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An Inner View:

The Novels of David Adams Richards

Lizabeth Lemon

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ABSTRACT

An Inner View: The Novels of David Adams Richards

Lizabeth Lemon

This thesis explicates the narrative style and themes in the six novels published to date by Canadian author David Adams Richards. The study traces the development throughout the novels of the author's narrative presentation and the refinement of his themes.

In the introduction of the thesis the classifications of "regionalism" and "social realism" are examined with regards to how well they have represented the works of Richards. Because Richards' narratives attempt to reveal and celebrate the inner existence of his characters, it is proposed that the words "existential" or "explorative" be regarded as more appropriate terms to apply to his work. The body of the thesis follows 1) the development of Richards' narrative style, from the exploration of his characters' inner, subjective perspectives in his first two novels, the experimentation with first person narration in his third and fourth novels, to the omniscient narration in his two most recent novels; and 2) the evolution and refining of Richards' thematic concerns with the relationship between private and public sectors of society.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVELS AND THEMES OF DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS

Nancy Robb once described the novels of Canadian author David Adams Richards as "sparse in action...not so much stories as composite character studies tied together by life's daily minutiae."1 Richards admitted to Robb, "I write from the point of view of character...When I'm writing at my best, I can't be concerned at all about plot, because the characters have to take over."2 Richards has consistently described the impulse behind his writing as one that seeks to explore the human soul: more specifically, to explore the spiritual and psychological motivations working behind a character's words and actions. In an interview with Andrew Garrod, Richards said, "I think people's motivations have interested me since I was a kid - why people are acting. It's not only people's motivations I suppose ... but the reason people do something that differs from the surface reason."3 Richards evokes the personalities of his characters by exploring their interior existence; the reader comes to know the characters and to understand their actions and motivations through the perusal of their subjective experiences.

David Richards' first novel, The Coming of Winter, winner of the Norma Epstein Prize in Creative Writing, was published in 1974, when he was still 23 years old. At the time he was a student of literature and history at St. Thomas University, but he soon left to engage in his writing full time. His first novel has been followed, to date, by an additional six. Blood Ties was published in 1976 and was followed by Lives of Short Duration in 1981; Road to the Stilt House, published in 1985, was nominated for the Governor General's Award; the award was granted to his fifth novel, Nights Below Station Street, which was published in 1988. Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace was published in 1991 and this is to be followed in the autumn of 1993 by his most recent novel, For Those Who Hunt The Wounded. In addition to the novels Richards has published Small Heroics (1972), a collection of poems, and Dancers at Night (1976), a collection of short stories. As well, he has written various scripts for both the stage and screen. After his winning the Governor General's Award for Nights Below Station Street, attention to Richards' work has broadened; and, since the copyrights to all of his novels were assumed by McClelland & Stewart in 1985, his readership has increased considerably. Most recently, Richards' writing has been distinguished by his being awarded the 1993 Australian-Canadian Literary Prize.

Since the publication of his first novel, Richards' work has been represented by reviewers and critics primarily as

"regionalism", "social realism", and as "bleak" and "naturalistic" in its vision of humanity. "The easiest way to define Richards is as a regional novelist"4, wrote George Woodcock, as though an appreciation of his work necessitated his being easily defined. John Mills dismisses Blood Ties with, "Regionalism has never attracted me very much and naturalism, in all its aridity, even less."5 Richards has often expressed a frustration with the dismissive and reductive manner in which he sees critics classifying his work under headings such as these. The "regional" and "social" concerns in his novels are not to be denied; nor are their moments of human sorrow and darkness. However, a too-narrow focus on the strictly regional and social aspects of the novels eclipses the author's existential concerns with the human spirit and human consciousness.6 In addition to introducing Richards' novels and themes, the present chapter will consider the above classifications of his work with a view to the fairness with which they have been used.

To date Richards has chosen the Miramichi River area of northern New Brunswick as the setting for all of his novels. Most of his characters participate in a traditional, rural culture; living and working along the banks of the Miramichi River and Northumberland Strait, they enjoy a close relationship with the natural world where their lives are attuned to its seasonal rhythms. Idiosyncratic, intensely individual, Richards' more memorable characters have been described by

critics as "marginal" or as "social outcasts."7 Douglas Glover compares Richards' characters to those of the Southern American writer, Flannery O'Connor: both writers express themselves, writes Glover, "through characters who live at the bottom of the economic ladder, on the periphery of society, an imaginative territory they both see as inhabited by petty crooks, drunks, suicides, and mystics ..."8 Some of his characters could be placed in the Canadian literary tradition of prophets or visionaries of the wilderness, where the "wilderness" is understood to be a psychic or spiritual realm: in their existence outside mainstream culture, which affords them the outsider's view of its hypocrisies and pretensions, characters like Packett Terri, Arnold, or Joe Walsh would keep good company with those like Cohen's "Suzanne", Laurence's "Christie", or Mitchell's "Saint Sammy". Almost all of Richards' novels include a broad spectrum of narrative perspectives - young, old, male, female; his narratives proceed through the casual exploration of these characters' subjective, interior experiences. In this way, the "stories" about particular characters, families, and communities are conveyed non-chronologically through the accumulation of detail. In Richards' writing the characters' interior existence is never objectified, but is portrayed as an ambiguous, spiritual, even mystical process that is impossible to predict or to control from without. It is in the realm of his characters' interiority that their physical participation

in the phenomenal world through the body's senses and their emotional and spiritual participation is synthesized.

The synthesizing movements Richards explores taking place within the realm of his characters' inner consciousness are comprised of memories, dreams, and the development over time of meaningful associations attached to certain objects, places, people, and events. It is through tracing these interior events that Richards reveals the hidden motivations behind a character's actions and words as opposed to the "surface" reasons. In The Coming of Winter, for example, the events taking place in the life of Kevin Dulse and his friends evoke in the mind of Kevin's father, Clinton, memories of his own youth and of his relationship with his first son, who died tragically. Clinton's words, gestures, and particularly his silence in Kevin's presence gradually become intelligible as a result of what is inferred from these memories and their correspondence to the present. Often a character may do something that appears anti-social, violent, or foolish to other characters (as when Arnold kicks a hole in the television in Road to the Stilt House); but when we follow his or her own process of inner consciousness, these actions become understandable (in Arnold's case, he is reacting against the subtle manipulation, what he calls "lies" and "tricks", used by the media to seduce people into wanting their products and adopting their opinions). In their own subjective experience of the present, Richards' characters are rarely, if ever,

aware of the "hidden" interior motivations behind their actions and desires; this kind of self-consciousness is experienced at a later time through memory and reflection.

Richards' project of exploring his characters' interior existence has seen his constant experimentation with style, narrative voice, and structure. In The Coming of Winter and Blood Ties Richards is primarily concerned with exploring the interior processes experienced by his characters. On a broader level he celebrates the communion they experience with their environment and with their families and communities. This communion is conveyed through the personal and communal mythologies evident in the presence within their consciousness of local history and folklore.

In these early novels Richards moves toward a literal presentation of his characters' interior experience. In The Coming of Winter his narrative shifts constantly from observations on what his characters are doing to the events taking place in their minds. Memories of past moments are conveyed in a careful manner so that meaningful associations between the past and present are easily detected and so that, as Andrew T. Seaman observes of one such moment, the atmosphere is developed, the setting defined, and the climax achieved. 9 In Blood Ties, Richards moves deeper into his characters' interior selves; here the narration proceeds almost solely through the examination of the characters' subjective experience. Although deliberately conveyed with less attention to

formal structure, memories are again used to develop the characters' personalities, to give an historical depth to their experiences, and to illustrate meaningful associations between the seemingly disparate events, emotions, or objects.

Some readers have found Richards' style in his early novels too inaccessible; in a review of Blood Ties, for example, John Mills quotes a passage from the text at random in order to demonstrate the vagueness of Richards' style, then concludes his review with: "Why is Richards making me work so hard...[his] cadences are either non-existent or too subtle for me to grasp."10 Other readers have praised Richards' style, however, precisely because of its poetic capacity to evoke atmosphere. Phil Milner writes that Richards' style is suited to his attempts to "explore...the colours of reality"11 and concludes that "if his prose where cleaned up, he would lose the ambience that he works so hard to create."12 Similarly, John Moss writes that the particular effect of Richards' style is that "we see all of the confused ambiguity of our own experience."13

In Richards' third novel, Lives of Short Duration, the reader is thrown with no direction into the interior landscapes of the characters' minds. Sentences are dense and convoluted, or are fragmented in order to suggest poetically the ambiguous processes of the character's perceptions, thoughts, and memories. The narration of Lives proceeds almost exclusively through the examination of accumulated

memories - there are only fleeting references to the present interspersed throughout the text. Fragments of past conversations, images (some only half formed) from previous experiences clutter the text, evoking the fullness of the characters' interior space. In Lives Richards attempts to explore the collective memory and collective consciousness of the entire community by recording a multitude of voices which date back to the community's founding, all of which are filtered through the memories and perspectives of only a few central characters.

In Road to the Stilt House Richards' style and narrative approach alter dramatically. The prose is simple, terse, and minimalist. For the first time Richards experiments with first person narration; the reader is given both subjective and objective views of the protagonist through the author's continuous alternation between first and omniscient third-person voices. Though they differ in terms of focus and style, both Lives of Short Duration and Road to the Stilt House share common thematic concerns. Both novels express concern over the displacement of the experiential roots in history and mythology (both personal and communal) by urban, industrialized culture and progressive ideologies.

In his latest novels, Nights Below Station Street and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace, Richards' prose is simple and compact, while the narration returns to that of the third person. Richards continues to be concerned with his charac-

ters' inner existence and subjective perspectives; however, rather than attempting to re-create the confusing events taking place on this level of experience, he guides his readers by sometimes describing the event in a distilled fashion as, for example, in the following from Evening Snow: "It did not enter her mind at the moment, but over the course of time and events, the apartment building, Cindi, and Savard would all fuse together."14 While the ambiguous nature of the process itself is maintained, Richards guides his readers' attention on a more conscious, direct level to the hidden motivations that compel his characters to act as they do.

In Nights Below Station Street and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace there emerges a narrator who reveals a familiarity with his characters and their communities. This narrator is explicit about the limitations of human knowledge and understanding, just as he is more direct about his ethical concerns with what Richards describes as "collectivist" 15 notions of social development, "socialized altruism"16 and "institutionalized" social change.17

Richards' exploration of consciousness in his more recent novels reveals the origins of such things as "freedom", "authenticity", and "change" as being the process of consciousness itself. These are characterized as experiences which occur as a result of events taking place within the soul and, as such, they cannot be enforced or legislated into existence. Characters like Vera and Ruby in Nights Below

Station Street and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace, or Juliet and Craig in Road to the Stilt House, try various ideologically determined methods to better the difficult situations in other people's lives; their attempts either fail miserably or serve only to worsen the circumstances. With regards to these characters, Richards said, "In their own way - and I've always tried to write of them with compassion - but in their own way they see change as being legislated. And the only proper changes come from the heart."18

The problem Richards seems to have with the notion of legislated or pre-determined social change is the underlying assumption that any one person or group of elite may possess objective knowledge concerning the rest of humanity and the nature of reality. An important effect of Richards' structuring the narrative of his novels to follow the subjective experiences of his characters is that humans are portrayed as participants in a larger reality which remains fundamentally unknowable in an objective, possessive sense. Because reality is knowable only through the characters' intuition and subjective experience, their world views or perspectives can best be described as "participatory".19 Given the impossibility from this perspective of possessing objective knowledge about humanity, together with the ambiguous, unpredictable processes of consciousness, social visionaries who attempt to disrupt and engineer the lives of others have no way of predicting the possible devastation their actions may have on

the lives of individuals.

In his remarks to interviewers, as well as in the novels themselves, Richards reveals an understanding of existence that hearkens back to classic Greek tragedy: humanity is fundamentally ignorant with regards to the part it plays in Being; what humans know or guess about their existence is derived from intuitions or intimations of a transcendent order; and correlative movements in the soul occur as a response to this order. The tragedy of Oedipus explores the fundamental and disturbing mystery which the universe and the gods represent to humanity. The same experience is evoked in the novels of Richards; in the final lines of Nights Below Station Street, for example, the character whose unwitting actions lead to the miraculous or coincidental rescue of two people is described as "not knowing the processes of how this had all happened, understanding that it was now irrevocable because it had."20 During an interview with Geoffrey Cook, Richards admitted to a belief in a trandscendent Being which participates in humanity:

> Tolstoy once said that the events in our lives are directed by things that we ourselves perhaps aren't personally conscious about. I tend to agree with that ... it seems that there is a God that either wills or allows and a lot of times we don't know the reasons why. That does not mean that man can't garner the strength to stand up to his own fate, because I think it's implicit in my books that he does. There's more to life than man-directed events.21

In the novels, this God or transcendent order is never named or alluded to in any obvious or explicit fashion; it is

simply what his characters have intimations of while in the process of becoming aware, if only fleetingly, of the larger mystery in which their lives particpate. Thus, changes occur within the heart or soul of his characters before they are brought to objective consciousness and, if ever, intellectualized. But it is this experience which compels them to act spontaneously and unpredictably in noble and selfless fashions. Without warning, Joe decides to quit drinking because he has realized within himself that his continued drunkenness is hurting not only himself but those he loves; one night Arnold wakes up and suddenly his soul is so overwhelmed by the beauty of the world around him that in the days which follow he looks beyond his own anger and unhappiness and is inspired to put up a Christmas tree for his family and provide them with presents.

Richards' portrayal of his characters' interior existence and the processes they experience at this level has been overlooked by critics who regard his work as strictly regional, social realist, and naturalist. In The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature, George Woodcock defines "regionalism" as "the geographical feeling of locality, the historical feeling of a living community, the personal sense of ties to a place where one has been born or which one has passionately adopted";22 when seen in this sense, the term is useful as an avenue into some of the existential aspects of Richards' writing. The geographical

aspect of Woodcock's definition is derived from a reference T. E. Hulme makes to "the peculiar quality of feeling"23 he experienced when he visited the prairies. An obvious sense of specific locality or regionality is present in Richards' writing because of the descriptions of geography which are particular to the Miramichi region of New Brunswick. But to dwell too much on the geographical aspect of Richards' novels is unfair to the work.

The particular "regional" quality of Richards' work that holds our interest is evoked by what Woodcock refers to as the "historical feeling of a living community", for Richards' novels strongly evoke a sense of community complete with history, ambience, and mythology. This human-historical aspect of his definition, Woodcock borrows from Margaret Laurence's explanation of her own regional consciousness inspired by the Canadian prairies:

> This is where my world begins. A world which includes the ancestors - both my own and other people's ancestors who become mine. A world which formed me and continues to do so ... a world which gave me my own life work to do, because it was here that I learned the sight of my own particular eyes.24

In an essay entitled "Northern New Brunswick - a personal reflection,"25 Richards demonstrates a regional consciousness which is similar to Laurence's. Essentially, his essay is about the process whereby myths and legends emerge from the shared experience of geography and history. The land and the experiences of those who have lived here are "assimilated into

our thought," writes Richards, "we have breathed them into our blood," "they are our own". The past, the present, and the land participate together in the present of human consciousness. A result of this synthesizing process is the generation of legend and myth as a means of expressing the experiences and recognizing their sharedness among the community.

A community's or nation's experiences and collective sense of selfhood are represented or articulated in its legends and myths - the symbols or elements of these are derived naturally from a region's particular geography and history. "As in every responsible nation," writes Richards, "our gifts, our legends are ... our own."[4] Here the participants in the myth-making process are the river, described in Lives as "one of the most violent rivers in the country"26; the "gothic" forests that have "beaten back" the roads and among whose lofty pines the Micmacs hear the gods; the sea, its blunt winds and icy waters; the human body which knows each of these intimately through the senses; and the human consciousness which assimilates it all and discovers in the synthesis both meaning and expression. The experience is expressed in the legends - "There are always legends. And when I was young I heard the sea all night and knew what these legends were" - and in everyday language: when an Acadien fisherman says goodbye in the morning, Richards writes, his heritage is reflected in the word he uses:

> It can be translated into English ... 'I'll hope for you.' The wives and loved ones say. That is, I'll hope not for your catch so much as for your return.

Richards grew up in the Miramichi; it is there that he acquired the "sight" of his "own particular eyes." The geography, history, and folklore of the region have been assimilated into his consciousness; it is through these particular geographical and cultural landmarks, as they have filtered through his imagination and his philosophical understanding of the world, that he engages in his dialogue with and about the world. While many of the experiences of his characters are universal, a distinctly regional ambience results from his use of images and symbols to express them which are derived naturally from their geographical and historical context.

Critics and reviewers representing Richards' work as "regionalism" have often regarded it as such within the genre of the "social novel" or "social realism". Critics have regarded his work as either an exposé on the social and moral deprivation of the Miramichi region or as a literary form of mediation between the downtrodden, inarticulate working class and the educated, articulate middle class. Among the former, Richards' Miramichi has been described by Anthony Appenzell as "one of the remoter backwaters of the welfare society ... a moral and social wastelot"27, by George Woodcock as being "deprived of civilization "28, and by Fred Cogswell as being representative of New Brunswick in general, where survival

demands a stifling "standardization" of human behaviour in all avenues of life. 29 Richards' characters have been similarly represented: James Doyle describes them as the "psychologically disoriented working-class"30, Bruce Stovel, as having been numbed into a "somnambulism of blue-collar drudgery and alcholic escape"31, and Janice Keefer describes their "speech and consciousness" as "minimalist".32 It must be recognized that Richards' Miramichi is not a "welfare" or "poverty stricken" society - only in Road to the Stilt House does Richards depict welfare recipients. In the other novels his characters own their own properties and businesses, are self-employed as woodsmen and fishing guides, or are employed as nurses, teachers, bus drivers and mill labourers. In all fairness, as Richards points out, Kevin Dulse probably earns more income as a mill labourer than the critics who reviewed the novel in which he appeared. Richards continues to describe the idea that his Miramichi and characters are economically and correspondingly spiritually deprived as an educated, middle class notion that "anyone who works with their hands was poor."33

The perception that Richards portrays characters lulled into "somnambulism" by the "drudgery" of their "blue-collar" lives and their society as deprived of morals and civilization overlooks the novels' themes. Richards' narrative approach to the novels through the minds of his characters constantly affirms the spiritual life and imagination they enjoy, even

though they may be engaged in dreary, mundane tasks. Furthermore, when we step back and look at the social picture portrayed in the "composite" (as Nancy Robb described it) of Richards' "character sketches", one of the most important things we discover in the many cross-references of shared experiences, memories, and emotions is the relationships and shared mythologies which form the basis of the family and the community.

In the vision of "family" and "community" presented in Richards' novels, relationships are based as much on common emotional and spiritual needs as material needs. Indeed, in the novel ironically entitled Blood Ties, the relationship between Maufat and his step-daughter Leah demonstrates an understanding of the family as a social structure which is based on love and caring as opposed to biological relationship. An identical relationship exists between Joe and Adele in Nights Below Station Street. One of the concerns in The Coming of Winter is to demonstrate the emotional ties and common experiences shared by different members of the community even though they may not even be well acquainted. The lives of the Turcotte and Dulse families, for example, are bound together on a primary level of emotional and spiritual experience, because both families share the experience of having lost a son tragically. The novel suggests that it is through these common experiences and the common modes of rendering them intelligible that the like-mindedness of a

community is discovered.34

In his interpretation of Richards' work as a form of mediation between the inarticulate working class and the articulate middle-class, John Moss writes that the cumulative effect of Richards' style of writing from the internal perspectives of his characters is that we learn "what is far beyond the capacity of these inarticulate, reticent people to reveal themselves."35 Bruce Stovel writes that Richards' distinctive achievement is that he has made "a new and striking speech out of inarticulateness"36; and in Under Eastern Eyes, Janice Keefer describes Richards as a "master" of Maritime realism which she in turn defines as a "language, a means of communication between the speechless illiterate and the articulate educated." 37

There are moments in the novels when Richards deliberately portrays his characters experiencing inarticulateness, but the above interpretations do not render these moments intelligible. The kind of inarticulateness Richards is concerned with on occasion does not arise from the characters' class or education but is a universal human experience of being struck dumb at some aspect of life which is mysterious or shocking. Such a moment is experienced by Kevin in The Coming of Winter, for example, when he celebrates his last moments of freedom with his friends. Aided by a few beers his mind swoons with thoughts about his upcoming marriage, about the recent death of his friend Andy, and about the pregnancy

of Andy's girlfriend. Overwhelmed with grief and lingering shock, Kevin feels, growing inside himself, "the pain of drinking taking root, wishing to say it all - unable to say it but wanting to say it all."38 Kevin's inability to express his emotions and realizations at this moment is experienced by most humans at one time or another during moments of extreme emotion and cannot fairly be judged as representative, in a general way, of his inability to communicate.

A number of Richards' characters express themselves through language other than mere words - that is, they articulate their emotions through their gestures and actions. With regards to this, reviewer Carrie MacMillan writes, "Richards would say that there are other ways of articulating than through language, and that in fact language can serve to cover up or disguise truth, which is only measureable through action."39 In his portrait of family life Richards evokes the sense of the long-term intimacy which his characters share with each other; this very intimacy entails the acquired knowledge of how to read each other's gestures and exressions. To describe these characters narrowly as "inarticulate" on the basis of their using alternative means of expression is, again, unfair.

In response to Janice Keefer's description of Richards' work as a form of "mediation", Herb Wyile writes that what she has failed to consider is the relativity of articulateness: "Richards' characters are certainly not speechless..[they]

have their own discourse within which degrees of articulateness and inarticulateness should be measured."[40] Wyile continues to say that the refusal to appreciate this fact amounts to a validation of "a particular definition of articulateness - that which is the product of education."[41] In response to Keefer's general description of Richards' characters as "minimalist" in their "speech and consciousness" alike, Wyile says:

> What Richards' narration accomplishes is to convey the complexities and nuances of the inner landscapes of his characters and of their social milieu, the fund of meaning upon which the discourse of his characters draws, and this provides an understanding which helps the uninscribed reader to better appreciate the richness of the discourse. But this is not to say that his texts are a mediation between the "speechless illiterate" and the "articulate educated"; neither category is clearly implied by Richards' writing, nor the process of mediation. [42]

The fact that the majority of Richards' readers might be of the "educated middle class" is merely a curiosity; it cannot support the argument that his work is a form of mediation between the middle-class reader and the working class. The assumption which rests behind this notion - that Richards is humanizing the working class - amounts to an act of elitist violence towards the working class. The working class does not need Richards or any writer to humanize them.

The instances in Richards' novels of economic deprivation cannot be denied, particularly in the darker novels, Lives of Short Duration and Road to the Stilt House. But these

instances are balanced by the moral values and relationships shared among families and members of the community. In his early novels, his characters are not conscious of being "deprived" in any sense; and in his later novels, characters, like Adele in Nights Below Station Street, who are unhappy with their family circumstances mature to the point where they turn to embrace their origins lovingly. Richards' character studies inspire an appreciation of the rich complexity of the human soul and psychology while his portrayal of family and community life provokes an understanding of the relationships and cultural experiences which bind people together. Because his writing is directed more towards understanding human experience through the subjective perspectives of his characters than towards advocating social change (in his more recent novels he is even critical of social activism), his work is best described as "existential", experiential, or "explorative,"[43] rather than "social realist".

The intent behind the present usage of the term "existential" is not to associate Richards with any particular school of thought such as the "existentialsm" which developed around the figures of Jean Paul Sartre or Albert Camus. The application of the term here places Richards in a much broader tradition of thinkers and writers who attempt to articulate the process of human existence as it is experienced and known from within.[44] Richards' writing is described as "existential" because of his choice to present such things as

human consciousness, the emotions, and notions of transcendence in subjective, experiential terms. This choice stems from his own existential awareness that such things cannot be expressed conceptually or objectively in terms of facts.

In the assessment of Richards' novels and vision as being "naturalistic," critics and reviewers have been misleading and uncritical. H. W. Connor describes Road to the Stilt House as "classic naturalism"45, and John Mills similarly describes Blood Ties as "naturalism, in all its aridity".45 While the classifications of "regionalism" and "social realism" describe aspects of Richards' work, "naturalism", because of its strictly materialist interpretation of human consciousness, can not be applied to any aspect of Richards' work. Richards' explorative style and his character sketches reveal an understanding of human consciousness as the faculty which ambiguously synthesizes all experience - physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual: the appreciation of human consciousness evoked through this is inconsistent with the materialist reductionism fundamental to naturalism. There are aspects of Richards' vision, aesthetics, and style, however, that could understandably inspire critics to experience his work as "bleak"; but "bleak" should not be confused with "naturalist".

Douglas Glover describes Richards' vision of humanity as "dualistic": the material and the spiritual, body and soul,

pervade Richards' vision. This dualism is the "root", Glover suggests, of both Richards' "tragic vision" and "comic insight".47 Though life is often "nasty, brutish, and short" in Richards' novels and his characters are "ruled by the image of gross flesh, by fantasy, and by social coercion," deep within their beings, writes Glover, "they have souls of essential goodness, yearning to be free, to express themselves in decent loving acts, in generosity."48 This contrast between the spirit and the flesh, the sublime and the coarse, is evoked, for example, in the elegant vision Old Simon has in Lives of Short Duration of his grand-daughter Lois:

> (Lois had also a tattoo of a tiny rose on her left breast. In the summer wearing a bikini with the straps down, sunning herself, this tiny rose signified somthing pure and life-giving about her, exuded from her a quality of love, though she said she'd gotten the rose tattoo on a $20 bet with a man, she said, who couldn't hold his own piss. 49

Packet Terri's perception and manner of experiencing life in Lives of Short Duration would best be described as tragi-comic:

> A steel rod of pain, as exacting as a surgeon's instrument at the centre of his life, while all around him sat the beauty of the earth, the stars forever, and the sun gracing the window after rain, or Donnie Murphy walking along collecting bottles silently.50

From this way of seeing and experiencing the world through extremes of tragedy and comedy, pain and joy, there emerges a particular aesthetic which becomes recognizable as Richards' own. This aesthetic is demonstrated in another description of Lois' beauty as stemming from "the impossible love/violence of

the river" which "flowed in her veins"51 and in the description of Little Simon's wit as "a dark genius". In both descriptions Richards relies upon a blend of extreme, opposite characteristics to evoke the whole and complex nature of his subject. This aesthetic is again evident in Road to the Stilt House when Arnold describes the night Trenda comes back to him: Trenda is teaching Randy how to dance and is wearing a bracelet which Jerry Bines has stolen from a grave vault. Shocked but not appalled, Arnold comments: "No smell of death invades our house tonight. In fact the little bells on the bracelet jingle a merry lively song."52 A raw edge is given to the merriness and liveliness of the moment by the knowledge of the bracelet's macabre history.

An appreciation of the integrity of Richards' characters, of their relationships with each other, and of the relative richness of their day-to-day experiences depends upon the recognition of his particular aesthetic and way of celebrating life. The appreciation for life which Richards demonstrates in his use of opposites and extremes to intensify each other is reminiscent of that evoked in Sheila Watson's The Double Hook, where the glory and joy of life has to be experienced within the larger context that includes death and pain. It is through the experience of the tragic and dark, in the fictive worlds evoked by both writers, that the comic and light may be recognized and experienced as meaningful.

Critics may experience Richards' work as "bleak" because

they are unable to reconcile the contrary experiences of the grotesque and the material with those of the sublime and the spiritual. In addition to the images of the grotesque in the novels, Richards' characters are made to experience moments of great trial and suffering. Richards admits to being interested in the "human dilemma" and in "moments of crisis".53 It is during times of crisis and suffering that the soul of a character emerges; through the process of reading we learn about the different modes in which existence is experienced and, hence, understand more about ourselves. If Richards' novels contained no affirmation of the human spirit, then, indeed his novels would be overwhelmingly bleak. But as Sheldon Currie once wrote, "in spite of the fact that accident, circumstance, inexperience and violence cripple and humiliate [his characters] ... the author sees through their scars and understands their intelligence, sensitivity, and love." 54

Richards gives no indication as to the purpose behind his characters' moral and spiritual dilemmas, just as he offers no solutions; as Sheldon Currie observes, "Richards' writing takes for granted that life is inexplicable; interesting, comic, sad, tragic, ludicrous, beautiful, but inexplicable."55 This, together with its faith in an ambiguous process of consciousness and spirit as the source of true liberation and right action, makes Richards' vision difficult and at times impossible to accept, particularly by the radically liberal or

revolutionary mind. The reader who is existentially rooted in a revolutionary world view will be compelled by necessity to reject Richards' vision, to shudder at what would appear to be an overly determined statement of human limitation. As a sympathetic critic of Richards' work and vision, the best one can attempt in such a case is to inspire an appreciation, at least, of his sincerity.

Aspects of Richards' prose style might also lead readers to experience his work as bleak. Part of what makes his style "inaccessable" and "demanding" is his refusal to state absolutes in terms of his characters' emotions and spiritual orientation. Abstractions of characters' emotions are rarely, if ever, encountered in the novels; readers are left to sort through the subjective details and experiences of the characters and to discover how the characters feel about each other. "I don't like conveying absolute emotion by writing, 'He loved her,' that's always rung false for me," said Richards, "In Blood Ties, for Maufat to say "I love Irene" - well, everyone knows he does...it's not enough to say it..."[56] Perhaps critics have missed the suggestions and implications buried in the details of his characters' experiences and have, thus, considered the work bleak. The marriage between Pamela and Kevin in The Coming of Winter, for example, has been described by reviewers as "loveless", "depressing", and "unenthusiastic"; what has been overlooked are the subtle ways in which Richards shows how Kevin loves Pamela: how, when

he looks at her, the simple thought of her goodness washes over him; or how, in the twenty-four hours leading up to the marriage ritual, his taut nerves and explosive impatience over his parents' fussing betray a genuine excitement with the future.

Because the characters' emotional and spiritual experiences are not conveyed explicitly, perhaps readers have interpreted the work as devoid of them. By its very nature, Richards' style and approach do not make it easy for his readers, particularly in his earlier novels where the writing is deliberately dense and convoluted in order to reproduce his characters' thought processes. This style often relies on the readers' perceptiveness and meditation to discover meaning and understanding from the accumulation in their own minds of the characters' various experiences and impressions.

Not all readers have the desire to put into their readings the effort Richards' novels demand - indeed, not all readers can afford to; but those who do will experience poetic glimpses into a world rich in diversity, mythology, and heroic strength. It is hoped that such a glimpse will be provided through the following exegesis of Richards' themes.

NOTES

1 Nancy Robb, "David Adams Richards: Universal Truths from Miramichi Roots," Quill and Quire, 54, No.4 (April 1988), p.24.

2 Robb, p.24.

3 Andrew Garrod, "Interview with David Adams Richards," Speaking For Myself: Canadian Writers in Interview (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater Books, 1987), p. 217.

4 George Woodcock, "Fires in Winter," rev. of Lives of Short Duration by David Adams Richards, Books in Canada, 11, No.3 (March 1982), p.13.

5 John Mills, rev. of Blood Ties, by David Adams Richards, Queen's Quarterly, 84 (Spring 1977), p.109.

6 Garrod, pp. 211-12.

7 W. H. Connor, "Coming of Winter, Coming of Autumn: the Autumnal Vision of David Adams Richards' First Novel," Studies in Canadian Literature, 9, No.1 (1984), p.33.

8 Douglas Glover. "Violent River," Books in Canada, 17, No. 4 (May 1988), p.10-11.

9 Andrew T. Seaman. "All the Confusion of their Lives," rev. of Lives of Short Duration, by David Adams Richards, The Atlantic Provinces Book Review, 9, No.1 (March 1982), p.4.

10 Mills, p.105.

11 Philip Milner, "Structure in David Adams Richards'

Unfinished Miramichil Saga," Essays on Canadian Writing, 31 (Summer 1985), p.201.

12 Milner, p.209.

13 John Moss, "David Adams Richards," A Reader's Guide To The Canadian Novel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), pp. 230-31.

14 David Adams Richards, Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), p.42.

15 Geoffrey Cook, "Interview with David Adams Richards," Carleton Literary Reveiw, 6, No.1 (1989), p.52.

16 Kathleen Scherf, "David Adams Richards: He Must be a Social Realist Regionalist," Studies in Canadian Literature, 15, No.1, (1990), p.168.

17 Cook, pp.52-53.

18 Cook, p. 53.

19 Eric Voegelin, Introduction, Order in History Vol.1: Israel and Revelation (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Universitly Press, 1956), pp.1-11. The term "participation" is used in the sense in which it is used by Voegelin in his Introduction to describe an epistemological stance like that which is suggested in Richards' writing:

> God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being. The community with its quaternarian structure is, and is not, a datum of human experience. It is a datum of experience in so far as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience in so far as it is not given in the manner of an object of the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of participation in it.[1]

20 David Adams Richards, Nights Below Station Street (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), p.225.

21 Cook, pp. 54-55.

22 George Woodcock, The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981), p.9.

23 Woodcock, Regionalism, p.7.

24 Woodcock, Regionalism, p.8.

25 David Adams Richards, "Northern New Brunswick - a personal reflection," UNB Perspectives, 10, No. 5 (Dec. 1983), p.4.

26 David Adams Richards, Lives of Short Duration (Ottawa: Oberon, 1981), p.114.

27 Anthony Appenzell, "The Gem-Like Flame Extinguished," rev. of The Coming of Winter, by David Adams Richards, Canadian Literature, 64 (Spring 1975), p.110.

28 Woodcock, "Fires", p.14.

29 Fred Cogswell, "Orchestrated New Brunswick," rev. of Blood Ties, by David Adams Richards, Canadian Literature, 76 (Spring 1978), p.115.

30 James Doyle, "Shock:Recognition," rev. of Lives of Short Duration, by David Adams Richards, Canadian Literature, 94 (Autumn 182), p.128-129.

31 Bruce Stovel, rev. of Blood Ties, by David Adams Richards, Dalhousie Review, 56 (Summer 1976), p.380.

32 Janice K. Keefer, Under Eastern Eyes (Toronto:

University of Toronto Press, 1987), p.170.

33 Lynn Van Luven, "Richards rejects Trappings of Sophistication," Evening Times Globe,16 Oct. 1990, p.A12, cols.1-5.

34 Much attention is paid to the disintegration of morals and family loyalties in Lives of Short Duration, but here, again, we find a misrepresentation of the spectrum of experience explored by the author. There is much love and respect shared mutually among Old Simon and his grandchildren Packett and Lois. Particularly in Lois' relationship with her children, and the leap she has made from the kind of relationship she and her siblings experienced with her own mother, is there hope for the future.

35 Moss, p. 231.

36 Stovel, p.381.

37 Keefer, p. 173.

38 David Adams Richards, The Coming of Winter, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p.179.

39 Carrie MacMillan "Works of Long Duration," rev. of Nights Below Station Street, by David Adams Richards,in Canadian Literature, No. 1 (Winter 1991), p. 207.

40 Herb Wyile, "Taking the Real Home to Read," Open Letter, 7, No. 6 (Fall 1989), p. 8.

41 Wyile, p.7.

42 Wyile, p.9.

43 Milner, p.201. Milner uses the word "explorative" to

describe Richards' prose style which attempts to evoke his characters' thoughts and experiences.

44 This tradition would include, for example, such writers as Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nietsche, Bergson, Joyce, and Eric Voegelin. Within the context of Richards' writing and vision which is rooted in the Christian experience, Kierkegaard, in particular, should be mentioned as a fellow participant in this tradition since his existential writings emerged from his own Christian faith.

45 W. H. Connor, "A Controlled Poetic Naturalism," rev. of Road to the Stilt House, by David Adams Richards, The Fiddlehead, 147 (Spring 1986), p.109.

46 Mills, p.105.

47 Glover, pp.10-11.

48 Glover, pp.10-11.

49 Richards, Lives, p.123.

50 Richards, Lives, p.237.

51 Richards, Lives, p.178.

52 David Adams Richards, Road to the Stilt House (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1985), p.41.

53 Scherf, pp.163-164.

54 Sheldon Currie, rev. of Nights Below Station Street, by David Adams Richards, Antigonish Review, No. 73 (Spring 1988), p.67-68.

55 Currie, p.65-66.

56 Garrod, p.225.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE COMING OF WINTER AND BLOOD TIES

The narration of Richards' first two novels, The Coming of Winter and Blood Ties, proceeds through the perusal of the day-to-day subjective experiences of his rural, "down river" characters. Rather than narrating the events which involve these characters and their relationships with each other, the author portrays how such things are experienced by revealing his characters' emotional responses. Richards rarely presents information about his characters or their relationships theoretically, that is, in terms of propositions or statements of facts abstracted from the characters' experiential context. The love of one character for another is never stated as a fact - i.e. she loved him; rather, the characters' emotions for others are conveyed through the symptoms or range of experiences asociated with their love. In Blood Ties, rather than telling the reader that the character Orville was blinded in one eye, Richards conveys the information gradually by means of Orville's subjective, concrete experience of blindness - his self-consciousness about having to wear an eye-patch, for example. Through this type of exploration of individual characters, Richards reveals spiritual and emotional maturation as a life-long process of gaining knowledge and understanding about oneself and the world experientially - that is, through experiences of living.

As one proceeds through Richards' novels, one becomes increasingly conscious of his focus on the characters' subjective experience. The substance of the knowledge and understanding Richards' characters tend to discover through their experiences is similar to the kind of truth William Barrett describes as "existential" or "subjective."1 This knowledge or truth is not gained intellectually but, rather, is encountered with one's "whole being" 2 as a result of one's concrete experiences and manner of confronting life. Richards' characters do not demonstrate this knowledge or truth in abstract, conceptual language but, rather, through their actions and gestures. Richards himself seldom narrates his characters' discoveries factually but, rather, dramatizes the outcome of such discoveries through their subsequent actions.

The development of Richards' characters' personalities is revealed to be experientially rooted in the way they confront life and respond to their experiences. What is true of the individual in terms of identity is true of the larger social groupings in Richards' novels. The distinct character or flavour of families which distinguishes their collective sense of self is rooted in the particular experiences, relationship with geography, and memories which are shared and exchanged among family members. The legends and symbols which articulate the identities of Richards' families emerge naturally from their common experiences and exist in the

consciousness of each family member. The present chapter will attempt to direct the reader toward an appreciation of how, in both The Coming of Winter and Blood Ties, Richards portrays the experiential processes whereby his characters learn more about themselves and their world and of how he evokes the distinct family milieu in which they are rooted.

At one point in The Coming of Winter Kevin Dulse thinks back to a particular time in his past when he had been an altar boy and had thought about becoming a priest; Kevin looks upon this period in his life as being "only one point along the way."[4] The sense that life is a continual journey through different phases, or a constant process of experiencing and learning, is also evoked in the novel by various symbols and rituals marking Kevin's passage from youth into adulthood. Natural symbols, which emerge from the specific geography, climate and culture in which Kevin participates, are used to comment on his "passage." "The coming of winter" symbolizing the coming of adulthood and wisdom is noted not only in the title of the novel, but in the frequent observations on the seasonal changes occurring in the surrounding landscapes and on the seasonal activities the characters participate in - hunting, bringing in firewood, raking leaves, wearing poppies. Kevin's regrettable shooting of Houlden Belia's cow at the beginning of the novel and his fulfilling the subsequent financial obligations at the end

might also be viewed as a sequence of events symbolic of his entering into adulthood. Also symbolic of his passage are the rituals of his twenty-first birthday and his marriage to Pamela at the novel's end.

The focus of the novel, however, is on the inner process of Kevin's emotions, spiritual tumult, and thoughts which occur in response to the exterior events he participates in: the death of his friend Andy Turcotte together with the knowledge that Andy's girlfriend, Julie, is pregnant, results in disturbing thoughts about the mystery of life and death; also, the anxious responses of Kevin's mother, Rubena, and his fiancée, Pamela, to his reckless behaviour force Kevin to acknowledge the fact that he must compromise his own impulses and desires in order to respect their emotions and expectations.

A number of events occur in the opening pages of The Coming of Winter which Kevin has to confront emotionally and spiritually over the next two weeks. While he is out hunting, enjoying the sights, smells, and feel of the autumn season, he shoots a farmer's cow and is faced with the possibility of a lawsuit. After driving into town to have a few beers before returning home for supper, he learns about the death that afternoon of his friend, Andy Turcotte. Instead of returning home, he finds his friend John, and the two drown their sorrows in beer and a cheap sherry named "Hermit". Kevin's abusive drinking provokes anger and frustration in his fiancée

Pamela, while his failure to return home that night or even to phone causes his parents much alarm. Over the next few days Kevin confronts the consequences of killing the cow, and of upsetting his fiancée and family, and realizes he must come to terms with the death of his friend.

When Kevin is drinking with his friends, he expresses the desire not to talk about Andy's death, "Don't talk about it anymore ... it doesn't do one bit of good to talk about it." [19] In their excessive drinking, both Kevin and his friend John attempt to avoid the immediate, painful impact of their friend's death. Following his long day of confusion and drink, Kevin's dreams "were frightening - full of red colour."[42] Perhaps in the "red colour" are fused the raw impressions of the day's events which linger in his mind - the sickly red wine, the spilled blood of his friend, Andy, and the blood of the animals he had killed that afternoon. The conflicts he has avoided confronting during the day haunt his unconscious self.

When the immediate impact of Andy's death is dulled, Kevin begins to confront the fact of his friend's death and becomes troubled by the mystery of existence. In his struggle to come to terms with the unknown, Kevin experiences a tension within himself between the orthodox Christian mode of expressing the mystery and his own pantheistic experience of nature. The Christian symbols and myths are present in Kevin's consciousness because he has grown up within a

Catholic community and even had served as an altar boy. But on a personal level, Kevin encounters the Sacred in a primitive or pagan (pre-Christian) manner of participating in the natural world.

Kevin's passion for hunting stems not so much from the possibility of killing animals but from the way the activity places him in the natural world where he is physically intoxicated by the sights, smells, and feel of the land and where he is spiritually uplifted by the peacefulness and perfection he discovers in nature. The spiritual aspect of Kevin's experience in nature is conveyed in the opening pages of the novel where he is hunting: the sky is described as "clean" [5]; Kevin experiences a "cleanliness and purification of the season" [5] with its scent of "rotting spruce cuts"; and the day carries in its "breath all cleanliness and purification" [7]. In the repeated description of the rotting leaves, characteristic of forests during the autumn season, in concert with Kevin's sense of the cleanliness and purification of the fall season, Richards suggests that Kevin participates in a pantheistic appreciation of the continuous cycles in nature of growth and decay, death and renewal.

Before he attends the funeral mass for Andy, Kevin spends his morning hunting. As though it were his own form of worship and mediation, his encounter with nature brings him peace:

> It was the land. The whole perimeter stilled by the frost of dawn, and the haze upon the water had not lifted yet. Nor was there any sound, nor the wretched smell that there sometimes was - nor a sound. That was the good of autumn - that is what made it good.[102-103]

The repetitions and cadences in Richards' prose evoke the sense of peacefulness and goodness Kevin experiences. After walking for some time Kevin stops to rest by a brook which "fingered dully through the rocks and mud" -

> Here he sat upon the cuts hidden by the saplings now grown above them, sat and waited...
>
> He waited half an hour. There was nothing - only the brook water slowly moving, like his blood at such an early hour, the smell of the rotting, the rich smell of rotting, with such a fragrance that he wished to sit all day.[103]

The growth of new saplings around the rotting cuts suggests the cyclical continuity of life and death, growth and decay. Kevin's pantheistic experience in this natural setting seems confirmed later during the funeral Mass when, in response to the priest's words, "into your hands Almighty God," Kevin's mind retreats to the memory of "the brook running its fingers through the mud." [106] The leap Kevin's mind makes from the priest's reference to God to the thought of the brook's fingers evokes an animistic association between the Divine and the brook whose waters nourish the land.

The priest's message during the funeral Mass does little to relieve Kevin's unrest or to comfort his grief. Not only is he angry with the insinuations about the kind of person Andy was - "Who could ever know what the future had in store for this young man?" asks the priest, "Perhaps there was

something in the future that was not so pleasant" [106] - he intuitively recognizes that the priest's subsequent words - "The Almighty God has a purpose in all that He does" [106] - together with the visual symbols in the church depicting the Christian mythology, do not represent certain knowledge about life and death but only the universal experience of their mystery:

> It was eleven now, Andrew inside for an hour, among it for an hour. There was something to be envied about an unexpected death, about something over which there was no control, no medicine. He knew now; in his grave he knew whatever there was to know about it all if there was anything to know, and that was the part that seemed so inviting. It was absurd to think of it that way - but Andrew did know while they all prayed and mourned for him whether the praying and mourning did any good.[107-108]

Kevin's recognition of the constancy of human uncertainty is expressed facetiously on another occasion when, after being interviewed by the priest before their marriage, he tells Pamela, "I told him if God was alive the last place he'd be found would be in a church."[213] For Kevin, God, or the Sacred, is more likely to be found in nature. Though his knowledge of this is never conveyed directly by Richards, or expressed conceptually by Kevin, himself, it is suggested in the way he experiences the natural world.

A week later, when Kevin is again drinking and carousing with his friends (to celebrate his last moments of being single), his thoughts return to Andy's death and funeral. His memory of the funeral is comprised of the concrete details

which linger in his consciousness, the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile impressions he had experienced in the church: "the stained-glass windows, the passions of the cross", the "firm pressure" of Pamela's gloved hand preventing him from moving toward Julie, "the thorns on the head of Christ, the incense and the smell of the soft October morning," and his awareness of "the thick lump decaying inside being wheeled about on rollers."[185] When he thinks of Andy's death this time it is within a larger context which includes the gestation of Andy's child inside Julie's womb:

> Andy in it for a week now, among it, almost that, and the juices inside her churning together, mixing within themselves to create something.[185]

The perplexing mystery Kevin has been concerned with is not dispelled by the image; indeed, the sense of mystery is heightened by the parallels drawn between the nothingness that precedes birth and that which follows death. The image is reminiscent of a primitive or pagan appreciation of human life and death as part of a continuous cycle of renewal in nature.

Part of the process of Kevin's confronting the death of his friend involves a renewed consciousness of his own mortality. The thought of attending Andy's funeral reminds him of the funeral for his grandfather, who had died when Kevin was a small boy. Kevin remembers that as he had looked down at his grandfather's corpse he had thought of his own death:

> Kevin gazed upon the old man in his coffin as he prayed on the kneeler beside it, and when he did,

> he saw the white pasty skin and smelled the smell of flowers around him, looked at the small cross in the lifeless hands and thought about himself there with others staring at him.[73]

Kevin experiences a brush with death himself when he and his friends are in an accident. His consciousness of coming close to death and of his mortality is conveyed the following day when he thinks about his own blood splattered on the inside of the truck and is repulsed by the thought of going to look at it. Kevin first thinks of how people, in general, are drawn to the scene of an accident to view the evidence of this precariousness and to be excited, like the spectators of an ancient Greek tragedy, by the experiences of horror and empathy. The sense that Kevin loathes the thought of observing a visual sign of his own precarious mortality is suggested through Richards' emphasis on the act of "looking".

> The way they gathered after every accident. He had <u>seen</u>, been there himself ... <u>watching</u> them drag the car into the lot ... <u>Always wanting a closer look</u>. The blood, they would say. <u>Look</u> at the blood. The handle would be covered with blood, the hood and the seats, and the stench of alcohol and the glass mixed with the clots of blood, and the twisted metal so <u>you could envision</u> the flesh tearing in that one moment, <u>the eyes seeing</u> the flesh tearing in that one moment. [223. My emphasis]

Kevin then thinks with a shudder of what it would be like for him to go and force himself to look at the cold, objective evidence of his experience:

> He did not want to <u>see</u> his truck because of that ... But what if he went inside to <u>look</u> and <u>saw</u> on the seat or the door handle or along the

> window frame his own blood streaked and cold and drying in the deadened frost? What if he went to look and saw that?[224. My emphasis]

Significantly, Kevin's temptation to go and look at his truck is superseded by the mundane actions of going to the bank, withdrawing the money he owes for the cow, and giving it to Houlden Belia. His preoccupation with death and the unknown gives way to the business of living. In the next few days Kevin enters into a different phase of his life when he gets married. The sense of his emotional and spiritual life's being in constant process is evoked by the fact that his grief over Andy's death and his concerns with the unknown give way to his excitement about his marriage and future with Pamela.

Through Kevin's relationship with Pamela and with his family, Richards explores another aspect of his character's maturing process: the tension between Kevin's having to accept the responsibilities he has toward his family and Pamela on the one hand and, on the other, his youthful desire to be reckless and carefree, like his friend John. By the end of the novel Kevin has realized the fact that he will have to accept a compromise between his youthful desires and the expectations of his family. One small incident bespeaks this compromise. Before Kevin goes out to celebrate his last moments of being single with John and Bruce, he insists on first going home to eat supper with his parents, despite John's attempts to coerce him into starting the celebrations immediately. It is implicitly understood that Kevin does not

want to put his parents through the emotional anguish they had experienced on the night of their older son's death when William failed to return home or to phone them and tell them where he was.

In his article entitled "Coming of Winter, Coming of Age: The autumnal vision of David Adams Richards' first novel"5, H. W. Connor defines the tension Kevin experiences between his familial obligations and his desire to be carefree as, "the basic dialectic between the forces of life and the forces denying life".6 Marriage to Pamela, writes Connor, represents conforming to society's expectations and, ultimately, "the death of the soul"7; John, on the other hand, represents a resistance to spiritual defeat. Connor's argument might seem to be supported by John's response to the news of Kevin's impending marriage - "Kevin would grow into a useless fat old man placing wreaths" [125] - and Richards' humourous elaboration on this idea later in the book when Kevin is mistaken by the town drunk for a veteran selling poppies:

> The man kept moving closer, moving his lips as he did in some pathetic demonstration ...
> "I wan- I wan - I wan," the man was saying.
> "What?" he [Kevin] kept saying.
> "I wan' a poppy."
> "It isn't the eleventh yet," Kevin said looking up. "It isn't the eleventh yet."[225]

Richards' humour has a double edge to it, however; for if Kevin is fated to become a fat old man laying wreaths to commemorate the glories of his youth, then John is equally fated to become one of the town's drunks.

There is no denying John's appeal; the essence of his soul is encapsulated in one passage concerning a night when he had stayed out and slept on the steps of the old general store - "not wishing to face his parents nor wishing to give up the good night which his friends had given up hours before."[110] John's reluctance "to give up the good night" seems to echo Dylan Thomas' "Do not go gently into that good night, but rage rage against the dying of the light", suggesting a fraternity between the spirit that inspired the poet and that which animates John. However, Richards' portrayals of the fascinating aspects of John's character, and of the wild spirit of youth in general, do not support the argument that Richards' novel validates youth over age. Connor's systematic approach to the novel's themes and symbols overlooks the complex nature of human experience and the ambiguous psychic processes taking place within human consciousness, all of which Richards deliberately attempts to communicate. Kevin's marriage to Pamela and his acceptance of adult responsibilities do not represent the defeat of his soul; they are, rather, a precious part of his journey through life. Indeed, through Richards' exploration of both young and mature experiences, and especially through the view of youth he provides through the perspectives of older characters, the novel offers a balanced appreciation of both youth and age in order to show how the two are not antagonistic opposites but complementary parts of a whole; both are part of the process

of living.

The view of youth from the perspective of age is conveyed primarily through Clinton. Where Kevin was introduced dramatically, in the act of hunting, Clinton is introduced in a narrated fashion; in a few brief paragraphs we learn that he used to drink abusively, chase whores, and beat his wife, but that now he was different, now he was a "silent man".[48] Through Clinton's memories the concrete experiences behind this information are fleshed out; thus we learn about his youthful dismay at never being able to leave the river alongside which he had grown up; about his early marriage to Rubena because of an unplanned pregnancy; about his reluctance to exchange his carefree youth for adult responsibilities; about his tumultuous relationship with his first son William; and about his inner despair when William died by drowning. Our responses to the character of Clinton are different from what they would be if we were introduced solely to the person he was earlier in life. The young Clinton is perceived through the person he has become. Because we are exposed to his character as a mature man who has acquired wisdom and understanding through his experiences, we are in the position to appreciate his character holistically - that is, to recognize his early violent behaviour and experiences as part of the larger process his life has involved.

Richards once said that, in one way or another, all of

his novels were about redemption.8 This "redemption" is another way to describe his project of rendering intelligible the words and actions of characters by revealing the inner processes they are experiencing. Through the accumulation of memories and the unfolding of thoughts, Clinton's inner redemptive processes are evoked. From the perspective of maturity Clinton looks back on his early, tumultuous relationship with Rubena with an understanding of his motives which he has acquired through time.

> But it was not hatred. He had not beaten his wife in hatred. It was rather an acute understanding at that boyhood age that everything was so hopelessly lost - that he would die never leaving the river to which he had been born. And his wife was pretty and had wanted to finish school but because of William she never had. [49]

The word "acute" is used here to convey his attunement to the critical fact that he would never leave the river - not his understanding of why at the time he was beating his wife. Through the perspective of maturity Clinton is also able to understand the dynamics behind his tortured relationship with William, the fact that the spirit of defiance and independence, which he both loved and envied most fiercely in William, was the very spirit he had to sacrifice because of William's birth. This aspect of his relationship with William is revealed in a memory of one of their impassioned confrontations:

> "The principal phoned me at work ... and says you're expelled for fighting. So what, be expelled; you're not smart enough to go to school anyway."

> It was a silly remark, a reflection on himself. The boy said nothing to this ... He began to smile somewhat mockingly though, as if he realized in himself already the capacity for independence from the wishes of his family. It was a smile that mocked the desperate situation of his father, of Clinton who had lost just such an independence because of his son who stood before him ... [89]

Richards' narrative implies that through a life-long process of inner searching and reflection, Clinton has been able to look at himself and to understand the person he used to be. One is placed in the position where, rather than forgiving or condemning Clinton for his actions in the past, one is invited to appreciate the fact that as a result of his lived experiences and reflection, Clinton has been able to forgive himself.

The integrity of Clinton's inner redemptive processes rests in the fact that through his experiences he is able to understand others and demonstrate this understanding in his actions. His understanding or knowledge about life and the processes that humans are involved in is not an objective knowledge or one which he would be able to articulate verbally. It is that form of knowledge described earlier as "existential" or "subjective", a knowledge of truth which is experienced with one's whole being and demonstrated through a person's behaviour. Clinton's gesture of giving his son a rifle for his twenty-first birthday communicates the fact that both he and Rubena have forgiven Kevin for shooting the cow. On the night of Kevin's accident, Clinton does not yell at his

son for drinking and driving recklessly; he does not pass judgement on his son's actions because, having been in similar situations as a youth, he no doubt understands how these situations may occur unexpectedly. Clinton's silent presence in the kitchen as he watches Rubena bandage Kevin's injuries becomes another means of communicating his love and understanding; indeed, there is even a kind of silent solidarity between the two males while Rubena vents her anger and concern. Finally, after Kevin's wedding reception, when the guests accompany the couple outside and discover the pig inside the car, Clinton again demonstrates, through his quiet demeanour and readiness to remedy the problem immediately, an understanding of the rash behaviour of youth - "They always act foolish at weddins' here...We can get 'er fixed."[257]

Also crucial to the readers' ability to appreciate Clinton's redemptive experience is the recognition of the fact that Rubena, herself, has survived the tumultuousness or their early relationship without spiritual or emotional damage. Far from having the demeanour of a battered, broken woman, Rubena has a strong, central role in the family which is alluded to in the description of her being "the conscience"[87] for them all.

Important to understanding both Rubena and Clinton, particularly the people they have become, is an appreciation of the depth of their love. The Coming of Winter cannot be fully appreciated if the love experienced between characters

is not perceived. During a discussion of the novel in an interview Richards said:

> The whole idea of love and companionship in The Coming of Winter, for instance, is subtle yet strong and very much part of the book ... Clinton's love for Rubena is evident, not when he was nineteen and just married to her, but when he was fifty-eight, which he is at the time of the book. There's a sense of belonging that's taken years to nurture.9

Because Richards never has his characters describe their love for each other explicitly, their emotions have to be discerned through their actions and behaviour.

The love between Clinton and Rubena, described by Richards as "a sense of belonging that's taken years to nurture," is evident in the way Clinton is continuously attuned to where Rubena is in the house and to what task or activity she may be performing. It is also evident in the way he is aware of her moods and is often able to anticipate her words and gestures. His knowledge of her ways bespeaks an intimacy and a mutual comfort with each other that has involved years of being together. Clinton's love for Rubena is evident, too, in the way he notices the slightest of changes about her person. For example, on the eve of Kevin's marriage, as the family awaits the arrival of Pamela and her parents, whom they are to meet for the first time, Clinton immediately notices the smell of the cosmetics she puts on:

> Then she came in and began to change before him. She sat on the bed to put more of that colouring onto her face and took lipstick from her purse to put on. She smelled of it all. As if, if he tasted her he would get the taste of powder

> instead of flesh. Like those days at the church picnic in the summer when the heat of the grounds brought it all out even more.[234]

The concrete experiences of the moment - the sense of smell and taste, together with the memories they evoke - betray their long-term closeness and intimacy with each other. Furthermore, the novelty Clinton experiences in Rubena's use of cosmetics also enhances the sense that this particular night, when they are meeting Pamela's family for the first time, is an occasion. In turn, the moment serves to add to the understated excitement surrounding the marriage of their son.

Through the accumulation of his characters' memories, thoughts, and experiences, Richards succeeds in conveying the distinct mythology of the Dulse family. By "mythology" is meant the primal experiences which exist deep within their collective consciousness and which form the particular manner in which they view the world and experience their lives. The Dulses may not be conscious of their mythology or even of the fact that they have such a thing called a "family mythology". Nevertheless this mythology exists, having been formed by their experiences and their particular ways of remembering them. Together, the Dulses participate unconsciously in their mythology; because it exists within their consciousness where it is an integral part of who they are both as separate individuals and as a family, their mythology is something they cannot detach themselves from.

The death of William is a major aspect of the Dulse mythology as it has made an indelible impression upon the family's collective consciousness and upon the way each member experiences certain phenomena. When we first meet Clinton and Rubena they are waiting for Kevin to return from hunting. Richards alternates passages which have them waiting with passages that relive the night William died when they had likewise waited for his return.10 Through the experiences of waiting and similar snippets of conversation the two separate moments overlap - that is, the past is relived in the present through the parallels of which Clinton and Rubena are both conscious. The alternation demonstrates the continued presence in their consciousness of particular experiences and the influence these experiences exerts on the present. Furthermore, though Kevin was only an infant when William drowned, his brother's death has made an impression on the way he experiences life. For example, his irrational fear of being in or on the water and ice is probably related to the stories he would have grown up hearing about his brother.11

We also learn through the accumulation of memories how the late autumn/early winter season has its own particular place in the Dulse family mythology. Important events in the family's history have occurred during this time of the year: William was born in winter, just as he died in the winter; Clinton's father died in late autumn. Kevin was born in late autumn and, in the present of the novel, he is married in the

autumn. The kind of familiarity the season has for Kevin and his family is revealed in one passage which explores Kevin's intimate knowledge of the autumn season through the smells and tastes associated with it:

> He was walking along the lane ... and he could feel the good autumn night upon him, and a little nervousness besides, the taste of evening smoke. It was nearing his birthday so that the air and the taste of the night seemed more familiar to him than at any other time of the year; was more fulfilling to him now that he was walking, and he could remember all the other autumns that he had felt. [82]

In The Coming of Winter Richards has evoked the sense of his characters' lives being a continual process of assimilating their personal, concrete experiences into consciousness where through memory these experiences remain and affect the manner in which characters subsequently confront life. The very essence of Richards' characters is defined by these interior processes which constitute their growth of knowledge and understanding about themselves and others. In his second novel, Blood Ties, Richards continues to focus on the unfolding of his characters' personalities by exploring the emotional and spiritual processes they experience as they grow up and confront life. Richards again summons forth the notion that one's knowledge about the world together with one's sense of self or identity is experiential, that such knowledge emerges from the concrete experiences of environment and history.

Spanning an approximate two and a half years, Blood Ties is divided into three sections, the subtitles of which chart the passage of time: "July 1967", "February 1968", and "October 1969". Exploring the experiences of the MacDermot family and close friends, the novel focuses primarily on the siblings Cathy and Orville during three different phases of their adolescence. Richards communicates the sense that characters' personalities are in constant process by portraying them in the concrete experiential midst of certain conflicts then showing them at a later time reflecting back upon their experiences as phases through which their lives have travelled.

The process of Cathy MacDermot's emotional maturation is conveyed in terms of her involvement with John Delano - the same character who figured peripherally in The Coming of Winter as the wild, rebellious friend of Kevin Dulse. The intriguing qualities of John's character which were explored in the previous novel - his spirit of spontaneity, rebellion, and defiance - are encountered again in Blood Ties. This "spirit" draws Cathy to John on their first date when he boyishly dives off the wharf at night into the dark waters below, just to show off for her benefit, and it continues to fascinate her when he surprises her with gifts and unexpected visits.

The very qualities which Cathy finds compelling in John render a committed relationship between the two difficult and,

eventually, impossible. The relationship between Cathy and John is an example of how Richards' narratives respect the complexity and ambiguity of human emotions and relationships. While readers are able to recognize an incompatibility between Cathy and John, the situation between the two is never allowed to appear straightforward. Readers familiar with John in The Coming of Winter know that part of what makes him the person he is, is his frustrated love for Julie: in John's mind, an honest display of his true emotions for Julie would entail an unwelcome compromise of his independence. Because of his refusal to compromise, John stands alone against most of the community and his friends. "He was the last of them," John proudly thinks of himself in The Coming of Winter, just after he hears about Kevin's intention to marry. At times, however, John experiences his heroic stand of independence as alienation. In a drunken exchange with Kevin, John reveals an inner anguish and loneliness because of his failure at love -

> "I love that bitch - that fuckin' little bitch ... But what in shit can you do? Ya can do fuck all ..."
> "Who's this, John?" ...
> "Julie - the bitch," he said. He said it in a voice quite unlike his own ...[184]

Even in this honest confrontation with his true emotions, John's refusal to speak Julie's name without the qualifying "bitch" reveals his reluctance to give in to the romantic, civilized side of his soul.

The appreciation the reader might have for John's independent spirit, together with the sympathy for the

loneliness it sometimes brings him, is complicated in Blood Ties by the emotional pain he inflicts upon Cathy. Rooted as Cathy is in a family milieu characterized by love and mutual respect for each member's dignity, she is emotionally unprepared for the ruthless side of John's independent spirit. While she looks for a consistent demonstration of his respect and love for her, he is prepared only to show his emotions spontaneously and sporadically. During her two and a half years involvement with John, Cathy confronts their unsuitability for each other on various occasions; each time she is hurt or disappointed by John she rehearses in her mind a scene wherein she demonstrates her emotional independence to him:

> He would say Oh Cathy, lets go out Cath, and she'd say, I don't feel like it today, ya can go out by yerself and he'd say But ya haveta come out and his lips would be white and tense over his tense face, the eyes small and black, and she'd look up at him so very calm that her heart would be calm, not even beating, and she'd say: Take Julie - since you're always bringing her name up, take Julie for a walk. He'd look at her and she'd turn her head away, slow ... 12

It is frustrating, though not without humour for the reader, when John arrives moments after Cathy's daydream to summon her and she rises to follow him without a word. At other times Cathy imagines a final scene between the two of them wherein she simply walks away from John, telling him nonchalantly that she is moving away. "Christ," she says on one of these occasions, "because she couldn't release it, the torment and pain of wanting it to work her way."[121] Implied in her

daydreams is not so much the desire to prove her independence to John or to hurt him, but to experience it within herself concretely.

In the course of time Cathy does manage to extricate herself from the relationship - no doubt, the threat of a venereal disease serves to speed up the process. As it turns out, things do, indeed, "work her way." Months after the relationship has ended, Cathy prepares to move with her friend somewhere "out west" and John happens to drop in on her just before she leaves for the train station, providing her with the longed for opportunity to demonstrate her independence with the casual words, "I'm leaving." The climax Cathy had once anticipated in this confrontation is deflated by a few unexpected turns: John is already too emotionally stunned by the recent death of one friend and the marriage of another to experience the full impact of Cathy's independence; and, <u>because</u> Cathy is now emotionally distanced from the affair, she is no longer in the position to really care about how John will react to the news. The emotional independence once longed for is now a reality, and because of this she is not excited by the chance to prove it to him. Cathy's real victory consists of the fact that her independence is, in the end, independent of John's thoughts or emotions. Rather than adding any comment on the relationship between Cathy and John, their final scene together provides a situation for Cathy's younger brother Orville, who has long been disturbed by John's

treatment of his sister, to express his concern.

Over time Cathy regards the emotional turmoil she experienced during her relationship with John as part of the larger process of her growing up, encountering the world, and learning to understand herself. That John was a part of this process is suggested at one point where she thinks back on him and his threat of disease as a part of her past, a phase her life merely stumbled through at one time:

> She hadn't seen John for months. She had washed it away like a stain on a garment, as if it were something to be cleansed and left to the sun. So the sun would sink its light into the fabric and then only the garment white on a fresh day ... When she thought of him now she thought of him as something distant and ugly that she had come across - as if in the murk of afternoon she had stumbled blindly through the woods and had met him. [247]

The sense of Cathy's life being in process is also suggested by her departure, her moving on to new things, at the end of the novel. On one hand this move may be interpreted as a disturbing sign of the disintegration of rural life and family traditions, a theme which appears in Richards' subsequent novels. But, like Kevin's marriage to Pamela at the end of the previous novel, Cathy's move also represents the beginning of another phase in her journey through life.

Richards portrays the character of Orville in a similar fashion by following the process of his thoughts and emotions during a particular phase of his adolescence and observing the changes in Orville's consciousness in response to his experiences. Richards' exploration of Orville's character

reveals interior processes which are reminiscent of those experienced by Kevin in The Coming of Winter. Like Kevin, Orville enters a phase of his life where he becomes preoccupied and disturbed with spiritual questions relating to the unknown. Orville serves as an altar boy, just as Kevin had at one time. Orville became an altar boy because he was drawn by the holy atmosphere he encountered within the church sanctuary: this atmosphere is pregnant with the sense of an other-worldliness in which Orville longs to participate:

> There was a sense of something other in the vestry, behind the walls ... It was that when his mouth opened something came into it that comes into it at no other place. He was reminded of somewhere where he had never quite been, or somewhere where the fullness of a June night was upon his flesh and skin like it never really had been.[158]

As a result of his participation in the "behind the scenes" preparations of the Mass and, in particular, through his relationship with the unimaginative, mean-spirited priest, Orville experiences a disenchantment with the formal rituals of religion. He begins to steal candles from the church, hoping that by burning them in his own room at home he might reproduce "that feeling of removal that he could never explain to anyone."[245] There is a tension in Orville's soul between the sense of removal or transcendence he has experienced and the emptiness he subsequently discovered in the church rituals. During the confrontation with his father, Maufat, just after he has been caught stealing the candles, Orville reveals an impatience with the way Christian mythology and

symbols, which are meant to articulate experiences of the Divine, have been literalized and rendered absurd through church doctrine:

> "...ya think God's got wings or somethin?" Orville roared. "Ya think angels got wings and fly around?" he roared.
>
> "No I don't," Maufat said. "I don't."
>
> "Ya do so - ya think angels got wings or somethin - because yer all stupid," he said... [175]

The tension Orville experiences is revealed through the way in which he comes to terms with the concept of infinity. Orville ponders the notion of "infinity" as it was explained by his teacher in school:

> "This is infinity," his teacher said. "A man wants a motel room and there is one with an infinite number of rooms but every room is filled. The manager says: 'I'll put you in room one and put the person in room one in room two, and the person in room two in room three, the person in three in four, and so on and so on - so that everyone gets a room.'" His teacher smiled. "Yet all the rooms are filled."[112]

This passage where Orville's mind struggles to grasp the logic and significance of the paradox is made all the more frustrating and dramatic because he is lost in a snow storm on his way home through the fields at night. Both his confusion with the concept of eternity and his frustration with not being able to express his emotions for his sister, Cathy, rage in his soul. His mind moves back and forth between perplexing thoughts of eternity and memories of those times when his attempts to express love inexplicably turned into gestures of contempt. The duality Orville senses within himself is

manifested in his act of killing the rabbit he had discovered alive in one of the snares he had been checking, a rabbit which he had had every intention of setting free. Orville's physical/geographical disorientation is accompanied by his emotional/spiritual confusion and disorientation. The inner tension between the two poles of love and hate, benevolence and malevolence, and belief and scepticism is evoked when Orville screams/calls aloud the name of "Christ" - '"Christ," he yelled, "Christ you Christ,"' and, '"Christ you Christ - hate you hate you", he yelled'. His calls seem to be at once both a defiant curse and an invocation or plea.

The ideas of God and infinity which Orville struggles with eventually become meaningful and intelligible to him when he relates them to his own life in a setting outside the institutions of the church and the school. Like Kevin Dulse, Orville develops a pantheistic appreciation of the natural world. Being alone outside in the woods fills him with a physical and spiritual contentment. "What made it feel so good to him, he had no idea but he felt everyday now for the last little while, when he went out with the .22, that he was physically a part of everything he touched..."[244] Both spiritual and physical aspects of his experience are made explicit when he thinks, "it was different from physical contentment." [246] In a truly mystical sense, Orville encounters that which the abstract word "infinity" attempts to represent; infinity becomes real to him experientially - that

is, through his conscious participation in it:

> In the mornings the sun shone through a haze that covered the ground, it streamed in light over the birches and alders and came through to him as the very thing his teacher had talked about months before - it came through on him as if he was just one small particle of it - made him infinite. All day he kept thinking of that word as he walked, of what the teacher had said months and months before, of the rooms in the giant hotel. And the light shone on the wetness, and the wetness was on every stem and twig and herb and branch. [245]

Orville is conscious of the fact that what he has become attuned to in this episode is a force which directs his life, even his every move; he is also conscious that his experience at this moment is the same as that he once had in the church and that he had tried to invoke by burning candles in his room - "Whatever he did was done by that moving forever in hotel rooms. And yet he knew it himself - when the smoke curled in the room and the rain beat on the window and no-one, only Cathy perhaps was inside."[245] Significantly, Richards avoids using the word "infinity" in these passages; that this is, indeed, the subject of Orville's thoughts, or rather, the substance of his encounter, is indicated with "he kept thinking of that word ... of what the teacher had said ... of the rooms in the giant hotel" and "that moving forever in hotel rooms".[245] The absence of the word "infinity" articulates more truly the sense that Orville has penetrated the abstraction of the concept to the engendering experience it represents.

Orville's consciousness of participating in infinity -

the concept of which had previously eluded and perplexed him - suggests the sense of inner process. His discovery represents the evolution of one phase of his life into another phase. What is most important about Orville's spiritual process is the fact that he gains a profound understanding about certain aspects of reality experientially, as opposed to intellectually or abstractly. Orville's experiential knowledge of eternity is subsequently expressed through his actions: when his nephew Ronnie comes to stay with Orville's family while his mother, Leah, gets settled in Toronto, Orville adopts him as a younger brother, teaching him how to hunt, how to take care of himself in the woods, and how to appreciate the natural world. Orville's emotional and spiritual maturity is also demonstrated by his ability to express his love for Cathy and his outrage with the way John has treated her - "You get out of here," he says to John in the final page of the novel, "you get out of here and leave my sister alone."[278]

In the composite of his explorations of individual characters, Richards portrays the MacDermot family mythology. The integrity of the MacDermot milieu is revealed through the quiet manner in which they treat each other with love, respect and dignity. This love has existed between Maufat and Irene from the beginning of their relationship. Typical of Richards' non-chronological method of conveying narrative through memories and thoughts, the beginning of the MacDermot

family history takes place towards the end of the novel. The early relationship of Maufat and Irene is conveyed in a fashion which deliberately communicates the mythical, primal status which their first sexual encounter acquires over time. The setting for this encounter is Edenic - it is a place deep in the forest called "the black moss...the place where the moss hung from the bog trees."[261] The fact that this encounter represents the genesis of the MacDermot family is consciously summoned through comparisons with The Garden of Eden: "It will be just like Adam and Eve," Maufat tells Irene. [264] It is during this scene that Maufat expresses his love for Irene by asking her to marry him and by telling her that he wants to adopt Leah.

One of the most powerful explorations of love in Richards' novels is Maufat's reaction to the news that Leah is not Irene's sister, but her illegitimate child. He is not embarrassed, as Irene's older brother Lorne is, nor is he at all jealous, as Annie fears he will be, by the fact that Irene has been intimate with someone else. He is quietly overwhelmed with joy at the thought that Irene had Leah:

> When Irene said: "Leah is not Annie's child cause she's my child," he was happy - something welled inside him to know that she had given birth to a child who that afternoon had played with a doll in the centre of the floor.[255]

The kind of love shared between Irene and Maufat, a love which is characterized by a respect for life and human dignity, is evident in the relationships between each family member. The

love between Cathy and Orville is manifested in the way Cathy always tries to include him in activities involving the family or her friends and in her keeping secret her own knowledge of his stealing the church candles. This same love and respect are powerfully demonstrated early in the novel through the way Irene takes care of her senile mother, Annie. The old woman is utterly helpless, but in Irene's attention to the slightest of details - covering the woman's naked body when she bathes her, finding the radio station with the right music, and sitting with her mother in the evenings rather than rushing home - she demonstrates a profound respect for the dignity of her mother's existence.

It is interesting that in a novel entitled Blood Ties the ending has two of the MacDermot children leave their family and home to live in other parts of the country. As the love Maufat has for Leah demonstrates, the novel is not so much about "blood" ties as it is about "love" ties. The reader may be certain that the bonds which hold the MacDermot family together will transcend both temporal and geographical realities just as they already transcend the reality of biology.

The love between characters and the mythical flavour of their family milieu are conveyed in both of Richards' novels through his exploration of their subjective experiences and responses to the world. In both novels, he portrays some of his characters in confrontation with the way in which their

families are perceived by characters outside their immediate circle of friends and associates. During these confrontations characters are shocked and disturbed by what they intuitively experience as unfair assaults upon the integrity of their families. During one of his memories in The Coming of Winter, Clinton recalls the occasion when he had to visit William's teachers because the boy had been involved in a schoolyard brawl. Clinton is made to feel as though both his son and his family were on trial because of the the principal's insinuating and patronizing comments: "you're Catholic? Does the family worship together"; "it is the responsibility of the parents to instill in their children respect for the Lord"; and "if William had a proper understanding of religion, then he mightn't be acting in this manner." [94] By stating the obvious in terms of parental obligations, the principal, Mr. Shale, betrays an assumption that Clinton either is ignorant of these obligations or has failed to live up to them. Also, Shale's choice of wording in the conditional phrase, "if William had a proper understanding of religion", reveals his assumption that William does not have a proper understanding. Clinton recognizes the disguised abuse directed towards his family in the principal's comments and a blatant unfairness in his decision to expel William and not the other boy involved in the fight; he responds to this unfairness by defending both his son's and his family's integrity:

> "You know why eh - you know why he never wanted to fight. [The other boy] He was too gutless and you and your piano fingers - you're too goddam gutless. We go to church just as much as you. You can't understand anyone fighting because you were afraid to. So you expel him and you won't expel the other boy."
>
> "Mr. Dulse," Shale said, red-faced and rising, hiding his fingers behind the desk ...
>
> "If there was a whole nest of whores outside," Clinton said menacingly, "neither of you'd know how to catch the clap." [95]

Clinton meets the injury directed at his family in the principal's insinuations with an equal show of verbal force but Clinton's is delivered honestly and directly rather than being disguised in a patronized tone of concern.

During a confrontation between Cathy and her math teacher, Mr. Hol , in Blood Ties, Richards portrays an outside view of the MacDermot family through Mr. Holt's perspective. The confrontation occurs when Holt discovers that Cathy has not finished her math assignment: "Well, fine, keep it up ...You won't graduate but keep it up, be like your sister before you -".[148] Holt is immediately aware that he has transgressed his bounds as a teacher by commenting on Cathy's sister; he tries to make amends for his boldness by elaborating - "I used to travel on the bus with Leah. She was the smartest person on the bus too ... But she didn't study ... she could have been anything, but she didn't study..."[148] Because the reader has become familiar with the MacDermot family through their subjective experiences, the assumptions betrayed in Holt's comments, that only through formal education may one fulfil one's potential, are

disturbing. Indeed, Cathy's classmates who have overhead the exchange experience Holt's comments as discriminatory - "If I were you Cathy, I'd take it to the school board - talking about your parents. He's not allowed to talk about your parents, anybody that talks about your parents I'd bring to the school board." [149] There is a sense of unfairness in Holt's comments to Cathy, just as there is in Mr. Shale's insinuations toward Clinton, which arises from the fact that through the perusal of the characters' subjective experiences, the reader is aware of the many potentialities for fulfilment. Both the Dulses and the MacDermots experience fulfilment in their relationships with each other and through the experiential knowledge of the world they have gained through their experiences.

It is undeniably frustrating for Mr. Holt, as a teacher, to witness the scholarly potential of his students remaining unfulfilled. Holt's comments, together with his consciousness of being out of line, express his genuine concern and his frustration. Unlike the reader, neither Holt nor Shale has the benefit of perceiving the MacDermots or the Dulses from their subjective perspectives. Here again, Richards portrays the ambiguous nature of human situations. There remains a moral ambiguity in the reader's simultaneous appreciation both for Holt's perspective and sentiments and for the sense of fulfilment which the Dulses and MacDermots experience. What Richards seems to be attempting in both novels, through his

concentration on the characters' subjectivity, is to inspire in his readers an appreciation of human integrity, potential, and fulfilment. Rather than regarding human relationships and spiritual predicaments abstractly, as though they could be detached from their subjective context, Richards seems to want his readers to appreciate them in terms of the concrete experiences from which they emerge.

NOTES

1 William Barret, Irrational Man: A Study of Existential Philosophy (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962), p.142.

2 Barret, p.142.

3 Barret, p.171.

4 David Adams Richards, The Coming of Winter (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), p.45. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

5 H.W. Connor, "Coming of Winter, Coming of Age: The Autumnal Vision of David Adams Richards' First Novel," Studies in Canadian Literature, 9, No.1 (1984), pp. 31-40.

6 Connor, p.33.

7 Connor, p.36.

8 David Adams Richards, reading from For Those Who Hunt the Wounded, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, N.B., Dec. 1991.

9 Andrew Garrod, "Interview with David Adams Richards," Speaking For Myself (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater Books, 1986), p.111.

10 Richards constructs an overlapping effect of past and present by juxtaposing the experience of Clinton and Rubena while they anxiously wait for Kevin to return with memories of the night their first son died when they had similarly waited.

Emotional parallels are drawn between both times by Clinton's consciousness of having reacted to Rubena's concern with the same words. The following exchange takes place as they sit in the parlour waiting for Kevin:

> But in a while his wife became nervous again and fidgeted for something to do...
> "...I wish you were the least bit interested. [Rubena speaking] He could be lying somewhere shot to death at this very moment, Clinton."
> "Well if he is -." He stopped short of saying what he was going to, remembering how many years ago was it he had said the same thing. There was an instantaneous sweat upon him and he looked. Silence once again.[48]

The cause of Clinton's panic is conveyed a few pages down when he remembers having said the same as what he had started to say above in response to Rubena's concern for William:

> ...one night he found himself an old man with his wife coming in to where he was and sitting beside him agitated...
> "William should have been in hours ago," she said...
> He said nothing.
> "Clinton - he might be dead," she said pale with fright.
> "Well if he is," he finally answered harshly, "what in Christ's name can I do about it!"[50]

It is not until later in the novel when Clinton remembers the grief he experienced when he tried to find William under the ice that the reader truly appreciates Clinton's horror at catching himself saying the same with regards to Rubena's concern for Kevin as what he had said on the night William died.

11 Kevin's fear of water is revealed in a memory he has of witnessing the drowned body of a boy pulled from the water:

> Depth. A hideous liquid encasement. He had seen them take a youngster from the water the summer before. Three days in the water tangled in construction wire under the bridge; ripped and swollen body, its bloated purple face. And he had run to see it; he, frightened by the depth and the blackness of the bay, frightened on the floes, frightened on his father's drifter as a child, had run to see. [33]

12 David Adams Richards, Blood Ties (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), p.151. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

CHAPTER THREE:

LIVES OF SHORT DURATION AND ROAD TO THE STILT HOUSE

There is a marked difference between Richards' focus in his third and fourth novels, Lives of Short Duration and Road to the Stilt House. What Richards achieved in terms of calling forth the mythological dimension of families' histories in his first two novels, he achieves in epic proportion in Lives of Short Duration: through the composite of his characters' memories and their recollections of local folklore, the nine-month period covered by the action in the novel opens up to encompass approximately one hundred and fifty years - from pioneer society to the present in the late 1970's. In Road to the Stilt House the focus zeros in on the experiences of a single family and, in particular, of one character. While Richards used his characters' memories extensively in his earlier novels to encompass the history of his families and communities, Road to the Stilt House concentrates primarily on the present, covering approximately one and a half years. Memories are used sparingly to reveal, in the starkest of ways, how particular moments in the past have affected the way characters experience their lives.

There is also a radical difference in Richards' narrative approach and voice in both novels. The narration of Lives

represents the furthest Richards has gone in his attempts to replicate his characters' thought processes. In the voice of an omniscient narrator, Lives follows the inner thoughts and impressions of four different characters, all members of the Terri family. The narration proceeds through what Andrew T. Seamen describes as a "relentless pursuit of random associations" 1: the narrative continuously "drifts" away from particular scenes before they are "fully developed", returning to them only after exploring the random memories or series of associations which erupt into the characters' consciousness. The "real structure" of the novel, suggests Seaman, is cumulative rather than explicit; the development of plot, character, and setting are realized by the reader at the end of the novel through the accumulation of details. Richards continues his project of revealing the inner life of his characters in Road to the Stilt House by experimenting for the first time with first person narration. In part one of Road the narration alternates between the first-person confessions of the protagonist, Arnold, and the narration of an omniscient third-person: this alternation permits us both to observe Arnold's actions on the surface and to move down into the underworld of his inner self where we discover the spiritual and emotional motivations behind his gestures and speech.

Despite their differences in structure, narrative approach, and focus, the novels are similar in terms of their

philosophical commentary on the North American society they portray. The social background of both Lives and Road is hauntingly similar to the "North American Mass Society" envisioned by George Grant in his Philosophy in the Mass Age. North America, writes Grant, "is the only society that has no history of its own before the age of progress, and we have built here the society which incarnates more than any other the values and principles of progress."2 Grant describes progress as the "primal" or "archetypal" experience in the collective consciousness of North America. The two distinguishing characteristics of this society are the "domination of man over nature through knowledge and its application" and "some men's dominance over other men." 3 North American history, suggests Grant, consists of the re-enactment of crimes against nature and against humanity, committed in the name of progress through each succeeding generation, on increasingly grander and more complex scales. The en masse domination of humanity by a few corporate elites is conducted through the manipulation of individuals both at work and at home: the work place is ruled by "scientific efficiency experts," and family life is manipulated through the popular media to service the corporate elite:

> The American family (though made more prosperous than the ordinary family so that the acquisitive desire will be aroused) is described and exalted in its life, which is so perfectly adjusted to the world of life insurance, teen-age dating, and the supermarket. This, of course, glorifies our society as it is. Here is the way all decent Americans live and here is the way all mankind

should live. 4

Grant sees an historical distinction between American liberalism and Canadian traditionalism. There exists within the collective Canadian consciousness knowledge of a way of life which is not based on the devastating tenets of progressivism. Many of Grant's philosophical observations on Canadian history and politics are presented in the form of a lament for the fact that this traditional way of life is being superceded (v. Lament For A Nation) by the movement in Canadian politics and ideology towards participation in the "homogenized culture of the American Empire".5 Particularly in Lives of Short Duration, through his characters' memories, and the experiences of characters who have lived in the natural world trapping, fishing, and hunting, Richards argues with Grant that in Canada there is another archetypal mode of participating in the world which does not involve the domination of nature or of others. In both his third and fourth novels, Richards explores the dismay experienced by his characters with the displacement of their rural, cultural identity and their experiential knowledge by progressive ideologies and industrialized urban culture. In Lives of Short Duration this displacement is experienced in the wake of industry and the belief in progress and, in Road to the Still House, in the wake of social engineering through legislation, social activism, and the popular media.

A general acceptance of the notion that society has

progressed and will continue to do so far into the future is demonstrated in Lives by many of the characters and by the popular media which continuously solicit them in a subliminal fashion - commercial jingles from the radio and television constantly filter in and out of the characters' consciousness. The lonely, self-tortured and self-destroyed Lance cheerfully tells Old Simon that "people today don't have to stay together"6, implying that couples like Old Simon and Merium stayed together for 55 years only because they had to. A young, successful real estate agent on the television gives witness to how "different" (and, it is implied, how much better) her life is "from her mother's" because she uses tampons. Against this kitsch and cheerful faith in progress, however, evidence piles up in the novel giving testimony to the opposite: the displacement of Native American culture is paralleled by the displacement of rural culture; the water systems are polluted to the extent that the river once famous as the "Atlantic Salmon Centre of the World" is now depleted of its fish population; ancient, primeval forests are reduced to clear-cut acreage; the dehumanizing treatment of individuals by institutions inspires bewilderment and nihilism; and the self-centred cult of individualism results in the wide-scale lack of commitment to other humans. James Doyle accurately describes Lives as "concentrated reflections on modern North American society" which "destroys nature and aboriginal peoples, ruthlessly sets individuals against each

other ... then salves its conscience with meaningless gestures of institutionalized benevolence." 7 The novel is a "bitter indictment" of society, concludes Doyle, which is "unrelieved by irony or by prominent suggestions of counteracting positive values".8

The vision of society in Lives is undeniably bleak, but as Douglas Glover observes, there is always a balance between opposites and extremes in Richards' vision, between the ugly and the beautiful, the brutal and the sublime. Though the protagonists of Lives participate in the destructive and brutal aspects of their society, they, nevertheless, respond to this society and its faith in progress with a bewilderment and contempt which arise from a tension they experience within themselves. Relief from the novel's bleak vision may be experienced through this inner tension together with the negative response it elicits from the members of the Terri family.

A single sentence near the end of Part One may be viewed as a comment on what Richards is attempting to do with his novel: "But the memories were present as in all women/men on the river. Present." [52] The sense that the memories of the past influence the manner in which the present is experienced is conveyed through the emphasis on their continued presence in the "present" of consciousness. Indeed, it is through Richards' exploration of his characters' collective and individual memories that he conveys how they participate in

the world. From the collage of memories explored in Lives, there emerge two separate traditions or modes of participation in the world: the modern, industrial tradition bequeathed the community by the pioneer Hitchman Alewood, and the pre-industrial, pre-modern tradition to which the Terris have access through their memories of the family patriarch, Old Simon. Knowledge of both worlds is present in the Terris' collective consciousness, and it is the tension between these two separate modes of experience that influences how they confront the world.

A dominant figure in the collective memory of the community in Lives is the legendary pioneer Hitchman Alewood. The importance of the Hitchman Alewood story is realized when it is understood as the "myth" or "primal" experience of the industrialized, "mass society" in Lives which is ruled by that which Grant refers to as the "acquisitive desire." The mythical character of the Hitchman/Emma Jane story is conveyed through the continued presence of the two through time in the collective consciousness of the community through subsequent generations.9

The myth of Hitchman Alewood represents the community's primal experience of progress and all this entails concerning the conquest and domination of both nature and other humans. According to legend, Hitchman founded the community when he began his saw-milling and shipbuilding enterprises along the river. A vision of how Hitchman's early conquest and

exploitation of nature have been re-enacted through succeeding generations is experienced by one of the characters, Lester Murphy:

> Alewood's money sent the first lumber down to the mill and out across the ocean and helped finance the last square-riggers to be built on the river. He [Lester] now saw the last of it coming. Life of course would go on, and go on merrily, the lumber might still go out, the vacant looking ships. The paper boats glided over the surface of the oily water, fathoms down salmon would struggle through flecks of fibre and swill. New faces would rise up with the expedients to make it rich. [226]

It was in the name of "expedience", no doubt, that Hitchman imported Swedes to cut his wood because they worked for almost nothing. His exploitation of other humans, however, is conveyed in more depth through his relationship during the 1880s with the sisteen-year-old Native American woman, Emma Jane Ward, whom he kept as a mistress in a house outside the village.[78] Emma Jane is physically isolated from her cultural community when Hitchman uses his influence to have the Indian Council ban her from the reserve; an accompanying spiritual deculteration is effected through Hitchman's seducing her with "trinkets, presents, hats and boots."[78] Emma Jane, proud of her new status, parades her wealth in front of her brother Tom Proud - corrupting his soul with the same "acquisitive desire" for possessions and power - "ha ha ha Tom - la la la - Hishman - Mr. Hishman will hit you 'gain Tom".[121]

The dissociation of Emma Jane from her cultural and spiritual roots is evoked in descriptions of her which

emphasize the absurd, alien character of her "trinkets" in the context of her physical, geographical reality: "Emma Jane Ward walked the roadway dressed in the latest fashion - her soft leather boots in the rutted earth." [79] The description of Emma Jane's face "corrupted with imported cosmetics in the drivelling sunlight" [121] is reminiscent of "Edith" and "Catharine Tekakwitha" in Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers,10 whose metaphysical transformations are satirically symbolized, respectively, by physical perfection and white, incorruptible skin after death. Indeed, there is a suggestion that at the core of Emma Jane's fascination with material wealth rests the belief that they are the visual signs of an advancement beyond her original state of being. This notion becomes manifest in her taunting insistence to Tom that he must "pray to her" for the possessions he, in turn, has been spurred into wanting - "you pray - pray to me Tom. Pray to me." [122] Emma Jane's notion of prayer, here, comes from a misunderstanding of Hitchman's use of idiom:

> "He don't look much proud to me, girl," Alewood said. Or: "What does he want?"
> "Money Hishman - he wants $3."
> "Money is it - tell him the only way he'll ever get money is if he prays for it, girl - eh?" [121]

The tragedy of both Emma Jane and Tom lies in the fact that they are torn from their experiential roots by the seductive belief that their existence will be truly authentic if they participate in the materialist world of the Alewoods; their alienation from their cultural base results in their inner

spiritual alienation.

The exploitative relationship between Hitchman and Emma Jane does not end in their generation but is repeated in the gap that exists between the subsequent generations of their descendants. Hitchman's legitimate descendants through Amanda, his "semi-aristocratic" wife from Boston, [129] enjoy the benefits of his fortune, channelling his money into a "thriving plastics factory" in Boston. [267] His illegitimate descendants, through Emma Jane, grow up on the reserve where their standard of living is compared, through the process of associations in Old Simon's mind, to that of developing nations:

> People with swollen bodies lay in various corners of the earth - so Anne Murray told him on the television, people with their skins wracked with sores, or hungry ... and children with flies crawling over their body, as he'd seen them crawl over Daniel Ward's children in Daniel Ward's house - and Daniel Ward's and Burton Crow's children had various itches and couldn't sleep, and everyone fought over jams and things. [107]

As the relationship between Randolf Alewood and the subservient Daniel Ward demonstrates, one half of Hitchman's descendants are dominated and exploited by the other half.

In the three generations which follow the time of Hitchman Alewood, Richards deliberately draws parallels between the "mythical" past and the present to show how the archetypal domination by Hitchman has been re-enacted through succeeding generations on larger and more complex scales. In a sweeping vision of the community's history Old Simon's mind

surveys the genealogy of past and future crimes committed against nature and humanity in the name of progress and expedience:

> The village now had street lights, and paved streets, with elms lining the drives, and it had modern stores - it had three churches and those three churches sat on those side streets and their bells chimed on Sunday. From a haphazard road it had changed (slowly conditioned by time), to become like all villages with streets and elms and churches. And there was talk of a new mall with a K-mart and there was talk of a MacDonald's fast-food hamburger restaurant. They said that there were great deposits of iron ore under the earth - so that even if over the next decade the mills shut down there was iron ore. And the children and their children, and the children of those children, by men's expedience to do what they had to do would go into the future. When the woods were gone the river'd be gone, but there'd be iron ore, and when that was gone there was uranium also. [137-138.]

Richards uses the word "expedience" to convey the sense that the exploitation of the earth is conducted out of self-interest; the question of what is just or right does not enter into the equation.

Through the experiences of Old Simon and his presence in the memories of his descendants, Richards points toward the existence of another "primal", "archetypal" experience which has not involved the domination of nature or of other humans. Having survived 60 years of his life in the woods, the eighty-two-year-old Simon is experientially rooted in the area's history, geography, and mythology. Part Two of Lives, entitled "Hallowe'en", explores the memories and thoughts of Old Simon on Hallowe'en from the time he leaves the hospital, where he has been undergoing tests on his leg and spine, and

spends the night with his family, up to his disappearance the following day into the woods.

Dismay and bewilderment with the changes that have taken place in his community are revealed in Old Simon's thoughts: concerns with the corrupt misuse of the forest and river and with the large-scale displacement of the area's cultural identity. In the broad spectrum of people who trail past his view, Old Simon confronts a community which has lost touch with its own cultural and spiritual ground. The "acquisitive desire," with its motivating spiritual quest to live "the way all mankind should live"11 according to the popular icons provided on the television, has inspired Georgie's ill-fated attempts to found a financial dynasty by emulating the ruthless entrepreneurs, Lester Murphy and Ceril Brown; it has inspired the attempts of Lois, Little Simon, and Packet to authenticate themselves during various phases of their lives by participating in the alien trends of pop culture - wearing medallions and skin-tight pink shirts and following the hordes to the "Real Thing Disco" where they drink "zombies". Utterly divorced from the Canadian hinterland in which they live, people drive around in vans with tropical scenery painted across their sides and spend a month's wages on such novelties as boa constrictors. The community's experiential ground - its history, mythology, geography, and climate, from which its distinct cultural identity emerges - has been displaced by the kitsch homogeneity (or "unwholesome anonymity"[254], as Packet

Terri later describes it) of an urbanized, North American mass identity.

Old Simon's choice to die in the woods where he has spent most of his life can be interpreted as a gesture of turning his back on the modern, progressive world. There is something in Old Simon reminiscent of the "beauty of strength broken by strength but still strong" of A.J.M. Smith's "The Lonely Land".12 This particular beauty and strength are evoked in one of the final images of Old Simon just before he disappears forever; Old Simon pauses to gaze upon the sleeping Lois, who has kept vigil by his bedside during the night:

> He leaned hunched against the window like an old beaten/unbeaten fighter - an odd antipathy to himself in the dim early-morning smell of dresser and mattress, the cool dust.[148]

Old Simon's return to the woods to die and his acute knowledge of the natural world lend a mythic aura to his memory in the collective consciousness of the Terri family. A passage in Part One, during which Georgie suddenly remembers the winter he accompanied his father to the frozen lakes deep in the forest, demonstrates Old Simon's presence in Georgie's consciousness:

> Oh, the fires of winter. How lovely they were. And his father could walk in a straight line - straight through the worst cedar swamp, by taking readings from tree to tree.
>
> "Don't be frightened George," he used to say. His father smelled of balsam. Ah, the fires in the winter, beyond the lake - cold cold fires in the winter, beyond the lake, the clear ice when the snow blows across it, the blue ice with rounded air bubbles - the fires, cold and far away beyond the lake where they went to fish through the ice...

Cold fires, the petrified smell of balsam. Ah
his eyes - Old Simon's eyes - far far away. [46]

The sheer force of the vision is suggested in the clean, sharp manner in which it penetrates through the drunken haze of Georgie's consciousness - a clarity which is realized through the sharp scent of balsam associated with Old Simon and the astringent, tactile images of cold, ice, and snow. The sense that Old Simon is a part of this natural setting is suggested in his ability to know exactly where he is by taking readings from the trees and by his perfect comfort so far away from civilization. A mythical quality is conveyed in the temporal and geographical distance suggested by the repetition of "far away". The reference to looking down through the clear ice at the frozen air bubbles is suggestive of looking down through time at the moments such as this which have become permanent features of one's consciousness.

Part three of the novel follows the inner thoughts and memories of Old Simon's half brother, the entrepreneurial Lester Murphy, who is a direct cultural heir of Hitchman Alewood - an idea which is suggested in the fact that one of the first things Lester does after amassing his fortune is to build a replica of Hitchman's house. This section of the novel ends dramatically when he is run down by a van and killed. Like his half-brother, Lester is dismayed by the spiritual disorientation and dehumanization he witnesses in the society around him. He is particularly dismayed at how his own position as a leader in the community is displaced by

the next generation of entrepreneurs. Unlike Old Simon, Lester is destroyed by the society he has participated in all of his life (ironically, the van which runs him down is painted with tropical scenes and driven by the adolescent he had tried to coerce into burning down his tavern in an insurance fraud).

Again, unlike Old Simon, Lester is haunted before his death by the knowledge of his participation in the dehumanizing cruelty and shallowness of the society which has destroyed him. His self-pity is penetrated by the memory of the despicable manner in which the people he had once consorted with tried to reduce people's humanity in order to boost their own self image; in particular he remembers how, growing up, he learned that "squaw meant nothing other than cunt, and buck nothing other than cock." [224] Recognizing the inherent cowardice behind this behaviour he acknowledges his own guilt: "And growing up he learned that it was cowardice - all this talk. And that he partook in the cowardice and listened, and appreciated it." [224]

The presence of Old Simon's memory in his descendants' minds bespeaks a knowledge, regardless of how realized or intellectualized this knowledge may be, of a way of participating in the world that does not involve the domination of others and of nature. Though the grotesque labyrinth of Georgie's interior existence in Part One reveals his participation in the shallowness and brutality of the "mass society" which surrounds him, his conscience does not

allow him to participate in this world with the blind optimism of Lance or the woman in the tampon advertisement. Georgie's mind is haunted by visions of the cruel and brutal acts he has witnessed in the war, in books (like Torso, about a person chopped to pieces in Hamilton, Ontario, which is high on his reading list), amongst the political parties in his community, within his own neighbourhood, and, finally, within his own family - namely, his own brutal treatment of his sons Little Simon and Packet. One memory which particularly haunts him is of the time he tried to impress the entrepreneur Ceril Brown, by forcing Packet's, then Little Simon's, heads into the toilette bowl as he flushed it. His memories of Little Simon's panic-stricken cries are experienced all the more painfully because they coincide with Georgie's memories of his son's recent suicide.

A portrait of George Terri's inner self emerges through the accumulation of his memories and emotional responses; the reader is impressed with the sense that Georgie's destructive alcoholism stems from his painful consciousness of having betrayed his family and himself. His sense of self-betrayal is suggested in thoughts about his having tried unsuccessfully to be "sly" and aggressive like the entrepreneurs, Lester Murphy and Ceril Brown -

> And hadn't he tried to wear what Lester Murphy did?...But by then it was already too late. Murphy had gone on into apartment buildings and fishing camps. And then Ceril Brown rose up to occupy the vacuum Murphy had left. There was something sly about them. Though Georgie credited himself with

> often acting as sly as Lester Murphy - or even slyer..."Oh am I sly!: No, no, no. The noise hurt his head. You weren't really that sly, truly you weren't..." [51-52]

After Georgie thinks with disgust about a particular priest in his parish who used his position to bull. the children in Bible camp, Georgie's consciousness of his own bullying, however shallow and reluctant this consciousness may be, is revealed in the line, "it easily erased itself from Georgie's mind, as did the sound and some of the terror of his own brutish life." [53] Georgie evades the painful epiphany which looms just beneath the surface of his conscious thoughts. Despite this reluctance, however, the fact that his conscience has not allowed him to participate in the brutality of the entrepreneurial world demonstrates the presence of knowledge within him concerning an alternative mode of participation - one which does not require the sly aggressiveness of the entrepreneurs he had striven to emulate.

Parts One and Three of the novel, which centre on the experiences of Georgie and Lester, respectively, are entitled "Graduation". The title is directly associated with the high school graduation festivities which take place in the immediate background, the sounds of which periodically filter into the consciousness of both characters. The title has a more sinister connotation, however, when the brutal world, into which the town's youth are being graduated, is slowly revealed through their memories. This notion is reinforced in Georgie's bitter recognition of the ironic role fulfilled by

the bullying priest as adult "ambassador" to childhood.[52]

Part Four of the novel explores the interior wanderings of Georgie's oldest son, Packet Terri. Packet's spiritual quest to understand the complicated processes experienced by his family and, historically, by his community is symbolized in his literal wandering from one end of the country to the other. Part Four is named "Victoria" after Packet's final destination. Like Old Simon and Lester Murphy, Packet surveys the genealogy of crimes committed in the name of progress and expedience; Packet's vision incorporates a more conscious analysis of the destructive legacy left by figures like Hitchman:

> ... we too ... have joined, and bragged about having and wanting, the great unwholesome anonymity of North America.[254]

Conscious of the "acquisitive desire" that has propelled so many in their search for authenticity, Packet thinks -

> So we have wanted and finally achieved our discos, our McDonald's fast food, our shopping malls and book stores with biographies of American politicians and Hollywood movie-stars. Quite a legacy left by Alewood, by Randolf himself whom Old Simon took hunting.[267]

Implied here is Packet's consciousness that a unique and distinct identity - be it rooted in the Canadian heritage or, more specifically, in New Brunswick's Miramichi heritage - is displaced by the self-destructive drive for North American anonymity. More than Old Simon's other heirs, Packet shares his grandfather's knowledge of the natural world and is able to survive in nature self-sufficiently; his dismay occurs

because of his consciousness of the distinct legacy available to his community in its geography and history.

At the end of his wanderings Packet discovers a childhood friend in Victoria, Emma Jane Ward (II), named after her great grand-mother. They fall in love and rumours of their engagement reach their families back home. The relationship between the two is prevented from being romanticized by the reader because of Packet's bitterness toward his community's history, which is vented in the final scene when he drunkenly offends his patronizing, middle class uncle Tully. But Packet's and Emma Jane's relationship should be appreciated for the fact that, because it is based on mutual love and respect, it does not repeat the archetypal pattern of dominance and exploitation instituted by Hitchman Alewood and his relationship with the first Emma Jane.

Revealed in the exploration of his troubled thoughts is Packet's own tragi-comic vision of the world. This vision is conveyed in his consciousness of both the tragedy and comedy in life, the dark and the light, the corrupt and the innocent, the ugly and the sublime. Packet's particular way of seeing the world is conveyed in the following-

> A steel rod of pain, as exacting as a surgeon's instrument at the centre of his life, while all around him sat the beauty of the earth, the stars forever, and the sun gracing the window after rain, or Donnie Murphy walking along collecting bottles silently.[237]

There is a sense that Packet's inner search to comprehend the history of his community ends with an encompassing vision

which recognizes, beyond its violence and brutality, the innate beauty and strength of the men and women who have lived and worked along the banks of the river. In the sheer will demonstrated throughout history by these men and women to survive and to raise their families so that there would be subsequent generations, Packet sees beauty and strength of spirit. His love for both his community and for Emma Jane seems voiced in the final words of the novel "OIGOA/Sepoitit" - Micmac for "you are beautiful".

The social background of Road to the Stilt House is similar to that of Lives of Short Duration. In Road, Richards isolates and develops his concern with how, through social institutions and the popular media, both the domestic realm of private homes and the cultural identity of communities are disrupted by the manipulative engineering of social visionaries. Focusing on Arnold's family, Richards explores how the world of private homes (that which, in his earlier novels, is shown to be constituted by a family's experiential rootedness in history and geography) is dismantled by the deterministic manipulation of social engineers, resulting in the breakdown of relationships and the displacement of identity. On a broader level, he explores how the large-scale disruption of a community's collective experience and recognized means of symbolic representation results in the breakdown of its collective or cultural identity.

The devastation effected by the deterministic form of manipulation described here is suggested symbolically at the beginning of the novel by Arnold's description of the road he lives beside, a road which is part of an aborted rural development project instigated by the provincial government -

> It's a road in the back end of our province, tattooed and broken. They said they were going to make it larger, and there'd be a lot of commercial enterprise on it, and that it would be opened up to all sorts of things. They have even ploughed back some gravel a little - but they haven't done anything else. So the road looks like a grey snake skin that follows the shale and ditches, and trees scared and fallen over.13

The disruption of the experiential ground or foundation from which both individuals and communities derive their sense of self is symbolized by Arnold's house on stilts, suggesting that not only Arnold but all of the society depicted in the novel is on the "road" to the "stilt house."

Road to the Stilt House could be described as a poetic documentation of the violation and destruction of Arnold's family by the meddling of social institutions. In his exploration of how Arnold's home is destroyed through the disruptive interference of the social welfare system and the family courts, Richards is not suggesting that society withhold assistance from those who need it; he is criticizing how financial assistance is accompanied by the attempts to disrupt and reorganize the internal structure of family relationships. One of the few memories Richards includes in this novel is of the day that the family courts decided to

place Arnold's young brother Randy in a foster home. The memory recalls Arnold's experience of helplessness and his sense of the subtle form of violence inherent in the court's decision and subsequent action:

> I was taken to family court then, and saw a big building that had the odour of musty carpets and long cold stairways. I remember the November sun through the dark afternoon windows like blood. They were high windows, like those in a Catholic church but with no agonies on them.[10]

An omniscient power of the family courts over Arnold's family is suggested by the comparison of the building to a church; the remoteness of the court room from the intimacy of the family's home and from each member's emotional turmoil is conveyed through its cold air, the absence of "agonies" or passions on the windows, and the musty smells so unlike the lived-in human smells of Arnold's house. Finally, the image of the sun pouring in through the windows "like blood" calls forth the violent apocalyptic nature of what takes place in the courtroom - the rending of Arnold's family. The insinuation in Arnold's next comment ("just because of fights at my house, simple and direct, without too much hitting") is that, because it is disguised in the benevolent dress of family <u>services</u>, the violence inflicted on his family by the courts is far more destructive than that which his family practises among itself.

The social worker and the cubmaster, Juliet and Craig,14 invade Arnold's house like its seasonal hornets, disrupting the integrity of the family's relationships through

the imposition of their agendas, and then abandon the household when the family's complete destruction is imminent (much like the provincial government had abandoned the road project after the land had been blasted and scarred.) As though repeating words which have been memorized from a government pamphlet or a CBC commentary, Arnold's family agree that "the social people have made important changes" in "Canada."[44] The narrator tells us that Arnold "didn't believe, as they all did, that things had gotten better since the social workers began to organize existence for them."[55] Arnold is profoundly disturbed as he witnesses the virtual disruption and dismantling of his family through Juliet's and Craig's involvement with his family.

The intrusive and violent nature of Juliet's presence is suggested at the beginning of the novel. Randy has just been returned to his home by the courts, but the joy of his return is dispelled because Juliet arrives to monitor the family to see if the home environment will be suitable. Her watchful insinuating presence immediately inspires the family with guilt:

> Juliet has driven here to see how Randy is; Juliet is our social worker ... I listen like a criminal to the guilt seeping through the house boards, and crawling belly down across the hot porch.
>
> Guilt at the edge of our trees.
>
> Juliet has watched me through our dirty window, our smell of human sadness, has watched me for a moment.[12]

Both guilt and sadness are private affairs of the soul; the

inspiration of guilt by a stranger together with her intrusive view of their sadness emphasizes the violative aspect of Juliet's presence. Richards intensifies the intimacy of the family's sadness by relating it in terms of the domestic "smell" of their house. Hence the violent intrusion of Juliet into the house is conveyed though her determined action of watching. The immediacy and intensity of the guilt are evoked in the imagery Richards uses to animate it - it is like a vapour which can't be contained and a grovelling beast.

Juliet's watchful presence and the guilt she inspires gnaw away at the family's dignity and integrity, which in turn affects their relationships. They are conscious of her presence even in her absence; it is not long before they begin to feel resentment towards Randy: "Randy spies on everyone in this goddamn house"[29] accuses Sadie one night. Arnold witnesses an exchange between Juliet and Randy that substantiates Sadie's accusation:

> How are you making out? she asked him.
> He looked at her a second and nodded, as if he were answering yes to a question.
> No, I mean how is everything, do you want to tell me?[30]

There is a leap between Juliet's "how is everything" and "do you want to tell me?" which betrays the prior assumption that there is something wrong. This prior assumption lurks constantly behind Juliet's gaze and her encouragement of Randy to "spy" on his family.

Revealed through Juliet's aggressive act of monitoring

Arnold's family and their corresponding passivity beneath her gaze is the unbalanced structure of her relationship with the family: Juliet's power to make decisions which will alter the lives of Arnold's family drastically (like removing Randy) and the family's corresponding helplessness. The inequality of their relationship is manifested in the fact that, while Juliet knows the most intimate details of the family's lives, they have no knowledge of hers. Her knowledge amounts to a form of power which she tactfully uses when her position and right to be in their home are challenged. On one occasion the tension Arnold experiences under Juliet's gaze becomes too much to bear; he challenges her with, "Why are you staring at me?"[55] Juliet responds with, "I'm not staring at you. Someone is paranoid."[55] The word "paranoid" makes reference to Arnold's history of mental illness and serves Juliet by distorting the reality of the situation to make it seem as though Arnold might be having psychotic delusions.

The unfairness of Juliet's knowledge of their most intimate experiences is expressed by the narrator with:

> She knew everything about Mabel.
>
> She knew all about Randy. (For instance, his bum was chafed. And she knew it all. All about his bum. But Randy knew nothing about her.).[72-73]

Shortly after this observation, government inspectors arrive to tell Mabel that the insulation in her house is ureaformaldehyde. In addition to patronizing her presumed level of intelligence by using the word "dirty" to describe

the hazard it represents to their health ("That was a good enough word to use",[103] they decided), they ask Mabel, "Don't you know why Randy's bum is chafed?"[102]. An utter disregard for the family's privacy and dignity is betrayed in this appropriation of what was told to Juliet in confidence for a governmental, hence public, report. What makes Juliet's relationship with the family artificial and thus dehumanizing is the fact that it is so one-sided. Because the family lacks knowledge of Juliet and her life there is nothing for the relationship to be based upon except her agenda. Interestingly, towards the end of the novel, Arnold is touched when he learns that Juliet is privately unhappy because she and her husband have been trying unsuccessfully for a long time to have a child. This is the only human fact Arnold ever learns about Juliet.

It is because of Juliet's encouragement that Randy joins the cub pack. His encounter with the cub pack, and particularly with the cubmaster, Craig, proves emotionally heartbreaking and spiritually destructive. Craig's leadership takes the form of coercion and bullying. Craig perceives Randy's blatant need of love and friendship as a repulsive weakness.15 He humiliates him by suggesting that his failure to pass his badges stems from some abnormality: "They aren't so difficult - for normal boys," says Craig tauntingly. The ideals which cub scouts seek to inspire - a sense of responsibility and concern towards the environment and other

people - are distorted by Craig's leadership into the notion that "might makes right". Craig tries to make a "man" out of Randy by coercing him into body-building. One night Craig tells Randy his neck muscles are too skinny; Randy returns home determined to build them up.[58]

The results which social institutions have had on Randy are revealed in the exchange his cousin Norman later remembers having with him:

> He told me...things - mostly in monosyllables, the way we talk here. Our most poignant conversations being nothing but a word or two - not much more than that...
>
> What does Juliet tell you?
> We must live as a family unit.
> How would that be?
> Like the foster home.[148]

The life-time experiences of intimate relationships, the shared mythology which Richards revealed in his earlier novels to be the experiential substance behind the word "family", have been subverted through Randy's experiences with the social worker. His letter at the beginning of the novel [8] demonstrates a love for his family and his instinctual knowledge of his experiential rootedness in this particular family milieu. Randy's later acknowledgement of the artificial foster home as a real family reveals how the interference of the social worker has uprooted him from his experiential ground and distorted his sense of self.

Richards' portrayal of the destructiveness in Juliet's and Craig's programmatic approach to the problems in Arnold's family can be understood on a broader level as a criticism

against the general assumptions which lie behind the liberal social agenda and the naive use of institutional benevolence to instill this agenda. The assumptions Richards scrutinizes here are the notions that human nature is capable of being moulded through predetermined manipulation and that the problems of the human condition may be solved through scientific, rationalistic methods. In part two, Father Billy alludes to these assumptions and tactics with -

> "Meddling has killed them - legislation has destroyed their house - how can anyone be legislated to have honour, to love or hope for goodness - when there is triumph in the social worker's face and pride in the scoutmaster's eyes."[158]

Richards isolates, through parodic images of Juliet and Craig as messianic figures, a religious, apocalyptic dimension to their liberal faith in the ability to instill peace and wellbeing through rationalistic methods and to remould humans into something better, respectively. (Perhaps it is no coincidence that, together, their initials spell "J.C.") On one occasion Juliet is pictured as a christ-like figure, holding her hands aloft, offering peace to the family. During a fight in Arnold's house ("one of those terrible things that happen without anyone knowing why") Juliet arrives -

> ...Juliet stood in the midst of them trying to restore order. It was so awful for them to see her holding out her hands in a peaceful way, and trying to placate them...he looked upon her, as she came through the back door beyond the stinking garbage pots, and had her hands aloft, as if to offer them peace.[75]

Craig is described, on another occasion, as a shepherd to whom

the innocent look for leadership and protection: "The cubs traipsed along behind Craig, who carried a staff. They were called the beaver pack."[70] (The irony, of which Arnold is conscious, is that Craig's leadership, represented in the image by his "staff", is not used to lead and protect his flock but to bully them.)

In the quote from Luke at the beginning of the novel, Richards suggests a larger context in which to interpret both Juliet's attempts to usher a realm of peace into the chaotic milieu of Arnold's kitchen and the division between Arnold and his family concerning the benefits of having people like Juliet interfere with their lives. The quotation of Christ's statement -

> For hence forth there will be five in one house divided, three against two and two against three.[Luke 12:52.]

- is a comment on the "politics"[24,25], as Arnold calls them, at his house. But the quotation has a deeper significance when placed in its biblical context. The above is Christ's answer to his own rhetorical -

> Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth: No, I tell you, but rather division...[Luke 12:51-52]

The division Christ foresees is between those who truly understand the truth about the Kingdom of God and those who don't; this truth is more important than temporary harmony in the family or the community.16 The politics at Arnold's house are caused by the truth to which Arnold alone is attuned,

concerning the destructive nature of the social worker's involvement with his family.

On another level the division which Christ addresses is that between those who interpret His realization of the "Kingdom of God" in temporal, material terms and those who understand it in purely spiritual terms. This division has characterized the Christian church throughout its entire history. The allusion to Luke thus provides an interesting context for the messianic image of Juliet's attempt to usher peace into the here and now of Arnold's house and in her attempts to transform their lives through materialistic means.

Juliet's attempts to realize her liberal agenda may be viewed as representative of what some thinkers have described as the "parousiastic", religious element of liberal ideology through its immanentization of Christian eschatology. George Grant refers to this religious element in his Philosophy in the Mass Age when he identifies the very "foundation" of the "revolutionary tradition" and its belief in "progress" as the notion that "history is the sphere for the overcoming of evil."17 Eric Voegelin, in his "Liberalism and Its History", similarly identifies the parousiastic element of liberalism in its premise that "a condition of everlasting peace" may be attained through "rational methods." 18 Voegelin describes liberalism as "irrational" in its premise, because its goal requires nothing less than the transformation of human nature, whereas "the unchangeable nature of man constantly places

obstacles in the path to the paradisiacal goal."[19]

A unity of thought seems to exist between Voegelin's perception of liberalism as "irrational" in its premise and Richards' portrayal of Juliet's and Craig's failure to realize their liberal agenda in Road. Juliet and the social institution she represents do all they can to improve the material conditions of Arnold's home - when the unemployment stamps run out, they are given social assistance; they are provided with tips on hygiene and nutrition and given blankets, school supplies, meals on wheels, etc. But the family refuses to budge; when the furnace runs out of oil in midwinter, they do nothing; instead of eating nutritious meals, they fill up on pop and chips; instead of getting along better with each other because of their relief from financial burdens, their fights persist and even worsen.

Both Juliet and Craig are frustrated by their failures to improve the situation in Arnold's home and to reshape the family's consciousness so that each family member will perceive the problems and solutions from Juliet's and Craig's own perspectives. Similar to what Father Billy says about the impossibility of legislating such things as love and honour, Arnold says -

> There is something that Juliet doesn't know - that people cut each other open just for spite and you can't apply any words to it. The more you apply words, the more there is misunderstanding.[58]

What Richards suggests is that both Juliet and Craig, together with the social institutions they represent, lack an

appreciation of the fact that human consciousness cannot be shaped through rational, scientific, or materialist means; that human consciousness and the modes in which humans participate in the world are formed by movements within the soul in response to what takes place around them.

Richards has maintained that change can only occur as a result of some movement experienced within the heart or soul. Arnold experiences a moment of epiphany within the novel and, while it doesn't change the world, he nevertheless views the world in a different light and, in the days which follow, he acts spontaneously towards others with generosity and kindness. Awaking one night when the moon is full, he is struck with the thought of "how the earth looked eerie, and silent". [67] He goes down-stairs where his thoughts move from the anger he feels inside him to what the rest of the world might experience:

> Did others have his anger?
> Did the rest of creation share his burn?
> Or was it just him?
> Arnold?[68]

(The universality of Arnold's spiritual dilemma is elsewhere alluded to when he tells Randy, "loneliness is the human condition".[93]) But Arnold is drawn from the house and his anger out into the night where he experiences a mystic vision of beauty; like characters in Richards' previous novels, the experience is inspired by the natural world:

> How sweet the night was. How tender this autumn - even under the blood-red famished afternoons. There was a stillness everywhere. He thought of

> how these afternoons where given to him to enjoy, how the little stream that followed here sparkled, and there was no other way to say this, like diamonds. Clear as cut glass, and rolled-over coloured stones to the river.[68]

The mystic quality of the experience is evoked through Richards' use of poetic language. In the days which follow, Arnold is moved to provide a Christmas tree and presents for his family, and later to keep vigil at the hospital by Mabel's and Randy's death beds.

Periodically throughout the novel the prison being constructed at the end of the road "rears its ugly head" as though foretelling Arnold's eventual conviction and prison sentence. His fate can be interpreted naturalistically, as some critics have viewed it, as the consequence of heredity and environment, only if Arnold's spiritual struggle is eclipsed from the readers' view. Richards once suggested that an appreciation of Road to the Stilt House depended on an appreciation of Arnold's "philosophical dilemma".20 The substance of this philosophical dilemma is Arnold's recognition that the involvement of social institutions with his family has disastrous rather than beneficial effects and his inability to convince his family of this fact. When he expresses his anger at the humiliation and indignity experienced by his family due to Juliet's insinuations, she is able to distort the situation in such a way as to make it appear that he doesn't want to see his family succeed:

> ...if I show anger I'm in the wrong. If she [Juliet] tells Trenda to go away from me, and I

> show concern, I'm wrong ... If I show argument over the fact that she thinks so little of us she tells my mother what to cook - and just for fun I ask her what she cooks, then I'm wrong again. So whenever I look at her she has the upper hand, and I look away. I look away before I start to curse, for Mabel doesn't want trouble.[31]

Arnold is not tutored in philosophy or ideology and is therefore not capable of producing an appropriate argument against Juliet's interference which would satisfy her or a judge in family court. His argument is articulated in his attempts to challenge Juliet's right to be in his home and to turn the tables, as described above. Arnold uses the words "lies" and "tricks" to express his corresponding knowledge of how people are manipulated by advertising. One means of combatting the inherent violence of Juliet's and the media's manipulation of people is to behave in an equally violent manner, but with a violence that is not permitted - kicking the television because it "lies" to people and tries to "trick" them, or by expressing his anger and frustration verbally.

Arnold's only means of defence is to retreat into his "underworld", as he calls it, where "things don't bother" him.[32] The escape is marked by his gestures of "looking away", his "leaden" stare - "like an evening in November with the leaves rotted, and the trees as bare as black whips"[21] - and his "blink":

> I can remember it as far back as life itself. The blink to avoid the look of strangers in a room, the blink to look away from those who teased your mother about being dirty when you were ten; like

> the blink coming out of a movie, out of a theatre, in the middle of a scalding sun.[13]

Note how the innate violence Arnold confronts in the teasing remarks about his mother is conveyed through the reference to the scalding sun. On the title page, next to the quote from Luke, Richards quotes the following words from Camus: "Man can overcome any fate by scorn".[5] Conveyed in Arnold's facial expressions and gestures of blinking or looking away are indifference, scorn, and contempt. They are Arnold's only means of deflecting the violence he encounters in people's teasing, insinuating remarks, and in their self-profiting distortion of his arguments. It is on this means of deflection that the novel's introductory quote from Camus seems to comment. This same type of scorn was demonstrated in Lives of Short Duration by Old Simon, who started spitting on the hospital floor to protest against the patronizing treatment of the nurses - "It was better that he spit and be hated than talked to as a child and learn to like it."[61, Lives].21 Towards the end of the novel Arnold's scornful withdrawal from the world which has destroyed his family and his society is suggested by the narrator's comments -

> Seaweed knew something about the impertinence of power without questioning it or even knowing that he did. When he was bullied on the street he said: "Yes that's just what it's like."[140]

Appropriately, towards the end of Part One, as Arnold disappears increasingly into his underworld, the story is told increasingly by the narrator. Finally, in Part Two, when

Arnold has completely disappeared, the narration is handled exclusively by Norman.

Arnold reacts against the large-scale manipulation of society by the media and advertising agents for the same reason he reacts against the interference of social institutions with his family. On one occasion Arnold breaks his mother's radio because he is angry with the way she is influenced by the CBC: "She listened to all the CBC shows on it. She laughed when it told her to laugh, and got upset when it told her to."[101] After kicking in the television on another occasion, he confesses to Father Billy:

> It seems as if we are always getting tricked into believing who we are, or who we are supposed to be like. For the schoolgirls on this road, they are supposed to be like that girl on the billboard wearing those jeans.[111. The girl on the billboard is described on another occasion as reclined seductively on a blue cloud.]

Arnold's corresponding anger with how people remain passive beneath the manipulating force of social engineers and advertisers inspires him to tell his family, "we are all nothing...we are lies - and liars are nothing - they'll be forgotten."[64] But like some backwoods Cassandra, his lamentations and warnings are for the most part unheard.

One of the most important aspects of Norman's narration of Part Two is the fact that he independently supports Arnold's perceptions. An interviewer once pointed out to Richards that Arnold's suspicions might be regarded as arising from a "primitive them against me" perception of the world.22

At one point, too, Juliet, the social worker, discredits Arnold's suspicions by alluding to his past history of mental illness. Thoughts that Arnold's suspicions are primitive or paranoid delusions are countered by the fact that the more articulate and intellectual Norman shares Arnold's view.

Norman's dismay at the way people are manipulated en masse by the media is expressed in his complaint about the manipulation of his wife and other girls in the community through advertising:

> She always tried to wear skirts that would show her beautiful legs, even if she had to freeze in them in February. No-one here knows how to dress for winter even though they've spent their entire lives in it. The girls try to dress like some picture post card of somewhere else, some city they've seen on television or in the movies. [161]

Both Arnold, through his instinct and intuition, and Norman, through a similar intuition which he is able to intellectualize, are attuned to the same crisis in their society - the displacement of self-knowledge and cultural identity through the deterministic manipulation of larger social forces through the media. The reference to the rudiments of climate and dress suggests the displacement is experienced through the subversion or loss of experiential knowledge - the knowledge acquired through both physical and spiritual experiences in the world which is realized intuitively or intellectually within consciousness.

Both Lives of Short Duration and Road to the Stilt House

are undeniably bleak in their portrayals of the violence inflicted upon private individuals by larger corporate and social forces which attempt to manipulate the unsuspecting. Although he admits that Lives is a dark novel, Richards maintains that there is hope in the love demonstrated between some of the characters; speaking about Lois, for example, he says, "It doesn't matter what happens, what she says or how she reacts - you know Lois loves everybody. She has tremendous compassion for her family, her boyfriends."23 The heaviness of the vision in Lives is lightened during those moments when the special relationships between Lois, Old Simon, Little Simon, and Packet are explored. Particularly hopeful is the leap Lois has made in her relationship with her children from what her own relationship with the self-centred Elizabeth Ripley-Terri was like. Where Elizabeth Ripley-Terri would fight with her children over such things as chocolate bars, Lois is extremely generous. Too, Lois deliberately tells her daughter, Leona, "My, my dear someday now ya'll be far prettier than yer mother" [101] which is the opposite of how Elizabeth Ripley-Terri always told Lois she would never look as good as she.[77]

No matter how dark things get in Road to the Stilt House, Richards states, there is always someone who loves someone else.24 Arnold's love for his family cannot be disputed. His love is portrayed in his acts of generosity - putting up the Christmas tree and giving people presents, and in his vigil by

Mabel's and Randy's death beds. His attempts to have an investigation into the doctor's negligence in his care of Mabel demonstrate his love and his outrage at how his mother was mistreated. Even in his violent acts of kicking in the television and breaking his mother's radio, Arnold demonstrates his love and concern; for if he didn't love his family, he wouldn't care if they were manipulated unsuspectingly.

An appreciation of the integrity of Richards' characters and their relationships with each other in these novels depends upon an appreciation for the tragi-comic aspects of life which is demonstrated through the vision of Packet Terri in Lives of Short Duration. It is a vision that encompasses the tragic and the comic, the dark and the light. Richards relies upon the relationship between extreme and opposite characteristics to evoke the whole and complex nature of his characters' experiences. It is through the experience of the darkness and pain that lightness and joy are known. It is also through the experiences of both extremes that Richards' characters fully realize their humanity.

NOTES

1 Andrew T. Seaman, "All the Confusion of their Lives," rev. of Lives of Short Duration, by David Adams Richards, Atlantic Provinces Book Review, 9, No.1 (Mar. 1982), p.4.

2 George Grant, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1959), p.2.

3 Grant, Philosophy, p.4.

4 Grant, Philosophy, p.7-8.

5 George Grant, Lament For A Nation (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; 1965), p.4.

6 David Adams Richards, Lives of Short Duration (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), p. 63. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

7 James Doyle, "Shock: Recognition," rev. of Lives of Short Duration, by David Adams Richards, Canadian Literature 94 (Autumn 1982), p.129.

8 Doyle, p.129.

9 The "presence" of Hitchman and Emma Jane in the collective consciousness of the community is revealed in the various recollections of characters concerning specific features of the story and through the continued relation of geographical landmarks to their story. For example, everyone in the community is aware of the fact that Lester Murphy's

apartment building used to be the house where Hitchman lived with Emma Jane, and that Lester's tavern used to be Hitchman's store. On the place where Hitchman's sawmill once stood there is now a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet and on the spot where Emma Jane's strangled body was discovered, there now exists a tennis court.

10 Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

11 Grant, Philosophy, p.8.

12 A.J.M. Smith, "The Lonely Land," Canadian Anthology (Toronto: Gage Publishing Ltd., 1974), p. 269.

3 David Adams Richards, Road to the Stilt House (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1985), p.9. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

14 Though representatives of separate institutions, both Juliet and Craig are continuously associated throughout the novels as partners. Both work together in the community, keeping each other informed of the events taking place in Arnold's home. Their association is alluded to at the end of part one with Arnold's: "So they have left and gone away. Juliet and Craig...They are working on the road below me." [137]

15 The cause of Craig's disgust with Randy is alluded to by the narrator with: "There must have been something about Randy that reminded Craig of his own self-indulgent childhood.

For he gave the boy a dry, contemptuous look, and often sent him home from the Beaver den, lonely and crying." p.70.

16 George Arthur Buttrick, commentary ed., The Interpreter's Bible Vol. VII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p.373.

17 Grant, Philosophy, p.46-47.

18 Eric Voegelin; Mary and Kieth Algozin, trans., "Liberalism and Its History," Review of Politics, 37 (1974), p.510.

19 Voegelin, p.510.

20 Andrew Garrod, "Interview with David Adams Richards," Speaking For Myself (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater Books, 1986), p.221.

21 It is also the spirit behind Clarence Simms's scornful embrace of failure in order to preserve his pride: "Clarence found himself in the enviable position of playing tiresome fool to a man [the more successful Lester Murphy] who was supposed to be his partner, so that he must finally, to save some sort of pride, take a barbering course in one of those schools in the south of the province and live in some sort of scorn not only of riches, but in the end, of cleanliness and order."[Lives, 119]

22 Garrod, p.219.

23 Garrod, p.216.

24 Garrod, p.219.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Nights Below Station Street and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace

The dominant preoccupation of Richards' characters in his two most recently published novels is with the notions of social change and authenticity. In Nights Below Station Street Richards explores the attempts of various characters to change their lives in order to live authentically and in Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace he looks at the attempts of social visionaries and reformers to change the lives of others in the community who are perceived as being disadvantaged. While Richards continues to focus on his characters' subjective experience of the present and the experiential processes through which they gain knowledge and understanding, his prose is much simpler, and his narration takes a more detached and analytical perspective than in the previous novels. In these later novels, Richards often breaks from the characters' subjective experiences to describe the forces influencing their lives or the processes they experience, all of which the characters themselves are not fully conscious until perhaps a later time. This direct analysis of the characters' experiences guides the reader toward an understanding of the hidden emotional and spiritual

experiences which stir his characters and compel them to act as they do.

In his article entitled "Discourse and Determinism in Nights Below Station Street," Frank Davey gives an insightful analysis of Richards' more recent narrative presentation. Using the following passage from the novel as an example, Davey observes that Richards' narrative is presented in "simple sentences or simple sentences joined by and, but, or then, often elaborated by appositives or an appositional series of main clauses" 1:

> Joe got up at five every morning. He would look out the window, wonder what type of day it was going to be, smoke a cigarette, and then go downstairs and put on the kettle. Then he would go about town playing punch-boards and sit in the malls.
>
> Each day Joe would go downtown and see how people were doing. Then he would go to the unemployment office to see if there were any jobs. Then, on those days Rita was out, he would come back and do the housework, make lunch, and then go back downtown again. Sometimes he would stand about the corner listening to men talk, and then he would go up the hill once more, walk along the highway, and back to his house, where he would peel potatoes and wait for Adele.

Davey refers to Walter J. Ong, who, in his Orality and Literacy, describes the use of "additive rather than subordinative syntax" and of "aggregative rather than analytic" sentence structures as prominent features of "oral discourse". Instead of arranging its material into "greater and lesser, independent and dependent, primary and auxiliary", Richards' syntax, writes Davey, "uses its resources to list, accumulate and remember items of indeterminate and thus

roughly equal significance." 2

Davey suggests that while Richards' simple, additive syntax might appropriately reflect the "halting consciousness" of a "nearly illiterate" character like Joe Walsh 3, it is inappropriate as a means of reflecting that of other characters like Dr. Hennesey or his Oxford-educated niece, Vera. Davey experiences Richards' narrative as an over-determined statement of his characters' "powerlessness" to "in the smallest ways direct their futures" 4. Indeed, Davey argues, Richards' syntax "operates as a kind of parody, which both mocks and patronizes" 5 its characters' attempts to change.

In both of his recent novels, some of Richards' characters experience change for the better as the organic result of spiritual processes taking place within them; some attempt to change their lives and the lives of others by adopting current political attitudes and programs of thought. Richards treats with equal respect and sympathy the basic human encounter with alienation and the desire for authenticity, which are experienced by all of his characters and which inspire their attempts to change. While at times he treats the naive, programmatic approach of some characters to be or to appear authentic with humour, he in no way "mocks" or "parodies" their loneliness and need to exist in truth. Rather than being regarded as suitable only for characters who are "nearly illiterate", perhaps Richards' prose and narrative

presentation might better be appreciated for the manner in which they present with equal emphasis the relative integrity of all his characters and their experiences.

In Nights Below Station Street the narrative centres around the Walsh family and their circle of acquaintances, focusing primarily on the experiences of Joe Walsh and Adele, his step-daughter, during critical periods of their emotional and spiritual development. Having been an alcoholic for most of his adult life, Joe strives to be true to himself and his family by staying sober; his struggle is inspired by his becoming acutely conscious of how his drunken exploits have caused much pain to his family. During her adolescence Adele endeavours to find her niche in the world around her; this entails her coming to terms with the conflict she confronts spiritually between her loyalties toward the traditional rural culture that her family participates in and the current political attitudes voiced by her new circle of friends - the "back-to-the-land" movement and protests against hunting, for example - which, though not consciously, at times make a mockery of Adele's culture.

Typical of those characters with whom Richards has demonstrated more sympathy, both Joe and Adele face and resolve their conflicts intuitively - their spiritual journeys are characterized by an unreasoned openness toward family and tradition. Contrary to the unreasoned orientation of Joe and Adele's struggle for inner truth are the programmatic attempts

of Vera Pilar, one of the central figures in Adele's new circle of friends. Vera's attempt to live in truth involves her embracing each new social trend and political movement. While Richards demonstrates much sympathy for the very human experiences of alienation and loneliness which inspire Vera's attempts to live in truth, he portrays her particular approach as pretentious and unauthentic. When we first meet Adele Walsh she is unhappy with her family's social status and, shunning her parents' values, she attempts to emulate people like Vera who appear to be authentic and enlightened; over time, however, Adele realizes the integrity of her family's values and, in particular, develops an appreciation for the sincerity of her father's efforts to live in truth. Adele's own experience of truth consists of embracing her family and origins.

At the time of the novel's opening on Christmas Day, Joe has just collected his first one-month chip from Alcoholics Anonymous. Joe has reached the point where he has decided to begin a new and sober life. His decision evolves from his becoming conscious of the truth that in his drinking he was pursuing a false image he had always had of himself - that "it was only natural and authentic"[6] that he drink. In everyone "who presumed because of a drink that they had suddenly become authentic, Joe saw himself".[116] With time Joe has recognized that this image he had of himself was not true; for this reason and particularly because of the unhappiness his

drunken exploits have caused his family, he has stopped drinking.

The atmosphere in the Walsh home on Christmas Day is permeated with nervous tension: Joe is struggling silently to resist the temptation to drink while his family, seasoned by his behaviour on past Christmases, wait "on pins and needles, sure that at any moment a taxi would pull up to the door with a load of booze."[13] The tension of their expectations is heightened by their consciousness of the fact that anything they might do or say could prompt him to start drinking. The tension experienced by Joe and his family on Christmas Day characterizes the subsequent months as both Joe's family and their friends wait for him to start drinking and feel guilty themselves for drinking in front of him.

The critical aspect of Joe's struggle which Richards reveals is the alienating effect his trial has not only on himself but on all of his family. Joe realizes the truth that he can't drink, but he knows that this truth applies to him alone and not Rita or any of their friends. Therefore, he knows he cannot ask Rita to stop drinking or associating with her friends who drink. This knowledge is accompanied by a profound sense of alienation:

> Joe sat in the tavern with them drinking tomato juice, and Rita found herself discussing old times with her brothers - and all of this, as innocent as it was, was an indication to Joe that he had become an outsider.[123]

Not only Joe, but Rita and his friends are aware of this fact,

and for this reason they cannot help but feel uncomfortable around him. Rita tries to convince Joe he should join her and her friends when they go curling, but conscious of everyone's discomfort in his presence, Joe declines. Rita herself experiences a sense of alienation as a result of Joe's struggle and is conscious of the condescending attitudes others have toward her:

> They all said they were glad he wasn't drinking. They all hoped he would not drink again. But she felt they wanted Joe to drink and she could not deny this. And sometimes she herself hoped he would drink. She also knew that people who didn't even know her sympathized with her because of him, but she knew also that it was a sympathy that had been manufactured by Myhrra and others - it was forced and had nothing to do with Joe, whom they did not know or care for. And sometimes Vye would give her arm a squeeze, and nod to her in a patronizing way.[122]

It is Joe's inner strength that helps him to remain faithful to his project of sobriety. Part of his spiritual strength is derived from the sense of purpose he has always experienced within himself. This thought has become manifest in him through the years, particularly when he thinks back to the time when, as a diver in the navy, he got caught in a turbine in the Bay of Fundy. Every time he thinks about this he wonders why he didn't die:

> He had felt his way along the round turbine for ten minutes, and found that he had not progressed in the right direction. In fact he had to swim back, but he had to swim back as carefully as he had come, or else lose his sense of direction completely.
>
> Yes, it was all so strange. If anyone asked him what had happened he wouldn't have been able to tell them. Halfway back along the wall he had to

> switch to his reserve tank. And he finally found his way through the opening and back to the surface, with four minutes of air left.
>
> For some reason he felt that he had something more to do, and every time he did something he felt that wasn't it ... He thought of the turbine, and how he had managed to get into it without knowing that he was - and then how did he manage to get out of it?[71]

The sense of purpose and openness in Joe's character is rendered explicit in the final section of the novel where his unconscious movements lead to the rescue of Vye and Myhrra. The strength of Joe's spirit, his openness to experience, and his sense of purpose render him a tragic hero where his rescue of the two hinges on his mistaking a glass of vodka for water.

Like Joe, Vera Pilar consciously tries to change her life. While Joe pursues his attempt to change in a quiet, intuitive manner, Vera pursues the idea of change in a public and programmatic way. Vera and her boyfriend, Nevin, move into the community and demonstrate an ideological commitment to many of the movements prevalent in the early 1970's. They speak out in favour of world peace, altruism, going "back to the land", women's rights, and vegetarianism, they publicly denounce such things as war and the killing and eating of animals. Richards makes no attempt to hide his scepticism of Vera's commitments:

> Vera was one of those people who is normally infuriating because every new opinion is suddenly hers - and hers alone - and in another year or so she will move on to something else. The very things that in 1968 she had argued for, were now vehemently argued against.[132]

Vera's new values are not the organic result of the spiritual

and emotional processes taking place within her psyche but, rather, are calculated attempts to give her life the appearance of authenticity and her thought as occurring on the cutting edge of each new trend.

The fact that Vera's ideological commitments are attempts to render her life authentic and different from everybody else's are revealed through her constant need of recognition from those around her of the radical changes in her attitudes and lifestyle. "I'm not like I used be, am I Ralphie?" [92], she frequently asks her brother; and visiting her uncle Dr. Hennesey, she tells him about all of the "new" and "different" things she is doing -

> Vera smiled as she spoke, and with her big calm eyes, looked at him, as if she knew he would not be able to believe all of the brand new things she was now doing. Though she was not consciously trying to impress him with all these new things, she could not help mentioning every detail of how her life had changed.[133-34]

Dr. Hennesey does not agree with his niece's notion of radical change being synonymous with authenticity and freedom from the past. He looks upon the "back-to-the-land-poor look" as an affectation merely of "those who could afford it"[48]; and, in conversation with his sister-in-law, Clair, he explains his concerns with Vera's and Nevin's other politically correct commitments:

> They have no idea about moose and have never seen one - and yet chastise anyone for hunting them. They make a mockery of Remembrance Day because they know nothing about it, and it's the same way with their peace movement. In this they believe they are visionaries while those who have suffered and

loved more ... get no credit at all!"[183]

Revealed in Dr. Hennesey's criticism of Vera's political commitments is a bitterness (a bitterness which is perhaps shared by the author himself) towards the sense in which such causes as the peace movement and animal rights acquire their justification and nobility at the expense of the experiences of previous generations: those who fought in wars because at the time they thought it was the right course of action and those who hunt moose because it is a method of survival. Thus, on a deeper level, the Doctor's criticism is also directed towards the sense of disrespect and irreverence in Vera's ideology toward the culture and traditions honoured by her and her community's ancestors.

What Vera perceives as strength of will and moral commitment in her back-to-the-land lifestyle and her vegetarian diet are regarded by the doctor as a frugal denial of herself and of her human condition. Vera's ascetic attitude toward such things as food and warmth, for example, results in her becoming seriously ill with pneumonia. When he visits Vera to see to her medical care, Dr. Hennesey looks at her kitchen and is dismayed:

> ... the doctor stood in the kitchen looking at the various grains, rice, and herbs in her jars by the sink, and there was something frugal about the kitchen which made him feel sad.[168]

In another scene which takes place in the contrary atmosphere of the doctor's kitchen, Richards evokes with humour the sense that in Vera's commitment to being a vegetarian, she denies

her human condition. The doctor is cleaning and preparing smelts, a traditional New Brunswick seafood, when Vera and Nevin drop in for a visit. The smell of the fish cooking fills the kitchen and Vera is tempted to indulge her appetite but is afraid to for fear of appearing weak in front of the doctor and Nevin:

> Vera hadn't eaten them since she was a little girl. In fact, she had started not to eat meat or fish since the first year of Greenpeace and the protest against the seal hunt. But now the smelts cooking in flour and butter made her want them. But she was afraid to ask. If she asked, the doctor might think the worst of her - this is what went through her mind - so she sat in the kitchen enduring the smell and looked at the clock over the sink, and the other clock over the fridge, and the clock on the timer on the stove - all telling a different time.[177]

Note Richards' implication that Vera's vegetarianism does not stem from an interior realization that killing animals and eating meat is wrong, but, rather, from an attraction to a political trend that comes to her externally. The sense that Vera is enduring an inner trial in the above passage is suggested through her conscious experience of time, of watching the clocks. Compared to Vera's perfectly ordered, ascetic kitchen, Dr. Hennesey's kitchen, with its jovial and indulgent atmosphere, has an air of misrule - a notion which is reinforeced by the fact that time is itself disorderly.

In various passages Richards suggests that Vera's conscious quest for authenticity stems from her sense of being an outsider to everything. While Richards treats Vera's commitment to politically correct ideologies with humour and

scepticism he treats her experience of alienation with much sympathy:

> Vera had always seemed to be alone. Ralphie would watch her coming up the lane, as a schoolgirl ... Because she always ate oranges the boys used to call her sucker. And she was always looking for new friends. And there was a great deal of silence about her. Once she had a pen pal, but then after a while the letters stopped coming. Vera would walk down to the post office to make sure there was not some mistake, but finally after about ten months realized that she wasn't going to get a letter again.[92]

At one point Vera and Nevin accompany friends of theirs to an Acadian Winter Carnival. Vera dresses up "to be suddenly Acadian"[159] and is confident that, having "read all of Maillet" and "listened to Edith Butler", together with Nevin's having publicly supported the causes of French equality, they will be a part of the Acadian festivities. Instead, Richards writes, Vera is saddened when she realizes that she cannot share in the authenticity of Acadian culture. Richards points toward Vera's conscious denial of her own culture as the source of her alienation and unhappiness:

> More than ever at this time, she disowned her own culture and wanted to belong with the Acadians who she felt were victims like herself. However, the night of the winter carnival, she and Nevin found themselves alone and ignored. People seemed to want to prove how uninhibited their culture was. And when people tell you that they are not restrained or inhibited, and have authenticity, they are also suggesting that you are restrained and inhibited and lack that which is authentic.[159]

In Vera's denial of her own culture - demonstrated in her decision to refuse such traditional meals as smelts or moose

and her politically correct disapproval of such traditional activities as hunting - she uproots herself from her authentic culture. She naively thinks that simply through doing the correct things - reading Maillet, listening to Edith Butler, wearing Acadian dress - she can participate in Acadian culture. Richards suggests that what she fails to realize is that culture is experiential; that one's culture consists of the mythology, the day-to-day experiences and activities one participates in on the mundane level of existence, together with the shared sense of relationship to the surrounding landscapes which emerge through time. To return to Joe Walsh, for example, it is his participation, unconscious though it may be, in the daily mundane activities of his culture (cutting wood, hunting, fishing) that not only fulfils him but, during his struggle to stay sober, keeps him from falling to pieces psychologically. Culture, Richards suggests, is something that we exist in with our whole being; our knowledge of culture is subjective and unconscious before it is, if ever, objectified.

Immediately after Vera's unhappy experience Richards includes a passage wherein Vera is portrayed alone in the midst of the surrounding landscape; the passage evokes the sense of alienation she experiences within herself:

> One night Vera left the house for a walk. She went for a walk along the beach and looked at the lights across the bay. The road was dark, the fields above her were frozen and the trees made wretched sounds ... She looked all alone, like a scarecrow standing in the middle of nowhere ... Out

> on the highway, at one of the houses they were having a party. There was music from a guitar which reached all the way to where she was, and she could hear screeching, and now and then a door slam, and then laughter.[160]

Vera's inner sense of alienation is mirrored in the dark, frozen landscape around her and in her gesture of looking across the bay to the lights on the other side. Her self-imposed exile from her own culture is indicated by her being outside in the cold listening to the warmth and merriment of her neighbours' celebrations. The comparison of Vera to a lonely scarecrow suggests her haunting awareness of being unauthentic despite her conscious attempts to be opposite.

It is interesting to compare the above passage where Vera's alienation from her culture is reflected in the harshness of the landscape with another passage where Vera is again alone against the landscape but experiences joy. On this occasion, her happiness comes unexpectedly as a result of her unconscious participation in a cultural experience:

> The smell of the road, and the pinkish light shining from Madgill's garage made her suddenly feel happy and elated. Everything was more solid at twilight. Up a side road some children played. She did not realize that she was feeling the greatness of the river that she was once again upon. The very trees and houses made her feel this way.[134]

Unconsciously, by forgetting herself and by being open to the "greatness of the river" and the beauty of the landscape, Vera participates in her own culture. The experience is one shared by generations who have allowed themselves to be open to the particular spirit of this land.

Vera enjoys a similar moment of openness when she cuts wood in the forest - a mundane task but one which, nevertheless, is a traditional activity in her region. The old woodsman, Allain Garrett, discovers her and passes the time by telling her stories. Listening to Allain, Vera again forgets herself and is uplifted:

> Vera listened to this story and said nothing. She was sitting on the saw, with her legs spread and her boots far apart. She peeled herself an orange as she listened, becoming more and more engrossed, not so much in what old Allain was saying, as by the hair in his ears, the gentle smell of wood chips and wine ... More than anything, Vera wanted to become like this old man. She was, above all, a shy person, and would not sit on a saw and spread her legs out into the snow like she did, peeling an orange and nodding her head, with anyone she did not trust. There was a loud crash in the bay. There was the smell of smoke lingering in the bare trees, with the bud tips wet and lonely.
>
> Allain smiled. "You work as good as your uncle, Dr. Hennesey." he said shyly. "I love that - like Rita Walsh - strong as an ox." And then he gently patted her head with his thick dark hand.
>
> She got flustered and then smiled, like a child who has just been complimented.[186]

Ironically, where Vera thinks she is doing something new by cutting wood herself, something males would usually do, her action is perceived by the old woodsman as part of a tradition - her strength is like Rita Walsh's and her commitment to her task is like the doctor's. It is interesting to note that though the landscape is directly referred to here as being "lonely", Vera experiences communion with both Allain and her cultural community. Contrary to the alienation she experiences when she consciously attempts to deny her community's traditions, Vera's truest moments of joy and

authenticity are experienced when she unconsciously participates in her cultural community.

At the beginning of Nights Below Station Street Adele is unhappy with her family's social and economic status in the town: she is embarrassed by the fact that her father Joe is shy and stutters, and is an alcoholic who is periodically unemployed because of a back injury. She also feels cheated by the fact that her mother, Rita, must often help provide for the family by taking care of other people's children and sometimes cleaning other peoples' houses. One of the things which particularly disturbs Adele is the patronising and condescending manner in which some of her family's friends and acquaintances treat her parents. In his more direct approach to his characters' situations, Richards directs the readers' attention toward the hypocritical motives for this condescension with -

> Rita had to start fending for herself at a time when it wasn't as accepted or as natural for women to go out to work. At this time, for a woman to work meant the family had some how fallen.[61]

Unaware of the fact that Rita might enjoy taking care of children,7 Adele swears that her life will be "different" and "better" than her mother's:

> It seemed to her that if her mother wanted to be a fool now, and wanted to keep kids for other people - this to Adele was an insult - and wanted to make her life like she did, then that was fine, but she herself would not have any part in it, and when she grew up she would be quite different from her mother, and by being quite different, she assumed she would be better.[32-33]

It is during this time that Adele begins a relationship with Ralphie Pilar, Vera's younger brother, who comes from a family whose social status in the town is much different than that of the Walsh's - Ralphie's father was a judge and his mother Thelma is "elitist and domineering" [43]. Contrary to the belief of his sister, Vera, that he and Adele were incompatible because of "class differences," 8 and in a manner which deflates the notion of social and economic status determining a person's niche, both Ralphie and Adele are drawn to each other because they experience their existences in a like manner. Similar to Adele's own sense of being an outsider, Ralphie is described as "belonging to the town without being a part of it," as knowing "all about it without people knowing him", and as going "about as an outsider through no one else's fault."[43] Ralphie thinks that his and Adele's relationship with each other evolved naturally because

> ... no one else seemed to think very much of them. Neither of them knew very much about how to act with those other more special and gifted people - gifted in the way people who assume they are doing all the right things - that is, socially gifted. So he and Adele ended up together. He learned that her father was a drunk and her mother was the woman who had taken care of him when he was a little boy.[46]

The suggestion is that Ralphie and Adele are suited to each other for experiential reasons. Their shared sense of alienation is rooted in something far deeper than class and economics - in their relationships with others, they both experience themselves as outsiders.

When Ralphie moves into his own apartment, both he and Adele inadvertently become the centre of attention when the town's "special and gifted people" discover in Ralphie's place a convenient spot to set up a "scene". Adele's struggle to find a place for herself in the world involves her attempts to relate and conform to the attitudes and ideas of those who appear to be authentic, the "gifted" people who drift through Ralphie's apartment, like the sociology students who express self-righteous concerns about all the politically correct issues and Ralphie's sister Vera.

For awhile, both Ralphie and Adele think of themselves as an integral part of the group of people who frequent the apartment and they start to believe that they can identify with the "same ideas"[47] which characterize this group - the ideas that they were all "free" of jealousy and inhibitions [50], that they were more

> ... irreverent than any other group you could ever imagine ... [and] the idea that they were suddenly all in hiding from their parents and desperate because of it.[53]

In an exchange between Adele and Joe, Richards humours Adele's notion that she can truly identify with these ideas: "Ralphie and I aren't going to get married - we are just going to live together in common law," she tells Joe and, anticipating his moral outrage, asks "what do you think of that?" Joe responds simply with, "Doesn't bother me ... My parents were never married."[35] The exchange demonstrates the artificial nature of Adele's notion that she, like some of her friends, has to

"hide" from her parents because of some tremendous gap in the way they think about human relationships and perceive the world.

Ironically, a complicated aspect of Adele's sense of belonging to the group concerns her consciousness of having grown up in a poor family with an alcoholic father. These facts about her family - which have long been the crux of her insecurities - become the ticket which admits her into the group for a time as an awed and distinguished figure. Some of the group's members are university students studying sociology, and the stories Adele has to tell them about her real-life experiences growing up in a poor household with an alcoholic father become real-life subject matter for their studies.

> Adele would sit on the beanbag chair and with her brown hair hanging down over her eyes take on the look of a person who had suddenly in a matter of hours grown up completely - and had been very much abused. [51]

Richards draws attention to the irony of Adele's poverty and difficult experiences at home being the very thing which bring her into the group; he also draws attention to the sad irony that Adele, who has first-hand, experiential knowledge of this "subject matter", measures herself "against" those whose knowledge is derived through text-books:

> ... because Adele had been poor all of her life she had seen more of life by the age of sixteen than a lot of these people - or at least a lot of life some people coming from university had taken courses on and pretended to be dismayed about. It was becoming a cultural thing to be dismayed at the

> right times about the right things. Adele had seen and heard more of all the things that were becoming sanctioned as the concerns of the day, but she always measured herself against these people, and always found herself lacking.
>
> That is, the affectation of concern was always seductive, but wit and affectation most often eclipsed Adele, with her nervous stomach, her skirt with the hanging hem, and her chewed mitts.[48]

The reference to Adele's "nervous stomach", "hanging hem", and "chewed mitts" juxtaposed with her friends' "affectations" of concern serves to demonstrate the experiential distance between Adele's first-hand knowledge of poverty and hardship and her friends' abstract knowledge of their subject matter.

Adele discovers the insincerity of her friends' affectations of concern when, after they have tired of Ralphie's apartment, she as a key-holder has become dispensable. In time, Adele gradually makes peace within herself and with her family. She comes to recognize the integrity of her own experiential knowledge and does not measure herself against others. The strongest evidence of Adele's change toward her family is her treatment of Joe. Where she previously took it upon herself to remind him at every convenience of his past mistakes, it is she who, more than anyone else, recognizes the sincerity of his attempts to change.

The turning point for Adele with respect to her appreciation for her family is her confrontation with Joe on the day she is caught shoplifting. Sent up to Adele's room by Rita, to "shake the living shit" [72] out of her, Joe, once he

is alone in Adele's room and surrounded by her personal belongings, is overwhelmed with his love for her, and his deep regrets for having caused her unhappiness in the past. What begins as a confrontation over her shoplifting, becomes a moment of truth when Joe tells her about his history of drinking, of his remorse for making his family unhappy (particularly for the time his drinking was the cause of the family almost being split apart by social workers), and of his present recognition that his drinking is a disease.[72-73] The moment ends powerfully when Joe asks Adele to forgive him. Though she responds vaguely with a "sniff" and an "I see",[76] her actions over the following months demonstrate the fact that she has forgiven her father and has discovered that she truly loves him. One night, shortly after being hired as a bouncer in a local tavern, Joe comes home bleeding from a cut he acquired while breaking up a fight. Everyone expects Adele to "faint" because in the past she had always swooned at the sight of blood:

> But at this moment her face became filled with the compassion that always brings out beauty.
>
> "Joe," she said, tears welling in her eyes. "Oh god - Joe." And without knowing that she would ever be able to do something like this, she took away the face cloth to look at the wound.[199]

The change taking place within Adele is also demonstrated in her attitude towards her parents' relationships with others in the community. At one point, when she is unhappy with her family's social status, she encourages Rita to play bridge with the people who meet next door at their friend Myhrra's

home. "Go on up, go on up," Adele tells Rita, "excitedly." Rita protests with, "I haven't played bridge in my life." Adele gets "doubly angry at this"[65], as though the fact that Rita has never played bridge before is symbolic of the family's low social status. But as Adele becomes attuned to her true emotions for her family, she begins to recognize the unwholesome insincerities in Myhrra's circle of friends. Particularly, as she begins to appreciate the depth of her father's commitment to the family, she realizes the fact that the condescending attitude Rita's friends have toward him could create a rift between her parents. One night, when Joe and Milly are in the woods hunting and Adele is left alone with Rita, she confronts her mother about the "sleazy" people like Myhrra, Vye, and Gloria Bastarache whom she has been curling with:

> "...they don't like Joe and make fun of his stuttering attacks, and I heard that Gloria was just the one to make some fun of his stutter. How could you go out with anyone who makes fun of his stutter!"[121]

Towards the novel's conclusion the spiritual and emotional maturing Adele has experienced is also expressed simply and directly when she tells her family and the doctor who surround her when she is in labour with childbirth - "Everyone's mad at me now ... but I love you all."[208] In both her words and actions, Adele demonstrates that she has finally discovered her niche as being with her own family and culture.

When Adele gives birth to a baby in the men's washroom of

the community centre, the reader is struck with the thought that she is in some ways repeating the pattern of her mother's life, which she had once sworn she would never do. The sense of repetition is evoked elsewhere in the novel when Ralphie begins working in the mines where Joe had worked years before. Everyone in the Walsh family is conscious of the fact that Ralphie is doing what Joe used to do but the consciousness of repeating the patterns of previous generations does not cause dismay for Adele or Ralphie - "That he was now doing the same job Joe had done years before made Adele happy. She was happy when Joe thought she would be angry."[194] Here the repetition of patterns is not experienced by Richards' characters as enslaving or proof of their own powerlessness; perhaps Richards deliberately portrays certain patterns being reenacted through generations in order to suggest that humans continue to discover happiness and fulfilment in particular experiences. Ralphie walks "about in absolute contentment" with his new job, and Adele's truest moment is experienced during childbirth when she voices her love.

It is not until reading Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace that the reader discovers how the pattern Adele at first appears to be repeating in having a child has been interrupted; even though Ralphie and Adele had planned to get married anyway, they have been persuaded by Thelma to permit their child to be adopted by a distant relative, Olive, who is unable to have children. In this latest novel Richards

surveys the political "climate" surrounding the issues of motherhood, sexuality, and fertility; specifically he contrasts the attitudes within the community toward the pregnancies of Vera and of the epileptic Cindi who has given birth to two children previous to marriage. Adele's experience provides a backdrop to this climate, and she, having become bitter towards the ironies and contradictions she discerns in the prevailing attitudes toward sexuality and motherhood, is a powerful commentator on the drama which takes place in this latest novel:

> Adele of course, hated the whole idea of Vera's pregnancy, of her going to have the child at home - or what she hated was the climate about the two opposing pregnancies. Vera was not supposed to get pregnant, but she did - and now it was absolutely natural that she did. Cindi, everyone perceived, could get pregnant every time she dropped her pants, and this was absolutely unnatural. Olive was an "expert" at "mothering", as Adele was told, while Adele, who had the child, was never mentioned as a mother.[79]

One is most struck by the fact that had Adele been allowed to follow the pattern of her mother's life by keeping her child, she might have experienced greater happiness and fulfilment. Interestingly, in terms of Adele's intellectual development, her role as commentator indicates a growing consciousness on her part of the value of the knowledge about humanity which she has acquired as a result of her experiences. When we first met her in Nights she could not give herself credit for this.

In Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace, Richards continues

to explore the dichotomy between ideological as opposed to spiritual commitments - the commitments he explores here are altruistic commitments to the well-being of others. Richards juxtaposes the ideological commitment to altruism with the kind of concern for others' well-being which stems from the sincere love of others. Similar to the interference of social workers with Arnold's family in Road to the Stilt House, in the present novel the attempts of crusaders to alter the lives of others to what is perceived to be better lead inadvertently to the destruction of those lives they attempt to help. Regardless of whether they are motivated by good intentions, by a sincere belief that their actions will benefit the good of others, or by a self-interested desire to further their own political or libidinous ends, Richards portrays how the deliberate actions taken to disrupt private homes and manipulate individuals may amount to covert violence.

The novel focuses on the experiences of Ivan and Cindi Bastarache, both of whom appeared in Nights Below Station Street as friends of Adele and Ralphie. In contrast to the manner in which Richards slowly introduced readers to the characters and stories of his earlier novels through the gradual cumulation of details, he opens Evening Snow with an immediate account of all the details necessary to orient the reader to the present story and the characters involved:

> Ivan had been married twenty months. But now he and Cindi were separated. The trouble had started because Ivan's father had borrowed a thousand dollars from Vera, his next-door neighbour, and

> then had asked Ivan to intercede. So Ivan had taken Cindi's money to pay the debt. A fight followed and chairs were broken, and the very money was torn to shreds. The RCMP had to come because of the shot-gun, and Cindi ran outside in her underwear and went to Ruby Madgill's.[3]

Richards' ensuing narration concerns the various ways the event is perceived publicly, the manner in which various individuals and interest groups rally around Cindi, and the motives behind each character's way of regarding the situation.

Immediately after introducing the story Richards explores the rationale behind Ivan's behaviour on the night in question. Ivan's actions of ripping the money in half and shooting the cabinet with his shot-gun appear violent to the outsider, but his reasons for behaving this way are rooted in an irrational, intuitive recognition of what is right and wrong:

> The reason he had the shot-gun out was to destroy the large oak cabinet in the living room. Since his father had continually for the last twenty months helped himself in one way or another to those meagre savings of his and Cindi's, Ivan, in taking his anger out on the oak cabinet ... believed he was reducing everything to its logical conclusion.
>
> He tore the money up for a more obscure reason ... Ivan could not stand that he had started this argument over something so shallow as money. It was better to be rid of it, tear it to shreds.[14]

The motives behind Ivan's behaviour are, as Richards states, "obscure" and would therefore not be understood by either the police or "any legislative assembly, speaking, as they often do today, on family violence."[14] What Richards does not

mention here, but which is surely suggested, is the fact that the legislative assemblies, though they may lack critical understanding of the dynamics behind human situations labelled "domestic violence," are nevertheless imbued with the power to interfere with and radically alter private homes.

Ivan's "obscure" motives elude the understanding of most of his friends, family, and community who regard the event as an occasion of brutal violence against women. Cindi acquires a black eye when she falls down during an epileptic seizure brought on by the confusion, but to the community it is evidence of her being a victim of Ivan's violence. Not long after this Cindi discovers she is pregnant, and a community of concerned individuals, spearheaded by the sociology student, Ruby Madgill, and Vera, now chairperson of a women's interest group, surrounds Cindi to protect her and her rights. The truth of Cindi's and Ivan's situation becomes distorted through Ruby's and Vera's biased perceptions of reality: Ruby perceives the event as evidence of Cindi's vulnerability and need of assistance; Vera views the event as evidence of women's victimization.

As he is ostracized from Cindi and from the community as a result of the way everyone interprets the affair, Ivan alone is conscious of how the truth has become distorted:

> Everything was suddenly looked at ... in the shadows he had been sometimes shown by the more obscure motives of others. He did not understand them as well as he should have, he was too certain of life to be bothered by them; he only knew that they were there.[14]

Ivan is too ensconced in his own experiential reality to be interested and tutored in ideology; nevertheless, he is aware in a subsidiary fashion of how ideologies (or what he thinks of on one occasion as the "war" of "ethics"[13]) influence people's vision and actions. Conscious of how his and Cindi's situation has been distorted in the public's perception, Ivan withdraws from the affair, spending part of the spring and summer months in the woods and the rest of the time aboard his grandfather's fishing boat. Reminiscent of Old Simon's retreat into the forest in Lives of Short Duration, Ivan's withdrawal into the natural world demonstrates his own spiritual self-sufficiency. It is this freedom of Ivan's spirit that prevents the reader from regarding Ivan as a victim of those warring "ethics" which invade and disrupt his life.

In the course of his narration Richards shows how Cindi and others in the community are swayed from looking at the affair truthfully to see it through the various perspectives of their own interests:

> Cindi's life this summer was like a movie, where all her friends were tantalized by and hoping secretly for more stories to come out of this affair, while telling each other they were not, and hoping it would end. Everyone from Ruby to Vera to Adele was listening and waiting, wondering what was going to happen ... And every one of them ... watched this film, from a variety of different places in the theatre, holding onto the idea that they hoped for the heroine, and not knowing the greatest visual effect was the one in which she was crucified for them.[131]

An old friend Ruby Madgill, the sociology student,

engineers Cindi's life, convinced that this is necessary for her friend's preservation. Richards locates Ruby's motives in her habitual search during the summer months for something sensational in which to involve herself:

> Ruby would not have been involved except it was the way she spent all of her summers. For Ruby, all her summers contained the same things. Excitement and bravado, and usually at someone else's expense.[105]

During the previous summer Ruby's "excitement" involved her meddling with the lives of a family whose father was dying of cancer. During the current summer, her excitement is at the expense of Cindi's and Ivan's marriage. Ruby's plan to construct a new life for Cindi is made all the more exciting when it is discovered that Cindi is pregnant. Ruby hatches the plan for Cindi's abortion: "It wasn't inherent in Ruby to forgo anything that was new or irreverent", observes Richards, "and this is primarily what attracted her to abortion."[133]

Beyond Ruby's libidinous desire to manipulate others, Richards reveals an even more primary level of experience which motivates her involvement with Cindi. This concerns her relationship with the intriguing Missle whom she had once almost married. Unlike Ruby's other boyfriends, Missle was "slight" and incompetent in most things; Ruby was, however, "patient" and even "parental" with him because she knew he was vulnerable to others. Missle's vulnerability was connected with the fact that he lived to be nine years old before he ever learned to talk - "He had lived in his own world"[53];

and Ruby, "who was always making fun of people, now learned not to do this in front of him."[53] Missle dies mysteriously, after which Ruby becomes "more beautiful than ever" and loses herself "in regret, tantrums, envy, and physical abuse from married men."[54] The time Ruby shared with Missle remains a special time in her life. During the summer in which she is involved with Cindi, Ruby has an affair with Dr. Armand Savard, who reminds her of Missle. Both Savard and Missle have birthmarks on the same side of their chins, signs of a premature birth.

Richards suggests that the reason why Ruby is captivated by the idea of Cindi having an abortion is because Savard, who reminds her of Missle, performs abortions. In fact, Cindi is herself conscious of this obscure connection between Ruby's affair with Savard and her notion that Cindi should have an abortion:

> Cindi was beginning to see that everything had been done on a whim - that if, for instance, Ruby wasn't in love with Armand, it might not have happened ...[196]

In a manner which demonstrates the ambiguous processes whereby present situations become unconsciously associated with events and emotional experiences in the past, Richards describes how Ruby's involvement with Cindi, her relationship with Savard, and her complicated emotions over Missle all become fused to prompt her present actions. On the day she first meets Savard and is taken "aback" by his resemblance to Missle, she looks over at Cindi's apartment building -

> The streets were broken up, the bay was dark. There was a lonely sea gull sitting on the pier. Suddenly, the sun came out cold and caught a window above her and sunlight hit her eyes. She turned about and saw an apartment building across the road. There was an ugly window that looked out into a dirt parking lot.
>
> It did not enter her mind at the moment, but over the course of time and events, the apartment building, Cindi, and Savard would all seem to fuse together.[55]

Thus, Richards locates the deepest motives behind Ruby's actions not only in her will to manipulate others, but in her unconscious association of strong emotional memories with the present.

As in the previous novel, Nights Below Station Street, Richards reveals certain of Vera's commitments to be pretentious and insincere: beside the few friends who are genuinely concerned for Cindi's well-being, Vera's concern for Cindi, a girl whom she has never met, is difficult to believe. The hypocrisy of those who surround Cindi is made evident when people like Ivan, who is the only one to express concern over Cindi's health and whether or not she is taking her medication to prevent harmful seizures, and his sister Margaret, who has long been a good friend of Cindi's, are denied access to Cindi when the expressed concerns of people like Vera are valued. Even Cindi is impressed when

> A woman's group had phoned to see if she needed money. There was a talk show on local television about a transition house, and her case, but not her name, was brought up by a woman with close-cropped hair whom she didn't even know. (This woman happened to be Vera.)[47]

A particularly insidious aspect of the concern Vera has for

Cindi which Richards investigates is the manner in which Cindi's perceived situation is objectified to the point where Cindi herself becomes a "Christ figure" for their causes. For people like Vera and "the more educated women about", Richards writes, Cindi becomes a "Christ figure because of her brutal marriage."[131-32]

In Evening Snow Richards again pokes fun at Vera's ideology, this time with regards to her self-ordained duty to instruct the unenlightened about important political issues. Ivan recalls:

> Vera, this first time they met, hearing that this young, jean-jacketed youth with dark, lively eyes and a pug nose, and large hardened hands with tattoos on his knuckles, was about to be married, took him aside. And, as if she were being watched by the obscure matron of those ethics Ivan knew nothing about, Vera spoke reverently about the position of women in society today.[13]

Through the manner in which Ivan is naively impressed by Vera's reverent tone and Nevin's behaviour (which is "much like a brother" who does not want to "intrude upon a priest giving a lecture to an altar boy about the moral danger of masturbation"[13-14]), Richards parodies the self-ordained, messianic nature of Vera's ideology.

Though he makes sport of Vera's and Nevin's ideological faith, Richards treats them sympathetically during their moments of greatest trial. In a subsidiary plot Nevin is caught by Antony, Ivan's father, in a seemingly compromising situation with Antony's fifteen-year-old daughter, Margaret. After listening to a story Margaret has told him, Nevin

spontaneously kisses her. Nevin has himself been under stress because of his and Vera's expected baby and his attempts to accumulate money. The kiss seems to happen as a natural response to the magical story Margaret has told him, but the scene is utterly misunderstood by Antony, who accuses Nevin of molesting his daughter. Pleased to discover a reason to show indignation, Antony rounds up some of his neighbours, and they all gather outside Vera's and Nevin's house demanding that he come out and face their charges. The entire episode mirrors that of Cindi and Ivan, where reality is similarly distorted. Though Vera does not understand what has happened, she begins to realize how the truth of a situation is not always clearly evident. Vera's humanity is simply though powerfully rendered when she stands next to Nevin and supports him: "Go away," she tells the self-righteous Antony, then returns to the house and sits beside her husband as a gesture of unconditional support.[180]

In his exploration of Cindi's psychology, Richards reveals her motives for allowing herself to be enticed by those around her into being a victim. Similar to the manner in which Adele in Nights was seduced into trying to please everyone simply because "she was not used to having influence"[Nights, 53], Cindi unwittingly becomes a sacrificial "Christ figure" for the community because she is attracted to the attention and status it lends her:

> The outrage of others made her feel important. It was impossible not to feel this way, with so many

> people concerned about her and visiting her, and Ruby saying: "Leave her alone - let her rest for awhile."[47]

In a similar fashion Cindi is manipulated by Ruby into thinking she should have an abortion:

> "This is a terrible time in her life, and she has nowhere to turn. But there will be no child if she doesn't want it - you just mark my words," she'd overheard Ruby say to Dr. Savard. And this, somehow, gave her [Cindi] a shivery feeling and made her feel important. "There will be no child if I don't want it," she whispered.[47]

Whether or not Cindi should have an abortion becomes a topic of household discussion in the novel. The general consensus among the community surrounding her is that she should. The truly violent nature of Ruby's and the community's meddling in Cindi's and Ivan's marriage becomes manifest in Cindi's abortion. The abortion is mistakenly deemed as necessary by many in the community who feel certain that Cindi and Ivan's marriage is over anyway. As things turn out, once Cindi and Ivan are left alone, they quickly mend their differences as they would have at the beginning of the conflict had they simply been permitted. That Cindi, herself, is not convinced she should have the abortion is indicated in the guilt she expresses to Dr. Savard: "I'm ashamed", she tells him, to which he responds with puzzlement, "Hm-oh-don't be." "One could tell", observes Richards, "he hadn't understood why she said this."[137]

There is no mistaking the sense of tragedy and regret with which Richards handles the abortion of Cindi's and Ivan's

child. Richards' argument should not be construed as being directed against the pro-choice side of the current abortion issue. The quotation from Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians on the novel's fly-leaf may be viewed as an indication of how Richards would like his readers to understand his argument - "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak".[1 Corinthians 8:9] The quotation suggests that Richards' criticism is directed towards the fact that Cindi has been unfairly manipulated by others who are not necessarily acting in her best interests. Cindi's abortion is not the result of a decision she has made following the course of her own conscious deliberation; it is an act she has been coerced into during a moment of weakness. Cindi is not free to have an abortion because the "freedom" of the act has not been realized within herself; her admission of shame suggests this. Ruby's "liberty" in this instance has become Cindi's stumbling block.

Cindi's personality exudes a quiet grace in her polite mannerisms around visitors, in her childlike desire to have people think the best of her, and in her conscientious attempts to do things well - whether she is scouting deer for Ivan or doing an algebra assignment for school. The strength of Cindi's spirit surfaces toward the end of the story when she gradually begins to understand the truth of how she has been manipulated by others as a result of their attitudes and whims:

> It might not have happened if she and Dorval Gene had stood up to Ruby - who wanted them to pretend that they were in the depths of that inner circle, simply because she was in love with Armand and had written his name on a stall.[196]

It is after Cindi realizes the ambiguous processes whereby she was seduced into being part of the "collective structure and morality of the gang"[132] that surrounds her that summer, that she returns to Ivan. The fact that they love each other is revealed in the simple direct way in which they patch things up. Ivan, who has been ill for a few days, wakes up to find Cindi by his bed. "Are we gonna go home tomorrow?" [200] he asks after a few moments conversation. Not long after their reunion Ivan dies in a fire set by his own father as part of a "make work" project. The quotation from Malcolm Lowry on the fly-leaf of the novel makes a sad comment on the reunion of Ivan and Cindi just before their final separation:

> And those who longest should have met
> Are set in each other's arm not too late.
> Today the forsaken one of the fold is brought home
>
> The tortured shall no longer know alarm.

The irony in the quotation is that, while on one hand it might be viewed as a comment on the timely reconciliation of Cindi and the tortured Ivan, ultimately it refers, like the title, to the peaceful rest of death. Ivan's death in the very fire which was set by his father's hand is metaphoric of the devastating violence to which the disruption and manipulation of others may lead.

Readers who are rooted in a radically liberal or

revolutionary world view will perhaps experience Richards' above narratives as statements about the "powerlessness" of his characters. Richards has stated an essentially pre-modern belief that "the events in our lives are directed by things that we ourselves perhaps aren't personally conscious about", that "there's more to life than man-directed events" 9; his prose and narrative style in the more recent novels, which is somewhat frank about the limited knowledge of reality shared by all humanity, might be appreciated as a fitting vehicle to portray the sense that his characters participate in a larger reality which is unknowable in an objective sense. Richards portrays humans as having the ability to derive from their concrete experiences a partial vision and subjective understanding of the forces influencing their lives and the processes they have been involved in, but this vision can never be full or complete simply because his characters are not able to step outside their existence in order to view it objectively. The purpose of Richards' narrative, therefore, is not to convey his characters' powerlessness but to confront his readers with the thought that because the human situations we find ourselves involved in cannot be possessed in a truly objective sense, we are unable to determine the result that our deliberate actions towards others might have. It is consciousness of this thought that may inspire a mature understanding of how we perceive others and that may temper our actions toward them.

NOTES

1 Frank Davey, "Discourse and Determinism in Nights Below Station Street," Open Letter, 7, No. 6 (Fall 1989), p.17.

2 Davey, p. 18.

3 Davey, p. 17.

4 Davey, p. 23.

5 Davey, p. 6.

6 David Adams Richards, Nights Below Station Street (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), p.59. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

7 The thought that Rita might enjoy taking care of children is suggested in one passage which describes the patience Rita demonstrates with the children who clutter her home and the grace with which she is able to manoeuvre around them:

> Rita then took charge of them all. People pawned kids off on her from all over town. Five would be sitting on a couch yelling and screaming, two more would be sleeping, and Rita, throwing socks and underwear over her shoulder, picking up a load of wash and resting her chin on it as she carried it towards the basement door, would have to step over two or three sitting on their bums on the kitchen floor. She would have to keep picking them off the counter as she slogged off to do another wash, and she would be heard screaming at them and telling them to stop putting their arms in the toilet.[20]

In the text Richards draws attention to the hypocrisy of the shifting attitudes towards working women; at the time in which the novel is set, Rita's occupation is scorned; today her work would be sanctioned with the titles of "day care worker" or "professional care giver".

8 David Adams Richards, Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), p.11. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition; page references will henceforth appear in the text.

9 Geoffrey Cook, "Interview with David Adams Richards," Carleton Literary Reveiw, 6, No.1, pp.54-55.

CONCLUSION

A dominant concern in all of Richards' novels to date is with the way humans perceive and act towards each other; more specifically, his concerns are directed toward the manner in which those who exist on the periphery of mainstream culture, usually on lower incomes, are publicly perceived as deprived (economically, socially or morally) and their lives in need of one form of institutional assistance or another. Often in Richards' novels the intervention of the family courts or social crusaders with private homes leads unpredictably to devastating ends. An emotional experience frequently encountered in Richards' characters is fear of "the social worker" - a fear which is inspired by the power imbued the family courts by the Provincial Government to transform the private realm into a public or political forum. This phenomenon appears in four of the six novels Richards has published. Road to the Stilt House documents the gradual dismantling of the integrity and dignity of Arnold's family by the insinuating presence of the social worker, and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace centres on the invasion and destruction of Cindi's and Ivan's marriage by social crusaders within the community. Passages in Lives of Short Duration describe the dehumanizing effects Little Simon experiences in

the foster home which finally prompt him to escape to "his part of the river"[214], and in Nights Below Station Street Joe remembers the terrible time when the social worker, alarmed by his drinking, thought it might be necessary to separate the family.

In each of these novels Richards is not questioning the need for social assistance or support groups; he is challenging the assumptions, first, that human affairs may be understood in strictly legalistic or scientific terms, divorced from the living context of human emotions and spiritual experiences; and, second, that human dilemmas may consistently be solved through purely rationalistic and programmatic methods. Richards' novels provide the private, living context behind those human situations which might be viewed by the public as examples of deprivation and domestic violence. Where such things as the human spirit and passions are concerned in Richards' novels, human situations and interactions are never permitted to appear straightforward or predictable.

Richards exposes his readers to a spectrum of violence in his novels: overt, physical violence is usually juxtaposed to that which is covert and manipulative. Richards attempts to inspire in his readers a realization of how the deliberate actions prompted by the above assumptions are potentially violent in a subtle, unforeseen manner. His method of provoking this realization has been to introduce the reader to

an interior, subjective view of the world his characters inhabit. Particularly in the earlier novels, the reader is thrown in to the interior realm of the characters where the only perspective available on the larger world is that provided by their thoughts, memories, and emotional responses. It is through this inner view that the reader gains an appreciation of the moral and social integrity of the community these characters participate in. It is also from this perspective that a critical appreciation for the ambiguity of human affairs may be formed.

As has been indicated in the preceding chapters, a development is discernable throughout Richards' writing in the presentation of both his narrative and thematic concerns. There is movement towards a direct analytical mode of narration as well as a conscious clarification of his thematic material. With each of his first three novels, The Coming of Winter, Blood Ties, and Lives of Short Duration, Richards delves deeper into the subjective realm of his characters, allowing the narratives to proceed through the gradual accumulation of the characters' thoughts and memories, through what one reviewer earlier described as the "relentless pursuit of random association". 1 In the first two of these novels Richards' primary concern is to celebrate traditional rural values by exploring the details of his characters' daily lives; the reader apprehends the moral and social integrity of the characters' families and communities through perusing

these details. Richards' particular concerns with how these characters are perceived by those outside their own cultural community are merely suggested or communicated indirectly - the reader infers from the emotional responses of characters to certain confrontations or conflicts what Richards might be trying to say regarding the manner in which humans perceive others. For example, in the confrontation between Cathy MacDermot and Mr. Holt in Blood Ties, Richards suggests through Cathy's and her classmates' indignant responses to Holt's comments on her family the notion that human worth and potential cannot always be measured in material or scholastic terms.

Though Richards continues to expose his readers to the characters' subjective perspective in Lives of Short Duration, he no longer relies on the reader to infer his meaning. In this novel Richards openly laments the displacement of rural culture by urban, progressive social trends. Though he permits his lament to be understood through the juxtaposition of rural and urban experiences, he also provides his readers with thematic commentary through the characters of Old Simon and, particularly, Packet Terri. An inner view of the characters' thoughts and emotions in Richards' next novel, Road to the Stilt House, is provided by first-person narration. Again, Richards' concerns with the displacement of experiential self-knowledge through social engineering and commercial media are expressed through the independent

comments of three characters - Arnold, Father Billy, and Norman.

Finally, in Nights Below Station Street and Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace, Richards shifts towards a more analytical mode of narration and presentation of thematic material. In these last two novels he provides an omniscient narrator to comment upon his characters' interior processes. It is worth mentioning that in spite of this more detached narration of his characters' interior existence, Richards is careful to acknowledge the ambiguous and mysterious nature of the human consciousness - that is, where he might narrate a particular sequence of unconscious associations taking place within a character, he does not present the process as something that could be defined in objective terms. In addition to this direct commentary, however, Richards permits his characters to reveal their inner selves through their own dialogue with each other. Indeed, critics have been generous in their praise of Richards' penchant for dialogue in his two recent novels.

The unfolding of Richards' creative and intellectual processes might be viewed as part of a conversation he is engaged in with his readers and critics. Much of the development and clarification which Richards' writing style and thematic commentary have undergone thus far are due to his own creative and intellectual processes of refinement and differentiation. Part of these processes may be attributed to

Richards' frustration with how his early critics have tried to classify his novels under the headings of regionalism and socialism, as though he were addressing the moral and social problems of a particular region and not the universal experiences of humanity. Richards has frequently expressed his dismay with this type of critical reception:

> To say that I'm a writer who deals with people in a little corner of the world, is just misplaced. I'm very interested in the true nature of violence and the true nature of goodness. They both live in the human heart.2

Perhaps the development of Richards' narrative and thematic presentations stems from the desire to direct his readers towards a critical appreciation of what his novels reveal about the complex nature of the human heart.

NOTES

1 Andrew T. Seaman, "All the Confusion of their lives," rev. of Lives of Short Duration, by David Adams Richards, Atlantic Provinces Book Review, 9, No.1 (March 1982), p.4.

2 Mark Tunny, rev. of Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace, by David Adams Richards, The Telegraph Journal, 3 Nov. 1990, p.37, cols. 1-5.

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