

TRAGIC DIMENSIONS
IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF RAYMOND KNISTER

Doris Edna Everard

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PREFACE

This thesis is intended as a tribute to a Canadian writer, Raymond Knister (1899-1932), who, writing at a period when Canadian literature still lacked recognition in the world of arts and letters, may well have produced in his short lifetime a body of work, which, had it been made more available, would have exerted a salutary influence on the general low esteem in which Canadian literature was held. In a study of a limited selection of Knister's short stories, it is hoped to demonstrate, even belatedly, his eligibility into that inner circle of avant-garde writers who have been since acknowledged as spokesmen of the twenties. Names such as Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and Sherwood Anderson are all too familiar now, but at the time when Knister was writing the stories here selected for study, these great writers, too, were struggling to establish reputations, writing directly from experience in a new experimental style, and to a great extent in the beginning, they, too, were concentrating on the form of the short story.

Knister's short stories have been even more neglected than his novels and poetry. Unlike the literary giants who grew out of the twenties and whose early stories attracted scholars in search of the beginnings of themes which were to dominate later work, Knister barely entered

the thirties. Drowned on August 29, 1932 at the age of 33, Knister never achieved that full literary development which would have made fertile ground of his earlier fiction.

It would be gratifying to vindicate Raymond Knister from the disrepute he has suffered as a result of the superficial treatment given his writing in the reference works on Canadian literature. His work, far from being what is praised casually as little more than reliable reporting of the rural scene, should be seen to have significance beyond the limits of surface realism, revealing dimensions of the tragic philosophy which Knister aimed to project through his art.

The preparation of this thesis has been greatly facilitated by the assistance of several individuals and institutions.

Especially generous of her time and resources has been Mrs. Myrtle Grace, Raymond Knister's widow. Her permission for the use of unpublished materials has contributed importantly to whatever success this study has achieved. The many pleasant hours listening to her reminiscences have provided valuable insights into the influences which shaped Knister's writing.

For encouragement and scholarly direction in the progress of the work, all credit is due to Professor Michael

Gnarowski of Sir George Williams University. The privilege of working under the direction of one so eminently qualified in Canadian literature is gratefully acknowledged.

An expression of gratitude is also extended to Mr. Robert Weaver of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for his co-operation in making available the radio profile of Raymond Knister and for arranging permission for including the transcription of it from Allan Anderson, also of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Indebtedness to Mr. Anderson is likewise gratefully acknowledged.

Other material has been made available by the Archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University.

Not the least of these acknowledgements is to Mrs. Joyce Granich whose perseverance and patience in typing the thesis has been appreciated.

ABSTRACT

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A critical chronological reading of six of Raymond Knister's best published short stories reveals a depth of tragic vision not often found in Canadian literature. The study is based on the evidence discernible from Knister's use of the fertility theme as a pattern within which to project the mystery of the paradox of life. The eventual darkness of his later stories is shown to have been pre-figured in his first. There is a brief period, during which time a choice of direction is left open. The uncertainty is short-lived. The last three stories increase in pessimism and irony. The ultimate view is that man is a victim of circumstances beyond his control, that beauty is an illusion and that life is absurd.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Six short stories of Raymond Knister are selected for study. These are: "The One Thing," "Mist-Green Oats," "The Loading," "The Strawstack," "Elaine," and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier." Although at the present time, a volume collecting them is at press, it was not available for the preparation of this paper.¹ The primary texts, to which internal page references apply, are gathered from widely disparate sources.² Where a choice was possible, the more

¹ The volume at press is one edited by Michael M. Gnarowski. The collection comprises the six stories of this study.

² Subsequent references will be made to the following texts:

"The One Thing." The Midland, v. 8, no. 1, January, 1922, pp. 1-18.

"Mist-Green Oats." Canadian Short Stories, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto, 1966), pp. 111-137.

"The Loading." The Midland, Iowa City, v. 10, no. 1, January, 1924, pp. 1-13.

"The Strawstack." Canadian Short Stories, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto, 1947), pp. 144-154.

"Elaine." This Quarter, Paris, v. 1, no. 1, 1925, pp. 160-166.

"The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier." This Quarter, v. 1, no. 2, 1925, pp. 172-181.

available source is the one cited.³

The factors considered in the selection of the group are based on characteristics of style which the stories possess in common and on circumstances of writing and publication which they share. The term "experimental" has been appropriately applied to such of Knister's stories as these.⁴ It is within that context that they are best generally classified. There may be others to which the term equally applies but this selection comprises those experimental stories which were published in highly acclaimed literary journals of the day and all were written within the short span of three years (1922-1925) - crucial years in the life of the author.

Of the publications in which the selected stories first appeared, two were This Quarter and The Midland - well known, avant-garde, "little" magazines of the twenties. This Quarter, the Paris publication of Ernest Walsh and Ethel Moorhead, was the vehicle for the expression of the group of American expatriates in Paris following World War I.

Numbered among its contributors were many whose names have

³ Other sources are indicated in a bibliography prepared by Margaret Ray, appended to Collected Poems of Raymond Knister (Raymond Knister, Collected Poems of Raymond Knister, edited and with "Raymond Knister: A Memoir" by Dorothy Livesay [Toronto, 1949], pp. 39-45.

⁴ Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto, 1965), p. 685.

since become legend. It was in this magazine that "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" were first published. The Midland was an American monthly published in Iowa City, influential in literary circles and regarded by Henry Mencken as "probably the most important magazine ever founded in America."⁵ Among its contributors during the twenties were Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Mansfield and Ruth Suckow. "The One Thing," "Mist-Green Oats" and "The Loading" made their first appearances in The Midland. The third journal involved in first publication was The Canadian Forum, a magazine of high cultural purpose, although not confined to literary concerns. It was the only Canadian publication in which one of these experimental stories found first acceptance. The story was "The Strawstack."

The selection is also based on the consideration of what is deemed would have been approved by the author as characteristic of his best work in the short story field. His critical awareness about his own writing is substantiated where he refers to a letter he had received from This Quarter accepting one of the stories: "Just when I have a magazine like T.Q. actually asking for the most unsalable stories in America, I have begun to rite [sic] the

⁵ Mencken is quoted thus by Leo Kennedy in a profile of Raymond Knister (Leo Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," The Canadian Forum, v. 12, September, 1932, p. 459).

salable [sic] kind" That he did not wish to be identified by the "salable kind" is implicit in what he goes on to say: "I think critics should judge us by our best, ... not what we perforce write for olives and tenderloin." In admitting the economic necessity of writing to market requirements, he expresses resentment of the lure of "olives and tenderloin," referring to the compromising of his integrity as "prostituting my art."⁶ He had been, by this time, reduced to writing the kind of stories which were acceptable to the editor of The Star Weekly, a popular magazine of wide circulation in Ontario. Some of his remarks make it obvious that he was not proud of much of this writing - having evidently refused to sign some of it.⁷

In contrast to such scathing criticism, Knister refers to the stories included in this study in modestly approving tones. He writes of the care given the structure

⁶ From a letter dated March 17, 1926, to Marion Font from Comber. (From excerpts of correspondence selected by Dr. Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press, in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University).

⁷ "The Star Weekly and R.K. seem to have taken different paths. As long as they would print fairly good stuff it wasn't so bad. But this year - nothing I can send O'Brien, and the last articles have been unsigned" From a letter dated Oct. 30, 1927, quoted by Dorothy Livesay in the "Memoir" she wrote for Collected Poems of Raymond Knister, p. xxx.

of "The One Thing."⁸ He compares "The Strawstack" to the stories of E.A. Poe.⁹ In a letter to which Dorothy Livesay had access, Knister is quoted as mentioning the difficulty of the composition of "The Strawstack" and the effectiveness with which truth is conveyed in "The Loading."¹⁰ His assessment of the importance of "Mist-Green Oats" is implied in his choice of its material to be extended into an ambitious undertaking he had been drafting the week before he was drowned.¹¹ Although he does not mention "Elaine" or "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" specifically by title in any of the documents available, it is probably to one or both of them he is referring when in one instance, he mentions "so slight a thing that every word must be just right ..."¹²

8 Raymond Knister, "Canadian Literati," typescript of an unpublished article. (From the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University), p. 4. Knister writes, "... the composition or architecture had been given much care, and I was not surprised, though rather gratified, when The One Thing was accepted by The Midland." See Appendix I.

9 "Canadian Literati," p. 10. Knister is referring to a story of his which had appeared in The Canadian Forum. This could only be "The Strawstack." The reference is to "... a story, somewhat Poesque." The original reference, "... a story, obviously derived from Poe" had been lined out. See Appendix I.

10 Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxiii.

11 "Via Faust," typescript of an outline for a novel. (From the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University): "Begin with life out of the soil. Similar to Mist-Green Oats. The sensitive adolescent soul learning about life"

12 Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxiv.

and in another, "a story I wrote nine times in the hope that it might have as many readers."¹³

Knister's deference to the magazines in which these stories appeared is also noteworthy. The allusion to "a magazine like T.Q." in a previous quotation indicates that acceptance in This Quarter was something in Knister's mind approaching the ultimate of success.¹⁴ Since he served for a time on the editorial staff of The Midland, there are numerous indirect tributes to that magazine in letters he wrote to his family and friends back in Ontario. Perhaps his most impressive, however, comes from a time before he was associated with the magazine where he recounts the circumstances of the publication of his first short story, "The One Thing." He recalls: "I had heard of The Midland through Edward J. O'Brien's yearbooks of the short story, and I figured that it would be better to have even one cent a word and printing in such a place than the thousand dollars I had heard the popular magazines paid and run the risk of any loss of prestige; ..." ¹⁵ Knister also rated

¹³ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "The Farmer Who Was Poet Too: A Profile of Raymond Knister," written and produced by John Wood, with material prepared by Allan Anderson. (Archives Disc No. 640719-10, C.B.C.). Transcribed by the author of this thesis in Appendix II. See Sec. 36.

¹⁴ Letter, loc. cit. (above, Footnote 6).

¹⁵ "Canadian Literati," p. 4. See Appendix I.

The Canadian Forum highly - "perhaps the most important and intelligent magazine we have"¹⁶

Raymond Knister is accorded token entry in Canadian literary histories although he cannot be said to enjoy a wide reputation. Historians have seen no reason to grant him the esteem he had enjoyed among his contemporary fellow-writers. Writing in The Canadian Forum, Leo Kennedy pays Knister the following tribute:

To those who have postulated that little more than tedium and the acceptable work of Grove has come out of Canada's soil sprung writers, I wish to broach the work of Raymond Knister. To those who revel in American experimentalists, and adumbrate the poppycock that outside of Callaghan's pages there is no experimental work to be found, I submit the novels, stories and trivia of Knister again. In a word, I suggest to those despairing of a Canadian literary renaissance, that the published writings of Raymond Knister be duly thumbed and well considered, for the reason that they contain matter of considerable moment to us to-day. ¹⁷

Few critics mention, as does Kennedy, the success Knister achieved in the short story genre. Most citations concern his achievements in the field of poetry and the novel. The recognition of his poetry is, in part, due to the posthumous publication of his Collected Poems, prefaced

¹⁶ Raymond Knister, "Canadian Letter," typescript of an unpublished article. (From the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University), p. 6. See Appendix III.

¹⁷ Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," p. 459.

by Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir" and to such recent evaluations as Peter Steven's article, "The Old Futility of Art," in which are elucidated some valuable thematic insights.¹⁸

As a novelist, Knister has attracted attention by the reprinting of the novel White Narcissus in the New Canadian Library edition.¹⁹ Little has been done to effect a similar influence on his reputation as a short story writer. He has been credited with having edited Canadian Short Stories and there is a Knister story in each of the other two important anthologies of Canadian short stories.²⁰ Yet he is only summarily mentioned as a writer of short stories. Carl F. Klinck, General Editor of an important critical history, devotes a page to the novels but merely includes Knister's name among a list of short story writers.²¹

Although Desmond Pacey is responsible for the section relevant to Knister's short stories in Klinck's history, Pacey has elsewhere pointed out that the stories are

¹⁸ Canadian Literature, no. 23, Winter, 1965, pp. 45-52.

¹⁹ Raymond Knister, White Narcissus (Toronto, 1966).

²⁰ The three important anthologies are those of Weaver and Pacey, op. cit. (above, Footnote 2) and that of Knister (Canadian Short Stories, ed. Raymond Knister [Toronto, 1928]).

²¹ Literary History of Canada, "Fiction: 1920-1940," p. 674.

of finer artistic merit than the novels.²² And in the brief preface to "The Strawstack" in his anthology, Pacey writes an enthusiastic tribute to Knister's prose style.²³ But little else has been done to focus attention on Knister's short stories.²⁴

Excepting the two anthologized, the stories have been difficult to find. Few readers are willing to search out what are now rare issues of periodicals, many of which are no longer extant and are available only in very extensive libraries. Even so, it is difficult to explain the scant notice given a writer whose stories appeared in such sophisticated magazines as This Quarter, The Midland and The Canadian Forum. Not only did these stories find acceptance with the editors of these publications but they were double-starred and triple-starred by Edward J. O'Brien in his nominations for the most distinctive short stories of the year in his Year Book of the American Short Story.²⁵ In

²² Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto, 1961), p. 271.

²³ Canadian Short Stories, pp. 143-144.

²⁴ Attention is drawn to Professor Gnarowski's collected volume now at press, op. cit. (above, Footnote 1).

²⁵ The three earlier stories, "The One Thing," "Mist-Green Oats" and "The Loading" are double-starred. The three later stories, "The Strawstack," "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" are triple-starred. These ratings are indicated in the Ray Bibliography, op. cit. (above, Footnote 3).

addition, Knister was, on at least one occasion, singled out for ranking by the prestigious Bookman as fourth among the most outstanding short-story writers of the previous six months to be published in all America.²⁶ The story so honoured was "The Loading" and it placed before stories by Sherwood Anderson and Katherine Mansfield.

Knister's reputation as a short-story writer suffers from the misconception that his work, in general, lacks artistic merit. The important reference works reflect opinions which can be only based on superficial reading or on second hand accounts. They describe his writing more in terms of honest reporting than in those of the high artistic endeavour at which he aimed. The general impression conveyed is that Knister is an innocuous surface realist, if not even a somewhat quaint scribbler from the back concessions. Typical entries comment on his ability to describe the rural scene. One such refers to "the stuff of daily existence and scenes of farm life."²⁷ Another suggests that "the places and activities of the farm provide pretexts for bits of bucolic sagacity that, ingratiatingly, avoid an excess of the cracker-barrel or the homespun."²⁸ The general opinion is reflected

²⁶ Gerald Hewes Carson, "Current Short Stories," The Bookman (New York), v. 59, April, 1924, p. 139. See Appendix IV for complete list.

²⁷ The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, ed. Norah Story (Toronto, 1967), p. 411.

²⁸ A Literary History of Canada, p. 729.

in the epithet, "writer of pastorals."²⁹

The misconception results from a tendency to seize upon and read out of context, Knister's use of the word, "real." In this way, critics have misinterpreted his meaning.³⁰ They label his writing with such terms as "realism" or "realistic."³¹ In the "Foreword" to his intended collection of poems to have been entitled "Windfalls For Cider," Knister emphasizes the word "real" and it is the following passage which is most often cited: "Birds and flowers are real as sweating men and swilling pigs. But the feeling about them is not always so real any more, when it gets into words."³² Knister is not referring to realism in the sense that his critics imply; he is not advocating verisimilitude as a literary objective. He is defending his subject as the proper province of poetry.

²⁹ Milton Wilson, "Klein's Drowned Poet," Canadian Literature, no. 6, Autumn, 1960, p. 5.

³⁰ "His objective in writing was 'to make things real,' to present rather than to interpret": See A Literary History of Canada, p. 729. In contrast it is interesting to read a contemporary's view to the contrary: "He does not exploit the Canadian background for mercenary purposes; he interprets it because he is of it; ..." See Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," p. 461.

³¹ Canadian Writers: A Biographical Dictionary, Rev. ed., edited by Guy Sylvestre, Brandon Conrin, Carl F. Klinck (Toronto, 1966), p. 82.

³² Collected Poems of Raymond Knister [Foreword], p. vii.

Another maxim seized upon is one from a quotation in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir" - "Poetry is to make things real" The rest of the quotation is overlooked: "... those of the imagination and those of the tangible world."³³ Knister's definition of reality is something more akin to the idea of truth than to that of actuality. He was much too consummate an artist to advocate literal realism as an end in itself.

Knister's artistic principles apply as much to his prose as to his poetry. What he has to say about realism is perhaps more clearly stated when he is discussing prose. He makes his position clear where he states: "What is known as realism is only a means to an end, the end being the personal projection of the world."³⁴ In another instance he speaks of writers who, like himself, want "to write of Canadian life sincerely ... have been moved by its life, tried to picture it ..." in what he refers to as a "micro-cosmic projection of what they knew, ..." ³⁵ Again, he pronounces his literary aesthetic thus: "... it is not so necessary that art should portray a reality we can identify

33 p. xxii.

34 Canadian Short Stories, "The Canadian Short Story" [Introduction], pp. xiii-xiv.

35 "Canadian Literati," pp. 2-3. See Appendix I.

without going further than the window or mirror, as that it should embody a life of its own."³⁶ Knister's dictum "to make things real" should be assessed in the context of his own definition of realism. It will be then seen that the lifting of his prescription from the total context tends to depreciate the complexity of his work. What he meant by making things "real" was to make real the feeling expressed by the writer and felt by the reader - thus awakening his audience to the great universal rhythms and patterns of life, no matter how regional the setting.

Knister's sense of reality is closely related to his statements about objectivity. His oft-repeated advice, stressing the need for keeping "the eye on the object"³⁷ is intended as the prerequisite for the projection of emotion. He uses the terms "object" and "emotion" as adjuncts when he writes, "The emotion, the object might be left to speak for itself, which would be a clear artistic gain."³⁸ Something of the vein in which T.S. Eliot pronounced his "objective correlative" inheres in Knister's statement. More directly,

³⁶ "Canadian Letter," p. 7. See Appendix III.

³⁷ "Canadian Literati," p. 5. See Appendix I.

³⁸ From a column entitled "Mine Run," a clipping in the private collection of Mrs. Myrtle Grace [Knister's widow, the former Myrtle Gamble of Port Dover, Ontario]. See Appendix V.

he repeats the dictum where, in citing Flaubert, he writes, "There can be no absolute objectivity. When Flaubert is bringing some undeniable picture to your recognition, he is doing it only to impose on you some emotion which is part of his plan and the outgrowth of his own emotion."³⁹ The foregoing pronouncement leaves little doubt as to Knister's position on objectivity. The criteria to which Knister cedes priority in the assessment of short stories are universality and lyricism.⁴⁰ Objectivity, like realism is, for him, only a means to an end.

Knister's strictures for objectivity were also dictated by his awareness of the need of a corrective for the effete subjectivity and sentimentality which marked much of the writing at the beginning of the century. Knister was in sympathy with the imagist movement and his critical writings often echo its manifesto.⁴¹ He even advocated that poets

³⁹ Canadian Short Stories, "Introduction," p. xiii.

⁴⁰ The precedence given universality and lyricism is implicit in Knister's general critical stance. One instance where he couples these qualities is contained in a letter quoted in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir," p. xxii. He is assessing the merits of what was to him the best of farm stories ["Heart of Youth" by Walter T. Muilenburg]. His choice is dictated by reason of its being "most universal and lyrical."

⁴¹ Knister's affinity with the imagists is obvious in an article entitled "On Reading Aloud." The source is a clipping in the private collection of Mrs. Grace. See Appendix VI.

should write prose because of the current misconceptions about poetry.

To write stories which met his own artistic standards, Knister found to be a difficult task: "I incline to find more and more that the short story is one of the trickiest of forms. How to impart a hint of the wonder and mystery behind the circumstances, and yet remain true to these latter?"⁴² The question he poses is the problem of reconciling objectivity and emotion. Knister was particularly sensitive to the implications of the problem; it was a paramount concern of his craftsmanship.

That Knister was a conscious craftsman is well documented in an article he wrote, purportedly for aspiring writers.⁴³ It is perhaps the best statement of his credo of the short story; it establishes his consciousness as an artist, above all else. For this reason, it has been reproduced in its entirety in the appendix.

Central to an understanding of these experimental short stories of Knister's is his wistful question: "How to impart a hint of the wonder and mystery behind the circum-

⁴² From a letter quoted in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir," p. xxiii.

⁴³ "The Canadian Short Story," The Canadian Bookman, v.V, no. 8, August, 1923, pp. 203-204. See Appendix VII.

stances and yet remain true to these latter?"⁴⁴ The "circumstances" constitute only the vehicle for the projection of his feeling about life, his personal philosophy. It is the metaphorical element implicit in this two-level structuring which provides the dimension of allegory so effective in evoking that universality at which Knister aimed. The lyricism, of which he was likewise insistent, speaks for itself, through the tragic intensity of his style.

It is the element of allegory which also provides the structure for the archetypal interpretations by which this paper seeks to achieve its purpose. For it is the "circumstances" of everyday life on an Ontario farm which provide the framework of imagery for the themes of the stories. The uncertainties of life on the farm are universalized in the ambivalent potential of the fertility theme by which they are translated. Knister's themes vary in the degree of pessimism which they derive from the evidence to be discerned from Nature. The fear that life may be without meaning is the ultimate tragic view. It is said to be from such fear that primitive peoples were enlisted in the ritual performances of the mystery cults which based belief on the observation of natural law - often erroneously. These rituals formed the basis of primitive culture. They

⁴⁴ Livesay, "Memoir," loc. cit. (Above, Footnote 42).

are also said to have been responsible for the birth of tragedy.

The relationship between tragedy and the fertility theme is expounded not to assess Knister's work by any formal definition of tragedy, but rather to establish the premise of the tragic nature of the vision he perceived behind the "circumstances" - the vision he projects in these six experimental stories.

Knister's tragic philosophy derives from the enigmatic mystery of life. His stories are structured on paradox which serves well to represent the human dilemma. Man is represented as a prisoner of the flesh, yet possessed of a spirit yearning to be free - mortal yet haunted by immortality. The paradox is most readily discernible in the tremendous tension of the writing. The frequent use of oxymoron and other wrenchings of language are stylistic means by which the effect is achieved.

The role of Nature is central to the paradox since it is within the context of the fertility theme that the mystery is projected. The mother-image is equated with earth, representing the physical dimension of life. The father-image is equated with the sun, symbol of the divine life-engendering spirit. The two are ambivalently related and the secret of creation hangs in the balance of their

polarity. That the arrangement works well in Nature is not necessarily borne out in the sphere of human affairs. In Knister stories, marriage is not the source of much happiness. Man is continually seeking to free himself of earth-bound limitations and the monotony of life working the soil. In the two last stories, woman is even portrayed as something of a task-mistress.

The first three stories, "The One Thing," "Mist-Green Oats" and "The Loading" are confined to the farm setting. Always there is the lure of the road but the central characters have seldom if ever been away to the city. These stories are the more optimistic of the group and are marked by a preponderance of images of beauty. The characters succeed to varying degrees in becoming reconciled to a way of life.

The later three stories, "The Strawstack," "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier," involve travelling. The leading characters have left the farm and find that the lure of the road is a delusion. The images of beauty disappear as does the optimism of the earlier stories. The man in "The Strawstack" returns to the farm to commit suicide. The women in "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" resort to moral and personal degrading practices. They have gone to the city to live but still haunt the roads and countryside where life used to be happier.

Roads are highly symbolic in Knister stories - lonely, misleading and without end. They represent the loneliness of the soul adrift, the continuum of purposeless life and the futility of human effort to bring anything to a conclusion.

Roads are related to Knister's concept of time, which is also without end and adds to the feeling of futility - particularly in the later stories.

Time is figured in the cyclical progression of the seasons and is responsible for change, only in the sense of monotonous repetition - that is, of eternal recurrence. That Knister was sensitive to this tragic rhythm of the seasons as the mysterious manifestation of the power of Nature controlling human life, is eloquently illustrated in a letter he wrote to his fiancée:

.... Today I have been pitching barley sheaves all day, a parlous (whatever that is) business It was windy all day, worse and worse, until we just got in to supper when heavy rain started obbligato. After, I put on rubber boots and walked in the garden and orchard, in wet grass and weeds, beneath straining trees from which leaves and fruit had been torn. From something, wind, soil, rain-smell, dusk, an orod of Autumn assailed me, appalling. The staid irrevocable march of the seasons. From the soil a quiet sadness, unquestioning, not to be denied, which looks always from the eyes of ruminant animals, and is not to be

made bitter save by the impatience of human hearts. And they, God knows, can contrive unhappiness anywhere.⁴⁵

The wind is an important symbol in Knister stories. It can be seen to represent Fate. As in the foregoing quoted passage, the wind is capricious - representative of a Fate which has no regard for human affairs. In "Mist-Green Oats" the wind appears as a benevolent force, riffling, as it does, across the fields to create a landscape of breath-taking beauty. Yet there is also a warning that Fate is blind. The wind has become menacing in "The Loading" - rattling loose boards and windows about the house at night. Its use, here, is more a symbol of something withheld than as active agent in itself. In "The Strawstack," the wind lifts, seemingly creating a centrifugal vacuum, pulling man forward to death. The association of the wind with high altitude is a common one with Knister. It is often seen as a force at work on high, moving clouds, windmills and tree-tops but seldom is it felt at man's level. In the last story, the wind has failed except in a surrealist scene of the void. There is a somewhat similar scene in "The One Thing" which establishes the latent and perhaps unconscious tendency which was to ultimately prevail. In the later stories the images of beauty as of the wind are

⁴⁵ Letter dated August 20, 1926 from Northwood, Ontario. (From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University). His fiancée's name was Marion Font.

disappearing, being totally absent in the last. The significance of the failing wind is that the belief in Fate is also failing. The man in "The Strawstack" thinks ironically of presuming to use the word "destiny." In the earlier stories the odds are more or less even that there may be a purpose in life. But as the wind fails and the beauty disappears, the odds decline. Life is seen to be without purpose; time and space are the void; Fate is an absurdity.

The general attitude toward Fate is expressed in the introduction Knister wrote to his anthology of Canadian stories. Here he writes of "fate as necessity inhering in character." The implication in the whole paragraph is that such a conception of Fate constitutes the tragic vision; being opposed to the romantic concept of man's freedom to determine his own destiny.⁴⁶ It is such a tragic vision that is projected in the stories. To varying degrees there

⁴⁶ "Yet in typical Northern stories there is no actual acceptance of life and hence, paradoxically, a frequently disinterested gusto in evoking it. The Wilds are grim, yes, the Barrens may claim your life; bad men and wild animals abound. But yet there is youth, health, virtue, above all, luck. These talismans forbid tragedy, and if there is death, it is only a possible death, and that too is a matter of luck. Such an attitude precludes a tragic philosophy, and makes of life a game: it is survival perhaps of biological necessity in Northern peoples. In older civilizations, where life has been easier for many generations, there is an acceptance of fate as necessity inhering in character, which results in a different conception of art." See Canadian Short Stories [Introduction], p. xvi.

is also an ironic note that man is cruelly deceived by an illusion that he could be free.

Despite the illusion, the world is a prison. In "The One Thing" its horizons are fairly distant. In "Mist-Green Oats" there is a hint that certain optical phenomena, concerning distance, are illusions. "The Loading" emphasizes the reality of small enclosed places. "The Strawstack" suggests that there is no difference between life inside and life outside a penitentiary. The prison is reduced to the dimension of the mind. Man creates his own prison by reason of his inability to escape himself. He is a victim of circumstances beyond his control and his life is a series of conditioned responses to the exigencies which arise. He has no choice to do other than he does. He is innocent. Life is absurd. This is the philosophical sense in which the later stories define Fate.

In the early stories there is some reason to anticipate a revelation; in the later stories the suggestion is that the mystery is better concealed. The early stories are of spring, sun, warmth and a response to the life urge. The later ones are of autumn, winter, night, the moon and chilling frost. The change is significant to the darkening vision of life and to the deepening cynicism of the narrator.

The tragic development is not one of progressively

increasing pessimism from one story to the next. There is a pivotal point between "The Loading" and "The Strawstack." "The One Thing" contains the seminal ideas of all the stories. Many of them are not developed in the next two stories. "The One Thing" is, in many ways, comparable to the last, "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier," providing an indication of the direction the group of stories was eventually to take. "Mist-Green Oats" is a dynamic story and is followed by "The Loading" whose theme, as interpreted here, almost mitigates tragedy. However, the next story, "The Strawstack," reverses the trend and it is a direction from which there can be no turning back. The last two stories, "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" increase in darkness and in ironic bitterness. The implication of the heavy irony is that what was latent and perhaps unconscious in "The One Thing" is now fully recognized and quite consciously projected. The suggestion is that death as the ultimate end is preferable to the possibility of life eternal, if eternity offers nothing more than a continuation of what has already been endured.

The plan of procedure is as indicated in the Table of Contents. Chapter II outlines the events of Knister's life which relate most importantly to his development as a short story writer. Each of the following chapters is a structural analysis of one of the stories.

Knister stories lend themselves well to this type

of analysis by reason of their being very consciously contrived. His approach to art results in an organic unity by which all elements of structure combine toward the total effect required of the theme. Knister does not use the word "structure" but he uses the concept.⁴⁷

These analyses are organized in much the same pattern with each story. The theme is condensed at the beginning to indicate the structural principle on which the story is built. This is usually explained in terms of thematic imagery. A somewhat literal digest follows for those stories for which it is deemed necessary. The opening passages, which serve as prologues, are given emphasis as near the beginning as possible, since Knister's openings are such important features of his style. The contribution of setting or of central character follows, the order depending on whether it is felt that time and place exist more in the mind or as external objects. The last element to be discussed is the action. Knister's stories are never dictated by concerns of formal plot. The action is always enigmatic; the begin-

⁴⁷ Knister uses the word "architecture" in some instances to mean structure. His concept of structure as composition is implied where in articulating the organic theory, he cites a story of Maupassant, "in which structure is so blended with atmosphere and feeling that the 'planned' element, the brick upon brick method ... is altogether absent at first reading." He continues, "It is usually this way in any finished story. The great art is that which is concealed." "Canadian Literati," p. 4. See Appendix I.

ning, middle and end are not clearly defined. The climactic point is always avoided. The endings are inconclusive. This flagrant disregard for dramatic convention is a deliberate device to accommodate what was for Knister's era, an unconventional tragic vision.

The stories are arranged in order of their publication. Although subsequent research may prove that such is not the order of their composition, it is not likely that there will be major changes. "The One Thing" has been definitely established as his first. "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" are fairly certainly late. The position relegated, by publication dates to the others, lends itself to a credible development, consistent with the biographical account.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Raymond Knister's experience of life provided him with the raw materials for his writing. He was born and raised on his father's Ontario farm near Comber, Essex County. From this setting are derived the fertility images which were to pervade his work. And it is in relation to the ambivalent meaning of the fertility theme that Knister's tragic forms find dimension.¹ From early childhood he experienced the rhythm of the cyclical progression of the seasons as they were made manifest in flock, field and woodland. But also he was made aware of a capricious element in the vagaries of wind and weather which could bring the long-awaited rain so needed in the growing season but which could also bruise and flatten the ripening crops upon the ground before they might be harvested, or make the soil so muddy that the harvesting machinery would mire. Beyond the cer-

¹ It is with such insight that James Reaney casts as "Raymond" the goose which sings of earth as a kind of womb-tomb. In "April Eclogue" she is a big, black sow; in "October Eclogue" the sacrificial goose-shed. Sometimes "Raymond" and another goose "Valancy" [Isabella Valancy Crawford?] sing duets about cyclical themes. (James Reaney, A Suit of Nettles (Toronto, 1958). It is perhaps noteworthy that Milton Wilson has recognized the same theme: "In the April Eclogue, Raymond, himself, may sing of the land's rebirth out of the ice age, and also (by analogy) of the flood, the ark and the released birds ... " See "Klein's Drowned Poet," p. 5.

tainty that the sun rose and set every day, and according to its regular patterns, that one season followed the previous one, there was really no certainty of a bountiful harvest; the ambivalent potential of the wind could frustrate the most diligent farmer.

Knister, no doubt, learned that the most successful farmer attuned his activities to the cyclical progression of the seasons and read the signs which foretold the imminent changes in the weather - hoping to circumvent disaster by providential planning. The business of farming, although becoming an increasingly scientific affair, has always had about it an element of uncertainty not unrelated to the aura of magic and mystery pervading the myth and folklore concerned with man's earliest attempts to wrest a living from the soil and to domesticate the wild things of nature.

That the senior Knister was a successful farmer is made obvious in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir":

... He was not merely a farmer, but a farmer who specialized in the best. The horses in Knister's "Stable Talk" were of no careless breed but pedigreed Clydesdales imported from Scotland. Later the father saw the advantage of growing seed corn rather than feed corn and made a success of that. He was a man who combined perseverance with foresight. He was the first to grow soy beans in Kent County, eventually becoming one of the largest growers in Canada. His daughter, Marjorie (Mrs. C.E. Willan) remembers vividly sending some samples of the crop

to the Chicago Winter Fair, "every bean handpicked on the kitchen table before it went to the Fair - where it took first prize." 2

In his boyhood, Raymond assisted with the work after school hours and during holidays - seemingly observing with care, the details of the routines of farming and learning firsthand something of the monotony of the endless rounds and of the weariness which comes in busy seasons of pushing one's physical powers to the limit. With such weariness came an accompanying deadening of spirits and the feeling of futility which is present in varying degrees in the stories which form the basis of this study. It was during these youthful years that he began accumulating the wealth of farming details which was to constitute the realistic plane of his creative writing. Leo Kennedy, a personal friend, assesses his unusual perception:

He has stored away a copious memory of the sights, sounds and smells encountered daily, season by season, on the Ontario farm and countryside. He has remembered the ways of the people, their problems and habits of mind. And writing the lives of these folk, he recreates honestly and plainly, each familiar impulse and motive, each rattle of harness and comment of cornerake. 3

2 Livesay, "Memoir," p. xiv.

3 Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," p. 459.

That his father was a perfectionist in his work has been suggested by Dorothy Livesay as responsible for the speech defect which suddenly afflicted the boy at about the age of seven and from which he never fully recovered. Although this explanation may have some validity, it would seem unjust to limit the father's influence to such a negative cast. He may very well have been the source of the sensitivity to the beauties and mysteries of Nature to which the son was heir. The father may even have served as the model for those rare Knister characters who achieve an acceptance of the tragedy of life without embitterment or loss of faith. Something of the father's sensibility is communicated in an excerpt from a letter he wrote to Raymond and his little family dated March 23, 1929:

"My Dears: "We have been waiting for Easter to come when you would all be home. Perhaps you have not been reminded of it as often as you should have been. But here comes a special invitation. The squirrels are on hand and I have invited all the birds to return and sing their first spring song. New life is free to everyone and all things. So please come home that we may all rejoice together ...

"Dad Knister"⁵

Such a message is difficult to attribute to a farmer concerned only with the material considerations of

⁴ Livesay, "Memoir," p. xv.

⁵ From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University.

wresting a living from the soil. And association with a man from whom such expression was forthcoming, could hardly be without effect on a developing writer.

The influences of his childhood were enduring: that he constantly returned to his father's farm despite temporary absences bespeaks a deep attachment to the soil and to his family there. His emotional being was rooted in this setting where his response to life was translatable through the everyday details of the activities of the farm. The farm was the world in microcosm where man faces the forces of Nature no less than does Lear on the heath and where too, the struggle manifests all the requisites of tragic conflict.

Knister's relationship with his mother has been bypassed by most commentators. She seems to have been a dominant woman and to have had certain plans for her son who had a fixation from a very early age on becoming a writer - which was certainly not what either of his parents had in mind. However, his mother's influence had a very important salutary effect in at least one respect. She introduced him at an early age to the world of literature. So, that in addition to his direct experience with life, Knister became acquainted with the views expressed by life's immortal spokesmen. Since his speech difficulty was a serious social handicap, he was even more isolated than most farm children. Observing his wide interests in reading, his mother provided books to foster

his enquiring mind. During high school years he concentrated on history and biography but these interests were gradually succeeded by those of language and literature and by the time he was eighteen he was writing poetry about his experience on the farm.

By the time Raymond finished high school, his family had moved to a fruit farm at Cedar Springs, Kent County. Fruit farming is a different agricultural operation but one which also follows the universal pattern of seasonal succession - budding and blossoming, maturity and harvest, and the dormant stage after the end and before the next beginning. Life here repeated the same cyclical progression he had observed in the corn fields of the first farm in Essex.

In 1919 his parents sent him to Victoria College at the University of Toronto, but illness forced him to leave before his first year was completed.⁶ Dorothy Livesay writes of this period:

He registered ... in a poor year for many veterans home from the war were enrolling, over-crowding the classrooms, and the vitality of the student body was sapped by the devastating influenza epidemic. Knister became ill with it followed by pneumonia. His father hastened to his side, and nursed him through to safety. 7

⁶ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 9.

⁷ Livesay, "Memoir," pp. xvii-xviii.

Here again the benevolent image of the elder Knister manifests itself. He seems to have provided Raymond with a sense of security and to have been as much responsible for Raymond's deep-rootedness as was the farm. For, although the Knisters changed farms, Raymond always returned home and seemed to find strength and renewal there.⁸

It seems unlikely that Knister's literary interest was the direct result of formal schooling, but rather that it was a response to a predisposed aptitude and taste. That he had a voracious appetite for reading is indicated in the mention of "perhaps a hundred volumes a year" in an autobiographical illustration he used to describe the plight of beginning writers:

When I started to write some years ago, I was a farm lad of little academic education or wordly acquirements. I had read rather widely, not to an unheard-of quantity, perhaps one hundred volumes a year from the time I was fourteen until I was twenty-one. Long before this period I had decided that I must become an author Well, it was getting time to start. What should I write about? It had been essays of a literary turn at first

Knister continues to relate his literary development at the university:

⁸ The source for this information is a conversation with Mrs. Grace in which she divulged an uncanny awareness of the unusually close bond between her husband and his father.

Then I went to Toronto University, but was unable to finish my first year, succumbing to pneumonia and pleurisy. The University magazines printed articles of mine on "The Intellectual But and Jeff" (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza) "The Modern Novel," and "Stevenson, Twenty-Five Years After," this latter a glowing tribute of five thousand words. 9

It is unlikely that in so short a time at the university he would have been strongly influenced by any particular literary school, although he seems to have formed a close bond with Pelham Edgar.¹⁰

After recovery from his illness, Knister felt no urge to return to the academic world. Perhaps, like so many other creative writers, he found the requirements of scholarship stultifying to his own individual development. His respect for Edgar seems to have been an exception to his general low opinion of the academic community.¹¹

⁹ "Canadian Literati," p. 3. See Appendix I.

¹⁰ It was to Pelham Edgar he was later to dedicate his novel, My Star Predominant. There is extant, much of the correspondence which was carried on between them throughout the years. In one of these letters Knister seeks approval about the wording of the dedication which must have been granted, since it was published unaltered - "To Pelham Edgar, my old teacher, in the hope that he may find reflected in these pages something of his genuine passion for poetry." From a letter to Pelham Edgar, dated November 8, 1931 (from the private collection of Mrs. Grace).

¹¹ Knister refers to Edgar in another reference as "the best Canadian critic as far as I know." See Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxix.

The professor, after all, was not an editor and, as James Reaney has surmised, Knister was searching for an "honorary godfather." Reaney, in evaluating Knister's experience at the University, regrets that it was an inauspicious period in the world of letters at Toronto:

The struggle between who you're going to follow in a literary way - in Knister's case - the whole thing is - here the poor boy gets all his education on himself and the Chatham Public Library to help ... and then he goes to Toronto - and now it's terribly important who he meets there and what he reads - and I don't honestly think the old guard in Canadian literature could have helped him very much - it's too bad they weren't a bit better. 12

At a later period Knister was to write somewhat disparagingly of some of [what was to Knister] the "later" work of one University of Toronto poet, Professor E.J. Pratt, as manifesting "dependence upon wit and the use in a professional way of erudite terms to convey honour."¹³ Because Knister was interested in getting his writing published, part of his distrust of erudition was directed at the scholarly controlled press. Although lauding The Canadian Forum as being the most likely outlet for good writers in Canada, he nonetheless records of it:

¹² C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 30.

¹³ "Canadian Literati," p. 7. See Appendix I.

... a sort of clique of younger generation of Toronto University - assistant professors, and visiting Oxford dons, had founded and controlled it. Its comments on politics and conditions belonged to a tastefully liberal order, and sometimes even disconcerted the constituted powers. It also put forth sound sense on the subject of national art and literature. But the group erred in supposing that its own members could supply whatever was necessary in these departments. 14

During convalescence on his father's farm he saw the potentiality of the life around him in so sufficiently objective a light that he felt that here, too, was material such as that drawn on by Chekkov and the many other writers with whose short stories he had become familiar. He was gaining the "sense of an indigenous life waiting to be rendered,"¹⁵ - a sense which he was to claim he never lost. Because of his own feeling of individuality, he was never able to completely identify with any school - the Russians, du Maupassant or even the Mid-West American one, because he assimilated something of them all to create a form uniquely Canadian and uniquely Knister. To this effect, Leo Kennedy writes: "The interesting fact about Raymond Knister's work is that he does not consciously or unconsciously emulate any school or style of writing. Reading either of his two published novels or any of his uncollected short stories, you

14 "Canadian Literati," p. 10. See Appendix I.

15 "Canadian Literati," p. 8. See Appendix I.

do not surmise sources. If there are such, they are too finely diluted for detection He is ... modelling his subject in a way native to himself."¹⁶ Knister speaks for himself in the same vein, in a reminiscence about his dawning consciousness to the meaning of the world around him:

But when I got back to the farm and recovered my health by dint of working fourteen to sixteen hours in the field until autumn I began to change my views about writing. There was something about the life that I lived and all the other farm people around me, something that had to be expressed, though I didn't know just how. But the attempt would have to be made in the form of short stories. I had read a great many short stories from several literatures. Now for a subject; it wouldn't do to start with an autobiographical piece. One must be objective. As the days got shorter, and the time of more leisure came nearer, I looked about me earnestly.

And he continues to relate the circumstances around which he wrote "The One Thing," his first short story:

It happened, that we had a former neighbour working for us that fall. He was a tiny short old man who had sold his farm and been away for years, and now he was back among the people he had known helping them with their crops. He and I hauled manure and cut corn in the field with sickles. He would mutter to himself amid the rustle of the stalks, though he was not ill-natured. When he was lifting staves loaded with tobacco-plants to the wagon, and had to toss them when the load

¹⁶ Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," p. 461.

became high, someone jocularly complimented him on being a ball-player. "I'm no ball-player," he returned bitterly. "Takes a good strong man to play ball." And one night I heard him talking in his sleep from the next room, cursing shrilly at some one who had not appreciated his horses: "Nothing but a damn fool! Ever know me to run down any man's horses?"

Here was my story. When the fall work was over and the Christmas season, I sat down, on January 2nd, 1921, and wrote it. The writing was quite bad, but the composition or architecture had been given some care, and I was not surprised, though rather gratified when "The One Thing" was accepted by The Midland. Four other magazines had rejected it. I had heard of The Midland through Edward J. O'Brien's yearbooks of the short story and I figured that it would be better to have even one cent a word and printing in such a place than the thousand dollars I had heard the popular magazines paid, and run the risk of any loss of prestige; the deuce with money! But the letter of acceptance from John T. Frederick, while it praised my story with the most ingratiating discrimination, mentioned that The Midland did not pay for stories. Two or three copies of the magazine were mailed to me in which I found stories by Ruth Suckow, Walter J. Muilenburg and George Carver.

That winter, I wrote several more farm stories and also thirty or forty farm poems, with the eye on the object. These were printed at intervals in the "little" magazines, poetry journals, and expatriate quarterlies, - all American. Some recognition came from American Critics, and in London The New Criterion singled out a dozen of my poems from a galaxy of moderns for their "objectivity." It was this objectivity which forbade the acceptance of my work in Canadian magazines. My poems and stories were so Canadian and came so directly from the soil that Canadian editors would have nothing to do with them.

The injustice was perhaps trifling; the quite modest merits of my efforts were adequately rewarded by the audience fit though few of the "little" magazines. But they weren't morally subversive, nor eccentric mannered, these attempts. It seemed gruesomely significant that not a Canadian editor would have anything to do with them, and that probably there were a few other young men in the country writing about it with the same immediacy, who were likewise rejected. 17

Although a farm would seem unlikely as a stimulating literary locale, Knister formed associations with writers and editors by correspondence, trying to learn from them what it was that his stories lacked which prevented their acceptance by the editors of the widely-circulated journals, where publication might have provided the monetary recompense that even writers require to subsist. He may have been hoping to alleviate his worst fear - that there was no paying audience for his kind of writing, which he was astute enough as a critic to know was good.

The narrator of the C.B.C. Profile cites evidence that - "During the years on the farm after his unsuccessful university attempt, Raymond began to explore the avenues open to young writers in the early nineteen twenties. He was a good critic and he began to write occasional book reviews for newspapers and periodicals."¹⁸ He also read the

¹⁷ "Canadian Literati," pp. 3-5. See Appendix I.

¹⁸ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 12.

the little magazines which kept him current, being in advance of popular trends - thus affording him certain compensation for his isolation from what passed as "literary circles." Morley Callaghan records his impressions of Knister as a critic when the two met a few years later:

Raymond knew what was going on in London and New York, Paris and so on. I couldn't figure the guy out - I mean - this was what was strange to me about Raymond - how did this boy, off the farm - you know - have this taste and understanding about writing? I have no idea how he got this way - this was what was so strange about him among Canadian writers. He was the only guy I knew in Toronto at that time - who, you know, that I might do a story and I could take it to Raymond and I would know that Raymond was reading this story just as someone in New York or Paris might read it and his judgment was just as good. In any time and in any period, these men are very rare - and Raymond had this peculiar taste and understanding about literature. 19

Knister was having little success with getting his stories published in Canadian magazines. During these years on the farm, the one story to find a Canadian press was "The Strawstack" which was likely accepted prior to Knister's departure to the United States since it was published in The Canadian Forum in October, 1923.

It is not surprising that greener vistas began to

¹⁹ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 11.

appear inviting. Knister was attracted to the modern literary movement in the American Midwest where a group of young writers from widely disparate European backgrounds had established a literary centre in Chicago in the previous decade. Although by the twenties the literary boom of Chicago had begun to recede, the area was one which was not too remote from southwestern Ontario. The movement was, of course, the one to become known as imagism, whose practice in economy and directness in the use of words provided a corrective to the effete school of New England which had been dispensing the American image. Knister had already been writing his own imagistic style independent of any group. Thus it is not surprising that he felt an affinity to the Midwest. In this regard, it might also be noted that Chicago was perhaps as much the metropolitan centre of his part of Ontario as was Toronto and one artistically alert, would keep himself current with the Chicago publications. Knister has written that "Heart of Youth," a short story based on farm life in the Midwest and written by Walter Muilenburg, with whom he later struck up a correspondence and became an associate on the editorial staff of The Midland "was perhaps the story which awoke me to country life as life and as possible material for art; and from my first reading of it in O'Brien to now, I regard it as to me the best of farm stories - most universal and lyrical."²⁰

²⁰ Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxii. Muilenburg's story "Heart of Youth" was published in Edward J. O'Brien's Yearbook of the American Short Story, 1915.

It was while still on the farm that Knister began to write to John Frederick, the editor of The Midland, in which some of his poems had found acceptance:

I was very glad to see the poems in your December poetry number. If you can use any others of my output which you have, I shall be grateful. I think that journalism could have a bad effect on me There is no kind of writing on the go that I would not tackle - with preparation enough. However, I expect to specialize in fiction in which there will be plenty of room. The matter of modern movements in literature and drama is interesting to - much of the stuff ... is bunk in itself, though any of these experiments may prove of value to one who can apply them to a vision of his own and a knowledge of the tradition. 21

John Frederick was interested in Knister's work and accepted "The One Thing" at some date prior to August 1921, although the story did not appear until the January 1922 number of The Midland.²² "Mist-Green Oats" was the next story to be accepted, publication following shortly in the August-September issue of the same year. "The Loading" was written sometime before the spring of 1922 since there is some correspondence about producing the play adapted from

²¹ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 13.

²² That the story was accepted prior to August, 1921, is indicated, since that is the date of a letter he wrote to a Miss Nicholl, editor of The Measure, a letter in which he acquaints her of this fact. (Letter from the private collection of Mrs. Grace).

it.²³ The story was not published in The Midland until January 1924. Frederick also gave Knister work at book reviewing and put him in touch with other editors who could use feature writing. There is a record that Frederick wrote him "a long letter offering him work on The Midland, help with finances, raises the prospect of the Midland collection of SS, and asks for 'Mist-Green Oats' for it."²⁴ A shorter, unabridged letter, from Mrs. Grace's papers, asks for an interview. This letter is merely dated Saturday, March 11, but the year is probably 1921. Sometime in 1922 Knister visited with Frederick at his place in Michigan,²⁵ but the letter asking for the interview was written before they had met, as is evident in the text:

"My dear Knister,
 "I have at last got my schedule straightened out and have decided that I can stop at Chatham, Wednesday morning next, at 6:18 Wabash train. I can stop only between trains, or until 12:44 that day - but I wondered if you could come into town and

²³ Letter from Knister dated June 10, 1922 to Bertram Forsyth, Director of Hart House, concerning his play, "The Loading." (From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University). When the play was eventually published in Poet Lore, Boston, December 1928, it had been recast and re-titled, "Youth Goes west." See the Ray bibliography in Collected Poems of Raymond Knister.

²⁴ Letter, without date. (From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University).

²⁵ Knister writes, "Three years ago (1922) when I was at his [Frederick's] place in Michigan" Letter quoted by Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxii.

we could talk at a hotel or the station. Don't try to get in so early as that and if you're overly busy don't try at all, for I know how farming is. I'll wait about the depot and you can recognize me as a tall man with rimmed glasses and a small bandage on his nose - memento of an accident at Glennie during the ice storm - I'll tell you about the story, etc.

"J.T. Frederick"²⁶

Discouraged by the uncongenial Canadian situation Knister began to think seriously of Frederick's offer on The Midland, although with some trepidation:

After a lengthy dry spell, we have a rainy morning wherefore I am inspired to the extent of letters and as I look up, the lake is misted, making the farm the end of the world. It almost has been so for me! Within a few weeks I hope to know something of my plans for the winter. I hope to get together a little money and if it's feasible, would like to go to Iowa City, though I fear it must be a crowded place for free-lance efforts. I think I'll try literary essays. Our Canadian magazines don't know a story from a bill of lading. 27

At the end of the summer of 1923 Knister accepted the position on The Midland. His stay in Iowa City seems to have been a very happy and stimulating one and provided him the opportunity of consorting with such moderns as Ruth

²⁶ From the private collection of Mrs. Grace.

²⁷ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 15.

Suckow, Walter Muilenburg and others identified with the Midwest group. Leo Kennedy relates of the American period, "After a year on The Midland he removed to Chicago, and, O'Brien's valuable reference work says in effect, spent several months reviewing for Poetry and the Chicago Evening Post, and filling casual jobs."²⁸

In the fall of 1924 Knister returned to his father's farm. Although, as James Reaney has pointed out, South-Western Ontario is geographically a part of the American Cornbelt, Americans do not feel the same way about their country as do Canadians about theirs.²⁹ If this be true, as indeed the poem, "After Exile" indicates, then it would explain why Knister, for whom writing was so much a projection of feeling, could not identify with the American image; his feeling about his experience of life on a farm was different from theirs. So that after assimilating all he was likely to find congenial in their literary views and techniques, and perhaps recalling "the indigenous life waiting to be rendered"³⁰ at home, he felt impelled to get back to the grass roots from which his emotional being drew its sustaining breath. The familiar objects on his father's farm cast

²⁸ Kennedy, "Raymond Knister," p. 460.

²⁹ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 18.

³⁰ "Canadian Literati," p. 8. See Appendix I.

themselves in his sensitive imagination into universal patterns and evoked the lyric voice as it could be summoned in no other place.

His sojourn in the Midwest has been said by some to have been under two years.³¹ Perhaps it would be less misleading to say that it was very little more than a year. According to his poem, "After Exile" which is believed to have been commemorative of his return,³² the month was October. Since this poem was published in the October issue of Voices 1925, he must have written it in October 1924. Thus, leaving at the end of the summer 1923 and returning in October 1924, his work with The Midland must indeed have been very brief - even more brief the reviewing work he did for some of the Chicago papers while there - unless perhaps some of these activities were carried on concurrently.

During his year in Iowa City, Knister met a southern American girl named Marion Font to whom he became engaged to be married. Because of religious differences, the match was opposed by both families and the wedding plans, after a time, were abandoned. When he returned to the farm, he and Marion continued to correspond, although it became increasingly apparent that the engagement was doomed. Some

³¹ Pacey, Canadian Short Stories, p. 143.

³² C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 23.

excerpts of his letters to her are eloquent of the unrest which was beginning to beset him. One letter, dated March 17, 1926 confides: "There are too many influences pulling me this, that and the other. I should like to take to the open road again ... " And the letter ends with "The Ploughman's Song"³³ which seems an apt epitaph to their ill-fated love affair. The tone, even after the final dissolution of the engagement, harks back to halcyon days when hope rode high but he also finds possible an acceptance of the inevitable - the tragic necessity inherent in life. On June 25, 1926 he writes to her "... I know at any rate that nothing again can hurt me quite so much ... One may become tempered without becoming embittered, disillusioned without losing ideals ;..."³⁴

It is noteworthy that the first four of Knister's avant-garde stories under study were written before he went to Iowa City and before he had met Marion. These stories are dominated by male protagonists and involve father-son relationships. Mothers are usually absent as is Len Brinder's mother in "Mist-Green Oats," or they are shadow figures like Nettie in "The Loading." When he returned to

³³ Letter to Marion Font. (From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University).

³⁴ From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University.

the farm after his sojourn in the American Midwest, he wrote the other two stories of the group, "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier."³⁵ These two stories have female protagonists and concern mother-daughter relationships. The shift in focus seems significant. According to the darkening vision of these last stories, the introduction of women into central positions in human affairs is not propitious. The shift is accompanied by increased irony, bespeaking a deep bitterness previously lacking.

The year Knister spent on his father's farm after his return to Canada was not an admission of defeat. As Morley Callaghan has put it: "No he was far from licked on his return."³⁶ According to his correspondence he was working hard and finding satisfaction in his efforts:

For something more than a month I have been working furiously, it seems alack, the only way I can work. I've done a draft of my second novel, which seems a more likeable piece than the first, and is again of the younger generation and of the farm. Also I have been working at a couple of short stories. One is so slight a thing that every word must be just right or it won't be worth much. 37

³⁵ Callaghan mentions that it was after he returned from Iowa City that he wrote two stories that appeared in This Quarter in Paris. Since "Elaine" and "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" are the only stories Knister had published in This Quarter, it must be to them Callaghan is referring. (C.B.C. Profile, Appendix II, Sec. 22).

³⁶ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 9.

³⁷ Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxiv.

This "so slight" a story may well have been "Elaine" - the other possibly "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier." These were the two stories accepted by This Quarter. It seems that Knister was most successful as a writer's writer. Perhaps he was at his best when he was completely unaware of any audience: "Indeed, I incline to think that the only safe way to write is for one's own enjoyment."³⁸ It must have been much-welcomed advice which was added in a postscript to a letter from This Quarter: "Your stuff is real. The story we took. Keep at it Dig all you can out of your surroundings. Don't play safe. You may manage something really big if you risk failure. Study our men. Note Hemingway and McAlmon"³⁹

Knister now went to Toronto and started to freelance in journalism. He was by no means proud of much of his output: "I see an announcement this week 'Harvest Home' delightfully humorous sketch of a rural chicken supper by R.K. - if they call that sardonic stuff humorous, they've more humour than I have."⁴⁰

What Knister had surmised in his letter to Frederick [circa 1922] about journalism having a bad effect on him seems to have been born out, when, after his debut in Toronto, the

³⁸ Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxv.

³⁹ From the excerpts of correspondence in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University.

⁴⁰ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 39.

decline in the quality of his short stories began.⁴¹ Some substantiation for this view is contained in the autobiographical account:

Living in Toronto ... I was free-lancing in the magazines and doing articles chiefly, literary criticism, interviews. Also I was doing stories of farm life, very brief, and patterned according to my own likings for the Toronto Star Weekly, our substitute for a Sunday newspaper. It was and is too small town to get by as a national weekly in another community, but its local flavour was what made it attractive to me. To be sure the editor would expostulate with me: 'Mr. Knister, you make your people too real. Our readers don't want to read about real things. They want to be amused. Try to put more plot in your stories.' And numbers of them came back. In fact, after I picked out half a dozen to send to Edward J. O'Brien, and he had starred or double-starred them in his Yearbook, all of them came back. It was disappointing, because though it was excusable in a Sunday newspaper to be determined not to be highbrow, I was sure that there were some thousands of readers of the paper who would like to see their life pictured, more or less, as it was without recourse to stage types and general old stuff. A new country and a new audience in the making. What an opportunity for Canadian writers! Hadn't Chekkov written in Russian papers of great and immediately increasing circulation? And in such a paper you would not have to pay any attention to the demands for a mechanical structure which our other magazines regarded as indispensable.⁴²

Knister's wistful hopes appeared doomed: "Although

⁴¹ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 13.

⁴² "Canadian Literati," p. 8. See Appendix I.

he managed to scrape a living out of articles he wrote with such titles as 'Christmas at Corncob Corners,' 'Mrs. Plethwick Was a Citizen' and 'No Gumption' ... he was not really moving in any particular direction. It was also clear that his talent and imagination lay elsewhere."⁴³ As Callaghan puts it, "Raymond was not a hack - this was the dreadful thing about it. Raymond was born to be a good writer and a good poet."⁴⁴ As Knister became increasingly disenchanted with hack writing, he began to turn to the novels he had planned. It may be that his philosophy of life began to change and for that reason the projection of what he felt about the things around him changed too. In any event, the intensity of his themes and his style began to be "toned down."⁴⁵ Knister was not unaware of the change in his writing, when, discussing White Narcissus before it had been published, he predicted to his anticipated audience, -

⁴³ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 40.

⁴⁴ C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 42.

⁴⁵ In a letter previously quoted to Marion Font on the final dissolution of their engagement, he also writes: "If I seem hard sometimes, it is only a shell I had to acquire literally to live Altogether some modification was effected in the naive faith in human nature with which I was born. At any rate, I was hard-boiled enough not to take much nonsense from anyone. I don't altogether deprecate this nor approve of sentimentalists. One may become tempered without being embittered, disillusioned without losing ideals; vide Conrad. And you can tone things down. Op. cit. (above, Footnote 34).

"... it will have any amount of roses and moonlight. You won't recognize the old me of other work in it."⁴⁶ His life had begun to take another direction.⁴⁷ Although there were several short stories published later in popular magazines, he never seems to have regained the tragic intensity he had achieved in his farm stories of those three brief years when he was publishing in the "little" magazines.

⁴⁶ Livesay, "Memoir," pp. xxix-xxx.

⁴⁷ Knister had married in June, 1927. His bride was the former Myrtle Gamble of Port Dover. Much of the writing of White Narcissus was done at their honeymoon cottage at Hanlan's Point. C.B.C. Profile. See Appendix II, Sec. 49.

CHAPTER III"THE ONE THING"

"The One Thing" is a story of the essential tragedy of life, a story of a man, who, by an accident of birth, coupled with the innate perversity of human nature, launches himself into an inevitable chain of causality from which he is unable to extricate himself. The structure, dramatically conceived, follows the tragic pattern. The suffering incurred finds no relief but is not entirely without purpose. Although the outcome is inconclusive, the struggle is a testament to the courage of the human spirit.

The protagonist, Billy Dulckington, is a misbegotten victim of circumstance. Ill-favoured from birth - runtish in stature, fishy-eyed and of otherwise dwarfish features, he is singularly dispossessed of those qualities which attract companionship. It is said of Billy that "aside from his shortness, he was not handsome. His chin was narrow, but came well forward; his nose was long and almost perpendicularly overhung his upper lip. His little eyes were fishlike below a sloping forehead." (3) Nor does his personality in any way compensate for what his appearance lacks. His unfortunate habit of raising his eyebrows and wrinkling his forehead "in apparent astonishment at the simplest remark made by anyone with whom he happened to be conversing" (3) serves only to further diminish his already insignificant image. He is repeatedly represented

as a figure of absurdity yet one deserving pity rather than derision: "There was something pathetic in a man of fifty-three years, who carried at most times, a bristle of beard speckled with white, being greeted always as 'Billy.'" (2)

In spite of his being so unprepossessing an individual, Billy has not been spared an innate hubris, "a certain amalgam of stubbornness and pride." (3) Characteristically, it is this quality which, up to a point, serves as his greatest asset; but having chosen a course of action for which he is peculiarly unsuited, it becomes his greatest liability. On a literal level, the ill-advised course of action is that of devoting his life to the tending of huge draft horses too high for him to reach. On the allegorical level, the action is the self-destructive withdrawal within himself where, too, lie forces beyond his power to control. The choice, although appearing to have been made freely, has been conditioned. Faced with a hopeless situation in the field of human relationships - specifically that of a relationship with a woman, Billy falls victim, on an occasion during his youthful urgent years, to a fascination for a Clydesdale filly. As the years go by, the horses become of increasing importance to Billy, involving him in an incident which causes a misunderstanding with his brother, Tom, the only person with whom Billy has ever related. The misunderstanding marks the advent of Billy's alienation. Although there seems to have been an opportunity for reconciliation

at one point, an ironic principle is at work. The irony lies in the nature of the occasion which brings the brothers temporarily together again. For, in coming to Billy's aid, Tom inadvertently helps cure the ailing horse which is to serve as the motive of Billy's final violent outburst against his brother.

Even before this time, it is apparent that Billy's love of horses is an obsession motivated more by pride than by common sense. By middle age, his farm is yielding diminishing returns; the pedigreed strain is running out in his Clydesdales and Billy, himself, is beyond the age when he is likely to admit the error of his ways. The underlying awareness that such is the truth makes his suffering even greater. Driven to the extremity, he curses his brother, apparently in dialogue with the horses in the field. At night, talking in his sleep, with no corporeal audience, he curses over and over a vague universal brother, whom he seems to have conjured in his mind as "Nothing but a damn fool." (18) Ultimately, in waking hours, from out the depths of unharvested corn, he curses everything, "four of a kind," (2) in a strangely disembodied voice. When his form emerges from the corn, the voice reverts to normal. Identification with the corn in his terminal state suggests a return to Nature - a dying. His emergence from the corn for the moment on the road is the living interval of "a reanimated corpse." (18) In setting himself, however unintentionally, outside the

ordinary world of generation, Billy has failed to propagate his own species whose consummation provides the mysterious power which Nature wields over her hapless victims.

Although Billy's life has been an apparent failure, it has not been entirely without purpose. In some mysterious way and counter to his plans, something of value has been achieved. Even if he does not succeed in his efforts, his work benefits others. He has produced stock from which others succeed - "had not some of the purchasers taken his own horses and won with them in the show rings? And done still better with the second and third generation?" (17)

Paradoxically, out of his madness and despair, he attains a negative kind of heroic stature which rescues him from the anonymity which threatened to make his life as meaningless as he had feared. Prior to his madness, "no one had ever taken him in the slightest degree into account." (2) In the end he has become a topic for conversation, by providing certain local colour, thereby constituting an indigenous symbol of community. He is a kind of folk hero who plays his sacrificial role in the service of others.

The opening scene serves as a prologue to the drama about to be unfolded. The setting represents the world in microcosm and the teamster represents man in relation to the world. The moment is one of arrested action for the man, who, with his team, is stopped on the visible section of road

which extends across the landscape. He commands a certain privileged view from the slightly elevated level of the road and from the added height of the load, atop which he sits to direct the efforts of the horses. The details of the topography are projected through his eyes but the pattern is impressionistically relayed and its significance is dependent on the reader's sensitivities.

In general, the landscape conveys an impression of restriction and enclosure. The effect is achieved in part by the presence of encroaching trees which although they "did not noticeably obtrude on the vision," (1) yet "they hid the horizon on all sides, and his [the teamster's] gaze might travel in certain directions so far as two miles, but always it brought up against trees." (1) Man's position at the centre of this more or less circular plane whose horizon is obscured by the screen of trees foreshortening the limits of vision suggests the universal limitations of his freedom. It also suggests his inability to penetrate the ultimate mystery. According to this story and to the others of the group under study, the mystery must remain inscrutable.

There is something of the atmosphere of a prison in the unhealthiness and monotony pervading the landscape. The air is stifling, "dank and heavy," (1) like that of a dungeon cell. The effect of the "streaks" of light seen between the sparse encircling trees is like that of light entering through

barred windows high above eye-level. The view beyond is of the sky only, which, being gray, offers little hope. The view within the microcosmic prison is of a landscape as flat, monotonously patterned and devoid of colour as is the ascetic existence of the central character who is so closely associated with the environment: "The land was perfectly flat ... he [the teamster] could see long, bleached, after-harvest grainfields, varied with dull tracts of beets and rows of soiled appearing corn shocks, stretching sombrely, wire-fenced to the backs of farms." (1) The drabness and melancholy of the scene reflect the hopelessness of the situation but also attest to the tenacity of those, who, like Billy, continue the struggle in the face of so inauspicious a prospect.

The outstanding feature of the landscape is the road - well-worn, deeply-rutted by the passage of many wheels and the weight of the burdens born by the wayfarers. Its beginning is not in view, nor is its end. Although the road runs to a spur line of the railway, suggesting a great traffic system of which this road is but a part, the destination of the main line is not revealed. The road's symbolic significance is further emphasized by reference to the "clay" of its substance. Thus associated with human clay, the element of perversity in the soil will be shown as something also inherent in man's nature as well. The presence of the teamster and the hardship of the passage further identifies the road as that of the kind of life about to be depicted.

The focal point of interest is the teamster, his team and the wagonload of sugar-beets. The indication is that the story is to be concerned with a man, his horses and their partnership in the struggle with a heavy load. Although the team may appear at the outset to be most directly involved in the labour, it is soon apparent that the teamster, too, is "bent to the job" (2) of loading the beets into the freight car. The necessity to straighten from the constant bending "to loosen a crick in his spine" (2) indicates that the teamster fares no better than his horses.

The moment is one of brief respite for the exhausted creatures in their struggle with the heavy load," as their wet flanks heaved." (1) The interval is not so much a rest as it is a recovery of their wind to resume the haul. The work in progress, like the road, is seen as a part of a never-ending torture - loading, hauling, unloading and returning to repeat the process. The fact that the load is sugar beets suggests, however, that there is a potential for some fruitful purpose. On the other hand, the possibility of sugar being only a tantalizing promise never to be realized, cannot be ignored. In either case, the arduousness of the labour in progress is in no way mitigated.

The elevation of the road and the deep ditches on each side are significant. The material which builds up the road is the excavation from the ditches. In presuming to

raise himself above the level of his grass roots in nature, man, by analogy, provides the depths into which he can fall at the least misstep. The image mirrors the folly at the heart of tragedy. The dross material which elevates the road also suggests an ill-founded pride at the core of human make-up - a dominating factor in the life story of the protagonist, Billy Dulckington.

Billy is a part of the opening scene, although he is not immediately distinguishable from the scenery. The first indication of his presence is a "rustling" (1) from the corn where he seems to have become a resident spirit. Then his voice "high-pitched and monotonous" (1) relates the wind soughing among dried-out corn stalks with the cry of the soul in agony. The pitch suggests the tension of tightened strings of a musical instrument and, by analogy, the stretching of a body on a rack of torture. His emergence from the corn seems to be motivated by a vague hope that someone may come to relieve his suffering. When he sees the teamster, however, Billy cannot bring himself to cry out to the man. Instead, he reverts to a normal voice, a conventional greeting, hears a comment on the weather and sees the moment fade back into the engulfing silence as man and team continue. Billy is left to resume his cursing in the corn.

Yet over all this grim opening scene there is a crowning glory. The beauty of the "cloud-tapestried" (1)

sky fosters a hope that beyond the agonizing clay a heroic design is being as purposefully worked out as were those masterpieces of the medieval craftsman who glorified life in terms of the sublime and ideal. The hope is that the beauty of the clouds holds out a promise that there is also beauty in the mysterious design of life, not granted human eyes to see. The danger is that the beauty is but a tantalizing illusion.

After the opening scene, the narrator becomes omniscient for the most part and maintains a general chronological order in the narrative. Some of the details of Billy's early life, however, are not revealed until the important scene of self-recognition in which the style shifts to one of a stream of consciousness. (10-11) In his reverie, it becomes apparent that the only person with whom he has ever had a close relationship is his brother Tom. Together, they had shared a happy childhood. With nostalgia he recalls "certain episodes in the childhood of himself and his brother Tom. 'Tom and Willy'! What differences between them then? He had forgotten but not forgotten their round of chumming and wrangling, to which his memory now lent a sadness immeasurably pleasing." (11) Billy realizes, for the first time, that he has been unconsciously lonely ever since, although to the casual eye he had appeared "a most matter-of-fact little man, unaware of any stunting of his own life or any lack of happiness." (11) Billy chooses to ignore the truth about himself

so that the awareness of the moment makes no difference to the course of his life.

As Tom grew up, he assimilated into the wider life around him but Billy was unable to do likewise. He tried to participate in the social life of the community but his efforts were sadly unrewarded: "Until he was almost forty he had occasionally gone to church; sometimes in winter he had attended one or two socials or concerts. At the former, he usually, by the lottery method, managed to get a partner with whom to eat the customary lunch - and some young fellow accompanied her home." (8) Tom married, but Billy's unprepossessing appearance and personality aroused no more than the "amusedly tolerant attitude of the buxom and well-grown young women of the district." (3) Billy's pride prevented him from exposing himself to the scorn he had good reason to expect a proposal of "serious intentions" (3) would occasion. Yet he seems not to have considered seeking out a girl of lesser attributes; he was evidently fascinated by females of statuesque proportions.

The acquisition of Lowry Lass is in many ways made to appear as a compensation for the big girls he can never hope to win. Her discovery is described in terms of the fulfillment of a "quest", the word Knister uses for the purpose. (4) Not only was she big, but she was blue-blooded and a prize-winner. The circumstances leading up to her purchase are

recounted in a manner reminiscent of courtship. On Billy's first vacation as a young man, to the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, he had attended the horse show where he had become interested in some imported Clydesdales: "There was something impressive in the size and strength and beauty of these magnificent beasts, something which enchanted him and called forth his longing." (3) He became "enamoured of one filly," (3) later referred to as his "first love" (4) but he was not in a position at the time to buy her. When he finally is able to claim her, she is not available but he easily settles for another - Lowry Lass, an even "heavier-bodied and more squarely built" (4) mare. Her arrival is described as that of a bride's homecoming. There is an atmosphere of celebration in the village and for Billy, in terms of social intercourse, the release of pent-up tensions: "That was the main day in his life on which he unloaded Lowry Lass from the freight car, and brought her to his farm. It was Saturday. There were neighbours in the village, in the stores, in the blacksmith shop, everywhere, it seemed. On each, the serious task of appraisal and of commendation was, in his presence, incumbent. More people were met on the road, and though with many of them Billy had scarcely exchanged a word for months, to all the circumstances of the quest were imparted with unaccustomed and composed absence of reticence." (4)

Although very obviously the possibilities are limited, the course of Billy's life up to this time might

have taken several paths concerning which he never conjectures until many years later. The purchase of Lowry Lass, however, constitutes what might be termed the fatal step, since after that time the course of his life follows a pattern of causality directly attributable to this initial action. The family of which she was the grand dame figured in every aspect of the subsequent development. She provided him with a reputation [as a horse-lover], with his only topic of conversation and with an object for his almost paternal affection and pride. Billy's judgment in horse-breeding proved impractical since his obsession with size put his animals in a class for which there was little demand and probably jeopardized other necessary qualities of the breed. He was unable to interest the "big horsemen of the East and Quebec in his stock." (5) He found ways to rationalize the general lack of interest and remained adamant in his preference for the heaviest of draft horses: "He was emphatic in his deprecation of the new style of Clydesdales, just beginning to 'come in'; the upstanding light-feathered, bright-gaited kind he held to be hackneys, carriage-horses, and that was for him the lowest depth of condemnation." (5) It was as though the size of his horses compensated for his own small stature. He seemed not to realize that the discrepancy in the size of the horses and of himself made a ludicrous contrast: "An odd figure he appeared to anyone passing who saw him, with the two huge drafters forging so far ahead

of him and making more evident than ever the disproportionate size." (15) It was a matter of ingrained stubbornness and pride that he would not admit during the crucial illness of Lena, the last of the pedigreed offspring, that he had to stand on the manger to "drench" (13) her.

The inherent danger of megalomania is reflected not only in the size of the breed developed but also in the increasing size of his herd over the years, so that "he could not assure even himself that it increased likewise in quality." (5) His farm consisted of only one hundred acres which should have put a limit on the number of horses it was able to support without jeopardizing the economic balance. Although "he continued to keep the other branches of the livestock represented, ... - pigs, milch cows, and a herd of steers," (5) it appears that the horses were becoming too much of a drain, monopolizing many acres which might otherwise have supported revenue-producing stock or produced such cash crops as sugar-beets.

Thus Billy was a long time in paying off the mortgage which the purchase of Lowry Lass had incurred. In about fifteen years, however, the mortgage was paid - due in no small part to Billy's unremitting toil. These were the best years of his life from the standpoint of vigour and health and he seldom needed to pay wages for help. Paying off the mortgage, however, was not the main incentive for Billy's work. He enjoyed work for the satisfaction he derived in his

own achievements and when he could work at something which required the services of his horses, the enjoyment was high ecstasy: "Plowing was one of his favourite jobs about the farm; he liked above most things ... the constant attempt to make each furrow straighter than the last and when a good furrow was attained, to keep those following it right, to have each of his 'lands' properly and symmetrically shaped. And he was proud of the straight and steady gait of his teams, perhaps a source of his skill and pleasure in it." (14-15) He was to recollect in a rare moment "the years which his love for his horses had given him." (10) It was the same love which was also to cause a serious rift with his brother.

The rift marks the point of reversal in the action of the story. An accident in the stable to one of the "big" colts prevents Billy from attending the funeral of his brother's father-in-law and makes very obvious to the large procession of mourners that Billy is very typically proceeding in the wrong direction. More ironic is the discovery that the veterinarian, whom he was seeking, had been unnoticed in the passing cortège and that the outcome of all Billy's misdirected efforts has been to catch a cold.

When Doctor Hickson, the veterinarian, eventually attends the horse, there is little to be done except to treat the animal for blood poisoning. Hickson establishes himself as an antagonist in the struggle. In the final analysis his

role is a destructive one. On the first visit, he injects a brand of poison by repeating to Billy some gossip about Tom's anger over Billy's failure to attend the funeral. In each of his subsequent visits the poison imagery persists.

Other rumour-mongers magnify the funeral incident and although time somewhat mitigates the feelings on both sides, the relationship between the brothers never regains its former amity. Like the prognosis of the injury to the colt's ankle-joint, "the swelling would not go down in the future, but would remain much as it was." (7) Evil is not to be undone: "... the breech slight as it seemed could not easily be closed" (8) The association of blood poisoning with a family feud is a conventional device. The emphasis on poison serves to place the story in a tradition.

The brothers nursed their grievances for seven years: "They nodded, spoke when they met and never ceased to 'change threshing': but their neighbouring ceased." (8) It is said that both brothers soon came to realize that the whole affair was a misunderstanding; but they were unable to unbend. Tom's family evidently tried to effect a reconciliation - "there seemed to be a notable amelioration in the manner of Gertie, Tom's wife [to whom the incident might have been expected to be most offensive] as time went on; and the children were really friendly when they saw him - taller now than 'Uncle Billy,' all of them." (8) Their efforts were to

no avail.

Billy becomes more and more of a recluse. Only for provisions, on rare occasions does he leave the farm, "and when he had a hired man he frequently sent him on such errands." (8) The social events which he had formerly attended no longer draw him out. The horses are becoming an obsession. Even his evenings are occupied with indulgent attention to the horses: "On some winter nights the light from his lantern could be seen gleaming from the windows of his stable until ten or eleven o'clock." (8) There is an almost erotic suggestion in the description of his attentions to the horses: "It was to him a joy familiar and recurrently consummate to slick the colts down with rags, to rub their pasterns, brush out their manes and their feather; to admire the round spring of rib on their well-turned bodies." (9)

Determined to maintain peak performance, Billy drives himself at an even more gruelling pace as he gets older. He allows himself no rest although he indulges his horses generously: "For years he had always driven two teams, making one 'round' of his long fields with one, and leaving it to rest while he made the next 'round' with the other." (9) His days are long: "Summer nights he worked until dark," (9) after which he found other chores. Frequently it was "breaking" colts, an activity which necessitated his running with the colt - a travesty of respite after a hard day!

His horses are supplied with the best of feed and furnishings - "stockfood by the barrel, bran by the ton" (9) and "Every one of them must have a blanket." (9) Left unblanketed the horses would naturally have provided for themselves by growing more hair. The self-denial he practices in order to provide luxuries for his horses is reflected in the neglect of his house and the frugality of his personal provisions. His house seems always cold and dark in comparison with the atmosphere of the stable. When the roof of his bedroom develops a leak, he moves to another room. Billy, however, never sinks to living in the stable; he continues to eat and sleep in the monastic austerity of his house. In this way Knister affirms Billy's humanity.

Eventually, the previous tendency toward an imbalance in the ratio of producing animals and consuming ones becomes a serious problem, despite his sacrifices and the increased tempo of his work: "... he was not making as much money now as he had been making." (9) Billy is squandering the resources of his farm on the increasing herd of horses, and he is apparently blind to the fact of his own mismanagement. It seems apparent that this state of affairs cannot continue very long, as a reminder of which it is learned that Lena, the reigning favourite and the last of the second generation of Billy's horses, is in failing health. The critical point of her illness marks the obscured climactic point of the story and her eventual recovery is merely a stop-gap. Billy's

dynasty is on the wane as is the moon "far-slide and waning over the distant forest." (14)

The events leading up to the climax have about them a mounting intensity. The increasingly feverish tempo of activities on the farm is a symptom of his nervous tension and parallels Lena's uneasiness in the stall at the onslaught of her fever. The structural fever analogy is apt since in the course of fevers, there is also a climactic point at which the fever breaks.

The use of high-pitched sound adds to the effect of increasing tension; a certain shrillness pervades the atmosphere of the story. The first sound is Billy's voice, "high-pitched and monotonous." (1) Again, it is a squeal from the horse-stable that prevents Billy from getting to the funeral. Another time, it is the high sound of wind in the telephone wires which accompanies Billy's rising anxiety about his horse and translates his night journey to town into a dimension of nightmare.

On the night journey, Billy is "privileged" in the tradition of tragic heroes to experience his hour of self-recognition - "to see that life and that lack with eyes other than his own." (11) His trance is induced not only by the high-pitched sounds of the wind in the wires but also by the hypnotic effect of the shadows cast by the turning wheels in the shifting light of the lantern.

The account of the journey is one of the most effectively sustained passages of surrealist description in Knister's repertoire and warrants quotation:

It was January. The night was already quite dark. A thaw had broken up the road, which was now a mass of hummocked and holey clay, with a pair of deep, narrow channels jaggedly traversing it longitudinally. In these the wheels revolved, bringing up watery mud, and making a continuous rolling splash. The wind was not strong, but seemed high, and the telephone poles on the other side of the deep ditch rang forth for him dully with deep resonance. The poles seemed miles apart, as the horse plodded and wallowed onward, while he nursed an anxiety which half consciously he hoped so to make baseless They became the thrumming years, as he puddled along and past them. Again their sound reminded him of music he had heard at Flossie Tintern's recital some years before. It was not often that he was reminded of music. He began to whistle, but ceased, his deviations from the tune formed such a travesty of the remembered impression.

He occupied himself with recollecting the years which his love of his horses had given him, certain things an infinitesimally different life might have brought him, certain hours of his youth, certain episodes in the childhood of himself and of his brother Tom. "Tommy and Willy!" What differences between them then? He had forgotten, but not forgotten their round of chumming and wrangling, to which his memory now lent a sadness immeasurably pleasing. He appeared a most matter-of-fact little man, unaware of any stunting of his own life, of any lack in his happiness; and now he thought suddenly to see that life and that lack with eyes other than his own. Every few moments he lifted the fixed regard bent on the swift dripping spokes revolving muddy-yellow in the light of the dangling lantern, imagining that he had traversed miles, and cried in his thin voice, which rising, always seemed on the point of breaking: "Gidyap! Gidyap!" (10-11)

The truth about himself has shaken Billy very badly but the knowledge has come too late. The narrator has already warned that colts should be broken early since then "they were more tractable and proved so later." (9) On his return to the farm that night, Billy is not alone and although conditions are much the same as on the way in, he does not allow himself to lapse into reverie again: "Now the moon occasionally showed her face tauntingly among the predacious and headlong clouds, and the wind still drew droning music from the telephone wires, as they drove over the shadows of the poles upon the track, but Billy's thoughts wandered back no longer from the frozen headland of the present."¹ (11)

The experience serves only to intensify Billy's anxiety about his horses; the justification for his own life is dependent on them. This heightened sensitivity serves to ensure the final "falling-out" with his brother; the quarrel is inevitable, and integral to the design of the tragedy.

The crucial illness of Lena, because of what she represents in Billy's life, marks the climactic point of the story. Since her illness is a fever, it provides an analogy

¹ The term "headland" refers to plowing, a context in which it is used to designate unplowed land at the end of furrows - land which cannot be reached with a plow which is the length of the horses and the harness tugs from the point where the team has to turn. This is wasted or "dead" land. The "frozen headland of the present" then is an apt metaphor for what is likely to continue to be the state of Billy's sterile existence.

for dramatic structure. As such, the climax is mysteriously obscured; there seems no certainty that one has actually occurred. The narrator passes it over very deliberately by the expedient of a time lapse - "It was more than a week later."

(12) Dr. Hickson is very vague about the matter: "That was about the crisis, one week after the case opened." (13) Nor is Billy able to fix on any particular point during the period of illness, recalling only "the week of nights he had watched and cared for the horse, and the mazes of his thoughts." (12) The uncertainty surrounding the breaking point of Lena's fever is increased by the occurrence of the relapse she suffers. Instead of wholly recovering, she has developed a virulent lump on the neck. The abortive climax of the mare's illness is related to Billy's life which is similarly frustrated. The pattern of living to which he has become accustomed provides no release for his mounting tensions.

The complication of the lump seems to provide an opportunity for reconciliation between the brothers. Tom had made an overture of neighbourliness as soon as he had heard of Billy's trouble. It seems likely that he would have come before had he known: "If you had sent one of the neighbor boys over to my place, I could have come as well as not." (13) But Billy is still nursing his old resentment. He feels that Tom and Dr. Hickson are in league against him. While they discuss the implications of Lena's health in terms of horse-

flesh, they "failed in Billy's eyes to express a sense of what this danger to Lena really entailed." (12) For Billy, she represents everything that the passage of the years has meant to him. His fear that she may not recover is the fear that his own life has been wasted. Tom's overture, although well-intentioned, has come too late, despite their efforts to bridge the years as "... the two brothers talked of crops, of neighbours, of taxes for a new drain, of Tom's children." (14)

The mood of Nature is inimical as the brothers take leave of the veterinary and of each other. The night is "brown," austerely starred and "keen-aired." (14) Their attempt at discourse is seen as feeble and pathetic in face of the forces arrayed against them. Nature is made to appear cruel and unfeeling. Man cannot redeem the past. Unconsciously both brothers sense the hopelessness of their plight: "... Tom walked home, head bent to keep the biting air from his throat, in what seemed a ghost of summer moonlight, from a moon far-slid and waning over the distant forest." (14) Billy, too, alone in his cheerless house, "abstractedly shaking his head in the darkness," (14) is assailed by dark forebodings which he quickly contrives to escape in the merciful oblivion of sleep.

The lancing of the lump in Lena's neck saves her life and allows her to resume her former duties and for a

time during her recovery, there still seems some hope that the brothers' dark forebodings are unfounded. Billy begins to think of leaving his farm to Tom's boy, Bill. The idea is without immediacy, however, as Lena's recovery serves to dispel the gloom which had gathered during her illness. Also the season is spring and its promise of re-birth raises hopes for a second chance. In response to the stirring of Nature, Billy too experiences a feeling of youthful resurgence: "The zest of the spring wind, brushing the trees and the manes of his horses, the various and wholly relevant notes of the new birds, the inconceivable freshness of colour on distant foliage, the smell of upturning soil, seem strangely to banish any sombre implication from a disposition toward his namesake." (15) His energies are renewed and he rejoices to begin the spring plowing which is his favourite job: "His faded jeans were turned up two or three inches above his shoes, and he stepped along with brisk, brief strides." (15) The buoyant mood is somewhat tempered this year by a certain feeling of nostalgia: "His horses had a new-old dearness for him." (15) and he takes more than usual thought to their well-being.

The first day on which Billy takes Lena out to work is ill-fated. It is seen that her life has been saved to fulfill a role - one which had begun with the acquisition of Lowry Lass. Lena represents the "one thing" which Billy prizes above all else - "than for his soul one had said." (17) She measures his own estimation of his success in life.

Billy's pride in his accomplishments is his real point of vulnerability. So that when Tom speaks casually of Lena's impending death, Billy considers the remark as a personal affront. The pride which had once been his inner salvation has suffered a mortal blow. The poison of doubt begins to rankle in his mind: "The thing began to obsess, to gain occupancy of his mind as the weeks passed and he worked on alone ... he had plenty of time to think as he rode on the discs It began to tell on him, though he would never have admitted it ... and would have been astonished had he been told what a large proportion of his time and thoughts the old fester occupied." (17)

Billy's condition continues to deteriorate rapidly and he finds it necessary to hire a boy to help with the regular work. The narrator transfers his point of view to the boy whose sensitivities bring Billy's sufferings into closer range and create surrealistic effects with the terrifying night-ravings: "One night as he was snoring heartily in his little room beneath the sloping roof, he was aroused suddenly. Moonlight in a slanting strip lay before the window. There was a sense of an instant of a silence dead, inanimate, broken; then he awoke to a chilling voice from the next room, thin, almost evil, yet almost tearful." (18) The "sloping" roof, the "slanting" moonlight recall other images of veering from the perpendicular, such as "a moon far-slid," (14) suggesting the unbalance of Billy's mind and anticipat-

ing its breaking.

The use of sound and interval confuses the senses and induces within the reader's mind, the feeling of madness into which Billy is falling. The chilling voice is almost preferable to the intervals of silence: "An interval of silence was a reanimated corpse." (18) The alternation of cursing and silence reaches into infinity. The story ends, as it begins, on a note of despair that there will ever be a merciful finality.

"The One Thing" achieves an aesthetic distance that none of the other five stories achieves. Although Billy is made to appear an exceptional man to the world of the farming community, his condition is universal. In thinking to have found fulfillment in life, he has deluded himself. He is dimly aware of a lack in his life but the truth is kept locked in his unconscious, surfacing only at unguarded moments or in dreams. He is the image of alienated man. His life demonstrates a great lack of something of which all men are in need. In the sense that he has missed life, he cannot die, as is understood at the end in the image of the reanimated corpse. His inability to put an end to his sufferings parallels the inconclusive ending of the last story, "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier." Unlike the later story, however, "The One Thing" lacks the apocryphal horror of Mrs. Lucier whose sphere of influence is much wider. Billy is an insignificant character

in comparison to her.

"The One Thing" has a very unusual time span for a short story and perhaps for this reason it contains much of the settings of all the stories. The important scenes are of spring and of winter. As in the succeeding stories, there is no stress on harvest time.

The moon plays its role in this first story. It is not to appear again until "The Strawstack." The matriarchal system of which the moon is goddess is figured in the dynasty of Lowry Lass. It is to this goddess that Billy has devoted his life. This idea of servitude to a matriarchy is submerged in the next two stories and so the moon will be absent.

Much of what is beautiful in the spring scenes of "The One Thing" carries over into "Mist-Green Oats" and "The Loading," where the beauty is intensified. The suffering out of which beauty arises is also intensified.

CHAPTER IVMIST-GREEN OATS

"Mist-Green Oats" is an initiation story. It would seem that Knister considered it as such when, in the outline for the novel he was planning during the last few days of his life, he writes: "Begin with life out of the soil. Similar to 'Mist-Green Oats'. The sensitive adolescent learning about life."¹ The story is of a boy's initiation into the larger community and into the tragic knowledge that, contrary to what he longs to believe - "If only he could keep himself unbound" (133) - he is not free but bound in servitude to a naturalistic universe. The truth comes to him only after an agonizing ordeal out of which is revealed his tragic role in common with that of all men. Although the knowledge is accepted in a tone of defeat and despair - "What's the use? What's the weary use?" (137) - the theme is, nevertheless, an affirmation of life. Despite the long hours of despairing toil, there are those moments of high ecstasy like that of the boy's thrill with the dynamic frolic of his beautiful horse. Impulsively "he clapped his hands." (130) Life, too, this story says, is worthy of applause. And hopeless as the ultimate prospect may be, the hopelessness serves to magnify the courage and dignity of the human spirit. If, as in the course of the action of this story,

¹ "Via Faust."

there is suffering, it is shown that out of suffering comes a heightened sensitivity to the joy of the beauty so lavishly abundant in Nature. It is also shown that out of suffering comes a recognition of the universal bond of fellowship which mitigates to some degree the loneliness so native to the human heart. Whether or not there is something beyond beauty is not within the intention of the story. If anything, it advocates an acceptance of the mystery and, within the limits prescribed, a participation in all earth's beauties, so various in their colours and seasons.

The brief opening flashback serves to introduce the idea of initiation as a departure. The scene at the railway station involves a boy's parting with the most important influence of his childhood - his mother. The parting is sealed with a kiss. There is a certain air of excitement about the station - a suggestion of some happening of vital importance to everyone in the crowd. The ritual of initiation was, indeed, an occasion of great importance in the primitive cults, and although a matter of apprehension for the initiate, it was a cause for celebration among the tribal community in general. As was customary, the women have withdrawn, leaving the ritual of the ceremony to the males of the tribe. The sister has departed at some prior date, the mother only at the last minute. Her holiday has about it an aura of providential planning from which she has been purposely excluded and of which she is fortunately unaware. Purportedly, she "thought she'd take a rest

before the morning came on" (118) When she returns, there will no longer be the awkward adolescent "self-conscious of his Sunday coat, overalls, and heavy shoes" (112) to whom she has said goodbye. She will only know that in some mysterious way during her absence, Len has become a man.

The single most important factor in the story is the boy, Len Brinder. Not only because he is the protagonist, but because he is virtually his own narrator, the reader is dependent on him. The stream of consciousness technique by which most of the story is recounted, identifies Len as an unconscious narrator. As a witness, he is never able to achieve an objective observation because he is so intimately involved in his own problem. The story is believed to have a strong autobiographical basis and Knister, himself, has whimsically alluded to such a probability.² It is perhaps for this reason that the problem of aesthetic distance arises, although from a thematic point of view, the narrative style might be conceded a deliberate device.

Whatever the stylistic problems, it is Len's impressions as narrator which convey the theme of the story.

2

In a letter to John Frederick, dated November 23, 1922, Knister writes, "About a month after *Mist-Green Oats* was printed, Len Brinder told me what he did after he came to the house with the mail when he so nearly ran away. Very kind, but why (blame him) did he need to be so sneaky about it after so many years? I always thought he was that kind of little ... words fail. What he did was just what I thought he'd do, if he didn't want to leave his story incomplete." From the private collection of Mrs. Grace.

Not only does he provide an ingenuous narration of the action of the initiation, but, through his relationship with the other characters, an insight into their roles. His sensitivity to the setting lends the atmosphere the quality of mystery which pervades the entire story. His emotional reaction to the experience engages the reader's response by evoking something of universal significance. He arouses feelings of pity and fear not only for the boy in the story but for all youth who must come to terms with the reality of life.

The narrator's impressions are unified within the structural framework of the archetypal fertility theme. All the prerequisites for such a pattern are readily available in the circumstances of the life of the well-established farming community where the Brinders live. Behind these circumstances, can be discerned dimensions of tragedy as universal as they are indigenous. Because "Mist-Green Oats" does not answer the ultimate questions with any degree of certainty, the final outcome is cloaked in the same mystery which prevails throughout. The stylistic means toward the achievement of such effect is appropriately enough, that of paradox. The paradox is organically conceived through the ambivalence of thematic imagery organized around the symbol of the cosmic dance and rendered in the frequent use of the figure of oxymoron.

The central scene which translates the total paradox is the one from which the story derives its title. The

description of the vegetation whose successively changing colours unfold with the development of its growth, as veils withdrawn in a dance, both reveals and conceals a secret. The beauty is of a dynamic and sensuous quality which transcends landscape. It is the essence of life itself - mystic, wonderful:

The green of an oats field was visible under the apple-boughs. It was even now beginning to take on a grey misty tinge. Soon the oats field would seem an unbelievable blue-grey cloud glimpsed from beneath the apple-trees. In those days the granite of oats would call the eye throughout all the country. The heads would seem to dance in the high sunlight, and fields of wheat would bow and surge in amber-lit crests. The rows of young corn would be arching to either side and touching, black-green and healthy. The smell of it as he cultivated and the horses ripped off pieces of heavy leaves, would be more sweet than that of flowers, and more bland. The year would pass on, the harvesting of wheat, of barley and oats, fall-ploughing again, threshing, the cutting and husking of corn, the picking of apples in the same orchard. 128

The imagery of the dance is the key-note to dynamic and sensuous beauty. The heads of the oats "dance in the high sunlight" (128) and the fields of wheat "bow and surge in amber-lit crests." (128) That the dance is of erotic origin is made explicit with relation to the fertilization of the corn - a crop which is dependent on cross-pollination. The corn is literally performing a fertility dance, "arching to either side and touching, black-green and healthy." (128) The dynamic quality of the dance provides the quickening spirit of the

story and is an important unifying factor in its organic entity.

In Len's vision of the title passage, life is divided into three stages, manifested by the variegation of the colours of unfolding veils. In early spring the veil is softly green; behind the green, another of blue-grey which, on emerging through the fading of the green, conveys the impression of "granite," the hardening stage; back of the blue-grey is another, "amber-lit," suggesting the culmination of the hardening process as understood in the formation of amber and also suggesting, by its colour, the attainment of a golden harvest. Beyond the beauty of the third stage, the vision does not extend; the last veil is not withdrawn; the ultimate mystery not revealed. Boyhood is the mist-green oats; gradually maturity develops into the blue-grey granite; finally, old age ripens into the "amber-lit" stage. As man shares in the beauties of Nature, so he must also share in its transience. To add to the irony, the farmer is cursed with the knowledge that in "the harvesting of wheat, of barley and oats, fall-ploughing again, threshing, the cutting and husking of corn, the picking of apples in the same orchard," (128) he provides his own sustenance which is but to perpetrate the process of generation which seeks his destruction.

The three characters in the story represent the three stages of growth perceivable in the fields. Len is

the mist-green stage "even now beginning to take on a grey misty tinge." (128) Syd, the young neighbour man, who has come to assist, is at the peak of his powers, already well-hardened to his role. Sam Brinder, the father, is still vigorous but shows signs of weathering into the "amber-lit" stage of old age. Each of them has a certain set role to enact in the ploughing part of the ritual. Len, as the initiate, is "to strike out" (114) new sections around the rows of apple trees. The father presides over the operation and handles the two-furrow riding-plough drawn by his well-matched, three-horse team. The dual nature of his role is emphasized by the two furrows - one human, one divine. Syd's work is to plough around the perimeters - "finishing the lands." (114) The number "three" suggests the idea that Syd has a symbolic role as the third member of the Trinity. In many senses he can be understood as representative of the Holy Spirit. The three roles are pointed out here to reinforce the idea of the "three" which forms an integral part of the structural design of "Mist-Green Oats." Well-recognized as the mystic number, it exerts an important influence in conveying the theme of the story.

The action of ploughing as the initiation trial can also be seen as a dance symbol. First, ploughing represents one phase of the fertility cycle - that of the preparation for the seeding. Secondly, the monotony of its endless rounds represents the cyclical recurrence involved in the ritual of the cults. The natural ritual of ploughing must have been recog-

nized by the priests of the ancient sun-worshippers since there is documentation to the effect that both in realistic and conventionalized forms, ploughing formed part of a rain dance.³ In this sense, Brinder, Syd and Len are the three ploughmen of the sun and what they are doing is the enactment of a ritual dance. It is out of this dance that the initiation is achieved - the rebirth which Len experiences at the climactic point in the dramatic action.

Ploughing can also be seen as a symbol for the tribute exacted by the sun in return for favours bestowed, whether the rain be actual or symbolic of re-birth. In a Biblical sense, ploughing may represent man's role in restoring Eden. The orchard, in which the ploughing takes place, serves as an image of the fallen garden. The "mushroom-shaped" apple-trees suggest knowledge more of evil than of good but the cultivation of the soil implies a new crop. The labour involved is the necessity by which man earns his daily bread. The profuse sweating of man and beast and the sticking of hat bands is reminiscent of the Biblical version of necessity: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."⁴ The point may be that in the struggle toward perfection is man's salvation. Paradoxically, it may be that the end is an illusion, as is the bird song which lures Len onward during

³ J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (Toronto, 1967), pp. 905-917.

⁴ Genesis III - 19.

the flagging hours of the first day. The ploughing, like all Knister's symbols, is ambivalent.

The general setting is a natural one for the enactment of a fertility theme. It is a community where neighbourly co-operation is still a custom. The business of farming is still largely regulated by the seasonal progression of the sun. Although the youthful protagonist revolts against the system of natural time in the beginning, he is forced in the end, to give up his reliance on the mechanical regulation of the clock. There are still some vestiges of ancestral ways surviving in the Allrows, said to be "Old-fashioned people." (132) A large family, all living and working on the farm as a tribal group, they are summoned to dinner by sound of a bell, not necessarily on the hour of twelve but at a time when there is a natural break in the activity in progress. It is by one of the Allrows, helping Sam Brinder, that Len is led to knowledge and into the fellowship of men.

The farm, as usual with Knister, is the microcosm of the world. The sun presides over the world of "Mist-Green Oats" as it did over the ancient one. And just as the sun-worshippers sought to comprehend the paradox of rebirth through death in the ritual performance of the dance, so the farmer must get in step with the natural rhythms in order to reap a bountiful harvest from his planting.

The idea from "The One Thing" that the world is a

prison persists in "Mist-Green Oats" but here it is not a dark prison. The farmer cannot escape because the next job is upon him before the previous one is finished. Only women and children can be spared occasionally to get away to the city. The prevailing emphasis is that the world is a beautiful prison. The beauty of the dancing oats "would call the eye throughout the country." (128) That there is possible treachery in the eye, is of course suggested in many instances, most notably in a passage in which, by a foreshortening of distance, the cows appear to be able to jump over the fence. (120) The important thing about beauty in this story is to see it - to be a part of it.

Len is the boy who is to be initiated into the dance and be made a part of it. He is the only son of Sam Brinder. He has been out of high school for a year, working on his father's farm without having made any decision about his life's work. He is more than usually sensitive and is much given to day-dreaming and philosophizing, preoccupations which interfere with his work habits. He is impatient and rebellious concerning the never-ending work and he is quick to blame his father for everything that is distasteful. He craves excitement and companionship as pleasures distinct from work. The only creature he seems to love on the farm is Lass, the driving horse. He does not even realize how much she means to him until he fears that his father is selling her. Likewise, he does not know how strong are his bonds to the farm until he tries to

leave. This and other lessons, Len has to learn before he is grown-up.

Sam Brinder is a diligent farmer. He is something of a cultist in the sense that farming is his whole life. He appears to be ascetic in his life-style. He works long hours on the farm and finds his leisure in attending farm meetings where the farming brotherhood gathers to exchange ideas of mutual benefit. His son pictures him going to such official gatherings as "a meeting of the school trustees, to raise his voice among the other men." (118) He is a kindly man and speaks tolerantly of his neighbours in conversation with Syd. Sam Brinder has come to some reconciliation with the conditions of his life. He is not free to control everything he does; there is a mortgage on his farm and when payments are due, he must meet them regardless of what other demands may be made upon him. Yet he does not chafe at his lot. He maintains a steady pace but allows himself and his horses sufficient rest to achieve the best long-range results. Brinder is self-controlled; this fact is evidenced particularly when, himself pushed to the limits, he finds Len reading and the work undone.

Brinder tries, on several occasions, to be as affable to Len as he is to Syd. Once he remarks, "Cows are coming up the lane of themselves ... We won't have to go after them. Pretty good, eh, Len?" (122) He would like to have Len

stay on the farm and become a partner. To this purpose, he acquires Syd's services to act as model and mediator. But he knows Len's decision about the future must seem to be the boy's own decision. For this reason he almost pushes him into leaving the farm.

Syd Allrow fulfills a special role in the initiation. He is a young man of the community who has come with his team of "blacks," in a spirit of neighbourly co-operation, to help Sam Brinder get caught up with the spring work. This includes the ploughing, not only in a literal sense, but also in a symbolic one, which is the initiation of Len. Syd has certain charismatic qualities which make him an attractive model for Len to emulate. Charisma also implies a giving in the service of others; in bridging the generation gap between father and son, Syd makes his presence felt both in the field and at the table where the meals are consumed in a ritual manner, approaching the conditions of holy communion. The father serves as celebrant, the boy sets out the vessels and Syd, as Holy Spirit, waits in attendance. Syd possesses a quality of literal as well as symbolic grace which makes itself known in his words and movements. His first appearance "sitting hunched on the handles of his plough" (112) as he chats easily to Mr. Brinder, is one of affability and non-chalance. On a later occasion, "Syd was going in the opposite direction, holding the plough as steadily, it appeared as though the ground had been softened by days of rain." (131)

He manages to make the ploughing look easy, even glamorous. With Sam Brinder he shares an easy intimacy and about this relationship, Len becomes resentful. Yet Len likes Syd, who, in the past, had kept a secret about a Hallowe'en prank which Len and some of his friends had played. One might suspect Knister here of some sly humour about ghosts - holy and otherwise. Syd, it might be noted, appears and disappears very mysteriously. But he is present during the entire action of the initiation.

The action of the story is extremely complicated because it unfolds from the mind of the protagonist-narrator whose experience is not understood by himself. The three-in-one image extends to the nature of this action which might be summed up as an ordeal in the sun. In this ordeal, the boy is struggling against three antagonists, all of whom are united by the phallic image of the sun - first, the sun itself; second, the father, who like the sun, is a figure of authority; third, his own masculinity seeking to assert itself.

It is the father who assumes the apparent role of antagonist for the purposes of the ritual. Brinder is a surrogate of the sun deity, symbol of cosmic authority. In this sense, he is a servant. But he is also a master, father of a son whose masculinity must be made to assert itself. In this sense, Brinder is the antagonist of the mother and of her child just as the sun is the antagonist of earth in a mys-

sterious dynamic conflict out of which is created life.

Although the three conflicts are enacted simultaneously, for purposes of analysis they will be considered as three separate theatres - the cosmic, the human and the psychological. This procedure, however, necessitates interruption of sequence and a re-working at certain junctures where conflicts converge.

The sun plays its role in the cosmic theatre of Nature, an aspect of the story which lends it universality. As the phallus, which annually engenders new life, the sun seems to be meeting with more than usual resistance this particular spring. The earth is responding frigidly - with tear floods of spring rains as if mourning her previous generations and as if reluctant to begin a repetition of the process. The reluctance is implied by Len's observation that, "The season had been retarded by late frosts and heavy rains at seeding time." (113) At the opening of the story, the sun is approaching its summer solstice, peak of its power, "the hottest day yet" (115) and the soil must be cultivated for the seeding of corn and later crops before it becomes "intractable." In Sam Brinder's experienced scheme of husbandry, all the farm activities are regulated of necessity according to the sun. And one of these activities is the initiation of future husbandmen. If Len is to succeed his father, he must learn to respect the authority of the sun. He must learn his limita-

tions before he can be delegated any part of that authority.

Len sets out on the first round at an arrogant pace but, "When he reached the end of the furrow he was almost panting from the wrestle." (114) He is surprised at the consistency of the sun-baked clay: "He was obliged to hold the handles at a wearying angle in going around the trunks of the big trees and to twist it back to normal position in the space between." (114) His pace against the merciless onslaught of the sun begins to tell on him: "The boy's hat was sticking to his brow as though clamped there with some iron band driven down like hoops on a barrel." (116) As the afternoon wears on, Len senses himself being forced earthward by his antagonist: "... the sunlight seemed to pack the heat down The boughs seemed to hold it there, and to make room in some way for more heat, which the sun still packed down." (117) Near the end of the afternoon, Len's pace is described as "stumbling" and "striding" simultaneously. Twice this oxymoron is used in the same paragraph. (120) The impression is that of a punchy fighter, automatically continuing well-rehearsed motions but nearing the end of his endurance. Len is saved from the death blow by Sam Brinder calling a halt to the day's ploughing but not before Len has been badly hurt. The sun "shining in his eyes" (120) blinds him. Later, on the lawn he performs a macabre dance in the grass, symbolic of death, but he recognizes the performance as a childish impulse and puts his feet back in the heavy shoes and re-laces them.

Next morning, beginning the second round with the sun, Len is still "nearly as tired and even more bitter than the evening before. The soil seemed as hard as ever, the horses plunged, the orchard was still longer." (127) But, in the sky, are some clouds which promise relief from the intensity of his antagonist. Also, Len has learned something from his experience in the first round. This time he does not set out with such haste. He works steadily with regular breaks - "Automatically he continued to work after the accustomed respite." (131) In this way he becomes a little hardened to the "dolorous wrestle in the dust." (130) It is as if "he had never known anything else." (130) Imitating one of Syd's gestures, he wipes his forehead; the grime on his handkerchief is a tacit reminder of his mortality, the significance of his lesson being that mortals do not challenge the sun. In learning some humility, Len has passed one part of his initiation. Other facets of the sun's role are carried over in the other two theatres of the conflict.

The most obvious theatre of conflict is the one in which Len's father is the antagonist. When Len arrives home from the railway station, it is clear that something of import is about to begin - something of which Len has not been instructed and of which his father is in charge. Although the job appears to be a concerted drive on the spring ploughing, the father has broader purposes which are directed toward inculcating in Len a general truth about the conditions of

life on the farm. One of the important features of the knowledge concerns the nature of freedom and necessity.

Brinder begins by letting Len know that he is expected to participate in some way: "We'll be in the orchard when you come." (112) He does not say "if" but "when." There is no choice about his coming, but when Len does finally arrive, he is made to believe that he has a choice as to which part of the ploughing he would like to do. The manner of the presentation of the choice and the reasoning which prompts it are directed toward an affirmative answer: "Syd's finishing the lands for me. Do you want to strike them out? It will be pretty hard around those old trunks." Sam Brinder's subterfuge succeeds as Len, disdainful of his father's warning, accepts the challenge: "Not much difference, is there?" (114) The arrogance Len displays in this rejoinder is a condition which may be expected to change before the end of the story. And Len, in accepting the "hard" part has committed himself to playing out the role. Attention is drawn to this fatal step by the gesture of bravado which accompanies Len's arrogant words: "... and at once turned his team into line." (114)

During the first day's action, Sam Brinder spares Len as much as possible by kindly considerations. Len is too hostile, however, to accept his father's spirit of kindness. When Len appears bent on a killing pace, his father intervenes by suggesting that Len go for a pail of water. Len pretends to have no need of refreshment and only grudgingly ac-

cedes to the request as a favour to the other two. Brinder suggests that the horses need a rest. Using this pretext, Len is able to get some rest also, but just before the end of the day's ploughing, the horses have a second wind which Len has not managed to get. Sam Brinder calls a halt just before Len is about to collapse.

In the house at suppertime, Brinder presides. There is a certain atmosphere of communion about the meal - in the ritual manner of its preparation and in the fellowship enjoyed by the two men. Also there seems to be an observance of dietary restrictions against meat. They belong to an egg cult. The meal ceremony provides an opportunity for a lesson on the nature of choice. Sam Brinder does not offer an alternative to eggs. The only choice is how the eggs are to be cooked.

The father has another opportunity to score a point during the evening. When Len discovers his father is not in the barn doing the chores, he suspects him of loitering at the neighbour's. Len is to learn later that his father has been having trouble getting a reluctant cow to the barn with her calf. The father does not lose his temper when he finds Len reading in the house, the chores unfinished in the barn, and when he hears Len state that he had "called it a day" (125) at nine o'clock, he simply observes to Len that, "It'll pay not to pay so much attention to the clock when a busy time's on, you'll find." (125) With this, Brinder goes out and does

the work himself. The fact that his father is controlled, disappoints Len who had expected to play the martyr. His father denies him that satisfaction and turns Len's own tactics against the boy himself. This point marks the reversal in the action of the story.

The next day Sam Brinder continues the same cool strategy he had used to handle the situation the previous night. Every consideration that Len had been tendered and had scorned the day before is withdrawn. Brinder announces that he will get the water himself this morning. The purpose is to emphasize to Len that whatever his sufferings may be, they are of his own choosing and that if he continues to make the required work more difficult for himself than it need be, he has only his own arrogance and pride to blame. When Len complains that Syd's job is easier, the father reminds him that he chose the job he is doing. Then as if to force Len into the big choice, Brinder pushes him to the limit. He begins to quibble about the time in somewhat the same fashion as Len had done the night before. In the morning he had observed that his watch was slow. He explains at mid-morning that it is twenty minutes fast. Len rises to this challenge; he resolves to call the telephone operator for the correct time, deciding "that if he discovered the clock had really been advanced, he must leave." (132) Len does not get the opportunity of going to the house early on this second day and when they all stop for dinner, Len's agitation about

telephoning mounts. When he gets to the house, he puts off his resolution, soothed in some mysterious way by Syd's quiet voice.

The meal-time ceremony of the day before is repeated; Sam Brinder presides; the main dish is eggs again; the choice as to how they are to be cooked is repeated. This second time the atmosphere of communion between the men begins to take effect on Len. The chanting of their voices over "the well-worn topics" (122) has a liturgical note: "The two voices went on" (134) There is no observable climactic action in this theatre of conflict: "He wanted to rise and rush from the room" (135) but he does not move. The climax is a psychological one but the initiation has been accomplished. Syd is getting ready to leave them. Thus Len has come to an understanding about the conditions of life on the farm and of man's insignificance in the total scheme. That the plan may be without purpose is suggested in the implication of "the blind unwitting stupor of life reaching for what it wanted, an ox setting foot on a kitten before its manger." (135) Len is reconciled to his father's ways and the farm is assured of a successor when one day their roles will be reversed. Syd has promised to return "... sometime after a while" (136) to ease the inevitable resentment of an old man's retirement. When Len goes down the lane to the highway, he goes only as far as the mail-box. This address is the one where he will always be reached.

The third theatre of the conflict is in Len's mind - the psychological conflict of the adolescent male. The antagonist is Len's masculinity; the protagonist is the child whose infantile impulses the antagonist seeks to overcome. The stage is set at the beginning of the story. Len's initiation, like the spring season, has been held back by his growth-withholding mother. The opening scene is a flashback which suggests the regressive tendency which is preventing Len's development. Len has just taken his mother to the train where she has kissed him and cautioned: "Now don't work too hard while I'm away, Len." (111) The boy thinks vaguely of the city to which his mother is bound. The indolence of the life he recalls of visits to the city is vaguely attractive. When he arrives home he finds that his father has plans for a concerted effort at getting caught up with the spring work. He also learns that he is expected to participate. The situation makes his mother's advice ludicrous and sets up the opposition which sparks the conflict. This opposition is polarized in the mother and father images which parallel the subsequent conflict in the boy's mind. Just before the climactic point, Len has resolved to escape to the maternal city, but by this time his masculinity is exerting the stronger power. When the time comes to go, he goes only as far as the mail-box and finds a message from the city. It is not from his mother but from his sister for whom he suddenly feels an attraction. When his mother returns, Len will not need her; his initiation

will have been effected and his relationship with his mother will be different. Until this stage has been achieved, however, Len makes his own ordeal difficult by vacillating between the two opposed natures of his personality.

On returning to the farm, he notices for the first time the signs of his father's aging - "that his father's face had become a little thin and bitter of apparently new wrinkles." (112) He realizes that his father needs help and he feels guilty - "He turned away when his father came around to that side of the team." (112) Besides the guilt, Len experiences a foreboding; he is "oppressed now by a sense of haste, by a fear almost of something unknown threatening their determination which yet chivied and lured the men of farms through those on-treading days of late spring." (113)

Back in the house for a late dinner, Len accedes to the spirit of his mother's presence by indulging in some philosophic lethargy. He rationalizes his father's way of life "as a race against time as much for the sake of the race as for the prefigured prize." (113) He thinks of life in the city as "rendered in different terms, understandable and entrancing" (113), a place where "no one appeared to work." (113)

When he is offered the "hard" part of the ploughing, his masculine personality automatically accepts, despite the aversion in his present mood to work. After having betrayed the child in him by this move, the opposition within intensi-

fies. The conflict becomes one of deciding whether he is going to stay on the farm or go to the city. He thinks, at this point, that the choice is that simple.

During the first afternoon, he builds up a case against the farm. When he rejoins the men in the orchard, the place has suddenly become repellent, charged with evil connotations. The horses' breathing is discordant; the wind dead; the trees parasitic ("mushroom-shaped" - 114) and the land referred to as "the cursed soil." (115) The soil is described in images of dust: "White dust like a smoke burst forth between the ground and the fresh soil falling heavy upon it. All along the orchard the spurting dust preceded him, thin portions rising with a little wisp of breeze about his face." (114) His total reaction to the ploughing is summed up metaphorically as "this dolorous wrestle in the dust." (130)

When his father calls to him to control his horses better, Len blames his father for all their problems: "The ploughing shouldn't have been put off so long ... And other people were able to get men on some terms, why couldn't his father? Then, why must he take such a busy time as last week had been to go to the city to see about the mortgage?" (115) But Len cannot in honesty blame his father entirely: "Bad management was to blame ... but he could not, yet, hold his father responsible whom circumstances seemed to have rendered

powerless." (115-116)

When Syd tries to fraternize, Len responds indifferently, dramatizing himself as the little boy whose mother has abandoned him: "'Yes, mother thought she'd take a rest' ... 'Gone to the city,' with a smile he suddenly felt was meant to appear brave." (118) Yet he is no more successful in holding resentment against Syd than he is in condemning his father: "The boy liked Syd, after all." (123)

After the day's ploughing is finished, the evening work still to be done gives rise to more resentment about farming. The boy reflects, while washing dishes, on the never-ending monotony. He ponders about older farmers whom he knows "still working as hard and during longer hours than anyone." (123) He concludes that, "They had come to like it." (123) But his feelings are ambivalent: "He envied and condemned them for that." (123) Suddenly Len is confident: "There was so much of the world to see, so much of life to discover, to compare with what one might find in oneself." (123) Yet he seems not to realize that he does know much of the world without having travelled. When he steps outside in the night breeze, he sniffs and mutters, "As fresh - as fresh, as on the sea." (124) The farm has already taught him much of the world.

After having been made to appear a fool by his

father, over the nine o'clock quitting affair, the idea of going to the city becomes more than a possibility: "The actuality stood before him of every movement from now until the time he should have reached the city and entered on some transcendently congenial and remunerative occupation." (126) He even imagines himself going off to sea - the sea even more than the city being a universal symbol of the mother - the waters of the womb. The idea is regressive in that it is a return to the primordial past - the Freudian embodiment of a death wish. Such are the thoughts with which Len retires for the night.

The next morning he begins in the same mood of childish petulance with which he had gone to bed. The first object he encounters as a victim for his hostility is his favourite horse, Lass, whom he strikes on the muzzle for an inconsequential move which irritates him. Before he has been ploughing very long, he thinks he hears his father trying to sell her to Syd. This infuriates the boy but he does not consider that it was not until he was in danger of losing her that she is suddenly very precious. The purpose of introducing Lass at the beginning of the second part is that Len is going to discover that his feelings about the farm, when he decides to leave it, are related to his feelings about her - "that one friend he'd always miss." (133)

The decision to leave the farm is conditional on

proving his father's guilt in manipulating the clock. In the meantime, he works himself into a highly emotional state by dramatizing the departure scene - "his father's queries and expostulations and his own determined silence" (132-133) At the watering-trough, "... he was so agitated that he was struck ..." (133) with a kind of seizure in which a mysterious transformation begins to take place. As in primitive initiation ritual in which it was believed that the boy died and was reborn as a man, something of this nature is taking place in Len's mind: "... the meal was almost over before Len realized there was something in his mind being worn down and smoothed away, as old ice is worn away by spring rain." (134) Under the hypnotic effect of the men's voices, the transformation takes place. Len looks at his father and sees his own image: "His father had been young, too, once." (135) He recognizes that his father and Syd have achieved something that he needs too - that in their talk "... they meant simply to demonstrate that they were together again," (135) secure in the warmth of the fellowship of men of the farm.

The new Len cannot give up the farm; it represents his urge to live which has triumphed over the pull of easeful death. When he goes to the mail-box, he is only looking for some message of hope to brighten the sombre knowledge he has gained. In the anticipation of his sister's visit, he finds "an issue" (136) sufficient for the present and he returns to the struggle with resignation.

All three theatres of the action have performed the same drama, although only in simultaneous performance do they produce the mind-expanding quality which enables the reader to share the experience with the protagonist. Something of the conflict which pulls the boy apart, pulls also at the reader's heart. The story revives memories of moments in life's changing pattern which are both bitter and sweet.

From an aesthetic point of view, life is represented to be the dance by which the theme of the story is translated. The changes are rendered in Knister's dynamic treatment of light and movement - imagery possessed of radiance, even glamour. In the throes of waves of heat and pain, under the withering rays of the noon-day sun, Len notices the scintillating shimmer of the dragon-fly's wings. On another occasion, he recalls his special little horse: "Standing poised and throbbing with life." (130) Her frolic inspires a spine-tingling thrill: "Her heels shot up again and again and he could hear the swish of her long tail as she kicked" (130)

All this dynamic beauty has ambivalent aspects. The shimmer of the iridescent wings of the dragon-fly is the prelude to the mating dance which is performed spiralling into the sun at midday. The dance is the dance of death. The dragon-fly may be considered an indigenous version of

the winged serpent which, in Biblical context, has strong transcendental potentiality.⁵ Although its dance into the sun is the dance of death, there is a promise of re-birth through this death into a glorious new life. The evidence of the dancing heads of the wheat fields is that to dance "in the high sunlight" (128) is to dance in glory. And although the dragon-fly is often regarded as a rain-withholder, Knister suggests in this story, that beauty is truth.

The ambivalence of the dance is well translated in the extended figure of oxymoron ["sweet pain"] by which Len's barefoot dance in the grass is described: "Such immeasurable sweet pain he had never known. At first he could scarcely bear to raise his weary feet from the depth of the grass. Presently he would lift one at a time in a strange and heavy dance for the pleasure of putting it down again in the cool, soft blades." (121) Out of the participation in the "danse macabre" in the grass, Len is awakened to the mysterious variegated evergreens of which he could never remember the names. The use of green shadings echoes the beauty of the mist-green oats. Evergreen trees are usually symbols of immortality. But there is no certainty; trees are often ambivalent. They hide the birds whose "sharp sweet notes" (120) lure Len to what would have been almost certainly his death

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John III - 14 states "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of man be lifted up."

had his father not intervened on the first day when "The grass became pale before his eyes and the sunlight a little milder broke among the branches as among windy streaming snow-flakes." (120)

In "Mist-Green Oats," the balance seems to be weighted in favour of the dance "in the high sunlight." The story is of spring and youth and some hope. Although spring and youth cannot last, it is perhaps in their very evanescence that their beauty consists. Knister portrays change to be the essence of life - that each phase has its own unique beauty and that to ignore the sensuous response is to atrophy. The story is predominantly a celebration of life and an invitation to join in the dance.

CHAPTER VTHE LOADING

"The Loading" is a companion-piece to "Mist-Green Oats." The two stories have certain surface parallels: - both concern adolescent boys; both are set in the microcosmic world of the farm; both are concerned with a problem relationship between a father and son. Thematically, the stories are in marked contrast: "Mist-Green Oats" is a celebration of life; "The Loading" is a celebration of sacrificial death. Both stories deal with problems indigenous to tragedy: "Mist-Green Oats" probes the meaning of suffering; "The Loading" investigates the nature of good and evil.

This story presents a world in which evil runs rampant and threatens to destroy life. But it predicts the eventual triumph of good over evil, according to a master plan of high mysterious order. The significance of man's role in the struggle is not clear, but hope is held out that his sufferings are not without meaning. Faith in his own purpose is justified in the manifestation of the sacrifice of a perfect love which eludes intelligence and can be understood only in symbolic terms. And the reader is left with the impression that the great mystery of life which has bedevilled man through all the ages, is also beyond understanding. The story echoes Knister's words in a letter in which he mentions

"The Loading": "Speaking of understanding, your remarks on the Bible touch on my pet theory - that we need not understand. We do not understand life, nor great art that is its essence."¹

"The Loading" is a paean to innocence and to beauty of spirit and to a love so rare as to seem wasted on fallen man. The theme merges the fertility myth and the Christian message. Although ambivalent, it seems to offer more cause for hope than for despair. It involves the death of a sacrificial victim who dies to redeem a world grown evil almost beyond redemption. The death scene is apocalyptic, combining the ultimate both of glory and of horror. By his son's sacrifice, the man who was proud and unbending is brought to his knees at the foot of a rack built of wood and nails which he has assembled himself and where the son dies. As the father, Jesse, sinks to his knees, the evil which had possessed him is impressionistically shown retreating, in the manner of a serpent: "A little cloud of dust lazily wandered away, twisting slowly across the ground." (13) As the evil disappears, a bob-white, symbol of bountiful harvest, calls forth a note, "portent of a day of rain." (13) The call anticipates the freeing of the waters of which the world is so much in need. The suggestion seems to be that not only is man restored to

¹ Livesay, "Memoir," p. xxiii. Letter is dated April 11, 1924, from The Midland, Iowa City.

Grace but fertility is restored to the land, the well-being of which is directly related to man's state.

Based on a superficial reading, the story would seem to derive its title from the loading of pigs into a wagon for delivery to market. The action arises from the preparations necessary to accomplish this loading. On the morning of the story, the Culworth family is assembled about the kitchen table at early breakfast. The family consists of the father, Jesse, the mother, Nettie, and their only son, Garland, aged fifteen. The father is in an irritable mood. After breakfast he announces that he has sold the pigs which are to be loaded into a wagon and taken to town. To this purpose, the horses are brought from the bush, stabled and harnessed. The pigs are penned and fed their last meal; a chute for their loading is fetched from a kindly neighbour. But the loading of the pigs is never accomplished because of the intervention of an accident. As the wagon is being manoeuvred into position with the chute, the horses lurch backward, and Garland, who has been standing absent-mindedly behind the wagon, is crushed to death against the wall.

Since the pigs are never loaded, a literal loading can not be what the title implies and so a deeper meaning must be sought. The fact that Garland is the one who is killed, suggests that he is the one who is loaded - in a figurative sense. To support this interpretation is the

figure of the mysterious horse, Old Mack. Just before the climactic moment, Garland notices a horse with his head down in the "green wheat field." (12) Garland guesses at the identity of the horse, but he cannot be sure because he cannot see its face: "It's old Mack ,... We couldn't have tied him up with the others But how did he get there, how will we catch him?" (12) The relevance of this observation is not immediately obvious. But the image of a horse with its head hidden echoes the story in Norse mythology of Odin's ascent to Valhalla on a mysterious steed which had appeared to him in the same manner, its head hidden in the oats just prior to the god's death. It might be recalled that Knister was of Germanic origin and was, more or less, familiar with his ethnic folklore.² One northern European harvest custom involves a ceremony connected with the loading of the last sheaf gleaned from the field. Sometimes it is called the Oats Stallion, but it seems likely that it is named for whatever crop happens to be the staple one of the region.³ The stallion, or sheaf, is loaded and then beaten, supposedly in mock-killing, in order to release the spirit of the grain which will be resurrected in the spring. It is supposed that the custom is the extant vestige of the annual festival in which the fertility god was ritually slain in order to re-

² Conversation with Mrs. Grace, January, 1970.

³ James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Papermac (Toronto, 1967), p. 603.

store fertility and to renew life. By the use of this particular kind of horse symbol, Knister identifies Garland as a universal fertility god. It also identifies him as a Christ-figure since in Christian symbolism, the horse is a symbol of the Cross. The merging of fertility and Christian imagery is endemic to the organic structure of the story - its theme, setting, characters and action. These are anticipated in the opening scene.

The opening scene provides a preview of the story by the establishment of the pervasive atmosphere, the introduction of the three main characters and an explanation of the motive for the succeeding action. The prospect is one of darkening gloom yet the darkness serves to highlight the penetrating brightness in the picture. The place is a kitchen which "was dimly lit by vine-covered windows." (1) The vine is said to be a virginia creeper, a name of sinister connotation threatening the encroachment of final darkness. The "fading dark paper" (1) of the backdrop sharpens by contrast the bright spots of the sunbeams piercing through the leaves of the vine and "targetting" (1) against the darkness. The use of the metaphor of light "targetting" suggests conflict, sharpness, pain and explosive bursts. The imagery is associated with the phallic symbol of the sun and is reminiscent of the dynamic vitality of the light in "Mist-Green Oats." The use of light and darkness suggests the conflict between good and evil while the sharpness of the light pre-

dicts the triumph of good. The time is early morning when the sun's rays are levelling through the room as they did on the ritual communion supper in "Mist-Green Oats." Breakfast is being served; the meal has some aspects of ritual - the washing of hands, the setting of the chair against the wall upon arising. The importance of food is indicated by the dominance given the table said to "half-fill the kitchen."

(1) Although the kitchen is a place devoted to the satisfaction of appetites and as such can be seen as a kind of prison of the flesh, the table may possess a transcendental potential.

Much of what is happening between the three members of the little family is not articulated. Jesse's early morning irritability makes itself felt and it bodes ill for the day. His pessimistic attitude to life is well conveyed by his favourite expression - "the devilishness of things in general." (1) The expression also conveys the somewhat intangible, yet nonetheless operative power of evil which is at work in a "general" sense in the world of the farm. Garland's presence, like the bright spots of light, provides sharp relief and is a sign that good will triumph. He is the focal point of the family, for of themselves, the mother and father are somewhat estranged in their manner to each other. They are shown separated by the length of the big table. Jesse regards Nettie "heavily" from one end. He speaks to her in the vocabulary he uses with the horses - "Whoa!" Despite

the disparaging attitude, he seems to need her favour. He looks to his wife "for approval of his wit" (2) but she withholds the approval he needs. Nettie's concern is only for her son having to go to the bush for the horses at a distance she refers to as "a long walk." (3) Otherwise, she attends to her household duties which centre about the table and the business of food.

The motive for the action of the story is said to be the selling of the pigs on the previous day when Jesse was in town, but the indications are that there are more deeply-rooted motives. Jesse's bad humour stems more from a basic envy of his old friends in the town where he had lived as a child than at the low price he must take for the pigs. The responsibility for his having been removed from the scene of his childhood is said to have been his mother's: "His mother who was living in the village after the death of her husband, persuaded him into taking a farm as soon as he had finished high school. She was intolerably afraid that he would not 'settle down' for until after his death her husband had not." (2) This flashback, set in the early morning scene, serves to suggest that there was something amiss very early in the great cycle of time.

The foregoing preview of the opening scene serves as a paradigm for the story. The sense of atmosphere which is responsible for much of the impact at the opening, operates throughout. The atmosphere is one largely derivative from the

archetypal pattern of imagery and diction with which the setting is projected, and it is one which leaves an impression of awesome mystical power.

A study of the total setting reveals a changing pattern of contrasts similar in effect to the shifting spots of the bright sunbeams on the dark wall of the kitchen. A broad view from the highway represents the countryside as a geometric design laid out in "ashen and green rectangles."

(9) The Culworth farm is shown to be similarly patterned but tending more to ashen than to green. The inherent danger of an insidious contagion is conveyed in the setting by the prevalence of dust which emanates from the pig yard and which threatens to spread to the greener areas of the farm. Spots of the disease have already broken out down the lane and are seen as circles of dust around the trunks of the shade trees where the animals have stood out of the sun. Associated with the dust imagery is that of weeds. These weeds are rampant in the pig yard and lurk also in the fence corners, threatening to infiltrate the corn-field. The whole farm is not yet completely wasteland, but the sun is rising towards its zenith and must be propitiated before the rains will be released.

The farm is a world divided into three areas - again the mystic "three-in-one" image from "Mist-Green Oats." Each area is associated with one of the main characters and is interrelated with the other areas just as are the characters.

The pig yard and the stables, associated with Jesse, emphasize his destructive influence and identify his area as a threat to the rest of the farm. The essence of the whole fallen world is summed up in the "dry stifling smell" (7) coming from "the hot barnyard." (7) The only hope raised is by reference to something within the strawstack said to "look like a precious bit of gold," (7) although the strawstack on the outside is referred to as "tarnished." (7) That the original or an earlier owner had envisaged much nobler plans for the farm, is implied in the mention that the enclosure, which is now the pig yard, had been once "meant for a paddock." (8) No signs of dignity remain to recall the original purpose. Represented in imagery of weeds and dust and translated in a harshness of diction which accentuates the effect, Jesse's realm verges on total desolation. Even the lane to the yard is "dry." Inside the yard, the soil "was long since beaten to a dust by little hoofs, and only straggling unpalatable weeds stood yet, gray with dust." (8) A contributing factor is the heap of "old sticks and rubbish and pieces of rusty fence-wire," (12) which has accumulated outside the fence. The harshness is reflected in the description of the dark stables where attention is drawn to "the strong glare of sunlight on the rhomboid of dirty stained cement within the door." (7) The total atmosphere is one befitting the harshness of the treatment accorded the horses and the son, who tries his best to please his father.

A quality of confinement pervades Jesse's realm. The proliferation of enclosures is apparent in the constant allusions to fences, pens, yards, stalls, racks and chutes. A restriction of freedom is similarly suggested by such restraining devices as halters, harness and neck yokes. That the connotations are not restricted to the animal world is implied in the way in which the animals are given human attributes. Dan is referred to as "the old slave," (12) and as "the wise old boy." (10) All the horses are described as though capable of wilfulness - "enjoying their truancy." (10) The last recalcitrant pig is said to be welcomed back "by his comrades rallying around" (8) and the reference to the pigs' "little hoofs" (8) is a tender one. Animals and people alike - "everyone and everything" (12) are included in Garland's compassion. The atmosphere is as much a prison for man as it is for beast but the animals have the advantage of being unaware of their sentence. Jesse, on the other hand, is tormented by the knowledge and dreams of escape "out West." (9) The idea of escape beckons him on, but it seems merely an illusion and part of a plan to keep him forever tied to the hopeless rounds on the farm. Accordingly: "Jesse stuck to the farm during the good years because they might continue, and he wouldn't quit in a bad year because then it and the stock could not be sold for what they were worth." (2)

A second area is the bush at the back of the farm. This area is associated with Garland and may be considered as

his realm. The bush serves as a concrete representation of anagogic childhood; it contains a legacy of primordial images lost to a fallen world. To convey the impression of a long-forgotten past, the bush is hidden in the early mists, reminiscent of the dawn of creation, caught in a moment between sleeping and waking when consciousness is suspended between dream and reality. It is said, "The trees stood dozing, or whispering a little softly so as not to rouse the others."

(3) The birds, too, are "mist-thralled" (12) and the horses found asleep are difficult to rouse from their lethargy. They "twined" (10) drowsily back up the lane with Garland to the actuality of the stables and to present time.

Another detail which tends to locate the bush far back in time, is Nettie's repeated remark about the distance to the bush. The first time she says, "It's a long walk back there." (3) The second time she says, "It's a long way back there." (5) Ordinarily the second remark would be read with a mental pause after the word "way." However, by placing the pause after "back," the meaning is quite different. Read so, the possibility exists that Nettie has inherited some terrifying recollections of the primordial past.

To Garland, the bush lot represents a sanctuary when the conditions of life with Jesse are more than he can bear. It is a holy place containing relics of forgotten temples. As archetypal sacred wood, it bears marks of the gods of all ages.

The impressions of a temple shift from age to age without regard to chronology and have need of arrangement. The earliest seems to pre-date an anthropomorphic god, when worship was directed to vegetation and animal spirits. The trees are described at one point as animate; they "stood dozing." (4) One is said to assume the form of a lion, another of a "slender fleet animal" (3) transfixed at a moment in time. Over this earliest impression of a worship-place is superimposed the lines of a Greek temple, "its columns upholding clouds." (4) In the depths of the woods is the suggestion of an oracle - "The echo of his voice seemed muffled distantly and to come back at him through the mist." (4) A later version with Christian or Hebraic overtones is suggested by the one tree which reminds Garland "of an old calm church elder as he stood outside the church after service and greeted the people." (4-5) The picture of "his long beard moving" (5) is a patriarchal image and recalls Biblical scenes. The movement of the beard suggests the agency of wind as the breath of God and relates particularly to such figures as the prophets of the Old Testament. Over this timeless holy place is a hush of reverence. It is the same quiet which was attributed to the quiet of a sleeping world. Both kinds of quiet belong in a world removed from reality. On this particular morning, Garland is eager to go to the bush, for he senses a more than usual irritability in his father. And it is Garland's preoccupation with the wonder and mystery of the morning woods which throws him off

guard for the rest of his brief day.

The bush is said to be "beautiful in its attempted negation of colour." (3) The lack of colour and vitality has an attraction very different from what is considered beautiful by ordinary standards. There is no dynamic principle at work in this kind of beauty. The beauty is of the essence of the bush - something of the warmth and fragrance by which it is known. It is a spiritual beauty.

The farmhouse, particularly the kitchen, is the area associated with Nettie, the mother-figure of the story. The general impression of the house is of crowded, cramped quarters. The house is specifically referred to as "little" as is the window in Garland's bedroom. The kitchen is said to be half-filled with a table. Several other bulky pieces - a stove, a sink and a sewing machine - fill the remaining space. Within the crowded confines are smaller box-like compartments such as a pantry and an oven. The atmosphere on the morning of the story, is somewhat stifling. Even Garland is relieved to get outside, although later in the morning, when he is reminiscing, the image of his home appears as a symbol of security where - "he would be warm and replete and in the light."
(12)

The kitchen supplies the basic requirements of life. The scenes in the kitchen involve eating and drinking and cooking - activities related to the satisfaction of the physical

appetite. There is also a certain therapeutic quality generated in the kitchen, not only the restorative power generated by food but the unspecified "something" which Jesse says he must get at the house to prevent the blood poisoning likely to infect the gash he has received on the rusty wire when chasing the horses. And the water in the sink is not only for drinking but for washing - at least for Garland. The washing of hands suggests a transcendental level of meaning for the place, giving it a possible redemptive role in the world. The kitchen is referred to as "the warm kitchen." The warmth comes not only from the hot food and the stove where it cooks, but from the heart of the mother. The warmth of her love is directed to her son, although not, perhaps, to her husband. There seems to be an emotional reserve toward the husband. The "reserve of warmth" noted in the beauty of the morning woods, has some relationship to Nettie's reserve.

The lane is the link between the woods and the house. It is the path which Garland travels between two sanctuaries of his childhood - his mother and his imagination. Both sanctuaries represent the womb - the kitchen in literal sense, the woods, archetypal. There is a latent danger in the womb image of the story. It might be noted that some of Nettie's equipment has sinister aspects. The oven is capable of intense heat and the sewing machine has certain destructive phallic connotations. And over her crowded little realm, winds the serpentine image of the vine which "The wind would rustle ...

dryly against the clapboards and the panes." (12)

The three principal characters of the story derive something of their natures from the parts of the farm with which each is associated and like the parts of the farm, they are united by complicated ties which are working to destroy the unit. Only by some wrenching of the total pattern can the trend be reversed. The one chosen to save the situation is the child.

As a sacrificial victim, Garland is portrayed both as fertility god and as a Christ figure. He has been marked from birth by virtue of his naming for the role he is to play. His name suggests the accolade accorded any hero marked for special honour but it also suggests the garland of flowers with which the victims about to be sacrificed, were adorned. Garland is a flower of purity and innocence and is offered up as was the flower of youth in the annual rituals of the ancient cults. As was the purpose in primitive times, this sacrifice, too, is propitiatory - exacted in return for the productivity in field and flock upon which the well-being of the people depends. Garland cannot be permitted to lose his innocence before his sacrifice, since only the pure can redeem the sins of the world. For the purpose of this story, there can be no initiation into the tragic knowledge as there was for the boy in "Mist-Green Oats." Although Garland has lived in his father's world for fifteen years, he is not of it. He is

of that other world of a child's imagination which can be understood as figured by the bush. In that dimension, he responds to the beauty and mystery of life in a way which shuts out the consciousness of evil. That his mother may be in any way responsible for the harshness which he senses in his father's world is not within Garland's compass. Garland is still a child; his mother is perfect. Garland's innocence is not effective in life as a reforming agent of his father's ways; if anything, it seems to aggravate the situation. Only through death can he conquer the forces of evil which have found a servant in Jesse and which are now rampant in the kingdom over which he holds sway. Garland is the embodiment of good which works in a mysterious way. Motivated by a mysterious power, Garland submits to his own sacrifice by which the world is redeemed for those he loves.

There are many details which identify Garland as a Christ-figure. He is the only begotten of his father and being an adolescent, he is, like the Christ, only half man. The name of his father also identifies him. As the son of Jesse, although Knister has telescoped a thousand years into one generation, Garland is seen as springing from the root of the house of David of which it was prophesied the Messiah was to be born.⁴ Also, Garland is a prince of peace. On his way to

⁴ Isaiah II, 1-10.

the bush in the morning, his contentment is expressed as being "at peace." (3) His love of peace is demonstrated by the willingness with which he performs whatever he is asked to do, despite the abuse heaped on him. Coming out of the early morning bush, leading Dan "by the damp forelock of his lowered head" (10) Garland fulfills another prophecy.⁵

Garland is endowed with a very special charisma. Noted of Syd in "Mist-Green Oats," the quality is magnified in Garland and is identified by three aspects - as the emanation of light and of grace and as a charitable giving in the service of others. His association with light imagery is very pronounced. A halo or nimbus moves with him, "opening a horizon about him" (3) as he walks through the mist to the bush; he follows the horses up the lane "whistling in the sun;" (9) he hurries home in the evening to the "little bright-windowed house" (12) where he will be "in the light." (12) Similarly, Garland is endowed with the gift of Grace, a state implicit in his innocence which marks him as the elect of God. Garland is even graceful in a literal sense. In the struggle to pen the pigs, "Garland had employed quickness and a good deal of wiry strength." (8) And when the horses stam-peded from the stable door, Garland outran them and brought them back while his father was still shouting. Everything

⁵ Isaiah XI-6, "...; and a little child shall lead them."

Garland touches responds easily. The same screen-door which "cracks to" (5) when Jesse leaves the house, "swings to" (3) when Garland goes out. The third aspect of Garland's charisma is his great charity. Even the horses are the object of his tender care. Before harnessing them, Garland "was making for the box containing the curry-combs and brushes." (6) But his father overrules Garland's kind impulse. The ultimate gesture of service to others is Garland's sacrificial death. Just before the crucial moment, he is overcome by compassion for those he loves: "Poor Mother! Poor Dan, the old slave! Unaccountable pity for everyone and everything enwrapped him." (12) Gazing at the pigs, it is as though his heart explodes in one great swelling burst of love and sorrow, "a strange pain at his heart." (12) At the same moment, the wagon-rack strikes him and he hears the triumphal shout.

The antagonist, Jesse Culverson, the second important character, has a very unusual name. Uncapitalized, the word "jesse," is both a verb and a noun. As a verb, it means "to scold or castigate;" as a noun, "a rod of chastisement." Jesse seems to have the attributes of such a rod; it said that he is "strong-looking and unbent of shoulders at forty." (1) He is a man at the prime of life, yet his vigour is affected by a rigidity which resists every adversity as a personal affront. He cherishes an image of himself as the special object of nature's inclemency: "To heavy rains and droughts, he resigned himself almost with enjoyment. If anyone's clover

failed to 'catch' it was his; if anyone's wheat winter-killed, his did. Hoof and mouth disease broke out miles away to head straight to his stable." (2) Like Milton's Satan, Jesse has come to enjoy the state of disfavour and fosters the atmosphere of Hell within the radius of his influence. His propensity for evil is illustrated in the image of the serpent in the dust which, until the end of the story, accompanies him even beyond the limits of his own farm. On the way to the Crampton's, out on the road said to be "long" and "empty," Jesse's progress is marked by a column of dust which "hung alongside the wagon as they drove." (9) And the observation that the road "seemed to hold ... the hush and warmth of noon" (9) intimates the presence of a pestilence abroad at that dread hour. To complete the Satanic image is the figure of Jesse at the stable door "gripping a fork-handle firmly." (6)

Everything bristles in Jesse's presence. Even the gatepost sprouts a thorn - "a stiff wire" (6) to tear his face which, itself, is covered with bristling beard "yellow-black in the dim light." (7) His beard provides him a masochistic pleasure: "The back of his hand bristled across his mouth." (5) His perversity affects even the horses which had come amenably to the barn for Garland but which become obstreperous when Jesse attempts to head them into the stable. Even the screen-door "cracked to behind him" (5) as he leaves the house.

Jesse's conversation is riddled with ironic barbs.

This tone is established from the opening scene. With reference to having sold the pigs, he qualifies whatever satisfaction is expressed by a disparaging comment about the price: "I should guess he would take them, the price he's paying now!" (2) His remarks about Garland or to him are particularly barbed. While waiting for Garland to get the horses, he remarks, "Lot of help he is!" (5) When Garland does appear with the horses, his father's way of rebuking him is with what is ironically said to be a smile, "You had to run them all over the bush before you could get hold of them, eh?" (5) The harnessing of the horses, is accompanied by such remarks as, "What are you standing there for? ... Haven't you lost enough time yet, eh?" When Garland, not being tall or strong enough to carry the harness clear of the floor, tries to do so, his father berates him again, "What d'you got to drag it over the floor for? If you can't pick it up, leave it alone." (8) Because everything he does is going wrong, Jesse finds relief in blaming Garland for what is happening. When something goes well, Jesse only grudgingly acknowledges the boy's help: "You'll make a farmer yet," (8) he says, when Garland proves capable at catching the pigs. The effect of Jesse's sarcasm merely aggravates Garland's ineptitude. When the chute narrowly misses the boy's legs, Jesse is driven to the extreme: "Well what are you thinking of this morning? ... Will you never learn? ... I've got to watch you like a baby ... I'll have to have his mother out to help me take care of

him. A great lot of good!" (11) Under this onslaught, Garland is stricken beyond words - "in a sort of daze of which he was scarcely half aware." (11)

Jesse's wife is included in his resentment. He seems to transfer the hostility against his own mother to Nettie and holds her responsible for all his troubles because he identifies her with his mother, feeling that she is doing to Garland what his mother had done to him. Jesse, at the same time, identifies with his dead father whose freedom he envies and plans that Garland and he will escape from the farm: "We'll have to go into business, you and I. Hardware business out West, eh?" (9) Jesse's hopes are doomed to failure. He must be taught a lesson in humility; his sin is pride in thinking to equal the Most High and assert his own will without first seeking Grace from God. His efforts produce a horrific backlash and the catastrophe which occurs is a dreadful price to pay for his sin.

In some respects Jesse is a tragic hero. In the sense that everyone can identify with him, Jesse is more human than is Garland. His suffering is greater and his fate more uncertain. His irritability represents the evil which lives in every soul and which seeks to destroy the good that was intended to prevail. Jesse is an example of sinful man, who is at the same time, innocent.

Nettie is an ambivalent character. As the mother of

Garland, she might be expected to symbolize the virgin mother but if this is true, then she is a somewhat parodied version. The name of the vine on her kitchen window, the virginia creeper suggests the virgin but the "creeping" quality is sinister. The vine is impeding full light from entering the kitchen and it rustles "dryly against the clapboards and the panes." (12) In this sense, Nettie is a threatening figure. The love she lavishes on her son puts her in opposition to her husband. She constantly intercedes on Garland's behalf and her interference serves to antagonize Jesse. Her name, too, suggests nettles which have an association with poison and sensations of stinging pain. Another contentious issue is her objection to Jesse's use of coarse language in Garland's presence. Since Jesse, himself, objects to Garland's inadvertent use of such language "as he would pick up," (3) the problem is not basically about profanity but about the use of a child as a weapon between husband and wife. Garland, in his innocence, is not aware of this aspect of his mother.

To the child, his mother is the bountiful source of all the things he needs. Her domain provides him with security - from hunger, from cold, from the dark. Although she appears but briefly in the story and is always occupied with food, she provides the love light of Garland's earthly home. The bright windows of the little house are symbols of the radiance of the mother's love which shines through her eyes.

But a shadow hangs over Nettie; some evil for which she is partly responsible must be overcome before the world recovers the state envisaged in former plans. In this story evil is overcome - and in the sense that Nettie is the mother of the Christ figure, she has a virgin mother role. However, the virgin mother is ambivalent.

The dramatic action, like the other structural elements of the story, has an archetypal basis. The fatal error has occurred before the opening of the story - even before the birth of the innocent protagonist, Garland. The error had been Jesse's manner of acquiring the farm in the first place. The acquisition is said not to have been of his own doing but of his mother's. If the farm is the microcosm of the world, then the fatal error seems to be in having been born (or something connected with creation) - and the responsibility for this is attributable to Jesse's long-gone mother - the archetypal Eve, who first entertained sin and lost forever the freedom of the garden for the human race. The analogy of Jesse's mother to Eve is supported by the implied analogy of his father to Adam, who, not having been born of woman, was the only man to have ever known paradise on earth. Jesse's father, depicted in the short-lived role of playboy, having never "settled down" until his death, is a similar figure. Having established Jesse's mother and father as the first parents, the action which follows is the struggle to live in a fallen garden. The conflict is between the powers of good

and evil. Until the end, evil seems to be gaining, but in a quiet, mysterious way, good triumphs through the sacrificial death of Garland.

Something of the foregoing allegory occurs in the brief span of the action of the story. The previous event responsible for Jesse's bad humour is his visit to town the day before when he sold the pigs. The action seems to develop as a result of the sale. Although this observation is partly true, Jesse's bad humour stems also from envy of his boyhood friends whom he sees "driving about the village in their motors after the closing of their stores" (2) - enjoying what appears to him to be freedom. The envy stirred up in his soul at the sights in town takes control of his action to an overpowering degree and casts him in the Satanic role of antagonist in the drama.

The job of pig-loading provides a series of mounting difficulties which parallel Jesse's increasing frustration with his problems. The heightening of the tension is relieved periodically by Garland's reveries, but each time it resumes with added intensity. The progressive stages of the loading provide an opportunity to show that Garland accomplishes with ease what his father is not able to do, even with great difficulty. While Garland is enjoying the beauty of the morning woods in his quest for the horses, Jesse is fretting with impatience at the delay, working fitfully at

odd jobs. The horses, which come easily for Garland, misbehave for Jesse. Jesse's abuse of the horses is responsible for the miscarriage of the loading.

The trip to Old Andrew's farm for the loading chute marks a turning point in the story. Up to this time, the boy and his father had been apparently accomplishing their purpose. But on the return journey, events begin to change. The change is first apparent in the atmosphere. The softness of the morning light is replaced by the "violent sunlight." (9) The evil, which had lain dormant, takes on a tangible form in the image of the serpent in the dust which is stirred up by the wheels and hangs "alongside the wagon" (9) like a living column.

Old Andrew's farm is an appropriate place on which to hinge the balance of the story. It represents that measure of fulfillment which the farm, consequently the world, can offer. At best, it is a modest expectation - a reconciliation with oneself or in Old Andrew's terms, "the consumption worthy of a pride he did not care to show." (9) In leaving Old Andrew's, Jesse is figuratively turning his back on the compromise which reconciles the conflicting forces of Nature. On the way home, Jesse delivers a tirade against farming and fools who are farmers. He makes himself even more dissatisfied with his lot by comparing it with the ideal which exists in his mind of a remote possibility "out West"

(9) in the hardware business of which he knows nothing.

The point of no return has also been passed in the struggle between good and evil. Jesse has lost the ability to recognize the difference. In failing to recognize what Old Andrew's place represents, his standard of values is shown to be distorted. His son is the only point of vulnerability left in Jesse. He needs Garland because his dream of escape to the West requires that the boy go with him. He turns "pale" (11) when Garland narrowly escapes being lamed as they turn into their own gateway. But the narrowness of this escape does not soften Jesse nor open his eyes. It only increases his ranting at the boy. When Garland is crushed by the wagon, Jesse crawls around behind, "his eyes shut." (13) The opening of his eyes occurs after the close. There seems no doubt that his eyes will be opened, although exactly what he will see is not revealed. That he will see more than a crushed and bleeding body is implied in the symbolic imagery with which the scene is portrayed. When the wagon strikes Garland, the climactic point of the story is reached. Although the climax occurs within the span of the story, the sound of the shout is confined to Garland's ears and its impact is lost on the reader since the pervasive impression is one of silence. However, the silence is broken by a bird call. The promise of rain in the bob-white's singing and the image of the retreating serpent in the dust, raise hope that man is redeemed and the world restored to fertility.

The significance of Garland's sacrifice is to confirm the power of love. But the truth of the mystery is beyond rational understanding, existing in a dimension outside the world of reality and forever inscrutable.

Although this story has been interpreted as a story of redemption through love, there is an underlying irony which develops more in Knister's later three stories and which might justify a different interpretation even in "The Loading." There is no certainty that redemption occurs. The reader is not told what the man sees because the story ends before he opens his eyes. The possibility exists that the redemption may be only temporary - like the reprieve the pigs are granted and which they can enjoy in ignorance and greed "guzzling at the trough." (13) And, indeed, like the pigs' innocence, there may be a suggestion that man is not guilty of anything for which he is in need of redemption, having had no responsibility for his presence in the first place in a world for which he has been so ill-conceived. But Jesse is less fortunate than the pigs - for unlike them, he is not oblivious to his fate. Jesse has been to school but knowledge has only worsened his lot because knowledge gives rise to the fear that life may be without meaning. It is a fear that lurks in the background of the story.

When Knister adapted the story several years later into a one-act play, much of what had been lurking in the

background is brought to the fore.⁶ Much of what was happening to his themes during the interim can be discerned in examining the way he changed the play. Although his title, "The Loading" has an ironic ring, the title of the play, "Youth Goes West" is even more so. In the short story, Jesse did not intend that his son "go West" in the manner of the dying sun, although that might be inferred. The title of the play makes its theme explicit. Also, the Christian symbolism in the fertility imagery is lost in the play, tending to erase the hope held out in the short story. In the play, the focus shifts from the stables to the kitchen where the action is either related by characters who enter or is viewed through the window. The change transfers responsibility to the mother.

For the purpose of the play, Knister introduces a sister. By this expedient, the details supplied by the narrator in the short story are conveyed in dialogue between mother and daughter while the dramatic action is taking place outside. As in the later stories, Knister is projecting the microcosm of a matriarchal world, whereas in "The Loading" and the earlier stories the projection is of a patriarchal one. The implications of the changing pattern are sinister. In the play, it is at the mother's instigation rather than the father's, that Garland should "go West." The signifi-

⁶ The play was published under the title "Youth Goes West" in Poet Lore, v. 39 (December, 1928), p. 582.

cance of the pigs to be loaded in the short story is almost lost in the play. More pronounced is a related episode of a sow eating a new-born shoat, an incident which is explained as her craving to eat earth. The archetypal image of the earth mother as parasitic on her own children is characteristic of the later stories. The idea of earth as a great sow devouring her young has an apocalyptic strain embodying an eschatology of deepest pessimism. Such is the pessimism which dominates the later stories.

CHAPTER VITHE STRAWSTACK

"The Strawstack" develops much of what had lain dormant in previous stories. Of central significance is the increasingly destructive influence of the mother-image. Her darker nature had been concealed in "The Loading" but in this story, it is revealed. Gone is the benevolent, patriarchal authority of "Mist-Green Oats," regenerating life by sacrificial service to the soil and to the provision of future husbandmen in the cult. The new power is a retrogressive matriarchal one, bent on its own preservation, sustained by the consumption of its own progeny whom it nurtures to make carrion. The engendering life spirit of the phallic symbol of the sun has set. The ensuing stories are marked by failing light, the cold of late autumn and the cheerless hours of night or of wintery mornings. As the sun sets, its role is usurped by the destructive phallic female, cast in shadow but growing visible in the thin, sharp crescent figure of the new moon. She is a malevolent mother and a Nature goddess and her ascendance bodes ill for mankind.

In this inimical world, man, having been born of woman, is a part of Nature and is thus bound by her laws. The tragedy of his being born is that he is limited by his own nature in the fulfillment of his aspirations. Although the story deplures what man makes of his life, he is por-

trayed as innocent, born with inherent frailties which render him susceptible to unconscious impulses beyond his control.

The sense of loneliness which pervades "The One Thing" mounts in "The Strawstack" to agonizing alienation. The fellowship extolled in "Mist-Green Oats" is recollected in "The Strawstack" as merely "the manifestations of a trivial life." (150) Man is seen as a prisoner not only within the world but within himself. The projection of the world as a prison is no longer only figurative: "Prison meant little to him Life was the same and left him with the same feeling after a few weeks behind the high iron fences and walls as it had outside." (149)

"The Strawstack" is a projection of the absurdity of life. It chronicles the tragic irony of searching for meaning since, according to the life portrayed in this story, the only purpose is to die. Man is shown, despite what he would like to believe, to be tied to the cyclical recurrence of Nature. And his sufferings are shown to stem from his inability to comprehend the absurdity of his situation. That in attempting to fathom, by intelligence, a rational explanation of that for which none exists, he is indeed embarked upon a futile quest - as futile as his search for beauty in a totally ugly world. How is one to explain the natural processes of that to which one, himself, is subject? The theme asserts

the meaninglessness of life; the corollary to which is left in question - that only in death can meaning be found.

The story is ostensibly that of a man wanted for murder, who seeks the sanctuary of his boyhood farm from where, at the age of fifteen, he had fled in the belief that he had accidentally killed his little sister. He had learned six months later that his sister had been only stunned and had suffered no permanent injuries but the news had reached him too late. Already he had taken up a life of drifting and petty crime. The crimes had mounted, interspersed by longer prison terms, until eventually, he commits murder. Knowing that he is being pursued, he seeks the sanctuary of the old farm.

It is at this point that the story opens. The fugitive finds himself a shelter for the night in a hole of an old strawstack. From this vantage point, he looks about him at the old familiar landmarks. The scene brings back the flood of memories which constitute his life story. While he is remembering, he inadvertently finds the cut pieces of binder-twine which are mixed with the straw. The moon rises, bringing back even earlier memories. These include one of a rope swing on which he and his sister had played. He recalls how the rope was made of twisted pieces of twine and of how he had expressed a wish to one day make a rope of his own. While he is remembering the swing, he is unconsciously tying

together the pieces of twine from the stack. When he realizes what he is doing, he is horrified but he recognizes the futility of any other course. When the rope is ready, he hangs himself from the same maple tree which had once supported the swing.

The opening scene is said to cover "the passing of a few sombre reflections" (144) as the returning fugitive walks from the back of the farm up the lane to where the buildings stand. The passage covers only a few minutes walking time but the significance of those minutes is said to be as important as that of a lifetime. His reflections are intertwined with another commentary somewhat detached from the conscious thoughts. The effect is that of two currents vying for domination in a mind bordering dangerously on schizophrenia. The walking, conscious man, does not see every detail that is related. The cows are among the unseen: "He went on without seeing them." (145) But the other narrator sees them and he notices the unsavoury nature of the beasts. This dual narration is an effective means to convey the confused and distressing bewilderment by which universal man faces the uncertainty of the outcome. To add to the uncertainty of the scene is the failing light. The hour is twilight and with the exception of the sharp broken lines of the roof of the house, the landscape is not seen in sharp relief. The whole depressing scene is vague, as in a dream, and it reflects the monotony of the fugitive's dull percep-

tion of the meaning of his actions.

Even in the first brief paragraph, much of the essence of the story is contained. The emphasis on atmosphere is a salient feature of these few lines. That the story is likely to be one relying heavily for thematic purposes on the strong use of that feature proves to be true. The theme of the meaninglessness of life is introduced at the outset: "He had walked ten hours before he came to it." (144) The ambiguous reference to "it" makes time and place indistinguishable. The ambiguity is increased by the understanding that the place of arrival is the same as a previous place of departure. The journey between is described more as the passage of time than of distance. The technique lends a desultory character to the wanderings, making of life more a matter of putting in time rather than of accomplishing an objective. An element of irony is incorporated in the contradictory evidence that a hidden objective, unknown until the end, has existed.

The effect of meaninglessness is also conveyed in the concept of flux. This idea is suggested by analogies to the sea, symbol of formlessness and primordial chaos. The reference to the "horrible rise and sinking of suns, moons" (144) as images of monotonous recurrence, recall the ebb and flow of the tide. And the reference to "his first homesickness" as "a sandbar only" (144) renders life in terms of drifting

wreckage and occasional moorings as impermanent as forms in sand, constantly shifting with the changing mood of the sea. The use of this kind of sea imagery relates closely to a figurative phrase used by Knister, referring to "the flotsam of humanity."¹ Such figurative devices indicate, at the very beginning of the story, that its theme is going to be one of Knister's most pessimistic projections of life.

Despite the general impression of dull monotony, the opening lines indicate that this last phase of the journey has about it an urgency that had been lacking in the previous wanderings. Curiosity is aroused concerning the reason for the change of pace and intensity. Another source of interest is the use of the word "stretch." It designates both time passed and distance covered. An analagous image is that of an elasticized thread which permits the pulling away from a point of attachment to a certain degree, but which has a recoil, when its limit is reached, returning swift and unerring to a firmly held end. Like the recoil, the fugitive's return seems to have an instinctive sense of direction. The word "stretch" also suggests a prison sentence, which, according to later reminiscences of the man's life, is applicable on both literal and figurative levels. Still another and more formidable association, is the kind

¹ Letter to Pelham Edgar dated January 14, 1930. From the private collection of Mrs. Grace.

of stretching of the neck involved in hanging. The deployment of the word builds up a peculiar frustration by the combination of tension and lethargy, giving rise to a despair that anything can resolve the situation.

The first movement depicts a puppet-like man, walking grotesquely across the fields of his boyhood farm. The facts that he is approaching from the back where runs a road "caved with woods" (144) and that he has waited for sundown before emerging, forebode an unpropitious outcome for the return. The impression of his being mysteriously impelled is heightened by his continued progress toward the appointed place, despite his failure to understand the reason for his return. He wonders, "... why he could have thought to find surcease here, and why his mind had not shied back from the contemplation of return, knowing its own danger." (145) His walking, like his motivation, seems absurd. The absurdity is well conveyed by the use of oxymoron to describe the manner of his walking. His "limp strides" suggest steps manipulated by threads from unseen hands. The whole performance bears the imprint of vaudeville. The man, like the trees, is "vagabond," his face like that of the grease-painted clown, "compressed in a colour of terror." (144)

The farm to which the man is returning is a nightmare landscape of death and as such is said to resemble the monotonous conditions of life: "The place was the same ...

he found in the chances of life, in its monotonous recurrence, inescapable." (144) Everything is said to have deteriorated - "the trees shrunken, grizzled and unkempt" (144) - "the fields worse" (144) - the stubble dirty, and the weeds brittle. The only sign of what might be considered life is the cows which are feeding on death - "the field, dead." (145) The cows' feeding is referred to as "munching" and is said to be "obscene" like "the ravening of wolves at the finding of a dead hunter." (144) Described as mythic beasts, half wolf, half cow, they appear to be inimical to man as "... they woofed and scampered leadenly away, turning to face him at a distance." (145) The leaden manner of their footfalls conveys the deadening effect with which life in this story is to be depicted. The deathly atmosphere is intensified by the "incomparable quiet" (145), the impending approach of "the greater dark" (145) and the image of the abyss perceivable in the man's posture of stiffening "as before a brink." (145)

The reconnoitring of the buildings provides a comment on the passage of the years and relates to the comparative influences of the mother and father images. The father image has fared better with time, as evidenced by the better preservation of the barn. The fugitive's feeling of the possibility of life within, suggests a lingering spark of the spirit of the father. Connected as it is with the memory of climbing to affix a windmill on the peak of the roof, the barn constitutes the only hope remaining about the place.

There is no vestige of life within the house, and, accordingly, the mother image has depreciated. It is the house which "shocked his numbness most." (145) Related in terms of animal imagery, it is the one clear-cut silhouette in the twilight landscape. Starkly outlined against the glow of the sunset, "one ridge of the roof as he looked at it against the red sky was bent, the spine of some old animal worn down by burdens." (146) The primitive quality of this sharp image in the landscape is repeated in the figure of the "monstrous wallowing animal" (144) whose fur the dirty brush of stubble awaits in the fields. There are certain phallic connotations contained in the severed stalks of the once-green fields and in the dead hunter who had once hunted the wolves now "ravening" his carrion body. The monster, related to the house and to the scavenger wolf-cows, is representative of the female archetype, dangerous, primitive and vulgar, and responsible for laying waste the farm.

The house is also associated with images of disease, overlaid with Freudian connotations connected with the "caved" woods located far back on the farm and remote as the beginnings of time. Such images include: - "two boards torn off at the ground showing black underneath" (146), "tatter of clapboards" (146) and "peeled paint." (146) There are references to the rotting of lower extremities - verandah posts hanging baseless and steps missing. The condition of the house conveys a powerful indictment of the female monster

which has ravaged the farm and seems about to process the last shred of humanity within her territory.

The confusion between outward reality and its inner reproduction is figured in the tearing sound inside the man's head. It is explained as the mounting "tenseness of his moods" (145) but it is also explained that the silk band around his felt hat is ripped and that it is flapping in the wind. The sound is symptomatic of the confusion between natural and psychic phenomena said to be characteristic of Knister.² The difficulty of making distinctions is born out in the use of such enigmatic expressions as "... it was hard to forget, to remember ..." (145) and by the confusion of one day with another. It is questionable as to whether his mind is producing the monotony or whether the monotony is affecting his mind. The determination of cause and effect eludes analysis. The indications are that the confusion is purposely contrived to convey the general impression of meaninglessness for what passes as life in this story.

The returned fugitive is an important factor in the story since it is his stream of consciousness by which the story is related. He is anagogic man and all the images of his disordered mind project life in terms of his experience. However, there is one dominant image in his mind; this image

² C.B.C. Profile. James Reaney makes this observation. See Appendix II, Sec. 34.

is the rope. It represents the paradoxical potential of the unconscious mind. At one extreme, the rope had provided a swing for children playing; at the other, it was to provide a noose for a man to hang himself. The tension in his mind, as a result of the mental struggle, is like the tension of a dead weight on the end of a rope. Yet there had been a time when children had laughed and played there. But even then, the tree from which the swing was hung had "shivered." (153) The fragments from which a rope could be made had been always in his mind, but they had never yet been given form. Milling about in chaotic profusion, the pieces are the destructive images by which the story is related. Issuing from a mind driven to the extreme, the bewildered outpourings constitute the flood which is the chaotic structure of the story.

The principle [if such it can be called] by which the structure is unified is chaos. The idea of a principle conceived in chaos involves the paradox of order within disorder. Such a principle requires the tension of the imagery about which the framework is built. It is precisely the orderliness of Nature to the point of everlasting monotony that creates one pole of the paradox, whereas the other pole is something rebellious rooted in the human spirit which seeks to break out of the cycle but, in the attempt, merely perpetrates what it had thought to overcome. In an ironic sense, man is shown to be the victim of his own perversity

in thinking to run counter to the order of Nature. Without realizing it, he effects his own death which is, in one sense, as meaningless as his life. His death makes no impact upon Nature nor does it achieve redemption for the world. It apparently achieves nothing - which is what the moon is said to see when she looks into his cave. On the other hand, the moon is said to be short-sighted. The ambiguity permits the possibility that in seeking his own death or at least in determining its hour, man does indeed assert his superiority over Nature.

The powerful sense of atmosphere which pervades "The Strawstack" is derived from the setting which, although ultimately existing in the fugitive mind, also exists in external objects of concrete reality. The farm is the microcosm of the world on the point of dissolution - the reason being a natural organic breakdown that is figured in the spreading of the rotting strawstack over the once green acres. The trend may be read in the features of the farm, described as having shrunken from their former stature and "... tiny beyond his toughened expectation." (144) The trees are "shrunken, grizzled and unkempt" (144); the fields are "worse; tiny closed places which his unthinking toil had made into sky-seeking deserts of ploughed land or unfathomable mazes of corn." (144) The stable, "which had seemed so long ..." (146) and whose roof "had seemed such an Alpine labour to mount," (146) is also described as being "tiny."

The one lingering possibility of life about the place is a presence within the barn. The vindication of the barn in this story might confirm the sacrificial meaning of Garland's death in "The Loading." One may perhaps be justified in supposing the father figure and his stables had been redeemed in Knister's projected view of farm life at the time of his writing "The Loading." An extension of the idea might suppose a reign of prosperity for a time, but that when the vigour of prime years has passed, an heir must be initiated to take over, as was Len Brinder. If not, the favours gained by Garland's sacrifice lapse. Having lost his son by a stroke of fate, the father of the fugitive in "The Strawstack" has been able to provide for the farm for only a limited time.

The house in this story has proven the dark forebodings lurking among the shadows of Nettie's little house in "The Loading." Consequently, the worst fears about Nettie have been confirmed. Her sharp-needled machine and the dark encroaching vines are symbolic of the destructive influence of woman - according to the development of the theme in these short stories.

The essence of the external atmosphere is contained in the dominating feature of the landscape - the great sprawling strawstack which provides the title. The strawstack is a symbol of Nature, made without plan or order, "... but taking what shape it might as it was spewed forth

from the thresher." (146) It is the epitome of the formlessness implicit in the concept of primordial chaos. The choice of diction of the "spewing" forth explains creation as a vulgar by-product of a more important process which seems to have become obscured. The formlessness and vulgarity of the strawstack relate it to the female monster ravaging the fields. Its posture "sprawling dark-brown over a great area of soil" (146) is suggestive as are the "Hummocks and holes ... made by time and the burrowing of animals." (146) Ironically, the strawstack provides the sanctuary into which the fugitive crawls to look back toward the "caved" woods, while forgotten memories from his meaningless life pass before his darkening sight. It represents the destructive chaos from which life was created and to which it is destined to return. Going into the hole in the strawstack is a symbolic withdrawal within his own mind. What he finds there are the fragmentary images of the story. He also finds fragmentary pieces of twine. When he reaches back far enough, the fragments take form. The two levels of the setting coalesce in the making of the rope. The setting thus illustrates the futility of the man's efforts to impose order either on Nature or on his mental processes.

The father of childhood memory has been ultimately unsuccessful. He "had disapproved the sprawled carelessness of such stacks," (146) and had built his own with "prudence." (146) He had been unable to build for posterity with such impermanent material, or to initiate a son to inherit his

building tradition. A perverse principle had been operating against him - the chaotic state of the woodpile from which his son had been throwing down sticks that had caused the accident which had driven the boy away. The father had accompanied his wife on a shopping trip and had not piled the wood in tiers. Had this been done, there would have been no accident. But the woodpile, like the strawstack, "had been thrown together into whatever shape it might take" (148) It, too, had been produced by a mechanical device - "the outcome of a day and a half of buzzing." (148) Like the strawstack, it also contained the seeds of destruction, the activation of which awaited only the inevitable moment of human error.

The pieces of twine represent the latent evil in Nature. Of itself, the twine is seen to be harmless, but in the hands of a desperate man, it becomes a rope. The connotations associated with the word "twine" and the image of the rope conjure the figure of the serpent, archetype of evil. The evil which the rope represents, although ambivalent, is death. In this story, where life is so intolerable, death is the lesser of the two evils and the man, recognizing this at last, frees himself by means of the rope, from the conditions imposed by the evil it represents. The act is the ultimate irony.

The idea of the female principle as the chaotic raw material of creation is reinforced by the odour of the straw-

stack. The odour is released when the man stirs about in the straw and it is described as a "sharp musty smell." (154) The mustiness of the straw suggests a pungent, earthy flavour. It is not only the odour of fecundity but also the odour of decay. It is this paradoxical mustiness which launches the man on the destructive train of thought which leads him back in memory through his years of wandering to the time of his great anguish at the age of fifteen and back before that to obscure beginnings and even "beyond beginnings" (150) into the depths of primordial consciousness out of which he had once formulated an unspoken wish. The wish to one day make a rope of his own can be seen to have been an unconscious death wish and the strawstack to be the rotting substance of a matriarchal universe, which stimulates by evoking memories associated with a distinctive odour, the destructive activity which culminates in the wish fulfillment.

The general setting for which the strawstack focuses the thematic imagery has been indicated to be the natural universe. Being a matriarchy, the presiding authority is figured as a goddess, the female archetype of the moon. Observed in the heavens, her course would seem to be a well-ordered plan, but judged by her influence in her realm below, the order is obscure in the extreme. Indeed, if a plan might be said to exist, it must be one bent on destruction, since Nature's universal power depends on the gradual wearing down of an opposing force, to the raw material which provides her energy.

As a goddess, the moon is a cold, indifferent mother image to whom the "short, thin branches" of the trees, her children, reach up "like baby fingers toward a mother's face." (152) On the night related in the story, she is beginning a new phase and is referred to as "a new moon." The term, "new," however is corrected and made to mean merely the beginning of a re-cycling of the same old moon. The phenomenon is applied universally: "How could one call anything new? People must have thought sometime that when they became gross and replete with light, the moons died. Or their souls appeared again on the other side of death. Then it could be right to call it new." (152) The shadow of the round penumbra discourages any hopeful interpretation that in the evidence of the cyclical recurrence of Nature can justification be found for belief in the immortality of man.

Knister projects the moon as a dangerous, phallic female - the divine counterpart of the primordial monster spreading over the earth below. She is seen to be "slight, sabre-thin" (152) equipped to make herself replete. Changeable in her moods, she is horribly monotonous in her pattern. Her waxing and waning is referred to as "the horrible rise and sinking" (144), the regularity ascribed to the ebb and flow of the sea's rhythm which the moon controls. As a derogatory comment on the efficacy of her authority, the end of the story depicts her as the epitome of imbecility where it is predicted that, "... soon the thin moon would come and

peer in short-sightedly and see nothing there." (154) The monotonous recurrence of her universal recycling is thus relegated to the ignominy of an imbecile impulse. In such a system, it is made difficult to discern any meaning.

If meaning exists, it comes from within a psychic dimension. It might be noted that the final act coalesces the tensions of the mind which had been engaged in the confused but desperate conflict. The tensions arise from the juxtaposition of past and present, the earth and the heavens, reality and illusion, and of life and death. That there is a synthesis is suggested by the man's recollection of roads: "... they were what he remembered, not one by one, but as a great stretch before him containing all the different sorts he had come upon, waves of dust and mire." (152) The roads connect all the episodes of his miserable life. In a similar manner, the lane to the back of the farm connects the "caved" woods with the house. Unlike the winding and circuitous paths of his life's wanderings, the one between the woods and the house is direct and short. It is the connection between the mother and child, between Nature and man. Nature never cuts her cord. Man must make one of his own if he wishes to be free. The only will man can exercise, according to "The Strawstack," is to take his own life.

The time element is important for the farm as for the fugitive. The present point in time is shown to be very

late. The hour is nightfall, the season autumn, and the weather cold. That the end has come is understood by the image of the "new" moon peering about for carrion to re-cycle into re-animated form in order to produce more fodder. The implication seems to be that the dark penumbra is a symbol of the great dark womb of Mother Nature. In this story, Nature is shown on the point of conceiving a new life - a consummation requiring the death of a victim. It appears more than coincidence that the time is also the hour of the fugitive's return.

As protagonist, the man remains nameless. His anonymity identifies him as everyman. It also identifies him as nothing, being of no more substance or worth than the chaff of the stack where he feels himself so at home. His experience is tragically universal: - "All: if it were only such as he!" (153) The tragedy is that he, like all men, does not learn the truth until too late: "The strange things men made of themselves in the course of the years, and the terrible part of it; that they never knew until moments such as this," (153) When he does recognize his role, he finds it to be that of "a dog on a treadmill" (153) and life to be "the years alike and he limping over them." (153) The object of his life has been "to learn and discover nothing but death and sorrow." (153) In deciding to end his life, he does so because he cannot imagine himself being able to endure such experience aware now of its meaninglessness: "... the same years over again, the same walkings,

cold, alley brawls, debauch ..." (153) All his life he had hoped that things would eventually change for him: "If he might only search even over the world and find something, some sharp beauty he had never known, which would tear apart the curtain that stood, elastically resisting prisoner's blows between himself and life." (151) Although never succeeding, he had tried to convince himself that the search was in itself enough, that it "would steady him, set him again upon his feet." (151)

Nothing of natural beauty can be recalled from his life. The memory of a mother is associated with the cold, indifferent moon. The "upreaching baby fingers" (152) that could never touch her face, are eloquent testimony of ungratified desires. It is almost as if, in the darkness of the womb, the unborn child had known such longings, which, never having been fulfilled, darken the span of his life: "His sight was never daylit." (151) He seems to have been always acclimatized to darkness. As a child running out in the dark for wood, going back in the dark for cattle, going out nights to hunt sparrows in strawstacks, running the gauntlet of the dark on the driveway the night of his flight, he proves himself a creature of the night.

The darkness in his nature relates him to primitive man, who, by necessity, went hunting in the night and was furtive in his ways. As evidence of such origins, his recollec-

tions are mainly of wanderings associated with roads and darkness. One of these is a very early memory when he and some boyhood companions had ventured forth upon "dark roads" (147) to hunt the little sparrows in their nests. He refers to the sparrow hunts as "the oblivion" and the word sums up the meaning of his life.

Paradoxically, the sparrow hunt provides the one consciously articulated image of beauty in the story. The beauty is related to freedom which is symbolized by the rare bird that escaped the net - "wind of its wings velvet against his cheek, ... free ..." (147) For a bird to escape "blindly in the dark" is surely to fly to its death so that the purpose of the beautiful image seems to be ironic - that of depicting death as beauty.

The darkness of his origins in Nature is related to the darkness within himself, being himself bound within the natural framework. Deep in his unconscious are vestiges of primordial images from an earlier existence than that of the sparrow hunts. The earliest memory concerns a rope which had exerted a powerful fascination. The obsession is not traced back beyond a time when he had been playing on a swing and had observed how the rope was made of many strands interwoven. But the implication seems to be that the rope image had always been with him. On the occasion he could first recall the rope he had formulated a wish to one day make one of his own. The

wish can be interpreted as an unconscious death wish, the fulfillment of which he has unconsciously been seeking all his life. The rope is the last detail he remembers of his departure from home on the night of the accident he had thought fatal. It is recalled by the handling of the bunch of twine he has collected while lying in the strawstack. At the time of his flight, it was "an old rope swing dangling in the wind, seatless, from a maple bough, opposite the back door as he left the house forever." (152) When he hangs himself, it is probably at this appropriate location he does so.

There is a slight possibility that the hanging site could have been the peak of the barn, in which case there might seem to be a mysterious meaning to the man's death. It should be noted that the boy had not been without aspirations. While working in the fields, he had imagined them to be "sky-seeking" (144) as he had imagined himself to be. As a symbol of his aspiring hopes, he had practiced climbing. Two objects are mentioned as having been surmounted. One was the maple tree from which he had hung the swing; the other was another kind of tree - the roof tree of the barn on whose pinnacle he had affixed a windmill. Since the barn seems to have retained whatever slight spark remains about the farm, its choice might offer some hope for a new life on the other side of the moon. The author does not divulge the information and it can only be supposed from the weight of other evidence, that there is little hope in the story.

The references to climbing trees and the probability of his hanging himself on a tree open up another area concerning the protagonist. The implication is that he is related to the image of the dead hunter being devoured by the ravenous beasts. A hunter is a symbol of the fertility god, who is sometimes referred to a hanged god and is associated with a particular tree. The reversal of the roles of hunter and hunted in the ravening scene, finds a parallel in the life story of the fugitive. For he is now hiding from a posse, just as once the sparrows had hidden from him. The parallel is an ironic comment on his youthful aspirations and a denial that death is followed by a resurrection.

The man is not only alienated from himself and from Nature, but also from his fellows. That there had been a potential for him to be otherwise, seems intended in the observation that "Other men who seemed to be of his calibre knew him from meagre intercourse to be a pal." (150) But he was convinced that no one understood him. Whenever he won the trust of others, he felt compelled to prove himself unworthy. He is convinced of his own unworthiness, the conviction having a touch of egotism in the belief that he is unique among mankind: "Despair burst through his soul at the thought that he even now refused to care that his crime, his crimes, refused to present themselves to his mind in the colours in which they existed in other men's sight." (151) What he considers his inability to feel guilt, causes him more suffering

than the cold. The chaplain's explanations of sin leave him even more confused. He means to prove, in the murder of a man, that he is capable of the worst he had always believed of himself. When murder proves nothing, he thinks the ultimate may be suicide. For him, it is, because it ends his sufferings. He seemed not to realize that his sufferings of themselves proved that he did care - that he cared to the point of being incapable of any more feeling. In the end he realizes that the guilt of the first sin had not been rightly his, but that it had numbed his sensibilities forever.

The dramatic action is the structural element by which the theme is carried forward. Although the recollected happenings of the man's life are "spewed out" in the same confusing disorder that marks the make-up of the strawstack, it is possible to arrange them in the tragic pattern.

The opening scene serves as a prologue - setting the atmosphere, introducing the main character and indicating the outcome of his conflict against the antagonist. There is then a gradual transition back to the accident of fate which was to set up the chain of wanderings, crime and prison terms which culminate in the act of murder. This does not seem to be the climactic point which the protagonist had thought it to be. It does mark, however, the point of reversal in the story. At this point the boy who had begun his quest as a hunter of sparrows in strawstacks, becomes the quarry of other hunters.

His undoing is the adversary within himself. The mistake of returning to the farm is that his background is known. In crawling into a hole in the stack, he puts himself in the same position as the birds he had once hunted.

He recollects the events of his life from the time of his departure from home in a loosely chronological order. Having brought himself up to the present in his hole in the strawstack, he produces some food from his pocket and eats it. It can be seen as an act of faith that he will live - an ironic ritual of the last supper.

The second act begins as the moon rises. He feels a pricking caused by the sharp ends of the binder twine against his neck. As he begins to pull them out of the straw, he begins another, more remote recollection of the past. These remote images seem evoked by the odour of the mouldy straw which his stirring about releases; the moon assists also by casting her feeble light. As he retreats deeper and deeper in the straw in search of twine, his memory also reaches farther and farther back. He gets to his hands and knees and assumes an almost fetal position in his retreat. At last he remembers the rope and the wish he had once formulated.

As he begins to tie the pieces together, he recognizes his own role, but the realization of what his life has been only hastens the conscious act of will by which he per-

forms the final deed: "I can't think, I'll not think ... I'll not think, I can't think." The end comes quickly and this is the climax of the story but it takes place off-stage. The cycle of events end where they began - at the back door of the house. There seems little doubt that his death has meant nothing more than what Nature had intended.

In face of this conclusion, there may be an element of heroic stance. By hastening the finality, the man exercises his only prerogative, which is to be the instrument of his own destruction. Recognizing his life as meaningless, his last act is a gesture of defiance against the horrible matriarch who had deceived him almost to the end.

At this point in the thesis, it is thought desirable to take stock of the new directions in which the stories have now begun to move. An important change is the reversal of the roles of hunter and hunted. In this, and ensuing stories, the female becomes the huntress and the male the hunted. The reversal can be noted by the image of the moon which is searching for the man in the strawstack. This man had been a hunter in the sense that his life had been a quest for beauty and truth. His literal counterpart, the dead hunter in the field, has also fallen prey to the ravening wolf-cow monsters which he had once hunted.

That the huntress moon is associated with the sexual functions of women, becomes clearer in the next story, "Elaine,"

where the mother, by her own admission, is on the track of a fugitive male. The image of woman in literature is brought into play in "Elaine" and in "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" - the latter being concerned particularly with religious literature. The evidence tends to be unflattering.

"The Strawstack" introduces an explicit reference to the failure of the Church to adequately explain the mystery of life. The chaplain in the prison is partly responsible for the tragedy which occurs. The role of the church in the last story, "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" is of a particularly ironic nature.

The introduction of literature in the next story, "Elaine" is an important innovation. The use of Barrie's The Little White Bird suggests a somewhat facetious approach to the role of motherhood.³ It illustrates the deployment of female guile in the institution of marriage, perhaps of necessity, according to the circumstances in Barrie's novel. It seems likely that the life of the young female protagonist, Elaine, is also to be dictated by most unfortunate circum-

³ The theme of the novel can be seen as centering on the superior forces of a young, captivating and deceptively fragile wife to whom a forty-seven year old "confirmed spinster" husband and father finally succumbs. "It is I who have the substance and you who have the shadow," she tells him, completely discounting his literary achievement in writing a book about the child she bore him and which he disclaimed fathering. J.M. Barrie, The Little White Bird (New York, 1903), p. 465.

stances. The power of female guile is a theme which the last story, "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" will pursue even further. That Elaine is an ardent reader of Shelley will not make her life easier.

The choice of Shelley as champion of feminism and of intellectual beauty is appropriate in "Elaine." It is natural that the school girls find him a fascinating poet. Although there is not much hope for Elaine, her friend, Addie, shows signs of becoming the new emancipated female and the fact that she has been led to Shelley by Elaine is important. The idea that the new female will be any improvement, however, is not encouraged in the last story, "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier." The daughter, Ruby, is a potentially dangerous figure.

The quest for beauty and truth, which was a literal journey in "The Strawstack," is on an intellectual plane in "Elaine" and in "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier," although traveling is literally involved. That the objective will ever be achieved becomes increasingly unlikely as the images of beauty disappear during the course of the last stories.

CHAPTER VIIELAINE

"Elaine" is the story of a journey, the details of which are arranged to convey the feelings experienced by the youthful protagonist, Elaine, as she is swept along, independent of her own volition, by an indifferent mechanical conveyance, powered by mysterious energy. It is the story of the bewilderment and embarrassment of a girl's growing awareness of the biological truths behind the common-place circumstances surrounding her childhood - a time of innocence, when laughter had been supposed to have arisen from mirth. In this story, laughter is seen to be occasioned by obscenity and it is within the context of obscenity that sexuality is portrayed. The knowledge dawning upon Elaine, constitutes the rite of passage into full membership of an ill-fated tribe doomed from the outset, although without final certainty, by a process beyond human control. The knowledge appears to be sinister.

The journey is Knister's framework for a story of initiation into the tragic cycle of life. Patterned on the fertility theme, "Elaine" is of the same type as "Mist-Green Oats" but its message is in marked contrast. "Elaine" can, in no way, be considered as a celebration. Its tone is cynical. The pattern in "Mist-Green Oats" is derived from the vegetation cycle and is depicted in imagery of intense beauty.

The initiation of Elaine is patterned on regeneration within the context of animal breeding and the imagery is in terms of vulgarity. As in the fertility rituals, the outer mystery of sexual initiation was prerequisite and, in some way, supposed to be analagous to initiation into the inner mystic revelation of re-birth through death. So it might be hoped that Elaine's initiation would offer some positive evidence of the good tidings so wistfully sought in all ages. But, just as the end of the story remains enigmatic, so it seems to be implied, is the revelation of the ultimate mystery "at the end of the line." According to the apprehension built up concerning the fate of Elaine, and consequently that of mankind in general (since her experience is part of the universal pattern) the implication seems to be that the mystery may be better left enshrouded.

On the surface, "Elaine" is simply a descriptive story covering perhaps an hour's travelling time on a trolley which is making an early morning run into the city. The passengers represent a fairly typical early morning commuting group - except that there is only one boy among the high school students, a circumstance which will be discussed later. It is understandable that there are not many housewives travelling at this hour.

The passengers are well catalogued as they get off - first the girls "and Fred Jameson, then the men, Mrs. Irwin

and other men who had appeared from nowhere." (165) There is an element of ritual about their movements, which is not easily explained. The appearance of men from nowhere adds to the mystery. The preponderance of girls in the student group also seems unusual, unless the intention is to convey the impression that the business of generation is chiefly the realm of the females and their numbers are more important in this matter than is the number of males. Such ironic allusions to "breeding" permeates the imagery of the story and serves to point up the human dilemma in a naturalistic world.

The presence of only one boy, Fred Jameson, has another aspect. He is singularly alone, even more so than Elaine, who had a companion for part of the journey. He seems to be apart from the crowd, as if withdrawn from the scene sufficiently to achieve the necessary aesthetic distance to perceive "the truth behind the circumstances." It is as if he were the omniscient narrator who is in that privileged position from which to observe the dirty "joke" perpetrated by Nature on mankind. He is perhaps the poetic persona of the author and the ensuing analysis is an attempt to interpret what he feels as he "pores" over the "expression" of Mrs. Wilks.

The story is set in a mythic dimension beneath the realistic surface. The journey of the trolley-car from a lake to a city duplicates the course of biological evolution

which pre-supposes a naturalistic determinism. The outcome, however, remains obscure as does the future of Elaine. The most that can be ascertained about the purpose of the trolley is that it carries children to school - indeed the grown-ups also alight at the same stop as do the students. The implication may be that life is a continuous learning process whose aim is the illumination of the dark mysteries of life. In this respect the journey becomes the universal quest of the elusive Truth.

How efficacious are lessons which pursue the monotonous round described by Elaine's former schoolmate, Addie, seems questionable. "... all he does in class" relates Addie of the teacher, "is take up homework and give us more homework for the next night." (163) If such lessons do little to solve the eternal mysteries they may, however, serve the ironic purpose of initiating the students into the similar deadening routines with which their working lives will be concerned. And the locking of the school library suggests the possibility that there is a conspiracy to hide some secret which would free man from his servitude to Nature's rounds. Furthermore, the recollection that Elaine had been able to find the key in the lock sometimes so that she could read books at noon hour affirms the existence of a dimension of the mind which can be opened and where a glimpse beyond apparent reality into the eternal verities can be caught. However, it seems only by chance that the key is found and even less likely that it is

even sought very often, anymore, by the body of workers wearied in their ceaseless rounds.

Elaine's affinity for Shelley suggests that it is indeed a "blithe Spirit" which is locked in the fleshly edifice of the library. And this is the spirit which the school master's drills seek to deaden, for he is intent, not on the eternal verities, but in that scientific variety of worldly knowledge, whose pursuit opens up endless vistas whose horizons recede and beckon forever as man strives intellectually to encompass the universe.

The sinister note on which the story ends as Elaine closes the book which she will probably never be able to read again on the candid level of innocence and as she hastens to become an accessory in the mysterious plans of her vulgar Mother, comprises a warning that the mystery indeed is dark. The foreboding has a tragic parallel in the story of The Little White Bird, in which Minnie Mannering "never revisited the shores of the Serpentine nor Peter with his good boat the 'Thrush's Nest' because she couldn't bear to say goodbye forever to Mother." (165) The possibility is not ruled out that "the end of the line" may be back to the lake - a possibility accounting for the increasing cold as the journey continues and as Elaine shivers and for the looks of surprise on the faces of the new load of passengers entering the trolley. The idea that one would re-trace his way without having had a pur-

pose in setting forth, has about it a sense of futility which the positive mind seeks to repudiate. Such a prognosis of the theory of evolution would render absurd man's efforts to solve the ultimate mystery since the end and the beginning are the same place.

As the vehicle transporting mankind on his mysterious journey, the trolley gives the appearance of being a somewhat decrepit machine, maintaining but a tenuous hold on the life-line ["the electric line"] from which it is fed. It is buffeted by the winds of time which rattle the "shaky" windows. But the trolley-car is imbued with an animating spirit which forces the old car along the prescribed track and which manifests itself by the "grinding squeal" with which it comes to a stop and by the grunting creature who acts as the conductor. As a microcosmic projection of the universe, the trolley is symbolic of a mechanically operated organism, propelled without benefit of any intelligent direction, but by a sinister monster, powered by the mysterious energy running through the line. Electricity provides an apt metaphor for the polarity involved in the life-principle as does its property of working in unseen and mysterious ways.

There is a parasitic tendency on the part of the monster organism toward exploiting the human cargo it carries. Seemingly beginning empty at the lake and travelling behind time, the trolley gathers traffic and tumult as it reaches

junctions with other lines, and the accumulation seems to increase its speed and strengthen its vitality "as the car with a resonant throbbing abruptly got under way again." (164) The monster requires the propitiation of human sacrifice.

The time is ambivalent in the fertility cycle - the morning of the day but the twilight of the year. A bitter season lies ahead; the opulent season has passed. Nature's appearance changes with the seasons: "The table cloth varies according to the seasons and in May it is made of cherry blossoms." (165) Now the pastures are "frosty"; the platform is "shivery" and Elaine grows colder as the journey progresses. The year is dying as is Elaine's season of childhood. These are the last moments of a passing phase of her life and the forebodings are ominous.

The reference to Toonerville, as the name of the "city" where all the passengers except Mrs. Wilks and Elaine disembark, strikes an ironic note. It recalls the syndicated cartoon, "The Toonerville Trolley," current in Knister's time, which presented a sardonic, if somewhat whimsical, view of the shortcomings of human insight into its own absurdity.

The broad allegory of the journey is reinforced by the image of the coop which refers to the waiting room from which the passengers emerge to embark on their journey. A coop is readily recognized as a brooding place for domestic fowl; it is the place presided over by the mother bird for

the business of hatching eggs and rearing young and the image provides the basic fertility symbol in this story whose theme concerns the mystery of creation. The egg is perhaps one of the most universal symbols in myth and literature for evoking this archetypal theme and the choice of a "coop," associated with geese or other domestic fowl, as a place of incubation rather than the nest of a wild bird, conveys the aura of a prison, consistent in "Elaine" with the total impression that the human condition from the moment of birth is one of bondage.

In "Elaine" too, the activities of "the coop" are primarily the domain of the female although it is still used by the high-school boy, Fred Jameson, who has evidently not yet flown, but being on the verge, sees the situation from a peculiar vantage point. Evidently men do not often use the coop, nor do they on this particular occasion. Only conditions of extreme storm and stress or unendurable tedium entice them within, - "for men did not use the coop unless the weather were bad and the wait long." (161) For some of the men, the coop provides a convenient "hole in the box" (161) through which one of them peeps surreptitiously and relates a ribald remark concerning what he has glimpsed, occasioning a series of guffaws from the group of men. The object of the guffawing is the figure of Mrs. Wilks, whose significance in this story is of key importance.

As an obscene old woman version of Mother Goose, she

makes palpable, on one of her rare public appearances, the mysterious energy or life-principle already surmised as propelling the universe. Although, as a dramatic persona, she is the antagonist in the story, she is not so much a character as the female archetype and as such, she is portrayed as the universal antagonist with whom man's spirit is in continual opposition.

Since Elaine is the protagonist, it is the opposition between she and her mother which represents the conflict between humanity and Nature. In universal terms, the conflict is the polarity of the process of creativity - of which sexuality provides a literal analogy. The parasitic nature of her power has already been indicated and she can be interpreted paradoxically as the antagonist within man as well as an external force. Man's struggle is thus, to some extent, a struggle with himself. For Mrs. Wilks ironically represents that part of man which is in Nature - the corruptible flesh from which, as from the coop, man's spirit can never free itself more than fleetingly. On this journey, Mrs. Wilks rides with humanity all the way, from generation to generation, as a new human cargo replaces the old, and she dominates the scenes of the journey.

As the object of the guffaws, Mrs. Wilks renders obscene the life-principle which propels the universe; as the female archetype she embodies the reproductive energies

of Nature. To make the allegory explicit, it might be best to pursue the case in detail from the text. She is described on first sight as standing in the doorway, "a figure of energy." As further evidence, she is first greeted as, "the ruling power" by Elaine's former schoolmate, Addie Weyburn, who seems never to have seen Mrs. Wilks before and is as surprised as Elaine had expected her to be on the appearance of the mother. Evidently, Mrs. Wilks, in keeping with the furtive ways of Mother Nature, does not often appear in public, preferring a more private milieu. That Addie had heard rumours of the woman, and that these rumours had not attested to her high repute, seems evident in the tone of the greeting, "So you're the ruling power!" (160) The impression is corroborated later in Addie's snort of derision at Mrs. Wilks' banal boasting of her privileged relationship with Mr. Chathern: "If he was here, we wouldn't have to wait, Elaine and me, he'd be driving - motoring into town everyday." (162) Her general vulgarity pervades almost any fragment of her speech: "Don't it stay dawk late these mornings?" (161) The effect is heightened by the ridiculous pretension to an Oxford accent on the word "dark." Furthermore, the acquisition of the ludicrous pink butterfly bow pinned to her hat offends the sensibility and is a travesty to good taste - considering her total effect.

Her infamy makes her the cynosure of everyone on the trolley. Her voice is strident and to the ear of her embar-

rassed daughter, drowns out the other conversations in progress - even the shrieking of the girls in the front of the car who appear to Elaine to be laughing "as though in answer to her mother." (164) Only fragments of gossip about Mrs. Wilks and Mr. Chathern can be heard above the incessant monologue which her mother carries on all the way into the city. Mrs. Wilks' talk is presumably directed at Mrs. Irwin, a newcomer to the neighbourhood, who has been unlucky enough to be singled out as the one with whom to share a seat. After an initial opener about the pleasantness of the countryside, Mrs. Irwin gives up any further attempt at dialogue with the garrulous creature and resigns herself in stoic silence for the duration of the journey..

Mrs. Wilks is not really interested in Mrs. Irwin nor in the beauty of the countryside. In fact, she can't even remember her companion's name most of the time and addresses her once as "Mizz Whatsaname!" (163) Mrs. Wilks is really only attracted by men because she can have "fun" with them. Mr. Chathern is a particularly good sport: "He's so funny, you've no idea!" (163) And she makes it her business to know all the men: she asks Mrs. Irwin if it is her husband who had driven her to the station because as she says "... I didn't think I recognized him." (162) She seems to assume a monopoly on all men. Since her relations with men are not such as are usually countenanced as a public performance, she assumes the propriety of sitting in the trolley beside another woman. She is

fortunate in finding one who doesn't know her. Elaine doesn't understand the sudden conversation that her mother has struck up with Mrs. Irwin: "Elaine was surprised: her mother seemed to hold aloof from nearly all the neighbourhood women, even the ladies in the village ... But whenever a man came to the farm, he got on splendidly with her, laughed and joked." (161)

Mrs. Wilks has a wild, undisciplined streak which displays itself partly in her apparent inability to carry on any sustained coherent conversation. She seems unable to extend her attention span beyond a passing thought - jumping from one subject to another with seemingly little relevance, although she has a particular interest in the subject of Mr. Chathern whose track she is pursuing this particular day. She operates by instinct as evidence of which she is often described in terms of animal imagery, conceivable as applying to a brood mare. She "bridles" when sensing the man peeking through the hole; she "tosses" her head frequently; she speaks of other women as "jealous mustangs" and she refers to washing the milk pails hurriedly as "licking." There is a marked emphasis on various aspects of Mrs. Wilks' mouth, lips and tongue - an important part of her general obscenity and also of her deceptiveness.

That her concessions to propriety are merely lip service is made fairly obvious throughout the story. She "purses her lips" to enquire of Elaine "sweetly" if she has

forgotten the gloves which she has probably never owned - gloves being an attribute of gentility to be pulled on over red hands to transform a drab into a lady. For Mrs. Wilks, like Nature, is a hypocrite; she has a concealed nature and a revealed one as Elaine realizes: "... her mother put a good face on everything." (161) But as the "ruling power" inherent in the female archetype, she is a law unto herself - not subject to social conventions. The institution of marriage has interfered in no way with her "fun." Her assurance of her magnetic charms engenders what is really contempt for her victims: "Oh, shoot," she exclaims to Mrs. Irwin, "if you show a man you've got some independence ... " (162) The conversation fades out with the implication that Mrs. Wilks knows that such tactics make women more attractive to the opposite sex. For it is the polarity of opposites which constitute the secret of her power and she knows intuitively how to exploit her magnetic field.

Although she pretends a great interest in the time registered on Elaine's watch, Mrs. Wilks, herself, is not subject to time in the chronological sense. As Earth Mother, she does not age in the ordinary sense, but "seems to have weathered." She blends into the colour scheme of the landscape as if she, herself, were made of earth: "Her face and brown hands, not noticeable at home, matched her worn clothes, so that they seemed to have weathered together." (160) Her work in the fields and the jokes of the hired men contribute

to the "earthy" image. There are not many given details of her physiognomy except that she has "a gap in her teeth" (162) like her earthy prototype, the Wife of Bath, who by her own admission was a "lusty" one who brought her victims to submission in the bed from which Mrs. Wilks too is loath "to tear herself loose" (161) in the mornings.

Elaine's father seems to have been bullied into abject docility long ago by accepting the role of cuckold unprotestingly and to have renounced any prerogatives he might have been expected to have as the head of the family. The question as to whether Elaine was to attend high school was entirely the decision of Mrs. Wilks as Elaine recalls it: "How glad he'd been when her mother decided that they could send Elaine to high school." (165)

Mrs. Wilks is, nonetheless, a bountiful source of sustenance necessary to physical well-being. Her milk, as she claims to have been told, is "so much richer" (163) than that available in the city and for this reason, the summer people, including Mr. Chathern, are attracted to her establishment. Herein lies her fatal fascination - for man is not free of necessity. His physical needs demand fulfillment which is rendered highly pleasurable although temporary and in constant need of replenishment. Thus Addie Weyburn is laden not only with books on her way to school but also with a lunch-basket. And part of Elaine's remembered pleasure of

reading during her noon hour was in "thinking of the warm classroom and herself eating sandwiches as she read." (163)

Mrs. Wilks is an astute business woman despite her naive "gabbling" to Mrs. Irwin. Her products are available for what is likely a premium price that the cottagers are willing to pay owing to necessity. There seems to be some indication that Mr. Chathern has fallen in arrears with his account which has been arranged on a credit basis. His offer for paying for Elaine's commuting expenses has now lapsed and he seems to have forgotten his commitment. Mrs. Wilks had been expecting further payment: "But he told me he'd be back ... " She suspects he has decided to ignore his account: "I don't know whether Mr. Chathern would notice me at all now if I did meet him in the city." (163) However, one does not fall in arrears with Mother Nature with impunity and Mr. Chathern is no doubt about to be brought to heel. The exact nature of Mrs. Wilks' subterfuge is not revealed: "Pull your sleeve over your wristwatch, child. This is something else again." (166) But it has something to do with the horror about to dawn on Elaine, who is to be the victim of the settlement of Mrs. Wilks' account. For, in keeping with Nature's tendency to self-aggrandizement, Mrs. Wilks' resources are exploitable for her own benefit and Elaine is one of these resources. She had been satisfied to accept commuting tickets as tender since they are negotiable and she had not planned that Elaine was going to go to school very

long to use many tickets in any event.

Intent on her own gratification, her children appear sadly neglected and deprived of her "riches." Elaine is clad in a second-hand coat which has been thrust upon her several sizes too large. The fact that the material is leather suggests that Elaine is little better accommodated than the beast from which it was skinned, and provides an apt comment on the law of the jungle which Mother Nature appears to endorse. Elaine's brothers seem equally uncared for: "And Preston and George, they always have colds all winter" and "Bruce goes around without mitts." (164) The neglect is indiscriminate.

Since Mrs. Wilks is Elaine's actual mother, the two of them constitute the principal characters in the dramatic conflict, the bulk of which, like the proverbial iceberg, lies submerged. By portraying Mrs. Wilks in a role of strength and dominance, and Elaine in a role of passivity and responsiveness, the outcome is foreseen as inevitable, as is the fate of a moth attracted to a flame. The certainty of the outcome makes the conflict easily seen as the universal exploitation of the innocence inherent in all young and beautiful things by the corruption of worldly experience. And worldly experience in "Elaine" is focused fairly sharply as sexuality - from which children are born by no act of volition of their own, but seemingly in response to a whim

of the creature personifying the life-principle.

Such are the circumstances accounting for Mrs. Wilks' offspring - the issue of her impulsive fun in the hay with the "hired" men. And she, in turn, perpetrates the "joke" on the unsuspecting Elaine by telling her, at a tender age and in terms of obscenity, the details about the "work" in the fields. Such is the world into which she plans to initiate Elaine to carry on her "work." Such is the world into which all youth must similarly be broken and come to some kind of terms with the antagonist. Some of the older passengers seem to have achieved a degree of reconciliation with some measure of dignity.

The two "sober" farmers sitting across the aisle from Mrs. Wilks and Mrs. Irwin are typical of the heroes of humanity, anonymous in their "shapeless overcoats," (164) wearied by the struggle, "one with hollow dark cheeks, one with drooping grey-yellow moustache" but still persisting to provide the best institutions they can devise - "consolidated schools" for the education of the new generation at whatever sacrifice ["second mortgage"] that must be made. And the sacrifice is made without resentment, for looking at the noisy, happy girls, "one was smiling" with indulgence.

Perhaps in recalling their own youth and the bewilderment suffered upon acquiring the knowledge of their enslavement, they have come to the realization that only in some

community of effort can man ever better his lot. For man must believe in the purposiveness of life; even in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, his spirit cannot accept defeat. The heroes of life are those "Like her father, who would take her on his knee and who believed everything, all the charming and diverting things she told him about that she read in books." (164-5) And those, too, who like Mrs. Irwin, bear their crosses in silence and even on a cold November morning are still capable of perceiving some beauty in the landscape. Although it snows and threatens to turn into rain, the sun may come out and "the frosty pastures be flooded yellow again" like the dream of childhood, "walking barefoot in the grass" (164), which keeps man pursuing the dream. It is only Elaine's ability to read and dream that offers her any escape. That she is so powerless, faced with the relentless designs of her terrible mother, points up the injustice of the human plight and affirms the courage of the human spirit in a contest against such fearful odds.

Although Mrs. Wilks dominates the story, Elaine is the protagonist with whom the reader identifies; he recognizes the loss of her dream as that of his own. The name "Elaine" signifies the beauty and innocence associated with childhood and is appropriate for this lovely girl child, so vulnerable, sensitive and willing to take on the responsibility thrust upon her by her mother. She is the very flower of maidenhood, "veiled" as a bride, but in sombre colours.

Her feet are clad in flimsy pumps. The frailty of such footwear prohibits her from directing her steps on any independent course of action as Addie plans to do next year if her father will buy her a "runabout." Elaine cannot hope for anything like that happening to her and finds her joys in the pages of literature.

Elaine has learned from poetry to view the world in mocoocosm and to escape from reality as when "thinking, or listening to old Pinch read poetry ... her eyes went strange and everything seemed small and far, and Pinch only an inch high, and the windows bright, tiny pictures." (164) On her journey, this peculiar sensitivity deepens - "in her mind, all over, not just her eyes, now." (164) She is soon to see the truth behind the circumstances that up to now she has regarded merely on the surface. Her world is becoming smaller and restrictive: "The bush at the horizon was smoky and sparse." (164) Life moves within the restricted limits: "A few cattle moved against it." The whole landscape is dominated by a mechanical mill, dependent on the capricious power of the wind. Such are the circumstances by which the reality of life is about to be understood - the animals more fortunate than the people, for although, "Smoke came from the farmhouses ... yet they seemed so much colder than the red barns ... " (164) Elaine is shivering and thinking that, "It would be warm in school." (165) Elaine springs up in answer to her mother's call, "closing the book," (166) but they do

not get off at the school with the others.

Elaine cannot understand what is happening to her any more than she can yet understand the fragmentary conversations she overhears or the "jokes" told by her mother: "Surely - what could it mean? But he was such a nice, comfortable man and friendly, and his daughter - so clever and funny, her mother used to say." (165) She is becoming disenchanted about her mother's wisdom and she is terribly embarrassed with her mother's conduct; her natural sensitivity revolts against her mother's uncouthness: "Elaine shivered. She had barely spoken to her schoolmate, and seemed incapable of anything but to listen with a miserable fascination ... the fence wires on the opposite side of the track were white with frost, and perhaps she was thinking of some impossible dare which would cause her mother to put her tongue to the wire, so the frost would clutch it, wrapping and twisting ... " (162) Elaine longs to escape from her environment, which is dominated by her awful mother - "her eyes stared straight out the door," (162) her senses extending themselves in anticipation of escape into the approaching trolley: "Almost before the grinding squeal of the car reached them, she had jumped up." (162) There is no escape. Her mother boards the trolley too.

At the end of the journey, bewildered and alone, cut off from the "merry throng" of school girls, she goes on

with her mother to "the end of the line." (166) She is like "Minnie Mannering, who never revisited the shore of the Serpentine nor Peter and his good boat the 'Thrush's Nest,' because she couldn't bear to say good-bye forever to Mother." (165)

That Mrs. Wilks is confident of Elaine's participation in her plan for her, is indicated by her smiling "knowingly" at the end of the story. She has been breaking Elaine into the work of the fields and dairy chores to which the girl's reddened hands bear mute testimony. Although financial assistance had been forthcoming to send Elaine to high school, this had not been Mrs. Wilks' plan for Elaine. As she explains with questionable logic to Mrs. Irwin that she had wanted the girl "... to be sensible ... and stay home and help me." (162) However, the mother is willing to bide her time and the pretext of Elaine's illness of "three days," however trivial [and one suspects perhaps a part of Mother Nature's conspiracy against an adolescent girl] provides an expedient excuse to withdraw her from school and from whatever opportunities and cultural influences there that might draw Elaine away from her.

Elaine is not to enjoy any advantages; Mrs. Wilks' plan is working. Although Elaine had not understood the "jokes" of the hired men in the fields at the time when they had been related to her, she has not forgotten them. On the

day of her fateful journey, they come back, as does an accumulation of other memories. For one, the banishment from the house to watch the boys outside when Mr. Chathern called. This comes to her mind coincidentally with snatches of conversation unavoidably heard from across the aisle: "Old Chathern's carryings-on this summer; going in to see him ... girl must know, feel sorry for her." (165) Perhaps she has sensed something sinister beneath the Victorian prudery of the theme of The Little White Bird which she has been reading during the progress of the journey. All these images, set against the nostalgia of last summer's running barefoot in the grass, create an apprehension in the reader's mind of pity and terror for the imminent moment when a scene of apocalyptic horror, beyond the dimensions conceivable on any realistic level that Knister presumes to attempt, are about to dawn in Elaine's imagination.

What Fred Jameson had been "poring" over is the dawning knowledge of the truth behind the circumstances of life in a matriarchal universe - for as such, the figure of Mrs. Wilks represents the world to be. What he senses is the deception which she, as Nature, practices. That the truth is camouflaged behind an enticing appearance is apparent in the passage quoted from The Little White Bird of a fairy ball. The dance is described as a ritual performance involving participation of the sexes. There are erotic connotations and ironic overtones to the dance: "... hundreds of lovely fairies

hastening to the ball, the married ones wearing their wedding rings around their waists, the gentlemen all in uniform, holding up the ladies' trains, and link-men running in front carrying winter cherries, which are the fairy lanterns. ... ¹

(165) The reference to "wedding rings" and "winter cherries" is characteristic of the facetious tone of Barrie's novel and suggests, in a subtle way, that Elaine's future pertains to sexual knowledge. There is also the suggestion that the knowledge is of a sordid nature since anything instigated by Mrs. Wilks can only be vulgar. The fact that it is at this particular episode in The Little White Bird when Elaine closes the book is significant.

There is a feeling of futility about Elaine's journey; consequently the feeling applies universally. There is no certainty that Mrs. Wilks will find Mr. Chathern. The destination may be back to the lake again. Either outcome would render absurd the pursuit of Shelley's philosophy. If life is nothing more than biological reproduction, man's dreams serve only to increase his suffering. The other conclusion is not much different - life in terms of travelling in circles, serves only to emphasize the hopelessness of trying to break out of the circle. Elaine is caught in Nature's design.

¹ p. 283.

CHAPTER VIIITHE FATE OF MRS. LUCIER

"The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" relates the story of a woman apparently obsessed with irrational fear. There are several facets to the theme but the controlling one is centered on the idea of fear as being the most powerful and dangerous of human instincts, since it is by means of fear that superstition gains control of man's beliefs and distorts his perception of Truth. Christianity is shown to be implicated in the distortion, its basic tenets being ironically associated with the misconceptions of the primitive fertility cults. The miracle of the Nativity is singled out for particular scepticism, the doubt being directed at the image of woman as mother of man's Redeemer.

The story is highly symbolic and the woman is not so much a character as an archetype. She is the personification of deception, being both the deceived and the deceiver. She betrays herself on two separate occasions when caught in the paradoxical situation of experiencing simultaneously the opposed sensations of triumph and dread. What happens to her personally is not important, since, in the final analysis, nothing happens to her. The importance of the story lies in the pathetic picture of a world infected by what she represents and in the dilemma of a race dependent for its generation on such absurdity.

By choosing a woman as the central character, Knister gives her responsibility for the state of human affairs, which seem, as the winter solstice approaches, to be at a low ebb. Although she is not the source of the evil besetting the world, she is an unwitting dupe for a power which uses her frailty as a mask behind which to hide unsuspected resources. Her frailty consists in the lack of an intelligence by which to fully understand the import of the deceptive role she plays. She is inadvertently responsible for human affairs in another sense, in that she represents one-half of the hereditary influences to which her progeny are subject. For man born to woman recognizes her fantasies as akin to those fears which he, too, has experienced at unguarded moments.

This woman is portrayed without sympathy. Something of sardonic humour at her expense underlies the ironic tone of the story. The men of the story laugh somewhat surreptitiously in her presence. Her husband, too, has been known to laugh at her publicly on one occasion, although not with impunity. He is seen to be working out his last days in a mill. Some awareness of the woman's dangerous qualities is shown to exist, since she is carefully avoided whenever possible. But since she is a necessary evil, a solution can be only relatively successful - a compromise at best. The expedient of this story is to objectify her in such ludicrous, pitiable form as to make her appear ridi-

culous. A similar subterfuge is employed concerning the kind of fear she personifies. It, too, is reduced to the category of absurdity.

The story is centred on an incident involving a middle-aged woman and three men in an isolated railway junction where she is waiting for an electric car to the city. The three men are very mysterious and it is not revealed exactly what is their mission nor where they are bound. The woman's name is Mrs. Lucier and it is learned that she is a retired farm woman, now living in the city, apparently very unhappily. She has been off the farm only three months but she has been going back as often as possible to visit her daughter who, with a husband, now runs the farm. Mrs. Lucier, at the time of the story, is returning to the city from her latest visit.

The connecting car to the city is late and during the wait Mrs. Lucier begins to imagine innumerable impending disasters - train wrecks, electrical failures, strikes and conspiracies. She begins to imagine that the three men have some kind of designs on her. She never thinks of them as the cousin, his son and his nephew, whom she is expecting from the West to visit her. There is never any certainty that they are her expected visitors, but there are many suggestions that they may very well be. She has not seen her cousin for many years and might not recognize him; the son and nephew she has never seen.

When Mrs. Lucier sees that the station agent is about to depart, leaving her alone with the three men, she panics and buys a ticket back to Huntville, the village from which she has just come. At the same moment, a train traveling in that direction surprisingly arrives and whisks her off, providing what she believes to be a fortunate escape.

After a surrealistic journey during the course of which Mrs. Lucier experiences a succession of euphoric sensations, she arrives back in Huntville, much relieved to be on home ground. She passes through the village and out through the dark night along the country road all alone. As she is nearing exhaustion she sees a light. She seems not to know it is the home of a kindly woman who welcomes her as an old friend, feeds her and perhaps keeps her for the night.

The details of her return to the city are not given but she is seen having arrived back very recently, recounting the story of her great escape.

Mrs. Lucier is ostensibly the narrator of her own story. As such she is responsible for whatever meaning can be gleaned from it. Except in the ironic sense that it tells about the meaninglessness of life, the story may be without meaning. It is certainly inconclusive. The manner of its telling - "on, on" (172) suggests the impossibility of bringing it to a conclusion. That it is going to be told over again conveys the impression that the monotonous monologue

represents the principle of eternal recurrence. Mrs. Lucier seems not to be aware of the futility of her story: she believes she has had a fortunate escape. Rather, it would seem that in thinking to avoid death, she has missed life. The title is enigmatic; it is meant to imply that Mrs. Lucier has no ultimate fate.

The opening scene shows Mrs. Lucier's ludicrously triumphant figure returned to her quarters in the city. After her story is finished, the closing lines pick up where the opening had been cut off by the account of her escape. It is as though her experience had been of no consequence. Mrs. Lucier tells of something which she believes almost happened but which, in fact, did not happen, so whatever it was, if anything, is relegated to the realms of speculation. According to what is shown of Mrs. Lucier's present circumstances, whatever might have happened could only have been an improvement. A more deadly existence would be difficult to imagine. Yet Mrs. Lucier considers herself lucky. The irony of the theme of the story is suggested in the opening passage and it is to the effect that what this woman clings to as life is the most horrible prospect imaginable and that her feeling of triumph over having escaped something feared only because it is unknown, is questionable logic. She is an absurd figure to be in any way considered as a ruling power, yet, in a symbolic way, she is in control. The matriarchal order may have reached a crucial point near the end of a cycle but the impe-

tus for the next cycle has already been put in motion. The daughter, Ruby, is young and Mrs. Lucier plans to be back at the farm when Ruby is ready to be told the story of woman's guile, which is what the escape constitutes. Mrs. Lucier will live forever in her daughter and her daughter's daughters. She is universal woman.

Mrs. Lucier is first seen in her living room which has all the distinguishing marks of a torture chamber. The atmosphere is permeated with the smell of burning hair and the pervasive impression is one of revulsion. The featured articles of furniture are a rocking chair and a gas heater. A rocking chair is often associated with tender scenes of a mother comforting a baby but the old woman rocking back and forth in this chair lends only a monotonous quality to the life pictured. There is also an idiotic note to such motion which is recognized as that typical of the mentally disturbed. The gas heater, being used to heat the curling tongs with which Mrs. Lucier is burning her hair, effectively conveys a feeling of hopelessness and despair.

From the description of the operation, it is to be understood that Mrs. Lucier is intent on curling her hair in a ludicrous attempt to restore her faded beauty of which it is said, "Her face was grey as twisted leaves beside a frosty road are grey." (172) The numerous coiled strands of singed hair create a Medusa-like effect which can hardly be the de-

sired result. The curling tongs, which are the instruments of her art, are destructive phallic symbols, appropriate to the futility of her efforts at rejuvenation. The burning of hair, said to be clay-coloured, is analagous to the burning of soil and might be meant to symbolize the destruction of the earth by fire. The fact that Mrs. Lucier is inflicting the destruction on her own symbolic fertility from the fires of despair figured in the gas heater, suggests that the whole scene is symbolic of self-consummation which, like the fires of hell, will burn forever.

An element of the grotesque is added to the horrific aspects of the woman by certain features of caricature. Her "pastelike" features bear the imprint of the sculptor; her posture of uplifted hand holding the burning brand parodies the lady of New York harbour. There is also a predominant strain of bovine imagery about Mrs. Lucier. Her eyes are cow-like, "milky," "slow;" her voice an "even plaintive drawl." (172) She is partly dumb - beast, partly plaster saint - caught in a gesture of mock triumph, half ludicrous, half sinister.

That Mrs. Lucier has no one to whom she can tell her story is not surprising. She is a forbidding creature. Her alleged listener, Mrs. Slagwin, is not likely to be an actual neighbour, but Mrs. Lucier's concealed self, on whom she is dependent and who, in turn, is dependent on her. To-

gether, they perform the reciprocal process by which Hell fire can be eternally sustained, feeding on the slag it creates. Mrs. Slagwin's name suggests death. Mrs. Lucier's name is etymologically related to "light," symbol of life. Together, the names denote the Nightmare-Life-in-Death creature known publicly as Mrs. Lucier. The name "Lucier" is ironic for one so acclimatized to darkness. Also, it is noticeably very similar to "Lucifer," the prince of darkness, also known as Satan. The existence of a double identity serves to emphasize Mrs. Lucier's deceptive nature.

The structure of the story is built around the duality of Mrs. Lucier's role. As in "The Strawstack," the imagery is ambivalent, characterized by such polarized incompatibles as Mrs. Lucier's emotional mating of triumph and dread. She is central to the paradox of the story, being herself a paradox of victim and victor. As apparent narrator, she provides a strong element of dramatic irony.

Mrs. Lucier's obsession with the irrational identifies her with the female principle, symbol of primordial chaos existing before creation in the utter darkness of the void. Beneath the pathetic facade, she has formidable qualities. She is sinister, partly because she is stupid and unpredictable and partly because she preys upon those who are made to feel obligated toward her in accordance with some kind of chivalric code. Lyniol is a kind of knight-protector whom

she expects to wait upon her wishes. On this particular night, she is depending on him for safe conduct through the city when she arrives. In the past, she has been badly disturbed on several occasions, which have remained etched in her memory, of his having failed her - leaving her unattended among a crowd at London fair or allowing the buggy in which they were riding to careen about on the road. He had once refused to avenge a malefactor - a cat which had scratched her and which she expected him to kill. Now, aging and dispossessed of the stronghold of her farm home, living in the unfamiliar surroundings of the city, Mrs. Lucier has become a victim of her own imaginary fears, which mount in magnitude, until they erase all else. The shock of the change in her life has stirred up depths of unconscious fears, hitherto undisturbed. The result is total fear - "the plenary terror of the world." (176) Fear becomes her constant pre-occupation. Its endless possibilities provide her with the only diversion she has from the monotony of life. For Mrs. Lucier, fear is half pleasurable. Yet for the masses of humanity, striving to maintain their sanity, her kind of fear [to which they cannot avoid being heir] is destructive. Her ways are furtive and her aspects various. She haunts dark road-ways - "a dark half-bent figure, long skirted, dragging her suitcase"; (180) she poses as timid traveller; she patronizes children; she clings dependently upon a husband.

Mrs. Lucier's lack of intelligence is an outstand-

ing characteristic. The suggestion is, that lacking intelligence, she relies on intuition, a trait which the story deems as short-sightedness. Mrs. Lucier's faculties of perception are illustrated by her response to extra-sensory impulses such as those relayed when "the telegraph clacked and twittered; pricking along her nerves like red-hot pins in memory." (177) There are many aspersions cast on Mrs. Lucier's mental prowess. At one cogent point it is said, "Her mind raced like an unloaded engine." (177) Less direct allusions to her feeble brain take up much of what passes for Mrs. Lucier's thinking. She is constantly in fear of something which she cannot explain. She cannot remember details of what she has read; she can't remember the train schedule; she has no thoughts to occupy her mind in any constructive ideas. When she travels she marks time. When she must wait, she prefigures catastrophes. Her apathy is well documented by such anomalous fragments as - "Her uninterest quite limp but not consciously dejected." (173) She is not really in possession of anything that could be termed "an intellect."

The image of Mrs. Lucier as an instinctive, almost sub-human creature, is reinforced by describing her several times in terms of animal imagery. In addition to her bovine characteristics mentioned in the opening paragraph, she is said to be a "rabbit-like woman." (173) In a subsequent instance she "looked up timidly as a rabbit from brush watches a passing hunter." (177) When disembarking from the train at

Huntville she "shied" in the manner of a skittish horse. In the waiting room, she looks about like "a caged bird." (176) As well as emphasizing the primitive quality of her nature, the animal images relate to creatures frightened, confined, or in hiding. This does not mean that the animal imagery is without ambivalent complexities. For example, the figure of the rabbit watching a passing hunter is a key image, suggesting as it does something beneath the surface fear - a propensity for subterfuge which makes the rabbit more than a match for the guileless hunter. The same might be said of Mrs. Lucier.

As archetypal female, Mrs. Lucier has many affinities to Eve, who has been blamed for first having entertained sin in the world and having thus incurred God's wrath upon subsequent mankind. Mrs. Lucier's fascination with trains is analagous to Eve's fascination with the serpent. The train is an archetypal serpent. Its approach stirs up depths of Mrs. Lucier's unconscious, exciting her with strange pleasurable fear. The sensation is described in terms relating significantly to the paradoxical darkness of primitive instinct: "The tremor of the platform, emerging from blackness like a raft out of depths, thrilled her as always on taking a journey." (178) The journey on which the train takes her back through dark tunnels is Mrs. Lucier's imagined paradise. Her dream is induced by the soporific quality of the swinging train. The motion is not unlike the rocking of the chair which accompanies the telling of her story.

There are no references to Mrs. Lucier's life before her marriage. It is almost as if she, like Eve, had had no prior existence without a mate. Her earliest recollected fears are all of incidents involving Lyniol. There are no memories of childhood, of a mother or father. She has a cousin whom she does not recognize in the flesh. It is said she does not see people "humanly." (173) She is more comfortable with the "bored gods" (179) on her return trip. It is as though she had appeared mysteriously in the world, fully mature.

There is an insinuation that marriage is a less than ideal arrangement when one of the parties to it is Mrs. Lucier. She has been a most uninspiring partner, having no concerns beyond food and children. She is solicitous of Lyniol's health and is concerned about his meals when she is not with him. Her other mild interest is in children's physical development. At the end, she warms up somewhat on the subject of the growth of Andy and Alice.

She has brought no dowry into the marriage except her irrational fears which are most certainly negative assets. The suitcase that she drags about with her seems to contain these prized possessions. Out on the shoulder of the road in the darkness, she is said to have "gripped the handle of her suitcase for a leap either way." (180) In the station she hides it as well as she can by pushing it "half under the middle of the bench." (174) She is afraid the men may think the suitcase

contains contraband which she has smuggled across the border from Detroit and she is afraid they are going to try to gain possession of its contents for themselves. All these details concerning the suitcase suggest that its archetype is Pandora's box, from another myth explaining woman as the source of all evil.

Mrs. Lucier's triumph depends on the success of her guile. As long as she never emerges from the image she presents, she is useful to the sinister power which employs her. She is a kind of agent provocateur, a role for which she has much native aptitude. When she says that she almost lost control, she means that she almost fled without her suitcase containing whatever secrets she would some day pass on to Ruby. Her secrets are the mysteries by which she can perpetuate herself forever. Like her story, there is no end; she goes "on, on." (172)

Although it was necessary to explain Mrs. Lucier first, the story is highly dependent for its effect on the powerful sense of atmosphere conveyed by the details of the setting. Time is of particular significance. It goes very slowly because the central incident revolves about waiting for something which is late and which, in fact, does not arrive within the context of the story. The paradox to the observation that time is going very slowly, however, is that it is said "Night was coming too soon." (173)

It is important that nature's season is far advanced. The hour is nightfall and the early evening which ensues. The month is early December, end of the calendar year and the beginning of the bitter season of winter. The manner of indicating the time of year is by reference to cyclical recurrence implied in the use of the verb "turn" - "December had turned." (173) The first of December is also the beginning of the Advent season, a time charged with hopeful expectancy in Christian theology. That some cognizance is intended to be taken of Advent is indicated by the reference to the plans for Christmas. In fact, it is "this first Christmas" (173) which is specified. The first Christmas might be explained as the first Christmas that the Luciers have been off the farm. On another level, the use of "first" may be ironic. There is no indication that a child is expected at the farm so that the inference to Christ's Nativity is intended to question the authenticity of the events which form the basis of Christian belief.

To pursue the analogy further, it has been claimed that Christ's birth had been long prophesied and that his arrival was already late in time. The world of the gospels was nearing the end of a great historical epoch; people were being oppressed and civilization was declining. It was a world much in need of redemption. "The Fate Of Mrs. Lucier" depicts a world in a similar advanced season and in as great need of redemption as it had been at the purported time of Christ's

birth. The story suggests, also, that the world is just as unlikely to be redeemed now as then if redemption is dependent on such irrational ideas as the mystical union involved in an Immaculate Conception. There are ironic overtones which cast doubt on the validity of the gospels which claim that man's Redeemer is the Son of God, born to woman.

Knister seems to be structuring his story around an argument long held by agnostics. The objection is based on a rational explanation of miracle as the machinations of charlatans whose power is the exploitation of primitive fear leading to the domination of the imagination over the intellect. In other words, they equate religion with superstition.

The date of December the twenty-fifth has been criticized as a most unlikely season for an important birth. Rather, it is said, early Christians confused the celebration with a much different pagan fertility ritual more likely to mourn the death of the vegetation god than to celebrate his re-birth which occurred with the new growth in the spring. Mrs. Lucier, it might be noted, appears to be celebrating a death rather than a birth as she is sitting in the station, "leaning forward with a mourner's mien." (175) Furthermore, the external world of Nature which Mrs. Lucier represents, is also posing in a mourner's mien. Clothed in the black of night, dissolving in misty tears which are condensing and clinging to wires and dripping from trees, she mourns the

winter solstice of the sun. The total effect complies with the unlikelihood of a joyous birth.

The three men who come into the station where Mrs. Lucier is waiting are a somewhat parodied version of the aspects of the Trinity. They are Father, Son and Nephew - "travelworn ... tired of each other ... familiar." (177) Having been associated for two thousand years might explain part of their weariness with each other. They are a somewhat incongruous trio and are sardonically amused at themselves. They laugh frequently although somewhat humourlessly. They have come from the West, hemisphere of intellectual enlightenment to search out and allay the primordial fear by which superstition has gained control of man's mind. They have come to correct the calumny which has kept them associated for so long. To do this, they have come to the East where the story began and where Mrs. Lucier represents the matriarchal institutionalized Church which has circulated the rumour. They seek to destroy her influence and replace her wildly irrational imaginings with an orderly rational philosophy by which man might achieve peace, security and surcease from the longings he has for immortality.

The story offers little hope that the intellect will ever triumph over superstition and fear. Mrs. Lucier escapes triumphant, before the three men have had the opportunity to fulfill their mission. They have come not to be born of the flesh. They seem to have come from a place where

things are arranged differently. They have come not to wipe away death but to divest death of the fear it breeds in men's minds, robbing man of a more abundant life on earth.

An important insight about the setting is its designation as "the East." The younger men have been looking at the map of Canada and for them as Westerners, Ontario is the East. On this wretched evening, the region appears extremely inhospitable to the weary travellers who seem to have expected a much different kind of country. Mrs. Lucier overhears one of them say "So this is the East" in what is likely to have been an ironic tone. She recognizes the word as something which rings a bell in her memory. In having her associate the East with an old detective story, there could be some intention to denigrate the holy gospels on which Christianity is based. Mrs. Lucier, being a regular church-goer, might be expected to be more conversant with the Bible but being as mentally inept as she is, her vagueness is perhaps understandable. Her failure to recognize the significance of the East betrays her lack of self-awareness - the reason being that Mrs. Lucier is the East. In a symbolic sense the East represents the matriarchal primitivism of this dark, foggy night-time region. The station agent refers to the night as "raw." His remark contrasts with the Knister country once so fascinating in "Mist-Green Oats" but become sinister since "The Loading," due to the ascendancy of the destructive female principle of which the East is the archetypal symbol.

Being the cradle of the barbaric fertility cults and of Christianity, "the East" and its association with the figure of Mrs. Lucier is prerequisite to an understanding of the story.

The universe is very much a matriarchal one. The taking over of the farm by a daughter and her consort rather than by a son is indicative of female domination. That this daughter drives her own horse further identifies her as the driver and her hands those which hold the reins of government. Her zealous propriety toward the horse she does not leave even for a few minutes to see her mother on the train, testifies to her sense of her own importance. And the designation of the place as "her" home, where she insists her parents must come for Christmas, does not include a partner in the enterprise. In a sense, Ruby is the emancipated female, driving herself about independently. She is an older version of Addie in "Elaine," who dreamed of driving her own car one day. Ruby is a Valkyrie-like figure, in her own way perhaps as formidable as her mother.

There is a certain primitivism about the whole region. The countryside viewed from the train leaving Huntville in the late afternoon, appears without plan or order, being distorted by the changing perspective and sharpened by acute angles to dangerous points - "fields with narrow bright pools, reeling jagged forests." (173) The travellers are warned of the danger by the harshness of "a bell's clanging." (173)

Even the village of Huntville is described as "dirty and amorphous ... its murky lights starting in the mist." (173) Its homes are referred to as "hunchback dwellings" (173) reminiscent of mound-dwellers' habitations or those of creatures not yet walking on two feet. The junction at Blenden is likewise bleak and lonely, set in the middle of "all that bare country" (173) but the station at Blenden is an important location in the wasteland. The waiting room at the junction of the railway and the electric line represents a potential meeting place of East and West - of the chaotic irrational imagination represented by Mrs. Lucier and of the orderly rational intellect - represented by the three men.

Attention is focused on an iron coal stove in which there is a "red-seamed bed" of coal providing warmth and cheer from the darkening night. The platform for the stove is said to be "sheet iron" and a spittoon containing sawdust is also of iron. This proliferation of iron imagery contains an element of play on the word "iron" and is appropriate to the figurative "irony" inherent in the aborted meeting which doesn't quite occur. A meeting in the physical dimension of the outer waiting room occurs but it never achieves the mutual recognition of kinship between the cousins who represent East and West.

The heart of the communications system is contained in an inner sanctum guarded behind a closed door, accessible only to the official of the company. The agent is said to be

dull-eyed, a quality which makes of him an easy dupe for the evil power in control of the system transmitting secret messages, which, exposed, might well prove fraudulent - thus dissipating the superstition and fear which impoverish the life of man. The three men are waiting for the agent to leave so that they can silence the captive key or convert it to a higher use. Their purpose has to do with exorcising the evil power by which Mrs. Lucier is held captive and by so doing, prove to her the error of her irrational fears and offer the possibility of redeeming what is left of time before it is too late. They have been studying the map of Canada, which is covered with the company's rail and telegraph lines, said to be indicated in red and described in terms of blood lines ["red-veined"] which must, to be metaphorically consistent, originate from a heart land. In this sense, Eastern and Western Canada are organically united and the fact that Mrs. Lucier is a blood relative of the three men, suggests that they, too, should have heart ties that if only they might recognize, Mrs. Lucier could be in time to free herself from fear forever and by so doing, rid the world of the evil indigenous to human nature.

However, Mrs. Lucier panics when the agent is about to leave. Some message on the telegraph "prickling along her nerves like red-hot pins in memory" (177) alerts her senses. She seems to have an intuitive understanding of the company's code and buys a ticket to go back. A train appears in a

twinkling to whisk her away from the three men who might have told her the truth and set her free.

The outer waiting room objectifies the paradox of the human dilemma. Although spacious and opening in the ceiling toward celestial realms, the trap-door is closed and almost camouflaged from view. The atmosphere is laden with particles of dust, symbol of mortality trapped beneath the closed door. The spittoon, filled with sawdust, repeats the image adding a touch of vulgarity to the scene. Something of the irony mentioned already, implies certain analogy to a boudoir - the "bed" of coals, the "sheet" of iron. Whether a boudoir, a grave or an inferno is left in question. Perhaps a combined effect of all three is intended. The idea is reinforced that what was intended as a meeting ground becomes a point of division seemingly designed by a diabolic power intent on the frustration of hopes and dreams.

The territory over which Mrs. Lucier travels on the way back to Huntville is obliterated by the darkness and the fog. The countryside has become "only the blackness of void." (179) Back at the village, there are no lights at front doors to invite callers. The life of the villagers appears to be somewhat clandestine - "their lights in back rooms dimmed by fog." (179) Beyond the village the road is in total darkness and bordered by "the deep mist-filled ditch." (180) The way is haunted by invisible spirits of the darkness, unknown and

unknowing. The safest passage is a narrow strip between road and ditch, but difficult to navigate because of the treachery of the wet clay. Near the end of the road, there is a light; the moon rises and the fog lifts somewhat. The bizarre effect of the moonlight on the dripping landscape is eerily foreboding. There is a sense of unreality about the lighted house which has appeared as if by magic out of the fog, to save Mrs. Lucier from being discovered out of character. The bridge over which she crosses the ditch is "shaky," as was the station platform back at Blenden when she felt the same thrill of fear.

The tremors which shake the world of Mrs. Lucier are always felt at moments of impending danger but the danger is always averted. The impression is conveyed of an insubstantial land precariously floating on a morass of quivering substance poised upon the point of taking form but never quite forming. The substance is the shadows of fear and chief of these shadows is Mrs. Lucier.

The action of the story is a contradiction in terms; for the most part, it is the "action" of waiting. The only visible action consists in flight, inspired by fear of something conjured in Mrs. Lucier's imagination. This action comes toward the end of the story and proves to be of no dramatic significance. Other than this late development, time passes while waiting for a car which may or may not ever ar-

rive. On the incoming train trip to Blenden to get this car, Mrs. Lucier occupies herself "marking time thirty-five miles." (173) At Blenden, "the wait was always endless" (174) an expression which conveys Mrs. Lucier's ennui toward the waiting. The men appear uneasy too, "as though conscious of a long wait." (174) They talk about cars while they wait for this one to come. The waiting is very irritating. The reader, too, chafes at the inaction and the seeming endless monotony.

The dramatic conflict is not clearly outlined since the two opposing forces never come out from their disguises. They might be said to be the powers of good and of evil but that would be to oversimplify; the conflict goes beyond good and evil and the moral emphasis implied by those terms is lacking in the story. The forces in conflict might better be designated as Fear versus Hope, or as Error versus Truth. Fear or Error is represented by Mrs. Lucier, who struggles in the cause of the established system. In a literal sense, the system is the railway company; in a figurative sense, it is the matriarchy - also the Church. The established power is destructive and retrogressive, operating very unreliable transportation but having a monopoly which includes the telecommunications lines over which pass secret codified messages designed to mystify and hold in awe the clientele who subsidize the operation.

The distinction between antagonist and protagonist

is not immediately obvious but, as has been already intimated, it would seem that Mrs. Lucier is the antagonist. The protagonist is represented by the Trinity. They are somewhat conspicuous in the East, being out of their Western territory. They are invading the enemy camp, although the invasion is disguised in the form of a visit. They are a somewhat incongruous group but are united in a common mission. God, the Father, has been in the East long ago but has left for some unknown reason and has now returned, supposedly for a visit. More likely he has other plans if he succeeds in the initial stage. He has come to do something about his cousin, Mrs. Lucier, and the system she unwittingly serves. His plans include allaying her wild fears about what he hopes to demonstrate is nothing, and by so doing, to redeem the life and time of the East from the state into which they have fallen.

If fear were to lose its grip in Mrs. Lucier's imagination, she could be told the Truth. The grip of fear is like the grip she has on her suitcase. If she could be parted from the suitcase, the battle might be won. Then the story told to Ruby would be the Truth which would emancipate humanity from superstition. Thus East and West, male and female, the imagination and the intellect would be reconciled. There would be no more strife and peace would reign forever.

This is not to be. Mrs. Lucier keeps a firm grip on her suitcase and her imagination is assailed with a bar-

rage of horrors - train wrecks, murders, conspiracies, guns, nooses and the fiery furnace. At several points, she realizes the men are rather ordinary people, but these thoughts are short-lived. A laugh or gesture is enough to launch her back into the wild recesses of her imagination.

The dramatic action, like the other elements of the story, has an archetypal basis. The action constitutes a night journey, usually interpreted in allegorical terms, as a re-birth archetype. This night journey is not completed because of Mrs. Lucier's irrational fears and the intervention of the evil power which pretends to be her benefactor in providing her transportation to turn back. The story never reaches a climax and so a re-birth in any spiritual sense is never achieved. Nor does Mrs. Lucier reach the point to which she had turned back. For what seems to be an unaccountable reason, she turns off before she arrives at the old farm in what is a kind of anti-climactic ending - never knowing what has motivated her action.

In a microcosmic sense, the night journey is the story of the darkness of a life deprived of spiritual dimension. It is also probably the story of woman's responsibility for the poverty.

The journey is divided into two acts. The first describes the journey toward the city and includes the waiting period in the railway station. The second describes the

journey back almost to the farm Mrs. Lucier had left. The two acts are similar in that in neither does she reach her destination. Mrs. Lucier seems destined never to arrive at any conclusive end. This inconclusiveness substantiates the idea in the theme that Mrs. Lucier cannot die. She is a living example of the hell which life everlasting would mean.

There is no central climactic point to the story. Near the end of the waiting period in the station, the tension reaches an almost unendurable peak - "A vast insufferable quiet held the little station between forefinger and thumb, in gingerly patience. No Breath." (178) The moment passes; the agent puts the keys in his pocket. A confrontation is avoided by the expedient of whisking Mrs. Lucier away from the three men. What should have been a climax is thus avoided. The paradox of Mrs. Lucier is explained by the kind of victory involved in retreat - "With trepidation and a quivering foretaste of triumph, Mrs. Lucier marched to her suitcase." (178) A certain military connotation to the word "marching" adds to the ludicrous effect of the whole affair, since any similarity between Mrs. Lucier and a soldier would be difficult to imagine. Yet, in a hidden sense, she is militant.

What was almost the climax is only a reversal. Mrs. Lucier travels back over the same territory, now blotted by the darkness. Her journey comprises an hour during which time she senses a feeling of euphoria. The world is said to be

shut out and Mrs. Lucier feels secure, lulled by the motion and the rushing sound of the wind and wheels. In travelling back, time moves quickly - "less than an hour." (179) It is no ordinary train which has dispatched itself for her return but a monster carrier from the spirit world where Mrs. Lucier is much at home with the "bored gods." (179) They are the gods of circumstances whose indifference to human affairs confounds and mystifies the rational mind seeking an answer for the perplexing questions of causality. Their whims are as capricious as the wind they ride through the void - the wind heard rushing between the cars as the doors open and close. Fate is a concept of absurdity when considered as being dependent on such gods. Such is the fate of Mrs. Lucier.

Mrs. Lucier's apprehensions are awakened when she is jolted back to the world as she alights again at Huntville. As she makes her way through the town, she passes the church and the graveyard, finding no sanctuary there. She proceeds along the country road with great care and in total darkness. She is not afraid of the dark but of falling in the ditch or of being hit by a vehicle on the road. When she reaches the first lighted farmhouse, she turns toward it, having some premonition that her luck is about to run out. Again the tension mounts as she crosses the bridge over the ditch. The bridge is shaky and Mrs. Lucier experiences the same ambivalent "triumph and dread" (180) she had previously felt in the station as she escaped. The fog begins to lift and the land-

scape is lightened by hazy moonlight. It is an eerie scene and the expectation of what is to be found in the house is unpromising. What Mrs. Lucier finds, however, is unexpectedly a warm welcome, children, and a good meal. Again her fears along the road have proved groundless but she attributes her escape to luck - "the gods of circumstance." (180) She never realizes that the gangsters she feared were her own relatives. Nor does she realize the role she has played in the rejection of enlightenment for humanity obsessed with the fear of the darkness.

APPENDIX ICANADIAN LITERATI

(Re-typed from an unpublished typescript in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University, by permission of Mrs. Myrtle Grace. Originally thirteen pages. Undated).

We have wanted to discover and create a new heaven and a new earth here in Canada, and to make others see it. When we write a poem about the pines, a novel about the mounties, or paint a picture of geometric ice-floes, we hasten to ask each other, "Isn't this really Canadian? Isn't it different from the productions of effete Europe or of the United States, where the people think only of dollars, paint skyscrapers, and write about stock-yards? This Canada of ours is a wonderful country. Her mineral resources alone"

To be sure, different environments and modes of life do make for subtle differentiations in the human spirit. But our writers have seldom cared to probe deep enough to find them. We want to be different, but not too different. The ideal Canadian litterateur is a man who has been educated as an English gentleman, though certain New England Universities will pass; in addition he should know French and Quebec life. Nor should he forget his training, but write about Canada as accurately and sympathetically as possible from the point of view of an omniscient tourist who, after all, knows better things. We want not so much to be different as to have had

different experiences about which we can talk at tea as suavely as anybody. It amounts in fact to our wanting to be American or English with an additional background which will lend chic, insight of the elemental, or an unsullied outlook, according to taste. So the differences we formulate are not important or intrinsic, and our creations have only seemed to exchange trappings with those of other countries.

Again, we forget that plus ça change, plus c'est le même chose. We forget that the differences between men are not more important than their similarities. It might be pleasant to believe that the open spaces and association with sagacious animals and noble savages have made us braver and more unselfish than other peoples, though as a matter of fact half our population has nothing directly to do with the great open spaces, not to $\frac{1}{2}$ mention the animals and savages; and those who have mostly lived on farms almost identical with farms to be found in Connecticut, Indiana and Kansas. And we have cities that in spite of polite contrary pretensions would like to boast of skyscrapers higher than those of New York, or an underworld more sinister and ubiquitous than Chicago's.

What then of our noble determination to make an all-Canadian literature where none was? If this is the Canadian attitude, if we would like to be like Englishmen or Americans and yet we are sure we must be better because of our glorious mines and forests - how does it affect the Canadian writer who

wants to write about Canadian life sincerely? We can't consider those who lightheartedly take Canada for a gold-mine of good yarns, "northerns" and "westerns." They are usually candid enough in their way. But what about those who have been born in Canada, have been moved by its life, tried to picture it, and become more or less worried about their failure or the seeming impossibilities of their task? Why is it that in spite of the able and well-known Canadian writers whose books are read in the States, that American readers never think of "the Canadian novel" as they think of "the Scandinavian novel"?

The comparison is not wholly unfair, for though Norway and Sweden are older, civilization as generally understood has not advanced farther in them than in Canada; nor are they more open to the influence of powerful neighbors. Yet these small countries have a body of creative writers who command the respect of the world: disinterested, profound, intensely local and yet - the antithesis cannot be avoided - universal. Canada's classics (to Americans) are Ralph Connor, L.M. Montgomery, and Robert W. Service. The contrast does not need to be underlined.

But - what of the generations following these writers? It is thirty fifty years since such books began to be written. Surely in that time, in a young country throbbing with energy and growth, there must have been $\frac{2}{3}$ a few young men and women who burned to give forth a microcosmic projection of what they

knew, winning the favor of the gods and the praises of men? There were and there are; but their throes have not given birth to anything more nearly mountainous than the old-style pine-trees. In truth they have been in a sad way, and the conditions have not been wholly of their own making.

I may be pardoned for offering myself as corpus vile; it appears necessary at this point to venture into autobiography in order to explain my meaning. When I started to write, some few years ago, I was a farm lad of little academic education or worldly acquirements. I had read rather widely, not to an unheard-of quantity, perhaps one hundred volumes a year from the time I was fourteen until I was twenty-one. Long before this period I had decided that I must become an author, my only vacillation being occasioned by a visit at the age of nine to an uncle who was a railway station agent. Well, it was getting time to start. What should I write about? It had been essays of a literary turn at first - there was one on the centenary of Froude. Then I went to Toronto University, but was unable to finish my first year, succumbing to pneumonia and pleurisy. The university magazines printed articles of mine on The Intellectual Mut and Jeff (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza), The Modern Novel, and Stevenson Twenty-Five Years After, this latter a glowing tribute of five thousand words.

But when I got back to the farm and recovered my health by dint of working fourteen to sixteen hours in the field until autumn, I began to change my views about writing. There was something about the life that I lived, and all the other farm people round me, something that had to be expressed, though I didn't know just how. But the attempt would have to be made in the form of short stories. I had read a great many short stories from several literatures. Now for a subject; it wouldn't do to start with $\frac{3}{4}$ an autobiographical piece. One must be objective. As the days got shorter, and the time of more leisure came nearer, I looked about me earnestly.

It happened that we had a former neighbor working for us that fall. He was a tiny short old man who had sold his farm and been away for years, and now he was back among the people he had known, helping them with their crops. He and I hauled manure and cut corn in the field with sickles. He would mutter to himself amid the rustle of the stalks, though he was not ill-natured. When he was lifting staves loaded with tobacco-plants to the wagon, and had to toss them when the load became high, someone jocularly complimented him upon being a ball-player. "I'm no ball-player," he returned bitterly. "Takes a good strong man to play ball." And one night I heard him talking in his sleep from the next room, cursing shrilly at some one who had not appreciated his horses: "Nothing but a damn fool! Ever know me to run down

any man's horses?"

Here was my story. When the fall work was over and the Christmas season, I sat down, on January 2nd, 1921, and wrote it. The writing was quite bad, but the composition or architecture had been given some care, and I was not surprised, though rather gratified, when The One Thing was accepted by The Midland. Four other magazines had rejected it. I had heard of The Midland through Edward J. O'Brien's year-books of the short story, and I figured that it would be better to have even one cent a word and printing in such a place than the thousand dollars I had heard the popular magazines paid, and run the risk of any loss of prestige; the deuce with money! But the letter of acceptance from John T. Frederick, while it praised my story with the most ingratiating discrimination, mentioned that The Midland did not pay for stories. Two or three copies of the magazine were mailed to me, in which I found stories by Ruth Suckow, Walter J. Muilenburg and George Carver.

That winter I wrote several more farm stories, and also thirty or $\frac{4}{5}$ forty farm poems, with the eye on the object. These were printed at intervals in the "little" magazines, poetry journals, and expatriate quarterlies, - all American. Some recognition came from American critics, and in London The New Criterion singled out a dozen of my poems from a galaxy of moderns for their "objectivity." It was

this objectivity which forbade the acceptance of my work in Canadian magazines. My poems and stories were so Canadian and came so directly from the soil that Canadian editors would have nothing to do with them. The injustice was perhaps trifling; the quite modest merits of my efforts were adequately rewarded by the audience fit though few of the "little" magazines. But they weren't morally subversive, nor eccentric mannered, these attempts. It seemed gruesomely significant that not a Canadian editor would have anything to do with them, and that probably there were a few other young men in the country writing about it with the same immediacy, who were likewise rejected.

To be sure I did not notice what was accepted in Canada until two or three years later, after I had returned from Iowa where I had helped edit The Midland, sojourned in Chicago, and spent a year on the farm again. Then I went to Toronto, our literary capital, and started to freelance my way. There had been a few people, I discovered, trying to do what I had been trying to do at about the same time or a little later. Merrill Denison had made a study of the northern Ontario poor whites which resulted in findings different from the movie romances of the region. His book of plays, The Unheroic North was published in 1923, and contained clear-cut depiction in a medium of robust satire and humor. He was the most promising writer in the country; but then that easy power of satire and the unresilient atmosphere which received

it were his artistic ruination. As a literary rebel he wrote an article with some such title as "Too Much Toronto," and he lived to exemplify the surfeit. He became a freelance journalist, wit, and man about town. ⁵/₆ His interest in Canadian types seemed to become more sociological than artistic, and the very dearth of comprehension of the simplicities of art, in Toronto drove him to a comprehensible sophistication. There have been no successors to The Unheroic North, though Denison has succeeded in laughing in turn at the Toronto social-business set in a play of the stock market. I found him saturnine yet jovial, very good company; but though keener and perhaps abler than ever, somehow he is not driven to creation.

At about the same time as the appearance of Denison's book, Mazo de la Roche published a novel, Possession, which seemed to me the most promising I had seen by a Canadian. It dealt with Canadian farm life, and if that was very different from the farm life I knew, being too manorial by half, as one of her characters might have said - they were all Englishmen or Scotchmen - the atmosphere was done with great care. I wrote a laudatory review of Possession, the author wrote to thank me, and I now met her personally in Toronto. She was tall, spectacled, gracious in manner. She had been brought up on a stock-farm near Toronto, and mingled with the best people. She had plainly been doing her best to recreate the Canada she knew, and the nostalgia she suffered for all things

English and old-worldly was perfectly natural. Her next book, Delight, was about a winsome English immigrant waitress who drove every man who saw her mad, for love. This and Jalna, which won a prize, were so far from any reasonable notions of Canadian life, which they purported to depict, as to alienate the sympathy I had once felt for the work of Miss de la Roche.

As for poetry, I found a peculiar situation. In the sixties had been born a group of men from whom Canada was still supposed to draw her spiritual pabulum. Some of them, like Duncan Campbell Scott, Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Archibald Lampman, had been fine craftsmen with verse, delicate lyrists, fine painters of Canadian landscape, employing the $\frac{6}{7}$ traditional forms of English prosody. They were all past their best work by this time, and there were only two Canadian poets in the generation following, between the ages of forty and fifty. Arthur Stringer had shown gifts equal to any of them, but sensibly had betaken himself to the manufacture of fiction and remunerative movie-scenarios, with an occasional attempt at something better, as in The Prairie Wife and poems like Open Water. But Wilson MacDonald - the name will indicate the national extraction - had determined to be a poet in Toronto against the grain and whether or no. Of course he had to employ a traditional technic. He did better; he employed nearly every metre that had ever been used in English. Of course he had to make liberal citations of pines, snows, plains, and waterfalls. He did better again, travel-

ling Canada from one end to the other for local color. His book, Out of the Wilderness, the chief outcome of this taking-thought, is only too representative of Canadian poetry at its best; but occasionally he found himself the vehicle of a deeply moving moment, a few exquisite and poignant lyrics, destined, I am inclined to think, for immortality. I found him an engaging personality, full of quirks and the most singleminded devotion to the goddess he has made of poetry.

MacDonald's brother in arms, or rival, E.J. Pratt, had come from Newfoundland, and became a professor, first of psychology, later of English, in Toronto University. In 1923 he published a volume of Newfoundland Verse which showed a good deal of freshness of material and vision. Then followed a hilarious tour de force, The Witches' Brew. Later volumes have shown similar verve, but more dependence upon wit and the use in a professorial way of erudite terms to convey humor. Pratt does not seem self-centred as many poets do, and is the prince of good fellows. Somehow I did not feel that I could talk either to him or to MacDonald about my ideas of poetry, and I am sure that the latter at least would have said that my free verse, $\frac{7}{8}$ Spartan-plain celebrations of ploughing, or horses, or bees, were not poetry at all. It did not matter. The conception of Canadian poetry had penetrated me at least far enough to make me sure that I was not a Canadian poet.

Perhaps it was mere good luck that I did not lose my sense of an indigenous life waiting to be rendered. Living in Toronto, which is a unique blend of English mannerisms and blood, pioneer Canadian puritanism, and American go-getter business tendency, I was freelancing in the magazines, doing articles chiefly, literary criticism, interviews. Also I was doing stories of farm life, very brief, and patterned according to my own liking, for the Toronto Star Weekly, our substitute for a Sunday newspaper. It was and is too small town to "get by" as a national weekly in another community, but its local flavor was what made it attractive to me. To be sure the editor would expostulate earnestly with me: "Mr. Knister, you make your people too real. Our readers don't want to read about real things. They want to be amused. Try to put more plot into your stories." And numbers of them came back. In fact, after I picked out half a dozen to send to Edward J. O'Brien, and he had starred or double-starred them in his Yearbook, all of them came back. It was disappointing, because though it was excusable in a Sunday newspaper to be determined not to be highbrow, I was sure that there were some thousands of readers of the paper who would like to see their life pictured more or less as it was, without recourse to stage types and general old stuff. A new country and a new audience in the making, what an opportunity for Canadian writers! Hadn't Chekhov written in Russian papers of great and immediately increasing circulation? And

in such a paper you would not have to pay any attention to the demands for a mechanical "structure" which our other magazines regarded as indispensable.

Morley Callaghan and I used to discuss the possibilities in Canada, but though he wrote articles, he offered only a few stories - all rejected - ~~8/9~~ to the Star Weekly; and it became plain to me that since the editor was instinctively on his guard against anything approaching artistic integrity in stories of city life, it was only because he wanted a quantity of "farm stuff" that he tolerated my stories. Callaghan's first story I had read in This Quarter, Winter 1926, a Paris, or international magazine of the arts which had printed some of mine. I had been filled with astonishment at the discovery of another young man apparently determined to do the very thing I was determined to do, with his kind of life, and doing it, moreover, without compromise with anything or anybody. I looked him up when I came to Toronto, where he was running a lending library, which languished, the while he sat on the table, a fat youth, and talked. I was more astonished than ever, because our differences of opinion seemed as important as our agreements. My differences of opinion with other Canadian writers hadn't seemed worth talking about. Callaghan didn't care about the country, had always lived in Toronto, and accused me of being an idealist and a stylist. Nevertheless he knew more about how to write a page of narrative, and especially how not to write it, than anyone I had

met in Canada. A favorite pastime was to reach out to one of his book shelves, pull forth a novel by some respected American or English novelist, open it at random, and immediately fix upon some bad writing. I accused him once of letting his hand pass over the volumes of Willa Cather. He had to admit that there was a writer; but Ernest Hemingway was the one he admired. He had made his acquaintance while Hemingway had been staying in Toronto, and learned, he said, more about what not to put into a story in one afternoon than he could have learned by himself in five years.

Callaghan's idée fixe was that Canadian life was not at all represented by Canadian books, to put it mildly, and that our best writers were regarded as merely popular writers in other countries, and had no identity. General indignation and the citation of names like those of Sir Gilbert Parker and Norman Duncan resulted when these opinions were published ⁹/₁₀ in a local literary journal.

Canadian life, Callaghan held, was more like American life than anything else, and his first novel, Strange Fugitive dealt with a typically American figure, a bootlegger. He was delighted to find in the files of newspapers record of the fact that there really had been in Toronto as many bootleg killings as there were in his novel. But few Toronto people would admit that he gave a faithful picture of life in the city. He seems to have suffered a nostalgia for Pittsburgh and Chicago, which he had scarcely seen, as strong as that

Miss de la Roche had suffered for England and the pleasant ways of England which she had not seen at all. Nevertheless he wrote in terms of his own experience, and a pivotal scene of his novel where rival bootleg kings come to conference to decide whether it shall be peace or war, shows these underworld big shots talking precisely like the boys on a street corner discussing a game of pool. Where this good faith is employed upon material that Callaghan really knows, as in the short stories of A Native Argosy, his effects are certain and illuminating.

There was one magazine which might have printed good creative work, The Canadian Forum. But a sort of clique of the younger generation of Toronto University - assistant professors, and visiting Oxford dons, had founded and controlled it. Its comments on politics and conditions belonged to a tastefully liberal order, and sometimes even disconcerted the constituted powers. It also put forth sound sense on the subject of national art and literature. But the group erred in supposing that its own members could supply whatever was necessary in these departments. For example, Canadian drama was represented by a play of Cockney scene, characters, and authorship. The only work of outsiders I can recall are the poems of A.J.M. Smith and a story, somewhat Poesque of mine. We still need a magazine which will publish some few pages of good creative work as often as it accumulates. In my opinion there is a good 'o' deal of talent in the country which

needs encouragement, which cannot make itself effective without such a magazine.

Poets of course can manage some way, almost without getting printed. But it is significant though not to be taken too much to heart that the new poets we have who would be taken seriously by scholars of the art in other countries, like A.J.M. Smith, Edward Sapir, Elsa Gidlow, are in other countries at the present time, and not at home. Occasionally one meets with talent blooming quite alone; there is J.C. Guthrie, of Wlarton, Ontario, who has had privately printed Thy People, a drama on the subject of incest, in blank verse which is not good verse. It embodies greater imaginative force than I have found in other Canadian writing, and takes you out of yourself irresistibly as only first-rate work can. As for prose writers, to get a hearing at the start they have to take the chance of appealing to American or English magazines and their definite requirements. Thomas Murtha is starting in The Midland as I did. He has a unique sense of things with some inhibition in the expression of it. A partially literate returned soldier has conceived a great block of narrative which amounts to immediate sensation of war, one of the best of the human-document sort of things I have read. This was published last spring with the title Show Me Death. Probably there are others emergent, equally good.

I have not touched upon the Montreal scene, for ex-

ample, where I am told a distinct vibration is perceptible in the air. One of les jeunes from that city enlisting my support for a new monthly to be published (a short-lived namesake of this magazine, by the way) expressed horror of the atmosphere of Toronto; his week-end among us had nearly stifled him, he claimed; even the liquor It is amusing to contrast these hopefuls with such a reverend and idealistic man as Frederick Philip Grove, author of A Search for America and Our Daily Bread, a self-made Canadian from Scandinavia ^{11/12} a man of mature years and good citizenship who addresses Canadian Clubs on nationhood and kindred subjects. They might tell him that he had too many convictions. The great idea is not to have ideas, they might say, and they would be only paraphrasing the words of a greater than any to be found among us: Keats. It is not possible to know too much, but it is easy to know enough to have prejudices and opinions which may warp creation. Not that any misconception can blot out the flame of genuine creative power. With that possessed, everything else becomes subordinate. And Grove's work has genuine power.

When Canada is different we will have a different literature. Whether we call it lack of genuine impulse or whether we assume power that is inhibited by scapegoat inferiority complex, the fact remains that Canada has given birth to artists as clever as those of other countries, but it has not been given her to produce a figure of towering

importance to the rest of the world. When she does, it is my guess that he will be found to have sprung from the soil and to have escaped the need for either a quaint regionalism or imitation of other nationalities. He will speak to men everywhere in their own ^{12/13} tongue.

There are other standards of course besides that of relevance to "conditions." Let it not be assumed that the only expression I advocate has to do with wheat fields and stock yards. I am only pointing out that we probably will have to come to grips with reality before we shall have a literature, before Canada will mean something to the Canadians besides his own personal experience. Our next great writer may be of a different stamp altogether. If any Canadian equals Green Mansions or South Wind, not to mention Moby Dick, in like or unlike exotic fields there will be no objection from anybody. Or if he can be as Canadian as Poe was American he may create his own world.

To round out my own story: my sapience has not availed greatly. It will not be surprising that the obstacles which were too much for the other writers I have mentioned have not been overcome by myself. My first book was an anthology of Canadian short stories. My first novel might have had its scene in many countries. And let no one await a peculiarly autochthonous voice in my next: it is about the character of John Keats.

Raymond Knister,
Port Dover, Ontario, Canada.

Jarvis Antique Shop,
Jarvis, Ontario,
March 7, 1972.

Dear Mrs. Doris Everard,

You asked permission to include the articles, "Canadian Letter" and "Canadian Literati" from Queen's University Archives -- also, "Mine Run" and "On Reading Aloud" from my personal papers.

I gladly grant said permission and thank you for your great interest in Raymond's work.

Yours very truly,

Margaret Kristina Grace

APPENDIX IITHE FARMER WHO WAS POET TOO:A PROFILE OF RAYMOND KNISTER

(Transcript of Archives Disc #640719-10 of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The program was written and produced by John Wood with material prepared by Allan Anderson).

C.B.C. Sunday Night presents "The Farmer Who Was Poet Too: A Profile of Raymond Knister." The program, about the life and work of the Canadian novelist and poet who died in 1932, includes reminiscences among others of James Reaney, Morley Callaghan and Wilson MacDonald. Excerpts from the poet's works and letters will be read by James Petty. The narrator is Frank Perry.

1. Reader: "Ambition."
2. Narrator: Raymond Knister - "The Farmer Who Was Poet Too" - as Dorothy Livesay has called him was born near Comber, Ontario, in the Spring of 1899. His father, who came from the industrious German farm community of Southern Ontario, was no ordinary farmer, for his horses were the best Clydesdales imported from Scotland and with accurate foresight, he was the first to grow soy beans and plant seed corn in Essex County.

Raymond was brought up in a rather strict Protestant environment; he worked hard on the farm but found time to study and pursue an intense interest in books and writing. His parents both encouraged this interest, but there is no doubt that a literary life was not what they had in mind for their son. His father taught him to face life with certainty and to always aim for perfection. It seems, though, that this firm belief in purpose was imposed on the groping and defensive spirit of the boy at too early an age, for even before he started to school, a conflict had begun to take hold of him. Raymond Knister's widow, now Mrs. Christy Grace of Port Dover, Ontario, recalls her impressions of his boyhood on the farm.

3. Mrs. Grace: "I believe there was too much of a tenseness in the family because he didn't really want to be a minister and his mother wanted him to be. He said he never remembered when he didn't want to write books and of course his father pointed out that there was no money in writing books - and so the whole thing was that he was always in conflict. They really loved him but they did him harm because they wouldn't let

him relax and be himself."

4. Reader: "The Ploughman."
5. Narrator: That poem, "The Ploughman," shows something of that struggle which seemed to be pulling at him. Some unknown blow to his sensitivity may account for a stutter which developed suddenly when he was seven years old. The stammer never completely left him and was probably one of the things which turned him to literature. At twelve he was reading books far beyond his years and by the time he finished high school, he was engrossed in writing poetry of his own.
6. Reader: "White Cat."
7. Narrator: From journals which he kept, it seems that most of his poems were written before he was twenty, although many things were altered before publication. In the rather small body of poetry which we have, there is an amazing complete picture of his life and thoughts during those early years.
8. Reader: "February's Forgotten Mitts."
9. Narrator: When Raymond had finished high school, his family moved to a fruit farm at Cedar Springs.

His life didn't change very much; he simply substituted pig-pens and the stables of horses for orchards of apples and fields of corn. In 1919, his parents sent him to Victoria College at the University of Toronto, but illness forced him to leave before his first year was completed. After he had recovered, he did not pursue a formal academic career any further. Wilf Eggleston and Morley Callaghan have described the sensitive and determined boy they knew in the early 1920's.

10. Wilfrid Eggleston: He was a shy country boy as I remember him. His complexion showed that he had spent a good many hours out ploughing or driving some farm implement under the hot sun. He was shy in the sense that it wasn't easy to get to know him. He was slender, medium height; his brown hair was receding; he had brown eyes as I remember it - rather a brooding withdrawn general impression. He wasn't in any sense a gladder or a mixer.
11. Callaghan: Raymond was - well, I would say, a rather good-looking man. He had a sensitive face and his forehead was enlarged by a kind of premature baldness which was really just at the front of

his head which gave him a very dignified and rather an interesting intellectual appearance - but I'll tell you the peculiar quality about Raymond - he had very interesting eyes - they used to irritate me a little, these eyes of Raymond's - they were good eyes and in a sense I suppose they were the eyes of a writer but they were also the eyes of an enormously self-conscious man. Now you might be talking to Raymond - you say - if you were in a room with six or seven people - and then you would notice that Raymond was not talking directly to you - he would be talking to you - but these eyes of his - you know - they'd be wandering all around the place - you know - the eyes of either a nervous man or a self-conscious man or a man intent on knowing what was going on behind him, in back of him, in front of him, so you always had the feeling that he was in four or five places. It gives you a feeling of restlessness in him. Now I think this was born out of a peculiar alertness that probably came out of his stuttering - you know - from the time he was about seven years old. He didn't - you know - he didn't always stutter - Raymond and I might have been able to sit here

now - you know - and if he was absorbed in what he was talking about, there would only be a little stutter. Raymond knew what was going on in London and New York, Paris and so on. I couldn't figure the guy out - I mean - this was what was strange to me about Raymond - how did this boy, off the farm - you know - have this taste and understanding about writing? I have no idea how he got this way - this was what was so strange about him among Canadian writers. He was the only guy I knew in Toronto at that time - who, you know, that I might do a story and I could take it to Raymond and I would know that Raymond was reading this story just as someone in New York or Paris might read it and his judgment was just as good. Raymond knew what was good! In any time and in any period, these men are very rare - and Raymond had this peculiar taste and understanding about literature.

12. Narrator: During the years on the farm after his unsuccessful university attempt, Raymond began to explore the avenues open to young writers in the early nineteen twenties. As Morley Callaghan has said, he was a good critic, and he began to write occasional book reviews for

newspapers and periodicals. It was at this point that he began to write to John Frederick, the editor of The Midland, a small but highly-respected literary magazine which was published in Iowa City near Chicago.

13. Reader: "I was very glad to see the poems in your December poetry number. If you can use any others of my output which you have, I shall be grateful. I think that journalism could have a bad effect on me - too much opportunity for the slovenliness that I tend to fall into. There is no kind of writing on the go that I would not tackle - with preparation enough. However, I expect to specialize in fiction in which there will be plenty of room. The matter of modern movements in literature and drama is interesting to me - much of the stuff in a magazine like Boom for instance, is bunk in itself, though, any of these experiments may prove of value to one who can apply them to a vision of his own and to a knowledge of the tradition. It is here, I think, that we Canadians are at a disadvantage; we seem to have had no standards but success. Our great authors are the best sellers. If I were to characterize the average Canadian novel, I'd say it seemed that the author

was entirely ignorant of the classics of his art."

14. Narrator: Knister, at this time, was meeting successful people in the literary and journalistic circles of Toronto but he was only managing to make a little money out of writing himself. With some encouragement from John Frederick, he began to think seriously of leaving this Canadian literary world and moving to the United States.

15. Reader: "After a lengthy dry spell, we have a rainy morning wherefore I am inspired to the extent of letters and as I look up, the lake is misted, making the farm the end of the world. It almost has been so for me! Within a few weeks I expect to know something of my plans for the winter. I hope to get together a little money and if it's feasible, would like to go to Iowa City, though I fear it must be a crowded place for free-lance efforts. I think I'll try literary essays. Our Canadian magazines seem to take them, though they don't know a story from a bill of lading."

16. Narrator: Although a sense of obligation to his parents,

who were experiencing some difficulty in running the farm, kept him at home longer than he had hoped, he was able, at the end of the summer of 1923, to accept a position on The Midland.

17. Callaghan: Raymond had the confidence to head directly for the people he wanted to see or meet. Now you have this remarkable man with this peculiar sensitivity coming out of an Ontario farm. He came to Victoria; he knew what he should do, having the kind of talent he had. He knew he had very little or no audience in this country and no place to write in this country unless he wrote in newspapers. So what did he do? He did what I probably wouldn't have had the nerve to do - that is, without any invitation - Raymond headed for Chicago.

18. Reaney: He just was looking for an honorary godfather. You see - Americans don't really feel the way we do and in a way you can see why he goes to Chicago and why Ruth Suckow, because they were writing about the same strip of North America that we're in - that Mid-West business.

19. Narrator: As James Reaney says, during the months he

spent working for The Midland in Iowa City, and associating with the Chicago writing circle, Knister was looking for a literary godfather. Although he didn't really find what he was looking for, a letter to his parents in March, 1924, shows that his life seemed to have taken on a new dimension.

20. Reader: "Last week we got a box of The Midland stories. John had ordered three hundred copies and as I am the office boy, I had the fun of busting the box and getting the first sight of them. They come in two editions, the trade edition of which yours is a copy at \$2.50 and the school edition at \$2.00. They're being used right away here in classes of English and next year by several large universities. The Iowan newspaper has organized a contest with prizes for the best reviews of the book. I'm gradually meeting a few new people. There's an old fellow with a mane of white hair who reminds me of Mark Twain who works in the printing outfit where The Midland is printed. He's an old master printer in the old way - by hand, and has a wonderful collection of books on printing. I guess he's not wealthy; he lives in a set of rooms in the Masonic Temple. Last Sunday night John and I

went to see him and he guided us about the mysterious precincts with a flashlight. Neither of us fell through any doors or anything like that. I continue to like it here, though don't know what it would be in summer. The novel is going by fits and starts - have it written now and am revising it - reading it aloud and hope to ship it away by the first of the week. That reminds me - Poetry, at long last, in the April number prints a poem accepted a year ago last fall. The cheque, however, meant more than it would have before. Voices, a Boston poetry magazine, has recently accepted one and The Midland for May is printing five."

21. Mrs. Grace: I would say that was one of the happiest periods in his life - was in the States with this bunch of young writers.
22. Callaghan: The curious thing is, he didn't make it - you know - he didn't find a publisher - and then he returned to Canada. You see he took the shot - you know in Chicago - and then he returned. He had enough sense to know that he was young and to know that he was in the pro-

cess of becoming something - and it was then that he wrote stories - some more stories that appeared in This Quarter in Paris. No - he was far from licked on his return.

23. Narrator: As "After Exile," a poem he wrote when he came home indicates, his return to Canada was essential to his development as a writer.

24. Reader: "After Exile."

25. Narrator: To Wilson MacDonald, a close friend and contemporary of Knister's, his imagist style and his modern approach to writing was a blight on his genius.

26. MacDonald: He went to the States and he got in with a group of moderns. Now I am modern; I love modern things but I like the eternal verities to be under them and to build on them. Raymond Knister felt the same way. He loved the old poetry just as he loved the new, but he was torn between two forces, you see. And then he came back finally and he wasn't nearly as much a modernist. The only criticism I make is if he could only have gone into both forms of verse - you see - and had both the rhyming and the other. Why dismiss anything that's glorious!

27. Reader: "The trees cry loud, ..."

28. Callaghan: That's where we began to differ a little bit. He told me that he had taken that poem around to Charles D.G. Roberts who didn't like it - you see - and then I immediately gave him a setting-out about why was he bothering about the older generation. Of course they wouldn't like his poems. And that is where we sort of went two different ways - I was interested in talking with Raymond, but Raymond sort of knew everybody. He had this hunger to know writers - you know - so he would go off visiting Charles D.G. Roberts and Wilson MacDonald and Mazo de la Roche and so on, and he'd come back reporting to me about them. You see - here was another thing that made me angry about Raymond - we had our differences about writing. I thought this farm poetry of his was very remarkable stuff. He was not regarded highly as a poet by older poets around here. Now, I don't care what you find them right now saying that they did have a high opinion of him - but he would return to me and tell me what was said - you know - and that was not good for him. I don't think it was good for him to feel that he was a sort of second rate Canadian poet -

you know - never quite making it with the big-time local poets. I don't think that was good for Raymond and I used to tell him so. His stuff was the farm; I don't think he wrote very well about the city at all - I don't think that he was an urban writer.

29. Reader: "Quiet Snow."
30. Reaney: The struggle between who you're going to follow in a literary way - in Knister's case - the whole thing is - here, the poor boy - gets all his education up on himself and the Chatham Public Library to help and all that and then he goes to Toronto and now its terribly important who he meets there and what he reads - and I don't honestly think the old guard in Canadian literature could have helped him very much - and it's too bad they weren't a bit better.
31. Narrator: While the poetry did find an enthusiastic audience among many of the poet's friends and contemporaries, Wilf Eggleston like Wilson MacDonald, did not like the unrhythmic, imagist approach.
32. Eggleston: "I am not a great admirer of it because it lacks melody. Its strong point, of course, is in its simple, plain, honest realism - the evocation of

farm scenes and things of that kind.

33. Reader: "Winds Way."

34. Reaney: P.K. Page and the Montreal crowd Preview group - they think Knister was just hopelessly pastoral and sort of funny - you know - writing about pigs and horses and so on - "Who the Hell does that any more?" they would probably say. They were interested in Rilke though, and he was interested in Rilke and that's where they meet - because in Rilke, that's where you get those images that you get in White Narcissus. And in P.K. Page you get these weird images - which sort of combine outside nature with things inside the mind. But there again you see, you need a Thor, a giant Thor with a hammer to get it across to these people that they're both interested in the same thing - that, simply because he's interested in Southern Ontario and they're interested in people with one arm in Montreal - or psychotic things that P.K. Page writes about quite often - people with complexes and so on. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're at daggers drawn. I think he did something genuinely classical - that means some-

thing that's permanent in the poems."

35. Narrator: In April, 1925 Knister was still living and working on his father's farm, but he was constantly pursuing the goal which he had set for himself.

36. Reader: "'I am in my house in the country and it rains,' saith Sherwood Anderson. Last week it was hot - 90 degrees one day. The bush became green - even the apple trees came into bud - but this morning it is necessary to minister to the furnace and I see hens from the window walking on ploughed land with some snow-shoes of mud, a sign it will rain all day. But the work on my novel was discontinued temporarily about April 15th - it should be rewritten. I wrote one story this winter nine times. I hope it eventually has nine readers. I publish scantily and seldom. February, March and May in Poetry and April in The Midland. I rise at five, inscribe two small pages, revise same in the field or wherever, and re-copy at night. However, it is my fault if I have written in half a score of magazines and several papers and made no mark yet. I can't seem to stick to any one line long enough to perfect myself

in it. I have engaged in the futility of writing a long play and have now six novels in mind from which I want to choose one to begin on. If I do that perhaps I can rewrite the one I have just finished another time. This comes back to my too great seriousness, I agree that art is probably taken too seriously. I even think that it doesn't make such a great difference after all whether one thinks that Edgar Guest is more completely beautiful than William Butler Yeats; the great thing is to find some beauty and interest in life."

37. Callaghan: You know he was broke naturally, but he thought he could write anything and he had written some pieces for the Star Weekly which were very authentic pieces about farm life - and he was around here in Toronto and I took him into the Star Weekly and introduced him to Greg Clark and the boys - you know - around there and he wrote a couple of pieces which Mr. Cranson didn't particularly want and then he said to me if they will just tell me what they want written and how they want it written, I can write in any style - you see - and this was Raymond's weakness. Raymond was an authentic

poet doing his own stuff in his own way. He had the illusion a lot of literary men have you know, that he could write anyway and be as good as anybody else - and that was always licking him and always in the back of his head.

38. Narrator: His introduction to the Star Weekly did eventually turn out to be profitable for a time, although it was obvious at once that he did not find this kind of hack writing particularly satisfying.

39. Reader: "You'll be interested to know that I have taken on the job of turning out a story a week - a series of rural character sketches - Toronto Star Weekly's request - loath to have anything to do with Canadian or any other kind of journalism - but I sez 'How much?' 'Two cents per word' quoth he. 'Aw well' sez I, 'You've brought it on yourself.' I see an announcement this week 'Harvest Home' delightfully humorous sketch of a rural chicken supper by R.K. - If they call that sardonic stuff humorous, they've more humour than I have. It will be wildly illustrated I dare say but it will teach me to write more simply. Your prayers would be ap-

preciated."

40. Narrator: Although he managed to scrape a living out of articles he wrote, with such titles as "Christmas at Corncob Corners," "Mrs. Plethwick Was a Citizen" and "No Gumption" during 1926 and 1927 he was not really moving in any particular direction. It was also clear that his talent and imagination lay elsewhere.

41. Reaney: In order to bring that kind of imagination in, he needed the help of trained literary critics and I doubt that he met any in Toronto. I don't think - you see - that Wilson MacDonald was a literary critic; I don't think that Morley Callaghan was a critic either. They were just fellow-writers you know - wobbling along the way Knister was - but Canada simply didn't have an enlightened personality able to tell him what to do.

42. Callaghan: Raymond was not a hack - this was the dreadful thing about it. Raymond was born to be a good writer and a good poet.

43. Narrator: Until this time there was not much evidence of any romantic interest in his life. His mother did not approve of a girl named Marion to whom

he was unofficially engaged in 1926 because she was a Roman Catholic. Eventually, after the girl's father forbade the marriage, Knister wrote to her and ended the affair.

44. Reader: "It begins to look to me as though we had better not think too definitely of June, while the tide might change in a month or two so that I might be sitting on top of the world, it is equally possible that I might be doing little better than now. I can't think of exposing you to the mischances of a hack-writer's life. I am sorry to have to write this and you will understand that I do so with great reluctance, only after it has forced itself on me as the truth. You seem to be busy and happy and all the people about you seem to be nice to you as how could they help be."

45. Narrator: With an earnestness that had marked his whole life, Knister kept hack-writing and at the same time, he tried to keep up with his own work - work which in his own estimation was good.

46. Reader: "As in other springs, I highly resolve to get some good writing done, come what may and perhaps this summer I can - at any rate, the writing habit has me now I fear irremediably.

When I am old and case-hardened, I'll be a hermit inscribing incessant-like between meals unless happily I'm annexed by some woman, strong-minded enough to drag me from my immortal lines. My loves have been few - but they are the makings of many books if I mistake not - when I get them assimilated and generalized so that I won't write an autobiography. I manage to escape matrimony in each case. I can't drop writing - even to get married."

47. Callaghan: Then I found things getting a little difficult with Raymond - he got married.

48. MacDonald: He'd had no girls because he stuttered - girls couldn't talk to him - so I introduced him to a nice-looking girl - took him up to a home - placed their hands together. We were sitting on the chesterfield with the people around - and they became engaged later - and I didn't see him much after that.

49. Mrs.
Grace:

I met Raymond years ago when I was living in Toronto, and we were close friends of Wilson MacDonald and I met him at a party and we were immediately attracted to each other because I was a little hard of hearing in those days and

I was about the only one who would sit and listen and that's what he liked and from then on we became close friends and I became interested in his work. At that time he was writing for the Star Weekly, he was reviewing for the Border City Star and a couple of other periodicals and he was working, but with all the things going on, he wasn't getting very far. Well - the upshot was that after a long time - maybe months - we became engaged - and without much hopes of getting anywhere, we were married. We went to Hanlan's Point and took a cottage and he felt so happy about being married and having someone of his own, he decided to throw all this hack-writing up, as he called it, and write a novel. So I went back to my work and he wrote White Narcissus.

50. Reader: "It runs in my mind that I have not replied to your last letter dated June 14th - that is June B.M. and it is now July A.M. (after marriage). Now it is out. On June 18th we were quietly joined in matrimony - or at least quietly enough that no riot act was read. Miss Myrtle Gamble, formerly of Port Dover, late of Toronto, to Mr. John Raymond Knister of Hanlan's Point, Ontario. The wedding procession proceeded by

taxi from the home of the bride, Earnscliff Apartments, to that of a minister - thence to a hotel for lunch - and from there to the home of the groom where a chicken dinner was prepared by the bride. She's a good cook!"

51. Narrator: After a week spent apparently in laughter, these two find that strangely enough they are not sorry about their bargain - and even despite membership in a disillusioned generation are somewhat hopeful of the future.
52. Reader: "So behold me established at length and happier than I have ever succeeded in being for any length of time before - feeling rich in everything but money and even rather assiduously working - in June I rewrote without much addition about one hundred and twenty pages of White Narcissus, one story and two articles - not bad for a honeymoon."
53. Narrator: Philip Child, another friend of the poet's, and also a writer, perhaps sums up best the worth of the book.
54. Philip Child: White Narcissus indicates the bent that he would eventually have taken. I think that he

was looking at nature freshly - very honestly. I think he's at the very best when he's describing in a simple way and not very vividly with something that I might call the poetry of realism, country life in Ontario, which he had known himself, and the country landscape - the Ontario landscape. I think that he's much better when he's doing this - when he's in the atmosphere and in the life and the people that he knew than when he's trying to introspect too deeply into their characters.

55. Narrator: While he was writing White Narcissus, Knister kept on with some of his other pursuits and ended his association with the Star Weekly.

56. Reader: "The Star Weekly and Raymond Knister seemed to have taken different paths. As long as they would print fairly good stuff, it wasn't too bad, but this year the articles have been unsigned. Poet Lore in Boston, oldest and largest review of drama, American introducers of Chekkov, Schnitzler and Strindberg, have discovered R.K. too - thereby saving the situation - a play called 'Youth Goes West.' I've started another novel, started to complete a volume of short stories - what I consider the twenty best.

Myrtle and I have been very happy here in our cottage and I almost wish it were possible to stay the winter."

57. Narrator: By the time White Narcissus was finished, the Knisters had moved to Toronto. There he put together the volume of Canadian Short Stories for MacMillan which was published in 1928, the year before his novel came out. Neither of these publications, however, allowed him any freedom from his financial problems. By this time he had become thoroughly involved in the writings of John Keats for whom he had developed a great admiration and a strange bond. After months of research he set about writing a novel based on the poet's life which he called My Star Predominant.

58. Reader: "The best way to go about this would have been to spend ten years on Keats and his contemporaries and then write out of a full mind and heart and check up on bits of inaccuracy afterwards. My method was to try and saturate myself in the whole thing in seven months and then start to write. As a result, I've had to keep up research and reading up as I went. What the whole will want when drafted will be

vitalizing detail, local color, more delving into the contemporaries. It will be, I hope, all novel and will avoid the scaffolding effect of even the best biography and romance biography. Of struggle and development there is plenty in the short duration of his young manhood."

59. Narrator: In the early 1930's Knister became interested in the Montreal group of writers which included Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, and Frank Scott. These writers found a certain amount of hope in the establishment of the Graphic Press, a new Canadian publishing firm which was launched in Ottawa with the express purpose of nurturing Canadian talent. The company offered, in 1930, three prizes of \$2,500, \$1,500 and \$1,000 for the three best Canadian novels submitted. Knister determined that My Star Predominant should be entered into the competition. In addition to the money, the prizes would include publication of the manuscripts.

60. Callaghan: He was making no money - and now remember - we are now into the thirties - and his position, I think, was desperate. The idea that he would knock off something quickly - you know - in a

wild rush - and that it would click and he might win a prize struck me as a rather pathetic and rather desperate and at that time I had the uneasy feeling that Raymond was due for some unpredictable hardship.

61. Narrator: After they had argued about the length of the book, the judges finally did award My Star Predominant the first prize, although much of the prize money never reached the winner. The novel was never to be published by the Graphic Press which went the way of many companies in those desperate years - to the bankruptcy courts.

The Rev. Mr. Cornish of Port Dover recalls his first meeting with the writer shortly after the prize was announced.

62. The Rev.
Mr.
Cornish:

When I first came to Port Dover I had a visitor, a very interesting young man, who spoke very slowly because he had an inclination to stutter and he wanted me to go to Toronto and speak for him at some literary gathering because he had won a prize for a book he had written on Keat's life. He was a very quiet man of medium height,

well-rounded and almost apologetic in his approach to me. I don't know whether it being a clergyman awed him in some sort of way or not but it was almost an apologetic approach.

63. Narrator: Raymond had not counted too much on the money and was struggling to assure himself that the cheques would be coming in regularly, for by this time, he had a daughter, Imogen - and the responsibility of his family was not something he took lightly.

64. Reader: "I don't have to look up the date to know that today is Dominion Day. Three bands marching up Main Street and Imogen and Myrtle are watching from the window. Imogen says 'Oh! la!' She has been well. Her eyes have not changed but are still a purplish-green or greenish-purple. She's very bright, does not sleep much and is very observant. I am writing now and want to turn out an article or story every week and work on a short novel. I may get down to an article on Pelee Island and today I'm writing the editor of MacLeans about one on soy beans. I think the Geographical Magazine uses that kind of article too. Got my detective story back but a nice letter with it, telling me what they want

and no doubt I can turn out same."

65. Narrator: Knister still had ambition but somehow, it seemed to be repetitious and only slightly altered from that of five years before. And still there was that same determination that he could turn out anything. He had not found a direction for himself.

Knister spent a part of the winter and spring of 1932 in Montreal among the other writers, trying to make some headway despite the hopelessness of the thirties, but it seemed that he had reached an impasse in his life. The determination was turning slowly to desperation. He had been fighting for what little he had gained for too long. Morley Callaghan and Nathaniel Benson had some inkling of the frustrations that were facing him.

66. Callaghan: The depression was too big and terrible a thing. What happened to him was that after he had reached a certain age - let's say thirty - thirty-one - thirty-two, Raymond was trying to go somebody else's way.

67. Nathaniel Benson: He was basically a literary artist and I think the great tragedy in his life lay in the fact

that a person of his type needed to be and should have been in some way subsidized in his early years 'til he found the lucrative markets he was aiming at or wanted to aim at. But, unfortunately, he did not have a regular job; he did not have a regular salary coming in; he was not in the true sense of the word a deliberate money-writer - as someone has called them; and he was not a man that could boil the pot at will, though he may have thought he was. I think he should have - though it seems a dreadful thing to say - become a public school teacher or a high school teacher and written in his spare time, because thirty years ago, it was not easy for a writer to make a living independently by writing unless he had some other source of income. I think Knister's solution would have been if he could have done it - a position, let us say like Archibald Lampman got in Ottawa as a postal clerk through the good offices of his friend Duncan Campbell Scott. It gave him solvency; it gave him freedom from these monsters of debt and penury and beleaguering that were closing in on Knister!

68. Narrator: On reflection, the summer of 1932 seemed to offer a glimmer of light to Knister's darkening mood.

He was offered a job at the Ryerson Press by Lorne Pierce. It was also agreed that Ryerson's would publish My Star Predominant. But the hardship which Morley Callaghan had predicted for the poet was soon to descend upon him. And in one tragic afternoon, the promise and determination which had for so long kept him going was gone forever.

69. Mrs.
Grace:

The last day at the cottage, Raymond felt as though he were just getting started - that he was going to have a position with Lorne Pierce at Ryerson's and he said from now on he wasn't going to do any work that wasn't what he felt satisfied with - and he was just on top of the world. We were staying at this cottage at Lake St. Clair that belonged to his aunt - and every afternoon we went swimming and took the little girl with us. But at Lake St. Clair, it is very marshy and we had to take the rowboat out about half a mile before there was depth enough to swim in and so I would stay in the boat and he would get out and swim. And on the last day he wanted me to go but the little girl was sleeping and I didn't want to go and for some reason or other, the day before I got kind of terrified

out there because the boat drifted so far and he had to run and chase it. We had no anchor. So I wouldn't go and I didn't want him to go but he thought well, I may as well have one more swim. In all that day he had been talking and following me around the cottage while I did tidying up and packing things. And he said, "I feel as though I'm on top of the world. That I'm just coming into my powers," he says, "somehow or another, I just feel as if I could write a novel in a week." He said, "I just feel as if this was just the way Shelley and the way Keats must have felt when they were just coming in." He says, "I feel as if I had just got a glimpse of the secret of what makes a man great when he's a great writer." That lasted for about three hours until he just exhausted himself and he put his bathing suit on and he said, "Come on with me." I looked in and the little girl was sleeping and I said, "You go on if you want to." And he said, "Well, as soon as she wakes up you come down." So I said I would - and he had no sooner walked down the path than I had the most awful feeling come over me - that I should have gone - because before we started on this trip I had a dream and each time we were going into a cottage

laid out a certain way - and Raymond and my brother were carrying in furniture - and I looked up and I saw a man that looked as though he was dead and he was shouting at me, "Go away, go away!" And you know as soon as I saw him going, I remembered that his father never liked Lake St. Clair and it came to me with a flash that was his father, the way I saw him the last time in the hospital. So I grabbed the little girl up and I ran all the way down to the beach - and I had a red sweater and I waved and he was out there swimming around the boat and I thought he has no anchor. Supposing that drifts too far. And just while I'm watching his head disappears. And I began to scream for somebody and he doesn't come up. And so I threw the little girl in the arms of a woman that doesn't speak English. They're all French up there. And I swam and I waded till I got out there and the boat kept going away - and finally two little boys in a boat came to my rescue and they put me in the boat and I kept thinking that maybe somehow on the other side he got back in the boat and was lying flat - that we couldn't see him - and we chased that boat 'til we got it and there was nothing in it but his bathrobe.

70. Narrator: I think he showed great courage. Perhaps this is what interested him so much in Keats - who, likewise, showed extraordinary courage. I imagine that both of them - both the greater writer and the lesser writer had a sense of having made a decision - having made an affirmation they were going to write - and they were not going to write cheaply - they were going to do their best and try and find and communicate what was in them to get. This would take some finding - some struggle, and I imagine that in both cases, this was a central act of will in their lives.
71. Callaghan: These are things that can't be explained - a man only goes on his hunches. Here was a writer - wasn't even as I say a commercial writer - he was just a man with a good, fine talent of his own - and this was in the thirties - and I didn't know what was going to happen to Raymond - I didn't know - and when I heard that Raymond had drowned in a curious kind of way - this is a hard thing to explain - I wasn't surprised.
72. Narrator: Who is to say what conjury of problems and ideas would assail him at a time when in a material

way, success seemed pretty far away and the struggle was great.

73. The Rev.
Mr.
Cornish:

In September, 1932, I had the sad distinction of holding his funeral service and at that service I read one of his favourite sonnets by Keats. He was buried in the Port Dover cemetery. He has a poem called "Change" and it is carved into a slab of blue marble that lies on his grave in the local cemetery.

74. Reader: "Change."

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
SOCIÉTÉ RADIO-CANADA

P.O. Box 500,
Station "A",
Toronto 116, Ont.,
March 1, 1972.

Mrs. Doris Everard,
24 Melbourne Ave.,
Montreal 215, Que.

Dear Mrs. Everard,

This will confirm officially that I have talked to Allan Anderson about the transcription of his profile of Raymond Knister, "Farmer Who Was Poet, Too", and that he has agreed to give you permission to reprint the transcript as an appendix to your thesis about Raymond Knister. Normally, the CBC simply buys first broadcast rights to material of this kind, but Mr. Anderson and I agree that it would be valuable to have the transcription of the interview preserved in this way and therefore we are both pleased to give you the required permission. Incidentally, I haven't yet had a chance to read the transcript so I am keeping the copy you sent us here and I thought I might eventually pass it on to Allan Anderson for his own files, but if for any reason you need it returned, would you let me know and I will mail it back to you.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Weaver,
Head,
Radio Arts Programming.

RW:os

APPENDIX IIICANADIAN LETTER

(Re-typed from an unpublished typescript in the archives of the Douglas Library, Queen's University, by permission of Mrs. Myrtle Grace. Originally seven pages. Undated).

Northwood, Ontario, May

In the field this morning the sun was warm, and when I came back to pick up my hat the mice had nibbled the leather band of the old Borsalino; but they had not found the apples in my coat pockets. The corn land is ready, the green of oats is almost as deep as that of the winter wheat; dandelions have usurped the pastures, and the trees of the bush are all clothed. The Clydesdales behind whom I ride on the disc harrow put their feet down with deft pasterns, shaking the long white hair, and lift them slowly But now at twilight, in the soft air, light exhaled by green, the grey rain transfixes pear blossoms before my window, which have drifted on the grey clods. The pear tree, undivested, stands gracious, unaware.

The Dominion of Canada! It is hard to be skeptical, not to think that there are infinite spiritual possibilities in a land as huge and undeveloped as this, open to the variety and potency of influences which bear upon it, heritage of the racial amalgam already emergent. Canada might look, except

for these stipulations so familiar to Americans, somehow as America appears to Europe. Even now one dare not report the "dumb Russia" Carlyle saw eighty years ago. But first the influences. $\frac{1}{2}$

In part they are banal enough. Briefly there is the "democratic" standardization which makes for fewer and fewer individuals. We are a part, of course, of the thing happening from the Rio Grande north, and trying to happen elsewhere, and it is possible to think that "Canadian" can not be anything more, ever, than "Middle West" or "Virginian" or "New England." The same clothes, movies, news, automobiles, grafts, liquors, success complex, clubs. But, there is more. Our cities are small and far apart, they only accent the real life of the land. The girls wear cloche bonnets over bobbed hair, roll their own, but more are healthy-looking than pretty; a little clay always adheres to the heel of our tanned youth's dancing pump, a little chaff has got into his cigarette-holder. There is, before and after all, the land, and room for anything. Nobody can forget that.

Why not a Canadian literature? It might be supposed that all Canada hears the question, since it is always possible to start enlivening discussion in newspapers, when some professor assures the ladies that we have not yet produced a Keats, and the columnists and editorial writers join full cry with citations of doz- $\frac{2}{3}$ ens, yes dozens of

fine poets, real poets, Canadians, whatever the leaden-domed devotee of exotic and fossil letters may say. Rotarians and branches of the Canadian Club (in whatever superinduced and palliative comatose frame) have hearkened to optimism or ob-jurgation concerning the hypothetical national literature - as like as not from the lips of the local author, whose stirring epic "The Skunk-Trapper's Daughter" is selling so nicely, or whose cantata "The Emerald Bluebird" was given with such success by local talent in the Opera House. There are animate and vocal denials that Canada may not yet rival and surpass the older, effete nations of the world in every way That is, we have writings which may be read enduringly if one has become embroiled by saying that they are or are not all that they should be, or - these cases are few - if one is constrained by profession to the reading.

It was not until our adoption of Maria Chapdelaine on its appearance in English, circa 1921, that these guesses, warnings, hopes, deprecations and complaints began to be heard generally, and now the Canadian Bookman lends an impartial ear to tens of these voices - which is a good augury, specially as one or two will bethink themselves like $\frac{3}{4}$ Edwin Ford Piper's bad man: "It seemed like there was too much talk, so the doin's they begin," - and turn to create some new poems or sound prose. But there has been for a generation or two (as long as there has been any) only one reading public in

Canada, which preferred Dickens to Thackeray or vice versa, admired Shakespeare and Milton whenever they were mentioned, and found our pioneers in poetry such as Lampman and Campbell good, because they "got their inspiration from Nature" like Wordsworth; professionals and bourgeois who were very advanced when reading "the Russians" Tolstoy and Turgenev. In those days the emerging bard of the back concessions nearly always appeared in the local paper with a stale catalogue of nature, in the Canadian Magazine and presently was bound in a book, to become one "our Canadian poets" sacred from any response save eleemosynary platform quotation. And of course to a large portion of this public anyone who wrote a novel or a history of his native township and got it bound in red cloth was a "great author."

The fascination of what's easy has held us. And this is likely to become more oppressive as time goes on; for now increasingly we have the popular American $\frac{4}{5}$ magazines everywhere to vitiate any possibility of taste; and our too-few book-stores are piled with Zane Grey and Hutchinson. Contempt for the printed word is bound to result on the part of the very people of whom the artist, whether of completely Tolstoyan conviction or not and against his will or not, inevitably hopes the most in a new country. And we have a host of semi-specialized journals, farm papers, religious weeklies, women's magazines, without standards, The fascination of what's easy, "because of the dollars"

bluntly. As soon as our writers attain a technic of sufficient dexterity that they can manoeuver material to such advantage, the American editor is upon them. So we have produced numbers of American best sellers. There may be little hazard in saying that none of these had the divine fire in him; but it is nonsense to pretend that some were not capable of better things. A man may not take to writing because he wants money (he would be a fool, and otherwise unedifying) but once caught, he is bound to concern himself with enough money to enable him to keep coals beneath his resolve to go on writing. He can do that in Canada partly through one or two prototypical *Satevpos* and *Woman's Companions*, ⁵/₆ by showing that golf-love-business and country club values are as seductive north of the Great Lakes as south of them, patting Canada on the back for being like the States; or, emigrating, his chances are better with more popular magazines, describing a Canada of snow, half-bred revenge, and beaded-lashed wood-nymphs, - a Canada the demand for which has subtly corrupted nearly all efforts at expression.

Even for conservative work there is no market here, only the "standard" organs of the United States, since they pay better than the English ones. The Canadian Forum, perhaps the most important and intelligent magazine we have, calls itself "A Journal of Literature and Politics," cogently except that literature is rather consistently omitted. Confidence, as well as judgment, is what readers and editors in

in Canada need, that there may be a few to know a sound piece of writing before it has been praised in the London Mercury or the New York Evening Post. Lift themselves by their boot-laces? Yet there is one thing which is practicable, and which might make all the difference in our prospects until and after we have a larger body of enlightened book buyers. A magazine devoted to creative work should be established, perhaps only a few pages $\frac{6}{7}$ every month, yet chosen for vital quality, and which should give a voice to what is actually being lived among us. And I will be ready to bet that the tones will not be too like those from other fields.

One comes near forgetting in our engrossing possibilities that such expression does not weigh so vastly according to purely literary values. Gun-playing West and North or chimes-auraed cathedral towns may be absurd; but it is not so necessary that art should portray a reality which we can identify without going farther than the window or the mirror, as that it should embody a life of its own. What our country of almost ten millions should do and provide as audience and background is nugatory speculation. Yet, inevitably, abundantly, it should be hopeful. Always there is the possibility that somewhere in the life of the real Canada is some creator, for whom these matters are not much, to build a different "Buddenbrooks" or Growth of the Soil, with whom perchance some American press shall make us acquainted. When he arrives, Canada shall have reached her spiritual majority.

Raymond Knister.

APPENDIX IVTHE BEST SHORT STORIES

(The list of the ten best stories published in America between November, 1923 and March, 1924, as selected by Gerald Hewes Carson for The Bookman [New York], v. 59, April, 1924, p. 139).

The following ten short stories are selected for special mention as mirroring the best elements in current fiction as it has appeared between November and March. When the stories selected are not by American authors they are, nevertheless, the work of writers so familiar to the American public that they are important influences on our own creative effort.

- "Lion's Courage." G.B. Mackenzie. Atlantic, December.
- "Four Generations." Ruth Suckow. American Mercury, January.
- "Painkiller." Marjorie Stoneman Douglas. Smart Set, February.
- "The Loading." Raymond Knister. Midland, January.
- "Caught." Sherwood Anderson. American Mercury, February.
- "Poison." Katherine Mansfield. Collier's, November 24.
- "Miss Flotsam and Mr. Jetsam." Elisabeth Sanxay Holding. Dial, November.
- "The Apple Tree." Konrad Bercovici. Good Housekeeping, December.
- "The Man Who Kept a Diary." J.C. Squire. Century, December.
- "Ginger Beer." Wilbur Daniel Steele. Pictorial Review, November.

APPENDIX VMINE RUN
BY RAYMOND KNISTER

(A clipping from the private collection of Mrs. Myrtle Grace. Name and date of magazine unknown. Reproduced by permission of Mrs. Grace).

One might have called this review Poets Should Write Prose, but not because of resentment of the number of writers of verse. Compared with the number of prose writers, the poets are not too many; nor do they trouble the reviewers or the public unduly. They are not in fact sufficiently provoking or even astringent or stimulating. They should write prose

Poets should write prose because the conception of what poetry is appears to have become so boggled in the consciousness of beginning poets and versifiers and also, of course in the minds of readers, and people who would like to read current poetry.

"Why don't they read it, then, if they would like to?" asks the poet in annoyance. Alas, it is the poet's fault. His work may be too delicate, too profound for the geniality of readers; it may demand a great deal before it makes proportionate returns. There have been such cases and sometimes they were the cases of great poets. But it is more likely that his poetry is lacking in life. After all that is what people read

imaginative writing for. There is more life easily available in the average novel than there is in the average book of poems. Hence more novels are read. When a book of poems possesses life in most of its poems, or even half of them, it does not lack for an audience. It is not necessary to refer to spectacular examples of sales, such as those of Byron, Housman's A Shropshire Lad, or Benet's John Brown's Body. Most good books of poetry take longer than these did to reach full effectiveness. But they do reach their audience finally.

All this is obvious enough. Poetry must have life to live. But why does so little of the general run of verse have life? Because of a wrong conception of poetry, a conception which actually turns its back on life. People's intelligence repudiates a great deal of what passes for poetry, so how can they be moved by it? Of course there are exceptions to this generality, and great exceptions. You may not care much for the idea behind Lizette Woodworth Reese's Tears. Yet you may be moved by it as by a great sonnet; and if you are you will have to give the credit to the writer's great skill and mastery of words. That is another important element in poetry. If the skill is sufficient, the poet may make you believe in his poem when you would repudiate indignantly the same notions couched in prose.

Since the conception of what poetry is, and the method of setting words down, are the two main elements in

its make-up, we may find in them some explanation of the difference between our poetry and great poetry.

In the first place, people generally have some preconceived notion of the subject-matter of poetry. You must write about trees, flowers, brooks, summer nights, spring, stars, moon, and the soul. Very well. We have always made poems of these subjects, and as long as poetry is written, it will be written about such things, among others. But there have arisen certain conventions, about the proper state of mind toward these subjects and even (perhaps because of the poverty of rhymes in the English language, and the tenacious devotion to rhyme for the last two hundred years) certain phrases and turns of expressions which are held proper to each subject. Thus, to quote some of the books supposed to be reviewed here, the moon is generally "cold, serene," stars are "a-gleaming," vessels are "of stout oak and iron made," houses are built "upon a rock" or "on sand," breezes are "perfumed," frogs are "rejoicing," mouths are "sweet," and - but what I mean is plain. Certain phrases have been worn down until they have not sufficiently precise meaning.

Now in prose this conventionalization has not proceeded so far, except possibly in newspaper headlines and movie captions. In prose it is recognized that while there are only the same subjects to write about that always have existed, there are a great many individual points of view.

The experience of most of us is very similar in essentials. Yet each man has his own peculiar contribution which he could make if he were a master of language. (Luckily, perhaps, he's not; he should try to be if he's going to publish). And Maupassant went so far as to tell would-be story writers that every object in the world has its own peculiar shape and contour, in the mind at least, which must be rendered.

We have reached the reason why poets should write prose, though the idea might form material for a long essay. If they wrote out the idea of what they think is going to be a poem, they might see whether it was worth trying to put into that form. Possibly it would make them write fewer poems. That is said to have been the effect on Coleridge. But the poems might be sounder. If this counsel seems dangerous, it would be well to try to write some prose for itself, which would develop respect for the concrete and for logic. After all it must be admitted that only the greatest poets have been able to write sound prose; while almost every novelist has "committed" a volume of verse. The fundamental brain-work in some of the lyrics of these books is scarcely equal to that demanded by a crossword puzzle, while the emotional impetus is far less than that occasioned by the pictures in a movie magazine.

One effect of writing prose might be a tendency to economy of words. The emotion, the object might be left to

speak for itself, which would be a clear artistic gain. An example of this effectiveness of apparently simple statement is suggested by its contrast with many of the "memory poems" in these volumes. It is in Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology "Do the boys and girls still go to Aaron Hatfield's farm for hickory nuts in the autumn?" Unfortunately it cannot be quoted in full. Yet it is useless to counsel the adoption of free verse, for it sometimes drives verse writers to the redundancies which they exhibit in material verse. Let them try prose, of the plainest. It may then be possible to avoid such confusions as Jennie M. Smith's Confession, though it rhymes:

Whatever else I may be -
 There's this, (and much!) against me;
 I've never learned the way to play,
 Nor lingered by frivolity;
 Life, was too earnest - O by far,
 Austere! and stern its teachings,
 Today; it shows in many a scar,
 The evils of its bleachings.

APPENDIX VION READING ALOUD
BY RAYMOND KNISTER

(A clipping from the private collection of Mrs. Myrtle Grace. Name and date of magazine unknown. Reproduced by permission of Mrs. Grace).

It has so long been a common-place that poetry should be read aloud, that one questions oneself rather quizzically if not seriously when the thought occurs that perhaps some poetry is not to be read aloud, or not in the way in which poetry traditionally has been read. Undoubtedly part of the charm of poetry is the music of its lines. This can scarcely be realized by silent reading. Nothing less than the actual sounding of the vowels and the feel of the rhythm will evoke fully the beauty of a noble poem. On the other hand, a just rendering of the sound values will reveal the deficiencies of a mediocre poem as nothing else will. After all poems were made not to convince us by their logic, but to move us by their music, or by the images they call up.

By their images. This is a comparatively new conception of poetry. It is perhaps a dozen or fifteen years ago that a small band of poets, some American and some English, adopted imagism, in part borrowed from the French, as a creed. This is not expressing it too strongly. The creed was precisely and definitely formulated. Nowadays all poets agree

that these rules regarding the use of the exact word, the keeping of the eye on the object, and so forth, are a part of all good writing, prose and verse. But as for making the image the whole poem, that is not accepted by anyone, though many fine poems resulted from such usage.

The idea was, roughly, that each poem should comprise an image, and that this image should not be blurred by extraneous matter. You should not say that this or that was like the other; that was evading the whole issue. You were somehow to convey the identity of your bird or rock or flower or person without comparing it to something else, and without moralizing or generalizing about it.

Undoubtedly this makes for clearer and more objective, chaster art. But it is more limiting than ever the sonnet was. If each poem is to be a single image, it may be perfectly satisfying as such, and yet in many cases fail to move the reader. Seeing this most poets abandoned the formula, and Ezra Pound writes: "Be in me as the eternal moods of the bleak wind, and not as transient things are, gaiety of flowers." That is a simile as much as any used by Milton or Wordsworth, both rebels in their own days. It is also as much poetry whether it is printed as prose or not.

For this movement was chiefly of free verse. It was a wholesome reaction away from the mellifluent generalities,

and the obvious rhythms of the generations previous. Poetry written now is at once more restrained and more spontaneous because of it. But one wonders whether the free verse movement may not also have been an adjustment to modern conditions of reading. Comparatively seldom do people read aloud, and usually they read at such speed that the sound values of what they read are not so apparent as the images and ideas presented. Perhaps swift, plain, objective free verse is the distinctive contribution of our age to literature, and more typical of it than anything else.

Undoubtedly this kind of writing is not to be read aloud in the way that Tennyson's Lotus Eaters, and the poems of William Butler Yeats are to be read. "I don't act my poems," remarked one of its practitioners, with the intolerance of youth. Yet if one doubts that free verse should be read aloud let him hear, as I did, some of Carl Sandburg's poems. It is strange to find the streets and their ugliness, which all men know, converted into beauty in the soul of a man: one is moved as by the highest art, by means impossible of detection. Again, a current magazine contains a long poem called Saint Agnes Eve in Wall Street. It is as different from Keats' poem as the gunman and the underworld are from the gods and the Elysian fields. But it moves one to hear, spoken in impersonal and level tones, and one knows that man must go on exploring his many provinces, that his only hope is a truthful and honest search for beauty in what experience is given him, in daily life and vision.

APPENDIX VIITHE CANADIAN SHORT STORY
BY RAYMOND KNISTER

(Published in The Canadian Bookman [Toronto], v. V, no. 8, August, 1923, pp. 203-204).

What, approximately, is the matter with the Canadian short story? The question is not in itself encouraging, though a search for answers to it may reveal potentialities as well as pitfalls. But the fact of the short story arriving at the stage of being considered at all as a division of our literature, is more or less significant. For I daresay that most people have pretty well passed it by until lately, left it unregarded in the magazines, except as a pleasant, more or less innocuous way of passing a quarter or half an hour. Nothing was the matter with it, so far as it went, they might have said. Now the publishers' list show a number of books of stories by Canadian writers, of a quality above the average of the rest of our fiction, and a moment seems to have come for reflecting on the genre as displayed predominantly.

The most obvious defect of our magazine fiction is Americanization. Good stories are constantly being written in the United States, and many of the magazines print one now and then (a periodical with, I think, the second largest cir-

ulation, prints, or used to print, numbers of them); but it is only too clear that the short story there is pre-eminently a commercial article, except in a very few magazines of small circulation. I do not mean that English popular magazines are better, for it is doubtful whether they are as good. But their influence has not been so strong, because the chances of their printing the work of Canadian writers has been less and the money reward smaller.

The criterion of the American magazine is "What the Public Wants," and literature being as it is a matter of individuality, the public is not likely to want what a new writer has in him to give - at least until its taste for him has been cultivated. What does the new writer, positively original or not, do about this, usually? He studies what the magazines have made the public believe it wants and, the instinct of self-preservation being strong, seeing in this course his only salvation, oftener than not attempts emulation. Naturally he is scarcely ever successful. Too frequently he has nothing to record and no knowledge instinctive or aetiological of literature to aid him in attempting to record it. And when he has both or either of these, and produces or shows ability to produce good work, he is looked upon by the more wideawake editors as promising, though his contributions may not fit into the requisitions of "our readers" - as we have trained them. At this point the young writer is sure if he has escaped so far, to be canvassed by the correspondence

schools giving courses in short story writing, and to consider their merits, which are practical if not so numerous as their publicity may insist.

The correspondence school has its finger on the markets, knows what is acceptable and what is not. And it has the short story reduced to a formula so regular that at the end of the course anyone with the minimum of acumen can turn out a story to conform in this way. And if the student transcends the minimum, has observed the life through which he has passed, and absorbed the current expedient notions which take the place of a philosophy of life in popular fiction, and indeed largely in daily life itself, he is prepared for his task and, granted industry and a knack with words, he will be a successful writer of short stories.

Now this does not seem the best way to form good writers. Doubtless they can and possibly they have been formed in this way, if we give a certain latitude to the word "good." It may even be that writers have or could go through this and become great - by shedding the induced fetishes. But innately the method seems better calculated to spoil good short story writers.

To be one of these, first of all, one must have known life. But we all have known that, and it is a matter of individuality and training whether we can present it in

objectified pictures. Individuality it is that counts; it is his view of the world which the artist seeks to impart, as Henry James has said. But if individuality is a prerequisite, so is training. (Commonplaces, these, surprisingly too often ignored). And literary training, by which I mean study of the masters, is precisely what the beginner usually lacks. But he will not begin by imitating nobody, as teachers sometimes advise; even if he be a genius he cannot do that. He has been impressed, let us say, by some aspects or ironies of life. But he cannot record them independently, without reference to other writings. Indeed, it is his reading of other writers which as likely as not has brought him to a consciousness of life and helped to shape it within him - which at least has caused him to desire to impart himself. In his struggles to express what he has seen and dreamed, therefore, he will adopt the methods of writers whom he admires and wishes to emulate.

So this is the fault of the popular magazine and the correspondence school: the beginning writer has let himself accept them at their face value (he does want cash and applause), even before he has taken the second step necessary for success with them, of accepting life itself at its face value; and even if he tries to imagine honestly he is handicapped by a fortuitous rather than an inevitable technique.

Now technique is not merely an exterior matter; or even if it be that it is as the bark of a tree is exterior -

and essential. Your subject will be changed, added to, weakened, heightened or diminished, by a change of method. And it is just in the mould-like effect of "plot" as understood which tends to make the short story a dead art form. It has become possible to know after the second paragraph of the plot story how it will end - unless the writer is a disciple of O. Henry, in which case one can count on the opposite to his expectations. One correspondence school, I understand, selects Maupassant's "La Parure" as a model in structure; another, a Canadian course which I have read, seems to hold up Charles A. Van Loan as a foremost exponent.

On the results of the conditions of the past scarcely more than a word is necessary here. To me they appear ominous enough; for I have never yet seen a good story ²⁰³/₂₀₄ by a Canadian author in a Canadian magazine. I do not doubt at all that there have been such. The point is that the run of stories in Canadian magazines has been such that I have not had the patience to read enough of them to discover good ones, and I claim to be fairly omnivorous about such reading. It is not my purpose to affront popular editorships, as one youthful writer must have wished to do by saying that so far as practical evidence of the knowledge was visible they did not know a short story from a bill of lading; nor yet the conductors of correspondence schools. With them it is a matter of business, and they dare not be fooled there. What I wish to attempt is to give a word of advice from an experience not yet too fre-

quently revised by time, to a few beginning writers of promise who, I feel sure, must exist and who may chance on these words.

What then is such an aspirant to do? First, consider his position. He does not want to turn out the sort of writing which the sensationally popular and would-be popular journals are sure to publish, much and naturally as he would like a large audience. But if he is determined to illustrate a new point of view, he is to remind himself that there are not more than half a dozen literary magazines, all of small circulation and (except the endowed ones), giving small pay, into which he can hope that his work will fit. So that unless he too is endowed he can not hope to make a living from his art, or even see many examples of it published, for a number of years. Of course, when his name is made he can count on the "standard" magazines. These strike a balance, being also refuges for some of the popular writers in their less melting and less heroic moods. Book publication too may come with an established trade-mark. To all this he must reconcile himself, the sooner the better, if he really means to attempt craftsmanship in the short story. It means a curtailment in the practice of his art, for it will not pay to try to write in any manner, as little in that of the most recent cult as of the Sunday supplement - though either may teach him things about his own method. Neither is it wise to do other work as near in method as the novel unless he is genuinely drawn to it.

But if he can write novels, I think that the present hospitality to new talent will save him from the necessity of doing anything but his best, of appealing for popularity. That is, if he cannot make money from other literary work which really commands his doing, he will have to content himself with looking forward to the pre-eminent rewards of consciously well-achieved effort and the approbation of small audiences, chiefly of other writers.

And next - if he still adheres to his determination - read the masterpieces of literature, and not of one literature or one age of literature. Only in this way will he come at a sense of life as it has been in the souls of the spokesmen of mankind. He must read them as one concerned by life, primarily, before they will help him as literature. But incidentally he will gain a knowledge of his instrument, of the weight and texture of language. This sounds discouraging and perhaps pedantic in our day, but there is still no philtre of achievement. Of course he will not read all the masterpieces! I know from experience that, however fortunately situated for doing so, he will not, and cannot, and if he is really a writer he will be impelled to attempt a contribution of his own before he reaches this goal. But before he begins let him study the best short stories of which he can obtain cognizance. All the kinds; not merely one school. Only thus may he have background enough to free himself of the influence of the magazine story, which, if his has been a normally uncloistered

life, he has always had with him.

And not alone the magazine story. By reading many of the masters of the form he can escape from the disadvantages of a single technique and, if he is gifted, he can strive, though probably he will not succeed, to combine disparate virtues in his view of existence to make a new form of his own. For it is not too much technique which ails the popular story, it is too little, of too arbitrary a kind. The fact is forgotten that Maupassant, to whom journalism as well as this kind of writing shall always owe a debt, did not always care to live up to his vocation as a plot model. There are such stories as "Clair de Lune" in, I think, the "Boule de Suif" volume, in which the structure is so blended with the atmosphere and feeling that the "planned" element, the brick upon brick method which makes Maupassant a model for the correspondence schools, is altogether absent at the first reading. It is usually this way in any finished story. The great art is that which is concealed. So in calling for more technique rather than less, one should be careful to counsel the emulation of no one writer, be he various as Tchekhov himself. Schnitzler and O. Henry will not be of equal value for any two writers, yet both should be studied.

But, as a young London critic has written, public agitation in favor of technique will accomplish little. The standard must be within. Every good writer takes care for the

methods which shall further his purpose. If his purpose is high it is the same. Let him learn some of the elements of his art from a correspondence school if he elects; the important thing is to learn them and to hold to an interest in matters beyond the elements. But he cannot learn to be a good story writer there nor, unless he gets a great deal of fun out of them, from such preparatory occupations as I may have made only to seem laborious. His study at best will help him articulate; and, if his eye be true and his emotions universal and directed, he will be one of the artists for which Canada has awaited to heighten the consciousness of portions of her life. And it may be that a time will come at which he can find a publisher awaiting him in his own country.

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