ORDEAL BY FIRE

The Genesis of MacLennan's The Precipice

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In 1946, on a trip with his wife, Dorothy Duncan, to New York, Hugh MacLennan saw the American Ballet Theatre's new production, *Pillar of Fire*. The occasion was to focus the themes he was considering for his third novel, *The Precipice* (1948). This ballet, in its first performance on April 8, 1942, had marked the emergence of an erotic and modern mode of ballet. Anthony Tudor, choreographer and male lead, and Nora Kaye, the prima ballerina, soared into popularity to an ovation of twenty-six curtain calls. Enthusiasm for *Pillar of Fire*, especially for Nora Kaye in her role as Hagar, continued well beyond the year during which MacLennan saw it.

Before seeing the ballet, MacLennan had been considering two general notions for his next novel.[1] On the suggestion of his friend, Blair Fraser, he had decided to set the novel in "darkest Ontario" — not Toronto, but those small towns which still embodied the Canadian puritan heritage. This puritan heritage had already gone sour in the United States and promised to do the same in Canada — a sociological situation which, Fraser surmised, might prove an interesting subject. This third novel, then, would provide a literary map of yet another Canadian region. Receptive to Fraser's suggestions, MacLennan had spent a week or so in the Ontario lakeshore towns of Coburg, Belleville and Port Hope, chatting with local people, and getting a feel for the countryside. At Port Hope he saw the huge sanitary company there and discovered that it had recently been sold to an American company, with the result that mass-produced facilities of inferior quality were being made. The second idea MacLennan was working on was that of having his central character a woman. This he considered a challenge — how to present convincingly the female point of view.

Seeing *Pillar of Fire* in 1946 produced in MacLennan "an immediate, strong creative feeling." Here, suddenly and by accident, was the "form" which could integrate the general themes uppermost in his mind. As Dorothy Duncan remarked after the ballet, "You have the plot for your novel right there." MacLennan returned to see this "remarkable ballet" a second time; his first impression was confirmed.

Pillar of Fire was inspired primarily by Arnold Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), but also by the sequence of poems, *Weib und Welt* (Woman and the World), which gave rise to this music.[2] These poems by the German romantic, Richard Dehmel, describe a situation between two lovers in which the woman confesses that she has conceived a child by a casual relationship. This experience has, she claims, taught her that she loves him rather than the sensual man she has encountered. As they walk through the moonlit woods, the man forgives her, accepts her and maintains that their love is so great that it will transfigure this situation, just as the moon transfigures the night.

Anthony Tudor in *Pillar of Fire*, as George Balanchine describes it in his *New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, "takes this story and presents it dramatically, introducing additional characters, giving us a picture of the community in which such an event can take place, motivating the characters as completely as possible."[3] In keeping with the Biblical title[4] (suggestive of a night transformed, not by moonlight and love, but by divine revelation), Tudor names his heroine "Hagar." This name recalls the Egyptian bondswoman of Abraham who is sent by Sarah, his wife, to conceive a child by Abraham; having done so, she is outcast, wandering in the desert until God gives her direction. The name Hagar suggested to Tudor the original "lost woman."[5]

Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* has two sisters — the "Eldest Sister" and the "Youngest Sister." The "Eldest Sister" is a rigid church-going spinster who dominates the household; the "Youngest Sister" is a pretty, insubstantial flirt. The two men who correspond to the true lover and the sensual lover in *Weib und Welt* appear in the ballet as the "Friend" and the "Young Man From The House Opposite."[6] The community in which Tudor sets these characters is Victorian, in keeping with the date of *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) and puritanical, in order to set up a moral framework in which Dehmel's tale might most fully express dramatic conflict.

In Tudor's adaptation of the story, the plainly dressed Hagar, fearing that it is her fate to become a spinster like the "Eldest Sister," hopes for the attention of the visiting "Friend." He, instead, is attracted to the pretty, blond "Youngest Sister" with whom he dances offstage. In a desperate attempt to resist her apparent fate, Hagar responds to the bold "Young Man From The House Opposite," dances a wild *pas de deux* with him and enters with him the house opposite where she has seen couples meeting and embracing. She emerges from the house into a world where her act will inevitably be seen as sin. The "Eldest Sister," in a violent scene, reprimands her, filling her with guilt. The whole community shuns her, even the "Young Man From The House Opposite." The "Friend" returns, disappointed in the superficiality of the "Youngest Sister," and offers Hagar his enduring love. The ballet closes with the two lovers walking into the dark moonlit forest where, presumably, the confession and forgiveness of Dehmel's story will occur.

In THE PRECIPICE, MacLennan bases his main character, Lucy Cameron, on Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*. Like Hagar, she has an elder sister, Jane, who is an inflexible spinster, and a younger sister, Nina, who is a superficial flirt. Jane, aged thirty-seven, takes after her calvinist father, John Knox Cameron:

> Her nose and chin were somewhat pointed, her mouth small and straight. Her features were sharp enough to give her an air of decision, though they were not gaunt. Her dark hair, severely drawn back, formed a widow's peak at the top of her forehead. It was a heart-shaped face, and a vain woman would have made much of it. But nothing about Jane invited admiration; everything about her demanded respect.[7]

Her father's Scottish harshness has turned sour whatever joy in life may have been latent in her, feelings that are revealed only when she plays the *Appassionata* on the piano; "a deep indignant passion of which Jane herself was obviously unaware." Jane is a music teacher, not because she finds music beautiful but because it is "useful." This puritan notion of usefulness also informs her gardening. No flowers for her, only vegetables. Typically divorced from nature, Jane stays indoors reading books as dry and lifeless as possible; for her, "sex was . . . near to the root of all evil." Like her father, she can "create at will an atmosphere in which everyone around her felt guilty." Sternly running the household as her father did before her, Jane, Lucy thinks to herself, "was like their collective conscience. She was the only one of them who followed in thought and in life, all the principles of the religion and morality which the entire Protestant part of the country professed to honour."

Nineteen-year-old Nina, like the "Youngest Sister" in the ballet, marks a contrast to Jane:

> She was a girl with blue eyes, golden curls, snub nose, a wide, laughing mouth, plump bare arms coloured like honey in the sun, and a short neat body that was never still.

In keeping with his placing of the novel between the years 1938-1945, MacLennan indicated that Nina has learned her craft from Hollywood actresses. Knowing herself to be "the prettiest girl in town," Nina indulges herself in clothes and parties as much as she can in the prudent Cameron household. If Jane is their "collective conscience," fun-loving Nina is their collective "id."[8]

Between these two extremes, Lucy is as uncomfortable as Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*. At twenty-seven spinsterhood closes in; Nina bluntly says to Jane, "Nobody would ever want to marry Lucy." Or as Bruce Fraser, her friend next door, puts it, "any pleasures Lucy Cameron would ever have would be shy ones." Even Lucy anticipates with pain "facing a blank wall for the rest of [her] life with a quiet and decent dignity." But the process which has almost completely repressed Jane's emotions has not been quite so effective with Lucy. Jane has an "iron will" and

flawless self-control; for Lucy there is still a lapse between response and repression. When Bruce Fraser calls across the hedge to her, for example, "quick pleasure flashed into her face as she saw him and then was immediately checked." Like Hagar with her clenched fists and palpable tension (and directly recalling Nora Kaye's performance),

> Lucy moved with the quiet grace of a shy animal, yet in all her movements there was an air of conscious control, as though she hoped whatever she did would escape notice. This same characteristic was even more marked in her face. It was an intelligent face ... essentially a proud face. Her chin and the upper part of her head could have modelled a cameo, clear-cut and distant. But in the eyes and mouth unknown qualities brooded. Her large eyes were brown and widely spaced, with curving brows. Her lips were soft and warm and sensuous. These features together with her air of dignified solitude, combined to give her the prevailing expression of a woman who has never been recognized by others for what she knows herself to be.

Thinking herself plain, Lucy disregards her appearance, pulling back her abundant dark hair into a severe style.

Three things in Lucy, however, help to militate against a future like Jane's: her intelligence, her love of beauty and her identification with nature. Lucy's intelligence is instrumental in freeing her from the past. In his treatment of the Cameron family, MacLennan works with the well-known Biblical theme that the sins of the fathers are visited on succeeding generations. Just as John Knox Cameron has been formed by "the merciless religion which her Father's aunts had inflicted upon them," so in turn, Jane and Lucy carry the burden of puritanism handed down by their father. "My father," Lucy realizes, "*was* queer, but it was such a Scotch kind of queerness we never noticed it till after he was dead. Jane doesn't realize it even now." Lucy does realize it — thanks to her intelligence and a three-year illness in her mid-teens which afforded her time to contemplate. Ultimately, Lucy can see what Jane cannot:

> The images of her father's aunts returned, and with them, a rush of indignation and a rise of self-assertive confidence. It was absurd that these two women she had never seen, so ignorant they believed even the misprints in the Bible were sacred, should bind their power into the third generation. Knowledge had power too. She knew what they had done to her father and what her father had done to her. Knowledge was the only power in the world which could undo the chain of evil men left behind them.

"Yes," she asserts, "there was knowledge. It exorcised the past from the present. Now this whole thing was throbbing with present life; the only thing of meaning and merit." Lucy can free herself from the past through intelligent perception.

Jane is immune to beauty. Not so Lucy who appreciates with a reverence. Recalling some romantic lines of poetry from William Strode's "In Praise of Music," Lucy responds deeply:

> One thing had stood by her, and she had learned how to foster it. She had learned how to discover beauty when no one else was near.... It was the kind of beauty ... which exists almost without knowledge of good and evil, probably the only kind possible in a puritan town.

Particularly from her garden and the beauty of flowers does she derive pure joy.

Moreover, Lucy feels herself a part of nature; from this identification she derives strength. Just as Jane is seen typically in the house, as is the "Eldest Sister" in *Pillar of Fire*, Lucy most often appears outdoors, especially in her garden. This garden, with all its Biblical and secular associations, recalls man's religious and natural roots. Certainly Dehmel had made much of this theme in *Weib und Welt*, where the lover takes most of his arguments from nature. Similarly, *Pillar of Fire* vindicates a natural world which is at odds with the civilized community which rejects "natural" behaviour. To reinforce this theme, MacLennan sets Lucy in the natural world, describing her as a "shy animal" and making her rejection of the town's values in favour of the natural world:

> Lucy went alone into the garden to inspect her flowers before it got too dark to see them. In full sunshine the garden was unchangingly brilliant, but in the morning and evening the flowers were like an assembly of living things, resting in the evening, in the morning like children eager to shout how fresh they were after the night and how much they had grown. Now the hyperion lilies had almost closed, but in the gathering darkness the nicotianas had opened and were filling the air with fragrance. A sickle moon was in the sky, half hidden by the upper branches of a maple tree. One pale star was visible beside it.

In a conversation with Stephen, Lucy confesses,

> "well, to me just being — just existing — would be a full life, if — "
> "If what?"
> "If I felt I were making the most of all that lay around me. If I felt free to be myself — as natural as one of those flowers."

MacLennan thus prepares the way for Lucy's sexual awakening through her identification with "nature"; in doing so, she harks back to both Dehmel's *Weib und Welt* and *Pillar of Fire*.

The transformation of Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* is transposed directly into *The Precipice*. Lucy's transformation from probable spinster to full-awakened womanhood is essentially the same as Hagar's. Flanked on the one hand by the "Eldest Sister" who represents the rejection of physical love, and on the other hand by the "Youngest Sister" who represents the superficiality of sensual love, both Hagar and Lucy discover through painful experience the fullness of a love that embraces both physical passion and tenderness. For each there is a rite of passage from innocence, through experience, to fulfillment. MacLennan relates this transfiguration in Lucy directly to the laws of nature. In her garden, early in the novel, Lucy speculates:

> Now all the thoughtless world was busy fulfilling innumerable life cycles, most of them with such savage cruelty that Jane would have been appalled if she understood what they meant. Lucy watched the lilies eager toward the sun, the nicotianas sturdy in the heat like white-faced women with closed eyes, the phlox crowding each other in their struggle to live. It was odd that gardening was supposed to be the gentle occupation. Any garden was an arena of frantic strife.

The view of life here is distinctly Darwinian; Lucy plunges into life, bidding for survival itself, compelled by natural urges more powerful than any individual.

As she herself concludes later,

> there is nothing unique in the fact that the least probable men and women attach themselves to one another and that time and place are more selective than we ourselves know how to be. People can join as much by random chance as the grains of pollen which meet in the air.

And her actual sexual awakening connects her with a prehistoric past: "Out of the ecstasy grew and became visible, a jet of unbelievable flame flaring out of primeval darkness." A revelation, a pillar of fire.[9] Lucy, like the plants she adores, never ceases to grow. Despite suffering, "she had refused nothing. She had lived . . . Now at least she was a whole woman."

Instrumental in Lucy's transformation are the two men in her life: Bruce Fraser and Stephen Lassiter. In both *Weib und Welt* and *Pillar of Fire* there are two men. In the former, there is the sensual lover by whom the woman has conceived a child, and the true lover who accepts her, despite her condition; in the latter, there is the sensual lover, the "Young Man From The House Opposite," and the true lover, the "Friend." In both works, the woman, desperate for the love of the true lover, turns to a sensual lover, then is outcast, to be accepted finally by the true lover. In *The Precipice*, however, the "Friend," Bruce Fraser, is also the "Young Man From The House Opposite." The sensual lover is Stephen Lassiter, the American efficiency expert who has been deserted by his wife.

The roles played by these two men are, consequently, somewhat different from those of the two men in *Pillar of Fire*. Like the "Friend" in the ballet, Bruce, at first, cannot see Lucy as she is:

> Bruce was too young, he was too engrossed in his own problems — in trying to understand the surfaces of so many different things — to be able to feel what lay within her, or even to know it was there. Like most of the men she had met, he looked for nothing in a woman's mind but some reflection of his own.

But there is no evidence in *The Precipice* that Lucy loves him as Hagar loves the "Friend" in *Pillar of Fire*. She is attracted instead to Stephen, the sensual man, who recognizes and answers her physical needs. MacLennan emphasizes Stephen's physicality by making him a young, athletic man; Lucy first sees him playing tennis:

> Lassiter was well over six feet in height, but his chest and shoulders were so powerful he seemed large rather than tall. In spite of his muscular development he was not still; he moved on the court with the feline precision of a natural tennis player.

This "animal vitality" links Stephen with the natural world of which Lucy is so much a part. He and Lucy are initially attracted to each other and ultimately "bonded" by natural instinct: "He had invaded her solitude and taught her finally that she was passionate, probably more passionate than the average woman." In marked contrast to Stephen, the more intellectual Bruce links Lucy's garden "with a political and philosophical idea."

Although Lucy does not consummate her relationship with Stephen, as Hagar does with the "Young Man From The House Opposite," she undergoes the same brutal criticism from society in general, and her elder sister in particular, that Hagar does in the ballet. In a scene taken directly from *Pillar of Fire*, Jane berates Lucy: "if they [the people of Grenville] said you'd been committing adultery with this sordid American — and you may be sure that's exactly what they *would* say if the talk started . . . do you think you'd be able to tell me *then* you weren't ashamed?"

Outcast like the woman in *Weib und Welt*, like Hagar in *Pillar of Fire* and like the Biblical Hagar before her, Lucy elopes with Stephen to New York. Only after she is married does Bruce perceive her beauty:

> he had been a fool not to have seen Lucy with different eyes all the years she had lived in Grenville. It was almost shameful to have come to New York and here see her with her husband and child before discovering that she was a beautiful woman.

This irony does not resolve into a happy ending for Bruce, as it does for the "Friend" in *Pillar of Fire*. Even when Lucy's marriage to Stephen disintegrates under the pressure of his "unnatural" work patterns and Lucy returns to Grenville with her children, she does not give herself to Bruce. Ironically she comes to see that she and Bruce have needed exactly the same thing, someone to see beneath the surface and recognize the true self: "She knew tonight, clearly for the first time, in what she had failed him. She had not sufficiently understood the tensions, she had given him no adequate releases for them." Her decision to return to Stephen leaves Bruce feeling as if he is on the edge of a precipice. Thus, although MacLennan altered in several significant ways the plot of *Pillar of Fire*, and the roles of the two men who act as catalysts in Lucy's transformation, his novel is clearly drawn in large part from the ballet.

Some settings in *The Precipice* can also be traced to *Pillar of Fire*. The set for the ballet in the 1946 production showed two houses facing each other across the stage; one belonging to the three sisters, the other belonging to the "Young Man From The House Opposite." Behind these is a moonlit forest as backdrop.[10]

In *The Precipice*, the houses are next door, affording Bruce a view of the Cameron garden. The "high, narrow house . . . embellished with Victorian scrolls"[11] from the ballet is transposed into a house in Grenville that MacLennan uses to foreshadow Lucy's rebellion against her Calvinist past; having "stripped off the imposed ugliness" of the harsh brown paint her father had used, Lucy has painted it white with a turquoise door and surrounded it with flower beds.[12] Though he based Grenville on three Ontario towns, MacLennan draws in more specific detail "the picture of a community in which such an event can take place"[13] from *Pillar of Fire*. Like the community there, Grenville has a small-town outlook, the result of puritan conditioning:

> Here was lodged the hard core of Canadian matter-of-factness on which men of imagination had been breaking themselves for years. Grenville was sound, it was dull, it was loyal, it was competent — and oh, God, it was so Canadian! . . . Until the Grenvilles of Canada were debunked from top to bottom, Bruce decided, there would be no fun and no future for anyone in the country.

The town is "prematurely old," largely composed of women and children preoccupied with respectability. Even the fields around it, Stephen observes, "look respectable." It is, Lucy sums up, "a town where people never divorced, where passion was either orderly and blessed by clergy, or else concealed and crushed out of existence." The town, in other words, is diametrically opposed to nature, imposing an overlay of respectability which hides the great passions and stultifies imagination. Lucy describes the force of this community as "closing in around her, freezing her into the mold of perpetual childhood."

Finally, vestiges of the ballet surface from time to time in MacLennan's descriptions of the gestures of the three sisters. Jane is always "erect" or "brisk"; Nina "gambols" and is "never still." Lucy's movements develop, like those of Hagar in the ballet, from tense constraint, through "quiet grace" to "suppleness." On one occasion, her inward response to Stephen's caresses could stand as a description of part of *Pillar of Fire* against the moonlit backdrop:

> She turned from him and moved inland. In this haunted, luminous mist the trees were strange. They were cool and ghostly like fungoid outgrowths of the darkness itself, like the colourless, scentless, noiseless landscape of a dark dream through which once she had wandered lost and alien, and then had awakened.

Indeed, the turning point in Lucy's transformation occurs at a dance to which Stephen takes her, after which she "never felt herself a spectator again." This scene is strongly reminiscent of that section of *Pillar of Fire* in which Hagar dances with the "Young Man From The House Opposite" before they enter the house and her sexual initiation takes place. During this part of *Pillar of Fire*, the "Young Sister" has danced off-stage with the "Friend," a situation roughly paralleled in *The Precipice*, where Nina's partner at the dance is Bruce.

BUT WHILE MACLENNAN uses directly several aspects of *Pillar of Fire*, he changes others significantly in his novel. The basic framework of the "Cinderella" theme[14] forms the backbone of the novel. Lucy's transformation from repressed girl to fulfilled woman is in essence and detail like that of Hagar. Her rite of passage is unchanged in its context of the three sisters. Any reader of the novel will recognize at once, however, that MacLennan does not let this framework stand on its own. He fleshes it out with themes, characters and concerns which overwhelm Lucy's story. Indeed, the novel's title *The Precipice* testifies to the centrality of the theme suggested by the Port Hope Sanitary Company — that of the puritanical drive for material success which motivates the American, Stephen Lassiter. Heavy with moral, philosophical and social comment, they swamp the more delicate theme of Lucy's rebirth which constituted the whole concern of *Pillar of Fire*.

MacLennan also accounts in great detail for the personalities, actions and motives of his characters. The burden of puritanism and its effects are traced back two generations, both for Lucy and her sisters and for Stephen Lassiter. Nina's flirtation is attributed to her interest in films; Stephen's attraction to Lucy is explained by noting her resemblance to his mother; even Grenville's attitudes are traced back to early Loyalist times. The novel is, consequently, firmly placed in small-town Ontario during the Second World War. This more factual representation of the story detracts from the mystery of *Pillar of Fire*, a mystery even more evident in *Weib und Welt* where the characters are unnamed and the timeless omnipresent natural world broods over them. On the other hand, this specific setting affords MacLennan the opportunity to speculate on such topics as the advertising world, Canadian nationalism, and puritanism in Canada and the United States — topics which may interest the more historically-minded reader.

While some of the settings in *The Precipice* are taken directly from the ballet, many are added by MacLennan. The set for *Pillar of Fire*, with its Victorian houses, must have suggested small-town Ontario to MacLennan, just as the Victorian morality of the community suggested Canadian puritanism. These settings, and those scenes in the woods, fields and beach near Grenville are strongly reminiscent of the ballet. MacLennan adds to these the scenes in New York and Princeton, taken from his direct personal experience. That these scenes seem of a jarringly different order than the earlier Grenville scenes is, consequently, not surprising. Lucy in New York is not only transformed from her earlier self, she also inhabits a different level of reality.

The theme of opposition between nature and society is essentially unchanged from *Weib und Welt* through *Pillar of Fire* to *The Precipice*. In all three, natural law romantically triumphs over civil law, and beauty is vindicated. Here, too, MacLennan renders the theme more specific. His view of nature has Darwinian

overtones, relating Lucy's struggle both to survival against odds (many men from Grenville being away at war), and to natural selection (in her urge to have children by the strongest male). Civil law is specifically defined as the moral codes of Scotch puritanism. In the debate between natural and civil law, MacLennan introduces as his spokesman a defrocked priest named Matt McCunn, who lives by anti-puritan values, symbolically outside the town.

The most pronounced difference between *Pillar of Fire* and *The Precipice* is the difference in the roles played by the two men. MacLennan portrays Lucy as faithful to one man. It is the sensual lover, not the friend, who commands her love throughout. Furthermore, unlike both Hagar and the woman in *Weib und Welt*, Lucy does not conceive a child out of wedlock. She discovers her full sexual nature gradually through marriage with Stephen, and MacLennan terms her a "whole woman" only after she has had children. This is significantly different from the more sensational sequence of events in *Pillar of Fire* and *Weib und Welt* where the woman, having conceived a child by a lover, returns to the deeper relationship with a friend.[15] This change alters the plot. Gone is much of the tension between Lucy and Nina, although Nina seems to be drawing Bruce away from Lucy, not only in the early part of the novel, but also later when Lucy leaves Stephen to return to Grenville. Instead, MacLennan has Nina compete briefly for Stephen's attention; though, again, it is never a serious competition. Nina, in fact, in one scene supports Lucy's bid to find love against Jane's criticism, a scene for which there is no precedent in the ballet. This dilution of the competitiveness between Lucy and Nina dulls the keen edge of the story and is inconsistent with the Darwinian view of nature propounded in the novel. By having Lucy remain loyal to Stephen, MacLennan seems to put forward a view that sexual intimacy and children bond a couple "naturally," a view consistent with his treatment of marriage in other novels.

Finally, the depiction of Bruce Fraser lends a completely new dimension to the original story. In *Pillar of Fire*, both men succeed: the "Young Man From The House Opposite" enjoys Hagar when he desires her; the "Friend" returns to have her permanently. A fine ironic balance is achieved in the ballet when the "Youngest Sister" wanders off with the "Young Man From The House Opposite" at the ballet's close. Bruce, in contrast to this, fails. He never cares for Nina and, falling in love with Lucy only after her marriage, he waits hopelessly in the wings. Even when it appears he may yet have her once she has left her husband, she decides to return to Stephen. Bruce's story runs parallel to Lucy's. Her true self is sought out and nurtured by Stephen; Bruce is not lucky enough to meet anyone to do the same for him. MacLennan seems to have identified with the role of Hagar in *Pillar of Fire*, as well as observing it as a feminine phenomenon. Indeed, Bruce's role — that of an "unreleased Hagar" — resembles that of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*. Like Nick, Bruce is the observer who merely looks on and records the lines

of those more passionate than himself. MacLennan was later to define the quality Bruce never develops as "spirit."

Somehow the story of *The Precipice*, though ostensibly Lucy's (and Stephen's) is really Bruce Fraser's. Had MacLennan allowed Bruce to narrate the tale, as Nick Carraway did in *The Great Gatsby* and George Stewart was later to do in *The Watch That Ends The Night*, the novel would have been a stronger and more ironic one. Bruce is, then, a prototype for George Stewart. In *The Watch That Ends The Night*, MacLennan's interest was to focus more clearly on the "Everyman" theme, which first appears with Bruce in *The Precipice*.[16] It must have been Hagar's anguished isolation at the beginning of *Pillar of Fire* which most struck MacLennan as emblematic of the human condition. Through *Pillar of Fire* and the raw working out of its themes in *The Precipice*, MacLennan was to strike the motherlode which was not to be fully mined until *The Watch That Ends The Night*.

NOTES

[1] Interviews with Hugh MacLennan, January 6, 1976 and September 29, 1976.

[2] MacLennan had studied at Oxford some poems from *Weib und Welt* in the *Oxford Book of German Verse*.

[3] George Balanchine, *New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, ed. Frances Mason (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 307.

[4] God is said to appear "by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them (the Israelites) the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (Exodus: 13,xxi).

[5] Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.

[6] MacLennan saw the following cast in these roles: Hagar — Nora Kaye; The Friend — Anthony Tudor; Eldest Sister — Lucie Chase; Youngest Sister — Janet Reed; Young Man From The House Opposite — Hugh Laing.

[7] This description of Jane is reminiscent of Lucia Chase in her role of "Eldest Sister" in *Pillar of Fire*. Anthony Tudor described Miss Chase as "pure granite" (Interview, September 6, 1976).

[8] MacLennan seems deliberately to suggest this Freudian interpretation by calling Nina's dog "Pan." Just as Jane represents the "super-ego" Nina represents the "id," or hedonistic nature.

[9] Anthony Tudor was well aware of the phallic implications of this title, an implication hinted at here by MacLennan.

[10] The costumes and set of *Pillar of Fire* remain the same from performance to performance. Always Victorian in period because Schönberg's music was composed in 1900, only the slightest variations in set (silver birches in the forest for the Norwegian performance, for example) have given local colour to different performances. (In interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[11] Balanchine, p. 307.

[12] Something Hagar would never have been allowed to do by her "Eldest Sister." (Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[13] Balanchine, p. 307.

[14] The term "Cinderella theme" is used here, as it is by MacLennan in his description

of the novel, in the general sense of the ancient "three sisters" story. Anthony Tudor disclaims any connection between the Cinderella story and *Pillar of Fire* and has taken great pains in his directing of the ballet to prevent any hint of Cinderella from appearing in the interpretation of Hagar. (Interview with Anthony Tudor, September 6, 1976.)

[15] Anthony Tudor intended his Hagar to have conceived a child in her brief encounter with the "Young Man From The House Opposite." (Interview, September 6, 1976.)

[16] At the beginning of Section 5 of *The Precipice*, MacLennan speculates: "We reach a point where we can physically go no farther, but our thoughts leap and then for a few moments we are on our way to becoming Everyman."

DREAM FOR AN ASTHMATIC LOVER

Susan Leslie

Lying in the moonlight
Lost lost
You fall
Through sheets and fingers
Down flooded halls
Past vacant beach
to the smooth enveloping sea

Water, you said
I dream of water
Nightly I drown
I am nightly devolving
This unseen fall
Is easier
Than the daily struggle for breath
I slip with the tide
Pulling back to the time
When I began
When I was simple
An urgent arrangement of flesh
This body swimming surviving
Before words before breath