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Quarrels with Circumstance  
The Romantic Tradition In Canadian Autobiography

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Generally, the nature of Canadian autobiographical writing chosen for exploration in this work is so constituted as to share in those conventions which are typical of the period which we wish to call Romantic; and naturally so, for the Romantic period had seen the creation of the classics of autobiographical writing through such figures as Goethe and Wordsworth. Canadian autobiography, like any literature, does not exist nor is created in a vacuum, but exhibits patterns and shapes universally applicable to all of the literature of the Romantic period and all autobiographical writing in general; yet containing the unique personal and individual perspectives and constructions of human beings who happened by circumstance to be Canadians and who have chosen for their own individual reasons to write autobiographies. The autobiographies of Moodie, de Roquebrune, Grove and Dobbs have been chosen because they exhibit an affinity with the rest of world literature. They are self-conscious literary creations, aesthetically structured within a definable literary genre. In order to understand the overall intention of this series of essays it is necessary to illustrate and explain some of

the Romantic conventions which shall be explored as well as to give a general view of the nature of autobiographical writing as a literary activity. The specific discussions on each work will describe and delineate these patterns.

Since there is a good deal of argument over what can actually be called "Romanticism" (Grove himself has a number of arguments and disagreements with "Romanticism" and would be insulted by having the category applied to him); an examination of some of the ideas and patterns which the Romantic thinkers exhibit shall be undertaken in order to explain the critical position here adopted.<sup>1</sup>

One of the conventional patterns of Romantic literature and one of the patterns which is exhibited throughout the autobiographies chosen for consideration, is the view of the past as a "Golden Age" or "Paradise", each of its authors exiled or fallen from paradise because of circumstance and necessity (construable as the "original sin" in the Biblical Genesis) and each trying to regain that paradise which is made either implicit or explicit in a social vision of the future.

A number of the ideas and patterns of Romantic literature which I have illustrated here are to be found in M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1971), to which I am greatly indebted.

"Paradises" and utopias are characteristic of the optimism of Romantic thinking. Any examination of the Romantic philosophers will indicate that they were undergoing the process of demythologizing Christian dogmas, turning them into literary and speculative philosophies. Hegel, Fichte, Kant, even Marx undertook to translate and secularize into their philosophies the fall and redemption of man, turning their philosophies into what Novalis termed "applied Christianity." With the Romantics, the prospect of the millenium in Christian thinking had fostered the development of a secular theory of historical progress which emerged at a time when the spectacular advances in the sciences provided a conceptual model of secular progress. The new technology seemed to provide the material means and Locke's psychology seemed to provide the educational means for the valid termination of man's condition and to once again restore him to paradise.<sup>2</sup>

This firm belief in the new sciences created the optimism which fostered a peculiar plasticity of consciousness which felt itself capable of organizing and arranging


<sup>2</sup>Abrams, pp. 12-13



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the stuff of the world into a recognizable order. The Romantic will, until the thinking of Nietzsche, believed itself capable of reconciling man and his condition of alienation, and in this reconciliation, restoring the paradise which was capable of creation within the history of mankind as a race.

This optimism gave rise to the most characteristic feature of modernity which affects our perceptions of the world and finds its origins in Romantic thinking: it is the conception of time as a linear process towards an, as yet, undefined goal mythically understood as Paradise, "where the lion shall lie down with the lamb." Time is conceived as a continuum in which the subject experiences the psychologically painful gratuity of events and sensations without meaning or direction. To experience time was to be separated from the harmony of Paradise - God if you like - and to be placed into a state of fragmentation, alienation and chaos. Christian thinking becoming conceptualized in the process of modernity created the optimism of the Romantics: the redemptive goal of the history of mankind was shifted from the reconciliation and re-union of man with a Transcendent God to an overcoming of the



opposition between the ego and the non-ego, the reconciliation of subject with object, and a re-union of the spirit with its own other in a societal vision, the culmination represented as occurring within the fully developed consciousness of men living their lives in this world. This secularity fostered the belief that the justification for the ordeal of human experience was located in experience itself. The redemptive goal of human life is envisaged as the stage where society, as the collective consciousness of mankind, can by the fullness and perfection of its power of knowing, repossess everything which was separated and alienated as object to itself as subject - where the world of thought becomes the world of nature.<sup>3</sup>

The existing metaphor in literary works is the lost spiritual home and its reconstruction through the marriage of the mind and nature, involving a circuitous movement from paradise, through the painful experience of the expanding knowledge of consciousness, through to a higher state of unity between the self and the world. What is involved is the promise of St. Michael in Milton's

<sup>3</sup>Abrams, pp. 172-195.

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Paradise Lost where a greater "paradise within" shall be realized which is far more blissful than the one from which they have just been expelled.

The metaphor of the lost spiritual home and the journey to attempt to regain another through the marriage of the self and the other is an ample and convenient framework for the writing of autobiography. The lost innocence of childhood, where necessity is succoured, corresponds with the lost paradise after the original sin. In Moodie, the lost paradise is England; for Grove, the leisure society of European culture and intellectual circles; for de Roquebrune, it is the childhood and society exhibited in French Canada during the early 1900's; and for Kildare Dobbs, it is the "daysprings of youth."

For Moodie, abandonment in the "prison" of the Canadian bush demands a radical shift in consciousness where by a triumph of the imagination in the acquisition of a "Canadian" language and through the exorcism of an old self longing for England, she is able to break out of the land about her. Robert de Roquebrune through the use of memory, wishes to save from destruction "a world that has vanished", a world where he "once knew happiness and have

since always tried to recapture it." The time spent in the manor-house where de Roquebrune and his family have lived "seems quite endless, a sort of blissful eternity. It is as if my existence as a child had lasted through a whole normal lifetime. . ."<sup>4</sup> He implies that since his days in the manor-house he has not "lived" but has been engaged on a circuitous journey to "recapture" the "blissful eternity" of his past. For Grove, his inability to conquer his own nature, particularly his "infirmity" as an artist, where leisure is the prerequisite of creation, is integral with the inability of society to reject materialism and to adopt and maintain a Romantic vision extremely close in character to Rousseau's picture of a society returned to nature, living with a morality based on the integrity of agrarian virtues. To suffer time and fragmentation of the self is, for Kildare Dobbs, to be exiled from Paradise. He is attempting to understand an essential self amid the series of "myselfes" which always escapes definition and which cannot possibly be defined until outward circumstances can reflect an inward unity

<sup>4</sup>Robert de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), trans. Felix Walter, p. 2.

and integrity which is constantly intimated through time.

The failure of Grove and Dobbs to define themselves is commensurate with the circumstances they find themselves in. If the self depends on the concrete experience of reality, the interpenetration of the inner and outer worlds, then the chaotic fragments of the world infiltrate and create a chaos of the self. Since the world cannot give a firm foundation on which to base a self, both Grove and Dobbs journey from self to self in an attempt to discover who and what they are. The inevitable end in death (and most autobiographies are written with death lingering about the door) precludes their success at finding an essential self. The self-distrust and the distrust of his audience that are made in Grove and that leads in some cases to an almost cynical estimation of the core of the self (despite his absolute confidence in the worth of some of his particular artistic achievements), suggests the malaise that is due not only to the cultural swamp that is Canada, but is also due to the nature of modern living altogether. In Dobbs' book, the illumination of the essential self is integral with a society that does not acknowledge social divisions: "And there the king is but as the beggar."

Dobbs' emphasizing of the point indicates that there is an implicit social vision amid the gratuitous events of his own life which he has chosen to describe--a social vision that seems to intimate a paradise which is not, but which has the political possibility and capability of coming about, in some country in the future.

Another chief characteristic of Romantic literature is that it is primarily a "literature of movement,"<sup>5</sup> whether spacial or temporal. If one is involved in a falling away from paradise then one must necessarily be involved in a movement to regain that paradise, usually in a circuitous fashion. That autobiographies should be characteristically a literary genre with movement as one of the central metaphors is quite natural, for the life which is represented in autobiography is not static but conceived as a process--it is not simply the narrative of the voyage through life, but the voyage itself. The authors must be careful to present the same sense of discovery in their lives as one has with any journey.

Looking at Mrs. Moodie, we can see that her two

<sup>5</sup>Abrams, pp. 143-195.

autobiographies are framed by two journeys--first, in Roughing It In The Bush, the emigration to Canada due to economic necessity, and secondly, in Life In The Clearings, the tourist excursion to Niagara Falls on board a steamer in search of health. The movement in de Roquebrune's Testament of My Childhood is essentially a temporal one. Though he is writing from Paris in the 1950's, the world he attempts to bring to life is located in another era where "even having known that era gives me the sensation of having lived on another planet."<sup>6</sup> The spatial relationship between the past and the present is implied in the "break between then and now"<sup>7</sup> where there is the vast distance between two planets separating his childhood and his present life. Because of the circumstances involved in Grove's life, his autobiography tends to be a series of arrivals, departures and escapes. His own nature, though longing for a sense of rootedness in the land, family and artistic labour, seems to preclude his ever finding this rootedness ~~is also lacking~~, for his is a self which cannot

<sup>6</sup>de Roquebrune, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>de Roquebrune, p. 1.

find the geographical, political and spiritual foundation on which to rest. The reader of Running To Paradise is given the privilege of having angelic qualities, being capable of "moving from one place to another" while not having to "pass through intermediate space."<sup>8</sup> Of course memory also gives Dobbs this angelic convenience while lying or reminiscing <sup>about</sup> ~~on~~ his past for autobiographical purposes. Dobbs covers most parts of the globe in his "running to paradise;" the reader, joined in an intimate relationship with Dobbs, does the same thing.

That autobiography as a successful literary technique and genre should find its flowering out of the Romantic period is not surprising, for autobiography is strangely unique in that it is a distinctive product of Western, post-Roman civilization. Also, the period is borne by a belief in the inherent significance of man asserting the claims of the subjective self, while at the same time, those of the concrete circumstantial reality. Of all literary forms, it is the one least affected by national characteristics and is most indicative of a common Western

<sup>8</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running to Paradise (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 7.



culture. By revealing its truths through the self's encounter with the world, it may illuminate some qualities of a particular national identity and the roots behind a national identity, but though it often treats of specific times and individuals and must do so to make its experience real, the autobiographies tend to be much more universal than local, more timeless than historic, and more poetic in significance than personal. Though the personalities find their peculiar shapes and meanings through the descriptions and manners of their times, they are primarily concerned with the self as a coherent entity and with the ultimate reality of being human. With a typical Romantic striving for synthesis, autobiography justifies and universalizes the particular as against the general, seeking laws for the individual soul and the law of its interaction with the objective reality. It grows out of the optimism that the self that is sought expresses some fundamental and true reality; that in its ultimate nature it belongs to the essence of life.

In Moodie, a feeling of confidence and trust guides the search--confidence in the ultimate wholeness and integrity of the self and in the meaningfulness of its destiny,

with a parallel confidence in the integrity and destiny of Canada as a nation in the future. Her faith and trust in God, along with her faith and trust in Protestant liberalism, is the centripetal force which gives unity and hope to the melancholy bleakness of her situation.

In Grove this trust fails. The effort of his autobiography is to attempt to find and create a wholeness which is not there, as well as an integrity which seems to be lacking. His reticence is determined not so much by the choosing of specific memories from among the profusion of incidents and events in his life which aid in revealing the story of himself as a writer in Canada, as they are, in many instances, to hide and forget many memories which are to be found in his past. As he reflects:

" . . .there was something that must be forgotten; and that is one of the most cruel things in life. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

The fundamental stimulant involved in the writing of an autobiography and integral with the significance of man asserting the claim of the subjective self, is the search for a consistency of the "I" as an identity through

<sup>9</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1946), pp. 335-336.

the continuum of time. Through the exercise of recollection, the artist in writing an autobiography attempts an anti-Cartesian synthesis of the self with the world from which it is divided, opposed and conflicting; to reclaim the consciousness to the world from which it is alienated; to engage in the redemption of chance. The writer attempts a metaphysics of integration to fuse, unify and give support to events and sensations which in themselves are fragmented, isolated and meaningless. Autobiography imposes a creative, imaginative structure on the life and the world by seeing the present self as something new which emerges and grows organically out of the old and is capable, in certain authors, of confronting and controlling circumstance because of this slow evolving process. As such, autobiography is a work of art in that there is a coherent shaping of the past with attention focused on the self--the spiritual identity of the personality is sought as it is expressed in the concrete experience of reality with an attempt to salvage the self from the ravages of time by giving it a history of meaning. Memory, serving the self-consciously created artifact, links the multiple experiences of the life reflectively in the con-

sciousness. These experiences, which are principally the make-up of the life, determine the literary form.

The autobiographies of Moodie, de Roquébrune, Grove and Dobbs, for all their different shapes, have a tendency to take the novel form. The "I" narrator becomes the protagonist who wins our sympathies and identification, not so much by his moral integrity or achievements (for these have a tendency to alienate the reader as is the case with Grove and Moodie), but simply through the author's allowance of his audience into intimacy with himself, into that collaboration between the artist and the audience which Grove asserts is essential to art. In de Roquébrune, Grove and Dobbs, there is a realization of the ineffability of the essential self, yet there is an attempt at expression through the construction of artifice composed of the self's successive collisions with circumstance and an effort to create a distinct personality and to give voice to the many experiences which make up a life.

In the writing of autobiography, an attitude determined either by a distinctive moment or by a succession of events triggers the memory into a recollection of the past and necessitates the act of writing. In Moodie, the

"painful experience" of hewing order out of the chaos of the Canadian bush directs her writing "a melancholy narrative to the British public. . .prompted by the hope of deterring well-educated people. . .from entering upon a life for which they were totally unfitted. . ."10 and later, under the different circumstances of Life In The Clearings, to "amuse the reader; and by a mixture of prose and poetry compile a small volume which may help to while away an idle hour, or fill up the blanks of a wet day."11 In de Roquebrune, the act of recollection is determined both by the happiness which he can partially recapture in remembering his past and because "it is a very moving experience to bring back to life a past age and to resurrect those who are gone."12 In Grove, the failure to communicate himself through his art because of the lack of an audience to hear his works, necessitates his "search of myself" with an avowedly autobiographic purpose" relying on the

<sup>10</sup>Susanna Moodie, Life In The Clearings (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1959), ed. Robert L. McDougall, p. xxix

<sup>11</sup>Moodie, p. xxxiii.

<sup>12</sup>de Roquebrune, p. 1

intimacy of the autobiographical form to establish the collaboration between himself and his audience which he so desperately lacked during his lifetime. The swamp and washout of Ontario is the distinctive moment where the self and the world both meet to express "a calamity of defeat" and "suddenly it seemed to me that the only thing that really mattered was the explanation of that defeat."<sup>13</sup> Dobbs' Running to Paradise may be more appropriately called "in search of myself," for he is concerned with a series of selves at different distinct moments. He maintains a static narrative presence aided by quotations from Yeats, prefaces and a prologue. The reader must attempt to synthesize the character from out of the fragmented episodes. For Dobbs, "the smell of sandalwood" acting like a Proustian madeline, retrieves a past that "glows in memory like a legend of the golden age."<sup>14</sup>

The writers we are dealing with are concerned with a shaping of the past--the imposition of a pattern on life which constructs out of it a coherent story rather than

<sup>13</sup>Grove, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Dobbs, p. 9.

suffer through the ineluctable evanescence of single day's oscillation of moments and events. Their writing involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life in Grove and Dobbs' case, or part of a life in Moodie's and de Roquebrune's case, in the actual circumstance in which it is lived.

The genre of autobiography and the autobiographies of the Canadian artists we are dealing with, is a most engaging literary form. As a "public" revelation of the self, it insists on an audience. It is a literature that most immediately and deeply engages our interest because it brings us an increased awareness through the understanding of another self in different times and places and an understanding of the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition. Within its scope of study, besides the unique artistic and aesthetic value, is the practical application of philosophical and psychological prescriptions for living, and it aids the reader in his search of self, in seeing an order and a meaning in the chaotic incidents of experience which is not to be found in experience itself. Our autobiographies ask the most important questions: "What is man?" "How shall I live?" and finally "Where is here?" and they help advance our understanding of these questions.

The metaphysical urge to unity aids in answering ontological questions. Though we can never have the exact experience in our own consciousness as the autobiographer had in his, and consequently can never know what he was in his deepest self, his relating of his experiences may enable the reader, as with drama or poetry or any mythopoeic construction, to know what man has been and what forms have proved possible for humanity. The ontological knowledge that is sought is concerned more particularly in knowing what man is in general, rather than as any single entity.

By being essentially teleological in nature, autobiographies delve into the depths of human experience to discover that its essence is to be contained in the self-consciously created artifact of their own lives through the selective use of memory. The focus in autobiography is the relationship traceable between the lived experience and its written record and what the written record offers to the reader as human being. There is the conscious attempt to unite the creative use of memory and imagination to the writer's life and personality and to see it in



relation to the vital impulse to order that has always caused man to create and that, in the<sup>END</sup>, determines both the nature and form of what he creates.

In Mrs. Moodie, memory is "a wonderful faculty,"

~~"the most mysterious and inexplicable in the great riddle of life; that plastic tablet on which the Almighty registers with unerring fidelity the records of being, making it the depository of all our words, thoughts, and deeds."~~<sup>15</sup> Memory is "this book of life. . . all the heart ever felt, the mind ever thought, the restless spirit ever willed, is there."<sup>16</sup>

In de Roquebrune, memory is directly associated with the self-conscious act of writing:

When from the depths of my memory I recall those scenes from my childhood, I feel as if I were turning the leaves of some ancient manuscript which has been left lying in a drawer for half a century. The ink has faded, and the words are sometimes hard to decipher; whole passages remain unintelligible. But suddenly an entire page is lit up with such clarity, that

<sup>15</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup>Moodie, p. 222.

what was almost obliterated takes shape once again, if only for a moment.<sup>17</sup>

In writing his autobiography de Roquebrune is capable of giving final, lasting shape to the epiphanic illumination of the "ancient manuscript" of his past. To see the past as a book is not a cliché of autobiographical writing-- when life is recollectively recaptured in the memory, it does have qualities of literary artifice about it.

In Grove, there are many passages which imply the shaping of the autobiography, where fiction is instilled with fact to create the fable of a life, a fairy tale past:

What she told me, vividly and in ever-repeated detail, dominated my inner life throughout my early years: it always started with the words, "Once upon a time there was a little boy." It dominated my life so completely that to this day I cannot distinguish my actual memories from reflected ones.<sup>18</sup>

In writing the story of his life as a writer in Canada, Grove is concerned with creating a definitive relationship

<sup>17</sup>de Roquebrune, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>Grove, p. 16.

between his autobiography and his life's work with the hope that he can know himself in the telling of the story of his life's work. The autobiography achieves this for it acts as a sounding board, determining and intensifying the depths of the themes and creative vitality that informs all of the volumes of his collected works.

In Dobbs, the "sequence of lies or reminiscences" are chosen because they establish certain stages in his life, making links between them, and defining implicitly a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world. There is no state of being but a process of development through the sequential episodes of his life--a state of being only capable of coming about when the journey and recovery of Paradise has been completed.

If there is to be a consistency and coherence to the life of the autobiographer, some fixed moment or particular stance as a narrative presence must be established. This narrative stance enables the writer to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order because it is the centripetal force of a life arising out of the innocence of youth into the

journey through the gradual and painful growth of the ever-widening artistic consciousness through time into a final philosophic and artistic position by reason of a life having been lived. By virtue of this standpoint, embodying as it does the wisdom that the author has learned, the harmony between the outward experience and the inward growth and unfolding, between the incidents and the artistic apprehension and spiritual digesting of them, becomes established so that each circumstance, each incident, instead of being merely an evanescent detail, becomes instead a part of the process and a revaluation of something within the personality. In this process of selection, the experience related thus acquires a symbolic value. There is both a consistency in the character described and an echoing consistency in the outward circumstances of life; those incidents chosen being not only a recollection of the events in the memory, but a "re-collection" of the peculiar circumstances by the shaping memory with self-conscious intent on the part of the artist.

The Canadian artists concerned are involved in the interplay of the past and present; the significance of the work being more a revaluation of the present situation

rather than an unveiling of the past. The autobiography serves as a means to review one's life, to organize it in the imagination and to bring the past experience and the present self into balance. The object is not so much to tell others about one's self as it is to come to terms with one's self as a whole. Grove for example is writing from a principle of failure, and his narrative stance, illumined by the human truth of that failure, is selective with the scope of incidents described, defining his failure accordingly. His inhibitions and reserve with relating what was a shameful past does not injure the autobiography at all, for that which is distinctive and essential in his understanding of his character is still revealed. The truth which arises from his work is not an objective truth, but truth in the confines of a limited purpose, a purpose that grows out of the author's character and imposes itself on him as his specific quality, and thus determines his choice of events and the manner of his treatment and expression of them.

Grove provides us with an insight into the manner of his recollections; the recalling of the past, experienced in a moment, revealing the necessity of his stance,

indicating the significance that experience acquires viewed in the perspective of a whole life:

At that moment, I was standing within six years of such a decay of the mental and emotional qualities as I had witnessed just now in the case of the old man, the grandfather of the "chit" by my side. . . Was that what I was coming to? If so, then it was surely time to be up and doing. . .

That night I sat down to begin, with an avowedly autobiographic purpose, the story of My Life As a Writer in Canada.<sup>19</sup>

Though the harmony of Grove's life is a tragically ironic one, his particular personality controls and chooses language descriptive of the collision between the past and present, the subjective and the materialistic reality. The "inward" myth which Grove wishes to maintain is delineated by an imaginative re-casting of many of the outward circumstances of his life. The autobiography is not simply a statement of what Grove was as what he is. It is a polemical statement, another contribution to his life's work, not a resume of it. It is an active contribution, not a closing of accounts. Its object is wisdom,

<sup>19</sup>Grove, p. 16.

not just self-knowledge or self-exposition, through the setting up of an order of values which are his own. He presents his failure as a blueprint and establishes it as the over-riding purpose which he finds has become expressed and grasped in the shape of his life.

It is the intention of this thesis to assert that the autobiographies we are dealing with exhibit literary patterns which are to be found in any world literature of the same period. If this is to be considered, we are not then dealing with classics, but still, we are dealing with some very interesting literary forms. The "national identity crisis" of Canadians is relevant only in so far as it is related to the crisis of the individuals in finding their own identities. An individual self transcends national boundaries. The intimacy of the literary form invites all humanity to share in its truths. What may come to light in the course of these studies written at and about different periods of time in Canadian history, is the autobiography of Canada as a country in general. Many Canadians like to feel that their country is still in the throes of adolescence, culturally and

politically. What one discovers however, is that Canada has aged quite rapidly. The inability of Grove and Dobbs, and to a certain extent de Roquebrune, to define themselves is not peculiar to the Canadian cultural swamp or the "thick-skinned game" (Dobbs' phrase) which is the nature of the Canadian mentality. It is, simply, the nemesis of modern living in any Western society or culture.



## CHAPTER ONE

### SUSANNA HOODIE

In Susanna Hoodie's autobiographies the personalities, events and circumstances become the framework, in some instances as with Life In The Clearings, the embodiment of her personality as a writer and as a human being who is pledged to life. There has been a good deal of interest shown in the value of her books as historical documents, their virtue lying in her "photographic eye" detailing concretely and accurately the incidents of pioneering life in Canada. If we are to deal with her autobiographies as mythopoeic constructions however, we must be set free for a moment from the historical facts and from a concern with their accuracy as historical documents in order to savour the central personality of Mrs. Hoodie.

Hoodie's two principal works not only reveal a photographic eye, but also reveal a "growing eye" in that they are movements in perspective. What she is dealing with is the acquisition of an artistic and social consciousness in the Canadian wilderness, a spiritual movement which takes place through the impact of a series

of scenes at specific times and places. Many of Mrs. Moodie's deeds are not simply recounted because they occurred, but because they represent stages of spiritual growth. The environment is ordered with mythopoeic constructions through the instilling of symbolic significance into objects and events. Mrs. Moodie goes beyond the mere remembrance of the past "Golden Age" and the innocence of England and from a mere remembrance of the past as poetic re-enactment and creation, into a new creative experience whereby she grasps and shapes herself anew.

Such a grasping of the personality is typical of all autobiography, for the reader does not merely take in all the descriptive details and historical facts, but participates in an integrated succession of experiences. Mrs. Moodie's books go beyond the genteel didactic intention as the motivating factor behind the structural elements of her story into the exploration of the artistic imagination in a new country, the acquisition of a new language and a vision powerful enough to present her experiences in the Canadian backwoods. Her memories of England and past gentility are subordinated to a dominant vision of Canada

in the future, a vision which is necessitated by Providence to "reclaim the waste places of the earth and make them subservient to the wants and happiness of its creatures."<sup>1</sup> Her destiny is one of creating order out of chaos, be that chaos the wilderness of Canada or the incidents of her own life. In reclaiming the desolation that is Canada, she is involved in constructing a "paradise" out of the land about her.

Mrs. Moodie's two autobiographies demonstrate a very intriguing over-all pattern. Mrs. Moodie equates her own growth from the innocence and naivety of her character when she was fresh from England with the birth and growth of Canada as a nation, as well as the growth of the knowledge of consciousness in man after the fall from Paradise; for men must be educated in their freedom in order to enjoy the greater fruits of life, and also, in order to mirror the "society of heaven" which is the substance of the secularization of the Christian vision in Romanticism. The two autobiographies present anti-thesis to the one whole personality of Mrs. Moodie: when the self

<sup>1</sup>Susanna Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1923), p. xix.

is involved with different outer circumstances, one necessarily discovers a different definition of the self since the self finds its expression through its interaction with concrete externalities.

Roughing It In The Bush, as the name would seem to imply, intimates the attempt to bring order out of chaos, the pioneering will with the axe and spade, bringing "civilization" to a lawless, dark, uncivilized land. The first autobiography of Mrs. Moodie is written in the confessional mode, where her mind, in isolation, is experiencing the physical and spiritual pain of life under the most pressing and adverse of circumstances. The character of the Yankees, with their republican spirit and deceptive schemes, are presented by Mrs. Moodie in order to express the shock which they have on her sensibilities, and also to depict that society which must be educated in order to create that rational society which will be "worthy of the Paradise in which they are placed."<sup>2</sup>

The immediacy of the circumstances, concerned with the

<sup>2</sup>Susanna Moodie, *Life In The Clearings* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1959), ed. Robert L. McDougall, p. 226.

real struggle for survival, gives added dramatic strength to the work. The book ends with the Moodies' departure from the bush of Douro township <sup>for</sup> ~~into~~ the clearings of Belleville.

With Life In The Clearings we have the antithesis to Roughing It In The Bush, for as its title suggests, it is "versus the Bush." Though there is a continuity between the works historically, the latter autobiography is a social autobiography dealing with the social man, not the solitary mind in isolation. The land has been cleared, and a society must now be attempted. In tone the book is more reticent than Roughing It In The Bush, not only because of its social nature, but also because the dramatic, immediate elements of a life dueling with necessity and circumstance are lacking. The tone of the book is civilized. Mrs. Moodie asks for our sympathy and intimacy. She is our guide on a journey which is not the pioneering journey of Roughing It In The Bush, but a tourist excursion to Niagara Falls. With these circumstances, the confessional strength of Roughing It is lacking, but we have an interesting metaphor on which are hung anecdotes and practical prescriptions for living, as well as some

astute observations of early Canadian society.

What often goes without consideration by many readers of Roughing It In The Bush (perhaps because of this quality of dramatic immediacy of which we have been speaking) is the fact that Mrs. Moodie is constructing her episodes in retrospect. The narrative stance she adopts is one of a discriminating, shaping consciousness in the "present", remembering and aesthetically structuring past experience, giving it a sense of unity and meaning. The symbolic objects and events of Mrs. Moodie's life exist as notes in a chord, each chord struck in arpeggio (if I may use the musical analogy), the whole structure involving the ultimate return to Paradise and God through the over-all use of Romantic conventions in describing her circumstances. The connective images and themes that go to make up the chords of which I am speaking are water, Mrs. Moodie's poetry, memory, nostalgia for the paradise that was England, the pioneering exploration of Mrs. Moodie, who learns to "see her way clearly through the wilderness" by foot or by canoe, and finally, the realization of the land about her and the hope of building an educated society that can gain the future paradise that the land is capable

of. Mrs. Moodie's destiny is interwoven and intimately involved with the destiny of Canada and her certainty of Canada's future. She aligns her life with future generations, seeing her life as a sacrifice of happiness and comfort in order to bring birth to a land once filled with desolation and despair.

An examination of the opening poem "Canada, The Blest--The Free!" will indicate all of the different themes interlocked together giving a final vision of the future realization from out of the roots of the past, a vision that is a definite product of the Romantic period, and a vision wrought from Protestant liberalism, the warp and woof which wove the early fabric of Canada's destiny as a nation.

Mrs. Moodie's first use of Romantic convention involves the use of poet as visionary, "Borne onward on the wings of Time", and whose vision implies the reclaiming of paradise through the perfected power of knowledge in man:

Canada the blest-the free!  
 With prophetic glance I see  
 Visions of thy future glory,  
 A page, with mighty meaning fraught,  
 That asks a wider range of thought.

Borne onward on the wings of Time,  
 I trace thy future course sublime;  
 And feel my anxious lot grow bright,  
 While musing on thy glorious sight.<sup>3</sup>

Her own "anxious lot" grows bright again when she considers the overall destiny of the nation. Her ability to see her own life as a sacrifice to future generations gives her a sense of meaning and integrity through the course of time. There is an ability to define one's self as a maker of history, turning the initial sods of civilization.

In the second stanza of the poem, Moodie praises Canada's inheritance from her "British mother's spirit," the "deathless, old renown" of the British past serving as the source of freedom for the country. The rejected people of the world (and Mrs. Moodie includes herself in this lot) find comfort on the "bosom" of Canada's wealth. These people along with the "scenery sublime/ By thy mountains, streams, and woods" shall "If greatness dwells beneath the skies" discover that greatness in Canada. Implicit also in the second stanza is the there that once the "hopes long crush'd grow bright again," the rejected

<sup>3</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 16.



can point to nature as a sustaining source of beauty and greatness.

In the third stanza, the optimism bound in the conquering of the wilderness (an optimism which regarded Canada as a pure potentiality and not as an actuality), and the bringing of order out of chaos is sounded by the "guardian angel" -- the conquering relationship of man to nature being providentially ordained, where the pioneering men and women are engaged in "reclaiming the waste places of the earth"; the unification of the inner and the outer worlds being brought about only by conquering and a subjugation of the environment:

Through the desert solitude  
 Of trackless waters, forests rude,  
 The guardian angel sent a cry  
 All jubilant of victory!  
 "Joy," she cried, "to the' untill'd earth,  
 Let her joy in a mighty nation's birth,-  
 Night from the land has pass'd away,  
 The desert basks in noon of day.  
 Joy, to the sullen wilderness,  
 I come, her gloomy shades to bless,  
 To bid the bear and wild-cat yield  
 Their savage haunts to town and field.<sup>5</sup>

The unity sought is not one where the bear and wild-cat lie down with the "lamb", but rather a constant yielding

<sup>5</sup>Moody, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 17.

of nature's "savage haunts" to the ever-spreading civilization of man. Men of "stout hearts and willing hands" "win a right" to the wilderness, their discipline being providentially rewarded.

In the next section, the pioneering battle which Mrs. Moodie personally relates in the entire text of Roughing It In The Bush, where there is a restraint required over the desires of the heart and a discipline over the weaknesses of the body, is revealed through the metaphor of one awakening from the dead and engaging in the battle with the land. This re-birth is significant for there are a number of rebirths in the book, one being Mrs. Moodie's own where she is able to "leave" the "heart's young hopes behind" and engage in bringing order out of the chaos. What is illuminated is that the pioneers first had to conquer their own bodies before they could wrestle and "win a portion of the land" from the wilderness of Canada.<sup>5b</sup> This conquering of the body, where "the peasant" "nerves his strong heart and sunburnt hand" is spoken of earlier. It again implies that there must be a conquering of the body before one engages in conquering the land:

It is not by such feeble instruments as

<sup>5b</sup>George Grant, Technology and Empire (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), "In Defense of North America".

the above that Providence works when it seeks to reclaim the waste places of the earth, and make them subservient to the wants and happiness of its creatures. The great Father of souls and bodies of men knows the arm which wholesome labour from infancy has made strong, the nerves that have become iron by patient endurance, and He chooses such to send forth into the forest to hew out the rough paths for the advance of civilization.<sup>6</sup>

What is required by the wilderness is an arm made strong by labour from infancy, as well as nerves of iron to "hew out the rough paths." In the fourth stanza, this same stern discipline is required, and once accomplished, the peasant experiences a resurrection from the dead-- the "dead" implying the world of the past "young hopes":

"Joy, to the sons of want, who groan  
 In lands that cannot feed their own;  
 and seek, in stern, determined mood,  
 Homes in the land of lake and wood,  
 And leave their heart's young hopes behind,  
 Friends in this distant world to find;  
 Led by that God, who from His throne  
 Regards the poor man's stifled moan.  
 Like one awaken'd from the dead,  
 The peasant lifts his drooped head,  
 Nerves his strong heart and sunburnt hand,  
 To win a portion of the land,  
 That glooms before him far and wide....<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Hoodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Hoodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 17.



The strange paradoxical sense of self which Mrs. Moodie arrives at is a freedom in determinism, necessity and Providence being one and the same. The peasant, driven by God into the hardships and toil of the wilderness for his own good, finds in his hardship, that he is "no more oppressed, no more a slave," but dwells in freedom. This paradoxical freedom in determinism is essential for Mrs. Moodie's own definition of self since she can see herself submitting to a supreme Will, dedicating her own life to the future of her children. What we have again is the secularization of traditionally theological language, particularly Protestant theological language, in which one is "called" to do God's bidding. Mrs. Moodie's certainty of self is not difficult to understand when she feels that she has been chosen by God to do his work and thus become a creator of history. Her destiny, as well as the destiny of her compatriots, is not fragmented, but whole, divinely directed, and it is this faith which is centripetal to her own understanding of her essential self. The metaphysical unity of substance which finds its direction from God to man and from man to God, unites the destinies of the pioneers, who, in 'reclaiming the

waste places of the earth', believed they were once again making the earth ready for God by once again making it part of His order. This theme is one which is conventionally used in Romantic literature--preparing the country or the world as bride for the coming of the bridegroom Christ.

Mrs. Moodie goes on to praise the heroic nature of the pioneering moment in the fifth section of the poem--those "who bore the day's first heat" and who, sent by "the Father, God" to "reclaim the stubborn sod", were engaged in a mission "truly grand", creating "Altar and hearth for the woodman's son." She praises the actions of the pioneers, who "by stern necessity reveal'd" in the process of time, shall "kindle to life" from "the stupid sod" a society of "perfect man and God."

In the final stanza of the poem, Moodie presents her vision of the political paradise reclaimed in the world--a Christian society united by a "stronger tie than blood." Moodie sees the sons of Canada hailing "a brighter, purer day" where "commerce, freed from tax and chain" shall join together the earth and the sea, Canada and England, Paradise and the earth. Education and intelligence, "the greatest blessing to mankind", shall be prized over

all, for it is the mind-soul which is the eternal part of man and through its improvement, which is a moral improvement, it shall render man more God-like and reflect Him. Moodie is committed to the building of the future society in the hope that education and love will unite man who is trapped in time, with the bliss which is the eternity of Providence. This unity is realizable on this earth and will occur when man, through perfected moral knowledge, sees a "purer day". This "purer day" is where God and man, time and eternity reflect each other and are one:

Joy, to the earth, when this shall be,  
Time verges on eternity.<sup>8</sup>

This poem, ~~which~~ represents the personality and narrative different from the attitude of the woman who once viewed Canada "with hatred so intense that I longed to die, that death might effectually separate us for ever."<sup>9</sup> Through the course of Roughing It In The Bush, Mrs. Moodie undergoes a re-birth from the past and a longing to return to it, into this stance which she now

<sup>8</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 18

<sup>9</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 38.

has in the narrative "present"--a vision of the future in which she defines herself. In the choosing of objects and circumstances to define this circuitous pattern which involves the loss of Eden and the movement to the possibility of a second Eden, Mrs. Moodie's discriminating memory unites the water imagery of Roughing It In The Bush to her lost paradise of England, as well as the melancholy experience of time and separation from eternity in the form of a leitmotif throughout the course of her autobiography. In the re-birth which she experiences, Mrs. Moodie demonstrates many archetypal patterns deriving from theological metaphors.

In Roughing It In The Bush, the first section "Canada: A Contrast" also represents the "present" narrative stance of Mrs. Moodie. It is the poised, collected personality about to render the practical wisdom which is the fruit of painful experience in the Canadian backwoods. Written as the preface to the 1871 edition and at a time when the first critical reactions to Roughing It In The Bush had been received, Mrs. Moodie attempts a defense of the work, calling most of the

criticism of her book "unjust":

I am well aware that a great and, I must think, a most unjust prejudice has been felt against my book in Canada because I dared to give my opinion freely on a subject which had engrossed a great deal of my attention. . . The many who have condemned the work without reading it will be surprised to find that not one word has been said to prejudice intending immigrants from making Canada their home. Unless, indeed, they ascribe the regret expressed at having to leave my native land, so natural in the painful homesickness which, for several months, preys upon the health and spirits of the dejected exile, to a deep-rooted dislike to the country.<sup>10</sup>

The "home-sickness" which 'exiles' Mrs. Moodie encompasses a little more than a third of the book, ending in a significant scene in the chapter on "Brian, The Still-Hunter". The theme of deterring well-educated families from moving to the bush is important, but not primary for Mrs. Moodie. The themes presented in the poem "Canada The Blest--The Free!" are those themes which shall be pondered upon and discovered by Mrs. Moodie as constituting a process which has been essential to her personality and her understanding

<sup>10</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 6-7.



of herself.

It was Frederick Philip Grove who said something to the effect that 'Canada needed to be fought for by the soul' and Roughing It In The Bush is precisely Mrs. Moodie's physical and spiritual struggle with the Canadian wilderness, which, she also discovers, must be won with the same degree of spiritual strife. In presenting the subject of her book with a short poem of introduction, Mrs. Moodie states:

I sketch from Nature the picture's true;  
Whate'er the subject, whether grave or gay,  
Painful experience in a distant land  
Made it my own.

There is a unity of the self with the subject, and a unity of the self with the act of creation. The "painful experience" makes the subject her own in the sense that the self assimilates and digests experiences which continue its spiritual growth.

Mrs. Moodie sees the contrast between her own life in the past and the present as parallel to Canada's growth as a nation:

Contrasting the first years of my life in the bush with Canada as she now is, my mind is filled with wonder and gratitude at the rapid strides she has made towards the fulfilment of a great and glorious destiny.

What important events have been brought to pass within the narrow circle of less than forty years! What a difference since now and then. The country is the same only in name.<sup>11</sup>

The stress on time is indicative of Moodie's attempt to make the reader aware of the process of change which both she and Canada have undergone. She states that her "attachment to Canada is now so strong that I cannot imagine any inducement, short of absolute necessity" causing her to leave the country of her adoption. She states that the country is "the same only in name," that it has been turned from chaos into order, and she uses Biblical language to describe this process of civilization:

The rough has become smooth, the crooked has been made straight, the forests have been converted into fruitful fields, the rude log cabin of the woodsman has been replaced by the handsome, well-appointed homestead, and large populous cities have pushed the small clap-boarded village into the shade.<sup>12</sup>

The use of Biblical language with specific reference to John the Baptist, the 'rough made smooth,' the 'crooked made straight,' illustrates the Romantic convention of

<sup>11</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 7.

preparing the country as bride for the coming of the bridegroom Christ. The forests as chaos and wilderness are cleared to make room for the "well-appointed homestead." The use of light imagery is made evident in the "small clap-boarded village" which is pushed into the "shade" by the large, populous cities. The "shade", being in the area between the "night and "dark" of chaos and the "day" and "light" of civilization, indicates, again through Biblical metaphor, the direction of Mrs. Moodie's vision, a vision which, though rooted in Christianity, finds its substance in the secular theories of historical progress proposed by the Romantic thinkers. That this vision should include the new technology as another step toward the light is quite compatible within Romantic convention, for it is believed that this technology, as the most powerful and most appropriate tool for conquering the darkness of the wilderness, shall provide the material means for the valid termination of man's condition. The language she uses in describing technology is one of dynamism, exulting in this form of conquest as being that which will bring Canada to full maturity as a nation in the shortest period of time:

The solitary stroke of the axe that once broke the uniform silence of the vast woods is only heard in remote districts, and is superseded by the thundering tread of the iron horse and the ceaseless panting of the steam-engine in our saw-mills and factories.

Canada is no longer a child, sleeping in the arms of nature. . . She has outstepped infancy, and is in the full enjoyment of a strong and vigorous youth. What may not we hope for her maturity ere another forty summers have glided down the stream of time!<sup>13</sup>

The destiny of the country as she sees it, includes the prosperity from Canada's natural resources, technology, politics and education as forming the constituents of the promised paradise:

Our busy factories and foundries--our copper, silver, and plumbeo mines--our salt and petroleum--the increasing exports of native produce--speak volumes for the prosperity of the Dominion and for the government of those who are at the head of affairs. It only requires the loyal co-operation of an intelligent and enlightened people to render this beautiful and free country the greatest and happiest upon the face of the earth. . .<sup>14</sup>

This is the social vision seen by Mrs. Moodie, the destiny which she has formulated for Canada. It now becomes

<sup>13</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 13.

appropriate to search for the individual behind the vision.

A number of passages in the initial chapter of Roughing It In The Bush serve to illustrate the fall from paradise motif that introduces the English reader to the Canadian wilderness. If one assumes that there is a subtle, discriminating aesthetic choice of circumstances and events by Mrs. Moodie, one may comprehend the significance of many of the incidents which delineate on this theme. It is only when Mrs. Moodie is able to forget the "matter-of-fact circumstances" of her longings for "English bread and butter" that she can indulge in an absorption of the scene around her. With a sensibility and sentimentality typical of the "aristocratic" English gentlewoman, she details a description of the sublimity of the Canadian setting:

As the sun rose above the horizon, all these matter-of-fact circumstances were gradually forgotten and merged in the surpassing grandeur of the scene that rose majestically before me. The previous day had been dark and stormy, and a heavy fog had concealed the mountain chain, which forms the stupendous background to this sublime view, entirely from our sight. As the clouds rolled away from their gray,

hald brows, and cast into denser shadow the vast forest belt that girdled them round, they looked out like mighty giants--Titans of the earth, in all their rugged and awful beauty--a thrill of wonder and delight pervaded my mind. The spectacle floated dimly on my sight--my eyes were blinded with tears--blinded by the excess of beauty.<sup>15</sup>

This description is interesting, for it must not be forgotten that at the heart of the "enchanted scene" is a cholera epidemic which is quickly depopulating the new country. The metaphor of the land being diseased occurs often in the first chapter. Another incident which serves to indicate an inverted order in things is the event where the captain takes his oath on Voltaire's History of Charles XII rather than on the Bible because one could not be found. Such incidents, though humorous, are deceptively significant, introducing an artistic order in the events chosen for delineation.

An example of the leitmotif which unites the water, England, poetry and eternity connections of Mrs. Moodie's sensibility, is the scene where she is looking eastward down the St. Lawrence River:

<sup>15</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 24-25

Eastward, the view down the St. Lawrence towards the Gulf is the finest of all, scarcely surpassed by anything in the world. Your eye follows the long range of lofty mountains until their blue summits are blended and lost in the blue of the sky. . . The surface of the splendid river is diversified with islands of every size and shape. . . As the early sun streamed upon the most prominent of these, leaving the others in deep shade, the effect was strangely novel and imposing. In the more remote regions, where the forest has never yet echoed to the woodman's axe or received the impress of civilization, the first approach to the shore inspires a melancholy awe which becomes painful in its intensity.

And silence--awful silence broods  
 Profoundly o'er these solitudes;  
 Not but the logging of the floods  
 Breaks the deep stillness of the woods;  
 A sense of desolation reigns  
 O'er these unpeopled forest plains  
 Where sounds of life n'er wake a tone  
 Of cheerful praise round Nature's throne,  
 Man finds himself with God--alone.<sup>10</sup>

Here, the "eastward" view is looking downriver, where the "eye", following the lines and shapes formed by the mountains and the river is "blended and lost" in the blue oblivion of sky, longingly looking back at England, for that is the direction in which her gaze is turned. There is a contrast in the scene between the land which is cleared and the "more remote regions, where the forest

<sup>10</sup>Moody, Nothing It In The Bush, pp. 26-27.

has never yet echoed to the woodman's axe, or received the impress of civilization." There is a contrast between the "sounds of life" and the "awful silence" and "sense of desolation" which inspires melancholy awe at the vastness of the chaos. Only the "lapsing of the floods" gives voice to the wilderness about her.

When she is invited by her husband to spend an afternoon with a military acquaintance on Grosse Isle, Mrs. Moodie's first words are: "Oh by all means. I long to see the lovely island. It looks a perfect paradise at this distance."<sup>17</sup> The sailor captain wryly smiling at the irony of her words and suggesting that "many things look well at a distance which are bad enough when near" indicates both the innocence and naivety of Mrs. Moodie's first perspectives, and she is placed, significantly enough, with her baby in the boat. Either Mrs. Moodie is "blinded" or she perceives incorrectly, which suggests a growth from innocence to experience, from childhood to maturity, through the course of the book.

When she finally sets foot on land, Mrs. Moodie

<sup>17</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 27.



is greeted by a chaotic scene:

A crowd of many hundred Irish emigrants had been landed during the present and former day and all this motley crew, men, women, and children, who were not confined by sickness to the sheds (which greatly resembled cattle-pens)--were employed in washing clothes or spreading them out on the rocks and bushes to dry. . . . The confusion of Babel was among them. All talkers and no hearers--each shouting and yelling in his or her uncouth dialect, and all accompanying their vociferations with violent and extraordinary gestures, quite incomprehensible to the uninitiated. We were literally stunned by the strife of tongues. I shrank, with feelings akin to fear. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Water seems to have an ordering, calming effect in the opening chapter. First of all, one is safe from the cholera while one is in the boat, and the immigrants themselves appear more orderly while on the boat:

And here I must observe that our passengers, who were chiefly honest Scotch labourers and mechanics from the vicinity of Edinburgh, and who while on board ship had conducted themselves with the greatest propriety, and appeared the most quiet, orderly set of people in the world, no sooner set foot upon the island than they became infected by the same spirit of insubordination and misrule, and noisy as the rest.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 29.

While the captain attempts to "satisfy the unreasonable demands of his rebellious people," Mrs. Moodie looks for a retired spot to enjoy some rest and solitude. She sits down by a "cool, gushing river, out of sight, but, alas! not out of hearing of the noisy, riotous crowd." While in this not quite retired spot, Mrs. Moodie first views many of the favoured English shrubs to be found growing wild in the wilderness. Her enjoyment of Nature arises from the effects of light and shade upon the water:

The dark shadow of the mountains, thrown upon the water. . . gave to the surface of the river an ebon hue. The sunbeams, dancing through the thick, quivering foliage, fell in stars of gold, or long lines of dazzling brightness, upon the deep black waters, producing the most novel and beautiful effects. It was a scene over which the spirit of peace might brood in silent adoration, but how spoiled by the discordant yells of the filthy beings who were sullyng the purity of the air and water with contaminating sights and sounds!<sup>20</sup>

Here the water serves to give a reflection of nature, "producing the most novel and beautiful effects," and like art, serving to give a clarity of line and a frame to the wilderness about it. The solitude which Mrs. Moodie

<sup>20</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 30-31.

finds necessary to enjoy the beauty of nature is sullied<sup>2</sup> by the "contaminating sights and sounds" of the humanity around her. The adjectives again stress disease and uncleanliness, appropriate images if one were to describe chaos.

Within Moodie's Christian vision of society, to be under no restraint is not to be free, but to be in a state of chaos. Such details as the "disease," the "strife of tongues," the contamination of the general area, are all descriptive of the distance she has fallen. The land itself appears a veritable paradise, if it can be civilized with the axe, but the population, lacking both education and morality turn it into a hell.

The unpeopled wastes of Canada must present the same aspect to the new settler that the world did to our first parents after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; all the sin which could defile the spot, or haunt it with the association of departed evil, is concentrated in their own persons.<sup>21</sup>

This is a conventionally Romantic aspect of Mrs. Moodie's thinking, for it binds the idea of the world as not being evil in itself, but always emitting God's presence, and

<sup>21</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 251.

capable of a Paradise once man is able to recognize and "possess/A Paradise within thee, happier farr." Mrs. Moodie feels that the moral intensification of man's inner powers through education can indeed create the "paradise within" and the paradise without.

In the second chapter of Roughing It In The Bush, we discover that water as a shaping element is essential to Mrs. Moodie's artistic consciousness:

I love to recall, after the lapse of so many years, every object that awoke in my breast emotions of astonishment and delight. What wonderful combinations of beauty, grandeur, and power, at every winding of that noble river! How the mind expands with the sublimity of the spectacle, and soars upward in gratitude and adoration to the Author of all being, to thank Him for having made the lower world so wonderously fair--a living temple, heaven-arched, and capable of receiving the homage of all worshippers.<sup>22</sup>

The first important quality of Mrs. Moodie's consciousness is the memory which serves to recall "every object" which is of emotional significance in the scene. The river creates "wonderful combinations of beauty, grandeur and power" the perception of which causes the mind to "expand

<sup>22</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 35.

and soar upward" in adoration to God in thanksgiving for the "living temple" which is the earth. Here the clue lies in the significance of both the objects remembered and the river as supplying the spiritual adhesive in reflecting the combinations of all the elements in the scene which is rendered as a "living temple, heaven-arched."

Another scene in the second chapter which describes the "shrine" and "altar" that is nature, again combines water as the enhancer of the beauty of nature:

The precipitous bank upon which the city lies piled, reflected in the still deep waters at its base, greatly enhances the romantic beauty of the situation. The mellow and serene glow of the autumnal day harmonized so perfectly with the solemn grandeur of the scene around me, and sank so silently and deeply into my soul, that my spirit fell prostrate before it. . . my soul at that moment was alone with God. . . The only homage I was capable of offering at such a shrine was tears. . . I never before felt so overpowering my own insignificance, and the boundless might and majesty of the Eternal.<sup>23</sup>

Here again there is the typical secularization of theological constructs peculiar to the Romantics. The

<sup>23</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 36-37.

metaphor of the communicant at prayer is changed into the individual's adoration of nature: the spirit prostrate in humility with the fear which instigates the sublime; the being alone with God in prayer, and the tears of thanksgiving after grace has been received. Her spiritual apprehension of nature is essentially a Wordsworthian one (Wordsworth being the first to poeticize it), where man, by a triumph of the imagination, is capable of rendering and engendering in Nature, visions of the Eternal. Her notion of what is sublime is similar to most of the Romantics, who with their dizzying vistas, volcanoes, and so on, found the sublime in the fear of one's own insignificance in the face of Nature's forms.

Mrs. Moodie follows her descriptions of Quebec and the beauty of nature with a passionate call to Canadians to protect what is theirs. The themes are struck in arpeggio-- Mrs. Moodie's "present" narratorial stance emerging on the past recollections to rhetorically call Canadians to arms:

Make your children proud of the land of their birth, the land which has given them bread--the land in which you have found an altar and a home; do this and you will soon cease to lament your separation from the mother country.

and the loss of those luxuries which  
you could not, in honour to yourself,  
enjoy. . .<sup>24</sup>

Though we have the call to love of country and love of nature, the last paragraphs of the chapter submerge the reader once again into Mrs. Moodie's recollected melancholy:

The lofty groves of pine frowned down in hearse-like gloom upon the mighty river, and the deep stillness of the night, broken alone by its hoarse wailings, filled my mind with sad forebodings. . . Keenly, for the first time, I felt that I was a stranger in a strange land; my heart yearned intensely for my absent home. Home! the word had ceased to belong to my present--it was doomed to live forever in the past. . . The heart acknowledges no other home than the land of its birth.<sup>25</sup>

Here Mrs. Moodie feels the "hearse-like gloom" of being exiled from home--the stranger in strange land, exiled from Paradise. There is an emphasis on time in the passage once again acknowledging the movement from one point to another.

In the chapter on "Tom Wilson's Emigration", Mrs. Moodie's recollections of the time when she first left

<sup>24</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 49.

England sound on all of the chords which go to make up the symbolic complex of her narrative:

The glory of May was upon the earth-- of an English May. . .To leave England at all was dreadful--to leave her at such a season was doubly so. I went to take a last look at the Old Hall, the beloved home of my childhood and youth; to wander once more beneath the shades of its venerable oaks. . .It was while reposing beneath these noble trees that I first indulged in those delicious dreams which are a foretaste of the enjoyments of the spirit-land. In them the soul breathes forth its aspirations in a language unknown to common minds; and that language is Poetry. . .Here I had discoursed sweet words to the tinkling brook, and learned from the melody of waters, the music of natural sounds. In these beloved solitudes all the holy emotions which stir the human heart. . .found response in the harmonious voice of Nature, bearing aloft the choral song of earth to the throne of the Creator.<sup>26</sup>

The memory of England stirs the imagination into recalling those scenes which speak the language of Poetry. There is a Romantic emphasis on the fact that this "language" is "unknown to common minds," that the poet or artist is the mediator between the "spirit-land" and the everyday world. The brook provides the "music of natural sounds," and she, as poet, is able to interpret the voice of the brook

<sup>26</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 77-78.



and the voice of nature which speaks of a unity between the self and the world; the human heart finds response in the harmonious voice of Nature. The passage continues:

Dear, dear England! why was I forced by a stern necessity to leave you? What heinous crime had I committed that I, who adored you, should be torn from your sacred bosom, to pine out my joyless existence in a foreign clime? Oh that I might be permitted to return and die upon your wave-encircled sod at last!<sup>27</sup>

Here the emphasis is on the "stern necessity" forcing Mrs. Moodie to leave England, questioning the "heinous crime" which she has committed. There is an emphasis on a fall, a redemption, and a circuitous return; the "heinous crime" being a variation on the original sin tearing her from the "sacred bosom" of her home, and the redemption consisting of going back to rest her weary head beneath England's "daisy-covered sod."

In Canada, Mrs. Moodie once again has a stream which brings the spirit world back to her and conveys the idea of eternal life:

Our new habitation. . . stood on a gentle slope, and a narrow but lovely stream. . .

<sup>27</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 78-79.

ran murmuring under the window. . .

I know not how it was, but the sound of that tinkling brook, for ever rolling by, filled my heart with a strange melancholy, which for many nights deprived me of rest. I loved it, too. The voice of the waters, in the stillness of the night, always had an extraordinary effect upon my mind. Their ceaseless motion and perpetual sound convey to me the idea of life--eternal life. . .<sup>28</sup>

The brook becomes both a metaphor of time and eternity, and of Mrs. Moodie's self, and she uses the brook as a counterpoint to her own understanding of her circumstances:

A portion of my own spirit seemed to pass into that little stream. In its deep wailings and fretful sighs, I fancied myself lamenting for the land I had left for ever; and its restless and impetuous rushings against the stones which choked its passage, were mournful types of my own mental struggles against the strange destiny which hemmed me in.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Moodie longs for the time when she did not have to fight her "strange destiny" which keeps her chained to necessity and circumstance. Captured in herself, every act fortifies the bars of her imprisonment. The water

<sup>28</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 147.

<sup>29</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 148.

constantly reminds her of England and eternal life, as well as the "mental struggles" against the "stones" which obtrude its freedom of passage. It is significant that she can only hear the brook when she is not distracted by labour:

Through the day the stream moaned and travelled on, --but, engaged in my novel and distasteful occupations, I heard it not; but whenever my winged thoughts flew homeward, then the voice of the brook spoke deeply and sadly to my heart, and my tears flowed unchecked to its plaintive and harmonious music . . . At that period my love for Canada was a feeling very nearly allied to that which the condemned criminal entertains for his cell--his only hope of escape being through the portals of the grave.<sup>30</sup>

The stream as metaphor of Mrs. Moodie's self, drives the "winged thoughts homeward," capturing the mind in the prison of the self, and having a disabling effect on her ability to perform those duties which are necessary to pioneer life.

One of the patterns of Mrs. Moodie's pilgrimage is an inward journey into the self. The descent, not

<sup>30</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 148.

only implied in the fall from an original paradise, but also implying a descent into the self which gives the autobiography its confessional strength (the confessional mode of autobiography is usually concerned with descents into the self), becomes a search for self-knowledge amid the 'prison of the Canadian woods.' Mrs. Moodie's condemnation to the wilderness creates a disability which is turned into art and becomes a necessary constituent in her understanding of herself. This disability is her own artistic sensibility. We have looked at Mrs. Moodie's original views of the grandeur of nature--each scene having to do with an appreciation and a spiritual digesting of the sublime. The Peterborough backwoods however, does not have the rocky crags of the city of Quebec, nor the sublime line of the Laurentian mountains. It is simply country of dense, interminable bush. The sensibility which digests the sublime in nature cannot cope with and turn into spiritual edification the monotony of trees to be found in the dense backwoods of Douro township. We discover Mrs. Moodie doing everything she possibly can to obtain the necessary material for her artistic appetite.

brook, or river in Mrs. Moodie's autobiography as that which causes the mind to "expand" and "soar upwards" to enjoy the divine illumination in Nature.

The chapter on "Brian, The Still-Hunter" is central to Mrs. Moodie's re-birth from the death-like pallor which grips her sensibilities, and, as an example, the passage we have just been examining would seem to indicate the spirit growing weary with life as it is lived in the Canadian woods. By placing her crucial experience in a chapter which describes a character she has met, Moodie uses this character as a foil. Brian's eventual suicide brought about by "moping melancholy" and isolation, is brought into relief with her own situation and circumstances, where she, feeling like a condemned criminal, finds "the only hope of escape being through the portals of the grave."

The chapter itself is perhaps the most entertaining of the book, having both the confessional strength and dramatic immediacy which make for good autobiographical writing. After a description of Brian's sad history

Moodie states:

My recollections of Brian seem more particularly to concentrate in the adventures of one night, when I happened to be left alone, for the first time since my arrival in Canada. I cannot now imagine how I could have been such a fool as to give way for four-and-twenty hours to such childish fears; but so it was, and I will not disguise my weakness from my indulgent reader.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs. Moodie introduces the isolation she suffered ~~and~~ which calls to her mind the character of Brian whose existence was terminated because of similar circumstances.

After accomplishing the feat of milking the cows for the first time, Mrs. Moodie returns to find herself "in a house entirely alone." She tortures her mind with questions concerning her husband's late arrival. When she opens the door to listen for his approaching footsteps, the brook serves again as counterpoint to her inward self: "The little brook lifted up its voice in loud, hoarse wailing, or mocked, in its babbling to the stones, the sound of human voices."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 204-205.

Later, the brook conjures up in her imagination "unreal terrors" and "fanciful illusions" and remains the counterpart of her inner self which she perceives is childish:

Oh, that unwearied brook! how it sobbed and moaned like a fretful child;--what unreal terrors and fanciful illusions my too active mind conjured up, whilst listening to its mysterious tones.<sup>34</sup>

Through the dramatic description of events, Moodie creates suspense which leads up to a climax which purges the old self:

Just as the day broke my friends the wolves set up a parting benediction, so loud and wild, and near to the house, that I was afraid lest they should break through the frail window, or come down the low, wide chimney, and rob me of my child . . . I opened the door, and stepped forth into the pure air of the early day. A solemn and beautiful repose still hung like a veil over the face of Nature. The mists of night still rested upon the majestic woods, and not a sound but the flowing of the waters went up in the vast stillness. . . Sad at heart, and weary and worn in spirit, I went down to the spring and washed my face and head, and drank a deep draught of its icy waters.<sup>35</sup>

The scene provides Mrs. Moodie's submission to circumstance

<sup>34</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 205.

<sup>35</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 206-207.

and in that submission the birth of a new self, implied in the symbolic act of baptism in the washing and drinking of the waters of the stream, which as she says, is the stream of "eternal life." The experience which she has just undergone has provided the deepest penetration into the isolated self--the night setting with screaming wolves providing the demonic atmosphere of the descent. Similar in many ways to other autobiographies, this significant, almost catastrophic scene, terminates her "childhood" and moves her to a wiser position in which to view her life.

Though the chapter goes on to provide the denouement to the incident, the next chapter, "The Charivari," supports the contention of the importance of the scene. Mrs. Moodie will no longer look back with hopes of returning to England, but through disciplining her "proud and rebellious feelings. . .submit to make the trial,"<sup>36</sup> beginning a new life in Canada:

Our fate is seal'd! 'Tis now in vain to sigh,  
For home, or friends, or country left behind.  
Come, dry those tears, and lift the downcast eye  
To the high heaven of hope, and be resign'd;

<sup>36</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 3.



Wisdom and time will justify the deed,  
The eye will cease to weep, the heart to bleed.

All that endear'd and hallow'd your lost home,  
Shall on a broad foundation, firm and sure,  
Establish peace; the wilderness become  
Dear as the distant land you fondly prize,  
Or dearer visions that in memory rise.<sup>37</sup>

In the integrated succession of experiences, the implication is that the memories of the "lost home" will establish the foundation of "peace" with the self. The truth which she learns is that she must be "industrious" and discipline herself in the wrestling of a life from the backwoods--a truth which is harsh to a person whose nature inclines to leisure.

This theme of the disability that the artistic sensibility causes one who is doomed to provide the necessities of life will arise again in Grove. The loss and rebuilding of a leisure society is integral with the loss and circuitous return to paradise. Unlike Moodie, Grove's submission is of a different sort; he is incapable of the submission which was necessary to survive the determinism and circumstance of a life without leisure.

The growth which Mrs. Moodie has undergone involves

<sup>37</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 214.

a forgetting of the past and a determination for the future. She confesses shame for being irresponsible to her duty:

Dear husband! I take shame to myself that my purpose was less firm, that my heart lingered so far behind yours in preparing for this great epoch in our lives; that, like Lot's wife, I still turned and looked back, and clung with all my strength to the land I was leaving.<sup>38</sup>

As the passage continues we learn that it was not "physical privations" which deters Mrs. Moodie, but rather, the loss of the leisure society, of men and women engaged in congenial pursuits. She, like Lot's wife, has been turned to a "salt" of sorts, in the sense that she has been made immobile through her longings to return to England.

In finding the source of her character Mrs. Moodie, though normally reticent on such matters, reveals the "school of self-denial" which had been the history of her family, a "family that rose superior to the crushing influences of adversity." Poverty and adversity "became their best teacher, the stern but fruitful parent of high resolve and ennobling thoughts." When searching for the

<sup>38</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 217.

meaning of herself, Mrs. Moodie finds this meaning in the "self-denial" which necessity has caused to be peculiar to her life:

. . . Memory was busy with the events of many years. I retraced step by step the pilgrimage of my past life, until, arriving at this passage in the sombre history, I gazed through the tears upon the singularly savage scene around me, and secretly marvelled, "What brought me here?"

"Providence," was the answer which the soul gave. "Not for your own welfare, perhaps, but for the welfare of your children, the unerring hand of the Great Father has led you here. You form a connecting link in the destinies of many. It is impossible for any human creature to live for himself alone. It may be your lot to suffer, but others will reap a benefit from your trials. Look up with confidence to Heaven, and the sun of hope will yet shed a cheering beam through the forbidding depths of this tangled wilderness.<sup>39</sup>

Though she regards her own life and the land about her as a "tangled wilderness," Moodie still finds a consistency in herself through time. By aligning herself to the past, with God, and by considering herself as a maker of history, forming "a connecting link in the destinies of many," she is able to see the "sun of hope" in the apparent savagery of the wilderness and her own destiny. By recognizing a

<sup>39</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 249-250.

society of men, the despair which she endures is lightened somewhat.

Concurrent with Moodie's submission to herself and to circumstance is a romantic pioneering engagement with the land. At a time when she has "little to do but to wander by the lakeshore, or among the woods, and amuse myself,"<sup>40</sup> she and her husband decide to do some canoeing over the Canadian waters. She describes the time as "the halcyon days of the bush":

The pure beauty of the Canadian water, the sombre but august grandeur of the vast forest that hemmed us in on every side and shut us out from the rest of the world, soon cast a magic spell upon our spirits, and we began to feel charmed with the freedom and the solitude around us. Every object was new to us. We felt as if we were the first discoverers of every beautiful flower and stately tree that attracted our attention, and we gave names to fantastic rocks and fairy isles, and raised imaginary houses and bridges on every picturesque spot which we floated past during our aquatic excursions. I learned the use of the paddle, and became quite proficient in the gentle craft.<sup>41</sup>

The scene depicted is idyllic; two characters in a different

<sup>40</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 263.

<sup>41</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 263.

paradise, where "every object" is "new" and where one gives "names" to the rocks and isles which pass before one. With Mrs. Moodie's paradise however, there is poetic involvement in the scene, the "naming" of new objects with new language. It is the pioneering freedom which she experiences which gives the paddling into the wilderness the "halcyon" quality.

In another passage, Moodie praises the Canadian rivers over the English rivers:

The most renowned of our English rivers dwindle into little muddy rills when compared with the sublimity of the Canadian waters. No language can adequately express the solemn grandeur of her lake and river scenery; the glorious islands that float, like visions from fairyland, upon the bosom of the azure mirrors of her cloudless skies. . .<sup>42</sup>

The praise which she has for the "sublimity of the Canadian waters" is quite different from the attitude she held earlier on in her life. It would seem that since the bush and forest cannot give the stuff which is necessary for the "sublime" appreciation of nature, Mrs. Moodie, once her receptivity is open, finds that the waters of the

<sup>42</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 248-249.

rivers and lakes can supply the adequate elements for her perception of the sublime.

A passage which serves to indicate the necessity for water with regard to her artistic sensibility as well as water's ability to break down the isolation she feels, is located in the chapter on "Burning the Fallow":

The progress of the workmen had been watched by me with the keenest interest. Every tree that reached the ground opened a wider gap in the dark wood. . . But when the dark cedar swamp fronting the house fell beneath the strokes of the axe, and we got a first view of the lake, my joy was complete. . . By night and day, in sunshine or in storm, water is always the most sublime feature in a landscape, and no view can be truly grand in which it is wanting. . . Half the solitude of my forest home vanished when the lake unveiled its bright face to the blue heavens, and I saw sun, and moon, and stars, and waving trees reflected there. I would sit for hours at the window as the shades of evening deepened round me, watching the massy foliage of the forests pictured in the waters, till fancy transported me back to England, and the songs of birds and the lowing of cattle were sounding in my ears. . . 43

The wilderness mirrored in the waters of the lake serves to give Mrs. Moodie glimpses of eternity and past happiness which she cannot discipline unless engaged in "mental"

43Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, pp. 295-296.

activities. The water serves to transport Moodie's mind back to England where memories are of a country somewhat more civilized. The ability to forget England can only occur when she can "discipline my mind to learn and practise all the menial employments which are necessary in a good settler's wife."<sup>44</sup> The tension between duty and her longing to return to the past runs throughout Roughing It In The Bush.

The poem "A Canadian Song" has water as that element which is <sup>the</sup> essential quality of the sublime, as well as the "canoe" which has been used for the pioneering exploration of the countryside. The waters are "many-voiced" and like Wordsworth, whose metaphor of wind and breeze corresponds to the spirit of God moving over the waters of chaos in Genesis, Mrs. Moodie attempts a parallel correspondence by shifting the spirit into the waters themselves:

God's voice is in the waters;  
The deep, mysterious waters,  
The sleepless, dashing waters,  
Still breathe its tones around.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 296.

<sup>45</sup>Moodie, Roughing It In The Bush, p. 337.

It is clear why water draws the soul nearer to God, for in its ceaseless movements it reflects both time and eternity; and in its mirroring reflections, it gives an order and serenity to the surrounding wilderness which is not really there. Water is then the central element of Mrs. Moodie's sensibility and it is this which is unique to her language and vision as a Canadian artist.

In 1840 the Moodies left the bush of Douro township to take up residence in the "clearings" of Belleville, and the book Life in The Clearings is a product of this life in a more civilized atmosphere. Written "to give an account of the present state of society in the colony, and to point out its increasing prosperity and commercial advantages"<sup>46</sup> to be found there, the work contains an essentially different sense of self from that of Roughing It In The Bush, for it is the more refined self in an orderly social atmosphere which Mrs. Moodie portrays, not the confessional self searching for the meaning of its destiny. Both Roughing It In The Bush and Life In The Clearings do share in one of the major characteristics of

<sup>46</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. xxxiii.



autobiography--that is they present practical recommendations and prescriptions for living which are products of the experience of adversity and circumstance digested and understood in the individual's personality.

Mrs. Moodie finds that it is "impossible for any human creature to live for himself alone," and such an attitude is good for the writing of autobiography since there is always an audience implied in its creation. Moodie hopes to convey "much useful information" in her work, and if such communication fails, she will "amuse the reader" with her "light pencil" sketches of the personalities and the environment about her. To her private life and the life of her family, she pays little attention. Though these subjects are dealt with reticently even in Roughing It In The Bush, there is no longer anything of particular dramatic quality about her experiences in the "clearings", nor are there experiences which plumb the depths of the human personality through severe physical and spiritual adversity. Mrs. Moodie seems to be well aware of the change in her own position and personality brought about by a settled decade of "life in the clearings." There is a social receptivity in her character which is

not found in Roughing It In The Bush, but this social atmosphere also demands more reticence with regard to her private personal life. Though she is fearful for her life because of the illness that has come upon her, we do not have the desperate search for self that makes for great confessional autobiography under such circumstances. Rather, there is a calm, deliberate personality prepared to die after a life which has proved fruitful. This awareness of death is one of the reasons why there is much information in the book about death, whether of the body as in the chapter "Wearing Mourning for the Dead," or of the mind, as in her many anecdotes on drunkenness or her reflections on the lunatic asylum.

My critical endeavour on Roughing It In The Bush has been to show the importance of water to Mrs. Moodie's artistic consciousness. The importance of water continues on in Life In The Clearings, where we have the entire structure of the book shaped with something having to do with water. First of all, whatever dramatic power the book may have rests in the fact that we are waiting for Mrs. Moodie's descriptions of Niagara Falls. It is the "shrine" to which we are journeying. Our journey is being

taken entirely upon water. We are asked into intimacy by Mrs. Moodie who is literally on her death-bed, and she entertains "small hopes of her recovery":

Come and take your seat with me on the deck of the steamer; and as we glide over the waters of this beautiful Bay of Quinte, I will make you acquainted with every spot worthy of note along its picturesque shores.<sup>47</sup>

We are asked by Mrs. Moodie to bear the "infirmities" which are the nature of her "gossiping sex and age;" to bear charitably her manner of presentation:

If I dwell too long upon some subjects do not call me a bore, or vain and trifling if I pass too lightly over others. The little knowledge I possess, I impart freely, and wish it were more profound and extensive for your sake.<sup>48</sup>

Such intimacy at a time when death hangs about the door is characteristic of autobiographical writing. It disarms the critic and asks for human sympathy on our journey through life--to savour the personality of this individual who has chosen to befriend us. The invocation to intimacy by Moodie also indicates that there will be a selective element to her recollections and descriptions, each

<sup>47</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 4.

contributing to the whole of her over-all plan.

The trip to Niagara Falls serves as the skeleton for Mrs. Moodie's observations of Canadian society. The narrative stance is similar to the one employed in Roughing It In The Bush where we have the selective memory in the "present" engaged in portraying the past as present. Though her trip to the Falls occurred some time ago, she gives it an immediacy which is not really there by portraying it as present. The concrete objective world and the flow of time serve to isolate memories and to give their descriptions preciseness through their direct relationship to some "picturesque spot" or significant detail worthy of note.

Mrs. Moodie's hope of seeing the Falls is parallel to the hope she entertains for Canada as a political entity. An examination of some of the language used to describe the two details will indicate this:

The hope of seeing Niagara Falls resigned for the present, was always indulged as a bright future--a pleasant day-dream--an event which at some unknown period, when happier days should dawn upon us, might take place. . . .<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 2.

A little further on she describes the immigrant's hopes for Canada as well as her own:

Let Canada still remain the bright future in your mind, and hasten to convert your present day-dream into reality. The time is not far distant when she shall be the theme of many tongues, and the old nations of the world will speak of her progress with respect and admiration. Her infancy is past, she begins to feel her feet, to know her own strength, and to see her way clearly through the wilderness.<sup>50</sup>

The language of personification is adequate enough to describe the growth of Noodie in Roughing It In The Bush, for she learns to "feel her feet," "know her own strength," and "see her way clearly through the wilderness," throughout the course of that book. The strength of the pioneering vision lies in the future--the conversion of the "day-dream into reality," ~~whether that reality,~~ whether that reality be material or moral progress, and Noodie's social autobiography is written to describe what needs to be done "to render perfect manhood one with God."<sup>51</sup>

In the chapter "Thoughts on Education", we can see that Mrs. Noodie's vision of society is not one of

<sup>50</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 53.

open republicanism, but rather one based on the distinctions of birth and wealth which are "necessary for the well-being of society." The necessity of social divisions in a Christian society finds its support and reflection in the eternal society of heaven:

Perfect, unadulterated republicanism is a beautiful but fallacious chimera which never has existed upon the earth, and which, if the Bible be true (and we have no doubts on the subject), we are told never will exist in heaven.<sup>52</sup>

Such a society, which accepts social divisions as necessary evils, needs moral education for those who are more "blessed" with the good things of the world so that they may "make labour honourable, by exalting the poor operative into an intelligent moral agent." The society which Mrs. Noodie sees is one where there will be an "equality of the mind":

We are advocates for equality of mind--for a commonwealth of intellect; we earnestly hope for it, ardently pray for it, ~~they~~. . .  
 But equality of station is a dream--an error which is hourly contradicted by reality. As the world is at present constituted, such a state of things is impossible. The rich and the educated will never look upon the poor and ignorant as their equals; and the voice of the public, that is ever influenced by wealth and power, will bear them out in

<sup>52</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 57.

their decision.<sup>53</sup>

The society pictured by Mrs. Moodie is one which works along the conventional Romantic theme of Christ as bridegroom and the country as bride:

"Truth, Wisdom, Virtue--the eternal three,  
Great moral agents of the universe--  
Shall yet reform and beautify the world,  
And render it fit residence for Him  
In whom these glorious attributes combined  
To render perfect manhood one with God!"<sup>54</sup>

The world must be transformed and beautified by the "great moral agents" in order that it may combine both God, in the figure of Christ "Him/ In whom these glorious attributes combined" and man through the redemption of education, into a fit paradise where Christ will reign again over His people on this earth.

Knowledge and science are those "moral qualities" which will transform and beautify the earth. Mrs. Moodie looks to Britain as the country which best exemplifies the ever-increasing perfection of mankind, where the "mind," which is associated with the soul, God, knowledge and science, has overcome and overpowered matter:

The power of the mind has subdued all the natural obstacles that impeded her course,

<sup>53</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 279.

<sup>54</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 53.

and has placed her above all her competitors . . . From her educated men have sprung all those wonderful discoveries in science which have extended the commerce of Great Britain, enlarged her capacity for usefulness, and rendered her the general benefactress of mankind.

If education has accomplished these miracles . . . think of what importance it is to Canada to bestow this inestimable gift on her children.<sup>55</sup>

Mrs. Noodie praises technology, "mechanical genius" as she calls it, as the highest form of the human intellect:

Mechanical genius, which ought to be regarded as the first and greatest effort of human intellect, is only now beginning to be recognized as such. The statesman, warrior, poet, painter. . . who among them has celebrated in song and tale the grand creative power which can make inanimate metals move, and act, and almost live, in the wondrous machinery of the present day! It is the mind that conceived, the hand that reduced to practical usefulness these miraculous instruments, with all their complicated works moving in harmony, and performing their appointed office, that comes nearest to the sublime Intelligence that framed the universe, and gave life and motion to that astonishing piece of mechanism, the human form.<sup>56</sup>

Today some of us may look at Mrs. Noodie's somewhat simple optimism in technology and the liberal vision

<sup>55</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 230.



with an historically superior irony, but what must not be forgotten is that this conquering relationship to "natural obstacles" and the open-armed acceptance of science and technology are both fundamental roots of our Canadian inheritance. This vision, the Protestant liberal vision, is itself a product of European romanticism, and in its practicality of application, where a conquering relationship was made necessary by the harshness of the land, it is no wonder that Mrs. Moodie would be sorry "to see the sons of the poor emigrant wasting their valuable time in acquiring Latin and Greek."<sup>57</sup> The education she prescribes is not a liberal education, not the pursuit of truth, but the training of the mind to conquer matter. That the sternness of this vision, the necessary discipline required by the pioneering spirit over "that astonishing piece of mechanism" the human body, should also have the sentimentality so necessary for emotional gratification which Mrs. Moodie exhibits, is a rather strange and paradoxical inheritance we have as Canadians. What Mrs. Moodie has formulated is a vision which has formed the warp and woof of that fabric which constitutes

<sup>57</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 59.

the Canadian identity.

The emphasis which Mrs. Moodie places on the social aspect of this sequel to Roughing It In The Bush may be found in the use of other personalities to describe their stories. An example is the story related by the travelling musician who was a young friend of Mrs. Moodie's, "now dead", whose story has been taken "down from dictation" and who comes to life aboard the steamer to relate the "trials" of his precarious living. The voice of the narrative is the musician's own, but Mrs. Moodie's rhetorical language comes through full force. In autobiographical writing, the use of other personalities as narrative voices serves to stress the point that the identity of the individual, qua individual, is to be found as much in others with whom one comes into contact, as within oneself. Mrs. Moodie's tendency has always been to regard her fate as never uniquely her own, but shared by a number of others. She sees herself as the "connecting link in the destinies of many." Other characters and their experiences become the embodiment of Mrs. Moodie's personality as a writer in much the same fashion as we are drawn into her sphere

of influence by taking our seat beside her on the steamer. The journey of life is made more interesting through the relation of anecdotes and the telling of stories. Each character, each experience has its story and lesson to tell, but the profusion of details which occur to the memory necessitates a selective process, choosing those which are most revealing and entertaining.

The symbolic cluster entailing water, England, Providence and paradise that we have been examining in Roughing It In The Bush is also observable in Life In The Clearings. The emphasis is not so much on England any longer, but the book does contain an overall circuitous pattern where the closing poems speak of "The Land of Our Birth" and "for London", showing Mrs. Moodie's eventual return to her beginning. This pattern, which is conventionally used in autobiography, is perhaps best captured in T. S. Eliot's phrases in "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end", "In my end is my beginning", for such is the tendency which autobiographers generally see retrospectively examining their lives. Both Roughing It In The Bush and Life In The Clearings suggest a circuitous return, the whole cycle containing the entire personality of Mrs. Moodie.

Niagara Falls, we learn from Mrs. Moodie, has been a "glorious ideal" to her mind ever since childhood:

Like a true daughter of romance, I could not banish from my mind the glorious ideal I had formed of this wonder of the world; but still continued to speculate about the mighty cataract, that sublime "thunder of waters" whose very name from childhood had been music to my ears.<sup>58</sup>

She speaks of the change that has come over her through the course of time and of the changes which have taken place over the countryside of Canada--the wilderness has been turned into a haven of rest--and as usual, water has attributes of Fate and Providence in its description:

Often as I had gazed upon it (the Bay of Quinte) in storm and shine, its blue transparent waters seemed to smile upon me more lovingly than usual. With affectionate interest I looked long and tenderly upon the shores we were leaving. There stood my peaceful, happy home; the haven of rest to which Providence had conducted me after the storms and trials of many years.<sup>59</sup>

The passage indicates the paradise secured from the wilderness of the bush, and there are a number of sections which

<sup>58</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 2

<sup>59</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 3

illustrate the passage of time and the change which has taken place in the appearance of the countryside.

Mrs. Noodie's attitude to Nature is typical of the Romantic--man is a fallen creature, Nature contains that same beauty which it exhibited to Adam and Eve. Nature reflects "In the outward beauty of His creation" the divine image of God, and through the "innate perception of the beautiful"<sup>60</sup> the intellect is refined and the soul is uplifted to God. This "innate perception" is not simply confined to the artists or poets, but is in every man of the "most common" sort. It is assumed that if one teaches man how to perceive nature, he will naturally become a "moral agent" of the universe and cease to be a fallen creature. The ideas are basically Wordsworthian. A number of passages of prose and some of the poetry serves to indicate this:

Heaven is above us, and another heaven--  
more soft, and not less beautiful--lies  
mirrored beneath; and within that heaven  
are traced exquisite forms of earth--  
trees, and flowers, and verdant slopes,  
and bold hills, and barren rugged rocks  
. . . We open our hearts to receive its

<sup>60</sup>Noodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 3.

sweet influences. . .and the inner voice of the soul whispers--God is here! Dost thou not catch a reflection of His glory in this superb picture of Nature's own painting, while the harmony that surrounds his throne is faintly echoed by the warm balmy wind. . .

"So smiled the heavens upon the vestal earth,  
The morn she rose exulting from her birth;  
A living harmony, a perfect plan  
Of power and beauty, ere the rebel man  
Defiled with sin, and stain'd with kindred blood,  
The paradise his God pronounced as good."<sup>61</sup>

The passage indicates that through a refinement of his intellectual and moral powers, man will once again be able to restore himself to "the paradise his God pronounced as good." What one also sees is the importance of water as a creative metaphor. Mrs. Moodie is peering into the lake, seeing the "exquisite forms" reflected there, and in viewing the scene, she captures the "reflection" of God's glory in the "superb picture of Nature's own painting." For Moodie, the framing effect which the waters of the lake have, "softens" the actual scene itself, giving it both a clarity of line and an easy accessibility of assimilation.

In the opening poem "Indian Summer," the mirroring reflection of the water illustrates this same artistic

<sup>61</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 107.

apprehension of the scene:

In their depths, life-like glowing,  
We see a second forest growing,  
Each pictur'd leaf and branch bestowing  
A fairy grace on that twin wood,  
Mirror'd within the crystal flood.

The water serves to give an order and a plasticity to the scene which assuages the harshness that is there. Many similar scenes are to be found in Rushing It In The Bush and they generally serve the same purpose. Like a Wallace Steven's jar in Tennessee, the rivers and lakes of Susanna Moodie serve to frame and order the countryside surrounding them.

The most important chapters in Mrs. Moodie's serene autobiography are her descriptions of Niagara Falls. We have passed the time on our voyage listening to characters tell their stories and to Mrs. Moodie's moral anecdotes. As a contrast to Rushing It In The Bush, where life is described dramatically, the serenity of Life In The Clearings is captured by Mrs. Moodie in a few lines:

We did not meet with a solitary adventure on our very pleasant voyage; the deep blue autumnal sky, and the gently-undulating waters, forming the chief attraction, and giving rise to pleasant trains of thought, till the spirit blended and harmonized with the grand and simple elements that composed the scene.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 242.

There is a marriage of the mind and nature in the scene, the spirit "blended and harmonized" with the environment about it.

The waters of the Rapids become a general metaphor of life for Mrs. Moodie. She sees each individual wave as an "identity" annihilated by a superior force:

Yet it is curious to mark how they 'slacken their mad speed when they reach the ledge of the fall, and melt into the icy smoothness of its polished brew, as if conscious of the superior force that is destined to annihilate their identity, and dash them into mist and spray. In like manner the waves of life are hurried into the abyss of death, and absorbed into the vast ocean of eternity.<sup>63</sup>

The reflection seems to indicate Mrs. Moodie's own thoughts on having her "identity" annihilated in the near future, but there is a calm understanding similar to the "melting smoothness" of the waves. There is an understanding of "life flowing perpetually forward" which Mrs. Moodie has and which eases the fear of death and the annihilation of the self. The falls themselves are a metaphor of God's perpetual power in His creation.

The earth as a paradise, and Niagara as an indication of that paradise, is captured by Mrs. Moodie

<sup>63</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, pp. 251-252.



in the early morning when she is viewing the falls:

Earth! how beautiful thou art! When will  
men be worthy of the paradise in which  
they are placed! Did our first father,  
amidst the fresh young beauty of his Eden,  
ever gaze upon a spectacle more worthy of  
his admiration than this?<sup>64</sup>

The mind of man is capable of seeing the world as  
a Paradise if there is a shift in his imagination and  
moral consciousness. Education, it is hoped, will once  
again make men worthy of this paradise through the in-  
crease of his intellectual and moral powers.

Through the course of both Roughing It In The Bush  
and Life In The Clearings, we have been examining the  
thoughts of one of the first women in Canadian literature.  
Mrs. Moodie, having been a writer in England before her  
emigration, had a natural inclination to continue writing  
her observations of her <sup>new</sup> country which have proved both  
unique and interesting as historical documents and as works  
in the genre of autobiography. But there is a deeper  
motivation behind Mrs. Moodie's writings perhaps best  
captured in the poem which introduces the reader to the  
chapter on "Odd Characters" in Life In The Clearings:

<sup>64</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 266.

"Dear merry reader, did you ever hear,  
 Whilst travelling on the world's wide beaten road,  
 The curious reasoning, and opinions queer,  
 Of men, who never in their lives bestow'd  
 One hour on study; whose existence seems  
 A thing of course--a practical delusion--  
 A day of frowning clouds and sunny gleams--  
 Of pain and pleasure, mix'd in strange confusion;  
 Who feel they move and breathe, they know not why--  
 Are born to eat and drink, and sleep and die."<sup>65</sup>

Mrs. Moodie is making an attempt to understand "the great riddle of life" and to understand her place in it. She discovers that she is attached to humanity as a whole, both in the past and in the future, and that her whole life has been one of sacrifice, "borne out of the school of self-denial", to a future vision of society both Canadian and universal, when time shall verge on eternity.

<sup>65</sup>Moodie, Life In The Clearings, p. 140.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ROBERT DE ROQUEBRUNE

In Robert de Roquebrune's Testament of My Childhood we have a social vision which is essentially the antithesis to Mrs. Moodie's. The vision of the future paradise which Mrs. Moodie sees as a product of history, technology and education is, in de Roquebrune, ironically and explicitly rejected. For de Roquebrune, the aristocratic agrarian world of the 1890's French Canada constituted a "Golden Age" which has since been replaced by Quebec's and Canada's zealous adherence to progress and economics, or, as he terms it, "Americanization". In his childhood autobiography, de Roquebrune describes the symbolic life he lived; one which is representative of Western man who, having reached an epoch in civilization, has given up an opportunity to live in an agrarian culture, and where, through recollections of his own childhood, he is able to resurrect a society and an age from "a world that has vanished" in time--an age which is referred to as the "golden age" of Quebec.

De Roquebrune's autobiography is concerned with a retrouve les temps, where the circuitous pattern he finds himself involved in is one of a journey through life search-

ing for "happiness" and one which always brings him back to the place where he began as a child, the manor-house:

Indeed it is probably because of my birth in this house that I have always been passionately devoted to happiness. And if I have always sought it, always pursued it, it is because I once knew happiness and have since always tried to recapture it.

But each time I have thought it within my grasp, the memory of my childhood home has come back to me and it seems to me that everything in my life which even resembles happiness has come to be associated with the place where I first encountered it.<sup>1</sup>

The circuitous return is indicated in the passage where one continually searches and pursues the "paradise" or "Golden Age" one once knew, and in autobiography it is usually as a child. Within the framework of childhood, recollection has a good chance of creating that concrete homogeneity of subject and object, of past and present, of mental image and external event which sees the life as a definable continuity.

To set the quest off in Romantic terms (and these are the terms of de Roquebrune), the fall from paradise is the fall from the "happiness" of the manor-

<sup>1</sup>Robert de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1964) trans. Felix Walter, p. 2.

house into the "world" of necessity and circumstance, and one tries to regain it circuitously by being "passionately devoted" to the search for it. Its recapturing occurs through its refashioning in the form of an autobiography. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Romantic literature is primarily a literature of movement, and de Roquebrune's autobiography shares in this characteristic by constantly pursuing and seeking a past which has vanished, his vehicle of movement being memory.

De Roquebrune's descriptions of the manor-house are indicative of the paradise he once knew; a life of rest and peaceful isolation, where necessity was once succoured:

In our old house. . .we lived on a sort of island far from the rest of the world. We heard little of what went on outside. Some families do live like this, remote, self-sufficient, content with a garden, a wood, and a strip of river. They never seem to feel the need for broader horizons, where chance and adventure may lurk.<sup>2</sup>

Here de Roquebrune indicates the lack of movement, a lack of "chance and adventure," the "garrison mentality" of colonialism as it has been called. When speaking of his

<sup>2</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 2.

parents, de Roquebrune states that "their attitude toward life caused them to live in a spiritual isolation which was as absolute as that of the house itself. . .we lived a profoundly peaceful, amazingly happy life."<sup>3</sup> He speaks of his own childhood as a "blissful eternity," an eternity which he has constantly attempted to recapture:

These childhood years of mine seem to have lasted for a very long time. When I recall our life together in the manor-house, it seems quite endless, a sort of blissful eternity. It is as if my existence as a child had lasted through a whole normal lifetime. . .

When I recall my childhood now with the eyes and the ears of memory, I relive forgotten vistas, forgotten echoes. And when this happens, I am thrown back into a past that seems like something out of a fairy tale.<sup>4</sup>

Thus we have in de Roquebrune the Golden Age of the past and the memory which attempts to seek it out, return to it and relive it. The search for happiness is caused by an almost external necessity. The self is "thrown back" into the past by the memory. This movement of the memory necessitates a reconciliations of some sort between the

<sup>3</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 2.

past and the present, to see them as a continuous revelation of the personality and of life in general.

The manor-house, as the symbol which pervades the entire book, besides informing the memory of de Roquebrune in his search for self, also acts as a synecdoche for the entire history of French Canada, and for a self that was once definable in that aristocratic society. The manor-house was "simple. . .but harmonious,"<sup>5</sup> "absolute" in its isolation from the surrounding world; and with an accretion of tradition which dated back to the days of Louis XIV. The oral tradition, which is such an important vehicle in the transmission of tradition, is that which keeps the past alive:

Before I ever read novels or stories, I was reared on these tales of the past, and these dramatic events of by-gone days, in which my ancestors had played a part, made history especially real for me.

The old house where I was born and spent my childhood was saturated with the past. Everything in it and about it was a reminder of people who had been dead for many years. Their pictures, their furniture, and other objects which had belonged to them kept their vanished world alive.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 52.

For de Roquebrune, the past is given "shape and substance" by his father who relates the history of his family, and concurrently, the history of French Canada:

For me, the history of Canada was a story told in the evenings, under the lamp-light--almost a fairy-story. And it was my father's words that gave shape and substance to this illustrious past.<sup>7</sup>

Canada's past besides being a story of the de Roquebrune family in part, is also a story of the manor-house, for the characters who created the history of Canada have all resided there. The past for de Roquebrune "remained a living reality" through its relation by his father. It is the material objects, such as furniture, pictures and so forth which link the dead selves of de Roquebrune's ancestors to the present, and the significance of these objects, their intimate ties to their owners, is related by de Roquebrune's father in his evening stories. These objects not only link the memory to the past, they also serve to establish a continuity and harmony in both the universe and time, the subjective and the objective worlds, the self and its roots. The identity which de Roquebrune

<sup>7</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 29.



has is inextricably linked to the oral tradition and the past, and he can find meaning because it has both shape and substance, or, in other words, reality. It is not dead or vanished, but continues to live on in the memory of the family.

The importance of the oral tradition in determining a sense of self is very easily recognizable in de Roquebrune. Even before he has conscious memory of his life, the incidents of his birth and the circumstances surrounding it are all related by members of his family. How he was born, the choice of his name, the circumstances of the family at the time, are all related by de Roquebrune as he received them from Sophronie, Roquebrune, his mother and other members of the family and he considers these early events as important factors in his life:

Already I had a past behind me--a past of only a few hours duration but still a past. There I lay in Sophronie's lap with Tiger and Jess pulling the big Berlin. . . Waiting for me at the other end of the first journey of my life was the Abbe Dorval. . . ready to christen me. What was really waiting for me, what I was really on my way to meet, was my life.

My life was just beginning. It had already begun.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 19.

De Roquebrune considers these related reminiscences of others as essential to his own history, in much the same way as his ancestors are an essential element of his own self. This relation of the past is not only essential to the consistency which one finds in time, but also is important in relation to the idea that the essential self is as much located in the interactions and existence of others and the outside world as it is in itself, or as it is within the sphere of one's own personality.

De Roquebrune's childhood shares in many features which are characteristic of much autobiographical writing on childhood in general. There is an emphasis on the ineluctable modality of the visible, the empirical approach of childhood as the formulating principle behind the work. The tone of de Roquebrune's book has the graceful freshness of a well-bred child, finding objects, other beings, and using them as points of orientation into the given world:

A child is always likely to be affected by the contents of the house where sensibility first comes to him, but nothing makes so deep an impression as pictures, engravings, and portraits.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 5.

The stress here is on sight--painting being an art form which mainly depends on sight--and we the reader watch the growing sensibility of a young boy with a penchant for "useless ostentation and for the poetry of decoration."<sup>10</sup>

In the second section of the book, the stress is on the sense of hearing as we listen to the stories being told to de Roquebrune, books being read to him and finally, his own reading deriving from the "sin of curiosity."

The adults which are presented by de Roquebrune have that finishedness and plasticity that they can only have for a child, for whom they are the "given," established world, accepted as such with a great deal of affection. They are not really "characters" in any sense. They have a few concrete static characteristics which are noted because they have influenced de Roquebrune to a certain extent. Their love of isolation, their affection for one another, their interest in tradition as well as the family, are all important factors for de Roquebrune, not only because they represent something which is unique and peculiar to himself, but also, <sup>because</sup> they represent those characteristics which are generally the nature of the society of Quebec

<sup>10</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 5.

before the turn of the century. Through the influence of their characters on de Roquebrune, we can trace the inner development of his sensibilities embraced in outer objects and events. De Roquebrune discovers that as a child he rarely scrutinized his essential self, for there was no ontological necessity to do so. He discovers that he comes to be and know himself through his awareness of others and the outer world:

. . .it is easier to remember what others did than what one did oneself. Most children are very observant and notice with great interest everything that happens around them even though they are hardly conscious of their own existence. A man of sixty will often succeed in retracing his steps back to that forgotten period of his life. He will find it is all still there, clearly etched in his memory like some changeless landscape. . .

There is only one person missing: I myself.<sup>11</sup>

He discovers that his own essential self is not there, that it is impossible to get inside oneself and see it from an objective position. As a child one's relation to the world is the passive reception of emotions, objects, events and circumstances. In recollecting his childhood, he finds that the objective world is "all still there,

<sup>11</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 89.

clearly etched in his memory like some changeless landscape," and his process of growth necessarily takes on a lively, concrete form through observations of things and people. He discovers that his youth is a widening consciousness in a widening world. De Roquebrune describes the events of "one particular day" which he remembers with "special vividness" because he experienced "a set of completely new and intense emotions for the first time." Such is the process of growing up.

The method of memory which is signified in the above passage is one which is selective in its choice of events. It chooses in this particular case, a day in which de Roquebrune experienced a new self. The events are decided and defined by the memory because they are constituents of an essential self. They are arranged according to correlated objects and the imagination creates artifice out of these images and events by making them alive and vivid. The "man of sixty," de Roquebrune himself, possesses the past in the present and sees his particular past as filled with feeling.

This awareness of the past is necessitated by a search for the self which is missing when he recalls the

"changeless landscape" of his mind. The motivation behind the writing is to search for moments of "poetry and passion" which are elements of his personality, and to search for a consistency of himself through the continuum of time:

I am aware that many men and women have completely lost their childhood. Or at best they have retained a colourless, shadowy recollection of that period, and hardly ever think of it. Such a surrender of childhood memories is a sure sign of indifference to oneself, but then lots of people are not really very interested in themselves. They easily forget their own pasts and are frankly bored with their own persons. Their lives are a day-to-day affair, and they let the past die out completely, as if there were nothing about it which made it worth holding on to, and yet the life of any individual may have its moments of poetry and passion. Childhood in particular is full of such moments.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike people who forget the past, de Roquebrune finds that his holding of childhood memories aids in the overcoming of indifference to oneself as well as showing a consistency of identity through time rather than merely a day-to-day shiftlessness which is exhibited in the mass of people.

<sup>12</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 2-3.

This indifference towards the self and the gradual erasing of the past are, we come to discover, characteristic features of modern life. De Roquebrune informs us that the book which held the family tree was the most sacred possession of either the aristocrat or peasant farmer. De Roquebrune discovers that where there is an indifference to the self, this indifference extends to tradition and the family, each individual denying himself and allowing time and death to eradicate the "intervening links" between the past and the present, between past influence and the unique individual personality:

All families have a past of their own, but most people know nothing about their ancestors. The lives of these men and women are shrouded in complete forgetfulness. Grandchildren know nothing of their grandparents. They have perhaps inherited the features of one of these forgotten forbears, the character of another. Elements which were present in the dead are reassembled in a boy now living or go to make up the loveliness of a young girl's face and features, but death and neglect have wiped out the intervening links.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 28.

The concern for the self is the concern for the consistency of the self through time. Since the self's definition is bound in the influences and inheritances of individuals who have existed long before the present, the search for the self becomes an infinite regression into the past. For de Roquebrune, his first unearthing of the past is the existence of Bernard La Roque in 1409. Since this is the earliest possible relative, one can begin the search there. In a passage previous to the one quoted above, de Roquebrune presents a criticism of modern society, which, because of some "dreadful spell" has lost the feeling of life altogether:

The past appeared suffused with a strange charm, but the human race today had lost its joy of living and its sense of beauty. Some dreadful spell had deprived mankind of the spirit of daring.<sup>14</sup>

There is the element of fairy-tale and magic in the "spell" as well as the intimation of a fall from the "golden Age" of the past where romance, beauty and daring were everyday elements of life. Modern society to de Roquebrune is one of boredom, shiftlessness and indifference.

<sup>14</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 27-28.



De Roquebrune's strongest criticism of modern society may be found in an analysis of his narrative consciousness. We have seen that the happiness which de Roquebrune has attempted to recapture has always been located in his childhood days, implying that he has not been happy since but has been engaged in a circuitous search, returning to the paradise of the manor-house. What we discover further is that de Roquebrune's search for happiness and his essential identity is motivated by a much stronger force, for he feels that he had been dead, existing in a "living death", a consciousness in the present pondering the past and seeking a clue to the constituents of being and discovering its location in the interaction between the past and the present, subject and object:

It is our senses that lead us to our knowledge of people and of things and to our mastery of the external world which they constitute. Those faces that I got to know so well, those familiar objects that I came in contact with each day. . .made their impression on my child's brain, which before had been a blank, and this impression remains, intact, precise, and alive, though the child that I was no longer exists. It is as if. . . those days still exist and I alone am

dead and gone.<sup>15</sup>

The outer world is so dominant on the personality because memory, needing correlative objects as an organizing principle, orientates the past and its myriad of images quite easily with external objects that remain ineradicable. The most elusive quality of the past is the perceiving subject:

The process of remembering consists in recalling the external world as it was, in recreating places that have vanished, in bringing back from the dead an entire family. The only one of them all who is still alive is precisely the one who seems most elusive, and that is one's own self. It is impossible for a person to see himself in such a setting.<sup>16</sup>

The elusiveness of the self is bound up in the process of time. One cannot imagine one's self in "such a setting", for in time the self is changing, growing, creating amid a Heraclitean flux, and the autobiographer must attempt to find the "still point" both ineffable and elusive, in order to redeem the self from both time and chance.

There are two ways of conquering time: one is submission to it; and the other is to die. De Roquebrune

<sup>15</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 89.

chooses a variation of the latter. The manner in which de Roquebrune dies is bound in the workings of the memory-- he must literally "die to himself" in order to resurrect the past. Both the method of this dying through memory and a hint of the discretion de Roquebrune uses in choosing events from his childhood are given in the passages which close out the section "Out of the Past". It should be remembered that it is de Roquebrune himself who is "dead and gone" and it is the past which is still alive:

What a strange thing the silence of the dead is! They seem no longer interested in earthly happenings. And if sometimes a departed spirit returns to wander in the place where it once lived, it does so with the greatest discretion. Only the vaguest indications betray its unwonted presence, so that the living are not usually aware of it.<sup>17</sup>

The symbolic fall of the nightjar in the garden associates both dreams and memory as connective links to the past. It is de Roquebrune himself who is the "wandering spirit suddenly hurled to earth":

Sometimes, in the evening, the quiet of the garden was disturbed by a sudden thudding sound, a noise of beating wings and of a body falling through space, as if somebody or something had lost balance

<sup>17</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 70.

and had fallen on to the lawn. . .

. . . There was something very disquieting about this abrupt thud, like the sound of a violent though invisible catastrophe, the death-fall of a wandering spirit suddenly hurled to earth. . .<sup>18</sup>

The scene symbolically depicted by de Roquebrune is the body relaxing before going to sleep--the muscles unwinding and the sense of falling which all of us have experienced at one time or another. The scene at first appears insignificant, disjointed. It is only through the association of dreams and memory that the passage is relevant.

In the next section de Roquebrune does speak of the nature of dreams and memories:

And yet, night, where the dead hold sway, sometimes brings one of them back. . . When sound asleep and dreaming, I sometimes see them again. On such occasions my parents are all mixed up in a most unexpected way with places and people belonging to a totally different period of my life when they were no longer alive. The incoherent nature of dreams brings people and periods together in this way, disregarding time and space, and forming fresh groups by choosing from successive layers of memory.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 70.

It is the memory and dreams which are able to conquer time and space simply by "disregarding" these two elements of life. Time and space are the prison gates of the self by giving to themselves the appearance of points of reference for the search of self. The self is a free spirit in dreams, capable of forming "fresh groups" and associations from the cumulative layers of memory, seeing itself as a unique whole consistent through both time and space.

De Roquebrune goes on to speak of some of the dreams he has had which disregard time and space, of how his mother was able to speak of his wife even though they had not met each other in their actual lives. The delight he has of seeing these "fresh associations" is dispelled by "another presence," one from which he must make a "great effort to escape;" and we can infer that the other "presence" is actual death:

And there was another presence there. At first I didn't want to go into the room and in the doorway I started back. I didn't want to see whoever it was who was there. I didn't want to hear that voice, because when I do, it is too painful.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 70.

Such a realization of "death standing at the door" necessitates the search for an essential self--dreams and memories are too fluid and insubstantial. Autobiographical writing in many instances illustrates the particular personality's preparation for death. In many cases it is the theme of the autobiography, and the knowledge expounded is a Socratic one--the greatest knowledge one can learn from life is how to die.

The manor-house is the chief symbol of the book, giving both a synthesis and unity to sections which exist as a series of reminiscences. Each individual section in each individual chapter consists of a series of images and events which are isolated in time, each contributing to a succession of experiences. For example, we discover that de Roquebrune is born on the twenty-eighth of July. After his baptism, the book speaks of early autumn and the associated objects and events which are typical of that time of the year. The next section deals with the gales of November, the next, Christmas and December, and "the big blizzards and the really cold weather" of January and February. We are made aware of the passing of time. In similar fashion, the chapter on "Out of the Past" deals in each section with a figure from the past, beginning with

the first relatives and ending in the present. Though these sections are unified through the linear progression of time, their isolation in time is distilled somewhat by their association within the larger framework of the manor-house.

Concurrent with de Roquebrune's lamenting for his lost childhood and the happiness which he once knew, there is also a lament for the passing of the Golden Age in Quebec--in the act of lamenting there is a celebration of memory:

Those years between 1890 and 1905 passed as if in a completely different universe--not only remote from us in time, but remote in the appearance of things, in the way people thought, and the way they acted . . . The break between then and now has been so complete, that even having known that era gives me the sensation of having lived on another planet.<sup>21</sup>

Memory is celebrated because it brings to life an age that has vanished. In passages throughout the book, the memory during childhood is seen as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, on which are written moments of poetry and passion. For de Roquebrune, the past and memory are an "ancient manuscript" which one must attempt to interpret and bring to

<sup>21</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 1.

life. In his memory, de Roquebrune sees the manor-house representing an epoch in civilization--an age when society reached its peak. In the section "Out of the Past", the tradition that has been accrued is that which constitutes society's height, a height from which they have since fallen due to "Americanization":

All civilizations reach a peak which is inevitably followed by a complete revolution in manners, morals and customs. No society can remain at its apogee for more than a very few years, and refinement is always the end product of a long series of social accretions perpetuated by tradition. It takes several generations of civilized persons to produce intellectual subtlety, purity of diction and consummate politeness. . . But these remains are only archaeological curiosities, museum pieces at best. The towns and the countryside of the province of Quebec are thoroughly Americanized, and the people who live there now don't even suspect that their ancestors built up a delightful civilization which was still in existence a bare half century ago.<sup>22</sup>

De Roquebrune sees his childhood as the height of a civilization which took two centuries in the making and which since has seen a complete "revolution" in morals and thought. The spiritual climate which was "all-pervading" over the countryside is wiped out because of the

<sup>22</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 142-143.



failure of Quebecers to uphold the family, tradition, morals, manners and customs which were conducive to the creating of a "Golden Age." The age itself, where magic was real and miracles and visions occurred, was not tainted by economics, technology or science, but lived in autochthonous harmony with the land.

The sharp contrast between life as it is lived in the 1890's and life as it is lived under American influence is shown most clearly in the sections on Leonide de Salaberry.

Journeying over the world in pursuit of love and happiness, Leonide first lands in England where he contracts a disease which, on his return to L'Assomption, the local doctors find impossible to cure. Finally, the family calls in St. Germain, whose profession of witch doctor "was as old as mankind itself;" "his art left the science of the doctors far behind."<sup>23</sup> He performs one of his usual miracles on Leonide and we discover that Leonide once again leaves Quebec for New York City, where "he made a lot of money and became completely Americanized."<sup>24</sup> The story of

<sup>23</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 62.

Leonide continues with foreseeable consequences:

Leonide never did come back to Canada. He went on practising law in New York and became more and more like an American business man. He even became naturalized and changed his name to "Mr. Salsberry." There are people like that who can shed their personalities completely when they leave their former surroundings. They turn into someone entirely different. Leonide not only became a different person; even his physical appearance changed. . . . Leonide didn't have a very strong character, and so New York changed him very quickly. About 1896, he sent my parents a photograph of himself. . . . It was the picture of a man with a furrowed brow, a grim expression, and a hard look about the eyes that bore absolutely no resemblance to Leonide, and no wonder, for it was in fact a picture of Mr. Salsberry.<sup>25</sup>

There is a stress on the "indifference to oneself" which de Roquebrune has stated is characteristic of modern society--in modern society people tend to "shed their personalities completely." When the civilization of America takes over, de Roquebrune sees fragmentation and indifference. He speaks of the "quite irresistible force" of New York's "strange spell" which is, of course, money. The effect of the effort in making money on the personality creates a completely different man out of Leonide.

<sup>25</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 63-64.

His complete turn about is equated with the turn about in modern society as opposed to the civilization of French Canada during the 1890's.

De Roquebrune goes on to describe Leonide's death-- the image drawn of New York being one of a demonic hell:

New York kills off its inhabitants ruthlessly, especially in summer during the great heat-waves. The dog-days are as dangerous as a full-scale epidemic, and people collapse on the sidewalks and in their offices. . . The hospitals are crowded with half-demented victims of sunstroke or heat stroke, and the huge city turns into a sort of cauldron in which millions of human beings slowly melt in the intense heat.

. . . It was during the dog-days that Leonide died. He was stricken as if an unseen enemy had hit him between the eyes . . . New York's magic is of a different sort, and perhaps Leonide died because he never really found that out.<sup>26</sup>

The medieval healing magic of St. Germain is juxtaposed to the ruthless magic of modern New York City. One may also intuit the contrast between the medieval aristocratic atmosphere of the French colonies and the modern, determined, money-making Americanization of the French people.

In the next section of the book, de Roquebrune

<sup>26</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 64.

makes certain of his juxtaposition between the hell of New York and the idyllic paradise of French Canada during the 1890's by giving a description of the zeitgeist of the period:

Along with a little Latin and a little Greek they [the priests] taught a whole way of life first conceived centuries ago along the sunlit shores of the Mediterranean. This ancient culture, which came to Canada with the first missionaries and the first colonists, managed to survive. . . The fact that they had done some Latin and read some of the French classics left its mark on the French-Canadian peasantry. It wasn't unusual to meet a farmer who could quote Virgil or an habitant who used tag-ends of Corneille and Racine in everyday speech.<sup>27</sup>

The description is similar to many others used in Romantic literature to describe the past as Golden Age and seeing it as either in the society of Athens or somewhere in the surrounding area of the Mediterranean.

The city of Quebec is also depicted by de Roquebrune as an "authentic antique," quite the opposite of New York, but since, through Americanization, the society and the charm have been left in ruins, to be preserved only in the memory:

<sup>27</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 66.

The Quebec of the Boucherville regime was still an authentic antique; the spurious Chateau Frontenac, designed to titillate American tourists, had not yet been erected. . .

. . . Quebec society had remained intact too; more than that of any other city in the province, it had retained its special virtues, its prejudices, its defects and its charms. It was an aristocracy of townspeople as old as the colony itself. . .<sup>28</sup>

The ruins of the fortress of Quebec are the only reminder of its antiquity.

De Roquebrune unifies his destiny with the destiny of his father and with the destiny of French Canada as a whole. The two events which finally determine the downfall of French-Canadian society are the death of Sambo and economic necessity. It is Sambo who "taught" de Roquebrune "about death,"<sup>29</sup> and it is the end of "the steady rain of gold from heaven"<sup>30</sup> which forces the family to contend with necessity. It is death and necessity which are the significant characteristics of life after

<sup>28</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 141-142.

<sup>29</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 138.

the fall from paradise and the "fall" for de Roquebrune comes when necessity is no longer succoured. De Roquebrune speaks of the letter from Boucherville as the "really decisive factor" in his father's career and it is also the really decisive factor in his own life. The language used by de Roquebrune to express the circumstances brought about by the letter, the "abrupt change of direction", the "complete about face,"<sup>31</sup> is similar to the language used to describe the differences between the civilizations he has known. The letter is a significant symbolic event, modulating the closing cadences of the book.

De Roquebrune speaks of the "whole series of coincidences and fortuitous events" which make up a person's life and the altering of the facts which can occur in "literary artifice."<sup>32</sup> The symbolic incident of the letter is the achievement of art; a symbol chosen by the evaluating memory to give an imaginative knowledge of the situation. De Roquebrune states that "one can really only write about one's own life,"<sup>33</sup> for it is only

<sup>31</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 146.

<sup>32</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 146.

<sup>33</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 146.

one's own self which knows that significant meeting-place between the individual and the outer world of objects which illuminates both. The letter is an object and event that is symbolic of de Roquebrune's personality as an entity unfolding in response to circumstances he is placed in, and as such is capable of being symbolic of the downfall of French-Canadian civilization. De Roquebrune is able to see his own life as significant because he is capable of seeing it as symbolic of the general unfolding of life about him, revealing significant truths about the shortcomings of that life.

De Roquebrune closes his autobiography by illustrating the connection between the manor-house and the age that is now gone:

We sometimes spoke of the manor-house and of the life we used to lead there, but it had all become rather hazy and merged into a distant past that was gradually blotted out. Memories in their sharp, detailed outline become vaguer and vaguer until a whole period of our lives could be summed up in a single image: the manor-house. This phrase. . . gradually ceased to have any particular meaning. . . Our new way of life had by now entirely enveloped the old one, with a completely new set of habits and familiar objects. The phrase had been the symbol of the old life; it died on our

lips because the period it represented was now completely effaced. . .<sup>34</sup>

For de Roquebrune the manor-house and the age which it represented, though now destroyed by fire, is saved "from destruction" by the memory which uses the physical object to project a chain of events in the past which evoke both a lament and a celebration. Single memories, which are essentially the memories of objects that evoke the emotions related to them, become less precise, less sharp, and since this is the case, the manor-house, the all-pervasive symbol of the book, acts as both a synecdoche for the age and an informing representative of the self in the aesthetic reconstruction of the past. The passage above seems to signify the death of the oral tradition in both the de Roquebrune family and, correspondingly, in French-Canadian culture altogether. With this destruction of the oral tradition, we also have the death of the family and tradition. The past is entirely "enveloped" in the present where there are a "new set of habits and familiar objects." Sophronie, "the last link

<sup>34</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, pp. 159-160.



that bound them to that particular place,"<sup>35</sup> has since died. The furniture, pictures and engravings which had held de Roquebrune's ancestors to the "present" have since been sold at an auction.

In order to retain the consistency of identity which was easily held in the past through the oral tradition, de Roquebrune attempts to preserve it in the print tradition through the literary artifice of autobiography. As he notes, "books are always easier to plan than human existences themselves"<sup>36</sup> since the coincidences and fortuitous events which make up the character of a person's life can be aesthetically shaped by both the memory and through an imaginative illumination of the knowledge to be drawn from the character of a life having been lived. If one finds that one's experience is merely "given" without significance or direction, then it becomes necessary to unite sensation to event, self to object, in order not merely to attempt to discover one's self, but to save one's very soul. The retrouvé les temps of de

<sup>35</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 154.

<sup>36</sup>de Roquebrune, Testament of My Childhood, p. 146.

Roquebrune is a literary one; the analogy of memory to an "ancient manuscript" is an apt one.

For de Roquebrune, the redemption of the self from chance and coincidence involves the symbolic refashioning of outer event and inner destiny, seeing their evolution as parallel processes in the continuum of time. The preservation of the self from time involves both memory and artifice. Such a redemption involves a circuitous return, to find one's "end" in one's "beginning," and to see that beginning and end as revealing something unique, essential and meaningful--a journey undertaken to recapture a dispossessed self.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

Of the four autobiographies chosen for consideration in this thesis, it is perhaps Frederick Philip Grove who best exemplifies the "quarrels with circumstance" that seems to be the nature of Canadian autobiographical writing. In his poignant autobiography, the failure of the potentiality of his art to rise above the miring swamp of Canadian ignorance and indifference, as well as his failure to regain the leisure so necessary to the artist for the act of creation, is discovered to be both the result of the circumstances he is placed in as well as the result of his own nature. The circuitous search for the "lost paradise" of European culture where necessity is succored and leisure abounds and the subsequent failure to achieve that state of leisure is the struggle which is characteristic of Grove's entire life.

Grove's "paradise" is in many ways similar and yet quite distinct from Moodie's and de Roquebrune's. Whereas in de Roquebrune we have the idealization of memory (especially childhood memory) which gives us the sentimental social form of the paradise vision located

in the past, a sentimental and nostalgic paradise which increases the separation between the subject and the object by drawing the subject into the isolated world of recollection, in Grove there is a reversal of this process with the attempt to unify the subject and object in the imaginative act of literary creation. Grove is not writing a "testament." His autobiography is not concerned with the disposition of his artistic and individual property after his fictive, literary death. Rather, in his retrospective gathering of accounts, he attempts to understand his personality as it has acted through the continuum of the past and present, its interactions as subject with the objective world, the battle which it has fought as spirit against the encroaching materialistic reality. Instead of dispensing the present as de Roquebrune does in his childhood autobiography, Grove is more concerned with <sup>involvement in</sup> the present. He endeavours to bring his past and present self into balance, to eliminate the contingencies of circumstance.

Susanna Moodie's Roughing It In The Bush resembles Grove's autobiography in many respects. Rather than attempting to return to the paradise of the past, one

commits oneself to a political vision of the future.

Moodie, however, sees the rendering of paradise through technology while Grove indignantly rejects the technological vision.

The structure and patterns which inform Grove's autobiography are enucleated in his theory of art, one which may be called an aesthetic of infirmity.<sup>1</sup> The ordering principle behind Grove's narrative consciousness in the "present" is his failure in finding the leisure necessary to perform the creative act--he has been bound body and soul to the "chase" after the necessities of life. Grove's theory of artistic creation also works within the realm of Romantic philosophy and conventions, examples of which we have seen in de Roquebrune and Moodie.

Grove's past, he makes us realize, was one of great potentiality, a potentiality which was capable of actualization in the great cultural centres of Europe, but not in the uncultured backwardness of the Canadian wilderness. In the "Prologue" to the autobiography,

<sup>1</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1946). Grove's theory of art is to be found on pages 429-433.

Grove builds up the attitude of promise in his abilities to ironically express the "fall" from the paradise of his past. Speaking of the time when he was a protege of a young Frenchman who had since had an effect on the "universes of human thought and human sentiment,"<sup>2</sup> he expresses the potentiality which others had seen in him:

Stranger than anything else, there had come back to me the memory of the attitude which this young Frenchman had observed towards myself: the attitude of a mentor coaching one of whom great things were to be expected, things greater than those within his own reach.<sup>3</sup>

When he returns to Europe and meets the Frenchman again, he discovers that "tragically. . .we had nothing any longer to say to each other,"<sup>4</sup> circumstances, being exiled in Canada, leading to his lack of ability to communicate with European cultural circles.

Though Grove in fact never did return to Europe after his exile in Canada, such an imaginative recasting of the circumstances of his life help to artistically create the situation of the artist exiled from the Golden

<sup>2</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 5.

Age of his past. It also indicates that the theories and subjects of his art in Canada are quite distinct from his European literary aspirations, and from those of his counterparts in his youth.

Grove's theory is more than simply a philosophy of art. It works more along the lines of what the Germans call the Marchen, an invented myth, incorporating both a philosophy of life and of history. Grove begins his philosophy by expressing that "all art is a product of leisure"<sup>5</sup> and he supplies us with an illustration of an imaginary nomadic hunter in neolithic times discovering the essential dichotomy of Grove's own life: that one cannot hunt and at the same time carve the image of the deer or lion. Grove provides us with analogies to his own circumstances by suggesting that "nobody has ever been "creative" under a threat," that threat being starvation. Once the hunter is preoccupied with the "chase" after the necessities of life, such a chase consumes all of the hunter's time. He must concern himself with supplying the strength and tools to carry out the successful completion of the chase.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 429.

Grove presents in a nucleated form the Romantic plot of the circuitous or spiral quest, where his own individual personality and struggles are equated with all artists in general. For Grove, the "chase" is his attempt to create a nest-egg from his earnings as a teacher and labourer in order to have the time to create the works of art that have long rested in his mind. Economics and art are concurrent and inseparable in the autobiography:

. . .this book is the record of a failure; and its explanation: a double failure, an economic and a spiritual one, for ultimately one involved the other.<sup>6</sup>

Grove's concern with economics overpowers the autobiography and is one of its weaknesses. Though there is a constant striving to unite both economics and creativity, and like Moodie, Grove strikes these themes in arpeggio fashion, one wishes that he would have taken us backstage to see the hidden processes which drove the works forth; the creative impulse which is the first issuance of art. He does do this with his account of the character of Abe Spalding, and this episode is certainly one of the more entertaining of the ones related, but through the rest of

<sup>6</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 409.



the book, the reader is often submerged in Grove's obsession with economics and is only rarely allowed to emerge from this concern to grasp the freshness of his creative impulses. One may turn to any section of the autobiography from "Manhood" onwards to discover the overriding concern with economics and the continual displacement of his time and efforts, directing them towards a future state where he hopes to be capable of writing. This is basically Grove's circuitous journey back to the "paradise" of his past, a paradise which he was incapable of entering into in his own lifetime.

As an artist, Grove's position towards the objective world is an aesthetic one--an "attribute of him who is more or less unfitted for the chase,"<sup>7</sup> a "temperamental" disability. Such a disability, or infirmity as he calls it in places, conveys leisure, since the artist is incapable of the chase after meat or money. When he sees the object of meat, it represents to him so much beauty, and through this aesthetic apprehension of the object, the artist is united, becomes one with the object he is

<sup>7</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 430.

about to kill, and thus becomes incapable of the act. For Grove, circumstances did not <sup>concede</sup> mitigate for such an arrangement. Throughout the course of his life, Grove is both physically and temperamentally disabled: physically through his deafness and semi-paralysis, and temperamentally because he is "of the aesthetic sense." The leisure which was a necessity for Grove under such circumstances was not available. He is forced by the circumstances in which he is placed to be a man of the "chase", yet the weaknesses of his own character, particularly his infirmity as an artist, necessitates an inevitable failure both economically and spiritually.

Grove states that the failure of the artist in modern times is integral with the cultural and political conditions of the society he is placed in. The aristocracy of the past has been replaced by "a more or less stupid public"<sup>8</sup> where the artist has become the public entertainer who "must rattle his tin cup" in order to gain the "crumbs" from the public's table. The artist, despising the public's obsession of making a success of their

<sup>8</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 432.

material lives, remains meanwhile, unfitted for such a task and "starves, metaphorically, if not in fact."<sup>9</sup>

In his rebellion against the society he is placed in, the artist is impotent. At least under the aristocratic regime he could claim the crumbs as his right. The malaise of modern living, its concern with progress and material well-being, its "standard of living" as Grove indignantly calls it, creates a much greater spiritual task for the artist if he is to change the public's taste and "create the beings who are to enjoy his paradise,"<sup>10</sup> for under the present circumstances, "everybody's task is nobody's task"<sup>11</sup> as the modern world moves to social and psychological specialization.

Grove in his didacticism attempts to rise above the mere subjective validity of autobiography into a convincing set of values and beliefs on an objective level. Though he is limited by the literary form he is working in (in the sense that autobiography does not serve as

<sup>9</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 433.

<sup>10</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 432.

<sup>11</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 433.

an appropriate means to urge the objective truths of a doctrine), the general truths that he has come to grasp in the workings out of his life, urge the acceptance of the values which his doctrine partially formulates. In his argument against materialism and progress, he insists on the personal, subjective validity of the proposal; yet, he insists that if his argument simply exists on the personal level, "it would not be worth my while to expound it."<sup>12</sup>

Grove's political vision is extremely close in character to Rousseau's. Giving up on technology, modern civilization, which he feels is a "consolidation with barbarism,"<sup>13</sup> he is attempting to make a consolidation with nature, where an agrarian society, in close harmony with the "genuine impulses" of life and "free from stultifying convention," supplies no "material wants beyond those requisite, allowing one the freedom to follow his thought wherever it leads him." He presents himself as both a heretic and an outcast, living on the borders of a civilization which has shifted its emphasis from a spiritual

<sup>12</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 447.

<sup>13</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 448.

to a materialistic realm.

Grove's autobiography is at the heart of the North American philosophical and political problem; one which may be summed up as the conflict between materialism and idealism, agrarian culture versus the urbanization of man. This conflict, though complex in all its variations, remains one which arose from Romantic thinking: it involves the problem of how man could best render paradise here on earth. The North American continent, viewed as pure potentiality, was attacked with the vigour of both spiritual conviction and material opportunism. The over-emphasis of materialism in this vision is essentially the problem which Grove grapples with during his entire life.

In a footnote near the end of A Search For America, Phil Branden, the narrator, states that the "paradise" he has been looking for has been abandoned in the United States, but perhaps, not yet, in Canada:

I have since come to the conclusion that the ideal as I saw and still see it has been abandoned by the U.S.A. That is one reason why I became and remained a Canadian.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Frederick P. Grove, A Search For America (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1971), p. 382.

In Search of Myself, written much later in Grove's writing career, speaks also of Canada's abandoning of this ideal vision. Grove's voice remains the voice of the dispossessed self, a self which can only find expression in an outcast culture. Being neither a Christian, nor having faith in material progress, and living on the edge of a society where these are the dominating mythologies, Grove's isolation is intensified. The artist who attempts to give voice to a cultural vision which will not nor cannot be heard, truly lacks the audience who has the ears to hear.

What Grove is basically arguing against is the "will-to-power" of modern technological civilization. As he states:

Every skyscraper erected in the United States, every canal dug through every isthmus, every air-line opened up exacts its toll of human life. . . It exacts its toll of human happiness as well; for the sheer physical labour required to bring such things about can only be supplied by some sort of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

In a society bent on both progress and industrialism, technology becomes the most effective means of man's

<sup>15</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 448.

utilization of his "will-to-power", whether that "will-to-power" be rural or urban. Grove's reflections on Nietzsche are pertinent to this point:

From the beginning I saw that there were two Nietzsches: the Nietzsche before and the Nietzsche after "Zarathustra". I felt that the earlier Nietzsche was a European event; the later Nietzsche, the violent one, became more and more specifically German, precisely because of his anti-germanic violence.<sup>16</sup>

It should be remembered that Grove is constructing his autobiography during the Second World War and that Nietzsche's "violent" philosophy found its most base and violent expression in Nazi Germany. Though Nietzsche is undoubtedly the step-grandfather of Fascism, the remark throws more light on Grove's character than at other places where he believes he is giving us psychological insights into his own personality. The Nietzsche after "Zarathustra" was the mature Nietzsche--the philosopher following his thinking to its inevitable and ineluctable conclusions. These conclusions found one of their formulations in the masculine logos of the "will-to-power". Grove rejects the masculine force, the violence of the

<sup>16</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, pp. 166-167.

will which attempts to subjugate and control the stuff of the world. What is peculiarly disturbing about Grove's personality in his rejection of the "masculine violence" is his femininity and passivity with regard to his view of the cosmos as well as his retrospective view of his own life. He rarely, if ever, delves into this element of his character with any psychological precision and one wishes that he had. Perhaps its foundations are, at bottom, his love of the Decadents in his early life. Wilde, George, Gide, the Decadents in general, are all peculiarly feminine with regard to their view of nature and the world, expounding as they did an "art for art's sake" pose. Though some critics take pride in the fact that Grove was one of the pioneers in realism and naturalism in Canadian literature, one wonders what his subject matter would have been had he not had the struggles of the pioneers to deal with. His early writings which are imitations of Stefan George's work may be an indication of this. But this is moot speculation. What we do have is a man buffeted by fate and circumstance, concerned with "the ultimate working out of what was in me: a sort of reaction to the universe in which man was trapped,



defending himself on all fronts against a cosmic attack."<sup>17</sup>

It seems rather odd that a man looking for rootedness in the land should have such a reaction to nature. Such thinking does not lead to rootedness, but homelessness. One may speculate that his early Nietzschean influence affected his lack of Christian faith, supporting his artistic pride in exile from a culture where such a faith predominated. One is reminded of Stephen Dedalus. But the psychological determinism so evident in his personality (the fatalistic passive unfolding of the innate qualities of an individual's personality and character in the buffeting flux of nature), seems to be an undeniable product of his own eccentric quirks, as well as his incapacity to come to terms with the nature of the "human will" which, in any action, does some violence to the world as it is.

In Grove's autobiography, the circuitous return to the "golden age" of his past is not considered. As an individual in a society of men, the Golden Age is no longer

<sup>17</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, pp. 162-163.

considered as an individual's past, qua individual, but is contained as a vision of the future political condition of society. He states in A Search For America that "the Golden Age stands at the never-attainable end of history, not at Man's origins;"<sup>18</sup> in other words, that the Golden Age is always and has always been an ineluctable transcendence. The patterns are similar to Susanna Moodie's in many ways; they have since undergone a century of secularization through the thinking of Darwin and Nietzsche. They still embody however, an implicit theodicy: the fall in Grove, though less explicit than in other authors, is conceived as a fall from unity into division with a subsequent movement back, through integrating the subjective and the objective worlds.

The land is central to Grove's vision of paradise. He views the human being as a "seed," "once released from the parent plant, it has to seek, or rather to find, its soil, there to grow or perish."<sup>19</sup> The land, the objective world, works in a collusion-like process on the individual's

<sup>18</sup>Frederick P. Grove, A Search For America, p. 382.

<sup>19</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 156.

soul, making him aware of himself intuitively, in a startling fashion. It is the disheartening wastes of Siberia which first reveal Grove's soul to him. It is only later, when he is brought face to face with the country surrounding the Pembina Mountains in Manitoba that he can once again strike root. His journey is a long one. Grove must find that place where the subjective self is capable of identifying with the objective world about it. This identification produces a life which is totally "aesthetic", to use Grove's theory of art once again, where the self or "I", and the world, the "not-I", are inextricably bound in a harmony of identification, where the soul of man is revealed to him. Life then becomes a battle against the "ugly," against all that is not beautiful.

The best method of unifying the subject and the object is through the imaginative act of literary creation. The land acts as a catalytic agent providing the spiritual impulse which emerges as a final work of art. Thus we see the significance of the opening "Prologue". The vision of a life bogged down in the mire of circumstance, a life which is a "wash-out" in respect to the great

potentiality Grove feels he had as an artist in his youth, is captured in a brief epiphanic illumination of the objective world. This vision of the landscape allows Grove to see the inexorable conditions of his fate as well as an illumination of his soul. It is the significant meeting-place of the subjective and the objective worlds: the paradise in which men are made aware of themselves, a place where they may find their identities.

For Grove, the Golden Age and the act of creation are concurrent. Man, through time, comes closer and closer to the Golden Age as more and more of the good and the beautiful appears on the earth. There can never be a complete realization of the Golden Age, however, for that would mean the end of "history," the complete unification of the subject and all which is separated from it as object. The experience of history or time is the experience of fragmentation, alienation and chaos characteristic of life.<sup>20</sup> For Grove, art overcomes this fragmentation through the unification of the self and world, bringing man to a closer approximation of the Golden Age through the marriage of

<sup>20</sup>See page 3 of the Introduction to this thesis.

the self and nature. The realization of the Golden Age would mean the end of its existence in the mind as a motivating force; its inspirational value would be finished. Grove felt that if God were known, he would be dead, for knowledge destroys transcendence. The realization of the Golden Age would spell spiritual death, for it would destroy the goals which have given men meaning throughout history. But the very ideal of the Golden Age is, for Grove, a goal which man has chosen because it is beyond his abilities to achieve it. For Grove, the process or search is all. He participates in that thinking which was at the heart of the Romantic movement: the search for perfection is held higher than the realization of that perfection itself.

The circuitous pattern of the autobiography, where the fall from the leisure society of Europe is united to the search for the Golden Age of the future, is bound up by the belief in the "educational" progress of man. The arts which are eternal lead man into the depths of his soul, continually enlarging the knowledge of his consciousness, bringing him closer to the state of perfection. Cultures follow a circular fashion in that

they rise up and fall again, but art and knowledge continue to accrue in man's consciousness in a slow spiralling progress. When this progress is completed, so will history be complete, for man will be able to repossess the world and once again restore the world of thought to the world of nature. All art does this. Grove moves from his own individual concerns with the search for a Golden Age, into the necessary social vision, a vision of a society based on the necessities of life: the raising of a family, the growing of one's own food, and a deep commitment to one's fellow man.

In The autobiography, Grove states that "In this record, I know, I am dying to myself,"<sup>21</sup> implying that in the search for himself, the realization of what he is brings an end to the mystery of himself, a spiritual death, like the creatures of his own imagination who, once created, are "born into death."<sup>22</sup> Literary artifice as an eternal form, carries Grove from time into eternity through the preservation of the patterns made evident in his life.

<sup>21</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 387.

<sup>22</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 387.

The work of art, rather than contributing to the individual's identity, destroys this identity by giving it a finality somewhat like death. As Grove states:

The life which is peculiar to me consists in letting other lives work themselves out within that, to me entirely mysterious, entity which is known to others by my name. What I am, as a consciousness, has nothing to do with it; I have often doubted whether there is anything that I can legitimately call "I". I have also doubted whether any so-called personality can be considered as an end in itself; for better or worse, our lives are part of the life of mankind. Willy-nilly we live for a while under the illusion that the link in the chain has as much reality as the chain itself. Death destroys that illusion; and death may well not be the cessation of anything whatever. We live as much in others as we live in ourselves. For the chain of the generations the life we live for others, in others, is the one thing which has any importance whatever. If we consider our indirect influence, it may extend through eternity.<sup>23</sup>

The individual, once understanding himself, recognizes that there is no self to understand; he labours under "the illusion of the individual life."<sup>24</sup> Grove, similar to Moodie in this respect, sees the individual and his meaning bound to the history of humanity in general:

<sup>23</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 452.

<sup>24</sup>Frederick P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 452.

that he and all men, are inevitably progressing to an unrealizable goal. Whereas for Moodie, the acquisition of this future state of society can best be rendered through technological and material progress, Grove relies on the antithesis to this vision. Art and culture will contribute to the expansion of knowledge in man's consciousness, not the continual race to acquire material goods which once acquired lose their significance, nor the will-to-power over nature through technology. Grove sees the fundamental need of man best provided by an agrarian setting. Art shall give the solace to the soul which materialism and the acquisition of material things cannot provide.

The tensions involved in Grove's autobiography between the "practical" and the "impractical," between spirituality and materialism, the self and the objective world, life as "adventure" or discipline, are those which make up the drama of his life. Throughout the course of his autobiography, Grove insists on both the inexorable weakness of his character as well as the "malice of circumstances" which inevitably causes him to make the



wrong choice at every crisis of his life. There is an understanding that "this is the way it had to be"; that nature had shaped and pre-destined him for what he inevitably was. The artifice of autobiography directs our attention to the personal subjective history of the man; to the ideas and actions as inevitable effluents of his personality and circumstances.

## CHAPTER 4

### KILDARE DOBBS

Most modern autobiographical writing tends to see the self as an elusive protean configuration--there is an undeniable certainty that it is there, yet, when one approaches it through recollection or contemplates on the objective circumstances surrounding and giving illumination to it, it tends to disappear or change form to remain the somewhat ungraspable phantom of a life. Such a protean-self is Kildare Dobbs; who, being incapable of answering the question ". . .who is this fellow? . . ." offers instead a volume of short, delightfully descriptive pieces of reminiscence. In his autobiography, the author and the reader walk together in a seemingly real dream-alliance towards the gardens inhabited by Stephen Dedalus and Marcel Proust; a paradise conceived in the imagination, be it the "daysprings of youth", captured and held in the memory and rendered into the "poetry" of art, or the "yet unimagined" Canada, "a country still in the future."<sup>1</sup> We are walking, or rather running, towards these gardens with Mr. Dobbs, but we fail to reach them. The circumstances

<sup>1</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 150.

of our times keep us from them.

Unlike the autobiographies of Moodie, de Roquebrune and Grove, Dobbs attempts to capture the multiple radiations of a series of "moments" and hopes for an illumination of the multiple "selves" to be experienced in each particular moment. The major moment is a Proustian moment, where the "smell of sandalwood" acting like the Proustian tea, engenders the attempt to retrouve les temps, which seem "so strange and still so familiar that it glows in memory like a legend of the golden age."<sup>2</sup> In Dobbs, there is the intangible, disturbing relationship between poetry and life as a preparation for something which never happens, where the dream and the reality are strangely related, be that dream the past of his own life or the country to which he is running and fails to find. Dobbs like Grove, is wary of the "idealized memory" of childhood, the longing for a nostalgic paradise of the past, of which de Roquebrune is an example. The two quotations from Yeats used to introduce the book suggest that there are two paradises: the paradise of the past, to which memory, resembling

<sup>2</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 9.

"those Swedenborgian angels," forever flies, and the paradise of the future, a country of political and social co-operation to which he is running. Both paradises are imaginative constructions: the nostalgic past being one constructed out of the "idealized memory" creating the usual "golden age" configuration typical of the other autobiographies we have been examining; and the paradise of the future, a goal to which one constantly strives which is capable of creation in the imagination and must be rendered into a political and social reality. Both paradises are explored in Dobbs' autobiography and, by way of a strange circuitous fashion, both paradises are one.

The subject matter, aim, and structural details of Dobbs' autobiography share in what is the chief enterprise of many of the best modern writers--that is, the "creative autobiography." Dobbs is creating both a factual and fictional work of art. In his "Preface" he attempts to get up the courage to say that his book is autobiographical and he asks us into intimacy with him on his journey through the past. He is pre-occupied with memory, time, and the relationship of what is passing to what is eternal--

the circumstances of his own life to the vision of paradise which he sees as the goal of his life. The peregrinations to paradise, which are the over-all adhesive to his life, determine the peculiar mode of experience and his response to the world. The autobiography is concerned with the evolving mode of vision of Dobbs in terms of his successive engagements with the world and his response to these engagements. Dobbs and Grove, and most artists of the twentieth century, find it necessary to understand this evolution of vision, for it is the "problematic" of the artist, defined in its most pointed form by Nietzsche.

Though Dobbs is writing from a "fixed" point in the present engendered by the "smell of sandalwood" and the circumstances of his past experiences, he does not really have the strong "narrative stance" of a Grove, Moodie or de Roquebrune; that is, he is not quite certain of his evolution of vision, for this evolution is still in the process of creating his standpoint which is as fluid as time itself. His stance is an ineffable one, filled with uncertainty:

. . .this book is autobiographical. I'd have written a proper one, complete with ancestors, funny sayings of the artist as a tiny tot and all, if I thought I could

get away with it. But I'm only too well aware that the question would then arise: who is this fellow? Or, worse still, who does he think he is? Good questions, both of them. It just happens that I'm not ready to answer them yet.<sup>3</sup>

The self that is sought by Dobbs is not to be found in a creative nostalgia.

There is an over-all circuitous return to the "golden age" of one's childhood, but this return is not the de Roquebrune nostalgia for happier times or for the social conditions of the past. Rather, the return involves a return to the attitude of childhood, to a time when one waited with patience and wonder:

Each morning of our life we woke up with the conviction that today something wonderful was going to happen. On Christmas day something wonderful did happen--but, strangely, without at all lessening our faith in wonders to come. Perhaps in this we were like the first Christians, astonished but not sated with a miracle, delighted but still confident of the delights to come. Simeon alone was satisfied, the only one to sing Nunc Dimittis. Or perhaps we were just being children, who, wherever they grow up, have it in their nature to wait and wonder.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, pp. 21-22.

This attitude reflects the Christian belief that "unless ye become like like little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven;" the autobiography hinging on the second coming of Christ, the something wonderful that will happen, the miracle for which one is waiting.

It is interesting to view Dobbs' Running To Paradise in light of the closing sentences of <sup>Yeats'</sup> ~~Yeats'~~ childhood autobiography, Reveries. The Yeatsian influence on Dobbs' book is undeniable. The writing style, the images are strangely similar:

. . .When I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens.<sup>5</sup>

The restlessness of Yeats at the close of his autobiography is captured by Dobbs in his "Prelude" to Running To Paradise:

Before I fall to sleep I have the feeling that something wonderful, something miraculous is going to happen. All my life, this feeling will not leave me. . .<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>William Butler Yeats, Autobiographies: "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth" (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1955), p. 106.

<sup>6</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 9.

This something that Dobbs is expecting to happen through the course of his life is made up of an <sup>apocalyptic</sup> ~~composite~~ occurrence: neither hopes for a realization of the imaginary destination to which he is running, where "the king is but as the beggar," or, he is waiting for the second coming of Christ, both of which are expected to happen, but the chances are highly unlikely. The Christian millenium is very strong through Dobbs' autobiography. Many of the chapters are recorded on Christmas Eve or Christman Day, each indicating hopes for the next great miracle.

What has determined the writing of the autobiography is a significant scene in the final episode, a scene where the objective and the subjective worlds meet to give an epiphanic illumination of a personal truth:

I walked down to the shore, behind me the black forests--and behind them the whole of Canada and the world and my life, before me the gleam of the Pacific, the waves running over sand and pebbles to my feet, the heavy drum of the surf beating on my brain. I looked out into the open ocean.

And the sea saith it is not with me.<sup>7</sup>

It was Marcel Proust who said that "the true paradises

<sup>7</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 159.



are the paradises we have lost," and most autobiographical writing tends to agree with this assertion, seeing the paradise as the glowing "golden age" of childhood or as an age when Man himself was much more innocent. Dobbs' final vision sees the whole of his life and the world behind him as being an experience teaching him that the ideal destination to which he is running is not to be found in Canada nor, perhaps, in this life.

In his book Reading The Time, Dobbs states that "nostalgia. . .is only another response to frustration. No one with an interesting future before him has time for dreaming about the past."<sup>8</sup> It is evident in the writing of Running To Paradise that Dobbs does not see an interesting future before him--there is only the sea. With such circumstances militating against further journeying, Dobbs decides to endow himself with angelic qualities, qualities which will help him to resemble "those Swedenborgian angels" who have the privilege of not having to pass through "intermediate space" on their peregrinations to their youth.

<sup>8</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1968), pp. 10-11.

"Youth" in Dobbs' autobiography has a number of different connotations. First of all there is its literal meaning, one's past between his childhood and maturity, and secondly, there is the idea of "youth" as a method of perception, as a way of organizing and perceiving the world through a freshness of sensation, as an attitude of waiting and wondering. Romantic literature is filled with references to childhood in almost every writer and his philosophy. Each writer sees childhood as a time when perception was at its height; when the "miraculous" was to be "found in the common" everyday occurrences of life. When man grows, he begins to lose his senses and finds himself in a condition of alienation and isolation. Through a radical shift in vision, man can once again retrieve the freshness of vision which he had as a child, where everyday facts and objects are perceived with an epiphanic-like illumination. Such perception is thought to be an adequate alternative to the forfeited Golden Age of the past, and in some writers, Carlyle, Emerson and Thoreau for instance, an adequate alternative to the expectations in a millennial hereafter.

Dobbs continues in this tradition. He sees children

who "wherever they grow up, have it in their natures to wait and wonder," and he himself is journeying angelically to this kind of childhood, where perception is constantly poetic. His actual childhood is a sort of "golden age"-- there is a pastoral acquiescence in the "pleasantly boring" routine. The idealized memory can combine both "stench and perfume" into one over-all pleasing scent. In the "Prelude" to the work, the "smell of sandalwood" calls to Dobbs' mind Christmas as he has experienced it throughout the different stages of his life. Each Christmas has a specific moment which is particularly remembered, an epiphany which strangely intimates the meaning of the event and suggests the manner in which the memory works. The first is the turtles with candles on their backs, slowly moving toward the river. The image is a sharp one; the meaning not explicit. In the second Christmas, a work of art called the Three Pots intimates to Dobbs' mind the rector and his family and the Holy Trinity. In the third, it is Mount Kibo, "the lamp of God." In the fourth section, the lion roaring at night and instilling a primal fear into the white men, as well as the "interrogative, 'who? who?'" of the hyena suggests meaning beyond what is

given. The atmosphere of mystery and the exotic is well established through the concise language of Dobbs, though there is an elusive dream-like quality to the descriptions. The perception of the images is "fresh"; each common object an epiphany of itself and of something more. The "something more" of the "Prelude" gives the vague quality which the reader feels when he reads it.

This "Prelude" is similar to a number of autobiographies from the Romantic period. One is immediately reminded of Wordsworth and Proust. Like Wordsworth's great poem and Proust's great novel, Dobbs opens his autobiography with a preamble at a time of his life when the narrator, falling asleep, has already experienced the events he is about to unfold. The narrative proper begins with memories of the author's childhood at Viewmount of which the central scene is waiting for Christmas and the "something" that was going to happen. The narrative continues with successive memories of specific characters and events which are somehow indicative of his childhood, adolescence and manhood. The whole involves a journey to an ideal destination, a paradise which, it is intimated, is not to be found in any country in the world. Each

chapter presents a different self; as Dobbs says, the autobiography is about his "selves" at different points in time.

When failing to find the "Glass Garden", on a trip through a Victoria, British Columbia hotel, Dobbs conjectures:

Did I dream this? Was it a trap set for me. . . Or was ~~it~~ a hint, perhaps, that that country I was running to, and still seek, was not to be found? Aida had led me to this, of that I was convinced, so that I realized I was not her favourite. . .<sup>9</sup>

One is reminded of the situation "Many are called but few are chosen", Dobbs himself being unable to find the spiritual and geographical foundation on which to base a self. Upon reading a Bible, in which he finds "refuge" from the dullness of his occupation as a book salesman, he quotes: "where shall wisdom be found?" indicating a search for some kind of position on which to base a viewpoint. He sees Canada as a "limitless territory rising from imagination into fact, and now sunk down into memory."<sup>10</sup> Canada is an "ocean of loneliness scattered with villages and cities

<sup>9</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, pp. 158-159.

<sup>10</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 155.

like lighthouses winking from the shores of sleep."<sup>11</sup>

The end of the book indicates that what Dobbs is looking for is not to be found in the "sea" whether that sea be the Pacific Ocean or the vast emptiness of Canada. Standing out on the farthest western point of Canada, imagining the world and his whole life gone behind him, Dobbs attempts to find the "standpoint" or narrative stance upon which to begin his autobiography. His life and experiences which he finds to his surprise are a restless journeying "westward", running to an ideal destination which is not only in the imagination but is existing in fact, are the circumstances which contain the impulse of the writing of the autobiography. The autobiography is circular in structure--its end an inevitable result of its genesis and vice versa. Since there is no where else to run, and since his intuitive wisdom indicates that what he is searching for is not to be found in the sea, he begins to retrace his steps through the memory, hoping for an illumination of the self amid the incidents, images and circumstance which imprint their importance on his mind.

<sup>11</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 150.

Each separate chapter of the book indicates a growth either of intuitive, intellectual, or practical knowledge. The characters and their actions are remembered either because they are "characters" and worth remembering, such as Buttonsshaw or R.F. Fitzalbot, or because they teach Dobbs something of value, such as Matata or Mr. Da Sousa. Through the relation of incidents or characters, detail is superimposed upon detail until, usually at the end of each chapter, an epiphanic illumination of what has happened occurs. Dobbs is elusive as a self in many of the chapters--he seems merely a voice. There is no desperate struggle to find the self until the end of the book. Similar to each individual chapter, the entire book superimposes detail upon detail, self upon self, the total of which is Dobbs' life, each contributing to the illumination of the meaning of his life as a journey to some paradise.

There is an implicit social vision in Dobbs' autobiography, not explicitly stated, merely indicated. The paradise to which Dobbs is running is a "destination as yet unimagined"<sup>12</sup> a country where the "king is but as

<sup>12</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Running To Paradise, p. 150.

the beggar." At the close of the autobiography, Dobbs is an alienated man--he has no country, no foundation, no fixed point of view, only an image of an ideal after which he constantly strives. In his "Introduction" to the book Reading The Time, Dobbs gives us a clearer indication of his position in the world. He states:

The chapters that follow are. . .products of a mind on the run. . .They are. . . attempts or trials, a nomad's efforts to make sense of what he sees as he runs through the landscape of his part of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

He goes on further to say that:

Contemporary man is a nomad, without ancestors, without posterity, and without a country. Despite the consoling fiction of nationality, we are all displaced persons.<sup>14</sup>

Such a character is the narrator of Running To Paradise, a modern man, who, after his headlong rush across the landscape of Canada, looks back to examine where he's been, with his "incurable habit" of making patterns and giving to his experiences "an intelligible form."<sup>15</sup> In opposition to modern man's restless running and home-

<sup>13</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time, p. ix.

<sup>14</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time, p. x.

<sup>15</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time, p. x.



lessness, Dobbs relates the circumstances of an older generation:

My father's generation. . .were taught to look at the world around them from a fixed point of view as though they were still attached to the land, rooted in a particular place. Culture, for them, was a fixed body of experience passed from generation to generation. It consisted of certain books, art objects, myths, institutions, buildings, sciences, and certain agreed ways of responding to them. A cultured man knew what to think as he stood in the Alhambra or on the plains of Marathon.<sup>16</sup>

Modern man is captured in a state of fragmentation and alienation. For Dobbs, one must have the "alienated vision" of the nomad in order to be free from the tyranny of modern times and to recognize the darkness we live in as real darkness:

We live increasingly in a city of illusion, sometimes a lovely illusion like Expo 67 with its darkened pavilions of toys and moving shadows, and this city holds us captive with what Coleridge called "the tyranny of the eye." To be free, we must see the house of mirrors for what it is and, with the traveller's alienated vision, learn the trick of reading the time.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time, p. ix.

<sup>17</sup>Kildare Dobbs, Reading The Time, p. xiii.

This "introduction" throws a good deal of light on the narrator who is standing on the shores of the Pacific. The inability of this "nomad" to define himself, to find a fixed point of view from which to view the world, is due to the malaise of modern living altogether. Canada a "country still in the future" is "sunk down to memory," its lovely illusions pre-destining its inevitable outcome. Its vastness and stark emptiness does not contain its "youth"; the mentality of its citizens who are modern, alienated men being an indication of its "age".

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