that of survival, describes the power within man, which enables him not only to remain alive after some incident or occurrence that could have taken his life, but also to cope with the ordinary problems of life without succumbing to them. Laurence emphasizes this concept of survival by using water symbolism and frequently by placing survival in juxtaposition with death. Laurence's characters often experience regeneration or spiritual rebirth near bodies of water, especially near the Pacific Ocean in British Columbia. Survival is frequently symbolized by the act of swimming: swimming is survival; drowning is death.

The life of Hagar, the major character in The Stone Angel, dramatizes the effect of water as a regenerative force as to a lesser extent do the lives of characters in the other novels. The dramatic events toward the end of Hagar's long life become more meaningful with the added dimension the water symbolism gives them. As mentioned in Chapter I, when Hagar runs away to the Cannery, her immediate concern is that she has forgotten to bring any water with her:

I haven't brought any water. I haven't anything to drink, not a mouthful, not even an orange to suck. Oh, what was I thinking of? How could I have neglected that? What shall I do?¹

The realization that she has no water to drink disheartens Hagar and makes her feel physically tired:

I'm all at once tired, so tired I can barely move one foot and then another ... I'm limp as a dishrag. I don't even feel specific pain in my feet or under my ribs₂ now -- only a throbbing in every part of me.²

Water with relation to the character of Hagar does not only emphasize her need to survive, but also symbolizes the actual life in her. Without water she feels drained of life. Chetwynd in his A Dictionary of Symbols reinforces this by saying that "without water there is no life: so water is not an image or simile, but a symbol of life."³ Hagar searches for water, because in spite of being so close to her death she has an enormous will to live. She is looking for a well, a container

of water which would enable her life to go on, but there is no well. Still she keeps trying, "Perhaps there's a well;" and rationalizing, "Now I'm certain there must be, if only I can find it. What would a fortress be without a well?"⁴

In using The Stone Angel as the title of the novel, Laurence has connected Hagar Shipley with the actual tombstone made of "pure white marble,"⁵ in the Manawaka cemetery. The tombstone is hard and unfeeling, with blank sightless eyes. Like the Stone Angel Hagar has lived her life surrounded by her granite-hard fortress-like pride. Now, at the end of her life she looks for a well in the fortress. According to J. E. Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols, "the well is also a symbol of the soul."⁶ Hagar's search for a well, then, appears to be symbolically related to her need to prepare herself for the end of life, to get in touch with her innermost being, her soul. Also since the symbol of the well and "in particular the act of drawing water from a well is - like fishing - symbolic of drawing out and upwards the numinous contents of the deeps,"⁷ Laurence is preparing the reader for what will happen in the Cannery, when Hagar finally does get in touch with her soul and begins to draw out of her unconscious the memories which have been hidden for so long.

As Hagar wakes up after her night in the house near the Cannery, beside the Pacific Ocean, her flesh is parched as she had no water:

I've not had a drop of water since - I can't remember how long it's been. A long time. It's not the way I imagined thirst would feel. My throat doesn't burn or even seem particularly dry. But it's blocked and shut, and it pains me when I swallow.

Hagar remembers that the house is near the Ocean, but she does not want to drink the salty seawater:

I can't drink seawater - isn't it meant to be poisonous? Certainly. Water water everywhere nor any drop to drink. That's my predicament. What albatross did I slay, for mercy's sake?

Hagar does not want to take any chances with her life. Since seawater is poisonous, it could lead to death. She does not want to die. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Hagar will not drink from the ocean. She will continue her search for water, impelled by her determination to live.

Hagar is given new life by some rain water which she discovers in a rusty bucket beside a shed. She perceives it as her "well in the wilderness."¹⁰ Laurence is referring to the Biblical Hagar and her similar situation in the desert when she and her son, Ishmael, were about to die of thirst, until the angel of God pointed out a well for them, full of refreshing water which revived them both. Hagar in The Stone Angel ob-

serves that the water which has saved her life is "murky and tastes of soil and fallen leaves and rust."¹¹ The symbolism of decay points to Hagar's approaching death. Although she drinks the rain water and is momentarily refreshed by it, this water of life tastes of mortality to Hagar.

Inside the Cannery Hagar once more feels her thirst and says, "A glass of water is really all I want."¹² By these repetitions of Hagar's need for water Laurence is emphasizing the tremendous necessity for human survival. For Hagar this fight for survival goes on even after she is rescued from the Cannery and brought to the hospital, and again Laurence chooses water symbolism to highlight the events of these last days in the life of Hagar.

When the nurse gives Hagar medication to make her feel more comfortable and suffer less pain, she gives it with "a good big swallow of water."¹³ Hagar resists and the medicine sticks in her throat until she washes it down with water. Water, symbolizing the very life of Hagar, serves as an agent to make her feel better at her moment of pain. During the night, when the pain returns, Hagar once more calls the nurse to her bedside asking for something to ease the pain. This time she does not resist but swallows the pill

with another gulp of water from the glass. Again with the help of water the pill goes down and the pain subsides.¹⁴

The very last picture Laurence gives of Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel is her last moment of life when she tries to wrest the glass of water from the nurse's hand to hold it in her own hands and to drink.¹⁵ At the very moment of death Hagar Shipley desires the water of life and expresses her tremendous will to survive. Water here is also symbolic of the last Sacrament, administered at the moment of death in order that the soul may continue living even after the death of the body. Elizabeth Goldsmith in her book, Ancient Pagan Symbols, reinforces this idea by stating that "the use of Water as a sacrament of regeneration, symbolizing spiritual re-birth goes back to earliest times...."¹⁶ Laurence's water symbolism here is truly universal and communicable.

Laurence uses water symbolism in her other novels as well to emphasize the concepts of survival and regeneration. In The Diviners Christie tells Morag about a battle scene he and Morag's father had experienced. He remembers how he passed out and when he revived, Morag's father had given him water. Christie also tells her that he shook so hard from the shellshock that

the water spilled, because he could not drink it. He calls it "a goddamn waste."¹⁷ Laurence suggests through this symbolism how life too is "wasted" under such circumstances.

When Morag is visiting Jules at his deathbed, she does not know how to help him. In her desperation she asks if he wants some water.¹⁸ Jules does not want just water; he asks for some rye with the water and Morag pours drinks for both of them. Rye and other forms of alcohol in Laurence's novels symbolize the opposite of water, the opposite of life. Jules will die; he does not fight for survival the way Hagar does.

In The Fire-Dwellers regeneration and survival are emphasized also through water symbolism. When Stacey locks herself in the bathroom, feeling that she is drowned by her problems, she cries for some time, then stops and "washes her face with cold water."¹⁹ The cold water refreshes her, taking the tear stains from her face. It also revives her so that she can return to the kitchen and go on with her life. This as well as the other instances of water symbolism mentioned earlier in this chapter have the common function of underlining the regenerative and survival aspects of man's life. Laurence has used these symbols to such an extent that water could be considered a general symbol for

life as opposed to death in all her novels.

In Chapter I of this study a number of symbolic settings such as pools and beaches were identified with the different periods of man's life. In this chapter also symbolic settings can be identified as serving to emphasize the regenerative and survival forces in man's life. Quite often Laurence's characters are revived by being close to a body of water. The sea coast becomes a dominant symbol of regeneration and survival especially in The Stone Angel. When Hagar finally makes her decision to leave Bram, she heads for the West coast, to Vancouver, to start a new life. It is there that a rebirth is made possible near the Pacific Ocean. Hagar's son, Marvin, does not return to Manawaka after the war, but goes instead "out to the coast,"²⁰ to start his life also in the setting which symbolically emphasizes regeneration. When Hagar's younger son, John, returns to Manawaka and after his father's death finds himself unemployed, the older brother, Marvin, insists that he too should return to the coast.²¹ Marvin is sure that he could find something for John to do there. Many other people have found their way to the West coast especially during the depression years, thinking "that they would rather be broke in a mild climate where the fuel bills would surely be low and the fruit was said to be cheap in season."²²

The West coast symbolizes hope and the possible beginning of a new life for them all.

In Laurence's other novels also the sea coast is an important symbol of regeneration and survival. In A Jest of God when Rachel achieves independence and begins to think of her own life she too wants to move to the West coast. Her mother is reluctant to leave Manawaka, but Rachel finally coaxes her into submission, reminding her that Stacey, the older daughter, is also on the West coast. To leave Manawaka behind and begin a new life in Vancouver is so important to Rachel that she uses all her skill to talk her mother into going, to live in that setting that seems so promising to Rachel. Rachel sees her life as being reborn and her future happy and free from the shackles of her small town "spinster-teacher" image. She envisions how she "will walk by [herself] on the shore of the sea and look at the freegulls flying."²³ Obviously Rachel hopes by this move to achieve the freedom and opportunity she has sought.

Stacey, Rachel's older sister, the main character in The Fire-Dwellers, could not wait to get away from Manawaka when still a young girl, in order to go to the West coast, where all opportunities seemed to be waiting. Having lived in Vancouver for a number of years Stacey has, indeed, found security and happiness

in her marriage to Mac. In middle-age, however, she begins to have personal problems: doubts about the value of her role as the mother of four children and as Mac's wife and as a middle-aged woman. She sees life slipping by and resents the changes in her body, the stretch marks and middle-age bulges that seem to brand her older than she feels. Her greatest concern is her inability to communicate with Mac and his seeming unwillingness to communicate with her. With these difficulties, after an intense quarrel with Mac, Stacey takes the car and drives off, finding her way toward the shore of the ocean. She wants to sit down near the water and think about her problems. Being close to the ocean not only clarifies her thinking but leads to her meeting with Luke, the man who lives in the cottage by the shore and who becomes Stacey's guide to a new life.²⁴ Luke is reminiscent of the Biblical Luke who through his profession as a doctor helped and healed people. The ocean shore specifically and the West coast in general symbolize the regeneration and survival of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers.

The sea coast is the setting for the new civilization in This Side Jordan. "The mammy-wagons [jounce] and [rattle] from Ashanti [the interior] down to the coast, bearing cocoa and bananas and people."²⁵ People from

the villages are moving to the coast in order to find a new and better life for themselves. Like the people of Manawaka in Laurence's Canadian fiction, the African people who want better lives move to the coast. The coast offers the opportunity for them to achieve a new life.

Johnnie and Miranda in This Side Jordan, an English couple who live in Africa, search for a new life close to water. They have had a number of problems in their life recently: Johnnie's business problems and the problems related to Miranda's pregnancy and the birth of their baby. On this particular day they leave the problems behind to be together and to begin a new phase in their life:

That afternoon, Johnnie and Miranda left the baby in the care of Whiskey's young wife while they drove out to Sakumono beach. They walked along the sand, past a grove of palms, a sacred grove. A few old fishing boats rested on the shore near the palms. They were grey and cracked, husks of fishing boats, like shells cast off by sea creatures. Beside them, the women of the village waited with their headpans for the evening boats to ride the wild breakers, bringing the day's catch to shore.

The closeness to the water and to nature in general is refreshing to Johnnie and Miranda. They observe the old fishing boats which lie on the beach like shells cast off by sea creatures. Johnnie and Miranda have had a difficult initiation period in the early phase

of their life in Africa. Now they are through that phase and ready to put behind their former naivete in order to go ahead with the fruitful new life which the "evening boats" full of catch symbolize. The sea setting has refreshed Johnnie and Miranda.

As mentioned earlier, the African coast in This Side Jordan receives its new inhabitants from the inland villages. Similarly the coast of Scotland in The Diviners becomes the new home and the place of refuge for people from the interior. These people, unlike the Africans, are driven off their land:

And it was old men and old women with thin shanks and men in their prime and women with the child inside them and a great scattering of small children, like, and all of them was driven away from the lands of their fathers and onto the wild rocks of the shore, then, to fish if they could and pry the shellfish off of the rocks there, for food.²⁷

This occurs in Christie's story about Morag's ancestors who having "lost their hearths and homes . . . lived wild on the stormy rocks there."²⁸ Once again Laurence uses the sea shore as the place of regeneration and survival. The displaced people find the beginning of a new life on the rocks by the sea. It is an unpretentious beginning, indeed, with nothing to lay their heads on except the rocks of the shore, but they are surviving. Later they leave the rocks on their journey to Canada and all the way to Red River in Manitoba where the new life

seeded on the rocky shore of Scotland grows and blossoms. The setting near the sea emphasizes the aspect of man's survival even in the most difficult circumstances.

A water-related setting, the Wachakwa valley in A Jest of God, symbolizes rebirth in the form of the recovery of his health, by Rachel's pupil, James Doherty. When James is too ill to go to school but well enough to be up around his home, his mother takes him for walks to the valley. Mrs. Doherty thinks that being "around the river" does him more good in that situation than returning to school.²⁹ With his tonsillitis in check James later returns to school recovered and well.

As previously mentioned, Laurence's symbolic sea settings emphasize the regenerative and survival forces in man's life. It is at or near the coast that her characters hope to find a future for themselves and begin new lives. Both Hagar and her son Marvin in The Stone Angel establish their lives on the Pacific Coast as do Stacey and Rachel Cameron at different times in The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God. Morag of The Diviners also moves from Toronto to Vancouver at the point in her life when she begins to build a new, independent life, and her daughter, Pique, is born there, another life beginning in the setting near the Pacific

Ocean. Many other Manawaka people move to the West coast in hopes of a new and better life for themselves and their families. They all begin new lives, but not all of them are successful.

To further emphasize the concept of survival Laurence has taken the water-related activity of swimming and often pitted it against its opposite, drowning, making them symbols for survival and destruction. Laurence's symbolic use of swimming and drowning (of which examples will follow) is similar to Ethel Wilson's use of the same symbolism in Swamp Angel, in relation to the main character, Maggie Vardoe. Maggie has survived three deaths in her family and the breaking of her marriage, but has begun a new life at the Three Loon Lake Resort. Wilson presents Maggie as a strong swimmer, a survivor:

...Maggie had a swim. There was this extra feeling about the swim: Maggie's life had so long seemed stagnant that - now that she had moved forward and found her place with other people again, serving other people again, humouring other people, doing this herself, alone, as a swimmer swims, this way or that way, self-directed or directed by circumstance - Maggie thought sometimes It's like swimming; it is very good, it's nice, she thought, this new life, serving other people as I did years ago with Father; but now I am alone and, like a swimmer, I have to make my way on my own power. Swimming is like living, it is done alone.... I will swim past obstacles (Vera is sometimes an obstacle) because I am a strong swimmer. ³⁰

Wilson points out that Maggie is a survivor because she can swim. " If she could not swim, ah... then.. [the water] would no doubt kill her and think nothing of it."³¹ Wilson compares swimming to living and emphasizes that Maggie survives and is able to live her life because she swims past the obstacles. She believes in her own strength to survive. "She could never sink, she thinks (but she could)."³²

Laurence's water symbolism pertaining to swimming also generally expresses living; yet, as in Wilson's writing above, death is never far away from Laurence's swimmers either. To be able to swim across a body of water or otherwise cross it, means survival and the ability to go on living; drowning is failure to survive. When Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers worries about her children's possibility of survival in the big city, she wonders whether "maybe the best thing would be to bring them up in the very veins of the city, toss them into it like into a lake and say swim or else."³³ Stacey understands that it might be better for the children not to be so sheltered that they are ignorant of the ways of the city. If they learn to swim on their own fairly early, "learn lungs," as Laurence puts it in This Side Jordan, they may have a better chance for survival in life. Laurence's symbol of being able to

swim emphasizes the survival aspect in man's life in general and in the big city setting in particular.

Stacey's son, Duncan, although he knows how to swim, nearly drowns when he gets his foot caught between some stones. Duncan was the unexpected baby in the family, born too soon after his brother, Ian. For his father he was also unwanted. Stacey recalls Duncan's birth:

When Duncan was born, Mac came to see me, and didn't ask about the baby at all, simply said You okay? I guess it was terrible for him. It was terrible. But it was his kid, too. It wasn't immaculate conception. Well, he took on the responsibilities, Stacey. What more do you want?³⁴

Duncan grows up to be a fine-looking sensitive boy. Stacey is able to relate to Duncan's sensitive nature, but Duncan's father, Mac, is not:

- It's the one thought Mac can't bear, the insufficient masculinity of one of his sons. He wonders what will happen when they leave home, what unnatural flowering. He tortures himself (or so [Stacey thinks]) with the idea, and then turns on them and does his sergeant-major act, the toughening process, or so he believes.³⁵

In all of Duncan's seven years Mac has not shown him affection, never picked him up or paid him special attention. For Duncan, survival includes having his father's approval. Yet Duncan continually displeases and infuriates Mac who cannot stand the boy's show of emotion even when Duncan is slightly hurt. After his

father scolds him, Duncan feels that he "never [does] anything right."³⁶ Stacey tries to make him feel better by telling him that his father "didn't mean" what he said. But Duncan knows how his father feels about him and will not be comforted unless it is his father who comforts him:

I just don't do anything right
 - What words? I haven't got any.
 It isn't mine [Stacey's] he wants
 anyway. It's Mac's₃ and Ian's and
 those he won't get.

Laurence uses the drowning accident to enhance Duncan's chance of survival in the family, because the accident makes Duncan's father, Mac, realize that he does love Duncan after all, and approves of him. When Mac is phoned about the accident he comes to the beach running, suddenly aware of the possibility of losing his son:

Stacey! Duncan - I got here as soon
 as I could -
 is he
 Mac is on his knees beside Duncan in
 the sand, uncaring about the vomited
 slime in which he is kneeling....
 Mac lifts Duncan out of Stacey's arms.
 For a moment, she protests.
 It's okay, Mac. I can take him.
 No. Let me. I'll carry him.
 She looks at Mac dazedly. His face is
 under control, but only just. He picks
 up Duncan carefully, and for an instant,
 his own head bowed over Duncan's holds
 him tightly, almost cradlingly.
 - He's never held Duncan before, not ever.
 Why did I think he didn't care about Duncan?
 Maybe he didn't, once. But he does now.

Why didn't I see how much, before?
He never showed it, that's why.³⁸

Later when Duncan is feeling better he has a conversation with his father:

Dad I almost
Duncan knows that Mac carried him from the beach. Mac did not tell Duncan, Stacey did, when Mac was not around. Now Mac is sitting on Duncan's bed. Yeh. Well, lucky for you that you didn't, eh? Next time³⁹ you better watch out for your footing.

Duncan has not even considered a "next time", but realizes that his father expects him to swim again. Knowing now that his father cares for him, Duncan wants to please him and goes swimming again:

Duncan reaches the edge of the water and then he walks, ploddingly, into the sea... Duncan looks incredibly small on the rim of the ocean. But he keeps on walking outward until he reaches what he judges to be a decent and to himself acceptable distance.⁴⁰ Then he turns and swims back to shore.

With this act Duncan appears to conquer his fear of the sea and of drowning. The literal drowning and survival incident reflects a more subtle, symbolic drowning and survival in Duncan's life.

Stacey herself is confronted with the idea of whether she is planning to swim or drown, when she makes her way to the shore of the ocean at a critical time in her marriage. Luke who finds her there huddled on a stray log asks her directly whether she is "contem-

plating a swim." After his question he adds a remark, "Don't drown yourself, that's all I ask."⁴¹ Stacey does not drown herself, but follows Luke into the cottage and having been helped by Luke over some of the difficult parts of her problem, eventually goes back home to Mac. Ever since she was a young girl Stacey has been an excellent swimmer, sure of her ability to cross any body of water. Laurence shows the reader through the swimming-drowning symbolism that regardless of how Stacey may feel, ultimately she is a fighter and a survivor.

The swimming-drowning symbolism is also used in many other places to emphasize survival. When Luke talks to Stacey about his father, he tells her that his father "believes [one has] to work very hard in this life, just to keep [his or her] head above water...."⁴² Again the water-related act of swimming, keeping oneself afloat, symbolizes survival. In This Side Jordan the symbol of drowning is used to emphasize the struggle young Africans like Nathaniel have to go through as they try to survive between the two cultures, the old primitive culture and the new urban culture. The old culture symbolized by the old river and the old gods is doomed as the rivers themselves are, and the gods "[lie] dead beside [the] River."⁴³ Nathaniel between

the two worlds, fighting for survival cries out,..
 "I am drowning."⁴⁴ Even though the symbol of drowning is strongly emphasized to show the despair fo the struggling new civilization, eventually the drowning ends and Laurence introduces the symbol of survival, the crossing of the body of water. Tano's River, the old river may be doomed, but Nathaniel sees King Jesus riding "all in gold",⁴⁵ across the River of Jordan. The Jordan River, the river to be crossed in order to get to the Promised Land, is in Nathaniel's case the symbol of survival and the renewal of life for the Africans.

One last example of the symbolic drowning-swimming is given in the Epigraph to A Jest of God, which reads as follows:

If I should pass the tomb of Jonah
 I would stop there and sit for awhile;
 Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
 And came out alive after all.

The Biblical story of Jonah describes a ship in a storm at sea, during which Jonah is thrown into the sea to drown, but is swallowed by "a whale" instead.⁴⁶ Jonah remains in the stomach of the whale for three days and three nights and eventually is deposited by this "Leviathan" on the seashore. After that experience Jonah is a changed man. Even though he was as good as dead, drowned and swallowed up, so to speak, he finally comes out alive after all, surviving the tremendous struggle.

He does not survive by his ability to swim, however, but is miraculously resurrected from the pit of the whale's stomach. Now he is willing to obey God and do what he at first refused to do. Jonah is granted a new beginning.

Laurence has chosen this particular epigraph to foreshadow Rachel's symbolic drowning in the circumstances of her present life: the aimless existence in Manawaka as a companion to her mother; her difficulties trying to establish relationships with people: Nick, Calla, little James Doherty, her principal. The deepest, darkest level of drowning for Rachel occurs with her loss of Nick and at the same time her "pregnancy". It is at this point that she attempts suicide: reaches the lowest point in her life, then little by little begins to surface again. Finally she, like Jonah, comes "out alive after all," and plans a new beginning on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The symbolic epigraph clearly emphasizes the struggle and the eventual survival of the novel's main character, Rachel Cameron.

In addition to the swimming-drowning symbolism Laurence uses rain several times to symbolize ongoing struggle in people's lives, giving emphasis to the survival aspect in spite of the struggle. In This Side Jordan a rainstorm breaks out while Johnnie Kestoe is visiting his neighbour, Helen Cunningham. Helen is

obviously afraid of the storm, the wind that precedes it and clatters the shutters, and the "evil and malicious" lightning, which represents to her Africa as a "cruel and hard and menacing" place to live.⁴⁷ The storm does not last very long, but in that time Helen expresses to Johnnie her fears about the Africanization presently going on at the British Firm that employs her husband and Johnnie Kestoe. Then, "the rain [stops] as suddenly as it began. For the moment, the storm [is] over."⁴⁸ The end of the storm releases Johnnie to go home; he is freed by the stopping of the rain from his obligation to listen to Helen further. Later, when the "symbolic" storm at the Firm blows over, Helen's worst fears are realized as her husband is the first to be let go. Johnnie, on the other hand, stays and becomes the new manager. All this Laurence has introduced through the rainstorm, the struggle that ends in a new life for Johnnie who is free to go after the storm is over.

Another example of how Laurence uses rain to symbolize the concept of a struggle followed by victory, occurs in The Diviners. Morag has moved to Vancouver, to start a new life on the West coast, but finds the continual rain overwhelming. The rain symbolizes the personal struggle she is going through. She is pregnant and tries to find a decent place to live.

She has very little to live on although eventually she hopes to start writing again for a living. Morag is a survivor by nature: she has been orphaned at an early age and has struggled all her young life to survive. In spite of the rain, that is, her personal struggle, Morag has decided to survive this situation too. In her challenging way she says, "Go ahead, God, let it rain, then. Let it rain forever. I won't be drowned."⁴⁹ Morag is determined to find for herself and her child the new life she has set out to seek, and the problems will not stop her. Laurence's rain symbol emphasizes struggle, but hints at victory and survival to come.

As mentioned earlier, alcohol in Laurence's novels generally symbolizes the opposite of water, the opposite of life. It is often called "firewater", to contrast it with water which cools and refreshes a person. Even wine is perceived as a harmful agent. As Hagar, in The Stone Angel, drinks the wine offered to her by the unknown man she meets in the Cannery, she finds that it tastes "sweetish", "slightly chemical", but "delicious after the rain water."⁵⁰ The result of her drinking is, however, a sick feeling, as she brings it all up later.

Wine in Laurence's novels does not promote health and life; rather, it induces feelings of illness and discomfort. It does not satisfy a person's thirst,

but makes it worse. After her drinking, Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers has a tremendous hangover and the same kind of thirst as Hagar in the Cannery. Stacey makes her way to the washroom, thinking, "Help. Water. Water. I'm dying of thirst. Bathroom... Am I going to throw up?"⁵¹ She, like Hagar, feels very ill and her thirst is worse than ever. Rachel in A Jest of God uses whisky to help her swallow the barbiturates when she is attempting suicide.⁵² The "firewater" burns her throat, and gives her a temporary reaction of lightness. She is not able to take the sleeping pills, however, and her resolve to die weakens momentarily. The whisky does not help her to solve her problem; it has been a part of her plan to take her own life. It could have destroyed her, had she not come to her senses in time.

The three examples above show how alcohol in Laurence's novels is generally a negative agent, leading to illness and self-destruction. It is shown as the opposite of water which is a positive, health-aiding and life-giving agent, satisfying a person's thirst rather than making it worse as alcohol invariably does. "Firewater" is not an agent for a person's survival but for his destruction.

The purpose of this chapter has been to analyze the main instances of the second important function

of water symbolism in Laurence's novels, that of the regenerative and survival forces in man's life. Hagar in The Stone Angel stands out as the character whose life most dramatizes the effect of water as a regenerative force. Hagar's struggle to survive and to be restored by water typifies the last days of her life. Such other characters as Christie and Jules in The Diviners and Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers also use water to improve their condition. Christie and Stacey are revived, but Jules who prefers alcohol to water will degenerate.

Laurence has also used symbolic settings to emphasize the regenerative and survival forces in man's life. The Pacific coast appears to be such a setting in The Stone Angel, The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God, as well as in connection with Morag's life in The Diviners. The African coast in This Side Jordan emphasizes the dynamic and forceful new African civilization. The coast of Scotland in The Diviners offers refuge and survival for Morag's ancestors and the beginning of their new life, as they embark on their journey to Canada. In fact, the ship that comes for them is another directly water-related symbol for shelter and survival. The leader of the people, Piper Gunn, "led his people into the ships when they were living on the rocks there in the Old Country,"⁵³ as Morag explains

to Jules, when describing her ancestors.

Proximity to water gives new life to many of Laurence's characters. They go near the water troubled in spirit and sometimes even ill in body and after a while return refreshed. The examples of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers meditating by the Pacific Ocean, Johnnie and Miranda in This Side Jordan taking a holiday on the beach and Jamie in A Jest of God getting physically better near the Wachakwa River bear this out.

The concept of survival is further emphasized by the swimming-drowning symbolism in all the novels. Often a struggle to survive is necessary, but the swimmers do survive at the end; they do not drown. Rain like the swimming-drowning symbolism symbolizes ongoing struggle, but there is a strong emphasis on survival and regeneration with the rain symbolism also. Rain symbolism used in this way appears in This Side Jordan as well as The Diviners. The several examples given throughout the chapter show that Laurence's emphasis is generally on the positive ideas of survival and regeneration rather than destruction and death.

Notes

Chapter II

- ¹Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 152.
- ²Ibid., p. 152.
- ³Tom Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982), p. 422.
- ⁴Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 153.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁶J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 350.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 350.
- ⁸Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 186.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 186.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 187.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 187.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 255.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 255.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 274.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 308.
- ¹⁶Elisabeth Goldsmith, Ancient Pagan Symbols (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), p. 28.
- ¹⁷Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 91.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 444.
- ¹⁹Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), p. 164.

- ²⁰ Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 130.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 182.
- ²² Ibid., p. 165.
- ²³ Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 202.
- ²⁴ Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 175.
- ²⁵ Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 97.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 280.
- ²⁷ Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 49.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 49.
- ²⁹ Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 50.
- ³⁰ Ethel Wilson, Swamp Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1962), p. 99.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 100.
- ³² Ibid., p. 100.
- ³³ Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, p. 9
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 22.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 26.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 119.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 119.
- ³⁸ Ibid., pp. 294-95.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 296.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 298.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 174.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 199.

⁴³Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 76.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁶Jonah 1:17.

⁴⁷Laurence, This Side Jordan, p. 122.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁹Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 296.

⁵⁰Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 223.

⁵¹Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), p. 111.

⁵²Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 170.

⁵³Laurence, The Diviners, p. 72.

Chapter III

Functions of Water Symbolism: Assisting in Characterization

In the earlier chapters, Laurence's use of water symbolism to depict the four major periods in man's life and to emphasize the survival and regenerative forces in man's life have been discussed. This chapter will focus on the third major function of water symbolism included in the present analysis; this final function is to aid in characterization. Laurence uses water symbolism in her descriptions of a number of characters, for example, Morag and Royland in The Diviners, Rachel in A Jest of God, Hagar, Bram and John in The Stone Angel, and Stacey, Luke and Tess Fogler in The Fire-Dwellers. She also characterizes the town and society of Manawaka and the city of Vancouver, and groups of people who live within these societies, as well as the myths of the Scots and the Metis, by using water symbolism.

Laurence's portrayal of the main character in The Diviners, Morag Gunn, is inextricably bound to the two rivers in Morag's life, which have both already been introduced in Chapter I: the Wachakwa and the river at McConnell's Landing (actually the Otonabee

River). The implications of the latter in relation to Morag's character will be discussed later in this chapter.

Morag's early life is characterized against the background of the brown Wachakwa River. She lives on Hill Street with Christie Logan, the town garbage collector, and his wife Prin. Years later the grown-up Morag recalls the details of Hill Street and its relationship to the Wachakwa:

Hill Street, so named because it was on one part of the town hill which led down into the valley where the Wachakwa River ran, glossy brown, shallow, narrow, more a creek than a river.... Hill Street was below town; it was inhabited by those who had not and never would make good. Remittance men and their draggled families. Drunks. People perpetually on relief. Occasional labourers, men whose tired women supported the family by going out to clean the big brick houses on top of the hill on the streets shaded by sturdy maples, elms, lombardy poplars. Hill Street -- dedicated to flops, washouts and general no-goods, at least in the view of the town's better-off.¹

Laurence has situated Hill Street, Morag's childhood environment, "below town," on the way to the Wachakwa River valley. In the valley itself lives the Metis family which is also ostracized by the townspeople. The entire Wachakwa River area has connotations connected with the lower levels of society from the point of view of "the town's better-off." The river itself is "brown, shallow, narrow, more a creek than river."

Laurence's characterization of the river blends well with the characterization of the community within the river environment as seen in the above quotation. The people, too, appear to be dirty-brown rather than dainty-white; their minds seem shallow and their goals in life narrow, limited. The "town's better-off" see the Hill Street and Wachakwa valley people as "flops, washouts and general no-goods," a rattling brown creek of people rather than a mighty flowing river.

Although Laurence uses the river environment primarily to symbolize the lower end of Manawaka society, she shows that within that environment there are also some positive factors. Even though the river is brown, its water appears clear. Morag, watching the river, wonders about this:

The river rattles over the stones, but the water is clear. How come the water is both brown and clear? Brown sounds murky. But this is as clear as brown glass, like in a beer bottle, or no, not that, not like that at all. What like? Like only itself, maybe, the Wachakwa River, in places only a creek.²

The entire river environment appears "murky" in the view of those who look at it from far above, the "town's better-off," but, in fact, is not. Morag, herself, raised in the vicinity of the Wachakwa and part of its low-class society, is not what the brown, slow-moving creek would imply. She is full of potential to grow

and be transformed. Laurence's presentation of the Wachakwa River appears to have a twofold purpose in the characterization of Morag: to show her early social background as perceived by others, in relation to the river environment, and to show the reality of Morag, the unique potential the society has not taken into consideration, implied by the real clarity despite the brown appearance of the water.

The Wachakwa River is not the only river involved in Morag's characterization, but, as mentioned earlier, there is also the McConnell's Landing river. This river is wide and deep and its water is "bronze-green"³ in colour. Compared to the Wachakwa it is a real river inhabited by fish and favored by waterfowl. It is full of life and appears ageless. Its unique characteristic is that it seems to flow both ways: north and south. Against the background of this river Laurence characterizes the grown-up Morag. Morag is "a lover of rivers"⁴ and her daily life is closely connected with this river. "As the mist [lifts],"⁵ Morag begins her mornings by watching the river; she "[looks] out at the river while writing at the long table in the kitchen"⁶ during the day, and in the evening she keeps her kitchen lights dim "so she [can] see the night river with stars floating like watercandles on it."⁷ When she is worried or unhappy, Morag gets even closer to the river: she sits

on the dock "[listening] to the slapping of the small waves against the wooden posts of the dock,"⁸ or looking at the "night river ... dark and shining."⁹ At times like this she experiences "incredibly, unreasonably, a lightening of the heart,"¹⁰ an emotional reaction resulting from her relationship to the river.

The river's unique characteristic of flowing both north and south at the same time provides the structural symbol for the characterization of Morag's entire life, as already mentioned in Chapter I. As Morag watches the McConnell's Landing River flow in one direction and ripple in another, she, too, allows her memory to go back and relives her entire life while continuing her present day existence connected with the physical McConnell's Landing River. The bronze-green colour of the river further recalls the idea of the life cycle of man, ("green [being] the colour of vegetation, but also of corpses...") the cycle of birth and death."¹¹

Just as the Wachakwa characterized Morag's early life, the shallow, narrow milieu of Manawaka, so the McConnell's Landing River now characterizes Morag's adult life, the culturally rich life of the recognized author whose ideas flow deeply like the river by which she writes. Whereas the colour of the Wachakwa is brown

and appears murky to those who look down on it, the McConnell's Landing River is bronze-green, further characterizing the difference in these two periods of Morag's life. The murky brown is the colour of the period of Morag's poverty: material, spiritual and cultural; the bronze-green depicts the improved life of Morag, the life growing by the deeply flowing river.

The water symbolism in one of the novels Morag is reminiscing on in The Diviners while watching the river further characterizes her:

The novel whose title is Jonah, is the story of an old man, a widower, who is fairly disreputable and who owns a gillnetter in Vancouver. He fishes the mouth of the Fraser River and the Strait of Georgia when the salmon run is on.¹²

Even though the main character of the novel is an old man, the fact that his name is Jonah implies a symbolic character closely related to Morag herself. Like the Biblical Jonah, Morag has, since leaving Brooke and her marriage, been in fear of drowning, swallowed by her troubles, until the time she is writing this novel, when she begins to surface and to survive.

The novel's Jonah is "fairly disreputable" like Christie and a fisherman like Royland, symbolizing the two men who have influenced Morag's life in each of the two periods mentioned above. It is through Christie's myths

that Morag has become interested in her Scottish background, but has her home and her roots in "Christie's land," Canada. Jonah's fishing location in Morag's novel is the West coast, the land of hope for survival and regeneration in Laurence's writing, the place where Morag, too, began her life over. At the time of the writing of her novel, Morag is in England, but makes her decision to go back to Canada, to return home like the salmon which return to their native rivers in her story.

Another person in The Diviners, who is characterized through water symbolism is Royland, Morag's neighbour at McConnell's Landing. He is portrayed by Laurence as "The Old Man of the River."¹³ Already before his job as a water diviner, Royland was a spiritual diviner, capitalizing on people's emotions. He tells Morag that when he preached, "strong men wept."¹⁴ Fortunately Royland did some spiritual divining of himself and did not like what he found. Leaving the ministry, he found that he could divine water and this seemed a more fitting occupation for him than preaching. Laurence relates Royland to water in three ways: as a preacher of God's Word, the Living Water; as a diviner who finds water, the source of life in the earth; and as a fisherman who finds the source of nourishment and

life in water. Royland is characterized by Laurence as "the Shaman"¹⁵ who finds the source of water and transmits life and nourishment in the form of water and the fish he catches, as well as through his understanding and compassionate words. As a fisherman, he has a symbolic precedent in the Fisher King of the Grail legends, "the wise man, who can bring up the treasures of the deep, from the depths of the mind."¹⁶ Like the Fisher King, Royland has been wounded. His wounds come from his previous life of uncharitable religious zeal which ended with the suicide by drowning of his wife. Royland has since found healing in his solitary life as a water-diviner. Whereas the Quester in the Grail legends fails, Royland, with wisdom, gained through experience, is able to help Morag by asking her the right questions as she attempts to understand life.

In addition to her characterization of Morag and Royland of The Diviners through the aid of water symbolism, Laurence portrays some of the characters in the other novels in a similar way. For example, the characterization of Rachel in A Jest of God is enhanced by water-related symbolism. Rachel, as has been previously mentioned, has difficulty with her human relationships. Laurence enlightens the reader about

Rachel's situation with each of these relationships by illustrating them through water-related symbolism. For instance, when Rachel talks with Willard, her principal, she experiences conflicting emotions. He has a certain attraction for her, but he also repels her. When she looks at him, she is reminded of a fish:

His eyes are pallid, like the blue dead
 eyes of the frozen whitefish we used to get
 in the winter when I was a child, and I
 always choked on that fish, recalling the eyes.¹⁷

Fish here is a negative symbol with sexual overtones. It is the eyes, however, that play such a prominent part in this symbolism. According to Chetwynd, fish eyes are "eyes into the unconscious."¹⁸ He explains that they symbolize "different self-governing complexes peering out at the dim domains of the psyche."¹⁹ Based on Chetwynd's interpretation then, as Rachel looks into those pallid blue fisheyes of Willard, she "peers at the domains" of her own unconscious mind and is aware of her own feelings: she is both attracted and repelled. She is not able to accept her feelings any more than she was able to eat the whitefish with the frozen eyes that Willard's eyes make her remember.

Rachel has a friend, Calla, who is a problem to her. Calla likes Rachel very much; in fact, at one point she displays her friendship in a way to make Rachel shrink back thinking Calla may be a Lesbian. Calla

goes to the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, a fundamentalist congregation where the gift of tongues is being manifested. Rachel has promised to go to Calla's church although she does not want to go. The evening when she finally does go, it is raining. Rachel is glad of this, because rain will be her symbolic disguise in order to enter the church unseen. The raincoat she is wearing, "the only new thing [she has] bought this season,"²⁰ is another disguise to remain anonymous. Calla compliments Rachel on her new raincoat and then leads her to the church, out of the rain. Calla herself feels "like a drowned rat,"²¹ open and exposed to the rain. Laurence's contrasting characterization of the two women, the tightly buttoned, neat Rachel and the disheveled wet Calla, has been achieved by this use of water-related symbolism. Rachel's desire to remain anonymous is symbolized by her white raincoat in which she will remain untouched by Calla's religion and even life itself, whereas Calla is not hiding herself inside a symbolic raincoat, nor is she afraid of life as she knows it. On the contrary, she allows herself to get wet, to feel and experience the rain.

At home Rachel has yet another problem, her mother, who is used to controlling Rachel's life and inhibiting her comings and goings. When Rachel is about to go for a walk, her mother says, "I thought it looked

like rain."²² Rachel's mother uses the idea of rain as a restraint in Rachel's life: Rachel will not be able to go out even for a walk without her mother making an issue of it, or if she goes, she has to button up in her white raincoat.

One of the water-related symbols used by Laurence to characterize Hagar in The Stone Angel is tears or the lack of them. Laurence shows Hagar as a tough, unyielding person, made so because of her pride. Even as a child Hagar displayed the characteristics of toughness -- or pride. When her father punished her, she would not cry. Hagar's father like Brooke's in The Diviners demanded surrender through tears. "He looked at [Hagar's] dry eyes in a kind of fury, as though he'd failed unless he drew water from them."²³ Knowing what was expected of her, Hagar would not relent. Her pride helped her to keep control. Even though she had to stifle her tears and quickly get out of her father's sight, she did not break down at his insistence. To Hagar tears are a sign of weakness and all through her life she refuses to cry.

In old age Hagar discovers that she is no longer in control of many things. When she falls and her daughter-in-law whom she despises comes to help her get up, Hagar is both humiliated and frustrated. To her utmost dis-

comfort and dismay she realizes that she is crying:

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 down my face.
 They₂₄ are no tears of mine, in front of
 her.

The fact that her daughter-in-law, Doris, is there to see the tears agonizes Hagar. The involuntary tears, symbolizing her loss of control over her own life, make Hagar cringe with shame. The proud old woman concentrates on forbidding the infamous tears, but to no avail. Laurence here seems to use the symbol of tears to characterize Hagar's aging and her loss of control in spite of her pride.

Through another incident in the old Hagar's life Laurence shows that anger can be even stronger and more effective than pride. When Hagar is being X-rayed, she has to swallow barium and begins to retch. Tears spring to her eyes unbidden. When the X-ray doctor tells her calmly that if she throws up, she will have to take the barium again, Hagar's anger overflows, "[her] eyes stop watering and [her] constricted throat is eased by [her] fury."²⁵ She snaps at the X-ray doctor and her tears and the resulting embarrassment are gone. Even though she is aging and her tears spring up without her will, Hagar's anger is still strong enough to keep her tears and her feelings in check.

The one time Hagar does not try to stop the unbidden tears is in the Cannery after she has told the strange man about John's death and admitted her own responsibility in it. She has not realized that she has said it all aloud until the man responds with sympathy. Hagar puts "a hand to [her] face, and [finds] the skin slippery with [her] tears."²⁶ These tears do not embarrass her. The strange but friendly man in the semi-darkness of the Cannery is not threatening to her. He is no one she knows; his anonymity releases Hagar to allow her tears to flow freely for once. Laurence's proud character has reached a new experience in life. Throughout the novel Laurence has characterized Hagar as the Stone Angel, "doubly blind,"²⁷ but now the character changes: the hardness of Hagar's pride is washed away with her tears as humility and truthfulness enter.

Hagar's husband, Bram, is characterized by Laurence as a lazy good-for-nothing who likes to waste time fishing on the Wachakwa River where there are no fish:

The moment would come when he would recall the brown Wachakwa, the easeful grass on the sloping banks, and he'd be off, like Simple Simon, to fish for whales, maybe, in six inches of creek water.²⁸

When he first came to Manawaka, Bram had "taken a home-
stead in the valley just outside town."²⁹ Like

the Hill Street residents mentioned earlier in this chapter, Bram, too, is portrayed against the Wachakwa River environment, which gives indication of his low social standing in the community.

To set the scene for Bram's impending death, Laurence has used negative water symbols. There is a drought in the area:

The prairie had a hushed look. Rippled dust lay across the fields.... The wind was everywhere, shuffling through the dust, wading and stirring until the air was thickly gray with grit.³⁰

The lack of water emphasizes death. The medication which John gives to his father, Bram, is alcohol, home-brew, which has the opposite effect to that of the life-giving water:

"Time for your medicine, Dad," John said. At first I wondered how he'd managed to pay a doctor or a druggist. But then I saw what it was. He refilled the glass from the gallon jug that stood on the floor, and put it into the old man's hands, helping him to drink it so he wouldn't slop too much over himself.³¹

Bram's unsuccessful life in the Wachakwa valley and his impending death are characterized through symbols which are either water-related or in opposition to water.

Hagar's favourite son, John, is also characterized by water symbolism in The Stone Angel. When Hagar makes the break from Bram and moves to Vancouver, she takes John with her. John, usually a lively youngster,

is unhappy about going, although he does not say anything against his mother. Yet "his face [is] still as stagnant water."³² The stagnant water symbol has negative connotations, portraying John's hidden emotions about going.

Even though John generally hides his emotions well from his mother and carries on the role of Hagar's favorite son, he eventually leaves his mother and returns to the farm in Manawaka to look after his ailing father. When Hagar comes to visit, she is appalled by the condition of Bram and the farm itself, and blames Bram for letting the farm go. The irritation brewing in John for years is well under control even at this point, but there is no doubt about the irony in his answer to Hagar, "What would you have done?.. Hired a rainmaker?"³³ John's answer not only suggests the impossibility of the situation and the excessiveness of Hagar's expectations, but it also characterizes John himself, now grown up and not afraid to talk back to his mother or show his real emotions.

When Bram dies, Hagar, true to her character does not cry. John, although Hagar's son and the one that she thinks takes after the Currie side of the family, does cry.³⁴ Laurence's characterization of John through these symbolic references increases the reader's understanding of his nature. Although he looks much like

Hagar, John is not built of the same marble as the Stone Angel. John's face may not reflect his feelings, but for him tears are a release.

In The Fire-Dwellers examples of Laurence's characterization through the use of water symbolism are found. A number of water-related symbols are used to portray Stacey MacAindra. When Thor, her husband's employer, meets her for the first time, he tries to convince her about the company's vitamin program. Stacey perceives that he is baiting her and that he sees her in terms of "a little fish,"³⁵ rising to bait. As usual, Laurence's fish symbol carries negative sexual connotations, suggesting that Thor's approach, innocent as it may sound in words, has sexual overtones. Stacey is characterized in this water-related incident by her quick perception of the situation and her negative reaction to Thor's suggestions. Even though everything that Thor says sounds fine, Stacey senses duplicity of some kind and tries to get Mac, her husband, to level with her about what he really thinks of Thor. Mac will not do so, because he is trying to keep his job and to believe in what he is doing.

Another water-related symbol introduced in connection with Stacey's character is the colour of Thor's

eyes:

Thor looks at Stacey, and she looks into his blue eyes, blue as the copper sulphate that used to be put in the near-shore water of Diamond Lake to clear it of the snails that caused itch.³⁶

Blue, the colour related to sky and water in a positive way, symbolizing, according to Chetwynd, "the inner spiritual essence,"³⁷ has also the connotations of coolness, even coldness. Even though on the outside Thor's blue eyes might symbolize his sincerity and inner spirituality, the message Stacey receives is one of coldness, a negative message. She associates the colour to copper sulphate, a poison used to kill snails at Diamond Lake. Stacey feels that there is a depth to Thor she does not comprehend and it is not necessarily pure. Laurence here characterizes Stacey as a perceptive, sensitive woman who intuitively and unerringly reacts to hidden stimuli, and makes her own conclusions about people and situations.

Although Laurence portrays Stacey positively, she also shows her weaknesses. Stacey drinks too much gin and loses control easily, then tries to regain control by drinking "nineteen cups of Nescafe before the kids get home."³⁸ As mentioned in Chapter II, alcohol, "fire-water," is a negative symbol in Laurence's writing and opposite to the positive "water." In Stacey's situation

it has the special meaning of identifying her with her father, Niall Cameron, the Manawaka undertaker who had a drinking problem. In Stacey's character, too, the use of alcohol is a negative characteristic.

Even though Stacey sees herself as a weak woman, Laurence portrays her as a fairly strong person. She is the Stacey who in her youth was not afraid to swim across any lake, knowing that she had enough strength to do it. She is the Stacey who can "swallow pills without water,"³⁹ take her medicine straight if she has to, and survive. She is also the Stacey who on the crest of her personal and marital problems surfaces as a "merwoman" on a far-away beach and has the courage to tell her troubles to a perfect stranger who finds her on the beach, at his doorstep.⁴⁰ Luke, the man she meets, is willing to listen to her if she is honest; otherwise he threatens to "throw [her] back on the beach."⁴¹ Stacey does not want to return home without help and tries to be honest with herself as she tells her story to Luke.

Luke himself is also characterized by water-related symbolism. He lives by the Ocean and is related to it both realistically and symbolically. When Stacey asks him what he does when he is not writing, he responds as follows:

I putter, sort of.... Other times I go fishing. I'm no hell of a fisherman, but

it makes me feel good if I can catch something I can live off...."⁴²

Like Royland in The Diviners Luke is the Seer who observes people and recreates life in his writing. He may not be a Fisher King, but his fishing like Royland's is related to bringing up hidden treasures from the minds of other people by listening to them and encouraging them with the right questions and comments.

Laurence characterizes Luke's lifestyle by symbolizing it as "only a rowboat, not one of those fiberglass jobs that all the salesmen have."⁴³ Luke does not "work that hard,"⁴⁴ and, as a result, has very little to show materially. He prefers the "rowboat-life" to the "speedboat life" regardless of the security the speedboats may offer as compared to his leaky rowboat. Luke has consciously made his choice of lifestyle. He is not afraid when "the water goes slap-crash against this feeble little boat;"⁴⁵ nor is he afraid of sea-monsters the way Morag in The Diviners is. Luke tells Stacey that he likes "being absolutely and utterly alone."⁴⁶ When he is alone he gets ideas for his writing, the treasures from the depths of his mind.

The third character in The Fire-Dwellers whom Laurence characterizes through water-related symbolism is Stacey's neighbour, Tess Fogler. In her living room Tess Fogler has an aquarium with some gold fish in it.

She often watches the gold fish and one day Stacey's older daughter Katie finds her forcing little Jen to watch as she tells her how the big gold fish kills and eats the little fish:

She was saying The little fish doesn't want to get eaten up but she's silly, isn't she? She doesn't run away and hide. So the big fish catches her, see? Watch now - look what he's doing to her. Nasty - he's nasty, isn't he?... And the big gold-fish had killed the other one and it was⁴⁷

Soon after this incident Tess Fogler attempts suicide. Her husband, Jake, cannot understand why she would do it. As Stacey thinks about it, she remembers the fish bowl incident and sees a similarity in Tess' own life. "Dog eat dog and fish eat fish. How many things added up? But I didn't get the message either."⁴⁸ Stacey had observed that Tess had no interests beyond her home; it was her symbolic fish bowl and she looked out into the world from inside its walls. Whether she was too afraid and self-conscious about the world to enter it, or whether she just could not cope with it, is not clear to Stacey. It appears from the symbolic characterization that Tess may have perceived her husband, Jake, as a threat, rather than a comfort. The big fish kills the little fish and eats it up. Perhaps Tess blames her husband for the fish bowl life she was living, perceives him as the killer of her desires and the destroyer of her self-confidence. He admits to Stacey having

teased Tess sometimes about being stupid "because she was so goddamn beautiful and I look like some kind of chimpanzee ... how did I know."⁴⁹ Or perhaps the big fish is life itself, swallowing the defenceless victim within the glass walls.

In addition to describing a number of her characters through water symbolism, Laurence also characterizes some societies, the myths of societies and the groups of people within the societies in the same way. The Wachakwa River has already been mentioned several times in connection with the Manawaka society. This river turns up in each of the Manawaka novels and its symbolism is consistent throughout. As has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter, Laurence describes in The Diviners the vicinity of the Wachakwa River as "the Scots-English equivalent of The Other Side of the Tracks,"⁵⁰ and the river itself as a brown, shallow, narrow creek. In A Jest of God Laurence describes the Wachakwa River as "amber water swifting over the pebbles."⁵¹ The colour of the water, brownish and earth-related, suggests that the Wachakwa River is a river of reality. Those connected with it face life realistically, because they have personally known its rough, seamy side. In A Jest of God the person most connected with the river is Nick Kazlik. As men-

tioned in Chapter I, he used to go to the river often with his brother as a boy.⁵² To them it was "neutral territory," not the town of Manawaka proper, nor their home farm either, and they liked to play there. Years later when Nick, now a high school teacher in Winnipeg, returns to Manawaka for a visit, he goes back to the river as if in search of his past, the past he has never forgotten. Nick, the son of Ukrainian immigrants had lived close to the Wachakwa River, on the wrong side of town in the view of the Manawaka society. Deep inside he still carries the scars the Manawaka society inflicted on him. Even though he has gone away from the river environment for good and has become an educator in the big city, the Manawaka society still remembers him as "the milkman's son."⁵³ For them he still inhabits a part of that society characterized by the earth-coloured river that dominates the landscape of Nick's childhood and youth.

In The Diviners Morag Gunn lives through a childhood and youth similar to Nick's. She too lived in the vicinity of the Wachakwa. Morag is also a realist. She knows that if she does not watch her step, she will slip and end up in the brown water.⁵⁴ Morag makes sure that she does not slip. She knows something about the Wachakwa River many other people do not know. She knows that the water is both brown and clear. Both

Nick and Morag leave the muddy Wachakwa behind eventually and realize their potential which was suggested by the actual clearness of the water of the river. Although their childhood years were spent on the Wachakwa, its implications regarding social standing have not reached into their successful adulthoods. It is only when they return to Manawaka and the Wachakwa environment that they recall the past which was dominated by inferiority.

The Wachakwa River is not a fantasy river, nor is it a river of romance. In The Stone Angel Hagar as a child observes her father walking together with Lottie Drieser's mother past the cemetery "quietly on the path farther down the hill, near the river bank, where the Wachakwa ran brown and noisy over the stones."⁵⁵ What appears, at first, to be a tentative love relationship between the two turns out quite differently, as they, moments later, part in anger. Manawaka society could never tolerate a love relationship between the low caste No-Name Lottie's mother and Hagar's rich and well-respected father. The brown, noisy, common Wachakwa River as the setting for this incident foreshadows the negative outcome of the encounter and emphasizes the social reality of Manawaka.

The Wachakwa River portrays also the threatening, even dangerous aspect of the Manawaka society:

In winter the Wachakwa river was solid as marble, and we skated there, twining around

the bends, stumbling over the rough spots where the water had frozen in waves, avoiding the occasional patch where the ice was thin - "rubber ice," we called it. Doherty from the Livery Stable owned the Manawaka Icehouse as well, and used to send out his sons with the dray and horses to cut blocks. Sometimes, skidding around a curve in the river, you'd see a dark place ahead, like a deep wound on the white skin of ice, and you'd know Doherty's dray and ice-saw had been there that afternoon. It was dusk, all shapes and colors having turned gray and indefinite, that my brother Daniel, skating backward to show off for the girls, fell in.⁵⁶

What appears only a bad chill at first, turns into pneumonia later and Daniel who does not have a strong health to begin with, dies. His father, Jason Currie, has not shown sympathy for him because of his weak health before his illness or during it. Jason Currie, Daniel's father, represents that side of Manawaka society, which cannot tolerate weakness in others. The threatening, dangerous characteristics of the Wachakwa River portrayed by its icy marble hardness and the "rubber ice" which stands out like "a deep wound on the white skin of ice" appear to symbolize the intolerance and unacceptance prevalent in Manawaka society to those who are not cut according to the accepted mode. Like Daniel, they may not survive.

Hagar Currie, when she marries Bram Shipley and moves to his farm, becomes a social outcast. She

has married a poor man with no gentility or culture, who uses coarse language and gets drunk publicly. Now she lives with him on "a homestead in the valley just outside town,"⁵⁷ the lower end of Manawaka society. There is no acceptance for her either. Her own father disowns her. Hagar herself is so naive in the beginning that she expects to change Bram's uncouth ways and does not believe their economic situation is as poor as it is. She thinks that later when they have cash she will be able to hire help to do the housework:

I thought of Polacks and Galicians from the mountain, half-breeds from the river valley of the Wachakwa, or the daughters and spinster aunts of the poor, forgetting that Bram's own daughters had hired out whenever they could be spared, until they married very young and gained a permanent employment.⁵⁸

Hagar does not realize that she herself lives in the river valley and that she too will have to "hire out" in future days. The commonness of the Wachakwa River valley and the people related to it, as pointed out in the beginning of this chapter in the long quotation from The Diviners, has not sunk into Hagar's mind early in her marriage, and later pride forbids her to acknowledge it even to herself. In the eyes of the Manawaka society the Wachakwa River inhabitants certainly are common: "flops, washouts and general no-goods;"⁵⁹ those who have envied Hagar in her better

days feel a certain satisfaction in her downgrading.

When Hagar's father dies, his money goes to the town of Manawaka and "within a year, Currie Memorial Park [is] started beside the Wachakwa River."⁶⁰ The fact that the location of the park is to be beside the Wachakwa River, is ironic. The rich, respected high-class citizen of Manawaka has now his name attached to a property beside the common Wachakwa. Death has balanced off the scales when Currie Memorial Park lies next to the Metis shacks.

Laurence's portrayal of Vancouver is very different from her symbolic characterization of the little prairie town of Manawaka. The location on the Pacific Ocean tends to invest Vancouver with almost a Utopian aura for many who are seeking a better future. Unlike Manawaka there is nothing small or shallow about Vancouver itself and, in addition, the Ocean lends an extra dimension of space and depth to the city. Yet Vancouver, too, has its ambiguities:

Down at the harbour, where Morag sometimes walks, hoping to understand the place, the vast ships cluster and creak, groaning and shunting, wallowing herds of ungainly sea-monsters. Then, surprisingly, one will glide majestically from the harbour, transformed by movement, as clumsy waddling seals are transformed into eel-like liveness when they swim. The gulls scream imprecations, their tongues hoarse and obscene, but the white flash of their wings is filled with grace abounding.⁶¹

Laurence's portrayal of Vancouver harbour from Morag's viewpoint is in terms of the giant machinery she sees around her. Laurence effectively characterizes Vancouver harbour and the ships in terms of natural and water-related symbolism, giving a dynamic quality to the world of machines. Even waterbirds, the gulls, are part of the harbour characterization, their voices as "shrill and obscene" as the noises from any foghorn or other manmade contraption, but their wings flash white grace, emphasizing the beauty and freedom seen in the natural world. Laurence calls them "freegulls", making them a symbol of freedom and hope.

Being a big city Vancouver has a variety of residential areas as opposed to Manawaka's town proper and the edges toward the river valley. Laurence describes the house in Vancouver, where Morag lives, as follows:

A tall narrow frame house, last painted around the turn of the century, no doubt, and now a not-unpleasant uniform grey, not the heavy hard grey of a uniform, but the light sea-bleached grey of driftwood, silver without silver's sheen.⁶²

Morag has learned to live simply, having faced the realities of existence and survival most of her life. The old house has the qualities of the Ocean itself, having been bleached by the sun and the salty sea winds for over a century. Such houses seem to represent both the memories of the past and the dreams for the future.

Like Hagar's Cannery, they can be treasure houses of thought and recollection, a shelter against the winds.

In addition to her characterization of the societies mentioned, Laurence uses water symbolism in describing the different myths of two segments of society: that of Morag, the Scot, and that of Jules, the Metis. The myths involving Morag's Scottish ancestors who were driven off their land and forced to make a living by the sea until a ship arrived to take them to their new homeland, Canada, are told by Christie Logan to Morag. The mythical ancestors set against the billowing, stormy seas are an important part of Morag's life as a child and she never tires of hearing stories about them.⁶³ When she and Jules compare stories, she finds that the Metis society has its own myths comparable to hers. In Jules' myths a legendary horse, Roi de Lac, rises from a lake, and Rider Tonnerre, an ancestor of Jules, rides him to battles.⁶⁴ The characterization in both myths is enhanced by water symbolism, giving Morag's ancestors a rugged, stubborn quality as they doggedly ply their lives to survive "on the stormy rocks there,"⁶⁵ by the sea, and to Jules' ancestors a quality of mysterious heroism, as they ride victoriously into battles on the legendary horse, "King of the Lake ... huge white stallion [which] came up out of the lake."⁶⁶ Later Morag understands that these

seemingly historical episodes are, in fact, myths based on some historic incidents or characters, and much altered in the process of telling.⁶⁷ To her and Jules they are an important part of their childhood and even their present identity.

Most of Laurence's characterization of groups of people within a society, involving water symbolism, is done in This Side Jordan. One of the main characters, Nathaniel Amegbe, the African schoolmaster, is being hounded by creditors for money to meet the obligations of his numerous relatives. His salary is not high and the pressure of the relatives and the relatives' relatives for money (since he is a schoolmaster he must be rich) is more than he can handle. As he sits at his desk after school despairing the situation, he sees his relatives "as the surf, wave after wave, a tumult of outstretched hands battering endlessly at one weak island."⁶⁸ Here Laurence appears to take advantage of the ambivalence of the ocean symbolism. Besides being a positive, beneficial symbol, there is a definite destructive element about the sea, the waves rushing high and powerful against the lone island. This characterization of the people in the African society in terms of the surf and waves is visually very effective.

At another time, on his way from work Nathaniel meets Ankrah, the carver, who like Nathaniel is origi-

nally from Ashanti. Ankrah has moved to Accra, because there is more money there, but he does not trust the coast people. Laurence's characterization of the coast people involves water-related symbols as Ankrah describes them to Nathaniel:

They're slippery, like the fish they catch... I'll tell you what they're like. Just like those crabs you see on the sand there. Step this way to catch one, and it slips off that way. You move that way, it passes this way--.⁶⁹

The symbol of the sea is also used briefly to characterize people of Africa from the viewpoint of the whites. As already mentioned in Chapter II, Helen Cunningham, the wife of one of the white executives of the British Firm, expresses her feelings about Africa to Johnnie Kestoe, Mr. Cunningham's colleague, during a sudden storm which rises:

The thunder that followed was an explosion so deafening that the steady roar of the rain seemed subdued by comparison.⁷⁰

This storm affects Helen Cunningham negatively, and prompts her to express her opinions to Johnnie:

That's what all of Africa is like to me -- vicious. It's all in the same pattern. The sea, the sun, the storms, that snake the other day, even⁷¹ the people. Cruel and hard and menacing.

In Helen Cunningham's words Laurence sums up collectively her characterization of Africa and its people as perceived by the expatriate European. The African people

are similar to the sea, and the sea is cruel and hard and menacing.

Nathaniel's view of African people, his own people, differs from Helen Cunningham's negative view. When Nathaniel is watching the church parade it appears to him like a river. "The parade flowed unevenly down the street."⁷² He watches the beautiful girl who with hips undulating and breasts bouncing leads the parade. He watches the "ranks of women, four abreast, all wearing the same blue mammycloth, the fishes and the sea nightmares leaping as the hips like wheels [spin] round and round and the soft brown shoulders [lift]."⁷³ The river of African women flows and undulates down the street dressed in blue cloth that has pictures of fish and other sea creatures. Nathaniel sees in the rhythmic movement of the human river a dance of joy and a dance of sorrow.⁷⁴ He knows the people differently from Mrs. Cunningham and he understands the emotions of the dance rather than just seeing the movement of the parade and the bright colours of the dresses and headcloths as Mrs. Kestoe, another European woman sees.

Laurence's use of water symbolism to aid in characterization is extensive. Not only does it serve to give depth to the characterization of such individ-

uals as Morag and Royland in The Diviners, Rachel in A Jest of God, Hagar, Bram and John in The Stone Angel and Stacey, Luke and Tess Fogler in The Fire-Dwellers, but it also enhances the portrayal of societies as a whole, the people of these societies and the myths of some societies. The portrayal of Manawaka, for example, would lack in depth if it were not for the Wachakwa River and all it symbolizes. The myths of the Scots and the Metis would lack interest and colour except for the background sounds of the crashing sea and the mysterious lake of Roi de Lac and all they symbolize. The characterization of the African people is also heightened by water symbolism as is the characterization of the differing viewpoints of the Africans and the Europeans.

Notes

Chapter III

¹Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (N.C.L.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 125.

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶Ibid., p. 420.

⁷Ibid., p. 214.

⁸Ibid., p. 286.

⁹Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 108.

¹¹Tom Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1982), p. 92.

¹²Laurence, The Diviners, p. 366.

¹³Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁶Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 152.

¹⁷Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 7.

¹⁸Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 152.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 152.

²⁰Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 28.

²¹Ibid., p. 29.

²²Ibid., p. 167.

²³Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), pp. 9-10.

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵Ibid., p. 111.

²⁶Ibid., p. 244.

²⁷Ibid., p. 3.

²⁸Ibid., p. 113.

²⁹Ibid., p. 46.

³⁰Ibid., p. 168.

³¹Ibid., p. 172.

³²Ibid., p. 141.

³³Ibid., p. 170.

³⁴Ibid., p. 184.

³⁵Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), p. 42.

³⁶Ibid., p. 42.

³⁷Chetwynd, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 91-92.

³⁸Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, pp. 135-36.

³⁹Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 175.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 193.

⁴²Ibid., p. 196.

⁴³Ibid., p. 196.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 196.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 197.

- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 197.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 208.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 271.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 272.
- ⁵⁰ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 28.
- ⁵¹ Laurence, A Jest of God, p. 85.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 83.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 67.
- ⁵⁴ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 125.
- ⁵⁵ Laurence, The Stone Angel, p. 18.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 23.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 46.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁵⁹ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 28.
- ⁶⁰ Laurence, The Stone Angel, pp. 63-64.
- ⁶¹ Laurence, The Diviners, p. 291.
- ⁶² Ibid., p. 291.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 144-45.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 144-45.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 418.
- ⁶⁸ Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 18.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 122.

⁷²Ibid., p. 195.

⁷³Ibid., p. 195.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 199.

Conclusion

The water symbols in Laurence's novels can be organized according to the functions they serve. The present study has concentrated on three predominant functions: to depict the four major periods in man's life; to emphasize the survival and regenerative aspects of man's life; and to assist in characterization. An attempt has been made to present an analysis of these particular functions of water symbolism in Laurence's novels.

The water symbol Laurence most often utilizes is the river, which in addition to its universal meaning of the irreversible passage of time also has a number of other symbolic interpretations.¹ The river at McConnell's Landing, mentioned in The Diviners only, symbolizes the periods of man's life in general and Morag Gunn's life in particular. The brown Wachakwa River which ripples over the stones in all but the African novel, can be perceived to symbolize the early period in Morag's life as well as in the life of Nick Kazlik in A Jest of God. There are several symbolic

rivers in the African novel, This Side Jordan, which represent historical and cultural periods of the African society.

In addition to serving the function of depicting the different periods, the river symbolism assists in characterization. As pointed out in Chapter III, Morag Gunn's life in The Diviners is characterized by two rivers: the Wachakwa and the river at McConnell's Landing. The lowly Wachakwa, hardly more than a creek, is a constant background setting for the young Morag, the foster child of the town garbage collector. Like the Wachakwa River which lacks water, her early life is also lacking in many ways. There is the ever-present look of poverty around Christie Logan's home where Morag lives,² and about Morag herself as she goes to school in shabby clothing.³ Yet the Wachakwa River symbolism is not entirely negative. Although the water is brown, it is clear and this appears to characterize the positive factors in Morag's life: the potential which she has regardless of her environment. Also the Wachakwa is used to characterize Morag's life from the viewpoint of the "town's better-off"; it is not necessarily her own viewpoint. She does not mind the river; in fact, she has learned to swim in it, which further characterizes her tremendous will to move onward in life, to survive in spite of the obstacles.

The McConnell's Landing River is used to characterize Morag's entire life. Laurence introduces this river at the specific times of Morag's growing up and maturing in life. The wind-ripples on the river, which seem to flow backwards, characterize Morag's reminiscences, her past, as she relives it. Both the Wachakwa and the McConnell's Landing river have a distinct purpose to serve in the characterization of Morag Gunn.

River symbolism also characterizes Morag's neighbour, Royland. He is "the Old Man of the River," closely related to it as a fisherman and water diviner. Both his and Morag's lives are characterized by the symbolism relating to the irreversible passage of the river.

In Laurence's other novels river symbolism is also used to assist in characterization. In the Manawaka society all those who live near the Wachakwa River are considered to be "the lower society." For example, in The Stone Angel Hagar's husband, Bram who has bought his property in the river valley is characterized by the river: a shallow-minded man, comparable to the shallow creek.

The Wachakwa River also characterizes the entire Manawaka society, rich and poor alike. Like the Wachakwa River, the Manawaka society is shallow

and narrow. The poor living within the river environment display the characteristics of the river, looking and sounding like "the lower class," when observed by "the better-off"; but those "better-off" by the very fact that they ostracize other people and judge them by their looks, bear the same characteristics of shallowness and narrowness which the river symbolizes.

Laurence has used the river symbolism to a great extent to depict the four major periods in man's life and to assist in characterization. She has not employed it so much to emphasize the survival and regenerative aspects of man's life. For this she has utilized especially the symbol of the sea coast and the ocean itself. The universal meaning of the ocean as the source of both life and death is reinforced with a number of related interpretations.⁴ The proximity of the ocean symbolizes near the end of Hagar's life in The Stone Angel the closeness of death. She does not want to drink seawater no matter how thirsty she is, because she remembers that it is poisonous. Hagar does not want to die; therefore, she must keep searching for fresh water as long as possible. However, more often in The Stone Angel the sea coast is the symbol of regeneration and survival. When people want to leave their old lives behind and begin over, they often move to the West coast, to Vancouver, where rebirth is possible

for them near the Pacific Ocean. Both Hagar and her son, Marvin, start new lives on the West coast. Many other Manawaka people, for example, Rachel in A Jest of God and her older sister Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers, perceive the West coast as their land of hope, where a new life is possible. Morag in The Diviners moves all the way from Toronto to Vancouver to begin a new life. The sea coast in This Side Jordan is used as the setting for rebirth for all those people moving from the interior to begin new lives in a better environment. The coast of Scotland in The Diviners is utilized as a setting for the new beginning of the people who are driven off their lands.

The symbol of the sea coast also serves the function of depicting some of the major periods in man's life, specifically childhood and old age. Childhood in The Fire-Dwellers is shown both as a golden, carefree time on the brink of the ocean of life, and as a time of great vulnerability, as the ocean shows its dangerous characteristics. The sea shore is utilized also in The Stone Angel as the play-setting for two children, but even here the play soon ends, and a dark, threatening note is added to introduce the end of the play and the end of a period. The Crombruch sea coast in The Diviners is used to symbolize the transitory nature of childhood.

Old age, the last stage of the life-cycle before death, is also depicted to some extent through the symbol of the sea coast and the ocean. Hagar in The Stone Angel spends a few of her last days right beside the sea. She listens to the sound of the waves, which brings to her the message of death. It is here she reviews her life and anticipates death. Laurence shows the ocean at this point as grave, cold and forbidding, the dark ending of the life-cycle.

Laurence does not use the symbol of the sea coast or the ocean to assist in characterization, except to some extent in the case of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers. During one of the difficult moments in her life, Stacey finds herself on a dark seashore near Vancouver. Clara Thomas makes the suggestion in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence that the man Stacey meets on that shore, Luke Venturini, "identifies her with water and calls her Merwoman, because she was suddenly there, on the seashore in front of his cabin," as if she had come from the ocean.⁵ Thomas further reflects on Stacey's ocean-related character as follows:

Stacey welcomes a temporary unreality and she enjoys the play-mystery of her Merwoman role.... Luke sees her quite simply and exclusively as a woman; therefore... a singular being, freed of the kaleidoscopic wife-mother-housekeeper roles in which others see her and with all of which, simultaneously, she constantly tries to identify herself.⁶

Stacey, then, is characterized as almost a mythical being, part of the ocean itself, reflecting its ambiguities in her character.

Another water-related symbol that appears frequently in Laurence's novels is the fish. According to the universal symbolism of fish which is essentially life-related and positive, Laurence uses the fish symbol to depict the beginning stage of the life-cycle, conception, mainly in a life-affirming and positive way. The symbol of an eel which swims in a pool of darkness depicts Bram's and Hagar's sexual intercourse in The Stone Angel. The unborn Morag in The Diviners and Nathaniel in This Side Jordan are symbolically "little fish." The symbol for conception in Rachel's imagined pregnancy in A Jest of God is a "tadpole." All these examples of fish-related symbolism depict conception in a positive way. It is when Rachel finds out that she is not pregnant, but, instead, carries a tumour in her womb, that the fish symbol is used with negative connotations. The fishes she sees in her recollection of a spawning incident, make her ill.

There are a number of other instances when Laurence uses the fish symbol in a negative way with sexual connotations. The most relevant example is seen in the characterization of Rachel in A Jest of God,

symbolizing her emotional reactions to her principal, Willard, through her recollection of a frozen whitefish.

The symbol of swimming and drowning is utilized to a great extent especially in connection with the concept of survival. Like Ethel Wilson's Maggie Vardoe in Swamp Angel, the strong swimmers in Laurence's novels symbolize the survivors. Stacey MacAindra in The Fire-Dwellers has been such a swimmer since her youth. No matter what the difficulties in her life may be, (and there are plenty), she does survive, because she is a strong swimmer. The symbol of swimming is also used in connection with Stacey's plans on how to raise her children in the city, and further in the case of Duncan, Stacey's younger son, who almost drowns in the ocean. He knows how to swim, but his foot gets lodged under a stone, causing him to fall underwater. His survival and eventual return to the ocean for a swim symbolize the changes in Duncan's life from parental disapproval to acceptance and affirmation.

Nathaniel in This Side Jordan has also been a good swimmer since childhood. Even so he has to struggle a great deal, and the fear of drowning is always with him. All this symbolizes his great problems in the emerging African nation of Ghana. Because Nathaniel, too, is a swimmer, he eventually emerges

as a survivor.

In addition to using the swimming-drowning symbolism to emphasize the survival and regenerative aspects of man's life, Laurence employs it to assist in characterization. While characterizing Morag in The Diviners, Laurence refers to her as a good swimmer who has learned to swim under difficult circumstances. This symbolizes the pattern of Morag's life from the hard years of childhood to the much better adulthood, showing her as a survivor. The above examples of Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers and Nathaniel in This Side Jordan could also be used to show Laurence's use of the swimming symbolism to assist in characterization.

All the symbols analyzed above, no matter what function they serve or how variously they are interpreted, have the common characteristic of being water-related. As explained earlier, water symbolism in Laurence's writing is seen to depict the four major periods in man's life, to emphasize the survival and regenerative aspects of man's life, and to assist in characterization. In conclusion, looking at all the five novels, it is also possible to see some specific water-related patterns beginning to emerge from novel to novel.

One such pattern is the sacramental pattern, pertaining especially to the Sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. In This Side Jordan Nathaniel is very

much engaged with the idea of crossing the Jordan River and symbolically does so, as he stops holding back and sings along with the Fundamentalist Congregation, "Joshua crossed the River to the Promised Land."⁷ The crossing of Jordan in Christian symbolism means being baptized which again means leaving the old life behind and entering a new life. For Nathaniel the symbolic crossing of Jordan means just that, only in cultural rather than religious terms. Stacey in The Fire-Dwellers receives her baptism in the troubled waters of her everyday life. When her father-in-law reads her the text for a particular Sunday's sermon, "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul,"⁸ Stacey is overcome with emotion, because she strongly identifies with the words, and feels the waters in her own soul. In order to cry alone, she locks herself in the bathroom. After the symbolic waters recede from her soul and after she has stopped crying, she washes her face with cold water, symbolically completing her baptism, starting life over once again. Both Nathaniel and Stacey are at a moment of deep crisis in their lives. They are approaching middle age and many of their experiences up to that point appear to add to the crisis. Their "baptisms" do not eliminate the crisis, but they do lead to changes apparent in their lives later on. Nathaniel finally accepts his role in the building of

the new African society and becomes "its guide in a new land, its ferryman across Jordan."⁹ Stacey is eventually able to "acknowledge to herself her acceptance of what she cannot change."¹⁰

In the other three novels the sacramental pattern continues in the form of the Eucharist. Rachel in A Jest of God attempts to take her life and tries to swallow some sleeping pills with whisky, "firewater," the symbol of death and degeneration in Laurence's novels. The moment of crisis, which is about to lead to Rachel's death, is almost miraculously changed and receives new meaning, as Rachel suddenly realizes she has "emptied the crucial and precious capsules out of her window."¹¹ The whisky she has swallowed has changed from an agent of death into an agent of life, giving Rachel a feeling of lightness and stopping the time for her so the moment of crisis can pass. This moment of crisis does, in fact, resolve into a change in Rachel's thinking. Instead of contemplating suicide or abortion, she gets on her knees to talk to God of her need, and in so doing receives the knowledge of how to go on with her life.

In The Diviners the sacramental pattern can be perceived in the scene at Jules' deathbed, when Morag tries to help him, and then asks him, "Do you want some

water?"¹² For Jules, too, this is a moment of crisis. He knows he will not recover from his illness and the minutes drag on with "the kind of physical pain which [Morag has] never experienced and [can] not imagine."¹³ Jules does not, however, want water, the symbol of life. He does not want to be kept alive artificially with "people punching [him] here and there, tubes down [his] nose, parts of [him] cut out like [he] were beef being butchered."¹⁴ Jules prefers to know to the end what is happening to him, and "the brief sound in the darkness [is] the sound of [Jules] crying the knowledge of his death."¹⁵ There is no noticeable change in the character of Jules at this point.

More than in any of the other novels, the sacramental pattern appears in The Stone Angel. Hagar in the Cannery, drinking wine with Murray F. Lees, is finally able to confess the wrong deeds in her past. Hagar who most of her life has struggled without the water of life in her own wilderness of pride has humbled herself at her moment of crisis. Hagar on her deathbed, wresting the glass of water from the nurse's hand, reaches for the cup of life, then quietly passes on. As in the lives of the other characters mentioned earlier, there is a change in the life of Hagar. S. E. Read in his article, "The Maze of Life," suggests

that like King Lear whom she resembles, "she - Hagar - through the agony of her last days, achieves vision, understands human suffering, and reaches out her hands in a dying gesture of love."¹⁶ The Stone Angel does become a human being before her life-cycle is completed. Clara Thomas, a well-known critic of Laurence's writing, confirms the idea of the sacramental pattern in the following way:

A strongly marked sacramental pattern moves with benign irony through The Stone Angel. The spirit of the religion that Hagar has known since a child only in the emptiness of its forms takes her from a terrible sense of sin and guilt through repentance and confession, toward freedom, and on to the simple but signal acts of restitution that finally constitute her brief and limited temporal freedom.... The pattern culminates as Hagar does lose her life to find it, in the splendid, strongly marked symbolism of the final line -- a fighting, dying, stubborn old woman -- a glass of water, the cup of life, the grace of God:

I wrest from her the glass, full of water to be had for the taking. I hold it in my own hand. There. There. And then --
(The Stone Angel, p. 303)

Life does not often offer us such a rounded completeness of pattern, though life does most strangely answer the demands of the will. Fortunately there is art, opening up glimpses of the possible whole, burning away fear and pity to make places for acceptance, charity, and the endurance to go on.

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The fish-cannery refuge and the seagull who comes there have a symbolic resonance that links them to the Christian sacramental pattern of the whole work.¹⁷

It appears that the moment reminiscent of a Sacrament occurs in all the novels at a time of crisis in a character's life. It is also possible to conclude that the time of crisis depicts a certain period in man's life, in Hagar's case in The Stone Angel and Jules' in The Diviners the end of life; in the case of the other characters mentioned earlier, perhaps the mid-point in life. Another noteworthy fact is the change in the life of the character, that follows the symbolic Sacrament. This can be seen in the lives of all the characters mentioned above, except in the life of Jules who refuses the water Morag offers him. The change in the other characters leads to a kind of spiritual rebirth and strongly emphasizes the survival and regenerative aspects of man's life. In this way the symbols which make up the sacramental pattern also serve the three predominant functions of water symbolism in Laurence's novels.

Laurence's use of water symbolism in her fiction is extensive and the variety of symbols introduced is broad. Many of the symbols are "universal" in the sense that they can be identified with symbolic archetypes and have universally understood interpretations. J. E. Cirlot reminds the reader in his Introduction to A Dictionary of Symbols that the universally understood symbols are not mechanical and restrictive

in their meaning. "A symbol proper is a dynamic and polysymbolic reality, imbued with emotive and conceptual values: in other words, with true life."¹⁸ Laurence's water symbolism can be characterized by Cirlot's definition. At no point does it become "mechanical" or "restrictive" or allegorical. It does appear dynamic, has polysymbolic reality as seen in the wide variety of examples, and is, certainly, invested with "emotive and conceptual values." It can be concluded, then, that Laurence's water symbolism is imbued with true life.

In the Introduction to the present study another statement by Cirlot, regarding the objectivity and subjectivity of interpretation was presented as one of the guideposts for this thesis. In spite of her sincere efforts to be objective, the writer of this thesis is conscious of her unavoidable subjectivity. She fully realizes that other interpreters will see different implications in some of the symbolism of Laurence's novels. On the other hand, Laurence does use a great many symbols which have universally known and understood interpretations. These have proved very helpful in the analysis.

One final observation about Laurence's writing is that water symbolism constitutes only one small part of all the symbolism she has utilized so skillfully

in her novels. Her extensive use of symbolism in general gives depth to her writing and makes the study of the novels a very satisfying experience. The symbolism is intrinsic in the sense that it does not intrude upon the reader; however, the presence of the water symbolism, as well as all the other symbolism, stimulates the reader who either consciously, unconsciously or subconsciously interprets the symbols and so gains a new depth of understanding and appreciation of the writing.

Notes

Conclusion

- ¹J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, transl. Jack Stage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 262.
- ²Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 29.
- ³Ibid., pp. 30-31.
- ⁴Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 268.
- ⁵Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1975), p. 123.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 123.
- ⁷Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 247.
- ⁸Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), p. 164.
- ⁹Laurence, This Side Jordan, p. 273.
- ¹⁰Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, p. 123.
- ¹¹Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 170.
- ¹²Laurence, The Diviners, p. 444.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 445.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 445.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 447.
- ¹⁶S. E. Read, "The Maze of Life," Canadian Literature, 27 (1966), p. 11.
- ¹⁷Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, pp. 73-74.
- ¹⁸Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. xi.

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