

*The Structure of Conflict: A Semiotic Analysis  
of Sinclair Ross's "Cornet at Night"*

by

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THE STRUCTURE OF CONFLICT: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS  
OF SINCLAIR ROSS'S "CORNET AT NIGHT"

BY

MICHAEL O'BRIEN MORAN

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the way in which Sinclair Ross depends on the customs, stereotypes and story-types of his culture to construct the short stories in the collection The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories. In particular, it is a semiotic reading of "Cornet at Night". The principal argument, however, is that the dramatic tension of each of the stories derives as much from the cultural competence a reader brings to the text as from the story he finds there; he must know a story before he can understand how to read that story. The story's theme (or symbolic code) exists, not within the text, but at the intersection of the text and the reader. Because the development of the symbolic code is a function of reading, rather than writing, it can be argued that, in effect, the text belongs to the culture shared by Ross and his audience.

The investigation will follow, more or less, the method of analysis developed by Roland Barthes in S/Z: An Essay. This method allows the kind of close reading that allows the de-coding of cultural markers.

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The First Book of Moses, called

Genesis

Chapter 1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day. and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day ....

Chapter 2

.... 7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul....

.... 15 And the Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it....

.... 19 And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

20 And Adam gave names to all the cattle, and to the

fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field....

Chapter 11

And the whole world was of one language, and of one speech.

2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found the plain of Shi'-nar; and they dwelt there.

3 And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4 And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

6 And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

9 Therefore is the name  
of it called Babel; because  
the Lord did there confound  
the language of all the  
earth....

In the beginning, there was a conflict between the creator of things and the namer of things. Out of the ground, God formed every beast and brought each before Adam to see what he would name it. <A>nd whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. That was the name thereof, until the namer of things, the user of language--until man--man messed with God's agenda: he tried to join the creator of things in heaven. And then was the namer of things confounded and the things he had named re-named; then did the namer of things become a consumer of names, an end-user of codes. Then did God, the author, reclaim the text, scattering His characters throughout the narrative, lest they attempt to tell their own story again. And always God wrote his characters as good and always they re-wrote themselves as men, and their culture as merely human.

God was the first realist; He wanted to tell a story and He wanted it to look as if it just happened (the myth of free agency). However, every time He drew back His hand, his characters squirmed away and began to tell their own stories. For the realist, whose fictional world is not a reflection of reality but only a construct



of subjective imagination, there is an ongoing conflict between intention and mode: if he is to write a realist story, the author must allow the culture to dictate the script (culture writes the conflict); if he is to control the story, he must intrude upon its "realism". In the final analysis, his story is neither realistic nor fully true to its intention; it is compromised. The author surrenders intentionality and gains nothing in return.

There is no natural language. The realist text, with its underdetermined prose, is burdened still with the weight of cultural meaning. It is not transparent, it is not indifferent and it cannot show without telling. Like all literature, realist fiction is coded into a system of signs, which signify a set of concepts whose referents belong to the world of objects. It is a system of meaning, bound to certain conventions of telling, and sympathetic to particular ideologies.<sup>1</sup>

In order to discover those conventions, connotations and ideologies, one must interrogate the text at the

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<sup>1</sup> As David Arnason suggests, in his unpublished thesis The Development of Prairie Realism: Robert J.C. Stead, Douglas Durkin, Martha Ostenso and Frederick Philip Grove (The University of New Brunswick) "reality" is not actually available to Prairie realist writers, any more than it is to any other realist writer:

....verisimilitude must be understood as a correspondence between the author's notion of reality as presented in his work and the idea of reality shared by the audience for which he wrote, and indeed, of which he was part.

(Arnason, p. 3)

level of the signifier. In the work S/Z: An Essay, Roland Barthes proposes a critical model which encourages this type of reading. The text is broken into *lexies*, or arbitrary word units, and each sign is released to its full connotative play. The text is compelled to surrender its latent meanings, the cultural baggage denotative meaning carries but does not acknowledge.

Barthes argues that all signifiers can be grouped under one of five codes: the hermeneutic, or code of puzzles and riddles; the proairetic, or code of action; the symbolic, or code of themes; the cultural, or index to the prevalent culture; and the connotative, or index to character. While the list of five codes may seem arbitrary, it is, at least, largely complete. It will, as Barthes claims, accommodate most signifiers. I have chosen to follow Barthes' example, as far as it is useful to do so. I will, however, employ a sixth code--the semiotic--to categorize *lexies* which are literary in function (an index to narrative conventions) and where Barthes develops sub-categories seemingly at whim, I will restrict myself, primarily at least, to the six principal categories.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As Barthes demonstrates, there is no end to the number of categories to which codes can be assigned. Every phrase demands its own category. Eventually, the list of codes becomes unmanageable and I have resolutely resisted the temptation to add unnecessarily to the list.

I will begin with a general examination of Sinclair Ross's fiction, looking for patterns of characterization of the landscape, of male and female characters, of society and the metaphysical world. I want to identify the characteristic manner in which Ross codes the western Canadian prairie and its people into the text. I want to discover the degree to which Ross's fictional world is informed by the new politics of being that accompanied the drought of the 1930's and the Great Depression.

With eye witness accounts (rather than historical documents), I will attempt to reconstruct a "common" account of life on the farm during the period. Though Ross's work is not to be judged by the degree to which it conforms to this "objective" account, it may be constructive to examine the similarities and differences between the two perspectives. The exercise should reveal both the general cultural stereotypes which informed Ross's view of the world and the particular emphases which belonged to Ross himself. Ross's world is formed and governed by the operative myths of both the culture from which it is drawn and tradition of prairie realist fiction to which it belongs.

Finally, I will turn to the story I intend to study most closely: "Cornet at Night". In the course of my examination, I expect to find that the dramatic energy of this story resides in the patterns of opposition that

underlay the society from which it is drawn (eg. man/woman, man/nature, man/God, farm/town, nature/culture, poverty/luxury, necessity/freedom, determinism/relativism, etc). The hermeneutic somehow survives, in spite of the determinism which prevails throughout the collection of stories. Though each binary operates independently, there will emerge a shadow of a pattern, a bi-polar structure of opposites, an unstable frame of essential conflicts: a man cannot be strong enough to succeed on the farm and yet gentle enough to succeed as a husband; the farm cannot accommodate high culture; a man cannot be both an artist and a man; a farmer cannot be both honest and successful. Each element of the binary is first defined and then denied by its opposite, dependent on the other for meaning but also rendered silent in its company. The world cannot be reconciled without compromise but compromise declares the world meaningless. Ross must allow his culture to tell its own stories; he depends on the mutual incompatibility of certain characters and/or characteristics to provide each story with its conflict and energy.

In the collection of short stories, The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories, Ross employs the realist's technique of including details that establish a sense of familiarity or reality. He wants the reader to accept his representation of prairie life in the 1930's as an accurate (or "real") and objective report.

The details, however, serve a second purpose. As one becomes increasingly comfortable with Ross's fiction, one notices that the details which comprise the reality effect also serve as the catalyst in a mixture that spontaneously generates stories. By carefully examining the world view of the author (a world view that is discovered or recovered from the stories themselves), and by decoding the cultural and connotative codes of the stories, one finds that the stories exist as much in the pieces as in the whole. By introducing a particular detail, with a particular emphasis, to a situation that is already comprised of other familiar details, Ross sets in motion a plot that, within the parameters of this narrow and well-defined fictional world, can only result in one conclusion. The logic of each story, given its premises (the cultural codes with which Ross operates), is absolute. The conclusion of each story is predictable. The fact that the stories remain

compelling, despite the predictability of their respective plots, is due only in part to Ross's craftsmanship. Their appeal derives also from the harsh, deterministic world view which informs each story, a philosophical perspective that manifests itself both thematically and structurally.

Using Roland Barthes's method of investigation, I will examine Ross's stories, seeking to decode the cultural and connotative codes. In doing so, I expect to discover that much of the energy of the stories resides in the mutual incompatibility of certain coded characters and/or characteristics. A prairie wife, for instance, within the context of Ross's creation, is logically opposed to her farmer husband. Their goals are finally and irrevocably divorced (in a more modern fictional world, the characters would be too). The standard structural model of the realist still applies (equilibrium - disequilibrium - equilibrium) but the advancement of the plot depends less on the characters (or narrator) than on the society which wrote the codes which collectively constitute the characters. There is conflict written into the codes of the characters, resident in the scene even as Ross presents it to us for the first time.

## How Culture is Coded

There is, within these stories, a series or pattern of oppositions that operate at the level of the codes. While the degrees of opposition may vary, and cannot be said to fall into only two classes, the dramatic effect is as if only two classes existed (within a particular story, two codes may not display as pronounced an opposition as I suggest at this point; the pattern of opposition, however, will hold throughout the entire collection of stories). The following examples, drawn primarily from the story "Cornet at Night", will serve as representatives of each class:

### The Farm

- nature of the universe
- Calvinism
- nature  
(weather, condition  
of land, etc)
- man  
(tied to the priorities  
of nature; dependent on  
the land's yield for  
essence; a parishioner  
of Calvin's church in  
the broadest sense; he  
believes that the universe  
is, at best, indifferent  
to man and, at worst,  
actively hostile)

### The Town

- nature of society
- gentrified religion
- culture  
(home, school, music,  
religion)
- woman  
(allied with culture  
against nature;  
intends to escape  
the farm, if not in  
person, then by  
proxy [vicariously,  
through her  
children]; dependent  
on husband [for  
means by which to  
purchase the  
trappings of  
culture])

- Tommy  
(in the process of becoming a man; knows that "it's like that on a farm")<sup>3</sup>
- Tommy  
(as a child, wants to run with the musical march; knows that "a cornet at night is golden only once" p. 51)
- Rock  
(and other dray horses; animals which, like men, are suited to the monotonous struggle of the farm)
- Clipper  
(Isabel, Bess, balky horses; animals whose talents do not lend themselves to the labour of the farm)
- rejected stookers  
("somebody big and husky" p.39; someone who has stooked before; "a big unshaven man" with a "hump of muscle" pp.42-43)
- Philip Coleman  
("the wrong hands: white slender fingers" p.44; like the pleasure horses, he does not belong to the farm)

There are roles in these stories which are meant to be filled either by characters or by natural or cultural forces (ie. a man is meant to be either X or not X). There is little margin or latitude for deviations from the normative roles. It is, in fact, that constraint, whether it be natural or cultural, which is the source of dramatic tension in Ross's stories. In this harsh and unforgiving world, where even the correct action can result in catastrophic consequences, there is little room for error. The religious code that dominates the text -

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<sup>3</sup> Sinclair Ross, The Lamp and Other Stories. ed. Malcolm Ross. (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p.51. All further references to this work appear in the text.



a hybrid form of Calvinism, complete with its attendant determinism - is the force against which all the other codes play. While many of the stories are drawn taut by the unexpected assignment of the wrong role to a particular character, animal or force, the chief protagonist in most stories is a palpable sense of Christian fatalism (ie. the matter is always in God's hands and, in this world, things will usually get worse).

### The Religious Code

Curiously, the actual religious code of this text is to be found most often in lexies that contain no overt reference to religion at all. Because the social, or gentrified, religion of manners is the obvious religious representative in the text, it would be easy, though inaccurate, to conclude that that code is, in fact, the religious code. The actual religious code, however, is to be discovered in the habits, psychological characteristics and shared world view of the characters.

Calvin's stern doctrine is the constant which runs through even the lightest of the stories. It is nowhere more evident than in the two characteristics common to all principal characters: a stubborn reliance on labour, even in the face of likely disaster, and a sense of helplessness. Where other Protestant theologians (including those who shared Calvin's belief both in the

utter depravity of man and in man's inability to save himself through good works) preached stoic forbearance, Calvin counselled also that "the world was to be mastered in unceasing labour for God's sake."<sup>4</sup>

That duty defines the relationship of farmers to their land (see "The Lamp at Noon", "Cornet at Night", "Not By Rain Alone" and "A Field of Wheat"). As Margaret Laurence observes, in her introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Ross's collection:

the land sometimes assumes a character as harsh as that of the vengeful God who sorely tried Job, and the farmers who stay on, year after year, seeing their crops spoiled and themselves becoming old in youth, yet still maintaining their obsessive faith in the land, are reminiscent of Job himself - Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.<sup>5</sup>

For the farmers, unceasing labour - a devotion unrequited by their land and misunderstood by their wives - is simply an act of faith.

The religious code is also manifested in guilty pleasures. These characters cannot afford to indulge themselves in luxury. It is for that reason that we find

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<sup>4</sup> Edward McNall Burns et al, ed., Western Civilizations. 10th edition (New York, New York: Norton and Company Inc., 1984), p. 487

Margaret Laurence, Introduction, The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories, by Sinclair Ross (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 8

characters either rationalizing their frivolous expenditures (regardless of whether the expense be in time or in cash) or concealing them. In both "The Outlaw" and "The Runaway" farmers purchase horses that are without value to a farm. In the first case, the purchase is excused as "a poor investment" (p. 24) but "a bargain" (p. 25). The farmer in the second story, discovering that he has been swindled into buying balky horses, allows that, whatever their faults, they are good mares: they will bear good colts. He knows, of course, that the purchase was imprudent, regardless of the horses' characters, because the team is not intended for work. In another story, "The Painted Door", characters pass the winter playing cards, not enjoying the relative leisure of winter but anxiously awaiting spring. They are uncomfortable, as all these characters are, with unproductive activity.

In the culture from which these characters are drawn, there could be no activity less worthwhile than the production of art, an enterprise which consumes resources without profit. Certainly, the religious and economic codes, both informed with Calvinist values, would argue against as wasteful a venture as Canadian literature (one could not suggest that Ross had any reasonable expectation of earning his keep with his pen). It is a curious irony, then, that realist fiction is sculpted from such a culture.

As Atwood says, in Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature:

The paradox that confronts us is that Ross ....[has] created memorable works of art out of the proposition that such a creation, in [his] environment, is impossible .... [He makes] art out of [his] characters' inability to do so. The true "symptom" or "reflection" of the limited Calvinist-Colonialist environment [he is] talking about would be no books at all.<sup>6</sup>

I will argue later in this thesis that the narrative voice speaks from a different cultural framework than the one to which he assigns his stories. That voice has departed its imaginative home. The meta-code--by which I mean Ross's own values (to the extent that they may be recovered from the text)--protests against the cultural codes of the text. The act of writing signifies its own opposition to an artless culture.

Finally, determinism informs the story even at the level of the codes. Each character is bound by his very nature to a particular course of action. The farmer will continue to plant crops, not because he believes that the new year will be better than the last, but because he is a

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, p 192

farmer and planting is what a farmer does. The stasis is not an accident: it is an index to the religious code.<sup>7</sup>

### Culture, Society and Social Religion

Where the religious code emerges as a world view (an understanding on the part of the characters of the universe in which they live), social religion manifests itself in an elaborate pattern of manners, observed more for the sake of the community than for the sake of God.<sup>8</sup> This code, more cultural than religious, is clearly evident in the story "Cornet at Night". Characters are expected to dress for the Sabbath, to observe the day's sanctity by not working and, in absence of opportunity for communal worship, to read scripture. The observance, however, is largely decorative.

Culture (or more precisely, high culture) is similarly represented as a thing extrinsically, rather than intrinsically, valuable; culture is valuable because

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<sup>7</sup> In The Development of Prairie Realism, David Arnason catalogues ten propositions which characterize the shared beliefs of the prairie realists. Nine of these - the concern for verisimilitude; reliance on mimesis; concern for ordinariness; pastoral intent (the belief that truth resides in nature); a belief that there are no absolutes of good and evil; a rejection of earlier forms; concern with the psychology of characters; belief in a unified world; and belief in liberal humanism - are also shared, to some degree, by Ross, who Arnason does not include in the group. The last proposition - the fundamental optimism of the realists - is not characteristic of Ross. Instead, Ross's fictional world is governed by fatalism.

<sup>8</sup> Consider, for instance, Mrs. Bentley of As For Me and My House.

it signifies something, not because it is something). Largely the province of women, culture is coded in music, manners and an appreciation, however imperfect, of the arts. It counter-balances, in stories like "Cornet at Night", "Circus in Town", "The Painted Door" and "The Lamp at Noon", that which farm wives identify as the dulling affect of farm life. Because it is defined within the text as something distinct from the farm life, culture is always coded as something foreign and grand. It is the vehicle by which children will escape the farm (ie. education, music lessons, etc) and the means by which farm wives will, temporarily at least, transcend the tedium of their lives. However, like social religion, high culture is usually decorative, rather than integral to the lives of the characters. It is that which does not belong. As Robert Kroetsch says, speaking of the prairie culture, new world culture is characterized by that which is absent:

an absence<sup>9</sup>  
of satin sheets  
of embroidered pillow cases  
of tea towels and English china  
of silver serving spoons

*How do you grow a prairie town?*

The gopher was the model.  
Stand up straight:  
telephone poles

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<sup>9</sup> In this section of The Seed Catalogue, Kroetsch begins an index of absences, absences which characterize--for the characters of Ross's fiction--social life on the prairies.

grain elevators  
church steeples.  
Vanish, suddenly: the  
gopher was the model.

*How do you grow a past/  
to live in*

the absence of silkworms  
the absence of clay and wattles (whatever the hell  
they are)  
the absence of Lord Nelson  
the absence of kings and queens  
the absence of a bottle opener, and me with a  
vicious attack of the 26 ounce flu  
the absence of both Sartre and Heidegger  
the absence of pyramids  
the absence of lions  
the absence of lutes, violas and xylophones  
the absence of a condom dispenser in the Lethbridge  
Hotel, and me about to screw an old Blood  
whore. I was in love.  
the absence of the Parthenon, not to mention the Cathed-  
ral de Chartres  
the absence of psychiatrists  
the absence of sailing ships  
the absence of books, journals, daily newspapers and  
every-thing else but the *Free Press*  
*Prairie Farmer* and *The Western Producer*  
the absence of gallows (with apologies to Louis Riel)  
the absence of goldsmiths  
the absence of the girl who said that if the Edmonton  
Eskimos won the Grey Cup she'd let me kiss  
her nipples in the foyer of the Palliser  
Hotel. I don't know where she got to.  
the absence of Heraclitus  
the absence of the Seine, the Rhine, the Danube,  
the Tiber and the Thames. Shit, the  
Battle River ran dry one fall. The  
Strauss boy could piss across it. He  
could piss higher on a barn wall than any  
of us.<sup>10</sup> He could piss right clean over  
the principal's new car.  
the absence of ballet and opera

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<sup>10</sup> In *The Seed Catalogue* again, Kroetsch captures the essence of social life on Ross's prairie--the juxtaposition of the absence of the Eastern/European influence with the presence of the homely western traits: *the absence of the Seine, the Rhine, the Danube, the Tiber and the Thames..../. ....the Battle River ran dry one fall. The Strauss boy could piss across it.*

the absence of Aeneas

Society, the place where culture resides, is the antithesis of the farm. On the farm, values are absolute and unchanging, assigned by God or nature, and unquestioned. Value is a function of utility and work is the essence of being. By contrast, society (which is identified with town) is a mysterious place of luxury, with uncertain rules and relative values.<sup>11</sup> In a larger sense, the social code includes a sympathy to the patriarchy, but that patriarchy is tailored to the particular economic circumstances.

#### The Economic Code

In these stories, set in the time of the Great Depression, the economic code often merges with the religious code. The heavens and the earth, both manifestly hostile to the enterprise of men, exert pressure on the farmer from two sides, seeking to squeeze him from the scene. Calvin's God, who owes no favour to fallen men, will not answer the prayer for rain or for fertile soil, and will not pass over the farm with His scourge of hail.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, consider an exchange of goods in the story "Cornet at Night": on the farm an egg is only an egg. It can never be more or less than an egg. But in town, the egg becomes a fraction of an orange. Its precise value is contingent both on the going rate for oranges and the going rate for eggs.



Pressing from yet another direction is the spectre of foreclosure. Because the financial forecast for the characters is often as dire as the meteorological forecast, both the religious and the economic codes are usually represented by the same sense of impending doom ("Not By Rain Alone", "A Field of Wheat").<sup>12</sup>

i. [Historical] Summary of Events<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth James Hughes, Signs of Literature: Language, Ideology and the Literary Text. (Vancouver, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1986), p. 174

<sup>13</sup> The two accounts that follow are meant to suggest a context for Ross's fiction. These are historical accounts not in the formal sense but rather remembered, or popular, history. They have only the authority of popular history:

Most of what happens in a village during the course of a day will be recounted by somebody before the day ends and these reports will be based on observation or on first-hand accounts. Village gossip is composed of this daily recounting combined with lifelong mutual familiarities. By this means a village informally constructs a continuous communal history of itself (Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 17)

This "social memory" provides a "realistic" landscape for Ross's fiction.

Realism was the literary style in which Ross's audience had faith: *the world exists in the manner and dimension I perceive it to exist*. Like popular history and memoirs, realist fiction is reflective of the popular myths of the time. It is realistic, not because it adheres to purely objective accounts (whatever those turn out to be), but because it reflects the popular remembrance of things past. Is Ross's account accurate?--the question is neither entirely answerable nor relevant. It is more important that the account is consistent with myths of the time. Ross wrote to, or for, his culture. That society believed, largely, what Ross believed. They shared a semiotic system.

During the late 1920's in Canada<sup>14</sup>, the times were pretty good. Western farm crops were good, and mining, fishing and lumbering flourished. Manufacturing was at a high level. Employment was steady, and while wages and salaries were low compared with today, everything was in proportion because goods and services were low too. If living wasn't easy, it certainly wasn't hard.

But there were danger signals. Wheat, Canada's blue chip export, was being over-produced around the world and the 1928 Canadian crop had still not been sold in 1929. The economies of many European countries were shaky and had been since the First World War. Factories, especially in the United States, were over-producing, and since the market couldn't take the goods, their inventories and stockpiles were soon huge. The values of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange were grossly overvalued, but governments and business appeared to ignore the signs. Things would get bigger and better, they predicted.

Canada was in a very vulnerable position. Despite the country's vast size, her thinly spread population numbered only about 10,000,000. Her revenues came from export sales -- grain, pulp and paper, metals. The U.S. accounted for 40 per cent of our export sales, and Canada

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<sup>14</sup> Frank Davey argues that only tradition and Ross's own personal background serve to place Ross's fiction on the Canadian prairie. In his paper, "The Conflicting Signs of As For Me and My House" (1990), Davey suggests that there is:

a semiotic silence around the Bentleys and Horizon. <Philip> has worked in anonymous towns, they met and married in a nameless city to which they are about to return; he has preached for an unnamed church; she orders clothing from an unnamed mail-order, walks beside an unnamed railroad.

Further, Davey argues, for every semiotic marker pointing to the Canadian prairie, there is another indicating the American midwest.

Davey presents a convincing case and the question is one of some importance. If the stories are not located, as I suppose, in Western Canada, many of my suppositions are wrong. For the purpose of this thesis and in the interest of space, I must retreat to tradition. I will attempt to meet Davey's challenge in a later paper.

counted on the Americans for vital money for expansion.

In October, 1929, all the black clouds met in one place, the New York Stock Exchange, and the thunderbolt struck. Stock prices fell disastrously, a sign that the American Economic System had been smashed. Things were never to be the same, in the U.S., in Canada, in the rest of the world.

Canada's markets began to collapse. The U.S., to protect its own, erected high tariff walls, shutting out Canadian goods. The prairie wheat economy tottered as the \$1.60 bushel price of 1929 skidded to 38 cents in 2 1/2 years. By that time even the weather had turned against us: the drought was destroying the West, and Canada like the rest of the world was deep into the worst Depression in history.

As the West and the wheat went, so did the rest of Canada. Farmers stopped buying. Eastern factories closed, or laid off hundreds. Construction virtually stopped. Banks no longer lent money; instead they called in loans. Less and less money was put into circulation and fewer and fewer goods were produced and more and more factories were shut down and the rolls of the poor grew longer and longer and the gloom and the despair deepened<sup>15</sup>.

## ii. Saskatchewan in the Depression

The thirties began in disillusionment and disbelief following the dramatic stockmarket crash in the United States in 1929. A year later the Wheat Pool was in deep financial difficulty. In 1931, the western prairies were swept by high winds and frightful dust storms. There was a fair crop in 1932, but wheat was down to 50 cents a bushel at the local elevator, and the price was still falling. Between 1933 and 1937, wheat prices dropped to a low of 20 cents a bushel in the elevators at Senate. One of our neighbours, Fred Downes, had a ten-bushel-per-acre wheat crop, and he contracted with Bill Sanderson to combine it for running costs only. They were

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<sup>15</sup> Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression. (Toronto, Ontario: PaperJacks, 1975), p.viii-ix

estimated at one dollar per acre. Hence it took half the crop to pay for harvesting at cost.

The cattlemen were hit just as hard. Hay crops failed; grass withered on the stem; weaning calves sold at three or four dollars a head. Two year steers might bring in twenty dollars, and three year olds twenty-five dollars -- if you happen to strike it lucky on market day. Searing winds cut off all young vegetation. One of our neighbors with 280 acres of fodder crop estimated that, had he picked every blade of crop by hand, the total would not have filled the wagon box. The situation was graphically summed up by a restaurant-owner of Chinese extraction in Climax who said of 1937: "No wheat, no grass, no hay, no gardens, nothing of everything."<sup>16</sup>

Relief -- handouts of money or food or clothing -- was the order of the day. And pride would not stand long when you saw your family hungry and in need of clothing, when you had no possible means of meeting your needs by your own efforts. A man with a family was eligible for fifteen dollars a month and a small clothing allowance. You were supposed to make do with this and with what you could make from the farm. We were able to ship to Seneca a carload of barley, delivered at twenty cents a bushel. We weaned thirty head of our best calves and fed them all winter on our best alfalfa and all the barley they could eat. I took a carload of them down to the Winnipeg stockyards in the spring. A few of the tops sold at a high of seven cents a pound, weighing out about 700 pounds each. They brought in about forty dollars a head by the time freight and other charges were met. Two or three, tail-enders, but still good beef, brought four cents a pound. I was almost too discouraged to return home. You could not win by hard work.<sup>17 18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The economic equivalent of Kroetsch's prairie culture--the land too signifies as the presence of an absence.

<sup>17</sup> This is always the lesson of the stories in the collection The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories--on the prairies, during the Depression, you could not win by hard work.

<sup>18</sup> G. Sheperd, West of Yesterday. (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), pp. 106-107

### The Connotative Codes

Both men and women are represented as relatively static characters. They are limited in their potential for growth or development. Whatever development does take place, is likely to be a gravitation toward a socially correct, or normative, role (as is the case with the young farmer in the story, "Not By Rain Alone", who will grow into the patient faith of the older farmers). The stasis is consistent with the determinism of the religious code: character is predetermined.

### Adult Male Characters

Men in these stories are usually coded as strong, silent types (in fact, they are only strong in silence), gifted with rugged labour strength. They are usually described as having rough clumsy hands (cultural code: they lack the dexterity for refinement; they cannot play music or engage in other cultural activities). They rarely shave, or, if they do, they shave for their wives (cultural code: they are unaware of, or are indifferent to, social pressure and good manners; they do not belong to the town, to "society"; they are rough and ill-, or un-, educated). Most are farmers ("men" are those who produce or provide). They are worn out and old before their time, or young and waiting to be old (like the

character in "Not By Rain Alone", who awaits "the submissive quiet that at last the seasons teach").<sup>19</sup>

Because they are essentially defined by the relative prosperity of their respective farms (ie. they are only men by virtue of their abilities to provide), men assign to the farm a priority. They are engaged in an elemental struggle, the final purpose of which is only partly economic (see comments on the religious code, above). In the event of the farm's failure, a man must, and will, concede to the wife some authority. At the very least, the wife will be permitted to challenge patriarchal authority.

#### Adult Female Characters

Women, by contrast, reject the elemental struggle as unfair, a contest rigged in nature's favour. Less inclined than her husband to wage the battle on uneven terms, a farm wife is likely to hedge the bet, relying on crop insurance, education, relatives and neighbours, rather than the solitary strength of the farmer ( see "A Field of Wheat", "The Lamp at Noon", "Cornet at Night"). She is sociable, and therefore frustrated by the

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<sup>19</sup> Ross, p. 52

isolation of the farm<sup>20</sup>; she seeks refuge, from the tedium and isolation, in social religion, high culture<sup>21</sup>, interaction with neighbours and family, even in the company of her husband. If she is unable to escape by any other means, she will attempt to escape by proxy, vicariously living through her children (ironically, the woman usually employs the proceeds of the farm to purchase her escape from the farm, whatever the form that escape takes). The isolation is often represented by a woman waiting at the window, anxious for any distraction.

Though the women in these stories always marry men who fit the description of the sex role code above, they fantasize of men who are well-groomed, clean-shaven and urbane (see "The Painted Door", "Cornet at Night" (in

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<sup>20</sup>In Ross's best-known work, As For Me and My House, Mrs. Bentley, protests against the loneliness. Though she lives in a prairie town, she might be speaking for any of the farm women when she writes in her diary:

We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and the solitude--we think a force or presence into it--even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us--for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all.

(As For Me and My House, New Canadian Library Edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957, p. 100)

<sup>21</sup>In Ross's fiction, the principal exception to this rule seems to be Laura, a "thorough ranch woman, with a disdainful shrug for all....domestic ties" (As For Me and My House, New Canadian Library Edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957, p. 93). She is, as Robert Kroetsch says, in his essay "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction" (1979), "almost androgynous".

which the wife wants a *clean* farm hand)). There is a distinction between men who are husbands and those who are attractive.<sup>22</sup>

I suggested above that the patriarchy, which is written into the social code, is undermined, to some degree, by economic circumstances. As Kenneth Hughes noted, in his discussion of "The Lamp at Noon", the dislocated syntax of the story's first sentence ("A little before noon, she lit the lamp"<sup>23</sup>) is an indication that the woman does not control the scene. Hughes argues that the inversion of the normal order of a sentence (subject-verb-object) removes the woman from an active position of power. He concludes that this helplessness is a function of the patriarchy.

That conclusion is suspect for two reasons: (i) in the first place, while it is true that female characters in these stories appear helpless, their husbands seem no less so; (ii) patriarchy, at least in part, "is a result of the differences in the ability to produce economic goods and the dependence of women on male providers"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Race and Other Stories, another collection of stories by Ross, includes two stories about men who are both attractive and married; in both cases, the men fail as husbands.

<sup>23</sup> Ross, p. 13

<sup>24</sup> Metta Spencer, ed., Foundations of Modern Sociology, 2nd Edition. (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 144



and that is not entirely the case here. The helplessness is a condition of the characters' world, more easily explained by reference to the religious or economic code, than by reference to the social code.

### Children

Where imagination is represented as a positive attribute in these stories, it is assigned to children ("The Outlaw", "Circus in Town"). Where potential exists for growth or change, it exists within the children. Because the child is coded in one way within artistic frame and in another way outside the artistic frame, he or she must function simultaneously in two distinct ways.

Within the frame, the child often represents the competing aspirations of his mother and father. For the father, a child (particularly a son) is an heir and farm-hand. To the mother, that same son represents the gentleman his father is not. The conflict between the farm and the town, between nature and culture, is played out through the rival claims to a child ("The Lamp at Noon", "Cornet at Night", "A Field of Wheat").

For the reader, on the other hand, the child represents the only character with any potential for change. When a child is introduced to a story, he

becomes the focal point<sup>25</sup>. We learn to expect a greater emotional or intellectual range from children. The narrative voice, reminiscent and temporally distant from the events of the stories, sympathizes primarily with the children ("Cornet at Night", "The Outlaw", "Circus in Town").

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<sup>25</sup> This custom does not hold for infants, for whom different rules apply; an infant represents either potential for tragedy or the combined hopes of his parents.

iii.

### The Story

The story is told retrospectively by a narrator recalling his youth.

Over his wife's objections, a farmer excuses his son, Tom, from school and music lessons, and sends him instead to town (the foreign place, the place of experience, the place of different cultural codes) to hire a stoker. The boy, thrilled by the adventure but confused both by cultural coding and by the mixed signals of his parents ("Make sure he's stoked before" - "Mind it's somebody who looks like he washes himself") rejects two experienced but rough stokers (as he is bound, by the conventions of realism, to do: without this action, the story lacks its critical conflict). He selects instead a soft and gentle man, despite that character's obvious unsuitability to the role. That night at the farm the hired man plays his cornet; the music has an effect on the family so profound that it is clear that culture, at least high culture, is not at home on this farm. As a stoker, the hired man makes a fine musician. He is dismissed after one day. While the mother derives one moral from the experience (that one should not work on the Sabbath day), Tom discovers another: "you always have to put the harvest first" (the essential conflict - *high culture/the cornet vs. the priorities of the farm*).

The rite of passage for the boy is the story's main theme, while the sub-theme is a comic tale of domestic strife.

In the section that follows, I will undertake the interrogation of a particular text (Cornet at Night) using the method of analysis developed by Roland Barthes in S/Z: An Essay. By employing the method for the purpose of discovering specific thematic patterns, I expect to find that the symbolic code (the code of themes) manifests itself throughout the text. I mean to demonstrate that the conflict of a story--an essential aspect of realistic fiction--lies coded in every lexie.

I will, therefore, limit myself to the discussion of particular aspects of each lexie, looking for an opportunity to test my thesis. A more thorough examination would bloat the paper to an unmanageable size.

(1) "The Cornet at Night" \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the riddle of the title; what, first, is the significance of the cornet and what then is the specific significance of the cornet at night? on the most basic level, the hermeneutic is simply this: what is the story about?  
 \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the title of a story is usually asked to carry the story's symbolic meaning - the question is

postponed until the end of the story but it nags the reader throughout his or her reading: how will the title provide eventual closure to the text?

(2) The wheat was ripe \* CULTURAL CODE: what might happen to the crop? Calvinist fatalism - that which is given might also be taken away; on the prairies, in the 1930's, a farm family cannot afford to risk a crop; therefore the crop must be harvested \* CULTURAL CODE: The wheat was ripe; an economic code, placing the action in a society which has evolved to organized agriculture; wheat is not a natural crop and ripeness is not a natural condition of vegetation; in effect, wheat is only ripe when it is ready to be harvested; harvesting is a stage of production \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the land is the first priority of the man; there is potential for conflict with the woman.

(3) and it was Sunday. \* CULTURAL CODE: the Lord's Day must be kept sacred but the work ethic declares value to be a function of labour (ie. a man must work and not work to be righteous) \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: social religion, the province of the woman, assigns great importance to the appearance of piety; conflict between the mother and father is drawn along the incompatible claims of the day.

(4) "Can't help it - I've got to cut," my father said at breakfast. "No use talking. There's a wind again and it's shelling fast." \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the comic sub-plot of domestic unrest; each speech of the father anticipates the answering remarks of mother \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: how will she answer? the sub-plot and the connotative codings demand that she disagree with her husband \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the wind is blowing; the crop could be lost; will he manage to harvest in time? \* CULTURAL CODE: man's impotence is a condition of the world; a farmer cannot dictate terms to fate; he has to cut before conditions deteriorate \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the farmer defends his decision by reference to the immediacy of the demands of the harvest; patriarchy depends upon the success of the farm (if he is not successful as a provider, a farmer is not a man; if he is not a man, the farmer cannot derive his authority from the tradition of the patriarchy).

(5) "Not on the Lord's Day," my mother protested. "The horses stay in the stables where they belong. There's church this afternoon and I intend to ask Louise and her husband home for supper." \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the closing of an action; the anticipated disagreement of the mother is realized \* CULTURAL CODE: the horses are beasts of burden; on the Lord's Day, dray horses belong in the barn

- church and company; religious/social duty versus the obligation to work; the opposition of social and universal imperatives \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the conflict is articulated; from this point forward, the opposition, first drawn between ripe wheat and Sunday will manifest itself in various ways; the essential story resides in these first few details \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: who is Louise? is she important? intend; though the mother intends to ask, the text confines her to mere intention; that restriction admits the possibility that the action will not be completed.

(6) Ordinarily my father was a pleasant, accommodating little man, \* PROAIRETIC CODE: ordinarily; one usually describes the normal state of affairs only if one is about to depart from the ordinary \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: what is different about this day? \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the ironic tone of pleasant, accommodating little man indicates a narrator who is more mature than the child narrator ought to be - narrative convention allows that the story might be told retrospectively.

(7) but this morning his wheat and the wind had lent him sudden steel. "No, today we cut," he met her evenly. "You and Tom go to church if you want to. Don't bother me." \* CULTURAL CODE: in Ross's world, things are as



likely to go wrong as not; ripe wheat, and the wind to scatter it, are conditions which hint at possible disaster \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: conditions lend the farmer steel; patriarchal authority is asserted in defense of the farm - church-going, an aspect of social religion, is woman's religious and social obligation; a man cannot be bothered with it when something more important claims his time.

(8) "If you take the horses out today I'm through - I'll never speak to you again." \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the mother threatens with a marital sanction; will she carry out the threat? is this the story? \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the mother positions her husband to reply.

(9) "And this time I mean it." \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: this time suggests that the threat has been made on previous occasions and not meant; it is an acceptable part of domestic discourse; the riddle is solved; the action is probably comic rather than tragic or melodramatic.

(10) He nodded. "Good - if I'd known I'd have started cutting wheat on Sundays years ago." \* PROAIRETIC CODE: closing the action of lexie (8); dropping the other shoe and delivering the punchline - a continuation of the comic sub-plot.

(11) "And that's no way to talk in front of your son."  
\* PROAIRETIC CODE: the mother's comment is, in part, an aspect of the Punch and Judy routine - And; in this lexie, and in lexie (9), the conjunction ties the banter together; dialogue awaits its completion \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: some things must be hidden from children; the nurturing mother protects the child from harsh reality (such as it is) - the mother, whose vicarious escape from the farm is dependent upon the child, must guard against the rough influence of the father if the child is to emerge a gentleman; the child must emerge a gentleman if the mother is to make good her escape \* CULTURAL CODE: the man-child is born innocent of the characteristics of his sex; fatalism does not apply to children who apparently may escape their destiny (environment may determine personal development).

(12) "In the years to come he'll remember." \* CULTURAL CODE: a condition of the world; one does not escape the consequences of past actions \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: will he remember? the riddle completes itself beyond the time frame of the text; in years to come, the boy *does* remember--he writes this story \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the realist pretends that there are years to come, that characters exist in time rather than as fictional constructs.

(13) There was silence for a moment and then, as if in its clash with hers his will had suddenly found itself, my father turned to me. \* CULTURAL CODE: clash; a martial metaphor, carried to the semantic domain of the domestic dispute; similarly, in lexie (7), the wind lends the father's will steel \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the father turns; it is the first physical action in a story that is, thus far, moved by dialogue \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: is this first physical action symbolically important?

(14) "Tom, I need a man to stook for a few days and I want you to go to town tomorrow and get me one. The way the wheat's coming along so fast and the oats nearly ready too I can't afford the time. Take old Rock. You'll be safe with him." \* CULTURAL CODE: need, wheat's coming along so fast, oats nearly ready, can't afford the time - man cannot deny the imperative of nature - get me one - the hired man is a commodity to be got from town; men are purchased when nature dictates that they must be \* CULTURAL CODE: Tom; the naming code; Tom is a man's name; going to town for men is a man's job; the rite of passage; the father is initiating his son to manhood CULTURAL CODE: Rock; the naming code; a horse that is steady and sure \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: will Tom be safe with the plodding dray horse? \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the father sets the mother up to disagree.

(15) But ahead of me my mother cried, "That's one thing I'll not stand for. You can cut your wheat or do anything else you like yourself, but you're not interfering with him. He's going to school tomorrow as usual." \* CULTURAL CODE: mothers are women; women cry - the opposition of the farm (father needs a man to stook) and Culture (the boy must go to school) \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the matriarchy; rearing of the child is the responsibility of the woman; the father cannot interfere - the child has the potential for growth; therefore, he goes to school.

(16) My father bunched himself and glared at her. "No, for a change he's going to do what I say. The crop's more important than a day at school." \* CULTURAL CODE: for a change; the matriarchy; usually the boy's actions are determined by the mother; the father must break that pattern to initiate the child \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the crop is more important than school; masculine versus feminine values.

(17) "But Monday's his music lesson day - and when will we have another teacher like Miss Wiggins who can teach him music too?" \* CULTURAL CODE: even in the service of High Culture, the woman must bow to the practical demands of the farm: a good teacher, like a good pair of

trousers, is the one which offers some economy; in this case, the saving is a convenience, a temporal economy, in a teacher who provides both the three R's and piano lessons--educational quantity, if not quality \* CULTURAL CODE: Miss Wiggins; the naming code; Miss Wiggins, a name that jiggles on the page, is probably part of a comic tradition \* PROAIRETIC CODE: But, and; the conjunctions continue to allow the mother to amend the father's thoughts.

(18) "A dollar for lessons and the wheat shelling! When I was his age I didn't even get to school." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: again, the opposition of High Cultural and homely farm imperatives provides a statement of the text's theme \* SYMBOLIC CODE: When I was his age; at Tom's age, the man-child ought to begin his rite of passage \* PROAIRETIC CODE: father serves to set up mother's return.

(19) "Exactly," my mother scored, "and look at you today. Is it any wonder I want him to be different?" \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the mother scores \* CULTURAL CODE: conversation is a contest \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the mother marries the father (a "man", someone who works hard, puts the farm first), but wants the son to be different - (ie. not a man).

(20) He slammed out at that to harness his horses and cut his wheat, \* CULTURAL CODE: the patriarchy; the man owns the farm-- his horses and his wheat.

(21) and away sailed my mother with me in her wake  
\* SEMIOTIC CODE: mother sails with child in her wake;  
language is metaphoric; diction provides an index to literary conventions; contrary to the conventions of realism, language draws attention to itself \* CULTURAL CODE: with me in her wake; the matriarchy; the mother carries the child with her.

(22) to spend an austere half-hour in the dark, hot, plushy little parlour. It was a kind of vicarious atonement, I suppose, for we both took straight-backed leather chairs, and for all of the half-hour stared across the room at a big pansy-bordered motto on the opposite wall: *As for Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord.* \* CULTURAL CODE: economic code--time is spent - religious code--vicarious atonement; language is borrowed from religious discourse; the mode of worship is Calvinist--austere, dark, straight-backed and solemn  
\* CULTURAL CODE: dark, hot, plushy little parlour; the language is vaguely erotic, a Freudian fantasy, suggesting a longing to return to the womb; mother draws the child back; she cannot release him \* SEMIOTIC CODE:

the motto recalls another of Ross's studies of the harsh and severe life on the prairies (the novel, As For Me and my House); the novel shares many cultural and connotative codings with the story collection, The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories.

(23) At last she rose and said, "Better run along and do your chores now, but hurry back. You've got to take your bath and change your clothes, and maybe help a little getting dinner for your father." \* SEMIOTIC CODE: at last; either much time has passed or the time has weighed heavily on the boy \* CULTURAL CODE: clothing code; there are clothes for worship and clothes for work; these two activities are separated by a ritual change of garments \* SYMBOLIC CODE: maybe help a little getting dinner for your father; preparing a meal is coded as a feminine duty; the mother confuses the boy's gender role, perhaps confining him to a gender-free childhood (ie. a child belongs neither to the class of "man" nor "woman"--s/he is a "child").

(24) There was a wind this sunny August morning, tanged with freedom and departure, and from his stall my pony Clipper whinnied for a race with it. Sunday or not, I would ordinarily have had my gallop anyway, \* SEMIOTIC CODE: There was a wind this sunny August morning,

ordinarily; a realist convention--there are other days, previous and subsequent, to the days that comprise this story \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Sunday or not; like his father, Tom occasionally departs from the strict observance of the Sabbath.

(25) but today a sudden welling-up of social and religious conscience made me ask myself whether one in the family like my father wasn't bad enough. Returning to the house, I merely said that on such a fine day it seemed a pity to stay inside. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: but today; a departure from the boy would ordinarily do \* CULTURAL CODE: the matriarchy; Tom returns to the house to be governed by his mother \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom is different than his father; he has an active social and religious conscience; he is not like a man, perhaps because he is still a child \* HER: Tom is not like a man (he worries about religious/social duty); in what other ways is he different from men?

(26) My mother heard but didn't answer. Perhaps her conscience too was working. Perhaps after being worsted in the skirmish with my father, she was in no mood for granting dispensations. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the privilege of the narrator; he knows that his mother has heard despite the fact that she does not answer - Perhaps; the



privilege is limited however--he knows that she hears but does not know why she does not answer \* CULTURAL CODE and SEMIOTIC CODE: employing a military metaphor, the narrator describes an argument as a skirmish \* CULTURAL CODE: the religious code; on the Sabbath, the mother chooses whether or not to grant a dispensation.

(27) In any case I had to take my bath as usual, put on a clean white shirt, and change my overalls for knicker corduroys. \* CULTURAL CODE: the clothing code; dressing in honour of the Sabbath; knicker corduroys; short pants; the uniform of a child.

(28) They squeaked, those corduroys. For three months now they had been spoiling all my Sundays. A sad, muted swishing little squeak, but distinctly audible. Every step and there it was, as if I needed to be oiled. \* CULTURAL CODE: the corduroys function in a number of ways; first, and most obviously, they function as a clothing code; they signify special occasions--days or company to be dressed for; as such, they are uncomfortable because they are foreign--they are an index to High Culture \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the corduroys are an index to tragic/comic sub-plot--as a youth, the narrator is tormented by the trousers (they had been spoiling all my Sundays)--as an adult, commenting from a distant point

in the future, the narrator is amused (Every step .... as if I needed to be oiled) \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the corduroys inspire the narrator to a mature, ironic tone; that tone defines the narrator as an adult who is removed from the suffering of his childhood \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the boy's reaction to the corduroys--his embarrassment--defines him as one who is acutely aware of the judgement of others; the self-consciousness is consistent with his age (adolescence) \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom resists the costume of a child; he is at the threshold of maturity but his mother dresses him in short pants.

(29) I had to wear them to church and Sunday-school; and after service, of course, while the grown-ups stood about gossiping, the other boys discovered my affliction. I sulked and fumed, but there was nothing to be done.

\* CULTURAL CODE: clothing code; church and Sunday school are events demanding the uniform of High Culture - behaviour code; after service .... the grown-ups stood about gossiping; church is an occasion for social, as well as spiritual, communion.

(30) Corduroys that had cost four-fifty simply couldn't be thrown away till they were will worn-out. My mother warned me that if I started sliding down the stable roof, she'd patch the seat and make me keep wearing them.

\* CULTURAL CODE: the economic code--one must derive full value from a purchase; the matriarchy; make me keep wearing them; the boy is subject to the mother's control

\* SYMBOLIC CODE: couldn't be thrown away till they were worn out; the mother will dress Tom in short pants until they are worn through; though she cannot prevent him from growing (a biological function--he will mature physically), she can prevent him from passing into manhood (a cultural function--one who wears short pants is defined as a boy)

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: farm boys slide down stable roofs.

(31) With my customary little bow-legged sidle I slipped into the kitchen again to ask what there was to do.

"Nothing but try to behave like a Christian and a gentleman," my mother answered stiffly. "Put on a tie, and shoes and stockings.

\* CULTURAL CODE: customary; this is a action that occurs regularly in the boy's life, within the artistic frame and beyond

\* CULTURAL CODE: behaviour code; behave like a Christian and a gentleman; because Christianity and gentility are coded the same way, the terms are, in this context, synonymous -

clothing code; ties, shoes and stockings are articles of clothing that signify Christians and gentlemen.

(32) Today your father is just about as much as I can bear." \* SYMBOLIC CODE and PROAIRETIC CODE: the comic sub-plot of domestic discord is furthered; the son should not be like his father.

(33) "And then what?" I asked hopefully. I was thinking that I might take a drink to my father, but dared not as yet suggest it.

"Then you can stay quiet and read - and afterwards practise your music lesson. If your Aunt Louise should come she'll find that as least I bring my son up decently." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I was thinking that I might take a drink to my father; Tom wants to escape the feminine realm--the house--to join his father in the masculine realm--the field; the mother keeps Tom in the house, symbolically denying his passage into sexual maturity \* CULTURAL CODE: behaviour code; being quiet, reading and playing music are indices to a "decent" child - social code; one is brought up decently so others will notice - the matriarchy; the mother will receive credit for a child who is reared properly.

(34) It was a long day. My mother prepared the midday meal as usual, \* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: as usual; in this culture, mothers/women prepare the meals.

(35) but, to impress upon my father the enormity of his conduct, withdrew as soon as the food was served.

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: impress upon my father the enormity of his conduct; the diction suggests a mature narrator, the adult voice reflecting on a distant childhood \* CULTURAL CODE: withdrew; the action is dressed in the language of the battlefield.

(36) When he was gone, she and I emerged to take our places at the table in an atmosphere of unappetizing righteousness. We didn't eat much. The food was cold, and my mother had no heart to warm it up. \* CULTURAL CODE: when he was gone, she and I emerged; reference again to the ongoing battle between the parents; the father is the enemy--Tom and his mother must await his departure to emerge from cover.

(37) For relief at last she said, "Run along and feed the chickens while I change my dress. Since we aren't going to service today we'll read Scripture for a while instead." \* CULTURAL CODE: the social/religious code; if one cannot attend the religious gathering, one honours the Sabbath by reading scripture - the clothing code; the mother marks the reading of sacred scripture by changing clothes.

(38) And Scripture we did read, Isaiah, verse about, my mother her black silk dress and rhinestone brooch, I in my corduroys and Sunday shoes that pinched. It was a very august afternoon, exactly like the tone that had persisted in my mother's voice since breakfast time.

\* CULTURAL CODE: the clothing code; the mother ceremoniously adorns herself with black silk and a rhinestone brooch - Sunday shoes that pinched; the Sabbath is meant to be holy, foreign and uncomfortable; one should not feel at home with the sacred; religious observance belongs to High Culture and High Culture lives elsewhere.

(39) I think I might have openly rebelled, only for the hope that by compliance I yet might win permission for the trip to town with Rock. \* CULTURAL CODE: openly rebelled; the martial metaphor to describe the domestic interaction - by compliance I might yet win; religious code; bartering obedience for a reward; satisfaction *might* be purchased with good behaviour; a departure from Calvinist doctrine, which counsels men against the heresy of meritorious salvation \* SYMBOLIC CODE: might have openly rebelled; the man-child must reject the maternal bond if he is to declare his independence.

(40) I was inordinately proud that my father suggested it, and for his faith in me forgave him even Isaiah and the plushy afternoon. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: inordinately proud that my father suggested it; the trip to town elevates Tom in status; the father recognizes that his son has matured \* CULTURAL CODE: plushy parlour; the adjective ties this lexie to lexie (22) and the erotics of the mother \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the opposition of parental duties; the father must send his son away; the mother must draw him close.

(41) Whereas with my mother, I decided, it was a case of downright bigotry. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I decided; Tom declares his allegiance to his father \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: bigotry, obstinate and intolerant adherence to creed or view; an index to the mother's character.

(42) We went on reading Isaiah, and then for a while I played hymns on the piano. A great many hymns - even the ones with awkward sharps and accidentals that I'd never tried before - \* CULTURAL CODE: awkward, never tried before; this is art, culture; it is foreign to the boy.

(43) for, fearing visitors, my mother was resolved to let them see that she and I were uncontaminated by my father's sacrilege. \* CULTURAL CODE: fearing visitors;

righteousness is a thing to be seen \* CONNOTATIVE CODE:  
the woman is concerned with religious observance; that  
concern is an index to her character.

(44) But among these likely visitors was my Aunt Louise,  
a portly condescending lady married to a well-off farmer  
with a handsome motor-car, \* SEMIOTIC CODE: But; the  
conversational tone of the narrative voice,  
ungrammatically, or least informally, connecting two  
sentences; the language suggests the spoken word, a  
narrator actively narrating \* CULTURAL CODE: economic  
code; a well-off farmer has a handsome motor-car CULTURAL  
CODE: motor-car; the diction places the story at a time  
when automobiles were uncommon enough that the car had to  
be distinguished with the adjective "motor".

(45) and always when she came it was my mother's vanity  
to have me play for her a waltz or reverie, or *Holy Night*  
sometimes with variations. A man-child and prodigy might  
eclipse the motor-car. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: my mother's  
vanity, A man-child and prodigy might eclipse the motor-  
car; the mother lives vicariously through the child; his  
cultural accomplishment re-defines her--she is not a  
farm-wife but the mother of a prodigy \* CULTURAL CODE:  
the cultural value of High Culture--the prodigy is worth  
approximately as much as a fine automobile.



(46) Presently she roused herself, and pretending mild reproof began, "Now, Tommy, you're going wooden on those hymns. For a change you'd better practise *Sons of Liberty*. Your Aunt Louise will want to hear it, anyway."  
\* SEMIOTIC CODE: she is only pretending mild reproof; the voice of the mature narrator, who understands that the mother can only affect musical appreciation \* CULTURAL CODE: Tommy; naming code; the mother holds her son in childhood by naming him a child \* CULTURAL CODE: Tom should practice *Sons of Liberty* because esteemed company might request it; the value of art is extrinsic, residing in its audience's willingness to pay respect - economic code; the value of High Culture is set by its market.

(47) There was a fine swing and vigour in this piece, but it was hard. Hard because it was so alive, so full of youth and headhigh rhythm. It was a march, and it did march. I couldn't take time to practise at the hard spots slowly till I got them right, for I had to march too. I had to let my fingers sometimes miss a note or strike one wrong. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom feels music; he is not like his mother (who pretends mild reproof) or his father (for whom music is signified by the dollar it costs him for lessons) \* SYMBOLIC CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: I had to let my fingers sometimes miss a note or strike one wrong; the authority for music resides in the

soul; Tom has a sympathy for music, referring to a transcendent Form for guidance rather than the printed notation.

(48) Again and again this afternoon I started carefully, resolving to count right through, the way Miss Wiggins did, and as often I sprang ahead to lead my march a moment or two all dash and fire, and then fall stumbling in the bitter dust of dissonance. \* CULTURAL CODE: I started carefully, resolving to count right through; the counting will constrain him, anchor him to the page, drowning out the distracting sound of the music; if he is deaf to the music (as Miss Wiggins apparently is), he might resist its charm \* SEMIOTIC CODE: sprang ahead to lead my march .... all dash and fire, and then fall stumbling in the bitter dust; again, the martial metaphor is carried to the domestic site - religious code; life, in its constituent parts, is clearly meant to be conquered, overcome \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and CULTURAL CODE: fall stumbling in the bitter dust of dissonance; not a realist's detail but a editorial comment by the narrator; how is music meant to sound? within the bounds of this culture, it is meant to be ordered and harmonious, played with discipline rather than abandon.

(49) My mother didn't know. She thought that speed and perseverance would eventually get me there. She tapped her foot and smiled encouragement, and gradually as the afternoon wore on began to look a little disappointed that there would be no visitors, after all.

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: My mother didn't know; cultural appreciation is a facade; she cannot hear that Tom has strayed from the rhythm because she does not listen to music but only purchases it; the pretence of appreciation is more revealing than the fact that the woman has a tin ear.

(50) "Run along for the cows," she said at last, "while I get your supper ready for your father. There'll be nobody here, so you can slip into your overalls again."

\* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: There'll be nobody here, so you can slip into your overalls again; clothing code; Tom will change from the uniform that honours company to the uniform of the farm.

(51) I looked at her a moment, and then asked: "What am I going to wear to town tomorrow? I might get grease or something on the corduroys." \* CULTURAL CODE: the clothing code; on one hand, a trip to town demands the correct costume (corduroy knickers); on the other, a

ritual passage into manhood should be marked with its appropriate uniform (long pants).

(52) For while it was always my way to exploit the future, I liked to do it rationally, within the limits of the sane and probable. On my way for the cows I wanted to live the trip to town tomorrow many times, with variations," \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: exploit the future, live the trip to town many times with variations; the imaginative capacity of the child \* CULTURAL CODE: rationally, within the limits of the sane and probable; the child's imagination is limited by the influence of the economic and religious code \* SEMIOTIC CODE: always; ie. there are other times; the realist convention of constructing a fictional life beyond the text.

(53) but only on the explicit understanding that tomorrow there was to be a trip to town. I have always been tethered to reality, always compelled by an unfortunate kind of probity in my nature to prefer a barefaced disappointment to the luxury of a future I have no just claims upon. \* CULTURAL CODE: tethered to reality, compelled; the religious code; rejecting unbridled fantasy, preferring disappointment to undeserved luxury; he is compelled (pre-determined, directed against his will, subject to another for direction) to prefer (to

desire, to want) \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: probity;  
uprightness, honesty; an index to his character.

(54) I went to town the next day, \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the  
action code; a pivotal change of scene \* CULTURAL CODE:  
the boy has been wrested from maternal control;  
increasingly, from this point, the mother will defer--in  
matters concerning the child--to masculine values.

(55) though not till there had been a full hour's  
argument that paradoxically enough gave three of us the  
victory. For my father had his way: I went; I had my  
way: I went; and in return for her consent my mother  
wrung a promise from him of a pair of new plush curtains  
for the parlour when the crop was threshed, and for me  
the metronome that Miss Wiggins declared was the only way  
I'd ever learn to keep in time on marching pieces like  
the *Sons of Liberty*. \* CULTURAL CODE: Tom is eventually  
*allowed* by his mother (the compromise of the patriarchy)  
to go to town, in exchange for the father's promise of  
new curtains and a metronome (both indices of high  
culture); the demands of the farm are met--boy goes to  
town, missing both school and music lessons, to find a  
farm hand; farm income will purchase high culture  
(curtains and metronome) and the opposition between the  
farm and high culture is sustained through the quid pro

quo bargain - economic code; mother and father barter, trading deeply held values as if they were commodities.

(56) It was my first trip to town alone. \* CULTURAL CODE: the rite of passage; the teen-aged boy is sent off alone to discover his manhood.

(57) That was why they gave me Rock, who was old and reliable and philosophic enough to meet motor-cars and the chance locomotive on an equal and even somewhat supercilious footing. \* CULTURAL CODE: the naming code; Rock, who is old and reliable \* CULTURAL CODE: locomotive; the story belongs to a time when trains were more common (ie; pre-World War II); the narrator differentiates between the part of the train (the locomotive) and the whole; he does not belong to the more contemporary culture which names trains less exactly.

(58) "Mind you pick somebody big and husky," said my father as he started for the field. "Go to Jenkins' store, and he'll tell you who's in town." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: somebody big and husky; Tom must find an individual who meets the criteria of the gender code for "men" \* CULTURAL CODE: Jenkins will know who is in town; in a small town, the keeper of the general store will know everyone.

(59) "Whoever it is, make sure he's stoked before."

\* HERMENEUTIC CODE: every word and sentence in the text invites us to consider its opposite; will Tommy find someone who has stoked before? what will happen if he does not?

(60) "And mind it's somebody who looks like he washes himself," my mother warned, "I'm going to put clean sheets and pillow-cases on the bunkhouse bed, but not for any dirty tramp or hobo." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom should find a hired man who is not like a man (ie. someone who does not fit the gender code for men); the boy is expected to find a stoker who is both a man (lexie "58") and not a man (lexie "60").

(61) By the time they had both finished with me there were a great many things to mind. Besides repairs for my father's binder, I was to take two crates of eggs each containing twelve dozen eggs to Mr. Jenkins' store and in exchange have a list of groceries filled. \* CULTURAL CODE: the rural practice of bartering, more naturally placed in this instance, with goods and services exchanged \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the binder, mentioned twice in the story, functions not as a farm tool (it is never actually used) but as a realistic detail (*l'effet du reel*).

(62) And to make it complicated, both quantity and quality of some of the groceries were to be determined by the price of the eggs. Thirty cents a dozen, for instance, and I was to ask for coffee at sixty-five cents a pound. Twenty-nine cents a dozen and coffee at fifty cents a pound. Twenty-eight and no oranges. Thirty-one and bigger oranges. \* CULTURAL CODE: the relative values of town in contrast to the absolute values of the farm; on the farm, the value of an object is intrinsic; a egg is an egg, worth only an egg and never worth less than an egg; in town, eggs have a price that fluctuates  
\* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom is initiated to the practices of the world around him.

(63) It was like decimals with Miss Wiggins, or two notes in the treble against three in the bass. \* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: the simile, like any comparative definition, is rooted in cultural experience; in order to decode the comparison, one needs only to know that decimals and treble scales are difficult concepts for a teen-aged boy.

(64) For my father a tin of special blend tobacco, and my mother not to know. For my mother a box of face powder at the drugstore, and my father not to know. Twenty-five cents from my father on the side for ice-cream and



licorice. Thirty-five from my mother for my dinner at the Chinese restaurant. \* CULTURAL CODE: the religious and economic code; and my mother not to know--the sin of tobacco; and my father not to know--the sin of vanity; the guilty pleasure of luxury.

(65) And warnings, of course, to take good care of Rock, speak politely to Mr. Jenkins, and see that I didn't get machine oil on my corduroys. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: in this diagesis, the father and mother speak, their voices emerging in the opposition of masculine and feminine values--taking care of the horse vs. taking care of corduroys and minding one's manners.

(66) It was three hours to town with Rock, but I don't remember them. I remember nothing but a smug satisfaction with myself, and exhilarating conviction of importance and maturity - \* CULTURAL CODE: economic and religious index; distance is measured by time; time is spent - time is spent but not remembered (ie. time is wasted) on an exhilarating journey; journey allows smug satisfaction and sense of importance and maturity; a guilty pleasure--costing time, purchasing self-importance.

(67) and that only by contrast with the sudden sag to embarrassed insignificance when finally old Rock and I drove up to Jenkins' store. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the judgement is that of an experienced and distant observer--the mature narrator speaks from the future about the conditions of his youth \* CULTURAL CODE: in town, a farm boy is subject to insecurity (an index to the relative sophistication of the town).

(68) For a farm boy is like that. Alone with himself and his horse he cuts a fine figure. He is the measure of the universe. He foresees a great many encounters with life, and in them all acquits himself a little more than creditably. He is fearless, resourceful, a bit of a brag. His horse never contradicts. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: again, the language is over-determined, speaking of itself as it speaks of other things; it is *literary* in intention and general in scope, often revealing the voice of author (or, more precisely, the voice of the author as he constructs himself in the text).

(69) But in town it is different. There are eyes here, critical, that pierce with a single glance the little bubble of his self-importance, and leave him dwindled smaller even than his normal size. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom's sense of worth is dependent upon external

validation; farm boys are clumsy and unsophisticated in town.

(70) It always happens that way. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the narrator comments on the other times when it has happened, times which exist only as an index to the narrative convention \* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: always; "always" marks the event as characteristic of this culture and identifies the narrator as one who notices, and comments on, cultural indices.

(71) They are so superbly poised and sophisticated, these strangers, so completely masters of their situation as they loll in doorways and go sauntering up and down Main Street. \* CULTURAL CODE: what does it mean to be sophisticated? one wants to loll in doorways (an index to the relative leisure of town life) and saunter down streets (an index to the character of townspeople--they are brazen saunterers).

(72) Instantly he yields to them his place as measure of the universe, especially if he is a small boy wearing squeaky corduroys, \* SYMBOLIC CODE: according to the clothing code, the phrase a small boy wearing squeaky corduroys is almost redundant--only a small boy *would* be wearing squeaky corduroys; from a distance, the mother

continues to undermine the rite of passage (by dressing her son in short pants, she makes him a small boy).

(73) especially if he has a worldly-wise old horse like Rock, one that knows Main Streets, and will take them in nothing but his own slow philosophic stride. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: in a curious way, Rock offers an adult role model for Tom (which is not to suggest that Tom should mature to a worldly-wise old horse but rather that he should become one who takes Main Streets in his own slow philosophic stride).

(74) We arrived all right. Mr. Jenkins was a little man with a freckled bald head, and when I carried in my two crates of eggs, one in each hand, and my legs bowed a bit, \* CULTURAL CODE: language evokes a farm boy worshipping at the altar of sophistication--his legs bowed, he carries his humble offerings, one crate of eggs in each hand, before the shop-keeper \* SEMIOTIC CODE: Mr. Jenkins; even in diagesis, Tom honours his mother's admonition to be polite; farm boys are like that \* CULTURAL CODE: as a boy, Tom must address an adult with respect.

(75) he said curtly, "Well, can't you set them down? My boy's delivering, and I can't take time to count them now

myself." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Jenkins is curt \* CULTURAL CODE: can't take time; economic code--time is money CULTURAL CODE: mistrust is characteristic of larger communities--Jenkins has to count the eggs.

(76) "They don't need counting," I said politely.

\* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom can tell Jenkins the number of eggs; he would not lie (the probity of his nature) so the eggs need not be counted

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom is the sort of boy who speaks politely.

(77) "Each layer holds two dozen, and each crate holds six layers. I was there. I saw my mother put them in."

\* CULTURAL CODE: I was there; in Tom's world, his word is a guarantee; Each layer holds two dozen, and each crate holds six layers; the absolute values of the farm; there cannot be fewer than twenty-four dozen eggs.

(78) At this a tall, slick-haired young man in yellow shoes \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and CULTURAL CODE: slick-haired .... in yellow shoes; a clothing code; he is a city-slicker, more sophisticated than the farm boy.

(79) who had been standing by the window turned around and said, "That's telling you, Jenkins - he was there."

\* SEMIOTIC CODE and CULTURAL CODE: compare to lexie (74)-  
-in town, young men refer to shop-keepers without their  
title \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: in Ross's stories, women  
usually stand at windows, waiting for company.

(80) Nettled and glowering, Jenkins himself came round  
the counter and repeated, "So you were there were you?  
Smart youngster! What did you say was your name?"

\* CULTURAL CODE: Mr. Jenkins becomes Jenkins; Jenkins, to  
whom Tom is meant to be polite, is rude; Tom acquires new  
values--honour must be earned (ie. town-the world beyond  
the farm-the place where sophistication is to be  
purchased through experience) \* SEMIOTIC CODE: What did  
you say was your name? rather than the less formal but  
more likely *What did you say your name was?*; probably the  
voice of the author; a narrative intrusion.

(81) Nettled in turn to preciseness I answered, "I  
haven't yet. It's Thomas Dickson and my father's David  
Dickson, eight miles north of here. He wants a man to  
stook and was too busy to come himself." \* CULTURAL CODE:  
the patriarchy; who is he? he is the son of David Dickson  
(identity is a function of paternity) \* CONNOTATIVE  
CODE: Tom considers himself to be the son of an important  
and prosperous man (i. the father wants to hire a man;

ii. in a society in which time is money, the father is too busy to come to town himself).

(82) He nodded, unimpressed, \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Jenkins is meant to be impressed by a man who is too busy to come to town to hire a stoker; an index to Tom's own character (he is naive enough to think that the shopkeeper will consider his father important) and to that of Jenkins (Jenkins is too worldly to be impressed by such a man and too rude to pretend for the sake of the man's son).

(83) and then putting out his hand said, "Where's your list? Your mother gave you one, I hope?" \* SYMBOLIC CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: your mother gave you one, I hope?; the comment of Jenkins characterizes Tom as both a man and not a man; to the store-keeper, Tom is just a boy; Jenkins wants to deal with the mother's proxy (the list) rather than the child; on the other hand, Tom is a man-child who--by virtue of his sex--does not belong to the class of people who market (ie. women).

(84) I said she had and he glowered again. "Then let's have it and come back in half an hour. Whether you were there or not, I'm going to count your eggs. \* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: a man of the town and a man of

experience (ie. he has learned to mistrust), Jenkins cannot take the word of a earnest farm-boy.

(85) How do I know that half of them aren't smashed?"

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom is still perceived, by Jenkins, as irresponsible--he is a boy.

(86) "That's right," agreed the young man, sauntering to the door and looking at Rock. "They've likely been bouncing along at a merry clip. You're quite sure, Buddy, that you didn't have a runaway?"

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the contrast between the light banter of the young man in yellow shoes and the earnest insistence of Tom provides an index to the nature of both characters

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: a runaway; the literary device of foreshadowing.

(87) Ignoring the impertinence I staved off Jenkins.

"The list, you see, has to be explained. I'd rather wait and tell you about it later on."

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: Tom *staves off* (averts, wards off, defers) Jenkins--the martial metaphor; as if Jenkins was closing on Tom

\* CULTURAL CODE: The list .... has to be explained; with the difference between town and farm values, Jenkins will not understand the order.



(88) He teetered a moment on his heels and toes, then tried again. "I can read too. I make up orders every day. Just go away for a while - look for your man - anything." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom is treated as an annoying child; Jenkins is coded as one who does not suffer annoying children well.

(89) "It wouldn't do," I persisted. "The way this one's written isn't what it really means. You'd need me to explain -"

He teetered rapidly. "Show me just one thing I don't know what it means."

"Oranges," I said, "but that's only oranges if eggs are twenty-nine cents or more - and bigger oranges if they're thirty-one. You see, you'd never understand -"  
\* CULTURAL CODE: the conflict between rural and urban (or relatively urban) values; the barter system.

(90) So I had my way and explained it all right then and there. What with eggs at twenty-nine and a half cents a dozen and my mother out a little in her calculations, it was somewhat confusing for a while; but after arguing a lot and pulling away the paper from each other that they were figuring on, the young man and Mr. Jenkins finally had it all worked out, with mustard and soap omitted altogether, and an extra half-dozen oranges thrown in.

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: what with eggs . . . .; the speaking voice delivering the narrative; a realist ruse, evoking a "realistic" narrator; one is meant to believe that the story is being told.

(91) "Vitamins," the young man overruled me, "they make you grow" \* CULTURAL CODE: the young man, sophisticated as he is, is schooled in the sciences.

(92) - and then with a nod towards an open biscuit box invited me to help myself.

I took a small one, and started up Rock again. It was nearly one o'clock now, so in anticipation of his noontime quart of oats he trotted off, a little more briskly, for the farmer's hitching-rail beside the lumber-yard. This was the quiet end of town. The air drowsed redolent of pine and tamarack, and resin simmering slowly in the sun.

\* SYMBOLIC CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: with a nod towards an open biscuit box; Tom is seen as a child and, accordingly, offered cookies; he takes the biscuit--he is after all still a boy--but as befitting a man-child on a quest for maturity, he accepts only a small one

\* CULTURAL CODE: the farmer's hitching post is in the quiet end of town, where the air drowns and things simmer slowly; the passage serves to characterize the

farmer (this is what farm people are like) and the town (this is the way townspeople see farmers).

(93) I poured out the oats and waited till he had finished. After the way the town had treated me  
\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the fragile subjectivity of a child (the town had not so much treated Tom badly, as not treated him at all); in town, he simply did not matter.

(94) it was comforting and peaceful to stand with my fingers in his mane, hearing him munch. It brought me a sense of place again in life. It made me feel almost as important as before. But when he finished and there was my own dinner to be thought about \* CULTURAL CODE: a sense of place again in life; at the farmer's hitching rail, Tom recovers his sense of self; the hitching-rail provides the farm-boy with a surrogate farm \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the rite of passage is overwhelming Tom.

(95) I found myself more of an alien in the town than ever, and felt the way to the little Chinese restaurant doubly hard. For Rock was older than I. Older and wiser, with a better understanding of important things.  
\* SYMBOLIC CODE and HERMENEUTIC CODE: what is Rock's superior understanding of important things? it is something one acquires with age (an indirect reference to

the passage rite); that understanding includes taking Main Streets in one's stride; however, a complete understanding of important things awaits discovery in the following lexie.

(96) His philosophy included the relishing of oats even within a stone's throw of sophisticated Main Street. Mine was less mature. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the completion of the riddle; the relishing of oats within a stone's throw of sophisticated Main Street; in the course of his spiritual journey, Tom must come to understand a proper sense of values (ie. that some things--like good oats--are more important than others--like sophistication--because they are substantial; they have inherent worth; they are important because one's own system of values declares them so) \* SEMIOTIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: mature; another reference to the process of emotional growth (the rite of passage).

(97) I went, however, but I didn't have dinner. Perhaps it was my stomach, all puckered and tense with nervousness. Perhaps it was the restaurant itself, the pyramids of oranges \* CULTURAL CODE: pyramids of oranges; the story is set in a time when oranges are a treat for boys; they are stacked in exotic pyramids; the

restaurant too is a place of mystery and adventure (it renders Tom nervous).

(98) in the window and the dark green rubber plant with the tropical-looking leaves, \* CULTURAL CODE: dark green rubber plant with tropical looking leaves; the details serve to establish the restaurant as a foreign and unusual establishment (at least, to a farm boy).

(99) the indolent little Chinaman behind the counter and the dusky smell of last night's cigarettes that to my prairie nostrils was the orient itself, \* CULTURAL CODE: on the prairies, a restaurant is usually operated by a Chinese immigrant; indolent little Chinaman; the cultural bias--the representative group of Chinese in this story (one man) are lazy; does Tom describe him as lazy because he is Chinese? \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the dusky smell of last night's cigarettes that to my prairie nostrils was the orient itself; Tom's father and the cornet player both smoke but only the indolent little Chinaman's cigarettes suggest the orient; are these different cigarettes (the rumoured opium-laced reefers of all Orientals) or does Tom simply assign exotic-ness to every aspect of the restaurantuer?

(100) the exotic atmosphere about it all with which a meal of meat and vegetables and pie would have somehow simply jarred. I climbed onto a stool and ordered an ice-cream soda. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: climbed onto a stool; fixes the size, if not the age, of the narrator--he has to climb onto stools; he is not yet fully grown; ordered an ice-cream soda; instead of a regular meal (meat and vegetables, a man's plate), Tom selects an ice-cream treat (the child's plate).

(101) A few stools away there was a young man sitting.  
\* HERMENEUTIC CODE: who is this young man?

(102) I kept watching him and wondering. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: why is Tom watching him and wondering? what about him justifies wonder? is he exotic like the Chinaman?

(103) He was well-dressed, with a nonchalance about his clothes that distinguished him from anyone I had ever seen, \* CULTURAL CODE: well-dressed; not a farmer  
\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: a nonchalance about his clothes; the clothing code; unlike Tom--unlike the others of Tom's culture--this individual assigns little importance to cultural uniforms.

(104) and yet at the same time it was a shabby suit, with shiny elbows and threadbare cuffs. His hands were slender, almost a girl's hands, \* CULTURAL CODE: the clothing code; he wears a suit--signifying foreign-ness, special-ness--but it is a shabby suit--signifying ordinariness \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: almost a girl's hands; a man is defined by his rough powerful hands; this man has slender hands \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: this man is both a man and not a man; how is Tom to interpret him? is he a failed man?

(105) yet vaguely with their shapely quietness they troubled me, because, however slender and smooth, they were yet hands to be reckoned with, strong with a strength that was different from the rugged labour-strength I knew. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: they troubled me; hands are an index to character; these hands trouble Tom; they argue against the accuracy of the existing cultural codes \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: however slender and smooth, they were yet hands to be reckoned with; these are hands that signify strength in slender shapeliness, a concept which is not yet available to Tom.

(106) He smoked a cigarette, and blew rings towards the window.

Different from the farmer boys I knew, yet different also from the young man with the yellow shoes in Jenkins' store. \* CULTURAL CODE: like the Chinaman, and unlike Tom's father, this individual smokes cigarettes in public; Tom identifies the unabashed use of tobacco with a foreign culture (foreign, at least, to the farm)

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: blew rings; not only does this young man smoke cigarettes in public, but he also does tricks with the exhaust - different from the farmer boys .... different also from the young man with yellow shoes; he is not of the farm and not of the town; he is not understandable

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: like the young man in the yellow shoes, he faces the window, a posture usually reserved--in Ross's stories--for women; the connotative code must be altered to allow for the difference between town and farm codings.

(107) Staring out at it through the restaurant window he was as far away from Main Street as was I with plodding old Rock and my squeaky corduroys. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: a symbolic sympathy; the two are united by difference, joined by their mutual distance from social propriety; Tom begins a second passage rite; even as the first rite requires that he be immersed in his culture, the second demands that he emerge from that immersion.



(108) I presumed for a minute or two an imaginary companionship. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom recognizes his attraction to the stranger \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: presuming a friendship--the imaginative capacity of the child.

(109) I finished my soda, and to be with him a little longer ordered lemonade. It was strangely important to be with him, to prolong a while this companionship. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: strangely important to be with him; this is the beginning of Tom's homoerotic infatuation; that infatuation should be understood, not as a deviation from normal sexual behaviour, but as a natural exploration of different types of manhood; it is an aspect of Tom's spiritual journey in search of his adult self.

(110) I hadn't the slightest hope of his noticing me, nor the slightest intention of obtruding myself. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: hadn't the slightest hope of his noticing me; the homoerotic; the language suggests a teen-age crush--he worships from afar; significantly, Tom assigns himself the subordinate role (ie. the feminine position but also the role of the novice); he awaits, but does not expect, recognition.

(111) I just wanted to be there, to be assured by something I had never encountered before, to store it up for the three hours home with old Rock. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: to be assured by something I had never encountered before; an aspect of the second passage rite; the apprehension of a different value system.

(112) Then a big, unshaven man came in, \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: a big, unshaven man; a connotative code--this man is a labourer.

(113) and slouching onto the stool beside me said, "They tell me across the street you're looking for a couple of hands. \* CULTURAL CODE: identification of man with labour; man reduced to his profitable appendages--his hands \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: he is a man who slouches onto stools.

(114) What's your old man pay this year?" \* CULTURAL CODE: in the town's economic scheme, the value of work is not constant but relative to the demands of the market; work is not an ethic but a commodity \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: What's your old man; the manner of speech is an index to character, establishing the class of the stoker.

(115) "My father," I corrected him, "doesn't want a couple of men. He just wants one." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: "My father," I corrected him; Tom uses language to effect a class distinction between himself and the stoker; despite the fact that he is only a child (and therefore subordinate to the other by virtue of age), he *corrects* the stoker, assuming a dominant role in the relationship; he is the son of a landowner and entitled to condescend to labourers \* CULTURAL CODE: the relative values of the town versus the absolute values of the farm--Tom asks Jenkins for one man but gets two; on the farm, one equals one--in town one can equal two CULTURAL CODE: unlike Jenkins, Tom's father has earned the respect of a title (ie. father vs old man); the absolute values of the farm (a man is a man) are proving inadequate in town (ie. the category of man is not sufficiently specific).

(116) "I've got a pal," he insisted, "and we always go together." \* SEMIOTIC CODE: always; reference beyond the frame--the realist's ruse--as if these characters exist outside this semiotic system.

(117) I didn't like him. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom, the man-child, is looking for a friend rather than a farm-hand \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the simple declarative sentence

carries enormous emotional weight--Tom *does* like Philip (the stranger) but not the rough man; he is selecting a lover/spiritual guide; he is exploring manhood and rejecting brute power.

(118) I couldn't help making contrasts with the cool, trim quietness of the young man sitting farther along. "What do you say?" he said as I sat silent, thrusting his stubby chin out almost over my lemonade. "We're ready anytime." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: couldn't help making contrasts; the clash between the connotative codes that Tom understands (ie. the labourer is a labourer) and those he does not (he does not what the quiet young man signifies) \* SYMBOLIC CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: What do you say?; the stoker acknowledges Tom as one who has the right to hire men; in effect, he is conferring, upon Tom, the status of man.

(119) "It's just one man my father wants," I said aloofly, drinking off my lemonade with a flourish to let him see I meant it. "And if you'll excuse me now - I've got to look for somebody else." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: aloofly; according to the conventions of the class system, Tom is permitted to be aloof with labourers; And if you'll excuse me now; again, Tom uses language to

distinguish between his own station and that of the stokers.

(120) "What about this?" he intercepted me, and doubling up his arm displayed a hump of muscle that made me, if not more inclined to him, at least a little more deferential. "My pal's got plenty, too. We'll set up two stooks any day for anybody else's one." \* CULTURAL CODE: a little more deferential; Tom is a boy; therefore he ought to defer to a man \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: what about this?; the stoker is a man; he meets the criteria of the category "man"; he is defined by his strength.

(121) "Not both," I edged away from him. "I'm sorry - you just wouldn't do." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I edged away from him; the quest for manhood; Tom confronts danger (actually, edges away from danger but, at least, remained in the room with it) to demonstrate his bravery \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: you just wouldn't do; the fundamentalism of a child (especially that of an unsophisticated farm boy, who is confused by decimals and by half cents) insists that two stokers--though they might work twice as fast as one--is one more than Tom is meant to get; his task is to hire a man.

(122) He shook his head contemptuously. "Some farmer - just one man to stook."

"My father's a good farmer," I answered stoutly, rallying to the family honour \* CULTURAL CODE: rallying; the martial metaphor; the family honour; merit is related to wealth--a good man is a prosperous man.

(123) less for its own sake than for what the young man on the other stool might think of us. "And he doesn't need just one man to stook. He's got three already. That's plenty other years, but this year the crop's so big he needs another. So there!" \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: this year the crop's so big; a child's boasting; So there!; a child's utterance \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom, despite the unfortunate probity of his nature, resorts to a lie to impress the young man.

(124) "I can just see the place," he said, slouching to his feet and starting towards the door. "An acre or two of potatoes and a couple of dozen hens." \* CULTURAL CODE: the insult provides insight to the values of the culture; the stoker sneers at <a>n acre or two of potatoes and a couple dozen hens, knowing that a man's merit is proportional to his net worth (unwittingly, the stoker also diminishes himself; he is landless, without even an acre or two of potatoes) \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: slouching

to his feet; this is the sort of man who slouches onto a stool (lexie 113) and back to his feet; slouching is an index to character and class--a better class of man would hold himself erect.

(125) I glared after him a minute, then climbed back onto the stool and ordered another soda. The young man was watching me now in the big mirror behind the counter, and when I glanced up and met his eyes he gave a slow, half-smiling little nod of approval. And out of all proportion to anything it could mean, his nod encouraged me. \* PROAIRETIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom, with a boy's stature, must climb back onto a stool

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: ordered another soda; orders another treat (an ice cream soda, a child's choice) rather than meat and potatoes (a man-ly meal)

\* SYMBOLIC CODE: The young man was watching me now in the big mirror, I glanced up and met his eyes; the

homoerotic--their eyes meet \* HERMENEUTIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: out of all proportion to anything it could mean; the homoerotic; Tom is encouraged by small attentions; a teenage infatuation.

(126) I didn't flinch or fidget as I would have done had it been the young man with the yellow shoes watching me, and I didn't stammer over the confession that his

amusement and appraisal somehow forced from me. "We haven't three men - just my father - but I'm to take one home today. The wheat's ripening fast this year and shelling, so he can't do it all himself." \* PROAIRETIC CODE and HERMENEUTIC CODE: I didn't flinch or fidget, didn't stammer over the confession; a record of *actions not taken* suggests the significance of their absence; Tom is a self-conscious farm boy but he does not flinch; how is the gaze of the stranger different from that of the townspeople? why does it force a confession from Tom? \* SYMBOLIC CODE: appraisal; the stranger is appraising (judging, valuing or fixing the price for) Tom, as a young man might appraise a young woman.

(127) He nodded again and then after a minute asked quietly, "What about me? Would I do?"

I turned on the stool and stared at him.

"I need a job, and if it's any recommendation there's only one of me." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: if it's any recommendation; the diction ascribed to the stranger declares his social class and level of education--he was not born a labourer.

(128) "You don't understand," I started to explain, afraid to believe that perhaps he really did. "It's to stook. You have to be in the field by seven o'clock and



there's only a bunkhouse to sleep in - a granary with a bed in it -" \* CULTURAL CODE: this man is not like other men; therefore, whatever he is, he cannot be a farm-hand; he must not understand.

(129) "I know - that's about what I expect." He drummed his fingers a minute, then twisted his lips into a kind of half-hearted smile and went on, \* CULTURAL CODE: that's about what I expect; these are normal conditions for farm hands - I know; he represents himself as one who is of, or familiar with, the culture--he knows what to expect \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: he is the sort of man who "drums" his fingers; the hands are always an index to character in the stories of this collection \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: what sort of man drums his fingers rather than making fists of them?

(130) "They tell me a little toughening up is what I need. Outdoors, and plenty of good hard work - so I'll be like the fellow that just went out." \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: who are "they"? - why does he need toughening? what's wrong with him? \* CULTURAL CODE: he will be cured by hard work and fresh air; does he suffer from consumption, a common disease of the time? \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: so I'll be like; he will never be like the others, who have been made tough by their lives.

(131) The wrong hands: white slender fingers, I knew they'd never do \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: white slender fingers; he is not a regular man.

(132) - but catching the twisted smile again I pushed away my soda and said quickly, "Then we'd better start right away. It's three hours home, and I've still some places to go. But you can get in the buggy now, and we'll drive around together." \* PROAIRETIC CODE: Then; a signal that Tom has come to a decision \* SYMBOLIC CODE: catching the twisted smile again; the homoerotic; Tom is undone by a smile; pushed away my soda; the soda--symbolic of youth's continuing claim on Tom -- is rejected in favour of the stranger; Tom will follow the stranger into manhood; we'll drive around together; a ritual of courtship--riding together in the buggy.

(133) We did. I wanted it that way, the two of us, to settle scores with Main Street. I wanted to capture some of old Rock's disdain and unconcern; I wanted to know what it felt like to take young men with yellow shoes in my stride, to be preoccupied, to forget them the moment that we separated. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: to settle scores; the martial metaphor--life is a conflict \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: I wanted it that way; Tom is still self-conscious; it is not enough that he capture

Rock's unconcern--he must be seen to exhibit disdain; others must know that he does not care for their opinion

\* CULTURAL CODE: Tom has acquired something of worth (the stranger); it must be publicly acknowledged if he is to exploit its full value

\* SYMBOLIC CODE: the two of us; a ritual of courtship; the public declaration of mutual interest.

(134) And I did. "My name's Philip," the stranger said as we drove from Jenkin's to the drugstore. "Philip Coleman - usually just Phil,"

\* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: in Ross's fiction, Philip is the name of a man who is not like a man; *Philip* connotes, in this story and in As For Me and My House, a man who is soft and cultured (ie. not a farm-hand).

(135) and companionably I responded, "Mine's Tommy Dickson. For the last year, though, my father says I'm getting big and should be called just Tom."

\* CULTURAL CODE: the naming code; grown men are honoured with a man's name; Tom is a man's name--Tommy is not

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom is approaching manhood.

(136) That was what mattered now, the two of us there, and not the town at all. "Do you drive yourself all the time?" he asked, and nonchalant and off-hand I answered,

"You don't really have to drive old Rock. He just goes, anyway. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: That was what mattered now, the two of us there, and not the town at all; Tom withdraws into homoerotic union, closing the circle of lovers against the influence of others \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the nonchalance of Tom's reply is an index to his relationship with Philip--he is at home with the stranger (as he was not with corduroy, or with the young man with yellow shoes, or with Jenkins, or with the stoker) CONNOTATIVE CODE: He just goes, anyway; the remark defines Rock.

(137) Wait till you see my chestnut three-year-old. Clipper I call him. Tonight after supper if you like you can take him for a ride." \* CULTURAL CODE: Clipper; the naming code; this is a horse with spirit \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Clipper is the great passion of Tom's life; he wants to share that pleasure with Philip.

(138) But since he'd never learned to ride at all he thought Rock would do better for a start, \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: he'd never learned to ride at all; in Tom's world, the horse is still the primary vehicle of locomotion; Philip is not of Tom's world; he thought Rock would do better; extrapolating from the connotative codes surrounding Rock, one is directed to the index to

Philip's character--what sort of man would prefer a "Rock" to a "Clipper"?

(139) and then we drove back to the restaurant for his cornet and valise.

"Is it something to play?" I asked as we cleared the town. "Something like a bugle?" \* CULTURAL CODE: cornet; as distinct as the violin is from the fiddle, so is the cornet from the bugle; the cornet does not belong to the class of traditional prairie instruments (eg. piano, fiddle, bugle, banjo--instruments which can be played alone and which require little arrangement or orchestration) but to a class of class of exotic instruments (ie. instruments which are played together and which demand complex systems of organization).

(140) He picked up the black leather case from the floor of the buggy and held it on his knee. "Something like that. Once I played a bugle too. A cornet's better though." \* CULTURAL CODE: A cornet's better though; the sophistication of the stranger, making fine distinctions between similar things; on the farm, the bugle and the cornet would belong to the same class (shiny musical instruments into which one blows to produce a sharp sound); that class is too general to be useful to a musician.

(141) "And you mean you can play the cornet?"

He nodded. "I play in a band. At least I did play in a band. Perhaps if I get along all right with the stooking I will again some time." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: you can play the cornet?; because Tom has never seen a cornet, it falls into the class of exotic things; because Philip can play the cornet, he participates in its exotic-ness \* CULTURAL CODE: I play in a band; Philip *plays* for a living; in Tom's world, men work \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: At least, I did play; the emphasis on the past tense begs for an explanation.

(142) It was later that I pondered this, how stooking for my father could have anything to do with going back to play in a band. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: how are the stooking and the return to the band connected?

(143) At the moment I confided, "I've never heard a cornet - never even seen one. I suppose you still play it sometimes - I mean at night, when you've finished stooking." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom has never seen a cornet \* SEMIOTIC CODE: you still play it sometimes - I mean at night; the literary device of foreshadowing anticipates a future action \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the title --cornet at night--hides in the text.

(144) Instead of answering directly he said, "That means you've never heard a band either." There was surprise in his voice, almost incredulity, but it was kindly.

Somehow I didn't feel ashamed because I had lived all my eleven years on a prairie farm, and knew nothing more than Miss Wiggins and my Aunt Louise's gramophone.

\* CULTURAL CODE: That means you've never heard a band either, knew nothing more than Miss Wiggins and my Aunt Louise's gramophone; Tom and Philip discover their cultural differences in the catalogue of experiences not shared; each assumes that stereotypical knowledge is universal rather than cultural.

(145) He went on, "I was younger than you are now when I started playing in a band. Then I was with an orchestra a while - then with the band again. It's all I've done ever since."

It made me feel lonely for a while, isolated from the things in life that mattered, \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I was younger than you are now when I started playing in a band .... It's all I've done ever since; Philip has not completed the ritual passage (a culturally specific ritual) which presently engages Tom; he has only *played* (a child's occupation), never worked and, according to the traditions of Tom's culture, is not yet a man

\* PROAIRETIC CODE: It made me feel lonely .... isolated from the things in life that mattered; Tom is presented with a cultural crisis, one which challenges his system of values.

(146) but, brightening presently, I asked, "Do you know a piece called *Sons of Liberty*? Four flats in four-four time?"

He thought hard a minute, and then shook his head. "I'm afraid I don't - not by name anyway. Could you whistle a bit of it?" \* CULTURAL CODE: Tom is looking for common cultural ground; if they share knowledge (ie. independently know a common thing) they are more alike.

(147) I whistled two pages, \* CULTURAL CODE: in Tom's experience, music resides on a sheet; Miss Wiggins and Tom's mother expect a competent musician (who may, or may not, be a good musician) to make music sound like it reads; good music is faithful to the page; it derives its authority from the page.

(148) but still he shook his head. "A nice tune, though," he conceded. "Where did you learn it?"

"I haven't yet," I explained. "Not properly, I mean. It's been my lesson for the last two weeks, but I can't keep up to it." \* CULTURAL CODE: not properly, I can't



keep up to it; the authority of the page; though he can whistle the tune, he has not learned it; until he is able to exercise control over it, the tune is not mastered.

(149) He seemed interested," \* SEMIOTIC CODE: seemed; the narrator, by realist convention, is a reporter who does not speak with authority on another character's inner experience.

(150) so I went on and told him about my lessons and Miss Wiggins, and how later on they were going to buy me a metronome so that when I played a piece I wouldn't always be running away with it, "Especially a march. It keeps pulling you along the way it really ought to go until you're all mixed up and have to start at the beginning again. I know I'd do better if I didn't feel that way, and could keep slow and steady like Miss Wiggins."

\* SYMBOLIC CODE and CULTURAL CODE: a metronome, keep slow and steady; the religious and the economic codes; the values of the Tom's culture--reigning in one's passions, practising restraint, allowing the metronome to assign the beat and marching in step.

(151) But he said quickly, "No, that's the right way to feel - you've just got to learn to harness it. \* CULTURAL CODE: Philip, unlike Miss Wiggins, understands music to

be a thing felt; in Philip's culture, music (an index to High Culture) and life are integrated.

(152) It's like old Rock here and Clipper. The way you are, you're Clipper. But if you weren't that way, you'd just be Rock. You see? \* CULTURAL CODE: Philip speaks to Tom in the language of his own experience; the farm analogy is a way of communicating across the cultural divide that separates the two characters.

(153) Rock's easier to handle than Clipper, but at his best he's a sleepy old plow-horse. Clipper's harder to handle - he may even cost you some tumbles. But finally get him broken in and you've got a horse that amounts to something. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the clash of cultural values; Tom's culture esteems the reliable and the predictable (the harvest, however lean) over the uncertain and the transitory (Clipper); God and climate argue against risk.

(154) You wouldn't trade him for a dozen like Rock." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: though not of the farm, and unschooled in farm values, Philip understands the worth of a pleasure horse; he is an adult but he seems equipped with imaginative capacity (like a child) to empathize with

Tom; he does not belong to the group *men* or to the group *adult*

(155) It was a good enough illustration, \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the analogy closes the cultural gap; the two are creating cultural codes, inventing a manner of discourse.

(156) but it slandered Rock. And he was listening. I know - because even though like me he had never heard a cornet before, he had experience enough to accept it at least with tact and manners. \* CULTURAL CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Rock continues to serve as a role model for Tom; he is not threatened (though he will later be surprised) by new experience.

(157) For we hadn't gone much farther when Philip, noticing the way I kept watching the case that was still on his knee, undid that clasps and took the cornet out. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the action builds suspense and introduces the cornet.

(158) It was a very lovely cornet, shapely and eloquent, gleaming in the August sun like pure and mellow gold. \* CULTURAL CODE: the religious code; Tom abandons the god of his fathers for a false idol.

(159) I couldn't restrain myself. I said "Play it - play it now - just a little but to let me hear." And in response, smiling at my earnestness, he raised it to his lips.

But there was only one note - only one fragment of a note \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the precipitating action--the introduction of the foreign cornet to the rural scene \* SYMBOLIC CODE and CULTURAL CODE: I couldn't restrain myself .... Play it - play it now; the language is sexually charged, suggesting unbridled passion; Tom's culture preaches that restraint is a virtue and passion a vice \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: why is there a "but"? why is there only one note? how will Tom's transgression be punished?

(160) - and then away went Rock. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the answer to the riddle--there is only one note because the horse is spooked \* PROAIRETIC CODE: Rock runs amok.

(161) I'd never have believed he had it in him. With a snort and plunge he was off the road and into the ditch - then out of the ditch again and off at a breakneck gallop across the prairie. There were stones and badger holes, and he spared us none of them. \* CULTURAL CODE: I'd never have believed he had it in him, With a snort and a plunge, a breakneck gallop; language which is usually

asked to describe Clipper now opens itself to Rock; Rock struggles beneath the burden of the symbol he is asked to carry (the symbol of the agrarian, the farm), protesting against its limitations; the inadequacy of the simple system of oppositions and the failure of symbolic language.

(162) The egg crates full of groceries bounced out, then the tobacco, then my mother's face powder. "Whoa, Rock!" I cried, "Whoa, Rock!" but in the rattle and whir of wheels I don't suppose he even heard. \* CULTURAL CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: the egg crates full of groceries; the economic code; the barter system--eggs have been *traded for/turned into* groceries \* CULTURAL CODE: the religious code: the wages of sin is disaster; Tom's family is punished for its failings (Tom for worshipping an idol--the cornet--and his parents for their indulgence in guilty pleasures) \* SEMIOTIC CODE: I don't suppose; the realist convention of pretending ignorance.

(163) Philip couldn't help much because he had his cornet to hang on to. \* CULTURAL CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Philip couldn't help; rather than lose his cornet, Philip allows a small boy to struggle with a powerful horse; he fails his ritual test (he is not a man) \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: the characters make culturally appropriate choices.

(164) I tried to tug on the reins, but at such a rate across the prairie it took me all my time to keep from following the groceries. He was a big horse, Rock, and once under way had to run himself out. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom cannot control the horse; this is a ritual test of strength and skill in which he must overcome the runaway horse to succeed in his quest for maturity.

(165) Or he may have thought that if he gave us a thorough shaking-up we would be too subdued when it was over to feel like taking him seriously to task. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: he may have thought; the realist convention--a narrative pose of ignorance \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom imagines that the horse is capable of reason (it is characteristic of Ross's child-narrators that they assign thoughts to horses).

(166) Anyway, that was how it worked out. All I dared to do was run round to pat his sweaty neck and say, "Good Rock, good Rock - nobody's going to hurt you." \* SEMIOTIC CODE: Anyway; the speech patterns of conversation; affecting the spoken voice \* SYMBOLIC CODE: All I dared do; evoking the danger of the ritual test.

(167) Besides there were the groceries to think about, and my mother's box of face powder. And his pride and reputation at stake, Rock had made it a runaway worthy of the horse he really was. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: a runaway; recalling the remarks of the young man in yellow shoes; closing the action initiated by the foreshadowing in lexie (86).

(168) We found the powder smashed open and one of the egg-crates cracked. Several of the oranges had rolled down a badger hole, and couldn't be recovered. We spent nearly ten minutes sifting raisins through our fingers, and still they felt a little gritty. "There were extra oranges," I tried to encourage Philip, "and I've seen my mother wash her raisins." He looked at me dubiously, and for a few minutes longer worked away trying to mend the egg-crate. \* CULTURAL CODE: the inevitable consequence of bad judgement is disaster; the symbol of art (the cornet) clashes with the symbol of the agrarian (Rock, the plodding dray horse) and the groceries and luxuries (an index to profit, the economic code) are the forfeit.

(169) We were silent for the rest of the way home. We thought a great deal about each other, but asked no questions. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the diagetic comment--We

were silent for the rest of the way home--carries the two characters back to the farm.

(170) Even though it was safely away in its case again I could still feel the cornet's presence as if it were a living thing. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: safely away; Tom is afraid of the cornet; it challenges his way of life; it challenges his understanding of the world.

(171) Somehow its gold and shapeliness persisted, transfiguring the day, quickening the dusty harvest fields to a gleam and lustre like its own. And I felt assured, involved. Suddenly there was a force in life, a current, an inevitability, carrying me along too. The questions they would ask when I reached home - the difficulties in making them understand that faithful old Rock had really run away - none of it now seemed to matter. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: its gold and shapeliness persisted, I felt assured, involved, a force in life .... an inevitability; the Platonic form, eternal and absolute; it is not the day but Tom who is transfigured, made over, by his experience \* CULTURAL CODE: faithful old Rock; the naming code invites appropriate adjectives.



(172) This stranger with the white, thin hands, this gleaming cornet that as yet I hadn't even heard, intimately and enduringly now they were in my possession.

\* CULTURAL CODE: intimately and enduringly now they were in my possession; the homoerotic; Tom captures the stranger and his music within the discourse of love; the language suggests jealous passion and ownership--the intense possessiveness of an adolescent crush.

(173) When we reached home my mother was civil and no more. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: what is the significance of the mother's reception? she, like her son, is class conscious and might be expected to distance herself from a farmhand; however, the comment of the narrator suggests that he entertained the possibility that his mother might offer more than civility.

(174) "Put your things in the bunkhouse," she said, "and then wash here. Supper'll be ready in about an hour."

\* CULTURAL CODE: strange men belong in the bunkhouse; the home is the feminine domain; it is a place of family and guests of distinction.

(175) It was an uncomfortable meal. My father and my mother kept looking at Philip and exchanging glances.

\* CULTURAL CODE: the economic code; the mother and father exchange glances \* PROAIRETIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: the parents unite only three times in this story, twice to exchange glances and once to listen stonily; they are bound by a common goal--the defense of their cultural value system against the threat of the stranger.

(176) I told them about the cornet and the runaway, and they listened stonily. \* CULTURAL CODE and CONNOTATIVE CODE: they listen stonily; they are impassive, unmovable; the adverb functions through a metaphor that ties the characters to their physical environment.

(177) "We've never had a harvest-hand before that was a musician too," my mother said in a somewhat thin voice. "I suppose, though, you do know how to stook?" \* CULTURAL CODE: harvest-hand; identifying the worker with the working part; man is what he does \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: harvest-hand before that was a musician too; oddly, though the mother respects Miss Wiggins (a school and music teacher) for that woman's versatility, she is less certain that Philip can excel in both fields; is her doubt an index to Philip's character or her own?

(178) I was watching Philip desperately and for my sake he lied, "Yes, I stoked last year. I may have a blister

or two by this time tomorrow, but my hands will toughen up." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: for my sake he lied; lying to protect the child/lover, an action that closes the circle, separating those within (the conspirators bound by a common secret) from those without (the parents); Tom is carried away from the family home, cleaving unto his symbolic lover \* CULTURAL CODE: the hands will toughen up; the toughening of the hands is a necessary step in the transformation to a labourer.

(179) "You don't as a rule do farm work?" my father asked.

And Philip said, "No, not as a rule." \* CULTURAL CODE: as a rule; Tom's is a society governed by rules; his father, a creature of habit and tradition, understands that the departure from an established order is dangerous; his culture does not reward risk; by contrast, the society from which Philip comes permits a greater latitude in behaviour.

(180) There was an awkward silence, \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the silence is an action, serving to slow the text and heighten tension.

(181) so I tried to champion him.

"He plays his cornet in a band. Ever since he was my age - that's what he does." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I tried to champion him; the child/lover *champions* his/her hero--the time-honoured practice of young lovers everywhere  
\* CULTURAL CODE: Ever since he was my age; Philip's rite of passage led him to play cornet in a band; effectively, he has not completed the rite required of men in Tom's culture.

(182) Glances were exchanged again. The silence continued.

I had been half-intending to suggest that Philip bring his cornet into the house to play it for us, I perhaps playing with him on the piano, \* PROAIRETIC CODE: glances are exchanged again and the silence continues; a moment of crisis \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: had been half-intending; the contingency of the language cancels the half-intended action even before the phrase is fully realized; it begs completion but denies it; why is half an intention so important that it must be recorded, even though it perishes before it is fully intended?

(183) but the parlour with its genteel plushiness was a room from which all were excluded but the equally genteel - visitors like Miss Wiggins and the minister - and gradually as the meal progressed I came to understand

that Philip and his cornet, so far as my mother was concerned, had failed to qualify. \* CULTURAL CODE: there is no place on this farm for Philip; he does not belong in the bunkhouse (he is not, as a rule, a farm-hand); but the mother guards the parlour and she rejects him as one who is without quality (he failed to qualify); he does not signify as a presence because he has no category.

(184) So I said nothing when he finished his supper, and let him go back to the bunkhouse alone. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: said nothing; let him go back to the bunkhouse alone; the language isolates Philip further.

(185) "Didn't I say to have Jenkins pick him out?" my father stormed as soon as he had gone. "Didn't I say somebody big and strong?" \* SYMBOLIC CODE: in Tom's journey, he was meant to learn the ways of the world; have Jenkins pick him out, someone big and strong; he has failed, thus far, to demonstrate that he can function independently of his father.

(186) "He's tall," I countered, \* CULTURAL CODE: Tom offers height, on the off-chance that it might be accepted as falling within the definition of "big"; he knows, of course, that big is culturally defined as an index to strength \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: I countered; the

sophism defines Tom, as one who plays with language; he is not a plain-speaker.

(187) "and there wasn't anybody else except two men, and it was the only way they'd come." \* CULTURAL CODE: the fundamentalism of the character is index to his culture; the father said to hire one man not two; though he is guilty of sophistry above, he believed--at the time of his quest (in town)--in realism; he believed that signifiers corresponded perfectly with referents.

(188) "You mean you didn't want anybody else. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: didn't want anybody else; the homoerotic; Tom is infatuated with Philip.

(189) A cornet player! Fine stooks he'll set up." And then, turning to my mother, "It's your fault - you and your nonsense about music lessons. If you'd listen to me sometimes, and try to make a man of him." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the father blames the mother for Tom's cultural confusion, believing (correctly, as it happens) that Tom will not reconcile his infatuation with the musician and yet emerge a "man"; he errs, however, in assigning the blame to his wife; it is the culture (with its system of binary oppositions) which has failed Tom--he cannot become a man like his father because his father

subscribes to too narrow a definition of manhood (*all* cornet players belong to the class of those who cannot set stooks); the culture argues that men cannot be musicians (an index to the feminine) and successful farmers (an index to the masculine).

(190) "I do listen to you," she answered quickly. "It's because I've had to listen to you now for thirteen years that I'm trying to make a different man of him.

\* SYMBOLIC CODE: a different man of him; a man who is both a man and not a man; the mother, no less than the father, is bound by cultural conventions; Philip is a different man but Tom's mother does not want her son to mature like him either.

(191) If you'd go to town yourself instead of keeping him out of school - and do your work in six days a week like decent people. I told you yesterday that in the long run it would cost you dear." \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: confused about the real crisis, the mother retreats to a flawed, but comfortable, argument--Tom, and the farm, could safely reside in their existing system of values if only the father would behave himself \* CULTURAL CODE: the religious code; the crisis is directly related to the father's sin.

(192) I slipped away and left them. The chores at the stable took me nearly an hour; and then, instead of returning to the house, I went over to see Philip.

\* CULTURAL CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: instead of returning to the house; the house is place of family and the feminine; a symbolic break with the mother (Tom deserts the family) in search of a different type of manhood (he goes to the bunkhouse to indulge his passion for the stranger).

(193) It was dark now, and there was a smoky lantern lit. He sat on the only chair, and in a hospitable silence motioned me to the bed. At once he ignored and accepted me. It was as if we had always known each other and long outgrown the need of conversation. \* CULTURAL CODE: It was dark now, and there was a smoky lantern lit; the seduction scene, dim ambiguous, obscure \* SYMBOLIC CODE: [He] motioned me to the bed; to the bed, the place of sexual coupling; It was as if we had always known each other and long outgrown the need of conversation; the condition of lovers; love on another plane; Platonic union.

(194) He smoked, and blew rings towards the open door where the warm fall night encroached. I waited, eager, afraid lest they call me to the house, yet knowing that I



must wait. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: He smoked, and blew rings towards the open door; the active lover; the masculine; Philip controls the seduction, blowing towards; encroachment an element of his sentence; the language pushes out, thrusts forward; waited, eager, afraid .... yet knowing I must wait; the traditional sexual condition of the feminine, accepting the thrust of the masculine.

(195) Gradually the flame in the lantern smoked the glass till scarcely his face was left visible. I sat tense, expectant, wondering who he was, where he came from, why he should be here to do my father's stoking.

\* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom--sitting tense, expectant, wondering about the lover who has come to do his father's stoking--recalls the farmer's daughter of a thousand old jokes; Philip is the city slicker, the fox in the hen house, the dangerous intruder.

(196) There were no answers, but presently he reached for his cornet. In the dim, soft darkness I could see it glow and quicken. And I remember still what a long and fearful moment it was, crouched and steeling myself, waiting for him to begin. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: glow and quicken; glowing and quickening are odd behaviours for a cornet; the cornet is metaphorically functioning as a phallus \* CULTURAL CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: crouched and

steeling myself, waiting for him to begin; the passive, the trembling, all indices to the feminine; a representation of the breathless anticipation of sexual union.

(197) And I was right: \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: how is he right? will the music satisfy his desire? has he come to some kind of understanding? has he completed his quest?

(198) when they came the notes were piercing golden as the cornet itself, and they gave life expanse that it had never known before. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: an orgasmic consummation which begins in this lexie and spills into the next; they gave life expanse that it had never known before; the epiphany; a moment of discovery, which opens briefly here for Tom, to offer an alternative--his world can be broader in scope than that of his parents.

(199) They floated up against the night, and each for a moment hung there clear and visible. Sometimes they mounted poignant and sheer. Sometimes they soared and then, like a bird alighting, fell and brushed earth again.

It was *To the Evening Star*. He finished it and told me. He told me the names of all the other pieces that he played: an *Ave Maria*, *Song of India*, a serenade - all

bright through the dark like slow, suspended lightning, chilled sometimes with a glimpse of the unknown. Only for Philip there I could not have endured it. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: simultaneously erotic and Platonic, the language contains (or, more exactly, fails to contain) the ineffable climax of the union of the stranger and the boy; Tom has been initiated--deflowered --carried to his quest-vision (a glimpse of the unknown), transported by a serenade - all bright through the dark like slow, suspended lightning, swept along by an emotion so intense [o]nly for Philip there [he] could not have endured it.

(200) With my senses I clung hard to him - the acrid smell of his cigarettes, the tilted profile daubed with smoky light. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: I clung hard to him; the intimacy of post-coital tenderness \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the acrid smell of his cigarettes; almost a cliché--the post-coital cigarette.

(201) Then abruptly he stood up, as if understanding, and said, "Now we'd better have a march, Tom - to bring us back where we belong. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: as if understanding; what does Philip understand? \* SYMBOLIC CODE: to bring us back where we belong; the return from ecstasy (ek-stasis), from the noumenal to the phenomenal.

(202) A cornet can be good fun, too, you know. Listen to this one and tell me."

He stood erect, head thrown back exactly like a picture in my reader of a bugler boy, \* SYMBOLIC CODE: He stood erect; the masculine--the phallus--thrusting forward \* CULTURAL CODE: like a picture in my reader; Philip is like the bugle boy rather than the bugle boy being like Philip; the book is more real than reality-- Philip derives his authenticity from the picture in the reader.

(203) and the notes came flashing gallant through the night until the two of us went swinging along in step with them a hundred thousand strong. For this was another march that did march. It marched us miles. It made the feet eager and the heart brave. It said that life was worth the living and bright as morning shone ahead to show the way. \* SEMIOTIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Philip's playing of the march recalls Tom's own exuberant rendition; this was another march that did march; the authority of Miss Wiggins (the authority of the page, counting the rhythm throughout a piece) is challenged by Philip's anarchic march (It made the feet eager and the heart brave. It said that life was worth the living and bright as morning shone ahead).

(204) When he had finished and put the cornet away

\* PROAIRETIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: significantly, the cornet (a phallic symbol) is encased to mark the end of the coupling; the two will never again enjoy the intimacy of the moments just passed; Tom moves slowly away from the homoerotic passion, slowly back to the practical concerns of the farm.

(205) I said, "There's a field right behind the house that my father started cutting this afternoon. If you like we'll go over now for a few minutes and I'll show you how to stook.... \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom goes to the field (an index to the masculine) with his lover/friend (a symbolic reference to the rite of passage) to teach the other to stook (knowledge of stooking belongs to the men of Tom's culture); he is discovering a different type of masculinity.

(206) You see, if you set your sheaves on top of the stubble they'll be over again in half an hour. That's how everybody does it at first but it's wrong.

\* CULTURAL CODE: there is a incorrect way to stook; Tom's lesson lends authority to the text \* SEMIOTIC CODE: this is a realistic story.

(207) You've got to push the butts down hard, right to the ground - like this, so they bind with the stubble. At a good slant, see, but not too much. So they'll stand the wind and shed water if it rains." \* SEMIOTIC CODE and CULTURAL CODE: this is a specific kind of knowledge-- a common experience--that Ross shares with his audience; whether one knows how to stook or not, one believes that Tom does; the detail buys him credibility.

(208) It was too dark for him to see much, but he listened hard and finally succeeded in putting up a stook or two that to my touch seemed firm enough. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: Philip learns to stook \* SEMIOTIC CODE and HERMENEUTIC CODE: too dark for him to see, listened hard, finally succeeded, seemed firm enough; the language of the text predicts failure; it creates a riddle (will he succeed?) but does not allow confidence (he cannot succeed).

(209) Then my mother called, and I had to slip away fast so that she would think I was coming from the bunkhouse. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: again, the boy deceives his mother (symbolic of the family) in the service of his friend/lover; figuratively, Tom is leaving home.

(210) "I hope he stooks as well as he plays," she said when I went in. "Just the same, you should have done as your father told you, and picked a likelier man to see us through the fall." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: you should have done as your father told you; as the rite of passage approaches its conclusion, the mother surrenders her son to his father.

(211) My father came in from the stable then, and he, too, had been listening. With a wondering, half incredulous little movement of his head he made acknowledgment. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: he made acknowledgement; in lexie (210), the mother grudgingly admits the musician to her world of experience; in this lexie, the father too must acknowledge the influence of the stranger; the parents' fear--that Philip will challenge the old order of the farm--is realized; he presents them with a treasure they cannot accommodate.

(212) "Didn't I tell you he could?" I burst out, encouraged to indulge my pride in Philip. "Didn't I tell you he could play?" \* CULTURAL CODE: burst out, encouraged to indulge my pride; the religious code; in this culture, one should not burst with pride or indulge oneself; such actions demand, and anticipate, dire

consequences (Calvin's God will punish those guilty of hubris).

(213) But with sudden anger in his voice he answered, "And what if he can! It's a man to stook I want. Just look at the hands on him. I don't think he's ever seen a farm before." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: And what if he can?; the father acknowledges the musician but denies him a place on the farm; he concedes that the music has inspired an emotional response but argues that emotional response is not culturally valuable \* CULTURAL CODE: look at the hands on him; a man with hands like Philip's is not a man to stook; the hands signify character type (he cannot have worked on a farm).

(214) It was helplessness, though, not anger. Helplessness to escape his wheat when wheat was not enough, when something more than wheat had just revealed itself. \* CULTURAL CODE: helplessness, though, not anger; the religious code; resignation rather than rebellion--one cannot help that things are as they are \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Helplessness to escape his wheat when wheat was not enough; the dangerous influence of Philip; he disturbs a system of meaning which had always denied that wheat might not be enough.



(215) Long after they were both asleep I remembered, and with a sharp foreboding that we might have to find another man, \* SEMIOTIC CODE: we might have to find another man; the literary device of foreshadowing.

(216) tried desperately to sleep myself. "Because if I'm up in good time," I rallied all my faith in life, "I'll be able to go to the field with him and at least make sure he's started right. And he'll maybe do.

\* HERMENEUTIC CODE and SEMIOTIC CODE: will Tom's efforts to teach Philip succeed? the question raises the opposite possibility and builds tension.

(217) I'll ride down after school and help till supertime. My father's reasonable." \* HERMENEUTIC CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: My father's reasonable; what is reasonable in this situation? is it reasonable to maintain the employ of a bad stoker simply because he is a talented musician? the question is symbolic --what is the greater need of the farm?--and it must await its answer; it cannot be resolved within the cultural framework of the story (though its resolution does reside in the text).

(218) Only in such circumstances, of course, and after such a day, I couldn't sleep till nearly morning, with

the result that when at last my mother wakened me there was barely time to dress and ride to school. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: of course; the conversational tone; the narrator narrating \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: in this fictional world, failure (Tom's inability to act on his plan) results in disaster; the question is only one of how the disaster will manifest itself (the story, of course, has been exposed almost from its beginning--its parts contain the whole; one knows how the story *must* end but not how Ross will close the text).

(219) But of the day I spent there I remember nothing. Nothing except the midriff clutch of dread \* CULTURAL CODE: dread; the religious code; the condition of the world--Tom has failed to act on his plan (however unrealistic it was); therefore, he rightly anticipates the worst.

(220) that made it a long day - nothing, till straddling Clipper at four again, I galloped him straight to the far end of the farm where Philip that morning had started to work. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: active verbs are characteristic of Ross's writing style--the rider assumes the action of the horse \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: where Philip that morning had started to work; Philip moves to the past tense; he has left the scene? where has he gone?

(221) Only Philip, of course, wasn't there. I think I knew - I think it was what all day I had been expecting. \* CULTURAL CODE: as always, the phrase of course is a semiotic marker (the realist ruse, pretending a spoken voice); more importantly, on this occasion, the phrase is a religious code, signifying Tom's understanding--that in such a world as this one is, one ought to expect the worst as a matter of course.

(222) I pulled Clipper up short and sat staring at the stooks. Three or four acres of them - crooked and dejected as if he had never heard about pushing the butts down hard into the stubble. \* CULTURAL CODE: as if he had never heard of pushing the butts down hard; the voice is frustrated, almost contemptuous, as it recounts Philip's failure; Tom speaks from the farm culture; though it is the father's voice, it rings plaintively with a child's impatience--Tom knows that he cannot keep Philip on the farm and he knows why he cannot keep Philip on the farm but he is angry anyway.

(223) I sat and stared till Clipper himself swung round and started for home. He wanted to run, but because there was nothing left now but the half-mile ahead of us, I held him to a walk. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: because there was nothing left now but the half-mile ahead of us, I

held him to a walk; Tom wants to postpone his arrival at the farm; what does the delay purchase?

(224) Just to prolong a little of the possibility that I had misunderstood things. To wonder within the limits of the sane and probable if tonight he would play his cornet again. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SEMIOTIC CODE: recalling lexie (53), in which Tom defines himself as one who wonders within the limits of the sane and probable \* CULTURAL CODE: he is burdened still with the weight of the religious and economic codes, his imagination limited to reasonable expectations \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the conflict between the child who limits his imagination and the man he becomes (the mature narrative voice who writes the story) is active in this lexie; on one hand, he prolongs the possibility of the improbable (that Philip will continue to reside at the farm)--on the other, he seeks to contain his wonder.

(225) When I reached the house my father was already there, eating an early supper. \* PROAIRETIC CODE: he is eating a early supper; on a farm with little tolerance for the unusual, something has interrupted the regular pattern of life; the cause must be significant.

(226) "I'm taking him back to town," he said quietly. "He tried hard enough - he's just not used to it. The sun was hot today; he lasted till about noon. We're starting in a few minutes, so you'd better go out and see him. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: he tried hard enough; Philip's failure was honourable--he worked, as a man ought to work and he failed, as a man is bound to fail; in a odd way, Philip has completed the culture's ritual passage to manhood; and yet he is returning to town.

(227) He looked older now, stretched out limp on the bed, his face haggard. I tiptoed close to him anxiously, afraid to speak. He pulled his mouth sidewise in a smile at my concern, then motioned me to sit down. "Sorry I didn't do better," he said. "I'll have to come back another year and have another lesson." \* SYMBOLIC CODE: He looked older now .... his face haggard; in maturing to cultural manhood, Philip has aged physically  
\* CONNOTATIVE CODE and SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom is maturing too; he has concern for Philip (as a parent would have for a child) - Sorry I didn't do better; Philip now occupies the child's role; he seeks Tom's approval (understanding, forgiveness).

(228) I clenched my hands and clung hard to this promise that I knew he couldn't keep. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: Tom is

changing; he is no longer tethered to reality but now clings hard to promises that cannot be kept.

(229) I wanted to rebel against what was happening, against the clumsiness and crudity of life, but instead \* SYMBOLIC CODE: instead; Tom's forestalls his rebellion (an impious act) because he is coming to understand that clumsiness and crudity of life are not incidental, but integral, to this farm; the utterance *instead* is an oath of loyalty--Tom must dress himself, temporarily at least, in the values of his father.

(230) I stood quiet a moment, almost passive, then wheeled away and carried out his cornet to the buggy. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: carried out his cornet; the cornet--a symbol of music and art--is ceremoniously dispatched from the farm.

(231) My mother was already there, with a box of lunch and some ointment for his sunburn. She said she was sorry things had turned out this way, \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: why is the mother sorry that things have not worked out? she is oddly sympathetic, almost maternal, in her gentle farewell to Philip; her compassion may be characteristic of the gender but her regret and

tenderness--both aroused by the farm hand who "failed to qualify" constitute a riddle.

(232) and thanking her politely he said that he was sorry too. \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: like Tom, Philip speaks politely \* SYMBOLIC CODE: Tom and Philip are doubles, travelling together one moment, and in opposite directions the next; Tom must abandon the farm (in search of a society like the one Philip left behind) if he is to fulfil his destiny (ie. become a man who has something more than wheat); Philip, on the other hand, who disappears into the text at the story's end, can only recover his health through hard work and fresh air (ie. life on the farm); Tom, as the adult narrator, emerges as the sort of a man his mother thought she admired (a man of culture, a writer); Philip is symbolically transformed to the boy Tom's mother was afraid to lose.

(233) My father looked uncomfortable, feeling, no doubt, that we were all unjustly blaming everything on him.

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: no doubt; the narrator's voice

\* CULTURAL CODE: unjustly blaming everything on him; the religious code--there is no unjust blame \* CULTURAL CODE: the patriarchy; Tom's father owns the culture and is, therefore, guilty for its failures (despite the fact

that Tom's mother also subscribes to the culture's belief system).

(234) It's like that on a farm. You always have to put the harvest first. \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the first moral of the tale--You always have to put the harvest first--signifies the completion of Tom's first rite of passage; he has acquired the wisdom and values of his father (the values of the masculine) and, according to the tradition of his society, has earned the status of *man*.

(235) And that's all there is to tell. He waved going through the gate; I never saw him again. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: And that's all there is to tell; the narrator addresses his audience, drawing the audience into the text; by realizing a reader--*he who is spoken to*--the author realizes his narrator--*he who speaks* \* SEMIOTIC CODE: time exists beyond the artistic frame; the narrator is transported to a non-existent future to report that he never will/never has seen the musician again.

(236) We watched the buggy down the road to the first turn, \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the beginning of the closing of the scene; the literary equivalent of the long camera shot.



(237) then with a quick resentment in her voice my mother said, "Didn't I say that the little he gained would in the long run cost him dear? Next time maybe he'll listen to me - and remember the Sabbath Day." \* PROAIRETIC CODE: the final action recalls the dispute that opened the text, closing the active portion of the story by returning its beginning; the little he gained would cost him dear; in substance, this is the utterance of lexie (191)--it is familiar language; the mother deals with a resentment she cannot understand by retreating to the more familiar sub-plot of domestic discord; in this case, however, the resentment is not practised and comic but *quick* and sharply felt \* CONNOTATIVE CODE: remember the Sabbath Day; the mother offers a moral that does not fit; the action serves as a connotative, rather than symbolic, code, signifying her confusion \* SEMIOTIC CODE: recalling lexie (233); the mother *is* blaming everything on her husband.

(238) What exactly she was thinking I never knew.

\* HERMENEUTIC CODE: what might she be thinking?

\* SEMIOTIC CODE: I never knew; the illusion of reality, an effect of language; the author, behind a narrator who is a fictional construct, pretending that a character--another fictional construct--can think a thought that does not originate with the author.

(239) Perhaps of the crop and the whole day's stooking lost. Perhaps of the stranger who had come with his cornet for a day, and then as meaninglessly gone again. For she had been listening, too, and she may have understood. \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: what does the story mean? what might the mother understand? (two perhaps's - in the farm's existing system of meaning, the two propositions cannot be accommodated as equally important - one value denies the other) \* CULTURAL CODE: meaninglessly gone again; the second moral of the story, and the meaning of the visit of the stranger with the cornet, is not available to the child-narrator - he experiences a regret that makes no sense within his current value system.

(240) A harvest, however lean, is certain every year; but a cornet at night is golden only once. \* SEMIOTIC CODE: the final comment belongs to the narrator as an adult; the language suggests a mature and distant opinion \* CULTURAL CODE: the narrator speaks from a different culture than the one on his youth; he is now able to reconcile the coded conflict of his childhood, marrying the practical concerns of his father (the harvest, however lean, is certain every year) to the cultural aspirations of his mother (a cornet at night is golden only once) \* SYMBOLIC CODE: the completion of the second

rite of passage; Tom is able to make sense of the story only by leaving its temporal and geographical location; he is washed in the water of a different culture and re-made; he is a man who esteems a singularly golden cornet more highly than the common harvest \* HERMENEUTIC CODE: the riddle of the title is answered; the restrictive cultural codings of Tom's youth are inadequate because they make no allowance for the transitory and sublime; for a "Cornet at Night" to emerge from the story as title, the narrator must abandon the cultural values which deny its importance; in effect, the boy becomes a writer (\* CONNOTATIVE CODE: not a regular man) who writes a story about his youth (\* CULTURAL CODE: set in the cultural system of meaning of his childhood) which will not sell on the farm (\* CULTURAL CODE: it is not of this culture).

Throughout the text, the symbolic code manifests itself repeatedly. The story (the rite of passage) is animated by the essential conflicts (the pattern of oppositions) which hide in the codes. In order to complete his rite of passage, Tom must first reconcile the values of his youth (ie. the harvest always comes first) with the new values he has acquired on his journey (that there is something more than wheat). Because his father's culture denies the possibility of such a reconciliation, Tom, as a youth, is trapped within a cultural crisis: his connotative code (a man who is manly and yet appreciates the value of the sublime) does not exist. He is able to complete his rite (ie. becoming the sort of man he is meant to be) only by returning to the story as narrator (a narrator who speaks from a different cultural perspective than that of the child he pretends to be).

In this thesis I have argued in favour of two propositions. The second proposition--that the stories of the collection The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories belong, not only to their author, but also to the culture from they are drawn--is probably more controversial than the first. There is nothing new, after all, in the argument that well-made stories should display an

internal integrity, that the parts of a story should support a central theme. The method of discovery may have changed and the vocabulary of critical discourse may have been modified (we are now, for instance, permitted to discuss codes and indices) but the first proposition belongs in substance, if not form, to a tradition of realist criticism.

The second proposition, on the other hand, challenges one of the great myths of our culture: that of the artist as a *creative genius*. In discussing that question it is important to distinguish between the story (the essential tale) and the text (the specific telling of a story). The text may reveal all the skill of a gifted story-teller but it relies, for its substance, on the story. The story is a collection of myths and stereotypes which originates, not with the author, but with the culture in which the author is immersed. In the telling of story, the author selects a plot from his society's body of existing themes and actions. If he did not do so, the text would remain forever closed to its audience. We are able to appreciate the text only because we already know the story.

In the case of "Cornet at Night", the story is simple and familiar: in the course of his rite of passage, a boy embarks on a journey; he meets a spiritual

guide, undertakes certain challenges and experiences a profound change. The rest is detail.

Perhaps, then, it is the details which demand creative genius. For details, as for plots, Ross borrows from the world around him. They are all derived from the existing body of themes and actions. The system of oppositions which manifests itself throughout the story (the masculine vs. the feminine; the farm vs. the town; art vs. commerce) is an aspect of Western Canadian culture. The economic code derives from particular historical circumstances. The religious code is drawn from the general religious tendencies and practices of a particular group of people in a particular place and time.

Ross's skill as a craftsman is obvious. He constructs a nice text. He does not, however, *create* stories but only re-tells the stories he has learned, sifting through a culturally created body of themes and actions, searching out the best fit. Legend has it (probably apocryphally) that the Italian sculptor, Michelangelo, always denied his own genius, maintaining instead that every block of marble contained a sculpture. The trick, he said, was knowing which part to leave out.

Like Michelangelo, Ross has a good eye for blocks of marble and a talent for cutting away the pieces that don't belong.

## APPENDIX

### Cornet at Night

by

Sinclair Ross

The wheat was ripe and it was Sunday. "Can't help it - I've got to cut," my father said at breakfast. "No use talking. There's a wind again and it's shelling fast."

"Not on the Lord's Day," my mother protested. "The horses stay in the stables where they belong. There's church this afternoon and I intend to ask Louise and her husband home for supper."

Ordinarily my father was a pleasant, accommodating little man, but this morning his wheat and the wind had lent him sudden steel. "No, today we cut," he met her evenly. "You and Tom go to church if you want to. Don't bother me."

"If you take the horses out today I'm through - I'll never speak to you again. And this time I mean it."

He nodded. "Good - if I'd known I'd have started cutting wheat on Sundays years ago."

"And that's no way to talk in front of your son. In the years to come he'll remember."

There was silence for a moment and then, as if in its clash with hers his will had suddenly found itself, my father turned to me.

"Tom, I need a man to stook for a few days and I want you to go to town tomorrow and get me one. The way the wheat's coming along so fast and the oats nearly ready too I can't afford the time. Take old Rock. You'll be safe with him."

But ahead of me my mother cried, "That's one thing I'll not stand for. You can cut your wheat or do anything else you like yourself, but you're not interfering with him. He's going to school tomorrow as usual."

My father bunched himself and glared at her. "No, for a change he's going to do what I say. The crop's more important than a day at school."

"But Monday's his music lesson day - and when will we have another teacher like Miss Wiggins who can teach him music too?"

"A dollar for lessons and the wheat shelling!" When I was his age I didn't even get to school."

"Exactly," my mother scored, "and look at you today. Is it any wonder I want him to be different?"

He slammed out at that to harness his horses and cut his wheat, and away sailed my mother with me in her wake to spend an austere half-hour in the dark, hot, plushy



little parlour. It was a kind of vicarious atonement, I suppose, for we both took straight-backed leather chairs, and for all of the half-hour stared across the room at a big pansy-bordered motto on the opposite wall: *As for Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord.*

At last she rose and said, "Better run along and do your chores now, but hurry back. You've got to take your bath and change your clothes, and maybe help a little getting dinner for your father."

There was a wind this sunny August morning, tanged with freedom and departure, and from his stall my pony Clipper whinnied for a race with it. Sunday or not, I would ordinarily have had my gallop anyway, but today a sudden welling-up of social and religious conscience made me ask myself whether one in the family like my father wasn't bad enough. Returning to the house, I merely said that on such a fine day it seemed a pity to stay inside. My mother heard but didn't answer. Perhaps her conscience too was working. Perhaps after being worsted in the skirmish with my father, she was in no mood for granting dispensations. In any case I had to take my bath as usual, put on a clean white shirt, and change my overalls for knicker corduroys.

They squeaked, those corduroys. For three months now they had been spoiling all my Sundays. A sad, muted swishing little squeak, but distinctly audible. Every

step and there it was, as if I needed to be oiled. I had to wear them to church and Sunday-school; and after service, of course, while the grown-ups stood about gossiping, the other boys discovered my affliction. I sulked and fumed, but there was nothing to be done. Corduroys that had cost four-fifty simply couldn't be thrown away till they were will worn-out. My mother warned me that if I started sliding down the stable roof, she'd patch the seat and make me keep wearing them.

With my customary little bow-legged sidle I slipped into the kitchen again to ask what there was to do. "Nothing but try to behave like a Christian and a gentleman," my mother answered stiffly. "Put on a tie, and shoes and stockings. Today your father is just about as much as I can bear."

"And then what?" I asked hopefully. I was thinking that I might take a drink to my father, but dared not as yet suggest it.

"Then you can stay quiet and read - and afterwards practise your music lesson. If your Aunt Louise should come she'll find that as least I bring my son up decently."

It was a long day. My mother prepared the midday meal as usual, but, to impress upon my father the enormity of his conduct, withdrew as soon as the food was served. When he was gone, she and I emerged to take our places at

the table in an atmosphere of unappetizing righteousness. We didn't eat much. The food was cold, and my mother had no heart to warm it up. For relief at last she said, "Run along and feed the chickens while I change my dress. Since we aren't going to service today we'll read Scripture for a while instead."

And Scripture we did read, Isaiah, verse about, my mother her black silk dress and rhinestone brooch, I in my corduroys and Sunday shoes that pinched. It was a very august afternoon, exactly like the tone that had persisted in my mother's voice since breakfast time. I think I might have openly rebelled, only for the hope that by compliance I yet might win permission for the trip to town with Rock. I was inordinately proud that my father suggested it, and for his faith in me forgave him even Isaiah and the plushy afternoon. Whereas with my mother, I decided, it was a case of downright bigotry.

We went on reading Isaiah, and then for a while I played hymns on the piano. A great many hymns - even the ones with awkward sharps and accidentals that I'd never tried before - for, fearing visitors, my mother was resolved to let them see that she and I were uncontaminated by my father's sacrilege. But among these likely visitors was my Aunt Louise, a portly condescending lady married to a well-off farmer with a handsome motor-car, and always when she came it was my

mother's vanity to have me play for her a waltz or reverie, or *Holy Night* sometimes with variations. A man-child and prodigy might eclipse the motor-car. Presently she roused herself, and pretending mild reproof began, "Now, Tommy, you're going wooden on those hymns. For a change you'd better practise *Sons of Liberty*. Your Aunt Louise will want to hear it, anyway."

There was a fine swing and vigour in this piece, but it was hard. Hard because it was so alive, so full of youth and headhigh rhythm. It was a march, and it did march. I couldn't take time to practise at the hard spots slowly till I got them right, for I had to march too. I had to let my fingers sometimes miss a note or strike one wrong. Again and again this afternoon I started carefully, resolving to count right through, the way Miss Wiggins did, and as often I sprang ahead to lead my march a moment or two all dash and fire, and then fall stumbling in the bitter dust of dissonance. My mother didn't know. She thought that speed and perseverance would eventually get me there. She tapped her foot and smiled encouragement, and gradually as the afternoon wore on began to look a little disappointed that there would be no visitors, after all. "Run along for the cows," she said at last, "while I get your supper ready for your father. There'll be nobody here, so you can slip into your overalls again."

I looked at her a moment, and then asked: "What am I going to wear to town tomorrow? I might get grease or something on the corduroys."

For while it was always my way to exploit the future, I liked to do it rationally, within the limits of the sane and probable. On my way for the cows I wanted to live the trip to town tomorrow many times, with variations, but only on the explicit understanding that tomorrow there was to be a trip to town. I have always been tethered to reality, always compelled by an unfortunate kind of probity in my nature to prefer a barefaced disappointment to the luxury of a future I have no just claims upon.

I went to town the next day, though not till there had been a full hour's argument that paradoxically enough gave three of us the victory. For my father had his way: I went; I had my way: I went; and in return for her consent my mother wrung a promise from him of a pair of new plush curtains for the parlour when the crop was threshed, and for me the metronome that Miss Wiggins declared was the only way I'd ever learn to keep in time on marching pieces like the *Sons of Liberty*.

It was my first trip to town alone. That was why they gave me Rock, who was old and reliable and philosophic enough to meet motor-cars and the chance locomotive on an equal and even somewhat supercilious footing.

"Mind you pick somebody big and husky," said my father as he started for the field. "Go to Jenkins' store, and he'll tell you who's in town. Whoever it is, make sure he'd stoked before."

"And mind it's somebody who looks like he washes himself," my mother warned, "I'm going to put clean sheets and pillow-cases on the bunkhouse bed, but not for any dirty tramp or hobo."

By the time they had both finished with me there were a great many things to mind. Besides repairs for my father's binder, I was to take two crates of eggs each containing twelve dozen eggs to Mr. Jenkins' store and in exchange have a list of groceries filled. And to make it complicated, both quantity and quality of some of the groceries were to be determined by the price of the eggs. Thirty cents a dozen, for instance, and I was to ask for coffee at sixty-five cents a pound. Twenty-nine cents a dozen and coffee at fifty cents a pound. Twenty-eight and no oranges. Thirty-one and bigger oranges. It was like decimals with Miss Wiggins, or two notes in the treble against three in the bass. For my father a tin of special blend tobacco, and my mother not to know. For my mother a box of face powder at the drugstore, and my father not to know. Twenty-five cents from my father on the side for ice-cream and licorice. Thirty-five from my mother for my dinner at the Chinese restaurant. And

warnings, of course, to take good care of Rock, speak politely to Mr. Jenkins, and see that I didn't get machine oil on my corduroys.

It was three hours to town with Rock, but I don't remember them. I remember nothing but a smug satisfaction with myself, and exhilarating conviction of importance and maturity - and that only by contrast with the sudden sag to embarrassed insignificance when finally old Rock and I drove up to Jenkins' store.

For a farm boy is like that. Alone with himself and his horse he cuts a fine figure. He is the measure of the universe. He foresees a great many encounters with life, and in them all acquits himself a little more than creditably. He is fearless, resourceful, a bit of a brag. His horse never contradicts.

But in town it is different. There are eyes here, critical, that pierce with a single glance the little bubble of his self-importance, and leave him dwindled smaller even than his normal size. It always happens that way. They are so superbly poised and sophisticated, these strangers, so completely masters of their situation as they loll in doorways and go sauntering up and down Main Street. Instantly he yields to them his place as measure of the universe, especially if he is a small boy wearing squeaky corduroys, especially if he has a worldly-wise old horse like Rock, one that knows Main

Streets, and will take them in nothing but his own slow philosophic stride.

We arrived all right. Mr. Jenkins was a little man with a freckled bald head, and when I carried in my two crates of eggs, one in each hand, and my legs bowed a bit, he said curtly, "Well, can't you set them down? My boy's delivering, and I can't take time to count them now myself."

"They don't need counting," I said politely. "Each layer holds two dozen, and each crate holds six layers. I was there. I saw my mother put them in."

At this a tall, slick-haired young man in yellow shoes who had been standing by the window turned around and said, "That's telling you, Jenkins - he was there." Nettled and glowering, Jenkins himself came round the counter and repeated, "So you were there were you? Smart youngster! What did you say was your name?"

Nettled in turn to preciseness I answered, "I haven't yet. It's Thomas Dickson and my father's David Dickson, eight miles north of here. He wants a man to stook and was too busy to come himself."

He nodded, unimpressed, and then putting out his hand said, "Where's your list? Your mother gave you one, I hope?"

I said she had and he glowered again. "Then let's have it and come back in half an hour. Whether you were



there or not, I'm going to count your eggs. How do I know that half of them aren't smashed?"

"That's right," agreed the young man, sauntering to the door and looking at Rock. "They've likely been bouncing along at a merry clip. You're quite sure, Buddy, that you didn't have a runaway?"

Ignoring the impertinence I staved off Jenkins. "The list, you see, has to be explained. I'd rather wait and tell you about it later on."

He teetered a moment on his heels and toes, then tried again. "I can read too. I make up orders every day. Just go away for a while - look for your man - anything."

"It wouldn't do," I persisted. "The way this one's written isn't what it really means. You'd need me to explain -"

He teetered rapidly. "Show me just one thing I don't know what it means."

"Oranges," I said, "but that's only oranges if eggs are twenty-nine cents or more - and bigger oranges if they're thirty-one. You see, you'd never understand -"

So I had my way and explained it all right then and there. What with eggs at twenty-nine and a half cents a dozen and my mother out a little in her calculations, it was somewhat confusing for a while; but after arguing a lot and pulling away the paper from each other that they were figuring on, the young man and Mr. Jenkins finally

had it all worked out, with mustard and soap omitted altogether, and an extra half-dozen oranges thrown in. "Vitamins," the young man overruled me, "they make you grow" - and then with a nod towards an open biscuit box invited me to help myself.

I took a small one, and started up Rock again. It was nearly one o'clock now, so in anticipation of his noontime quart of oats he trotted off, a little more briskly, for the farmer's hitching-rail beside the lumber-yard. This was the quiet end of town. The air drowsed redolent of pine and tamarack, and resin simmering slowly in the sun. I poured out the oats and waited till he had finished. After the way the town had treated me it was comforting and peaceful to stand with my fingers in his mane, hearing him munch. It brought me a sense of place again in life. It made me feel almost as important as before. But when he finished and there was my own dinner to be thought about I found myself more of an alien in the town than ever, and felt the way to the little Chinese restaurant doubly hard. For Rock was older than I. Older and wiser, with a better understanding of important things. His philosophy included the relishing of oats even within a stone's throw of sophisticated Main Street. Mine was less mature.

I went, however, but I didn't have dinner. Perhaps it was my stomach, all puckered and tense with nervousness.

Perhaps it was the restaurant itself, the pyramids of oranges in the window and the dark green rubber plant with the tropical-looking leaves, the indolent little Chinaman behind the counter and the dusky smell of last night's cigarettes that to my prairie nostrils was the orient itself, the exotic atmosphere about it all with which a meal of meat and vegetables and pie would have somehow simply jarred. I climbed onto a stool and ordered an ice-cream soda.

A few stools away there was a young man sitting. I kept watching him and wondering.

He was well-dressed, a nonchalance about his clothes that distinguished him from anyone I had ever seen, and yet at the same time it was a shabby suit, with shiny elbows and threadbare cuffs. His hands were slender, almost a girl's hands, yet vaguely with their shapely quietness they troubled me, because, however slender and smooth, they were not yet hands to be reckoned with, strong with a strength that was different from the rugged labour-strength I knew.

He smoked a cigarette, and blew rings towards the window.

Different from the farmer boys I knew, yet different also from the young man with the yellow shoes in Jenkins' store. Staring out at it through the restaurant window he was as far away from Main Street as was I with plodding old Rock and my squeaky corduroys. I presumed

for a minute or two an imaginary companionship. I finished my soda, and to be with him a little longer ordered lemonade. It was strangely important to be with him, to prolong a while this companionship. I hadn't the slightest hope of his noticing me, nor the slightest intention of obtruding myself. I just wanted to be there, to be assured by something I had never encountered before, to store it up for the three hours home with old Rock.

Then a big, unshaven man came in, and slouching onto the stool beside me said, "They tell me across the street you're looking for a couple of hands. What's your old man pay this year?"

"My father," I corrected him, "doesn't want a couple of men. He just wants one."

"I've got a pal," he insisted, "and we always go together."

I didn't like him. I couldn't help making contrasts with the cool, trim quietness of the young man sitting farther along. "What do you say?" he said as I sat silent, thrusting his stubby chin out almost over my lemonade. "We're ready anytime."

"It's just one man my father wants," I said aloofly, drinking off my lemonade with a flourish to let him see I mean it. "And if you'll excuse me now - I've got to look for somebody else."

"What about this?" he intercepted me, and doubling up his arm displayed a hump of muscle that made me, if not more inclined to him, at least a little more deferential. "My pal's got plenty, too. We'll set up two stooks any day for anybody else's one."

"Not both," I edged away from him. "I'm sorry - you just wouldn't do."

He shook his head contemptuously. "Some farmer - just one man to stook."

"My father's a good farmer," I answered stoutly, rallying to the family honour less for its own sake than for what the young man on the other stool might think of us. "And he doesn't need just one man to stook. He's got three already. That's plenty other years, but this year the crop's so big he needs another. So there!"

"I can just see the place," he said, slouching to his feet and starting towards the door. "An acre or two of potatoes and a couple of dozen hens."

I glared after him a minute, then climbed back onto the stool and ordered another soda. The young man was watching me now in the big mirror behind the counter, and when I glanced up and met his eyes he gave a slow, half-smiling little nod of approval. And out of all proportion to anything it could mean, his nod encouraged me. I didn't flinch or fidget as I would have done had it been the young man with the yellow shoes watching me,

and I didn't stammer over the confession that his amusement and appraisal somehow forced from me. "We haven't three men - just my father - but I'm to take one home today. The wheat's ripening fast this year and shelling, so he can't do it all himself."

He nodded again and then after a minute asked quietly, "What about me? Would I do?"

I turned on the stool and stared at him.

"I need a job, and if it's any recommendation there's only one of me."

"You don't understand," I started to explain, afraid to believe that perhaps he really did. "It's to stook. You have to be in the field by seven o'clock and there's only a bunkhouse to sleep in - a granary with a bed in it -"

"I know - that's about what I expect." He drummed his fingers a minute, then twisted his lips into a kind of half-hearted smile and went on, "They tell me a little toughening up is what I need. Outdoors, and plenty of good hard work - so I'll be like the fellow that just went out."

The wrong hands: white slender fingers, I knew they'd never do - but catching the twisted smile again I pushed away my soda and said quickly, "Then we'd better start right away. It's three hours home, and I've still some

places to go. But you can get in the buggy now, and we'll drive around together."

We did. I wanted it that way, the two of us, to settle scores with Main Street. I wanted to capture some of old Rock's disdain and unconcern; I wanted to know what it felt like to take young men with yellow shoes in my stride, to be preoccupied, to forget them the moment that we separated. And I did. "My name's Philip," the stranger said as we drove from Jenkin' to the drugstore. "Philip Coleman - usually just Phil," and companionably I responded, "Mine's Tommy Dickson. For the last year, though, my father says I'm getting big and should be called just Tom."

That was what mattered now, the two of us there, and not the town at all. "Do you drive yourself all the time?" he asked, and nonchalant and off-hand I answered, "You don't really have to drive old Rock. He just goes, anyway. Wait till you see my chestnut three-year-old. Clipper I call him. Tonight after supper if you like you can take him for a ride."

But since he'd never learned to ride at all he thought Rock would do better for a start, and then we drove back to the restaurant for his cornet and valise.

"Is it something to play?" I asked as we cleared the town. "Something like a bugle?"

He picked up the black leather case from the floor of the buggy and held it on his knee. "Something like that. Once I played a bugle too. A cornet's better though."

"And you mean you can play the cornet?"

He nodded. "I play in a band. At least I did play in a band. Perhaps if I get along all right with the stooking I will again some time."

It was later that I pondered this, how stooking for my father could have anything to do with going back to play in a band. At the moment I confided, "I've never heard a cornet - never even seen one. I suppose you still play it sometimes - I mean at night, when you've finished stooking."

Instead of answering directly he said, "That means you've never heard a band either." There was surprise in his voice, almost incredulity, but it was kindly. Somehow I didn't feel ashamed because I had lived all my eleven years on a prairie farm, and knew nothing more than Miss Wiggins and my Aunt Louise's gramophone. He went on, "I was younger than you are now when I started playing in a band. Then I was with an orchestra a while - then with the band again. It's all I've done ever since."

It made me feel lonely for a while, isolated from the things in life that mattered, but, brightening presently,



I asked, "Do you know a piece called *Sons of Liberty*?  
Four flats in four-four time?"

He thought hard a minute, and then shook his head.  
"I'm afraid I don't - not by name anyway. Could you  
whistle a bit of it?"

I whistled two pages, but still he shook his head. "A  
nice tune, though," he conceded. "Where did you learn  
it?"

"I haven't yet," I explained. "Not properly, I mean.  
It's been my lesson for the last two weeks, but I can't  
keep up to it."

He seemed interested, so I went on and told him about  
my lessons and Miss Wiggins, and how later on they were  
going to buy me a metronome so that when I played a piece  
I wouldn't always be running away with it, "Especially a  
march. It keeps pulling you along the way it really  
ought to go until you're all mixed up and have to start  
at the beginning again. I know I'd do better if I didn't  
feel that way, and could keep slow and steady like Miss  
Wiggins."

But he said quickly, "No, that's the right way to feel  
- you've just got to learn to harness it. It's like old  
Rock here and Clipper. The way you are, you're Clipper.  
But if you weren't that way, you'd just be Rock. You  
see? Rock's easier to handle than Clipper, but at his  
best he's a sleepy old plow-horse. Clipper's harder to

handle - he may even cost you some tumbles. But finally get him broken in and you've got a horse that amounts to something. You wouldn't trade him for a dozen like Rock."

It was a good enough illustration, but it slandered Rock. And he was listening. I know - because even though like me he had never heard a cornet before, he had experience enough to accept it at least with tact and manners.

For we hadn't gone much farther when Philip, noticing the way I kept watching the case that was still on his knee, undid that clasps and took the cornet out. It was a very lovely cornet, shapely and eloquent, gleaming in the August sun like pure and mellow gold. I couldn't restrain myself. I said "Play it - play it now - just a little but to let me hear." And in response, smiling at my earnestness, he raised it to his lips.

But there was only one note - only one fragment of a note - and then away went Rock. I'd never have believed he had it in him. With a snort and plunge he was off the road and into the ditch - then out of the ditch again and off at a breakneck gallop across the prairie. There were stones and badger holes, and he spared us none of them. The egg crates full of groceries bounced out, then the tobacco, then my mother's face powder. "Whoa, Rock!" I cried, "Whoa, Rock!" but in the rattle and whir of wheels

I don't suppose he even heard. Philip couldn't help much because he had his cornet to hang on to. I tried to tug on the reins, but at such a rate across the prairie it took me all my time to keep from following the groceries. He was a big horse, Rock, and once under way had to run himself out. Or he may have thought that if he gave us a thorough shaking-up we would be too subdued when it was over to feel like taking him seriously to task. Anyway, that was how it worked out. All I dared to do was run round to pat his sweaty neck and say, "Good Rock, good Rock - nobody's going to hurt you."

Besides there were the groceries to think about, and my mother's box of face powder. And his pride and reputation at stake, Rock had made it a runaway worthy of the horse he really was. We found the powder smashed open and one of the egg-crates cracked. Several of the oranges had rolled down a badger hole, and couldn't be recovered. We spent nearly ten minutes sifting raisins through our fingers, and still they felt a little gritty. "There were extra oranges," I tried to encourage Philip, "and I've seen my mother wash her raisins." He looked at me dubiously, and for a few minutes longer worked away trying to mend the egg-crate.

We were silent for the rest of the way home. We thought a great deal about each other, but asked no questions. Even though it was safely away in its case

again I could still feel the cornet's presence as if it were a living thing. Somehow its gold and shapeliness persisted, transfiguring the day, quickening the dusty harvest fields to a gleam and lustre like its own. And I felt assured, involved. Suddenly there was a force in life, a current, an inevitability, carrying me along too. The questions they would ask when I reached home - the difficulties in making them understand that faithful old Rock had really run away - none of it now seemed to matter. This stranger with the white, thin hands, this gleaming cornet that as yet I hadn't even heard, intimately and enduringly now they were in my possessions.

When we reached home my mother was civil and no more. 'Put your things in the bunkhouse," she said, "and then wash here. Supper'll be ready in about an hour."

It was an uncomfortable meal. My father and my mother kept looking at Philip and exchanging glances. I told them about the cornet and the runaway, and they listened stonily. "We've never had a harvest-hand before that was a musician too," my mother said in a somewhat thin voice. "I suppose, though, you do know how to stock?"

I was watching Philip desperately and for my sake he lied, "Yes, I stoked last year. I may have a blister or two by this time tomorrow, but my hands will toughen up."

"You don't as a rule do farm work?" my father asked.

And Philip said, "No, not as a rule."

There was an awkward silence, so I tried to champion him.

"He plays his cornet in a band. Ever since he was my age - that's what he does."

Glances were exchanged again. The silence continued.

I had been half-intending to suggest that Philip bring his cornet into the house to play it for us, I perhaps playing with him on the piano, but the parlour with its genteel plushiness was a room from which all were excluded but the equally genteel - visitors like Miss Wiggins and the minister - and gradually as the meal progressed I came to understand that Philip and his cornet, so far as my mother was concerned, had failed to qualify.

So I said nothing when he finished his supper, and let him go back to the bunkhouse alone. "Didn't I say to have Jenkins pick him out? my father stormed as soon as he had gone. "Didn't I say somebody big and strong?"

"He's tall," I countered, "and there wasn't anybody else except two men, and it was the only way they'd come."

"You mean you didn't want anybody else. A cornet player! Fine stooks he'll set up." And then, turning to my mother, "It's your fault - you and your nonsense about

music lessons. If you'd listen to me sometimes, and try to make a man of him."

"I do listen to you," she answered quickly. "It's because I've had to listen to you now for thirteen years that I'm trying to make a different man of him. If you'd go to town yourself instead of keeping him out of school - and do you work in six days a week like decent people. I told you yesterday that in the long run it would cost you dear."

I slipped away and left them. The chores at the stable took me nearly an hour; and then, instead of returning to the house, I went over to see Philip. It was dark now, and there was a smoky lantern lit. He sat on the only chair, and in a hospitable silence motioned me to the bed. At once he ignored and accepted me. It was as if we had always known each other and long outgrown the need of conversation. He smoked, and blew rings towards the open door where the warm fall night encroached. I waited, eager, afraid lest they call me to the house, yet knowing that I must wait. Gradually the flame in the lantern smoked the glass till scarcely his face was left visible. I sat tense, expectant, wondering who he was, where he came from, why he should be here to do my father's stoking.

There were no answers, but presently he reached for his cornet. In the dim, soft darkness I could see it

glow and quicken. And I remember still what a long and fearful moment it was, crouched and steeling myself, waiting for him to begin.

And I was right: when they came the notes were piercing golden as the cornet itself, and they gave life expanse that it had never known before. They floated up against the night, and each for a moment hung there clear and visible. Sometimes they mounted poignant and sheer. Sometimes they soared and then, like a bird alighting, fell and brushed earth again.

It was *To the Evening Star*. He finished it and told me. He told me the names of all the other pieces that he played: an *Ave Maria*, *Song of India*, a serenade - all bright through the dark like slow, suspended lightning, chilled sometimes with a glimpse of the unknown. Only for Philip there I could not have endured it. With my senses I clung hard to him - the acrid smell of his cigarettes, the tilted profile daubed with smoky light.

Then abruptly he stood up, as if understanding, and said, "Now we'd better have a march, Tom - to bring us back where we belong. A cornet can be good fun, too, you know. Listen to this one and tell me."

He stood erect, head thrown back exactly like a picture in my reader of a bugler boy, and the notes came flashing gallant through the night until the two of us went swinging along in step with them a hundred thousand

strong. For this was another march that did march. I marched us miles. I made the feet eager and the heart brave. I said that life was worth the living and bright as morning shone ahead to show the way.

When he had finished and put the cornet away I said, "There's a field right behind the house that my father started cutting this afternoon. If you like we'll go over now for a few minutes and I'll show you how to stook.... You see, if you set your sheaves on top of the stubble they'll be over again in half an hour. That's how everybody does it at first but it's wrong. You've got to push the butts down hard, right to the ground - like this, so they bind with the stubble. At a good slant, see, but not too much. So they'll stand the wind and shed water if it rains."

It was too dark for him to see much, but he listened hard and finally succeeded in putting up a stook or two that to my touch seemed firm enough. Then my mother called, and I had to slip away fast so that she would think I was coming from the bunkhouse. "I hope he stooks as well as he plays," she said when I went in. "Just the same, you should have done as you father told you, and picked a likelier man to see us through the fall."

My father came in from the stable then, and he, too, had been listening. With a wondering, half incredulous little movement of his head he made acknowledgment.



"Didn't I tell you he could?" I burst out, encouraged to indulge my pride in Philip. "Didn't I tell you he could play?" But with sudden anger in his voice he answered, "And what if he can! It's a man to stook I want. Just look at the hands on him. I don't think he's ever seen a farm before."

It was helplessness, though, not anger. Helplessness to escape his wheat when wheat was not enough, when something more than wheat had just revealed itself. Long after they were both asleep I remembered, and with a sharp foreboding that we might have to find another man, tried desperately to sleep myself. "Because if I'm up in good time," I rallied all my faith in life, "I'll be able to go to the field with him and at least make sure he's started right. And he'll maybe do. I'll ride down after school and help till supertime. My father's reasonable."

Only in such circumstances, of course, and after such a day, I couldn't sleep till nearly morning, with the result that when at last my mother wakened me there was barely time to dress and ride to school. But of the day I spent there I remember nothing. Nothing except the midriff clutch of dread that made it a long day - nothing, till straddling Clipper at four again, I galloped him straight to the far end of the farm where Philip that morning had started to work.

Only Philip, of course, wasn't there. I think I knew - I think it was what all day I had been expecting. I pulled Clipper up short and sat staring at the stooks. Three or four acres of them - crooked and dejected as if he had never heard about pushing the butts down hard into the stubble. I sat and stared till Clipper himself swung round and started for home. He wanted to run, but because there was nothing left now but the half-mile ahead of us, I held him to a walk. Just to prolong a little of the possibility that I had misunderstood things. To wonder within the limits of the sane and probable if tonight he would play his cornet again.

When I reached the house my father was already there, eating an early supper. "I'm taking him back to town," he said quietly. "He tried hard enough - he's just not used to it. The sun was hot today; he lasted till about noon. We're starting in a few minutes, so you'd better go out and see him.

He looked older now, stretched out limp on the bed, his face haggard. I tiptoed close to him anxiously, afraid to speak. He pulled his mouth sidewise in a smile at my concern, then motioned me to sit down. "Sorry I didn't do better," he said. "I'll have to come back another year and have another lesson."

I clenched my hands and clung hard to this promise that I knew he couldn't keep. I wanted to rebel against

what was happening, against the clumsiness and crudity of life, but instead I stood quiet a moment, almost passive, then wheeled away and carried out his cornet to the buggy. My mother was already there, with a box of lunch and some ointment for his sunburn. She said she was sorry things had turned out this way, and thanking her politely he said that he was sorry too. My father looked uncomfortable, feeling, no doubt, that we were all unjustly blaming everything on him. It's like that on a farm. You always have to put the harvest first.

And that's all there is to tell. He waved going through the gate; I never saw him again. We watched the buggy down the road to the first turn, then with a quick resentment in her voice my mother said, "Didn't I say that the little he gained would in the long run cost him dear? Next time maybe he'll listen to me - and remember the Sabbath Day."

What exactly she was thinking I never knew. Perhaps of the crop and the whole day's stooking lost. Perhaps of the stranger who had come with his cornet for a day, and then as meaninglessly gone again. For she had been listening, too, and she may have understood. A harvest, however lean, is certain every year; but a cornet at night is golden only once.

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