

THE MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION:
SELECTED CANADIAN FICTION

THE MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION:
SELECTED ENGLISH-CANADIAN FICTION 1925-1932

By

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ABSTRACT

The decade of the nineteen-twenties has generally been recognized as a dynamic period in English-Canadian literature, but so far as fiction is concerned its achievement is widely assumed to be the introduction of social realism into the Canadian novel. Those novels which employ other than realistic conventions have been assumed by many critics to be inferior because of their non-realistic aspects.

This dissertation examines four such novels, supposedly flawed by melodramatic excess -- Raymond Knister's White Narcissus (1929), Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925), Morley Callaghan's A Broken Journey (1932), and Frederick Philip Grove's The Yoke of Life (1930) -- in order to discover the function and significance of melodramatic conventions and the sort of vision they project.

The first part of the dissertation defines such terms as "realism" and "melodrama" and explains the critical approach to be used. In the central four chapters, this critical approach is applied to each novel in turn.

When the novels are compared, following the detailed analysis of each, significant similarities emerge. In thematic terms, a quest is undertaken, in each case, which is meaningful on several levels: on the literal level there is an arduous physical journey across or into a specific (and generally threatening) landscape; on a symbolic level there is a journey of mythological and/or religious import; in

psychological terms the journey is into the less rational aspects of human experience in an attempt to re-integrate a personality divided against itself. In terms of structure, as well, certain patterns emerge: each novel employs a balanced, rather symmetrical structure, formal devices which tend to distance the reader from the material, and vortex-like patterns of movement on the part of the protagonist.

The formal and thematic patterns which emerge from a comparison of the four novels, then, suggest that there is a "melodramatic mode" common to them, and possibly to novels of periods other than the one explored in this thesis. Indeed, it is further argued, melodramatic conventions (which are related to the gothic mode and romanticism in general) may serve as an appropriate vehicle for the expression in fiction of a profound modern theme, the portrayal of alienated man in a secularized and relativistic universe.

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PREFACE

This dissertation sets out to explore the "melodramatic imagination" as it operates in English-Canadian novels selected from a period which has not yet been examined in a full-length study, the nineteen-twenties (or more specifically the years between 1925 and 1932).

The phrase "the melodramatic imagination" and the definition of melodrama as the realm of "heightened drama" and significant extravagance are adopted from Peter Brooks' influential study. In The Melodramatic Imagination (1976),¹ Brooks demonstrates about other authors and another period what this thesis will demonstrate about Canadian fiction -- that melodramatic excess is a legitimate and appropriate tool for the portrayal, in novels as well as in theatre, of an essentially modern vision.

In Canadian fiction, the nineteen-twenties is a decade usually celebrated for its introduction of social realism into the Canadian novel. This thesis notes, however, that melodramatic extravagance is also characteristic of many of the novels of this experimental decade. Nor does the employment of melodrama necessarily represent degeneration into an earlier and less aesthetic sort of romantic novel, as critics have suggested. Rather it constitutes an apparent attempt by some Canadian writers to use extremity and excess as a deliberate means of portraying psychological realism and the search for selfhood within the modern context, which is to say within a universe of "desacrilized"² values.

The dissertation consists of three parts. It is essentially an exploratory study which selects a few basic texts and posits a particular approach or way of reading Canadian fiction, a method which might be applied to other periods and other texts. Part I lays the groundwork -- examining the nineteen-twenties as a period, defining terms like realism and melodrama, and explaining the selection of texts and the critical approach to be used. Part II consists of four chapters, each of which applies this critical approach to one novel in considerable depth, the novels chosen for study being Knister's White Narcissus, Ostenso's Wild Geese, Callaghan's A Broken Journey, and Grove's The Yoke of Life. In each case only the single work by each author is studied in detail, although references to other works by the same author may be made incidentally for comparative purposes. Part III, which concludes the thesis, consists of a set of observations and generalizations based upon the preceding analyses of the selected novels, first identifying common patterns in the fiction studied, then going on to postulate the existence of a "melodramatic mode" and its relationship to modern aesthetic theory.³

These deductions, which are based on a systematic approach and a thorough examination of the texts in question, support the argument that, contrary to much critical opinion, the realistic novel is neither the only nor necessarily the most significant type in Canadian fiction of the twenties. Rather, a significant number of the novels of the nineteen-twenties are dominated by melodrama, as are earlier novels, like Wacousta, and many recent Canadian novels, like those of Margaret Atwood.

Hence the melodramatic impulse, which is related to gothic traditions and the romantic vision in general, is a strong and identifiable current in Canadian fiction, just as it is in Canadian poetry, and ought not to be ignored or disdained.

Indeed melodramatic conventions are particularly well-suited to the needs of modern fiction, with its thematic emphasis on introspection and subjectivity and its general aesthetic demand for significant form. Thus although this study of the melodramatic imagination in Canadian fiction has as its focus selected texts of a particular decade in Canadian letters, it offers in the end a method of looking at the literature in broad, non-nationalistic terms, as a literature related to other modern literatures and their portrayal in fiction of the modern vision.

NOTES TO PREFACE

¹Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).

²The term "desacrilization" is used by Peter Brooks to define the lack of theological parameters which characterizes the modern vision. Modern artists, he believes, tend to portray the sense of loss which modern man feels as he confronts an abysmal secular or "desacrilized" universe. Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. 17.

³In its structure, the dissertation is modelled on that of Geoffrey Hartman's The Unmediated Vision. Because he wishes to avoid prescriptive criticism, based upon a particular "school" and its tenets, Hartman constructs his book in two parts: Part I consists of four essays on poets of three different countries, focussing upon a single work in each case (rather than on the entire body of each poet's work); Part II is made up of two essays in which he generalizes from the preceding exhaustive analyses and constructs several broad hypotheses about the nature of modern poetry. Geoffrey Hartman, The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

I

INTRODUCTION

Few would deny that the nineteen-twenties constitute a dynamic decade in English-Canadian literature. Clara Thomas speaks of the years after World War I as "a period of national literary enthusiasm" comparable to the "explosion of the late 1960's and 1970's."¹ Germaine Warkentin sees 1923 as "a critical juncture" in English-Canadian literature:

E. J. Pratt's Newfoundland Verse had been published in 1923. The McGill Fortnightly Review was shortly to be founded, the early stories of Raymond Knister were being published,² and Morley Callaghan would soon make his first appearance.

Her emphasis is on a "gathering reaction" to the poetry of the past, especially to nineteenth-century Canadian poetry, and she quotes Leon Edel in acknowledging the Montreal group of poets — "the little literary group that helped to torpedo sentimental verse and make the presence of Eliot, Pound, Joyce, James, the early writings of Bloomsbury, known at least to a small literary minority."³

Desmond Pacey records an explosion in critical writing during the twenties. He notes the publication of critical monographs and histories of Canadian literature as well as the re-issuing of out-of-date classics. In a recent article⁴ Pacey calls the twenties "the first decade of systematic literary criticism in Canada." He cites monographs

such as Lorne Pierce's Makers of Canadian Literature Series or the Raddison Society's Master Works of Canadian Authors Series (1925). He goes on to mention the appearance of histories like Archibald MacMechan's Headwaters of Canadian Literature (1924), Logan and French's Highways of Canadian Literature (1924), and Pierce's Outline of Canadian Literature (1927), as well as critical analyses like Stevenson's Appraisals of Canadian Literature (1926).

Pacey argues for the vitality of fiction during the same decade. His review of "Fiction 1920-1940"⁵ is a dizzying catalogue of novels and novelists, citing some seven hundred novels which were published during that period, the majority before the Depression, which, naturally, slowed publication considerably.

But what is particularly interesting to the student of the Canadian novel is the critical response to this explosive decade in Canadian fiction. From the beginning critics have observed that the novel was taking a new direction during the twenties but have assumed that the most valuable aspect of the fiction of this decade was its shift toward realism. They have generally praised realism in these novels and have tended to disparage their non-realistic aspects as unconvincing or incredible.⁶

Defining terms like "realism" and "non-realistic aspects" is fraught with difficulty. Damion Grant's attempt to define realism⁷ concludes, in fact, that the term has evolved philosophically over two centuries from one meaning to its opposite. At its eighteenth-century origin the term "realism," deriving from res, "thing," was descriptive of works aiming to render objective truth -- that is, to incorporate

into literature those things which have a real existence outside the perceiving mind. By the twentieth century, however, "saddled with all kinds of relativistic structures of consciousness" and the assumption that there is no objective reality, only perceived realities,⁸ "realism" has come to refer to subjective reality: ". . . reality is not only located in the mind, but is at the mercy of the moods and caprices of that mind, dilates and contracts with the degree of activity of the consciousness."⁹

For the purposes of this dissertation, however, simple working definitions can be set out. The term realism has been employed by critics like Pacey, John Moss, Carlyle King and Philip Child, to name a few, in the traditional sense of social realism, by which is meant the inclusion of much literal, purportedly-verifiable detail; cumulatively such detail tends to offer a high degree of credibility, in social terms, to the reader. On the other hand these critics have tended to reject those non-realistic modes which operate on non-literal levels, often within the boundaries of otherwise realistic novels: their employment of considerable excess (particularly in the obsessive behaviour of characters and their emotionally extravagant speech), of coincidence, and of patterning tends to make such novels, while meaningful on a symbolic or mythic level, quite incredible to the reader in social terms.

During the nineteen-twenties critics were tentative in praising realism. Lionel Stevenson (1926) calls for recognition of those novels which run counter to the tradition of pleasant, simple and wholesome novels, a tradition which has become, in his opinion, devitalized; but while praising the "more serious treatment of life" in the new novel he

appears to question the "distinct cult of unpleasant characters and an assumption of the harshness that is loosely termed realism."¹⁰

Similarly Pierce, in An Outline of Canadian Literature (1927), praises Canadian realism but does so because it (fortunately) avoids "the stern philosophy and morbid psychology of the Continent, and on the whole is more optimistic and wholesome."¹¹

Later critics are much less ambivalent about the value of realism in fiction and accept the portrayal of objective reality as the chief merit of the fiction of the twenties. Pacey is not alone in praising social realism at the expense of other aspects of fiction during this period, but because his is the definitive article on the nineteen-twenties to date¹² and because he does serve as a proponent for the novel of social realism, his appraisal of the period is a convenient jumping-off point.

Pacey states baldly that "if this period deserves remembering at all" it is for the attempt by some writers to "come to terms with their Canadian environment. . . ." He goes on,

All that the best novelists of this period were able to do was to begin the process of turning the eyes of readers and fellow-writers from a fabled past or a romanticized¹³ present towards the actual conditions of Canadian life.

He then praises novels like Stead's Grain, or The Smoking Flax, for their "basically accurate picture of prairie life in the first two decades of the twentieth century,¹⁴ or like Grove's prairie novels for portraying "man in conflict with a forbidding land and a forbidding climate. . . ."¹⁵ He favours Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925) because, although it is "primitive," it is, in his opinion, "the single most consistent piece

of western realism" to appear before Grove.¹⁶

Just as novels of social realism are considered to be successful, other promising novels of the period are, for Pacey, flawed by their lack of realism. Callaghan's three early novels, Strange Fugitive (1928), It's Never Over (1930), and A Broken Journey (1932) are marred by "melodrama."¹⁷ Knister's White Narcissus (1929) suffers from an "incredible" plot and "weird" however "powerful" characters.¹⁸ Mazo de la Roche, in Delight (1926) and Possession (1923) provides "entertainment for the millions" but, "judged as a realist, she is almost pitifully vulnerable."¹⁹

Critics like Pacey (especially), Thomas and Warkentin have done yeoman service in constructing the history of Canadian literature and in stacking the novels of the twenties against those less solid, admittedly devitalized novels of the previous two decades in Canada. Inherent, however, in the historical approach to literature is a certain danger, as the work of Pacey would appear to illustrate. As Peter Brooks argues, reading literature historically and arranging literary events chronologically, tends to exert, "whether the claim is voiced or not, almost of necessity the logic of the causal claim," for "surreptitiously, it is more often teleology that takes over as the controlling principle: history becomes a development, heading toward realization in a genre, an author, a work."²⁰ Because it stresses development, or cause and effect, historical evaluation tends to look for progression -- in the case of the fiction of the twenties, a progression from nineteenth-century romanticism toward twentieth-century realism. Values are then assigned: if progress has been made, then what is "new" must be

"better." In this case, exemplified by Pacey, a bias toward realism tends to emerge along with disparagement of novels that lack credibility in the sense of portraying objectively verifiable social "reality."

Given this problem, it can be argued that the fiction of a period ought to be approached synchronically, to borrow a term from linguistics,²¹ which is to say with a determination to read those works from a common period without preconceptions about schools or lines of development. A synchronic reading of the fiction of the nineteenth-twenties does turn up a realistic "canon," of course, as Pacey argues so well, in the novels of Stead, the prairie novels of Grove, the early urban novels of Callaghan, as well as in many lesser novels of the period.

But at the same time the reader becomes aware of a considerable body of fiction which appears to draw upon a separate and powerful set of conventions. Almost-forgotten novels like The Gleaming Archway by Alexander Maitland Stephen (1929) or Lantern Marsh by Beaumont S. Cornell (1923) share sombre and strange effects. Mazo de la Roche's Possession and Delight trade in high emotion and a sort of inverted pastoral quality that suggests the presence of evil in apparently bucolic communities. Often works which include much realistic detail are at the same time non-realistic in fundamental ways. Salverson's Viking Heart and Ostenso's Wild Geese depict young heroines whose introduction to harsh pioneer life is heightened by their awareness of an inhospitable, even hostile, quality in both the brooding landscape and those men determined to tame it. Morley Callaghan's early "trilogy" -- Strange Fugitive, It's Never Over and A Broken Journey -- consists of

novels which use reiterative light/dark symbolism to explore the relationship between evil and the categorical imperatives of instinctual life. Even realistic writers like Grove or Stead dabble in incredible plot twists and extreme states of emotion: The Smoking Flax and Grain offer pat endings and incredible coincidence; The Yoke of Life culminates in a romantic double suicide of mythic proportions.

Such novels, and others like them, abound in extremities of plot and emotion. Often they assume the existence of a "sub-world" of primitive and threatening power beneath the surface of things. Their definitive quality would seem to be the employment of excess -- in plot design, character motivation and/or evocation of atmosphere -- in order to celebrate moments or to plumb depths more extreme than those tolerated within the boundaries of the purely realistic novel. Taken together these attributes are melodramatic: if melodrama is assumed to be a descriptive critical category inclusive of the novel as well as of drama, and if "melodrama" can be defined as the use of intense and extravagant elements within a context of apparent realism,²² then a wealth of melodramatic fiction seems to have surfaced during this decade in English-Canadian fiction.

It would seem a valid critical exercise, then, to scrutinize, with special attention to their formal properties, a small group of melodramatic novels chosen from the nineteen-twenties, a formative and vigorous period in Canadian fiction, in order to examine the aesthetics of melodrama -- to see how non-realistic devices function in novels of the period and what sort of vision they express.

The four novels selected for analysis here -- White Narcissus,

Wild Geese, A Broken Journey and The Yoke of Life -- are melodramatic novels. Each has been described as a realistic novel flawed by its non-realistic aspects, but each is in fact a carefully-structured work which, on further study, can be seen to employ melodramatic devices aesthetically as a tool for expressing a stark and generally uncompromising vision.

The critical approach in this paper is that of "new criticism," in the sense of coming to each novel separately and reading it as an artistic whole with only slight reference to historical or other contexts.²³ Because the intention is to read the novels for their aesthetics, which is to say for their formal presentation of an informing vision, the structure of each novel is used as a framework for the discussion, in an effort to deal with the novel-as-a-whole and avoid a piecemeal extraction of themes or images. Hence the approach to each novel is initially to its point of view, in the interest of defining the protagonistic centre of the novel. The reading then moves through levels of meaning, structural patterning, and informing symbolism, as a way of reaching the ultimate vision which realistic detail and melodramatic devices have combined to create and present in these novels of power and imagination.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Clara Thomas, "Biography," in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), III, 190.

²Germaine Warkentin, Introduction to The White Savannahs, by W. E. Collin (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. xxi.

³Ibid.

⁴Desmond Pacey, "The Course of Canadian Criticism," in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed., III, 18-19.

⁵Desmond Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940," in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 1st ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 658-691.

⁶The short survey of critical opinion which introduces the study of each novel in this paper will demonstrate that, almost without exception, critics have looked for realistic detail in these novels and have dismissed their non-realistic aspects as melodramatic and therefore ineffective. Margot Northey has also commented on the emphasis on realism in criticism of Canadian fiction:

A random perusal of a number of studies will indicate that by and large critics overplay the realistic side of Canadian fiction, frequently associating its achievements with the growth of realism. Books most often discussed, moreover, are those in which realism has a sociological direction -- those which attempt to reflect the social fabric of the land.

Margot Northey, The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 3.

⁷Damion Grant, Realism (London: Methuen, 1970).

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

⁹Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰Lionel Stevenson, Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), p. 131.

¹¹Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1927), p. 43.

¹²Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940," in Literary History of Canada, 1st ed., pp. 658-693.

¹³Ibid., p. 658.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 677.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 682.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 679.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 690.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 685.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 669-670.

²⁰Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. xii.

²¹Robert Scholes uses the term "synchronic" to describe the linguistic examination of a particular word in relation to other words and sounds in use at the same time, and "diachronic" to describe the examination of the word as it is related to its etymological or phonological antecedents and successors. Robert Scholes, Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 17.

²²Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. ix.

²³I suppose that this might be called a "hermeneutic" reading of texts, as defined by Paul Hernadi in Beyond Genre: "Instead of permitting preconceived generic expectations to distort his response to the work," the hermeneutic critic must "stay ready to revise his idea of genre in the light of new experience." Paul Hernadi, Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 3.

II

WHITE NARCISSUS: "A PLACE OF CHOKED VISTAS"

Raymond Knister's White Narcissus is usually read as a realistic novel which is seriously flawed by its more melodramatic aspects. When the novel is praised it is for its realistic treatment of Ontario farm life or for its evocation of the atmosphere of rural Southern Ontario. In his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of White Narcissus, Philip Child calls Raymond Knister a "painter poet," emphasizing his ability "to describe with sensitive understanding the ordinary life and occupations of Ontario farm families, and . . . also to describe the face of the land with power and simplicity."¹ Similarly Desmond Pacey praises Knister's "treatment of Ontario farm life" in White Narcissus, and goes on to note the novel's "capacity to recreate the atmosphere of the Ontario rural landscape."²

The temptation to read White Narcissus as a realistic novel is great given the biographical connection between Knister and the American Midwestern journal, The Midland. Through his association with The Midland in the twenties, Knister came into contact with the work of the American "new Realists"³ like Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg and Ruth Sucknow, and from that set of contacts Knister's earliest-published stories⁴ (fatalistic, farm-centered and imagistic) would seem to have derived.

But on the whole, critics agree, White Narcissus is a failure

as a realistic novel. Child finds the plot, particularly its dénouement, unconvincing. Both Child and Livesay comment on the incredibility of the characters and both cite Knister's own retrospective comment that when he wrote White Narcissus he "did not know anything about human relationships."⁵ Pacey calls the characters "powerful" but "weird," and assails the style as "a curious combination of simple directness and pretentious double-talk."⁶ Similarly Child finds the dialogue weak, observing that there is "too much soliloquizing by the hero or, at least, too little of it that is clear."⁷ John Moss would deny even that the landscape is realistically drawn, claiming that Knister "bends an indifferent landscape too much to his literary purpose for it to remain also a natural world. . . ."⁸

Realistic criteria, then, where realism is used in the traditional sense, do not work well with this novel, which has despite its so-called flaws a peculiar power and intensity. In fact its flaws are all in the direction of excess, marking White Narcissus as a melodramatic novel: the pat plot and balanced structure, unconvincing characters, unnatural dialogue and tortured landscape suggest that Knister was striving for a different sort of effect than that generated by the social realism which most critics have emphasized.⁹

Knister was certainly concerned with realism and indeed himself called for a greater degree of "reality" in Canadian literature.¹⁰ But, in conveying "reality" Knister emphasized that the text must consist of a fresh perspective on ordinary life, arising out of the author's "seeing" the common world from his own, unique perspective. He observed that prose writers had been slower than poets to abandon the "classical

theory of objectivity," and to recognize that in an absolute sense there is no objectivity:

When Flaubert is bringing some undeniable picture to your recognition, he is doing it only to impose upon you some emotion which is part of his plan and the outgrowth of his own emotion. What is known as realism is only a means to an end, the end being a personal projection of the world. In passing beyond realism, even while they employ it, the significant writers of our time are achieving a position of evolution.¹¹

Phrases like "personal projection" and "beyond realism" suggest that for Raymond Knister realism was "subjective reality" and that a way of approaching White Narcissus is as an exploration of subjective states which portray the world not as it is, but as it is perceived. In that case, analysis of the novel might begin with the formal problem of point of view, by establishing the perspective from which the story is told.

White Narcissus is a novel built upon a single point of view, that of Richard Milne, whose quest for self-knowledge comprises the subject of the novel. Although the point of view employed is third person rather than first person, it is entirely Richard's, as Philip Child observes:

There is no scene of present action and dialogue which does not take place under his eyes and no action or memory of the past that is not reported to him. It is he who introspects his own conflicting thoughts and emotions and who explores Ada's. It is he and not the author who appears to register and appraise the nature and motives of other people in the story and who weighs what they say.¹²

As such, White Narcissus is a classic example of what Sharon Spencer calls the "closed form," in which the structure of the novel is built upon a single perspective, a point of view so limited that it is bound

to lead to some distortion of the subject (that is of any reality external to the given point of view). Its homogeneous tone -- often repetitive, obsessive and emotional -- makes for a bizarre and subjective rendering of reality. In fact, two striking effects of the limited perspective are an unnatural "intensity" and a certain "autonomy" or freedom from the conventional laws of reality.¹³ Spencer explains that a novel which employs the very selective closed structure is unlikely to be plausible:

There is no need for characters conceived and portrayed according to the principle of verisimilitude and provided with believable motives for their actions, no need for conventionally measured approximations of time and space, for dialogue that reproduces actual speech patterns, or for actions and themes that reflect the lives of ordinary men.¹⁴

There is no need for objective realism because the province of the closed form is subjective reality:

. . . verisimilitude is beside the point. What is required is intense focus upon a single perspective of a reality that has generally been seen from some other much more common perspective. To see something absolutely, one must necessarily concentrate upon those facets that he has never allowed to come within his field of vision. In this sense, the novel with a closed structure may be regarded as a corrective to realism . . . a complementary vision of life.¹⁵

In White Narcissus the "intense focus" is upon Richard Milne's obsession: he sees himself as undertaking a quest to free Ada Lethen from her parents' domination and carry her off with him. He moves through a landscape perceived entirely in subjective terms and particularly in terms of his personal past. He perceives the external quest for Ada as parallel to his own inner search for meaning in his life. Just as Ada is divided between her parents and fixed by her devotion to

both, Milne is a man divided by practicality and idealism and caught by his inability to escape the dichotomy between his utilitarian past (as the urban advertising man) and his idealization of rural life (as the romanticizing novelist he has also become). To transcend his own divided self, Milne feels he must unite with Ada and come to terms with the response to life that she represents. The structure of Richard's quest (and the novel chronicles his third foray into Lethen territory) is significant: he approaches the Lethen place from Hymerson's farm and fails, then approaches it from Burnstile's farm and succeeds. He succeeds, that is, in carrying Ada off. Whether or not he has amended his life thereby, and paved the way for his emergence as a real artist, is a debatable point and one which can be dealt with best in terms of the vortex-like structural patterns retrospectively evident in the novel.

The opening paragraph of the novel establishes Milne's perspective, which in its tone and emotional tenor is melodramatic:

Richard Milne was only two hours away from the city, and it seemed to be still with him. He found incredibly foreign the road down which he swung, as though with resolution. Its emptiness shortly became impressive. He met no one, and it seemed to lead burrowing, dusty, into the bleak wind, into the centre of lost wastes screened by scattered and fretful trees. The trees sighed as though in abandonment from struggling forests which, the man knew, would seem to recede as he went forward. He felt lost in this too-familiar country, and slackened his pace.¹⁶

Alone with his thoughts, Milne is undertaking a journey which he perceives as a descent. In the first paragraph he swings "down" a road which burrows into a forest that apparently swallows him up as he penetrates its depths. Much of Richard's attention is focussed on the road. Between Lower Warping and the farms, that road deteriorates from gravel to sandy

spots and then to ruts. As he approaches the farmlands the road becomes winding, inscrutable and difficult to follow:

Like the village which had seemed still smaller than a village, smaller than it had ever been before, this countryside had the look of having arisen about him foreignly with the incredible immediacy of a dream. The road made fitful efforts at directness and would ignore the swing of the high river banks, only a little farther on to skirt a depression, a sunken, rich flat, bearing rank, blue-green oats surrounded by drooping willows, elms through which only a glimpse of the brown ripples of water could be seen; again, underbrush, small maples, wild apples, green sumach came right to the road and hung over the fence, hiding the drop of a ravine. A place of choked vistas. (p. 20)

The use of pendulous words ("drooping," "hangs") and words connoting descent ("depression," "sunken," "drop") suggests Richard's sense of descending into a threatening world. Further on, the road and the river seem to "rival each other in the vagrancy of their courses," the land becomes more "rolling, hummocky, confused" and fences are half-concealed, as Milne's mind records a landscape in which barriers, divisions, demarcations become less and less clear. Over all, notes Milne, the sun "flowed coldly" (p. 23).

Richard Milne's apprehension is clear and, as he goes on, his purpose and the reasons for his discomfort are articulated. On the one hand he is in the grip of a compulsion to see Ada Lethen and is torn between his desire for her and his uneasiness at knowing himself obsessed. Repeatedly Milne speaks of the irrationality of his undertaking: he speaks of his "impulsive" consciousness of his goal (p. 20), his "conflicting emotions" (p. 21), and the "excitement coming unreasonably into his mind" (p. 26). He fears that he may reveal some lack of control and strives to conceal his emotional turmoil, swinging

down the road "as though with resolution" (p. 19), "sauntering on with an appearance of ease" lest he meet anyone (p. 21), attempting to "cloak" his irrational excitement in random conversation with the Hymersons.

On the other hand, Milne is uncomfortable because he feels compelled to enter a landscape which is synonymous with his past. He speaks of the "questing spirit" which had led him from the farm to the city but notes regretfully that his city travels and works were only apprenticeships (his "Wanderjahre and Lehrjahre") preparatory to his return to the farm to settle things (p. 24). Richard feels trepidation, moreover, at the "emptiness" of the road and his sense of being "lost" in a "too-familiar" country: his alienation derives largely from his sense of the "foreign" nature of what ought to be familiar.

Knister establishes Milne's point of view, then, simply by revealing Richard's perceptions as he travels from Lower Warping to the Hymerson farm in the first chapter, but also employs several other devices as well in order to reinforce its sense of subjectivity or subjective reality. Knister emphasizes, for example, the word "seems." Virtually nothing exists in the chapter except as Richard perceives it: the village seems smaller than before because Richard sees it that way; the farmhouse where Richard once lived "seemed to stand on the edge of a brink," for Milne perceives it that way; even time and space are altered by Richard's perception of them — the June evening is "apparently endless" and stationary (though time actually passes) and Richard seems to have walked a long way (though perhaps he has not) (p. 23). At one point "seems" is used in conjunction with "incredible"

and "dream": Milne observes that "this countryside had the look of having arisen about him foreignly with the incredible immediacy of a dream" (p. 20). Similarly, Knister repeats the word "impression." On the first page the emptiness of the landscape is said to become "impressive" to Richard and later he compares his own mental habit of recording "impressions of the place" to the typical farmer's "utilitarian" eye (p. 20).

Indeed, several times in the first chapter Knister underlines the subjectivity of Richard's point of view by allowing his perception to distort the physical, externally real, landscape, with surrealistic effect. The personified forests recede as he moves forward (p. 19), the countryside looms about him unnaturally (p. 20), man shrinks amid the endless roads and strung-out farms, and, most interesting, the Burnstile farm (his original home) teeters on the edge of an abyss:

The lumbering farmhouse seemed to stand on the edge of a brink, for nothing showed behind it but, in the distance, the round tops of apple trees, grey-green in the almost apparent wind. At the first glance he felt that the barn and other buildings might have dropped away, but turning he saw the unpainted, sagging-ridged building standing on the edge of the hollow, as near the road where he had unwittingly passed it, as the house. It had been moved up from the slope behind in his absence. (p. 21)

The tentative language ("seems," "dream," "incredible," "impression") and surrealistic distortion on Richard's part emphasize the subjectivity of Richard's vision, the central vision in the novel. But they also suggest that Richard's is a tortured sensibility, and the imagery of the first chapter reinforces that sense of emotional intensity and emotional distortion which might best be called "melodramatic."

Repeatedly things which are organic are perceived as perverted, twisted or thwarted. Forests are described as "struggling" (p. 19), flowers "twitched peevish" (p. 19), vistas are "choked" (p. 20), and even Richard's love for Ada is described in organic terms: he has been recalled not by the soil but by a "forfeit of love which in final desperation he had come to redeem or tear from its roots forever" (p. 21). The implication is that whatever really brings Richard back to the farm -- and we have only his subjective statement that the basic motivation is his love for Ada -- is strangling his organic centre, the source of his spiritual life, as the image of a sun shining without warmth suggests.

Knister maintains the single limited perspective almost without exception throughout the novel,¹⁷ but employs techniques other than point of view to reinforce the sense of subjectivity which dominates the novel. One technique is Knister's unwavering refusal to reveal Ada's personal point of view. All we have of Ada's inner life is filtered through Richard's assumptions about her feelings and Richard's revelations about her past. Her own remarks tend to be brief and frequently ambiguous. A second device is Knister's frequent use of "framed" scenes, where Milne, a spectator, observes a "picture" from a specified vantage point. Richard observes Mrs. Lethen for the first time as she moves in a lighted window while he watches from a darkened verandah. He observes the Hymersons from an upstairs bedroom window as father and son quarrel below (p. 48). He imagines Ada as a child, sitting on the stairs over-hearing her parents' quarrel (p. 43). Eventually he and Ada observe the Lethens' reconciliation, again through a window as if they were observing a play.

Such framed scenes tend to define Richard as contemplative and as an observer rather than a participant in events. The point is reinforced by Milne's ineffectuality in acting: Hymerson breaks down before Richard can really act for the Lethens in their legal dispute; the Lethens reconcile and thereby "free" Ada before Milne is forced to act and compel them to release her. But most important the framed scenes reinforce Milne's identity as a perceiver, suggesting once again that in White Narcissus modes of perception, of passivity, are as important as modes of action, perhaps because the novel is "about" subjective reality, and the importance of the artist's response to it.

Reality is a complex idea in White Narcissus, for although the novel employs a single limited point of view, Richard Milne perceives his quest on at least two levels simultaneously and, although Ada Lethen is always at the centre of his search, her symbolic function varies within each framework.

On the first, most literal level, Richard Milne perceives his quest for Ada in the simple terms of a conventional love story. The two grew up together. Both were isolated children, artistically talented, products of unconventional family relationships, a little odd in their ways, and attracted to one another by these similarities. Even after Richard has gone to the city and become successful in the advertising business, he cannot forget Ada, who is so inextricably bound up with his past, and returns to Lower Warring several times to persuade her to come away with him to a new home and a glittering life together in the city. In White Narcissus, the story of his third attempt to woo Ada, Richard is increasingly obsessed with his love for the girl and more determined

than ever to win her over in this, his last, campaign to unite with the woman he has desired for so long.

On a second level, however, Richard perceives his quest for Ada in melodramatic terms as an attempt to liberate a woman victimized by parents who have so manipulated their daughter as to paralyze her will. In this context, Richard casts himself as the saviour of Ada, the classic maiden in distress. He views himself as an urban outsider, facing a threatening and animated forest landscape in order to see Ada again, "though it were for the last time" (p. 20), and carry out some "determination," some "plans" (p. 20) related to her. At their first meeting, Richard perceives Ada as an elevated figure and he describes her in language which evokes mystery and religious awe: he approaches her as she stands on a verandah and is "overwhelmed" by her (p. 33), "lost in the sight of her" (p. 33); he speaks of "enchantment," calls her a "riddle" and applies to her family the world "relics" (p. 35). Even at the end of his quest -- when he dares to assume Ada will leave with him -- he still thinks of her unrealistically, in fairytale terms, imagining her princess-like "in exquisite gowns, radiant, differently beautiful, flattered by the lights of famous restaurants, of ballrooms . . ." (p. 132).

Similarly, Milne sees the Lethen homestead, where Ada is imprisoned, in gothic terms: at twilight, overwhelmed by a "sense of strangeness" (p. 32), he imagines the house is an impenetrable fortified castle: "The Lethen place hid the sunset, looming beyond a dredged cut to the river, like a moat, dry and overgrown with weeds" (p. 32); the house itself is old, windows draped by Virginia creeper, "only the gables

showing the weathered brick expanse which towered remote as though to scan the oblivious invader below" (p. 33); above all, Richard says, the Lethen place is not "a reasonable and practicable . . . daylight world" (p. 35). Even in the light of noon, trees guard the house like veterans (p. 66) and the house itself is more ugly, more obviously evil, "like the face of a harridan washed of paint" (p. 66). The parent-gaolers are, in gothic fashion, of more than earthly strength.

Mrs. Lethen is the more villainous of the two. Once Richard has penetrated the house, for a noonday meal, he faces her with "something like terror" (p. 67) and uses expressions in describing her that suggest an eerie villainy: she is an "enemy," "timeless," two-dimensional in black and white clothes, with a colourless face marked only by black brows and "dark burnt-out eyes" (pp. 68-9). Mr. Lethen is less formidable but disconcerting as well, with his queer ideas (p. 61), his lack of impelling motives (p. 61), his sidling motions (p. 82), his oddly attenuated appearance. Above all, he (like Ada and her mother) is not, and never was, commonplace.

On this level, then, Richard Milne's pursuit of Ada, rendered in intensified fairytale-like terms, takes on an obsessive quality: an unusual, gifted person (like himself), she must be confined no longer to her parents' dark and stifling world, but must be released into "another world," that "real" world outside where he alone can lead her. At the same time, however, on a third level Richard seems to perceive his quest for Ada as a quest for himself, or at least for those meaningful elements of a past that he finds oppressive but cannot completely throw off.

Much of the first chapter emphasizes that when Richard Milne penetrates the farmland beyond Lower Waring he is entering a land whose domination he has never been able to escape. He knew "that he could never be freed from the hold of this soil, however far from it he had travelled" (p. 21); as a youth he had found the land beautiful, yet he had spent his youth in a "dream of wider freedom" (p. 23), for the fields had "seemed designed to pen his youthful hopes forever within the congeries of haphazard misshapen fields" (p. 21). Later he repeats, "For all the years in which he had struggled for success there, it seemed that the only real and personal part of his life had been lived here, surrounded by trees, fields, river, which claimed him as though he had never left them" (p. 32). Only by releasing Ada, it seems, can he escape this "smothering shroud of time and place" and surmount the "overpowering creep of memories that die only to haunt implacably" (p. 37).

In what sense is Ada at the centre of his past? There is a longtime relationship, of course, for they were friends as children when both were different from others; in fact it is because they were different together, one feels, that Richard loves Ada. Their similarities are great: both are artistic (he as a writer and she as a musician); both are educated, or at least committed to the world of books; both are "orphans," in the sense of being deprived of normal parents and parental love; and they are both divided, she between her duty to her parents and her love for Milne, and he between the world of the writer and that of the advertising man. Above all, they are intuitively related, or at least Richard assumes so, for their

relationship seems "without beginning" and is rooted in a deep silence between them (p. 38).

Indeed there is much to suggest that their relationship goes beyond shared experience, in that Richard sees Ada as one with himself: "Though Ada Lethen and the part she played with him were the most familiar things to his mind, they formed its greatest mystery -- more profound because part of the mystery was himself" (p. 76). Thus, fundamental to the obsession of Richard Milne for Ada Lethen, is what C. F. Keppler has called the phenomenon of the "second self."¹⁸ Keppler describes the second self as an objective manifestation -- that is, another person in the story who is physically separate from the protagonist -- of a "missing part" of the personality or character of the first self. The attraction of the first self to his second self is virtually irresistible, for it is only through union with the second self, he realizes intuitively, that he will be able to heal his own dissociated personality, or at least to transcend his divided state of mind.

In the tradition of literature which employs the "second self" as a means of exploring one's own identity, it seems that in White Narcissus Richard sees Ada as another side of himself, or even an alter ego which must be liberated before he can be free. Hence his assumption that she ought to be freed, despite her reluctance to leave, and his curious and elevated speech to Ada: often his words to her seem stilted and even superficial because they are in effect mere ritual; what links Richard and Ada goes beneath and beyond the level of rational discourse, and one feels that their outward conversation is not their deepest form

of communication.

What Ada represents, moreover, is not only Richard's past (or his alter ego caught in the past which he feels still confines him) but also the "still centre" of that past, the one unchanged thing. His image of her as "sleet frozen upon maple buds" (p. 38) suggests that Ada, the element "surely in all this place of eroded dreams . . . least changeable" (p. 36), will thaw in the warmth of his love: enkindled by his devotion, she will undergo spiritual growth that will mean, for the first time, the emergence of change as a positive force in both of their lives.

For in the past Richard Milne has had a great fear of change. In the first chapter he records the alterations he sees in village life negatively: the village is smaller, shrunken and inhospitable, Hymerson's farm has deteriorated, and Burnstile's children seem to derive less excitement from meeting a stranger than he had in his youth. One of his major statements in this chapter is his lament, "if memory could prove so fugacious" how had he trusted it so long? It is as though sameness, however stultifying, would be at least manageable, and could be dealt with and ordered, while disorderly, irrational change is perceived as threatening to him at this point.

As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that the "still centre," which Richard believes he is pursuing in Ada is, ironically, the repository of that very irrationality he fears, and that it is the irrational in Ada (and therefore in himself) with which he must come to terms before he can be happy as an artist and as a man.

Certainly Milne's desire for Ada Lethen is irrational in essence.

She appeals to him despite the fact that she does not fit a conventional definition of beauty:

He seriously doubted whether she would charm many men, even men of more than average insight. She was like some rare work of art, inordinately admired, even idolized, by a few devotees, tolerantly assessed by snobs and cognoscenti, and neglected by the world. He at least knew her value; and to him she was far more seductive even of face and limb than any woman he had encountered. Her spell was such that it met him at every point, in his memory. (pp. 111-112)

Her value, in fact, lies in her ability to cast a "spell" upon him such that he "idolizes" her, admires her "inordinately." Repeatedly, throughout the novel, Milne uses words like "enchantment" and "mystery" to define Ada's appeal. In other words, though Richard does not seem to realize it at a conscious level, much of his attraction to her is to her irrational qualities.

The irrational side of Ada Lethen is especially significant given Richard's insistence that she is his source of inspiration in his work: her image and his urge to write, he says, are "the twin deities of his life" (p. 110); perhaps, he goes on, she is "at the bottom of his urge to write"; having reached her -- even though he has not yet won her at this point -- he foresees development in his art. Indeed the structure of the novel suggests that, to the extent that Richard's search for peace of mind is resolved, resolution comes through his exposure to and acceptance of the irrational forces in his life as bound up in and personified by Ada Lethen.

The structure of White Narcissus reinforces its theme: to make some meaning out of his past, Richard must come to terms, through his relationship with Ada, with his artistic need for contact with subjective

reality and the irrational wellsprings of the creative mind. First of all, the novel is structurally divided into three parts, an introduction and two major sections. Of the fifteen chapters in the novel, the first two are introductory. Milne penetrates the countryside, and travels from Lower Warping (which is two hours from the city) to Hymerson's farm in the first chapter. In Chapter 2 he establishes himself in the Hymerson household and prepares for the rest of his task, to go to the Lethen farm and persuade Ada to leave with him. The first major section of the novel -- the six chapters from Chapter 3 to Chapter 8 -- concern Richard's attempts to free Ada, using the Hymerson farm as a base. The ninth chapter is pivotal: Milne is still at the Hymersons, but falls out with Carson and departs for the Burnstile farm. In the final section of the novel -- the six chapters from Chapter 10 to Chapter 15 -- Milne operates with the Burnstile farm as his base. He pursues Ada rather differently and this time succeeds in making love to her and persuading her to leave.

There are significant parallels between the two major segments. In each Richard approaches the Lethen farm twice. In the first section he first approaches it alone at sunset, meets Ada there, delivers his "sales pitch" to her (in Chapters 3 and 4); later he goes to the Lethens with Ada at noon (in Chapter 7) where he joins Ada and her mother for dinner but is repulsed by the mother after delivering a scathing speech about Mrs. Lethen's duty to her child. In the second section Richard approaches the Lethen farm alone at night, contemplates it and leaves (in Chapter 11); he then approaches it with Ada in the final chapter where they witness the Lethen reconciliation, then leave together. In

both sections Richard does farm work to pass the time, but in the first (Chapter 8) he views the work as "of use" (p. 74) and abandons himself to driving horses in a "routine" "programme" which will occupy his hours; in the second section (Chapter 12) he works out of sympathy for Burnstile because the rains have made harvest almost impossible (p. 109) -- it is as though Milne chooses to submit to the demands of the weather. In both cases Milne is flooded with thoughts of Ada but in the first, during an arid and dusty spell, he states her centrality in his work (p. 76), while in the second, when the air is heavy and moist, he dwells on her mystery, and her sensuality (p. 111).

A third, more significant, parallel involves Richard and Ada's meeting in the woods. At the midpoint of each section (Chapter 6 in the first and Chapter 13 in the second section), Milne and Ada walk through the same section of the bush. In both chapters they approach a towering old tree which sits on an "isthmus of its own," screened by a grassy knoll, cedars and vines. But in Chapter 6 "there seemed no path leading down" to this "place for shelter" (p. 63), while in Chapter 13 they do jump down to that sheltered spot where they embrace; at that point Richard realizes that he cannot force Ada to make a "conscious choice" and rather that there will simply "come a time when it would be seen accomplished" (p. 122); after this they move to a second wooded shelter -- more cathedral-like in its twenty-foot high "roof" of sumach -- and there they make love (pp. 124-125).

The question that arises is why Milne succeeds in winning Ada when he is at Burnstile's farm and fails when at Hymerson's. In a sense they are two different worlds to Richard Milne and represent two

responses to life. Hymerson is associated by Richard with the practical, utilitarian world of the farmer. His is the world of machines arranged not for aesthetic effect but for functional utility:

These machines were not rusted in any state of disuse. In fact, they and the buildings, instead of giving the place a general effect of neglect, imparted a business-like aspect, as of work being in progress which forbade such fol-de-rols as neatness, newness, paint, and shelter from the elements of air and earth, for which all things were, in any case, ultimately destined. (p. 25)

Hymerson's is a world of rough comfort ("prickly towels" and mealtime conversations about farm problems) and of rather uncommunicative conversations where farm business and jocular small-talk dominate.

The Burnstile farm, on the other hand, is much more casual and idyllic. Mrs. Burnstile is less efficient than Mrs. Hymerson, is "lackadaisical" (p. 97), content and almost unconsciously idle (p. 98). The children run about without restraint and dinner conversation consists at one point of a lively tall tale. While Bill Burnstile farms reasonably well, he is unexcited when rains impede his wheat harvest and simply acquiesces to that fate.

In a sense, then, the Hymerson and Burnstile farms symbolize antagonistic principles, Hymerson's utilitarian establishment representing reason and order and practicality in opposition to Burnstile's more chaotic, "natural," and spontaneous family life. But at the same time there is a third choice, the Lethen response to life. The Lethen place is based on unreason, on an unreasonable quarrel of many years' standing, on Ada's unreasonable refusal to leave her parents for a life of her own, on the contradictory nature of Mr. Lethen who combines unusual education

and reading with an inability to get along with his neighbours, a simple task surely. To Richard all the Lethens are a "mystery" because they cannot be fathomed logically, and much of the terror Milne fears in confronting the Lethens is surely fear of their irrationality, impenetrability to logic, order, plans and threats. But what he also fears is that the Lethen world is the missing response, the part of himself he has been denying. Interestingly, in Chapter 9, the transitional chapter, when Milne decides to side with Lethen in the legal matter (necessitating his move from Hymerson's to Burnstile's farm), he perceives himself as a divided man, using a striking image of this severance, and connects the missing part of his identity with Lethen. As Lethen speaks, Milne

had been lost in thought while the voice went on, reaching him almost unwittingly. It was to him as if the ghost of some lost part of himself were speaking. An angleworm twisted in a shining clod of the freshly turned earth, its two halves separate. (p. 87)

There are, then, three separate farms and three sorts of responses to life. Two of those responses correspond roughly to modes of life that Richard has already tried and found wanting: his life as an advertising man corresponds to Hymerson's utilitarian response to life, and his experience as a romantic novelist resembles the Burnstile attitude. In addition there is some suggestion that these two responses correspond to different "stages" of his past when Richard dwelt on the land, for while he is at Hymerson's Richard relives his youth spent in farm work, and while he is at Burnstile's he seems to go back to his own childhood through the carefree relationship he has with the Burnstile

children. At any rate Richard is satisfied with neither response to life and is fascinated by the Lethens, whose lifestyle is "insane and foreign to humanity" (p. 43), despite his inability to "see things straight" in their environment (p. 72). Consequently Milne seems to realize instinctively that in order to heal the division in himself he must transcend both of his previous responses by descending into the Lethen world and escaping with Ada, by descending into his past and uniting with the irrational wellsprings that Ada, as his alter ego, represents.

Significantly Milne's forays into Lethen territory are coloured by the base from which he operates. While he is at Hymerson's farm Richard is still very much the ad-man, practical and efficient. In the first chapter he carries a club bag and comments on the power of money to gain accommodation (p. 23); in Chapter 8 he restrains himself from telling the farmer Wallace Bender how much money he made last year in the city (p. 79); in the ninth chapter, when he quarrels with Hymerson, Milne is eager to assure Carson that his signature is worth more than Hymerson's (p. 92).

Appropriately Richard's attitude toward Ada during his Hymerson stay arises from the business-like side of his nature. He presses her with "reasonings" (p. 29), wonders at her inability to behave logically (p. 36), urges her to take "a definite course" (p. 44), plans to assail her parents with "reason" and "common logic" (p. 46), and in fact acknowledges that he has assailed her with the "sales-talk" of a "city go-getter" (p. 45). He vows to "conquer" all, after "testing" her situation with her parents (p. 63), and states that he will take a

"definite" "course" once he has decided how to proceed (p. 71). During this period Milne is amazed by Ada's irrational bondage to her parents, is maddened by his "increasing sense of impotence" (p. 37) and is "confused" by the "avalanche" of emotions she arouses in him (p. 38). Although he realizes that "he had nothing to do but to listen, given up not to her reasonings, but to her, the spirit beneath" (p. 45), he makes a "perverse effort at balance" and vows to win her by rational means (p. 46).

For Richard, Burnstile's farm, on the other hand, offers a pastoral experience in the classical sense. As Leo Marx observes in The Machine in the Garden, in both ancient and modern literatures the pastoral experience is generally seen as an interlude (with the assumption that one will return to the crowded social scene eventually) and as a mid-point between the urban scene from which a character has fled and the chaos of untamed nature just beyond the pastoral setting.¹⁹ At the Burnstile farm, the pastoral setting in White Narcissus, Richard is overtaken by lethargy, but not an arid lethargy such as he felt at Hymerson's. Rather, it is a lethargy experienced in such a pregnant atmosphere that it seems not terminal but preparatory, a transitional state. Over the "fecund and steaming earth" (p. 104) there lies a sense of impending storm, and the effect is to "bury his consciousness" as Milne watches the landscape "without thinking" (p. 104). As his rational, active functions are depressed he begins to think of himself as a Hamlet figure, with paralyzed faculties (p. 105), and the literary allusion seems directly opposed to his quotation from Goethe in Chapter 8, that "nothing will resolve doubt but action" (p. 79). In

Chapter 11, Milne realizes, in seeing himself and Ada as star-crossed, Fate-dominated lovers (p. 105), that there is little he can actually do, that the only certainty is that there can be no certainty (p. 108). In submitting, in realizing the inefficacy of action in matters of the spirit, Richard Milne has through contemplation accepted the irrational chaotic elements beyond his control and in so doing it is as if he has made himself worthy of Ada.

Milne's acceptance of his inability to control and arrange all aspects of his life seems to be paralleled by an acceptance of a new definition of the nature of reality. Much of White Narcissus is concerned with disagreement of the farmers over fences. Specifically Hymerson's attempt to foreclose Lethen's mortgage is merely his attempt to absorb and enclose the unfenced Lethen land so that he can erect a meaningful fence around the whole property. In a sense the concern with fences in the exterior world corresponds to Milne's interior, mental, state before the "resolution" of the novel, for during much of the novel Milne seems to be trying to define and clarify the lifestyles of the various farmers, and, more specifically, to define the nature of the "reality" which each represents. Initially when Milne perceives each version of reality as separate and contradictory, there is a sense of his trying to test each objectively. He finds Bill Burnstile "honest, simple, rough, real, true to himself, and open-eyed to what reality came his way" (p. 58); can Burnstile be said to see things truly, however, when he deals with the commonplace romantically, seeing "quartz-glitter" in its "dust" (p. 54)? The Hymersons' practical life ought to be simple and represent the "real" world, but curiously when Richard observes

father and son from above he views them almost surrealistically, through a "haze," "dust" and the shade of the barn, and in demonic terms: the hayrake is a "skeleton" into which they fit "teeth," Carson claws the air viciously, twists wire and speaks in injured tones of imperial dudgeon (p. 47). The undercurrent belies the surface, making the point that "truth" is never simple or clear-cut.

The Lethens, of course, fail to deal with reality at all, in Richard's mind, and much of his time is spent recording this failure on their part and attempting to make them see reality. Milne notes, for example, that Ada fails to see the "unreal, almost delusive quality" of her situation and conceives of "no other reality" beyond her abnormal world (p. 40). When Richard does get to see the mother he attacks her for living with "mirages" and failing to "gather the valley flowers of reality" (p. 67). All in all, the different versions of reality seem to "forever forbid his imposing reality or recognition" upon others (p. 58), and at night he cannot distinguish between dream and that "reality" from which, tossing, he tries "to find surcease" (p. 47).

In the end, however, it seems that Richard Milne comes to terms with the impossibility of defining objective reality. In Chapter 14, the news that Hymerson -- whose preoccupation with fences may be at the root of his breakdown -- has collapsed arouses no wonder in Milne. He "scarcely pays heed," for Hymerson had suffered, he says, from "delusion" all summer. In Chapter 15 Milne is aware of feeling simultaneously that nothing could be the same and that nothing has changed; he admits there will never be an end to mysteries (p. 131); and he fails even to question the irrational reconciliation of the Lethens, for that is their reality

and his is to walk away with Ada. Earlier in the novel Richard's fascination with the changeable, chaotic elements of life had been established:

Richard Milne had never ceased to admire the peripety of life, its myriad fugacious shadings like lake tints which become more intricate to the sight with care in scrutinizing them. (p. 50)

But as the events of the novel reveal, he had questioned those elements, had tried to control and pattern them. In the end, through Ada and his union with the irrational elements she represents, he merely accepts them.

It is significant that the union of Ada and Richard is accompanied, in the case of each love scene, by a sense of transcendence, which is to say escape from the "real" world. At their first meeting they yearn to transcend the "shroud" of time and space together: Richard notes that the night "could have lasted forever," "might have been the beginning or end of eternity" (p. 37); indeed the night "flowing past" them seems to leave them "stranded in an unimaginable waste beyond life," but they are "alone and not together" (pp. 38-39). In their first meeting in the woods (Chapter 6) they do not manage to transcend, but instead leave the woods, their shoes covered with dust as a symbol that they are at this point earthbound (p. 65). But in Chapter 13, when they do consummate their love,

interlocked wholly, it was as though that still muffled soft nook were a temple revealing a mystery even there too plangent and too overwhelming in colour, in the wild clash and fusion of the senses through an ecstasy which they created only to find it again in the whole pressure of a suddenly cognizant universe -- lost again in rapt, in overwhelming confusion and merging with an element greater than all their minds groping, their dreams mounting, their hearts seeking, had ever foreknown. . . . (p. 125)

In the final chapter Richard sees Ada in terms of stars ("her generous eyes were the stars of that night") and states that "Once more they were beyond time and space" (pp. 134-135). The language of transcendence is appropriate because Richard has transcended his divided self and united with the "missing part" that Ada Lethen represents. It is appropriate as well because, in transcending time and space, Richard and Ada are in a realm given over to subjective reality, where the realities of other people have no significance at all.

In a second way as well the structure of the novel serves to reinforce its theme of descent into the wellsprings of irrationality, for the movement of the characters across the landscape is patterned and seems symbolic.

If the three farms that comprise the central landscape of White Narcissus are imagined to be laid out linearly (so that the Burnstile farm is closest to Lower Warping and Lethen's is farthest from it), the balance between the two main sections of the novel becomes evident. In the Hymerson section Milne approaches the Lethen farm twice, once with Ada, and penetrates the household once but is forcefully ejected; in the second or Burnstile section he approaches the place twice, and one of these times is with Ada, but he does so without trying to enter it. This simple diagrammatic construction of the plot emphasizes one major theme in White Narcissus, the idea that for Milne inaction, submission to forces beyond his control, proves more productive than any action could be.

But if the three farms are assumed to be laid out not in a straight line along a straight road but in a group along a curved road

-- and there is much suggestion in the novel that this is so -- a slightly different effect is created, for the impression given of Richard's journey is that he works through a maze. Richard traces and retraces his steps. He approaches the Lethen place various ways but always leaves, without Ada, and then recoups and approaches from a slightly different angle. The text supports the idea of the structure as a sort of maze with the Lethen establishment at its centre. At their first meeting Richard speaks of a "mazed night"; in Chapter 8, while at Hymerson's, he feels as though he is "in a maze, helpless" (p. 79); and in Chapter 10, just after his move to Burnstile's, the idea is repeated in the statement that "Every move he made drew him further into an irrelevant maze" (p. 100). The structure in this way contributes to a dominant motif in White Narcissus, that of the maze which serves to emphasize the number of attempts, the variety of approaches, Milne makes toward the Lethen place, but also to signify the fundamental fact that Milne is trying to get to the core of things. In every maze there is a centre and usually it holds a mystery which is as frightening as it is spectacular. In Milne's case the mystery at the centre is Ada, but Ada is also the key to his selfhood, and to himself as an artist, so that on every level his pursuit of his own "still centre," like the centre of the maze, is the point of his quest.

A third construction can be given to the plot. In this case the movements are plotted as curves and a third effect is achieved -- that of a vortex. Milne moves, in ever-decreasing circles, funnelling toward a centre, which is Ada. But given Ada's function as an alter ego and Richard's role as a contemplative man rather than an active man, in fact

the centre is in himself and particularly in himself as an artist. Hence the use of the vortex structure is most significant: when the idea of centripetal movement is combined with the idea of descent, the vortex becomes demonic and the descent becomes a descent into a personal hell.

Richard Milne does descend into "hell": his apprehension and his suffering are evident; the summer heat, in combination with, first, aridity and then a palpable humidity, underscores the demonic impression we have of Richard's entering a threatening, claustrophobic, hot-house environment in pursuit of Ada. Because Ada is his other self and represents for Richard a descent into and submission to irrational forces, Milne cannot really transcend this sort of hell, in the sense of rising above it or entirely escaping it into some sort of heaven. Rather, he must come to terms with it by coming to accept the relativity and subjectivity of life and of truth. This is exactly what Milne does when he accepts the irrational mystery of life and the certainty that there can be no certainty.

Surprisingly little has been written about the "meaning" of White Narcissus.²⁰ Part of the problem lies in the difficulty of interpreting a novel which is "about" subjective reality, especially when the closed form -- with its emphasis on distorted vision and one-sidedness -- is employed. A second difficulty is with the melodramatic tone of the novel in combination with the ambivalence of the ending: so many incredible events take place and Richard's final vision of Ada in the city is so idealistic that one wonders if the novel's final statement, that they went "down" the road, is intended as an ironic

reminder that Milne's descent is not necessarily over. And a third problem is with the central symbol, the narcissus of Mrs. Lethen, which initially seems difficult to relate to Richard Milne.

The first problem, that of the difficulty of interpreting a novel which explores subjective reality, is resolved if one accepts Sharon Spencer's observation:

In the final analysis, there is no such thing as a novel based upon a single perspective; the reader's own perspective always plays its part in the complete apprehension of any novel. Furthermore, many authors actually depend upon the reader's ²¹ perspective when they conceive of their scheme of narration.

In White Narcissus, Knister underscores this need for the reader's own perspective by permitting the narrator to intrude, very slightly, at several points in the narration, as if to remind the reader that Milne's vision is only one very subjective version of reality, but that what matters is his recognition (and the reader's) that every vision is subjective, that truth is relative. If the reader were to see Milne as absolutely right, or as infallible in his perceptions, much of the impact of the novel's statement on relativity or subjectivity would be diminished.

The second difficulty, that of a melodramatic dénouement, can be resolved by emphasizing, again, that the point of the novel is not to portray reality -- in the sense of verisimilitude or plausibility -- but to portray subjective reality. Indeed two of the least credible aspects of the plot are ultimately explicable. We have been prepared for Hymerson's breakdown by numerous references to his increasing hysteria; in addition, Hymerson's obsession with fences (symbolic of

trying to impose order on natural chaos) would appear to make loss of his sanity inevitable. Hymerson makes an excellent foil to Richard, whose acceptance of the unfenceable nature of experience strengthens him while Hymerson weakens.

Secondly, the Lethens' reconciliation, the other "incredible" event, is plausible, given their relationship to the irrational. When Lethen smashes the narcissi he is behaving irrationally, and when Mrs. Lethen laughs in response, she is not behaving "reasonably": thus their reconciliation arises out of their irrationality, out of their emotional rather than their reasonable faculties. The implication is that the Lethens' unreasonable but intuitive behaviour is healthy while Carson's orderly, efficient, legalistic actions have proven to be fundamentally unhealthy for the inner self and for peace of mind.

More significant, in dealing with implausibility in the final chapters, is the reminder that neither of these episodes is as important as Richard Milne's responses to them. Milne does not question the validity of either situation, probably because he has learned not to judge the nature of the reality by which others live. Perhaps this is why Knister concludes with Milne's very idealistic anticipation of Ada in the city and his final sentence about Ada that her eyes were "the stars that night." Two points can be made. One is that flaws in Richard's vision which the reader can perceive may be seen to underscore the theme of the subjectivity of truth, a fundamental theme in White Narcissus. Secondly, it is useful to note that Richard has previously in the novel profoundly distrusted his earlier romanticizing of rural life because he feared he had not captured the "real" nature of farming.

In concluding on an idealizing note, Knister emphasizes once again that there is no reality outside of perceived reality. If Milne is more comfortable in the end with dreams and private visions, perhaps it is because he has grown by acknowledging the importance of subjectivity, especially to an artist.

The white narcissus (a central symbol, as the title of the novel indicates) serves to emphasize the importance of Richard's quest in terms of his desire to become an artist. The narcissi are Mrs. Lethen's, of course, and Richard himself perceives them initially as oppressive, their odour sickeningly sweet. He seems to contrast the narcissi, which are cultivated inside, with the wild flowers that Ada searches for in the woods (p. 59), and at one point states that Ada (as though she were herself a wild flower) cannot possibly bloom in her family's oppressive environment (p. 60). At the same time, however, Milne is apparently fascinated with the narcissi: he notes their artistic arrangement in bowls and records their "radiance" in the Lethen's dark parlour (p. 67). At one point he suggests that the narcissus, used as Mrs. Lethen uses it to shut out the world, results in the creation of an illusory world: in his scathing speech to Mrs. Lethen Richard warns her about self-absorption, saying, "It is possible to look across the fields of everyday life to some mirage of mountains, longing to be there, and to find after years that one's limbs are too worn even to gather the valley flowers of reality" (p. 69). In a striking image elsewhere, however, he imagines that the crane circling above Ada and himself must perceive their faces as "strange, wavering bulbs" (p. 60), and the projection of himself and Ada together as narcissus-like suggests that there is in fact something

positive about the self-absorption symbolized by the narcissus, at least for Richard in his search for his artistic nemesis (in the person of Ada Lethen).

The reader is certainly aware of Richard's quest as narcissistic, as self-absorbed, and the hothouse atmosphere of the farmhouse -- reiterated throughout the novel -- suggests an analogy between the Lethen parlour and the landscape through which Milne, introspective and preoccupied, wanders. In addition, other details from the novel suggest that Knister has intended to invoke aspects of the classical myth of Narcissus in White Narcissus.

Edith Hamilton summarizes the myth of Narcissus in these words:

. . . Narcissus went on his cruel way, a scorner of love. But at last one of those he wounded prayed a prayer and it was answered by the gods: "May he who loves not others love himself." The great goddess Nemesis, which means righteous anger, undertook to bring this about. As Narcissus bent over a clear pool for a drink and saw there his own reflection, on the moment he fell in love with it. "Now I know," he cried, "what others have suffered from me, for I burn with love of my own self -- and yet how can I reach that loveliness I see mirrored in the water? But I cannot leave it. Only death can set me free." And so it happened.²²

Like Narcissus, Milne is completely self-absorbed and he pursues Ada less out of altruistic love than from a sense of his own incompleteness. Indeed, Ada, the object of his love, is upon examination seen to be in his own mind an extension of himself, a missing fragment of his own identity. Like Narcissus, Milne is at times in the novel lethargic, and near paralysis in his inability to focus upon anything but his contemplation of Ada, which is to say of himself.²³

Knister's portrayal of Milne as a Narcissistic figure, however, is far from negative, largely because Milne is an artist, and Ada

represents the irrationality or instinctual response, missing in Milne initially, which he must learn from her. Robin Magowan's argument about the relationship between Orpheus and Narcissus is relevant here.

Magowan argues that the two are opposite sides of the same character:

Narcissus is the simpler and when he drowns Orpheus comes into existence.²⁴ Magowan assumes, then, that Narcissism is a stage or process which does terminate and is in fact essential to the birth or the liberation of Orpheus, the poet-artist.

In White Narcissus, both Mrs. Lethen and Richard Milne do terminate their narcissistic phases. She slips from her obsessed world into the world of social relationships in a moment of genuine emotion. He abandons himself into lethargy and inaction (a sort of death) only to be rescued at that point by Ada's admission of love for him (p. 117). But in Richard's case the parallel with Narcissus/Orpheus is explicit, for he assumes that the eventual resolution of his multi-levelled quest will lead to more and better work as an artist.

Magowan goes on to say:

Narcissus and Orpheus form opposite poles of the same character, and from this opposition comes the basic tension of the form. Where the first is a child and wants to live only in the spatial moment of a painting, the other knows that he must break that glass, step through it, in order to live in human time.²⁵

Two points can be made, the first concerning Milne's attitude toward time in White Narcissus: Richard Milne had been preoccupied with his past, but his coming to terms with it was hampered by the conflict he felt between the past as he had remembered it and the changes he saw about him which made him question the validity of his remembered experience. In a sense he lived in the present-as-past, attempting to resolve the tension he

felt between his oppressive past on the farm and the frenzied, however free, present he spent in the city. In the final chapter of White Narcissus, when he leaves with Ada, so optimistically, there is a sense of Milne's having crossed a frontier of some sort. He leaves his past but takes the relevant part, Ada, with him and begins to live in the present, with an eye to the future, which seems a healthier, more positive orientation.

Secondly, as Magowan suggests, there is something of the Orpheus figure in Richard Milne at the end of the novel. Just as Orpheus, because of the eloquence of his song, succeeds in bringing Eurydice back into the world of light, so does Milne emerge with Ada from her dark and oppressive world into the larger world outside, which he connects with light and festivity. In the Orpheus myth, of course, Eurydice is ultimately lost to him when Orpheus looks back, contrary to instructions, before they have even left the underworld, and there is no parallel to this part of the myth in White Narcissus; but the hint of the Orpheus myth in reference to Richard Milne tends to confirm the reader's suspicion that Milne may be over-optimistic about his and Ada's artistic prospects in the big city at the end of the novel.

There can be little doubt, nevertheless, that, regardless of the eventual outcome, Milne's Narcissus-like quest is positive and essential if he is to become an artist. There is a parallel to the movement of Milne in White Narcissus in a poem of Rilke, whose work Knister much admired.²⁶ In Rilke's Sonnets to Orpheus, Narcissus seems to drown as a preliminary stage in the emergence of Orpheus:

Mirrors: no one has yet distilled with
patient knowledge your fugitive
essence. Your spaces in time, that are filled with
holes like those of a sieve.

Squandering the empty ball-room's pomp,
deep as forests when twilight broods . . .
and, like sixteen-pointers, the lustres romp
through your virginal solitudes.

Pictures crowd you at times. A few
seem to be taken right within you,
shyly to others you wave adieu.

There, though, the fairest will always be,
till through to her lips withheld continue
Narcissus, released into lucency.²⁷

In White Narcissus, too, self-absorption seems to be the condition on
which Narcissus -- Richard Milne (through his second self, Ada Lethen)
is finally released into "lucency."

White Narcissus is not a realistic novel. It is contrived,
melodramatic and an experiment, whether intentionally so or not, in
closed form. It is a novel which portrays subjective reality as well as
making a statement about the value of subjectivity and irrationality
in the creative process. Unrealistic in the conventional sense, it is a
considerable attempt to use melodrama in order to explore and portray
non-objective realism, a significant aspect of the modern vision.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Philip Child, Introduction to White Narcissus, by Raymond Knister (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 1962), pp. 11-12.

²Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940," Literary History of Canada, 1st ed., p. 685.

³Dorothy Livesay, "Knister's Stories," Canadian Literature, No. 62 (Autumn 1974), p. 79.

⁴Five of these early stories are collected in Michael Gnarowski, ed. and intro., Selected Short Stories of Raymond Knister (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1972).

⁵Child, Introduction to White Narcissus, p. 12 and Dorothy Livesay, ed. and "Memoir," The Collected Poems of Raymond Knister (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), p. xxix.

⁶Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940," 1st ed., Literary History of Canada, p. 685.

⁷Child, Introduction to White Narcissus, p. 12.

⁸John Moss, Patterns of Isolation in English-Canadian Fiction (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 110.

⁹Two critics have suggested that White Narcissus might be read in non-realistic terms, as a symbolic novel, although neither actually analyzes the novel this way. Pacey connects Knister's work to the symbolic elements in the work of American midwestern writers, like Dreiser, Anderson, and Lewis. Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, rev. ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1961), pp. 204-205. And Michael Gnarowski, introducing his collection of Knister's short stories, argues for a mythological approach to Knister's works. His argument is basically historical, for he assumes that as a product of the twenties Knister would have had to be aware of (and imaginatively engaged with) the general literary interest in myth as reflected in, for example, Frazer's The Golden Bough, Weston's From Ritual to Romance, and Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns. Gnarowski, intro. to Selected Short Stories of Raymond Knister, p. 12.

¹⁰Raymond Knister, "Canadian Literati," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 4, No. 2 (1975), 167.

¹¹Raymond Knister, ed. and intro., Canadian Short Stories (Toronto: Macmillan, 1928), pp. xii-xiv.

¹²Child, Introduction to White Narcissus, p. 10. Child, however, weakens his point by insisting nonetheless that the story is "more Ada's" than Richard's.

¹³Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 27.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶Raymond Knister, White Narcissus (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 19. All further references to the novel will be to this edition and page numbers will be bracketed within my text.

¹⁷There are occasions where the narrator does very slightly intrude (see p. 46, p. 78). I shall argue later that these intrusions have a positive and perhaps deliberate effect.

¹⁸C. F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972). The phenomenon of the second self, which recurs in each of the novels studied here, is discussed at greater length in my conclusion, where it is dealt with in relation to twentieth-century fiction in general and as a melodramatic convention in particular.

¹⁹Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

²⁰Leo Kennedy, for example, states that White Narcissus fails to embody a "significant theme" or to develop the central symbol of the narcissus. Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," Canadian Forum, 12 (September, 1932), 466.

²¹Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel, p. 82.

²²Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: New American Library, 1953), p. 88.

²³ Interestingly, the Oxford English Dictionary connects the narcissus with numbness and lethargy and narcotic effect -- one of the associations Knister has meant to suggest, surely, given the name "Lethen" and particularly "Ada Lethen" or "aid-to-oblivion." Also, Keppler's observation that the reflection Narcissus sees in the pool may be that of his second self is germane here:

Let us return for a moment to the Narcissus legend. . . .
 So long as we consider the face that enchants the young man to be only the reflection of his own it is not, for modern readers at least, a true second self, for it lacks the element of objectivity that is one-half this figure's reality. But in a later version of the same legend, that reported by Pausanias, the face that gazes up at the down-gazing Narcissus, though the exact replica of his own, is not his own, but that of his recently-deceased twin sister."

Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self, pp. 147-148.

²⁴ Robin Magowan, "Orpheus and Narcissus: Some Thoughts on Modern Pastoral," Prose (New York), 6 (1973), 157-168.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁶ Dorothy Livesay, "Memoir," in The Collected Poems of Raymond Knister, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

²⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Sonnets to Orpheus," in Selected Works, trans. J. B. Leishman (New York: New Directions, 1967), II, 270.

III

WILD GEESE: "SEEKING THROUGH SOLITUDE"

For the most part, critics have interpreted Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925) as a realistic novel notable for its detailed treatment of farm life and its explicit portrayal of sexual passion and subsequent pregnancy in a young farm girl. Carlyle King, in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Wild Geese, is the dean of such critics. He defines the novel as a healthy deviation from the "Sunshine School of Canadian fiction" (as he classifies writers like L. M. Montgomery, Ralph Connor and Robert Stead), noting the earthiness of Wild Geese:

In a novel of the Sunshine School, human nature is fundamentally noble and Rotarian morality always triumphs. The main characters are basically nice people. Nobody ever suffers long or gets really hurt or says "damn." . . . This cheerful and dishonest tradition obviously was of no use to a novelist who proposed to make the chief female character in her book a seventeen-year-old girl, as wild as a broncho and as vivid as a tigress, who runs into a clearing in the bush, strips off all her clothes, and presses her breasts against the good earth. Later on, Judith throws a hatchet at her father's head, uses the language of the barnyard in rebuking her elder sister, and glories in the fact that she carries her lover's child within her body. . . . These things do not happen in a well brought up Canadian novel.¹

Above all, King admires the authenticity of the novel, saying that Ostenso

catches the feeling and flavour of a pioneering farm community, and she pictures with sympathetic understanding the customs and the superstitions, the crudities and the kindnesses, of the

Icelandic, the Hungarian, and the other new settlers. She neither magnifies nor denigrates a way of life on the farm that was usual in Western Canada a generation ago but has now largely changed; she does not romanticize, she represents.²

Other critics concur in praising Ostenso's use of authentic details of prairie life, which is to say her realism. As early as 1926, W. E. MacLellan writes:

Truthfulness is the distinguishing characteristic of the book. There is not an incident in it which might not have happened in the surroundings, not a character introduced which might not have been a logical product or part of the conditions.³

More recently, S. G. Mullins, in an article in Culture (1962), has called the novel a "herald of the realistic prose fiction of Grove and Callaghan."⁴ Similarly Marion Smith places the novel among contemporary "realistic treatments" of the struggle of rural man against the land, like Glasgow's Barren Ground (1925) and Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth (1927): she calls Ostenso's novel "a shatterer of illusions about the romantic West."⁵

Most critics, moreover, having praised the realistic or plausible elements in Wild Geese, deplore its less plausible, more melodramatic qualities, particularly its dependence on coincidence and extraordinary characters. Roy W. Meyer, judging Wild Geese as a "Middle Western farm novel," cites Ostenso's failure to render authentic farm figures, and calls the novel a "somewhat implausible story of brutal paternal domination."⁶ Thomas Saunders, introducing Stead's Grain, praises the movement toward "more authentic realism" in Ostenso's work, noting that her "attempt to present life as it is" caused great furor in 1925.⁷ But he also implies that the character of Caleb Gare is not "ordinary

enough to be truly credible as Stead's characters are."⁸ Marion Smith feels the novel has been "robbed of much of its impact" by its implausible character motivation:

Accidental illegitimacy no longer seems sufficient motivation for the servitude and suffering endured by Caleb Gare's wife and children. Caleb himself, in comparison with any number of concentration camp commanders for example, seems not so much an emanation of primal evil as a bush-league bully hoist with his own petard. The brooding atmosphere of frustration and death so effectively evoked and consistently maintained suffers, in the absence of adequate and clearly-defined motivation, from a melodramatic aura of soap-opera before soap-opera.⁹

And Carlyle King, while praising Ostenso's eye for detail and knowledge of seasonal farm work,¹⁰ criticizes as "weaknesses" three elements which affect the credibility of the novel -- the inconsistent point of view, a "contrived" (i.e., coincidental) plot and its melodramatic conclusion.¹¹

At the same time, however, even the critics who apply only realistic criteria to the novel would appear to admit that much of the power of the novel derives from its so-called melodramatic character. King, for example, concedes that the conclusion of Wild Geese, despite its "elements of melodrama," "provides the book with its most exciting and powerfully written scene as Caleb fights fire with demoniacal fury to save his field of flax and sinks slowly into the muskeg. . . ."¹² Marion Smith acknowledges that the reader's attention is held in spite of "the excessively poetic justice of its dénouement."¹³ Another critic, Grant Overton, notes that in Caleb Gare Martha Ostenso "has drawn a villain of really towering order, even for fiction."¹⁴

It is not surprising, then, that several recent studies of Martha Ostenso have abandoned realistic criteria as a starting point and

have begun to examine her works in the context of romanticism. Stanley C. Stanko, in a 1968 thesis, writes of Ostenso's novels:

There are . . . elements of literary romanticism in the works: the exploration of consciousness; of unconsciousness in its manifestations of guilt and desire; the role of external nature in human life; the exploration of loneliness, social ostracism; the power of society and history in shaping the human personality; and a very complex exploration of the quest theme.¹⁵

He takes exception to King's blanket condemnation of sentimental and melodramatic elements in fiction, arguing that within the framework of a romantic novel these may be "absolutely essential."¹⁶ Margot Northey refers to Wild Geese as "an example of the prairie novel which is ostensibly realistic and sociological, but which emerges with demonstrably gothic qualities."¹⁷ Similarly, Clara Thomas, in a 1973 publication, applies the word "grotesque" to Caleb Gare, using the term as a means of linking Ostenso to novelists like Anderson and Hawthorne:

Martha Ostenso's vision comprehended the physical and psychological demands that a harsh land and a hard life make on men and women. Her imagination did not move toward the heroic, but rather toward the grotesque, an expression of her perception that a situation requiring an enormous effort of will and endurance would often lead, not to an almost super-human being, but to an inhuman one.¹⁸

As Thomas and Stanko suggest, the realistic approach to Wild Geese may be too limited. A more fruitful assumption, especially given Ostenso's exposure to contemporary American writing and criticism during her study at Columbia in 1921-22, is that Ostenso was drawing upon a much broader set of conventions. Wild Geese appears to be a twentieth-century version of the romantic quest for identity, her rural melodrama serving as a metaphor for, or exploration of, a universal theme, the need for integration of the self.

Like White Narcissus, Wild Geese is a more complex novel than most critics have acknowledged. Without denying the importance of the realistic or literal level, which critics have explored to some extent, it is quite possible to identify other levels, which operate simultaneously in this novel and employ melodramatic effects as a means of exploring deeper levels of human experience -- those which underlie the surface of everyday, "real" life.

In its structure, Wild Geese is a remarkably balanced novel. The story is framed by the arrival and departure of Lind Archer, the school teacher who boards with the Gare family for a single term. Almost simultaneous with her arrival is Mark Jordan's. He, like Lind, is from the city and has taken a temporary job as a labourer on the Klovacz farm. The love story of Mark and Lind frames the rest of the novel, and in the last chapter they leave for the city and marriage, but the development of their love affair runs through the novel, and it is significant that their story is parallel to and interacts with the love affair between Judith Gare and Sven Sandbo.

Within the framework provided by the arrival and departure of Lind Archer is another structure, a sort of scaffolding formed by the progression of the seasons. The northward movement of the wild geese in April (Chapter 1) and their southward movement in October (Chapter 23) span this seasonal sequence. Within that framework the middle chapter of the book (Chapter 12) is set in the middle month of the seven portrayed, July. Farm labour punctuates the months, with the sowing of seed in April, sheep-shearing in May, flowering of the flax in June, haying in late July and August, and harvest in September.

Significantly, the development of the plot imitates or follows this farming cycle. In the early chapters of the novel, covering April through June, much seed is sown. Caleb sows and tends his flax and vows to keep Judith in line, for she is the only member of the family strong enough to destroy his hold on family and farm. Lind sows the seed of rebellion in Judith, inspires in Martin a sense of beauty in nature, encourages Ellen to develop her music and arouses in Amelia memories of her own town-spent youth. In the second half of the book, from August through October, the seed is harvested. Lind has some measure of success, liberating Judith, and increasing Amelia's resistance to Caleb. Although Martin and Ellen remain too weak to defy Caleb actively, without Judith's submission to him Caleb's tyranny over the family is broken. Caleb's own "harvest" is a failure: not only does Judith escape, but his magnificent flax crop is destroyed by fire, and in trying to save it at any cost Caleb pays the price of his own life.

An "outer" plot, then, involving Lind Archer's entry into and departure from Oeland, frames the inner story of her experiences while she is a boarder at the Gare farm. This "inner" plot parallels in its own development the progression of the seasons in a harsh northern community and turns upon a fundamental opposition between Caleb Gare, a brutal tyrant, and Lind Archer, the intruding "soft-eyed chit" whom he might have known "would not keep her place."¹⁹

The middle chapter, moreover, which (like the mid-chapter of Callaghan's A Broken Journey) focusses upon a different set of characters, serves as a foil to or counterpart to Lind's own mission in Oeland. In Chapter 12, Malcolm, a half-breed who seems to represent another

alternative to life on the Gare farm, offers to marry Ellen, allowing her to escape not to the city (as Lind arranges for Judith) but to the wilderness where he believes Ellen would live simply but with dignity and love. It is a chapter which reinforces the importance of Lind's task, and because it is a failed attempt to release a daughter of Caleb Gare, emphasizes the difficulty of her own quest on Judith's behalf.

The antagonism between Caleb and Lind, then, is implicit in the formal aspects of the novel. It is fundamental as well to three separate levels on which the novel can be read -- the literal, the mythic and the psychological.

On the literal level, the plot of Wild Geese is simple and sentimental, for Lind Archer's initially frightening journey to a physical and spiritual hinterland is concluded very neatly by the death of a villain and the marriages of not one but two worthy "heroines" to suitable young men.

As the structure of the novel suggests, beginning and ending with Lind Archer's arrival in and departure from Oeland, it is the story of a school teacher's one-term visit to a northern farming settlement, and concentrates on the teacher's influence on the family she visits and the effect of the family on her. During her stay Lind's exposure to life on the Gare farm educates her (and this is ironical for she is supposed to be the educator in the community) about the harsh realities of farm life. But it also educates her into the nature of evil, by exposing her to the tyranny of Caleb Gare. Lind's resolution to release the Gare children, or at least Judith whose desire for escape is so great, is a direct response to the nature of the evil in Caleb

Gare, for his malevolent will and quest for power involve a perversion of family life, while love and marriage embody her own highest ideals.

Although such a story and such attitudes seem conventional, even trite, it is to Ostenso's credit that in Wild Geese she does explore through Lind Archer's situation a profound and moving theme which is common to much twentieth-century fiction, the problem of man's essential loneliness in face of a hostile or indifferent universe.

In Wild Geese the members of the Gare household are all portrayed as essentially lonely and alienated. The text is explicit:

The Teacher was lonely, and even more conscious of the stark loneliness of Amelia, of Judith, of Ellen and Martin, each within himself. Work did not destroy the loneliness; work was only a fog in which they moved so that they might not see the loneliness of each other. (p. 33)

So is their second visitor from the outside world, Mark Jordan, a lonely man, as is established in his first "scene" in the novel:

As he rode along, a mood of loneliness overtook him -- the same cold feeling of belonging nowhere that he had had at night when he was a little boy, after the priest had put the light out and he lay listening to the rain on the glass of the window. (p. 49)

The multiple point of view employed in the novel also emphasizes the isolation of characters and their inability ever really to understand one another. And this fundamental loneliness, so central to the novel, is caught as well in the sound of the wild geese of the title. Lind associates them with alienation: "Their cry smote upon the heart like the loneliness of the universe. . . ." (p. 47). Mark Jordan arrives at the same conclusion independently: "'Wild geese,' he said aloud. 'They sound as if they know something about it -- something about being alone'" (p. 49).

The basic antagonism in the novel between Lind Archer and Caleb Gare is expressed, moreover, in their opposing attitudes toward the elemental fact that alienation is at the heart of the human condition. Each man must deal with this problem. Caleb's position is evident in his symbolic confrontation with Mark Jordan, wherein Caleb denies man's need for love or altruism:

Mark leaned his elbow upon a fence post and looked down at him. "Is there anything in the world you care for as much as for yourself, I wonder, Caleb Gare?" he asked curiously.

"Eh? What is there worth caring about? Nobody helps me but myself -- what else should I care about? What do you care about, except yourself? What does anybody care about? Every man for himself, that's what I say. Nothing matters to me but myself." (p. 193)

Because no man can live entirely alone, however, Caleb turns to material things. To him the flax crop is a surrogate, specifically for Amelia, whose soul he has never possessed, but generally for the human contact he has always lacked:

Caleb would stand for long moments outside the fence beside the flax. Then he would turn quickly to see that no one was looking. He would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress -- more intimate than any he had ever given to woman. (p. 119)

Caleb's elevation of a material entity, his endowing it with a "transcendental power" and seeing it as "more exacting, even, than an invisible God" (p. 119) is most significant, for as he himself realizes, it means he has "given his soul to the flax" (p. 237) in a travesty of the true values to which a soul ought to aspire.

Lind Archer, on the other hand, values human love as the proper solution to man's essential alienation. The bleakness of farm life on

the northern frontier merely dramatizes the need for union and communion among men on earth. Lind's solution appears to depend on sexual love, on the union of male and female elements which she and Mark represent and foster, in turn, in Judith and Sven. But there is much in the novel which suggests that such "mating" is only an instrument for, or a step toward, the real answer to man's needs, constructing a family unit.

Scattered throughout Wild Geese are examples of individuals who inhabit the same harsh landscape as the Gares do, but inhabit it serenely: in each case, though, the individual is part of a successful family unit. Fusi Aronson, who in his goodness and strength is Caleb's opposite as well as his nemesis, is consistently motivated by his loyalty toward his brothers -- the one whose reputation Caleb threatens to ruin and the others who died because Caleb refused them shelter. The Klovacz family exhibits community, generosity and dignity even in the face of Anton's death, in contrast to the Gares' material and spiritual impoverishment. Above all the Bjarnassons are a model of such values: in their communality as a family they have erected a strong stone house, warm homely artifacts and a family mythology, all of which sustain them in the harshest of places at the harshest of times.

Wild Geese, then, explores the theme of man's essential loneliness and pits characters with opposing solutions to it against one another. The demise of Caleb Gare in the muskeg which had always been a bane to him is melodramatic, but it is also intensely symbolic of the theme which permeates the novel on this literal level: one who lives alone perishes alone; on the other hand, those who have striven to unite in love and serve one another's needs -- like Lind and Mark, Lind and Judith, and

Judith and Sven -- are rewarded by escape from their unhappy existence, specifically by escape into a sustaining family unit.

On a second level, which might be called the mythic, it can be argued that the visit of Lind Archer to Oeland in Wild Geese is a journey into a kind of underworld. It is a journey that echoes and draws upon the classical myth of Persephone, a story of loss and retrieval. Much about the structure and the setting of the novel suggests that Oeland is, within the context of Lind Archer's journey, a kind of underworld. In the first place Ostenso employs specific techniques which suggest that Lind's own world and the world that the Gares inhabit are mutually exclusive and that it is difficult to "cross" from one to the other. For example, she frequently isolates the two outsiders from the landscape and illuminates them in their isolation. After their dinner together at the Klovacz farm, as Mark rides with Lind "over the miles" that have separated them from the Gare farm, the rain stops and a star emerges from the clouds as if to illuminate their way (p. 66). Similarly, in the eighth chapter, after another meeting, a fortuitous sort of moonlight isolates them from the dark landscape:

Lind and Mark walked down the wood road, leading their horses. Above the darkening cedars the moon rose, and the night opened upon them like a tender, gloomed flower. They moved together involuntarily. Lind looked up and saw his face clear and intent upon her in the ashy light. His absorption was gone now. He was all human and very near to her. They stood still in the road and looked at each other. The moonlight seemed to form a globe over them, locking out every alien sound. (p. 108)

The starlight and the moonlight suggest somehow that Lind and Mark are creatures from a more benevolent world, and the suggestion is reinforced by Ostenso's tendency to elevate these figures against the landscape:

at one point Lind and Mark gaze down upon a colony of ants, a "tiny world of intense life" (p. 128) and the situation seems analogous to their constant observation of and commentary on the life of the Gares; in fact, later, in a parallel situation, they stand upon a ridge, the highest elevation at Oeland, and speak of the serenity of the land compared with the ignobility of man (presumably men like Caleb Gare) in this rural world (p. 195).

By frequently distancing Lind Archer from the Gares and elevating her above the inhabitants of Oeland, Ostenso implies that Lind's journey to this dark centre of the continental interior is a descent. In fact, at the point when Lind feels most threatened and most vulnerable, she and Mark are placed, symbolically, below the level of the landscape as they traverse the dried lake bottom, "the hollow where the lake had been" (p. 219).

In addition, the "arrangement" of the setting in the novel implies that Lind has descended into a sort of underworld. In an article called "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese," Robert Lawrence constructs a map of the area in which the novel is set.²⁰ Lawrence's intention is to demonstrate similarities between the fictional Oeland and the area of Hayland, Manitoba, where Ostenso actually taught school. There is a great deal of correspondence. But what is striking about his diagram of the Oeland region is that Gare's farm is at the centre of the farms shown, flanked on one side by the Thorvaldson farm and on the other by that of the Sandbos. Surrounding this core and at some distance from it are the Bjarnasson, Klovacz and Aronson farms. The arrangement, then, is circular with the most evil

figure, Caleb, at its heart: the unpleasant figures of Thorvaldson (a mean and lecherous man) and the ghost of Ludvig Sandbo (with his frightening black shoe-button eyes) are located just beyond his land; "good" figures, in turn, whose lives are difficult but who are not themselves malevolent, encircle these three. This circular construction, taken in combination with the impression of descent that generally surrounds Lind's journey in Wild Geese, tends to suggest a vortex-like movement, a downward pull towards hell. Indeed, the arrangement of the setting also suggests levels or circles of hell,²¹ and this is reinforced by the other aspect of setting, time, which in this case involves the summer season. In Oeland summer is so intensely hot and work-laden that the labourers at its centre, the Gare family, become apathetic, heavy-limbed, akin to the spiritless shades that inhabit the underworld of classical myth.

Lind herself is clearly aware of her temporary sojourn in a separate world far removed from the other place which she considers to be the "real world." Thus before she meets Mark she is said to have longed "for someone of her own world to talk with" (p. 38). When she does meet him, she tells Mark he is the first "real" human being she has seen in over a month (p. 63). After he begins to court her she resolves to keep him "in another world, so to speak" separate from the Gares, with the possible exception of Judith, who does not belong there anyway (p. 77). Mark agrees that the worlds are separate and when Lind feels frightened by Caleb's implacability (and indeed by the harshness of the land itself) Mark comforts her with the reminder that they will be "away" soon and then this life will seem "like a dream" (p. 219). Frequently,

throughout the novel, they speak of leaving for the "outside" in the fall (as on p. 175).

Not only does Lind perceive the Gare world as different from her own but also as truly demonic in its lack of humanity. From the first chapter she expresses fear of the place:

A feeling of apprehension was growing upon Lind. The high romance which had attended her setting out for this isolated spot in the north country was woefully deserting her. She had never before looked upon the naked image of hate. Here it was in the eyes of a seventeen-year-old girl. (p. 13)

For Lind the harshness of life on this farm is crystallized in an image which suggests the indifference of the north to man:

. . . it was still cold and raw. The ruts of the cow pen, since there had been no rain or snow for weeks, were hard as cement, and reminded Lind of the relief maps children made at school. The deep tracks of the cattle were almost indistinguishable from the human tracks intermingled with them. The cold of winter had fixed them there and only the rains of spring would wash them away. (p. 23)

But when spring arrives it is clear that summer will not thaw out a people whose life is so influenced by the harsh land that the "intolerance of the earth" seems to have crept into the "very souls" of the populace (p. 104). And after a summer whose effect on those working the land is to render them zombies, heavy-eyed, spiritless, capable of violence at best (as in Judith's case), Lind's conviction that this is a perverse and evil world increases: she notes that superstition is rampant (Mrs. Sandbo reports a child has been born with the head of a calf), that Judith's beauty is "wild" in the "unnatural glamour" of the storm (pp. 129-130), and that loons cry out at night, predicting disaster. She tells Mark the place is "sinister" (p. 169) and as they

walk Caleb's land toward the end of the novel her apprehensions reach a climax:

Southward, across the hollow where the lake had been, lay Caleb Gare's flax field. From where they stood, Lind and Mark could see him going away from the field, his squat body leaning forward toward the earth, and outlined against the sky.

"Mark," Lind murmured, taking his hand, "he frightens me." (p. 219)

At the centre of Lind's perception of the farm as demonic is her perception of Caleb as a monster, a demon, a Satan. Clara Thomas has portrayed Gare as a sub-human figure:

Caleb's obsession pushes him farther and farther from his own humanity; he is a menacing, demonic and tortured figure, blighting all the lives around him and destroying his own. His children are crippled into a death-in-life, except for Judith, who alone has the strength of spirit to fight for her right to live her life.²²

Certainly Lind perceives Caleb in melodramatic terms, as satanic, from the start. In her first impression she notes Caleb's unnatural, disproportionate figure, his pointed beard, his black brows and his unnaturally soft voice (p. 13). She sees him as a "fakir," his head wreathed in blue smoke (p. 15). Later she calls him a satyr (p. 34) and refers to his monstrosity (p. 41), although she believes him too cowardly to be a real devil figure (p. 77). From the beginning she knows she will come to fear Caleb and imagines his secret visions to be "demonical" (p. 15). Fearing his sinister control over Amelia and his determination to break Judith, she also senses that he wants to bring "something ominous" directly upon Mark and herself (p. 185).

For his part, Caleb Gare recognizes Lind from the start as a

challenge, a woman who will not keep her place. The antagonism between them is direct and clear and comes to centre on the daughter Judith, whose strength and will are like Caleb's, but whose sensitivity and beauty (as well as her misery) convince Lind that she does not belong in this world.

Lind's attitude toward Judith is complex. She is at first moved by the girl's "vigorous beauty," which has a masculine quality about it:

Lind Archer saw her against the dim light of the lantern that hung by the kitchen door. She had a great, defiant body, her chest high and broad as a boy's; her hair was wild-locked and black and shone on top of her head with a bluish luster; her eyes were in sullen repose now, long and narrow; her lips were rich and drooped at the corners. She wore overalls and a heavy sweater, and stood squarely on her feet, as if prepared to take or give a blow. (p. 11)

But at the same time Lind tends to see in Judith feminine qualities apparently derived from her mother. Lind sees Amelia as a person somehow apart from this rural environment, as an outsider in other words:

Amelia was fifty and was beginning to put on flesh, but she bore herself with a dignified reserve that seemed almost a part of her physical being, so that the grace which was hers in youth still clung to her. She seemed preposterously ill-fitted to her environment. Lind was filled with pity as she watched her. . . . Amelia must surely have been worthy of a better lot. (p. 16)

Thus, later, when Lind begins to admire the more sensitive qualities in Judith, she becomes convinced that the girl is essentially her mother's daughter, that the "certain fineness of mind" in Judith came less from her contact with the seasonal teachers at Oeland than "from a deep native consciousness drawn from Amelia" (p. 26).

The point is an important one, for if Ostenso has imbued Oeland

with the qualities of an underworld and if she has arranged for an outsider to "rescue" a girl from that underworld, Wild Geese has overtones of the Persephone myth. Obviously the "first" Persephone, in this case, was Amelia, captured and held by the Pluto-like figure of Caleb Gare,²³ all because of an act of youthful folly. But if Amelia cannot be rescued, or cannot be salvaged after so long a time, Judith, who is truly her mother's daughter (even to the extent of also being caught in an accidental pregnancy), is a suitable surrogate. Indeed, ultimately Judith's escape is made possible by Amelia, whose decision to support her daughter's flight to freedom is caused by the mother's realization of the affinity between them: "There was a raging tumult in her ears. Mark Jordan would know now . . . but another young life would not be ruined as hers had been. . . ." (p. 226).

The role of fate in the resolution of the novel is not surprising, given its mythological foundation. In the classical myth it is fate in the form of Jove which decides that the imprisonment of Persephone should end, fate which selects and dispatches a messenger to the underworld to rescue the prisoner, and fate which decrees that the girl shall be released in spite of Pluto's objections. The parallels with Wild Geese are significant. It is fate which brings Lind Archer to Oeland, as Mark observes (p. 65). It is fate that she should come to a farm where the "prisoner" is a girl with whom she can readily identify. And it is fate which decrees inevitably that Caleb must release Judith, despite his objections -- fate in the form of the fire which distracts Caleb at the moment of Judith's flight and ultimately exacts from him the price of his life. That Caleb is sucked into the earth at his death

seems most appropriate, given his Pluto-like role in the novel.

In the classical myth, of course, there is some compromise, for Persephone is bound to return to the underworld for a portion of each year. Wild Geese offers a parallel here, too, in the recognition that both Lind and Judith will never be entirely free of their "underworld" experience. Of the classical myth Edith Hamilton writes that:

all the while Persephone knew how brief that beauty was; fruits, flowers, leaves, all the fair growth of earth, must end with the coming of the cold and pass like herself into the power of death. After the lord of the dark world below carried her away she was never again the gay young creature who had played in the flowery meadow without a thought of care or trouble. She did indeed rise from the dead every spring, but she brought with her the memory of where she had come from; with all her bright beauty there was something strange and awesome about her.²⁴

In Wild Geese, Judith prophesies that the inhabitants of her world will never know total freedom, for they are all ultimately "rooted" to the land that has held them so long (p. 181). The emphasis in the novel on the passage of seasons and the inevitably cyclical nature of farming tends to underscore her pessimism and make her return to Oeland seem inevitable. It appears that even Lind has been altered from the gay, amused creature she was on arriving: her last gesture in leaving Oeland is a shiver, despite the fact that Caleb Gare is dead and she is leaving with a lover.

On the mythological level, then, the Persephone myth is powerfully evoked in Wild Geese and serves to intensify the conflict between Lind Archer and Caleb Gare and to create empathy for the unfortunate Amelia and her daughter, Judith, who is so unjustly made heir to the "sins" of her mother. To some extent this mythological

framework also justifies certain melodramatic effects in the novel. Certainly it accounts for the many references to Caleb Gare as demonic and explains the apparently irrational submissiveness of Amelia to her husband. It also justifies the coincidental, so-called implausible ending by introducing the concept of an intentional "Fate." But, equally important, this level, which explores Lind Archer's penetration into an underworld, a hell of sorts, provides the underpinnings for a third significant level of meaning, the psychological.

On a third level, Wild Geese may be seen to involve another sort of journey and another sort of underworld -- a descent into the darker recesses of human nature. If on the literal level Lind explores the nature of evil, and on the mythic level she strives to free an imprisoned soul, on this the third level she may be said to contend with irrationality in the form of one figure who is a counterpart to her own civilized rationality and another figure who is a dark and sensual alter ego, from whom she learns much about the primitive resources of the human spirit.

In Oeland Lind discovers in Caleb Gare a counterpart to her own civilized sense of order, and initially she is apparently quite fascinated with him. She observes his quirky physical appearance and his curious relationship with the land (when walking he is not exactly vertical but bends slightly toward the earth [p. 18]). She tends to imagine him in exotic terms, as a satyr or a fakir wreathed in smoke. Her attitude toward his tricks, his gamesmanship, is amusement, as when he elevates Skuli Erickson at her expense (p. 14) or when he includes her in his five o'clock breakfast rule (p. 22).

Her amused fascination with Caleb, however, quickly changes to apprehension when she realizes the nature and scope of his tyranny, that he intends to order all experience on the farm in such a way that he can firmly control and exploit the lives of the entire family:

Lind felt that the rigid routine of the farm was imposed by Caleb to keep anything out of the ordinary from happening. And nothing happened; nothing happened. Day in and day out, not a soul came to the Gare farm; not a soul left it, not even to visit the Sandbos, two miles or less away. And Caleb went about with the fixed, unreadable face of an old satyr, superficially indifferent to what went on, unconscious of those about him; underneath, holding taut the reins of power, alert, jealous of every gesture in the life within which he moved and governed. (p. 34)

Similarly when Caleb -- having denied his entire family (except Charlie) permission to attend Easter church services -- forces everyone to listen to his retelling the sermon with his own interpretation upon the text, Lind finds his imposition upon them truly "monstrous" (p. 41). In her first conversation with Mark Jordan, in fact, Lind indicts Caleb for this same quality, speaking of "the rancour of Caleb Gare and the terrible oppression in his household" (p. 66).

It is significant that Lind should locate Caleb's "monstrousness" in his determination to order the universe toward his own ends. For Lind had come to Oeland as a person fully committed to the values of order and civilization. As a teacher her mission would be to bring the civilized "culture" of the city to this isolated northern outpost. Within hours of her arrival, for example, she is attempting to alter the lives of the "natives": she presses city fashions on Judith in the form of a string of amber beads, city baubles that Judith knows are unsuited to a girl who cleans stables. Throughout the novel she dresses Judith's hair, perfumes

her, and even sews dainty underthings for her. Similarly she urges upon the people of Oeland greater attention to the beauty of nature, bringing pussy willows into the Gare house on Easter Sunday (p. 36) and urging Ellen and Martin to listen to the catbird song (p. 50). She also promotes music in the Gare household, exposing Judith to music at Mark Jordan's dinner party and urging Ellen to develop her musical talent. In a similar vein, Lind's first assignment to her students is to paint pictures for the schoolroom wall (p. 25).

Lind's passion for the values of urban civilization seems to be based upon a more fundamental passion, moreover, for calm and rational order. The trait is typified by Lind's attitude toward schooling and her students: when she is able to bring "order out of chaos" with her small desk bell, when the children obey her, and when she "sees with relief" that she has "captivated" them, Lind is satisfied. Indeed the disorder which she perceives in the Gare family, where children are set against their father in a perversion of the natural order, is the greatest disappointment and the greatest threat to her aspirations: the "romance" which she had anticipated before coming to Oeland dissolves when she sees hate toward her father in the eyes of a girl (p. 13).

"Romance," then, or the ideal state, for Lind at the beginning of her quest involves a cool and rational ordering of the universe. Her opposition to Caleb Gare is rooted in her disgust for his type of order and it is significant that she attempts first to fight fire with fire, by replacing his manipulative tricks, his devices for ordering, with her own. She encourages the children's rebellion, plots Judith's liaisons with Sven, informs outsiders of Caleb's treatment of Judith, sews

costumes secretly for the jubilee, and plans Judith and Sven's elopement, interfering with Caleb to the end.

But at the same time there is some evidence that, whatever Lind's actions, her attitudes do alter through her experience, and that she is losing faith, to some extent, in reason as a solution to fundamental human problems. Certainly her confidence in her own power to thwart Caleb decreases as the novel progresses, just as her irrational fears (as of the omen of the loons) increase proportionately. An alteration is signalled also by her changing attitude toward the land itself. The contrast between her perception in the first chapter of the Sandbo place so overgrown with blossom that it would seem to be "hidden in a white nebula" (p. 28) and her perception in the last chapter of "stubble" and "short brown grass" and "black corpses" of trees (p. 238) is pronounced. But most significant is the change in Lind Archer which is signified by her curious relationship with Judith Gare, for she identifies more and more strongly with Judith as time goes on, and does so (one suspects) because of the girl's more irrational response to their situation.

Judith and Lind are, of course, opposites who are attracted to one another by that oppositeness. Lind is fair and Judith is dark; Lind is dainty and Judith large and strapping; Lind is educated and Judith is, literally, a farmhand. Indeed their oppositeness is attractive to one another. Judith is impressed by Lind as a "dainty" creature with "soft laughing eyes" who has come from "another world" and will go back there again (pp. 53-54). Lind, in turn, is struck by Judith's beauty, strength and passion: she repeatedly associates

the girl with animals, calling her a "centauress" (p. 16) watching her with fascination as Judith breaks a horse (p. 39), and later comparing Judith herself to a wild horse (p. 65); at one point she marvels at Judith's vivacity and calls her "the embryonic ecstasy of all life" (p. 33). In a significant statement Lind says that Judith has a "wisdom" that she herself lacks (p. 21).

There is much, then, to suggest that Judith complements Lind to an uncanny degree and that there exists indeed between Lind and Judith what Keppler calls a relationship between a first and second self.²⁵ Apparently Lind feels bound to the Gare farm because of this relationship: she feels she cannot be free until Judith is free to leave too. The first conversation between Lind and Mark makes this point, as Lind tells Mark how beautiful Judith is and how she would like "to know her better," and then goes on to tell Mark that she has resolved to stay, in spite of "the terrible oppression" of Gare's household (pp. 65-66).

Certainly Lind and Judith both complement and, in the course of the novel, complete one another. Judith is inspired by Lind. Aware that Lind's coming has somehow "sprung" a "secret lock" in her own being (p. 53), Judith comes to think of herself as belonging by nature to "another clear, brave world of true instincts" (p. 225). Sven, with his offer of a job in the city, becomes a way out of her dark existence, and it is not surprising that Judith at one time perceives Sven as "a god, out of space" who can take her "far away" where she can be "somebody else" (pp. 149-50). In fact Judith does become "someone else" in the course of the novel. At first she is portrayed as an entirely physical creature. Her passion for Sven Sandbo is explicitly physical,

for she is attracted to his "frank maleness" (p. 83) and passion for him consumes her like an "undercurrent of fire" (p. 90). But, when she has hurled the axe at Caleb and believes herself to be facing real imprisonment for her crime, Judith feels a different and greater sort of loneliness: "For the first time in her life, Judith felt a need of Sven that did not spring from passion" (p. 174); she feels that to have him sit beside her would be enough.

Lind Archer's transition is in the opposite direction. Her first meeting with Mark Jordan is an evening of conversation, rather detached, abstract conversation about the meaning of life and of their experience. As the novel progresses Lind moves into far more emotional and far less rational states of mind. Her love for Mark becomes more physical, for example, but even more striking is her transition from a detached, amused observer to an involved and fearful participant in the life of Oeland.

The movement of the two characters is thus each toward the polarity of the other, and it can be argued that the two do in fact merge on the symbolic level, or at the very least that each does experience the experience of the other. For Judith, the relationship with Lind brings not only physical liberty but contact with civilized values, notably the appreciation of art and artifice, the rational and ordering aspects of human experience. On the other hand Judith introduces Lind to the darker side of human nature -- sensuality, passion and violence. In linking herself to Judith, the civilized Lind may be said to be joining her rational nature to a primitive irrational one, thereby encountering unbridled passion in its healthier aspect,

symbolized by Judith's unleashed sensuality, and in its perverse aspect, the brutality in the relationship between Judith and her father. For Lind, it is a dark and frightening knowledge: Mark points out the very real danger that she may be "swallowed up" (p. 219) by the enormity of the experience.

At the same time there seems little doubt that the "merger" of the women has meant, for Lind Archer, a vital contact with the irrational aspects of her own female nature.²⁶ It seems significant that as Lind's experience broadens and she becomes less the sheltered, over-civilized teacher who had come to "order" the experience of her rural charges, her attitude toward the wild geese, a central symbol in the novel, changes as well. Lind's first reaction to the sound of the geese had been fear -- she had imagined them flying to some nether area beyond human warmth and human isolation. Their loneliness and their contact with remote, unknown aspects of the universe were at this point frightening to her. After Lind's visit to the Bjarnassons, however, she speaks of them less fearfully and with more wonder:

High above the souging of the wind under the great eaves of the stone house, Lind heard the trailing clangour of the wild geese. Their cry smote upon the heart like the loneliness of the universe . . . a magnificent seeking through solitude -- an endless quest. (p. 47)

Lind makes the association between the wild geese and some dark mystery which they must seek out alone, and she does so after visiting a home which cultivates not only brotherly feeling but also mystery, myth and faith, those irrational forces in the universe which Lind has apparently never before acknowledged. Then, as the book closes, Lind

repeats those phrases about the geese, not as questions but almost as facts, perhaps intending to summarize the knowledge she has gleaned at Oeland.

In this final conversation, Mark calls Caleb's death "strange" in that what he really cared for "claimed" him in the end. Lind shivers, despite Mark's embrace, and the novel concludes with the repeated references to "seeking through solitude" and "endless quest," as if to suggest that Lind Archer's journey, too, has been solitary in essence, has meant encountering a dark and insoluble mystery, and has triggered a set of responses that, for her, will never be over.

Wild Geese, then, is a cohesive novel in which the journey motif -- as Lind Archer penetrates then withdraws from an isolated northern community -- functions on at least three levels, and thereby explores three interdependent concerns or themes which are common to much twentieth-century literature -- the existential problem of man's essential isolation,²⁷ the quest motif which draws upon mythological sources, and the psychological drive for re-integration of the over-civilized, too-rational, one-sided personality with those irrational aspects of human identity which have tended to be repressed.

Such a reading helps to explain the strength and staying power of the novel, for it is a remarkably unified piece of work. Although she employs an omniscient point of view in Wild Geese, and some critics have complained of the jarring effects of this "multiple point of view," Ostenso has focussed the novel structurally on a primal, clear conflict: on each level the story is dominated by the struggle between a single, innocent protagonist and her singleminded, evil foe.

The novel is unified as well by its consistently melodramatic tone. The plot abounds with coincidence and depends heavily upon the unrealistic convention of an intervening, almost intentional Fate, as has been discussed here. But the dominant imagery of the novel is melodramatic as well, particularly in its emphasis on enclosed spaces and on flight.

Imprisonment is suggested throughout the novel in a variety of images such as the dark rooms of the Gare house at night, illuminated as they are only by an infernal red glow, or the stable which literally imprisons Judith after she hurls the axe at her father. It is suggested as well by the valley-like landscape which threatens to swallow Lind near the end of the novel. Perhaps the greatest of the imprisonment images is the repeated picture of Caleb's flax, which is to him a "vision" and a "dream" because it symbolizes for him his power over nature: he has forced its captive beauty from an earth unused to it and under normal, natural circumstances unable to sustain it.

The corollary of the imprisonment imagery in Wild Geese is the vision of freedom implied by a second prevalent motif, the image of flight. This is suggested by the wild geese of the title, of course, who soar above the landscape and are, however lonely their sound, at least more free than the inhabitants of the Gare farm. Flight is an unrealizable ideal in Wild Geese, for the dream of total freedom and unfettered escape is unrealizable for anyone, given the human condition. But it is an especially poignant vision for the farmer bound to a harsh northern land; the closest a farmer can come to flight is to stand vertical against a horizontal and down-pulling land. Hence Judith's

despairing vision of man on the prairie -- a "solitary" figure served "like a meagre offering from earth to heaven" upon the prairie, which is like nothing so much as an "empty platter" (p. 112). One measure of Caleb's villainy is that he is a farmer who cannot even stand vertical but is always pulled down, angled toward the land, incapable of flight even as a dream or vision. In contrast, Lind's concept of the hero in this landscape is realized in Fusi Aronson, who is described as "grand in his demeanour," lonely "as a towering mountain is lonely," but erect "as a solitary oak on the prairie" (p. 31).

Wild Geese, then, is a consistently melodramatic novel, dependent upon extreme characters, a contrived plot, a brooding atmosphere, and corresponding images of hateful imprisonment and hopeful flight. But it is also a novel which uses melodramatic effects to explore a significant theme and convey a powerful vision of the confrontation between good and evil against a harsh and remote landscape. Through her journey to an isolated northern farm Lind Archer confronts evil in the guise of Caleb Gare. In symbolic terms her experience in this vortex-like setting culminates in her descent into the more primitive layers of the human personality. It is an experience which serves as an antidote, perhaps, to her own over-civilized orientation, but it is an experience which leaves her (and the reader) somewhat shaken. The encounter with moral absolutes is the province of the melodramatic novel; Wild Geese explores this theme in justifiably melodramatic terms, and (to Ostenso's great credit) much control.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Carlyle King, Introduction to Wild Geese, by Martha Ostenso (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. v-vi.

²Ibid., p. ix.

³W. E. MacLellan, "Real 'Canadian Literature'," Dalhousie Review, 6 (Oct. 1926), 22.

⁴S. G. Mullins, "Some Remarks on Theme in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese," Culture, 23 (Dec. 1962), 359.

⁵Marion Smith, "Period Pieces," Canadian Literature, No. 10 (Autumn 1961), p. 74.

⁶Roy W. Meyer, The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 150-151.

⁷Thomas Saunders, Introduction to Grain, by Robert J. C. Stead (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. v.

⁸Ibid., p. viii.

⁹Smith, "Period Pieces," pp. 74-75.

¹⁰King, Introduction to Wild Geese, p. ix.

¹¹Ibid., p. viii.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Smith, "Period Pieces," p. 75.

¹⁴Grant Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels, rev. ed. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 249.

¹⁵ Stanley C. Stanko, "Image, Theme and Pattern in the Works of Martha Ostenso," M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1968, p. 12.

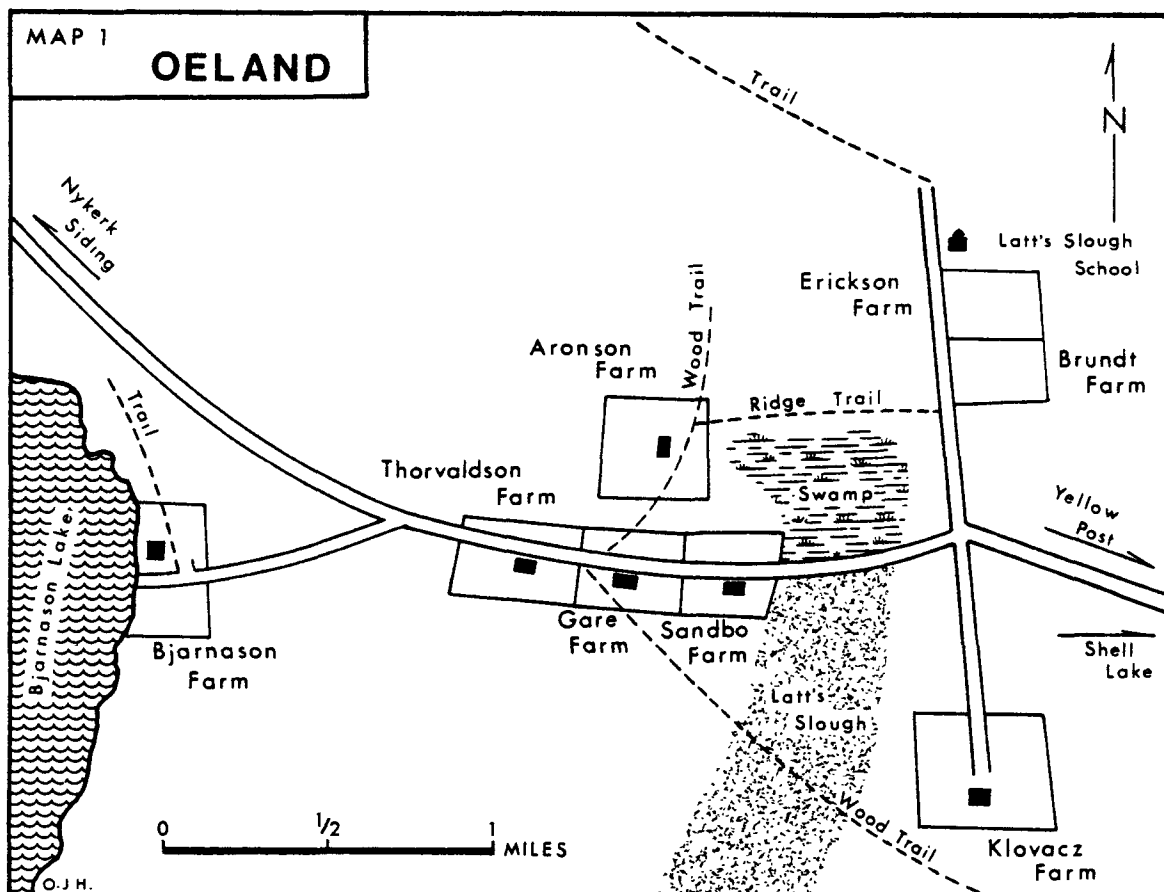
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁷ Margot Northey, The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 62.

¹⁸ Clara Thomas, "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," in Writers of the Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1973), p. 41.

¹⁹ Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 68. All subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and page numbers will be bracketed within my text.

²⁰ Robert G. Lawrence, "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese," Journal of Canadian Fiction, No. 16 (1976), pp. 108-114. Lawrence's map "Oeland" (p. 104) is reproduced here.



- ²¹G. M. Kirkwood, A Short Guide to Classical Mythology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959), p. 45. Kirkwood notes that in the underworld of classical myth there were distinct levels of hardship, ranging from the relative comforts of Elysium to the total misery and discomfort of Tartarus.
- ²²Clara Thomas, "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," pp. 48-49. Thomas argues, interestingly, that Ostenso's true mentors may have been Anderson (particularly his "Book of the Grotesque") and Hawthorne, whose Chillingworth is, she says, the great realization of the Grotesque in North American literature and the prototype for Caleb Gare himself.
- ²³Stanko, in his thesis, connects Caleb to the sub-human figure of Caliban, though he does not posit an underworld of any sort. Also, G. M. Kirkwood makes the point that the mythological figure of Pluto is an agricultural figure — the god of wealth, but for an agricultural society wealth is produce from the earth. This makes for an interesting parallel between Pluto and the farmer Caleb Gare in Wild Geese. G. M. Kirkwood, A Short Guide to Classical Mythology, p. 44.
- ²⁴Edith Hamilton, Mythology, p. 54.
- ²⁵Margot Northey refers to "lesbian undertones" in Wild Geese, but I feel that the attraction of Lind to Judith is more psychological than sexual and that the concept of the second self is a more satisfactory explanation of the bond between them. Northey, The Haunted Wilderness, p. 65.
- ²⁶Stanko makes an interesting point in this connection, theorizing that Judith and Lind together come to represent the figure of the "creative female" in Wild Geese, and that their "combination" in this way is balanced by the fact that Sven and Mark together comprise a "vital male" figure; in both the composite male and female figures there is a union of the passionate or irrational side and the intellectual or rational side of human nature. Stanko, "Image, Theme and Pattern in the Works of Martha Ostenso," p. 65.
- ²⁷Clara Thomas has stated that each of Ostenso's first two novels is a testimony to affirmative living which is essentially "existentialism in its most positive form," though Ostenso would "certainly not have been aware of the term, nor of the corroboration her convictions would ultimately assemble in philosophy and literature." Thomas, "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," p. 49.

IV

A BROKEN JOURNEY: "SHARP RAVINES STILL FILLED WITH MIST"

A Broken Journey (1932) is Morley Callaghan's third novel, following Strange Fugitive (1928) and It's Never Over (1930). Belonging to the same period is the novella, No Man's Meat, published in 1931 by Edward W. Titus' black manikin press.¹ In many ways the four works are of a piece: each is heavily dependent on symbol and symbolic repetition, is flat and laconic in style, yet is melodramatic in tone and turgid with unspoken emotion.

In other ways A Broken Journey stands apart from the first two, more realistic novels, for (like the less sustained No Man's Meat) it is a novel less of social commentary than of psychological insight and is a tightly structured novel in which plausibility has been abandoned in favour of a melodramatic portrayal of the quest for identity and peace of mind.

A Broken Journey is the story of the love affair between Marion Gibbons, a repressed and passionate young woman, and Peter Gould, a rather conservative young lawyer whose infatuation with her is fateful: when he and Marion temporarily part company, Peter takes up with another woman; when he decides to leave the other woman, Patricia, for whom he can have "no real feeling" because of his obsession with Marion,² Pat pushes him down a flight of stairs. Although Marion and Peter are

subsequently reconciled, Peter is at this point already a broken man, immobilized by an agonizing back injury, and their long-awaited journey to the Algoma highlands (undertaken at Marion's insistence) is apparently doomed from the start as an instrument for the lover's reconciliation and union.

On the whole critics have treated A Broken Journey harshly. Desmond Pacey, in Creative Writing in Canada, dismisses the novel in less than a sentence, calling it a "much weaker novel" than either Strange Fugitive or It's Never Over.³ George Woodcock calls it a "very undisciplined novel" and complains that the characters are "not clearly realized."⁴ Hugo McPherson criticizes a lack of "plausible action" in the novel.⁵ And William Walsh speaks of A Broken Journey, along with the other early novels, as "muddy in texture and melodramatic in action."⁶

Much of the opposition to A Broken Journey (as well as to Strange Fugitive and It's Never Over) appears to arise out of the assumption that Callaghan was at this time attempting to write realistic fiction with a naturalistic philosophical bias, and naturalism, indeed, is named as the villain of the piece in almost every case. Pacey, in his single brief comment, stresses Marion's belief that she is unable to love because of her mother's "wild life."⁷ Woodcock says that all of the characters "suffer tragedy because of the distortions of love which their own natures conspire with external circumstances to force upon them."⁸ Even Maxwell Perkins, Callaghan's editor for A Broken Journey, advised Callaghan to eliminate some of the "almost naturalistic details" that he found jarring.⁹ Recent Callaghan specialists like Brandon Conron and John David Ripley continue this tendency to see A Broken

Journey as part of a naturalistic phase. Conron calls the novel "realistic" but with "naturalistic elements" and sees Marion as a victim of her heritage;¹⁰ Ripley calls all three novels deterministic and pessimistic, akin to Dreiser, Zola and Hemingway, though they are "wanting" in comparison to the work of these writers.¹¹ Ripley goes so far as to argue that one of Morley Callaghan's first errors "was that of allowing himself to be too strongly influenced by American naturalism" before he was mature enough to benefit from it.¹²

At the same time critics find elements in A Broken Journey which are contrary to naturalism and (to their way of thinking) incompatible with the dominantly naturalistic tone of the novel. Woodcock says the novel is "packed with symbolic objects" and each example that he cites (such as unattainable mountain peaks, decaying roses, encroaching waterweeds) is tinged with the extravagance of romance;¹³ Conron says the novel revolves around "romantic" love that is "spoiled," and speaks of the "idyllic descriptive passages" about Algoma;¹⁴ Max Perkins speaks of "the glamour of this romance" and calls it a potential "tragic idyll;"¹⁵ in a 1932 review of A Broken Journey, Jonathon Daniels refers to the "sense that life is dark and futile" in conjunction with "a mysticism strangely compounded of blood ties, Roman Catholicism, and eroticism."¹⁶ Perhaps it is McPherson who is most explicit. He argues that "if the convention of Callaghan's fiction were Gothic or expressionistic, we would accept such implausibility without cavil," but because Callaghan's realm is "the objective environment" he ought to create in the novel a realistic, which is to say "empirically verifiable," world.¹⁷

The main difficulty, then, seems to be in the inability of critics to reconcile naturalistic and romantic elements in A Broken Journey; consequently the novel is condemned as disunified, as unsuccessfully hybrid. Such a reading of the novel seems unduly prescriptive. Perhaps the critic ought to begin not with the assumption that A Broken Journey is a naturalistic novel with intruding romantic elements but with the assumption that it is, more simply, a modern novel wherein attention must be paid to form and structure. Callaghan has himself emphasized (in an interview with Donald Cameron) his concern for the formal presentation of material, his perpetual desire to do something new, "to see something in a form and to get it together and so on, so that it will come out as something in itself, and it won't have been done before."¹⁸ If, as Callaghan's comment suggests, form is particularly significant in A Broken Journey, a place to begin analysis of this much maligned novel is with its formal elements, such as the identification of its protagonistic centre and examination of its structure.

In fact, the single protagonistic figure in A Broken Journey is Marion Gibbons and this is most significant, for it suggests that the novel is not only (and perhaps not essentially) a melodramatic love story whose focus is the disastrous affair between Marion and Peter. Rather, it is the story of a single person, Marion Gibbons, who seeks inner peace and a sense of integrity.

As Ostenso does in Wild Geese, Callaghan employs an omniscient narrator in A Broken Journey, a detached observer who reveals the inner thoughts and feelings of almost every character at some point, from main figures like Theresa, Peter and Hubert to rather minor figures like the

ship's doctor and the country doctor who visits Peter when he is ill. The method seems somewhat awkward to the modern reader (who is more used to "closed forms" of narration, to use Sharon Spencer's term),¹⁹ but the effect of the omniscient and multiple point of view in A Broken Journey is two-fold. First, it serves to underline the dichotomy between inner feelings and outward appearance which is a common impediment to human relationships but is also a mark of the particular dichotomy which incapacitates Marion Gibbons. Secondly, it establishes a detached and judgmental tone, which ultimately puts the passions of the characters, especially of Marion, into a cool perspective, serving as a counterpoint to the melodramatic emotional excesses which motivate the plot.

In the first chapter of A Broken Journey the omniscient point of view is used to explore the tension between the inner feelings and the outward appearance of several characters. In the opening pages of the novel the narrator offers a character sketch, complete with biographical details, of Theresa, Marion's mother, and then of Peter, Marion's suitor. Both await Marion, the focus of attention, with a measure of insecurity or anxiety which is at odds with their external composure. Mrs. Gibbons is apparently in a "jolly humour," but the narrator catches her "smoothing her coat so she would look more impressive" (p. 4). Similarly, Peter's excitement is barely suppressed: although he feels "impatient and irritable," his outward expression is composed, in fact "solemn" (p. 6).

Marion Gibbons is herself a divided personality. When she does arrive the narrator lingers over her cool, controlled appearance — her

effortless stride, her slim, neat and fair good looks, her polite, almost formal conversation, but there are suggestions from the start that Marion's appearance belies a heightened emotional core: she feels a "childish pleasure" in Peter's admiration, blushes at her mother's intruding cough, and strives never "to appear ridiculous" (p. 7). Indeed a close observer might detect the chaos which underlies the composed surface of Marion Gibbons, as is clear in the climatic scene of the first chapter where she and Peter sit alone in her garden:

Marion was sitting on the bench, her blonde head held back against the green leaves, her throat long and arching. Her eyes were closed, but her red and moist lips were parting. In the shadows of the arbor her cheek bones seemed high and her skin was clear and fine. When she opened her eyes slowly and saw Peter looking at her, she moistened her lips with the tiny red tip of her tongue. Only the rich blood running in her cheeks and the faint movement of her lips revealed any agitation, for in her utter lack of movement and in the candid stare of her blue eyes there was a kind of calmness and poise that couldn't be disturbed. (pp. 11-12)

The mode of narration, then, establishes from the start and as a first principle that in each major character there is an almost palpable tension between what one really feels and how one presents oneself to others. Each character strives for a controlled, rational, best-foot-forward appearance at the expense of emotional expression and honesty. It is an unnatural dichotomy or severance of the total self which (as Marion's experience will verify) impedes the individual in his desire for self-knowledge and personal growth, and dooms his relationships with others.

That A Broken Journey is primarily the story of Marion Gibbons, despite the multiple point of view, is indicated by the arrangement of

the first chapter, which tends to focus the narrative on her. In dramatic terms Callaghan spotlights Marion by postponing her arrival, having the others await her at the train station. He also highlights her, quite literally, by connecting her consistently with light: at her entrance she is described as being slim and fair; as she and Peter leave the train station, the afternoon sun shines "all of a sudden" on her fair hair; in the garden Marion, wearing a light dress, is visible to Peter through, and then against, dark leaves.

In mythic terms, too, Marion is emphasized. As Peter awaits Marion he stares at three different doors through which she might come (p. 6). The three doors suggest a familiar folk-tale conundrum, that of "the lady or the tiger," and hint at a fundamental ambiguity in Marion Gibbons. Is she maiden or siren, succour or succuba? The lady/tiger impression is reinforced by Marion's lithe movements and kittenish glances at the young man in the station. It is more clearly indicated by the Edenic garden scene which concludes the chapter, where Marion's maidenly airs (she looks at Peter shyly and fears he will think her bold) are juxtaposed with suggestive gestures (the tip of her tongue moistening already moist lips, the stockings being straightened for Peter's benefit). In so emphasizing the ambiguity of Marion Gibbons in the first chapter Callaghan indicates that the character in A Broken Journey whose identity is in question is she.

In terms of plot, as well, the "broken journey" of the title is fundamentally Marion's, and hers alone. She is the instigator of the plan to go north to Algoma in the first place; she is the one who arranges the journey after (and in spite of) Peter's injury; once there

she is in practical terms the sole explorer, for Peter is immobilized and confined indoors and his brother Hubert has become his companion and keeper. Finally, it is Marion who explores the landscape and Marion who attempts to merge with the wild country through Steve, the guide, long after Peter has wanted to go home to civilization and the city.

Structurally, A Broken Journey consists of two major movements, both centering on Marion Gibbons, the first recounting her attempt to develop a meaningful, even redeeming, relationship with a good man, and the second examining her attempt to "find herself" through exposure to a primitive and cleansing northern landscape. Indeed, the novel is divided quite exactly into two halves and the second -- despite some differences in setting, characters and details of plot -- is fundamentally a repetition of the first. Chapters 1 through 11 are set in the city; Chapters 13 through 22 are set in Algoma: and Chapter 12, which employs the point of view of an outsider, a priest, is a transitional piece between the two sections.

The halves of the novel are almost exactly parallel in plot. In both sections Marion Gibbons is frustrated, self-critical and undeniably destructive in her personal relationships. In the first half she is involved in a triangular relationship with Peter and her mother: when she rejects Peter for his presumed involvement with her mother he is driven into a disastrous relationship with Patricia, which leads to his back injury; when Marion resumes her relationship with Peter she causes her mother to go to pieces. In the second half of the novel the triangle consists of Marion, Peter and his brother Hubert: with Peter

immobile and increasingly unhappy in his small white room, Marion engages in a physical affair with Steve; as if not satisfied with Peter's discomfort and frustration, she then turns to Hubert and with apparent deliberation sets out to destroy his faith in her and his own spiritual equanimity.

Within the two halves, certain subsections are also parallel. Each half begins with an anticipated arrival and hope on the part of Marion that she will achieve happiness. In Chapter 1, after Marion reaches the city, she and Peter, in an idyllic garden scene, anticipate a flight north together. In Chapter 13 the lovers arrive in Algoma and in an idyllic shipboard scene Marion holds Peter's hand and feels "an extraordinary peace and contentment" as they approach the Mission (p. 152). But there is a hint of foreboding in each chapter as well: in the garden Marion teases Peter by straightening her stocking and on the steamer there is fog and Marion's nervous sense of aloneness.

The second chapter in each section realizes that sense of foreboding by documenting sexual arousal and disappointment, then disillusionment. In Chapter 2 Marion's longing for Peter and dreams of Algoma are destroyed by Ag's news that Theresa has been seeing Peter in Marion's absence. In Chapter 14 Marion's longing for Peter and her enjoyment of Steve's physicality are blunted by her realization that Peter is seriously injured, that the river is spoiled by garbage, and that the water is treacherously dark and weedy:

Slowly she began to undress, thinking of nothing at all and feeling tired, but when she was almost naked, she put her hands over her breasts, remembering how long she seemed to have been waiting, and how she had thought all resisting

would be over and she would have her lover in this country. Her body felt chilled. . . . "There's no use pretending," she thought. "I feel so disappointed." (p. 169)

And disappointment in both cases leads Marion into retributive acts toward others and an act of careless self-indulgence on her own part. In Chapters 3 and 4 Marion, with an "indolent" smile dismisses Peter in the garden which by day had been idyllic for them (p. 54); and she walks the streets, picking up a college student, who falls asleep before physical harm is done but not before Marion has spiritually capitulated like (in her words) "a sensual little bawd" (p. 48). Similarly, in Chapters 15 and 16 Marion's disappointment as she perceives that Peter is indeed crippled leads her to try to hurt Hubert, "and then feel good, watching his pain" (p. 189). Afterward she gravitates to the sleazy party at St. Leo's store, where through liquor and bawdy songs she can attempt to "become one with" a dark-haired hostile half-breed woman (p. 198).

Then follows in each section a repentance and penance. Shocked by her experience with the student in Chapter 5, Marion abjures sexuality, going about town with her mother and visiting a girl friend for entertainment. In the corresponding Chapter 15, she, feeling "ashamed of herself" (p. 200), waits on Peter and busies herself trying to bring the outdoors in to him in the form of shells and berries and stones (p. 204).

At this point Callaghan's focus shifts slightly. The next section in each half of the novel deals with a love affair, but in the first half, Chapters 6 through 9, it is that between Peter and Patricia, while in the second half, Chapters 18 through 21, it is the affair between Marion and Steve. There are, however, important points of

similarity. As Patricia is for Peter a substitute for Marion who has rejected him, so Steve is for Marion a substitute for Peter who is crippled and cannot make love to her. Both couples penetrate the countryside to make love close to nature. Peter and Patricia retreat to the outskirts of the city where the farmland edges out to the bluffs. There their lovemaking fails for Peter: "Whatever feeling was between them ought to grow and ripen just as the plants in the field were ripening" (p. 115), but it does not, because Patricia is not Marion and there is no real feeling between them (p. 116). Marion and Steve make love on a remote island, and like Peter Marion is unsatisfied -- "all the feeling went out of her and she felt only disappointed" (p. 257). But her reasons for disappointment are different: while Peter sought harmony, a sort of organic feeling with Pat, Marion is disturbed by the naturalness, the harmony and the impenetrable tranquillity of Steve, his "solitary peacefulness," which excites her but causes her to feel a certain fear "of herself" (pp. 227-228).

Thus both sections of the novel conclude in failure and destruction. In the first half of the novel (Chapters 10 and 11), Marion leaves town, her mother's life a shambles and her lover's life blunted by an agonizing injury. In the second half Marion moves on, too, leaving the brothers alone in a barren environment, both painfully disillusioned. Having confessed her love affair to each brother she leaves Hubert shorn of "all his old notions of her," and Peter empty of any illusion that he might have had that they did benefit from their exposure to the north (p. 264). The effect of the structural repetition, moreover, is to convince the reader that Marion is actually

repeating herself, going in circles, and has not, despite the opportunities afforded her in Algoma, broken out of the pattern she felt constraining her as the novel began.

A Broken Journey, then, is structurally a very balanced novel; and like other novels in this study which set aside plausibility in favour of a structure so balanced as to strain credulity, A Broken Journey is a novel which operates on more than one level, the literal level supporting other, more symbolic, functions.

On the most literal level, the journey of the title is Marion Gibbon's attempt to escape from home and from the city through a love affair set against a stark and primitive landscape. Her choice of words when she first proposes the trip to Peter implies that she thinks of their journey to Algoma primarily as a flight and an escape: "What in the world could catch up to us?" she tells Peter, "That country's so big and wild" (p. 14). Her yearnings are those conventional desires of romantic love -- to escape a restrictive past life and to transcend everyday life through the experience of love. Certainly "home" for Marion offers little. Her father admits this, saying, "Your mother and I haven't provided an idyllic background for you" (p. 17), as he prepares to leave town and "follow the ponies" from city to city, as is his habit. Her mother is a weird, almost sinister, figure who spends much time clipping and preserving the more lurid tales of "civilization" from newspapers. The city itself is anathema to the lovers: even while they plan to escape to the country, as they sit in an arbour in her parents' garden, the humming of automobiles on the macadam road just the other side of the fence is a reminder that the city encroaches upon,

or is sensed to encroach upon, them.

Algoma, then, in this context represents escape to a private tranquil place, and Marion imagines herself and Peter in a clean white-washed room in the only house "for miles and miles" with the river beneath their window (p. 25). It will also be an escape from time. In the first chapter of the novel Peter is painfully aware of time, staring at the clock at the station and fearing that Marion has missed the train. When Marion suggests the trip north he again stresses the pressure of time and urges,

But please let us hurry. Let us not waste a minute.
 . . . I just don't want to shorten the time we'll have
 together. . . . How do we know that will be long enough? (p. 14)

Marion's reply that the north will be timeless -- "Peter, up there you'll have all the long days and all the long nights" -- is a typical lover's statement of belief that through their union they will be able to transcend time and place in the intensity of their relationship.

The love affair, however, does not fare well. When Marion breaks off her relationship with Peter part way through the first section of the novel, it is because, significantly, she believes he has become involved with her mother: the suspicion, unpleasant in itself, is intensified by Marion's idealism, her need to believe that she can transcend, through a romantic love affair, her past and particularly her relationship with her mother. There is some suggestion that in reconsidering and deciding to take Peter back Marion is attempting to prove that she is unlike her mother and will be receptive to the rarified and somehow purifying atmosphere of the country:

"You know what we ought to do, Mother. Two people of our special temperament ought to get out of the city. It only muddles us. We ought to live in the country. The city gets us mixed up."

"Heavens, Marion, I couldn't stand the country." (p. 104)

Unwittingly, Theresa, in denying that she can respond to the country, gives her daughter hope that she, Marion, differs from her mother in one very significant way.

But Marion's decision to return to Peter comes too late. Fate having intervened in the form of Peter's accident, the journey to Algoma can only be a failure for the lovers and their relationship. Peter's physical malaise disallows consummation, on any level, of the love affair Marion desperately needs. His physical impotence intensifies her own emotional imbalance, drawing her into an abortive affair with Steve, who is only physical. Marion's betrayal of Peter, filtered through the senses of his idealistic brother Hubert, serves to further atrophy Peter in body and spirit. And in the end there is nothing for Marion to do but leave, and presumably start over in her quest for escape from the past, perhaps through another journey and some new relationship.

On this, the literal level, the "journey" is irretrievably "broken" for a reason well within the conventions of the traditional love story. Marion has failed to trust Peter, and groundless suspicion of him has deprived her of her chance at a transcendent love affair. That she fails to see this condemns her, we suspect, to endless repetition of the cycle and an empty loveless existence, and the novel thus ends on an ominous note.

On a second level A Broken Journey explores Marion Gibbons' struggle to find peace in religious terms. Burdened with a sense of guilt and sin that is the legacy of her mother's Catholicism, Marion is without the corresponding sense of transcendent faith that is the gift of the Church to those who can accept its dogma and rituals. In this context, the journey of the novel's title is Marion's attempt to escape those dark aspects of her mother's faith (which she has herself internalized) by escaping to a crude and natural landscape where she may undergo, hopefully, a spiritual rebirth into freedom from guilt.

As the novel opens, Marion Gibbons is restless and searching. She and her suitor sit in a cloistered garden which would seem edenic if it were not for the suggestion of encroachment by city traffic on its borders and the intrusion of Marion's mother as they talk. Marion urges that she and Peter escape into the Algoma Hills and the "old, old village on a great river called the Mission" (p. 14). Her rendering of the Indian name "Michipicoten" as the "Mission" seems significant, for Marion approaches this northern outpost with a reverence that suggests that it is, for her, like a spiritual retreat.

Indeed Marion's past has been marked by a deep sense of guilt and at least one failed attempt at redemption. At one point she entered a convent as a novice for the express purpose of suppressing her sensuality, which she has always perceived as sinful. At the convent she welcomes physical deprivation and apparently attempts to sublimate her sexual feelings into religious ecstasy. When she leaves the convent, it is because she realizes that the Christ of her ecstatic religious experience wears the face of Christopher, a college

suitor, and thus that institutionalized virginity has failed to eliminate her sensuality: "She cried all night, for she knew she ought to leave the convent. 'It's my mother's nature in me,' she thought at the time" (p. 41). Even the name she chooses for religious life, Sister Mary Rose, indicates that there is in Marion Gibbons a perpetual tension between the virginal and the sensuous, and between the aspirations of Marion (a name she retains in Mary) and the decadence of her mother (who is echoed in the name Rose, which suggests the banks of roses, now dead or dying, that Theresa cultivates in the city garden).

For two reasons, then, Marion is ready to abandon the Church: she has failed to purge herself through the rigours of its convent; worse, her mother, a "bawd," to Marion's way of thinking, is sustained and supported by Catholicism every day of her life. Mrs. Gibbons takes comfort in the life of St. Augustine, frequents the Cathedral for private prayer, propels her daughter toward convent life, and asks for priestly house calls in times of emotional crisis. When Marion sees Theresa at prayer in the cathedral she feels bewildered by "the curious contradictions" in her mother's character and angered by her mother's enthusiastic participation in Church rituals, in "honest devotion," when she is herself neither "honest nor dishonest" (p. 100).

But Marion's disillusionment with the Church is not evidence that she wants to forsake religion. On the contrary, she is constantly searching for a faith, for honourable ideas and spiritual peace. For this reason Algoma becomes for her a place of anticipated spiritual rebirth. The Mission with its "clean, whitewashed room" in the boarding

house by the river seems as remote and as austere as a convent cell, Later she interprets the hills of Algoma as "an immense, crude, rugged cathedral of rock with deep, dark crevices for a decorative pattern" (p. 230).²⁰ Clearly Marion assumes that while the Church had insisted upon severance of physical and spiritual experiences, it will be possible in this primitive setting to combine them without sinning. Given the dichotomy she feels in her personality between the debased sexual or physical side and the idealistically elevated spiritual side, and given the fact that suppressing the physical side (at the convent) has failed, Marion sets out for the north expecting to use the physical, this time, as a means of attaining spiritual transcendence. Marion has come to desire sexual experience as religious experience, and her goal is to transcend not only time and place through a sexual relationship (as lovers traditionally aspire to do) but also to transcend the dichotomy in herself. Sexual union -- like religious or mystical ecstasy -- ought to render her at one with the universe, harmonious and at peace.

What, then, goes wrong with Marion's northern journey as a religious quest? The answer, again, is apparent in the parallelism of the two "halves" of the novel. In the first part, the focus of her expectations is the relationship with Peter, an idealistic and in many ways innocent young man. When Marion suspects him of carrying on with her mother, he becomes tainted by association and her own idealism falters. As with many disappointed idealists, Marion's response is despair, an emotional and spiritual nadir as extreme as her initial elevation of expectations. Her response is a descent into sordid

activities: she takes to the streets and allows herself to be picked up by a stranger and taken to his apartment. Later, after her "sin," she is appalled by her behaviour and repentant. Convinced now that she is indiscriminately sensual, like her mother, Marion takes Peter back, and, despite his injury, re-plans their journey north with a new urgency; obviously she cannot be "good" in the city, and must redeem herself in a purer environment.

During the second half of the novel, however, Peter and Marion effectively separate, for during this stage Peter is seriously injured and never leaves his room while Marion ventures outward alone into the country which she believes will heal her. Once again, though, her disappointment in Peter (this time because his spinal injury deprives her of that essential and purifying sexual experience) drives her into despair. She slips into sleazy behaviour, and allows herself to gravitate toward the sulky and hostile Indians at St. Leo's store, and the eager village men (who can't believe their luck when Marion arrives). Again Marion is saddened by her inclination toward the seamy side of town life, and again she seeks to be reconciled with a man in the hope of curing herself. This time, however, the man is Steve, a logical choice because he personifies and is the essence of the north country, that primitive and unsettled "real" country which is her last hope, the final bastion of her faith that she can be redeemed. In this climactic movement of the novel, Marion actually moves out into and penetrates the wild country, trolling with Steve on the great lake and trout fishing with him in marshy inlets and on an uninhabited island.

Marion's hope for a sexual experience which will also be a

spiritual epiphany is now focussed on this primitive Algoma landscape and union with a man who represents it. The country ought to evoke such religious feeling because it is so huge, so inexorable, that it diminishes human individuality and accents the communality of man with nature. At one point Marion feels this as she watches the northern lights with Hubert and feels as though they were elevated, "high up in the deep silence"; she connects the experience with rebirth, for "it was like watching the night come on for the first time in a new world" (p. 208). Steve seems a part of the harmony of this universe because of his "solitary peacefulness," and if she is to participate in this "quiet, holy time, a time for a close communion with some one" (p. 227), Steve, she assumes, is her best choice.

Yet there is little evidence that Marion is aware of the cost, in psychological terms, of the experience she craves. What is required, in becoming one with the natural universe (as Steve has done) is a willing submission to nature, abandonment of control. Although Marion realizes that she ought to submit, she is afraid to abandon her conscious will lest the experience crush her "resistance" and "destroy" her (p. 238). It is the conditioned response, undoubtedly, of a Catholic girl raised and trained to recognize and automatically reject the temptation to surrender to natural urges or physical desires. When Marion refuses to surrender, to explore this long-buried life within her, however, Steve's love-making is reduced to a natural act which can only fail to serve supernatural purposes; sexual union will then fail to heal her internal schism.

Consequently Marion quickly arranges to leave the north and

return to the city, in a final circular movement, complaining that her faith has been destroyed: immersion in this place did not, could not, heal her. She is like her mother and cannot either purge herself of passion or elevate it to a sacramental level by her choice of lover and environment.

Most jarring, perhaps, is her self-punitive attitude in the final chapters of the novel. Convinced that she is "no good" and never has been any good (p. 260), that she lacks "fidelity" and "honor" and "faith" (p. 263), and that she has "spoiled" things because of a "rotten streak" in her (p. 264), Marion decides to punish herself by leaving Algoma. She vows to leave "passion" behind her (p. 264) and says it is good to know what she is "losing" (p. 261):

The notion of going away, which from the first had been consoling, now began to excite and strengthen her. She felt eager to go, eager to scourge herself by leaving so much behind. (p. 267)

The choice of words suggests religious martyrdom and signals an intended return on the part of Marion Gibbons not only to the city but to the unsatisfying and unhealthy severance of body and soul which had characterized her at the beginning of the novel.

This severance of body and soul, and Marion's inability to reconcile opposing facets of her being, suggest a further and deep schism in the personality of Marion Gibbons. On a third level, one which interacts with the second (her quest for a healing religious experience), Marion's "broken journey" is into the deepest recesses of her own being. At this level she explores primitive and essentially irrational aspects of human experience, and attempts to abandon those

rational, intellectual restraints which she feels have robbed her of intuitive, instinctive life. The vehicle for her exploration of irrationality, which leads her into a primitive and symbolic landscape is, of course, sex.

Other critics have placed a Freudian interpretation upon A Broken Journey, noting that the novel seethes with Marion's repressed sexuality. Victor Hoar, for example, states, "One phase in Morley Callaghan's career as an artist was his brief 'confrontation' in the 1920's with those symbols associated with Freudian psychology."²¹ He goes on to say that Callaghan's naturalism took the guise of portraying people in the grip of "psycho-sexual drives."²² Without opening the Pandora's box of Freudian literary criticism, it is possible here to agree with Hoar that, in the case of A Broken Journey, Callaghan has indeed portrayed a personality which suffers from "over-civilization" (an excess of rational restraint) and longs for the more primitive, irrational side of human experience which has been repressed since childhood.

Certainly Marion has long feared, but simultaneously longs to explore, her own sexuality. She projects sexuality, whether consciously or not, whenever she encounters men as her story unfolds. Peter notes "the slight little effortless swing of her neat hips" (p. 8); Badame, the grocer, elicits her husky laugh (p. 30); Alderman Redpath notices her husky voice and her lazy assurance (p. 96); and the young priest is disturbed by a certain "wantonness" in her manner (p. 98). Even Hubert is apparently moved by her husky voice and breathless manner (p. 192).

Part of Marion's appeal, moreover, seems to lie in a certain duality which she projects, a tension between the "virgin" and "siren" elements in her public manner. One notes, for example, that when she wears a blue and white costume (the colours of the Virgin) it is tight at the waist and hips. On another occasion Peter becomes excited when he visualizes Marion (who generally affects cool, innocent colours) in the harlot-red dress of a silver-faced store mannikin (p. 80).

Nor is Marion simply teasing men by her ambivalence, for her feelings about sex are genuinely and profoundly ambiguous. She desires sexual experience and clearly welcomes Peter's advances:

"But, Peter, I'm not afraid at all."

"Will you?"

"Yes," she whispered, trembling. (p. 13)

She says they "could" get married at once secretly, but several sentences later she is proposing the trip to the Mission and marriage is conspicuously absent from her plan (p. 14). In the second chapter, alone in her room, Marion is clearly sexually aroused, the pounding of her heart "so disturbing and delightful," and "eagerness" for Peter "so strong within her" that she forces herself to turn from thoughts of Peter to cooler thoughts of the north (p. 24).

But the north, Algoma, is for Marion Gibbons essentially a metaphor for sexual experience. Although her description of Algoma to others is perfunctory (she says only that it is a "rocky country" with "great cones of spruce," that it is "the loneliest and most beautiful country in the world" [pp. 7-8], and that it is "big" and "wild"

[p. 14]), the type of experience she anticipates and welcomes is clear from the language of her inner thoughts:

At last she got into bed, turned out the light, and began to think of the blue Algoma Hills, the great lake, the black rocks, the high, overhanging crags of basalt and the sunlight on miles and miles of burnt timber, solitary, dried out, sun-white stumps with the roots in the surface earth on great rocks. (pp. 24-25)

The words that Marion uses are harsh and suggest a lonely, barren land whose colours are few and glaringly intense. The words themselves are hard, dominantly monosyllabic and urgent with repeated d's, t's and g's. Algoma then, in its harshness and severity is indeed an escape from civilization, but it is also in Marion's mind an escape into a very masculine world, or into a male element, which she finds exciting.

At the same time, Marion's rejection of her sexual feelings has been profound. As a young woman she had entered the convent in order to purge herself of the sensuality she feels she has inherited from her mother:

She had not gone into the convent as a timid young girl. After the university, when she was twenty-two, she had begun to think of her mother's life as something twisting and decaying at the very root within her till she had become a demoralized woman. She had thought also that a young woman ought to be able to do something with her own life, and a feeling which had been building up within her grew large and came to a peak one day, and she decided eagerly that if she lived alone, say in a religious order, she might find strength, intensity and courage. Though she wanted to keep a deep respect for her mother, she wanted at the same time to be utterly apart and different from her, clean, simple and untouched by any of the passions she felt had destroyed her mother. (p. 22)

There is, then, a fundamental conflict within Marion between those sensual elements she attributes to her mother's nature and influence and another cooler and more ideal nature. In this basic conflict between

passion and reason, Marion has spent much effort in affecting reason, in successfully projecting a cool image, however emotional she feels inside. Frequently, throughout the novel, she connects excitement and particularly sexual excitement, with a lack of reason.²³ Indeed, she fears passion or loss of control, which she connects with her mother, and bottles emotion, whatever the cost, rather than submitting to it. When she is passionately angry after she learns of her mother's relationship with Peter, for example, her response is to hold herself "so tightly" that she fears something will "break inside her" (p. 29).

While Marion feels guilt about her own barely-suppressed sensuality, however, she does appear to realize that in order to feel fully alive one must abandon reason and give oneself over to passion:

As soon as she was in her own room Marion felt so alive and full of bliss she flung herself on the mauve silk bedspread and tried to bury her head in the pillow. . . . Then she sat down with her hands in her lap, undid her shoestraps, and with a solemn face kicked off first one shoe, then the other, to the farthest corner of the room, and giggled as if she had never been so amused in all her life. She wasn't thinking of anything at all, just letting herself feel happy. (p. 21)

The same kind of excitement and determination to give herself over to feeling inspires Marion's trip to Algoma, as if she assumes that once there she will be able to abandon herself to sexuality and thus overcome the rigid barriers between reason and passion in her own personality.

It is significant, too, that Marion sees herself as essentially alone in her journey. Although she wants a man to accompany her to Algoma, and needs one for sexual concourse, she takes one man, Peter, who is wounded and cannot function as a man, and befriends another,

Steve, who is less a man than a personification of the country. As she approaches the Mission, Marion's awareness of her isolation is clearly stated:

Out of this trip she had expected a great deal of happiness and now she felt so utterly alone as she looked toward the shore and the Algoma Hills. Between great dark wooded hills were only sharp ravines still filled with mist, and only the rocky summits of the hills reached up to the sunlight. And even the water lapping on the side of the boat seemed to upset her. (p. 149)

The things she finds frightening -- darkness and mist, which obscure a landscape she had previously seen clearly, the height or distance from her of the sunlit summits, and the sound of the water eternally lapping -- are details which suggest the obscurity and difficulty of her task and the inexorable quality of the landscape she is entering. When, in addition, she perceives the sandy beach as "a great polished bone set down between the blue water and the green hills" (p. 160) and notes that on the river's surface thick weeds "were like a great net holding down life in the river" (p. 161), her fears are clear;

On the river in the evenings she had always been afraid of those thick heavy weeds on the surface. The first time she had seen them she had been afraid because the water was so dark underneath, dark and deep because you couldn't see it. (p. 261)

She knows there is within herself a buried life, but fears it, just as she fears the river where weeds enclose a held-down life. The landscape becomes symbolic of human consciousness with its hidden, held-down, irrational life, and her journey into that landscape (like her descent into the wellsprings of her own submerged life) takes on frightening overtones.

Indeed Marion's apprehensive response to the landscape, and particularly the river, raises the question of whether or not she will be able to abandon rationality and allow herself the kind of experience she came for. She desires a loss of self and immersion in a greater harmony, as is clear when she observes nightfall with Hubert:

It was soon full night. As the northern lights began to sweep vastly across the sky, she felt a strange harmony and peace all around her, and she felt herself groping toward it and trying to become a part of it. She felt, as her heart began to beat heavily, that her love for Peter was the way toward a more complete and final peace than any she had ever known, and that they might both know the mystery that rounded out the night. (p. 208)

At the same time, however, she fears loss of control, feeling "with strange nervousness that she would be helpless in such a country" (p. 161). There are other hints that Marion's quest is not entirely sincere: words like "theatrically comic" (p. 173) and "opera" (p. 182), which recur in the novel, suggest that she may be role-playing or engaging in dramatics; details like her refusal to abandon city costumes in the country indicate a fundamental reluctance to give herself entirely to the task and the country at hand.

The nature of her experience with Steve, set against an amoral landscape, underscores Marion's continuing inability to assert the natural or physical part of her personality without guilt. Hubert observes that "A woman wouldn't be having an affair with Steve at all" but "with this country" (p. 225), and it is true that Steve is, to a great extent, nature personified. He lives on the land and plans never to leave it. His tranquillity, moreover, arises from his willingness to submit to nature: like the swimmer attacked by the loons, one who

lives naturally must above all be resigned to his own helplessness, must abandon all pretext of rational control over the unfolding of his fate. But what is most significant for Marion Gibbons is that in his naturalness Steve is her opposite. A man of primitive, non-intellectual responses, Steve is for her a potential "second self," to use Kepler's term, representing the latent side of her own nature.²⁴ Union with him might render her whole.

Thus, there is much to suggest that in rejecting Steve as a lover, Marion is above all rejecting submission to her own irrational passion. Despite her physical attraction to him, she finds herself giving him reasons for not making love -- that she is in love with "the fellow who was hurt" (p. 233), that Steve will never return to the city and is not likely to ever marry (p. 254), and especially that she cannot tolerate the idea of submission, for "It's terrible to be helpless and not able to resist. Then you get so that you don't want to resist" (p. 255). Although she wants very much "to be like" Steve, there is "deep within her" an "uneasiness" (p. 229), and when it is time to yield -- to nature, sexuality and irrationality -- Marion is afraid to submit, to go under, to lose control.

The structure of the novel, a series of movements by which Marion penetrates more and more deeply into the natural world, then withdraws from it, is most apt. It suggests the nature and the depth of the division in Marion Gibbons and her inability to heal her internal schism: in the end she resists passion, refusing to face the dark undercurrents in her own nature, and thus denies one half of her selfhood. Even acknowledging that dark side might have led to exorcising her

feelings of guilt. But unacknowledged, semi-repressed, the passionate side of her nature can only eat away at her from within and eventually destroy her in the process.

A Broken Journey, then, is a novel which functions on several levels. In each case the melodramatic plot, and repetitive, circular structural patterns, combine to suggest the tortuous and ultimately unsuccessful search of a divided young woman for inner peace and a sense of harmony with the universe. Her failure and despair, and the sense of sad inevitability which permeates the text, are underscored by certain symbolic motifs that inform the novel.

There are two basic symbols which operate in A Broken Journey. One is "light," which functions as a part of the light/dark dichotomy that runs through the novel. The other is, in general terms, "wound" imagery, which includes broken things, injuries and even decay when it is associated with a growth cycle.

Light and dark are symbols, for Marion Gibbons, of good and evil, where good is generally linked with pure love, or love sanctified by reason, and evil is associated with unbridled passion. Thus when Marion and Peter first meet in the garden it is in daylight and she wears a light dress (p. 11); when she sends Peter away, however, because he seems tainted by his relationship with Theresa, it is night and Marion wears black in the darkened garden (p. 58). When Marion imagines Algoma, she tends to think in terms of a sunlit landscape and a whitewashed boarding house; at one point she daydreams about it in the Gibbons' yard and notices simultaneously the unkempt house and dark withered flowerbeds of the city home next door. Most of all when Theresa is seen at prayer

in the cathedral Marion notes that the light is dim. On the other hand she associates young lovers with light: she notes couples, arms linked, under street lights (p. 101) and pursues the lights at St. Leo's store (p. 197) as indicative of camaraderie (although she later discovers the sordid nature of the party there).

Perhaps more important, Marion sees light and dark as symbolic of the two halves of herself, of her divided nature. A childhood memory crystallizes the association:

It had been Marion's birthday and the children were having a surprise party for her, and her mother had taken her walking in the park so she wouldn't know, and had taken the picture of her standing by the oak tree. That day she had worn her best alice-blue frock; before they had gone out together she had gone to her mother's room and from a bureau drawer taken the transformation or "switch" as she called it, that her mother used when she wanted to pile her hair high on her head: the "switch," of course, was black, but Marion, who had been disappointed that her hair wouldn't grow faster, had tried to pin the black switch under her blond hair so it would make a big bun at the back. When her mother saw her she had hugged her tightly and nearly died of laughter. But that was years ago, before her mother's life had become distorted and ugly. (p. 38)

The thrust of the novel is in the implication that Marion's insistence upon that dichotomy has been unfortunate and erroneous. Steve is dark, and yet he could have been an instrument, properly used, in her self-realization. The water may be dark, and weedy on the surface, but beneath that surface (and the water corresponds to her own inner depths and resources) is a buried life whose energy could be channelled positively. The brothers may appear ridiculous to her in their stark environment as she leaves them, but they are happier than she, for they feel "very close together, very necessary to each other in the small,

white room" (p. 270), while she in the end is isolated, frustrated and as divided against herself as ever.²⁵

In general, what is wrong with Marion's fixation upon light and darkness is that it is a fixation, a rigidity which leads her to reject one part of herself. Callaghan's pre-occupation with the nature of innocence seems relevant here: in an interview with Robert Weaver, Callaghan says that he has never known any "pure innocents" because a "man's nature is a very tangled web, shot through with gleams of heavenly light, no doubt, and the darkness of what we call evil forces";²⁶ in an interview with Donald Cameron, he speaks of the unholy "obsession" of the "saint" and states flatly, "I hate the person who loves the idea. . . ."²⁷ This is precisely Marion's flaw, as the light/dark dichotomy in her mind indicates: like a true fanatic she cannot submit in a positive way to passion because she has labelled all passion evil on account of her unbalanced, extreme distaste for her mother's life.

The other symbolism which permeates the novel is that of the wound. Peter is physically wounded; Marion is psychically wounded; Theresa says she is "going all to pieces" (p. 130); and Peter later talks of hearing and seeing "a person's identity dissolving, going to pieces, and you can't do anything about it" (p. 250). In a related symbolic pattern Marion associates roses with decay and especially with the loss of sexual bloom that she sees in her mother. Her perception of fragmentation and decay all about her heightens Marion's sense of urgency about unifying her own personality, healing the division in herself, in the Algoma highlands. But it also increases the pathos when she fails to

heal the schism in herself and goes home scarred by the same dichotomy as when she left. That pathos is preserved in the title of the novel. Marion's journey is "broken" in the sense that she can penetrate no further in her quest, and withdraws, going home and breaking off her northern retreat. But it also suggests that Marion is going home "broken," rather than whole, for in failing to transcend the division in her personality she has failed utterly to realize her potential as a human being.

While melodramatic in plot and emotional tone, then, A Broken Journey is a substantial novel which deals with a profound and romantic modern theme, the quest for inner harmony or spiritual peace in a secularized context. The novel portrays the pain of a divided personality, Marion Gibbons, and suggests that re-integration of such a soul, wherein artificial barriers separate the rational and irrational hemispheres of a single nature, can best be effected through subjective exploration of one's self, and particularly the "buried life" of instinct, impulse and passion.

It seems significant, moreover, that Callaghan himself has taken pains to disagree with critics who compare his work with Hemingway's and instead has emphasized that the works of Sherwood Anderson influenced him more fundamentally.²⁸ Certainly A Broken Journey is like Winesberg, Ohio (1919), for example, in its exploration of psychological states, portrayal of the power of repressed sexuality, and emphasis upon the depiction not of objective reality but of subjective states and perceived realities. As this analysis of A Broken Journey indicates, Callaghan's concern, at least in his early novels, may well be less with the social

realism which most critics have looked for than with the portrayal of psychological realism through melodramatic and structural patterns which critics have yet to explore.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹Morley Callaghan, No Man's Meat (Paris: black manikin press, 1931). The novella is 42 pages long and the edition was limited to 525 copies. No Man's Meat has been reprinted recently in a volume with The Enchanted Pimp (Macmillan, 1978).

²Morley Callaghan, A Broken Journey (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), p. 115. All subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and page numbers will be bracketed within my text.

³Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, p. 210.

⁴George Woodcock, "Lost Eurydice: The Novels of Callaghan," Canadian Literature, No. 21 (Summer, 1964), p. 27.

⁵Hugo McPherson, "The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan," Queen's Quarterly, 74 (Autumn, 1957), 356.

⁶William Walsh, "Morley Callaghan" in Morley Callaghan, ed. Brandon Conron, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1975), p. 134.

⁷Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, p. 210.

⁸Woodcock, "Lost Eurydice," p. 28.

⁹Maxwell Perkins, "To Morley Callaghan," in Morley Callaghan, ed. Conron, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 73.

¹⁰Brandon Conron, Morley Callaghan (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 73.

¹¹John David Ripley, "A Critical Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Morley Callaghan," M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1959, p. 80.

¹²Ibid., p. 203.

¹³Woodcock, "Lost Eurydice," p. 28.

¹⁴Conron, Introduction to Morley Callaghan, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 6.

¹⁵Perkins, "To Morley Callaghan," pp. 42-43.

¹⁶Jonathon Daniels, "Night of the Soul," in Morley Callaghan, ed. Conron, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 40.

¹⁷McPherson, "The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan," p. 356.

¹⁸Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 28-29.

¹⁹See above, pp. 13-14.

²⁰Callaghan uses similar imagery in The Varsity Story: at one point, the Australian, Tyndall, recalls his first impressions of Algoma where he "had seen the great hills rising like cathedrals against the slashes of light made by the setting sun." Morley Callaghan, The Varsity Story (Toronto: Macmillan, 1948), p. 11.

²¹Victor Hoar, Morley Callaghan (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 74.

²²*Ibid.*, p.

²³At one point Marion and her mother are conversing, when, "for no reason" Marion's thoughts turn to Bedame, the fruit store proprietor and his "lazy laugh" and sensual mouth. Immediately, "for some reason," Theresa starts thinking about her lover, a young army officer killed in France. In both women, sensual thoughts and memories are connected with irrationality, lack of control (p. 105).

²⁴Jean Mallison argues that the second self tends to represent the latent side of the personality of the protagonist, stating, "I shall take it as axiomatic, because it cannot be proved, only demonstrated, that the Double in literature stands for un-lived life, for the unmanifest side of one's nature: the latent or unexpressed embodied as Other." Jean Mallinson, "The Double in Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry," Atlantis, 2 (Spring, 1977), p. 95.

²⁵In a sense the brothers, who are opposites in many ways but who are bound together by fraternal love, serve as a foil to Marion who can express neither need for nor devotion to another person and hence remains isolated at the end of the novel.

²⁶Robert Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," Tamarack Review, 7 (Spring, 1958), 23.

²⁷Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists, pp. 23-24.

²⁸Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," p. 14.

THE YOKE OF LIFE: "SINCE I WAS I"

Several critics have gone so far as to suggest that Frederick Philip Grove is not, fundamentally, a novelist at all. Edward McCourt writes:

The tragedy of his artistic life is that so much of his work was done in a medium for which he had little talent. His best bits of writing are descriptive and philosophical rather than narrative.¹

Even Douglas Spettigue concurs, concluding his book Frederick Philip Grove with the statement that "Grove was not ultimately a novelist but a confession writer and essayist."²

Grove's greatest flaw, according to most critics, is his inability to create believable characters. Spettigue says that we do not become intimately involved with his characters even when they do seem "real"³ and Desmond Pacey notes⁴ that this has been a critical assumption since Robert Ayre first made the claim in Canadian Forum in 1932: Ayre uttered the criticism that has been repeated ad nauseam ever since -- that Grove could not portray living human beings, that he "lacked passion and emotional spontaneity."⁵

Having deplored his characters as unlikable, such critics, faced with the power of Grove's fiction, tend to vindicate Grove by emphasizing his descriptive powers in combination with his philosophic concept of man

caught in a vital struggle with irresistible forces in the universe.

McCourt, for example, argues:

Grove was not a great novelist, for the power to create living people was denied him; but he brought a cultured and philosophic mind to the contemplation of the Western scene, and an eye for specific detail which will make his work a valuable source of information to the rural historian of the future.⁶

It is a view reiterated by Norah Story in The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, for she defines the "essential element of Grove's artistry" as "his concentration on the description of prairie moods."⁷

Their focus on Grove's use of descriptive detail and his depiction of pioneer life has led critics to label Grove a prairie realist or even a naturalist. Pacey calls Grove a "pioneer realist" in North America.⁸

Thomas Saunders assumes that Grove, along with Ostenso and Stead "introduced" realism to Canadian literature.⁹ Ayre connects Grove with naturalism, calling him the "Theodore Dreiser of Canada."¹⁰ Similarly Pacey has stressed Grove's deterministic portrayal of man in a universe controlled "by forces deliberately malignant towards man or by forces simply ignorant of or indifferent to human aspirations."¹¹ Ronald Sutherland, indeed, declares unequivocally that "we must accept that Frederick Philip Grove was every inch a literary naturalist."¹²

At the same time, however, there are problems in classifying Grove as either a naturalist or a realist. So far as realism is concerned, critics have tended to deplore (particularly in the early novels), his use of unlife-like characters and rather incredible plots, which depend on coincidence and emotional excess. Thus Birbalsingh states that "Grove is not so much giving an objective portrait of credible human

relationships as expressing unbalanced, unstable and probably uncontrollable retaliatory feelings born of his own frustrations."¹³ Similarly, Ayre cites the over-emotional responses of perpetually adolescent characters which mar Grove's novels and, in his opinion, prevent them from attaining the level of high tragedy.¹⁴ So far as naturalism is concerned, Pacey has observed that although man is a victim of universal forces in Grove's fiction, these forces are more like the Greek concept of fate than those of naturalistic determinism with its emphasis on heredity.¹⁵ In addition, Sutherland's own emphasis on the dignity of the individual rebel in Grove's work is suggestive not of naturalism but of another twentieth-century philosophy, existentialism, or indeed of romanticism itself. And finally, Grove's treatment of sex is not naturalistic: as Pacey says, the emphasis in Grove is not (as in naturalism) on the animal aspects of sex, but on the emotional components of the experience and particularly on the anguish and frustration of sexual desire.¹⁶

Given the limitations of the realistic and naturalistic approaches to Grove's work, then, it is not surprising that other critical approaches to Grove have been suggested recently, by two scholars in particular. The first is Desmond Pacey, who, revising his earlier position in "Grove's Tragic Vision" (1944), suggests in Frederick Philip Grove (1970) that the symbolic aspects of Grove's work ought to be investigated. He writes of his earlier work:

I was at that time, as a result of my work at Cambridge on the influence on late Victorian England of French realism and naturalism, completely wedded to the realistic theory of the novel. As almost all other critics of Grove have been, I was content to apply to his novels the usual

realistic canons of credibility, consistency, social accuracy and psychological objectivity. I failed to see -- and to this day no one has fully demonstrated -- that Grove is as much a surrealist as a realist, and that an examination of his patterns of imagery and symbolism would have been much more revealing than my rote application of the rules of Flaubert and Zola.¹⁷

A second approach, and one not incompatible with Pacey's, is toward Grove as a romantic writer, despite his own professed scorn for romanticism. Spettigue is one who makes this claim, but it is Margaret Stobie who most convincingly defines Grove as a philosopher of the romantic school, locating the source of his romantic outlook in the educational theory he absorbed as a young man and professed all his life:

That philosophy stemmed from Rousseau, it held the unity of nature as a doctrine, it emphasized the combination of mathematics and nature study as the fundamental one for education, it believed first hand observation of nature to be not only educationally, but morally superior to learning from books, through Froebel it expanded into symbolism, with Herbart it saw the child as passing through "cultured epochs" of human history, and it conceived of "natural" education as the regenerative means whereby society could be led back into its intended greatness. It was both pedagogical theory and religious conviction. It was the relevant core of Grove's training and thinking, and, to a large degree, this educational philosophy determined the themes of his writing.¹⁸

The theories of Pacey and Stobie point to the need for re-examination of Grove's novels outside of the context of realism (and naturalism), and particularly for critical attention to those of his novels which have been most neglected or assailed by critics employing realistic criteria. In this chapter, therefore, one such novel, The Yoke of Life, will be read without preconceptions, beginning (as have the studies of other novels in this dissertation) with its formal elements or its construction, and working through form towards the vision

which Grove thereby expresses.

The Yoke of Life is apparently one of Grove's least successful novels. Published in 1930, it was written some years earlier and forms part of a group of pieces set in the "Big Grassy Marsh" country,¹⁹ along with Settlers of the Marsh (1925) and the companion pieces Over Prairie Trails (1922) and The Turn of the Year (1923). Dismissed by most critics as a pale imitation of Settlers of the Marsh,²⁰ the novel has not yet been reprinted or made available in paperback for the modern reader.

In plot, The Yoke of Life is melodramatic. Len Sterner, a promising farm boy, falls in love with Lydia Hausman, a frivolous and apparently unworthy girl, whose vanity and materialism lead her toward town life and eventually into moral dissolution. Because of his obsessive devotion to Lydia, and his idealization of this young woman so clearly unworthy of him, Len gradually abandons his other ideal, education, and slides into a spiritual, physical and emotional decline. When Len and Lydia eventually reunite it is too late. She is a ruined woman and he has become quite mad. Their attempt to salvage their relationship by returning not only to the country (that is, the farm life from which they came) but to the wilderness, is doomed to fail, and their journey ends in double suicide on the stormy waters of a remote northern lake.

Despite its apparent flaws -- an improbable plot, stilted dialogue and intense emotional pitch -- The Yoke of Life, like other novels in this study, is a substantial and moving novel. Grove himself assumed the novel was both powerful and aesthetically effective. In his

letters he speaks of his hope that the novel will "restore" his "artistic integrity,"²¹ and this follows upon a statement made three years earlier that he had not at that point been "fully satisfied" with the structure of this novel.²² Taken together, both comments suggest that Grove was conscious of form and structure in The Yoke of Life and, indeed, close reading of the novel verifies that it is meticulously and significantly constructed.

The Yoke of Life is a very carefully structured, remarkably balanced novel. Despite the omniscient narrator and multiple point of view, there is a single protagonist, Len Sterner, whose metamorphosis from an idealistic boyhood to a manhood tainted by disappointment and madness is the single focus of the novel. The four sections of the novel chronicle the growth of Len Sterner -- his "Boyhood," "Youth," "Manhood," and "Death." The sections are roughly equal in length, the first section having six chapters and the others seven chapters each. As Margaret Stobie notes, the book falls naturally into two larger parts, "Boyhood" and "Youth," and "Manhood" and "Death," each half terminating in a death or deaths and each part impelled by a natural disaster which suggests that nature is a shaping force in the lives of men.²³

In fact, however, the four-part structure is more versatile and far more complex than Stobie assumes, for it permits the novel to function on several levels simultaneously. Like other novels in this study, The Yoke of Life is fundamentally the story of a journey, in this case a journey on the part of Len Sterner towards a much-thwarted union with Lydia. The journey is both literal and symbolic. Physically they move from farm to camp and town, thence to city and eventually into

the wilderness. On this simplest level Len's is a journey toward union with his beloved Lydia, a union which he assumes will bring them both happiness and dignity as they struggle to survive together in a world of poverty and hardship. Secondly, Len's is a spiritual journey which involves a devastating loss of innocence and an attempt to experience redemption after his lapse into moral error. And, thirdly, at a deeper level, there is a psychological journey in which Len Sterner, through his relationship with Lydia, explores the darker side of human experience.

On its first, most literal level, The Yoke of Life is the story of a farm boy whose aspirations are continually thwarted by the harsh economic conditions and bitter social realities of pioneer life. Len Sterner is a sensitive boy of academic promise. Initially his dreams are intellectual: he aspires to "master all human knowledge in all its branches."²⁴ But gradually, as adolescence brings sexual awakening, knowledge as an ideal is subsumed into his growing love for Lydia Hausman, so that the acquisition of learning becomes a means to another end: Len assumes that education and a career in education will make him worthy in the eyes of Lydia, who aspires to life outside the bush and the farm.

The impediments to their love affair are at first external and largely economic in origin. A severe August storm dictates their separation and an end to formal education, for Len's stepfather is forced to send him to a lumber camp to work for wages, and the Hausmans simultaneously decide that Lydia shall work as a maid in town. At camp and in town both are exposed to the seamier side of life and

certain "internal" impediments to their affair are set in motion: Lydia's latent materialism is stirred by town life and she flees to the city; Len, aware of her intent to "sell" herself into a life removed from the bush, is shattered and forced to idealize her in order to spur himself on. Eventually economic need again intervenes and Lydia enters a "house" in the city while Len again leaves home and farm when a natural disaster -- the loss of Kolm's horses in a flash flood -- dictates his becoming a wage-earner in the city.

When the lovers are finally reunited in the city, both have been coarsened by experience. Len has, in his own eyes, surrendered to sensual urges and allowed himself to be taken to a house of pleasure, and Lydia, of course, walks the streets. Eventually each attempts to redeem himself, apparently, by an act of love, he in fleeing from sexual temptation because the girl reminds him of Lydia and she in nursing Len through weeks of delirium and fever. When the two set off for the purifying wilderness they are utterly changed, committed to one another and mutual death, as if in rebellion against a life that has conspired against them.

There is much on this first, literal level to suggest that Grove has written in The Yoke of Life a realistic, if not naturalistic, treatise on the hardships of farm or prairie life. Economic hardship drives Len Sterner to madness for it forces him to submerge his personal educational goals in order to save the farm. Farm details are harshly sketched, as when Crawford visits the Kolm family in the field, and finds Len's mother working despite a very recent miscarriage, or when Kolm is exploited and abused by Jewish merchants in town. City life is

equally harsh if not worse, for the frivolity of the rich is a constant reminder of the ill-fortune of the poor, just as Pennycup is to Len a reminder of the callousness of the rich and their failure to see that land at least endows the farmer, however poor he may be, with dignity.

Thus it is not surprising that critics have stressed Grove's social commentary in The Yoke of Life. Spettigue writes that Len Sterner "represents potential greatness cramped and frustrated in the poverty, isolation and intellectual vacuum of the Big Marsh."²⁵ Stanley McMullin emphasizes the impact of industry on a sensitive farm boy.²⁶ Laurence Ricou also stresses the victimization of Len and Lydia by forces they cannot control:

In the final section of the novel the prairie is left behind. Although the reason is not made explicit, the brutal character of the prairie undoubtedly had something to do with Len's coming to the lake, either because of the marginal existence which it provided, or simply through his desire to escape. In a sense, however, it is still the same world. Len and Lydia are exposed on a vast sea, pummelled by the relentless powers of nature.²⁷

But even on this level there is more to The Yoke of Life than the indictment of the hardships of settlement life. It is also an exploration of possible responses to such hardship. In a sense The Yoke of Life depicts two basic types of men, or prototypes, who inhabit every civilization. From the first chapter of the novel it is clear that Len and his brother Charlie are opposite types and that their polarity is significant. In the first chapter Len converses with Crawford, dreams and play-acts while Charlie does little more than play tag, and their differences are magnified as they become men. Charlie, who is quick to grasp the practical and elementary principles of schoolwork, grows to be

physically strong and mentally uncomplicated. He chooses the sturdy and affable Helen as his wife. Without either pride or contempt he accepts his brother's sacrifice as his due, for he has not the imagination to conceive of another way:

He, too, relied on Len. Len would help him to hold the farm even though his parents left it! There was nothing sentimental in his attachment to the place. He had been born there; had grown up there; he could not imagine any other kind of life; he would never leave it. He was planted and rooted there. (p. 262)

A second sort of man, much rarer according to the schoolteacher Crawford, is typified by Len Sterner. An idealist, lost in imagination much of the time, one who thinks, feels and reacts much more than he acts, Len is tall and slender and physically vulnerable. Instinctively he chooses a frail and vulnerable mate in Lydia, who from the start is said to have an anemic look about her. Unlike Charlie, Len is slow to grasp fundamentals and logical precepts at school but Crawford labels him a "genius" because he instinctively soars above the fundamentals and toward the abstract and the ideal. Crawford tells Jackson,

. . . now and then you find even today a boy or a girl who has ideals. Perhaps ideals is not the word. It is something deeper than that. I have a case in point. There is a deep, instinctive urgency in the boy; a striving after the highest to which he can never give scope without an education; but it was there before he had ever looked into a school. (pp. 42-43)

The two types of men are further symbolized by the two mentor-like figures in The Yoke of Life, Jackson and Crawford. Jackson is a folksy sort of man who believes in social order, in justice, in the law: he has found a man guilty even though he knew he would have committed the same

crime in the same circumstances himself. Crawford, however, believes above all (like the tutor in Rousseau's Emile, says Stobie)²⁸ in the value of the individual, and in living the sort of questing life that one's imaginative being dictates. He tells Len:

. . . I hungered and thirsted after a higher and truer idea of life. That hunger and thirst itself is happiness, Len. We shall never still it. We shall never find truth. But we must strive after it without standing still. (pp. 45-46)

Charlie, of course, will survive. But what of the idealist? That Len's type of man is a minority, that his quest for intellectual or spiritual ideals is much threatened in the pioneer society which values his brother Charlie, is suggested by the opening sentence of the novel: "In front of a white and diminutive but well-built cottage in the 'bush' a small boy sat on the bare back of an enormous plough-horse." As Spettigue observes:

This first sight of Len, a small boy on a large horse, is symbolic too. An ironic centaur figure, his humanity, his intellectual promise, is pitifully small by contrast with the animal.²⁹

Indeed the rest of the novel is a careful, structurally balanced exploration of the fatality, or the doom, that surrounds the quest of the idealistic man within "normal" society, which is by its very nature materialistically bent. The Yoke of Life consists of two broad sections, "Boyhood" and "Youth," and "Manhood" and "Death," whose thrust or movement is essentially circular: just as the first half of the novel deals with the union of Len and Lydia and their subsequent separation, the second half deals with the continuing separation and then a subsequent re-union; the "Death" of the final section is a counterpart

to the "Boyhood" or Birth of the first section, and is a completion of it in the sense of a new beginning or a rebirth for the doomed lovers.

But within these two broad divisions, the novel consists of four movements which are almost dialectical³⁰ in nature and move toward a resolution as the Idealist is forced to come to terms with a less-than-ideal "real" world.

In the first section of The Yoke of Life, entitled "Boyhood," Len embraces the ideals which he assumes are to serve as truth, purpose and goal in his life. The first is knowledge, which he identifies with Mr. Crawford and connects with formal education. The second is love, which he identifies with Lydia Hausman, whom he sees as innocent, virginal and ideal: he perceives her as "a bud opening in the summer air" and responds to her "flaxen hair" and "white lawn" dress as if she were a "Reality" which "excelled all visions" (p. 73). Yet, almost immediately, both ideals begin to be undercut. Len is forced to fight with Henry Kugler because he has suggested that Crawford is not an ideal teacher in that he lacks "impartiality" (p. 38). Len's vision of innocent love is undercut first by his observing the sexual overtones to a quarrel between his parents (p. 84) and later by his awareness that Lydia is materialistic and coquettish, a combination that gives rise to jealousy on his part and a justifiable fear of the other boys in town.

The second and third sections of the novel chart Len's increasing disillusionment. At the lumber camp he becomes aware of experience as a different and perhaps more valid sort of knowledge than education, and the ineffectual "young Croesus" figure who comes to the camp crystallizes his disappointment:

An education seemed a mere bauble, to wave in order to dazzle the common crowd which had not looked behind the scenes as he, Len, had done. Over against it stood Life, with a capital letter. (pp. 120-121)

His idealism about love between men and women is also threatened: at camp he hears and sees the coarseness of men and women where sex is not accompanied by love; in town Lydia rejects him for materialistic reasons, then tempts him physically anyway, and later behaves flirtatiously and dishonestly with the boys who pursue her. Indeed, faced with a reality which so threatens his ideals Len retrenches: he creates an "artifice," a "fiction" in which Lydia is restored to innocence, "de-carnalized," and thus can serve as a goal, an inspiration for his work and particularly his studies for his entrance examinations (p. 178).

But Lydia's dishonourable flight to the city, leaving a wake of death and destruction, undermines the reconstructed vision, and Len Sterner, in the third section of the novel, appropriately entitled "Manhood," must come to terms with his shattered ideals. Initially he knows only despair:

Nothing mattered to Len. Love and learning: two things he had valued; but the disaster in which the former was shattered destroyed the value of the latter as well. (p. 197)

His exposure to intellectuals in the city -- the shallowness of Pennycup and the indifference of Lockhart -- confirms his loss of belief in education. His own susceptibility to the "intoxication" of city life which he had thus far resisted, "inviolable," confirms his own sensual weakness and the impossibility of ideal love (p. 249). The fever to

which he succumbs is real, but is also a symbol of his confusion and despair. Recovery from it is accompanied, significantly, by a new acceptance of his obsession with Lydia, for he feels that their relationship -- however imperfect -- is "fatal" and that she embraces his "doom" (p. 275).

The final movement, where a reunited Lydia and Len decide on mutual suicide, is meant, one feels, to be heroic. Fundamentally, Lydia is as much an idealist as Len, and she declares,

I loved you. Had come to love you. The thought of you had been the only thing which upheld me. The only thing which kept me from going to pieces, from turning wicked and profligate. (p. 337)

In mutual sorrow for the limitations of humanity, they consummate their love as a symbolic act -- a concession to the physical, limiting components of life which make the ideal unattainable. It is an act which is ritualistic, like the sacrificial pyre they build (p. 334) prior to sacrificing their lives.

On the literal level, then, Len Sterner's story is that of the disintegration of the sensitive, introspective, idealistic man who is forced to come to terms with the harsh social realities of pioneer life. Len Sterner's response to the necessity for compromise, for accepting the un-ideal nature of life on earth, is defiance: he chooses death over submission. His defiance, moreover, is heroic, especially in the context of Grove's fiction as a whole, for as Frank Birbalsingh has argued,

. . . Grove's characters do not respond passively. Although they acknowledge domination by mysterious and hostile forces, they summon up all possible inner resources in a fierce show of resistance, even when they realize that resistance is futile.³¹

On a second, less secular level Len Sterner's ultimate choice of death over life may also be interpreted as a positive gesture. On this level, The Yoke of Life employs familiar and archetypal religious motifs in order to portray Len as undertaking a sort of edenic quest, seeking spiritual peace and personal redemption following his own fall from innocence.

On the one hand the novel draws upon classical mythology, for there are echoes in Len Sterner's tenaciousness of the classical figure of Prometheus. Len's "heroism," as has been discussed, lies in his unwillingness to compromise and his willingness to suffer and even die rather than to accept life on terms other than his own. The Promethean connection is suggested not only by Len's attitude of defiance, but by Grove's use of fires in the novel -- the "divine spark" which Crawford sees in him, the eerie light which bathes the scene at the slough, the campfire which the lovers build in the wilderness, and above all the image of the pyre invoked at their deaths. The implication that Len Sterner is like Prometheus in his rebellious quest for knowledge and his defiance of convention in the pursuit of personal ideals elevates Len's quest by underscoring the magnitude of spirit of the sort of man who would defy the gods or, in modern terms, remorseless fate.

More significant, however, are the Christian motifs which permeate The Yoke of Life. The structure of the novel itself suggests an archetypal Christian progression -- the movement of a soul from innocence through a fall, thence through purgation and eventually into a state of redemption or rebirth. The four sections of the novel correspond to these four stages. "Boyhood" recounts Len's state of

innocence on the farm, which is a sort of Eden for the idealistic child. In "Youth," set in lumber camp and town, there is exposure to evil for both Len and Lydia, followed by the temptation which each arouses in the other and a fall; the "sin" is clearer on Lydia's part than on Len's, but each is aware of his own fall from innocence. The third part of the novel, "Manhood," is set largely in the city whose inferno-like characteristics suggest hell and purgation. The final part, "Death," set in the wilderness with a lake at its heart, corresponds to the final stages of purgation and the waters of redemption.

Christian themes and images pervade the novel. It opens with Len's dream of possessing all knowledge, which is, of course, Adam's sin. His boyhood vision of the deer as unicorn is significant, for the unicorn is traditionally symbolic of chastity and also (because of its association with Christ) of perfection.³² Here it symbolizes Len's thirst, even as a boy, for spirituality and for perfection, ideals which are patently unattainable in temporal life and lead the Christian to long for spiritual release through death. Predictably Len's initial attraction to Lydia is marked by that duality which Christianity attaches to women: he sees her as white-skinned and clothed in white, suggesting her purity, but imagines as well her skin suffused with blood, with blushes emblematic of sensuality (p. 70), so that Lydia is from the start a dichotomous figure, Mary and Eve, virgin and temptress. Through her, Len is summoned from a state of innocence towards a state of experience, a process which he equates with sin.

Thus it is Len himself who, in the central two sections of the novel, thinks in terms of a fall from grace and the need for redemption.

It is Len who, after he has desired Lydia, imagines a sinister voice whispering, "Ye shall be as God knowing good and evil" (p. 71). It is Len who later sees Lydia as "Eve . . . after the Fall" (p. 162). It is Len who believes he himself has erred as well:

He knew that, since his return from camp, he had approached Lydia, not with the heights but with the depths of his being. Not the uppermost, but the nethermost strata of his essence had been the bridge between them. (p. 223)

And it is Len who construes his journey to the city as a descent into an "abyss," where he must "probe the depths" (p. 217) in a hellish atmosphere of "steam and smoke," "doom and death" (pp. 226-227). His plan in finding Lydia is to re-establish their relationship, and he uses familiar Christian words to define that alteration: "having found her, he must redeem himself of what he now called the curse of sex" (p. 275).

The final movement of the novel is indeed redemptive. In archetypal Christian terms both Len and Lydia redeem themselves through an act of unselfish love which is praiseworthy precisely because it disregards and transcends the obvious physical attraction each feels. Lydia's act of love in nursing Len (the doctor notes that she has saved his life through her love) is an entirely asexual, purely spiritual gesture (p. 293). Later Len will offer to release her and die alone, renouncing the passionate desire to possess her which has consumed him since boyhood and recognizing at last that she is his "equal who must be consulted about the path to be taken" (p. 315). Having lived as brother and sister and having proved the strength of their spiritual love, Len and Lydia recapture Eden (although, being mortal, they realize the temporality of that state [pp. 329-330]) and then can marry, can

consummate their love, in "the sight of almighty God" (p. 340).

Their suicide pact is not a Christian act per se, of course. But the emphasis on the value of the lake -- one of Len's goals and the only one not destroyed -- suggests that Grove drew upon the idea of water as an ancient archetype for birth and, in Christian terms, rebirth through the baptismal fount.³³ Len and Lydia's ritualistic swim, where they shed their clothes and swim separately, is an act of purification; their lashing their bodies to the boat on the lake in a storm is an extension of that act and a dramatization of the central Christian assumption that in Death alone is there genuine Life. The simultaneous birth of a second Len -- trivial and coincidental on the literal level of plot -- is in symbolic terms a confirmation of the vitality of their gesture.

Thus, although The Yoke of Life is not a Christian treatise, the religious (and particularly the Christian) motifs do serve to reinforce the exploration of heroism on the secular level. On the level of spiritual quest, as on the secular level, perfection is unattainable in this world, and Len's self-immolation is a gesture of defiance and contempt for the limitations of earthly life. Rather than edifying wisdom, compromise, or submission, The Yoke of Life, employing Christian imagery to make the point, celebrates a sort of heroism common to other works in the Grove canon: in Spettigue's words, the essence of heroism in Grove's work is always the exercise of the superior will.³⁴

On a third level, The Yoke of Life depicts a journey of psychological significance, a journey to the centre of the self on the part of the sensitive, introspective and disturbed Len Sterner. In

this context, Len and Lydia undertake a melodramatic flight across a haunted landscape which appears to be symbolic of Len's own tortured consciousness and unending quest for identity and integrity. Len's emotional excess and psychological instability dominate the novel. Half-mad midway through the novel, he relentlessly pursues the woman he loves (who is herself depraved and unbalanced by this time). Once they find one another, rather than rejoicing and settling in, the lovers set out for the wilderness, consummate their love, and agree to commit suicide by lashing themselves to a frail boat in a fierce storm.

For the most part the landscape is depicted in malevolent terms as a wasteland (as Ricou observes)³⁵ that chills the spirit. In summer the charred stumps of burnt trees, separated by a "dense entanglement" of brush and undergrowth, are the most prominent features in the predominantly grey landscape (p. 12). In winter the indifference to man is quite dreadful:

An ineffectual morning sun glared down on the waste created by the night's blizzard. The landscape -- the drifts, the bare trees, and even the sky -- looked ice-cold, windswept, and hostile. The absolute quiet of the atmosphere and the indifference of the sun intensified that impression, just as the song of a bird on the battlefield emphasizes its horrors. (p. 26)

At times Len perceives nature not only as indifferent but as actively hostile. The August hail storm is terrifying because there is "diabolical significance" in its "manifestation of the powers above." Phrases describing that storm, like "the spasm of a sob," "unearthly silence," "a weird, incomprehensible radiance," "pounded into a pulp," and the concluding statement, "The world seemed to stand in ruins,"

reinforce a sense of malevolence in the atmosphere (pp. 58-59). Similarly the second storm is caused by a cruel nature whose "underground channels" swell into a flash flood, so that the eternal wolves can drive Kolm's horses into the slough and howl them into agonizing panic and inevitable death (p. 199). Indeed the inefficacy of light against this dark world, for someone like Len, is suggested throughout the novel -- in the lighted Kolm house which seems to offer respite from the dark night in the first chapter but which is actually a place where Len is "picked on" lest he become a "loafer" (p. 24); in the bonfire which illuminates the horses in the slough only to magnify the horror and the helplessness of the bystanders; in the campfire that Len and Lydia build which creates an apparently comfortable microcosm for them, but one which is ultimately "artificial" and actually drives home the fact that "this small world created by the light of the fire was surrounded by another huge world of unknown or at least unseen things" (p. 303).

As Len moves across this hostile landscape, moreover, his path is not straightforward. Rather, he changes direction frequently, zigzagging constantly in a crisscrossing labyrinthine journey suggestive of his inner confusion as he pursues Lydia Hausman from farm to city and beyond.

Each of the four structural units of The Yoke of Life is marked by the erratic movements of Len Sterner. In the first section, "the Kolm farm" is the predominant setting, but from that base Len makes short forays beyond the farm as he goes about his business -- collecting the cows, going to school, walking to meet Lydia and, at the end, going to

town on his way to meet the train for the journey to the lumber camp. In the second section, Len wanders farther afield. He journeys as far as the lumber camp, returns to the farm, visits Lydia in town and at her parents' home, is tempted by Lydia in the woods and eventually sees her flirtatious behaviour in town behind the Smith barn. The third section also traces Len's restless movements. It opens with the loss of the horses on the farm and Len's working on the farm prior to his decision to leave: he will head for the city because his family needs his wages to secure the farm, but also because he has seen Charlie and Helen in the woods, where he and Lydia once met, and their innocence and pragmatism seem to confirm his sense of belonging there no longer. The departure of Len for the city, then, signifies his renunciation of farm life, his alienation from a former, more pastoral life and his consequently dislocated sense of identity.

In many ways this mid-point of the third section of the novel is its major turning point, for although Len returns to the farm several times, once following a fever in this third section, it is never again with confidence that he can stay. The fourth section is climactic. Len is still profoundly dislocated, fevered and disoriented. Even after he has found Lydia in the city he is restless and feels somehow bound to visit the farm once more. Once there, he renews his commitment to leave it, but does so with pain, "wincing with sobs" in the "anguish of parting" (p. 323). His inexorable movement toward this dark, unknown and primitive landscape, moreover, is perceived by Len as the final movement in his compelling and circuitous journey: he "thought he had found his way through the labyrinth and seen a door that led beyond"

(p. 324).

Len's journey, then, is much like the zigzagging movement of one working his way through a maze. Several images from the text reinforce this impression: he himself refers to "the labyrinthine tangles of life" (p. 245); in a related image, suggestive of confusion, his mind is referred to as "a seething chaos" (p. 176); and, in a striking serpentine image, he is said to be "worm-eaten with impatience" (p. 177). Such imagery is significant, for Len's labyrinthine movements, in combination with the sense of descent attached to his entry into the inferno-like city, suggest that Len's journey, which culminates in an atavistic return to a primitive natural landscape, is symbolic of a descent into himself, into the primitive sort of human experience which he assumes is the "door" to his identity. Early in the novel, Crawford, Len's schoolteacher and mentor, has defined the nature of Len's quest as a search for the organic, the whole, self. Len has been described from the start as an imaginative child. In searching for the cows at dusk he fears the dark, a fear "which is common to all such children as people the landscape with the creations of their brain" (p. 11). He imagines the landscape as "a witch's habitation in an enchanted forest" (p. 11), and is relieved to recognize Crawford's "wonderfully friendly" voice out of the "haunted night," unlike his brother Charlie, who does not fear the dark but goes to bed without a light quite "cheerfully" because he lacks such a powerful imagination (p. 23). Indeed Crawford identifies Len as "a genius" (p. 43), destined for "the highest things" (p. 53), a boy in whom there is a spark he wishes to fan into a flame (p. 46). And Crawford, who is a lame Vulcan-like figure,³⁶ urges Len to

become a seeker, a visionary, and defines the "great man" that Len can become as one "who has thought and known more and more deeply than others"; great men are those who "explore the human heart and mind and help other men to understand themselves" (p. 8). He warns Len that "happiness" for such men is in the seeking and that "the hunger and thirst" can never be stilled (p. 45). Len's response is as to a visionary, revelatory experience and he seems to comprehend that selfhood is to be at the heart of his quest:

Len's eyes gleamed and glittered. All the muscles in his shivering body tightened with the exaltation of his mind. His vision took the shape of a glorious sunrise, the only kind of glory which he knew. He felt as if he were wrapped in solitude; the words of the man by his side were coming from a great distance. Len was in the presence of revelation; and what was revealed to him was the majesty of his self. (p. 46)

In fact, however, he does not realize then or for a long time that selfhood is a large organic sort of entity, that embraces, to quote Crawford, both "thought" and "knowing," the "mind" and "heart" -- that is, a combination of learning and living, of thinking and feeling, of reason and passion. Len Sterner's early bent for knowledge, by which he understands academic knowledge, has caused him to idealize the academic and the ethereal, and to denigrate the earthier side of experience.

From the beginning, it is clear that Len does have a capacity for passion and sensuousness (his awakening sexual response to Lydia is evidence), and that he does respond instinctively or intuitively to his schoolwork, grasping at the whole rather than mastering its sequences and components (p. 33). But his own nature or personality erroneously

insists upon suppressing sensuality, upon establishing polarities between reason and passion, rational and non-rational responses. Thus at camp he denounces books when it is apparent that "real life" pulsates around him and is more "alluring" (p. 115). When he is physically attracted to Lydia he cannot reconcile his intellectual response to her as an ideal with his sensual response to her as a woman:

A minute ago, his whole being had been mind; now it was all sense. He felt as though he was being conquered by something which was not his own, ordinary self; as if another self were rising within him, eclipsing him . . . and merging him into the fiery sea of his blood. (p. 161)

In the chapter called "The Tempter," Len sees Lydia as one through whom he might become either god (if she remains ideal and inviolate) or beast (if the bond between them is "purely physical," a gate through which he might enter "the lower world" [p. 165]).

Hence when Len returns from the lumber camp having learned that living or experience is as important as learning or thinking about life, Crawford assumes he has "assimilated a vision" (p. 175) and seen the connections between the formal and the experiential aspects of knowledge. In fact Len has not. He continues to insist upon the separation and incompatibility of the two, valuing reason and therefore devaluing passion. Thereafter he vacillates between periods of "purity" and flashes of bewildering sensuality. Even his decision at the end of the third section to submit to his need for Lydia is a polar decision, for he assumes that there is "doom" in his fatal preoccupation with her and "the curse of sex" (p. 275). Even at this point, then, unwilling to admit the interlocking of the physical and spiritual planes

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in human experience, Len is a divided soul, in fact a tormented half-person at best.

It is Len, indeed, who defines himself as incomplete and recognizes that Lydia is somehow a missing part of his own identity. Certainly Len is aware from boyhood that Lydia represents another side of life, perhaps "soul" not "mind," and that every soul must seek its complement:

A longing was in him, unrecognized as such: a first adumbration that a human being is, in mind and soul, imperfect by itself; that somewhere in this world it must find its complement. A half is seeking the other half which will complete it into a self-contained whole. (p. 67)

Thereafter the theme is often repeated. He fears their separateness and longs to possess her (pp. 139-141). He subordinates himself to her in a special sense,

not to her, but as a part is subordinated to the whole, the whole consisting of the two of them united. They were equinascent, of equal rights and equal worth; and, whether she saw it or not, they fitted together: they formed the possible whole. (pp. 165-166)

He feels incomplete without her (p. 336), and wonders if they will ever form the "perfect whole" (p. 324). He calls her his "other half" (p. 336). To find her and to unite with her is his fate and his doom.

In essence, then, the relationship between Len and Lydia is, like the central relationships found in the other novels in this study, one between first and second selves. Keppler argues that the first self is usually naive at first, thinking of himself as the whole self until it is forced upon him that another self is involved in his make-up.³⁷

He says that when there is a relationship between male and female selves it is always tempestuous for "There are no tepid relationships between the hemispheres of the soul."³⁸ Indeed, such lovers, he says,

do not merely attract each other because they complement each other. The lovers . . . attract each other, if necessary from the ends of the earth, because they are each other; very much as though they had inherited in its full strength the nostalgic yearning for each other experienced by the two halves of one of those once-whole humans long ago bisected by Zeus, each utterly preoccupied with this yearning, yet equally unable to account for it or to satisfy it.³⁹

Certainly, the intense relationship between Len Sterner and Lydia Hausman is founded on their complementary natures. For Len, Lydia is more than a girl he has met at an impressionable moment. She is a soul-mate, an obsession, because he senses, quite accurately, that she complements him in a vital way: she errs in the direction of sensuality as surely as he does in the direction of rationality. His first impression of her is authentic: he "feels" her looking at the back of his head as they sit at school and senses that as the "upper and more mobile strata" of his mind continue to function, she is invading and pervading "the lower strata" (p. 34). Later he will evoke, in a metonymous fashion, the essence of Lydia Hausman by remembering the edge of her dress against her skin below her throat, and, however chastely he invokes the image it is a sensuous one and has a sensual effect on him. Quite apart from his passionate response to her, Lydia's own sensuality is evident in her craving for the indolence of town life, her materialism which is focussed on acquiring fancy clothes and cosmetics, and, of course, in her own experienced response to Len's accidental touch:

For a moment, as he had held her clasped, she had felt his hand on her breasts; she had felt herself sinking; that feeling she knew. (p. 166)

Thus, although he does not realize it at the time, Len's decision to submit himself to his obsession for Lydia, to find her and possess her, is a positive movement, for she embodies the missing elements, the irrational, sensual responses, in which his own character is deficient. And, having found her, his instinctive selection of the wilderness as a theatre for their union and their death is also a positive one. Their sojourn in the wilderness is, for both of them, a surrender to the "other" side of experience, a surrender which is made possible because they have isolated themselves from the expectations of society and from the artifices which society had required them to adopt. For Len there is surrender to the irrational aspects of life in his performing, out of commitment, a sexual act with a woman he has long since connected to the "primal" side of life (p. 222). For Lydia there is surrender in her abandonment of artifice and indolence in favour of the hardships of wilderness life with a man she loves; in other words the sensual woman has committed herself to an ideal, an abstraction, even to the point of accepting Len's suggestion of dying for a principle, an idea.

Their decision to die is, of course, melodramatic. But as Ricou suggests, "for all its element of wilderness gothic" it is "not nearly so incongruous as it first appears."⁴⁰ Indeed, in the context of the psychological quest for identity, it is a symbolic and probably essential act. On the one hand, their abandonment of themselves to

rough water in a small craft is a gesture of tribute to those values they have embraced through their union -- a commitment to nature and fate, for they had found one another fatefully and then, stripped of the encumbrances of civilization, were able to find themselves in each other. Secondly, their suicidal gesture is a commitment to Death as a positive experience: Death is a climax symbolic of their sexual loss in one another, of course, but it is also -- given the arena of their death, which is a vortex-like lake surrounded by ascending walls of chattering rock -- a symbol of their mutual descent into the deepest recesses of the self, especially in Len whose surrender has been to the dark, passionate underside of human experience. And thirdly, even on this non-religious plane, submission to death by water is symbolic surely of rebirth in an archetypal sense. Stobie quotes Rousseau's statement that "We are born, so to speak, twice over; born into existence and born into life; born a human being, and born a man";⁴¹ this suggests that the immersion in water, even though it involves death, is the act which marks Len's stormy birth into manhood after his unusually prolonged adolescence.

But their death makes clearest sense in light of Crawford's teaching and philosophy, which Len may not have consciously absorbed even in the end, but which the reader may well attend to. Crawford's early statement to Len, the boy who wants to know all things, is his connection between knowledge and selfhood:

You are of the stuff of which wise men are made, Len, not learned men. What, in all branches of knowledge we really investigate is ourselves. (p. 80)

Earlier he had warned Len that for men such as himself the essence of

life is searching, not finding, for "It is the road that matters, not the goal" (p. 80). And in his final speech to Len, Crawford goes further: reading and writing are but ways to "beguile the time" until one faces death, as he himself now faces death in his old age. Taken together Crawford's statement to Len is clear: all of life, for the man of poetic temperament, is a search for self; having found it one should embrace selfhood freely; but having found it the searching is ended and this life is ended, and one can only welcome death.

Len, in finding his goal, himself, in uniting with Lydia, has nothing to live for. If quest is the essence of life he is ready to die, a wise man. In the wilderness he has found freedom, not by exacting slavery from Lydia -- for he has released her and she has chosen to come -- but in conferring free will. In achieving, or consummating, selfhood, one can die into life.

It is clear then, that The Yoke of Life is a complex novel which can be read on several levels simultaneously. On the simplest and most realistic level, Len Sterner is an existential hero in his defiance of those factors in his environment which prevent the realization of his ideals, which reinforce his sense of the imperfections of men on earth. On a second level his journey is rendered in spiritual terms and culminates in rebirth-through-death, a climax which draws upon Christian and other religious imagery. And on a third level, the deepest, there is a psychological "journey" which leads Len Sterner through recognition of his "second self" into self-awareness and self-immolation as an attempt to merge, one suspects, with those large mysterious forces -- nature, fate, death -- through which he has found meaning.

The fact that Grove altered the title of the novel several times is significant, suggesting that he was aware that there were several facets to the novel and that it could not easily be pinned down. The Yoke of Life was the publisher's title, and one that Grove professed to loathe, but it is a title which points to the first level of meaning, where Len as victim, struggles with and eventually defies his oppressive environment. One of Grove's own titles, "Equal Opportunities," would also seem to point to this, the most material level. Other of Grove's suggestions, "The Gate of Life" and "The Gateway of Life" are suggestive of the Christian imagery, the death-in-life theme, that predominates at the second level. But Grove's favourite title, and the one by which he consistently refers to the novel in his correspondence is "Adolescence," a title which suggests the third level, the psychological search for identity which is the mark of adolescence in human development, and a search which obsesses Len Sterner throughout the seven years which the novel portrays.⁴²

The Yoke of Life, then, operates at several levels simultaneously, only one of which can be termed "realistic" at all. It is significant that critics have begun to recognize Grove's romanticism, insofar as he celebrates the essential unity of nature and the individual's ability to participate in that unity. Stobie writes of The Yoke of Life:

To redress the degenerative influence of society, as Grove says, "Rousseau's education is intended as education for individuality" and the aim of Emile's tutor is to educate this one boy to be a man! Such also is the aim of the saintly school teacher in The Yoke of Life. But the deep structure that is involved here is the essence of the individual -- the "I, Myself", the "permanent sub-stratum" which obeys and must obey its own laws and directions because otherwise it would be denying itself.⁴³

The point is that by abandoning the assumption that Grove is a pioneer realist or naturalist, avenues are opened to the critic for a reading of the novel on other levels as well, and for approaching Grove as a writer working within that essentially romantic tradition in Canadian fiction which explores a quintessential theme in modern literature -- the quest for re-integration of the splintered identity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Edward McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction, rev. ed. (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 68.

²Douglas O. Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 157.

³Ibid.

⁴Desmond Pacey, ed., Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 3.

⁵See Robert Ayre, "A Solitary Giant" in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, pp. 17-24. Ayre argues that Grove "stiffens life," that he "stuffs language like oatmeal into their mouths."

⁶McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction, rev. ed., p. 69.

⁷Norah Story, The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 333.

⁸Desmond Pacey, "Fiction 1920-1940," Literary History of Canada, ed. Klinck, 1st ed., p. 679.

⁹Thomas Saunders, "The Grove Papers," Queen's Quarterly, 70 (Spring, 1963), p. 24.

¹⁰Robert Ayre, "A Solitary Giant," in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers, p. 17.

¹¹Desmond Pacey, "Grove's Tragic Vision," in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 46.

¹²Ronald Sutherland, "What was Frederick Philip Grove?" The Grove Symposium, ed. John Nause (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1974), p. 8.

¹³ Frank Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," Canadian Literature, No. 43 (Winter, 1970), p. 75.

¹⁴ Ayre, "A Solitary Giant," in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 21.

¹⁵ Pacey, "Grove's Tragic Vision," in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 46.

¹⁶ Pacey, "Grove's Tragic Vision," p. 49.

¹⁷ Pacey, introduction to Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 6.

¹⁸ Margaret Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 17.

¹⁹ Margaret Stobie sees these works as a unit and refers to them as a "trilogy" (treating Over Prairie Trails and Turn of the Year as a single work). Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 57. It does seem probable that these books were written within a short period of time, for a version of The Yoke of Life was sent to Arthur Phelps in 1925 under the title of "Equal Opportunities."

²⁰ For example, Isobel Skelton calls The Yoke of Life a working over of Settlers, but with "a poorer crop." Isobel Skelton, "One Speaking Into a Void," in Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Pacey, Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series, p. 38. Similarly John Moss compares The Yoke of Life to Settlers of the Marsh, for both are "set in the same terrain," but he finds The Yoke of Life "less successful" on the whole. John Moss, Patterns of Isolation, p. 199.

²¹ Frederick Philip Grove, Letter to his wife dated February 18, 1929, The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto: University Press, 1976), p. 247.

²² Grove, Letter to his wife dated February 3, 1926, *ibid.*, p. 226.

²³ Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 85.

²⁴ Frederick Philip Grove, The Yoke of Life (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 33. All subsequent references will be to this edition and page numbers will be bracketed within my text.

²⁵Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 106.

²⁶Stanley E. McMullin, "Grove and the Promised Land," The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 32.

²⁷Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 53.

²⁸Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 39.

²⁹Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 106.

³⁰"Dialectic" is used in the Hegelian sense here to mean a method of investigating the truth, or the nature of truth: an idea is stated (i.e., a thesis is set up), it is then attacked or denied (the antithesis), and then a more complete or rounded truth emerges from the conflict between the two (the synthesis) in the end.

³¹Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," pp. 68-69.

³²J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage, rev. ed. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), pp. 357-358. Cirlot notes that the unicorn is symbolic of chastity and an emblem of the word of God. He explores its connection with virginity and says that it often symbolizes Christ. Although earlier societies attached ambivalence to this surprisingly universal mythical creature, moreover, "the Church does not recognize this negative side of the unicorn."

³³In archetypal terms, Len's death by drowning is symbolic of what Philip Wheelright calls "cleansing by water," a gesture on Len's part which would define him not as an aimless "Wanderer" but as a true "pilgrim figure," who moves along a directed path, in this case toward chosen death as a commitment to his values. Philip Wheelright, "The Archetypal Symbol," in Perspectives in Literary Symbolism, ed. Joseph Strelka (University Park and London: Penn State University Press, 1968), p. 238.

³⁴Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 104.

³⁵Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World, p. 51.

³⁶Incidentally, it is Vulcan (or Hephaestus) who fashions the ball of thread that Theseus uses in the Labyrinth.

³⁷ Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self, p. 3.

³⁸ Ibid. Margaret Stobie sees in the relationship between Len and Lydia echoes of the theme of the "primordial hermaphrodite." Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 88.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁰ Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World, p. 52.

⁴¹ Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 67.

⁴² For a discussion of the various titles Grove considered, see Pacey, ed., The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove, p. 247.

⁴³ Stobie, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 37.

VI

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began as an exploratory study of four novels which were generally assumed to be flawed by melodramatic excess. In this, the concluding chapter, the general characteristics of melodrama (along with its relationship to gothic conventions) and the significance of the melodramatic mode in modern fiction will be examined.

In the beginning, it seemed to me that each of the four novels, White Narcissus, A Broken Journey, Wild Geese and The Yoke of Life, was strangely powerful and effective despite their common tendency to portray obsessive characters and extreme emotional states, as well as their tendency to use language awkwardly, especially in dialogue. Indeed, the strength and effectiveness of these novels appeared to derive directly from their use of melodramatic conventions -- as a tool for projecting an atmosphere of hypersensibility, of heightened feeling barely restrained.

A detailed analysis of the function of melodramatic excess in several such novels seemed in order, after which certain general questions might be raised. What is the effect of melodrama when it operates within the boundaries of an otherwise realistic novel, for example? Do the melodramatic properties employed in these novels open up other and deeper levels of meaning for the reader than that meaning

evident on the literal level?

In broader terms, moreover, an in-depth study of even a very limited number of such novels ought to raise significant questions for the student of modern fiction, and especially of English-Canadian fiction where critical attention has been focussed almost exclusively on novels of social realism. What do melodramatic novels have in common, aside from their obvious use of melodramatic story-lines and heightened emotional tone; in particular are there shared formal or structural patterns? To go further, if a "melodramatic mode" can be discovered, what is its significance within the larger context of modernism and romanticism: does melodrama lend itself to the expression of a particular vision or philosophy? And, perhaps most important for a study which is focussed on a few novels, is the approach to (or way of reading) novels which is presented in this paper applicable to other non-realistic fiction of other periods?

Melodramatic excess has proven to be characteristic of each of the four novels examined in this study: each protagonist, when caught in a dramatic set of circumstances, reacts with extreme and obsessive emotion. In Wild Geese, Lind Archer is set down, fatefully, in the Gare household, where her fear of Caleb's tyranny increases proportionately with her determination to wrench his daughter, Judith, from his grasp. In White Narcissus, Richard Milne is equally determined to liberate Ada Lethen, freeing her from her self-imposed bondage to her parents, so that she can marry him and join him in a presumably happier life in the city. In A Broken Journey, Marion Gibbon's heightened emotions and sexual excitability drive her into a desperate and doomed liaison with

a man whose overpowering physicality she cannot ultimately accept. In The Yoke of Life, Len Sterner pursues a woman with an obsessiveness that borders on the fanatic, leading them both through a purgatory that culminates in mutual suicide.

In each novel, moreover, melodramatic effects do serve to intensify and deepen the impact of the story. Richard Milne's impression of the landscape as haunted in White Narcissus, and of the Lethens as grotesque gaolers of the woman he loves, intensifies the reader's perception of his desperation in his quest for Ada, whom he has wanted for so long. Lind Archer's perception of Caleb Gare as satanic and Ostenso's suggestion of madness in his obsession with his perfect flax, magnify the reader's feelings of empathy with Judith, Caleb's most desperate victim and the one most worthy of escape. Similarly, in The Yoke of Life Len's obsession with Lydia, his fevered search for her, their coincidental crossing of paths in the city, and finally his frantic journey into the wilderness in search of final peace, are melodramatic in tone but do serve to heighten the reader's awareness of the effect of the rigidities of pioneer existence upon a sensitive and essentially creative spirit. In A Broken Journey, too, the plot is melodramatic, but Peter's fateful and immobilizing injury precipitates the essential crisis in the novel: it forces Marion to look further than Peter, toward Steve, a more "natural" man, in her attempt to reconcile her own conflicting feelings about sexual experience.

Melodramatic effects, then, tend to reinforce or expedite theme in each of these novels. But what seems truly remarkable is the number of patterns, particularly structural patterns, which they also share.

In the first place, each novel is set up formally so that it has as its focus a single protagonist who undertakes (and ruminates upon) a specific journey, literally moving across a particular landscape in pursuit of a clearly-defined goal. For example, in White Narcissus, Richard Milne sets out to come to terms with his rural past and to win the hand of his childhood sweetheart, who is bound to her aging and restrictive parents. Wild Geese is the story of a young school teacher who travels to a remote farming community as an emissary of culture and civilization, then returns to the outside world educated herself, ironically, in the harsher truths of life on the fringes of civilization. In A Broken Journey Marion Gibbons determines to travel north and penetrate the natural and primitive landscape of the Algoma highlands, a place she associates with the inner peace, harmony and spirituality she desires. Len Sterner's journey in The Yoke of Life involves his movement from farm to town, thence to city and finally into a wilderness in pursuit of a woman he first loves and idealizes and then obsessively pursues.

The journey which each novel depicts, moreover, is rendered via a very balanced form or structure. Wild Geese employs a structure-within-a-structure: the inner story of Lind's involvement with the liberation of Judith Gare is framed by the love story of Lind and Mark. Lind arrives in Oeland in Chapter 1, alone, and leaves for the outside world in the final chapter with her lover, Mark Jordan. Within that framework, the novel is divided symmetrically into seasonal units that are punctuated by the arrival and departure of the wild geese, from April (Chapter 1) to October (Chapter 23), with the middle chapter

of the novel (Chapter 12) depicting July, the middle month of the seven portrayed.

A Broken Journey is also a "symmetrical" novel, the first half (Chapters 1-11) being set in the city and the second half (Chapters 13-22) set in Algoma. The middle chapter (Chapter 12) is less a link between the two halves than a commentary on them: just as the young priest finds the sensuous world of Theresa Gibbons bewildering and rejects it as evil, so too Marion in both her abortive "journeys" toward sensuality (one, with Peter, now past, and one with Steve yet to come) perceives passion as threatening and ultimately denies herself that experience.

The Yoke of Life is balanced structurally as well. The four sections of the novel, entitled "Boyhood," "Youth," "Manhood," and "Death," are roughly equivalent in length, "Boyhood" consisting of seven chapters and the other sections six chapters each.

Even White Narcissus, the least obviously structured of the four novels, is in fact a carefully balanced novel. Following its two introductory chapters, which serve to move Richard Milne into Lower Warming and into the Hymerson household so that he can begin his quest for Ada, the novel divides itself (much like Wild Geese and A Broken Journey) into two major sub-sections linked by a pivotal and symbolic chapter: in the first sub-section, the six chapters from Chapter 3 to Chapter 8, Richard operates from Hymerson's farm (and business-like, rational viewpoint) and fails to win Ada, while in the second sub-section, the six chapters from Chapter 10 to Chapter 15, he moves to the Burnstile farm (accepting their more natural, spontaneous ways) and

succeeds in carrying her off. The linking chapter is that in which Richard perceives himself as a divided man, like a severed earthworm, whose "halves" (presumably the rational and the passionate) must somehow be bridged.

There is significance in the fact that the four novels share a fundamental formal characteristic, a very balanced structure in which there is without exception a striking symmetry. A novel which attempts to simulate real life or objective reality tends to approximate the spontaneous flow of events which is the mark of everyday experience. While dramatizing such material in the process of turning life into art, such "realistic" novels attempt to capture the sense of life's unfolding casually or even haphazardly. In many modern novels (as in the stream-of-consciousness novels of Woolf or Proust), there is an attempt to capture "subjective reality" through such techniques as the portrayal of time as flow (what Joseph Frank calls the "spatialization" of time),¹ or through the depiction of multiple levels of consciousness and the peripety of human thought processes. In novels which attempt to portray life realistically, then, the artistic manipulation of material, though obviously present, is not intended to intrude upon the reader's consciousness as he experiences the text. Hence the reader is encouraged to empathize or to identify with the characters and story.

In these melodramatic novels, on the other hand, structures are employed which are so balanced as to undermine credibility. An obviously balanced, basically symmetrical structure weakens verisimilitude by making too apparent the imposition of artistic ordering upon the raw material of the novel, namely real life or everyday experience. It is

as if structural patterns are being allowed (whether intentionally or subconsciously on the part of the author) to intrude upon the reader's awareness, and the overall effect of such an intrusion is to distance the reader from the material by making it more difficult to identify with the characters.

The point of view employed in each of the novels is another formal aspect which has a distancing effect on the reader. In all four novels the point of view is third person, a narrative voice which eschews the intimacy and empathy implicit, for example, in first person narration. Three of the novels use a multiple point of view in combination with an occasionally-intrusive omniscient narrator. Only one, White Narcissus, experiments at all with "closed form," as defined by Sharon Spencer,² a mode which does attempt to approximate reality in the portrayal of consciousness; and even in this novel, the single point of view of Richard Milne is accompanied by some intrusive narrative commentary upon Richard's progress and state of mind.

Like the tendency toward symmetrical structure, the third-person narration (in combination with an omniscient narrator who comments on, indeed almost judges the material as it is presented), has the effect of undermining the reader's identification with characters and events in the novel. As in Brechtian drama, such formal properties tend to break the spell between reader and character, moreover, in order to encourage intellectual, non-sympathetic reaction to the material. Indeed this analytical approach to the material on the part of the reader is essential, for -- in the case of all four novels -- he must manage a narrative which functions coevally on several levels at once, and which

draws on a broad spectrum of conventions from the purely literary to those of mythology and psychology.

Each of the four novels does, in fact, function on at least two levels beyond the most literal. In the first place each draws upon mythology -- popular, classical or religious -- although the degree of dependence upon myth varies a great deal. In White Narcissus, as the title indicates, Richard Milne is like the classical figure Narcissus in that his quest is essentially egocentric and self-directed: his pursuit of Ada is motivated not by magnanimous love or concern for her welfare but by his feeling that without her he will be less of an artist, that she will serve as his still centre; thus abandoning himself to her will permit him to function creatively in the outside world. In mythological terms their relationship will facilitate within Milne the death of Narcissus (that paralyzed state of self-absorption) and make possible his subsequent re-birth as Orpheus the poet.

Wild Geese is a novel enriched by echoes of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, caught in a dark underworld not of their own making. Caleb Gare is an obvious Pluto figure and his universe a hell for his family whom he imprisons there. Amelia, as Judith's mother, is Demeter-like in her efforts to liberate her daughter from Caleb's domination, but the focus of the novel is Judith-as-Persephone and Lind's identification with her: Lind too is caught in Caleb's net, for she cannot leave the Gare farm without Judith, who functions, as has been shown, as her alter ego. When both young women do leave this infernal landscape, Caleb having disappeared, Satan-like, into the bowels of the earth, their escape is incomplete (as was Persephone's)

for both realize that they can never leave behind their dark experience at Oeland: it has marked them and will go with them all the days of their lives.

The Yoke of Life is a complex novel in which both Christian myth and a classical figure play a role. The central Christian myth, that of the fall and redemption, underlies the structural units of the novel. In a familiar pattern, "Boyhood" corresponds to Len Sterner's state of innocence; "Youth" tells of his fall as Len gives himself over to the obsessive search for Lydia, herself a fallen woman; "Manhood" represents his time of purgation and purification as he finds Lydia but suffers illness, fevers, and spiritual agony in an inferno-like city; and "Death" depicts Len's redemption, in his new-found ability genuinely to love and accept Lydia, as well as his re-birth, symbolized by his voluntary death in a lake with its baptismal connotations.

At the same time there are classical echoes in The Yoke of Life, for Len is in some ways (as has been discussed) a Promethean figure and it is the connection with Prometheus which gives his obsessive quest for Lydia, and his choice of death over submissive life, its dignity and heroic depth. In finding Lydia and accepting her in sorrow as a woman sullied by experience, by the harsh verities of life, Len comes to terms with the conditions of temporal life. But as an idealist and a man who wants nothing less than the gods -- which is to say perfection -- Len's final gesture must be defiance, suicide as a gesture of his unwillingness to submit to man's fate.

In A Broken Journey, the least mythopoeic of the four novels, neither classical nor religious mythology plays an obvious role. But

Marion Gibbons' quest is permeated by a sort of general romantic mythology which she herself attaches to her journey to Algoma. For Marion, Algoma is desirable because it is a wilderness unspoiled by the excesses of civilization -- quiet, remote and therefore potentially therapeutic. In Algoma, she assumes (as does popularized romanticism) she will be able to lose herself, particularly her Church-rooted inhibitions, and by drawing upon the immensity of Nature and the tranquillity and sensuality of a natural environment, her divided spirit will be healed. When Algoma fails to exorcise her sexual guilt and habitual repression, her dreams are irretrievably shattered, for, within the framework of romantic mythology, there is nowhere to go beyond wilderness: it is the end of the spectrum whose beginning, ascetic denial of and aversion to pleasure, had left her dissociated and spiritually malcontent in the first place.

The four novels, then, share a tendency to use mythology, in varying degrees, as a way of intensifying the impact of the protagonist's quest, a quest signified by the journey he has undertaken at the literal level. But the mythological level is itself a metaphor for yet another level in each case, the protagonist's search for himself, for an inner tranquillity which will heal and surmount a dichotomy he feels within his nature or his identity.

Thus in White Narcissus, Milne is at the start of the novel a man divided -- a practical man attuned to the present who nonetheless feels compelled to come to terms with his ephemeral past, a city man who simultaneously yearns for the simple pastoral pleasures he associates with the Burnstile family, and above all a business man whose advertising

job is somewhat at odds with his desire to be a creative writer. Marion Gibbons, in A Broken Journey, is a divided woman who futilely attempts to overcome her aversion to her own sensuality: while she associates passion with her mother, for whom she feels contempt and revulsion, she also feels constricted and frustrated by her own lack of sexual experience and experiences a restless sense of being somehow incomplete. Len Sterner's inner conflict is essentially moral. He is torn from the start by his desire for perfection (as in his youthful dream of possessing all knowledge) and his passion for Lydia Sterner, a woman who is imperfect, as are all human beings, but whose imperfections shatter Len's illusions: her "sins" cast aspersion not only upon her, but upon him for loving her to the point of obsession despite her flaws. Lind Archer's identity, in Wild Geese, is perhaps the strongest of the four protagonists'. She comes to Oeland confident of her values and leaves with those "civilising" values apparently intact. But it is significant that her exposure to the evil of Caleb Gare is unsettling to her all the same. She repeatedly confesses her fear and despair to Mark Jordan who, although he is not much affected by Gare himself, becomes concerned that Lind will be "swallowed up" (p. 219) by her experience. Lind's sense of identification with Judith, a wild girl who is in so many ways her opposite, is itself bewildering to Lind, whose tension and frustration increase as Caleb's hold over his daughter intensifies.

What seems most significant in these portraits of divided and searching protagonists is another shared pattern -- the tendency of each to identify intensely with another figure, a person who is simultaneously and paradoxically both his opposite and a sort of

soulmate, so that the novels share a literary convention which has been called the "phenomenon of the second self."

The "Double" is, of course, an ancient and primitive archetype, apparently rooted in a certain primal fear of and fascination with "twin-ness."³ The literary projection of this fear is the Doppelganger, who resembles a protagonist to an uncanny extent, simultaneously attracting and repelling that protagonist and initiating in him a tension that disturbs his peace of mind and demands resolution. The Double may exist objectively, as another character (a twin or a shadow) or subjectively as a manifestation of the protagonist which is not entirely separate from him but is a projection of himself (like a reflection, an artifact or even the other half of a split personality). In the twentieth century, moreover, even the objective manifestation of the Double, as a separate character, has come to serve a subjective function. As Keppler argues, with the development of psychology and increasing awareness of the complexity of the human mind,⁴ fiction has come to portray with increasing frequency a protagonist who is divided or incomplete and who is made to encounter a Double in the form of a "second self" which represents the other half, the missing part, of his own dissociated personality. Hence there tends to be a simultaneous attraction to and revulsion from the second self on the part of the first self: the relationship between them is frightening because of its intensity and/or its uncanniness; yet union is essential and fundamentally positive, however painful the process, because without it the protagonist remains a half-person without a sense of harmony, integrity (in the sense of wholeness) and inner peace.

All four of the melodramatic novels studied here depict just such a relationship. Richard Milne relentlessly pursues Ada, a woman reared in a stifling emotional atmosphere, who is incapable of decision and immune to reason (to Richard's way of thinking). She is not particularly attracted to men, he knows, and has actually turned him down several times. Yet Richard courts her endlessly -- because she is essential to him. She is his creative inspiration, is "at the bottom of his urge to write" (p. 110), and without her he is incomplete as an artist and therefore as a man.

The case of Len Sterner is even clearer. He follows Lydia and determines to possess her despite his disappointment in her because (as Len himself perceives it) "whether she saw it or not, they fitted together: they formed the possible whole" (pp. 156-157). Len feels that every person must seek his complement, "the other half which will complete it into a self-contained whole" (p. 67), and Lydia Hausman is his counterpart, his second self.

Marion Gibbons exemplifies those who fail to unite with a preferred second self, to their own detriment. As the novel opens, Marion instinctively searches for a man who will complement her by embodying the physicality and sensual release she needs. Peter, however, her first choice, is the wrong man. Very much like her, he is fair, educated, intellectual rather than sensual, and "civilized." Steve, on the other hand, whom she locates in Algoma, in the wilderness, is the sort of mate she needs. He is dark, sensual, inarticulate and "natural." Indeed he is at ease only in the natural world where submissiveness in the face of larger forces is both essential and

dignified. At the point of making love with Steve, Marion suffers what can only be called a failure of nerve. Afraid of abandoning herself to natural passion, she flees, planning a return to the city, so that the novel ends in a sense of loss because Steve might well have functioned as a second self for her, but she rejected the experience.

In Wild Geese the emphasis is slightly different, for the central relationship is not between male and female but between Lind Archer and Judith Gare. Because they are of the same sex, however, theirs is probably the clearest example in all the novels of the meeting between a person and a true alter ego or second self. In fact the two are opposite faces of a single feminine persona: Judith's dark beauty, strapping physique, passion, defiance and earthiness are the very attributes that Lind herself -- delicate, fair, cerebral, dainty and gentle in manner -- is lacking. Significantly, Lind's attraction to Judith is immediate and irresistible. By the end of the first chapter there is such a bond between herself and the vigorous, strapping Judith that Lind has begun to speak of arranging the girl's escape from her father. Before long Lind is telling Mark that, whatever her personal apprehension, she cannot leave the farm without securing Judith's freedom, and it becomes increasingly clear that Judith represents for Lind an essential body of knowledge and experience -- a sort of primitive wisdom that complements her own more civilized bias.

Indeed, in every case, contact with the second self tends to involve a specific kind of knowledge or experience, that of the darker, more passionate side of human experience, which is to say the less-civilized half of a bicameral human consciousness. Keppler argues,

following Masao Myoshi, that modern thought tends to assume that there is a profound division between two spheres of human consciousness -- between self-control and passion, between intellect and imagination, between morality and art, between civilization and eros, between action and imitation, between the lawful and the unlawful, between rationality and irrationality.⁵ And, as Claire Rosenfield has observed, the second self generally represents the less civilized and rational, more terrifying, of the two spheres, and the one which civilized man fears may gain control over him:

Not until Freud revealed the importance of the irrational in man have we been willing to admit the possibility that each of us has within us a second or shadow self dwelling beside the eminently civilized, eminently rational self, a Double who may at any time assert its anti-social tendencies.⁶

At the same time, however, there is a realization, instinctive or self-conscious, that the wholly rational, over-civilized man is incomplete and that his sense of ennui stems from his habitual repression of those irrational, primitive aspects of human experience which are essential to creativity, spirituality and a certain harmony of body and mind. Thus, although the relationship between a protagonist and a second self may be painful, it will be essentially positive, a "fruitful disturbance,"⁷ says Keppler, who goes on to conclude that every second-self story is ultimately a story of the growth of a first self, even if he is ostensibly harmed in the process.⁸

In these four melodramatic novels that theory is borne out. For Richard Milne, Ada, his second self, is the deepest source of his creative drive. Her connection with the creative process is made clear

as the novel unfolds and Richard begins to associate Ada with the irrational environment, the Lethen home, from which she has emerged. Although it is painful for Richard to suppress his planned, rational and active pursuit of Ada, he does so, learning the art of passivity, of waiting, then acting spontaneously or irrationally. It is a procedure which wins Ada over, and is also analogous to a necessary, however difficult, part of the creative process -- the ability to enter a state of receptivity in which one can be infused by inspiration, a condition which cannot be forced or willed by the rational mind. Having won Ada, Richard sets out for the outside world confident of his own inevitable growth as an artist.

Similarly in Wild Geese Lind's experience is painful but positive in the long run. There can be little doubt that Lind acquires greater depth as a person through her bond with Judith, and although she is the least self-conscious of the four protagonists, it is clear that she is at the end of the novel a changed person, as is signified by her final reaction to the wild geese of the title: in the novel's concluding paragraphs the wild geese, who mark "the beginning and the end of the period of growth" (p. 239), pass over Oeland and Lind's response is to shiver in acknowledgement of the "proud mystery" they symbolize; when, a few sentences later, Mark refers to the "mystery" at the Gares and then the novel ends with a reference to the "endless quest" of the wild geese, the reader is left with the impression that Lind Archer's exposure to evil at the Gare farm has spawned endless repercussions and that she will never again be the carefree but rather vacuous girl she was at the start of the novel.

For Len Sterner, who is fundamentally idealistic, his encounter with his second self is truly agonizing. Because Lydia Housman (a woman who has "fallen" on account of her proclivities toward passion, instinct and sensuality) is undeniably the "other half" of his "self-contained whole," Len is forced through her to face the imperfections of human nature and indeed his own flawed humanity. It is a truth he faces but refuses to live with, choosing suicide with Lydia as a way of defying the limitations of temporal existence. That he chooses death, however, does not negate the essentially positive nature of Len's experience: in depicting Len's death on the lake as symbolic of re-birth, Grove suggests that Len Sterner's final gesture is affirmative, even heroic, and emblematic therefore of the potential for spiritual growth which is inherent in contact (through a second self) with the darker side of human experience.

The pathetic situation of Marion Gibbons at the end of her "broken journey," is further testimonial to the importance of responding to the irrational, instinctive side of human experience. That she is alone, restless and tortured with guilt at the end of the novel, just as she was at the beginning, indicates the importance of the experience she has denied herself: in failing to give herself over to passion through Steve, thereby suspending her rational will, lest she be "destroyed" by her lack of "resistance" (p. 238), Marion has repudiated the side of her nature which might have redressed in her the over-civilized, over-regulated behaviour she has cultivated throughout her past. Significantly, in the end she is driven back into judgmental, ecclesiastical language (seeing herself as lacking "fidelity," "honor"

and "faith," and feeling "eager to scourge herself" in her failure) symbolic of her deep regression as she withdraws from a potentially liberating relationship with a second self.

At this point it seems possible to summarize and to postulate, on the basis of this close analysis of a number of melodramatic novels, that a melodramatic mode does exist in fiction and that it tends to convey a vision particularly relevant within the context of modern thought and experience.

Traditionally, melodrama is a term used to describe a popular entertainment, usually theatrical. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "a dramatic piece characterized by sensational incident and violent appeals to the emotions. . . ." ⁹ As James L. Smith observes, literally thousands of melodramas appeared on the English stage during the nineteenth century. ¹⁰ He goes on to state, however, that from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, melodrama evolved from a fairly rigid theatrical form into a wide variety of forms encompassing virtually any type of entertainment which deals in extravagance, implausible motivation, sensation and pathos. ¹¹ Hence critics like Peter Brooks have come to apply the term to a broad spectrum of twentieth-century art forms, including fiction, and prefer to define melodrama simply as a "mode of excess," ¹² characterized by hypersensitive characters, an often incredible plot, a tendency toward animated setting (animation deriving from the character's projection of emotion upon his environment), and an atmosphere of fear and/or tension related to the obsessiveness with which the protagonist undertakes his quest.

On the basis of my work, I would go on to postulate that the

extravagant nature of the content of such fiction tends to be in contrast to its controlled and distancing formal properties: in the case of the specific novels studied, a balanced structure and impersonal point of view have the effect of distancing the reader from the story and encouraging in him an intellectual or analytical response to the material as it functions on several levels and employs a variety of conventions, simultaneously. Indeed the tendency of the melodramatic novel to portray heated emotional states and intense passions in a form whose properties tend to be cool and detaching, may account for the vitality of the genre: the tension between rigidly controlled form and extravagant emotional content is perhaps one reason for the powerful effect of the melodramatic novel on the reader.

In many ways the characteristics which I attribute to the melodramatic novel are very like those of the gothic novel, and one aspect of the four novels studied here which has not yet been discussed is their shared use of the conventions of gothic, or neo-gothic, literature.

There has been much interest in gothic and grotesque elements in North American fiction in recent years,¹³ and certain features of the modern gothic, or "neo-gothic," novel have been identified. Davendra Varma, historian of the gothic novel, emphasizes the evolution of the gothic form. He identifies three "streams": the "Gothic historical" stream (including the novels of Clara Reeves, those of the Lee sisters, and Scott's Waverley novels) stresses the background of "chivalrous pageantry"; the School of Terror, inspired by Radcliffe, emphasizes superstition and the supernatural (explaining everything logically,

however, in the end); and the School of Horror, Lewis' and Maturin's stories, revels in lurid violence and cruelty. These streams were chronologically successive, though overlapping at times, and ultimately evolved into the Victorian sensation novel, with its blend of realistic detail and villainy, violence and crime, which is the heir of gothicism and the path by which the gothic influence reached the twentieth century.¹⁴

Thus, the dominant characteristic of the gothic novel has always been its atmosphere, the sense of fear evoked as a hero sets out across a haunted landscape to pursue and rescue a maiden who is imprisoned, literally or figuratively, by a villainous figure. But as the gothic novel evolved into the twentieth century, its patterns blurred somewhat in keeping with the ambiguity and relativity of twentieth-century thought. Fear and horror, for example, are present in the neo-gothic novel, but are directed less toward the supernatural than toward the lack of it, as with the sense of alienation felt by a hero who believes there is nothing, in an absolute sense, beyond himself. The focus of such a novel becomes the individual, and the neo-gothic novel is above all an attempt to portray individual sensibility and that subjectivity which is the concern of a great number of modern novels. Male/female stereotypes persist, but they are more ambiguously rendered in the neo-gothic than in the gothic novel: the "hero" often combines elements of hero and villain, becoming what Varma calls a "Byronic hero,"¹⁵ while the "heroine" tends to combine characteristics of two earlier types, virgin and shrew, so that their relationship is more complex and less morally clear-cut than that of "hero" and "maiden" in early gothic fiction.

Hence there is a fundamental ambiguity in the neo-gothic novel as, its focus narrowed to "one vision and one will" (as James Justus notes),¹⁶ a protagonist — alienated, moody, self-tortured, disillusioned and often eccentric — moves across a landscape upon which he projects his unsettled emotions. He flees from past oppression and/or towards someone (often a mirroring image of himself) whom he regards as oppressed, or even incarcerated, and in need of rescue. Typically the haunted ancestral castle of the gothic novel has been replaced in neo-gothic fiction by various symbols of imprisonment and authoritarianism that are linked to the protagonist's personal past and often take the form of values which he has internalized but now resists. The evil feared is no longer the supernatural but now exists in the realm of the sub-natural — that dark region within the personality where the irrational, the unconscious, and (as Lowry Nelson states) the potentially "uncontrollable unconscious,"¹⁷ lie in restive internment.

In portraying the frightening but necessary encounter between a protagonist and the primitive resources of the human spirit, neo-gothic fiction often employs certain motifs, images and structural patterns. Irving Malin identifies, for example, various motifs in American gothic fiction — images of suffocation, of burdensome and confining silence, of darkness and murky colour, and of mirrors and reflections.¹⁸ He also designates three fundamental recurring images: the gothic haunted castle is replaced by neo-gothic images of confinement, usually rendered as a room of some sort, or an enclosed space which the protagonist may prefer to freedom; the gothic flight into the forest is replaced by journey imagery of a less specific sort; and the gothic emphasis on

actual reflection may be replaced by imagery more loosely suggestive of Narcissism.¹⁹

In addition, as J. Douglas Perry has demonstrated,²⁰ a common structural pattern emerges in neo-gothic fiction, one which is related to the protagonist's sense of entrapment and is represented by concentricity and circularity. These tend to be rendered structurally by whirlpool- or vortex-like movement on the part of the protagonist as he undertakes a circuitous journey and in doing so experiences great fear of being drawn into those powerful irrational forces that lie just beneath the rational surface of things, utterly threatening his sense of being in control of himself and his life.

Obviously much more might be said about modern gothic fiction, but the point to be made here is that the four melodramatic novels explored in depth in this study do draw upon neo-gothic conventions to some extent. The journey undertaken in each case is a deep spiritual quest rooted in a protagonist's coming to terms with his own past and his internalized values. His quest involves another person in each novel, but because that other person proves to be in fact a missing side of himself, which is to say a "second self," his pursuit takes on eeriness and he himself experiences anxiety and dismay, heightened emotional states which create that fearful atmosphere characteristic of neo-gothic fiction. In addition, each of the narratives incorporates gothic plot conventions and structural patterns.

In White Narcissus, for example, Richard Milne moves across a landscape which is clearly animated by his own apprehension. His goal is to rescue a maiden, Ada Lethen, from her home (a hulking and dreary

farmhouse analogous, of course, to the gothic dungeon) and especially from her parents -- the father an odd stick outcast by his community and the mother a weird, almost sinister figure who is clothed in black and surrounded by banks of pale and forced narcissi. The zigzagging of Milne across the landscape, and indeed (as has been argued) the physical relationship of the three farms between which he repeatedly travels, suggest the vortex-like pattern of movement which Perry found typical of neo-gothic fiction and which corresponds to the psychological descent into the self which Milne experiences through his union with Ada.

The Yoke of Life is also in many ways a neo-gothic novel.

Len Sterner is "Byronic," to use Varma's term, an archetypical hero-villain who, alienated, eccentric and obsessed, pursues a woman who is herself an ambiguous figure, both maiden and siren, saint and sinner. Len's pursuit of Lydia invokes an atmosphere of fear and tension coloured by his own slightly mad perceptions of the world around him, first as hellishly indifferent (especially in the case of the city) and later, in the wilderness, as welcoming and comforting (when in fact the deserted lake and its ugly chattering walls of rock epitomize for the reader inhumanity and profound danger). Much about Len's movements in pursuit of Lydia suggests circularity and descent: he moves from farm to city and back again in a circular pattern; he descends into a city he perceives as inferno-like; and he descends ultimately into the tarn-like lake surrounded by walls of rock, there to die literally at the lowest point in his journey. As in the case of Milne, Len's journey has been a descent into the darker half of the self, represented in The Yoke of Life by Len's passionate and sensual second self, Lydia

Hausman. But unlike Milne, Sterner cannot live with what he perceives as the heart of darkness and so opts for death, a prison, perhaps, but one of his own choosing.

Wild Geese, as Margot Northey acknowledges in The Haunted Wilderness, is gothic in its portrayal of the villainy of Caleb Gare.²¹ Lind Archer perceives Caleb as a nearly sub-human creature who would harness his own family in the pursuit of his obsessive dream. But Caleb's villainy is further dramatized by Ostenso's suggestion in Wild Geese that Caleb is almost supernaturally evil. Lind herself characterizes Caleb as satanic and his world as infernal: his children at times seem no more than listless shades labouring in remorseless heat as if in atonement for unremembered sins; and when Caleb dies in quicksand, framed by fire and sucked under by the earth itself, it seems the fitting end to a figure who had seemed more than mortal in the scope and intensity of his tyranny. In addition, there is some suggestion of the vortex in the arrangement of the farms upon the landscape, which places the Gare farm, and Lind with it, at the centre of the settlement, with the farms of unpleasant men adjacent to his and the farms of the "good" families most remote from Caleb, the evil core. It is a pattern which suggests the circles of hell, and Lind's frightening descent into its nucleus.

A Broken Journey is a novel written on a less grand scale than the others: it is less inflated in style, less mythopoeic in vision and also less gothic in execution. But in several ways it too employs gothic conventions. In a modern reversal of stereotypes, the pursuer is in this novel a woman who sets out to win over a young man, Peter,

who trusts and eagerly responds to her. Marion is herself an ambivalent figure, for she is both maiden and siren and her "rescue" of Peter proves to be destructive for him, both in causing his fall by driving him at one point into the arms of another woman, and by later compounding his injuries in moving him to Algoma when his back is broken. The destructiveness in Marion Gibbons, moreover, stems from her lack of inner equilibrium, her inability to experience peace of mind so long as she senses that a part of herself -- the capacity for guiltless passion and sensuality -- is missing. When the relationship with Peter has clearly failed, she continues, driven, to move across a landscape animated by her fears, projecting particularly onto the waters of Algoma her own panicky sense of submerged life barely held down. To heighten the sense of eeriness in this northern setting, there is the bizarre presence of Peter, a man wracked with pain and no longer ambulatory, whom Marion seems compelled to carry with her like a wounded albatross as she moves closer to the wilderness experience she craves but also fears.

As in A Broken Journey, Marion's penetration of the wilderness is indicative of her psychic descent into primitive emotion. Although there is little suggestion of the vortex in her movement, there is a clear movement in linear terms involving deeper and deeper penetration of the wilderness as Marion seeks a sort of spiritual epiphany through her relationship with Steve. She moves from city to a northern town, the Mission, then out onto the lakes with Steve and eventually more deeply into the wilderness itself as, while trout fishing, they penetrate remote creeks and swamps. Significantly Marion's failure is

underscored by a direct reversal of this path: she flees from Steve and the wilderness, retreats to the boarding house where she dons her city clothes, and plans her return by steamer to city and civilization.

It is clear, then, that these four novels, which I suggest represent a melodramatic mode in fiction, do employ gothic machinery and stereotypes, and this connection raises a larger issue, that of the relationship between the melodramatic and the gothic modes in general.

As Peter Brooks argues in The Melodramatic Imagination, the melodramatic novel shares many characteristics with the gothic novel. They emerge at about the same time historically, and both are preoccupied with nightmare states, clausturation and thwarted escape, as well as sharing a preoccupation with evil as a very real force in the world.²² In a sense, then, the melodramatic and gothic modes are cousins and one may draw upon the conventions of the other (melodrama employing gothic stereotypes, for example, or a neo-gothic novel portraying hypersensitive emotional states typical of the "mode of excess," melodrama). But, I would argue in agreement with Brooks, melodrama is the larger, more encompassing term, and a more complex mode in that it appears to have a greater capacity for expressing moral vision, especially within the context of modernism.

Gothic fiction is most concerned with asserting the existence of the numinous, the presence if not of supernatural forces themselves then of man's capacity to achieve transcendence, to experience truths beyond those "proven" by sensory data.²³ In modern gothic fiction (unlike early gothic novels which tended to assume the presence of the preternatural), the quest for transcendence is most often expressed in

personal terms, as a psychological need for freedom from repression or other spiritual bondage. Melodrama, however, a more sophisticated mode, is less concerned with the reassertion of the numinous for its own sake, as Brooks argues, than as an expression of ethical corollaries and the moral imagination. Operating on several levels simultaneously, melodrama tends to project meaning outward from the personal towards the universal. It assumes that man can redeem himself (in spiritual or in psychological terms) by choosing to contend with conflict: in existential terms, the ability of man to move toward the resolution of personal conflict is an affirmation of the possibility of meaning in a relativistic universe -- one in which the cosmic has shrunk to the "I."

In fact melodrama is a most appropriate tool for expressing those concerns fundamental to modern thought. Brooks states that melodrama emerged in France around the time of the end of the Enlightenment, which is to say at that "epistemological moment" in Western history when the modern period began, and when through the assertion of reason, "the traditional Sacred" and its sacred values and representative institutions (the Church and the monarch) had been in effect liquidated.²⁴ The loss of absolutes defines modern thought:

it is no longer possible to say what must be, but only what is probable in relation to time and space. Except for the speed of light, there is no constant in the universe; after Einstein the only thing that is certain seems to be that nothing is certain save for a given moment under specific conditions.²⁵

In a world without theological co-ordinates, a "desacrilized" universe, certain revolutionary patterns began to emerge. First in philosophical terms, in reaction to the loss of the assumption of the

supernatural as an external force, came a compulsion to look inward for spiritual meaning and for that capacity for transcendence which if denied would leave modern man without meaning and with "the vertiginous feeling of standing over the abyss created when the necessary centre of things has been evacuated and dispersed."²⁶ From the emphasis on inner feelings and subjective states derives an insistence upon the uniqueness of the individual and his inner being:

From amid the collapse of other principles and criteria, the individual ego declares its central and overriding value, its demand to be the measure of all things. The incipit of modernity is the first page of Rousseau's Confessions, with its insistence on the uniqueness of his individual being; his difference from all other men, and on the necessity of expressing that being in its totality.²⁷

The modern period is, in other words, an extension of the Romantic era, and Brooks, like many others, argues that Romanticism is the central fact, indeed the "genesis," of the modern, "the sensibility within which we are all still living."²⁸ Arthur O. Lovejoy, for example, while recognizing the difficulty of defining a movement as diverse as Romanticism, observes that ". . . 'modern' or Romantic art . . . has for its peculiar province, the inexhaustible realm of the inner life of man."²⁹ Northrop Frye also makes an observation about Romanticism which is relevant here, noting that while the traditional metaphors for spiritual quest were upward, in recognition of man's assumption of supernatural order, "In Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward, toward a hidden basis or ground of identity between man and nature."³⁰

Significantly, both of these general characteristics attributed to Romanticism (and therefore modernism) are also characteristic of melodrama as it is defined in this study: melodrama is a vehicle for the exploration of the inner life of man, with its inevitable conflicts, and for the portrayal of the quest for meaning in terms of what John B. Ower has called a "vertical shaft," driven downward as if to penetrate the spiritual core of man as it exists below the rational surface of things.³¹

In addition to its portrayal of thematic concerns which are fundamental to the modern temper, melodrama serves another essential function if, as Peter Brooks argues, it is a form intermediate between comedy and tragedy and tragedy has become a genre no longer viable in the modern period. Brooks assumes that genuine tragedy cannot operate in a universe without absolutes and that in the twentieth century, especially, we are "persistently surrounded by spurious claims for the tragic."³² In a relativistic context, conflict with or struggle to overcome a personally-related, subjectively-perceived evil is the relevant aesthetic; and melodrama (particularly because of its relationship with psychology)³³ makes meaning of the struggle of modern man to signify in a world without absolutes -- which is to say a world in which the consensus of values essential for the recognition of tragic action is lacking.

The focus, then, of melodrama and of much modern literature is individual subjectivity and it is because of its ability to portray and dignify extreme subjective states that melodrama is effective in expressing the modern sensibility. As Bradbury and McFarlane suggest in

their essay on "Modernism," the cornerstone of modern literature is its rejection of traditional objective realism: the modern era is one of

high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life. 'No artist tolerates reality,' Nietzsche tells us; the task of art is its own self-realization, outside and beyond established orders, in a world of abnormally drawn perspectives.³⁴

In fiction, the twentieth century has brought much experimentation with techniques for portraying subjective reality. At its most extreme, such experimentation takes the form of attempting to reproduce the multi-sensual experience of human perception by means of such devices as unmediated narration, the spatial (rather than linear) rendition of time, or, ultimately, the abjuration of form itself in favour of what Ihab Hassan calls the "randomness and surprise" which supersede an older teleology.³⁵ Truly modern art, says Herbert Read (following Suzanne Langer), aims at the non-discursive presentation of reality.³⁶

Melodrama is, in this context, a rather rudimentary and conventional form, for it does tend to portray a degree of social realism at its most superficial or literal level and does depend, for the most part, on traditional linear narration. But its emphasis on formal patterning, distancing devices and portrayal of subjectivity and modes of perception does define melodrama as a form well-suited to the modern penchant for symbolic rendition in place of mimetic authenticity.

It has been established, then, that a melodramatic mode exists and is expressive of a significant modern vision, and that the four novels analyzed here employ melodramatic conventions successfully (whether or not they are deficient in other ways which are not of concern

here). One question remains -- that of the significance of these findings for other novels of other decades, perhaps even of other nations.

It has been made clear from the start that this dissertation intends fundamentally to present an approach to or way of reading experimental non-realistic fiction. There can be little doubt that non-realistic fiction (that which depicts subjective states that cannot be verified by objective criteria or social consensus) may best express those concerns which are at the heart of modernism, or modern Romanticism. Robert Scholes goes so far as to argue, in The Fabulators, that social realism as an art form has been dead for decades:

Proust's brilliant exposition of the paradoxical notion that we can truly experience life only through art is the death knell of the realistic-naturalistic movement in fiction, though even today, forty years afterward, neo-naturalists like James Jones contrive to write frantically, headless chickens unaware of the decapitating axe.³⁷

Yet in their treatment of Canadian fiction critics have for the most part failed to understand or appreciate experimental excursions into non-realistic forms. One of the problems for the critic of fiction is a general one (which Robert Scholes has pointed out), namely the lack of a "poetics" of fiction,³⁸ which is to say a common critical language and an agreed-upon way of managing the comparatively large literary unit which is the novel. Like Scholes, I suggest that one begin with form, with how the novel is constructed. This is especially useful in approaching non-realistic material. First, as has been borne out by this examination of the formal aspects of melodramatic novels, shared patterns or conventions, once identified, may be seen to function as

tools for presenting and working through a common vision. Secondly, as proved to be true of melodrama, non-realistic works of fiction tend to be formalistic by nature: that is, they tend to employ formal devices which intentionally distance the reader from the material, thus encouraging intellectual rather than emotive reaction to the subject or content. If an intellectual or analytical response is essential, an appropriate place to begin analysis is with formal properties like point of view, structure and patterning rather than with an attempt at emotional identification with esoteric characters and events.

Based on the close study of a limited number of non-realistic novels, then, I have proposed a way of reading such fiction in order to discover its operative conventions, and in so doing have come to identify a distinct melodramatic mode in Canadian fiction and the significant moral vision which melodrama can facilitate within the modern, essentially relativistic, context. From here at least two avenues are open to further investigation in the field of Canadian fiction. One would be to determine the role of melodrama, or the dependence upon melodramatic conventions, in other works of some of the writers whose novels are studied here. Certainly in the case of Morley Callaghan there is a significant body of melodramatic fiction, consisting of his first three novels along with the novella No Man's Meat, that ought to be examined. Similarly there is in the case of Grove a group of early works that appear to employ melodramatic conventions in varying degrees, notably Settlers of the Marsh and the apparently autobiographical A Search for America.

The second avenue is even broader. There is a need for

examination of other melodramatic novels from other periods of English-Canadian fiction: Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano, Sinclair Ross' As For Me and My House, Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy and the novels of Margaret Atwood come to mind. There is a need as well to discover the conventions which operate in other types of non-realistic fiction -- the much-maligned romance (Howard O'Hagan's Tay John and Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley are examples), the purely mythic novel (like Sheila Watson's The Double Hook and, possibly, Marion Engel's Bear), or the novel of fantasy (like those of Robert Kroetsch or Jack Hodgins). Indeed, an idea worth exploring is that these other non-realistic forms are themselves aspects of or offshoots from the melodramatic mode which is so clearly identifiable in the first modern decade in Canadian fiction, the nineteen-twenties.

What is most important about this approach, however, with its emphasis on reading novels individually, as formal entities (though without the rather crippling paraphernalia of linguistics, formalism or structuralism) is that it is a non-nationalistic, non-insular approach to Canadian literature, applicable in fact to non-realistic fiction of other nations, and as such is the sort of non-chauvinistic approach for which critics like Desmond Pacey and George Woodcock have long seen the need.

As early as 1955, Woodcock was calling for criticism that "in the full sense, seeks to evaluate Canadian writing in a creative manner and to relate it, not only to Canadian experience, but also to a universal criterion . . ." and for what he called "textual criticism," with its close scrutiny of individual works.³⁹ Even before that,

Desmond Pacey stated the need for less emphasis on the invention and elaboration of "schools" of criticism in Canadian literature and more emphasis on the "close analysis" of individual works,⁴⁰ and recently he concluded his survey of Canadian criticism with the hope "that Canadian literary studies now move into a phase where scholarship rather than thematic criticism is the dominant concern. . . ."41 It is in this direction that my dissertation is intended to move.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

¹Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in the Novel," in Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951, ed. John W. Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press, 1952), pp. 43-66.

²Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel. See pp. 13-14 for my discussion of White Narcissus and closed form.

³My discussion of the Double and the Second Self is based on the following books and articles: Claire Rosenfield, "The Shadow Within: the Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double," Daedalus, 92 (Spring, 1963), pp. 326-344; C. F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1972); Jean Mallinson, "The Double in Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry," Atlantis, 2, no. 2 (Spring, 1977), 94-110.

⁴Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self, p. xii.

⁵Ibid., p. 189.

⁶Rosenfield, "The Shadow Within: the Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double," p. 326.

⁷Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self, p. 26.

⁸Ibid., p. 196.

⁹Quoted in James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen, 1973), The Critical Idiom Series, p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹Smith argues against the debasement of the term "melodrama," which he says has in popular use become "a blanket term of abuse and contempt, and . . . probably the dirtiest word a drama critic dare print." Smith, Melodrama, pp. 5-6.

¹²Brooks' is the most thorough study to date of melodrama as a legitimate mode with particular relevance to modern fiction. Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (1976).

¹³In the field of American fiction the classic studies of gothicism are Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), and Irving Malin, New American Gothic (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962). In Canadian fiction, Margot Northey's full-length study is the first sustained examination of gothic elements in Canadian fiction: Margot Northey, The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976). Like Northey, I assume the grotesque to be one aspect of the gothic vision, and have not discussed the "grotesque" as a separate genre with relevance to my topic.

The basic histories of gothic literature, to which my argument is indebted, are Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), and Davendra Varma, The Gothic Flame (London: Arthur Barker, 1957).

¹⁴Varma, The Gothic Flame, p. 206.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 191-192.

¹⁶James Justus, "Beyond Gothicism: Wuthering Heights and an American Tradition," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 5 (1960), p. 25.

¹⁷Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Yale Review, 52 (1962), p. 249.

¹⁸Irving Malin, New American Gothic, pp. 10-12, p. 127.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 79-80.

²⁰J. Douglas Perry, Jr., "Gothic as Vortex: the Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, Styron," Modern Fiction Studies, 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1973), 153-167.

²¹Northey, The Haunted Wilderness, pp. 62-65. At one point Northey refers to Wild Geese as having a "melodramatically gothic" finale (p. 65).

²²Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, pp. 19-20.

²³Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵ Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 457.

²⁶ Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. 21.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," PMLA, 39 (June, 1924), 247.

³⁰ Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 33. Ihab Hassan makes the same point, though his field is contemporary fiction, claiming that as twentieth-century man "recoils" into subjectivity, transcendence in effect "moves downward" into isolated intuitive experience. Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward A Postmodern Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 4.

³¹ John B. Ower, "Black and Secret Poet; Notes on Eli Mandel," Canadian Literature, No. 42 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 14-15.

³² Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. 203. Undoubtedly some would argue in contradiction to Brooks that tragedy is possible even in the modern context. Murray Krieger, for example, recognizes the modern existential hero as tragic: while classical tragedy depicts an individual erroneously challenging a universal order with his monomania, the modern tragic hero is the Romantic rebel who stands on his own outside the universal. Whether such a modern hero is "tragic," however, when there is nothing by which to measure his defiance or weigh his nobility, is a moot point, and Brooks' point that the tragic response withers in the absence of universal or absolute values seems convincing. Murray Krieger, The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 6-7.

³³ Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. 201. Brooks goes so far as to call psychoanalysis "a version of melodrama . . . in its conception of the nature of conflict, which is stark and unremitting, possibly disabling, menacing to the ego, which must find ways to reduce or discharge it."

³⁴Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in Modernism 1890-1930, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Great Britain: Penguin, 1976), p. 25.

³⁵Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 9-10.

³⁶Herbert Read, The Tenth Muse (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 243.

³⁷Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 21.

³⁸Robert Scholes, "Foreword" to Approaches to the Novel: Materials for a Poetics, ed. Robert Scholes (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1961), pp. i-ii.

³⁹George Woodcock, "A View of Canadian Criticism," Dalhousie Review, 36, No. 3 (1955), 220-222.

⁴⁰Desmond Pacey, "Literary Criticism in Canada," in Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), p. 48. The article was originally published in University of Toronto Quarterly in 1950.

⁴¹Desmond Pacey, "The Course of Canadian Criticism," in Literary History of Canada, ed. Klinck, rev. ed., III, 25.

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