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Structure and experiment in contemporary Canadian fiction.

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STRUCTURE AND EXPERIMENT IN
CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN FICTION

BY
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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the
Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Arts at University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario
1974
Abstract

The substance of this thesis is an attempt to outline the principles informing the fictional impulse in contemporary experimental fiction in Canada in conjunction with a thorough reading of seven of the most prominent experimental novels: A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, Ethel Wilson's *The Swamp Angel*, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors*, Graeme Gibson's *Communion*, and Robert Harlow's *Scann*.

The thesis sought to review the little significant criticism outstanding on these novels. But it also labored to breach the theory-practice dichotomy that limits much contemporary criticism. The key concept in this attempt to bring critical theory and critical practice into some kind of coherence is that of the novel as a kind of story telling activity, a product of the fictional impulse, the psychological desire to tell a story. How the novel differs from other modes of story telling activity resides in the novel's peculiar narrative structure, a structure which utilizes the physical properties of the book.

I am not able to state the extent of my success in era-
sing the line between critical theory and critical practice at this time, the thesis being a little too close to me at the present time. Nevertheless, the attempt has been made.

Ultimately, I discovered in my reading of the novels stated above a case for the charge of decadence in the new fiction. The thesis tried to characterize the boundaries of this decadence, pointing first to its abandonment of the archetypal role of literature in its relationship to the societal meaning structure and secondly to the structural convolutions of experimental fiction, convolutions that isolate the new fiction within the society making it a private consciousness, the consciousness of an exclusive group.

Yet, as to the charge of decadence, the thesis balked at slipping into a too simplistic overview and thus withdrew from taking a definite position. It was hoped, instead, that the thesis would help to articulate the question of decadence, its corollaries and implications within the sophistication of modern technological society. In the end, it rests on the understanding that it has offered some study for this difficult, though critical, question.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the work of the members of my committee, Dr. P. Stevens, Dr. B. Harder, and Dr. P. Flood. Whatever success this thesis enjoys is chiefly owing to their suggestions and questions while the project was evolving from very shaky beginnings. The failings of the thesis, however, do belong to the author.

I want also to acknowledge the assistance of my wife without whose help, both spiritual and physical, I simply would not have completed the project.
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Polemical Preamble - A Theory of Fiction

What I am primarily concerned with in this preamble is an outline of my theory of fiction, that is, what we mean when we say, "This is a work of fiction," and a presentation of some key vocabulary that will be needed to carry the projected argument of the thesis.

The phenomenon concerned here is contemporary experimental Canadian fiction in English. To restrict the thesis further, only representative works of significant length in prose will be dealt with. By significant length I mean, of course, those of 'novel' proportion.

However, because the word 'novel' itself appears to have no real meaning in today's vocabulary of criticism, it is necessary to start at this point to construct a definition of it. The main difficulty with the notion 'novel' is that critics have traditionally obfuscated the concept with abstract principles that are better suited to perpetuating critical systems of theory than elucidating what the novel is all about. If such a thing as a novel does, in fact, exist, we should, as literary critics, be able to talk about it as a thing, the object of our study.
Northrop Frye chooses to get-at the novel by making it a category of the mode he calls 'fiction'. I will ultimately make the same proposal. However, there are problems with Frye's discussion of the novel, problems which eventually frustrate his attempt to deal with it. To begin with, he abandons too many key concepts to his students' understanding when he should be telling what they are about in the context of his critical theory. For the notion of 'fiction', he gives us this description:

The word, fiction, which, like poetry, means etymologically something made for its own sake, could be applied in criticism to any work of literary art in a radically continuous form, which almost always means a work of art in prose. 1

Obviously this statement can have little meaning without more discussion of its key ideas: the relationship between poetry and fiction, given the fact that they are etymologically related; the meaning of the multiply ambiguous phrase "radically continuous form"; and the exceptions to the general rule that fiction is a work of art in prose, suggested by the statement. I have not found any work in which Frye takes these ideas beyond the statement I have quoted.

What he does do, though, is break the general category fiction into four sub-categories which he distinguishes on the basis of four criteria: whether they be extroverted or

introverted and whether they be personal or impersonal. Thus, he finds that fiction has four sub-categories, the romance, the novel, the anatomy and the autobiography.

The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. ...in the romance we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow, reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. ...the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our finest novelists have been conventional to the point of fussiness.

Following from this, Frye describes the novel as "extroverted and personal" displaying an "interest...in human character as it manifests itself in society." The romance, on the other hand, is "introverted and personal". The remaining two modes, the anatomy and the autobiography, we will ignore as they have no relevance to the discussion.

Unfortunately, Frye does not continue his discussion of these modes to give us some idea of what he intends by the terms introverted-extroverted or how these types of fiction are personal, a criterion that differentiates them from the anatomy and the autobiography. We must suppose, then, that he

2. Ibid., p. 43.
3. Ibid., p. 47.
wants us to understand some popular sense of these words. The question we must ask, then, is if he refers to the popular sense of these words, leaving key concepts multiply ambiguous, why not allow for the popular sense of the novel as well? Why bother trying to elaborate such a specialized notion of the novel?

The answer is simply that the careful distinctions between the types of fiction he proposes are motivated within the theory of archetypes, making fiction a psychological curiosity. But Frye is not really sure what he means by archetypes. Discussing the history of the word, he notes that archetype is "a word which has been connected since Plato's time with the sense of a pattern or model used in creation." Then, he suggests elsewhere that "it might be convenient to say... archetype when speaking of significance", what Mircea Eliade has called "deep meaning". Still a third sense emerges in his critical practice, a practice that often seems little more than an exhibition of his reading knowledge. The archetype assumes a sense of "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole." It is not clear

5. Ibid, p. 15.
whether he means the archetype to be the form of the image or symbol or whether it is the significance or deep meaning.

Yet the concept of the archetypal in literature is important because it explains why we read novels and why we let them tell us what we are all about. With respect to Frye's work with the archetypal, this much seems essential to the way we are to understand it: literature is intimately connected with the societal meaning structure as a whole.

Frye himself expresses this rather awkwardly in his Anatomy of Criticism, emphasizing that the archetypal function of literature resides "in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from 'reality', but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate." Thus, literature plays an integrative, sanctioning role in the society that is creative to the extent that it shows us possibilities of psycho-physical involvement with the societal meaning structure that transcends the more mundane pursuits of daily existence. It justifies our behavioural patterns with a show of the imagination that informs them.

Because of the ambiguity that bothers his work, I choose not to accept Frye's notion of the novel. However, there is no escaping the fact that literature has exercised an archetypal

8. Ibid., p. 184.
role, bringing people and their world into an understanding. As we proceed with the study of these novels, we shall see that it is the understanding that has changed with the new fiction.

A more tantalizing, though equally abstract notion of what the novel is, is that of Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg:

The novel is not the opposite of romance...but a product of the reunion of the empirical and fictional elements in narrative literature. It is an unstable compound, inclining always to break down into constituent elements.9

'Within this theory, the empirical and the fictional are themselves two distinct types of narrative. They are divided once again into sub-types with the fictional having as sub-categories romance and didactic narrative such as fable and the empirical, historical and mimetic narrative.

Again, the complexity of classification introduces unavoidable abstraction. My outline does justice to the amount of discussion each of their categories receives. Ultimately, the theory reduces criticism to the pursuit of 'pigeon-holing', better known as the classical query 'where

does this go?"

One valuable distinction does emerge from the Scholes and Kellogg book, however, that the novel is a kind of narrative. In fact, the novel seems to me to be related fundamentally and directly to the business of storytelling.

E. M. Forster writes:

Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. II

And realizing this simple fact, it is easy enough to relate so sophisticated an enterprise as a Henry James novel to the legends of Sweet Medicine in the Cheyenne tradition, 'say, or the tales of the Somalis, painstakingly translated by a younger Margaret Laurence. Perhaps we are even suggesting something very profound about the human species, recognizing that he lives in the stories he tells.

II. Aspects of the Novel (Middlesex, 1962), p. 34 Michel Butor, in his Essais Sur Le Roman (Saint Amand, France, 1969), writes similarly:

Le roman est une forme particulière du récit. Celui-ci est un phénomène qui dépasse considérablement le domaine de la littérature; il est un des constituants essentiels de notre appréhension de la réalité. Jusqu'à notre mort, et depuis que nous comprenons des paroles, nous sommes perpétuellement entourés de récits, dans notre famille tout d'abord, puis à l'école, puis à travers les rencontres et les lectures. (Essais, p. 7)
But to say things about human beings is really not my business here. I am more interested in that phenomenon man called the novel. In his brief monograph *Aspects of the Novel*, Mr. Forster wrote:

Perhaps we ought to define what a novel is before starting. This will not take a second. M. Abel Chevally has, in his brilliant manual, provided a definition, and if a French critic cannot define the English novel, who can? It is, he says, "a fiction in prose of a certain extent" (une fiction en prose d'une certain entendue). 12.

Dexterously turning the question back on his readers, Mr. Forster continues:

If this seems to you unphilosophic will you think of an alternative definition, which will include *The Pilgrim's Progress, Marius the Epicurean, The Adventures of a Younger Son, The Magic Flute, The Journal of the Plague, Zuleika Dobson, Rasselas, Ulysses,* and *Green Mansions*, or else will you give reasons for their exclusion? 13.

It is not hard to add to the list of novels confronting the serious student of the novel. Several of those included in this thesis swell out the list in numbers. I have tried to show, in the examples of Northrop Frye and Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, that attempts to synthesize the novel into a system of categories and sub-categories creates an atmosphere of a criticism serving its own ends.

Yet when we reflect upon the simple statement that the novel is a sort of story-telling thing, we find that we are revealing a great deal about it. We are saying that it has a story teller, for instance, and that it has a subject, or something that it is about. We are saying that it consists of a series of events, temporally related. Our experience could add that this temporal relationship is of two types, not mutually exclusive; chronology, or one event following upon another because it is less in the past than the other; and cause and effect, or one event causing the next event to happen. We may like to call both of these plot or restrict the use of that word to cause and effect as Mr. Forster has chosen to do. And, probably most important of all, we might point out that story telling, at least in the novel, is a kind of language activity.

This last fact, that the novel is a kind of language activity, gives a clue as to the essential difference it has from the Cheyenne legends and the tales of the Somalis: the novel exists in book form; its language is that of the printed word while the legends of Sweet Medicine belong to an oral tradition. Critic Hugh Kenner writes:

It has taken us centuries to realize how the Gutenberg Revolution transformed literary composition into a potentially Stoical act. So long as writing was the graph of speech, its highly stylized limitations, its nuances synthesized from discrete particles, were tacitly al-
allowed for. Tones, gestures, live inflections, meeting eyes, these catalysts for the continuum of dialogue the reader learns unconsciously to supply. Not only was reading for many centuries an operation performed with the voice, not merely the eye, but writing, even writing for the press, was controlled by the presupposition that these words here chosen would ideally be animated by speech. 14

Doubtless the printed word owes much to the spoken language but over the years it has tended to sophisticate its grammar and diction to accommodate the increasing demands made upon it as a logic of communication. Certainly the origin of the printed word can be traced back further than the printing press, yet the press was such a catalyst to the relative autonomy the printed word now enjoys from the spoken that, as Kenner suggested, we are only beginning to see what has happened.

Consequently, story-telling has become more complex. The story as a book allows for innovations in the basic structure, for 'experiments' with it, as a story and as a book.

Our theory, then, is ready to dig deeper into the notion of 'experimental' in relation to the novel. I want to call this business of story-telling the fictional impulse and the resulting story, whether written or oral, fiction. Inssofar as the novel becomes an aesthetic project, a thing constructed by human beings out of the 'real' world, it is the result of

the written word. Accordingly,

One cannot (or 'should' not) speak of the form of a novel without discussing the narrative structure itself. In spite of elaborate modern attempts to expunge the teller from his tale, a novel cannot avoid having a narrative situation - someone must choose to tell a tale and the telling may be done in a variety of ways. 15

The description of a novel as 'experimental', then, is predicated on the observation that the limits of narrative structure are being explored to test ways it can approach its subject.

Hugh Kenner has suggested that "the species of literary composition we call the Novel...is a long work in prose which from the first has fulfilled two requirements:"

1) Verisimilitude. This means that the book shall abound in words which name objects familiar to its reader, and in sentences describing pieces of behavior or imitating pieces of conversation which the reader finds recognizable.
2) Plausibility. This means that the progression of events which the work purports to chronicle shall at every point satisfy criteria of reason, since it is the reader's belief that his own actions are reasonable, and he will employ his book-reading time on nothing less. 16.

We will rest with this definition of the novel. It is a long work in prose characterized by verisimilitude and plausibility.

With the advent of relativity theories and postulates em-

phasizing the inaccuracy of human measurements, it is only natural that the novel, archetypally related to the societal meaning structure as a whole, should be affected.

In our time, space is conceived not as one-sided or linear - as in the Renaissance idea of perspective - but as many-sided and virtually inexhaustible in its potentiality for relationships, none of which are mutually exclusive. Consequently, absolute description of any object or area is impossible from a single point of reference. Each position which provides a perspective will reveal a different aspect of observation or contemplation, for in modern physics, space is conceived as relative to a moving point of reference. 17.

As the subject becomes more complex, so the novel reaches for techniques to represent it. It is precisely in the two areas of verisimilitude and plausibility that the new fiction is best characterized. Verisimilitude has generated planes of content formerly untouched as well as unique attitudes to the novel as a formal composition. Plausibility has opened into the techniques of juxtaposition and narrative discontinuity, both of which re-structure narrative movement in the novel.

The surface complexity of the new fiction demands new techniques of criticism. It is not surprising, then, to see this demand echoed in academic circles. Leslie Fiedler has approached the problem from a socio-historical point of view. I will outline his position briefly preparatory to formulating my own.

Fiedler suggests that the modern period, characterized by the fiction of Joyce, Lawrence, Virginia Woolfe, is dead; "we have...entered quite another time - apocalyptic, anti-

rational, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to joyous misology and prophetic irresponsibility; one distrustful of self-protective irony and too great self-

awareness."

Before the Bible ceased to be central to the concerns of men in Western society, it had become merely a book among others; and this may have misled the Arnol-
dians, who could not believe that a time might come when not merely 'the' Book ceased to move men by even books in general. Such, however, is the case, certain-
ly as far as all books that consider themselves art, i.e., Scripture once removed, are concerned, and for this reason, the truly new new novel must be anti-art as well as anti-serious. 19.

Fiedler goes on to say that "if criticism is to survive,

therefore, if it is to become or remain useful, stable and relevant, it must be radically altered..." He suggests that the kind of criticism that we should now produce should concentrate "not (with) words on the page, but words in the head."

Apparently he has in mind the neo-impressionistic gab-

ble of a McLuhan which seeks to make everything a fantastic "poetry", in the loosest sense of that word. The work itself,

the aesthetic project which is the subject of the critic, is to be marginal to the critic's own effluence. The critique will become not exposition but flamboyant and arty, a rival to the original subject.

Fiedler misconceives the nature of contemporary fiction if he believes it requires a criticism that will try to surpass it for flamboyance and extravagance. The business of criticism has always been its subject and because the new fiction is so little understood, growing stranger than most care for, the critic must now act as a liason between the novel and its social milieu.

The new fiction is no longer an integrative force within the societal meaning structure. Rather it moves into itself, becoming introverted, in the popular sense, a private experience; its irony is at the reader's expense. The wholeness of form has been buried in a surface profusion of content.

Criticism must now be more engaged by the aesthetic project than ever before because it is now the society's only access to the works of its imagination. As a part of us, the new fiction assaults, rejecting its traditional archetypal role of integration and disputing the validity of the social structure. Its goal seems not to satisfy but to haunt, to bother the conventions that we have erected around our being.

I take the task of criticism today to try to bring our
art back to us; to make it once again speak of authentic, creative possibilities for us. It means showing an understanding of the new fiction to convince our writers that we are aware of their efforts; that their statements are not passing us by unnoticed.

Eli Mandel writes:

An irrational criticism concerned with sympathetic participation in literature rather than with detached examination and evaluation is undoubtedly subjective and unsystematic; it is probably sentimental as well. ...But, it seems to me, at the present time-and it is the function of criticism at the present of which we are speaking-criticism must risk the excesses of subjectivity and sentimentality if it is going to become human once more and if it is to bring us closer to the unsolved mystery at the heart of all our perceptions. 22

I understand this as different from Fiedler's position in one very important respect: to make it human is not the same as to make it 'arty'. My critical practice is irrational in two respects. Firstly, it has no rigorous basis, being, as it is, largely intuitive. Secondly, it tries to be sympathetic to the work's movement as much as possible.

Before concluding this preamble, I would like to add a few remarks concerning the structure of the thesis. I plan to move from an analysis of the individual novels, an analysis that concentrates on what is happening in them, to a

conclusion that tries briefly to orient and place the new fiction within the societal meaning structure.

The first three novels — A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, and Ethel Wilson's *The Swamp Angel* — anticipate the later extravagances of the new fiction. They show developments in narrative structure and language which make their inclusion in a thesis of this sort necessary.

The remainder — Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors*, Graeme Gibson's *Communion*, and Robert Harlow's *Scann* — are what I mean when I talk of the new fiction. Each are given extensive discussion to illustrate the dynamics at work in the fictional impulse.
Chapter 1

The Sobbed Oriental Note

When The Second Scroll first appeared in 1951, it was greeted as an important work by a major figure working in Canada. Nevertheless, critics have had strong reservations about the integrity of the book. Miriam Waddington has commented: "the structure of the book, with its sudden allegorical eruptions, sparse characterization, and elaborate glosses, seemed to me (on first reading) inexcusably manipulative of the reader." Her criticism justified itself in the stylized characters, one-dimensional within the movement of the novel; in the glosses appended to the end of the book, interrupting the continuity of the narrative by making the reader flip to the back in the middle of a scene; and in the allegorical patterns that the glosses present. While she eventually found features in the novel that redeemed it somewhat for her, Ms. Waddington did not change her opinion about the book as a whole.

Her view can be taken as exemplific of the critical reception The Second Scroll had and still has. And perhaps it is


17.
the correct view. But Klein as a poet had ideas of form radically different from other novelists, especially the conservative breed that were then working in Canada. He was also familiar with the work of the Irish novelist James Joyce and his study "The Oxen of the Sun" shows the mark of intensive research into the structure and technique of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Moreover, he undoubtedly learned much from the publication of his lengthy tirade against Hitler, called simply *The Hitleriad*, for the excesses in expression that bother that work are a part of the technique used in *Glosses Aléph and Beth*, the two poems of Klein's protagonist.

In fact, the stylized characters, the allegorical glosses and the discontinuous narrative, though technically crude in *The Second Scroll*, create an atmosphere that suspends the logical, empirical faculties of judgement before the coincidental happenings and the highly sensitive issues that are Klein's subjects. Plausibility is exaggerated to heighten the circumstances to a point where the exaggeration becomes acceptable.

The theme of the novel is, of course, the Zionist movement and its success in founding a home for the Jews once again, bringing them back to the Promised Land. But the tech-

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2. In *Here and Now* (January, 1949), Pp. 28-48. Apparently, this article was to have been a part of a book on Joyce which was never completed.
nique is calculated to make the Zionist movement an experience on the same level as the aesthetic experience of wholeness of form. Under Klein's direction, the success of the Zionist movement becomes an objective correlative of the aesthetic experience, that is, the novel makes of the Zionist movement a framework for the kind of feeling we associate with the satisfaction we take in the aesthetic. We will sample various aspects of the novel to show how this is brought about.

The Torah, which corresponds to the Pentateuch in the Christian Old Testament, is invoked as a metaphor for the Zionist movement; hence the chapter headings Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As the Torah recounted the epic wanderings of the Jews before their entry into the Promised Land, so The Second Scroll claims a similar epic event informing the Zionist movement.

The chapter Genesis introduces the voice of the novel's narrator and protagonist, repeating the themes of birth and fall from pristine innocence that is the theme of the first Genesis. Uncle Melech, the 'chosen one' and legend in the house where the protagonist grows up, is disgraced when he forsakes his people to join the Bolsheviks, becoming Comrade Krul. The household questions the motivation of Melech, reviewing the issues at stake:

My mother would try to defend her brother's action—what he had lived through, she said, had upset his
judgement - God spare us all such testing! But it was an unconvincing defence and one that knew, even while it was being made, the arguments of its rebuttal.

4. 3

The theme of man's estrangement from God, a theme significant in the Old Testament wanderings of the Jews, is introduced, setting the scene for the protagonist's mythic quest of Melech and Zionism that will bring him an understanding of Zionism.

The quest is the subject of the chapter Exodus, which, like its Biblical prototype, concerns a setting out. The protagonist's psychological involvement in the events is emphasized.

My life was, and is, bound to the country of my father's choice, to Canada; but this intelligence (the success of the Zionist movement), issuing as it did, from that quarter of the globe which had ever been to me the holiest of the map's stigmata, the Palestine geography, was as intimately known as the lines of the palm of my hand, filled me with pride, with exultation, with an afflatus odorous of the royal breath of Solomon. (Scroll, p. 28)

The reference to the stigmata, carrying with it overtones of the supernatural wounds received by Christ during the transfiguration, and the metaphysical conceit, "the Palestine geography... as intimately known as the lines of the palm of my hand", distort the linguistic context, giving the distinctive Jewishness that informs both vocabulary and syntax an extra

dimension of meaning. The Christian overtones and the metaphysical conceit work to generalize the experience more, drawing on the non-Jewish reader.

Moreover, phrases like "afflatus odorous of the royal breath of Solomon", where qualifier follows noun, show another dimension where Klein exploits his awareness of language. The inversions, popularly considered to be a characteristic innovation of Jewish speakers of English and marked particularly by Miriam Waddington in the essay cited earlier, contribute to a sense of Jewishness through the language itself. This awareness of his language also distinguishes Klein from the Canadian novelists who were his contemporaries.

Already fascinated by the emotional magic emanating from the Zionist movement, the protagonist is charged by his publisher to collect the poetry of "Israel's latest nest of singing birds." (Scroll, p. 28). He is to journey to the land of "Holy Writ" for this purpose. At the same time as he receives his commission, a long overdue letter from Uncle Melech reaches him, magnifying the significance of his trip: Uncle Melech is alive and himself moving towards Israel. The situation is highly contrived yet it makes apparent the sense of an agent guiding the circumstances. The incident establishes an expectation for the meeting of uncle and nephew as the resolution of the novel. We are also prepared to meet future
contrivances.

There is a sense of playfulness in the way that Klein foists his contrived plot upon his readers. Technically, it seems calculated to keep the reader at a respectable distance. It's as though Klein did not want us to get too involved with the content of the novel but rather he would like us to sit back and enjoy its form. It would also seem to be related to Klein's need to keep the emotional flow of his story in control, something he may have learned from The Hitleriad.

The plot twists its loose strings into one strand without resorting to disguise. Yet curiously the story seems to gain more force in itself as the author intrudes himself more into it. E. L. Epstein remarked on the role of the intrusive author in Joyce's Ulysses similarly:

The reader, invited by the caperings of the irresponsible author, says in his heart that he wishes the fool (author) would get out of the way and let the 'real' story continue, let the characters show what they are doing without the screen of the intrusive author. It is at this point that the author has triumphantly succeeded in removing himself from the tale. By his actions he has attracted all elements of artifice in the fiction to himself and thus projected the characters of his fiction purged of their unreality, which now attaches solely to him. The reader's impatience to know what 'really' happens is the sign that reality has finally been attained by the fictional characters.

Even though Klein's characters occupy a single dimension,

known by us only in their outward expressions, the blatant intrusions of the novelist, setting up the coincidences in the plot, increase the attraction of the story. The intrusions become 'automatized', predictable, expected, and the story is 'foregrounded', that is, it becomes the focal point of interest.

The notions of 'foregrounding' and 'automatizing' have their origins in the Prague School of linguistics. Jan Mukarovsky talked of 'foregrounding' as a function of poetic language.

The function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance. Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization; that is, the de-automatization of an act: the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme. 6.

However, I believe the concept can be re-thought to meet the needs of my critical project as follows. To my mind, foregrounding is not the violation of the scheme, the pattern set up in the composition, but rather what we are made aware of through the violation. Thus, in The Second Scroll, Klein violates his story with coincidental plotting. By plot, I am

referring to the sense of plot as the temporal element in the story and not restricting it to cause and effect. The violation is best regarded as an intrusive mechanism that effects the foregrounding of material in the aesthetic project. Automatization, then, becomes what is predictable in the design; what is expected in the way of content. In *The Second Scroll*, the coincidental plotting, the glosses, the stylized characters and the manipulation of language are all automatized to foreground the unfolding of the narrative as form.

What happens is a strengthening of the story as the force in the novel. It is gradually foregrounded, against the many intrusive devices. The effect is to emphasize the direction it takes rather than the nuances of its content. The focus is on the end of the book, the completion of the form.

The third chapter, Leviticus, shows that Klein was not too intent on too literal an association with the Torah, the first scroll. "The Biblical Leviticus contains a restatement of the Mosaic law in order to unite the people of Israel." Klein's Leviticus, however, concentrates on a statement of the essential unity of all human experience in the world of being. This is an important motif, introduced earlier in the novel when Comrade Krul, who is Uncle Melech, becomes a propaganda agent for the Bolsheviks. Klein has his

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protagonist comment on an essay written by Comrade Krul that he has chanced to read:

...it constituted a remarkable instance of what happens when the Talmudic discipline is applied either to a bellettristic (sic) or revolutionary praxis: Krul's quotations from European writing had the thoroughness, and in a sense the quality, of a concordance, and his argumentation was like nothing so much as like the subtilized airy transcendent 'pilpul' of Talmud commentary commentators.  *(Scroll, p. 26)*

The intellectual Jew is as much a dialectical entrepreneur as anyone else, the difference being not in quality of mind but in choice of subject matter. The protagonist describes his youth as "a questionable amalgam between Hollywood and Holy Writ."  *(Scroll, p. 29)*

The substance of Klein's Leviticus is Uncle Melech's relationship with Monsignor Piersanti and the appearance of Settano, that curious figure of the Italian underground. Both figures act as foils to the Jewish presence in the world; the one representing the Christian penchant for converting folks to their persuasion, the other the secular passion of the non-believer. The chapter culminates in Melech's turgid prose exposition of the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in Gloss Gimel. The typology invoked in the motifs of Michaelangelo's work prod Melech to rhetorical heights that emphasize the essential similarity between Jew and Christian.

Thus in the hour of peril does Israel triumph. ... The sigils, talismans, and magic circles of Michaelangelo
to this purpose did I read; and when at last I stood beneath the sign of the gourd and the whale's head, the prayer of Jonah in the fish's belly spoke for me... Thus did I leave the chapel, noting for the last time the series of rams' skulls of which the poet had made a device to signify, some say, descent to mortality. But to me, through the long marble corridors hurrying back, they were rams' horns, sounding liberation. (Scroll, p. 112-3)

The art of the Christian can speak for and to the Jew because it is really not distant from him. It articulates his moments of being as well as those of the Christian.

At one point in her essay, Miriam Waddington writes: "Klein's erudition in the Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as his frequent summoning up of the ghosts of Pope, Byron, Spenser, and anonymous authors of Anglo-Saxon epic and homiletic verse, makes for an obvious linguistic complexity; it also results in the less obvious loss of cultural connotation to the reader who is not familiar with the Jewish world." Unfortunately she does not go on to say what she means by 'cultural connotation'. If she means by this that the semantic specificity, including ideological associations, of the words is lost, she is only partially correct. Personal associations with the language would be lost to the non-Jewish reader but the intermittent words of Hebrew and Yiddish as words referring to aspects of Jewish liturgy do not resign their semantic specificity. In

8. Waddington, op. cit., p. 26
fact, they assume additional connotative power, given the broader semantic context of the novel. If she means that only Jews can understand what is going on in the novel, she misunderstands it, neglecting Klein's attempt to associate the Zionist movement with universals that can be appreciated by the non-Jewish reader.

In Leviticus, we also learn that Melech has moved on to Morocco to work among the Jews at Casablanca. Krongold, a friend of Melech, explains to the protagonist a feature of his uncle's psychology that emphasizes the cosmopolitan character of the Jewish intellectual:

He is not in ideas a monogamist. An idea passes before him, it finds favour in his eyes, he courts it: it is love. Finally he embraces it, the idea turns to honeymoon ideal, soon acquires domesticity, it is a wife of an idea, and then - a new one passes by, walking and mincing as it goes, making a tinkling with the feet - and Davidson casts his eyes after that. (Scroll, p. 54)

There is humour here, in the metaphor of the idea as a woman. Klein frequently plays with his material in this way, endowing it with incongruity, but it never exceeds a gentle irony and it is never at the expense of his reader.

In Gloss Dalid, Melech's polemical drama, the motif of the Jew as no different from anyone else is completed as the character of the Jew rhetorically allies himself with his Arab brethren: "Onto your face as onto mine/Has our Father Ibrahim, with the generations for mirrors, cast/The cast of his countenance!" (Scroll, p. 134)
The second person pronoun implicates the reader as well. We will note a similar usage of this form of the pronoun in Godfrey's *The New Ancestors* and Gibson's *Communion*. Then, drawing on the case of Abukir before the Cadi, the Jew argues:

Is ours then not the case of Abukir?
For hear, O Cadi, there is but one God!
His is the light, the one transcendent light

Announce the light - but their's is not the light.
The light is God's! That light sees all.
Grant it, the triple justice: the recognition of kinship (*Scroll*, p. 135)

The apostrophe to the Cadi seems to suggest the reader is to be a judge as well. We must be brought to commune with the protagonist in the happening which is Zion. From disinterested curiosity, Klein would have us feel the rightness, the appropriateness of the success of the Zionist movement.

In the chapter 'Numbers,' Uncle Melech Davidson fulfills the messianic role implicit in his name as he leads the beggared and diseased Jews of Casablanca's slums in a protest against the imprisonment of one of their number. For his part, Melech is expelled from the city, just prior to the arrival of the protagonist. Melech proceeds to Israel.

The protagonist decides to follow the steps of his Uncle to Israel. For us, the story is unfolding as it should. But while he is in Casablanca, a young Arab, singing outside
his hotel room window, inspires in him a sense of the unity among men.

I recognized, in that singing the accents of forgotten kinship and was through it transported back to ancient star-canopied desert campfires about which there sat, their fires firelit, my ancestors and that Arab's. (Scroll, p. 57)

His atavistic impulses infuse the novel with suggestions of epic proportions as well as inducing a captivating feel for nostalgia in the reader.

The protagonist receives a photograph of Uncle Melech but the face has been double-exposed so that it is only a blur of a face. Again the contrivance is apparent, blatantly so. But more important is the way it works to focus attention on the way the story is developing, its form rather than the content. We are made to anticipate the prospective meeting between uncle and nephew.

The fact that the protagonist does not get a concrete picture of Uncle Melech from the photograph prepares us to accept not only the death of Melech and the Narrator's arrival after the body had been mutilated by the Arabs but the mystical role Uncle Melech comes to portray. His legendary aura is, in effect, enhanced by the lack of a physical description. As content in the novel, Melech is as much a creation of the imagination as his mythological significance would suggest.
Also, as I suggested before, there is a sense of playfulness in the way Klein treats these blatant contrivances in his plot, as though he were teasing us. His novel owes something to the picaresque tradition and it is here that its links with the characteristic flippancy of that type of story is felt. It seems as though Klein were showing us that he was aware of the shallowness of his story, despite its importance to the Jewish national identity. Or, rather he is trying to relax the non-Jewish reader into resigning himself to the lighter side of the tale.

The final chapter, Deuteronomy, synthesizes the mythic quest in the meeting between the uncle and nephew we have been led to expect as the completion of the form. It no longer matters that Melech is dead and that the occasion of their meeting is his funeral. This form of their meeting satisfies us as valid, right for the outcome of the novel.

The protagonist has just discovered the meaning of poetry in the streets of Israel where he experiences the "metamorphosis and rejuvenation" (Scroll, p. 84) of an ancient language.

It was there all the time - the fashioning folk, the men who were giving new life to the antique speech, but merchants, traders, day labourers. In their daily activity, and without pose or flourish, they showed to be alive again, the shaping Hebrew imagination. (Scroll, p. 84)

"The miracle had again been repeated": Israel returned to the Promised Land: the mythopoeic energies of a people
making a world for themselves: the creative impulse manifested.

The anticipated meeting between the protagonist and his uncle is now ready to take place. However, Uncle Melech has been killed and is now being transformed into a symbol, a symbol that reinforces the intensity of the revelation in the streets. His funeral formally expresses the re-union of Israel.

As the banners and slogans were raised aloft, announcing the names of the settlements in Negev, in the Emek, in the Galil, each with its own exclamatory reaction to these obsequies which transcended their immediate purpose, it was as if the tribes of Israel had come to life again and were travelling as in olden times, each with its devices and gems: Reuben of the Sardius bearing a banner gules its device the city Shechem; Levi of the stone smaraged; Judah of the emerald; Issachar of the sapphire, and Zebulum of the diamond; Dan, his banner azure with serpent couchant; Gad of the agate; of the amethyst, Nepthali; Ashar of the Tarshish; Joseph of the onyx, and jaspered Benjamen. (Scroll, p. 92.)

The catalogue technique, enhanced by successive changes in word order, reaches to communicate the energy of the scene.

The heightened significance of the scene emerges in the protagonist's response to the funeral.

I intoned the 'kaddish' for my uncle who had no son, uttering with pride this wonderful mourner's Magnificat which does not mention death... The name that once rung for me with angel pennies was resounding now to the conning of a new alphabet. (Scroll, p. 92-3)

Thematically, the funeral signifies the death of the Jews as a wandering, dislocated people and their rebirth as a chosen
people in the Promised Land. There is the direct association with the first scroll, both in theme and in the catalogue of the twelve tribes.

Structurally, this indirect meeting of the protagonist with his uncle engenders a sense of wholeness in the completion of the quest theme. The success of Zion is made to seem as if it were of the same stuff, each becoming a metaphor of the other. Thus, the re-birth of the Jews as a nation is a metaphor for the sense of aesthetic wholeness and the feeling of proportion, of things working out the way they should is associated with the success of the Zionist movement.

Little has been said about the use of the glosses to this point. In one sense, "the use of glosses (is) reminiscent of the commentaries of Talmudic students." However, more important to the working of the novel, they operate to foreground the force of the story in discontinuing the narrative.

It cannot be denied that the glosses are intrusive. But, as suggested earlier, their intrusive character is precisely that aspect which accentuates the movement of the story; that is, our impatience with them becomes a measure of their success in strengthening the power of the story. Hence, the seeming

9. Ibid., p. 22.
magic of the story in The Second Scroll despite the "inexcusable manipulation" of the reader.

The glosses contribute to the novel in a more direct manner as well. It is noteworthy that they are all of different literary forms, each illustrating language in action in a different manner. Glosses Aleph and Beth are poems, strong in rhetorical posture. Gloss Gimel is a letter from Uncle Melech to Mosignor Piersanti that is more an essay, delineating Melech's peculiar vision of the roof of the Sistine chapel in a prose that is turgid and dense with academic associations. Gloss Daalid is an allegorical drama written by Melech. It is polemical in tone and structure. Finally, Gloss Hai is a draft for a liturgy, again from the pen of Melech and, with the exception of the final piece, Psalm 30, all proceeding from his mind. Together, the Glosses not only juxtapose tones with the chapters they are inserted into, but they foreground a strong sense of language as a medium for aesthetic purpose.

Thus, Gloss Aleph, the autobiographical poem of the protagonist, "a "Jewboy", amplifies the fall motif in the Chapter Genesis.

I am no old man furiously intent
On memories, but in memory I seek
The strength and vividness of nonage days;
Not tranquil recollection of event
It is a fabled city that I seek;
It stands in Space's vapours and Time's haze;
Thence comes my sadness in remembered joy
Constrictive of the throat;
Thence do I hear, as heard by a Jewboy
The Hebrew violins,
Delighting in the sobbed Oriental note.

(Scroll, p. 97)

The piece is redolent of the nostalgia that is the product of lost innocence, in the choice of words, in the heaviness of movement generated in the pervasive use of caesura, and in the predominance of consonance, particularly fricative consonants.

It precipitates the voyage in search of innocence.

In Gloss Beth, the elegiac poem, the "sobbed Oriental note" changes to a harsher tune. The protagonist calls for divine vengeance on those who have transgressed against the Jews:

Hear me, who stand
Circled and winged in vortex of my kin:
Forego the complete doom! The winnowed, spare!
Annul the scattering, and end! And end Our habitats on water and on air:
Gather the flames up to light Orient
Over the land: and that funest eclipse,
Diaspora-dark, revolve from all our ways!
Toward Jerusalem and Jacob's tent
Set up again: again renew our days...

(Scroll, p. 102)

But the imperative voice reaches for more ghastly notes to measure its contempt for its enemies.

As Thou didst to Sodom, do to them!
But not, O Lord, in one destruction. Slow,
Fever by fever, limb by withering limb,
Destroy! Send through the marrow of their bones,
The pale treponeme burrowing. Let there grow
Over their eyes a film that they may see
Always a carbon sky! Feed them on ash!
All in one day pustule their speech with groans,
Their bodies with the scripture of a rash,
With boils and buboes their suddenly breaking flesh!
(Scroll, p. 100-1)

Echoing The Hitleriad, the piece edges on the grotesque.

As a phenomenon in art, the grotesque is a complex thing.
Essentially it is a conceptual distortion, depicting aspects
of the physical world in bizarre and extraordinary forms.
Its success is based on catching the reader's empirical
assumptions about the forms of his world by surprise.

The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be sum-
med up in a phrase... THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED
WORLD. ...We are so strongly affected and terrified
because it is our world which ceases to be reliable,
and we feel that we would be unable to live in this
changed world. 10

Wolfgang Kayser suggests that the grotesque is a development
of the art of the caricaturist and that it is closely related
to satire. The principal difference that it bears from satire
is that the grotesque does not offer a point of view from which
it may be safely viewed. It just stands there: haunting and
remarkable for the way it bothers our sense of rightness, of
proportion, perhaps even of order if we are so inclined.

In Klein's Gloss Beth, nothing has prepared us for the
brash descriptions that explode from the pen of the protagonist.
Nor does Klein choose to comment on it or show satiric intent

10. Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature
or otherwise.

The grotesque has become a prominent feature of the new fiction. Frequently, it is tinged with a humour that is at the expense of the reader. Kayser explained this 'black' humour as the result of the writer inhabiting a world apart from his reader. Thus, he is able to distance himself from the grotesque in a way that the reader is not.

Laughter originates in the comic and caricatural fringe of the grotesque. Filled with bitterness, it takes on characteristics of the mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter while turning into the grotesque. II

A touch of the subjective response creeps into the grotesque at this point. It is not inconceivable that the reader share in the humour of the grotesque moment.

We can note a sense of humour in Klein's treatment of his protagonist in the naivety of the content that is the poem. It is related to the caricatural aspect of the voice which structures the poem.

Eventually the imperative voice peters out into prayer, emotion gradually exhausting itself.

Again renewal them (the Jews) as they were of old, And for all time cancel that ashen orbit In which our days, and hopes, and kin, are rolled. (Scroll, p. 102)

What we are left with ultimately is a feel for language used II. Ibid, p. 187.
to articulate, to communicate, to structure emotion. Terse and bordering on bombast, the glosses induce a sense of expression that impinges, impressing the reader with the power of language as medium for art. In part the glosses intensify, in part they complement the narrative.

In Gloss Hai, the liturgy, prayer, the expression of consciousness at rest with itself and the world, settles the stasis that follows the intense moments of the funeral scene into a low energy field. It's tenor is satisfaction with the way things have gone.

By reducing his characters to their expressions, Klein makes of The Second Scroll a mirror of the imagination structuring its satisfactory moments. As a prelude to the funeral scene, the emotional moments are foreshadowed in the reflections of the narrator as he flies into Israel.

Warmed by the sun beating through the port hole, my mind was dreamily in communion with the murmur of the motors humming through aluminum. They made me whatever music my mind willed, lullative, Messianic, annunciatory. (Scroll, p.70)

Again we can note the intertwining of Christian and Jewish themes: communion, Messianism, annunciation. Taken in conjunction with the variety of literary forms displayed in the glosses, the strong pull of the narrative, the stylized characters, and the occasional allegories, The Second Scroll is reaching to become the "performed miracle", where subject and
and object are brought into perfect co-incidence. Positive in its energies, the novel succeeds as an experience of imagina-
tion seeing itself in form.

Yet, in spite of, or perhaps it would be better to say because of the sophistication of the intrusive techniques, the Second Scroll has had and will continue to have only limited appeal. Moreover, Klein's arcane learning, exhibited in the literary echoes mentioned by Miriam Waddington, and his delight in unusual figures of speech increase the dis-
tance that the book has from the general reading public.

Ultimately, I feel, if The Second Scroll is remembered, it will be as that novel of A. M. Klein's, the one that first broke down the emphasis on narrative continuity in Canadian fiction.
Chapter 2

Fishing for the Glory

Form in fiction is primarily a function of its linear movement in time. A novel always moves towards a final page, a final period. In fact, a novel such as Klein's The Second Scroll lends itself to a discussion of its form very easily because it is so constructed that its movement is oriented towards a final wholeness or totality. Northrop Frye has called the moment when the form of a novel is complete the moment of "simultaneous significance" and characterized it as being "conceptually visible".

In most works of fiction we are at once aware that the 'mythos' or sequence of events which holds our attention is being shaped into a unity. We are continually, if often unconsciously, attempting to construct a larger pattern of simultaneous significance out of what we have so far read or seen. ...we expect a certain point near the end at which the design becomes conceptually visible. 1

This experience of the 'simultaneous significance' is the focal point of a novel and is central to its aesthetic. I use the word 'aesthetic' roughly throughout to refer to the principles of composition that underlie a work as well as the par-

ticular satisfaction that is the result of reading a novel.

As there is a design, so there is a designer: the novelist or story-teller.

In any reading experience, there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters, and the reader. Each of the four can range in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value, moral, intellectual, and even physical. 2.

The key concept here is distance, a metaphysical relationship holding among the participants in the novel's aesthetic as outlined by Wayne Booth. Distance is the novelist's way to control the reading experience; its function is to establish the manner the novel is to be read. It ranges from a state of keeping the reader out of the novel's movement, making the act of reading a very deliberate thing, to carrying the reader away in the novel's movement, the reading experience becoming an overwhelming thing.

In Ethel Wilson's *The Swamp Angel* and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, the narrative voice or story teller defines itself in a very direct manner in relation to the novel. It sets itself up as the agent controlling the highly stylized conventions. A co-incidental honing of the content into an economical conciseness creates very formal compositions, which are positive in their energies, although they contain their

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own irony.

The **Double Hook** is constructed about the myth of death and rejuvenation. A small, rural community purges itself of the essentially static forces pervading it. Stasis is embodied in the figure of the old lady, the mother of William, James and Greta, whom James murders at the beginning of the novel. The community re-unites itself about the scene of the birth of the child of James and Lenchen.

The **Swamp Angel** is basically a variation of the quest myth: Maggie Vardoe flees her domineering husband and journeys north to find fulfillment; Hilda Severance marries, making a home for herself away from a mother who, for all her intuitive wisdom, has never been able to give her the kind of life she wanted; and Edward Vardoe is forced to meet the world on its terms when his wife walks out.

Although both novels are somewhat more complex than this terse outline would suggest, I intend to leave thematic discussion at this point. What we are interested in is the emphasis on form in these two novels and the various stylistic devices each employs to maintain a continuous sense of content losing itself in something greater, taking shape in form.

In both novels the narrative voice establishes itself immediately by making itself felt in the language. Sheila Watson uses a verse-like structure to begin The **Double Hook**.
In the folds of the hills

under Coyote's eyes
lived
the old lady, mother of William
of James and of Greta
lived... 3.

A catalogue of the characters follows. The technique points out the direct presence of the story teller, preparing us to expect and accept her right to manipulate the content of the novel. It establishes an immediate distance from the work.

Similarly, Ethel Wilson begins telling The Swamp Angel with her narrative voice manifesting direct control.

Ten twenty fifty birds flew out past the windows and then a few stragglers, out of sight. A fringe of Mrs. Vardoe's mind flew after them (what were they? - birds returning in migration of course) and then was drawn into the close fabric of her preoccupations. 4.

Several things confront the reader: the use of numbers in another catalogue kind of technique; the narrator's authority to 'tell' us the thoughts of the character in highly intrusive fashion, using parentheses; the essential third person, movement of the prose which is accentuated by the interpolation of the thoughts of the first person character. As in The Double Hook, a distance is worked through these devices to make of the reading experience a very deliberate, con-

scious affair; one that is aware of the story teller working in the book in a very direct manner.

However, this distance is capable of surprising moments of immediacy in the novels. After the verse-graphics, Sheila Watson picks up her story.

Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James' voice. James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters. (Hook, p.19)

The simplicity of the language is captivating and it lessens the initial distance experienced in the verse structure, which opened the novel. The terse explicitness of the prose, enhanced by the use of periods to make sentence fragments, evokes the fullness of activity.

Yet, in the following paragraph, the tempo is increased; the sense of the concrete is dissolved in abstraction.

James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Rushed by James' will. By James' hand. By James' words: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (Hook, p. 19)

The fragmented detail, couched in disjunctive syntax, paces the action. But the tenor of the metaphysical images, 'jaw of the roof', 'vault of the bed loft', and the Biblical echo 'shadow of death' introduces a linguistic complexity that works to disguise the action of James killing his mother. A sense of abstraction is generated in the images. This abstraction is increased in the parallel patterning of preposition
and noun phrase after the passive verb 'rushed', and culminating in the cryptic words of James: "This is my day. You'll not fish today."

The method engenders a confused distance within the novel and this confusion is active on several levels. To begin with, we are kept from dwelling on the content too long so the moral and logical faculties of judgement are held in abeyance. There is also a broadening of the linguistic context which works to lose the content in itself. Content is made into forms of content: forms of action, forms of characters, forms of dialogue. The content loses touch with the real world, inhabiting instead a linguistic world that may or may not be the same as the real world.

Ultimately it is the vitality of this linguistic world which Sheila Watson creates that is eventually foregrounded in the book. The story becomes automatized, expected; the language, unpredictable, open to infinite variation under the direction of the narrator.

With respect to the story, our thread through the labyrinth of language, it is almost lost, buried beneath the vitality of the language. For instance, at one point James is dropped for an entire section, having ridden off after whipping Kip. Sheila Watson picks him up again with a single sentence that ties together the loose strings of the chronology:
"James had simply saddled his horse and ridden through the
gate." (Hook, p.91) The preterite verb tense is charged with
the whole time lapse.

Such economy in the narrative is startling when we con-
sider how fiction is essentially an outgrowth of narrative
art. Yet it is keeping with Sheila Watson's purpose of mak-
ing a fictional form rather than a novel with a great deal of
content. In its simplicity, The Double Hook almost becomes
a parody of all fiction.

There is considerably more content to the narrative
technique in The Swamp Angel, although the same terse manner
governs it. When Maggie Vardoe flees her husband, the de-
tails are handled with a simplicity that approaches banality.
The 'he' in the excerpt is Edward Vardoe, the husband.

He turned from the table and seemed to settle to the
paper. ...She took out the plates, cleared the table,
and went into the kitchen, closing the door behind
her. She ran the water into the dishpan. Water makes
more noise than anything but crumpling paper, doesn't
it, she thought. I must have things quiet, so that I
can listen both ways. She piled the dishes, one on
one, very quietly. It was seven o'clock. She began
to wash the dishes silently enough. (Angel; p. 19)

The passage continues on in this fashion for another page.

It is easy to detect a certain fondness that Ethel Wilson has
for her characters, especially in the light humour with which
she reveals their thoughts. The circumstances are portentous,
ominous to Maggie, but for us they seem almost comical in the
simplicity of the narration.
When Maggie reaches the waiting taxi, her manner assumes an earnestness incongruous with the unhurried motion of the prose.

She reached the taxi and looked in eagerly. She saw the Chinese face. Before the driver could reach the handle, she wrenched the door open, sprang in and closed it. "Drive," she said, and leaned back in the car with a relief that made her for a moment dizzy. (Angel, p. 20)

From the tone of Maggie's prompting we could be reading a detective novel or some such adventure story. But Maggie's earnest exhortation is not in keeping with the tone of the narrative. The simplicity of the diction, the lack of subordination, the intermittent use of 'and' that highlights the dearth of other sentential structure words, and the brevity of the sentences makes for a style that would almost seem wordy if it did not work, giving us a novel enchanting in its exaggerated simplicity.

Where we are allowed to touch the consciousness of the characters, the effect is a confused immediacy. It is confused because the story teller is still a tangible presence. The character is never more than a technique of the story teller; the story never more than an expression of the narrative voice.

A similarity in the two novels lies in their use of dialogue. Both writers stylize basic colloquial patterns in their choice of diction and syntax to patterns consonant with
the tone of the respective novel.

For example, in this scene from *The Double Hook*, Heinrich Wagner, the boy, meets William and Ara Potter while he is out looking for his sister, Lrenchen.

The boy wanted to call out to William: Set her down. You might as well ask a dog to ride with you. But William would answer: I knew a dog once that could ride a horse as well as a man. When the going got rough, he'd say, the dog moved his backside against the cantle the way a man settles his rump. They must be going to James' place, the boy thought, and moved his hand to rein in his horse. But William turned half in the saddle and called to him. I was going to see James, the boy said, riding up. But if you have business with him I'd best leave it to another time. You said your business wouldn't keep, Ara said, remembering the passage between James and the boy. Could a woman ask, she said, what is between you and James now?

William looked across at her and then to the boy who had ridden abreast of them on her side. It's a dangerous thing, he said, to ask business between men. I'd thought you might have learned that. The boy here would hardly tell you so much. It would seem like setting someone older and wiser right. (*Hook*, p. 81-2)

The dialogue of a simple scene becomes a morality play. William's sage platitudes, the use of uncontracted auxiliary verb forms, and the visual feel of the scene exaggerate the dialogue while attenuating the dramatic tensions in it. The precision with which the characters are made to use their words brings the scene into sharp relief.

In a similar manner, Felix Prosper's words startle us with their evocations of Catholic ritual. In this scene, Fe-
lix approaches his wife, Angel, to ask her to return home and help nurse Kip.

Peace be with you, he said.
Angel took a step forward.
Forgive us our trespasses, Felix said.
Theophil shoved Angel aside and started for the door.
And lead us not into temptation, Theophil said. His fingers curled into the palms of his hands. The priest taught me the same way he taught you, he said.
He spat on the floor. And uncurling one hand he wiped it across the back of his mouth. (Hook, p. 78-9)

Through the language, simple detail is brought into sharp focus. The language makes a rhythm of its own that keeps changing to effect an accumulating sense of movement throughout.
The language carries the novel.

Ethel Wilson's use of dialogue in The Swamp Angel works to a similar end. She simplifies the colloquial patterns to attenuate the dramatic potential in the scene rather than make it stand out more as in The Double Hook. For instance, in this scene between Maggie Vardoe and Mr. Spencer, the owner of the fishing goods store where Maggie sold her flies, the conversation keeps threatening to trail off into banality.

"Who made these flies?"
"I did."
"Who taught you?"
"My father."
"Where did he learn?"
"At Hardy's."
Mr. Spencer now regarded the young woman with some respect. She was unpretentious. Her grey eyes, rimmed with dark lashes, were wide set and tranquil and her features were agreeably irregular. She was not beautiful; she was not plain. Yes, perhaps she was beautiful. She took no pains to be beautiful.
The drag of her cheap cloth coat and skirt intimated easy curves beneath.
"Would you like to sell us your flies?"
"Yes, but I have no more feathers."
"We can arrange that. Have you a vice?"
"Yes, my father's vice."
"We will take all the flies you can make. Would you like to work here? We have a small room at the back with a good light."
"I would rather work at home." (Angel, p.14)

The scene continues in this fashion. Noteworthy is the almost exaggerated simplicity of the syntax, evidenced in the uncontracted form of modal verbs and auxiliaries.

Moreover, unlike in The Double Hook where the diction in the dialogue frequently becomes very sophisticated, this dialogue frustrates the overly clever reader. What could be a pun on the word 'vice', following as it does Mr. Spencer's reflections on Maggie's physical attractiveness, is embarrassed by the frankness with which the context is made clear in the next sentence. While Sheila Watson continually amazes us with her ability to use the language in exciting and innovative ways, it is the simple 'charm' of the story teller that eventually emerges from The Swamp Angel.

Mrs. Wilson also uses intrusive images that seem to impose themselves not only on the reader but the novel as well. The scene between the eagle and the osprey which is watched by Maggie, is an instance.

From invisibility came an eagle. The eagle, with great sweeps and stillness of wings, descended on the osprey. It beat about the osprey with its great wings.
The osprey turned this way, that way. The dark eagle was with him, above him, beating him with great wings. Perhaps the eagle attacked the osprey with his beak. Maggie could not see. ... The battering continued — how long, Maggie could not, afterwards, say. The osprey still tried to escape. Then, as if suddenly accepting defeat, he dropped his fish. Down swooped the eagle. He caught the fish in mid-air and rose. (Angel, p. 90)

Ethel Wilson does not let the image work dramatically, allowing it to unfold out of Maggie's consciousness, but rather she imposes it within the narrative, making it a thing suspended within the framework of the novel. It becomes a little morality play without the attendant moral being drawn.

Another example of the intrusive image is the kitten-fawn sequence earlier in the novel. These sequences work in the novel because they share that quality of voice that directs the book as a whole.

Mrs. Wilson also attempts to interpose brief chapters which deal with Edward Vardoe after Maggie has left him. They are very short and really catch the reader unaware initially because he has no way of knowing who the characters are in the scene or what relationship it bears to the main story. The novelist has simply not prepared very well for their inception and the book suffers accordingly.

But there is another reason why these chapters do not work for me. As I suggested before, the strength of the novel is the 'charm' of the story teller. In these terse seg-
ments, I no longer read that voice and the scenes fall flat.

Sheila Watson makes use of intrusive devices as well. The Biblical references, the figure of "Coyote" mentioned periodically in the novel, and those metaphysical images of the general form 'the noun phrase of the noun phrase', where the first noun phrase is always concrete and the second, concrete or abstract, operate as intrusive mechanisms. But the most interesting of the techniques she uses in this way is the technique of discontinuing the prose movement for a verse-like structure, similar to the one that opened the novel. As James Potter approaches the town, echoes of the novel's beginning are constructed on the page.

In the town below
lived Paddy, the bartender
and Paddy's parrot.
Lived Sheperd, the game warden,
Pockett, manager of the General Store,
Bascomb, the bank manager
and Tallifer, his clerk.
Lived ten score other souls. (Hook, p. 92)

The effect accentuates the formal movement of the novel, foregrounding the language that is its reality. Similarly, the novel ends with the voice of Coyote "crying down through the boulders":

I have set his own feet on soft ground;
I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders
of the world. (Hook, p. 134)

Thus, this physical idiosyncracy of the novel provides a frame for its formal movement.
The effect of these intrusive mechanisms is similar in both novels. What they do is stylize the content to foreground the larger design evolving out of the content. It is the inner dialectic of the fictional mentality, working itself out of time to a purely aesthetic world where the fictional reality is the reality that emerges in both novels as the primary experience.

Accordingly, John Moss writes of The Double Hook:

Sheila Watson populates, makes tangible, a moral universe. The structure of The Double Hook is an attempt to articulate that universe, to give it form. It is this that communicates: form, rather than meaning. 5.

"The very strength of the work is that while it invites interpretation, it resists definition."

These insights could apply equally well to The Swamp Angel for in that novel as well the formal design dominates the content. Hilda Severance's letter to Maggie, telling her of Mrs. Severance's death in The Swamp Angel, could well serve as an epilogue to both novels.

I feel Maggie that I ought to say some of the sad conventional things about Mother it seems only right but I can't because Mother's life was complete and to say anything else would be phony. (Angel, p. 154)

This is as close to a statement about her novel as Ethel Wil-

allows herself. Sheila Watson refuses any explicit statement.

And it is this reticence that adds to the charm of *The Swamp Angel*. For *The Double Hook*, it would have been inconsistent with the nature of the novel to have tried to say more. It is the sense of a form complete that ends both books. It is the originality of the language in *The Double Hook* that makes the reading experience and in *The Swamp Angel* it is the simplicity of the language. In both, it is the presence of the narrative voice which informs the novel that shapes the form.

But in their strength is their weakness. They are both shallow things because they have removed themselves from the content of the real world. They are romantic because they ignore their content, preferring to live in the form they create. They are absurd.

In literature, it is the design, the forming and shaping power, that is absurd: Real life ... never manifests meaning or purpose... Whatever gives form and pattern to fiction, whatever technical skill keeps us turning the pages to get to the end, is absurd, and contradicts our sense of reality. 7.

Both *The Swamp Angel* and *The Double Hook* are myths of the imagination, the fictional impulse leaving the real world behind. They bring to Anglo-Canadian literature a sense of the power

potentially in the fictional impulse. In *Beautiful Losers*, Leonard Cohen exploits the power and uses its irony to satirize his reader.
Chapter 3

God is alive. Magic is afoot.

One of the more controversial books to emerge on the Canadian scene is Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. With its blatant erotic realism, the extravagances of its language and narrative structure, and the esoteric delight it takes in the tradition of Eastern mysticism, the novel has confused critics and reading public alike. In fact, one critic has gone so far as to brave a tenuous analogy between Cohen and Hugh MacLeeman, based on certain moral considerations, disguised in the work of both men, though I think more so in Cohen.

The problem, as I conceive it, lies in the ambiguous tone that Cohen touches his subject matter with. On one level it is possible to read the novel as a serious thing concerned with "Cohen's generation, (setting) out to rediscover the body, and Cohen (depicting) time and life itself as one vast orgasm..." Cohen's characters inhabit the popular world of the comic book and the film screen and it is easy for the romantic impulses in us to see this world endowed with a special

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2. Ibid., p. 47.
justification when it is associated with the Eastern tradition.

However, it is equally easy to see in Cohen's treatment of this world the hand of the caricaturist. His characters are only one dimensional; his scenes frequently grotesque. Moreover, there is never more than a tenuous differentiation between the characters until in the end we see the narrator of Book One and the character F. merge into one figure.

In an attempt to reconcile these two positions, I propose to read the novel in terms of its narrative structure and language. It is these two aspects of Beautiful Losers that are its links with the new fiction.

What is immediately apparent in the novel is the novelist's de-emphasis of the story element. Michael Ondaatje notes that "the narrative is almost completely ignored."

Everything that 'happens' is stated blandly in the first pages: Edith's death, the sainthood of Catherine, F.'s death, the role of the Narrator. The rest of the novel digs deeper into the relationship of these four people. The book progresses not by logical movement of plot, but rather by expanding situations.

I will continue to use Ondaatje's capital 'N'-Narrator to refer to the narrator of Book One, "The History of Them All", to distinguish him from the narrators in the other two books.

This de-emphasis of the story, the temporal arrangement of events, is not as important to the novel as a formal com-

position as it was to the novels we looked at in the foregoing chapters. Displacing the temporal logic of plot, what Hugh Kenner has called "plausibility", is juxtaposition, the logic of association, and narrative discontinuity.

Through these two techniques, the book has a great deal of structure. The narrative structure of the novel assumes a dialectical movement in the three successive books that make up the whole. It moves from the first person narration in book one through the long letter from F., which complements the events of the first book thereby adding a degree of distance from them, to a third person epilogue. Within this movement, two stories gradually unfold: the story of the relationship between the Narrator, Edith and F.; and the story of Catherine Tekakwitha, the Indian saint.

The technique of narrative discontinuity works to isolate and distance the reader from the novel while Cohen proceeds to bombard him with his flamboyant and unpredictable content. We find ourselves adrift in the density of the content the novelist commands, reaching for whatever lines of narrative he throws us to piece our reading experience together. The novelist will exploit the position he has forced us into in his epilogue.

4. See Kenner's remarks, quoted on p. 11.
In fact, the Catherine Tekakwitha story operates in the first book as a thread through the labyrinthine ramblings of the Narrator. It has more chronology to it than anything else and hence it is a more familiar spirit within the novel. On another level, though, it reminds us of the kind of things Cohen is doing to his story in this unusual narrative structure.

In short, what is happening in Beautiful Losers—is Cohen letting the energies of the fictional impulse loose within the novel as a book. If we understand this fictional impulse, our propensity for telling stories, as a manifestation of the imagination approaching the reality, then the novel begins to make sense. It is about the preposterous absurdities extant in the societal meaning structure; it is about the inability of fiction to deal with this reality in the traditional manner; it is about the folly of our expectations in the fiction we read; it is about a great many things. But more than this, I feel it is about the imagination—Cohen's imagination?—shaking itself awake in the anaemic, lethargic, static world in which it is forced to live.

Each of the three narrators, the Narrator of Book One, and the omniscient narrator of book three, is essentially a distorting force in the section he is involved in. "The History of Them All", Book One, comes to us through a first person
narrator we come to identify as a folk-writer. He is trying to understand his wife's suicide, the death of his friend, F., and the legend of Catherine Tekakwitha. We know him only as a product of the cultural context:

I always wanted to be loved by the Communist Party and the Mother Church. I wanted to live in a folk song like Joe Hill. I wanted to weep for the innocent people my bomb would have to maim. I wanted to thank the peasant father who fed us on the run. I wanted to be against the rich, even though some of them knew Dante; just before his destruction one of them would learn that I knew Dante, too. I wanted my face carried in Peking, a poem down my shoulder. ...I wanted to come out of a mining town with rude manners and convictions given to me by an atheist uncle, barfully disgrace of his family. I wanted to rush across America in a sealed train, the only white man whom the negroes will accept at the treaty convention. 5

The Narrator defines himself for us as various romantic dreams of heroic postures, each encumbered with the irony of its own contradiction. They define a sentimental vision of the world, enhanced in the persistent rhythm of "I wanted".

The Narrator, however, is a victim of this irony, for the confusion which is manifested in the irony discomposes his dreams and generates a stasis of existence for him. He is his own sentimental hero.

His plight is made to slip into bathos and farce.

Bathos is a quality of imagery, the images used to carry an

emotion being humorously disproportionate to that emotion. In this passage, the rhythm of the 'I + verb phrase' syntax culminates in a bathetic mood.

I tried to sail past the plague in a gondola, young tenor about to be discovered by talent-scout tourists...I forgot the way Edith died, the way P. died, wiping his ass with a curtain. I forgot that I only had one more chance. I thought Edith would rest in a catalogue. I thought I was a citizen, user of public facilities. I forgot about constipation...Why me? -the great complaint of the constipated. Why doesn't the world work for me? The lonely sitting man on the porcelain machine. What did I do wrong yesterday? (Losers, p. 47-8)

The personification of constipation and the image of "the lonely sitting man on the porcelain machine" burlesque the sentimentality in the tenor of the image. The result is a kind of ironic pathetic fallacy, the forms expressing the Narrator's emotion inappropriate to the emotion.

Cohen is obviously playing with the context of his novel. Perhaps we could go as far as to say he is playing with his readers in the manner he treats the dreams of his Narrator.

Thus, the heading of book one: "The History of Them All".

The passage quoted first encourages a sense of empathy or, at least, sympathy with the Narrator while the bathos in this passage destroys the reader's willingness to empathize or otherwise. What is happening is Cohen is working to confuse the distance between his reader and the novel. In short, he is preparing a trap for his reader.
D. G. Jones finds in the recurrent images of machines important thematic implications to his reading of the novel. In these, he sees suggestions of the de-humanization of man in his world of technology. Thus, for Jones, the novel "celebrates the triumph of the outcast irrational world against an overly exclusive and overly mechanical rationalism." His argument, although somewhat terse, seems to satisfy itself in the episode with the Danish Vibrator. As we shall see, this scene also suggests much about the narrator, F., of book two. Jones finds that ultimately Beautiful Losers is "a satirical fantasy which cries out against a desire for perfection that would reduce the whole of life to a system."

So, as the novel proceeds, the imagery becomes bathetic, and episodes transform overtones of high-seriousness into farce. For instance, the classical sin of hubris is associated with comic book figures in this scene between F. and the Narrator, told by the latter: The first speaker is F.:

-No.
He tightened his grip.
-Oh, oh, oh, please! Help!
-The truth! You disdained the coupon because of the sin of pride, didn't you? Charles Axis wasn't good enough

7. Ibid, p. 78.
for you. In your brain you cherished an unspeakable desire. You wanted to be Blue Beetle. You wanted to be Captain Marvel. You wanted to be Plastic Man. Robin wasn't good enough for you, you wanted to be Batman.
-You're breaking my back.
-You wanted to be the Superman who was never Clark Kent. (Losers, p. 147-8)

The confession is actually a parody of confession, the authority figure F. forcing the penitence of the Narrator. It is accentuated in the Narrator's cry "You're breaking my back." Yet, as the classics are somewhat vulgarized by the association with the Narrator in his confession, so the world of comic books achieves a measure of greater seriousness from the same association. In fact, the Narrator's subservience to F., his confessor and, in every way that we can see, his superior, places F. in the position of an authority figure, the one who will give us the real answers after he has exposed this fool of a Narrator. F. is the member of Parliament, hero of the Quebecois, entrepreneur who converts a factory to a private games room. F. is our dream of success written large, the person the Narrator always wanted to be.

The Catherine Tekakwitha story is always kept in the background of Book One, partly as a comment on the lack of a story in the central thrust of the book and partly as a device to give some structure to the rambling of the Narrator's mind. However, in its structural function in the book, the Tekakwitha story reveals much to us about the Narr-
tor and narrators in general, an important lesson to prepare us for what will happen later in the novel. We continually discover the Narrator interpolating his consciousness into the Tekakwitha story. A good example is the campfire scene in which Catherine is induced by her old aunts to go through a fish ritual, a prelude to more physical intercourse with a young brave. The Narrator turns it into the ludicrous.

The ceremony must not be completed, the old magic must not be honored! Catherine Tekakwitha stood up. The hunter smiled, Catherine Tekakwitha smiled sadly, the hunter thought she smiled shyly, the aunts thought she smiled slyly, the hunter thought the Aunt smiled greedily, the Aunts thought the hunter smiled greedily, the hunter even thought that the little slit in the head of his cock smiled, and maybe Catherine thought her cunt was smiling in its new home. A strange luminous fish smiled.

-Smack, smack, yum, said the hunter inarticulately.

Catherine Tekakwitha fled the squatting hungry people. (Losers, p. 64-5)

The Narrator reveals his presence in the scene through such words as "the ceremony must not be completed, the old magic must not be honored!", in the bathetic use of the smiles among the Indians, in the rhyming 'ly' of the manner adverbials, in the reference to "a strange luminous fish". These stylistic extravagances are tensed against the outline of the story. They show a mind making up the story.

Aspects of the grotesque are evident in the scene. The diction distorts the sense of lewdness to a point where it loses our empirical sense of reality in its own distortion.
In the smiles and in the inarticulate grunts of the brave
that are given orthographic substance, our world of sen-
suality is made ludicrous.

It is in the sense of the world as ludicrous that Cohen
uses the grotesque. For instance, when Catherine Tekakwitha
tips over a wine glass at a dinner with the French, the
spilled wine magnifies itself in an unexpected fashion.

Despite the suave activity of the several servants the
stain continued to discolor larger and larger areas of
the tablecloth. Conversation dwindled as the diners
directed their attention to its remarkable progress. It
now claimed the entire tablecloth. Talk ceased as a
silver vase turned purple and the pink flowers it con-
tained succumbed to the same influence. ...A total
chromatic metamorphosis took place in a matter of
minutes.

(Loeser, p. 124-5)

The scene tries our credibility, naturally, but it also con-
fuses us in the tenor of its distortion. Again, the effort
is to reduce everything to a sense of the ludicrous. We will
have occasion to note the other side of the grotesque later on;
that sense of the grotesque that gives us a world that is fear-
ful.

"The History of Them All" ends on an expectant note.
both the Greek phrase and the Tekakwitha legend promising
something more than the ignominy of this Narrator when they
are understood. "A Long Letter from F." interposes dramati-
cally into the consciousness of the Narrator, giving us a
distanced view of him. However, instead of a movement out of
the sentimentality, the bathos, the farce, the grotesque, in-
stead of a movement towards that "moment of larger simultan-
eeous significance", the verbal and structural extravagances
increase. Footnotes annotate F.'s invocation to the life of
Catherine Tekakwitha in the middle style; lines are drawn a-
cross the page to disjoin the text; and orthographic things
like "Grrrrrr! Arroooooof!" meet us. The distance deter-
iorates to a new kind of absurdity.

The letter is at first didactic as F. moralizes about the
Narrator's shortcomings. However, it changes rapidly into an
excursion into the world of the grotesque until finally the
whole thing exhausts itself into a farce that subverts the
entire section.

Unlike the Narrator, F. is a telling figure, a first
person omniscient narrator, or so he would have us believe.
F. M. Macri suggests that "(the) modern priest is F.; and his
will dominates Edith's and the (N)arrator's. He is running the
salvation movie." His omniscience comes at us like ancient
wisdom, although at times he seems to be twisting our arms to
accept it.

8. See Frye's elaboration of this notion quoted on p. 39.
Initially, we do not know that F. is not to be trusted. We have been led to believe that he is a figure greater in kind than the Narrator. In fact, the Narrator continually looks to F. for guidance. "Oh F.," he says, "do you think I can learn to perceive the diamonds of good amongst all the shit?" F. answers cryptically: "It is all diamond." (Losers, p. 10)

Thus, F. seems to have all the answers to the Narrator's questions; he seems to have the potential to make sense out of the Narrator for us. Even in the first book his tone is rhetorical and didactic.

Connect nothing: F. shouted. Place things side by side on your arborite table, if you must, but connect nothing! (Losers, p. 22)

Ronald Sutherland would have it: "F. is symbolic of the physical, sensual aspects of man, and the homosexual relationship between the protagonist and F. represents modern man's frantic search for sensual experience." But F. is also a member of Parliament and recognized leader of the separatist movement, as well as a successful business man. In short, he is the embodiment of everything the Narrator wants to be; an amorphous symbol of success in the material world.

F. M. Macrè presents a more provocative interpretation:

Cohen's story involves the relationships and events in the lives of two characters. Though they have four names, they are really only two people: the narrator-F. and the Catherine-Edith characters. F., the hero, the perfect aggregate of external convention, is protean, constantly changing role and ideas. The narrator, anti-hero, passive, suffering, is an historian, seeking painfully to articulate his spiritual needs. Edith, the twentieth-century ideal of plastic-beauty, sexually insatiable, is completely controlled by F., her creator. Catherine, anti-woman, mystic, passive, suffering, seeks ecstatic release from her physical person through the pleasure-pain of religion.

Yet, despite the fact that Macri claims they are really only two characters, the outline obviously treats them as four. Macri also overlooks the fact that both Catherine and Edith are Indians; the fact that F. loses his voice in the novel to the radio; and the fact that the voices of F. and the narrator are distinct for much of the book. It is not until the last book that the Narrator and F. become confused as one and the same character. Moreover, the woman figure towards the end of Book Two changes to Mary Voolnd, F.'s nurse in the sanatorium, and the lady driving the car in the final book.

The women figures actually have very little reality in the novel. Edith is used as a foil to both F. and the Narrator while Catherine provokes the expressive powers of both male figures. Mary Voolnd and the woman driving the car are convenient foils for Cohen, the novelist, towards the end of

In his letter, F. picks up many of the incidents mentioned by the Narrator in the first book. Thus, we get an additional commentary on the Charles Axis episode. F. writes:

You always resisted me. I had a body waiting for you, but you turned it down. I had a vision of you with 19 inch arms, but you walked away. I saw you with massive lower pecs and horse shoe triceps, with bulk and definition simultaneously. In certain intimate embraces I saw exactly how low your buttocks should descend. (Losers, p. 201)

F. projects himself as a creative power with the potential to transform reality: a novelist. But F. is really only the technique of the novelist, Cohen, conning us into believing in him. F.'s lengthy panegyric on his aspirations for Quebec, la Quebec libre, reflect an exaggerated vision.

This didactic strain culminates in the much quoted "God is alive. Magic is afoot." (Losers, p. 197) incantation. Yet in this incantation, the rhythm of statements builds towards a ritualistic expression of the imagination alive in language. In the free associating consciousness that informs the passage, a sense of the surface as the reality is induced. It is the magic of language, transforming itself into the reality, that emerges; it is the power of the words to chant a universe of belief that finally makes it.

But Cohen is not through with his readers. He has F. become gloriously mad. As the details of his relationship with
Mary Woolnd unfold, we realize that F. has become crazed by his own power. The episode with the Danish Vibrator is as grotesque a scene as the novel contains, F. assaulting the Narrator with erotic realism in a last effort to teach him the meaning of his ignominy.

The scene develops as Edith and F. have failed to achieve sexual fulfillment. The Danish Vibrator offers release from their growing frustration.

We both leaped for the Vibrator at the same instant. Her fluids made her slippery. For a second in our struggle I wished we were making love, for all her nozzles were stiff and fragrant. I grabbed her around the waist, before I knew it her bum popped out of my bear hug like a wet watermelon seed, her thighs went by like a missed train, and there I was with empty lubricated arms, nose squashed against the expensive mahogany floor. (Losers, p. 222)

The similes "like a wet watermelon seed" and "like a missed train" distort the scene, generating a humour in their incongruous feel within this context. F. refers to a part of Edith's anatomy as "her nozzles", suggesting she has become a machine-like figure to him.

As the scene proceeds, Edith is serviced by the Vibrator and then it turns to F.:

Before I could question her further it was upon my buttocks, its idiot hum revved up to a psychotic whine. The detachable crotch piece inserted itself between my hairy thighs, ingeniously providing soft support for my frightened testicles. (Losers, p. 223)

The humour changes to the grotesque as the scene becomes lu-
dicous. The Vibrator then turns to Edith once again.

Edith backed into a corner as the Danish Vibrator ad-
vanced toward her. She stooped queerly, as if she 
were trying to hide her cunt behind her thighs. I 
could not stir from the puddle of jelly in which I 
had been buggered by countless improvements. It had 
made its way across the hotel room in a leisurely fa-
shion, straps and cups flowing behind it, like a Ha-
waiian skirt made of grass and brassieres. (Losers, 
p. 225.)

This use of the grotesque intrudes upon us its humour, titil-
ation and moral shock. The explicitness of its detail for-
ces response of some kind, whether it is the ability to laugh 
with Cohen or moral indignation at its crude, fulsome manner.

In short, it does not let us alone.

F. also completes the story of Catherine Tekakwitha in a 
way reminiscent of the Danish Vibrator episode. “Totally ema-
ciated from flagellation and sleeping on thorns, the details 
of which F. is only too liberal in supplying, Catherine pre-
pared to die.

After the evening prayers, Catherine Tekakwitha asked 
permission to go into the woods once more. Le P. Chol-
lenec granted her permission. She dragged herself 
past the cornfield under the blanket of melting snow, 
into the fragrant pine trees, into the powdery sha-
dows of the forest, on the levers of broken fingernails she pulled herself through the dim March star-
light, to the edge of the icy Saint Lawrence River, 
to the frozen foot of the Crucifixion. Le P. Lecompte 
tells us, "Elle y passa un quart d'heure à se mettre 
les épaules en sang par une rude discipline." There 
she spent 15 minutes whipping her shoulders until 
they were covered with blood, and this she did with-
out her friend. (Losers, p. 264)

Noteworthy is the esoteric, solemn quality the French has to
the Anglophone reader. This distanced enchantment with the horror is maintained to a certain extent in the English translation, although the terse French phrase "par une rude discipline" becomes a wordier English "and this she did without her friend." In his characteristic way, Cohen has touched the horror with his laughter.

Through F., Cohen is playing with our sense of fiction. The distortions, the extravagances in the text operate to foreground the power of a consciousness working with its content. Ultimately, the whole letter from F. is lost in the static of the radio.

-Static. It's the radio, F.
-The radio? You didn't say anything about the radio.
-Quiet. It wants to tell us something.

(Dolly in to close-up of the radio assuming the form of print.)
-This is the radio speaking. Good evening. The radio easily interrupts this book to bring you a recorded historical news flash: Terrorist Leader At Large. (Losers, p. 285)

The radio reduces the letter to farce, completing the distortion of the fictional reality that has been going on all the way through the book. The effect is to confuse the distance between the reader and the novel.

As a voice in the novel, the radio is the ultimate authority figure, manipulating forms of consciousness rather than creating them. Gavin Gate and the Goddesses are one of the voices of the radio; they suggest the pretension of the
pop song. The banal lyrics that compose the song are parodied in the parenthetic commentary. At one point, the comment accompanying a particularly obnoxious line by Gavin Gate associates the pop singer with kingship.

(Who are you Gavin Gate? You have a strange command. I think you have been through some ordeal and have learned much. You are a king of some slum block and you have handed down laws.) (Losers, p. 95)

Earlier, the Narrator refers to "'The Great Pretender', a song which was to change the popular music of our day." (Losers, p. 12)

Thus, when the radio displaces the voice of F. in the novel with its own voice, F. is transformed from hero to one of the losers for he has lost to the radio. The radio also points to the novelist, Cohen, whose unpredictability within the novel is what keeps us off-guard.

After the profuse and unpredictable content of the first two books, a feeling of 'catharsis' or, more simply, rest accompanies the epilogue. We have been exercised vigorously in the convolutions of the structure. This technique, creating a density of content within the formal composition, is not original with Cohen and has been characterized elsewhere as the "rhapsgodic mode", "the sense of being carried away by content, the sheer presence of things."

The final book, the epilogue, plays with this sense of catharsis. The change to third person omniscient narration and the longer sentences induce a sense of things moving to a close, to an ending. But it soon becomes obvious that Cohen is not through with us yet. The first paragraph plays with empirical reality.

Spring comes into Quebec from the West. It is the warm Japan current that brings the change of season to the west coast of Canada, and then the West Wind picks it up. It comes across the prairies in the breath of the Chinook, waking up the grain and caves of bears. It flows over Ontario like a dream of legislation, and it sneaks into Quebec, into our villages between our birch trees. (Losers, p. 289)

Spring coming to Quebec from the west is illogical, regardless of what winds are blowing it. The simile "like a dream of legislation" loses the sense of final things in humour.

Nonetheless, the third book returns us to the chronology of story, leading us out of the convolutions of the book. The Narrator reappears as "an old man (standing) in the threshold of his curious abode, a treehouse battered and precarious as a secret boy's club." (Losers, p. 290) A young boy approaches and the Narrator begins to echo F., calling the boy 'darling' and exercising solicitude for the boy's physical well-being. He tells the boy:

Be careful! Look at the way you're squatting! You're ruining your little body like that. Keep the thigh muscles engaged. Get the small buttocks away from the heels, keep a healthy space or your buttock's muscles will over-develop. (Losers, p. 293)
When the boy 'pees', the old man says: "Watch your leggings. Write your name." (Losers, p. 293)

The confusion with F. continues until it becomes total identification at the Main Shooting and Games Alley. The old man has just left the Systems Theatre where he discovered that "his eyes were blinking at the same rate as the shutter in the projector...and therefore the screen was merely black." (Losers, p. 298) The crowds at the Alley take notice of him.

- Look at his hand!
- It's all burnt!
- He's got no thumb!
- Isn't he the Terrorist Leader that escaped to-night?
- Looks more like the pervert they showed on T.V. they're combing the country for.
- Get him out!
- He stays! He's a patriot!
- He's a stinking cocksucker!
- He's very nearly the President of our country!
(Losers, p. 298)

A 'stinking cocksucker' yet 'very nearly President of our country': we are reminded of F.'s assertion "it's all diamond".

In fact, the novel comes to us as a series of clever paradoxes, koans, that foreground the imaginative ingenuity in the book. Michael Ondaatje writes: "it is...fascinating to see a mind working towards completion, to see the basic poetic process which moves from being just a smudge of your character into the story."

13. op. cit., p. 56.
F. advises that the Narrator be magic at one point in the novel and this is exactly how the novel ends up: that is, it becomes magic. The old man transforms himself into a vision of "All Chances At Once."

Between the Deluxe Polar Bear Hunt and the plate-glass windows of the Main Shooting and Games Alley the gasps were beginning that would spread over the heads of the astounded crowd like a leak in the atmosphere. The old man had commenced his remarkable performance (which I do not intend to describe). Suffice it to say that he disintegrated slowly: just as a crater extends its circumference from the inside out. His presence had not completely disappeared when he began to reassemble himself. 'Had not completely disappeared' is actually the wrong way of looking at it. His presence was like the shape of an hourglass strongest where it was smallest. And that point where he was most absent, that's when the gasps started, because the future streams through that point going both ways. That is the beautiful waist of the hourglass! That is the point of Clear Light! Let it change forever what we do not know! For a lovely briefness all the sand is compressed in the stem between the two flasks! Ah this is not a second chance. For all the time it takes to launch a sigh he allowed the spectator a vision of All Chances At Once. (Losers, p. 304-5)

This novel's moment of 'simultaneous significance' traps us between the poles of what we are willing to believe and what the book tells us.

The scene changes rapidly: "Quickly now, as if even he participated in the excitement, (the old man) greedily reassembled himself into — into a movie of Ray Charles." (Losers, p. 305) The halting repetition of the 'into' emphasizes the incredible aspect of the performance. This is a world of the imagination where even the most fanciful possibilities are
réalités. Beautiful Losers is a powerful expression of what the imagination can do with the content of its world, given the power to select and organize it within a formal composition.

Cohen shows us a world that lives not too far from the mundane activities of daily existence. In many ways this world is escapist and deserves to be denounced as such even though it is so alive with possibilities that the energy expended in declaring it would seem wasted. It is an issue we will return to.

Despite the fact that it escapes the problems of our world, this world of Beautiful Losers is at least a pleasant place. But what happens when the fictional world turns on us, attacking our world? Dave Godfrey refuses the archetypal role of integrating us with our societal meaning structure in a very belligerent fashion; The New Ancestors sorties, like marauding guerilla fighters, against the frontiers of our civilization to withdraw again into its own secrets.
Chapter 4

The Statues of Our Ancestors

Before the publication of *The New Ancestors*, Godfrey wrote in an open letter:

> If you come expecting paradise on earth, be prepared to search elsewhere, for Ghana has found civilization as imperfect as the rest of us. The dragon's teeth have been sown, and there can only be 'spontaneous' joy at thoughts of harvest. 1

'Spontaneous' joy, not deliberated reassurance. The caution could well serve as an epigraph to the novel itself, a novel that deals with repression and oppression, the rulers and those who would rule, the third world struggling with itself and the twentieth century. Using the novel form, Godfrey seeks to create a confused world, a world impatient with itself and those who would come to it.

*The New Ancestors* is about ancestors; our need for them, their need of themselves, and their origin in ourselves. In an interview, Godfrey talked about ancestors:

Ancestors are the process by which gods are made. There is a sort of great-grandfather figure, and he's a very particular person. As he moves back into the past, he merges with other grandfather figures, and

great-uncles, and whatnot, so that he becomes certain peculiar, peculiar characteristics, and then he passes towards the gods. So there's always a progression, as you look backwards, of the individual moving back towards the gods. When the great-great-great grandson calls on the gods, he's calling on the force which is built up in the ancestors and which is in him, you know, genetically 'is' in him.

Whether these ancestors are, in fact, genetically present in us or not is moot. But what Godfrey is attempting to characterize is this archetypal consciousness, exercising itself in time to construct an awareness of itself that is outside the "time" continuum. This is the consciousness of the grandson as a generic reality, justified in the remembrance of those who were here before him. It is a collective consciousness that informs his art, his religion and all those things which manifest his being. It expresses a psycho-physical involvement with the world of other things.

The New Ancestors is about the archetypal consciousness adrift in the mundane world without the direction of viable ancestors. The novel draws its content from the intellectual, the political and the socio-historical context of our century. As in Beautiful Losers, the formal composition is designed to trap the reader in the fictional world. Briefly, the novel turns its energies on the reader, abdicating its

role to control, order, direct the reality through the whole-
ess of form. In place of this wholeness is a narrative structure that leaves the reader vibrating with the chaos of the Lost Coast.

In many ways, The New Ancestors is similar to Cohen's Beautiful Losers in design. Both novels are constructed in such a way that they are fundamentally experiences of content rather than exercises in "conceptually causative logic". In both, the conclusion to the story is given at the outset and the story then acts as a frame for everything else. Thus, in "A Prologue", we learn, through Geoffrey Firebank, the British consul, of Michael Burdener's deportation for his complicity in the murder of a prominent musician friend of the President's. We learn further that one, First Samuels, has been captured in connection with the crime and that Burdener leaves behind him an African wife. In short, the fate of all the central char-
acters - Burdener, Ama Burdener, Gamaliel Harding, and First Samuels - is revealed in the prologue.

In this way the story is automatized, expected and it operates to foreground the multiple perspectives that make up the novel. The techniques of juxtaposition and narrative discontinuity work to make an atmosphere of expanding aware-

ness for the reader.

As in *Beautiful Losers*, *The New Ancestors* displays a variety of narrative methods. "A Prologue" works with a third person limited narration, the story teller looking over the shoulder of a single character. The same posture is used in the third section, "A Child of Delicacy". "The London Notebook" on the other hand, develops through a first person voice, that of Michael Burdener, while the section entitled "Freedom People's Party" utilizes an omniscient third person, the focus shifting discriminately. The last section, "The Agada Notebook", oscillates between a third person limited narration and the more immediate voice of Burdener. Finally, "In the Fifth City" is a collage of narrative voices ranging from a highly involved first person to an omniscient narrator.

All this narrative activity makes for a complexity of design that is amplified in the manipulation of time in the novel. The sections are not ordered temporally but according to the juxtaposition of part with part. With the exception of "In the Fifth City", each section is marked with a date. "A Prologue" is dated February 5, 1966 and the murder, we are told, was "a fortnight past". "The London Notebook" then

takes place in the summer of 1965; "A Child of Delicacy" moves us back to February 5, 1966 and "Freedom People's Party" spans a full year from February, 1965 to February, 1966. Finally, after the timeless "In the Fifth City", the "Agada Notebook" is dated "Harmattan-1966", which would be the period prior to and including the murder. The novel concludes as Burdener discovers that Gamaliel has been murdered.

Several things result from this method of treating the time element. The logic of cause and effect, the essence of the popular novel in North America, is done away with through this narrative structure. The Lost Coast universe is made to seem irrational, without the temporal ordering that we associate with the rational universe.

Then, too, the de-emphasis of the temporal element tends to emphasize the spatial properties of the Lost Coast. In her study of experimental fiction, Sharon Spencer has commented on novels of this type, novels she calls "archetectonic":

the archetectonic novel manifests an avoidance of character developed for its intrinsic interest, its essential feature is...structural. Its goal is the evocation of the illusion of a spatial reality, either representational or abstract, constructed from prose fragments of diverse types and lengths and arranged by means of the principle of juxtaposition so as to include a comprehensive view of the book's subject. 5.

This spatial reality is created through the novelist's ability to make his novel into a montage of scenes. It becomes an abstract representation of its subject.

Ms. Spencer calls these "prose fragments of diverse lengths and types" perspectives. As I indicated previously, they are joined by the principle of juxtaposition, the logic of association, and by narrative discontinuity. Discontinuing the narrative as Cohen did in Beautiful Losers and as Godfrey does in The New Ancestors provides a structural unity that binds the sections together; each section shares the same story, if you will.

Ms. Spencer has found three types of perspectives important to the archetectonic novel, all of which are found in The New Ancestors. First, there is the author's development of the subject as it is perceived or experienced or evaluated by one or more voices or characters in the novel. The various narrative postures outlined earlier are an excellent example of this technique.

This technique is also the basis of Graeme Gibson's first novel, Five Legs. The novel develops out of the consciousness of Lucan Crackle and Felix Oswald, each character providing the focal center for half the novel. Placed back to

6. Ibid., p. 77.
back, the two sections counterpoint one another to make a complex picture of a fictional reality greater than either character.

However, in *The New Ancestors*, there is an additional level of perspectives supplied by the intellectual framework woven into the novel that gives it a socio-historical dimension. When he has to visit Gamaliel Harding because Kwame Bird Lady Day, who is Gamaliel's son, is failing in his grades, Burdener relates the substance of the conversation. Gamaliel tells him:

There are only two ways to get through life, Michael, here or anywhere... If you're not brilliant, you knuckle into the system. You do what it tells you and it provides the rewards your intelligence cannot. If you are-brilliant - unusual - you absorb the system. ... The system always remains alive within the people, especially the stupider ones. (*Ancestors*, pp 39-40)

Gamaliel is an ultra-conservative, fanatic in his support of the Redeemer, President Kofi Krumah. He ruthlessly catechizes his son, Kwame, until Kwame flees him.

Michael Burdener's own lessons are revealed to us through his wife, Ama, who was once a student of his.

"Steal from the obruni (whiteman)," he would shout, when the median was low after a test. "For generations he has been 'stealing' your lumber and your cocoa and your gold and your bodies. Steal from him now; steal all that is left to him: his knowledge, his magic, his books. You are only learning; you ought to be stealing. Because the Redeemer is right; you do have to catch up one hundred years in only ten. But," and he would wag out his long finger like 'obosombo (ju-ju priest), "in those ten"
years the Americans and the Germans will be another
twenty-five years ahead. By then you must have
learned to steal proper." (Ancestors, p. 156)

Burdener, the scientist revolutionary, believes that we are all
of the Olduvai Gorges in accordance with that view of evolu-
tion that traces the first human-like beings there.

You must learn to forget those clever marks the Eu-
ropians drew all over Africa — and are still attempting
to redraw. Civilization began here and here it must
be rebuilt. Europe will need another war against
Russia, before it can even start accepting its basic
savagery. The babaos of war will ride again in
your time, don't fear that. (Ancestors, p. 161)

"You must ask questions," he tells the class, "You were taught
to seek answers because with answers you can be beaten..."

(Learn) the simple lessons to be learnt from the study
of the animal kingdom. And knowing them, you are rea-
dy for man, this highest link, this predominant spe-
cies, this spoiler of the balance. And there is very
little within him that should surprise you now. Es-
sentially another animal. A hairless gorilla. As
Darwin pointed out some time back. But set this ani-
mal free, in time or in space and all fixity disap-
ppears. For man mutates his own mind. You will re-
call my brief digression on the porpoise. Such great
simplicity does not apply to man. (Ancestors, p. 159)

The new biology, lucid and explicit in Burdener's school-mas-
ter rhetoric, is as arresting and stimulating as Gamaliel's
social theory. But the two are not completely compatible.

Neither are they meant to be for what they do is give a sense
of the intellectual climate of the Lost Coast. Frantz III,
one of the young 'rads' organized by First Samuels, announces
that "Marx must be rewritten to take into account the merging of the class into a basic new conflict. Between the generations; the old men and the gad-boys." (Ancestors, p. 271)

His revision is both a travesty, an ad-hoc innovation in the theory, and a valid insight.

Godfrey once said: "seeing it without preconception, that's one of the problems. I can be busy taking a position one week and the next week my hero could be the guy who's on the other side." The fictional impulse, then, seeks to achieve an objective representation, divorced from a particular point of view.

Sharon Spencer has coined the term "open-structured" novel to describe the kind of book that results. In distinction to what she calls the "closed-structured" novel, the open structure pretends to a reality "of diffusion, of flux; of constantly forming, dissolving and reforming relationships among the elements of the work." In the juxtapositional method, the open structured novel becomes that flux in a representational abstraction. The difference between the closed and open structure is one of focus: the closed has limited its focus sharply to a single perspective while the open

7. Godfrey, Myths, p. 35.
structure has opened its focus to try to take in as much as it can. The open structured novel tends to be cyclic, its end trailing off into its beginning. The New Ancestors, for example, ends where it has begun: Michael Burdener's deportation.

The second kind of perspective Ms. Spencer has found in the archetectonc novel she calls simply "photographic", "the attempt to eliminate affective and qualitative elements". Again, the intent is to approach an objective stance with respect to the subject. The novelist conceives his scenes in terms of their visual properties and the language is made to carry the sense of spatial relationships. The sense of place is a function of the texture of the prose, the catalogue of small details growing into a tangible world of things and dramatic activity.

On his way to the airport to see Burdener deported, Firebank orders his driver to find an alternate route so that they can avoid the changing of the guard in front of the President's palace. The Lost Coast world is filtered onto the page as they go.

Ali was taking him through a section of town he did not know, avoiding the changing of the guard in front of the President's palace. In that quarter of pure work-and-happiness socialism through which they now drove, high apartment buildings rose among

10. Ibid, p. 77.
the saffron, earth built shacks of unknown workers. Signs warned of future plans for the land. Do NOT Build Between These ARROWS Or Your House Will BE TORN DOWN! The arrows included half-finished homes of rough concrete. A large drawing on the signs showed a wrecker's ball crashing through a wall. (Ancestors, p. 20-1)

Shifting the focus to detail external to his character, the author constructs a world of physical depth, enhanced in its objectivity by a street sign which becomes content in the novel. This is the traditional strength of the novel, this ability to project a three-dimensional world in terms of language. As detail of this type continues to work itself into the book, it gradually catalogues an awareness of things which belong to the Lost Coast world.

The big innovation made by the new fiction into the use of language in the novel is the use of the present tense as a dramatic force in scenes. Godfrey makes sporadic use of the present tense in scenes like the following. As First Samuels prepares to complete the demolition of a fishing village despite the protest of the 'youngmen', the continuing use of the present tense works a sense of greater immediacy to the drama.

Slowly, the bulldozer lunges forward. Five yards from the students PS dips the blade so that it bites about six inches into the ground and begins to roll a rug of earth and ashes towards the students. Four of them scatter almost at once, their thin faces seething with anger and frustration. But the girl, Norah, and two of the young men, Binkers and Halsey-Cayford...stay where they are. Norah is hollering something at him, something low and Agadan, but he cannot hear. He dips the blade a little lower, being careful not to tear up so much earth
that his run will be interrupted but wishing to protect the children from the actual power of the blade; but he moves relentlessly forward, even as Halsey-Cayford is dumped off the shuddering turtle of mud, even as Biney runs forward and leaps upon it and carries Norah off under his muscular arm. Only Blinkers fearfully hangs on, seeing nothing of the scorn the mob is pouring on his comrades, unable to twist around and see how close he is to the embers, simply scrambling to keep his feet upon the shifting mud and ash beneath him, to reach his hands more firmly to the top edge of the blade, near the hydraulics, near the very thrust of the machine. (Ancestors, p. 214)

To the visual outline of the scene, the present tense contributes the feeling of simultaneous activity, of everything happening at once within the scene, of a continual, inexorable progression of time in the movement of the present. It accentuates the lapse of time within the prose in this way, foregrounding the action to a pronounced degree.

The third type of perspective that Sharon Spencer discovered in the new fiction, and certainly its most characteristic, is the introduction of blatantly intrusive mechanisms such as "illustrations, variations in typography, the use of colored or textured paper; the organization of words according to spatial properties of the page, the practice of reprinting passages from other printed sources" and any others the enterprising author may be able to come up with. She sees these devices as exploiting "the resources of the book".

11. Ibid., p. 77.
itself" and she divides them into four types:

Two consist very simply of bringing into the novel literary techniques and types of content that are traditionally assigned to other literary genres, to poetry and the essay in particular. The third approach is more characteristic of modern poetry...the practice of literary quotation, with or without citing sources. The fourth approach...is the use of photographs and illustrations; of different textures and colours of paper; and, most important, of variations in typography and the space presented by the page.

Not all these relate directly to The New Ancestors but they can be found in our experimental fiction in general. Leo Simpson uses footnotes in The Peacock Papers and we have already noted Klein's use of glosses in The Second Scroll and P.'s footnote to the story of Catherine Tekakwitha in the middle style in Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers. Robert Kroetsch's The Stud Horse Man includes a Kent cigarette advertisement approximately halfway through the novel, and in Beautiful Losers we find reproductions of comic book coupons. Simpson's The Peacock Papers is framed, that is, begins and ends, with an orthographic representation of television show with anonymous voices commenting on the show interpolated.

This is similar to the radio in Beautiful Losers.

These intrusive devices command a startling presence when they appear in the fictional context, so flamboyant, so misplaced do they seem. In general, they are calculated to sim-
ulate or represent the way things come at us in the 'real' world. They mark a multi-dimensional reality within the context of the novel. Yet they are distancing devices because they appear abruptly and stand out from the text of the narrative. There is no attempt to integrate them smoothly into the flow of the narrative structure. The edges of the formal composition become rough, the lines harder.

In *The New Ancestors*, speeches, newspaper columns with bold block lettered type, signs, initials of groups, buildings, associations, and orthographic representations of propaganda messages intrude into the montage of perspectives, multiplying the content the reader must cope with. But it is in his use of the Africanisms that Godfrey defines the ultimate distance from the novel for in these the Anglophone reader meets directly with incomprehensibility.

In the blurb to the paperback edition, Godfrey talks of his rationale with respect to the Africanisms.

The lack of a glossary is deliberate and has three rationales. One, the publisher was unhappy with the length of the book as it stood. Two, I wanted the non-African reader in some way to experience those moments of stark incomprehension which hit even the most open-minded travellers to Africa. Then, and most importantly, as somewhat of an adopted Ghanaian nationalist, I wanted to point out to scholars the clear gaps not only in their knowledge of African cultures but in the libraries they have helped to form.

(*Ancestors*, p. 444)
The first of his rationales speaks for itself. For the rest, we find that the Africanisms are technically relevant in the way Godfrey intended them. Our libraries are lacking in material on African languages and cultures, a fact I became uncomfortably aware of when it became necessary for me to know what the African proverbs meant. We have already noted that the Africanisms do give that sense of incomprehension to the Anglophone reader. This is a new experience in Canadian fiction, similar to the use of 'Joual' among Franco-Canadians. It is the experience of the novelist shutting us out from his fictional world.

Thus, with all these planes of content what happens in the archetypal novel, and The New Ancestors, in particular is a fictional world that has several dimensions and moves at various changing distances from the reader who is stationary. Succinctly, the novel becomes a world of its own and, in a curious transformation of positions, while the world of the Lost Coast moves and unfolds before us, we become the consciousness of the Lost Coast. The novel begins to read us.

The section "In the Fifth City" exploits the irony of this experience, the content actually including the reader. Detail becomes fragmentary; the death of Rush, the C. I. A. agent, is rehearsed in several possibilities, some linked to titillating lesbian activity. Mathematical formulae intrude
into the narrative which features a bizarre basketball game in the middle of the desert. The chief male characters - Michael Burdener, First Samuels, or F. S., and Gamaliel Harding, assume transparent disguises as Pierre Burd, Effez and El Amaliel respectively. The novel generates a strangeness of context that entices the reader in the cheap attraction of sadism, titillation, and mystery, only to turn on him for being attracted.

The narrator of this section takes on dramatic form unexpectedly in the novel. João Pedro attacks his "worthless lies", tells him:

I am just a man, even to the worthless - none would deny that, 'non'. But there has been no mention of the ore. There are no maps. And this American was seen, despite what you assert as to his death, boarding the afternoon flight to Bamako and Dakar. A ticket had been purchased in his own name: Aloysius Washington Rusk. (Ancestors, p. 365)

Valuable ore, maps and secret agents: the passage parodies popular thrillers, overtly toying with our sense of mystery and intrigue. For his part, the narrator recants to João Pedro's accusations, makes excuses, apologizes for the inconsistencies. There are good reasons. He had not considered some possibilities.

Although the possibilities were there: What possibilities are not? Once the observer becomes a part of the system which he observes, his every measurement distorts that system slightly and renders his data invalid for a second point of time, a second determination of energy or mass. (Ancestors, p. 366)
The tone peremptorily changes. The narrator declaims his critics: "Leopards paw in the deeper jungles. I am not interested in adjusting your gunsights. The eyes you were born with are clouded by sand." (Ancestors, p. 389) The blame for the distortions is shifted to us.

This photograph is blurred. If you have become a wish to assimilate this battered and sand-based world, there will be little in it for you. The long strings, red, white, black and yellow - perhaps the black is missing - are being wound about the body. Will this do for you? Is this your soul sister, for whom your body lusts, who winds the cords - perhaps the black is missing - tighter and tighter and tighter? Or can you not accustom yourself to this raw and eternal desolation? Does the naked sun after all bore and shame you? (Ancestors, p. 373-4)

In a strange kind of ritual, perhaps a burial ritual, the rhetorical 'you' brings the reader directly into the novel, making of him content. The strings might suggest the 'stringy' contrivances of the narrator, shaping a fictional reality.

The "wish to assimilate" exposes the archetypal imagination, seeking to read itself in that moment of "larger simultaneous significance", to see itself in the wholeness of form. The book begins to read us.

Finally, the novel turns on the reader, the narrator profaning him and stating surlily: "I can carry only so much with my narrative. You must learn to educate yourself, whoresmen and lepers." (Ancestors, p. 423) The reader finds himself becoming content in the novel; "Africa begins to occur
both without and within... on the page and in the mind.

Ultimately, though, the narrator blatantly panders to our expectations.

Yes. I will say to the men the phrase they expect, the phrase that has been spoken here many times already. Welcome in the name of Allah. What is in your hearts is known to him, therefore make your lives worthy. The voyage is prepared before you. In an hour I will take you to Ali Tatari, who is the honest boatman you have been informed of long before now. But for the moment, seek calm, partake of that which calms the unslaked thirst, think only of the voyage which awaits you, which searches you, which lusts for you, and yet which possesses you tomorrow as it possesses you yesterday as it possesses you today. (Ancestors, p. 420)

The wisdom of Islam is esoteric, sharing an irony similar to the parting wisdom of Coleridge's ancient mariner: it is only too shallow, yet how profound. In it lies the novel's secret: we are the voyage and it is us; we are the novel and it is us.

W. H. New has commented on the words "Prophase. Metaphase. Anaphase. Telephase." (Ancestors, p. 367) that share a similar irony:

The recurrent references to the processes of cell division - prophase, metaphase, anaphase, telephase - recall the genealogical process and racially mixed parentage of the Harding-Burdener family, and also contain the metaphoric meaning of Godfrey's scene and setting. Metaphase, when the split chromosomes group in the 'equatorial plane' of the cell, is followed by anaphase, when the halves of the chromosomes move into opposite sides, before the entire cell divides and new

nuclei are formed. The process is ordered, the result unpredictable except on the basis of statistical probabilities - a tension which gives the book its basis for conflict...and which takes Godfrey into the principles of quantum theory and their application to political affairs. 16

New's idea is very sketchy, but the germs of Godfrey's belief in the ineluctable chain of existence that joins all humanity is suggested in it. The biological foundation of being is but one of the links in the chain. In fact, the political and social theories propounded in the novel, as discordant as they seem, have at least this in common: they are concerned with their socio-historical context. In a passage of lyrical splendour, enhanced by the poetic devices of balanced phrasing and repetition, a female voice expresses the idea of the chain.

For my fingers too were lost in the cold sand as the fingers moved slowly through the grains the dunes of all the past...pushed down from the unshaped desert of the past driven by some unviolent wind and showed me how greatly like to a curving of the river I was, one of hundreds, one of thousands, one of the uncountable curvings, and backward, backward from where we had come I see them all and we are linked as I am linked to these strange brothers here by the ashflame and I know I would like to go ashore and see from where we come and to where we are travelling on such a cold night but I am only one and there is no shore here, only islands...(Ancestors, p. 412-3)

The voice is almost lost in the density of content.

16. Ibid, p. 231
The Akan proverbs contribute to this chain idea the

collective wisdom of one culture. Mr. Ashiabor, my transla-
tor, wrote that the proverbs "play an important role in our
traditional education of the youth."

These are wise sayings or proverbs used on particular
occasions and they also serve as corrective and educa-
tive quotations to the young ones. 17

Along with the references to the discoveries of the new
biology and the many socio-historical ideas, the Akan pro-
verbs show articulated links in the existence of a people.

We can summarize the movement of the novel, then, as
follows. The first four sections make a montage effect, the
world of the Lost Coast unfolding around us. "In the Fifth
City" exploits the objectivity of this Lost Coast world,
turning the content into a parody of the fictional reality we
have come to believe in. The apparent orderedness emerging
in the successive perspectives is subverted and returned to
the chaos from which it was coming. The difference is that
we have lived in the Lost Coast for some three hundred pages
and its chaos now belongs to us.

With the final section, "The Agada Notebook", Godfrey
returns us to the logic of his story. It is an epilogue,
featuring a chronology of events. But, as in Leonard Cohen's

17. See Appendix 11, p. 151.
Beautiful Losers, the novel does not end but merely trails off. In this case, the form is cyclic, the end of the novel temporally prior to its beginning.

The novel ends with Michael Burdener parading in one of Peggy's wigs while she sleeps.

Three wigs sitting on plastic heads about the silent rooms. Like statues of her ancestors. But faceless, mysteryless. Unrevered. Except that her life is devoted to them. One black. One silvery. One lank and asiantic. And a row of dresses. Bright as a new sun. Even in this dim light. A child's revolving lamp, on which wooden soldiers, red and white, slowly march with sloped rifles. Cliff Rcihards and the Beatles and Swame and the Queen and Gregory Peck staring down from chromed frames on the unpainted walls. And a Kingsway postcard of the palace at Kruba. ...Does anyone blame him if he places one of the wigs, the silvery, angel hair, one upon his head and starts life afresh in fear and fantasy. (Ancestors, p. 443)

The last sentence is marked as a question by the position of the 'does' first in the sentence; yet it ends in a statement.

This is what Michael Burdener does and look how innocent it is among the pop heroes and toy soldiers. But how wrong it is, how sick, how deranged this Michael Burdener has become. We are trapped between conflicting responses. Godfrey does not let his question complete itself but instead makes it into a statement, conclusive and definite.

W. H. New would have it:

Godfrey has written a novel that powerfully seizes the imagination and score the mind. If it ends on the words "fear and fantasy", it does not abandon itself to vagueness and hyper-emotionalism; it merely recognizes, in-
stead, the power of dreams to draw men into action at the same time as it admits the basic weakness of human nature. 18.

But Michael Burdener goes from Peggy's apartment and his fanciful parade in the wig to the Silla airport, a beaten and defeated 'persona non grata' in the Lost Coast. If the novel does, in fact, score the mind as New suggests, it is more because of our own empathetic communion in Burdener's fear and fantasy than anything else. We are trapped in the Lost Coast world, sharing the consciousness of Michael Burdener. We have been reduced or opened or simply exposed to the kind of confusion which permeates the Lost Coast. Perhaps, in the end, the novel has read us more than we it.

18. New, op. cit., p. 233
In her study of experimental fiction cited earlier, Sharon Spencer distinguishes between what she calls closed and open structures in the novel. The essential difference is one of focus. In the open structure, the writer attempts to expose the subject from as many angles as possible. The result is a fiction of great complexity and density of content. Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors* are examples of open structured novels.

The closed structure, on the other hand, "derives its essential features from the fact that only one perspective is permitted as a point of view upon the subject." This single perspective shapes the content into a single movement, which is usually focused sharply through the logic of temporal events. The closed structure features that moment near the end which makes the whole conceptually visible, that moment of larger simultaneous significance.

Graeme Gibson's *Communion* is a closed structured novel.

but it does not close its form down until very late in the book. This makes the novel a very bold and innovative use of the closed structure.

In Communio, his second novel, the fictional world is atomized, the author exploring its minimal bounds only to re-assemble it in a tightly bound narrative logic. The fragmented scenes that compose the first part of the novel are thus closed into one, final intense moment.

The novel is constructed around the character Felix Oswald and the story of his attempt to free the caged and dying husky from the pet store in which he works. As in Beautiful Losers where the Catherine Tekakwitha story is used to structure the ramblings of the Narrator in the first book, the story of Felix and the husky provides a narrative thread through the labyrinthine world of images or vignettes which compose the novel.

The central theme of the novel is stasis, the congested and stopped movement of vitality in the veins of the fictional world that is the book. The husky, dying passively in the cage and frantically when Felix tries to free it in the open field, becomes a symbol, an objective correlative, if you will, to the closed in kind of existence of the characters.

The elements of the story - Felix's relationship with
his employer, Peter Walters, his solicitude for the husky, his lunch in the graveyard where he enjoys fondling the stone statues that are the ends of the bench he sits on, and his effort to free the husky — are a consistent rhythm in the novel, sustaining its progression of scenes so that they do not trail off. The story element gives to the book a sense of it going somewhere, working to some end. The story culminates in the journey sequence, the hard logic of chronology displacing the loosely organized vignettes to end the novel.

Thematically, the story is about an attempt to free this caged life; the vignettes depict the life which is caged, turned in on itself. A quiet desperation, ineffable though struggling to articulate itself, dominates the characters. But it is a desperate obsession that impels Felix to force freedom on the husky even though the husky responds to this liberation with an equally desperate paranoia to be caged again.

The novel's imaginative force resides in the fleeting sequences of images or vignettes loosely patterned by the story of Felix and the husky. Sometimes these vignettes are identifiable with the main characters, but more often they are devoid of any direct relationship to the central story. Sensual titillation, mystery and the attractive simplicity of economical phrasing are the novelist's tools to command imagina-
response in the fragmentary method. Once again, we note that the principle of movement through much of the book is juxtaposition and narrative discontinuity.

A sense of vicarious involvement is encouraged in the use of erotic realism, the use of explicit detail to describe sexual activity. Frequently, however, comedy confuses our response to the eroticism. For instance, in the sexual fantasies of Peter Walters, the veterinarian boss of Felix Oswald, the incongruous use of similes works against the erotic realism.

Automatically he kisses her eyes, his sucking lips down the length of her nose: her mouth is small, it opens for his tongue, her teeth are pointed. He undoes her dress, slips his hand inside her brassiere and pinches the nipple. Her brown eyes watch him. He kisses them shut. He'd swear the breast is growing in his hand. It lolls uncontrollably on her chest and the nipple's like a walnut. Kissing her chin, then her throat, he undoes the remaining buttons down the front of her dress. There are seven in all: they're not too small and she moves helpfully under his hands and mouth, he doesn't have too much trouble.

She smells like roast beef. 3

The curious melange of detail – the erotic realism, the metaphors "like a walnut" and "like roast beef", the smaller detail like the data on the buttons – makes for a complex scene.

We are trapped between titillation and comedy in the incongruous detail.

3. Graeme Gibson, Communion (Toronto, 1971), p. 43. All passages from the novel are from this edition, abbreviated to Communion.
When Walters appears in his dog suit, Mary Anderson coos, "How sweet, an itsy-bitsy, puppie dog," and the comedy is more overt. But the scene between Walters in his dog suit and Mary Anderson turns this comedy against the reader. We discover ourselves implicated in her angry outburst aimed at Walters when his activities fail to amuse her any longer.

(He) leaps to the bed, she bounds away. He follows. She snaps playfully at his hands. He growls in his chest: she's trembling as he circles close, sniffs the gentle flesh of her buttocks, smells the ripe earth, tastes...
"Fuck OFF you PERVERT!"
Frightened and turning, grabbing at the coverlet about her, she's staring at Peter Walters in his dog suit. (Communion, p. 46)

There is an obvious contrast between Peter Walters in his dog suit and the husky. While the husky is wasting away, slowly losing its vitality, Walters, assuming the disguise of a dog, revels in his role. The implication is that it is perversity, the escape from socially sanctioned behaviour, that is alive.

But more important to the novel is the use of the rhetorical 'you' by Mary Anderson. It reaches out to point at the reader looking on as well as the character Walters. Gibson is turning his readers into voyeurs, lookers on who are appeased in the actions of others.

As the scene progresses, it changes unpredictably, Walters taking offense at Mary Anderson's vituperative abuse.
His paws on her face, he hears nothing but her heart; he forces past her arms and bites deep into her throat, tears flesh, tastes dark blood pumping between his jaws. (Communion, p. 46)

The scene becomes grotesque, trapping us in our position as voyeur into a projection that we would rather not have any part of. This is a different use of the grotesque than we saw in Beautiful Losers. Cohen made the world ludicrous; Gibson makes it fearful, a feeling of horror enfolding the action.

Moreover, the scene no longer seems to be a mere fantasy of Peter Walters. Couched in the dramatic present tense, with its aspect of immediacy, the fantasy ceases to be fantastic. A tension is fostered that confuses the fictional reality.

This confusion between fantasy and the fictional reality is an example of the pervasive confusion that permeates most of the book. It operates to weaken our sense of the empirical and the logical, insisting instead on the paramount reality of its own world.

In the opening scene, for instance, the meticulous detail of the woman forcing cigarettes on a male figure appears to have no relationship, logical or temporal, to the rest of the book. Yet so integrally important to the movement of the work is it that the novelist repeats it laconically prior to the journey sequence and, at that time, he calls the male figure Felix. In this way, the scene makes a frame for the section of vignettes and its repetition intensifies the moement into
the journey sequence.

Furthermore, many of the figures that appear in the fragments are anonymous, that is, there is no naming reality we can tag them with. In much of the Urquehart sequence, the young man in sneakers may be Felix Oswald but there is nothing in the novel that directly associates the two. Thus, we cannot state with certainty, as John Moss does, that these fragments exhibit Felix Oswald as the voyeur.

The daylight scene in Urquehart’s apartment details "several women at a table by the window... The table is covered with open beer bottles..." (Communion, p. 79) Despite the intimacy of the scene exuded in the meticulous catalogue of detail, we never learn the name of the male figure who knocks and enters the apartment at Urquehart’s invitation, a fact that disguises the relationship of the sequence to the Felix Oswald story. The scene dissolves into an image the narrative voice projects of the male figure alone with the blond girl who has only one arm.

Later, when she is naked, her breasts marbled with miniature blue veins, he sees that the shoulder curves smoothly, uninterrupted into her side, there’s no sign she ever had an arm. He stands in front of her, he cups his hand where her arm should begin, her body is cool, her eyes are closed, she puts her hand on his and speaks his name. (Communion, p. 81)

Noticably we never hear the name she says. Yet, the economical simplicity of the phrasing is captivating, the visual feel
of the scene heightened in the rhythm of the sentences spliced together.

Because the scenes develop in this way without the benefit of a relationship with the story element, they are isolated in the novel. What they foreground through their isolation is the quality of detail they project, highly visual, spatially oriented detail.

Often both male and female figures are unknown, anonymous, although, to be sure, there is always a tenuous link with some name. For instance, in some scenes, we may be able to call the female figure Urquhart but the male, presumably her husband, we know is not Felix and there is no evidence to connect him with Fripp, the truck driver, Ritson, the derelict, or Peter Walters. Again it is the detail in these scenes that captivates, as in this bedroom scene:

Her long body in his arms, strands of her hair in his mouth, still gentle they undress each other, a shaft of fading sunlight across his body and hers, he spills wine on her breasts, her belly, and drinks; laughing she presses him onto his back, her fingers, mouth and teeth at random on his body. (Communion, p. 77)

The scene reaches for the fragility of the lyrical moon, a state of consciousness enthralled in its content, through diction like 'strands', 'still gentle', 'fading'. The dramatic strength of the present tense in such verbs as 'undress', 'fading', 'spills', 'laughing', 'presses', verbs that feel more like adjectives in their sameness of tense, support the mood.
So vibrant, so alive does the scene become in its simplicity that it inhabits a tangible, palpable world of its own.

In fact, the characters have very little reality in the novel. They are type-like characters, limited to their flat presence on the page. They are actually sketches of characters that we catch glimpses of in their world.

We may recall that Sharon Spencer pointed out that the archetectonic novel "manifests an avoidance of character development for its own intrinsic interest..." Often de-emphasized as de-humanized for the way it subordinates character to the representation of place dimensions and atmosphere, the new fiction displays a change in the conception of character in the novel, its emphasis now being the world of character.

In this world of things and actions that Gibson makes for us, we can feel a disarming of our empirical and logical faculties at work. The sense of an infra-reality, a reality blown up so that we can better perceive it, is engendered in the novel. The epigram to the book becomes our key to understanding the principle behind the fragmentary style: "Space is always between us and time is inserted in us like a disease." Time is erased in the succession of fragmented vig-

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4. op. cit., p. xx.
nettes, each coming to us in the present tense, while the emphasis on spatial dimensions inflates our sense of spatial reality so that spaces are made the disease between us.

Gibson plays with the spatial properties of language to achieve startling effects. Imagery is spatial to the extent that it suggests dimensions among things. By concentrating on the separateness of things, assuming the distances that make them separate, time is suspended creating the sense of a still-life, that is, things removed from their ground in temporal categories. As Felix watches a funeral procession come into the cemetery where he is eating lunch, the scene is isolated in space.

The limousine, black and official, the sun glinting from its polished surface, slips through the trees before he sees it; next, and close behind, comes the hearse. They make no sound and Felix, eating his apple, is at first unaware of them. When he does look down, when he sees them, more cars have come over the hill, big rented cars with important mourners, and the procession, in slow motion, glides among the headstones. (Communion, p. 35)

Through the manipulation of tense, maintaining a continual sense of present, our vantage point is lifted from its temporal context and the scene seems suspended in the spatial properties of separate things and their distances from one another. A sense of simultaneity results in the shift from the cars to Felix and back to the cars.

In fact, the basic tense of the novel is the present. Chronology and cause and effect are displaced in the continu-
ous present tense action within the novel's timeless conception of space. For instance, as Felix drives the sick husky from the city to free it, the passage of time is recorded in the lapse of landscape and place names.

Orangeville, then north through Camilla with the pale headlights of approaching cars, Primrose, Horing's Mills, driving back into winter, the sky grows pale, then dark between metallic clouds and the horizon. Farms are farther apart now, their front doors sealed for winter and trees crowd to the highway's edge; the beams of headlights thicken with snow. ... The highway has been rising imperceptibly from the lakeshore, he doesn't know how far, perhaps a thousand feet, so that the hills sway beneath him, he knows the land drops sharply to Georgian Bay just beyond a particular clearing by a heavy stand of evergreens. ... he passes houses without lights clustered at crossroads. The hills become longer, steeper, until he reaches the plateau: the wind is blowing from the west to east across the road, they pass the farm, he can't tell if it's still empty, it hasn't mattered for a long time, he hardly looks at it. He continues past the shell of a building, an abandoned schoolhouse, perhaps it's a deconsecrated church. One wall has crumbled away, the roof has gone, the windows are empty and snow drifts high on the inner walls. He stops the car and turns off the ignition. (Communion, p. 62-3)

The catalogue of places, buildings, landscape marks the journey. Only the complex verb phrase "has been rising", what we might call a progressive aspect, that is a continuing aspect of a past tense carrying both a sense of something past and passing, deviates from the present tense. The visual appropriateness of the detail, particularly noticeable in such details as "the beams of the headlights thicken with snow", contributes a tangible feel for the journey as a reality. In
short; the car ride from the city is lifted off the page in the scene.

Thus, through the visual precision of his language, Gibson foregrounds spatial dimensions. Ultimately, we are brought to a profound realization of things, around us, between us. We become isolated in the fictional experience, a content between the fragments, a voyeur in this random reality.

We meet Ritson and experience the power of possibilities that inhibit the present from their throne in the future that bred grammatical modality.

"Memories are like bad dreams." Ritson's voice, it doesn't sound like a voice, he hears it in the dark. "They torment me so. That's why I live in a cellar, it must be: I am lonely, but I am away from it all. That must be the reason. I have had to get used to it, it has not come easily. How could it? It is not a man's nature to live like an animal...." If he allows himself, he'll pursue this sort of speculation forever, he'll exhaust every combination of possibilities, and even though it's challenging for the mind, even though it could prove more or less diverting, it has nothing to do with lying here, on his back, his body undeniably weaker than he has ever known it to be. (Communion, p. 86-7)

Ritson is the voice of space isolated: physically atrophying and decaying; mentally diseased with his own inertia. "Exhausting possibilities" is an appropriate description of the narrative technique for the fragments seem to be doing just that. Ritson is echoed fifteen pages later:
If he allows himself to pursue this sort of speculation forever, he'll exhaust every combination of possibilities, and even though it's challenging for the mind, even though it could prove to be more or less diverting, it has nothing to do with lying here, on his back, his body, undeniably weaker than he has ever known it to be. (Communion, p. 102)

With the repetition, the 'he' suggests the narrative voice as well as Ritson. Caught in the world of fragments, this novel is becoming as inert as Ritson.

The opening scene, the woman forcing cigarettes on a male figure, is repeated, only this time the male is named as Felix. It becomes ritualistic, a fact the narrative voice points out, and it signals a change in the novel. Felix begins his journey to California to find Morag, a girl who stayed with him for awhile and sent him a picture of her but never answered any of his letters. Used to the fragmentary style, the logic of narrative chronology insists its rhythm on us, setting up the end of the novel.

We meet Fripp, the truck driver, and the novel dramatizes the journey through dialogue between Fripp and Felix and landscape, that is, a catalogue of place names and passing things.

They're driving very fast, (Fripp's) voice fills the cab but Felix doesn't understand; past exit roads for Kitchener, then Preston, bland fields in tentative sunlight, Woodstock and London Felix slouching, staring through the glass, falling each mile farther into himself: side roads empty, occasionally barns with homes in shadows and always the fields geometric on the land. Mile after mile. ... A field rising to bush, trees.
crowding the sky's edge and there, into the trees, an entrance leading away and he sees himself climbing the field in silence, sees a figure alone, only briefly pausing, then striding as best he can from sight.

(Communion, p. 113)

This image of Felix watching himself walk away is reminiscent of Godfrey's Michael Burdener looking around him as he is being escorted to the plane, "a cricket master wondering if the whole team were late, or if perhaps he were half an hour late."

(Ancients, p. 24) and Robert Harlow's Amory Scann watching himself to a point where he is watching himself watch himself. This sense of time suspended to such extreme metaphysical distances is the ultimate image of reality isolating itself. It is the expression of consciousness inhibited by self-consciousness.

The truck continues through the catalogue of places and landscape.

Driving past Chatham with night overtaking them...
Past Chatham, on towards Windsor with the sky rising mountainous behind them, they're driving against the earth. Mile after mile. (Communion, p. 115)

The novel concentrates its focus by illustrating the journey as a catalogue of things; it tightens its structure, closing it down, by emphasizing a single story. The rhythm of the ride becomes hypnotic, lulling us towards the final moment of the novel.

After crossing into Detroit, Felix flees Fripp's sexual advances and comes upon Ritson who is being attacked by kids,
The sense of accident, of things happening by chance and in a manner that is irrational because there is no cause and effect, asserts itself into the chronology. Felix is appalled that the kids are preparing to burn Ritson; he seizes one, "the small body is limp in his hands, he has to support it, he stares into bulging eyes, the black contorted face, it's dead."

*(Communion, p. 118)*

Standing over it he tries to understand. The swollen tongue, it lolls from between its teeth with blood boiling onto the chin, he doesn't understand, he falls as he tries to turn away, his knees bang stupidly against his chest, he's bleeding from the mouth, he doesn't feel the garbage against his face. He doesn't see the tentative figures emerging from the shadows, they circle closer, cautious, like dogs, they douse his shuddering body from pop bottles, with gasoline, one of them lights a match and Felix Oswald bursts into flame. *(Communion, p. 118)*

Leonard Cohen shows us a world of fantasy not far from the mundane world; Godfrey traps us in a world where our inability to distance ourselves is the tragedy; and Gibson forces us to commune in the grotesque immolation of Felix Oswald. Instead of satisfying the archetypal imagination, the novel haunts it with a vision of destruction and the life forces revelling in their own negation: Ritson, now free of the kids, shoots as many as he can while they flee.

Carl Oglesby wrote of Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, a novel similar to Matt Cohen's *Johnny Crackle Sings* in that escape is proposed as the serious alternative to a society gone bad:
Just as Camus evades history by redefining rebellion as a metaphysical act, so Heller evades it by redefining rebellion as privativistic. A Yossarian in neutral Sweden—perhaps what Heller really wants to say here, by the way, is Eden—is a Kilroy without objectives, a McMurphy without Big Nurse, an Ishmael without Captain Ahab.

And of course it is well known that one need not migrate to arrive in this Sweden. It is nearly everywhere. It is in camp art and the newer team art, the art without signature. It is in the sanctum of Optical and Acrylic constructivism and the machine aesthetic of the hard and efficient surface. It is in the art culture of once ironic iron which today has apparently abandoned its original subversive content in favor of sheer enthusiasm for a world without people, a very clean and orderly utopia. It is in the new preoccupation with sensibility and the McLuhanite extension of the senses. It is in the new grotesque, which offers to cover up the hour's malaise, the time's bleeding consciousness, through the expedient of so-called black laughter which turns out to be avant-garde and rebellious, all of them at the same time increasingly addicted to what 'is', increasingly alien from that which is not 'yet', these new Swedens, these Wonderlands without contents, without histories and futures, these Expos of polite defeat are everywhere.

By 'privativistic' I understand Oglesby to be referring to the fragmented aesthetic which surrounds modern art. The art of our day has rejected its archetypal role in the societal meaning structure in favor of select audiences, defining its own audience and cutting it out from the society as a whole through the formal composition. Thus, Oglesby claims, art has become a divisive force in the society, atomizing it into those that share in the aesthetic experience of the 'avant-garde' and

those who do not.

The problem is a very complex one and I don't want to reduce it to any simplified overviews. However, the more I consider the implications of an art that is no longer a people-oriented art but is rather a particular group-oriented art, the more I feel compelled to make some statement on the matter. An art that promotes division in this manner, it seems to me, is an art working against the world that gave it birth and calls on it to offer authentic, creative possibilities for psycho-physical involvement. I will return to the question in my conclusion.
Chapter 6

When The Gods Are Weak

The creative has always been recognized as the result of making something out of something else, a fashioning of content into form, or as Robert Harlow puts it "where once there was nothing there is now and therefore something". And fiction is a work of creation for it is the operation of the imagination on a content towards some end. It takes some actions or events and projects them into a story.

Robert Harlow's novel Scann is about this business of story telling. Harlow takes the fictional universe, a world familiar to all of us, regardless of whether we read novels, because we all engage in telling stories, and he examines it to see what it is all about only to deposit us back on the street of Linden with his protagonist, Amory Scann, limping from the heat of a fictional world burning with waste paper.

Amory Scann is a writer of fictions as well as editor of the Linden Chronicle, the local newspaper. The novel structures itself about his Easter weekend retreat with the fictional

2. Robert Harlow, Scann (Port Clements, B. C., 1972). All passages from the novel are from this edition, abbreviated to Scann.
impulse in room 322 of the Linden Hotel. The religious background is ironically significant for Scann is not a savior figure, or even one of Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators" of the race. Scann is simply a fellow who likes to tell stories.

But overseeing his story-telling energies is an intrusive narrator who narrates Scann narrating. Unlike the last three novels we looked at, Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers, Dave Godfrey's The New Ancestors and Graeme Gibson's Communion, the principle of movement in the novel is chronology. The chronology of Scann's weekend from Friday to Monday morning. Three stories are intertwined within the chronological framework, however, each discontinuous so that a complex view of reality is generated in the novel's structure.

The principal story is Scann's efforts to chronicle the saga of trapper Linden and Thrain, two men central to the history of Linden. The one loaned his name to the town and the other built the first building, the Linden Hotel, on the site that would eventually be Linden. This story is Scann's reason for hiding himself in room 322 of the Linden Hotel.

Into this story, the personal circumstances of Scann's life insinuate themselves: his faltering marriage; his affair with his secretary; his attempts to seduce Mary Major, the aging chamber-maid. From his seduction of Mary Major, the
Philippa Morton story evolves, another of the devices or "lines" Scann has for the chamber-maid.

Finally, there is the story of Scann's second world war experiences and his first acquaintance with David Thrain, everyone's idea of a war hero. This story is grafted to the novel as a kind of flashback: Scann revisiting the pub in Grayden and seeing the 'lady in red' again begins to relive the events of his first meeting with David Thrain and his flight group. The precise chronology of this story to the rest of the novel is confused and the section has the quality of a vivid memory. The story lapses into a brief account of the trial of David Thrain for the murder of his step-mother, Amantha Morton, a charge he was acquitted of.

Thus, the time element is the essence of the novel. Within the chronology of Scanh's Easter weekend, three periods of history, Scann's history and Canadian history, unfold before us. There is the pioneer period of Linden and Thrain, the war period of Scann and David Thrain, and the contemporary period of Scann and his dentist, George, and all the attendant problems that confront them.

Moreover, the limits or boundaries of the stories are confused. Thrain, who is one of the principal characters in Scann's historical narrative, appears in the more immediate narrative of Scann's Easter weekend. A very senile old man,
Thrain burns the manuscript of his life, Scann's weekend of creation, charred by its principal character. David Thrain, a figure from Scann's war and a minor character in the Linden-Thrain story, also makes his appearance late in the novel, as does Ro Linden, another minor character in the Linden-Thrain story. This complexity of design forces us back on the question of exactly what is the fictional reality in this novel.

In fact, Amory Scann is not the most immediate level of reality in the novel. He is the character of the intrusive narrative voice that is with us at every turn of the page in the book. This is made clear from the outset with the use of the title to get the passage going, the asymmetrical quality of the prose and the third-person reference to Scann.

EDITORIAL INSIGHTS: One: pitching and catching. The editor of the twice-weekly 'Chronicle' writes on scratch pads that float like rafts on the river of copy that runs across his desk. He is speaking to himself about history: the fiftieth anniversary of the town of Linden. (Scann, p. 9)

Amory Scann is a third-person reality in the novel, a fact made startlingly clear when the intrusive voice of the narrator begins to discuss him and his work later in the book, during the war segment. Up to that point, we are used to this voice on the periphery of the novel.

We note it primarily in the asymmetrical movement of the prose: the lack of balance on the sentence level which
is a function of irregular length and structure of the sentences; and the movement from concrete to abstract, from the visual, the tactile, to the metaphysical. The latter is especially prominent in images of the form "the noun phrase of the noun phrase" such as "the river of copy". In images of this type, the movement from the physical world where a river is a river and copy is copy to a metaphysical one where copy is a river is made through the use of the single preposition 'of'. It is the abruptness of the transition that throws the phrase off-balance.

Moreover, while there is balance within the sentence, there is much more complex motion in the paragraph as a whole. The paragraph begins with a sentence which is really a series of fragments of a sentence or sentences. There is broad deletion of the structure words that define the prose logic between the phrases, particularly deletion of the auxiliary verbs. The middle sentence, "The editor...his desk.", features much subordination in both subject and object positions, making it much heavier in a metaphysical sense than the fragmented first sentence. The final sentence, however, reads very light in the subject position while concentrating more weight in the object or right most side of the sentence, utilizing a colon to subordinate the phrase "the fiftieth anniversary of the town of Linden." The result is a prose which
insists on its distance from the reader, making a movement in the language that does not carry the imagination but rather turns more and more into itself.

Couched in the dramatic present tense, the prose is completely unpredictable and, with the manipulation of the time element, it engenders a complexity of design that is the complexity of Scann's world. In fact, with the proliferation of narrative activity, both Scann's and that of the narrative voice, reading the novel becomes a very deliberate act. Ultimately, a consciousness of narration is fostered, foregrounding the existential experience of the fictional impulse attaining objectivity. We are finally left with the imaginative elan that is the novel, its ability to project the tension between the fictional world and reality, as the fundamental experience of the book.

We see this tension all through the novel, particularly in the interaction of the narrative voice with it. For instance, the intrusive narrator continually tags his characters with short titles that satirize them. Thus, we have, among others: "Campfollower Scann" (Scann, p. 36), "Writer Scann" (Scann, p. 40), "Creator Scann" (Scann, p. 44), "Critic Scann" (Scann, p. 38), "Thief Linden" (Scann, p. 49), "Trickster Linden" (Scann, p. 46). The tags bestow a distance on the characters treating their seriousness lightly.
the tag used as caricature.

Equally significant in drawing attention to the tension between the fictional world as it unfolds and the kind of reality that exists behind it are the discussions of the aesthetics of the novel as a genre, both by Scann and the intrusive narrative voice. One persistent metaphor for the creative process is pitch and catch, a metaphor that both Scann and the narrator seem to be in sympathy with. The pitch and the catch define structural boundaries, the context of the fictional project, its beginning and end respectively. The movement of the project between its pitch and catch is the field of creation.

That moment waiting for the time of the pitch to culminate is where composition and life touch. It includes the pitch and the catch, but it excludes them too (they should be forms only), because they are beginnings and endings and therefore are false: there are no beginnings or endings. (Scann, p. 11)

This is similar to Northrop Frye's notion of what constitutes the absurd in fiction: that sense of design that gives a content to us with a beginning and an end. But where Frye insists on the primacy of the thing as form, Harlow's intrusive narrative voice and Amory Scann tend to stress the fictional project as its content. They would agree with Charles Olson that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT".

When Mary Major tells her version of the Philippa Morton story, a version that is less grotesque and one that features a pleasant ending, Amory Scann rises as critic. "Do you know what?" he says:

"No, what?" "You are a crypto-pornographer." "What's that? My God, you should call me names with all your dirty sex. I'm talking about unrequited love." "I think not; you're talking about giving people their jollies." "And what are you talking about?" "You would give people their jollies by completing their attacks on each other, by letting there be an ending. There are no gaslines and knives and black widows upstairs and high priests become prime ministers..." (Scann, p. 131-2)

Yet, despite Scann's criticism of Mary Major's version of the story, his is the one more likely to appeal to the mind that enjoys thrillers. The fictional world he creates is one of adventure after adventure, sometimes reaching grotesque proportions. Scann knows that "fictions are supposed to control chaos: that's why we like them. They make us feel safe - or safer - even the tragic ones." (Scann, p. 12) But his fictions release more than they control.

Novelist Harlow has written elsewhere that "fiction is not life, it is about life and that is the first thing; and in order for it to be about life experience must have a new context in which to operate, a context that will allow it to be disloyal to the actuality from which it was taken." Thus,

5. Harlow, Fiction, p. 163.
Scann's story of the Linden-Thrain journey to Linden's trap-line and his "bullshit" story of Philippa Morton work within the structure of the book because they have the context of Amory Scann behind them. The Linden-Thrain story is a series of adventures with no beginning and no end, but it works because Scann is the frame. As for the Philippa Morton story, it is quite obvious that Scann has ulterior motives when he narrates the tale to Mary Major and that these motives inform the way he tells it.

This is important to recognize because one reviewer of the book praised the stories while criticizing the frame, Amory Scann. Audrey Thomas wrote:

Scann's descent into the hell of Linden's past constitutes the frame of the novel and, unfortunately, its greatest weakness. As a person, Scann is just not interesting enough and some of his puns are so bad that one is tempted to put the book down, immediately, in despair.

She goes on to list the objectionable puns, or at least a few of them. But it is the nature of the pun that it is a superficial kind of joke. It's not hard to imagine the Elizabethans groaning at Shakespeare's best.

Yet, what really disturbs me about Ms. Thomas' review is that she fails to see that without Amory Scann the other stories,
the ones she enjoys so much and that she believes should be rewritten on their own, would simply not work. It is because of Scann that they achieve their vitality in the novel. In short, her criticism doesn't convince me.

But, if novelist Harlow knows about things like context and real life, writer Scann does not. His stories race along propelled with the power of his imagination. In fact, the stories are the most vital element in the lethargic world of Scann's Linden. Scann says of his dentist, George: "There is the road to contentment, perhaps even happiness. (There are no straight lines for him, only an equation, balance, a stunning act of faith that order and ancient logic will solve all the x-factors of life." (Scann, p. 169) With this kind of mentality, the novel and the fictional universe is reduced to beginning and end, a "conceptually causative logic", pitch inferring catch.

In a passage that recalls Shakespeare's Prospero, Amory Scann gets hung up in his theory of linear abstractions.

But only he, Creator Scann, knows that dreams are arbitrary and therefore futile, and that dreamers dreaming dreams dream only partial fancies before a last nightmare. Dreams are little animals walking their undeviuous paths into the mouths of traps. Dreams are marten, fisher, fox and lynx who, trapped, are skinned and left

as guts. We dream and are dreamed. But the world isn't. (Scann, p. 44)

Yet we know that "love stories threaten him" (Scann, p. 117).

because "love stories are about boundaries" (Scann, p. 118)

Scann reflects:

life is a discontinuous narrative surrounded and made durative by the habit of existence. He lies uncomfortable on his bed. ...Given Marie and Philippa, Stephanie and Amantha, little Red and Cecilia the processes follow easily: connections are managed, contexts are constructed and 'voila' what have we achieved? The past is made predictable. (Scann, p. 237)

The characters of Scann's memory, those who presumably share a level of reality with him, and those of his Philippa Morton tale are made to share the same kind of reality in his mind.

Thus, the boundaries between life, the reality that gives content to the fictional impulse in the act of form, and the fictional world are confused, both belonging to the temporal dimension we call 'past'.

The past may become predictable in this way, but the incidents of Scann's narratives do not. Sometimes they unfold into proportions that challenge our sense of probability.

After throwing his hatchet at a deer, Thrain is attacked by it.

He throws the axe, more in despair than with intent. It catherinewheels over the feeding deer and lands beyond it. Its head comes up, looks at the handle in the snow and then, incredibly, it turns and leaps exactly at Thrain. It is a tiny thing, but its eyes are wide and steady; like a boxer's. Thrain watches for it to swerve away to the left or the right past him. He is surprised when the first hoof hits his chest. ...The eyes above him change
colour from brown to black; they lust after guts.
(Scann, p. 251)

Nature does not behave predictably in Scann's narratives. Deer
become forbidding predators. The strange source of what Scann
calls Philippa Morton's religion is a castration of I. J.,
her negro servant, by the dog Master at the moment when Phi-
lippa and I. J. reach the consummate level of their sexual
union. The castration becomes a ritual, central to the con-
sciousness of the wilderness community presided over by Phi-
lippa Morton. (Scann, Pp. 96-7)

Moreover, there is no past tense in the novel, just a
continuing present that suggests a past as it moves from se-
quence to sequence. A sense of simultaneity results in the
influence of the present tense on the narrating activity.
There is a chronology because things happen one after the other.
But the notion of a past is defined by the book itself.

Scann's world is as much a present tense in the story of Lin-
don and Thrain as it is during his war as it is in the scene
between Ro Linden and Mary Ann, the drug addicted Indian
girl.

Harlow has written that "fiction's business is to deal
with the 'times' in terms whose bedrock is time itself."
And eventually the novel is about time: it's about how time operates on the times, you know what I mean; I mean time itself: actual chronometric time, sex time, life time, all sorts of things are going on and they are the different kinds of times. How they force the times to become history, okay. 10

Thus, to Harlow, "fiction is of time, about time and all the subtleties of time are its tools."

Hence, the novel Scann is about the fictional impulse working with the times - pioneer times, war times, contemporary times, to work for a comfortable position of understanding between its past and its present. This search theme which underlies the movement of the novel is on two levels: the level of Amory Scann who lives in Linden; and secondly, the level of the narrative voice studying the movements of Amory Scann.

What happens, though, is an exploration of the fictional impulse itself. Mary Major tells Scann: "anyone can see what's happening to Cecilia is being made up by a man." (Scann, p. 130) And earlier, rising from his bed to release herself from Scann's story-violation of her integrity, she upbraids him: "You're a funny man. What're you doing sitting up here trying to make up stories about real people?". (Scann, p. 61)

Then the intrusive voice formalizes within the novel and begins to discuss Amory Scann as a writer, reviewing his Phi-

11. Harlow, Fiction, p. 162.
lippa Morton, which, we learn, is an "unfinished manuscript".

Condescending, arrogant, its manner is rude.

The writing, as it stands, in these rather full notes, is crude, as are the sentiments and emphases from time to time. /.../ Still, one is bombarded with meaning and buoyed up by a complexity and candour of motive that moves along on the simple roller-bearings of the narrative in such a way that one regrets extremely the fact that it is an unfinished work. (Scann, p. 271-2).

Its comments are all the more perplexing when we realize that the Philippa Morton story is the most obviously contrived. Scann trying to whet Mary Major's appetite for a more physical involvement with the storyy teller.

One wonders what the climax will yield when Thrain (yes, this is another Thrain story) meets - perhaps clashes would be better word - with Philippa. For this meeting is not just the simple aim of the narrative, but must also be the culmination of the socio-religious-sub-structure of the story: Thrain, the naked and naive native Canadian force thundering up against the repressed religious nymphomaniac female principle whose guilt regarding her fearful drives demands that she train her half-wolf dog to geld sexual partners during coition, thus 'freeing' them to become, one supposes, Good Citizens, but (and this must surely be Scann's point about the "Negro", the "Indian", the slave mentality latent in all of us) incapable of love and, as Scann tells us, victims of "a ball-less mentality". (Scann, p. 271)

The discussion provokes its own kind of humour.

But as the critical discussion continues, it becomes a parody of itself. It begins to search out a 'deeper meaning' for the character Amantha.

And, one asks oneself, by rather crude extension, whether
Scann intended her actions to throw some kind of light onto the motivational behaviour of Canadians in general. After she passes through the lives of the Thrains, the men are less than whole. But perhaps Scann only intends her passing to give some shape to the sentiments they all have for Erica in whose memory and for whose loss they light their candles and trim their wicks. (Scann, p. 270)

A 'crude extension' it certainly is. The critical faculty exercising its talents in the work of Amory Scann is reminiscent of much of the 'myth' criticism that is currently popular among our own critics.

But this is the first indication we have had of the relationship between the Philippa Morton story and the Thrain story. We learn later that Amantha, the younger daughter of Philippa, was Thrain's second wife and that David Thrain was tried after the war for her murder, though he was acquitted, under sordid circumstances. Scann's plots are convoluted and contorted in many directions at once. We are pushed back on ourselves to find what is the fictional reality in the book.

The critical voice then attacks Scann in very direct fashion.

Some might complain that we are hard on Amory Scann, and might sigh that a prophet is seldom honoured in his own country. Scann is no prophet. He is a literary cheat and a hack to boot and the sooner we get back to the authors of our post World War II renaissance the sooner we will be able to honour our prophets. (Scann, p. 205)

It becomes difficult to say just how we are to receive the cri-
tical voice that intrudes itself into the novel. In passages like this, there is certainly some tongue-in-cheek tone touching the dialogue. However, it is obvious that critical voice distorts the fictional context.

Yet, in spite of the bad reviews Amory Scann gets from this criticism, his fiction still exercises a powerful attraction in the novel. It is the quality of the writing that eventually captivates the imagination in Scann's narrative, as well as the ease with which events move along those "simple roller-bearings of the narrative", if you will. Amory Scann is a coward, frightened to the point where his capability for fright is exhausted in the flight with David Thrain, and a voyeur, revelling in his own images of lolling mammaries, and also a bad punster. But Scann is a clown as well with his falls from the chair he uses to roar at the world of the hallway in the Linden Hotel through the transom, and his futile attempt to escape the authoritative grip of David Thrain after he has been discovered peeping through the key hole of Thrain's office, and in his efforts to bed an aging Mary Major. He is a story teller and a story.

In short, Amory Scann causes our fictional consciousness to develop in several directions at once: the archetypal, pioneer past of Linden and Thrain; the wartime, heroic past, epitomized by David Thrain; and the mock-heroic world of Scann and his dentist, George, a world haunted by drug addicted In-
diants, hippies abandoning the societal meaning structure, and
old war-hero Parliamentarians who, perhaps, only half hear the
changing times. Scann's world is a world where only release
through its own absurdities sustains a reasonable sanity.

It is a world deeply disturbed and yet awakening to the
vast fields of experience just beyond the comfortable cities
of its language. In the precision of imagery and diction, we
glimpse a world startlingly alive with vitality. Erica,

Train's first wife, gives birth to David:

on a paddlesteamer as it turns terrifyingly but routinely
end-for-end down the long rapids eighty miles east of
Linden. Thrain delivers himself. Erica, her nordic
bones seperating and her long muscles heaving, shoves him
out, and Thrain catches hold of him, after miles of
whitewater labour which had started when the water had
broken as she leaned against the raling amidships near
Train who was standing, head tilted back, looking up
at the tops of mountains through spray scooped up by
paddles aft and blown by the wind across his line of
vision. It had been cold. Quiet water along the edges
of the river had turned to ice, but during her whole
pregnancy she had felt warm and carried a fan which she
had held even then in her lightly mitten hand. In-
side, on the bunk, she held it like a relic over her
heart, and during the last deep, desperate and exhausted
heaves to get the baby born the fan had broken, shred-
ded, disintegrated, and pieces of it had become tangled
in her hair - bright yellow and blues and reds. Thrain-
it is a new thing - is charmed as he looks down at her
while he holds the boy for her to see. (Scann, p. 12-13)

Through metaphysical conceptualization - "after miles of white-
water labour", the fictional impulse reaches for a unity of
reality through the confines of its linguistic environment.
The complexity of the movement, the rhythm of the sentences,
and the imagery, alive in its ability to describe new areas of experience such as the birth with economical precision, presents the natural beauty of the scene without marring it.

It is the unaffected, seemingly spontaneous quality of the prose that ultimately carries the novel. Carcajou, the wolverine, bane of Linden's trapdom, attacks Thrain while he tries to see if Linden has died in the snow.

The wolverine begins to leap; it is a rush as quick as a transfer of affection. ...Thrains raises his hands to ward off the crippled gambado being executed by the bloody carcajou: it is a crazy ball of blackness in this bowl of dusk where, Thrain understands, as he watches the slow-motion scramble of his attacker approach, that all three of them are dying. One trapper trapped and broken, one hunter hunted and pierced, and one seducer seduced and about to be ravaged by teeth, claws and quills. His right hand lowers, feels for the axe; his left hand stays high and grapples with the wolverine's open mouth as it arrives. Carcajou's leap forces it against the outstretched hand and arm. Thrain's bare hand slides down past the quilled jaws and tongue to the narrow canyon of the throat. He holds to the base of the tongue and sinks back into the snow, all of his strength in his arm and hand. Thrain feels his flesh gathering points of pain. Carcajou tries to retreat; Carcajou undulates, its eyes wide and red with anger and with foreign terror. Quills from the cheek, jaw and tongue hold deeper. Thrain pulls back. The hand does not move. Carcajou screams as loud as a horse, and Thrain's heart rises and plucks his throat; he feels his eyes bulging with effort and his right hand races to find the axe. He raises it and hucks past Linden's bloody function into carcajou's brain. (Scann, p. 75)

Here the grotesque is carried in the asymmetrical movement of the prose. Complex embedding operations shift the weight of the sentence from subject to object position and object to sub-
ject position randomly. The sentence "Carcajou tries to retreat; carcajou undulates, its eyes wide and red with anger and foreign terror." features successive weight of the sentence on the right side, the object position. It is followed by "Quills from the cheek, jaw and tongue hold deeper.", a sentence noteworthy for the unusual weight in the subject, or left-most, position. These are then followed by two brief, highly dramatic sentences.

Unpredictable, rich in variations, the asymmetrical prose does not carry the reader in its rhythm but distances him in the display of its control over its subject matter. Its rhythm is halting and ponderous, more laborious in its movement as it carefully releases the focus to grasp small details in the scene.

From the hole in the closet in the Linden Hotel, Scann watches a stranger ceremony than any he has written of. Mary Ann, an Indian girl who has become a heroin addict, is entrusted into the care of Ro Linden by Scann's daughter Marilyn and her friend, Paul.

Her moment expands to a process, a progression. Spoon, water, needle. Ro watches. "It's been a little while," he says at last. She concentrates. The needle sucks up the fluid. She twists her scarf around her arm and after a moment holds it with her teeth. "They'll take you again, Mary Ann, and it'll be cold turkey," he says. "Shut-up," she says, her voice a delighted gas escaping through the clench of her smile. She turns to show him she's found a vein and then puts the needle into it.
The plunger works. She waits, the instrument by her side like a shot pistol. ...Ro rises slowly from the bed, but when the hit arrives he doesn't catch. She twists, her face is translated to beauty, opens, and her hands grab at the edges of the basin as if she might be violently sick, but after a long moment she floats up out of it and turns again, this time holding on to Ro. She laughs. "Smack," she says, looking up into his face. ...She leaves him and goes lightly around the room, but when she comes back near him she holds onto him again, leaning her head against his chest and gradually drawing him in closer. Ro lets her. His smile is a reflection of hers. Between them her hands begin to fumble and finally lift him free. Scann blinks. He has seen nothing before like her action now. She might be mounting a bicycle too tall for her. Ro stands stolid, then persuaded, then helpful. He holds her high. Her legs go nearly around him. Scann's tongue dries. He sees nothing, only a female clinging to a male. (Scann, p. 246-7)

The prose seems uncomfortable with the scene and Harlow shifts us to dialogue and Scann at his hole to offset some of the reticence in the prose. Perhaps this is an unfamiliar world to the novelist. Nevertheless, his story takes us even here, in the closed hotel rooms of Linden.

The character Scann operates as comic relief in the scene, while the strangeness of this area of experience in fiction works to allay the perversity in it. We are forced beneath the yoke of our preconceptions, moral, logical, to deal with this reality on an immediate level. If we find ourselves at a loss, distanced from it at the same level that Amory Scann is distanced through his peep-hole, the novel becomes a satire of our inability to live authentically in this world. We will
get nothing from the book's ending and the whole business of reading Scann is profitless.

However, if we are able to see the irony in Amory Scann and his incidental scribblings irrelevant to the immediacy of his own world, we have achieved nothing more than an understanding of decadence, a society atrophying in the world it created. The novel will take us no further.

While we have moved through three different periods in the novel's scope, it ultimately returns to the chronology of Scann's Easter weekend. Alone with his 'animal' in room 322 of the Linden Hotel, Scann feels the cathartic power of his weekend of creation.

Out in the middle of the room, he feels the old serpent uncoil and drop, but his sense that endtimes are now with him is sure. And they are the continuing result of absolute possibilities, the original consummations: earth, air, fire, water, which lie inert, or decay, or become; between their own pitch and catch, something living - a simplicity of movement; a complexity of route; a bravery of intention; a simulation of chaos; vague proof of the accident of beginning, a denial of Apocalypse, and even, in the end, perhaps, a refutation of the end. Scann smiles at himself. ...He stands on his 8x9 carpet with his arms at his sides and his head raises like a dog's at the moon. He makes a dumb prayer that speaks in another tongue, and which only he could possibly answer at some point beyond discovering the key to its translation. And so the pitch of his romance culminates and he must wait and see whether he is caught again and slung back into the arms of old faiths. (Scann, p. 273)

Scann is a joke, a dog of a man baying inanely at the moon, for his achievement is formless, its quality immeasurable because
non-existent. Only the vaguest of abstractions can approach a statement of his own self-satisfaction. When old Thrain burns his manuscript, the joke of it even affects Amory Scann.

But we would certainly be remiss if we did not recognize the ambiguity in Amory Scann. He has walked that same carpet many times in his Easter weekend alone with the fictional impulse and that may be enough to make it his land on any terms he might choose. Just as his prayer to the moon sought another language, another tongue, so has the novel Scann reached for a point of release from the conventions of its language. In the end, it must be the critical faculty that pulls it down and says no, you did not get beyond your content.

(Scann) turns from Thrain and sees them lift Mary Ann from the bed, her tiny body supported by many hands. They make a gaggle crowding through the door. "Extras," he shouts after them, and then he reaches down into the can and picks out what is whole and half-whole and fragments burned and wet. "There are no beginnings and end-ings, Thrain," he says, stuffing his briefcase and closing it. "But there are responsibilities." He stands before Thrain's absolute quiet. The urge to dance is upon him - his animal maybe. Or it may be the result of a moment of new consciousness. Hardwon. He does not dance. Writer Novelist Scann goes carefully, husbanding that moment, through the door, pramples blue roses and walks with tenderness on his left foot, the one that put out the fire. (Scann, p. 306-7)

An Indian girl is dead or dying; a writer-editor can make a joke of the sudden show of concern by the many; the novel ends in comedy and death. Scann's manuscript has been destroyed
and he's limping over the floor of blue roses after his heroic effort to save his story.

Only Scann knows whether the moment has been apocalyptic, engendering a "new consciousness", or whether things are as they were when he entered the hotel on Friday evening. For us, there is only the ambiguity, the ambiguity and the world of Amory Scann.
Conclusion

When I began this thesis project, my intention was to show that the new fiction—those difficult, impenetrable books notable for their incomprehensibility, are, in fact, readable. I found these same aspirations articulated by Sharon Spencer. She wrote:

Bold and difficult works of art must depend, at least while they are newly evolving, on the intelligence and good will of critics who will commit themselves to the actions of understanding and of explaining to others the ways in which the formidable book can be approached. Except for a very few critics, in the United States the modernist novel—in English and in translation alike—has generally been rebuffed by the established literary critics and journalists, most of whose sensibilities, tastes, and values reflect the social and political ambience of the 1930s, and by a self-indulgent reading public, whose imaginations have gone flaccid through lack of use and whose capacity for active participation in art has been undermined by more easily available cliché-ridden entertainments. 1

At the time, the veracity of what she said seemed to me incontrovertible, especially in relation to the Canadian scene where the density of the output in the arts of the last decade has enabled us to set aside the serious efforts of our experimental writers.

The situation has deteriorated to such a degree that one

reviewer received Matt Cohen's latest novel, The Disinherited, with a frank avowal of his confusion at the novel's structure. He wrote:

Matt Cohen seems to measure the world with a micrometer, finely, precisely, and with utter detachment. Yet at the end of the novel, the nagging question remains: to what purpose?

He then talked about the book in terms of sketchy characterization, predictable endings, all the while neglecting to mention the span of four generations that the novel reaches for and the simple fact that the book works within its own set of rules. What had happened, it seemed to me, was a reviewer who had prejudiced himself against the novel because it did not read like those novels he had been used to.

Yet it seemed to me as well that the fact that I thought his review inadequate did not alter the point of view which informed it. The new fiction is different in its linear movement. The essence of the change resides in the realization that the book is the basis of composition for the novel. Here, the formal composition becomes more complex when a writer begins to use the properties of the book and the printed word. Much more area can be covered through manipulation of the narrative structure. Still related to the fundamental fictional impulse, the business of story telling, the conventions are so changed that the story no longer has to un-

fold in temporal dimensions.

So, the novel has changed and this change has resulted in a fiction that has divorced itself from the society as a whole. José Ortega y Gasset writes of modern art in general, and certainly the new fiction belongs to this trend, that:

Modern art...will always have the masses against it. It is essentially unpopular; moreover, it is antipopular. Any of its works automatically produces a curious effect on the general public. It divides the public into two groups: one very small, formed by those who are favourably inclined towards it; another very large - the hostile majority. ...Thus the work of art acts like a social agent which segregates from the shapeless mass of the many two different castes of men. 3

He goes on to say that it is not simply a question of taste that makes the division.

Every work of art arouses differences of opinion. Some like it; some don't; some like it more, some like it less. ...But in the case of the new art the split occurs in a deeper layer than that on which differences of personal taste reside. It is not that the majority does not like the art of the young and the minority likes it, but that the majority, the masses, do not understand it. 4

Herein lies the basic question with the new fiction, and the one that brings us back to Carl Oglesby for it is the question of its decadence. In effect, with Matt Cohen's novel, this puts me in direct conflict with the Time reviewer, not

4. Ibid, p. 5-6.
because I would argue against his assertion that the characterization is sketchy and that the ending is more or less predictable, but because I would argue that these considerations have nothing to do with it. The real question, it seems to me, is who is right?

It is no longer a question of my showing him how to read the novel because he has obviously already done that. His review indicates the experience he had with it.

And it is this that brings us back to Oglesby and his charge of decadence. The new fiction is no longer archetypal, working to integrate individual consciousness with the collective unconsciousness of the societal meaning structure. It has become a divisive force within the society, fragmenting the collective unconsciousness into individual consciousness.

Using Heller's *Catch 22* as a touchstone, Oglesby catechizes:

What Heller finally offers us super-sensitive Westerners is a contemporary world in which we may ignore what threatens us by its example, what challenges us to change our lives. A world...without fundamental tension, one which is not destined for a significant transformation, a world in which the summons to partisanship has been muffled if not ridiculed by a nihilism which has recently learned to frolic in the ruins of certain hope. Maybe this was a remotely defensible posture in that decade before the First World War when another solitary rebel deserted another homeland 'to forge', as he put it in a tone now forbidden, 'in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race'. But
several wars and revolutions have changed the situation. The conscience exists, standing before us now asking not to be created or perfected but to be chosen and defended, in need of champions, not exiles. 5

But I wonder if this is really the problem. It seems to me that Oglesby is speaking to that small few of us who have read and understood the novel Catch 22. Would it not be better to re-phrase the question to express the simple fact that there are many more that this novel does not speak to? And the question phrased in this way, is it even practical to try to answer it, knowing full well that a large segment of that large segment that doesn't understand the novel lacks a familiarity with the printed word in any form?

One of the dangers is, of course, that in refining the question so fine we risk reducing it to a point where it makes no sense any longer. But the other danger is in making the focus of the problem so narrow that any answer that is given must be superficial. In an earlier draft, I celebrated the new fiction, calling it a testament to the imagination in times that seem so confused in their daily existence that such dramatic displays of creative activity are necessary, indeed essential, despite the fact that the show is for the benefit of a very small audience. While I don't think this is incorrect, I think it would be more honest for me to express

5. op. cit., p. 51.
my bewilderment at the social conundrum the new fiction points out, acknowledging it, and stating that, despite the puzzle, a puzzle I cannot resolve, the new fiction works for me as the expression of the imagination shaking itself free of the lethargy permeating our age.

But, is the new fiction decadent? I hesitate to answer.

The chapters of this thesis express the way I read the new fiction and I don't think we can deny that Ortega y Gasset's analysis of the environment surrounding modern art reaches below the cultural crust to articulate deep-rooted divisions which truly bother the individual assessing his position within the societal meaning structure. Oglesby's criticism of the Heller novel is an example of this. Yet it may very well be that the question of whether or not such division is harmful to the social structure as a whole is a completely different question.

At any rate, I cannot answer the question that I proposed. Perhaps, I should not have taken my thesis in this direction. But the issue is critical to me, and, in a sense, it was the thesis that took me in this direction. I trust that the chapters make some sense out of the subject matter I chose. However, I hope more that the question of the decadence of our art has been formalized somewhat with this conclusion and the work in the body of the thesis.
Appendix 1

Note on the Translations

The translations for the most part were done for me by Mr. Prosper Ashiabor, a Ghana school-master who is a personal correspondent of my wife. To him I am deeply indebted. I have also provided his illuminating, though terse, comments on the proverbs which I am sure all agree are fine glimpses of the cultural significance of the proverbs.

Where two translations are given, the one marked Danquah is from the book *The Akan Doctrine of God* (London, 1968). His note on his translations may help to shed light on some of the discrepancies between the two versions.

The maxims listed below are those cited in the text. They are taken from Rev. J. G. Christaller's "Twi Mmebusem Npensa-Ahansia Mmoaano," published at Basel, 1872, entitled in English: "A Collection of Three Thousand and Six Hundred Twi Proverbs in use among the Negroes of the Gold Coast speaking the Asante and Fante (i.e., the Akan) language." ... The translations are, as far as possible, idiomatic English, and not literal.

This book was recommended to me by Mr. Godfrey and for that reason I include all the translations that were available in

The numbering system is arbitrary. Each piece is followed by its page number in the paperback edition of The New Ancestors, abbreviated Ancestors.

1. Ee okoto nsuo, yederema wo.
   Nan kusi, dee enni wo so, yede rema wo.

   ...  
   Akokoburuwa e!
   akokoburuwa, merehwete m'afikyire a,
   Yese yenkye me nton.
   Nemmmo ayowa po na akota sanya,
   Yese yenkye menton.

   Osua ato ato e.
   Osua ato ato
   Mere koyi anammon:
   Odo anammon ni.

   Anammon nyina nse.
   Mere koyi anammon,
   Odo anammon ni.
   Songs (Ancestors, p. 109)

   Eei! We offer you water.
   Chief Kusi, we offer you what you don't desire.

   Hen!
   hen, if I scratch behind my house,
   It is said I am to be sold
   I have not broken a clay pot,
   How can I break a silver pot
   Yet it is said I am to be sold.

   It has been raining
   It has been raining
   I am going to have a (stroll) walk
   This is a walk of Love
   Father of all walk
   I am going to have a walk
   This is a walk of love.
   (Ashiabor)
Note: There is no translation in Danquah.

2. Osu tu po mu. Yenim se epo so, nanso nsu to gum? (Ancestors, p. 190)
Rain falls into the sea, we know that the sea is big but rain falls into it. (Ashiabor)
That the sea is all water is well known, but rain still pours into it. (Danquah, p. 196)

3. Obi nko asaman nsan mmeka abibsem. (Ancestors, p. 199)
No one has ever visited the "ghostland" and returned to tell his experiences. (Ashiabor)
One does not return from Asaman (Hades) to talk of things African. (i.e., worldly things). (Danquah, p. 188)

4. Kwashianí feemo. (Ancestors, p. 214)
Poorishman be careful. (Ashiabor)
No translation in Danquah.

5. Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma; obi nye asase ba. (Ancestors, p. 235)
All human beings are children of God; no one is the earth's child. (Ashiabor)
All men are the offspring of God, no one is the offspring of Earth. (Danquah, p. 193)

6. Asem a esen hene wo ho. (Ancestors, p. 244)
There are some matters greater or mightier than a chief. (Ashiabor)
There is a reality greater than the King. (Danquah, p. 196)

7. Kuro so a, omanni-bere ye ona. (Ancestors, p. 251)
Time is useful to citizens of any town. (Ashiabor)
It is hard to meet an excellent man in a big and straggling town. (Danquah, p. 192)

8. Wote kuro-bone mu a, wo ani na ewu. (Ancestors, p. 256)
You all the time feel ashamed as long as you stay in a "bad town." (Ashiabor)
If you live in a wicked town the shame is yours. (Danquah, p. 196)

9. Osu to fwe wo na owia fi hye wo a, na wuhu abrabo yaw. (Ancestors, p. 258)
It is only when you taste both the sunshine and the rain that you come to know the experiences of real life. (Ashiabor)
If you are soaked by the rain and then scorched by the sun you see the way of this world. (Danquah, p. 196)
10. Abufuw to se ohoho, ontra abia lofo fi. (Ancestors, p. 269)
   Anger which is just like a stranger is not found in a man’s home. (Ashiabor)
   Anger is like a stranger, it does not stay in one house. (Danquah, p. 190)

11. Wusua asempe a, wunya anuonyam. (Ancestors, p. 274)
   If you lead good life, you gain popularity. (Ashiabor)
   He sees glory who fathom the infallible. (Danquah, p. 196)

12. Ade a chene pe na woye ma no. (Ancestors, p. 280)
   A chief usually gets his heart-felt desires. (Ashiabor)
   What the king orders is what is done. (Danquah, p. 194)

13. Wobo bra-pa a, wote dew. (Ancestors, p. 283)
   If you lead a good life, you will enjoy life. (Ashiabor)
   If you lead a good life, you enjoy its sweetness. (Danquah, p. 194)

14. Wunyin a, na wunhu; na woye bone de a, wuhu. (Ancestors, p. 286)
   As you grow older, you don’t recognize it; but you realize your sin just as it is committed. (Ashiabor)
   You may not see yourself growing up, but you certainly know when you are sinning. (Danquah, p. 194)

15. Onipa nti na wobo afoa. (Ancestors, p. 290)
   A word to the wise is enough. (Ashiabor)
   Because of man the sword is made. (Danquah, p. 193)

16. Obiako di’ wo a, etoa ne yam. (Ancestors, p. 294)
   The man who eats honey alone experiences its reaction alone in the stomach. (Ashiabor)
   If one eats the honey, it plagues his stomach. (Danquah, p. 189)

17. Obi nye yiye nnya bone. (Ancestors, p. 300)
   No one receives a bad reward for a good work of service done. (Ashiabor)
   The pursuit of beneficence brings no evil. (Danquah, p. 188)

18. Obi se ‘bo wo bra yiye’ a, onyaw wo e. (Ancestors, p. 3-1)
   It’s not an insult to be advised to lead a good life. (Ashiabor)
   If some one tells you to lead a good life, that is no abuse. (Danquah, p. 188)
19. Wope obi ti atwa a, na wotwa wode. (Ancestors, p. 302)
It's when you want to cut off someone's head that you hurt him.
(Ashiabor)
If you want to cut some one's head, they cut yours first.
(Danquah, p. 195)

20. Mkrante nko babi nnyaw ne nnam. (Ancestors, p. 303)
The cutlass does not journey and leave its meat behind.
(Ashiabor)
Where the matchet goes, there it sharpens. (Danquah, p. 194)

21. Obayifo oreko e! Obayifo oreko e! Na wonye obayifo a, wantwa wo ani. (Ancestors, p. 305)
Witch! Witch! If you were not a witch why did you turn to look back. (Aghiaob)
If somesone called out: "Witch! Witch!" and you were not a witch, you would not turn round to look. (Danquah, p. 188)

22. Abusua te se nfwiren; egugu akwu-akuw. (Ancestors, p. 310)
Each family is like a flower; it varies according to its plant.
(Ashiabor)
A family is like flowers, it throws off in clusters. (Danquah, p. 190)

23. Bosomapo ne Ayee ńtām', wugoru ho a, aboba si wo.
Ancestors, p. 314)
Between Bosombo (a river in Ghana) and the Ayee (a river in Ghana) when you play you will be hit by a stone. (Aghiabor)
Between the sea god Po, and the river god Aye, play habitu-tually, and the grinding stone will crush you. (Danquah, p. 190)

24. Onipa ye abogyabo, (Ancestors, p. 320)
Man, remember you are a blooded animal. (Ashiabor)
Man is a warm-blooded animal. (Danquah, p. 193)

25. Onyame nkrabea nni kawitbea. (Ancestors, p. 321)
Whatever is bound to happen will surely happen. (Aghiabor)
There is no by-pass to God's destiny. (Danquah, p. 194)

26. Ohene bekum wO a, ennim ahamatwe. (Ancestors, p. 329)
A chief doesn't use his left hand in cutting a tree or a rope but his right hand. (Aghiabor)
If the king orders your execution, drawing lots will not help you. (Danquah, p. 190)
27. Odomankoma owuo suro tutu a, anke abefu onipa. (Ancestors, p. 330)

When a case is judged and the culprit does not take the judgement, he is removed from the society. i.e. made an outcast. (Asahiabor)

Would Odomankoma (universal) Death venture to take man if He could be saved by Discord? (Danquah, p. 190)

28. Ohene nufu dooso a, omansan na enum. (Ancestors, p. 332)
If the king's breast is full of milk, it belongs to all the world. (Danquah, p. 190)

Eto sibyi o, eto mfuate o. yeniya okomfo kum no. (Ancestors, p. 332)

Whichever side the die falls, we get a priest to hang. (Danquah, p. 196)

Note: Mr. Asahiabor provided me with only one translation of 28: "Whatever one's character one will surely die."

29. Ame yile bliboo. (Ancestors, p. 332)
He is completely beaten up. (Asahiabor)
No translation in Danquah.

30. Wopa wo ho tam wo abonten so ne wode be fura ofie a, enye fe. (Ancestors, p. 345)
It's not fair for one to undress oneself in public. (Asahiabor)
If you are disrobed in the public square there is no grandeur enrobing at home. (Danquah, p. 194)

31. Bismillahi, bismillahi. (Ancestors, p. 367)
In the name of God, in the name of God. (Asahiabor)
No translation in Danquah.
Appendix 11

These are the comments Mr. Ashiabor appended to his translations.

A. The translations are just the literal meanings. They have deeper meanings which cannot all be written out.

B. These are wise sayings or proverbs used on particular occasions and they also serve as corrective and educative quotations to the young ones.

C. They play an important role in our traditional education of the youth.

D. The whole of the translations in number 1 can be played on talking drums and those who understand the drum language would interpret it and give instances when similar things do take place in either their own life history or the history of their village or town.

E.g. in number 1, 11

Can be attributed to anyone who is often involved in troubles not so much of his own making but out of mere hatred for him by his neighbours who will exaggerate his actions to spoil his good name.

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number 1, 111
This might be quoted by some who has (sic) love for someone else or feels happy about some good deed he is about to do.

E. Numbers 3, 9, 16 and 17 have some similarities in meaning. They apparently point to the two important parts of a lot of things. i.e. the good and the bad aspects of things which happen to man and these two aspects can be recognized, understood and known from experience and personal experiences.

F. Most of the others like numbers 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 28, point to everyday and common truths.

G. Number 30 is similar to "Do not wash your dirty linen in public".

H. Numbers 4, 15, 16, 18, 24 and 28 are general pieces of advice to all people in the community.
Appendix 3

An Interview With Robert Harlow

This interview, with novelist Robert Harlow, was recorded July 18, 1974. The following transcript has been edited by Mr. Harlow.

R. D.: This might interest you—you were on a course description at the University of Alberta grad school. It struck me as interesting how they had described the writers on it. The thesis was that recent Canadian writers have gone against the myth theories of Northrop Frye. Does that surprise you? That they should mention you in connection with a thing like that?

Robert Harlow: It would be unconscious, Bob. What do you think they meant by this?

R. D.: It had something to do with a literature working in conjunction with the society. And that, I suppose, is what is at the heart of Frye's theories. And, of course, the tremendous irony that always permeates the endings of your books, I think maybe that's what they're getting at.

R. H.: Well, I guess I had a real sense of it being in those three books; of writing something that had to do with my particular generation. My people being sort of second generation pioneers, and one of the books uses that phrase. If you add the three of them up together you get sort of a not-very-nice picture of the kind of moral fibre of the people who came after the first people who were there. The exploiters, it seems to me, are certainly less worthy than the builders. I think that by the time I got to Scann I felt a lot less, oh, sort of bitter about what had happened to the country, and I realized, I suppose, that people don't have the control anymore that they once did. When my father's generation went to that part of the country they had control; they were civilization, they were culture, they were whatever was there, you
know. And perhaps they were in that sense mythopoetic. If you do a literature about them it would be conjunctive—is that the word?

R. D.: Yes.

R. H.: But I was writing about a generation in which the heroes, the protagonists, were people who were losing control, had lost control. In fact, they didn't know what in the hell they were doing. Murdoch, the pioneer, knew precisely what he was doing, despite the fact that he staggered there; he knew who Murdoch was. But his son didn't. His son was quite willing to go in any direction at all. And in the second book, Nairn was a guy who was only looking for shelter, you know, and he had to come from the east to the west to gain it. All he had at the end of the war to exploit was the lumber mill his father had built. It was a small end of his father's empire in a sense. But his wealth had gone down the drain in the depression and then the war came along and the mill was all he had left. So, I guess in the first two books we're talking about a small kind of community. A regional community which, of course, is supposed to have some connection with what's happening in Halifax and Regina and maybe even Toronto. But by the time you get to Scann, well Scann is trying to make myths. So there is a process going on where you have Murdoch who knows exactly what he's doing and if there are myths around well, he'd use them too, I'm sure. And the second book is about those people who had to pick up the pieces after the early 1900's are through, the 1930's are through and the war is through. It's a melodramatic book, yet it says what it started out to say. But then Scann sits down and asks what was it all about; what were these things all about; and he knows in his heart of hearts he's another Nairn, I guess. He's been in Linden since the War. He didn't pick up the pieces; he decided that hell, I'll become an editor; I'm not going to Toronto to see if I can become another guy who's making it in the big city as a journalist. And I'm going to stay right here and I'm going to have the good life, and he does. But eventually it catches up with him and he has to make some kind of myth out of it. He's got the crippled one, the Philippa one, the bullshit myth. And then he's got the one about his own war, which is his own kind of idea about himself, which is what? I don't know if it makes a myth or not. But the big thing is his understanding of Linden. And that is where he makes it. That's the reason he comes to write anything at all. And when he winds up back on the street with his sore foot, well, what
good are myths anyway: He's still got to go home and see his old lady, who isn't there, to see if he can get her back. Of course, one has to understand, I guess, that authors get more complex as they go along too. I mean if you deal with the same material long enough, you eventually do as any scholar will: begin to deal with criticism of criticism, if you know what I mean.

R. D.: Yes.

R. H.: And dealing with your own material in this way, and this can be seen in a lot of regionals, whether they be English, French or American, you eventually get to the point where you've got it boiled down and you're dealing in essences. Faulkner's Light in August, for instance. But sometimes you go beyond that to Finnegans Wake, which seems to me to be relatively useless. Highly interesting, I'm sure, to those people who gather every year in the Joyce Society to talk about the roots they untangle. But simply an essence, the kind which a writer may come to. But, that's a long way from Mr. Frye.

R. D.: Yeah. But I found though, when I was reading your work, there was a tremendous amount of concern for what you called the "generation of caretakers" that permeated the work. And perhaps that really did make it mythopoeic in a strange sense of the word. A social concern or whatnot. So what I'm trying to say is - I don't think you're writing out of the same stance as, say Joyce and Beckett. I think you're much more tied in to what is happening.

R. H.: That just scares me - to hear my name with those two. You see, I live in a country called Canada and Canada literally is 60-65 years old, you know. I mean there was a very, very long colonial period which came to an end probably with the first world war. My father who's now pushing 86 - he's healthier than I am - arrived in this country as an immigrant from the U.S. in 1909, I think it was. And they were just building the last railroad. So, there's very few other countries, perhaps Australia and New Zealand, you know, who can say this. Not even them, because they've got two or three hundred years of history, a very closed history. But what we have here is a generation that you can go and meet them. And I'm the next guy in line and then there's you. And your life is an extremely sophisticated one: it's tied in with everything that's happening in the world. I mean, you've got all the communications, from flying to the LP record. And you
belong to a world; I didn't. I belonged to a generation that had a chance to do something, but actually no chance. I mean, through the depression and to the end of the war. And I'm the youngest end of this thing too, you understand. Most of my generation is 60 years old; I'm 50. But between the generations the war seemed to interrupt all those things that happened from Champlain on. It really interrupted that flow. And then we became tremendously North-Americanized; tremendously. We didn't deal with the problems that there were in Canada becoming Canada. The books are relatively inarticulate on the subject because I was really defining the subject, you know. Really defining it. And I guess that's okay.

R. D.: Yes. But in Scann a thing like the youth movement is peripheral to the whole thing but it's there.

R. H.: Yes. It leans a little bit, that's all. It was a hard book in which to put all that together because there are really about 4 or 5 strands. I closed Scann down when I was thinking about the book, and eventually put him in a hotel room that was 10 x 12, I suddenly found I had more freedom than I had in any other structure I'd thought of. Once you get somebody that immobile then he can do anything he wants with his head. It's a very different kind of adventure story, but it can accommodate many more strands, at least I found it could. The only other way you can go is sort of the War and Peace way, you know, where you write the whole bloody history. And I wasn't about to do that. Maybe it hasn't been done for us in this country yet. Margaret Laurence's five books do it for her kind of regional place.

R. D.: I saw you read at the University of Windsor when you were there a couple of years back. And one of the things you said there, and I believe you mentioned it again when I was talking to you, was the need for the novel in Canadian literature.

R. H.: Yeah. And I suspect I was talking about the capital 'N' - novel, the big thing.

R. D.: Yeah.

R. H.: The grand form. We have a great liking on the North American continent and in England for the truncated form, for the sort of half-novel. The novel is Moby Dick, it's War and Peace, it's Crime and Punishment, it's Cortazar's Hopscotch, you know, Don Quixote. This is the grand form, like Beetho-
ven's symphonies or the classic ballet. And I really think 
writers have to reach out. You can write a hell of a lot of 
what I call 'action' novels, or 'crisis' novels. They are 
250 pages long and they deal with a crisis. It's an outgrowth 
of the short story, in a sense. North America has been very 
good at doing this. We deal with encapsulated things and to 
capsulize the novel you have to find out how to do it. You 
usually do it around a day, you do it around a crisis, you 
do it around a family, something happens, etc. But the novel 
itself, the big novel, is about everything, somebody once 
said. I mean capital 'E'-everything. Scann is a small at-
ttempt on my part at being about everything in Linden. And 
it approaches becoming a big novel in that sense. Now, the 
necessity for the novel is that our whole history has been 
sandwiched into the last 60-70 years, I mean the rapid growth; 
it's as if we became the whole bloody tree in the last 60 
years. Well, in order to define this, in order to count the 
rings, so to speak, on this tree and to get caught up cultur-
ally to what we have actually done in terms of growth, it 
seems to me that our authors are going to have to do it in 
large forms whether the audience likes it or not. We've got 
to somehow subsidize our culture by writing big novels which 
will take 10-15 years to permeate the cultural crust of the 
country. Now this is happening in a sense. I mean, you've 
got, say in the last 5, 6, 7 years, a number of books that 
are beginning to do this. Margaret Laurence's books are a 
good example. And I think Matt Cohen is beginning to find 
his feet; I mean Matt has always had his feet but I think The 
Disinherited is really a good example in terms of what I'm 
talking about because he's headed towards that capital 'E'- 
everything. And I was just recently talking to Graeme Gib-
son, and, this probably shouldn't be quoted by anyone, but 
he's started on a really big one. And it's a breakthrough, 
it seems to me. I mean, he understands that he's got to go 
from 1870 to 1972, with the big family novel. I think that 
Gibson's roots are very strong in Toronto, in South-
ern Ontario, and this is where he'll go. I think that Mun-
ro, Alice, when she starts, when she finally gets the big 
form under control she's going to do something with south-
western Ontario, with Canada. And it's going to be really 
good. So these things are coming. I hope that we have an 
audience and I hope we have some publishers. But I think 
it's necessary for us to be able to tack down what is hap-
pening in terms of the large form. Any artist wants to do 
the large form. I mean a musician wants to do symphonies 
and ballets and quartets. And the painter - I don't know 
whether a mural is the same thing for a painter - but I bet 
it could be. If somebody said look, would you do this 100
yard thing for us in Ottawa, well, I think a painter likes that. He could say a lot. And the sculptor does want to do the big thing. He may become an architect and design buildings. It's important that you do the big thing; the big statement allows for summations as well as for intricate looking and searching.

R. D.: It's interesting that you have this regard for the 'big' thing. You talk a lot about Tolstoy and there are similarities between you and Tolstoy, particularly in Scann with all that narrative activity. Would it be fair to say that Tolstoy is one of your models?

R. H.: No. Not consciously. These things are going to be accidental. I know what you're saying. I started out with Faulkner as a model, let's face it. When I was 25; when I'd come back from the war, got my degree here, went into graduate school, I had never, to my shame, read any Faulkner. And I suddenly read Faulkner, you know, read all 20 books. And you know my mind was blown circa 1928 by this whole thing. And that kind of understanding of a novelist is a terrible thing, you see; that's where it all started from. I think Tolstoy is a very natural writer; he's not a very crafty guy. In the sense of craft and also in the sense of being crafty, like some writers are and some writers have to be. But he's a very natural sort of writer and my narrative sense is a sense of the natural narrative. Is a sense of history. I've had a sense of history. Which again your generation doesn't seem to have. It feels that history has betrayed it a bit. I don't; I feel that it's necessary to know it. I think it would be nice to write like Tolstoy, you know, Anna Karenina, that's a beautiful book, that's really a terrific book, natural. I'm not too sure mine are.

R. D.: Yes, but in many ways Scann is almost an anti-historical novel. Scann is playing around with the various historical dimensions, then coming out as he does, a bit of a joke - maybe a serious discovery.

R. H.: I was fascinated with Gunter Grass before I started writing Scann. You made me think of this by asking that question. It is relevant. The thing that fascinated me about Grass was not precisely what he wrote. But the thing that he did was to take the Dickensian novel and to turn it upside down and give it one hell of a shaking, you know. Yet, by the time you're through Tin Drum and Dog Years you're bored with the whole thing because he's done his act and
that's great. He shouldn't have done *Dog Years* in a sense because *Cat and Mouse* is a much better effort. A hundred and twenty-five pages beautifully done. That's one of the great novellas, I think, of the last 50 years. But his shaking of the Dickensian novel, his turning it upside down, fascinated me and that kind of imagination had fascinated me also. It's the kind of imagination that I have also: a kind, a type, you know, not saying it's good or bad or indifferent. And he can also go to pot with it too, as in *Local Anaesthetic*. You want to read a bad book, that's really a bad book. It's got some brilliant parts in it but it doesn't add up. It starts nowhere, it ends nowhere, it just does all sorts of things. And that's the danger of having that type of imagination and I knew it, fortunately. That's why you read other people's books. I liked the idea of turning things upside down and I knew the Scann'thing was coming. I didn't know who Scann was at the time but I knew the Lind-en thing had to have a wrap-up. That I was through with that material, otherwise I was just simply going to disappear into myself. Okay. So I started out with the Philippa story because it was that kind of thing and it was a much straighter story. And it was going to be the thing that looked into it and it was going to have connections with the Murdoch family; it was going to have connections with the Acton family; all sorts of things. It was going to sound more and more like it was Pottstown, Pennsylvania, you know, than Linden. And so one day Scann walked into the book and he was the guy who could turn the whole thing upside down and make it— you know, your description of it as an anti-historical novel in a sense is right. Every novel is an historical novel. I always feel this is a redundancy. If I were going to teach a course in how to write a novel, which one should never do, I would have everybody research a time. Get as much as they could, pages and pages, hundreds of pages of notes on the time, people and events, then sit down and write it. Because that's exactly what one does, at least it seems to me you do. You wind up with that many notes about a Linden, or a Vancouver or a Windsor or a Toronto, you know. I mean that's the setting and there are the people in it and what is happening in it. And eventually the novel is about time: it's about how time operates on the times, you know what I mean: *I mean time itself,* actual chronometric time, sex time, life time, all these sorts of things are going on and they are the different kinds of times. How they force the times to become a story, okay. That's it. That's beautifully stated, Rance. And so you have to wind up: if you're going to turn upside down what you have to do is get it out of joint and the times out of joint. So you can see what
the hell they are. I don't think I could do Scann a different way; one can agree or disagree or whatever. But, anyway, to have Scann come in who understood this sort of thing, being that diurnal person, the newspaper editor, he would be able to be familiar enough with the times so that his madness, you know, his anger about them, his concern about it, his worry about it, all these things, he would be able to have confidence about time itself and be able to deal with time as time. That portion or this portion. The hole in the wall. And also to let himself become timeless, to become terribly open, terribly vulnerable and at the same time protected because he was only lying. And so all these opposites were operating to try and break down some of the problems with time in the historical novel.

R. D.: Without running to 700-800 pages.

R. H.: Right. I mean the thing runs 140,000 words as it is which is a bit of an unusual book and certainly annoying to a lot of publishers. I mean publishers are now looking for books exactly and precisely the size of Surfacing, you know. That's the right size. Scann cost $7,000 just to set.

R. D.: After reading Scann - I mean I was taken by Scann from the first, so I went and I read your first two novels. And what immediately struck me was how different Scann was. I wonder now, after writing Scann, do you consider yourself an experimental writer?

R. H.: No, I don't. Scann was a response to a number of things. It has to do with my history: I went to Iowa. I was the first Canadian to go to the Iowa Writer's Workshop where I came into contact with that sort of energy Americans have. That kind of energy was going into books then that were rather similar to my first two, perhaps more sophisticated in some cases, in some cases not so. So when I came back here I joined the CBC and I had a career and a marriage and children and all that sort of thing. And it wasn't until 1960 - well, I aborted a couple of books during the '50's, and Murdoch I wrote out of that experience in the '40's, so it's really a book out of the '40's. And then right after, I had a thing about second novels, you know, I started the Echoes book to be of a piece with the Murdoch book. I already was becoming uncomfortable with it. If you'll notice in it there is the grotesque and there is this sort of splitting up of time in a different way. At least I felt the pressures of it. And, when the book came out, I was terribly disappointed with it really. For myself, I don't think it's
that bad anymore, but I did at that time. Because it was almost a genre piece. And then I came to work at the University with young people. This is going to sound like goodbye Mr. Chips or something, but I learned a hell of a lot by having to explain myself and my feelings about work that came across my desk from students. There are no real rules about writing; you just have a piece of work in front of you and it makes up its own rules and the question is do they work? And when I was thinking about these things, and thinking very hard, and often failing as a mentor, I learned an awful lot about what was wrong with, you know, not really wrong but what different approach I should be taking to writing in order to get rid of the Linden material. And so when you come right down to it, Scann is an experimental thing—it became an experiment in order to solve a problem. Because the thing evolved out of a straight historical book. And the book I'm working on at the moment is a very ordinary sort of thing. But it certainly draws on the experience of the last 20 years in terms of writing. In its first draft, it's really a light weight thing, almost at the level of pure entertainment. So I don't consider that I'm kicking down any walls at this point. In Scann I had a sense that maybe I was kicking some walls down, for myself at least. But in this new book, it has really a sense of consolidating and then maybe the next step will be different. However, it may turn out to be a very complex book too. I don't know. The first 55-60 pages are not. It deals with a time and a place and a specific—well, it's like a war novel or a campus novel. It deals with subject matter, I'm not going to tell you what it is, but it deals with subject matter that is as closed as a war experience is, or a campus experience is. It works with people who are on the periphery of respectability—which is where I feel we are.

R. D.: As a society as a whole?

R. H.: Especially now. I think we're willing to give up a good deal of respectability to keep what's been here for the last 25 years, mainly capital 'P'-progress and all those comfortable things that I would like to see go on too. My God, in this town we elected a man named Bill Clarke whose maiden speech in the House of Commons was to remove income tax, you know, a real daddy-warbucks. And he was elected by a giant majority over some good men. I mean, we don't have any respect, I don't think, for the country anymore. Well, there is one side of us that says we want to have a country, we want it to be great and all the rest of it. But our terms of greatness require that we're not too bloody respectable.
Appendix 4

This is a copy of a mimeographed set of "notes" Mr. Harlow handed out to a novel workshop he runs at the University of British Columbia. He prefaced the notes emphasizing that this is his first attempt to put down his approach to his writing. The following is an excerpt.

Fiction: A Few Notes on Times and Perspectives and Genres

Fiction is the art of time. Consummately so. Where other arts seldom have to go beyond timing, spacing, and certain rhythmic devices which are often recognized viscerally rather than objectively, fiction is of time, about time and all of the subtleties of time are its tools. These subtleties are durations fashioned to create focuses on developing consciousnesses (characters). Beginnings, middles and ends are only its modes.

Fiction is a time art in the most practical way: chronometric time becomes narrative time; subjective time becomes loving, eating, sleeping, dreaming, fearing or hating (the hundreds of times we know and experience in life); metaphysical time becomes objectified in the labyrinths of the mind (Borges has dealt with many of them), and in the speculative possibilities of time-lapses, time-warps, the bunching of durations which play with denying chronometric time.

Our concept of time as a function of the "world we live in" produced in the long mediaeval period tale-tellers whose sense of time was one of endurance, a continuum that made no real distinction between existence and duration. To feel oneself exist was to feel oneself to be: neither changing, nor becoming, nor in any way succeeding oneself. Existences were created existences; thus there were hierarchies (angels, man, animals). By the same single act of will the creator caused existences to be and to endure. Thus man was always man. Creation and preservation were therefore indivisible actions. (I am indebted here to George Poulet's book Studies in Human Time.) Mediaeval fiction tended to reflect

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this essentially (then) Christian concept of time as God's time; or it circumvented it through romance and fantasy - the standard unsophisticated reactions to current concepts of time in any age.

As time went on new concepts of time changed serious fiction writers into, for instance, psychological prospectors when time was thought of as potential, as evolution and as motivation; into relativity buffs (all change is relative and time/space becomes a fourth dimension and not simply a potential); and in the last 25 years especially to citizens of an age which reflects the quantum theory: time is not continuous - but is discharged in discrete amounts, or quanta: Thus time is fragmentary and there is no continuous creation: time/space has become not a continuum, not a potential for change, not a dimension of life, but rather it is thought of as individual moments of consciousness buried in "the times."

Fiction is often now the function of these moments in relation to "the times." We need not go far to recognise quantum authors: Robbe-Grillet's novellas, Michel Butor's short fictions and his novels, Cortazar's latest writings, Kosinsky.

These concepts of time should not be theoretical for the writer of fiction. How we view time in our society is a basic and practical consideration, and no amount of romance about experience and inspiration, however well intentioned and "true", will convert considerations of human time and "the times" into simply a part of an aesthetic process. Fiction's business is to deal with "the times" in terms whose bedrock is time itself. Prose as an art has been continuously in operation, and in print, since Homer, gradually becoming more sophisticated until now it is an instrument whose "technical memory", scope and influence is often greater than any other art now or in the past.

In order for there to be time, it must have a context. Cosmogonies and Apogegmations are necessary beginnings and endings which allow time to inhabit our world. However, if experience is not always to be mere autobiography or non-fiction, it too must have a context manufactured for it. Fiction is not life, it is about life experience and that is the first thing; and in order for it to be about life experience must have a new context in which to operate, a context that will allow it to be disloyal to the actuality from which it was taken. It is only a step from these two prime necessities of fiction (and no other art in the same life-like way) to the final all-embracing technical consideration of the fiction-writer: point of view.

Here, the writer creates a system of perspectives, and in doing so understands that he has synthesized a universe using God's three basic technical attributes: a sense of now
(time), which measures and has a memory of creation, the ability to create (where once there was nothing there is now and therefore something), and objectivity (that distance in his creative nature which wills the thing created into time to have its own life and to use itself up). All else is persiflage made up by scholars and critics.

In fiction, the subject is time (as opposed to subject matter). Simply, time asks, time demands, time refutes, time allows; time is disinterested, unmoved, it is infinite and infinitely divisible and infinitely variable. It is the labyrinth at whose centre its own miracle sits, the object as well as subject of creation. The labyrinth, in fact, should be the emblem of fiction: something designed, manufactured, accessible with effort, and embodying the structures, content and forms of time in one indivisible entertaining and instructive creation.
Bibliography

The Novels


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Secondary Sources


Vita Auctoris


1971  Married Ms. Lily Trzeplinski

1973  Bachelor of Arts Degree, with high honours, from University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Awarded Board of Governor's Medal for English.