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The Shaping Art and Vision of Howard O'Hagan: Quest, Belief and Cycle in Tay John

Ella Tanner

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ABSTRACT

The Shaping Art and Vision of Howard O'Hagan: Quest, Belief and Cycle in Tay John

Ella Tanner

O'Hagan is concerned not only with how myth is made but with how myth comprehends the world. The primary aim of this study is to discover some of the sources of Tay John's power, to recognize how its vision is concealed in codes, to attempt to decipher these codes as they emerge in the novel's underlying patterns, and to explore what these patterns mean for the inner reality of the work, for the shape of art and vision, the shape of life. It will focus on the linking images that recur and interweave between the levels of the novel, discussing in particular the patterns expressing the concept of the revolving earth as an analogue for man. They are the patterns which release the identity of the wild with the human and the sacred, and which generate the resilient and sensuous form rather than the rigid facts of knowing, patterns which inform the novel with the sense of a powerful but elusive presence. The novel calls us to explore rather than to appropriate and civilize the unnamed territories of life, sustained by a knowledge based not on the rigidity of logic, but on the resiliency of the imagination, on the archetypal patterning of its organic and sacred symbols, as they are revealed in the word alone, the word as myth, and myth as an expression of the primitive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my director, Lewis Poteet, for his kind support and guidance and also those who, in their respect for the work of Howard O'Hagan, have offered their help and encouragement, among them Gary Geddes, Robert Harlow, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Petersen O'Hagan, Patricia Morley, P. K. Page and Jack Robinson.

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INTRODUCTION

> I know it sounds silly, damn silly, but I used to feel, oh, I don't know, a presence in the mountains. Some kind of a presence.
>
> Howard O'Hagan

> . . . art is disclosure—disclosure of a world, an event in which being comes to stand. . . . Art is art when it brings a world to stand before one.
>
> Richard Palmer
> Hermeneutics

In all his work, Howard O'Hagan has tried to capture the inner presence of things through the magic of words—through the art of combining them in unprecedented and luminous ways. He discloses "a world." It is the aim of this study to inquire into the nature of that world and consider how he brings it to stand through language.

He is possessed of an original vision. It is never made explicit, but is given poetic form, a form which subtly suggests both an organic and a spiritual conception of the earth. His writings are imbued with the sense of a vibrant living wilderness and a deep intuitive allegiance to its inherent values. These values are humanized by the presence of man—not only mountains—brooding through the work and giving it an existential centre of gravity. This results in a correlative respect for language: a humanistic concern, similar to Palmer's (241), with the word and the form in which the word is communicated, and ultimately, with

how this affects its potential for revealing the indwelling patterns of things.

The problem lies in interpreting a world in which almost all the gracious marks of presence have been banished. O'Hagan realizes that we are increasingly separated from its essence; our senses and our memory are dulled and, when we do recognize its patterns and its rhythms, our language is often inadequate.

This sense of dismay and nostalgia in O'Hagan has led some recent critics to take the deconstructive view, to see in his writing an undermining of the word, resulting in an "uninvention" and "reinvention" of the world. I view it rather as a "reorientation"—to its unnamed and unnoticed aspects. If anything is being undermined it is our habitual way of seeing.

I intend therefore to examine his work as his inquiry, and ours, into the capacities of language to break through, at least in glimpses, to a deeper level of recognition and understanding of both word and world—not a reinvented world, but the one in which we are already standing.

The study will focus on O'Hagan's primary work, Tay John. First published in London in early 1939 and reprinted in New York in 1960, it only came into general circulation with the New Canadian Library edition in 1974.

When relevant, reference will be made to his other works: a later novel, The School-Marm Tree—more romantic,

less mythic and compelling than Tay John; two collections of short stories, Wilderness Men—intense evocations of actual wilderness figures, and The Woman Who Got On at Jasper Station and Other Stories—moving tales, most of them based on mountain experiences; Coyote's Song, a collection edited by Gary Geddes awaiting publication; stories and essays which appeared in the Thirties in Esquire and Maclean's and in journals such as The Prairie Schooner and The New Mexico Quarterly; writings, published and unpublished, from the O'Hagan Archive at the University of Victoria; and material culled from The McGill News and The McGill Daily. O'Hagan was Editor of the Daily, and also a friend of A. J. M. Smith and Stephen Leacock while studying Law at McGill in the Twenties.

Tay John has been acclaimed as "a brilliantly written and conceived mythic novel," a "technical breakthrough" in its innovative style, "a book that hooks itself into the fabric of the mind and stays there."[1] Yet there has been little sustained criticism on this work. Up until the 1980's, there was only one published essay, Michael Ondaatje's "Howard O'Hagan and the Rough-Edged Chronicle," an article by Gary Geddes aptly titled "The Writer CanLit Forgot," Patricia Morley's introduction to the 1974 edition of the novel,[2] and a few commentaries and reviews—some of which narrowly understood his expansive vision.

Although Tay John's London publication met with excellent reviews, it also met with impending war. This circumstance, together with O'Hagan's travels abroad, the inactive

literary community in Canada at that time, and the fact that, in any case, his metafictional, post-modern approach—highly experimental for 1939—was a generation ahead of his time, likely contributed to the lack of critical attention.

While for several years now he has been quietly respected and recognized as influential in much contemporary fiction by those few critics and writers who know him, it is only recently that he has been attracting wider appreciation and critical response. This was evidenced when, at age 80, a few months before his death in 1982, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by McGill University. In late 1986 essays by Arnold Davidson and Margery Fee appeared in Canadian Literature.[3]

The main reasons for the present study are three, and are stimulated by the above challenges:

The first is personal and incorporates the "why" in this venture. I am intrigued—as most who have read this unique work are—by the shape of vision in Tay John, by why the book "hooks itself into the fabric of mind and stays there." Mysterious, enigmatic, its world pulls at the reader, demanding to be questioned.

The second, correlative with the first, is concerned with the "how," with the shape of O'Hagan's art; with what makes his style not only "technically innovative" but, in the idiom of Leslie Fiedler, what makes it "resonate and go." What is there in O'Hagan's language itself that answers to meaning?

The third reason pertains to the absence of a body of criticism and thus the need for a comprehensive study of his

style and thought. The novel is a mythopoeic "unnamed country" with few critical guidelines.

An additional stimulus for this study stems from my having had the privilege of talking with Howard O'Hagan on two occasions.

My thesis is, that concealed beneath the vivid surface story of Tay John there is a deeper meaning, that this meaning may be detected through an examination of the interacting patterns of language and vision, particularly the patterns associated with the quest and belief theme and its resolution in the concept of the cycle; and that it is at this underlying thematic level and not on the level of explicit narrative that the basic shape and unity of the work may be perceived.

I hope to show the following:

1) How patterns of vision both shape and are shaped by art.
2) How the double and interacting theme of quest and belief functions, the quest being more closely concerned with how one can "hear" and "say," and belief with what one knows or thinks one knows.
3) How this theme is depicted in terms of the primitive world of Tay John with its emphasis on initiatory patterns, in terms of the civilized world of secondary characters, both religions and profane; and further, how the narrator functions between these two worlds.
4) How O'Hagan's own unspoken vision influences his perspectives on these worlds.

5). How this vision is indirectly manifested through a unique and compelling use of language: through choice of words and imagery, particularly archetypal imagery, and through repetition of motifs in patterns of story and myth.

6) How these artistic strategies illuminate the way in which O'Hagan's imagination constructs its symbols; and consequently how it is his art that carries much of the responsibility for informing the novel with the sense of a powerful but elusive presence.

The primary aim of this study, then, is to discover some of the sources of the novel's power; to recognize how O'Hagan conceals his vision in codes, and to attempt to decipher these codes as they emerge in the novel's underlying patterns.

The approach will be impressionistic and hermeneutic. The focus will be on how style and content work together to give the novel its vitality rather than on discussions of technical theory, or of such areas as the eclectic mix of genres evident in the work.

The inquiry falls into two parts.

Section One will be concerned with establishing backgrounds. In Chapter One, "Perspectives," the nature of the underlying patterns will be questioned and some answers proposed; in Chapter Two, "Contexts," consideration will be given to relevant backgrounds: O'Hagan and influences, and the Canadian, Romantic, and mythological-primitive contexts; in Chapter Three, "Approaches," an indication will be given

of how the patterns will be traced through O'Hagan's concern with the word alone, with the word as story, with story as myth, and with myth as a revelation of the primitive.

Section Two will deal more directly with the text itself. Since the unity of the novel's theme is carefully reflected in its overall structure, this technique particularly applying to the circular tripartite division of the novel, and since this structure serves to organize the shape of O'Hagan's art and vision, I am dividing Section Two of my study similarly with corresponding chapter headings: "Legend," "Hearsay," and "Evidence—without a finding." Page references for the text will be used here mainly for clarification since most quotations should be easily locatable within the chapter concerned.

The distinctions I am making among the three different headings are a reflection of the three different means of seeing and knowing the world. I will not restrict myself to the contents of the sections as chronologically presented in the novel since Tay John and his legend are set against other patterns and concepts throughout the work. How these patterns develop, interact, and define the shape of an individual's world and also the shape of the author's art and vision will be my concern.

Many of O'Hagan's passages are analogous and support endless glossing. In one of these, using an analogy that frequently recurs in the novel—the concept of "a mountain in an untravelled land"—he suggests that the story of man's

dark destiny is similarly "unfathomable." Yet we note (and this is the way O'Hagan drops clues) that it also "waits . . . for someone to come close" — perhaps to explore how or why it is unfathomable.

Tay John is a novel that not only invites this kind of exploration, but through its self-reflexive dialogue also invites a creative participation. It is not only a work of art but about art—the art of language and of living in the world.

A conclusion will provide a summary of some of the ideas that have evolved during my various re-readings of Tay John.

Notes

[1]Gary Geddes in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature 84, and Saturday Night 90.

[2]In addition to Gary Geddes, Michael Ondaatje and Patricia Morley, Howard O'Hagan is esteemed by such writers as Robert Harlow, George Woodcock, P. K. Page, Kevin Roberts, Geoff Hancock, Jay Macpherson, Patrick Lane, and Dick Harrison, who took the title of his study of prairie fiction, Unnamed Country, from a phrase in Tay John, and Robert Harlow, who took the wolverine encounter scene in Scann from "The Black Ghost," Wilderness Men.

Some of their comments are as follows: "The first novel of real uniqueness and consequence produced by a Canadian . . . he wrote greatly, beautifully . . . a technically sophisticated, innovative and imaginative novel whose scope is epic, whose people really lived, and whose narrative voice is sure and wise and full of the experience of life," Robert Harlow, Howard O'Hagan: A Memoir, CBC Anthology, July 1983. "It is the most important piece of fiction to come out of British Columbia before the Second World War . . . a work so self-reflexive, so overtly conscious of the limits of the fictive art, that it can be called Canada's first serious work of metafiction," Gary Geddes, "British Columbia, Writing in," The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, 1983:84. ". . . the most powerful, evocative, romantic and moving piece of fiction I'd read in this country. At times the writing was spellbinding," Kevin Roberts, "Talking to Howard O'Hagan," Event Magazine, 5.3, 1976:42. "I can think of no novel that has got as close to [the] raw power of myth as O'Hagan's book does," Michael Ondaatje, "Howard O'Hagan and 'The Rough-Edged Chronicle,'" The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century 277.

[3]These essays were previously presented at the Learned Societies Conferences— Montreal, 1985, and Guelph, 1984 respectively. Davidson also had an essay published in Etudes canadiennes in 1983. Geoff Hancock wrote an article under "Howard O'Hagan" for the Oxford Companion, 1984.

SECTION I

The Shaping Art and Vision:

Perspectives, Contexts, Approaches

. . . . . Is there not
An art, a music, a strain of words
That shall be life, the acknowledged voice of life?

William Wordsworth
"Home at Grasmere"

CHAPTER ONE

Perspectives

Visionary Power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words.
There darkness makes abode; and all the host
Of Shadowy things do work their changes there,

. . .
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine;
And through the turnings intricate of Verse,
Present themselves as objects recognis'd,
In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.

William Wordsworth
The Prelude

The world imagined is the ultimate good. . . .

It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing. . . .

A light, a power, the miraculous influence. . . .

We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge . . .

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one . . .
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air. . . .

Wallace Stevens
"Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour"

Out of the dark womb of the ageless earth arises this extraordinary figure, Tay John. Out of the intangible time of the past, from the obscure echoes and lambent shapes of legend, proceeds this extraordinary tale. It begins simply, quietly, and grows into inexhaustible suggestions of meaning. In both form and content it follows a strange circular path: "the shroud awaiting him by his mother's womb" is of snow and, enfolded in it, Tay John disappears into the earth once more.

It presents unusual perspectives on space and time, man and destiny, world and word; on the silent communication of wind and mist, and the silent lonely communion of Tay John with the earth. Shadows, curiously, are everywhere, and the leaves of the poplar tree quiver over all the key scenes. The narrator is much concerned with the mysterious "source," with the momentary "glimpse," with the dark memory; with the inscrutability of God, of "unnamed country," and of man—his mind, his visions, his fate.

Time seems to stand still for the powerful set-pieces of the story, and language itself stands still while Denham searches for "the right word, the only word" to "mirror clearly" what he sees. The novel delights in naming and tales. At the same time it is intensely concerned with the inexpressible and with silence. It provides an immensely powerful imaginative experience, "one that is likely," as the 1939 London Times predicted, "to live on in the mind."

The above are images that reveal not only the sensuous surface of Tay John, but something of its inner presence.

What do they mean? Or more important, as Susan Sontag advocates, "How do they mean?" (14).

Particularly apposite to Tay John is Sontag's belief that "the knowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something rather than a knowledge of something (like a fact or a moral judgment) in itself," that the satisfactions of a literary creation "do not lie in its views on God and man, but in the superior kinds of energy, vitality, expressiveness which are incarnated" in the work (22). This would seem to indicate that it is not the facts of knowing one's world but the degree and shape of imagination one brings to this knowledge that reveal the indwelling patterns of things.

Before looking into "the form or style of knowing" or responding to the query "How does it mean?" we should consider what makes Tay John a novel of which we ask questions. What pulls at the reader and communicates a sense of "energy, vitality, expressiveness"? What makes it "live on in the mind"?

First, I would suggest it is O'Hagan's unique and mysterious vision of man and earth as manifestations of an implicit philosophy of creative energy and regeneration: his imagery of solitary questing man and a vibrant primitive earth, and of how the two in a sense become one in the cycle of all living things. Tay John as the central image seems to represent what is potent and creative, light-giving and redemptive in nature and, simultaneously, what is silent

and elusive, dark and strange. He is also a figure symbolic of the "Truth and Beauty" and their tragic precursors, "agony" and "violence," which Father Rorty recognizes as underlying organic and spiritual life (188).

Second, I believe this is an extraordinary novel because of O'Hagan's approach to art. In its metafictional and storytelling elements there is a gratitude not only for the living world, but for the vibrant word—"a good word that"—and also a recognition of the inexpressible, of mystery and elusiveness at the centre of art as well as of life. The most resonant echoes in Tay John are often its silences. While allusive clues can be variously interpreted (or ignored), facts themselves seldom reach the core. The vibrant inner reality Sontag refers to as "incarnated" in a work is not easily accessible.

Something of the deep structural relationship between the earth, those who dwell there, and art, is set forth in O'Hagan's oft-quoted passage, its motifs and resonances making it almost a canon for his thought, a metaphoric expression of how throughout the work the concept of the mountain functions as a matrix of both man's life and his story:

> Every story—the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny—having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still unlived—man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light—every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name upon it,

> and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down—and when you have finished, the story remains, something beyond your touch, resistant to your siege; unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain. You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude. (166)

Mountain and story stand solitary and self-sustaining. Like man himself, they "exist independently," as Denham says just prior to this passage. Although rich in buried imagery, O'Hagan's world remains to a large extent unmined, unnamed, unsurveyed. And this, I think, is intentional. In Tay John labelling frequently suggests prejudice and dogmatism, pretension and possession; it is "assault" (a key word in O'Hagan), and breaks the fragile connection to the heart of life, of story, of wilderness; and the logic of the compass does not measure beauty—or violence. Evidence of this kind is "without a finding." Here, story and mountain end as many Indian legends do, by declaring "That is all I am telling you" (Kuipers 219). Unnamed, undefiled, primitive, puzzling, but coded, mountain and tale appeal to man's curiosity and to his desire for orientation. For, as O'Hagan suggests, we walk "in unaccustomed light"; his world and word leave us at times spellbound, at times dazed, thus provoking not only infinite questions but infinite hypotheses. Could answers lie in the depths not only of the mountain but also in the silence of the "surrounding solitude"?

That the essence of reality, with its truth and its agony, invites exploration yet is virtually inaccessible and inexpressible, is confirmed by Saul Bellow in a passage strikingly parallel to O'Hagan's thought:

> The essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it is shown to us in glimpses, in what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as 'true impressions.' This essense reveals, and then conceals itself. When it goes away it leaves us in doubt. But we never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come. We are reluctant to talk about this because there is nothing we can prove, because our language is inadequate and few people are willing to risk talking about it. (67)

Both Bellow and O'Hagan are striving for a concealed truth, a truth more radical than that provided by the second-hand facts of the glib religious, commercial, or legal worlds in Tay John.

How then does one glimpse, and keep the connection open to the root, to the essence "incarnated" in the contours of the mountain, in the shape of existence, the shape of art? How does Tay John mean?

O'Hagan won't tell us, but we can be aurally and visually alert to his search patterns. We can, for instance, follow his interest in communications of various kinds: fragments of tales, tidings, gospels, news, utterings, visions, namings; and the silent voices of blazes, tracks, signs; and moreover we can note his underlying concern for their orientation and interpretation values. And where do the Shuswaps look for harbingers of the "shape and color of the life before them"

(45)? The pattern—enhancing their imaginative legends and visions—would seem to be in coded imprints, in the contours of the dark vale, in traces of its creatures, and in the shape of its voices, such as that of the strange spectral "word left in the valley" (50). Word and vision, though veiled, are unified by significant form.

Form, then appears to be what one can believe in, whether it be of art or existence. And it has to be experienced; it is individual recognition and awareness, initiation not indoctrination, that discloses a world—a world perceived as peculiarly vivid and rhythmic in the mode of the tale, yet strangely shadowed in its role of expressing "the form or style of knowing something."

In Tay John, form is primarily revealed through cyclic imagery, and style through poetic language. Within these contexts, and sometimes within their discordant opposites, O'Hagan expands the experience of how we come to believe. Particularly through the dialectic of the narrator, he invites us to consider how knowledge comes to us, how we receive it, and how it affects attitudes to our source, our destiny, and ultimately to our redemption. By the power of imagination, he moves us beyond our customary limits of understanding through the medium of the symbolic image, the poetic word, the boundary situation, the tantalizing riddle, all of which tend to send out strange archetypal reverberations.

How he makes use of these strategies is worth considering in further detail since they function to shape the inter-

acting patterns of language and vision in which the novel's unity, power, and possible meaning are concealed. If the art is seen as shapely then perhaps the vision will be seen as shapely too.

The prime symbolic image presented is that of the natural world; through its organic form, it portrays the concept of cycle. And in a correlative manner, the poetic word, through its vibrant style, portrays the earth as a living organism sustained by an inner principle, a circle of processes which continually return to themselves.[1] Theme is reflected in structure: the story and the quests within it run their path and end where they begin; and the circular movement and unity of the novel itself are expressed in its rhythmic three-part form.

The cyclic shape of vision and art recognizes a poetry in the rhythms of the earth which says something to man about the rhythms of existence, and is perhaps what Heidegger means when he says man dwells "poetically" on this earth (Palmer 248).

It is not surprising, then, that O'Hagan, like Wordsworth, attributes a lyric communicative power to the motions of the "wind," to the shaping force of "the river" and "the hills around " (83, 126); and that his vision, like that of the poet, is ringed about with shadow.

It is "the darkness" that is "unveiled" in Tay John (80). "Unnamed," it is concerned not only with the country, but with suffering, alienation, and doubt. There are few

distinct outlines or answers. Tay John, himself, who silently arises from the shadows and from a forgotten Tsimshian legend, remains a chthonic figure "spawned by the mists" to the end (260). It is Wordsworth's poetic yet "ghostly language of the ancient earth" (Prelude 2.309) that we hear in O'Hagan's word, and wraiths of gesture and action that we detect in his world.

Symbolic image and poetic voice evoke a vision, strange but inviolable, that plays as rhythmically as a ground theme beneath the changing melody of character and story. Does this vision represent the archetype of the primordial indwelling spirit (the Algonquin Manitou) in Shuswap language, "the Snam"?[2] Is it O'Hagan's communication of "some kind of a presence"? Or Ondaatje's sense of "something mysterious and uncaught in the general movement of the whole book"?[3] Nameless, it seems to be something sensed from the beginning of time, something inexpressible, yet which is somehow the source for the strange undercurrents of thought and feeling that roll through the work, for the wild darkness from which they flow and into which they return.

In O'Hagan's world, where the radiance of life is transitory and shadowed, a brief "twilight" (162), this presence seems to be related to Stevens' "light, a power, the miraculous influence": his vision of "God and the imagination" as one, illuminating the evening, and making it possible to dwell there poetically, like Heidegger's man—at least for a time. It is a vision realized in the novel's pervasive

symbolism of light within darkness, particularly as evidenced in the solitary and imagistic, fleeting and mythic, figure of Tay John.[4] In an unfathomable universe where all is passing, for O'Hagan as for Stevens, "the world imagined is the ultimate good"; and, for both, it is the originality and style of the imagination that survives in the dark which reveals a significance in its flickering shadows.

Imagination functions in Tay John largely through symbolism. Meaning is felt through poetic movement. Language, often Biblical, interacts with vision to form the kind of vital and mediatory symbols George Whalley so pertinently described as

> . . . those objects of contemplation which reveal the primary values of life: the relations between man and the universe, between man and man, between man and God. Single symbols cluster about and point towards various aspects of these primary relations: birth, death, love, fear, fertility, desolation, immortality, suffering. . . . . these may be regarded as images, words and names consecrated, not simply by religious usage, but because they recur in the general consciousness; because they persist in that residual storehouse of human memory laid up throughout history and transmitted in social custom, in ritual and literature. (167)

Value is recognized through a style which does not explain but points, through a knowledge based not on the rigidity of logic but on the resiliency of the imagination, on the archetypal patterning of its organic and sacred symbols. These are also the symbols of myth, symbols which emphasize its role as "a condensed account of man's being" (Whalley 178).

Such an orientation to the essentially unknown affects O'Hagan's representation of nature, character, culture, history, religion, and story telling. It is the symbol that gives silent things voices and offers a possible redemption through an experience of underlying primary value.

Poetic symbol, however, is never simple. Beyond the grasp of language, it is often beyond the grasp of understanding. In Tay John it frequently embraces the kind of paradox Whalley describes as a "fundamental antinomy in the structure of reality" (131). Indeed, the shape and movement, the creative energy and seductive mystery of O'Hagan's world are contingent upon his riddling approach to both life and art, an approach which is a significant component of his feeling for boundaries and the beyond.

This puzzling, often humorous, game-playing masks a deeper seriousness through the art of ironic comment, teasing observations, even false clues or red-herrings.[5] The related beyond is that of the land, of the sacred, of language, and of time: of the country behind the mountains, of the inscrutable gods, of the unutterable word; of time past with its suggestions of being closer to the sources of life but, as the railway approaches, receding from man, and inviting the likes of Denham to attempt a decoding back to the beginning; of time "still unlived," also dark for the questor, "the future . . . a blind across his eyes" (232).

Like Julia, each of us, alone in unnamed country, is "benighted" (139). How then does the author suggest we

recognize and understand the shape of existence? What does he mean when he says, "Sometimes when we are older there is a glimpse"? In his universe of puzzle, contradiction and hints of an obscure beyond, his dark earth underpinned by a sense of unfathomable depths, how can he bring a tangible and credible world to stand? This is the predicament of which Bellow says "few people are willing to risk talking about." Are enigmatic forms and symbols enough?

O'Hagan to a large extent avoids the issue by his disdain for accepted rationales, in art no less than in life—an approach which often calls for a Keatsian ability to hold contradictory ideas in the mind. First, he obviously prefers intuition and imaginative insight over intellect and mechanical method, and consequently is flexible and sympathetic in his response to the earth. But even more important here, he frankly admits to doubt, and consequently is reluctant to impose belief on his readers.

He is a writer who says, "Oh I don't know . . . I feel," who acknowledges that the gods are indifferent, perhaps implacable, and, moreover, clearly must be accepted on their own terms. Is he not asking us to be imaginative and intuitive in his dialectical setting of Tay John and his legend against the mechanistic and logical world represented by the railway? To be sensitive in his reference to the "incapacity to doubt" as "callous"? To be wary of imposed beliefs in his choice of inconclusive section titles? And add to this the fact that the story is called a "chronicle,"

a blend of historical facts and found fragments—and a rough-edged" one at that. Yet the shaggy amorphous edges and evasive vague titles do encompass an intricately woven texture: richly suggestive scenes which, although they do not intend to tell the whole story, do provide telling clues in recurring echoes and motifs.

Thus a certain modesty nourishes O'Hagan's vision, permitting him to bring his world to stand through a restorative organic imagination which evolves, plant-like, by what Sontag calls "incarnated" energy; an energy which shapes as it develops, and generates the rich form rather than the bare facts of knowing, and so represents an expansion of consciousness beyond the narrow limits set by the rational mind.

O'Hagan's imagination, then, constructs its symbols in a style that takes us beyond ordinary seeing and saying into a realm of understanding where the real world is seen to reveal unexpected and luminous relationships; where the era of quest is not over, and belief is not final; where the rare pleasure of the unscripted revelation occurs—when something in the work surfaces that is not at all the meaning anticipated but a suggestion of something else, unnamed and untold, something which, like Stevens' "highest candle," so illuminates the situation that we are granted an insight not only into the novel but into existence itself.

In so directing us by means of a realistic narrator to that which is beyond our mundane condition, to the remote

places of the imagination where anything is possible, O'Hagan places parts of Tay John in the genre of magic-realism, a literary form where fantasy merges with the real to suggest a fresh, wondrous vision of life.

Unusual perspectives are also made possible through O'Hagan's self-conscious playing with the content and structure of his novel. This device reveals how language carries coded values and exposes the processes by which myth is made. It suggests the ways in which our own sense of reality is similarly fabricated, and so implies the need to confront and redefine the nature of perception.

However, unlike many magic-realist and metafictional texts, Tay John is not a reinvention of the world but a reorientation to it, an original vitalization of the primitive, a recovery of its spirit and its power.

Although embedded in a sensitive response to the reality of the simple things of earth, the novel's symbols—at once dark and luminous—also point beyond to an area of spiritual experience; to the numinous forces within objects and events which, while moving in mystery, yet reveal something of Stevens' lambent vision of "the obscurity of an order, a whole," his sense of poetry "as that essence which takes the place of God as life's redemption" (Adagia 540). A similar belief in the unity and sacredness of all life is implicit in O'Hagan's vision.

This runs counter to David Stouck's opinion that "there is no providential order suggested in Tay John, rather a

nihilistic void" (220), and also counter to his belief that there is a thoroughgoing strain of misogyny in the novel (218). Stouck's corroborating quotations need to be examined as possibly the kind of intentional miscues which should be carefully reconsidered in the context of the whole work. Tay John is much too rich in resonances of fertility and procreation to warrant such criticism.

However, this kind of response does indicate how some critics find the novel not only compelling, but "disturbing."[6] Exploring to the depths, or outward to the edge, can alarm and bewilder as well as fascinate. Or, conversely, the story can, like its analogous mountain, be so arresting in its surface contours that it becomes easy to avoid these unsettling areas and so overlook keys to its further meaning.

When mined beneath the surface, or explored on the boundaries, reaction to Tay John has for the most part fallen roughly into two camps: one which responds to its vibrant symbolism, to the "raw power of myth" and language in the novel (Geddes, Ondaatje, and others), and one which responds to its riddling aspects (such as Marjorie Fee and Arnold Davidson); while Fee suggests that we must "constantly reconsider" (17), Davidson, in both his essays, seems more concerned with exposing O'Hagan's riddling as ambiguity.

This study encompasses both camps, the argument being that O'Hagan's tendency to puzzle and intrigue is part of his dark mythic vision, a significant part of his quest and belief theme. It can be seen as a strategy to challenge

our reflective and deductive capacities and our perseverance in pursuing that disturbing sense of something missed. It is, in fact, integral to O'Hagan's attempt and ours to wrestle with the limits of knowing, with the limits of accepted creeds—with ultimate or boundary questions.

Cycle (and cycle within cycle) plays a significant role in this venture. Its form not only expresses the creative process and the mystery and riddle in the novel but, imaged as the rim of the circle, it serves effectively to sum up the concept of boundaries as symbolic of the manner in which the far peripheries of word and world function. In the following remarkable series of parallels it can be seen as the ideal form to shadow forth a timeless realm of mystery and risk, of wonder and creation.

The rim is where O'Hagan himself operates—on the edge of the dark and primitive unconscious; it is where Tay John lives, physically and psychologically—"on the boundaries of society" (253); and where Denham meditates and mediates—on the metaphysical limits, on the horizons of space, time and memory, suggesting thought itself in orbit. Here also everyman's yearning for the beyond is awakened: the compelling vision and behind it the inevitable shadow. Here the legend, raw and original, fragile yet potent, is preserved: as Ondaatje observed, "the source is not qualified, leaving the power of the hero's story . . . intact and virtuous" (277). Here, "unnamed," nature works to its own ends: "only vision holds it in the known world" (80). Here are both con-

tinuity and mystery: the inviolate cycle and a meeting of the word and silence in the interface, on the boundary which stands between us and the world beyond, the boundary between the known and the unknown.

For O'Hagan, the truth of the cycle is a truth to recognize and accept, to move on and within. And while it is often a dark truth, ultimately the direction of the curve is positive. To borrow Robert Scholes' happy phrase, "it rejoices us upwards" (94), subtly overcoming any downward arc of negativism in the novel.

Saving grace is in the simplest, in the rhythm of birth, death and rebirth, the womb beside the shroud beside the womb (162)—in the continuous creation of a pattern which has existed from the beginning, the eternal present of the "world being made" (80). And Tay John, as the image of man, is seemingly a product of this incredible process which creates him and of which he is also a part.

It is a truth which embraces O'Hagan's feeling for mystery, for wonder, for both agony and beauty, a truth which senses the fragility of organic life—of living as inseparable from dying—yet its shaping and controlling imagery is that of creative energy and regeneration.

Confusion easily arises because such meaning is often concealed—but waiting—in the obscure boundaries or, returning to the key analogy of the mountain, in the deeper layers of the work.

It is an "incarnated" meaning, perhaps experienced most intensely from perspectives on the hidden: perspectives on how O'Hagan's mythic and cyclic vision surfaces in luminous glimpses, but is often controlled by and controls underlying patterns of flickering shadow—of earth, of story, of man, of time, of the sacred; and, in a correlative manner, perspectives on how his concern with a vibrant language surfaces in self-reflexive meditations on the poetic word, but is often controlled by and controls underlying patterns of unnamed symbolism—of the beyond, of the untold, of the inexpressible, of doubt, of riddle. His vision and art thus come to us invoking a dark and silent presence—the presence of a rhythm we share with all living things, the presence which infuses the work and generates its raw primitive power.

The gods are inscrutable: it is up to solitary man to decipher his world, to decode it from shadows and cryptic fragments. And it is up to the reader to decode O'Hagan's story, to recognize how he "relates" it, in both senses of the word, to "the known world" (166).

Notes

[1]This corresponds to the "Gaia Theory" of the earth. Also, Schelling, in Wordsworth and Schelling (Hirsch 70), uses these terms to describe this concept.

[2]Barbeau 174.

[3]283.

[4]The imagery of light within darkness, particularly in silence, is prevalent in much of O'Hagan. See, for instance, "Her Name . . . was Mary," Event Magazine 5.3 (1976): 84-96.

[5]O'Hagan's capacity for doubt, and for seeing both darkness and light in a situation, leads one to question not only suggestions of misogyny (mentioned by Stouck and referred to later in this chapter), but also hints of evil in the dark valley (46), and equations between the spirit of its cruel white bear and "the old bear with snow dust on his coat" (49)—who is perhaps simply aged or is a silver-tip breed of grizzly, such as the one Tay John struggles with (85). O'Hagan, in conversation, admired the grizzly. It is only Denham who sees the killing as "a victory of man over the powers of darkness," and he does add "whatever they may be." A careful reading will disclose other red-herrings or game-playing.

[6]Among them, Margaret Atwood in Canadian Monsters. With regard to questions of belief and disbelief and their connection with feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and repression, Northrop Frye suggests that "trying to think within the categories of myth, metaphor, and typology—all of them exceedingly 'primitive' categories from most points of view—does involve a great deal of such disturbance." In Introduction, The Great Code (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982) xx.

CHAPTER TWO

Contexts

We of the sunrise
Joined in the breast of God, feel deep the power
That urges all things onward, not to an end,
But in an endless flow, mounting and mounting
Claiming not overmuch for human life,
Sharing with our brothers of nerve and leaf
The urgence of the one creative breath.

D.C. Scott
"Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris"

Great things are done when Men & Mountains meet;
This is not done by Jostling in the street

William Blake
Epigrams, Verses, and Fragments

(Used by Howard O'Hagan as the epigraph for The Woman Who Got On At Jasper Station.)

O'Hagan's vision, its truth and its beauty, its agony and its violence, its incarnated meaning and its sense of presence, originate where "men and mountains meet." It is here, in the context of the Canadian wilderness tale, that a sensitivity to both land and people is expressed in a mythic and mystic primitivism.

Still, O'Hagan is a writer who resists easy classification. The whole literary imagination seems to be his contextual turf. He moves easily across disciplinary fields, gleaning what is meaningful from fragments of religion, psychology, mythology, cultural anthropology, history and geography, exploring like his surveyor, Jack Denham, a topography of the mind as well as of the land. Further, he mixes the genres within literature. Contemporary and Romantic, realism and magic-realism, lyric and epic, tragedy, comedy and satire, mingle without interfering with the dynamism of the tale—itself an important genre in the novel.

Yet beneath this "rough-edged chronicle" with its many areas of reference runs the strong theme of the life cycle, the timeless myth pattern of rebirth. It is in this pattern that O'Hagan's seemingly incommensurate worlds converge in a concept of existence as hallowed, as an expression of the continuing and living whole, "the urgence of the one creative breath." The contextual background of such a vision is at once primitive and mythopoeic, religious and psychological.

The contextual background of Carl Jung's vision of a pre-existent unity of being is essentially the same, neither man making an artificial distinction between the sacred and the secular. Jungian theories then might serve, in general, as a preliminary to understanding the contexts of Tay John and, in particular, might give access to the way in which the creative process functions to develop the patterns and inner reality of the novel.

O'Hagan's vision appears to evolve intuitively in accordance with Jung's conception of God as an archetypal image in which opposites are reconciled. Jung sees this image as originating instinctively in the unconscious and rising to the conscious mind as the archetype of wholeness, a conception leading to the "approximate equivalency" of what he calls "border-line concepts": the image of God, the image of the whole, and the unconscious, and thence the poetic imagination (Answer to Job 177-78).

It is through such equivalents that much is revealed about the origin of O'Hagan's elemental truths and creative energies. Indeed by his own admission he was "not conscious" of the meanings in his work, a disclosure supported by P. K. Page, who makes this observation in her introduction to The School-Marm Tree: ". . . his left and rationalizing lobe had no understanding of what his creative right lobe had done." In addition she believes such unconscious truths "are the very thing that gave his work that extra dimension, offering remarkable intimations of 'the other'" (letter,

April 1984). O'Hagan himself seems to confirm this when he says "in writing a story the truth is near at hand. The task is to grasp it and give it endurance in words. The truth comes unbidden" (in Geddes, Saturday Night 86).

Pertinent here is Jung's view of the creative process as

> consisting in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the unfinished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life (qtd. in Gould 15).

Jungian thought appears to be relevant, then, to our examination of the sources of O'Hagan's creative process. But where do O'Hagan's images come from? What are the origins of his unconscious or "unbidden" truth?

Sources will be explored first in the man himself and his influences; next in the Romantic and Canadian background; and lastly, and above all, in the mythological-primitive context—which will be discussed as a possible "way back to the deepest springs of life."

To begin, a portrait of the author (1980, 1982 interviews) introduces a review of what for him seems to have expressed truth.

Like the wilderness and its peoples, O'Hagan came across as at once rough-edged and vulnerable, realistic and mystic. Irascible yet disarmingly lovable, passionate yet calm, his piercing blue eyes seemed to look deeply into man, foreseeing his potential for destroying "through ignorance and

greed," the earth that gives him sustenance. A prophet in ecology and social politics, he nevertheless—or perhaps consequently—spoke with nostalgia for a simpler age. Opposed to the aridity of institutionalized and industrialized society, to social propriety and prejudice of all kinds, he was accordingly disdainful of cant and pretence and the rhetoric they are propelled by. He himself was reticent and self-deprecating and, as in his writing, concealed his personal opinions in indirect suggestion and story—his ironic wit and detachment perhaps a defence against sympathies that went all too deep.

However, it was evident that this was the man who had declared "one of man's highest occupations is wonder at the world he lives in" ("We Are Not Alone," Archive), [1] and he did express something of the singular religious views that are evident in Tay John.

"Belief," he said, "is what you cherish," and typically noted that "this is from the derivation of the word."[2] Further, "belief may be an individual thing, but faith is collective" (and in Tay John is represented by a church stripped of its wonder). O'Hagan's mother was Protestant; his father was Catholic. But he, for the most part, rejected the doctrines of both faiths in person and in the novel. Yet he did acknowledge influences from various Books of the Bible; and the novel does reverberate with Biblical words and with obvious though fragmentary echoes of the cyclical imagery of time from Genesis and Ecclesiastes, of the Mosaic quest journey from

Exodus, and of crucifixion imagery and the Messianic and rebirth themes from the Gospels. Still O'Hagan claimed that, rather than Biblical creeds, it was Herbert Spencer's doctrine of eternal repetition that he believed in. As he explained it in his interview with Kevin Roberts, "something that happens will always occur again in eternity . . . man has eternal life now whether he wants it or not" (Event 46).[3] He was, in addition, somewhat familiar with Jung, but does not acknowledge an influence here.

On the lighter side, O'Hagan delighted in telling tales wherein he played a role resembling that of the Indian trickster figure, tales where humour lightened the situation, making it whole (see also Geddes, Saturday Night). For him such play seemed to be a kind of redemption, an expression of another way of looking at the world.

Like Jung, he shaped his personal ethic from the totality of man's relation to the earth and its creatures, attempting to break down the rigid dualisms that separate matter and spirit, reason and feeling, seriousness and playfulness.

Sources for O'Hagan's art and vision are also evident in his background. Over the years what, for him, was "near at hand"?

An early indication, with particular relevance to his vision, can be found in his autobiographical short story, "Her Name . . . Was Mary" (Event 84-96). This reminiscence is pervaded with a sense of natural beauty, curiosity and wonder, and suggests how the physical and mental landscape of his childhood became the landscape of his work.

A later key, this time a harbinger of his art, can be found buried in the March 14th, 1924 issue of the McGill Daily (O'Hagan was Editor-in-chief at the time). Although an unsigned editorial, it clearly bears his trademark, and provides a rare opportunity to preview what was later to become his literary creed. Under the title "The Art of Reading" the qualities we should "strive to appreciate" are presented as "only two in number, Truth and Style . . . so closely entwined that they form a single unity":

> A work of art must carry with it the conviction of truth. . . . . Scene, character and development of plot should impress us with a sense of reality. Let us suspect the happy ending; . . . the spectacle of man heroically carrying on . . . and going down at last with colours flying is an infinitely truer and more satisfying one than the vague almost impossible business of 'living happily ever after,' as if there were no more to tell after the final osculation.
>
> And then we should learn to listen for the cadences and harmonies of style moulding itself to theme. . . . . There is an individual note in the prose of every master as distinct as in the works of great musicians. . . . . The prose of a Lamb, a Pater or a Conrad is a sheer delight to the understanding ear. . . .
>
> Preaching in the name of some great abstraction such as Duty, Patriotism or God, carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. If books are to exert a moral influence they must do it in the same way as Nature does it, by the spirit alone and not by the letter.

". . . for the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life," St. Paul adds (II Cor. 3:6).

Much that is said here finds its realization fifteen years later in Tay John, including the transformation of

the original legend's "happy ending" into one which suggests there is "more to tell."

O'Hagan followed his interest in simple truth and style in his travels. First in Australia, he appreciated the local words as "wondrous and inventive," but "never dull," and the peasant quality of the voices as suggestive of "unique and unconforming personalities" (in Roberts 43-44). And then in Argentina, as PR Director for the Central Railway, he appears to have picked up—perhaps while riding the rugged hinterland—something of the strange magic-realist atmosphere evident in Borges and Garcia Marquez.[4]

A period from 1963 to 1974 in Sicily, where his wife was studying art, was apparently unproductive. Not surprisingly, the Italian world was foreign to his thought.

Between travels abroad O'Hagan pursued his passion for words by working as a journalist, reporter and short story writer, and his passion for wilderness by working as a guide, packer and axe-man in the Rockies which, like Denham, he came to know "better than the lines on the wide calloused palm of his hand" (76).

He could not write there, however, and consequently Tay John was written in Berkeley, California and Howe Island, B.C. He found the mountains "too powerful a presence," he said in his interview with Geddes. But it was not a claustrophobic presence. Rather he felt that mountains "opened out" to him. Certainly their vastness and serenity, order and immutability, provided him with a distinctive conception of

man's lot on earth—one not found by "jostling on the street."

It is his experiences there that provide the remarkable particularity of detail of both man and nature that make even his legendary scenes so hauntingly real. Yet this wealth of experiential knowledge he carried lightly, weaving it into the word and world of his characters. More important was the Westering quest which became for him the exemplar of all journeys—we are all Westerners (162)—offering its particular themes of truth and violence in lost Edens, archetypal heroes, and encounters between the primitive Indian and civilization with its follies and moral implications of ownership, power, and the law.

O'Hagan experienced the West as at once primeval and progressive, compelling and forbidding, illusory and realistic. Something of the nature of his impassioned but ambivalent reaction to the mountains is evident in his radio interview with Ken Mitchell (Sound Heritage 22-25). Here he recants his use of the words "physically exhausting" in describing Denham's response to unnamed country (Tay John 80). Instead, in his own recollection, it was:

> Beautiful! Beautiful! I can't explain how beautiful it was—it was like—I don't know, it was like a cry. . . . I just wanted to be able to sing. . . . Oh well I can't express it. . . . I said to look on unnamed country is physically exhausting. . . . It isn't. It's exaulting! [sic] (24-25).

This spontaneous expression of a personal response also provides an example of O'Hagan's propensity for savouring a plurisignative word, one expanding to nuances of both

"exhilarating" and "exulting." Ascendant, liberating and recuperative, it stands in striking contrast to the loss of energy implied in "exhausting," yet both words arise from a reaction to physical pain of a sort, from a poignancy difficult to express.

In his interview O'Hagan could not explain what the wilderness is but rather would lift expression to that state where it most naturally passes into song, a state reflected in his writing. If we listen to the novel as music then, we may recognize, as his editorial suggested, the notes and rhythms underlying the development of theme. Although O'Hagan may not be "able to sing," he has, as P. K. Page notes in her School-Marm introduction, "a kind of absolute pitch" for language and for the pulse beat of the earth. Rare indeed is the writer who could understand the mountains well enough to tell the story of Tay John. Rarer still is the mountain man who could make the story sing.

The story not only sings, it grows. As a source for O'Hagan's art and vision, it has a unique Western background of its own. It expands from an actual Indian legend, "The Dead Woman's Child," or "The Return of the Child," not a Shuswap but a Tsimshian story.[5] Originally heard by the sociologist, Boas, in 1888 and 1890, it was later lost.[6] Diamond Jenness rescued it for his Indians of Canada (197-99), describing it as "one of a few outstanding tales which, in spite of its exoticism and impossibilities, appeals to our hearts on account of its warm humanity" (195). Indians

too were known to interweave fact and fantasy in their stories. The child here is not yellow-haired but is a full-blooded Indian, and the story ends after his birth and baptism. O'Hagan developed the Jenness version and nurtured its growth, putting into practice his own belief that "legends grow or they perish" ("We Are Not Alone").

Tay John also has origins in the history of Yellowhead Pass and the actual fair-haired, half-breed Iroquois who had his cache in the vicinity at a spot still called Tête Jaune Cache.[7] The Shuswaps of this area are sometimes called the Yellowhead people.

In addition, a false start was made on the novel using Milton and Cheadle's North-west Passage by Land (Mitchell 22), a story which includes an incident about a headless man found against a tree (perhaps a model for Red Rorty's death?).

O'Hagan's imagination imposes colour and form on these various sources in accordance with the situations he wished to cover, such as the expectation, widespread among American and Canadian Indians at the time, of a fair-haired Messiah who would deliver them from the scourges of the white man.[8] He does this by fusing the stories with fragments of fact and fiction arising from his own experiences and "unbidden" intuitions of the West and its people.

According to Geddes, the author's use of a narrator had its source in such an intuition: O'Hagan, out walking and

feeling he could go no farther with the omniscient point of view, "suddenly heard the voice of a local marine editor named Jack Denham telling him about Tay John and his dealings with the white man." "Thus," says Geddes, "the shift from mythic omniscience to the chatty first person commentary in the bars of Edmonton" (Saturday Night 87). Denham's enjoyment—based on O'Hagan's—of "one too many" in these bars seems to have added to the creative process of story telling for both men.

O'Hagan also listened to the real voices of Jonnie Moyé and Joe Sangré, the friends mentioned in his acknowledgements who, like Tay John, were half-breeds (interview 1982), and equally to the voices of the forest, voices which O'Hagan sensed were echoes of those heard long ago in the Kalevala.[9] Appropriately this ancient Finnish legend is about a god who taught the world to sing and, as Philip Wheelwright explains it, about how man alone has the capacity to "sing the full song" (3)—perhaps the song O'Hagan strives towards by maintaining a fidelity to both inner and outer experience.

Further, some of the death and violence incidents in the novel originate in and are no doubt heightened by the author's own recollections: recollections of the dead and dying curiously centering on imagery of the mouth,[10] of the Shuswap law of death as the penalty for adultery, of a newspaper report on an Alcatraz prisoner who chopped off his hand with a single blow.[11]

In conversation O'Hagan deplored the fact that he had included this remarkable amputation scene in the novel: "It is not realistic," he said. "Tay John would not have been able afterward to bridle a horse." This is an example of how this writer, for all his mysticism, did believe in bringing his narrative to the rigorous test of good sense.

However the other side of the pragmatist is the imaginative poet, and this side was to have the greater effect on his work—in particular on his preoccupation with the hero figure, a figure seen by his wife, Margaret, as being "close to the early gods."

O'Hagan was interested in the birth of new yet eternal kinds of heroism. Hence perhaps his admiration for W. H. Hudson, Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner, all of them celebrative of a legendary type of hero, a figure who carries a perceptible numen.

In fact Hudson's Rima in Green Mansions is something of a female counterpart of Tay John. Likely with this in mind, O'Hagan appreciated a compliment Hudson received from Conrad: "he writes as the grass grows" (Roberts 46)—a statement that could apply equally to himself.

As Editor of the Daily, we recall, he respected the work of Conrad. From an early age he was familiar with his Tales of Hearsay, an undoubted influence on Tay John. The two writers can claim kinship in their use of first person ironic narrative, and in their great zest for life—for its passion and its awesome strangeness, its violence and its dark beauty.

With regard to Faulkner, relationship can be recognized in their peculiar propensity for imagistic effects: stark silhouettes against a vast background and symbolic characters unforgettable in their stillness, and in the use of expanded prose rhythms expressive of implacable patterns in time—perhaps indicative of a similar inner consciousness of the cyclical rise and fall of existence.

O'Hagan felt that Tolstoy's War and Peace was an ideal expression of this pattern of rise and fall, an example of truly integrated descriptive writing—something he felt was lacking in Tay John (in Roberts 47).

O'Hagan also had an admiration for Hemingway, for his writing, but not for his sentimentality or his emphasis on the male quest (in Roberts 46). Similarities can be recognized in their lean sensuous prose, their precise sensory vividness and their spare rendering of emotion (through experience rather than description), qualities which made both men expert in the short story.

In addition, O'Hagan appreciated Walt Whitman—like himself, a singer and namer of the world.[12]

Stephen Leacock, his mentor at McGill, was a direct influence. In a reminiscent essay, "Stephie," O'Hagan values not his wry humour alone, but his portrayal of "the mingled heritage of tears and laughter that is our lot on earth" (139). For both writers, whisky was, as Denham put it, "another victory over the powers of darkness"—his professor's idea of afternoon tea with his student being four Scotch.

However, it was as a symbol of courage and tragic mystery that O'Hagan remembers Leacock. In a toboggan scene remarkably similar to that in the closing passages of Tay John, he recalls him heading westward home,

> . . . his lonely figure . . . pulling young Stephie after him . . . head bowed as with a burden. . . . He is still walking on and on into the years (146).

There are further keys to O'Hagan in unacknowledged influences such as that of Romanticism. Appreciation of Hudson, of course, gave him a direct line to this Period, to the Coleridgean concept of "the one life within us and abroad," and the Wordsworthian concept of "primal sympathy," combined later with "a faith that looks through death" (O'Hagan's "sometimes when we are older there is a glimpse"?).[13] Many moments in the novel recall specific Wordsworth poems as well as his general ethos.

O'Hagan, however, did not look, as many of his contemporaries did, to Nineteenth-Century England for his central motifs. Instead he had the daring and resources to write in sensitive anticipation of the crises of his own time and place. He attained much of his strength through not sentimentalizing the land—nor the hero, the love story, the religion. He shaped rather than was shaped by the Canadian literary scene; and thus is seen as a prophetic precursor of writers such as Sheila Watson, Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, Jack Hodgins and Robert Harlow.

These are people who, like O'Hagan, recognize that the spirit is vastly different in a land so isolating, so new, "you can hear the world being made" (78). A native voice rather than a borrowed one is essential. Northrop Frye beautifully illustrates this in his anecdote about a city doctor travelling with an Eskimo guide in an Arctic blizzard:

> What with the cold, the storm, and the loneliness, the doctor panicked and began shouting 'We are lost!' The Eskimo looked at him thoughtfully and said, 'We are not lost. We are here.' ("Haunted by Lack of Ghosts" 27)

Frye continues, suggesting that "There are gods here, and we have offended them. They are not ghosts: we are the ghosts, Cartesian ghosts caught in the machine we have assumed nature to be" (29). Tay John is an expression of how the white man with his religion, commerce and law, has "offended" the gods. O'Hagan invites us to reach outside this system to a non-technological society where organic vitality is not sacrificed to civilized mechanical pattern, to be "here" getting our bearings from a stance on our own earth.

Among Canadian writers who similarly give spirit to the land and look to the beliefs of our early peoples as an alternative to those of the white man, are D. C. Scott, Rudy Wiebe and to some extent, Robert Kroetsch.

In the epigraph poem, Scott, like O'Hagan, makes use of an Indian legend to suggest "the power that urges all things onward." And in "The Canadian Tradition in Fiction," T. D. MacLulich notes that in both Wiebe and O'Hagan:

> The Indian stands for something beyond the self. The encounter with the Indian is inseparable from the encounter with the wilderness where the Indian dwells . . . . both Indian and wilderness are seen as embodying a timeless spiritual essence: the wilderness is a symbol of an eternal reality, and the Indian is an archetype of the fully integrated self in harmony with the cosmos. (196)

(This observation is pervaded with the imagery underlying the Jungian spiritual equivalents.)

Kroetsch also is concerned with the way in which the West "hints of meaning." Unlike O'Hagan he likes to talk about his art, and in his interview with Geoff Hancock offers clues that elucidate the work of both men—particularly in the light of such post-modernisms as word-play, metafictional devices, and the interweaving of fantasy and reality (Canadian Fiction Magazine 23-52). Forty years after Tay John, in a nonconformist approach remarkable similar to O'Hagan's, he recognizes that world and word are still in process, and then moves against the system toward the mythic edge, toward the primitive feeling that "the connection is back to the earth" (50).

Both writers are much concerned with the aesthetics of narrative, with suggestive naming and suggestive silence, with the shaping yet open-ended spontaneity of the oral tale—in beer parlours in preference to tea-rooms (51). In this spirit, Kroetsch in "Unhiding the Hidden," applauds writers who, "in Heidegger style," affirm the root meaning of the word "truth" as "un-concealing," "dis-closing," "dis-covering," "un-hiding" (43). He thus voices much of what

the earlier and less communicative O'Hagan was attempting to do.

However Kroetsch greatly differs from O'Hagan in the bizarre limits of his fantasy, and in what Peter Thomas notes as "the lack of a reconciling tendency in his humour" and "the lack of the loving maternal place in the expression of landscape" (Robert Kroetsch 97).

O'Hagan and the above writers are, each in his own way, trying to offset the Canadian fear of the wild, what Gaile McGregor in The Wacousta Syndrome calls "the recoil from the other as alien" (978). "We are lost," as Frye's city doctor said, and afraid of what we might find below the civilized surface, not only of the earth, but of the mind—afraid, as Tom Marshall sensed, "we might even become the landscape" (qtd. in McGregor 302). Such writers as O'Hagan, however, see the land as code, in a heightened or magic realism, and hold their world in a primitive-like tension between trust and vigilance. The land becomes an expression of rediscovered indigenous myth, but myth that sees situations in terms of individual lives and is tempered with a recognition of present Canadian issues and anxieties, myth in which the land is not only a geographical and ecological statement but a redemptive and vitalizing metaphysical one.

The drama of human redemption and the individual capacity for self-renewal are prime considerations of myth criticism, a criticism with an intrinsic intuitive truth

which enables it to function on a variety of planes—planes similar to the contexts of Tay John. As René Wellek notes, "Myth points to, hovers over, an important area of meaning, shared by religion, folklore, anthropology, sociology . . . and the fine arts" (Theory 190). Myth is also recognized as the historical and psychological source of all literature, defining the essence of who we are and what we hope to become. Seen as "the spoken part of ritual" (Wellek and Warren 191), it mysteriously discloses the underlying shadows of the human soul and thus has an affinity with both Romanticism and the mode of the tale. The perspectives of myth criticism are thus valuable for interpreting the patterns that move beneath as well as on the surface of a work, for deciphering the essential colour and form of both word and world.

Correlative to this is Richard Chase's observation that myth manifests "a strange brilliancy or dramatic force in the world," and that "part of the magic power of myth stems from its ability to furnish recognition scenes in which we have the experience of coming face to face with a disinherited part of ourselves" (Quest For Myth 80, 101). It is a part "familiar yet strange" as Father Rorty, with unconscious insight, said of Tay John; a primitive part which is alive and—as the priest discovered, sometimes alarmingly so—in a way our civilized nature is not.

Jung similarly observes that "every civilized human being is still archaic man at the deeper levels of his

psyche" (qtd. in Michael Bell 70); and further that the archetype is functional here, acting as "a bridge between present day consciousness . . . and the natural, unconscious, instinctive wholeness of primeval times" (Psyche and Symbol 140). In the novel the silent figure of Tay John is such a bridge and, in the spirit of mythic archetypes, is inexhaustibly expressive of the inexpressible. "The most we can do," Jung suggests, "is dream the myth onwards and give it modern dress" (123).

In doing just this, O'Hagan stirs up both fascination and fear, reactions intensified by the story's dark undercurrents and unfinished patterns, patterns the reader's imagination is left to complete. This is myth in its role of shadowing forth the unnamed, the outer limits of what can be described in words—the limits of creation, survival and renewal. Myth tends to see the completion of these unfinished patterns in a sacred context. Significant here is Philip Wheelwright's suggestion that for the understanding of such patterns in literature "the needed perspective is a mytho-religious one" (qtd. in Wellek and Warren 192).

Mytho-religious perspectives are singularly appropriate for the realization of the central pattern of imagery in the novel: the pattern of rebirth. The full impact of O'Hagan's symbolizing imagination is first felt in "Legend," in the poignant and mystical appearance of Tay John as a small boy.

Jung points out that the child is "the symbol par excellence of the reborn psyche" (Psyche and Symbol xxxii), and that the concept of rebirth "must be counted as among the primordial affirmations of mankind" (Four Archetypes 50). This order of archetypal symbolism informs Tay John with an imagistic vision that, appropriately, seems to breed on itself. "There is only one myth," as Chase says, "namely the death and rebirth of a god":

> This archetype is thought to constitute the essential action of tragedy especially, but also of comedy, elegy, and perhaps ultimately all valuable literary forms. . . . It is thought to be eternally recreated in man's unconscious and also to be prescribed in some unexplained manner by the nature of literature itself—so that in various guises it is always cropping up in different writers and different cultures. The characteristic American form of the mythic archetype is thought to be the fall from innocence and the initiation into life—an action of the soul that entails a symbolic dying and rebirth. (The American Novel 286)

Maud Bodkin, whose Archetypal Patterns in Poetry has considerable bearing on Tay John, is similarly concerned with the tremendous amount of energy stored up in this archetype, her emphasis being on its tragic and sacrificial aspects and its penetration of not only the great literary dramas but also the Gospel story and the mystery religions—especially the latter with their rituals which cannot be talked about but only experienced—silence being inherent in the word mysterion. The Eleusinian Mysteries particularly relate to the fair-haired Tay John: the appearance of the

golden sheaf of grain is, for the participants, symbolic of the sacred rebirth after endurance of the cycle of darkness. This imagery, Bodkin believes, "suggests the obscurely felt relation of the individual life to the larger life that nourishes and sustains it, and is something older and more profound than morality as we understand it" (286).

Although O'Hagan with his aversion to erudite allusions would likely not admit it, Tay John has a further mythological substratum which, in spite of its apparent unconscious aspect, cannot be ignored. Obvious in the novel are key Greek myth patterns as expressed in the rhythms of chthonic heroes: Dionysian patterns of dark plunge into risk and tragedy followed by renewing absorption into nature; Orphic patterns of sacrificial rescue of the bride followed by survival in some eternal reality (song, story); and especially telluric patterns of the downing of Antaeus, wrestler son of Gaia, followed by revival through contact with the earth, his mother. Such mythic patterns relating to harvests and spiritual rebirths are, in Tay John and elsewhere, the basis of rituals such as initiations and provisions for the dead, rituals that seem to be recurrently necessary for man.

Daniel Brinton brings us an example of this continuity in a correlative vision from our own myth. In the words of an aboriginal Canadian:

> We Indians shall not forever die; even the grains of corn that we put under the earth grow up and become living things. (Brinton 277)

Here the profound morality of the Mysteries is more clearly realized as that of Tay John and his tribe.

Examined in terms of modern belief, this morality is alien to the Protestant faith of Red Rorty but related to that of Paul Tillich who sees religion as simply the state of being "grasped by the power of being itself" (The Courage To Be 172). It is alien to the Catholic faith of Father Rorty but related to that of Teilhard de Chardin who feels a communion with God through this world: through an earth seen as "a great Host in which God is contained for us, a God who seeks to bring all humanity to convergence and unity, a God inherent in 'a divine milieu'" which is evolving through stress and suffering—"not through man's withdrawal from the earth but through integrated absorption in it."[14]

Integration with the dark earth finds expression in much of O'Hagan. In Tay John its imagery is valued by Geddes, in his interview with the author, as "a tremendously beautiful metaphor" and further, as "structurally important to the work." In this capacity, through its shadowy yet luminous imagery, the earth sensitively communicates both the ancient—yet modern—morality of the Mysteries and Sontag's incarnated meaning.

Its thematic and structural force, then, is invaluable; and in addition, through various associations, it generates rhythmic echoes throughout the novel. Thus with his fanciful and striking metaphor O'Hagan not only "dreams," but sings "the myth onwards."

Hence Tay John's symbolism fulfills what Eric Gould sees, in a decidedly Jungian context, as the essential function of the archetype: "It must create some kind of a code and enter into some kind of a dialectic with a perceiving mind, and not merely be a memory from the mists of time " (31). And the novel's narrative similarly fulfills Jerome Bruner's criteria, also clearly Jungian, with regard to exemplary myth: "it tells of the origin and destiny of man, lives on the boundaries between fantasy and reality, connects the world of reason with the world of impulse, and somehow has the capacity for invoking belief" ("Myth and Identity" 279).

Such a mythopoeic story harmonizes the sacred and profane and speaks with an instinctive integrity and continuity. Thus it is in accordance with "the saner and greater mythologies," which, as Jung declares, "are not fancies; they are utterances of the whole soul of man, and as such inexhaustible to meditation" (qtd. in Whalley 178).

To return to the questions at the beginning of this chapter, what then are the primary contexts of such meditation in O'Hagan and Jung, the contexts which give access to the way in which the creative process functions? And what do the speculations provoked by these contexts mean for the fulfillment of the patterns and inner reality of the novel—for the shape of art and vision? the shape of life?

The context which at the deepest level seems to have engaged both men is that of primitivism: the aboriginal ele-

ments underlying and shaping cyclical belief patterns, their psychological background, and their strong, though disturbing, appeal at the unconscious and mythic level—the level that Robert Allen, in a review, recognizes as "the bedrock of the soul where O'Hagan stirs the silt up" (129).

Indeed O'Hagan (in 1939) foresaw, like Jung, the need for stirring up change in the spiritual outlook of his time, foresaw the need for a return to the constant and inviolate in human existence. Longing for what is lost, often with a corollary quest for a Messiah figure, seems to arise at times of spiritual fragmentation and change. Manifested in a curious and inexpressible pull toward the source, it is a desire—sometimes wistful, sometimes rapacious, but always irresistible—clearly recognizable in the fabric of Tay John; it is particularly evident in its patterns of return.

For the aristocratic and exiled Denham such a return is a shedding of moral and social preconceptions in a naked encounter with a rough-edged existence, in a glimpse of the world and man as originally created, uncorrupted by the greeds of civilization—in Wallace Stevens' poetic terms, an occasion to "step barefoot into reality" ("Large Red Man Reading").

For the myth-impoverished such as the Rortys, Julia and Dobble, it is an occasion to create fragmentary or inferior myths, myths that become obstacles, not means, to wholeness.

For the Shuswaps the return answers to a nostalgia for a lost order of time or place of origin "beyond the mountains," and for a leader who knows the way. This nostalgia, according to Mircea Eliade, is related to the ancient yearning for a recovery of the values ab origine or in illo tempore, "in that time," a sacred time where one renews contact with being. It also answers to man's belief in being able to attain to an absolute beginning (Cosmos and History 20). However Eliade notes further that this "mythical time," a time where anything is possible, "must not be thought of simply as past time, but as present and future, and as a state as well as a period" (an idea which, according to Jenness [24], is conveyed in a unique use of tense in Indian languages). From the point of view of primitive spirituality, Eliade states, every beginning is illud tempus and therefore an opening into the Great Time, into eternity (Patterns 396). (A somewhat similar meaning may underlie O'Hagan's interpretation of "eternal repetition" as "having eternal life now.")

Eliade's conclusions with regard to patterns of return are particularly relevant to the patterns in Tay John:

> The longing for Paradise can be traced even in the most banal actions of modern man. Man's concept of the absolute can never be completely uprooted: it can only be debased. And primitive spirituality lives on in its own way not in action, not as a thing man can effectively accomplish, but as a nostalgia which creates things that become values in themselves: art, the sciences, social theory, and all the other things to which men will give the whole of themselves. (Patterns 434)

O'Hagan's personal vision is at surface or conscious level lyrically Romantic and ruggedly Canadian. At the core or unconscious level it is darkly mythic and transparently primordial. It does "stir the silt up." It brings together the dark and light sides of nature and human nature in a new yet age-old pattern, mystically integrating them, instead of— as in analytical thought—breaking them into parts.

In accord with this vision is Jung's belief that the future will depend on the extent to which we can stand the tension between the dark and light side of our nature without projecting the darkness onto others: "we either come to grips with our shadow or it will [as in Tay John] trip us up" (qtd. in Hanna 100). Of such prophetic fiction E. M. Forster says:

> It demands humility. . . . It is spasmodically realistic. And it gives the sensation of song or of sound. It is unlike fantasy because its face is towards unity. . . . A prophet . . . does not hammer away. (Aspects 125)

And like Jung, he predicts:

> . . . if human nature does alter it will be because individuals manage to look at themselves in a new way . . . for if the novelist sees himself differently he will see his characters differently, and a new system of lighting will result. (152)

This could be a system of lighting similar to that in Tay John—one of the mountains, not of the street, one which, recalling O'Hagan's editorial, "influences in the same way nature does, by the spirit and not by the letter." A primitive and mystic recognition of the Jungian unity of being, the Indian shared and cyclical nature of "the power that urges all things onward," might thus be restored.

Tay John can be seen then, in its diverse contexts, as a many layered reorientation myth unfolding its patterns to more fully order, not only the shape of art and vision but, ultimately, the shape of life.

Ondaatje notes that "once O'Hagan has established the base of the book—the myth with its power and fragility—he turns to the role of the story-tellers" (280). The turn is circular. The devices O'Hagan uses to move in this direction will be the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

[1]Also published in the Victoria Colonist, October 25, 1959, 12.

[2]OE léafa, "dear, esteemed" (OED).

[3]As Margaret Chase notes in Time and Reality, this world-view can be seen in the work of other writers: in Joyce's "eternal recurrence," in his developing cycles in which, "although individual death cannot be abrogated, whatever has been is not lost but is incarnated (as in Oriental mysticism) with each turn of the wheel" (26); in the principles inherent in Bergson's creative élan vital and la durée (126); and in Proust's "involuntary memory, in his recognition of being part of a temporal continuum" (24). O'Hagan's sympathies with these views rather than with those of religious dogma were obvious in his conversations with me and with Kevin Roberts (46), and are implicit in his attitude toward both the Rortys and their bringing of the Word in Tay John.

[4]Also, O'Hagan's attitude toward the arrogance of organized religion is similar to that in Garcia Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude (84) where an inhabitant of the remote village announces that they have been so long without a priest they no longer have need of one: they "have lost the evil of original sin" and now arrange their souls "directly with God."

[5]The story is sometimes attributed to the neighbouring Carrier tribe.

[6]"By 1931 there was no trace of it." Bruner, "Myth and Identity," Myth and Mythmaking 285.

[7]For more on this, see John Grierson MacGregor, Overland by the Yellowhead (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1974).

[8]Maclean, Canadian Savage Folk 452.

[9]O'Hagan mentions the Kalevala in Coyote's Song. For more on The Kalevala see Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain 3-4.

[10]Mentioned in conversation. This imagery is evident also in The School-Marm Tree and in various short stories such as "The White Horse" (Woman Who).

[11]According to Chris Petter of the O'Hagan Archive this notice was placed opposite chapter seven of the New York edition only.

[12]In particular one feels he would have appreciated his "Animals," wherein he writes of their placidity, how they "don't weep for their sins or discuss their duty to God," are "not demented with the mania of owning things," "not one kneels to another," and they are not "respectable or industrious."

[13]"Aeolian Harp" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," and Tay John 162.

[14]Merton qtd. in Belford 85; and Happold 394.

CHAPTER THREE

Approaches

There are, it may be so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

I Cor. 14:10

Day to day pours forth speech.
There is no speech, no audible words; yet their message goes out through all the earth.

Ps. 19:2

(Stoop) if you are abcedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this alphbed! Can you . . . rede its world?

James Joyce
Finnegan's Wake I.i

Tay John is a novel about the language of meaning and not just about meaning. It is about the power of "many kinds of voices" to penetrate through darkness and by their imaginative arrangement as "Legend," "Hearsay," and "Evidence—without a finding," to gather energy and bring meaning to birth.

O'Hagan has given the novel a form and content that enable the reader to respond to it as song and prophecy. With the narrator's buoyant reverie and his self-conscious use of the word the author steers a middle course—unusual in today's fiction—between the sophisticated avant-garde of metafiction and the kind of innocence that once chanted songs in the Kalevala or in Shuswap ritual.

Wheelwright suggests, in his application of the Kalevala to literary vision, that we should be concerned with "the ways in which men have aspired to imitate the god worthily and sing the full song," a song which he sees revealed through "expressive language or depth language, . . . the language of religion, poetry, and myth" (3-4). This is language which contributes to the nature and significance of the world. World and word together can then be seen as an inexhaustible Joycean "clayboook," a book in which man's pilgrimage from birth to death is written. In both Joyce and O'Hagan the journey is circular and is written in "curios of signs."[1]

On this journey how does O'Hagan catch the full song? How does he find words adequate to world? And what are

the ways in which the varied uses of language aid in creating the effect of the tale?

This chapter will be concerned with how O'Hagan makes use of "depth language" to create effects through the power of the word alone, the word as story, story as myth, and myth as a revelation of the primitive. In O'Hagan language is more than a delightful play of fancy—although it is that too—it is also an intriguing word-game, a playing with meanings and rhythms which are submerged (Joyce does urge us to stoop). Hence a web which reveals underlying tendril-like relationships is fashioned.

William Carlos Williams has said, "A word is a word most when it is separated out." And O'Hagan does just this in such phrases as "that's the word" and "a good word that," bringing to our attention a new way of looking at the word alone. As he observes, echoing Proverbs 17:27, "Those with few words must know how to use them" (91). His is a language devoid of clutter; hence words tend to stand out with the spareness of poetic images.

And then there is the use of the word as an enigmatic cipher, the word hinting that it stands on the threshold of something more. This sends one to the dictionary where nuances of meaning are discovered, sometimes etymological, sometimes archaic, sometimes Biblical—all of which are in accord with O'Hagan's concern with origin, with the primitive, with the sacred. In the use of such words as "behold" for example, is O'Hagan perhaps feeling back through the

patterns of modern English to an older mode of consciousness?

Certainly in this way a single word becomes layered with meaning. It becomes plurisignative; or add a value aspect and it becomes multivalent; or add an accumulative function and it becomes an expanding symbol.

Eliade explains multivalence, with its deeper kind of layering, as

> characteristic of religious symbolism, . . . its capacity to express simultaneously several meanings, the unity between which is not evident on the plane of immediate experience. (The Two and the One 201)

The few words used by Tay John and his tribe frequently fall into this category, also the many words with Biblical reference. By curious coincidence Indians often make use of archaic grammatical forms such as "thou," thereby lending their words a simultaneous primitive and Biblical ring.

E. K. Brown's description of the inexhaustible functions of the expanding symbol illustrates its peculiar significance for the enigmatic type of novel:

> By the slow uneven way in which it accretes meaning from the succession of contexts in which it occurs; by the mysterious life of its own it takes on and supports; by the part of its meaning that even on the last page of the novel it appears still to withhold—the expanding symbol responds to the impulses of the novelist who is aware that he cannot give us the core of his meaning, but strives to reveal now this aspect of it, now that aspect, in a series of sudden flashes. (Rhythm in the Novel 57)

Words relating to time and to the natural world particularly, have this effect in Tay John and seem to evolve into a kind of O'Hagan cosmology.

Descriptive power is also invested in the word as name; name which in Dickensian style becomes a symbolic correlative for character—indeed for several characteristics in the case of Dobble and Red Rorty. Such names will be examined in context.

In Indian culture the name magically denotes the significant aspect of the individual. For example, Kumkankleseem actually does mean "saviour with yellow hair," Kuipers informing us that "Kum" means "to save" (219) and O'Hagan providing the remainder of the interpretation. ("Jesus," similarly means "Saviour.")

"Tay John" itself calls for some analysis. How much more solid, stark, elemental and mysteriously mythic it is than the soft-sounding "Tête Jaune." The reinforcement of the "y" has much the same effect it has in Blake's "Tyger." Further, the name bears considerable resemblance to "Taygete," one of the mythic Seven Sisters. (The Seven Sisters coincidentally are also the mountains of Yellowhead Lake, and are themselves almost pagan gods.) And could there have been echoes of the Oreades, the mountain nymphs of myth (orioseira meaning mountain range in Greek) in O'Hagan's mind when he gave the heroine the strange name, Ardith Aeriola? Names in O'Hagan can thus become symbols as well as appellations. Thereby some of the characters provoke reflection rather than empathy; they become visionary creatures and are accordingly distanced from us. Significantly Jack Denham has an ordinary name, and is one

of the few characters we can relate to internally.

The potency of the name "Tay John" also carries over as title of the novel. In addition, the one-word sub-titles are a version of naming—of a kind that absolves the author from a strictly logical approach; thus encouraging a mythic conception of both world and word.

However, there are times when things cannot be named; times when, like Denham, one cannot find the words (90). Language is prey to vanishings, and the word alone often stands out most distinctly when there is silence surrounding it. In art such silence often discloses the way things are: "Evidence" is "without a finding." Or, as George Steiner observes, "whenever it reaches out towards the limits of expressive form, literature comes to the shores of silence" (Language and Silence 86). Empty spaces around and inherent in certain words—like the abandoned places in the land—leave us space "to wonder" (193), to be co-creators of word and world. As Patricia Morley notes in the introduction, "throughout Tay John there runs a continuous tension between silence and 'the Word'." There is energy in stillness and silence.

Tay John has no spoken moral message; the central character suggests rather an attitude or a presence, and is all the more powerful because of this, (The School-Marm Tree somehow has less impact because it leaves less to the imagination.) Tay John and Ardith scarcely exchange a word in this tale. Their communication is silent, while

most of the others, for all their talk, seldom communicate.

From word and silence what kind of pattern does O'Hagan use to unfold his story? What does the novel look like in terms of rhythm? How do content and form function to enlarge our understanding of things? And what is it beyond story that so frequently provokes a profound response from the reader?

First let us examine the novel in terms of pattern and rhythm. In Tay John content and form or truth and style create, as O'Hagan suggested in his editorial, "a single unity." In an organic and lyric twofold evolvement in three parts, they seem to merge and grow, waxing and waning together. The rhythm of the story, like the individual rhythm of the lives within it, is a cyclical process of moving forward and rounding back.

Using a further musical analogy—always appropriate for Tay John—many of the previous notes and rhythms continue to exist in the present ones. They produce what E. K. Brown calls "interweaving themes," themes which reverberate on and below the surface level: the stories of individuals, the reflections of the narrator, the flow of history and the seasons. In the lyrically expressive "depth language" of these themes, few readers are aware of the many subtleties of suggestion in the symbols and motifs woven into the texture. Such fragments seem to move in contrapuntal patterns of alternation and recur-

rence, of life and death, of energy and repose. Even minor motifs such as humour and details of description are part of the pattern; and, as Brown suggests, when one later reflects on this kind of book as a whole, these fragments "seem to lead a larger existence than was possible when they lay before us on the page. . . ." Such a story "does not say what things are like: it sings of their existence" (59).

It sings in the omniscient voice of legend, a voice which evokes the grand rhythms of the Bible and myth; it sings in Denham's "listen-to-this" bardic kind of prose, and in Blackie's mythic vision. It meditates in the form of preludes and interludes. "Legend" itself is a kind of overture, its motifs echoing through the rest of the novel. Here life in its newness and freshness is presented, and the reader gains by listening to its voices first in the opening pages.

Each section of the novel—and sometimes each story—has reflective prefatory and interim passages which abound in repeated suggestions and symbols; and in "Hearsay" and "Evidence" when Denham broods on ideas and events he wanders and digresses before building up to a climactic phase—a style not only true to musical compositions but to the oral tale. In Brown's terms, then, while the surface story may be "saying" what things are like, the real story in its accumulation and repetition of motifs and in its digressions is "singing" in something akin to ballad style.

The undersong here is part of the form; it is the energy of process merging with the texture of language; it is ~~O'Hagan's~~ "style moulding itself to theme," a pulsating process which is vibrant and alive; it is something which can merely be glimpsed and, as Denham recognized, sometimes only "when we are older" (162). The undersong can never in Red Rorty or Dobble fashion be seized. The approach requires something light-handed, such as the narrator's gathering of words of hearsay and legend into memory, or something mystical, such as the Shuswaps gathering and manifesting meaning in ritual.

The structure of the novel as a whole can be apprehended as three movements: "Legend," "Hearsay," and "Evidence—without a finding," terms which suggest the circuit of the quest and belief theme in the novel.

One approach to the trilogy would be to see this theme resolved in terms of a thesis, antithesis and synthesis cycle. Is there not some sense of integration (primitivism), disintegration (civilization) and reintegration (reunion with the earth) underlying the rhythm of the novel?

It is not, however, as clear-cut as this. There is also an elusive sense of interdependence, something more like identity in change at work here. It appears to be something akin to Blackmur's more psychological and poetic conception of an interacting triad (~~an idea he~~ applies to Stevens' "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction"). Here Blackmur

observes that "wanting as we all do . . . to discover and objectify a sense of . . . a supreme being, [the writer] sets up three phases through which it must pass. . . . Each phase is conceived as a version of the other two." Such a triad is:

> a combination of two notions with a development into a third, which if not reached is approached from all round. . . . A triad makes a trinity, and a trinity to a certain kind of poetic imagination, is the only tolerable form of unity. . . . The deep skills of imagination by which insights, ideas and acts get into poetry thrive best when some single, pressing theme or notion is triplicated. It is not a matter of understanding, but of movement and of identification and of access of being. The doublet is never enough, unless it breeds.
> (Language as Gesture 250)

In Tay John the imaginal third is indeed bred and, rather than reached, is shadowed forth. Access to being is sought first in the mystic vision of the Shuswaps, then in the religious creeds of the Rortys and the secular creed of that self-appointed authority, Dobble (whose presumptions along with those of the NWMP are "without a finding"). Finally opinionated knowing shades into myth once more and the trilogy takes on its inherent symbolism of mysterious unity.

The attempt to discover and objectify the spiritual has been something like T. S. Eliot's "raid on the inarticulate," (Four Quartets) or on Stevens' "supreme fiction" or, in O'Hagan's words, on "the inscrutable."

O'Hagan's raid is an appropriately poetic approach "from all round." It utilizes Wheelwright's "Four Ways of

Imagination," the ways in which the world receives signification:

> Confrontive: an I-thou approach which intensifies;
>
> Stylistic: a divinizing or dramatizing approach which distances;
>
> Archetypal: an embodying and adumbrating approach which suggests universality;
>
> Metaphoric: a unifying approach which fuses elements into a whole.
>
> (The Burning Fountain Chapter 5)

These approaches to insight are recognizable in the interweaving and often interchangeable patterns of all the sections of Tay John.

The three subtitles themselves are so resilient they can contain and express the forces of doubt, belief and mystery, of action and reflection, of word and silence that inform the quest theme of the novel. They are all ways of "saying," or communicating, and they are also ways of "hearing" or attaining knowledge. While as communication these terms lack certainty, and as knowledge they lack validity, they yet remain remarkably provocative. They too suggest a truth that functions beyond story. The truth then does not come in precise sections. The rough-edged boundaries of the three parts often merge into each other and into fantasy and illusion—and into silence.

Moreover within the boundaries there are often mere glimmerings of knowledge: communications through bits of legend, snatches of rumour, parts of NWMP reports; and, in a more coded manner, communications through allusions to

the hidden sources of life: the womb, the mountain spring, the tree, the ground; and, perhaps ominously, to the mutilations of life: Tay John's hand, Red Rorty's head, the Grizzly's head, the cub's nails and head, wisps of hair and fur, drops of blood. Even the dead seem to be trying to speak; like the silent animals and forsaken signs, are they perhaps carriers of a cryptic message from one world to another? Only in scattered moments do these portents come into view. And then we still must ask, what do they mean? how do they mean?

Every element of style seems to be a means of suggesting something. Less formally, how does style and its meaning fit into the tradition of the oral tale? with why and how the story is told? with who tells the story and what kind of story evolves?

"Each valley," Denham observes, "has its lore which is kept alive" (114). It is kept alive to keep the valley people alive. Story is ritual, is something like the winter festival event in "The Bride's Crossing"; an event "to give light and push back the darkness of the year" (Woman Who 73). In a world that appears to be indifferent to man, it is a strategy used to confront existence—to survive and more important, to give meaning to survival.

This perhaps explains the amount of attention given to the announcement that Denham comes "with a tale," with the enticing magic of pure story. His tale is "a gospel to be spread," but a gospel of a special kind—one which includes

"the truth of the marvelous," which Lionel Trilling, in an essay on the tale, sees as mediatory and redemptive:

> . . . the element of the marvelous in literature has important moral implications: it suggests that life is not to be understood in terms only of our daily practical knowledge of it, that it is also a mystery, evoking our wonder no less than our fortitude. (724)

Being alive to the marvelous then, shapes perception in a special way. In general our lives, like those of Dobble and the NWMP are committed to fact. When the marvelous appears, particularly in an otherwise realistic setting, it has a special value: it preserves the mind from an unresponsive and lifeless way of existence.

O'Hagan has his original legend, but what gives it impact, both before and after he hands it over to Denham and others, is the astonishing imaginative energy lavished upon it, an energy which indeed evokes "the truth of the marvelous."

Western Canada, a place where both land and story are still being shaped is ideal for this kind of tale. It is one of the few areas left where there is a shared delight and wonder between the teller and hearers of the tale. Hearing is the other half of saying in the novel. The egotistical such as Red Rorty and Dobble do not share and significantly, they do not tell stories—nor do they really listen.

The reader too must listen if he is to hear the tales within tales in Tay John: possibilities of parables, hints of other stories and of the story which is not told. Im-

bedded tales also take the form of a letter, a journal—fragments of the past; and a catalogue, a picture, a vision—dreams of the future. They interrupt the time scheme of the narrative—sometimes confusingly as in the case of Father Rorty's letter; they also establish distance between periods, and between the remembered and the forgotten, the named and the unnamed, the place here and the place elsewhere.

Another area where one must pay attention is point of view. Who is telling the tale?

An analysis of the narrative patterns discloses a complex and often bewildering nesting of storytellers. There is first the omniscient voice of legend—simple, poetic, solemn, matching that of the original Indian legend. This voice, or perhaps the voice of one of the bar regulars, introduces Jack Denham. From then on it is apparently "Jackie's tale," fragmentary stories about events some of which he has observed, but for the most part hearsay—stories which he has picked up from the tales of others, who may in turn have heard them elsewhere. These hearsay tales are often told in the words of the other storytellers. The difficulty lies in remembering that Denham is narrating the whole story, and also in recognizing that his version of it admittedly has the addition of "a twist of fancy" as well as distortions of a faulty memory.

O'Hagan moves, then—often with no indication—from the tale of the narrator to the tale of a character without ever worrying about problems of point of view. Of this situation

Forster says "a novelist can shift his viewpoint if it comes off." While O'Hagan is not always successful, it does not seem to interfere with the dynamism of the tale. And Forster does state further that "this power to expand and contract perception (of which the shifting viewpoint is a symptom) this right to intermittent knowledge . . . is one of the great advantages of the novel form, and it has its parallel in our perception of life" (83).

O'Hagan himself, as the frame narrator, produces a few strange twists of imagination, which may nevertheless have some unconscious meaning. Can something be made of the fact that Red Rorty's hair is described as fair, then as his illusions dissolve and he meets his dark end it is suddenly—without explanation—seen as brown? Further, in the original legend the small Tay John is gathering "fireweed," a plant which—most appropriately—endures to reseed itself rapidly after destruction in forest fires. In the novel it is "firewood." What happened here? And consider the paradox in this astute (but Irish!) writer's statement: "Tay John moved now on the rim of the white man's world forming around him" (99). Self-contradictory, yet how concisely it describes the truth of Tay John's plight. Indeed he is on the rim and at the centre of both the world and the tale of the novel—and there is loneliness at the centre as well as on the perimeters.

O'Hagan exhibits another kind of double vision, this time with regard to his characters. He has the rare ability

to see them and their world with an attitude that admits both compassion and cynical scorn, an attitude which he passes on to his sometimes alter ego, Jack Denham. (This is perhaps what led Davidson to accusations of ambiguity and Stouck to accusations of nihilism and misogyny.) By means of this dual vision unusual reaches of perception are invariably, but never cruelly, held in check by ironic humour, and speculation is not allowed to go too far lest it becomes illusion.

While the oral tale is controlled and mediated by an educated and contemplative narrator, there is still the traditional spontaneous licence in the telling—the kind of self-interruption and questioning that belong to the spoken word. The significance is self-consciously in the creative process: voice and performance and—with regard to the key events in the novel—even theatrical staging. (The Irish also see the world as theatre.) Thus the story, passed down and embellished by a series of narrators, frequently takes on some of the characteristics of the "tall tale."

Still Denham's blend of imagination, enthusiasm and irony, together with his borderline relation to both primitive and civilized worlds, make him a perceptive commentator. Basically honest, his twists of fancy and occasional memory lapses suggest a human rather than an unreliable narrator. Also, in spite of the irony, and perhaps because of it, he is allowed to see only fragments of life, never it all, and

the story retains its sense of the marvelous.

The sense of the marvelous is the essence of myth. And the mythic presence is the key to the underlying form and meaning of Tay John.

Below the surface, below the accurate facts of history and geography, there is an intriguing roughness which seems to indicate the shapes and rhythms of a deeper level. This is in accord with Northrop Frye's observation that "the bumps and hollows of the story being told follow the contours of the myth beneath." Frye relates this to the Jungian notion that "beneath the conscious world lies the deeper world of the unconscious revealed in dreams, visions, flashes of mystical insight manifested through myth" (qtd. in Richter 51). This underlying world frequently activates something of deep concern to the writer. In Tay John it seems to be related to the submerged primitive nature of reality—the reality of mountain, of man, of story.

Thus myth is at once one of the most elusive and one of the most direct forms of communication. It is both O'Hagan's story "beyond your touch" (167) and Geddes' story that "hooks itself into the mind and stays there." There is apparently a strange kind of boundary or threshold which he who would empathize with myth must at least approach, if not move beyond. Hence the reader must be led to extremes, to the inexpressible—to beauty and truth, to agony and violence; he must realize the extremes and only then can he, if not cross over and "touch," at least imagine

what lies on the farther side. This is, according to Whalley, "the quality of spiritual events"—the key ingredient of "vital myth"—rather than "the historicity of physical events" (179).

Myth then is a way of rendering a certain spiritual vision of existence. It is also a way of rendering character.

In Tay John the individual is presented stylistically and archetypally. His contours are described, and from this the reader interprets the psychological shape of the personality beneath, the shape which often darkly names the pattern of fate to which he is destined.

Except for Denham's personal reflections and Father Rorty's letter, we see little of the inside of characters. There appears to be simply a vague search for a ground of being. For the most part it is the civilized who are in some sense orphaned in a world of their own creating—estranged from self, from others, and from the earth. However, in the case of Tay John, the distancing, outside-only view serves, as Ondaatje notes, to preserve the "raw power" of the hero. Jenness tells us that there is no analysis of character in Indian folktales either (192). Perhaps the world of the imagination of which Tay John is a part is forever inviolable to intellectual analysis.

Myth with its aura of supernaturalism and its concern with the marvelous, often resolves into the miracle tale, a tale which is concerned with new belief or revelation.

In Tay John various characters come with "tidings." Denham's tale in particular is received as "a faith—a gospel," ("good spell," "good story," "good news"). However Denham later says, "there is nothing new—neither these words nor their meaning" (161). His story then is simply a fresh version, a tale retold and revived in the telling.

This points to a peculiar quality of myth: its repeatability. Myth tells of something identifiable with the old yet seen in a new light. It is open-ended, giving off new meaning for each new age—in the case of Tay John's legend, first for the Indians, then for Boas (1890), for Jenness (1932), for O'Hagan (1939), and for the reader today. Here O'Hagan seems to have succeeded where Frye, at least until lately, saw a literary failure. In The Bush Garden he states that it was "impossible for Canadians" (who saw Indians as "nineteenth-century literary conventions") to "establish any real continuity" with an Indian mythology; a mythology which "included all the main elements of our own" (233).

In these times a tale which mythologizes the passing of the wilderness and its people has something of an elegiac meaning, one concerned with the preservation of both "mountain" and "man's story," of both the West and its oral heritage. Myth renewed thus expresses the constancy of human values, values concerned not so much with access to success as with access to being.

Told and retold, the legend of "The Return of the Child" and all the tales of hearsay are not simply repeated;

they are recreated, and in this they are reborn. Story-telling itself becomes part of the novel's theme of rebirth.

Eliade states that he who retells a myth is "taken out of profane becoming" (Patterns 430). Is this not the re-birth that Denham seeks? And is not the listener, "cradled in a web of words," also reborn? Thus the mythic tale gives a special enhancing quality to moments as they pass, and a hungry part of the spirit is nurtured.

Myth then earns its right to repeatability through its power to capture the transitory in language, through its capacity to pass on and preserve the valuable. As Ondaatje says of the cyclical and constantly renewed world and word of Tay John, "fragments of myth will repeat themselves forever" (278).

Recalling Jung, Wheelwright believes that discovering such enduring mythic ways of knowing "depends upon how far we can divest ourselves of the white man's preconceptions and enter imaginatively into the primitive world view from which not only our beliefs but our very being has evolved" (155). Through his narrator, Jack Denham, and even more so through Blackie, O'Hagan takes us on this journey. The primeval and mythic land is not just an impressive setting. The Canadian wilderness is construed as both a particular entity and as a mysterious metaphor for existence. It is an underlying but decisive force in shaping not only story but man and his destiny, as O'Hagan observed in his ubiquitous "mountain" passage.

Yet mythic story, with its incorporation of the extraordinary in the ordinary and the irrational in the rational, communicates without being fully understood—as O'Hagan also observed. The novel's primitive approach allows us to penetrate a little farther into the mystery but never to its heart. The core remains dark (161). This is art as value—for reorientation; it is not art as argument—for information. Myth as a revelation of the primitive is a sufficient form of utterance.

Mythic story and mythic silence make up the power of Tay John. Life is at once simple, elemental, and infinitely complex, darkly magical. Not only is evidence of its meaning without a finding, we should not even try to pin it down.

With its frequent reflective uses of "for," the story suggests that we should ponder and wait. Perhaps, as for Swamas, a wonder will spring forth. To return to the beginning, to Palmer's Hermeneutics, we might then move into a new recognition of the world, "lighted up for a moment in its truth," not the truth of evidence, but "a truth nevertheless" (247). Life spawns its own destruction, but from the shadows the cycle, like myth, begins again and again. Through the novel and its strange silent hero the myth about the world becomes "the Word." Primitive spirituality then "lives on," as Eliade said, "in its own way."

Much of the meaning is in the making, in the rhythmic form and mythopoeic voice of the tale. Depth language

ventures to fathom and preserve the undersong—which is "the full song"—so that in this novel we behold the vision and the art together. Palmer would ask, "do w understand the question it puts to the reader? the question behind the text? what brought the text into being? (250). It is the reader then who is asked to take up the quest.

Thus far we have broached these questions by considering perspectives, contexts, and approaches. We will now more specifically examine how the world becomes "the Word," and "the Word" becomes the world, how together they unfold "the full song," in the three parts of the novel.

"Legend" will explore the patterns of belief inherent in the mythic perspective. Wisdom is acquired through the senses, from nature, and from the traditions of the group. The point of view is omniscient and mystical. For the most part, the mood evoked is one of silence and peace.

"Hearsay" will involve patterns, sometimes distorted, of beliefs arrived at through observing or "hearing," and "saying" or telling, the teller attempting to convince himself as much as his listeners. The point of view is that of the narrator or sub-narrators; they provide a participation mystique, an invitation to be caught up in the web of the tale or gospel. Identity is sought after through another, apostle-style. In the quest for a hero, illusion is a factor. The imagery is dynamic and often disturbing.

"Evidence—without a finding" will illustrate the several patterns of interpretation discernible in this

phrase. It can be seen merely as indicative of the situation at the end of the story, or it can represent an obsessive search for evidence of material success or for belief of various kinds. The point of view follows the same pattern as in "Hearsay" and is similarly based on opinion, conjecture, and some first-hand experience. The imagery, also like that of "Hearsay," becomes, in the end, like that of "Legend," an evocation of a mythic silence and peace.

These are the three parts of O'Hagan's "claybook"—a book which curiously never uses the word "myth" yet which seems to engender a wondrous mode of earth consciousness in the reader.

"Can you rede its world?"

Notes

[1] I am indebted to Robert Scholes who in The Fabulators (104-05) expresses somewhat similar ideas with regard to Finnegan's Wake.

SECTION II

Quest, Belief, and Cycle:

Legend, Hearsay, and Evidence—without a finding

. . . feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.

. . . The days gone by
Return upon me almost from the dawn
Of life: the hiding places of man's power
Open; I would approach them but they close.
I see by glimpses now.

William Wordsworth
The Prelude

CHAPTER FOUR

Legend: To Dwell Poetically on This Earth

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.

Heb. 11:1

All is prepared in darkness. Enormous light
is but the foetus of big-bellied night.
The image hatches in the darkened room:
the cave, the camera, the skull, the womb.
Future and past are shut. The present leans:
a bright calf dropped between two infinite sleeps.

Dilys Bennet Laing
"The Apparition"

Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die
But in the mountains did he feel his faith
There did he see the writing. All things there
Looked immortality, revolving life.

William Wordsworth
"The Excursion"

Faith may be "the evidence of things unseen," but the writer must offer the reader in a discreet way a code and an itinerary for the quest journey, something by way of orientation to the "curios" of signs that surround him. O'Hagan does this immediately. In fact the word "Legend" itself may imply not just a story to be heard but signs to be interpreted. What, for instance is the connection between the unfolding of the human drama and the austerely imagistic language of earth? of time? Does it perhaps reflect the austerity with which the Shuswaps view human experience? Yet within Tay John's simple and spare style there is a Biblical and almost oriental subtlety and suggestiveness. Particularly on re-reading there is a sense that nothing is completely neutral in this work. Even the documentary facts of geography and history seem to be charged with the significance of parable. Indeed this whole first section can be seen as an unusual initiatory narrative, an introduction to a book that yields the secret of its strange power and intensity only gradually, its signs pointing to possibilities of more myths waiting beyond the threshold.

A mytho-critical reading involves seeing such myths as a reliving of sacred events, as links with previous moments stretching back to the time of creation, links with the moments originating in illo tempore. In fact, each part of the novel opens with a development section, with the idea of beginnings, the idea of "the new." The first lines of

Part One are like a tone poem defining the limits of a universe of both place and time. There is a lyric evocation of a word and world in the making—a Genesis world: "The time of this in its beginning. . . ." There is a hint of an era far older than "men's time," of a time that has left traces even more enduring than "blazes" to mark man's way, a Biblical time when the world and its life were spoken into existence.

Time strangely mingles with the ageless mythical aspects of "its place," a place which also suggests the need for a perspective back to the stillness of the past. A wealth of symbolic power wells up from the land, from the fertile valley and the mountain headwaters of the river. Here is the source of life—and also of story—and the beginning of the journey through the wild. Here is the permanent and the cyclic, the stillness broken only by "the sound of running water" or in winter by the frost cracking the trees—the more resilient evergreens growing closest to the snow-capped mountains. Surfaces shimmer and change in sunshine and in blizzard, but the centre holds.

Time is measured by rhythm, by the seasons of the earth. Space and time are thus held in mysterious identity in this primeval world. There is a sense of an immutable universe, of the present with the past summed up in it and the future implicit in it, of time not imposed from without but generated from within. According to Cassirer,

this is one of the earliest concepts of human consciousness, "the subtlest sensitivity to the peculiar periodicity and rhythmic ebb and flow of human life" (Philosophy 108). Not surprisingly, in Tay John rhythm in life and in story often brings forth an idea before it is expressed in words.

There is even a suggestion of fantasy in the language of time. "In those days", evokes a "once-upon-a-time" kind of world where daily life is infused with wonder and magic.

Moreover this effect is conveyed in the tone of an omniscient voice, not self-conscious as in Parts Two and Three, but strangely assured, calm and authoritative—perhaps to suggest the confidence in primitives to arrive at an understanding of the wholeness of the world. The stately grandeur and brooding presence of the mountains is captured as in Indian legends, in slow meditative cadences, the Wordsworthian "revolving life," of earth contributing to the powerful yet spare style. Days are "long," in summer, and nights are "long," in winter. The patient land has its own code waiting to be uttered.

Nature's signs slowly but inexorably begin to take over man's signs, to encroach upon his trading posts, his trails and his blazes, which now point to a past rather than a future. The land, then, will be resistant to imposed meaning. Signs of contention between primitive time and civilized time are but a portent of the contention to come: between the land and the railway, between God and man.

For now, the timeless seems to be held within the point of the moment. "Until that [the railway] happened, the country . . . was little changed from what it had always been." However it is 1880 and the movement is beginning. At first very gradual, it starts with the sacred and moves toward the profane and back again.

There are already prospects of the railway, in turn, encroaching on the land. In these passages, while the voice of "Legend" is still mild, the sentences become shorter, the tempo slightly more hurried. However it is five years before the Canadian Pacific and thirty-one before the Grand Trunk (unobtrusively giving us the full time-frame of the story). The valley now anticipates the future. There is still time, but another world is intruding and its rhythms will not be slow, quiet, patient.

As the subtitles indicate, the story will be a mediative communication between different modes of hearing, saying, and seeing, between those represented by the river source and those represented by the railway. We are to have the perspective of both men's time and the timeless, of the place here and the place beyond, in the "heart of the Rockies," expressing the desire for an immutable time, the time of the unfathomable mountain with its poplars and its springs. These are the unchanging codes of the universe of cycle against which will be projected the transience of man's life.

The logic and value of the tale that follows depend upon realizing its profound mythicity while simultaneously recognizing the artistic stratagem of the matter-of-fact style of the telling, the careful verisimilitude in details of landscape, of seasons, of history, even of turn-of-the-century Western character types. This close fidelity to place and time will coexist with and make more real the symbols of the imagination, the archetypes and motifs in the word alone, in the word as story, and in story as first a re-creation and then a creation of myth.

Rather than the single word, it is the atmosphere provoked by the word that evolves from "Legend." It is drawn out by the wilderness, a spiritual territory which represents the great alone: it is the aura of solitude. The dictionary links "solitude" with remote and unfrequented places, with loneliness and seclusion, but also with the unconfinable and free, the sole and unique.

O'Hagan believed in the inherent power of a thing to be itself, be it a tree, an animal, a human being. Certainly the characters in the novel exhibit a fundamental singularity. And towering above them all is the solitary splendour of Tay John.

Thus we have a concern with not only the word alone, but man alone, a concern with the isolated self, with the man who comes to terms with ultimate solitude and the man who does not. Just as our beginning is always with us

until the cycle is complete, so in a sense is our solitude. The myth of Tay John tells us simultaneously of the isolation of the individual, and of the truth that we are all part of one great story—that together we face the outer darkness: "Past our stars, we think, is darkness. . . . Here is light where once was darkness, and beyond it, farther than our eyes can see. . . . is darkness still" (161). Man is indeed alone where the darkness is unveiled. In the novel we are presented with each character and the loneliness of his way. Yet the Wordsworthian "still sad music of humanity" is both individual and collective in O'Hagan. It is like the coyote's ironic song of "wit and laughter" with his fellows, yet "each individual offering stands . . alone"; and it is like the howl of the solitary wolf and that of his pack which "speaks of hunger, of suffering and of loneliness in the night" (Coyote's Song). It is Tay John alone or Tay John as Shuswap; it is the pattern of the tribe lying at night about the fire, "each man alone" yet "like the separate spokes of a wagon-wheel."

The "still" music is in the wilderness, where the inner and outer landscape is so uncluttered and solitary that such as Swamas can hear and observe "the substance of things hoped for" (29). Solitude then brings a kind of knowing, a kind of faith. It is an initiation into mystery and its possible meaning. A. N. Whitehead, in fact defined religion as "what man does with his solitude" (qtd. in Whalley xxv), and Byron spoke, rather like O'Hagan, of

"the feeling infinite so felt in solitude when we are least alone" (Childe Harold). That one needs a great deal of solitude to understand anything at all is borne out in Tay John. In "Legend" the word "alone" appears nine times.

There are two other words related to solitude in this unnamed land: "Stillness" and "silence." Together the three suggest the spirit of "Legend," unfathomable and organic, the spirit of the essence of life and of peace.

Solitude, stillness and silence invite a sense of presence. It is in the quiet landscape that the word is heard. "In the mountains did he feel his faith," said Wordsworth. Here, for the Shuswaps also, is the medium of encounter—of ritual, of vision, and also of redemption. It is the medium of the primitive, not of the civilized; when such as Red Rorty come up against it they feel threatened.

Another medium of knowing is concerned with how one sees, and with the word used to express it. The Indians "behold" the preacher and his shadow; Tay John "looks upon" Shwat (and later "upon" the sorrel mare). Such words, apart from their Biblical resonance, vibrate with an experiential sense ~~that is not~~ found in "see." They suggest rather a seeing-into," an "I-thou" relationship instead of a utilitarian one. This sense of beholding spills over from the visual into the auditory and the tactile, and even into apprehension through scent and taste, as when the tribe examine the dark sand with "the light of the sun in it" (51).

Moving to the word as story, people both civilized and primitive increasingly mingle with the mythical aspects of place, and the quest pattern for salvation or a change in belief or at least a route to refuge begins.

The pattern presents two worlds juxtaposed but in conflict: the world of the wilderness and the world of civilization. The language of each is central to the novel's theme, style and structure. The pattern also serves to illustrate the difference between what we say we believe (in Red Rorty's case four times), what we believe we believe, and what our actions show we believe.

The irony implicit in transparent statements, the metaphoric naming, and the few deft strokes of the pen with which O'Hagan strips his people to caricature-like essentials all make for incisive portraiture. Assonance between names and characteristics also contributes, often emphasizing a single idea or quality. Appropriate to the concerns of the novel, voice is first to carry the prime signification.

Red Rorty roars onto the scene with, not his hair (however, wait), but his words flaming. A harbinger of the railway to come, he belches smoke and fire on creation. His raid on the inscrutable takes the form of a vocal attack on the Shuswaps, the mountains and even the trees—which are both preached to and shot at. Thus with pentecostal tongues of fire and martial imagery begins the first assault and violence pattern in the novel, the first "assault on the surrounding solitude."

Rorty as prophet bears considerable resemblance to John the Baptist (including some of the circumstances of his execution); however, flames and vengeance roar not only in his words but in his past and portentously in his visions.

The preacher's sin, in O'Hagan's eyes, would be arrogance. He conspires with the future against the present, a recurring theme in the novel. Armed with hubris, the pride that competes with God, he oversteps human limitations. His self-righteous sacrifices are inauthentic, exterior. And in the hymns that impress him there is promise of receiving something in return: new possessions, spiritual acquisitions—the shining crowns and martial glory of the imperious leader.

He feels himself "called" (another recurring motif), personally addressed by God. Like his brother and Dobble he is one of the elect, an entrepreneur of final truth. He imagines his words are magnified and multiplied as they echo off the rock cliffs. But patterns of arrogance, assault and falsity rebound on the perpetrator in Tay John. O'Hagan knows his Bible better than his preacher does, and its patterns serve to show up the abuse of the word, the irony, and the consequent cyclicity of the sham evangelist's activity.

In a travesty of the words of the Good Samaritan story, "Go and do thou likewise," the Pharisaic Rorty damns his visitors till "their backs felt cold when they were turned."

It is instead the Shuswap hospitality that "warms" and enacts the parable for him.

In his further demonic inversion of the Scriptures he ultimately finds himself trapped in the bondage of suffering and mutilation he preaches. Having tied his horses to a tree to kill them, he is similarly tied. Is this a subconscious reflection of Isaiah's warning (11:9), "Thou shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain"? In his inability to swallow what he preaches, his lie "chokes" him. Is this perchance a literal enactment of Mark 4:13, "the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in . . . choke the word and it becomes unfruitful"?—or of the question in Proverbs 6:27, "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" Red Rorty's word in the end is stopped by a stone and, like the setting sun (73), he is literally "consumed by the fires of his own creating."

Could it have been, however, not only the arrogance of his false virtue, but the arrogance of his vengeful God—a God who made humans into objects of absolute knowledge and control (17)—that brought out a corresponding savagery in the Indians? Was this perhaps the Nietzschean God who had to be killed? Or was it a re-enactment of the great primitive orgies in which the sterile king is slain in anticipation of fertility of the earth with a new leader? Or do Yaada and her women, with their nails filled with blood and their triumph over Rorty's head, call to mind

Euripides' The Bakchae? Tay John does bring out the kind of speculations that hover around such possibilities.

Myth and Christianity certainly interweave in the religion of the novel. Moreover, their similar concern with numbers is evident—for instance, in the twelve elders and the numerous three-day or equivalent Indian four-day time spans.[1] However, what we are left with in Red Rorty's case is the imagery of a tree transformed into a fiery cross, the spectacle of the militant "man of great voice" overcome by the peaceful tribe who "were not ready with big words," and above the flames perhaps the prophetic echo, "those who live by the sword will die by the sword."

In addition to patterns of assault, arrogance and cycle, Rorty's story provides a pattern of how myth is made; of how or why it works or doesn't work. It is a pattern of how one hears and says, and shows how myth—often at several removes from its origin—becomes layered, and sometimes, as Eliade earlier noted, "debased." In re-telling his myth, Rorty is not, as Eliade mentioned, "taken out of profane becoming" but, paradoxically, enters into it. It is his shadow that is "upon the ground before them"; he faces away from the light; the Indians begin to wonder.

His method of delivery has aspects of Wheelwright's "confrontive," but in assuming the role of "an avenger," he enacts a suspicious "I-thou" relationship to both man and nature; it also has aspects of the "stylistic," but

in his divinizing and dramatizing a wrathful God, he distances himself and his deity from humanity—yet in his own taboo-breaking, he discloses just how human he is.

His gospel is third hand, distorted by dulled communication, be it by ear, by eye, or by encrusted sensibility: by a church that values his voice for its loudness, by a minister whose eyes are "half-lidded," or by an unexamined mind layered and concealed by hair "thick and matted as though it had never been combed." Increasing loudness and repetition, suggestive of a martial rhythm, are measures of belief. Knowledge and salvation are gained by rote; it is easier to appropriate a ready-made belief than to search for "the right word." And unlike true Christianity or true myth, the gospel according to Rorty constructs a realm that has no parallel in the natural world.

Red Rorty sees himself as a born-again Christian, above the heathen; a new birth and a new myth do result from his encounter, but they are not his. And even his brief rebirth is not of himself, but of a copy.

The Shuswaps and their story provide a striking contrast. We now have myth as a revelation of the primitive. This second set of thematic images has parallels, however, in its concern with cycle, with story telling, with patterns of knowing. But words now flow spontaneously to pass from what destroys to what calms and enriches: from blindness to vision, from arrogance to humility, from falsity to truth, from assault to acceptance. The move-

ment is from separation and exclusion to union and tribal kinship: "Shuswap" means "the people." The Wheelwright fusing-unifying "metaphoric" and adumbrating-universalizing "archetypal" methods become prominent; there is also an element of the intensifying "confrontive"; now, however, it establishes an authentic "I-thou" relationship between man and nature. As we are introduced to the tribe the imagery is that of a poetic hallowing of life. It is true to O'Hagan's sense of irony, and also of feminine values, that the intruder, a man of God and of civilization, is the more profane, and that his cold paternal code of punishment, his separation of the sacred and the secular, suggest beliefs which, unlike those of the Indians, cannot be integrated into the warm maternal earth.

This Western evangelist's idea of "setting one's house in order" by subduing the grandeur in life is contrary to the primitive conception of maintaining maat, the order of nature. As Whalley notes, it is this order "at once primordial and abiding" that "haunts the mind of man" ("The Humanities" 243). Accordingly the Shuswaps turn to their own codes, and from the shadows of Rorty's self-destructive cycle, from the smoking ashes of his fire, phoenix-like a new cycle and story as myth begins—a myth which curiously is created from this man's one creative act. In embracing Hanni does he embrace the wilderness?

The new myth begins with the Indians' reverence for the oneness of life. Every aspect is sanctified and no

person or creature is excluded. The life of earth and each individual life is spiritually discerned even in their crafts:

> They believed that the world was made up of things they could not touch nor see, as they knew that behind the basket their hands made was the shape of the perfect basket which once made would endure forever and beyond the time when its semblance was broken and worn thin by use. So they knew that the shape of tomorrow lingered just beyond today, and that today the people made tomorrow's basket. Each man sought the shadow beyond his work, and no man could reach it. (29)

Baskets join different realities, suggesting a fixed pattern, a destiny; behind baskets and behind life there is, in Platonic fashion, both order and mystery. The tribe's "faith" (a paraphrase of Heb. 11:1) "was the substance of things hoped for, the shadow of what they could not yet discern" (29).

Hill-Tout, who has observed actual Shuswap basket-making, explains—in terms that suggest a remarkable paradigmatic relationship to the novel—that the pattern is not on the surface but worked in, "imbrication," and that the coiled structure is so beautifully crafted the vessels hold water and sometimes last for as long as fifty years (69).

In this connection Frye uses a related term, "bricolage," to somewhat similarly describe the form of primitive art; he notes that it corresponds to "a fitting together of events, or rather remains of events," that it "internal-

izes the occasion," and that what it represents spiritually "has a reality which is timeless and independent of circumstances" (Great Code xxi). In the shaping of baskets and the shaping of myth the fragments endure in an underlying fusion of past, present and future.

And the tribe endures. A sharing of the patterns of life, of its activities and its trials—of both its energy and its darkness—is somehow mysteriously at the heart of Tay John.

In a scene of immense but subdued pathos, O'Hagan presents a desolate time of famine when the Shuswaps would

> . . . rise up from their houses through the snow in the morning like bodies from the grave and go from one smoke-hole to another and call down for food for their children or their old people—because in such times each family shared and helped the others as in better times what they owned was held in common. (31)

Projecting a strange winter light of feeling, the sounds too are gently mournful, primeval: "woman weeping," children "chirping and hopping like birds," "hunters standing silent," "voice spirits of the dead" calling in the wind in the trees, empty cradle baskets hanging and hitting against the bare branches. These are the voices. And this is the winter Hanni is "with child."

The circumstances surrounding her conception are described in scriptural terms and there is even a hint of an Old Testament drama in her name. Can we make something of the fact that Hanni, like the Biblical Hannah (I Sam: 1), "was sad" because she had promised her husband a male child

and had not yet conceived? It is she who passes close to Rorty's house after dusk. Thus begins her story, her circle of sacrifice and tragedy.

It is also a circle of love, a circle of words that are changed into something beyond themselves. They act as a prelude—one easily passed by—to the more striking birth scene. They are the words spoken by Swamas before the rituals performed to bring Hanni back from the cold and darkness of her dying:

> You will not die. . . . If you die that part of me which is yours, will die with you. But you will not die. Nor will I die, for new life is coming to us. (33)

"You will not die" points with a rhythmic and peculiar grace to the root-meaning of a-mor, "away from death" (Eliade, Rites 165 n.), possibly the most moving and transforming of all ways to name love, to name life, to name eternity. It is a ceremony of words that become a poetry beautifully apposite to Swamas' sense of a life deeply akin to his own. These are words that make a whole of the fragments that constitute human relations and recall the primitive belief, "we Indians shall not forever die."

In spite of two opportunities to speak, Swamas says no more. But he is there. His experience now lies beyond language. It moves into silence. He begins his solitary yet shared pilgrimage. Action and feeling become indistinguishable as he too reaches back into blackness and sadness. It is a recurrent condition in Tay John that the field of significant meaning is often the dark.

Indians do not hide from the imagery of death. Reclining or sitting on the grave is a sacred custom among some tribes. By carrying out this ritual Swamas is placing himself in mythical time, in illo tempore, in a period that is creative, the time between dying and birth. It requires a stillness, a solitude, a descent into the self to restore the connection with the root of being, a renewal of contact with the source of all life. It requires a watchful waiting on the rhythms of existence.

The motif of life through death, of dying into life, particularly as related to the earth, is a recurrent and a central one in the novel. Death is often "the mother of beauty," as Stevens recognized ("Sunday Morning"). Now, following the dark passages, man and nature are simultaneously redeemed in an enormous springtime rebirth—new, fragile, vulnerable—when the small fair-haired boy is seen on the grave gathering flowers of blue and yellow (Persephone's flowers?) under the sprouting leaves of the poplar trees. Death and life are interfaced, boundaries are upset, edges undefined and veiled, different orders of being (real/unreal? visible/invisible? magical/spiritual?) flow into, disappear into, one another. This kind of "coalescence of things" Wheelwright sees as "connected with the primitive view that existence is vaguely alive and indeterminately fluid" (161). The scene evokes Wordsworth's "sentiment of Being spread/O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still" (Prelude). For an attuned people,

origin moments are sacred moments when life is born. Swamas remains silent.

From earth the small child is delivered[2] and from night and winter Swamas is delivered, not just through the mythic almost Eleusinian story or theme, but through the dynamics of the prose. It sometimes seems that by the very intensity of the language describing Swamas' contemplation the shroud becomes the womb. Eyes "watch" and "kindle," hands knowingly fashion and plant successive gifts of bows (the bow being expressive of resilience and strength through yielding).[3] As Tay John moves along the trail, life grows stronger.

This is a visionary experience in which imagination and religion merge, in which something within Swamas (amor?) responds to the occasion and goes out to meet it:

> He smiled, and his heart that had hung like a dead bird within his breast fluttered then beat fast once more. (37)

The metaphors are organic; nature is a part of him, as immediate as his own newly awakened pulse. With his unusual and sensuous simile of a renascent bird, O'Hagan allows his readers to share in a glimpse of the mysterious forces stirring within the experience. Again this is the poet's "sentiment of Being"

> . . . spread
> O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye
> Invisible, yet liveth to the heart.

The brushstrokes that the author applies to small moments touching on intense implications are as skillful and gentle as his caricatures are skillful and incisive. And always his descriptions are enhanced by their sparseness, revealing a world that is fresh because the approach is unique. Although there is a suggestion of a movement from the Old Testament to the New with a child, a beginning again, the strange setting unexpectedly renews the Gospel's power. Such scenes in the novel suggest myth as sacred story or "hierophany," as Eliade calls it—an impressive compelling manifestation of a spiritual force, an "epiphany" (Murray, Myth 336).

It is an elusive force, suggesting the elusiveness of Tay John and of his story, and of life continually called back to the grave—of the necessity for magic and wonder to make man "truly alive" (38).

O'Hagan has brought us the wonder of the boy child and now it is balanced by the need for the feminine and the old, for the wise woman who holds the secrets to the mysteries of the earth (one of the several counteractions to Stouck's charge of misogyny).

The elders have given the special child breath but merely to give life is not enough. The woman "from beyond the mountains" holds him and touches him into a life of mutuality. As in the Bible and fairytales, she brings gifts: of listening and of laughter, of baptism under the waterfall and under the sap of the burned spruce trees—

which Eliade tells us represent the divine mother and are also sought by the spirits of the dead who want to return (Patterns 281). The sacrifice of the spruce gives him "a full free life," yet also shadows forth its transience. His baptism gives him a kinship and personal identity with both trees and "running water," recurrent motifs in the novel.

He is called "Kumkan-Kleseem" for, as Minquais predicted, his hair is "yellow as the poplar leaves in early frost." Naming here is a kind of mythmaking. "Kum," "saviour," echoes the new expectation of the tribe as expressed in John 12:47, "I came not to judge but to save." "Kleseem," for his yellow hair (the only part that earlier survived his shrivelling), gives him the crown of the original autumn god. Thus the strange radiance of the spirit within Tay John is evoked from the beginning through his association with the golden poplar leaves, the leaves which survive after frost—nature's cycle of violence then beauty—the leaves which O'Hagan found "beautiful in the autumn when they moved in the wind."[4]

However Kumkleseem is still not happy. The Salish, Brinton tells us, believed in an outside and inside shadow, "man's intangible image, his constant companion, and of a nature akin to darkness" (272). The small boy, "born where the sun could not reach him," does not have one. As the emblem of man's mortality and of his hidden darkness, it is necessary to being wholly human. While Rorty avoided

his shadow, Kumkleseem, with the aid of the wise woman, seeks it.

It is found "alone," apart as he himself will be. Kumkleseem's lonely saviour role is further suggested in echoes of the Biblical nole me tangere: "no one might touch his shadow," yet "the grasses moved when it passed upon them."

The next story as myth and as prophecy, while a minor one, is related to the motifs of the theme. It is told the night before the hero's vision quest. It is a prelude to yet another hierophanic vigil, one which will show Kumkleseem "the shape and colour of the life before him," and grant him the knowledge of "the spirit that would guide him." His grandfather, Smutukseh, points to a constellation, placing the youth in a vast context, yet one which gives a lasting illusion of permanence. He says simply, "That is the Bear. You see him and he sees you." These few words echo those of Meister Eckhart: "The eye with which I see God is the same as that with which he sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving" (qtd. in Davis 63).

Sacred places, like sacred knowledge, tend to be inaccessible, shadowed, and related to the source. Kumkleseem chooses the difficult path, the one to the high dark valley, for his fasting. In solitude, silence and stillness he watches and waits "where the river is born." Here the invisible inheres in the structure of the visible—in

shapes, imprints, fragments. The most intense life is here, passing in the night. The mind must create meaning from imagery, from shadows, from imprints, and from the voices of the stream, the night owl, and the trees. From among the many animals who mark him, "watch him," the elders decide that it is "the old bear with snowdust on his coat" who "left his shape and shreds of fur behind him," who will be his totem:

> The bear-spirit will be your guardian spirit. His strength will be your strength, and his cunning yours. His mark will be upon you, and your mark upon him. He will pull back the cape from his face so that you may see him [the masked god?], and he will talk to you with a man's voice. (49)

This kind of response to the emblematic character of nature and its processes (there was also "grass trembling in the wind, and the roof of the forest bending when the mountains breathed, and sun shining on running water") expresses an identification with all that is, a further interpretation of "We" not "I" as the word of man's "greatest magic." In language that is again Biblical there is a recognition of a pattern of knowing that seems always to have been there, yet it is the initiate's own way. It is Jung's individuation, "a religious way of life because it means to live one's own existence creatively in the awareness of its participation in the stream of an eternal becoming" (Psyche xxix). It is often a dark stream as at the vigil, when it carries "the dark sand where the dark waters come from ... . yet the light of the sun has entered

into it so that it shines even now at night."

But Kumkleseem goes to be sought as well as to seek. Voice, as always, is important here. It is the "word left in the valley," the perhaps fearful word that speaks instinctively below the conscious levels of thought and feeling that the elders wait to hear. For the ear is more instinctive in reaction even than the eye. It senses primitive rhythms, forgotten movements in time, the beginning and the end, perhaps the beginning in the end.

From the far reaches of the valley Kumkleseem admits he was summoned by two voices, "one called me farther . . . one bade me stay lest I go so far I would not come back." Is "the darkness" of the earth or "the shadow left in the grave" (41) calling for his return? perchance the shroud hovering around the womb? He chooses life. He fashions his world not only from the path which he takes and the shapes which he sees, but from the voice which he chooses to hear. It is customary not to immediately tell all about the vigil experience. This kind of primitive mysticism has its logic but it is, to use a word of Rudolf Otto, a "wonder" logic (qtd. in Happold 72).

It is a mysticism also invoked with the incantatory voices of drums, with song and with dance, celebrations of death (Hanni's), birth (Kumkleseem's) and now rebirth (initiation), in ceremonies (52) consciously connecting the tribe again with the mystery and rhythms of the cosmos.

However civilization intrudes again, and the next interlude, or perhaps prelude to the exodus, is more story than myth, although the three travellers, one dark, bearing gifts, have some resemblance to the three wise men. They do not bring gold, however, but kneel before it. This is a reversal of values, not only from the worship of the Christ but also of the autumn god. The men give Kumkleseem a new role—that of "guide"; it will recur and play a significant part in his life from now on. They also give him a new name, "Tête Jaune," as strange to the tribe as the prospectors themselves are; it becomes "Tay John." Names, particularly new names, are also significant from now on.

Tay John becomes a traveller too, but his centre is still the tribe. In an organically beautiful metaphor O'Hagan tells us that he always returned, "making great loops through the mountains till the pattern of his travels reached out from the village like the petals of a flower." Travel patterns also become important now. There is tension between journeys toward selfhood, and journeys toward escape from the loneliness of the self into some kind of unity and belonging. The lotus flower or mandala pattern would indeed be appropriate here.

As the white men move in, the game move out, forming another pattern, a dark one. Civilization and ensuing famine bring "new shadows to the land." The intruders are not gentle and friendly to "the place." Unlike the Shuswaps, they do not dwell poetically, humbly invoking the rebirth

of the animals they kill, nor do they dance and "sing songs to the berry spirit"—the language that speaks to the life gods; their voices are those of boasting, of rifles—of death.

There is, however, another voice. In a sequel to Minquais' rather Biblical "plenty and famine" dream, Kwakala has a vision of the promised land, on earth not in heaven like Rorty's. Like that of Moses it is a vision of a past place and time of deep concordance between man and nature, a place correlative with "the book of life" (Phil. 4:3) where, as Tzalas hoped (25), they "will be called by the names [they] are given." It brings us back to story as myth once more.

The tribe set out, Tay John playing a Joshua to Kwakala's Moses. In the wilderness the aged leader, the man "great in his magic," has his last vision. His arm held by Tay John, he points through the "land of shadow and forest," the land of graves and no imprints, to the new place. But "his spirit looks back." Like Moses, he dies before reaching the promised land. It is a land of poplar trees, a lake shining in the sun, and green meadows, suggesting another Biblical association: beyond "the shadow of death," "the still waters" and "green pastures" of the Twenty-third Psalm.

Romance and bloody realism with a few mythic undertones weave the story which brings "Legend" to a close. After the violence, Tis-Kwinet reflects on the denial of Shwat to Tay John in words that echo Ecclesiastes: "For all things there is a way." Perhaps this belief is related

to the primitive sense of maintaining maat, a belief system meant to insure not Tay John's well-being but the survival of his tribe. Or is it, as Tzalas speculates, related to the required destiny of Tay John in his unsought messianic role to be alone with his untouchable shadow, to be "a leader of the people who is married to their sorrows"?

The last images, impressions, are of desolation, and again of stillness, solitude, silence. Smutuksen, who had taught Tay John to see signs in the sky, is blind. In a scene of quiet expectation and gradual closing off—the primitive approach to death—he calls for his grandson's touch and for an answer to his words. But the only sounds are those of spruce needles falling in Tay John's empty house, cold ashes from his fire blowing in the wind, "snow covering the place where they had been," poignant emblems of life's cycle. The haunting voice of an owl, symbol of darkness and death, is heard in the night.

But this voice is also a symbol of wisdom and solitude and is a link with the land of the spirits. What now? What happened in "Legend" to give us clues? Which voice in the end speaks with the most power? the most magic?

Is it the mythic voice, the quiet cadence of the ancient spoken word, the voice that has placed the reader in a primitive space-time frame? Does the answer lie less in the analysis of myth than in the understanding of how the voices of "Legend" release it?

In Part One there is the shadow that makes us human, and amor that makes us in the truest sense immortal. There is the shape of destiny seen through art, through basket weaving, through myth, and through nature—through a poetic dwelling on this earth which constantly re-aligns us. There is the sense that to learn is to "know by heart," a term intrinsically relevant to the organic presentness of meaning within the spirit of man, mountain, and unfathomable story. There is the sense of a pattern in time which life has followed and which life will always follow. It is a mythic pattern in which O'Hagan finds and releases his identity of the wild with the human and the sacred: Kumkleseem like the corn god, growing "tall, wondrous fair with hair, and shining," rising "above those around him."

The pattern of quest has been disclosed through a rhythmic sense of slow waxing and waning, of living and dying, of the light kindled and the light dwindling. As Tay John's fire subsides he is, as Denham observes on a later occasion, "leaving one form of existence for another."

Notes

[1]Often related to the four seasons and four cardinal points. "Among the Salish everything goes by 'fours'; it is their mystic number" (Charles Hill-Tout 174).

[2]An illegitimate infant in Roman terms is "a child of the earth," and in Roumanian, is "a child of flowers."

[3]O'Hagan does not include the arrows, expressive of assault, from the original legend. Opposing tensions in the bow, however, produce harmony.

[4]In conversation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hearsay:

Shaping Our Imagination—New Names, New Tales, New Shadows

A word spoken in due season, how good is it!

Prov. 15:23

Our days on earth are as a shadow. We spend our years as a tale that is told.

Ch. 29:15, Ps. 90:9

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

John 3:8

It is now 1904. And again we are placed in the perspective of men's time. For those so inclined, Tay John's age and the time scheme of the story can be continuously tracked from O'Hagan's accurate dates and his unobtrusive allusions to the passing seasons.

And again the emphasis is on the new, on new names contending with the nameless, bringing new shadows to the land. There is even a new kind of religion, a new messiah: men meet "in half-circles of worship round railway stations." It is not a religion of primitive austerity or of fundamentalist denial, but it does follow the theme of Red Rorty, the theme of aggression and possession; it now speaks of money and trade, of armies and political influences.

As always O'Hagan's irony creeps in around the edges. The railway aiding British troops is mentioned in the same passage as the importance of independence; its potential to "give our country back to its rightful owners" is mentioned in the same passage as the announcement that "the white man's breath blasted the Indian and buffalo from the grasslands."

The railway is strangely just a background fact, but its presence pervades the novel in much the same way as Tay John's does. Both project a kind of mysticism. It is what they represent that matters. The railway assaults the primitive; it seeks to own the place and the people of myth.

There are hints of sexualization of the land in the imagery now; they are perhaps portents of more to come, and

portents too of the stories of "Hearsay" and "Evidence" which are largely concerned with man/woman tensions, contentions and sacrifice. The images and sounds are often those of militancy "imposing on" the tone poem of the poetic Genesis world. Men "shout," "blast," "pierce," the "gateway," the "gentle contours" of Yellowhead Pass. The land takes its stand. Mountains are fortresses, lakes are moats. Nature, even in the form of the source of life, is implicated: "the sun" (a metaphor for those who sit under it?)

> laboured across the sky all day and set at the day's end, great and red and bloated, as though slowly consumed by the fires of its own creating. (73)

The wind also plays a part. New names "blow up," ideas "stir like a wind." Myths are reborn and men are carried by their visions up canyons into unnamed country. It is a soundless country where "man had never been and words never lived before . . . silence was about them on the snow like a name each had heard whispered in his mother's womb" (calling him back?). The rivers tug at men's stirrups; their shadows either seem to be lost or they cast them "in strange shapes." Is O'Hagan implying that the land is resourceful, is setting up further defence tactics, when he presents imagery of men being captured between peaks that "closed after them" and also "waited ahead"? Are they lonely beings caught in the brief span between birth and death? All this shadows forth a cycle both awesomely poetic and increasingly ominous.

The codes of poetry, irony and silence are free to mean as they please in "Hearsay." They will take on a further significance in "Evidence" particularly with regard to time and the beyond, to assault and the new. For now, out of the stillness of this country, comes a word, a tale and a teller, a man who says, "you must judge for yourselves" (185).

He does drop clues however. While dates are obviously important to the railway, he informs us that "out there"—the place of the tales—"only the seasons are important" (91). Thus the "word alone" is "born in the country, born from the imaginations of men and their feeling for the right word, the only word to mirror clearly what they see."

It is born from imagination and it also completes imagination. In one of the most remarkable passages on the single word in the novel, Denham speaks of autumn "before the snow began to fly—(There's an expression for you . . .)," of "men who have

> watched it day by day outside their cabin window coming down from the sky, like the visible remorse of an ageing year; who have watched it bead upon the ears of horses they rode, muffle the sound of hoofs on the trail, lie upon spruce boughs and over grass—cover as if forever, the landscape in which they moved, round off the mountains, blanket the ice on the rivers—for them the snow flies. The snow doesn't fall. It may ride the wind. It may descend slowly, in the utter quiet from the grey and laden clouds, so that you can hear the flakes touching on the wide white waste, as they come to rest at the end of their flight. Flight—that's the word. They beat on the air like wings, as if reluc-

> tant ever to touch the ground. I have observed them coming down, on a very cold day, near its end when the sky above me was still blue, its flakes great and wide as the palm of my hand. They were like great moths winging down in the twilight, making the silence about me visible. (91)

O'Hagan here illuminates a quiet and transparent beauty—the beauty of the cycle, now delicate and restorative. "The visible remorse of an ageing year" and the muffled "sound of hoofs" suggest the passage of the dying, the tragic sense of life coming to a close. But the protecting wings of snow then "blanket" the cold ice with their great white softness and evoke a feeling of gentle compassion, recalling the Psalmist's prayer, ". . . hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (17:8). And if there is a suggestion too that they act as a shroud, it is a shroud which shapes, "rounds off," a shroud which—as O'Hagan will tell as later—"waits by the womb" (162). Because the snow "flies"—spiralling perpetually on the brink of a new birth—it suggests the effortless attainment of a new sphere. "Riding the wind," it awakens a sense of freedom, even of deft self-sufficiency, a moving beyond the prison of the self, then, like humans with their few brief and fragile moments "above the ground" (153), coming "reluctantly," "slowly," to "rest at the end of their flight."

Snow then becomes a symbol of all that is luminous and lifting, ephemeral and light. Its "flakes great and wide" allow one to see, and its "utter quiet" allows one to hear.

Words too seem to hover, fly, wing down, to assume physical shape, contour, power. The gentle rhythm of the sentences piling up, the interplay of the white flakes and the wind and the oncoming shadows of twilight are also a description of waves of feeling, a description which makes shapes out of real moments in time and in which reality is transformed. This is an example of an O'Hagan passage in which the reader is lifted out of the text to soar in imagination, a passage which, Scholes would say, "rejoices us upwards."

Here indeed is the epiphany of finding "the right word"—another way of breaking the limitations of the earth. And then there is even breaking the limitations of the word, the winging flakes "making the silence visible." Flight, in the sense of escaping limitations, is important in multivalent ways throughout Tay John.

Another word—one linked here with snow and throughout the work frequently linked with escaping limitations—is "wind." It often seems to be the breath of the living world, seems to offer man a participating energy with nature.

Even before his birth the tribe predict that Tay John's face will be "like the face of the west wind. It warms the blood of the people but no man will ever see it" (33). Then, in the silence before Tay John speaks of his vigil, his face, "grown lean and hard . . . gleamed against the fire . . . and his yellow hair, long to his shoulders lifted gently and flowed out from him in the night wind of the forest" (47).

And, in another sense of escaping limitations, and again combined with "flakes of snow settling from the dusk of the sky," he is envisioned after the Julia episode as "a figure on a pinto horse, long hair flowing in the wind" (147).

The wind, then, suggests evanescence as well as freedom. It even suggests aggression as we shall see shortly. In its flight, with or without snow, like Tay John himself, "it bloweth where it listeth."

From the beginning of the novel therefore there is an attempt, through naming, to pin things down, to lay, as the surveyors do, a human map across the wild. "A name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it . . . . and you've got it," as Denham says (80). "Name" is indeed a significant cipher, an important single word in the novel.

Naming seeks to convey the primitive force and simplicity of direct perception, seeks to endow places and individuals with spirituality, to change them into something of symbolic value. In discovering the identity underlying the name a small gesture towards immortality is made, a gesture which succeeds in varying degrees throughout the novel.

We cannot leave "the word" in "Hearsay" without mentioning what Denham saw as emblematic of Tay John's "strength in the abstract": "Endurance, solitude—qualities that men search for" (83). "Endurance" is certainly a key word in

O'Hagan's system of values, and it is frequently linked with "solitude" and its companions, "stillness" and "silence," examined in "Legend." "Endurance" is also linked with time, with acceptance and patience, with the immutable and the constant, and thus with the land. In these qualities the guardian and sustaining spirits reside: the bear gods, the snow gods, the wind gods. They now, in a sense, have usurped the function of the omniscient narration, and their voices present a calm and poetic undertone to the more contentious and prosaic surface atmosphere of "Hearsay."

And, of course, in this section what the characters hear and say, the self-reflexive "word" itself is of utmost importance. As O'Hagan said in The School-Marm Tree, "speech . . . in itself is a thing of wonder" (185). Metalanguage both offers multivalent perspectives from the outside and is caught up inside the effect of what it is saying, whether explicit or implicit. It also invites reader engagement, invites a teasing out of signification. The word in the wild country has an evocative power of a kind seldom seen in a world where language is used for practical rather than mythopoeic purposes. Moreover the characters themselves are frequently defined by their use of and attitude towards "the word."

In "Legend" the dominant coding is that of religion through the beliefs of the church—the coding of civilization, and through the beliefs of the primitive—the coding of the natural world. In "Hearsay" it is the coding of

talk, through the beliefs of gossip, "what's new?"—the coding of society; nevertheless it too is set against the backdrop of nature and its ciphers.

While Wheelwright's "confrontive" approach predominates in the humanly involved view of "Hearsay," "stylistic" distancing occurs in the myth, romance, theatrical, and riddling elements; and as always the "metaphoric" and "archetypal" are present at least below the surface.

Jack Denham's attitude toward language and toward unnamed country energizes "Hearsay," moving it into story. In both language and land, the truth is in the detail and is easily overlooked.

Denham brings his tales from the country where men were uncertain whether either their shadows or their words "lived" (75), "the country where words [no matter how far they were pushed] were too often outdistanced by the actions that gave them rise," the country where language never quite comes up to the meaning of events. O'Hagan states that Denham "had not given events their shape"—and in the sense of manipulating them he had not—but now, as story teller, he is a more powerful shaper than the characters who, with all their talk, make this claim.

It is not just the story, however, it is how it is told that gives it shape. Its form is found in "speech" (114), in "saying," in the use made of the word. It is equally, or perhaps more, important to note the "hearing," to note how the story is heard—what the listeners make of

it. O'Hagan does warn us, in an easily dismissed comment, that what the listener "has not seen he deduces, and what he cannot understand he explains" (114).

Denham, himself, is introduced in terms of his sense organs: his eyes, his enjoyment of food and drink, and the light and leisurely contact with the earth of his stride. His appearance and actions suggest intelligence combined with an easy-going tolerance, an aristocratic background combined with an appreciation of the rough life, a knowledge and sensitive relationship with men and mountains combined with a healthy independence. He is a man of earth and common humanity yet isolated enough from his society to be individual too. His face resembling that of a watchful and "thoughtful St. Bernard dog," he seems a most suitable narrator for O'Hagan's kind of tale.

In Part One of the novel the emphasis is on the past, on myth, on memories of origins. In Part Two it is on the present. The "Hearsay" milieu, in addition to that of the omnipresent land, is that of the pub. Denham is drawn outward to Tay John's story and inward to the life of the bar, and it is its changing rumour, impromptu humour and tall tale propensities that colour his tale. He balances the wisdom of both worlds with a gentle irony and with meditations that seem more like communings with himself, reflections that carry him and his listeners out into the wilderness. It is difficult indeed—and not at all necessary—to remember that we are still in the pub. "Imagina-

tions cradled in a web of words," our reveries lead us elsewhere. The narrator brings out the subliminal memory, still in all of us, of the story told around the campfire. The lilt of the spoken word exerts a captivating pull; the oral tale is, after all, the source of all fiction.

Denham speaks of the shadows that surround the backwoodsman's tales (114), and of how from them, "like smoke from a smudge—and perhaps no more defined—rises sometimes the figure of a man; not of the real man perhaps, but of the man other men have seen and spoken to" (114). Thus Tay John's story is a gospel according to Denham, but also according to McLeod and Charlie, and eventually Blackie, a fitting narrator for the ethereal fourth gospel. As in the Bible, versions differ somewhat and, like Christ's disciples, the listeners both doubt and believe.

In "Legend," while we had the Red Rorty story, the Shuswap story and the young Tay John story, in "Hearsay" we have three more distinct yet still interrelated tales, Tay John's three trials: the grizzly episode, the hand episode, and the Julia episode—encounters with wilderness, with trade, and with woman. After the first story, Denham, as surveyor of story as well as of land, is looking for evidence, for "remnants of Tay John's presence" (92). Even the remnants are powerful. They are like bits of a puzzle that must be fitted together; and if we don't quite get a complete picture, we can at least discern a network which is meaningfully interconnected, fascinating.

Like Conrad's Marlow, Denham is drawn to a figure of disturbing attraction. (Although Tay John is not on an explicit quest himself he is clearly the kind of person who makes the quest possible.) And in O'Hagan as in Conrad, much will be lost if we do not attend to the digressions. The surface details are often numinous of the core. We have been warned that our narrator "stretches his story," much as he does the word itself, "the length of Edmonton." As an oral epic, the tale is an Odyssean journey of life with detours which explore what is felt, thought or imagined along the way. Denham's rambling style suggests an openness to a wide range of experience as well as to the physical immediacy of the situation. With an imagination that vividly recreates what he has not directly witnessed, he is both creator and re-creator of story.

In either case it is impossible to tell life exactly as it happens. It is what the storyteller selects to gather from the original events, what he finds and remembers from others—from fragments actually—that determines the nature of the tale.

All three of the stories of "Hearsay" bring into play the subtle mechanics of suspense and disclosure. They suggest that storytelling, in addition to the depiction of surface events, has much to do with time, with rhythm, with echoes. All three begin by allusively trembling on the verge of a climax. But the first one in particular begins vibrantly, darkly. "It has," as Denham announces

at once, "blood in it."

After this beginning, Denham makes an unobtrusive comment about the infeasibility of crossing the narrow but deeply jagged creek: "At the time anyway it was impossible." It is a comment that will yield further meaning later. For the moment he is at the right distance, both realistically and artistically speaking. Timing and timeliness are crucial in Tay John.

Denham then digresses again. This time it is to one of the great theme passages of the novel, one which tells of the impact of the high wilderness on human consciousness. He tells of finding the life-giving source of the stream and, perhaps correlative to this quest, of "hoping vaguely for some revelation, for something he has never seen or felt before." This is a discernible pattern in Denham's travels—a surveying of both the earth and the road which man must travel on it.

It is an earth with more distinctly sexual undertones now (80). The unnamed land is seen as playing a participatory part in the origins of life, in the erotics of existence. The revelation is also mystical. When Denham says that "had he come a second earlier he would have surprised the creator at his work," he seems to concur with Eliade's observation that climbing upwards is coming close to the centre of the world or breaking through to another sphere (Patterns 376). Denham continues in the meditative vein of a soliloquy:

> . . . for a country where no man has stepped before is new in the real sense of the word, as though it had just been made, and when you turn your back upon it you feel that it may drop back again into the dusk that gave it being. It is only your vision that holds it in the known and created world. It is physically exhausting to look on unnamed country. A name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it. The unnamed—it is the darkness unveiled. Up in those high places you even think you can hear the world being made. Anyway you can hear the silence, which is the sound of the earth's turning, or time going by. (80)

This is the place where myth originates, where nature continuously recounts the story of its own creation.

"Myth," as Gould tells us, "functions in the gap between event and meaning" (6), in the gap between reality, the place of named things and the uncreated world. The "meaning" of such myth, Gould continues,

> is perpetually open and universal only because once the absence of a final meaning is recognized, the gap itself demands interpretation which, in turn, must go on and on; for language is nothing if it is not a system of open meaning.

In Tay John the moment of illumination will continue to be discoverable in the effort of searching for the source—of river, of story, of perhaps ourselves. It is a land where as O'Hagan says, man's shadow is elusive and strange, and his word as yet unknown (75). All is unmapped. In unnamed country it is the darkness that is unveiled, but its power invades creation.

In the above passage the land waits in silence to be known, but like woman—mysterious, evanescent, elusive—

not to be exploited. O'Hagan seems to be asking in Tay John, how we see and hear the wild. Is it a place to be hallowed—a place to listen to the earth's primordial turning?—or a place to be possessed? Do you name it appropriately, primitive style, or do you Dobble style, impose an alien name upon it? In such discordant naming then, is the darkness veiled?

The kind of potentiality hidden in Denham's digression here should alert us to read slowly the preludes to the more obvious main events of the novel, the set pieces which in turn have their own concealed meanings.

The set piece which stands out in its intensity—it was a short story in itself originally[1]—is the encounter with the grizzly. It has taken O'Hagan five pages to get to it. It is one of the moments in the novel when time stands still. The episode itself is miraculously prolonged by the flow of language—by contextual descriptions—while simultaneously tension is built up with interventions of "It was a matter of moments, I tell you." Tension is also increased by mystery. What is just out of sight beyond the edges of the clearing? There is a hint of what Wordsworth called a "dim and undetermin'd sense of unknown modes of being" (Prelude).

The scene is removed further from "the known world" (167) by the atmosphere of theatre. We are separated not only by the physical barrier of the surging river, but by its sound barrier as well. Tay John "is listening to some-

thing [Denham] couldn't hear" (84). And then there are the shadows—the long shadows of trees on the water, the shadows of the muscles across Tay John's body and of the reflected light of the sun burning deep down in his dark eyes." The "direct look" of the half-breed is, as O'Hagan so compellingly described it in "The Tepee," "the gaze of blood and hunger, hunt and knife . . . the gaze of an ancestry foreign to my own" (16). It seems to stir Denham's blood-consciousness and draw him into another realm. This is a gaze that strips away the shams of civilization. Here we are given the intimate intense effect of a cinematic focus, the long shot and then the close up.

In fact Denham sees it all as a play, as a spectacle of light and sound, "with the forest and mountains for backdrop, the gravel bar . . . for stage, and the deep river with its unceasing crescendo for the orchestra pit." It brings out his propensity for showmanship. The dramatic perspective serves to keep the situation intact—at once real and unreal—by specifically locating the hero in relation to everything around him. Stage directions almost appear to be there as Denham even chooses the point of view from which light and shadow will fall appropriately. Tay John is seen as a symbol: both as art—seen sculpturally as "a bronze and golden statue"; and as part of the earth—seen organically as "grasping," "owning," "planted on," the ground. Both conceptions suggest myth; the transformation of a mortal into a plant is often an expression of immortal-

ity in mythology. In either case the hero is larger than life, as actor or sculpture, and as part of the forest. Thus the brilliant mythic drama has the effect of modifying the violence involved.

In contrast to his own agitation, Denham has captured the intensity of stillness in motion as both grizzly and man "stand their ground." Even the natural world seems held in the spell and suggests a sunlit veil hanging in a glowing suspension of green and yellow and bronze. Heightening the senses in a kind of magic realism, this is one of the novel's golden scenes, scenes which reveal the romantic imagination inside the rough edges of Denham's consciousness, scenes which reflect, as most of these occasions seem to do, the presence of a wilderness autumn god. As Walsh said of Wordsworth's "spots of time," "light-enfolded they stand out from the common murk and obscurity of human life as phases of critical significance, when the 'hiding places of power open'" (38).

A pattern that cannot be overlooked here is that of the Biblical Jacob wrestling with the Angel. Tay John does seem to be in some kind of inner colloquy with his guardian spirit, the mysterious colloquy in which a god takes part. In Genesis too the vision is in the wilderness, a wilderness seen as "none other than the house of God," and the protagonist is given a new name because he has "prevailed" (28, 32). In Tay John's case, rather than the receiving of a new name—"Yellowhead," "my Yellowhead," given him

by Denham at this point—there is perhaps instead an achievement of a sense of self apart from both the tribe and Denham or civilization.

It is the primal being, the self of the wild, the self of the grizzly he absorbs. He assumes not only her blood and shreds of her fur as their bodies merge in the river, but also something of her strength and animal courage. Heidegger suggests that,

> In essential striving . . . the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures. . . . Self assertion is surrender to the concealed originality of the source of one's own being. In the struggle each carries the other beyond itself. The more the struggle overdoes itself . . . the more inflexibly do the opponents let themselves go into the intimacy of simply belonging to one another. (Poetry, Language and Thought 49)

Did not Denham catch glimpses "of that yellow mass of hair, like a bundle the she-grizzly held with affection to her breast"?

Through the communion of shed blood, the "stream of dark blood" which "flowed into the hungry river," life is strengthened and endlessly perpetuated. The sacrifice of life to give life is, from Hanni onward, a recurrent theme in the novel. The grizzly dies bearing, not only her cubs, but Tay John to life once more. With images of blood and water, struggle, a muddied head, "a cry and a protest," Denham sees his hero as "just being born, as though he were climbing out of the ground."

Tay John is now a full blood-brother to the grizzly, both male and female. Looking back to his initiation, he has lain with the bear again; the bear's mark is "upon him," and his "upon the bear." And looking forward, he will also participate in the grizzly's fate.

Her sacrificial death is what Bodkin sees as "a symbol of all life in its subjection to death and the power of renewal" (Patterns 133). Bodkin, continuing on the subject of the sacrificial rebirth pattern, cites anthropologist D. O. James in connection with the ritualistic meaning behind the shedding of blood: ". . . it is not the taking of life that is fundamental, but the giving of life to promote and preserve life, and to establish union between the individual and the unseen forces that surround him" (285).

If theatre, as the Greeks saw it, is the interaction between the gods and man, then this set piece, with its dance of golden light, its flow of dark blood, is like returning to the source of both story and the life of man in the wild.

O'Hagan seems to be concerned not only with the kind of characters who survive against the odds, not only with death and how an individual dies, but also with how, when we kill another, we kill a part of ourselves. We are all in a sense half-bloods, with other creatures as well as with other races.

In fact, in an old legend, it is the grizzly who teaches man how to survive. A fitting tutelary figure, he fulfills

the will that actuates him, O'Hagan seems to be saying, better than the civilized human: Wilderness life will fight fiercely for new life. It will also die for it. This is perhaps why something untameable will continue to unexpectedly break out of Tay John's pages.

It is interesting to note some primitive customs concerned with death and initiation and consider their relevance to the novel.

In some tribes, Jenness tells us, the Indian must kill his personal tutelary before its tutelaryship is established (174). And in others, Eliade notes that the initiate, away from the tribe, is hit by a grizzly paw which symbolically "kills" him; then he returns four days later with new knowledge (Patterns 175). The bear here, with his seasonal appearances and disappearances is seen as having insight into the rhythms of the earth.[2] The encounter with the grizzly, then, can be looked upon as something of an initiation for Denham, and as a second initiation, a second birth for Tay John. Jung adds to this idea by informing us that in mythology the second mother of a hero is often an animal, and that through her he shares in her immortality—Hiawatha being an example (qtd. in Lewis 345).

Tay John's placement of the bear's head in a tree is not only in accord with the Indian belief that the tree is a sacred place, a place of safekeeping to be respected by passers-by, but is also in accord with the ancient Taoist belief of "earth rounding the way of heaven," and its

admonition to "conduct your triumph as a funeral" (Bynner 40, 45).[3] Tay John's action can thus be seen as an example of the awesome seriousness with which the man of archaic societies expressed reverence towards sacred powers and archetypal forces beyond his conscious control.

Perhaps something of this is also stirring in Denham, in memories residing in the margins of his consciousness. Jung tells us that in myth dramas, "the initiate may either be a mere witness of the divine drama or take part in it or be moved by it, or he may see himself identified through the ritual action with the god" (Four Archetypes 51). In this way Jung suggests, man both stands apart from the god-hero and relates to him.

Denham certainly seems to be projecting the archetype of power and divinity onto Tay John. To do battle with a bear is "the sort of thing [Denham] had sometimes dreamed of" (85). He is most anxious to participate with his hero, to name him, to speak to him, to touch him: "We had won. That was how I felt." But the time is not ripe for crossing over and, in spite of six attempts to create intimacy, Denham feels "disdained" (89).

As the violence recedes we are left with a starkly effective stage set. We are moved from the suspenseful foreground to the meditative stillness of Tay John's and then Jack Denham's wonder, to the timelessness of ritual, and then to the hint of an epiphany.

> The branch moved there before my eyes,
> swayed gently, touched by an invisible

> hand after he had gone. It moved. The river flowed. The headless trunk of the she-grizzly swung out a bit from the bank, rolled over in the force of the current as if in her deep sleep she dreamed. Night's shadow was on the valley. Trees creaked in a new wind blowing.

In the fall of these thythms, the world is again "being made" and a dark beauty is being born. The break and tide of rhythm throughout this scene has taken Denham to the wildest shores of human sensibility. He cannot "find the words." From the most wondrous and imaginative, the most strange and remote, we are returned to the world of ordinary perception. And we are left, like Denham, with the question of what we carry away from the experience. Have we indeed witnessed the pattern of an unmeasurable force in the world, the pattern of redemption through sacrifice? Here, as in other set scenes in the novel, the tableau seems to be suffused with a strange vitality, with that mysterium tremendum which lies at the heart of all great religions. At its fullest intensity, life remains "unfathomable."

Feeling overcome by the dark "covering" of night, Denham pulls his fingers away from the guiding but "harsh" bark of branches of trees. Instead he holds them in contact with the reality of his sides. Trees in relationship with man's body are important in O'Hagan. Which is more real? Are they perhaps one? As in "Legend," we would do well to look carefully here at the nature of reality and of power.

Like "Legend," "Hearsay" shadows forth a pattern of waxing and waning, of living and dying. At the close of

this story, again with the voice of an owl—a bird who sings only in darkness—both Tay John and Denham seem to have experienced a redemptive death, and Denham's observation that his hero appeared to be "leaving one form of existence for another" would seem to apply to himself as well. But Denham will need time—and whisky. O'Hagan undercuts his vision by suggesting that he sees it as "an epic battle: man against the wilderness." The stage has distanced reality. For now, Denham uses the wrong words. He is indeed not yet ready to cross over.

The second tale of "Hearsay" also "has blood in it," and again through digression and time displacement we are introduced to the story by way of it—this time by the massive stain, the stain that can't be "washed off" (97).

As a prelude to the tale Denham says ". . . on that survey we were aware of time. We worked feverishly . . . you would have thought someone was treading on our heels." This recalls what I heard a present day aborigine say (with some bewilderment), "the white men chase the days." And of course in Tay John the days with their "hot breath" end up chasing the white men. The mounting tension in this second story is once more concerned with time. Men's time, the rhythm of the impatient, has infiltrated the Indian world, and it pursues Tay John.

Events are also foreshadowed by the statement, Tay John was "walled no longer by the faith of his people." Is this to be interpreted as "closed in" or "supported"?

or both? Clearly he is vulnerable. He is in a world where life is not a sharing nor an interchange between man and the earth, but "a series of trades." It is a world where minds are not "untamed," but are what Levi-Strauss described as "cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return" (219).

Contrasting ways of seeing the wilderness are evident here too. It is seen fearfully, aggressively, "as an enemy": when approaching a cabin, one "shouts from far back"; or sensuously as nourishment: Denham "sucks" the earth (the elements actually get into people's mouths, eyes, nostrils, hair, in this work); or again, as a propitious golden scene: above the poplars "white clouds drift, rimmed in gold . . . the northern lights appear . . . like banners of a god-like host borne on a soundless wind" (93). It is however the unreal that speaks to and tempts Tay John, the calendar that is not life (the then popular September Morn?) but freezes life in its perfection. It is on the wall next to the table that will receive his blood.

Details are accumulating, at first almost unnoticed, but gradually creating an atmosphere of foreboding. When McLeod asks what the furs, "shining white as snow and dark as nameless river water," are worth, he does not know how high the stakes will be.

Timberlake wants the mare for a use—with a part of him. Tay John wants the mare "with all of him." As he "looks upon" her all his senses are involved and she becomes

a winged horse, a Pegasus that will carry him to "the white-skinned girl."

In the stillness of the cabin there is a feeling of a relentless movement towards horror and chaos, an increasing momentum of dark Dionysian forces, and at the same time a sense of mad calm at the centre. "New shadows dance in the room, . . . the lantern dimmed by the blaze from the chimney corner." Then the rum stirs in the head "like a shout in a dead white silence." In the highly charged atmosphere, tension is built up. The civilized gods are conspiring against Tay John. Again the primitive instinct for survival is at work. We have the feeling it will fight back—and fiercely.

Action and words become non-rational, ambiguous. "One cut," again with a shining blade within reach, is ominous. "If your hand offend you" is hearsay of the white man's Bible, taken literally once more. In an alien world Tay John is a victim of language.

Frye tells us that "mutilation, . . . which combines the themes of sparagmos and ritual death, is often the price of unusual wisdom or power . . . as in the story of the blessing of Jacob" (Anatomy 193). From the grizzly Tay John has a scar. Will there be another birth, and another naming, from all this blood?

Tay John was certainly willing to re-enter naked into the world, to give away all his possessions to attain a new life. Even mutilation does not break his spirit: he re-

mains as intractable and resilient "as a four-inch spruce." The consciousness of the past is still with him too, in his singing of the remembered Shuswap song and in the use of the healing spruce-needle brew. Is this the new baptism? In the first one he was seen as Kum, the "messiah"—meaning the "anointed one." He does say "now they will call me The One-Handed," with its negative connotation.

McLeod's memories will last equally long in his vivid remembrance of the bloody severed hand, "like a great, bloated spider," and they will last in the indelible black stain. He has to "eat off it." He can even "taste it." He cannot ignore the primal dark. He can only absorb it as the table did.

Dick Harrison, referring to this novel in his review of School-Marm, remarks that

> Tay John, a mixed blood, carries wordlessly at the centre of the action all the struggles between Indian and white, wilderness and civilization, spirit and flesh, light and dark, life and death, which animate the story. (117)

In the imagery of the map-like stain on the table, the story-teller implants in us the passions of the wronged. The blood gives us—as it did the "uneasy" McLeod—our shame. This time the river will not wash it away.

"Possession" is the key word in Denham's third tale. It is "a great surrender." It is "bondage." On the surface it is Tay John's possession of a horse that Denham is speaking of. But set against a land, unmarked, unpossessed, is a drama where humans attempt to own each other.

To render this, O'Hagan establishes the most elemental and free relatedness between the characters and the earth, and counters it with imagery of artificiality and bondage. In addition, place and appearance often act as correlatives to an individual's internal state. The wind again, often with snow, is an intermediary. It can be healing, and it can be aggressive, but it seems to declare that in the wild the earth is master.

> At times it would lift them from the ground, blow them from the face of the earth entirely, lift after them into space the very tracks they had left behind. It would blow the thoughts from their heads, speech from their mouths, sight from their eyes—leave nothing at all but the land of mountains waiting for their names . . . (132)

Freedom in such a land is full of ironies. Tay John, a man "shaped by the river, by the hills around to their own ends" (126), will perhaps not long wish to serve the ends of the Aldersons. And gradually, like a wary wild animal, he withdraws farther and farther away (132).

But for a while he seems possessed by them. This time he does not pay for his horse in blood, dark and red, but in the showy false colours of his new clothes. He too appears to have been gelded, exploited. Actually he only takes what he is entitled to and, like Denham, "treats others with no more respect than he regarded due himself" (76). Alderson complains that he does not say "thank you." Maclean tells us that Indians neither expect nor offer thanks, but may say instead "you have a good heart." He adds that "the

white man has received in land more than he can ever repay" (13).

In this Alderson tale it is again the preludes and interludes we must listen to, particularly when they address the fraudulent. Julia is unreal. She is the calendar girl from the previous story but dolled up. She sees even the primeval land as art, as a picture post-card owned by McLeod: "nice place you have here." Subtle images of falsity are everywhere. Julia in particular is woman as artifice, in the several meanings of the word; and Alderson is the paternalistic possessor who wants to keep her as a child, diminished as the gelding and Tay John are. Is this the "old person," the proprietor with his "jewel"? (Much of the play on names in O'Hagan is at the level of pun, and can provide this kind of amusement.)

Even stories are transformed, falsified: Tay John is said to have lost his hand "in a fight with a grizzly"; and the wilderness tale is transformed by an Englishman (named Arthur) into a make-believe Arthurian romance, complete with imagery of swords shining above the water and knights and castles. Is there perhaps some irony in the fact that he is a mining engineer and has come to see "how things are done out here"?

Porter too sees things in terms of England—in terms of an adventure in Chums. "Fancy that!" he exclaims—a clearly British way of expressing wonder. Like Alderson he is eventually "guided" in the full sense of the word,

by Tay John and his Canadian wilderness.

These are all examples of how myth too is imported, altered—to use an O'Hagan idiom—"imposed upon." Julia herself is an import. O'Hagan seems to see his American characters—Dobble for example—as artificial, whereas the people of the mountains, such as Charlie and Ed are described in organic terms.

The story is replete with echoes and images of hunting and entrapment. Julia's sexual awakening takes place in "a country never hunted before." Her presence is defined by her musk-like scent, a scent which assumes a physical shape and colour. It is "a pillar of purple flame," and later "a haze" that like smoke invades the chinks between the logs of the cabin. McLeod senses more than the perfume. He opens the windows to let in the fresh air, then rips the image of falsity off the wall. Foreshadowing emotions to come, this takes place at an instinctual level below conscious understanding. (McLeod has "no answer.") In this respect the preludes and the "hearing" itself are reminiscent of Forster's A Passage to India.

"Hearing" is particularly significant in this story. In the windy high country it is more important than speech. Man's voice is "a small thing." It is (like Julia's voice at the trial) "a whisper dying in the storm."

Julia hears her husband without "listening." She wants rather to listen to what other younger men think of her through the subterfuge of her "leading question." And

later she wants them all to overhear her "story," the story in which she betrays both her husband and Tay John. In one of the most graphic and amusing similes in the novel, Porter, "all agog," is described in terms of his large ears, "cupped forward, to catch all that was going on": "They enclosed his face like a set of parentheses." It is most important, then, to hear clearly.

It is the still, the silent, the initiated man who hears. It is Tay John who suggests,

> a wisdom the others searched for, a knowledge of the Dark Stranger who moved in their words, one whose voice he knew, whose call he had heard, whose gaze he had met. (136)

Is this the wisdom "so strong, so sure" that frightens Julia (137) but also draws her? The fascinating and inexpressible, the generative and catalyctic is always dark.

In a characteristic passage, shot through with typical O'Hagan image and turn of phrase, we are told of the "wall of darkness" surrounding the mountain episode:

> Night was around them and above them. Clouds hid the stars. Night was a great dark bird shadowing them with its wings, and like down from those wings snow began to fall. It was not white so much as an intensification of the dark, making the obscurity palpable. They were being touched by night itself. The flakes upon their eyelids were the caress of sleep. Somewhere a wolf howled—a being from another planet lost upon the earth.

O'Hagan shapes the movement from the once again protective enfolding snow towards hints of an uncanny and transforming otherness at work in the surroundings. Without straining

a simple scene he invests it with gently increasing portentous camouflages and shadows. The unknown, the unnamed, exerts a strange power, adds a curious unpredictable touch, making the implications of the story go farther than perhaps even O'Hagan realized. Characters in the novel are frequently in tenuous communication with something from beyond, with something from the other side of the mountain or the river, something they can't quite see or hear but perhaps have always unconsciously known. Hence all the attempts to cross over from the named to the unnamed and sometimes the reverse. The pass has more than geographic significance in Tay John.

There is a brief interlude before Julia's final scene which anticipates her later understanding. Wide-eyed, and with perhaps more than her hair "undone" (her scheme rather than her virtue?), she suggests an abandonment to instinct. She regards the three men of civilization as unreal. She perhaps has been touched by the primitive night too. Was she, as Charlie said, being "saved" by Tay John? from herself? Even she does not seem to know. While Tay John has made the river passage—albeit with some difficulty—from the wilderness into civilization, Julia, like Denham is not yet ready to cross in the other direction. She has been caught in the tension between the civilized surface and the uncivilized within, and between the dream of the primitive and the dark realities of the wild. "The creek," or in this case the mountain, is, as Fee noted, "the distance

between reality and what people make of it" (13). Julia is another example of O'Hagan's interest in the reaction of the civilized mind in its encounter with the dark power of the primeval.

Like Denham, it takes Julia many days to find the right words. In the meantime she collapses—as will her story, her myth, with its violence to language, its dramatized distorted shape, its wrong words.

There is also a foreshadowing of how Alderson, the man who made his wife the butt of his belittling jokes, will be made a fool of. He is seen, looking out of his tent, as "a head collared with canvas at a country fair at which customers shy wooden balls"—O'Hagan's typical fusion of the ludicrous as an integral part of the serious.

The foregoing serves as a prelude, as contextual undertones to the counterfeit emotions, evasions, misconceptions and false witness surrounding the trial. Fragments, glimpses, intermittent impressions all play their part in these digressive prologues to the main event.

At the trial the evidence is indeed hearsay. Julia recants, as Adela did in A Passage to India, and similarly breaks out of the bondage of her imprisoned self. She has perhaps found the "something she had lost" (138), a knowledge she did not consciously possess before, an elemental incarnate knowledge, not a picture postcard one. The novel is silent on this point, allowing us to make what we will of the imagery.

As O'Hagan suggests, one cannot get inside another's mind. There has been the long gradual filling of the vessel of memory and the translating of initiation into actuality. The mind is the "urn of blood and shadow, the place of silence," and it is sealed. Julia perhaps responds to Tay John's great slow pulse beat, or to his stance, "his feet braced . . . as if he felt the roll of the earth beneath them." Tay John says only four words: "I do not lie." But he is heard.

Julia tears her handkerchief, prior to tearing her story "to shreds" with her own four words: "He was our guide." Tay John has perhaps rendered back to Julia her own truth. She, like him, has been initiated, has discovered she can contain the dark.

Walsh speaks of such passages in life as times when "the mind expands and sees that it is expanding, when the mind realizes that it is passing from one order of comprehension to another" (38). Here, as in the grizzly scene, "the hiding places of power open." Walsh's further comments seem to be particularly apposite to O'Hagan's insight into the perceptions of the participants in the hearing.

He suggests that such experiential scenes "have two seemingly contrasting characteristics." The first is concerned with a heightened sense of light and discernment, an awareness of things "inaccessible to ordinary sensibility, like the slow secret movements of the revolving earth." The second is concerned with the dark authority of the mind, with

the effect of "the slow deposit of years lived with scrupulous integrity . . . the mind's most piercing perception" being "grounded in sensory particulars, the more spiritual the one, the more vivid the other" (39-40).

Light and darkness meet without contradiction in Tay John, in the mind, in the land, in life's story. This concept is expressed in closing scenes particularly. Often portentous and bordering on tragedy, they are played at a slow pace and are shadowed, blurring the boundaries between myth and reality. When Tay John departs—again an outsider—there is once more a sense of

> merging with the curtain of snow, becoming less a man than a movement. He did not leave so much as he disappeared from view, his proportions whittled by mist and distance. (156)

Tay John "renounced" his hat, and all that it stands for. He has no need either to thank or to blame. He has brushed past Alderson in the manner of the other half-breed in "The Tepee," who showed the white man only "the contempt of his strength and the disdain of his charity" (18). Here is the reverse of Julia: here is the power of the wild meeting the civilized mind.

For Porter and the others, Tay John's hat embodies the story of a hero, and the postscript to the tale is the chase, played at the fast pace of comedy—also important in O'Hagan's world.

Notes

[1] In The Canadian Century, ed. A. J. M. Smith (Toronto: Gage, 1973) and also in The Canadian Experience, ed. A. J. M. Smith (Agincourt, Ont.: Gage Publishing, 1974).

[2] The Indians' and O'Hagan's reverence for the bear is brought about by other characteristics as well. Like most animals, bears live in the eternity of the present moment; their hearing is acute; they like to clown; they evince a creative yet potentially destructive vitality; they care for their young for two years; they can walk upright, and appear to ponder. For an amusing satirical account of a grizzly who masquerades as a man and, reversing the usual pattern, succeeds in making humankind look ridiculous, see O'Hagan's "Ursus," illustrated by his wife, Margaret, in Malahat Review 50, April 1979, 49-64. Other excellent stories of bears are his "The Valley's Other Tenant," and "Animals in Thought," both in the O'Hagan Archive, University of Victoria, the latter also in the Victoria Colonist, October 25, 1959, and "Bear Cub is Everybody's Baby," Maclean's, July 21, 1956, "Grizzled Gentleman," Maclean's, January 1st, 1949.

[3] The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu, translated Witter Bynner, pp. 40 and 45, verses 25 and 31. Subsequent references to this, the Tao Teh Ching, will be designated by TTC followed by verse numbers.

CHAPTER SIX

Evidence—without a Finding:

The Unfathomable—and Last Things

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay. . . . the stiff-necked people, and the self-willed, and self-important ones, the self-righteous, self-absorbed all of them who wind their energy round the idea of themselves and so strangle off their connection with the ceaseless tree of life.

D. H. Lawrence
"Vengeance is Mine"

As for man his days are as grass: as a flower of the field so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

Ps. 103: 15-16

Flesh is as grass, but the word endureth forever.

I Peter 1: 24:25

Those shadowy recollections
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence.

William Wordsworth
"Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

While "Legend" rolls with the earth and "Hearsay" strolls with Denham and sometimes meanders from the course, "Evidence" searches for clean-cut answers and doesn't find them. The chronicle is still "rough-edged." The coding, as ever, is in the land, but attempts are made to find evidence through religion and through talk, particularly through Dobble's salesmanship of himself and his project.

By now we have come to realize that "how" and "what" Tay John means is embodied in and revealed through hitherto unrecognized connections in word and world, that somehow small previously disconnected facts, if we take note of them, have a way of becoming connected. As before, much of this kind of evidence is to be found in the preludes and reflective interludes. This is particularly true of Part Three of the novel. "There is nothing new—these words nor their meaning," as Denham says in the opening meditation on vanity and illusion and their relationship to the time cycle. As usual in these reflective passages, we have the surface subject but there is much to watch for besides.

In addition to anticipating possible connections within the work, further unsuspected meaning may be deciphered by recognizing Taoist and Biblical resonances, particularly from Ecclesiastes. While the Tao Teh Ching's and Ecclesiastes' concern with vanity will be particularly appropriate to the Dobble episode, relevant at this point is the Wisdom Preacher's observation on the new:

> That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been (3:15)

And in O'Hagan's version:

> To-day was implicit in time's beginning. All that is, was. Somewhere light glowed in the first vast and awful darkness, and darkness is the hub of light. Imprisoned in its fires which brighten and make visible the universe, and shine upon man's face, is the core, the centre, the hard unity of the sun, and it is dark. (161)

The Biblical poet continues with the similar recognition that, while "He hath made everything beautiful in his time," also

> He hath set the world in their heart so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. (3:11)

This the characters of "Evidence" refuse to believe, and is likely what O'Hagan is referring to when he sees them as "arrogant."

Denham's reflections on the darkness of the cycle lead into one of the most significant passages in the novel, one which reverberates through each story:

> Men walk upon the earth in light, trailing their shadows that are the day's memories of the night. For each man his shadow is his dark garment, formed to the image of his end, sombre and obscure as his own beginning. It is his shroud, awaiting him by his mother's womb lest he forget what, with his first breath of life, he no longer remembers. Sometimes when we are older there is a glimpse. It appears we are returning. We have made the circle. (162)

Here is the concept of the glimpse, the flashback to the beginning of life, to the beginning of story, the concept of the elusiveness of knowledge—in particular of our

dark destiny; here also is the recognition of the need for initiation, the need for the passage of time and for the return, to realize the fullness of the shadowed cycle. It is an old concept though nonetheless powerful, and one understood by various great poets from early times to the present.

The singer of Ecclesiastes observes further,

> One generation passeth away and another cometh: but earth abideth forever. (1:4)

And 500 years before Christ, Lao Tzu of the Tao Teh Ching said simply

> The valley spirit never dies. (TTC 6)

The extraordinary poetic perspective which O'Hagan has on the realization of the cycle is also similar to Eliot's "The end is where we start from . . . /We are born with the dead" (Four Quartets); and it is further almost identical to the one memorably formulated in Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality." And like this poet's "Ode," it is arresting, shaping, dynamic: "the soul" that rises with us/ Hath had elsewhere its setting"—its "shroud."

This is the glimpse, the recognition of previous moments stretching back to creation, a pattern recognized in the primitivist idea that man can travel backward in imagination to the source, to where all life began; it is thus an encounter with the past as it comes towards us, the offering of a redemption in illo tempore. It has an air of magic about it, but also of tragedy. It is only a glimpse.

Denham continues with a perspective on existence between the womb and the shroud, one which has echoes of the men caught between the mountain peaks in "Hearsay." Now, "our today is but the twilight between our yesterday and our tomorrow," and a place from which our vanity prompts us to escape. "The child of darkness, walking . . . in unaccustomed light" (167), not only "trails" his shadow (162), but would cast it far before him:

> Man, if he could, so vain he is, would lift his shadow from the ground and with his blunted fingers shape it. Yet he cannot—for the substance of the shadow is in the fingers that would turn it, and its form, that makes it whole, lies tight upon the earth from which they would remove it. (162)

The earth has us. It is then our relationship to this ground that counts. Man is a participant in a process from which he cannot separate himself; we are always enclosed within the cycle at which we are looking, and it is a continuous one. Shadows as manifestations of destiny are often on the ground before the characters in Tay John. This is particularly so in "Evidence"; a hint of the irony implied in the subtitle is discernible here, in that man, try as he may—and certainly the novel's vain characters try—can never fully understand his own condition. The attempt to look for this kind of evidence is, in O'Hagan's view, another veiled indication of arrogance (219).

The word "evidence," and its associates, then, bears examination. It can be seen as a clue to look for evidence in the novel and to question it. While this word's implica-

tions were woven into "Legend" and "Hearsay," it is now ironically appropriate to the concerns of propaganda, of law, of sexual and cultural ideals addressed in Part Three. Certainty of possessing evidence lends itself to all kinds of specious persuasion in characters such as Dobble. His "I know" is an example of language used as defence and deception. While he is on an obsessive quest for evidence of material success, Father Rorty is on a similar quest for evidence of spiritual success—for "victory over temptation." And there is also, I suspect, an ironic pun in this subtitle on the determined but often narrow-minded investigations of the NWMP, based as they are on neatly kept records while neglecting natural law and intuition. In every case evidence is "without a finding"; "illusion" is thus paired with "evidence" as a key word.

Indeed Denham concludes his meditation by pointing out the illusory nature of reality, of both its sights and its sounds: in mountain mirages, and in the "cold silence that is a hum . . . and the river murmur that is a sort of silence." There is a suggestion here that illusion can become, like "possession" in Part Two, a self-constructed bondage.

"Time" is again a key concept as it was on the first page. It is now 1911. Men's time has changed a blazed trail into a "hammered-through" railway bed. But juxtaposed to this, there is still the time, the rhythms of "Legend": the locomotives "howl," but "when they passed

there would be again . . . . the sound of lapping water." The "endurance" of "Hearsay" is still a word to be reckoned with. But Dobble pays no heed. For him a place becomes a time: "Dobble's Future," and it calls him to a precarious passage.

The word "beyond" comes into its full significance now. Father Rorty's "beyond," as well as Dobble's is in the future; the NWMP are more concerned with the past, with records and clues; and Tay John and Ardith, while they do go "beyond" the mountains, it is the fulfillment of the present they seek. All leave the security of one world, as did Red Rorty, to face a journey into the unknown in quest of the new. But except for Tay John and Ardith they carry luggage filled with commandments, inhibitions, scruples—or the lack of them—the burdens of civilization.

"The new" is an important word, then, and it is connected with freedom, with flight. To begin is to be free. "Evidence," however, expresses something of the vision of Northrop Frye in his own musing on Ecclesiastes:

> . . . there is a time for all things, something different to be done at each stage of the cycle. The statement, 'There is nothing new under the sun,' applies to wisdom but not to experience. . . . Only when we realize that nothing is new can we live with an intensity in which everything becomes new. (Great Code 124)

Denham, in his meditations, appears to have arrived at a somewhat similar realization.

Woven into the reflections of "Evidence" is the interplay between the two powerful polar forces of the story. The

reader, like the narrator, will be "trailing back and forth . . . between the source of [the] mighty and tempestuous river and the railway." These are the novel's critical poles of thought and feeling and also the paths to choice. Along with Tay John, the man of two bloods, Denham is caught between the lines of hard steel and the winding trails of unnamed country. Similarly Red Rorty was caught between the world of booze and brothel and the world of fundamentalist religion; and Father Rorty will be caught between the call of earth and the call of heaven. Dobble, like the railway, just hammers ahead "to achieve" regardless of circumstances. The coded quest—shadowed and silent—is, however, for the source.

Whereas Red Rorty had "the Word" to purchase redemption from loneliness, Father Rorty has the Cross to purchase redemption from fear, and Dobble has money to purchase redemption from anonymity. And Denham still has his story and his imagination to—like Scheherazade—keep death from the door. Denham is one of the few, however, who know it takes a certain dying to be reborn.

The tales of "Evidence" are wide-ranging and call for a combination of Wheelwright's modes: there are "confrontive" elements, particularly when concerned with commercial and legal logic; in the episode concerning Father Rorty's death, the priest's letter and Denham's experience present both a subjective and objective point of view; and towards the end, "archetypal" and "metaphoric" aspects predominate,

distancing the reader through the shadows of myth.

These tales form a complex system of stories within stories, of worlds primitive within worlds civilized, of inner worlds concealed by outer appearances. Denham begins his story with Dobble and as usual begins several times. Dobble introduces him to Father Rorty and Ardith, and these three characters give us ~~the~~ stories, again three, of Part Three.

Father Rorty's story includes a letter which results in a double time displacement. It is written before the events leading to his death, September 1911, but presented after; and this presentation takes place some time before the story of the finding and actual reading of the letter in October 1911. Evidence does not come to hand readily. The priest's story, however, is the one most easily extracted from the others, and exploring it first might aid in clarifying the events unfolding around it. Extracting it also underlines the intensity of one life lived at a time.

O'Hagan offers several portents and shadows of destiny as a prelude to the main episode of this tale. Although it appears to have no connection, we might even include "the shadow of the pine tree" falling across the window of the Lodge (182). This is observed in the passage before introducing Rorty as "a solitary figure in black outlined against the shining waters"—a suggestive phrase in itself, and one presaging a dark forbidding beauty. Shadows frequently tell of dark stricken moments in the story, moments which

are outlined against the luminous magnificence of earth.

Shadows, moreover, are a description of how the little priest sees life. A man of the Cross, he is estranged from the grace of the physical world. "The Cross," Jaffé notes, symbolizes "the tendency to remove the centre of man from the earth, and to elevate it to the spiritual sphere, earthly life and the world and the flesh being forces that have to be overcome."[1]

Father Rorty's inner state is emphasized further by his pale frailty, and by his gesture of brushing back his black forelock, "as if he strove to clear an image from before his fine blue eyes better to see the world" (an action symbolic of subservience: it was a serf's gesture of greeting to his master in medieval times). Finally, caressing his lock of hair instead, the priest appears to give up and instead hold his dark image and perhaps his guilt to him.

Father Rorty has "an earthly quest" as well, and not only for his elder brother. Living "by his faith," but "not for it," the earthly harlot draws him more than the Heavenly Virgin. (And in a curious reversal of the confessional, it is to Ardith that he appeals for grace and absolution.)

A striking example of man's vulnerability, Father Rorty steps carefully in a forbidden world, carrying his faith—not as a weapon as his brother did—but "as a burden" (185). Both weapons and burdens tend to unbalance one. Each in their own way, the Rortys are "warring against the intangible forces of human destiny." Both are—as Father

Rorty realizes about himself—"materialists," who are using God as "a refuge." Neither God nor human beings are meant to be used, the novel frequently seems to suggest—they are ends in themselves. In the Rortys' refusal to pay tribute to life, Jung would say "the dark God"—and God is often dark in O'Hagan—"would find no room" (qtd. in Jaffé).

Father Rorty is strongly associated with the O'Hagan themes of doubt (his name is Thomas), and, although he is timid, with arrogance and illusion. His church, however, does not allow doubt, and he therefore cannot even "begin to learn" (184). In fact for O'Hagan, the Catholic Church seems to represent illusion, "promising another heaven," as Denham says, "dooming us by that promise, to further hells" (a view he held strongly and repeated to me in conversation). Further, as "self-appointed caretakers of eternity," for themselves and others (a description applicable to Red Rorty and Dobble also), priests are the epitome of arrogance. "All of this may seem far away from Father Rorty," Denham says in a red-herring statement which, however, concludes with "you must judge of that for yourselves."

This suggests that in the next scene Denham may be again leading us astray. Although the situation is replete with sexual imagery, he suggests that the priest's thoughts were not on woman. Certainly Denham's were. Further, the priest's later vision of immersion in the lake, with its aftermath of fear and failure is echoed in the first sentence:

> The sun, low over the black rim of the western mountains, slanted on the lake waters until they became a carpet of creeping flame, failing as it advanced towards us, until at our feet only black water lapped, cold and spent and sobbing in the sandy runnel where the canoe's prow had rested. . . . The shape of the paddler in the stern rose above them, paddle flashing sword-like from the water and streams of water, blood-reddened against the sinking sun, running from its blade. For a long time we heard the tinkle of those falling paddle streams and the widening wake as a sigh upon the flaming waters. Then the four heads and the paddler's back and the canoe merged, blurred, became black and small and still, consumed before our eyes in the fiery expanse of lake and sky.

The vital and free rhythms expressed here are in sharp contrast to the Church's calculated anti-sacramentalism of the body. For O'Hagan, both art and nature have an erotic component, and it includes a sense of anguish, a sense of "the suffering, the struggle that is passion's part" (200) that runs through the story.

Here, apart from the actuality of the event, O'Hagan, through the language of poetry, gives a sensuous body to the earth itself. And a sense of sorrow at its denial can be seen in "the black water," darkly ebbing at the feet of the priest.

The whole passage evokes an endless, almost elegiac, rise and fall, a shining forth of flaming colour dissolving into darkness. O'Hagan builds this array of impassioned patterns of imagery, letting them extend panoramically into suggestions of both exultation and desolation, until the sunset's radiance and its fading seem to play across the

surface of the words. In treating sex obliquely, as O'Hagan almost always does, the language itself changes what could be considered profane material and mythologizes it into the sacred; and, of course, it does the opposite too, in his disdainful treatment of the Church. Thus an ongoing dialectic between body and spirit is expressed. The language describing this incident may be somewhat extravagant—the passage continues in this vein—but it is representing intensity, "the fury and single passion" of earth (and of man) which is "beyond our understanding," that he spoke of earlier (88).

Father Rorty realizes this when he says to Denham:

> Beauty and Truth, Truth and Beauty. But violence first. . . . Without the Cross our Saviour's life would not be beautiful. It is from His agony, not from His words, that the leaves of the poplar-tree are never still. (188)

The leaves are never still with their rustling shining-forth of golden colour. Their light and dark sides showing simultaneously, they are alive with meaning in the passing breeze.

The Cross is an inevitable experience, and a lonely one, for man; one can neither take refuge in it nor from it. "The beauty of violence draws man and affrights him," Rorty adds, and it leads him to his tree, the "Y"-shaped tree "apart from its fellows."

In addition to its relevance to the crucifixion, the school-marm tree can be seen as representing the agony of choice. (The letter "Y" is also appropriately the symbol for an unknown quantity.) In his letter, Father Rorty

says, "I have passed my life battling the impulses rising within me. . . . I see two roads stretching before me, and neither can I see clearly" (211, 213). To help him in his decision, he tries, as several of the other characters do, to emulate the gods while having no initiation into the real powers of the universe. At the same time, however, he realizes that escape through suppressing a vital procreative part of himself is "to deny the balance that life imposes on us." Self-deformation as well as earth-deformation is sacrilege in Tay John. Creation can impose upon man, but not man on Creation.

Thus fear looms for Father Rorty in the shape of a shadow, "moving great upon the wall" (214). It is the shadow of his hand; and the words he fashions and the "fingers that shape" them, as O'Hagan earlier warned, labour in vain. In vain, too, are his dreams symbolized by the Gatsby-like light marking Ardith's camp. His vision "of flames, of water flowing, of a long white road," is it of passion, of grace, of death?

When he climbs the mountain his robe is kilted, half-abandoned. But he is in a world where contradictions are no longer possible to dismantle or to bear, and the two unclear roads that were stretching before him will become his long white road, the road of the Indian "path to the land of the shades" (Maclean 312). For both Indian and white it expresses the solitude of man's last passage.

In the end Father Rorty is riven to the earth by bonds of pain, shackled by the ropes, the tight restrictions, the

unnatural laws with which he has laboriously bound himself. O'Hagan is ever alert to the traps of theological thinking, and the cassock that the priest did not remove to immerse himself in the lake is the black mantle which, along with his words, is now removed by the hurling rain, snow and wind. Is this perhaps a catharsis, a casting off of the tyranny upon life—not so much of sin as of irrelevant virtue? "God's mantle in the wilderness" is the wilderness, and it is not black but the colour of life: green and gold and sometimes blood-red.

Denham sees it thus when he climbs the Calvary-like mountain: "the shafts of the sinking sun rolled the golden spokes of an ever-revolving wagon wheel across the sky. Close to me a creek, cutting the dark sward of the clearing, was a band of shimmering gold." (217) The years eternally wheel, and are shown too in the tree, "bearing upon its crest the image of its perfect growth." Even the broken school-marm tree reveals not only the pattern of past scars, but also, reborn with two new branches, "strong and tall," the pattern of intended wholeness.

O'Hagan adds to the idea of nature's powers of renewal by the only injection of Greek myth into the story. The lake is seen as an amethyst, "that amethyst to which an ancient people turned in hope from their intoxications," amethystos for the Greeks, meaning "away from toxic."

It was "the tree," however, "that was the thing." In Denham's intensely realized confrontation, it is seen in

its double role of death-dealing and life-giving; and from the Cross of death it becomes the tree of life. If according to Denham, it has "no phallic form," it is, like earth, woman; he has no need to raise himself, as Father Rorty did, above the nurturing soil:

> There in that tree against my body, pulsed the strength beyond all strength. I felt the earth caught in the noose of time lurch beneath me. The hum of stars was out beyond my fingertips, for the arms of the tree in those moments were my arms, and its movements mine.

Again the creative and the sexual are closely linked. Here are the primal and vibrant forces that entwine themselves about man's being. Denham becomes one with the pulsating time of the cosmos, Wordsworth's "tree of many, one."[2] The shadow thrown from the Cross is changed.

"Immense it went beyond"—the lone shadow of man and tree—an evocation of eternity. Yet how expressive these words are of infinite yearning. We think of all Father Rorty had missed in life.

The inexhaustible energy of earth circles endlessly in the night, even while the priest is dying. Here the words and the world are alive with life endlessly held in succour:

> The twilight faded. Under the tree roots, the ground sucked in shadows and spewed up darkness. Night rolled in a wall over the continent. . . . Rivers would still run, winds would blow in darkness . . . behind him he felt a light. If he could turn his face he would see it.

But Father Rorty was expecting "a light so stupendous, never before seen by man"—not something as simple as the dawn.

"What was before him" as he died, Denham wonders: "the shape of the Cross, the vision of his faith, or the face of woman . . . , or was there only the sound of the wind blowing, and far away the sound of running water where all who thirst may drink?"—grace for all who will accept it? Are all perhaps one? It has taken the final "spirit's agony," as the priest said of his brother, to give him, but not us, the answer.

When carrying Father Rorty's body down the mountain, Tay John comments, "The little priest is light. . . . Now he is afraid no more" (221). His fleshly burden is gone. In a reversal of animal sacrifice, part of it is literally and symbolically gone to the marten. In a cycle where life feeds upon life, he is related again to the natural world. The named mountain and the tree cross become his memorial.

Compared with the laconic realism of Red Rorty's death, O'Hagan grains this crucifixion on the reader's consciousness through two intense impressions, neither of them from evidence observed at the time. We have instead the prelude of the priest's introspection, tormented and fearful, poignant and desolating, and the postlude of Denham's reflections, visionary and instinctive, empowering and restorative.

Death may leave no evidence, but somehow, Denham reflects, it brings men "closer together." To all "the riddle of human destiny was propounded . . . and the shadow of a common lot fell upon all alike" (223).

In the story of Dobble, O'Hagan follows his usual pattern: the word ironically exposes the evidence the character seeks to conceal. Language is used here—more than in the other episodes—for comic purposes. A wry recognition of human folly is depicted with the merciless insight of the cartoonist, broadening out into an archetypal treatment of a man who is "not quite a villain." He is however a farce as a self-declared hero. The tone is set in an introductory incident which is an example of how O'Hagan treats his pompous characters: with splendid nonsense as well as seriousness, and with visual comedy—in this case you might even say musical comedy. Denham tells of his response to Dobble's jabbing finger: Always "a bit proud" of my chest,

> I spread out my chest and the buttons from my vest flew off. One hit Dobble in the face. They made a merry tune. Dobble danced back as though he had been stung by hornets. A laugh went up: I left the buttons on the floor and went out to get new ones sewn on.

Here is the art of telling the story: the unperturbed gesture used as language; light assault in return for light assault, and the musical rhythm unbroken by leaving the buttons where they fell. Dobble even dances to this tune. Denham is in control, and Dobble, rather like Alderson in a similar fair-like scene, will get it back "in the face." The passage is an altogether unexpected demonstration that superb and enlivening theatrics inhere in anything.

Where the Shuswaps saw Yellowhead Lake as the promised land and Father Rorty saw it as woman, Dobble sees it as

opportunity, as his "Future," as they call his false "Switzerland in America." His schemes, like those of religion, serve the devious purpose of an enclosed self. This time the garment of concealment is not a cassock, but a long black cloak. Under it he hides "the knife" of blackmail—a dark use of the word indeed. The other garment of concealment, in O'Hagan's usual mix of seriousness and folly, is the Aphrodine Girdle. Dobble seeks not only to be known, but to be, like a god, adored. And Aphrodite's magic girdle, myth tells us, made its wearer, male or female, the object of desire. But Denham, paraphrasing Ecclesiastes, notes that it is "Vanity, vanity, the fat upon the spirit," that is Dobble's chief weakness (228). Using false constructs to avoid reality will cause a painful collapse of spiritual fat, of a "Future," or of the word as "holy writ." A false manipulator of self and others, Dobble, rather like the Rortys, is a victim as well as a perpetrator of the word used as propaganda. An example of the "hazard of belief," he is, Denham observes, "blind to facts, in so far as those facts threatened the beliefs that gave his life impetus" (225). If Red Rorty's life was impelled by and became a fire that burnt itself out, and Father Rorty's impelled by and became a dark image, Dobble's is impelled by and becomes a fevered dream, an illusion.

This entrepreneur is most graphically exposed through his name, his appearance, and his word.

He is as double as his name sounds. As he himself says, there are "two b's in it." He comes to "spy out the

land," curiously a Biblical phrase (Nu. 13:16). He has a double in James, a man who "virtually swallowed his face when he grinned"; tellingly this is also an amusing observation that finds a correspondence in the Bible: "The lips of a fool will swallow up himself" (Ecc. 10:12); and James is Dobble's mouth—"the inspired punctuation to his master's remarks." Of such as James and Dobble, the Psalmist said, "They do but flatter with their lips and dissemble in their double heart" (12:2). "Publicity is the word," says Dobble, as far as the "good" priest's death concerns his development. Further, in his crooked dissembling and his agitation, his rigidity and his brittle, sterile dryness, Dobble is unbalanced: he wobbles. In the end he will be blown from his moorings by his own windy rhetoric, blown from his "Future" where his men do all the work. In this project one might stretch O'Hagan's fun with a name further and say he "dabbles."

It is his fervent desire "that others might know his name." He uses it to put his god-like stamp of possession on things. Even his cigarettes bear his initials, and his sign reads "Alf Dobble, Proprietor." He does not understand the Taoist warning that "The sanest man,"

> Takes everything that happens as it comes
> As something to animate, not to appropriate. (TTC 2)

The clothes of falsity, of illusion, of death, come in many styles in O'Hagan. Dobble's "meagre" shadow, James, is as amusingly lost in his baggy coverings as Father Rorty is tragically lost in his flowing cassock. Dobble too is

lost, "off the path," skulking furtively in the wilderness in his long incongruous cloak. He is usually dressed entirely in black, and his shoes with their illusory shimmer are of patent leather. And it is not only his shoes and his girdle that place artifice between him and nature; in the "dead" centre of his mouth is a tooth "with an immense gold cap" (181). As with all those with faith in "a mission," as Denham calls it, he is inflated with himself, "swollen with his tidings" (189). However all he can "hatch" (along with his schemes) is a cigarette from his case—and it goes "dead" (224).

If punning names and ill-fitting garments suggest the disproportion between the reality of a man and his exaggerated pretensions, and if irony feeds on the gap between profession and performance, Dobble is the perfect victim—the gap is large.

Now we come to O'Hagan's third descriptive tool: a man's use of the word. Dobble wants his word remembered. He frequently says, "mark my words," and takes the attitude of a "preacher" (an anathema, of course, to O'Hagan). His words have but one feverish note to sound, "I" "I" "I." He "knows himself" and "other men." But as a narcissist, the other is himself.

He believes that "talk is what sells," and that "the tongue [not the eye nor the ear] is a mighty instrument" (176). With its staccato mechanical rhythms it will shape, "make over" the mountains, "the heart of the mountains" no less, and that of Tay John and Ardith as well. All is to

be "changed, changed, do you hear?" says Dobble with his habit of doubling a word to force it on his listener (171). Yet he sees himself as a paternalistic benefactor (another form of blackmail) of both Tay John and Ardith. He is not only The Almighty, The Creator, The Truth, The Word, he is Providence as well.

But more than anything else Dobble's belief in himself concerns omniscience: he "knows" the future, knows that he heralds "a new era" (225).

He is a man from Colorado (which also has its alien-named Lucerne). He is the myth of the American West, serving its own ideological function as all myths do. When the frontier closed below the border (around 1890), men such as Dobble who had exploitive managerial relationships toward nature, turned northwards for the expansion of their over-excited dream. Dobble's attitude is the epitome of what Dennis Lee saw, at this period, as

> The view of everything but one's own ego—the new continent, native peoples . . . one's own body, as a kind of raw material, here as pure value-free externality, to be manipulated and remade according to the hungers of one's own nervous system and the logic of one's technology. (qtd. in Bissell 8)

Denham, for instance, is to be given "the command of waters"—waters which "have gone on till then without intervention," he protests. And Tay John is to be "used," like a cigar store Indian, "dressed in skins, meeting trains."

Such is Dobble's "illusion" that it "was more real to him than the dark pine trees which gave him logs for his

buildings." And that is all the pines were to him. As it did for the priest, the tree here also serves an end other than itself.

Prophetically, but no doubt influenced by rum, Denham has a vision of Dobble's incongruous Swiss chalet "as a ship" (foreign no doubt) "tilted . . . , foundered in a strange and hostile sea" (231). (And earlier he spoke of it as "a castle of logs," which somehow echoes "a castle of cards.") Once more the Tao warns,

> Those who take over the earth
> And shape it to their will never succeed.
> The earth is like a vessel so sacred
> That at the mere approach of the profane
> It is marred
> And when they reach out their fingers it is gone.
> (TTC 29).

Nature's limits are not ours to change, but ours to imitate. While the spruce tree branches "sloped to shed the winter snow," Dobble's roof eventually sags beneath it, and his cabins "sink into the ground." The earth remains "untutored," as Denham perceived earlier.

Inauspicious, too, for Dobble is "the new wind blowing." It carries wisps of Tay John's yellow hair "scuttling as if on small unseen feet" over the blood-spattered floor to his office. Later the helpless Dobble in the bushes reminds Denham of "the Biblical sacrifice—the ram caught in the thicket." Consciously or unconsciously, O'Hagan does frequently have the Bible in mind.

For Dobble the trail to reality is overgrown with the thickets of confusion and he, like the railway, appears to be on a collision course. He is the fourth to have lost

the way through bringing unnatural and alien values to the land. Surrounded by the imagery of vanity and illusion, sterility and death, the evidence is all against this man who so assiduously collects evidence against others.

For a street in the wilderness is a contradiction in terms. Visions don't, as Dobble would like to believe (177), come from streets. At the end of the sidewalk is the dark unknowable. Fragments of Dobble's buildings, like those of his story, go elsewhere. "Lucerne" remains as a sign, not a memorial like the Priest's Mountain, but an epitaph. For all Dobble's hopes (189), a sign, unlike a tree, does not "bear fruit." Dobble is likely the man O'Hagan is thinking of in his canon passage: he who attacks mountain, man and story and tries to "lay a name" on them, and ends up having "merely assaulted the surrounding solitude." He "got what was coming to him" (247). "He that cleareth wood is endangered thereby" (Ecc. 10:9). His circle is complete.

Denham's first impression of Ardith Aeriola is found in her name and its assonance: it "sounds like a whisper in the dark." Dobble introduces her into "his small world at a crossroads in the mountains"; and it is indeed a place where paths cross. In the subtle prelude to her story (192) Denham recalls Tay John and the reason for dismembering his arm, and also the priest and "his doctrine of violence." There are as well vague references to woman and her implication in the death of past heroes (Helen of

Troy?); and to Dobble's "castle of logs" (Troy's walls do fall). These are all portents of her future which will be woven in along with fragments of her past—the bits left along the way like "the tufts of wool" left by the mountain goat.

Metaphoric words and places suggest a shadowy background, suggest that indeed her pattern is and will be created from violence and agony, but perhaps also from truth and from beauty. She has been and will be "where the flames beat high," in a world where people look for evidence "to shape a case," a world where a dark past is not accepted any more than a dark skin. Thus in a society that is condemnatory rather than celebratory of the dark, all that is on the shadowed side is not likely to be assimilated.

Ardith herself is dark-haired and comes from Hungary. O'Hagan has caught the atmospheric accuracy of this land in his description of its lonely distances and its mood of haunting sadness and inevitability "within the unchanging ring of the horizon." It seems to be a reflection of Ardith herself. But Ardith has also experienced New York, "that white tombstone of the future," a petrified symbol and a place where in death the cycle is sealed. It is where (and here is O'Hagan's ironic opinion of certain types of naming) her "benefactor—yes they called him that,"—is like Dobble, a hypocrite and exploiter. Is there not a hint of "whited sepulchre" hovering around the language here?

Ardith, however, is "reality of some sort—what that is no one ever knows in a world of make-believe"; she is then mystery and wonder too. Stouck's claims of misogyny are refuted here, for she has the qualities O'Hagan most admires. "Mature beyond her years . . . most women are that," she has already crossed over; further, she lived for "today" and, like Tay John, "she had a presence—but it was her consciousness of that presence that gave her power" (197). She is evidence, however, not of material success nor the knowledge that gives access to it but of something darker that cannot be verified. Both power and humility are seen in an unconventional light in Ardith and Tay John.

O'Hagan, in conversation, claimed that most people who claimed to be humble "didn't know anything about the word," implying that their humility sprang from arrogance. However, Ardith is arrogant, not in the sense of vanity, but of inner conviction:

> She was arrogant, as one who comprehends her destiny and can meet it without fear or equivocation—and humble too, for she saw herself, as well as those drawn to her, as victims of that capricious and inscrutable force. (197)

This, for O'Hagan, is the real meaning of "humble."

Ardith, "fierce in an animal-like sort of way," her nostrils "flexing ever so slightly while she listened," is Robert Graves' White Goddess, "no townswoman: she is the Lady of the Wild Things" (481), partly innocent and partly harlot. And, as befits a goddess, Dobble's men bring her offerings.

In the scene with the cub she is associated with blood and mutilation, and with the strong pull of both the mother and the mate and their association with life and death.[3] With her snake-like tongue, she is Eve, and for Father Rorty she is both Eve and Mary; in her life-giving aspects she is Demeter or Persephone, "man's promise of immortality," and in her death-dealing aspects, Cybele. She is an enigma—and one who stirs up erotic memories from Denham's own shadowy past. He saw her as "woman," woman in her manifestation of the suffering and struggle inherent in passion, "man's ease . . . and his torment."

Time has elapsed (seven years), since Denham's first wild "adventure" with Tay John and the grizzly. His hero seems "not so tall" now, and he and his ageing horse are both seen as subject to the life cycle. Whereas Denham was once mythologizing the human, he is now almost—but not quite—humanizing the myth. The two men now communicate, and the words are more concerned with inner knowledge, with the way of fear and the way of laughter. (Perhaps there is a hint of an answer here; the cardinal sins in the story have ever been sins against the self.) However, Tay John continues to be almost pure sign when he stands firmly "as if emerging from the ground itself—the soil disturbed ever so lightly" by his moccasins. He has no desire to shape the earth; rather, it shapes him; instead of seeking a halo, he throws it wantonly in his hair. A man "who has

no doubts about himself" (78), he still says little, sees much, and bends his knee to no man—or god. The earth itself requires no explanation—he is synonymous with it. It is the significance of Dobble's world that baffles him.

Tay John retains signs of his violent past in the scar on his forehead, a symbol which links him with the wounded god-figures of mythology. But it is more than a symbol, it still can become "livid, angry and alive" with blood (207).

It is blood and anger that characterize the assault episode in the Lodge when Ardith is insulted, and mob intoxication subsequently sets in to "shape" and "change" what is "different" in Tay John (240).

Later, blood and life pervade the cabin. For the third time, the lure of Ardith's lantern "pulsed and glowed"; the bed "spilled a flood of crimson blankets. . . . and from Tay John's brow great drops of blood dropped to the floor, staining it in sudden separate splotches as if . . . roses burst and bloomed" (242). There are echoes here of the passion of Christ and also of Adonis, from whose blood in a similar episode with Aphrodite red anemones bloomed. It is then a scene of sacrifice and surrender, but not defeat, in spite of O'Hagan's use of the words "white surrender." Tay John's blood is given for Ardith, who has always been both a Mary Magdalene and Aphrodite figure, and one who, like these women, appears to be anointing her guide.

No word is uttered, "fearful that mere sound would break the tie." Preserving this sense of the sacred, Denham backs out "into the night, quietly, raised upon [his] toes." For the first time since Swamas and Hanni, the dynamics of love and silence rather than mastery and loudness are evidenced, and they similarly point to sacrifice to come.

This episode has the typical O'Hagan mix of underlying mytho-religious references. However, by aligning Tay John and Ardith with connotations of myth and religion he elevates these particulars—which might otherwise seem excessive—to the legendary. It is a perspective that Denham has no wish to disturb.

Although the narrator continues to seek evidence "as nearly first hand as possible," Tay John's story is still very much hearsay. "What happened at Yellowhead Lake" is passed from Juana to Flaherty to Wiggins before it finally reaches Denham. However the duality of fact and fancy is ever kept in focus with not only meditation but alcohol. Denham steadies himself with his eye on the visually verifiable evidence of whisky labels—"good reading that"—and with his hand on a glass.

In the meantime Tay John and Ardith move into winter, into unnamed country, "far into the mountains." They are "returning," leaving behind the bonds of confinement—of

church and railway, city and sepulchre, all that is mediated through the channels of propriety and established institutions.

It is the way of solitude. They are leaving a life that has been imposed upon them by the expectations and dreams of others: Tay John as messiah or hero or model Indian, and Ardith as submissive mistress or romantic figure. Even Flaherty tries to impose his wistful dream on Ardith (misinterpreted by Flaherty and some critics as her idea). They have not "fled from Dobble so much as . . . from the life whose image he was, the life whose humiliations paid for its necessities," the kind of life, Denham observed, "whose security is the measure of our denials" (253).

Theirs instead is the instinctive life of spontaneity, of intuition, the higher of Henri Bergson's "two ways of knowing." It is certainly not the way of logic, as Wiggins recognizes. "What logic there was," Denham adds, "would not be ours." In the manner of Tay John discarding his hat, Ardith leaves fragments of her past on the trail, the images of the church, of commercial sex, of the anguished priest. Tay John and Ardith recall the half-breed couple (the sunburnt Ardith is now a "brûlée") described with graceful simplicity in "The Tepee":

> They were not seeking life, nor fleeing from it, nor interested in building a larger tepee than their neighbours. They lived by what they had, and not in the white man's way for what they lacked. The future did not intrude into their present, but their life-long present endured into the future. (Woman Who 15)

Tay John and Ardith will similarly give their few months the quality of an eternity.

Before they leave, Denham toasts summers past and summers to come, "before winter lays its snow and silence on the land" (271). As he contemplates the "tilted" imagery of Dobble's "Future," he reflects on his own more primitive vision of eternity, a vision shaped to the balanced and ever-rounding circle that would go on without Dobble—indeed without the interference of anyone.

> Winter would come, but it would bring its spring. Men would die, but children would come after them, lifting up white faces to the light. Man's voice sustained by its own echoes, rolled on in murmurs, in shouts, in laughter, in weeping, in exhortation, in prayer, in whispers, hoping somehow to be heard, pausing now for an answer—rising again to drown dismay when no answer came, drifting across the vasts he walked. Man was alone. The future was the blind across his eyes. He listened to the seconds ticking, measuring his mortality, theirs the only sound in all eternity where suns flamed and stars wheeled and constellations fell apart.

In time, in space—the ticking made more audible in the appalling silence—there is no answer, no evidence: "Man is alone." Nature is an impersonal process. But it is a process and thus implies creation: "children would come after them." Out there in "the vasts" then, is there something man can trust, something that corresponds to human hope and meaning?

Here is the poetry of the word. In harmonious and shapely parallel forms, the ebb and flow of life is rendered and the organic pattern of life is gracefully unfolded. The

shaping principle is reflective and not the voice of everyday speech. Surely Denham is not voicing this memory in the bar, but is catching the song of man's story in quiet soliloquy. The structural rhythms, in fact, are suggestive of a ballad, a solitary one. The lines fall and lift, echo and roll, paralleling the murmurs, the laughter, the weeping, the exhortation, the prayer, the whispers—the utterances, the drama that make up the novel and which enter into man's quest for meaning—the voices which in the end sum up the sound of mortality, and all that man will ever know of immortality. Thus O'Hagan extends the possibility of language, shaping it to the realities of existence, making it as fluid as his rivers, making his words in their sensitive portrayal of man's plight an initiation into mystery, the mystery of the human condition.

It is perhaps the mystery of the circle and of the Cross. They are the forms to which man must shape himself, the forms which express both the agony and the truth of life. Thus the pregnant Ardith "traced a circle" with a foot no longer in heels, but in mocassins, a foot able to feel the earth. The circle marks the earth as sacred place, a place to be enclosed, to be protected, the earth as haven, and procreation as completion.

Joseph Epes Brown informs us that the medicine man similarly draws a circle representing the nest, and that it is drawn with the toe because "the eagle, the symbol of the Great Spirit, builds his nest with his claws." (13). The

circle is also the magic mandala, the circle that takes in Tay John and Ardith and their child, those whom others would shut out.

It takes in the wilderness itself, the wilderness which the many poplar-lined clearings in the book had attempted to keep at a distance. The space that Ardith traces embraces that portion of time and place freely given them, the place of the earth and its savage fullness. In this wilderness it is not Tay John, as Ondaatje felt, who "is the intruder in every scene" (283), but rather the white man, as Denham himself realized in the grizzly episode.

Ardith's clothes are no longer of silken yellow. They are now earthy, crude, primitive. Her hair is in two long plaits and the fringe of her buckskin jacket is frisked by the wind. As Flaherty leaves the scene she seems transformed. She stands "on a little knoll," tipped against and towards "the far-off mountains." Mounds are holy places in many early religions, and Ardith's stance suggests an attitude of primitive worship or prayer. The circle and the mound—they stand out with the clarity of the single word. And they suggest that to be is more important than to know.

The Cross, with its dark meaning, is also transformed. The sun catches its silver and recalls Tay John's observation that the sun did not shine on the priest (207), the priest who had stood in the shade, "black against the shining waters." Now fear and agony have been replaced by

completed love which creates the silence where communion begins; and the Cross can be seen as symbolizing the point where one life intersects with that of another. Here, it merges with the scene, placing the wearer at the centre of generative forces, both dark and light, "the smoking tepee . . . behind it the wooded hills, and beyond the hills the great blue wall of the Rockies" (257).

Indians do in fact wear crosses to represent the four winds. "The centre of the cross," Maclean tells us, "is the earth and man, sometimes indicated at that point by a circle surrounding a dot" (333). Father Rorty's Cross has at last found its true place.

Denham has never wanted to control anything—man, mountain or story. Stories instead have "tracked" him down (247). It is not incongruous then, as some critics have suggested, that Blackie should be the last to bring tidings of Tay John. Denham was not in on the beginnings of the legend, and it has been elusive all the way through. "The story," contrary to Ondaatje's view (283), has not been "taken away from Tay John," he is rather placed at a significant distance from it. And Denham is still listening, as usual, to the tale of the hero from another. I believe—and again in disagreement with Ondaatje—that more than ever we can "trust and believe" in the character of this new story-teller, particularly where the story's important mythic aspects are concerned. The story after all was

meant to be rough at the edges. Denham, in fact, in his seeming indifference, might have simply wanted to escape the sense of its ending. Blackie may not be able to "relate it," as Denham did, "to the known world," the ordinary world, but he is the ideal narrator to relate it to the beyond, to the extraordinary legendary world of vision and imagination.

His voice is primitive, something like the voice of legend. Oracle-like, it resounds "as if from a cave." Such a voice shapes experience differently and gives a final value to the mythic point of view, to the mythic place. While Denham moves in and out, Blackie almost continuously participates in this world. He is, like Tay John, close to the source of creative energy, the source of the wild mountain river from which life and story run. And unlike some of the others, he has no desire to change its course. He is from the "country beyond": "wild country. A very mother of rivers—a mountain still unnamed is there." Blackie wonders at this world he lives in and, with his furs, garners its astonishing tales.

He looks primitive too: rather like a bear with his "shambling gait," "ponderous hands," "arms held in front of him, stiff and not swinging." Indeed, with his black beard, "eyes deep in under shaggy eyebrows," and "dark brow of a prophet," he is somewhat of a wonder in himself. Moreover, his single name is animal-like. And to be animal-like in O'Hagan is to be superior. Also, more than any of the other white men in the novel, he seems to affirm his

existence as his.

Blackie's eyes are assaulted by the city. It is the "outside—a good word that, to denote the man's experience of leaving the shelter of the world he knows." The "outside" is where the darkness is veiled, O'Hagan has implied, (New York was an "outpost of man in time"), and it is here that Blackie needs corrective glasses, here that he cannot trust his own mythic lenses. He belongs to "the time of this in its beginning," but not to "men's time."

His "ritual and suffering" are those of "travel—man's form of worship of the vast round earth." Is the story or the quest related, as Kroetsch said to Hancock, to "human loneliness. Travelling the world back together" (49)?

On his travels, things shine and speak to this, our last narrator. Unlike Father Rorty who tried "to see the world" through his lock of hair, Blackie sees and hears and tracks the signs well. His quest leads him, not to the Cross, but to a scene which has an aura of the empty tomb. And—as did the disciples of that other man of mysterious birth who lived thirty-three years on earth—in the end, Blackie believes what he wants to believe.

The NWMP are a different story. They require evidence "to make a case." Surrounded by shelves of reports—dead records—Wiggins "worships the achievements" of a different kind of "Force." If the body is the pattern of the spirit, he is a perfect example of the Canadian respect for business-like law and order, the world and story as logic. He has his own way of seeing: his "shielded" eyes are "half-opened,"

suggesting shrewdness. His moustache is like a paper clip on his grey face, the "rasp" of his black hair is "wiry" and so is his voice: "it twanged like a banjo." His shoulders broad and powerful, he is rather like a god himself. Denham feels that he could fold his desk "like a book, clamping his inkpot and papers in the middle"—another example of entrapment.

Wiggins is interested in labels; not in reading the enlivening labels on whisky bottles, but in imposing labels on people, labels that degrade, that name people not as whole, but as parts. Tay John is "a yellowhead," Ardith is "a pair of legs," "a tart," "bad meat." "Mark my words," says Wiggins, sounding like the peremptory Dobble.

The authoritative emphasis on "only the facts, the failure to employ the human in language dismays O'Hagan much as it did Dickens in Hard Times. Such vanity does not provide the answer, the "finding." There are no plain facts in art, in Tay John's story, in life—only degrees of plausibility.

This is increasingly obvious in the last five pages of the novel, and since these few pages have a significance far beyond the amount of space they occupy, they will be given separate attention.

Last Things

Behold I show you a mystery. . . . We shall all be changed.

I Cor. 15: 51

Existence is beyond the power of words
To define:
Terms may be used
But are none of them absolute.
. . .
The core and the surface
Are essentially the same,
Words making them seem different
Only to express appearance.
If name be needed, wonder names them both:
From wonder into wonder
Existence opens.

TCC 1

Beyond the bounds of our staring rounds,
Across the pressing dark.

Rudyard Kipling

The breath of life moves through a deathless valley
Of mysterious motherhood
Which conceives and bears the universal seed,
The seeming of a world never to end,
Breath for men to draw from as they will;
And the more they take of it, the more remains.
. . .
The valley spirit never dies.

TCC 6[3]

Wiggin's facts and Blackie's wonder: these are the two approaches to the last passages of Tay John—the final circle of story, of man, and of mountain, the ineffable circle of Christian, Taoist and Indian thought.

As O'Hagan said of Almighty Voice (Wilderness Men 65), Tay John "is now travelling on the border of that shadowed kingdom beyond which words do not carry." Blackie's wonder wins out. All the words of legend, of hearsay or of evidence are, when it comes to death, without a finding. Rather this "shadowed kingdom" needs what D. H. Lawrence called "some welling up of religious sources that have been shut down in us: a great yielding [recalling Swamas' bows] rather than an act of will: a yielding to the darker, older unknown, and a reconciliation . . . the natural mystery of power"(qtd. in Walsh 206).

Power in the novel has always been in the bow rather than the arrow, in tree and river, in mist and wind and snow. While earlier it was the roar of the creek that distanced the observer from the drama, now it is the howl of the wind. It seems appropriate then that Tay John complete his circle veiled and enfolded in "a curtain of swirling snow":

> . . . his figure appearing close, then falling back into the mists, a shoulder, a leg, a snowshoe moving on as it were of its own accord—like something spawned by the mists striving to take form before mortal eyes. (260)

Tay John is both spawned and spawning—with its dark sacrificial undertones. And it will cost him his life.

Blackie tells Tay John—this man who has always swum upstream—that he is "going the wrong way." But which way does he want to go?

> Life on its way returns to a mist
> Its quickness is its quietness again. (TCC 40)

Like the story itself and its own "falling back into the mists," Tay John has ever been striving to take form. And like the story too, he is seen here in fragments, in glimpses.

Resembling Tay John's shadow, Ardith lies silent upon the toboggan behind Tay John, her hand still tracing its own furrow, her mouth slightly open and filled with snow. She marks the snow and it marks her: She is dead. It is again "half-dark like night," this resonance of Good Friday recalling Father Rorty's words about "our Saviour's death," about the Truth and Beauty that come "from His agony, not from His words."

Civilization curiously intrudes on this almost mystical scene. Tay John first asks for a doctor, and then caves in:

> Then he looked up. He said to me, not askin' questions this time, but telling me: 'I'm going to a church. There's a church over there behind the mountain.' . . . An' we couldn't even see the mountain with the snow and the wind howlin'.

Is Tay John having hallucinations as Blackie suspects? Or is this a transition from concerns of the body to concerns of the spirit, a final crossing over? Heaven and earth do seem to mysteriously merge in these last scenes. The code and poetry of the ancient Tao Teh Ching sensitively realizes the indwelling patterns—silent and visible, evanescent yet

continuous—for us:

> What we look for beyond seeing
> And call the unseen,
> Listen for beyond hearing
> And call the unheard,
> Grasp for beyond reaching
> And call the withheld
> Merge beyond understanding
> In a oneness
> Which . . .
> Forever sends forth a succession of living things
> as mysterious
> As the unbegotten existence to which they return.
> . . .
> Meaningless images,
> In a mirage.
> . . .
> Yet one who is anciently aware of existence
> Is master of every moment,
> Feels no break since time beyond time
> In the way life flows. (TTC 14)

Tay John is such a one.

The revealed world of the spirit, be it in Taoist, Christian or Indian thought, and the cyclical primitive world of nature now come into alignment—where they really have been all along. Tay John has always lived by the power of the unseen, has understood the signs. For him it will not have the terror of the unknown.

The earlier images revive, with no mention being made of their connections. Tay John's shadow—"the day's memories of the night . . . his dark garment formed to the image of his end"—and the "word left in the valley" are his unconscious reminders, and ours. He had not answered the call to return at the time of his vigil; it is now time to make the passage, to answer the one "whose call he had heard, whose gaze he had met" (136). He can do so because he has been "shaped," not by civilization, but by

these "hills around." They lead him to—again with Biblical echoes—embrace the suffering and death that are his destiny.

We remember also "the shroud by his mother's womb," the womb of his Indian mother who was buried in the Shuswap way in the soft earth on the side of the valley. The Great Spirit often comes through visions, and for the Indian the world of nature itself is a sheltering sanctuary. Indians associate mountain passes with the mysterious forces of ancestors and deities (Maclean 312), and sometimes locate the Land of Spirits beneath the earth or in "a distant cavern in the mountains where the voices of eternal singing" can be heard (Jenness 165, 175). Is Tay John, then, again listening to something the other "couldn't hear"? In Wilderness Men O'Hagan spoke of those "who seek not the mountains' conquest but in their obdurate rock and ice, the truth" (181). And Warren Tallman suggests that even in the cold and the storm "the divinities speak, if at all, to those who lone it toward the mountain pass" (248). Perhaps here reality becomes transparent to another even greater reality.

Tay John doesn't fall. Like snow in flight, the snow which earlier suggested a world animated by spirit, he moves against the dark, rides with the wind. In his commitment to that which is unborn, he is in accord with what "the primitive opposed to death":

> his confidence in the solidarity, the unbroken indestructible unity of life . . . the deep conviction of a community of all

> living beings—a community that must be preserved by the constant efforts of man. (Cassirer, Essay 95).

Tay John's efforts leave him looking "lean . . . fierce and starved," recalling images of the martyr saints. He enters the earth with a burden, as he did at the time of his birth when the last bow he attempted to take into the grave "was so heavy his body bent beneath it" (38). Then too he revived. He apparently goes on, climbing "up the valley," till he comes once again to the fork of two passes.

In the hauntingly beautiful final scene, he is a symbol of "life which cannot die," of some far-reaching mystery of which this existence is only a part:

> It was dusk by then. Cold. A tree cracked. Blackie's breath rose . . . as grass smoke before his eyes. There was no wind. The snow fell in great wavering flakes without cessation, as if it would go on snowing for ever, as if all the clouds had been upended. The trees, the mountains, the ice on the rivers, all the familiar world, the sky itself, were gone from sight.
>
> Blackie stared at the tracks in front of him, very faint now, a slight trough in the snow, no more. Always deeper and deeper into the snow. He turned back then. There was nothing more he could do. He had the feeling, he said, that Tay John hadn't gone over the pass at all. He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground.

On an earth still and hushed, the cold snow, as before, wings down at dusk making "the silence visible" (91)—a silence made palpable, articulate and hallowed in the breath rising like grass smoke, like an unearthly Indian incense. The "silence on the snow" can be, however, "like

a name whispered in our mother's womb" (75), or the silence of "the world being made" (80).

Tay John's brief days on earth are thus quietly one with the cycle of man, of mountain, of story. As an "image of the world," he is "continuously, endlessly, the dwelling of creation" (TTC 28). In dying he gives life to the legend. And beyond the duality of the two passes, is the "revolving life" of creation, from the primal "time of this in its beginning" onwards to the final curtain of mist and snow.

Throughout the story the emphasis has been on not only "once-upon-a-time," but on "time-and-time again," the pattern of the cycle. The vast indifference of the universe takes life, but it gives it back again. The plangent poetry of the novel communicates, in spite of no evidence, O'Hagan's "some kind of a presence."

The end of Tay John suddenly pulls the reader to a stop. But the beginning of the book and the beginning of Tay John's life were ushered in with the changing of the seasons. Surely, "man, the child of darkness" and his "story" will have "reverberations in a future still unlived." For beyond the mountains is a sanctuary. From wonder into wonder/Existence opens" . . .

The valley spirit never dies.

Notes

[1] In Jung, Man and His Symbols, 240-244.

[2] "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."

[3] In Indian lore it is believed a bear's spell will cause the womb to be "child-heavy."

[4] The last line is from verse 6 of the Tao Teh Ching, trans. Gia Fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Books, Random House, New York 1972.

CONCLUSION

Works of art are of infinite loneliness
and with nothing so little to be reached
as with criticism.

Rilke

For the letter killeth but the spirit
giveth life.

II Cor. 3:6

If the poem is a real creation, it is a
kind of knowledge that we did not possess
before. It is not knowledge "about"
something else; the poem is the fullness
of that knowledge.

Allen Tate

Man rounding the way of earth
Earth rounding the way of heaven
Heaven rounding the way of life
Till the circle is full.

Tao Teh Ching 25

We have come to the end of O'Hagan's "rough-edged chronicle" of the body's journey and the soul's quest, his legend, hearsay, and evidence of moments rescued from the pilgrimage towards death. It remains a novel unusual in its approach and unfathomable in its meaning, a book of which we will always ask questions. Many of its moments are diffused with a lambent and enchanting light, but perhaps more important, the darkness is also unveiled—the darkness of the spirit of man, of mountain, of story.

In the reflective passages, O'Hagan's unique and haunting rhetoric bears an absolutely personal stamp, the stamp of an originality of mind inseparable from an originality of language. A work like Tay John, so remarkable for its rhythmic spontaneity, makes us realize that style can be a whole way of existing. "Imaginations cradled in a web of words," we don't read it so much as listen to its song as it carries us along. The wind of the earth's passion blows through this story, and is identified with the human and the sacred. O'Hagan communicates his vision, its tragedy and its joy with a sensuous receptivity to the wildness of individual responses to mountain, to lake, to tree, to other questing men and women, and to God.

Pervaded with both violence and beauty, his lyrical art, like agony, like eros, stirs the pulses to full life, in a work that can be light-heartedly amusing, yet infinitely sad, a work that is wide and dark and deep—a reflection of how he himself understood life.

The metafictional style and handcrafted turn of phrase disclose a genuine responsibility to the word. Tay John speaks in a human voice in understated, unaffected, spare language that is often such that it might have come out of the Bible, and much of it did. It is indeed Wheelwright's "expressive or depth language, the language of religion, poetry and myth."

O'Hagan is concerned not only with how myth is made, but with how myth comprehends the world. His inimitable meditations on being and reality reveal the intersection of the plane of the absolute and unknown with the commonplace and familiar. Thus the mythic and remote become humanized while everyday experience becomes enriched, significant. Beyond this world and related to it, he implies, lies another world whose wholeness, harmony and order are inviolate. While O'Hagan believes "man is alone," his best passages belie the grand dismay these words contain.

"We are not lost," as Frye's Eskimo said, "we are here," participating in the scene—by a grave, in a high valley, in a clearing in the forest, on a dark mountain top, and at the close, staring with Blackie at the last footprints.

In giving an original shape to his hero and to the mountain, O'Hagan offers contours of meaning not usually rendered at all in the novel form. In fact, so unexpected are they, it is essential that Tay John be read and re-read slowly if one is to catch the coded language and spirituality of the subtext.

We have attempted to answer the question, "How does Tay John mean?" Relevant now is Susan Sontag's further comment that such a work of art is of a special order, that of the world itself: "Both are. Both need no justification; nor could they possibly have any" (27). O'Hagan would like that.

Certainly there is a suggestion of form, like the earth, generating itself in this novel which begins in named country in daylight, pursues a watchful waiting on the rhythms of existence, and ends in unnamed country in outer darkness.

O'Hagan has offered us a way of seeing and living life as creation, as something to be understood without the support of evidence or logic, a way of dealing with the conditions of meaning and not just meaning.

In this tale where geography is character and the shape of the land is the shape of destiny, "beyond the mountains" is an experience not a place. Despite man's assaults it is still a pristine reminder of the promise or possibility of a reorientation within or outside the self. And O'Hagan recounts through story what courage and folly and hope there is in the endeavour, in the crossing-over.

If he had any intentions at all in his writing—and this he would deny—it would be to free the reading of story and of life from doctrinal traps. His concern with quest and belief seems to suggest that we not cloud our vision, that this is no country for possessiveness, for

dogma, and that only those who are in some sense primitive, only those who can endure the backward look, can see its real value. In a land where the mountains and their surrounding solitude have the final word, all mere pronouncements are vulnerable regardless of the pretensions to absoluteness with which they may be uttered.

O'Hagan then invites the reader to an experience outside the system at an extraordinary remove from the textures and forms of common experience, in a place where myth and legend pursue their truth. It is a place where to learn is to know, as Swamas did, not by logic, but "by heart," the place of the shadow that makes us human and amor that makes us in the truest sense immortal.

Perhaps all truth, with its beauty, its agony, its violence has something of the primal scene in it, something of forces beyond our capacity to understand or control. O'Hagan's is a voice that shuns the very idea of "knowing." It calls rather for a widening of the imagination, calls us to explore rather than appropriate and civilize the unnamed territories of life.

In speaking of literature as "conscious mythology," Frye suggests that what is important is "the position of the reader's mind in the end, in whether he is being encouraged to remain within his habitual social responses or whether he is being prodded into making the steep and lonely climb into the imaginative world" (Bush Garden 236). And similarly, Wheelwright believes, "The ground-bass of

poetic truth is the truth, contextual but real, of man's possible redemption through the fullest possible imaginative response" (302). The fact that O'Hagan's "story" is "beyond your touch" is perhaps the reason "it hooks itself into the fabric of your mind and stays there."

The meaning of this rich, shadowy, suggestive book, then, lies ultimately in the reader's redemptive imagination, in the wilderness of unnamed country remaining unnamed, in mountains simply gathering back the words and the silences of earth and remaining forever closed to the reconnaissance of language and logic. It is a book we should begin with wonder and end with gratitude as the last images linger on.

We can believe this ending on any level we choose. It speaks of a reality, as Frye said earlier of myth, "timeless and independent of circumstances," Tay John is Sontag's work of art as a "vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched" (281); it is Palmer's work of art "in which being comes to stand"—a fulfillment that reason may refuse but which feeling accepts from myth and poetry without argument.

The reader is invited to allow the vision to complete itself in him. Others will see things in this work that I have not seen: thus a work of art has a life of its own, and through story, there is triumph over time—through this story that has been so vividly realized that we have

difficulty in resisting the idea that in some way it is true.

Tay John has vanished now, but he remains caught for us in the fragile but enduring web of language. This book of imprints is itself likely to be—somewhat as its first London review suggested—imprinted on the mind forever.

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