

# GODFREY'S PROGRESS

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**D**ESPITE THE INTEREST and praise generated by its publication in 1970, Dave Godfrey's novel *The New Ancestors* has received limited critical attention. W. H. New has presented some perceptive comments in his essay "Equatorial Zones and Polar Opposites,"<sup>1</sup> but no one has attempted to suggest a comprehensive approach to its complex thematic and technical problems. The novel is so richly textured, so far-reaching in its reference and, in part, so obscure in its meaning that anyone wishing to understand it fully could be easily confused or discouraged. For this reason, the short stories written by Godfrey prior to his novel are particularly useful as guides to the themes which interest him and the literary means he uses to explore these subjects. Because Godfrey's stories are much more stylistically conventional than his novel, one can more easily discover in them the thematic problems and fictional techniques which re-appear in *The New Ancestors*.

Godfrey's short stories, fourteen of which are collected in *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, concentrate on social and cultural issues rather than problems of individual psychology. The theories of such behavioural scientists as Konrad Lorenz seem to exert considerable influence on Godfrey as he examines the conditioning effects of culture on the responses of an individual. He explores most thoroughly the relationship between an individual and his social context, the roots of human violence and the role of the family in creating and sustaining culture. Much of Godfrey's commentary on these issues is embodied in the predominantly ironic tone he establishes in each of his stories. Intersecting prose styles, narrative perspectives and time settings are the characteristic devices used by Godfrey to control the reader's response to the events depicted.

Armed with this knowledge of Godfrey's thematic interests and literary techniques, one can more successfully come to grips with *The New Ancestors*. Not only can one discover these same characteristics in the novel but one can also gain some insight into Dave Godfrey's development as a writer of fiction. Most of his stories appear to be constructed out of personal experiences re-shaped to exhibit

his thematic concerns. He adopts a pronounced reportorial distance from his material, and he frequently employs a narrator easily identified with the author's viewpoint. *The New Ancestors*, on the other hand, is less concerned with a life-like plot than with an imaginative re-creation of essential human experiences. Irony is still the major stylistic feature, but the language is now rich and evocative rather than stark and precise. By overcoming his tendency to re-shape his own experience into fictional form, Dave Godfrey has shown a greater confidence in his imaginative potential and his artistic capacity.

For Godfrey, man is very much the product of the social group in which he lives, and an individual's instincts and actions can be explained and understood only by reference to this larger context. Culture is firmly rooted in social conditioning — an historical process in which each generation transmits its attitudes to the next and consequently creates an apparently inevitable cultural evolution. One major influence on Godfrey appears to be Konrad Lorenz. In an essay on CUSO entitled "Doomsday Idealism" Godfrey refers favourably to Lorenz's theories:

Rather than reason, he finds it is instinctive behaviour mechanisms which provide the dynamic source of friendship and love, warmth of feeling, appreciation of beauty and the curiosity that strives toward scientific enlightenment. Our danger lies not in failing to defeat our "animal nature" but rather in denying causality, denying the effects of race history on our behaviour, in favour of an unproven, idealistic free will.<sup>2</sup>

In rejecting explanations of man's actions which rely on concepts of universal rationality Godfrey in turn emphasizes the uniqueness of individual cultures which have each developed a distinct set of behaviour characteristics. For this reason, the interaction between two cultures is an especially important problem for Godfrey, as he indicates in the quotation from Lorenz used as an epigraph for *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*:

The balanced interaction between all the single norms of social behaviour characteristics of a culture accounts for the fact that it usually proves highly dangerous to mix cultures. To kill a culture, it is often sufficient to bring it into contact with another, particularly if the latter is higher, or is at least regarded as higher, as the culture of a conquering nation usually is. The people of the subdued side then tend to look down upon everything they previously held sacred and to ape customs which they regard as superior.

The meeting of two persons from different cultural groups or the introduction of an outsider into a foreign society is thus more than a meeting of individuals: each person brings with him the essence of his whole cultural group, its history and prejudices, character and instincts.

The influence of these theories can be seen throughout Godfrey's stories. In "It's Going to be a Good Summer There's a Wedding Every Night and Mostly's

Two" Godfrey re-creates the internal functions and relationships of a Manitoba railway gang. The interloping narrator (a teacher with Frontier College) describes the characters' pleasures, desires and ambitions so as to suggest the completeness and consistency of their social and cultural group. In fact, the narrator is primarily concerned with the possibility that he may destroy their society by educating them in the values of the larger Canadian society. "The Generation of Hunters" examines the relationship between a father and a son through which values and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to the next. The father instructs his son, the future soldier, in the morality of hunting by means of aphorisms: "Heart or head for hellshots; legs for the lazy; stomachs for sadists." This process of moral instruction serves to rigidify behavioural patterns within the society to such an extent that, as the narrator states at the end, "there are times when you seem conscious of observing inevitability." "The Hard-Headed Collector," Godfrey's most anthologized story, is a very clear illustration of the Lorenz theory cited in the epigraph to Godfrey's collection of stories. A self-sufficient group of men from one culture gradually disintegrates as the group passes through the land of a more technically advanced people. A fruitful mingling of the two cultures is impossible. The artisans from the Queen Charlotte Islands are destroyed before they can employ their skills on the giant tree, Egsdrull, belonging to the other civilization in order to create a totem, the symbol of a cultural identity.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important aspects of these cultural theories is their implication for the relationship between an individual and his society, between the "I" and the "we." In an early story entitled "Fragment" Godfrey re-creates fictionally the day of Thomas Scott's execution by Louis Riel. Scott is shown to be a person, not just an historical figure, but Godfrey preserves the episode's wider social significance by embodying in Scott the prejudices of a culture which views Riel's people as "savages."<sup>4</sup> "Gossip: The Birds that Flew, the Birds that Fell" examines more closely the forces which limit and control the response of the individual. Mrs. Wagwood, the small town gossip, personifies the vigilance of social expectations as she watches over Mr. Courtney, predicts his reactions to the apartment development and interprets all of his actions in the light of her own suppositions about him. The destruction of the bush, the political machinations of the Reeve, the wife swapping games of his son and daughter-in-law and his daughter's plan to marry a Jew all coincide to bring the pressures of society to bear on Mr. Courtney. He cannot defeat or escape from these forces, and he can only respond by shooting the two pheasants in order to save them from a lingering death at the hands of an encroaching civilization.<sup>5</sup>

Hunting, violence, death and slaughter are central to many of Godfrey's stories. He seems to find in these images some key to the specific nature of the conditioned mentality of his time. Because he traces an individual's instinct for

violence to the society from which he comes, his treatment of these subjects appears extremely cold and analytical. The title of his collection of stories, *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, reworks an advertising jingle to juxtapose ironically two aspects of modern culture: killing and big business. This seemingly flippant attitude toward death appears in such stories as "Mud Lake: If Any":

It is one of the strangenesses of youth that you can treat a specific chance of death with no more care than you'd give to your old Dinky Toy, that one-inch, green-camouflaged British Army troop lorry.

In addition, Godfrey shows how individual acts of violence may be sanctioned by a society. "Up in the Rainforest" illustrates this point by drawing a parallel between the assassination attempt on the "Redeemer" and the white hunter beating his African wife. In "A Python of the Gaspé" Godfrey uses a small fishing party as a miniature society to show how guilt feelings can be alleviated. Having failed to catch any large fish, the men decide to kill some ducks which eat fish eggs. Instead, they kill fourteen of another type. Old Alex, the guide soothes their pangs of conscience by placing the ducks in a fishing net and telling them that there is no reason to be excited: "Now if we were to see a python or an elephant, that might be something unusual.'"

It is by such means that cultural characteristics are re-inforced, and Godfrey views the relationship between generations as a key to their transmission. In "River Two Blind Jacks" a "tall tale" told by the narrator's grandfather to a group of children serves to teach them about their land and to make them a part of a continuing tradition. Likewise, in "Newfoundland Night" a teacher comments on the futility of teaching children who are "only temporarily students, permanently the shadows and rebirths of their fathers." Because the family serves this function, Godfrey treats parents in his stories with special concern. To some extent, they can control what qualities of their culture will be communicated to the next generation. Godfrey, however, usually shows parents acting in an unfortunate manner. Mr. Courtney, in "Gossip," tries to communicate anti-Semitism to his daughter, and the soldier's father in "The Generation of Hunters" only passes on bits of folk wisdom on hunting. Thus, the one hope for change Godfrey holds out is being abused in this generation. Effective change can occur only by altering the conditioned behaviour of a society, and Godfrey can see no one attempting to do this through the only means possible — the creation within the family of a new system of values.

**G**ODFREY most effectively conveys his attitude to these patterns of social behaviour through an ironic tone. A story such as "Fulfilling our Foray" abounds in ironies: the white hunter in modern Africa; the "pure

socialist" who brings back "an object of worth and beauty"; and the preference of young Africans for a musical group that plays electric guitars bought by the Minister of Defence. Frequently, he uses irony to undercut the reader's reaction to an earlier part of a story. In "The Winter Stiffs" the frankness and vulgarity of Finn's story may lead the reader to a harsh judgment of his character, but the narrator, back in the ostensibly more civilized Toronto, points out the hypocrisy which exists in the language of cultured people:

You know that gentle tone with which we in Toronto can say lady, when we mean, really, something entirely different.

Many of his ironic comments arise from similar juxtapositions. In "Fragment" Scott's story is interspersed with selections (ironic in their optimism) from the journal he is writing. Mr. Courtney in "Gossip" is reading from a history of the persecution of the Jews in fourteenth century Strasbourg while he himself is being persecuted. "The Hard-Headed Collector" is interspersed with selections from a newspaper story about a more practical man of arts. Sometimes the intersection is achieved by having a character tell another story, as Mrs. Mier does in "On the River," or by framing the story with separate pieces at the beginning and end, such as Godfrey does in "Two Smiths," "Mud Lake: If Any" and "The Generation of Hunters." Godfrey does not dwell on these contrasts or comparisons; he does not pedantically explain them. Rather, he allows the reader to search out their significance.

The fact that many of these stories were written for the "Outdoors" column of *Saturday Night* may help to account in part for the degree to which they draw on personal experience.<sup>6</sup> In reviewing *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola* George Woodcock said that the stories were on the "borderland between the factual and the imagined," and he referred to Godfrey's "illuminated realism" and "lapidary craftsmanship."<sup>7</sup> Robert Cockburn called them "short stories in name only."<sup>8</sup> Not only does Godfrey make use of personal experience, but the reader usually becomes aware of this and, not surprisingly, identifies Godfrey with one of the characters, usually the narrator. "It's Going to be a Good Summer" draws on Godfrey's experiences with Frontier College,<sup>9</sup> and the cynical narrator probably contains some self-portraiture. The narrator of the framing sections of "Two Smiths" reminds one of Godfrey's own assistance to draft evaders.<sup>10</sup> The narrator of "The Way We do it Here"<sup>11</sup> helps to organize a lumber camp strike in much the same manner as Godfrey did.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that such associations are always accurate or even productive. But the fact that they arise so readily indicates the extent to which Godfrey has reworked his own experience into fictional form. Whether or not he has avoided all the pitfalls of such a method is another matter.

In a sense, one might consider Dave Godfrey's short stories to be the equivalent of another writer's first novel: the fictionalization of personal experience in an

intriguing but basically unsatisfying manner. Phyllis Grosskurth approaches this view when she comments on Godfrey's stories:

Technically very competent, they all seemed written to a formula, the sort of writing which seems to emerge from creative writing courses.<sup>13</sup>

One senses an artificial manner in many of the stories when the cool tone becomes frigid and the patterned structure turns stiff and unwieldy. In part this may be due to some difficulties with language, especially an uncertainty in the use of images. As Alden Nowlan says, there are "bits of bad Hemingway," and "many almost embarrassingly bad similes and metaphors."<sup>14</sup> Such phrasing as, "I felt like I lived in a house with a stopped-up toilet,"<sup>15</sup> or "It changed as quickly as the sun-glints off a Finnish girl shaking out her hair after pulling off a hat of fox fur,"<sup>16</sup> is more confusing than enlightening. Imagery can be startling, but one wonders if in these instances it was fully understood or if all of its implications were considered. Godfrey simply seems too self-conscious in many of his stories. His use of personal experience, his constant concern for the moral position of the narrator (especially in "The Winter Stiffs" and "It's Going to be a Good Summer") and his highly idiosyncratic use of images prevent him from stepping outside his stories and achieving the distanced perspective he seems to desire. Only in "The Hard-Headed Collector" does he begin to gain this distance. By creating an imaginative world of parable and allegory, he permits the reader to accept the story as an objective literary entity, open to investigation and discussion. The unsolved problem in many of his short stories, however, is to gain this perspective while still employing materials gathered from personal experience: to unite the immediacy of experience with the objectivity of the literary artifact.

**D**AVE GODFREY accomplishes this, and much more, in *The New Ancestors*. The same general thematic concerns found in the short stories are present in the novel, but Godfrey greatly expands and clarifies them. Moreover, he displays a technical mastery of the large-scale, complex patterns of the longer novel form. In part, Godfrey accomplishes this by employing a wider imaginative scope and richer, more expressive language. Both the reportorial attitude to experience and the stark, Hemingway-like language of the short stories are almost entirely eliminated. Instead, Godfrey has written a totally imaginative work based on a confident, evocative prose style.

The influence of the cultural theories of Konrad Lorenz can again be found in Godfrey's work. The importance of instinctive behaviour, the conditioning power of history and the weaknesses of reason and idealism are illustrated in the conflicting political philosophies propounded by the politicians of Lost Coast. Both Michael Burdener and First Samuels believe that the road to the ideal Lost

Coast state lies in rational analysis and empirical action. Burdener, as a scientist, tells his students not to act according to myth:

'But if *you* probe, if you question and act according to discoveries not according to myths, you can construct a civilisation which will make theirs look like the mask it is.'

Being an idealist, he, along with First Samuels, is not satisfied with the slow progress of historical forces. First Samuels, impatient with the government, longs for the continuation of the revolutionary struggle:

'Our brothers have become too tame, too comfortable, too quickly. . . . What we need, it seems to me . . . is a new series of direct confrontations, direct actions, to rekindle the struggle.'

In the long run, he wishes to sever the country's historical roots, as he indicates when he speaks of the students who oppose him:

'If they lived in this town for twenty years — if they have lived for twenty years free of their ancestors — they would be more serious, you know,'

and then to establish new ancestral lines:

'Perhaps the thing to do is to start many families, Biney. Start many families. I am serious.'

On the other hand, Kofi Kruman, the Redeemer, has attempted to associate himself with the myths and religion of ancient Africa, and even First Samuels experiences the effectiveness of the technique:

it was the attack upon the old man which went somehow — no matter how easily his mind accepted the necessity — went against some fear and restraint which had been cored into his very being, as though they would be breaking creation itself by breaking Kasepreko. . . . It was only a trick of dialectics, this trick by which Kruman had linked himself up with that sense of deification for the past.

By the end of the novel it is evident that only through the acceptance and utilization of these cultural forces will the lives of the people be altered. As the cabinet minister Obatala states, the real threat to Kruman comes from the tribal chiefs and their sons who "trace their ancestors back as far as any Englishman." Myth and religion will prove more powerful than reason and idealism.

The implications of these theories are again embodied in the relationship between individuals and their society. The novel is designed to explore both the personal agony of an Ama Burdener and the political situation of a newly independent country. In fact, Godfrey implies that the personal and social levels are indivisible: Ama's suffering stems directly from her associations with the major political figures.

In this regard, the concept of synergy is very important for Dave Godfrey. He

has described a high synergy society as one in which "the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his own advantage and that of the group."<sup>17</sup> Such a society is non-aggressive, as opposed to a low synergy society (like the United States) which is obsessed with winners and losers and in which one man succeeds only at the expense of another's failure. Furthermore, Godfrey holds that "any colonial situation . . . represents the imposition of low-synergy conditions upon the colonized."<sup>18</sup> Lost Coast, therefore, is a society attempting to shift from low to high synergy, to create a state in which an individual acts for the benefit of the whole. Gamaliel Harding, as spokesman for the movement, tells the market women about what "we must" do, but they see it only in terms of their historic individualism:

History went far back for them and it was always the same. 'We must' meaning *you must*. Chiefs declaring war for sport, war for slaves. White-frocks explaining slavery in terms of the expansion of civilisation.

The Redeemer cult and the plan for African union indicate the government's desire to bring the "I" into an ever closer relationship with the "we." But the key opposition figures continue to respond as individuals. Michael Burdener is a foreign parasite who lives off the energy of Africa:

And so I will return to Africa, because there is something there I can say yes to. . . .  
And I need to say yes to something at this moment. I need to say yes. After all, now, finally, I know myself.

More importantly, First Samuels leads a counter-revolution based ultimately on personal greed, not social consciousness:

This time he would not be left behind by the Gamaliels and the Azaccas. The past would not hold him back again. . . .

He hated all this luxury. But why should fate hand it out to Eban and not to him?

Even Ama Burdener, who is opposed to both political groups, places her hope in an individualistic solution, personal love, rather than social salvation.

A low-synergy society, based on aggression, is especially conducive to violence. Godfrey no longer works through the hunting metaphor found in his stories. Instead, he presents directly the conflicts between human beings which arise from their instinct for violence. The primary source of violence in the novel is not the government but the low-synergy group led by First Samuels. They use assassination and bombing to gain their ends, and the government only responds to their actions. The fundamental tendency to violence in the society appears in the three mob scenes in which someone is beaten: Burdener, Frantz and Gamaliel. In each instance, the mob, conditioned by life in a low-synergy, colonial society, attacks in order to defend the individual interests that it feels are being endangered.



Thus, violent action always emerges from the depths of an individual's being, not from rational intent. First Samuels and Burdener seem to abandon their political shrewdness as they enter into plans for direct action. For Samuels, his relations with Norah, which parallel his plans for violence, indicate his surrender to blind, instinctive passions:

he made love to her violently . . . so that he could slide back into the past and be overcome by her again, so that he could sing into the blindness.

Likewise, Burdener says, "Let perception flee — it had fled before — and simply act." Phyllis Grosskurth has described the effect of the novel as being "sucked into a maelstrom":

into the inner volcano of man's darker being to a level where sunlight never penetrates; where we are forced to acknowledge that hell bears a startling resemblance to commonplace reality.<sup>19</sup>

The manner in which Godfrey links violence to man's inner drives and passions is in large part responsible for this effect. Unlike the world of his short stories, where violence is cold and dispassionate, violence in Godfrey's novel is deeply emotional, at times almost hypnotically ritualized. In the section entitled "In the Fifth City," for example, the repeated killing of Rusk becomes an act detached from physical, historical reality and transformed into imaginative, mythic ritual. The reader cannot even be certain that any of the acts of violence described in this section actually occurred, because the possibility that Rusk left the country by plane is never discounted.

As in his short stories, Godfrey shows how the family operates to transmit social instincts. He has stated that he brought back from Africa a sense of "the determinism that is built up in a family from generation to generation,"<sup>20</sup> and his novel contains a complex web of family relationships, a web drawn even tighter by the late revelation that Samuels may be Gamaliel's and Ama's half-brother. The very title of the book, *The New Ancestors*, indicates the centrality of the problem of ancestry of Godfrey. None of the main characters can trace his ancestry very far back. In fact, no one can get beyond his own parents. Michael Burdener has only an insane father (called Mr. Buxton) for a family, and Ama points out the consequences:

One man, his whole family only one man; no wonder he's mad. . . . What is a man without elders, without ancestors? . . . where is the man, where is the society he has ever respected?

But Ama herself is cut off from her ancestors because she "adopted" Mr. Awotchwi as her father and because she is unable to see beyond her mother:

what did she know of herself, of her ancestors, of her inner trickeries? Nothing. . . .

She couldn't get beyond her own mother. Delicacy was time. Delicacy was a long, high, thick wall against time.

First Samuels cannot even be sure of his father's identity, and Gamaliel Harding became an outcast from his family when he ran away to America.

Even more importantly, these characters are cut off from the future generations. Burdener's first son, Cricket, dies young, and he appears to abandon Ama with his other children who never seem to register on his consciousness. Gamaliel disowns his son, Kwame Bird, who later runs away in a manner reminiscent of his father. This latter case is made especially pointed by Gamaliel's earlier regard for his son as the fulfilment of ancestral hopes:

Gamaliel smiles at this display of memory, as though Delicacy has been made whole again, recreated in the image of her grandson, her long years of deprivation and struggle rewarded with gold and flesh rather than madness.

THE TITLE, *The New Ancestors*, is, therefore, open to a dual interpretation. It refers both to the new ancestry the characters create for themselves and to the fact that they will become ancestors for future generations. The people of Lost Coast have broken from their colonial past through a revolution, and now they seek to re-establish their cultural identity in the ideals of African union, the Redeemer cult, political action or personal love. For them, "new ancestors" must remain a paradox because they attempt to use something "new" to replace something which only time can create. But while searching for their own ancestors they are at the same time becoming the ancestors of future generations. After their break from a colonial past, they have the opportunity to establish new ancestral lines, but the opportunity is largely ignored or abused. Both Burdener and Gamaliel place hope in the sons they eventually destroy; even the Redeemer is insistent that Ama not bear any children by him. At the end of the novel, we have no hope for the future of Lost Coast and its people: they are all trapped within paradoxes. Those representing the forces of individualism, who seek immediate, ideal solutions (Burdener, Samuels), are defeated by the forces of ancestral and social cohesion (e.g., the Kruba dam workers). Those who are attempting to create a high-synergy society through association with ancient Africa (Gamaliel, Kruman) are confronted by the strong instinct for individualism and social pluralism still present in the people (e.g., the market women and the tribal chiefs). Nor can the problems simply be ignored, as Ama Burdener discovers when political affairs destroy the safety island of personal love she has created. The people of Lost Coast, therefore, are both destroying their old ancestors and failing to create new ones.

An ironic tone continues to be Godfrey's primary technique for commenting on his material. The theme of ancestry is put in this perspective by passages such as Burdener's description of Peggy Neal's room:

Three wigs sitting on plastic heads about the silent room. Like statues of her ancestors. But faceless, mysteryless. One black. One silvery. One lank and asiatic. . . . Is that her past? Where is his.

Similarly, the "new ancestors" of the people of Lost Coast are plastic and sterile in their newness, despite the devotion given to them. Lesser ironies appear as a recurring motif throughout the novel: the strident nationalism of politicians, but their dependence and pride in "Pepsi", "Carnation" and light standards "Imported from Germany"; Kofi Kruman, the Redeemer, acting the role of an African slave dealer; Gamaliel Harding, the spokesman of the new Africa, acting the role of General Stanley; and Ama's description of Michael as "the David Livingston of the Liberation movement". Godfrey's concept of the entire political situation is fundamentally ironic. First Samuels states his belief that it is through action, not words, that the revolution will succeed:

He had learned and Gamaliel hadn't; it was that simple. . . . He knew the people now would respond only to actions; all you could set up against Kasepreko's lying, greedy actions were your own unlying, ungreedy actions.

The irony here is that both rhetoric and action fail: Gamaliel's words are rejected by the market women and Samuels' act of bombing is opposed by the workers. It is also evident that Samuels' potential revolution would not have made any substantial change in Lost Coast, that he was motivated by a "counter-greed" and not a "counter-pride." Godfrey wishes to emphasize the complexities of the situation, the difficulty of ever believing entirely what any one character states. He does not want to present Lost Coast as an ideal revolutionary state; he emphasizes instead its inner contradictions and imperfections. While teaching in Ghana, Godfrey says that he felt "driven to encourage cynicism as well as understanding, the sardonic as well as the interpretative remark."<sup>21</sup> The ironies of *The New Ancestors* bring the reader to much the same attitude.

Just as in his short stories, Godfrey achieves many of these ironic effects through the use of intersection. For example, the presentation of Ama's point of view in "A Child of Delicacy" put Michael Burdener into a sharper focus than he appeared in "The London Notebook." The frequent use of epigraphs also serves to clarify some events and make others more complex. The whole purpose of the opening section, "A Prologue," is summarized in the epigraph from David Levy, "*Dullness, after all, is the garment of nightmare,*" which indicates that there is turmoil and anguish under the calm exterior witnessed by the British expatriate community. The use of untranslated African language in the epigraphs and the text may at first seem rather arrogant and unfair. But it does suggest the integrity

of the culture being described and the deeper levels of mystery in the society which the outsider cannot penetrate. These texts are effective even if they are not enlightening.

One section of the novel which may also appear to be more effective than enlightening is "In the Fifth City." Its hallucinatory, surrealistic quality is highly suggestive of a dream or a drugged experience (the graphic symbol attached to the section appears to be a poppy). Time and event are warped and multi-layered:

think only of the voyage which awaits you, which searches for you, which lusts for you, and yet which possesses you tomorrow as it possesses you yesterday as it possesses you today.

The section is given no date, and a number of events, most notably the killing of Rusk, are presented in terms of a series of possibilities rather than a definite statement. The recurring camera images help to create the sense in which events can be run backward or forward, or, as in a movie, restaged and filmed in a different manner. This is particularly emphasized with Rusk watching "the delayed sequence television screen" and the earlier description of Rusk's mind in cinematic terms:

Rusk's thoughts as the throng moves toward him remain caught where they were; the reel will not turn forward and the film begins to burn.

When placed in the context of the novel as a whole, the region of the Fifth City appears to be some form of parallel, imaginative reality to the reality of Lost Coast. It is located in Mali, the historically significant area of "the old kingdoms of this continent," containing "the knowledge depositories of Timbuctoo." In fact, a rather curious set of parallels is drawn between the major characters of the novel and the characters in the Fifth City. The Englishman Burr obviously relates to Michael Burdener; Donald has some parallels with Ama; El Amaliel possesses some of the characteristics of Gamaliel Harding; and Effez parallels First Samuels. "In the Fifth City", therefore, offers the reader a totally imaginative commentary on the "realistic" actions of the characters in the main body of the novel. It possesses an allegorical power similar to that of "The Hard-Headed Collector", in which the imagined experiences of the artists comment upon the factual material in the newspaper story.

Thus, Dave Godfrey makes different use of his personal experiences in this novel than he did in most of his short stories. In 1968 he wrote in an introduction to three of his stories:

I'm bored with plots in stories. . . . I dream a lot of language now, just language, not character or background or narrative flow, just language. And experience doesn't really teach you anything, I can see that now. . . . And so I try and grab hold of language.<sup>22</sup>

*The New Ancestors* is not an example of "completely invented fiction,"<sup>23</sup> but it does reveal a more imaginative use of experience. One cannot identify Godfrey with any of the novel's characters because he establishes a considerable ironic distance between himself and all of them, especially Michael Burdener. Godfrey also takes the considerable risk of attempting to portray African minds, to present a perspective which he cannot have experienced personally. Shifting time sequences and the appearance of the conclusion as a prologue effectively undercut the plot with a sense of the inevitable. "In the Fifth City", in fact, makes a mockery of conventional plot structures by presenting one character dying in five different ways.

But it is the quality of the language in the novel which truly sets it apart from the short stories. Godfrey abandons cold, terse, unadorned prose for an impassioned, richly textured, expressive means of communication. A keener sense of prose rhythms, a delight in the accumulation of detail, an invocation of meaning through repetition and a linking of incident through the association of words all serve to create Godfrey's personal style. He uses words much more freely, without imposing some foreign standard of starkness on his active imagination. He now gives us a series of phrases rather than one or two coldly analytical words:

The justified, justified, justified, final, fear-ending, awe-ending, hatred-ending, love-ending, betrayal-ending, life-ending, shame-ending blow is struck with the sphere a dead weight in his hand, up into the air and then hard down upon the neck-joining-head flesh and gristle and Gamaliel's flesh joined in the death-blow that sends soothing pain from his bruised knuckles, his torn palm, shuddering through his shoulder backward, inward against the empoisoning to his dissolving fury, his dissolving heart.

Godfrey has gained control over his images; they are no longer embarrassing or confusing. Even such an "embarrassing" image as Ricky Goldman's description of the girl's legs as "the colour of melted Hershey bars", reflects the character of the speaker rather than of the author. The imaginative power of Dave Godfrey's language in this novel is the surest indicator of his escape from the confines of personal experience and introspection. Stark, reportorial prose would be incapable of embodying the possibilities Godfrey has imagined.

*The New Ancestors*, therefore, marks an important point in Dave Godfrey's career as a writer. His earlier short stories show us his concern for man's position within his culture and Godfrey's technique of ironic commentary, but these stories also reveal the limited scope of his imagination and the restricted quality of his prose. *The New Ancestors* picks up the same fundamental cultural and social themes and employs many similar ironic devices, but the range of Godfrey's imagination beyond his personal experiences and the power of the language he uses to express himself indicate the considerable achievement this novel represents.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Articulating West* (Toronto: new press, 1972), pp. 216-33.
- <sup>2</sup> In Bill McWhinney and Dave Godfrey, eds., *Man Deserves Man: CUSO in Developing Countries* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), p. 423.
- <sup>3</sup> Dave Godfrey has commented extensively on this story in two recent interviews. See, "Dave Godfrey: Myths and Gardens," in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part Two* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 34-47; and Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, n.d.), pp. 151-79. See also, W. H. New, "Godfrey's Uncollected Artist," *Ariel*, 4, No. 3 (July 1973), 5-15.
- <sup>4</sup> *Canadian Forum*, No. 39 (January 1960), pp. 228-30.
- <sup>5</sup> *Tamarack Review*, No. 30 (Winter 1964), pp. 3-22.
- <sup>6</sup> Eight such stories appeared between November 1966 and November 1967. All but two were reprinted in *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*.
- <sup>7</sup> *Canadian Literature*, No. 38 (Autumn 1968), pp. 91-93.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Cockburn, rev. of *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, *Fiddlehead*, No. 76 (Spring 1968), pp. 78-79.
- <sup>9</sup> See Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 164.
- <sup>10</sup> See Donald Cameron, "The Three People Inside Dave Godfrey," *Saturday Night*, September 1971, p. 22.
- <sup>11</sup> In *Death Goes Better*, pp. 93-102.
- <sup>12</sup> See Cameron, "The Three People Inside Dave Godfrey," p. 22.
- <sup>13</sup> *Canadian Forum*, No. 51 (April-May 1971), p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> Rev. of *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, *Canadian Forum*, No. 47 (March 1968), p. 282.
- <sup>15</sup> "The Generation of Hunters," p. 13.
- <sup>16</sup> "An Opening Day," in *Death Goes Better*, p. 17.
- <sup>17</sup> "Doomsday Idealism," p. 424. See also his comments in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part Two*, pp. 40-42.
- <sup>18</sup> "Doomsday Idealism," p. 425.
- <sup>19</sup> Grosskurth, p. 16.
- <sup>20</sup> Cited by Robert Weaver, rev. of *The New Ancestors*, *Macleans*, February 1971, p. 57.
- <sup>21</sup> Dave Godfrey, "Letter from Africa to an American Negro," *Man Deserves Man*, p. 212. This article originally appeared in *Tamarack Review*, No. 38 (Winter 1966), pp. 57-80.
- <sup>22</sup> *New Canadian Writing 1968* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1968), p. 140.
- <sup>23</sup> Weaver, p. 59.