

Technologies of Identity: The Language of the Incontinent Body in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*

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IN AN ESSAY ENTITLED "Identity, Genealogy, History" Nikolas Rose explains the Foucauldian sense of "technology" that is signalled in this paper:

Technology, here, refers to any assembly structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal. Human technologies are hybrid assemblages of knowledges, instruments, persons, systems of judgement, buildings and spaces, underpinned at the programmatic level by certain presuppositions about, and objectives for, human beings.... Perhaps the insistence upon an analytic of human technologies is one of the most distinctive features of the approach, ... an analysis which does not start from the view that the technologizing of human conduct is malign, but rather examines the ways in which human beings have been *simultaneously capacitated and governed* by their organization within a technological field. (132; emphasis added)

Rose's terms help to clarify something of what is meant by the "productivity" of "power," and, while "not start[ing] from the view that the technologizing of human conduct is malign" *can* permit a more complex view of the historical field than is usually available through cause-effect lenses, I want nevertheless to address the malignancy of technologies of the self. This hurtfulness of history is represented in the literal and figurative workings of the incontinent body in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, a novel that displays the armature of a self simultaneously capacitated and governed by the force fields of negative difference. The autobiography of Hagar Currie Shipley stages in intimate detail the effects of negative differentiation, particularly the effects of what John Porter referred to as "an extensive repertoire of class labels" (11). Even though Porter

noted its near absence in 1965, we have yet to write a genealogy and technology of class in Canadian literary history.

This paper does not pretend to offer such a writing; rather it attempts only to be suggestive about the implicit role of class in literary history in a former colony. To this end of suggestiveness, the paper begins with a meditation on identity, or, on technologies of the self and the institutional value of *The Stone Angel*, then turns to a close reading of the incontinent body in the novel for its condensations and displacements of technologies of identity in an invader-settler colony.

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I take it as axiomatic that the self is constituted by its relations with others and with itself, and that the history of identity in Canada can be understood in part as a history of the ensemble of differential practices and languages for identity. What is significant about these differential measures of identity is their proximity to or distance from nodes of power and their interlocations in time. The ensemble of practices and languages for identity in Canada includes, among other things, the history of invasion-settlement, Enlightenment principles of upward mobility within a democratic, laissez-faire nation-state, and the necessary work of the nation's creative writers and critics in imagining and teaching "community" out of those contradictory principles and history.

Differences, including class differences, do not operate in the same ways and with the same force or efficacy but are themselves, like the subjects they define, more or less emergent, more or less powerful, in relation to other things. For example, racial/ethnic differences figure highly in the consolidation of settlement and nation-making in the generation that fathered Hagar Currie Shipley, particularly in relation to the organization of agrarian and rail economies, and these in turn in relation to the rise of early urban economies. The rise and consolidation of a property-owning, mercantile, and administrative class in Canada coincided with the emigration of Europeans of neither "founding" peoples; such consolidation, then, was especially reactive to difference during times of socio-economic difficulty, as recorded in Hagar's autobiography (and in many other novels of the period, such as John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* or Gabrielle Roy's *The Tin Flute*), and as analyzed in such historical studies as Howard Palmer's *Patterns of Prejudice* (see also Palmer, "Mosaic"), or the more recent *A Nation of Immigrants* (ed. Iacovetta). Indeed, such reactive differentiation persists to this day in ongoing struggles over practices and powers of national identity; obvious well-publicized examples

would include the restrictive immigration policies advocated by the Reform Party, or Bloc leaders' condemnation of the "ethnic" vote for the failure of the 1995 Quebec Referendum.

Reactive differentiation in the national symbolic economy has its structural parallels in more private symbolic economies, where difference is also necessary to and productive of consolidation of the self. For example, the private economy of the nineteenth-century family produced and distributed identity and power particularly along gendered differentials: this economy lingered belatedly in the colony as illustrated in its correlations in the broader public sphere. Wayne Fraser notes such a correlation in *The Stone Angel* in the following terms:

Men, in dominating women, dehumanized them; "angels" were, inevitably, "stone."

Laurence thus quite deliberately sets the twenty-five years of Hagar's formative years in the era of dynasty-making under the aggressive, almost ruthless, economic policies of Sir John A. Macdonald. In his tough drive to unite the provinces from sea to sea by rail, Macdonald strove to establish the "Kingdom of Canada," a nation founded on the same principles and institutions as Britain but independent of her. The foundations of this new nation, in Macdonald's "National Policy," determined that the country would be forged, almost arbitrarily, by the power of economics.... Into this society Hagar is born and from it she learns the inevitability of masculine domination. (Fraser 93-94)

Hagar is not only governed by such power, however: she is also *capacitated* by her father's capital, or at least by its symbolic purchase for her sense and practice of self in relation to others; her social position as the daughter of an angloceltic town father is enabling.

That Hagar was "fathered" rather than "parented" is in itself a figure for a series of practices which positioned her as both victim and agent. *Pave* Patricia Morley's detailed study, I do not think that "Hagar's experience could be transposed into a male key with relatively minor alterations" (91-92; see Beckman-Long; several essays in McCormick Coger). The fold within Hagar's gendered and bodily identity hides one "inferiority" (in masculinist terms) that leads to Hagar's projection of an array of inferiorities particularly onto other women as classed and ethnicized/racialized bodies. Such projections in the dialectic (or mutual revision) of past and present in the story of Hagar's life might be read dialectically as well in the history of the novel's criticism, given the work performed by

certain key measures of identity in such institutionally powerful locations as university curricula; the critical reception of Laurence's work may be, for its own dialectical reasons, celebratory of Hagar's "survival" (and that of other Laurence women) at the expense of maintaining the terms of her father's colonial paradigm. To situate knowledge production in the colony's literary history, particularly for those of us of invader-settler inheritance who participate professionally therein, involves the hard work of facing up to certain historical facts as also intimate ones and vice versa. I have found *The Stone Angel* to be a profoundly useful novel "to think with" in these terms.

In particular, incontinence as a repeated feature of the text illustrates the crosshatchings of gender and empire, family and colony, race/ethnicity and class, institutions and values, bodies and metaphors. Through Hagar's body Laurence writes the novel's most sustained critique of the symbolic economies of a nation's and a self's consolidation. But this critique, as thorough as it is, is perhaps also naturalized for particular readers, predominantly those of a more socially (if not also economically) powerful white angloceltic protestant constituency. On the one hand, incontinence functions in a register of realistic narrative detail concerning Hagar's aged body; on the other hand (and simultaneously), incontinence figures in a register of metaphors of excess — excess that is located in an individual body, but also in the body as signifier of the costs of Victorian and colonial discourses of gender and empire and, spoken through them, class and race exclusivity.

Hagar's growing awareness of her literal body figures the body's return of that which is repressed. Her very life is purchased, and the first page of the novel poised, over the dead body of the mother; her gravestone not only signals a fledgling pharaoh in a new land, it also signals how the discourse of the "self-made" man occludes the agency of women in giving life and thereby outlaws for Hagar — though she is expected to embody them — the traits associated with the private or maternal sphere of Victorian sexuality. Even when "maternal feminism" made possible the emergence of settler-invader women into the public sphere, the mechanism of negative projection by race and ethnicity, and thus by gender (because of women's childbearing capacity), persisted in the consolidation of women both *as* individual public agents and *in* the consolidation of the "superior" imperial race.

The narrative requires us to read through, and with, Hagar's incontinent body. Reading through the body illustrates how deeply and contradictorily Hagar's representative life has been inscribed by the complex

of gendered, classed, racialized, and ethnicized values so central to colonial discourses (see Stoler). In being “rampant” — incontinent — “with memory,” Hagar gives us a fiction that both binds her to and frees her from these inherited arrangements. In her old age, she can no longer escape the body that she has systematically repressed. But while for her this body is a source of shame, for readers it can be the source of Laurence’s most sustained critique of what she called the “intertwined and simultaneous” discourses of patriarchy, empire, and traditional authority. Engaged in a “talking cure,” Hagar painfully learns that although she did not inherit her father’s house, she has nevertheless lived her life within its discursive walls, sacrificing the body and those incontinent significations that might have made of her life, and the lives of others, a different narrative. Before taking up the textual manifestations of the cure, however, I detour the close reading through a meditation on the institutional value of Laurence’s novel, in her own and others’ terms.

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In an essay that explicitly compares the predicament of a colony to the predicament of women (an analogy strategically risked in a particular phase of white feminism in Canadian literary history), Laurence wrote: “Fiction, in the political sense, both binds us to and frees us from our ancestors.” She also wrote: “The growth of some of the themes in my writing — those themes which in the broadest sense I may define as political — took place in my mind in an intertwined and simultaneous way. My sense of social awareness, my feelings of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarianism, had begun, probably, in embryo form in my own childhood” (“Ivory” 24). This was a childhood in which her elders, to whom respect was owed, were pioneers, a generation of settlers of the prairies who had the strength — the “backbone,” as Hagar’s father would say — to survive. But these settlers were also invaders, as the persistent presence of Métis in Laurence’s Canadian fictions reminds us, and pioneer strength was often founded on and sustained by a denial of the humanity of the Other, whether Otherness was signalled by the differentials of gender, race, language, religion, or class, or a mapping of one differential onto another. As a reader of Octave Mannoni’s psychoanalytic critique of colonization in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1956; see her essay “The Imperialists,” esp. 277-79), Laurence was well aware of the mechanisms of projection and displacement at work in imperialism in Africa and in her own ancestry. Her remarks on imperialists in Africa make an apt account of Hagar Currie Shipley:

however much Africans may have suffered at their hands, it is to be hoped that one day Africans may be able to see them for what they really were — not people who were motivated by a brutally strong belief in their own superiority, but people who were so desperately uncertain of their own worth and their ability to cope within their own societies that they were forced to seek some kind of mastery in a place where all the cards were stacked in their favor and where they could live in a self-generated glory by transferring all evils, all weaknesses, on to another people. As long as they could be scornful or fearful of Africa or Africans, they could avoid the possibility of being scornful or fearful of anything within themselves. (“Imperialists” 251)

In one of her less guarded comments on the pioneers, and in reference to the then unpublished manuscript of Hagar’s story, Laurence wrote,

In my experience, pioneers are pig-headed old egotists who can’t relinquish the reins. If there is one thing that gives me a pain in the neck, it is certainly pioneers. This is not an acceptable point of view. And yet every last one of them is more to be pitied than blamed This whole novel is something that goes so far back, with me, and is such a wrenching up of my background, that it is difficult for me to be honest enough. The main problem is that if it ever gets published, which is unlikely, considering its nature ..., IF it ever gets published, a lot of people will be mortally wounded and offended (qtd. in Wiseman, Afterword 313)

Well, it *did* get published, and has been central to the identificatory operations of the English-Canadian literary curriculum. *The Stone Angel* was rated the top in the top ten most important novels in Canadian literature by the academic participants of the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel; it also scored high (eighth out of ten) in the list of the ten most important Canadian books of various genres, including literary criticism such as the monumental *Literary History of Canada* (see Stouck). And it was again chosen number one in the *Quill & Quire* July 1999 survey of thirty-seven “academics, writers, booksellers, and librarians” on the thirty “most interesting, important, and influential” books of twentieth-century Canadian fiction (Smith 21). Laurence thought the novel would give offense but instead it was and continues to be embraced, perhaps because of the degree to which Hagar’s story is recognizable to the predominantly angloprotestant readership that has been involved in the institutionalization of Canadian literature. As Laurence told Clara Thomas in 1972, “British readers saw her [Hagar] as a universal old woman

about to come to terms with her death; American readers tended to see her as a North American old woman; Canadians saw her as their grandmother” (Laurence and Layton 66). That is, for many Canadian readers of the generation of critics who valued this novel so highly in the 1970s (and still do), this novel tells if not a familial story, at least a familiar one.

The Stone Angel is valuable precisely because it is such a representative text: it is a literary history of a phase of settlement in Canada, and its reception is a history of a phase of literary critical settlement. Its parallel status to W. L. Morton’s 1957 history, *Manitoba*, has been amply noted, but the possible parallels between the cultural work of the novel and that of its criticism and/as pedagogy remains unstudied. In the ongoing construction of a national literature, a slowly shifting edifice in which Laurence has played a foundational role, many critics have read her Canadian work as positively representative of strong women who can be vehicles for the tenor of the coming independence of Canadian identity. They *are* strong women, and they have been crucial to the literary establishment of cultural sovereignty between two empires. But I am curious about what *that* reading in turn might represent.

That is, I wonder if there isn’t a readable absence in our collective scholarship on the novel, an absence that may be symptomatic of the longstanding critical paradigm whereby a focus on the *individual* hero/ine as representative of a national allegory of the struggle for independence necessarily marks the limits of dominant historiography in fictive and literary critical forms. The Laurence criticism archive on the whole, to which this essay is in general indebted, is underwritten willy-nilly by the fundamental paradoxes of Enlightenment struggles for agency and mobility, for individuals *as individuals*, reflected in emigration and settlement and in the historical development of the liberal democratic state. Enlightenment forms of “betterment” through access to education, property, and a means of capital accumulation were a response to prior forms of subjection, whether to an authoritarian monarchical state or to its later colonial or neo-imperialist residues; however, such forms, as Laurence’s novel amply demonstrates, risk perpetuating the operations of “have” and “have-not” and related discourses that sustain agential identity in an emergent nation-state structure. The operations of racism, for example, as Etienne Balibar itemizes them, should be immediately recognizable in Canada’s history of consolidation as well as more intimately in Hagar’s autobiography: “the ethnicization of social inequalities, the somatic projection of moral judgments, and the identification of differences among men [and women] with differences between [hu]man and animal” (197).

In other words, (if I may be permitted what may seem an anachronistic use of the phrase) an Enlightenment “politics of identity” saturates Canadian settlement, and especially its angloceltic protestantism. I do not use “Enlightenment,” then, as a shorthand for a certain postmodernist rejection of “master narratives,” nor do I use it to signal intellectual sympathy with Charles Taylor’s multicultural project (see Bannerji, “On”), nor to assume that reason is always and everywhere a bad thing. Rather, I mean to signal (but without elaboration here) a complex and powerful historical formation that migrated with settler-invaders and significantly informs the technologies of self, of “national” identity, and of fictive and literary crimythologies well into the twentieth century.

Hagar’s story is the story of the first generation of angloceltic Protestants born in Canada, but born, as it were, between two worlds — the world of the British Empire from whence it was possible for those disinherited at “home” to emigrate to the colonies, and the New World where, following Old World values, they could found their “dynasty” (*Stone* 3), as Jason Currie does in Laurence’s novel. This pattern of (compensatory) upward mobility was noted by Laurence in her essay on “The Imperialists” (1964) whom she observed while living in Africa: “Every last one of these people purported to hate Africa, and yet they all clung to an exile that was infinitely preferable to its alternative — nonentity in England” (252). Porter has similarly remarked on the class of professionals whose post-1944 access to university education in Britain failed to lead to “being accepted socially at the class level appropriate to their new professional status. They may have emigrated to Canada, where their social origins may not be so apparent, to achieve more upward mobility” (46-47). Given that 53% of “immigrant professionals who came [to Canada] between the end of the war and 1960 were from Great Britain, and many of these no doubt had been trained subsequent to the education reforms of 1944 which made university training less of a class privilege than it has been in Canada” (Porter 46), the cultural and political value of the parallel struggles of individuals and a colony to “succeed” may well have affected Laurence’s own generation of writers, critics, teachers, and publishers of Canadian literature, an affect that may also, then, have been curricularized. When this struggle for individual economic independence and class mobility meets the struggle for cultural and economic sovereignty in angloCanadian nationalism, then meets (white) feminism in Canadian letters in the 1960s and 1970s, and when all of that is underwritten by angloceltic dominance in the Canadian history of institutional power, Laurence’s novel and the critical paradigm that responds to it as

Hagar's story make thorough, if in hindsight limited and limiting, sense (see Irvine on forgiving criticism for its time). My point here is not to deride my critical and familial predecessors, nor to suggest that no critical attention has been paid to Enlightenment paradoxes in Canadian settlement. My point is to try to contemplate the writing and reading of Canadian literature through this one example *in institutional time* as it inheres in the contradictory spaces of the experience of modernity-as-development in Canada; my point is to look at the operations of technologies of the self in a novel foundational to technologies of Canadian identity.

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Victim of a lost inheritance and lapsed baronetcy, Jason Currie emigrates to Canada where he can be a “self-made” man: in the colony, where he is freed of the restrictions of class and ethnic prejudice of the Old World — he was after all a Scot, not an Englishman, and “without a hope or a ha’penny” when he emigrated (*Stone* 14-15) — he becomes a highly successful town father, businessman, and absentee landlord (a particularly resonant detail, given the history of the Scottish Clearances, so central to the production of tragic pride at the roots of Scottish emigrant identity and power). He “never farmed, although he owned four farms and had them tenanted”; when he died, he was worth “Two hundred thousand ... at least,” as Hagar says, “and never a red cent of it came to me” (41). Disinherited materially as her father was, for she inherits none of his houses nor his money (and thus casts herself as also by necessity self-made), Hagar nevertheless inherits the values that Jason Currie brought with him from the Empire, values that enabled him to establish Old World structures of power and wealth here, and to sustain those colonial structures by arbitrary distinctions between his humanity and others’ lack of it, distinctions drawn on class, racial or ethnic, linguistic, religious, and gendered lines.

Values of orderliness, cleanliness, protestant election, or next-to-Godliness, or, as Clara Thomas puts it, “what we now see as nineteenth-century imperialism,” were “linked to God’s will and the missionary enterprise of Protestant Christianity” (67; see also Hutcheon; New; Lemieux). Hagar’s father, a “self-made man” who “never believed in wasting a word or a minute”(7), articulates these imperial values in a colonial space; he illustrates the intertwining and simultaneity of the protestant work ethic with commerce. Hagar summarizes her father’s philosophy thus: “*The devil finds work for idle hands.* He put his faith in homilies. They were his Pater Noster, his Apostles’ Creed. He counted them off like beads on a rosary, or coins in the till. *God helps those who help themselves?*”

(*Stone* 8). Though the figures are ecumenically strung together here, not drawn only from the stern Presbyterianism of Jason Currie's heritage, they nevertheless establish an equivalence between Godliness, toil, self-interest, and the accumulation of financial capital (see Weber). The equivalency of financial capital and cultural capital, the figuring of one in terms of the other, is also prominent in the settlement world into which Hagar is born. These equivalencies, and the values for which they stand, are spelled out from the novel's beginning where "the first, the largest, and certainly the costliest" monument in the Manawaka cemetery, artwork imported from Italy for an upwardly mobile settler class, is less a memorial to Hagar's mother than a proclamation of her father's "dynasty" (3). Hagar *knows* these are manufactured equivalences: they represent the unjust and hypocritical construction of her father's superiority over others, yet Hagar herself speaks the same rhetoric. She repeatedly uses it to dismiss others and thereby to buttress her sense of self. What makes this bind and contradiction bearable for Hagar and for readers (if it is) is the retrospective telling; it permits a measure of both public and self-reflexive irony that sharpens Laurence's broad-ranging critique of the colonial self *and* fleshes out Hagar's position as both victim and agent.

Look, for example, at the interrelated portraits of "No-Name" Lottie Drieser (whose last name signals her mother's non-British ethnicity) and Telford Simmons, two children of "questionable" origins. Hagar remembers that she and the doctor's daughter used to

wonder what it would be like to be Lottie Drieser and not know where your father had got to, or even who he'd been. We never called Lottie "No-Name," though — only the boys did that. But we tittered at it, knowing it was mean, feeling a half-ashamed excitement, the same as I'd felt once seeing Telford Simmons not bothering to go to the boys' outhouse, doing it behind a bush.

Telford's father wasn't very highly regarded. He kept the Funeral Parlor but he never had a nickel to bless himself with. "He fritters away his cash," my father said, and after a while I learned this meant he drank. (10-11)

Presented in the novel next to and in contrast to Jason Currie's and the doctor's daughters, Lottie's lack of a father's (legitimate) name — the absence of the marker of one's breeding — says a good deal about Hagar's class consciousness. The fact that the girls only titter while the boys actually speak "No-Name Lottie" also points to a gendered consciousness linked to class consciousness: "decent" girls wouldn't publically be so im-

proper. But this passage also specifically links forms of incontinence with the lower class. There is first of all the sexual incontinence of Lottie's mother: to have been impregnated "in a ditch or barn" (27), to have an illegitimate child, is to leak out of legitimacy, propriety, proper breeding. In this same passage, we also find the impropriety of urinating in the bushes when an outhouse was available. The passage also discloses what Jason Currie regards as the moral and financial bankruptcy that goes with drinking, a form not only of yielding to bodily temptations but of being incontinent with one's nickels. Many years later, Hagar will fall into material poverty by marrying "beneath" her (another figure of speech that maps hierarchical values). She marries precisely because of her bodily attraction to Brampton Shipley, to the "crescents of ingrown earth" beneath his fingernails, his beard "rough as thistles," his daring to press his erection against her on the dance floor (45, 47), and because he "flout[ed]" good manners and fine speech with his bad grammar and crudities (79) (several critics have also noted that she marries Bram for his "Indian" features). She remembers that she was "drunk with exhilaration" when she defied her father in marrying Bram, but, as if proof of her father's values (toil, prudence, orderliness, cleanliness, next-to-Godliness), she is plunged into "squalor" when she takes this other(ed) man's name (52).

Instead of embracing those incontinent features that attracted her to the man she married, Hagar clings to her inherited values more fiercely than ever, and "scour[s] away" twenty-four years of married life before leaving her husband (116). Her disgust for her husband's incontinence is catalogued in the narrative in a cluster of details and events, remembered (as if in justification) just before she leaves Bram: her horror at what her favourite son must suffer when schoolchildren call his father "Bramble Shitley" (weeds and excrement); her fury when she learns that Bram has been warned by the RCMP for "'Reliev[ing] hisself ... against the steps of Currie's store'" (115); and her final humiliation, that she cannot get credit in the store her father built because her husband has frittered away his cash and credit by drinking Red Bidy with the half-breed Charlie Bean. Even his farm disgusts her, especially when she, "Hagar Currie serving a bunch of breeds and ne'er-do-wells and Galicians," realizes that these men whom she regards as her social and racial inferiors are laughing at her husband's dreams of new farm buildings: the "breeds" and "Galicians" would "glance sideways out the window to the gray-bleached barn that settled a little more each year into the dung-soft loam, the hen-house surrounded by chicken wire that sagged bunchily like bloomers without elastic, the tip-tilted outhouse" (114).

Figures of speech that rely on the impermissible exposure of the body and bodily waste are such a prominent feature of Hagar's perceptual and linguistic repertoire that her narrative seems like the empire writing back through the body. Incontinence figuratively means lacking in self-restraint, especially in the gratification of sensuous desires. It also refers, of course, to the uncontrollable urination that afflicts Hagar in her old age and that afflicted her "weak" and "malingering" brother Dan when he was a boy well past bed-wetting age; that Dan does not "survive" speaks to the inscriptions of social Darwinism in colonial space and the fears it generated (see Craig; Kramer; Devereux). The body and its leakages figure the interlocking values of nineteenth-century patriarchy, imperialism, and their exclusionary representation of their others; but, as the example of Dan illustrates, the body's excess also puts into question the racial and class superiority of the upwardly mobile pioneering settlers. Racial purity, good breeding (literal and figurative continence), and proper English are all taken to be natural signs of superiority and therefore justification of imperial ventures. Look at Hagar's assessment of her husband Bram's first wife: "A vat of a woman she had been, something moistly fat about her, and around her there always clung a sour yeasty smell as though she spent her life in cleaning churns. She was inarticulate as a stabled beast, and when she mustered voice it had been gruff as a man's, pebbled with impermissibles, *I seen* and *ain't*, even worse coming from the woman than from the man, the Lord knows why" (46). That ironic qualifying phrase, "the Lord knows why," signals Hagar's retroactive awareness of the arbitrariness of such distinctions. Nevertheless, for most of her life, which is to say for most of the novel, Hagar's response to women is the inherited one: women are often associated with the sensual (incontinent) body rather than the rational mind, yet contradictorily, the same dispensation colonially invests some women with the power to keep "the race" alive (see Gagan; Devereux).

Hagar's inherited values are displayed especially virulently in the displacement and compounding of her attitudes to gender by her attitudes to class differences. To return to that monument in the Manawaka cemetery (see Vauthier), even though Hagar *knows* retroactively that her mother's stone angel is a monument to her father's pride, she nevertheless measures and dismisses the other monuments in his terms: "The others, as I recall, were a lesser breed entirely, petty angels . . . with pouting stone mouths . . . pointing with ecstatic leer to an inscription" (3-4). The relations between breeding and class figure even the most minor details in the narrative: e.g., Hagar's incredulity that her step-daughter, "a slovenly creature, that Jessie," could ever have been thought of "as my boys' half-

sister” (126); or her segregation of her favourite son John from Jessie’s children, “A whining bunch they were, bulge-eyed and vacuous, their pants always drooping below their bellies and their noses never wiped” (122). Even the most innocent-seeming similes are invested with the language of breeding and class differentiation: in the opening pages of the novel, Hagar remembers “the planted peonies, dark crimson and wallpaper pink, the pompous blossoms hanging leadenly, ... bowed down with the weight of themselves ... , *infested with upstart ants that sauntered through the plush petals as though to the manner born*” (4; emphasis added). Much later, of course, the Currie monument will be brought low, not only because Hagar will inscribe the Shipley name on it, as equivalent to the Currie name, but because the angel literally will be knocked down, “toppled over on her face, among the peonies, ... the black ants scurr[y]ing through the white stone ringlets of her hair” (178). The angel’s face also signals the dissolution of class difference as a means of differentiating between the Curries and others: “Someone had painted the pouting marble mouth and the full cheeks with lipstick. The dirt clung around it but still the vulgar pink was plainly visible” (179). The final humiliation for the family of a founding father of Manawaka is symbolically apt, however, for its mapping of the gendered and class other onto this monument to founding genealogy.

The “intertwining and simultaneity,” as Laurence put it, of anti-colonialism and anti-patriarchalism has been a staple of Laurence’s work and its criticism, an important feature of the “victim” position in the victim-agent complex of settler-invasion. These structural relations between colonies and women are, again, figured very early in *The Stone Angel*, and interestingly enough they figure the disciplining of Hagar’s mind and body by her father’s values. A very informative example is Hagar’s misbehaviour at home, for which she is punished at the store, when she “tweak[s] ... off” her Auntie Doll’s cap and “expos[es] her frizzled mop to the chortling eyes of” the milkman (7). (Notice the incontinence here: exposure — and to a lower-class labourer — of the body’s unruly hair; a “mop,” incidentally, etymologically refers, among other things, to being “half-drunk” and, in nineteenth-century usage, to “the annual fair or gathering at which servants are hired” [*OED*]). Hagar is

ship[ped] off to the store, and there my father would sit me down, ... amid the barrels of dried apricots and raisins and the smell of brown paper and sizing from the bolts of cloth in the dry goods section, and make me memorize weights and measures.

“Two glasses, one noggin. Four noggins, one pint. Two pints, one

quart. Four quarts, one gallon. Two gallons, one peck. Four pecks, one bushel.”

He'd stand there behind the counter, bulky and waistcoated, his voice with its Scots burr prompting me when I forgot, and telling me to concentrate or I'd never learn.... He never believed in wasting a word or a minute. (7)

Hagar's behavioural incontinence at home is disciplined by her father's imperial measures, drilled into her memory and in her father's store, “the first in Manawaka” where he greeted his customers as if “he welcomed the world” (9).

But even here in this mercantile outpost of empire in Manawaka, there are threats to the order and purity, the continence and control, represented by Jason Currie and his disciplining of his daughter's self. While her father is busy serving the lawyer's wife, Hagar incontinently “poked [her] nose into the barrel that housed the sultanas, intending to sneak a handful”

“Oh, look! The funniest wee things, scampering — ”

I laughed at them as they burrowed, the legs so quick and miniature you could hardly see them, delighted that they'd dare appear there and flout my father's mighty mustache and his ire.

“Mind your manners, miss!”

The swipe he caught me then was nothing to what I got in the back of the store after she'd [the lawyer's wife had] left....

I wouldn't let him see me cry, I was so enraged. He used a foot ruler [another imperial measure], and when I jerked my smarting palms back, he made me hold them out again. He looked at my dry eyes in a kind of fury, as though he'd failed unless he drew water from them. (9-10)

As an old woman, of course, after a lifetime of (not always) living continently by her father's measures, Hagar regards her incontinent tears as a source of shame. Even her forgetfulness — so thoroughly unlike the memory that was supposed to be fostered and sustained by memorizing imperial weights and measures — is a form of incontinence. “It slipped my mind” spells contents that leak out with increasing frequency, shaming her, and threatening the stronghold of her identity (66).

The body in *The Stone Angel* not only signifies parallels between colonies and women, however: it also signifies that the colony can function just like the empire, and women just like patriarchs. Hagar thoroughly articulates this paradox, again in the space of the structural

contradictions of an invader-settler colony. Not surprisingly, then, Hagar's own incontinent body functions paradoxically in the novel, for it both registers and is a register of the repressive relations of settlement-invasion and social stratification represented in the novel. At the level of realistic detail, much of the narrative is taken up with Hagar's aged body, with its unwieldy size, its embarrassing and troublesome excesses of tears, urine, intestinal gas, and pain. She speaks of her "ankles and feet (thick as stumps)" (30), her "layered fat" (31), "heavy larded flesh" (54), "great swathed hips" (56), her "bulk" (55), "whole hulk" and "blubber" (76). Yet throughout her life, she has used this very excess of flesh in *other* women to condemn them: significantly, they are always women from a lower-class background than hers, even though neither she nor they may still occupy the particular class position of their birth. She thinks, for example, "What a disgrace to be seen crying by that fat Doris" (6), her daughter-in-law — a disgrace not only because of Hagar's incontinent tears but because of Doris's lower-class origins (Hagar seems unaware that Doris's marriage to her son ought to have changed her social status upward; Hagar has managed to make class-distinctions even between her own sons). Similarly, Hagar's body's excess is a source of shame to her, but she rationalizes her excess through her husband's financial incontinence. Her body grew excessive because it was not contained by "a foundation garment." She remembers contemplating ordering a corset from the catalogue, but she did not want her values — propriety, decency, continence, maintained by *artificial* means — to be exposed by or to her husband's laughter. And so she deflects that exposure to his daughters, his values, and lower-class excess: "'The girls don't go in for them things, do they, Hagar?' Of course his girls did not. Jess and Gladys were like heifers, like lumps of unrendered fat. We had precious little money — better, he thought, to spend it on his schemes" (56). Again, the language confirms what was regarded as the natural inferiority of the lower classes. Jason Currie had, in similar terms, dismissed Bram for his class inferiority: "'Lazy as a pet pig,' my father said of him. 'No get-up-and-go'" (46). Class inferiority is also signalled by association with "imprudent" racial sexual liaisons: Bram is said to be "Common as dirt ... he's been seen with half-breed girls" (47). Jason's sexual hypocrisy was known to Hagar who witnessed, without thoroughly understanding, the end of his liaison with, and fear of contamination by, Lottie Drieser's mother in the town cemetery, where not all "weeds," it seems, were kept from encroaching on the borders of civility (18). But somehow Bram's incontinence is worse because he crosses both a class and racial border. Hagar herself, wondering

how her firstborn son came to have the name Marvin, concludes that it must have been Bram's doing. "A Shipley name, it was, I think. Just the sort of name the Shipleys would have. They were all Mabels and Gladyses, Vernons and Marvins, squat brown names, common as bottled beer" (32). And here, too, one sin is figured in terms of another — the commonness of the name confirmed by its comparison to bottled beer, a source and measure of incontinence.

* * *

I have concentrated thus far on the negative functions of incontinence in *The Stone Angel*, but incontinence has a positive function in the narrative as well. I have already noted that Hagar was attracted to the improprieties of Bram Shipley, but would not speak her sexual satisfaction in their marriage because she "had manners," and a "decent" woman was not to feel, much less speak of, bodily pleasure (81). Yet Hagar's narrative is, as she says in the early pages, "rampant with memory" (5): to be rampant is to be out of control, to behave excessively, to be incontinent, to "indulge" as Hagar puts it, and to stop "dissembl[ing]" (5). In this rampant narrative she speaks with an incontinent and "wayward tongue" (138), her voice "erupt[ing] like a burst boil" (92). She wonders, "How is it my mouth speaks by itself, the words flowing from somewhere, some half-hidden hurt?" (68). And so incontinence becomes a means of healing old wounds, wounds inflicted not only on the self but on others. Significantly, the signs of such healing come when Hagar — proper Hagar Currie Shipley — tells a complete stranger the story of her responsibility for her favourite son's death. Again, as with the tarted-up and toppled-over monument, the condensation of textual details for Hagar's confession is symbolically apt: she tells her story while drinking cheap wine and smoking cigarettes in an abandoned building (emptied of all but traces of its prior colonial capital and symbolic investment), with runs in her stockings, beetles in her hair, and an uncharacteristic openness to the disclosure of intimate sexual details (see Stevens's detailed analysis of this scene).

The healing enabled by rampant memory and incontinent behaviour approaches completion only as Hagar approaches death. In the hospital where she ends her days, aware of her lack of social position because she lies in a public ward, Hagar is appalled at the conditions: "So you sleep here as you would in a barracks or a potter's field, cheek-by-jowl with heaven knows who all" (255). In each of the beds is "a female body of some sort" (254), all from the working class, speaking different tongues, and subject to various incontinences. Everything that Hagar has sup-

pressed or disparagingly attributed to others — and most often through the language of the body and its uncontrollable significations and desires — now fills her days and nights, and enables her to recognize that instead of keeping silence in the house of her father’s lord and repressing or displacing the body’s speech, she ought to have rejoiced: “Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances” (292).

* * *

The Stone Angel was Laurence’s first novel to be set in Canada and to deal with a specific phase of settlement and local, familial pioneer history. By the time she wrote *The Diviners*, her final novel, she seemed to have overcome her anxieties about giving offense to the pioneers (though the censorious response of the moral right to this novel’s inclusion in the high-school curriculum illustrates the perpetuation of Jason’s generation’s attitudes). Everything that Hagar feared capacitates and governs the formation of Morag Gunn’s biography. Morag is literally disinherited when her parents die; she grows up with two grotesque bodies for parents — the fat, dimwitted Prin and the drunken, cursing, nonsense-speaking Christie who earns his meagre living as keeper of the town dump, the nuisance grounds. There was a dump in Manawaka in *The Stone Angel*, a place where Hagar and other girls daintily walked, like “czarinas” (27). In *The Diviners*, the nuisance grounds reveal what the incontinent body does in *The Stone Angel*, the impermissibles of contradictory emergent bourgeois life. In her last novel, Laurence seems to turn the tables on class superiority but also attempts to close the gap on racial difference when Morag’s child is the daughter of the union of the British settler-invaders and the hybrid and dispossessed Métis.

For many readers, the trajectory from Hagar’s story to Morag’s constitutes something called progress, though to take the measure of progress seems less important (to me) than trying to read in time in a different sense (yet even here the genes of “betterment” tell). If we consider the institutional (and personal) place of *The Stone Angel* and of Laurence’s work in general in the dominant narrative of the emergence and consolidation of a national literature; if we understand it to be also a place for the suturing of critical narratives of “survival” with territorial, economic, and cultural independence from British and American imperialism; and if we consider it as also a place for the productive coincidence with white liberal feminism and state funding of cultural sovereignty in the 1960s

and 1970s, then we may also be able to read an Enlightenment inheritance therein. To read the trope of incontinence in *The Stone Angel* becomes a strategy for encroaching upon the plots of that inheritance, for reading in collocated time, and thus for reading the technology of colonization in Canada in some of its governing, capacitating, and often malign complexities.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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NOTES

¹ Porter's work remains highly useful; more recent work that incisively hooks class analysis together with race, gender, ethnicity, language, and the broader discursive and political economy of nation-states, includes Li; Singh Bolaria and Li; several essays in Gunew and Yeatman (on Canada in particular, see Ng; Stasiulis, and Kamboureli therein); several essays in Verduyn, ed., *Literary* (especially Bannerji); Godard; and Padolsky. From somewhat farther afield, see Stoler for a methodologically and historically useful study of how "the discursive and practical field in which nineteenth-century bourgeois sexuality emerged[,] was situated on an imperial landscape where the cultural accoutrements of bourgeois distinction were partially shaped through contrasts forged in the politics and language of race" (5). On the complexities of nineteenth-century women's agency, particularly in relation to class, I have found methodological and historical value in such studies as Poovey (for its materialist emphasis); Jolly (for its comparative close reading); and White (for a corrective to a tendency in Canadian criticism to use "carnival" without historicizing it or attending to its specificities in a gendered field). See also Mohanty; Suleri; Spelman; Narayan, Lugones; and Friedman.

² Laurence noted that "survival" was "an almost inevitable theme for a writer ... who came from a Scots-Irish background of stern values and hard work and puritanism, and who grew up during the drought and depression of the thirties and then the war" ("A Place" 17; in the same essay, Laurence abbreviated her background to Scots-Presbyterian" [18]).

³ On the "unmarked" white body's invisibility to those who live in it, see, for example, Frankenberg; and essays collected in Bannerji, *Returning*. For useful exceptions to the body's invisibility in Laurence criticism, see Verduyn's essay on *The Fire-Dwellers*; Van Herk's on *A Jest of God*; and Cook's on *The Drovers*. For an interesting interdisciplinary use of in-

continence (to read the history of Western rationality and recent critiques of it in feminist bioethics), see Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies*; my thanks to Maryanne Kaay for bringing this book to my attention.

⁴ Laurence's later works are situated in similar terrain, but for me they represent Laurence's coming-to-terms with her own inheritance; that *The Stone Angel* was the *first* in her Manawaka series of semi-autobiographical utterances makes language of repression very powerful indeed. The fact that it has taken me almost a decade to move from the relatively safe space of teaching the body in this novel (in predominantly white undergraduate classrooms) to drafting a paper on it for an undergraduate conference, to revising it for publication for me intellectual peers (and other interested readers) speaks volumes about repressions near and dear (i.e., necessary and costly) to me own psychological history. My thanks to *SCL*'s anonymous assessors for their assistance in curbing my autobiographical excesses in an earlier draft of this paper.

⁵ For a very interesting but seldom cited study of Canadian cultural and institutional politics that predates much of the work on these categories of subjectivity in Canadian letters, see Wilden.

⁶ Both of these surveys have been criticized for being limited to academic, writerly, and mainstream publisher respondents, or to those who were taught to appreciate and circulate such texts in institutional ways, but that actually illustrates rather than negates my point about the curricularization of texts and values such as *The Stone Angel* and its angloceltic inheritance. Buss noted in 1981 the material factors that made the novel important: "From the moment of its publication the first Manawaka novel has been seen as an important work by critics.... Because it has been constantly cited in survey studies and comparative studies of Canadian literature, it is a 'high-profile novel.' Its simultaneous publication in Britain, the U.S. and Canada gave the novel a wide readership and it has become a staple of high school and college literature courses" (5). Buss also lamented at the time, however, that "Laurence has of late been too closely associated with that great sacred cow, 'The Canadian Identity.' Not until critics can get past Laurence's nationality can her work be properly assessed" (14). I suggest we take seriously that close association, now that we have the luxury of hindsight afforded by two more decades of high-profile reception.

⁷ For Toshiko Tsutsumi (writing from Tokyo, Japan),

To arrive at th[e] goal of universal understanding, however, the reader is required to have a fair grasp of not only the physical but also the mental, spiritual, historical and cultural peculiarities of the region, a process which demands much from the outside reader.... The Scots-Irish Presbyterian tradition, for instance, obstinately retained in many of Laurence's major characters ... is utterly foreign to the Japanese readers at large, while the understanding of that tradition is essential to the thorough grasp of the inner lives of these characters. (307)

This response captures quite nicely the work of slippage from a particularized sociohistorical context in which literature is produced, to universalized "inner lives"; the former becomes an obstacle for arriving at a reading whose circumference is no-(or every-) where.

⁸ Criticism that treats specifics of the politics of the social context within Laurence's work in ways that interest me include Bowering on class and race; New on the linguistic markers of various kinds of locatedness; Hughes on political types; Jewinski on family violence; and Fulton on the relations between humanism and feminism in Laurence's work. Rare explicit exceptions that attend to the pedagogical and scholarly contexts are Mukherjee on students' resistance to her politicized teaching of "The Perfume Sea" ("Ideology"); ten Kortenaar on ambivalence and complicity in reading the postcolonial in *The Diver*; and Ware on teaching race and conflict comparatively. Laurence's African work, often treated as

a “preparation” for her Canadian work, has more recently been read as postcolonial work in its own right (see, e.g., Beeler; several essays in Reigel; or Nourbese Philip’s “Taming our Tomorrows,” which self-reflexively draws its title from Laurence’s *The Tomorrow-Tamers*).

⁹ Significantly, most of the work on this front has derived from “the other woman” in Canadian literary history; see especially Ng, Bannerji, and Mukherjee.

¹⁰ The arch(e) example of this sort of reading is Spivak’s deconstruction of US liberal feminists’ self-consolidating uses of nineteenth-century British fictional heroines (such as Jane Eyre) and neo-imperialist plundering of third world women’s texts; see also Rich. I do not, of course, pretend to have managed the specificity, complexity, or range of their arguments. Rather, I want to make a few notes towards a politics of location for a white woman teacher-critic reading and teaching settler-invader Canadian literature at the end of the twentieth century in ways that are not about unproductive or unhistoricized guilt or apologies.

¹¹ For a helpful schematic overview of the contradictions built into shifting forms of state (political economy) in relation to shifting forms of civil society and forms of capital (economy as more commonly understood in relation to bourgeois needs), see Gordon.

¹² See, for example, Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies*, which was published after this manuscript was submitted to *SCL*. My thanks to an anonymous *SCL* reader for the opportunity to refer others to this book.

¹³ For a dizzyingly detailed catalogue of the occurrences of “scatological” references in Canadian novels as the other side of the production of the civilized self and the social body, see Kramer.

¹⁴ See Clark and Davis on definitions of “thresholds of repugnance and finality by gender” (650).

¹⁵ See Kramer for an interesting observation about the “rhetorical” or narratological uses of the lower class in *The Diviners* (52).

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