

TO LIVE IN ABUNDANCE OF LIFE:
A STUDY OF TIME IN FIVE CANADIAN AUTHORS

By



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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

1981

A STUDY OF TIME IN
FIVE CANADIAN AUTHORS

TC DOONDY

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1981)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: To Live in Abundance of Life:
A Study of Time in Five
Canadian Authors

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NUMBER OF PAGES: .vii, 318.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to present the treatment of time in twentieth-century Canadian literature as a critical approach able to reveal the increasing complexity and sophistication in the literature of this country. By tackling one of the major themes of modern Western literature -- man's relationship with time -- Canadian authors of this century have indicated that their concern is not only with regionalism and nationalism but also with moral and psychological problems common to all mankind.

Fundamental to the critical approach adopted is the idea that twentieth-century literature reflects an interest in the subjective rather than objective aspects of time. The common attempt in prose and poetry to mine a movement away from the objective world into subjective consciousness working in time often blurs traditional genre distinctions to the point of annihilation. Indeed, the works of two poets (Margaret Avison and Al Purdy) and those of three novelists (Frederick Philip Grove, Hubert Aquin and Mordecai Richler) are studied in this dissertation as a single group concerned with internalized, temporal events.

The examination of the treatment of time in the works of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler as presented in five individual chapters reveals a few common points. Aware of the devastating action of time on man, all five authors, in various degrees, favour an orientation of human experience around those subjective aspects of time which seem to reverse or halt the consciousness of life's progress towards death.

Despite their emphasis on individual ethics, Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler are not oblivious to man's social responsibility, and, therefore, in their works the meaning of human life is also linked to a notion of love and social engagement.

The space about which Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler write is a particular one. But they have been able to distill the particular and the regional in order to extend their themes to a more universal level -- that of the destiny of man facing nature.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Insofar as this acknowledgement can repay kindness and generosity, I would like to express gratitude:

- to the English Department and the School of Graduate Studies at McMaster University for making possible a study trip to Europe and for accomodating various problems caused by my relocation to Ottawa;
- to the Canada Council and the Province of Ontario for financial support;
- to Georges Poulet for fruitful and challenging discussions in Nice, and for reading and commenting on the outline of this dissertation;
- above all, to my supervisory committee (Dr. C. Ballstadt, Dr. J. Ferns, Dr. L. Hutcheon and Dr. N. Shrive) for patience, guidance and encouragement.

I can only hope that none of these feels betrayed by what follows.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

This study will come as a surprise to all those who consider twentieth-century Canadian literature sombre, pessimistic or obsessed with the problem of human survival in a wild country, among wild animals, and at the mercy of a wild climate. While it is undoubtedly true that contemporary Canadian prose and poetry are deeply concerned with man's unremitting struggle against an inclement environment, it is the contention of this dissertation that the major concern of Canadian writers is not only with regionalism and nationalism, but also with moral and psychological problems common to all mankind. An outstanding twentieth-century concern is man's relationship with time, the fourth dimension of relative space which makes the world dynamic. Indeed, a question which Canadian writers ask with great frequency is not just what it means to be human in the Canadian natural and social context, but what it means to exist as a human being at all.

For years, the Canadian sensibility has been mainly seen as a function of land and climate, and critics as different as Margaret Atwood, Wilfred Eggleston, D. G. Jones,

Desmond Pacey, Julian Park, Warren Tallman and Clara Thomas have stated that Canadian writers attach importance not so much to the intricacies of private thought as to setting and incident. In his The Frontier and Canadian Letters,² Wilfred Eggleston attempts to present the Canadian imagination as a product of the process of conquering a new territory, while in Survival,³ as the chapters of the book indicate, Margaret Atwood maps Canadian sensibility along such cardinal points as "nature the monster, animal victims, ice women vs. earth mothers." And, when Atwood looks at family literary portraits, what she primarily seems to discern are "masks of the bear." Similarly, the literary works discussed in the seventeen studies assembled by George Woodcock in A Choice of Critics⁴ are as many "windows onto landscapes" as their number is, while Clara Thomas focuses her guidebook to English Canadian literature in a single direction: Our Nature - Our Voices.⁵ Concentrating his attention mainly on spatial elements in Canadian literature, D. G. Jones proposes the "butterfly on rock"⁶ as a central image of a primarily nature-oriented literature, while Warren Tallman, for whom many Canadian literary heroes are "wolves in the snow," concludes his discussion of the five books which he considers particularly significant examples of the literary attitudes in this country with the following statement: "There is only old mother North America with her snow hair, her mountain

forehead, her prairie eyes, and her wolf teeth, her wind songs and her vague head of old Indian memories."⁷

In Creative Writing in Canada,⁸ Desmond Pacey, too, suggests that Canadian writers have restricted their gaze to man's physical environment. Likewise, Julian Park's The Culture of Contemporary Canada explicitly condemns the Canadian writer's preoccupation with the land for, "It has given importance to setting and to incident.... It has given importance to action, hazard, struggle, as contrasted with dialogue, sensibility, and the subtleties of private thought."⁹

Absorbed in the excitement of Canadian identity hunting, and "where is here?" fishing, literary studies such as Collin's The White Savannahs,¹⁰ Ross's Our Sense of Identity,¹¹ Atwood's Survival, Moss's Patterns of Isolation,¹² Drew's "Wilderness and Limitation,"¹³ or Helwig's "Poetry East, West and Center,"¹⁴ have created a unilateral image of a young and unsophisticated literature. They have made the public believe that the literary works produced in Canada suffer from an obsession with space and climate, that Canadian authors feel more comfortable with the local than with the universal, that Canadian spiritual geography can be easily perceived in terms of bears and

wolves, rocks and rivers.

Of course, one cannot, and would not, deny that the landscape and climate of Canada are inescapably impressive and that they have been assimilated into the Canadian imagination. Hence, one cannot, and would not, deny that the landscape and climate of Canada hold a prominent place in the literature of this country. But, as Arthur Phelps puts it in the preface to Canadian Writers, to see mainly the concern with space and ignore equally intense concerns with other dimensions of human existence is at once to deny Canadian literature maturity and sophistication and to reveal Canadian criticism as limited:

Too often the comment on our literature has been sharp and right only with negative emphasis; not sufficiently often has comment been discriminating and firm in a positive direction. Cleverly expressed fastidiousness has paraded as superior discernment, and exhibited, not sound criticism, but the mark of the colonial mind. It is time we searched for a better way.¹⁵

Indeed, not all twentieth-century Canadian writers think of themselves as wolves in the snow, salmon living in polluted waters, or hunted cariboo, whose sole preoccupation in life is to secure food, hide from hostile weather, and breed. On the contrary, many twentieth-century Canadian writers think of themselves as individual human beings primarily, and, only secondarily, as members of yet another

animal species on earth. Hence, the attention of Canadian poets, as Edwin Hamblet points out in a survey of the contemporary poetry in Quebec, is directed not so much to the problem of how to survive, as to the uniquely human question of how to lead a significant life. As for other writers within the Western civilization, for the twentieth-century Canadian writer it is no longer enough merely to exist. He wants his existence to have meaning too. And, he wants to acquire a sense of identity not only as a Canadian, but as a man:

La poésie Québécoise semble avoir atteint le rang de l'universalité tout en retrouvant sa particularité et en annonçant un nouveau classicisme par sa pureté et par son authenticité.... C'est une poésie à la fois chrétienne ou séculaire selon l'optique du poète individuel qui annonce sa foi en l'homme libre et en la collectivité dont il fait partie. C'est aussi un chant liturgique qui proclame la rédemption de l'homme libéré d'une fatalité écrasante et de tout complexe d'infériorité qui accepte le risque de vivre et l'aventure que cela comporte.¹⁶

One of the first critics to draw attention to the universal dimension of modern Canadian literature was Lionel Stevenson. Commenting on the attention paid in Canadian literature to problems posed by the physical environment, Stevenson says in Appraisals of Canadian Literature:

But this is only one part of the twofold attraction of literature, the dual appeal that Aristotle distinguishes as the individual and the universal.

That is to say, literature not only represents particular scenes and conditions which are interesting for their unfamiliarity, but also uses them as the vehicle for a fresh illumination of the mysteries common to man's existence in any age and clime. Some attention must therefore be paid to this second attribute of Canadian literature, its "universal" value as a contribution to man's comprehension -- or rather to his intuitive and imaginative conception -- of his place in the world.¹⁷

Unfortunately, however, Appraisals of Canadian Literature dwells only briefly on this topic, and therefore Stevenson's observation with regard to the universal interest of some of the problems discussed in Canadian literature, though accurate, remains unexplored.

It is precisely because a unilateral view of Canadian literature such as that presented by W. G. Collin, D. G. Jones, John Moss, Desmond Pacey, Julian Park, Warren Tallman, or Clara Thomas has prevailed for many years that one welcomes critics like Sandra Djwa or John Ower, Stephen Scobie, Edwin Hamblet or Dennis Brown, who claim that the landscape does not overshadow Canadian writers to the extent of restricting their interests in other aspects of life, that the concern of Canadian authors lies not exclusively with the individual's relationship to his natural environment, but also with his society and with himself. For instance, in "Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic," Sandra Djwa attempts to prove that the readers of Canadian literature have reason to

stop "boggling" at the "vista" of a Canadian writer who shares the concerns and techniques of the international literary world. Discussing certain statements made by E.K. Brown in On Canadian Poetry, Sandra Djwa points out that many thematic, modal and technical aspects of Leonard Cohen's work definitely place him within a literary tradition that goes beyond the borders of Canada and encompasses much of the modern Western world:

If Brown considers a Whitman or a Dos Passos improbable, a Canadian Genet, a Canadian Burroughs, or a Gunter Grass is clearly beyond expectation. Yet, it is precisely to this tradition -- that of the contemporary Black Romantics, as we might call them -- that Leonard Cohen appears to belong.¹⁸

Similarly, in an analysis of Eli Mandel's poetry, John Ower notes that this poet has escaped the inhibiting effects of the harsh Canadian climate and landscape. John Ower discusses Mandel's poetry against a large background of both Hellenic and Hebraic intellectual traditions, and remarks that in this poet's work "the empirical foreground yields precedence to spiritual and psychological matters running far beneath the surface."¹⁹ Finally, in "His Legend a Jungle Sleep: Michael Ondaatje and Henri Rousseau," Stephen Scobie discusses this Canadian poet's fascination with the French painter, a fascination visible throughout his work, but especially evident in the common, central theme of "The

Way to Stop Time," while in "Susan Musgrave: The Self and Other," Dennis Brown compares Musgrave's poetry to that of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton with respect to matters of theme and philosophical position.²⁰ Critics such as Djwa and Ower, therefore, do not discuss the work of Canadian writers in isolation. Rather, they compare the literary merits and achievements of Canadian poets and novelists with those of poets and novelists from other countries, with a view to establishing to advantage the position of Canadian literature in relation to the literary world at large.

If T. S. Eliot was right when he pointed out that, in terms of philosophical position, the literature of the Western world "has a simultaneous existence, and composes a simultaneous order,"²¹ what, then, is one of the main ideas that has engaged the best literary minds of the twentieth-century? Time, says Hans Meyerhoff; Time, agrees A. A. Mendilow; Time, complains Wyndham Lewis.²² Wyndham Lewis's Time and the Western Man was, in fact, one of the first studies to draw attention to, and even to protest against the fact that time has become such a predominant theme in literature:

For any intelligent European or American the point has certainly been reached where he has to summon whatever resolution he may possess, and make a fundamental decision. He has to acquaint himself first of all with the theory of, and then decide what

is to be his attitude towards, the time-cult, which is the master concept of our day.²³

In Time and Literature, Hans Meyerhoff, too, argues that one of the fundamental notes of modernism is that its very modes of thinking and feeling bear the mark of a concern with time. The main idea around which Meyerhoff's book revolves is that literature has something to say about significant aspects of time which are not included in the analysis of time given by science. The critic mentions that time is one of the ideas which have engaged literary minds throughout the ages, but which have received special attention in contemporary literature. "There is hardly a major figure in literature who has not raised the problem of time and its relation to man,"²⁴ Meyerhoff states, and he substantiates this claim with brief considerations of the work of authors such as Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Thomas Wolfe, all of whom argue that the modern mind has become particularly concerned with the consciousness of time and its meaning in human life.

A. A. Mendilow's views of the important part played by man's consciousness of time in modern literature coincide with Meyerhoff's. Mendilow's study Time and the Novel is roughly divided into two parts: a general consideration of

the treatment of time in Western literature is followed by a close literary analysis of Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, one of the first novels in which the complex relationship between different, individual time-values, assumes meanings which vary from one frame of reference to another. In his analysis, Mendilow not only remarks that man's feelings about time have assumed an extraordinary importance in our century, but also considers himself entitled to speak of a "time-obsession," and briefly tries to account for it:

It would seem to be not unlikely, therefore, that what is widely referred to as "the time-obsession of the twentieth-century" is conditioned by the increasing pace of living, by the wide-spread sense of the transience of all forms of modern life, and more particularly perhaps, by the rapidity of social and economic change. These factors have taken from people that feeling of stasis in society, that assurance of permanence that appears to have marked more confident and more slowly changing periods.²⁵

What Mendilow understands by "time-obsession" is not that time is the exclusive preoccupation of twentieth-century literature, but that it is the theme that determines many authors' choice of subject and modes of articulation.

To document the preeminent concern with time in contemporary Western literature is not necessary here. Any intelligent European or American, to use Lewis's phrase, knows that the common and fundamental characteristic of, say, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, Marcel Proust,

Virginia Woolf and Thomas Wolfe, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, William Faulkner, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, or Franz Kafka is their interest in time; an interest not disguised, but clearly articulated. Thomas Mann, for instance, makes clear beyond doubt the idea which underlies The Magic Mountain when he declares:

If it is too much to say that one can tell a tale of time, it is none the less true that a desire to tell a tale about time is not such an absurd idea.... We confess that we had something like that in view in the present work.²⁶

The same concern finds expression in Gertrude Stein's characteristically disconcerting syntax in Narration: Four Lectures, "I can say it enough but I can say it more than enough that the daily life is a daily life if at any moment of the daily life that daily life is all there is of life."²⁷

Furthermore, in The Art of the Novel, Henry James testifies to the fact that time is one of the ideas which have received special attention in modern literature, and emphasizes some of the technical problems posed to the modern writer by the primacy of a thematic concern with time:

This eternal time question is, accordingly, for the novelist, always there and always formidable, always insisting on the effect of the great lapse and passage, of the "dark backward and abysm," by the terms of truth, and on the effect of compression, of composition and form, by the terms of literary arrangement.²⁸

It is true that the dialogue on time has become acute in recent years, but it would be an error to claim that only in this century has time and its relevance to human life become a preoccupation. On the contrary, throughout the ages, literary minds have been engaged by the idea of time. Whether Greek or Roman, English, German or French, authors have always shown a constant and articulate concern with time, and this remains true even if the discussion is restricted to English literature alone. Shakespeare's sonnets are dominated by a concern with time:

No! Time, thou shall not boast that I do change
 Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
 They are but dressings of a former sight.²⁹

In Tristram Shandy, Laurence Sterne uses the time-shift device, the emancipation of the plot from strict chronology, almost two hundred years before Joseph Conrad and Madox Ford adopted it as a principle of composition, thus making it obvious that not only in theme, but also in experimentation with form is time a predominant and characteristic factor in the major literary works produced by our civilization in the course of its history. Likewise, among the romantic poets, P. B. Shelley not only writes about

time in poems such as "Ode to the West Wind," or Queen Mab, but even attempts to define the concept itself. In his preface to Queen Mab he writes:

Time is our consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind. Vivid sensation, of either pain or pleasure, makes time seem long, as the common phrase is, because it renders us more acutely conscious of our ideas. If a mind be conscious of a hundred ideas during one minute by the clock, and of two hundred during another, the latter of these spaces would actually occupy so much greater extent in the mind as to exceed one in quantity. If, therefore, the human mind, by any future improvement in its sensibility, should become conscious of an infinite number of ideas in a minute, that minute would be eternity. I do not hence infer that the actual space between the birth and death of a man will ever be prolonged; but that his sensibility is perfectable, and that the number of ideas which his mind is capable of receiving is indefinite.³⁰

Therefore, when one speaks of "an obsession with time" in contemporary literature one does not mean that the preoccupation with the idea of time is entirely new; rather, that the degree of intensity of this preoccupation in this century is unprecedented.

The factors responsible for the rise of the interest in time in the contemporary literary world are many. As Joost Merloo points out in Along the Fourth Dimension, outstanding among these causes is the so called "scientific revolution" which has led to man's unprecedented understanding and mastery of the physical universe:

Modern physical science has taught us that absolute objective time does not exist. The concept of physical time is based on the occurrence and recurrence of certain events within certain systems, and Einstein pointed out that since systems are relative, time is relative too. Zeno on the other hand, used his celebrated paradox to prove that time does not exist at all.³¹

The same "scientific revolution," A. C. Ward writes in Twentieth Century English Literature, has caused the world to witness a rapidly accelerating technological and social change:

Little more than half a century separated the end of Queen Victoria's reign from the beginning of Elizabeth II's, yet in that first fifty years of the twentieth century, the human race moved faster -- forward and backward -- than during perhaps fifty generations in the past.³²

In its turn, the increasing pace of living has not only accentuated man's sense of the transience of all forms of life, but has also made time extremely important in daily existence. Of course, intellectual and artistic disciplines interact; authors are influenced by the scientific and philosophic temper of the age, and, in their turn, exert influence upon it. Twentieth-century literature has demonstrably been influenced by the modern view of time. For instance, the theories associated with Henry Bergson and Sigmund Freud in the field of philosophy and psychology

exerted a powerful influence on modern writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Franz Kafka. So did the philosophical systems of William James, A. N. Whitehead, G. W. F. Hegel, and the ideas of Karl Marx, Auguste Comte and Charles Darwin who introduced temporal laws into the study of sociology, history and biology. The discoveries made by linguists such as Benjamin Worf regarding the cultural relativity of time also contributed to the increased awareness of time in the twentieth century. To all of these, as Mendilow points out in his study of the Western novel, one must certainly add the death of the traditional concept of God, and, with it, of a number of traditional values:

Our universe has changed. We are no longer confined comfortably in Time between the limits of creation and the Day of Judgement. Our temporal horizons have withdrawn, they no longer remain a matter of faith. Again and again, writers and thinkers remind us that 'The demand that time should be taken seriously is one of the fundamental notes of modernism.'³³

The loss of belief in old values riddles contemporary literature with a sense of anguish and absurdity. God is dead, coherence and integration are gone, and many authors feel with W. B. Yeats that "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."³⁴ Yet, the same authors speak of hope. They embark upon a quest for some basis in experience which would allow man to redress time, hold infinity in the palm of his

hand, and live eternity in an hour, as William Blake suggested.³⁵ Modern man understands with T. S. Eliot that "Only through time / time is conquered,"³⁶ and profoundly impressed with the radically individual character of human existence, modern authors address themselves to people more as individuals, and less as members of a society, though their literature retains a social interest. Life outside the mind does not lose its meaning, but, as W. H. Auden emphasizes in New Year Letter, human authenticity manifests itself less in the overcoming of external obstacles, and more in a progressive self-articulation:

Clocks cannot tell our time of day
 Because we have no time, because
 We have no time until
 We know the time we feel.³⁷

If twentieth-century authors focus on human time not as a measurable dimension, but as experience, literary critics respond by using the element of time in order to analyze the manner in which human perceptions organize the mental universe of the literary work. In Europe, the names of Albert Bequin, Georges Poulet, or Jean Starobinski, in North America, the names of John Lyden, or J. H. Miller have long been associated with a literary criticism which proposes time as an analytical coordinate for the existential evidence provided by literature. In Etudes sur le temps humain,

Georges Poulet, for instance, presents a historical study of changing concepts of time in human existence, and suggests that the element of time has been used by Western authors throughout the centuries as a means of vision, tentatively manipulating human experience into a coherent perspective:

Ne pouvons-nous donc pas faire de tous nos instants une harmonie? Ne nous est-il pas possible, par des regroupements et des effaçures, par l'assortiment des ressemblances et des dissemblances qualitatives, de redistribuer tous les moments de notre vie et toutes les formes de notre pensée, de telle façon qu'au lieu de les regarder défilier dans l'enchaînement ininterrompu du temps causal, nous les découvrirons à la fois très loin et tout près les uns des autres, se faisant écho à distance, se ressemblent dans leur diversité, s'illuminant de feux réciproques, et formant en n'importe quel moment où nous les considérons, une vaste étendue faite de temps, d'espaces "brodés", dont notre pensée actuelle serait le centre?''⁸

While not denying the existence of connections between modern literature and theology or philosophy, psychoanalysis, or sociology, the present study's approach is grounded on the belief that literary works form an order among themselves, and, as Northrop Frye emphasizes in his Anatomy of Criticism, that they should be studied independent of outside frameworks:

It would be easy to compile a long list of such determinisms in criticism, all of them, whether Marxist, Thomist, liberal-humanist, neo-Classical, Freudian, Jungian, or existentialist, substituting a critical attitude for criticism, all proposing not to find a conceptual framework for criticism, but to attach criticism to one of a miscellany of frameworks

outside it.³⁹

Similarly, in Twentieth Century English Literature,

A. C. Ward warns against the subordination of literary analysis to an externally derived critical attitude:

Literature as a whole, and academic criticism in particular are in present danger of illiterate hardening of the arteries as both become affected by cliches and by the jargon of psychiatry and pseudo-science which serve as substitutes for independent thought.⁴⁰

Northrop Frye's or A. C. Ward's claims for an independent criticism are substantiated by statements made by authors such as Thomas Mann, or scientists such as Sigmund Freud. The latter admitted, for instance, that poets may intuitively sense and articulate subjective realities which are impossible to decode and interpret with strictly scientific methods:

The poets are valuable allies, and their testimony is to be rated highly; for they tend to know a great many things between heaven and earth not yet dreamed in our academic knowledge. In the study of the mind, in particular, they are far ahead of us ordinary people, because they draw upon sources which have not yet been tapped by science.⁴¹

Likewise, Thomas Mann, one of the authors whom critics have often called "psychoanalytic," has bluntly rejected any conscious attempt on his part to write within a

psychoanalytic framework: "I did not come to psychoanalysis; it came to me."⁴² Statements such as those made by Frye or Ward, Mann or Freud point out the fact that writers have developed methods and techniques of dealing with man's sense of time without slavish indebtedness to scientific theories.

"But, what is time?" is the legitimate question at this point. Since the days of St. Augustine there has been no shortage of answers, which, in spite of their merits, have failed to supply a satisfactory and unanimously accepted definition. "It is ironic", Richard Gale comments in his introduction to The Philosophy of Time, "that something with which we are so intimately acquainted should give rise to paradoxes as soon as we attempt to scrutinize it analytically."⁴³ He blames philosophers for the methods they have adopted in analysing time, and suggests reconsidering their approach. In Gale's opinion, the first step one must take in any consideration of the concept of time is to realize:

that the problem of time is not a simple problem, namely that of defining time.... Rather, the problem of time is a group of intimately related questions having to do with the nature of the concepts of truth, events, things, knowledge, causality, identification, action and change.⁴⁴

Other philosophers doubt even the legitimacy of the

attempt to give a definition of time. In "Analytic-Synthetic," Frederick Waisman, for instance, bluntly denies the possibility of reducing to a simple formula the immensely varied semantic area covered by the word "time":

But what exactly is the difficulty? We know what the word "time" means in the sense that we are able (1) to understand it in various contexts... and (2) to use it on the proper sort of occasions in the right sort of contexts. But it would not be right to say that we are able to reduce its whole immensely variegated use into a simple formula, a very different thing.

Here it might be asked: can the word be defined? But why should I try to find a definition? A definition would enable me to eliminate the word "time" from any given context and replace it by its definiens. But it is just the point that there exists in English no other word, nor any combination of words which does the job the noun "time" does.⁴⁵

Therefore, with respect to defining time, we are, in the twentieth century, in an almost identical position to St. Augustine's when he exclaimed, "What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not."⁴⁶

But this dissertation is not a study of Time. It is a study of modern Canadian literature with respect to the experiential content revealed in the literary treatment of man's relation to time. Whatever time is, it is with certain qualities of it that modern Canadian literature is concerned, and it is in these qualities that this study is interested.

Fundamental to my approach is the recognition of the distinction between physical or objective, and psychological or subjective aspects of time. This distinction is commonly accepted, yet, a few major aspects of it will be briefly recalled here.

In his daily life, man, as a member of a society, conducts his activities according to the simple framework of clock and calendar time. This is physical or sidereal time, chronological or historical, and it is based on the occurrence and recurrence of certain events in our solar system. We consider this natural time to be objective because it refers to uniform motions which are independent of human action. Time, however, is not only an objective event; it also encompasses a variety of subjective experiences which are not estimated by objective external scales, but in relation to individual internal values. Memory, expectation, imagination, or intuition are important aspects of psychological time. However, as Joost Merloot remarks in Along the Fourth Dimension, in its fullest sense, inner time expresses a condensation of relationships between the individual as subject, and events, things, or other individuals as objects:

Subjectively, time is man's repeated internal drama, not in three acts but in thousands and millions of acts, some long, some contracted, some exciting, some

dull, but never uniform in their repetitions. Time is hope. It is also destruction of hope, and then resuscitation of hope.⁴⁷

The differences between time in nature and time in experience are many. At least three major concepts, measurement, order, and direction, find different expression in the contexts of the two systems. Estimated by sidereal movements, objective time is independent of how man experiences it. It is irreversible, and can be expressed in constant metric units that follow each other invariably. Conversely, thoughts and emotions proceed at a variable, personal rate, and the length of an objective interval of time is subjectively relative. Time flies or drags, it seems long or short depending on particular psychological circumstances. During a few minutes or hours of clock time, one can imaginatively live through a period of time that may stretch for anything from seconds to centuries. Or, as Virginia Woolf observes in Orlando, a month or a year of objective time may seem utterly devoid of experiential content:

The mind of man works with strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented by the time piece of the mind by one second.⁴⁸

Heinrich Reichenbach used the celebrated example of the "unscrambling of eggs" in order to illustrate the irreversibility of time in nature.⁴⁹ Through memory, however, man can not only recall, but also re-live, past moments of his life, with an intensity that may, at times, surpass that of current experiences. Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu is a classic example of the literary treatment of man's awareness that events in nature proceed in a uniform, sequential order, while memory exhibits dynamic association and interpenetration of images and ideas. Recollections do not follow each other in the chronological order of actual occurrences, but in a sequence depending on a combination of physical and psychological factors. Hence, the importance attached in the reconstruction of an individual's self to that part of his memory which is formed not by habit, but by psychologically significant events. Western man, therefore, works with one objective time-series only, whereas in perception there are as many time-series as there are selves who perceive; or, as Mendilow graphically phrased it, "Every man carries his own time-system about with him."⁵⁰

Indeed, as one of the major modern discussions of literary time -- Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending -- points out, it is precisely an acute interest in the subjective qualities of time that the literature of the

twentieth century reflects. One reads in this literature about a universe charged with human significance, a universe where no absolute external reality is acceptable any longer, and where the cult of the individual reigns supreme. Prose and poetry alike emancipate man from strict chronology, replace ordinary events by psychological ones, and insist not on chronological duration which is a quantity in plot, but on psychological duration which is a quality of man's perception. Time in novels is no longer related to an exterior norm of time, and the stories move forward not according to the frame of reference of objective time, but in the sense of an accumulation of more explicit facts. Episodes no longer derive significance from their linear, or horizontal, linkage in terms of objective time, but from a symbolic, or vertical, connection in the subjective one. Literature, as Kermode emphasizes in his study, articulates states of being that metaphorically extend from the heights of heaven to the depths of hell:

Such are those moments which Augustine calls the moments of the soul's attentiveness; less grandly, they are moments of what psychologists call "temporal integration." When Augustine recited his psalm he found in it a figure for the integration of past, present and future which defies successive time.⁵¹

In this context, the extensive use of the stream of consciousness technique testifies to authors' attempts to

capture the constant interplay between different aspects of time in experience, to exercise the merely successive character of events and to reveal the human synthesizing consciousness at work transfiguring, in Kermode's words, objective time (chronos) into subjective time (kairos):

To put it another way, the interval must be purged of simple chronicity, of the emptiness of tock-tick, humanly uninteresting successiveness. It is required to be a significant season, kairos poised between beginning and end. It has to be, on a scale much greater than that which concerns the psychologists, an instance of what they call "temporal integration" -- one way of bundelling together perception of the present, memory of the past, and expectation of the future, in a common organization. Within this organization that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future, what was chronos becomes kairos.⁵²

Another interesting idea that Kermode's The Sense of an Ending advances, -- an idea with which I fully agree -- is that in literary attempts to reconcile objective and subjective time, traditional genre distinctions are often blurred; indeed, annihilated. Poems, novels and dramas alike mime a movement out of the objective world into subjective consciousness working in time. Poems, novels and plays become moments of human time, or, as Kermode calls them, "fictions of complementarity," where memories of the past invade the present, while the present is also invaded by concerns for the future. "To close that great gap (between chronos and kairos) we use fictions of complementarity,"

Kermode comments. "They may now be novels or philosophical poems, as they once were tragedies, and before that, angels."⁵³

Grounded in the belief that what unites poems and novels is a common attempt to create human duration, the present study of the treatment of time in modern Canadian literature goes beyond traditional genre boundaries; it discusses and compares prose to poetry and poetry to prose. Like the song "Some of These Days" which Kermode cites as an example of "fiction of complementarity," the Canadian works which I shall be discussing later in detail form a single group, for they contain no "happenings," no facts outside human consciousness. Their moments are individually internalized, they are "adventures."⁵⁴

This approach, generally known as "critique of consciousness," was developed in Europe in the 1950's. The phrase "critique of consciousness" was first employed by Georges Poulet in his introduction to Jean-Pierre Richard's Litterature et sensation.⁵⁵ Years later, it was adopted by Sarah Lawell as the title of her study of critics who write about existential structures in literature.⁵⁶ Among the critics who represent the criticism of consciousness are Marcel Raymond, Albert Beguin, Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre

Richard, Jean Starobinski, Jean Fousset and Maurice Blanchot. With the exception of Maurice Blanchot, all these critics are associated with the Swiss town of Geneva. This is why they are usually referred to as "the New Geneva School," not to be confused with "the Geneva School," a term used to describe the linguists Bally, de Saussure, and Sechehaye.⁵⁷ Of the seven critics belonging to the New Geneva School, Georges Poulet is the best known. He is also the critic that most definitely focuses his work on the treatment of the concept of time in literature.

In the introduction to her study of existential structures in literature, Sarah Lawall emphasizes the fact that:

The criticism of consciousness is totally different from our own [North American] approach, and it requires from the reader a new understanding of literature and a different manner of reading.⁵⁸

Indeed, this type of criticism offers an existential perspective on literature.⁵⁹ In other words, unlike the traditional analytical attitude which considers the work of art as an aesthetic object with objectively ascertainable forms, the criticism of consciousness looks upon literary work as the verbal transcription of human experience, and is interested in man's awareness of his existence and his manner of expressing this awareness in literature. In its turn, the

idea of literary consciousness leads to an analysis of the work as a mental universe independent of any criteria other than existential. As Georges Poulet emphasized in a discussion I had with him in the summer of 1977, the literary analysis cannot admit attachments to criteria outside the work itself, because the work is an expression of individuality, and, hence, the reading of it must also be openly personal.⁶⁰

An analysis that studies a literary work for forms, varying interpretations or lexical peculiarities runs directly counter to the criticism of consciousness. Following the example set by writers themselves, the criticism of consciousness refuses to make distinctions between genres. As Frank Kermode pointed out in his The Sense of An Ending, literary forms disappear in favour of "fictions of complementarity" which may assume any form from novels to tragedies to angels. In place of a traditional play, poem or novel, one finds a consciousness, a single voice in a number of works by the same author. Therefore, the sole criterion for coherence in a literary analysis is the consciousness of the author.

Fully concurring with the idea that literary works should be studied independently of any externally imposed

directions, the literary criticism practiced in this dissertation on the treatment of time in modern Canadian literature has no medium and no goal beyond the literary experience provided by the authors' transcription of human existence. The aesthetic or formal structure of works have only a supportive role in relation to the organizing consciousness. Structural symmetries and ambiguities are of little interest in the present discussion.

As Ives Bonnefoy explains in "Critics -- English and French, and the Distance between Them," the American reader will find it difficult to reconcile his traditional views with those expressed by the critics of consciousness for, unlike the former, the latter look upon literature as an act, not as an object.⁶¹ Sarah Lowell, too, notes the different presuppositions to be found at the roots of the traditional North American critical attitude and of the new European movement, and she expresses the view that:

This criticism's [of consciousness] most obvious claim to our attention is that it reflects a broad stream of contemporary thought, a humanistic revival which is only part of a larger social transformation.... In aesthetic terms, this revival provides a re-evaluation of previous standards and limitations, and broadens the references of all art by multiplying its paths into the human consciousness.⁶²

I adopted the criticism of consciousness as the critical approach in my analysis of the treatment of time in modern Canadian literature because, in my opinion, this approach offers an active relationship to literature and, hence, an enhanced appreciation of it: the complex of human perceptions which the creative mind has transmitted to the work are given a new genesis by the critical mind who reads free of external constraints.

The main proposition of this dissertation is that the twentieth-century literary works which will be discussed in it have an interest not only in Canadian life, but also in life in general. They address themselves not only to problems of Canadian space and time, but also to those of time in general. Their authors, Frederick Philip Grove, Hubert Aquin, Margaret Avison, Al Purdy and Mordecai Richler, have reacted to the contemporary climate of opinion, and, embracing the universal theme of time, have tended to define themselves in terms of their attitude towards it. They have, thus, exhibited a sensibility which is very intensely that of the modern world.

The pessimism pervading the intellectual climate of our age has taken its toll on these five Canadian authors, yet they are not exhausted by their knowledge of man's

impermanence. Though fully aware that man's life is both insignificant in cosmic terms and subject to crucial limitations, they do not conclude that human existence is a mockery, that life is the ultimate "four letter word." On the contrary, even though man is no longer believed to hold the privileged position of being the culminating point of Creation, but is regarded as being an integral part of an ecological system, Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler try to contend with the awareness that man's reason for existence is not supplied by an external agency, but is cosubstantial with the individual who thinks.

It is to man himself that they assign the task of creating living value, of finding an inner reason to sustain himself in an existence which may otherwise be considered a purely biological accident. Indeed, these five Canadian poets and novelists look for the redeeming feature of the life of man in man's uniqueness, in man's capacity to engage mentally in what may be called a vertical temporal movement, rather than merely living a chronologically horizontal sequence of moments.

Running through their work is a clear intellectual tune affirming the dignity and significance of human existence, with the structure of novels and poems as its

appropriate orchestration. Hence, the reader of their works is taken from the periphery of human experience engrossed in local and transitory preoccupations to the centre of experience itself, where spatial order ceases to be all-important. It is precisely this quality that raises novels by Grove, Aquin or Richler, and poems by Avison or Purdy into a literary order where people not only face Canadian problems, but also face the problems of Man, and reach towards a universal spiritual reality accessible to all mankind.

To point to what is common between Canadian literature and other literatures is not to deny that Canadian literature is a separate entity in the intellectual configuration of the world. It is only to place Canadian literature in relation to the literary world at large. It is to say that, in addition to the emotional and intellectual responses to a never-ending procession of seasons, illimitable forests, and numberless animals, poems by Purdy or Avison, and novels by Richler, Aquin or Grove, offer much more than this, and, therefore, are interesting to any reader. This study has proceeded on the premise that what is of real value in Canadian literature engages not only our sense of nationality, but our humanity as well.

The best works produced in Canada in the twentieth century sometimes speak about restricted geographical areas, but they are no more provincial in spirit than, say, Faulkner's novels which concentrate a whole philosophy of life in Ycknapatawpha county. To neglect Canadian authors' interest in time would mean to deny at least one aspect of the mental environment from which they have arisen and by which they have been influenced, the international affiliations which transcend the limiting factor of cultural isolation. To overlook Grove's, Aquin's, Fichler's, Avison's and Purdy's concern with time in a century, in which one of the major preoccupations is time, would mean to accuse them indirectly of mere sufficiency within the visible natural world, and of limited capacity for intellectual experience. It would finally mean to limit our own understanding of the range and vitality of some of the best works produced in Canada during this century.

It is not the aim of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive presentation of the treatment of time in twentieth-century Canadian literature; rather, it is to open the problem as an introduction to a new approach to the literary output of this country. My attention is focused on five writers, and on particular works by them. In selecting Frederick Philip Grove, Hubert Aquin, Al Purdy, Margaret

Avison, and Mordecai Richler from among those who merit inclusion, a number of criteria have been employed. First, their status in Canadian literature has been considered. Each is indisputably a major Canadian writer in terms of psychological insight, poetic imagination and technical achievement, and none is in danger of being reduced from the position he or she occupies; a reputation gained with difficulty will most probably endure.

Common sense also dictates that, in order to prove a thesis one has to choose obvious examples. While the five authors discussed here are not claimed to be the most representative Canadian writers who have addressed themselves to the problem of human time (for such a claim would mean the exercise of a critical authority which I have no desire to presume) they are presented, however, as being among the most representative Canadian authors in whose work the discussion of human time holds a prominent place.

Variety in the literary treatment of human time has also been a criterion employed in the selection of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy, and Richler rather than other twentieth-century Canadian authors. Indeed, the authors under consideration disclose a diversity of stances towards the unique issue of how to use time itself in the achievement

of a meaningful human existence. Grove constructs a theory of time which satisfies objective conditions, even if by doing so he partially discourages the practice of certain subjective qualities of time which are charged with great significance in human experience. He advocates rigorous synchronization with objective present time even though he recognizes the importance of the expansion of man's imaginative grasp of objective reality. While Grove urges the reader to stay keyed up to the time of clocks and calendars, Aquin exhorts him to avoid living in the present to the point of totally ignoring the objective dimension of time. His heroes find it difficult to reconcile themselves to the reality around them, and propose an artificial arrangement of human existence through an incessant re-invention of time in the act of creation. Avison, Purdy and Richler, on the other hand, do not advocate the cultivation of modes of perception favouring one dimension of time to the detriment of the other. Rather, they attempt to achieve an ideal balance between the two; the subjective consistently enriching and transfiguring the objective. Avison and Purdy present love as the unique perspective from which life should be considered, and reach towards a kind of time which one may call "emotional." Richler considers that fantasies and metaphors may equally function as subjective pivots around which human life can be organized

significantly, and attempts to show the way in which such pivots bear upon human life and save it from spiritual regimentation.

A further reason why Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler have been selected for discussion in this dissertation is that an examination of their work gives the reader an opportunity to follow the progress of the twentieth-century preoccupation with time, and of the spiritual movement accompanying it, from the early 1900s to the present. These authors belong to different generations, and reflect a gradual liberation from the anxieties of the pioneer. Grove still drove a sled on unmarked prairie trails, Purdy has lived for a long time in a small community, but Aquin, Avison and Richler are products of the big cities.

These five authors also recommend themselves because their works are about life as experienced by themselves not as communicated by others. Indeed, Desmond Pacey could never ask about the works of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler the question he did ask about the works of other Canadian authors, "How deep are the roots of their work in their own experience?"⁶³

Nor can these five authors be accused of exhibiting

an uncontrolled vision leading to chaotic moral nihilism, a charge that could be levelled at other twentieth-century writers. On the contrary, Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy, and Richler have found themselves in a world they understand and control only partially, yet they have attempted to order their consciousness of reality, and put themselves in harmony with the patterns they discern. They do not try to reveal a grand design, but attempt to find foundations for the forms of behaviour which one would prize in a whole man and a fulfilled society.

Finally, since this study is about subjectivity, I have allowed my own subjectivity a word to say. I wrote about these five authors because I enjoyed reading their works, and writing about them.

NOTES: CHAPTER I

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22 See W. Lewis, Time and the Western Man (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1928); A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1972); H. Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955).

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²⁹ W. Shakespeare, "Sonnet No. 123," Shakespeare's Songs and Poems, ed. F. Hubler (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), p. 113.

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- 52 Ibid., p. 46.
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- 55 J. P. Richard, Littérature et sensation (Paris: Seuil, 1954).
- 56 S. Lawell, Critics of Consciousness: The Existential Structures of Literature (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968).
- 57 J. H. Miller, "The Geneva School," Critical Quarterly, 8 (Winter 1966), pp. 305-321.
- 58 S. Lawell, op. cit., p. ix.
- 59 The term "existential" should not be confused with the term "existentialist." The latter is usually taken to refer to a particular philosophy which developed in France in 1940's and which can be traced to Heidegger and Husserl.
- 60 The trip to Europe which was the occasion of the discussion with Poulet was made possible by a travel grant from McMaster University. Prior to this discussion, Poulet read and commented favourably on a brief presentation I had sent him of the scope and method of this dissertation.

⁶¹ Y. Bonnefoy, "Critics -- English and French, and the Distance between Them," Encounter (July 1958), p. 43.

⁶² S. Lavell, op. cit., p. 269.

⁶³ D. Pacey, Essays in Canadian Criticism, 1938-1968 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), p. 203.

II. AT THE MERCY OF WINDS AND WAVES:
FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE'S OVER PRAIRIE TRAILS¹

Frederick Philip Grove's world is basically one of pioneers and immigrants, these two words being understood not only in their primary sense, but also as encompassing all people whose most immediate challenge comes from space. This chapter will demonstrate that it is this spatial index attached to his heroes that explains the rather uncommon outlook on time which Grove holds. In an epoch predominantly convinced that the experiential properties of time are more important for human lives than scientific concepts associated with the idea of time, Grove constructs a theory of time which satisfies objective conditions, even if by so doing he partially discourages the cultivation of certain subjective qualities of time which are charged with great significance in human experience. Yet, while advocating man's rigorous synchronization with present time and objective reality, Grove writes numerous pages with a view to encouraging the expansion of man's intellectual and imaginative grasp of objective reality. He also expresses concern about the equally harmful effect which an unbalanced imaginative, or unbalanced pragmatic approach to life may have under

conditions of extreme environmental pressure such as pioneering and immigration.

The articulated premise fundamental to Grove's discussion of the life of man, the idea of "constant battle," springs from the recognition of man's position within the general pattern of existence. This Canadian author considers that the individual has to reach a state of acquiescence in which he is able to accept himself as a finite creature surrounded by a hostile universe, yet, in spite of his frailty, capable of scoring victories and making contributions to his own life and to that of his fellow men. Grove's preoccupation with the constant interplay between the individual and the spatial and temporal dimensions of his existence is obvious throughout his work. In Over Prairie Trails, however, his concern is articulated with particular poignancy. Here, the challenge issued to man by space and time is at its most intense, and the author's response is adjusted proportionally.

Unable to find employment in the same town, Grove and his wife live separately: he, as a high-school teacher in Gladstone, she, as an elementary school teacher in Falmouth. Grove's little daughter is also in Falmouth with her mother, and Over Prairie Trails records the author's efforts to

overcome natural hazards of various kinds to reach his wife and child during weekends. Readers and critics have been unanimous in recognizing that the sketches of which Over Prairie Trails is composed are not only factual reports of Grove's rides from and to Gladstone, Manitoba, but also testimonies to his profound love for the Canadian northern landscape, and his consummate poetic craft in communicating a wide range of experience.²

The framework of this book is deceptively simple; an almost bare stage, and three performers in dramatic confrontation: Man, Space and Time. The man is alone, and stands against space in its most brutal form, hostile nature; 68 miles of prairie enveloped in impenetrable marsh fog, and 90 miles beginning with the second week in January when the roads become almost impassable because of snow. The temporal index attached to the stories which constitute Over Prairie Trails includes both autumn and winter, Fridays, from four in the afternoon, when school is over, to the fall of darkness, which, once it sets in, turns driving over unmarked rut-trails into a perilous enterprise. The stage properties are distilled to essentials: the prairie, the forest, the marsh, a creek, a bridge, and a few scattered signs of human habitation. Yet, this simplicity of setting is not accidental. Rather, it is a feature that characterizes

Grove's entire work, from the three "novels of the soil,"³ as Ronald Sutherland calls Fruits of the Earth, Our Daily Bread and Two Generations, to Settlers of the Marsh and The Yoke of Life; from the stories included by Desmond Pacey in Tales of the Margin, to the sketches contained in the volume The Turn of the Year. But the spareness of setting in these works is not only characteristic. It is also instrumental in conveying a message founded in "the simpler, the more elemental things" constituting human life, "things cosmic in their associations, nearer to the beginning or end of creation."⁴

Under the immensity of the Manitoba sky, the driver in Over Prairie Trails is seized with an overwhelming sense of his insignificance in the universe. Watching "that insensible, silent, and yet swift shifting of things in the heavens that seemed so orderly, pre-ordained, and as if regulated by silent signals" (OPT, 134), the individual realizes that space, in spite of its beauty, threatens his physical existence, and that time, in spite of its endlessness, allows him only a few hours of light. The feeling of being squeezed between space and time, of leading a life predicated on given spatial and temporal dimensions is common to most of Grove's heroes. Abe Spalding in Fruits of the Earth and John Eliot in Our Daily Bread, the Lunds in

Settlers of the Marsh or the farmers of the short stories are all under the pressure of their physical environment, and of "proving-up" in time, paying rents in time, or simply avoiding starvation for a certain time. Niels Lindstedt of The Settlers of the Marsh must "prove-up" before he can marry and have the children he desires so much. Len Sterner of The Yoke of Life would like to orient himself towards an intellectual career, yet has to spend the greatest part of his life helping his parents till the soil. Even Sam Clark, who does not strictly belong to a pioneer generation, for he is "the master of the mill" he inherits, embarks upon a certain course in life not because he wants to do so, but because, years earlier, his father had been guilty of certain irregularities. There is, therefore, a constant pressure, spatial and temporal, exerted on Grove's characters.

Nevertheless, as S.E. McMullin points out, if the author of Over Prairie Trails "believed in any kind of determinism, it was a psychological determinism."⁵ In other words, Grove considers that notwithstanding external circumstances, it is a man's reaction to life that ultimately determines his destiny. Grove's heroes recognize that the human condition is not one of absolute freedom, yet are willing to wage battle, for they know that they are free enough to decide intelligently about their own lives. In

Fruits of the Earth, Abe Spalding is fully aware that pioneer farming in the prairies of Canada is a difficult and risky undertaking. Nevertheless, on first beholding his plot, he decides that "he would change this prairie, would impose himself upon it, would conquer its spirit!" (FE, 23). Spalding is also aware that only hard work will make him successful. He is, in fact, so convinced of this that he starts ploughing during the first evening of his moving to his newly acquired land. John Eliot of Our Daily Bread and Niels Lindstedt of Settlers of the Marsh also decide to fight the bush in order to attain their goals. And in the Master of the Mill, Rudyard Clark, Sam Clark's father, works relentlessly because he wants to turn the grist mill into a prosperous enterprise. Even Cathleen Ormond, one of John Eliot's daughters, although in a privileged position in a big city, is aware that the moment "you try to relax, you drop out of sight. And it is at once reflected in a falling off of income" (ODB, 171). Thus, the attitudes exhibited by Spalding, Eliot, Lindstedt and Clark reveal at once a mature assessment of objective conditions and an exercise of choice.

The same mature assessment and exercise of choice informs the situation in Over Prairie Trails. The driver in this book is fully aware of the dangerous character of his trips from and to Gladstone, but he decides to undertake them

because he knows that success can be achieved, that driving on unmarked trails in foul weather combined with darkness can be managed if the driver is able to use to his advantage harnessed space and present time -- the two arms paradoxically supplied to him by the very dimensions against which his life is pitted. The metaphors for the driver's newly emerging sense of time and space are the watch and the horses. Without them, his endeavour would be abortive, and, with the recognition of this truth, the idea of anticipating danger and of preparing to face it is introduced into Grove's argument. "I believe in getting ready before I start," he openly admits (CPT, 31), and, indeed, throughout the book he tries to turn this theory into practice. The common goal of the seven rides described in Over Prairie Trails is to reach home safely. Hence, the driver's criteria for buying his horses and buggy are utilitarian rather than aesthetic. Peter, for instance, is more chunky than beautiful, but during the whole season there were numerous occasions when only his sense of the road, and his muscle power prevented fatal accidents.

But, superimposed on the spectacular pressure of space in Over Prairie Trails, there is the less spectacular, but no less fatal, attrition of time: darkness and only forty hours for the return trip, actual visit and rest. Not

surprisingly, therefore, the first chapter of this book begins with the phrase: "At ten minutes past four, of an evening late in September..." (OPT, 1). The time is thus given both in terms of season and hour, and, to the reader who could not infer the real significance of the reference, the narrator explains: "At this time of the year, I had at best only a little over an hour's start in my race against darkness" (OPT, 21). Under the double pressure of darkness and distance, complicated by bad weather, the individual has a keen consciousness of every second ticking off, and, once on the road, his watch becomes his best ally, the whole development of the story being in effect a function of correct timing. "I looked at my watch," and "I looked at my watch again" are phrases which mark the narration, for Grove plays upon this theme abundantly and repeatedly.

Within the general framework of the seven journeys, the first drive is of particular importance. It takes place in September, on a beautiful evening, and the driver enjoys daylight, twilight and moonlight consecutively. During this journey, the space between Gladstone and Falmouth is mapped out. A fence, a gate, Bell's corner, or the wire connecting certain cedar poles become important landmarks for Grove on future drives. He even memorizes that on the last half mile of dam over the marsh there are no weeds -- a seemingly

insignificant detail which will subsequently save his life. He is fully aware, however, that all these guiding signs will eventually be covered by snow, that even before the arrival of snow, thick marsh fog or darkness could envelop him, thus rendering all these objects invisible. Therefore, as a measure of additional but vital precaution, he times his horses and translates the distance between spatial elements into units of time. Knowing the speed of his horses and the precise time, he can always guess when he should reach the most important points of his itinerary. For instance, during one trip when it is too dark to see very far, but when he can see what his watch indicates, he appreciates correctly that, if he drives his horses "pretty briskly," he must "within little more than half an hour strike the black wall of the densest primeval forest fringing the creek" (OPT, 10). But not only is space converted into temporal units; time too is translated into space, and the interplay between the temporal and the spatial is most obvious when Grove looks at the height of the sun and concludes: "a ball of molten gold -- two hours from 'town' as I called it" (OPT, 10). A particular position can therefore be simultaneously expressed, and hence, determined, in two different codes, thus providing the driver with a double control system.

Grove's acute awareness of the decisive role played

by objective time in an individual's life is apparent not only in Over Prairie Trails and his novels. The farmers in the stories included in the volumes The Turn of the Year or Tales from the Margin too must not only pay rents and mortgages, but also must pay them at a certain date, or more debts will be incurred; they must not only turn productive the land purchased from the government, but also must turn it productive during a certain period, or they would lose ownership. And, of course, in all cases, a certain measure of financial independence must be attained before old age and physical incapacity come. Thus, even if man succeeds in achieving a measure of control over his physical environment, "there is still the enmity of Time to contend with."⁶ This is why the short stories are almost obsessively punctuated with time readings. "It is only five o'clock in the afternoon...", the narrator says in "The Lumberjack" (TM, 87); "next morning, at six o'clock...", he states in "Herefords in the Wilderness" (TM, 105). And in "The Teacher," he indicates not only the hour, but also the day of the week and the season when the action takes place: "It was Saturday, late of an afternoon towards the end of August" (TM, 129). Even in the supremely beautiful and extraordinarily economical "Snow," Grove finds it of importance and interest to place the incident in time. "In the west, Orion was sinking to the horizon. It was between

five and six o'clock," he tells his reader (TM, 261), thus drawing attention to this important dimension of the story. To further illustrate Grove's interest in natural time, one must certainly add that, at the peak of his successful years, Abe Spalding, one of his most time-conscious characters, was in the habit of timing himself on his rides, in an attempt to gain for work a few more minutes otherwise wasted on driving. "Even his waiting he seemed to do briskly" the author comments on the behaviour of this man, for whom each instant of life was emphatic, because he recognized in it both a fearful enemy and an unique ally (FE, 31).

In what sense, though, is present time man's ally? It is so in the sense that it is the sole dimension within which action is possible. Indeed, Grove considers that man has the power to transform each instant of his life from a situation in which he is acted upon into an opportunity to act, thus making it possible for him to reach his goal rather than become a victim of circumstances. Consider, for instance, the moment when the driver in Over Prairie Trails finds himself and his team before a layer of snow which reaches the top of the surrounding trees, facing the danger of being buried alive, if the horses do not rear and plunge rhythmically together. He has a fraction of a minute to take the situation in and make a decision. Coordination of

movements and immediacy of action are at once necessary, and, understanding this, he summons up all his will power to control his fear, and calls to his horses "in a low and quiet voice, 'Peter -- Dan -- now!'" (OPT, 86). They hear him and their muscles play with the effort of desperation for, indeed, it is now or never. With this "now", the force of the instant is asserted. At war with hostile forces, man is given only little time to pause and weigh his difficulties; the promptness of his response is of the utmost importance. To defer committing oneself to action means danger. In the particular instance mentioned above, a victory was won, but the next moment was ready to undo what the previous one had created. When the team emerged on top of the drift, the driver realized with astonishment that they were above the top of the trees, and the question of how to descend loomed larger than that of how to ascend, for the horses were fast sinking. Again, he had to act in a flash, thus, once more revealing that to catch in flight what each opportunity offers is essential.

At this point, it is important to note that mechanical performances are not considered by Grove to be instances of action. For this Canadian author, action is only the voluntary process by which the mind is fertilized and made to bear fruit. The fruit thus born is the right

thing, the thing done at the right time. In The Master of the Mill, for instance, Sam Clark's career as a director of the Langholm flour mill is a concatenation of such right performances at the right times. A graphic example in this respect is the brilliant decision he takes during the war in South Africa. Flour being in extraordinarily high demand, he avails himself of the opportunity offered by a strike at the mill in order to introduce the most advanced technology. Thus, practically overnight, he transforms the productive, yet still modest industrial unit, into a highly profitable enterprise. "I knew positively that the strike was on the point of flaring up," one of the characters in The Master of the Mill comments. "It was that moment which Mr. Clark chose for leaving Langholm; he was away for two weeks going east" (MM, 172). And, it is during these two weeks that the newest machines are installed to the dismay of the workers on strike.

It is true that through acting the individual risks his existence. Action, being an expression of will, orients future moments in a certain given direction, and entails repercussions for which man himself is at least partially responsible. Yet, acting is the only way to oppose drifting, and the distinction is fundamental to Grove's philosophy of life, in terms of which, control over one's actions is

sometimes taken to the point of synchronization with sidereal temporal movements. Thus, for example, during the seventh trip in Over Prairie Trails, the driver "had moonlight from time to time, and whenever one of the clouds floated in front of the crescent," he "drove more slowly and more carefully" (OPT, 139). The same kind of synchronization is demanded of those engaged in farming. Ploughing or seeding, weeding or threshing, are all activities that must be performed at certain definite times if the farmer wants to be successful. Grove himself tells us that during the first years of pioneering, Niels Lindstedt and John Eliot were in "possession" of the present (ODB, 13). Hence, they were so much in accord with nature that, in his introduction to Our Daily Bread, D.C. Spettigue feels entitled to claim that these two farmers cease to represent man "in stubborn conflict with the elements." And, if Grove makes sure that his reader understands that Eliot's or Lindstedt's wealth is created by their working hand in hand with space and time, he also makes sure that his reader realizes that the poverty of many of his pioneers, say that of Eliot's sons-in-law, is, at least partially, due to their laziness and wasting of time. They usually do things either too late, or do not do them at all.

Perfect timing and control over one's actions cannot

he achieved, however, if man is not attuned to the present, and if his thinking does not identify itself with the environment. Grove sees this vital identification realized through man's constantly taking inventory of external reality with both his senses and his mind. In Over Prairie Trails, for instance, sight is the most reliable sense, but when sight fails, the driver relies on his hearing, so that certain landmarks come "through the ear, not the eye" (OPT, 34). Under conditions when the senses cannot help, it is the intellect alone that takes over. Blinded completely by fog, and unable to walk beside his horses and lead them, the driver converts the length of the dam into units of time, and times his horses. When the time is up, he gets out with precision, and thus avoids being sucked in by the swamp.

But the individual's position in space changes constantly. Therefore, he must be continuously alert and respond adequately to new stimuli. The time at his disposal is, anyway, unequivocally short, and any disruption caused by his lack of attention cuts it shorter. "One wrong step, and a horse might wallow in snow up to his belly, and you would lose more time than you could make up for in an hour's breathless career," Grove advises in Over Prairie Trails (pp. 126-127), thus emphasizing that only a precise consciousness of space permits a direct contact with

objective time, that only in the absence of all distraction can man be in readiness for the events of space, as well as of time that converge towards him. This readiness is of paramount importance for a life under direct determination of the sidereal time order -- as the life of pioneer farmers is. The celebrated "stacking" in Fruits of the Earth proves this contention. It took place during a torrid summer that yielded a bumper crop of wheat. The threshing machines had not yet reached the Spalding district when Abe realized that heavy rain was bound to come, and that the rain would ruin the crop. Consequently, for a few days, while the other farmers were simply watching the progression of the sun in the sky, Abe worked desperately, and stacked all his wheat. The flood did come, and did destroy everything except the wheat in Abe's stacks. This wheat, saved through an act of perfect timing, made Abe Spalding the richest man in the whole region. With the mind and the body joined in the present, the individual can observe his enemy and decide tactics. While stacking his wheat, Abe Spalding achieved this vital identification, and scored an enormous success.

Grove's insistence on the significance of the present, his detailed presentation of the ways in which the lived present instant is man's ally, though time as a whole is his fierce enemy, is dictated not only by the awareness

that action is possible solely within the span of the present moment, but also by the knowledge that man has a special propensity for abusing the present moment -- this unique point of authentic and vital contact with reality. The fifth drive in Over Prairie Trails offers a discussion of this problem. This particular trip started under doubtful auspices: horses extremely tired, and a snowstorm ready to break. As usual, the driver anticipated the danger and prepared for it: an earlier start, and a longer, yet safer road to town. Soon after departure, the wind started to blow and the snow to whirl down, but the trail was relatively good, and the driver was convinced that "so long as you have such a trail and horses with road sense, you do not need to worry about your directions, no matter how badly it may blow" (OPT, 96). This belief released his attention for other things, and the drama started. He thought of his wife and child, of his poor health and shaky pecuniary situation; he observed the angle in which snow flakes fell; he noticed how different in shape and density each flake was from the other, but did not notice that the horses had missed the right trail. Later, when he reverted his attention to what was happening around himself and to himself, there was no trail, and no possibility of telling the direction in which they were going. That eventually he found his way is less important for our argument. What is of significance is that

the almost fatal accident happened in a moment when his interest shifted away from his environment. Lifting one above the immediate surroundings, thoughts, it is true, can create a world immune to the ravages of the present. Cold and wind are more easily bearable when one thinks of family and home, and chaos on earth can be ignored by the driver "imbued with the moods of the skies" (OPT, 143).

Nevertheless, the same lack of coincidence between objective and subjective time exposes man more to the hostility of space, and makes him more vulnerable. Even during his first trip, the driver in Over Prairie Trails, for instance, noticed that, as soon as he "started to dream," Peter, the horse, "was sure to fall into the slowest of walks" (OPT, 3). But, on his fifth trip, his general frame of mind rendered him less equipped for the confrontation with distance and darkness than ever before. Indeed, as Grove himself explains, during all other drives he was "on the go" from his solitude in Gladstone to his family in Palmouth; during the fifth drive he was "on the coming back" from the warmth of his family to the desolation of his town apartment:

I am afraid that the prospect of going back to rather uncongenial work must have dulled my senses. Or, maybe, since I was returning over the same road after an interval of only two days, I had exhausted on the way north whatever there was of noticeable impressions to be garnered. Or, again, since I was coming from 'home', from the company of those for

whom I lived and breathed, it might just be that all my thoughts flew back with such an intensity that there was no vitality left for the perception of the things immediately around me. (OPT, 14)

Nowhere in Grove's work is the damaging effect of excessive indulgence in temporal subjectivity better illustrated than in The Yoke of Life. This book has the shape of a journey through the life of Len Sterner, the son of poor Canadian farmers from the prairies of Manitoba. The physical level of the journey starts with a departure from a small settlement, moves progressively to a confrontation with a big city, and finds an exit in Len's untimely death through drowning. Indeed, as the titles of some of the chapters indicate, Grove follows Len Sterner in space from "The House" through "The Camp" and "The City" to "The Lake." Simultaneously, as the names of the four parts of the book explain, the author pursues his protagonist chronologically from "Boyhood" through "Youth" and "Manhood" to "Death." As a correlative of Len's physical movement through space and chronological time, the novel also reveals his psychological progression from an incipient dissatisfaction with the world around him towards an almost total separation of his self from objective reality. The eventual resolution does not take the form of reintegration but of the decision to commit suicide. As elsewhere in his works, in this novel Grove

reveals causal elements beyond the events themselves, in an attempt to make sense of what otherwise would be an incomprehensible avalanche of incidents. Again, the titles of some of the chapters are indicative of an individual's onward, inner motion from "New Stirrings" through "Disquisitions and Thoughts" to "The Great Crisis" and "The End." Events are thus removed from their merely chronological order, and assume legitimacy as signs of something more fundamental: man's relationship not to chronology, but to inner duration, to time as personally experienced.

The early circumstances of Len Sterner's life are not unusual. He is born on a farm, and spends the first fourteen years of his life at home helping his parents. But, unlike his brother Charlie, Len shows a temperamental propensity for living more in the realm of his own thoughts, than in that of the world around him, and this early dissociation prefigures the profound temporal separation the victim of which he will later become. As an adolescent, Len undergoes an experience which leaves an indelible mark on his character. One day, when walking through the forest, he has a vision of an animal:

the body that of a large deer; the head almost that of a small but nobly shaped horse, especially in its gesture of startled attention; and from its forehead there sprang a single horn, spirally wound or twisted, but perfectly straight and ending in a fine

point three feet above the head. (YL, 59)

Eventually, the fabulous unicorn proves to be a jumping deer, but, during the span of this visionary moment, Len recognizes his own human beauty in the beauty of the animal, and, intuitively, becomes aware of the richness of his own soul. Following this incident, the physical world seems a mere component of a more profound, more complex reality, and Len is willing "to scorn and spurn the merely reasonable things. The unexplained made its appeal: poetry, mystic significance, religious symbolism" (YL, 69-70).

Grove elaborates on his protagonist's inner life and centers it on the ideas of love and beauty, of the harmonious development of the human body and mind in a world that seems brutal, irrational and irresponsible. Len's visions of love and beauty find expression in his attachment to Lydia, a young girl from the same settlement. His ideal of human harmony is at the origin of his desire to become a university professor. The incidents in Len's life cease to be isolated events in the Canadian prairies, and his findings and experiences acquire larger dimensions. Concomitantly, the author expands the outer landscape of the book and separately moves both Len and Lydia from the little settlement of their childhood and adolescence to the big town of their maturity. It is in the city that the climax of Len's spiritual

progression is reached.

To afford to attend high school courses, Len has to deliver coal. He does this with pleasure in spite of the hard work to which he is forced to subject himself. The need for love, however, is still an unfulfilled element in his life, for, in the meanwhile, Len has lost contact with Lydia. Even earlier, Len's affection for Lydia was so inclusive that he resented the fact that the girl had a life of her own. As it remains unsatisfied throughout the years, Len's love for Lydia turns into a desperate, irrational hunger for her, a hunger which, in its turn, becomes the driving force behind his constant search for her in the city. Meanwhile, Len adds more and more imaginary fragments to his vision of Lydia, and the new psychological configuration he creates is more intimidating, more terrifying still, for it is all-inclusive, "He went sternly on, without stopping or listening; and always Lydia stood before his mind's eye.... Her he purified, deified in his thought" (YL, 281). The further into life Len proceeds, the more his imagination prevails over objective reality and causes him to experience a time-cleavage between his psyche and his flesh. Visions become more important for him than real life, until he reaches the point when he completely abandons his brilliant studies in favour of his search for Lydia, "He no longer read

nor thought. He was absorbed in one single thing which seemed all-important" (YL, 279).

He does meet the girl and immediately falls gravely ill. Faithfully nursed by Lydia, Len is restored to life and to the realization that Lydia was a prostitute. Moreover, he learns that the money for the food and the medical assistance necessary to save his life came from her prostitution. This is the moment of Len's psychological crisis, when the real world becomes for him a landscape of futility, constriction and despair, when the connection between his already diverging mind and body becomes weaker. Physically he convalesces; mentally, he agonizes. "Both [he and Lydia] knew that there was something to clear up between them, something enormous" (YL, 293). But Len also knows that there is something to clear up within his own being. He has to decide whether or not to accept the world on its own terms, whether or not to accept the yoke of life. In this very awareness lies Len's possibility of containing the polarities of his own self, of his own time, and, by reaching out to Lydia, of breaking the circle of loneliness and restoring new meaning to his life.

But Len is unable or unwilling to compromise. Any logical bridge between his visions and objective reality is

fallacious: the world and the individuals that form it are beyond comprehension and beyond remedy. After Len's physical recovery, there is no return to humanity because there is no reintegration of the self. Len takes Lydia to Lake Winnipeg, and this trip is a metaphor for his error in perception and in judgement. Grove narrows the outer landscape of the book first to the lake, then to a boat on the lake. The wide angle lens the author has used to encompass the incidents in the city is replaced now by a telephoto, and what happens in the boat is the ultimate expression of isolation and despair. Len's escape from the ugliness of the world does not assume the form of becoming invulnerable to this ugliness by consciously accepting it. The form his release takes is suicide.

Certainly, a legitimate question is why the presence of the woman he loves does not act as a deterrent. The inevitable realization is that Len is not in love with Lydia the woman, but with Lydia the ideal. To him, the girl represents the visionary love and beauty for which he craves, and, as a woman, she becomes unacceptable. "'If you had been,' Len said, 'what I thought you could be for me, Lydia, you would have doubled and trebled my manhood'" (YL, 336). Indeed, in the process of allowing his imagination to prevail over the objective reality of life, Len allows subjective

time to prevail over the objective one, and not only creates another self, but takes his creation a step too far. He refuses any involvement with the outside world and, consequently, can no longer find sustenance at the level of humanity. He has built and inhabits an emotional igloo. In the absence of love, his attempts at self-integration are one-directional, solitary and ultimately useless. In The Yoke of Life the final step towards the reconciliation of inner and outer duration is never taken. The unification of the psyche is never achieved, but the direction is clear and has deliberately been determined by the author: it is human love, it is Lydia.

What Grove seems to indicate through Len's experience is that the reintegration of a divided self can be achieved only with the help of another human being, and that it implies the integration of this "other." Lydia must die too, and, indeed, she dies with Len, because the humanity she extended to him was not reciprocated. Thus, Len's tragedy is incorporated into a larger setting, and, in The Yoke of Life Grove defines the failure of both communication and reconciliation.

Len Sterner's situation, "his incapacity and unwillingness to adjust to realities which offend his

sensitivity," as Ronald Sutherland phrased it, are hardly peculiar.⁶ Grove is perfectly conscious that the adult mind has a tendency to detach and ultimately free itself from a serious immersion in the affairs of a dissatisfying present. The idea that only with an effort can the imaginative man force his attention to apply itself to immediate events is explicitly stated in Over Prairie Trails, the book whose straightforwardness of exposition makes it almost a guide to the decipherment of Grove's other works:

Most serious minded men at my age, I believe, become profoundly impressed with the futility of 'it all.' Unless we throw ourselves into something outside our own personality, life is apt to impress us as a great mockery.... Modern civilization has, on the whole, deprived us of the ability for the enjoyment of the moment.... Then a moment like the one I was living through arrives. Nature strips down our pretences with a relentless finger, and we stand, bare of disguises, as helpless failures. We have lost the child-like power of living without conscious aims.... If no such awakening supervenes, since we never live in the present, we are always looking forward to what never comes; and so life slips by, unlived. (OPT, 118)

This is not to say that Grove advocates the restriction of an adult's temporal perspective. On the contrary, numerous pages in his books are written with a view to encouraging the expansion of man's intellectual and imaginative temporal and spatial grasp of objective temporal and spatial reality, and to caution against a singleness of

purpose which can reduce life to a mere sequence of chronological moments, and thus become a source of tragedy as fearful as the unbalanced working of imagination. "When, in the man, the gift for idealization and sublimation is not more or less absent under pioneer conditions," Grove writes in a letter addressed to Desmond Pacey, "the fact usually leads to disaster of some kind; and I believe that in my books, grim as they may seem, I have made room for that tragedy too."⁹

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Indeed, single-mindedness, though superficially profitable, causes many of Grove's heroes to fall prey to experiential shallowness. When allowed to make persistent and constant demands, the land or the mill in Grove's works impose crippling limitations on the individual's mental and imaginative life. Imaginatively poor, man does not live, but merely exists, and, in spite of his earthly possessions, he is a spiritual pauper. Abe Spalding, for instance, works so hard and relentlessly that his neighbour Nicol feels obliged to ask him: "Do you find time to live?" (FE, 37). Indeed, his material struggle absorbs him to the point that he hardly knows his children, and that wrings from his wife the cry: "That work. I don't know. To me it seems senseless, useless, a mere waste. Work, work, work! What for?" (FE, 48). The question is legitimate for even after the

formidable success achieved when he saved his bumper crop, and had enough money to retire, Abe Spalding worked still harder, and bought more land. Likewise, John Eliot of Our Daily Bread drove himself to the point of losing essential contact with other human beings, his family included. After his wife's death, he tried not to think of this irreparable loss, not because it would have broken his heart, but "for fear that such thoughts might keep him from doing his daily duty" (ODB, 139). Niels Lindstedt too is so preoccupied first with "proving-up," then with acquiring more land, then with more building, that he hardly knows who his neighbours, the "settlers of the marsh," are, and in the astonished eyes of the district, contracts a marriage that proves disastrous. In The Master of the Mill, Rudyard Clark also lives as "a link in a chain -- a slave handling his slavery on" to his son Sam (MM, 111). In his turn, Samuel Clark, in full awareness of the dangers of the situation, allows the mill to become "the central fact in his life," a presence of such a destructive nature that "it had never permitted him to be entirely himself" (MM, 2). Finally, in The Yoke of Life, in a conversation between Len Sterner and Lydia, one finds the same commentary on the patterns of labour and routine that reduce the lives of even the most successful farmers to mere existences:

"What do they get out of their lives?" [Lydia asks.]

"Work, work, work!"

"And while they work they live!" [Len answers.]

"No. They exist, Len!" (YL, 161)

Commenting upon the absence of introspection in the life of some of Grove's heroes, D. O. Spettigue says: "These characters are not thinkers and dreamers to begin with; they become so after their material ambitions have been realized and turned to ashes in their mouths."¹⁰ This statement, however, is only partially correct. The supreme irony, or tragedy, of the situation in Grove's novels, is that almost all his materially successful men start with what might be called "a vision." But, in the long run, the vision proves more elemental than visionary. Thus, for instance, the vision that informs Niel Lindstedt's daily life in Settlers of the Marsh goes back to the short story "The First Day in the Life of a Pioneer," when he imagines himself established on a small farm of his own with a wife and children who bring "inspiration" to his life. For John Eliot of Our Daily Bread, as for the biblical patriarchs of Israel, the image of his children living in harmony around him initially represents the driving force behind his actions. Likewise, when in The Master of the Mill Samuel Clark becomes a director, the mill is "a dream" of perfection and creativity. And, when in Fruits of the Earth Abe Spalding mentally looks upon the district "from a point in time twenty years later"

(FE, 16), what he sees is not only his well-appointed farm, but also a whole prosperous settlement.

Initially, therefore, there is an imaginative or emotional dimension to the plans for the future of most of Grove's protagonists. Eventually, however, by emphasizing the material aspects connected to the realization of their visions, the heroes practically annihilate their visions and the inner time related to them. Niels Lindstedt predicates the existence of the wife and children on the largeness of the house he wants to afford to build. John Eliot thinks more of the farms which he would like his children to inhabit than of the children themselves. Spalding's thirst for more and more land cannot be quenched by anything, whereas Sam Clark's mill, from "a dream," turns into "a pyramid," still a symbol of perfect design, but also concealing the tomb of ruthless capitalism. Indeed, Senator Sam Clark inherited the Langholm mill from his father, and, in his turn, passed it on to his son. At the beginning of his career as the director of the mill, the Senator regarded it as a means of improving the lives of his employees by solving some of their pressing financial problems. Gradually, the director becomes less and less concerned with the human aspect of his enterprise and, the mill, like any other industrial unit, turns into an instrument of increasing financial returns for his owners

only. The mill has to produce more and more in an ever shorter time even though that proves detrimental to the welfare of the workers.

But, in order to achieve this aim Sam Clark has to dedicate all his energy, all his time to the mill. His involvement with the mill progresses until such a time as a line of no return has been crossed: he lives solely for the mill and through the mill, he reduces his life to one single dimension in order to increase production. Thus, once more in a novel by Grove, objective time and reality devour man's inner time and imaginative world. Lindstedt's, Eliot's, Spalding's and Clark's visions become materialistic obsessions, and these men of high potentialities exhaust their humanity in searches for economic success. In a letter to Desmond Facey on the subject of Fruits of the Earth, Grove himself unequivocally articulates his concern with the gradual erosion of individual complexity: "What I wished to bring about in this book is the decay of a potentiality."¹¹

This particular dimension of Grove's novels, the presence of materialistic obsessions in the character of the protagonist has also been S. E. McMullin's object of study. Discussing Grove's use of the Promised Land myth, McMullin notes that on the flat prairie expanses of this author's

novels, "man's contest with nature is reduced to a basic equation: horizontal nature and vertical man."¹² But this fails to take into account the fact that, in spite of the vertical spatial position which the heroes maintain, temporally, they allow themselves to be reduced to horizontality. In other words, in a world of continuous conflict between the individual and his environment, Grove's protagonists succumb to the pressure of the environment, and, subjectively, become as flat and as subject to chronology as nature itself. Hence, Spalding, Eliot and the Clarks do not ultimately impose their spirit upon the prairie or the mill. Rather, the prairie and the mill conquer their spirit. As a result, as Isabel Skelton comments, there is "no bright, no gay side" to these individuals, "there is no humour about them, no knocking of fun and laughter out of the accidents of the day. There is nothing but the prosaic plodding and gathering of gear, each year a little ahead of the last..."¹³ Spalding and Eliot, Lindstedt and the Clarks are very successful financially. Yet, Grove seems to say, in order to be so under pioneer conditions, man has to pay a considerable price: he has to become rigid, he has to center his life upon "a single-minded preoccupation with the specifically pioneering task."¹⁴ Grove also seems to say that in such an individual's success lies his ultimate defeat, for, in order to become so prosperous he uses the objective

span of life allotted to him without actually living it. Under the shadow of the land or of the mill, Eliot's or Clark's lives begin "to appear futile as soon as the process of taming and building has been accomplished,"¹⁵ and, lacking a subjective temporal dimension in their personality, they have to struggle with a feeling of existential worthlessness.

More often than not, in their failure, the heroes come to a belated understanding. They gain insight into the complex problems involved in the human condition, but this happens at an age when the possibility of reconstructing one's existence is no longer available. When Abe Spalding, for instance, realizes the futility of mere economic success, he turns to his family for spiritual satisfaction and support. What he discovers is that there is no basis for communication between himself and his wife, and that his children, with whom his relationship is also a failure, are ready to leave home. The attendant emotion, Spalding's sense of having lost his life by spending it foolishly, is overwhelming. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, true to his own belief that a really good book "tends to look back rather than forward" (INS, 128), Grove ascribes a special role to recollections.

Permitting the individual to assemble disparate

pieces of evidence, memory assists in the process of re-appraising values and events. Founded on the view that memory is the basis for the re-evaluation of one's life, The Master of the Mill, for instance, does not progress chronologically from 1888 to 1939, the dates which represent the objective temporal boundaries of the novel. Instead, it moves backwards and forwards by means of flashbacks and recollections, of hopes and plans, and of visions. What emerges from this continuous interplay of subjective temporal relationships is a group of significant associations on the basis of which the old Senator, Sam Clark, assesses the real meaning of the mill, and of the part it played in his life. What he finally understands is that, though he is referred to as "the master of the mill," it is the mill that fundamentally is his master. More painful still is the realization that the course his life eventually assumed was not the one he originally intended, that he himself was to blame if he went where he did not want to go. Indeed, emerging from the wealth of memories is not a pre-eminently pragmatic self, but one partly a dreamer, and only partly a man of achievement.

For Grove, therefore, the use of the time-shift device does not represent a catering to a twentieth-century literary fashion, but springs from a profound conviction that

what one commonly calls a self can be known against the background not only of a structure of objective temporal moments, but also of a subjective associative network which only memory can reveal.¹⁶ When, one summer afternoon, the footman closes the door of old Senator Sam Clark's car, and the reader realizes that he is, in fact, imaginatively taken back to a similar afternoon forty years earlier, this is not a sheer exercise in mental and artistic suppleness on the part of the author, but a device used to follow a man into the recesses of his own psyche. The old Senator thinks back in an attempt to comprehend not only the course that his life has followed so far, but also the significance of the events he has witnessed in their relationship to the present and the future; notably, the inadequacy of old institutions to cope with the emergence of the machine. Or, as Ronald Sutherland remarks, although The Master of the Mill consists of reminiscence, "it deals with human reactions to conditions of the present and of the future rather than of the fading past."¹⁷

A parallel situation is to be found in the novel Our Daily Bread. Like all of Grove's works, this novel is thematically complex. It involves conflicts between generations, developments in Western agricultural methods, and changes in mental attitudes as a result of the

introduction of mechanical equipment. It also examines the course of life of the protagonist in terms of the tension between his inner world and that of objective reality, between his inner time and that of clocks and calendars. John Eliot's dream is to see his sons and daughters settled on farms around him. It is a beautiful family vision, similar to Niels Lindstedt's in The Settlers of the Marsh, and, significantly, Eliot's error of judgement is similar to Lindstedt's too. Niels predicates his marriage and the raising of a family on the largeness of the house he wanted to build. Eliot puts the farms on which his children were supposed to settle before the children themselves. So, he spends his life accumulating material assets, but fails to build a meaningful relationship with his wife and children. The former dies suddenly of cancer, and the latter, one after another, drift away from him.

Intent on material pursuits, John Eliot never allowed himself to think, so that it never occurred to him to weigh things against each other, and assign to them a superior or inferior value. It is only very late in life, notably after his wife's death, that rich, but utterly unhappy, John Eliot stops to think and ponder, thus allowing past time to be resurrected in his memory. It is only after re-living all of his life during the few hours spent near his son-in-law's

death bed, that he re-invests objects and occurrences with new value. Had he tried to understand his wife better, had he tried to be spiritually closer to his children, he could have led a life of a different quality, that would have yielded different results. Only when the past is used to interpret the present, does he doubt the fundamental principle that had governed his life -- that of happiness conditioned by wealth. It is only then that, with his mind's eye, "he saw the dug-outs, the sod-cabins of recent settlers in the Saskatchewan hills, and for the first time in his life he thought of poverty with affection" (OEB, 173).

The same bitter realization is Niels Lindstedt's lot. Yet, at the end of The Settlers of the Marsh, Lindstedt is still young, and, unlike John Eliot or Sam Clark, he can still reconstruct his life. Thus, in The Yoke of Life, Our Daily Bread, The Settlers of the Marsh, Fruits of the Earth, and The Master of the Mill, Grove uses the novel form as a vehicle for an enquiry into the nature of the tragic flaw in his protagonists. In particular, he attempts to discover the reason behind the partial dehumanization which results from a too long enslavement to chronological time.

But the same novels also reveal his interest in human beings who exhibit harmonious and balanced personalities.

Daddy Lund of The Settlers of the Marsh, for instance, belongs to this category. He had emigrated, Grove explains, "and the mere fact that he was uprooted and transplanted had given him a second sight, had awakened powers of vision and sympathy in him which were far beyond his education and upbringing" (SM, 60). Similarly, Dr. Vanbruick, Abe Spalding's brother-in-law, having abandoned his practice in town, and having bought a shop in the countryside, lives in a world of the spirit and of the imagination. Ruth and Charlie, Spalding's wife and son, have also developed sensibilities that provide a contrast to Abe's hardened pragmatism. Likewise, in Our Daily Bread, John Eliot's wife, Martha, was able to hold the family together precisely because to John's "dogmatic forthrightness she had added that touch of human blood-heat which he had seemed to lack" (ODB, 11), and thus gave life an emotional richness otherwise denied in a daily humdrum existence.

Further examples to illustrate Grove's interest in existential problems can be found in several of his stories. In "The House of Many Eyes," for example, the simplicity of chronological time is contrasted with the richness of subjective time. The objective time span covered by this short story is less than a year, yet this interval is sufficient for Grove to reveal all the agonizing details of

the gradual deterioration of a marriage. The author follows the inner life of both Tom Creighton and his wife, from the day of Tom's accident to the moment when communication is no longer possible between the spouses, and the wife slams the door in her husband's face. Despite their apparent dissimilarities, a close thematic affinity exists between "The House of Many Eyes" and "The Desert." The subject of the latter short story is the coming home, after ten years of absence, of a thirty-two-year-old woman. But Grove is concerned less with Alice's physical movement from the city back to her parents' house, and more with the complex psychological reactions triggered by this event. Thus, for instance, Grove reveals Alice watching the sun setting, but he does not describe what her eyes see, rather he follows his heroine into the recesses of her mind where, in a few minutes of objective time, she recapitulates all her previous life. "This was a moment filled with an intense emotional content almost painful," Grove comments (TM, 80). A similar situation can be encountered in "Lazy Bones." Basically, this short story describes a working day on the farm owned by Elisabeth and Walter Hurst. The author briefly considers the many chores that both husband and wife have to perform, but his attention focuses on one particular moment of the long summer day, one when the experiential intensity Elisabeth Hurst feels far surpasses her actual circumstances. Elisabeth

was simply engaged in milking when she felt "at one with some mysterious thing pervading the world. She did not care about it; she did not care what it was; but it made her happy" (TM, 21). "The Boat" also centers upon the possibility of superimposing a rich psychological life upon an uneventful chronological duration. The narrator of this story has simply walked from his sea-side house to the nearby beach, yet is able to exclaim: "Down there, at the beach, I seemed to live; at the house I merely existed" (TM, 235).

Largely autobiographical, A Search for America supplements the short stories in the concern they reveal for the experiential depth the individual can attain even in the absence of a powerful, external stimulus. This book recounts the efforts of an European immigrant, Phil Branden, to establish himself in North America and come to terms with the civilization of the new continent. The protagonist moves rapidly from Toronto to New York, through the towns of New England, across the Mid-Western states, and into the prairies of Canada. He works consecutively as a waiter in a cheap restaurant, as a travelling book salesman, as a hobo following the harvest from Missouri to Saskatchewan. A Search for America thus ranges widely over events and places, yet the one unifying thread of what otherwise may simply seem a picaresque adventure, is Phil Branden's quest for an ideal

America despite the real deficiencies and inadequacies of the actual America through which he travels. Closely allied to this search for the true nature of America is the urge to transfigure a simply chronological existence. The following passage is lengthy, but it deserves to be quoted in full for it is one of the most beautiful in Grove's work, and one of the most representative of the way in which sensory perception enriched by imagination and feeling can become the basis for the enjoyment of a temporal subjective depth denied to a merely rational perception:

Every morning I woke as to a feast. I was young, in the early years of manhood. My whole body and soul were astir with the possibilities of passion. Love was not only a potentiality; it was a prime need; it was a craving, a cry of my innermost being. And this love had no object except the woods, the mountains, the streams; bird, insect, beast, gossamer threads, smoky haze, the smell of the earth. These, or more briefly, the country, I loved. (SA, 238)

In Over Prairie Trails, the driver experiences similar intensely felt moments. Lifted by his horses on top of a drift which buried the trees around, he feels seized with a

feeling of estrangement, as it were -- as if I were not myself, but looking on from the outside at the adventure of somebody who yet was I --... a feeling of having been carried beyond my depth where I could not swim --.... (CPT, 86)

The world of outer reality fades from the driver's consciousness, and, through an experiential leap, he transcends his objective circumstances, and reaches towards a reality beyond objective time. It becomes evident that between Grove's novels of the soil and his short stories, between The Master of the Mill, In Search of America and the sketches forming Over Prairie Trails there is a thematic correlation and a unity of purpose. They all testify to his interest in modes of perception which do not suffer from shallowness, and which function as components of a concerted effort to warn against the danger of allowing external time to encroach upon man's personality.

Grove, however, was too astute an observer of the human condition not to point out that the intense instant on top of the drift in Over Prairie Trails, for instance, was flanked on both sides by moments of cruel factuality: one of urgent necessity to ascend, and one of equally imperative need to descend -- a peak squeezed between two points of low altitude, a situation whose symbolic value is obvious. As mountains and hills cannot and should not be flattened, for this would detract from the richness of man's environment, so private time can not and should not be annihilated, for this would mean a contraction of human experience. But, because of the rigors of his ride through space, man must also remain

connected to objective reality. The "cheerless night" when he nearly lost his life taught the driver a painful lesson: if Peter stumbled, it was not the horse's fault but his own, for he "should have watched the road more carefully instead of giving in to the trend of his thoughts" (OPT, 119).

But to reconcile the antithetical temporal dimensions of human life -- the objective and the subjective, the practical and the imaginative -- is infinitely difficult. At the level of individual existence, the balance tends to tip one way or the other; towards the practical for Abe Spalding or John Eliot, towards the imaginative for Len Sterner or Daddy Lund. The two divergent temporal tendencies of the human personality can be controlled only with great effort, but the message implicit in Grove's works is that this effort is an absolute necessity. If Eliot died lonely and unwanted, if Spalding derives no satisfaction from his prosperous life, if old Sam Clark is overwhelmed by regret and Len Sterner commits suicide, it is either because the objective dimension of time has turned into fatal pragmatism, or because the subjective dimension of time has become fatal idealization. As often in Grove's work, an idea that is implicit in a novel appears unequivocally articulated in Over Frairie Trails. The story of the sixth drive from Gladstone to Falmouth

centers upon the necessity to control and temper both the power of subjectivity and that of objective reality. This drive takes place under the evil omen of the illness of the driver's daughter, and the desire to join her prompts him continuously to send his horses into a gallop. With an effort, the driver checks himself, since he can fully appreciate the consequences of surrendering to the call for speed which he hears "in his veins":

Not yet, I thought. On that long stretch north, beyond the bridge, there I was going to drive them at their utmost speed. I was unstrung, I told myself; this was mere sentimentalism; no emotional impulses were of any value; careful planning only counted. So I even pulled the horses back to a walk. (CPT, 122)

Grove's concern with the need to blend harmoniously objective and subjective existence is also apparent in A Search for America. Like Niels Lindstedt of Settlers of the Marsh, Phil Branden, the narrator of this book, emerges from the jarring collision between the world of his dreams and that of action, not only with a measure of self-knowledge, but also with the ability to balance inner and outer time. Indeed, like many other European immigrants, Branden started his American journey with a misleading American dream. In terms of his initial vision, America was a kind of Garden of Eden, replete with material assets not only within everybody's easy reach, but also which, once possessed,

opened for the individual the door to happiness. It took Phil Branden many painful years to correct this vision. He had to stoop and do menial jobs, he had to starve and endure cold to realize that America was not a place, but a state of being; not space, but time. To reach Grove's "America" therefore is like reaching Virginia Woolf's "lighthouse," or Thomas Mann's "Magic Mountain": it is to attain an abundance of life that, in full awareness of the rigours of natural time, transcends it, and re-organizes temporal units not into simple chronological succession, but around a subjective pivot.¹⁸ For Phil Branden this subjective pivot is engagement, commitment to the service of mankind. At the end of A Search for America, at the end of his physical and spiritual odyssey, Branden is able to reconstruct his life, and give it a new direction:

In my survey of the American attitude, I was apt to take ideals for facts, aspirations for achievements. From the vantage ground of retrospect, I can only be glad that an anticlimax intervened before I set about building my life. (SA, 382)

Yet, aware that there are as many subjective time series as individuals who perceive, in other words, aware of the radically individual character of human life, Grove does not set up Branden's solution as the answer to the human condition. The question of how to live one's life is still

open, but Grove makes it imperative for each man to make his own decision, and to strive to give his own life such a subjective determination as would balance his emotions with the objective span of his life. As the author himself explains in the volume It Needs to Be Said, what "we really know of this world in which we live is limited by the range of things to which we react emotionally. Our emotional reactions are the one, fundamental reality, the one, only thing which we really know and which at the bottom concerns us" (INS, 112).

Grove's interest in "the one, fundamental reality" of man's emotional reactions is evident even in The Seasons, his unpublished novel. Bruce Nesbitt, who studied the manuscript and the typescript copy of the novel both of which are part of the Grove papers in the library of the University of Manitoba, reports that the book was conceived as a major exploration of man's destiny dependent on space and time.¹⁹ Indeed, The Seasons was intended to have three sections: Summer, Fall, and Winter, with a connecting link between these sections provided in the person of Arnold Brewster, a former political economist at the University of Toronto. In an attempt to escape the nightmare of the big city, and to enjoy a simpler but more rewarding existence, Brewster comes to farm at Rivers, Ontario, only to realize that man's life

in the countryside is not less difficult or less complicated, that the human condition is the same everywhere and at all times. He also becomes aware that, while local and historical details may vary, the essential conflicts between man, space and time are always the same. Thus, The Seasons represents a continuation of some of the major themes of Grove's fiction. "Had the novel been completed," Bruce Nesbitt remarks, "I believe it would have been Grove's richest and most competent expression of the 'response of the soul to the fundamental conditions of man's life on earth.'"²⁰ One can only regret that The Seasons was not finished.

Also, one can only agree with Robertson Davies' words in the Peterborough Examiner:

Grove is a literary artist of a type recognized in Europe, but hardly guessed-at in Canada. Without attempting to relate the men in any other way, or to make a comparison between their writings, he resembles Thomas Mann in his philosophical approach to his work, in his scholarly backgrounds, in his integrity, and in his essentially European estimate of the place of the artist in the community. His books have few charms for the ordinary reader; he makes demands on emotion and understanding which the average patron of a lending library cannot meet, and will not tolerate from a man who has not been labelled "great" by non-Canadian reviewers.... Is it surprising that this man's voice was drowned by the clamour of the literary hucksters in the market place? And will it not be surprising if his voice is still heard two hundred years from now when Canada has begun to take intelligent pride in her literature?²¹

It will not be surprising at all, for Grove is one of the few Canadian authors who is at once sensitive to the changing attitudes towards human values in the twentieth century, and who constructs a strictly realistic vision from "the application to the life of a new area of a philosophy born of the long grim story of man's life on earth."²² His main concern is with the potential of human nature under extreme conditions, and, while recognizing that man's spatial and temporal dimensions exert a constant pressure upon the individual, he protests against the individual's allowing himself to be a victim of circumstances.²³

Grove considers that man's duty towards himself is to make his visions and ideals prevail over his physical existence by continuously spurring himself towards the attainment of a quality of life that would rescue from the onward marching of years something of the joy of living. Maturely estimating man's position not only in space, but also in time, he stresses the sovereignty of spiritual values over rigid pragmatism, yet warns against the danger of allowing one form of time to devour the other. He exhibits thus a distinctive attitude that makes his studies of the life of the Western prairies of Canada set the reader pondering the meaning of all life on earth. This important

characteristic of his work, its universality, is the object of comparative study by Antoine Sirois. Discussing similarities between Grove's and Ringuet's work, Sirois comments: "Ils ont su aussi et surtout se dégager des particularismes ou des régionalismes pour porter leurs thèmes sur un plan plus universel, celui du destin de l'homme face à la nature."²⁴ Like Ringuet, Grove strives for a final evaluation of life starting not only from a recognition of Canadian realities, but from the recognition of man's true place in nature.

When in A Search for America Phil Franden falls victim simultaneously to a hostile environment and to his own incapacity to oppose it, he admits: "I was at the mercy of winds and waves" (SA, 104). The last three words of this sentence serve (in similar sequence) as title to Chapter V of Over Prairie Trails where the nearly fatal accident caused by the driver's lack of involvement in the present is described. The sequence "winds and waves" is also to be found in the volume It Needs to Be Said in a discussion of the importance of the human reaction to some part, or to the totality of the outside world (INS, 68). This can hardly be a coincidence. On the contrary, the repetition of these words seems to be an indication of a unifying concept in terms of which waves and winds, fluctuation and drifting are irremediably part of

human life, but man has enough creativity to resist them rather than be at their mercy. Grove's message becomes transparent. A significant human life is a volitional act, for of ultimate importance is the spirit in which man responds to the sum total of factors which constitute his environment. In other words, it is not man's time that is all-important. It is man's mode of attaching himself to time that is decisive.

In speaking of Over Prairie Trails, Grove himself considered his brief comment on the human condition "not too trivial to detain for an hour or so a patient reader's attention" (xiv). Of course, one may agree or not with Grove's point of view, but one cannot dispute that the pressure of his compelling arguments opens a pathway along which the reader's mind can move with confidence in the accuracy of the presentation. His belief in the value of human endeavour has its roots in experience, particularly that of the pioneer: while man is not always able to beget his luck, at least he can change it.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

¹ An initial form of this study appeared in University of Windsor Review, 11 (Spring 1976), pp. 49-56

² See, for instance, M. Ross, "Introduction," F. P. Grove, Over Prairie Trails (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), or D. Pacey, F. P. Grove (Toronto: Ryerson, 1945).

³ P. Sutherland, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 40.

⁴ F. P. Grove, Over Prairie Trails (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 51.

All other quotation from Grove's works are taken from the following editions, and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

- INS It Needs to Be Said (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929)
YL The Yoke of Life (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930)
MM The Master of the Mill (Toronto: Macmillan, 1945)
FE Fruits of the Earth (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965)
SM Settlers of the Marsh (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965)
TM Tales of the Margin (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1971)
SA A Search for America (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971)
ODR Our Daily Bread (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975)

⁵ S. E. McMullin, "Grove and the Promised Land," Canadian Literature, 49 (Summer 1971), p. 16.

⁶ D. Pacey, "Grove's Tragic Vision," F. P. Grove, ed. D. Pacey (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 47.

⁷ L. O. Spettigue, "Introduction," F. P. Grove, Our Daily Bread (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1975), unpaginated.

⁸ F. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 55.

⁹ D. Pacey, op. cit., p. 49.

- ¹⁰ D. C. Spettigue, op. cit., unpaginated.
- ¹¹ D. Pacey, "F. P. Grove: A Group of Letters," Canadian Literature, 11 (Winter 1962), p. 31.
- ¹² S. E. McMullin, art. cit., p. 15.
- ¹³ I. Skelton, "One Speaking into a Void," F. P. Grove, ed. D. Pacey (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 31. This article is also to be found in Dalhousie Review, 19 (July 1939), pp. 143-163.
- ¹⁴ M. G. Parks, "Introduction," F. P. Grove, Fruits of the Earth (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), p. viii.
- ¹⁵ R. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 35.
- ¹⁶ The importance of the role that memories play in Grove's Master of the Mill has also been recognized by M. B. Smith in "Period Pieces," Canadian Literature, 10 (Autumn 1961), pp. 72-77.
- ¹⁷ R. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 39.
- ¹⁸ The interplay between the subjective and the objective is used by W. J. Keith to demonstrate that an artistic patterning is present in one of Grove's supposedly non-fictional works. See W. J. Keith, "Grove's Over Prairie Trails," Literary Half Yearly, 13 (July 1972), pp. 76-85.
- ¹⁹ B. Nesbitt, "The Seasons: Grove's Unfinished Novel," Canadian Literature, 18 (Autumn 1963), pp. 47-51.
- ²⁰ B. Nesbitt, art. cit., p. 51.
- ²¹ P. Davies, "Reviewing In Search of Myself," F. P. Grove, ed. D. Pacey, pp. 172-173. This review has initially appeared in The Peterborough Examiner (November 6, 1946), signed Samuel Marchbanks.
- ²² D. Pacey, op. cit., p. 55.
- ²³ For the influence exerted by modern philosophy on Grove's own thinking, consider, for instance, F. Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," Canadian Literature, 43 (Winter 1970), pp. 67-76.
- ²⁴ A. Sirois, "Grove et Ringuet: Témoins d'une époque," Canadian Literature, 49 (Summer 1971), p. 27.

My translation: "Above all, they also know how to separate themselves from the particular and the regional in order to take their themes to the more universal level, that of the destiny of man facing nature."

III. TO WRITE OR TO BE WRITTEN:

HUBERT AQUIN'S PROCHAIN ÉPISEDE:

Chapter II showed that, because the world of Grove's novels is basically one of pioneers and immigrants -- a world directly predicated on the time of clocks and calendars -- Grove emphasizes the importance of the individual's constantly staying tuned to the objective present. Conversely, Chapter III will demonstrate that because Aquin's novels are primarily concerned with the difficulty the individual may have under extraordinary circumstances in fully reconciling himself to the reality around him, this author emphasizes man's need and necessity to transcend objective time.

As a solution to present contradictions, Aquin's novels propose a partial detachment from objective duration. In this context, Prochain épisode, Trou de mémoire, L'Antiphonaire and Neige noire explore the extent to which drugs and alcohol, sex and recollections lessen man's involvement with his immediate environment and with objective time. The same novels, however, ultimately reveal creative activity as the sole, most effective means of shifting the

individual's interest towards subjective dimensions of life, and, simultaneously, of achieving self-preservation and self-enrichment. The writing of a book, the production of a film are indicated in Aquin's novels as acts of will which not only shield their creators from the irregularities of a dissatisfying present, but also assist them in their struggle to achieve psychological equilibrium. Of all Aquin's novels, it is in Prochain épisode that the creative process is most convincingly presented as an active, subjective duration through which the individual at once fights a hostile environment and reveals himself to others and to himself.

The narrator-protagonist of Prochain épisode has been imprisoned and subsequently hospitalized for terrorist activity, and, at the chronological time delineated in the novel, he is deprived of his freedom, and is waiting for the date of his trial and sentencing. Under the stress of solitary confinement combined with prolonged suspense, the prisoner discovers his sense of self disintegrating and considers committing suicide. Realizing, however, that mental detachment from the reality around would shield him from the dangerous effects of detention, the prisoner decides to draw on his memories and fantasies and write a story, thus partially interposing a subjective world between his psyche and his physical life in prison. Grove advocated

synchronization with the present because the driver's success in his book was predicated on his ability to stay constantly in contact with the space around him. For the prisoner in Aquin's novel, it is imperative that he separate himself from his immediate environment, if he is to survive and preserve his sanity until the day of his trial.

The initial statement of Prochain épisode, "Cuba coule en flammes au milieu du lac Léman pendant que je descend au fond des choses,"² abruptly introduces the reader to the agony of the prisoner, a human being in a moment of profound crisis. His exact position in time with respect to his court case is of fundamental importance, for it is not the physical incarceration itself, or the breaking of his spirit by the strict schedule of solitary confinement, that drives him to despair. Nor is it the knowledge that prior to his arrest he has failed both his revolutionary mission and the woman he loves. It is all of these reasons, but, above all, it is the suspense in which he has been forced to live for a long time. Falling prey to uncontrollable psychological tension, and threatened with insanity, the prisoner exclaims, "D'ici là, [until the date of his trial], je suis attaché au fond du lac Léman, plongé dans sa mouvance fluide qui me tient lieu de subconscient.... J'assiste à ma solution."³ Thus, from the first pages, it becomes evident

that the structure of Prochain épisode is governed by the juxtaposition of two different, but mutually qualifying temporal movements: one related to the objective world of the clinic where the narrator is incarcerated and kept under strict surveillance, the other to the subjective world created in his own mind.*

The existence of several temporal levels in one and the same book is characteristic not only of Prochain épisode, but also of Aquin's other works which exhibit a striking similarity both in content and technique. In Trou de mémoire, L'Antiphonaire and Neige noire the narrative flow moves back and forth, symbols are played against facts, memory against anticipation. The subjective reality thus achieved in Aquin's novels is strikingly similar to the subjective pluri-dimensional reality revealed in James Joyce's Ulysses. This is hardly surprising since the Irish author is one of the acknowledged masters of this Canadian novelist, and since the latter considers Ulysses a supreme literary achievement. Ulysses, Aquin explains in "Considérations sur la forme romanesque d'Ulysses de James Joyce," is virtually inexhaustible because the many different temporal perspectives from which the author can present the life of his protagonist are also the many different ways in which the reader can perceive a unique reality:

De mon point de vue, j'ai plusieurs perspectives sur ce livre inépuisable: je peux utiliser un grand angle, ou, au contraire, m'accommoder à d'autres niveaux référentiels situés plus loin dans le temps. Oui, Ulysses est unique en son genre car il me permet indéfiniment de reprendre sa lecture, de suivre Bloom dans son errance ou Ulysses dans ses cabotages homériques, ou encore de suivre, changeant souvent de niveaux, la performance d'écriture de James Joyce. Il est rare qu'on puisse dire d'un livre qu'il est à ce point inépuisable.⁵

Aquin's reader, therefore, is not surprised to see that the story constituting L'Antiphonaire, for instance, does not develop along strictly chronological lines, but in an order dictated by the dynamic relationships established between events unrelated chronologically. L'Antiphonaire is basically the story of the breaking up of the marriage of Christine and Jean William Forestier under the double pressure of the wife's ruined medical career and the husband's ruined mental health. In the very first pages of the novel, Christine Forestier, at once protagonist and narrator, openly discards a strictly chronological approach to her subject matter in favour of a subjective compositional design based on the dynamic relationship between events unrelated chronologically, "Je veux tout raconter non pas nécessairement dans l'ordre de succession mais selon une composition en 'cursus velox' (sautant ainsi à la composition en temps voulu et non sans fracas....)"⁶

Consider now an example of Christine Forestier's narrative technique. She is in a Montreal hospital, and, while waiting for news about the condition of her lover who has been shot by her husband, she tries to write the story of a sixteenth-century manuscript, and of the people involved with it. As in Prochain épisode, in L'Antiphonaire, temporal events unrelated except in the experience of the protagonist are abruptly juxtaposed in the course of the narration:

Mais, tandis qu'il se repose, [Chigi Zimara, one of the heroes of Christine Forestier's story] je ne sais où entre Bourg-en-Bresse et Lyon, moi -- Christine -- je ne sais plus quoi penser de renseignements contradictoires que je reçois au sujet de l'état de santé de Robert.'

Consequently, as in Prochain épisode, the central tension in L'Antiphonaire does not arise from the interplay between objective occurrences in the life of the protagonist-narrator, but from the effort to bring her private temporal world into alignment with the external one. The only unifying element is the imagination of the protagonist-narrator. Believing that human reality eludes narrow concepts and categories, Aquin allows Christine Forestier's imagination to form the structure of L'Antiphonaire, as he allows a prisoner's imagination to form the structure of Prochain épisode.

A similar technique, and, hence, a similar structure is employed by Aquin in Trou de mémoire, a novel which attempts the emotional reconstruction of a murder. With this end in view, Trou de mémoire records the extraordinary interior monologues, letters and diaries of a few individuals, most of them proving to be one and the same person, Pierre X. Magnant. The story thus revealed develops around a supposedly perfect crime: the strangling by Pierre X. Magnant of his lover, Joan. To the inattentive eye, the novel may resemble a whirlpool of events in which the objective measurement of time has no place and in which the authenticity of Joan's murder is highly questionable; the crime can equally be a fact or a state of mind. If the reader is more conservative and attempts to establish when exactly the strangling of the young woman happened, for instance, he will find himself disappointed by the author. Indeed, Aquin takes twenty-eight pages before he mentions that the murder of Joan took place "(hier soir déjà, entre dix heures et onze heures quarante-cinq --)".⁸ Then, he takes one hundred and seventeen more pages to mention "minuit, samedi, 14 mai 1966."⁹ Now, as Patricia Smart notes, what is left for the reader to do is to realize that the two temporal indications given by Pierre X. Magnant and Olympe Ghezso Quénun respectively, reverse each other and thus annihilate any attempt at establishing chronology:

S'apercevant par exemple de l'importance accordée aux dates dans les récits de Pierre Magnant et d'Olympe Ghezso Quénum, le lecteur typique essaiera de rétablir la chronologie des événements; mais ce sera pour découvrir que les deux récits se reflètent comme dans un miroir, la chronologie du deuxième inversant celle du premier."¹⁰

And, it is precisely this date reversal in Trou de mémoire that calls into question the very authenticity of the crime as a fact.

The same redistribution of factual material according to a subjective temporal pattern is employed by Aquin in Neige noire. The plot of this book, the murder by Nicolas Vanesse of his wife Sylvie, is not really a plot at all. Rather, it is a set of conditions which create human problems demanding resolutions. Places overlap places, flashbacks overlap flashforwards, creating a dizzying present which is Nicolas Vanesse's mind. Moreover, elements of space are continuously translated into elements of time. The reader is informed, for instance, that Nicolas and Sylvie Vanesse are taking a trip through the north of Europe, but he is not told what they see. He is told only what they feel. And, through their impressions of the landscape, the surrounding space is internalized and becomes a subjective event, unrelated to any specific chronology. Looking at the northern European landscape, Nicolas and Sylvie Vanesse experience:

le vertige de celui qui, s'éloignant de la mesure du temps, fait son entrée dans une grisante instantanéité. Le temps ne s'arrête pas, non! Le temps ne s'arrêtera plus; il supprime par le vide, tout celui qui le précède et tout ce qui le suivra. On ne sent même plus le passage d'un jour à l'autre.¹¹

Certainly, the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated temporal elements in Prochain épisode, L'Antiphonaire or Neige noire as well as the chronological reversal of the two dates in Trou de mémoire are hardly surprising in an author who openly discarded chronology as an unimportant element in the architecture of his novels. In an interview given to Norman Cloutier, Aquin expressed his belief in the legitimacy of a novelist's redistribution of the factual material constituting a novel according to a subjective temporal order which could better reveal the dynamic connection between events chronologically separated:

Dans un roman bien fait, qui donne libre cours à l'imaginaire, tu utilises des fragments de la réalité, tu les redispenses, les réarranges dans un ordre nouveau -- l'ordre fictif -- et tu rends ainsi la réalité plus visible et plus lisible, ce dont tu serais incapable dans un roman qui se contenterait de refléter la réalité.¹²

As Albert Leonard comments in "Un romancier virtuose: Hubert Aquin -- À propos de L'Antiphonaire," with the movement away from identifiable space and chronological time,

Aquin takes his novels away from a regional inspiration and towards an integration in the cosmopolitan literature which characterizes the twentieth century:

C'est sans doute le lot des littératures dites secondes de ne pouvoir que très difficilement se passer de l'inspiration régionaliste et de n'atteindre le sens de la synthèse qu'après une longue et pénible maturation. Hubert Aquin est sans doute le premier romancier québécois à avoir fait un pas décisif dans le sens de la création globale.¹³

The recognition of the universally human character of the experiences described by Aquin seems paradoxical in view of the fact that all his protagonists live in what may accurately be termed as "extraordinary circumstances." In Trou de mémoire, Pierre X. Magnant, the narrator-editor, has just murdered his lover, whom he nevertheless loved profoundly, and still loves. L'Antiphonaire opens with the image of a Montreal couple, Christine and Jean William Forestier, on holiday in California, only to disclose that the husband is a violent epileptic who had repeatedly tried to kill his wife during moments of crisis. Likewise, the main heroes of Neige noire, Nicolas and Sylvie Vanesse, also of Montreal, are planning a trip to Northern Europe, but their marriage is irremediably undermined by an incestuous relationship of the wife with her father, a relationship about which the husband secretly knows. At first sight,

Aquin's overt interest in "deviations" from normal patterns of existence might seem perverse. Upon closer analysis, however, one realizes that this very interest in the "unusual," coupled with the adoption of chronological discontinuity as a compositional principle, renders more evident what Aquin's work ultimately is: a quest for equilibrium in a world utterly fissured, where man lives, divorced not only from his fellows, but also from himself. This quest receives its most brilliant exposition in Prochain épisode.

In this novel, the pattern of "extraordinary circumstances" is again evident. The protagonist is obliged to live in a combined state of confinement and prolonged suspense. Imprisonment, of course, denies the individual the possibility of moving in rhythm with the rest of humanity. The thought that "Tout fuit ici sauf moi."¹⁴ grieves the man reduced to motionlessness while the rest of the universe is in motion. The agony of the prisoner is heightened by the fact that in the absence of a fixed trial date, hence, in the absence of a fixed point from which to measure time, he loses track of time itself. Wasted by the obligation to live in shapeless duration, the prisoner feels his mind breaking into innumerable discordant pieces, and, on the verge of insanity, he is astounded to realize that no human project can resist

for a long time the pressure of waiting. In addition, suspense also refuses the individual an authentic contact with his own future. Consequently, the prisoner in Aquin's book is simultaneously subjected to a double incarceration: that of his body and that of his time. The problem he faces is, therefore, not so much how to bear his physical confinement, but how to fight the mental enclosure imposed by waiting and its harmful effects. Existence in suspended duration and lack of any form of activity have already affected him to a certain extent: not only have they caused a physical aging at a dizzying rate, but also a spiritual fatigue which threatens to overcome his whole being. Manifesting itself as a gradual amputation of will power, this mental torpor finally leads him almost to suffocate in nihilism, and consider suicide, "Tout cela me ressemble à une formidable tricherie, y compris le mal que je ressens à l'avouer.... Plus rien n'alimente mon âme.... Plus rien ne me propose une distraction...."¹⁵ comes the unbridled cry testifying to his reaching the limit of endurance.

Yet, without any transition or justification, the sentence immediately following the expression of the all-encompassing negation, marks in Prochain épisode the beginning of the spy-story which the prisoner has decided to write. Is this an instance of Aquin's losing control of his

subject matter, or, on the contrary, an indirect comment on the capacity of the human spirit for creative action? In view of the evidence provided by subsequent pages, the sudden juxtaposition of the nihilistic statements concluding Chapter I, and the narrative ones introducing Chapter II is not a slip of the pen or a lack of craftsmanship, but a master stroke testifying to the force of the prisoner's intelligence and creativity. Despite his present situation in jail, and despite the formidable depression which he experiences, Aquin's hero has decided to continue to live. This is one of the crucial moments in Prochain épisode, and, in the interview with Cloutier, Aquin not only expounds its significance, but also points out the analogy between this moment in the book and a similar one he himself experienced:

J'étais complètement désindentifié, je dois le dire. Mais quand je me suis trouvé coupé de tout, eh bien! je me suis trouvé voulant vivre encore, voulant vivre jusqu'au bout l'affaire pour en sortir. J'ai alors écrit Prochain épisode, où je récupérerai les éléments de ma vie passée et les métamorphosais.¹⁶

Indeed, the man whose objective circumstances have deprived of an external reason for continuity, has found an inner one to sustain him in existence: desire to become again an integral part of humanity. As soon as he is able to say, "Et que je vole enfin! que je me promène encore inconnu et impuni au hasard des rues qui s'écharpent... pour se mêler

au grand courant de l'histoire...,"¹⁷ the principle which allows for his continuation in life has been discovered. And, since waiting for one's trial, despite its detrimental effects, allows for the hope of a light sentence, the inmate resists the thought of committing suicide. "Desire itself is movement," said Eliot in his Four Quartets.¹⁸ Desire and hope are also revealed by Aquin as determinant factors in counteracting the devastating nihilism which threatens to cloud the prisoner's mind.

But, under the constant pressure of a present which has no positive value, means must be devised to make desire and hope endure. Again, the solution comes not from an external agency, but from man himself, as an act of his own spirit. The prisoner knows that, while a free man, he found enormous pleasure in the woman he loved. It is, therefore, the image of his mistress that he attempts to recall, and while recalling the image to sustain his passion for the woman, and the hope of possessing her again. "Ton corps ne me redit que je suis né à la vraie vie et que je désire follement ce que j'aime."¹⁹ the prisoner explains, establishing love as the basis for the achievement of an experiential depth which enables him to recover his will to live. The radically individual character of human existence is thus asserted, but subsequent statements also recognize

the interdependence of men, the interaction of the lives of people. "J'ai besoin de te revoir. Sans toi, je meurs,"²⁰ the prisoner addresses his beloved K, at once woman and Quebec. "Ah, qu'on me rende la chambre soleil et notre amour, car tout me manque et j'ai peur,"²¹ he wishes, fully conscious that the objects of his love, though absent from his immediate world, must be continuously present in his imagination, if he is to resist the attrition imposed by confinement and waiting. For, these objects of love are the ones that nourish his will to live. He also realizes that, while rigorous coincidence with his present time and surroundings in jail would definitely condemn him to madness, excluding as they do the woman he loves and the revolution he serves, the denial of intimacy with the world around him would save his mental balance.

But how is this absence from the present to be achieved; how does one combat lucidity when lucidity threatens one's mental balance? The means most seriously considered by Aquin are recourse to memories and fantasies, creative activity and the use of drugs. Thus, to acquire distance from an imperfect present, and, concomitantly, to recapture both woman and revolutionary cause, the prisoner in Prochain épisode both fantasizes and recollects. "Je me saoule, fidèle à notre amère devise, d'une boisson nitrique

qui fait de moi un drogué."²² And the motto in his mind is that of Quebec herself: "Je me souviens."

Recollections and fantasies create a mental world immune to the ravages of the present, and, since an acute consciousness of time presupposes a direct contact with space, recollections and fantasies lift man above his immediate surroundings. Entombed in his cell, the inmate sometimes finds refuge in memories of summer days spent in the village, La Nation, nights of love with K, or activities with the P.L.Q. At other times, the subjective world created in his imagination enables him, for instance, to live in less than twenty-four hours of physical life "de 1776 à 1870, du Boston Tea Party au Camp de la Misère...",²³ thus shielding him from the hostility of his life in prison. Whenever reminiscing and imagining are impossible, the prisoner feels threatened by mental dissolution. More often than not, the force of the memories and fantasies which surge in his mind is so great that without effort he is able to re-live past events, smell past odours, hear past melodies and even experience events which in real life he had never experienced. As a result, a new relationship is established between himself and his objective present. Dangerous synchronization is replaced by a salutary lack of coincidence. The practice of certain subjective qualities of

time is therefore revealed in Prochain épisode as being charged with great significance in human experience, for it offers the individual a refuge from an unsatisfying reality.

Nevertheless, fully aware that indulgence in memories may induce a condition of both mental and physical paralysis, Aquin is against mere recollection. In Point de fuite, for instance, he unequivocally declares that a mental life predicated exclusively on the past is of no interest to him, and that it is with a view to exposing recollection as a "practice, apparently healing, but ultimately lethal, that he wrote Trou de mémoire, "Le passé ne m'intéresse pas et je ne me reconnais pas en lui. Je suis un homme sans mémoire -- et il est significatif que mon deuxième roman s'intitule Trou de mémoire."²⁴ In Trou de mémoire the protagonist succumbs to such an extent to memories of his crime that the only solution to the feeling of remorse and despair that devastates him seems to be suicide. It is in this book that Aquin's warning against the force of memories assumes the guise of spectacular language. Consider the following passage, for example, "Vomir, oui comme ça ferait du bien; vomir d'une seule vomissure toute cette bave de souvenirs trop frais qui m'est restée sur l'estomac et m'empoisonne."²⁵

To avoid being poisoned by memories, and becoming a

victim of psychological dissolution, the narrator-prisoner in Prochain épisode does not stop at the stage of recollection, but proceeds further. Drawing upon past moments selected from the chaos of his memories, he decides to write a story; more precisely, a spy-story.²⁶ Representing the brief alignment into which subjective time, space and man himself have merged, the story within the story becomes the embodiment of the creative potentiality of the prisoner. Like any other form of creative activity, the writing of the spy-story is at once a strictly personal event and a means of communication. As will be further discussed, in both these aspects the spy-story in Prochain épisode is the positive affirmation of the human spirit which refuses to be bullied by space and present time.

As mentioned earlier, the first few pages of Prochain épisode are a blend of statements regarding the profound state of despair in which the narrator-prisoner finds himself and detailed descriptions of the actual conditions in the psychiatric institute. The reader learns, for instance, that, if the narrator is a prisoner, forced to take stelazine pills and fed cold lunches, it is because sometime, somewhere in Switzerland not only did he fail a terrorist mission which involved his lover, but also in the process he lost his lover as well.

Abruptly, the spy-story begins, and from then on, until the last chapter, Prochain épisode rides on the tension created between the orderly unfolding of the spy-story and the numerous chaotic memories that assault the prisoner's mind. From a drive with K through the countryside of Acton Vale in Switzerland to the apartment on Côte des Neiges in Montréal, where the narrator and K made love for the first time, from an afternoon of love in Hôtel d'Angleterre in Lausanne to the red truck involved in the F.L.Q.'s \$20,000 theft of gems and ammunition from the Fusiliers Mount-Royal Armoury, recollections move swiftly and disorderly, back and forth in chronological time.

At first sight, even the story within the story seems to be a collection of fractured moments obedient to the sole motive of releasing the inner tensions of the prisoner by objectifying them. One notices, for instance, that, in a reaction against the difficulty of keeping track of time during his detention, the narrator records with obsessive precision the dates and hours of the action of the story. "Entre le 26 juillet 1960 et le 4 août 1792," "il était près de six heures quand," "lendemain" are phrases which punctuate the narration. A more attentive reading, however, reveals that the narrator-prisoner actually sets in order disordered

past movements. He imposes upon them a system which is deliberately created, and obliges them to constitute themselves into a coherent duration. From the night in Vevey, where the protagonist stops at Café Vaudois for a mug of beer, through his failed murder attempts first in Coppet Forest and then in H. de Heutz's mansion, the spy-story develops chronologically, even though interrupted by unchecked recollections, up to the moment when he receives K's parting note from the reception clerk at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. Throughout this story, K is present both as a lover and as a companion in the struggle for a common cause. It is K, for instance, who relays to the protagonist messages from an F.L.Q. leader and who disappears without a trace when the protagonist misses an appointment. A spy-story is a highly structured literary genre. The narrator-prisoner willingly submits himself to very strict formal demands, and, thus, the spy-story becomes the very opposite of the fragmented existence he is forced to endure because of imprisonment and suspense. The creative process which gives birth to this work of art is the active duration which the prisoner opposes to the passive duration imposed by confinement.

Thus, what the spy-story revives is a past dictated not by a mere concatenation of precedents, but one consisting

of events which, occurring in Canada or Switzerland, are united through the unique feeling of love and commitment aroused in the narrator-prisoner. Nothing is revealed, for instance, with regard to the childhood, the family or the education of the protagonist. Nothing is revealed with regard to the occupation or the emotional life of the protagonist prior to his joining the F.L.Q. movement and his meeting with K. What one witnesses in the spy-story is a continuous re-invention of a particular world: the prisoner's immediate past with K and his involvement with the F.L.Q. It is in the affective reconstruction of the world of K and the F.L.Q. that the prisoner finds justification for wanting to continue to live. Rigorously avoiding elements not connected with K and the F.L.Q., the spy-story appears constructed with the intention of re-establishing a relation of continuity between the prisoner and his revolutionary brothers, of feeling, in spite of imprisonment, the sacred ties binding him to them, and, thus, of mixing himself with the great flood of the future revolution:

Ce livre est le geste inlassablement recommencé d'un patriote.... De plus, il épouse la forme même de mon avenir: en lui et par lui, je prospecte mon indécision et mon futur improbable.²⁷

Thus, in Prochain épisode, moments fractured by imprisonment -- the past and the future with K and the F.L.Q. -- are bridged by the emotional involvement of the prisoner, and

writing becomes the means not only of recognizing the past in "quelques anciens visages blessés," but also to invent and identify with the future of "d'autres compagnons qui déjà me préoccupent."²⁸ Emotional participation with other people is the path the narrator-prisoner follows towards liberation from his own personality; in its turn, freedom from the prison of the self helps him overcome his sense of fragmentation, and acquire a sense of continuity. By attaining concordance with the past containing the objects of his love and commitment, the narrator-prisoner in Prochain épisode attains a sense of concordance with their future as well, even if, following the trial and sentencing, he may or may not join them physically.

What Aquin proposes in Prochain épisode is, in the final analysis, a completely artificial arrangement of human experience and an incessant re-invention of time through the act of writing. This, however, does not mean that for Aquin the formal or imaginative universe is of primary importance, and that action is only secondary. On the contrary, believing that the individual self is to be created in the realm of action, he urges man to act in the present, for only through action can he reveal himself to others and to himself:

L'univers artistique, ou formel, pour moi, est

secondaire. C'est la politique, au sens large, qui vient en premier, ou, si vous voulez, l'action.... Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse saisir un homme selon des catégories définies, le figer dans un moment de sa vie. C'est dans l'action que l'homme se révèle à lui-même.²⁹

In Prochain épisode, acting equals writing, but it is not the product of writing that is important to Aquin. Rather, as he notes in "Écrivain faute d'être banquier," it is the continuous genesis implied in the process of creation whose success rests in the movement itself. The act of creation as revealed in Prochain épisode is a private event which leads to self-discovery and, therefore, has a profound impact on the individual engaged in it: "Le roman que j'écris, ce livre quotidien que je produis déjà avec plus d'aise, j'y vois un autre sens que la nouveauté percutante de son format final. Je suis ce livre de l'heure en heure au jour le jour."³⁰

But the writing of the spy-story gives the narrator in Prochain épisode much more than detachment from the present and the satisfaction experienced by any creator who has imposed order on chaos. The spy-story gives the narrator himself a future. An examination of the episodes of which the story consists indicates that their selection is determined at once by the narrator's need for the love and re-assurance with which to counteract the annihilating effects of waiting in loneliness, and by his desire to set

himself in resonance with a particular world, that of the F.L.Q. and of his mistress K, and thus become part of their future.

In an extensive study of the importance of the position held by the concept of time in contemporary literature, Joost Meerlo remarks that in "creative time, the distance between now and the future is broken down. It all comes suddenly alive in a tremendous now, full of sensation and mutual relationship."³¹ Meerlo's comment seems highly accurate in terms of the evidence provided by Prochain épisode. While writing a spy-story essentially grounded in the intellectual and emotional realities of Quebec, the prisoner fully associates himself with these realities and, in a powerful statement of identity, declares: "En moi, déprimé explosif, toute une nation s'applatit historiquement."³² In its turn, this rhapsodic identification with his people gives him the feeling of exercising control over them, by writing not only about things that have passed, but also about those that have yet to come. Indeed, once a reality beyond the objective one is captured in word boundaries, man acquires mastery over something which, unnamed, eludes possession. Past and present are organized in the direction of the future.

But writing is not only a personal event. Writing is also a means of communication, and the narrator-prisoner is fully aware that a victory of the F.L.Q. revolution would turn his book from a personal event into a historical account of the time preceding the revolution, "Quand nos frères mourront dans les embuscades et les femmes seront seules à fêter le 24 juin, ce que nous écrivons cessera d'être un événement et sera devenu un écrit."³³ Hence, through the story he is writing, the narrator-prisoner becomes both a creator and a sharer in the future of the province and the woman he loves. And, since the particular group with whose future he wants to relate himself is part of the universal totality of men, the prisoner is, in fact, setting himself in resonance with mankind. "Pour t'écrire, je m'adresse à tout le monde. L'amour est le cycle de la parole,"³⁴ the narrator admits to K, and thus, in spite of certain misleading statements regarding his mechanical writing, he reveals himself as he truly is: an author who is conscious of the techniques he employs and who follows with lucidity the stages of his artistic creation.

When in prison the narrator in Prochain épisode writes: "Ce soir, pendant que je roule entre Échandens et le fond d'une vallée..."³⁵ he is not giving in to neurosis. His use of the present tense where a past tense would seem to

have been in order is a desperate attempt to commune in the present with those with whom he took part in past events, for he knows that the realization of his future is possible only as part of the general flow of human history; more specifically, as part of the revolutionary separatist movement in Québec. "Évènement nu, mon livre m'écrit et n'est pas accessible à la compréhension qu'à condition de n'être pas détaché de la trame historique dans laquelle il s'insère tant bien que mal."³⁶ Therefore, the writing of the spy-story, as opposed to merely recollecting the events which constitute it, is an act inspired by different motives than simply preserving sanity. Retrospective and prospective at once, the writing of the story within the story is simultaneously undertaken in the service of the prisoner's past, present and future, of his feelings and thoughts. For the prisoner to have remained inarticulate would have meant his giving in to the pressure of the present instead of trying to stand up to it and create a future.

As Ronald Sutherland remarks in the introduction to Prochain Episode, the story within the story which is so rich in descriptive material about Switzerland that it can serve as a tourist's guide book, remains an equally effective guide book when the reader is able "to see beneath the surface."³⁷

The spy-story is not advertising the beauty of the Swiss Alps where its action takes place, nor is it a work of political agitation, in spite of its author's overtly expressed political views. The spy-story is a full account of the inner life of a fascinating personality, the spiritual geography of an anguished soul searching for a viable spiritual stance which could make his life worth living.

Sent to Switzerland by the F.L.Q. to kill H. de Heutz, an English-Canadian banker who is reportedly financing activities against the F.L.Q., the French-Canadian protagonist of the spy-story finds himself in the banker's superb castle, surrounded by objects of art. In the presence of art, the Québécois separatist discovers that he does not have the narrow-mindedness and lack of sophistication of those who can be used as blind instruments of a cause. Rather, he becomes conscious that he is an acutely sensitive individual, fascinated by the elegant and the beautiful, with a distaste for crudity and violence. The admiration which the contemplation of an antique commode or a leather book binding elicits in him is indicative of a capacity to recognize and respond to beauty; the more so as this beauty reveals to him unexpected and admirable traits in the character of the man he is supposed to assassinate.

But the reader also knows by now that the young separatist is profoundly and sincerely committed to the idea that violence is sometimes justified as a means of causing social and political change. Indeed, if the narrator-prisoner is partially, if not entirely, the young terrorist in the spy story, then through the allusions to historical events which accompany the recollections of the former, a glimpse at some dominant traits in the character of the latter is provided. Of these allusions, the most significant seem to be those connected with moments of violent social and political change such as the Geneva revolution of 1781, the revolution of the United Provinces of the Low Countries in 1787, or the abolition of the privileges of nobility and clergy in France on August 4, 1792. These are allusions and dates with which the narrator-prisoner / spy-story protagonist associates himself and in terms of which his personality can be defined: a young Québécois, acutely sensitive to beauty, committed to violence on behalf of a social revolution. And, as the spy-story reveals, it is this very sensitivity to beauty that ultimately prevents the revolutionary from committing murder.

The moment the young Québécois feels partial admiration and respect for his victim, the moment he

identifies partially with his victim, the rebel ceases to be the blind instrument of a cause, and becomes a sensitive individual, any sensitive individual faced with an insurmountable dilemma: "How to kill somebody in whose sophistication he recognizes his own refinement, how to murder someone whose values he shares?" The spy-story does not have the answer. The young Québécois fails to resolve satisfactorily the profound antagonism between his mission and his new relationship with his intended victim, between the objective world of political activity and the subjective world of his feelings and thoughts. He pauses for a moment to consider the complexity of the situation in which he finds himself, and because he is able to ponder he fails to kill the banker. The young Québécois flees the chalet in despair both at his inability to commit murder, and at his being late for an appointment with his mistress K. Indeed, by the time he reaches the place of the rendez-vous, K, whose real name and address he does not know, is gone. And, if K is a metaphor for Québec, failing to kill the English-Canadian banker, the French-Canadian youth has failed both the woman and the country he loves. But, there are strong indications in the spy-story that K is also the mistress of H. de Heutz; therefore, Québec loves both the French and the English. And, if this is true, whom has the young terrorist failed? Or, has he failed at all? The spy-story does not provide an

answer. Perhaps, because there is no answer.

Nevertheless, the chalet episode represents in miniature the whole of Prochain épisode, the opposition between individual emotions and social or historical imperatives, between personal values and sweeping revolutionary demands, between art and real life. And, since art is a form of subjective time, the spy-story reveals the clash between objective and subjective time that an individual may experience in the course of his life. It follows, therefore, that the moment when the separatist feels caught between duty to the political party he belongs to and reluctance to perform blindly this duty marks in Prochain épisode the passage from regional inspiration to a synthesis of universal human values. The young man in the spy-story ceases to be merely a Québécois terrorist and becomes everyman. The spy-story reads not as a political piece of propaganda, but as the spiritual geography of an anguished soul who cannot resolve the antagonism between duty and personal values, between objective and subjective time.

Most remarkably, the anxiety in the soul of the Québécois separatist who is the protagonist of the spy-story reflects the anxiety in the soul of the narrator-prisoner who writes the story. The latter is fully aware that the writing

of a story is only a substitute for reality, an imposition on time, not the living of it, and that the product itself, the story, is only a very fragile edifice set against the march of time. Like anything predicated on time, both creative writing and the story will fail to endure forever. The narrator is also conscious of the strictures characteristic of this particular dimension of artistic life. Language is ultimately impotent, both in defying time and as a means of complete self-articulation. The right words, even if found, will neither liberate him completely, nor hold time in its flight. He knows that writing, as any highly subjective form of activity, proves at once salutary and dangerous. As the narrator-prisoner points out, one of the most severe consequences of one's absorption in a subjective order of existence is the fact that it prevents one from functioning adequately in real life. The narrator dreads finding himself changed through his own writing, "différent à force de boire l'impossible à gueule ouverte..." and fears that he will wake up from the dream-like process of creation "dégénéré, complètement désidentifié, anéanti."³ Above all, imprinted on his mind is the knowledge that, because of his own limited capacity to comprehend human reality, his story, like any work of art, is directed towards a conclusion which it may never attain. Indeed, Prochain épisode poses awesome questions about the struggle between opposite thrusts in

human existence and, like the spy-story, ends with an awesome absence of answers. It only announces that the events it recorded will be followed by other events, that there will be another "prochain épisode."

Throughout the process of writing, the complex and constantly accompanying awareness that both the mechanisms regulating individual and social life and the mechanisms regulating the narrative form of the story he attempts to write may elude his grasp marks the narrator-prisoner with a sense of despair, until tired and discouraged he is tempted to give up struggling for words and substituting purposeful arrangement for aimless disorder:

Pourquoi continuer à écrire et quoi encore? Pourquoi tracer des courbes sur le papier quand je meurs de sortir, de marcher au hasard, de courir vers la femme que j'aime, de m'abîmer en elle et de l'entraîner avec moi dans ma résurrection et vers la mort?³⁹

Because, he himself gives the answer, he is aware that he gains something: he gains time. It is dead time, because it is mentally created beyond the temporal and spatial order which he inhabits. Yet, it is time alive, because it saves his sanity and gives birth to a novel. Therefore, he summons up all his spiritual resources, and forces himself to recommence writing because he knows that through the acceptance of the temporal conventions of a work of art and

through the continuous exercise of creativity, he changes his relationship to his own time, and, instead of remaining its victim, he becomes its begetter. The misery of life is metamorphosed into the beauty of art, "Mon récit est interrompu, parce que je ne connais pas le premier mot du prochain épisode. Mais tout se résoudra en beauté."⁴⁰

"Artists," D. E. Kuspit comments, "make readers aware of the existence of things in time. To do this, the artist confronts one aspect of time with the other -- theoretically, the past with the future; practically, the sterility of time with its fertility."⁴¹ Artists like Aquin also show their readers that time, understood in a personal way, becomes a force, that man himself can empty or fill the past, the present and the future. Accordingly, the prisoner in Prochain épisode is not the only one of Aquin's characters who is involved in an act of creation. Almost all his main characters are, and thus establish a new relationship between themselves and their environment, between themselves and their time.

Unhappy in both marriage and profession, Christine Forestier of L'Antiphonaire experiences reality not as a fulfilling totality, but as a sequence of broken and disorganized parts. In the motel room in San Diego,

California where Christine is thinking about her abandoned medical career, the presence of an epileptic husband recovering from a recent fit increases the sense of failure and desolation that devastates her:

La respiration profonde de Jean Williax, couché à ses côtés, divisait en intervalles réguliers le temps mort qui s'étirait pour Christine et se traduisait synchroniquement en un long ruban d'enrui et de désolation.⁴²

To counteract the mental disintegration caused by anxiety and regret, Christine tries to absent herself from a present which she feels as insufficient and inadequate in order to live. "Elle se faisait absente, de plus en plus, à cette existence qui demandait d'elle une présence vigilante."⁴³ Knowing, however, that despite adverse, objective conditions, experiential fullness is still available to her as an act performed by her own mind, Christine Forestier tries as desperately to achieve it as the narrator-prisoner in Prochain épisode:

Pour moi, l'existence n'est qu'une série de séquences brisées, auto-suffisantes, dont l'addition n'égale jamais la totalité. En fait, la totalité n'existe pas autrement que comme schéma performée dans l'esprit.⁴⁴

Like the narrator-prisoner of Prochain épisode, Christine Forestier of L'Antiphonaire decides to write a story. Initially, it is the story of a sixteenth-century manuscript.

Ultimately, it is her own spiritual biography: "Puis, la vie s'est insérée de force dans mon pauvre récit; et, du coup celui-ci s'est transformé en une autobiographie."⁴⁵ Thus, to the dead time in which ennui and desolation oblige her to live, Christine Forestier opposes the living time of creative effort. By tackling the formal temporal demands of the narrative genre, Christine Forestier, like the narrator-prisoner of Prochain épisode, transcends the discontinuity which she feels in her everyday life by the imposed continuity of her story. And, it is precisely this continuous exercise of creative activity that enables Christine Forestier to overcome the difficulties of the present, and to believe in the possibility of rebuilding her life.

Analogously, in Trou de mémoire, Pierre X. Magnant knows that it is imperative for him to avoid a present which confronts him both with the absence of his lover Joan whom he has murdered, and with the inability to reason why he has committed such an act. "J'éprouve un frisson global et prolongé; je fais perdre la raison, je combat la lucidité,"⁴⁶ Pierre X. Magnant confesses in the grip of drug-induced hallucinations. But the use of drugs does not help Magnant comprehend why he strangled Joan, the equivalent of K in Prochain épisode, the woman-country lost through

misunderstanding. As in Prochain épisode, it is only the exercise of creative writing that retrieves lost beings and lost time. In the novel that Magnant decides to write, the passage from death to life is possible. In the literary work that Magnant attempts to produce, the dead Joan can be resurrected. And even though Magnant is not entirely able to achieve his goal, for he still misses Joan and still cannot understand why he murdered her, he saves himself for some time from the sterile incoherence of monologues, and changes the temporal patterns of his daily life:

Je vis sous une telle compulsion secrète que le temps se trouve disloqué et semble mettre une éternité à passer. Oui, le temps s'allonge indéfiniment et m'instaure majestueusement dans sa propre immobilité.⁴⁷

However, unlike Prochain épisode, in Trou de mémoire, the complete metamorphosis of personal experience into a literary work is not achieved. Pierre X. Magnant ultimately fails to impose structure on the chaos of his memories, and thus fails to create coherent duration out of fractured moments. Engulfed by painful and disordered thoughts, by "le bégaiement informel que je sténotypie avec tristesse sur ces pages pour oublier l'inoubliable nudité de Joan,"⁴⁸ the protagonist of Trou de mémoire commits suicide.

One encounters a similar situation in Neige noire.

Following the discovery of the incestuous relationship between his wife and her father, Nicolas Vanesse, the protagonist, finds his sense of self profoundly disrupted. As a result, his previously total involvement in everyday activities becomes only partial, and he exists doubly as a person in experience and also as a spectator who stands outside the time of the experience in order to judge it. Like the protagonists of Prochain épisode, L'Antiphonaire and Trou de mémoire, Nicolas Vanesse is fully aware that the perceived length or quality of time is ultimately a matter of psychological conditions, and, therefore, can be influenced by so-called "technical means" such as sex, drugs, entertainment, or work: "La perception du temps est sans doute liée aux moyens techniques dont l'homme se sert pour gagner du temps ou le tuer."⁴⁹ To bridge the gap between his mental life and his performance as a social being, in other words, to bring together again the subjective and the objective temporal aspects of his life, Nicolas Vanesse compulsively writes and directs films in his mind. Like the spy-story in Prochain épisode, like the story of the sixteenth-century manuscript in L'Antiphonaire, the scripts Nicolas Vanesse creates are essentially autobiographical. Hence, as the protagonists of Prochain épisode and L'Antiphonaire do, through the act of creation, the protagonist of Neige noire attempts to sustain a degree of

integration of himself and his time, and is able to say: "Le temps me dévore, mais de sa bouche je tire mes histoires."⁵⁰

In "Profession: écrivain," Aquin complained that his becoming a novelist was imposed on him, not by his talent, but by his inability to become a financier, and he tried to challenge the very foundation of creative writing in a situation of colonization such as the one in which he perceives Quebec to be. Under these circumstances, creative writing is a "stammering ceremony" which indicates acceptance, Aquin claims. Creative writing, he continues, is a traditionally compensatory passivity whose temporary appeasement should be refused:

La pratique littéraire, en situation coloniforme, exprime un comportement d'acceptation. De plus, les rites de la création littéraire sont généralement reconnus pour leur effet thérapeutique: après une nuit d'extase plus que lente, le danseur n'a plus la force de riposter au sphinx colonial. En l'épuisant, dans un article rituel, la danse des mots sur la ligne d'horizon réconcilie l'homme avec son irréalité. Dans notre pays désagrégé, je refuse l'apaisement que j'ai trop longtemps cherché dans la cérémonie bégayante de l'écriture.⁵¹

Yet, acceptance is exactly what writing is not in Aquin's novels. Rather, it is an attempt to master a chaotic reality which at once eludes and oppresses. Seen in a larger perspective, writing, like any other form of creation, is an

act of will. It is a personal struggle which has a liberating effect, and, as Aquin notes in Point de fuite, even a novel like Prochain épisode which has political overtones is not a political manifesto. Rather, it is a testimonial and a confession:

Sur le plan artistique, je suis non engagé.
D'ailleurs, Prochain épisode est un témoignage, une confession, non un roman engagé en sens étroit du terme, c'est-à-dire une prise de position politique.⁵²

Therefore, Patricia Smart is right to point out in Hubert Aquin -- agent double that Aquin's novels are revolutionary in character not because they deal with matters of social revolution, but because they attempt to implant the revolution at the level of the self. The reader watches the protagonists gaining consciousness of themselves and of their role in the history of mankind, and in the process, as Patricia Smart notes, he gains consciousness of himself and of the historical role he himself plays:

le caractère vraiment révolutionnaire du roman d'Aquin est de nous en faire prendre connaissance. Plutôt que d'offrir une solution compensatoire, il renvoie le lecteur au réel avec une nouvelle conscience de son propre rôle dans le dépassement du vertige collectif et dans la prise en main de l'histoire.⁵³

"Je n'écris pas, je suis écrit,"⁵⁴ the

narrator-prisoner in Prochain épisode exclaims, expressing the agony of an individual forced by events to acknowledge that the human condition is not one of absolute freedom. Yet, notwithstanding this painful awareness, common to all Aquin's protagonists, the sentiment with which the reader closes Prochain épisode, Trou de mémoire, L'Antiphonaire or Neige noire is not one of despair. On the contrary it is with a sense of hope that one leaves these novels. In all of them, the act of creation is revealed by Aquin not only as an anodyne against the highly insufficient present and phenomenal world, but as the subjective dimension within which human intelligence can gain a victory over the irregularities of time. Indeed, if one were to use Kermode's words, the act of creation is one of the most effective means of turning "chronos" into "kairos." Prochain épisode, Trou de mémoire, L'Antiphonaire et Neige noire also represent the recognition of the fact that in a man's life there may be moments when the subjective dimension of time must be made to devour the objective one, when man must endure in a constrained attitude if he is to survive. Significantly enough, the motto of Neige noire is from Kierkegaard: "Je dois maintenant à la fois être et ne pas être."⁵⁵

Thus, even though Aquin's novels are grounded in the life of French Canada, they are not primarily concerned with

Canadian places and Canadian politics, but with the effort of the individual everywhere to come to terms with existence, with life and death. From the dramatic and complex situations depicted in Aquin's novels, as from the dramatic ones revealed in Grove's books, human life emerges as dependent not only on objective conditions, but also on the imaginative stance the individual himself adopts towards the world and on the actions he himself takes. The spirit in which Aquin's heroes respond to the sum total of the factors which constitute their environment is of pre-eminent importance, for, even though man cannot ultimately choose his time, he can decide his own mode of attaching himself to it. To live, therefore, is at once to write and to be written. And even so, "Écrire est un grand amour," Aquin concludes in Prochain épisode, making at one and the same time a statement about artistic life in particular and about human life in general.

NOTES: CHAPTER III

¹ An initial form of this study appeared in Modern Fiction Studies, 22 (Summer 1976), pp. 449-56.

N.B.: Translations from French into English will be supplied for all quotations from Aquin's work. All translations are mine even in the cases where published ones exist. I have decided on this course, since I find the published translations not as close to the original text as is necessary for the purpose of this study.

² H. Aquin, Prochain épisode (Ottawa: Le cercle du livre de France, 1956), p. 7.

Translation: "Cuba flows in flames in the middle of the Lemn Lake, while I descend to the bottom of things."

N.B.: All subsequent quotations from this novel will be to the same edition if not otherwise indicated.

³ Ibid., p. 11.

Translation: "From now until then, I sit at the bottom of the Léman Lake, plunged in its fluid movement which plays the role of my subconscious.... I watch my own dispersion."

⁴ This quality of Aquin's novel has been briefly noted by P. Brazeau, An Outline of Contemporary French-Canadian Literature (Toronto: Forum House, 1972), and R. Legris, "Les structures d'un nouveau roman, Prochain épisode," Littérature canadienne (Montréal: Les Éditions Sainte Marie, 1968), pp. 25-32. Neither critic, however, gave adequate consideration to this important feature of Aquin's novel.

⁵ H. Aquin, "Considérations sur la forme romanesque d'Ulysses de James Joyce," L'oeuvre littéraire et ses significations, eds. P. Pagé and R. Legris (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1970), p. 63.

Translation: "From my point of view, I have a number of

perspectives on this inexhaustible book: I can use a wide-angle lens or, on the contrary, accommodate myself to other referential levels situated further away in time. Yes, Ulysses is unique in that it permits me, time and again, to resume reading it, to follow Eloom in his wandering or Ulysses in his Homeric pursuits, or, by changing often the perspective levels, even to follow the performance of James Joyce's writing. It is only rarely that one can say about a book that it is inexhaustible to such a degree."

⁶ H. Aquin, L'Antiphonaire (Montréal: Le Cercle du livre de France, 1969), p. 18.

Translation: "I want to tell everything not in order of succession necessarily, but according to a compositional design in 'cursus velox' jumping therefore to the composition according to desired time, and not without any disruption."

N.B.: All subsequent quotations from this novel will be from the same edition.

⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

Translation: "But while he rests himself I do not know where between Bourg-en-Bresse and Lyon, I -- Christine -- no longer know what to make of the contradictory items of information which I receive with respect to the state of Robert's health."

⁸ H. Aquin, Trou de mémoire (Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1968), p. 28.

Translation: "(yesterday evening already, between 10 and 11⁴⁵ --)"

N.B.: All subsequent quotations from this novel will be to the same edition.

⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

Translation: "midnight, Saturday, May 14, 1966."

¹⁰ P. Smart, Hubert Aquin - agent double (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973), p. 79.

Translation: "Noticing, for instance, the importance given to dates in the stories told by Pierre Magnan and Olympe Ghezze Quenum, the typical reader will attempt to re-establish the chronology of the events, only to discover that the two stories reflect each other as if in a mirror, the chronology of the latter reversing that of the former."

¹¹ H. Aquin, Neige noire (Montréal: La Presse, 1974), pp. 64-65.

Translation: "the dizziness of one who by distancing himself from the measurement of time, enters an intoxicating instantaneity. Time does not stop, no! Time will no longer stop; through emptiness it cancels everything that precedes and follows. One does not even feel any longer the passage from one day to another."

¹² N. Cloutier, "James Bond Balzac Sterling Moss... Hubert Aquin," (interview with Aquin) Maclean's, 6 (September 1966), p. 14.

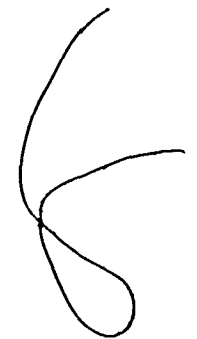
Translation: "In a well written novel, one which gives free rein to the imagination, you use fragments of reality, you re-dispose them, you re-arrange them in a new order -- the fictional order -- and thus you render reality more visible and more readable, something you would be unable to achieve in a novel which would content itself with merely reflecting reality."

¹³ A. Léonard, "Un romancier virtuose: Hubert Aquin -- À propos de L'Antiphonaire," P. Pagé and R. Leiris, eds., Op. cit., p. 191.

Translation: "It is no doubt the fate of the so-called secondary literatures to be unable, without great difficulty, to give up regional inspiration, and to reach a sense of synthesis only after a long and painful maturation. H. Aquin is, no doubt, the first novelist from Quebec who has taken a decisive step towards an all-inclusive creation."

¹⁴ Prochain épisode, p. 48.

Translation: "Everything here is on the run except myself."



¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Translation: "Everything seems to be an extraordinary cheat, the pain which I feel while admitting it included.... Nothing feeds my soul any longer.... Nothing can be a distraction any more...."

¹⁶ N. Cloutier, op. cit., p. 41.

Translation: "I had completely lost my identity, I must say. But when I found myself cut off from everything, well, I found myself still wanting to live, wanting to live this experience to the very end in order to get out of it. Therefore I wrote Prochain épisode where I recaptured the elements of my past life and metamorphosed them."

¹⁷ Prochain épisode, p. 35.

Translation: "To fly at last! To walk at random, incognito and unpunished, the streets which slash each other in order to mingle with the great flow of history...."

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," The Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1953), p. 8.

¹⁹ Prochain épisode, p. 153.

Translation: "Your naked body tells me again that I was born for real life, and that I desire madly what I love."

²⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

Translation: "I need to see you again. Without you, I die."

²¹ Ibid., p. 34.

Translation: "Ah, to be given back the sun-like room and our love, since I miss everything and I am afraid."

²² Ibid., p. 36.

Translation: "I glut myself, true to our bitter motto, on a salty beverage which drugs me."

²³ Ibid., p. 96.

Translation: "from 1776 till 1870, from the Boston Tea party till Misere Camp...."

²⁴ Point de fuite, p. 18.

Translation: "The past does not interest me and I do not recognize myself in it -- and it is significant that my second novel is entitled Blackout."

²⁵ Trou de mémoire, p. 30.

Translation: "To vomit, how good that would be; to vomit with just one spasm all this slime of too fresh recollections which have remained on my stomach and poison me."

The forcefulness of the language in Aquin's novels has been noted by other critics too. See, for instance, A. Brochu, "Un clavier de langages," L'instance critique (Ottawa: Léméac, 1974), pp. 359-368.

²⁶ The fact that the prisoner commits his thoughts to paper in order to escape psychological disintegration has been briefly discussed by R. Bourneuf, "Formes littéraires et réalités sociales dans le roman québécois," Livres et auteurs canadiens 1970 (Montréal: Éditions Jumonville, 1971), pp. 265-69. Also, see C. Lackquell, "Prochain épisode," Livres et auteurs canadiens 1965 (Montréal: Éditions Jumonville, 1966), pp. 41-42.

²⁷ Prochain épisode, p. 39.

Translation: "This book is the incessantly recommenced gesture of a patriot.... Moreover, it espouses the very shape of my future: in it and through it, I prospect my own indecision and improbable future."

²⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

Translation: "a few old, wounded faces," "other companions who already preoccupy me."

²⁹ J. Bouthillette, "Écrivain faute d'être banquier" (interview with Aquin), Point de fuite, pp. 13 and 18.

Translation: "For me, the artistic or formal universe is secondary. It is politics, in the broad sense of the word, that comes first, or, if you want,

action.... I do not believe that one can seize the nature of a man according to definite categories, that one can fix him during one moment of his life. It is through action that man reveals himself to himself."

³⁰ Prochain épisode, p. 92.

Translation: "In the novel which I am writing, in this daily book which I produce already with more ease, I see another meaning in addition to the piercing novelty of its final form. I am this book hour by hour, day by day."

³¹ J. Meerloo, Along the Fourth Dimension (New York: The John Day Company, 1970), p. 262.

³² Prochain épisode, p. 25.

Translation: "In me, explosively depressed individual, a whole nation flattens itself historically."

³³ Ibid., p. 94.

Translation: "When our brothers will die in ambushes and the women will be alone to celebrate the 24th of June, what we are writing now will stop being an event and will become an account."

³⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

Translation: "To write to you, I address myself to the whole world. Love is the cycle of the word."

³⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

Translation: "Tonight, while I am driving between Échandens and the bottom of a valley...."

³⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

Translation: "Naked event, my book writes me and it is not understandable but on condition that it is not detached from the historical fabric to which it belongs for good or for evil."

³⁷ R. Sutherland, "Introduction," H. Aquin, Prochain Episode (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. iv.

³⁸ Prochain épisode, p. 47.

Translation: "different as a result of drinking the impossible with open mouth," "degenerated, without an identity, annihilated."

³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

Translation: "Why should I continue to write, and what next? Why should I draw curved lines on the paper when I am dying to get out of here, to walk at random, to run towards the woman I love, to annihilate myself in her, and to lead her with me in my resurrection and towards death?"

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 171.

Translation: "My story is interrupted because I do not know the first word of the next episode. But everything will resolve itself in beauty."

⁴¹ B. Kuspit, "An Analysis of Creativity in Terms of Time," University of Windsor Review, 5 (Fall 1969), p. 56.

⁴² L'Antiphonaire, p. 13.

Translation: "The profound breathing of Jean William asleep by her side, was dividing into regular intervals the dead time which expanded itself for Christine and which simultaneously translated itself into a long ribbon of ennui and desolation."

⁴³ Ibid., p. 12.

Translation: "More and more, she made herself absent from that existence which demanded of her a vigilant presence."

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

Translation: "For me, existence is nothing but a series of broken sequences, self-sufficient, whose addition never equals the totality. In fact, the totality does not exist except as a scheme performed in the spirit."

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

Translation: "Then life inserted itself forcibly in my poor story; and, suddenly, transformed it into an

autobiography."

⁴⁶ Trou de mémoire, p. 25.

Translation: "I experience a global and prolonged shudder; I make myself lose my mind, I struggle against lucidity."

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

Translation: "I live under such a secret, propelling force, that time finds itself dislocated, and seems to take an eternity to pass. Yes, time indefinitely elongates itself, and majestically settles me down in its own immobility."

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

Translation: "the informal stammering which I sadly note in shorthand in order to forget Jean's nakedness."

⁴⁹ Neige noire, p. 93.

Translation: "The perception of time is no doubt connected to the technical means which man uses to gain or kill time."

⁵⁰ Quoted by J. Bonenfant, "Neige noire," livre et auteurs canadiens 1974 (Montréal: Editions Juscville, 1975), p. 22.

Translation: "Time devours me, but it is from his mouth that I draw my stories."

⁵¹ H. Aquin, "Profession: écrivain," Parti pris I (January 1964), pp. 27-28. Quoted by P. Smart, op. cit., p. 28.

Translation: "Literary practice, in a situation of colonization, is the expression of acceptance. Moreover, the rituals of literary creation are generally recognized for their therapeutic effect: after a night of more than slow extasy, the dancer no longer has the strength to retort to the colonial sphinx. By exhausting him through ritual, the dance of words on the horizon line reconciles man to his unreality. In our disintegrating country, I refuse the appeasement which for too long a time I sought in the stammering ceremony of writing."

⁵² Point de fuite, p. 16.

Translation: "Artistically, I am not engaged. As a matter of fact, Prochain épisode is a testimonial, a confession, not an engaged novel in the literary sense of the word, i.e., taking a political stand."

⁵³ P. Smart, op. cit., p. 64.

Translation: "The truly revolutionary character of Aquin's novel is to make us gain consciousness [of the role we play in the history of mankind]. Rather than offering a compensatory solution, he sends the reader back to reality with a new sense of his own part in the process of overcoming the collective vertigo and of taking history in his own hands."

⁵⁴ Prochain épisode, p. 89.

Translation: "I am not writing, I am being written."

⁵⁵ H. Aquin, Neige noire (Montreal: La Presse, 1974).

Translation: "Now, I must be and not be at the same time."

IV. THE ALL-SWALLOWING MOMENT: MARGARET AVISON'S POETRY¹

Of the Canadian poets who have addressed the matter of man and his relationship to time, Margaret Avison deserves special attention. Like the novels of Grove and Aquin, her poems are striking examples of what Kermode calls "fictions of complementarity," that is, literary works which, regardless of the genre to which they belong, re-create a movement out of the objective world into the subjective consciousness working in time. What is also remarkable about Avison's poetry is both the intensity of her preoccupation with individually internalized moments and the synthesis of the religious and the secular that she achieves in her advocacy of a concerted visionary-emotional response to the present, phenomenal world. Critics such as I. Jones and M. Beaty have rightly acclaimed this poet's work as an impressive technical achievement and an unflinching quest for meaning.² Other critics such as E. Redekop and M. Wilson have followed her progression from a playful search for significance in life to her mystic experience, but have only briefly called attention to the remarkable fusion of psychological insight and poetic imagination which characterizes Avison's poems.³ It is the purpose of this

chapter to consider in depth the system of beliefs which has permitted Margaret Avison to organize human experience meaningfully around a spiritual centre and create subjective, living value out of chronological duration.

With respect to ideological content, Avison's two volumes of poetry are similar. Both Winter Sun and The Dumbfounding testify to the poet's acute interest in man's inner life and his subjective perception of time, rather than in his external environment and objective time duration. What distinguishes the two volumes, however, is the fact that by giving poetic expression to a mystical experience not recorded in Winter Sun, The Dumbfounding reveals an additional context for the subjective experience of time. The poet's religious conversion opens the way for a potential change in time perception that a specifically Christian context might make. To give, through Christian love, stability and consistency to each instant of existence, to become, through the acquisition of a newness of spirit, illuminated children of the kingdom of earth is Margaret Avison's understanding of the message of Christ. It is also, in her opinion, the only true solution to the human condition. Having received this divine revelation, however, the poet goes beyond it, and proposes a way of life whose terms are equally accessible to the believer and the

non-believer, for they are grounded in the transfiguring effect that an imagination enriched with feeling may have on human life regardless of religious or secular context.

As Desmond Pacey observes in his Creative Writing in Canada, Margaret Avison shares with other contemporary writers the painful awareness of the inadequacy of man's existence predicated on time, and founds her discussion of the human condition on the idea that, with a temporal index attached to it, human life is not only transient, but also tragically short.⁴ If poems such as "A Nameless One" or "Apocalyptic" note only briefly that within the overall framework of existence, man is only an "insect living in a bathroom," a form of life whose flow is limited to "a sparrow time," in the poem "In Time," Avison's concern with the shortness and transience of human life is emphatic. Here, the poet attempts to give artistic form to the concept of growth, but, significantly enough, her attention is not focused on the ideas of rejuvenation and renewal associated with growth. Rather, it is concentrated on the inexorable passage of years implicit in the same process:

Stumps in the skull
 feel smooth.
 No juice. No punkwood.
 Sheaves
 of tall timber
 sprout awkwardly -- poplar clumps
 by the railway cut --

in a matter of years.

That's growth.⁵

Human transience is noted as a particularly negative experience in Avison's poetry because for this poet, as for many other contemporary poets, the traditional integration of God, Nature, and Man, no longer holds true. The mind of modern man has risen in Lucifer-like mutiny against a strictly Biblical interpretation of the universe, and a number of poems by Avison structured around the metaphor of the particle falling away from the kernel give voice to the spiritual chaos engendered by man's second fall, that is, the loss of intuitive or non-inquisitive faith. In "The Earth That Falls Away," the central symbol of the poem, the blindfold, is the physical expression of man's spiritual descent into the darkness of doubt and unanswerable questions, whereas in "Watershed" the idea of man's having cut himself off from traditional beliefs is expressed in a direct statement:

The clocks in the wrists and the temples, and up in the
towers
That you see as you walk, assuming the earth your floor
Though you know in your heart that the foot-hold really
is gone.⁶

Irremediably subjected to destruction by objective duration,
and with no external reason for existence, the twice-fallen

world, Avison's "The Fallen, Fallen World," seems to mock any meaning, and people, whether "REVOLUTIONARIES," "IDEALISTS" or "THE LEARNED," breathe "murk and apprehension," instead of life-giving air. "Rondeau Fedouble" resumes the "falling away" motif. To the stupefied eyes of the modern man in this poem, existence appears as a senseless pattern of opposites in tension, an endless avenue lined with poles at once "divorced from origin," and with an obscure end.

Moreover, Avison observes in "Chronic," that the perpetual tension perceptible in the outer world is reproduced at the level of the individual by the gap between his objective and subjective life. Placing form in the direct service of concept, Avison adopts in "Chronic" a two-part compositional design which reflects the lack of synchronization between the time lived and another time not lived, but contemplated. The first stanza centers upon the idea that inner individual cadences do not always coincide with external ones. Moreover, that an individual's inner life, his "house made of old newspapers," cannot even be recognized by outsiders:

My house is made of old newspapers.
 Not very old ones, always about a week's
 Accumulation. And don't pretend you recognize it.
 You don't. (WS, 8)

The personal "newspaper house" is not recognizable because it

does not conform to commonly accepted rules: it is neither square, nor tepee shaped, for instance. The newspaper house can be recognized and understood only by the "eye" that lives within its walls and whose existence it influences. Indeed, the more intensely the individual lives a reality governed by subjective time, the more he feels divorced from a reality defined in terms of objective duration:

But as the weeks pass I become accustomed
 To failing more and more
 In credence of reality as others
 Must know it, in a context, with a coming
 And going marshalled among porticos,
 And peacock-parks for hours of morning leisure. (WS, 8)

Within the walls of the newspaper house the individual enjoys absolute freedom; he can think of "strawberry festivals and of quinces" while in the world outside, the world of the second stanza of the poem, winter and cold reign supreme.

But the duality of consciousness presses hard on the individual, and, as a theme, recurs transfigured in many poems by Avison. "The Two Selves," for instance, gives poetic treatment to the alienation resulting from the sense of existing at one particular moment, and the capacity to operate detached from one's own self. This poem is steeped in the confrontation between two distinct voices which the individual hears inside himself, but in which he only partially recognizes himself. The recognition being

incomplete, the attendant feeling is not a release from inner tension, but a strong sense of isolation from one's own physical time. In "Chronic," the inner time of the individual and its experiential possibilities were symbolized by the house of newspapers where one could think of strawberry festivals in the depths of winter. In "The Two Selves," the fulness or emptiness of individual time is represented by the room full or empty of birds. The birds which used to inhabit the room have left, causing the room to turn into a "customs shed" full of crushed, dry cages, and the dialogue between the two selves attempts to register the mind's struggle to retain identity among shiftings of time and experience. The frustration engendered by the failure to achieve a permanent meeting of the flesh and the spirit, of objective and inner time is "like knowing the sound of the sea when you / live, under the sea," the poet notes, thus making suspension in water the physical expression of man's suspension between experiential extremes when "the here" is not also "the now."

Margaret Avison's poems give voice to man's feeling of estrangement not only from himself, but also from his fellows. In the work of this Canadian poet, the reconciliation between the concept of time as sequence, or historic event, with the concept of time as plurality, or

psychological event, is immensely difficult to achieve. "Many as Two," for instance, is both conceptually and structurally similar to "The Two Selves." In the form of a dialogue between two inner voices belonging to the same individual, this poem attempts to define in human terms the concepts of life and death. Life is "the green thing," "the thrum of the touched heart strings." Death is "the flesh's doom" and "the terror" one does not name. Life and Death are common to all mankind, but the particular manner of thinking and feeling about them isolates each individual from his fellows. As a result, as Mendilow puts it in Time and the Novel, the universe is a psychological multiverse.⁷ Indeed, the second stanza of "Many as Two", not only accepts the inevitability of death, but also affirms the radically individual character of human experience. Obligated by his own mind to concentrate on himself as an entirety rather than as part of an aggregate, man must face his undeniable essential loneliness:

Outside the heartbreak home I know, I can own
no other.
 "The brokenness. I know.
 Alone." (D, 21)

Yet, the poet reveals in "Searching and Sounding," that correlative to the strong sense of individual isolation is the awareness that man can not fulfill his life alone

either in space or time:

I run from you to
 the blinding blue of the
 loveliness of this wasting
 morning,....

 And as I run I cry
 "But I need something human,
 somebody now, here, with me." (D, 60-61)

In poems such as "Identity," "The Artist," or "Lonely Lover," man's ultimate experiential isolation coupled with the absolute necessity for companionship create a situation balanced on the knife edge of opposite realities and hence, of opposite thrusts: one towards the dissociation of individual, subjective time from the objective time of physical environment, the other towards a synchronization of the same dimensions. Nevertheless, the poet is not affected by spiritual paralysis. On the contrary, the contemplation of the conflicting claims of inner and outer time is the very source of her illumination, and lies behind the poem "A Nameless One."

This poem follows chronologically the short life of a nameless insect, in a nameless, second floor apartment. The insect lives for one day only, but the physical and physiological stages it undergoes clearly parallel the stages of development of a human existence: at six a.m., youth "wafting ceilingward," at noon, maturity "still as a

constellation of spruce needles," at four p.m., old age, "a wilted flotsam." The watching of the brief insect life makes available to the poet the experience of an existence complete in itself, and the insect becomes the symbol of the ephemerality of all life. The poet understands that, as an integral part of living nature, human life has to obey its biological rules, and the poet is able to accept reality without agony or revolt:

Its insect-day
has threaded a needle
for me for my eyes dimming
over lips and tears and
thin places. (D, 97)

But the poet's reflection on the minute and apparently insignificant life of the nameless insect does not result only in coming to terms with reality, and does not lead only towards the mere acceptance of man's transitoriness. The contemplation of the microcosmic image of life represented by the insect also reveals to the poet the uniqueness of the human condition. The new perspective is profoundly sympathetic and has a redeeming effect. The poet comprehends that even though the objective direction of man's life is unalterable, man can redeem his life by giving it numerous subjective dimensions. By mending his "dimming eyes" through the widening of the scope of his perceptions and understanding, man can acquire new perspectives to look upon

life. He can thus transform the nameless room he is inhabiting in space and time into an adequate apartment:

now that it is
over, I
look with new eyes
upon this room
adequate for one to
be, in. (D, 97)

The way to give new directions to one's life, the reader is told in the poem "Intra-Political," is to consider each present moment, each "now" an instant at once central and privileged, and to discover the whole meaning of life within its experiential span:

Form has its flow,
a Heraclitus-river with no riverbank
we can play poise on now. (WS, 47)

"Intra-Political," which Avison has structured on a continuous interplay between spatial images serving as metaphors for temporal realities, is crucial to the understanding of her ~~entire~~ canon. It is in this poem that Avison unequivocally notes that, if time seems oppressive and weighs heavily on man, and, hence, man feels an antagonistic relationship between himself and space, it is of his own making:

(Nothing inert may, in stone, space, exist -- except
as

our clocking selves insert it.
 We move too far from ways of weightlessness.)
 Space is a hazard. (WS, 45)

"Intra-Political" opens with the question, "Who are we here? / boxed, bottled, barrelled / in rows?" then, swings from remote reaches of the past into the present in search of an answer (WS, 44). Central to the development of the search, is the opposition the poet perceives between the experiential narrowness of the human soul turned commercial and rigid, and the experiential largeness available to the same soul through imagination and vision. The relation between these two existential possibilities is similar to that between a mudcake and the sun:

Games are too earnest.
 These packaged us-es
 are to the gamboling of real nourishment
 as mudcake to transmuted sun. (WS, 44)

In an analysis of the above quotation, E. Redekop notes that these four lines advance proportional changes into opposites and establish the following equation:

$$\frac{\text{packaged us-es}}{\text{gamboling of}} : \frac{\text{mudcakes}}{\text{transmuted sun}^{\circ}}$$

real nourishment

Indeed, having asserted the qualitative difference between a mode of existence strictly predicated on immediate space and

chronological time, and one that could go beyond objective temporal barriers, and therefore "beyond objective space, the poet explores the means and possibility of transcending man's biological and experiential limitations. Through a complex of images at once astronomical and anatomical the poem affirms that, in spite of the important scientific discoveries which have opened up the external universe, man's universe is actually within. It is there that a major transformation must occur in order to unbox, un¹bottle, and unbarrel man's experience of space and time. The colt startled by the noise of a passing train, the lone balloonist jerked into the air by the force of heat become symbols of man in search of his interior cosmos and time. Plunging "away / from the inexorable of / weaving orbits" of space and chronological time, gamboling "the real nourishment" of imagination and vision, the individual discovers that his space and time are not fixed, but amenable to immense "largeness":

If, with dainty stepping, we unbox ourselves
 while still Explosions slumbers,
 putting aside mudcakes,
 the buying, selling, trucking, packaging
 of mudcakes,
 sun-stormed, daring to gambol,
 might there not be an immense answering
 of human skies?
 a next expectant largeness? (WS, 47)

The recognition and the acceptance of this subjective spatial

and temporal reality is the crowning of man's migration through his internal galaxies. It is his re-birth, "a new Genesis":

... our darkness dreams of
 this heavy mass, this moil, this self-
 consuming endless squirm and squander, this
 chaos, singling off
 in a new Genesis. (WS, 45-46)

To such a moment of "new Genesis" Margaret Avison dedicates the poem "April 17-18 (Apollo XIII)." The major metaphor of this poem -- the earth as a space capsule -- is used by the poet in order to examine the nature of man's existence on earth in the light of the failure and success of the Apollo XIII mission. The poem moves chronologically from Friday morning to Saturday afternoon, from launching to splash-down in order to culminate in the question "What of the where and why?" The answer to the poet's inquiry into the reason and goal of man's technological achievements is expressed negatively: ⁴

Air burn, the ocean, divers, nets and decks
 quarantine, doctors, complex
 debriefing days
 are not the NOW that grips all our energies
 as knowing, both the dark possibilities
 and the bright, grows.⁹

Margaret Avison's "NOW," "the NOW that grips all our energies" is beyond the mechanical details of life, and,

therefore, is not represented by the launching of the rocket. Avison's "NOW" can exist without technological achievements, for it is located at any time in experience. It is not a function of man's conquest of his physical universe, nor is it predicated on any specific phase of historic development. Such a "NOW" is invisible on the TV screens. It is not detachable by the most sophisticated equipment of the most sophisticated scientific laboratories, but is rendered in artistic form by the poet who creates "Birth Day."

The dominant image of "Birth Day" is that of a holiday in the town of Mitilene. The description of a perfect summer day is followed first by an account of the landscape around the town, then of the people of Mitilene themselves. While the theme of the celebration looms large in the poem, what seems to have most stimulated the poet's imagination are not the festivities, and the spatial elements associated with them, but the subjective temporal reality existing against this objective present moment. In the privacy of her own self, the poet comprehends the cosmic significance of the birth of a child. Whether the birth referred to in the poem is that of the first child ever born to a human being, or whether it represents the birth of Christ is not important for our discussion here. What is important is the extraordinary experiential fulfillment felt

by the poet who, for a brief span of chronological time, is able to transcend the celebrations she is attending, and acquire an insight into the miracle of birth. The experience, which represents a violation of an old self and the creation of a new one, turns the Mitilene holiday from a simple celebration into a spiritual birthday. And because this re-born individual happens to be a poet, she attempts to communicate her unique state. She shouts out her news in the form of a poem even though she knows that in order to comprehend the miracle of child-birth people must "stretch and swell with strangeness":

And then
 The hour of genesis
 When first the moody firmament
 Swam out of Arctic chaos,
 Orbed solidly as the huge frame for this
 Cramped little swaddled creature's coming forth
 To slowly, foolishly, marvellously
 Discover a unique estate, held wrapt
 Away from all men else, which to embrace
 Our world would have to stretch and swell with strangeness.
 (WS, 73-74)

This does not mean, however, that Margaret Avison is rejecting space and the objective present. Rather, she is making them the basis of a subjective NOW which seems to last beyond its clock limits. In other words, like many other contemporary poets and novelists, Avison is attempting to demonstrate that "there is implicit in time an atemporal

reality which simultaneously makes the time somewhat real and shows it to be somewhat unreal."¹⁰ It is, therefore, in the present experiential moment, not in the chronological one, that Margaret Avison finds an authentic expression of human existence. It is only this NOW that widens the individual's temporal landscape, and, therefore, for her, it is the only credible unit of human time.

The symbol for Avison's sense of human time is the tree, more precisely the urban tree, not the tree in the forest. Poems such as "Easter," "Extra-Political" and "Not the Sweet Cicely of Gerardes Herball" in the volume Winter Sun, or, "Black-White Under Green," "The Mcaner" and "Branches" in the volume The Dumbfounding are dominated by the image of the tree. But nowhere is the tree more clearly defined as the symbolic representation of subjective duration than in "Urban Tree." Significantly, the tree which is the poet's object of contemplation in this poem is "orphan" and squeezed "among the knees of / clanking panoplied buildings." Yet, in spite of its loneliness and the over-cemented soil around it, in spite of the pipes, steel stems and cellars through which its roots must find nourishment, the urban tree forks skywards and, through the vapours it produces, ensures the continuance of life:

Its auburn fernstrings pour

invisible waterthreads of falling life
 from the overplastered earth into
 the very air-pillars that build that
 dove & lambswool cloud. (D, 98)

Through a sudden shift, the poem moves from the external landscape of the tree to the internal landscape of the poet. The physical movement of the tree is paralleled in the spiritual movement of the individual who contemplates the tree, and the former becomes the symbolic expression of the latter's spirit taking on a new vitality. The individual stops enjoying time horizontally, as a massive and continuous development of chronology, and, like the urban tree, transforms time into a vertical dimension by availing himself of each instant to absorb life:

In a thin whitish space
 off center, vast unblur,
 the sun lives
 as its alive sapling
 lives and is traced in
 fingering on the
 arrested armor here, this
 morning. (D, 98)

For Margaret Avison, therefore, the direction of the inner movement which aims at reorganizing human experience is "up," through spiritual and sensory roots to an ever-widening experiential sky. This is the sense of the vital process that takes place in the urban tree, and this is the sense of the flight described by Avison in "Dispersed Titles."

This is a cycle of seven poems which develop a careful examination of man's relation to his environment and to his history. Apparently disconnected, these seven poems actually correspond to points in space and moments in time united by references which are mainly astronomical. From Tycho Brache and Copernicus, to Kepler and Buckminster Fuller, the poet moves freely back and forth among centuries and places in an attempt to juxtapose contemporary Western civilization to other possible ways of looking at the world: the ways of Oriental culture, for instance. While probing deeper and deeper into the nature of the Western world, the cycle reaches deeper and deeper into the inner recesses of the poet by means of impressions related to scientific or historical references:

For Tycho Brache's sake I find myself,
 but lose myself again for
 so few are salvaged
 in the sludge of the
 ancestral singular.

.....

The northern centuries
 funnel me, a chute of
 steel and water tumbling,
 and I forget
 warm boards, old market awnings.... (WS, 5-6)

The suggestion is that all these disparate impressions and recollections, all these "RCOTS" are contained in the structure of man's present imagination which Avison calls

"FLIGHT." "[FLIGHT] [HAS ROOTS]," Avison openly proclaims in the titles of the first two poems forming the "Dispersed Titles" cycle. Function of both internal and external factors, man's life is subject to fluctuations in terms of imaginative and sensory stances. Consequently, at times, the individual may experience deep frustration for being "tossed out in the confused up-and-down" of disorganized experience. Notwithstanding the painful recognition of man's inability to sustain an even level of experiential intensity, "Dispersed Titles" advances a new vision of the world. By assembling the titles of the seven different sections of the cycle, one obtains a poem within a poem which affirms the value of moments of experiential flight. Transfiguring and transcending the "now" and the "here," these moments go beyond reason or memory. During their span, all the roots -- the world as it was and still is -- are assimilated in man's imaginative flight upwards:

[FLIGHT]
 [HAS ROOTS]
 [BUT IS CUT OFF]
 [EXCEPT FROM ALL ITS SELVES]
 [THE EARTH HAS OTHER ROOTS AND SELVES]
 [THE NAMELESS ONE DWELLS IN HIS TENTS]
 [AND "UP" IS A DIRECTION]

As a dominating image, the flight also appears in "The Mirrored Man," "Meridian for a Melody," "For Doctor and

Mrs. Dresser," "Bestialities." Like the tree, the flight is a persistent and recurrent metaphor that gives Avison's poetry the coherence of a myth. Transcending chronological duration and oriented vertically through visionary flight, the time of the individual becomes an inner event rather than an external one, and each instant of life can potentially be a break away from a linear temporal sequence. The intensity of such vertical moments constitutes for Avison the major beat in man's existence, and it is by this intensity alone that the absurdity of human life can be "blotted sheer out of time" (WS, 58), and thus redeemed.

However, representing an individual's inner time, the experience undergone during intense moments cannot be readily communicated. Hence, the acute awareness of separate identity which informs the poem "Words," for instance. This poem can be easily seen as the poetic treatment of modern communication theory which holds that the meaning of encoded forms lies not in the encoded message itself, but in the entire process of sending and receiving, that is, in the human act that we call language. "Words" begins by setting up a contrast between medieval and modern warfare, by underlining the clear distinction between personal battles and impersonal mass eradication:

Heraldry is breath-clouded brass,

blood-rusted silks, gold-pricked even threadbare
 memorials of honor
 worn,
 a shield when napalm and germ-caps and fission are
 eyeless towards color, bars, quarterings. (D, 23)

The old and the modern in weaponry represent two different perspectives on life. The poet feels this dichotomy and tries to express it through words, but fails, for the imaginative order which is available to the privacy of the "de- / ciphering heart" cannot be resolved in plain words. The particular spelling which the poet uses for the adjective "deciphering" is indicative of the dual character of the experience; it decodes for the individual who undergoes it, it encodes for outsiders:

The ancient, the new,
 confused in speech,
 breathe on, involving
 heart-warmed lungs, the reflexes
 of uvula, shaping tongue, teeth, lips,
 ink, eyes, and de-
 ciphering heart. (D, 23)

While recognizing that ordinary, spoken words fail to decode or translate for the outsider the nature of the private experience, and that the process of receiving and sending information is thwarted by the impotence of plain language, Avison believes that experiences of subjective temporal order can be communicated if the language is manipulated in such a way as to make words at once pregnant with more than one meaning and to make them relate to each other in more than

one way. By forcing words into new semantic and functional relationships, one achieves the supreme condensation of stimuli that metaphorical language represents.

Indeed, Avison is as self-conscious a poet as Aquin is a self-conscious novelist. "Butterfly Bones," "The Artist," "Rigor Viris," "Meeting Together of Poles and Latitudes (In Prospect)" reveal art as the means of creating human value and time. To the rigor mortis to which he is doomed, the artist opposes his supreme achievement, the rigor viris of his own re-created existence:

In this clear twilight contour must contain
Its source, and distances with contour come
Opening peacock vistas that can no man entomb. (WS, 62)

Moreover, pending his ability to communicate experience, the artist becomes a creator of time not only for himself, but also for his public. Avison wants her experiences imparted, and this is why poems such as "Meeting Together of Poles and Latitudes (In Prospect)" or "Searching and Sounding" strive to bridge with metaphors the gap between the individual sender and the group receiver. The metaphors around which these poems are structured act as the items of heraldry contemplated in the poem "Words," that is, they communicate subjective moments emanating a sense of fulfilment beyond anything that objective, conscious intellect can supply.

"Meeting Together of Poles and Latitudes (In Prospect)" is a three stanza poem founded on the idea that the constituent elements of what is commonly called humanity, or the totality of people, are opposite psychological tendencies in continuous tension. The first stanza is dedicated to pragmatic, realistic people:

Those who fling off, toss head,
Taste the bitter morning, and have at it --
Thresh, knead, dam, weld,
Wave baton, force
Marches through squirming bogs. (WS, 21)

These active people who are successful in daily life, live separately from, and seldom meet, the day-dreamers and artists who seem inhibited in everyday existence and appear passive:

Those who are flung off, sit
Dazed awhile, gather concentration,
Follow vapour-trails with shrivelling wonder,
Pilfer, row, play jongleur
With mathematic signs.... (WS, 21)

The third stanza of the poem advances the possibility of the "curious encounter" of these opposite poles of human spiritual geography, within the span of moments which succeed in temporarily abolishing "the felt disunity"¹¹ between opposite aspects of the human self:

But when they approach each other

The place is an astonishment:
 Runways shudder with little planes
 Practising folk-dance steps or
 Playing hornet,
 Sky makes its ample ruling
 Clear as a primary child's exercise-book. (WS, 22)

Avison is not of the opinion that a permanent coalescence between opposite aspects of the human self is possible. Indeed, the experiential sky disclosed by the "curious encounter" is "clear as a primary child's exercise book" but it is, nevertheless, in "somebody else's language." However, by permitting man to live even temporarily in a state of reconciliation between the realistic and the transcendental, harmonious moments of communication give adult life something of the innocence of childhood.

The importance of sharing and communicating experience as a means of transcending objective time is also the theme of the poem "The World Still Needs." Here, Avison espouses the view that the world still needs "piano tuners," and brings a logical sequence of arguments to support this idea. The piano tuners are the people whose profession is to maintain the quality of certain musical instruments. Through music, people may communicate with each other and achieve mutual comprehension, or, in Avison's words, "a communal cramp of understanding." Thus, in spite of different and separate identities, people may share experiences and thus

lessen the discrepancy between personal and group values. Mankind, therefore, needs piano tuners, for music is one means at man's disposal to rise beyond simple chronology and, by sharing the "absolute texture" of intense experience, temporarily turn many solitudes into one single identity. The moment of experiential communion, explains Margaret Avison:

Is like the moment
When the piano in the concert hall
Finds texture absolute, a single solitude
For those hundreds in rows (WS, 27)

Margaret Avison does not claim, however, that art is the only means of transcending the objective reality. The intense experience of the ordinary fact can be equally rewarding, and poems such as "The Agnes Cleves Papers," "New Year's Poem," "Easter," or "Pace" are celebrations of facts of perfect immediacy and simplicity. In this respect, in a comparison of Avison and Wevill, John Colombo duly remarked that "what excites Avison is particles of experience which at odd angles bombard the retinas of her eyes and in her poems are turned into atomic particles."¹² The title of the poem "Pace" is a pun upon words. In Latin, pace means peace. Indeed, says Avison, peace is a function of pace. The setting in "Pace" is the city; more precisely, a city park inhabited by birds and little animals. Those who pass slowly

through the park, and let their ears experience the
 "discreet, delicate / clicking" of squirrels and pigeons,
 find themselves enveloped by a feeling of supreme
 tranquillity:

Pedestrians linger
 striped stippled sunfloating
 at the rim of the
 thin-wearing groves. (D, 12)

Similarly, in "Easter" a fine April morning is the background
 for an extraordinary imaginative experience when the outer
 world becomes the inner world turned inside out:

A bird sings, forceful, glorious as a pipeorgan,
 And the huge bustling girth of the whole world
 Turns in an everywhere of sunwardness
 Among the cloudcarved sundering of its oceans. (WS, 42)

Avison's sunward moments, therefore, are not
 significant because of the nature of the activity performed
 in their span; nor are they significant through their
 position in relation to the past and the future. What is
 important is the degree of man's absorption in the moment,
 the intensity with which he responds to life at that
 particular time. Like nuclear particles, to use Colombo's
 phrase, the intense experiences described in "Easter" or
 "Pace" break the horizontal flow of time, and organize it
 along a deep vertical axis of involvement. Ideally, Margaret

Avison notes in "A Child: Marginalia on an Epigraph," one should be as deeply engaged in living as a child is, for no intermediary comes between a child and his environment. Whether he eats or puts his clothes on, whether he plays or cries, a child participates directly in the world, and nothing interposes itself between him and his delight in life:

He is completely absorbed
and his heart therefore aches
(radiant, bone-barred):
and to long for the
not enough out of the light yet
to be filled,
fulness. (D, 32-33)

Unlike the child's enjoyment of life, the adult's potential experiential richness is permanently menaced by the false rituals which tend to rule his life. One of Avison's most direct, engaged, and moving meditations on the contemporary pursuit of sham values is "July Man," a poem which claims that man himself must be held accountable for the numbing of his own experiential potential. As elsewhere in Avison's poetry, the landscape of this poem is the city park surrounded by noisy, animated streets. The central human figure is the July man:

Old, rain wrinkled, time-soiled, city-wise, morning man
whose weeping is for the dust of the elk-flowers
and the hurting notes of time. (D, 22)

The first stanza of the poem sets the July man in opposition to the "buzzing populace" of the town, which has lost the capacity to slow down from the race, and, for ever funnelled in the mad headlong course for material gratification, is no longer receptive; it has ears that do not hear and eyes that do not see. In contrast to this mode of existence which renders man imaginatively and spiritually lifeless though physically alive, the last two stanzas suggest an existence free from the materialistic suction that cuts off the individual's imaginative and visionary flight, an existence which would emphasize the subjective dimension of human time rather than its objective one. Unlike his fellow citizens, the July man takes time to sit on a bench in a park, in the sound of a fountain, and, it is precisely because of his refusal to become part of the rat-race that he becomes sensitive to things which those engaged in perpetual rushing do not perceive. His is an existence which emphasizes the subjective dimension of human time, and even though the objective flow of time remains undeniable, the experiential "sudden sunlight" that the July man feels constitutes for Avison true human reality:

The rushing river of cars
 makes you a stillness, a pivot, a heart-stopping
 blurt, in the sorrow
 of the last rubbydub swig, the searing, and
 stone-jar solitude lost, and yet,

and still -- wonder (for good now) and
trembling:

The too much none of us knows
is weight, sudden sunlight, falling
on your hands and arms, in your lap,
all, all, in time. (D, 22)

In a discussion of man's ability or inability to establish a desired relationship with time, Georges Poulet argues in Le Point de départ that a host/guest-like situation should exist between the individual and his life. As a good host prepares himself for, and looks forward to the visit of his guest, so man should refine his mind and senses and walk in anticipation of the many experiences life can offer. Through preparation in advance and readiness, the host increases the pleasure of his guest's visit. Through preparation in advance and readiness, man expands the experiential content of his life and establishes, in Poulet's words, "an authentic contact with time."¹³ The idea that it is man himself who is ultimately responsible for the experiential richness or poverty of his life preoccupies Margaret Avison not only in "July Man," but also in many other poems. "Two Mayday Selves," "To Professor X, Year Y," "Unfinished After-Portrait" also accuse man of misplacing his energy and of not taking time to be the impatient host of his own life. No longer running out to meet his guest, no longer holding his breath in expectation, the individual narrows the

scope of his experience, and, unlike the July man, feels "barricaded, caged, cramped" (WS, 37).

The opposite of feeling barricaded, caged and cramped by clocks and calendars, and ultimately by death, is to re-create the universe in imagination, Margaret Avison claims in "The Swimmer's Moment." This is a difficult undertaking, and the poem contains an unequivocal comment on the effort implied in transfiguring objective reality and creating experience in the mind. "The Swimmer's Moment" opens with a direct statement. In each individual's life there is at least one moment of acute self-awareness. This is Avison's "swimmer's moment," when man must decide what his further attitude towards the "whirlpool" of experience will be. "For everyone / The swimmer's moment at the whirlpool comes" (WS, 36). Following such a moment of perfect identification of thought and actual existence, people can adopt one of two possible attitudes. Some will ignore the new insight into life acquired through the gaining of consciousness, and continue in their old thoughtless patterns of behaviour, "Pale and forever on the rim of suction / They will not recognize" (WS, 36). Others will use the profound psychological event as a point of departure towards a mode of existence more authentic than the merely chronological one. But not all of them will succeed. Many of those who attempt

to transcend the present and "dare the knowledge" of a subjective reality will be sucked in by the "gaping vertical" of disorganized experience. Only one or two will be able to swim upwards, out of the "black pit" and thus emerge towards a more meaningful personal existence. In "The Swimmer's Moment" surfacing is a symbolic representation of each individual's struggle and ability to achieve wholeness within himself, harmony with his environment, and thus arrive at Avison's

... anonymous breadth
 Where one or two have won.
 (The silver reaches of the estuary). (WS, 36)

The idea that the imaginative re-invention of life is an act of will is also affirmed in the opening statement of "Snow."¹⁴

Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes.
 The optic heart must venture: a jail-break
 And re-creation. (WS, 17)

In Avison's opinion, therefore, the act of "seeing the world" is volitional; it is also private and difficult. The individual must first gain consciousness, his heart must stop being simply a heart. It must become "the optic heart." Armed with an "optic heart," man must then venture a "jail break," an escape from the "prison of chronological time. But

the break alone, the isolated moment alone is not enough, Avison emphasizes in the same poem. If the "soul's gates seal, and cannot bear" the permanent coincidence of intense experience and time, the gaining of consciousness and the occasional intense moment remain fruitless. Man must constantly re-invent his world; the soul must be made to bear "creations unseen freight." Following the philosophic manifesto represented by the first three lines, the imagery of "Snow" centers upon the opposition between organic and inorganic forms of matter, stressing the idea that energy and light can be imparted by the "optic heart" even to cold cinders. Beneath a cold layer of snow lies life, beneath the surface of things lies an infinity of radically different worlds which can be made available by the power of man's imagination:

... Sedges and wild rice
 Chase rivery pewter. The astonished cinders quake
 With rhizomes. All ways through the electric air
 Trundle candy-bright disks; they are desolate
 Toys if the soul's gates seal, and cannot bear,
 Must shudder under, creation's unseen freight. (WS, 17)

The last six lines of the poem place the symbolic use of snow in cultural perspective, and contribute a powerful affirmation of the mind's capacity to create human value out of negative elements. In oriental cultures, Avison notes, white is the colour of mourning. Hence, in oriental art snow

is often used as a symbolic representation of "an indifferent stasis that's death's warning." However, under the cold layer of snow that covers the banks of the Yellow Yangze river, lies life. Under the cold layer of snow, the poet sees in her imagination, "Asters of tumbled quiteness reveal / Their petals" (WS, 17). And, it is precisely the "starry blur" created by visionary effort that enables the poet to accept death as a value-imparting background for life. It is only because death exists that life is precious.

The impact of visionary imagination on the creation of human value and thus on the enhancement of human time through additional dimensions is also the theme of "Two Mayday Selves." As in "Snow," the structural landmark of this poem is the tension between two kinds of reality: the "here" of a beautiful Mayday, of "brilliance" and "buds," and the "there" of the "aloof / tiers of offices, apartments, hotels." The first two stanzas of the poem record the feeling of joy produced by the contemplation of the energy and exuberance of the organic world awakened by spring, and the disappointment caused by the realization that so much of human life must be spent surrounded by the lifeless immobility of the inorganic. The third stanza, however, expresses the recovery from disillusionment in a reassertion of the poet's belief that, through an imaginative "convulsive

gulp," man can see beyond the cement walls of buildings, partake of the beauty of the spring day, and transfigure his dull surroundings by imparting to them something of the marvel of the "first day of green." Through the intermediary of the two Mayday selves Avison articulates one of her most direct calls to man to free himself from a too serious immersion in mundane affairs, and expand the objective span of his life through intense living:

"Old ghoul, leather-tough diaphragm,
listen! -- I am
holding my breath.
The power of the blue and gold breadth
of day is poured out, flooding, all
over all.
Come out. Crawl out of it. Feel
it. You,
too." (D, 11)

At this point, it is interesting to note that in the volume The Dumbfounding, "The Two Selves" and "Two Mayday Selves" are juxtaposed to each other by Avison. This juxtaposition is not without significance. Both thematically and structurally, these poems are related. Both question the possibility of reconciling subjective and objective existence, and use division of voices as an organizational principle. Moreover, the resolution which is not achieved in "The Two Selves," the first poem in the sequence, is realized in "Two Mayday Selves." Indeed, the division of voices which persists throughout the former poem, and which is indicative

of a fractured existence, becomes one inclusive voice in the latter poem, where a new temporal synthesis has been reached.

Margaret Avison's continuing concern with the possibility of mentally recreating the world of experience has been noticed and appreciated by critics. Brewster Ghiseling, for instance, commenting upon the substance of five of her poems -- "Perspectives," "Geometaphysics," "The Party," "Iconoclasts," "Song But Oblique to '47" -- makes the following statement:

The central concern of all the poems in this group by Miss Avison is the order by which men live. Very markedly this is a poetry of ideas. Explicit argument and exposition are prominent in much of it, particularly in passages dealing with the use of certain constructs of our vision and with the means by which new ones are created.¹⁵

The studies by Milton Wilson and Ernest Bedekop can also serve as examples of discussions of the role which vision plays in the process of ransoming time.¹⁶ Yet, there seems to have been a general failure to observe that the particular phrase which Margaret Avison uses, that is, "the optic heart" in "Snow," or, "the de-ciphering heart" in "Words," denotes not only visionary ability, but also emotional involvement. Indeed, it is not the intellect or, "the optic mind" that she sees as being able to operate as a pivot, and dictate individual moments to align themselves not in mere

chronological succession, but in their relation to the pivot itself. It is the combined transcending power of vision and love that man must embrace in his attempt to re-create his life. Vision is not enough for Avison. What she wants from the individual is "the optic heart," the emotional equivalent of vision.

The reason why Margaret Avison considers emotional involvement imperative in the process of re-creating human reality is her awareness of the devastating psychological effect of the alternation of moments full of living content and moments devoid of experiential substance. Not protruding into each other, the vertical moments in "Intra-Political," "The Mirrored Man," or "Natural/Unnatural," for instance, pattern life in an alternating rhythm of withdrawal and return, and indicate that migration through fragments of internal duration can be destructive. In "Intra-Political," the "lone balloonist" who one minute has the courage to plunge away from the "weaving orbits" of chronological time, and to explore the temporal orbits within himself, lays waste a minute later and feels "Zones of ultramarine / clutch at his jugular" (WS, 45). Nature itself which spoke to the individual during his imaginative venture becomes mute, and, stripped back to the "squirm and squander" of everyday affairs, the same human being is reduced to the reality of

"grocery store designs" and "city shelves." Tossed in the confused up and down of disorganized experience, living alternatively moments pregnant with life and moments of experiential sterility, "The Mirrored Man" feels the absurdity of his condition, and succumbs to spiritual fatigue and despair. Similarly, oscillating between hope and fear, between instants of transfiguration and instants when the soul is merely behaving in commercial, social or political ways, the individual in "Natural / Unnatural" alternatively experiences "newness" and "refuse," and ultimately sees his existence deflated to "one / luxuriant deep-breathed zero" (D, 84).

But the temptation of the nihilism explored in poems such as "Natural / Unnatural" or "The Mirrored Man" must be resisted. With this, one comes to the crux of Avison's thinking. During a moment of profound religious revelation like that described in "The Word," Margaret Avison comprehends that through love man can attain a synchronization which allows intense moments to remain autonomous, yet become part of a life-time coordinate. The same synchronization rescues the individual from the spiritual disruption caused by the withdrawal and return of experiential fulness.¹⁷ "The Word" records the imaginary dialogue between the poet and Christ. The first two stanzas

assume the form of extensive metaphysical questions asked by the poet who cannot fully comprehend the divine intrusion and message:

... You mean
 head over heels, for good,
 for ever, ...
 ... you implore
 me to so fall
 in Love, and fall anew in
 ever-new depths of skywashed Love till every
 capillary of your universe
 throbs with your rivering fire? (D, 56)

Learning about the truth comes gradually through the first two stanzas, but knowledge is sudden. The voice of God is a rape, and Margaret Avison becomes pregnant with Christ's word. This is "The Word" which, capturing a reality beyond rational expression, locates and assesses the spark of life. During the instant of impregnation the poet "far fallen in the / ashheaps" of her own "false-making," comprehends that love, with its power to overwhelm and transfigure the moment, is the only conciliatory means of associating temporal and spatial aspects of reality:

The line we drew, you crossed,
 and cross out, wholly forget,
 at the faintest stirring of what
 you know is love (D, 57)

Like Leda who survived the visitation of the Swan in Yeats's poem, Avison hears "The Word" and survives it to

write "The Dumbfounding," the poem which gives its title to her second volume of poetry. "The Dumbfounding" does not open the volume, but directly follows "The Word." As Ernest Redekop notes, the recognition by man of the moment of revelation and love expressed in "The Word" is for Avison "the dumbfounding."¹⁸ Like "The Word," "The Dumbfounding" is a poem of layered insights which celebrates a love that can include and transcend the world. Like "The Word," "The Dumbfounding" moves through stages of doubt about the nature and essence of Christ in order to reach a final moment of held breath and bewilderment. Like Christ, man sounds "dark's uttermost, strangely light-brimming, until / time be full," and he is born and re-born through comprehension.

Filtered through all-absorbing love, the discontinuous becomes continuous, and in "Ps. 19," the direction of time is no longer from past to future, but from isolated moments to authentic duration or sustained experiential ecstasy:¹⁹

Enduring is the word with clean.

The fear once won
of sunward love, it proves -- not boulderstone,
baldness, slowly in fire consuming -- but green
with life; moss, cup-rock-water, cliff riven
for a springing pine;
and thus, trusted to fire, drawn
towards an enduring sun. (D, 24)

Concomitant with the sense of human reconciliation made possible through moments of regenerative triumph, is the abolition of the sense of division between the individual self and the rest of the world. But, as Eliot put it in "East Coker," what man needs is:

Not the intense moment
 Isolated, with no before and after
 But a life time burning in every moment
 And not the life time of one man only
 But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.²⁰

In other words, from the recognition of the discontinuous character of moments of intensity springs the necessity to find a system able to unite and reconcile them, to turn the heterogeneous into the homogeneous. It is with a view to illustrating her unifying and conciliatory system at work that Margaret Avison proceeds in "Searching and Sounding."

As she often does, in "Searching and Sounding" Avison brings together wildly separated times and experiences, which she combines thematically and imaginatively. This poem is long, and slowly makes its way through a landscape of

sandstone, baldness, the place
 of jackals, the sparrow's skull,
 tumbled skeletons of what were
 hills clothed in forest
 and spongy meadows, the place of
 baked stone, dryness, famine,
 of howling among the tombs. (D, 61-62)

Here, as in "Meeting Together of Poles and Latitudes (In Prospect)," the confrontation is between the pragmatic and the imaginative, and the moment of recognition is the moment of realizing that which is shared and loved. Love is the new music which Avison hears in Christ's message and which she accepts as her own philosophy. The last stanza of "Searching and Sounding" suggests that the wasteland and division without and within the speaker can be redeemed through moments of understanding of the deep relation between inside cadences and outside occurrences, when the individual shares in the exuberance of the natural world, and melts in general communion with the universe:

Reaching
 with light that is perfect, needed no
 kernels to swell nor juices to syrop nor
 no further making -- all newness --
all being
 that the remotest fishrib,
 the hairiest pink-thing there
 might as one fragment
 make towards the fulness (P, 62)

It may seem that to achieve Margaret Avison's "fulness" is to surrender the uniqueness of one's ego to a truth outside the ego. Thus, a contradiction arises as to the nature of such intense moments, which seem to both create and annihilate the self. This contradiction is only apparent, however, for absolute sufficiency does not destroy identity. Margaret Avison's "all-swallowing moment" is a

sudden experience at once of self recognition and of comprehension. The all-swallowing moments, therefore, are instants within the breadth of which both the self and the reality beyond the instantaneous are discovered. Like the notes of a piece of music, they are perceived both individually and as orchestrated. The four line invocation that ends the poem "Searching and Sounding" maintains the opposition between chronological and psychological time, but it also contains the possible birth of a shining, subjective world through faith and love:

GATHER my fragments towards
the radium, the
all-swallowing moment
once more. (D, 62)

In "Five Breaks," however, Avisca moves away from private, mystic experience into a powerful universal vision that can be shared. To the inadequacy of chronological time she does not oppose a believer's time, but a kind of time which may be called emotional, and which is equally accessible to the believer and the non-believer. "Five Breaks" consists of five stanzas each representing a possible state of being. The poem begins with a description of an innocence usually associated with childhood, when the individual is totally absorbed in the present moment, and takes straightforward delight in life. From the statement,

"Joy it is / to ride the day," the poem moves to an adult world of "barren lands" and "famine," when the flesh, caught in chronological time, is no longer regarded as a vehicle for "dancing and humming," but as fruit for worms. After the descent into the adult world of imprisonment in time and death, the poem climbs towards a new experiential possibility which consists of establishing love as the unique perspective from which life should be considered. With "Valentine cards" bearing upon the whole ensemble of facts which constitute universal existence, human life acquires a higher form of innocence, a mature innocence of consistency and constancy. The climax of the poem is reached with the assertion of the availability of a subjective reality where temporality is no longer so threatening and where, despite mortality, grief and disappointment, the adult can reveal his authenticity in love. "Cogito," Avison seems to say, may mean that one exists; "I love" is the proof that one really lives:

Valentine cards

In the February lace of daylight
 through window and doorway glass:
 store; children; love; a lakeblue sudsbright
 eleven o'clock outdoors, seen too
 by the scorched eyes of grief,
 the graveled eyes of
 utter disappointment, these
 zero in the
 arrowing sunburst, cone-tip, the
 transfixing life. (D, 55)

But Avison's inner time, both pre- and post-revelation, is not only visionary and emotional. It is also sensuous. Indeed, this poet is one of the most sensuous poets that Canada has produced so far, and the transfiguring glory of her "all-swallowing moments," lies heavily in their sensory quality. Sensations assault the poet, and invite her to take permanent inventory of the universe around her. And, as A. J. M. Smith puts it, she responds "by pressing all senses into service."²¹ Bare knees and summer clouds are smelled in "Prelude," and in "Twilight," light itself is perfumed if man is ready to breathe in. In "The World Still Needs," music reveals the ultimate to the ear which is ready to receive, while in "Thaw," touch and smell are the means of resurrecting the past:

Move your tongue along a slat
of a raspberry box from last year's crate.
Smell a saucantilt of water
on the coal-ash in your grate. (D, 87)

"We hear her called a very intellectual poet," Milton Wilson comments, "but she begins (and often ends) with the perceiving eye."²² Indeed, in "Branches," Margaret Avison notices that the "diseased elms are lashing / the hollowing vaults of the air," and in "Ps.19," she finds glory in

both the mists smoking from pure
stone-cold lake-still sun-sweetened places
and the dank mist that rises
from the long-unsunned, sour

pools, hid even from the storm's sluices. (D, 24)

Similarly, in "Black-White Under Green: May 18th, 1965," Avison overtly recognizes the power that colour and form have in her life:

This day of the leafing-out
 speaks with blue power --
 among the buttery grassblades
 white, tiny-spraying spokes on the end of a weed-stem
 and in the formal beds, tulips. (D, 14)

The range of sensory perception presented in Avison's verse includes taste too. Indeed, it is from the gastronomic imagery used by the poet that the immediacy of the experience in part six of "Dispersed Titles" is derived. Margaret Avison considers life as a huge dining table, an immense "irridescent shore" to which the sea of experience permanently offers the infinite richness of its waters. But on the sandy beach, the poet sees "suppers" who can smell and hear but are sightless. Unable to see, the "suppers" are unable to behold the copiousness of the feast and, therefore, their enjoyment of it is only partial. The treatment of the imagination as "food" for human life is also encountered in "Intra-Political," a poem where one also finds one of Avison's most open invitations to share her hunger for this special nourishment, and, through an emotional and visionary resurrection, re-create time by creating new rituals, sit,

eat, and feel alive:

Form has its flow,
a Heraclitus-river with no riverbank
we can play poise on now.

(George Herbert -- and he makes it plain --
Guest at this same transfiguring board
Did sit and eat.) (WS, 47)

But nowhere is Avison's Gargantuan appetite for life more evident than in the manner in which she describes the moment of dawn in the poem "Far Off From University." The first three stanzas of the poem represent as many imagistic vignettes: a greasy spoon, a derelict caboose and railway yards. Having bombarded the senses of the reader with experience, the poet also presents a possible way of imagining the stimuli: an integrated way of seeing an awakening city as a child suckling the world. The poem culminates in a description of an intensely subjective moment existing against the background of the sun rising, when Avison's hunger for life reaches gigantic proportions:

... After the sour
senility of night, suddenly,
a more than animal joy, a sanity
of holy appetite awoke;
breast bared for its blind suckling
a more than mother leaned, drew breath, tendering.
Cement and weeds, sky, all-night diner, flesh,
gathered as being; fumbling, fed. (WS, 76)

In "An Analysis of Creativity in Terms of Time," D.B.Kuspith notes that "an artist need not know philosophy, need not be religious, need not have an art which is a peephole giving one a quick, happy glance at eternity. He need only be concrete -- consequential and forceful -- and learn what it is to live one lifetime."²³ Like Grove and Aquin, Margaret Avison has certainly learned this. For her, to live a life is both a sensory and a visionary act which, through love, imposes an enduring quality upon fluctuation. Understanding that a human life is ultimately the manner in which man himself chooses to live, Margaret Avison sets each individual the task of creating living value. To win from space an "unchill, habitable interior" (WS, 29) is not enough for human life. Man's duty to himself is to ride on the pulse of time, and, by constant sensory, visionary and emotional effort, re-organize its units, and create his own rhythms and durations. If man's spiritual resurrection effaces the difference between individual, chronological moments, human life stops being a mere pageant of days, months or hours, and becomes "a large breathed Day" (WS, 43). And, if eternity is understood as timelessness, those able to attain experiential intensity partake of the eternal. Though in Avison's poems, as in Grove's and Aquin's novels, temporality weighs the individual down, objective time no longer triumphs. For Avison, as for the two other Canadian

writers discussed so far, a significant life is the supreme affirmation of the human spirit.

NOTES: CHAPTER IV

¹ An initial form of this study appeared in English Studies in Canada, 3 (Fall 1976), pp. 339-44.

² Consider, for instance, L. M. Jones, "A Core of Brilliance: Margaret Avison's Achievement," Canadian Literature, 38 (Autumn 1968), pp. 50-57.

Also, M. Beaty, "Poetry 1950-1960," Chapter 40 of Literary History of Canada, ed. C. F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 785-817.

³ E. Redekop, Margaret Avison (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970).

Also see M. Wilson, "The Poetry of Margaret Avison," Canadian Literature, 2 (Autumn 1959), pp. 47-58.

⁴ D. Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961), p. 240.

⁵ M. Avison, The Dumbfounding (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 18.

After this footnote reference, all subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text, with the title of the volume abbreviated to D.

⁶ M. Avison, Winter Sun (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 48.

After this footnote reference, all subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text, with the title of the volume abbreviated to WS.

⁷ A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), p. 7.

⁸ E. Redekop, op. cit., p. 90.

⁹ M. Avison, "April 17-18 (Apollo XIII)," E. Redekop, op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁰ J. Lynen, "Forms of Time in Modern Poetry," Queen's Quarterly, 82 (Autumn 1975), p. 357.

¹¹ J. Lynen, The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 3.

¹² J. R. Colombo, "Avison and Wevill," (review article) Canadian Literature, 34 (Autumn 1967), p. 73.

¹³ G. Poulet, Le Point de départ (Paris: Flon, 1964), p. 7. My translation.

¹⁴ Discussing the importance of the same moment, N. Endicott goes so far as to claim that Margaret Avison's philosophy of life, "when she expresses it directly, as in a number of poems, is for the most part an elaboration of the position expressed with concentration in the first lines of 'Snow.'" See N. Endicott, "Recent Verse," Canadian Literature, 4 (Autumn 1960), p. 61.

¹⁵ B. Ghiseling, "The Architecture of Vision," Poetry, 70 (Spring 1947), p. 324.

¹⁶ M. Wilson, art. cit., pp. 47-58. See also E. Redekop, op. cit., pp. 53-70.

¹⁷ For an extensive discussion of the nature of the religious experience undergone by Margaret Avison, see D. Doerksen, "Search and Discovery: Margaret Avison's Poetry," Canadian Literature, 60 (Spring 1974), pp. 7-20.

¹⁸ E. Redekop, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁹ E. Redekop came very close to realizing this important dimension of Avison's poetry when he spoke of "the spiritual imagination of the soul" (op. cit., p. 3). Unfortunately, he did not pursue this idea; hence, his notice, adequate as it is, remains both unexplained and undeveloped.

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," The Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943), p. 17.

²¹ A. J. M. Smith, "Critical Improvisations on Margaret Avison's Winter Sun," Tamarack Review, 18 (Winter 1961), p. 82.

²² M. Wilson, art. cit., p. 47.

²³ D. E. Kuspith, "An Analysis of Creativity in Terms of Time," University of Windsor Review, 5 (Fall 1969), p. 60.

V. THE PRIVILEGE OF FINDING AN OPENING IN THE PAST:

ALFRED PURDY AND THE TREE OF EXPERIENCE¹

Al Purdy has been writing and publishing for more than twenty years. Not surprisingly, therefore, his work exhibits a wide range of thematic directions from the value of childhood innocence and the agony of the process of creation to native rights in Canada and the realities behind the Iron Curtain. While a theme such as sex, for instance, may be heavily present in the volume Sex and Death, it may be less obvious in the volume The Cariboo Horses. There are, however, a number of central concerns which persist throughout Purdy's canon. One such theme is man's relationship to time. Indeed, as this chapter will reveal, from Emu, Remember! to In Search of Owen Rcblyn or Sundance at Dusk, Purdy's preoccupation with the fourth dimension of human life is constant and continuous; a thread running through a succession of bead-like individual poems which gives them the linking element that will eventually form a necklace.

This chapter will also attempt to suggest that for Purdy, as for Avison, moments of self-awareness represent at

once burdens that put his spirit in peril, and points of departure towards modes of existence more complex than the merely biological one. In this context, for Purdy, as for Avison, the tree, with its roots penetrating deeply into the soil and with its branches expanding towards the sky, becomes the most appropriate symbol of both the poet's consciousness of human reality, and of the poet's attempt to put himself in harmony with the patterns he discerns in the universe.

The reader of this chapter will remember that one of the most famous moments in contemporary literature is that in Sartre's La Nausée, when Antoine Roquentin contemplates a tree in the public gardens of a small French town. The experience the young historian undergoes at the sight of the dark mass of roots brutally plunging through the ground is the celebrated existentialist sickness -- the revulsion and horror caused by the realization that under the veneer of individual manifestations, there is only one ultimate reality: matter, infinite, viscous matter, man himself being not the center of any divine creation, but merely another form of physical substance.²

There is in Purdy's poetry an equally interesting moment which is given account by the poet in the poem "Trees at the Arctic Circle." The poet describes himself on Baffin

Island looking at some dwarf Arctic trees and noticing, with initial contempt, their desperate struggle to survive for a short time in a hostile environment. Yet, suddenly aware that their roots "must touch permafrost / ice that remains ice forever," that they "use death to remain alive," the poet is impressed by "the dignity of any living thing," no matter how humble a form of life it represents:

I see that I've been carried away
 in my scorn of the dwarf trees
 most foolish in my judgements
 To take away the dignity
 of any living thing
 even tho it cannot understand
 the scornful words.³

Both in Sartre's account of Roquetin's experience in the small French town and in Purdy's account of his own experience on Ruffin island, the reader is presented with moments of perfect identification of thought and physical existence, moments which jolt the individual and oblige him to reconsider previously formed patterns of perception and behaviour. Ambivalent in nature, such acts of consciousness can maintain the human being with the knowledge of his impermanence and insignificance, or, as the analysis of Purdy's poetry will emphasize, they can become the basis for man's transcendence of his earthly life, without ceasing simultaneously to embrace it.

In "Roblin's Mills (2)," for instance, Al Purdy refers to "lost children of the time" -- a descriptive phrase which is fundamental to his view of the human condition. This poem functions on two levels. The most obvious one presents the reconstruction of a visit to the place where Roblin's Mills used to be located, and of the feelings aroused in the visitor by this event. To this primary level, there corresponds a more profound one, that of a journey back into childhood. Roblin's Mills no longer exist. Time has wrought its destruction of the abandoned building, and eventually even the stones of the ruins have been carried away. Of this important landmark of the poet's young days, nothing remains but a pond, the sole witness of a mode of life that has come to an end:

The mill space is empty
 even stones are gone

 no outline remains
 no shadow on the soft air
 no bent place in the heat glimmer. (WGW, 46)

The noisy world of highways, of cars and exhaust pipes which opens the poem is in sharp contrast with the silence which envelops the poet walking around Roblin's pond. It is during this interval of quietness that, triggered by the sight of the pond, the process of re-living childhood through recollection begins. Standing in the empty space by the

pool, the visitor's "inner eye" sees and hears not only people and actions associated with the mill no longer existent, but also:

all things laid aside
discarded
forgotten. (WGW, 47)

The reconstructive power of the human imagination is thus recognized but the poem remains steeped in the knowledge that man's life is not only insignificant within the general framework of existence, but also subject to crucial, temporal limitations. Given an objective temporal index, man's existence has both a single direction, and is tragically short, Purdy notes in "Further Deponent Saith Not." One need only breathe or sigh, and everything changes from "is" to "was," taking man closer and closer to his final destination. When that moment comes, somebody knocks on the door of man's life, and, though man would like to answer, "I am not at home / I am not at home," he has to step out and meet the caller.

Desmond Pacey was one of the first critics to notice that Purdy masters not only the modern idiom, but also embraces the modern point of view on many philosophical issues.* As in the work of other contemporary poets, in Purdy's poetry, God is no longer a reassuring presence at the

chronological limit of man's life. Be it thirty five or seventy years long, the span of life seems to Purdy only a brief prelude to the infinity of death and in poems such as "Transient" or "Boundaries" the contemplation of man's transitoriness elicits an honest confession of fear. Like any other animal, man is trapped, Purdy contends in "Transient." Man is trapped not only in existence, since he is not able to decide his own birth, but, once born, man is also trapped within a single frame of motion: a passage from childhood, when he rides "naked with the summer in his mouth," to old age when he waits in stupefaction for life "to jerk to a halt."

The time of "Transient" is the depression of the 1930s and its central image, "riding boxcars" from Winnipeg towards Eastern Canada is at once the action of a hungry man in search of economic improvement, and a symbol of the unidirectional progress of human life. As trains pass through stations and continue towards a determined destination, so man passes through different stages of development in his journey towards death. Boyhood follows childhood, the first sexual encounter follows adolescence. The culminating point in man's physical development is the attainment of maturity, which, in its turn, is accompanied by the certainty and stability of the ego:

After a while there is no arrival and
 no departure possible any more
 you are where you were always going
 and the shape of home is under your fingernails
 the borders of yourself grown into certainty. (CH, 108)

Physical maturity, however, is followed by the first step towards physical decline. Having achieved full growth, whether settled or on the go, man actually "stands growing older." Nevertheless, in "Transient," physical deterioration is partially redeemed, for, coincidental with it there is an enhancement of man's humanity. Able to extricate himself partially from the self-centredness which characterizes the years of development, man gains in understanding the common human condition. Concomitantly, he is able to feel compassion for his fellow man. The question "Got a smoke?" asked in the second stanza and repeated at the end of the poem, finally elicits sympathetic action:

and the guy behind you says then
 "Got a smoke?"
 You give him one and ...

 You stand there growing older. (CH, 108)

But not only time is against man. In Purdy's poems, space is as much an enemy to the individual as it is in Grove's novels. The Canadian landscape as revealed in "My Grandfather's Country," "The Turning Point," or "The Country North of Belleville" is a hostile environment which, despite

its great beauty adds to the sadness of an existence dependent on chronological duration. "The Country North of Belleville" is a long poem set in the bush and scrub land around Weslemkocm Lake, in the townships of Cashel, Wallaston and Dungannon. This beautiful land is openly labelled by Purdy as "the country of our defeat" for its aridity reduces the lives of its farmers to a sequence of "back breaking days / in the sun and the rain" (SP, 118). The idea that the farmers in this region must be engaged in an unremitting struggle with the land in order to ensure a minimum subsistence is emphasized by the image of the farmer as a Sisyphus rolling a big stone up the hill only to see it roll back again. Indeed, not only are the crops poor, but even after years of hard tilling the farms, like ancient cities sinking slowly in the sea, are gradually swallowed up by the surrounding forest:

Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
 a pile of moss-covered stones
 gathered for some ghost purpose
 has lost meaning under the meaningless sky
 --they are like cities under water
 and the undulating green waves of time
 are laid on them--. (CH, 75)

Nevertheless, this beautiful land gives more to the life of its inhabitants than a small measure of economic stability. Assimilated in man's imagination to the point

where "its convolutions run parallel with his own brain," the land around Weslewkoom Lake becomes the dominant element of the individual's inner universe. As such, the arid hills on which the economic life of the farmers is so intensely dependent, also supply them with a sense of beauty and of belonging vital to the human being:

This is the country of our defeat
 and yet
 during the fall plowing a man
 might stop and stand in a brown valley of the furrows
 and shade his eyes to watch for the same
 red patch mixed with gold
 that appears on the same
 spot in the hills
 year after year
 and grow old. (CH, 75)

The adverse effects of time combined with the inhospitability of the land, however, weaken the spiritual relationship between man and the country north of Belleville. The old people feel most of their illusions gradually destroyed and the young ones leave as soon as the opportunity arises. While reading this poem by Purdy one cannot help but recognize the appropriateness of Lionel Stevenson's comment that very often in Canadian poetry people inhabiting Canada "seem to be precariously perched on a monster."⁵ And, precariously perched they are, because the country north of Belleville is not simply a monster, but a chameleon-like monster, illustrating the ancient observation that one can

never step twice in the same river. Those who want to return home to the townships of Cashel, Wallaston and Dungannon are perplexed by the fact that neither home nor themselves are the same. Memory proves deceptive when confronted with the reality in permanent change, and going back becomes literally impossible. The realization that the identity of persons and objects is only the product of memory shatters man's sense of identity and "The Country North of Belleville" ends on the sad note that continuous displacement of the self seems to be a correlative of the condition of the individual. One only thinks that one encounters the people and the places one has long known. In fact, one "must enquire the way / of strangers."

In an extensive commentary on the general, mental and spiritual climate of our time, J. G. Brennan endorses Camus's observation that, for modern man there is "only one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."⁶ Brennan's remarks on this major preoccupation of contemporary writers are applicable to Purdy, who experiences the fluidity of the world in a negative way, and who attempts to deal directly with the problem of death in his cemetery poems. Whether he goes to Peru, Turkey or Greece, whether he spends time in

Prince Edward Island or in the Arctic, Purdy visits graveyards and in "Evergreen Cemetery," "Kalamankis Cemetery," or "Eskimo Graveyard" he records not only what he sees, but also what his mind is considering while he is looking.

Outstanding in the graveyard group is "Evergreen Cemetery," a poem which makes explicit Purdy's view of the value of human existence on a cosmic scale. "Evergreen Cemetery" reveals the poet visiting his mother's grave, and pondering the meaning and significance of individual life "as earth shapes and reshapes itself / again and again" (PAA, 104). The first section, built around the opposition between the transience of life and the eternity of death, protests against human fate and ends on a note of profound despair. If being human means nothing else but being a protein formula able by accident to contemplate its own destiny and watch the deflation of its aspirations, then one is better off not alive and thereby spared the pain of thinking:

And I get a grim glee from all the high-sounding
old aspirations and clichés ending in damp ground,
glee close to grief maybe, a hangman's gladness:
if that's being human it's best done with. (PAA, 104)

The second section of the poem marks the recovery

from nihilistic despair. The poet realizes that the human body is not only a "rotting mausoleum," but also the source of profound delight in life. The possibility of experiencing through one's senses the beauty of nature or the beauty of other human beings is considered by the poet a rare privilege and a significant reason for wanting to live:

I have seen this same graveyard sunlight
at a beach mottled on a girl's flesh,
and groped for it under a blanket:
I've seen these trees spilling down mountains
that I trudged up sweating,
and loved for their banner's brightness. (PAA, 105)

Armed with the realization that even though a transient form, man's body possesses qualities that can redeem its transience, Purdy concludes that a discussion of the human condition is "too complicated to sum up, / in telling phrase or easy pessimism." He also hurries to leave the cemetery in affirmation of the value of human life. In this context, the ambiguous title and first two lines of the poem acquire a new meaning. Purdy is not merely shocking his reader by associating the colour green with the idea of death. He uses "evergreen" as synonymous with "permanent" and affirms that, if death is obviously permanent, so is life in the final analysis: "I guess it is evergreen... / and what's sure if green isn't?" (PAA, 104)

The idea that in spite of the agony it involves human

life is a positive phenomenon is also expressed in "Dark Landscape." This is one of the most representative of Purdy's poems, for, not only is it a work of resolved consciousness, but also one that contains in a most explicit form -- human life as a "crossing of many fields" -- the metaphysical basis for the ultimate value of human life: the distinction between time in nature and time in human experience. Like "My Grandfather's Country" or "Country North of Belleville," "Dark Landscape" begins as a meditation on the Canadian environment. This is a "dark landscape," where the hostility of the natural environment, symbolized here by huge black flies, is augmented by man's conscious, or unconscious cruelty towards his fellows, symbolized by the mushroom-shaped clouds of nuclear explosions:

and flies are something terrible
and mushroom clouds likewise
and there's them that die of livin'
and there's them that joy in dyin'
and there's agory and screamin. (WGW, 96)

Against this hostile background, the living of a life is similar to the crossing of a field, a short walk between a fossil past and an uncertain future:

in middle age the body itself
slows to contemplate nothingness
seasonal metrics stagger and jerk to a halt
mandolins in grass roots end
winter is coming
I sit stupefied
waiting.... (WGW, 95)

The next few lines of the poem introduce the contention that, if any life is "to cross a field," then, human life is "to cross many fields," for, the chronological time is only partially the time of the human being. Time fully experienced can break the pattern of day and night by forging the sun and the moon together, can stop the rigorous course of years by arresting the planets in their tracks, thus transforming the scientifically valid into the psychologically false:

and all I have is laughter
and the spring came on forever
the spring comes on forever. (WGW, 96)

Even though the omnipotence of chronological time wins over the dream of a single life, and even though the span of a man's life represents an instant between man and nothingness, human existence finds one of its meanings in the very act of enjoying life. This is why in the last section of "Dark Landscape," Purdy answers the reproach "You don't take livin' serious" with an emphatic "Yes I do yes I do."

Aware that chronological time is only partially the time of the human being, in poems such as "The Time of your Life," "House Guest," "Night Summer," "Inside the Mill," or "Late Rising at Foblin Lake," Purdy explores the complex

world of the mind. What he discovers is that the concomitant existence of objective and subjective modes of perception can make each present moment more meaningful. In nature, Purdy says in "My '48 Pontiac" or "Old Alex," processes are irreversible, and the relationship of cause and effect cannot be violated. The '48 Pontiac, reconditioned and with the odometer turned back, is still the '48 Pontiac, and old Alex, prettied with cosmetics, is still dead. In experience, however, one may live several lives at the same time: one by clocks and calendars, and numberless others independent of them. "All hours the day begins" is the opening line of "Late Rising at Roblin Lake" which proclaims the independence of time defined psychologically from time defined chronologically. For the nude man at the window who feels imprisoned by objective time and "earthbound / by heart tick and clock beat," time is ransomed as soon as he achieves the essential step of disengaging himself from the restrictive matrix of objective reality. Objectively, the time in the poem is afternoon; subjectively, it is early morning, for the individual truly wakes up not when he gets out of bed, but when he sees the tall blue heron on the shore of the lake, and becomes aware of the beauty and the richness of the life around him:

in noon fog lit
with his own slow self-strangeness
stood a tall blue heron

and the day began with his. (CH, 101)

"Subject/Object" also revolves upon the idea that the only way out of time's cage is to see the wonder of its subjective potential, and in "House Guest," even though the imagination can not ultimately defeat time, it expands the richness of life by imposing on each "now" an experiential depth denied to merely sensory perception. The latter poem is a record of a period of two winter months spent by the poet and a friend in a farm house, but during this short span of chronological time, the two friends cover imaginatively man's whole history from the Peking Man and the Jews in the Negev to Roman Law and bedbugs in Montreal. Moreover, Purdy notes that during one morning, one may mentally encompass man's entire journey from snarling ape to Homo Sapiens; indeed, that a brief span of time is enough for the mind to link events separated by millennia, and imaginatively live the whole history of man:

We quarrelled over how dour I was in early morning
and how cheerful he was for counterpoint
and I argued that a million years of evolution
from snarling apeman have to be traversed before noon.
(SP, 81)

"Dream of Havana" also substantiates the idea that

human experience gives a different expression to the concept of measurement, order and direction in the system of time in nature. This poem gives artistic form to the impressions garnered by Purdy during a trip to Cuba, and concentrates on the differences between Cuban life and that on the North American continent. Nothing escapes his attentive eye and ear, from the hot, thick air of the tropical country to the presence of Chinese anti-aircraft guns aimed at the sky, and of the American warships outside Cuban territorial waters. Tanks patrol the roads of the country and the probability of assassination plots hovers over the entire island. The sum total of these objective facts creates a profoundly antagonistic reaction in the poet who has come to Cuba prompted by a dream of true democracy and socialism:

What world is this, I've come to?
I don't believe it
not for a moment. (SP, 55)

The final moment of the poem reveals Purdy in a Cuban night-club sipping white rum. With his spirit bruised by Cuban political realities, the poet attempts to find solace by imaginatively re-living the beautiful early years of his life in Canada:

and my thoughts exit
sideways and backward
to childhood and a lost dog
tantrums and broken toys
trouble enough

and mothers in long ago doorways
calling children home at night
for bed-time stories. (WGW, 24)

If in "Dream of Havana," the poet engrossed in childhood memories is oblivious of the actual passage of time, so is he in "Night Summer" where fragmented time is united through music, and an instant extends into a lifetime and beyond. This poem which attempts to recreate the impact that music may have on the individual's experience of time begins by distinguishing three kinds of music. First, there is the music which derives its significance and influence from its association with certain words, and which loses its effect upon the removal of these words. Then, there is the music which even in the absence of supportive language retains a measure of effectiveness even though diminished. Finally, there is that supreme combination of sounds which form "a music / that is complete forgiveness." This kind of music needs no words to reveal its meaning because the sounds themselves form a structure which acts as a powerful stimulus to the individual imagination, and, hence, to the individual perception of time. Like the contact with any other form of accomplished art, listening to this kind of music can become a process of self-recognition and self-discovery. The experience of this "self-music," can reach within a limited span of chronological time an experiential intensity beyond

anything that rational consciousness is able to supply. Thus, the poet who in "Further Deponent Saith Not," "Collecting the Square Root of Minus One," or "My Grandfather's Country" suffered from time-sickness and protested the fate of man, in "Night Summer" fully recovers from his illness, first by discovering, then by relying on the significance that time can reveal once the imagination finds its place in it, and makes the man listening to music "ache" with life:

Listen to it again and all is different,
 as if the listener added one of his selves
 before, and the self-music takes the listener
 to a mountain peak where a man sits writing --
 not music, not words, nothing
 that can be taken away,
 touched, handled, lifted, fingered, tasted,
 not to be known unless the lost self
 aches (SD, 88)

Subjectively, therefore, man's life as revealed in "Late Rising at Roblin Lake," "Dream of Havana," or "Night Summer" is practically limitless. With the realization that part of the mental equipment of man is the ability to superimpose two different temporal movements, poems such as "Joint Account," "Poblin's Mills (1)" or "News Reports at Ameliasburg," recognize the dignity of being a conscious individual. Unable to choose his own birth, and aware of the ultimate absurdity of all existence, man is able to find an

inner principle to sustain his interest and involvement in life. He derives the strength necessary to live from the acceptance of the fact that as an individual he possesses neither permanence, nor stability, but, as part of the human continuum he is timeless. "Joint Account" is a three-stanza meditation whose structural units correspond to as many statements of identity. The poem opens with an unequivocal admission both of the poet's Canadian nationality and of his imaginative and spiritual adherence to, and conditioning by the country in which he lives:

my backyard is the Rocky Mountain trunk

 I take deed and title to ancient badlands
 of Alberta around Red Deer:

 Dead Peothucks of Newfoundland track down my blood;
 Dorsets on the whale-coloured Beaufort Sea
 carve my brain (LBB, 66)

The Canadian poet recognizes himself also as a North American. In the body of a beloved woman he sees "the long body of the land," and in the words thought, but not articulated between them, he hears the language of the whole continent. In the third stanza, Purdy's identity becomes even more inclusive in scope, for the Canadian, the North American is above all a man, a particle in the continual flow of humanity. As such, individual life is the manifestation

of the human principle, whether below or above the surface of the earth, whether manifested or manifesting. The human being is born into individual identity, as a Canadian and as a North American. He dies, but the race of man continues; he ceases to exist, but mankind does not. The poet admits feeling "all the men, / chanting hymns, / tunnel towards me underground." Purdy thus exhibits what Eliot called a profound historical sense, "the perception not only of the pastness of the past but also of its presence."⁷ Purdy explicitly acknowledges that the structure of his imagination is the product of the spiritual development of the race of man throughout the ages. Grounded in the recognition of individual identity as inclusive in scope, the poem achieves a conceptual integration of mankind as a spiritual and imaginative "joint account," to which Purdy's country of origin makes a contribution: "The myth includes Canada / inside the brain's small country." (LBB, 66)

The idea that, though separate individuals, men have in common both an identity of person and of nature, also lies behind "Poblin's Mills (1)" where the poet is seen sifting through the remains of old farms and homesteads. But the objects of Purdy's artistic recreation are not the shapes that he notices above the ground. Rather, they are the forms which he mentally sees beneath a thin layer of soil. These

forms are the Marthas and Tabithas, the Hiram and Josephs who once inhabited the village around Foblin's flour mills, and who continue to live through their descendants, the Marthas and Tabithas, the Hiram and Josephs of today:

Those old ones
 you can hear them on a rural party line
 sometimes

 a lump in your throat
 an adam's apple half
 a mile down the road
 permits their voices
 to join living voices
 and float by
 on the party line sometimes. (CH, 71)

Purdy does not conceive of his ancestors as part of an existence already accomplished and deprived of significance. On the contrary, he believes that predecessors long gone back to earth come to life again in present day people, that, like trees, they sprout through their descendants, not in flesh, but in spirit. From community of spirit, Purdy proceeds to create human significance: the Marthas, Tabithas, Josephs and Hiram who inhabit the country today are "stemmed in the valley graveyard" near Roblin's mills. Individual genealogy is not read, but lived. Descendants partake of their ancestors' weakness but they also share in their strength. What they ultimately have in common is "humanity." It is precisely due to this common,

continuous denominator that Purdy sees the living Marthas, Tabithas, Josephs and Hiramns not as "present" but as "incessant" and leaves the poem open-ended. Indeed, in an interview granted to Gary Geddes, Purdy himself declared the open-endedness of some of his poems as well as the use of the continuous rather than the time-point form of verbs to be "both a device and a philosophy." Semantically, both open-ended sentences and verbs in the continuous form indicate continuity. As grammatical structures, therefore, they serve Purdy's belief in the existence of a universal continuity which includes all human beings.

At this point it should be noted that, without denying the significance of the chain of generations, it is spiritual continuity, not genetic continuity that is the ultimate focus of Purdy's attention. In "News Reports at Ameliasburg," the poet distinguishes in his personality not only the voice of his direct ancestors, but a certain quality representing the enduringly human superimposed upon continuous individual change, and the poem does not show the connection between Purdy and his kinsmen, but between personal and racial history:

At night in our own bodies comes a small dark whisper
 relayed here from the beginning of human time
 where ancient hunters confer with stones and tree-spirits
 their campfires throwing enormous shadows on the forest
 and witch-doctors dance in our blood forever. (SP, 94)

behind small, chronological particulars. "The Cariboo Horses," for instance, evolves on two temporal planes. While Purdy describes cowboys riding horses into 100 Mile House, he actually dramatizes the coming into existence of a particle of timeless history: man's relationship with the animal world. "The Cariboo Horses" develops as a comparison between the history-making horses of the so-called heroic ages and the ordinary ones used by present day cowboys. Purdy ironically notes that apart from belonging to the same animal species, the common denominators between these two groups are rather obscure, for the cowboys' horses are humble,

lost relatives of these
 whose hooves are thunder
 the ghosts of horses battering thru the wind
 whose names were the wind's common usage
 whose life was the sun's. (CH, 8)

Yet, different as they are from each other, the Kiangs and the Egyptian builders, the Quaggas and the Asian nomads, the Cariboo horses and the Canadian cowboys are only particulars illustrating the enduring relationship between man and animal, between rider and his horse. Several times in the poem, phrases such as "only horses" or "only horse and rider" emphasize the ultimate connection and continuity between man and animal:

On the high prairie
 are only horse and rider
 wind in dry grass

clipping in silence under the toy mountains
dropping sometimes and
lost in the dry grass
golden oranges of dung. (CH, 7)

Analogously, while walking through the "Ruins of an Indian Village," or while contemplating "The Archeology of Snow" in Montreal, Purdy does not merely converse mentally with a group of people but, as George Powering noted, he "actually encounters the entire race of man."⁹ And, in "The Runners," the discovery of the new land by the two Gaelic runners, brother and sister, is a significant situation enduring beyond place and time, though expressed through the details of individual characteristics of a definite place and time. "The Runners" is the poetic treatment of a fragment from Erick the Red's Saga, which Purdy quotes as an epigraph. The time of this episode is the reign of King Olaf Tryggvason and the place is Greenland. Determined to proclaim Christianity to Greenland, Olaf sends the two slave runners, Haiki and Haekia, to investigate the nature of the new country. In spite of home-sickness and fear of the new land, the two slaves decide not to return to their masters. They prefer hard, dangerous freedom to soft enslavement. The words of the woman, "I am afraid of this dark land," are equally applicable in a geographical or psychological context. A frightening, dark land may signify a new

continent, country or town, but also a new relationship upon which a man and a woman embark. The moment when Haekia invites her brother to take her hand and run together away from the Norsemen marks at once the beginning of a new kind of love between the two slaves and an assertion of the dignity of the individual's struggle for personal freedom. Here, as elsewhere in Purdy's work, the open-ending of the poem indicates the poet's belief in the continuing character of the experience described in the poem:

Brother, take my hand in your hand
 this part of ourselves between us
 while we run together,
 over the stones of the sea coast
 this much of ourselves is our own:
 while rain cries out against us,
 and darkness swallows the evening,
 and morning moves into stillness,
 and mist climbs to our throats,
 while we are running,
 while we are running --

Sister -- .

(WGW, 111)

As the objective realm of poems such as "The Cariboo Horses," "The Runners," "Lament for the Dorsets," or "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'" stretches towards that remoteness which is both far away in space and long past in time, details cease to be important and the subjective swallows the objective. Symbolically therefore, this mythical time can be reached not by a horizontal, recollective movement backwards

in time, but by imaginatively plunging vertically below the surface of the present. At the subjective temporal level where the dead Marthas and Josephs of Roblin's Mills meet and mingle with the Mycaenian warriors and the Gaelic slaves, the ultimate unity of human experience reveals itself. The reader is thus taken away from an objective present into an atemporal comparison of human experience wherein he reaches one of the central themes of Purdy's creation, "the sense of the mystery of time by which things happen and are lost, happen and endure."¹⁰ Purdy descends subjectively to the level of mythical roots, achieves release from a solely physical existence, and emerges better equipped spiritually and imaginatively into the ever-distending scope of experience. The psychological time Purdy creates in the cycle of poems In Search of Owen Roblin, for instance, is a vertical axis representing the subjective, dynamic relation between events which have happened, are happening and will happen. It is this inner vertical axis, this transcendental unification of experience felt by the human being in search of Owen Roblin, which make past and future appear intensely real and quivering with present potency.

At first sight, this unpaginated volume seems to be the lyrical exploration of an area; the place is Central Ontario and is celebrated. Upon closer analysis, however,

the celebration of the local proves to be not an end in itself, but Purdy's means of bringing to the attention of his readers both the universal and the timeless in each individual and, hence, in himself:

For it wasn't only Owen Roblin I was looking for
 but myself thru him always myself
 I am the sum total of all I know
 all I have experienced and loved

 I don't mean solipsistic navel-watching either
 but John Donne's "I am a piece of the main"
 meaning a part of everything larger.

 a fly speck in history
 dust mote cruising the galaxies. (OF)

In Search of Owen Roblin opens with the image of the poet looking at a family album. After a short inventory of direct ancestors, the attention of the reader is directed to the larger landscape of a village, for, as the name of the volume indicates, Purdy is not so much in search of his grandfather or any of his relatives, as he is in quest of Owen Roblin, the founder of the settlement. Of ultimate importance to the poet is not to establish the history of his own family, but to tap the spiritual heritage to which he recognizes that he belongs.¹¹ Diving through time "down the long stairway / we all came up when we were born," Purdy pierces imaginatively the town pavement built there where Roblin's Mill village was before, and enters the past of his

country. By imaginatively transforming "now" to "then," he stands in present witness of occurrences of long ago. He "sees," for instance, the moment when Roblin's Mill was closed down and the owner stamped his feet with such an indignation that "the flour / dust floated out from his clothes." Leaping from Roblin's Mill and Canada towards the universe, he unequivocally voices his belief in the unity of human experience:

whatever is underneath a village
and a one-time pioneer settlement goes deeper
rooted inside human character
contemporary as well as ancient. (OR)

Through mental communion with the past, Purdy recognizes equivalence in the gestures of his predecessors, and is able to explore his own self unafraid of darkness and failure. Following his spiritual search at Roblin's Mill, Purdy admits:

After being them I become myself again
rooted in Year One of all the directions I am travelling.
(OR)

Spiritual communion with predecessors is also established by Purdy as an energizing source for the present:

Wandering through Roblin's Mill
I began to stop feeling sorry for myself
taking strength from them. (OR)

Having gained an increase in self-knowledge, and,

simultaneously, having absorbed the strength that comes from accepting the reality of human continuity, the poet finds it easier to reconcile himself to the knowledge of his own transience, and to conquer his solitude:

I contain others as they contain me
 in the medieval sense I am Everyman
 and as Ulysses said of himself in the Cyclop's Cave
 "I am Nobody"
 and a lover. (OR)

The world stops being merely plural. Instead, it opens to the poet and receives him as a member of the human community, thus abolishing the age-long conflict between the whole and its parts. To find spiritual roots is for Purdy what to find a lighthouse is for Virginia Woolf, for instance. It is, as David Daiches phrased it, "to make contact with a truth outside oneself, to surrender the uniqueness of one's ego to an impersonal reality."¹² To find spiritual roots is for Purdy to realize that the most characteristic mode of human experience is not the sense of time as formulated by science but the psychological sense of time of the individual. Hence, even though Purdy is constantly conscious that psychological time cannot endure beyond the mortality of man, in In Search of Owen Roblin he openly relegates the objective meaning of time to a second place: "Time that tic-tocs always in my body / its deadly

rhythm is only a toy of the mind." (OR)

In this context, in Purdy's poems, as in Avison's, it is the image of the tree that crystallizes the basic postulate of a philosophy which holds that with strong roots in the past and branches opening towards the future, man no longer feels bordered by waste and helplessness, but discovers himself as part of a universe that extends beyond the chronological time of the individual self. Like Margaret Avison's trees, Purdy's trees in "Canadian Spring," "Watching Trains," or "Trees at the Arctic Circle," are standing trees, rooted in the soil in which Purdy's ancestors are not buried but "planted." These are trees that represent at once the dead "sprouting buds," and the people alive "stemmed in the graveyard." Unlike Avison's eyes, however, Purdy's eyes do not rest so much on branches forking upwards, as on roots plunging downwards. The particular interest of this poet lies more in the past spiritual roots of man than in a visionary flight into the future, because he believes that it is at the level of roots that the integration between the individual and the universal is achieved, and that the destructive time of clocks is conquered by the vital time of the creative imagination.

Outstanding among Purdy's poems in which the tree is

employed as a metaphor for psychological time is "The Hunting Camp," a poem cast to investigate the feelings and reactions triggered by the poet's visit to an old, abandoned camp. First, the trees appear in the poem as the physical representatives of absent people, and the poet discourses with them for, it seemed "natural to address the trees / as a people substitute." At the sight of the camp "spectral with decay among the green life," the poet experiences a crisis of identity, an acute sense of having lost spiritual continuity as the direct result of the disappearance of the hunting camp, and with it, of all the people he associates with the camp and with a part of his own past. The second stanza notes the flight of the poet's memory which by filling in the spiritual gap caused by the physical disappearance of the camp transfigures the actual span of time spent by the poet visiting the abandoned site:

Whatever time was went by
 contracted or expanded somewhere in his skull
 one thought went out to explore the brain's territory
 among locked doors and doors slightly ajar. (SD, 19)

From this point on, the poem contains two superimposed temporal movements connected with the trees in and around the camp. The trees are at one and the same time the living bodies among which the poet walks, and metaphors for the intellectual processes which replace the momentary

loss of identity with the gladness of a regained sense of belonging. The discovery of a subjective temporal continuity between himself and the no longer existent camp, elicits a gasp from the poet, and the trees are finally heard "chuckling" "about the ridiculous sound / so exactly right for his regained calmness" (SD, 19).

Significantly enough, most of the covers of Purdy's volumes of poetry are illustrated with trees. From the intriguing depth of the covers of Selected Poems and Sundance at Dusk to the monotony, yet the striking beauty of the medallions of In Search of Owen Roblin, the reader constantly encounters trees.¹³ Loyal to the poet's desire to express through his poems a fundamental conception of time rather than merely to capture the looks of things, the illustrators' choice of images complements and sustains the poet's choice of words in an attempt to give poetic form to the idea that as young trees find physical nourishment in the decaying trunks of old trees, so is human tradition a contributor to new, spiritual life.

At this point, it is essential to note that in Purdy's work, the quest for roots does not lead only to the self's recognition in one's immediate predecessors or in "everyman." The quest for roots also leads to the overcoming

of self-centredness and to the ability to participate emotionally in the world:

In search of Owen Roelin
 I discover a whole era
 that was really a backward extension of myself

 and for all these things I am talking about
 I admit a strong feeling of affection. (OR)

The idea that, having as object to descend as deep as possible and immerse man in the spiritual experience of other generations of people, the search for roots rids man's spirit of the burden of individuality, appears in other poems by Purly as well. "The Sculptors" for instance, reveals the poet fumbling through cases of Eskimo sculpture in search of a piece that could best represent the art of Northern Canada. The touching of the small, stone walruses, polar bears or seals triggers in the poet's mind the image of the sculptors themselves, hard at work during long winter months. Imaginatively descending the stairs of history through hundreds of years, the poet is able to understand the quality of a mode of life long separated in time from his own:

And I have a sudden vision
 of the carvers themselves
 in this broken sculpture
 as if the time & place & me
 had clicked into brief alignment
 and a switch pulled
 so that I can see and feel
 what it was like to be them. (NS, 76)

Moreover, the Eskimo carvings, mostly broken, become symbols of the struggles, victories and failures of individuals long dead, but with whom the poet associates emotionally for, in their tribulations, he recognizes his own.

"Lament for the Dorsets" is similar in theme, tone and composition to "The Sculptors." Here, too, the imaginative process is triggered by the touching of a small carving, but the focal point of the poet's imagination is not the carver but the creative process that gives birth to the carving:

He selects a sharp stone tool
to gouge a parallel pattern of lines
on both sides of the swan
holding it with his left hand
bearing down and transmitting
his body's weight
from brain to arm and right hand
and one of his thoughts
turns to ivory. (WGW, 55)

It is through the visualization of the agony and satisfaction involved in the process of creation that Purdy recognizes his own gestures and feelings in the gestures and feelings of the extinct Dorset. Liberated from the prison of acute individualism, and with the self rendered supple and flexible by imaginative identification, Purdy merges himself in love with other beings, and gives his life the significance which

it might otherwise lack.

Like Margaret Avison, Purdy transcends chronological time through an imagination enriched by feeling, and his equivalent of Avison's "optic heart" is "the hearing blood." When in "Roblin's Mills (1)" Purdy hears the voices of his immediate ancestors, it is in his veins that he hears them, and, when in "News Reports at Ameliasburg" he feels ancient doctors dance, it is in his blood that they dance. Similarly, in "My Grandfather's Country," it is precisely his "hearing blood" not his "hearing mind" that gains for him a piece of eternity understood not as infinite time but as timelessness:

And there are seas in the north so blue
 that a polar bear can climb his own wish and walk the sky
 and wave on wave of that high blue washes over the mind
 and sings to each component part of the hearing blood
 a radiance that burns down the dark buildings of night
 and shines for 24 hours a day of long sea-days.
 (WGW, 105)

The prominent position that emotional involvement as a means of transcending simple chronology holds in Purdy's work has also been observed by Michael Hornyansky. Speaking of the poems contained in the volume Love in a Burning Building, this critic notes that "the territory here, as Purdy promised, is the whole baffling country of love -- from the sexual bedrock to the most tenuous ideas, the absurdity

and despair, the queer shifts of time and memory and elusive gleam of permanence." Hornyansky's comment is equally applicable to other volumes by Purdy. Indeed, from The Cariboo Horses and Poems for All the Annettes to Sex and Death and Sundance at Dusk, his poems range widely in topic, and embrace manifestations of feeling, from fellowship and brotherly affection to marital love and sexual passion. Among the so-called "marriage poems," the three-stanza "Necropsy of Love" deserves special attention, for it contains Purdy's unambiguous profession of faith in the redeeming capacity of love. "Love is an absolute as death is," the poet declares, anticipating a future moment when the beloved being, though dead, continues to live in his memory and, thus, continues to participate in, and influence his life. A brief exploration of the importance of sex in the life of a couple, as a means of fostering intimacy, is followed by a strong affirmation of the necessity to love; in tender gestures towards the object of love, man not only discovers himself, but also transcends the fleeting nature of his existence:

If death shall strip our bones of all but bones,
 then here's the flesh, and flesh that's drunken-sweet
 as wine cups in deceptive lunar light:
 reach up your hand and turn the moonlight off,
 and maybe it was never there at all,
 so never promise anything to me,
 but reach across the darkness with your hand,
 reach across the distance of tonight,
 and touch the moving moment once again

before you fall asleep -- . (LBB, 11)


As a form of love, fellowship preoccupies Purdy in many poems. "Hockey Players," "Homage," and "English Faculty Versus Students Hockey Game," for instance, use the game of hockey in order to explore the meaning and significance of this human dimension. In "Homage" Purdy presents hockey as a preeminently Canadian reality, as a myth with a strong psychological influence:

"Hockey" says Dave pontifically
 "is the game we're made of all our myth
 of origins a million snot-nosed kids
 on borrowed bob-skates bolting lumps
 of coal in Sask and Ont and Que." (SD, 37)

The combination of "ballet and murder" which the game of hockey is, becomes in "Hockey Players" the microcosmic representation of human life in all its complexity, and, on the basis of this awareness, Purdy advances the humanistic idea that universal brotherhood should be the regulating concept of an individual's life. Like the game of hockey, the game of life cannot be played alone, or in isolation. It can be played only as a team, "breast to breast," each member depending and relying on others, each member assuming responsibility for the rest of the team. Transfigured by love, the temporal units constituting human life become moments of magic and shine, like those described in "At

Roblin Lake," "When the mind joins the body / in one great leap beyond the universe," moments when the edges of things "sharpen" and "quiver," as they do in "Sargeant Jackson." "Separation," "Borderlands" and "Paper Mate" reveal that suffering and even death can be mitigated by the strength of man's genuine feelings, while "When the Moment Is" qualifies the presence of the loved one as the "hinge of now," the force capable of redressing man's temporal existence in stability and consistency by flouting the rules of objective place and time.

Undoubtedly, Purdy reveals in "Old Alex," "Percy Lawson," or "Love Song," that to detach oneself emotionally from the world is far easier an option than to take on the travail of sharing love for the world and participating in the work of transfiguring it. It is easier, for instance, to dismiss Old Alex as a "miserable alcoholic" than to search desperately for his qualities and extend compassion to him. But, if one of the main goals of men is to be able "to rehearse the earth music together," love as revealed in "Idiot's Song" is the sovereign means of achieving universal harmony. This short poem begins with a recognition and an acceptance of the separate identity of each individual, an identity which can act as a barrier between human beings. However, aware that gestures of love and companionship, "the



talking to," "the touching," "the staying with" can save something from the hurry of time, the poet emphatically calls attention to an ultimate and universal spiritual reality accessible to mankind:

Stay with me in the same world
 or I am lost and desolate

 that you are here at all
 delays my own death
 an instant longer. (LBB, 80)

The poet realizes, however, that the capacity to love as well as the desire to look for roots and real values in life are permanently menaced by the danger of succumbing to the general tendency towards thoughtless living and conformity. Commenting upon the sad state to which man has declined at considerable spiritual cost, in "For Oedi-Puss," Purdy notes that in modern society "time is all filled-up and lost / In work and wages." A misplacing of values may encourage an exclusive interest in trivia, "Sargeant Jackson" points out, but, sooner or later there comes a moment when one is forced to see that "haggling over a lousy nickel," or being a perfect desk clerk will not prevent one from getting old, weak and eventually dying. In addition, the old painter in "The Country of the Young" warns that, by not allowing man time to feel, permanent rushing may also lead to an insensibility which equals nothingness. This poem, steeped

in awareness that an important component of human life is the unremitting battle between real personality and the demands of a materialistic society, aims in two directions: towards "the traders" lost in dreams of money or "the sailors" hunting the seas in search of profit, and towards the dreamers and the artists like the old painter. The former do not have time enough to associate pieces of evidence and find human value where it really exists. The latter refuse to allow their subjective emotional and imaginative existence to be squashed by objective institutionalized callousness:

Look here
 You've never seen this country
 it's not the way you thought it was
 Look again

 And you can't be looking for something else
 money or a night's lodging on earth
 a stepping stone to death maybe
 or you'll never find a place
 hear an old man's voice
 in the country of the young
 that says

"Look here -- ." (NS, 79-80)

Yet, aware that significance in life or the lack of it is a matter of subjective appreciation, in "Por Oedi-Puss," "Sargeant Jackson" or "The Country of the Young," Purdy refrains from passing judgement. He only wonders whether a design for human existence far more complex and comprehensive is not violated by man's just being materially

with the universe.

This is not to say that Purdy conditions man's capacity of extending love to others on one's having first communed spiritually with past generations. To find an opening in the past by using the subjective dimension of time is one of the human privileges which he singles out for investigation. His poems are of that essentially humanistic inspiration concerned to communicate the experience of living through the tragic paradox of the human condition, not bent on prescribing rules. The clue to Purdy's philosophy lies in a time awareness, which, in Joost Meerloo's words, "is having a sense of continually mirroring ourselves in each other and in history. These are not merely passive reflections. Out of them emerges a feeling of deep relatedness. Our mutual reflections acquire meaning, the meaning of our inner and extra personal history."¹⁵ Indeed, in "Helping my Wife Get Supper," Purdy warns his reader of the danger of indulging in that "carrot-like behaviour" which erodes the difference between man and other species on earth. In "What It Was" he urges man to use constantly his potential to engage imaginatively in a vertical temporal movement and thus avoid:

the occasional mistake
and sometimes the brain and the heart's failure
to know say
this is the moment you'll remember
this is the wind-blown instant of time

that swings you into the future
oh heavy as the heavy cellar stones of the world
but hammering on the gates of the sun. (CH, 48)

Though he knows that victory is never completely achieved, and, therefore, the effort to transcend objective time should be unremitting, Purdy believes that it is in the power of the human being to transform life from the "noble struggle / of being a fool," into the noble struggle of being a man. For this Canadian poet, life is not the ultimate four-letter word. Purdy loves life, and wants to live. "Include me out of it all?" is incomprehensible to him (WGW, 121).

NOTES: CHAPTER V

¹ An initial form of this study appeared in Queen's Quarterly, 83 (Summer 1976), pp. 261-269.

² For a perceptive analysis of the nature of the existentialist sickness see G. Poulet, Le Point de depart (Paris: Plon, 1964), pp. 216-236.

³ A. Purdy, North of Summer (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), p. 30.

When the title of individual poems is not mentioned, all other quotations from Purdy's works are taken from the following editions, and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

- EF Emu, Remember! (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1956)
- CH The Cariboo Horses (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966)
- PAA Poems for All the Annettes (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968)
- WGW Wild Grape Wine (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968)
- LEB Love in a Burning Building (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970)
- SP Selected Poems (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972)
- SAD Sex and Death (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973)
- OR In Search of Owen Roblin (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974)
- SE Sundance at Dusk (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976)

⁴ D. Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961), p. 245.

⁵ L. Stevenson, Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: MacMillan, 1970), p. 41.

⁶ Quoted in J. G. Brennan, Three Philosophical Novelists: James Joyce, André Gide, Thomas Mann (New York: MacMillan, 1964), p. ix.

⁷ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays 1917-1932, 3rd ed., (London: Faber & Faber, 1961) p. 14.

⁸ G. Geddes, "A.W. Purdy, an Interview," The Sixties, ed. G. Woodcock (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1969), p. 70.

Purdy's use of the continuous form of verbs as well as the open-endedness of some of his poems have also been the objects of M. Doyle's attention in "Proteus at Roblin Lake," Canadian Literature, 61 (Summer 1974), pp. 7-23.

⁹ G. Bowering, Al Purdy (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 68.

¹⁰ D. Helwig, "Four Poets," (review article) Queen's Quarterly, 79 (Autumn 1972), p. 405.

¹¹ In this respect Mike Doyle has noted that "Purdy is manifestly Canadian partly because his consciousness is a link-point between past and present." See M. Doyle, art. cit., p. 17.

¹² L. Daiches, Virginia Woolf (London: New Directions, 1942), p. 84.

¹³ In a review article, Linda Sandler has also noted the constancy of the tree illustrations to In Search of Owen Roblin. See L. Sandler, "Purdy on Owen Roblin," Tamarack Review, 65 (March 1976), pp. 98-100.

¹⁴ M. Hornyansky, "Letters in Canada 1970: Poetry," The University of Toronto Quarterly, 40 (Summer 1971), p. 380.

¹⁵ J. Meerloo, Along the Fourth Dimension (New York: The John Day Company, 1970), p. 264.

VI. OF SELF, TEMPORAL CUBISM AND METAPHOR:

ST. URBAIN'S HORSEMAN BY MORDECAI RICHLER¹

In an interview with Nathan Cohen, Mordecai Richler admits writing from compulsion "to say what I feel about values and about people living in a time when to my mind there is no agreement on time."² Indeed, the literary analysis undertaken in this chapter confirms that Richler's work to date dramatizes the passage from epochs of collective ideology on temporal matters to an age of individual ethics. The same analysis will reveal that, despite acute and articulate lack of faith in traditional, unifying values, Richler's work is grounded in the belief that human life can still be organized meaningfully. The way to do so, Richler agrees with Grove, Aquin, Avison and Purdy, is to find a subjective pivot capable of lifting the individual from a simply chronological existence into a manner of living that transcends objective reality. His novels focus attention on the way in which memories and metaphors, daydreams and fantasies bear upon human life and give it consistency while preserving the integrity of its individual moments. The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, A Choice of Enemies, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, The Incomparable Atuk, and Cocksure return regularly to Richler's preoccupation with

subjective duration, or the individual perception of objective time. Critics such as D. Meyers, D. Sheps or H. McPherson have not considered them entirely successful works.³ But now, as George Woodcock has noted, we also have that "long and completely structured novel, dense with memory, the kind of slowly and accurately crafted work that seems appropriate to end a period in a writer's life and also to recapitulate it."⁴ We have now St. Urbair's Horseman which represents not only Richler's most notable artistic achievement, but also his most profound discussion of human time.

Like the writings of the other four authors examined in this dissertation, Richler's novels have as their major premise the idea that the concept of the self is inseparable from the concept of time, that both man's organic and psychological development are predicated on time. Richler's approach to his subjects is also based on the observation that the concept of time in human experience is different from the concept of time in nature. One major distinction is the fact that events of real importance to the human psyche do not flow in a systematic chronological order, but enjoy an unequal distribution within a span of time objectively measured. However, what might be called the discontinuous in terms of clocks and calendars is the psychologically

continuous, for apparently disparate events converge towards the unique point of present experience, and what happens to a man at one particular moment in his life is in resonance with what has already happened to him at other times. Thus, together with the other four writers examined in this dissertation, Richler seems to share the belief that while alive the individual does not merely pass through certain phases of chronological development. Rather, that significant experiences from the past are continuously present in the individual unconscious and are constantly modifying his conscious behaviour.⁵

Richler's earlier novels are not so evidently concerned or structured with a sense of psychological time as St. Urbain's Horseman is. The Acrobats, for instance, recounts the fate of André Bennet, the artist-son of a wealthy Montréal businessman. Bennet suffers from an acute guilt feeling about the tragic death of his Jewish lover, has periodical nervous breakdowns, and dies in a fight with an ex-Nazi executioner. The Acrobats progresses chronologically through the days of a fiesta in Valencia and the night that climaxes this Mediterranean holiday is also the night when the protagonist loses his life. Yet, as early as this first novel, there are indications of what would later become one of Richler's major methodological principles: the

superimposition of two temporal movements: one -- objective -- obedient to the rules of clocks and calendars; the other -- subjective -- totally independent of them. Thus, in The Acrobats, Richler notes with precision, "It is now 11.30 a.m., Sunday, April, 1951. Valencia, Spain." It is fiesta time and in the street a guitarist is singing: "Manolete, Manolete / El mayor matador de España."⁶ The former Nazi officer Roger Kraus is physically in that particular place, and at that particular time. Mentally however, he is living in the "rain filled night of February 3, 1921, in Circus Krone, Munich," and what he hears is not the song of the Spanish performer, but a chorus of "Deutschland, Deutschland, Über Alles, / Über Alles in der Welt...." In the same novel, the American tourist Barney Lazarus is also attending the Valencia fiesta; yet, he "was not of the present," Richler comments:

This, at long last, was one of his European experiences. He was already thinking of the evening in terms of how he would embellish on it over cocktails for the benefit of the boys at the lodge several months hence.⁷

The structural pattern of Son of a Smaller Hero, Richler's second novel, resembles that of The Acrobats. The former novel is an account of the attempt made by Noah Adler, a Montreal Jewish youth, to escape from the bonds of the

mental ghetto in which the rest of his family lives. Repelled by the stubbornness and willful blindness with which his relatives preserve their minority isolation, Noah openly rebels, and becomes profoundly involved with the Gentile world through an unhappy love affair. Like The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero unfolds between two definite points in time: from Noah Adler's leaving of his parents' home in the Jewish ghetto of Montreal, until his departure for Europe in search of a spiritual freedom which he believes exists beyond the boundaries of his native city and country. Nevertheless, this chronological development of action is accompanied by a repeated movement backwards and forwards in time without regard for chronology. One evening, for instance, Noah is looking through his window for just one minute, but during this span of time, he re-lives in his mind a meeting of a Montreal Jewish youth organization that occupied a whole evening of physical time.

A similar example of Richler's endeavour to follow the contemporary novel's adjustment to man's relation to time is to be found in A Choice of Enemies, set in the Europe of the 1950s. The central figure of this novel, Norman Price, is an expatriate who has left North America because of his leftist views. In London, he is subject to fits of amnesia as a consequence of an airplane accident suffered during the

war in Spain. After a profound psychological crisis caused by the murder of his younger brother by a former Nazi, Price marries an English girl and settles into a comfortable middle class life. Basically, the novel develops along a chronological line, but there are many instances when the objective sequence of events is broken to make room for the invasion of the subjective. Consider the following example. Norman Price and two of his friends, Charlie and Joyce Lawson, are having dinner in a London apartment. But, "Norman and Joyce did not see the fat balding man with foxy brown eyes before them. Once more they were in New York,"¹⁸ Richler explains in an attempt to show that though physically present in a certain place and at a certain time, the individual can in his imagination be living somewhere and sometime else.

In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, the story of a land-hungry Jewish youth from Montreal, one also witnesses occasional emancipation from strict chronology, but of a kind different from that in The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, or A Choice of Enemies. "We do have a short break in the general straightforward chronology," A.P. Evan points out, "when, after meeting Duddy as a particularly nasty, fifteen year old boy, we go back to learn something about his earlier exploits, and especially about his relationship with his

grandfather."9 But, in this novel, unlike Richler's previous ones, the movement back in time is external to the protagonist. It is not Duddy Kravitz who, through his recollections, brings the past back into the present. Rather, it is the narrator himself who shifts the story to an earlier period in order to cast light on the sources of Duddy's present behaviour. Therefore, in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz the objective flow of events is dislocated not by the psychological time of the individual, but by the narrative time of the author.

In The Incomparable Atuk, Richler moves farther away from characters that live according to an A to B temporal itinerary, and, disengaging himself from a narrative mode of characterization, employs implausibility of action and satiric fantasy in events as a means of character delineation. Like all Richler's novels, The Incomparable Atuk is essentially a story of an individual; this time, Atuk, a young Canadian Eskimo. After having helped to kill and eat an American officer, Atuk is imported into Toronto by a big fur company. Once in the metropolis, this predatory cannibal proceeds to make everything he can out of life, until he is finally guillotined on stage during a quiz show. However, what happens to Atuk during a certain span of physical time is far less important to Richler than the

mental connections which are established between apparently unrelated events, connections which, as subjective temporal events, account to a large extent for the inner life of the protagonist. One evening, for instance, Atuk is in his Toronto apartment performing magic rites with a few members of his family who have accompanied him to the metropolis. The rites having been completed, Atuk pours himself a drink, and turns on the television. After a few minutes, however, even though Atuk follows the news with his eyes and ears, he no longer watches it. Instead, he imagines a scene that could possibly take place in Ottawa as a result of his having previously been involved in the hunting and eating of an American officer:

When the third news item came on he startled. Suddenly he was very alert. The hunter. Three F.B.I. agents hurried up the steps of a building in Ottawa. Not far behind came Sargeant Jock Wilson.¹⁰

The temporal removal and transposition of episodes employed here by Richler are instrumental in focusing attention not so much on what happens but on why it happens. Atuk imagines that particular scene in Ottawa because he knows that he is guilty both of murder and of cannibalism, and that the F.B.I. and the R.C.M.P. are looking for him. Unlike in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, where the movement back in time is external to the protagonist and narratively explicit, in The Incomparable Atuk this movement is implicit in the

reaction triggered by the news program Atuk is watching. In other words, the author's interest lies not with the objective time and reality of the evening news, but with the subjective time and reality of the hero.

Like The Incomparable Atuk, Cocksure seems, at first sight, to be no more than comic and undemanding farce populated by characters engaged in caricature-like action. Closer analysis reveals, though, that this book is, like The Incomparable Atuk, an unabashed satire of contemporary patterns of thought and behaviour.¹¹ Mortimer Griffin, the main character of Cocksure, is an editor in a London publishing house. A conspiracy of friends is built around him with the view to convincing him that he is not a Gentile, as he thinks he is, but a Jew who wants to conceal his true identity. Mortimer clashes professionally and ethically with Star Maker, the new owner of the publishing house, and the final pages of the novel reveal him at the mercy of the latter's German thugs.

As D. Meyers notes in his study of the satirical devices used by Richler in his novels, in The Incomparable Atuk the author places the savage Atuk in a civilized society, and invites the reader to decide who is ultimately uncivilized. In Cocksure, Richler reverses the technique he

employs in The Incomparable Atuk. He isolates the highly civilized Mortimer Griffin in a "mod world of swinging savages,"¹² and directs the reader's attention not towards external events in time but towards the hero's emotional response to them. Indeed, the dialogue hardly keeps hold of objective temporal reality, whereas the interior monologues allow the author to roam, regardless of objective time, over an extraordinary range of contentious subjects, from human sexuality and reputation building to progressive education and the exploitation of minorities.

Personality, as Richler perceives and reveals it in The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure, is a present unity arising out of continual association and change, and consciousness is a blending of anticipation and reminiscence. In this context, a memory formed not by habit, but one consisting of significant events, discloses the coherent structure of the self which cannot be recovered if only present experience is considered. This is why, in St. Urbain's Horseman, Richler in search of Jake Hersh's self, is in quest of Jake's memory, and, with the exception of a few pages dedicated to the trial to which Jake is subjected and which are narrated in the third person, the novel consists of Jake's recollections in connection to this important occurrence in his life.¹³

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But, in St. Urbain's Horseman, the problem Richler had to surmount was not how simply to convey the constant resonance between the memory, the expectation, the imagination and the momentary experience of the protagonist. Rather, the problem Richler had to surmount was how to present simultaneously all points of view put forward by different temporal perspectives, and render accurately the mental and the spiritual processes that led to the creation of the metaphor of the Horseman. The solution is simple. Richler uses a structure that might be called "temporal cubism." This structure is similar to the montage technique used in the cinema, with an emphasis not so much on spatial, but on temporal perspective. The author chooses one particular moment in the life of his protagonist, and, by means of his protagonist's recollections and expectations allows the reader to view the central event from a large number of points in time, both past and future. In other words, what a cubist painter or a film director does with space, Richler does with time. He makes the present "spacious" by making it a point of confluence not of events governed by uniform and consecutive order, but of incidents which exhibit dynamic association and interpenetration.

Dynamic association and interpenetration are the

mechanisms by means of which significant memories, present experiences and expectations relate to each other, and, therefore, they are indicative of the relationship between time and the self. Richler's temporal cubism, therefore, is not essentially different from the traditional foreshadowing and flashback techniques. Chapters I and II of this dissertation discussed at length the use of such techniques in Grove's Master of the Mill and Aquin's Prçchain épisode, for instance. What is original in St. Urbain's Horseman, however, is the condensation and overlapping of the two techniques in relation to an extremely brief span of time, the "spatialization" of the present. As a result, an impression of simultaneity is created with regard to past, present and possibly future events. Analyzed from Kermode's perspective, Richler's "temporal cubism" is a perfect example of "temporal integration": "one way of bundelling together perception of the present, memory of the past, and expectations of the future."¹⁴

Thus, Richler is able to reveal at the time of the trial, aspects of Jake Hersh's self which one could ordinarily discover only by observing him during a long span of chronological time. As a result, certain artistic limitations evident in Richler's earlier novels, for instance, the creation of characters who do not resemble real

human beings, but seem to be externalizations of human terrors, are triumphantly overcome in St. Urbain's Horseman. As George Woodcock put it, in this novel, Richler combats "within the human mind itself those spectres that arise darkly out of the half-conscious realms of memory and guilt."¹⁵ But the spectres of the past are not only combatted in the present. Through hope and expectation, they are also projected into the future, for Richler's temporal cubism catches the interaction of disparate psychological events in a formalized, yet dynamic, system, and reveals the co-presence of past and future temporal elements in the making up of the self. Accordingly, his protagonist is not a fixed structure, nor is he a passive recorder, but a constant interpreter, organizer and synthesizer. He is a distinct pattern of responses and associations, he is a distinct series of subjective temporal events called Jake Hersh.

Of the total number of temporal perspectives from which Richler considers the central moment of the trial in St. Urbain's Horseman, the present study will concentrate on those which are most notable within the framework of the novel, for they introduce the basis for the creation of the metaphor of the Horseman. These are the moments during which Jake's Jewishness and social consciousness are born and developed. Jake Hersh is a Jew from Montreal, and, what

might be termed the Jewish component of his psyche emerges from the exploration of a number of incidents chronologically disconnected. As a child living in Canada at the time of the Second World War, he only hears reports about the Holocaust, yet has first hand experience of anti-Semitic discrimination on the part of certain French Canadians. He is a witness when an English Canadian calls his father a "Jew bastard," and listens attentively to the latter's comment, "You see what they're like, all of them, underneath. You see, Jake."¹⁶ As an adolescent travelling to America, he meets an insane old Jew with numbers from German concentration camps on his arms, and is informed by an American security officer that some of the Nazis responsible for the fierce persecution of the Jews are still in office in West Germany. These incidents stored in the deep layers of his mind make him particularly sensitive to the terrible realities disclosed in a journal written by a former prisoner of the KZ. In effect, his reading of the diary, supplemented by the revelations of the Frankfurt proceedings against Nazi criminals, acts only as a catalyst for reactions already in his mind as separate ingredients. As a result, Jake Hersh finds himself walking in the streets of Munich seized with the desire to shout, "Murderers, murderers" (SUH, 245). Yet, he is well enough read and educated to remember that Kant, Fauch and Brecht are German names, and, therefore to feel obliged to weigh the

contribution to the world by some Germans against the atrocities committed by others. He is also conscious that things have changed since the war, and, if the American officer was right when he pointed out that some former Nazis were still in power in Bonn, it was also true that in Burgerbraukeller, the very place where Adolf Hitler fired his first two shots in the air, Rabbi Meltzer could sing "Hear O Israel" in front of a congregation of American soldiers of Jewish extraction. So, on one hand he concludes that, hatred being a matter of discipline, "he would have to train harder" and hate (SUH, 245). On the other hand, he sees sense in the statement of a young Canadian girl that the Germans are excellent people, and that Germany is a delightful country:

The school teachers attached to the base were in the midst of a cocktail party and Jake mingled with them briefly. Small-town Ontario giggles. Lamely, Jake asked the first girl he brushed against, "Like it here?"

"The Germans are a fantastic people," she replied. "This is the country for me." (SUH, 249)

When the German problem does not constitute a point of reference, Jake Herish's emotional response to his own race is also dual in nature. While admitting, for instance, that a measure of unity was necessary for the Jews in Montreal in order to survive as a minority under conditions of anti-Semitism, he resents profoundly the absurdly clannish

attitude exhibited by the Hershesh, and rejoices when one of his cousins takes her family to Toronto, thus breaking with the Hersh system. Years later, he again exults when, following his marriage to a Gentile woman, all his relatives feel deeply antagonized. This does not mean that Jake Hersh cherishes the illusion that anti-Semitic sentiments have disappeared from the world. On the contrary, he is fully aware that anti-Semitism is still a part of contemporary reality, but he considers that the time has come to fight it not by building higher walls around the ghetto, but by pulling them down and meeting other people. This is why he rejoices when the state of Israel wins the Six Day War, but sincerely worries about Arab civil rights in the same country. This is also why at the time of the trial, when his friend Harry proclaims with hostility, "For purposes of census, taxation and pogroms, I am a Jew," and thus arouses racial feelings in the audience, Jake screams in his mind, "It's the rope, it's the rope for sure" (SOH, 71). His past experience bears on the present and enables him to recognize the enormity of his friend's mistake.

Of equal importance for the reconstruction of Jake Hersh's self are the temporal perspectives from which the building of his social conscience is considered by the novelist. Again, the significant memories which Richler

chooses to present are disparate and disconnected chronologically, yet again they constitute resonant elements for the present, for they too obey the logic of significant associations. Early in his childhood, Jake witnesses social discrimination and injustice in his own family when, in spite of the material prosperity of the Hershes, the family of a deceased uncle is forced to live in a cold water apartment, and struggle on such a meager allowance that his widowed aunt is obliged to sell newspapers in order to support her three children. Years later, when Jake is on his way to America, communism is mentioned appreciatively to him as an idea based on complete brotherhood between people, yet impossible to implement because it contradicts the selfish nature of the human being. The following years supply him with manifold information regarding the emaciated millions of India, the starving crowds of Africa, and once a Time editorial confronts him with the undisputed proclamation, "While you're eating your dinner tonight, 417 people will die of starvation" (SUH, 356). As a result, when he finally shoots his first film, the happiness produced by this dream come true is severely marred by the awareness that, "the energy he and others had expended, the one million two hundred dollars they had consumed could have been used more beneficially providing shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry" (SUH, 272). In view of Jake Hersh's character as illustrated

by these events, his behaviour at the time of his trial acquires intelligibility through the past, and the reader is not surprised to hear him proposing to his friend a new definition of the word obscene, "You know what's obscene? General Westmoreland. The CIA. Factory farming. Probing, thought-provoking stuff it would be. Très ballsy, very cinéma vérité" (SUN, 16).

But the scrupulous notation of the protagonist's psychologically significant memory is not unique to St. Urbain's Horseman. Richler has always recorded the meaningful recollections of his characters in order to show that past events become part of the individual's actual experience, that memory connects the past with the present, and that this relatedness has at times a healing quality, at times a traumatic one. In Son of a Smaller Hero, one has to know Noah Adler's memories of the Jewish ghetto in Montreal in order to understand his present ruthless severing of relations with his parents and other members of his family. It is precisely in his memories of meaninglessly performed religious rituals and of artificially imposed racial feelings that one finds the roots of his desire to escape the fetters of an inhibiting heritage, and advance towards a form of spiritual independence. Similarly, in The Acrobats, one has to be familiar with the events André Bennet remembered from

his childhood spent in a house where each parent went his own way, one must be familiar with what he remembered of the horrors of the Spanish Civil War to comprehend his present despair and realize that while in April 1951 in Valencia, at the time of a fiesta, "if any one had asked him the hour -- yesterday, now, tomorrow -- he would have replied, ineluctably: 'Five minutes to the End.'"¹⁷ In A Choice of Enemies too, Norman Price's hasty marriage to a woman he does not love, and his inordinate desire to have a son who would act as a panacea for all his troubles indicate that his private existentialism does not amount to much; yet, the reader is not surprised by this course of events. Through the character's retrospection and anticipation, Richler has taken care to present his consciousness as the product of disillusionment with several twentieth-century revolutions and causes, American democracy included. If Norman Price's mental and spiritual life is constantly threatened by chaos, if he is incapable of acting consistently, it is because in his reaction to external events the past is just as alive in him as his actual experience of the present.

Likewise, Duddy Kravitz is desperately and unscrupulously trying to acquire a piece of land because all his past experience has made him believe that to own property represents at once worldly recognition and personal

fulfillment. Indeed, throughout his childhood, as the son of a poor taxi driver in St. Urbain street in Montreal, Duddy Kravitz has experienced the bitter taste of poverty. His first-hand knowledge of the disadvantages of being poor in an affluent society is supplemented by the education he receives from his grandfather, with whom he has a close relationship. Therefore, when at sixteen years old, Duddy's supreme goal in life is to buy property, the reader is not surprised. For, Duddy had never forgotten either the poverty of his childhood or the words of his grandfather, "A man without land is nobody."¹⁸ And, if shortly after his arrival in Toronto, Atuk becomes "a Zionist Eskimo, a Duddy Kravitz of the Arctic Circle," as John Carroll put it,¹⁹ it is at least partially because he remembers the teaching of the Old One: that for an Eskimo boy to make his mark in the world, "he must be brighter, better, and faster than other boys."²⁰ In Richler's work, therefore, the significant past is not dead, or simply remembered, but re-experienced and incorporated into the living present.

This is not to say that in Richler's fiction a direct, one to one, causal relationship can be established between one's present and one's past experience. Indeed, no particular past event or moment is, for instance, directly responsible for Jake Herish's present state of mind or

behaviour. What Richler tries to suggest by his extensive change of temporal perspective in St. Urbain's Horseman is that the self of his protagonist is similar to a multiple resonance chamber, and that he is not an immutable set of characteristics, or a mere repository of facts, but a center of dynamic forces organizing the heterogeneous elements of experience into a functional unity, commonly called identity. Thus, the moments during which Jake Hersh's sense of Jewishness is born and developed are inextricably connected to the moments during which his social conscience was born and developed, and Richler himself is careful to make this clear beyond doubt through the use of free associations. Accounting for man's mental processes to a large extent, free associations do not proceed chronologically or in any logical order, yet, they are subjectively logical in the sense that there is a profound, unconscious meaning connecting the apparently random thoughts and images that crowd the drifting mind. Thus, what Jake calls his Jewish nightmare, is not an omnipresent feeling, but, significantly, an attending emotion of moments of heightened self-consciousness:

And so how could he [Jake] tell her [his wife], without seeming psychotic, about his Jewish nightmare, the terror that took him by surprise in his living room, striking only on those rare evenings when he brimmed over with well-being, a sense of everything having knit mysteriously together for once, his wife, the children they had made, so that he could even contemplate his shortcomings, his failures, his own rot and dying and, all things

considered, it was tolerable. (SUH, 65)

It is at these particular moments that he tries to comprehend the reason why he is being allowed to enjoy himself when at the same time "somewhere else, there is war and rape. Famine. Rats gnawing at the toes of black babies" (SUH, 66). It is then that he fears his happiness endangered by all the "injustice collectors," by all the insulted and the injured who come to ask him for an accounting (SUH, 81). If he imagines this general attack under the particular forms of Nazi tactics and procedures, this is so because it is then that his Jewish background manifests itself. The importance of the concomitance of the two occurrences cannot be emphasized enough, for it is this concomitance and its implications that raise this author's work from Jewish parochialism into human universality, and catapults Canada into a world order in which men face the problems of contemporary men. St. Urbain's Horseman does not depict a Jewish experience, but the experience of a man who happens to be a Jew, and the fact that he is from Montreal, Canada, and lives in London, England, has the same bearing upon the issue as the fact that Faulkner's characters, for instance, are Americans and live in Yoknapatawpha county. Jake Hersh's is a general human fear expressed through a Jewish particular, and Richler's art pulls the reader away from any specific

context towards the center of the human experience itself. Beyond Jewry and beyond Canada, Jake Hersh's traumas and perplexities are those of every man.

St. Urbain street thus "reaches to the ends of the earth,"²¹ and, through the transparency of the present time of one of its inhabitants, one sees into other significant past and future temporal levels, and acquires a better, general understanding of the human personality acting in the present. Or, to use David Sheps' words, "significant time works something like a palimpsest. It is not so much that characters are living in time, but rather that time is simply a device whereby the reader gains more knowledge."²² This knowledge about characters and situations is gained by the reader through Richler's scrupulous recording of one of the most typical of human functions, what Merleau-Loup calls "the ideational and symbolic internalizations of experiences into condensed mnemonic traces, the accumulation of numerous unconscious images of the outside world."²³ The fantasies and metaphors that constitute the structural landmarks of a person's imagination are such conscious or unconscious images of the outside world. They are the subjective temporal counterparts of objective temporal events. Hence, fantasies and metaphors are outstandingly relevant psychological data, and are ascribed a special function in Richler's novels as

constituent parts of subjectively experienced time. Although a number of examples could be cited to illustrate the revelation of human experience and subjective time through metaphor, mention will be made of three which are particularly indicative: the rats in The Acrobats, the land in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, and, above all, the Horseman in St. Urbain's Horseman.

André Bennet, the protagonist of The Acrobats, recurrently sees rats. He sees them both when he actually meets them in the neighbourhood where he lives, and when they do not exist at all. He feels them crawling over his body, he feels them eating his flesh alive. In reality, they do not, but the experience is highly authentic, for squalor, poverty, death and everything else that rats symbolize are an undeniable presence in his mind ever since he witnessed the misery and terror of the Spanish Civil War. In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, the desire to possess land accounts for the frenzy which dominates Duddy's activities after he leaves school. But, to this young man, land does not represent property alone. It also represents social recognition and security, it guarantees friendship and love, it brings about personal fulfilment. Or, as William New phrases it, "the discovery and habitation of a new land becomes a metaphor for an attitude of mind, and that attitude

is at the forefront of personal literary thought."²⁴ Referring to a pre-eminently value-charged aspect of experience and, therefore, of subjective time, the rats and the land, the metaphors which Richler uses in The Acrobats and The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz yield substantial information for the deciphering of the personalities of André Bennet and Duddy Kravitz respectively. Yet, nowhere in Richler's work has the problem of the relationship between the metaphor governing an individual's mind and his experience of objective time been tackled with the intensity and attention with which it is analyzed and rendered in artistic form in St. Urbain's Horseman. Here, the metaphor of the Horseman is the protagonist's leading statement of identity, and the author considers it his responsibility not only to mention its existence, as he did in the two earlier works, but also to account for the manner in which it was produced, and for the reason why it plays such a considerable role in Jake Hersh's life.

In order to reveal the gradual evolution of the metaphor of the Horseman, Richler again relies heavily on temporal cubism, in terms of which echoes of past moments are discovered almost simultaneously in a process of not merely re-living experience, but in one of self-identification in a present act and of self-projection into the future. Three

events seem to be particularly revealing in this respect. The initial moment, or the primitive impressicn, goes back to the year 1943, when, due to a number of circumstances, Jake singles out his cousin Joey as exactly the opposite of what he considers hateful in the rest of the Bershes. Joey represents success, adventure and action pitted against the petty humbleness, clannish unity and passive acceptance of the other members of his family. To Jake's amazed eyes, Joey appears not only as a being interesting to watch as a performer, but also as one worthy of investing his faith in. Richler confers high significance upon this moment in Jake's life, for it contains both the given object -- Joey -- and the spiritual movement of Jake's heart to seize this object.²⁵

The next important moment occurs when Jake is informed that his cousin had been in Spain in 1939. In spite of warnings that, in fact, Joey had been running away from troubles with American gangsters, Jake persuades himself that his cousin actually fought in the Spanish Civil War. Because of the enormous symbolic value attached to this war, anyone participating in it on the side of the Loyalist forces was, by Jake's definition, a champion of freedom. Joey was therefore such a being, and Jake, at that time with his budding social and political conscience, again relates to his

cousin profoundly: "Without realizing it, Jake had become Cousin Joey's advocate" (SUH, 159). Again, what is found is a significant fragment of time -- the War years -- attached to a significant agent -- Joey. Again, Jake develops and adheres to an idealized image of his cousin.

The third important moment takes place when Jake discovers Joey's temporary stay in Israel, and when, despite the disturbing facts regarding Joey's conduct which are brought to his attention, he chooses to believe only that his cousin fought in the battle for Jerusalem, and that he eventually left the country because it no more corresponded to his ideal than does communist Russia correspond to the ideal of those who fought the revolution against the Czar. Leaving Israel, Jake takes with him a file which Joey has abandoned together with other papers. This file testifies to Joey's interest in German Nazis, an interest which Jake himself shares. At this point, a profound relationship is established between Joey as an object and Jake's consciousness. The latter recognizes part of himself in the gesture of the former, and through a mentally mimetic operation, creates the Horseman, Joey's spiritualized equivalent, "'The Horseman: Born Joseph Hersh in a miner's shanty in Yellowknife, Yukon Territories. Winter. Exact date unknown.' Following, there was a list of Joey's aliases"

(SUH, 30).

Indeed, Jake believes that Joey fought for the democratic rights of the Spanish people, that he participated in the legitimate building of the State of Israel, but abandoned it when racist tendencies became apparent in its government. He also believes that Joey is presently engaged in pursuing former Nazi officers in order to avenge the atrocities committed against innocent victims. The Horseman, therefore, is a fighter for the oppressed, an avenger of the wronged, a participant in just causes. Above all, the Horseman is not Jewish in mentality and loyalties, for, "When a Jew gets on a horse he stops being a Jew" (SUH, 30). The metaphor, completed after the visit to Israel, grasps Jake completely. Not only does the Horseman become his moral editor, but also potentially his supreme adviser. "Oh, Horseman, Horseman, where are you?" Jake Hersh's mind often enquires when he craves for answers and assurances (SUH, 282).

For, besides being a Canadian Jew with a social conscience, Jake Hersh is also a twentieth-century idealist. Unlike his friend Luke Scott who has succumbed to cynicism, Jake entertains a humanistic outlook on life, and at a time when his contemporaries find it difficult to believe in

anything, he believes in man's potential goodness. In other words, to a world obviously lacking in certainties, Jake Hersh tries to oppose an act of faith in man. Therefore, he is still able to hope, to ask questions and crave for answers and revelations:

"Oh, God, Luke, what's to become of us?"

"Look here, baby. We're on the Titanic. It's going down. Everything, everybody. Me, I've decided to travel first class."

"Is that all?"

"Before you turn around, you're dead." Luke fiddled with his glasses, embarrassed. "All right, then, what do you believe in?"

"Praising those who were truly great, those who came nearest the sun. I believe in theirs and ours. Dr. Johnson, yes, Dr. Leary, no." (SOH, p. 283)

His resistance to the idea of a meaningless existence, his desperate attempt to establish consistency and significance in a life which apparently lacks both of these qualities is made explicit by the Horseman, the metaphor embodying not only his wish to emancipate himself from Jewry as a discriminated-against minority, but also his desire for social justice and for an active pursuit of this ideal. As a metaphor, the Horseman constitutes one of the dominant traits of Jake's personality, for, to find a metaphor is nothing other than to extricate an aspect of one's true self from impression into expression. To find a metaphor is an attempt to relate one's subjective time to an objective temporal reality:

Considering a script, deliberating for days as was his habit, consulting Nancy, arguing with himself, vacillating, reading and re-reading, he knew that in the final analysis he said yes or no based on what he imagined to be the Horseman's exacting standard. Going into production, whether in television or film, he tried above all to please the Horseman. For somewhere he was watching, judging. (SUH, p. 290)

In the preceding paragraph, it has been pointed out that when a metaphor is created, the human being who creates it begins by rising above an object and by identifying it with an ideal image.²⁶ Thus, Jake Hersh's Horseman is an idealized Joey. Unfortunately, however, Jake's spiritual progress does not stop at that point, but returns to the object and identifies it with the metaphor itself. From Joey to the Horseman, and back to Joey, is the regressive itinerary followed by Jake's mind. The literary notation for the gross confusion between metaphor and real object, between the subjective and the objective aspects of time, is Jake's attic aerie. Indeed, the attic aerie in Jake's house in Belgravia is a shrine he builds not to the Horseman, his ideal image of man, but to Joey, St. Urbain's Horseman, the abused equivalent of his human ideal. The walls of the attic aerie are covered by photographs retrieved from Joey's file; here Jake keeps Joey's papers, riding habit and saddle; here he preserves stacks of tinned food to provide Ruthy, Joey's abandoned fiancée, with contest labels.

It is also in the attic aerie that the clock on the wall indicates the time in Faraguay, the cuntry where the former Nazi officer Dr. Mengele is supposedly living, and with whose brutal acts against Jewish prisoners Jake became familiar through Joey's file. At the time of the trial, the present time of the novel, Jake thinks that his cousin is in Paraguay trying to identify and kill the former Nazi doctor. "Mengele cannot have been there all the time. In my opinion, always. Night and day." are sentences that recur in Jake Hersh's mind and testify to the extraordinary profusion of his obsessicn with the Nazi doctor (SUH, 67). Neither the knowledge that Mengele must be so old now that it would be senseless to kill him, nor the knowledge that his murder would only complicate the situation of the Jews in Paraguay can change his belief that once Mengele is punished, justice will be done for his concentration camp victims.

Above all Jake's attic aerie contains Richler's own subtle comment on the propagation of the spirit of revenge: the time that the clock on the wall indicates is yesterday's time compared to Greenwich standard time. The author seems to imply that vindictiveness belongs to yesterday's pattern of behaviour. Therefore, ironically enough, Jake Hersh, who reproaches his Montreal family for obsolete attitudes and

conduct, is ultimately guilty of the same misdemeanour, the only difference being the specific aspect of life affected by the common mentality. The Montreal Hershes are not in favour of revenge, but oppose interracial marriages; Jake Hersh concludes an interracial marriage, but is bent on vengeance. As a result, whenever he thinks of the Horseman, or, more exactly, whenever he thinks of his cousin Joey, he imagines him carrying out retaliatory plans:

Joey, Joey.

In his mind's eye, Jake saw him cantering on a magnificent eleven stallion. Galloping, thundering. Planning fresh campaigns, more daring maneuvers.
(SUH, 31)

Jake Hersh's persistence in confusing metaphor and real object is so strong, his desire to cling to a particular image of Joey is so fervent that he systematically disregards all evidence that could disrupt the subjective temporal reality represented by the Horseman. Unpaid bills for brandy and cigarettes come to his address, a discarded fiancée extorts from him \$700 which Joey took when he ran away from her, gangsters threaten him with murder, yet Jake denies vehemently any suggestion that not only is Joey not hunting Mengele down, but that, if by chance he should find him, he would not kill but blackmail him. Similarly, when confronted by things that do not easily yield themselves to

comprehension, or when uncertain of himself, Jake Hersh chooses to lean upon the stability of an ideal which only he himself dreams certain, until he finally reaches a point at which the less satisfaction he experiences in his life, the more he thinks and talks about his cousin, "oddly convinced that somehow Joey has answers for him" (SUH, 214).

Certainly, the legitimate question is: why this almost insane belief in Joey, in spite of all evidence, and in spite of the fact that in his lucid moments Jake himself has the realization that his adventure with St. Urbain's Horseman is leading him to ruin? Indeed:

Jake was not surprised that out of his obsession with the Horseman he had been delivered Ruthy.
 Who had sent him Harry.
 Who had served him Ingrid.
 [Who had caused him the trial.] (SUH, 82)

The painful truth is that Jake needs his idealized cousin, for, while he believes he is right in his social and political perceptions, he is essentially weak when concrete action is called for. Torn between disgust for the social system in which he lives and desire to belong to it for all the advantages it can offer, Jake Hersh is able to pass hard judgments on the present, but is unable to act consistently to transform this present. And, of course, a moment long dislocated in time, yet scrupulously recorded by Richler

provides further comment on Jake's inability to bring into alignment the objective and subjective dimensions of his life: at a party in Toronto, Jake, verbally playing the role of a revolutionary, is approached with a question, "Do you guys care, I mean really care?" (SUH, 139).

The answer is "no," and it is this "no" that obliges Jake Hersh to use Joey as his self-justifying image, to have him exhibit attitudes he himself should exhibit, to have him perform acts he himself should perform with a view to bringing the objective and subjective aspects of his own time into alignment. Jake himself admits to this flaw in his character when he calls himself "a big talker but a chicken" (SUH, 11), and is fully aware that his complacency renders him a mere provider like any of his despised uncles -- "Worse. A provider with pretensions" (SUH, 283). He is also conscious that, in spite of the liberal speeches he delivers, in the absence of a serious commitment, his life is "ultimately self-serving and cocooned by money" (SUH, 81). Continuously faced with an amputated will power which incapacitates him from acting in accord with his own ideal and to make the subjective aspect of time bear on the objective one, Jake Hersh craves for action from outside, and, pathetically, greets it no matter how ill-timed or misplaced it may be, and no matter what form it may assume.

Even Harry's intentionally burning a hole in his new armchair fills him with respect, for, in his frustrated mind, this act of vandalism represents the courage to do the things he only dreams of doing.

Sometimes, however, strengthened by the thought that perfect coincidence of objective and subjective time is ultimately impossible, that even though the ideal cannot be ultimately possessed, what is important is the act through which man places himself in the direction of his ideal, Jake hurriedly attempts to live up to his own expectations of himself. But even then, the most he can do is not to go on a trip to Spain, because the Spanish government has fascist inclinations; not shoot a film about Israel, because the country is Zionist; and, as a director, consort not with leading actors, but with has-beens and never-beens. More often than not, allowing himself to be absorbed by sensations and to act on impulse, his actions are totally misguided and interpretable only as springing from underlying aggressiveness directed towards authority, rather than from a conscious opposition to its abuses. After having spat in the face of a security officer, or after having bullied a policeman, Jake feels consumed with shame, and realizes that, he "had done the wrong and childish thing, made a fool of himself, when hitherto, all the right had been on his side"

(SUH, 108).

But nowhere is Jake's inconsistency rendered more evident than in what might be called his cinema fantasies. Unlike, for instance, Ruddy Kravitz's film montage based on actual fact and prepared for commercial, not personal purposes, Jake's cinema fantasies are unreal as far as actual performance is concerned but highly realistic psychologically. Like the metaphor of the Horseman, these fantasies represent an enormous condensation of time and experience. The fantastic is part of the substance of The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure too, but, unlike in St. Urbain's Horseman where fantasies are part of the processes taking place in the protagonist's mind, in the former two novels the fantastic is external to the heroes; a narrative device employed by the author himself. Consequently, it is only in St. Urbain's Horseman that fantasies provide important, subjective indications for the delineations of the protagonist's character. In this respect, the fantasy in which Jake casts his own funeral is outstanding. In attendance are his wife, his best friend, and his two children. Most characteristically, his daughter Molly is married to a Black Panther, but his son Sammy is Lord Samuel Hersh with a mansion in Belgravia. Jake's desire for social justice is satisfied, for his daughter has

espoused one of the most discriminated-against minorities, yet the comforts of the establishment are there too, for his son is well off and an aristocrat in addition. Jake's simultaneous disgust with the social system in which he lives, and his desire to belong to it, as reflected in the composition of the group of mourners attending his cremation, obviously complements another moment in the novel, far distanced in time, but succinctly advancing a statement of the same issue: Jake and Harry are having a drink; Jake is hopefully suspecting himself of social integrity, but Harry candidly reassures him, "Don't worry. You're rotten" (SUH, 350).

In terms of the novel's structure, the fantasy of the funeral is remarkable because it exhibits Richler's temporal cubism in miniature; the condensation of past, present and future within a brief span of objective time. Here Richler uses the cinematic technique of montage, and the dualities warring within Jake Hersh's mind are revealed by means of the superimposition of four different points at once of spatial and temporal perspective:

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DAY. GOLDERS GREEN. THE NONDENOMINATIONAL
CREMATORIUM
Rain. Wind in the sorrowing trees. No birds sing.
As a black limousine pulls up....

.....

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Luke Scott mounts the podium. He's in his sixties, wearing stitched-on shoulder-length hair, earrings, grandmaw glasses, and a medallion hanging from his wizened neck.

.....

ANOTHER ANGLE

As the casket begins to slide into the flames, stage curtains part to reveal... THE ANDREWS SISTERS

ANDREWS SISTERS
(singing).

Bei Mir Bist Du Shayn

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LORD SAMUEL HERSH'S BELGRAVIA MANSION. DRAWING ROOM. ALL OF YANKEL HERSH'S PROGENY gathered together. Drinking. Eating.

LORD HERSH

I say (SUH, pp. 284-285)

After the various dislocations of the time sequence throughout the novel, one observes the final actions of the story unrolling in chronological sequence, till the moment comes when Jake Hersh is informed of the death of his cousin. The moment is crucial, for not only does Jake experience a profound depression, but also he feels the moral obligation to become himself St. Urbain's Horseman, if the idea of the Horseman is to endure at all: "He wept because the Horseman, his conscience, his mentor, was no more. Unless, he thought, pouring himself a brandy at his desk, I become the Horseman

now" (SUH, 433). But this is precisely what he cannot, or will not do. However, the pressure of the responsibility to prove true to his own ideal is so severe that one night he has a nightmare during which he himself is the Horseman who has finally reached Mengele's house and is in a position to punish him. At this point he wakes up, and his next movement, the final one of the book, is climactically significant.

In view of what the author has already disclosed about Jake Hersh's past, this present moment is at once retrospective and prospective. Whether called by St. Augustine a moment of "the soul's awareness" or by Kermode a moment of "temporal integrity," Jake's last movement in St. Urbain's Horseman is one of Richler's "spacious" presents within the span of which past temporal events coalesce with the momentary experience, and, from the relationship established thereby, one can intimate the future. Like a drowning man clinging to a straw, Jake clings to the refusal of Joey's mother to believe in the death of her son, and, though fully aware of the absurdity of this presumption, he climbs to his attic aerie, retrieves the Horseman's journal, and replaces the entry regarding Joey's death with the words "presumed dead" (SUH, 436). And with the gliding instant, his act becomes the future. The circle

is thus completed, and Jake Hersh is left where he was found in the first chapter: journeying between the physical time of his bedroom and the mental one of his attic aerie, oscillating between the symbol of a mode of life he only partially deplores and an ideal he is unable to pursue. The initial moment of the book revealed Jake waking up; the final one discloses him going back to sleep, and then, what Richler calls "stock-taking time" has come for the reader.

He closes the book with a conviction that Richler's work represents a notable contribution to the discovery and understanding of the self, and that the structure the author designed for his novel reflects the idea that what one commonly calls the self is experienced only against the background of the individual's biography, a biography defined not only as an objective structure of temporal movements, but also as a subjective associative network. In order to capture this plurality of facets whose significance consists only in its totality, Richler uses a method analogous to cinematic space perspective. His temporal cubism is able to disclose Jake Hersh's personality not as a sum total of past impressions, but as the result of the interpenetration of experiences. An important aspect of his self is illuminated by the Horseman, the dominating metaphor which encloses at once significant space and time. If the largest part of the

novel takes place in Jake Hersh's memory, it is because Richler is aware that recollections are able to restore the unified structure of the self, inaccessible if the individual is observed only in momentary manifestations. But Richler is not imitating Proust. Jake's trial is not Marcel's biscuit and cup of tea; having triggered memories, it does not disappear, and the book does not move backwards. On the contrary, the trial is the extensive present of the novel, and into this present the past is summoned to render it intelligible.

At the end of St. Urban's Horseman, Jake Hersh still says: "I do not understand anything. I am going upstairs." This final note of doubt as to the capacity of the individual to exercise his creative potential and transcend his objective existence is common to all Richler's novels. In The Acrobats, André Bennet dies at the hands of a Nazi officer, in Son of a Smaller Hero, Noah Adler leaves for a doubtful European destination, and in A Choice of Enemies, Norman Price succumbs to a commonplace existence. The Incomparable Atuk literally loses his head, the Cocksure Mortimer finds himself isolated from friends and family, and at the end of The Apprenticeship, Duddy Kravitz clings to his property and makes it his entire world. Nevertheless, the fact that in St. Urban's Horseman -- Richler's most serious

discussion of human time to date -- Jake Hersh's attic aerie as a symbol of a meaningful life exists at all, is the proof that this author has accomplished the task he had set himself in the words of the motto. Indeed, "beleaguered by the same / negation and despair," St-Urbain's Horseman shows an "affirming flame." It flickers feebly, but it flickers.

NOTES: CHAPTER VI

¹ An initial form this study appeared in International Fiction Review, 3 (January 1976), pp. 30-34.

² N. Cohen, "A Conversation with Mordecai Richler," Mordecai Richler, ed. D. Sheps (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1971), p. 29.

³ See: D. Meyers, "Mordecai Richler as Satirist," Ariel, 4 (January 1973), pp. 47-61.

H. McPherson, "A Survey of Richler's Fiction," Mordecai Richler, ed. D. Sheps, p. 120.

D. Sheps, "Waiting for Joey: the Theme of the Vicarious in St. Urbain's Horseman," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 3 (Winter 1974), pp. 83-92.

⁴ G. Woodcock, "The Wheel of Exile," (review article) Tamarac Review, 58 (Summer 1971), p. 69.

⁵ For a discussion of a few modern writers who share the belief that the chronologically discontinuous is the psychologically continuous see A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), p. 5.

⁶ M. Richler, The Acrobats (London: Andre Deutsch, 1954), p. 56.

⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸ M. Richler, A Choice of Enemies (London: Andre Deutsch, 1957), p. 139.

⁹ A. R. Bevan, "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz," Mordecai Richler, ed. D. Sheps, p. 90.

¹⁰ M. Richler, The Incomparable Atuk (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1963), p. 84.

¹¹ For a perceptive discussion of the satiric vein in Richler's fiction, see D. Meyers, "Mordecai Richler as Satirist," art. cit., pp. 47-61.

¹² Ibid., p. 51.

¹³ A succinct discussion of the role played by memory in the restoration of the self and its treatment in literature can be found in H. Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 26-54.

¹⁴ F. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 46.

¹⁵ G. Woodcock, art. cit., 67.

¹⁶ M. Richler, St. Urbain's Horseman (Toronto: Bantam, 1971), p. 245.

After this footnote reference, all subsequent references to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text, with the title of the novel abbreviated to SUH.

¹⁷ M. Richler, The Acrobats, p. 31.

¹⁸ M. Richler, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 62.

¹⁹ J. Carrol, "On Richler and Ludwig," Tamarac Review, 29 (Autumn 1963), p. 100.

²⁰ M. Richler, The Incomparable Atuk, p. 63.

²¹ Quotation from Montreal Star printed on the cover of the Bantam edition of the novel.

²² D. Sheps, "Introduction," Mordecai Richler, ed. D. Sheps, p. xiv.

²³ J. Meerloo, Along the Fourth Dimension (New York: The John Day Company, 1970), p. 262.

²⁴ W. H. New, "The Apprenticeship of Discovery," Mordecai Richler, ed. D. Sheps, p. 69.

²⁵ For an interpretation of Joey's personality see also D. Sheps, "Waiting for Joey: the Theme of the Vicarious in St. Urbain's Horseman," art. cit., pp. 83-92.

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of the mental processes which account for the creation of metaphors, consult G. Poulet, Studies in Human Time (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), pp. 305-315.

VII. CONCLUSION

"Canadian literature is sombre and negative," Margaret Atwood noted in Survival¹ and few critics can claim for themselves the distinction of having made a more superficial statement. Such a statement confuses pessimism with a mature estimation of the limitations inherent in the human condition. It has been the main goal of this dissertation to provide an examination of the treatment of time in twentieth-century Canadian literature with a view to proving that, fully aware that there is no one comprehensive view of the human condition that is not an oversimplification, some of the major Canadian poets and novelists of this century attempt to convey through their works a coherent and humanistic view of the world. It has also been the aim of this dissertation to present the study of the treatment of time in twentieth-century Canadian literature as a critical approach able to reveal the increasing complexity and sophistication in the literary output of this country.

The INTRODUCTION begins by documenting one of the basic premises of the dissertation: the idea that by focusing attention mainly on the treatment of spatial elements in

Canadian literature, Canadian literary criticism to date has tended to create a unilateral image of a young and unsophisticated literature. Readers have been encouraged to believe that the literary works produced in Canada suffer from an obsession with space and climate, that Canadian authors feel more comfortable with the local than with the universal, and that the general tone and message of twentieth-century Canadian literature is pessimistic.

In contrast to such a view, this dissertation contends that by tackling with great intensity one of the major themes of modern Western literature -- man's relationship with time -- Canadian authors of this century have indicated that their concern is not only with regionalism and nationalism but also with moral and psychological problems common to all mankind. Moreover, their work does not provide a negative view of the human existence, but a clear position affirming the dignity and significance of man.

The articulation of the basic premise of the study continues with an examination of the outstanding position which man's consciousness of time has in twentieth-century Western literature and of the factors responsible for the rise of the interest in time in the modern world. However,

while demonstrating that the concern with time has become acute in modern literature, the study emphasizes that it would be an error to imagine that only in this century has time and its relevance to human life become a preoccupation. Man's relationship to time has been a concern of Western writers throughout the centuries. What is unprecedented in our century is the degree of intensity of this concern.

Following the discussion of the so-called "obsession with time" in twentieth-century Western literature, the thesis deals with man's inability to define time even though he is intimately acquainted with it. In this regard, the thesis notes that there has not been a shortage of answers to the question "What is time?" but that none of them have been unanimously accepted. However, since this thesis is not a study of "time" but of the experiential content revealed by man's relation with time, those qualities of time with which modern literature is concerned, and, therefore, which are of interest to this thesis are pointed out. Fundamental to the critical approach adopted is the acceptance of a distinction between physical or objective, and psychological or subjective aspects of time. Also fundamental to the critical approach adopted is the idea that twentieth-century literature reflects an interest in the subjective rather than objective aspects of time. Prose and poetry alike emancipate

themselves from strict chronology, replace external events by psychological ones and insist not on chronological sequence which is a quantity in plot, but on psychological duration which is a quality of man's perception. The common attempt by prose and poetry to mine a movement away from the objective world into the subjective consciousness working in time blurs the traditional genre distinctions to the point of annihilation. Thus, from the critical perspective adopted, poems, novels, plays simply become moments of human time.

Grounded in the belief that what unites prose and poetry is a common attempt to create human duration, the five individual chapters following the INTRODUCTION go beyond traditional genre boundaries and analyze the treatment of time both in twentieth-century Canadian prose and twentieth-century Canadian poetry. Indeed, the works of two poets and those of three novelists are studied as one single group formed of internalized, temporal events.

This approach, generally known as "critique of consciousness," was developed in Europe in the 1950s, and is slowly being introduced into North America. The critique of consciousness offers an existential perspective on literature in terms of which the sole criterion for coherence in a literary analysis is the consciousness of the author read in

an openly personal way by the critic. This is the kind of criticism practiced in the five analytical chapters of the dissertation, and this criticism has no medium and no goal beyond the literary experience provided by the author's rendition of human existence; the aesthetic or formal structure of the works analyzed have only a supportive role in relation to the organizing consciousness.

The exposition of the critical approach is followed by the presentation of the five authors whose works are subsequently analyzed as pre-eminent examples of the adoption by twentieth-century Canadian literature of the universal theme of time and man's relationship to it. By pointing to what is common between Canadian literature and other literatures, the dissertation does not intend to deny that Canadian literature is a separate entity in the intellectual configuration of the world. It only intends to draw attention to the fact that the adoption of the theme of time places Canadian literature more evidently in its relation to the Western tradition, and includes it in a literary order where people reach towards a universal spiritual reality accessible to all mankind. Hence, Canadian literature is interesting not only to the Canadian reader but to any reader concerned with the universal human destiny.

Finally, the last section of the INTRODUCTION explains the criteria employed in the selection of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler from among those Canadian writers who deserve inclusion in a discussion of the treatment of time. The most important criteria are their status as Canadian writers, the intensity of their preoccupation with time, the variety in their literary treatment of human time, the authenticity of the experiences they communicate, and the attempt they make to order their consciousness of human reality.

CHAPTER II is dedicated to the work of Frederick Philip Grove. All his major novels as well as some of his short stories are considered, but the emphasis of the chapter is on Over Prairie Trails. It is suggested that while Grove's preoccupation with man's relationship to time is obvious through his work, it is in Over Prairie Trails that his concern is articulated with particular poignancy.

CHAPTER II makes two important statements about the treatment of time in Grove's work. First, that, if in an epoch predominantly convinced that the subjective properties of time are more important to human life than objective time, Grove holds a rather unique view, it is because the world of his novels is also rather unique. His is a world of pioneers

and immigrants, people whose most direct challenge comes from their immediate physical environment and, as such, their rigorous synchronization with present time and objective reality is imperative. The second point CHAPTER II makes is that, while partially discouraging the cultivation of the subjective qualities of time, Grove expresses deep concern over the dangers implied in an unbalanced pragmatic approach to life, one that would totally discourage the expansion of man's intellectual and imaginative grasp of objective reality.

CHAPTER III discusses the treatment of time in the work of Hubert Aquin. All his major works are surveyed, both of fiction and non-fiction, but, as in the chapter dedicated to Grove, the emphasis is on one book: Prochain épisode. This novel is Aquin's most convincing argument in favour of the idea that the creative process is the one subjective dimension of time within which human intelligence can not only gain a victory over the irregularities of objective time, but within which he also reveals himself to others and to himself. The world of Aquin's novels may be considered the opposite of that of Grove's books. While the lives of Grove's pioneers and immigrants demand a constant tuning-in with objective duration, the lives of Aquin's political prisoners and potential or factual murderers represent a

recognition of the fact that in a man's life there may be moments when the subjective dimension of time must be made to prevail over the objective one. After exploring the effectiveness of drugs and alcohol, sex and escape in recollections as means of divorcing man from an oppressive, objective present, Aquin reveals the act of literary creation as the only true path towards the achievement of a subjective temporal reality conducive to psychological equilibrium.

CHAPTER IV deals with the canon of Margaret Avison, one of the Canadian poets who has addressed the matter of man's relationship to time with particular intensity. What is also remarkable about the work of Avison, is that in the process of re-creating a movement out of the objective world into the consciousness working in time, her poems also achieve a synthesis of the religious and the secular. For analysis poems from both of Avison's volumes of poetry, and one poem published independently are selected. As her poems indicate, Avison is able to move beyond a powerful, mystical experience which she has undergone into a universal vision that can be equally shared by believers and non-believers. To the inadequacy of a simply chronological time she opposes a subjective time which is at once visionary, emotional and sensuous. Imagination, love and the senses, all become means of achieving the transfiguring glory of Margaret Avison's

"all-swallowing moments," moments when man's "optic heart" sees the world and rejoices in it.

Equally, "all-swallowing moments," are rejoiced in by those who in Purdy's poems have a "hearing blood." To study this poet's consciousness of human temporal reality is the aim of CHAPTER V. Like the poems of Margaret Avison, Purdy's poems are individually internalized moments, which reveal and advocate modes of existence more complex than the merely biological one. The analysis encompasses poems selected from nine volumes of poetry by Purdy. The particular interest of this poet lies more with the past spiritual roots of man than with the visionary flights into the future, because he believes that it is at the level of spiritual roots that the integration between the individual and the universal is achieved, and the destructive time of clocks is conquered by the vital time of the mind. It is also at the level of spiritual roots that Purdy recognizes his gestures and feelings in the gestures and feelings of his predecessors and can merge himself in love with other human beings. Thus, like Avison, Purdy transcends chronological time through an imagination enriched by feelings, and gives life a subjective significance which it might otherwise lack.

CHAPTER VI deals with man's relationship to time as

presented in the work of Mordecai Richler. Again, as in the chapters dedicated to Aquin and Grove, a number of novels by Richler are briefly discussed, but the attention is focused mainly on St. Urbain's Horseman for it is in that novel that one finds Richler's most profound discussion of human time. This author's basic premise is that the manner in which an individual experiences things and events at one particular time of his life is in resonance with the manner in which he has experienced things and events at another time in his life. In other words, what is discontinuous in terms of clocks and calendars may form a psychological continuum. Consciously or unconsciously, significant past experiences converge towards, and influence the unique point of present experience.

The other interesting idea which Richler puts forward in his work is that significant experiences from the past form the basis for the daydreams, fantasies and metaphors constituting the structural landmarks of the individual imagination. They represent the expressions of one's true self and, as such, can function as important subjective pivots in life. When brought to bear on human life, daydreams, fantasies and metaphors are able to lift the individual from a simply chronological existence into a manner of living that transcends objective reality.

The examination of the treatment of time in the works of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler reveals a few common points of view. Aware of the devastating action of time on man, all five authors, in various degrees, favour an orientation of human experience around those aspects of time which seem to reverse or halt the consciousness of life's progress towards death. By orienting the individual within the world of human experience, all five authors attempt to prove that man is more than calculable, chronological time. Man is also uncalculable, subjective time for, experientially, he is able to reach a deeper and more complex reality than reality itself.

Implicit in these five authors' attitude to life is a profound humanism based not only on what man is, but also on what he may become. In their opinion, man should not attempt to forget the onward march of time, accept it passively, or morbidly contemplate its passage and effects. Rather, he should both fundamentally change the furnishings of his mind, and turn his senses into means of reaching beyond the objective world and time. Any feeling, any thought, every quality of the mind or of the spirit can be drawn upon; no perception comes amiss in the process of man's finding timeless dimensions in experience.

However, transcendence in the works examined in this dissertation does not mean unification with a form of existence beyond the real world. Neither does it mean total escape into a mental universe that hovers away from the world of real life. For Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler transcendence represents an attempt to surpass objective contradictions by giving man's life new imaginative and emotional coordinates. Under extraordinary circumstances, the immediate is almost totally abandoned, but the general suggestion made by these five authors is that things and events must be enjoyed in time.

With their insistence on personal experience as the ultimate test of value in life, the five authors examined in this dissertation prove themselves portents of the modern transition from epochs of collective ideology to an age of individual ethics. But, despite individualism, their works do not reflect chaos, for, to balance egotism, there is commitment. Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler are not oblivious to man's social responsibility, and, therefore, in their works the meaning of human life is also linked to a notion of love and social engagement. Man fights chronological time with a kind of subjective time that may be called "emotional" (not simply "imaginative"), and, thus,

human life lends itself to significant, social existence.

The space about which Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler write is a particular one. It is the Canadian pioneer settlement or farm, the Canadian prairie or city. Yet, to use Eliot's words, all these five writers "dig deep enough to come upon a self that is universal,"² and they reveal a temporal world of unparticularized significance. They have been able to distill the particular and the regional in order to take their themes to a more universal level -- that of the destiny of man facing nature. Simultaneously, they strive for an evaluation of human life starting not only from a recognition of Canadian realities, but from the recognition of man's true place in the universe.

The works examined in this study speak truly of an age when not all stories end in happy marriages and happy lives thereafter. But the stories of our age are not sombre and pessimistic either. They begin with moments of self-understanding and end poised between despair and hope. As one of the great humanists of this century observed, "the richness of human life is that we have many lives; we live events that do not happen (and some cannot) as vividly as those that do; and if thereby we die a thousand deaths, that is the price we pay for living a thousand lives."³

Understanding that human time does not precede man, but is the manner in which man himself chooses to live, Grove and Purdy, Avison, Aquin and Richler, each in his (or her) own way, urges his (or her) readers to stop indulging in thoughtless living and conformity which erase the difference between man and beast and, through a spiritual and imaginative resurrection, achieve the essential step of disengaging themselves from the restrictive pattern of horizontal duration. In their view, the key part of man's equipment is not his technology, but the spirit in which he responds to the challenge of the sum total of nature, and man's goal in life is not only to wrest from space a habitable interior, but to give his existence an experiential depth denied by merely sensory perception. If, in order to transcend objective reality, man has to question, to challenge and conceive of alternatives to the very life he is leading at that moment, Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler tell us that he should have the courage and strength to embark upon this course. And, even though success is never complete and the struggle remains unremitting, the individual has the task of riding on the pulse of time, re-organizing its units, and, by constant effort, imposing on them his personal volition.

When able to transcend his earthly life while still embracing it fully, man becomes the creator of his own rhythms and duration and gains a victory in knowledge and will at the same time. Kermode, the literary critic, would call this process of transfiguration the ability to turn "chronos" into "kairos."⁴ Toynbee, the historian, called it the ability "to hear the accents of Jacob's voice, while feeling the hands of Esau."⁵ Expressed either way the message is the same as that found in the works of Grove, Aquin, Avison, Purdy and Richler: a rich and significant life is the supreme affirmation of the human spirit which conquers time through time, and lives in abundance of life.

NOTES: CHAPTER VII

¹ M. Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 245.

² T. S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," Selected Essays 1917-1932, 3rd. ed., (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 27.

³ J. Bronowski, "The Reach of the Imagination," The Norton Reader, ed. E. A. M. Eastman (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 74.

⁴ F. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 46.

⁵ A. Toynbee, A Study of History (London: New Directions, 1972), p. 469.

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