Margaret Laurence uses the anecdote to comment both on “contemporary urban life” and on her own identification with the cabs and cabbies of the world, the degree to which she collects stories, as they have collected “fares,” in Vancouver, Cairo, Athens, Inverness, Toronto, New York, and Winnipeg. It is a striking list—which is not so much a comment on driving practice as a reflection on differences between narrative and critical preoccupations.

Criticism has focussed almost exclusively on villages and small towns as Laurence’s characteristic fictional landscapes. Africa and Manawaka figure large, as, of course, they should—inssofar as these conceptual landscapes affect everything Laurence wrote. In answer to the woman who once sent her a chastising letter, saying, “You really are getting mileage out of MANAWAKA!!,”
Laurence asserted, "well, tough beans, lady, it's my town..." (Heart 182). Manawaka exists, she added, in the mind and on the page, not in geography books—and in another context, she further remarked, "Nature imagery comes easily to me whereas urban imagery does not, largely because I am a small town person, not a city person. I really don’t feel at ease in cities at all" (Fabre 22). But the stories that tell of small-town Canada and village Africa are not divorced from social history. Small towns may, Laurence reflected in "Down East," “turn out to be to our culture what the possession of manuscripts in monasteries was to medieval Europe during the dark ages...[for] it is really only in communities such as these that the individual is known, assessed, valued, seen, and can breathe without battling for air. They may not be our past so much as our future, if we have one” (Heart 164). Towns and villages, that is, are not unconnected to urban settings and events, either in fiction or in life, and however “ill-at-ease” she found herself in them, cities appear repeatedly in Laurence’s work. How they function in fiction, however, does not uniformly depend on how they function as Centre of population density and economic influence. As far as Laurence’s writing is concerned, they are variously signs of power, signs of social alternatives, the external confirmation of the difference between physical desire and spiritual grace, and embodiments of energy and imperfection, aspiration and decay.

The more than two-dozen cities Laurence mentions range from the “faraway city called Bethlehem” in The Christmas Birthday Story (the New Testament, paradoxically, refers to Nazareth as a city but Bethlehem as a village) to the bullet-ridden Detroit in which Joe Bass dies, as recounted in Heart of a Stranger. They include London (Dance 157; Diviners 293) and Lagos (Drums 150), Calgary (Dance 47) and Corinth (Jest 36), Rotterdam (Prophet 9), Rome (Jason 9; Prophet 174; Fire 126), Jerusalem (Jest 42; Diviners 221), and Jericho (Jordan 248). Winnipeg, Toronto, and Vancouver recur most often. (Other mentions include Montreal [Jest 146; Tomorrow 29; Bird 193; Diviners 248], Mexico City [Tomorrow 29], Chicago [Tomorrow 29], Cairo [Prophet 12], Genoa [Tomorrow 37], Djibouti [Prophet 111], Philadelphia [Tomorrow 52], Paris [Prophet 119, 174], Peterborough [Heart 162], Oxford [Jordan 38], Ottawa [Diviners 373], Victoria [Dance 109], Accra [Jordan 2; Dance 52].
Bombay [Prophet 10], Hong Kong [Heart 172], Addis Ababa [Prophet 113], Calcutta [Diviners 176], Inverness [Diviners 313], and Mecca [Heart 125; Prophet 31; Tree 37].) But cities, referred to in a more general sense, often unnamed or unspecified, can also directly establish the complex set of moral tensions that Laurence’s fiction repeatedly addresses.

One of Laurence’s children’s works furnishes the pattern. Six Darn Cows tells of the Bean family and its close relationships, and of the two children, who leave the farm gate open and have to pursue the cows who get lost in the dark woods. Almost at the end of the story appear these three sentences: “Dan Bean, the kids’ dad, was now home, too. He worked two days a week in town fixing TV sets to make some extra money. On the other days, he worked on the farm with everybody else” (n.p.). It would be easy to make too much of this observation, to transform it from a declaration of family responsibility into a sign of the fragility of the agrarian dream in the face of corporate-controlled passivity or the urban lifestyle. This contrast between agrarian and urban possibilities, nevertheless—or between home and away, family and money—runs throughout Laurence’s work, from her early African stories to her posthumously published family memoir. Godman, in “Godman’s Master,” for instance, heads to the city to find work (“That is what men do—they work”), only to find out that the new and “unknown place” is “frightening” without a friend (“So many people, and the noise, and those high buildings” [Tomorrow 147-148]). For its part, Dance on the Earth alludes everywhere to cities: as places where friends live, but also as transit points, places of minimal touchdown on the way to somewhere else, ultimately the town of Lakefield, where Laurence lived during her last years: “We flew first to London,” she writes of her return from Africa to Canada, “stopping over with Adele Wiseman, who was living there. Then a flight to Montreal, where we also stayed for a day with friends, and another flight to Vancouver. My childhood friend Mona met us at the Vancouver airport and a few days later took us to catch the small plane to Victoria. Aunt Ruby met us there” (113). Family and friendships constitute a support system, a way of coping with contemporary fashion and modern technology (which in 1984 she would say was “still largely male-dominated”) on the way to finding “human wisdom, compassion,
common sense and conscience...values [that] seem to be at risk in the face of the ubiquitous machines" (229).

It is this contrast that makes the resolution to another children's book, Jason's Quest, so enigmatic. The title character, a mole, an ordinary young citizen of the underground city of Molanium, goes on a gallant quest to find a cure for what ails his community. Along the way he finds adventure, danger, friendship, love, and an animated cure for the city's disease (which turns out to be boredom); in the process he turns from an ordinary citizen who believes himself to be fearful and inconsequential into an ordinary citizen who is stalwart, brave, and true. As a didactic parable, this story follows conventional lines. But a further cast is given the narrative by its recurrent allusion to imperial models. Molanium is designed on a parallel with Londinium, the fortress of the Roman Empire and later the seat of the British, and it is to London, or what the moles think of as Londinium still, and refer to as "Thither" (4), that Jason must go for his solution. "The molefolk thought they had everything nicely settled, once and for all. But they didn't," Jason realizes, after he does battle with the new London's underground ruler, the Great Rat (190), and realizes that to survive he has had to depend on his new friends, urban animals who speak with a variety of Commonwealth accents. Although it is clear that Molanium's desire not to change is part of its current problem, the patterns of change that Jason takes back home do not fundamentally alter the city's desire for power. Molanium will change its name to Moleville, elect a mayor instead of a Venerable Leader, and subsequently acquire a railway, a museum, explorers, tourists, a mole equivalent of the Olympic Games, airmail, a nightclub, and Moles in Space, all the accoutrements of twentieth-century American civilization. Perdita, Jason's new-found love, moreover, is presented with a walkie-talkie so that she can keep in touch with her London friends on weekends. Although these changes are announced as solutions to the city's "invisible sickness" (210), they at the same time reinscribe the lineaments of Empire. Friendship might be the force that keeps the community productive and free, but the city itself—Jason's city—remains in many respects a counterforce, the medium in which decay and authority compete for people's allegiance, and sometimes get it.
That the nightclub is an emblematic sign of city life is clear from Laurence’s African writings as well. Her comments on Cyprian Ekwensi’s novel *People of the City* focus on a character named Sango, who “is sacked from The All Language Club, because he has been playing election music for the opposite party to the one the club’s owner supports. The city begins to devour him, as it has devoured so many” (*Drums* 150). Further, Ekwensi’s style, Laurence notes, catches “the tone of the city dweller’s speech with its jazziness like highlife music” (*Drums* 199). The appeal of urban music in Laurence’s work is in part an appeal to independence. In “The Drummer of All the World,” Matthew returns to Africa after his English education to find that Africa has changed: new political slogans are in the air, a nightclub is called “Weekend in Wyoming,” the mammy-lorries declare such slogans as “Authority Is Never Loved,” highlife bands are called “The Majestic Atoms” and “Scorpion Ansah and His Jet Boys”—it is a world in which Matthew finds himself rootless and from which he is now estranged. Adamo, too, in “The Voices of Adamo,” is torn between conventions, his dilemma epitomized when he hears “the families of frogs in the nearby lagoon” over “the clash and clatter of the city’s cars and voices” (*Tomorrow* 221). Relatedly, Emmanuel, in “The Tomorrow-Tamer,” tells Kofi that when he finishes with the bridge he will go “‘Back to the city. First I’ll have a good time. Everything a man does in the city, I’ll do it—hear me?’ . . . Kofi was amazed. ‘You do not know where you will go?’ ‘I’ll find out,’ Emmanuel said easily. ‘What about you, bush boy?’” (*Tomorrow* 100–101).

But such independence carries a price. For Arabetto, in *The Prophet’s Camel Bell*, it seems the price is not too high; fascinated by modern films and quick, syncopated rhythms, he

was what the Somalis called *nin magala-di*, a man of the town . . . [He] did not appear to miss the tribal affiliations, or to need them. He neither gave advice nor asked for it. He went his own way. . . . Not surprisingly, he was more politically minded than the others appeared to be. . . . The goal [of independence] seemed impossible to me, considering the limited number of educated leaders. To him, it seemed not only possible but inevitable, a foregone conclusion. . . .
Hurry, hurry,
Fly like a bird—

The others in camp were scornful of Arabetto’s music, but he paid no attention to their sarcasm. He would take his gramophone to the edge of the camp and sit there, cranking it and playing this one song over and over, clapping his hands to the rhythm, humming the tune. (175–177)

For other figures, however, the city’s music is a more dire temptation.

This Side Jordan demonstrates the distinction. It opens with the Fire Highlife playing “with a beat urgent as love” (1). Johnnie Kestoe, who does not like Africans, is dancing with an African woman who is mocking him, and others around them are variously angry and concerned. “Music,” says the text, was the clothing of West African highlife, but rhythm its blood and bone...

The dancers themselves did not analyse the highlife any more than they analysed the force that had brought them all together here, to a nightclub called "Weekend In Wyoming"...

They were bound together, nevertheless, by the music and their need of it... But the ancient drums could no longer summon the people who danced here. The highlife was their music. For they, too, were modern. They, too, were new. (1–2)

The novel examines the lives of several persons caught up in the larger social dances of sex, race, and power, but particularly it focuses on two: Kestoe, trained in the “gutterstreet” (4) of his London childhood to the hierarchy constructed by prejudice and violence (the only interesting thing he finds in the Tower of London is, emblematically, a massive suit of armour), and Nathaniel Amegbe, “born far inland in the forests of Ashanti,” who for six years has made “this decaying suburb of Accra... almost his own” (44). The novel gives support roles to the women closest to each of these men, but neither gentility nor gentleness can immediately counter the force of city highlife. Kestoe wants to control the city, and seeks an African prostitute to prove his power, even “sagaciously” (233); Nathaniel wants to stay true to his inland ideals, but
finds that wealth and influence, the staples of urban commerce, inevitably compromise his life.

The novel moves ahead along these intersecting and diverging lines. As the city becomes more “familiar” (86) to Johnnie, so it becomes more devastating for Nathaniel. His old uncle tells him, “You have forgotten your own land. You live in the city of strangers, and your god is the god of strangers, and strange speech is in your mouth, and you have no home” (104). This moral admonition chastises him severely, but when the words come back to him later, they have acquired another, more political resonance. Once, he thinks, there was

Only sweat and the forest, and at night songs and love. That was Eden, a long time ago...

—But something said—GO...Something said—don’t stay here...Something said—a man got to live until he dies, and that’s a long time, Nathaniel, a long time to wonder what he might have done if he’d tried.

—So now you’re finding out. The city of strangers is your city, and the God of conquerors is your God, and strange speech is in your mouth, and you have no home.

“Where shall I go, where shall I go,
Seeking a refuge for my soul?”

It was a song he had heard in this city that was now his city. But he could not remember the answer, or even if there were an answer. (167–168)

Nathaniel subsequently succumbs to the temptation of bribery (“I am the City, boy. Come and dance.” [195]), even though the voices of his past tell him that the dance can be dangerous, not necessarily his own, and that his ancestors had once been chained on the slaving ships and “Hauled to the deck and made to dance” (210). Johnnie, full of self-loathing, punishes him for his ambition and for seeming to be weak. Invoking the traditional African identification of place with time, Nathaniel then knows that the city “isn’t my home, this city of new ways, this tomorrow” (227), but even as he realizes his rural naiveté, “Spider Badu’s band still beat out the highlife” (228). Only with the birth of his son Joshua is
there any promise of change—a promise of a generation that will know how to make the city its own (281)—but this declaration sounds as much like Nathaniel's wishful thinking as it does political prediction. The claim on the future is still not separate from the hold of the past.

This motif permeates Laurence's "Canadian" texts as well. Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel*, like Stacey MacAindra in *The Fire-Dwellers*, always carries her past with her; both have left Manawaka for Vancouver, but not left Manawaka behind, and both try in vain to flee the city northwards, into less inhabited territory up Howe Sound, before they can come to terms with what their lives have become, and may yet be. Hagar takes Manawaka into her son Marvin's suburban home and then into the multicultural hospital in Vancouver, where she dies. Suburbia is anathema to Hagar, but the hospital is a final test of her ability to accept life and deal with change. For, to the small-town communities who have shaped her mindset, the hospital is one of the most resonant signs of city life or city necessity—it is perceived as a force of external, institutional authority and also as the suspect hand of an interfering technology. The same is true for the characters in *A Jest of God*. Stacey in Vancouver, thinks her sister Rachel Cameron, has had all four of her children "born in hospital and in wedlock, as the saying goes" (*Jest* 168). Yet for Rachel the hospital in the city (in her case, Winnipeg) measures the past as much as it facilitates the future; it is to the Winnipeg hospital she must go for the surgical removal of her tumour—but as far as the town of Manawaka is concerned, going away for hospital treatment is tantamount to admitting to an abortion ("So that is what is being said. 'You can imagine why she went into the city—that's why she has to leave, now, afraid it'll get to be known—No, it wasn't that way at all—she didn't go into the city for that—I heard she went into hospital there because she'd tried to do it herself and it went wrong. Who could he have been, though?'" [200]). Gossip has its own life in the "community" of the small town, its reality superseding any other, which is why Rachel herself also ultimately leaves for Vancouver, locating in the city at least "a change...evolution" (201), to take the place of the repetitive, sectarian service that has thwarted her, and the stasis of empty desire.
For, as with Nathaniel Amegbe, the city is imagined as the site of change for Rachel. Her summer lover Nick has been teaching elsewhere—in the city, Rachel ascertains: “I oughtn’t to have said the city,” she thinks after saying these words aloud; “As though I believed it were the only one anywhere. Why didn’t I say Winnipeg?” (62), and yet she repeats the phrase “in the city” when justifying to her mother her date with Nick. Saying the word city is a charm, an invocation of difference and even danger, of imagined classiness, though certainly not always of respectability. In A Bird in the House, Vanessa MacLeod’s classy first boyfriend, the airman Michael, for example, already has a wife, who comes from Vancouver on a surprise visit that reaffirms the power of institution over fantasy (it is one of several revelations that permit Vanessa to realize that there are greater wildernesses than those of Manawaka). When Brooke Skelton offers Morag Gunn the chance to move to Toronto, she thinks: “Would she like Toronto? Would she like Paradise? With Brooke, and away from the prairies entirely” (Diviners 168), only to realize much later that the fantasy city is unreal and “You have to go home again, in some way or other” (248), making it your own. Rachel Cameron dreams through the children’s rhyme of being “queen of the golden city” (Jest 1), and even though she can see past the surfaces of other people’s illusions (the inadequacy of eighty-year-old Tom Gillanders when he sings a solo of “Jerusalem the Golden” [42]), she has to live through her own illumination before she can move on. Piquette Tonnerre, too, reaches for what the Manawaka townspeople call respectability, when she says she is going to marry a blond “English fella” named Al who works “in the stockyards in the city” (Bird 124), and she also, with what Vanessa later realizes is “a terrifying hope” (124), lays claim to city sophistication when she tells Vanessa that she has “Been all over the place—Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon” (123).

But in neither case does the charm work for Piquette as it sometimes does for other Manawaka characters. Nick Kazlick’s sister Julie, for one, “took off...re-married and went to Montreal” (Jest 146), apparently without further consequence, for she disappears from the narrative with that information, until she turns up again in The Diviners, in North Vancouver, about to divorce Buckle Fennick (whose story is told in The Fire-Dwellers), and still about to remarry and go to Montreal. Another character, Vanessa MacLeod’s
Aunt Edna in *A Bird in the House*, chooses to honeymoon in Montreal rather than in Winnipeg, having come to equate Winnipeg only with her first, unhappy, unsuccessful attempt at love, work, and breaking away. For Edna, Winnipeg is at once too far away in distance to make commuting to work from Manawaka possible, and too close in time to make the past disappear. For some in the next generation, however—or Vanessa (or for Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*)—going to university in Winnipeg is a different kind of route away; though the language they hone outside the town constitutes the medium that returns them to the voices of the past, the “Manawaka” they both create in the books they ostensibly write is a construction that frees them into the future, not one that chains them to the authoritarian rule of institutional marriage, closed family doors, and patriarchal history.

The most sustained analysis of city living in Laurence’s writings occurs in *The Fire-Dwellers*, where Stacey MacAindra is torn between different kinds of desire: for freedom, for sex, for support, for recognition, for love, for security, and for some sense of fulfilment and self-esteem. Those around her seem only to exacerbate her condition. Her four children grow away from her, and she cannot live their fears for them. Her salesman husband Mac cannot express his feelings without fearing he is losing his masculinity as he does so. One potential lover, Buckle Fennick, is self-absorbed, and wants only an audience; the other, Luke Venturi, significantly younger than she is, wants mainly to live for the moment and protest the past. Her husband’s boss Thor Thorlakson displays and pretends to exert power, but it is tissue-thin, for he fears that Stacey will recognize him for who he really is: he is Vernon Winkler from Manawaka, who has concocted the godlike identity Thor as a kind of costume, worn flamboyantly to hide what he construes as the shame of a Manawaka past. Artifice surrounds her in plastic and in pills as well as in the language of advertising and the behaviour of people. She lives on Bluejay Crescent; she drinks coffee with her neighbour and gets her hair done; she copes with the clichés of office parties. And this artifice she has come to associate with suburbia.

The suburb depicted reads something like a cross between Dunbar and the North Shore: the suburbs where Laurence lived
during her years in Vancouver. ("Dunbar" is on the southwest side of the city, next to what was then called the University Endowment Lands and is now called Pacific Spirit Park; "the North Shore" occupies the lower mountain slopes north of Burrard Inlet, across the harbour from the "Downtown" city centre.) Laurence was living in Dunbar when writing the stories of The Tomorrow-Tamer. I do not wish to suggest an equation between author and character here, nor between real and fictional settings, except to say that there is not so much a difference between the two Vancouver suburbs (Dunbar and the North Shore) as between suburb and city centre (Dunbar and downtown), and that The Fire-Dwellers makes much of a parallel contrast. In The Diviners (208–209), Morag Gunn dismisses the empty "Self-dramatization" of the Toronto apartment name Crestwood Towers—Laurence no doubt quietly alluding here to John Seeley's 1956 book Crestwood Heights, a semi-fictionalized sociological account of life in the postwar planned communities of Central Canada. (Seeley refers to both the "physical entity" and the "psychological fact" [4] of life in suburbs outside what he calls "Big City"—sociological fabrications based on Don Mills and Toronto.) A street name such as Bluejay Crescent in The Fire-Dwellers invites a similar reaction, except that The Fire-Dwellers ultimately refuses to condescend toward suburbia. Yes, the name is an illusion, an aspiration of a sort—which the novel's bird and flight images both reinforce and undercut: the ladybird allusion in the title is a reminder of suburban uncertainties, whatever the desire for peace. Thor Thorlakson is imaged as a "bat-winged Mephistopheles" (44); Mac is a driver in "a winged chariot" (20), unlike Buckle, who treats driving as a kind of rape (154; cf. the "wham" of urban traffic, 157); Stacey's son Duncan learns that "God loves birds" at Sunday School (70), an absolute he vaguely distrusts; Stacey herself hears the "pierce of water birds" when she first tries to escape the city (171), but she somehow also knows that escape is another kind of illusion, for she also sees that there are "gulls... at the city's rim" (260).

More devastatingly, at the heart of the downtown of "this city, jewel of the Pacific Northwest," Stacey recognizes that an economic underclass lives with more abrupt realities:

The pigeons are shitting all over the granite cenotaph... Along the steps at the base, three old men sit in the feeble sunlight,
coughing and spitting, clenching their arms across their skinny chests, murmuring something to one another, memories, perhaps, or curses against now...

In the lobby of the Princess Regal Hotel, some yawning yellow-toothed fishwife, fleshwife, sagging guttily in a print dress sad with poppies, is sweeping up last night—heel-squashed cigarette butts, Kleenex blown into or bawled into, and ashes. Old men are sitting there, too, sitting in the red plastic-covered chairs, waiting for the beer parlor to open, so somebody can stand them a drink and they can accept haughtily, their scorn some kind of sop to their pride.

—What is it like, really? How would I know?...All I know is what I read in the papers. (6-7)

These images convince her of her distance from the city; but over the course of the novel she has to come to terms with her connections. Another ex-Manawaka resident, Valentine Tonnerre, now working the downtown streets, pierces one of the illusions, identifying Vernon Winkler for her; this recognition concretely reminds Stacey of Manawaka's participation in the social charade. Money and class consciousness continue to intrude onto opportunity, and to determine exclusion and exclusivity. The violence of the Vietnam War, played out in television fire daily in suburban living rooms, intensifies further the sense of disparity between experience and image, but suicide and immolation interrupt seemingly ordinary lives, and when Stacey's life, too, threatens to come apart, the difference between Dunbar and downtown looks to be not as great as suburban artifice conventionally desires. (Cf. Davidson 134: "Vancouver...does not function in Laurence's fiction simply as a Canadian Florida...[D]espite its mild climate and urban amenities, [it] has its dark underside"; and Thomas 188, who compares The Fire-Dwellers's Vancouver with a hellish Bosch canvas.) Yet as with all Laurence's works, the recognition of violence is never unalleviated by hope. Time provides a perspective, and some while later things change, at least for the central character—if she has seen enough, if she has learned to differentiate between what is wanted and what is due. In The Fire-Dwellers, Duncan learns how to construct acceptable distances (297); Jen, Stacey's "angel bud" (291) youngest child, learns to talk, and so,
metaphorically, both to blossom and to fly; and Stacey herself "feels the city receding as she slides into sleep" (308).

But the novel, of course, closes on a question, not on this apparent closure; "Will it return tomorrow?" the text asks in the rhetoric of uncertainty. In some ways it is an apocalyptic question, one that long preoccupied Laurence and that permeated the peace-writings of her later years. As early as The Prophet’s Camel Bell, she had asked this question, as in these comments in the chapter called “Place of Exile”:

Near Borama were the ruins of an ancient city, or perhaps several cities built on the same site.

Amoud was the name the Somalis had given it. The word means "sand," and the name was apt, for the city had returned to the mountains and the desert. When it was alive, Amoud must have spread up the hillside, the brown-yellow houses mellow in the sunlight, among the stiff acacias and the candelabra trees. In the marketplace, the donkeys and camels would have been laden with the sacks of aromatic gums and ivory, the bundles of ostrich plumes, and would have set out for the coast, where the goods would be taken by dhow to Arabia.

But now, as we walked through it, Amoud had been dead a long time.

Looking at Amoud, and then at the nomads’ huts crouched at the bottom of the hills, I could not help thinking of the western world with its power and its glory, its skyscrapers and its atom bombs, and wondering if these desert men would not after all survive longer than we did, and remain to seed the human race again, after our cities lay as dead as Amoud, the city of the sands. (101-103)

The prose style speaks of hypothesis and also of identification; fictions of the past and future jostle in the mind as alternatives to the experiential present, perhaps better, perhaps worse. In many ways the passage is a paradigm of the way Laurence constructed city settings throughout her writings, and of her reasons for doing so. As the embodiment of institutional power, the city falls away; as the embodiment of vitality, it promises a place in which to dwell. Recognition is all.
This distinction emphasizes yet again the principled fabric of Laurence's writing, and the relation between her fictional landscapes and her Protestant upbringing. As several commentators on American fiction have observed, the city can be (and has been) represented as a territory of knowledge to be struggled with (Williams; Caws); the embodiment of technological reach, action, and (sometimes gendered) economic independence (Bremer; Clarke; Jaye; Gelfant); an "unnatural" environment contrasted with a version of nature that is coded as female (Grâce); a heavenly, static, Utopian, mythological positive space; a walled defence against the wilderness; and a real, hellish, constantly changing space of escapist guilt (Machor; Rosenthal; Pike). Other critics (Levy; Schorske; Howe) have commented on a related set of features attributed to European literary cities: industry, pleasure, vice, waste, shock, energy, chaos, violence, labyrinthine deviousness or uncertainty, and ethnic variation (that is, visible departures from a declared social uniformity); as Carl Schorske puts it, they express a felt loss of community decorousness and rural virtue, and codify an "Enlightenment dream gone wrong" (114).

Underlying these options, as Bernard Rosenthal makes clear (191), is the distinction Saint Augustine drew between the City of God and the City of Man. Augustine's *City of God* argues this distinction at length, defining two metaphoric alternatives in Christian theology by means of a series of overlapping, but not congruent, binaries:

the city of God—the city of Man

Jerusalem—Babylon

the heavenly New Jerusalem—Jerusalem in the present

the Holy Church—the Roman Empire

the saved—the damned

the promise of grace—the rule of law

citizenship in the Eternal City—worship in the cult of the theatre and the public temples (*City* 239)

everlasting good—temporality and civil authority (*City* 599)

freedom—servitude (*City* 597)

love of God—love of self (*City* 593)
the mind in control of the body—the body aroused to commit some wrongful act (City 605–606)

Abel—Cain (City 596)

agrarian idealism, represented as natural harmony—internal conflict, represented by litigation, war, battle, and the pursuit of victory that brings with it death (City 599)

Augustine drew his central image explicitly from the Psalms (City 429): "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God" (Psalm 46:4); "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness" (Psalm 48:1); "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Psalm 87:3). The City of Man is the city of change and power, figured as the city that Cain built (Genesis 4:17) after his offering to God was rejected; the City of Man is named for Enoch and metaphorically occupied, therefore, by the children of Cain. The heavenly City of God, by contrast, is associated first with Cain's brother Abel, and then with Seth (City 608), and is figured as agrarian and virtuous. In Augustine's words:

Now Cain was the first son born to those two parents of mankind, and belonged to the city of man; the later son, Abel, belonged to the city of God... [I]n the individual man, to use the words of the Apostle [I Corinthians 5:46]: "it is not the spiritual element which comes first, but the animal; and afterwards comes the spiritual"... The same holds true of the whole human race. When those two cities started on their course through the succession of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and later appeared one who was a pilgrim and stranger in the world, belonging as he did to the City of God. He was predestined by grace, and chosen by grace, by grace a pilgrim below, and by grace a citizen above. (City 596)

Augustine goes on immediately to cite the passage from Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (4:21–25) that identifies both the city of God and the city of Man as female; in this passage, Paul allegorically interprets Abraham's relationship with two wives: "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above us is free, which is the mother of us all." Augustine's interpretive comment is that
we find in the earthly city a double significance: in one respect it displays its own presence, and in the other it serves by its presence to signify the Heavenly City. But the citizens of the earthly city are produced by a nature which is vitiated by sin, while the citizens of the Heavenly City are brought forth by grace, which sets nature free from sin. (City 598)

Accepting that “Identification of Sinai with Jerusalem/Zion is frequent in Jewish tradition” (Meeks 19), Agar thus relates to the covenant of law, Sarah to the covenant of grace.

Laurence’s work draws on this contrast—not, I suspect, with deliberate didactic intent (though the relevance of the Galatians passage to *The Stone Angel* is fairly explicit), but rather because the contrast was so familiar, because it so dominated the Christian teachings of her upbringing. Divisions between mind and body, conflicts involving freedom and servitude, dissension with external authorities and dissatisfaction deriving from internal tensions: these are the abstract oppositions that her works often concretely represent in the split between country and city. The contrast is complicated, of course, by the numerous classical allusions that also appear in Laurence’s prose—for example, the recurrent reference to Agamemnon, king of Mycenae (*Heart* 19; *Fire* 4, 197), who sacrificed his daughter to appease the gods, and who is explicitly identified with Laurence’s grandfather Simpson in *Dance on the Earth*: “the Big House...was my grandfather’s stronghold and he ruled it like Agamemnon ruling Mycenae or Jehovah ruling the world” (63). The link between Agamemnon and Jehovah is both explicit and illuminating. For although not without qualities, Agamemnon is not heroic in Laurence’s world; Joshua is the figure who combats the walls of the city of Jericho in *This Side Jordan* (248) and the “brick battlements” that are the equivalent of the Simpson stronghold in *A Bird in the House* (173). Just as absolute power is never admirable in Laurence’s world, nor is institutional power that is granted even the illusion of unchallengeable right. But to broach the walls of the city/stronghold is to open the enclave to the possibilities of change. And yet it is the small town that Laurence said was the guarantee of the future. How does a reader respond to this apparent dichotomy? Is it the heavenly city or the earthly city that in Laurence’s work is being
challenged in this way—or are both being questioned, along with the binary mindset that creates the separation between them?

Luke Venturi in The Fire-Dwellers has written a science fiction manuscript he recounts to Stacey at one of their meetings. It is an apocalyptic tale, in which African administrators arrive in North America after a nuclear disaster, discovering a few survivors known as the greyfolk:

The educated greyfolk have developed the belief that their ancestral culture was harmonious, agrarian and ideal until the disaster, which some believe to have been an act of nature such as multitudinous volcanic eruptions and others believe to have been an outside attack by unnamed destroyers. [The Chief Administrator] Acquaah’s problem is whether to let them continue in these comforting beliefs or to tell them what really happened. In the end, they have to know, of course. Trouble is, I’m not sure what happens when they find out. (200)

For Laurence, the indeterminacy is what has to be accepted. Hence the agrarian ideal, the closed version of the heavenly city that constructs the civil city as evil, proves to be as problematic a design for living as is any urban surrender to amorality or hedonism. Toward the end of This Side Jordan, Nathaniel Amegbe resolves to stay in the city but to reject the despair that has threatened to destroy him, in these terms:

In my Father’s house are many mansions. A certain Drummer dwells in the House of Nyankopon, in that City of Many Mansions. I know it now. It is there that he dwells, honoured, now and always. It may be that I shall never see him again. But let him dwell there in peace . . .

—I cannot have both gods and I cannot have neither. A man must belong somewhere . . .

—My God is the God of my own soul, and my own speech is in my mouth, and my home is here, here, here, my home is here at last. (274–275)

With echoes of the Gospel according to Saint John (14:2) combining with those of the American Black freedom movement, the novel commits itself to the causes of justice and independence. It also sets in motion the image of the city that Laurence’s
subsequent work was both to develop and to sustain: an image of the city as a place that, however flawed, still permits over time a growing spiritual grace. The city functions, then, as both a social strategy and an ethical proposition, as an imagined map of proximate places and a working geography of moral convention.

NOTES

1. The Epistle to the Hebrews (13:14)—widely attributed to Saint Paul by the third century A.D. (though the Egyptian philosopher Origen, subsequently repudiated by the Church for treating scripture as allegory, questioned Pauline authorship at the time [City 455]; Augustine acknowledges that the attribution has been questioned [City 680])—adds: “For here [i.e., on earth] have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” (See also Revelation 3:12, which makes an architectural identification between person and place; “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem.”)

2. See Dombrowski 54–58, and Hauge 126ff.

3. It may not be insignificant that it is the “daughter of the city,” in Genesis 24, who goes outside the wall to the well and who offers water to strangers. Surrounding villages on lands a city owned were also often referred to as the “daughters of the city” (McKenzie 140). Certainly it is highly significant that it is the “bird-boned, but well-endowed” snake-dancer Fan Brady in The Diviners (253) who offers Morag space and sustenance when she is a stranger to North Vancouver; of all Laurence’s characters, Fan Brady is the most urban, the most at home in the city, and probably the most openly secure about her sexuality; her occupation as snake-dancer, moreover, emphasizes her difference and her metaphoric distance from the early character Godman, in “Godman’s Master,” who ends up boxed in by circumstance, working as a sideshow exhibit for a troupe of “sleight-of-hand magicians” and snake-charmers (Tomorrow 156).

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