

MOVEMENT AND VISION

IN *The Sacrifice*

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THOUGH WIDELY ACCLAIMED ever since its reception of the Governor-General's Award for Fiction two decades ago, Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* has been subjected to relatively little critical analysis. Beneath the salient theme of the Wandering Jew, the nature of the sacrifices, and the Old Testament names lies a complex tension between thought and action, or more specifically, between vision and movement, which incorporates mountain, plant, and animal symbolism.

The dichotomy between motion and perception appears in the opening sentence: "The train was beginning to slow down again, and Abraham noticed lights in the distance." The "familiar pattern of throbbing aches inflicted by the wheels below" is a reminder of the circular journey to a new land from the old country where the pain of pogroms has been inflicted on Abraham's family. Fighting the rolling motion of the train, the seemingly endless journey, Abraham "tried to close his eyes and lose himself in the thick, dream-crowded stillness, but his eyelids, prickly with weariness, sprang open again." This opposition between vision and motion recurs cyclically until the final scene where Abraham's grandson, Moses, returns from Mad Mountain "in the bus that rattled its way down toward the city, with his hand shielding his swollen eyes from the possibly curious glances of the other passengers," but at the depot he lifts his hand away from his face. Isaac, the link between the generations, "shifted his bundle uncomfortably under curious stares and raised his eyes upward and ahead in imitation of the oblivious purposefulness of his father." The oxymoron indicates the conflict within the immigrant family — a conflict based upon the need to act as opposed to the imperatives of perceiving. In mind and body Abraham must build: "They would not be idle in the world. In spite of his fatigue, his legs moved more quickly to the rhythm of his thoughts."

On impulse Abraham decides to challenge this perpetual motion by settling in a city where he can "send down a few roots — those roots, pre-numbered and shallow, of the often uprooted. . . . No matter what is done to the plant, when it falls, again it will send out the tentative roots to the earth and rise upward again to the sky." In place of the promised generations numerous as stars or grains of

sand, Abraham envisions the past and future organically in the plant metaphor, the natural cycle reflecting the human. His God “could pluck the fruit of a man’s desire when it was scarcely ripe and strangle such seed” yet replace through Moses “new grapes on the vines.” Like life, death is a seed that is sown as Abraham explains to Chaim, comparing it to a weed or fungus:

We think it’s a sudden thing, and it is, in a way, in its moment of triumph, when it has drawn the last bit of life into itself and flowers into its own world of stillness. And yet, try though he may, a man can’t choke it off. I think that death is sown in all of us when we are conceived, and grows within the womb of life, feeding on it, until one day it bursts out. We say then that life is dead. But really death is born.

Wiseman repeats the image of growth (plant movement) and identical phrasing when Abraham considers how people have forgotten his son’s heroic deed: “The weeds of everyday life sprout up quickly around the rare flower and seem to choke it off and hide it away. But push aside the weeds and the flower is there.” This “choking” forms part of the larger pattern of binding and constricting actions in the novel: “The gap where Isaac had been was still there. But the ragged underbrush was beginning to creep up, to cover the wounded earth, to try to hide the spot where something fine had stood.” The passage echoes Abraham’s earlier reference to his other sons, “Death cuts a gap in life.” Thus, Abraham must destroy Laiah, that “great overripe fruit without seed.”

Like life and death, birth is analogous to the organic tree which Abraham invokes in expectation of a grandson. The presence of Isaac and Ruth “is as when a man has a cherry tree in his garden.”

There had been such a cherry tree in Abraham’s childhood. It was a pity that cherry trees didn’t grow in this climate. . . . Weren’t Ruth and Isaac like a cherry tree that a man could sit and watch in the springtime? The young buds swell and strain and puff themselves out in the sunshine. A man wakes up in the morning, and suddenly the blossoms leap into his eyes, waving their new-released petals so that the whole tree sways with happiness and freedom. So the two of them in their excitement, they too broke forth in his eyes as the cherry tree that blew its blossoms in the sun. And where the blossom is, the fruit will follow.

The extended metaphor is accompanied by the characteristic interweaving of vision and action. Though the image decays for Sarah (“Perhaps she had withered and twisted about a little, as a delicate tree will when its branches have been torn off”), the metaphor is developed in the procreation of the masculine wind and feminine flower. “Did the wind consult the weather bureau before it picked up the seeds or blew the pollen to the waiting flowers?” In Abraham’s theory the animus is visually active whereas the anima remains passive: “A man could be compared to the wind, which must riffle through life, turning over the leaves of time with a restlessness, trying to see everything at once, always seeking. A woman waits, rooted in the earth, like a tree, like a flower. Patiently she lifts her face to

receive the gift of the wind. Suddenly he sweeps across the earth and stoops to blow the dust." Abraham imagines Isaac's reaction to this speculation: "He was never content to examine merely the beauty of the flower. He had to find its very roots." Once again the deracinated must go beneath the surface to find deeper meanings.

Wind and tree, male and female are both interconnected with the characters' movement. Icarus-Isaac, after "the wind blew him forward, and he flapped his arms as though in flight, as though he were about to take off from the ground," stops against a tree, just as Abraham had stopped in front of a tree, but Abraham cannot fly: "Wings? My arms are like lead weights. I can scarcely raise them." Realizing that his mother is moribund, Isaac leaves this female, arboreal shelter and starts home, "placing one foot uncertainly in front of another." His action parallels Abraham's earlier return home "over ground that met his strides firmly, as though he had just learned to walk," and the return to Isaac's death: "Now Abraham's feet seemed to take a long time to reach the ground." After his argument with Ruth, Abraham pauses to lean his head against a fencepost as Isaac had rested against the tree. "The warm wind of a summer night, tugging persistently at Abraham's beard, pulled him gradually out of his stupor. . . . Only the wind, threading the hair on his face, whispered teasingly of life." The supernatural power of the wind appears in Abraham's simile about Isaac, "Like the wind, you would shake down the stars," and in his question about his two dead sons, "Why did I weep, then, when I saw them hanging, swaying at the will of the wind?" Though not as important as W. O. Mitchell's and Sinclair Ross' use of the symbol, Adele Wiseman's prairie wind is one of the activating forces in the novel, plunging father and son toward catastrophe.

Just as the plant imagery suggests rootedness, a sense of belonging or fulfillment, so the "mountain" is developed as a psychological as well as physical landmark involved in the dialectic of vision and movement. Isaac surveys the city with its "double-crested hill that dominated the eastern landscape. To Isaac the land seemed like a great arrested movement, petrified in time, like his memories, and the city crawled about its surface in a counterpoint of life." The double crest is possibly an allusion to the sacrificial Mount Moriah and Moses' Sinai or may be taken physically as the female breasts, for later Abraham mentions the gentle swellings of the earth's breasts while Liah fingers her low-cut housecoat. Furthermore, Mrs. Plopler's two daughters who explain the meaning of Mad Mountain to Isaac are themselves "like twin mountains." In contrast to the pulse of the city and the opulent residential "heights," the mountain is frozen, like Isaac's past, in the eastern direction. "He was aware of the hill to the east as he walked. When he didn't look at it, it seemed to crowd up closer, as though it were watching, absorbing every gesture in its static moment. He looked sideways and back toward it, and the mountain assumed its proper proportion, the sweeping double hump

carelessly mantled in splotches of autumn color.” The interplay between vision and motion is transferred to the mountain which witnesses the activities of the city’s inhabitants; the distinction between observer and the observed disappears. Ironically, through observation and static force, Mad Mountain regulates what is below it: “a strange name to call a mountain that looked so intimately on all the affairs of the city. Strange to think of the people that it had gathered up to live with itself.” But this double-breasted shield cannot always protect: “Although, with a certain fondness for their native landscape, the citizens claimed that Mad Mountain sheltered them from many a violent wind, the winds had apparently learned to circumvent this hazard and blew most persistently from the undefended north.” Masculine wind contends with feminine mountain and tree.

Whereas the wind manages to avoid the mountain, Isaac remains magnetized to its centripetal force at the end of the first chapter when he and his parents sit in the little park by the river:

Isaac watched the double-crested mountain, towering in front of them, and was aware of it even as his mind jumped from thought to thought. It was strange that, no matter where his mind went, the hill remained there, solid in his vision, every time he looked up. It was a comfort that it didn’t change, like the people he had known and the other things that had once stood rooted, it had seemed forever. It was like the sight of his father’s face when he had opened his eyes for the first time after the fever, towering over him, claiming him.

The perceiving mind wanders while the stable mountain stays permanent and is identified not with mother earth but with the father figure. The mountain accompanies Isaac through the hardships of winter. “The wind that blew down from the northeast past Mad Mountain and whipped across his shoulder blades seemed, in its way, to be trying to help him along,” and “The mountain, too, seemed to jog along with him.” Vision and movement vie during this trudge: “Things creep up from behind while you keep your eyes ahead of you, trying to edge your way safely through life. . . . As though to prove this, he turned quickly and caught the mountain in the act of creeping forward in the dusk.” The hypnotic power of the mountain also affects Ruth’s vision: “She was looking at Mad Mountain. The hill, rising above the houses across the way, had already thrown off its day cloak and was wrapping itself in evening blue. Just such a dress Ruth wanted to sew for herself. . . . Contemplating it, she lost track for a moment of what Isaac was saying.”

Moses seeks visual refuge from Dmitri’s gang in the mountain: “He made a face again, then looked past them with pretended indifference toward Mad Mountain in the distance.” And in the final chapter Moses inherits his father’s visual affinity for the lofty beacon as he prepares for his ascent to visit his grandfather. “Moses laid down the novel as in the distance a cluster of yellow lights popped open and peered from behind the Mad Mountain’s hump. Once that had

been the signal for him to close his eyes and rush quickly into his disappearing act." But he cannot escape into invisibility like the giant Iloig, for his mother places a heavy burden of responsibility on his shoulders. "It was a mountainous weight that dropped on him when she talked like that, of death and the evil of man, like an old mountain of his grandfather's stories, settling, crushing the giants of his childhood over again, breaking them into splinters that tore him apart inside." The description reverses the iconoclasm of the Biblical Abraham towards Terah's idols, while the allusion to Sisyphus is also evident. In preparation for his revelation on the mountain Moses keeps his eyes focussed on it during his meeting with Aaron: "Moses glanced back at the mountain with narrowed eyes" and "He nodded toward the mountain. . . . eyes still on the mountain." One of Moses' childhood daydreams is about a journey to the mountain where he confronts a shadowy old man; in reality, however, he overcomes through communion the "height of the mountain [that] might still be separating them." Facing eastward, intoning to the eastern air, Abraham is once again identified with Mad Mountain. Thus, Mad Mountain, a symbol of mental instability yet ironically a stabilizing force for the city at large and for Abraham's family specifically, plays its role in the movement-vision axis.

In addition to the mountain and the vegetable world, the animal world's relationship to man is of some importance in the novel, for man's progress may be measured in the substitution of animal sacrifice instead of human sacrifice. The civilized advance to animal sacrifice is an ironic contrast to the debate between Abraham and Isaac on evolution, the former denying any Darwinian notions. On the lowest level animals provide some of the lighter moments in the novel from the reduction of Mrs. Plopler as a rabbit to Polsky's pregnant cat, but a more serious dimension is usually involved. Though Abraham first alludes comically to Laiah in a bovine metaphor ("They say that a cow will stand in a green field and wave its tail and show its rear to every passing bull"), he soon regrets his pronouncement: "What could she have to do with them, with her body . . . and her hoarse, low voice with its persistent animal call? . . . It was not for him to laugh at her because he had chosen to live another life — not, especially, while he could still understand the animal call." Abraham's identification of the slaughtered cow and Laiah rests on the vision of the slaughterer and the slaughter preceding the act: "the sky crowded into my eyes piercingly, blindingly. . . . In front of me the cow was looking downward in a sort of modesty, with her eyelids covering her eyebulbs, which seemed so fine and large under their veil." Abraham also brings Nikolai a large slab of cow as a "thank offering." Abraham and Chaim depend on the butchering of animals for a living; yet they gain a great awareness of life and death in their relationship to animals. Moses, too, comprehends his grandmother's death when the landlord's shaggy dog dies.

Running counter to the primitive world of sacrifice is the evolutionary theory upheld by Isaac but rejected by his father during their debates on the subject. "Avrom had afterward had an interesting conversation with Chaim Knopp on the subject of man's relationship to animals. And together they had discovered many similarities not only between man and the apes, but between man and many other creatures of God's world." Isaac distorts social Darwinism, the "survival of the fittest," to attack the mechanistic capitalism in the factory, but the phrase also comments on the speed of escape from persecution. Descended from lower forms of life, man is compared to various animals to imply the baser instincts in the chain of being: Hymie Polsky claws Laiah with the "animal uncontrol of his strong young paws"; Abraham is like "some four-footed creature" scuttling from one coffin to another in his surrealist dream; Abraham and Ruth argue, "tearing like beasts at the raw entrails and the naked heart," while he paces "like some animal pent up" as the "long, twisted reptile sounds snaked around him." Conversely Abraham confronts the beast within himself, the darker, deeper side of life, when he prepares to sacrifice the animal before him. Thus, plants, the mountain, and animal imagery all form part of the larger motif of vision and action.

NO SOONER IS ABRAHAM SETTLED at Mrs. Plopler's than movement recommences in a variety of forms, not the least of which is the visual. Sarah is hypnotized by the Dickensian landlady's "hyperactive nose" and equally active mouth (her name is derived from the Yiddish "chatter") and eyes: "she swept her eyes over their pale adolescent son" and "Her eyes took in their portable belongings." Like her characters, Wiseman progresses experimentally in the first chapter from a brief stream-of-consciousness passage flashing back to earlier stages in the family's history as Isaac tries to fall asleep, to a temporal overlapping similar to Stephen's and Bloom's wanderings in *Ulysses*. This contrapuntal discovering begins with Abraham's rehearsal of his son's English instructions, followed by Isaac's walk to school, Sarah's ordeal with Mrs. Plopler, Abraham's return home, and finally the family outing in the park. Through movement and empirical absorption, each episode demonstrates the family's initiation into the new milieu.

In the first section Abraham repeats the English names for tree, sky, cloud, house, and mountain — each a vertical marker for the aspirations of the newcomers. He stops in front of a tree, frowning at it demanding, "and his eyes traveled up the trunk in search of a clue." Isaac's peregrinations through the autumnal city parallel his father's: "Isaac walked to school, studying signs and faces, learning the contours of the city, wondering what was to come for him." Under the questionable tutoring of Mrs. Plopler, the cicerone of the ghetto who telegraphs "significant looks" with "expressive movements of the nose, eyes, and

lips," Sarah is introduced to the city, as though the nibbling face of her landlady were pursuing her. Headed for the reunion in the final section, "Abraham paced home over ground that met his strides firmly, as though he had just learned to walk." The student-walker becomes one with what he sees as he remembers the name for "tree": "It came to him suddenly, out loud. Tree. . . . Now they looked at the furrows about his eyes as though he were the trunk of some tree."¹ By the end of the chapter father, mother, and son sit together in the park while "each one made his own silent voyage into the past and future" in contrast to Mrs. Plopler's garrulousness and their own testing of the new language. In order to establish firm roots Abraham decides to buy permanent seats at the neighbouring synagogue.

The tragic events of the past cause the mental and physical restlessness while the exigencies of Canada compel the immigrants to develop an empirical mode of perception. Pausing only to watch the snow drifts, the external counterpart of the huddled family, "Abraham paced restlessly as his past years in their fullness forced themselves over him." Sarah's distant and dream-haunted eyes "grated together when she blinked them, and ached so" as a reminder of the painful events witnessed. For once, the landlady catches one of her tenant's visual habits: "Mrs. Plopler's eyes had taken on a slightly vacant look of reverie." When memory focusses on the past, the present becomes blurred, unrecognizable: thus, Isaac, recalling his brothers, rushes into his classroom "without even seeing" his friend; thus, Abraham, recounting those years to Chaim, "leaned forward and scrutinized the ground in front of the bench, without seeing it." Abraham's chronicle of the emergence from the cellar after the pogrom shows the pain of sight: "even the light seems hostile to us. For a while we are nearly blind. It hurts us to see. Perhaps, after all, now that I think of it, the light was our friend and wanted to shield us." Past vision mixes with present haphazard motion: "For a few moments he moved about aimlessly, quickly, back and forth. . . . His arms moved as though he had no longer any control over them." This split in Abraham between thought and action foreshadows his loss of control in the murder of Laiah. "I saw all and felt nothing. . . . All I wanted was to move, to run run run. My body screamed to wear out all its movements in violence and to drop down in a heap, unfeeling, somewhere, anywhere."

Isaac's recollection of the same events immediately follows Abraham's. In the cellar's darkness fear and laughter "ran out of his eyes" until danger passes and Nikolai releases them: "Isaac strained past him to see if there were really stars left, to catch a glimpse of something — any shapeless thing in the yard to try to focus his eyes on. . . . How his eyes ached — unbearable shooting pains from the sudden light. . . . As he walked along the lane . . . he had to keep pressing his fists in his eyes to ease the hurt." When they return to Nikolai's to thank the peasants, they recognize their own samovar stolen during the attack: "His father's eyes,

now perfectly blank, moved past his own. . . . His mother was not looking at anything but sat still, her swollen eyes on nothingness. Isaac didn't want to look toward the kitchen again. But in spite of himself his eyes kept slithering toward the kitchen door." The revelation leads to the urge "to get up and go — quickly, to run if necessary," for vision results in action.

Following these two remembrances, the narrator contrasts father's and son's modes of perception: "Why couldn't he be like his father, keeping his eyes fixed somewhere, at a point, so that everything he saw had to mold itself to his perspective? Instead his eyes wavered from point to point, and nothing remained fixed under his stare but, moving, changed and revealed itself as something new. Even when he looked into himself, his own motives, the things he thought and the things he professed, he could see a thousand hidden sins." Isaac asks Ruth, "Do I really see things he doesn't see, or does he just see them in a different perspective?" and later he poses the question to Abraham: "And if we can't seem to see the same thing in the same way at different times, how can we tell what is the true way of seeing it?" Isaac's skepticism and Abraham's certainty lead to frequent debates with tragic results; the reconciliation between relativism and absolutism occurs in the third generation when Moses discovers the truth about his grandfather. Yet despite his firm belief in God, Abraham loses his faith, a loss expressed visually through flight: "I lost my mind, my eyes that could see ahead of me. . . . We fled blindly." At the same time when Isaac contracts typhus his father sees him "as though for the first time."

Slaughter or sacrifice is associated with vision or lack of it. "The abattoir was out of sight. It was part of the dark underside of life. Abraham knew something of this side." Abraham narrates the sacrifice in *Genesis* to Moses who "doesn't take his eyes" from his grandfather's face: "the glint of the knife and the glare of the sun and the terror of the moment burning into his eyes so that when the time comes many years later when he must in turn bless his sons he is too blind to see that Jacob has again stolen the march on Esau." Wiseman juxtaposes insight and blindness in Abraham's slaughter of the cow: "Not only did I see in that moment the depths of baseness in a man," but he blinks at the creature and searches the sky which "crowded into my eyes piercingly, blindingly." The same emphasis on the visual reappears when Abraham murders Laiah: "She felt a thrill of relief as his eyes moved with awareness over her. . . . She let her eyes flutter closed under the ardency of his gaze," and "Looking at her then, he was lifted out of time and place. . . . he saw her as though for the first time, and yet as though he had always seen her thus, saw her as something holy." The blinding vision of the three participants in the sacrifice correlates with the circle that encloses eternity in a split second. Abraham had also seen his son "as though for the first time" during his typhoid fever, for the old man is never too old to re-learn

the lessons transmitted mystically and empirically through the windows of his soul.

Abraham's despair after Isaac's death resembles the blinding purification of sacrificial revelation: "Again and again he broke the surface, staring about him with salt-washed eyes, caught sight of some fragment, and because it was only a fragment and the salt had burned his eyes clean saw it with a ruthless, useless clarity before he sank to the massed confusion below." The disintegration which ensues manifests itself mainly in Abraham's actions but also in his perceptual abilities: "Unnoticed, the dusk of an early spring evening had crept in through the kitchen window, muting the clear distinctions between one object and another. . . . There was a fuzzy blueness about Ruth, close though she was to him. He did not even know what he himself really looked like any more."

WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF MOSES at the structural centre of the novel followed soon by the deaths of his grandmother and his father, Wiseman presents a different mode of perception. The young boy sees his dying grandmother through a narrow crack in the door, while Mrs. Plopler's application of the glass cups becomes grotesque when seen through Moses' eyes: "the glasses with their great gobs of discolored flesh stared at him from her back." Mrs. Plopler's therapy is one of the first impressions on his *tabula rasa*; it "helped to imprint on his memory as the first indelible recollection of his childhood the strange, yellow-shadowed scene at his grandmother's bedside." At Sarah's death Moses wanders about, detached, viewing the world from the narrow vantage point of the green box. "He managed to pry the lid up and, after climbing in, crouched, peering out through a slit in the lid that he could make larger or smaller by pressing back or ducking down his head." This adjustment of focus on a narrow slice of life prepares for Moses' need for spectacles.

Also leading to the time for glasses is the scene in the park where father and son watch the movement of the clouds. "The child, stretched out in the same attitude as his father, one hand firmly clenched in the larger one, squinted up at the sky." The scene combines vision with the motion of the cloud; it also demonstrates Isaac's scientific relativism seen earlier in his discussion of evolution, and contrasts with the final scene in the novel between grandfather and grandson who join hands. Moses braves the Copernican carousel: "The whole earth was speeding quickly past the clouds. Moses felt a little dizzy. They were rushing along, and he couldn't stop. With a sudden little scream he wrenched his eyes away from the cloud and twisted his body around so that he toppled right on top of his father. 'I jumped off!' He adjusted his eyes to his father, blinking a little. His father, close and solid in his vision, laughed too." As Isaac seeks the shifting

cloud or shifting mountain, he thinks, "Strange how a child will skip from a thought into an action, afraid neither that he will lose the thought nor spoil the action." Isaac is about to experience the difference between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* when he rushes spontaneously into the synagogue, for Isaac, like his Biblical namesake, is aligned with vision and thought, whereas Ishmael "was a man of the fields, more used to action than to speech." Proud of his son, Isaac closes his eyes filled with the kaleidoscopic cloud of vision and action: "In the confusion of pre-sleep it seemed to him that his son had committed an act of courage, jumping off that way, and as he fell asleep he was pointing this out with a swell of pride to the figures that crossed his eyelids."

The scene shifts to Moses' handicapped eyesight. Like Stephen Daedalus, "Moses looked around him experimentally. The outlines of things sprang sharply into his eyes. He blinked once or twice. On his nose perched the spectacles, round, black-rimmed. They seemed to be all over his face. He swiveled his eyes round and round, trying to see the entire circuit of the rims. Experimentally he took a step or two forward to find out if the world would remain steady about him." With these new spectacles Moses must face the derision of Dmitri, his father's heroic act and consequent death, and his grandfather's crime. As a result of the murder, Moses and his mother leave the neighbourhood, carrying on the tradition of the uprooted Wandering Jew, combining wary vision and action. "They were moving. Moses helped to uproot the furniture. . . . he nevertheless moved with a feeling of furtiveness, of haste, glancing about him every time he came out on the porch with another bundle, to see whether there was any movement in the neighbouring houses." The mode of perception during the departure resembles the mode when Moses is first presented at the crack in the door and the slit in the box; "seeing but not being seen," he crouches among the furniture: "With narrowed eyes he peered after the bent figure. Slowly, deliberately, he raised his finger and took aim." Though unlike the hunters Ishmael and Esau, Moses Jacob, the musician, demonstrates a streak of action or violence; similarly his violin bow becomes a sexual object, and the key to his house is a literal symbol of his *rite de passage* like his grandfather's key to Laiah's apartment.

The two major sacrifices in the novel are connected with each other by the interaction of vision and motion. Wiseman transfers from the scene between Abraham and Laiah (whose master's "movements had traced themselves in fire"), in which they discover that they "had been scarred by much the same fires" to the scene where Isaac rushes into the burning synagogue. He notices "two enveloping arms of flame" which seem to be "in supplication," a parallel to Abraham's pain-filled arms which are purged in the slaughter of Laiah. Just as Isaac's action is preceded by the sight of the glow within the synagogue windows, so Abraham sees Laiah's shadow, the shadowy underside of his life, cross the kitchen window. Like Isaac, Abraham "was tired in every part of him": "every

separate movement seemed to require his complete concentration. He labored upward under a growing heaviness, as though he were carrying his whole life on his back up an endless flight of stairs." This Sisyphus ascends as his life's burden becomes heavier with each step. Instead of Isaac "Leaping out of the inferno, like a revelation bursting from the flaming heavens," Abraham's "thought leaped" before "his arm leaped, as though expressing its own exasperation, its own ambition, its own despair, the Word leaped too, illuminating her living face." The spontaneous sacrifices of father and son lead to revelation, death, and ostracism.

While much of the action and vision move in the direction of growth and integration, a movement in the opposite direction of division and disintegration develops, particularly in the second half of the novel where one character is excluded from a social group or where a character is divided within himself. Though Ruth is included in the family, she is excluded from the past tragedies which bind her husband and his parents: "it seemed to her as though they were suddenly suspended, the three of them, in a thought from which she was excluded. She would look from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac, her husband, and he would be sitting quietly, not looking at anything." As Moses grows, Sarah begins "to fade away" from Abraham: "It was as though the strings of his spirit that bound him to Sarah twanged suddenly, spreading through him vibration upon vibration of a feeling that was a confused mixture of fear and sadness and certainty." With each of the several deaths a new gap is cut in Abraham's life, and even young Moses wanders about, "detached," trying to find a place for himself in the midst of Sarah's death.

The two major sacrifices result in isolation — Isaac's and Abraham's movement away from society. After saving the Scroll, Isaac "was imprisoned in a transparent bubble. It pressed inward with a constant contracting pressure. . . . If he relaxed slightly it shrank in on him, so that it was the action of his own body that determined the size of his prison." Captured in his relativistic microcosm, inexorably bound to his sacrifice in an act which has separated him from mankind, Isaac tries to escape through vision and "superhuman movement," but ultimately fails. "Sometimes, in a burst of energy and desire, he pushed out and outward, expanding his sphere, stretching his limbs beyond any length that they had ever achieved, so that the tips of his toes and fingers alone touched its surface, and he poised in the ecstasy of effort, certain that one final burst of strength and will would stretch the bubble to its limits and he would break through." Wiseman collocates Isaac's "ecstasy" with his son's "vast ecstasy" at the end of the preceding chapter; she also repeats Isaac's "bursting out of the synagogue" in the final incarcerated "burst." The literal sense of "ecstasy" indicates that Isaac and Moses stand outside of the social mainstream while being divided within themselves. The mirror vision which follows the futile movement further emphasizes the segregated ego: "Gradually, as he strained his eyes to see what lay beyond

his sphere, he began to realize that although it was transparent, he could make out only his own face grimacing at him in reflection." Isaac's ambiguous sphere resembles the *fenêtre symboliste* of Baudelaire and Mallarmé as dream and reality become blurred for the "horizontal hero" whose vision had always followed the verticality of Mad Mountain: "If I broke through I'd no longer have the sphere as my boundary, but I'd lose its protection too. The bubble bursts, and I burst with it, into the unknown. On the other hand, if I give way I collapse, I am crushed, again into the unknown. Aren't the two things in the end the same, my victory and my defeat both illusory?"

Isaac's "breakdown" leads to a similar split in his father — a division within himself and a retreat from his fellow man, witnessed climactically in the slaying. Ever since Isaac's heroism "there have been two voices" in Abraham: "all the time while one voice rejoices the other is whispering. What is wrong, then?" Abraham's dissolution appears in his walking: "Now Abraham's feet seemed to take a long time to reach the ground. Instead of air he walked through some heavily resistant material to which the ground was not very firmly anchored." The movement contrasts with Isaac's ideas "so grimly anchored to the ground." The separation also manifests itself in long silences, a wandering mind "as the English phrases skipped by," and in vision: "He did not even know what he himself really looked like any more. He had only a feeling of face. Here his arm lay in front of him loosely on the table, his fingers drumming, a thing apart from him. He had only a feeling of arm, a throbbing feeling of two aching arms. The threaded violin pierced in and out, tied him to the table, bound him to Ruth, looped through the room. . . . Where was the whole man, Abraham?" The physical dissection at once prepares for Laiah's sacrifice and recalls Isaac's imprisonment in the sphere as Abraham attempts to retrieve and reintegrate the severed parts of his ego: "It was with an effort, with the deliberate movement of all his body, that he restored the feeling of the whole outline of his physical self." Isaac's reflecting sphere reappears during Abraham's argument with Ruth which accelerates the schizoid propensities: "He had come, begging to know, to understand, and suddenly a mirror had been flipped up in his face and he himself stood revealed as he was to another — a stranger, an enemy, an egoist." Through this looking-glass Ruth's words cut additional gaps in the old man's life: "It was as though another vital part had been slashed away from him, and he was all contorted, trying to hold his wounded members in place and at the same time trying to fend off with his own fury the fury that threatened to dismember him entirely."

Abraham emerges from the violence of this argument, no longer in control of his actions, thoughts, and words. "As though invisibly propelled, he headed through the hot summer air, unaware of direction, scarcely aware even of the piston movement of his legs, and totally unaware that he was speaking his thoughts aloud to the night air around him." In this state he reaches Laiah's

apartment where his thoughts, words, and actions are completely divorced from the present reality; he is conscious of a special awareness, "of a reaching out of his senses. Sensations impinged on him sharply and separately." Laiah is apart from him just as his actions and parts of his body are removed from him. All the nerves of his body are drawn to his hand. "But this seemed to be taking place apart from him." The systolic and diastolic rhythm that locked Isaac in his sphere overtakes Abraham: "It was as though he were seized up by something within himself, by a strong hand that gripped his insides tightly, then released them, gripped and released and gripped them again." Leah's whisper, "like one," and the "other part" of Abraham recall his two voices and contrast with the ultimate unification of hands between him and Moses. Abraham's mind "zigzags" back and forth from past to present while he is glued to the breadcrumbs and to Laiah's body heat. The contradictory, fragmenting forces within Abraham are symptomatic of his need to be both creator and destroyer.

After all this disintegration, Avrom and Moses are united in a reconciliation of vision and action that invokes the Shakespearean identification of lover, fool, poet, and madman: "one hand, the hand of a murderer, hero, artist, the hand of a man." Their hands, symbols of action, unite with the vision. "His eyes, fascinated, saw that the hands were not really different. . . . It was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing upright." Moses' narrow mode of perception will henceforth be widened to encompass his future as an adult.

To answer the questions of Abraham's culpability and who controls the movements and visions of the characters in *The Sacrifice*, one must examine the problem of free will and determinism. Abraham's spontaneous decision to stop at the unknown city demonstrates the strength of his will. "The thought took hold in his mind like a command. . . . He must act now." He is "fixed in his determination" as he "wills" the cramp out of his body; he feels "excited at making a positive gesture in the ordering of his fate." Though he retains the strength of a young man, deterministic forces work against him: "What did it matter to destiny, the age of a man? A God who could pluck the fruit of a man's desire when it was scarcely ripe and strangle such seed as could have uplifted the human race did not think in terms of days and years." And when Abraham finds employment at Polsky's, Mrs. Plopler exclaims, "As though it were fated!" Yet if the first chapter begins with a declaration of Abraham's free will, it ends on a deterministic note: "After all these sorrows, God had chosen to set him and his family down in this strange city to await what further He had in store for them," and on the train "It was as though the wheels below had taken control of our lives." In place of the earlier "Enough!" the chapter closes with the more resigned "Very well," the same words of acquiescence uttered by the Biblical Abraham when asked by God to sacrifice Isaac.

The lives and deaths of Abraham's sons appear predestined, for Moses was a singer and Jacob a thinker almost from birth; as for their premature deaths, "In the end I told myself that God knew best whom to take and whom to leave. It was not for me to argue His decisions. . . . It was meant to be." Contrasting with his Job-like acceptance of suffering is his joy for life and birth, his celebration of Ruth's "miraculous" pregnancy — "he felt at home with miracles." Determinism at birth heightens with the parallel announcement of the birth of Chaim's grandson: "It was strange, and he and Chaim often discussed it, how all had happened almost as though they had planned it. It was meant to be, there was no doubt about it. Looking at the child, Abraham could not recall a time when his grandson had not been there, implicit in his life." And just as Abraham sought to determine the future of his sons through signs, so he attempts to augur his grandson's life; ultimately, however, God controls the fate of his dying wife and newly-born grandson: "Did she not deserve a few more years at least to see the child grow up, to see whatever it was that He, the Lord — and Abraham did not presume to prognosticate — at least to catch a glimpse of what He had in store for their house?" Abraham's fatalism and God's will are at work in Isaac's death: "It was as though he were walking into a picture that had hung on his wall all his life, waiting for him." Even Laila's presence in her doorway prior to her death is "as though this had been promised or foreseen." Finally Abraham understands that he must subserve God's will instead of deifying himself: "I was not content to be, as He willed it," and he almost accuses himself of deicide. Moses visits him on Yom Kippur "when our fates are sealed" and inherits his grandfather's religious determinism: "He felt as though all along he had known it would have to be."

NOTE

- ¹ From the examples which I have chosen it is evident that Wiseman overdoes the "as though" construction. The only possible defence of this repeated simile is that she tries to portray the heuristic immigrant experience by constantly comparing it to another set of experiences to suggest the experimental, unsettled life of the newly arrived.