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BEYOND SURVIVAL:
THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST OUT OF THE NORTH IN MEN

by

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ABSTRACT

"Beyond Survival: The Making of an Artist out of the North in Men" explores four texts which consider "the North" as a region of the Canadian mind extending beyond the geophysical boundaries of the North as place. It describes the psychological process of "dying" by which the frontier-type and artist alike accept that death cannot be escaped, that immortality can be realized only symbolically, that art, not life, is the ultimate source of the "survival" both are seeking.

In But We Are Exiles, Robert Kroetsch's protagonist ends his journey into the geophysical North when he "dies" psychologically, his willed ego-death signalling his potential to recreate himself as artist and the North as a metaphysical place. North of Summer describes a practising artist's search for this internalized frontier--the North in men. When Al Purdy's poet-persona accepts that there is no "given" entry to this place, he also accepts his need to "die," to surrender his ego to art just as Kroetsch's protagonist surrendered his to life. In Riverrun, Peter Such enters this "other" frontier as a shaman-artist. His dreams are his entry to the spirit world of the Beothuk dead, his novel a symbol of their spirit's continuing existence. Finally, in Surfacing, Margaret Atwood combines the initiation rites of the shaman-elect with the birth of the potential artist. Her protagonist's "survival" in the physical and metaphysical "near North" enables her to return to the world of the living as an intercessor who has learned to confront life and death creatively.

Beyond Survival : The Making of an Artist out of the North in Men

Dedicated to the students of Lake Melville High School

North West River, Labrador

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INTRODUCTION

In Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972), Margaret Atwood makes the "sweeping generalization" that the "single unifying and informing symbol"[1] at the core of Canadian literature--English and French--"is undoubtedly Survival, la Survivance" (p. 32): "Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who make it but of those who made it back from the awful experience--the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship--that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except gratitude for having escaped with his life." (p. 33). Though possibly a despairing summary of Canadian literature, Atwood's examples illustrate that her pessimism is not unfounded. Whether the "awful experience" was physical (the wilderness, the climate, the Indians); or psychological (first Britain and now America dominates our socio-economic-cultural identity); or spiritual (even the "gods" of this place are alien after several centuries of settlement), our literature reveals a people more obsessed with what they fear--death--than with what they desire--life. Canadian protagonists are, in Atwood's scheme, less victors than victims of a country they somewhat pretentiously call their own.

If Atwood's "thematic guide" seems simplistic, its implications are not. Because a victim's survival depends on the will of some "other," his escape is more a reprieve, or a stay of execution, than it is a release. Ultimately, he will die and his fear will have become a self-fulfilled

prophecy. Survival's purpose, summarized in a quotation from Saint-Denys-Garneau, is to make that danger apparent:

> For it is unthinkable to sit
> quietly accepting
> the body of this death
> "The Body of This Death"

A second epigraph, by Margaret Avison, explains Atwood's more than terse style:

> Telling it in plain words
> Makes me see how I feared the wrong thing.
> "The Agnes Cleves Papers"

As critic, Atwood deals more with the facts--the "plain words"--than with their origin. She suggests that our colonial mentality is in part responsible for our victim-mentality, but she does not explain why. She asks, however, if it is possible "that Canadians have a will to lose which is as strong and pervasive as the Americans' will to win?" (p. 35). It is a question well worth considering for it names what is quite possibly the essential psychological difference between our two identities.

Survival has never been a question in the Puritan inheritance of America. It is a "given." "Manifest destiny" is the expression of a people who believed from the start that the new world was a promised land given to the chosen. In Canada, however, the new world belonged to France and to England. Unlike the American who fought a revolution to free himself from the restraining influence of any will but his own "will to win," the Canadian--French and English alike--did not kill to free himself from the old European order. His "will to lose," therefore, reflects a curious desire not to surrender his old identity to the new

world but to maintain a kind of barrier between "Who" he might become and "Where" he was now living.[2]

The exception to this colonial stereotype is the coureur de bois. A unique figure in Canadian history, Atwood likens him to the American frontiersman who moved continually West to "escape law and order" (p. 121). In the Long Journey: Literary Themes of French Canada, Jack Warwick explains the details of that escape. A rebel to the idea of settlement, the coureur de bois lived in the pays d'en haut of New France--initially, "the country upstream from the original colonies."[3] His knowledge of the wilderness and Indian way of life gave him an essential role in the economic expansion of New France. Ironically, it was his quest for freedom from the legal and moral restraints which the State and Church embodied that realized the skills each needed from him. Because he was their interpreter and guide, they could not profitably suspend his freedom; nor could they sanction his outlaw freedom.

What is significant about the coureur de bois as a figure in Canadian history is the success with which he created an identity that began to answer the riddle, "Where is here?" That was the essence of his freedom. He accepted the wilderness, his very will to live in order with its disorder defying the European principle of settlement. His journeys into the pays d'en haut were thus as much psychological as they were physical for, in leaving the settlement, he chose to become someone "other" than a European, French, Roman Catholic, rational-minded man.

"Who" the coureur de bois became in fact is less important than "Who" he became in fiction. Warwick states:

> The coureur de bois, being neither bureaucratic nor literary, leaves no succinct picture of himself. He is recorded only by his detractors, sincere or hypocritical. However, some characteristics are clear. He was not just an ordinary vagabond. His entry into the language under a name of his own denotes a certain importance in the collective consciousness. The phrase itself suggests a popular origin, and we can be certain because of the great government concern to prevent the habitants from going off to join them, that these men occupied a large place in the popular imagination.
>
> (p. 14)

While The Long Journey focuses on what the coureur de bois's quest for freedom means to the French Canadian imagination, Warwick notes that "the lone voyageur is a familiar figure among the myth makers of English-Canadian poetry" as well (p. 7). The rebel "Canadien," it seems, appeals to the aesthetic imagination as well as to the popular. By implication, "the collective consciousness" is more than just French, since the English-Canadian--according to Warwick's summary statement--is also in search of an identity that is born of that chaotic freedom.

Such a quest in the imaginative experience of English Canada is at least the premise of W. H. New's more formalist study, Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature. New states in the introduction: "The search for imaginative identity is not limited to Quebec, but whereas the liberating impulse epitomized by the bush journey there is curiously wedded to a Jansenist conception of man's role on earth, the same impulse in 'English' Canada is tied to Calvinist commitments to duty and work. The non-rational elements of the imaginative flight were thus overlaid by a stern rational will to possess the continent."[4] While Warwick associates the "imaginative flight" with going upstream--

"Downstream led to the absolute monarch [France], upstream led to possibilities without bounds" (Warwick, p.12)--New associates it with "going West." His thesis complements Warwick's, for it explains the aesthetic process by which the artist creates on paper the "imaginative identity" that the coureur de bois created in "real" flight. For the artist, however, "real" flight like the "real" West does not exist. Both are but metaphors that describe what he wants to escape--the "East." Originally, New explains:

> The East referred to England, West to the New World. It was an inexact view in several ways, and as Roughing It in the Bush later reminds us, it had force not as fact but as myth: it was an idea of wilderness apparently needed by England. If it could not last in Canada itself, its demise was partly due to the fact that settled Canada--no longer total wilderness or pagan or unknown or mythic, but plainly genteel and real--required a frontier myth of its own. It became, in other worlds, an 'East' in its own right, locating another 'West' further into the continent.
>
> (p. xv)

As the continent became increasingly ordered, however, even the Canadian "idea of wilderness" required re-creating. Ultimately, "each new East was an old West after all" (New, p. xv), the effect of which was to push the quest for frontier freedom and "imaginative identity" farther and farther West.

In New France, the original pays d'en haut also gave way to civilization: "the extreme case is that of Montreal, whose independence was once a frontier problem for Quebec, and which is now the biggest centre of Canadian society" (Warwick, p. 34). In spite of the cumulative effect of the civilizing process, the pays d'en haut have survived as an

imaginary frontier. They have also survived a change in name to "the North," the newer term, Warwick speculates, a consequence of the shift of the original frontier from the St. Lawrence Valley to the "North-West parts of the country, which meant the prairies until Confederation made new designations possible" (pp. 24-25). While freedom and "imaginative identity" thus lay farther and farther away from the geographical boundaries of New France, French-Canadian survival in an increasingly English world depended on the creation of a "national cultural identity" (Warwick, p. 7) that espoused the very values the coureur de bois had denounced and the frontier represented. Both, therefore, required redefining.

To begin, the coureur de bois became the voyageur, the new name describing a type supposedly less rebellious and anti-social than his prototype. His heroic qualities could then be fused to the habitant's domestic ones. Through this process, historians and writers were able to participate in the spiritual and cultural rayonnement of French Canada. Their texts and stories idealized "courage, industry, fidelity to Church and cultural tradition" (Warwick, p.37), while simultaneously articulating new values for the "old" pays d'en haut where the habitant lived on his farm. At the same time, the missionary, another voyageur type, extended French-Canada's spiritual frontier into the far North, a fact that also contributed to the popularizing of the new term, the North.

In contrast, then, with English Canada's progressive expansion West, French Canada's frontier expanded and retreated simultaneously. For this reason, Warwick includes in his survey "works where the physical notion of the North is reduced to a small vestige, but where the spirit of this elusive North is strong" (p. 6). He divides the "elusive" North, however, into three sections. The first, "The Pays d'en Haut Proper," describes

the literature that concerns itself with the region's original dialogue: "expansion through pioneering versus liberty through the fur trade" (p. 40). The second, "The Pseudo-North" is "a land of illusion which has all the epic qualities of the North without being too far away from civilization" (p. 41). It is into this North that the city-dweller can escape for the weekend, finding in his return to the "wilderness" the "imaginative identity" that first the coureur de bois/voyageur and secondly the habitant embodied. The third, the far North, is divided between literature which deals with "specific Northern peoples" and literature which explores the effect of the far North's "splendor. . . challenge. . .and loneliness" on protagonists in search of spiritual adventure" (p. 45).

Warwick thus agrees with New that the frontier "idea" cannot be contained by "place." New himself admits that "in many ways the Arctic is a new Canadian 'West'" (p. x), though the location is not so important as the idea that the frontier holds a redemptive disorder for highly ordered societies.[5] The objection that all physical frontiers are soon ordered by the dictates of the immigrant society does not invalidate the thesis; rather, the last frontier is an expression of a spiritual yearning which is as easily realized in imaginative experience. New's thesis assumes, therefore, that the transformation of the "frontier from a physical to a metaphysical 'place'" (p. xxiv) will be perpetual, and that the created 'place,' like the physical West, will represent a recreative freedom. What this emphasis upon "freedom" overlooks, however, is the "survival" thesis of an Atwood which suggests that "chaos" might be utterly destructive, or might leave at best only a lame handful of

survivors. For those whose lives are claimed by the frontier, chaos must be redefined to accommodate the presence of death. The frontier itself then offers freedom only when death as the last frontier can be conquered.

John Steinbeck's The Red Pony poses such questions for American culture about the last frontier, though it serves as an illustration of the problem inherent in frontier notions of freedom. "Westering," the protagonist's old grandfather explains, "was as big as God."[6] It, like the landscape it was named after, promised infinite freedom. At the Pacific, however, the old man and "the big crawling beast" suddenly discover that there is no infinite geographical frontier to escape into: "There's no place left to go. There's the ocean to stop you." Realizing that the freedom they desired was "as big as God," and that the end of the frontier means death for old men, the line of old fellows on the beach could only hate "the ocean because it stopped them," unless they were able to re-articulate the meaning of "westering."

This need to transform the meaning of "westering" from "a physical to a metaphysical" level may already be expressed incipiently in French Canadian culture in the figure of the voyageur. According to Warwick, "There was little before La Montagne secrète to show that the voyageur type in literature was on his way to becoming an artist. On the other hand, there was everything to show that this was his destiny" (p.99). Such a transformation of the wanderer into the figure of the artist might suggest a natural movement from history to art; it also expresses a natural tension in the psyche between order and freedom. If, as Warwick suggests, the journey of the voyageur is toward internalized landscape, we might then speak of any such "metaphysical place" as "the

North in men" (p. 47). But what is now expressed too often to be ignored in this "metaphysical" expression of "North" is the threat involved to the creative imagination in its recreative freedom. The symbolical result, if we are to believe Atwood, is more often death or, hardly more comforting, a haunted survival, unless death itself be transformed from a physical to a metaphysical level.

Several recent works in the literature of English Canada suggest that such a transformation has in fact been taking place in our imaginative experience. Two books which appeared in the mid-sixties transcend the more familiar literature of disaster by emphasizing the creative potential of two men who enter, one way or another, the world of the dead. Peter Guy of Robert Kroetsch's But We Are Exiles (1965) runs north from personal (particularly sexual) chaos to recover some lost sense of order; but what he finds in the north is a projection of his repressed unconscious which forces him to undergo a symbolic death and recreation of himself through submission to the communal force inherent in the sex-instinct. Al Purdy's poetic persona in North of Summer (1967) is more aware than Peter Guy of an ancient world, even a dead world, in the North; but his quest for some entrance into the dead time leads to a new understanding of himself as an artist who can remake (because he "remembers") himself in the image of an artist from that extinct culture.

Two subsequent novels, both from the early seventies, make explicit use of shamanic metaphors to suggest that "the North in men" is in fact this metaphysical place where the souls of the dead are encountered--with decisive results for the making of the artist. Peter Such's Riverrun (1973), on one level a study of cultural guilt in the extinction of the

Beothuks, is nonetheless a study of blood guilt as a shaping force in the lives of both a Beothuk shaman-protagonist and a modern artist. The creative relief of guilt leads, in each instance, to a redefinition of the tensions between self and communal wills. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's Surfacing (1972) belies a thesis of mere survival; the unnamed protagonist enters into a world of death in the "near North" where she can emerge only by confronting her guilt and creating new symbols for herself which both authorize her human existence and intercede for her in the world of natural forms.

With the exception of Kroetsch's Peter Guy, each of these protagonists (in the case of Such, the artist-protagonist implied by the preface) is reborn out of the Northern journey as an artist. Warwick's analysis of the voyageur turned artist-figure in Quebec literature seems prophetic for English Canadian culture as well. The common obsession with the North as a place of the dead nonetheless forces any cultural investigation into psychological analysis. For what seems to be discovered in "the North in men" is the inspiring fear of death itself as one of the wellsprings of art. Peter Guy of But We Are Exiles does not grow specifically into an artist; rather, he begins to recreate his personality, an act which is itself the prerequisite of artistic production. For this reason, Otto Rank's psychological theories of "art and artist" are particularly helpful in explaining the conflict of two wills in Peter Guy's quest, since his flight from the West to the North involves the tensions of freedom and order which are intrinsic to the arguments of both Warwick and New. Briefly, Rank's theory of the artist presumes that art is an answer to death, made out of an individual fear of death but made also on

behalf of a community lacking other symbolic forms of consolation. In Art and Artist, Rank argues that the sexual impulse is made to serve the individual will in order to immortalize the ego in symbolic form. The potential artist therefore defeats death by a process of metaphysical transformation, though he must himself die, as it were, to create a new "ideal-Self."[7] The process, as Rank explains in "Self and Ideal," is nonetheless not without guilt for the creator who strives for his own enrichment at the expense of the species. Psychologically, then, there must be some attendant submission to race (or biological will) in his work, if not in his life.

This tension between ego-will and race-will is not easily solved for the artist who also feels his communal guilt in the extinction of a whole race (Such's Riverrun). Here, Andreas Lommel's ethnological theories about blood-guilt in the practice of shamanism[8]--where the shaman absolves the guilt of the tribe in animal murders by abolishing death in his imagination, by inventing the souls of the animals he kills--might offer a further refinement of the specific problem of artistic guilt in relation to community. Finally, Mircea Eliade's theories of shamanism as a spiritual ideology, rooted in but reforming the beliefs of a traditional community[9], provide an equivalent of Rank's art ideology for investigating the phenomenon of spiritual rebirth out of the artist's descent into death.

The "real" literary journey in what follows, then, is toward a new concept of the metaphysical "North in men," and a new figure of the artist as "voyageur" who is in creative confrontation with death, not in flight from it. When the journey's "new" meaning is juxtaposed with the coureur de bois's original flight from order, one can speculate that the

historical figure was also looking for infinity--a place which suggests that the "immortal" Self he might adopt would be unfettered by boundaries of any kind. But the difference for the artist in his quest is that any journey into chaos must result in a reordering of experience and a new creation of form. It is the form the journey takes in every case which must reveal the depth of transformation of death itself as one frontier--from a physical fact to a metaphysical fiction--from collective despair to a new faith in aesthetic order.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 31. All further references will be to this edition and will be identified within the text in parentheses.

[2] Atwood quotes Frye (p. 10), as does W. H. New (p. xi) in the introduction to Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature (Toronto: New Press, 1972). Frye's own words are taken from The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 220: "It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question "Who am I?" than by some such riddle as "Where is here?"

[3] Jack Warwick, The Long Journey: Literary Themes of French Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 35. All further references will be to this edition and will be identified within the text in parentheses.

[4] W. H. New, Articulating West, p. xviii. All further references will be to this edition (see n. 2 above) and will be identified within the text in parentheses.

[5] See W. L. Morton, "The Relevance of Canadian History," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 48-70, for an alternate view of the importance of a northern frontier to the continued French and English identity in the

Canadian character. See as well Dick Harrison's "Fictions of the American and Canadian Wests," Prairie Forum, 8(Spring 1983), 89-96, for a discussion of Morton's use of the Laurentian hypothesis to confirm the reluctance of Canadian culture to lose its "European" identity.

[6] John Steinbeck, The Red Pony (1937; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 91.

[7] Otto Rank, "Self and Ideal" in The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings, ed. Philip Freund. (New York: Vintage, Knopf, 1959), p. 292.

[8] Andreas Lommel, Shamanism: The Beginnings of Art, trans. Michael Bullock (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 15.

[9] Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollinger Series LXXVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 7-8.

CHAPTER ONE

"Dying North": The Conflict of Two Wills in *But We Are Exiles*

In *But We Are Exiles* (1965), Robert Kroetsch juxtaposes the journeys of Michael Hornyak and Peter Guy through two regions of the Canadian landscape, the West and the North, respectively, to articulate the need in Canadian experience for ordering chaos. Hornyak's continuing experience of chaos in the West, and Peter's initial experience of order in the North, project the opposing but balancing tensions of energy and stasis that Kroetsch sees as fracturing the Canadian psyche.[1] The men's failure to reconcile these tensions informs the psychological and physical exile with which each responds to his particular landscape. While the men's failure is personal, Kroetsch's intention is to "disclose"[2] the source of their failure, to engineer a confrontation between the fear of chaos and obsession for order that will ultimately "unhide"[3] the source of this dualism in psychological and cultural experience.

The novel begins with its protagonist, Peter Guy, dragging the Mackenzie River outside Norman Wells for the drowned body of Michael Hornyak. The novel ends with Peter Guy's throwing the body back into the river in order to claim for himself the deadman's place in the canoe/coffin. While critics do not dispute the meaning Kroetsch has assigned to the river-journey and doppleganger motif--Peter's search for his missing identity is explicit--critics do dispute the meaning Kroetsch has rather

ambiguously assigned to this final moment of chaos and ominously imminent death.

John Moss interprets the moment as Peter Guy's "final surrender to the metamorphosis"[4] that began six years earlier when he and Hornyak met. Morton Ross agrees that the action might be "a final reconciliation. . .of his essential identity with Hornyak," although Ross also speculates that the action might be "a violent usurpation, a repudiation or exorcism of Hornyak's memory and all that it represents."[5] Peter Thomas, emphasizing Peter Guy's passivity, compares him to Narcissus, "a stockaded self who will not plunge (even by surrogate) into the destructive element. . . . hence his rebirth is impossible."[6] Frank Davey offers the most optimistic reading of the novel's concluding moment, although he too is obliged to qualify his enthusiasm: Peter's "failure [to create an identity] can be redeemed only by his lying in the bed [canoe] of death. . .[by his willingness] to suffer a symbolic death in order to live again. At the book's end, his quest is completed but his actual life is in extreme jeopardy and may well end within a few hours."[7]

In summary, these critics agree that either the "old" Peter dies and Hornyak is re-incarnated, or Hornyak is repudiated and some "new" Peter is about to be still-born. Only Peter Thomas denies the possibility for even an aborted rebirth. His endorsement of total failure underscores Atwood's survival thesis: "Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who make it but of those who made it back from the awful experience. . . . that killed everyone else."[8] Physical survival, Atwood implies, is not to be confused with psychological victory over chaos. Frank Davey agrees. One way or another the known Peter seems doomed to die. In contrast with

W. H. New who has emphasized the liberating aspect of chaos--"The real known must then come again into tension with the impalpable unknown for both of them prove necessary to the human imagination"[9]--these critics assume that chaos kills. If New ignores death altogether, the latter critical position misinterprets its creative function, for Peter's freedom to re-create himself depends primarily on his freedom to kill his old Self. That, in brief, is his journey's purpose: to recognize and affirm the creative necessity of death.

That is the truth longest hidden throughout the novel; yet the introductory scene clearly suggests that it is the truth Peter is meant to perceive. Seated in the canoe, he is gazing at his "mirror smooth" reflection in the river: "this time he saw his own face watching him."[10] The implication that he had once seen another face in the mirror recalls the folk mythology of the double, the belief that when a man loses his reflection he will die, while his double--the face in the mirror--will live vicariously and posthumously in his place.[11] This, of course, is what did happen to Peter six years earlier. He walked into Kettle's room in Banff and saw in the mirror not his anticipated self-image but "the image of two raging bodies" (p. 145)--hers and Hornyak's. In silence, he turned from the room and went North. Like Narcissus, the other mythological figure recalled in this introductory scene--and Kroetsch makes the comparison explicit in the epigraph which he takes from The Metamorphoses--Peter has lived, since that moment, exclusively for himself. He has risked no "other" images appearing in the mirror. Ironically, his "going North" has served to confirm his "death" in the West, for as a riverbum he has chosen a way of life where identity is irrelevant, where "function

is so clear that each is simply called chief, skipper, second, pilot" (p. 19).

When Hornyak reappears, however, that "known" order ends. The lamp breaks, Hornyak dies, and Peter begins to undergo the transformation in identity he would have undergone had he "killed" Hornyak six years earlier. That is the significance of the body beneath Peter's reflection on the river's surface. He and his double are the same man. He may try to repress one-half of his fractured psyche, but he cannot be free of it without destroying the "other" half as well. To break his tie with Hornyak, therefore, Peter must first affirm his identity with his double. As long as he is afraid of the chaos that Hornyak represents, he will continue to be compulsively and narcisstically obsessed with order. But to affirm his identity is to accept his own "death" with Hornyak. That is the truth he accepts in the final scene: he symbolically surrenders his rage for order even as he submits himself to the threat of chaos. Ego and alter-ego are both given up in exchange for some necessary unknown.

Theoretically, this reading of But We Are Exiles posits that a "new" Peter will arise from that coffin, a man free at last to create the kind of order that both Hornyak and the "old" Peter sought but neither was able to effect. To defend so unqualified an interpretation of the protagonist's ultimate success, it will be necessary to explain, first, the "authentic"[12] meaning of the chaos and order that obsess Hornyak and Peter respectively, and second, to explain the psychological process by which a narcisstic personality-type can free himself of the fears that obsess him. Thirdly, this reading will try to explain why the conflict between chaos and order is resolved finally in the North.

Peter and Hornyak meet at the Ontario-Manitoba border, the beginning of the West. While the two are the same age, only twenty, Hornyak is the elder, not only in his experience of the world, but also in his fear of the world. He is driven more than he drives in search of a source that will end the sense of chaos: "We've got some chaos to contend with. . . . Contend a little" (p. 135) that threatens to destroy him. While a search for water is the modus vivendi that inspires Hornyak's prairie quest, alcohol and women are the only source that assuage his seemingly unquenchable thirst. What chaos is, Hornyak himself never specifically defines. He simply lives in reaction to his fear of its power and omniscient presence. When he advises Peter, however, to "Stay young and hang loose" (p. 135), he reveals that time is the pursuer that he cannot drive fast enough to beat. It is the inescapable enemy that will ultimately catch up to him and end his life. Thus he searches the West for the fountain of eternal youth. That is his hope: somewhere in the West he will find the source that will end his fear of dying.

The degree to which Hornyak is unconscious of his fear of death is evident in the degree to which his fear of chaos is irrational. The type of disorder that Kroetsch has described hardly exists in the Canadian West. Rather, it is a well-organized and regulated society with numbered roads, maps and signs that provide all the directions necessary to find the mountains and water. As well, there are police and jails for those who prefer neither to follow nor to read. Hornyak is one of those: "We're lost," he declares, disregarding the highway sign, "Regina 42 miles" (p. 139). He later tosses the map out the car window and flips "a coin at the next crossroads" (p. 141). Such contrived confusion

reveals his underlying acceptance of defeat. He no longer believes in order. Not even his culture's religious myth can inspire him: "There's hope, but not much," he says in response to the advertisement, "Ye cannot repent your life, but ye can repent your sin" (p. 137). He no longer trusts words, with good reason. He has been refused a drink in a town that boasts "The Best Water in Manitoba" (p. 138). At Gull Lake, an old blind man informs him that the water (like the man's vision) is "dried, drained and gone" (p. 138).

The West becomes more and more the opposite of the land of youth and opportunity which Hornyak wanted to discover. Keeping pace with his search for water--"I'm a walking, living drought" (p. 138)--is his growing realization that death, like a nightmare or like the West itself, cannot be escaped. Hornyak was, after all, coming from the West when he impulsively reversed directions to pick up Peter. His deliberate entrapment suggests, therefore, that his exile is complete. He is lost in the chaos of his own despair, in an emptiness as vast and threatening as the prairie world that surrounds him. What he does trust in that meaningless (to him) landscape is the first elevator: "There at Dufresne, alone and reaching, like a great damned phallus, like one perpetual hard-on. . .trying to make eternity" (p. 135). He can respond to its thrusting presence as he can to his own drives because his sexual impulse is the only energy he knows that is powerful enough to defend him against his fear of dying. It is his sexual energy, therefore, that he trusts will lead him to the source of his anticipated renewal: the female in general, Kettle in particular.

Kettle's name suggests that she may be able to renew him. Language

nonetheless fails once more, for her apparent barrenness cannot give Hornyak a second life any more than the mountain lake can renew "the wrinkled old man who couldn't die." Like the water that the old man crossed the prairies to find and then learned to curse--"Take your feet out of that damned water!" (p. 144)--Kettle, so Hornyak will learn, is not the private source of renewal that he initially perceived her to be. And yet, ironically, it is he who is sterile, not she. His own sexual impulse cannot defy death anymore than the elevator can "make" or reach eternity. Because Hornyak is so literal a man, however, he does not associate "make" with "create" but with conquest or control. When he accepts, finally, his sense that the West will not be re-ordered, he "goes North" to die, his very death, like his sterility, a reflection of his failure to live productively.

Neither, however, does Kettle's father, Fraser, live productively in the North. He too is afraid of chaos. In contrast with Hornyak who seeks an eternal present that will defy death, Fraser creates an eternal past that denies life. He arrests time by framing it in "two pictures in gilt frames: Kettle as a small girl. . .and a posed picture of an older very beautiful woman who must have been Kettle's mother" (p. 40). By not allowing Kettle, now a mature woman, to reenter his northern world, he avoids acknowledging the number of years that have passed since her birth and her mother's death, a simultaneous beginning and ending that the two frames keep separate. This contrived denial of time is really an attempt to balance life's credits against death's debits. Motivating Fraser's terrible need to control Kettle's life is his equally terrible need to appease his guilt for having created her: "And I killed her mother. In

my own fool way" (p. 46). But death cannot be cancelled by pretending that it does not exist, and so Fraser compounds his guilt, as the two "gilt" frames imply, by denying first his wife's death and secondly his daughter's life.

If Fraser's false order works for him, he knows at least that it is false, that it works only within the restricted context of his life in Aklavik. He understands that one journey to Edmonton, "just the sight of one sky-scraper" would destroy the illusion of his escape from time. In contrast with Hornyak who identified himself with the elevator's "thrusting presence," Fraser knows that his sexual impulse cannot "make eternity." He also knows that the North has protected him from his fear of that truth for too long to risk facing it now. Thus he warns Peter: "You dumb young bastard Guy. A man is free here. You ever hear the word. He is so free that nothing else in the world is ever as good again. Never. But it's a screwing jail this place. I can't leave" (p. 46). While Hornyak initially believed, albeitly sceptically, that he could defeat death, that "there's hope but not much" (p. 7), Fraser knows that he has simply avoided life to defer the payment of death. For him the North is a last, neurotic frontier. There's no place left to go in either the outer world or the inward stockade of his mind.

Fraser's stasis in time is the death-in-life exile that Peter has already begun to live. To follow Fraser's advice and leave the North, Peter must overcome his fear of death. He cannot otherwise renew himself, since, as Kroetsch implies, there is no comparable Canadian myth to D. H. Lawrence's "true myth of America, [where] she starts old, old wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing

off of the old skin towards a new youth."[13] Unlike the American Adam[14] who assumes that ever-renewed innocence is his national birth-right, no one in But We Are Exiles, neither Hornyak, nor Fraser, nor "the wrinkled old man who couldn't die" (p. 144), nor Peter at this point in his journey, has been able to metamorphose himself magically into a new youth. Neither, however, can the old men in Steinbeck's The Red Pony[15] escape the geographical limitations of the American myth of exodus. There is no new (and renewing) place to go to for the line of old men who stand at the shore of the Pacific, hating the ocean that blocks their "progress," (even where they remain oblivious to the fate of Melville's Pequod on that same ocean). Kroetsch's protagonist has, as it were, to decreate the "myth of America" by turning northward to the final frontier. But his flight is the final act of self-deception, since he will discover in the physical North that it is not "the terror of human relationships" (p. 19) he wants to escape, but the terror of dying itself. The tragedy of American innocence, then, is not inevitable in its Canadian version; but the outcome depends very much upon the depth of innocence and consequent degree of self-knowledge in the protagonist.

Peter Guy's wilful self-deception begins in virtually a sexual version of the Wild West. When he sees Hornyak's and Kettle's "two raging bodies" (p. 145) in the mirror's reflection at Banff, Peter assumes he has been innocently robbed of his fiancee. The postcards that he writes to Kettle while crossing the West suggest otherwise: "I've met him--the kind of man you should be marrying. So help me God. This is what you deserve" (p. 36). Because Peter did not mail those cards, he did not wish to give her to Hornyak voluntarily. He preferred instead that she be stolen from

a passive victim, that their intended marriage be circumvented by the wilful presence of Hornyak.

Peter's link with his alter-ego is thus based on his need to avoid guilt. He wants to blame an "other" for the loss of Kettle just as he wants to blame an "other" for the loss or death he has experienced in his fall from innocence to experience in the West. He refuses to identify with the male image in the mirror because he refuses to admit that the sexual urge or "rage" controlling Hornyak also controls him. Peter's primary fear of his double is thus a fear of his own sexuality.

That fear, explains the psychologist Otto Rank,[16] is Everyman's fear of the sexual experience which man's biological life-impulse demands, and which the ego-will in neurotic types must resist affirming. To say "Yes" to life[17] is to obey a force that threatens to consume one's individuality; to say "No" is to disobey instinct, a refusal that is a negation of life itself and a source of profound guilt. How the individual resolves the conflict that Rank asserts must rage between Impulse and Will depends on one's sense of Self, for if the surrender is made, some type of death must occur, and death to such narcissistic personality-types is as guilt-producing as the alternative which is not to live at all.

Hornyak, for instance, initially tries to live forever. The chaos that he flees in his prairie quest is his fear of being mastered by his sexual urge. It can control or "kill" him. To avoid surrendering himself to life, therefore, he forces others to surrender for him.[18] Kettle explains the process to Peter in Aklavik: "He consumed me the way he consumed everything. You lived for him or you stopped living" (p. 54). The death that she has described metaphorically is the death that Hornyak

refuses to experience. When he finally does surrender himself, it is only to commit suicide. Once again he illustrates how literal a man he is. His death is final. There can be no recreation of his ego or resolution of the guilt that he should have borne had he surrendered himself psychologically. His anticipated fear of that guilt is evident in the care with which he engineers the "accident." He taunts Peter into giving him the lamp: "You ought to get killing mad Guy. Personal pride and all that. I'll do the job myself while the rest of you think about it" (p. 23). Hornyak's last desperate act in life thus reflects his need to blame an "other" for the death that his Will is too inhibited to affirm as its own.

The guilt that Hornyak refuses to bear is the guilt that Fraser refuses to give up. While the latter's sexual urge conceived a child, it was not he, but life, the birth, that killed Kettle's mother. That is the tie, threatening but real, that binds life and death together. Creation demands a sacrifice, and in Fraser's case, the sacrifice is his wife. In contrast with Hornyak who never pays at all during his life for the "other" lives that he consumes, Fraser wants to pay with his "living" so he will not have to die. His guilt is as compulsive an attempt to control life as is Hornyak's suicide an attempt to control death.

Together, the two men are explicable in terms of Rank's contrasting non-productive personality types: Hornyak, the criminal who makes the "other" pay, and Fraser, the neurotic who punishes himself for the sake of perpetual existence. There is, nonetheless, an equally narcissistic type who is obsessed with a personal need to defeat mortality. The difference with the artistic type is that he ultimately affirms his surrender to life in his symbolic recreation of himself; he accepts the

rule of life by which he is consumed, but with this difference, that he wills the destruction of his ego on an "ideological"[19] plane where there is scope for reconstruction. Thus, for example, while the criminal (Hornyak) and neurotic (Fraser) waste their lives in a continual fight not to die, the artist begins by recreating himself in a paradoxical surrender to life. He achieves the immortality that the others desire because he successfully transforms his fight with death from a literal to an "ideological" level of conflict. The process by which he makes that shift is the very process to which Peter--an "artist" by virtue of his potential to recreate at least himself--will submit in a productive manner to overcome his fear of dying. First, however, Peter must overcome his fear of guilt, since his freedom "to kill" depends on his corresponding freedom to bear guilt.

His conflict begins as soon as Hornyak dies and Kettle asks, "Peter? Who killed him, finally?" While he initially answers, "Nobody" (p. 11), the letter that he writes to his father a few days later--"When is an accident an act of God, if it ever is, and when [is an accident an act of man, he silently asks himself]" (p. 42)--suggests that Peter has begun to reconsider his assumed innocence. He is pondering, in fact, the novel's informing thesis: "Who is responsible for death?" To answer it honestly, he must admit that a connection exists between his urge to kill Hornyak in Norman Wells--"he confessed to himself that he had had that impulse"--and the act of giving Hornyak the unshielded lamp. It is a connection that he quite understandably wants to deny--"but that was after he led Hornyak to the equipment, he told himself, <u>after</u>, <u>after</u>" (p. 27)--because an affirmation would mean that a murder, not an accident had taken place, a murder which Peter and "Nobody" else, certainly not God, had committed.

Kettle's question, therefore, stimulates precisely the conflict that Peter tried to avoid in Banff when he ran away from the self he denied (or conversely, wished to kill) in the mirror's reflection.

If he had identified himself with Hornyak then, he would necessarily have had to admit that the innocent boy-Peter was dead, killed by "Nobody" but himself. Afraid to admit as much, Peter blamed Hornyak, using him to shift guilt for his actions to another ego.[20] The subtle ambiguity, therefore, of Kettle's question about responsibility--whether it is Peter or Hornyak--underscores not only the double identity that Peter still shares with his alter-ego, but also the truth that he is as responsible for Hornyak's death in Norman Wells as he is for the death of his own innocence in Banff. While his struggle to assume responsibility for Hornyak's "accident" is a moral conflict, it parallels the psychological conflict he "must" undergo in order to recreate himself.

The two conflicts begin to fuse in Aklavik. Peter and Kettle consummate their deferred "marriage," and Peter admits, "In a way I killed him" (p. 55). No longer Narcissus--he has finally made love to Echo[21]--he has begun to challenge his neurotic fear of guilt. That must be the connection between the lamp's breaking and his sexual union with Kettle--Peter has metaphorically entered the mirror and become Hornyak. He does not, however, want "to be like the Hornyak he met that summer day" (p. 64). Neither does he want to make an unqualified confession. He wants to compromise, to pay in part but not in whole for the murder that has renewed his life-urge. In Tuktoyaktuk, for instance, he pays the Inuit hunter's debt to the Hudson Bay Company. While the gesture illustrates Peter's new freedom to share, the payment frees the hunter of his debt to

an "other," but hardly Peter of his debt to life. His tie with Hornyak cannot be broken so vicariously.

Kettle shows Peter how unfree he really is when she asks him to take over Hornyak's role in her life, to become, in effect, her surrogate husband. Because Peter once invented Hornyak to play that role for him, to be "the man you should be marrying" (p. 11), her request really means that Peter should identify at last with his alter-ego. His response, "I'm the type for Christ sake. The goddamn savior type" (p. 75), articulates the depth of his fear of assuming responsibility for his recreation. It is the role that only a martyr, a self-styled Canadian Christ,[22] "Peter the Pater" (p. 76), might willingly bear. And so far, "Peter the peter" is not willing. No myth, let alone his particular interpretation of the Christian myth, has yet revealed to him how self-sacrifice, or "playing puppet to a dead king" (p. 69), can free him from his misunderstood relation to his alter-ego. If he is not Hornyak, the type that "consumes" other lives, he fears he can only be Christ, the type that loses his life to "save" other lives. Neither role is appealing, but as long as Peter refuses to be the former, he dooms himself to be the latter. These are the only two identities allowed by his fractured psyche.

Kroetsch, in the very act of naming, has nonetheless hinted that Peter is capable of creating a new identity. If he compares him to Narcissus, the boy who the prophet had said would "live full long so that him selfe he doe not know" (epigraph), he also names him Peter, the disciple who perceived and named Christ, "the son of the living God." In brief, Peter might be self-blinded, but he might also be a visionary. His full name underscores these tensions. He might be Peter, the rock, on

whom a new myth can be founded, or Peter, just another "guy," who will restrict his life to the world of ordinary experience. His surname, Guy, its roots dating from Peter's French Canadian parentage though lost by the time he inherits it, suggests that he is of noble ancestry, a naming device that works well for a romantic hero whose journey follows the conventional steps of losing and recovering an identity. Guy de----; no name completes the place of origin, but a homonym suggests the French world "guide," and that is what a potential artist and mythmaker is meant to do: guide. First, however, he must guide himself out of the impasse in which his fractured psyche has trapped him.

The crisis that prompts some acceptance of his role as savior occurs at the Ramparts. While the Nahanni-Jane is caught in the narrows by the river's decreasing water level, Hornyak's body, with the electrical cord still tied around it, is recovered. Kettle and the crew decide that the evidence confirms Peter's guilt. In truth, they all wanted Hornyak dead: the crew, so he couldn't covert the Nahanni-Jane into a fishpacker; Kettle, so he could no longer "consume" her; Peter, so he could be free of this reminder of his neurotic guilt. No one, however, is willing to admit his/her guilt. Each wants to leave the North--to get past the rock--without accepting responsibility for the body. It is Peter who "saves" them and himself from the whole truth, though paradoxically he does so by denying his criminality like Hornyak, by confessing his neurotic guilt like Fraser. Very shrewdly he does both by assuming a martyr's role: "The whole crew had somehow come to assume that the body was Peter's. And after the first shock, the first impulse to deny, he found the idea not an unpleasant one. A vague pride took hold of him; they had given him their

guilt and he would keep it and claim it and they could condemn him if they so pleased" (p. 100).

Peter, of course, manages in such a way not to condemn himself. The "rock" of everyone else's guilt, he remains innocent at heart. That is the ambivalence of his role as martyr. Rather than admit his guilt, or complete the confession he began in Aklavik ("In a way I killed him"-- p. 55), he admits the crew's collective guilt. So he has yet to run "hard around" (p. 93) on the truth of his own crime. Like Hornyak in Norman Wells, Peter is really a false martyr because he is a false confessor.

But then so is Fraser a false confessor. The neurotic has also admitted his guilt for the wrong crime. He does not believe he killed his wife in his "own fool way" (p. 46) as much as he secretly believes he nearly lost himself when he married her. It is this surrender of man to woman, of individual to race, of ego-will to biological will, that he cannot admit. Like Narcissus, Fraser loves ego too much ever to let it die. Consequently, he avoids "dying." Consequently, he is never free. He lives in a "screwing jail" (p. 46) for the very "crime" of screwing which he hesitates to confess.

This problem of fear, associated with the threat to ego of the female, is reinforced in the novel by the attitudes of the supporting cast of males. When Kettle, for instance, reboards the Nahanni-Jane, the men, like the crew in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,"[23] are sure they will die. Pottle calls it "bad luck aboard" (p. 93), this ambiguity of reference--whether "it" is Kettle or Hornyak--emphasizing the connection of his fear of woman with his fear of death. Kettle unconsciously underscores the link herself when she answers Peter's request that she leave the

boat, alone, in Norman Wells: "I won't go without the body" (p. 111). One of the mirror's "two raging bodies," she and Hornyak must "go" together, cannot, in fact, do otherwise for Peter cannot resolve his fear of her without also resolving his fear of Hornyak. Her request, "Break the mirror for me. Break it, please, smash it, Peter. Listen to me, smash it" (p. 124), begs him to release them both.

Finally, but only in a renewed isolation as complete as anything he has known, Peter triumphs in a new scene of "raging" elements. A storm blows up. Once again the crew are threatened with death if they do not cut their tie with the barge bearing Hornyak's body. As before at the Ramparts, Peter assumes responsibility for saving them all. This time, however, he cannot remain a false martyr. He sees at once that rescuing the body is not a task for the virginal "young Mud" (p. 132), but for him, an indirect admission that he has begun to comprehend the relation between sexual initiation and death.

In the amnesiac state that the fall onto the barge induces, Peter's memory of that loss of innocence, that original death of self, is awakened. He recalls every detail of the journey West, his introduction to Hornyak, to experience, to guilt. The past becomes at long last a continuous part of his existence. This time, he does not run from the mirror's reflection. Nor does he run from Hornyak's body. Illusion and reality, past and present fuse: "Stay out, the voice said. Peter? the voice said. And he jerked at the handle; he braced himself and pulled, all his hunger black in his stomach. Who killed him. Peter? Who did it, finally?" (p. 145).

Now the glass that Peter would not break for Kettle on Lobstick Island begins to shatter. He looks, at last, at the face that he has in fact never seen: "This time he had to look" (p. 145), and this time he recognizes himself. So at least the reader must assume, for the laughter that accompanies his discovery is the laughter of unexpected relief. It is both revelation and catharsis. For Peter confronts his own ghost. He did not kill an "other" when he gave Hornyak the lamp; he killed the unacknowledged Hornyak in himself. It is his own ghost, therefore, his own guilty Self, that he throws into the water.

Peter now replaces Hornyak's body in the empty canoe with his living one. No longer in need of an "other" to blame for death, his exchange signals Peter's willingness to affirm his own power to "kill." The moment is a victory. He denounces his false innocence and frees his neurotic will from its inhibiting fear of life. The "soft delirium of his impassioned motion" (p. 145) captures not only the sexual rhythm of his symbolic surrender to woman, but also his ego's symbolic surrender to death. In Rank's terms, Peter has willed the necessity of surrender because he "must."[24] He does not surrender, however, like Hornyak, to the power of Impulse to consume his life by willing it in fact. Hornyak merely commits suicide and leaves Peter to bear the burden of his guilt. But Peter, while acknowledging his impulse to kill to "save" himself, does not rest either in the neurotic's false confession of guilt. Where Fraser blames himself for the wrong murder, Peter can admit, in the substitution of his living body for Hornyak's, that the life he "consumes" is his own. He abandons his false burden of collective guilt, and forgoes his attempt to reclaim his personal innocence by surrendering, in isolation, even in

abstraction, his ego to the claim of sex and death.

It is a surrender which may foreshadow Peter's return to Kettle as a real person--he had decided on Lobstick Island to return North once more--or it may simply point to his abstract, "ideological" reconstruction of the Self. In either event, the rock of guilty Will is dissolved, or overcome, in a willed surrender to life which becomes its own freedom, as well as its own form of continuity. Stasis is released into the endless plunging of the waves, which is underscored by the endless state of the narrative, an openness of form itself to new possibilities. And Peter, the type of artistic man, is free to create out of his ideological surrender continuously new "selves," if not necessarily continuous new "art." But this newly created man, unlike the American Adam, will no longer maintain a tragic innocence; nor, like the Canadian "Christ," will he cling to a false martyrdom, the mirror image of innocence. That is the ironic truth of the billboard's statement, "Ye cannot repent your life, but ye can repent your sin" (p. 7). Life itself cannot and must not be repented, but it may be renewed when the nature of man's "guilt," and his consequent "death," is redefined.

To this end, the North as a literal frontier, as a real last place to go, offers a crucial check upon the escapist dream of American "westering," even as it offers a second chance to escape the tragedy of American innocence. The flight from chaos in the West to pristine order in the North uncovers the real deadliness of imposed order (cf. the ordered conquest of the Canadian West). The northern frontier in this particular Canadian revision of the myth thus becomes the equivalent of the repressed

unconscious, a sort of Presbyterian soul writ large. As such, the landscape has nothing to teach but the threat of psychological annihilation. And yet the protagonist's ultimate engagement with this fear leads to a new surrender to nature--not to landscape but to personal, human and biological nature--which can only reaffirm the possibilities of the self in that open landscape.

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Donald Cameron, "The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," JCF, 1(Summer 1972), p. 49. Kroetsch distinguishes between his understanding of America's interest in expansion and Canada's interest in equilibrium: "opposites in necessary balance."

[2] Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden," JCF, 3, No. 3(Spring 1974), p. 45. While this article postdates But We Are Exiles' publication by nine years, it explains Kroetsch's interest then in distinguishing between what is "authentically" Canadian from what is "borrowed" (p. 43).

[3] Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding," p. 45.

[4] John G. Moss, "Canadian Frontiers: Sexuality and Violence From Richardson to Kroetsch," JCF 3(Summer 1973), p. 38.

[5] Morton L. Ross, "Robert Kroetsch and His Novels," in Writers of the Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 107.

[6] Peter Thomas, Studies in Canadian Literature: Robert Kroetsch (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), p. 34. See also Peter Thomas, "Robert Kroetsch and Silence," ECW 18-19 (Summer-Fall 1980), pp. 33-53, and "Priapus in the Danse Macabre," Can. Lit., 59(Winter 1974), pp. 54-64.

[7] Frank Davey, "Robert Kroetsch" in From Here to There (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1974), pp. 156-157.

[8] See introductory chapter of this thesis, p. 1.

[9] W. H. New, Articulating West, p. xiii.

[10] Robert Kroetsch, But We Are Exiles (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), p. 2. Further references to the novel will appear in parentheses in the text of the essay.

[11] Otto Rank, The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study, trans. and ed. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 4-7.

[12] Kroetsch, "Unhiding," p. 43.

[13] D. H. Lawrence, "Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels," in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1977), p. 60.

[14] R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (1955; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 5.

[15] See introductory Chapter, p. 8.

[16] Rank, "Self and Ideal," in Myth, pp.280-295.

[17] Rank, "Life Fear and Death Fear," in Myth: "The vicious circle is closed by the realization that the freeing of instinct from repressions causes fear because life and experience increase the fear of death; while, on the other side, renunciation of instinct increases guilt, not because it represents repressed aggression that turns against one's own ego (Freud), but because instinct renunciation is a renunciation of life, and therefore the individual feels himself guilty" (p. 278).

[18] Rank, "Life Fear and Death Fear," in Myth: "The death fear of the ego is lessened by the killing, the sacrifice, of the other; through the death of the other, one buys one's self free from the penalty of dying or being killed" (p. 275).

[19] Rank, "Life and Creation," in Myth: "There is, however, this difference: the neurotic, in this voluntary remaking of his ego, does not get beyond the destructive preliminary work and is therefore unable to detach the whole creative process from his own person and transfer it to an ideological abstraction" (p. 142).

[20] Rank, Double, p. 76.

[21] Peter Thomas, "Priapus in the Danse Macabre," pp. 56-57.

[22] Dick Harrison, "The American Adam and the Canadian Christ," TCL, 16(Jan.-Oct. 1971). Harrison discusses the historical impossibility of an archetypal Canadian hero experiencing the idealized rebirth attributed to the American Adam: "Unlike the American he [the Canadian Christ] stands not at the beginning of a new history but in the midst, carrying the weight of an imperfectly understood past history and uncomfortably aware of his own implication in its sins" (pp. 161-62).

[23] Russel M. Brown, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," UWR, 7(Spring 1972), p. 17.

[24] Rank, "Self and Ideal," in Myth: "This 'I will, because I must'" is easily seen, the positive opposite of the denying attitude we formulated in the sentence," 'I do not will at all, but I obey a force!'" (p. 287).

CHAPTER TWO

"The Poetics of Memory": Creation of An Ideal Self in North of Summer

When Kroetsch's Peter Guy finally surrenders his ego to the related fears of sex and death,[1] he is potentially freed to "die" productively, to create out of his ideological surrender an ideal self which is the precursor to artistic production.[2] Al Purdy's persona in North of Summer (1967) takes this development of an ideal self one step further in his journey into the North; by "dying North" he is enabled to create an artistic alter-ego who himself creates aesthetic symbols of immortality to "forestall" the extinction of his race.

Initially, however, it is not his own race but an "other" people that he wants to remember. He sets out, therefore, in search of a "given" entry to the world of drowned sailors and extinct Dorsets, a search that ultimately realizes what Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu has named "an opening in the past,"[3] and John Lye "a metaphysic of the continued existence of individuals."[4] While both critics explain how Purdy's poetics of memory works, how he uses art "to enter the past and make its spirit available,"[5] neither explains the psychological "death" and surrender to art which his persona undergoes in order to make that "break-thru"[6] in consciousness. George Bowering sees a psychological dimension to what is essentially a narrative structure in North of Summer (as he says, it is "truly a book rather than simply a collection of occasional

poems"[7]); but his version of the psychological quest is more in keeping with a theory of cultural displacement, since he sees Purdy heading North "much in the way the Group of Seven went North to find visual experience that would make images for a Canadian art and Canadian character different from the European springs."[8] Dennis Duffy, on the other hand, argues that since "discontinuity is our experience" in North America, "one of the functions of the artist is to break down that separation in time and place and restore to us that sense of a past we have lost."[9] Purdy's own view of history, George Woodcock explains "is based on the knowledge. . . that this is, even in human terms, an ancient and not a new land, a land already beginning to decay into maturity."[10] It is appropriate, therefore, that his artist-persona knows as his plane begins its descent over Frobisher Bay that he is not entering a new land--the frontier of popular mythology--but the end of that frontier, a land so old that even the gods, as he suggests in "Arctic River," have "forgotten their last worshipper" (p. 22). What his persona has himself to remember is his own ancestral faith in art as a medium of human continuance, though memory, he discovers, will not serve without his imagining his own death in the death of an artistic alter-ego from the "other" race. Purdy's re-discovery of a community of art symbols thus helps to reaffirm his faith in the "continued existence of individuals"--the community of both the living and dead.

Purdy begins his search for memory by reading a map of the Canadian Arctic. Looking at it, he goes "rocking thru history / in search of dead sailors. . . .and finds them at the precise point / where the meter registers 'alive' / when a living man remembers them." While Purdy finds

"place-names" on that map, he does not "find" the men--Franklin, for instance--who once brought their names to those places. The men themselves have been lost. Whatever "play-back" ("The North West Passage," p. 20), or flashback device that Purdy imagined would let him "see" through two hundred years of history obviously does not work, or more realistically, does not exist. But then neither did the "true" north-west passage exist. No "crews of homesick seamen" ("The Country of the Young," p. 79), ever reached Cathay. That is the irony of Purdy's comparing his quest with theirs. He cannot find on that map-paper what he must create on his own paper, because the "true" North, like all "true" places,[11] exists only in the mind. His introduction to "The North West Passage"--[The Passage] is found / needs no more searching" (pp. 20-21)--declares that Purdy is not ignorant of such distinctions. He has not, therefore, confused fact with fiction or history with myth; he simply does not yet know how to use such a distinction creatively. Since "dead sailors" cannot assist him to find the "place" in his mind, he wonders if one of their descendants, a young Inuit girl, can help him.

An obvious example of historical continuance through generation, the girl's mixed blood is a "living" record of the North's history:

> Sixteen years old and beautiful
> all her white blood boiling red
> under the not-brown skin maybe
> attending music class in winter a
> whaler's hornpipe danced the brown girl white.
>
> "Girl," pp. 24-25.

She is not, however, a helpful guide to the past, for her Inuit mothers, her "brown" memories, have been lost in the two-hundred-year process of

her creation. Rather than conducting Purdy into the past, she shows him where it has stopped: "No thought of a non-Christian past / enters her working head," as Purdy, "pounding / a typewriter," hopes to have such thoughts enter his. Ironically, she is as caught in the present tense as he is. "Neither brown nor white and becoming / becoming without going anywhere," the native girl and the poet's persona have both lost their "true" places of origin. She cannot return "home" to the North any more than can he return "home" to Europe. He tried, twelve years earlier, "and never did make a final decision / about going or not going tho" he did go in the end; ambivalently reserving a last minute freedom to jump off the boat in "Le Havre harbour / and swim / back." Now, in the North, he is back, looking for the memory that he did not find in Europe. Ironically, there is no memory to find, just as there is no "true" place to which he or she can return. It is up to Purdy, therefore, to create "what's missing in both" of them.

In "Eskimo Graveyard" (pp. 26-27), he begins to reassess his personal responsibility for discovering the past. He sees a dead old woman's body lying in the glacial litter. Not yet buried, she is "Neither wholly among the dead / nor quite gone from the living." There is a possibility, therefore, that she can help him find the "opening" that he is seeking. If "a thought of hers enters the minds / of the people she knew before," and if he, as a kind of intermediary could intercept those thoughts, he would have access to the world of the dead. As much as he would like to believe that the woman could communicate with him and he with the dead, the notion is too primitive for him to consider it seriously. He laughs at his wishful thinking, comparing his feeding off her "thoughts" with

the mosquitoes who attempt to feed off him: "and thoughts of me occur to the mosquitoes." He is aware, nevertheless, in his reference to "human bookkeeping" that the present owes something to the past. But that is all he knows for now. Not knowing a "thought" of hers, he cannot create a monument of "Public Works" that will remember her life, or the lives of "the people she knew before." As much as he wants some "break-thru" ("NWP," p. 21) to occur, nothing does. He wonders if he is defeated, if indeed there is "no way out" of death for her because there is no way into the past for him. Then he notices the people's white tents, "like glowing swans" in the twilight. It is an image that will eventually evolve into "the ivory thought" that Kudluk carves in "Lament for the Dorsets,"[12] but for now such pictures remain "a flicker," until he can imagine a dying artist carving for his dead "ancestors."

One such modern-day artist, "an old man carving soapstone / in the co-op in Frobisher Bay" ("Innuit," pp. 32-33), offers the poet a chance to look with him into the past. Purdy watches neither the man's hands nor the carving itself, but his "faded eyes," hoping to see in them the vision or "flicker" of memory that directs the old man "into secret vaults / and catacombs of marrow / bone rooms / that reveal nothing" to Purdy, but which reveal to the carver his pre-historic, pre-Dorset past. Watching him work, Purdy is aware that the carver has never lost his memory of origins. For him, the North is as much his home today as it was for his ancestors five thousand years ago. Together they have endured

on the edge of the world
a myth from long ago
that reaches into the past
but touches an old man still living.

A descendant of the Thule Inuit of Greenland, the carver is not in actual historical fact a descendant of the Dorsets and pre-Dorsets of Siberia. Yet he claims to share a past with them. "Looking into his eyes / it is possible to see the first hunters / (if you have your own vision)." If you do not have your own vision, the parentheses imply, you must wait to see what he is carving in soapstone, presumably his image of "the first hunters."

The carver's art, therefore, like the Bering Strait, is a kind of "swing-bridge" ("Canso," pp. 34-35), that connects all "the People." Purdy and the girl, however, are foreigners, "barbaroi / something other than themselves," because their memory of origins, their race-soul, has been lost in the "white smother" ("Innuit," p. 33) that began in the nineteenth-century migration North. If Purdy could find the right "swing-bridge," he implies, he might become one of "the People." That is surely the implication of "the improbable birth" which he desires at the conclusion of "Eskimo Graveyard." It is as improbable for him to converse with the dead woman's soul, however, as it is improbable for him to discover his own lost race-soul. Nevertheless, his quest for memory depends upon some such discovery.

Very gradually, then, Purdy's search for an "opening" has shifted from other people's "thoughts" to his own. He has realized, watching the carver, that he--an "outsider"--must find his own entry to the world of the dead. He still, however, does not know where that opening is. In

the shamanic tradition out of which the carver is working, Purdy the "tribesman" might seek initiation from an elder, undergoing a ritual death and descending into the "bone rooms" ("Innuit," pp. 32-33) of his own memory. Lacking an intermediary, however, Purdy must become his own tutor. Ironically, his twentieth-century rational mind imposes that role on him. An existentialist, he cannot believe or "see" what he has not experienced. To remember "the first hunters," therefore, he must first experience their way of life.

With Jonesee, "the archetypal hunter," Purdy leaves Frobisher Bay for the Kikastan Islands and a two week sojourn in as unadulterated an environment as is possible in 1965. Because this is already an "era of welfare cheques and family allowance" ("South," pp.61-63), Jonesee lives in the present and past simultaneously. "In terylene shirt and binoculars / Peterborough boat and Evinrude motor / Remington rifle with telescopic sight," he is a thoroughly modern man. As a hunter, however, he is timeless; while the style of the kill has changed, the kill itself has not: "death for someone or something. . .is reassuringly old-fashioned" ("Eskimo Hunter New Style," p. 57). Looking at him, Purdy is looking at a descendant of the pre-Dorset hunter whom the carver envisioned. Jonesee is thus himself a kind of "swing-bridge," a man who can "see" his way back and forth between two worlds: the past and the present, the dead and the living. Though Jonesee as a guide to the hunt might not understand the shamanic purpose of Purdy's journey, Purdy does begin to see his way into the past.

En route to Kikastan, the two men stop at Slaughter Beach. The animal remains littering the beach recall the "bone rooms" that Purdy

imagined in "Innuit." Seeing "the real thing," however, is more unsettling than stimulating to him:

> Now the pictures in my head
> of what I'd expected things to be like
> start to come true
> bones everywhere
> even inside the tent
> that swells in wind like a heart
> trying to break
> loose from flesh and
> pieces of animal carcass around
> yellow blubber in cold sunlight
> a white whale's body in shallow water
> on the beach with blood
> like smoke
> drifting
> from the beast face.
>
> "Metrics" (pp. 37-39)

For the first time in his journey, Purdy "sees" real death. The animal graveyard touches him "at the precise point / where the meter registers 'alive'" ("NWP" p. 20). It reminds him that he is alive, but not forever. Someday, his body will also be reduced to "pieces of animal carcass," his face to the same "beast face" that he sees on the beach. The "thought" threatens his very faith in memory. Until now, he has wanted to believe that creativity could redeem man from death's total destructiveness. His poems would "remember" man. Now he wonders if there is anything human to remember, if man's resemblance to the animals does not suggest that man is merely animal.

His suspicion obliges him to revalue his self-worth. As the existential inventor of himself, he has been the sole author of his meaningfulness. Now, his "human spirit" has crashed "like a housefly." He becomes as insignificant a living thing in that landscape as he once

thought the Arctic willows were. Unlike them, however, he does not have any permanent life-source or root system, nor like the carver, a myth and faith in shamanic art to sustain him. Instead, he has within himself "an empty place," "some hustings" for a soul, but in truth, he fears, no soul at all. That is the irony of his presence on Slaughter Beach. As a poet, he understands the symbolic significance of bones. As a man, he is afraid of them. They are not for him, as they were for the Inuit carver or Jonesee, a "swing-bridge" between the living and the dead. There is an obvious gap, therefore, "an empty place" in his mind between the literal and metaphorical meaning of bones.

Quite unexpectedly, Purdy has found a glimmering of the "opening" he has been seeking--his own obsession with death. He has forgotten that his journey's essential purpose was to save man--including himself--from death's power to destroy man entirely. Now he doubts his intellectual ability to overcome the fear that those "lost feelings" have suddenly recalled. He begins to assess his humanity, wondering if the Inuit dogs' reality (they have been abandoned on a neighboring island, "for the Arctic summer / to survive or not survive") is not closer to the truth of what it means to be man--a forgotten animal--than he has previously understood. His world-view threatened, he sets up "the portable typewriter / on a cardboard box in the tent / for an order of things," his intention to write a poem revealing how dependent he is on art to hold his life in order. English, however, "is not spoken here," so presumably, his language is not going to work this time. When he hears the Old Squaw ducks' "going / ouw-ouw-ouw," he tries <u>to think</u> "to the other side of that sound" because he does not want <u>to feel</u> the "self-deception and

phoniness" that he suspects is the "real" truth of his humanity. Afraid to enter "the empty place" that his collapsed sense of self has created, he tries to deny it, again using poetry to order his life:

> and really it isn't really it isn't
> the echo of cosmic emptiness at all
> (really it isn't)
> and start typing

"Odysseus in Kikastan" (pp. 40-42), provides another immediate example of Purdy's fanciful misuse of art. He is looking at icebergs. First he describes their size and beauty lyrically--"Ice castles drift by in the sunlight / blue and turquoise magic / moulded and shaped by water."--then prosaically: "One looks like a bowling alley / another like Maple Leaf Gardens." Both descriptions are entertaining for reader as well as poet, "a sort of creative doing nothing / that I make a specialty of," but neither is relevant to Purdy's "authentic" function as poet: to reveal the truth that beneath those icebergs' magnificent facade is bone-chilling death. He comments on their similarity to Circe and the Sirens: "And you almost expect a sign / 'Castles for Sale / Apply at Circe's Island'," borrowing from Homer because he cannot rely upon the uncreated myths of his own people and place. There is not one literary artist whose experience of the North has been "authentic" or profound enough to satisfy Purdy. As much as he mocks our national obsession for Canadian content--"and a guy with a CBC loudspeaker / who wants me to say a few words but not / unless I happen to be John Diefenbaker"--he recognizes the need expressed in the obsession. He also recognizes how "phony" it would be for him "to say a few words" on behalf of someone else. That is the irony of his refusing to explore "the echo of cosmic

emptiness." Until he does explore it, he can only speak for someone else. Correspondingly, he can only "work on a new translation / of Homer's Odyssey Arctic-fashion" because he personally resists Odysseus' descent into the world of the dead as the prerequisite for writing our collective odyssey of the North. For Purdy's art to be "authentic," therefore, he must use it honestly to explore his own fear of death, not falsely to deny it.

In "When I Sat Down to Play the Piano" (pp. 43-45), Purdy wittily discovers how "phony" he really is as a philosopher and a poet. With half-savage huskies snapping at his anus, his "heroism" is too artificial to be real, and his existentialist philosophy too abstract to be useful. Quite humorously, then, the "most natural of natural functions" makes a mockery of the whole intellectual "I think therefore I am" tradition that has shaped western man's mind. Recognizing that his existence at this moment depends less on his ability to think than it does on a young Inuit boy's ability to work a sling-shot, he twists Descartes' formula into doubting nonsense: "therefore there I am I am I think." Able to laugh at his intellectual conceit, he is no longer as confident a rational man as he was. The Inuit "David" has exposed how stupidly inept his Goliath-like faculty of reasoning really is.

In "Still Life in a Tent" (pp. 47-49), Purdy begins to look for a new means of venturing in and out of "Hades," determined now to work "the other side" of life which he had avoided in "Metrics." Alone in his tent with a "slight fever / temperature of maybe 100," his conscious mind is conveniently freed of its usual restraints of reason:

I lie there fevered and
float a single thought out
into a night tinted
with day flowers in my mind
then send a second one
to join the first
and my thoughts travel together
in fevered fantasy
north of summer
with ice become a thousand foot wall
so photo-real it might be
me both here and there
staring up and up
a fevered little man
at that cold altar
where June July and August
are a brief tremor
on god's thermometer.

For the first time in his northern experience, Purdy allows his thoughts to go where they will. They "float" because he is no longer thinking rationally; his fever will not allow it, or so he pretends. In fact, he is trying to think irrationally, trying to "break-thru" the intellectual barrier that has to date blocked his search for an "opening." Just as the sailors could not find the "real" opening to Cathay because it did not exist, neither has Purdy been able to find the "real" opening to the past because it exists, like the "true" North, only in his mind. He has misdirected his search, therefore, by attempting to follow other people's thoughts--the dead old woman's, for instance. Here, then, he begins to follow his own brooding vision.

When his mental journey is stopped by the "thousand foot wall of ice," he sees himself "both here," in his tent, in the geographical North, or more ambiguously, "here" in Ameliasburg writing the poem, as well as "there" in the "other" metaphysical North--the North in men--that man enters when he imagines himself face to face with death. He accepts both

"photo-real" images of himself. He is not, in other words, only what he thinks he is, a poet who wants to defy death's permanence, but also a "fevered little man" who wants simply to live. Now he experiences none of the "phoniness" or comic cowardice that he felt in "Metrics" or "When I Sat Down to Play the Piano," respectively. Just as he had previously learned to de-value the "great Douglas firs. . .tall maples. . .oaks like gods" ("Trees at the Arctic Circle," pp. 29-30) by re-valuing the dignity of the dwarf willow, so does his minute stature before that altar of ice teach him to revalue his diminished human dignity. Life, he realizes, has always been dwarfed by death's omnipotence. Regardless of place, North or South, "June July and August / are a brief tremor / on god's thermometer" and there is nothing that man's intellect can do to affect that "permanent" reality. Perhaps rationality, then, is the wrong way to explore "the North in men." Glad to have met himself as "a stranger / at the northern end of the world," Purdy wonders if that stranger's mind --the irrational "other" half of himself--is not the "opening to the past" that he is seeking.

In "Listening," (pp. 50-51) Purdy continues with this new insight to moot his faculty of reasoning. Lying on a mountain top that "became an island / before the first man died," he carefully tries to hear God's voice. His experiment intends to discover if his irrational mind, like the Inuit carver's race-soul, "drawn back. . . .from white men / into secret vaults" ("Innuit," p. 32), can still remember its mythic origins. Thus, pretending to listen for God, "Purdy's persona is actually listening to himself; "the sounds I hear / are not from outside me any longer." What he hears, however, is not God's voice within but the "black scream. . .of

a white bird / flying above this stone island." His concentration shattered, his body is "suddenly warm then cold," as first he fears, and then is relieved, that "God had not screamed at the world." The man who previously has lain in the tent confronting the "cold altar" of ice has discovered, in his awe of death, that he is not free, even now, of the image of a wrathful God. "Listening" is in one sense a renewed search for God by this man who has come back from the brink of annihilation. What he finds is "no sound at all / only the dull singing of my own ears," until the cry of a bird reminds him that if there were any god in this world, he would scream at man, not console him. His meditation thus re-affirms his own existentialist despair, a despair, however, that he still refuses to accept as final. Unable to "break-thru" the wall of ice that blocked his descent to the world of the dead, equally unable to transcend his body's stone-like inability to experience the romantic or mystic or primitive man's oneness with nature or God, he readdresses the human condition--rationally.

For Purdy, then, man is alone in a world of creatures like the "white bird" with its "black scream." He wakes at dawn in "Dogsong" (pp. 52-53) to hear the dogs' "mourning voices / running down the scale / all the human equivalents," and concludes that it is "Impossible to say it means nothing." What it "means," however, has less to do with "some invisible signal" from the sky than with a marked resemblance to

> some unhappy humans
> facing the riddle of living
> who can't understand it
> who'll never understand it
> or find an answer.

The qualifier "some" is still ambiguous. It limits "unhappy" to some "humans," and sets up the contrast between some humans who look for "an answer" to "the riddle of living" and dogs who "forget the answer. . .and then forget the question / and think of nothing at all." Living by instinct, the animals are unable to think. Very subtly, then, Purdy compares his previous listening for "any impossible sound" with the dogs' looking at "some invisible signal." If he has earlier mocked man's ability to think, he now reconsiders it. It is he, after all, not the dogs, who "shivers" at the "sound of nothing at all." Unable to forget his bleak answer--nothing--he is equally unable to forget the question--Is man immortal, or is his meaningfulness simply dissolved into "the empty place" that is the grave? If the latter answer is yes, Purdy cannot accept it, or at least not yet. Having satisfied himself in "Listening" that no magico-religious solutions exist, and in "Dogsong" that man thinks because he "must," he is ready to examine his anxiety from a more practical point of view.

In "Two Hunters," Purdy watches himself watching Jonesee and his partner butchering dead seals:

> and myself a kind of witness
> but not exactly a reporter
> "kabloona" the white man, memorizing details
> outside my tent, with Old Squaw ducks
> going "ouw-ouw-ouw" beyond the islands.

The setting recalls Slaughter Beach, the blood, blubber and bones, the ducks' cry, "the echo of cosmic emptiness." This time, however, Purdy looks at death from a physical rather than metaphysical perspective, his new approach suggesting that the answer to life's riddle may lie in the

blood and bones that make and break the tie between life and death. So far he has only thought about death. He has contemplated in turn the old Inuit woman's, the pre-Dorsets', and his own death: "Dear Sylvia River / have you a few moments / to spare of my life / in someone-else's mind / when I am less than a memory?" ("Arctic River," p. 23). But he has not, like the two hunters, touched death. That, he discovers, must be the next step in his journey.

For in "Dead Seal" (pp. 58-59), Purdy's persona tries to touch the dead animal and discovers that he cannot. It frightens him too much, an irrational fear since the seal is dead. Examining its carcass, however, he discovers how much it resembles a living man:

> He looks like a fat little old man
> an 'old Bill' sort of face
> both wise and senile at the same time
> with an anxious to please expression
> in fact a clown.

That is the problem, the real source of his fear: the dead seal looks like a foolish man--a clown. Death has destroyed the animal's dignity, made "life itself trivial" ("Trees at the Arctic Circle," pp. 23-24). Purdy is not ready, however, to laugh at dead seals that look like old men because he is not ready to accept the inference that deadmen look like comic dead seals. Again "the riddle of living" ("Dogsong," p. 53) perplexes him. He is not sure

> of what a human being is supposed to be
> (despite the legal and moral injunctions that say
> "Thou Shalt Not"
> nobody says or is likely to say with real conviction
> "Thou Shalt--go ahead and Shalt"
> or 'shall' as the case may be).

In brief, he is not sure of what a human being would be if there were no moral code to distinguish him from an animal. "No hunter / of any kind," he has never had to reconcile breaking the law, "Thou Shalt Not [Kill]," with the law of survival, "Thou Shalt [Live,]" He is not, therefore, like the two hunters of the preceding poem, free to turn, "with seeming negligence [from the animals they have just slaughtered] to the place where their wives are waiting." To Purdy, death and life have always been opposites. Now, noting the similarity between the dead seal's wound/and "an intimate part / of the human [female] body," he sees that the "death taboo" is also a prohibition against life. When he decides, therefore, "I [damn well] shalt" touch the dead seal, he breaks both taboos. He affirms, however, only his impulse to touch "with delight in living," not his impulse to break rules. He is still refusing, therefore, to affirm the reality of death <u>for him</u>.

Purdy has yet to explore in "South" (pp. 60-63) his fear of disobeying "the legal and moral injunctions" ("Dead Seal") that continue to prescribe his humanity. Pretending not to be a man, he grants himself the autonomy of the "Seal King / lording it over the pack ice." Ironically, he becomes a clown in his own illusory court, a Laurence Olivier or Alec Guinness or Henry Irving. If Jonesee, the spectator, giggles, he does not participate in the illusion, for there is no choice of roles or morals to be made by the "archetypal hunter." He has already accepted the "power of necessity" inherent in his using "death to remain alive" ("Trees at the Arctic Circle"). When his gun goes "Boom-Boom and / ALLAKAZAM / a seal / the small whiskered comic face appears," so does Purdy accept Jonesee's need to kill. For himself, however, knowing "I am no hunter / of any

kind" ("Dead Seal"), he chooses to identify with the destroyed seal. Neither the poet nor the animal can ever lord it over the pack ice of death. So the poet's profane act of libation, a "reverse blessing on the world / from a sacriligeous [sic] well-wisher," gives him a new comic share in the "seal blood drifting-down / the ocean currents" ("South"). The man who can not be a hunter, who finds himself unable to give the death, can for once celebrate death with more than a despairing note of mockery. He has accepted his part with the "clown" seal, laughing at death before it had had the chance to laugh at him. Implicitly, then, Purdy has "pissed on" his own death; he has taken his place with the dead clown-seal.

He is free now, like the hunters, to turn "with seeming negligence / to the place where their wives are waiting" ("Two Hunters," pp. 54-56). Thus in "Washday" (pp. 64-66), Purdy joins the women washing clothes, his very turning to them confirming his acceptance of the unity of death and life in the "intimate part" he has touched in "Dead Seal." As if the washing were a kind of purification ritual, he is cleansed of part of his old self: "some of the 'me' I am / removed / the walled self / defenses down." Then he thinks, "even without knowing / the language at all it's possible to speak / to them." Perhaps he is undergoing the "improbable birth" that he desired in "Eskimo Graveyard," or perhaps a "thought" of the dead old woman has entered his mind. Certainly some kind of parturition, a "break-thru" between his mind and the women's is taking place.

It leads through the opening, finally of "Tent Rings" (pp. 68-69), into a place where living and dead "hunters" mingle:

To enter these tent rings
is mingling with the past
being in two places
having visions
hearing voices
sounding in your head
almost like madness
summoned by wizard angakoks
a thousand year old spell
relayed and handed down
a legacy
from dead to the living.

By entering those rings, he enters "the sealed white tents" that he described in "Eskimo Graveyard." For having accepted his place with the seals, the tents are no longer "sealed" to him. Their walls have been removed as "the walled self / defenses" that enclosed him before have also been "removed." One wonders if the "1000 foot wall of ice" that blocked his mental journey in "Still Life in a Tent" has not also been removed. Certainly, "hearing voices / sounding in your head" ("Tent Rings") suggests that he has made a "break-thru" to the other side of life. What he has discovered contrary to his fear in "Metrics" is not "the echo of cosmic emptiness" but the voices of "the People"--first the living women's, then the dead hunters'. He has also discovered, John Lye explains, that "the points at which an individual can contact the past are physical, and are consecrated through use by men."[13] His fear of death's power to destroy the past thus resolved--there obviously is "still life in a tent"--Purdy's persona now wonders if he himself will be remembered in the future. He also wonders, later watching a track meet in Pangnirtung, if "the People" literally and metaphorically "still / in the running" ("Track Meet at Pangnirtung," pp. 70-71), will survive their race against time. What artifact can ever serve to remember them?

This accent on future memory is taken up more positively in "What do the Birds Think" (pp. 72-73), where he wonders "do they ever / remember down there in the southland / Cumberland Sound / and the white place / of Baffin / what I will remember soon?" The suggestion, not yet fully realized, is that the real journey North will begin "soon," in the act of remembering. But for the present, Purdy is not quite out of the geographical North. Neither is he out of his habit of thinking of memory as artifact or souvenir. Thus, in "The Sculptors" (pp. 75-76), he goes "thru cases and cases / of Eskimo sculptures" looking "for one good carving / one piece that says 'I AM' / to keep a southern promise." The perfect sculpture, however, does not exist. Tired of all the "broken / bent misshapen / failed animals / with vital parts missing," he has a "sudden vision of the carvers themselves." They too are "failed animals," victims of the human fate, doomed to failure, yet all the more alive for that failure. Now Purdy wants "to buy every damned case," his impulse an expression of his sympathy for human imperfection. Not yet a creator of "northern" art, he must content himself as a consumer. He has understood, however, that "authentic" art, art that says "I AM," remembers its creator and his place honestly.

He explores that realization in "At the Movies" (pp. 77-78). The volume's penultimate poem, it makes the Inuit into consumers not unlike the consumer in "The Sculptors." The "art" is manifestly false to the place: "Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster / in a technicolor western shootemup." The "Eskimos don't understand the dialogue / at all but they like the action." After the movie, Purdy's persona steps outside where "the fiord looks like poured blue milk / mountains like bookmarks

under a cold sky:"

> But the point I'd hoped to separate
> from all these factual things stubbornly
> resists me and I walk home slowly feeling stupid
> rejecting the obvious
> threading my way between stones in the mud
> with the beginnings of a headache.

While Purdy refuses to state the obvious, it must still be less than obvious to his persona that the truth of this place which he has come seeking exists only in "mountains like bookmarks." The country itself is in fact the bookmark to his uncreated page; it waits to be translated into "The Country of the Young" (pp. 79-80), the final poem of the collection.

A. Y. Jackson, an artist who has seen and painted what is for him the "true" North, tells Purdy finally that he too will see the "place" when he looks at it more closely:

> "Look here
> You've never seen this country
> it's not the way you thought it was
> Look again"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The colours I mean
> for they're not bright Gauguin
> or blazing Vincent
> nor even Breughel's 'Hunters in the Snow'
> where you can get lost
> and found in 5 minutes.

Jackson is quite obviously directing Purdy to look at one of his northern canvasses--reprints of eight of them introduce North of Summer. It is there, in art, he implies, in the creative act of remembrance, that Purdy will see truly what he could not see factually. He missed the North like

so many who went there before him because he was looking for someplace else--some exotic place that Gauguin or Vincent or Breughel might remember, but not the homegrown North that Jackson and eventually Purdy remember.

It is not until after the publication of North of Summer (1967) that Purdy "Look[s] again" and creates "the opening to the past" that he was unable to create in his original journey North. Wild Grape Wine (1968) includes one of his finest poems, "Lament for the Dorsets" which becomes the aesthetic resolution of the quest turned from the place itself back toward the art of the place. The "remains of the Dorset giants," including some "2-inch swans," lead him at last into a meditation on the "extinct" carver of the swans. But it is in this act of meditation, where the poet imagines the last Dorset carving "for a dead grand-daughter," that a word-sculpture comes to life, and makes the poet heir to the Dorset, "carving" in his turn for a nearly-forgotten race. Art, "the ivory thought," may be "still warm," but its warmth comes as much from the poet who "remembers" the occasion and conditions of its creation as it comes from the hand which turned "one of his thoughts. . . .to ivory." It is no co-incidence that the specific carver who is imagined--"some old hunter with one lame leg / a bear had chewed / sitting in his caribou skin tent"--should be "carved" in the poet's own image, much like the maimed animals of the failed artists in "The Sculptors." Purdy himself has sat in one of those tent-rings, his arthritic knee "laming" him. But he has learned that art is more than a confession of human failure, and might evoke more than pity for human mortality. He is no longer the sympathetic consumer of failed sculptures, but one of the living

sculptors. And the sculpture succeeds where life fails. It succeeds because the creator "remembers" the act itself of past creation. Thus the dying Kudluk becomes the poet's alter-ego, a figure who represents both the creative man's surrender to the claim of life--the imperative of "race"[14]--and his crucial reconstruction of himself in ideal form, doing battle with the "cosmic emptiness" for the sake of all mankind.

Unlike the gods of "Arctic River" who have "forgotten / their last worshipper," who have forgotten their creation in their old age, the ideal artist "in the country of the young" has to remember all "creation" in the past work of art, and to create in symbolic form the life which would otherwise have been lost. In this sense, the poet enters through the shared symbols of immortality (sculpture and poem, tent rings and voices) into the past which is "still warm" and "young." Like Kudluk who accepts his heir's death (and implicitly his own death), Purdy has apparently come to terms with his mortality as well. He does so heroically, however, by continuing the legacy of Kudluk, by carving "in spirit" with him in the very midst of death. His own word-picture thus becomes an answer to the question of extinction; it recreates the past, even as it speaks to the future of the continued obligation entailed by life and art.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Al Purdy's Sex and Death (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) offers a later, alternate reading of these "great themes of literature . . . .For in my book, sex and death must always include love and life" (p. 4).

[2] Rank, "Life and Creation" in Myth, pp.1-12. See also discussion in Chapter I, above, pp. 25-26.

[3] Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu, "The Privilege of Finding an Opening in the Past: Al Purdy and the Tree of Experience," QQ 83(Summer 1976), p. 268.

[4] John Lye, "The Road to Ameliasburg," DR 57(Summer 1977), p. 247.

[5] Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu, "The Privilege," p. 267.

[6] Alfred Purdy, "North West Passage" in North of Summer (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Limited, 1967), p. 21. Further reference to this volume will appear in parentheses with page numbers in the text.

[7] George Bowering, Al Purdy: Studies in Canadian Literature (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970), p. 89.

[8] _____, "Purdy: Man and Poet," Can L 43(Winter 1970), p. 31.

[9] Dennis Duffy, "In Defense of North America: The Past in the Poetry of Alfred Purdy," JCS 6(May 1971), pp. 26, 21.

[10] George Woodcock, "On the Poetry of Al Purdy," in Al Purdy, Selected Poems (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 9.

[11] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick: An Authoritative Text, Reviews, and Letters by Melville, Analogues and Sources, Criticism (1851; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), p. 56: "Queequeg was a native of Kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down in any map; true places never are."

[12] Alfred Purdy, "Lament for the Dorsets" in Wild Grape Wine (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), pp. 54-55.

[13] John Lye, "The Road to Ameliasburg," p. 249.

[14] Rank, "Self and Ideal," in Myth, p. 289. See also related discussion in Chapter I above, pp. 25-26.

CHAPTER THREE

The Whiteman's Burden: Blood Guilt and Shamanic Art in Riverrun

Riverrun, like "Lament for the Dorsets," also remembers an extinct race of people--the Beothuk of Newfoundland. Its major difference from North of Summer is that it begins, where the latter book ends, with the figure of an artistic alter-ego--an ideal Self--who seeks by symbolic means to prevent his race from vanishing out of human memory. Where Purdy's imagined Kudluk communicates, however, with the living through an historical artifact--the carved swan--Peter Such's alter-ego, Osnahanut, communicates much more directly and personally. Such confesses in his preface: "It is tempting to explain my obsession with writing about the Beothuk. Let me just say that it is a kind of debt that I owe to Nonosabasut, Demasduit, Shawnadithit, Doodebewshet and Longnon--to whom I was introduced first through the pages of history--and to Osnahanut and the other persons in this book whom I met in dreams."[1] The premise of Such's poetics of memory is thus more literal than Purdy's, for he implies that the souls of the dead are immortal and accessible to the living through dream.[2] In this sense, Such claims to have become, in effect, the shamanic intermediary that Purdy wanted to become in "Eskimo Graveyard." Osnahanut, therefore, is not only Such's alter-ego, the ideal creation of the artist's primary act of personality reconstruction, but

he is also an autonomous spiritual being who depends all the more on a living man for his continued existence in the human world. It is perhaps for this reason that Such develops a conception of shamanism that is founded upon guilt; we owe the Beothuk a "kind of debt" because of their racial extinction.

The theme of murder-guilt, as Arnold Davidson points out, is itself one of the novel's major "crosscurrents": "From the Indian point of view, the white men had no mercy. They lacked. . .restraint."[3] The Beothuks, on the other hand, killed fearfully: "It wasn't a good thing to take too many. During the difficult springtime they [the partridge] might not come your way because the spirit who ruled them considered you greedy" (Davidson, p. 197). The traditional chant of the Beothuk hunters was thus offered on the eve of the hunt in an attempt to appease "the spirits of the hunted" (p. 20). This act of "remembering" the dead is not unlike Such's own "chant" for a race his people have destroyed; in both cases, a spokesman for a whole people seeks absolution for criminal blood-guilt.

This "criminal" basis for "song" receives a fuller definition in ethnological terms as the informing power of shamanism, a spiritual ideology which can be understood as a communal response to the problem of shedding animal blood. Andreas Lommel argues that primitive man absolved his murder-guilt by inventing the immortal soul "in order to be able to say that he does not really kill the animals but only their bodies."[4] His explanation of shamanism, unlike Mircea Eliade's presentation of it in terms of religious phenomenology, is thus essentially aesthetic: death is abolished in the imagination for relief of guilt.

Such's preface identifies the author as a guilty artist-shaman in the image of his shaman-protagonist Osnahanut. Such himself is a curious instance of the literary artist displacing what, in Rank's terms, is fundamentally an aesthetic guilt at having asserted the ego-will over the biological-will (life impulse).[5] In these terms Such transfers his individual guilt to his race for having exterminated the Beothuks, even as Nonosabasut, the shaman-elect, finds his guilty uniqueness subsumed in his tribal guilt for the murder of caribou.

Such's journey into the interior of Newfoundland thus extends the geographical boundaries of "East" into the "metaphysical place" of the "North in men," that place where death may either destroy or recreate the present. Nonosabasut is similarly engaged in an interior quest upstream against the current of time. His task is to embody momentarily the vanishing history of his people, since he thinks that his people's immemorial patterns of migration are now coming to an end: "Outward the sea, once untroubled except by the lifting easing canoes of the People. But for generations now it has borne the bruising keels of the invaders. Nonosabasut, hawk-high in his clifftop birch is witnessing this final evening of his People's last journey to these shores." (p. 3). Like the sea, the Beothuk were also once "untroubled." Now, Nonosabasut decides, agreeing with Longnon, a hunter who has already moved his camp to the interior, that the People's survival depends on retreat. They can no longer risk open conflict with these "invaders" whose disregard for life--since even their ships bruise the sea--has been so destructive for

the Beothuk. The decision to give up the annual journey to the sea is in truth an admission of defeat. The Beothuk way of life no longer works; the new way does, but only for the invader. Unable or unwilling to adapt, Nonosabasut decides that the sea has betrayed him: It is not "part of the People any longer" (p. 4). It belongs now to the "invaders."

In the woods, however, this break-down between the Beothuk and his tradition has not yet occurred. There, the tie between past and present still works. In fact, Nonosabasut is as much a part of those woods as he is of his People: "Nonosabasut ALIVE in his forest. The People's forest is wet. Groundwood is spongy, silver birchsticks CRACK they break sometimes. Old woman's bones their silver skins slip off, wet red rotwood under his moccassins in wet turn red. Red too his hands with red ochre, as he stumbles they stain silver birchbark, and his tread sinks in breathing bellies of mossbanks." (p. 12). This world is "alive" with Beothuk history. It is a world imbued with spirit--Nonosabasut's, the trees', the skeleton's. Nonosabasut, for instance, is in the woods to appease the anger of a dead old woman whose remains he accidentally disturbed the day before. Very religiously he smears her bones with red ochre, traces the outline of her skull, talks to her: "Peace old mother here is your ointment" (p. 13). Because her body is dead, Nonosabasut does not reason that her soul is also dead. To the contrary, he does not reason at all. He intuits or senses her living presence around him. She is part of the forest in the same way that the old spruce tree, "the old tree dame" he calls her, is part of the forest. If the tree can reach out and trip him, remind him in effect that the woods are not his alone, so can the woman's spirit. He

did, afterall, trip over her. Her bones, therefore, symbolize her continuing spiritual existence. If they eventually crumble into the soil like "the wet red rotwood" that the silver birchsticks decay into, they will still be part of her and the forest. Her ochred bones, therefore, symbolize the unity in which Nonosabasut, his body also painted red, lives as an inseparable part of all of life. They are each, like the tree, part of "the People's forest."

What threatens that continuing unity is the whiteman's progressive invasion of the Beothuk world. Since the sea has already been lost, there is little hope that the People will not lose the forest as well. The similarity between the dead woman's empty skeleton and the living Beothuk women's barrenness is not lost on Nonosabasut: "The woven basket of her hips was broken. How many children had she built in there? When would the People again be lords of this bay?" (p. 13). The answer--unspoken--is never. Nonosabasut's ritual, then, is done as much in respect for the old woman's soon-to-be "broken" immortality as it is for his own. Like her, he too needs descendants to carry his memory into the future. To date, he and Demasduit have created only one child. At age two, Wauanathoake, like the other children, is already sick. So conscious in fact are the People of their imminent extinction that even Osnahanut and Shawnadithit, too closely related to be "husband and wife" in the old days, have approvingly broken the incest taboo, but to no avail. The People, it becomes increasingly clear, cannot reverse the pattern of destruction that their own myths have forecast for their world: "Weren't the whitemen from the sea, their huge ships with wings like gulls, the monsters that the old stories warned about?" (p. 135).

This, it seems, is the essence of the People's conflict with the "invader;" they can not stop him, for his monstrous appetite is "fated" to devour them. Eschatology is no stranger to the primitive after all.

Nonosabasut remembers his first premonition of the death of his world:

> His father had said, 'Now you are ten years old, this summer you can come and see for yourself.' And that was the first time, at the sealing, he'd seen a horizon of carcasses, soft boulders from the sea, piled high where the white hunters had left them."
>
> (p. 20)

Because the white hunters are so well versed in death, they appear to be avenging furies of sorts, themselves impervious to death. Nonosabasut, for instance, feels guilty for clubbing semi-helpless ptarmigan to death. They challenge neither his skill nor his courage. He himself does not risk death in causing death. While the whitemen did not risk death either in killing the seals, their freedom to kill serves only to remind him of his own guilt: "Towards the season's end, he saw a beach again littered, but this time with the shot-down bodies of the People, after a large killing, whether of birds like today or of the caribou that were coming soon" (p. 21). Aggravating his murder-guilt is his inability to appease it. If, as a child, he understood the bond that man broke when he ended a life, as an adult and hunter he requires some means of repairing that bond. The

rituals, however, have been lost with the death of the "fathers." Not even Wothamisit can remember the chants that "hunters would sing to the spirits of the hunted before setting out and again when they returned" (p. 20).

Cultural memory, so essential to the Beothuk's sense of well-being, is in this instance dependent on the continued presence of the shaman. If the shaman will not forget the animal's spirit, then its death might not be permanent.[6] Ritual would absolve the hunter's guilt in the same way that Nonosabasut's anointing the dead woman's bones appeases his guilt for having disturbed them. Nonosabasut's respect can appease even the anger of the dead. Since the old woman wanted to remain "ALIVE / Now Still" (p. 14) in the present tense, then her continued spiritual existence depends on the "memory" of her descendants. It is important, therefore, for the People to maintain their peace with the dead--animal and human alike--for the dead may be forced to retaliate. Conversely, if the spirits are content, they might assist the hunter by sending him the animals he needs. If the spirits are not content, however, they could misdirect the animals and ruin the hunt. Thus, the whole of Beothuk existence is governed by a very effective contract between the living and the dead. They each "live" in debt to the other because their "lives" are dependent on the other.

By the time Nonosabasut becomes an adult, this contract no longer works. There are no effective intermediaries left to renew the People's knowledge of the dead or to assist the hunters in their search for food. While old Wothamasit is a valuable story-teller, his ability is derived from long-ago memory--and a failing one at that. In need of a shaman,

the People now look to Nonosabasut. A shaman's son, they hope he has inherited his father's psychic powers. Fittingly, Nonosabasut is first seen seated "hawk-high" (p. 1) in a birch tree--suggesting, in effect, that the candidate-elect has already completed one initiation rite, the ascension of the tree that symbolizes the cosmic centre of the world.[7] From here Nonosabasut "sees" his People's future. But Longnon, already moved to the interior, has also seen that future. Nonosabasut's vision, therefore, is not "psychic." It is based on the common sense of ordinary experience.

In the woods, Nonosabasut's accidental discovery of the skeleton signals his next initiation rite: the psychological death he must die to transcend the profane human condition and thus be reborn into the sacred. He undergoes that death through dream:

> He dozes too and dreams he is riding a huge stag, the herd leader. Then he is the stag. He is trying to lead his herd safely past the deer fences, but they won't follow him. He cannot speak. He can only nudge this one and that one with his heavy head. . .too many to keep on the right track. . .try to panic them, to make them run fast and blind. . .suddenly whoops and shouts. . .whitemen chasing them. . .guns spitting fire and bellowing in echoing valleys. . .run Demasduit. .run Waunathoake. . .she can't run fast enough. . .Shawnadithit, Longnon, Osnahanut, Wothamisit, running running. . . .
>
> Down Down. No breath in him. Others are falling on him like stones. No escape, not even his head can lift. Darkness. Can't breathe can't breathe. . . .
>
> He wakes. He's panting. He sits up. There is a man sitting by the fire. It's his dead father. His face glows in the firelight. His father reaches out and touches his neck gently. Sleep, Nonosabasut. Bafu buth babashot. . . .
>
> (my italics, pp. 48-49)

A powerful vision, on one level it foreshadows his death--he will be shot by the whiteman--and his failure as his People's leader; though on another level it also offers the spiritual consolation of his dead father's presence. While his metamorphosis into a stag represents his becoming the caribou's soul, ritualistically re-establishing the unity of man and animal that existed in mythical times, in illo tempore, before the fall,[8] his dream tells him that the "herd" is an endangered species. Ironically, the primeval unity of man and animal is restored only in terms of their common victimization. For that reason, not even Nonosabasut is confident that his election as shaman--his dead father's presence when he awakes from his dream should convince him--is a true election. His identification with the animal makes any "divining" of the hunt into an act of self-murder. He is afraid, for example, to stop Longnon's boy from killing the lead-stag in case there is no connection between it and his "guilty" dream, and yet the moment the stag lies dead on the bank, "Nonosabasut stands there silent. Remembering his dream. . . ." (p. 55).

The hunter-as-shaman is nonetheless hopeful of some sort of rebirth: "For months he has been waking with a great peace inside him. He wakes up ten years old, the world new, hills to toboggan" (p. 61). But when he throws a caribou shoulder-blade into the fire and reads the picture he sees in its cracks and lines, he is finally unsure of himself as a visionary: "He wonders is it here [hunting] away from the People, that Osnahanut and Nonosabasut will die waiting for good luck to come out of a dream that was perhaps no shaman's dream, but a common one of his own making" (p. 68). Thus, while Nonosabasut is elected, initiated, and

given visionary power, he doubts the "sacrality" of his knowledge. His guilt makes him "profane," unable to renew his People's faith in their immortality because he himself has lost his faith in the sacred.

The People are trapped, therefore, between their fear of extinction and their failure either to adapt to the whiteman's world-view or to revitalize their own. The Micmacs, for instance, survived European contact because they made the life-saving compromise. They worked for the whiteman, exchanging their tradition for his guns. The Micmacs, it seems, have not been as bound by the tradition of unity among all living things; hence they are no more crippled than the whiteman by blood-guilt. For example, in the river drowning of a Micmac brave--an accident that the Micmac's own People observed and grieved but did not prevent--Osnahanut explains: "These strange people let their own men in danger die even when it is possible to save them. They say it is too great a debt to owe your life to another man" (p. 28). Nonosabasut, to repudiate this breaking of the contract that binds the living to the dead, lets fly an arrow into the exact spot where the dead man's people pulled his body from the river. Now they all owe their lives to the Beothuks.

As respectful as the People are of the dead, Such tries not to romanticize them. They are not, as Arnold Davidson notes, "nature's nobleman."[9] They have on occasion killed as cold-bloodedly as the English. In one incident validated by history, two British soldiers, hostages in a voluntary exchange with two Beothuks, are killed when the People suspect that the intended peace talk is really an ambush. Because the killing is a murder--the two men are stabbed in the back--there is no means of rationalizing the deaths or expiating the murderers'

guilt. Yet the crime cannot be ignored. Doodebewshet, a widow, is chosen to pay for it. In decapitating the two bodies, she re-enacts the crime, assuming through ritual the guilt that cannot be absolved but must nevertheless be borne. The tribe's scapegoat, she frees the People of a debt they could not otherwise pay.

Such uses this incident to contrast the Beothuk's guilt-consciousness with the whiteman's apparent lack of it. When Nonosabasut, for instance, is murdered for attempting to rescue his wife, none of the party involved is innocent because each willingly participated in abducting her. As one of the participants, the sympathetic John Peyton Jr., writes of the abduction: "On this being done [Nonosabasut] became infuriated, and rushing towards her he strove to drag her from them; one of the men rushed forward and stabbed him in the back with a bayonet" (p. 81). Peyton pities the "poor wretch" who must be shot, but his tone is more wondering at the savage strength of the man who has threatened Peyton's own life in trying to free his hostage mate. Ironically, Nonosabasut has set out across the river ice to initiate peace talks with her captors, the very reason for which she has been abducted--the governor wanted a Beothuk ambassador. An historical fact that Such neglects to mention in his novel is that a bounty was offered for the live capture of the woman.[10] Obviously, the man who stabbed Nonosabasut did not understand his mission's purpose: to save the Beothuks from extinction. As Peyton reports, the man, when reprimanded by one of the others in the party, replied: "'It was only an Indian' and he wished he had shot a hundred instead of one" (p. 87). Peyton himself understands that "the untaught Indian was only doing that which every man ought to do--he came to rescue

his wife from the hands of her captors, and nobly lost his life in his attempt to save her." But the journal entry does not recognize or acknowledge any responsibility or guilt for having precipitated the event that cost Nonosabasut his life. There is, therefore, a curious denial of criminal intent in stealing a man's wife. The abductors' law need not protect the rights of an "untaught Indian" who fails to understand the good intentions of this imposed rule of law.

Most evident in the appetite with which the white "invaders" consume life--the Beothuks', the seals', the fish, the forest, the fur-bearing animals'--is the "invaders'" inherent notion that this "new found land" is a lawless land. These nineteenth-century frontiersmen are thus "free" to kill as if Death itself were their quarry.[11] Not even the well-meaning colonial government, as Nonosabasut's death illustrates, could check their freedom. Viewed from this perspective, Newfoundland is most certainly Canada's first frontier. Like all frontiers, its moral freedom is an illusion whereby men seek to live out the symbolic conquest of death which is more properly the province of art. This "transcendence" of law claims only the Beothuk, however, as its victim. While the colonial government was willing to acknowledge that truth, it was not willing to affirm its own institutional murder-guilt. The wife of the last Beothuk shaman had accordingly to be educated into the justice of Christian principles.

For "good reason," the point of view then shifts from Nonosabasut's perspective to Demasduit's after her capture. Now the reader is not an observer of the whiteman in the wilderness, but of the Beothuk in the garrison. Such implies at the outset that Demasduit cannot survive

the dislocation: "the lines of the runners grow closer and closer as she stares. The lines meet. Just afterwards Nonosabasut disappears. The snow, in cold evening now, continues to mark. . .the wake. . .of her own passing" (p. 88). Psychologically, of course, she isn't meant to survive. She is supposed to "die." The plan to re-educate her depends on that event. The vanishing point, therefore, represents the death of her old way of life, the dissolution of her double vision of reality.[12] In its place, she is to see singly, like her captors. In her religious instruction class, for instance, Reverend Leigh "cannot understand her drawing even though she tries to tell him the story of it. He takes paper and draws the church too. But he only draws how it looks from the outside, as if you were a long way away" (p. 99). Such's point, of course, is that the minister is a "long way away" from the kind of "primitive" faith in the immortality of the soul that informs Demasduit's dual-vision of life. Her drawing of the church, the exterior and interior superimposed upon each other, reveals how profoundly unconscious her sense of this duality really is. She projects it onto all that she perceives. She cannot understand, therefore, why her captor sees only partially what she sees wholly. Reverend Leigh is not concerned that he should. His purpose in educating her is to teach her to see life as he does.

What Demasduit sees, however, are barriers. Her captor's house, for example, is curiously divided: "A special room to sit in. A different place to sleep" (p. 94). Her first experience in that house,

consequently, is her first experience of aloneness: "Then she, Demasduit, wife of Nonosabasut, mother of Waunathoake. . .sleeps for the first time alone" (p. 95). In church, the people are again curiously separated from each other: "There was no laughing and clapping and dancing as there was when old Wothamisit used to tell his stories" (p. 99). As co-operative a student of the whiteman's ways as Demasduit is, her aloneness in his world ultimately destroys her: "With an urge to touch trees, frantic she went to the walled garden. . . .A gardener's workcoat hung on the handpeg of his oiled scythe. Its sweatsmell caught in her throat. She went dizzy to her knees. Reek of the nearby outhouse assaulted her nostrils, in her ears the caught blue buzz of flies. The mealy earth pressed against her hands. She rocked remembering the forgotten uses of her body" (p. 108). In reverse of the Judaeo-Christian myth of man's fall from the garden, Demasduit's fall is from the wilderness. The wall that protects the whiteman from nature does not protect her. Rather it violates her, imprisons her in an identity--Mary March--that is meaningless because she has no one with whom to identify. With neither husband, nor child, nor People--they live, dead or alive, on the other side of the garden--"Demasduit" is as "dead" as the dead old woman in the forest would be if she too were separated from her People. Nonosabasut's "remembering" of the old woman at the beginning of the novel contrasts with Demasduit's desire to be remembered now: "Demasduit. To hear her real name again. She'll get them to say it over and over and over. Everyone will say Demasduit, Demasduit and leap three times for her. She stretches out her hands. They hold her hands, then they

hold each other all together, and she will be Demasduit again" (p. 113).

If hearing her name could "save" her life--"she will be Demasduit again"--then her aloneness in the whiteman's world is as much spiritual as it is physical and sexual. The garden wall, therefore, has been as destructive an experience for her psyche as it has been for the invader. At least Such's use of her experience in the garrison implies that the "walled garden" has been equally destructive for the whiteman. The latter, however, has accepted the death of his "whole" nature by refusing to value, or more exactly, re-value, what he has lost--his participation in a collective that shares an immortal soul. In compensation for that loss, he has won a private identity. John Peyton Jr. (my italics), for instance, has been carefully named to distinguish him from his father. Demasduit's benefactor, he alone understands how destructive her identity as Mary March has been for her, for when she is dying he apologetically and sympathetically calls her Demasduit. If he can restore her name, he cannot restore her life, at least not physically. Demasduit's survival, therefore, depends on her captors' redefining survival--not to deny their murder-debt to the Beothuks but to pay the debt for which they abducted Demasduit to pay for them.

If Part II concludes, like Part I, with a death, Part III is a quick succession of several deaths. Finally, only Osnahanut and Shawnadithit, her mother, Doodebewshet, and her sister, Suauthwedit are still alive. Now the reciprocal relationship that Oshahanut glimpsed when he and Nonosabasut were hunting the preceding spring--"I see the snow falling on

us and burying us dead-asleep with all the other asleep-dead things" (p. 70)--has acquired new meaning. Then, Osnahanut feared never awakening physically; now, he fears never awakening spiritually: "Shawnadithit. If all the People die with no children there will be no one to remember our spirits. We will disappear in the ages like birchbark in the fire" (p. 128). To be forgotten, therefore, is the meaning of Osnahanut's fear of death. His immortality depends on his being remembered, more precisely, on his soul's being remembered, for like Demasduit his identity is not private but collective. He needs a People to live forever. Unless he can adopt someone into the tribe who will take on the burden of remembering them--Demasduit and he can "build no babies" (p. 128)--their soul will disappear. Osnahanut meets Peter Such in dreams because he is the one who asserts the threat to the ego in the absence of race. Such himself, who shares the "guilt" of Nonosabasut, assumes the duty to remember as the payment of blood-guilt. He takes on his shoulders our collective burden.

Riverrun, Peter Such hopes, will prevent Osnahanut from disappearing from our collective memory. Just as the Beothuk remembered the other first People of Newfoundland--"the race of giants who were the first People's ancestors" (p. 21)--so can contemporary Canadians, Such believes, remember the Beothuk. It is as much our duty as Shawnadithit feels it is hers, and for the same reason: "Those of us who are alive should try to remember the dead ones or else their spirits will have no resting place" (p. 132). But the artist's success depends on his convincing the reader that ancestors can be adopted.[13] Because the present could not "conceivably" exist without the past, the ties with the

past cannot be denied. Such's use of historical documents and journals underscores that truth. Facts, however, are not sufficient. They are too biased. They hide as much as they reveal because the "other" side of the story remains untold. To tell the Beothuk's side, Such has borrowed from them their own means of recording history--dream. Here he discovers another frontier, not the one he read about "through the pages of history" (p. ix), but the one Osnahanut introduced him to--the world of the dead, the world of eternal ancestors.

To give Osnahanut's role as ancestor plausibility, Such must first give his dream theory plausibility. Again he borrows, or perhaps invents to "borrow back," his aesthetics from the Beothuk themselves: "As a man sleeps each night his soul learns how to leave him, until the one day when it leaves him forever." When old Wothamasit is sleeping, for instance it is assumed that his soul "is talking with the gods." He "lies stone lonely" (p. 41)--like a dead man--because until he repossesses his soul and awakens, he is in the Beothuk sense of sleep, dead. His soul has left him. Osnahanut's dream theory thus reveals how his fear of dying is in essence a fear of losing his soul forever. His double vision also reveals the importance of dreams--the means by which the living talk "with the gods," and alternately, the means by which the gods talk with the living. The distinction between "asleep" and "dead" is thus more radical than subtle, for once the "asleep-dead" are all "dead-asleep" there will be no one to dream the dead back to life.

Shawnadithit experiences the same fear in a dream she has after Osnahanut dies: "Eight People. She herself made nine. The eight

People were walking ahead of her. She thought they were walking. They were going by a long route to avoid the whitemen. The children kept saying to her, "When we get there we'll talk to Nonosabasut, and he'll show us where we can find Osnahanut. Then we can all start again" (p. 136). Of course, they cannot start again, historically. They are as trapped in the disappearance of their race as they are "trapped by the legs. . .like snared animals" that Shawnadithit also dreams them to be. Their release from death, therefore, depends on their finding an alternate means of starting again. Shawnadithit naturally assumes that her lover-husband Osnahanut will save them. And he does--becoming the intermediary that Such requires to learn the Beothuk's own story. Interestingly, Nonosabasut is reduced from his original status of shaman-elect to the intermediary who "finds" Osnahanut. And Such himself takes on Osnahanut's role as "word-creator"[14] to sing, like Shawnadithit, last of her people, "a song of your People" (p. 144).

Finally, it is in art that the dead must live in our world, even as they have been "recalled" in other times through the "art" of the shaman. The art of memory, in this sense, not only opens a door for us into the past; it leaves the door open for the dead to bring us relief from guilt, to awaken in us something of our lost faith in our spiritual origins. That "This is where the riverrun ends" (p. 144) is true only should we accept Shawnadithit's lonely fear that "the speaking river [must] run to the sea forever, bearing no longer the living People through the frogback rapids, bearing only the dead leaves of the woods in autumn." The elegy of the modern singer reverses that claim, making the rivers speak of our common destiny even as his "leaves" remember our common origins.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Peter Such, Riverrun (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1973), p. ix. Further references to this text will appear in parentheses in the text.

[2] Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, pp. 84-85: "Seeing spirits, in dream or awake is the determining sign of the shamanic. . . .They serve the candidate as a means of entering into contact with divine or semi-divine beings."

[3] Arnold E. Davidson, "Crosscurrents in Peter Such's Riverrun," JCF, 31-32 (1981), p. 197.

[4] Andreas Lommel, Shamanism: The Beginnings of Art, p. 15.

[5] Otto Rank, "Creation and Guilt" in Will Therapy and Truth and Reality, trans. Jessie Taft, (1936; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 277: "This conception of the creative will as a victory of the individual over the biological sexual instinct explains the guilt which the development and affirmation of the creative personality necessarily produces. It is this going beyond the limits set by nature as manifested in the will accomplishment to which the ego reacts with guilt."

[6] Stanley Diamond, Introductory Essay: "Job and the Trickster" in Paul Radin, The Trickster: A Study in American Mythology (1956; rpt. New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. xxii. Diamond quotes analogously a Maori witness in a New Zealand court: "Gods do die, unless there are tohungas (priests) to keep them alive."

[7] Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, trans. Willard R. Trask (1958; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 94.

[8] Eliade, Shamanism, p. 94.

[9] Arnold Davidson, "Crosscurrents in Riverrun," p. 197.

[10] Peter Such, Vanished Peoples: The Archaic Dorset and Beothuk People of Newfoundland (Toronto: New Canadian Publications, 1978), p. 69.

[11] Refusing to respect the life of the "other," these frontiersmen resemble the criminal-type discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. They kill impulsively to control death so that it cannot control them.

[12] In Demasduit's world-view, body and soul are inseparable. Thus she sees "doubly" rather than singly or rationally as Newton taught the western world to see.

[13] See David Williams, "The Indian Our Ancestor: Three Modes of Vision in Recent Canadian Fiction", DR, 57 (Summer 1978), pp. 309-328.

[14] Lommel, Shamanism, p. 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Articulating North": The Integration of a Divided Self in *Surfacing*

Like *Riverrun*, *Surfacing* deals with the question of collective murder-guilt, in as much as the natural world of the "near North"[1] is being destroyed by civilized technology. The narrator's concern for the death of nature is nonetheless revealed as a projection of her personal guilt in the abortion of her foetus--what her lover told her was "only an animal."[2] Like Kroetsch's Peter Guy in *But We Are Exiles*, she must face and affirm her responsibility for murder in order to realize her journey's essential purpose: to heal the schism between mind and body, self and world which her sense of man's and woman's alienation from nature reflects but does not explain.

While critics are in general agreement about the narrator's search for wholeness, they differ about the means and even the possible success of such a quest. Those who favour an archetypal interpretation include Josie Campbell who compares her journey to the "mythic heroic quest,"[3] Catherine Ross to the shaman's "initiation ritual" and "mystical rebirth,"[4] and Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen to the "Grieving Mother's" search for her "lost primitive, psychic origins."[5] Feminist and Jungian critic Annis Pratt agrees with the latter that the narrator's self-actualization depends on her recovering her "unconscious world where maternity is a form of power."[6] Nancy Bjerring adopts a linguistic

approach which is more concerned with expression than is the archetypal approach. The narrator "must confront both her essential emotional self and the reality of nature and in so doing learn the language through which their meaning can be expressed."[7] Another variation of the feminist approach is the political perspective of Rosemary Sullivan. She reads Surfacing within the context of Atwood's Survival thesis: "It is a novel about power. The narrator has neatly divided the moral world into killer and victim."[8] Susan Schaeffer offers a more existential treatment of power and victimization: Surfacing is about "mortality, the unacceptable fact of one's own death, the even more unacceptable deaths of others."[9]

These differing versions of an antagonist in the novel require varying terms of resolution, though the question posed by some approaches admitsof no resolution. Sullivan argues that "The quest for insight in the novel has been pursued by a process of decreation, a disengagement from time, from language, but no bridge to re-enactment has been discovered."[10] Arnold and Cathy Davidson agree that "no new role" has been created for the narrator. They explain, however, that Atwood could not realistically provide one: "In both the old myths and the modern society there is no definite place for a female mythic hero."[11] Their conclusion overlooks that of Hinz and Teunissen, whose Mater Dolorosa is a face of the mythic Great Mother, though the problem remains of restoring that authorizing vision in the world.[12] Jerome Rosenberg explains that the narrator does not "return with an elixir that 'restores the world'" because what she "has learned is tentative, less an absolute ethical formula from the mystic beyond, more a realization of the strengths and weaknesses of one's humanity."[13] For

Williams James, the narrator's decision "to live in the usual way" is itself her elixir: "I think that there is here the basis for a radically revised relation to the world of culture as well as to the world of nature, a relation which includes the human community."[14]

The narrator herself provides the most important clue that her return to society will be meaningful. In reference to her brother's near drowning, she has said, "If it happened to me I would have felt there was something special about me to be raised from the dead like that; I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn't" (p. 74). Though the narrator is unconscious of the essential meaning of those words when she says them, Atwood has nevertheless quite consciously chosen an "escape artist" (p. 72) to be her protagonist. Once her heroine's escape from the "unacceptable fact"[15] of death has ended, she can begin to confront her fear of that fact productively, to become an "authentic" artist. Certainly she has decided to use language--what James Harrison says "is all we have, as humans, to achieve wholeness"[16]--to communicate with Joe. Willing to return to him and to the city, she is correspondingly willing to accept that the myth of eternal life in the North has been debunked, that her real journey must take place in the metaphysical landscape of the "North in men," the region of her mind where the uncreated symbols that will heal her spiritual alienation from nature and the human community exist potentially. Her quest is then indeed for her psychic origins in "nature," but it must involve a translation of "nature" into a meaningful language.

The narrator establishes her intellectual awareness of man's fractured sense of self in the novel's first few pages. Joe, her lover,

looks like the "buffalo on the U.S. nickel" (p. 8), while Anna, her friend, is a failed portrait of a princess from a children's fairy story. David, she ultimately decides, is "an imposter, a pastiche, layers of political handbills, pages from magazines" (p. 152). No one knows how to be a "natural" human being. Neither, however, do the humans allow animals to be "natural." David mocks them with his Walt Disney imitations; the service station owner ridicules them by dressing a family of moose in human clothes. Informing this need to parody nature--human and animal--is everyone's need to control nature.

The narrator is no exception. A sophisticated and cynical observer of her friends' phoniness, she is ignorant of how self-controlled or phony she herself has become. While she looks "natural" in her "jeans and sweatshirt and fringed over-the-shoulder bag" (p. 20), in fact, she is not. Much more artificial than Anna, who lies about her appearance, the narrator fabricates most of her past. Her disguise is a story: an invented marriage, a divorce, an abandoned child. Her truth is a failed love affair and an abortion. The necessity of the abortion and a lie to disguise it are rooted deeply in her fear of life and the ego-deaths required for her to live productively. Peter Guy's neurosis in But We Are Exiles is, from the male perspective, a near analogy: his fear of any ego-surrender to race or to biology prevented him from affirming his sexual initiation. Hornyak--his double--bore the moral responsibility that he refused to bear. Correspondingly, the narrator's fear of surrendering her ego to the child she had conceived led to the abortion of the foetus. It died so that she might remain "herself," "anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ" (p. 140), she says, in

virtual recognition of the psychological truth that "the killing, the sacrifice, of the other" is one means of lessening the "death fear of the ego."[17]

Informing her fear of self-surrender is her unexpressed fear that death is permanent. She has no myth of eternal life to assure her that she will not "die" forever. When her brother "died," for instance, when he fell into the lake and was rescued by his mother, she asked her mother "where he could have gone if she hadn't saved him. She said she didn't know" (p. 74). Lacking a response, the narrator-as-child had only school-yard nursery rhymes to fall back on:

> Stick him in the bread pan,
> Sock him in the jaw;
> Now he's in the graveyard
> Haw, haw haw.
>
> (p. 74)

If her children's mythology laughed at death, she at least had a mythology at that time. Her parents did not. They controlled their fear of death by denying that it frightened them. Her mother explained nothing, her father explained everything, but neither satisfied her curiosity.

A rationalist, her father did not believe in God, "a superstition," or in life after death, "people are not onions. . .they stay under" (p. 104). He believed in reason. What was irrational existed only by virtue of human error: "To him that's what Hitler exemplified: not the triumph of evil but the failure of reason" (p. 59). While he thereby acknowledged that man was capable of acting irrationally, he did not question why. Neither did he question his "authentic" need to live in the bush for six months of the year. He assumed that his island retreat was an escape from irrational people, but once in the bush, he had then

to escape from the wilderness. He built a garrison: a cabin, a fenced garden, a playpen for his son. When he had been there alone for too long, his daughter wonders if he did not go insane: "Crazy, loony. Bushed" (p. 60). She wonders, in effect, if he did not finally become one of the irrational people whom he had always disliked and tried to escape.

In contrast with her father, the narrator's mother lives more by instinct than reason. Consequently, her relationship with the wilderness is a more nurturing one than his: she feeds the birds; she protects her children from a bear that wanders into their camp. If she does not need to re-order nature (her husband worked for a power company that drowned the wilderness), neither, apparently, does she need to order or articulate the meaning of her human relationship with it. In her journal, she records only the seasons. In the hospital, she talks about planting bulbs, not her imminent death. Like her husband, she is a remarkably one-sided person. She refuses to use logic; he refuses not to. Both refuse to be fully human.

Like the two dolls in the barometer that the narrator remembers having seen in Paul and Madame's house, her parents lived connected, but separate lives. They responded to each other--when one appeared the other did not--but they were not, like the Indian couple that she used to see in the "weather beaten canoe: father in the stern, head wizened and corded like a dried root, mother with her gourd body and hair pared back to her nape" (pp. 86-87), an integrated organic whole. The consequence of her parents' mechanical-like marriage was that neither had ever to surrender his/her self to the "other"--be it his spouse or the "other" side of his mind. Each avoided psychological "death." The narrator's

mother, however, eventually succumbed to a brain tumor and her father, she suspects, has succumbed to the bush. He could no longer live by reason alone, and her mother could no longer live by instinct alone because the "golden mean" that their frontier retreat represents--a half year in the city, a half year in the bush--can only be realized by affirming the "other" side of their mind, not by repressing it.

The narrator's freedom to live as a "whole" person also depends on her affirming the two halves of her fractured mind. First, however, she must discover the "authentic" meaning of the mind-body schism that she has inherited from her parents' fear of life. Although the mother's rapport with nature suggests that she has surrendered her ego to instinct (impulse), her silence suggests that she has really lost her human self, or any language which could express the unity of instinct and her ego-will. She is natural, but in a real sense she is "bushed," unable to leave her daughter anything of personal value or meaning beyond what the daughter has created for herself. The narrator's father, on the other hand, has not yet succumbed to nature in his futile quest to control it. His disappearance is the first indication that the narrator has of his failure to make nature conform to his will. Her search for father and mother both is then an attempt to reconcile these contradictory wills in herself.

But to date, she has been no more than an escape artist in life, and a commercial artist at work. In neither has she been able to express her "essential emotional self."[18] Her publisher will not print children's books with any "disturbing" (p. 53) truths in them; she has herself repressed the "disturbing" truth of her abortion. Ironically, it is her

father's primitive art that reverses her neurotic flight from life and initiates the process of what must be a willed "ideal-self creation."[19] Looking through his papers, in search of some clue to assist her finding him, she discovers his drawings of Indian rock paintings: "More hands, then a stiff childish figure, faceless and minus the hands and feet, and on the next page a similar creature with two things like tree branches or antlers protruding from its head. . . .I can't make sense out of them" (p. 59). At first, the paintings frighten her, confirming her suspicion that her father has gone mad. The second time that she looks at his papers she discovers the words--"the academic prose" (p. 103)--that do make sense: "The subject matter falls into the following categories: Hands, Abstract Symbols, Humans, Animals and Mythological Creatures. In treatment they are reminiscent, with their elongated limbs and extreme distortion, of the drawings of children" (p. 102). The explanation pleases her. He was not hallucinating; he was not insane, he was engaged in a very methodical, scientific bit of research that ultimately killed him. The logic relieves her: "crazy people can come back, from wherever they go to take refuge, but dead people can't, they are prohibited" (p. 103). Relieved that he is dead, she decides to retrace his trail, to break the code of numbers of the drawings of the X's on the map that he has left, she decides, "like a puzzle" (p. 104) for her to solve. Ironically, however, his logic must lead her to the end of her rationality, just as it led him to his.

When she dives into the lake, it is to find the submerged rock paintings. She sees, instead, her father's drowned body which she confuses with the "drowned" or repressed fact of her aborted foetus. Now, no codes to find the truth or lies to deny it are necessary: "the lake was horrible, it was filled with death, it was touching me" (p. 142). In a way that logic had never made clear to her before, she realizes that she is not an innocent victim of some "other" will--be it American technology destroying the landscape, or her lover: "He made me do it . . . .He said it wasn't a person only an animal" (p. 144)--but one of the Americans/Canadians/human beings who kill because they have "the power to kill" (p. 116). Just as she wondered "what part of them the heron was that [the fishermen] needed so much to kill it" (p. 119), she knows that she has killed "whatever [the foetus] is, a part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it" (p. 148). Her defensive will no longer in control, her mind is open again to the impulse of her body: "feeling was beginning to seep back into me, I tingled like a foot that's been asleep" (p. 146). She is also ready to pay for her murder-guilt, to leave a gift on the shore, a piece of clothing as an offering to the gods who have given her the truth--the power--that she needed.

Ironically, the narrator can only misunderstand the gods' gift at this point. They have given her the power to see her guilt, but not the power to resolve it. She herself, is still controlled by the same Body-Mind/Impulse-Will conflict that has always inhibited her freedom to be an integrated human being. While she wants "to be whole" (p. 146), she is afraid to love Joe. He could impregnate her. Rejecting him, she re-affirms her fear of life, refusing again to surrender herself to

anything beyond her control. This time, however, her fear is not of nature--what the foetus represented--but its opposite, reason--what Joe as a human represents: "he was rising out of the fur husk, solid and heavy; but the cloth separated from him and I saw he was human, I didn't want him in me, sacrilege, he was one of the killers" (p. 147). Thus, while the narrator knows her guilt, she now abandons entirely her individual will in the rush to do penance. She wants only to be an animal, to be free of the moral burden, the sacrilege that being a whole human means. In effect, she reverses roles with Joe--figured as the "buffalo" on the U.S. nickel," he is clearly intended to represent the natural and "racial" side of herself--taking on herself the shape of a natural creature from which he is now excluded. No longer neurotic, she has faced her murder-guilt, and she risks her own victimization by the world from which she exiles herself.

This "animal" phase of her development may be physically dangerous, but it is morally safer, in her view, since animals are victims, not killers. As an animal, therefore, she begins her re-creation. She "mates" with Joe, outside, in the night, the moon on her left as it was in her child-drawing, the absent sun on her right:

> He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out fronds. This time I will do it by myself, squatting, on old newspapers in a corner alone, or on leaves, dry leaves, a heap of them, that's cleaner. In the morning I will be able to see it: it will be covered with shining fur, a god, I will never teach it any words.
>
> (pp. 161-2)

What she is seeking, albeit unconsciously, is an entrance to that picture she found after her dive into the lake; the picture that she believes is a legacy from her mother, but which is really a saving gift of her own child-art to her adult self:

> On the left was a woman with a round moon stomach: the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out. Opposite her was a man with horns on his head like cow horns and a barbed tail.
>
> The picture was mine, I had made it. The baby was myself before I was born, the man was God, I'd drawn him when my brother learned in the winter about the Devil and God: If the Devil was allowed a tail and horns, God needed them also, they were advantages.
>
> (p. 158)

The child that she thinks she conceives with Joe is the child in the picture--herself! Now as its mother, she has become her own mother, the source of her own re-creation: "The two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers." (p. 162) to be born, however, a separation between mother and child must take place. And she is still tempted to remain in the safety of the womb since she would like to exist without becoming human, without "killing"--that is, giving up--the moon-mother and animal-god-father who created her. Yet if she does not "kill" them, she will die.

The narrator's final journey into the world of the spirits--the dead--is thus a capitulation to the impulsive side of her life--to "nature" in her mother's sense--but "nature" will serve her no better than it did her mother unless she is able to see its limitations, or even to lay the ghosts that she has raised.

In searching for them, she does become completely non-rational, "insane," "bushed," and she embarks upon a wilful destruction of any

barrier which has separated her from her non-human past. She begins with the cabin, ripping and burning every drawing and photograph, smashing and slashing everything else. When her "human" history, as well as her parents' dead past, has been destroyed, she leaves, walks to the lake, lies down in it, and peels her clothes off her body "like wall-paper" (p. 177). Her ritual appears to cleanse her of her false human form. A loon sees her but ignores her: she has become part of the land. Now in harmony with nature, she has become an animal. She eats from the garden, kicks earth over her droppings, hollows a lair near the woodpile and crawls into it to sleep.

Though she has eliminated the borders which have walled out the ubiquitous threat of death, the "gods are demanding, absolute, they want all" (p. 178), and so she must face their new threat to her being. By the next morning, even the garden has become taboo. Because "it could not exist without the fence," it is "a stunt, a trick," a remnant of human history. To enter it is to become one of the "killers." Consequently she resists her hunger. She "searches the ground for shapes" (p. 180) she can eat. She no longer names the plants. Words are also barriers that separate the thing from its essence. Curiously, the narrator acts irrationally, but her mind is lucid, aware of all that her body does. She is in control, it seems, of her accelerating descent to the world of the dead. Finally, when she sees herself in skeleton form--"I'm ice clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh, the ribs are shadows" (p. 181)--her ego-surrender is complete. There are no barriers left between her mind and the "other" --be it her body or the world: "I lean against a tree, I am a tree

leaning." Then even the borders that divide nature into its components dissolve: "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (p. 181). Her mystical unity with the world realizes her freedom to enter the spiritual "condition the dead themselves have entered" (p. 180).

She cannot, however, exist in this selfless state for long. Like the shaman who must also ascend from his ecstatic journey to the dead, the narrator must surface or die. Her journey, however, has initiated her to the role of psychopomp.[20] Her dive into the lake represents her summary election, the steps of her "dying" the frightening process by which the shaman is also transformed from the profane human condition to the sacred. Her old Self now "dead," she must resurrect herself and return to the "living" human world. The act is one of parturition; she gives birth to herself: "I have to get up, I get up. Through the ground, break surface, I'm standing now; separate again" (p. 181).

Ironically, it is when she has begun to reverse the process of her "dying" that she "sees" her dead parents. In contrast with the shaman whose ancestors speak to him, the narrator's parents are silent. Their meaning, like her own, depends on her. If she had formerly ignored their deaths--she did not attend her mother's funeral, neither did she believe that the fishermen had found her father's body--she cannot ignore their presence now. Their ghosts evidently summon a rebirth of her own creative potential. To release them from her past, she must correspondingly release herself.

Thus, when she sees her mother and "she is wearing her grey leather jacket, her hair is long, down to her shoulders in the style of thirty

years ago, before I was born" (p. 182, my italics), she sees the static image in which she has neurotically imprisoned both her mother and herself. She would still be--as implied by the ambiguity of "before I was born"--unborn. Though when her mother is suddenly transformed into one of the bluejays she was feeding, the image is shattered and the narrator is left with the burden of creating a mother. She must herself assume the role of nurturer, of feeder of the creatures, and create a new life--her own as well as the child's life she has conceived with Joe. For the moment, however, she cannot give up her new identity as "Mother of the Animals." When Joe returns she hides in the woods, certain that if he and the men with him "guess her true form, identity" (p. 183)--that of an animal--they will kill her. Once again, she nearly aborts her freedom to create a new life, this time, her own.

Only when she sees her father does she begin to understand the "deadly" implications of her fear of being human. He is standing "near the fence. . .looking in at the garden." He cannot enter it, she decides, because "now his own fence excludes him as logic excludes love." When she says his name, "Father" (p. 186), he turns and "it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf's eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen at night in the car headlights. Reflectors." What she sees in those eyes is her own reflection, "what you meet when you've stayed here too long alone" (p. 187). It is she who is the wolf. Just as her father rejected logic at the end of his life, so has the narrator rejected logic in freeing herself from the burden of being human. As an animal, she excludes herself from love. It, like logic, also requires fences. That is the hidden meaning of the garden in the

wilderness.[21] Its fences have a creative value, for, without them, the garden could not exist. Correspondingly, the narrator without her fences of logic and reason cannot exist as a human being. She must learn, therefore, how to use logic to recreate her "natural" self.

She discovers the means by looking at the lake--the source of all her important discoveries:

> From the lake a fish jumps
> An idea of a fish jumps
> A fish jumps, carved wooden fish with dots painted on the sides, no, antlered fish thin drawn in red on cliffstone, protecting spirit. It hangs in the air suspended, flesh turned to icon, he has changed again, returned to the water. How many shapes can he take.
>
> I watch it for an hour or so; then it drops and softens, the circles widen, it becomes an ordinary fish again.
>
> (p. 187)

Here the movement from nature--the unthinking, non-rational fish--to the idea--the rational conceptualization of fish--to the icon--the man-made symbol that integrates nature and logic--becomes the way back to the human world. While the fish appears to change form many times, returning always to an "ordinary fish," it is the narrator who is creating these forms. The "real" fish and the "idea of a fish," the old dichotomy of body and mind which has left her fragmented, is mediated at last in the icon of a fish, in a symbol for which she herself is responsible. In this way she is free to synthesize nature with logic, to heal the body-split that has fractured her former sense of Self. She discovers that she too can possess more than one "meaning." As woman she can be both mother and artist, one who surrenders to the impulse of "race" or

biology and one who also asserts her creative will to express her "self." To do both she must return to the city, to Joe, and to human language, her leaving "the North" signalling that she can leave the past but not what it means.

That is the burden she must take South: the need to create "living" symbols of the world of the dead she has entered and emerged from anew. Ironically, the prophecy that she made about her brother's near-drowning has begun to be fulfilled: "If it had happened to me I would have felt there was something special about me, to be raised from the dead like that; I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn't" (p. 74). The most important secret she has learned concerns herself. She is no longer a victim: "I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone" (p. 191). She has accepted, then, that all life is a creation. Her own form, like her child's "shape of a gold fish now in her belly," like Joe's shape, is "only half-formed" (p. 192). But that, her new tone of realism suggests, is what all human life is--incomplete, average. Its essential meaning, like the fish she watched change form, like her parents whom she has let become human and die so that she could free herself from them, depends on her ability to integrate flesh with idea--to procreate the physical race, but also to create abstract symbols, visions of the spirit, which authorize human existence and intercede for it in the world of natural forms. In that sense, the narrator of Surfacing comes out of the North as a shaman who has not only absolved herself of guilt but who has found a spiritual ideology directed toward living.

Notes to Chapter Four

[1] Jack Warwick, The Long Journey, See the introductory chapter of this thesis, p. 7.

[2] Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (Don Mills, Ontario: Paperjacks, 1973), p. 144. All further references will be to this edition and will be identified within the text in parentheses.

[3] Josie Campbell, "The Woman as Hero in Margaret Atwood's Surfacing," MOSAIC, 11(Spring 1978), p. 18.

[4] Catherine S. Ross, "Nancy Drew as Shaman: Atwood's Surfacing" CanL 84(Spring 1980), pp. 14, 16.

[5] Evelyn J. Hinz, and John J. Teunissen, "Surfacing: Margaret Atwood's 'Nymph Complaining,'" ConL, 20: 2(Spring 1979), pp. 221, 230.

[6] Annis Pratt, "Surfacing: The Rebirth Journey," in The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism (Toronto: Anansi, 1981), ed. Arnold E. Davidson, and Cathy N. Davidson, p. 153.

[7] Nancy E. Bjerring, "Problem of Language in Margaret Atwood's Surfacing,"QQ, 83(Winter 1976), p. 597.

[8] Rosemary Sullivan, "Surfacing and Deliverance," CanL, 67 (Winter 1976), p. 12.

[9] Susan F. Schaeffer, "'It is Time that Separates Us': Margaret Atwood's Surfacing," CentR 18: 4(Fall 1974), p. 319.

[10] Rosemary Sullivan, "Breaking the Circle," MalR, 41(Jan. 1977), pp. 40-41.

[11] Arnold E. Davidson, and Cathy N. Davidson, "The Anatomy of Margaret Atwood's Surfacing," Ariel, 10(July 1979), pp. 49, 50.

[12] Hinz and Teunissen, pp. 221, 236.

[13] Jerome H. Rosenberg, "Woman as Everyman in Atwood's Surfacing: Some Observations on the End of the Novel," DR, 59(Spring 1979), p. 80.

[14] William C. James, "Atwood's Surfacing," CanL, 91(Winter 1981), pp. 179, 190.

[15] Schaeffer, p. 319.

[16] James Harrison, "20,000,000 Solitudes of Surfacing," DR, 59(Spring 1979), p. 80.

[17] Rank, "Life Fear and Death Fear," in Myth, p. 275.

[18] Bjerring, p. 597.

[19] Rank, "Self and Ideal" in Myth, p. 286.

[20] Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, p. 4.

[21] Ross, "Nancy Drew as Shaman": "The parents' original creation of this garden in the bush was a labour of love, of civilizing in the best sense. . . ." (p. 11).

CONCLUSION

A recent study of the Northern journey in the literatures of French and English Canada concludes that the North holds a symbolic value for Canadians, but that this value is more a product of cultural primitivism than it is of artistic symbolism: "Thus the North becomes a strategic site for physical spiritual testing, and it appears that only Indians and Eskimos and those who emulate them can pass. They emerge as almost the only heroic characters in contemporary Canadian fiction. It is, our novelists suggest, their example that we must use to revitalize our wornout civilization. It is they who emerge as the lay prophets of a new faith which has its roots in the natural environment."[1]

The geographical and ethnological bias of such an argument is not its only limitation: a romantic faith in nature runs deeply contrary to the evidence of our literary senses in Canada, as Margaret Atwood's Survival so easily documents. The vision of "going North" in some of our best literature is indeed concerned with spiritual renewal, but the North as a symbolic place is more often the abode of the spirits, the place of the dead. The function of this quest is not then escapist but heroic, concerned as it is with confronting this ultimate threat to freedom. Art itself becomes the means, though not an end, of the human need for immortality.

The "North in men" of this thesis is the psychological expression of such a metaphysical place, a symbolic creation of the will which intercedes for the "tribe" or the civilized community at large by providing a new

faith in the existence of the soul, in the collective spirit of a whole culture. But the quest for a spiritual ideology is in this sense a quest for art itself, which is why the protagonists of four such quests under consideration here are at least potential artists.

The protagonist of Robert Kroetsch's But We Are Exiles goes North to avoid acknowledging the "ending" of the West. A self-exiled man, his eventual decision to leave the North is a decision to transform his inner "place" of imprisonment to the "place" of freedom that he assumed the North would be. In facing his fear of containment, he faces his "authentic" fear of death, resolving through his subsequent surrender to mortality, the compulsion for escape that has driven him to the end of his country. But We Are Exiles thus deconstructs the popular myth of the North. Not a "place" of escape, it is a "place" of death, a frontier whose freedom can be realized only ideologically.

In North of Summer, Alfred Purdy describes a practising artist's search--Purdy's persona is a poet--for that freedom. Based on a journey that the author took to Baffin Island in the summer of 1965, his persona goes there in search of a memory or artifact that will guide him into the world of dead Dorsets and European sailors. Informing his quest for an "authentic" world of the dead is his need to know (as an existentialist, his credo is experience, not faith) if the souls of the dead are "alive." In brief, he cannot believe in the soul; immortality seems no more than an out-moded religious idea. Too rational-minded for the spiritual journey he envisions, he is obliged, like Kroetsch's protagonist, to admit defeat: there is no "given" escape from death. He "must," therefore, create his own metaphysical answer to death, converting his

experience into art as he once surrendered his Self--in his primal act of ideal-self-creation--to fear. This time, however, he does not need to re-create his Self but an "ideological representation"[2] of his Self, an "other" Self or "imaginative identity" that can survive death symbolically.

Purdy's persona is thus obliged to create his own metaphysical North, his own world of dead ancestors. In contrast with primitive man whose faith in "the collective immortality idea" assured "the continuation of the individual existence in the species,"[3] modern man has no assurance of spiritual survival. His use of art, therefore, is opposite to his predecessor's: he "must" create the "idea" of the soul, not lend what already exists "concrete existence."

Riverrun interestingly combines both "primitive" and modern art theories to much the same end. A re-creation of the last years of Beothuk existence in Newfoundland (1818 to 1823), Such's novel is based on historical fact and Beothuk memory--what the dead have told him in his dream-journeys to their "other" world. The shaman-artist that Purdy's persona could not become, he succeeds in surrendering his Self to the spirit, "dying" in order to become the intermediary the Beothuks required if they are not to die spiritually as they have already died biologically. He correspondingly offers the reader a memory that he may or may not accept as "authentic" proof that the primitive, "collective immortality-idea" still works.

Riverrun thus transforms Canada's first frontier--Newfoundland--into its last frontier--the "new" North or metaphysical world of the dead. Such a place is to be found as well in Atwood's Surfacing, though the

spirit "place" is just as much a creation of the protagonist as it is an existential condition. Her narrator also "dies" in her journey into the "near North" of the Ontario-Quebec-border lake district. Although she goes there in search of her missing father, she confuses his drowned body with a foetus that she aborted years earlier. The link between a lost, primitive "picture of the soul"[4]--the petroglyphs her father had been charting--and the lost child suggests that modern man is as personally responsible for his spiritual death as she is for her child's aborted life. Affirming responsibility for the latter, she thinks that she has conceived a new child. Its birth, however, like the "idea" of the soul it connotes, depends on how successfully the narrator can give its life meaning--meaning that will "survive" her eventual necessary return to the city where modern man/woman lives.

Surfacing complements the preceding three texts' treatment of "going North." Like Kroetsch's protagonist, the narrator begins her journey North as an "escape-artist" from life. She ends that journey as an "authentic" artist, one as rational-minded as Purdy's persona but capable, nevertheless, of making a shaman's descent to the world of the dead. She does not, however, like Peter Such, assume the role of psychopomp whose story of the dead is intended to assure the living that the souls of the dead still exist. For Atwood's narrator they do not. Her dead--her parents--are memories, not spirits, transfigured ideas that renew her understanding and respect for the lives they have lived, but nonetheless memories unable in themselves to resolve her spiritual crisis in a technological world.

In contrast with Purdy and Such, then, Atwood rejects the return to

the past as the exclusive source of the immortality symbol which her narrator requires. The primitive "other" that Purdy eventually creates in Kudluk in "Lament for the Dorsets" and that Such discovers in Osnahanut in Riverrun rediscovers a spiritual relationship with the past, though not a spiritual relationship with the present. What Atwood's narrator seeks is a "new symbolism,"[5] which is not to discover man's primitive origins alone but "to bring man back into a new relationship with the divine." For the narrator, that relationship must wed past and present, nature and technology, woman and man, the North and the city.

Surfacing thus deconstructs the "near North" as a place of escape as effectively as But We Are Exiles has deconstructed the far North. The literary journey between the two has seen the frontier transformed from "a physical to a metaphysical 'place'" and the protagonist from a frontier-type in flight from death to an artist in creative confrontation with death. The immortality symbols that Purdy and Such have created in "Lament for the Dorsets" and Riverrun respectively, affirm the power of art to create "living" memories from the past, while pointing the way to create new "living" spiritual ties with the present.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Allison Mitcham, "Northern Mission: Priest, Parson and Prophet in the North: A Study in French and English-Canadian Contemporary Fiction," LUR, 3(November 1974), p. 30.

[2] Rank, "Life and Creation," in Myth, p. 142.

[3] ____, "Creative Urge, Personality Development" in Myth, pp. 118-119.

[4] ____, p. 118.

[5] Evelyn J. Hinz, "The Masculine/Feminine Psychology of American/Canadian Primitivism: Deliverance and Surfacing," in Other Voices, Other Views: An International Collection of Essays from the Bicentennial, ed. Robin W. Winks (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 90, 91.

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