Chapter V

A Bird in the House

“That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me.”

A Bird in the House

Laurence’s book A Bird in the House, a collection of short stories, was published in the year 1970. Laurence’s art is most evident in her short stories. The book is important because it provides the best avenue into all her works which is united by recurring characters, techniques and themes. A Bird in the House is a woman’s confessional memoir. Through confession Vanessa, the protagonist attempts to see life whole what she gradually pieces together through the stories is herself as she has developed over the years.

Vanessa MacLeod is the young heroine of these stories. She recalls her youth, the ten years of her life in Manawaka. She has an urge to become a writer. The eight short stories in this collection form a novel:

Margaret Laurence calls these stories “fictionalized autobiography”: her own growth form a child’s awareness of the small, tight world of family to an adolescent’s understanding of the widening circles of the world around her is paralleled by Vanessa MacLeod’s.¹

The circumstances under which A Bird in the House was
composed is of great importance. In 1962, when Laurence began writing stories, she made some risky decisions. She left her husband and settled in England with her two children. Separated from her relatives and from her home town Laurence looked back at Canada, at Manitoba, and at her own family and described them in the Manawaka novels. In 1963 when Laurence was revising The Stone Angel, the first novel in the series, she published The Sound of the Singing, the first story in A Bird in the House. In 1964, when Laurence began to write A Jest of God, she published two more stories, To set Our House in Order and A Bird in the House, as well as The Stone Angel. In 1967 Laurence advanced to publish The Fire-Dwellers. The stories were published in various periodicals in Canada and America and in Macmillan’s Winter’s Tales in England. Later she published her other stories The Mask of the Bear, The Loons, Horses of the Night and The Half-Husky. The last one, Jericho's Brick Battlements, was published with the entire collections in 1970. The Diviners was the last novel in the Manawaka series and it was published in 1974. During this period she also wrote many newspaper articles, essays, book reviews, and Long Drums and Cannons—a study of the Nigerian Literature.

The protagonist Vanessa in these stories explores her family, surroundings, her own talents and gradually discovers her vocation as a writer. Vanessa is depicted in different stages in these collected
stories. She is ten years old in the first three stories, eleven or twelve years in many others. In the stories she is portrayed as a small child, an older adolescent or a young adult. The first person narrative voice is technically brilliant. Vanessa is represented as a child and as the remembering adult.

The eight stories are unified by a steady progression and the facets of suffering. The first story deals with social exclusion and loneliness, the second with death and dreams. Not only Grandmother Connor's death is depicted in the third story but the family's grief, and Aunt Edna's lost love also are depicted. The fourth story deals with the death of Dr. MacLeod and Vanessa's loss of religious faith. The fifth, sixth and seventh stories relate individual suffering to social failures, such as economic depression, poverty, world war, class friction and racial discrimination. In all these stories Vanessa the protagonist shows a development in her ability to comprehend human suffering.

In her first story 'The Sound of Singing' the title indicates that the story acts as an overture. The first sentence which establishes the dominant key "THAT HOUSE" in Manawaka is the one in which more than any other, I carry with me" (BH 11). The house was known to the people as the old Connor place and to the family as the Brick House.

The stories of A Bird in the House, as Laurence has said, are "directly drawn from my childhood but they are autobiographical in a
The ten year old Vanessa is the protagonist. Surrounding the house were lushy green vegetation for which Timothy Connor, Vanessa's grandfather was responsible. He had brought the seedlings all the way from Galloping Mountains, a hundred miles north. Vanessa and her family always went to the Sunday dinner at the Brick House, the home of her mother's parents. Vanessa's father was a doctor and her Grandfather was a very strict person. He would not like people to come late. When the story opens it was nearly five and Timothy was standing in the porch to greet them. He was a tall husky man, and possessed great strength. Grandmother was sitting in the dining room watching the canary. She did not believe in bestowing names upon non-humans. For grandmother, names meant a christening, possibly only for Christians. She called the canary "Birdie" (BH 14) and said that it was not a real name.

Grandmother would ask Vanessa about the Sunday school which she attended. As Vanessa was interested in imaginative stories she had read large portions of the Bible and had no trouble in providing herself a verse every week before setting to the Brick House.

On Sunday, grandfather spent the day in a leisurely manner and no task would be undertaken. He wandered around the house for Sunday to be over. He would repair the hinges in the door and was more important way than in the real-life characters and situations."
widely acknowledged as an ‘upright’ man in Manawaka. Grandfather thought that it would have been a disgrace if he had been known by the opposite word which was ‘downright’.

Grandfather always spoke of the past. He had come out west by Sternwheeler and had walked the hundred-odd miles, from Winnipeg to Manawaka. He was the first blacksmith in Manawaka and had finally saved enough money to set himself up in the hardware business. He frequently narrated the epic of the significant day, the day when he set himself up a hardware business. Grandfather’s store was full of kitchen utensils, saw-blades, garden tools and keg of nails. He later sold it to the Barnes.

Vanessa’s mother was the eldest in the family of five whereas Aunt Edna was the youngest. Aunt Edna was handsome and strong but she did not like being so. She was constantly worried about whether she had put on weight.

Grandfather started to be a Methodist, but when the Methodist’s joined the Presbyterians to form the United Church, he refused to join them, for he did not like the Scots who were also in the congregation. He therefore turned Baptist and went to Grandmother’s Church.

Uncle Dan, grandfather’s brother was not an ‘upright’ man. He was not a sincere person. He was raising horses but never made any profit. He never married. There were frequent quarrels between the
two. As a result Dan left the place. The story ends with the
grandfather Connor going in search of Uncle Dan. Vanessa too goes
after Uncle Dan. But she wonders whether she would be able to catch
up with him. The story ‘Sound of the Singing’ reveals how Vanessa
gained psychological insights into character and family relationships.

Laurence progresses vertically with each story being separate yet
parallel. The title “The Sound of the Singing” in musical terms
introduces voices to be developed through later in the novel. The first
sentence focuses on the thematic centre. Though it seems to be secure
yet it proves unstable. Even the brick house finally collapses because
they are sustained by Vanessa’s belief in her grandfather. She
considers the house the centre of attention and judgment, because it
seems to offer a stable focal point.

Vanessa’s identity is marked even from her childhood days. She
as a child is full of curiosity and eagerly longing to know things. She
has certain insights and does not miss even single event. She records
anything that happens around her whether she understands it or not.
She as a child is present but is unnoticed when the adults talk. Things
are plain before her eyes but they become significant and valuable. She
must be able to interpret the clues provided by her observations, to find
out the difference between appearance and reality. She has to
understand the hidden motives and she finds it through the speech of
her father over the telephone:

Listen, Sweetheart, tell your mother I won’t be home for a while yet. I’ll have dinner here. And tell her she’s to go home early and get to bed. How is she? She’s okay?” But I was immediately alert “Why what was the matter with her? [...] I’d never have forgiven myself.” (BH 17-18)

Vanessa immediately notes her aunt’s “odd” look, because she has learned to look at the smallest clues in order to understand the mysterious world of adults. She is not old enough to understand or read the ‘mute appeal’ in her mother’s eyes. When Aunt Edna and her mother exhibit mutual understanding she realises that she is attracted towards them and that she belongs to a woman’s world within the family. Through such clues she realises that the warmest human relationships are complex, especially love.

Vanessa finds it difficult to prove her identity with the members of her family. She has a very tense relationship with her egotistical Grandfather and her gentle relationship with her Grandmother who is severe in her own way. She understands first the plight of Aunt Edna, who is forced to return to the imprisonment of the Brick House, secondly the difficulty faced by Mrs. MacLeod during her pregnancy and thirdly the fight between her Grandfather and his brother Dan. The story reveals Vanessa’s life in Manawaka and the intricacy of
family relations and the depth of family feelings.

Vanessa begins to discover a paradox that would preoccupy her throughout the book. Such a paradox also helps her to define herself. Determination, restraint, willpower, propriety—all these are bound up with weakness or can even exhibit perverse expression of weakness. Grandfather demands strength because he is afraid of weakness. Vanessa towards the end of the story is attracted to the hearty sound of uncle Dan's singing because it is the music of what might have been, if only Grandmother had made the more adventurous choice of marrying uncle Dan. Since she already feels adventurous, she is drawn to the romance of what might have been. As she pursues the vanishing music at the end she begins a long quest for some undefined joy.

In the second story ‘To set our House in Order’ depicts the events leading up to the birth of Vanessa’s brother. Vanessa’s father invited Dr. Cates and they both discussed about her mother’s condition. Even when severely ill Vanessa’s mother was worried about the house being kept in order. Vanessa was very worried about her mother’s health. Later through her father she knew that her mother was safe. She was out of fear and depression. In the house there were many odd-shaped nooks under the stairs, and dusty tunnels where she took refuge. In these places there were the unseen presence of those persons young or old who belonged to the house and had died. Uncle Roderick, the baby
and Grandfather MacLeod who had died a year after Vanessa was born were believed to be present in the places.

The house had a dignity of its own. There were many features in the house that gave the house its style. There were many rooms in the house. One of them was Grandmother MacLeod’s bedroom with its stale-old-smelling air and the lavender sachets. There were the silver-framed photographs of uncle Roderick as a child, as a boy, and as a man in his army uniform. There was a massive bed designed for queens or giants. Grandmother used to lie within it all day when she had a migraine.

Grandmother and Vanessa paid a visit to the hospital. There was no change in her mother’s health. Grandmother tried to console Vanessa by narrating her experiences: “when your Uncle Roderick got killed” she said “I thought I would die but I didn’t die. Vanessa” (BH 48). She tried to cheer Vanessa. Hence during lunch time she chatted animatedly. Grandmother wanted to keep her house neat and tidy. She wanted someone to be hired to help her in the domestic chores. She always said to Vanessa “God loves Order” (BH 49). She replied with emphasis. “You remember that Vanessa. God loves Order— he wants each one of us to set our house in order—I’ve never forgotten those words of my father’s” (BH 49). Finally according to Grandmother’s wish they decide that Aunt Edna would help them in
the house chores. Aunt Edna used slang words and this had a great influence on Vanessa. Grandmother accepted her since she visited only for a part of the day.

Towards the end of the story, Vanessa is seen venturing into the fields and enjoying nature. She, in her lighter moments admired a lady bird labouring tirelessly to climb a blade of grass, but fell off, and started all over again, seeming to be unaware that she too possessed wings and could have flown up too.

Vanessa immediately thought of accidents that might easily happen to a person or might happen to somebody else. She thought of the dead baby, her sister, the leather bound volumes of Greek and iced cakes and so on. She sensed the strangeness and the disarray of such things. She could not comprehend these things and she felt that “whatever God might love in this world, it was certainly not order” (BH 61).

In this story Vanessa must learn to sympathise with and forgive people like Grandfather Conner and Grandmother MacLeod who are tormented by the conflicting needs of human nature. Vanessa, as a girl, learns to see by learning to speak and as an adult, she learns to write her memoir. She is instructed by her Grandmother MacLeod as how to speak properly, to talk like a lady, never to lie, to avoid slang, and vulgarity and to speak precisely. She moves from disorder to order,
from ignorance to understanding. She then proceeds into a more significant disorder, associated with silence. The experience though frightening proves to be a challenging form of freedom. The title reveals the challenge: a house in an orderly form designed for preserving and developing the family. There are certain subversive forces which are hidden in secret places and the concealed drawer containing Dr. MacLeod’s old love letters is one such place. These silences are associated with truth. The most devastating secret concerns the accident of the blinded Roderick and the real nature of his death in World War I. Vanessa is sensitive to all these and realises that the world is not orderly. She discovers in the disarray of tidy house, the tangled complexity of human motives and feelings. At the end she feels strangely threatened because she senses that her home is haunted by secrets. She never understands them but feels their disruptive effect.

The birth of her brother symbolises the hopes of a new generation. It has an ambiguous significance for her since he hears the “life’s name” of her dead Uncle. He has a secret past even before he begins his life. Vanessa is puzzled and she learns to appreciate how people suffer and then go on living with their pain. Since she shares their grief, she enlarges her conscience as well as her consciousness. Finally she says: “I could not really comprehend these things, but I
sensed their strangeness, their disarray” (BH 61).

In the third story ‘The Mask of the Bear’ Grandfather Conner is depicted as a person who wears an enormous coat made of the pelt of a bear. It was a coarse-furred unevenly coloured shabby looking coat. Grandmother MacLeod remembers a time when he had not worn it. It was a very heavy coat and Grandfather was an extraordinarily strong man, built to shoulder weights. Vanessa in her mind sometimes would call Grandfather “The Great Bear” (BH 63).

One Saturday afternoon in January, Vanessa’s Grandfather appeared unexpectedly when she was playing in the ring and said that she had to stay with him for a couple of days. Her father was gone and her mother had accompanied him. Roddie, her brother was looked after by an old lady.

One day there was a call for Aunt Edna. It was Jimmy Lorimer who was waiting at the C.P.R. Station. Aunt Edna’s expression changed when she was on the telephone. She was to go to the station to pick up Jimmy Lorimer. Jimmy was a man Aunt Edna had gone around with when she was in Winnipeg. He had given her the ‘Attar of Roses’ in an atomiser bottle with a green net-covered bulb. It was a perfume which she used to spray around the room after she had a cigarette. When Grandmother told Grandfather about Jimmy’s visit, Grandfather did not like it. He wanted Edna to avoid Jimmy’s
company. Vanessa heard Aunt Edna crying in her room as she was depressed.

Once, when Grandmother Connor was ill, she would not see any doctor except her father. She wouldn't trust anybody except Grandfather in winter. She fell ill again and Vanessa’s mother, being a nurse, looked after her. No one was allowed to see her. Everyday after school Vanessa went to the Brick House to see her mother. Vanessa would ask about her health but would not get a positive reply.

Weeks went by and one afternoon when Vanessa arrived at the Brick House, Grandfather Connor was standing out on the front porch. She was startled to see him because he was not wearing his great bear coat. He broke the news of the death of her Grandmother. “Vanessa, your Grandmother’s dead.” he said (BH 79). She could not accept the fact that Grandmother Connor was dead. She never knew that death would be like that.

Many years later, when Vanessa was far away, miles from Manawaka, she saw one day in a museum the Bear Mask of the Haida Indians. It was a weird Mask. The features were ugly and yet powerful. The mouth was turned down in an expression of fallen rage. The eyes were empty caverns, revealing nothing. Yet as she looked, they seemed to draw her own eyes towards them, until she imagined she could see somewhere within that darkness a look which she knew, a lurking
bewilderment. She remembered then that in the days before it became a museum piece, the mask had concealed a man.

In this story Vanessa examines the disguise worn by Grandfather Connor and discovers that it is an ambiguous sign of identity. By now, Vanessa should know the clues and learn to interpret them for instance, the angry crunching of his rocking chair is “a kind of sub-verbal Esperan to” (BH 51) and is an unspoken universal language. Its surface meaning of disapproval is clear. Due to her lively imagination Vanessa transforms everything she sees into something fabulous. The bear is Vanessa’s “secret name” (BH 52) for her Grandfather. His bear coat becomes “some lonely and giant Kodiak [...] or an ancient grizzly” (BH 62). She transforms Grandfather into a bear and a dinosaur and Edna into a barbaric queen. She has a strange experience when Grandmother Connor asks if Jimmy is a “good man” and Edna replies to no one is particular. “Good what a word. I wish I didn’t know what she means when she says that. Or else that she knew what I mean when I say it” (BH 71). Vanessa does not appreciate the word for it has a range of meanings such as morally upright, socially acceptable and pious. What is good for Grandmother however, may not be proper for Edna and no one can be good enough for Grandfather. In this complex situation she realises that she does not understand the adult conversation and feels excluded: “I felt chilled by my childhood,
unable to touch her because of the freezing burden of my inexperience” (BH 50).

It was difficult for Vanessa to think of her Grandfather as delicate, since the mask he wears is so fierce. But once she thinks of Grandfather in this way, she sees him as all too human. Vanessa feels that to sympathise with Edna is easy but to sympathise with Grandfather requires the power of forgiveness. Vanessa as a young girl is far too young and immature for such humility. But when the story ends “many years later” (BH 74) when the mature woman sees the Haida mask that reminds her of her Grandfather, only when it is too late can she appreciate the wisdom of her Uncle Terence’s words and, through a fine metamorphosis, transforms the bear back into a man.”

The fourth story, ‘A Bird in the House’, begins with Vanessa watching the Rememberance Day Parade. Her mother had brought Roddie with her. She felt that she was betraying her father for it was the first time she had stayed away from the Remembering Day Parade. The Manawaka Civic Band always led the way. They were joined on the Remembrance Day by the Salvation Army band, whose uniform seemed too ordinary for a parade. Vanessa’s father used to chide the Salvation Army band for they always played faster. But her mother had great respect for the Salvation Army because of the good work they performed.
When Vanessa was alone at home, Grandmother MacLeod caught hold of her shoulders and grumbled. She went to the den and found her father sitting in the leather-cushioned armchair beside the fireplace, smoking. Vanessa wanted her father for herself, she did not want anyone to disturb them. She wanted to speak in someway that would be more poignant and comprehending. When they were talking about the death of Uncle Roderick, Grandmother MacLeod interrupted them saying that their friend had called them twice for lunch. The following winter Vanessa’s mother went to work as a nurse.

When Vanessa’s parents along with Grandmother MacLeod went to the United Church every Sunday she was made to go to Sunday school in the church basement. They followed all the rituals, including grace at meals, when her father would mumble “For what we are about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful Amen” (BH 95) running the words together as one long word. Her mother approved of these rituals which seemed decent and moderate to her.

That winter many people in Manawaka had flu. Vanessa’s dad and Dr. Cates were busy attending the patients. Vanessa as well as her father fell sick. One night she woke up suddenly on hearing voices. Dr. Cates was there. She then knew that father had fallen very sick. The weather was very bad. In the morning her mother told her that father had developed pneumonia.
Later that night when all the inmates in the house were asleep she heard a sound. It was her mother who was crying. She guessed that her father must have passed away. In the days following her father's death she stayed close beside her mother to console her.

Everything changed after the death of her father. The MacLeod house could not be kept any longer. Her mother sold it to a local merchant. Something about the house had always made her uneasy. There was the tower room where Grandmother MacLeod's potted plants drooped in a lethargic manner, the long stairways and hidden places, the attic which she always imagined to be dwelt in by the spirits of the family. It was never an endearing house. When it was no longer theirs and when the Virginia creeper had been torn down it seemed that the house had lost its dignity.

During the Second World War when Vanessa was seventeen and in love with an army man, she wanted to get away from Manawaka and from her Grandfather's House. She happened to go through the old Mahogany desk that once belonged to her father. There were a number of small drawers inside and further inside there was another drawer. When she opened it she found a letter dated 1919 and a picture of a girl. Not wanting the others to know about it, she burnt the letter and the picture. As she watched the picture turn into scorched paper she grieved for her father as if he had just died.
In the title story “A Bird in the House” death moves closer to Vanessa. It deals with her father's death and her own loss of religious faith. The story opens with the ceremony of Remembrance Day. The military parade is a ritual of grief and pays tribute to those killed in the First World War. It consoles the citizens of Manawaka by affirming that there is a purpose and dignity in an honorable death. The parade with its costumes, music and medals is of sympathetic memory. She should be more refined in order to become an artist. When she is young she has little conception of death and is far from sympathetic. She feels that the costumes look silly. She cannot bear the sight of the elderly veterans. She is unprepared to face death, the death of the soldiers, Uncle Roderick, her sister, her father and then herself.

She has some painful lessons to learn. She learns the impersonal arbitrariness of death. She learns that death is not heroic, nor a gentle reward for a virtuous life. It is cruel especially the death of children. She feels that it is right that old people should die. She is haunted by the thoughts of the deaths of Uncle Roderick and of her own baby sister. She hears in her dreams “the caught sparrow fluttering in the attic, and the sound of my mother crying and the voices of the dead children” (BH 56).

When Vanessa narrates about how she found her father's love letters there is a terrible change in her. She overcomes her bitterness
and accepts her father's death. Her father's life is a secret. By
treasuring and destroying his letters Vanessa finally enacts her own
personal ritual of love and grief.

The fifth story "The Loons" begins with a graphic description of
river Wachakwa. The Tonnerre family stood in a dense thicket where
the Wachakwa river ran. It is just below the Manawaka. The dwelling
was built by Jules Tonnerre some fifty years before when he came back
from Batocha. Vanessa was a child when the Tonnerres were there in
the thirties. Sometimes old Jules or his son Lazarus would get mixed
up in a Saturday-night brawl. They used to be arrested and put in cell
for the night and the next morning they would refrain from indulging
in such activities.

Piquette Tonnerre, daughter of Lazarus was in Vanessa's class at
school. She fell sick very often and was irregular to school. Vanessa’s
father had a liking for Piquette. He suggested to his wife that she
should be taken to the Diamond Lake that summer for she would be a
good company for Vanessa. Vanessa and Piquette got along well with
one another. Piquette stayed most of the time in the cottage helping
her mother in her household chores.

Vanessa went to the Diamond Lake for a few days that summer,
with Mavis and her family. The MacLeod cottage had been sold after
her father's death and she did not even go to look at it not wanting to
look at the “long ago kingdom” (BH 119), possessed then by strangers.

One evening she went down to the shore. The small pier which her father had built was gone and in its place there was a large and solid pier built by the Government, for Galloping Mountains was now a national park. The Diamond Lake had been renamed as Lake Waparkata for an Indian name would have a greater appeal to the tourist.

Vanessa felt that at night the government pier looked the same as it had already been darkly shining and everything quiet around. She then realised that the loons were no longer there. The birds were not there. It seemed to Vanessa that in some unconscious and totally unrecognised way Piquette might have been the only one who had heard the crying of the loons.

In this story Vanessa learns the secret of doing housework, of raising a family, and of being a lady like Grandmother MacLeod. She is a rebel unlike Mrs. MacLeod. She will not be content to the reward of marriage or with any identity that depends on being someone’s wife.

Vanessa finds her own female power most severely challenged and her compassion tested in Piquette’s tragedy. Piquette is doomed to disaster no matter what she does. She can neither accept help nor avoid the trap that she falls into. However good Vanessa’s intention is, Piquette could not benefit from Vanessa’s friendship. She discovers
that Piquette is an exaggerated image of herself. She shares the difficulties faced by woman in a man's world. But Piquette suffers from them far more painfully than does Vanessa. She can only feel sympathy for Piquette.

Once to treat Piquette’s tuberculosis, the Macleod’s take her to rest at Diamond Lake. Here Piquette remained dull and uncommunicative, “as though she no longer dwelt within her own skull” (BH 112). Vanessa wanted to find out what Piquette’s true feelings were. But her effort proves a failure when she invites Piquette to enjoy the poetic atmosphere. Piquette’s realistic remark shatters the solemnity. “You wouldn’t catch me wailing way down there just for a bunch of squawkin’ birds” (BH 30). She like Piquette has a desire for love and freedom. She should learn to respect the differences in characters.

The ‘Horses of the Night’ begins with the arrival of Vanessa’s cousin Chris from the North to Manawaka to study in the high school. He belonged to a large family, who lived at Shallow Creek up north. Vanessa was six years of age then, she could not believe that whether plain people, meaning people who were not Eskimos, would live in such altitudes. Uncle Wilf, Chris’s father had a homestead many years ago. Chris was fifteen years old. She was instructed to behave well with Chris. Grandfather Connor was very happy to receive Chris. He spent
his years without any complaints in their house.

When Vanessa was eleven almost two years after Chris had left he came back to Manawaka. One day when she returned from school Chris was sitting in the hall. He was a traveller and was selling vacuum cleaners. He demonstrated the machine to Vanessa and the rest of the family.

The next time he visited Manawaka he did not stay there for even a month. He was selling magazines—the “Country Guide”. Later when he was at Manawaka, he was selling sewing machines. He presented Vanessa and her brother, a pair of socks each.

After her father’s death, Vanessa’s mother decided that Vanessa should have a change of place. She wrote to Shallow Creek about Vanessa’s visit. She readily agreed to go to Shallow Creek. In that place there was Jeannie, Chris’s sister and Aunt Jess, Chris’s mother.

Chris was unattached to family members. He spoke well with children but stayed away from elders. When the haying began in the fields which they owned, he went to camp out. Vanessa could not think of staying in the house without Chris. She pleaded him to allow her to go with him. Finally he agreed. They spent the day looking after the horses in the camp.

After the war began, Chris left Shallow Creek and joined the army. He went to England. They did not hear from him. Six months
later they heard from Aunt Tess about Chris. He was sent from England to a hospital because of mental breakdown. Vanessa felt pity for Chris and his eventually pitiable state of health.

In this story the divine and artistic aspirations are represented by the legendary Dr Faustus, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for limitless knowledge and power. Vanessa, through her quest hopes to gain power like Dr. Faustus.

The seventh story is about The Half-Husky a pup which is half-husky. Peter Chorniuk the birch seller lived in the Galloping Mountains. Every autumn he visited Manawaka and brought a load of birch for Vanessa’s family. She was in the corner of the garden when Mr. Chorniuk came. He gave her a pup which was a mix up of a Husky. She was excited and she wanted to have the pup but was scared that Grandfather would object. She decided to keep the pup if her mother permitted. When Grandfather saw he was furious but, finally let her have the pup. She named him Natasha but her brother wanted to name it as Nanuk.

Nanuk had always a problem with Harvey Shinwell. Harvey was heavily built boy of about sixteen years who delivered papers. Once when Vanessa returned home from school she saw Harvey had come to deliver the newspaper. He held a short pointed stick and was popping it through the bars of the gate. On the other side was Nanuk who was
four months old was snarling. He caught the stick in the teeth but Harvey pulled it away. On another occasion she saw Nanuk being tortured by Harvey.

Harvey Shinwell robbed the ‘Starlite Café’ at the North End. Yang Min, the old man who owned it was found unconscious on the floor. Harvey was caught and punished. The story ends with Vanessa feeling sorry for Harvey.

In this story, according to Vanessa, Harvey is merely a twisted product of his environment. He also suffers from its worst features, just as Picquette does. He is first seen as an outsider, delivering newspapers. Suddenly he stops visiting them. Vanessa never felt his absences. She had adopted her grandfather’s snobbish views. “He was somebody who had always been around and who I had never actually seen” (BH 149). She had failed to understand others. Her understanding is unproductive, because it seems to lead nowhere. She has not even felt compassion for Piquette and Chris. At the end of the story following her grandfather’s example she snubs Harvey’s aunt.

Vanessa learns a lesson of showing a limited sense of social tolerance and sympathy even to enemies. It is a lesson that she must apply in her life for she herself had been selfish in asserting her own freedom at the expense of her own town and family. By witnessing the disastrous results of Harvey’s wildness, she witnesses the anti-social
revolt on Harvey's past.

The young Vanessa is eager to escape from Manawaka. She fails to do justice to her world and her people. The older Vanessa redeems herself. She confesses her failure and through writing, imaginatively embraces the people she had formerly rejected. As a teenager she excludes Harvey's aunt in the street, but as an adult she welcomes her into her memoir.

The final story ‘Jericho's Brick Battlements’ is about Vanessa’s grandfather’s house. The Brick House “had always been a Sunday place for Vanessa and hence she could not think of living there. Since her father had died, her brother and her mother and she had gone there to live. She did not want to live with her grandfather. But nothing could be changed.

Vanessa liked the car which her grandfather owned. She enjoyed the ride with him. She used to feel proud sitting near her grandfather. When she was fourteen the new CNR stationmaster Grigg, began to visit the Brick House. He was a great admirer of Aunt Edna. She was very popular in the old days when she used to work as a secretary in Winnipeg. Wes stayed for the supper. Mother asked Aunt Edna whether she would like to marry Wes. At first she refused but later expressed her liking for Wes. They were married that spring and she went to live at the CNR station. Vanessa missed her but was happy
that Aunt had a house of her own.

Vanessa met Michael, a visitor in a dance party. They used to meet very often in the Brick House. Grandfather was not in favour of Michael visiting the house. One evening grandfather shouted at her for keeping awake in the night. He disclosed the fact to Vanessa that Michael was a married person. She was very furious. It hurt her. Later it was found out that what her grandfather had said was true.

Vanessa went to the University to be graduated. When she was in the third year, she was called home abruptly. Her grandfather had a stroke. Her grandfather’s funeral was the first she had ever attended. When grandmother Conner died and when her father died, Vanessa had been too young, to realise what death meant.

Later when she went out for a walk she caught sight the old stable-garage and the Mac Laughlin-Buick. It was worn out and rust grew on it like patches of linchen on a gravestone. She wondered what the car might have meant to her grandfather, to the boy who walked the hundred miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka with hardly a cent in his pockets. The memory of a memory returned to her then. She remembered herself remembering driving in it with him in the ancient days when he seemed as large and admirable as a God.

Twenty years later, Vanessa went back to Manawaka again for the last time. Everything had changed. There was another family.
After her grandfather's death, her mother had sold the Brick House and moved to Vancouver.

When Vanessa's mother died she was buried beside her husband. Of all the deaths in the family, her mother's death remained unhealed in her Vanessa's mind for long.

One day, Vanessa rode to Winnipeg, to the cemetery and looked at the granite headstones and names. She realised from the dates on the stone that her father had died when he was the same as as she was then. She remembered saying things to her children that her mother had said to her, the cliche of affection, perhaps inherited from her mother.

Vanessa parked the car beside the Brick House as the Caragana hedge was unruly. No one had trimmed it properly. The house had been lived in by strangers for long. She did not think that it would hurt her to see it in others hands, but it did. She wanted to trim their hedges, to repaint the window frames. She looked at it only for a moment and then drove away. Thus the story ends with the reassertion of the dominance of her grandfather and his house in Vanessa's life.

Vanessa dreams of living a heroic life. She yearns for a life of noble ideas, love and action. The change in her outlook is prompted by the Second World War. She is glorious and she experiences her first love affair with a soldier. Later when she looses her friend Micheal she
realises that war is not glorious at all. Grandfather treats aunt Edna like a child but she overcomes obstacles and succeeds in her love affair and eventually marries whereas Vanessa's story is not so. Her story has an ironic conclusion. Unlike her aunt Edna, Vanessa does not escape from the repression of her house: despite her boast, Jericho's wall remains intact. Vanessa's mother's words offer consolation: "I know you won't believe me, honey, but after a while it won't hurt so much. And yet in a way I guess it always will, to some extent. There doesn't seem to be anything anybody can do about that (BH 186)

In *A Bird in the House*, Vanessa is denied the grand finale that she desires, but is granted some satisfaction. Her task in the final story is to affirm life by coming to terms with her roots, her ancestors and her Gods. Her heroic aspirations seem to be mocked at.

Vanessa's main source of regret, is her tumultuous relation with her Grandfather, Timothy Connor. In almost every story he provokes her to rebellion. It is only after his death Vanessa makes peace with his memory. She does this acknowledging her kinship with him. She identifies herself with him. She discovers something essential about herself only when she admits her intimate connection with him. In "*A Bird in the House*” Vanessa MacLeod strives to come to terms with the overbearing presence of her dead grandfather Connor in a world presided over by a God of chaos.
In the stories Vanessa in her effort to be truthful, condemns Manawaka society. The Manawaka society is known for preserving a genteel, dull and respectable exterior. Vanessa in her search for truth about her town and about herself finally discovers to her astonishment that personal identity and freedom are inconceivable apart from a sustaining social environment.

By narrating her story, Vanessa tries to acquire religious awareness and imaginative vision. She depicts that life is not a series of accidents but a quest for meaning and value. Man lives in order to prove the significance and worth of one’s life.