

WOLF IN THE SNOW

PART ONE

Four Windows on to Landscapes

Warren Tallman

In the essay commenced below Warren Tallman bases a study of modern Canadian Fiction on five books which he considers particularly significant as examples of literary attitudes in this country. They are *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross, *Who Has Seen the Wind* by W. O. Mitchell, *Each Man's Son* by Hugh MacLennan, *The Mountain and the Valley* by Ernest Buckler, and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* by Mordecai Richler. In this first part of the essay Mr. Tallman presents a consideration of the first four novels in their setting of Canadian life.

TO ENTER the fictional house these novels form is to take up place in rooms where windows open out upon scenes in Saskatchewan, Quebec and Nova Scotia: two prairie towns, one farm, a small seacoast city and St. Urbain Street in Montreal. In order to prevent view from jostling view it is convenient to single out the characters Philip Bentley (*As For Me And My House*), Brian O'Connal (*Who Has Seen The Wind*), David Canaan (*The Mountain And The Valley*), Alan MacNeil (*Each Man's Son*) and Duddy Kravitz (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*), letting their lives suggest the details which make up the study. Since these five form into a handful, it is best to enter the fictional house at once and move across rooms to where the windows open out.

From whichever window one chooses to look, at whichever person, the initial impression gained is that of his isolation. Superficially, this isolation traces to the ways in which each is alienated from the natural child-

hood country of ordinary family life. In *As For Me And My House*, Philip Bentley has this comfort stolen from him even before it is provided when his unmarried father, a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, dies before Philip is born. That the son is cast by this deprivation into the limbo of an uncreated childhood becomes evident when he emerges into adult life also a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, struggling without success to discover the father he did not know while married to a woman who is all too obviously more a mother to him than she is a wife. In *The Mountain And the Valley*, David Canaan is gifted with yet cursed by reactions far too intense ever to mesh except occasionally with the more ordinary responses of his brother, sister, parents and grandmother. When he fails in a school play, his family has no resources with which to meet the violence of humiliation which fairly explodes within him. His childhood and youth are a long succession of such intensities leading to such explosions. Each time the pieces settle back together, he finds himself inched unwillingly away from others onto a precarious plane of solitary being from which he can communicate his extravagant reactions only by other extravagances which further emphasize his growing isolation.

If David's is the most painful face turned toward us, Brian O'Connell's is the most deceptive. Even as *Who Has Seen The Wind* opens, he is shown growing away from his family in order to follow impulses which bring his struggling consciousness into contact with what are described in the preface as "the realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death." But if Brian appears to discern a deeper than familial ordering of experience in and around the Saskatchewan town where he grows up, the persons and personifications which illustrate his discernment tell, I think, quite another story. They tell of a sensitive boy's attempts to reconcile himself to the human viciousness and natural desolation which characterize the town and the prairie. Of this conflict, more in place. Unlike Philip, David and Brian, Alan MacNeil in *Each Man's Son* is less an individualized child and more simply the naive witness to a stylized pattern of adult conflict. Thus he is the puppet son to each of three disparate fathers: Doctor Ainslee, the type of inhibited intellect; Archie MacNeil, the type of unthinking animal force; and the Gallic Louis Camire, the type of passionate spontaneity. Because the larger human pattern of which these men are parts has been broken, each partial man

struggles toward a different solution to his incompleteness, one which excludes the others. When their longings for wholeness draw them to Alan and his mother, the pattern will no longer knit. Alan's role as each man's son is to witness the gradual forcing together of these disastrously alienated men.

The kinds of alienation which I have sketched point to a common problem. When the hazards of life reach out to disrupt families and isolate children it is almost certain that such children will respond with attempts to create a self strong enough to endure the added stress and more extreme fluctuations of experience. Yet the very disturbances which create a need for such strength frequently conspire to take away the opportunity. Prematurely conscious of weakness in the face of experience, the timid self stands back from contention. And much of the isolation is in the standing back. Yet to lose out in this way is to gain in another. For so persistent and powerful are the mysterious forces which drive self on its journeys toward some measure of fulfillment that when the journey is interrupted self will either struggle to make the island upon which it finds itself habitable, or—if particularly hard-pressed—may strike out for new islands of its own making. To know experience or novels even cursorily is to realize that such attempts are among the decisive gestures of human experience. The more vital the attempt, the more interesting the discoveries, the more illuminating the journeys. But to say all this and then turn to Philip, David, Brian and Alan is to encounter difficulties.

First Brian. Throughout *Who Has Seen The Wind* we are shown his growing consciousness of the grim passive cruelty of the prairie and of the only somewhat less grim active cruelties of the community. The prairie doesn't care and the townspeople care too much, but in all of the wrong ways. Mitchell would have us understand that Brian attains insight into deep permanent forces of man and nature and so becomes reconciled to the problems of his existence. But if the winds and gods of the prairie and the town are shown ministering to the evolution of a troubled boy's consciousness, there are many reasons to question the nature of their influence. For what Brian actually discovers and enters into is somewhat uneasy communication with a hierarchy of odd and withdrawn persons, most of them caught up as he is in attempting to resolve the dilemma of their alienation from the community. At the head

of this hierarchy are several disaffected persons whose professional standing gives them precarious half-footing in the community: Hislop, the enlightened minister who is forced to leave; Doctor Svarich, Miss Thompson, the school teacher with whom he has had an unsuccessful love affair elsewhere, and Digby, the school principal. Because these humane persons are only half accepted by a community which they in turn only half accept, they lead incomplete, almost inert lives.

Brian's more active education begins where their influence leaves off: with his uncle Sean, whose intelligent efforts to cope with the drouth are met by a human inertia so perverse that he is reduced to random cursing; with Milt Palmer, the shoe and harness maker, who eases his discontent with the jug he keeps under the counter in his shop and the copy of Berkeley's philosophy he reads and discusses with Digby, presumably to get at the nature of existence, actually to escape the pointlessness of the existence he leads; with Ben, the town ne'er-do-well, who makes his still and his gifts as a raconteur the basis for contact with a community that otherwise despises him; with the son, young Ben, who responds to his father's disgrace by a withdrawal so marked that his human impulses only glimmer at depths of his remote eyes; and with old Sammy, the town idiot, who lives almost totally withdrawn in a self-built insane asylum at the outskirts of town, his intelligence—that light which keeps the human psyche habitable—lost in the nightmare clutter which existence becomes when the light flickers out.

It is all but impossible to accept Mitchell's inference that contact with these persons serves to reconcile Brian's consciousness to the "realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death." What he learns, if anything, is that the kinds of suffering which afflict those who are completely alienated from the community are far more damaging than the kinds of suffering which afflict those who are only partly alienated. It isn't surprising that the two most vivid portraits in the novel are those of young Ben and old Sammy, the two most severely withdrawn of all the persons represented. Young Ben appears to Brian in unexpected places and at unpredictable moments with all of the suddenness of a hallucination projected from Brian's unconscious. To be Brian in the kind of community Mitchell represents is to be not far from young Ben. And what is old Sammy in his age and insanity but young Ben later on and farther out on the road leading away from contact with other human beings. What

but negative lessons can Brian learn from such dissociated beings—so grim a school of lives!

Nor is it possible to accept the protective, but not very protective, screen of humour with which Mitchell has softened and attempted to humanize the world Brian experiences. Here contrast is helpful. The mordant western humour of Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce and Bret Harte derives the tensions which make it effective from these writers' awareness of the overt savagery of the settlement years. In Brian's world the savagery is still there—the gratuitous cruelty of the community drives the Chinese restaurant owner to despair and suicide—but it has become socially organized, hence acceptable. Mrs. Abercrombie, the town assassin, is also the town social leader. However, the intended humour of the scenes in which her control over the school board is finally broken is without animation because it is without true animosity. The firing of the enlightened minister, the exclusion of the Chinese children from the community, the suicide of their father, the sadistic persecution of Young Ben, as well as the constant badgering of the school teachers, provide cause enough for any amount of enmity. But far from being a gesture of delight at the downfall of a despicable person, the humour is simply a droll and softening pretense that she never was actually dangerous.

The need for this pretense is not far to seek or at least to suspect. If the town is presided over by Mrs. Abercrombie, an incarnation of community enmity toward personality—let them be citizens instead—the prairie is presided over by old Sammy, an incarnation of the disintegration which is likely to overtake all but the most resourceful personalities when the individual self wanders beyond sphere of human community. These two represent the actual, the most powerful of the gods who preside over Brian's attempt to establish contact with human and natural forces which will sustain his precocious selfhood. And despite her overt hatred of the diversity and freedom that are essential for self-nurture, Mrs. Abercrombie is less fearsome than is old Sammy who presides with his mad, mumbled incantations over psychic chaos and old night. Or let us say that the open emptiness of the prairie is humanly more frightening than the huddled pettiness of the town. Because this is so, the town must be sugar coated with humour so that the lacklustre perversity of the place will seem merely droll, hence bearable. But readers who find

it impossible to swallow Mrs. Abercrombie under any circumstances at all will feel that the failure of the humour reflects a failure of the novel to confront the actuality which it suggests. As a place for Brian to discover a community which will foster self-growth, the town in its resourcelessness more nearly resembles the prairie. The humour is scarcely a compensation for such desolation.

TO TURN TO the more severe isolation from which David Canaan suffers in *The Mountain and The Valley* is to encounter a more intense but scarcely a more successful attempt to discover new ground upon which the withdrawn self might stand in its efforts to move into presence. During his childhood and youth David's vivid impulses fascinate his family and friends. Mutual responsiveness brings on that gradual blur of familiarity which can cause us to notice least those persons we know best; but when responsiveness is somehow short-circuited the one who stands apart becomes impressive in his otherness. Throughout childhood and early youth David moves among others with the aura about him of the chosen person, the mysterious Nazarite who is motioned toward an unknowable destiny by unseen gods. But what is an advantage during his early years becomes a disadvantage later when the appealing mystery of his loneliness becomes the oppressive ordeal of his unbreakable solitude. More devastating still, at no point in his life is he capable of actions which might rescue him from the limbo in which he dwells.

He carries on a correspondence and later a friendship with the Halifax boy, Toby, but makes no attempt to visit Toby and explore possibilities for new experience in the city. He is conscious of talents which might open experience out for him so that his self could follow into presence. But he turns his back upon these talents and remains on the farm even though aware that it is his prison rather than his promised land. He quarrels with his parents but seems unable to move past the evident incest barriers which bind him to them even as they shut him away from them. That the male mountain and the female valley of the title loom up so prominently in the novel is surely a sign, here as with Wordsworth, that natural objects have been endowed with all the seem-

ing numenousness of their inaccessible human equivalents. Conversely, other persons in the novel are invested with a deceptive glamour. The breath of life fans the nucleus of David's impulses into a glow, but because these impulses are checked they never achieve the release of communication, much less communion. Unable to know his family in their ordinariness, he must create his own knowledge in the image of his arrested, his childish and childlike psychic life. Consequently his parents are perceived as mythical, almost biblical beings and this appearance is sustained as long as David's response is intense enough, the glow white hot. Such intensities are as much the hallmark of the novel as a markedly devitalized humour is the hallmark of Mitchell's. But like Mitchell's humour, the intensity is badly flawed.

For David is trying to sustain an illusion. Whenever the hot impulse cools the glow goes out of the novel and we see David's family and friends for what they are, very unbiblical, unmythical, ordinary human beings. At no time does his friend Toby demonstrate those distinguished qualities with which David invests him. His sister Anna is represented as soul of David's soul, but it is only possible for David to sustain this sublimated conception by overlooking the almost overtly incestuous basis for their relationship. Only the looming mountain can provide adequate expression for the childlike awe with which he regards his father. In his relations with others David is much like one inside a house which he cannot leave looking out at persons he has never known because he has never actually moved among them. As one by one these persons depart, he begins to notice the emptiness, room leading silently to room. The novel is an account of David's attempt to ward off such knowledge. But fathers and mothers die, and brothers, friends and sisters—soul of his soul—depart. Until only the grandmother is left, calling out "Where is that child?", even as the child, unable to endure both an outer and an inner emptiness, goes at last up the snow covered mountain into the final dimension of his solitude. The emptiness, the silence and the snow into which he sinks down at the end of the novel figure forth the constant nothingness against which his bright intensities had beat, thinking it the high shores of this actual world. His life would be pathetic if it were not heroic.

The heroism is in his effort, in the extreme tenacity with which David clings to the sources of his suffering, and it is in the novel, in the record

of that suffering. The very intensity which creates those illusions with which David tries to live also creates a distinctive lyric exaltation. Because perception is so consistently at fever pitch, the descriptive surfaces of the novel are exceptionally fine-grained, the communion with nature, with appearances, with actions, so close that many passages read like lyric poems. But paradoxes are endless, and if the unreleased intensity which is a tragedy for David becomes an advantage for the novelist it in turn becomes another kind of disadvantage for the reader. For Buckler has no compositional key except maximum intensity. Sentence after sentence is forced to a descriptive pitch which makes the novel exceptionally wearing to read.

ONE TURNS with something like relief from the kind of illusions with which Brian O'Connal and David Canaan seek to escape isolation to the blunt but subtle absence of such illusions in *As For Me And My House*. The bleak assumption of this beautiful novel is that Philip Bentley has no ground whatsoever upon which he might stand, no communion at all through which he might discover saving dimensions of self. The overwhelming desolation which rims Horizon around—the hostile wind, the suffocating dust and sand and the even more suffocating and claustrophobic heat—recurs on the pages of Mrs. Bentley's diary as outward manifestation of the inner desolation felt by her husband. All that Philip can claim or cling to is his maddeningly inarticulate impulse to create. The novel is less like a story than it is like a cumulative picture in which Ross, by a remarkable, almost *tour de force* repetition of detail, grains a central scene upon the reader's consciousness so that all other details and even the action of the novel achieve meaningful focus in relation to the one scene at the center, repeated some thirty times. It is of course that in which Philip is shown retreating to his study where he will sit interminable evening superimposed upon interminable evening, drawing or fiddling at drawing, or staring with baffled intensity at drawings he has in some other time and place tried to draw. Yet, "Even though the drawings are only torn up or put away to fill more boxes when we move, even though no one ever

gets a glimpse of them . . . still they're for him the only part of life that's real or genuine." The novel is a projection through the medium of Mrs. Bentley's remarkably responsive consciousness of the despair in which her husband is caught, "some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him . . . so blind and helpless it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself." And the town itself, with the dust "reeling in the streets", the heat "dry and deadly like a drill" and the wind "like something solid pressed against the face", is simply a place name for the limbo in which Bentley lives, "a wilderness outside of night and sky and prairie with this one little spot of Horizon hung up lost in its immensity" beneath which "he's as lost and alone."

Philip's need to escape from this isolation drives him to art. But just as he can find no terms under which he may act as a self so he can find no terms under which he may act as an artist. His most characteristic drawing is a receding perspective in which a looming false-front building gives way to a diminished next building, and a next, and a next, an endless progression which provides a portrait of the monotony of his own being. The novel is a study of a frustrated artist—actually, a non-artist—one unable to discover a subject which will release him from his oppressive incapacity to create. The excellence of the study traces to the remarkable resourcefulness with which Ross brings into place the day-to-day nuances of Mrs. Bentley's struggling consciousness as he builds up her account of an artist who cannot create because he cannot possess himself and who cannot possess himself because there is no self to possess. Certainly there are more deep-reaching portraits of the artist, for in this novel all is muffled within Philip's inarticulation, but none that I know represents with so steady a pressure of felt truth the pervasive undermining of all vital energies which occurs when the would-be artist's creativity is thwarted. No momentary exuberance survives. The flowers won't grow. The adopted boy, for whom Philip tries to provide that childhood he did not have himself, cannot be kept. Neither can his horse. Neither can his dog. Nothing can drive away the "faint old smell of other lives" from the house. No one and nothing can intercede to shut out the wind, prevent the dust, lessen the heat in which the Bentleys are "imbedded . . . like insects in a fluid that has congealed." Not once in the novel does Philip break through the torment of his constraint to utter a free sentence. Even when his wife confronts him with knowledge of his

covert love affair with Judith West his response, beyond the endurance of even an Arthur Dimmesdale, is silence. But if the beauty is in the detailing, it does not trace to the dreariness which is portrayed. It traces to the constant presence in Mrs. Bentley's consciousness of an exuberance which flares up like matches in the wind and struggles to survive, a counter-impulse within her by which life attempts to defeat the defeat. This bravery loses out to the dreariness—the flowers *won't* grow—but in the process of struggling it animates the novel.

However, there is no mistaking the meaning which events bring into place during the last distraught days which the diary records when Judith West dies and even the wind rebels, blowing the false-front town flat. When creative power is thwarted, destructive power emerges. "It's hard," Mrs. Bentley tells us, "to stand back watching a whole life go to waste." But the diary is an inch by inch representation along the walls of her resisting consciousness of the relentless crumbling under destructive pressure of her husband's life and hence her own as the undertow of bitter silence about which the portrait is built drags these prairie swimmers under wind, under dust, under heat, to that ocean floor of inner death upon which such silence rests, strongest swimmers most deeply drowned.

There is a superb scene in which the Bentleys walk during an April snow storm to the outskirts of town:

The snow spun round us thick and slow like feathers till it seemed we were walking on and through a cloud. The little town loomed up and fell away. On the outskirts we took the railroad track, where the telegraph poles and double line of fence looked like a drawing from which all the horizontal strokes had been erased. The spongy flakes kept melting and trickling down our cheeks, and we took off our gloves sometimes to feel their coolness on our hands. We were silent most of the way. There was a hush in the snow like a finger raised.

We came at last to a sudden deep ravine. There was a hoarse little torrent at the bottom, with a shaggy, tumbling swiftness that we listened to a while, then went down the slippery bank to watch. We brushed off a stone and sat with our backs against the trestle of the railway bridge. The flakes came whirling out of the whiteness, spun against the stream a moment, vanished at its touch. On our shoulders and knees and hats again they piled up little drifts of silence.

Then the bridge over us picked up the coming of a train. It was there even while the silence was still intact. At last we heard a distant whistle-blade, then a single point of sound, like one drop of water in a whole sky. It dilated, spread. The sky and silence began imperceptibly to fill with it. We steeled ourselves a little,

feeling the pounding onrush in the trestle of the bridge. It quickened, gathered, shook the earth, then swept in an iron roar above us, thundering and dark.

We emerged from it slowly, while the trestle a moment or two sustained the clang and din. I glanced at Philip, then quickly back to the water. A train still makes him wince sometimes. At night, when the whistle's loneliest, he'll toss a moment, then lie still and tense. In the daytime I've seen his eyes take on a quick half eager look, just for a second or two, and then sink flat and cold again.

The hushed, almost sealed, inner silence which is the price Philip Bentley pays for his failure to summon self into presence is not broken but poured momentarily full of the "iron roar . . . thundering and dark" which in times past had signalled to him an escape from the desolation of his childhood. Even on this forsaken April day it echoes into lost realms of self to those times when his eyes took on a "quick half-eager look" until the weight of silence reasserts itself and they turn "flat and cold" like the day. When an artist in fact discovers that close correspondence to life which he is always seeking, life takes over and the details of representation become inexhaustibly suggestive. D. H. Lawrence's unhappy lovers have wandered through Sherwood Forest to just such sudden "deep ravines" and have half glimpsed the "shaggy tumbling swiftness" which they, like the Bentleys, have lost from their lives. And James Joyce's depressed Dubliners have had the same universal angel of silence shake snow into drifts upon "shoulders and knees and hats" as the pounding onrush of the train, thunder in the blood, dwindles and disappears, leaving the scene, "distorted, intensified, alive with thin, cold bitter life". It is not surprising that the departing train draws Mrs. Bentley's thoughts—it is one pathos of the novel that we never learn her first name—back in the longest retrospective passage of the diary to her husband's childhood in search of the bitterness, constantly emphasized, which gradually seals him in, seals her out. Nor is it surprising that later when she becomes aware of the force of mute passion with which Judith West breaks through Philip's constraint she is at once reminded of the April day she and her husband "sat in the snowstorm watching the water rush through the stones"—the silence, the snow, the water and the stones—the story of their lives in a profound moment, a magnificent scene.

IF KNOWLEDGE OF Philip Bentley's uncreated childhood comes mostly through the indirection of his adult life, our knowledge of Alan MacNeil's isolation and insecurity comes through the indirection of the adult conflicts he witnesses. And most of the adults in *Each Man's Son* can be known only through the additional indirection of the assigned part each plays in the general scheme of conflict which MacLennan has devised. They are like those persons in actual life whose roles become masks concealing self from access. Such arrangements are as unsatisfactory in novels as they are in actuality. Self is the centre of being, the source of our most vital impulses, and when those fictional persons who enact the artist's vision of life are not directly related to the artist's self, they will inevitably speak and act mechanically, without true animation. This is so decidedly the case in *Each Man's Son*—as in MacLennan's fiction as a whole—that any attempt to understand Alan MacNeil's plight must be an attempt to move past the masks MacLennan has created in order to reach what is vital, the source rather than the surfaces of his vision.

The mask in *Each Man's Son*—as, again, in all of MacLennan's novels—is made up of the pseudo-sophistication, the surface civilization in terms of which the portrait of Doctor Ainslee is built. MacLennan never wearies of extolling his surgical prowess and yet his human *savoir faire* and yet his intellectual probity. He is the fastest man in North America with an appendectomy and other doctors stand by, not to help, but to hold the watch on his performance, noting afterward with knowing glances that Ainslee has done it again. If I seem to be suggesting that Doctor Ainslee is Walter Mitty played straight, this is less an accusation than it is an identification. For it is not, as MacLennan would have us believe, residual effects of Calvinistic sin which constantly unsettle the doctor's composure. It is the all but impossible facade he seeks to maintain, so false that MacLennan is incapable of animating it because it has so little to do with the profound naïveté and relative crudity of response in which MacLennan's true force as an artist is rooted.

If all the world were true there would be no place in fiction for falsity. But, notoriously, the world is far from true, and Doctor Ainslee's cultural veneer is all too accurate in its patent falsity—true of Ainslee, true of a good half of MacLennan's protagonists, true—above all—of most North

Americans, who also adopt European disguises having little or nothing to do with the self beneath, the source of vital energy. Constant anxiety is the price Ainslee pays in order to maintain his facade. But if MacLennan would have us believe that the reason for the anxiety is the Calvinism, a more apt explanation for both the anxiety and the mask comes to us from the other, the vital side of the novel.

The night that Ainslee operates upon Alan he flees to the harbourside from the strain of both a professional and a personal involvement—cutting the child he hopes to adopt—and experiences a partial breakdown in which “his mind was pounding with its own rhythms and his body was out of control.” To escape the panic that grips him, he runs up the wharf.

Before he realized that his feet had caught in something soft he plunged forward, an explosion of light burst in his head and his right temple hit the boards. For a moment he lay half stunned, trying to understand what had happened. He rolled to get up, and as he did so, the hair on the nape of his neck prickled. He had stumbled over something alive, and now this living thing was rising beside him. He could smell, feel and hear it, and as he jerked his head around he saw the outline of a broken-peaked cap appear against the residual light from the sea. It rose on a pair of huge shoulders and stood over Ainslee like a tower.

The tower is Red Willie MacIsaac, and Ainslee in his fear, repugnance and anger shouts out, “You drunken swine, MacIsaac—don’t you know who I am?” This outcry under these circumstances does much to illuminate the novel.

For the drunken swine, Red Willie, is one of the group of incredibly naive and endlessly quarrelsome displaced Highlanders whose portraits in their really superb clarity and exuberance make up much the most vital part of the novel. These Highlanders, doomed to wear their vitality away in the dreary Cape Breton Island mines, rebel like the profound children they are by recourse to the only political action of which they are capable, their endless evening brawls. The sum of their whimsical and powerful impulses is crystalized into the portrait of their downfallen hero, Archie MacNeil, the finest single portrait in MacLennan’s novels.

Now the main use to which Doctor Ainslee’s mask—his civilized facade—is put is to hold these impulses in check. A word from him and the miners back away, chagrined. When he cries out, Red Willie becomes contrite. But the identification is surely much closer. When the

rhythms of Ainslee's mind and body become separated and he trips over and becomes mingled with Red Willie there is reason to believe that "this living thing . . . beside him" is simply the self behind the mask, the vital, violent being held in check by the civilized surface. That Ainslee can and does check Red Willie is an obvious victory for Ainslee and it is a tragedy for Alan's actual father, Archie. For Ainslee stumbles over Red Willie immediately after Archie has been ruinously defeated in Trenton. And the voice that emerges when he lies tangled with Red Willie mutters, "There was dirty tricks in the States last Friday and by chesus I am going to kick them up your ass." The blame is, if dubiously aimed, properly assigned. The conflict at the heart of the novel is between the civilized facade maintained by Ainslee and the naive violence of the place represented by Archie MacNeil.

Alan is caught between the violent needs which drive his father away on the forlorn prize fighter's Odyssey in which his one-time physical magnificence becomes the dupe of unscrupulous promoters and the counter needs which drive Ainslee to fill in the chinks of his cultural facade by inching his way through the alien Greek of the classical Odyssey. Both men want to save Alan from the mines, those holes in the ground which give nothing and take everything away, but each tries to do so in ways which rule out the other. At the conclusion of the novel, when Archie prevails and smashes down his wife and her lover and he and Ainslee confront each other, it is the civilized surface confronting the violent self among the ruins created by their tragic alienation.

(The second part of this essay, in which the four novels are related to the urban fiction of Mordecai Richler, will be published in the next issue of *Canadian Literature*.)