

**CLASS AND STRATIFICATION IN THE WORKS OF
ALICE MUNRO AND MARGARET LAURENCE**

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who have encouraged me throughout my studies.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of images and issues of class in the fiction of Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro. The Introduction examines the impact of previous critical examinations of class in Canadian literature and the role of such studies in determining the lack of research done in this area. Chapter one focuses on the class structure in Canadian society, examining how myths of classlessness have infiltrated our literary criticism. Chapter two looks at the fiction of Alice Munro, with specific focus on the interaction between class and gender, and the influence of class on the development of the sexual identity of women. Chapter three examines images of class in the Manawaka fiction of Margaret Laurence. The class-bound nature of an individual's perspective is examined in terms of how characters identify and define themselves in relation to other class groups in Manawakan society, such as the Métis. Laurence's fiction is further examined in terms of the inherently destructive and anachronous nature of ideologies concerning class-based superiority in contemporary Canadian culture. Finally, the Conclusion suggests that images and issues of class in are not merely present in Canadian literature, but that they are central concerns in the texts examined.

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INTRODUCTION

Canadian literature, writes Robert L. McDougall in his 1963 essay "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature," demonstrates "little evidence of... a genuine feeling for class" (226); it is marked, according to McDougall, by its "abnormal absence of feeling for class and of concern for what the class structure can do in a developing society to make or mar the life of the individual" (217). McDougall's essay has been the basis for numerous assertions that class and social stratification are, essentially, non-issues in Canadian literature. I propose that it is time to reexamine such assertions. Canadian literature is not, nor has it ever been, classless. Rather, the perception of Canadian literature as classless has been shaped by socially pervasive myths concerning the nature of Canadian society, myths which are ideologically supported, to a degree, by our literature, but more so by our literary criticism and how we choose to read and write about our national literature.

In "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk," McDougall contends that there is a "correlation between the kind of society which has evolved in [Canada] and the kind of literature it has produced" (216). Canadian society, according to McDougall, is "moribund and doesn't know it" (217), an assertion which he founds on what he perceives as Canada's stagnant class system, a system which he feels

Canadians passively accept without question. McDougall sees in our literature the same problems faced by Canadian society; Canadian literature, he asserts, possesses a “climate of thought and feeling that is frigid and constrained” (217). He thus concludes that within our literature “the response to the problem of individual freedom within the social structure [is] negligible” (230). McDougall’s argument has greatly influenced both literary and sociological Canadian critics, resulting in numerous researchers’ scantily informed dismissal of Canadian literature as classless. This, clearly, was not his intention; as an essay expressing what McDougall feels is an ominous silence concerning class in Canadian literature, this critical work was, ironically, meant to lead others to question the homogenous and hegemonic nature of our literature. Rather, this ominous silence has seemingly infected our literary criticism, for since McDougall’s article there have been few critical examinations of class in Canadian literature, a critical silence which has perhaps resulted in the perpetuation of Canadian literature’s classless image.¹

Issues and images of class in Canadian literature have thus been largely neglected by contemporary literary study. Like Canadian society, our literature has been inaccurately identified as classless and is thus perceived as unconcerned with both social issues and class inequity. This misconception has been supported by

¹ Significantly, this appears to be a trend in criticism in general; Angelika Bammer observes that the influence of class in literature and literary criticism is “much less acknowledged,” and “*how* it is a factor remains largely unexamined” (Mastery 240). Lillian S. Robinson, in her book, Sex, Class, and Culture, observes that “the literary profession has chosen to ignore the class nature of the categories and standards it employs” (5).

influential sociologists like John Porter, who, in his article, “The Canadian Character in the Twentieth Century,” asserts that “Canadian literary themes have little social reference” (53).² Significantly, due to a lack of other available critical works concerning class in Canada, Porter and others founded their assumptions on a single piece of literary criticism - McDougall’s study.³ Beyond McDougall’s essay, previous literary examinations of class in Canadian literature have focused on the writing or representation of a single class (usually the working-class). Such a limited focus is, however, dangerously myopic, as it isolates a class level, removing it from the system of stratification through which it is developed and defined. This thesis considers the Canadian system of stratification in a holistic manner, thus addressing class levels as interrelated components of a pervasive and multifaceted system. Examining the stratification system as a whole enables the identification of how power is maintained by certain groups at the expense of others, and how hegemony is perpetuated through the transmission of class-based ideologies both between and within class groups.

One of few exceptions to the persistent neglect of class issues in Canadian literature is the 1970’s series of studies completed by J. Paul Grayson and L. M.

² See also M. Patricia Marchak, who contends that “Canadian novels reinforce [a] classless image of Canada. They are not, in the main, about classes, let alone class struggles” (cited in Grayson, “Ideologies” 266), and Zureik and Pike, who suggest that our literature supports a “bland consensus” and thus “social class does not play a significant role in Canadian fiction” (Socialization 22).

³ See Grayson and Grayson, “Class and Ideologies of Class in the English-Canadian Novel.” Grayson and Grayson observe that the authors cited “base their impressions on literary critic McDougall’s “The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature” (266).

Grayson, which subjected McDougall's assertions to sociological examination. McDougall founded his arguments on two premises. The first, that Canadian culture is marked by "inhibitions so strong as to all but rule out the possibility of a dynamic theory of social mobility" (217), is widely accepted and documented by numerous sociologists who concur that there is a "tory streak" in Canadian society (Grayson "English" 426).⁴ In terms of class, this conservative streak is manifested in Canada's acceptance of inequalities and social hierarchies as natural and based on individual merit, an acceptance which clearly precludes recognition of social inequities as maintained by structural barriers. Grayson and Grayson, however, dispute McDougall's second assertion, which assumes that Canadian literature's ostensible classlessness is due to the majority of authors belonging "to a single social group identifiable with a university-based Establishment" (218). Finding that the "presumed classlessness in Canadian literature . . . cannot be traced to the middle-class background of Canadian writers" ("Elite" 291), Grayson and Grayson conclude that the supposed lack of concern for class in our literature is thus "related to factors other than the class background of our writers" ("Elite" 307).⁵

⁴ See Forcese, Grayson and Grayson, Pike, Porter, and Zureik.

⁵ Grayson and Grayson's study, "The Canadian Literary Elite: A Socio-Historical Perspective," is a study of the "presumed" classlessness in Canadian literature which finds that the "middle-class background of Canadian writers" is not necessarily a factor in the ostensible homogeneity and classlessness of Canadian writing. They assert that "the literary elite, in a number of ways, is more representative of the population than elites defined in terms of institutional position" (291). As McDougall claimed that class concerns in British and American writing are more prominent than in Canadian, Grayson and Grayson founded their study on a comparative data project, examining differences between the backgrounds of Canadian and British authors.

Such other factors influencing the perception of Canadian literature as classless, I suggest, are to be found in how Canadian society constructs itself ideologically.

The notion that Canada is classless is, as previously mentioned, a secure myth in our society, one which is widely accepted regardless of the reality of Canada's inequitable social stratification system. While perpetuating the image that Canada is a meritocracy, our ideological institutions maintain class inequality through such means as the standardization of language and the privileging of class-based notions concerning culture in Canadian society. Furthermore, as most major institutions are controlled by the upper and middle-class of Canadian society, such groups are able to practice a self-protective and exclusionary power, enabling them to determine the norms and mores of society, which in turn become accepted as natural and self-evident, thus excluding those who do not share these values. The Canadian class-system, as the means through which the allocation of power and privilege in our society is determined, is thus a rigid and pervasive system of inequality. This reality, however, is clearly in conflict with Canada's construction of itself ideologically as a classless, meritocratic society.

Neither Canadian society, nor our literature, is classless. The presumed classlessness of Canadian literature has according to Grayson and Grayson, never existed, as they contend that "class and ideologies of class have found embodiment in English-Canadian novels more or less continuously since the early nineteenth century" (Ideologies 266), images and ideologies which have perhaps been dismissed because they signal a "general acceptance of the class structure" (English

423), rather than overtly presenting images of rebellion. Significantly, this acceptance of the class structure clearly indicates that such texts are enmeshed in class discourses, as they are engaged in a cultural and ideological maintenance of class-based values. Grayson and Grayson further observed an alteration in this acceptance of class ideologies, forecasting a change in the ostensibly hegemonic nature of Canadian literature: “[s]hould the trend of the last century or so continue, a future decrease [in the acceptance of the class structure] can be . . . expected” (English 443). The perception of Canadian literature as classless has thus been founded on belief rather than reality, and it is a belief that is becoming increasingly difficult to accept as images of class become more prominent in our literature.

Clearly, Canadian literature has changed greatly in the two decades since Grayson and Grayson’s studies. As the Canadian canon has begun to open up to women writers and writers of non-majority groups, the illusion of Canadian literature as classless has become an anachronous discourse which is nonetheless widely accepted and perpetuated in our literary criticism. Perhaps McDougall’s concerns about Canadian authors’ affiliation with a “university-based Establishment” are concerns that would have been better directed at our literary critics. The omission of the concept of class from literary study, and our refusal to interpret our literature in terms of class indicates our complicity in maintaining misleading discourses concerning Canada’s ostensibly open and equitable society.

The first chapter of this study defines all terms pertaining to class and stratification used in this study. Current, relevant sociological theory on the class

system in Canadian society is examined, with particular focus on the influence of class on the psychic and social identity of an individual. The role of heritage in the creation of an individual's sense of class status is addressed, as, for immigrants, the disparity between an individual's class position in their country of origin and their status in Canadian society has a substantial impact on the formation of their identity as a Canadian citizen. Language, as an influential means of perpetuating class inequity, is examined with particular focus on how the standardization of language, literacy, and, as a result, of literature, functions to exclude certain groups from obtaining these means of entering into discourse with other, more powerful class-based groups. The interrelated nature of class, culture, and power is also addressed in terms of the middle-class's authority in determining what are considered to be components of Canadian culture. Problems and assumptions encountered when approaching class from a literary basis are considered, with a brief examination of the class-based nature of assumptions concerning what constitutes proper literature. This chapter concludes with a discussion of my reasons for choosing to examine class in Canadian literature in terms of the stratification system. The examination of literary representations of the Canadian class stratification system as a whole, I believe, resolves some of the complications inherent in examining class groups from a literary perspective. By investigating the system of stratification rather than isolating a single class group, it is possible to escape what Angelika Bammer, in her article, "Mastery," terms "self-blind altruism" (245). Looking at class from an academic perspective runs the risk of

creating an “us” (academic students) and a “them” (working-class) dichotomy; this may be avoided by examining class in a manner which recognizes the role of other class groups and inescapably class-based institutions play in creating and maintaining class inequalities in Canadian society.

The class inequalities of Canadian society are present in the stratified, small-town settings of Margaret Laurence’s and Alice Munro’s fiction. These fictional towns, I suggest in my second and third chapters, act as microcosms, representing on a smaller scale the class-based stratification present in contemporary Canadian culture. Both Munro and Laurence examine how the occupants of such towns struggle within the restrictive, class confines of their communities, investigating how the characters achieve social mobility (upward or downward), cross class boundaries, and suffer the effects of these upon their psychic and social sense of identity. Additionally, Munro and Laurence illustrate the possibility of escaping class positions, the methods used in becoming seemingly classless, and the relationship between class and heritage.

The fiction of Alice Munro is overtly concerned with the interaction between class and gender identity. In Lives of Girls and Women, and Who Do You Think You Are?, Munro focuses on the tensions between the “working” class and “upper” class in terms of values and lifestyle, and she examines how class influences Del Jordan’s (Lives) and Rose’s (Who Do You) psychic and social identity. Her texts further indicate an awareness of how social class is mapped on the literal landscape of Canadian society, and of how social and geographical boundaries serve to

maintain hegemony within class-based groups. Munro also investigates how class and gender interact to relegate impoverished women to an underclass position in Canadian society, a disempowered status which seemingly determines both the economic and social value of their being, and which further determines the social valuation of their sexuality. Munro suggests that women's underclass position makes them not only subject to social and ideological control, but that it further subjects impoverished women to the sexual control of middle-class men who use their class privilege to construct these women's sexuality in a self-serving and utterly devalued manner.

Margaret Laurence's fictional communities are more dynamic than Munro's, including representations of immigrant populations and the Métis. The class status of those belonging to the Métis population aids in examining the stratification of Manawaka society, but their experience, significantly, is limited to the perception and attitudes of the typically majority-group narrator. Through the limited perspective of the narrator, Laurence examines how the perception of class-based and ethnic groups in Manawakan society is inevitably bound to one's own class status. This is a particular focus in The Diviners, in which Morag Gunn observes her power to interpret and record the experiences of others, a power which she recognizes is inevitably influenced by her own experiences and perception. Laurence's work thus examines how dominant groups in Canadian society identify themselves in relation to other groups within Canadian society, and it further examines how the middle-class assumes the privilege of defining the roles and

opportunities of those excluded from their ranks. This middle-class authorial power, Laurence suggests, functions to perpetuate and legitimize existing class relationships. Her concern with the middle-class also stems from this group's generational transmission of ideologies concerning social superiority, ideologies which oppress groups like the Métis while simultaneously oppressing younger generations within the middle-class group itself. Thus, the inheritance of class-based ideals is suggested by Laurence to be socially destructive. Laurence charts a multi-generational trend in the collapse of such restrictive and racist ideologies, observing that past class-based ideals form a dangerous presence in contemporary society, both for those whom they oppress, and, though clearly to a lesser degree, for those whom they privilege.

Canadian literature is not the moribund, stagnant cultural presence that McDougall once feared. Rather, authors like Munro and Laurence express a strong sense of the impact class position has on individuals and groups within Canadian society, and their literature is extremely concerned with the lack of freedom experienced by some existing within our inequitable system of stratification. Class-based concerns are unequivocally voiced in their literature, but they are not fully addressed in our criticism. Class, if mentioned at all in our critical literary studies, is given a passing acknowledgment; it is identified as a factor in shaping our literature and our criticism, but it remains unexplored and undiscussed. This omission signals complicity, it indicates our acceptance of social inequity, and it

identifies our refusal to recognize how our academic institutions continue to participate in discourses of exclusion and class-based elitism.

CHAPTER ONE

Perceived as an open society with relatively accessible opportunities for social advancement, Canada has in the past been considered a meritocracy, and to a large degree in present society, it is viewed as a country that is, essentially, classless. In reality, however, Canadian society is marked by its rigid and structurally pervasive system of class-based inequality. This reality of the stratification system is obscured by ideologically secure myths which perpetuate conflicting discourses of Canadian society as simultaneously classless and meritocratic, discourses that create the image of Canada as a “promised land” of readily achieved wealth and status. A conflict thus exists between the manufactured and widely accepted illusions of the Canadian class system, and the actuality of its inflexible and discriminatory order. The Canadian system of stratification possesses, as Dennis Forcese notes in his book, The Canadian Class Structure, “extremes of wealth and poverty” (33), extremes that are ideologically inconsistent with Canada’s preferred cultural myths. This ideological construction of class in Canada has had a substantial impact on the reality of its citizens; it has shaped how Canadians perceive opportunity and upward mobility in Canadian society, and it has necessitated the complicity of powerful ideological institutions in reconciling discrepancies between socially accepted illusions of class in Canada, and the

actuality of its pervasive class-based inequity. The transmission of illusory ideologies by such systems as the school, church, and government emphasizes the fundamental role played by such institutions in both establishing and perpetuating the social myths of Canadian society. Additionally, the institutionalized and ideological nature of class discourses suggests that the self-maintaining and exploitative nature of Canada's class system may reside less in unequal divisions of economic wealth than in the manner in which images of class, and expectations of those belonging to a class group, are negotiated - and fabricated - in Canadian culture.

Class is a complex and loaded term. Rodney Stark, a sociologist, defines a class as a group of people who share a "similar position in the stratification system" (667), a position which is usually measured in economic terms. Focusing on the economics of class, however, as Nicholas Coles observes in his article on working-class literature, tends to obscure other components of class inequity. Coles argues that class is an "institutionalized practice of dominance and subordination on which the social order is founded" (Democratizing Literature 672), a system which unequally distributes both rewards and opportunities among individuals in a society. Class is clearly both an economic concept and a social construct; it is, as Anthony Giddens asserts, "a mediate relation between the economic and the non-economic, [it is]. . . a mode of structuration, a set of constitutive relays linking economic identities with social identities" (Giddens cited in Dimock/Glimore 3). An individual's class position may become the means

by which he or she is socially identified, potentially becoming this person's sole defining feature, a feature which is perceived as indicative of innate abilities or social worth. It is thus crucial to acknowledge, as Dimock and Gilmore suggest in their book, Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations, that class is a "relationally derived construct rather than a self-executing entity" (Dimock/Gilmore 3). Class, then, is an economic and social value judgment that is imposed on individuals who share a similar position in the stratification system, an appraisal which is often mistakenly believed to be indicative of a person or group's innate abilities and value.

Class cannot be examined without the consideration of other interrelated and interactive factors, such as culture, gender, race and ethnicity. As Dimock and Gilmore suggest, "the operations of class necessarily involve an entire spectrum of interdependent terms" (3), which must be acknowledged without "making causality a one-directional phenomenon, and without attributing to [any]. . . term a determinative weight" (3). All components that influence an individual's class position must be considered equally. Without this consideration, the risk of ignoring class and attributing inequalities solely to ascribed characteristics¹ is imminent, a misconception which attributes inequality to "other factors, such as

¹ Ascribed status, according to Stark, is a "position assigned to individuals or groups without regard for merit but because of certain traits beyond their control, such as their race, their sex, or the social standing of their parents" (665). Conversely, "achieved status" refers to social or economic standing that is gained through individual merit.

language or ethnicity, and not. . .class” (Forcese 32), and which inevitably aids in perpetuating the myth that Canada is a classless society.

Many Canadians are ambivalent about Canada’s imagined classlessness, and thus their awareness of class differences is coupled with a desire to deny them.

Dennis Forcese, in his book, The Canadian Class Structure, observes that Canadians “ten[d] to deny the notion that there are social classes in Canada, even as they undoubtedly [are] guardedly aware of inequalities” (32). This denial of social classes suggest that the illusion of classlessness is culturally significant to those living within its discourses. Founded on an ideal that once held some basis in reality, this myth constitutes a socially extinct concept which has its roots, as John Porter suggests in his influential study of class in Canada, The Vertical Mosaic, in “an earlier historical period of. . . society, its golden age perhaps, [an age] which. . .is held up, long after it has been transformed into something else, as a model way of life” (3). Forcese also notes that the image of classlessness is related to Canadian heritage; he asserts that “class is perceived as an ‘old country’ concept, not relevant in a ‘new’ settler nation” (32). Canada’s colonial history has thus aided in the construction of the ostensible classlessness of Canadian society. The settlers of Canada, as Neil ten Kortenaar suggests on his article on postcolonialism and Margaret Laurence, brought with them their colonial notions of the land as a “blank, unpeopled landscape on which a future history [would] be written,” a vision which thus ignored “both the names given to that landscape by the indigenous peoples and the fate of those peoples” (11). While envisioning a

classless society for immigrants of white European descent, the settlers of Canada simultaneously imposed a map of class on the Canadian landscape which excluded the Native people, and which was characterized by the racial discrimination present in European society. Social and class values remained tied to old-world concepts of propriety and social standing, and, as Margaret Osachoff observes in her article, "Colonialism in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," "the mother-country [remained] the source of all standards, the home of culture and civilization" (229). The land and indigenous people of the colonized territory were thus perceived as innately inferior to the cultured, civilized homeland.

The myth of classlessness continues, however, to be perpetuated by more recent immigrants to Canada. As Tamara J. Palmer suggests in her article, "The Fictionalization of the Vertical Mosaic," many immigrants to Canada are seeking a classless society; they come with the hope of exchanging exploitation and oppression in their country of origin for the "promised land" of Canada. In contrast to the rigid systems of stratification in some countries, contemporary Canadian society does offer a relatively open system in which success may be perceived as easily accessible. Rapid achievement of wealth and status were, and continue to be, a plausible attainment for numerous immigrants to Canadian society. The notion that Canada is a classless society, however, is based on the experiences of a select group, whose aforementioned colonial power and standards helped to shape the Canadian stratification system. Forcese observes the homogenous and exclusive nature of this group, noting that "[t]he emergent class society of Canada

marginalized aboriginal populations but embraced generation after generation of 'old country' migrants, nurturing the myth of boundless opportunity and classlessness" (18). Those who rapidly advanced in the emerging stratification system were not only the creators of the system, but they also determined what ascribed characteristics would be privileged, and which would be discounted.

Clearly, the colonization of the Native people indicates that Canada has never been a classless society, and that the possibility of classlessness and boundless opportunity is, essentially, a privilege that is only granted to a select group within Canadian society.

Consequently, this myth of classlessness has had a profound and misleading influence on Canadians' perceptions of access to social mobility. As opposed to estate or caste-based systems of stratification, societies like Canada, which are constructed around social classes, possess a comparatively open and flexible system. Theoretically, upward mobility is both "accepted" and "encouraged" in Canada (Forcese 16); it is the expected goal of all individuals who do not already belong to the middle or upper class.² The actual crossing of class boundaries,

² Class groups in Canadian society can be divided into four categories. The "upper class" is a group possessing substantial wealth and power, which are usually shared among families and maintained by inheritance. They differ from other class groups by a consciousness of their shared and privileged position. The "middle class" is typically, in Canada, a large and homogenous group that is economically secure, but which is not as privileged as those in the upper class group. This group is the most benefited by the educational system, a system which aids individuals in maintaining their middle-class position. Due to the large and insular nature of this group, the middle class is not, as a whole, very aware of those who exist on either extreme of the stratification system, and thus tend to perceive their norms and morés as self-evident and natural. This group is also noted for its "cult of respectability," high "educational standards" and "standard of living and ideals of

however, is not as readily accepted or achieved as our cultural ideals suggest. Rather, advancement across class lines is often viewed as more of a transgression than an achievement, and the individual who attains upward mobility may be received with suspicion and hostility. Additionally, that individual may experience alienation from their friends and family who remain in their original class position, and they may confront animosity from those in the new class group who fear that their position will be made redundant by the upwardly mobile individual. The relatively homogenous nature of the Canadian middle-class also complicates the upward mobility of citizens of different ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds. Yet despite these contradictions and difficulties involved in upward mobility, the opportunity for advancement, if not the reality, remains an important ideal in Canadian society.

Many Canadians who are aware of class stratification in Canada believe it to be resulting from what they perceive as the meritocratic nature of Canadian society (Forcese 33). This misconception has been somewhat altered by recent economic

family life" (Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 193). Additionally, middle-class lifestyle is "usually associated with town life" (Dictionary 193), rather than rural or urban. The working-class occupies a lower economic and social status in society. This group is more likely to be impoverished, have "lower incomes, less job security and more unemployment" (Dictionary 273). They also have "fewer chances of a structured career. . . and less chance of success within the educational system" (Dictionary 273). Finally, their consciousness is dual in nature: "people simultaneously reject and accept the social, economic and political structures that create such inequalities, and their views are incoherent" (Dictionary 273). The last group, the subclass or underclass, includes women and ethnic minorities, groups that are relegated to the "lowest-paid, least secure and most unpleasant occupations" (Dictionary 256). They are differentiated from the working-class by their ascribed characteristics, and their chances of achieving upward mobility are more strongly structurally and ideologically barricaded.

recession and mass corporate down sizing (Forcese 33), yet it remains particularly pervasive in the middle-class, perhaps due to that class's work ethic and emphasis on education. In a meritocracy, upward mobility is reliant on the effort exerted by the individual. Those who fail to achieve social advancement are perceived as either lazy or unintelligent, and thus the responsibility for an individual's class position is placed entirely on that individual, a belief which ignores inherited disadvantages, racial and ethnic discrimination, and the structural barriers enforced by powerful ideological institutions. Consequently, the notion that each individual "deserves" the social standing in which they are located is perpetuated, and Canadians are, as Porter observes, "taught that we succeed or fail by our own efforts," a notion which he asserts is "readily accepted" by middle-class persons (Mosaic 32).

The myth of meritocracy and its support from the middle-class is also evidenced in what Alfred A. Hunter, in his study entitled Class Tells: On Social Inequality in Canada, suggests is Canada's "tolerance for positional inequality" and "acceptance of *limitation*, of hierarchical patterns" (186 Italics his). In the Manawakan community of Margaret Laurence's fiction, I believe that this tolerance is partially reflected by the misconception that individuals possess the class position that they merit, but I suggest that it is also inevitably related to the fact that the vast majority of this society, like Canadian society, is comprised of those belonging to the middle-class, a group which is subtly stratified within its own ranks. This internal stratification may create, for middle-class people, the illusion of a meritocratic

social structure, as it offers relatively minor mobility within the middle-class group. Those living in extreme affluence or poverty on the periphery of Canadian society, however, are not truly considered. When such extreme stratified conditions are forced on the consciousness of middle-class Canadians, however, the notion of a meritocratic society is conveniently upheld; class boundaries are perceived as permeable and easily crossed, and failure to achieve upward mobility is viewed as resulting from individual apathy.

Essentially, Canadian society is structured around what Forcese identifies as a “duality or social contradiction,” in which it presents an image of classlessness founded on an “ideological commitment to . . . values such as freedom and equality,” while it is simultaneously “characterized. . . by institutional restraints and inequities” (3). Though somewhat tempered by the Canadian government through social welfare programs and “bureaucratic intervention,” class inequalities in Canada remain “institutionalized, reinforced and highly resistant to fundamental transformation” (Forcese 6). Consequently, class positions endure across generations, and the possibility of escaping one’s class is far more difficult than the myths of our society would suggest.

An individual’s struggle to improve his or her economic and social status is enormously influenced by their original class position, as “the opportunity for wealth, like wealth itself, has proved to be inheritable” (Forcese 2). Individuals inherit their class position from their parents, and their opportunities for advancement are also thus inherited. Ascribed status has the power to determine

the level of education an individual will achieve, their profession, and their potential for upward or downward mobility. As Forcese notes, “inherited benefits include not only wealth but access to such key institutions as universities and prestigious employers (17). Forcese’s list of inherited benefits may be extended to include social encouragement and the possession of a strong, positive sense of self-worth and social value. Families of “good name” and “good breeding” pass on their socially approved standing to their children, aiding succeeding generations in fostering a sense of innate social value. Conversely, children belonging to socially ostracized groups may inherit a sense of devaluation; they may see their family and class-base group portrayed negatively in the media, which may lead to the development of a correspondingly low sense of social value.

Perhaps equally formative as the inheritance of ascribed characteristics is the inheritance of class-bound perceptions and beliefs concerning one’s social status and class position. First and second generation Canadians may “inherit” their grandparents’ or parents’ class expectations, ideals which are bound to the relative’s position and status in their native country. Such expectations usually express a sense of dissatisfaction with the older individual’s relatively new class position in Canadian society. Immigrants entering Canada without the benefit of socially privileged ascribed characteristics often find that the stratification hierarchy is not one that is easily climbed, and consequently, they may, as Palmer suggests, experience a clash between their vision of Canada as a “land of opportunity” and the “harsh realities of the vertical mosaic” (Fictionalization 62).

This discrepancy is often paralleled with a disparity between the class status individuals previously held in their country of origin, and that possessed by them in Canadian society. Additionally, even if economic status remains comparable to that previously possessed, such status may be altered if individuals do not share the same ethnic heritage of the majority group in Canada.

The discrepancy between what individuals perceive as their rightful class position and their actual status in society can be psychologically difficult to reconcile. Upward or downward mobility can accentuate this tension, as both psychic and social identity are largely affected by change in class position. Social mobility causes a strain to develop, as Palmer notes, between “old and new, there and here, past and present self, perception and language” (524). For some, the chasm between these binary concepts cannot be bridged, and a discrepancy remains between their psychic, or internalized sense of class position, and their actual class and social status in Canadian culture. Consequently, an individual who experiences a drop in status may choose to uphold the ideals and image of their previous class affiliation, and those who achieve social advancement still may possess an internalized sense of social devaluation derived from their working-class or underclass position.

Entering a new class position, perhaps, is not unlike entering a new culture. Individuals must mediate between conflicting class ideologies and an altered, unfamiliar sense of class affiliation and status that may not be congruent with their sense of identity. Increasing tension between upwardly mobile individuals and

their relatives exacerbates the difficulty of adapting psychologically and socially to a new class position as upward mobility usually occurs in conjunction with assimilation, particularly in terms of language, Canadian customs, and class-related etiquette. As Renny Christopher suggests in his essay, "Cultural Borders," individuals who are upwardly mobile must mediate between "expectations on both sides," as they negotiate between their own expectations and aspirations, expectations which may be shared with family, and "those of the society which [they are] moving into" (53). Palmer notes that when a character achieves upward mobility in Canadian literature, the advancement is almost always accompanied by a "price of entry" to the new class position. Characters commonly find that the price exacted, such as a loss of ability to communicate with parents or friends, is not worth the often fleeting or illusory rewards. Thus, the task of adapting to a new class position, maintaining communication with one's family, and preserving one's cultural traditions, may be equally or more difficult than the actual achievement of the new class position itself, and the loss of a sense familial or cultural community may not be, for some individuals, worth the benefits of upward mobility.

Upward mobility, however, depending on the class heritage of an individual, is extremely difficult and unlikely. Opportunities to advance in Canadian society are restricted to those who already possess a degree of privilege, and upward mobility is often only achieved within the middle-class in the form of a minor movement occurring within an internal stratification system. Forcese asserts that the crossing of large and structurally maintained class boundaries, like that separating the

working-class from the middle-class, is extremely unlikely, arguing that “[m]ost working-class children are unlikely ever to achieve middle-class, let alone upper-class, status,” and conversely, “children of high-status individuals are unlikely to be downwardly mobile” (36). The rigidity and structurally secure nature of the Canadian stratification system denies, for most people, upward mobility. Consequently, rapid success and abandonment of an impoverished life are rarely achieved through education, advancement in one’s profession, or sudden wealth. Rather, those who achieve accelerated mobility must seemingly bypass the class and stratification system as a whole by achieving a celebrity status. This jump from impoverishment to celebrity status is usually, as Stark notes, reflective of “a lack of other avenues to wealth and fame” (327). Though such individuals ultimately may be located in a class and status category, they do not achieve this advancement by routinely climbing from one level to the next. Additionally, this accelerated mobility may be complicated by a large discrepancy between their psychic and social sense of status, a discrepancy that may be so great that they seemingly become classless, removed from that system of valuation by their very ability to move so rapidly within its perimeters, and removed by their lack of an accountable or normative status within that system. Such individuals may also find that they escape, at least temporarily, the defining power of one’s class position, as their crossing of class boundaries and placement in a celebrity role complicates their position as typically upper, middle, or lower class.

The power of a class label to define individuals and their options within society is especially insidious when considering gender. Women of “lower” class groups are regularly forced to confront their position as “Other” to the predominantly middle-class society of Canada. Nancy Mandell, in her book, Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality, asserts that “Otherness” can have a profound psychological impact on women; impoverished women, Mandell suggests, “live their [O]therness by giving up many needs, aspirations, and their sense of self - in fact, their self-reality” (114), resulting in an alienated sense of self and a “deep sense of isolation that is compounded by women’s social location” (115). As powerful positions in the workforce have traditionally been difficult for women to achieve due to discrimination on the basis of gender, women are confined to limited social roles and locations. The resulting feminization of poverty, as Lesley D. Harman observes, has the potential to place women in an “underclass,” locating them “both outside and below the class system. . . disenfranchis[ing] them from. . . society” (409).

Additionally, impoverished women typically feel trapped in their situation, finding that rather than “experiencing efficacy, a sense that they can alter their situation, poor women sense defeat” and feel that they are utterly “dismissed by society” (Mandell 47):

Since they do not see themselves reflected in television sitcoms, in magazine stories, or in billboard ads, poor women describe themselves as ‘observers of life,’ continually on the outside looking in. (47)

Impoverished women do not see themselves reflected in socially accepted images, and thus they are not given a sense of community or social belonging. Rather, the class position of an impoverished woman has the potential to become her only defining characteristic, for beyond a recognition of her poverty when she stands in line for her welfare cheque, such women are so socially alienated that they are completely removed from the social consciousness of Canadian society.

Within literature, class and gender issues are rarely addressed. Lillian S. Robinson, in her book, In the Canon's Mouth: Dispatches from the Culture Wars, notes the neglect of this category, identifying class as "the great unexamined" of feminist literary criticism, and thus asserting that the study of class and gender in literature is "the Cinderella of cultural studies, left behind in the ashes while race and sex whirl off to the ball" (161). The clearest, and most common literary image indicating the interactive nature of class and gender is that of the female body as a symbolic figure either supporting or condemning the class struggles of male workers. Wai Chee Dimock, in her essay, "Class, Gender, and a History of Metonymy," notes that women's bodies are used as representative of the site of class conflict, an appropriation which she asserts results in a critique of class being "mapped on the symbolic body of gender" (88). Women are thus turned into "representative bodies, bodies that . . . encapsulate . . . the identity of a larger whole" (88). Gender issues and inequality remain, in the traditional Marxist sense, secondary to class issues, and the female body is typically used solely as a representative figure of exploited and subordinated *male* workers, with female

workers subsumed under them. Consequently, female characters are often used as means of addressing what are perceived to be essentially masculine issues and problems, and female class issues -if even acknowledged as different from men's - are treated as subordinate to masculine struggles.

Additionally, the image of the female body is almost always conflated with controlled sexuality, and by extension, it is associated with the control of working-class peoples. Cora Kaplan, in her article, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," notes that myths concerning women's sexuality are often appropriated as a means of displacing "questions about the economic and political integrity of dominant groups" by "focusing on the issue and image of female sexual conduct" (968). The control of women's sexuality is thus used as a method of deflecting attention from powerful groups, but, more importantly, it is also used to legitimate the power of these social elites. Through the depiction of women's sexuality as naturally promiscuous and self-destructive, and by affiliating women's ostensibly necessary subordinate position with the position of oppressed workers, it is suggested that "lower" classes require the same amount of supervision and control that has traditionally been enforced on women's bodies and reproductive systems. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in her article on stereotypes of women in literature, observes the literary and, perhaps, ideological control that is enforced on women, asserting that they "are dominated by what one might call the male voice" (207), which "covertly. . . tailor[s]" them "to meet the needs of fundamentally *masculine* problems" (207). Consequently,

women appear in literature “not as they are, certainly not as they would define themselves, but as conveniences to the resolution of masculine dilemmas” (207). Essentially, as Kaplan suggests, the “morality of [a] class as a whole [is] represented by those who exercis[e] the least political power within it,” thus making the figure of the female body a means of legitimating unequal power distribution. Kaplan further asserts that women’s bodies and sexuality are made into a “condensed and displaced representation of the dangerous instabilities of class. . . for both sexes” (969). Such metonymic appropriation of the female body results in women’s class inequality and the impact of class on the development of women’s sexual identity being largely ignored or labeled as insignificant when compared with the class struggles of men, and it also suggests that both women and the working-class are unruly and unpredictable, thus supposedly legitimizing their subordinate position in a system dominated by a small group of powerful elites.

Textual images of the symbolic colonization and exploitation of the female body by a male figure have received some examination in literary studies, but little has been done in investigating how sexuality and class position are interrelated. Societal assumptions concerning the female body and what is considered appropriate or inappropriate female sexual behaviour have a powerful influence on how a woman may perceive her sexuality, her control over her body, and the relationship of these issues to her class position. The control a woman feels she possesses over her physical body, and the value or devaluation she attributes to her body are inextricably bound to class position and social status. This psychic and

subjective self-evaluation is of utmost importance, for though concern with male control of women's bodies and sexuality as a central component of women's oppression is valid, by privileging the physical over women's psychic and subjective experiences, the oppression of women is reinscribed. Women, and particularly women in lower class and status positions, become mere physical presences, sexual bodies that do not think or speak.

When impoverished women enter into literature, it is usually in a romanticized and unrealistic form. The often abused and socially degraded prostitute is recreated as a saintly whore, and the passionate, sexually assertive woman is recreated as a sexually deviant and loose woman. Clearly, such images function to ideologically perpetuate the notion that sexual control of women is necessary and justifiable, and they are also founded on notions of how women's sexuality and class position interact. Often, as Wolff observes, a woman's "social status. . . seems to reflect [a] built-in moral bias: chaste women tend to be well-born; sensuous women are low-born - or they are gypsies or foreigners" (209). It is thus suggested that class position and ascribed characteristics can determine a woman's sexual nature; class and sexuality intermingle to form an essentialist discourse in which it is implied that working-class women are, in socially and economically evaluative terms, "cheap."

Class position, and socially accepted discourses concerning the "nature" of individuals belonging to certain groups, are extremely powerful determinants in creating one's perception of one's self in relation to others of different class, status

groups, and authoritative institutions. As Richard Cole suggests, an individual's class position is formative "both in social experience - in how one acts and is acted upon - and in social vision - in how one sees and interprets the world" (671). In relation to powerful institutions and those who represent these establishments, studies have found that individuals belonging to the working-class are inclined to distrust these authoritative powers, viewing government-run institutions, such as the education system, with suspicion and hostility (Forcese 124). W. Peter Archibald, in his essay, "Social Class and Social Interaction," asserts that an individual's class-based self-assessment is greatly influenced by social myths, particularly those that "stress individual achievement and mobility," as these have been found to result in "many working people. . . [possessing] an ambivalent evaluation of their personal worth" (Kaplan, Sennet, Cobb, ref. in Archibald 542). Archibald is careful to note, however, that in situations in which working people do not vocalize or defend their opinions, it is not necessarily because they feel themselves or their ideas to be inferior. Rather, they may feel their opinion to be of equal value to that held by a member of the elite, but they may hesitate to express their ideas due to "selfconscious[ness] about vocabulary or lack of education" (543). Language, as a means of engaging in discourse with powerful institutions and those who represent them, is clearly enmeshed in class privilege.

The standardization of language and literacy in academic institutions has had a profound negative affect on the accessibility of these institutions. Standardization of language, literacy, and, as a result, of literature, is one of the most powerful

methods of legitimating class differentials; the language, literary materials and literary styles of the elite are accepted as normal, and deviations from these “self-evident” norms are viewed, as James Collins suggests in his article, “Literacy and Literacies,” as “deficiencies and disabilities” (83). Literature may be identified, as Louis Althusser suggests, as part of a “‘cultural’ ideological state apparatus” which is “instrumental in disseminating ideologies supportive of the status quo” (Althusser cited in Grayson, “Historical” 339). This standardization of literature and literacy ensures that the hegemonic middle-class culture is maintained as a socially pervasive norm, and it also ensures that the stories of those who do not share the “standard” level or form of language and literary capabilities are excluded, devalued, and deemed unworthy of acknowledgment or study, and kept on the periphery of Canadian culture.

Additionally, the exclusivity of such standardization is compounded by the class-bound nature of language. Basil Bernstein, a British linguistic researcher, contends that the role of language in the maintenance of social class position is extremely influential. According to Bernstein, “the genes of social class [are carried] through a communication code that social class itself promotes,” suggesting that the language and linguistic codes possessed by individuals of certain class groups, are, to a large degree, perpetuants of the on-going inheritance of class position” (qtd. in Ohmann 281). Language, being taught mostly in the home, is passed from one generation to the next, with formal education playing a comparatively insignificant role in the development of a child’s linguistic patterns.

Richard Ohmann, in his essay “Reflections on Class and Language,” suggests that through this inheritance of linguistic codes, social classes repeatedly pass on language skills that both characterize and perpetuate their position in the class structure. According to Ohmann, “[t]he power relations of a society permeate speech and shape it, while speech reproduces or challenges the power relations of the society” (288). Language then partially determines the nature of class interaction and the roles that each individual takes in relation to the power and status of others. Participants “*create* the social relations of each encounter, in addition to inheriting them. In so doing they reproduce society. By such tiny increments is class made and remade” (Ohmann 293, italics not mine).

Additionally, this stratification within language can also relate to literacy and reading habits to produce what Collins terms “stratified literacies”:

Elites are socialized to an interpretive relation to texts, and non-elites are socialized to a submissive relation to texts. Schooling reflects and reproduces a stratified social system, in which national bourgeoisies have been defined by reading, especially by book reading. (84)

Consequently, the “profound ideological promises,” such as “enlightenment and social progress,” that literacy and fluency in the English are believed to provide are at least partially illusory (Collins 83). The disadvantages of being inarticulate and not literate are, however, distressingly real, and carry powerful symbolic significance. According to Collins, in addition to functioning as a means of maintaining class inequalities, illiteracy and inarticulateness “signif[y] economic stagnation, political decay, and cultural disorder” (Collins 84).

The standardization of language and literacy in educational institutions is thus, as Collins observes, a “hegemonic project, involving the displacement of nonstandard varieties of language and a shunting aside or discrediting of alternative literacies” (84). Those belonging to minority groups or “lower” class positions are unlikely to find their linguistic traditions and group-specific knowledge in the academic curriculum, and rather are more likely to find their knowledge and linguistic patterns discredited and dismissed. In reaction to this censure, individuals who are conscious of language differences may be silenced, both literally and metaphorically. Recognizing the power involved in language, such individuals may realize that their linguistic skills are, according to the dominant groups in society, debased in nature, and silence may thus take the place of articulating opinions and ideas. Conversely, an individual is presented with two other options; they may, as Ohmann notes, adapt their language to accommodate more socially accepted pronunciations and forms of speaking, or they may “defiantly stand [their] linguistic and social ground” (288).

Such battles, Ohmann suggests, “may not be the heart of class struggle, but they surely express conflict that is rooted in class” (288). The conflict between class and language is exacerbated when gender is considered, as women are still, though to a lesser degree than previously, socialized to be silent, use linguistically submissive terms and speech patterns, and express a readiness to forfeit their opinions and behave compliantly. Language, as suggested by Bammer, must be acknowledged as “at once a class and a feminist issue” (247). In terms of race, and

particularly for Native Peoples, the standardization of a “national” language is one of the most destructive components of colonization. A conflict between using the language of the oppressor to gain power, and the potential of assimilation due to this usage, is a Gordian knot faced by Native people in their struggle to preserve their culture. The education system is thus, for Native people and minority groups, as destructive as it is liberating:

For various native peoples and polities, [the encounter with European culture and education] has been marked by the painful awareness that literacy and schooling bring cultural genocide and self-loss; that literacy can provide essential tools for cultural documentation and preservation; and that contemporary Indian circumstances make necessary a reworking and transcending of the oral vs literate, tradition vs assimilation dichotomies. (Collins 85)

For members of minority groups, school is, as Forcese notes, a “white, middle-class, alien and hostile environment” (120), which either perpetuates disadvantage or compels assimilation.

Assumptions concerning the value of certain forms of linguistic and narrative structures are pervasive in all levels of education. In examining the selection process of canonical literature, a process which critics such as Angelika Bammer, Renny Christopher, Nicholas Coles, and Florence Howe suggest is exclusionary to writers of working-class backgrounds, working-class texts may be received, as Bammer found, as “act[s] of cultural provocation” (249). In teaching a class on “Women in the Arts,” Bammer included a text by a working-class author which was not well received by her students. The students were unable to accept that the

text could possibly represent how the author “‘really’ talked; the poor grammar and misspelling were [perceived as] deliberate” (249). In comparison, a text by Katherine Mansfield about working-class people was found to be “reassur[ing]. . . she was well and genteely educated, and her elegant language affirmed their own cultural experience and class values” (250). Bammer concluded that Mansfield was so warmly received because she “maintained the proper distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (250), or, the academic, middle-class students, and the foreign and seemingly unbelievable working-class language and world. Similarly, Alice Munro’s writing and portrayal of the working-class have, in some instances, been received in classrooms with suspicion and hostility. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Munro recalls a friend’s experience in teaching one of her texts:

. . . a friend of mine was teaching a class on *Lives of Girls and Women* and one of the women in her class put up her hand and said, “I think the class should know that Alice Munro came from the wrong side of the tracks.” So to her my vision is suspect. I thought, yes, I did, and I never realized how much this influenced me and how much it is still in this reader’s mind. (Canadian Writers 206)

Class differentials clearly affect how an individual reads and interprets a text, and they also remain a way of identifying and evaluating both a person and his or her world-view. To those in the middle-class, the experiences, stories and literature of individuals in the working-class are, as Munro and Bammer suggest, “suspect” and possibly fabricated.

Significantly, in Munro’s Who Do You Think You Are?, Rose, a member of the working-class, reads the same text by Mansfield that Bammer examined with her

class. Rose notes that the “poor people in that story” are “viewed with compassion,” an interpretation which she perceives as “[a]ll very well” but which frustrates and angers her:

. . . Rose was angry in a way that the story did not mean her to be. She could not really understand what she was angry about, but it had something to do with the fact that she was sure Katherine Mansfield was never obliged to look at stained underwear; her relatives might be cruel and frivolous but their accents would be agreeable; her compassion was floating on clouds of good fortune, deplored by herself, no doubt, but *despised* by Rose. (WDY 58)

Mansfield’s text, Munro suggests, presents a sanitized and glossed-over vision of class inequality, a portrayal which is written in a sympathetic but unrealistic manner in the language and style that characterizes and appeals to the dominant, middle-class group of Canadian society.

The incredulity expressed by the students reading working-class texts is indicative of the pervasiveness of middle-class culture. As the most elusive and intangible of all class groups, the middle-class is an obscure but powerful presence which seemingly has the privilege of defining Canadian culture, and yet which is itself difficult to define or identify. Bammer defines the middle-class in negative terms as “neither ‘upper’ or ‘lower,’” a class composed of people who are unwilling to say “who or what they are” (247), yet they are nonetheless a coherent group that “presume[s] to speak for those it . . . defined as Other” (247). This elusiveness of the middle-class is, as Amy Shrager Lang suggests, due to the acceptance of its ideals and morés as a “pervasive cultural norm[s]” (Silent Partner

277). Thus, the middle-class is difficult to identify until it is recognized that it is, essentially, everywhere; most institutions, ideologies, and social valuations are constructed around and hegemonically supportive of the norms and values of this one class group. Thus, minority groups are relegated to the periphery while the middle-class remains largely unaware of the inequality that is determined by the standardization of their norms.

The “self-evident” nature of middle-class culture and norms is partially responsible for sustaining the myth that Canada is a “classless” country. Porter assessed the power of the Canadian middle-class in the 1960’s, concluding that the “literate middle-class is both the producer and the consumer” (6) of Canada’s classless image, an assertion that is still valid today. Forcese concurs with Porter’s assessment, citing studies that conclude that “‘middle-class’ Canadians . . . perceive themselves as living in a homogenous middle-class society” (32), an illusion which Forcese contends is maintained by powerful institutions and influences, suggesting that middle-class Canadians are “taught to think in such a fashion by parents, peers, the school and the media” (32). Significantly, the insulated nature of the middle-class perpetuates such illusions by ensuring that the realities of the Canadian stratification system remain, as Forcese suggests, the “stuff of television drama” (33), allowing middle-class individuals to interact with others solely within the confines of their class group. In terms of community and workplace, class boundaries are securely and carefully delineated. Archibald notes that “those of different class, status, and power [are usually] physically separated”

(540), and cites the use of separate entrances, cafeterias, washrooms, elevators and offices for white-collar workers and maintenance staff in the workforce, and he also asserts that “voluntary associations and pubs tend to be frequented by those of the same class” (540), emphasizing that the division between classes is both economic and social. The extremes of the stratification system are thus largely removed from both the sight and the consciousness of middle-class Canadians. Additionally, since extremes of poverty and wealth do not fit into the middle-class constructed “reality” of Canadian culture as classless, the groups that have been pushed to the periphery rarely, as Porter notes, “find expression” in the education, language, and literature of the dominating middle-class group.

Consequently, the Canadian educational system is also marked by class-based segregation and the perpetuation of class boundaries. In general, education is surrounded by the same myths of opportunity that structure our vision of social mobility; we perceive education as readily accessible and associate scholarly achievement with upward mobility and increased opportunity. Such possibilities are attainable, but for the most part, the education system in Canada is a fairly closed institution. Though elementary school and high school are free, and university studies are largely subsidized, the equality of opportunity promoted by this financial coverage does not outweigh the inequality of students’ home lives, nor does it alter the inequality created by teachers’ differential treatment of students in the classroom. Significantly, the financial subsidization of education aids in promoting the myth that those who fail to improve their social position are

responsible for their failure or are marked by their own inabilities, when in reality, the educational system is overwhelmingly intertwined with the class system, functioning to both reinforce and seemingly legitimate class differences. As Forcese notes, education in Canada is “not so much a means to class mobility, [but] rather[,] it mediates and reinforces family advantage” (131). Education as a means of opportunity is limited by the same need to possess ascribed characteristics that, in general, determine the upward mobility of working-class Canadians. Consequently, rather “than defeating stratification, formal education is a cause of persisting and increasingly rigid stratification. . . [ensuring] meritocracy for the meritocrats, or middle-class status for the middle-class” (Forcese 133). Again, for an “open” class society, such limited prospects clearly suggest that the myths of classlessness and meritocracy are illusory; they are, essentially, myths that ensure that the socially privileged remain empowered through the subordination of others.

Higher level educational institutions function as means of perpetuating middle-class culture by assimilating those who attend them. Thus, education often requires not only an abandonment of economic class position, but it also demands an abandonment of class affiliation, values, and outlook. Renny Christopher suggests that “a college degree is a certification that one belongs to the middle-class; in other words, the institution of college stands as a guard at a metaphorical border” (45), a socializing institution that acculturates its students and molds them for middle-class life. Membership in this group provides “normalcy” to an individual, and it initiates its new members into a world of

“culture” and standardized meanings, language, and values. Class advancement is thus coupled with increased culturedness, and it is thus inextricably bound to power and social acceptability. As Bammer notes, “[t]he realm of culture is recognized as a privileged one, based on and constitutive of power. ‘Culture’ is an attribute of those, who, as the saying goes, ‘have class’” (241), or more accurately, those who are located in a middle or upper-class position. Bammer further explains the interrelated nature of class, power, and the formation of “culture”:

. . . power and culture are inseparable; the one sets the other in place. Those who hold power define what is ‘culture,’ what is to be included and what left out. Yet, couched in the formalist terms of aesthetic discourse, these politics of selection remain invisible. Indeed, that a process of selection - and rejection - has even taken place is seldom if ever acknowledged. Culture... is made to appear self-evident. (238)

In terms of literature, notions of proper culture influence what texts are read and considered to be of value, a selection process which often privileges the texts of powerful societal groups and thus identifies their ideals as worth cultural preservation. Literature, as previously mentioned, is an integral component of ideological control; it functions “through means other than the exercise of naked force, [to] foster adherence to existing social relationships” (Grayson/Grayson English 3), and it acts as a means of justifying and perpetuating notions of the inequities of society and culture as natural and merited. Additionally, the ability possessed by authors to use and manipulate standardized and conventionally accepted language is inherently linked to ideological power, as it provides entry into discourses that exclude those who speak or write in a “substandard” manner.

Also, as Grayson asserts, writers' "facility with the written word and their ability, through their work, to transmit ideologies" makes them influential in "sustaining a particular social order or. . . contributing to a false consciousness on the part of certain classes" (Socio-Historical 292). The maintenance of an image of classlessness is perhaps the most insidious of false notions that may be perpetuated through such cultural powers, as it is clearly a method of asserting the dominant group's hegemonic power.

When Robert L. McDougall examined Canadian literature over thirty-five years ago, he was concerned by a lack of feeling for class. Questioning if one was to expect a "dynamic view of society" from the "closed, circumspect and intellectually sophisticated ranks" of academia (230), McDougall's concerns were clearly bound to the exclusive, middle-class domination of Canadian universities. As the Canadian canon has opened up in past years to include a more diverse group of writers, the class background of such authors is no longer as homogenous, and their literature shows an increasing awareness of class issues. Modern Canadian literature, according to Paul Grayson in his article, "The English Canadian Novel and the Class Structure," shows a "rapid decline in the number of authors whose work supports the maintenance of existing class relations" (434), a decline which Grayson suggests could indicate a continuing and increasing trend in our literature.

Previous studies of class in Canadian literature have focused only on texts by or about the working-class, a limited perspective which omits the study of the system stratification through which this class is defined. Class in Canadian literature must

be studied in terms of stratification, for to disregard the middle-class is to ignore the group that plays a central role in the assignment of advantage and disadvantage to various groups in society. Additionally, such an omission aids in creating an “us” and “them” dichotomy which segregates the working-class from the middle-class, and which yet again reinscribes the values and perceptions of the middle-class as normal and self-evident. Conversely, to focus solely on the middle-class is to myopically ignore the inequities of Canadian society, and clearly such a study would reinscribe the persecution of other groups by not deeming them worthy of study. As social classes do not exist in isolation, one cannot effectively study them in isolation.

If an image of classlessness has been maintained in the study of Canadian literature, it must be acknowledged that criticism of Canadian literature has been largely complicit in founding an acceptance and ongoing recreation of this notion. Hegemony with unrealistic ideals and illusions concerning Canadian culture have been maintained by our literary criticism and by our institutions, even after our literature has begun to change and indicate increasing sensitivity to class issues. As McDougall warned, however, the “fault is not . . . in the nature of the institutions themselves, but in how we conceive of them” (231). How we conceive of our educational institutions is similar to how we conceive of, or construct, Canadian society. The reality of Canada as a classless society has not merely been gone for years, it clearly never existed in the first place. If we continue to conceive of Canadian literature as classless, the class-based concerns of writers such as the

ones studied in the following chapters will go unaddressed, or worse, unnoticed.

On a larger scale, if the illusory nature of Canadian society as classless is not dispelled, we may become the “moribund” country that McDougall identified, a country that clings to anachronistic, racist, and inequitable class-based ideals.

Essentially, the recognition of class stratification in Canada, and the acknowledgment of the hegemonic nature of much of our literature and criticism is imperative, for without an identification of class inequities, change is clearly unfeasible as it is simply impossible to reject, alter, or rebel against a class system that ostensibly does not exist.

CHAPTER TWO

Location plays a crucial role in the texts of Alice Munro. Her writing, as Cora Ann Howells observes, “offer[s] social maps of small-town life in rural Ontario” (Howells 1), maps which impose social and ideological meaning on the landscape, and which thus function to conflate geographical and social locations. The mapping of geographical boundaries in Munro’s texts is complicated by the presence of an overlapping, yet sometimes elusive map of social stratification, a map which outlines the typically rigid class system present in such small, isolated communities. While demonstrating an intense awareness of this restrictive delineation of boundaries, Munro’s texts provide insight into what exists beneath such social perimeters; she goes beyond mapping social geography to examine that which is not granted a position on most literary maps: the class-bound experiences and perspectives of an underclass of impoverished women.

Geographically and socially located as outcasts, many of Munro’s female characters are relegated by their stratified communities to an underclass position of indigence and social devaluation. Munro examines how gender interacts with class-based ideologies to maintain hegemony within such impoverished groups, identifying the manner in which class-based values construct boundaries that prohibit women’s ambition and upward mobility, boundaries which, although

restrictive, are nonetheless culturally significant to those who exist within their confines. Munro thus suggests that the institutions and social values that manufacture and maintain the existence of a gendered underclass are entwined with familial and community-based ideals, social ties which complicate the women's abandonment of such a restricted class position. Furthermore, Munro examines how the middle-class power to define social norms and mores is manipulated and exploited by middle-class men to entrap working-class women within sexually degrading and disempowering discourses. Munro suggests that part of middle-class male-privilege includes the power to map working-class women's sexuality, thus enabling men to set and alter boundaries concerning women's sexuality and physical bodies.

Although her texts document how women struggle to construct value and find power within their impotent underclass position, Munro acknowledges the difficulty of escaping this socially devalued location. Her characters are torn between conformity and the need to escape from the geographical and social boundaries of their towns, a social extrication which often proves both physically and psychologically impossible. As some characters cannot move beyond the boundaries of their town, some are unable to adapt psychologically to upward mobility, and remain plagued by a sense of guilt at their socially unacceptable transgression of class-based boundaries.

Rural small-town communities in Munro's fiction are characterized by their exclusive and rigid class-based system of stratification. Robert Thacker, in his

article “Connection: Alice Munro and Ontario,” observes that “the Ontario small-town” is “an inherited presence” (213), in Canadian literature; it is a symbolic location where past traditions and beliefs are maintained, and it thus functions as a location where the social mores and class-based ideologies of previous generations are transmitted and perpetuated. Consequently, as W.J. Keith notes, Canadian small towns, perhaps in both literature and reality, are generally marked by a “paradoxical cohesiveness that operates within a context of various forms of exclusion,” creating a socially stratified system which in turn maintains a class-based hierarchy predicated on “social standing, ultimate national origin, specific shared interests, connections through marriage, as well as religious attendance” (Literary Images 151). Town communities, according to Keith, thus form a “series of loose confederations” which interact “within clearly established limits” (151) and which follow an unspoken, but carefully respected code of class-based behavior. These abstract but real boundaries are maintained by all citizens, enforced by ideologically secure beliefs that class-based positions are natural and should not be challenged. As the young narrator in Munro’s “Executioners” observes, in the small-town community “it [is] expected, even necessary, that people should stay as they [are] and not be improved or changed” (SIB 141).¹ Such beliefs function to legitimize and perpetuate class-based

¹ Abbreviations of Munro’s texts will be as follows: Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You (SIB); Friend of My Youth (FMY); Dance of the Happy Shades (DHS); The Progress of Love (POL); Lives of Girls and Women (LOG); Who Do You Think You Are? (WDY); Open Secrets (OS); The Love of a Good Woman (LGW); The Moons of Jupiter (MOJ).

inequalities, thus securing the stratification system in these communities by making it an unchallenged presence.

Munro's awareness of such socially maintained boundaries and class restrictions is founded on her own experience growing up in the small, rural town of Wingham Ontario. Identifying her family as living "outside the whole social structure" in a "little ghetto where all the bootleggers and prostitutes and hangers-on lived," Munro asserts that she belonged more to this "community of outcasts" than within the town society of Wingham (qtd. in Ross 23). It was not, however, until a return trip to her home town that Munro became consciously aware of how her sense of being an outcast was related to the Wingham class and stratification system. Munro asserts that while on this trip she "noticed immediately. . . the class system," and recognized "how much this influenced [her] and how much it is. . . an important reality in [people's] lives" (qtd. in Hancock 206). Significantly, Munro suggests that her class background was "enormously good. . . for a writer," as it distanced her from middle-class "neighbourhood[s] where people [are] more or less the same" (qtd. in Hancock 207), and where class boundaries, though carefully maintained, are not as obvious due to the hegemonic nature middle-class culture. Her experience of living both literally and psychically outside of society also influenced her writing, providing the basis for her investigation of the relationship between geographical location and social class.

Throughout her texts, Munro blurs the boundary between an individual's physical location and his or her class status as a means of indicating how these

social placements interact to represent and determine an individual's opportunities within their community. In "The Love of a Good Woman," the potential of several youths is explicitly defined in terms of their location within their small town:

Most of them lived in the north end of town, which meant that they would be expected to get a job of [some] sort as soon as they were old enough, and that none of them would ever be sent away to Applebey or to Upper Canada College. And none of them lived in a shack or had a relative in jail. Just the same, there were notable differences as to how they lived at home and what was expected of them in life. But these differences dropped away as soon as they were out of sight of the county jail and the grain elevator and the church steeples and out of range of the chimes of the courthouse clock. (LGW 11)

Although geography is used to define their future as determined by the expectations of their community, the youths find that they can leave such expectations behind once they travel beyond the town limits and the social expectations charted upon its landscape. The slow, almost unchanging face of the landscape perhaps parallels the static, almost inescapable nature of small town social stratification, thus suggesting that in order to leave one's class position, both the literal and the social geography of one's youth must be abandoned.

Munro's protagonists, however, usually commence their narration from within the stratification system, identifying their class position and their corresponding geographical location. In Who Do You Think You Are?, Rose, the protagonist, identifies herself and her family as living "in [the] poor part" of West Hanratty, an area located in a devalued position within a geographical stratification of people and class-based groups:

In Hanratty the social structure ran from doctors and dentists and lawyers down to foundry workers and factory workers and draymen; in West Hanratty it ran from factory workers and foundry workers down to large improvident families of casual bootleggers and prostitutes and unsuccessful thieves. (WDY 5)

Rose is intensely aware of how her location in this stratified community imposes a class-based identity on her, a social valuation which limits her options and negatively influences her sense of self. She thus associates the possibility of escaping her social identity with a departure from the confines of the town:

She had a window seat, and was soon extraordinarily happy. She felt Flo receding, West Hanratty flying away from her, her own wearying self discarded as easily as everything else. She loved the towns less and less known. (71)

The freedom of escaping the class restrictions imposed by her position in town is alluring to Rose; like the youths who temporarily escape the expectations of the social geography of their town by passing beyond its boundaries, Rose anticipates that with her departure from the town she will also extricate herself from its restrictive class-based expectations.

Similarly, Del Jordan in Lives of Girls and Women, possesses a recognition of the geographical and social nature of class boundaries, but her vision of these barricades is coupled with a recognition of their virtually impermeable nature, an awareness which is indicated by her opening narrative which constructs a social and geographical map of Jubilee society. Significantly, Del commences her narration from outside of Jubilee's confines. Visiting her "Uncle" Benny, Del is

initially situated in the “wealth of wreckage” (LOG 3) that constitutes Benny’s home, a dilapidated, infested structure which is seemingly immune to the social dictates of the Jubilee community. The world of Uncle Benny is, to Del, an expansive place of freedom, but it is also lawless and unordered, and thus threatening. Del describes this world that “lays alongside” the world of Jubilee as “a troubling distorted reflection” (22) possessing monstrous possibilities that are “gigantic and unpredictable,” and which make it a place where “nothing [is] deserved, anything might happen” (LOG 22). When temporarily removed from the social restrictions of Jubilee, Del is both awed and terrified by the possibilities made available through a crossing of class boundaries. Del, however, is as of yet unable to transgress her class role. Her narration thus guides the reader from Benny’s uncivilized world of freedom back into the social geography of the town and Jubilee society. She perceives, however, that there is a “connection” as “plain as a fence” between Benny’s world and her own, an image which suggests her recognition of the constructed nature of social boundaries that separate individuals, and which further suggests that she identifies the reasons for divisiveness as insignificant, yet extremely powerful in their ability to maintain social segregation.

Unable to accept the negative definition imposed on them by the town, many of Munro’s characters attempt to deny their devalued social position by asserting their liminality within the community’s stratification system. This self-identification with a liminal location is indicative of her characters’ desire to redefine themselves outside of the town’s confines, a recreation of self which ultimately necessitates

removal from the stifling social geography of the community. Rose rejects the hierarchization of the Hanratty community by imagining her family as existing outside of this divisive stratification system. She thus considers “her own family as straddling the river, belonging nowhere” (5), even though she remains socially defined by her actual geographical location in the poor area of the town.

Ultimately, she is bound by the expectations of her working-class situation, and she thus becomes unable to maintain her illusion of being classless and unaffected by the stratification system. Her recollection of Hanratty and of her youth become a memory of “mostly low-down things. . . and a cloudy, interesting, problematic light on the world” (6), a childhood world which is remembered in terms of poverty and limited opportunities. Similarly, Del Jordan in Lives of Girls and Women lives on the edge of town, identifies her home as “not part of town. . . but not part of the country either” (5), a liminal location which suggests that she does not fit easily into any societal group, and which also expresses her desire to be removed from the expectations of Jubilee society.

Conversely, though geographically associated with the outcasts of Flats Road, Del’s mother, Ada, strives to socially distinguish herself *within* the Jubilee community and surrounding area, an ambition for improved social status which is both threatening and embarrassing to her family. Envisioning herself as a victim of hard luck, Ada feels that “[f]ate has flung [her family] onto a street of poor people,” (DHS 4), a statement which Del finds ironic considering the comparable poverty they had lived in before moving to Flats Road. Nonetheless, Ada believes that the

“only way to take” their imagined drop in status “is with dignity, with bitterness, with no reconciliation” (DHS 4), and with continued aspirations toward the achievement of a “cultured” status. Culture, in Ada’s mind, is equated with education; her desire to move beyond the restrictions of her class position and of her gender are evidenced in her employment selling encyclopedias, a job which takes her beyond the geographical limits of Jubilee and which she hopes may also move her beyond the limits of her social class.

Ada’s ambition, however, is treated by her family as an odd preoccupation and a social embarrassment, and it thus functions to alienate Ada and trap her between two class-based groups. She is rejected by the “cultured” class of Jubilee because of her “backwoods” education (62), and she herself rejects her membership in the working-class, as she is disgusted by what she perceives as the “sexual looseness, dirty language, haphazard lives, [and] contented ignorance” of this group. Ada is further isolated by her rejection of the notion that people should stay as they are and not desire to be improved or changed (SIB 141), as her aspirations toward upward mobility threaten not only her family, but the stratification system as a whole.

Munro’s characters demonstrate a sensitivity to the mapping of social meaning on literal geography, an awareness which is manifested in their reaction to the symbolic geographical crossing of class boundaries. Rose recognizes the danger in being in the territory of the privileged, and she thus feels relief when she crosses the bridge separating the school district from her own territory in West Hanratty:

“The change in Rose, once she left the scene, crossed the bridge. . . was remarkable. No nerves anymore. A loud skeptical voice, some hip-swinging in a red and yellow plaid skirt, more than a hint of swaggering” (WDY 49).

Conversely, Ada, who desires membership in the “cultured” and respectable middle-class community of Jubilee, is relieved by her geographical abandonment of Flats Road and her entry into the town society. Del observes that “[a]s soon as [her mother’s] feet touched the town sidewalk and she raised her head. . . a sense of relief, a new sense of consequence flowed from her” (LOG 6). Del, however, does not share her mother’s pride as she recognizes that safety is granted through conformity to Jubilee’s social dictates, dictates which she fears she is violating by crossing geographical boundaries. In “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” a story which introduces the unnamed character of Del, Ada forces Del to accompany her to town, a journey which makes her feel as though she is an “objec[t] of universal ridicule” (DHS 5), which even the geographical markers of the middle-class township laugh at: “Even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk are laughing at us” (DHS 5). Del’s social conformity is thus manifested in her desire to remain geographically “where she belongs,” in the poor part of town.

The role of family in creating a conflicting sense of class-based identity is largely determined by the interactions of the women within the familial group. Del’s aunts espouse conformity, thus maintaining a hegemonic position within the shared class position of the family. A conflict thus exists between Del’s extended family and her mother, as Ada’s ambitious endeavors transgress the boundaries of

her class role. Del feels “the weight of [her] mother’s eccentricities,” and she is vaguely aware “of something absurd and embarrassing” about her mother, an awareness which makes her wish to “repudiate [her mother and] crawl into favor” with her non-intellectual and socially conformist aunts. Though Del wishes to “shield” Ada from the victimizing contempt of her aunts, Del’s conformist nature does not allow her to do so, and consequently she cautiously keeps her own aspirations and desire for status concealed, thus only silently acknowledging that she “share[s] her mother’s appetite” for culture, education, and change.

Consequently, Del’s aunts’ hegemonic ideals help to perpetuate her silent complicity with class expectations. Indoctrinating Del with ideals that support the existing stratification structure, her aunts teach her that “choosing not to do things show[s], in the end, more wisdom and self-respect than choosing to do them” (32). Individuals who reject offerings such as marriage, positions, opportunities, and money (32) are thus more respected in Del’s familial community than those who aspire to leave their class position, economically or socially. Though they are not “against ability,” they are wary of pretensions, alarmed by ambition, and seemingly feel that “the thing to do [is] to keep [ambition] more or less a secret” (32). Del behaves in complicity with her aunt’s class-based expectations, but she remains consciously aware that her ambitions to escape Jubilee and go to University are more in keeping with her mother’s radical and socially unaccepted ideals.

Rose’s family possesses similar ideologies meant to curb aspirations and perpetuate conformity, ideologies which are further reinforced by the education

system. Though Rose desperately wishes to “align herself with the towners, against her place of origin” (47), her struggle is cautious and covert as she recognizes that her actions would be viewed with contempt and condemnation not only by her family, but by other authoritative figures, such as her teachers. After having rapidly learned a poem by memory, Rose is scolded by a teacher, who asks her who she thinks she is, “thinking [she is] better than other people” (WDY 243). Munro discusses how the question of “who do you think you are?” is indicative of the manner through which the educational institution encourages conformist behavior:

. . . the first time someone says ‘Who do you think you are?’ it is the teacher reprimanding a student in class, for trying to shine, to show off. I was brought up to think that that is absolutely the worst thing you could do . . . So ‘Who do you think you are?’ comes the minute you begin to let out a little bit of who you would like to be, as soon as you start sort of constructing somebody that is yourself. (qtd. in Howells 54)

Ambition is only encouraged in children of certain class groups. Others, like Rose, are warned not to construct an identity that is not in keeping with their class role, as such an affirmative, independent sense of self would be perceived as pretentious and risky, as social failure is expected from individuals in Rose’s class position, and success and upward mobility are perceived in both social and familial circles as an abnormal transgression of class boundaries. Rose’s family distrusts ambition; they subscribe to an ideology dictating that “[o]ne doesn’t try because one may

fail” (Munro qtd. in Gibson 247). Those who do try are subject to social ostracism, for their risks involve the entire family, and their family-based sense of pride.

Flo, Rose’s stepmother, struggles to make Rose accept the inequities of her class position and maintain complicity with discourses of her class-based disadvantages. She thus exposes Rose to all the inequities of their life, an exposure which, ironically, is done in an attempt to protect Rose from degradation. Flo possesses a strong contempt for ambition and self-improvement, and she thus delights in seeing “people brought down to earth” (29). Her resentment of the polished, unthreatened life of the upper and middle-classes is expressed in her mocking of lawyers and doctors, as she imitates “their high-flown remarks, their flibberty voices” and turns them into “[m]onsters. . . of foolishness, and showiness, and self-approbation” (13). Flo’s cutting down of the elite of Hanratty society is counterbalanced with an equally mocking glorification of the “poverty or frugality” of her family’s life. As Rose observes, Flo ensures that “there [is] not a thing in their lives they [are] protected from” (58); they exist in a constant state of exposure which forces Rose to learn that there is a “weariness, suppleness, deviousness, meanness common to a class” (138), and which makes those who attempt to escape that which is common to this group “sweat for [their] pretensions” (38). Eventually, however, Rose recognizes “[s]o long after, and so uselessly” that Flo was “trying to warn and alter her” (45); Flo was attempting to save Rose from the difficulty of struggling to achieve upward mobility from an underclass position, a movement that would

inevitably be characterized by “[h]eadlong hopefulness, readiness, need” (44), and a desire for social approval which would be both enslaving and degrading.

Flo’s exposure of the indignities of poverty, however, makes Rose even more determined to abandon her class position for middle-class privilege. Rather than focusing on the indignities of abasing oneself to achieve upward mobility, Rose focuses on the insults of poverty. Poverty, Rose realizes, translates into a lack of privacy; the bathroom in her house does not conceal any noises, making disassociation the only method of maintaining dignity: “The person creating the noises in the bathroom was not connected with the person who walked out” (5). As John Porter notes in his study, The Vertical Mosaic, privacy is a privilege; it is a commodity which is purchased, suggesting that “the value of privacy and the capacity to afford it” (5) is a significant class-based privilege. Rose resentfully perceives that individuals in higher social standing and middle-class positions are protected from noises in the washroom and other such indignities that she associates with impoverishment.

Del shares Rose’s resentment of the protected nature of the middle-class. Reflecting on the privilege of the “reigning queens of [their] class,” Del and her friend Naomi note that the insularity of the middle-class is manifested in its geographical location, a position which is both socially and physically removed from the impoverished areas occupied by individuals like Rose and Del:

We hated their immunity, well-bred lack of curiosity, whatever kept them floating, charitable and pleased, on the surface of life in Jubilee, and would float them on to sororities, engagements,

marrriages to doctors and lawyers in more prosperous places far away. We hated them just because they could never be imagined entering the Town Hall toilets. (LOG 131)

The middle-class girls that Del and Naomi resent are not bound by their geographical location; they have the option of avoiding disreputable areas and moving beyond the boundaries set by Jubilee society. Part of the privilege of the middle-class, Munro observes, is its power to create and alter boundaries. In “The Shining Houses,” a group of homeowners lobby to tear down the dilapidated farmhouse of a woman on the edge of their new subdivision. Asserting that “people who let their property get so rundown” have no “claim to [their] consideration” (DHS 27), this middle-class group claim the right to dislocate individuals who owned the land before them, thus altering boundaries to suit their purposes.

Boundaries for the working-class, however, are not remotely flexible, and consequently, impoverished individuals must work within their narrow class confines to construct a sense of value that counters their socially devalued position. The lack of protection from the despairing elements of life, and the indigent class position occupied by some characters, become indicators of moral strength and standards which ostensibly elevate these individuals above the rich, but supposedly corrupt, elite. The narrator in “Jesse and Meribeth” is taught by her Aunt that “money [makes] you shameless, leisure [makes] you useless, [and] self-indulgence mark[s] you out for some showy disaster” (POL 233). Jesse’s aunt maintains that

their family is composed of “superior people in spite of, or perhaps because of, relative poverty” (POL 228), a notion accepted by the narrator for the respectability it adds to her otherwise devalued life: “I accepted that even a superiority based on such hard notions was better than no superiority at all” (POL 228). Similarly, though Ada in Lives of Girls and Women is unable to see value in poverty, she does find value in her letter campaigns to the local newspaper, and she sees value in her home, as suggested by her somewhat unnecessary care in concealing the house key under the front verandah. Before Ada hides the key, Del must run to the deserted country road to ensure that nobody is watching, and then, once the house is secured, they may leave for town. Del notes that the imagined burglar’s “knowledge, their covetousness, made each thing” of perceived value in her home seem “confirmed in its value and uniqueness” (78), and later, when she stops believing that burglars desire her treasures, she finds that she “misse[s] the thought of them” (78). The value that these covetous, though illusory burglars provide to her otherwise devalued, impoverished life is both a material and a social value; Del is intrigued by the possibility of possessing something that someone else may perceive as valuable, and she is interested in how the material value of her possessions reflects the value judgments that are socially imposed on her life.

Del’s understanding of social value is thus inextricably bound to her awareness of the economic nature of class boundaries. Money and possessions are viewed by Del as part of a social and economic system of rewards, a system which she initially accepts as natural and equitable, but which is repeatedly exposed as unjust

by the contradictory ideals and actions of her family members. After ceasing to believe in burglars, Del's sense of value is further unsettled by her Uncle Bill, who takes her on an extravagant shopping trip during which he spends carelessly in an exhibitionist manner. Del is shamed by his actions, finding herself "depressed by this idiot largesse, which [throws] the whole known system of rewards and delights out of kilter" (72). Such freely given rewards function to alert Del to the fact that she has little access to material goods, thus forcing her to realize that rewards in life are unequally and unfairly distributed. As a result, Del resentfully conforms to the ideologies of her family, choosing to be disgusted with the theatrical and excessive display of her uncle's wealth. She is humiliated by his presumptuous and classist nature when he "behave[s] as if nobody else [is] in the store at all, as if they only came to life when he called to ask them something, as if the store itself was not real but had been thrown together the moment he needed one" (71). Bill's treatment of the daily reality of her life, as indicated by his actions in the store where she and her mother shop carefully and conservatively, makes Del realize that she too is part of the "lower" class that Bill scarcely acknowledges but actively exploits. His display of economic and class elitism thus shames Del; it is akin to her mother's status pretensions, and it exposes her to economic inequities which inevitably alter her sense of value, forcing her to realize that she belongs to a class that is both socially and economically devalued.

Munro's concern with social movement across such class boundaries is specifically related to the social and psychological transitions her characters

undergo in adapting to their new class position, adaptations which she suggests are accompanied by a sense of guilt and betrayal. Though Rose and Del's carefully concealed ambition ultimately enables them to succeed in escaping the economic aspect of their class position, the socially constructed identity developed during their impoverished youth remains with them. Munro expresses her own feeling concerning upward mobility and the guilt involved in crossing class boundaries:

. . . not only do we have this social system but we tend to make great leaps here and there or across it. There are all sorts of in-between classes that think they are classless. I think I am classless. Which, of course, isn't true. . . if you come from a fairly low, a fairly underprivileged class of very limited expectations and then make a big leap into another class. . . there's some guilt involved in this. (qtd. in Hancock 206)

Like their creator, Del and Rose do not completely escape their psychic sense of class position, and they both experience an intense guilt concerning their class departure and altered lifestyle. Their internalized beliefs concerning the unchanging map of class and its uncrossable boundaries plague them, creating a sense of betrayal of both their families and their own identity.

Thus, Rose's confidence in her new status and class position is greatly undermined by her family's disapproval; they perceive her success as "limited and precarious and provincial. . . and. . . they disapprov[e] of her even more when she fail[s]" (222) or suffers a setback in her career. A discrepancy clearly exists between dominant societal notions of value and her family's perception of the value of Rose's career, a disparity that is largely influenced by class position and formative class-based ideologies. As earlier noted, Rose realizes that "[w]e sweat

for our pretensions” (48), a notion which is manifested in her family’s perception of her acting as pretentious and as a shameful transgression of class boundaries. Her family refuses to approve of her new class-based identity and status, and they thus refuse to allow her status among them to change, making Rose feel unalterably alien when among her family members.

The most obvious problem of upward mobility, however, and the one in which the betrayal is most keenly felt is that of language. Munro also comments on this directly:

... you begin to talk differently. And I feel very guilty about that. And did for a long time.

I know I haven’t lost my Huron County accent entirely, but believe me, I have lost a great deal of it. I tried to lose it. To me, this seemed a cowardly thing to do. To change oneself. To become more acceptable in this way. We always spoke grammatically at home because my father and mother knew how to. But we knew we should speak ungrammatically outside so that people wouldn’t be offended, or make fun of us. (qtd. in Hancock 207)

In Munro’s fiction, the loss of a rural accent or class-bound speech patterns by her characters is often accompanied by a corresponding loss of voice. Seemingly, in sacrificing or discarding the language of one’s past, a fundamental connection between family and heritage is broken, thus creating a profound sense of social dislocation for the upwardly mobile individual. The loss of class-bound language in Munro’s fiction is, initially, part of a deliberate discarding of class-based signifiers. As a powerful marker of class position, and as an indicator of the level of culture one is perceived to possess, language functions as a barrier that prevents

upward mobility. In their desire to reconstruct their identity and achieve upward mobility, Munro's characters initially discard the language of their youth, feeling ashamed of its class-bound nature. Later, however, this deliberate action becomes perceived by the characters as a sacrifice made in order to advance socially, and the decision to abandon their class-based language is recognized as something compelled by society; it is not, essentially, a free choice. The loss of language is thus identified as a price exacted for entrance into a new class group, a price which is often perceived by Munro's characters as not worth the reward of their elevated status.

Rose's shame at her rural accent prompts her to abandon it, but this is not done without a sense of guilt and concern over the long-term implications of her decision. Upon returning home from university, Rose finds communication with her family difficult - if not impossible - as she discovers that she "[doesn't] even have any way that she [can] talk, and sound natural" (WDY 107). She cannot "slip back into an accent closer to Flo's, Billy Pope's and Hanratty's" with her wealthy, elitist boyfriend present, and she soon realizes that she is no longer able to speak in the language of her past class position:

That accent jarred on her ears now, anyway. It seemed to involve not just a different pronunciation but a whole different approach to talking. . . . Seeing them through Patrick's eyes, hearing them through his ears, Rose too had to be amazed. (WDY 107)

In addition to the difficulty experienced by Rose in communicating with her family, she also finds that she feels like an impostor using the language she has learned at

university. Her middle-class accent is, perhaps, an accent that, as an actress, she has taken on to play a role. In this case, it is a class role which clashes with her working-class identity. Consequently, Rose finds herself straddling class positions, belonging nowhere as she had once desired, yet finding her new ambivalent position conflicted and unsettling. Her sense of identity is thus strained by her own rejection of her past class position, and her uncertainty concerning her new class role, causing her to suffer what Carrington identifies as a form of “social trauma” caused by “linguistic splits and amputations” (28). A sense of familial belonging and shared history is removed with the loss of language, and this sense of alienation is further complicated by an inability to linguistically conform to either class group. Rose’s loss of voice and intense feelings of social alienation ultimately force her to question the price she has paid for the crossing of class boundaries.

Involuntary loss of lower-class linguistic patterns creates additional problems. In “Chaddeleys and Flemmings: Connection,” the narrator is intensely aware of her changed linguistic status, an altered status which was prompted by her attempt to appease her husband’s classist notions concerning accents and language. Her husband, Richard, has struggled throughout their marriage to “amputate” her from her past class affiliation; the narrator observes that he is “stern about rural accents, having had so much trouble with [hers]” (12), and she is aware that he regards her past class position as “shabby baggage,” and a status that is equal to a “low-level obscenity and an “affliction” (12). The narrator’s conflict between her

class-heritage, her previous class-bound language, and her current elevated status and manner of speaking is indicated in her hopes concerning the visit of her cousin, Iris. The narrator aspires to receive affirmation of her “own value, from both sides” (MOJ 12) of her identity; she hopes that Richard will accept Iris as a “relative that nobody need be ashamed of” (MOJ 11), and she desires that her new status as Richard’s wife will elevate her in Iris’s eyes, thus eradicating her previous location in “the category of the poor relation” (MOJ 11). Richard, however, dismisses Iris on the basis of what he perceives as an inadequate degree of culturedness, rejecting her in terms of both class and gender as a “pathetic old tart” (MOJ 17). The narrator thus becomes torn between the love she feels for her relative from her past, and the social value she derives from her current, elevated status. Communication between husband and wife breaks down as the narrator begins to recognize that her social value is bound to her husband and his social status, a value that is predicated on her complicity in the erasure of her heritage and class-based identity, both of which are enmeshed in the linguistic alienation enforced on her by her husband.

Though the narrator once willingly sacrificed her class-based language in order to appease her husband and achieve upward mobility, she begins to recognize that her complicity was compelled by her impoverishment, a complicity which now threatens to destroy her sense of self and heritage. She has, as Lorna Irving suggests in “Women’s Desire/Women’s Power,” “sid[ed] with power. . . [selling] herself for. . . ‘a pleasant recognition’ of her own value” (97), a value which is predicated on her husband’s status. Irving further observes that the narrator has

become aware of “the limitations of Richard’s vision and the imposition of her speech” and she recognizes that this imposition has resulted in “[h]er own voice [being] drowned out” (97) by his notions of cultured language. She thus feels she must silence him in order to hear her own voice, and in anger at her voicelessness she throws Pyrex plate at his head while he is talking: “his speech stopped, his mouth open” (97). Her own voice, which has been altered and suppressed by her husband’s classist ideals, is founded on her past and class heritage. She recognizes that her sense of self is “dependent on memory, on association, on connection” (Thacker 221); it is dependent on her relationship with her cousin Iris, and her memories of her past and family.

Marriage, as a means of evading class boundaries, is thus portrayed by Munro as a somewhat dangerous option for achieving upward mobility, as she seemingly perceives the relationship as inherently couched in class-based terms of power and privilege. As the narrator in “Chaddeleys and Flemmings: Connection” is aware that her husband feels that he has a well-merited “advantage” in their relationship due to his economic and social status, Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are? recognizes that her wealthy fiancé, Patrick, “in some oblique way acknowledges her luck” (WDY 95) in marrying him. Rose receives a seductive sense of power, social recognition, and social value through her engagement to Patrick, finding that people in Hanratty who “had never spoken to [her], had never given any sign before of knowing who she was” (11) are suddenly interested in her future, making Rose feel that due to her engagement “[p]aths [are] opening. . . barriers [are] softening”

(11). Rose, however, fails to recognize that she is exchanging old barriers for new ones, as her relationship with Patrick is founded on class-based power differentials. As Howells notes, Rose's "desperate longing for love and social acceptance. . . [is] a kind of beggary" (54), a position of disempowerment and need. Thus, Patrick is enabled to assume a position of authorial power in relation to Rose; by describing Rose as a "delicate" (96), "White Goddess" (97), Patrick constructs an image of Rose as a blank page upon which he can erase her class heritage and write a new, privileged future. He further constructs her gender and sexuality by identifying her as a "Beggar Maid," thus equating her with a "meek and voluptuous" figure of "milky surrender. . . [and] helplessness and gratitude" (95). Such images reflect an attempt on Patrick's part to fit Rose into his stereotypical notions of femininity, and also position her as a "damsel in distress." Her history, Patrick believes, makes Rose in need of rescue from her ostensibly shameful class position, and it also means that she is malleable, she can be transformed: "Her accent [can] be eliminated, her friends [can] be discredited and removed, her vulgarity [can] be discouraged" (WDY 101). While Rose acknowledges her complicity in such alterations, she also recognizes that she is "destroying herself for him" (WDY 101) by carefully concealing her allegiances to her past and previous class position. Even though she becomes increasingly aware that she and Patrick are not compatible, she feels that her class position makes it impossible for her to "turn Patrick down" (95). Consequently, when retrospectively considering why she married him, Rose courts several explanations, but "[w]hen she [is] seeing life in

economic terms,” she believes that their marriage was founded on her need to escape her class position. She asserts that “only middle-class people ha[ve] choices” and “if she had had the price of a train ticket to Toronto her life would have been different” (17). Though this explanation does not entirely satisfy her, it does convey her lack of options and power, and it indicates that she is clearly lured by Patrick’s ability to reconstruct her identity, recognizing that “her own appetite. . . [is] not for wealth but for worship” (95), and she is seduced by the value that Patrick’s lifestyle and perception of her confer on her person. Her power within this marriage, however, is based on a constructed figure which she has agreed to become, a figure which erases her sense of identity, and of power.

Although Munro’s protagonists resent the fact that upward mobility requires an abandonment of their family and heritage, none choose to accept their working-class position and thus sacrifice their ambition. Their need to achieve upward mobility is inextricably bound to the nature in which class and gender interact; for impoverished women, an acceptance of class position necessitates an acceptance of a subordinated role within an already subordinated class group. As members of an underclass, these women are not provided with a clear or socially positive identity, rather, they are relegated to a class location which is not acknowledged within their community, or within larger society. Thus, Rose and Del share the frustration of being intelligent, ambitious, women in an utterly disempowered class position. Significantly, Rose receives criticism from her family that is designed to maintain her complicity with her class *and* gender roles;

her father is literally disgusted by her intellectual endeavors and “her high hopes of herself, her gaudy ambitions” (WDY 54), as he feels that women should be “naive intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs” (WDY 55). Rose clearly threatens to disrupt this order, silently acknowledging that “part of her disgrace [is] that she [is] female but mistakenly so, [she will] not turn out to be the right kind of woman” (WDY 55). Beverly Rasporich, in her book, Dance of the Sexes, suggests that the ideals held by Rose’s father are such that maintain gender-based inequality, thus making him a “repressive [figure]. . . whose duty is to reprimand and who functions in the larger social world of poverty-stricken West Hanratty as part of a primitive, patriarchal order” (60). He is a figure of a past that resists and resents change, and which accepts and perpetuates class-bound notions of gender and femininity.

The power of men to map class on the female body is most explicitly explored in Munro’s stories that are concerned with the power dynamics between female domestic workers and men of higher class positions. These young women are relocated geographically, transferred from their working-class homes to middle-class households without a corresponding change in their class status. They are thus treated as second-class, exploitable citizens within this household; they are women who function within the home, but who lack a clear, defining role in relation to the male figures of that space. As neither wife, mother, nor girlfriend, these women exist in an unclear delineation of boundaries, an undefined position

which perhaps results in their domestic work being associated with domestic sexuality. The privilege of defining their role in the household is subsequently appropriated by the male figures in the home, who, while rigidly maintaining the boundary between their middle-class status and the women's working-class position in order to maintain power differentials, take advantage of their power to construct these young women's sexual identity in conventionally accepted, classist notions of "lower-class" promiscuity. In "Sunday Afternoon," Alva, a domestic worker, is approached by a guest of her employers, a young man who expects her complicity in his sexual advances. Alva does not reject him, rather, she waits until he takes "hold of her lightly, as in a familiar game, and [spends] some time kissing her mouth" (DHS 173). As a "familiar game," Alva is cast in the role of a summer fling, a woman who is sexually available to upper-class men, but whose working-class status makes her unmarriageable. Her employment seemingly identifies her as sexually available and exploitable, an identity which Alva accepts, as she recognizes the "game" and plays along, even though it will only end in a sense of "mysterious humiliation" (DHS 173).

Munro observes the invisible nature of working-class women, recognizing that if not identified as a sexual object, many women, like Alva, would not be recognized or valued within an upper-class household. Thus, Alva barter her sexuality for a brief, and ultimately humiliating, moment of recognition. Edie, in "How I Met My Husband," is also unnoticed in her position as a domestic worker in an upper-class home until she has a fairly innocent encounter with an engaged

man. Naively believing him when he promises he will write and tell her where to find him, Edie has not yet learned the rules of the “game” that Alva plays with her employer’s cousin. Her carelessness causes the fiancée of Edie’s admirer to discover their intimacy, leading her to cruelly outline how Edie was perceived and treated by her lover:

“Loose little bitch, aren’t you? I knew as soon as I saw you. Men despise girls like you. He just made use of you and went off, you know that don’t you? Girls like you are just nothing, they’re public conveniences, just filthy little rags.” (SIB 63)

The notion that working-class women are sexually available “public conveniences,” is exploited by the jilted fiancée who maintains that Edie is trashy and filthy, even though her own situation in relation to the disappearing lover is not really much different. She is, however, spared the condemnation she forces on Edie, as she occupies a slightly superior class position.

Such assumptions concerning “lower” class women’s sexuality are exploited by male figures in Munro’s work, who use these stereotypes to construct a sexually insatiable and deviant identity for the young women they seduce, an identity which simultaneously functions to remove them from culpability for their actions. In “Jesse and Meribeth,” Jesse, a young domestic worker in the rich household of the Crydermans’, is culturally conditioned to equate sexuality with power, an illusion which is destroyed by her employer and replaced with a devalued perception of her sexuality. Intrigued by, but not really attracted to Mr. Cryderman, Jesse imagines the power and sense of sexual value she believes would be bestowed on her if she

were to engage in a sexual relationship with this authority figure. Her imaginings give her a sense of power and of mystery, and she finds herself “wonderfully lightened, not burdened” (POL 243) by lying to her best friend about her fabricated relationship. When the lie is changed to truth by Mr. Cryderman’s advances, Jesse’s illusions of power and freedom are dispelled; Mr. Cryderman is more aroused by degrading Jesse than by engaging with her in sexual intercourse. He manipulates and rejects her sexual complicity, exposing and destroying her notions of gaining power.

He strokes my leg through the thin cotton. “You’re an impulsive girl Jessie [sic]. You shouldn’t go inside places like this with men just because they ask you. You shouldn’t be so ready to let them kiss you. I think you’re hot-blooded. Aren’t you? You’re hot-blooded. You’ve got some lessons to learn.”

And this is how things continue - the stroking and the lecturing, coming at me together. He is telling me I’m to blame, while his fingers start up these flutters under my skin, rousing a tender, distant ache. His dry voice reproaches me. His hand rouses and his words shame me, and something in his voice mocks, mocks endlessly, at both these responses. (POL 250)

Mr. Cryderman constructs Jesse’s sexuality as needy and trashy, and he scolds her for his shared desires, thus absolving himself of responsibility for his actions through his construction of her as a “hot-blooded” and sexually loose girl. Munro suggests that Jesse’s notion that she may gain power and value through her sexuality is an impossible ambition, as Jesse does not possess the power to define her sexuality as valuable, and thus it is dominated by conventionally accepted assumptions concerning promiscuity and “lower-class” women. Consequently, her

sexuality is devalued, and Jesse is identified by her socially respected middle-class employers as a woman with whom they may have a consequence-free fling.

Such socially constructed notions of “lower-class” women as promiscuous results, for some individuals, in a sense of internalized devaluation and powelessness. Lois, in “Thanks for the Ride,” is extremely aware of how her class position has affected her sexuality, and she does not question her role as a sexually available woman. Dick, the narrator, is a young, sexually inexperienced male whose power to dictate the nature of the relationship between himself and Lois suggests that she is, as Rasporich suggests, “at the mercy of middle-class men” (42) who use her sexually, but abandon her for other women. Invited by her friend Arlene to join Dick and his cousin George for the evening, Lois is, as Thacker observes, “defined by Dick’s observations of the town’s environment, her physical appearance, and her home and family” (50), and she is thus not permitted the privilege of defining herself. Dick’s privilege of defining and speaking for Lois is perhaps indicative of the authority that the middle-class takes in defining the working-class, and it is also indicative of a male privilege to set definitions determining the sexuality of impoverished women. Lois’s sexuality, Dick realizes, has been mapped out by previous men. Dick realizes that Lois “[knows] the countryside; she [has] been there before” (DHS 57), a recognition of Lois’s sexual knowledge, and of her familiarity with a repetitive set of events that implies that her experiences have been charted out by men who map their expectations of her

sexuality on her body, expectations which she knows well and does not expect to alter.

Unable to identify with Lois, Dick constructs her as an “Other,” an unknowable and threatening member of an underclass of women whom he feels are “born sly and sad and knowing” (51). As an “Other” to Dick’s defining middle-class voice, Lois is refused the privilege of speech. Though Dick imagines that he is being open to conversation, he silences her with vengeful comments about her family and the transient nature of her previous relationships, topics which function to remind Lois of her class position and reiterate her powerless situation. Significantly, Lois’s attempt to counter Dick’s negative construction of her identity suggests her awareness of her position as a sexual commodity, as she attempts to convince him of her value by listing her material goods: “I’ve got an imitation cashmere sweater at home. It cost me twelve dollars. . . I’ve got a fur coat I’m paying on, paying on for next winter. I’ve got a fur coat. . . (DHS 56). Dick treats her as a sexual commodity and an objectified “Other,” making him, as Carrington notes, “the agent of Lois’s humiliation” (107) through his inability to associate with her as a person. Her “crude. . . abusive and forlorn” shout, “Thanks for the ride,” forces Dick to acknowledge that he, like the men before him, has “taken Lois for a ride: he has used her body, then dumped her” (107), and he has taken both “sexual and class advantage of her” (Rasporich 42). He has simply reinscribed her position in society, setting the same definitions of her sexuality as the men before him.

Significantly, Lois's angry reaction is indicative of her refusal to absolve the narrator of his guilt, and her harsh, unforgiving attitude prevents him from retrospectively romanticizing their encounter. Dick is not allowed to escape blame in the same manner that Mr. Cryderman does, and Lois's silent anger indicates that her sexual promiscuity is not an innate component of her identity. Rather, her anger at the conclusion of the story functions to point a finger at her oppressor, thus identifying men like Dick as the creators of her devalued status.

Women's sexuality is thus redefined and altered by men, a masculine construction of a gendered sexuality which is predicated on the woman's class position. Rose, in Who Do You Think You Are?, suggests that working-class women's sexuality is exceptionally mutable when it is retrospectively defined by men. Men's power to alter the realities of an utterly degrading sexual event in order to romanticize the encounter is, Rose observes, an unfair method of absolving blame for abusiveness and injustice. Recalling Franny, a mentally challenged, physically deformed girl who is raped by her brother on the playground at school, Rose recognizes that this abused girl may be recreated by the men who abused her, men who "cheat" by changing a socially abused and devalued figure into a beautiful, stupid but sweet, sexually available whore. Franny, Rose suggests, may thus be transformed into an "idiotic, saintly whore, a figure whom Rose observes, only exists in "book[s] or movie[s]" (WDY 32), and a figure that is wholly discrepant from the socially degraded and abused Franny. Rose, thus recognizes the reality of Franny's situation, perceiving her as the ultimate figure of devalued

sexuality. Franny's underclass position and physical deformities combine to shape her experience in Hanratty society as an inhuman figure, a sexual joke, and a body that is available for men, and even family, to abuse. For Rose, Franny is beyond moral or compassionate considerations, as she is a terrifying figure of the possibilities of social and sexual degradation. Rose tries to neutralize this threat, asserting that "[a]n act performed on Franny had no general significance, no bearing on what could happen to anyone else" (WDY 33). Clearly, though Rose refuses to romanticize Franny, she shares the social inclination to gloss over the significance of Franny's abuse, constructing her as a void, a body upon which anyone may act, but a body which holds no social significance. Franny's situation, perhaps, is not that far removed from the experience of many women in Munro's fiction, as these women are treated as bodies upon which men act, but which ostensibly hold no social voice, power, or significance.

Women's bodies, when not defined in terms of social value, are defined in economic terms of wealth and poverty. Rose, as an intelligent, independent, and impoverished young woman, feels that she is socially perceived as desexed, an image with which she does not identify, but which she is forced to acknowledge when she meets the girls who share her position as a scholarship winner at university. The female students, she recognizes, look "about forty" and possess detectable "trace[s] of eczema, stained underarms, dandruff, moldy deposits on the teeth and crusty flakes in the corners of the eyes" (87). She further observes that they are all condemned by their "publicly proclaimed braininess and poverty":

Poverty in girls is not attractive unless combined with sweet sluttishness, stupidity. Braininess is not attractive unless combined with some signs of elegance; *class*. Was this true, and was she foolish enough to care? It was; she was. (WDY 87, italics Munro's)

The impoverished class of these young women is manifested in their bodies, and their desire for social acceptance is evident in the “terrible pall of eagerness and docility” that they share (87). Their bodies are devalued because of their class, but unlike working-class women, these girls are transgressing class boundaries with their intellectual ambitions, a pretension which perhaps makes their presence - both physically and intellectually - threatening. Inherited wealth and status are also considered in physical and gendered terms. Discussing a woman whom she later realizes her partner is in love with, the narrator in “Hard-Luck Stories,” reads class and sexuality into his description of the other woman. She is able to “see the money on her, the way he saw it, like long lashes or a bosom - like a luxuriant physical thing” (MOJ 192). Her inheritance of money is identified as a fortunate physical trait, making her “seem like a treasure” (192), and the result of a good family and good breeding. As a commodity, women must have money invested in them so that it may be perceived as natural, a trait which enhances their sexuality. Conversely, a woman who makes the money herself is not as attractive, as she threatens male-dominated economic power. Thus, such women are perceived as “just brassy and ordinary” (MOJ 192). The boundaries between economic class position and the value of women's physical bodies are blurred, suggesting that

women's bodies are inevitably commodities to which monetary value may be assigned.

Elsewhere, Munro explicitly links sexuality and loss of value, both monetary and social. In "Connection," an adult explains to the youthful narrator the definition of "rape" by informing her that it means "[y]ou get your pocketbook stolen" (MOJ 3). This adult is couching sexuality in emphatically financial terms; it is something of value that may be stolen. Additionally, as Irving suggests, "[t]o have her purse stolen, to be raped, can lower a woman's value as the desired object and, furthermore, rape controls women by emphasizing their powerlessness" (96). The young narrator also recognizes that women's bodies also lose value as they age, but this, she asserts, differs greatly "according to class and aspirations":

. . . [their bodies] would either sag and loosen, go wobbly as custard under pale print dresses and damp aprons, or be girded into shapes whose firm curves and proud slopes had nothing to do with sex, everything to do with rights and power. (MOJ 1)

Upper-class women clearly have more control over their physical and sexual being; they, like girdles, can hold everything in, and they can also withhold sexual favors as a method of bartering for power and authority. Working-class women's bodies, however, possess undefined boundaries, they are loosely concealed, readily abused, and simultaneously undesirable and discardable.

Del Jordan's perception of her body is largely influenced by her working-class position; she feels that the boundaries surrounding her body are vague and undefined, and she thus fears that her body may be readily violated. Del recognizes

a discrepancy between her lack of authority over her body and the power associated with the male body, realizing that while men can transgress class and social boundaries with comparative ease, women are not granted this freedom:

. . . being female made you damageable. . . a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. (LOG 147)

Del recognizes that the freedom and social status of men, even impoverished men, is still greater than that of any woman. She is seemingly bound by both her physical location and her physical body, unable to leave Jubilee and return with new knowledge, and unable to escape the socially constructed gender roles that surround her body. As the young girl in "Boys and Girls" realizes, women are defined - and limited - by their body: "A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also, it was a joke on me" (DHS 121). This joke means, as Rasporich notes, that young women must learn to "deal with powerlessness as opposed to power, with passivity as opposed to activity, with following as opposed to leading" (96). Del is intensely aware of how her body is defined in terms of powerlessness and contempt, recognizing that her male classmates' sexual insults are designed to "stri[p] away freedom to be what you wan[t], [and] reduc[e] you to what it [is] they see, and that, plainly, [is] enough to make them gag" (98). The limitations of her body are set by Jubilee society, and

they are maintained through the gender-based ideologies expressed by the young boys who are learning their gender-based prerogative to define and control women's sexuality. Del's recognition of the limiting nature of these definitions is coupled with a desire to cross them, as she realizes that "[w]ithout even thinking about it, [she] had decided to do the same" as the men in her life; she is determined not to be limited by her body, but to go out and "take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off" what she does not want (LOG 147).

Consequently, Del decides to pursue the mysterious and seemingly dangerous power that is granted through sexual awareness, as she hopes that by transgressing Jubilee's social mores she will be removed from its rigid and defining system of social stratification. Self-protection and secret ambition seem to exhaust Del; she covertly desires sexual experience that could occur without her consent, and that would thus free her from culpability for both her sexual conduct and the drop in status and social value that would correspond with her sexual promiscuity. This notion of socially unacceptable freedom is prompted by stories told to her by Mr. Chamberlain, a friend of her mother's boarder, about the sexual knowledge of young girls in Italy:

If I had been born in Italy my flesh would already be used, bruised, knowing. It would not be my fault. The thought of whoredom, not my fault, bore me outward for a moment; a restful, alluring thought, because it was so final, and did away with ambition and anxiety.
(LOG 128)

Del's desire to succumb to powerlessness rather than struggle for independence and upward mobility indicates the painfully difficult nature of striving to achieve such power when starting from a underclass position. She is clearly aware, however, that unlike in Italy, succumbing to sexual desires would be socially unacceptable in Jubilee, where sex is perceived to be "the girl's fault" (LOG 112), because they, according to Naomi's mother, "can control [their] urges better than they [boys] can" (112). Nonetheless, Del is brazenly compliant with Mr. Chamberlain's attempts to fondle her, and just as Mr. Cryderman attempts to construct Jesse as sexually promiscuous, Mr. Chamberlain blames Del for his sexual advances, implying that she is sexually deviant by "assum[ing] without any trouble at all that there [is] treachery in [her], as well as criminal sensuality, waiting to be used" (137), a construction of her identity which is encompassed in his handwriting sample: "*Del is a bad girl*" (136). Del's compliance is, however, clearly not founded in deviant sexuality. Rather, she is intrigued by the changes in her status that could occur if she were to abandon herself to him, as his sexual advances suggest to her a kind of lawlessness. His actions transgress the social boundaries of Jubilee and provide a tempting, though disgraceful, method of removing her from the social dictates of her position within the Jubilee community. His advances seem to Del like "a flash of insanity, a dreamlike, ruthless, contemptuous breakthrough in a world of decent appearances" (LOG 135), and thus suggest a liberating, though degrading, sexual valuation of her body. Notably, Del's final meeting with Mr. Chamberlain occurs out of town, suggesting that Del

is engaging in actions that move her beyond the confines of Jubilee society, and also implying that she is expecting to complete actions that will result in her “subsequent expulsion” from the community (Macdonald 207).

Del can only envision two sexual identities for herself, as she imagines that she will be “changed from schoolgirl to whore” (Macdonald 209) by her final meeting with Chamberlain. She is instead left disillusioned by the lack of change that accompanies her new, though still limited, sexual knowledge. Del is not enabled to give up her aspirations and desire for success, nor is she expelled from Jubilee society, as her developing sexuality fails to trap her into complicity with a devalued class position. Consequently, as Rasporich notes, Del decides to “retrea[t] with open-mindedness into books and while they are no substitute for sex, they are an imaginative means out of the narrow, circumscribed lives of the girls and women in Jubilee” (49). Del is thus not freed from the limitations imposed by Jubilee society on her body, but she is enabled to envision a future outside of the class confines of Jubilee.

Del’s wish to escape Jubilee, however, remains complicated by her desire for sexual knowledge and her uncertainty if her developing sexuality can be reconciled with her wish to achieve upward mobility. Unwilling to accept her mother’s belief that “sex [is] something no woman - no *intelligent* woman - would ever submit to unless she had to” (68), Del continues to seek freedom through sexuality. She constructs romantic ideals of sexuality and sacrifice, believing in a “[v]oluptuous surrender” in which she may abandon herself “[n]ot to a man but to fate, really, to

darkness, to death” (153). Del’s glorification of such a melodramatic surrender of autonomy is again indicative of her desire to renounce ambition and allow herself to live out the conventional “fate” of women, or at least, to live out the fate of women as constructed in dramatic operas and women’s magazines. Del’s overly romantic ideals, however, are consistently undermined by her own experiences and those of Naomi, her childhood friend. Munro identifies Naomi as a “foil character” who represents the ‘adjustment made by the female in these communities, the female who can’t get out, who doesn’t have whatever Del’s [advantage] is, and who will live in that community all her life. . .’” (cited in Carrington 90). Working in a pink-collar job until she gets married, Naomi focuses on slowly accumulating household wares with which to start her new life. Her plans, however, are disrupted by her unexpected pregnancy and quick marriage to a man she does not love. Del recognizes that she does not want “to go” where Naomi is going in life, but she simultaneously fears that she is not “progressing” (152) due to her inability to accept her subordinate role in relation to men and plan her future around them. Consequently, although Del has the power to escape Jubilee, she is nonetheless dangerously intrigued by the safe, unambitious course that Naomi follows.

Part of Del’s fascination with conventional gender roles is predicated on her fear that such traditional options are not available to her; she is awed by the demands that a “conventional” feminine lifestyle imposes on the body of women, and feels herself unable to meet the requirements of feminine stereotypes. Feeling that the “diets, skin-care routines, hair-shampooing methods, [and] clothes” (149) that are

required to make her body into a sexually desirable commodity are overwhelming and complicated, Del fears that her inability to manipulate her body and conform to such feminine standards means that she is not worthy of love: “Love is not for the undepilated” (150). Del is further upset by the fact that such physical demands are unaccompanied by intellectual demands. An article outlining “the difference between the male and female modes of thought” informs Del that while men look at the moon and “thin[k] of the universe, its immensity and mystery,” women look at the moon but fail to see it; they turn their thoughts inward, considering the domestic and the self. Disturbed by socially accepted beliefs concerning women’s ostensibly limited scope of understanding and thought, Del asserts her difference; she wants “men to love [her], *and* [she] want[s] to think of the universe when [she] look[s] at the moon” (150). Thus, as Rasporich notes, Del “chooses with defiance to be abnormal” (50), indicating a rejection of the “abrogation of self required” by conventional gender roles.

Del’s relationship with Garnet French, however, enables her to learn the role of the lover, tempting her to exchange her “abnormal” autonomy and intellect for romance and passion. To Del, Garnet is a romantic figure; he is divorced from reality and exists for her only in the immediate present. She feels that “[e]verything [they do] seem[s] to take place out of range of other people, or ordinary consequences” (192), and thus she does “not fear pregnancy,” although an unexpected pregnancy would destroy her chances of going to school. Del, however, feels that “[p]resently nothing matter[s]” (180) in her life beyond her

sexual relationship with Garnet, a myopic perspective which ultimately results in her failure to win the scholarship she needs for university. Her planned route of escape from Jubilee is thus removed, but her ambition to escape Jubilee has also been temporarily removed by her obsession with Garnet. Del is immersed in her role as Garnet's lover, a construction of her identity which suggests that she sees herself in terms of her sexuality, and in terms of her sexual value to her partner.

Del's inability to reconcile her sexuality with her ambition is further complicated by her inability to balance her sexual identity with her social class identity. When her mother questions Del about her future plans with Garnet, Del reacts with an emphatic denial that she will "live in Jubilee all [her] life" and "be the wife of a lumberyard worker" (183). Garnet's class position is below that possessed by Del; he is among the "backwoods" country people that Del and her friend Jerry examine with a detached, classist, analytical gaze that once secured their sense of difference and superiority. Del's inability to envision a future with Garnet is predicated on this sense of class and intellectual superiority. She feels a "sinking of the heart" (180) when she considers Garnet's "lower" social standing, and she jokes with Jerry about Garnet's intellect, calling him "Cro-Magnon" with a feeling of "cheerful shameful treachery" (182). Although Del refuses to define herself as the wife of a "lower-class" man, and although she cannot take him seriously as a person whom she might marry, she does define herself through her sexual relationship with him. Their sexual encounters are all encompassing, leading Del, as Carrington observes, to "surrender to her body" (91). A split

develops between her mind and body; she recognizes that her relationship with Garnet is purely sexual, and that “[n]othing that could be said by [them] would bring [them] together; words [are]. . . enemies” (183) which threaten to confuse their relationship. Del ceases to identify herself in terms of her “abnormality” and difference from others, and rather, begins to identify herself in purely sexual terms. She identifies herself in her sexual relationship with Garnet as “suspended in clear and warm and irresistibly moving water” (LOG 182), an image which suggests a state of stasis that is incompatible with change or movement. Thus, Del allows herself to be both defined and limited by her sexual relationship with Garnet, and consequently, as Carrington suggests, her struggle “is not only against Garnet” and the power he exerts over her, but it is “also against *herself*; [as] part of her prompts her to ‘knuckle under’ to him in his ‘struggle. . . to dominate her’” (91). Del becomes caught between her sexual desire and the power of that desire to entirely define and limit her, as she is as of yet unable to create a balance between her sexual and her social identity.

Consequently, Del and Garnet’s relationship ends when he attempts to exert a patriarchal and authorial power over her, a power which would irrevocably remove her options and ambitions and lock her into an impoverished class role. Aware that Garnet has “rearranged [her, taken] just what he needed, to suit himself” (183), Del realizes that she has done the same; she has constructed him as a lover, a safely limited role which keeps him “sewed up in his golden lover’s skin forever” (198), and which does not enable their relationship to progress. Consequently, as Howells

observes, when Garnet asks her to marry him, he “directly challenges Del’s fantasy” (46). Del awakens from her dreamlike state to realize that she has never had any intentions of making her relationship with Garnet permanent, and “that [she has] somehow met his good offerings with. . . deceitful offerings” (198). When Garnet accuses Del of feeling she is “too good for anything. Any of *us*” (197), referring to his family and class-based group, Del becomes aware that she could never have sacrificed her desire for upward mobility in order to marry Garnet. Her amazement that “anybody could have made such a mistake, to think he had real power over [her]” (197), suggests not only the strength of her innate sense of independence and self-determining power, but it also implies that she abides by the classist notions of Jubilee society; she cannot imagine that someone, like Garnet, who is supposedly her social and intellectual inferior could believe that he had a right to control her. Garnet struggles to secure his power over her by forcing her to be baptized, a symbolic act which, as Del fears, may both literally and metaphorically drown her. She thus struggles against the patriarchal power he attempts to exert over her, realizing that the “game” she has been playing with Garnet is “no game at all, or if it [is], it [is] a game that require[s] [her] to be buried alive” (198). Their romance thus “threatens to turn into a trap [which] Del resists. . . at the peril of her life” (Carrington 46). It is, nonetheless, a trap which she has been complicit in creating, as she considered the possibility of abandoning her ambition and conforming to socially conventional gender roles.

Del ultimately recognizes that gaining sexual freedom will not release her from her ambition. Her relationship with Garnet is inevitably enmeshed in discourses concerning class and gender differences, discourses which seemingly require her surrender of autonomy, ambition, and power to her male lover. Thus, her romantic ideal of “[v]oluptuous surrender” in which she may abandon herself “[n]ot to a man but to fate, really, to darkness, to death” (153) is exposed as contradictory to her true desires; she does not want to resign or abandon herself to a life of poverty, and she no longer feels that she wants freedom from her ambitions. Conversely, Del chooses a different form of surrender, one which leaves her lover behind, but which she finds is “more tempting, more gorgeous even than the surrender to sex. . . [the] surrender to the final importance of gesture, image, self-created self” (153). This surrender not only suggests, as Carrington observes, that Del wishes to “maintain... [a] proudly independent self” (87), but it also implies that Del no longer wishes to deny or conceal her ambition. Del is thus both “relieved” and “desolate” when her relationship with Garnet ends. She ponders what her life could have been had she “never wakened up” or had let herself be baptized under his power, but she simultaneously feels that she can now “get started on [her] own life” (201). Although Del’s decision to “surrender” to her “self-created self” is not a balanced, ideal choice, it is nonetheless a step toward the development of an identity which is not defined through Jubilee’s class structure, through a patriarchal authority figure, or exclusively through her sexuality.

Del's rejection of the defining power of the patriarchal class system of Jubilee is further evidenced in her destruction of her Uncle Craig's manuscript, a document which is a social map of Jubilee that is written from a specifically male perspective, with specifically male concerns. This gendering of cartography, as Aritha van Herk suggests, is an exclusive mapping of the lives of men:

Men map the territory of place, history and event [while] the female fiction writers of Canada map a different territory, not as obvious but just as important. They map the country of the interior, the world maze of the human being. (van Herk cited in Howells 40)

Women view the social maps of Canadian society from a different position than men, a position which inevitably provides a different perspective. The underclass perspective of many women is rarely charted, and thus, rather than simply charting the typically public, and thus ostensibly socially valuable, lives of men, Del's writing functions, as Howells notes, as a "revelation of the lives of some of the girls and women within this social structure" (40), and the ways gender and status interact to shape an individual's identity.

Munro's fiction perhaps serves a similar function. Though her fiction does not offer a prescription for the resolution of class inequality, nor does it suggest methods of breaking down the social barriers that keep women in an underclass position, Munro's stories do provide a recognition of women's class-bound experiences, experiences which are usually deemed unworthy of acknowledgment and preservation. She observes the pervasive nature of gender and class-based inequalities by mapping them on the social and geographical landscape of her

fictional towns, indicating her awareness of how class boundaries create divisive and fractured societies. Her examination of her characters' sense of guilt in crossing class boundaries suggests an awareness of the pervasive and internalized ideologies that function to maintain gender-based inequities in Canadian society, and her examination of the sexist, class-based discourses that construct impoverished women's sense of social devaluation indicates her refusal to accept such socially constructed images as natural. Her texts, by recognizing the constructed nature of the gender-based limitations imposed on women in Canadian society, create a much needed counter-discourse to widely accepted class-based and male-imposed valuations of women, and their role in literature.

CHAPTER THREE

Margaret Laurence's fictional town of Manawaka is a rigidly stratified society made moribund by its inflexible class-based ideals. Past and present class-bound ideologies and discourses of racism and exclusion mesh with devastating results in the Manawakan community, as socially accepted, but restrictive codes of behavior function as obstructions for members of both ethnic groups and younger generations. Furthermore, these class-based ideals simultaneously create an increasing sense of alienation and isolation in some of the elderly community members who persistently engage in a struggle to maintain and function within obsolete class discourses. As Munro does, Laurence examines how such discourses and social boundaries may be symbolically mapped out in the class divisions manifested in small-town geography. Laurence's writing, however, charts a wider range of class history than Munro's, providing an investigation of how imperialism and colonialism in Canadian society have supplied the foundational structure of the Canadian class system, and how this hierarchical stratification has been maintained throughout Canadian history through to its pervasive presence in modern society. Laurence's works progressively examine the increasingly anachronous nature of class discourses concerning race and gender in an ostensibly developing multicultural society, and her writing thus offers an investigation of how past imperialist class issues concerning ethnicity, gender,

language, and culture interact with contemporary discourses to continue to create social prisons and incarcerating ideologies which are inherently divisive and destructive. Laurence's texts suggest that such discourses may be deconstructed and, it is to be hoped, abandoned, but her stories document the difficulties involved in the creation of counter-discourses when commencing from a disempowered class position. Significantly, the majority of Laurence's narrators, with the exception of the youthful Morag in The Diviners, relate a specifically white, female, and middle-class perspective, a viewpoint which necessarily shades their view of other groups within Manawakan society. The circumscribed and exclusive nature of this voice is manipulated by Laurence throughout the Manawaka series in an effort to expose the limitations of various individuals' class-bound perspective, providing an indication of how this perspective may limit such individuals in power, and how their authority may be used to oppress and restrict those they label as socially inferior.

Manawaka's stratification system is divided on both ethnic and economic lines, creating a hierarchy of power and status which may be divided into three central groups. The upper-level of the stratification system is comprised of Scottish Presbyterians, an insular settler group with a strict, old-world value system that values hard work and social status, and which is intolerant of all other groups in Manawakan society. This group is relatively homogenous, but there are, however, as David Blewett notes in his article "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," "subtle gradations of social degree within this group" (177). The internal stratification of

the Scots-Presbyterian community suggests that power and status are only afforded to a select elite, and thus those who are both poor and not of this Scottish Presbyterian descent are, due to their difference, relegated to an underclass position. Consequently, external to the dominant group are those whom Blewett suggests “do not count socially” (177), a group composed of Ukrainians, unsuccessful individuals, and “ne’er-do-wells” (177), who fail to adopt the ideals of the Scots Presbyterians. The Métis are the most socially and economically disadvantaged group in Manawakan society; their community exists both “outside the town and its social order altogether,” (Blewett 177) and their claim as the original and rightful owners of the Manawakan land is unacknowledged by the dominant group.

The contrast between the underclass position of the Métis and the powerful social authority of the Scots-Presbyterians is perhaps analogous to what Laurence describes as tribalism. Within dominant groups there is a shared sense of community, but this bond is dependent on the exclusion of various groups; it is a society that defines itself in terms of a socially outcasted “Other.” Clara Thomas suggests that a sense of partnership and belonging in the Manawakan community is derived from conformity to Scots-Presbyterian “[i]deals of godliness and business enterprise” which are evidenced in “unremitting work” (176). Those who do not subscribe to such “corporate ideal[s]” or who, due to racial and ethnic prejudice, are not enabled to pursue economic wealth, are thus subjected to “great personal loss and social peril” (176). Thomas likens the stratification of Manawaka to that

of a tribe, being “not, primarily, a network of kinship and family, but a powerful structure of hierarchical social relationships” (176). Tribalism itself, according to Laurence “is not such a bad thing, if seen as the bond which an individual feels with his roots, his ancestors, his background” (qtd. in A Place To Stand On 31), but she does observe, however, tribalism has the potential to become “frighteningly dangerous” when the tribe “is seen as ‘the people’, the human beings, and the others, the un-tribe, are seen as sub-human” (31). It is possible, then, to perceive the Métis, as an ethnic-based underclass in the Manawakan community and as a historically oppressed group in Canadian society, as having been treated as members of an un-tribe or underclass. Defined by dominant groups in racist and imperialist terms as a “primitive” and “improvident” people, the Métis have been viewed as necessarily subject to a form of Social Darwinism that privileges “European culture as superior to primitive cultures” and which positions the powerful as “entitled to preempt the ‘inferior’ people’s land” (Morley 145). Laurence indicates how the historical devaluation of the Métis people and culture remains a reality in contemporary Canadian society, identifying the imperialist stratification system that initially imposed their disadvantaged class position as also being the means by which their devalued status is perpetuated.

The stratification of Manawakan society is thus examined by Laurence as the product of imported cultural views and imperialist ideologies which have ultimately aided in creating a Canadian heritage of exclusionary practices. Laurence’s first Manawakan novel, The Stone Angel, traces the life of Hagar

Shiple, a woman whose destructive pride and inability to show emotion are partially the product of her class position as middle-class woman of the Victorian era. Hagar's father, Jason Currie, as Constance Rooke suggests in her reading of The Stone Angel, embodies "the colonial sensibility which looks to the old world for its values and for a continuation of class privilege" (80). The colonialist belief that "the mother-country is the source of all standards, the home of culture and civilization" and that the "colony is inevitably. . . second-rate, . . . a place of exile, a place to be exploited" (Osachoff 1) is an ideology evidenced in Jason Currie's importation of an Italian gravestone purchased "at a terrible expense" (SA 3) to mark the grave of his wife.¹ The Stone Angel metaphorically stands as a marker of Hagar's blind pride, but it is also a marker of Jason's class-based ideals, acting as a testimonial to Currie's preference for Old World standards which distinguish him as a "pharaoh" in a land populated by those he perceives as his social inferiors (Rooke 80).

Laurence uses the land of the Manawaka cemetery to symbolize the territory mapped and claimed by Canadian settlers, an appropriation of land that pushed indigenous peoples to the periphery of the community and which mapped out class and social status differences on the Manawakan landscape. The carefully manicured cemetery is as "rich and thick as syrup with the funeral-parlor perfume of the planted peonies," (SA 4), a plant which Osachoff notes is an import to

¹ The titles of Laurence's texts will be abbreviated as follows: The Stone Angel (SA); A Jest of God (JOG); A Bird in the House (BH); The Firewellers (TF); The Diviners (TD).

Manitoba, and which signifies that the burial grounds, with their “civilized forms, the marble angel and the peonies, is the colonial culture and a garrison in the midst of an expanse of wild prairie grass” (229). This meticulously landscaped and maintained garrison, however, is challenged by “tough-rooted. . . wild and gaudy flowers” that are carefully “held back at the cemetery’s edge. . . by loving relatives determined to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized” (SA 4). The efforts of the settler community to control and “civilize” the land are thwarted by these flowers located on the periphery of the cemetery, indigenous plants which send their scent across the boundaries of the land to permeate their colonialist barricade:

. . . for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair. (5)

As Leslie Monkman notes in his article on the Tonnerre family, the graveyard represents an “opposition between the ‘civilized’ rigidity of Manawaka’s white citizens and the essential vitality of nature, in a landscape associated with the Indian” (144). It is also a geographical location which represents the cultural and class divisions that characterize the Manawakan community, a divisiveness which is made clear by the Currie-Shipley tombstone, a stone that functions as a shrine to the class and ideological divide of the two families, physically documenting their opposing views, as Blewett notes, through the back to back engraving of the family names. This social split is later emphasized in Laurence’s The Diviners when Jules

Tonnerre is denied the right to bury his father in the town cemetery, a refusal which he asserts is because the town does not want “[h]is halfbreed bones spoiling their cemetery” (289). Morag Gunn, in The Diviners, feels that her working-class family does not belong in the socially exclusive garrison of the cemetery, and observes that her adoptive parents, Christie and Prin, should be buried in the “Nuisance Grounds,” the dump where Christie worked.

Geographically, the socially constructed and hypocritical nature of the class divisions of Manawaka is represented by the close physical location and similar function of the cemetery and the town dump. Though the dump is later identified as “the town’s unofficial cemetery” (TD 168) in The Diviners, the symbolic link between these geographical locations is first suggested in The Stone Angel. Blewett notes that for the “children of genteel families” like Hagar, “the dump reveals yet another side of life - the stark and sickening reality of filth, disease, mutilation, suffering and the necessity of death - the facts of death which funeral parlors and cemeteries are designed to conceal” (179). Hagar’s consciousness of the darker side of life represented by the dump is only temporarily awakened when, as a child, she and her friends visit the garbage heap. The young girls find some eggs that have hatched in the heat of the sun, leaving the “feeble, foodless, bloodied and mutilated” chicks who are still partially encased in their shells to struggle for life. Finding herself only able to “gawk and retch,” Hagar is surprised when a fatherless, socially outcasted young girl referred to as “No-Name Lottie” crushes the doomed chicks. Laurence associates Lottie with the struggling chicks,

describing her as “light as an eggshell herself” (SA 27), possessing fine “yellow hair” and a “light” and “tiny” physique (SA 11). As the chicks are an “affront to the eyes” of Hagar, Lottie is an “affront to the eyes” and the ideals of Manawaka; her uncertain parentage violates the town’s rigid moral code, and thus forms the basis for Lottie’s exclusion from the community. Notably, Hagar envisions her elevated position in relation to Lottie as natural, and she thus shares in the merriment with “a half-ashamed excitement” (11) when Lottie is called “No-Name” by school boys. Hagar’s notion of her inherent social superiority in relation to Lottie is learned through her acceptance of her father’s class pretensions; Jason Currie removes Lottie’s name from party lists of “intended guests” composed by Hagar and her brothers, and, after the death of Lottie’s mother, he reflects on her as a woman whose “sort isn’t much loss to the town” (19).

As Lottie is relegated to a socially outcasted position because of her parents’ actions, Jason Currie desires to make his daughter a symbol of his elevated class position in the town. Constructed by her father’s desire for status in the Manawakan community, Hagar is, as Rooke suggests, the product of another imported angel: “the Victorian image of woman as ‘The Angel in the House’” (2). Though smarter and braver than her brothers, Hagar’s future is determined by her gender and her father’s power over her as his property, a possession which he wishes to keep in his house as a reflection of his status. In “A Mirror For Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature,” Cynthia Griffin Wolff notes how women, as the property of their fathers, become markers of class and social status, observing

that “woman’s function. . . is to magnify the men who support her; she is the visible manifestation of their success and the repository of that traditional morality which they so often suspended during the process of amassing wealth” (215). To her father, Hagar is a symbol of his class position and economic success. Consequently, he gives her an education which he does not wish her to use, a superfluous schooling that upgrades her value as his possession:

Father looked me over, my bottle-green costume and feathered hat. I wished he’d find some fault, tell me I’d been extravagant, not nod and nod as though I were a thing and his. (SA 43)

Hagar becomes a “credit” to her father, an “ornament of prosperous society” who can hostess his dinner parties and act as “evidence of pecuniary ability to afford a life of idleness” (Wolff 215). Additionally, as Rooke notes, Hagar’s education “aims at making woman decorative [and]. . . keep[ing] her dependent upon men” (3). Hagar, however, who feels she is of inherent social value due to her parentage and her education, fails to recognize that her status is dependent on that of her father. Consequently, when Hagar marries Bram Shipley she is unable to recognize that she cannot transfer her class position and social status to her husband, thus emphasizing her inability to understand that class privilege is a socially ascribed quality, and not an inherent genetic quality or character trait that is immutable and always possessed. Hagar’s learned obsession with maintaining a class-based image of propriety causes her to be so enmeshed in signifiers of class and culturedness that she is unable to recognize individuals as people, but rather sees them as

members of a class, and that status position as their sole unchanging and permanently defining feature. Hagar's acceptance of the ostensible natural nature of class difference is perhaps indicative of how class-based pride functions to create a sense of imperialistic difference which evaluates both women and ethnic groups on constructed notions of innate difference, notions which subsequently function to keep both groups in an underclass position.

By associating Lottie with the image of the helpless chicks, Laurence complicates the ostensibly innate nature of Lottie's social status, and further exposes the blindness with which Hagar accepts such elitist class-based ideals. Years later, the elderly Hagar realizes her uncertainty about the motivation of Lottie's supposedly merciful killing of the chicks, finding that she is "less certain. . . that [Lottie] did it entirely for their sake" (28). Lottie's physical resemblance to the pale, struggling chicks, and her anger at their obvious suffering suggest that she is aware and resentful of her socially offensive presence in the Manawaka community. Her ability to face the necessary slaughter of the chicks is reminiscent of Rose's assertion in Who Do You Think You Are? that poverty and devalued social status deny protection to individuals, exposing them to ugly and frightening things in life. As the dominant group in Manawaka is protected from the reality of death by its sanitized and flowery funeral parlors and cemeteries, individuals like Lottie, and later, Morag and Jules, are not given the same privilege of such shelter, thus remaining intensely aware of social inequities. Lottie angrily kills the exposed chicks, a merciful but possibly resentful action that is demanded both by the

obvious helplessness of the chicks and her anger that, like herself, they are unjustly at the mercy of others. Conversely, Hagar struggles against this recognition of inequity and injustice, finding the chicks such an “affront to the eyes,” that though killing them is “the only thing to do,” she refuses to “touch them” (27). Hagar is unable to associate the unfair suffering of the chicks with the socially imposed suffering of Lottie, preferring to maintain her class-based distance and cultivate a self-protective obliviousness to the pain of others. This blindness enables Hagar to maintain her beliefs concerning her innate superiority, an internalized sense of value which, if destroyed, would shatter her fundamentally class-based sense of self.

Hagar’s desire for class survival thus contributes to her blindness, and ultimately makes her psychologically unable to accommodate the class transition that results from her marriage to Bram Shipley. Initially, Hagar believes that she can change Bram by molding him into a man who “prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar” (SA 50). When the impossibility of this becomes clear, Hagar remains confident of her own class-based value and looks down on her husband, resenting that Bram wants his “dynasty no less than [her] father had” (101), a desire she feels is ridiculously pretentious: “[T]he thought uppermost in my mind was - *the nerve of him*” (101). She is psychically unable to accommodate the reality that she has fallen in status through marriage, thus retaining her feelings of contempt and superiority for those who work with her husband, and never “letting on how [she] felt about. . . serving a bunch of breeds and ne’er-do-wells

and Galicians” (114). Hagar later recognizes that her marriage has threatened, or destroyed, her imagined status, a realization which is prompted by her sense of degradation at having sold eggs to Lottie, a woman who Hagar believes is her social inferior. Fleeing to the washroom, Hagar stares in the mirror at a “brown and leathery face that [isn’t hers]”, an image which she confronts “as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some truer image, infinitely distant” (133). Unable to identify herself as an impoverished, aging woman, Hagar searches her face for a sense of self that is founded on an illusory class-based self-perception, but she is only able to find a face that is discrepant from that internalized sense of class value.

Although her social superiority is founded on a class position that she lost through marriage, Hagar still struggles to indoctrinate her favored son, John, with the class-based ideals and beliefs of that lost status. John, however, feels that such class pretensions are hypocritical, and prefers, against his mother’s wishes, to associate with the social outcasts of Manawaka. His friendship with Lazarus Tonnerre and his family is, as Monkman suggests, indicative of his acceptance of values that oppose those held by the “white civilization associated with Hagar Shipley” (143). Similarly, his exchange of the Currie plaid pin for Lazarus’s knife indicates the carelessness with which he views his restrictive class heritage, and it also suggests that he wishes to possess some of the freedom that Laurence’s characters often believe is held by the socially outcasted groups of Manawaka.

John's relationship with Arlene, Lottie's only daughter, also transgresses the class boundaries that Hagar struggles to maintain, perimeters which to John's generation are insignificant, but which are, to Hagar's cohorts, crucial markers of class-based pride and identity. In recognition of the generational difference of class boundaries, John angrily informs his mother that her classist notions are obsolete: "This may come as a shock to you. . . . But it's not her grandfather I'm going around with, nor she with mine" (204). Hagar, however, is unable to recognize the value of Arlene's love for John, nor is she able to understand that they are unconcerned about their class differences. As Rooke notes, Arlene has "abandoned the sense of class superiority" that Hagar clings to, and similarly, John has recognized his mother's ideals as distinct from reality, creating a strong psychic division for John between his true status position and his mother's incarcerating "spurious prestige" and indoctrination of anachronous class-based ideals (Rooke 5).

Both Hagar and Lottie's desire to maintain their social status becomes so destructive that they indirectly sacrifice their own children to save their class pretensions, a sacrifice that not only suggests the self-defeating nature of trying to maintain obsolete class ideals, but which also demonstrates how past class pretensions function to bind and suffocate younger generations. Though economically and socially elevated through marriage, Hagar maintains a vision of Lottie's situation as beneath her, feeling that her son marrying "No-Name Lottie Drieser's daughter" is a laughable notion (204). Thus, just as Hagar is threatened

by the social risk involved in John's friendship with Lazarus, she is also intolerant of John's relationship with Arlene. In consequence, Hagar temporarily unites with Lottie to plot against their children in effort to keep their younger generation in the confines of their inherited class ideologies and positions, a struggle which results in Lottie and John's death on a railroad track as they rebel against the authoritarian stance taken by their parents. Lottie and Hagar thus, as Rooke suggests, "symbolically. . . stamp out their [children's] life, just as once before. . . Lottie trampled on the chicks emerging from their shells; in both cases death is accomplished presumably for the good of its victims" (5). Rooke later notes that "[i]n causing the separation of John and Arlene, however, their mothers do not kill 'for mercy's sake,' but for their own" (5); their need to preserve their outdated and destructive class ideals ultimately is greater than their love for their children. The death of Arlene and John thus indicates the moribund nature of Manawakan class ideals and the dying nature of this society. It is a stratified community which does not allow for the young to change, and which seemingly destroys those who struggle to push beyond the obsolete class-based ideologies of their parents' generation.

The destructive nature of anachronous visions of class and social respectability is thus manifested in an inter-generational conflict, a friction which complicates the development of identity for members of the younger generation. In A Jest of God, Rachel, the narrator, must mediate between her own feelings concerning her class position, and the restrictive, class-based code of behavior espoused by her mother,

Mrs. Cameron. Mrs. Cameron possesses similar class-based notions of ethnic superiority to those possessed by Hagar, racist assumptions that are founded on her Scots-Presbyterian heritage. Rachel notes that her mother's ideals are in part defined by difference, and the devaluation of a socially unaccepted "Other" in the Manawakan community: the Ukrainians. The difference between the two groups is sarcastically identified by Rachel, who suggests that it is founded on class pretensions: "The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God" (JOG 71). Rachel, however, disagrees with such ideals, recognizing that her generation holds different class perceptions than those of her parents:

She [Mrs. Cameron] was brought up that way, and my father too, and I, but by the time it reached me, the backbone had been splintered considerably. She doesn't know that, though, and never will. Probably I wouldn't even want her to know. (JOG 71)

The class and ethnic-based racism of Manawakan society is clearly breaking down in younger generations. Mrs. Cameron's struggle to uphold her classist ideals clashes with Rachel's desire to escape her mother's - and Manawaka's - restrictive and discriminatory ideological beliefs. Rachel's disagreement with her mother's ideals is, however, a silent protest, one which she finds herself unable to articulate aloud for fear of upsetting the hegemonic nature of her middle-class society. Thus, Rachel outwardly conforms to such discrimination, and occasionally finds herself thinking in classist terms even though such thoughts to her are part of an outdated

ideology and a threat to her identity: "It can't be myself thinking like that. I don't believe that way at all. It's as though I've thought in Mother's voice" (70).

Rachel's difficulty in resisting internalized class discourses increases her feeling of alienation from members of her own generation; she perceives herself, as Morley suggests, as "an anachronism, sole survivor of an extinct species. . . an invisible woman" (91) who "does not accept her mother's view, but cannot act on her own" (91). The conflict between Rachel's outward, public conformity to Manawaka's outdated social codes of behavior, and her own internal discourse of resistance becomes so extreme that it ultimately causes her near mental breakdown, forcing her to struggle to free herself from her mother's obsolete class perceptions. Mistakenly believing a uterine tumor to be a pregnancy, Rachel is compelled to recognize how many of her fears are constructed around the beliefs and ideologies held by others; her concerns about her pregnancy revolve around not being able to "hold her head up forever after on Japonica Street, outcast and also seeking exile" (166), as she is intensely afraid of the drop in status that would occur should she have a child out of wedlock. Her socially constructed identity is, essentially, a growth within her that is destroying her true sense of self, and which must ultimately be rejected and removed. Rachel's determination not to be defined by her mother's racist and obsolete ideals is indicated when she realizes that she is "the mother now," (191), a new identity which places her in control of her family unit, and which signifies her acceptance of the validity of her own ideals. Her role as the mother now also suggests that she can articulate her different class-based

ideologies, and it relegates her mother's discourses of exclusion to a disempowered position.

As with the cemetery in The Stone Angel, Laurence uses the funeral home once owned by Rachel's father not only as an indication of the moribund class culture of Manawaka, but also as an indicator of class differences. Rachel is aware of how the sanitization and denial of death is a middle-class phenomenon, noting that "[n]o one in Manawaka ever dies, at least not on this side of the tracks. . . . Death is rude, unmannerly, not to be spoken to on the street" (JOG 19). Rachel demonstrates an understanding that her class group is somewhat protected from such disturbing and disruptive events, and she also notes that this is not a privilege afforded to those in the working-class. The relationship Rachel notices between this sanitization of death and class position is explored by Hughes, who asserts that it reflects a "split between the rational and middle-class side of the tracks and the lower-class physical or passionate side":

Having created a narrowly rational, sternly controlled society, one in which passion or the emotive side of life has been left to the lower classes, the middle classes have repressed the emotive side of life and developed a death-in-life existence which makes death impossible. Death is a meaningless concept if it is not seen in relation to life, and here there is no life. (114)

Manawakan social and class codes dictate that individuals must be completely removed from their emotional side; respectability is dependent on resisting the passionate side of life that Hagar avoids in The Stone Angel, as such passion presents a threat to propriety and social appearances. Rachel recognizes her

complicity in the maintenance of such appearances noting that she cannot understand how anyone can “bear to make a public spectacle of themselves” (41). She finds it threatening and unsettling, feeling that “[p]eople should keep themselves to themselves - that’s the only decent way” (41). These thoughts are the product of her upbringing, and the voice in her head is again, perhaps, her mother’s and not her own. Nonetheless, Rachel’s repressed emotions begin to be expressed in a manner beyond her control, as when she strikes a student, or when her voice betrays her and begins she speaking in tongues at the Tabernacle. Such outbursts are indicative of the destructiveness of repressing emotions, and how the ideals of the middle-class group in Manawaka are, as Hughes suggests, not unlike a comatose state, a joyless existence which has caused stagnation and frustration in Rachel’s life.

Hughes’ assertion, however, that the working-class is somehow emotionally freer than the middle-class is an illusion which Rachel entertains, but which Laurence exposes as fallacious. Rachel informs her lover, Nick Kazlick, that she “envied. . . [p]eople like [him],” (meaning Ukrainians) because “in comparison with the kids” at her end of town the Ukrainians “always seemed more resistant. . . more free” (JOG 93). She confesses that, in comparison with the middle-class, their community seemed “[n]ot so boxed-in. . . [m]ore able to speak out. More allowed to - both by. . . family and by yourself” (94). Nick, however, laughs at her misconceptions, and questions her skewed vision of his lifestyle: “More free? That’s a funny thing to say. How did you think we spent our time? Laying girls

and doing gay Slavic dances?" (94). In contrast to Rachel's visions of freedom, Nick recalls, as Morley suggests, the "alienation felt by Ukrainian children in a town where the power structure, the hegemony, was Scottish" (97). Rather than advancing the notion that one group is freer than the other, Laurence sets up a class dichotomy in which she suggests that complete freedom does not exist in a system of stratification, as any individual within that society remains bound and restricted by their inherited class-based ideals and expectations. Freedom thus only exists in the working-class and the middle class as a dichotomous "freedom to" and "freedom from"² situation, a system which allows liberties, but which counterbalances these licenses with stronger limitations. Whereas Rachel perceives the Ukrainian people, through their lower social status in Manawaka, as having freedom from the restrictive social discourses of the Scots Presbyterians, Nick recognizes and grapples with the difficulty in achieving upward mobility from a devalued status position. For Nick, freedom to explore new avenues and opportunities is limited in Manawakan society, and thus he feels he must abandon not only his hometown, but also his ethnic heritage in order to gain such options.³

² George Orwell, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, outlines the concept of "freedom from." This may have been the basis for the dichotomized definition used here, which is from Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale: "There is more than one kind of freedom. . . Freedom to and freedom from" (24).

³ Those who are forced out of Manawaka, or who are compelled to leave in order to achieve upward mobility, tend to move to Vancouver, but this change of physical location does not always occur in conjunction with an alteration in, or abandonment of, the individual's psychic sense of class location. Vancouver, in Laurence's novels, is a city which represents both hope and, as Clara Thomas suggests, a "place of final despair" (179). Stacey Cameron, in Laurence's The Firedwellers, is not only threatened by the city, but also by her sense of class location and past; she finds that her "mental baggage. . . keep[s] spilling out. . .

Consequently, although Nick and Rachel attempt to construct their own “neutral territory. . . [s]omeplace that [is] neither one side nor the other” (93), a place where they can exist outside of the class-based restrictions of Manawaka, they are ultimately divided by their different class heritage and notions of freedom. Rachel feels guilty about the difficult immigration experience Nick’s family has endured; even though she recognizes that both groups “came for the same reasons, because they had nothing where they were before” (71), she feels “apologetic towards people like [Nick’s] family, that they went through all that” (112). Nick, Rachel realizes, makes her “feel. . . as though things had been easy for the people [she]

taking [her] by surprise” (38), mental baggage which she hoped would have been left behind in her hometown of Manawaka. The town, however, has gone with her in both a psychic and a literal sense, as Stacey finds herself confronted with impoverished and alienated individuals from Manawaka, members of the community from whom she was once protected by her middle-class status. Thor Thorlakson, the employer of Mac, Stacey’s husband, is revealed to be Vernon Winkler, who, in Manawaka, was a victim of abuse and poverty, and Stacey also encounters Valentine Tonnerre, who is now a dying, destitute woman whose presence is a “reproach” to the securely middle-class Stacey. Stacey’s sense of danger as a woman and as a mother fearing for her children is put into perspective when she has coffee with Valentine; she realizes that her protected, middle-class status is dangerous because of the blindness encompassed in that position, a blindness which threatens those who exist on the margins of society. As Monkman notes, “[t]he destruction of the Tonnerres and the degeneration of Métis culture result from the same insularity and ignorance that Stacey feels threatening her own life” (147). Wishing she could “go back in time” and explain to Valentine “that she never meant the town’s invisible stabbing,” Stacey is forced to recognize that “this is not possible” because the discrimination faced by the Tonnerres “was [her fault] too, so she cannot edge away from it” (FD 240). The classist and racist oppression that slowly destroys the Tonnerre family is, as Craig suggests, “a shared responsibility, applicable to all members of the victimizing group - which Laurence defines as English-Canadian with a strong dash of Scotch” (RA 117). Thus, Stacey’s “inherited” debts and “sins of [her] fathers” are not things of the past, but rather they are continuing realities that she has inadvertently aided in perpetuating.

came from, easy back into prehistory and forward forever” (112), a bias that is clearly discrepant from her own current struggle within her restricted situation.

Rachel and Nick remain separated by their inability to negotiate between their own desires and those of their family, and they remain irrevocably separated by the distinctions between their class-based experiences in Manawakan society.

Nick’s inability to form a relationship with Rachel is paralleled by his increasing alienation from his family, a self-imposed isolation which is the result of his determination to abandon his heritage. This decision, which is partially based on his rejection of the class restrictions that have been imposed on the Ukrainian people within Manawakan society, is indicative of his desire to seek approval within the constructed values and ideals of the dominant group in Canadian society. Quoting from the Bible with “an edge of self-mockery,” Nick explains how his desire to change his class and status position has necessitated his rejection of his cultural past: *“I have forsaken my house - I have left mine heritage - mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest - it crieth out against me - therefore have I hated it”* (JOG 116). Nick’s inability to recognize his heritage as valuable leads him to speak of his culture with a “streak of flippant bitterness” that reflects his resentment of his Ukrainian background. He admits that his reluctant “treks back” to Manawaka “make [him] sick” (92) and revive embarrassing memories, such as his father’s nickname in the town, “Nestor the Jester” (117). His alienation from his father is further increased by his cruel assertion that he “couldn’t care less what the Ukraine did - it didn’t mean a damn thing to [him]” (95), an assertion which

creates a cultural split between Nick and his father, and which leaves his father to struggle with his disappointment that he cannot “leave his place [the dairy] to someone who cares about it” (118). It is clearly not only his dairy, however, that Nestor Kazlick is concerned about, it is his pride in his Ukrainian heritage that he wishes he could pass on to his son, something that Nick is unable to “make himself care about” (118). Instead of priding himself on his heritage, Nick chooses, as Osachoff suggests, to “deny his ‘inferior’ status” by becoming “as much a part of the ‘superior’ culture as he can” (232). Thus, Nick achieves a university education and becomes a teacher, a role that is “very likely reinforcing the values and attitudes of that culture” which once rejected him and devalued his now abandoned heritage (Osachoff 6). His assimilation alienates him, as he remains socially unaccepted in Manawaka, and he lacks a familial tie through which he may construct a sense of identity and pride. Nick’s inability to accept his heritage leaves him “an isolated and alienated individual” (Hughes 118), a figure who, as Hughes notes, implies that “the only path open for the ethnic community is a steady assimilation and the loss of its cultural heritage” (119).

Laurence suggests that the class stratification system is inherently culturally destructive. Class position is exposed as a method of maintaining the disadvantaging of groups like the Ukrainians and the Métis, and it is identified as a method of perpetuating inequity that impels such groups to choose between their heritage and their desire to achieve upward mobility. The price exacted for a disregard for heritage is suggested in the isolation of Nick; he cannot form a

significant bond with his family, nor with Rachel, but rather exists in an alienation which is based in both circumstances on a sense of rejection founded on class and status difference. Rachel's psychic split between enacting the dominant, but exclusive ideologies of Manawaka which she has inherited from her Cameron Scots-Presbyterian family, and her in fact desire to disregard such debilitating ideologies thus embodies the ongoing conflict between inherited and discriminatory class expectations and modern, changing society. It is, essentially, a system which assimilates younger generations and progressively destroys their inherited sense of culture.

Only the dominant group in Manawaka, the Scots-Presbyterians, is capable of maintaining its culture, but the notions of class superiority possessed by this group are identified as equally destructive to their younger generations; the repressive, anachronous propriety stifles the youthful members of this group who desire freedom and opportunities not available under such strict moral codes. In A Bird in the House, three generations are presented, each struggling to cope with the class expectations of the generation before them, expectations that, as in The Stone Angel and A Jest of God, are inherently imprisoning. The first generation, Vanessa's grandparents, derive their sense of class superiority from the pride they invest in their old world values. As Osachoff notes, "the colonial spirit resides in Vanessa's grandmother MacLeod, who is very much like Jason Currie in her high regard for things Scottish" (Colonialism 233), and who tends to "romanticize the remote ancestral past" even though she has "never been to Scotland" (233).

Grandmother MacLeod struggles to maintain a class position that has always been, and, due to the Depression has become even more so, an illusion. Vanessa's father notes that her grandmother sees that "the house is still the same, so she thinks other things should be, too" and that she was once "interested in being a lady. . . and for a long time it seemed to her that she was one" (BH 55). Their "comedown" in status is not acknowledged by the grandmother, who blindly tries to ignore their impoverishment by hiring maids that they cannot afford, and sending away for expensive linens that they cannot use. She desires, as Morley suggests, "to live as an aristocrat, like her Scottish ancestors" (114), valuing the Old World ideals and class system that she has never experienced above the realities of a community in which she has lived all of her life.

Unlike Grandmother MacLeod, Vanessa's Grandfather Connor values his work done in Canada, priding himself on his success as a self-made man. He does, however, imprison himself in his work ethic and notions of class-based pride, leaving him to "rag[e] in the cage of his retirement" (Davidson 99) and cling to his fading status in town as "an upright man" (BH 16). Grandfather Connor has lived his life believing that Canada is a meritocracy, a land where those who are unsuccessful, like his brother Dan, are "downright worthless" social embarrassments. The young Vanessa internalizes this economic valuation of people, feeling that such impoverished individuals "should not be on view" and "should be hidden away in an attic along with other relics too common to be called antiques and too broken to be of any further use" (BH 16). Socially ostracized and

impoverished people are viewed by Connor as insignificant, a class-based perspective which is emphasized when he describes a poor woman as “nobody a person would know, to speak of” (159). He is oblivious to the hardships faced by others, and his belief that Canada is a meritocratic society aids in his justification of his lordship of his ostensibly superior position over all others, including his family.

The threat Vanessa faces from both of her grandparent’s class-based ideologies is suggested by her inability, and, to a lesser degree, her parent’s generation’s inability, to exist in either grandparent’s house. Initially living in her Grandmother’s house, Vanessa is enraged by her Grandmother’s inability to show compassion or empathy, a situation which ends when her father dies and the family moves in with Grandfather Connor. In both of these homes, as Arnold E. Davidson suggests in his article, “Cages and Escapes in Margaret Laurence’s *A Bird in the House*,” Laurence explores one of her “main themes”: the “continuing presentness of the past” (92). Expected to conform to the ideals of the governing figures of these houses, Vanessa and her parent’s generation are prisoners of the grandparents’ anachronous ideals and codes of behavior, an incarceration which Vanessa’s aunt Edna is unable to escape, and which Vanessa lashes out against in numerous events during which she decides “enough [is] enough” and stares her anger at her Grandfather (BH 170). She ultimately recognizes that although she “had feared and fought the old man,” he nonetheless “proclaims] himself in [her]

veins,” suggesting that she does carry an inheritance of his character, but which does not include his classist notions.

Vanessa’s unwillingness to subscribe to her grandparents’ ideals matures and develops with age, as indicated in the alteration from her youthful to her adult perception of Piquette Tonnerre. As a child, Vanessa adheres to socially cultivated racist stereotypes of the Métis people, accepting her Grandmother’s assertion that the Métis belong nowhere and are thus rightfully banished from Manawakan society:

They [the Tonnerres] did not belong among the Cree of the Galloping Mountain reservation, further north, and they did not belong among the Scots-Irish and Ukrainians of Manawaka either. They were, as my Grandmother MacLeod would have put it, neither flesh, fowl, nor good salt herring. (109)

Vanessa initially perceives Piquette as “a vaguely embarrassing presence” to whom she is “neither friendly nor unfriendly,” (109), and who, throughout a summer vacation spent together “remain[s]. . . both a reproach and a mystery” (115) to Vanessa. Expecting Piquette to be “in some way a daughter of the forest, a kind of junior prophetess of the wilds” (112), Vanessa struggles to maintain her romantic notions even after Piquette does not live up to such stereotypes. She eventually dismisses Piquette, thinking that “as an Indian, Piquette [is] a dead loss” (114). Notably, Vanessa’s romantic illusions are indicative of an overarching national ideology; when her family’s cottage property is commercialized in later years, the developers choose to change the lake name from “Diamond Lake” to “Lake

Wapakata, for it [is] felt that an Indian name would have a greater appeal to tourists” (119). As Monkman notes, “[t]he white world that . . . rejects Piquette chooses to acknowledge only a romantic image of the past rather than the grim reality of the present” (Mirrors 146). The youthful Vanessa shares in the romanticization of the Native people, choosing to reject Piquette when she does not live up to such ideals, rather than recognizing the constructed and false nature of such stereotypes.

Years later, Vanessa’s image of Piquette alters when she encounters the adult Piquette in the town diner. Vanessa still possesses “the frightened tendency to look the other way” (117), finding that Piquette both “repel[s] and embarrass[es]” her (117). Piquette, excited about her engagement, informs Vanessa that she will be married in the fall to a white man with a “classy name,” a revelation that shocks Vanessa out of her narrow, resentful perspective:

For the merest instant, then, I saw her. I really did see her, for the first and only time in all the years we had both lived in the same town. Her defiant face, momentarily, became unguarded and unmasked, and in her eyes there was a terrifying hope. (117)

Piquette’s attempt to leave Manawaka and the racist and classist system of oppression is unsuccessful; she returns home after being beaten by her husband, and subsequently dies in a house fire with her children. Vanessa later recalls Piquette in conjunction with the disappearance of loons, believing that “in some unconscious and totally unrecognized way, Piquette might have been the only one, after all, who had heard the crying of the loons” (120), a recognition which

indicates Vanessa's new awareness of Piquette's social isolation. Additionally, the extinction of the loons due to commercial development is, as Terrence Craig suggests in his book, Racial Attitudes in English Canadian Fiction 1905-1980, a metaphor for the plight of the Métis people, as "they can only exist marginally with whites who refuse to make room for them" (116). Though Vanessa is uncertain as to whether the loons have migrated or died out, the white development of the land clearly is reflective of the dispossession of the Métis territory by white settlers, and a "crowding out. . . [of] an unwanted people whose lifestyle [is] a nuisance" and a "reproach" to the dominant and powerful groups in society (Craig 116).

Laurence thus observes that the stratification of power and privilege that was originally set in place by white settlers and the subsequent oppression faced by the Métis people are not things of the past, but rather are discourses of power and inequity that are securely maintained and reenacted in contemporary society. The white settlers who originally created the class system, Laurence suggests, passed on their privilege, enabling their succeeding generations to recreate and perpetuate social inequalities. Thus, those who possess class-based privilege also possess an authorial power over those whom they label as social outcasts, an authorial power that enables individuals who work within dominant ideological institutions as teachers, lawyers, publishers, and so forth to determine the lives of the disempowered and dispossessed in Manawakan society. The Métis and the working-class are, as a result, denied the privilege of both self-definition and

self-determination, a denial which, according to Laurence, is inherently incompatible with the pursuit of freedom:

“If freedom is, in part, the ability to act out of one’s own self-definition, with some confidence and with compassion, uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, it is also a celebration of life and of the mystery at life’s core” (Ivory Tower 25).

Laurence addresses the relationship between freedom and self-definition in The Diviners, examining how Jules Tonnerre, a Métis, and Morag Gunn, a woman of the working-class, cope as socially ostracized outsiders who nonetheless exist within, and are defined by, the hegemonic middle-class culture of Manawaka. Both Jules and Morag endeavor to escape the defining nature of their respective positions within the Manawakan stratification system, and both struggle to gain a self-determining, authorial power over their lives.

The authorial privilege of the middle-class citizens of Manawaka is evident in the deciding power they enact on the options available to the youthful Jules, Morag, and her adoptive father, Christie Logan. Frank Davey, in his examination of silence in The Diviners, notes how the privileged, powerful members of Manawakan society can make and exact choices for individuals of underprivileged class groups:

Among the middle classes are the variously empowered of the town: the doctor, who can decide whether or not to make the special effort needed to cure someone like Piquette of her TB; the teachers, who can decide which children are encouraged or promoted; the lawyer, who can decide whether someone like Jules can also have the opportunity to become a lawyer; and the newspaper editor, who

decides whose activities enter into print, in what words, and with what privileges. (32)

“These people and the institutions they represent,” as Davey suggests, “enforce class privileges” and also, to a degree, script the lives of those within the town. The teachers neglect Jules and Morag, the lawyer laughs at Jules’s law career ambitions and recommends he become a mechanic, and the newspaper editor literally edits the Tonnerre’s family history by omitting information that Lazarus had fought with Riel (Davey 32).

Christie Logan, Morag’s adoptive father, possesses ambivalent notions of the nature of his class position. He fluctuates between attempts to convince himself and others that he has chosen his devalued role as the town scavenger, a subversive act through which he denies the town the privilege of authorial power, and conversely, he chooses to recognize and accept the town’s definition of himself, a definition which he subversively extends to all of Manawakan society: “Some of them, because I take off their muck for them, they think I’m muck. Well, I *am* muck, but so are they”(47). Alternately, he asserts his equality through his heritage, arguing that his Scottish ancestry provides him with “kin and clan as good as theirs any day of the week” (56). Myths of meritocracy are partially the cause of Christie’s ambivalent perception of his personal value; he tells Morag that “you make your own chances in this world. . . [o]r else you don’t make them. Like me” (TD 99), a statement which he quickly counters: “Although that’s not the truth of it neither. It’s all true and not true” (99). Christie is aware that Manawaka is not a

meritocratic society, but because his class position is assumed by the town to be the result of a lack of abilities or a lack of effort, he maintains an ambivalent sense of self-worth. Notably, as a victim of shellshock, Christie is a fundamentally disabled man, a disadvantage which is not readily perceived and thus not acknowledged as a partial cause of his disrespected position.

His wife, Prin, does not share his ambivalence concerning the nature of their shared class position; conversely, she has internalized the town's definition of herself and her options. Labelled as simple by Manawaka's educational system, Prin repeatedly finds that she and Christie "never seemed to get anywheres" causing her to accept the town's definition of her so completely that she finds she "don't kind of know how to be any different, like" (53). Prin feels that she "was lucky [Christie] married [her]" (53), a self-effacing belief which articulates her sense of devaluation. Significantly, Laurence suggests that the desire of the town, (the town being represented by the middle-class) to maintain and perpetuate class boundaries is conveniently served by this marriage; Morag observes that the Manawakan community seemingly forms a coherent group in expressing relief that these two ostracized people are married: "Prin married Christie when he came back from the Great War. The town said good job too; a pity to spoil two families" (43). Individuals like Christie and Prin are only of concern to the dominant groups in society if they threaten to invade their ranks, whereas if these devalued figures maintain complicity by remaining in their class position, they remain completely removed from the consciousness of the middle-class townspeople. As Morag

notes, Christie “lived nearly all his life in [the] town, and everyone knew him to see him. . . but nobody knew him to speak of, or even to speak to” (423). The stratification system of the town dictates the lives of Christie and Prin, creating for them a socially isolated, impoverished existence.

Ironically, Christie employs his oppressive class role as a method of maintaining his pride, an accomplishment achieved by literally fulfilling the town’s expectations. Acting foolish and uncultured, Christie uses grammar that he knows is incorrect, punctuating his speech with “lower-class” idiomatic language, and acting “uncivilized” in an effort to subvert class-based stereotypes. Upon encountering the town lawyers, Mr. McVitie and Mr. Pearl, Christie “goes into his doormat act,” by mockingly playing the role of a simple, honest working-class man with simple, honorable values: “Och aye, an honest job is all I ask in this very world. . . that’s God’s truth. An honest wage for an honest day’s work. . .” (132). McVitie is apprehensive of Christie’s manner, “suspecting dirty work at the crossroads somewhere here” but it is not something that he can “put his finger on” (132). When Christie acts out the definition given to him by the town, the oversimplified, insulting, and constructed nature of such expectations is exposed. Similarly, when insulted by some children, Christie responds by “twisting his face, like different crazy masks” and laughing “in a kind of cackle, like a loony” (47). The children are silenced by the demonstration, frightened by Christie’s blurring of the line between reality and stereotype. As he informs Morag, he is “[o]nly showing them what they thought they would be expecting to see” (47); he is acting

out a constructed class-based image which is founded on classist stereotypes of working-class people rather than on reality.

Christie's use of "substandard" language may also be perceived as subversive; he appears to be intensely aware of language as a means of gaining and maintaining power, but rather than appropriating this means, he rejects it, countering "proper" language with his own idiomatic, profane, and grammatically incorrect speech. His "substandard" language reflects his refusal to accommodate the classist ideologies of Manawaka, and it is a means of voicing the offense he takes at the inequities of the class system. Christie thus vocally rages against the town using obscenities to describe the racist and stratified society which may be perceived as an obscenity in itself: "By their garbage shall ye know them. . . by their bloody goddamn fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them" (48). His language also indicates his refusal to assimilate to Manwakan ideals; as Christil Verduyn notes in her article on language in *The Diviners*, Christie's "intentional misuse of language runs counter to both proper speech and social decorum" (58), tactics, which Verduyn suggest "serve the purpose of exposing social inauthenticity and counterfeit language" (58). His rejection of elitist language, and by association, elitist ideals, is further emphasized when he makes fun of the Wordsworth poem Morag is studying, mocking the language and the man "daft enough to write. . . like that" (72).

Morag, however, is threatened by Christie's nonconformist actions.

Embarrassed by and ashamed of her social devaluation, Morag struggles within the

Manawaka stratification system, hoping to “pass” as a member of another class by linguistically and physically altering herself. At church with Prin, Morag ensures that she looks respectable; her clothes are “in good taste” and her figure is “a very nice one,” but she is forced to recognize that “all this makes no difference”:

When church is over, and they’re all filing out, chattering, the Camerons and MacLeods and Duncans and Cateses and McVities and Halperns and them, no one will say *Good Morning* to Morag and Prin. Not on your life. Might soil their precious mouths. . . . They’re a bunch of - well, a bunch of so-and-so’s. Morag does not swear. If you swear at fourteen it only makes you look cheap, and she is not cheap, goddamn it. Gol-darn it. (122)

Morag’s conformity fails to alter the town’s rigid definition of her as “lower” class. She remains restricted by the terms of the town, terms which do not allow change and thus thwart her efforts to recreate herself.

Perceiving no other options, Morag determines that academic success is her only means of escaping the class role imposed on her by the town. Refusing to accept the fate of Prin, Eva, and other impoverished women in Manawakan society, Morag rejects a future as a “product. . . of poverty and brutalization by structures of authority” (Davey 29), and thus chooses to work within these structures as a means of empowerment. Hoping that if she “really really work[s] and get[s] educated. . . something will come of it. . . [l]ike being able to get out of Manawaka and never come back” (134), Morag struggles through an educational system that is, to a degree, designed to discourage upward mobility. She is forced to cope with authoritative historical texts that omit the history of her ancestors and which do not

reflect her experiences, and she also struggles to ignore teachers who define her as “not quite *all there*” (72) and who she feels “hate her” because she “isn’t a little flower” who is neatly dressed and quietly complicit (71). Morag’s ability to cope in the educational system, and her eventual success are partially dependent on her decision to use language as a means of gaining the power she desires, a decision which implicitly requires a degree of assimilation. The learning and application of “standardized,” middle-class language enables Morag to participate in middle-class culture, a social advancement which is secured by her time spent in university and her abandonment of the “substandard” language of her past class position.

Additionally, Morag’s decision to become a “wordsmith” ensures that she will possess an authorial power over her life, and that she will not be “beaten by life” (126). Like Christie, however, who dies unable to speak, sounding out a “hoarse, unverbal croaking” (422), and Prin, who as a “whalewoman, unwholewoman” (226), dies a silent and dehumanized figure, and Jules, who dies of throat cancer, Morag has only a temporary possession of authorial power, a privilege which is prolonged due to her status as a member of the majority group in Canadian culture.

Morag thus recognizes that her authorial power will eventually be lost, passed on to the next generation who are the “inheritors” of the “gift, or portion of grace” (477) that enables her to write. The loss of authorial voice that Jules and Christie experience will be shared by Morag as well, but for different reasons; as a member of the middle-class majority group, Morag no longer faces the discrimination that Jules and Christie endured. Thus, as a product of her time and class, Morag’s voice

must eventually be silenced in order for younger, and more diverse voices to be heard. As Mrs. Cameron had to be silenced in order for Rachel to privilege her own ideals and beliefs, Morag's authorial power must be removed and given to her daughter, Pique, enabling old and anachronous ideals to be abandoned.

Clearly, Jules's struggle to gain authorial power over his life is far more complicated than Morag's, though there are some shared experiences. Jules's alienation in the educational system is partially due to his refusal to accept the dominant ideals espoused by such institutions, but it is also, like Morag's, founded on the omission of his family's history and his class-based experiences. According to the Canadian history taught in school, Jules, Morag notes, "comes from nowhere" (80). The exclusion of the Métis from Canadian history prompts Jules's refusal to sing "The Maple Leaf Forever," a song which, as Osachoff observes, "celebrates the Scots, Irish and English as Canadians with Wolfe their 'dauntless hero'" (234) and which clearly omits his ancestor's original and rightful claim to Canadian land. Osachoff suggests that Jules's silence during this "narrowly colonial song" speaks louder than words, as it not only indicates that Jules has no voice in the classroom, but it also reflects the Métis people's lack of a political voice in the 1930's. In an attempt to give voice to the history omitted by the educational system and to compensate for their children's sense of alienation in the classroom, both Lazarus, Jules's father, and Christie, try to give their children a sense of pride and heritage by creating oral tales which act as counter-discourses to the exclusionary historical narratives that they learn at school. These tales, as

Kortenaar observes “do not tell what happened, they tell what should have happened and provide the present with the past it needs” (15). Though this revisioning of narratives provides both Morag and Jules with a sense of their heritage, both recognize that there are few people who acknowledge their unofficial historical accounts. Additionally, these narratives, though functional for them in their youth, are ultimately limited, as they are not reflective of their own personal accounts and experiences. Both Jules and Morag move beyond these narratives by creating their own versions of these tales, thus commencing their respective authorial careers, and thus engaging in the struggle to redefine both themselves and their heritage in terms of worth and value.⁴

The struggle to define themselves in their own manner, and assume authorial power over their lives, lead Jules and Morag in very different directions, a discrepancy which is inextricably bound to their respective class positions. Laurence is careful to note the variance between Jules’s and Morag’s opportunities; while Morag faces discrimination on the basis of her class position and her gender, her status as a member of the majority group in Manawaka, and in Canadian society, enables her to achieve upward mobility. Conversely, Jules must struggle with both racism and impoverishment, and his status as a visible minority person makes him unable to “pass” as a member of another class. *The Métis in Manawaka*

⁴ Significantly, Morag’s revisioning of the tale of Piper Gunn to the story of Piper Gunn’s Woman suggests an inability to envision autonomous women. As Davey notes, although Morag struggles to make Christie’s stories her own “by replac[ing] Piper Gunn in the subject position of the narrative with his wife. . . the only name [she] has available for this wife” is as the husband’s “woman,” suggesting that Morag views women as “possessed and subservient” (37).

society, Morag notes, are ostracized and devalued to the point of forming an “untouchable” class: “People in Manawaka talk about them but don’t talk *to* them. . . . They are dirty and unmentionable” (79). This definition of the Métis people is not restricted to Manawakan ideology, but rather is indicative of racist discourses concerning the Métis in Canadian society as a whole. Morley cites Joe Sawchuck, a sociologist whose work with Métis in Manitoba led him to identify a dominant “white settler mentality” in Canadian society which defines the Métis people in a negative and limiting manner that ultimately serves to “destroy the Métis sense of self-worth” (145). Jules sees this destruction of self-worth in his father and sisters, leading him to reject the ideals of white society, and reject the possibility of upward mobility within the stratification system, as he recognizes that to struggle within the system is to work within a discourse that narrowly defines him and his people as inferior and limited in capabilities and potential.

Conversely, Morag, as Jules recognizes, has both the determination and the ability to change her life, a freedom to redefine herself that is not equally available to him. When Morag questions him as to his plans for the future, he responds with an uncertainty that emphasizes their different situations: “How should I know? I don’t much care. . . . I don’t have to *do* anything all that much. I’m not like you” (181). The freedom to achieve upward mobility possessed by Morag is an opportunity which Jules once wished for, but which he has become aware is largely denied to him. His initial goal of becoming a lawyer is indicative of a desire to work within the stratification system by gaining a position of power from which to

enact change, a position which he feels, "if you've always been screwed by people" is a means of "do[ing] some of the damage yourself for a change" (149). Simon Pearl, who could choose to help Jules, instead laughs and informs him that "a person like [him] might do well to set their sights a bit lower" (149), an assertion which drives Jules away from the educational system and back to the valley where his father lives. This move indicates his return to a position on the periphery of society, and his rejection of social assimilation. As previously mentioned, working within the stratification system is, for Jules, virtually impossible. Thus, he chooses an alternate direction, becoming a singer and composer, an employment which offers the authorial power that is denied to him in Manawakan society. His career enables him to define himself creatively and independently, and though he is forced to cater to white audiences in physical appearance and clothing, his songs remain genuine and uncommercialized. The stereotypical clothing Jules wears when performing are, to him, "a load of shit," but his musical career keeps him from "working in a lousy factory," and enables him to sing songs that are "at least. . . [his] own" (286). Jules thus succeeds in achieving, as Monkman notes, "self-respect and. . . freedom" which are, partially, "products of an acceptance of his fate and of a recognition of how little he can do to alter that fate" (149). His freedom, however, is perhaps less indicative of this lack of control over his life than it is of his recognition that he cannot measure himself by the definitions set out by white society.

Although Jules achieves a form of freedom, he remains frustrated by the inequities imposed on him because of his heritage. He recognizes that the friendship he possesses with Morag is inevitably tenuous, knowing that once they both leave Manawaka, she will advance in the stratification system, whereas he will remain largely bound by racist and classist discourses. The divide between them develops shortly before they leave Manawaka:

. . . Jules stops walking. . . [h]e grins, but not in the old way, not conspiratorially. Not quite hostile, but nearly. To him, she is now on the other side of the fence. They inhabit the same world no longer.
(181)

Morag's upward mobility creates a divide between herself and Jules, a class-based gap which locates her on the "other side of the fence" in a new, privileged class position. They are also, however, further separated by the racism inherent in the stratification system, leading Jules to perceive Morag, as Monkman notes, "as part of the white society that has dispossessed his people despite her hatred of the social attitudes of Manawaka" (148). Morag herself recognizes that she is forever unable to understand his class-bound experiences, as "[e]verything he knows, everything he has seen, the films there in his head" (287) are things with which she can only try to emphasize, but which she will never be able to experience or understand.

Morag's struggle to transcend her class position, however, is not simple, nor is it accomplished without sacrifice. Her attempt to deny her past class affiliation and to assimilate to middle-class culture create a sense of psychic dislocation which she cannot easily resolve; she feels socially excluded at university, finding that she

cannot identify with the middle-class, “golden-appearing college kids,” even though she recognizes that they are “not all happy, not all inheritors of some as-yet-unspoiled Garden” (193). Simultaneously, she fears those whom she identifies as the economically “worse-off ones” who walk alone or “tr[y] to ingratiate themselves, clownlike, into the brazen multitude,” as she does not want to identify herself with these “walking wounded” (193). Feeling utterly “downgraded, devalued, undesirable” (203), Morag finds herself alienated from both classes, having rejected the working-class from which she comes, yet feeling herself unable to fit in with the middle-class culture of the university. She thus both needs and appeals to an authorial power that may direct her and initiate her into a new class role, a power that can teach her how to be like the “golden” college kids rather than the “walking wounded.”

Morag finds this guiding figure in Brooke Skelton, her English teacher. Presenting herself as a blank page upon which he can inscribe meaning and impose definitions, Morag is complicit in Brooke’s construction of her as a figure over whom he can exert an authorial and a paternal power. She informs Brooke that she “feel[s] as though [she doesn’t] have a past. As though it was more or less blank” (211), an assertion which, as Kortenaar notes, appeals to Brooke’s imperialist ideals as she implies that she has “nothing to put alongside his cultural tradition” (14). Thus, Morag constructs herself as a woman without a past or a family in hopes that Brooke may be able to make this lack of history become a reality; she wishes that he will obliterate her past and initiate her into middle-class culture.

Her desire to define herself in the terms of the middle-class results in her becoming an oppressed, colonized figure, as her marriage to Brooke requires both the surrender of her autonomy, and of her self-determining power, sacrifices which silence her to the point that she feels she “do[es] not know the sound of [her] own voice” (277). Her marriage is, clearly, as Kortenaar suggests, indicative of her desire “emigrate to the world of books,” culture, and civilization (14), a world where she can ignore the poverty and inequity of her past. This attempt to intellectually redefine herself fails, as she discovers that “only alienation lies in foreign books” (14), an alienation which requires her to play a role determined by the narrative set by the foreign power. Thus, in her marriage, Morag becomes a character in her husband’s narrative. Brooke defines her in relation to himself, feeling that a wife “should look decent” and be “a credit to him” (276), and that her hair, clothing, and all outward and physical appearances should reflect his status as a university professor.

Her altered language further reflects Brooke’s “cultured” discourse and class position, a language which she wishes she could abandon and instead succumb to “the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak. . . the Protean oaths upon which she was reared” (276). Morag does experience a sense of release when she finally allows herself to yell at Brooke in Christie’s “substandard” language; it is a release that enables her to vocalize her resentment of the authorial power that Brooke exercises over her, and a rage which allows her to acknowledge the insult and degradation she feels when he employs

infantalizing methods of identifying her, as when he calls her his “little one” or “child”. Speaking in the voice of her past enables Morag to assert that she does “*have a long past. . . that was both fortunate and unfortunate*” (277), and a past class position which remains integral to her sense of identity. Morag’s independence from Brooke increases as she writes her first novel, and by the time it is ready for publication she is capable of assuming an authorial role in her life. She thus rejects her husband’s authoritative power over her by having her novel published under her maiden name, an act which is an assertion of her retrieval of her sense of identity.

Morag’s later encounter with Jules provides her with a link to her past that enables her to abandon her marriage, a connection which also prompts her to recognize the price she has paid for her escape from Manawaka. Her crossing of class boundaries and abandonment of her past has not only alienated her from her family, but also, as indicated in her silencing marriage to Brooke, from herself. Although she feels ashamed of Christie and Prin and their poverty, she feels that she has done wrong by “turning her back on the both of them” (267). At the same time, she cannot fully accept her new class role, finding that she “hates. . . [her] external self who is at such variance with whatever or whoever remains inside the glossy painted shell” (268). Jules, observing her past desperation to leave Manawaka, asserts that she “sure wanted to go *somewhere*” (286). Morag ponders his observation, thinking that “[s]he had got what she wanted. Not, however, what she’d bargained for” (286). In opposition to Morag’s imprisonment in marriage,

Jules possesses a freedom which she envies: “Skinner Tonnerre, moving through the world like a dandelion seed carried by the wind. Not such a bad way to be, when you considered the alternatives” (293). Middle class culture clearly does not provide Morag with the freedom she envisioned; rather, it creates new confines and restrictive definitions which ultimately incarcerate her in a relationship founded on her silence. Jules frees Morag from her imprisonment, functioning, as Monkman notes, “as the shaman of freedom and release,” who sexually liberates Morag from Brooke’s imperialistic and authorial control. Jules’s lack of “real freedom in larger social contexts,” as Craig notes, is thus counterbalanced with his “liberty within personal relationships” (117), a freedom which he shares with Morag and which aids her in realizing that she must “be on [her] own” wherever she goes next, creating her recognition of her need to define herself and build her own life.

As with Jules’s musical career, Morag’s career as an author places her on the periphery of society. Morag’s status, however, remains undeniably privileged. Her text and reminiscences reflect a sensitivity to classist and racist oppression, yet she is the only character in Laurence’s text to gain power. As Davey notes, both the working-class and the Métis remain “as alien to power as when the novel began” (41), only entering into “official discourse through the act of a white novelist,” an act which Davey contends “underline[s] their exclusion rather than. . .negat[ing] or mitigat[ing] it” (41). Morag succeeds in achieving the power to define herself, but Jules and Christie remain, to a degree, defined through her perception of them, a

perception which she warns the reader early in the text is potentially false, constructed, and which is inevitably shaded by her interpretation.

Class divisions remain rigidly, and perhaps realistically secure at the end of the novel; Morag has moved to a new, though ambiguous status, but Jules remains impoverished, and his avenues to power and freedom are exposed as limited. Thus, when confronted with terminal throat cancer, Jules chooses to commit suicide in what Monkman suggests is a “final limited gesture of defiance” (149) against the classist and racist definitions by which he is socially defined. As Christie died unable to speak, Jules’s voice is threatened by disease, a silencing and fatal illness that symbolically suggests that both Christie, as a member of the working-class and Jules, as Métis, are still not permitted a voice in Canadian society. Jules thus chooses to die in an effort to maintain control over his life, and as a last attempt to dictate his own future. He dies, however, in fear for his daughter and her freedom, warning Morag to “just let [Pique] be” (470) and let her make her own choices. Morag wonders if “he felt he had to speak like that,” but then acknowledges that “perhaps he did” (470), and accepts the warning that she must let her daughter be free from her defining ideals, which, though liberal, are still tied to her position as a white, majority-group woman. As Morag’s ability to escape the class prejudices imposed on her in youth is contrasted with Jules’s lack of opportunities, Morag is also separated from her daughter by a class and status-based gulf. She acknowledges that her own childhood “was a residual bad dream, with some goodness and some chance of climbing out” (119), whereas her daughter’s is “an

accomplished nightmare, with nowhere to go, and the only peace is in the eye of the hurricane” (119).

Significantly, the final section of The Diviners opens with Pique offering to tell Morag about her trip to Manawaka, a trip during which she visits the Tonnerre shack and the town cemetery, locations which are markers of the discrimination faced by Jules and Morag. Laurence uses these markers to suggest that although such classist and racist ideals persist in contemporary society, these discourses are in decline and thus ceasing to possess the power that they did in past. The Tonnerre home is “fallen in, and the boards [are] rotting” (461), and though there is no “sign that there’d ever been a fire” at the shack, it is nonetheless a disintegrating monument to the oppression faced by Piquette, her children, Jules, and Lazarus. Christie and Prin’s grave, Pique observes, has been carefully tended by Eva Winkler, a woman who is representative of the traditionally limited options for impoverished women. The beaten and abused figure of Eva, however, also suggests an end to such circumscribed opportunities for women; Eva has never left Manawaka and is unable to have children, limitations which imply that hers is the final generation to be trapped by such severe gender-based and class-based restrictions.

The graveyard and the Tonnerre shack, as concluding images of fading monuments to the past, are indicative of a slowly changing class society. They are integral parts of a past which Pique inherits, but which she refuses to allow to play an authorial role in her life. Rather, Pique asserts her autonomy and power to make

decisions for herself; she quits her job as a cashier in a supermarket, an employment which she hates but which is necessary to support her partner, and independently decides to go to Galloping Mountain and aid in building a family-based Métis community (463). Though Pique is not at all free from the class prejudices of Canadian society, she does choose to exist outside of such prejudices by, as Wayne Fraser notes in The Dominion of Women, “searching for her own way, struggling against exploitation by her lovers, trying to assimilate her heritage” (148). She acts autonomously, expressing her determination to define herself in Canadian society as a person of inherent, as opposed to class-based, value. Additionally, Laurence seemingly suggests that, as an “inheritor,” Pique may successfully integrate the disparate mythologies she inherits from her parents with her own stories told in her songs, thus creating a new, inclusive narrative that may act as a counter discourse to the exclusive and racist class ideals evident in Manawaka and in Canadian society.

Laurence’s examination of class throughout the Manawaka series is sensitive to the relationship between class and identity. As older generations struggle to protect obsolete notions of status and class-based behaviour, younger generations endeavor to break free from such restrictions. Inherited discourses of class superiority are identified as constructs and products of imperialistic ideals, class-based mores which Laurence suggests are hypocritical, elitist values that are, to a large degree, effectively dead ideals that are maintained in appearances, but not in practice. Thus, Laurence observes the socially constructed nature of class

divisions, and rejects the false pretenses upon which this hierarchy of oppression is founded. Finally, the divisiveness of the Manawakan community is suggested to be inherently destructive, causing feelings of alienation in individuals of all class groups, and creating boundaries which threaten to divide families and culturally assimilate younger generations. Though Laurence concludes the Manawaka series with the figure of Pique, who seemingly represents change and independence, her texts offer no solutions to class-based oppression. Rather, they provide a recognition of class inequities, and an indication of the multitude of voices that are limited and silenced by such discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Stacey Cameron “had been in my mind for a number of years” before starting The Fire-Dwellers, writes Margaret Laurence in “Gadgetry or Growing?. . Form and Voice in the Novel,” and she goes on to say that she found herself so immersed in the world of this fictional character that she felt that she knew “almost too much about her and her family” (86). Her intense immersion in the creation of Stacey’s life indicates that Laurence deeply considered and carefully developed both the psychic and the physical contexts that she conveys in her fiction, contexts which encompass the environmental and social positions in which her characters are located, and that further include their perspectives, values, and beliefs. Laurence’s profound sensitivity to the numerous factors that shape an individual’s experience in Canadian society is clearly manifested in her ability to convey the emotional and psychological aspects of her characters’ identities in relation to such determining factors as class position, race, and ethnicity.

Similarly, Alice Munro states that her fiction is reliant on the shared environment and interaction between people; she writes that she does not create characters “in any kind of a vacuum or spare setting,” but rather, she draws on the community of her youth, which she identifies as having provided her with “a crowded canvas” (qtd. in Hancock 221) of stories founded on real lives in Canadian society. Thus, through their own personal experiences, and their creation of

fictional worlds, both writers have lived or thoughtfully considered the varied aspects of the class-stratified society of Canada. Consequently, the fiction of Laurence and Munro relates a dynamic sense of what it is like to be immersed in a class society; they provide a detailed experience which, although fictional, is securely grounded in the reality of the class system in Canada.

Unlike the analytical literature produced by sociological research founded on statistical examinations of the class structure, the writing of Laurence and Munro not only conveys the atmosphere encountered in various class-based communities, but it further interprets and develops such contexts through an investigation of individual responses to class position and social status. By providing insight into the influence of class position on the thoughts, emotions and sense of identity of a variety of individuals, their texts move beyond the aspects of class stratification that are typically investigated in the scholarly literature of other disciplines, and thus address class in human terms, articulating the lived experience of class-based inequity in Canadian society.

Laurence's charting of the Canadian class system on the geography and people of her fictional community of Manawaka demonstrates how reality and fictionality blend in her texts. In The Stone Angel, Laurence depicts the class system as the product of imported colonial standards of "civilization" and culture, and she identifies the symbolic manifestation of such class-based notions on the Manawkan landscape as a means of both recognizing and condemning the exclusionary nature of such ideals. Through the use of symbolic geography, Laurence exposes the

constructed nature of class boundaries; her juxtaposition of the unnatural cultivation and “civilization” of the Manawakan cemetery with the natural wilderness that exists on the periphery of this cultural garrison (Osachoff 229) relates the imported and exclusive values of the European settlers and the impact they had on the Native peoples. In The Diviners, Laurence demonstrates how such geographical and social class boundaries function as the means by which the privileged maintain their empowered position in Manawakan society, and how they oppress those who lack their power.

Alice Munro also depicts the class boundaries manifested in the geography of her fictional small towns in terms of limitation. Munro demonstrates how a transgression of geographical class location is symbolically indicative of a corresponding violation of social position, actions which are perceived as breaches of the shared values of a class-based community. The reaction of her family to the protagonist’s symbolic and literal class transgressions is identified by Munro as the means by which class boundaries are maintained; the system of class stratification in her small town communities is largely perpetuated by hegemonic discourses within all class groups and on all class levels, discourses which transmit ideologies concerning the ostensibly natural and innate nature of class differences, and which further dissuade ambition and upward mobility.

Laurence demonstrates through Hagar Shipley and Mrs. Cameron how middle-class familial values function to maintain hegemony and perpetuate privilege within this class group. Such values are identified by Laurence, however,

as inherently destructive, as they stifle younger generations who wish to abandon their parents' elitist ideals. Laurence thus depicts a breakdown in the middle-class transmission of class-based ideals, a breakdown which is paralleled by a corresponding destruction of familial ties due to an ideological gap between members of each succeeding generation.

Both Laurence and Munro depict the crossing of class boundaries as occurring in conjunction with abandonment of geographical location. The town that rigidly defines individuals by their ascribed class position, according to Laurence and Munro, must be abandoned in order to achieve upward mobility. Upward mobility is inevitably accompanied by a price for the transgression of class boundaries, one which Munro and Laurence both suggest is often not worth the benefits of the new class status. The experience of individuals who achieve upward mobility is clearly one of psychic strain and isolation; they find themselves alienated from their family, their heritage, and their sense of self, and they thus become trapped between their past class affiliation and current class group. Consequently, according to Laurence and Munro, an additional social tension is experienced by individuals who must not only mediate between their own sense of class-based affiliation and that of their new class group, but who must further contend with conflicting class-based ideologies concerning their "rightful" position in Canadian society.

The alteration of an upwardly mobile individual's language is identified by both Laurence and Munro as the most powerful means by which the tensions between

past and present class-based affiliations are expressed. Munro demonstrates how individuals' surrender of the language of their past creates a sense of psychic dislocation, as their linguistic transformation functions to heighten their sense of alienation and ambivalent class location. Significantly, Munro identifies the abandonment of class-based language as being socially compelled rather than a free choice; upward mobility in Munro's fiction is thus considered in terms of a struggle between social conformity and assimilation, and the development of a self based on heritage and class-based affiliation.

Laurence exposes language as a marker of class position and of "culturedness" through her investigation of how language shapes the interactions between members of different class groups. Language is recognized by Laurence as a means of "making a statement" about one's "place in and . . . relationship to the existing configurations of power" (Bammer 252) in Canadian society. Linguistic conformity, as Laurence demonstrates through Morag, enables an individual to work within the class-based discourses and language of the powerful groups. The ability to work within such discourses to enact change, however, is implicitly presented by Laurence as limited. This is evidenced in Morag's restricted, class-based view, and her subsequent need and desire to include the songs of Jules and Pique, and the stories of Christie and Lazarus in order to construct an inclusive counter-discourse to the dominant discourses in which she is inextricably enmeshed, and from which she writes. Thus, Laurence perceives linguistic conformity as inherently destructive; the stories of Jules and Christie are as

valuable as Morag's, but their linguistic traits are not socially privileged, nor are their stories. Consequently, through the inclusion of the lyrical works of Jules and Pique in the album component of The Diviners, and the presence of the oral tales of Christie and Lazarus in the body of the novel, Laurence advocates a diversity of linguistic forms and means of expression, a diversity which may, as Bammer observes, "offe[r]. . . a way out of the class-bound double-bind of mastering language or being mastered by it" (252).

The role of ascribed characteristics such as race and gender are recognized by both writers as integral in shaping an individual's class-based experience. Munro's fiction privileges the stories of impoverished women who are not normally granted a voice in Canadian society, and further establishes the interaction between class and gender as integral in determining women's opportunities and identity. The construction of "lower class" women's sexuality as available to the dominant groups in society is identified by Munro as another aspect of middle-class power; her fiction demonstrates how middle-class men play a fundamental role in determining the circumscribed options of impoverished women, and how they assume the authority of defining such women in relation to the privileged groups of Canadian society. Although she identifies the power discrepancy between impoverished women and middle-class men as substantial, Munro does not portray the women themselves as powerless. Rather, Munro demonstrates how impoverished women construct a sense of value in their lives by either taking pride

in their class position, or by refusing to judge themselves by the standards of the middle-class.

Laurence perceives the middle-class as exercising an authorial power over those whom they identify as “Others” to their class-based community, an authorial role which she identifies as particularly detrimental to individuals belonging to non-majority groups. The middle-class, Laurence recognizes, maintains their privileged position by reinstating the inequitable treatment and opportunities of those who lack their privileged ascribed characteristics. Thus, Laurence’s portrayal of the difference in opportunities possessed by Jules and Morag realistically addresses the racist nature of the class system in both Manawakan and Canadian society. Whereas Morag’s status as a member of the majority group enables her to achieve upward mobility, Jules’ Métis heritage restricts his opportunities, thus forcing him to struggle to create a sense of identity and of belonging which are external to the inequitable discourses and ideologies of the white, European-founded stratification system of Canadian society. Laurence thus rejects the pervasive and classist ideals of the middle-class and clearly refuses to accept such norms as self-evident or natural. Jules and Pique’s shared determination to identify themselves outside of the Canadian stratification system indicates their refusal to accept the dominant group’s valuation of them, and it further demonstrates their refusal to judge themselves by a system which is utterly racist and unjust.

Middle-class privilege is also depicted by both Laurence and Munro in terms of the sheltered, protected nature of this group. Whereas the middle-class citizens of Manawaka construct sanitized funeral parlors and cemeteries in order to conceal death, the impoverished and ostracized groups of this community are not afforded the luxury of such shelter. Christie and Morag's knowledge of the illegitimate children buried in Nuisance Grounds and Lazarus and Jules's struggle to cope with the horrific death of Piquette and her children indicate their brutally exposed position in Manawakan society. Similarly, through the interaction between Flo and Rose in Who Do You Think You Are?, Munro demonstrates how lack of social protection translates into a sense of devaluation and indignity, a sense of social exposure which, as Del's experience in Lives of Girls and Women suggests, may be both geographically and socially charted on the landscape of her fictional town.

Whereas Canadian literary critics and sociologists have largely chosen to ignore images and issues of class in our literature, artists like Munro and Laurence have clearly recognized and depicted the influential and inequitable nature of the Canadian system of stratification. Although removed from the sociologist's statistical proof and analytical stance, the Canadian artist's portrayal of this system is no less accurate or truthful; the images of class presented in the fictional worlds of Munro and Laurence are substantially grounded in reality, and thus, rather than providing numerical evidence reflecting Canada's stratification system, they offer testament to reveal this system by sharing reflective experiences and life stories. Beyond conveying the complex and intricate manner in which class position

interacts with every aspect of an individual's life, identity, and opportunities, Munro and Laurence's vision of class in Canada conveys human values that are often unaddressed by those in other disciplines, thus delivering both an accurate and sensitive examination of the oppression faced by many in contemporary Canadian society.

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