THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEPRESSION: MORLEY CALLAGHAN, HUGH MACLENNAN, EARLE BIRNEY

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

May 1974

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the influence of the Great Depression on four novels by three Canadian authors: Such Is My Beloved and They Shall Inherit The Earth by Morley Callaghan, The Watch That Ends The Night by Hugh MacLennan, and Down The Long Table by Earle Birney. The novels have different focuses, different perspectives from which they consider the social, political and economic upheavals of the Thirties. Through an investigation of the techniques, themes and character portrayals in the four novels, supported by a brief historical sketch of the period, this thesis illustrates how Callaghan, MacLennan and Birney have captured the atmosphere of the decade and the feelings of desperation and disillusionment that characterized the Canadian society during the Thirties.

Chapter I describes the political, economic and social reactions to the Depression by the government and the public. This chapter provides background for the literary analysis which is to follow. Chapter II illustrates Morley Callaghan's concern for the individual who is caught up in the social turmoil. Such Is My Beloved concerns a priest who tries unsuccessfully to effect some good in society, while They Shall Inherit The Earth describes a young man's escape from the systems and attitudes that have been hindering his growth as a person.

In Chapter III, the discussion of The Watch That Ends The Night

focuses on the manner in which the main characters align themselves with a force greater than themselves. This chapter investigates the quest for meaning and purpose in a time when neither the traditional beliefs of the past nor the radical hopes of the future seems to have any value. MacLennan's novel is, in the final analysis, an affirmation of Christian faith. Thematically, Chapter IV is a continuation of Chapter III in that the main character, Gordon Saunders, is also searching for a meaning and purpose in his life. Down The Long Table illustrates the effects of the sterile promises of the Communist movement on a man desperately trying to find something in which to believe. Chapter V discusses the conclusions that can be drawn from the analyses of the four novels in the previous chapters. Ultimately, the individual emerges triumphant over the political, economic and social systems that have been trying to control and manipulate him.

The novels must be understood as affirmation of the value and the overriding importance of the single, lone individual.

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CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEPRESSION IN CANADA

A Carol

Oh hush thee, my baby,
Thy cradle's in pawn:
No blankets to cover thee
Cold and forlorn.
The stars in the bright sky
Look down and are dumb
At the heir of the ages
Asleep in a slum.

The hooters are blowing,
No heed let him take;
When baby is hungry
'Tis best not to wake.
Thy mother is crying,
Thy dad's on the dole:
Two shillings a week is
The price of a soul.[1]

c.1935

C. Day Lewis' poem about the humiliation and despair of poverty reflects, somewhat, the feelings of many artists during the 1930's. Few creative artists were able to isolate themselves from the chaos around them and accordingly, they put their discontent and disapproval into words, songs, and sometimes, actions. This thesis will establish the nature of the technique which three Canadian authors have employed to portray that decade. THROUGH A DISCUSSION OF ~~By discussing~~ four novels: They Shall Inherit the Earth and Such is My Beloved by Morley Callaghan, Down the Long Table by Earle Birney, and The Watch That Ends the Night by Hugh

MacLennan it will become evident that each author has a unique perspective of the Depression and that each author has manipulated the historical events for his own artistic advantage. In the course of this thesis, a literary analysis of each novel will be offered with special emphasis on the social philosophy each novel expounds.

Before such an analysis can take place, we must know something of the economic, political, and human events which characterized the Thirties. However, since the focus of this thesis is essentially literary, and since such a task usually requires the talents of a qualified historian, the limitations of the historical information which will follow must be made clear. This thesis is not primarily concerned with ~~(hardcore)~~ statistics, although they do lend themselves to interesting hypothesis; the approach is humanistic. In other words, the actions and reactions of Canadians who experienced the Depression are the concern of this thesis. Callaghan, Birney and MacLennan have captured a moment in time, a period in the development of Canada. They see the Depression not with the perspective of an historian or an economist or a political scientist; rather, they focus upon specific individuals in specific dilemmas. When the characters and circumstances which are described are studied, it may well be asked whether the authors are describing isolated cases or whether they have really put their fingers on the pulse of the Canadian society during the Thirties. To resolve this question, this chapter will attempt to clarify the significant events of the Depression; and once the historical foundations have been laid, we will then be prepared to deal with the

fictional depictions of the physical and spiritual effects of those events.

Thursday, October 24, 1929, is unofficially heralded as Day One of the Depression; on this date known as 'Black Thursday', the averages on the New York Stock Exchange plummetted to new lows. Although the failure of the Stock Market was a significant factor in bringing on the Depression, the Crash alone was not responsible for the subsequent seriousness of the economic difficulties of the Thirties. Thousands of words, scores of theories, and a wide range of perspectives have been put forth to explain the true causes of the Depression; indeed, as we examine more and more facts, the causes grow in exponential proportions. Ultimately, we have to group the specific causes into a generalization, a statement which is broad enough to include the specific causes and yet accurate enough to give a broad, general base of causality. Once this base is established, then we can move to a more specific analysis of Canadian reactions.

Charles Kindleberger, in his recent book, The World in Depression (1973), concerns himself with the world situation:

> The 1929 Depression was so wide, so deep and so long because the international economic system was rendered unstable by British inability and United States unwillingness to assume responsibility for stabilizing it ... In 1929, the British couldn't and the United States wouldn't. When every country turned to protect its national private interest, the world public interest went down the drain, and with it the private interests of all.[2]

What Kindleberger says essentially is that smaller countries like Canada really could not effect their own cure. Canada was at the mercy of the super powers, and neither R.B. Bennett, MacKenzie King, nor

J.S. Woodsworth could reverse the downward momentum of the Depression with policies, expenditures, or tariffs. In later chapters, we will see how Morley Callaghan grasps, intuitively perhaps, the basic uselessness of public action, how his characters come to terms with the Depression in personal terms. Also, we will see the degree to which Birney and MacLennan are equally cynical and equally pessimistic about public action.

In 1929-1930, the ominous spectre of a lengthy economic slump was not yet visible to many of the most knowledgeable and influential Canadians. As Michael Horn, editor of The Dirty Thirties, has remarked: "Bank presidents, industrialists, mining magnates, financial editors, politicians ... for several years they bemoaned the present while spying silver linings, turning corners and seeing better futures ahead."[3] In the political arena, the Liberal government, led by MacKenzie King, suffered from the same myopia. Prior to the general election of 1930, King gave repeated assurances to the Canadian public that the situation was temporary. Ramsay Cook, in Canada, A Modern Study, points out the Liberal government's insistence that unemployment was temporary and the government's belief that the Depression would soon yield to the traditional policies of cutting government expenditures and balancing the budget.[4] The Conservatives, under R.B. Bennett's leadership, considered the Depression much more serious than did King. Although King would have preferred that the Depression and its alleviation not be the central issue in the 1930 election, such was not to be the case. Donald Creighton has described the debate as follows:

> He [Bennett] put all his enormous self-confidence and his evangelical fervour into the general election of 1930. MacKenzie King had disregarded and depreciated the depression; Bennett made it the central issue of his campaign. Only the Conservative Party, he shouted, could save Canada from the disaster into which MacKenzie King and the Liberals had permitted it to flounder. He promised an imposing list of public works. He denied passionately that tariffs benefited only manufacturers; he would make them fight for the primary producers as well. He would, he declared with savage emphasis, use tariffs to 'blast his way into the markets' of the world or 'perish in the attempt'.
>
> MacKenzie King contemptuously called it demagoguery; but the electoral results were as dramatic as Bennett's electoral methods. The Conservative strength rose in the new Parliament from 91 to 137....[5]

With his public mandate to revive the economy, Bennett set his course. In an emergency session of Parliament in September, 1930, 20 million dollars were voted for relief works. From this sensational move, however, the effectiveness of Bennett's programs ground to a stand-still. He employed conventional economic tactics by raising tariffs and by attempting to balance the Federal Budget. He did not realize that the old, 'tried and true' solutions, no matter how intensive, simply would not do.

During the Bennett years (1930-35) there were various attempts to stimulate the flagging Canadian economy. As in the past, Canada turned to Britain for support. In 1930, the Imperial Conference held in London was designed to unite the Commonwealth countries into a single co-operative system for defence and foreign policy. Unfortunately, Bennett assumed a very chauvinistic attitude, especially in economic matters. He wanted British preference for Canadian goods; but in return, he raised the Canadian tariff by 10% on all foreign goods.[6] Understandably, the Conference broke down and nothing of value was

accomplished. A second conference, the Imperial Economic Conference, was held in the summer of 1932 in Ottawa. The result of this meeting was limited; natural resources received preference in Britain in return for tariff benefits in Canada. The sum total of these conferences was hardly worth mentioning; but if Bennett felt dissatisfied with his failure to 'blast his way' into a better economic situation on the international scale, the events at home must have really upset him. Unemployment had reached staggering proportions by 1933: 826,000 people, a quarter of the labour force,[7] were out of work. Bennett reacted by instituting an expansive, and expensive relief program.

Relief, charity, welfare -- whatever term was deemed applicable to the dispensing of public funds to the needy, was a fact of life for never less than 10% of the working force during the term of Bennett's government. For the most part, unemployment was not a phenomenon which cut across the whole of Canadian society; the lowest economic groups suffered the most. As Horn observes:

> even before the Crash many people had been living perilously close to the edge of pauperism, managing still to work and survive on the fringes of an industrializing society, buoyed up for a time by the jobs provided in the two twentieth-century investment splurges and in the Great War, but ultimately ill-equipped in attitude, skills, education and possessions to adapt to the economic and social changes which capitalism and Canada were undergoing. It was from their ragged ranks that most of the victims of the Depression and its relief-ridden aftermath were drawn.[8]

Horn's observation is accurate, as far as it goes. But what of the rest of society? What about the middle and upper income groups who were more established and better equipped to handle the economic slump? Was relief only a reality to the "fringe" elements of society while the rest

were left untouched? L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss have edited a collection of letters to Prime Minister Bennett, The Wretched of Canada, which provides interesting glimpses into the concerns of those on relief. They also point out the dangers of relying on statistics to evaluate the effects of relief:

> In the worst year of the depression about two million Canadians, or one in five of the population, were public dependents. These figures ignore the tens of thousands who were too proud to fall back on 'charity' and the millions whose standards of living fell but not quite enough to force them onto relief.[9]

Later chapters, which examine the novels in detail, will show how relief is a concern of everyone during the Depression. Callaghan, in Such Is My Beloved, describes the conditions of two women at the bottom of the economic hierarchy and yet unwilling to take charity. In They Shall Inherit The Earth, Callaghan moves into the middle and upper levels of the hierarchy to demonstrate again the lengths to which some Canadians go to stay off relief. One of the central characters of MacLennan's The Watch That Ends The Night, George Stewart, takes an unsatisfying and unrewarding job as a school teacher rather than be unemployed. In Callaghan's and MacLennan's novels, relief is seldom emphasized. Like death, relief is always present, and like death, it is seldom mentioned. The fear of unemployment and the shadow of relief are the constant companions of Callaghan's and MacLennan's characters. Such is not the case in Birney's Down The Long Table, where the focus is upon those on relief and upon the effects of being on relief. What Callaghan and MacLennan imply and use as background, Birney highlights with scathing social criticism. When the perspec-

tives of all these authors are fused, we can see how relief is an omnipresent fact of life for the Depression generation.

During the Thirties, a group of new words became part of the everyday vocabulary -- Boondoggling, Bennettbuggies, Bennettburgs, to mention only a few. Boondoggling was a term used to describe the 'make-work' programs which federal and provincial governments imposed upon relief recipients. The logic, it seemed, was that people receiving money should do some work in return, no matter how little or how trivial. James Gray, in his interesting account of his personal experiences during the Depression, The Winter Years, describes the 'make-work' projects in which he was involved. The following is one example of his boondoggling experience:

> Before we set off for the job the first morning, the foreman stood on a tool-chest and made a little speech.
>
> 'Men,' he said, 'when we leave here we're going to walk over to the top of Niagara Street and start cleaning the dandelions off the boulevards. If everyone will co-operate, we will get along just fine. Nobody expects you to bust a gut on this job, but, if you sort of set yourself some sort of goal, time is bound to go quicker. There is only one rule: You [sic] can kneel down, sit down, or lie down, but I don't want you standing up. Standing up will attract the attention of the people on the street, and if they see you standing around doing nothing some of these dames will be phoning in to raise hell.[10]

Such useless and meaningless tasks were not uncommon: building roads which started in the middle of nowhere, went through uninhabited country, and ended in as equally isolated spots as those in which they started were favourite boondoggling projects. If the originators of these programs thought that they were removing the stigma from those who received welfare, they were mistaken. If anything, boondoggling only

reinforced feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

Bennett-buggies were automobiles hitched to a team of horses. During the prosperous years of the Twenties, when wheat and other grains were bringing high prices, many farmers bought combines, tractors, trucks, and other mechanized equipment to increase their efficiency and acre yields. During the Thirties the combination of natural disasters and decreasing world demand for Canadian grains made the new machines obsolete. Farmers could not afford repairs or gasoline for their automobiles; the horse again became a prominent means of transportation. The 'Bennett-buggies' symbolized the ~~regression~~ STANDSTILL of progress, as well as a disbelief and distrust of the technological 'golden age'. On the Prairies, the farmers expressed their discontent mostly in political terms. The emergence of various political organizations (~~Collective~~ CO-OPERATIVE Commonwealth Federation, the United Farmers of Alberta, Social Credit) indicated the re-organization and re-structuring of Canada which Prairie farmers felt was necessary to revitalize their economy.

The anathema of the Thirties was the relief-camp, the Bennettburg, which, in theory, was to provide the single, unemployed man with food and shelter until such time as when he would be able to re-enter the work force and earn a living. In fact, the camps were Canadian concentration camps, without the torture. The conservative forces in government viewed the unemployed man with suspicion, mistrust, and as a potential revolutionary. Blair Neatby has observed that the "concern was the fear that these men were a danger to the established order":

> Men like Senator Robertson, Minister of Labor in the Bennett government, still frightened by the memories of the Winnipeg General Strike, were convinced that these men were potential revolutionaries and that many of them were already communists. Robertson's solution was to deport those who didn't have Canadian citizenship and to exile the rest in remote labor-camps.[11]

The organization and implementation of these 'labor-camps' were placed under the auspices of the Department of National Defence with Major-General A.G.L. McNaughton in charge. A letter from General McNaughton to H.H. Stevens, Minister of Trade and Commerce, makes the purpose of the relief camp quite clear:

> By taking the men out of conditions of misery in the Cities and giving them a reasonable standard of living and comfort ... we were removing the active elements on which the "Red" agitators could play....If we had not taken this preventative ... it was only a matter of time until we had to resort to arms to maintain order. ...No doubt the "Red" organizations fully recognized the purpose of our work and it was for this reason primarily that they were trying to break it up and force us to send the men back into the Cities where in the intolerable conditions there ... they would soon be susceptible to their disruptive propaganda....[12]

The relief camps were subject to criticism from many sources because of the waste they incurred, both in economic and human terms. An excerpt from 'The Bennett Papers' stresses the monetary waste:

> One prominent man in British Columbia who had supported the present Government, stated that in a life time spent in lumbering he had never seen such graft, extravagance and exploitation as had marked the camp scheme, the arrangement of leases, the purchases of equipment and furnishings, and the assingment [sic] of men to work in them.[13]

Gray, in The Winter Years, stresses the human waste:

> The worst thing was the hopelessness. All the investigators who roamed the camp ... were unanimous on this point: the single unemployed regarded themselves as Canada's forgotten men. They had been filed and forgotten and nobody cared if they lived or died.

But the Communists cared.[14]

If those in power thought that they were discouraging radical political ideas and beliefs, they were mistaken. The repression only sparked the revolutionaries into more frenzied activity. The following is a letter sent to R.B. Bennett by a relief-camp striker:

> We see ... We think. We see Red ... and we think Red. Can you blame us? Would you like to have us lie down like a bunch of spineless whelps and be contented as slaves? Is that all our grandfathers toiled for?[15]

To hold that Gray and the relief-camp striker voiced the opinion of the majority is not a tenable position. It would be extremely difficult if not impossible to obtain any consensus of opinion concerning the advantages or disadvantages of the Bennettburgs. There are people who have gone on record as supporting the camp system; one such man is Ernst Watkins. His book, R.B. Bennett -- A Biography, makes a spirited defence of Bennett both as a man and as a politician. He puts forth the following in defence of the relief-camps:

> Yet the camps did provide thousands of young men with work and the chance to improve their skills, as well as their physique. They provided Canada with a number of public works that would not otherwise have been tackled. Five years later, many of these young men were to join the Canadian Army and turn themselves, voluntarily, into a fine, disciplined, fighting force. The scheme can hardly be called a failure.[16]

So much care has been taken to describe the relief-camp scheme because of the importance they play in Birney's Down The Long Table, where the camps are symbols of tyranny and injustice to camp members or potential camp members. The characters in Such Is My Beloved and The Watch That Ends The Night are not really threatened with exile to a

camp; but for Birney's characters, internment is a very real threat. If we can understand the passionate resentment which the camps evoke from the unemployed, we are well on the way to understanding why Birney's characters so eagerly embrace radical political philosophies.

Whether relief was beneficial or harmful in terms of Canada's social and political growth is a moot point; it existed, and it was an important factor in the restructuring of Canadian politics and in the formation of a new political consciousness. As Neatby in The Politics of Chaos, points out:

> Relief was thus only the first step. Governments were expected to go further, to take control of the economic system and to direct it and manipulate it to bring an end to the depression.[17]

It is a matter of record that governments did not take the necessary steps and, as a result, Canadians witnessed the emergence of new political parties extolling new philosophies. Each geographic area (except the Maritimes which remained faithful to the two established parties) produced its own brand of politics to solve its particular problems; as one historian, James Patterson, remarks, The Depression smashed the dominion into "rather demagogic principalities."[18] The schisms in Canadian politics were important in that they represented reactions to the Depression -- reactions of an electorate to unacceptable conditions. Neatby observes that:

> The decade of the 1930's was thus an era of transition. The fascination with politics reflected the loss of faith in institutions and policies which had been unquestioned for half a century. It was a period of turbulence and confusion.[19]

In 1936 in Quebec, Maurice Duplessis and the Union Nationale Party

were elected to office. This victory climaxed several years of political and social unrest in the province. The previous government under Taschereau had been corrupt; and its policies favoured English and American capitalists. Ramsay Cook describes the Quebec situation this way:

> In Quebec in the 1930's political unrest combined social radicalism with French-Canadian nationalism. Since the war, Quebec had been passing through an industrial revolution which transformed the province from an agrarian to an industrial society. Most of the capital which financed this transformation came from English-speaking Canadian, British and American investors. Many French Canadians became concerned about the domination of their economy by English-speaking capitalists. When the depression threw thousands of French Canadians out of work, smouldering resentment exploded into anger against "foreign" employers.[20]

Duplessis used this anger to win over the Quebec electorate, but once elected, he quickly forgot his reform promises and those issues which directly concerned the needs of the working people. Instead, as Cook notes, Duplessis declared "war on the federal government."[21] This action was to have far-reaching effects on the shape and character of the Canadian scene, but Duplessis did very little to resolve the immediate economic problems of Quebec. Neatby sums up Duplessis' effect this way:

> And out of it all came, not a radical, socialist or left-wing movement for reform, but a nationalist movement; a French-Canadian, rather than a farmers' or workers' movement, a French-Canadian movement which used the rhetoric of ethnicity and race rather than the rhetoric of occupation or class. The problems of the depression, rural and urban, were translated into problems of French versus English, with the result that little was done to resolve the economic problems of the depression.[22]

In Ontario in 1934, the electorate brought the Liberals back to

power after twenty-nine years in Opposition. The leader of the Liberal Party was Mitchell Hepburn, a flamboyant man, who, according to Donald Creighton, made "cheeky gibes at the affluent and powerful."[23] Like Duplessis, Hepburn was elected because of his reform objectives, and also like Duplessis, he attacked the federal government and tried to get more provincial power for his own province. In the course of Hepburn's career as Premier, it soon became clear that he was full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. As Ramsay Cook writes:

> He used the rhetoric of reform. He talked of the rights of labor, the rights of the underprivileged, the rights of the people, the need for increased relief and public works.[24]

In fact, he adhered to a 'balanced budget' policy which necessarily negated effective action on his part. On one memorable occasion, Hepburn demonstrated his 'Liberalism', when he called in the R.C.M.P. to break up a strike at an Oshawa plant, saying that the C.I.O. would enter Ontario only over his dead body.

On the Prairies there emerged two political parties which might not have been formed had it not been for the Depression. The Social Credit Party in Alberta and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba came about because of the public's dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of existing parties. Their support came from the ordinary people rather than from the wealthy capitalists. Since the two parties stood somewhere between the right-wing Conservatives and the left-wing Communists they managed to convince a great number of electors that they had the answers to their problems.

Donald Creighton comments upon the creation of the C.C.F. in his

book, Canada's First Century:

> The origins of the new party were as much in British socialism as they were in Canadian Progressivism. The League for Social Reconstruction, frankly planned as the Canadian equivalent of the Fabian Society in England, provided the C.C.F. with its basic body of ideas; and the League drew a great deal of inspiration and guidance from the history of British socialism. From the beginning the primary aim of the leaders of the C.C.F. was to unite farmers, industrial workers, and middle class in a genuine democratic socialist party on a national scale.[25]

With J.S. Woodsworth, a former Methodist minister and a Labour member of the House of Commons, as the elected leader of the new party, the supporters of the C.C.F. met in Regina in 1933 to formulate their ideas and objectives. The following is an excerpt from the Regina Manifesto; although not complete, it does indicate the stance which the new party had taken:

> The C.C.F. is a federation of organizations whose purpose is the establishment in Canada of a Co-operative Commonwealth in which the principle regulating production, distribution and exchange will be the supplying of human needs and not the making of profits.
>
> We aim to replace the present capitalist system, with its inherent injustice and inhumanity, by a social order from which the domination and exploitation of one class by another will be eliminated, in which economic planning will supersede unregulated private enterprise and competition, and in which genuine democratic self-government, based upon economic equality will be possible. The present order is marked by glaring inequalities of wealth and opportunity, by chaotic waste and instability; and in an age of plenty it condemns the great mass of the people to poverty and insecurity. Power has become more and more concentrated into the hands of a small irresponsible minority of financiers and industrialists and to their predatory interests the majority are habitually sacrificed.[26]

The C.C.F. had an immediate appeal to the electorate. For example, in British Columbia after the 1933 election the C.C.F. became the official Opposition to T.D. ~~Pattallo's~~ PATULLO'S reformed Liberal government,

though they had only seven seats. In 1934, in the Saskatchewan general election, it was also the Official Opposition with a mere five seats. In the federal election of 1935, the C.C.F. in conjunction with the other minor parties contributed to the collapse of the Bennett government by diluting the electorate's votes to the point that MacKenzie King's Liberals were elected with only 45% of the popular vote. In short, the C.C.F. had a great effect on the political system in Canada. The failure of the traditional parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, to cure a sagging economy brought about a political party to which Canadians might not have otherwise turned.

In August 1935, Albertans elected "Bible Bill" Aberhart and his Social Credit Party into office. Aberhart had been a fundamentalist preacher who had gained province-wide popularity through his radio-sermons. As the economic fortunes of Alberta fell, Aberhart became concerned with political, as well as religious salvation. He fused the Social Credit doctrine of Major Douglas with his religious beliefs -- a combination which appealed to the Alberta farmer. His solution was deceptively simple. Since the problem was that there was not enough money in the system, he would give every citizen a cash dividend. Unfortunately, Social Credit philosophy was easier to preach than practise. Ramsay Cook puts it this way:

> Aberhart soon discovered that most of his ideas and promises, especially those that had to do with the field of banking and finance, lay outside the constitutional powers of the provincial government to make good. Attempts to control banking, finance and credit were rejected by the courts because they interfered with the federal power over banking and currency, and after several unsuccessful experiments with "social dividends," Aberhart was content to give the province good government while his

followers dreamed of the day when Social Credit would capture Ottawa.[27]

In addition to the Union Nationale, Social Credit and C.C.F. which were 'acceptably' radical in nature, there also existed, during this period, a political ideology which was not 'acceptable' to the majority of Canadians, the Communist - Marxist - Trotskyist - Stalinist groups which mushroomed throughout the nation. Though these extreme leftists were relatively few in number, their views and beliefs were voiced loudly and continually. Unfortunately for them, they were unable to organize their forces sufficiently to put forth a unified front.

> The Left was, throughout the period, split into Socialist and Communist camps, thus its force was considerably diluted. In the early years of the depression the communists would support no policy aimed at ameliorating economic conditions. They preferred to stir up trouble and wait while capitalism went through its death throes, smugly pointing to the Soviet Union, ...[28]

It is worth noting at this time that in the novels under discussion Communism and related radical political movements are referred to continually by the authors. In Such Is My Beloved and They Shall Inherit The Earth, Communism is offered as one possible solution to the economic and social problems of the Depression, though Callaghan most decidedly does not share this point of view. Through Bill Johnson and Charlie Stewart, we see Communists as patient individuals who believe that eventually society will be forced to come to them for solutions. In The Watch That Ends The Night, the Communists are less cold-blooded, less patient, and more actively involved in bringing about the changes they want. Jerome Martell, Nora Blackwell, and other

less significant Communist figures try, in their own idealistic way, to further the Cause. Yet, there is still a degree of intellectual detachment and aloofness in their radicalism. Such is not the case in Birney's Down The Long Table. His characters, aside from George Saunders, are impassioned, embittered individuals who, in desperation, have pledged themselves to leftist groups. Birney's novel chronicles the futile efforts and unfulfilled hopes of Canadian Communists during the Depression. All four novels are concerned with Communism in varying degrees and although the development of leftist politics in Canada would be an interesting study, the complexity of such a study would require another thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, it is enough to realize that leftist ideology was being offered to the public. The following paragraphs attempt to explain why Canadians opted for the limited radicalism of Duplessis, Woodsworth and Aberhart rather than the extreme radicalism of the Communists et al.

The answer is relatively simple. Canadians simply did not believe the system was at fault for their personal problems. Somehow they felt individually responsible and did not look outside themselves for the causes of their misfortunes. James Gray's autobiographical work, The Winter Years, describes his feelings as he walked to the welfare office for the first time:

> Applying for relief might prove the most humiliating experience of my life (it did); but it had to be done, and I had to do it. The deep-down realization that I had nobody to blame but myself made the journey doubly difficult.[29]

It would seem that many Canadians shared Gray's belief that they had

'nobody to blame but themselves'. Aside from a few vocal radicals like Tim Buck and Slim Evans, the majority dug themselves in for the duration of the Depression. The majority of the letters selected by Grayson and Bliss for their The Wretched of Canada, reflect this attitude. A few contain demands for new reforms and new solutions to economic problems, but most of them simply contain requests for money or jobs. The prime concern of the letter-writers seemed to be for the moment and how they would survive the next week or the next month. As Gray recollects, "the most persistent and widely held delusion of all was that unemployment was a temporary thing and would soon pass."[30] Grayson and Bliss have drawn certain conclusions about why many Canadians did not lash out and demand radical changes and also about the possible dangers in assuming Bennett's letters to be representative of all Canadians:

> Bennett's correspondents tend to be humble, proud, and God-fearing folk. Some spirits have been broken, but only a handful are striking out in rage and despair. Perhaps most of the letters received (or kept) by a Conservative prime minister would be from conservative, deferential people. But perhaps the Canadian people as a whole had too much discipline, too much individualism, too much nineteenth-century grit, or too little political sophistication to fight back in radical protest against a whole economic and social system.[31]

Michael Horn, in The Dirty Thirties, talks of a fear that many Canadians shared, "The fear of losing the ability to provide for self and family."[32] Such a fear can have two very different effects -- docile submission or in aggressive rebellion. In an article on radicalism in North America during the Depression, John Garraty comments:

> But fear can lead to paralysis as well as aggression. With so

> many unemployed, those who still held jobs were afraid of losing them and were thus unlikely to give tongue to criticism of the system, whatever their beliefs. Among the unemployed, the depression produced a great deal of violence, but also much passivity; it is a cruel fact that the more one suffered the more one was likely to become apathetic.[33]

James Gray makes a similar observation about his experiences in Winnipeg:

> The closest we ever came to re-capturing the spirit of 1919 was in a small riot at the City Hall, when a few rocks were thrown and a few rock-throwers were clubbed. To anyone who had known Victoria Park and could remember a streetcar being burned on Main Street, it was an anaemic imitation of the real thing. The revolutionary spirit that had been a Winnipeg hallmark had melted into an all-pervading political apathy.[34]

The point to be made here is that the lack of necessary reforms, which only came about in 1940 with national unemployment insurance and in 1945 with family allowances, must fall partly on the shoulders of the ordinary citizen, as well as on those of the politician. Reform could only have come about if Canadians had collectively raised their voices and demanded changes. The few voices that did protest were absorbed in the apathetic quiet of the majority.

CHAPTER II

MORLEY CALLAGHAN

The previous chapter has demonstrated the economic and political metamorphosis which was occurring in Canada during the Thirties. It has also attempted to point out part of the social metamorphosis which was occurring at the same time; unfortunately, the social historians have not to date focused their critical talents on this area to the same extent as the political and economic historians have on their respective areas, a lack which accounts for the scarcity of such documented evidence. Thus, if we are to understand the effects of the Depression, in psychological terms, on Canadians, we have to look past the factual world of the historians, and into the less factual, less concrete world of Canadian artists. Artists, by definition, are not required to adhere to tangible evidence or empirical proofs; they are permitted to use truth and imagination in whatever combination they wish. Nor does the degree to which an author is faithful to historical facts determine his worth as an artist. Any approach to a fictional work based on historical accuracy is a fruitless one, not to mention an insult to both the work and the author. This thesis will not make a literary evaluation based on the historical accuracy of the novels under consideration. The novels are, however, in varying degrees, attempts to capture the spirit of a

particular era, and as such, open to analysis on those grounds.

In Callaghan's Such Is My Beloved and They Shall Inherit the Earth, we will see how Callaghan handles the emotional, political, economic and social events of the Thirties, as reflected in the actions of the characters involved. We see the bread-lines, the riots and long columns of unemployed men through individuals who are concerned not with social justice or equality, but entirely with the struggle of day to day living. Unlike Jerome Martell in The Watch That Ends The Night and Gordon Saunders in Down The Long Table, they are not crusaders with a burning desire to correct the evils in their society; they are small, insignificant men seeking some refuge from the battering social forces around them. Throughout his novels, Callaghan has emphasized the single man, the individual, the lone combatant and his battle for meaning and purpose in life. As one critic, J.R. MacGillivray, notes:

> His merits are both considerable and obvious. He would show us his world as he sees it, a drab, unheroic place, inhabited by people without wealth or security, young couples ... older ... perplexed adolescents, living on the edge of poverty, on shabby streets, in cheap rooming-houses, loitering under street lamps. Concern for the more unpleasant aspects of modern life has been so rare in Canadian fiction, ... that we may be grateful to Morley Callaghan for helping to redeem the balance.[1]

At the turn of the century, it was a commonly held myth that North America was the land of opportunity and prosperity, that everyman's son could be another Horatio Alger. The Depression brought these pipe-dreams to a swift and final dissolution. The ordinary man came to the realization that he did not control his own destiny, that forces, mainly economic forces, operated without his approval or consent in ways he could not understand or even identify. Callaghan's novels do not describe the forces, but chronicle the effect of these 'forces' upon

individuals. Callaghan reflects the confusion and disbelief felt by the ordinary person. Victor Hoar observes that:

> We are all products of our environment, of the socio-economic context into which we are born and in which we are raised. In the 1930's in North America, this context took on an added dimension, not to say ominous character. The Great Depression had come to the land .... Throughout his stories and novels of that decade, Callaghan continues to assert the presence of a forbidding atmosphere which was infecting lives and aspirations. His people, especially those in the stories, are often cranky and angry; they slip in and out of quarrels. They are uneasy and the reason may well be this "something" ... that is working to destroy them.[2]

Callaghan is too much of an artist to stand on a literary soap-box and openly accuse the system of betraying its participants. Instead, he describes a labourer who cannot find work and thus turns to crime, or a priest who is powerless to effect any good, or a middle-aged businessman who comes to the crushing awareness that he has spent his life worshipping the false god of success. These people do not influence the direction of society; they are alone and as chaff in the wind.

Callaghan is also cognizant of the difference between the American and Canadian reactions to the Depression. Although both countries experienced severe social and economic difficulties, Canadians reacted differently, according to Callaghan, from their American counterparts. The difference was that Americans expressed their discontent in violent action. John Steinbeck, in In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath, clearly demonstrates this tendency among the American victims of the Thirties. Canadians, on the other hand, were more prone to passivity than activity. This, of course, was not true of everyone. For the most part, though, Canadians accepted the situation in quiet frustration. Callaghan feels that Canadian writers have a responsibility to capture

the 'Canadianness' of any particular situation. He says that "We have our own idiosyncrasies up here, you know, our own peculiar variation of the cultural pattern, and the job of a Canadian writer is to get that."[3] Professor Hoar has summed it up this way:

> There are many authors, who, like Callaghan, comprehended the tragedy of the era and sought to describe this ordeal in terms of the human, and not just the political dimension. Callaghan could and did write about men out of work, witness Michael Aikenhead, but these men did not become martyrs, they did not throw themselves upon barricades. On the contrary, they lived quiet, frustrated lives far removed from the union struggles and street clashes. But their predicament was just as real, just as agonizing, as if they had.[4]

It is this attitude on Callaghan's part which allows F.W. Watt to maintain that in Callaghan's writing "social circumstances are a secondary matter."[5] Watt's observation is correct, in that Callaghan does focus upon the individual and his particular problems; however, social circumstances are not so much secondary as they are subordinated to the concerns of the individual. Social forces provide the backdrop to personal suffering. The subterranean forces of economy and politics influence the day to day actions of Callaghan's characters, and in this way his characters act as barometers of social pressures.

Callaghan uses an objective, reporter-like technique; his direct and penetrating vision sees past the shams and societal veneer into the heart of his subject. That 'subject' is Canada: not the physical landscape, but, more importantly, the people who make the Canadian nation. Callaghan sees Canada as no other Canadian novelist has before him; he sees the belittled labourer, the hungry child, the lonely streetwalker, and other manifestations of a sick society. His vision is not like Ralph Connor's; he does not see a mighty nation growing out of its

colonial traditions into a promised land, but describes a nation of individuals, almost, though not entirely, crushed by the weight of a malicious and indifferent society.

In Such Is My Beloved, published in 1934, Callaghan has taken one cell of the social organism and magnified it, thus concentrating his focus on one isolated area, one segment, one facet of social existence. Callaghan employs a device in Such Is My Beloved which Victor Hoar calls the "centre of intelligence." By this Hoar means that, "the third person point of view, rather than being omniscient, is directed at and through the vantage point of a figure in the novel ..."[6] Father Dowling is such a figure. His concern is for two prostitutes, not for all the inhabitants of skid-row, or even for all the needy in his own parish, but simply for two people. The novel is based upon the idea of a 'one to one' relationship, and it is the frustration and failure of this relationship which gives this novel its power.

There are two approaches which can be used to analyze the novel; one could be an examination of the religious symbolism and the message derived from its parabolic motif. The other method could be an investigation into those social forces which created and maintained the problem which Father Dowling tried to overcome. Malcolm Ross, in his introduction to Such Is My Beloved in the New Canadian Library edition, constructs an admirable case for understanding the novel as a Christian parable. He writes that"the 'social content' of the book is informed and controlled in religious terms and by religious insight."[7] Hugo McPherson supports this point of view and in his article, "The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan," proclaims Callaghan a "religious writer."[8]

No doubt there is a great deal of validity to this approach. One must, however, ask if this is the primary concern of the author. Callaghan grew up in a Roman Catholic environment and he more than likely had first hand experience with a priestly crusader like Father Dowling. It is also important to remember that Callaghan was a newspaper reporter, an observer of life who chronicled events which happened around him. When asked if he wrote 'religious' novels, he replied: "I don't sit down to write religious books. Don't you see? The last thing that's in my mind is to write religious books."[9] With this in mind and remaining consistent with the aims of this thesis, this chapter will concentrate upon those social forces which existed during the 1930's and investigate their efficacy in defeating the efforts of Father Dowling.

The effects of the Depression appear on every page. As Malcolm Ross notes in his introduction to Such Is My Beloved, Callaghan "was intensely aware of his moment in time -- the depression, the 'bourgeois ethic', Marxism, the rise of Fascism."[10] The story is about two children of the Depression, two women facing the economic realities of unemployment. They are prostitutes, not because they want to be, but because they know of no other way to feed themselves. This is the crux of Father Dowling's problem: he offers them food for the soul, when they are, and must be, primarily interested in food for the stomach. The problem is clearly illustrated in a conversation between Midge and the priest:

> "Now see here, both of you, I'm not trying to be harsh," he said. "Only I have been praying a lot for you and I thought I had really touched you in some way the other night ..."

> "Oh, don't keep nagging at us," Midge said. "Why do you come here if you want to nag us?"
> "What's that, my child? I don't want to nag you."
> "You have a good time talking about praying for us, don't you, but prayers won't pay for our room, prayers won't help me get my hair curled. You can't eat prayers. How do you think we're going to live? Did you ever stop to figure that out?" (pp. 21-22)

As Victor Hoar points out, "there is a disparity between the concern of the loving Father Dowling, and immediate, concrete remedies."[11]

In Such Is My Beloved, we are presented with a cross-section of Canadian society consisting of underworld characters like Lou, ordinary middle-class citizens, upper-class patricians like the Robinsons, and a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Each social group contributes to Ronnie's and Midge's prostitution, as well as to Father Dowling's frustration in his attempt to change their life style.

Lou is a pimp, a parasite who likes things the way they are and who tries to stop any outside influences that would change the status quo:

> Lou left the hotel, walking slowly, with his head down, and even if he had to walk all night, he intended to think through the problem clearly. For days he had felt the simplicity, comfort and security of his life being menaced. There had been for a long time a fine orderliness about his life that made him feel honest and almost respectable. As he shuffled along slowly, he couldn't figure out why the priest wanted to disturb a life that had become so pleasant. (pp. 67-68)

There is the common man who indulges himself with the prostitute, and afterwards "come[s] hurriedly out of the hotel, pull[s] his hat down far over his eyes and start[s] to walk furtively up the street, gradually increasing his pace and almost running as if expecting to be arrested at any moment, or have some one touch him on the shoulder and point back at the hotel" (pp. 19-20). There are the Mr. and Mrs.

Robinsons of society who are well-meaning and concerned until they come in close contact with the cancer itself, and then they scuttle into their cars, or furs, or warm houses and advocate mass sterilization. After all, Midge and Ronnie are, according to Mrs. Robinson, only "Feeble-minded girls. Only feeble-minded girls go on the streets" (p. 95). These people are cozy and comfortable in their sheltered world, and they, like Lou, seek to maintain the status quo.

Perhaps the most disturbing element of society, in terms of hypocrisy, is the clergy, as reflected by the Bishop. He is so much a part of organized society that his vested interests overrule the basic principles upon which the Church is founded. He prefers that his priests not dirty their hands with people in need of help, but reinforce instead, the pious misconceptions of the Robinsons of the world. Father Dowling had created a scandal by trying to communicate with, and help, the prostitutes. The Bishop's reaction is, "Can't you see it was an impossible state of affairs for you, a priest?" (p. 132). His hypocrisy is astounding. Hoar aptly remarks that the Church in Such Is My Beloved, as an institution of significance and relevance, "suffers from a case of hardened arteries."[12]

It is a curious feature of Such Is My Beloved that the only strongly articulated solution to the existing problems comes from the Marxist, Charlie Stewart. Father Dowling is concerned with the individual, whereas Charlie thinks only in terms of the State. His theory is that:

> "In the perfectly organized state there would be no streetwalkers. If the state has a proper control of the means of production and the means of livelihood, it's never necessary for a woman to go on

> the streets. No healthy woman of her own accord would ever do such work. It's too damned degrading. But if in the ideal state there were still women who were streetwalkers out of laziness or a refusal to work steadily then they would be kicked out or interned somewhere for laziness, or as non-producers. Then they'd have to work or starve. Your mistake [referring to Father Dowling] is seeing this as a religious problem. It's really an economic problem. Do you see, Father?" (pp. 126-7)

Despite his forceful expression of these views, Charlie does not get actively involved in trying to bring about the social system he advocates. Unlike Father Dowling who attempts to effect some concrete solution to the immediate problems of the day, Charlie seems content with mere rhetoric. In Such Is My Beloved, there is a decided similarity between the attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church members and the Communists, in that their involvement never seems to leave the intellectual level. In Callaghan's novels, neither the Church nor Communism is offered as a viable solution to the concerns of the Depression victims, simply because both systems are more interested in talking about social reform than in actively trying to achieve that reform. Callaghan, in Such Is My Beloved, clearly rejects any system as having the cure for society's ills; and with equal clarity, he concludes that only individuals, regardless of ideological affiliation, who are willing to sacrifice their personal happiness for others and who are willing to come to grips actively with existing social problems can hope to effect beneficial changes.

They Shall Inherit the Earth was published in 1935, during the height of the Depression. Its scope is much larger than the earlier novels, and as Brandon Conron notes, it "marks a new level of complexity and variety in its structures and characterization."[13] Like Such Is My

Beloved, it employs a religious motif, the parable of the prodical son, as a vehicle for social analysis. They Shall Inherit the Earth reflects the soul-searching which many people underwent as a result of the economic misfortunes caused by the Depression. F. W. Watt describes the novel as a "search in the 'thirties for meaning or redemption in this moral desert, now also an economic wasteland."[14] Ultimately, the novel must be seen to contain a questioning of social values and an affirmation of the dignity of man.

In the 1930's, business had failed and society, which had functioned upon the premise that existing economic principles were immutable, was forced to revaluate the situation. They Shall Inherit the Earth can be understood as an attempt by several people to re-establish the economic foundations of their existence. Such Is My Beloved illuminates two extreme positions: the conservative, reactionary position of the Roman Catholic Church, and the progressive, radical philosophy of Charlie Stewart. They Shall Inherit the Earth presents the forces of conservatism and radicalism in the persons of Jay Hillquist and Bill Johnson respectively. Jay Hillquist is an extreme reactionary who steadfastly looks backward for stability; and Bill Johnson, a Communist, is the extreme socialist who looks ahead to an entirely new and revolutionary society. The other characters in the novel are somewhere between these two positions, searching for a system or philosophy that they can claim as their own, and in which they can believe.

Jay Hillquist is the man of faith, faith in business and the free enterprise system. He rejects all forms of social democracy in terms of the economic affairs of the country, and will allow nothing, not even

personal friendships, to shake his beliefs. He represents a generation which has confidence in the status quo, confidence in a man's ability to guide his own destiny, and confidence in business as the most fundamental aspect of society. Andrew Aikenhead, his business partner (one has the feeling that everyone is Hillquist's business partner) is a man of shaken faith; he has spent his life working towards a goal which society calls success, whose attainment, he comes to realize, is at best a pyrrhic victory. He is not sure where he has failed, or even whether he has personally failed, but he does know that something is lacking in his life. What he lacks, he believes, is the love of his son. He says he is "seeking his son because nothing in his business life could any longer give him much joy" (p. 17). He tries to breach the gap between Michael and himself in several ways -- revisiting the past, offering comradeship and money, only to fail. Finally, through an act of forgiveness he succeeds. Michael, his wife, and their son give him the peace and contentment which he desires, and a success which surpasses anything he has achieved in the realm of business.

In Such Is My Beloved, Charlie Stewart represents the extreme socialist point of view; In They Shall Inherit the Earth, Bill Johnson serves this function. He stands opposed to everything that Jay Hillquist believes: order, money, free enterprise, in short, the status quo. Like many people during the Depression, Johnson is totally disillusioned with the existing structure of society. He sees the soup-lines, the eviction of families, the brutal crimes, the lustful old men, and the deserted girls as markers along the road leading to the establishment of a new, and better society. In response to a question

from Michael concerning the probability of Communism being instituted, Bill answers:

> "I'm not a fool, Mike. I don't expect any revolution tomorrow. It may take years. It may take all of my life and a hundred years more, but it's coming and it's worth working for, and I know that every bit of work I do now and all the tough times we go through and the beatings you take now and then all pile up and hasten the end, and the human race goes slowly forward." In his excitement, Bill whispered, pulling at Mike's arm, "You know damn well you'd feel a lot better if you, yourself, had something to live for." (p. 174)

Bill Johnson has been able to make sense of society, and more importantly, of his own existence. Communism is the promise of the future, and, by aligning himself with the Communist movement, his life has meaning, direction, and purpose. Like Hillquist, Johnson has faith; faith in a system that will eventually justify his life.

There is yet another alternative to believing in Jay Hillquist's and Bill Johnson's systems and it is faith in God. Nathaniel Benjamin, a converted Jew and disenchanted intellectual, has chosen religion rather than the political or economic beliefs of Johnson and Hillquist. Benjamin is an escapist; and as Michael says at one point, "All the guy's longing is really for friendliness and goodness and peace" (p. 146). Callaghan's portrayal of Benjamin is not particularly kind; however, we cannot help but be a little relieved that Nathaniel eventually finds sanctuary in a girls' college where he will be teaching metaphysics; his escape is complete.

Michael Aikenhead, Anna Prychoda and Ross Hillquist are characters in the novel who have not associated themselves with systems. They do not possess the 'faith' of Jay Hillquist, Bill Johnson, or Nathaniel Benjamin; instead, they have chosen a path which F.W. Watt has termed,

personalism.

Michael Aikenhead is his father's son to the extent that he has been blessed/cursed with the 'work-produce-earn money-succeed' ethic. He recognizes the inherent weaknesses of the system and attempts to identify with the labour class and the revolutionaries. However, he fails to devote himself fully, for he does not wholly believe in communist doctrines, nor does he fully reject the capitalist system. He wants to work, he wants the benefits of success, but he believes he has had bad luck, a belief which has made him a bitter man. His bitterness is founded in his frustration and is externalized in his criticism of society and of the people who perpetuate that society. His violent reaction to the young friends of Dave ("Your fathers stuck you there because they didn't know what the hell to do with you and to keep you out of trouble" [p. 33]) reveals a dissatisfaction with the products of the Hillquist world, and possibly, on a deeper level, a dissatisfaction resulting from his own rejection of that course of action. He chooses an individualist path; he is his own man and indebted to no one. The result, however, is poverty and self-denial. To counteract his own feelings of failure, Michael develops a hard exterior, a callousness, a rejection of emotions or feelings which he calls 'soft'. When he expresses real feeling and need for Anna, he calls himself an actor, and retreats to a less vulnerable position. He is afraid to feel, to experience, to hope. Nathaniel scornfully defines him thus:

> Gentlemen, I give you Mr. Aikenhead, the modern man.... no hope in anything, no faith in anything. Just immersed in matter. The

young modern....(p. 89)

Nathaniel's definition is only partly accurate. While Mike is a young modern, he is neither hopeless nor faithless. His hope and faith lie dormant, waiting to be revitalized by something or someone. He has been so disillusioned and frustrated that he is afraid to shed his protective veneer. He needs a feeling of oneness with life around him and a sense of purpose in life. His efforts to associate himself with nature fail. While on the wolf-hunt with Ross and Jo, Michael makes the equation between the predatory wolf and the capitalistic system:

> "If you want it to be clear that a man is ruthless and an enemy of society you call him a wolf, don't you?" he went on. "Any enemy of the race you call a wolf because he knows no moral law, and that's why you can't organize society, because it's full of wolves, and they don't know justice, and don't want it. The financial brigands and labour exploiters and the war profiteers and the Wall Street sharks and nearly anybody who tries to put his head up in a world of private profit, what are they? Wolves I tell you." (pp. 189 - 190)

Eventually, he does find meaning. He finds it when he acknowledges his responsibility for Dave Choate's death:

> His anxiety to state it all accurately increased, and sometimes he groped for the precise words, though his voice was never raised above a whisper. When he was finished, and could say no more, he said, with that desperate eagerness, "I'm not afraid at all, Anna. It's a simple matter now. Tomorrow I'll talk to the police." (p. 246)

By assuming responsibility for his actions, Michael becomes part of society, and has a reason to live.

In They Shall Inherit the Earth, Callaghan has developed a father-versus-son pattern -- Andrew against Michael, Andrew against Dave, Jay against Ross Hillquist. The fact that fathers and sons are at philosophical loggerheads is clearly evident in the conflict between

Andrew and Michael; but the same situation exists between Jay Hillquist and his son. Jay Hillquist is concerned only about himself, and to a limited extent, his family. His son, on the other hand, feels a responsibility towards society in general. In his capacity as a doctor, Ross heals the sick, assists the needy, and fights for better conditions for all. He actively involves himself in the daily struggles of his fellow citizens. Jay Hillquist says at one point, "To think I'd ever see the day when I'd let a personal relationship interfere with business" (p. 135). Ross, as Sheila points out, "sees a lot of confusion and disorganization around him and thinks it's up to him to straighten it out" (p. 184). Like his father, Ross, has faith, but it is faith in man rather than the systems which control man.

Anna is, in many ways, a unique character in They Shall Inherit the Earth. She is neither a Communist or a Capitalist, neither a social crusader nor a political agitator; she is so involved with trying simply to survive that all her energies are taken up with that task. Like Catherine Martell in The Watch That Ends the Night, Anna lives a personal existence; personal, but not selfish. She provides strength for her lover, Michael. She provides the love that is so noticeably lacking in the other characters. Her capacity to love is so strong, so influential, that, eventually, she helps Michael achieve the awareness that he has desperately sought.

The novel, when viewed as a whole, can be understood as a reflection of what is, what was, and what can be. The future is not spelled out explicitly, a solution of the economic problems is not offered, a new life-style is not depicted; but Michael's new awareness

promises some sort of bright future. By humbling himself, Michael will, as suggested by the title, inherit the earth.

It is clear in these two novels that a fundamental tenet of Callaghan's belief is that the individual has lost his identity, and that a powerful force generated by organized society has taken the individual's destiny out of his control. F.W. Watt puts it this way:

> The early stories and novels are full of 'strange fugitives' from society whose condition is explored, who are portrayed sympathetically because they suffer at the hands of their society, and who are scarcely responsible for their lot because they are at the mercy of forces that are greater than themselves -- biological, psychological, social -- and that are beyond their comprehension or control.[15]

Professor Watt, in another article, maintains that:

> each man has his salvation to some degree in his own hands to achieve as best he can whatever social forces are at work upon him and, above all, whatever are the external judgements of society (including the Church's) as to the true condition, moral and spiritual, of that hidden inner life.[16]

So far, several approaches designed to cope with the problems of the Depression have been isolated. Systems, either religious, commercial, or political, have been rejected by Callaghan. It would seem that, for Callaghan, if there is an answer to the social dilemma of the Depression, that answer will have to come from those individuals who are intensely aware of themselves and their relationship with society.

The Depression years taxed the spirit and moral lives of all those who lived during those times. F.W. Watt has written that Callaghan's "real achievement ... was in immersing himself so fully and sympathetically in the social turmoil of the Depression while steadily exploring its moral significance."[17] Both Such Is My Beloved and They Shall Inherit the Earth can be understood as chronicles which focus

upon the social and moral problems of the Thirties, and the manner in which individuals have confronted and have overcome those problems.

CHAPTER III

HUGH MACLENNAN

The Depression decade was a period of transition. In economic terms, the laissez-faire tradition was replaced with government intervention in monetary affairs. It became necessary during the Thirties for governments at all levels to take an active part in guiding and controlling the economic destiny of Canada. No longer could the economy respond to the traditional forces of supply and demand; governments had to effect changes by either stimulating or depressing the currency flow. This function was accomplished by the creation of the Bank of Canada in 1934 and more completely in 1936, when the Bank of Canada was taken out of the hands of private concerns and placed in public ownership. From this point onward, the government of Canada was raised from the position of a handmaiden to industry to a position of much greater influence and power. In political terms, Canada saw the emergence of new parties who challenged the supremacy of the two traditional parties. The C.C.F., Union Nationale, and Social Credit parties established themselves as the viable forces in the political arena in Canada. Their rate of growth and the amount of public support they received reflected the growing desire for change that many Canadians felt. In social terms, the transition was a much less obvious process and thus more difficult to document. Many Canadians simply did not understand what was happening around them and thus

looked everywhere and anywhere for solutions to their problems. The economic and social comfort of the late Twenties was decimated as the catastrophic events of the Depression mounted one upon the other.

In Hugh MacLennan's novel, The Watch That Ends The Night, we are presented with three essentially different responses to the events of the Depression, as demonstrated by the actions and reactions of the three main characters, Catherine Martell, George Stewart and Jerome Martell. One critic, Alec Lucas, believes that MacLennan "has expanded the romance into a novel of social analysis."[1] Although most of the critics seem to agree on this point, they do not, however, agree completely about the manner in which the social analysis is presented.

Patricia Morley in The Immoral Moralists, maintains that The Watch That Ends The Night is a celebration of life.[2] Her focus is primarily upon Catherine Martell's daily confrontation with death and her [Catherine's] struggle to lead a normal life regardless of her severe physical handicap. Catherine has had, in Morley's view, from the beginning of her life, a capacity to experience, a capacity to give everything to the moment regardless of its consequences. She has given over the responsibility of her life to a power greater than herself, trusting that she is not as a fly to wanton boys. Because, Morley concludes, she is free of this heavy burden, she is able to live life to its fullest.

Paul Goetsch, in his article "Too Long to the Courtly Muses", has a different perspective on the novel. He maintains that The Watch That Ends The Night is a study of "the mature man ... who faces violence or

a narrow environment squarely and does not permit himself to be defeated or cramped by it."[3] His focus is on George Stewart and the manner in which George is able to weather the social and economic storms of the Depression. Like many during the Thirties, George survives the Depression experience and eventually comes to the realization that life is more than merely survival; life must have hope as well.

Yet another critic, George Woodcock, holds that the novel is a study of the "social idealism of the Thirties."[4] In his critical work, Hugh MacLennan, Woodcock says that The Watch That Ends The Night is a quest for meaning and purpose in life. Although this generalization applies to all the central characters in the novel, it is particularly appropriate in Woodcock's view for Jerome Martell. Woodcock sees Jerome's whole life as a quest, a quest which eventually leads him to a belief in a power greater than himself. Because Jerome's search is so compelling, Woodcock labels Jerome a "super Odysseus,"[5] and although Jerome is not technically the hero, his personality is so forceful that he tends to dominate the novel.[6]

The Watch That Ends The Night thus lends itself to several interpretations, though the novel is not as diffused as the previous critical references might suggest. Admittedly, Jerome, Catherine, and George represent different reactions to the problems of the Thirties, but MacLennan makes it clear by the end that each person has been moving towards the same goal. That goal, although for the most part an unconscious one, is religious: a belief in something or someone greater than man guiding the destiny of mankind.

Early in the novel George attempts to portray his wife, Catherine, only to be caught up in a multiplicity of descriptions. She is a composite of many things: a lover and an artist, a mother and a queen; she is wise and yet innocent. Although George cannot find a single definition broad enough to contain Catherine, he does recognize that quality which enables her to be all these things:

> Some people have within themselves a room so small that only a minuscule amount of the mysterious thing we call the spirit can find a home in them. Others have so much that what the world calls their characters explodes from the pressure. I think of it as a force. I have recognized -- and I am no mystic -- an immense amount of this spiritual force in people whose characters, judged by the things they do, are bad. In others who are blameless I have found hardly any. Probably I will never be able to know what its real nature is; all I do know is that I know it is there. Call it the Life-Force if you prefer the modern term; call it anything you like. But whatever it is, this thing refuses to be bounded, circumscribed or even judged. It creates, it destroys, it re-creates. Without it there can be no life; with much of it no easy life. (p. 27)

To Catherine's mind, the Depression has relatively little significance, except, of course, as it affects those she loves. Because of her rheumatic heart, Catherine has learned to face the prospect of death; with every beat of her heart she is continually reminded of her frail grasp of life. Catherine has two choices: she can protect herself and prolong her existence through emotional and physical isolation, or she can extract from every precious moment everything that life has to offer. Because of the strength of what George calls her Life-Force, Catherine chooses to experience all that she can in the fullest possible way, an effort which necessarily demands all her efforts. Catherine simply does not have the physical strength to adopt the kind of social consciousness that Jerome displays. In a conversation with

George, she says of Jerome:

> "if he must go to Spain, then he must go to Spain ... He tells me a personal life doesn't matter in a time when millions are going to be killed. I suppose he's right, but I'm a woman and a personal life is all I can understand." (p. 236)

Catherine is aware of her limitations and of the fact that she is simply unable to be a social crusader like her husband. Similarly, Jerome understands that Catherine is controlled by her body and that because of her body's weakness, she must necessarily be a "private person" (p. 252).

Morley's contention that the novel's focus is on Catherine and her capacity to celebrate life, is reinforced by the implications of the novel's title, especially as it is Catherine who makes reference to it in a conversation with George:

> "I've been reading the Bible lately," she said. "Do you know the Ninetieth Psalm?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Nobody ever reads it any more, I suppose. They should. 'Thou turnest man to destruction and sayest: return, ye children of men.' Yes indeed all our days now are consumed in somebody's anger." (pp. 235-236)

Her Biblical allusion is to verses three and four of Psalm Ninety; and the complete quotation is as follows:

> [3]Thou dost unto destruction
> man that is mortal turn;
> And unto them thou say'st,
> Again,
> ye sons of men return.
>
> [4]Because a thousand years appear
> no more before thy sight
> Than yesterday, when it is past,
> or than a watch by night.

This passage is a statement about the relationship between mortal time and eternity, and attempts to give form to the relationship by equating a thousand years to man with a mere day to God. Catherine recognizes the insignificance of man's actions in terms of eternity. The wars that are instituted, the governments that are overthrown, the systems that are replaced, are in themselves meaningless. What is important is the manner in which man lives his life. If man is to have meaning and purpose in life, he must go beyond the temporal framework of society and believe in a power greater than himself. Catherine, Jerome, and George eventually come to this realization; and thus, they are able to see the Depression in its proper perspective.

Catherine is an integral part of The Watch That Ends The Night whose importance in the novel cannot be depreciated in any way. MacLennan has created a character of truly majestic and universal proportions; Catherine is no more a product of the Depression than Madame Flaubert is of Nineteenth Century France. Catherine has achieved a spiritual plateau, an existential position that transcends the economic, social, and political problems of her time. She has placed herself in the hands of God, and, as George remarks, "her face [shows] what I can only describe as the joy of the Lord" (p. 350).

Catherine's spiritual awareness is not a result of the economic and political turmoils of the Thirties; she did not pass through the social fires to emerge with a new, or reborn sense of the power of God. But for Jerome Martell and George Stewart, the Depression is, in many ways, a purifying agent. In The Watch That Ends The Night we become

increasingly aware of a dual response to the Depression. On one level, the Thirties is a time of economic insecurity and material deprivation. On another level, the Thirties are characterized by idealistic crusades against social evils led by powerful, compelling personalities. Through Jerome and George, we begin to understand the polarities of reactions during the Depression. Personal aggrandisement, personal security, and personal salvation are sharply contrasted with selfless dedication and public consciousness.

George, in the telling of his own story, creates a hero of epic proportions, a David confronting a host of Goliaths, a super-Odysseus, in Jerome Martell. Jerome is the illegitimate son of a lumber-camp cook who neglects to give her son a surname. His mother is murdered by one of her lovers, and because Jerome witnesses her death, he is forced to flee for his life. Against seemingly insurmountable odds, Jerome survives a dangerous voyage down a river and is eventually taken in by a kindly minister and his wife whose surname Jerome assumes. There is a curious parallel between Jerome's youth and Catherine's childhood. Both of them encounter death on intimate terms. The lesson each learns, however, is totally different. Catherine develops an inner strength to cope with her situation; Jerome, on the other hand, demonstrates a fierce determination and a powerful will coupled with physical strength which he uses to overcome obstacles. As adults, Catherine effaces herself because of her early experiences, whereas Jerome tries to impress his identity on his age.

When the Depression occurs, Jerome is a successful, and highly

respected doctor in Montreal with a devoted wife, Catherine, and a daughter, Sally. Unlike his wife, Jerome cannot be a private person; as the unsettling events of the Thirties mount one upon the other, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to remain uninvolved. He has a dual vision of the world; one vision is social and the other is political. He sees a world in disharmony, and a society stricken with disease of "economic exploitation" (p. 251):

> The place to attack disease is where it starts, and where it starts -- a good deal of it -- is in economic conditions. Not enough to eat. Not enough of the right food. The slums. The insecurity. The whole damned nineteenth century set-up Sir Rupert Irons represents. (pp. 151-152)

Unfortunately, he cannot find an adequate means to implement his social idealism. Communism does, to a certain degree, provide him with the necessary structure to fulfill his humanitarian aims; he fails to realize, however, that the Communism of the demagogues of the Montreal cells is more concerned with rhetoric than action.

Politically, Jerome sees clearly the threat that Fascism poses to the world, and he sees with equal clarity the course of action he must take. He tries to explain to George why he is willing to sacrifice his family, his profession, and possibly his life:

> This evil inside the human animal -- the fascists are charming it out like a cobra out of its hole and the capitalists let them do it because they think its good for business. You think I'm abandoning Sally by leaving for Spain. I tell you, if I don't leave for Spain then I really do abandon her to a future of fascism and concentration camps. (p. 251)

On an earlier occasion, he tells George that:

> Around 1933, with the depression and Hitler and everything else, all those bad days came back to me like unpaid bills. I was a

> doctor now. I was reasonably successful and it would have been easy to have lived a private life. But how can anyone live a private life now? All the hatred and the killing has started again and this time it's a thousand percent worse because the killers understand what they're doing. Anything to break the system that causes these things, George. Anything! (p. 157)

The unpaid bills Jerome refers to bear directly on his reasons for going to Spain. During World War I, he had been a soldier, and in that role he had been responsible for the deaths of several men. He has never recovered from this experience, and, although he dedicates his life to saving men rather than destroying them, he still feels that he must atone further for his murderous sins. When the Spanish Civil War breaks out, Jerome seizes the opportunity to repay completely his debt to mankind.

Jerome, for the most part, is not a political creature, although at times he does couch his social and political feelings in the dogma of the Communists. Essentially, Jerome is an idealist searching for a way to effect some good in an otherwise diseased society. He finds that he must go outside the traditional avenues of reform to accomplish his aims, because those avenues are totally in the hands of the capitalists. Capitalism has brought about the Depression, and capitalism is encouraging Fascism. As he remarks on one occasion, "what else is fascism but the logical product of the capitalist system?" (p. 251). For Jerome, Communism becomes the only course that promises swift and decisive action.

Eventually, Jerome leaves for Spain armed with his determination and ideals. While overseas, he struggles to bring about his idealistic aims; he fights, but ultimately he is defeated by forces too

large to be controlled by the sheer force of his will. In his introduction to The Selected Poems of E.J. Pratt, Peter Buitenhuis writes of Pratt that "his best praise is reserved for man -- man beset, exhausted, killed, but ultimately victorious."[7] Pratt would recognize Jerome as a worthy subject for his poetry.

Reflecting upon the spiritual wasteland of the Depression, George Stewart observes that "a man, apparently, needs a god. So in the Thirties we tried to make gods out of political systems, and worship and serve them" (p. 320). He goes on further to observe that:

> if he cannot believe there is meaning in the human struggle, what are his chances of emotional survival? We may assert that as flies to wanton boys, so are we to the gods who kill us for their sport. But we can't live long believing this. Human dignity forbids it. (p. 320)

Jerome Martell's victory lies in the fact that he has forsaken his old political and social gods and embraces the Christian God. In a conversation with Catherine, he recounts the moment of his spiritual awakening:

> One day I woke up and Jesus himself seemed to be in the cell with me and I wasn't alone. He wasn't anyone I had ever known before. He wasn't the Jesus of the churches. He wasn't the Jesus who had died for our sins. He was simply a man who had died and risen again. Who had died outwardly as I had died inwardly. (p. 308)

The Jerome of the Thirties is dead. He is no longer the warrior in search of a battle, no longer the crusader holding high the banner of social justice; his idealism has been tempered with wisdom and humility. Jerome has, through deprivation and suffering, found the peace he has so desperately desired and his earlier restlessness has been replaced by a spiritual tranquility. Jerome's quest for fulfillment is not over,

but one feels that now, finally, he is on the right course.

Catherine and Jerome represent two reactions to the Depression. Catherine remains detached from the social turmoil because of her private, personal struggle for life, and meaning in that life. And Jerome, the crusader, fights for reform and change, and sacrifices his personal life for his ideals. There is, however, a third alternative, another choice available to the victims of the Depression. That alternate course stands somewhere between the polarities established by Catherine and Jerome; a course which wavers between ignoring the situation and accepting the challenge that the situation presents. In The Watch That Ends The Night, George Stewart represents this third alternative.

The Watch That Ends The Night, is, as Paul Goetsch points out, George's story. Although the novel is concerned with other characters, George is the narrator; he is the one we follow, step by step, through the Depression and its aftermath. He provides the continuity in the story. He is the single thread which ties all the characters and events together, and thus he creates the unity which the novel would otherwise lack. George is, by training and by profession, a commentator; even in the Thirties, George demonstrates this aptitude by taking a position of relative detachment between the polarities of Jerome's social activism and Catherine's intense personalism.

We should, however, be careful not to accept everything George relates at face value. All that we learn about the people and the events of the Depression is guided and qualified by George's memory.

It is a psychological truism that one's memory is selective and that over a period of time one easily confuses what actually occurred with what one believes occurred. This is not to say that George's observations about the Thirties are not accurate, but it does warn us to be cautious about accepting George's story as objective truth. An important feature of MacLennan's use of the first person narrator is that it accounts somewhat for the deterministic tone in the novel. Early in the novel we are forewarned about the futility of social activism when George says:

> Was there ever a time when so many people tried, so pathetically, to feel responsible for all mankind? Was there ever a generation which yearned to belong, so unsuccessfully, to something larger than themselves? (p. 6)

It comes later as no surprise that eventually, the characters do, successfully, find something to believe in larger than themselves.

George is the product of a middle-class home, ruled, not by the head of the family, who is an ineffectual dreamer, but by a domineering aunt who has very definite plans for her nephew. Acquiescence to superior force is ingrained in him from birth. At his father's knee, George learns passivity and how to compromise his own desires. As a youth, and later as an adult, George's tendency to submit is demonstrated in his inability to act decisively. This weakness in his character is clearly illustrated on one occasion. It occurs when George and Catherine are young. At the end of a summer romance, when they know they are going to be separated, Catherine tries to show her love in the most complete way a woman can:

> "George!" she whispered, and I felt her will, her woman's will,

taking possession of my weaker male one.

Then we were in one another's arms on the sofa and she had nothing on but her dressing gown and the nightdress underneath it. I held her and felt the house quiver and saw strange images and she was alive and stirring against me, alive and embracing me with an instinctual female knowledge wonderful and frightening.

"George!" she murmured. "Dear George! Dear George!"

Then she sat up and looked at me and I saw her eyes grave in the dim light. She slipped out of her clothes and I saw her naked and strange with the white and immense wonder of a woman's beauty the first time a man or boy sees it. Then again she was in my arms and I held her blindly.

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes, yes. We must, we must."

But I trembled and was afraid not merely as a boy is who fears to make a girl pregnant, but because I was not yet a man.

She waited for me, she held me, she was as quietly restless as a quiet sea.

Finally I sat up and heard myself say: "No, I can't." (p. 75)

It is little wonder that this man is so incapable of responding to the overpowering pressures generated by the Depression.

In an interesting article in Victor Hoar's The Great Depression, MacLennan recalls "What it was like to be in your Twenties in the Thirties." In this article, he makes some pertinent observations not only about himself, but about a situation in which the George Stewarts of Canada found themselves:

> Sexually and physically we are then (in our 20's) in our prime. If in addition we have an education behind us, we are like aircraft tuned up with motors turning over ready to fly, and we can't start soon enough.
>
> The essence of being in your twenties during the Thirties was that no matter how well tuned up you were, you stayed on the ground. Many of us stayed on the ground, or just above it, for ten years.[8]

Unlike his idol Jerome, George is unable to react passionately or actively to the Depression. He does not scream out against an unjust system, or storm the barricades of the establishment; instead, he tries, as Alec Lucas remarks, "to find security through withdrawal into a private world."[9]

George's efforts to find sanctuary in a tumultuous world is the motivating force behind his actions. In Jerome, he recognizes the strength and ability to face life that he lacks. When George is asked on one occasion why he continually stands up for Jerome, he replies: "Because I admired him. Because he did a great deal for me once. Because he was brave and I wasn't" (pp. 23-24). During the Thirties, George feeds on Jerome's bravery, and draws it about him as a protective cloak against the harsh realities of life. In his relationship with Catherine, George tries to do the same thing, a fact which Jerome is quick to identify: "You married her for safety against life" (p. 343). Before Jerome returns from the dead, George has, it seems, achieved his desire. He has a loving wife, an adoring step-daughter, and a secure income: "That winter I truly thought I had begun to relax for the first time since I was a boy" (p. 6). But Jerome's return and Catherine's illness successfully destroy his carefully constructed world.

When Catherine is on the verge of death, George realizes that he has built his whole world around her; she has been his faith, his belief, his very reason for living, and he is now forced to recognize the illusion he has been trying to live. At this point, when his world

is crumbling around him, George achieves a spiritual awareness. Like Jerome, he has passed through the fires and become, as he reflects, "conscious of His power" (p. 349).

In The Watch That Ends The Night, MacLennan has traced the spiritual growth of three people; he has described forces and events which ultimately lead them to an affirmation of faith in God. MacLennan uses the Depression as a vehicle for the development of this faith. The title of the novel suggests the relative unimportance of the Thirties; and it is this realization by George, Jerome, and Catherine which places the Depression in its proper perspective. Society is not all important; man, the lone individual who achieves an understanding of his position in the universe, is all that really matters.

CHAPTER IV

EARLE BIRNEY

The novels of Callaghan and MacLennan trace a definite, observable movement in terms of the political, and spiritual growth of the characters. In Such Is My Beloved, Callaghan describes the disillusionment of Father Dowling, whose idealism is destroyed as he is forced to recognize his impotence in a savage and selfish society. His movement is a downward one which eventually results in his inability to face reality. In They Shall Inherit the Earth, Callaghan describes the changes in values brought on by the severe economic conditions of the Depression. The central characters, Michael Aikenhead and his father, Andrew, come to the realization that the gods of money and success are false. In the end, they discover that happiness cannot be equated with monetary gains; happiness results from the ability of one person to love another in a selfless and complete way, and so, the movement in They Shall Inherit the Earth, is an upward one. In MacLennan's The Watch That Ends The Night, the movement is again an upward one. Jerome and George pass through stages of social and political growth and eventually achieve a spiritual understanding of their own existences.

In Earle Birney's Down The Long Table, there is also movement in terms of the characters' growth, a cyclic pattern in this instance. Gordon Saunders ends in the same position from which he starts.

Gordon's adventures in the arena of radical politics do not significantly alter his perception of himself or of his society. The cyclic pattern in Birney's novel is a revealing, and perhaps condemning, statement about the nature of radical politics during the Depression.

When the novel opens, Gordon Saunders has been called before an American Senate committee which is conducting an investigation into persons with known Communist affiliations, either past or present. At this point in time, Gordon is a respected university professor. Because of his past associations with the Communist Party in Canada, he is now forced by the Senate Committee to account for his supposedly subversive activities. In the course of the committee's questioning, the ashes of old and forgotten memories are stirred as Gordon recalls the events, the people, and the circumstances which have caused him to be a victim of the American witch-hunt.

At this time, it is worth emphasizing the manner in which the events of the Thirties are related. As in MacLennan's The Watch That Ends The Night, the novel is dependent upon the memories of one man, a technique of first-person narration which permits an author to distort the facts of the period to his own artistic and possibly political advantage. Also, it is a technique which alerts us to the possibility that Gordon subjectively interprets past events in terms of his present situation, and thereby renders an incomplete picture of past occurrences. These features play a large part in establishing the tone of futility so apparent in the novel.

In 1932, Gordon is a lecturer in a small university in Utah. His position at the university is a tenuous one not only because of the

dire economic situation brought on by the Depression, but also by the fact that he does not have "The Degree" (p. 16), as Dr. Crump, his department head, puts it. Ultimately, these two forces unite and, when Gordon asks for a leave of absence to pursue his Ph.D., Dr. Crump takes advantage of the situation to inform him that certain criticisms have been leveled at his teaching methods and that, accordingly, he cannot count on his job being held for him. To this news, Gordon reacts in a way which characterizes his responses when under pressure. Although he wants to teach and establish himself firmly in the educational hierarchy, he reacts in a passionate, almost irrational fashion. He is accused of teaching 'sexy' poems by the son of his Dean, and as Crump is in the process of chastising him, Gordon lashes out:

> "Well, Dr. Crump, you can tell dear Latter-Day-Saintly Dean Wollonby from me that his son is a goddamned little liar, as well as a sneak. And if you'd had any decency you'd have given me a chance to prove it long ago. I never said it ... and what's more I dont agree with it." As Crump heaved the door open, Gordon's voice rose, hysterical with battle. "Because I hate your lousy bathtub prohibition gin, and I havent found a decent-looking virgin here yet and --" (pp. 19-20)

Up until this point, Gordon has successfully kept his feelings concerning the university and the people he is forced to work with bottled up. Previously, he has found release in whoring and drinking with his friend, Oscar; but now, all his emotions come to the surface. The effect of this outburst is that now he no longer needs to make a decision about whether to leave Utah or not; his actions have taken the final decision out of his hands. But Gordon has problems besides the obvious one of unemployment. He has been having an affair with a married woman, Anne, and now that he is leaving for Toronto, he must

decide where she fits into his future plans.

Anne is a strong dose of reality with which Gordon must contend. When they meet to discuss their future, Gordon is caught up in his immediate passions. He proposes that she desert her husband, abandon her children, and sacrifice everything to live with him in Toronto. But Anne, however, realizes that she has responsibilities and obligations which she must honour, specifically to her children. At the very core of her existence are her children; they represent her cause, her reason for living. She recognizes the fact that Gordon has only one responsibility and that is to himself, and she tells him so:

> "The main thing is that for you nothing, nothing, matters so much as your career, using your brains -- even though your glands sometimes persuade you otherwise." (p. 28)

This observation exposes the fundamental weakness in Gordon's personality. He is a highly intelligent man with a developed capacity for logical, rational reasoning; unfortunately, he is also, at times, subject to periods of irrationality. There are two causes which account for this inconsistency in his character. The first is that the economic aspect of the Depression has blocked the path which he would have taken in more prosperous times. Had the necessary funds been made available, undoubtedly Gordon would have gone on to receive his Doctorate, then returned to the academic fold. As it happens, he finds himself shut off from this course of action and is thus forced to seek an alternative path to follow. The second reason is simply that he does not know which path to choose. He knows that he wants "to be of some use in this stinky world" (p. 48); beyond that, he is unsure and

confused. He says of himself that he has "beliefs without belief" and that he "got on the wrong tack somewhere" (p. 39), and so, when Gordon goes to Toronto, he is still looking for a meaning, a purpose for his life; he is a man in search of a cause. As it turns out, the void is filled by the Communist party.

Gordon's first encounter with Communism occurs one day while he is walking through a park in Toronto. He pays only passing attention to a speaker on a platform who is denouncing the economic conditions, until the police move in to break up the meeting. As the authorities advance on the crowd, a policeman on a motorcycle collides with a woman pushing a baby-carriage:

> Instantly the high voice renewed its boo from under the trees, a boo prolonged and passionate, triumphing over the motorcycles, the lesser jeers, and even the little screaming woman struggling to right her baby-carriage. He had put all his strength into it. (p. 55)

Gordon's reaction at this time resembles his outburst in Dr. Crump's office, though the causes of each are distinctly different. In Dr. Crump's office, Gordon was releasing a pent-up bitterness that had been festering in him for a long time, and perhaps, although not consciously, he had rehearsed his speech many times before. In the park, Gordon reacts instinctively against the blatant and senseless violence he witnesses. Possibly, on a deeper, subconscious level, Gordon is venting his disgust with the power figures in his own private world who have arbitrarily closed the doors on his academic career. Although he does not know it, this apolitical outburst is about to draw him into a series of events that profoundly affect the next year of his life.

Gordon's action at the rally has been observed by members of the local Communist Party. They see in him a comrade, a fellow-traveller who would be receptive to their philosophical and political ideas. When they approach him, Gordon is impressed with their single-minded, idealistic dedication and concern for the problems of the unemployed. They have a cause, a banner under which to fight. Initially, his response to Communism is an intellectual one: "I'd like to be able to argue with more than a boo" (p. 66). Accordingly, Gordon attends meetings of the Social Problems Club of the University of Toronto where Communist ideology is bantered back and forth, couched in socio-political jargon. Part of Gordon's initiation into the club is a report on the Communist Manifesto. Rather than simply demonstrating an understanding of the work, Gordon presents Marx's ideas in the form of an anology, a reflection of Gordon's intellectual involvement with Communism rather than his deep committment to it. Most of the members respond in an equally intellectual fashion; everyone, that is, except Kay, who sees through the smoke-screen of the textbook-radicals: "The workers dont need to study it. They learn it through their sweat!" (p. 81).

The form which Birney employs to describe this meeting, as well as the meeting of the Trotskyite group in Vancouver which occurs later in the novel, is that of a play, complete with stage directions. If one fails to pick up the satiric resonances in the dialogue, one cannot miss the satire implied by the form; that is, these meetings are simply not in touch with the real, concrete issues of society.

We have seen how Jerome Martell's guilt feelings and his desire to atone for his sins made him an easy convert to Communism. As penance, he chose to sacrifice everything and to involve himself in the Spanish Civil War. Gordon has similar feelings of guilt because of his desertion of Anne. We are never sure that her death and the death of her unborn child are directly related to his actions. Gordon, however, believes that he is responsible. Thus, the Communists offer him the chance to redeem himself and pay part of the debt he owes. He says that he has the "anguished conviction that he could atone for his manifold crimes ... only by abandoning the role of watcher, and whirling, to the end of his strength, in the wildest dance that would have him" (p. 108). His involvement begins to shift from intellectual to active participation in Communism, and as with Jerome, the Communists are quick to capitalize on this situation. Gordon's intensive involvement does not have the cathartic result of Jerome's, for Gordon finds only frustration at the end of his quest.

Eventually, Gordon abandons his intellectual posture and assumes an active role as a political radical. This shift from passive to active participation results from two influencing factors. One is his guilt feelings; the second is his infatuation with Thelma Barstow. She is a romantic who spouts Communist dogma with a child-like sincerity; for Gordon, she represents unblemished innocence, a person free of cynicism and pessimism, able, thus, to speak the truth. As a result of these two forces, Gordon accepts the task of establishing a Trotskyite group in Vancouver.

Gordon's efforts to found a Trotskyite cell in Vancouver are decidedly unsuccessful. Although he puts all his energies into his recruitment attempts, it is to little avail. Gordon is unable to penetrate even the ranks of the working man, much less the ranks of the middle and upper classes. His comrades are those people who have absolutely nothing left to give, either in monetary or moral support. The point is driven home on more than one occasion that he is rummaging among the "ragtag and bobtail for the heroes of a new social revolution" (p. 230), but Gordon refuses to be discouraged. He joins various leftist organizations, participates in illegal raids on government offices, and goes everywhere and anywhere in search of support. When it seems that no one is interested in his party, he stumbles across an already established Trotskyite cell called The South Vancouver Workers' Educational Army. Gordon is ecstatic about finding this group of men who are already believers in Trotskyite ideas, because now he has the necessary number of men required to form an official branch of the Canadian Communist Party. This is what he had been sent to Vancouver to do, and now it looks as if he will be able to complete his task. Unfortunately, Gordon's success is short-lived. When the group applies for official membership, it is confronted with objections and qualifications from the head office in Toronto. Gordon's group has become a pawn in an ideological chess game between disagreeing factions within the Party. The end result is that Gordon's creation is stillborn. As Gordon tries to put the pieces of his shattered faith back together, he turns to a fellow-comrade, Ole Hansen, for support.

Hansen, a legitimate radical, a genuine working class product, serves an important function in the novel as a foil to Gordon's part-time radicalism. He has committed his life to bringing about the 'Revolution'. For him, Communism is not a game, not a summertime sport or amusement, but rather a deadly serious business requiring from people the utmost dedication. When Gordon turns to him seeking guidance and encouragement, Ole becomes brutally honest:

> "You is yoost havin holiday. Purty soon you go back to be perfesser. Dat's where you belong. Yaw, yaw--" he added, seeing Gordon about to protest--"you iss good socialist, Paul, and good man tew. You help me tink, but you iss only summer-time rebel." (p. 267)

Gordon's final disillusionment occurs when his friend Smitty turns out to be an informer for the police. He finally recognizes that he has been living a fool's dream. He confesses to Dr. Channing, a former university teacher and personal friend of Gordon's, that:

> I kidded myself I wanted to do great deeds, be a prophet and pioneer, a destroyer of sin. I thought it would be easy, just like my father who thought he would pick up nuggets on the next river bank. And what did I do instead! I got myself mixed up with a bunch of starry-eyed juvenile delinquents who had repudiated honest childlikeness and who started me out playing blindman's buff and then drifted off, leaving me wearing the bandage. And even when I clawed that bandage off I couldnt see properly. I couldnt see, until tonight, that I was simply gathering around me another bunch of kids, though grown-up kids, bent on pain and power, on the destruction of liberty, and intellectual honesty, or merely preferring the excitement of death to the boredom of life, or choking themselves to death on a surfeit of despotic principles." (p. 283)

As a result, Gordon, the idealist and the summertime rebel, packs his bags and leaves Vancouver to return to Utah and resume his teaching career. He has ended where he had begun. Unlike Jerome, Gordon has not experienced a spiritual awakening; unlike Michael Aikenhead, he has

not discovered a new reason for living; what he does do is again embrace his gods of old with renewed conviction. Like a long distance runner, Gordon has endured pain and suffering only to return to the point from which he has started. From his futile struggles, Gordon becomes a sadder man, but, unfortunately, no wiser. The experience of his summertime radicalism does not bear fruit until many years later when Gordon is forced to examine his motives and beliefs during the Depression. It is obvious to Gordon that Communism, as a political system designed to alleviate social problems, does not work, and capitalism must suffer a similar judgement. What Gordon does learn, he calls "the grandeur of the thinking beast" (p. 298), a personalist affirmation very much like the philosophic conclusions reached by Michael Aikenhead in They Shall Inherit The Earth, and Jerome Martell, Catherine and George Stewart in The Watch That Ends The Night. Their conclusion is that man, not collectively, but individually, will be ultimately victorious in the social arena of the Twentieth Century.

Gordon's realization at the end of Down the Long Table that Communism is a fool's game does not come as a surprise to the reader. From the beginning, we are made aware of the internal divisions within the leftist movement which necessarily negate cohesive and effective action. One excellent example can be seen in the incident in which Gordon is expelled from the Social Problems Club because the rest think he has Trotskyite leanings:

> No! No! Why do you want to drive me away from you, when we all have so much in common? You and I, all of us, surely we all want to make an end to this dreary succession of crises and depressions and unemployment and despotisms and war that we are sunk in; we all

> believe some form of international socialism might end them, whatever new problems of government it might create -- (pp. 85-6)

Communism, for Gordon, is a means to an end, a tool for the betterment of society. Unfortunately, the others see Communism as an opportunity to perform ideological gymnastics. This tendency on the part of verbal radicals manifests itself time and time again in the novel both in Toronto and Vancouver. Every time in Down The Long Table that Communists with slightly different political beliefs meet, they end up arguing the fine points of dogma and forget the concrete issues of the time.

Part of the ineffectiveness of the Communists for Birney can be explained in terms of ideological dissent; but beneath the verbiage, there is a much more fundamental reason. It is simply that the leaders of the movement do not believe in the cause they are leading. Leo Sather, for example, advises Gordon to go to Vancouver rather than return to his teaching position in Utah. But he reveals his true feelings when he thinks to himself, "the poor bloody innocent; if I were in his place, if I had a choice again, I'd run, I'd run hellbent from everybody's politics" (p. 161). Shortly after that, Sather abandons The Cause and elopes with Thelma. Jack Barstow, another supposedly dedicated believer in Communism, seizes the first opportunity he has to join what he had previously called the "Technocracy" (p. 103). Years later, Jack reminisces: "Hard to remember what bloody fools we were, isnt it? Romantic as all get out. Still, we had a lot of fun" (p. 296). Stephen McNames, a one-time district organizer for the Communist Party in Vancouver, becomes an informer for the

American government. These men sell-out to the very establishments which they have professed to loath. It is little wonder if Birney's views are accurate, that Communism lacked the necessary unity to make it a viable force during the Depression.

It is not only the leaders who demonstrate a willingness to forsake Communism for the greener pastures of the middle class; most of the rank and file membership join the Communists because they are unemployed, beaten, and frustrated by a system they feel has betrayed them. As one unemployed man says, the "Hell with politics, all we need's jobs" (p. 216). Another man describes the unemployed radicals this way:

> "Shat," a silent old codger on the grass said unexpectedly, pushing a yellowed crown - broken panama back from his forehead. "Belly-reds, that's what y'all are. Coupla full dinners in yer guts and you'll be yellin God Save the King as loud as any of em and dreamin of sleepin with Carole Lombard." (p. 217)

'Belly-reds' or not, until such a time as conditions improve, these men profess their faith in Communism. Mrs. Barstow sums it up when she says that professional radicalism is "fer when comrades cant find nothin else to do" (p. 150).

By undercutting the motives of the majority of Communists, Birney undercuts the movement itself. But there is a third element of the movement which must be considered before we can draw conclusions concerning the nature of Communism during the Thirties. That element is the radical who believes in Communism, acts according to those beliefs, and who is not hampered by ideological considerations. Ole Hansen and Fred Hughes are two such men. Unlike the members of the official

Communist party, they are pure Communists whose beliefs rise above the selfishness and pettiness so characteristic of the other radicals in the novel. In many ways, Hughes and Hansen are quite similar in nature to Jerome Martell. Like Martell, each of them struggles to bring about social changes and to improve the conditions of man. There is, however, one fundamental difference between Martell, and Hughes and Hansen: it is that Martell retains a spark of idealism after his defeat, whereas Hughes and Hansen are described as fanatics who fight, but have forgotten what they are fighting for. As Gordon remarks on one occasion:

> Liberty! They've got themselves permanently drunk on the idea of it, as underdogs always do, without any notion what to do in their euphoria except to scream, in freedom's name, against a passing cloud for raining on them. (p. 198)

Hansen and Hughes, and others like them, have lost their dreams, lost that spark of idealism which gives purpose and meaning to their suffering. The future for them promises only continued loneliness and frustration, and, eventually, blessed relief in death.

As Gordon stares down the long table at his Senatorial inquisitors, he realizes that he does have a belief, a Cause to which he adheres. He has faith, not in God or in organized society, but in man.

> I believe in man, he thought, moistening his lips to speak, even in these men, for somewhere in them, as in me, is the power, however denied, to achieve the grandeur of the thinking beast, to hope and to imagine, to adventure into change, to create beauty and to share it, and in self-denial itself to assert the importance of their separate selves and the inconsequence of their mortality. (p. 298)

Communism, like success to Andrew Aikenhead, has been a false god. Gordon realizes that he does not have to go outside himself to define his beliefs. He has finally found the words to express that which he

has felt from the very beginning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

During the Great Depression, Canada experienced severe economic, political and social upheavals. One of the many reactions to the deplorable conditions occurred within the ranks of Canadian novelists. Morley Callaghan wrote about the Depression as it was happening, whereas Earle Birney and Hugh MacLennan wrote their novels two decades or so later. Nevertheless, these three novelists can be legitimately termed chroniclers of the Depression. Each of the four novels discussed in this thesis is immersed in the social and political problems of the Thirties, and in the final analysis, reaches a common conclusion. Where the novels differ is in the perspective of the authors and the manner in which they reach their conclusions.

In Such Is My Beloved (1933) and They Shall Inherit The Earth (1934), Callaghan has assumed a position of detachment and objectivity concerning the effects of the Depression on the lives and attitudes of his characters. There is in the two novels a sense of restraint, a sense on his part of holding back any comment, either damning or otherwise. Hugh MacLennan, in The Watch That Ends The Night (1959), is somewhat less detached from the socially destructive events of the Depression. MacLennan controls the temper of his novel through the personality of his narrator, George Stewart. Earle Birney, in Down The Long Table (1955), is, on the other hand, more passionate, more

outraged, more demonstratively concerned about the effects of the Depression on society than either Callaghan or MacLennan. Like George Stewart, Gordon Saunders, the narrator of Birney's novel, controls the degree to which emotions are expressed.

Callaghan writes of the Depression as a reporter would write about the effects of a natural disaster. The facts are presented to the reader with a marked lack of comment. Callaghan's reportorial technique is reinforced by his use of the third-person narrator. When he published Such Is My Beloved and They Shall Inherit The Earth, the Depression was not yet part of history. Callaghan's novels served to make his readers more keenly aware of what was happening both around them and to them during the Thirties.

When Earle Birney and Hugh MacLennan published their novels in 1955 and 1959 respectively, Canadian society was in the midst of a post-war boom. Although the Depression was still influencing societal values, the pain and anguish of the Thirties had passed. Thus, it was necessary for these two authors to recreate the feeling of desperation, the feeling of being cut adrift in turbulent waters, if their messages were to have the desired impact. Both authors use the first-person narrator to create and to maintain an atmosphere of immediacy in their novels.

The main characters in each of the four novels are disillusioned when the organizations or systems in which they believe, fail to meet the demands of the Depression. In Such Is My Beloved, Father Dowling learns that the Church is more concerned about the ninety and nine than it is about the one that is lost. When Father Dowling realizes that he

is alone in his Christian desire to bring about some good in society, he suffers a mental breakdown. Fortunately, Michael Aikenhead, in They Shall Inherit The Earth, is able to survive the loss of his 'religion', the religion of capitalism, and to emerge possessing a strong sense of his own identity and worth. Jerome Martell and George Stewart in The Watch That Ends The Night, and Gordon Saunders in Down The Long Table, are disillusioned when they realize that Communism, or any political movement for that matter, is an impotent force, unable to effect the social changes they had hoped for. Out of the rubble of their social idealism, a new faith emerges, a faith which for Gordon is founded in man and which for Jerome and George is founded in man and his relationship with God.

Although the three authors differ in their artistic representation of the Depression, they reach a common conclusion. Callaghan, as Blair Neatby observes, is "more concerned with individual morality than with class struggle."[1] MacLennan, according to Robert Cockburn, explores "the development of a person through conflict with the external human condition."[2] Birney, as his main character Gordon Saunders concludes at the end of the novel, believes in man. The point at which the three authors converge is in asserting the importance of the individual. Clearly, Callaghan, MacLennan and Birney recognize the influence of external forces which are continually operating on society; however, they assert that the individual is capable of overcoming these forces and leading a private and meaningful existence. Ultimately, the novels must be seen as affirmation of the value and overriding importance of the single, lone individual.

NOTES

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[2] Charles Kindleberger, The World in Depression 1929-1939 (London: The Penguin Press, 1973), p. 292.

[3] Michael Horn, The Dirty Thirties (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1972), p. 24.

[4] Ramsay Cook, with John Saywell and John Ricker, Canada A Modern Study (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 215.

[5] Donald Creighton, Canada's First Century (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1970), pp. 198-199.

[6] Ibid., p. 203.

[7] Ibid., p. 205.

[8] Horn, The Dirty Thirties, p. 13.

[9] L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, ed., The Wretched of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. x.

[10] James H. Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1966), p. 42.

[11] H. Blair Neatby, The Politics of Chaos (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1972), pp. 33-34.

[12] R.C. Brown and M.E. Prant, ed., Confederation to 1949 (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1966), p. 222.

[13] Horn, The Dirty Thirties, p. 327.

[14] Gray, The Winter Years, p. 149.

[15] Horn, The Dirty Thirties, p. 340.

[16] Ernst Watkins, R.B. Bennett -- A Biography (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), pp. 186-187.

[17] Neatby, The Politics of Chaos, p. 35.

[18] James T. Patterson, "Federalism in Crisis: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States in the Depression of the 1930's," The Great Depression, ed. Victor Hoar (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969), p. 12.

[19] Neatby, The Politics of Chaos, p. 189.

[20] Cook, Canada A Modern Study, p. 226.

[21] Ibid., p. 228.

[22] Neatby, The Politics of Chaos, p. 112.

[23] Creighton, Canada's First Century, p. 211.

[24] Neatby, The Politics of Chaos, pp. 127-8.

[25] Creighton, Canada's First Century, p. 209.

[26] Brown and Prang, Confederation to 1949, p. 251.

[27] Cook, Canada A Modern Study, p. 223.

[28] John A. Garraty, "Radicalism in the Great Depression," Essays on Radicalism in Contemporary America, ed. L.B. Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 104-105.

[29] Gray, The Winter Years, p. 9.

[30] Ibid., p. 14.

[31] Grayson and Bliss, The Wretched of Canada, p. xxv.

[32] Horn, The Dirty Thirties, p. 15.

[33] Garraty, "Radicalism in the Great Depression," p. 103.

[34] Gray, The Winter Years, p. 28.

Chapter II

[1] J.R. MacGillivray, "Fiction," University of Toronto Quarterly, 6 (1936-7), p. 363.

[2] Victor Hoar, Morley Callaghan (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969), p. 1.

[3] Robert Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," Tamarack Review, 7 (1958), pp. 5-6.

[4] Hoar, Morley Callaghan, p. 79.

[5] F.W. Watt, "Morley Callaghan as Thinker," Masks of Fiction, ed. A.J.M. Smith (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1961), p. 118.

[6] Hoar, Morley Callaghan, pp. 27-28.

[7] Malcolm Ross, in the introduction to Such Is My Beloved (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1933), p. v.

[8] Hugo McPherson, "The Two Worlds of Morley Callaghan," Queens Quarterly, 64 (1957), p. 352.

[9] Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," p. 25.

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[13] Brandon Conron, Morley Callaghan (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), p. 87.

[14] F.W. Watt, in the introduction to They Shall Inherit The Earth (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1934), p. v.

[15] Watt, "Morley Callaghan as Thinker," p. 117.

[16] Ibid., p. 119.

[17] Watt, in the introduction to They Shall Inherit The Earth, p. vii.

Chapter III

[1] Alec Lucas, Hugh MacLennan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1970), p. 56.

[2] Patricia Morley, The Immoral Moralists (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 98.

[3] Paul Goetsch, "Too Long to the Courtly Muses," Canadian Literature, 10 (1961), p. 29.

[4] George Woodcock, "A Nation's Odyssey," Canadian Literature, 10 (1961), p. 8.

[5] George Woodcock, Hugh MacLennan (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969), p. 60.

[6] Woodcock, Hugh MacLennan, p. 102.

[7] Peter Buitenhuis, ed., Selected Poems of E.J. Pratt (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968), p. xvii.

[8] Hugh MacLennan, "What it was like to be in your Twenties in the Thirties," The Great Depression, ed. by Victor Hoar (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969), p. 145.

[9] Alec Lucas, Hugh MacLennan, p. 22.

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[1]Neatby, The Politics of Chaos, p. 85.

[2]Robert Cockburn, The Novels of Hugh MacLennan (Montreal: Harvest House Ltd., 1969), p. 110.

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