

TWIN MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The Structure of Patricia Blondal's

A Candle To Light the Sun

Laurence R. Ricou

"If I read till my eyeballs ache I shall eventually get a hint. It's like a mystery story, but the mystery is inside the reader waiting to be unraveled."

THROUGHOUT THE GENERALLY WARM REVIEWS of Patricia Blondal's *A Candle to Light the Sun* (1960) runs the persistent reservation that the novel lacks discipline: "reads everywhere like the sprawling incoherent first draft of a very promising novel," wrote Miriam Waddington in *Canadian Literature*; "there are enough characters and incidents for ten novels" observed F. W. Watt in "Letters in Canada." Certainly Blondal, driven by the premonition and then by the knowledge that she would die from cancer, knew she did not have time for ten novels. And the general impression that the novel consists of nice insights and lyric moments lost in a clutter of eccentrics and unlikely events has apparently persuaded most readers and students of Canadian literature to ignore it. But the novel should not be dismissed solely for having too much in it. On the contrary its amplitude should challenge an examination of Blondal's structural principles, and of the relevance of particular details to the whole novel. In beginning that analysis here I hope to show the way to a fuller understanding of the novel's meaning and achievement.

Blondal's prose in *A Candle to Light the Sun* is dense with new understandings, surprising resonances and startlingly right images. She is sensitive to the force which will unify her novel: the repetition of such images as the wind, the light, the railway, or the sun; the unobtrusive motifs, such as the variations on "thinness," or on "waiting"; the bristling of allusions, most obviously to the Bible and to T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." There is, in short, whatever the imprecisions and hastiness,¹ much evidence that Blondal planned and constructed the novel with considerable care. This care is particularly impressive and interesting in the way she makes pairings of characters a principal structural and thematic feature.

Blondal was a fascinated student of psychology; her papers² include scribbles of notes (reminiscent of the scribbles accumulated by David Newman, the central character of *A Candle to Light the Sun*) on Freud, on Jung, and on the history of epilepsy. Her interest in psychology accounts for her attempts to expose the buried lives, the secret selves, in the individual character, as in *Mouse Bluffs* (and, indeed, in the world of which *Mouse Bluffs* is a microcosm). She is absorbed by imperfect man's lust for perfection; she sees human relationships tottering uneasily on longtime, deliberately nurtured misunderstandings. She creates her characters in pairs and watches them collide. In outlining *A Candle to Light the Sun* her notes describe the plot as "The Twin Misunderstanding":

David in his hunger secretly believes he is Doctor Ross's son.

Ross believes David an epileptic, if he were perfect Ross would have to accept him fully.

Blondal's attraction to this pattern can also be seen in the more transparently structured *From Heaven With a Shout* (1963).³ Through a classified advertisement Alex Lamond hires Arden Calcott as a wife. The story describes their mutual attempts to transcend the misunderstandings inherent in such strange beginnings. Arden must try to understand both Alex and his twin brother, George, a "duality in one man." The pattern of twinning is completed by the introduction of Monica Cosgrove, Alex's first wife, a doctor like him, and a lover to both brothers. Such complicated balancing is basic to both novels, and dozens of minor and major reflections of the design occur throughout *A Candle to Light the Sun*: the novel's division into two books, the tension between *Mouse Bluffs* and *Winnipeg*, the polarities of valley and plain, or river and drought, of Old Country and new, of "two societies . . . ordinary townfolk and the railroaders," the conflict between David and Darcy, the harmony of David and Ian, even the contradictory longings of the Henderson Twins. The contrapuntal structure, as old as literature itself, has its modern psychological dimension in Blondal's use of the pairings to objectify one person's encounter with himself. According to Derek Crawley, reviewing *From Heaven With a Shout* in *The Dalhousie Review*, "Blondal was always impressed by what she saw as Dostoevsky's attempt in *The Brothers Karamazov* to explore the artistic possibilities of fragmenting the various pulls within one individual into different fictional characters."

Crawley's suggestion that Blondal trusted the artist before the psychologist is particularly important. Indeed, as much as she was intrigued by psychological study, she probably shared the view she gives to Ian Ross in her notes: psychologists (their representative in the novel, of course, is Basil Waterman) are the "spiritual successors to the old puritans, . . . who cried deep and strong for a formal method of dealing with life, a prescribed manner of reaction to all things." Patricia Blondal was not concerned with working out a particular psychological

theory in fiction, but she was serious about probing the mind through the more reliable — because less prescriptive, less arbitrary — psychologizing of the writer's imagination.

Examination of any of a dozen or more characters would illustrate her detailed scrutiny. The intricate relationships among characters, by which Blondal challenges the questioning reader, extend even to quite minor figures (such as the parallel between Gavin Ross and Matt Henderson). But four characters — David Newman, Gavin Ross, Ian Ross and Darcy Rushforth — are most central to the structure and meaning of *A Candle to Light the Sun*. Blondal knows these characters intimately; whether or not she admires them, she certainly understands them. I had always felt that Blondal's sympathy for her characters emerged readily enough from the novels, but I found exciting confirmation of it in her papers. In creating eight of her major characters Blondal wrote sketches of up to eight pages for each. Six of these sketches, including those for the characters just mentioned, are written in the first person. Although the novel was to be written in the third person, primarily from David Newman's point of view, Blondal diligently attempted to know her characters from the inside, to imagine how they would see things from their own perspective. As a result, her characters persist in the memory with an individuality beyond their eccentricity.

A Candle to Light the Sun opens with the tentative contact, in sift of "snow, salt-fine" and dark of night, between the old doctor, Gavin Ross, and the frail, sensitive ten-year-old boy, David Newman. Gavin's solemn announcement, "The King is dead," marks not only the town's connection to an imperial past, but initiates a repeated pondering throughout the novel on the nature of kingship. David is at first frightened, partly by the looming figure of Gavin, but more by the magnitude of the King's death. But then — it is a key to the dramatic conception of the scene and apt to go unnoticed — Gavin sits down on the snowy steps. In doing so he brings himself down to David's level, and seems to reveal a warmth, even a humility, which makes his relationship with David much more credible. Blondal's analysis of the impact of the announcement indicates that David's development through the novel is not so much a wrenching away from all that he has been, but a consolidation of a change that occurs in Chapter One:

A boy stands in a bucket of syrup, waiting for someone to free him, reach out and touch his hand and release him, waits and waits, watches with apprehension the adults, not wanting to go, yet aching for someone to show him how, free his way, afraid to leave for the larger place, afraid of the night, the bleak unhappy old faces.⁴

For Blondal the death of the King marks the end of an era, the symbolic freeing of the town from an old loyalty. But behind the social significance lies the critical personal significance for David. He is not only discovering adult emotion, but also the *sharing* of that emotion. Blondal's emphasis suggests that David is here first

thinking — or feeling — for himself: the sharing with Ross is not so much a coming together, as it is an establishing of his independence and individuality, through his discovery of loss and loneliness.

Already in this carefully conceived opening scene, the polarities are peculiarly insistent: a boy / an old man; town / prairie; fire / ice; the King is dead / the Prince of Wales is King; joy / disaster; the *Family Herald* / the *Illustrated London News*. Such balancing of images governs the novel's lyricism, and, as the pattern grows through the novel, establishes the emotional landscape within which David struggles for himself. Here is a boy desperate for his own freedom, and yet at the same time desperate for a father. His maturing will involve both attempts to reconcile polarities and, more importantly, a recognition of the necessity of making a choice, of the time when there can be no more waiting.

David's fantasy that Gavin is his father is strengthened when Gavin gives him a dollar to spend on the Clear Lake trip, and invites him to come and meet Darcy Rushforth on his return. The irony is that Gavin's gesture is prompted not by his own affection, but by Ian's reminder of their debt to the boy. This irony demonstrates something of Blondal's technique of fragmenting and simplifying characters. The two brothers are acting in concert, as parts, in a sense, of one personality. Gavin may be doing what he wants to do, what his own yearning for a son urges (he had on the first night invited David in, and asked him to return), but we see the pressure applied externally, by Ian as a sort of *alter ego*. Gavin, we must remember, is by profession a doctor, and he is meeting David here primarily as patient.

It is as doctor, according to Blondal's note on "The Twin Misunderstanding," that Gavin Ross fundamentally misunderstands David. Yet it is clear from Chapter Six that Blondal's intention to have David mistaken for an epileptic has been altered — wisely, I think. At the worst Gavin sees David as a frail boy of poor appetite; David's one medical problem, the TB scars on his lungs, is not diagnosed until he attempts to enlist, and then by another doctor. David's conclusion that Gavin thinks him "constitutionally inadequate" reveals more of David's paranoia than of Gavin's callousness. The TB is mentioned on a Christmas Eve when David is home from Knox College: Gavin ensures that Darcy is out of the way before he takes David to the homey warmth of George Lee's restaurant, where he compliments him on his university work and dismisses the demerits for late hours as insignificant. In this atmosphere, which hardly seems as patronizing as David imagines, Gavin raises the question of David's health, and his comments are terse, it seems to me, mainly because he has to admit his own failure to diagnose the disease. What David interprets as a "grave" and "indifferent" attitude can equally be seen as concern and embarrassment at his professional failing. He is so in love with the dream of the grand moment when his ideal father will stand revealed that he is blind to the actual gesture when it comes. Gavin's "misunderstanding,"

then, seems more general and, therefore, more significant: he cannot understand the confusions of a growing boy, he cannot appreciate the boy's sensitivities or accept him as a thinker and potential artist.

The next discussion of David's university programme is not nearly so calm, nor is David nearly so imperceptive. David announces that he is giving up engineering to return to studying Arts. Gavin argues for a utilitarian education:

My brother had the humanities and it did nothing but enable him to spout Lucretius when he was drunk. . . . Being a gentleman is no profession in this country and that's the end of it.

Again we can just detect Gavin fighting against the other side of his own personality; his nostalgia for the "old world," and for "Old Country women" who "bring out the best in men," imbues this comment with a note of personal loss. But David is no longer prepared to submit to his surrogate father. Even as he senses that the idea of Gavin Ross as his natural father may be self-deceptive, he knows him to be his emotional father. The opening scene established that a father must show the reluctant son the way to freedom. David now is ready to act according to the freedom he glimpsed on that snowy night.

Gavin adamantly refuses to support David if he returns to Arts.

David smiled into his own rage: we've never been so alike as we are right now. He said softly, "To hell with you then."

As he left, he heard Ross roar with laughter and felt his stomach, clenched up with fury, suddenly burn with joy. . . . With the harsh delighted laughter at his back he knew he could manage. In resistance was the strength of challenge, the old man's love of challenge and respect for those who could meet it.

After this recognition, David, whatever his lingering desire for a father, always meets Gavin as an equal, asserting his own independence. When Gavin calls David a "stray," David senses the old man's loneliness and becomes more considerate; when Gavin asks David to work against Darcy's insanity plea, David makes his own judgment of Darcy and embraces the very imperfection which Gavin cannot accept. In Blondal's character sketches, David describes his own changing attitudes:

In our terrible hungers for him [Gavin] we became more alone than we might have been; he gave us something of himself in this way, that when it was done we were more like him, incapable of loving.

In the novel we can follow this same pattern in David, from his yearning to be like Gavin, through his solitude, to his recognition of their similarities. As he becomes a more complete and independent human being, David, paradoxically, seems to absorb Gavin's personality within his own.

A SIMILAR DEEPENING of David's personality occurs through his relationship with Darcy Rushforth. No one, of course, is more incapable of loving than Darcy. His murder of Pamela Green pushes *A Candle to Light the Sun*, for a moment, close to the worst excesses of the gothic novel. But, in the midst of the bizarre and crudely superficial events, David shows an intuitive understanding of the murder. The grimly tense relationship between David and Darcy is the most difficult in the novel to comprehend. Darcy's own attempt to understand it is described in Blondal's preliminary sketch: "David and I, Yang and Yin. The black part of him is dying, or perhaps now it will be part of him where once it was outside him." Clearly many of the dichotomies of the novel (the country/city tension is particularly obvious) are personified in David and Darcy. Yet it would be a mistake to associate Darcy with Yin, and therefore with the female, dark, passive, negative principle, and believe we have him finally classified. Blondal moves, on the contrary, toward a dynamic harmony, a balancing of opposites, within David particularly, but more generally among the other characters as well.

In progressing toward this resolution, however, the novel has a major weakness. Although Darcy is certainly the least likeable character in the novel, Blondal strains to show us his essential humanness. David is for a long time magnetized and intimidated by Darcy, then resentful and quarrelsome, until he begins to try and understand, and so, in a measure, to sympathize. But David and Darcy have related for so long on a superficial, external plane that the depth and complexity are not there (as they are, for example, in David's discoveries of Gavin) when Blondal needs to call on them.

Darcy's personality, in fact, tempts people to stereotype him. To Ian, Darcy is a "little swine," to Christine he is "gutter"; Gavin sees his nephew as a "scamp," while his father, Charles, imagines that he has "a certain select place in the world." Only David, even in the years when they meet only for a few weeks each summer, moves beyond simple classifying: "Darcy is his friend. Companion? Summer Friend? What was Darcy?" His questions reveal the tentativeness of the relationship: not only is David unsure of himself, he is also almost subconsciously cautious about becoming too intimate with this mysterious boy. And, although David is awed by the "wonder of Darcy, so foreign to Mouse Bluffs," he only meets Darcy in the first place because of Gavin's request to "show him the ropes." The small scene is rich with irony. Darcy is no doubt aware that David's friendship is motivated by his sense of duty to Gavin. Darcy, for much of their growing up, will be the teacher and leader; by the time David does begin to teach Darcy it is too late; Gavin, as much as he admires his scamp, may recognize that Darcy desperately needs a solid friend. Finally, the reference to "ropes" has a last cruel echo when Darcy is hanged.

That hanging brings to a violent end a relationship which depends increasingly upon crime to hold it together.⁵ David and Darcy are bound by their setting fire to the Yeates' place. The fire, and the accumulated disasters in the macabre ending of Book I, strike some readers as overdone. But there is good point, and considerable care, in Blondal's presentation. The brevity of the episodes, the abrupt changes of scene, the truncated monosyllabic dialogue all reflect stylistically the psychological turbulence. Blondal diminishes the sensationalism by focussing on the boys' motive, rather than on the actual fire. Both boys, although they are obviously driven by the electricity of the storm and their adolescent desire for adventure, are at least partly moved by a sense of charity: "Uncle Gavin says if that old store of Yeates' burned down, the town would give them a house." But the charity is perverted by an enormous, uncaring, adolescent egocentricity: "We are the only people in the world, David thought."

This self-centredness, however, is as much externally imposed by an intensified "everyman-for-himself" outlook, as it is internal. Certainly the death of Elsie Yeates' baby is as much a community responsibility as it is David's and Darcy's. The burning of the Yeates' shack climaxes Blondal's account of the Depression's effect on the small town, an account which began, of course, with the opening dirge on thinness. In those few paragraphs which precede Chapter One Blondal created an atmosphere of emotional draining strongly reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence, the sense of a life which has lost its richness, lost the inarticulate sharing which gave it strength and satisfaction. Now the wind fans the flames, and carries away the sound of the first bell; there is no water to fight the fire because Reese Todd, the town clerk, had ordered it turned off to promote his own perverse lust for power. In this scene David and Darcy, then, are to a great extent the anonymous dark embodiments of a social, physical and economic environment. The sense of overwhelming external forces is confirmed by the close linking of the fire with the death of David's mother, who utters at the end of her feeble claim to the glamour and power of a far-off world forever lost: "Tell him I was presented."

The fire, and the death of his mother, at the end of Book I bring David to the verge of manhood. In Book II the structural dualities become more apparent as they are inverted. The scene shifts from David's home territory to Darcy's city. But just as David had not been able to show Darcy the ropes in Mouse Bluffs, now Darcy is unable to guide David in the city. The more David changes, the more Darcy stays the same. Master of Gavin, and David, and world-beater in Mouse Bluffs, Darcy in Winnipeg is unable to control his father, or David, or his own vocation. Darcy, that is, remains the sophisticated adolescent, the grown-up child, unable to master the adult world.⁶ As in Mouse Bluffs "the asking [is] Darcy's always," and as David comes to recognize Darcy's inadequacy he grows into his own maturity. Or, in terms of Blondal's transparent surnames, he stops *rushing forth* and becomes a *new man*.

Darcy seeks out David at Knox College, and although David is trapped into continuing the relationship by the past and their never-spoken complicity in crime, he now has some awareness of his own inadequacy:

This is how the old man lives, he thought, and was glad he had learned so much. Then knew he was only making words, implying a choice where there was no choice. It is what everyone does, he thought. Take it and try to call it courage. It's what everyone does.

The imperfect syntax and the unconnected pronouns seem to reflect David's difficulty in understanding himself. David's sexual initiation with the prostitute Margie comes through Darcy's initiative, but again the complete picture of the situation exposes Darcy's immaturity. Blondal, as she does throughout the novel, reinforces the dualism on the rhetorical level by withholding information which, when revealed, causes the reader to see an incident from a completely opposite perspective:

I've never seen tail affect a soph so much.
And I've never seen a guy who liked to watch before.

In such exchanges David shows his growing assertiveness, here accomplished by a cheap taunt, but nonetheless significant. Darcy, too, is sensing the change. There is a touch of envy when he explains to his father: " 'He has a hero. . . . I have none.' " And a moment of agony when he realizes that David can see Margie as a living human being, not a sex machine. As potential writers, more generally as artistic temperaments, their differences become still clearer. In David's mind his own writing is a natural necessity (only haltingly pursued in the novel), while Darcy's writing is only a means to an end: " '[He] wants to write because he likes to read or because he has some compulsive desire in a thing-directed society to produce something above the level of things.' " David, realizing that he must keep something of himself intact and private, refuses to show any of his writing to Darcy.

AS ENROSSING AS THE NOVEL IS from this point on, there is no doubt that pronouncements such as these on heroism and thing-directed societies diminish the intensity of Book II. In *Mouse Bluffs* the world, particularly as apprehended by David, is primarily sensuous and portrayed in precise, yet suggestive images: for example, the "bloom" of the street lights in the novel's opening scene, parodied as "grimy yellow pods in bloated gray husks" at the end of Book I. In Book II David is moving into the intellectual world of abstraction and concept. As Lilja explains, in *Mouse Bluffs* " 'they don't have to blueprint and verbalize everything they do or feel.' " Had Blondal written more she would, no

doubt, have found the way to present this aspect of experience without the blueprint showing. But, in this work, the prose often seems less dense and more evasive in the later part of the novel. A symptom of the weakness, perhaps, is the uncertain manner in which the imagery, and the proverbial truth, of the title is integrated with the novel's theme. Another is the unnecessarily long account of Charles's attitude to Darcy in Chapter 17, which does little to interest us in Charles, or to reveal Darcy. And perhaps most disconcerting is the hastily prepared and superficially presented acquaintance of Darcy and David with the Greens.

No doubt the haste and lack of detail intensifies the shock of Pamela Green's murder. But shock alone is hardly sufficient justification for the vague background and the uncertain connections among the characters. Blondal explains the cause of the murder by showing Darcy's pretence to be the urbane artist/genius gradually eroded by his awareness that David has the artist's sensibility and intelligence. Possession becomes Darcy's whole ethic: "I got me an artist, a writer," he exults in Blondal's sketch. Lilja sees Darcy's possessiveness and tries to warn David away:

'you've got it — what he's wanted. Maybe he's known all along, ever since he first came to the Bluffs and latched onto you. What he hasn't faced yet is that he hasn't got it, that's going to be worse. Get away.'

It is a sign of David's maturity and difference that he will not flee. In his less analytical (and more sympathetic) assessment: "'He [Darcy] needs someone.'" To satisfy that need Darcy arranges for David to meet Pamela Green, retarded daughter of a fur tycoon. The apparent plan is that this liaison will quickly leave David free for Darcy. But Darcy, again showing his blindness, does not anticipate David's simple interest in Pamela's gentle humanness. David, that is, approaches Pamela with the same openness that he had brought to the relationship with Darcy, and that he must bring to his relationship with Gavin. Perhaps it is some glimmer of this parallel that reduces Darcy to desperately open pleading for David's exclusive attention. But David fights for his own unique self: "'whatever I've got it's mine. Alone.'" David cannot be what he is not and has begun to admit it. Darcy cannot be what he is not, but refuses to be what he is. Here lies the final, unbridgeable difference between these two characters so closely paired. Hence Darcy's ominous final curse when he knows David to have slipped his grasp: "'I'll kill her first.'"

Not that David becomes a model of blameless perfection; in his continuing fear of, and fascination with Darcy, he shares, in a sense, responsibility for Pamela's murder. Once implicated with Darcy by violence he is now, ironically, implicated by his fear of violence. The murder frees him of Darcy and forces him to be more objective. Gavin Ross blames David, but as Gavin must acknowledge that Darcy

cannot be his son (since he is flawed), so, at the very moment he spurns David as a "stray," he is moving closed to him. David senses the new order: Gavin and his family will try to convert Darcy, who has lived and prided himself on the role of the Devil, into a new Christ: "Darcy would go out with the sun darkened and the veil of the temple rent, sane but temporarily foolish. My brother." This thought marks David's acceptance, his Christ-like gesture, when Darcy has been abandoned by all others. The brotherhood is clearest in the remarkable scene when David imagines himself being cross-examined concerning Darcy's sanity. At each turn he can see himself in the same situation, he can recognize the other side of him that is Darcy, and his generous understanding becomes also a mark of his increasing self-awareness. In singing rhythms he makes his half-deranged discovery of his own fault:

saw my dark brother waiting to do his work and let my mouth close over the warning, saw him in the shadows as I have seen him now for years, watching, waiting, and did not catch his hand warmly in mine to stay it. I feared that handclasp, told myself that whoever survived it would be a killer.

... Pity ... the one who had to destroy Darcy or live forever too near the sucking vortex of Darcy's heart.

Gavin, good man, I give you Darcy, my dark brother. I killed him for you.

No! I killed him for myself.

This passage indicates David's knowledge that he must be freed of Darcy. But that knowledge is coupled with the recognition that the Yin, the black and dark, is now within him. In reaching for the mystery within, Blondal risks complete muddle, as in the strange connection between surviving a handclasp and becoming a killer. Certainly the confused syntax suggests that David's understanding is tenuous and incomplete at best, more charged with emotion than with reason. Yet the hints of betrayal, purity, and even redemption in her understated analogy to Christ's death, broaden and intensify the meaning of this strange relationship.

David, searching for a father, eventually becomes a father, first to Darcy and later to Gavin. Gavin, yearning for a son and heir, is disappointed in Darcy, and unable to embrace David. Darcy, frustrated anarchist, refuses to be either son or father, though he exploits the external trappings of both roles. Ian Ross, Gavin's brother, completes this central pattern of pairings in the novel. But unlike the other three Ian is primarily an observer and commentator, in which roles he has a significance beyond the relatively few words devoted to him. Ian in the physical cripple against which we can measure the various emotional and intellectual failings of the other characters. Ian also has a public moral weakness (Mouse Bluffs, of course, would not see it as a disease), his alcoholism, against which we can assess the moral adequacy of the others. Among the other three characters, Ian has least to do, directly, with Darcy, though there is clearly some parallel between his relationship with his brother and Darcy's relationship with David. Bound to

his wheelchair and his drink, with, in a sense, little more to lose, Ian can be cynically frank about the world around him. His detachment makes him a valuable guide to David, a mentor more incisive in his advice and direction than either Gavin or Darcy.

But it would be unlike Blondal to cast him merely as the perceptive eccentric. When Ian drops his mask we see unexpected depths, particularly in the relationship with his brother. One moment he is boasting defiantly: "I'm the only sinner in town; you should prize me, not thwart me. What would Mouse Bluffs do without me? Mothers would have no bad examples for their sons." The next moment he is weeping brokenly, sharing with Gavin the inarticulate distant memory of a Scottish home: "'all gone. And the road from Bridge of Weir. And the frogs and the good hot voices out of the hills. Mary and it all coming back and no good, no good.'"

Ian, then, is no callous comic grotesque; his feelings and his sensibility combine to make him both a soul-mate for David, and a guide who cannot be condescending. The two are first seen together at the beginning of the novel when Gavin sends David to the hotel with word of George V's death. David, struggling with both sorrow and fear, hears Ian expound on the meaning of the monarchy and the significance of the King's death. Ian knows there is a "great break": he recognizes that ties are severed, that a new home must be built in a new place. But he knows, too, that the King symbolizes something more general than a particular Empire: the King is "better than any of us and the best in all of us." This abstraction, the King as symbol of the best that man can be, is very meaningful to David (though Blondal does not suggest that he recognizes the significance at the time) and it is the hunger for this ideal that echoes through the novel as the allusions to the King's death are multiplied.

Ian's complexity is also suggested by the extent to which his impassioned babble contains in concentrated form the most memorable features of Blondal's style and approach: the ripples of allusion and symbol, the reaction against the precision of psychological theory, and the note of irreverent exuberance. It is fitting, moreover, that Ian, determined to penetrate the meaning of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, should find that "It's like a mystery story, but the mystery is inside the reader waiting to be unraveled." For *A Candle to Light the Sun* has both poetry and wasteland in it.

I BELIEVE, THEN, THAT Blondal's main line of sympathy runs through Ian to David. Ian sees how similar he and David are, especially in their relationship to Gavin. He tells David of his own leaving for university: "That older brother was God and the Holy Ghost and Our Lord. Cut off your arm! The younger one would have cut away obligingly." Ian is trying to warn David

not to sacrifice his own life and individuality to a pursuit of Gavin's/God's approval. Then he turns on himself, apologizing with one of his memorable enigmatic phrases. " 'It's the morbidity, d'you see, the morbidity of the unloved.' " But the comment is more self-mocking than self-pitying, as if he is suggesting a more universal gloom, as if he is cautioning David against expecting love from Gavin. David, sensing the kinship, confides to Ian his darkest secret, his complicity in the murder of Elsie Yeates's baby. And Ian — quite naturally and without pretence it seems to me — grants an absolution and points the way to the future:

'I did many murders once myself. Deliberately. You don't stop thinking of them but neither do you talk of them and perpetuate the murder. I absolve you, you need no other absolution. Some day you'll absolve yourself, alone in the clear noon of reason.'

David grows still closer to Ian after Ian's death. Ian leaves a letter with Waterman in which, irreverent in his very seriousness, he hopes that David has become a man and warns him never the talk to Darcy about the night of murder. When David eventually follows Ian's advice and shares his guilt with Basil Waterman, it is not a sign of desperation, but a measure of his mastery of the situation. He leads the conversation, summing up along the way his own view (he now has his own view, and is able to give voice to it) of Ian's influence:

'He taught me to read good things and to distinguish between the King and God, and that the highest calling was not killing wogs for the Empire and that no one would beat the ass off me if I dared to think otherwise. But I was never impressed by his — histrionics?'

So Darcy's joke at Ian's death ("*Holy Ghost gone*") now becomes David's recognition: "No one has knowledge but Wiseman Waterman and Ian-Ghost. And my brother and I." And Blondal's central analogy, that the search for a father is a search for a King and for a heavenly Kingdom, takes yet another turn. Ian, who once saw Gavin as the Trinity, is now himself seen as the Holy Ghost. Ian has shown David the way to distinguish God and King, to seeing the difference between the material and the spiritual, to knowing that Gavin may be father, even a King, but certainly no god. David discovers, prompted by Darcy's taunting, that Ian is his best source of knowledge, his spiritual guide, and that Ian's search for the "best in all of us," as well as Ian's passion for writing, is his also.

As David learns something of Ian's ability to detach himself from his own experience (also a necessity for the writer) he grows in understanding of his own actions and values. As first Ian, and then Darcy, dies, David is stripped, in a sense, of possible fathers. From each he takes what he can, and the novel moves by combining several limited personalities in one complex maturity, and new man. The break with Gavin is, of course, the most difficult, even though, as I have described it, the progress of the whole novel is a deepening and extending of a realization that comes in the opening scene. The break with Gavin is more fundamental, since

Blondal presents it as the universal separation of son from father. "When it was done," to repeat David's conclusion in Blondal's preliminary notes, "we were more like him, incapable of loving." Thus do the inverted relationships of the characters bring their own insights. The dichotomies, the opposing characters, may lead to a twin understanding: that reaching for an opposite leaves one isolated in his own individuality, and that within that individuality lies a version of the other thing which must be dealt with. Hence the multiplying ironies of the novel's resolution: David begins fathering the child-like Gavin; Gavin, crippled, is trundled about in Ian's wheelchair; David, for a brief time, takes to furious drinking reminiscent of Ian's escape. David is finally able to write about Darcy, in elusive metaphors which would have delighted Ian. He wonders "Had the double man, four-armed, four-legged beast, dissolved once for all in the hemp-woman's embrace? Perhaps this was noon, the only noon a man could know, the clear simple awareness that the beast lived still." His questioning contains the awareness that the double man has not dissolved but has been absorbed, has become David Newman.

David avoids drink by repairing the suspension bridge, an act which Blondal presents symbolically as gradual "victory over the rot." The bridge is between David's present and his past, or, to use Lilja's metaphor, he is driving the wrong way down a one-way street. On this journey, "the quietest way forward I know," he meets Lilja again, and their old love flares up for a moment before they must admit that it can be no more. Against the backdrop of Mouse Bluffs' 75th anniversary celebration of its own past, the last stages of David's awakening take place. Roselee Rushforth returns to Mouse Bluffs and she and David acknowledge their long-unspeken love. So David makes a significant integration of past and present: he vows to marry Darcy's sister, and Gavin's now-so-designated "heir." "She was a Ross, on the line of Gavin or even Ian," as her father had once concluded. Having won Roselee, David tries a last time to ask for the most important part of the Ross estate, Gavin's love, but the words won't form and he can only say, "Do you remember the night the old King died?"

From Gavin's opening announcement, "The King is dead," to David's final query, "Do you remember the night the old King died?" is a movement from the end of a political era to the beginning of a personal commitment. Gavin dies watching the street-dancing, which last occurred in Mouse Bluffs when he married Christine; ironically, as the town celebrates its past, the end of the Rashleigh dynasty is confirmed. Yet David inherits a new life. After Gavin's death he discovers a final note, block letters spelling "*What King?*" If the note is a last reminder of Gavin's abrasiveness, it also marks, surely, his recognition that there are many kings. And the richness of the novel implies that the note is saying much more: that all is forgotten, perhaps; or that David must acknowledge no kings; or that Gavin's own reign is over; or, more simply, that he does remember his

first meeting with David most vividly and is reaching out for the boy in his query, just as David had used a question to hide his yearning. Repeatedly David asks himself the same question, and makes this answer:

I loved you, good man, loved your good imperfections all my life. *It's the morbidity, d'you see, the morbidity of the unloved.* From a long way off he heard Ian's voice, saw Ian's sick hands over the blanket, knew now, acknowledged, that he too had not been loved. Long after a son's needs were past, his life had been spent upon winning, earning a father's love. Now, having failed, he had no father, only his own identity.

The reflection seems an acknowledgement that there is yet one other king, David himself. As Lilja had once told him: " 'David, I always envied you your name. Your royal name.' " The passage on identity, or this last allusion, might seem in isolation too neat and too earnest. But the many versions of kingship, the weakness of Ian, the evil of Darcy, the reverberating questions of guilt and love, save the conclusion from insufferable certainty. David's search is finished and he is freed, but Blondal deliberately turns away from glib optimism to a final paradox more fitting for a man who has grown by embracing opposites: David is "freed . . . to loss."

NOTES

- ¹ McClelland & Stewart's contract with Blondal's Estate stipulates that a sum of \$500.00 is to be deducted from royalties as "compensation for expenditures made by the Publisher in preparing the manuscript for the press."
- ² The Patricia Blondal Papers have recently been donated to the Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library, by Stephanie and John Blondal, the author's children. Quotations from the papers are used with their generous permission. Many of Patricia Blondal's letters and manuscripts remain unlocated; I would be grateful for any information regarding such material.
- ³ The novel was written before *A Candle to Light the Sun*, and serialized as "Strangers to Love" in *Chatelaine*, 32, nos. 9-11 (September-November 1959).
- ⁴ Patricia Blondal, *A Candle to Light the Sun* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), p. 14. (The New Canadian Library Edition, 1976, has the same pagination.)
- ⁵ The bizarre and mysterious side of crime is a favourite Blondal subject. There is a strange connection in *From Heaven With A Shout* between Monica's shooting Alex in the leg, and Alex's mysterious suicide. An unpublished non-fictional novel, "Good Friday," is based on the murder trial of a Winnipeg taxi-driver.
- ⁶ David's first loves among women, Lilja Frank and Pamela Green, are also seen as eternal children. And both, of course, are left behind as David comes to maturity. As he tells Lilja, in another version of the twin misunderstanding, " 'You did the right thing thinking it was the wrong thing, most of us reverse the process.' "