"THE DOUBLE HOOK'S" DOUBLE HOOKS

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THE OSTENSIBLE FUNCTION OF THE MODERNIST EPIGRAPH is to point a way into the work (presumably difficult and thus requiring some avenue of entry) that follows. But the epigraph to Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, by implicitly posing a series of questions, points mostly to its own problematic status as statement:

> He doesn't know
> you can't catch
> the glory on a hook
> and hold on to it.
> That when you
> fish for glory
> you catch the
> darkness too.
> That if you hook
> twice the glory
> you hook
> twice the fear.[1]

Just who are "he" and "you"? What does he know? What can you catch? Does catching "the darkness too" mean that you can, after all, also catch the glory that earlier you could not? Furthermore, how do you hook, even conditionally ("if"), both "twice the glory" and "twice the fear"? From no catch to a catch to a dubiously doubled catch and all in the same brief passage which is beginning to sound rather like a tale told by a fisherman — full of sound signifying exaggeration. Somehow metaphor has merged into mysticism or hyperbole but without ever making clear its terms, its tenor, and its transformation, all of which "he doesn't know." Perhaps Coyote does, for the entire novel, we are early told, unfolds "under Coyote's eye" (19). At the outset, however, Coyote is not talking, and could we believe that traditional trickster if he did? The same passage from the novel that provides the epigraph explicitly notes "that Coyote . . . himself is fooled and every day fools others" (61), which means, as Stephen Scobie has recently observed, that "Coyote . . . is a master of lies."[2]

Furthermore, the origin of the opening voice is also problematic. The epigraph to the novel, Douglas Barbour has pointed out, "was the result of an editorial

decision which McClelland & Stewart made without consulting Mrs. Watson. Because Professor Salter's Preface did not quite fill all the pages set aside for it . . . , Kip's statement . . . was inserted as a prefatory quotation."[3] That prominent placing, unsanctioned by the author, has made the passage "appear far more important to critics of the novel than might have been the case had it existed only as the thoughts of a single character at a certain point in the narrative."[4] Consequently, for Barbour (and for Scobie too), the intrusive epigraph can only misdirect the too-attentive critic or reader.

Yet I would suggest that the epigraph unauthorized fits the novel far better than it ever could authorized. A promised preface a little too short along with the exigencies of publishing give us a separate page and a "prefatory quotation." This is contingency, accident, and misdirection at work, or, in a word, Coyote. Since the narration unfolds "under Coyote's" vision, how appropriate that its transmission into text, into the artifact of the book, takes place at least in part under his supervision too.

The novel unfolds under the watchful eye of Coyote and, up to a certain point, it just as much unfolds under the watchful eye of Kip, who is, after all, designated by Coyote himself as "my servant Kip" (35) and who also intends to profit personally from his watching. More specifically, Kip plays a kind of Pandarus to the unfolding affair between James Potter and Lenchen Wagner but a Pandarus with a program of his own. He will not only vicariously take part in the action, he will also presently take James's part. Thus the lovers, even at their most secret meeting, could not elude his keen vigilance, and that attention, as intended, casts a certain shadow over their love-making, a shadow under which James's personal crisis grows marvellously to include even matricide. James is, in effect, being cast as Kip's servant — and as Coyote's. Through the agency of James, Coyote can have the old woman and carry her away, as Kip sees or foresees, "like a rabbit in his mouth" (57), and through the agency of James, Kip will have the young woman. That at least is his plan, and as he watches it unfolding and finds it good, we encounter the passage that appropriately — it sits in the middle of the mischief of the text — provides the epigraph:

> Kip's mind was on James. James's strength. James's weakness. James's old mother. James and Greta. James and the girl Wagner. The messages he'd taken for James.
>
> He's like his old lady, Kip thought. There's a thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold onto it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make. (61)

Some of the earlier questions prompted by the epigraph can now be resolved.

"He" is no doubt James. The "glory" and the "darkness" reflect those dualities in which James, his baby about to be born and his mother recently killed, is at this point seemingly inextricably entangled: family (either one) as refuge and trap; love as gain and loss; life as birth and death. James, as fisher and as fished for, is himself doubly and thoroughly caught. But so, too, is the reader in a passage that seems to be both Kip's and Coyote's and that, with Coyote's epigraph juxtaposed against Kip's anticipation, suggests another juxtaposition, Kip's anticipation against Coyote's resolution. And rereading this passage again in the context of the whole text still more becomes clearer, for what Kip said about James, we now see, can also be applied to Kip. He has been fishing, too, and it is he who especially catches the darkness. He is, indeed, literally blinded in the text precisely because of what he did not see even as he prided himself — "these eyes seen plenty" (56) — on missing nothing. He certainly misperceives just "how much mischief Coyote can make" for his own servant as much as for anyone else.

Blinded, Kip does begin to see better. He can, for example, finally admit just what he was trying to do and recognize the justice of the consequences: "I keep thinking about James, Kip said. I kept at him like a dog till he beat around the way a porcupine beats with his tail" (133). Defeated in his attempt to claim a place in the secret affair, Kip is at last given a place in the community. In the first half of the novel he is ever apart, the distanced observer of the activities of others who, when he does try to play a larger role, is characteristically shown the door. In the second half he is taken in, tended. At the end with Felix as Felix fishes, he answers the other's question as to how he would "pick up a living now": "There's no telling at all, Kip said. There's no way of telling what will walk into a man's hand" (133). Compared to what Kip earlier thought he knew, the uncertainty and ignorance here acknowledged constitute a kind of wisdom.

Is JAMES EXONERATED for the blinding when Kip takes the blame on himself, and even more to the point, can a matricide, too, be laid mostly at the "dog's" door (attributed to Kip as a would-be Coyote making mischief badly) or be seen as a kind of innocent "porcupine" reaction to Kip's (or Coyote's) badgering? Those are questions that the novel neither specifically answers nor, for that matter, specifically poses. Indeed, one of the more idiosyncratic features of this idiosyncratic text is the resolute indirection with which it never faces the crucial killing on which so much of the action turns. Do we have grounds for a charge of murder or of manslaughter? Was the death mostly an unfortunate accident, a misplaced push on the stairway that got out of hand? When James much later "asked himself now for the first time what he'd really intended to do when he'd defied his mother at the head of the stairs" (98), he

does not himself have an answer and declines to accept the one that Coyote at once conveniently provides. Was there even any "death" at all or do we have merely a transformation from one continuation to another, for the post-push mother gone fishing, grimly endures her death in much the same manner that she apparently endured her life.

There is something coy in the presentation of the killing from the very start. Corresponding to the epigraph is another passage set apart from the text to follow. The novel proper begins with a poetically cast troupe of characters, with a list of those who "*lived*" "in the folds of the hills / under Coyote's eye" (19; emphasis added). Heading the list is "the old lady, mother of William / of James and of Greta." In short, the *dramatis personae* is provided only to be at once rendered inaccurate. We can notice, too, how it trails off into an appended, qualifying, textually isolated phrase — "until one morning in July" — that serves to call the information just presented into question, whereupon, with another break in the text but no break in punctuation, the action of the novel commences:

> Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James's voice.
>
> James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters.
>
> James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (19)

Baking hotcakes, making coffee, and killing mother: those actions make an odd mixture with which to begin the morning and the novel. The dead-pan conjunction of the three evokes the grim humour of the theatre of the absurd. More specifically, the equation of the mundane ("Greta was at . . .") and the matricide ("James was at . . .") denies any particular special meaning to either side of the equation even as it also hints at the ineffable meaning of meaninglessness as set forth by, on the one hand, the hotcakes and the coffee and, on the other, the crime.[5] The double hook is already being set. Or considering the "crime" and, by extension, the "criminal," we might notice that James himself has already "walked away" and left responsibility to "James's will," "James's hand," "James's words." Does will defer to hand and hand to words (which are, of course, also Coyote's words — the text taking place under his vision — and the author's words too)? Furthermore, does not an excess of agents call them all into question, with each cast as at most an accomplice reluctantly implicated through the agency of the other two? In short, James's action, broken down into constituent parts, does not give us a human calculus whereby that action can be reconstituted and fully explained. It might also here be noticed that the desire for explanation is itself mocked in the text from the very beginning by being comically embodied in James's prolix elder brother. As the authorial voice early observes, even before this character is encountered, "William would try to explain,

but he couldn't. He only felt, but he always felt he knew. He could give half a dozen reasons for anything" (20-21). The test case is "a spool of thread" William was asked, as postman, to fetch "from the town below" for a woman on his route. "He'd explain that thread has a hundred uses. When it comes down to it, he'd say, there's no telling what thread is for" (21). As with agents, an excess of explanations cancels explanation out, and the account devolves from assessment into anecdote: "I knew a woman once, he'd say, who used it to sew up her man after he was throwed on a barbed-wire fence" (21). But we notice, too, that the narration explains William even as it calls explanation into question and then cagily verifies its own explanation with the anecdote into which his devolves. Characteristically, he does not see how close to home his story metaphorically comes and that his own family is largely beyond mending. What the text takes away with one hand, it gives with the other.

It gives, however, no full explanation for the crucial killing, so a number of critics have laboured to remedy that lack. The simplest explanation is to blame the victim, which has led to a good deal of critical Ma-bashing, starting with the early reviewers who described Mrs. Potter as the "sinister force which has held [James and Greta] since childhood in a net of fear and sterility"; as James's "tyrannous, possessive mother"; as "the old lady whose tyranny had held [James] and his sister in thrall."[6] In much this same vein, Margaret Morriss in 1964 described the mother as a woman "whose concentrated ferocity brought fear, darkness and death" to the community.[7] Or Nancy Corbett in 1974 sees her as embodying destruction and domination, as a woman who has "given life only to strangle it."[8] Or still more recently, Stephen Putzel, writing in 1984, argues that even if the mother does not obviously deserve to die, it is still somehow right that she does: "James had to kill the old woman, to descend into the 'valley of adversity,' to confront his fear, before he can be redeemed."[9]

In its more modest form that last quotation still gives this whole explanatory enterprise away. It is James whose fate matters, whose actions must somehow be redeemed, rendered reasonable and just. Such literal and figurative privileging of the male protagonist constitutes what could well be termed a cowboy reading of the text — the hero claiming his home on the range and establishing himself in that inhospitable territory. This privileging of the male protagonist, however, strangely domesticates him at the cost of whatever radical innocence may have inhered in his original action as portrayed in the novel. A fable seemingly, in the Nietzschean sense, beyond good and evil is mythologized in the most mundane Barthesian sense into the simplistic virtue and vice of the conventional western, as if James wore a white hat and was never the first to draw, while Ma twirled her black moustache and cheated at poker.

The critics' charges are grounded more in a reading of James's "rebellion" than in any description of Mrs. Potter's pre-textual tyrannical reign. The mother is

written into the novel after her death, and the problem of interpretation that centres in Mrs. Potter is not what she, living, might have done but what she, dead, still does or, we are told, might do:

> Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom. (20)

Action beyond apocalypse; the dead woman's design defying God's; this is still fishing with a vengeance, all of which poses the question of just what does she fish for with such implacable determination. Is it the very salvation that in this same passage concerns her so little?

One is tempted to conflate the numerous biblical references in the text: the possible Christian implications of Mrs. Potter's living search; her subsequent fishing ("the fish is, of course, a conventional symbol of Christ"[10]); and the way in which the dead Mrs. Potter apparently at last finds peace, "just standing [by a "pool"] like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (118). Put them all together and they do seem to spell out a Christian parable of life lost in life but all resolved in salvation after death, a parable that is doubly tempting in that it can also be seen as underlying the living fate of the other characters, who are also finally allowed to work out a more earthly model of redemption as they, too, make their way through a sterile wasteland world to the symbolic waters of rebirth and regeneration.

A number of critics have argued this essentially Christian interpretation. Thus Margot Northey asserts that "the message of *The Double Hook* is religious. It is a story about redemption written from a Christian vantage point."[11] Or Beverly Mitchell maintains that through "the process of identifying the biblical associations one makes in reading *The Double Hook*," even "Coyote's identity is revealed."[12] Coyote turns out to be God, or at least to have "his prototype in the Jehovah-figure of the Old Testament,"[13] Mrs. Potter, carried off by Coyote, "is 'redeemed' like the other characters," and the whole novel becomes "a re-telling of the universal, supra-regional, and timeless story of God's love for mankind."[14]

The problem here, however, is that Mrs. Potter's proclaimed salvation, like her proposed sinful life, is a postulation largely extraneous to the text. "By the process of association, then," Mitchell argues, "Mrs. Potter appears to have her prototype

in those figures of the Old Testament whose actions brought suffering to others."[15] But Mitchell has provided the associations that "define" the character. "Like the cunning and crafty men described in Job, Mrs. Potter is one of those who 'meet with darkness in the daytime, and at noonday . . . grope as though it were night' (Jb. 5:14)."[16] Why these fumblers from the Book of Job? Why not a female Diogenes with her lantern looking for an honest man or even perhaps an honest son? Essentially, the critic tells us what the crucial blanks in the text are and then bridges them over. Those bridges give us not what the character searches for (for that is still missing in the text) but what the critic elsewhere has found, not the character's quest but the critic's certainties.

Furthermore, once masquerade is admitted, the possibilities are myriad. What is essential visage and what is superficial mask? Mitchell, for example, slides over some of Coyote's more dubious counsel to concentrate on his final claim that it is he who has provided the redeeming baby, and Coyote thereby almost becomes Jehovah. In contrast, Northey notes Coyote's frequent advocacy of seduction and suicide to view him, in Leslie Monkman's terms, as a figure "who functions in satanic opposition to the Old Testament Jehovah."[17] Would the real Coyote please stand up.

Coyote does frequently speak with a biblical cast, but by borrowing the diction of the Christian God, does he become a stand-in, even an agent for that God, or a mock, a parody? Does the double demonstrate identity or difference, and, even more to the point, what does identity or difference itself prove? Mitchell, as noted, equates Coyote with God to make Coyote God. But why could not the same equation have the opposite resolution and make God Coyote? Similarly, Putzel argues that "Coyote's biblical echoes transform the dry rocks of British Columbia into a Palestine, a holy land," and never stops to consider the possibility that the echoes might reverberate quite the other way to translate even a Palestine, a holy land, into more dry rocks and just another British Columbia.[18] And neither does difference necessarily define. Disputing Mitchell's interpretation of Coyote, Scobie insists that "these parallels do not establish an identification. Rather, they establish the fraudulent nature of Coyote's claim; for Coyote to assume the language of Jehovah is presumptuous parody, seen at its most blasphemous when he welcomes Greta's pitiful suicide."[19] Yet the very privileging of God implicit in blasphemy is hardly sanctioned in a text in which Coyote has all of the best lines (not always biblical) and gets the last word too. No defining differences between God and Coyote are specified in the novel. On the contrary, functioning as both God (ubiquitous, controlling, beyond human ken) and not-God (contingency, accident, a trickster often tricked himself), Coyote delights in calling the very possibility of definitive difference into question. Indeed, from the Coyote point of view, God is just another Coyote who wildly, comically overstates his claims.

SO FOR WHAT, METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING, might the old woman have gone fishing? One possibility is for Coyote himself. With his sign — tracks, voice, spittle in the form of prickly pear — everywhere and he himself nowhere, Coyote is, after all, one feature most obviously missing in the text. And appropriately so. Coyote as an Indian trickster god given to Christian claims and phrasings is a supernatural figure half in one cosmos and half in another, with each calling the other into question. Consider, too, that the little community of the novel is indistinctly placed in a roughly analogous fashion. It is set apart from both the residual world of the surviving Indians and the larger world of white civilization with its local outpost of the town below. Presided over by Coyote, there is a conjunction between the broken present (the state of the town) and the broken past (the state of the reservation) enacted in and on the broken landscape — "as if it had been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world" (22) — in which the novel is appropriately grounded. Caught in that conjunction are all of the characters. Mrs. Potter, "fishing upstream to the source" (21), might therefore be seen as finally attempting to resolve after her death one of the ambiguities of her life. Searching for Coyote, she could at last ground her being in its Indian source, a source that well may be itself in process of disappearing or at least becoming something else as indicated by Coyote's propensity (protecting disguise?) to pass himself off as the Christian God. But the reader can hardly rest comfortably with this inconclusive postulation either. Perhaps Mrs. Potter fishes to evade Coyote, merely to be (after death as before), to just go fishing. Or perhaps she fishes to become Coyote, which is a possibility also broached in the novel when her appearance after death is also evidenced by the signature of Coyote's paw print left where she had cast her line.

The fate of the dead mother never becomes clear, and neither do we fare much better with the surviving son who, late in the novel, claims for himself a new freedom (freedom from freedom) and then attempts, with the full complicity of the text, to put that limiting freedom into definitive practice. It is a freedom founded, first, on the almost preordained failure of his attempt to flee from both the death of his mother and the affair with Lenchen but a freedom also founded on his own and the text's duplicity in claiming it. As such, it cannot be taken even at its own paradoxical and oxymoronic face value.

Arriving in the town knowing nothing as to how he might proceed farther — "He had no idea what a railway ticket would cost. He'd no idea where to buy a ticket to. He knew nothing about the train except that it went to the packing house, no way of boarding it except through the loading-pens" (99) — James withdraws from the town bank all his family's money, flaunts it, and consequently soon loses it. He is taken in hand, taken to the bar, taken to the whorehouse, and

then simply taken. After he has already paid for food and company but enjoying neither, one of the girls follows him out into the night. Pretending a special attraction, she lifts his wallet with all his remaining cash and then leaves him for Traff, the same "friend" who had been showing James the town. Peering in through the whorehouse window, James sees Traff counting the money, knows he has been robbed, and accedes to that fact with the realization that carries him through to the end of the novel:

> The flick of a girl's hand had freed James from freedom. He'd kissed away escape in the mud by the river. He thought now of Lenchen and the child who would wear his face. Alone on the edge of the town where men clung together for protection, he saw clearly for a moment his simple hope. (121)

We might notice, first, that the paradox of James being freed "from freedom" by a fortunate theft highlights a problematics of freedom characteristically ignored in typical westerns. The freedom to abjure the constraints of civilization and, in Huck Finn's terms, light out for the territories is a freedom not so much of radical possibility but of evasive action. It is a freedom rigorously patterned into the very form of the standard western and consists of little more than the hero's perpetual potentiality for dislocations in space and action (particularly romantic action). In other words, the western hero's requisite refusal to be bound in one place, to be claimed by domicile and domesticity, leaves him bound by movement, bound in and for many places instead of one. Thus, in the old-fashioned westerns, the hero at most kissed the girl and rode away. In modern versions he might sleep with her first, but he still moves on. To wait almost nine months and then to ride frantically away a day or so before the baby arrives spoils the whole effect. The call to further adventure ("a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do") begins to look suspiciously like a desperate shedding of responsibility. Yet what fundamental difference can a few months make? So James's hasty and belated flight compromises departures more judiciously timed. Neither does the immediate end of that flight — to be willingly robbed by a prostitute — counterbalance the support he was not prepared to provide for Lenchen.

James claims to be saved by his fortuitous fleecing; by accident and hazard; by, if one will, Coyote. Yet the duplicity of freedom that this character exposes is countered by the duplicity through which he achieves his own different freedom, and that second duplicity is, of course, James's complicity in his own victimization. His first purchase in town, for example, is a wallet for which he pays cash because then "you've got ownership rights on it and can smash it up if you so choose" (95-96). In his fashion he so chooses. It requires no great perspicacity to see what trash Traff is and what he is after. It requires no particular subterfuge to part James from his money either. Even the parrot in the bar, conveniently trained to proclaim "drinks all around" and "drinks on you," was plucking the young man clean, which is one of the reasons Traff hustles James off to better

things. As he observes, "it might as well be me as someone else" (102), especially a parrot. Furthermore, even after Traff has the cash, the town knows that he is a thief, so any kind of outcry could have brought action and James well might have recovered most of his money. The obvious fact is that James desires the resolution he achieves but he also wants it to seem as if that resolution is quite out of his own hands. Consequently, the forced non-freedom (contingency) that frees him from the false freedom of opportunity and escape is itself a fraud.

The novel participates in the protagonist's strategy of claiming a deserved punishment and disclaiming it, too. We can notice, for example, how James at one point acknowledges his unconvincing rationale for being "drawn to Traff. It was the cap of hair, straight and thick and yellow as Lenchen's" (106). The author and the character here contrive not just for James's desired victimization but for a victimization that somehow reverses and thereby cancels out his victimization of Lenchen. This time he will be the one seduced and abandoned and by a Lenchen at that. We might notice also how "the slanted edge of the bank" (107) and "her hands pressed against his chest" (108) as the wallet is taken evoke the stairway and the killing of James's mother. Again he suffers a parodic diminuendo of what he has already done, and the text writes his coming restitution every bit as duplicitously as he sought it in a dubious theft.

THE TEXT LABOURS IN ANOTHER WAY, too, to return the reader and the protagonist to the impending resolution. As Morriss early observed, the "nature [of the town] is basically that of the wilderness," and "in effect, James has merely escaped to another wasteland." The two are "parellel" to such a degree that the second can even give James versions of what is concomitantly happening in the first. Thus "the brothel smells of 'bodies and kerosene burning away'" evoke "Greta's self-destruction of which James is unaware."[20] Similarly, Lenchen is briefly replaced in James's fumbling and ambivalent embrace by Lilly ("Go away, he said. His arm pulled her close" [108]), and neither Lenchen nor Lilly is, at this point, the pure flower of the latter's name. Angel, up above, also has, in name anyway, an analogue down below. The other prostitute at Felicia's is named Christine. She is onomastically closer to Christ but in action somewhat further away. Although Angel has also gone from man to man, she has done so essentially for the sake of her children and on a much more limited scale than Christine. And Felicia is, of course, the feminine form of Felix, and, like Felix, offers (admittedly, for a price) food and other comforts to those who come to her door.

The smallest and most dubious of communities, the prostitutes and their patrons, mirrors, especially in its imperfections, the very mess from which James fled, and thus the limit of his escape, the farthest that he can go (experientially,

psychologically, financially), returns him to his origins and the reasons for his flight. Lilly, moreover, tells him as much. "We all mean all right, Lilly said. It's just there's no future in it. Drinking and crying, and everything being washed up the next day" (106). It is precisely that "no future" that the novel arranges for James in the town which allows him a future back in the folds of the hills. So the fourth section is forced, contrived, something less than the textual free play of the other parts.[21]

The Double Hook forces itself into plot and pattern, into regionalism and psychological realism in order to force a resolution. With that resolution coming, the novel too can come home again, can return to the mythic play of its first parts, a turn which comes at the very conclusion of Part Four:

> The life which Traff and Lilly led behind Felicia's dull glass belonged under Felicia's narrow roof. In the distance across the flats James could see the lights of the station and across from them the lights of the hotel where the parrot who lived between two worlds was probably asleep now, stupid with beer and age.
>
> James stood for a moment in the moonlight among the clumps of stiff sage which shoved through the seams and pockets of the earth. (109)

Opposed to life as narrowly constrained, as dull and stupid, we have the potentiality of the man in the moonlight with life burgeoning around him even through the cracked and broken earth. Whatever the message or meaning that might be abstracted from those moon-illumined clumps of sage thrusting through a desert landscape, it is qualitatively different from whatever the significance of the drunk parrot at last silently asleep.

The same suggestive scene of contemplating the finally indeterminant poetry of things which ends Part Four is then repeated in a slightly different key as the first sentence of the final section of the novel. "William stood looking into the charred roots of the honeysuckle" (113). How does one read those "charred roots of the honeysuckle," the smoke that "rose from the charred logs," the "bones [that might] come together bone to bone" for one to "prophesy upon" (113-14)? Ara's answer is a vision of welling water and leaping fish. Coyote's is a bark from a dry rock ledge: "Happy are the dead / for their eyes see no more" (115). Although the rock is definitely there whereas the water is not, the novel does not particularly privilege one answer over the other. Life goes on, as marked by the birth of the baby, which gives a focus to the end of the novel. And so does death, as indicated by the continuing passing of Mrs. Potter whose active dying has been a focus from the start. The end of that process — the end of her fishing — seems in sight when she is last seen "standing by [Felix's] brown pool . . . Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water" (117-18).

The married couple reunited, the young lovers together again, the baby born, the house of Potter to be rebuilt — the end of the novel does tempt with the promise of a new beginning and the possibility of an affirmation of life. It is a

temptation easily acceded to. As George Bowering notes, "all readers of the text agree that we have a more-or-less happy ending, a kind of transformation, or resurrection, a new testament. A revelation (I, Coyote, saw this) under the seer's eye." But Bowering also rightly warns against going "too far" in positing "James as redeemer and renewer," for he did kill his mother, blind Kip, and abandon Lenchen.[22] We can remember what he has previously done and have also seen how much his return is premised on his continued misreading of who and what he is. Ara, near the conclusion, maintains that James "never in all his life had strength enough to set himself against things" (123), an observation that seems as true then as earlier. James let himself be carried away and he let himself be carried back. So any proclaimed regeneration of this character at the novel's end is doubly dubious in that it, first, premises a capability not previously observed in James and, second, remains conveniently untested.

Particularly germane here is James's first reaction to the "seared and smouldering earth, the bare hot cinder" of what had previously been his home. "He felt as he stood with his eyes closed on the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed that by some generous gesture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things" (131). The gesture, however, is only his own still self-deceived desire. At the end of the disastrous process he dreams origins again. Despite the different evidence all around him, he posits some green Eden in which, by definition, there will be no trace of what he has already done. Yet that Eden cuts two ways, for any restored paradise can only await a fall.

The same point is even more implicit in James's immediate promise to rebuild the family house. His decision to locate the new dwelling "further down the creek" can well represent a wise move from the previous disastrous site but his decision to build "all on one floor" (131) is strangely suspect. Does he really believe that without the requisite stairway henceforth no Potter can be pushed to premature death? Coyote, in the last words of the novel, set the feet of James's and Lenchen's baby "on the soft ground / . . . on the sloping shoulders / of the world" (134). As has been amply demonstrated, those same shoulders slope for parents too.

Narration here slides out of text as ambiguously and unclearly as it slid into it. In the conjunction of set feet and soft ground, set feet and the sloping shoulders of the world, the novel demonstrates again its ability to unsay what it says even in the act of saying it. In other words — and this book both perpetually demands and precludes "other words" — the reader is caught on the double hooks of the text (living/dying, articulation/silence, God/Coyote, meaning/meaninglessness, even, if one wishes, construction/deconstruction) as firmly at the end as at the beginning. Or as the epigraph in retrospect suggests, you can't catch the glory of this text on the hook of a final definitive interpretation, for when you fish for story you catch the darkness too.

NOTES

[1] Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook* (1959; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 15. Subsequent references to this New Canadian Library edition of the novel will be made parenthetically in the text.

[2] Stephen Scobie, *Sheila Watson and Her Works* (Toronto: ECW Press, n.d.), p. 35.

[3] Douglas Barbour, "Editors and Typesetters," *Open Letter*, 3rd series, no. 1 (1974-75), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, ed. George Bowering (Ottawa: Golden Dog, 1985), p. 9.

[4] Barbour, p. 9.

[5] Angela Bowering, in "Figures Cut in Sacred Ground: *Illuminati* in *The Double Hook*," *Line*, 2 (1983), 47, effectively points out how, in this opening scene, "narrative and imagery marry domesticity and death, doubling back on themselves."

[6] Hugo McPherson, "An Important New Voice," *Tamarack Review*, 12 (1959); Don Summerhayes, "Glory and Fear," *Alphabet*, 3 (1961); Philip Child, "A Canadian Prose-Poem," *Dalhousie Review*, 39 (1959); all reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, pp. 24, 29, 32.

[7] Margaret Morriss, "The Elements Transcended," *Canadian Literature*, 42 (1964), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 87.

[8] Nancy J. Corbett, "Closed Circle," *Canadian Literature*, 61 (1974), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 117.

[9] Steven Putzel, "Under Coyote's Eye: Indian tales in Sheila Watson's 'The Double Hook'," *Canadian Literature*, 102 (1984), 14.

[10] Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 90.

[11] Northey, p. 88.

[12] Beverley Mitchell, "Association and Allusion in *The Double Hook*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 2 (1973), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, p. 102.

[13] Mitchell, p. 111.

[14] Mitchell, pp. 105, 113.

[15] Mitchell, p. 104.

[16] Mitchell, p. 104, ellipsis in the original.

[17] Northey, p. 89; see also Leslie Monkman, "Coyote as Trickster in *The Double Hook*," *Canadian Literature*, 52 (1972), 71.

[18] Putzel, p. 13.

[19] Scobie, p. 33.

[20] Morriss, p. 93.

[21] In "Sheila Watson, Trickster," from *The Canadian Novel, Volume III: Modern Times*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press, 1981), reprinted in *Sheila Watson and 'The Double Hook'*, George Bowering more fully argues this point. See especially pp. 196-98.

[22] Bowering, p. 197.