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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE CARNIVALESQUE IN THE STONE ANGEL AND KAMOURASKA:  
FEMALE IDENTITY, LANGUAGE, AND NARRATIVE VOICE

BY

KARIN E. KONDRATZKY

A THESIS

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and Anne Hébert's Kamouraska. Throughout the thesis an attempt is made to trace the duality of experiences in the lives of the female protagonists in the respective novels: a duality which can be seen in terms of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. The multiple female identities of the heroines are examined in the first chapter, especially as these identities are alternately denied and revived by Hagar and Elisabeth. The problem of fragmented speech and official vs. unofficial forms of language in the two novels is addressed in chapter two and related to Hagar's and Elisabeth's concept of self and to their dual roles as victims and manipulators of language. Finally, in a third chapter, the narrative voices and techniques adopted by Laurence's and Hébert's heroines receive careful examination and are placed in the context of the dialectical tension which characterizes the range of psychological, linguistic and narrative movements in the two novels. While Laurence's Hagar and Hébert's Elisabeth show similar carnivalesque tendencies, Hagar undergoes catharsis through the recognition of a comic universe. Elisabeth, on the other hand, is not purged of the guilt in her soul; the end of the novel brings no redemption.

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Karh E. Kondratzky

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## INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel (1964) and Anne Herbert's Kamouraska (1970) are two Canadian novels which present female protagonists whose world view and attitudes are fragmented and often ambivalent. Both characters feel the need to maintain the co-existence of different ideologies, perspectives and forms of discourse in the unfolding of their narrative. Their experience can be seen in some respects as an expression of the "carnavalesque" which, according to Bakhtin, recognizes a duality of worlds and discourses (the official vs. the unofficial) that exist in a dialectical relationship of opposing and sometimes converging forces. While neither The Stone Angel nor Kamouraska reflect or adhere to the ultimate carnivalesque domination of the lower, baser elements of human nature, they do contain certain elements which paradoxically help to reinforce the more individualistic nature of the works. Since the two novels stem from the tradition of the bourgeois, individualistic novel, it is impossible to deny the individual's movement towards transcendence, which is antithetical to the general downward movement of the carnivalesque novel. However, the concept of the carnivalesque will still serve us well in an analysis of the protagonists of The Stone Angel and Kamouraska, where we will use it primarily to show how certain tendencies which we will term carnivalesque (such as the manifestation of the grotesque and the

subversion of official worlds) are important in the attempts of Hagar and Elisabeth to liberate themselves from social constraints. In other words, we will examine the lower forms of the carnivalesque experience alongside the general movement towards transcendence in the novels to discover to what degree these carnivalesque elements displace or fail to displace the more spiritual, individualistic tendencies in the works.

Furthermore, we will make reference to the laughter component of the carnival only in the context of the comic grotesque and Romantic grotesque, as these two forms are expressed in The Stone Angel and Kamouraksa respectively, and in so far as they are responsible for the comic nature of Hagar's experience and for Elisabeth's essentially tragic universe. This important distinction between the novelistic world of Laurence and that of Hébert is also indicated in Philip Stratford's article "Kamouraska and The Diviners.":

Anne Hébert's work is...totally different from Laurence's. Where Laurence is comic, Hébert is tragic. Where Hébert's structure is dramatic, close-knit, almost preserving the unities of time, place and action, Laurence's is an itinerary sprawling in time and place and welcoming the diverting detour, its unity assured by the central character who undergoes change herself as the action progresses.

In this thesis, we will attempt to clarify this comic/tragic distinction between Hagar and Elisabeth referring to the different manifestations of the carnival in the two works. Moreover, we will use Stratford's distinction between

<sup>1</sup> Philip Stratford, "Kamouraska and The Diviners, Review of National Literatures 7 (1976), 121.

the self-contained nature of Hébert's novels and the more unified characters in Laurence's works to suggest that Hagar is the more unified character, and Elisabeth the more isolated, egocentric. However, despite these differences between Hagar and Elisabeth, we will also maintain that in each novel a kind of ambivalence prevails, an ambivalence which is inherent in the carnivalesque experience and which reflects the constantly shifting "Weltanschauungen" of Hagar and Elisabeth.

In our analysis of The Stone Angel and Kampuraska we will concentrate on illuminating the dialectical relationships present within each of the novels, instead of considering the novels as examples of two stylistically and historically distinct traditions. We will attempt to identify the dialectical tendencies in each novel in an effort to understand how the two novelistic worlds reflect similarities and differences in the expression of the carnivalesque. Chapter One deals primarily with the female identities that the characters adopt and/or shed in a context of patriarchal or official values. We will examine how Hagar and Elisabeth use others to reinforce their sense of individuality and assess how social integration and individuality are defined for each character. Furthermore, we will explore how Hagar's and Elisabeth's experiences reflect different aspects of the grotesque and discover what role this difference plays in the nature of the universe

which each woman inhabits. Chapter Two is an essay on the problem of language in the two works. Here we will also explore the dual nature of communication: its verbal and non-verbal sides, its official and unofficial forms. The dual role of Hagār and Elisabeth as manipulators and victims of language will be examined in detail. Moreover, the analysis of the role that language and communication play in each novel will in turn help us to determine whether one character is more isolated or more unified than the other by the end of the work. In Chapter Three we analyze the narrative technique and the problem of voice in The Stone Angel and Kamouraska, keeping in mind how the identities and linguistic forms adopted by the two protagonists are reflected in the juxtaposition of narrative perspective and voice. A comparison of the protagonists' attitudes towards temporal states and their need to find narratees (either human or divine) will also be made in an attempt to discover why catharsis is present or absent in the two novels.

Throughout the thesis, we will elaborate on the presence or absence of the Christian Deity in the novels and relate the treatment of official religion to the tendency of each heroine to alternately adhere to and subvert official forms of expression. We will then draw on the evidence presented in the thesis and come to some specific conclusions concerning differences and similarities in the "Weltanschauungen" of Laurence's Hagār and Hébert's Elisabeth and their concept of self with respect to the

carnavalesque features of the two novels.

## Chapter I

### Female Identity: Hagar's and Elisabeth's Carnavalesque Experience

In The Stone Angel and Kamouraska, the female protagonists, Hagar and Elisabeth, are defined by their multiple identities as women. Their roles include those of mother, daughter, wife and lover. Their names, key elements in their identities, also change according to the person with whom they interact. Both women lead recognizably dual lives, lives which are affected by official and unofficial or "subverting" value systems that characterize the "carnavalesque experience" as outlined by Michael Holquist in his modification of the Bakhtinian concept that deals solely with the "rire carnavalesque" or the universe of laughter.<sup>1</sup> As we shall discover in our examination of Hébert's novel, the laughter aspect of the carnavalesque is not the prevalent feature in Kamouraska as it is in The Stone Angel. Nevertheless, the term can be usefully applied in terms of the concepts of duality and subversion that it entails. For Bakhtin, carnival, or the carnavalesque, recognizes a duality of life for people which consists of rites and values that are constructed next to or outside of some official construct or ideology, thus taking the form of

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Holquist, "The Carnival of Discourse: Baxtin and Simultaneity," Canadian Review of Comparative Literature 12.2, Special Issue, (1985): 222-234.

3. 7

"a second life, a second world"(11).<sup>2</sup> Michael Holquist, however, takes the principle of carnival and gives it a more novelistic application by drawing attention to the duality inherent in the concept:

Carnival is best conceived dialogically: i.e. as the interaction of differences in a simultaneity. Carnival can be understood only in relation to a set of differences which both oppose it and, at the same time, enable it. A major simultaneity, then, must be the difference between official and unofficial worlds. The normal state of society is one in which relatively rigid hierarchies and hard-edged divisions separate social classes: what is and what is not permissible in personal relations and sexual politics. It is a state intolerant of ambiguities and semantic fluidity...It promotes indeterminacy...carnival's symbol is the mask and the costume that decertify identity and enable transformation.(222).

As Holquist suggests, the carnivalesque experience is an ambiguous, ambivalent one, as are the lives of the female protagonists in Margaret Laurence's and Anne Hébert's novels. Both Hagar and Elisabeth lead not only dual, but fragmented lives which are influenced by their adherence to the official world of social respectability and their desire to subvert this order by asserting their individuality. Feminist readers will be quick to recognize the various forms of patriarchies as examples of the official world which can be oppressive and imprisoning. Both The Stone Angel and Kamouraska carry ambivalent messages concerning the role of men in the lives of Hagar and Elisabeth.

In The Stone Angel and Kamouraska men act as the means of isolation

<sup>2</sup> Mikhael Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1984) 11.

in Hagar's and Elisabeth's worlds; however, they are also used by both characters to define and strengthen their identities as individuals. Thus in these novels, there is often an ambivalent attitude as to whether the individualization of the character is preferable to her individuation and incorporation into the social mainstream.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I will attempt to examine Hagar and Elisabeth in the context of their novelistic worlds in order to determine which aspects of the carnivalesque experience dominate in the respective works.

If we examine Margaret Laurence's heroine Hagar, we notice that she possesses a very divided character. She attempts to adhere to the social codes of an official world, but also continues to retain her autonomous, individual quality:

I must be careful not to speak aloud though, for if I do Marvin will look at Doris and Doris will look meaningfully back at Marvin, and one of them

<sup>3</sup>Carl Jung distinguishes between individualization and individuation in the following passage: "...self-realization seems to stand in opposition to self-divestiture. This misunderstanding is quite general, because we do not sufficiently distinguish between individualism and individuation. Individualism means deliberately stressing and giving prominence to some supposed peculiarity, rather than to collective considerations and obligations. But individuation means precisely the better and more complete fulfillment of the collective qualities of the human being, since adequate consideration of the peculiarity of the individual is more conducive to better social achievement than when the peculiarity is neglected or suppressed." Carl Jung, "from The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious, Preface to the Second Edition," The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung, ed. Violet Staub de Laszlo (New York: Random House, 1959) 144. Jung thus equates individualism with egotism and individuation with integrating one's "particularities" into society.



will say, "Mother's having one of her days." Let them talk. What do I care now what people say? I cared too long.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, the reader is already made aware of Hagar's indomitable pride which isolates her in a wilderness of egocentricity. However, we then discover that the old Hagar is at constant war with her desire to cling to her individuality and to the memory of past ties to others. "Oh, my lost men" (SA, 6) she utters, while rampant with memory. This lapse into dependency is then once again counteracted by her wilful statement: "No, I will not think of that" and with the realization that it would be a disgrace to be seen crying by her daughter-in-law Doris. These are some of the first indications of Hagar's struggle to retain a sense of individuality and yet find another human being to communicate with in some way.

The rift between Hagar's adherence to social respectability and the subversion of this order is reflected in the various identities that Hagar possesses. Her earliest identity is that of Hagar Currie, Jason Currie's daughter and sister to Dan and Matt Currie. Hagar's tie to her mother is not strong because her mother died giving birth to the girl. Moreover, Hagar's character differs greatly from that of her mother; she is essentially her father's child, partly because she is so dominated by the influence of the

<sup>4</sup>Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel. New Canadian Library. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd.) 6. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses within the text of the thesis. The title will be abbreviated as SA.

patriarchal system or by the male presence in her environment. (In Kamouraska, Elisabeth is greatly influenced by women). Hagar's father enforces the oppression and restriction of women that accompanies patriarchal systems typical of the Victorian era and which adhere to an inflexible religious system. Jason Currie demonstrates his patriarchal heritage when he sends Hagar to the Ladies' academy to learn all the proper skills of a young woman:

When I returned after two years, I knew embroidery, and French, and menu-planning for a five-course meal, and poetry, and how to take a firm hand with servants, and the most becoming way of dressing my hair. Hardly ideal accomplishments for the kind of life I'd ultimately find myself leading, but I had no notion of that then. (SA 42-43)

however, at first, Hagar does not recognize this rigid side of her father's temperament; when she thinks of the Currie name, she imagines the Scottish dynasty with a sense of wistfulness:

It seemed to me, from his tales, the Highlanders must be the most fortunate of all men on earth, spending their days in flailing about them with claymores, and their nights in eightsome reels. They lived in castles, too, every man jack of them, and all were gentlemen. How bitterly I regretted that he'd left and had sired us here, the bald-headed prairie stretching out west of us. (SA, 15)

Here Hagar reveals the important role her father and his dynasty play in her life, and how at an early age she has an admiration for "gentlemen" and genteel manners which she feels she will never find in Manawaka. In his reference to

the "genteel" manners of her ancestors, she already betrays the undeniable role social order plays in her own behaviour. She is also aware of her father's feeling of regret that she was not born a boy:

"Smart as a whip, she(Hagar) is, that one. If only she'd been--"

And then he stopped, I suppose because he realized that in the dining-room his sons, such as they were, were listening. (SA, 14)

Indeed, Hagar inadvertently seems to fulfill this secret wish of her father's on several occasions. She does not, for example, identify with the maternal role when Matt asks her to dress up as her mother for their dying brother, Dan. Hagar refuses because she thinks that she is not like the "meek woman" (SA, 25) whose frailty Dan had inherited. In other words, she refuses to play out a role that is not true to her own nature: "to play at being her--it was beyond me" (SA, 25). This refusal to take on the role of the mother figure suggests that Hagar wants to imitate the patriarchal stance of her father; her need to continue to identify with her father remains strong. As a result of her refusal, Matt ironically plays his mother and thus sets aside all concern for social expectations. (In this instance, he proves to be more feminine than his sister). This event in Hagar's past reveals how strongly she adheres to her traits of pride and strength, which she has inherited from her father and has chosen to cultivate on her own as well. So strong is her need to stay in character, that even the death of her

brother will not allow her to sacrifice her pride to commit an unselfish act.

Hagar's relationship with her brothers is not a close one, simply because she does not make an effort to communicate with them. She is too afraid of showing weakness or vulnerability. Her need to distinguish herself from her weaker brothers may be the result of the fact that she is the only female presence in her immediate family. In this sense, she is also unique. Eventually, the members of Hagar's immediate family all pass on; her brothers both die of illness and her father of a stroke, leaving Hagar as the sole heir to the Currie name. However, Hagar reports that after Jason Currie dies, he leaves Hagar none of the inheritance, (thereby depriving her of the Currie identity) choosing instead to immortalize the Currie name in the grand gesture of a charitable donation to the town (Currie Memorial Park is named after him). When Hagar leaves her father to marry Brampton Shipley, she officially drops her Currie name and she can only continue the memory of the Currie clan by passing on the story of the dynasty to her son John (in the ceremonial handing over of the Currie family pin).

Hagar's marriage to Brampton Shipley marks the beginning of a new identity for Hagar--that of Hagar Shipley, wife of a man whose family name suggests common and vulgar qualities:

Whoever chose Marvin for his name? Bram, I

suppose. A Shipley family name it was, I think. Just the sort of name the Shipleys would have. They were all Mabels and Gladyses, Vernons and Marvins, squat brown names, common as bottled beer. (SA, 32)

What attracts Hagar to Bram is the fact that he is an anti-establishment man who opposes the rigid, social codes imposed by her father. In her marriage to Bram, Hagar opposes the Father figure and gains a new dimension as a lover and wife.<sup>5</sup> Bram becomes one of the men she refers to as her "lost men" later in life. Nevertheless, regardless of how attached she is to him, she feels the need to shape him into a man of "cravats and grammar" (SA, 50) because she cannot accept him for what he is: a very corporeal man who lacks the social graces.

Hagar's adherence to social conventions and her pride also make her insensitive to Bram's tenderness and sensitive gestures, which she only recognizes years later. For example, on their wedding day, Hagar snubs Bram's wedding gift of a "cut glass decanter with a silver top." Bram consequently reacts in his predictably vulgar way and says: "Let's see what you look like under all that rig-out, Hagar" (SA, 51). Years later, Hagar realizes, "I never

<sup>5</sup> In her Jungian analysis of The Stone Angel, Angelika Maeser indicates that Hagar opposes the Father figure by marrying Bram in an act of rebellion. "Rebellion against and rejection of the father thus assumes larger cultural proportions, for it is the Father in a collective value-system that Hagar unconsciously opposes when she marries the never-do-well Bram Shipley" (SA, 153). Angelika Maeser, "Finding the Mother: The Individuation of Laurence's Heroines," Journal of Canadian Fiction 27 (Summer 1980): 153.

thought much of that decanter at the time, but now I wouldn't part with it for "any money" (SA, 62). Hagar's sense of pride and her need to distinguish herself from others also enters into her domestic relations with Bram. She is very selfish in the sense that she will not divulge her dependency on Bram for his love, love being antithetical to social respectability. (If she had only admitted to loving Bram, she would have been liberated in some way.) Even in her sexual relations with Bram, Hagar will not admit that Bram's "banner" over her was love:

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

For the young Hagar, then, pride is equivalent to virginity and social respectability. A declaration of love for her husband would break this rigid social code that Hagar's father and Hagar herself have imposed on her character. The older Hagar, in retrospect realizes that Bram's banner over her was "only his own skin" (SA, 81) and that she no longer knows why it should have shamed her. The old Hagar mentions that she has no picture of her husband and asks, "I wonder now if he would have liked me to ask for a picture of himself, even once? I never thought of it" (SA, 69). This passage suggests that Hagar has insight into her past thoughtlessness, her lack of compassion for others and her egocentricity. This suggests a waning of pride on

Hagar's part and, as in the decanter episode, a recognition of Bram's important role in her life as a manifestation of Eros or the Jungian principle of sexual love (the anima-figure).<sup>6</sup> This crossing over to an alternative viewpoint on the part of Hagar reflects her desire to affirm love in her life instead of denying it for the sake of social conformity.

Bram is also one of the few people who call Hagar by her name; Hagar notes this because the concept of naming is very important to her in the novel. Her first name defines her and sets her apart from others. The entire nature of naming is important in the scheme of the novel as it adheres to a carnivalesque model. Bakhtin notes that "the suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance" (10). We can thus include naming in the official/unofficial world opposition that we have sought to establish in our analysis of Laurence's novel. The dropping of social appellations such as "Mrs." or "mother" suggests a subversion of social forms, a subversion which Hagar finds difficult to initiate on her own.

<sup>6</sup>Carl Jung identifies four stages in the heterosexual Eros or anima-figure:

1. Eve, earth: purely biological; woman is equated with the mother and only represents something to be fertilized.
2. The second stage is still dominated by the sexual Eros, but on an aesthetic and romantic level where woman has already acquired some value as an individual.
3. The third stage raises Eros to the heights of religious devotion and thus spiritualizes him: spiritual motherhood.
4. Sapientia: wisdom. Carl Jung, "From Psychology of the Transference, Introduction," The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung, 404. In her dealings with Bram, Hagar reaches the second stage of the anima figure.

Mary Daly points out the negative aspect of the dual status of women:

...women have duality of status, and the derivative aspect of this status--for example, as daughters and wives--divides us against each other and encourages identification with patriarchal institutions which serve the interests of men at the expense of women.

Bram, however, in good feminist fashion succeeds in overcoming social obstacles when he says:

You know something, Hagar? There's men in Manawaka call their wives "Mother" all the time. that's one thing I never done. (SA, 80)

Hagar comments:

It was true. He never did, not once. I was Hagar to him, and if he were alive, I'd be Hagar to him yet. And now I think he was the only person close to me who ever thought of me by my name, not daughter, nor sister, nor mother, nor even wife, but Hagar, always. (SA, 80)

This situation is revealing because it demonstrates Hagar's strong need to define herself as an individual despite the role other people play in her life; in fact, this is the struggle she is engaged in throughout the book: her conflict between individuality and her social interaction with, or dependency on, others. This clash results in a fragmented Hagar, a Hagar who seeks autonomy but who cannot escape the trappings of social respectability.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) 2-3.



Hagar's emphasis on her first name is all the more crucial when viewed in the context of Bram's sickness and road to death. When Hagar and John return to Manawaka to visit Bram, Hagar mentions that Bram did not know her: "He didn't speak my name" (SA, 72). And as time passes, Bram refers to Hagar as "that woman" (SA, 182) which deprives Hagar of her strong sense of identity and individuality. After Bram's death, Hagar decides to put her name on the Currie plot and engraves the Shipley name on the other side of the gravestone; this gravestone symbolizes the coexistence of two major roles in her life: her role as a daughter and descendent of the Currie dynasty, and her life as wife or lover to Brampton Shipley and mother to Marvin and John Shipley. Both the Currie and the Shipley names are associated with the men in her life and with the continuation of a dynasty. Thus, Hagar embraces "une dualité du monde" or a dual-world view in this particular realization; however, this dual world-view is portrayed by Laurence as a positive feature in contrast to the negative connotations Mary Daly attributes to it in Beyond God the Father. It would seem then that, in this case, Hagar embraces an un-feminist view of her identity.

We have seen how Hagar functions or is influenced by her role as a Currie daughter as a Shipley wife and as "Hagar." However, Hagar's relationship with her sons is even more complicated and helps define another side or aspect of her identity: that of a mother. A number of critics have drawn

attention to the quest for the Mother figure in Hagar's voyage of self-discovery.<sup>8</sup> Hagar does not fulfill this role very well, as we can see when she refuses to play "mother" for her dying brother. Even in her interaction with Marvin and John, she is inadequate. Marvin is ignored in favour of John; in fact, Hagar never praises Marvin; yet he takes care of her until the end of her life. She cruelly says "I almost feel as though Marvin weren't my son" (SA, 62). Hagar denies Marvin praise for doing his chores, and when Marvin goes to war in France, she is so conscious of social embarrassment that she does not even offer him a farewell embrace:

I didn't know what to say to him. I wanted to beg him to look after himself, to be careful as one warns children against snowdrifts or thin ice or the nooves of horses, feeling the flimsy words may act as some kind of charm against disaster. I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses. (SA, 129)

Even at such a crucial moment, Hagar will not let go of her pride to express love for her son; she denies him maternal love, just as she has refused to admit to Bram the pleasure she experienced in their sexual relationship.

Marvin is treated like an acquaintance here, and the proud

<sup>8</sup>See Angelika Maeser, 1980; Evelyn J. Hinz, "The Religious Roots of the Feminine Identity Issue: Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and Margaret Atwood's Surfacing," Revue d'études canadiennes 22.1 (Spring 1987): 17-31; Constance Rooke, "A Feminist Reading of 'The Stone Angel,'" Canadian Literature 93 (Summer 1982): 26-41; Stephanie A. Demtrakopoulos, "Laurence's Fiction: A Revisioning of Feminine Archetypes," Canadian Literature 93 (Summer 1982): 42-57.

Hagar refuses to give him her blessing as a mother—a blessing which he so desperately wants. Only later, as a ninety-year old, does Hagar think about what life would have been like without Marvin:

If Marvin hadn't been born alive that day, I wonder where I'd be now? I'd have got to some old folks' home a sight sooner, I expect. There's a thought. (SA, 101)

However, insightful as Hagar is, the remarkable part of her personality is her conflict between resisting change, her pride, and "The Stone Angel." Near the end of the novel Hagar finally acts out the role of Marvin's mother, which she never did in her younger days. She gives him the parental blessing that he always wanted and she tells him, "You've been good to me, always. A better son than John." (SA, 304) For one of the few times in her life, Hagar commits an unselfish act; she tells someone close to her something that he wants to hear, instead of worrying about the embarrassment or discomfort such an act could cause her.

Hagar's relationship with her other son, John, is stronger than her ties to Marvin. Marvin carries a Shipley family first name, but John symbolizes for Hagar a continuation of the Currie dynasty, a boy after Jason Currie's own heart. Hagar gives John the Currie family pin and tells him about the Currie family history. Ironically, John exchanges the pin for a pen knife.

Hagar is also more possessive of John than of Marvin. For example, she is jealous of John's interaction with

others. When John wants to go back to help the sickly Bram, Hagar feels threatened because she wants John to rely on her. She also resents John's relations with women; they remind her of Bram's sexuality and she does not want to identify John with the Shipleys (although John claims that he is like his father, 174 ). This attitude toward John as a creature of social perfection is also reflected in her wanting John to look like Jacob "wrestling with the angel" (SA, 179) when he strains to right the toppled-over statue at the gravesite, the image being reminiscent of her desire to make a man of cravats and grammar out of Bram. The scene is also comic-grotesque in nature. Needless to say, John does not measure up to Hagar's expectations. This is not surprising because Laurence is deliberately counteracting Hagar's desire to make serious Biblical comparisons with her family. In writing The Stone Angel, Laurence claims that she did not "necessarily search for Biblical symbols when [she] wrote" it, and that she did not want the parallel between her novel and the Biblical story of Hagar to be too exact.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Hagar tries desperately to treat John as if he were her only son and her possession; unfortunately, John only grows farther apart from her. Hagar's possessiveness, or jealousy, also suggests that John is replacing Bram (although she doesn't see him as a Shipley). It is therefore not surprising that, when Hagar is in the hospital

<sup>9</sup> Michel Fabre, "From The Stone Angel to The Diviners: An Interview with Margaret Laurence," A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence, ed. George Woodcock (Edmonton: NewWest Press, 1983), 197-98.

and calls out John's name, the other patients think that John is her husband. For Hagar, then, John symbolizes everything that Bram doesn't, and she uses him to gauge or increase her own sense of respectability and self-worth, which she could not do with Bram or Marvin, the "true" Shipleys.

Hagar's relationship with her family is coloured with Biblical symbolism, which in turn draws her to an understanding of spiritual Eros (the third step in the Jungian system of the Eros figure). Hagar's semi-conscious journey towards a higher plain of existence is supported by her recognition of herself and of her sons (Marvin, John) as players in Biblical events or as Biblical figures. W.H. New and Sandra Djwa both point out that Hagar is referred to as "the Egyptian" in the novel, that is the Biblical Hagar, the Egyptian bond-maid, and that she also has parallels with Sarah.<sup>10</sup> However, she also sees herself "strangely cast" in the role of Isaac blessing his sons<sup>11</sup>: she ascribes the role of Jacob alternately to John and to Marvin. (John is also an Ishmael figure because he is a "wandering outcast, born and living 'after the flesh'").<sup>12</sup> Hagar sees John as Jacob when he wrestles with the stone angel in the cemetery. She sees

<sup>10</sup>See W.H. New, "Introduction," The Stone Angel, New Canadian Library Edition. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968) viii.

Sandra Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction 1.4 (Fall 1972): 43-50.

<sup>11</sup>According to Evelyn J. Hinz, Laurence does not limit Hagar to a comparison with female prototypes. Hinz, 1987.

<sup>12</sup>Linda Hutcheon, "Pride and the Puritan Passion," Etudes Canadiennes 11 (December 1981): 56.

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Marvin as Jacob in search of a blessing, and she assumes the role of Isaac accordingly, thus recognizing him as the true Jacob figure.

While Hagar identifies the Biblical typology in her sons and in herself, Margaret Laurence also suggests a kind of typology within the dynasty of the Currie and the Shiplèy families. In the Currie family, Hagar's brothers take after the mother; they are "graceful unspirited boys who tried to please [her] father but rarely could" (SA, 7). Only Hagar, "who didn't want to resemble him in the least, was sturdy like him and bore his hawkish nose and stare that could meet anyone's without blinking an eyelash" (SA, 7-8). A similar situation recurs in Hagar's progeny. Marvin, who desperately seeks to please Hagar, does not succeed; Hagar favours John instead, because Marvin reminds his mother of the common Shipleÿ clan. Thus, we see how the cycle of roles or identities repeat themselves in successive generations. Laurence seems to be blending Biblical and dynastic or ancestral typologies to suggest a mythical element in her fiction and by extension in the Canadian identity.

While Hagar's family members help define her or reveal conflicts in her character makeup, they are not the only determinants. Hagar's way of referring to herself also reveals her constant struggle between distinguishing herself as an individual and her consciousness of her own body when interacting with others. We have already alluded to Hagar's male-dominated background and her isolated role as a woman.

We have noted that Hagar does not particularly like to be defined as Abram's wife or as a mother. However, this does not imply that she is androgynous in all respects. Through the voice of the ninety-year old Hagar, we realize that she takes great pains to appear feminine and presentable in spite of the grotesque encumbrance of her flesh. She has a need to look and feel attractive in spite of her old age. We discover this when she describes her lilac silk dress and her gray flowered brock, and also when she refers to her handsomeness as an enduring quality. (SA, 60)

However, in spite of the care she takes to give the appearance of good taste, Hagar's self-conscious body image and her feeling of victimization, either in public or in isolation, seem to prevail. The principle of the grotesque thus appears to dominate the book, giving it an added comic dimension which offsets the serious side of the novel (another example of the dual, carnivalesque world view). She uses inanimate terms when referring to her body. For example, her legs are "thick stumps" (SA, 30) that one has to uproot, she feels like "a perambulating puppet" (SA, 91) or is bundled up and held securely like an "egg in a crate" (SA, 93). Animal imagery also figures strongly in her conception of herself. She is "like an old brown caterpillar" (SA, 208), an "old malevolent crow" (SA, 91); and when she feels threatened, she feels like "a fenced cow" (SA, 53), "a calf to be fattened" (SA, 35) and "an earthworm impaled... on the ferociously unsharp hook of a safety pin" (SA, 54). These

images dwell on visual, animal-like body images, which reflects Hagar's own preoccupation with the encumbrance of her body, with her gestures and with how they diminish her sense of self-worth. Hagar despairs over these descriptions; however, most readers are able to perceive in these unpleasant, exaggerated images something humorous and unmistakably true of the "human" condition. Bakhtin suggests that recognition of the grotesque results in the liberation of an individual or of a society.<sup>13</sup> For example, the individual must realize that the body and the spirit contribute to the whole and should not be separated. Hagar must therefore recognize her own comic nature or the grotesque nature of the universe before she can be liberated.

Hagar's search for solitude, for recognition or for understanding of her inner qualities which are hidden from others by social norms and expectations, is reflected in her desire to escape the confines of the body and hence the world. She feels most comfortable when alone, and especially in her room where no one can monitor or criticize her movements. In other words, she feels that her identity is defined by her house (a very typical comparison in Canadian

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<sup>13</sup> "...the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright. All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities." Mikhail Bakhtin, 47.



literature)<sup>14</sup> and by the objects in her own room, "the shreds and remnants of the years"(SA, 36):

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

Here Hagar reveals her need to adhere to the past experiences which help define her character, but she also needs to find a sense of eternity in the remnants of her past, since she cannot properly find conflict-free love and security in her interaction with people, for there are too many physical and social encumbrances.

Her search for the eternal quality (by which she means her memories or thoughts which are free from the conflicts of speech and actual confrontation with people) is further reflected in her wish to escape the confines of her body and other social pressures:

If I cry out, who would hear me? Unless there's another in the house, no one. Some gill-netter

<sup>14</sup>E.D. Blodgett indicates that the English Canadian novel (e.g. Alice Munro's fiction) projects a metaphorical vision of the house; the house is an extension of the individual, as well as a device that relates to "character as a problem and process"(67). French-Canadian fiction, on the other hand, (i.e. Anne Hébert's novelistic universe) contains synecdochic references to place or space. E.D. Blodgett, Configuration: Essays on the Canadian Literatures (Downsview: ECW Press) 67, 69. Philip Stratford defines synecdochic references as "the rapid evocation of the part to stand for the whole." Philip Stratford, 1976, 119. This analysis is particularly interesting in comparing the nature of Hagar's and Elisabeth's character; Hagar's moves from one house or place to another suggest a distinct progression in her character. Elisabeth's naming of places simply locate her in time or in the convoluted narrative universe that she has created for herself.

passing the point might catch an echo, perhaps, and wonder if he'd imagined it or if it could be the plaintive voices of the drowned, calling through the brown kelp that's stopped their mouths, in the deep, and barnacled places where their green hair ripples out and snags on the green deep rocks. Now I could fancy myself there among them, tiaraed with star fish thorny and purple, braceleted with shells linked on limp chains of weed, waiting until my encumbrance of flesh floated clean away and I was free and skeletal and could journey with tides and fishes. (SA, 162)

Here Hagar expresses the desire to escape the "encumbrance of flesh" in order to journey "free and skeletal." This wish almost suggests a search on the part of Hagar for a spiritual identity, for a form or identity which could be bare and openly displayed or revealed to others without the fear of social conventions or awkward physical presence. Furthermore, she rejects the company of people here in favour of fish; one can extend this preference to a desire for somebody who is not human--someone with whom Hagar could communicate without speaking, someone who would recognize Hagar's true feelings. This presence would seem to be God, (an entity who would accept the "skeletal frame," the soul of a person, without the social and physical baggage.

Hagar's search for solitude, her withdrawal from others is carried out in the hope of living a conflict-free life in which her identity can be whole and pure, instead of fragmented, or torn in two by social codes and self-consciousness. However, it is only through a forced meeting with a stranger, another human being, in the key event of

the novel, the cannery scene, that Hagar is finally able to reconcile herself to her own family members, relieve herself of some of her past guilt, and become more unified as a person. The cannery scene and the later hospital scene are turning points in the story as far as Hagar's concept of herself, her attitudes towards language and her use of narrative are concerned. All three aspects will be dealt with in the following chapters. It is through her interaction with Murray F. Lees in the fish cannery at Shadow Point that Hagar is led to reexamine her attitudes towards God and her own past life, which in turn allows her to arrive at an acceptance of the arbitrary, comic nature of the universe which she must then apply to her perception of herself towards the end of the novel. After listening to Murray Lees' account of his child's death in a house fire, and then recounting the events leading up to the death of her son John, Hagar is able to come to an unconscious (since it is never spoken directly in relation to her own case) conclusion that no one is to blame for certain catastrophic events, or that there is no point in blaming anybody. These events are the arbitrary acts of a Deity who would laugh to see humans wrestling with the question of blame. In fact, after Murray tells his tale (like that of the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's poem), he and Hagar sit and "listen for the terrible laughter of God, but can hear only the vapid chuckling of the sea" (SA, 234). Margaret Laurence, as Kenneth Russell suggests, thus subverts the notion of the

patriarchal Godhead by affirming life or in this particular case, nature:

Margaret Laurence seems to look past the neatly packaged God of the church to an ultimate mystery which is beyond life, yet not separated from it. Her characters seem blessed in life, through life, and by life. Some purpose and meaning graciously sustain their existence and enable them to make an act of trust in life itself. Life as a transcendent force is the horizon against which Margaret Laurence writes, and the criterion by which her characters measure the church and find it wanting.<sup>15</sup>

By subverting a tragic view of the universe with a comic one, Laurence suggests a carnivalesque dimension to her protagonist's realm of experience.

Hagar's experience in the abandoned house in turn helps her recognize the comic, somewhat grotesque nature of the universe in her stay at the hospital. The scene in which Hagar carries a bedpan to Sandra Wong is told with a remarkable mixture of seriousness and humour as Laurence provides a description of the heavy Hagar awkwardly making her way to the bathroom:

Heaving, I pull myself up....I grasp the bed, put my toes on the icy floor, work the cramp out, and then I'm standing, the weight of my flesh heavy and ponderous, my hair undone now and slithering lengthily around my bare and chilly shoulders, like snakes on a Gorgon's head....The idiotic quivering of my flesh won't stop. My separate muscles prance and jerk.(SA, 300)

The act of getting the bedpan reflects Laurence's intention

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth C. Russell, "God and church in the fiction of Margaret Laurence," Sciences religieuses 7.4 (1978): 446.

to deal with bodily functions, which is typical of carnivalesque traditions.<sup>16</sup>

Hagar's reconciliation with the dead son and the aid she renders to Sandra Wong help her to focus on the living dynasty in the form of Marvin and her granddaughter Tina; Hagar accepts the role of the living Mother as opposed to the mourning Mother. Furthermore, by acting as spiritual Mother to another human being in the bedpan scene, she is able to bridge the gap of understanding that exists between her and her biological child, Marvin. Thus, only by embracing the world of strangers with love is Hagar finally able to embrace those closest to her in a truthful way.

Like The Stone Angel, Kamouraska also emphasizes the multiple identities or roles that the protagonist possesses. Anne Hébert's character Elisabeth has a variety of names, each of which gives her a different personality. Her names include Elisabeth d'Aulnières, Madame Tassy, Madame Rolland, Elisabeth, La Petite and L'Innocente. For the purposes of

Bakhtin makes a link between the function of defecation and the subversion of cosmic terror: "We must not forget that urine (as well as dung) is gay matter which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter. If dung is a link between body and earth (the laughter that unites them), urine is a link between body and sea. . . . Dung and urine lend a bodily character to matter, to the world, to the cosmic elements, which become closer, more intimate, more easily grasped, for this is the matter, the elemental force, born from the body itself. It transforms cosmic terror into a gay carnival monster." Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, .335. As Laurence clearly suggests, Hagar's monster-like carriage alleviates the tension that the above scene creates for the reader sympathetic with Sandra's condition.

this thesis, I will use the name "Elisabeth" to refer to the central consciousness which embodies all the above roles in her dream-like, semi-waking state. The name Elisabeth is also equivalent to Hagar's first name which entails a distinctiveness of character. As Hagar says in The Stone Angel: "...who do you think you are? Hagar. There's no one like me in this world." (SA, 250). Like Hagar's name, in The Stone Angel, Elisabeth's first name emphasizes the individual vs. the social baggage attached to the person.

The identity that Elisabeth possesses in her waking state is that of Mme Rolland, wife of the respectable bourgeois Jérôme Rolland. However, she also uses this identity as a role that she can fall into when her other identities have unpleasant dimensions. Madame Rolland is Elisabeth's second married name; it binds her, on the one hand, to the social duties of a wife and mother, and on the other hand liberates her from the painful memories of her roles as Mme Tassy and as the woman responsible for George's damnation, the "malfaisante Elisabeth." In this sense, Elisabeth effects an interesting inversion or subversion of the patriarchal tendency as outlined by Mary Daly in Beyond God the Father: "...in patriarchy with the aid of religion, women have been the primordial scapegoats."<sup>17</sup> In Elisabeth's reliving of the murder of Antoine Tassy, Antoine is turned into a scapegoat figure to justify the illicit love relationship between Elisabeth and George; the animal-like

<sup>17</sup> Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, 47.

descriptions that Elisabeth provides of Tassy reinforce this notion as we will examine later in this chapter. As Madame Rolland, Elisabeth seeks to adopt the role of the dutiful, respectable, self-righteous wife; she hides from her guilt associated with the murder of her first husband by adopting a mundane lifestyle of feigned respectability, borrowing or hiding behind her husband's name:

Epouse parfaite de Jérôme Rolland, un petit homme doux qui réclame son dû presque tous les soirs, avant de s'endormir. Mon devoir conjugal sans manquer...<sup>18</sup>

Mme Rolland n'est plus qu'une machine qui s'agite (KA, 37).

Her life as Mme Rolland is, in fact, almost at the opposite extreme from her life as Mme Tassy. Her husband is gentle, but his demands on her to fulfill certain marital duties make her feel like a baby machine: "Je n'ai été qu'un ventre fidèle (KA, 10). This view of herself corresponds to the first step of the Eros figures as outlined in the first part of this chapter dealing with Hagar's female identity. In Jung's analysis, the first stage of the Eros figure is that of the biological Eve: a reproductive entity or vessel. As the wife of M. Rolland, Elisabeth ensures a

<sup>18</sup> Anne Hébert, Kamouraska. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) 10. All subsequent references to this text will be to this edition and will be indicated in parentheses in the text of the thesis. For simplification, the abbreviation KA will be used to refer to the novel;

<sup>19</sup> Carl Jung, From Psychology of the Transference, Introduction, 404.

place for herself in the official world, which contrasts with the unofficial world with no boundaries that she shares with George Nelson. This official, patriarchal world is parallel to Hagar's life as a child under the domineering influence of her father Jason Currie.

The role of Mme Rolland also allows Elisabeth to escape her horrible memories that bring back the guilt associated with the murder of Antoine and the reproaches of George Nelson. Whenever she wants to exit from an unpleasant scene, she falls back into the character of Mme Rolland:

Vous vous trompez, je ne suis pas celle que vous croyez. J'ai un alibi, irréfutable, un sauf-conduit bien en règle. Laissez-moi m'échapper, je suis Mme Rolland, épouse de Jérôme Rolland. Je n'ai rien à faire rue Augusta... Je vous le jure. Je suis Mme Rolland, Mme Jérôme Rolland (KA, 57).

As Mme Rolland, Elisabeth has a sense of power over her thoughts and memories; the role is a safe one to adopt because her husband Jérôme is a respectable man. Elisabeth assumes the god-like status of a "voyante" (KA, 184). She absorbs all her other personalities and allows them to act out their roles at her discretion. She is thus distanced from the action like a camera: "Comme je vois bien tout. En entier et en détail" (KA, 205). Furthermore, Elisabeth uses this central omniscient and omnipotent consciousness to distance herself from George Nelson by assuming the identity of Mme Rolland and consequently denying her love for him:

Laisse-moi m'en aller. Devenir Mme Rolland à jamais. Exclure de ce jeu de mort, entre



Antoine et toi... Innocente! Innocente! Je suis innocente!(KA, 233)

Not surprisingly, the guise of Mme Rolland can be just as easily abandoned in favour of another role by the central consciousness, Elisabeth. She then becomes the director of the same play in which she is an actor:

Comme si je n'attendais plus que ce signal, j'entre en scène. Je dis "je" et je suis une autre. Foulée aux pieds la détroque de Mme Rolland...Au musée son masque de plâtre.(KA, 115)

The hierarchichal "je" in the passage above seems to direct the action. According to Josette Feral, this superior "je" is an identity outside of the boundaries of time and space, an identity which contains the essence of the individual and which is not identifiable with any of the roles that Elisabeth assumes in the course of her narrative:

Trois noms, un seul prénom: Elizabeth, fil directeur du récit dont les multiples incarnations donnent au texte sa diversité et sa souplesse. Oscillations de l'une à l'autre et parfois les dominant toutes un JE qui n'est ni Elizabeth d'Aulnières, ni Mme Tassy, ni Mme Rolland, mais un MOI hors du temps et de l'espace, au plus profond de l'être, au plus profond du rêve.<sup>20</sup>

Having examined the fertile yet sterile environment that surrounds Elisabeth as Mme Rolland (she bears her husband eight children, but his bourgeois respectability is life-denying), let us now look at how Elisabeth's identity

<sup>20</sup>Josette Feral, "Clôture du moi, clôture du texte dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert," Voix et Images 1.2 (décembre 1975): 276.

as Elisabeth d'Aulnières takes shape from her exposure to a female-oriented environment. Elisabeth's earliest identity is that of Elisabeth d'Aulnières, a girl raised in the company of four women--her widowed mother and her three celibate spinster aunts: Tante Adélaïde, Tante Luce-Gertrude and Tante Angélique. This environment is a sterile one for Elisabeth; she has no contact with men. However, when she reaches puberty, her aunts make it their business to teach Elisabeth how to be a proper lady:

--La petite grandit à vue d'oeil!

--Elisabeth tiens-toi droite, le buste bien dégage. Surtout ne t'appuie pas au dossier du fauteuil.

--Il faudrait changer de couturière. Celle-ci ne sait pas piquer droit.

--N'oublie pas tes Pâques. Ne lève pas les yeux de ton ouvrage de tapisserie. Ta beauté et tes bonnes manières feront le reste.

Adélaïde, Luce-Gertrude, Angélique tourbillonnent autour de la Petite. Surveillent son poids et sa taille. (KA, 59)

Elisabeth's aunts refer to her as la Petite because they seem to resist the reality of Elisabeth's growing awareness of her sexuality. When remembering her past experiences associated with the murder of her husband Antoine, Elisabeth refers to herself as Elisabeth d'Aulnières, as la Petite or l'Innocente, because these names which spring from her childhood suggest the image of a secure, unthreatening, or non-sexual environment. In the role of Elisabeth d'Aulnières, Elisabeth sees herself as a child-like victim of the vulgar and violent Antoine Tassy.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup>The theme of childhood or the notion of putting off

She uses this image of herself to justify her actions and to deny her guilt. However, like many states in Kamouraska, the state of childhood is also surrounded by an aura of ambivalence. On the one hand, it is a time of innocence, a presexual state of purity; on the other hand, it suggests the sterility of Elisabeth's existence in the presence of her spinster aunts. Thus, Elisabeth's world is carnivalesque or dual in nature in much the same way as Hagar's. As we have already noticed, Hagar's childhood is also tinged with a kind of ambivalence; she is under the domination of a father who oppresses her individuality by sending her to the ladies' academy instead of to the teachers' college; yet she also becomes aware of the richness of her Scottish heritage.

Like Elisabeth, Hagar also feels persecuted at times; however, she does not have a mask of innocence that she can don at will. She is much more aware of her own failings and of the conflicts in her life; her awareness of laughter and humour in the universe allows her to accept the arbitrariness of all human experience.

Elisabeth, on the other hand, is entrenched in a personal, tragic universe and chooses to deny her guilt. Her experiences are therefore suggestive of the Romantic grotesque or Gothic world as opposed to the Medieval or

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 adulthood and all of the responsibilities and sexual aspects that accompany it is common in French-Canadian literature. (e.g. Marie-Claire Blais, La belle bête and other Anne Hébert novels). Many of Anne Hébert's characters view childhood as a time of innocent sibling love which also has connotations of incest (e.g. Michel and Lia in Les chambres de bois, Julie and Joseph in Les enfants du sabbat).

renaissance grotesque which pervades Hagar's world view.

She uses her name as Elisabeth d'Aulnières as a means of escape and as a means of liberating herself from the guilt she feels:

Decliner son nom. Se nommer Elisabeth d'Aulnières  
à jamais. Habiter toute sa chair intacte, comme  
le sang libre et joyeux. (KA, 23)

However, this temporary celebratory act (which characterizes the carnivalesque) is always counteracted by the nature of the mask that Elisabeth dons throughout the novel. Masks in *Kamouraska* do not turn terror into something comical. Instead, they deceive; they function as an "individual carnival"<sup>22</sup> which is marked by isolation. Bakhtin indicates that, in the Romantic grotesque, "laughter" has no regenerating power. Madness is no longer a "gay parody of official reason," but acquires instead "a somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation"<sup>23</sup>. If we apply this generalization to Elisabeth's actions, we can see why her attempts to liberate herself ultimately fail. Her universe is a Romantic grotesque one, and as some critics have argued, a Gothic world.<sup>24</sup>

Elisabeth is caught in a world of contradictions and paradoxes. Ironically, the name that she uses to escape the guilt associated with the name Mme Tassy is also associated with the sterile, childhood environment that she chose to

<sup>22</sup>Bakhtin, 37.

<sup>23</sup>Bakhtin, 36.

<sup>24</sup>Arnold E. Davidson, "Canadian "Gothic and Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981): 243-54.

escape by marrying Antoine. Thus, Elisabeth escapes one prison only to enter into another.

Eventually Elisabeth does abandon her maiden name to take on the name of another. Elisabeth d'Aulnières, l'Innocente becomes the "jeune fille à marier"(KA, 69) when her mother decides one day: "Il va falloir marier la Petite"(KA, 60). Shortly after this announcement, the household makes preparations for the Governor's ball and Elisabeth becomes increasingly interested in "les garçons"(KA, 63), asking Aurélie, the promiscuous servant, to tell her about her own encounters with boys. The ball represents Elisabeth's initiation into sexuality and reflects her desire to break ties with the female dominated world of the house on the rue du Parcior.<sup>25</sup> This breaking of ties with the family (or the official world) is also present in The Stone Angel when Hagar leaves her father's house to marry the uncouth, social rebel Bram. Elisabeth remembers with excitement the sights and sounds of the Ball:

Je crois que le Gouverneur(danser a en perdre le souffle) me renverse sur son bras. Comme une fleur qui se pâme...Ma mère dit qu'il faut me marier...Les garçons s'essoufflent, renâclent, pareils à de petits cochons, patauds et maladroits. Ils me regardent par en dessous. Ma mère dit encore qu'il faut me marier...Aurélié, il faudrait que je te parle pourtant. Comment faire? Je voudrais savoir...les garçons...Les garçons....(KA, 64-5)

<sup>25</sup>The ball or the dance seems to be a common motif or scene for female sexual awareness or initiation experiences in literature. Emma Bovary is made aware of the sexual nature of the dance in Madame Bovary, and in Katherine Mansfield's short story Her First Ball, the heroine is initiated into the adult world by attending a dance.

Elisabeth's rupture with her "chères petites tantes" (KA, 66) is further revealed in her interest in hunting, which is not "un passe-temps convenable pour une jeune fille" (KA, 66). As an Artemis figure, Elisabeth embraces danger and cunning. Although she is presumably the prey in her encounter with Antoine Tassy, she will also acquire the role of the goddess who dominates the animal world (in which she places Antoine and George respectively). Erich Neumann points out the cruel and arbitrary nature of Artemis's desires in Die Grosse Mutter or The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype:

...in the matriarchal unconscious phase, a feminine self creates an inner hierarchy of powers. Her image in the human psyche manifests the unconscious and unwilled, but purposive, order of nature. Cruelty, death, and caprice stand side by side with supreme planning, perfect purposiveness, and immortal life. Precisely where man is a creature of instinct living in the image of the beast or half-beast, i.e., where he is wholly or in large part dominated by the drives of the unconscious, the guiding purpose, the unconscious spiritual order of the whole, appears as a goddess, in human form, as a Lady of the Beasts.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout the novel Elisabeth views Antoine as a beast; in fact, his murder is likened to slaughtering an animal. He is easy game or "gibier facile" (KA, 67).<sup>27</sup> It is

<sup>26</sup> Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. Ralph Manheim. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963) 278.

<sup>27</sup> For an elaboration on the animal imagery in Kamouraska, see Albert LeGrand's article "Kamouraska: ou l'Ange et la Bête" Etudes françaises 7.2 (1971): 119-143.

during the hunt that Elisabeth meets Antoine, who comes from a good family but who is nevertheless a "veyou" (KA, 69). Elisabeth, however, feels that she will make him respect her: "Je me ferai respecter de lui, comme une jeune fille à marier" (KA, 67). Her attitude towards Antoine is very much like Hagar's view of Bram. Hagar chooses to marry Brampton Shipleý because he is an introduction to sexuality, and yet she feels that it will be a challenge to tame him and mold him into a man of cravats. Unlike Hagar, however, who loves Bram, Elisabeth does not love Antoine ("je suis mariée à un homme que je n'aime pas" (KA, 70)) and she seems to go through with the marriage out of a sense of social obligation and for the novelty of the experience:

--Éléonore-Elisabeth d'Aulnières, prenez-vous pour époux, Jacques-Antoine Tassy?

Il faut répondre "oui," bien fort. Ton voile de mariée. Ta couronne de fleurs d'oranger. Ta robe à traîne. Le gâteau de noces, à trois étages, nappé de sucre et de crème fouettée. Les invités se mouchent derrière toi. Tout le bourg de Sorel attend pour te voir passer, au bras de ton jeune époux. (KA, 70)

After her marriage to Antoine, Elisabeth becomes increasingly conscious of his animality and vulgarity. She contrasts him with the delicate atmosphere of the governor's ball. Antoine and his friends "sent et la sueur et la crasse. Ils se démentent en dansant et rient comme des bêtes qu'on égorge" (KA, 72). Antoine also loves "les filles pas lavées, à l'odeur musquée" (KA, 72). Elisabeth associates all of these features with the Tassy lifestyle and, as a

result, chooses to refer to herself as Elisabeth d'Aulnières, "sa femme" or as "épouse d'Antoine Tassy" instead of Madame Tassy, which would make her feel tainted.<sup>28</sup> She thus becomes obsessed with the idea of remaining pure and untouched by the Tassy hand in order to return to her sterile childhood state, which represents a reversal of her earlier desire to escape the claustrophobic life with her aunts:

Aucun enfant d'Antoine ne mûrira plus dans mon ventre. Ne prendra racine. Ne se choisira un sexe et un visage dans la nuit. Me voici libre et stérile comme si nul homme ne m'avait jamais touchée. Quelques jours encore et je serai purifiée. Libre. (KA, 118)

While remembering the events leading up to the murder of Antoine, Elisabeth refers to herself as Mme Tassy only through the voices of other people, which creates a distancing effect. For example, Elisabeth imagines George Nelson passing "dix fois peut-être, devant les fenêtres de Mme Tassy" (KA, 129). By viewing herself as Mme Tassy here, Elisabeth suggests the distance between George and herself as it is reflected in the barrier caused by her married name. Furthermore, the name Mme Tassy is not unique because it already belongs to Antoine's mother. In other parts of the novel, Elisabeth seems to associate the name of Mme Tassy with guilt; thus, she never says "moi, Mme Tassy" the way she says "Moi, Elisabeth d'Aulnières" or "je suis Mme

<sup>28</sup> Curiously enough, Elisabeth's descriptions of George Nelson also include references to animals, only in these references the images are positive in nature.



Rolland"; she is Mme Tassy only to the voices of outsiders. Elisabeth feels that these voices judge her and monitor her actions, thereby drawing attention to her guilt:

Danseurs, danseuses et chaperons se figent et retiennent leur souffle--Quelle apparition dans l'encadrement de la porte! Mme Tassy et le docteur Nelson, grelottants, le visage rougi par le froid...Insolents, quoique traqués.(KA, 138)

The tone of judgement is also present in the following passage:

Un témoin s'avance, un deuxième, un troisième, puis un quatrième...Ils déclarent tous, sous la foi du serment, qu'il y a un commerce criminel entre le docteur Nelson et Mme Tassy (KA, 155).

In these passages, Elisabeth projects a sense of guilt when remembering her affair with George Nelson. However, because she views herself through the eyes of society, she creates a distance and thus avoids admitting her guilt in the murder and in her adulterous affair. In short, the guilty verdict is pronounced by the voice of society and not by Elisabeth's, which makes it possible for her to deny it. Interestingly enough, the sense of justice in Kamouraska is the justice of the law and not of God: "Point de pardon ici, puisque Dieu n'existe pas, n'a jamais existé. Injuste justice de la Loi..."<sup>29</sup>

In order to free herself from the identity imposed upon her by marriage to Antoine Tassy, Elisabeth sees herself as

<sup>29</sup>Fernand Dorais, "Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert--Essai de critique herméneutique" Revue de l'Université Laurentienne 4.1 (1971): 80.

the purified lover of George Nelson. With George, she is no longer ~~Mme Tassy~~—wife of a vulgar, brutal man, but Elisabeth, a receptacle of purity, a free entity.— This conception of herself is very similar to Hagar's view of herself as "Hagar", an individual free of social ties (the role of somebody's wife). Like Hagar, Elisabeth is thrilled when her lover calls her by her first name: "Elisabeth.") Il m'a appelée par mon nom"(KA, 125). Unlike Hagar, however, Elisabeth always needs another person to help her arrive at this true identity or core self. We must remember at this point that there is an essential difference between the roles of Elisabeth d'Audnières and Elisabeth. In the case of the former, the perception is one of a pre-sexual being, a woman raised in a sterile, female environment by spinster aunts and in a state of security. As "Elisabeth," however, Hébert's protagonist seems to arrive at a higher plane of existence, at the plane of experience. Through George Nelson, Elisabeth believes that she can find purification. She thus envisions a kind of rebirth through her interaction with George Nelson, who takes on the traits of a divine figure:

Vous sanglotez de joie, docteur Nelson. La paix elle-même vient à votre rencontre(KA, 155).

George s'éloigne de moi à nouveau. Comment faire pour le rejoindre? Je suis encombrée. Surchargée. Ligotée. Prisonnière de la rue Augusta et de la ville de Sorel. Me libérer. Retrouver l'enfance libre et forte en moi. La petite fille aux cheveux tondus s'échappant de la maison par une fenêtre. Pour rejoindre les gamins de Sorel. Que faut-il faire? Docteur Nelson, que faut-il faire?

Dites seulement une parole et je vous obéirai. Dois-je à nouveau sacrifier ma chevelure? Laisser derrière moi mes enfants et ma maison? Hors de ce monde, si vous le désirez. C'est là que je vous donne rendez-vous. Telle qu'en moi-même, absolue et libre. Etrangère à tout ce qui n'est pas vous. (KA, 123)

In George, Elisabeth sees the possibility for liberation from the prison house of marriage to Antoine Tassy, just as Hagar seems to search for liberation from the ties and expectations of society. Unfortunately, for Elisabeth the only way of effecting such an escape is by committing the murder of Antoine. Elisabeth must traverse the realm of guilt before she can enter into this state of bliss or second innocence with George. Ruth Major indicates that many of Anne Hébert's female characters are marginal women: "...il devient évident que les femmes ne peuvent être sujets que dans l'ordre d'un discours ou d'un état marginalisant (comme le meurtre, la sorcellerie, le vampirisme)".<sup>30</sup> This is because the acceptable social activities belong to the realm of men, and the women must assert their individuality and identity in some marginal way.<sup>31</sup>

Antoine must be eliminated, not only because he poses a threat to Elisabeth's sexual affair with George, but because he shares George's actual childhood (they played chess

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Major, "Kamouraska et Les Enfants du sabbat: faire jouer la transparence," Voix et Images 7.3 (printemps 1982): 468.

<sup>31</sup> Julie in Les Enfants du sabbat is a witch, Héroïse in Héroïse is a vampire, and the Atkins sisters in Les Fous de Bassan are nymph-like creatures. Elisabeth also has an other-worldliness that seeks to transcend the petty bourgeois, and therefore socially acceptable role of Mme Rolland.

together). Elisabeth sees this bond as a real obstacle to total union with George because she sees childhood as a state in which time is suspended:

Il [George] se retire avec une facilité, une impudeur totale. S'absorbe sans doute dans une muette et savante-partie d'échecs, contre un garçon blond, (Antoine) battue d'avance. Il faut ramener cet homme près de moi. Interrompre sur-le-champ une partie d'échecs entre fantômes. Docteur Nelson, je vous aime farouchement jusqu'à désirer franchir avec vous les sources de votre enfance. Pour mon malheur je les trouve ces sources inextricablement mêlées à l'enfance d'Antoine Tassy. (KA, 122)

Only by eliminating Antoine does Elisabeth feel that she can share a kind of childhood with George.

Elisabeth's desire to arrive at this purified state with George by way of the murder is transfused with an abundance of religious imagery. These religious images or the use of inverted typology helps define Elisabeth's role in her relationship with George and how she sees him. Elisabeth sees that it is possible for her to be saved only through the death of Antoine: "Il faut qu'Antoine meure et que je sois sauvée de la mort" (KA, 167). This is one example of the perversion of the Christian notion of sinners being saved or finding salvation through the death of Christ. In this particular instance, a sense of personal justice subverts the justice system of patriarchal Christianity.

Another example of distorted typology in Kamouraska is reflected in Elisabeth's view of herself as "life and death":

Je suis l'amour et la vie, mon existence n'a de comparable que l'absolu de la mort. (KA, 170).

Elisabeth views herself as a Christ-like figure here in control of the destiny of others.<sup>32</sup> She suggests that only through death can George arrive at her source of love and life. The irony of course is that this death not only involves self-sacrifice on the part of George, but also the murder or sacrifice of Antoine Tassy. As a result of these actions, George Nelson will become a fusion of divine goodness and demonic, Byronic madness or "le roi des démons." (KA, 196) This co-existence of the demonic and the divine principles reinforces the ambivalent nature of the universe in Kamouraska, linking it to the duality of the carnivalesque tradition.

As we can see, religious typology and identities do play an important role in forming the self-image of Elisabeth in Kamouraska and of Hagar in The Stone Angel. Both Hagar and Elisabeth seek to escape constraints placed on them by society in order to reach a higher, purer or more liberated state of existence, the unofficial world of the carnivalesque experience. Hagar desires to escape the encumbrances of the physical self and certain social obligations. This cannot be effected by a selfish act; by speaking the truth and by committing unselfish deeds, Hagar

<sup>32</sup> Ruth Major suggests that in Hébert's novels, females have the power that is ordinarily ascribed to God in Christian doctrine: "Le pouvoir de vie et de mort qu'elles détiennent (qui devait appartenir à Dieu, selon la morale chrétienne) en fait des êtres à part" (1982: 466).

liberates herself in some way. She also recognizes the comic, arbitrary nature of the world she lives in and reconciles herself to the world of carnival. Elisabeth, on the other hand, tries to arrive at a purified state by means of a crime, through guilt, through selfishness, and through her demands on others. Furthermore, she conceives of herself as absolute and sees George as her salvation, unlike Hagar who searches for peace and freedom through unselfish acts and eventually finds these possibilities in other people, and even in God at the very end of the novel. Elisabeth's universe, as Philip Stratford points out, is essentially tragic;<sup>33</sup> she lives in a world of the Romantic grotesque which centers on the fear-inducing power of the individual, resulting in complete isolation. Elisabeth's dishonesty in remembering certain events isolates her from the rest of society. As a result, she cannot find her essence or arrive at a sense of relative wholeness as Hagar does at the end of

The Stone Angel:

Le temps d'un éclair, entrevoir la réconciliation avec soi-même, vainement cherchée depuis le commencement de ses souvenirs. Se découvrir jusqu'à l'os, sans l'ombre d'une imposture. Avouer enfin son mal profond. La recherche

<sup>33</sup> In his analysis of Kamouraska and The Diviners, Stratford writes, "Anne Hébert's work is...totally different from Laurence's. Where Laurence is comic, Hébert is tragic. Where Hébert's structure is dramatic, close-knit, almost preserving the unities of time, place and action, Laurence's is an itinerant sprawling in time and place and welcoming the diverting detour, its unity assured by the central character who undergoes change herself as the action progresses" (121). The emphasis on the unity of character in The Diviners can also be applied to Hagar at the end of The Stone Angel.

éperdue de la possession du monde. (KA, 129)

Thus Elisabeth searches for her true self in vain, because she denies the truth of her guilty involvement in the murder of her husband; Hagar, on the other hand, reconciles herself with others and finds unity through truth. In Jungian terminology, Hagar succeeds because she undergoes the process of individuation which recognizes the blending of social norms and an individual's particularities to form a whole person. Elisabeth, on the other hand, fails because she follows the cult of individuality which becomes synonymous with egotism. Patricia Smart suggests that Elisabeth's tragic outcome is the result of her desire to pursue Romantic ideals and her reluctance to come to terms with "ordinary" life: "Anne Hébert is perhaps suggesting that love and authenticity lie not in the snare of the absolute but in the limits of life in time: giving birth, cleaning dirty little faces, keeping the larder stocked with sugar and lying beside a husband who is gentle and dull."<sup>34</sup> I am not so sure that Hébert is approving of such a complacent life for women in general in Kamouraska. She presents us with a problematic conclusion to the novel, which is appropriate for a character whose self is problematic. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Hébert would approve of a life of domestic banality for Elisabeth; what she seems to promote throughout the work is the old Polonian

<sup>34</sup> Patricia Smart, "Novels and Novelists: Kamouraska," Quebec Quarterly 81.3 (1974): 475.

adage "to think own self be true," regardless of the kind of  
life one leads; this is surely where Elisabeth misses the  
mark.



## CHAPTER II

### Binary Speech in The Stone Angel and Kamouraska

Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and Anne Hébert's Kamouraska are novels that revolve around two female protagonists and their struggle with language. Hagar Shipley and Elisabeth d'Adnières are the victims and the manipulators of language; as a result, language both shapes and fragments their identities as women and as communicators in a particular society. These characters experience conflicts and division because they isolate themselves from the voices of others of their respective worlds. Hagar and Elisabeth sense that they stand apart from the rest of society, and that they possess fragmented identities. Their fragmented language is yet another expression of the carnivalesque experience which pervades both novels. Julia Kristeva points out some of the features of carnivalesque discourse:

Les répétitions, les propos dits "sans suite" (et qui sont "logiques" dans un espace infini), les oppositions non-exclusives qui fonctionnent comme des ensembles vides ou des sommes disjonctives--pour ne citer que quelques figures propres au langage carnivalesque--traduisent un dialogisme qu'aucun autre discours ne connaît d'une manière aussi flagrante.... le carnaval conteste Dieu, autorité et loi sociale; il est rebelle dans la mesure où il est dialogique: il n'est pas étonnant qu'à cause de ce discours subversif; le terme de "carnaval" ait

pris dans notre société une signification  
fortement péjorative et uniquement caricaturale.

Both The Stone Angel and Kamouraska reflect the carnivalesque experience in the opposite forces or tension inherent in the interplay of different discourses in the two novels. The female protagonists in the respective works constantly subvert the discourse of the official world as typified by a patriarchal, Christian, social conformist order.

In The Stone Angel, Hagar perceives language as being intimately linked to one's identity and more specifically to her own self-image. Near the beginning of The Stone Angel she describes her father as a self-made man who "never believed in wasting a word or a minute" (SA, 7). Hagar views Jason Shipley as a man who is stingy with his praise and who does not believe in overusing the spoken medium. In this sense Hagar is very much like her father since she too believes in withholding praise as we noted in the preceding chapter on identity. For example, she does not praise her son Marvin when he dutifully completes his chores. She also fails to wish him well just before he leaves for the war because of her sense of social embarrassment:

I didn't know what to say to him. I wanted to beg him to look after himself, to be careful as one warns children against snowdrifts or thin ice or the hooves of horses, feeling the flimsy words may act as some kind of charm against disaster. I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him against all reason and reality, not to

Julia Kristeva, "Le mot, le dialogue et le roman," Semiotika: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969) 161.

gc. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses. (SA, 129)

Her reluctance to express affection and praise is due to her self-conscious attitude towards speech, which she views as a barrier to the expression of true feelings. In this instance, the difficulty in communicating is linked to Hagar's denial of the mother in her, at least where Marvin is concerned. Furthermore, Hagar is very aware of the division that exists between speech and thought; this division causes her to be hypercritical of speech and to feel uncomfortable when communicating with others. She perceives a split in her identity, because she distances herself from her own speech acts by commenting on them as if they were uttered by a completely different person.

Margaret Laurence's protagonist is extremely conscious of uttering the inappropriate phrase or word in a particular situation. Her self-conscious attitude towards speech is thus linked with notions of social propriety and expectation and with feelings of insecurity. For example, the young Hagar is too proud to tell Bram that she enjoys their sexual encounters because she does not feel that these encounters can be described in a socially acceptable manner:

Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like the things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train (SA, 80)

Hagar's disenchantment with the lack of socially

respectable discourse during the act of lovemaking is similar to Rachel's Romantic vision in A Jest of God of discussions pertaining to sexual matters as opposed to her actual conversations with her lover Nick:

Listen, my love--whatever your terms--I don't make any conditions. Nick, do you know what I love about you? I love the way your voice sounds, deep but with that scepticism I used to fear and don't fear now, and the way your skin feels, and the hair that grows blackly down to your belly and around your sex, and the muscles that lie within your thighs. It was good--wasn't it?

Her actual dialogue with Nick does not allow her to bring up the matter of birth control:

But when we are in his room I can't tell him what has been on my mind, what's worrying me. It's his concern, too. I know that. But will he know it? I have to speak of it.

Like Rachel, Hagar tries not to speak because she worries that other people will think her a fool:

--Could Doris have felt the same about me just now as I felt that day in church about Bram? It doesn't bear thinking about.

I will be quiet, I swear, never open my mouth, nod obligingly, keep myself to myself for good and all. And yet, even as I swear it, I know it's nonsense and impossible for me. I can't keep my mouth shut. I never could (SA, 90).

Hagar is evidently worried about how others see her and has to force herself to keep quiet to avoid public embarrassment. As in her relationship with Bram, she feels

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 141.

<sup>3</sup> A Jest of God, 126.

the need to remain respectable. However, sometimes she cannot maintain this mask because her speech rebels and incriminates her. Hagar's façade of respectability (like Elisabeth's role as Mme Rolland) is the result of her pride and her need to uphold her sense of self-worth. Consequently she will not reach out to people because she considers her own feelings before the feelings of others. Communicating her concern or sympathy to others verbally would be synonymous with demeaning herself or losing her respectability:

Sidling up to me is a slight person in a pink cotton wrap-around...What does she want with me, this old old body? Should I speak to her? We've never met. She'd think me brash (SA, 101).

Hagar's concern with speech, however, is not only an individual or personal concern, but also a universal one. She expects the same social conduct from other people that they demand of her. In fact, she is more interested in the delivery of a speech or in the manner of expression than in the content or the semantics of the speech. This preoccupation with verbal expression is reflected in Hagar's criticism of Bram's language and way of expressing himself. She is disappointed when his verbal utterances do not complete his image of a "good-looking man" (a disappointment that Elisabeth also experiences, after recognizing the beastlike quality in the seigneurial nature of Antoine Tassy):

He was a big-built man, and he carried himself so well. I could have been proud, going to town or church with him, if only he'd never opened his mouth(SA, 69-70)...

He couldn't string two words together without some crudity, that man. He knew it riled me.

That's why he kept it up so(SA, 79)

Hagar also criticizes Marvin's and Doris' grammar which suggests that Hagar is a psychological editor, a precursor to Morag Gunn, the writer in The Diviners. As W.H. New states in "Every Now and Then: Voice and Language, in Laurence's The Stone Angel," Hagar's discourse emphasizes the "writerly quality of the language with which Hagar constructs the world."<sup>4</sup> This tendency is clear in her criticism of Marvin's letters. Hagar remarks that Marvin's letters "were always very poorly spelled"(SA, 130). Similarly when Doris asks her to join her for a cup of tea, Hagar is hypercritical of the language Doris uses:

Marv and me are having a cup of tea, Mother; would you like a cup?

My lips tighten. Marv and me. Why could he not at least have found himself a woman who could speak properly? But this is absurd, for he doesn't speak properly himself. He speaks as Bram ~~old~~(SA, 30).

Here, instead of appreciating Doris' gesture of friendship, Hagar dwells on the grammatical structure of Doris' speech because it gives her a sense of pride to be able to correct the flaws of others. She also seems to recognize that for,

<sup>4</sup>W.H. New, "Every Now and Then: Voice and Language in Laurence's The Stone Angel, A Place to Stand On, ed. George Woodcock. (Edmonton: NewWest Press, 1983) 174.

others, as well as for herself, the spoken medium is inaccurate and lends itself to easy criticism because it does not adequately convey sincerity of feeling.

Given Hagar's reaction to the language used by her relatives, it is not surprising that she is equally critical of the speech of strangers or acquaintances. These people include doctors and ministers. For instance, when Hagar has a conversation with Mr. Troy, the minister, she pounces on his verbal inaccuracies or on the delivery of his advice instead of appreciating his concern and his gestures of kindness. Mr. Troy bursts out, "Would you care to pray?" (SA, 290) and Hagar comments, "As though he were asking me for the next dance" (SA, 290). Like many of Laurence's characters, Hagar is keenly aware of stereotypical expressions. T.Q. Dombrowski indicates the role of the cliché in his analysis of Laurence's works:

One cause of urgency which Rachel (A Jest of God) feels arises from the manner in which words can become for her, as for so many of Laurence's characters, empty, devoid of meaning... Laurence also presents protagonists typically sensitive to the clichéd word, the empty automatic phrase, what Rachel calls set patterns of response. Stacey herself acts as a kind of authorial sensibility at many points, wryly observing the clichés of advertising...

Like some of Laurence's other characters, Hagar is so conscious of having utterances expressed in a socially acceptable, unambiguous way that she makes it very

<sup>5</sup>Theo Quayle Dombrowski, "Word and Fact: Laurence and the Problem of Language," Canadian Literature 80 (Spring 1979): 51.

difficult for other people to communicate with her and vice versa. Spoken language thus acts as a barrier between characters in The Stone Angel.

Since the verbal medium provides obstacles for Hagar, she must find another medium in which she can express her feelings without the pressures of social demands in the official world. This medium is none other than the medium of thought. Hagar's thoughts, or her interior monologues, reflect what her true feelings are on a subject and usually consist of mental apologies and promises that she cannot bring herself to utter. Many of her moments of clear, conflict-free thought occur when she is alone, that is when she does not have to engage in conversation with others:

I hold the banister tightly, and of course I'm all right, perfectly all right, as I always am when I haven't got an audience (SA, 33).

She is constantly looking for a moment to herself, but "something is forever intruding" (SA, 92).<sup>5</sup> Her search for isolation reaches its climax when she leaves Marvin's house to run away to Shadow Point. By undertaking this journey alone, Hagar feels proud and independent: "I have everything I need...no one's here to inform me I'm a fool" (SA, 216).<sup>6</sup> As we noticed earlier, Hagar believes very strongly in her individuality and in her need to distinguish herself from the rest of humanity.

<sup>6</sup> See John Baxter, "The Stone Angel: Shakespearian Bearings" The Compass: A Provincial Review 1 (August 1977): 3-19, for a comparison between The Stone Angel, King Lear and the motif of the fool.



However, Hagar's moments of escape from the intrusive voices of other human beings are relatively short-lived. Throughout The Stone Angel she is bombarded by voices both identified and unidentified, which force her to live in the present and be aware of her fellow human beings. Thus, even if she refuses to speak to others, she cannot help hearing voices:

How is it that I have kept my hearing so acute? Sometimes I wish it would dim, and all voices be reduced to a wordless drone in my ears. Yet that would be worse, for I'd always be wondering what they were saying of me(SA, 66).

Here, Hagar's need to hear voices is linked with her sense of self-esteem or identity. She finds their din disturbing, but she wants to know what they are saying about her. These voices that Hagar hears sometimes have an inhuman, unidentifiable nature, which only accentuates her confusion:

There are voices, though, and these should mean that people are beside me, but I have the feeling that only the voices exist, only the vocal cords, the unbodied mouths babbling and plotting somewhere in the middle of this vault's dark air(SA, 110).

Once again Hagar attempts to gain control over the medium of language, but cannot name things; the voices are undefinable and severed from their source. They have become dissociated from the people they belong to, just as Hagar's own voice and speech have been separated from her thoughts. Later, when Hagar is in the hospital ward with other women, she again hears noises and voices which she cannot place.

They also invade her privacy and interfere with the clarity of her thought:

A wisp of a voice sings in German off-key. Near me, someone prays aloud...And endlessly, the breathing and the voices flutter like birds caught inside a building (SA, 256).

However, after spending some time in the hospital, Hagar is able to identify the voices and to attach names to them. She does this in an attempt to order her world and become a member of a certain community.<sup>7</sup> Even though the voices are still "fragments"(SA, 274), Hagar is not disturbed by them anymore. She says:

Now I know where they come from. The murmurs from further beds are too vague to be deciphered. But the nearby ones--I can put names to those. I go over the names in my mind, to see if I can remember. Mrs. Reilly, Mrs. Dobereiner, Mrs. Jardine... (SA, 274).

Not only is Hagar no longer frightened by the other voices, but she herself numbers among these "fretful leaves"(SA, 275):

Tom, don't you worry none--  
Mother of God, pray for us now at the hour of--  
Mein Gott, erlöse mich--  
You mind that time, Tom? I mind it so well--  
I am sorry for having offended Thee, because I  
love  
Erlöse mich von meinen Schmerzen--

<sup>7</sup>The integration of the individual into the community is also emphasized in Ethel Wilson's novel Swamp Angel, where an aging female character, Nell Severance realizes that she is part of an everlasting web of humanity: "No Man is an Island, I am involved in Mankind," Ethel Wilson, Swamp Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1954), 150. Hagar resembles Wilson's character in many respects.

Bram! (SA, 275)

The voice screeching "Bram" belongs to Hagar, who is no longer the isolated Hagar who entered the hospital; instead of being an island she is involved in mankind.

The voices that Hagar hears are transformed from hostile, intrusive, and unknown voices to recognizable ones which Hagar accepts instead of repelling. In other words, Laurence's heroine does not always seek isolation and privacy from the voices of humanity; in fact, throughout The Stone Angel she searches for some kind of ideal or special interlocutor who will listen to her silent and vocal pleas. During times of desperation or despondency, Laurence's character remarks, "Now there is no one to speak to" (SA, 81). At the doctor's office, when barium is being rammed down her throat she says, "If only there were someone to speak with" (SA, 110). Obviously Hagar cannot speak in this specific instance; therefore, she must be thinking of a form of communication that does not require verbal utterances. She seems to be searching for an interlocutor or advisor who can read her thoughts. The only being that fits this description for Hagar would be God, and it is He to whom Hagar unconsciously calls out throughout the novel. God is the only entity who would hear her cries when no one else is present. He is also the only being who can be reached through thoughts instead of through speech acts. Near the end of the novel, Hagar finally addresses God directly, thereby recognizing him as this

ideal interlocutor: "Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg (SA, 307)."

While the language of thoughts and prayer allows Hagar to overcome the barrier of speech and helps her to express her feelings, this is not the only method Hagar uses to communicate. Margaret Laurence clearly suggests that communication and social interaction between individuals is also made possible through song, through laughter and through acts of sacrifice (unselfish actions).<sup>8</sup> Hagar herself is not successful in communicating with God through song; her voice "quavers in tremolo, breaks in low mournful grunts" (SA, 218) when she sings a hymn. However, Mr. Troy finally melts Hagar's hardened heart of pride by singing. She describes this experience:

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

After hearing the hymn, Hagar suggests that Mr. Troy has spoken from the heart and has conveyed his feelings in a way he never could through speech. She then realizes that she herself never spoke "the heart's truth" (SA, 292) in her lifetime.

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<sup>8</sup> W.A. New observes that there are different stages of language in the development of Morag's character in The Diviners: "There was a language of class and place, a language of song and race, a language of teaching, a language of learning, a language of seeing, a language of knowing, a language of flesh and a language of shaping form." "Every Now and Then," 171.

Hagar overcomes the barriers or distance created by language is speaking "the heart's truth." She is able to communicate by helping other human beings. Just as Mr. Murray Lees, the stranger Hagar encounters in an abandoned house, helps her in her loneliness by listening to her retelling of the past, Hagar helps a young Chinese girl in the hospital by bringing her a bedpan. This act on the part of Hagar seems rather trivial and insignificant (as we noted in the preceding Chapter, the act is comic grotesque in nature); however, it is through this unselfish motion that Hagar touches another human being. In an interview with Michel Fabre, Margaret Laurence indicates that many important acts of communication are often "wordless":

Between human individuals much of our deepest communication is at a non-verbal level... People can make love, people can hold and comfort their children... In all my novels, in some of the scenes that I think are most emotional the characters involved are really saying very little.

Hagar's act of fetching the bedpan for Sandra is a way of communicating her concern for another human being on a non-verbal level. After Hagar has fetched the bedpan, she even wonders whether she has done the act for Sandra or for herself (SA, 301). Then the nurse enters in on the scene and chastises Hagar for getting out of bed. The young girl and Hagar laugh about the nurse's reaction and are thus brought

<sup>9</sup> Michel Fabre, "From The Stone Angel to The Diviners: An Interview with Margaret Laurence," A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence. Ed. George Woodcock (Edmonton: NewWest Press, 1983): 201.

together by a common incident: "Convulsed with our paining laughter, we bellow and wheeze. And then we peacefully sleep"(SA, 302). Through the medium of laughter and through her unselfish act, Hagar succeeds in communicating with and in reaching another human being, which she could not do in her past life because of her pride and self-consciousness that were linked to her attitude towards speech.

It is interesting to note that Hagar's breakthroughs, her acts of unselfishness, take place when she interacts with strangers who then unknowingly prepare her for her final encounter with her son Marvin. Hagar suggests that she can feel more comfortable around strangers:

I've always been definite about people. Right from the start, I either like a person or I don't. The only people I've ever been uncertain about were those closest to me. Maybe one looks at them too much. Strangers are easier to assess(SA, 102).

The knowledge that she gains from her ability to communicate with strangers(e.g. Mr. Lees, Sandra Wong, the people at the hospital and Mr.Troy) helps her finally admit to Marvin that he was a better son than John. For Hagar, the "stranger" functions as a way of forcing Hagar to come to terms with social expectations and language, so that she can be reintegrated into society. In Kamouraska, on the other hand, the stranger allows Elisabeth to escape the protective constraints of society, thereby emphasizing an individual language, instead of a universally shared one.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Stratford, 118.

In other words, through her search for listeners and through her ability to make sacrifices, Laurence's protagonist can overcome her social embarrassment associated with words of praise and finally tell Marvin verbally that he was a better son than John. This moment in the novel is important in terms of Margaret Laurence's own perception of acts of communication. According to the author of The Stone Angel, non-verbal acts of communication are important; however, they can never be entirely separated from words: "Words," Laurence says, "are very imperfect; yet we are stuck with them. This is the only way we have to exchange views; we can exchange emotions without words but we cannot exchange views."<sup>11</sup> This comment on communication is also applicable to Hagar because Hagar does not succeed in bridging the gap of understanding between Marvin and herself until she says to him: "You've been good to me always. A better son than John" (SA, 304). In this instance, she literally speaks the heart's truth and thus momentarily overcomes the barrier of social embarrassment so closely associated with verbal communication for Hagar throughout the novel. Here the rupture Hagar experiences between her thoughts or feelings and the spoken word is mended because she performs a "free" (SA, 307) act. The words she addresses Marvin with are "spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love" (SA, 307) and therefore acquire the significance of a liberating force. Because of her words

<sup>11</sup> Fabre, 201.

of love, Hagar reaches her son and is made whole; she is incorporated into the web of humanity and is no longer as isolated or as fragmented an individual as she was earlier in the novel.

Like Margaret, Laurence's heroine Hagar, Anne Hébert's Elisabeth also views language as a barrier and thus tries to exercise control over the medium or over the voices that she hears. As Madame Rolland, Elisabeth can control the pace of her memories by lingering over specific words, and by listening to certain conversations and ignoring others. Much of the language that she dwells upon includes words that suggest innocence, love and self-esteem. For example, the name Sorel, Elisabeth's childhood home, evokes pleasant associations for Elisabeth; it suggests a time of innocence and peace:<sup>12</sup>

D'où vient ce calme, cette lumière douce proménée sur une petite ville déserte? Sorel. Ses rues de quelques maisons à peine. Maisons de bois. Maisons de briques. Square Royal. Rue Charlotte. Rue Georges. Coin des rues Augusta et Philippe. (KA, 50).

Here Elisabeth savours the memory of her childhood home because she remembers its peaceful environment. In a similar way Madame Rolland savours the words of her daughter, who points out to Elisabeth her devoted care of Jérôme Rolland:

<sup>12</sup> Grazia Merler draws attention to the soothing, dreamlike effect of place name evocations on Elisabeth: "Elisabeth se laisse bercer par le son des noms des endroits évoqués." "La réalité dans la prose d'Anne Hébert," Écrits du Canada français 33 (1971): 67.



Non, non il ne faut pas te lever encore. Le docteur dit qu'il faut te reposer. Tant de dévouement et d'inquiétude à cause de papa. Tu es complètement épuisée. Il faut dormir encore un peu.

Mme Rolland savoure les paroles de sa fille. Avec avidité: dévouement, inquiétude. La paix, un jour,, sera cachée dans un compliment, comme une amande dure(KA, 93).

In this situation, Elisabeth reveals how her awareness of language is linked with her perception of herself as an innocent woman.

Like Margaret Laurence's Hagar, who is conscious of the syntax and delivery of speech, Elisabeth also manipulates words and syllables. She often takes words out of their context in order to incorporate them into her own experience. For example, when she recites the Lord's prayer, she focuses on one specific part of the prayer, instead of regarding the prayer in its entirety:

Je récite le 'Notre Père', du bout des lèvres. Soudain une grande fureur s'empare de moi. Je réveille d'un coup comme une sonnambule. Me fait mordre dans quatre mots de la prière, les détachant du texte, les éclairant, les dévorant. Comme si je m'en emparais à jamais. Leur conférant un sens définitif, souverain. 'Délivrez-nous du mal.' Tandis que le mal dont il faut me délivrer, à tout prix, s'incarne à mes côtés, sur le banc seigneurial. Prend le visage congestionné, les mains tremblantes de l'homme qui est mon mari(KA, 90).

Elisabeth thus takes the "deliver us from evil" portion of the Lord's prayer and changes its application. Instead of asking for strength to resist her own temptations, she applies the term "evil" to her

husband Antoine. This manipulation of language suggests that Elisabeth does not subscribe to the interpretations of others or, more specifically, to a patriarchal prayer entrenched in the rigours of Christian contexts. So it is with Margaret Laurence's Hagar when she inwardly criticizes Mr. Troy's way of encouraging her to pray. Like Hagar, Elisabeth disregards the original context of the prayer and uses the words in a more personal way.

The manipulation of religious language or typology is common in Anne Hébert's work. In Les Fous de Bassan, for example, her characters subvert or modify the referential aspect of language and use it to assert their own identity. Nicolas Jônès, the community preacher in Les Fous de Bassan refers to himself as the Word, the incarnation of Christ: "j'ai été le Verbe de Griffin Creek, dépositaire du Verbe à Griffin Creek, moi-même Verbe au milieu des fidèles..."<sup>13</sup>

Antoine Sirois points out the parodic presentation of Nicolas in the novel as the Word made flesh in a sexual sense (he is sexually attracted to his own mother): "Le lien est ici parodique car Nicolas, prédicateur infidèle de la Parole, devient le Verbe qui s'est fait chair, mais dans un sens péjoratif."<sup>14</sup> Nora Atkins, a female character in the same novel subverts the patriarchal context of the Biblical passage through her utterance concerning her own made nature: "Et moi aussi, Nora Atkins, je me suis faite

<sup>13</sup> Anne Hébert, Les Fous de Bassan (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982) 19.

<sup>14</sup> Antoine Sirois, "Bible, mythes et fous de bassan," Canadian Literature 104, Spring (1985): 179.

chair....Livrée aux métamorphoses de mon âge j'ai été roulée et pétrie par une eau saumâtre..." (118).<sup>15</sup> Like these characters in Les Fous de Bassan, Elisabeth is concerned with modifying the referential aspect of language in order to reinforce her egocentric view of the world. All expressions of language in short are condensed into "ce cri, qui est le roman" or her narrative.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to focusing on individual words or syllables, Elisabeth also visualizes letters that were never written and conversations that were never held. In fact, throughout her narrative or her remembrance of the past, it is difficult to ascertain whether her reports are accurate representations of the past or whether they are distorted through Elisabeth's imagination. This ambiguity is partially the result of Madame Rolland's state of mind at the time. She floats between the worlds of the past and the present because of her insomnia and fatigue. Consequently, her imagined conversations or letters are fragmented and erratic, consisting of short, often verbless sentences:<sup>17</sup>

Je soupire et mordille mon porte-plume.  
Ce sale devoir de vacances à faire. Profiter de  
cette soirée de pluie. D'autant plus que le  
temps presse... Vous me recopierez cert lignes:

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed comparison of masculine vs. feminine ideology and discourse, see Neil B. Bishop's article, "Distance, point de vue, voix et idéologie dans Les Fous de Bassan d'Anne Hébert," Voix et Images 9.2 (hiver 1984): 113-

<sup>16</sup> Merler, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Denis Boak, "Kamouraska, Kamouraska," Essays in French Literature 14 (1977): 69.

Mon cher petit mari--C'est ta petite femme qui t'écrit--pour t'annoncer un heureux événement--un heureux événement pour... le mois de... (je compte sur mes doigts et recompte sur mes doigts) pour le mois de décembre, si mes calculs sont bons--ta petite femme qui... (KA, 152).

This fragmentation in the language reflects Elisabeth's own fragmented identity as Madame Rolland, Elisabeth d'Aulnières, Mme Tassy and Elisabeth and her tendency to shift from one identity to another at will. Her manipulation of identities and language suggests that she is in control of her own past; she can distort events so as not to injure her sense of self-worth, which is what she does when she composes an imaginary letter addressed to her from George:

Vous laisserez le Canada, n'est-ce pas? Vous viendrez, Elisabeth, dites-moi cela seulement. Vous viendrez? Vous viendrez? Dites?... (KA, 244).

Unfortunately, Elisabeth never received such a letter from George and thus interprets this lack of correspondence as a sign of abandonment.

In her adoration of George Nelson, Elisabeth also listens to his voice and to every word he speaks: "J'écoute chaque parole véhémement" (KA, 121). This fixation on language is reiterated by Nora Atkins in Les Fous de Bassan when she admires the potent, sexual force behind Nicolas Jones' sermons<sup>18</sup>: "Les paroles du révérend Nicolas Jones

<sup>18</sup> Grazia Merler refers to the incantatory power of words on Elisabeth's consciousness in Kamouraska: "le rappel de certains sons, de certains mots a un pouvoir incantatoire

sont prises dans la Bible s'en empare, les fait vibrer et chanter dans sa bouche d'homme vivant et charnel."<sup>19</sup>

However, both female characters seem to sense the power of using male utterances or modifying them to distinguish both their individuality and their marginality as women.<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth's memory of George's English expressions ("Farewell my love") and her reference to his sleigh as a "sleigh américain" instead of "un traîneau" as it is referred to by witnesses at the trial suggest that she uses George's American status and language to make herself feel unique. He is the only one to call her Elisabeth and he is the only foreigner with whom she has a close relationship. The only other foreigner she encounters is the Governor at the ball whom she admires for his "air très british" (KA, 72). At this ball Elisabeth also stresses that she speaks English "avec distinction" (KA, 72).

Another example of Elisabeth's control of language is the way she transforms the Queen's language, the language which accuses Elisabeth of the murder of her husband, into George Nelson's language, the language of her love:

Elisabeth d'Aulnières veuve Tassy, vous entendez? C'est en langue étrangère qu'on vous accuse et qu'on vous charge? Cette langue est

sur la conscience d'Elisabeth et déclenche toute une suite d'autres souvenirs." "La réalité dans la prose d'Anne Hébert," 65.

<sup>19</sup> Les Fous de Bassan, 118.

<sup>20</sup> See also Stratford on the marginalization of Elisabeth through her contact with a stranger, "Kamouraska and The Diviners," 118.

celle de mon amour. Rien ne compte pour moi que la forme des mots sur ses lèvres. Elisabeth d'Aulnières, veuve Tassy, souvenez-vous de Saint-Denis et de Saint-Eustache? Que la reine pende tous les patriotes si tel est son bon plaisir. Que mon amour vive!(KA, 44)

Here, Elisabeth seems to recognize that the language of her accusers in court is also the language of her love; however, within the same language, Elisabeth identifies two different levels of expression or a duality of discourse: a discourse of accusation and a discourse of love. She affirms George's language because it is a language of love which makes her unique; it separates her from all the other people accused of crimes in the Queen's language. Thus, Elisabeth fragments the English language in this particular situation in order to preserve an identity of innocence.

In addition to manipulating voices to make them suggest pleasant memories and associations, Elisabeth is also besieged by voices that she cannot identify and by voices that bring back unpleasant events. In this sense, she resembles Hagar who also finds it difficult to place voices when she is in the strange hospital room. Many of these voices Elisabeth hears belong to witnesses at the trial or take the form of declarations that proclaim Elisabeth's guilt in the murder of her husband Antoine Tassy. For example, near the beginning of Kamouraska Elisabeth either imagines an ordinance condemning her of the murder of her husband or remembers an actual document written by the court. The act is written in English,

which for Elisabeth is all the more devastating because it is written in the language of her lover George Nelson (KA, 32). Madame Rolland hears the voice of her servant Florida accusing Madame Rolland of assassinating Jérôme Rolland and of killing her first husband Antoine Tassy. Thus, even Florida, a symbol of social servitude and security, is transformed into a menacing court usher in Elisabeth's dream experience:<sup>21</sup>

Oyez! Braves gens, Oyez! Monsieur se meurt. C'est Madame qui l'assassine. Venez. Venez tous. Nous passerons Madame en jugement... Oyez! Braves gens oyez! L'acte d'accusation est écrit en anglais. oyez! L'acte d'accusation est écrit en anglais... La cour est ouverte! (KA, 32)

However, Elisabeth soon dispenses with the guilt that she should feel as a result of these statements by remembering that the accusatory document is written in the language of her lover, George Nelson, and must therefore be false.

Elisabeth has a tendency to deny the accusations made in any of the judgements that she visualizes or hears. When she hears the unidentifiable voice of someone accusing her of spending time in the bedroom with Doctor Nelson she asks:

Qui a parlé? Qui a osé dire cela? C'est écrit sur papier timbré. La déposition d'Aurélié Caron. Cette fille est une menteuse (KA, 44).

Once again Elisabeth denies her guilty part in the murder of Antoine by choosing to disregard the judgmental

<sup>21</sup>Boak, "Kamouraska, Kamouraska!," 76-77.

voices that she hears. In The Stone Angel Hagar also finds voices that she cannot identify as confusing, but once she learns to accept her flaws and failures, the voices lose their haunting quality. By denying the judgmental voices, Elisabeth feels that she has control over her own life and her narrative voice or her own identity as Madame Rolland or down to or refuse to acknowledge the rest of humanity or society. Like Hagar, who eventually learns to accept her flaws and establishes better communication with her fellow human beings, Elisabeth wants to isolate herself from the rest of society. She alternates between a search for silence, or the suppression of speech, and a need to break this silence. This conflict within Elisabeth's consciousness reflects the fragmented identity that we discussed earlier in relation to Elisabeth's different names. Like Hagar, Elisabeth is aware of the difficulty in communicating with others and in finding a way to express her feelings. At one point in the novel she feels like a statue, mute and unable to communicate, searching in vain for a means of expression:

La compassion en moi tourne à vide, s'épuise. Cherche éperdument une issue, un geste, une parole qui l'exprime et la sorte de la pierre où j'étouffe. Changée en statue, Véronique fascinée sur le seuil de la porte... Me voici emmurée dans ma propre solitude. Figée dans ma propre terreur. Incapable d'aucun mouvement, d'aucun geste. Comme si la source même de mon énergie (étant faussée) se mettait soudain à produire du silence et de l'immobilité (KA, 218)

Like Hagar, the blind and often mute "stone angel,"



Elisabeth also has a voiceless and inhuman mode.<sup>22</sup> Here Elisabeth expresses her frustration at not being able to communicate with George Nelson, a man in exile, who has just killed Antoine Tassé. However, this silence is also a reprieve for her since she cannot accept her guilty role in the murder of Tassé. Shortly after she identifies herself with a statue, Elisabeth decides that she even wants to reject George Nelson's voice which she used to adore. She cannot accept his condemnation of her and she would rather dispense with his voice than force herself to accept her share of guilt in the murderous affair:

Tu me supplies (tandis que ta voix s'altère se gâte tout à fait; tombe en poussière, dans mon oreille) de bien vouloir écouter ton histoire jusqu'au bout...Encore une fois je te supplie de m'épargner la suite de ton histoire. Tout cela est une affaire d'homme (KA, 233).

Not only does Elisabeth dissociate herself from George by not listening to his plea, but she also destroys the unity of their relationship. There can be no shared catharsis as we observed in The Stone Angel in the cannery scene between Hagar and Murray Lees. Instead,

<sup>22</sup> Josette Féral points out that Anne Hébert's characters are often frozen in time and space: "L'univers hébertien est un univers clos et individualiste où il n'y a de place ni pour les étrangers, ni pour les foules...Le héros est lié au lieu de sa naissance, et ce lieu est souvent fermé, isolé de toute voie de communication, encastré dans une vallée difficile d'accès, (le Torrent), perdu dans un lieu sauvage (le Temps sauvage), protégé par des murs infranchissables (les Chambres de bois). Quand un étranger ou un visiteur s'y aventure...on cherche à l'y emprisonner, à l'y retenir." "Clôture du moi, clôture du texte dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert," 266.

Elisabeth isolates herself from George and dissociates herself from the crime by calling it an "affaire d'homme" (KA, 233), thereby adopting an official, patriarchal world view. By conforming to standard norms of a bourgeois society, she is able to maintain her mask of innocence. However, her relationship with George is broken; she pictures them as strangers who look at one another "sans parler" (KA, 241). Neither one of them, Elisabeth suggests, dares repeat the word "amour" and the word "liberte" in the aftermath of the murder.

Elisabeth is at the point in her narrative or memory of the past where she "ne parvien[t] plus à articuler aucune parole" (KA, 238). This inability to communicate reflects Elisabeth's reluctance to accept her guilt and responsibility for destroying another person's life. George Nelson's language has suddenly become a "langue étrangère" (KA, 248) in the sense that Elisabeth refuses to recognize it. His language is no longer a language of love for her, but a language of condemnation. Fernand Dorais comments on the language of love, as a language without a referent, primarily because Elisabeth denies the referent by the recursive nature of her discourse that keeps returning to the point of departure:

Conscience et langage ici se recouvrent. L'une comme l'autre, excités par l'énergétique constitutrice de l'être psychique, tous deux tissent le subtil réseau ou du trajet obscurément intentionnel ou de la structure syntagmatique qui déroule le Discours pour seulement revenir au point de départ. Mouvement inutile; mouvement de

pure immobilité....Conscience, langage: une et seule toile d'araignée tendue sur ce qu'on ignore quel abîme, sans Référent aucun, si ce n'est à l'araignée qui la parcourt pour ne capter nulle proie...l'Amour n'est que Désir d'Amour, autant dire Absence ou recouvrement qui se dévore.<sup>23</sup>

Rather than accept that the judgments of accusation and the expressions of love can be traced to the same person, George Nelson, and that they are directed at her, Elisabeth denies George's identity and her own identity as his lover. Instead of accepting George's judgment of her as "that damned woman" (KA, 248) who has ruined him, she plainly states that she prefers to wear "le masque de l'innocence" (KA, 249) because pride is her sole joy: "L'orgueil est ma seule joie, de place en place, tout le long d'un chemin amer" (KA, 249). This phrase clearly echoes Hagar's utterance: "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear" (SA, 292). Hagar, however, is integrated into the social structure in an honest way at the end of the novel and not in the dishonest, deceptive way that Elisabeth is. Elisabeth hears voices and judgments and dishonestly conjures up her own when she finds these voices disagreeable; she even addresses herself and says, "Vous entendez des voix, madame Rolland... Vous jouez à entendre des voix" (KA, 76).

By denying the voices of condemnation, Elisabeth isolates herself from the rest of society in order to

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<sup>23</sup> Fernand Dorais, "Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert--Essai de critique herméneutique," Revue de l'Université Laurentienne 4.1 (novembre 1971): 80-81.

live a lie. She does not speak "the heart's truth" the way Hagar does in The Stone Angel, partly because she turns only to herself for comfort and pity instead of trying to overcome the barriers of communication through unselfish acts the way Hagar does. Hagar finds peace within herself and freedom of expression when she communicates with strangers and with her son Marvin through acts of self-sacrifice and love. Through these acts, she also finds the peace and freedom of expression which she finally associates with God. For Elisabeth, there is no possibility for reconciliation with the rest of humanity because she makes no sacrifices of her own. Moreover, she lives in a godless universe as Henry Cohen aptly points out:

...comment se fait-il... qu'aucune valeur spirituelle ne subsiste ni à Sorel, ni à Québec, ni à Kamouraska? Dans la vie privée il n'y a que matérialisme, hypocrisie, instinct dépravé et répression du naturel; dans la vie publique, rien que du conformisme aveugle.<sup>24</sup>

Hébert's protagonist only demands help and pity from others, shutting out the voices of condemnation instead of integrating them into her experience. She manipulates the lives of other people (George, Aurélie) in a god-like way in order to enrich her own life. Even when she is with George, she thinks of the two of them as being isolated or separated from the rest of the world, which suggests her need to set herself apart from others. She says, "George

<sup>24</sup> Henry Cohen, "Le rôle du mythe dans Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert," Présence Francophone 12 (1976): 104.

vient près de moi. S'isole avec moi. Dans un coin de la pièce" (KA, 176).<sup>25</sup>

Unlike Hagar, who is touched by prayer, by song and by the actions of others, Elisabeth hears prayers and religious litanies, but instead of using them to reflect on her guilt, she uses these hymns as an escape:

Sancta Lucia, sainte Agnès et sainte Cecile! Que ces litanies sont douces et apaisantes! Dieu soit loué, je reconnais à présent la voix pure de ma fille Anne-Marie! Ceci se passe chez moi, dans ma maison de la rue du Parloir. Je vais descendre immédiatement auprès de mon mari, Jérôme Rolland, pour l'assister jusqu'à la dernière minute. Il ne sera pas dit que j'ai laissé mourir mon mari, sans assistance ni consolation. Ne suis-je pas sa femme fidèle, depuis dix-huit ans? (KA, 232-33)

The litanies that Elisabeth hears sweep her back into the present. She once again assumes the identity of Madame Rolland, wife of the respectable Jérôme Rolland. Her involvement in his illness, however, is motivated by her consciousness of social opinion, not true love and sacrifice as in the case of Hagar's approval of Marvin. Just as Elisabeth manipulates the religious songs or prayers that she hears in order to escape, she also manipulates or uses Monsieur Rolland, who provides her with a mask of social respectability. Because Elisabeth is so conscious of protecting her own honour and reputation,

<sup>25</sup> Once again we see how the house in Canadian literature functions as a way of defining the identity of the individual. In this reference to the corner of the room, Hébert also emphasizes the marginal quality of the Elisabeth/George relationship.

she is destined to remain estranged from humanity and live a life of solitude:

Lorsque la femme se présente dans la ville, courant et implorant, le tocsin se met à sonner. Elle ne trouve que des portes fermées et le désert de terre battue dont sont faites les rues. Il ne lui reste sans doute plus qu'à mourir de faim et de solitude (KA, 250).

A language of isolation, a language of solitude: this is the kind of language that Elisabeth is left with by the end of the novel. Her denial of society's accusatory speeches and her search for a language of innocence, shrouded in a vocabulary of lies, isolates her as an individual instead of integrating her into a community; this search furthers the fragmentation of the self, instead of mending her already divided identity. For Laurence's heroine; on the other hand, there is a kind of salvation in Hagar's recognition of a universal, communal language: the non-verbal acts of communication such as acts of love, and most important of all, acts of truth. Unlike her unhappy counterpart, Elisabeth, the ninety-year old Hagar learns to love and to communicate by sacrificing a part of herself, that proud and untruthful nature which refused to acknowledge human weakness, vulnerability, and dependency. She is reintegrated into the social structure, a typical ending in a comedy or even tragi-comedy. Through her acts of love and truth she attempts to overcome the barriers created for her by spoken language in an effort to reach her human and divine interlocutors; this is a triumph which Elisabeth's

discourse of lies and mask of innocence never achieve. She is a tragic figure who will continue to die a thousand deaths. In Kamouraska, society is the winner, the individual the ultimate loser.

### CHAPTER III

Polyvalent Voices: Hébert's Elisabeth(s) and Laurence's Hagar(s)

Now that we have examined the multiple identities of Laurence and Hébert's protagonists and their attitudes towards language, we can address the problem of narrative perspective and narrative voice in Kamouraska and The Stone Angel. However, before we enter into a thorough analysis of the narrative techniques in each of these novels, it is necessary to make a preliminary distinction between the terms "focalization" and "voice" as they are to be applied in the following analysis. The more general term for narrative perspective is point of view, which Seymour Chatman distinguishes from narrative voice in his book Story and Discourse:

Thus the crucial difference between "point of view" and narrative voice: point of view is the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation. Voice, on the contrary, refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience. Point of view does not mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made. The perspective and the expression need not be lodged in the same person.

The final statement in the above passage is especially important in the analysis of Mme Rolland in Kamouraska,

<sup>1</sup> Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) 153.



because, in her case, the voice and the point of view are determined by the different roles that she assumes in the course of the narrative.

While Chatman's terms may appear satisfactory for the purposes of a narrative analysis of a novel, they do not work as well for a detailed analysis of multiple voicing and perspective in a novel as does Gérard Genette's terminology. Unlike Chatman, Genette distinguishes between mood and voice, the term "focalization" appearing in his section on mood in Figures III:

...la plupart des travaux théoriques sur ce sujet (qui sont essentiellement des classifications) souffrent à mon sens d'une fâcheuse confusion entre ce que j'appelle ici mode et voix, c'est-à-dire entre la question quel est le personnage dont le point de vue oriente la perspective narrative? et cette question tout autre: qui est le narrateur? --ou, pour parler plus vite, entre la question qui voit? et la question qui parle?<sup>2</sup>

Genette continues with further subdivisions of the term "focalization" which I will apply to my discussion of the novels. My main focus will be on "focalisation interne" (internal focalization) which, according to Genette, "n'est pleinement réalisée que dans le récit en monologue intérieur,"<sup>3</sup> of which The Stone Angel and Kamouraska are two excellent examples.

The narrative aspects of Kamouraska have received much critical attention; in fact, an entire ~~has~~ has been written

<sup>2</sup> Gérard Genette, Figures III (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) 203.

<sup>3</sup> Genette, 209.

on the subject.<sup>4</sup> While this thesis can in no way provide a comprehensive analysis of narrative problems in the novel, it can nevertheless focus on some of the more prominent examples of ambivalence or dialectical forces as they are expressed by the narrative technique and voicing.

In Kamouraska, Elisabeth's preoccupation with herself and her need to manipulate others are reflected in the multiple narrative voices in the novel, which are all projections of Elisabeth's consciousness and traceable to Mme Rolland, either while she is awake or asleep. We have already established that Elisabeth, like Hagar, has multiple identities which suggest a fragmented concept of self. Throughout the novel she switches from one role to another in an effort to manipulate her past and present experiences. Some critics in fact have remarked that Elisabeth's experience is "hors du temps et de l'espace."<sup>5</sup>

She is even able to project the thoughts or voices of other people in the course of the novel; this manipulation of voices and identities is in turn responsible for the novel's ambiguous voicing. Some critics have suggested that there are narrators other than Elisabeth in the novel,<sup>6</sup> while others have opted for the view that there is a single voice which projects multiple voices.<sup>7</sup> For example, the

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Harvey's Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert: une écriture de la passion; suivi de Pour un nouveau Torrent, (Montréal: Editions Hurtubise, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Féral, 278.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Harvey, for example, identifies 4 different narrators: Elisabeth, an omniscient narrator, "la Voix" and Jérôme Rolland.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Major states, "il y a donc...une seule voix qui se

beginning of the novel is narrated in the third person, which would seem to suggest the presence of a narrator not identifiable with any one of the characters. Robert Harvey and Jeanine Nadeau-Fournelle<sup>8</sup> claim that this narrator is a heteroextradiegetic narrator who is not a participant in Elisabeth's narrative and who is identical to the omniscient narrator type. This narrator presents Mme Rolland and describes her attitude towards the illness of her husband: "Son mari allait mourir et elle éprouvait une grande paix...Mme Rolland attendait, soumise et irréprochable"(KA, 7). However, shortly thereafter this narrator enters into the consciousness of Mme Rolland and the narration changes to the first person mode:

Il aurait fallu quitter Québec. Ne pas rester ici. Seule dans le désert du mois de juillet. Il n'y a plus personne que je connaisse en ville. Si je sors, on me regarde comme une bête curieuse(KA, 7).

The rest of the novel is written largely in interior monologue and narrated by Elisabeth in the first person. Only later does the reader realize that the third person accounts are focalized through Elisabeth's consciousness (either that of the awake or the sleeping Mme

fait entendre, cédant parfois la parole aux personnages qu'elle contrôle, pour donner l'illusion de la pluralité des voix." "Kamouraska et Les Enfants du sabbat; faire jouer la transparence," 460.

Jeanine, Nadeau-Fournelle, "Analyse des techniques narratives dans Kamouraska," thèse de maîtrise, (Université du Québec à Montréal, 1977). Microfilm. 55.

Rolland). Elisabeth's consciousness is pseudo-omniscient when she is awake (she projects what others are thinking; whether she is accurate is not important, since it is the creative process or the rendition of events or the "discours" of the novel which is the significant factor)<sup>9</sup> and omniscient in her dream or hallucinatory state. The actual distinction between the waking and the sleeping Mme Rolland is not a crucial one in the novel because Hébert seems to be deliberately trying to obliterate the distinctions that she, or Elisabeth tries to define, like other authors or narrators of the carnivalesque tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Elisabeth refers to herself in the third person in order to achieve a distancing effect between her multiple identities, including those of Elisabeth d'Aulnières and Madame Rolland, the player in a drama:

Que Mme Rolland ne se rassure pas si vite. Ne se réveille pas en toute hâte, dans la petite chambre de Léontine Mélançon. Pour classer ses souvenirs de mariage et les accrocher au mur, les contempler à loisir. Rien n'est moins offensif que l'histoire du premier mariage d'Elisabeth d'Aulnières... Cette distance même qui devrait ne rassurer est pire que tout. Penser à soi à la troisième personne. Feindre le détachement. Ne pas s'identifier à la jeune mariée, toute habillée de velours bleu (KA, 70-71).

In this instance, Elisabeth emphasizes the fragmentation of

<sup>9</sup> "C'est le processus créateur du roman que le lecteur veut saisir plus que le drame d'Elisabeth," Merler, 59.

<sup>10</sup> According to Bakhtin, the carnival experience of the people was "opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms." Rabelais and His World, 11.

her identity. She is caught in a dual existence as an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent overseer and as a designated player in her recreated drama. As a superior or higher form of consciousness, she can be either Elisabeth d'Aulnières or Mme Rolland because she is like an omniscient narrator overlooking these two women, who are merely actors in her narrative. By referring to herself in the third person, Elisabeth also distances herself from the guilt that is associated with her life as Elisabeth Tassy.

In addition to referring to her other identities or voices, Elisabeth projects the imaginary voices of Jérôme Rolland and the speech of other people. In doing so, she once again manipulates the narrative since she enters into the minds of people like an omniscient narrator. For example, in her conversations with Jérôme she assumes that he is constantly thinking about the Antoine Tassy trial and her guilty part in the murder of her first husband:

M. Rolland ferme les yeux. Refuser carrément de boire. Il attend Florida. Le temps ne compte plus. Pourquoi ménager Elisabeth? Pourquoi ne pas lui témoigner enfin notre profonde méfiance? Lui avouer que l'on n'a jamais été dupe de son innocence?(KA, 26)

This piece of narrative is written in free indirect discourse; the voice is intended to be that of Jérôme Rolland, but it is more likely that it is Elisabeth using his voice to project her own fears. Once again the

focalization, although projected outside, is through Elisabeth's consciousness. By viewing herself through the eyes of others in this manner, Elisabeth indicates the extent of her preoccupation with feelings of guilt and the need to preserve a mask of innocence.<sup>11</sup> It is also interesting to note that, in the above excerpt, Elisabeth does not regard Jérôme's accusation as an individual judgement; instead, it represents the judgement of a collectivity, of an entire society. Elisabeth sees Jérôme allying himself with others so that he can call his distrust of her a collective distrust or "notre profonde méfiance" (KA, 26). By having Jérôme use the pronoun "we", Elisabeth suggests that she is conscious of being condemned by a group.

Throughout Kamouraska Elisabeth projects the voices of society, accusing her in some way and reminding her of the guilt she should feel. Some critics have found parallels between these voices and the chorus of Greek tragedy.<sup>12</sup> This chorus represents social opinions which generally chastise Elisabeth. When she does hear these voices, she makes an attempt to place herself in the position of a victim so that the voices of condemnation seem unreasonably harsh. In one particular instance Elisabeth

<sup>11</sup> Denis Boak suggests that Jérôme believes Elisabeth to be guilty (93); however, whether Jérôme actually believes that Elisabeth is guilty is not the important issue in the novel. What is important is Elisabeth's perception of Jérôme's thoughts.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Harvey and Grazia Merler's articles on the narrative voices.

hears the voice of her husband Jérôme, the seigneur, who wants to rape her:

Il faudrait avoir la santé de violer cette femme. La ramener de force avec nous, sur le lit conjugal. L'étendre avec nous, sur notre lit de mort. L'obliger à penser à nous. L'insaisissable qui est notre femme, la coupable qui ne fut jamais pardonnée, notre femme, notre beauté corrompue. La convaincre du péché, la prendre en flagrant délit d'absence (KA, 26).

Here, Anne Hébert's protagonist not only sees herself as the victim of Jérôme's force, but as a woman violated by a punishing god-like figure, a metaphor for social justice. By painting the man in her life in such a violent way, Elisabeth is able to convince herself that she is a passive and unwilling participant in certain events. In other words, she makes other people appear guilty by manipulating the voicing of the narrative and by distancing herself through the use of third person reference ("cette femme"). Elisabeth seems to have an unconscious desire to admit her guilt; however, by distancing herself from these voices of condemnation, she undercuts this repressed desire.

Elisabeth's need to maintain her mask of innocence is also reflected in her desire to adopt the voice or words of other people in order to appeal to the sympathy of certain characters. For example, when Elisabeth wants George Nelson to pity her, she has to adopt the role of the victim. She does this on one occasion by speaking in the voice of George's dying sister, who is also a nun:

J'emploierai la voix mourante de Kathy s'il le faut. La voix même de toute vie menacée qui veut vivre. Sauvez-moi, docteur Nelson! Sauvez-vous avec moi! Non pas avec des prières et des alchimies vertueuses et abstraites. Mais avec toute votre chair d'homme vivant, avec toute ma chair de femme vivante. Votre nom à donner, à votre femme, docteur Nelson, en échange d'un nom exécré (KA, 170).

Here Elisabeth uses the words "sauvez-moi" that were uttered by George's sister on her deathbed in order to assume the mask and the discourse of innocence. She wants to use both the voice of George's sister Catherine and George Nelson's own name to purify her image and to rid herself of the name Tassy which she associates with shame and guilt.<sup>13</sup> Her identity is thus inextricably bound to the identity and language of other people which she absorbs in parasitical fashion. Once she assumes this purified state, she believes that she can control the lives of others without the help of prayer or God; she and George will save one another through the sexual act which Elisabeth describes in terms of the Holy Sacrament. George will save her from perdition with his "chair d'homme vivant" and she will in turn save him with her "chair de femme vivante." Thus, Elisabeth's role as the omniscient narrator is closely bound up with her

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Louis Backès notes that Elisabeth never utters her name, Mme Tassy: "...parmi les trois noms du personnage, celui de Mme Tassy a un sort un peu particulier: il n'est jamais vraiment prononcé par celle qui conte l'histoire...il est toujours mis dans la bouche de quelqu'un d'autre." Jean-Louis Backès, "Le système de l'identification dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Anne Hébert," *Voix et Images* 6.2 (hiver 1981): 272.



rejection of the Christian sacraments (both marriage and communion). Instead of accepting her guilt and appealing to the higher authority of God for forgiveness, or even to society, she sets herself up as a Godhead in order to gain control over her own destiny.

The power and control that Elisabeth exhibits when she adopts multiple voices and identities is also reflected in her acceleration, deceleration or deletion of sections in the narrative. In an earlier chapter, we observed that Elisabeth postpones painful events in her narrative or interior monologue by changing identities and voices. In this sense, she is the author, creator and sometimes recreator of her own life story. She can resuscitate or retrieve certain characters at will or delete unpleasant events. As the awake and dreaming Madame Rollard, Elisabeth oscillates between the role of a narrator who controls the text of her life and an unwilling participant in this story who is forced to relive the experiences. As a participant in the events, Elisabeth feels herself transported back into her ambiguous past (part imagined, part real) at Kamouraska by the voices of trial witnesses:

Tout ce bavardage des témoins autour de mon lit. Tous ces gens entassés me respirent sur la face et m'examinent avec avidité. Ils prennent en secret des mesures exemplaires pour me sortir de mon lit... Projettent de m'emmener de force jusqu'à Kamouraska. Je sais que je n'y échapperai pas (KA, 208-9).

Here, Elisabeth once again portrays herself as a passive, victim-like figure who is forced by others to relive her past experiences or to recreate them in an even more nightmarish fashion.<sup>14</sup> However, she is never completely successful in maintaining this role, because she needs to exercise some control over her narrative by delaying the replay of events from the past:

Je prolonge, à la limite du possible, l'état de stupeur dans lequel je suis... Tout au plus m'est-il permis de gagner du temps. Résister encore un peu. La force de l'inertie. Aveugle, sourde et muette, il faudra que l'on me traîne par les poignets. Pour l'instant je me défends de donner droit d'asile et permis d'identité à cet étranger que vous décrivez avec tant d'insistance et de précision. Moi seule pourrais ramener cet homme à la vie. Le tirer hors du temps et de l'oubli. Le perdre à nouveau et ne perdre avec lui (KA, 208-9).

Elisabeth's denial of the distinction between temporal states once again suggests the carnivalesque tendency to obliterate clearly defined worlds or realms of experience. Rather than work within the constraints of time, she uses her imagination to acquire omniscience and, by extension, omnipotence. She believes that only she can create an identity for the stranger known as George Nelson. Like God, she can restore people to life and create something out of the void; of course, her world is the realm

<sup>14</sup>Grahame Jones states that Elisabeth inhabits a kind of "no man's land" lodged between the present and the past, "perdue entre ces deux plans temporels." "Alexandre Chenevert et Kamouraska: une lecture australienne," *Voix et Images* 7.2 (hiver 1982): 332.

of the imagination.<sup>15</sup> As she revives George in her memory, she also revives her own identity as George's Elisabeth; similarly, when she forces the image of George out of her narrative or conscious experience, she destroys her identity as George's Elisabeth and reassumes her identity as Madame Rolland, the omniscient narrator who contrives to create gaps in the narrative and omit the central event of the novel, the murder of Antoine Tassy:

Il y a pourtant un trou dans l'emploi du temps de celui que je cherche. Moi-même complice de ce vide. Evitant avec soin une certaine histoire, entre toutes capitale (KA, 224).

The manipulation of temporal events is another factor that emphasizes the themes of fragmentation and the dialectic of chaos and control in Anne Hébert's novel. Elisabeth presents her narrative without respecting the boundaries between past and present experiences. Instead, she fuses the past and the present by recounting past events in the present tense. This lack of attention to tense also helps her to jump from one role or identity or voice to another. For Elisabeth, then, the time of her narrative becomes "un seul présent" (KA, 23), the hallucinatory experience of Madame Rolland. Past events are reexperienced in the present and are marked by present tense verbs and deictic expressions that convey the illusion of an experience in present time. For example,

<sup>15</sup>"Elle (Elisabeth) est consciente et fière de ce pouvoir qu'elle a sur son propre domaine imaginaire," Jones, 338.

when figures from Elisabeth's past, including her childhood self, are recreated, they are described in the present tense:

Mes petites tantes m'embrassent et me cajolent. Elles sentent la naphthaline et le pain d'épice. Est-ce que je les retrouve vraiment, en cet instant?(KA, 53)

Je dois avoir sept ou huit ans. Mon éducation commence à l'instant.(KA, 54)

Mon mari se meurt, en ce moment même(KA, 57).

La figure ahurie de Justine Latour me regarde maintenant, moitié riant, moitié pleurant(KA, 57).

In the above passages, present tense verbs and present time deictic markers such as "en cet instant," "à l'instant," "en ce moment même," and "maintenant" are used to describe Elisabeth's past experiences and to convey a sense of immediacy. However, sometimes Elisabeth does not use any verbs or deictic markers at all when remembering her past, just a series of phrases or sense impressions characteristic of someone dreaming. These unsyntactic snatches of thought are recognizable as the Joycean "stream of consciousness" technique:<sup>16</sup>

Son profil précis couleur d'ivoire. Sa bouche lippue. Sa pipe. Un nuage de fumée. Puis plus rien. Aurélie a disparu(KA; 64).

<sup>16</sup>Chatman distinguishes between "stream of consciousness" and "interior monologue" in Story and Discourse: "Interior monologue is marked by syntax: it ascribes present tense verbs and first person pronoun-reference to the thinking character (or the implication of these where the syntax is truncated). Stream of consciousness...goes beyond syntax: it constrains the arrangement of semantic elements according to

Denis Boak suggests that Elisabeth's narrative technique is really "stream of unconsciousness" because of the dream-like quality of the narrative.<sup>17</sup> The first few phrases of the above passage are not only suggestive of a dream-like state, but also reflect Elisabeth's narrative style and her tendency to use fragmented language to evoke a series of events which are recollected or recreated in a random, disordered fashion, and not pulled together chronologically. Elsewhere in the novel, Elisabeth does endeavor to provide a chronological account of her life in order to maintain some modicum of order to offset the chaotic impressions Elisabeth still retains surrounding the murder of Antoine (for example, in Elisabeth's description of her childhood, or in the recreation of the trial). This aspect of the narrative will be addressed later in this chapter. Such a movement from a chronological ordering to a circular and chaotic presentation of events is also present in Hébert's more recent work Les Fous de Bassan, in which the multiple narrators try to reconstruct the events leading to the rape and murder of the twin sisters Olivia and Nora; however, their chronological accounts are often disrupted with proleptic remarks or confused comments which add an

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 the principle of free association."(189) Thus, in order to be completely accurate, one should, I suppose, refer to the syntactic play in Kamouraska as the interior monologue technique; however, it seems to me that grammar and syntax should be examined in conjunction with the semantic impact. Therefore, the distinction that critics have made between "stream of consciousness" and "interior monologue" is, in my opinion, completely arbitrary.

<sup>17</sup> Boak, 72.

aura of mystery and confusion to the circumstances surrounding the actual crimes.

Yet another indication of Elisabeth's need to orient herself temporally is her use of places or houses from her present and past. In her book Narrative Fiction, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan indicates the important role the environment plays in characterization: "A character's physical surrounding (room, house, street, town) as well as his human environment (family, social class) are also often used as trait-connoting metonymies."<sup>18</sup> E.D. Blodgett also calls attention to the presence of environment or, more specifically, the house in Anne Hébert's fiction:

While houses are in simple synecdochic relation with the other characters (Antoine is the lord of Kamouraska, etc.), they are used in Kamouraska, finally, to fragment the narrator. They are her, adventure, her "seule et épouvantable richesse" (T, 4.65). Their function is to punctuate her desire to be elsewhere. They not only characteristically break narrative flow into short chapters and sequences, but the projections they force also support the gout de théâtre that is woven into the narrative (cf. Kamouraska, pp. 148-49, 163).<sup>19</sup>

Blodgett demonstrates how the places or houses in Kamouraska are related to the breaking of the narrative and to the fragmentary nature of Elisabeth's account. By recalling a particular residence or place name, Elisabeth gives the reader clues as to which aspect of her life she is about to describe. This recollection of

<sup>18</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Methuen & Co., 1983) 66.

<sup>19</sup> Blodgett, 61-2.

places also allows Elisabeth to orient herself spatially, and we must not forget that she is slipping in and out of consciousness all the time while lying in her bedroom in Jérôme's room on the Rue du Parloir. As Madame Rolland remembers that her husband is dying in the next room. Her identity as Madame Rolland is reinforced through the reference to the place:

Vous êtes irréprochable. Mais vous n'êtes qu'une absente, madame Rolland. Inutile de nier. Votre mari se meurt dans une des chambres du premier, et vous feignez de dormir, étendue sur le lit de l'institutrice de vos enfants. Vous entendez des voix, madame Rolland. Vous jouez à entendre des voix. Vous avez des hallucinations. Avez-vous donc tant besoin de distractions qu'il vous faut aller chercher, au plus creux des ténèbres, les fantômes de votre jeunesse?(KA, 76)

Here, Elisabeth is preparing to make a transition from her identity as Mme Rolland in the Rue du Parloir to another identity that she possessed in her past life. The voices that she hears also serve as a means of making this transition possible. The change in identity, place and time is completed two paragraphs later:

On dit que la voix des morts se mêle au vent, les soirs de tempête. Personne n'est mort ici. Je suis vivante et mon mari aussi. Nous passons au manoir de Kamouraska notre cruelle jeunesse, sans fin: Nous sommes vivants, lui et moi! Mariés ensemble. S'affrontant. Se blessant. S'insultant à coeur joie, sous l'oeil perçant de Madame mère Tassy(KA, 76).

At this point in the narrative, Elisabeth has crossed

back to her identity as Elisabeth Tassy. However, we know this only because of the change in place and through Elisabeth's altered identity; the verb tense provides no indication of a change in time because it is the same tense used in the preceding paragraphs (the present tense). Further on in the narrative, Elisabeth once again draws attention to her spatial and temporal existence as it reflects the fragmented and shifting nature of her illusory/real, present self/past self experiences:

Quelqu'un qui a une voix forte (cela vient du corridor) déclare qu'on viendra me chercher en temps et lieu.

J'habite ailleurs. Un lieu précis. Un temps révolu. Aucun prestige de la mémoire ne pourrait réussir cela. Il s'agit de la possession de ma vie réelle. De ma fuite parfaite de la rue du Parloir.

Allongés, tous les deux, dans la pénombre suffocante de la chambre de bois. (KA, 162-3)

In this instance, Elisabeth moves spatially and temporally from her room in Jérôme's house to the "chambre de bois" which she inhabits with George Nelson. In addition to manipulating time and space here, Elisabeth also manipulates the definition of the real and the dream-like; her recreation of the relationship with George becomes her definition of the real; it is the "lieu précis," while her role as Madame Rolland recedes into the background. This transformation or reassignment of values expresses the ambivalent, everchanging structure of the novel or of Elisabeth's narrative.

Time is also manipulated by Elisabeth since her



present is replaced by "un temps révolu," a time of the past. However, the expression "temps révolu" also has another sense in the scheme of Elisabeth's narrative. It suggests a concept of cyclical or revolving time, which is the nature of Elisabeth's narration of present and past experiences. She relies heavily on the use of repetition in order to achieve the cyclical nature of her narrative.<sup>20</sup> She relives past events up to a certain point and whenever they become too painful to remember any further, she jumps back or is swept back to her present identity, time and place. While there are times when she respects a chronological rendering of the events in her past, her primary reason for doing so is to slow down her narrative, thereby delaying the memory of Antoine's murder and her guilty part in the event:

Je frappe dans mes mains...Chasser les fantômes. Dissiper l'effroi. Organiser le songe. Conserver un certain équilibre. Le passé raisonnable, revécu à fleur de peau. Respecter l'ordre chronologique. Ne pas tenter de parcourir toute sa vie d'un coup(KA, 97).

Most of the time, Elisabeth's narrative is not an orderly remembrance of the events, but a confused, repetitive and cyclical recreation of past happenings, as the end of the novel clearly suggests: "Brusquement le cauchemar déferle à nouveau, secoue Elisabeth d'Aulnières dans une tempête"(KA, 249). This circularity or repetition

<sup>20</sup> Grazia Merler describes Kamouraska as a spider web and emphasizes the novel's concentric or circular nature, "La réalité dans la prose d'Anne Hébert," 60.

is characteristic of the narrative structure in other of the  
 Hôbert novels. In Les Fous de Bassan, for example, the  
 character Olivia speaks from the grave and enters a  
 cycle in the remembrance of her death. Like Elisabeth  
Kamouraska, she too has a prophetic knowledge of the  
 outcome of the events that she remembers: "J'ai beau me  
 répéter qu'il est neuf heures trentesix devant l'horloge  
 de Maureen, et qu'il n'est encore rien arrivé."<sup>21</sup>  
 This realization is followed shortly after by the  
 comment: "mon Dieu, vais-je mourir à nouveau?"<sup>22</sup>  
 Like Olivia, Elisabeth also has a frightening  
 remembrance of a murder; this time the murder is that of  
 another individual. She has a 'nightmarish' vision of  
 her husband standing in front of her with bandages on his  
 head, as if he had already been shot. The vision or  
 narrative appears within her narrative identity as  
 Elisabeth Tassy; however, Elisabeth's consciousness of  
 narratorial role as Madame Rolland soon takes over to  
 reassure Elisabeth that the horrible event has not yet  
 taken place in the reenactment of Elisabeth Tassy's life:

Mon Dieu! Il va ôter son bandeau! Montrer  
 sa blessure! Antoine arrache mes mains de sur mon  
 visage. Retient solidement mes deux poignets,  
 dans une seule de ses mains larges. Me force à le  
 regarder bien en face... Plus aucun bandage ne  
 cache les fins cheveux blonds. Je voudrais  
 remercier Antoine pour son image indemne... Mon  
 jeune mari de six mois. Dieu soit loué. Rien  
 n'est encore arrivé (KA, 82).

<sup>21</sup> Les Fous de Bassan, 224.  
<sup>22</sup> Les Fous de Bassan, 224.

The above passage suggests the fragmentary nature of Elisabeth's narrative because it blends two narrative voices: Elisabeth Tassy's and Madame Rolland's. As Madame Rolland, Elisabeth can use prolepsis (or the flashforward technique) and say with confidence that the murder has not yet taken place. This ability helps alleviate Elisabeth's fear when she reexperiences the murder of her husband which is repeated several times throughout the novel:

Mon mari porte de nouveau un bandeau blanc, qui lui serre le front (KA, 85).

L'image d'Antoine tué va s'abattre sur moi... Je suis hantée, jusqu'à la racine de mes cheveux, la pointe de mes ongles. -- Antoine multiplié à l'infini, comme écrasé au pilon, réduit en fines particules. Chaque grain infime conservant le poids entier du crime et de la mort. Son sang répandu. Sa tête fracassée. Son coeur arrêté... Son sang, sa tête, son coeur. Cela recommence. Une ronde dans mes os, une multitude d'Antoines assassinés circule dans mes os (KA, 92).

These two passages reflect the phenomena of circularity and repetition that are two distinct qualities of Elisabeth's narrative in Kamouraska. Elisabeth remembers the guilty event over and over again in her hallucinatory state.<sup>23</sup> This act of depicting the same event a number of times throughout the novel

<sup>23</sup> Many of Anne Hébert's protagonists experience this phenomenon of the cyclical nightmare. In Les Fous de Bassan, for example, The dead Olivia is unable to forget her frightening rape and murder: "Je n'ai que juste le temps de me couvrir d'ombre comme un poulpe dans son encre, m'échapper sur la mer avant que ne revienne, dans toute sa furie, la soirée du 31 août 1936." Les Fous de Bassan, 225.

is referred to by Gérard Genette as one of the expressions of repetition. Genette stresses that when an event or a narrative statement is repeated, "aucune des occurrences n'est matériellement (phoniquement ou graphiquement) tout à fait identique aux autres, ni même idéalement (linguistiquement), du seul fait de leur co-présence et de leur succession."<sup>24</sup> This observation is certainly applicable to Elisabeth's reexperiencing of her husband's death. Each time she sees her wounded husband, she describes the event in a slightly different way. In the above passage, the repetition of the murder is reflected in the repetition of phrases or expressions: "Son sang répandu. Sa tête fracassée. Son cœur arrêté... Son sang, sa tête, son cœur" (KA, 92, my italics). However, the slight alteration of the text creates the effect of intensifying the experience for Elisabeth. By isolating the nouns "sang," "tête," and "cœur," Elisabeth succeeds in emphasizing the fragmentary, dream-like and repetitive experience of the event. After repeating this series of words, Elisabeth says that "cela recommence"; she feels a multitude of Antoinettes circulating in her bones. This narrative statement once again reflects Elisabeth's replaying of the murder; the "multitude d'Antoinettes assassinées" is a similar way of saying "Antoinette multipliée à l'infini"; however, in the former case, Elisabeth adds the notion of circularity ("une

<sup>24</sup>Figures III, 145-6.

multitudes d'Antoines assassinés circule dans mes os") and provides a summary of the murder described in the preceding paragraph by means of the single word "assassinés." Thus the function of repetition in Elisabeth's narrative text is one of intensification and summation effected through a slight altering of the text.

The careful manipulation of language and narrative in Kamouraska, as exemplified by the "different narrative voices" and the modification of statements that depict the same event, suggests a constant alternation between, on the one hand, breaking down the text and the narrative events and, on the other, reintegrating them into the circular and closely bound form of Elisabeth's narrative experience.

The closed nature of Elisabeth's world is reflected in the way she manipulates the text as Madame Rolland the omniscient narrator, particularly when she chooses a narratee. Her choice of narratees raises the question of the "destinataire" (addressee) of the narrative. Who is the intended listener or recipient of Elisabeth's narrative, and why does she revive the memory of the horrendous events of her past? The answers to these questions may be found in an analysis of the relationship between Elisabeth's narratees and the powerful role of language or words in her narrating world. The circular nature of the narrative is reflected in Elisabeth's

use of one of her multiple selves as a narratee. Throughout the novel, she addresses one or another of her many selves in order to emphasize the split or fragmentation in her consciousness and to maintain control over the narrative. For example, Elisabeth addresses the figure of Elisabeth d'Aulnières in the voice of her central narratorial consciousness in an effort to maintain this closed, private world that she creates for herself in her hallucinatory experience:

Elisabeth d'Aulnières veuve Tassy, vous entendez? C'est en langue étrangère qu'on vous accuse et qu'on vous charge? Cette langue, est celle de mon amour. Rien ne compte pour moi que la forme des mots sur ses lèvres. Elisabeth d'Aulnières, veuve Tassy, souvenez-vous de Saint-Denis et de Saint-Eustache? Que la reine pende tous les patriotes si tel est son bon plaisir. Que mon amour vive! Lui seul entre tous. Que je lui sois donnée à jamais (KA, 44).

Here Elisabeth (in the voice of her central narratorial consciousness who oversees all the various players in Elisabeth's narrative) addresses Elisabeth d'Aulnières as a narratee in order to differentiate between the victimized, accused person (Elisabeth d'Aulnières) and the commenting narrator who controls the narrative and who claims that Elisabeth d'Aulnières has been unjustly accused. Grahame Jones notes that the use of the second person "vous" in certain passages of the novel suggests authority.<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth uses the language of accusation here, the Queen's language, English, and

<sup>25</sup>Jones, 333.

redefines it as the language of her love, George Nelson. She subsequently addresses Elisabeth d'Aulnières and asks her to recall her memories of George, thus strengthening this particular manifestation of her past self. The series of subjunctive commands which follow this form of address to Elisabeth d'Aulnières reflects the control the central narratorial consciousness possesses in the recreation of her past selves, in her ability to manipulate the language of others, by undercutting the authoritative voice of society.

It is clear that Elisabeth's narrator-narratee relationship with her multiple identities helps to reinforce the closely bound nature of her narrative or dream experience. However, her use of narratees other than as projections of herself also helps emphasize the enclosed, carefully manipulated nature of her narrative. In this respect, Elisabeth's use of George Nelson as a narratee proves particularly interesting. Near the beginning of the novel, he appears to be Elisabeth's intended "destinataire" because the text itself is written in italics as if it were in the form of a letter:

Par la suite des temps vous laisserez le Canada, n'est-ce pas, dites-moi cela seulement. Dites-moi comment il faudra vous écrire(KA, 9).

Throughout the narrative of Elisabeth's memories, George is recognized as the major narratee. Yet while he is resuscitated and revived by Elisabeth's consciousness and therefore belongs to the closed, self-created

world of Elisabeth's narrative, he also becomes identifiable with a liberating agent in the scheme of the closed text of Elisabeth's hallucinatory, dream-like experience. His identity as a doctor, his "langue étrangère" (KA, 248) and his love for Elisabeth all convert him into a liberating narrative for her:

George s'éloigne de moi à nouveau. Comment faire pour le rejoindre? Je suis encombrée. Surchargée. Ligotée. Prisonnière de la rue Augusta et de la ville de Sorol. Me libérer. Retrouver l'enfance libre forte en moi... Docteur Nelson, que faire? Dites seulement une parole et je vous le dirai. Dois-je à nouveau sacrifier ma chevelure? Laisser derrière moi mes enfants et ma maison? Hors de ce monde, si vous le désirez... C'est là que je vous donne rendez-vous. Telle qu'en moi-même, absolue et libre. Étrangère à tout ce qui n'est pas vous (KA, 123).

For Elisabeth Wassy, George Nelson becomes a way of escaping the restrictions placed upon her by her husband Antoine; for Madame Rolland, he represents a way of alleviating the pain and the guilt she experiences as a result of her husband's murder. He acquires the dimensions of a god because his Word and his actions can save her from the confines of her family life. In this sense, he represents the liberating force of the carnivalesque. She is even willing to leave her earthly existence - to go "hors de ce monde" (KA, 123). However, Elisabeth is unable to sustain this view of George near the end of the novel, which forces her to remain a prisoner of her dream-like world and of her real world



as the wife of Jérôme Rolland:

Vous parlez en langue étrangère...  
 Nelson. Non, je ne connais pas cet homme...  
 Elisabeth d'Aulnières, épouse en premières nocess  
 d'Antoine Tassy, seigneur assassiné de Kamouraska,  
 épouse en secondes nocess de Jérôme Rolland... Si  
 ton amour te scandalise, arrache-le de ton  
 cœur... Qu'il retourne dans son pays qu'il  
 n'aurait jamais dû quitter... Qu'il retourne donc,  
 anathème, dans son pays natal (KA, 248).

The use of different pronouns and voices in the above passage have a dramatic effect, and reflect Elisabeth's own sense of self-dramatization in the course of her narrative. She is a "femme de théâtre" who is aware of her role as director and actor in a murder play. The shift in pronouns in her reference to George Nelson thus suggests a kind of distance. By the end of the narrative, George Nelson is nothing more than a man for Elisabeth, a foreigner who has accused her unjustly. She abandons him as a narratee by referring to him in the third person ("cet homme") and by mentally denying his existence; she rejects him and orders him to vanish, much like an author who arbitrarily decides that he no longer wants a character to remain in the narrative. Consequently, she is left with no narratee other than her self, which forces her to remain imprisoned within the confines of her own narrative world. There is no liberating force or personality for Elisabeth as there is for her husband Jérôme at the end of Kamouraska. Unlike Elisabeth who has unsuccessfully looked to George for forgiveness, he finds pardon for his sins from God:

J'ai reçu le sacrement d'extrême-onction, Elisabeth. Le bon Dieu m'a pardonné tous mes péchés (KA, 250).

Instead of finding peace and liberation, Elisabeth is destined to live in a world of barricades where "elle ne trouve que des portes fermées et le désert de terre battue dont sont faites les rues" (KA, 250). She presents us with a dark image of an entombed woman who is pictured as eternally blackened with guilt:

L'épouse modèle [Elisabeth] tient la main de son mari, posée sur le drap. Et pourtant... Dans un champ aride, sous les pierres, on a déterré une femme noire, vivante, datant d'une époque reculée et sauvage. Étrangement conservée. On l'a lâchée dans la petite ville. Puis on s'est barricadé, chacun chez soi. Tant la peur qu'on a de cette femme est grande et profonde. Chacun se dit que la faim de vivre de cette femme, enterrée vive, il y a si longtemps, doit être si féroce et entière, accumulée sous la terre, depuis des siècles! (KA, 250)

This final vision of the dark and guilt-ridden woman of Elisabeth's narrative underscores Elisabeth's inability to rid herself of the guilt associated with Antoine's murder and her brief realization that she is manipulative and unregenerate in a very secular sense. However, the realization is soon eclipsed by the final remark of Léontine Melançon (as projected by Elisabeth) which once again views Elisabeth in a sympathetic, innocent light: "Voyez donc comme Madame aime Monsieur! Voyez comme elle pleure..." (KA, 250). This final remark is Anne Hébert's way of suggesting that Elisabeth's cycle of the denial of guilt and the

recognition of evil brings is endless in a psychological, ontological, and narrative sense. Elisabeth's tears at the end of the novel seem to suggest a superficial catharsis, but most critics agree that there is no genuine catharsis for Herbert's protagonist.<sup>26</sup> While there is no cathartic experience for Elisabeth, Boak does suggest that the text is arranged to provide just such an effect for the reader, who is implied in the "je" who uses the "vous" form to address Mme Rolland. After all, the text does come to an end for the reader, even if the ellipses of the final sentence seem to signify otherwise.

Unlike Kamouraska, which reflects a complex use of narrative voice, The Stone Angel has often been criticized for its simplistic narrative technique. Philip Stratford calls the narrative of The Diviners "plodding," and this novel is more complex on a narrative level than The Stone Angel.<sup>27</sup> Barbara Hehrer in "River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's Narratives," deals with the narrative technique in The Stone Angel briefly by drawing attention to the chronological ordering.<sup>28</sup> The lack of interest critics have shown in analyzing formal components in the novel would seem to suggest that the work does not contain intricate problems of form like Kamouraska, which has received much criticism

<sup>26</sup>Boak, 80.

<sup>27</sup>Stratford, 121.

<sup>28</sup>Barbara Hehrer, "River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's Narratives," Canadian Literature 74 (Autumn 1977): 40-57.

on narrative structure. While this is partly true, it does not mean that Laurence has written her novel without considering the important role narrative technique plays in reinforcing Hagar's attitudes towards language and her female identity. Hagar's narrative is dual without being as ambivalent as Elisabeth's; this statement applies especially to the ways in which Hagar distinguishes between past and present temporal states.

As we have already seen, Kamouraska constantly shifts from past to present, often obliterating the distinction between present and past, real and unreal experiences, to provide the effect of simultaneity of experiences characteristic of a dream-state. In The Stone Angel, by contrast, it is relatively easy for the reader to distinguish past experiences from present events. This is because Hagar's narrative consists of past events which take the form of memories that are presented chronologically and of present occurrences which are also chronologically presented in the novel. Thus, instead of possessing a circular, explosive quality, the narrative is distinctly chronological in its rendering of both past and present events. In an interview with Michel Fabre, Margaret Laurence addresses the problems of presenting a narrative in such a manner:

Fabre: Coming to the narrative technique you adopt in The Stone Angel, one is struck by your special use of present and past. Although present and past merge easily in our consciousness, what were your reasons for mixing them up? Mostly

technical ones or an attempt at rendering the life of the mind?

Laurence: I had a great problem of narrative technique. It is one I did not solve and it is a structural flaw of the book. But I think the alternative would have been worse. The way I have it in The Stone Angel, Hagar's memories are chronological. She starts remembering what she was when a child and goes on. Well, people don't remember in that order, as we all know. In The Fire-Dwellers I have the protagonist Stacey remembering quite distortedly. That is the way people remember. But Stacey's memories are far less important to the narration of the novel than Hagar's are to The Stone Angel. The thing is, I was trying to reconstruct Hagar's very long life and did not want to start at the beginning and write a straight chronological narrative because the main thing was that in time present she had to be an old woman. If I had had her experiencing her memories the way people really do experience their memories, it would have made it really impossible because it would have been far too disjointed, largely because her memories span such a large stretch of time. So I chose what had seemed to me to be the only possible course which is to have the time past recreated chronologically. But the way I tried to do it in order to have it work reasonably well was to have each of her long memory sequences triggered off by some occurrence in her present story, so that there<sup>29</sup> would be a plausible transition each time.

Margaret Laurence tries to defend her fairly simple use of narrative technique in The Stone Angel by emphasizing the easy and natural transitions that Hagar makes from present to past time. A further justification for this kind of narrative technique lies in Margaret Laurence's general approach to the craft of novel writing. For Laurence, form and structure seem to evolve from her creation of a particular theme or character:

<sup>29</sup> Fabre, Michel, 204-5.

What matters to me is all the themes, and, of course, the characters. I think that what matters to me most about anything that I write is really the characters themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Anne Hébert's heroine Elisabeth whose character seems to both develop from, and influence the complexity of narrative voices and techniques in the novel, Laurence's protagonist Hagar seems to determine the form and structure of the novel. In her effort to impose order on a chaotic world where past and present experiences run into one another all the time, she remembers chronologically (or Laurence has her remember the past chronologically in order to show how each event influences the Hagar in the present). Laurence maintains in her interviews that she allows the character to determine the course of the narrative voice, and given Hagar's need to exert some control over the course of her life, this chronological rendering of events can be rationalized.<sup>31</sup> Writing fiction oriented towards an individual character, "appears to be the only way I can write", claims Laurence:

Once the narrative voice is truly established--that is, once the writer has listened, really listened, to the speech and idiom and outlook of the character--it is then not the writer but the character who, by some process of transfer, bears the responsibility for the treatment of time within the work. It is the character who chooses which parts of the personal

<sup>30</sup> Fabre, 206.

<sup>31</sup> Denis Boak does note, however, that in spite of Elisabeth's leaps forward and backward in time, her confused narrative is more "realistic" than linear narrative (such as Hagar's), 74.

past, the family past and the ancestral past have to be revealed in order for the present to be realized and the future to happen. This is not a morbid dwelling on the past on the part of the writer or the character. It is, rather, an expression of the feeling which I strongly hold about time--that the past and the future are both always present, **present** in both senses of the word, always now and always here with us. It is only through the individual presence of the characters that the writer can hope to convey even a fragment of this sense of time, and this is one reason, among others, why it is so desperately important to discover the true narrative voice--which really means knowing the characters so well that one can take on their past, their thoughts, their responses, can in effect for a while **become** them.<sup>32</sup>

Hagar's orderly present and past narratives represent an individual's attempt to unify her fragmented life, consisting of distinct past and present experiences. The easy transitions from the present mode to the memories of her past suggest this need to bridge the two temporal states. Yet, as we saw in Hagar's attitude towards language and her own identity, we also recognize that Hagar's sense of time and narrative voice are characterized by a certain disruptiveness. According to Pierre Spriet, the interior monologue or stream of consciousness novel demands disorder; in fact, he says paradoxically that "disorder is therefore carefully built in" the novel.<sup>33</sup>

Hagar seeks refuge in the past and enters into this

<sup>32</sup> Laurence, Margaret. "Time and the Narrative Voice," A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence. Ed. George Woodcock. (Edmonton: NewWest Publishers, 1983) 156.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Spriet, "Narrative and Thematic Patterns in The Stone Angel," Études canadiennes 11 (December 1981): 107, 108.

temporal state fairly easily," as can be seen in her conversation with Mr. Troy:

"Dear, dear," says Mr. Troy, not certain what the response should be to that. I will not tell him more. What business is it of his? Yet now I feel that if I were to walk carefully up to my room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise, I would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt off to the training ring, the young ladies' academy in Toronto. (SA, 42)

and

I didn't mean to mention John to Mr. Troy. He trapped me. I'll say this much for Marvin--in all these years, he's hardly even spoken of John.

I wasn't frightened at all when John was born... (SA, 121)

While Hagar's movement from the present to the past is relatively smooth, this is not at all true with her movement from past to present modes of experience.<sup>34</sup> In the latter case, Hagar finds herself jarred back to reality in much the same way that Mme Rolland is awakened from her dream-like state by the sounds and images of her life with Jérôme Rolland:

As we finished tea, Lottie smiled insinuatingly.

"Why sell them now, Hagar? You're not taking a trip or anything, are you?"

Placidly, I denied. Then I took Telford Simmons's hard-earned cash and did just that.

"Mother--come on."

A voice, and a hand shaking my shoulder. Startled, I draw away.

"Eh? Eh? What is it?"

<sup>34</sup>Reingard M. Nischik also comments on the "smooth transition between the present and the past" and describes the present time in The Stone Angel as "abrupt." Reingard M. Nischik, "Multiple Plot in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel," Etudes canadiennes 11 (December 1981): 127, 128.



"It's time," Doris says, with forced patience. "Come on, now."  
 "Mercy, it can't be time to get up yet, can it?" (SA, 136-7)

In this particular passage, Hagar reminisces over selling her Mother's old things and is interrupted by Doris who wakes her up. Hagar is immediately disoriented and forgetful. To live in the present is an effort and a constant struggle for her whenever she comes in contact with other people. Living in the present is only bearable and tension-free when she can be left alone with her thoughts. This clarity of thought is especially present when Hagar leaves Marvin's house, and heads to Shadow Point to avoid going to the nursing home:

Marvin looks after my money. The account's in his name now. I had forgotten. I haven't a nickel. I'm stumped once more, but only for an instant. How well I'm thinking tonight. Ideas come thick and fast...Excitement burns through my arteries, making me wakeful just when I want to sleep. (SA, 140)

As Pierre Spriet suggests, the narrative that Hagar creates isolates her: "Hagar is linguistically the only subject: the others exist through the words she utters. The world created by her discourse is exclusively her own: she sets it up against the "I" of her discourse."<sup>35</sup>

The Stone Angel lacks the rich multiple voicing that we observed in Kamouraska; the entire novel is narrated by Hagar Shipley in the first person and not much of an attempt

<sup>35</sup>Spriet, 107.

is made to project the voices of other characters. Despite this limited narrative perspective, some insight may be gained into Hagar's character and language when one examines her third person references to other people and her embedded phrases that echo social critiques or the voices of people she knows. This kind of embedding is typical of interior monologue. Unlike Mme Rolland, Hagar hardly ever addresses people mentally in the second person as direct narratees; most of her references are in the third person. This lack of mental address in the second person reinforces her difficulty in communicating with people in conversation. Instead of finding a series of narratees as Mme Rolland does in *Kamouraska*, Hagar often sets herself up as a dual speaker and interlocutor. In the narrative, there is a clear distinction between the Hagar who speaks (and therefore acts), and the Hagar who comments either on the speech of others or on her own spoken discourse. She thus embodies the dual nature of the carnivalesque experience. The social criticisms which mark her interior monologues often parallel her own criticisms of others. For example, Doris' criticisms most often find themselves in Hagar's thoughts:

Then I am jerked alert by one of the strutting shadows inhabiting the gray region where I lie drearily begging the mercy of sleep. The soaking smelly sheets, the shadow insinuates, in Doris's voice. (SA, 77)

and

How has it happened? I'd give almost anything now

for a cup of tea. I seem to hear Doris laughing --  
~~Serves you right, for dumping it down the sink.~~  
 Oh, I never did--how can you say it? It wasn't I.  
 You're mean, Doris. How can such meanness  
 flourish? (SA, 153)

Here Hagar projects the voice of society, much as Elisabeth does in Kamouraska. A similar ambivalence also exists in her projection of voices; that is, in the course of the novel it becomes difficult to distinguish between the values and opinions of Hagar and those of others. This is partly due to the fact that Hagar and Elisabeth create their own narrative worlds and, in doing so, possess a dialectic of integration and rejection, individuality and conformity. An individual is also a product of his social surroundings and this further emphasizes the ambivalent nature of Elisabeth's and Hagar's statements. Through their narrative discourse both heroines emphasize their ambivalent personalities.<sup>36</sup>

The voices of society projected by Hagar are paralleled by Hagar's own hypercritical statements on her act or spoken words. In this respect she resembles Mme Rolland in Kamouraska who oversees her performance as Elisabeth d'Aulhières in her dream state. The split between Hagar's and Elisabeth's roles as commentator and actor suggests a distancing effect that is important in many first-person narratives, where the narrator is also a character (extrahomodiegetic narrator). Hagar engages in this kind of

<sup>36</sup> See the articles by Reingard M. Nischik and Pierre Spriet for further discussion of the ambivalent or binary nature of Hagar's personality.

limited omniscient-narrator role than Mme Rolland simply because she does not recreate conversations and events to the same "unreliable" degree that Mme Rolland does; she does not use free direct or free indirect discourse as much as direct discourse which is more diegetic than mimetic.<sup>37</sup> The entire act of "telling" is stressed more in The Stone Angel than in Kamouraska, which is more cinematic in its narrative perspective. Furthermore, Hagar's account of her long life suggests that she is approaching death and that her narrative will provide some kind of cathartic experience. Nevertheless, like Elisabeth, she too is guilty of distancing herself from others by assuming the role of commentator; examples of Hagar's hypercritical mode include her own criticism of Doris' language which I pointed out in chapter two of this thesis:

"The seeds will get under your plate."  
 ... "They're better for wine, blackberries."  
 "For those that use it," Doris sniffs.  
 She always speaks of "using" wine or tobacco, giving them a faintly obscene sound, as though they were paper, handkerchiefs or toilet paper. (SA, 94)

This commentary effect is also present in Hagar's criticisms of herself, especially when she thinks of being forced into a retirement home:

Can they force me? If I fuss and fume, will they simply ask a a brawny nurse to restrain me?  
 ...I fear this place exceedingly... Is it a

<sup>37</sup> See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's summary (as written by Brian McHale) of mimetic and diegetic forms of narrative technique. Narrative Fiction, 108-110.

mausoleum, and I, the Egyptian, mummified with pillows and my own flesh, through some oversight embalmed alive?...

"It's mean, mean of you," I hear my disgusting cringe. "I've not even any of my things with me--" (SA, 96)

Hagar is acutely aware of the discrepancy between the language and images she chooses in her thoughts and her child-like outcry, calling the latter a "disgusting cringe" as if it were uttered by someone else. This distancing effect functions as a way of sustaining Hagar's feelings of victimization just as it did in Mme Rolland's narrative. Of course, there is also contempt in Hagar's attitude towards this second self; however, as long as Hagar views this second self as a victim of social conventions (which are identifiable with Doris and other figures of authority) Hagar will feel somewhat superior in the person of the commentator, thereby setting herself up as a kind of narratorial and psychological God ("pride was my wilderness") who chokes mentally and verbally: "I'm choked with it now, the incommunicable years, everything that happened and was spoken or not spoken" (SA, 296). The reader, along with Pierre Spriet, realizes of course that Hagar is not an innocent victim: "she belongs to the same world as her oppressors and she is guilty of the same oppressive tactics; she partially shares their values...."<sup>38</sup>

The narratorial God-figure that Hagar turns herself into evolves naturally from her inability to find someone

<sup>38</sup> Spriet, 117.

who "really" ought to know...things" (SA, 296). The difficulty in finding a God, or some kind of saviour forces Hagar to seek consolation in herself, which is what Mae Rolland does in Anne Sebort's novel. However, with Hagar, the novel does not end with the protagonist in this solitary and egocentric universe; when Elisabeth does not like the response of certain narratees, she dispenses with them and puts herself in control psychologically and narratologically. However, Hagar is relieved of this kind of control when she interacts with Murray Lees in the cathartic cannery scene. Here she becomes the listener, or the narratee, and thus acts as an interlocutor instead of the speaker (or the generator of discourse which she was in her failed conversations with Mr. Troy, the minister). As a result, the cannery scene proves to be the turning point in the novel from a narrative perspective. Ironically, once Hagar suspends her search for an amorphous, God-like, mental narratee and becomes a more passive partner in dialogue, or the confessor herself, she is able to engage in her own confession in a less self-indulgent way than she did in recollecting her memories without the presence of others. This subsequent confession is a direct echo of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner's penance for his sins in the telling of his former crimes. The comparison with the Ancient Mariner is by no means arbitrary; Hagar herself refers to an albatross of guilt in the novel. ("Water water everywhere nor any drop to drink. That's my predicament. What albatross did I slay, for

mercy's sake? Well, well, we'll see--come on, old mariner, up and out of your smelly bunk and we'll see what can be found"(SA, 186)).

Murray Lees' confession of his search and his wife's search for some grand revelation of the end of the world and his subsequent realization that the end lay "close by" in the death of their child also affects Hagar. Lees refers to the fire that started in his house while he and his wife were at the Tabernacle:

"It's a funny thing," he says. "She thought it would come from so far away. The Almighty voice and the rain of locusts and blood. The moon turned dark and the stars gone wild. And all the time it was close by." (SA, 233)

During Lees' confession, Hagar senses his desire to find a listener:

I lean forward, attentive, ease a cramped limb with a hand, and look at this man, whose name I have suddenly forgotten but whose face, now turned to mine, says in plain and urgent silence: Listen. You must listen. (SA, 232)

After some time Hagar wants Murray Lees to stop his narrative because she has "heard enough" (SA, 234). This statement is typical of Laurence's protagonist, whose progress or development in the novel does not occur in leaps and bounds but in small steps--Laurence thus provides a very accurate portrayal of old people who find it very difficult to unlearn old habits. After her encounter with Lees, Hagar recognizes in the exchange or the dialogue "a kind of mercy"

(SA, 253). She sees in the encounter a dialectic of gain and loss which marks the notion of human sacrifice: "...this gain is mingled mysteriously with the sense of loss which I felt earlier this morning" (SA, 253).<sup>39</sup> This particular exchange of experiences is then repeated in Hagar's hospital stay where she realizes that "there is nowhere to be alone" (SA, 261). Her own introspections and private ruminations are limited, as she is forced to interact with other people, unlike Elisabeth in *Kamouraska* who always retreats into her own world, thereby creating and recreating her world to preserve her self-esteem and false innocence. Hagar's confessions and dialogues with others allow her in the end to achieve the ultimate speech act of the novel--a prayer which recognizes the arbitrariness of the God in the novel:

Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father--no. I want no part of that. All I can think is--Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg. (SA, 307)

This address to God is the only direct second person address that Hagar makes to the deity in the novel; it reveals her understanding of prayer, which for Hagar should be spoken and can only be spoken from the heart as opposed to a formulaic, pre-ordained utterance. This way of addressing God in a somewhat ambivalent manner is very

<sup>39</sup> Josette Féral emphasizes the dialectic of liberation and captivity in *Kamouraska*, but concludes that captivity dominates the narrative and thematic components of the text: "le combat entre ces deux forces est inégal. Le poids de la captivité est infiniment plus lourd que celui de la libération...." (265).



similar to the way the Biblical Hagar addresses God in the book of Genesis. Phyllis Tribble calls attention to this form of address in her article "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection" in which she carefully examines narrative and syntactic elements of the story of Hagar in the Bible to suggest the isolation and banishment of this particular figure.<sup>40</sup> Tribble analyzes how Hagar responds to the prediction of God's divine messenger concerning the birth of her child Ishmael and Yaweh's promise to heed Hagar's affliction (Gen. 16: 11-12). Hagar, in response, "calls the name of Yahweh who has spoken to her." Tribble says that Hagar is "the only person who dares to name the deity"<sup>41</sup>; in other words,

[T]he expression is striking because it connotes naming rather than invocation. In other words, Hagar does not call upon the name of the deity (qr bsm yhw; cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Instead she calls the name (qr sm-yhw), a power attributed to no one else in all the Bible. "She calls the name of Yahweh who has spoken to her, 'You are a God of seeing'" (16:13b).<sup>42</sup>

Immediately after this naming or identification of God, the Biblical Hagar questions her identification with the remark "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" (Genesis 16:14, King James Version), thereby expressing the same kind of doubt and indecision that marks the discourse of Margaret Laurence's Hagar. This need to

<sup>40</sup> Tribble, Phyllis. "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection," Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Philadelphia, Foretress Press, 1984): 9-35.

<sup>41</sup> Tribble, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Tribble, 18.

name and identify is of course also a trait of Laurence's protagonist--a phenomenon which we drew attention to in chapter one of this thesis. Thus the direct form of address (the second person, thou form) seems to mark, both in the case of the Biblical Hagar and for Laurence's heroine, a turning point in their lives; if one cannot define this "calling on the Lord" as a form of orthodox prayer, then perhaps it is a private, self-created prayer, or the only kind of prayer that the Hagar's of the world, who are the victims of an arbitrary, cruel and absurd life, can create or utter. For Anne Hébert's Elisabeth, on the other hand, God is not the ultimate narratee. He is displaced by Elisabeth's human narratees (George Nelson, for example) and by her own multiple identities; thus her world remains self-contained through her constant withdrawal.

In addition to the presence of narratees, the chronological ordering of events in The Stone Angel helps to emphasize Hagar's moments of clarity and reconciliation to the tensions and struggles which are a part of life. This reconciliation is brought about by her memories, especially those concerning John, and by her confession of John's death to Murray Lees in the cannery.<sup>43</sup> Hearing Murray Lees' own life story also acts as therapy for Hagar. When Hagar seeks

<sup>43</sup> Simone Vauthier indicates that during Hagar's conversation with Murray Lees, the "locutor's time and the narrator's time coincide: the narrator's activity, instead of being an escape from the present, is objectified as part of the locutor's interaction with another suffering human being." Simone Vauthier, "Notes on the Narrative Voice(s) in The Stone Angel," Etudes canadiennes 11 (December 1981): 138.

refuge in the cannery, past and future are of no consequence. She will take "one day at a time--that's all a person has to deal with" (SA, 140). In fact, after the incident in the cannery, Hagar's lapses into the world of the past decrease;<sup>44</sup> she spends her last days mainly entrenched in the present world of the hospital ward, partly because she has to communicate with other people in this particular situation. Here she recognizes that "the world has shrunk" (SA, 254) into a hospital ward.<sup>45</sup> Thus her former dependency on the past, on the distorted memory of her son John, has also shrunk and she is now able to concentrate on making peace with her only living son, Marvin.

The proportion of text in The Stone Angel devoted to past and present narrative is directly related to Hagar's changing attitude towards time in the course of the novel. One might almost say that the past experiences are accompanied by an isolated Hagar, a Hagar who can indulge in memories and in unfettered language, while the present is associated with crippled, inarticulate, ambiguous speech (the product of Hagar's attempts to converse with others). Hagar's chronological ordering of the text in the past reflects an awareness (on the part of Hagar) to put large

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<sup>44</sup> Spriet says that "the death of John brings the recollection of the past to the end" (110). This statement should be modified to read "substantial recollection of the past" because Hagar still makes occasional reference to the past after the cathartic scene in the cannery.

<sup>45</sup> Laurence and Hébert both use place as a time element in their respective novels.

sections of memory behind her so that she can concentrate on the little time she has left as a nonagenarian to devote to the people in her present world (or, more specifically, to people who are physically present). As Laurence declares, "the past and the future are both always present, **present** in both senses of the word, always now and always here with us."<sup>46</sup> The only time that has meaning is the present; and even then, the present is often clouded with an amalgam of past, present and future experiences. This merging of temporal states is also evident in Kamouraska where Elisabeth inhabits "un seul présent." Hagar's final moments are filled with urgency; she no longer has the leisure to "get back, back to [her] sleek cocoon" (SA, 308) to collect her thoughts:

Pain swells and fills me. I'm distended with it, bloated and swollen like soft flesh held under by the sea. Disgusting. I hate this. I like things to be tidy. But even disgust won't last. It has to be relinquished, too. Only urgency remains. The world is a needle. (SA, 307)

Hagar reaches the end of her struggle, and at the same time the beginning, when she recollects the birth of her second son. In this passage, we witness Hagar's attempt to reach an end while still keeping in mind the origins of life. The Stone Angel's narrative differs in this respect from Mme Rolland's in Kamouraska; since Hagar's narrative has progressed logically towards a recognizable end, we see the death of the protagonist who has collected her memories

<sup>46</sup> Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," 156..

and purged herself of the guilt associated with her past by reaching those she comes in contact with in her present world. This therapeutic dimension of the narrative was discussed in relation to Mme Rolland's complex assortment of narrative stances, voices, techniques and was found absent. However, in The Stone Angel, we find that Hagar's acts of truth and sacrifice coincide with important aspects of the narrative; the verbal outpouring of her son John's death in front of Murray Lees coincides with the end of her lengthy memories associated with John. Hagar's confessions are not only private introspection, but public statements. Elisabeth's guilt is never released in this fashion, nor does she sacrifice her self-esteem for peace of mind. Her world is more enclosed and more imaginatively self-contained than Hagar's.

If we once again compare the narratorial elements, the forms of address, speaker/addressee relationships, and the temporal considerations in The Stone Angel and Kamouraska, then we can conclude that Laurence's protagonist achieves her catharsis and receives a kind of grace in the novel due to her acts of sacrifice, and her interaction with humanity. The albatross of guilt associated with her pride drops from her neck and she is at last able to pray to some cruel yet laughing deity. The chronological rendering of the events also has a teleological value and therefore suggests a linear progression towards an ultimate end (ie. Hagar's death). Hagar still struggles up to the time of death as

she wrestles with the nurse for the glass of water (also a symbol of divine grace--baptismal water), but she at least has learned what it means to share pain, or to embrace the pain of others as one's own. The only circularity in terms of form near the end of the novel occurs in the narrative that evokes the memory of the birth of Hagar's second son and in her willingness to believe in an after-life:

He (John) couldn't have known before or suspected at all that breathing would be what was done by creatures here. Perhaps the same occurs elsewhere, an element so unknown you'd never suspect it at all, until--... (SA, 306).

Hagar's final words in fact are spoken from another world ("L'au-delà" (SA, 308)); the phrase refers to some past event, presumably her death, and must have been uttered from another world, or domain; nevertheless, these two words mark the end of her life in the mortal world. The narrative of *Le Silence*, on the other hand, has no such sense of completion. Elisabeth is destined to live a life haunted by the curses and accusations of her former lover ("Malfaisante Elisabeth! Femme maudite!" (KA, 250)) and she does not impart her pain and feelings of guilt to another human being. The horrific nightmares of the murder of Antoine Tassy is a cyclical affair, linked by the absence of a therapeutic or cathartic experience for Elisabeth. The novel and the depiction of character is progressive,ressive and consequently places the heroine in a self-created vacuum. In The Stone Angel, on the other hand, there is a definite

of linear and teleologically oriented movement which  
maxes in a scene of narrative, psychological and  
linguistic purgation in the cannery.

## CONCLUSION

In our analysis of The Stone Angel and Kamouraska we have attempted to emphasize the dialectical structure and thematic features of the novels as they are reflected in the struggling female protagonists, Hagar and Elisabeth. In the first chapter on female identity, we applied Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque experience to the novelistic worlds of Hagar and Elisabeth and discovered, that, in both cases, the heroines were aware of a co-existence of official/unofficial worlds, patriarchal/feminist ideologies and individualistic/social-conformist tendencies. Hagar's experiences in a male-dominated world cause her to assimilate some of the rigid, proud and egocentric principles of her father and to deny her own female nature. In the course of the novel, she is put in touch with the Mother figure (which is an inherent element of her personality), not merely in an individualistic sense but in a more universal way. Nevertheless, up to the very end of the novel, Hagar retains her essentially dual nature. In Kamouraska, Anne Hébert presents a similarly ambivalent message in the character Elisabeth. Her protagonist attempts to restructure her world according to her individualistic, egocentric desire to liberate herself from religious, patriarchal ideologies and to escape social ennui in the form of bourgeois life. However, this liberation is only an imaginative liberation; in her "real" life, she conforms to



social standards by retaining a mask of respectability. Her passion for life exists only in an imaginative sense; it has no actual referent. Elisabeth adopts the mask of the Romantic grotesque, a manifestation of the "individual carnival" which is responsible for the tragic atmosphere of the novel. This tragic universe in Kamouraska finds its counterpart in the comic grotesque world of The Stone Angel, the form of the grotesque which, according to Bakhtin is the true, universal carnivalesque.

In the second chapter we proceeded to examine the dialectical structure of language in the two novels, pointing out some of the carnivalesque elements such as the subversion of the official or established language of social conformity by a personal or unspoken, physical language of love. Both novels show the paradoxical nature of the universe in which the heroines dwell. In The Stone Angel, Hagar rebels against the formalities and fettered nature of social language and opts for a discourse of thought; at the same time, however, she criticizes others for doing the same, thereby contradicting her position. Elisabeth similarly reverses her position on the liberating force of the language of love and desire when the object of her desire accuses her of murder and ruining his life. Consequently, she retreats into the security that the bourgeois lifestyle of marriage and child-rearing provides for her. She condemns her lover George Nelson with the same voice that condemns her throughout the novel: the voice of

legal justice and ordinances which recognizes no marginality and condemns alternative expressions. Thus, Elisabeth ultimately rejects the subversive, liberating power of the carnivalesque by returning to the banal, official world.

In both novels, the theme of communication, or lack of communication, is prominent. Hagar and Elisabeth live in worlds where silence and verbal communication are constantly assigned different values, depending on their context in the novel. In The Stone Angel, actions speak not only louder but more clearly than words; as long as they are carried out with "a kind of love," they even make possible a form of communication and understanding. The demonstration of such love may be carnivalesque in nature, as in Hagar's act of fetching a bedpan for a person in need. In Kamouraska, silence carries an ambivalent message: it isolates the individual, yet it also allows for alternative forms of expression. For example, silence can unite two individuals who are marginal beings, outsiders in a society of official language and social decorativeness. In both novels language is a powerful tool which can be used by the protagonists, but which can also work against them.

After studying the multiple identities of Hagar and Elisabeth in connection with their attitudes towards language, we analyzed the narrative technique in each novelistic world. Once again we observed a dialectic inherent in the narrative. For Hagar, this dialectic resided in the two distinctive temporal dimensions of past and

present. Such a distinction is not always clear in Elisabeth's narrative because of the fusion or confusion of temporal states. However, both Elisabeth and Hagar share the fragmented roles of commentator or narrator and player in their narrative worlds. We concluded that the circular structure of Elisabeth's narrative provides an open-endedness that contributes to the unresolved nature of the narrative and which offsets or prevents any cathartic or therapeutic effect for the protagonist. Hagar's narrative, on the other hand, with its linear, chronological rendering of the events leading to the heroine's death is less striking in its undercutting of such an effect. Hagar, contrary to the opinion of some critics, does undergo a cathartic experience in the cannery and reconciles herself to the ordinariness and arbitrariness of human experience, which are important aspects of the carnivalesque. Elisabeth remains imaginatively in control of her existence, but her masks of innocence only defeat her and instill terror and fear, instead of liberating the heroine. Thus, by adhering to the individual carnival of the Romantic grotesque, Elisabeth neither transcends her tormented existence, nor allows the corporeal elements of love and unofficial expressions to dominate. Her novelistic life appears to be neverending; she becomes identifiable with the archetype of the blackened woman through her self-deceit. In short, she is outwardly a social conformist (having married Jérôme Rolland), but inwardly remains an egocentric rebel.

Having analysed three major aspects of The Stone Angel and Kamouraska (identity, language and narrative elements), we can see that each novel embraces different aspects of the carnivalesque tradition. The Stone Angel stresses the liberating, more universal force of the comic or Medieval and Renaissance grotesque; Kamouraska, on the other hand, projects an aura of Romantic grotesque which is responsible for the black, cynical and self-destructive nature of Elisabeth's world; this Romantic grotesque is synonymous with an individual carnival. Our analysis of the two novels and their protagonists has shown, therefore, that the expression of the carnivalesque is geared towards the comic in The Stone Angel and towards the tragic in Kamouraska. However, this comic/tragic distinction is the end result of the constant interplay of opposing forces in each of the works we have examined, an interplay between the downward movement of the carnivalesque and the opposite movement towards transcendence. In The Stone Angel, certain carnivalesque elements (such as the awareness of bodily functions and a sense of arbitrariness) paradoxically help bring about Hagar's liberation and spiritual awareness. In Kamouraska, on the other hand, the interplay between the carnivalesque and the higher forms of expression results in a stalemate; Elisabeth allows neither the baser, unofficial elements of her world nor the official ideology to dominate. Despite this essential difference between Hagar's and Elisabeth's experiences, the two women are both essentially

ambivalent entities who alternate between bourgeois and carnivalesque tendencies. The Stone Angel and Kamouraska thus provide a clear sense of how the notion of the carnivalesque is modified in the context of these bourgeois, individualistic novels.

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