

Chapter III

A Jest of God

The second Manawaka novel, *A Jest of God*, is about passing judgments and making false assumptions based on prejudice. It is also about the plight of women in a man's world, about being alone and segregation, about fear and despair, and ultimately about insight, acceptance, Love and hope is totally within her which is really felt when the reader reads the novel. The 'I' of the story becomes 'me', at the end of the first reading at least, one finds it impossible to remember her name, and remembers only one's own. Rachel herself says of the Scots who settled in her hometown that "they knew how to be almightier than anyone but God" (71). From her childhood, Rachel has been astonished with a responsible behaviour which is the method expected of her. She has grown up into a silent, compliant woman who appears to accept the role she is expected to play - that of devoted daughter and committed school teacher. This would suggest that she has successfully lived up to the town's and her family's expectations. However, Rachel feels deeply that she is a failure because she has not been able to fill the role which society as a whole and Manawaka as its delegate, sets aside for a woman that of wife and mother. Orbach in her book *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age* comments: "...the construction of femininity is bounded by fundamental social Laws that delineate the parameters of a woman's Life." (43). She is a spinster, one of those women with no place in a male-oriented society.

Margaret Laurence's second of the Manawaka novels shows the life of a fearful, unmarried school teacher named Rachel Cameron. At the age of thirty-four, she is trapped in a life of personal seclusion and isolation, caring for her compulsively

dependent, hypochondriac mother. Rachel meets the challenge of gaining control over her life by achieving self-understanding. The growth of her personality follows the pattern of the isolated heroine's progress to self-knowledge. Rachel who is approaching middle-age is alone in her life without the comfort of a spouse or anyone really close to her, to whom she can disclose her feeling. She feels keenly for the lack of protection. She is made powerfully aware of her solitude by her sense of not being a true part of the world in which she lives.

She has outgrown place in the world and now feels disturbed from it as she watches the young girls who "look like another race but that's wrong too. This is their planet. They are the ones who live here now. "Rachel feels powerless to deal with her loneliness and frequently withdraws into daydreams. Consequently, she becomes uncomfortable and is conscious always of not knowing what to do or say, how to act, or even what to wear." (68) She feels this lack too, and chastises herself for her ignorance of things that "any seventeen-year-old would have known". (91) Her isolation, especially her lack of love, is reinforced by Laurence in which Rachel comes upon two teenagers embracing on a hillside. Rachel is, indeed, alienated from the world she glimpses here, and she knows this herself. "I was the intruder... " she thinks (79) as she hurries, embarrassed, away. This understanding is the first step in her path toward the development of self-understanding, responsibility, and ultimate survival.

Rachel's indispensable seclusion is reflected back at her, by others and her crucial impossibility of communication with anyone else is emphasized over and over again. As C.M. Mc Lay, in his article "Every Man is an Island", remarks: "Margaret Laurence in *A Jest of God* suggests ... that every man is an island, a theme ... typical of the twentieth century." (61) Rachel's story, like that-.of other isolated heroines of

Laurence, is one with the consciousness of loneliness, facing and accepting it, and existing in spite of solitude. Rachael, like Hagar in *The Stone Angel*, is not capable to commune with others, for her devil is fear. Fear fills Rachel's life and prevents her from forming a true relationship with anyone. Djwa Sandra in "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross" notes: "just as *The Stone Angel* can be seen as a study in pride, there is a sense in which *A Jest of God* is a case study of a pathological fear, an all-pervasive anxiety that tends to choke the life out of all of Rachel's experiences" (81).

Rachel is close to the realization that she must take responsibility for her own life, but as yet is unable to face or accept it, and continues to retreat to the security, albeit false, of conventionality. She cannot face any such emotional exposure, believing that "people should keep themselves to themselves. That's the only decent way." (35) Later in the novel she will recognize a similar attempt at retreat when she meets it in Nick Kazlik, with whom she has a brief affair. This is among the experiences which, finally, precipitate her action in taking control of her life. Carol Ann Howells in *Weaving Fabrications: Women's Narratives in A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence* explains:

"...consciousness is dominated by gaps in comprehension and by the untranslatability of language, where words become signifiers whose meaning is always deferred. In her mind words separate themselves from meaning or at best exist in unstable relationships, so that language becomes the agent not of human communication and self-expression but of alienation"(95).

In her egocentricity Rachel is like a child, inexperienced, insecure and self-orientated. Her mother continues to please her like a child in many ways and she herself says that when she inspects herself in the mirror, she doesn't look her age. So,

her story is one of growing up late, but not too late. The novel is about declaration, verbal or non-verbal. None of the characters in the novel is able to articulate what they really feel. Rachel accuses her mother of listening to her but not hearing completely what she means, and it is same with all the other characters. She replicates that her parents gave up talking to one another years before her father's death.

Rachel has an affair with her former school mate, Nick Kazlick, a teacher from Winnipeg who came to live at his father's farm near Manawaka. Rachel has a strong desire for sex and conquers all her fears, self-doubts and has an ardent relation with Nick, hoping that she would become pregnant. Rachel's relationship with Nick presents her an opportunity to free herself from her mother's control. Her approach towards her mother transforms as she moves around with Nick. One day she goes out with Nick crossing all the obstacles on the way. She is overjoyed by this pristine eagerness in her. When Rachel returns after meeting Nick, she finds her mother wide-awake. When she informed her mother that Nick had taken her to his house to meet his family, the mother's face changes and asks Rachel if the affair was serious.

Rachel's mother is worried about her own state if Rachel leaves the house. "What will become of me" (114) after Rachel is gone. This realisation irritates Rachel who goes to the extent of wishing that something bad should happen to her mother. "Why can't she die and leave me alone" (114). Rachel's mother does not approve of her daughter's relationship with Nick. Nick is considered to be inferior to their family as he is a milkman's son, but Rachel does not allow her mother to interfere in their love relation: "I can't believe it could happen, though. A thing like that-to grow a child inside one's structure and have it born alive? Not within me. It couldn't. I couldn't really believe it could ever happen. Nick, give it to me (117-118). The idea

grows upon her and she is anxious of this: “If I had a child, I would like it to be yours” (148).

Nick, like Rachel, is not capable to face anything that requires a tough touching reaction or desire from him. He is able to identify his father’s obstinate action on part but cannot look upon the weakness of senility: Nick could bear to feel that Nestor was difficult, unconventional, even a giant clown, but not diminished. Not saying Steve because he no longer knew. Nick could look at everything. ‘But not at that’. (188) The position of people like Nick or Rachel is unstable; neither is ready yet to come across pain or responsibility, so must move away from such things to see, which might bring their knowledge of isolation to the surface. Rachel perceives others hiding within themselves as she hides inside herself. For instance, she once detects the real Hector “living there behind his eyes” (128), and later realizes that all people remain secreted inside themselves, revealing little. Rachel really doesn’t hear when Nick tells her that he cannot provide her what she wants, though she distinguishes early in their relationship that he is different in one way or the other.

Rachel is shattered when she is not finding answers for the questions she asks herself. She tries to question, criticise, she analyse, but she never rests. Yet in the uncommon moments when she unlocks herself to what is around her, especially in the natural surroundings, her comeback is optimistic. Those which Rachel uses to describe herself are especially bright and meaningful. Nick tries to do something better so he invites Rachel to a movie, about the only enjoyment accessible in the town. She wastes the rest of the summer listening for him to telephone; her moments with him while they make love are the only moments when she feels really alive.

Dimly Nick recognises and fears her great need, but ultimately he cannot accept responsibility for filling it. “Darling, I'm not God, I can't solve anything.”(148).

When all comes to all, he will not be tied down. His father would like him to take over the farm which he has worked since he came to Canada from the Ukraine, but Nick cannot face giving up his independence as a teacher in Winnipeg. One day Nick takes Rachel down around the Wachakwa River for a ride where he used to come with his twin brother Stefan Kazlik, who died eighteen years before. Rachel feels sorry and asks him whether he feels lonely. Nick replies, "That's what I wouldn't care for," "Even -with Steve and myself, people used to group us together, although we were quite different. He never seemed to mind. He just laughed it off. But I hated it." And he adds, "I wanted to be completely on my own. And then it happened that way" (90). Thus Rachel's quest for freedom begins with her affair with Nick and she desires such independence for herself.

Rachel envies the Ukrainian kids for their freedom. She conveys it to Nick about the kids:

"I don't know how to express it. Not so boxed-in, may be. More outspoken. More able to speak out. More allowed to-both by your family and by yourself. Something like that. Perhaps I only imagined it. You always think things are easier somewhere else...in winter on your dad's sleigh, and I remember the great bellowing voice he had, and how emotional he uses to get-cursing at the horses, or else almost crooning to them. In my family, you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon." (94)

Rachel gains courage to speak about her inner feelings in solid words. In the beginning, when she wanted to say something she was unable to speak out with fear of being thought unconventional or particular. Later, she has come out of the fear and she wants to say, "I don't care, I don't care about anything, except this peace, this pride, holding him" (98). When she reaches home, she thinks, "Right now, I'm

fantastically happy. He did want me. And I wasn't afraid. I think that when he is with me, I don't feel any fear. Or hardly any. Soon I won't feel any at all" (100). Rachel gains courage to deceive her mother and discovers that she can be cruel in disagreement to her when the issue is something she wants and needs as badly as her hours with Nick.

Nick asks Rachel to go with him to his house when his parents are away. This new-found mercilessness stimulates her. She goes out to Nick's place where she is unable to express her doubt that she is due. Then Nick asks her,

"What's the matter, Rachel?"

"Nothing. Nothing's the matter. I feel better, actually, here in this place"

"How - better?"

"Safer."

He laughs. "Because of its four walls and a roof?"

"You think that's foolish, don't you?"

"Yeh, may be. But women don't."

Women. I'm not the only one, then, who feels that way. Nick goes to the window and opens the curtain. (109)

Nick clearly tells Rachel what is expected of her. On entering his parents' house with her, Nick goes to the window and opens the curtains, to let the sunlight in. When Nick enters her body, she inquisitively thinks of herself in language that might speak of a house: "...the knowledge that he will somehow inhabit me, be present in me, for a few days more—this, crazily, gives me warmth, against all reason" (110). It is also language that describes a disease, the disease that Rachel is filled with when

she imagines her body and her selfoccupied by foetus or tumour, or the eccentricities of advancing age and the town's influence. Rachel has her own fears regarding talking. She cannot think of anything to say whereas Nick talks "so easily when he wants, yet he does not seem bothered by silences. I am the opposite"(111)

Rachel imagines herself pregnant, a social disaster in such a society as that of hers. She is unaware of how to go about with an abortion because she is not modern. In her state of hopelessness, she tries to commit suicide but cannot even do that. She calls this last malfunction opting out, and she determines in herself the desire to survive. Finally, she prays, though she has little hope of an answer to her prayer from a God she has ignored up to now. But she tackles him, accepting, as she says, that "All the nuts and oddballs turn to you." (171) in saying this she admits to belonging to this group herself. She has moved past the fear of being thought eccentric. She has made a fool of herself and she will have to live with it, so she will have her baby, whatever comes her way. The fact is, she wants the baby in any case. She had done nothing to stop a pregnancy, partly through physical meticulousness, but also feels, she wanted a child subconsciously.

Rachel is unable to know others not only because of her own refusal to see, but because of their refusal to show themselves. "That's why I can't see them properly, because their eyes are closed." (165) Rachel ultimately realizes that Nick acts in the way he describes his father to be, in spite of the fact that she had thought him "more outspoken. More able to speak out" (8) than she. Nick is like Nestor, who "makes a kind of theatre out of his life, and yet in the end he doesn't intend anyone to know how much of the act is real or if any of it is." (146). She also turns out to be aware of just how difficult it is to really perceive another. "I can't tell at all what ... he's thinking. I never can, not with anyone. Always this futile guessing game." (84).

The speculating situation is as the result of the reality that Nick, like Rachel herself, and certainly like many people, has his own privacies, which are not to be expressed. The thinking of such revelation is horrifying and leaves one open to damage and hurt. "He doesn't reveal much. He only appears to talk openly. Underneath, everything is guarded." (85) She cannot give the wrong impression about herself into taking for categorical truth that he says, for she knows that her words are not absolutely reliable either. "I don't know why I take people's words at their face value. Mine can't be taken so..."(63).

Rachel is not only capable of reading others but she is also unable to communicate her own pain; even her mother does not know her, in spite of her disagreements to the contrary, and Rachel feels that she "wouldn't even want her mother to know." (65) Rachel in due course realizes that her personal feelings are away from description nevertheless "there isn't much to say about myself, nothing, that can be spoken" (107), and for a long time she convinces herself, that her silence is a virtue "people should keep themselves to themselves -- that's the only decent way." (351) Rachel's mother symbolizes the kind of person who cover up herself in the peripheral anxieties of daily life to avoid herself from facing the appalling truth of total estrangement and separation. She suffers without recognizing the cause because she doubts taking accountability for her survival and adheres instead to the dubious security of a conservative life. McLay argues: "under her foxiness, her calculated emotional appeals and demands, lies a terrible fear of isolation which is the lot of every human being." (57) Initially this is the replica which Rachel tries to follow, but she is ultimately unable to be satisfied with this kind of life. As yet, however, she is not arranged to consider fully her sense of emptiness and continues "not buying her views but not capable to act on my own." (90) How much of Rachel's insight is shared

by Mrs. Cameron is strange to us, as it is to Rachel, although we are conscious that she suffers and is alarmed and clings to Rachel for protection. Rachel's fear of revelation develops into a kind of suspicion, which leads to a great deal of disbelief of others, for instance, of Willard Siddley:

“I've nothing to be afraid of, with him. He has never given a bad report to the School Board on my teaching, as far as I know. I don't know why I should even think he might have. (7)

What is he looking for?

Have I done something?

What has he found?” (23)

Rachel's Principal, Willard Siddley, seems a sadist to her. All her students are unique to her. At the same time, she is disgusted because of her maddened by her maternal feeling shown towards James Doherty, one of her pupils. Willard is a strict disciplinarian. He always looks for occasions to strap the boys. Rachel has a revolting feeling towards him. Willard is informed by his wife Angela that James was seen on the banks of Wachakawa thrice. So, he wants to punish James for absenting himself from school. Rachel tells that James has been suffering from tonsillitis and that his mother gave him notes to excuse his absence. Though Rachel has maternal love towards James, she cannot stop Willard from stripping James. She sends him to Willard's chamber and as he returns, she thinks that “his face look like bone, his eyes staring my betrayal at me, then I want only to go to Willard and tell him to listen, just to listen. *I am not neutral- I am not detached-I know it. But neither are you and you do not know if*” (31-32). She is afraid of losing the job and she thinks of leaving the school.

She administers fact that she teaches, that to get through each day and worse still, each anguished night and on to the next, that she does manage to sustain, indulge, and even feel some extravagance for her mother—all of these features denote nothing to her. But the reader sees them. What Rachel is actually doing plays its counterpoint—limited in range, but necessary to the novel’s success—to what she thinks are her total failures. More than anything else, she worries being thought peculiar, curious, and foolish, by her present pupils or the ones she used to teach, by any one at almost of all by herself, though she continuously beats herself with burning ridicule. She refers to herself as some grotesque being: “that giant She” (7), “a stroke of a white chalk” (35), “gaunt metal or gaunt bird” (121). The isolation from which she suffers so much is, in part at least, self—induced; there have been hands stretched out to her, but through fear, or snobbery, or insecurity, she has pushed Lennox and Calla away:

“When I first came back to Manawaka, Lennox Cates used to ask me out, and I went, but when he started asking me out twice a week, I stopped seeing him before it went any further. We didn’t have enough in common, I thought, meaning I couldn’t visualize myself as the wife of a farmer, a man who’d never even finished High School. He married not long afterwards. I’ve taught three of his children. All nice-looking kids, fair-haired like Lennox, and all bright. Well.” (37)

Calla Mackie is her colleague. Rachel feels that she looks quite smart in contrast with Calla because Calla has no dress sense at all. Calla also offers friendship, but Rachel avoids social gatherings. Calla is desperately lonely, yet Rachel cannot listen to her silent request because of her fascination is within herself. Rachel is uncomfortable by Calla’s lack of interest by her unconstrained carelessness, and

most of all by the fundamentalism of her Pentecostal religion. People's inability to make others understand is symbolised in Rachel's unexpected and shattering experience of speaking in tongues at the Pentecostal gospel meeting which she unwillingly attends with Calla. Mclay in his article "Everyman is an Island: Isolation in *A Jest of God*" describes: "we can never truly know another human being, never penetrate behind their facade, since words which reveal also conceal. We must accept others as they appear to us, reach out to them in compassion, yet be free to stand alone." (68) When Rachel goes with Calla to the "Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn" (35), to her absolute self—degradation she is seized with hysteria and begins to moan and babble as if speaking with tongues. When Calla kisses her in Calla's apartment, she suffers more shock and revulsion. Rachel escapes from there, when Calla's affection is revealed as a lover's and not as friend's.

Calla Mackie, whose unconventional behaviour and appearance humiliates Rachel and seem to represent too much of Calla's personality. Calla is also an outsider, but she come into views and terms with her reality. She does not fit into the world which surrounds her, but neither is she made uncomfortable by it. She leads a life that suits her, painting her apartment in odd colours and dressing as she pleases, despite what the town may say of her. Calla is a survivor, one of the few who sees in a land of the blind. Rachel is torn between Calla's flamboyant ways "I wish I were more like. that" (174) and her mother's more conservative views "I wish Calla 'looked a little more usual" (171). Rachel cannot decide which approach she prefers, rejecting at once the wild emotionalism of Calla's Tabernacle and the stiff-neckedreserve of her mother's congregation "I was neither one way nor another" (90), she says. This division of self is yet another characteristic of the "path to self-understanding

followed by the isolated heroine as she is torn between accepting her experience and blinding herself to it.

Rachel, who is lost in the feelings of Nick, reaches Calla's house. There she continues her talking with Nick and says, "I'm not afraid when I am with him, but when I'm not with him, it seems to return" (137). Calla reveals to Rachel that she is given the gift of speaking in tongues: "It was peace. Like some very gentle falling of rain" (142). Rachel talks to Nick and informs that she knows him completely. She has talked only to him like that when she is alone. Nick's father is becoming old and he calls Nick Steve three times. He wants him with him in Winnipeg.

In a burst of self-confidence that follows her first experience of physical release in love, Rachel voices her need for a child, his child:

"If one speaks from faith, not logic, how does that turn out?

I do not know, except that I am so strong in it, so assured, that it cannot possibly go wrong.

"Nick

"Mm?"

"If I had a child, I would like it to be yours."

This seems so unforced that I feel he must see it the way I do. And so restrained, as well, when I might have torn at him- *Give me my children.*

His flesh, his skin, his bones, his blood-all are still connected with mine, but now suddenly not. Not a muscular withdrawal. Something different, something unsuspected. His face turns away from mine: He puts his mouth momentarily on my shoulder. Then, still not looking at me, he brushes a hand across my forehead.

"Darling," he says, "I am not God. I can't solve anything." (154)

Nick pulls out his wallet and extracts a photograph of a six-year-old boy and Rachel asks “yours?” and he replies, “Yes.” Rachel does not hear from him again. As summer ends and school begins, she has that loss to bear and the terrible fear and just as terrible hope of pregnancy besides. But she cannot go to the doctor. He will ask about the things that are none of his concern: “Have you told the man, Rachel? Would he be willing to marry you?”(178). She thinks of her mother’s heart immediately that she may get another attack. Similarly, she cannot go away with any explanation. She thinks of various possible ways, but she could not find any true solution. Calla helps her and assures her that “Everything’s going to be all right” (181) Rachel can have her child. Her mother can be looked after by a housekeeper and finances can be managed.

Dr.Raven observes her and says that there is a tumour, and she may have to confer with a specialist in Winnipeg. Then Rachel remarks, “All that. And this is at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque light headedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools now that I really am one” (188). Under anesthetic, she mumbles, “*I am the mother now*” (191). When Rachel is discharged she travels back to Manawaka. Rachel goes to Nick’s house to find out about Nick and his family. Nick’s mother informs her that Nick is never married yet. Rachel excuses Nick and says, “He had his own demons and webs. Mine brushed across him for an instant, and he saw them and had to draw away, knowing that what I wanted from him was too much” (197). When Rachel comes to know that Nick has left for Winnipeg, she was unable to understand the depth of his own problem as the son of a Ukrainian immigrant. She felt that, as a son, Nick was not able to anything for his parents which, his dead brother, Steve would have done. Nick could have preserved the land that his father, Nestor Kazlik loved. He understands Rachel better than she understands him. She does not lose Nick

because she had certainly not had him in any devoted sense, and she does not bear his child as she hoped.

Rachel herself begins to rearrange her desire away through her sexual encounter with Nick. Nick provides Rachel with a "neutral place" (92) in both the material world and her personality in which her requirements can be authenticated for what they are. Rachel had dual views: her mother's, to which Rachel turns when in necessity of a defence against the world, and the voices of society which repeatedly anguish Rachel with distorted pictures of her appearance to others. Nick's voice expresses neither the command of tyranny nor the dominion of agreement, but both urges Rachel to act on her own requirements and attaches her in a discussion in which her voice carries equal heaviness.

In Rachel's association with Nick, the phallus makes possible rather than subject Rachel's desire. With Nick, Rachel can use very important to consciously express her desire: "Nick--take your clothes off" (153). The impartial place and the voice Rachel develops in this situation become autonomous of Nick's physical presence. After imagining how preposterous she must have looked making love on a Hudson Bay blanket, she says "All right, God--go ahead and laugh, and I'll laugh with you, but not quite yet for a while" (121). She then counters her attempt to repress her thoughts: "Rachel, stop it. You're only getting yourself worked up for nothing. It's bad for you. Why bad? I've felt a damn sight better since I stopped considering my health" (121). Rachel here occupies a psychological space from which she resists the voices of both God and her mother. From this mental space Rachel also sees that "those eyes all around [which] have swollen to giants' eyes" (54) belong to people who, like Nick, have their "own demons and webs" (197). Rachel comprehends that her essence is an interior concept, not an exterior reality: her observations of others' insights of her

were distorted from reality by her own demons, her own repressed fears and requirements.

Rachel sustained to be a child even when she entered into her highly developed life. This was evident in the method she spoke to herself, analyzing, and examining her personal schedules. Such development is a normal evolution for women but protesting against such a change is the competition that exists between mothers and daughters. The latter who are passionate to shape their own path, become bothered when they recognize they are not expert to select something innovative for themselves. This is because it has previously been registered into them from their mothers. The routine is traditional and demonstrations are amicable struggle between the intelligent and the cleverer, as the former struggle to prove they are independent. It is an effort by lineage to ascertain their resourcefulness, and advance acceptance and support from their mothers. Rachel understood this was happening simultaneously with the declaration of her internal nature, took custody of her individuality and stirred herself and her mother to the West Coast.

Rachel continued to be a child even when she entered into her matured life. This was apparent in the method she spoke to herself, analyzing, and examining her personal schedules. The explanation manner was that of a maternal expression, expected indication of the panic for what her mother would say, and thoughtful of whom she was budding into. Protesting against such development is a normal evolution for women because a sturdy intelligence of competition exists between mothers and daughters. The latter, enthusiastic to shape their own path, become troubled when they understand they are incapable to select something original for themselves for the reason that it has previously been registered into them from their mothers. The performance is ceremonial and demonstrations approachable struggle

between the intelligent and the cleverer, as the former struggle to prove they are independent. It is an effort by descendants to ascertain their inventiveness, and advance receiving and endorsement from their mothers. Rachel understood this was happening concurrently with the resolution of her internal nature, took custody of her individuality and stirred herself and her mother to the West Coast, at the end of the book.

It was the communication conflict that started from different centuries; they both had nothing in common except the distinguishing feature of communication. The generation gap was the major problem between Rachel and her mother. Rachel's mother was a virgin, righteous woman who maintained high ethical values for herself and her family. Rachel's mother expected her to be a good human being and make correct decisions and not to be problematic to anyone. Her mother had several times warned her on the strange actions she made and compared with some other who did the same. Though this made Rachel furious about her mother, she associated her relation with Nick, not considering how her activities with Nick, looked to anyone who could be examining or noticing them. Rachel had neither the acceptance nor the yearning to communicate to her mother for dreadful situation rousing because of them.

The significant constituent inborn in a successful mother-daughter organization is the sense of balance. The fastidious connection between mother and daughter is delicate and unlike any other connection due to outlooks of arrangement on behalf of both women. The female consciousness is, unsurprisingly vigilant: each woman having a certain deputation making them exclusive. The values and behaviours are up to date, probably natural; from others are two of many things which carve an individual's performance. It is the similarities and differences which often

cause dissimilarities between mother and daughter. In *A Jest of God*, the rapport between Rachel and her mother is worried due to the situation that each other had. Hindering from poor communication, a mass of discrepancies was believed to tolerate between the two created in their identicalness.

The communication problem between herself and her mother, Rachel wanted to consider that the trouble was instinctive in the mistake each had of the other. Unknowingly, Rachel was similar to the conditions with what was actually truthful of the space between herself and her mother: their distinction put down in her want not to be similar. Rachel was unmarried and her mother a widow, both were single. Through her fling with Nick, Rachel wanted to express her longings to be unconventional from her mother and have a mature association with another human being. The two women were in their tendency to be strong-minded and mysterious; having sentiments which they did not express. The firmness was obvious in the relations of spiritual enquiry because they together were curious about their belief.

Rachel was more quarrelsome in her curiosity as shown during her visit to the Tabernacle, though kept it a top-secret knowing her mother risked about what well-mannered people saw in such movement. Both mother and daughter divided what was in their indulgence at living in a small town. Even when the father died, neither Rachel nor her mother was nervous to change their living style. Rachel was not unsighted to the similarities she had with her mother but did not do any alteration in her behaviour in order to be different.

Rachel's movements during her last months in Manawaka represented the final struggle to be unlike from her mother. This behaviour showed by Rachel was like an adolescent's last disobedient activities before entering maturity. Rachel was forced to gossip behind her mother's back, worried to safeguard an unplanned

association with a man which her mother would condemn of. Rachel's mother seems that she had no apprehension talking her thoughts. Rachel worried to uphold her replacement as a correct, sincere school teacher, and declined to speak to her principal about a worrying matter for fright he would drop esteem for her. When attending the Tabernacle, Rachel spoke in dialects and gone not expressive what she exposed of herself only that her mother would confidently condemn of what she had done. These external movements by Rachel were affectionate of her need to complete her divine development, which was weak by an arrogant mother, and her individual suffering of the identical way.

Rachel's great achievement in life is acquisition of freedom, and harmony with an attempt to connect the communication gap between herself and her mother. Taking the burden of her life was something Rachel had not even felt grateful to the increasing acquaintance of her inner-self. As she was living under her mother's self-protective wing, it has become necessary to open out on her own, which she was never before capable to do this. Although she seems to scorn her mother for the makings she admittedly possessed herself, Rachel was deteriorating to connect only helped to strengthen this.

Rachel's sarcastic inner life, her struggle with irresponsibility and her bid for subsistence make this stylistically cultured explanation loving and sympathetic, but never passionate. Rachel Cameron's dilemma is delightfully and honestly concentrated in a study in which intelligence is contradicted by her sentiment. Rachel is shattered when she is not finding answers for the questions she asks herself. She tries to question herself, criticises her activities, analyses her behaviour, but she was not able to understand her own self. Some exceptional situations in her life made her release to world around her, in particular to the natural surroundings, and bring her back to an

optimistic state. Nick tries to do something to make Rachel feel happy and so he invites her to a movie, which is the only enjoyment available in the town. She spends the rest of the summer listening him on the telephone. Her moments with Nick, while they make love are the only moments when she feels really alive.

Rachel's choices are very limited; she does have many choices and she makes one of them the decision to move. She is not afraid to leave Manawaka, for she is no longer rely on her fear of the town for a kind of difficult security of identity. She is free of the geographical place, Manawaka, while still knowing and accepting that in the deepest sense the town will be with her forever, both its strengths and its constraints. These she will always carry within her to deal with. She applies for and is accepted by a school in Vancouver and against all her mother's tears and threats she moves there, taking "her elderly child" with her:

"We watched until the lights of the town could not see any longer. Now only the farm kitchens and the stars are out there to signpost the night. The bus flies along smooth and confident as a great owl through the darkness, and all the passengers are quiet, some of them sleeping. Beside me sleeps my elderly child. Where I'm going, anything may happen. Nothing may happen. Maybe I will marry a middle-aged widower, or a longshoreman, or a cattle-hoof trimmer, or a barrister or a thief. And have my children in time. Or maybe not. Most of the chances are against it. But not, I think, quite all. What will happen. It may be that my children will always be temporary, never to be held. But so are everyone's." (208-209)

Rachel sees herself "rising gawkily, like a tame goose trying to fly" (136), or "an ostrich walking with extreme care through some formal garden." She defines Calla as "looking like a wind-dishevelled owl, a great horned owl, her fringed hair

like grey-brown feathers every which way” (32). There are scores of others: “sour as a crab apple” (95), “thin as a thigh-bone” “like a stroke of white chalk” (35), “crane of a body, gaunt metal of gaunt bird” (121), “like a dried autumn flower stalk, “an empty eggshell skull” (192). The images refer to Rachel herself, merging the wretched and ridiculous in their effects, but all of them outspread the range of Rachel’s voice and growth the variability of its effects.

Rachel literally takes cares of her mother when she ardently, even immaturely, requests against the move. Kenneth Hughes in the article entitled “*Politics and A Jest of God,*” brings in a motivating similarity between Rachel’s relationship with her mother and that of the association between the populated and the colonizer, say, Canada and Britain. Mrs. Cameron becomes the stately power however Rachel is symbolic of “a Canada seeking to free itself from an authoritarian colonial past and to make its own future.” (50) Rachel’s tumour in the body represents the past with all its rigid values. The removal of the tumour suggests independence from the colonial state of mind. Rachel, like Hagar was in search for liberty and enjoyment. She wins an incomplete release from terror and has got a new meaning to her relation with her mother, and a receipt of the unidentified of human personality.

Rachel rebels against limitations of her parents and jerks an extended exploration for the groundwork of inspiration inside of herself. Her concern with her childhood friend Nick Kazlik becomes a new acquaintance to Rachel. The relation becomes a persuasive event for Rachel’s modification. Their joining becomes not a modest dearest anxiety. There are many things which draw them together. Nick is extremely difficult for Rachel because he becomes a person who is mindful of her emotions and thoughts. Nick also tries to deal with his fears. Nick and Rachel replicate each other and anyhow their relations end rapidly. It helps Rachel to spread a

central judgement on her path of specific rebellion. This small apprehension gives Rachel new dream of her, determines her sexuality and helps her to rebellious against severe norms of her mother. In spite of experiences a lot of alarm, hurt and crime, because of this association becomes a significant step to autonomy and liberty.

Rachel overturns the dual disagreement that privileges the phallus over the womb. Rachel whose imaginary pregnancy substantially signifies the change in her. At first Rachel considers it as a gift from Nick, and dreams of a marriage with him and having more children. Rachel's desire formerly is to find her destination in Nick. This change, however, when Rachel realizes that Nick has left, that "there isn't anyone. I'm on my own" (171). Her desire for the child is divorced from a sense of phallic lack: "Look--it's my child, mine. And so, I will have it. I will have it because I want it and because I cannot do anything else" (177). The child is not a gift to gain neither agreement, nor that completes her. It is part of her, produced and belonging to her, and desired by her. The womb, then, expresses a presence of which the phallus is only a shadow. Accordingly, Rachel can endorse her desire to move from Manawaka without sentiment to justify her decision either to her mother or to Willard. She also changes her connection to her mother without reference to the paternal. Carol Ann Howells in her article "Weaving Fabrications: Women's Narratives in *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*, *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence*", comments "is a story of rehabilitation within limits" (99). However, the opposing seems to be the case: Rachel's life is a story of treatment through breaking down prescribed limits and building upon the potentials thus created.

Rachael is frightened of public's decision and creates the whole thing probable to turn out to be imperceptible for other people. Her unchanging emotion of union convinces her that other individuals can only evaluate her and that is the motive she

keeps away from any kind of contacts and communication with other people. Rachel avoids people in order to evade sentences but ultimately, she becomes her possess moderator herself. She finds fault with herself for everything: performance, behaviour and even belief. The mortuary below her house represents Rachel's obscured opinion and feelings. She does not live an occupied life and unable to build strong associations with other people.

Rachel's companionship with Calla Mackie spends Rachel's apparition of public and dealings. Calla is self-determining and self-possessed. She is not frightened of people as Rachel does. Calla shows Rachel a novel method to indulgence folks and herself. Calla not only demonstrates Rachel an instance of usual dealings between people, but also illustrates her means to right holiness. Their acquaintance develops into one of the equipment which assists the character to attain her inner self and become unconventional from limitations of her uncertainties and guiltiness. She augments self-confidence in herself and now becomes talented to depend on other people and construct normal relationship with them. Rachel has to go by a long passage in order to determine her accurate inner self. During the flight she has to learn her central troubles and restrictions. She has to find out to make relationships with other people and her own parents. She had to experience in her childhood, restrictions and limitations; she has to find sufficient authority to treat other people with faith and admiration.

Rachel Cameron greatly looks for companionship and feel affection for but discards them as soon as she gets a possibility to construct close association with an important person. Rachel's mother hold backs all her proposal and requirements. Rachel appears a method to run away her restrictions. She imagines to disappear from her little town Manawaka but her genuine limits are within her. Rachel uses all time

and endeavour in her occupation but it does not bring her contentment. *A Jest of God* is a tale of limits and boundaries which other people and conditions put on us. The author also emphasizes that very often people themselves reject their opportunities, same like the character of the book does. Rachel is in search for love and friendship but cannot accept them when she gets the opportunity. To great extent the novel walks around associations amid children and parents and authority parents have on the lives of their children.

Rachel is 34 years old but she still cannot become self-governing and manage her life. Her authoritarian mother does not allow her to take any choices of her own. The author shows how companionship and faith help the character to make an extensive pathway of individual alteration. Companionship is a central part of our life. It gives significance to relationships between people and helps people to expose their inner self. Real individuality can be developed only from beginning to end communication with other people and friendship is one of them. Laurence puts much consideration to relationships between children and their parents and the novel illustrates how family relations play an important role. Confidence and ability to build relations with other people are habitually formed during the time of youth.

In *The Jest of God* one can outline how parents and family education becomes the main boundaries the character faces in her life. Rachel needs to come in terms with the rest of the world and find her place in the society. She has got into an agreement with the struggles which chase from her childhood. In her novel Laurence gives deep emotional knowledge about the relations between children and parents. Modern psychology establishes that children automatically follow all their parent's wishes even though these wishes are not permanent. Children always consider their mothers as a little divine and sacred. Female children wish to be similar to their

mothers and boys desire to do everything to create their mothers pleased. Mothers must be aware of their every phase and be a faultless example for their children.

In the novel, it is understood in what way mother's limitless inspiration generates limits and boundaries for the character. Each expression and every movement of a mother can be of uncountable for her children and their attitude forms children's relationship with the remaining part of the world. Absence of regular communication and thoughtful about her mother avoids Rachel from constructing standard relations with the people around her. Rachel has a knowledge about management and constraint from the very childhood and that is the motive she is not able to trust other people and cannot build friendly relations with others. Restrictions which Rachel's parents formed in her young age developed later into internal limitations which happen in the method of thoughts, fears and mistrust to other people.

The exploration for individuality is the foundation of the equalist crusade and so it has appeared as a foremost anxiety not only in the typical of Canadian Literature but also in the side-lined literature in Canada. Another aspect of Canadian feminism is the search for roots and it has developed as a superseding concern in much of post-colonial writing. The desirable sovereignty has imposed the Canadian writers, to regulate their individual characteristic originalities and give presence to them in their writing. The women in the Canadian setting are especially inhabited as the countries having post-colonial history. They have to generate themselves in their individual societies in the other Canadians, particularly persons who take additional space, more roughly in the range of principles. The greatest visible characters of Laurence's novels are their tentative nature, infrequently as a mark of downfall and notification and sometimes as an objection. All through the novel *A Jest of God*, Rachel is shown to be

meaningfully suppressed, repressed to a virtually uncontrolled gradation and antagonistic to all exhibitions of impulsive sense.

Rachel Cameron, the central character of Laurence's *A Jest of God* is a spinster whose fragments preordained by the views of multi-ethnic phenomenon. As a youngster she is prohibited to play with any other youngster from other communities in Manawaka. At thirty-four, she challenges her unhealthy mother's ethical dominion on her and chooses to have an affair with Nick Kazlik, of Norwegian origins. After Nick leaves her, making their relation as a holiday romance, Rachel finds herself pregnant. After a few days she discovers that it is only a tumour and not a child that she is carrying. Her incapacity of carrying Nick's child burdens on the discontented determination to regulate dissimilar societies of European settlers. She fights to follow her particular independence in a nation of incapable realisms in the pretext of diverse cultures.

A reading of the novel gives one an impression of how the concept of self-stages beyond the matter of conflict. Laurence throw-outs the reasons or the implied belief that there is approximately like an identity that contains fight, outward or interior. I always brush my hair a hundred strokes. I can't succeed in avoiding my eyes in the mirror. The narrow angular face stares at me, the grey eyes too wide for it. "I don't look old . . . Or do I see my face falsely?" (16)

Although the novel is set in Manawaka, a prairie town, the places occupied by the central character Rachel are all inner: the school room, the accommodation she divides with her mother above the Japonica Funeral Chapel and most significantly the freedom within her own head sheltered within her own mind and body, she is mainly of the occurrence disaffected from other people and from time to time she is even

separated from herself. Laurence portrays Rachel as “a potential hysteric who does not for quite a while realize this about herself” (85).

“And then, I can’t. Tonight, is hell on wheels again. Trite. *Hell on wheels*. But almost accurate. The night feels like a gigantic ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly, turning once for each hour, interminably slow. And I am glued to it, or wired, like paper, like a photograph, insubstantial, unable to anchor myself, unable to stop this slow nocturnal circling.” (18)

Her father’s Funeral Parlour, “A nasty word, smacking of mortality” (13), confirms the fear bearing Rachel. As the daughter of an undertaker living above the mortuary, Rachel is preoccupied by the prohibited place of her youth and its mysteries maintain to bother her dreams: “The stories descending to the place where I am not allowed. The silent people are there...” (19). Death is the subject matter banned by her father and excepted from the house by her mother. George Bowering in *That Fool of a Fear*. *A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence* remarks: “Rachel’s mother had “an interesting fear of the touch of both death and life, a double fear that her daughter has picked up” (213).

Rachel challenges to rebuild her awareness through nostalgia and her present profession as a teacher. As Rachel stands inside the classroom, she is preoccupied by the gaps between her inner and outer worlds: The wind blows low, the wind blows high, The snow comes falling from the sky. Rachel Cameron says she’ll die For want of the golden city... hey are not actually chanting my name, of course. I only hear it that way from where I am watching at the classroom window. (1) At the same time, she is mindful of the dilemmas of her awareness. George Bowering comments: “Rachel has been leading a strangely pendulum life” (210) which fluctuates between the world of social gathering and her inner daydream life.

Confined within the limitations of her role as well-mannered unmarried school teacher and obedient daughter, Rachel's silent questions the image and that registers her deep suffering and disagreement in her mind.

Unrelated stories control the novel Rachel's longing to find liberty and her fortune to meet Nick. As one-story winds down, the other winds up. The first plot commences with Rachel as an anxious being. She is infatuated with her own status, her representation in the centre of population and her family status. Trained for an occupation, but involuntary to desire for romance, yearning for motherhood at the very minute when her mother's own difficulty show this relationship to be the forger of unbearable bonds, Rachel perfectly summarizes the predicament of women in her time-blending autonomy with the remaining hierarchic custom.

Rachel is the novel's essential character. It may perhaps be somewhat realized in terms of what Margaret Laurence conserve and what she discards. What she most particularly safeguards are Rachel's rejection to be encroached upon as supported in her uneasiness over Mr. Willard's act as she says "why should Willard Pry? He has no right to open my desk" (23). Rachel has to confer a mingling of subjects, whether educational or ancestral, individual or tentative. She tries at an announcement of a struggle and ultimately turns up at either a prejudiced or a thoughtful solution.

Rachel has to make the expedition into her own identity and challenge her suppressed side. She manages with the problems and grows tougher in the process. Patricia Morley in her book *Margaret Laurence* describes: "Rachel escapes not from society, like some Canadian Huck Finn, but into more dynamic forms of community life." (93). An increased awareness of the mother-daughter relationships manifests in this kind of female journey. In *A Jest of God* Rachel undertakes a journey on her own. The novel deals with issues like pregnancy and death; conflicts with issues like

parenthood, toleration, fate, generational conflict, social withdrawal, themes of birth all are explored, examined and understood from women's viewpoint. Atwood in her book *Afterword to Margaret Laurence: A Jest of God* describes:

“*A Jest of God* is structured almost entirely around children and the flow of time and emotion in and around them: and thus, around mothers and mothering, fathers and fathering, and the relationships, often interchangeable, between those who mother and are mothered those who give and receive nurturing and comfort”. (214)

Rachel is inventive, fragile, and solid pushed by the slim orthodoxies of her friend, Calla's Tabernacle and the balanced cruelties of Mr. Willard, the headmaster and her growing understanding of her mind's glide into fragmentation. Yet, Rachel soon after, with a sense of an enthusiastic arrogance and ego, rejuvenates herself and increasingly develops an intense sense of interval.

Margaret Laurence produces another Rachel in the book – the one who continually, yet time after time connects with herself predominantly on private walks about the River Street. The following passage could be taken as an amazing illustration:

“The day does end, of course. Am I walking home unusually slowly? I feel as though I were. Summer holidays will begin in another two weeks . . . I am trying to recall when I last hit a child. I cannot remember . . . In a year or two, will I have locked today away in some junk box, never to be found among all the other scraps and trifles”. (54)

Thus, she is represented as a woman who keeps more to herself.

With Nick Kazlik in the backdrop, the novelist interlocks a difficulty of character in Rachel. Both Rachel and Nick do not fit in to the Manawaka Landscape,

one of the bases why they are strained together. The place they live is packed with immigrants who wandered there for the same reason. Nick leaves Rachel and Manawaka at the end of the summer:

“He had his own demons and webs. Mine brushed across his for an instant...I don’t know whether he meant to lie to me or not. As for what was happening with him or to him this summer, I couldn’t say what it really was, nor whether it had anything to do with me or not”.
(189).

Rachel’s matter with Nick, although existentially excruciating in its feelings of defeat and lack of message, does supply her the force and will to make a change-to move to Vancouver.

A great breakdown is the consequence of what Rachel does to herself. She treats in the trickery of self. She is helplessly drained towards fantasy. She devises a self, with an intention on misinterpretation of indication or practicality. She ends up a true subject matter to a sort of genuineness that is invented and hence confusing. This demolishes her will authority as she thoughtlessly believes the external and the inner world to be an undistinguishable disorder.

Her liberation comes in a different form: hoping and dreading that she is pregnant with Nick’s child, she finds that it is not a child but a lump which is growing inside her. This is the *Jest of God* which she comes in time to see as benevolent rather than hateful in its irony. Only when that is removed she is untied from the corporeal fear which she carries within herself, and only then can she speak her personal desires, which are not erotic but motherly. Under sedative she declares, “I am the mother now” (184). Through her apparition pregnancy, she has given birth to herself

as mother, caring for “that elderly child” (203), her own mother and pretentious responsibility for both of them.

Her story ends with her taking leave of Manawaka as she and her mother depart for Vancouver. Nothing much has changed on the surface of Rachel’s life and yet hers is a story of healing within limits, “I will be different. I will remain the same” (201). It is still a world of broken up signs where everything is both true and false. But Rachel has come to accept her limits of understanding and has found a voice which she carelessly acknowledges her self-divisions “Sometimes I will feel light-hearted, sometimes light-headed. I may sing aloud, even in the dark. I will ask myself if I am going mad but if I do, I won’t know it” (202). Her decision to leave Manawaka against her mother’s wishes indicates that she has at last had an identity for herself.

For Rachel to solve her problem, she must find her own way and not rely on imitating either her mother or Calla. Part of Rachel's self-control, is due to her Presbyterian background. “In my family,' she says, 'you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon.” (88) Also, like Hagar, Rachel finds that her recollections of the past are subjugated by her perplexity about her father's life. He was a withdrawn man, whose profession, undertaking, set him apart from others. Rachel regrets that she knew so little of the man who “felt at ease with them, the unspeaking ones”. (13) She has yet to comprehend how little can be corresponded and mourns for the fact that she had not spoken to her father about his life. “By the time I knew the question it was too late and asking it would have cut into him too much” (14) For Rachel, her father's mystery is the key to her association of love and death, which are put adjacent to in her mind all the way through the novel. Nick tells Rachel, for instance, that their place in the woods is "as private as the grave." (90) It is also in a place from which "you could see the cemetery" (149) that Rachel sees the two teenagers embracing. In the

funeral chapel, Hector takes her support and leads her "like a bride up the aisle." (125) Both love and death are, in some determine for Rachel, attempted solutions to the problem of isolation. Both of these means of resolving her disagreements are considered by Rachel before she becomes willing to face her problems head on.

McLay in "Everyman is an Island" comments: "Rachel tries to overcome her remoteness through accepting Nick's love and through conceiving a child with him, which is an attempt to escape her isolation as a separate being" (181). Such an escape is not achieved, because Rachel asks too much of the relationship. She demands that Nick save her from her conscious of loneliness, which is ever-increasing, and with which she does not want to contend. Nick realizes the depth of her need and his inability to fulfil it. He gently tries to let Rachel know the impossibility of what she asks him." 'Darling,' he says, 'I'm not God. I can't solve anything.'"(148) The other possible 'solution' to her problem, suicide, is discarded because it signifies a total submit to isolation. McClay suggests, "accentuates our consciousness of an isolation which already exists."(182). The collapse of these solutions to Rachel's troubles rests on the fact that both are external to her. Neither is an active affirmation of life on Rachel's part, but instead involve escape from her dilemma without actually solving it. Rachel must not be defeated by her isolation but must accept it and allow it to become a source of strength which will lead her to ultimate survival. Rachel's child turns out, ironically to be a tumour, a dead thing, rather than a living being. The 'jest' spoken of could be a reference to the view that life itself is a massive story. The challenge facing Rachel, is to take a joke and make it into something of value.

Rachel finally realizes that a child would not have been the answer to her dilemma anyway. The children may "make a shelter" (50) for their mothers, but they, like her school children, are "temporary , never to be held." (20) It eventually, to have

a child would not solve the problem she seeks an answer to anyway, since, as McLay suggests, "motherhood does not ensure immunity from isolation." (182) Rachel seeks a child initially as a means of insulating herself from the pain of her isolation. It is the 'death' she experiences in discovering that her 'child' is not one at all which brings her to the threshold of self-knowledge and the realization that she must find her own way in life. The realization comes to a fuller knowledge and understanding when she recognizes the role she plays in her mother's life. She recognizes and accepts the dependence of her "elderly child" (201) but will no longer allow herself to be influenced and inhibited by her.

The beginning of self-understanding shows itself in Rachel's thoughts. "I am not neutral -- I am not detached -- I know it. But neither are you, and you do not know it." (251) She does not try to converse her truths, however, and, knows as a substitute that they will stay behind hidden, but by the close of the novel she has also realized that life cannot, and to be sure need not, be other than it is. It is her discernment of her life and her capacity to control her own life that matters. What has brought her finally to this realization is an experience similar to Hagar's with Murray F. Lees. Rachel's saviour in this case is Hector Jonas, the man who has taken over her father's business. Set apart initially by his chosen profession, Hector is another outsider who appears, like Calla, to have reached amity with himself. He's able to answer her questions about her father's life, and also, by extension, those about her own. "I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most," Hector tells her (124), although at first she is unable to accept the contention that destiny is in the hand of the individual. "Hector Jones said my father got the life he wanted most. I don't *know* what they're talking about. As though people did get what they wanted." (165).

After considering the facts, however, she is forced to admit that there is something to what Hector says, for "If my father had wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different. Did he ever try to alter it? Did I, with mine?" (124-125). She is faced with the certainty about her own situation, and must, as she is in the process of changing her perceptions about her situation in life or realizing that she is responsible for her own life and capable of effecting change in it. This truth both sets her free and awakens a sense of regret for the life of her father, who was satisfied with so little. "If it's true he wanted that life most, why mourn why ever cease from mourning?" (125)

It is the union of Rachel's mishap upon Nick and Hector which finally grants her freedom. It is Hector who teaches her that it is "absurd to hold back" (122) and Nick who trains her to reach out to another human being for affection and console, even though they do not eventually answer her problem. As she loses her sense of guilt about the wasted life of her father, she realizes that the responsibility for her mother's life does not belong to her. "It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive. There is, suddenly, some enormous relief in this revelation." (195)

Rachel is absolved of her guilt about her father's life:

"I can't know what he was like. He isn't here to say, and even if he were, he wouldn't say, any more than Mother does. "Whatever it was. That happened with either of them, their mysteries remain theirs. I don't need to know. It isn't necessary. I have my own." (198).

Rachel is suddenly aware of what is happening in her life and is thus able to assume control over it. No longer will she feel that "everything in my life seems a chance encounter, and everything that happens to me is permanent." (150) She will

have, if not complete control, at least partial control over what will happen to her from now on. George Bowering in his essay "That Fool of a Fear". *A Place to Stand On* comments : "Her early weakness and confusion, her thirty-five-year old character traits are still there, at the end of the life. They are just not so bad now" (173).

Rachel expresses the essence of her experience of growth to self-realization when she finally turns from her dream world to the sight of her other eyes. The layers of dream are so many, so many false membranes grown around the mind, that : "I don't even know they are there until some knifing reality cuts through, and I see the sight of my other eyes for what it lies been, distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearably a joke if viewed from outside". (15). After such a vision, Rachel is no longer able to draw back to her daydream world.

"I thought if the old game could be persuaded and fabricated up once more, it would be a way of seeing the days through by not seeing them. A gate closed, quite quietly, and when I tried to open it again, it wouldn't it. There wasn't any way around it. No way in, not there, not any more". (182-83)

She realizes that she hasn't so much in need of the dream world now, either, for "there never was any reason to be afraid. It was only my nervousness, conjuring up dragons to scare myself with." (156-57) She has not, she knows, changed utterly "will be different. I will remain the same." (201) but her new awareness and her willingness to face and cope with her isolation "I will be lonely, almost certainly." (202) will give her the strength she needs' to survive. Rachel has succeeded in altering her perceptions of her life. Our realization of this gives us hope for her future. She has taken the actions necessary to gain control over her life and willpower live it with more dignity, just as Hagar is able to die with dignity. Although she will always

remain susceptible to human being alone, she will nonetheless be able to live more plentifully through her acceptance of the value of and responsibility for her own life.

Rachel presupposes that it is because his mother Grace whom she knew at school does not care about her son. She assumes too that Grace cannot possibly understand James' genius as she can. During their interview Rachel discovers that Grace cherishes her clever son as much as she herself does and with more right. There's the rub again when Nick shows Rachel a photograph of a boy of six looking very much like himself. She assumes that it is a photo of a son of his whereas it is in reality a picture of himself, Nick is not married. Rachel's child is as illusory as the son in the photograph. Neither has any substance. Both are figments of Rachel's imagination. How ironical, too that Rachel makes a fool of herself with the son of the Ukrainian milkman whom her mother who are representing the respectable Scots community in Manawaka looks down upon. Not only does she break the moral code laid down by these people she breaks the social code as well as in choosing to make Rachel love a man of Ukrainian origin.

Rachel herself sees it as sarcastic that when she has no one else to turn to she goes to Calla whom she has shunned all summer. Somehow, she mechanically knows that, Calla will not make judgments alone of the people in town. The greatest of all the ironies is contained in the incident in Dr Craven's office. Dr. Craven has known Rachel since she was a baby and now she is going to him to disclose that she is "a fallen woman" as she pictures. When she confesses to having missed a period the doctor benevolently eliminates the possibility of a pregnancy. The psychological pain and dread experienced by Rachel during the physical examination as she waits the dreadful instant when he will have to inform those words is the climax of the story. This is replaced by panic which the doctor supposes to be caused by the fear of

cancer. The sorrow at the loss of her baby and fury at the cruel God who has played such a jest on her making her suffer so much for so little.

The finding that Rachel has a tumour brings with it the prospect that she has cancer and will die. Death plays a predominant role in the novel as it does in all Margaret Laurence's novels. Rachel and her mother live above the funeral parlour where her father used to carry out his unexplained duties as an undertaker. It is now owned by Hector Jonas who as, any typical North American entrepreneur would have installed a blue neon sign which flashes Japonica Funeral Chapel and offends Rachel's sense of propriety. The sign becomes a symbol of the changing attitude of the town to the subject of death. Rachel is preoccupied by the recollection of her father and the fact that he worked with bodies protecting them painting them to look lively. She begins to suppose that he favoured the dead to the living; many questions were posed like: whether he was more at home with his corpse than with warm flesh and blood, if he hated poignant living human beings, why her mother seemed to come alive when her father had died, Was there any association here with what he had seen on the battleground about which he could not bear to talk, but no answers to the questions were found, Rachel feels herself somehow dead too stiff and cold like a corpse.

Rachel forces herself to use her mother's discarded douche she is drawn downstairs to the place of death her father's domain. She feels she has killed something alive. At the same time because she values herself so little she cannot believe that anything living could come from here In Hector's place of employment she finds a kind of console and harmony. His straightforward approach to death and his connections with it make it possible to see his as a job of work like everyone. Formerly, she had never been accepted to go down into her father's province, she had

imagined it as a place of repugnant secrets and gruesome sights. At last, she is able to see her father in a different angle when Hector emphasizes that he feels Niall Cameron had the life he wanted.

Rachel realises that he had been free to choose to change but he had not. She is free moreover she can change. The modification has already begun when Rachel is able to allow Hector to put his arm around her shoulder without her shying away at once physical touch, she is learning, can be a comfort Rachel's descent into the underworld of the dead, the funeral home. In this symbolic way each must reach down into her deepest self to get free of her ghosts and free herself from the dead hand of the past. Each is unwittingly aided in this process of catharsis by a very ordinary little man, in one case an insurance salesman, in the other an undertaker. Both are connected with death. The irony is obvious. Both of the women face up to the death of beloved men, mourn them and Let them go. Rachel makes it possible for her to move on, rather than mark time as she has been doing. The last time Rachel and Nick make Love, and she cries out inwardly, "Give me my children", Nick suddenly draws her attention to the fact that the cemetery can be seen from where they lie, symbolising in a sinister way the death of their relationship Rachel has her process, signalling the death of her imaginary child. During her stay in hospital she fantasises about Nick for a day; but finally, she accepts that hope of anything from him must die too. "A gate closed quite quietly, and when I tried to open it again, it wouldn't. There wasn't any way round it. No way in, not there, not any more. Visa cancelled" (183).

The definiteness of Rachel's words is clearly identifiable under the anaesthetic during her operation Rachel mumbles "I am the mother now." The child Rachel is dead. She will now take the dominant role in organising hers and her mother's lives.

She comes to comprehend for the first time too that her mother clings to her so because she is scared of death. She decides to make a clean break with her past. They will go away to Vancouver where she will have a new job in a new environment and can make a fresh start.

Rachel has stopped to worry about what others will think she is able to take a more positive stance. In the past she has been paralysed by fear, which meant that she always saw her Life in terms of what she could not do, lest she be made to look foolish. However, having become a fool she finds the fear worse than the fact. Moreover, for the first time she stops thinking so much about herself and can look outwards actually to see other people in a more charitable light. Her new clarity of vision regarding herself can now include others, to whose needs she had previously been blind. As she talks to Nick 's mother and father she silently acknowledges that "Nick had his own demons and webs.... he had to draw away, knowing that what I wanted from him was too much." (189) In her farewell conversation with Willard Siddley she recognises his lack of confidence and his need for an affirmation of himself as a colleague, headmaster and even as a man. In addition, she suddenly realises that she is hearing people differently.

Rachel's attitude to her mother and to Calla has been crucial serving as an indication of her frame of mind throughout the novel. In the beginning her mother embodies all those attributes of Manawaka society which Rachel secretly questions but has not the courage to openly oppose. In her interminable dialogue with herself she forever examines the validity of the beliefs and evaluations which Mrs Cameron expresses on behalf of all respectable Manawakans. Rachel's new view of things makes it possible to recognise that there are also some ways to do things. One of these is to take responsibility for her own life and to make decisions which are hers alone.

She will not abandon her mother but she will no longer be shamed into inaction. To Mrs. Cameron this appears callous, but in fact Rachel's sharpened insight improves her ability to comprehend her mother's need for love and reassurance in the face of her unspoken dread of Loneliness and death.

Rachel is a mother now. As the bus carries them to their new life in Vancouver, Rachel says with compassion, "Beside me sleeps my elderly child." (201) There is no longer the confusion of roles expressed earlier in the words: "Surely I Love her as much as most parents love their children. I mean of course as much as most children love their parents. (114) In the early chapters of the novel Rachel's unwilling friendship with Calla Mackie symbolises her attitude to life. She finds it difficult to give herself to any relationship. Calla's proprietary manner, her eccentric mode of dress, her apparent total lack of taste and her devotion to a freakish manifestation of Christianity all offend Rachel's sense of the fitness of things. Calla appears to lack all those qualities which society considers womanly moreover, she does not seem to mind looking outlandish.

Rachel is ashamed of her embarrassment and repugnance "her taste in furnishings seems so horrible to me that it creates a kind of horrible snobbishness in me" (133). Calla embodies the whole thing that Rachel wants above all else. To keep away from her own understanding, has opened her eyes which is she able to appreciate Calla for what she is - a loyal, loving woman who makes no judgments and holds nothing back. She is capable and independent, realistic in her expectations, and optimistic in personality. Most significant, Rachel sees for the first time how very alone her friend really is. "Calla, listening in the early morning or in the darkness for some sound." (137) "Calla, pillar of tabernacle, speaker in tongues, mother of canaries and budgerigars." (198) These words are spoken with real pity and understanding.

Calla too could weep for her unborn children. By her reconsideration of Calla's worth, Rachel reveals her own growth in love and sympathy. In the end she can bear to say that she doubts that things are not different; she can recognize the love that Calla offered her though its lesbian overtones once shocked her. Calla voices what we feel Rachel would now be able to say- "I'll survive." (198)

As the novel ends, Rachel reveals how much she has changed when she says that she feels nothing any more. There is a sense of peace and calm after the hurricane. She can now accept whatever life brings. It may be better; it may not. Something, or nothing, may happen. She will be "light and straight as any feather" and "will drift and settle and drift and settle." (201) The image of the feather appears earlier when Rachel first thinks she is pregnant and is searching frantically for a solution. After an incident at the bus station, she catches a glimpse of herself "thin, stiff white feather like a goose's feather caught up and hurtled along by some wind no one else could feel" (153) There the image suggests someone driven along unwillingly by an uncontrollable force. Now she is in control; she can let things happen. She will be the same in many ways but in the most imperative way of all she will be different. She will be able to take things less gravely perhaps even laugh in time. She has survived.

Rachel Cameron, struggles against patriarchal ideologies that specify rigid social roles for women. As space in Manawaka is categorized, so are its inhabitants. As a young, unmarried woman without her biological children, Rachel has neither the privileged status of mother nor the security of being a part of a couple. She is victimized by a myth of normalcy, which women are expected to enact within strict specifications dictated by patriarchal structures. She takes on the roles of teacher, daughter, hostess, sister, mother, virgin, lover, friend, fool, eccentric. She is relaxing

in none of these roles and is in constant demonstration within herself. She struggles with words as she struggles within her skin. She struggles with influence and domination, especially in the roles of teacher, virgin and lover. Only near the end of the novel does she accept flux as part of her reality. The fear that Rachel expresses at the beginning of the novel “God forbid that I should turn into an eccentric” (8) becomes at the end of the novel, acceptance and anticipation of this most marginal, least static role: “I may become, in time, slightly more eccentric all the time.... I will ask myself if I am going mad, but if I do, I won’t know it” (209). Rachel no longer fears becoming an eccentric. Rather, she looks forward to the liberation that being an eccentric brings.

Rachel is realistic enough in her self-appraisal to admit she “will quite frequently push the doors marked Pull and pull the ones marked Push (202) This single sentence with its multiple imagery of the individual who cannot get in or out who cannot escape from or may not enter into life completely sums up her dilemma. But she can learn to read the signs and make aware decisions. During the learning process which she has undergone she has come to recognise how much her view of what is right proper and desirable is the result of conditioning - the acquisition of a Manawakan Scottish Presbyterian set of values with its emphasis on decorum. Donald Cameron in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* comments: “She has been subjected to the suffocating pressure of parents’ society religion” (133) to such an extent that she will never be totally free from this inheritance. Rachel knows she will be taking these built-in prejudices with her, just as she is taking her mother who symbolises them, to Vancouver. The difference is that Rachel is in charge. She has liberated herself enough to be able to come to terms with the Legacy of her Manawaka past. Her survival will be based on self-knowledge, compassion for others

and the willingness to take risks. Her final words are a request for mercy and grace, but first of all she opens her heart in pity for the terrible Loneliness of God.

To her mother's request against the move when she mentions her poor health, Rachel replies, "It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I am not responsible for keeping her alive" (202). There is, suddenly, some emotional relief in this realization. The life of Rachel seems to be very prospective as she takes responsibility of her life, devices plans and takes her own decisions. It shows that Rachel marks her achievement. The decision to take up a job in Vancouver and thus move out of Manawaka. Rachel finally breaks free of her mother's domination over her.