

The Portrayal of Old Age in English-Canadian Fiction

by

Heather Gardiner

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Heather Gardiner

Graduate Department of English

University of Toronto

This thesis deals with the presentation of old age in English-Canadian fiction. The development of Canadian fiction coincided with the time when old age was becoming an issue in society at large. The number of works of Canadian fiction in English began to grow rapidly in the 1960's, just as the number of old people in Canada began to form an increasing part of its population. In Canadian literature, in general, there is a large body of works dealing with the subject of old age. It was thus found necessary to confine this research to the way the ageing process is dealt with in English-Canadian fiction. Cross-references are made to some French-Canadian works and to some English-Canadian poetry. Analogies to other world literatures are made in footnotes which follow the conclusion.

The main body of the thesis focuses on certain authors who deal with the ageing process in depth. For example, in Chapter One, "Images of Confinement: Order and Control in the Literature of Old Age", Frederick Philip Grove's presentation of the ageing of the prairie farmer John Elliot in Our Daily Bread (1928) is one of the artistic techniques considered in detail. Other chapters deal with the portrayal of old age and its

relationship to the topics of retrospect, wisdom, vitality and mortality, and the concept of resurrection. Aside from Grove, other authors whose work is examined closely include Margaret Laurence, Joan Barfoot, Janette Turner Hospital, Ethel Wilson, Rudy Wiebe, W.O. Mitchell and Jack Hodgins.

The above research supports a particular pattern in the study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. This thesis argues that the study of old age in this field suggests a liberating process which is possible in the minds of the aged as death is approached. Elderly protagonists in this genre are, on the whole, portrayed as possessing remarkably strong and vital personalities. Far from the notion of mere “survival” suggested by Margaret Atwood in Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972), powerful elderly English-Canadian protagonists break away from the confinement of ageing bodies and explore new realities.

This work not only builds upon the work of Canadian scholars such as Constance Rooke, but also makes a contribution to the rapidly growing field of literary gerontology in the study of literature in general. Where appropriate, references are made to studies in other disciplines such as psychology and sociology.

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Introduction

Canadian fiction in English began to flourish in the 1960's just as the number of old people in Canada began to form a large percentage of the population. According to Statistics Canada, there has been a dramatic decline in the birth rate since the early 1960's. When this is combined with an ageing baby boom generation, the result is a marked increase in the number of seniors in the Canadian population. In Aging in Canada (1980), Victor Marshall notes the sharp rise in the number of Canadians over 65 between the years 1961 and 1981. During these years, this segment of the population grew from 7.6 per cent to 9.7 per cent (59). At the same time, the number of elderly protagonists in fiction has risen, not only in Canada, but also world-wide, reflecting the general increase in the number of old people in the population of the world at large. As the population ages, there has been a greater awareness of the process of ageing and this has resulted in an increase in the number of stories about old age. What makes the Canadian situation so interesting is that its fiction was developing just as the phenomenon of ageing populations was entering society. This accounts for the fact that there are so many novels about old age in Canadian literature.

The interest in fictional works about the ageing process is likely to continue. Statistics Canada predicts that, with advances in medical technology, the increase in the number of seniors will continue well into the next century. It should be noted that the proportion of over 65's in the Canadian population is less than that in other developed

countries. For example, in 1986 it was 11 per cent compared with 15 per cent in Sweden and 12 per cent in the United States. Even so, by the year 2021, one in five Canadians will be over 65 and today's baby boom generation will become "a generation of seniors" early in the next century. In the year 2031 the number of old people in Canada is expected to be as high as 22 per cent of the population (Statistics Canada, 1988). Within this greying population, the number of "old" seniors is expected to rise dramatically. Statistics Canada defines a senior as someone 65 years of age or older and predicts that within this group the number of those over 85 will rise more significantly than those between 65 and 85 (Stone, Seniors Boom, 2.1). In About Canada: The Aging of the Canadian Population, a study carried out by the Research Centre of Aging at the University of Manitoba in 1990, Neena L. Chappell observed a wide discrepancy of ages in those over 65, and found that age differences between 35 and 40 years are still possible. Chappell remarks upon the fact that such a diverse group has been defined as "the young-old, the middle-old and the old-old". This supposes that "young-old" is 65-69, "middle-old" 70 to 74 and "old-old" 75+. Chappell remarks:

The number who are old-old is increasing rapidly. By 2031, about 45 per cent of seniors in Canada will be aged 75 and older. That is, almost half of the senior population will be old-old.(11)

For the world at large, the situation is unprecedented. As Chappell notes, "never before has any society had such a great amount of its population live to old age" (8).

In the same year that Chappell's work came out, Hugh Hood's Property and

Value (1990) was published. In this work Hood has, for fictional purposes, carried the process described by Chappell still further. He comments with wry humour on the division of old age into segments and on the proper definition of "old age". Towards the end of the novel, the middle-aged Matthew Goderich recalls a conversation with the bank manager of his Uncle Philip. Matthew gives his uncle's age as "[s]ixty-eight or nine" and the dialogue between bank manager and nephew is recalled as follows:

"Oh well, Mr. Goderich, nobody in estate planning today considers that old age. We've completely revised our thinking in that direction. Nowadays we consider middle age to extend right through to seventy-five if the customer is in good health and solvent. Then we divide old age into two segments, young old age from seventy-five through eighty-four, and middle old age from eighty-five on up."

"I see Does anybody really get old?"

"I think that the concept has pretty well been abandoned."

"Nobody grows old?"

"Not as long as they're reasonably well off. They fish, they golf, they have their collections - paintings, drawings, medals, stamps, veteran car models - and the ladies have their causes and their volunteer work, or they may have feminist attachments. Both sexes travel a good deal."

"But they still do die, from time to time?"

"That's really rather outside my field, sir." (233-4)

While Uncle Philip qualifies as old by any definition, one Canadian gerontologist, Mark Novak, defines old age as 60+ and in Successful Aging: The Myths, Realities and Future of Aging in Canada(1985), he notes that by the year 2025 this segment of the world's population will be about 14 per cent (53).

When he conducted his research into ageing in Canada, Novak also looked at population ageing in other countries. He found the percentage of this ageing group to be

lower in Canada than in places like West Germany, where more than 15 per cent of the population is already over 65 (Novak,53). Novak also points out that there is going to be a sharp increase in the ageing populations of the developing nations of Africa, South and Central America and Asia. He predicts that, in these parts of the world, there will be some instances where the number of people 60 and over will double in the next forty years and that by the year 2000, 60 per cent of the world's elderly will live in the developing nations. Novak comments:

For these poorer nations, without resources or the social machinery to meet older people's needs, these changes will be devastating.(54)

In contrast, Novak sees the " 'sudden' crisis of population aging in Canada" as "more a matter of a sudden awareness of aging" (55).

According to Novak, the study of ageing in Canada grew slowly between 1950 and 1980. In Aging and Society: A Canadian Perspective (1988), Novak notes that in 1950 the first committees to study ageing were set up by the Canadian government. Research increased in the following two decades and in 1971, the Canadian Association on Gerontology was formed. In 1980 the first collection of gerontological writings by Canadian scholars was published in Victor Marshall's Aging in Canada, and in 1982 the Canadian Journal on Aging was first published. Novak remarks on the fact that papers presented in the early 1980's focused on health issues and he acknowledges the need for more research on other aspects of the lives of the aged.

Back in the 1960's other potential areas for research in the study of old age were beginning to emerge. Literature and literary concepts began to appear in studies of the aged. "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged", a paper by the American psychiatrist, Robert N. Butler, presented the results of research into the process of reminiscence in old age and included literary examples. Butler argued against the view that reminiscence was an uncontrolled and "aimless wandering of the mind" (66). His research suggested that the process contained the possibility of resolving past conflicts and reintegrating them into a more harmonious old age. Butler begins his paper with literary quotations about old age and memory taken from the works of Aristotle, William Cowper and Somerset Maugham. Further, he later includes a discussion of "The Beast in the Jungle", a short story written by Henry James when he was sixty years of age. Butler considers the relationship of this story to the life review. In addition, he also refers to Thomas Wilcher's life review in Joyce Cary's To Be A Pilgrim (1942) and Krapp's in Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (1958).

In the process of the life review old people tell the stories of their lives and, in effect, create their own fiction. The need to do this is acknowledged in two later clinical studies, Ageing and Reminiscence Processes (1986) by the English psychologist, Peter G. Coleman, and Reminiscence and the Self in Old Age (1991) by the American psychologist, Edmund Sherman. Coleman sees reminiscence as a journey of exploration through memory and the storytelling element of the life review as a means for the isolated elderly

to make a connection with society once more. Similarly, Sherman also sees a link established through the "unity" of "self narratives" (88), narratives which bring together the events of a life into a whole and thus provide a sense of completion for the aged speaker.

The necessity for life review in old age and the analogy to fiction are also seen in a work by Frank Kermode published a few years later, in 1967. In The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, Kermode relates closure in fiction to closure in life and suggests the process of life review when he discusses "form" and describes it as

organizing the moment in terms of the end, giving meaning to the interval between the tick and tock because we humanly do not want it to be an indeterminate interval between the tick of birth and the tock of death.(57-8)

Through the means of life review, fictional elderly protagonists write their own life stories. As Kermode points out, human beings fear death

and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives(7)

Almost twenty years later, in an article published in What Does It Mean to Grow Old?: Reflections from the Humanities (1986), Kathleen Woodward comments on the work of Kermode and also that of Butler. Her approach is a literary one and though she has reservations about aspects of these earlier works, she too acknowledges the role that

imagination plays in the facts that surround the end of a life. In the article, "Reminiscence and the Life Review: Prospects and Retrospects", Woodward examines several works of fiction including "The Beast in the Jungle" and Krapp's Last Tape. She raises the possibility of a link between the imagination involved in the literary process and that involved in an individual's personal attempt to make sense of old age and death.

The cross-over between literature and gerontology that Woodward explores began to be studied systematically approximately a decade earlier in 1975, when the Conference on Human Values and Aging took place at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Before this only sporadic attempts were made, such as Constance E. Kellam's A Literary Bibliography of Aging (1968), the first reference text to literature and ageing. This work was published to be used not only by the American Council of Social Work Education in training its social workers, but also by any other profession or volunteers working with the aged. Although this bibliography was originally compiled for the use of social workers only, interest from other professional groups led to its publication for broader use. It covers six fields of literature in less than fifty pages, so is necessarily limited. The Stone Angel is the only Canadian literary work mentioned. A recent work, Aging in Literature: A Reader's Guide (1990), edited by Robert E. Yahnke and Richard M. Eastman, is more comprehensive, but still only adds Alice Munro's "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" to the Canadian works included.

Of more importance is the appearance in 1970 of Simone de Beauvoir's ground-breaking study Old Age (La Vieillesse). In this work, de Beauvoir makes an attempt to present the old as individuals, as voices that need to be heard and not just as

fringe elements on the edge of French society. She opens her work with a discussion of what she calls "Old Age Seen from Without". Under this heading, she looks at the history of old people in society and the available ethnological and biological data. Her focus is on the old person as seen from the perspective of younger people. In the second part of the study, she moves to what she calls "The Being-in-the-World", a study of the old person from the old person's point of view - in other words, she concentrates on the subjective aspect of old age. Some interesting comments are made on time and memory and the recovery of childhood in old age, and de Beauvoir also acknowledges the potential problems associated with elderly protagonists:

It is true that if an old man is dealt with in his subjective aspect he is not a good hero for a novel; he is finished, set, with no hope, no development to be looked for; as far as he is concerned it is all over and death already dwells within, so nothing that can happen to him is of any importance. Then again, a novelist can identify himself with a man younger than himself because he has already passed through that age; but he only knows aged people from the outside.(237)

This study of English-Canadian fiction invalidates de Beauvoir's assumptions. The "subjective aspect" of old age will be shown as being capable of development as death approaches and the question of the ability of the young to write effectively about the old will also be addressed.

Literature and the ageing process are components of three sociological studies of ageing populations in England, Canada and America: Ronald Blythe's imaginative sociological work The View in Winter (1979), Merrily Weisbord's Our Future Selves:

Love, Life, Sex, and Aging (1991) and Thomas R. Cole's The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America (1992). Blythe describes his book as listening to the "talking" of the old people in the village he calls Akenfield and he notes that, with few exceptions, "all movement in the talk is backwards to youth and childhood" (5). Blythe's subjects range in age from the early 70's to the early 90's and he also includes a brief section where the children of the Sixth Form in the village school give their impressions of old age. As an historian, storyteller and literary critic, Blythe is able to summon up literary and historical analogues to what he hears in the stories of the old and thus contribute to a deeper understanding of their world. Weisbord is a Canadian journalist, and her work reports a series of encounters with old people in the United States and Canada. Its main interest lies in the descriptions of meetings with Canadian authors, the late Dorothy Livesay, born in 1909, the late Morley Callaghan, born in 1903, and the late Hugh MacLennan, born in 1907. All three are authors of works in old age and about old age. Finally, Cole's work is an academic study focusing on the way old age has been viewed in America. It is interesting because it uses the journey of life metaphor and places literary references in a sociological and historical context.

Along with these recent sociological studies, the study of literary gerontology has entered the mainstream. In an article entitled "Literary Gerontology Comes of Age" (1992), Anne M. Wyatt-Brown acknowledges the contribution to this field by the American literary scholars Kathleen Woodward and Janice Sokoloff. She notes that these women were the first to argue that the imaginative treatment of old age is a neglected topic in literary criticism. Since 1978, Woodward has contributed to the research on

ageing and literature, this aspect of her work culminating in her latest publication, Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions (1991). In 1986, Sokoloff contributed an article to Gerontologist called "Character and aging in Moll Flanders" and in 1987 she wrote The Margin that Remains: A Study of Aging in Literature for the American University Studies series. Wyatt-Brown goes on to note two earlier isolated instances of qualitative studies in literature which appeared in Gerontologist, M.S. Haynes's "The supposedly golden age for the aged in ancient Rome (a study of the literary concepts of old age)" (1962) and R.M. Ricciardelli's "King Lear and the theory of disengagement" (1973).

The increasing level of interest in ageing and literature is evident in the recent publication of several literary anthologies which deal exclusively with the process of growing old. These include Literature and Aging: An Anthology (eds. Kohn, Donley and Wear:1992), Songs of Experience: An Anthology of Literature on Growing Old (eds. Fowler and McCutcheon:1991) and Vital Signs: International Stories on Aging (Eds. Sennett and Czarniecki:1991). Vital Signs has an introduction by Robertson Davies and contains Mavis Gallant's short story, "His Mother", but all three are primarily American publications with an international focus. The one Canadian anthology of short stories about ageing is Constance Rooke's Night Light: Stories of Aging (1986) which was published in Toronto. Rooke includes four Canadian short stories in this anthology, Mavis Gallant's "Irina", Munro's "Spelling", Michael Ondaatje's "The Passions of Lalla" and Guy Vanderhaeghe's "Dancing Bear". In her introduction to this anthology Rooke remarks,

What happens to old people - in fiction and out of it - has an importance that is denied only by those who would discount the humanity of the old in order to exempt themselves from the aging process. Writers who take the fictional journey into old age, anticipating or reflecting their own life course, remind us of that importance(ix)

Rooke is Canada's foremost scholar in the study of old age in fiction. In 1988 her article "Hagar's Old Age: The Stone Angel as *Vollendungsroman*" was published in Crossing the River: Essays in Honour of Margaret Laurence. The term *Vollendungsroman* is one that Rooke has coined to describe what she calls "the novel of 'completion' or 'winding up' " (31), a novel in which the elderly protagonist

picks up the human story at a pivotal and richly dramatic point, when the evaluation of life seems most urgent, and when the old dramatic question of what comes next seems most poignant.(36)

In 1987, Rooke published another article, "Disengagement and the Family: Old Age in Contemporary Fiction", in the New Quarterly. In a later work, Fear of the Open Heart: Essays on Contemporary Canadian Writing, the focus is not on old age, but the old women in Gallant's "Irina" and Watson's The Double Hook are discussed, as is Hagar. This time Rooke not only considers The Stone Angel as *Vollendungsroman*, but also looks at it from a feminist perspective.

Aside from Rooke's work, four articles by Gerald Manning, now Chair of the Department of English at Guelph University, should be mentioned because they all relate to what is happening in Canada in the study of old age in fiction. In 1987, Manning's

"Sunsets and Sunrises: Nursing Home as Microcosm in Memento Mori and Mr. Scobie's Riddle" was published in Ariel: A Review of International English Literature. Later, in 1989, Manning contributed "Fiction and Aging: 'Ripeness is All' " to the Canadian Journal on Aging which is published quarterly by the Canadian Association on Gerontology. In 1991 yet another article by Manning, "Spinning the 'Globe of Memory': Metaphor, Literature, and Aging", appeared in Metaphors of Aging in Science and the Humanities edited by gerontologists from Canada, Europe and the United States. Finally, in 1993 Manning's article "Loss and Renewal in Old Age: Some Literary Models" was published in a special issue of the Canadian Journal on Aging devoted to the humanities in gerontology. The last three articles focus on only two Canadian novels in detail, The Stone Angel and Tom Marshall's Adele at the End of the Day (1987). However, Manning does acknowledge the potential for discussion in short stories such as Alice Munro's "Spelling", Michael Ondaatje's "The Passions of Lalla" and P.K. Page's "Birthday". Further, Manning notes the possibilities existing in W.O. Mitchell's The Kite (1962), Joan Barfoot's Duet for Three (1985) and Jane Rule's Memory Board (1987).

The work of Rooke and Manning forms the backbone of the study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. In his 1993 article about "Loss and Renewal in Old Age", Manning points to the need "to move beyond the gathering of images of aging ... to a more searching analysis" (470) of the specific literature of a country at a particular time. The possibilities of such research were also suggested by the work of Constance Rooke. In her work on the *Vollendungsroman*, Rooke not only isolates many of the images to be found in the fiction of old age, but also moves away from merely listing them to consider

such processes as disengagement and affirmation in the fictional life review. Although her material is not specifically Canadian, it can be used to provide a valuable foundation for further studies which focus on Canadian literature.

One final work should be noted and this is a bibliography primarily published in the United States, but also in Wales and Canada, Portrayal of Old Age in Twentieth Century Canadian Novels (Sobkowska-Ashcroft and Berman:1991). The volume appears as number thirteen of a continuing series on Canadian Studies, and lists French-Canadian as well as English-Canadian works. It is a useful listing of relevant works, but it is also limited in that it contains only superficial synopses of the novels included. Other limitations are evident in the computerised summaries of anything and everything to do with authors and elderly protagonists in Canadian fiction. The lists of psychological and physical traits of the "major elderly" are remarkably full of redundant detail. An earlier work by Berman and Sobkowska-Ashcroft, Images & Impressions of Old Age in the Great Works of Western Literature (700 B.C. - 1900 A.D.): An Analytical Compendium (1987), also contains similar computer generated indexes.

In this study of old age in English-Canadian fiction, specific authors will be focused upon because they create a fiction in which the detail adds to our understanding of old age. Such authors place an elderly protagonist at the centre of their work and consider the ageing process in depth. For example, even as far back as 1928, Frederick

Philip Grove interrupted the flow of Our Daily Bread to enable an ageing John Elliot to speak "on stage" from the centre of the novel; indeed, he made Elliot's ageing process central to the novel as a whole. When Simone de Beauvoir wrote Old Age (La Vieillesse) in 1970, she commented:

Because of the mass of documentary evidence that we have on the present state of the aged, that provided by literature is only of minor interest; and in any case it does not amount to much.(237)

This is not the case in English-Canadian fiction, as can be seen in Grove's portrayal of John Elliot in 1928 and, in a later work published in 1944, his portrayal of Senator Samuel Clark in The Master of the Mill. In both instances, the detail of Grove's work adds to the texture of an analysis of old age. These and other works in the English-Canadian canon can be read with an eye to the basic patterns of experience that come up in literature.

English-Canadian fiction prior to the 1960's has several other examples of remarkable elderly protagonists who play an important part in the work of fiction in which they appear. The first prominent elderly figures in English-Canadian fiction are Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert in Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables (1908). Matthew is only sixty, but is described as having "long iron-gray hair" (16). His age and attitude and that of his sister, Marilla, are carefully played against the youthful exuberance of Anne. Later, between 1927 and 1960, Mazo de la Roche's Jalna series introduced the indomitable matriarch, Adeline Whiteoak. Like John Elliot, Adeline

demands her share of attention. In her autobiography, Ringing the Changes (1957), de la Roche comments,

The grandmother, Adeline Whiteoak, refused to remain a minor character but arrogantly, supported on either side by a son, marched to the centre of the stage.(181)

Again, before the 1960's, conspicuous elderly protagonists are also evident in Ethel Wilson's The Innocent Traveller (1949) and Swamp Angel (1954). As Canadian fiction blossomed in the sixties, these isolated examples became the forerunners of a constantly increasing body of fictional works in which the elderly protagonist is predominant. The publication of Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel in 1964 and its portrayal of the feisty ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley signalled the emergence of a new kind of protagonist.

When the presentation of old age in fiction is considered as a new genre with specific conventions (Rooke's *Vollendungsroman*), an argument can be developed for a particular pattern in English-Canadian fiction. The study of old age in this field suggests a liberating process which is possible in the minds of the aged as death is approached. Elderly protagonists in this genre are, on the whole, portrayed as possessing remarkably strong and vital personalities. Far from the notion of mere "survival" suggested by Atwood, powerful elderly English-Canadian protagonists break away from the confinement of ageing bodies and explore new realities.

Examination of elderly protagonists and the works in which they appear

suggested five main structural devices to be followed in the presentation of the above argument. These devices revolve around specific images. When the English-Canadian canon was explored, certain recurring images were found to be associated with different aspects of the fictional portrayal of old age. These images associated themselves with particular patterns of approach. The first example of this is the artistic use of the image of the house which is used in such a way as to suggest the approach taken in Chapter One, "Images of Confinement: Order and Control in the Literature of Old Age". Here the image of the house is discussed as suggesting the confined and limited world of the old. Elderly people are frequently portrayed as trapped in their house or in the confines of a nursing home. In the case of Canadian protagonists, this entrapment is exacerbated by a sense of isolation which is peculiarly Canadian and which is linked to Northrop Frye's notion of a "garrison mentality", one which he sees as existing since the early days of settlement in Canada. Margaret Atwood comments on this in Survival (1972) and takes it one step further with the notion of the Canadian family as a trap; she sees within this family an old woman, like Hagar, as being further "trapped" by living in a body she no longer recognises as hers (210).

The themes of order and disorder run through portrayals of this limited world. To create a sense of order in the face of the constant threat of impending death and disorder, elderly protagonists turn to the past and bring things down both literally and metaphorically from the attic of the "house" which contains their life. Images of confinement and the themes of order and control are especially remarkable in Frederick Philip Grove's Our Daily Bread (1928), Margaret Laurence's A Bird in the House (1970)

and Joan Barfoot's Duet for Three (1985). All three works will be explored in Chapter One.

When control is relinquished a new form of ordering can begin, one which results in a journey of the mind. The image of the journey is at the centre of the second category of structural devices considered. Like the images of confinement, the image of the journey is frequently employed by Canadian writers and its use suggests a different aspect of old age, the journey into retrospect. The theme of exploration which Atwood has noted in Survival as "a recurring motif in Canadian literature" (114) encourages the use of this image and is a factor in Chapter Two, "Looking Back in Old Age: Ordering and Retrospect in the Journey of Life". As elderly protagonists journey back through memory, they explore the past and through this process attempt to find a new form of ordering and a new sense of self. In Divisions on a Ground (1982) Northrop Frye notes the Canadian "obsession with movement and transportation, the eye that passes over the foreground object, the restlessness"(50). Frye's words could be used to describe the portrait of the old man at the opening of Frederick Philip Grove's The Master of the Mill (1944). Senator Sam Clark is in his eighties and one of the dominant images of the novel is that of an unsettled old man making a repeated journey by car around "The Loop" that he has established outside his home. Both he and Laurence's Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel (1964) get out of the house they have lived in and begin a journey down the "steep slopes" at the end of their lives. Hagar takes a bus to Shadow Point and there makes a further journey into hidden, as well as unknown, areas of the self. In both instances, the technical devices of life review and retrospect are used to enable these old people to take

such a journey. Elderly protagonists like Sam and Hagar get out of the "house" which has defined them and move towards a new perspective, one which is gained by looking back over the period of a long life.

The portrayal of Sam and Hagar will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, along with further consideration of Grove's John Elliot in Our Daily Bread. As in Chapter One, this chapter will show how different writers play variations on images to make comparable points about old age. The retrospective journeys of Sam, Hagar and John Elliot are linked not only with the image of the journey, but also with that of the circle. Before the novels of Laurence and Grove are explored in depth, Chapter Two will initially consider the processes of retrospect and ordering involved in the self-editing and writing of a life. Janette Turner Hospital's The Tiger in the Tiger Pit (1983) provides a good illustration of the artistic technique of old Edward Carpenter as he builds a new story of his life.

When elderly protagonists consider the stories of their lives the image of weaving is frequently employed. Again, the image is used in such a way that its recurrence contributes to the study of old age and leads to the understanding of a different approach to the subject. Chapter Three, "The Wisdom of Old Age: Finding Meaning in the Life Experience", discusses the use of the image of weaving in defining the wisdom associated with old age. The image is especially apparent in the presentation of the voice of Frieda Friesen, the old Mennonite woman in Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China (1970). Frieda's voice weaves its way through a mixture of other viewpoints. Its steady optimism is in marked contrast to the defeated voice of old Muttachi, a voice which

emerges from darkness and which is accompanied by the meaningless, repetitive motion of her spinning wheel. Similarly, Ethel Wilson's image of the fish weaving over the Swamp Angel gun at the conclusion of Swamp Angel (1954) recalls the speech of the seventy-eight-year-old Nell Severance, a speech about "the miraculous interweaving of creation ... the everlasting web" (206). Nell makes this speech outdoors, but she also verbally acknowledges that "Everything of any importance happens indoors" (204). The "interweaving" of what happens indoors and outdoors is an important device in the presentation of several elderly protagonists in English-Canadian fiction. The movement away from the house and the insight gained, as Nell puts it, through looking back from her "little mound of years" (206), leads to a breakdown between the interior and exterior of the self, a weaving which crosses over the self-imposed barriers of a long life.

Frieda and Nell both attempt to pass on what they have learned to the coming generations, Frieda to her grandchildren and Nell to Maggie. Both old women are presented as vital figures with something to offer to the next generation as they themselves approach death in old age. This vitality-mortality opposition suggests a fourth structural device in English-Canadian fiction, one which is held together by the image of the wind and one which will be explored when another aspect of old age is considered in Chapter Four, "Vitality and Mortality: Coming to Terms with Death". In Ethel Wilson's The Innocent Traveller (1949) and W.O. Mitchell's The Kite (1962) the elderly figures of Topaz Edgeworth and Daddy Sherry live their lives fully until the moment of death. In one scene in The Kite, Daddy figuratively pops out of a grave. Mitchell portrays Daddy as doing much more than just surviving to the age of one-hundred-and-eleven; he presents

Daddy as offering the hope of renewal and transformation beyond the limits of mortality. In Survival (1972), Atwood notes that "in Canadian literature, a character who does much more than survive stands out almost as an anomaly" (245). A study of old people in English-Canadian fiction suggests the opposite. Like Daddy Sherry, most of the elderly protagonists studied transcend the boundaries of a life of confinement and mere survival.

In the fifth and final structural category, boundaries are transcended and Spit Delaney's question is raised, "Where is the dividing line?" Spit is one of the ageing characters in Jack Hodgins' collection of short stories, Spit Delaney's Island (1976). Like many of Hodgins' characters, Spit is a figure on the edge of the world and the image of the dividing line suggests a final aspect of old age, the point of crossover between what is real and what is not real, between life and death and between death and resurrection. The fifth and final chapter, "Old Age and Resurrection: Another Look at Reality", examines the work of Jack Hodgins and his exploration of alternative realities which present themselves in old age. For example, in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne (1979) Hodgins presents the enigmatic figure of old Joseph Bourne. Like many elderly protagonists, Bourne lives alone on the edge of the community. He is depicted as a deteriorating, diminished figure who "dies" and is reborn. His "resurrection" suggests the possibility of new frontiers, something which Northrop Frye sees as endemic to the Canadian imagination. In The Bush Garden (1971) Frye comments:

One wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it.(220)

Old people in English-Canadian fiction not only look back into the past, but also look forward to the possibilities of the last and final things in life. Geographically, Canada sits at the edge of the world and evokes the potential of limitless journeys. It is a country of winter, a country particularly reminiscent of the final season of life and, as such, eminently suitable for a study of old age in fiction.

The images that are central to the five chapters described above are not the only images which recur in the study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. Other imagery such as that of water, clothing, edges, birds, cages and attics will be considered in the context of the thesis. In many instances, description, to be expected in realistic fiction, becomes at the same time a metaphor for the condition of old age. When images recur in later authors, such as that of the bird in the cage of old age which is found in Laurence's A Bird in the House as well as in de la Roche's "The Cure", the question of influence is raised. Such influences may only be unconscious, but must be considered when images recur as different aspects of old age are explored. How writers tap the recurrence of certain images is a question that is not easily answered. There are specific images available to them for a particular theme and certain aspects of ageing evoke certain images. However, unless an influence is directly acknowledged it remains a matter of speculation, and the challenge for the literary commentator becomes more one of following through the clues that are presented by these images and showing how a particular artistic strategy

works.

For the purposes of this study, the biblical guidepost of "three-score years and ten" (Psalm 90:10) was initially considered as appropriate in the definition of old age. By and large this has been followed, but, as research progressed, it was found that in certain novels figures younger than seventy are "elderly" and have characteristics of old age that make it appropriate to include them. This is partly because the notion of what is old has changed with increased longevity. The aged and greying figure of the fifty-five-year-old John Elliot in the opening scene of Grove's Our Daily Bread, a novel published in 1928, reflects the concept of old age at that time. Figures like Elliot were chosen for research because of the subtle and concentrated nature of their presentation, as opposed to those whose portrayal merely touches on the subject of old age.

One notable exclusion from this selection is an in-depth exploration of the work of Robertson Davies. Davies' work is full of elderly protagonists telling stories and at first sight would seem to demand special attention here. However, his strategy is to use old age more as a stance than as a subject for analysis. He does not explore old age as such, but is more interested in the temporal perspective of an elderly protagonist as it reveals the development of the individual from youth to maturity. Examples of this technique can be seen in the seventy-one-year-old Dunstan Ramsay's memoir in Fifth Business (1970) and in that of old Doctor Jonathan Hullah in The Cunning Man (1994). Fifth Business will, however, be briefly referred to in Chapter Two and The Cunning Man will be commented upon in the Conclusion.

The list of old people portrayed in English-Canadian fiction continues to grow.

Just as this study was being completed, for example, George Elliott's stories about a group of old men in a nursing home, Crazy Water Boys (1995) was published. To include all such material about old age would be an endless task, so the decision was made to concentrate on those which focus conspicuously on the ageing process rather than the mere fact of age. Reference and comments about materials not included in the body of the thesis will be made in the Conclusion. Occasionally, works by well-known French-speaking Canadian fiction-writers are referred to in the body of the thesis when these are likely to be familiar to their English-speaking counterparts. Similarly, English-speaking Canadian poets are occasionally cited when their subject matter overlaps with that of the novelists who are my major concern.

Finally, in order to put this study into a larger framework, relevant works of fiction from outside of Canada are mentioned in footnotes which follow the Conclusion. All Canadian works in the chapters themselves are quoted from first editions. An exception to this is made in the case of Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel (1954) where I quote in general from the Canadian first edition but quote also, when necessary, from the enlarged American text, originally published in the same year and recently reprinted in the New Canadian Library.

Chapter 1

Images of Confinement: Order and Control in the Literature of Old Age

Knowledge of age
begins in winter, a thin-railed whistling gate
under sonorous pines
a few shivering paces, and so far,
from the stone house and all its hearths.

Margaret Avison (No Time, 181)

Old age is frequently expressed in literature in the language of confinement and imprisonment. Either imprisonment is portrayed literally, such as confinement in a nursing home or other limited space, or the process of building a "stone house" of self-imprisonment is suggested, one whereby the elderly protagonist carefully orders and controls what he or she chooses to present to the outside world. In the following chapter, the operation of various images of confinement in English-Canadian fiction will be examined, first by discussing several minor examples and then by focusing in detail on the

work of Frederick Philip Grove, Margaret Laurence and Joan Barfoot. The portrayal of John Elliot in Grove's Our Daily Bread (1928) will be analyzed and followed by a discussion of Laurence's portrayal of elderly protagonists, first in stories published initially in periodical form in the early 1960's and later contained in A Bird in the House (1970) and then in The Stone Angel (1964). Our Daily Bread and The Stone Angel will also be discussed in Chapter Two as both novels cover different aspects of old age. Finally, in this chapter, Laurence's influence on Joan Barfoot will be acknowledged and demonstrated in an analysis of the relationship between self-imprisonment, order and control in Barfoot's presentation of the eighty-year-old Aggie in Duet for Three (1985).

The need for order and control in old age is opposed to the threat of disorder which increases as old age progresses. Old people in English-Canadian fiction are frequently associated with the lines of order that man erects against the progress of time and the personal deterioration associated with the ageing process. An analogy can often be drawn between the ordered landscape linked with the fullness of life's maturity and the subsequent decline of this landscape with the disintegration of age. In Survival (1972), Margaret Atwood remarks on the orderly lines which early settlers attempted to place as a stay against the uncontrollable elements of the Canadian wilderness, a process which she describes as the "imposition of the straight line on the curve" of Nature. She also comments on the elderly patriarchs in Frederick Philip Grove's fiction and notes their efforts as young men with families to create a "pattern of straight lines - barn, house, fence - on the curved land" (Survival, 122). In Grove's fiction, decay and decline of a house are analogous with the physical deterioration of the ageing body. As the body ages, control

slips away. The house of the body and the house built to establish order and control inevitably decay. As Al Purdy expresses it in his poem, "My Grandfather's Country (Upper Hastings County)", "failed farms sink back into earth/the clearings join and fences no longer divide" (147). The lines placed against Nature cannot hold, and the elderly protagonist is forced to respond to the imminence of death.¹

The image of the house is critical in such a response. This image is used to suggest not only the limited and self-enclosed world of the old, but also a progression of awareness as age advances, one which opens up into a new form of order only apparent when the lines of order are abandoned and disorder is embraced. Not all elderly protagonists are described as having the ability to take the necessary steps away from the security suggested in Avison's "stone house", towards a different understanding. Some are described as reacting to the proximity of death by shutting down this "house" even further. However, some do move to the attic of the mind and search for a new form of order, one which opens a window on the self and begins the "few shivering paces" (in Avison's words) necessary to commence the journey into a "knowledge of age". Such knowledge depends upon the old person's ability to move out from what Constance Rooke calls "the garrison of the self" and to lose the "fear of the open heart" that Rooke equates with the "garrison mentality" that is so peculiarly Canadian (Fear,9,12).

The physical deterioration that accompanies old age often makes it difficult to

move at all and the image of the house of the ageing body as a form of confinement is common in the literature of old age. There are many works which do not go into the detail that Grove, Laurence and Barfoot do, but are still worth mentioning. In all of these works, what looks like straight description really says something about the condition of old age. An example of this occurs in the children's novel, Redwork (1990), in which Michael Bedard describes the restricted world of old Mr. Magnus. The house Mr. Magnus lives in no longer has its own shape, but has taken on the shape of the old man, now in his nineties, "settl[ing] around him like a second skin". The movements of Mr. Magnus are limited to this house, where a "few sad rooms" become an "old man's world" and "horizons" are reduced to "walls" (178). Further, a parallel linguistic prison is sometimes described inside this house of the body in old age. In Alice Munro's short story, "Spelling" (1978), the young Rose is shown an old woman who is confined behind the bars of her crib in the Wawanash County Home for the Aged. This old woman's language is reduced to "spelling" occasional words. The description of her imprisoned in her crib and the focus on her speech suggests the caging of another language in old age. Such parallel imprisonment of the mind and body in old age is also evident in Janette Turner Hospital's The Tiger in the Tiger Pit (1983). The novel opens with the cranky seventy-three-year-old Edward Carpenter "[c]aged" (11) in the upstairs room of his home. A bad heart limits his physical movements, but his chief regret is a life of controlled feelings, one of "moral rectitude" and "[s]eventy-three years of keeping the rules" (10,12). A "courteous and correct gentleman" (9) all his life, Edward possesses an emotional restraint which is now mirrored in the image of him as a prisoner in his own house, trapped in the body of old

age.

The image of a caged animal and its keeper is a further extension of the image of the ageing body as a form of confinement. In The Tiger in the Tiger Pit, the needs in Edward's restricted life are ministered to by his seventy-year-old wife, Bessie, who is described as a "senile smiling keeper" (11). Similarly, Mazo de la Roche's short story, "The Cure" (1928), describes the elderly alcoholic, Dick Boone, set up in his chair "just like an old doll" with his aged wife, Ada, tending to his needs "very much like a small girl washing and dressing her doll" (109). Like Edward Carpenter, Dick Boone is "caged" by old age and his plight is mirrored in the image of the caged canary above his chair. Michael Bedard suggests the same analogy in Redwork when he describes the way Mr. Magnus keeps a large rainbow parakeet caged in his house. A link between the confinement of the parrot and that of the old man is suggested when Mr. Magnus runs his fingernail along the bars of the cage and comments on his own condition, stating: "Inside this sad old bag of a body ... there's a young boy"(195).

In de la Roche's "The Cure", the bird in the cage is not only confined by the bars of the cage, but also by a small brass fence that encircles it. This additional restriction suggests another layer of restraint in Dick Boone's life, one created by the ritualistic motions of this old man's keeper who attempts to keep the deterioration of old age under control by making sure that he is routinely "washed and combed and scented" (109). However, behind the image of a controlled bird in a cage lie the indefinable possibilities of the "luxurious disorder" (119) embraced by Dick and Ada in better times and now only expressed in their messy bathroom,

Ada Boone's own secret room, where, filled with apprehensions, often sick at heart, though humming gaily so that Dick might not guess it, she administers to his needs in bad times. And when he was "himself", it was from this room that they emerged in turn, fresh, scented, combed, shaved, curled, a still dashing, still to-be-stared-after couple.(112)

Such "secret room[s]" of emotion are also kept under control in Guy Vanderhaeghe's short story of another old man and his keeper, "Dancing Bear" (1982). In this story, Dieter Bethge is confined to his house and tended to by his housekeeper, Mrs. Hax. Though his life is limited and confined, Dieter struggles to enter the rooms of his past and open the door into a deeper understanding. The opening words of the story provide a stark image of restraint:

The old man lay sleeping on the taut red rubber sheet as if he were some specimen mounted and pinned there to dry.(170)²

Dieter responds to his entrapment by attempting to "pry ... memories out of the soft beds into which they had so comfortably settled, sinking deeper and deeper"(171). Not only is Dieter held down by the limitations of old age, but so are his memories. He can do little about his physical confinement, but struggles to open the cage of his mind. He manages to recall a "dancing bear" that reflects his present state, one who "lived in shame and impotence" (174), tied to his keeper by a ring through his nose, but who experiences "a kind of freedom" (178) through the music of his master's violin. Dieter's "freedom" lies

in a vision of truth at the moment of death, when he imagines a fall into the waiting arms of the unfettered bear.

The image of the elderly protagonist as a trapped animal is also evident in the cage and zoo imagery at the conclusion of Kenneth Radu's Distant Relations (1989). In this instance, the seventy-four-year-old protagonist, Vera Dobriu, is taken on a visit to the zoo. In failing health, but with the doors of her mind opening, Vera lives mostly in memory. En route to the zoo, she suffers a heart attack and the image that comes to her mind illustrates the prison her body has become. She sees a baboon "constrained in a kind of contraption, a box out of which only his head and arms poked" (240). As death approaches, Vera accepts it as a part of life and the cage of the body begins to swing open. However, in the ambulance en route to hospital, she anticipates her fate when she sees an image of the box falling apart, only to reveal the baboon "wrapped in wires and straps, plastered with electrodes and white tape" (244); this is an image which suggests the final effort to assert control, one that will be practised upon her by the keepers in terminal care.³

Before this last desperate confinement, a progressive series of confinements is often experienced by the old. In fiction, as in life, the aged are frequently moved from being confined at home, to the further limitations of a nursing home, in many instances again with a keeper, such as the tyrannical Mrs. Rawlings in Richard Wright's Sunset Manor (1990). Nursing home confinement can be exacerbated by the administration of drugs and tranquilizers, as in the attempts to subdue the seventy-six-year-old Henry Thornton in David Laing Dawson's Last Rights (1990). In David Waltner-Toews' short

story, "A Sunny Day in Canada" (1980), an old married couple are confined, in a nursing home, to a "two-bed inescapably pastel pink room". The husband describes his wasting body as a "skeleton wrapped in parchment", one which the orderly discovers each morning "tucked into a cave of white sheets and woollen blankets: bald as a plucked chicken, the legs bent up towards the chest, twisted around each other" (15). Not only does confinement of the old occur in smaller and smaller spaces, but the body shrivels in its space and, as the old man points out, so does language:

The old body speaks in simple sentences. We progress, in this place from long sentences to short phrases to a few key words and finally to silence and eternal peace.(15)

As physical and linguistic diminishment progresses, the smaller space within the nursing home or hospital shrinks even further.⁴ Hagar Shipley, whose main action in the novel takes the form of a desperate attempt to escape being placed in a nursing home, comments on this in Laurence's The Stone Angel (1964) when, in hospital towards the end of the novel, she is moved from a geriatric ward to a private room. She remarks to the nurse that the next room she moves to will be "the smallest of all", with "just enough space" for one (282). At the end of a long life, the one-hundred-year-old Topaz Edgeworth in Ethel Wilson's The Innocent Traveller (1949) finds herself in a similar situation. Her world becomes "bounded by one room" (273) and, in the words of the narrator, it is a world which "continues to shrink":

It is a bed; it is a cup of milk; it is a voice ... [it] has closed down to a point;
it is a point of departure.(274)

Faced with such a shrinking world, elderly protagonists respond in one of two ways. They either break through the walls of the self and embrace disorder, or shut down and lock up its doors in an attempt to achieve a life of apparent order and control.⁵ In the first category, there are frequent examples of old people being portrayed as capable of embracing disorder and releasing caged emotions. These old people thus place themselves in a position to step forward into a new form of awareness and "knowledge of age". When the lines of order and control are relaxed in old age, a new form of ordering emerges, one which results from opening the doors and windows in the attic of the mind. If the "remnants and oddities" of a life are brought down from this attic, the elderly protagonist begins a process of release and escape from "the garrison of the self" and "fear of the open heart". Part of this process involves a sharper awareness of the world outside the house of the ageing body. Alongside the pain and despair of old age, a change in perception occurs, one which is described in "Miss July Grows Older", one of the poems contained in Atwood's latest collection, Morning in the Burned House (1995):

The way the sun
moves through the hours becomes important,
the smeared raindrops
on the window, buds
on the roadside weeds, the sheen
of spilled oil on a raw ditch
filling with muddy water.(23)

Similarly, in Hugh MacLennan's Two Solitudes (1945), the retired Nova Scotian sea-captain, John Yardley, is described as becoming aware of a different sort of order in Nature as he ages, one which is outside that which men attempt to impose artificially in their younger years. As an old man, Yardley lives in a single room on the top floor of an old house in Halifax with a view from the window across the harbour. This view reminds him of younger days when he was "free to move" (307) around the world. His movement is now in the mind as he journeys towards the knowledge that comes with age. For him,

knowledge was necessary; otherwise beauty was wasted. Beauty had come to him late in life, but now he couldn't have enough of it. It was something a man had to understand. Pictures and colours, for instance, and fine glass.(316)

Such "knowledge" is also apparent in W.O. Mitchell's short story, "But As Yesterday" (1942), which begins with an old man seated in his rocking chair "beside the window" of his second floor room. This window is described as

always open, teasing the old man's nostrils with the softness of spring, or the richness of summer, or the wild wine of fall. Now that eighty years had imperceptibly declined, moment by moment piling up their careless weight, the old man knew his life for a firefly's spark in much darkness; he knew that the world of his window was all the world left to him.(132)

When winter descends and this window is closed, the old man is separated from the order

that lies outside in Nature and is confined, in the winter of his life, to "looking at the flat faces of four walls and a ceiling, at a candy-striped bedspread that covered him over" (136).

Throughout "But As Yesterday" the old grandfather makes every attempt to keep the window of his room open and himself connected to the different order suggested by the seasonal rhythms of the outside world. The open windows of de la Roche's Dick Boone and Hospital's Edward Carpenter are also linked to an awareness of the rhythms of cyclical change in Nature. Though confined physically, Dick Boone is keenly aware of the chestnut-tree blossoms outside his window and Edward Carpenter of the smell of honeysuckle and lilac. Edward is able to struggle across to the window in his room and flick his daily dose of medication through "the rip in the screen". This "jagged tear in the screen" (10) is an image which prefigures the opening which will take place in Edward's mind during the course of the novel. As the "intrusion into [Edward's] past" begins and he journeys into memory, his forehead "push[es] against the screen"(12) which separates him from memories of the past and he begins to break open a window into the cage of his emotions.

In the attempt to find a new form of ordering, many elderly protagonists, like Hospital's Edward Carpenter, open a window on old age; other protagonists confront these emotions when they are portrayed as endeavouring to bring down and order the remnants of a life from the attic of the mind. In English-Canadian fiction the image of the attic is almost as important to the study of old age as the image of the house. Works which employ the image of the attic can be seen as precursors to Barfoot's Duet for Three which uses this image to suggest the development of a different form of ordering in old age. For

example, in Mazo de la Roche's Young Renny (1935), the eighty-year-old Adeline Whiteoak is described as having an annual ritual of bringing her dead husband's clothes out of the house to be aired. When "three trunks [are] brought down from the attic" (175) at Jalna and their contents spread on the grass before her, Adeline opens the store-room of her past and examines its contents. In old age, she attempts to establish a new ordering which is more related to living in the present and not merely confined to the past. She allows her son, Philip, to burn a symbol of the past, her dead husband's moth-eaten coat. In later Jalna novels, Adeline is constantly portrayed as an old woman who embraces life and its disorder until she dies at the age of a hundred years. Like old Mr. Magnus and Dick Boone, she too has a pet bird, "Boney", but her bird flies free in a vibrant room at Jalna which is described in Young Renny as being "enriched by memories beautiful, voluptuous, painful, passionate, [and] heart-rending" (79).

In Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley (1952) David Canaan's grandmother also attempts a new form of ordering by bringing remnants of the past into the present. She is portrayed as an old woman hooking a rug from bits and pieces of old cloth once worn by members of her family. The image she presents becomes the organising image for the novel: it is there at the beginning and then at the end. The remnants of cloth that the old grandmother works into her rug are linked in her mind with the people who have been part of her long life. As the novel opens, she is working on the last rags she has been able to find, some from a bag which had been "tied tightly at the top, inside a trunk" (4). These are the last memories, difficult to get to, but essential to bring out and use in the completion of the new pattern being hooked into the rug.

Such difficult and hidden memories are often repressed in the more remote parts of the upper storey of the mind. In Alice Munro's short story, "The Peace of Utrecht" (1960), and in Joy Kogawa's Obasan (1981) young women are led by old women into an exploration of these hidden recesses. In "The Peace of Utrecht", the narrator is taken by her "very old" great-Aunt Annie upstairs "into the darker parts of the house" (203-4). A box is taken down from the top of a closet and when the two women explore its contents, previously unknown dimensions of the past are brought out into the present. In Kogawa's novel, the eighty-one-year-old Obasan takes her niece up into the darkness of an upper storey after midnight. Obasan appears to her niece to be "the bearer of keys to unknown doorways" (16) and, once in the attic, it is she who opens the boxes and small trunk stored away there and who causes her niece to reflect on the "memories" and "dreams" in the "ordinary stories" of people's lives and how these become part of the "furniture" of the house of the body. Through Obasan, the niece becomes aware that

[o]ur attics and our living-rooms encroach on each other, deep into their invisible places.(25)

The image of the house with its "attics" and "living rooms" of the mind can thus be seen as central to the portrayal of elderly protagonists who embrace disorder and attempt new forms of ordering at the end of a long life. However, as their world progressively shuts down, many elderly protagonists turn away from the possibilities of disorder and still attempt to assert a form of control over the physical and emotional

parameters of their lives. When death knocks at the door, these old people react like the three little pigs of nursery rhyme fame; they attempt to shut themselves down and lock themselves in. One elderly protagonist who does this is Mrs. Emblem in Ethel Wilson's The Equations of Love (1952) . This ageing woman is locked into a definition of self which is tied to the house she lives in. At night, she lies behind the curtains and locked door of an upstairs room which is diminished and controlled in all aspects. The "neatness and cleanness" of this "rosily shaded and suffused" (48) room is necessary to Mrs. Emblem's sense of order and identity. She is alone and under control; the disruption of a personal life is kept at bay by limiting a great deal of this life to the vicarious reading of the Personal Column in the newspaper. The potential disorder and decay of Mrs. Emblem's life is also controlled by the precision of her nightly routine, the repetitiveness of which resembles the washing, combing and scenting of old Dick Boone. Mrs. Emblem's ritual includes "curls for tomorrow [being] tied prettily within a pink of blue silken scarf finished with a knot or bow" (49). Her attempt to control herself inwardly is reflected in this precise outward display, one which is mirrored in the portrayal of Anne Hébert's old Mademoiselle de Bichette in the short story, "La Maison de l'Esplanade" (1942). Mademoiselle de Bichette is described as having "[des] boucles rembourrées qui s'étagaient sur son crâne étroit, avec la grâce symétrique d'une architecture de douilles d'argent" (151). This old woman is also described as living "[une] vie bien ordonnée". Her appearance, like that of her grey stone house, presents "un édifice parfait de régularité" (152). As she ages, Mademoiselle de Bichette gradually closes down her house in an attempt to maintain control over her life. When a room is no longer used, it is the task of

the housekeeper, Geraldine, to close it down and this old servant longs for the moment when "enfin toutes les chambres seraient fixées dans un ordre éternel" (155).

Like Mademoiselle de Bichette, an ageing John Elliot in Frederick Philip Grove's Our Daily Bread (1928) builds his own "cage" (244) by literally and metaphorically shutting down his house. Through this action, he desperately attempts to maintain some form of order in a life which is slipping out of control into chaos. At the centre of a technically conventional work, Grove creates a remarkably sensitive portrayal of the ageing process. Analogies are drawn between the gradual shutting down of Elliot's house and his progressive physical deterioration and psychological disorder. Our Daily Bread begins with a middle-aged Elliot poised at the point of losing control. His grey figure is described in a moment of survey as he looks down on the orderly farm and large house he has built in the barren landscape of Sedgeby, Saskatchewan. At this point, his wife and most of his children surround him at home and the physical parameters of his life are still tangible. With the death of his wife and the scattering of his family, his home becomes "spectrally empty" (251) and Elliot approaches old age with uncertainty and a sense of imminent disorder. In the winter of his sixty-eighth year, he reacts by shutting down the rooms of his house and limiting himself to one room. This is the same house to which, in his youth, Elliot "added room after room and a second storey" (5). Now, with

"[o]ld age ... approaching" (242), he retreats and shuts down his world.

As age advances, Elliot not only shuts down the rooms of his house, but also closes the window on any attempt to see with clarity at the end of life. He moves his bed to the kitchen and blocks off the large bay window at its southern end. When a pane of glass breaks in this window, he seals it off with black tar paper "inside and outside" (243) effectively shutting out any light . Elliot also closes off the northern end of the kitchen by hanging a horse blanket over its door (244). In the middle of such a sealed and controlled environment, Grove draws a portrait of Elliot in old age, one in which the image of the house is used to suggest the confinement of an ageing body and mind:

Sometimes, during the winter of 1918 to 1919, [Elliot] sat in his huge, chilly room, the only one now used in the great house, with overshoes on his feet and a muffler wrapped around his throat, tied under the white and untrimmed beard, and stared into vacancy with unseeing eyes which began to grow blur.(243)

The barren nature of this description reflects the "unseeing eyes" of Elliot's mind and his self-imposed confinement in the house of an ageing body is accentuated by the image of the constricting muffler which is "wrapped " and "tied" around his throat. Grove's portrayal of this lonely and desolate figure suggests a shutting down of the house of the ageing body. Elliot is shortly described as living in a farmhouse in which the upper storey is allowed to fall into "complete decay" (248). The upper storey of his farmhouse becomes enclosed in inches of dust and broken window panes allow birds to fly in and out at will and nest in its disorder. The disarray in Elliot's "upper storey" is something which

he refuses to confront. By gradually shutting down his house, he attempts to maintain control in a world which, as he ages, is slipping away from him. Instead of opening doors and windows to the outside world and the processes of ageing and death, Elliot seals himself off in an environment which gives him a false sense of control.

Elliot's sense of self is closely tied to the house he has lived in for most of his life. In this he resembles Laurence's Hagar Shipley who, when a nursing home is suggested to her, resists and clings to her house, commenting that if her idea of self cannot be "contained" (36) in her house and its contents, she has no idea where it can be found at all.⁶ At the age of seventy-four, Elliot longs to return to the sense of "order and repose" (378) he found as a young married man in his house at Sedgeby. The farmhouse is now empty, but an unsuccessful attempt to recover a sense of order through his scattered family leads him back to it. A thwarted and defeated man, he returns to a house in ruins and dies within its walls. One of the final images of Elliot is that of an old man crawling on his hands and knees along the "tangle[d]" (387) pathway of weeds that leads up to the broken-down door of his house. Just before Elliot's death, one of his children finally opens the "nailed up" (388) doorway to the upper storey of this house, something which Elliot, in his old age, has been unable to do.

Like the old man in T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion", Elliot endures old age in a broken-down house which reflects the condition of his body and mind. The words of a neighbour recall the old adage which sums up Elliot's condition, "An unoccupied house soon goes to ruin" (389). Comments such as this which suggest the state of the house as a symbol of the state of the self are frequent in Grove's work. His association of the state

of the self with the image of the house is commented upon by Nancy Bailey in "Frederick Philip Grove and the Empty House". Bailey remarks:

The self as symbolised by the house in Grove's novels is often strong and magnificent in its ego side, the side that faces the world, but empty, decayed or in violent conflict within.(178)

In addition, in Over Prairie Trails (1929), Grove comments that "[a] house has its physiognomy as well as a man" (21) and In Search of Myself (1946) he recalls the abandoned house that triggered the writing of Fruits of the Earth (1933). In this novel, Abe Spalding's house begins a process of deterioration within a few years of construction, eventually resulting in the destruction of Abe's "vision" which, like Elliot's, "had been bounded by the lines of his farm" (165). At the conclusion of Our Daily Bread, the final image of Elliot is that of an old man dying in a decayed house. The lines of order and control that he has attempted to establish in his lifetime no longer exist and the image of the house reflects that of an old and broken man.

Comments such as the above not only provide an insight into Grove's work, but also could be used to look forward to the imagery used by Margaret Laurence in A Bird in the House (1970). In this collection of short stories, Grandfather Connor's fortress-like Brick House is a reflection of the "self" of Grandfather Connor; "strong and magnificent" on the outside, it contains a variety of personal conflicts within. Before

moving on to a discussion of Grandfather Connor and his “brick house”, the “houses” of Grandfather Connor’s contemporaries, Grandmother MacLeod and Grandmother Connor will first be considered.

Though its exterior is not described in A Bird in the House, one suspects that Grandmother MacLeod’s house would be similarly imposing from the outside. Within it mirrors the suppressive order and control epitomized in the character of Grandmother MacLeod as described in “To Set Our House in Order”, one of the stories contained in A Bird in The House. These stories are told by Grandmother MacLeod’s grand-daughter, Vanessa MacLeod. It is Grandmother MacLeod who tells Vanessa,

God loves Order - he wants each of us to set our house in order.(46)

Grandmother MacLeod certainly manages to do this. She is described by Vanessa's mother as someone who can “keep everything in order, and then some” (40) and her need for order is expressed in the house she lives in, one in which

the dirt must not be tracked in upon the blue Chinese carpet with its birds in eternal motionless flight and its water-lily buds caught forever just before the point of opening.(43-4)

With Grandmother MacLeod, many things are “caught” and trapped in a moment of stasis, just before full bloom and consequent decay. As in the portrayals of Mrs. Emblem and Mademoiselle de Bichette, the description of the architecture of the house of

Grandmother MacLeod's body reflects the confinement of her mental state. Her hair is described as "bound grotesquely like white-feathered wings in the snare of her coarse night-time hairnet" (40). Further restraint is suggested in Grandmother MacLeod's choice of jewelry; she wears a "pendant on which a fullblown ivory rose [is] stiffly carved" (47).

Grandmother MacLeod keeps her house and her emotions under control. When ridiculed by her son over the name she suggests for her new grandchild, she does "not flinch, or tremble, or indicate that she [feels] anything at all" (56). It is the same son, Vanessa's father, who reveals an awareness of the dilemma Grandmother MacLeod is experiencing in old age. He understands that

the house is still the same, so she thinks other things should be, too. It hurts her when she finds they aren't.(53)

Grandmother MacLeod's way of dealing with the constant change which accompanies old age is to cling desperately to the things she still has some control over: her house, her appearance and her emotional response to disorder. However, as Laurence acknowledges in "Time and the Narrative Voice", the stories in *A Bird in the House* "deal with the fluctuating and accidental quality of life (God really doesn't love Order)" (158). The paradox suggested in Grandmother MacLeod's portrayal in "To Set Our House in Order" is that life is not neat and orderly and the older one gets the more disorder must be dealt with.

Denial is the form of response that Grandmother MacLeod chooses as a means

of coping with unsettling changes in her life. This response is unsuccessful because it not only shuts out those around her, but also shuts down the possibilities of psychological development through the ageing process. In his article, "Loss and Renewal in Old Age: Some Literary Models", Gerald F. Manning discusses what he calls "a familiar problem - loss and diminishment in old age [and] strategies of coping" (469). He also notes the "series of fearful 'Ds' " that accompany the ageing process, "diminishment, decline, disengagement, ... demise" (470). To this could be added the "Ds" of disorder and disarray and Grandmother MacLeod's denial of this.

In A Bird in the House, Grandmother Connor, Vanessa's other grandmother, also develops a strategy of denial as means of coping with life's disorder. Calm and controlled, she lives in a self-contained world and remains psychologically confined within the Brick House. Her strategy is reasonably successful, she has a limited relationship with family members and, as Laurence remarks in an interview with Graeme Gibson, she is actually "fairly happy" in her "cage", as is her pet canary (Gibson, 206). Laurence uses the image of the bird in the cage to suggest the suppressed psychological state of Grandmother Connor. Order and control are important to Grandmother Connor, as they are to Grandmother MacLeod. Grandfather Connor upsets her equilibrium, but even he sees her as a distant "angel" (84), one at another remove from his world. Like Dick Boone in de la Roche's "The Cure", Grandmother Connor is first seen sitting near her caged canary. She has refused to give "Birdie" a real name, supposedly for religious reasons, but this denies her bird an identity and cages it even further. The canary is just as amorphous as the old woman who sits beneath its cage "[a]mple and waistless in her brown silk dress".

Grandmother Connor watches the bird and the bird has "its attentive eyes fixed upon her" (6); the reader watches too, as Laurence creates a mirror image in which the caged plight of old age is reflected.

In "The Mirror Stage of Old Age: Marcel Proust's The Past Recaptured", Kathleen Woodward notes the young Marcel's technique for avoiding the "disease" of old age, "keeping one's emotional distance [and] avoiding any form of intimacy" (57). In old age, this is Grandmother Connor's tactic for avoiding its vagaries. "[C]oddled" (17) by her family, she remains impassively inside the cage of the Brick House where she is distanced and protected from the disorder of the outside world. When Vanessa asks whether the canary likes being in the cage, Grandmother Connor responds that it would not know what to do with itself "outside"(6). "Inside" is safe and this is where Grandmother Connor chooses to remain, securely ensconced within the walls of the Brick House and a protective family. In this limited environment she "chirp[s]" only "softly" (11) and, just as she has problems in coaxing a song from the anonymous "Birdie", so too is it difficult to release a response from her in the psychological and linguistic prison where she chooses to live out old age.

Like the other elderly protagonists in A Bird in the House, Grandfather Connor also embraces order. The Brick House is described by Vanessa as "part dwelling place and part massive monument", an "embattled fortress" (3) thrown up as a defence against the nihilism of mortality. In an attempt to control his world even further, Grandfather Connor occasionally retreats defensively into the furthest corners of the Brick House. Just as John Elliot shuts down his world, every Sunday Grandfather Connor

closes himself off and limits his world to that of a basement room near the furnace. By doing this he turns away from the realities of the ageing process. However, when he is down in the basement, Grandfather Connor unwittingly acknowledges his age. As he sits in his rocking chair he assumes a traditional posture of the old:

Above ground, he would not have been found dead sitting in a rocking chair, which he considered a piece of furniture suitable only for the elderly, of whom he was never in his own eyes one.(62)

In scenes like the above, Grandfather Connor is presented as refusing consciously to confront his own old age. He does his best to confine and limit the use of one of its symbols, the rocking chair, to the furthest recesses of his house. Like Grove's John Elliot, Grandfather Connor and turns away from opening the doors into an upper storey and chooses instead to pace in the confines of a limited world.

Grandfather Connor and John Elliot are both pioneers in the Canadian wilderness who have attempted to place their personal mark against it. Each finds "freedom" (61) in hard work, but away from this they are both imprisoned in cages of their own making. The repetitive back and forth movement of both men in their self-imposed confinement suggests unspoken inner torment. The two men differ in that Elliot's portrayal suggests a pathetic old man defeated by his inner chaos, whereas Grandfather Connor's inner rage is more suggestive of that described by Dylan Thomas in "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night". The caged pacing of the two men resembles the zoo imagery referred to earlier in Radu's Distant Relations and

Vanderhaeghe's "Dancing Bear". Vanessa even calls Grandfather Connor "The Great Bear". She insists that this nickname is not merely because he wears a large coat made of the pelt of a bear and has the temperament of one, but because he "stalk[s] around the Brick House as though it were a cage ... prowl[ing] through the living room" (61).

Grandfather Connor lives a life in which any suggestion of emotional distress is confined to the deepest recesses of the Brick House. However, in one story, "Mask of the Bear", he expresses a "lurking bewilderment" that Vanessa comes to understand years later, when she sees in a museum a Bear Mask of the Haida Indians (88). After the death of Grandmother Connor, Vanessa is surprised to find her grandfather "standing out on the front porch" of the Brick House. Lear-like, he is alone and without the protective layering of his bear coat or the Brick House. Vanessa describes how

he stood there by himself, his yellowish-white hair plumed by a wind which he seemed not to notice, his bony and still-handsome face not averted at all from the winter.(79)

As he stands out on the unprotected front porch of his home, the storm in this old man's mind is revealed when he momentarily steps out from behind the "carved face" (80) of the "mask of the bear", sobs, and embraces disorder.

Just as Grandfather Connor embodies the dialectic between those characters

who embrace order and those who embrace disorder, so too does Hagar Shipley. At the beginning of The Stone Angel, the ninety-year-old Hagar recalls that, as a child, she was "anxious ... to be neat and orderly, imagining life had been created only to celebrate tidiness". As was noted earlier, Hagar clings to her home as a means of keeping the parameters of her life in order. However, as an old woman, she relates to the scent of wild cowslips and is "rampant with memory" (5). The disorder of her mind finds a more suitable "home" when she moves away from the constraints of the house she shares with her son, Marvin, and his wife to the disorder of the dwelling-place she finds at Shadow Point.

In the old fish cannery at Shadow Point, Hagar discovers a place of chaos, one which is full of "remnants and oddities" (215). This scene of disarray contains another trapped bird, a seagull, and Hagar comments:

I hate a bird inside a building. Its panic makes it unnatural. I can't bear to have it touch me. A bird in the house means a death in the house(217)

In the literature of old age, elderly people are frequently described as resembling birds. Old hands "claw" sheets, hair becomes tangled like the nest of a bird, facial features resemble those of a bird and the image of the bird of death sits in the cage of the body of old age. Hagar's reaction to approaching death is suggested in the frantic movements of the seagull caught in the cannery at Shadow Point and, in the interview with Graeme Gibson, Laurence commented on her frequent use of the imagery of a trapped bird. She

was aware of the potential that lies in the ability for flight and remarked:

A great many of the things that have to do with personal liberation or freedom ... involve labouring mightily against a door which actually is not locked.(Gibson,206)

As they struggle between the need for order and the possibilities of disorder, Grandfather Connor and Hagar knock at the door to a different "room" in old age, but Grandfather Connor does not embrace disorder long enough to open it. His inflexibility is also seen in the character of Hagar who has been described by Laurence, in an interview with Michel Fabre, as "too rigid". However, as Laurence goes on to point out:

Hagar does only begin to come free when she releases her wilful control over her dead family and her living son and daughter-in-law.(Fabre,195)

Hagar also becomes "free" when she moves away from the confines of her house and, for a brief period of time, finds "personal liberation or freedom" in the new house she makes for herself from the boxes and other odd things discovered in the chaos of the fish cannery.

When she embraces disorder, Hagar joins a class of elderly characters who will not settle for the limits that a life of order imposes. In Jack Hodgins' The Honorary Patron (1987) Jeffrey Crane's elderly sister, Tess, lives in the same sort of chaos that Hagar finds in the fish cannery. Like Hagar, the disorder of her room reflects the disorder of her

mind and Tess openly acknowledges this with the words, "What a mess - this room and me!" (234). Another striking example of such old people in English-Canadian literature is the old woman on the bus in Atwood's poem, "A Bus Along St.Clair: December". This old woman breaks through the house of the self, "destroying/the walls, [and] the ceiling" (Atwood, Journals, 61) and thereby chooses disorder. Such fictional old people join ranks with characters like Grandfather Connor's brother, Uncle Dan, in a class against the likes of Grandfather Connor and Grandmother MacLeod. Uncle Dan not only leaves his fingernail parings scattered on the "polished hardwood floor" (25) of the Brick House, but also sings, smokes and argues with Grandfather Connor within its walls. His presence threatens the order of the Brick House and when he leaves he takes "the sound of the singing" (38) with him. The Brick House can only contain Uncle Dan briefly, but even he can be silenced momentarily within its walls, becoming a "Daniel" in the encaging den of Grandfather Connor. After one of his arguments with Grandfather Connor has been resolved outside, Uncle Dan sits inside with Grandfather and Grandmother Connor and the "three old people" form a *tableau vivant* as they sit "silently in the blue-grey light of the spring evening, the lamps not flicked on yet nor the shades drawn" (35). Inside the Brick House, order has been restored, but its old occupants are confined in a twilight of restrained emotions which offers no defence against the onset of the darkness outside.

Margaret Laurence's portrayal of the everyday lives of people, such as the elderly inhabitants of the Brick House described above, has had a direct influence on the

work of Joan Barfoot. Barfoot comments on this when she reveals in a Books in Canada interview how Margaret Laurence has affected her work. Barfoot's eighty-year-old Aggie in Duet for Three (1985) is reminiscent of Laurence's Hagar, and, in the interview with Stephen Stamp, Barfoot has acknowledged her debt:

It was a great relief to read Margaret Laurence. She was the first person I read who made it obvious that you could write about the ordinary lives of women(Stamp,21)

In Duet for Three, Barfoot explores the "ordinary" life of the elderly Aggie when she describes the bringing down of a trunk and boxes from the attic of Aggie's home into her living room. The literal action of bringing the trunk down suggests the metaphorical one of bringing the hidden recesses of the upper story out and into the living areas of daily lives. Like Hagar, Aggie builds her own fortress of the self. Hagar's true self lies behind the "changing shell" of the body that "houses" (38) her and Aggie's lies behind the sheer size of her body. Weighing over two hundred and seventy pounds, Aggie's "padded body" becomes "a kind of protection" (108), a Brick House whose bulk is perfectly expressive of the sheltering of the psyche:

looking at it from the inside, as its inhabitant, [Aggie] finds it pleasing and comforting, cosy, like a warm house.(53)

When the trunk is brought down from the attic, the "protection" that Aggie has built up

around her begins to crumble and memories which had been suppressed emerge, leading to the possibilities of a new form of ordering and a new sense of self.

In old age, Aggie is confined and imprisoned by a huge body which begins to fail. The novel opens with the "more or less helpless" (2) Aggie trapped in a wet bed waiting for help to arrive. Aggie knows with the wetting of the bed she has "crossed some boundary" (3) and order and control are slipping from her. For Aggie, death represents "loss of control carried to the extreme" (55) and in old age, "[b]its and pieces of her seem to be escaping" (80), leading her to question:

What is going to come of this? She is not used to being frightened. To lose control, to no longer be able to say, Now I shall stand, I want to go here, or there, eat this or that, watch such and such a program, or turn the TV off and read this book - to face losing that is fear. Age and bulk, those are restricting enough.(54)

Barfoot's work is concerned with the uneasy interplay of freedom and control in our lives, the longing for freedom and the fear of losing control in gaining this. In old age, movement is restricted and control gradually taken away. The shelter of a "comforting" house of flesh begins to deteriorate and all that is left is to move beyond the cage of the body to an exploration of the parameters of the mind. "When Aggie awakens" in the opening words of the novel, she is described as "lost for the right word, rooting around for the proper explanation"(2).

In the penultimate chapter, Aggie makes an attempt to find some sort of "explanation" by exploring the contents of her past with her fifty-eight-year-old daughter,

June. Aggie and June's relationship is limited. June would like to turn away from it by placing her mother in a nursing home, but Aggie strongly resists. When Aggie and June contemplate the contents of the old trunk and boxes brought down from the attic the lines of order and control which keep mother and daughter apart begin to break down. Aggie leans forward in her chair and opens up a small space between it and the tight fit of her body. This suggestion of a gap in the wall of the "house" that Aggie has built around herself has parallels in the sense of Aggie also beginning to release herself from her own linguistic prison. Into the space that Aggie creates come words unlike anything that has passed between the two women before. The dialogue between the two women anticipates the new form of ordering that is about to take place. As they go through the boxes, "Aggie supposes it's a good thing to have order emerging" and watches as things are slowly "separated" into

what will be kept (the pictures and books), what will be given away (the pans and bowls and pots) and what will go to the garbage (all those ledgers).(242)

"What will be kept" is what remains of human relationships, the words and stories that Aggie has devoured in the past. "What will be given away" are the kitchen pots and pans from which Aggie has drawn sustenance and which have been the source of her protective layering of flesh. The ledgers will be thrown away. It is time for Aggie to do a different sort of accounting.

In the process of separation and ordering of physical objects, psychological

boundaries begin to change and a new form of order emerges. Barfoot describes Aggie's emerging awareness in old age in simple, practical terms. In one instance, Aggie's response to an old housedress she wore sixty years ago is described:

Here she is ... her body crammed with food of her own making, her mind crammed with stories and with information that sometimes comes in handy, and she's in her own living room with her daughter and a pile of boxes from the past, and her granddaughter will be here soon and she sometimes has accidents in her bed. Some things she might change, but not so many, on the whole.(241)

Similarly, when June questions Aggie about wedding presents from her family, Aggie directs June to a table in the room in which they now sit and the narrator comments:

This is a piece of furniture against the far wall that has been there for years, pretty much unnoticed except for having to be dusted. Short-legged and oval, it has no obvious purpose. Mainly they're in the habit of laying things on it temporarily, like unfinished books or mending. "My father made it," Aggie says, and suddenly sees the curves of the legs, and how it is put together without nails. All the shaping and carving and sanding he must have done, out in the barn, to please his daughter. A gift of his own efforts, a speech he couldn't make. And at the time she hadn't heard.(245)

By placing the table at one of the far edges of the room and associating its use with the instability of disorder, Barfoot suggests a psychological repression that has taken place in Aggie's mind during her long life. Aggie finally sees beneath the temporary disorder of the things left "unfinished" on the table and becomes aware of the harmony expressed in the crafting of the table, the "speech" her father was unable to make. At the age of eighty,

with the disorder of her past placed in front of her, Aggie can now begin a new ordering by turning to the relationship with her father and "mending" it as she listens to his unspoken language across the barriers of death and time.

Aggie's realization about her father is echoed in June's growing awareness of Aggie, as they both sift through Aggie's past. Aggie feels no "real attachment" (246) to any of the things she sees in front of her, but June's attention is caught by Aggie's wedding dress in the trunk. Aggie wants to throw it out and, in an attempt to keep it, June "tears" it and this tear suggests a further opening in the relationship between mother and daughter. June is described as

thinking that maybe if she hung it in her room and stared at it for a time, it might reveal something to her she has never understood.(247)

The breakthrough in their relationship is further suggested in Aggie's feeling that the opening of the boxes and trunk makes it look "as if they've been packing up to move". Aggie does move directly into the beginning of a new relationship with June, when she expresses the fear of an old woman:

"I get frightened, you know," she hears herself saying. Did she actually say that? Must have, June's looking at her so surprised.(247)

By letting go of the order and control which has shaped her life, Aggie breaks from the confinement of the prison of the self and begins an exploration which brings the attic of

the mind into the living room of life.⁷ At the end of the novel, Aggie "reach[es] out" (252) to June and both women move together towards the front door of the house to open it and admit disorder in a "duet for three" which will begin when Aggie's grand-daughter, Frances, enters.

Like Kogawa's Obasan, Aggie perhaps holds "keys to unknown doorways" and, in the opening of doors to admit June and Frances, she unlocks the entrance to her inner self. The first "few shivering steps" towards a "knowledge" and acceptance of age are taken in step with a daughter and towards a grand-daughter. The house of Aggie's body is failing in old age, but in the attic of the mind she is able to discover the foundation of a new form of order, one which is linked with successive generations. In a similar way, the conclusion of Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice (1956) unlocks the doors of the mind to suggest a different ordering. A literally imprisoned grandfather, Abraham, is visited by his grandson, Moses, who becomes aware during the visit that

[i]t was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing upright, with his grandfather leading him, as he always had.(345)

Through her choice of names, Wiseman suggests the ability of the elderly patriarch to lead the younger generation away from the slavery of a locked up and limited "garrison mentality". At the end of a long life, the old people portrayed by Wiseman and Barfoot are linked with the possibilities of other doors opening and a different journey beginning, one that leads away from the "stone house" of the body towards the possibilities of new

forms of order.⁸

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, there are many powerful elderly protagonists in English-Canadian fiction who commence such a journey. They react to the physical sense of confinement and entrapment in old age by initiating an exploration into the distant memories in the attic of the mind. Such an undertaking expands the limited world of the old by leading them along the pathways of retrospect towards a new sense of order as the journey of life nears its end. The relationship between ordering and retrospect is one to which we now turn.

Chapter 2

Looking Back in Old Age: Ordering and Retrospect in the Journey of Life

... I do have, both in my own life and in my life view, a sense of the wheel coming full circle, that kind of journey where we end up in the place where we began, but with a different perspective.

Margaret Laurence (Sullivan,69)

In the literature of old age, many elderly protagonists are depicted as spectators looking back on a long life and attempting "a different perspective" as this life nears its end. Through retrospect, a route into the past is opened and a journey into memory begun. Just as new forms of ordering are suggested when the past is brought down from the attic of the mind, so too is this sense of ordering continued in the journey of retrospect, a journey which has been described in Chapter One as taking the old away from the house of the failing body and towards new dimensions of the inner self. Getting out of the "house" by journeying into the past and unlocking new doors into the self seems incumbent upon the old. In "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged", a clinical study published in 1963, Robert N. Butler postulates the

universality of the life review process in older people. Butler notes that not only does proximity to death stimulate this process, but also in many instances it seems to come unbidden, as part of old age itself. T.S. Eliot suggests such a process in "Little Gidding" when he describes one of "the gifts reserved for age" as "the rending pain of re-enactment/Of all that you have done, and been"(142). In an example taken from life, the words of the seventy-nine-year-old Crossing-Keeper's son in Ronald Blythe's The View in Winter (1979) also suggest this spontaneity:

Father's chair - fancy me a-thinkin' o' that now! But that's how it is when you're an old un, it all kin-a starts up agin, the long ago. As plain as lookin' out that winder.(46)

The origin of a similar natural link between old age and the journey into memory is noted and questioned in "Locked In", one of the poems in Running Out the Clock (1991), a collection of poems by the seventy-year-old Canadian poet, Raymond Souster. "Locked In" describes a journey taken into the past and the unlocking of a memory from childhood, the discovery of "[o]ne more nightmare it seems/deep from the past", that of a boy of ten unwittingly locking himself and a young friend into the "small, dark, unknown space" of a farmhouse closet. What Souster cannot understand is why this particular memory has chosen to "surface unannounced, catching [him]/completely off guard" sixty years after the incident took place. In the closing lines of the poem, Souster questions,

And still I have to ask again - why today
 did this memory have to well up from the past,
 why the waiting all these years for this burden
 to be finally lifted from my heart,
 to wash me free again
 in the tears of childhood, of lost innocence? (110)

A possible answer to Souster's question lies in the fact that retrospect itself is a form of ordering, one which is an integral part of the ageing process and one which unlocks the doors which must be opened in preparation for approaching death. Through retrospect, the wheel of life is turned back to youth and childhood and in many instances, but not all, new pathways are opened towards a different kind of homecoming. The old person ends the journey of life where he or she began it, seeing its full span with a perspective which is only possible when age restricts the physical momentum of life and the journey comes "full circle" in some yet "untrodden" pathways of the mind.¹

Two of the most common images used in the fictional presentation of retrospect are the journey and the circle. Three novels stand out as providing these images in such detail that they contribute significantly to an analysis of old age in fiction. Frederick Philip Grove's Our Daily Bread (1928) and The Master of the Mill (1944) place the images of the journey and the circle amidst an abundance of realistic detail and Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel (1964) does likewise. Laurence also makes use of the image of water and her artistic technique suggests a link between all three images and the final phase of the life journey of the ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley. All three novels will be discussed later in this chapter.

The images of the journey and the circle contained in the "story" of a life are examples of larger archetypal images, images commented upon by Thomas R. Cole in The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America (1992). Cole discusses the history of the image of the circle in the journey of life motif, noting its antecedents in the medieval wheel of life and the wheel of Fortune. In her work on the *Vollendungsroman*, Constance Rooke has taken this circle image and used it to illustrate her concept of the different phases of the life cycle. In "Old Age in Contemporary Fiction", Rooke notes that she coined the term *Vollendungsroman* by comparing the novels of old age with those of the "bildungsroman", the novels of youthful development. She feels that the "novels of growing up" complement the novels of "completion or winding up" in old age. The two genres are inter-related in Rooke's depiction of the circular progression of life, and she sees a link between the first task in youth with its "construction of ego" and the last task of old age with its "deconstruction" (245). For Rooke, "deconstruction" in old age depends upon the ability of the elderly protagonist to move away from the house of the body and its "furniture" of identity, into "the natural world" (255).

English-Canadian fiction provides many examples of fictional old people who get out and away from their house and seek a more natural environment, one in which the image of a circular journey is often associated with what Rooke calls the "formlessness and mobility" of the image of water (255). Hagar Shipley's journey from her house to an abandoned cannery next to the ocean at Shadow Point is a notable example. Another example occurs in Janette Turner Hospital's short story, "I Saw Three Ships", in which Old Gabe leaves his rooming house to fish by the ocean. Here he is described as "reeling

in his past" and thinking, "The whole wheeling world comes back to where it started, there's no help for it" (Isobars,84).

The circular journey through memory meets the human need for movement which continues into old age. This need is one which is frustrated by a lack of physical mobility in old age, but one which can be met in the journeyings of retrospect. As the English writer Ronald Blythe points out in The View in Winter:

The most irreconcilable aspect of age is the destruction of progressive movement, that hard fact of having come to the end of the journey when custom and instinct still insist that one can and should go on.(5)

The interviews of old people that Blythe conducted suggested to him that the old return to the memories of childhood because it is there that they find the "pace" they need. He feels that, through retrospect, these old people are able to "embark ... for the beginning, where things still move fast and are bright and clearly defined" (5). This continuing desire for movement in life, is particularly appropriate to a consideration of old age in English-Canadian fiction. In Divisions on a Ground (1982), Northrop Frye notes the Canadian "obsession with movement and transportation", the "restlessness" and "constant movement up and down [the] immensely long and narrow corridor" that is Canada(50). Such movement is analogous to that of the elderly protagonists in Canadian fiction who pace "up and down" the physical limits of the house they have placed against Nature. The house becomes a metaphor for the limits of their ageing bodies and many of these old protagonists displace their restlessness into a journey away from the body and into the

mind.

In old age, the journey into memory is selective and makes use of the imagination to find some meaning and order at the end of a long life. In "Reminiscence and the Life Review: Prospects and Retrospects" (1986), Kathleen Woodward analyzes several works of fiction including Joyce Cary's To Be a Pilgrim (1942) and Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (1958). Woodward suggests that the use of the imagination in old age is similar to the use of the imagination in the writing of literature. In an introduction to Woodward's article, Sally Gadow comments:

Behind each of [Woodward's] analyses looms the question central to the issue of meaning in aging: Is the act of imagination that creates, for example, literary works, the same process whereby the individual makes meaning and sense of aging? (Woodward,135)

A similar creative process is noted a few years later by the psychologist, Edmund Sherman, in Reminiscence and the Self in Old Age (1991). Sherman observes the "narrative function of reminiscence" in the old and "the tendency of the elderly participants [in his study] to attempt to integrate their life narratives, to make their life histories cohere into a unity" (Sherman,88).

The link between the creating of a life story in old age and the construction of a work of fiction is not only apparent through the use of the imagination, but also through the use of imagery. In "Hagar's Old Age: The Stone Angel as *Vollendungsroman*", Constance Rooke notes the connection between Robert Butler's clinical observation of

the life review as "a highly visual process" (Butler,68) and the visual aspects contained in the imagery used in the "*literary process*". As Rooke points out,

The verisimilitude of Hagar's 'poetic voice', as a register of proliferating images - birds and eggs, for example, images that we associate with death and captivity and rebirth - is vindicated by Butler's work.(39)

Earlier in the same article, Rooke comments directly on the way Hagar writes the story of her life:

Hagar is not unlike her author in the need to tease out and shape the meanings of her material. Memory is an art.(29)

Further, in "Old Age in Contemporary Fiction: A New Paradigm, of Hope", Rooke has remarked upon the importance of the life review as "a common structural device" and in "Oh What a Paradise It Seems: John Cheever's Swan Song", she comments on new perspectives which can be obtained through the process of the life review. As she explores the relationship between Cheever's old age and approaching death and his last text, Rooke is aware of what she calls the "fictionality of life [which] is suggested by the analogy between living and writing a life story". She goes on to observe:

The elderly protagonist is often cast as a person looking back on (or reading) the "story" that he or she has written and continues to write in life. In selecting, shaping, and evaluating the data of memory, the protagonist (as author and critic) creates once more a sense of identity (the

protagonist as fictional character).(209)

An awareness of new perspectives and new life stories to be created through retrospect has also been commented upon in sociological studies of the life review. In his book, Ageing and Reminiscence Processes: Social and Clinical Implications (1986), Peter G. Coleman notes that the significance of events in life cannot be appreciated fully at the time, but only later in retrospect. For him, the "achieving of a perspective depends on a view from a distance" (3); the further on in life one is, the more connections can be made between events. Coleman goes on to comment on "the development of a 'lifespan perspective' on ageing" (6) in gerontological studies and acknowledges that to properly understand the behaviour of the old in the present, consideration must be taken of their memories of the distant past. Coleman's observations are analogous to the possibilities of Laurence's awareness of a "different perspective" as the wheel of life turns "full circle". As the old travel towards new and distant horizons of the self in old age, events from the past can be seen as life's turning points and the process of ordering a life can begin.

To understand the process of retrospective ordering and the part it plays in the journey of life, this chapter will initially explore the ordering involved in the self-editing and writing of a life through retrospect. Robertson Davies' Fifth Business (1970), Janette Turner Hospital's The Tiger in the Tiger Pit (1983) and Jane Rule's short story, "Puzzle", will first be commented upon as providing clear examples of the artistic technique that can be used to describe the way an elderly protagonist becomes the author of his or her own life and begins to write the novel of this life through a retrospective

journey into memory. Following this, the main images used in the way retrospect is presented in the fiction of old age will be discussed.

The writing of a life story is a task undertaken by the schoolmaster, Dunstan Ramsay, in Robertson Davies' Fifth Business (1970). Ramsay writes his "memoir" (15) in the form of a report to the Headmaster of his school. At the opening of the second section of the first chapter he questions:

But why, you will ask, am I writing to you at all? Why, after a professional association of so many years, during which I have been reticent about my personal affairs, am I impelled now to offer you such a statement as this? (5-6)

His answer reflects his need, at the age of seventy-one, to make things right, to become the author of his own life. He has undertaken to write his life story because he objects to a piece in the school's *College Chronicle* which he sees as portraying him "as a typical old schoolmaster doddering into retirement with tears in his eyes and a drop hanging from his nose" (6). His role as editor of his own life is evident when he comments, "it is not by piling up detail that I hope to achieve my picture, but by putting the emphasis where I think it belongs" (9). As noted in the Introduction, when Davies employs the strategy of using an elderly protagonist, he too, like Ramsay, places the "emphasis where [he] think[s] it belongs", rather than attempting to examine the process of ageing.

The selective ordering of the life story constructed by the old in fiction is even more explicit in Hospital's The Tiger in the Tiger Pit. In this novel, the seventy-three-year-old Edward Carpenter laments being "muzzled to [an] unedited and unacceptable life" (43). He dreams of an "alternate autobiography" and the narrator comments:

It seemed to him expedient now to edit and revise his life, to compose a variant past, to approach death from a different and more bearable direction.(15)

The process of editing and revising is not an easy one, but the selection process protects the author. As Edward observes,

How selective the memory gets, coddling and pandering.(112)

What Edward cannot bear is the "torturing knowledge of the turning points, with no possibility of skipping a chapter, going back a page, excising" (112), the acknowledgment that "[a]fter seventy, one craved unremittingly for the roads not taken" (14). Faced with the prospect of such mental anguish, Edward concludes, "I have to edit" (113). His decision and its selective nature are seen as a stay against mental chaos, against the bad decisions and poor choices in a life. The appeal of retrospect is evident when Edward ruminates:

Revised editions possible, no doubt, and maybe even beneficial. Try again,

begin again. Fast forward in time. Experiment number two: things as they *might* have happened. Should have happened.(71)

Edward builds an alternate route through memory, a new construct which turns him in a different direction and allows him to create a satisfactory "ending" (242) to the story of his life.²

From the above, it can be seen that the retrospect of an elderly protagonist can lead to a form of ordering. In some instances, such a protagonist is actually portrayed as an author, one who is inadvertently also in the process of shaping his or her life story. An example of this occurs in Jane Rule's short story, "Puzzle". Here Ella Carr, an elderly writer in her late seventies, attempts to put together and complete the "puzzle" of her life. As the narrator comments:

Dying is gathering up the pieces, the bright and the dark, fitting them together, puzzling out the true picture, seeing it at last. ("Puzzle", 273)

Not all elderly protagonists in English-Canadian fiction who journey into retrospect are depicted, like Ella, as seeking the answer to the puzzle of life. In Joyce Marshall's short story, "So Many Have Died", ninety-one-year-old Georgiana Dinsborough has no desire to become the author of her long life, but accepts memory as "pure memory" and not as a source for questions to be answered. As the narrator describes it:

From time to time she considered her life (or, as it sometimes seemed, her

life came back to consider her) though more as pure memory, she had to admit, than as material for questions she must answer.(Marshall,99)

As an agnostic, Georgiana's responds to old age by writing her life in the present; she performs and plays the expected "*caricature*" (102, 106) of old age for her family, but has found her own old age "hideous" and without form, a "feeling of looseness, of belonging nowhere, not even with her own body". For Georgiana,

The gaieties of old age were like the rare gaieties of adolescence, same sense of spinning off towards some wonderful country that was waiting to receive you if you could only find the way. But now you knew there was no such country and no way, and treasured and drank the joy.(110)

Georgiana is described as having "trained herself to think along the edge of her mind" (105). She has no desire to give shape and form to her life through the exercise of imagination on memory and no desire to "find the way" to other countries of the mind.

When elderly protagonists do undertake an interior journey of the mind, this journey is often mirrored by an actual journey in the course of the novel. Before the journey is undertaken, some of these protagonists are depicted metaphorically as chafing restlessly against the limitations of the "house" they live in. Two of Frederick Philip Grove's characters fit into this scenario. As we have already seen, in Our Daily Bread the

sixty-eight-year-old John Elliot is portrayed as confined to his house and repeatedly walking up and down one room. From here, he eventually sets out on a solitary journey to the distant homes of his children. Similarly, as we shall soon see, in The Master of the Mill, Grove's Sam Clark, an old man in his eighties, is described in the opening paragraph as restlessly pacing up and down a large hall of his house. Sam, too, gets out and away in the regular solitary car rides he takes through "The Loop" outside his home. In a similar way, Margaret Laurence's Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel is also depicted as being confined with a restless energy indoors and eventually breaking out into new paths of awareness. The ninety-year-old Hagar initially describes herself as "stump[ing] around [her] room, remembering furiously" and as being "rampant with memory" (3). Hagar eventually gets away from this room and her house and journeys alone by bus to Shadow Point, a place from her past.

The solitary journey that Elliot, Sam and Hagar take in old age back into the far reaches of the mind reflects another aspect of the Canadian sensibility. Exploration and isolation are familiar themes in Canadian literature and, as Margaret Atwood has noted in Survival (1972),

Pushed a little further, the "exploration" story takes on overtones of another kind of journey into the unknown: the journey into the unknown regions of the self(113)

Such an individual journey into the mind has overtones of what Northrop Frye has described in The Bush Garden (1971) as particularly Canadian, a "feeling for the immense

searching distance, with the lines of communication extended to the absolute limit". For Frye, the Canadian perspective is "horizon-focussed" (10) and he sees this sense of "probing into the distance" as something inherited from the Canadian *voyageurs* (222). It is also an aspect of the larger archetypal image contained in literature in such works as Tennyson's "Ulysses" or T.S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages". Both of these works present a resonant image of ageing travellers still striving forward even as old age signals the final phase in the voyage of life. In old age, the traveller journeys towards distant horizons which are far away from the house of the ageing body. The unknown horizons of life are striven for by travelling through new pathways of the mind, pathways which can only be determined from the distant perspective possible at the end of a long life.³

The perspective of an old person is the focus of the opening pages of Our Daily Bread, The Master of the Mill and The Stone Angel. In all three instances, emphasis is placed on the visual aspect of the life review process contained in the pages which follow. Though only fifty-five when Our Daily Bread begins, John Elliot Senior resembles an old man, dressed in grey and "grey of hair and beard" (3), as he surveys his farm property from a vantage point halfway up a slope which leads away from his house. Later in the novel, Elliot is described as becoming a "spectator" (134) in life. In the opening paragraph of The Master of the Mill, Sam Clark is portrayed as an "old, old man" (1) who constantly seeks the view at night from one of the windows of his hillside home. Towards the end of the novel, he, too, is described in a similar fashion to Elliot, as "standing outside of things, a bewildered looker-on" (371). Further, The Stone Angel opens with the voice of ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley recalling the "sightless eyes" of the stone angel which

"viewed" (3) Manawaka from the edge of a hill above the town. In each instance, the opening focus on perspective is followed by the elderly protagonist undertaking an interior journey of the mind. As the old person begins the journey of retrospect, he or she turns from the restricted perspective of the view outside the self to the boundless view inside.

In Our Daily Bread, Frederick Philip Grove uses the image of the journey to explore a time in Elliot's life when he begins to move out of the passage of chronological time and into "visions of the past" (182). The first focus on these visions occurs when Elliot visits the house of his daughter, Cathleen. The narrative is interrupted at this point and Elliot is, in effect, placed on stage at his daughter's home as he tells "stories and anecdotes" (181) from his past. This episode is contained in Book Two in the chapter "John Elliot Goes A-Travelling". At this point, Elliot is still in his fifties, but as he enters his seventies in "Book Three: In Exile", the emphasis on both physical and psychological journeys increases. In the chapter "John Elliot Passes from Hand to Hand" (350) Elliot visits several of the homes of his scattered children and during his travels "the old man" begins to "[lose] track of the passage of time". As the narrator describes it,

occasionally he would obstinately, persistently act and speak as if the time were not the present but the past.(350)

Earlier in Book Three, Elliot begins to become aware of "curious lapses" of thought, "as if the continuity of time were broken" (302). As he looks back on the past, Elliot searches

it for the sense of order and continuity he finds missing in old age.

Elliot's search leads him, through retrospect, back to a "vision" (243) of the past containing an idealised version of his early life with his wife, Martha, their children and the family house in Sedgeby, Saskatchewan. This vision is first described when Elliot is sixty-eight, with "[o]ld age ... approaching" (242). As he sits in his now empty house, he is described as having "eyes [which] were unseeing" and yet which

seemed to see things: the children at play after dark, in this very dining room, by the light of the lamp, with Gladys knitting perhaps, she being the oldest, and with his wife sitting by, her hands in her lap, and looking on over the rim of her glasses.(243)

As he ages, Elliot lives more and more with such "phantoms of the past" (352) and turns increasingly back to this vision.

In the final chapter of the novel, "A Last Emotion and a Pilgrimage", the vision of the house at Sedgeby is described as having one major "flaw" (375): Elliot sees it exactly as it was twenty years ago and makes no allowance for the passage of time. By the end of the novel it is this "vision" that lies behind all this "thoughts" and "reflections" and to which he clings as he makes his final journey, one in which he circles back to his "empty house" (377). So desperate is Elliot for this vision of the past that he finally crawls towards it on his hands and knees (388). Tragically, Elliot's wanderings have not led him into any new pathways of the mind. He does journey out and away from the house and life he knew as a younger man, but is unable to find new pathways in old age and is forced back

to a static vision of the past. This vision is linked to a journey that concludes with the physical reality of death in the body of a decaying house.

The image of the journey is also pivotal to the portrayal of Sam Clark in The Master of the Mill. In this later work, Grove explores in more detail what happens to an old person when he or she looks back over a long life. Like Elliot, Sam undertakes a circular journey, but his is by car in the regular driving of "The Loop" which he has established outside his home. Sam's repetitive circular journey is analogous to that of the elderly Japanese cyclist in Jack Hodgins' short story, "The Sumo Revisions", contained in The Barclay Family Theatre (1981). Hodgins' old cyclist rides all day, every day, around the edge of the moat which surrounds the Emperor's palace. As with Sam, there is a positive sense of trying to escape and yet a sense of danger also exists alongside any attempt to break out of the circle. Both authors suggest the liberating and dangerous consequences of such an action. Sam's request to stop at the fork of the road on one of these journeys around "The Loop" is precipitated by the movement of the car down "a steep slope", one which results in him "opening his eyes" (97) to one of the turning points in his life. In this instance, Grove revivifies a dead metaphor and makes it new by having Sam travel down an actual geographical slope. The journey down this slope is necessary if Sam is going to be able to find the way to a new psychological perspective.⁴

As in Our Daily Bread, The Master of the Mill offers the reader a glimpse into the psychology of an old man's mind. As Rudy Wiebe has pointed out in "A Novelist's Personal Notes on Frederick Philip Grove",

a Grove novel can teach a young writer a great deal about "stills", vivid motionless pictures where everything for a moment stands as still, suspended as if caught in a perfect mirror. (Wiebe, 219)

In the opening scene of The Master of the Mill, the reader is offered "stills" which, as Grove describes it in It Needs To Be Said ... (1929), enable the reader to "look on at what is happening from the inside" (Grove, 76). The "old, old man" described at the beginning of the first chapter is not named as Sam Clark straight away and thus Grove presents the reader with the "still" of an anonymous old man. The reader becomes a spectator to the journey of retrospect in the old and to the mental struggle of coming to terms with the need for such a journey as death draws near.

As Sam stands near the window in the opening scene of The Master of the Mill, he is described as realising

that what he was doing in thus analysing and finally reviewing his life was preparing himself for death. He was setting his mental and spiritual house in order; not until he had done so could he rest, could he lie in peace(5)

At the end of life, Sam stands positioned for the final analysis of a past which is almost complete and for the viewpoint of a final perspective. In "analysing" and "reviewing" a life, different interpretations are possible. Grove acknowledges this in "Rebels All" when he states:

The world of facts is unknown to us. The world of our interpretations is

known. Even in our own lives, in looking back, we do not see the facts, but merely our interpretations of those facts Who has not gone through the experience that the interpretation of an episode changed as life proceeded?(74)

As an author, Grove prepares his reader to watch the process of Sam's "interpretation" of his life. Author, reader and elderly protagonist are all spectators, with both author and reader watching the interpretative process of an "old, old man". In "Flaubert's Theories of Artistic Existence", Grove defines the artist as "spectator" (4). His position is mirrored in the placing of Sam where he can look through a window at life and begin a retrospective journey in which he becomes the author of a life which can be interpreted and "justified in his eyes" (387).

As he begins this journey, Sam is also being watched by two women who have had roles to play in his life. Grove presents a picture of two women looking at each other and at the old man who gets up to look at a view that he has "carefully avoided" in earlier times. The suggestion is implicit that only in old age is he ready to approach this view. The first words of the novel record a "smile of comprehension" (1) which passes between the two women. However, the narrator is quick to point out that "it was doubtful whether either of the women realized what went on in the old man" (2). The view of the women is limited and, at the close of the chapter, the narrator again refers to the inadequacy of their response, in particular that of Sam's daughter-in-law, Lady Clark:

The historic bearings of [Sam's] life escaped her as they escaped the other woman. She saw in him simply a human being that had lived beyond his

time, lovable, frail, and tragic because he who had once been young was old
....(6)

A true picture of Sam is beyond the two women, and, in turn, his view is poorly defined. He looks from the window across a space between the house and the mill which has played such a pivotal part in his life. The mill now has no more than a "shadowy existence" (3) and his contemplation of it takes place "night after night" (1,4), never in the light of day.

The opening emphasis on age and perspective continues in the rest of the first chapter. Sam is described as an "old man ... in his hoary old age" (3,4), one who repeatedly seeks the same view:

Night after night he rose at last and went to the window, here in the hall, or upstairs in the gallery, to stare at the mill, at first puzzled, but gradually working out in his mind certain things which, the clearer they became, the more amazed him. Till at last, in order to explain them to himself, he began to review his whole life; or at least such parts of that life as stood out with sufficient decisiveness.(4)

The fragmentation of Sam's life review into "parts" emphasises his particular perspective, one that can only make sense "to himself". Grove's focus on the life review process of one old man is evident in the "inevitable form" he claimed to have found for this novel. In her article, "The 'Message' and the 'Inevitable Form' in The Master of the Mill", Beverley Mitchell quotes Grove's comment that this was "the only form in which the book [could] convey its message" (Mitchell,74). Grove wrote at least eight versions of the novel, all of

which have been examined by Robin Mathews. In "F.P. Grove: An Important Version of The Master of the Mill Discovered", Mathews describes the difference between the published version and what he calls "the Edmund version" (Mathews,23). In the published text he notes that "the memory and recall structure is increased", and that

Grove's shift of narrative technique in the published text is dependent upon his rearrangement of time in the novel. Both versions relate a large chunk of history. But the Edmund version deals, step by step, with a large slice of Sam's life. The published text concentrates everything into the last days of Sam's life, during which time he is reviewing his soul's history(248)

Grove's "inevitable form" can thus be seen to change the focus of the novel to the retrospect of an old man in "the last days" of his life.

Having established the need for retrospect in an old man, Grove closes the first chapter by embarking Sam on a new journey. He does this in a significant way that will also be seen in the analysis of Laurence's The Stone Angel. Both works are planned so that small details have a larger significance than merely being part of a realistic background or ordering of events. At the end of the opening chapter, Grove turns Sam back away from the window and places him under the light of an enormous chandelier, the light from which is fragmented by its crystals. The focus is now on Sam as he purposefully changes course and heads for the door of the library, planning to sleep there and not continue with the regular route to his bedroom at night. He makes for the library door "without stopping" (6) and thus figuratively steps into a different psychological room, one that will

give shape to an "old man's thought" (2) with the order and meaning of words. By choosing a different route, Sam steps into chambers of his mind which will take him away from routine thought and into the more difficult mental challenge of interpreting a life through retrospect.

Entering different chambers of the mind is something which is only possible for Sam in old age. At one point in the novel, Sam is described as having spent a lifetime outside the conversations of any rooms he might have entered:

he was like one entering a room where there was in progress a conversation to which he had neither clue nor cue; and such rooms he had been entering throughout his life.(371)

As he travels into memory, Sam is able to move away from the position of spectator into psychological rooms in which he is an intimate participant in the "conversation". At one point, he is described as sharing the "vision" of an old man with Lady Clark. As has been noted, the thoughts of Sam and the two women in the room with him as the novel begins are completely separated. However, as an ailing Sam journeys through retrospect and Lady Clark nurses him,

suddenly, by a sort of transference of thought, she became aware that the visions, hers and the old man's, had merged; as if their blood were beating in a common pulse. She knew that he saw what she saw(264)

Shortly afterwards, another "fleeting" recollection seems "once more to make one mind

out of two" (269). This "transference of thought" is only momentary and then the paths taken are again in different directions.

Grove carefully ensures that Sam's journey into the past is not just seen as the description of an old man's reflections. At the opening of the second chapter the narrator comments:

Reliving a past life is a different thing from merely reflecting upon it.(7)

At this point, Sam actually begins to relive the journey of his life and Grove marks this turning point by having Sam once again move towards the window from which he can see the mill. He is described as doing this when things begin to "crystallize" in his mind and at this moment, the window becomes "blurred" with rain and the reflection of the mill in the water is "shattered and broken into a million luminous shards". The outline of the mill appears "to stand behind a veil". Instead of looking "through the glass", Sam turns away from "merely reflecting" towards actually "reliving a past life" (7) and through this he considers the multiple possibilities of its interpretation. As at the end of the first chapter, what goes on in the "room" of Sam's mind is spotlighted. However, now the view sought is no longer exterior, but the interior vision of the mind.

The first instance of Sam's actually "reliving" the past is figuratively presented as Sam makes one of his routine journeys through "The Loop" outside his home. He breaks out of the routine "loop" of "merely reflecting" on the past and orders his driver to stop at a "fork" in the road; one path of this fork leads to the house, one to the stables

and "car-sheds" (97). Sam rejects the latter and heads on foot to the house and the room of his choice at the end of the first chapter, the library. Once in the library, Sam walks into his past and begins the journey into a new aspect of the self, one that is not illuminated by the "shards" of a crystal chandelier, but one that is exposed in the library under the constant light of an "electric floor-lamp". As the narrator notes, later that same day,

the senator, in evening clothes, still impersonating the man he had been, was in the library, poring over the old plans under the light of an electric floor-lamp. He was not conscious of any impersonation; he was reliving, living the past.(107)

Sam's journey into the past is broken when Lady Clark enters the library and turns on the lights of the chandelier above him. This light brings Sam back into the present and illuminates the figure of a shattered old man:

Painfully, the senator awoke to reality. He was not Sam; this was not Maud [Sam's wife]. It was that Maud who was Lady Clark; and he was a man over eighty years old.

It was too much of a shock; he sat down; and the tears were running down his hollow cheeks.(113)

Reliving the past brings home to Sam the stark reality of the physical present. One of the elderly protagonists in Jane Rule's Memory Board (1987) encapsulates this idea of travelling between the physical and the spiritual when he is described as thinking that

"[w]e park our bodies like cars ... and walk off into books, memories, dreams, and the more intense the experience is the harder it is to find our way back into our fleshly means of transport" (232). Grove's portrayal of Sam suggests this difficulty through the image of despairing old age surrounded by the books of a library and the memories of a past.

From the vantage point of old age, the elderly protagonist is able to look back and see retrospectively the turning points in life's journey. What may not have had much significance at the time takes on a new importance in retrospect. Grove presents this new direction in thought when he has Sam literally stop at the fork in the road before embarking on a different psychological pathway. Sam's recollections are voluntary; he requests a second ride around "The Loop" so that he can continue with the progress of his memories. Margaret Laurence, on the other hand, uses memory triggers as a structural device to take the old person back to the critical moments of a life. As she notes in "Gadgetry or Growing: Form and Voice in the Novel",

All Hagar's memories are touched off by something which occurs in her present, and I think this is legitimate and the way it really happens.(83)

In The Stone Angel, Hagar's journey into retrospect is triggered not only by external objects such as the painting on the wall of her doctor's waiting-room (82), but also by the

recollection of "the scent of cowslips" shortly after which she describes herself as being "rampant with memory" (5). Jack Hodgins uses a similar device in The Honorary Patron (1987) when he describes the elderly Professor Crane's memory as being sent "reeling back" (13) by the scent of lily of the valley. When Hagar's memories are evoked, she begins a retrospective journey and her first-person narrative implies an attempt to order the life she has lived by the telling of its story.

Margaret Laurence often spoke of the structural problems of moving between the present and the past in fiction. In "Gadgetry or Growing", she comments on the trouble she had with the form of The Stone Angel and its "flashbacks" into the past from the present tense. Laurence's dilemma lay in deciding whether the flashbacks should be in chronological order and she acknowledges that this ordering "is *not*, after all, the way people actually remember" ("Gadgetry", 56). However, Laurence chose this method to simplify things for the reader. In a similar way, Grove's choice of chronological flashbacks for Sam Clark facilitates the reader's approach to what can be a confusing novel. For Laurence, part of the reason the flashback method works in the portrayal of Hagar is that Hagar "is so old, is living largely in her past, does - like many old people - remember the distant past better than more recent events" (83). In order to enter this past Laurence uses the image of the journey to allow a technical narrative perspective which encompasses a vast span of time in Hagar's life.

Like Sam, when Hagar journeys into memory in The Stone Angel, she too travels down a "steep slope". The "steep slopes" at Shadow Point lead her down to some of her darkest and most repressed memories. Arriving by truck at the entrance to Shadow

Point she comments,

...I'm standing among trees that extend all the way down the steep slopes to the sea.(150)

Hagar moves down her "steep slopes" to the old fish cannery. Here, she first settles down in what was possibly the manager's home and from this abandoned building she notes that

The windows are broken and when I look outside I see a larger building a short distance away, right beside the sea.(153)

Hagar then moves from the ground floor of this building upstairs to an empty bedroom, and here again the emphasis is on her view:

From the bedroom window I can look out to the darkening trees and beyond them to the sea. Who would have thought I'd have a room with a view?(155)

By having Hagar journey down "steep slopes" and then from room to room at different levels in the shell of a home, Laurence employs a form which suggests the descent of the body towards death and the possibilities which exist when "a room with a view" is included amongst the chambers of the mind. By moving Hagar from room to room in the fish cannery Laurence suggests a journey through the different rooms of the mind and an approach to death which is analogous to that described by Morley Callaghan in A Wild

Old Man on the Road (1988), a novel written when Callaghan was himself eighty-five. In this novel, the sixty-two-year-old Jeremy Monk's "voyages" are likened to those of the "ancient mariner" (115) and Jeremy describes his final voyage into death as "*just like opening a door into another room*" (181). In a similar way, Laurence's use of the image of a "chambered nautilus" (162) in Hagar's description of herself when she moves, yet again, into the fish cannery itself, reflects Hagar's journey from one room to another. The many-chambered spiral shell of the nautilus has an interior of pearl and the sheen of a different perspective becomes possible for Hagar in the depths of the memories evoked at Shadow Point.⁵

To set her "mental and spiritual house in order", Hagar, like Sam, turns away from the view outside to a view within. After her first night at Shadow Point, she is awakened by rain "slanting in" (161) through a broken window pane. The rain coming in through Hagar's window is a similar artistic construct to the tear in the screen of the window in Edward Carpenter's room in Hospital's The Tiger in the Tiger Pit. Further, such techniques resemble Grove's use of blurring and broken images associated with rain at a window in The Master of the Mill. It was at that point in Grove's novel that Sam began to relive his past; similarly, as Hagar lies behind the broken window with the rain coming in, there is a shift in her thought processes. For the first time in the novel, she loses her bearings and what has been, before this, embarrassment at absent-minded mistakes becomes now a fully fledged mental shift into reliving another time. Hagar believes she is back in her house with her son Marvin and his wife, and not at Shadow Point.

Hagar's description of the rain opens one chapter of her stay at Shadow Point, while the subsequent chapter begins with a description of the sun. In this chapter, Hagar's "journey" continues as she moves "out the door" (186) of the manager's old house towards her psychological "well in the wilderness" (187). Laurence has discussed the biblical analogy in The Stone Angel and remarks that, "in the case of my Hagar, the wilderness is within" (Fabre,198). In her stay at Shadow Point, Hagar progresses from self-doubt to self-knowledge, by exploring the deepest parts of her personal wilderness. From the wilderness without she moves to the wilderness within and this movement is figuratively expressed in her words:

Then I cross the weed-grown lane, open the cannery door, and look inside.(214)

When Hagar opens the door of the cannery she is brought "full circle" back to the junkyard of Manawaka. The inside of the cannery is "[a] place of remnants and oddities" (215), a "wilderness" of memories of another time.

Inside the cannery, Hagar begins what Rooke has termed the "deconstruction of ego". As she approaches Shadow Point by bus, Hagar describes herself as sitting "[r]igid as marble ... solid and stolid to outward view" (146). Now she becomes a Lear-like inhabitant of the natural world. With June bugs adorning her hair, she describes herself as "queen of moth-millers, empress of earwigs" (216). In a world reverting to nature, one which man has abandoned, Hagar is constantly aware of the presence of the ocean. She

sees it from the manager's empty house and now sits among relics which make the cannery resemble the "sea-chest of some old and giant sailor", with ropes "like tired serpents" and the "skeleton" of a "derelict fishboat" (215). Only after Murray F. Lees joins her in this setting is Hagar able to describe the reaction of an old woman to the proximity of the sea, an indefinable and uncontrollable element from which she is now only separated by the skeletal framework of the cannery. Hagar's description suggests the psychological turmoil of the Ancient Mariner that she so resembles at this point and to which Laurence alludes earlier in the text when Hagar describes herself as an "old mariner", refers to the albatross and quotes directly from Coleridge's poem (186). Now Hagar's mental distress is evident in the following:

Outside, the sea nuzzles at the floorboards that edge the water. If I were alone, I wouldn't find the sound soothing in the slightest. I'd be drawn out and out, with each receding layer of water to its beginning, a depth as alien and chill as some far frozen planet, a night sea hoarding sly-eyed serpents, killer whales, swarming phosphorescent creatures dead to the daytime, a black sea sucking everything into itself, the spent gull, the trivial garbage from boats, and men protected from eternity only by their soft and fearful flesh and their seeing eyes. But I have a companion and so I'm safe, and the sea is only the sound of water slapping against the planking.(224-5)

By placing the ninety-year-old Hagar in a deteriorating building next to the ocean, Laurence presents the image of an old woman with a failing body sitting on the edge of the formlessness of eternity, far removed from the security of the bodily house which has offered her shape and form for most of her life. As noted in chapter one, Hagar's sense of identity is closely tied to the house she lives in. At Shadow Point, Hagar

is separated from her house and the "shreds and remnants of years" (36) it contains, and new voyages into realms away from physical objects remain the only possibility. In "Oh What a Paradise It Seems: John Cheever's Swan Song" Constance Rooke comments on the link between this process and the use of the image of water in the *Vollendungsroman*:

[Water] generally signifies the flux and open form of nature and is associated with the fear of death and the hope of spiritual renewal. Often it is opposed to the house, which is an image of society as opposed to nature and the protective carapace of a singular identity; typically, the aged protagonist moves away from the particular house and towards universal water. Water functions most powerfully as a symbol of the universal quadrant from which we came and to which we must return.(222)

The need for "spiritual renewal" is suggested when Hagar picks up a pile of empty scallop shells left inside the cannery and probably collected to be used as ash trays. She notes the intricate "outside" of each shell, the way "the sea clings to them still" and that "the bland inner shell [is] coated with a silken enamel of diluted pearl" (216). Hagar wakes into a new form of awareness on her last morning in the cannery and what she has observed in the scallops becomes a figurative representation of what she now perceives. With the light "sting[ing]" her eyes she reaches a turning point. The eyes that have resembled those of the "sightless" (3) stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery now begin to see, and Hagar realizes:

Things never look the same from the outside as they do from the inside.(249)

It is only after the above realization that Hagar can come to terms with a new sense of self. Her darkest memories have been brought to light in the religious atmosphere suggested in the offering of food and wine by Murray F. Lees and his role as Hagar's confessor. Hagar's journey into retrospect began with her view of an "I, Hagar" who is "doubtless forgotten"(4) . Now, "with a different perspective", Hagar declares her newfound sense of self:

Stupid old baggage, who do you think you are? Hagar. There's no one like me in this world.(250)

By acknowledging the difference in perspective from the outside and from within, Hagar can now move towards a form of reconciliation with Marvin and towards the hope of spiritual fulfilment suggested in the "full" (308) glass of water offered by the nurse at the conclusion of the novel.

Hagar seizes this glass and, holding it, speaks her final two words, "And then -" (308). The open-endedness of these words suggests the possibilities of spirituality, possibilities which Hagar clings to as an antidote to the formlessness of death. As she is moved into smaller and smaller rooms in the hospital in which she spends her last days, Hagar feels herself becoming "bloated and swollen like soft flesh held under by the sea". This is a state which is repugnant to her and her need for order is evident when she states, "I like things to be tidy" (307), and longs to

get back, back to my sleek cocoon, where I'm almost comfortable, lulled

by potions. I can collect my thoughts there. That's what I need to do, collect my thoughts.(308)

Hagar's need to "collect [her] thoughts", to order through retrospect, continues until the moment of her death and this need is also expressed by the eighty-year-old Daisy Goodwill in Carol Shields' The Stone Diaries (1993). The structure of this novel stresses the order of Daisy's retrospect; the chapters are carefully divided and labelled from "Birth" to "Death" suggesting the journey of life and the ages of life referred to earlier in this chapter. Daisy's need for order is articulated in the middle of the opening chapter when she acknowledges a longing to be the author of her life, "to bring symmetry to the various discordant elements ... which [she feels] compelled to transform into something clean and whole with a line of scripture running beneath it or possibly a Latin motto" (23). Daisy's need for shape and order, like Hagar's, is still strong as she approaches "Death". In the penultimate chapter the narrator makes this clear:

All she's trying to do is keep things straight in her head. To keep the weight of her memories evenly distributed. To hold the chapters of her life in order. She feels a new tenderness growing for certain moments; they're like beads on a string, and the string is wearing out. At the same time she knows that what lies ahead of her must be concluded by the efforts of her imagination and not by the straight-faced recital of a throttled and unlit history. Words are more and more required. And the question arises: what is the story of a life? A chronicle of fact or a skillfully wrought impression?(340)

As they progress towards the final chapter of their lives, both Hagar and Daisy

express an urgent need for someone to listen to their story. Hagar longs to force the attention of a hospital nurse and inwardly comments,

Listen. You must listen. It's important. It's - quite an event. (282)

Similarly, as Daisy reflects on the necessity of creating "the story of a life", she is described as needing "someone - anyone - to listen" (340). If the listener is a child, the life story comes back "full circle", not only to personal memories of childhood, but also to the child who listens. This is the case in "Le vieillard et l'enfant", one of the stories contained in Gabrielle Roy's La route d'Altamont (1966). Here, the images of the journey, the circle and water come together in a story which focuses on journeys and memory and the last journey of all. A "vieil enfant" (96), Monsieur Saint-Hilaire, takes a young girl who is fond of creating journeys in her mind, to Lake Winnipeg and, as they both look out across the lake, he offers her a philosophy of life which is analogous to Laurence's circular journey. Looking far into the distance and with the child at his side, he states:

"Peut-être que tout arrive à former un grand cercle, la fin et le recommencement se rejoignant". (121)

At the end of their day's journey, the child still has "une dernière question importante à lui poser, qui avait trait à ce qui passe, à ce qui reste ..." (151-2), a question that perhaps the old can answer with the voice that emerges from the "different perspective" possible in old

age.

When the old move away from the house of the body towards this new perspective, they are often portrayed (like Monsieur Saint-Hilaire) as passing on to subsequent generations the wisdom they have gained in a lifetime. As noted earlier in this chapter, Hagar and Sam Clark are depicted as having moments in which they connect with the next generation, Hagar with Marvin and Sam Clark with his daughter-in-law, Lady Clark. However, it is in the work of Ethel Wilson and Rudy Wiebe that this process is explored in detail. Each author portrays an elderly protagonist who not only attempts to bring together the threads of meaning learned from the life experience, but who also tries to convey this wisdom to the generations that follow. Such a process will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Wisdom of Old Age: Finding Meaning in the Life Experience

...[Athanasie Tallard] reflected on what seemed to him the supreme irony of human life. A man had to come near the end of it before he acquired enough experience and wisdom to qualify him to begin the process of living.

MacLennan: Two Solitudes (93)

Old age is often considered as synonymous with the acquirement of wisdom. The wisdom gained through the process of ageing is only touched upon by MacLennan in his portrayal of Athanasie Tallard. In contrast, Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel (1954) and Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China (1970) are texts which deal in depth with the wisdom of old age. Both texts will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Wilson's seventy-eight-year-old Nell Severance and Wiebe's eighty-four-year-old Frieda Friesen are elderly protagonists approaching the end of life and both are portrayed as expressing the wisdom to be found in the life experience. There are differences and similarities in the ways in which Wilson and Wiebe approach the topic of wisdom. First, the differences. Apart from the contrast between the poise and elegance of Wilson's prose and the

matter-of-fact tone Wiebe uses in his approach to Frieda's story, another difference should be noted. Wilson's Nell is presented through a third person narrative and Wiebe's Frieda through the immediacy of a first person narrator. Each choice reflects the different way the author deals with wisdom in old age. Wilson uses the artistic strategy of alternating between an internal and external view of the elderly protagonist to suggest the development of an inner landscape of the mind and, in contrast, Wiebe focuses on Frieda's voice. Both strategies will be considered in detail as each novel is discussed.

A further difference which could affect the artistic approach to the subject of wisdom is the age of each author at the time of writing about the experience of old age. Both Wilson and Wiebe portray an elderly female protagonist. Wilson presents Nell from the perspective of a female author in her sixties and Wiebe portrays Frieda from the perspective of a male in his thirties. It is difficult to say which author is more successful. Wiebe's convincing portrait of the resilient Frieda is analogous to that of Margaret Laurence's indomitable Hagar Shipley, a character created when Laurence was also in her thirties. Whether the age of the author makes a difference in the portrayal of old age is a question that is not easily answered. It has been raised by Constance Rooke in "Oh What a Paradise It Seems: John Cheever's Swan Song". In her study of the seventy-year-old Cheever's final work, Rooke asks: "What difference does it make if the writer is old and nearing death?" (208). Cheever's protagonist is the aged Lemuel Sears and Rooke suggests that the narrator of Oh What a Paradise It Seems (1982) is a "ghostly version of both Lemuel Sears and John Cheever", one who "points in both directions at once, to the protagonist within the text and the author outside of it." In old age, Cheever creates a

fiction that is described by Rooke as forming "a bridge from one place to another", one that "spans the gap between art and life and the gap between life and death" (213). For Rooke, the writer in old age is especially open to the possibilities of insight and wisdom at the end of life.

Rooke's observation is difficult to apply generally to the study of insight and wisdom as presented by authors in English-Canadian fiction. In works like Morley Callaghan's A Wild Old Man On The Road (1988), published when Callaghan was eighty-five, or Robertson Davies' The Cunning Man (1994) published in Davies' eighty-first year, Rooke's notion of the link between elderly protagonist and author is easy to discern. It is also possible to see a connection in Ethel Wilson's portrayal of Nell and the possibilities of this interplay will be considered in the discussion of Swamp Angel. However, as noted earlier, younger authors like Wiebe and Laurence are also capable of producing sensitive portraits of old age. Whether the age of the author makes a difference is a question that can only be answered by an examination of individual works.

Regardless of the age of the author, there are common elements to be found in Swamp Angel and The Blue Mountains of China. Both Wilson and Wiebe present the wisdom of old age as a means of connecting one generation to the next. The relationship between old Nell Severance and young Maggie Lloyd is central to Wilson's work and Wilson includes a third generation by suggesting the possibilities of Maggie's relationship with young Angus Quong. Wiebe also portrays a connection between three generations. Through the medium of Frieda's voice, Wiebe links her wisdom with that of her father before her and with the grandchildren who follow. This strategy of presenting different

generations as a means of expressing the wisdom of old age is one that is used elsewhere in English-Canadian fiction, but not given the same emphasis as it is in Swamp Angel and The Blue Mountains of China. For example, in Mazo de la Roche's Young Renny (1935) the eighty-year-old Adeline Whiteoak attempts to pass on the wisdom she has learned to a grand-daughter and in the same scene remembers herself as a "tiny child, lifted to her father's shoulder to look out on the great world" (83). In contrast to de la Roche, Wilson and Wiebe place more focus on the different generations and explore in depth the wisdom to be gleaned and passed on from the life experience. In yet another similarity, both authors use the metaphor of weaving as a structural device to achieve this.

The use of the metaphor of weaving to express the reflections of the old appears also in several other instances in English-Canadian fiction. It is commonly used not only to express the possibilities of dialogue between old and young protagonists, but also of inner dialogue between what is old and young within the self. An instance of the latter occurs in Kenneth Radu's Distant Relations (1989) which opens with the vivid recollection of the seventy-four-year-old Vera Dobriu who journeys back in memory to a brush with death at the age of ten. Memories of childhood and youth surface as Vera sits outside embroidering a pattern onto white linen pillowcases. Movement back into the present is accompanied by the dropping of "several stitches" (7) as memories of sexual passion arouse the body of an old woman. The white linen that Vera embroiders is analogous to the last white circle that the grandmother in Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley (1952) stitches into her quilt. Both instances are related to the search for the child within. At the end of the first chapter of Buckler's novel, the "child" cannot be

found by the grandmother. In the concluding chapter, the lives of a family are finally contained in the workings of a quilt, but the figure of the solitary grandmother still remains questioning, "Where is that child?" and finally commenting, "You never know where that child is" (301). The "child" is David, but Buckler's artistic strategy also suggests the grandmother's search for the child within, a search which frames the novel itself.¹

In both Distant Relations and The Mountain and the Valley, the elderly protagonists create patterns between old and young, but don't contribute much to the concept of "wisdom". The literal use of the image of weaving in these novels is also apparent in the knitting of the grandmother in the final chapters of W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind (1947). In contrast, in Swamp Angel and The Blue Mountains of China, weaving is used as a metaphor to express in some detail the wisdom drawn from a long life. "Web", "thread" and "cord" are central images in these novels and the weaving which takes place is a function of both author and elderly protagonist. This is in contrast to the use of the image of weaving in the other novels mentioned where the weaving is momentarily linked with the figure of an old person, but the concept of old age and wisdom does not thread through the novel as a major part of the author's artistic strategy.

In sociological studies, the image of weaving has been found to be a critical one in understanding the wisdom gained as age advances. In "Toward More Human Meanings of Aging: Ideals and Images from Philosophy and Art", Geri Berg and Sally Gadow study the impact of ageing and how it is revealed in an examination of the early and late works of such artists as Michelangelo and Picasso who worked creatively into the eighth and ninth decades of their lives. Berg and Gadow feel the metaphor of weaving is particularly

suitable because no one particular meaning is capable of unifying the life experience.

Instead,

interwoven and mutually reinforcing, [the meanings] form a fabric sufficient to encompass that experience; we are provided with a fabric as variously textured as aging itself, for some of the threads of meaning are strong and palpable, while others are elusive and fragile. Thus it is necessary to weave a dialectic between the fragile abstraction of ideals and the more concrete immediacy of images in order to encompass the complex possibilities of an experience as profound and universal as aging. (Berg and Gadow, 92)

From such a "dialectic" some sense of the final form of the self is achieved. As Berg and

Gadow conclude:

Finally, the unity of ideal and image that seems to thread its way throughout the fabric of aging expresses the individual's possibility for determining final forms - both of the self and the world. (92)

Berg and Gadow's work suggests that the integration of the self in old age depends upon a process of weaving the threads of life into a fabric of meaning. Similarly, in The Fountain of Age (1993), Betty Friedan comments on the work of the American psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, in words which suggest a weaving back and through the threads of life to achieve a form of wisdom in old age. In Friedan's words,

When Erikson first developed his theory with his wife Joan, in their forties, they saw the final stage of wisdom as simply an objective

reconciliation of life in the face of death. Now in their eighties themselves - the only life-span theorists so far to look back from that peak personally - they have tried to spell out the ways in which each earlier stage of life is recapitulated in the wisdom of old age.(122)

Erikson's theory that each of the early stages of life is present in all of the later ones finds its apotheosis in the final stage of old age in which, as Erikson describes it in Vital Involvement in Old Age (1986),

the life cycle weaves back on itself in its entirety, ultimately integrating maturing forms of hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love and care, into a comprehensive sense of wisdom.(55-6)

For Erikson, each stage of the life cycle has its opposing psychological possibilities, those in old age being despair versus integrity. As Constance Rooke has pointed out in her work on Cheever, these two factors "must be balanced if wisdom is to be achieved" (206). The balancing of these opposites and the process of weaving suggested in the life experience, point to the possibilities of the integration of the self in old age. In the discussions of Swamp Angel and The Blue Mountains of China which follow, elements of the above sociological studies appear and contribute to an understanding of the artistic presentation of the wisdom to be found in old age.

In Swamp Angel (1954) Ethel Wilson offers the insight and wisdom of the seventy-eight-year-old Nell Severance through a technique which is reflected in the inside versus outside emphasis of one of Nell's most succinct insights, "Everything of any importance happens indoors ..." (204). Nell is generally seen "indoors", but Wilson also presents her as breaking down the walls of the inside/outside dichotomy to reveal the way an old woman weaves meaning into the life experience. "Indoors" for Nell is a state of mind and emphasizing whether she is inside or outside is a strategy used by Wilson to illustrate the integration of Nell's wisdom and insight. Such an interplay is apparent in the description of Nell's house in chapter sixteen which is immediately followed by her decision to go outside and "take the air". The house is small and contracted, an "objectionable little house" which is seen by Nell only as "the structure that contain[s] her chair, her table, her bed, and her kitchen". As age progresses, space shrinks and Nell's house can be seen as a metaphor for the physically limited house of the body in old age. At seventy-eight, Nell is no longer concerned with its "outside appearance". The verandah is physically constructed so that it is "almost too small for a chair", but "large enough" to support the different mental landscapes of "say[ing] goodbye" (96).

Stepping outside onto the verandah and away from her small house is linked to the development of one of Nell's most critical insights, that of the excessive value she has placed on the Swamp Angel as a symbol of her past life. When she falls on the sidewalk outside the house, the Angel tumbles from her pocket and the reaction of people around her reminds her of its reality as a gun, a "symbol ... destroying reality" (99). From the confines of a small house, Nell is able to step towards the development of new insight.

This is something that Hagar Shipley also does in The Stone Angel when she leaves the house that can no longer define her and gains a different perspective at Shadow Point. As Gerald Manning has pointed out in "Spinning the 'Globe of Memory': Metaphor, Literature and Aging", Laurence uses the "spatial metaphors" of "contraction and expansion" (48) in her development of Hagar's insight. Manning notes that this is particularly evident in Hagar's words at the beginning of the final chapter of the novel:

The world is even smaller now. It's shrinking so quickly. The next room will be the smallest of all. (Laurence, Stone Angel, 282)

Kathleen Woodward has remarked on the structural use of contracted space in the artistic presentation of the progression towards insight and wisdom in old age. In "Master Songs of Meditation" (1978) her work on the late poems of Eliot, Pound, Stevens and Williams, Woodward notes "the central image of the *sanctuary*, partly ironic, partly paradoxical, of the small closed room" (182). Woodward argues that the Four Quartets, the Pisan Cantos, "The Rock" and the fifth book of Paterson "offer insights into the experience of successful aging and the sources of its wisdom" (181) and that

[w]ith the lessening of mobility imposed by age, social pressures, and personal choice, in these poems space shrinks and disengagement from the social sphere takes place. But through the exercise of the imagination, memory, and the meditative mode this contraction is not lethal. On the contrary, it brings to the poets new insights and new possibilities for personal integrative experience. (183)

Wilson illustrates the above process in her portrayal of Nell, not only by suggesting that a constricted physical environment can lead to the expansion of new insights, but also by creating an elderly protagonist who accepts the "disengagement from the social sphere" that takes place with age. For example, a defensibly selfish Nell is described as thinking,

I don't really care for humanity ... it gets between me and my desires ... which are very simple, but constant.(97)

Later, in a discussion of faith with a friend of Hilda's, Albert Cousins, she comments,

I believe in faith. I believe in God ... and in man, to some extent at least.(134)

In both instances, Wilson moves Nell away from the larger perspective explored by W.J. Keith in "Overview: Ethel Wilson, Providence, and the Vocabulary of Vision", towards what Keith briefly refers to at the end of the article as "the 'eye of the mind' which has its own vision" (Keith,116). Nell's need to get away from "humanity" reflects her need to change the focus in her life to what is "happen[ing] indoors" .

When the Swamp Angel falls from Nell's pocket "outside" the parameters of her small "house", she describes her reaction as a sudden awareness of being "old" (158). Confronted with this fact, Nell knows she must perform the "deeply significant closing act" (104) of tying and cutting the string on the box containing the Swamp Angel and the life it represents. When she does this and sends the box away to be posted, she has another

moment of insight which confirms the approach of death, "a bright revealing instant that came, and then passed," revealing to her "that life and the evening were closing in" (105). The Swamp Angel becomes only a "symbol of years of life gone away" (58) and, with time running out, the search for a meaning beyond the symbols of memory becomes critical.

In packaging and sending the symbolic Swamp Angel to Maggie, Nell cuts herself off from the past and her action signifies the detachment suggested in the surname "Severance". In old age, with the physical parameters of life restricted, Nell is able to approach "indoors" what Northrop Frye defines in The Great Code (1981) as "the secret of wisdom ... detachment without withdrawal" (123). In his discussion of wisdom, the fourth of seven phases of revelation that Frye finds in the Bible, Frye notes:

The center of the conception of wisdom in the Bible is the Book of Ecclesiastes, whose author, or rather chief editor, is sometimes called Koheleth, the teacher or preacher Like other wise men, he is a collector of proverbs, but he applies to all of them his touchstone and key word, translated in the AV as "vanity". This word (*hebel*) has a metaphorical kernel of fog, mist, or vapor, a metaphor that recurs in the New Testament (James 4:14). It thus acquires a derived sense of "emptiness", the root meaning of the Vulgate's *vanitas*. To put Koheleth's central intuition into the form of its essential paradox: all things are full of emptiness.(123)

Such "emptiness" is suggested in the imagery Wilson uses in two of the short stories contained in Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories (1961), "The Window" and "Fog", both of which are useful in understanding the portrayal of Nell in the earlier Swamp Angel. Both stories contain elderly protagonists who are depicted as withdrawing from life in old age. Their portrayal is in marked contrast to the detachment that leads to Nell's insight and

which enables her to step outside from behind the "cloud" (42,205) of cigarette smoke with which Wilson frequently associates her and which suggests an obscured vision of life.

The description of Mrs. Bylow in "Fog" is similar to that of Nell. She is described as "an old woman who live[s] in a small old house" and for her, like Nell, death waits outside. However, in contrast to Nell, Mrs. Bylow's withdrawal from life is central to the story. Day by day, she sits behind her window "looking into the fog" enveloping Vancouver and her home:

This, and not much more, was her life as she waited for the great dustman and the ultimate box. So Mrs. Bylow's days and months slid and slid away while age - taking advantage of her solitariness, her long unemployment of vestigial brain, her unawareness of a world beyond herself, her absence of preparation for the gray years - closed down upon her like a vice, no, more like a fog.(98)

When Mrs. Bylow goes outside, she dies accidentally as the victim of a robbery attempt at the local convenience store. She has made no "preparation" for death, but has instead chosen to withdraw from life in old age and spend her time sitting "beside her window in a sort of closed-up dry well of boredom" (100), what Wilson describes in "The Window" as a "tundra of mind" (205).

In "The Window" Mr. Willy, described by an acquaintance as "about a hundred" (199) years of age, lives, like Mrs. Bylow, behind the window of his house in Vancouver. As with Mrs. Bylow and Nell, death waits outside: a bird flies at the window of the glass and is killed and, in the darkness of night, the grounds of his home contain a

potential assailant. However, unlike Mrs. Bylow, Mr. Willy does attempt to "employ" his mind in search for the meaning of life:

He found himself looking this way and that way out of his aridity for some explanation or belief beyond the non-explanation and non-belief that had always been sufficient and had always been his, but in doing this he came up against a high and solid almost visible wall of concrete or granite, set up between him and a religious belief. This wall had, he thought, been built by him through the period of his long life(202-3)

The "wall" that Mr. Willy comes up against is structurally similar to the metaphor of the fog which surrounds Mrs. Bylow or the cigarette smoke which screens Nell. Like Nell, Mr. Willy has progressed to the point of acknowledging the imminence of his own death which, with age, has begun "to assume a certainty that it had not had before" (203). However, unlike Nell, Mr. Willy cannot break down the wall that would allow him to weave threads of insight and meaning into old age.

In these two short stories and in Swamp Angel, Wilson uses the symbolic constructs of fog, wall and cigarette smoke to suggest the boundaries which must be broken down if wisdom and insight are to be achieved at the end of a long life. In the conclusion of "The Window", the "interested observer" (197) who has lurked in the shadows of Mr. Willy's home breaks in and Mr. Willy sees his struggle with death reflected in the "mirror" (208) the window has become with the onset of the blackness of night. Looking at his own death forces a "crack" of insight into the wall that closes off his life with the fact of physical death. For a brief moment, Mr. Willy senses the possibilities

of the "light" beyond the wall (209). "The Window" ends with Mr. Willy's recognition that he

must in some way and very soon break the great wall that shut him off from whatever light there might be. Not for fear of death oh God not for fear of death but for fear of something else.(209)

As David Stouck has pointed out in his "Afterword" to Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories (1961) "Mr. Willy fears that life has no meaning at all" (216). What Wilson does in Swamp Angel is to weave the possibilities of "light" and "meaning" into the fabric of her portrayal not only of the seventy-eight-year-old Nell, but also the seventy-five-year-old Mr. Cunningham.

Like Nell, this "old fella" (181) does not withdraw from life in old age, but becomes detached. The description of him not only emphasizes this detachment, but also suggests a moment of insight that links him to the "light" that Mr. Willy so desires. Mr. Cunningham is portrayed as he fishes "apart" and "solitary" at Three Loon Lake, a place which the narrator describes as one where fly-fishermen go to fish alone and become "one with the aqueous world of the lake" (181). As he fishes, Mr. Cunningham breaks the surface of the light falling on the lake and momentarily moves out of time to experience the "inner rapture" of weaving the self into its possibilities:

It is a matter of light falling, how green or not green the forests can be. He does not look too long (for he is fishing) but the green and the greens, the blue, the sombre, the white, the deceptive glamour of the lake surface enter

into this mystique of fishing and enhance it, and they enter into him too, because he is part of it. There is no past, no future, only the now.(182)

Mr. Cunningham's "unique" experience, one which is "his" (183) alone, takes him closer to what lies below the outward surface of each individual life.

The potential of the self lies "indoors" in the mind and when Mr. Cunningham almost drowns outdoors on the lake in a storm, he is described as becoming aware that he has been on a "margin", "near the point where Being touched Non-Being" (187). Death waits outside for Mr. Cunningham, just as it does for Nell, Mrs. Bylow and Mr. Willy. By employing this stratagem, Wilson explores the possibilities of what happens "indoors" as the final "margin" of life is approached and the proximity of death in old age becomes visibly apparent.

In "A Cat Among the Falcons", an essay published in 1959 just a few years after the publication of Swamp Angel in 1954, Wilson comments on the art of the writer in ways which illuminate the pursuit of insight that she expresses in her fiction through the "outward" and "inward" dichotomy. These comments also suggest a connection between Wilson and her portrayal of Nell:

there is manifest truth, and creation from manifest truth, the outward eye and the inward eye. One man writes about a river, but Roderick Haig-Brown writes about a river that never sleeps; there is truth and there is creation, the outward eye and the inward eye.(Wilson,98)

Wilson was in her early seventies when she wrote the above and she concludes the essay

with the following:

It will be better, now, to take my convictions safely indoors and sit looking out of the window at what I can see, and at the sky which is so beautiful.(103)

Wilson's words echo Nell's philosophy of the importance of what happens "indoors" and suggest a connection between elderly protagonist and elderly writer, one being a "ghostly version" of the other as Rooke has suggested. Wilson's voice can also be heard in the voice of Nell when she attempts to pass on the wisdom she has learned to her spiritual heir, Maggie Lloyd.

The spiritual relationship between Maggie and Nell, between an older and a younger woman, is central to Swamp Angel. At the novel's conclusion, Maggie describes Nell as "my greatest friend and the friend of my spirit" and notes that the life of the "worldly unworldly" Nell would have been amazing, "even if she had never moved from her house" (212). These words suggest that Maggie has absorbed Nell's awareness of the importance of what happens "indoors" and they echo Nell's belief in the inner life of the spirit within the cramped quarters of old age. In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Nell meets Maggie in Kamloops, British Columbia, where they plan to stay for a week. This is the only time Nell and Maggie are together in the novel and they meet away from Three Loon Lake where Maggie, like Mr. Cunningham, has experienced an "inner rapture" out on the lake, feeling momentarily "like a god" (130) while swimming there. The fact that Wilson brings these two women together away from the possibilities of spiritual

experience at the lake suggests that Nell, as an older woman, has something to offer the younger Maggie which cannot be found even in the most profound experience at Three Loon Lake.

It is at Kamloops that Nell offers her insight, "Everything of any importance happens indoors" (204). After these words are spoken, Wilson employs an artistic strategy which moves Nell literally from inside to outside the room at Kamloops. This movement is accompanied by a breakthrough in the inside and outside dichotomy, one which insists that the true "indoors" is of the mind and independent of physical location. Inside their room at Kamloops and from "behind a cloud of smoke" (205), Nell tells Maggie the story of her life with Philip, the father of her child. As she comes to the end of this story she is described as "look[ing] up into the smoke" before she concludes with:

Well, look at all those children - issuing from the same womb, all different and all dead, and you sit there and tell me something will or will not happen again! Everything happens again and it's never the same.(206)

Nell's words from behind the "fog" of her cigarette smoke can be compared with the unpredictable and transitory nature of life found in Frye's discussion of wisdom in The Great Code. Frye refers to James 4:14 (Frye,123):

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life?
It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

The basic facts of the repetitive and transitory nature of the life experience are offered by Nell inside the confines of the room at Kamloops. In old age, Nell looks through the smokescreen of everyday life and sees beyond it in such a way as to make the true "indoors" that of the mind, one which does not depend upon the physical parameters of a room. She is able to break down "the wall" that Mr. Willy finds himself up against and, like the old woman in Dorothy Livesay's poem, "Interiors", or Margaret Atwood's Susanna Moodie in old age, integrate inside and outside to weave meaning into the life experience.

When Nell moves "outside" and beyond the smokescreen, she is able to offer words of wisdom to Maggie, words which contain the "meaning" that Mr. Willy so desperately seeks. Nell's words are spoken from the vantage point of old age and the image of weaving is invoked as she begins,

I sit on top of my little mound of years ... and it is natural and reasonable that I should look back, and I look back and round and I see the miraculous interweaving of creation ... the everlasting web ... and I see a stone and a word and this stub [the stub of Nell's cigarette which she throws down at this point] ... and the man who made it, joined to the bounds of creation - has creation any bounds, Maggie? - and I see God everywhere.(206)

Nell's focus on such everyday objects as "a stone and a word and this stub" invokes a form of wisdom to be found in the Bible, one which Frye refers to in The Great Code when he discusses "living in the dense fog that is one of the roots of the word 'vanity' ". Frye points out that, in the Bible,

the invisible world is not usually thought of as a separate and higher order of reality: it is thought of rather as the medium by which the world becomes visible

For Frye, the metaphor of fog or mist implies

that life is something to find a way through, and that the way of wisdom is the way out.(124)

When Nell suggests to Maggie, "Let us go out" (206), she takes Maggie beyond the smokescreen of vanity towards a way of looking at a newly "visible" world.² Her wisdom and insight suggest a "way out" for Maggie, one which will lead her through the unfairness and brevity of "the web" of life and towards a "faith in God" which Nell can't define, but which makes "old age bearable" (207).

For Wilson, what happens "indoors" in the workings of a personal faith reaches an apotheosis in the mind of an old woman.³ As an old woman, Nell has gone beyond a faith which can be expressed in words, towards one which can only be developed nonverbally in the mind. Frank Birbalsingh refers to this in his article, "Ethel Wilson: Innocent Traveller". Birbalsingh places the "aged, half-mystic, half-prophetic Nell Severance" in the company of E.M. Forster's Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore in Howards End (1910) and A Passage to India (1924) respectively. He sees these women as "frankly accept[ing] their limitations and blissfully transcend[ing] them by developing their inner

lives". For him,

Faith is the development of one's inner life, an activity of the spirit that both Mrs. Wilson and E.M. Forster approve of and strongly advocate, but which neither of them fully understands. The most they seem able to do is illustrate it. (Birbalsingh,44)

Both authors associate the physical "limitations" of age with the "indoors" development of wisdom and new insight into faith and meaning. In "De Senectute", published in The London Magazine in 1957 when Forster was seventy-eight years old, Forster, like Yeats, states his belief that "wisdom is inevitably connected with the decay of powers" (16).[†] He goes on:

I find myself being invited to define wisdom, and becoming mystical about it. I do regard it as an immensely important human achievement. I connect it with length of years and I distinguish it from intuition which may occur at any age. It has nothing to do with making decisions or with the conveyance of information, it is only indirectly connected with the possession of knowledge. It does not specialize in sympathy. But it has the power, without proffering sympathy, of causing it to be perceived, and it is certainly not cynicism. The possession of it arises from human relationships rightly entertained over a long period.(17)

Like Forster, a writer whom she admired, Wilson also sees a connection between "human relationships" and the concept of wisdom. Towards the end of the novel, Maggie is described as thinking, "Human relations ... how they defeat us" (195). Outside at Kamloops, Nell comments on her life "in the web" of human relationships and remarks

"it takes God himself to be fair to two different people at once". Maggie acknowledges this remark as one "which had risen so often in her own mind" (207). Wilson's emphasis on the unfairness of life, a continuing observation in her novels, is established in the early pages of Swamp Angel, when Nell is described as thinking "that life is unfair" and muttering to herself, "It's not fair ... not fair" (55). Wilson counters this unfairness with the wisdom contained in the acceptance of changes that life can bring and the positive outlook expressed in Nell's affirmative, "Life is the damndest thing what it can think up for people ... but I wouldn't have missed it" (204). This perspective is echoed by Wilson in the epigraph to Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories (1961), "Life '... is a difficult country, and our home.' "

Nell's spiritual relationship with Maggie is demonstrated when Nell's words on human relationships resonate with thoughts that Maggie has often had. The connection between the two women suggests a relationship that can contain the "essence" of life (216), a weaving of the self between two women that is in stark contrast to the loose threads of the relationship between Nell and her daughter, Hilda. When Nell tells Hilda the story of her youth in the circus with the Juggling Bigleys, Hilda hears the repeated recounting of an old woman and is described as thinking, "[o]nly in this did her mother seem old ...only in this recounting was there any sign of her mother's age" (78). Hilda fails to see an old woman's search for meaning as her mother weaves back through her life and integrates "the girl" she was then into the self of old age.⁵ For Nell,

This legend (which was almost a song) was, together with the Swamp

Angel, her only proof of a life which had once been garish and vivid to some girl (could it be that I, sitting heavily here, am that girl?), who had long been fugitive into the past, but not yet gone with all the others of whom there was now no trace or witness: who (this girl) could be retained and treasured only in the retelling of the scene. Memory alone would not do. Memory would fall into the chasm where lay - perhaps waiting - all things and people gone, and so this girl would cease; therefore Mrs Severance told the tale, and I, the girl, lived.(77-8)

When Wilson describes Nell as sending the Swamp Angel to Maggie, she cuts Nell off from her past and puts her in a position where she must face death without drawing support from "[m]emory alone".⁶ What stands alongside memory is what also happens "indoors", the final acknowledgement of a grander pattern realised not only in the integration of the self in old age, but also in the far-reaching possibilities suggested in "the miraculous interweaving of creation". The ramifications of the human experience within a larger plan are explored in Wilson's focus on that part of "the everlasting web" (206) formed by human relationships, in particular the older generation to the younger.

Swamp Angel concludes after Nell's death with an emphasis on Maggie's relationship with a member of the next generation, the young Angus Quong, and with a description of Maggie rowing out onto Three Loon Lake and, following Nell's instructions, throwing the Swamp Angel overboard, "higher than even Nell Bigley of the Juggling Bigleys had ever tossed it". The final description of the Swamp Angel suggests a larger pattern, an "essence" which weaves and persists below "the surface" (216) of memory . This is the "something" which Wilson describes in Love and Salt Water (1956) as "stay[ing]" and which, being "added to the general sum, is not just memory ..." (90).

Wilson's belief in a persisting "essence" is expressed in the image of the next generation, under specific orders from the older, tossing the restrictive symbol of memory far into the distance. Maggie's relationship with an old woman has changed her life and brought her closer at a young age to an awareness of the ongoing pattern of life and the importance of faith suggested to her by Nell at Kamloops. Now, outside on Three Loon Lake after Nell's death, the image of Maggie tossing the Swamp Angel connects the next generation with the "light" that Mr. Cunningham becomes aware of when he breaks the surface of the lake in old age. The narrator describes the results of Maggie's far-reaching toss as follows:

[The Swamp Angel] made a shining parabola in the air, turning downward - turning, turning, catching the sunlight, hitting the surface of the lake, sparkling down into the clear water, vanishing amidst breaking bubbles in the water, sinking down among the affrighted fish, settling in the ooze. When all was still the fish, who had fled, returned, flickering, weaving curiously over the Swamp Angel. Then flickering, weaving, they resumed their way.(216)

The first Canadian edition of Swamp Angel ends with the above words. However, in the first American edition there is another paragraph in which Maggie rows back to the lodge, but something of Nell persists in the shore of the lake and the hills left behind:

The far shore (like Mrs. Severance) would recede until it was nearly out of sight, but it would still be there. (American edition,215)

The persistence of Nell is similar to the ongoing nature of the "weaving" action of the fish that Wilson describes and both are analogous to the artistic presentation of Rudy Wiebe's eighty-four-year-old Frieda Friesen in The Blue Mountains of China (1970). Wiebe not only weaves Frieda's voice through the text, but also links it with other voices in old age which are associated with the imagery of weaving. Both techniques are used to illustrate Frieda's insights as an old woman, some of which resemble those of Nell. Wilson's Nell broods in a way that Frieda does not, but both old women are aware that the rhythm of nature expresses the possibilities of a larger pattern in life. Further, both women could be described in old age as, in Nell's words, having a faith which "makes old age bearable and happy, and fearless" (207). However, Nell's old age is characterised by an attempt to articulate her philosophic brooding and, in contrast, Frieda's is characterised by a calm acceptance which comes from the confinement of her thoughts to the tenets of her faith. Frieda accepts the vicissitudes of life and, like the fish in the lake who resume their "weaving" after the Swamp Angel has been thrown into their midst, her voice continues its thread even after other voices in the novel have described and succumbed to the black depths of human experience.

"I have lived long. So long ..." (7). Frieda's words open Wiebe's novel with an emphasis on old age. She describes herself as being born in Canada in 1883 to the Mennonite family of Isaac J. Friesen. Hers is the only voice that is presented constantly in the first person and that is exclusively given more than one chapter of the novel. In four separate sections, each entitled, "My Life: That's As It Was", Frieda describes her life in a

voice which reiterates the calm acceptance of these words. The steady sound of her voice is woven through the chorus of voices presented in the novel and this voice is immediately associated with the insight of old age when, shortly after her narrative begins, she comments,

the Lord led me through so many deep ways and of the world I've seen a little, both north and south. If your eyes stay open and He keeps your head clear you sometimes see so much more than you want of how it is with the world.(7)

The life that Frieda has been "led ... through" is presented as a closely woven fabric. Her voice is spun into the fabric of her family and the text and it is interlaced through the novel, the chronological "weft" of her life being held by the "warp" of past and future voices. Frieda's voice contains her father's voice and both are linked with the future voices of Frieda's grandchildren, Johann and Friedl. In contrast, the voices of the two other old people in the novel, Muttachi in "Sons and Heirs" and Jakob Friesen (IV) in "On the Way", exist in a void. They are cut off from the audience and "alone" in the text. Their voices suggest a downward spiral of limited movement with no faith like Frieda's to show the way. Both voices are associated with the act of weaving, but the thread is loose and the same thread woven repeatedly. The fabric is never formed and any insight falls into a void. Frieda does not need the spinning wheel of Muttachi or the cord of Jakob's bundle: she has her voice.

Frieda's voice is woven through the novel at steadily increasing intervals. One

chapter separates the first two chapters of her voice, two the second and third, and three the third and fourth. Her voice does not end, but stays in place to hold the fabric of the novel together. Whatever calamities have occurred in the life of this old woman are related in the same even tone that she uses to describe life's joys. One of her earliest memories is of a worker dying during harvest time at her father's farm. What Frieda remembers of this man is nothing more than "a wide face with a mustache that stuck out black on both sides of it" (8). Similarly, when the daughter of a neighbour dies, Frieda comments:

At the funeral they said only three things about her life: she was born in Furstenland, Russia in 1846, she was confirmed in 1863 and she died August 23, 1902.(10)

The description of this eulogy presents the basic facts of a life. Frieda's words resemble those of Nell to Maggie at Kamloops, when Nell comments on the predictable unchanging cycle of birth and death in Philip's family. Both instances suggest the inevitable changes in life and Frieda's insight lies in her acceptance of these, in her belief that "[s]ome talk about these things too much, as if that was all their life was". "My Life: That's As It Was" is echoed in the words "as if that was all their life was" (143). Like Nell, Frieda is aware that there is more to life than a litany of facts. She too is aware of the approach of death and acknowledges this when she states, "it won't be long with me" (143). However, unlike Nell, she accepts the parameters of a prescribed faith and merely records her life "as it was" within the boundaries of the Mennonite faith. As Ina Ferris points out,

Frieda's inner peace and her age protect her from entanglement either in the here and now (which remain vague) or in her story itself. She relates rather than recreates(89)

Frieda's detachment enables her to view everyday happenings as part of a larger scheme of things. In this she again resembles Nell who is finally able to see beyond the failures of specific human relationships, to the pattern suggested in the transmission of wisdom and learning from one generation to the next.

The rhythm of Frieda's voice includes the repetition of words she has heard from her father. His voice echoes in hers when she repeats throughout her story the words from her father which have sustained her through life:

But think always like this ... it does come all from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty.(10)

This maxim from her father describes in words the insight that is suggested in the tone and rhythm of Frieda's voice. What "my father said" (10) is the steadying link from which other verbal insights radiate. For instance, Frieda remembers that

Everything seemed to come so bunchy in our family and it was enough to make you think sometimes, my father said.(10)

These words are echoed later when Frieda recalls:

So much of everything comes at once sometimes, just when you think that the most maybe is over. Terrible bunchy, like my father said.(92)

Frieda's insight is associated with the steady echo of her father's voice in hers. Kenneth Radu employs a similar artistic strategy in Distant Relations when he suggests a connection with the voice of the elderly Vera and the voice and stories of her deceased father. Frieda's memories of childhood link her father's voice with the rhythm of the seasons of life and death. As an old woman, what "my father said" is an integral part of the insight that a voice on the edge of life has to offer and pass on to the next generation. Through his portrayal of Frieda, Wiebe presents the wisdom of old age as something which depends upon a weaving back into voices from the past and a threading forward of words that will pass from generation to generation.

Just as Wilson places Nell with Maggie and Maggie with the Quongs, Wiebe connects Frieda's voice not only with that of her father, but also with the voices of her grandchildren. The telling of Frieda's life story to Johann and Friedl is linked with the emphasis on Frieda's age in the opening words of the novel. Here, Frieda describes herself as living "long" enough that, in her words,

it takes me days to remember even parts of it, and some I can't remember at all until I've been thinking over it a little now and then for weeks, and little Johann or Friedl ask, "Urgrossmuttchi, what is that, so cold in Canada the ground is stiff?" Then I have to be careful or I'll start making it up, they like to hear so much, What I tell I remember only through God's grace. I never wrote anything down(7)

The emphasis on Frieda's voice and its connection with the questions of her grandchildren is also apparent in a later description:

After youth instruction was through in July my *velobta* and I went for one day together with Abrams to Winnipeg to the Exhibition. We rode on one of those big wheels with seats, and that's hard to make clear to little Johann and Friedl too. They want to know, how can there be a wheel as high as two churches and then their father has to tell them again, "Just listen to Urgrossmutchi. She lived once in Canada and has seen something - just listen, there's more than that." And they do.(42)

In both instances, "something" is suggested beyond the mere words themselves, a "something" that Wiebe, like Ethel Wilson, is aware of. Frieda restrains herself from "making it up" and the voice of an old woman implies that in the telling of a life "there's more than that". For Frieda, the "bunchy" incidents in her life are not as important as the thread of life that runs beneath them, a thread that links Frieda not only to her grandchildren, but also to her father.

Wiebe attempts to pick up this thread when Frieda talks about the questions her grandchildren do not ask, questions beyond the incidents of a life. As Frieda comments,

Outside of that we lived and worked in quiet and peace. Children like Johann and Friedl never ask because they know nothing about such things and what you tell them seems to have been all piled up at once, as you tell it, but older ones not from Paraguay sometimes ask, and if they don't sometimes they say things that show they are thinking it anyway, "What do you do, one year end to the next, living there in that wilderness?" Well, what do you do. There are always the new grandchildren on the way, but

mostly you wait for the rain. The time goes by and you look back and years have passed you never thought of as years; the only thing you really remember, even the birth years of the children, is how they fit with the rain. When it rains you harness every horse and work the land till it's too dry; then you wait again.(142)

Frieda's voice is as steady and persistent as the way she doggedly waits for rain. What this voice offers is the wisdom of a positive outlook on life. Magdalene Falk Redekop refers to this when she comments on Frieda's "affirmative voice" (97). As a Mennonite herself, Redekop feels that the qualities in Frieda's voice exist because even though Frieda speaks in English the sound of Low German can be heard at the same time. As Redekop points out, Frieda's voice expresses the Mennonite language of "everyday life"(98). Such a voice also reveals an old woman who has learned to pick up the rhythm of life and continue its pattern after a thread has dropped and death or disaster has torn it apart.

This is not the case in "Sons and Heirs" which immediately follows "My Life: That's As It Was (1)" and is framed at its conclusion by "My Life: That's As It Was (2)". Wiebe's artistic strategy is to juxtapose the calm of one woman in old age to its opposite: the anguish of a young man imprisoned in Soviet Russia and racked with social fears and sexual guilt. His voice, in turn, is complemented by another voice in old age, but this one expresses defeat. Like Frieda, Muttachi exists wholly as a voice. Her only physical description is that of a "[t]iny", "hunched", "black shape in the chair by the lying bench" (16). She is later described as a huddle of long dresses ... and a cry" (40). It is in this state that her grandson, Jakob (V), finds her when he returns to the family farm after being imprisoned by the GPU during the persecution of the Mennonites in southern Russia in

the 1920's. His parents and siblings have fled to Moscow and only the voice of Muttachi remains.

Jakob finds his deaf grandmother by the lying bench in the old family farmhouse where she stays "motionless" except for an automatic turning of the spinning wheel beside her. The only sound is the "sing-song" of a voice "emerg[ing] out of its dry miaul". Later, when she does speak, her voice is linked to the "small gray bumps" of the spinning wheel which rise and fall while her fingers work "crooked to the white thread"(16). Muttachi cannot weave a straight thread into the life of her grandson and the emotional distance between them is evident in the text. The "white thread" that Muttachi weaves is analagous to the final white circle that David Canaan's grandmother weaves into the quilt in The Mountain and the Valley. In contrast to Muttachi, this grandmother's weaving is closely associated with the life and death of her grandson and the quilt that she weaves becomes a symbol which, in Claude Bissell's words, represents "the power of human relationships to withstand the gnawing of time" (Bissell,x).

In Frye's terminology, Muttachi "withdraws" from life and its pain. She emerges briefly when she can relate to tangible objects: the wheel stops when she hands a letter to her grandson and when the GPU Commissar Serebro enters the farm to remove even more possessions that have been part of her life. She attempts to hold on to some of these with success, but when she is refused any more, remains once more "motionless" and "soundless" (32). Like Hagar before she leaves for Shadow Point, Muttachi is defined by her house and the objects in it and has been unable to come to terms with life and step towards integrity of the self. She reflects the "despair" that Erik Erikson places as a polar

opposite to "integrity" and which he suggests must be brought into balance in old age. For Erikson, integrity "convey[s] a peculiar demand ...*wisdom*" and Erikson, like Frye, stresses detachment, not withdrawal. In The Life Cycle Completed, Erikson defines wisdom as an "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself" (61).

In Vital Involvement in Old Age (1986), Erikson comments on a pattern of life which is analogous to Nell's "everlasting web". Like Nell, what Erikson sees is a larger pattern which includes the integrity of three cycles, "the life cycle, the generational cycle, and a larger cycle of community" (70). In The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe presents another portrait of old age at the polar opposite to wisdom, one mired in despair and cut off from all three cycles. Muttachi's son, Jakob Friesen (IV), is presented later, as an "old man in difficulty" (181): he is a seventy-eight-year-old man separated from family and friends and one who speaks with a "strange foregone-conclusion kind of talk", making statements as if "[a]nticipating the worst not to be disappointed" (187).

At the end of the novel, Jakob is positioned with another young Mennonite, John Reimer, on his "walk of repentance" (194) along the Trans-Canada highway. Like Christ, Reimer carries a cross in his journey west towards the Rockies whose snow is later described as "burning blue against the evening sky" (200). The aura of the blue mountains is analogous to the "essence" that Ethel Wilson is aware of and, in a technique which impinges on allegory, Wiebe unties the knot of Jakob's memory and reaches for the meaning beyond it. As the young man and the old man walk on the highway, the old man repeatedly unties and braids again the cord which ties his bundle on his back. Like Muttachi, his weaving is without purpose, but when he ties a knot in the cord and puts

it in his pocket, he begins work on a new fabric of the self. It is at this moment that he reveals his sense of guilt in the death of his only son and, in doing so, takes an important step towards the integrity of Frieda's acceptance. As Erikson has pointed out in Vital Involvement in Old Age, the past cannot be altered and his study of twenty-nine octogenarians revealed to him that

All are struggling somehow to accept the notion that, whether or not they could have behaved differently in the past, they cannot *now* alter decisions made or courses of action taken *then*.(71)

When Jakob puts the cord in his pocket, his words echo Frieda's "it was enough to make you think sometimes" (10). The "old man" now speaks out and "up into the air" and states:

Once you start thinking, you can never think enough, of it all(224)

The imagery used with Jakob and Reimer not only suggests Christ, but also the figure of Everyman travelling towards Death, a figure also evoked by an author whom Wiebe admired, Frederick Philip Grove. The final chapter of Our Daily Bread entitled "A Last Emotion and a Pilgrimage" describes John Elliot as an old man struggling towards "home". As an old man, Elliot, like Jakob, becomes aware of the psychological distance between himself and his family, a family in which "the last link" has been broken and the "sheaf" untied (390). The allegorical dimension of Jakob's weaving suggests a meaning that

emerges when the fabric of life is woven in proper proportion. As noted earlier, Frieda's voice does not weave a closing thread, but leaves the fabric open to the element of hope, one suggested in the wind which passes over the two men at the conclusion of The Blue Mountains of China. A similar spiritual breeze is associated with the broken body and home of the dying John Elliot. In both instances, the emphasis is the repeated cycle of human relationships and the possibilities of insight and wisdom contained in these.⁷

The association of the wind and/or spiritual breeze with elderly and sometimes dying protagonists is frequently related to them finding a way to face approaching death. As the body becomes less important, the wisdom of the spirit emerges and along with this, in many instances in English-Canadian fiction, emerges a strong impression of old, but vital, elderly protagonists. The vitality of these characters is often set against a background which contains frequent reminders of mortality. The opposition of vitality to mortality and its inherent suggestion of a way to deal with the proximity of death will be dealt with in the chapter which follows.

Chapter 4

Vitality and Mortality: Coming to Terms with Death

This is the story - part truth and part invention - of a lively woman who lived for a hundred years and died triumphant in Vancouver and is nearly forgotten after all her small commotion of living.

Author's Note: The Innocent Traveller (1949)

Ethel Wilson's Topaz Edgeworth lives to be one hundred years old. As a vital figure in old age, one who is opposed in extreme old age to the force of death which comes closer and closer, Topaz is not unique in Canadian fiction. In Survival (1972), Margaret Atwood notes the many examples of "powerful, negative old women in Canadian fiction", but fails to consider the positive elements reflected in characters such as Topaz. Atwood includes in her list the "raucous, blood-sucking vital old grandmother in Jalna" (205), but chooses not to focus on the life force a "vital" Adeline Whiteoak represents, a force recognised by her son, Nicholas, in Jalna (1927) when he comments,

Remember, she's ninety-nine, and she's never had her spirit
broken by life - or by the approach of death.(157-8)

In this instance, the description of Adeline resembles that of Topaz and such vitality can be found in later figures in Canadian fiction, figures such as the one-hundred-and-eleven-year-old Daddy Sherry whose vigour is also opposed to the theme of mortality which runs through W.O. Mitchell's The Kite (1962).¹ Topaz and Daddy will be the focus of this chapter which will also consider a vital voice in old age being used as part of an artistic strategy to suggest a form of continuance after death. Another part of this strategy can be seen in the way both Wilson and Mitchell use the imagery of the wind to suggest an ongoing life force in their portrayal of these two elderly English-Canadian protagonists.

The life force found in figures such as Topaz and Daddy Sherry transcends the negative view of old women, and rigid, orderly, pioneering old men, that Atwood finds in Canadian literature. For Atwood, this literature is dominated by an element of negativity, one which she sees as a reflection of the sense of national identity in a country where, as she describes it in Survival, "Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals"(79). Atwood does acknowledge "moments of affirmation" and "elements" which "transcend" the negativity, but feels that,

in Canadian literature, a character who does much more than survive stands out almost as an anomaly(Atwood,245)

The reverse seems true in a study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. The "anomaly" is the character in old age who does not affirm life. The vitality of de la Roche's Adeline Whiteoak has already been noted. The strength and sexuality of Constance Beresford-Howe's Eva in The Book of Eve (1973) provides another example. Eva reacts to the receipt of her first old-age pension cheque by dramatically leaving a demanding, chronically ill husband and learning to embrace her own life and individuality. Eva's male counterpart is George Wilson in Max Braithwaite's Lusty Winter (1978). Upon receipt of his first pension cheque, George leaves his wife of forty years and chooses a more liberated lifestyle in his cabin in the Muskokas. In addition, examples of vital Canadian Jewish women in old age can be found in Jack Ludwig's A Woman of Her Age (1973) set in Montreal and Bess Kaplan's Malke, Malke (1977) which takes place in Winnipeg. In the former, the eighty-five-year-old Doba is aware of approaching death and yet contemplates a return to law school. At sixty-five, Malke Brenner affirms life when she enthusiastically embarks on her fourth marriage. In a country with little sense of national identity and in a society which deprives the old of a sense of self, English-Canadian fiction articulates a strong voice for the old, one that can be heard across generations. In the case of Topaz, the memorable voice of an old woman is clearly linked to a sense of being Canadian.

What is most remarkable about the "story" of Topaz is the voice that persists after the story has been told. Like the voice of Rudy Wiebe's Frieda Friesen discussed in the last chapter, the voice of Topaz illuminates the life story of an old woman and makes sure that, after death, she is only "nearly forgotten". Topaz is remembered because of a voice which reflects the unremitting vitality she possesses for one hundred years. In The Innocent Traveller, Wilson opposes the vitality of Topaz to the ever-present factors of time, mutability and death. This dichotomy of vitality and mortality is suggested by Wilson in that part of the Author's Note quoted above. Here Wilson carefully points out that the character she has created is a "lively woman" who "die[s] triumphant" after the "small commotion" of her life.

The vitality reflected in the voice of Topaz promises a form of continuance after death and outside the novel. In her essay, "Somewhere Near the Truth", included in David Stouck's Ethel Wilson: Stories, Essays and Letters (1987), Ethel Wilson discusses the writing of her books and suggests the following should be amongst the questions asked by an author when a work is in progress:

Do the people go on living? Do their voices speak?(86)

Topaz continues to "speak" and "go on living" outside the work of fiction that has created her. This effect results from the life force that Wilson suggests in her portrait of an "innocent" traveller who journeys only on the surface of life, one who possesses a vitality which is not diminished by the complexity of human relationships. As noted in the

discussion of Wilson's Swamp Angel, both Maggie and Nell are well aware of the frustrations involved in relationships and at the conclusion of his article, "Ethel Wilson's Novels", Stouck remarks:

Human relations, their complexity, their fragility, is Ethel Wilson's intimate theme(87)

Topaz, by contrast, skims through life, above the depths of these relationships and, in the "Author's Note" to The Innocent Traveller, Wilson goes on to remark on her presentation of Topaz:

The metaphors are not mixed. The drop of water, the bird, the water-glider, the dancer, the wind on the canal, and Topaz, are all different and all the same.

Through these words, Wilson links Topaz with metaphors which suggest an intangible force passing through the surface events of a life, one which offers a form of hope beyond the difficulties of "[h]uman relations". What makes Topaz "different" is her portrayal as a vital figure which suggests the persistence of a life force even into old age and perhaps beyond. To achieve this, Wilson describes Topaz as the antithesis of the common fictional portrait of old age, one that is frequently focused around a time of retrospect and inactivity. At the age of ninety, Topaz is described as "sitting up in bed vigorous, vibrating, [and] still talking", having "talked for ninety years" (244). Even on the day of

her death, "gay, volatile" and "one hundred years old", Topaz is still moving forward and longing "to go" (275).²

The life force suggested in Topaz is opposed to mortality in the opening chapter of The Innocent Traveller. "Dinner at Noon" describes an Edgeworth family dinner at which Topaz is present as a small child who cannot be "squelched" (1), one who persists in crawling under the table and between the shoes of those at dinner as each life's journey is foretold. Through all the descriptions of life and death, Topaz is portrayed as doggedly "crawl[ing] on", as one who is "never to be tamed, never" (5-6). The chapter concludes with the blunt fact of the death of the mother of Topaz the next night. Even in a "sober" motherless home, the vitality of the Edgeworths cannot be repressed, family members "bubble [...] up" and are described as people who one "couldn't down". Of these members, the "sparkling volatile Topaz" (11) lives longest and, even in great old age, is described as a "small ancient being" with "unquenched vitality" (255).

This vital old woman lives most of her one hundred years in Vancouver and her voice contains a large part of the living history of this city. Topaz lives and dies "triumphant in Vancouver" and her identity is closely tied to this Canadian city as well as to her strong family bonds. In "A Cat Among the Falcons" (1959), included in Stouck's Ethel Wilson: Stories, Essays, and Letters (1987), the seventy-one-year-old Wilson describes a fragile "sort of subsoil of culture" in Vancouver, one which she stood on as a child and one which,

as the forests came down, had been vaguely prepared by our forebears in

the haste of building and earning. They had arrived at the water's edge with their violins and pianos, some books, some pictures, ideas, undoubted aspirations, opinions - or nothing whatsoever.(Stouck,100-1)

Orphaned at the age of ten, Wilson came to live in Vancouver with her maternal grandmother in 1898. In "Shockable and Unshockable Methodists in The Innocent Traveller", Irene Howard explores the background of Wilson's family and comments on the milieu in which Wilson lived:

[Ethel Wilson] lived, moreover, in Vancouver, a new town on the periphery of the world, without a literary tradition of its own, separated from the centres of an inherited tradition in London, Paris, and New England, and even from the beginnings of a national Canadian culture.(110-111)

The unconventional figure of Topaz was created in this environment and emerges from it with a voice which not only speaks for old age, but also contains a sense of identity drawn from the history and beginnings of a "Canadian culture".

Topaz is intimately linked with Vancouver in Wilson's struggle to find a title for the novel. In a letter to her publisher, John Gray, reprinted in Mary McAlpine's The Other Side of Silence: A Life of Ethel Wilson (1988), Wilson comments,

What a plaguing thing that title is. I now have

A Portrait of Vancouver
Told in Vancouver
Vancouver Tale

A Vancouver Story
Vancouver Aunt
 & the old Portrait of Topaz (McAlpine, 147)

European settlement of British Columbia only began in the middle to late nineteenth century. On the first page of The Innocent Traveller, Topaz is linked with the poet of the "present" period in England, Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). As a Victorian child of this period, Topaz moves through one hundred years which approximate the first one hundred years of the city of Vancouver. Eliza Edge, the family figure behind the fictional Topaz, died in 1943, just six years before the publication of The Innocent Traveller. The voice of Topaz is thus closely connected not only to the city of Vancouver, but also to an actual "family voice" which persists after many of its members, including Eliza, have passed through what Wilson calls in The Innocent Traveller the "strangely moving curtain of Time" (16).

Ethel Wilson was aware of the problem of creating a language and a referential vocabulary appropriate to a character's time frame, in particular, an idiom for the voice of old age. She was also aware of the tenuous nature of the voice of past generations. "Reflections in a Pool", published in Canadian Literature in 1964 when Wilson was seventy-six, begins:

I am old enough to remember the older members of the previous generation and the much older members of the generation before that - dwindling towards their close - and, like large slow-moving fairies in white beards or white caps, the survivors of a generation before that, who chiefly existed in quotations, or in palely inscribed ink on brittle paper, or on

gravestones.(29)

The fragile existence of the voice and words of past generations suggested above and the need to connect in a meaningful way from one generation to the next is discussed by Alexandra Collins in her article, "Who Shall Inherit the Earth? Ethel Wilson's Kinship with Wharton, Glasgow, Cather and Ostenso". Collins argues that, like Wharton and the other authors mentioned, Wilson was acutely aware of the need for a "collective past" (62,66), one which would hold meaning for the present and the future. Margaret Laurence expresses a similar need in "A Place to Stand On" when she discusses the creation of Hagar whose "meaning" she sees as "the same as that of an old woman anywhere, having to deal with the reality of dying" (18). Laurence describes Hagar as being drawn from people in her past, in particular her grandparents' generation. Both Wilson and Laurence turn to voices of past generations to discover meaning in the life experience.

In The Innocent Traveller, published when Wilson was sixty-one, the necessity of finding meaning in the voices of past generations is parodied in a humorous exchange between Great-Aunt Topaz and Yow, the Chinese cook. Yow describes for Topaz what he sees as the difference between the "Canadian people" and the "China people" of a much older civilization. In Yow's words,

Canadian people no savee nothing. China people more different. Last February China New Year my family have large party seven hundred people. All my kah-san. All my generation. You no care. You not ask all your famuly. I not hear you go telephone seven hundred people, all your generation. You not know all your generation. You not care. I care. I

know all my generation.(166-67)

Yow's words reflect the impermanence and potential loss of the voice contained in the generations of "white beards" and "white caps" that Wilson is aware of in her past. Shortly after Yow's diatribe, it is the voice of Topaz which urges,

In this new country it is very important that we should not lose track of family history. Tradition tends to die.(168)

As an old woman, the last of her generation, Topaz is defined by her voice and vitality. For her generation and those before, "wisdom" is described as being synonymous with "bearded age" (73) and a reason for connection between the old and the young. In the "Nuts and Figs" chapter of The Innocent Traveller, Ethel Wilson presents a picture of old age in which this association has dwindled and the young generation views the old with distaste. Pretty Milly, the dressmaker's daughter, sees ninety-year-old Great-Grandfather Edgeworth and seventy-nine-year-old Miss Raphael sitting in the garden and dismisses them as inanimate "old mummies" and "hardly people". She comments, "Eh, I'd lief be dead as look like tha'." Ironically, the portrait that Wilson presents of the "two old people" (82) is far from lacklustre. As the narrator points out, these "two old people had not discovered that they were mummies" (83) and Great-Grandfather Edgeworth is portrayed as a vital figure in the middle of proposing marriage to Miss Raphael. He has also just unsuccessfully proposed the same to Miss Raphael's sister, the

eighty-seven-year-old Mrs. Grimwade.

Great-Grandfather Edgeworth is the father of Topaz and Wilson makes him older than his model, her great-grandfather, Joseph Edge, who lived to the age of eighty-seven. In "Piety, Propriety, and the Shaping of the Writer", Barbara Wild traces the maternal and paternal family trees of Ethel Wilson for four generations, "the same distance in time that Wilson herself traverses in The Innocent Traveller" (27). As Wild points out, the characters in this novel are based on Wilson's own relatives, in particular the Malkins, her mother's side of the family. Wilson herself is behind the figure of the young Rose and Topaz, as we have seen, is based on Wilson's great-aunt, Eliza Phillips Edge, who died in 1943 at the age of ninety-eight. The "part truth" component of the story of Topaz is thus drawn from Wilson's family experience and to this she adds the "part invention" of fiction to create a timeless voice which interconnects all four generations. In "Somewhere Near the Truth", one of the essays contained in Stouck's Ethel Wilson: Stories, Essays, and Letters, Wilson comments on this blending of truth and fiction in The Innocent Traveller. She describes it as a "family chronicle" in which

[t]he persons and incidents are true, or, when I made some up (as I did), they are so truly characteristic of certain persons that they approximate to truth. (Stouck, 87)

Fact and fiction are thus linked in the creation of family figures and voices in the novel.³ As David Stouck points out in his article, "Ethel Wilson's Novels", The Innocent Traveller is "a memory book" and the reader is "continuously reminded, by means of interpolated

speech from later years, that these are family stories being remembered". Stouck goes on to note the novel's uniqueness in the 1940's in that it "celebrat[es] the domestic joys of family and old age rather than youth and erotic love" (77).

In her portrait of a vital woman who travels through time to a great age, Wilson carefully plays the voice of Topaz against the Edgeworth family voice. The latter voice includes that of great-niece Rose and, as noted earlier, behind this voice is the authorial voice of Wilson. Through the artistic strategy of a combination of voices, Wilson presents the possibility of a voice which persists, a stronger voice than the ephemeral one Wilson associates with the "white beards or white caps" (29) of "Reflections in a Pool". This is particularly evident in the description of the Book Meetings in the Pottery Towns of England, meetings which Topaz remembers attending as a young woman. In this instance, Wilson's authorial voice interrupts the narrative with the following:

I was never at a Book Meeting, because I was not alive and had not then been thought of, but I have heard so much about them that I am there with Topaz. There we sat(59)

Through the above, Wilson's personal voice becomes part of the family voice and, by extension, part of the voice of Topaz at the Book Meetings. This intricate network of voices breaks down barriers of time and provides a sense of history and identity not only for the new city of Vancouver, but also for the family and individuals within it. As the omniscient narrator points out, this is a "history" which "will not be written for a long

time" (158) and an alternative sense of identity is engendered in the oral history presented and preserved in the voices and stories of the The Innocent Traveller.

The voice which persists in the novel is that of Topaz. This voice does not change from youth to old age and its timeless quality is reflected in the comments of the narrative voice early in the novel:

Only the small and irascible Topaz was an individual from the time she uttered her first sentence ("Oh, yes, I spoke clearly and fluently at the age of nine months; my Mother *was* surprised!" "Now Aunty ...!") until that day nearly a century later when, still speaking clearly, she died.(15)

The voice of Topaz enters in parenthesis, as does that of her listener, Rose, but it is the voice of Topaz which dominates and Wilson ensures this by the frequent parenthetical interjections of this eccentric voice into the narrative. As in the above, Wilson often interrupts the omniscient narrative voice with the slang and energy of the unchanging voice of Topaz. A return to the omniscient voice frames and highlights the intensity of a voice which persists for "nearly a century". Such vitality is ensured by Wilson's use of repetition, exclamation marks, italics and repeated questions; "I do declare!" is exclaimed and repeated by Topaz right up until moments before her death (275). Use of such methods enables Wilson to create the language of a "lively woman who lived for a hundred years", one whose words "leap[] like little jangling jaguars" (229) and one who peppers her language in old age with unusual words from the Staffordshire dialect, such as "sneaped" and "jannock" (231-2). As the narrative voice comments,

(now that Topaz was old, she used old colloquialisms and Staffordshireisms, "jannock" she would say for "kind and pleasant")
(232)

Such liveliness and intensity of language ensures that it is the voice of Topaz, even as an old woman, which stands out from the other voices in the text and cannot be "forgotten".

It is the voice of Great-Great-Aunt Topaz which is remembered in the future by a great-grandson of Annie, sister of Topaz. Annie is also called "Grandmother" and based on Eliza's sister, Ann Elizabeth Edge, who lived to be eighty-six. In a chapter called "The Journey", this great-grandson walks along the banks of the Rideau Canal in Ottawa and looks over the railing at its "rather still" water. His thoughts revolve around the need for a suitable "memorial" for generations past and subtly link Topaz with the image of the wind:

"My Great-Grandmother ... needs no memorial. There are forty of us - why there must be fifty of us now! - Canadians, up and down the country, who have issued from her or her issue, and for better or worse we are her memorial. And my great Aunt Rachel, whom I just remember, needs no memorial either, because there are still people who knew her and honoured her quite a lot, and anyway, a person like my Great-Aunt Rachel has her own memorial. But Great-Great-Aunt Topaz, who outlived these two, and outlived all her generation, and many of the next generation, and some of the next generation, and who defied these generations in her later days - don't I remember her! - she has gone; there is no mark of her that I know, no more than the dimpling of the water caused by the wind a few minutes ago. She is only a line on granite, 'Sister of the Above'. Yet she lived a hundred years, and is not long dead. Already she is seldom mentioned, and when we meet together as we sometimes do, all so busy, all so occupied, perhaps no one remembers, until afterwards, to mention her name. It

really is a shame," thought the great-grandson idly, "that one can live a hundred years with gusto, and be happy, and agitate the stream, and pass at once out of memory. So she has no memorial ... I'd better hurry or I'll be late" The breeze blew and rippled the waters of the canal here and there(104-5)

Ironically, it is Topaz who stands out in the recollections of the great-grandson. She is the family member whom this great-grandson links in his memory with the passing of generations and in whom he finds a voice and vitality which endures. Topaz is remembered for her individual "gusto" and not for the people she knew or the sheer numbers of her descendants. The vitality of Topaz is associated with the "wind" which passes over the "still" waters of the canal and which is earlier described as a "small invisible wind which ran rapidly along the surface of the water" pushing "waste twigs" and "lately fallen leaves" (104) to the edge of the canal. This imagery suggestively opposes an intangible life force to the "still" waters of mortality and links this force to the "gusto" of Topaz who "agitate[s] the stream" of life as she passes through it.

Vitality and mortality are again associated with Topaz in a later chapter which reflects this dichotomy in its title, "The Buried Life". Now in her nineties, Topaz chooses to read lines from Matthew Arnold's poem of that title and dramatically raises her voice as she approaches the following lines,

A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze(253)

Arnold's words associate an awareness of mortality with increasing age and link this awareness with the spiritual promise of "the breeze", a form of hope which is offered in the opening words of the Old Testament:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.(Genesis 1,1-2)

Wilson uses the image of the wind to suggest an ephemeral life force in *Topaz* with links beyond the limits of mortality and time.

When Wilson portrays the great-grandson walking along the canal "about a half a century later" (104), she in effect crosses the boundaries of time in the journey of life and in doing this suggests a life force outside the imposed limits of past, present and future, one which requires a mental journey to appreciate. In a letter to Anne Blochin at the Macmillan Publishing Company, contained in Stouck's collection of Wilson's essays, letters and stories, Wilson discusses the writing of *The Innocent Traveller* and her words suggest such a journey:

One finds the Time phenomenon cropping up startlingly but very elusively from time to time in ordinary life - just glimpses of it. But I have tried to give a hint - a layman's ignorant guess - in the third chapter without labouring it too heavily. The future, past, and present seem implicit in each other, seem one and the same But there it is, the Time mystery which has bemused a lot of people - it's outside our understanding, hardly inside our perception, but always adjacent to us, and we are implicated in it, I'm sure.(Stouck, 120)

As Stouck points out in a footnote to Wilson's letter, the "third chapter" is difficult to determine because of Wilson's numerous changes to the manuscript (121). However, the "strangely moving curtain of Time" (16) in the third chapter of the published version suggests a different journey, one beyond the boundaries of time imposed by mortality. Chapter Three is titled "By Our First Strange and Fatal Interview" and deals with the life and death of another "innocent" (20) traveller, Grandmother's sister Mary, who dies in childbirth in India. Vitality and mortality are once more emphasised in the brief description of Mary's life and of her death, a death which is placed abruptly at the end of this chapter, just as the death of Mother is announced at the end of the first.

Wilson constantly reminds the reader of the presence of death in the journey of life. When the young Topaz boards the train to cross Canada for the first time, she is described as "travell[ing] light", taking with her very little emotional baggage except a "joy of living", one which is described as being

concerned only with the veriest surface of material and psychic being, [and which] allowed her to amuse herself like those 'water-gliders' which we see in summer running about on the top of pleasant weed-fringed pools.(103)

Again, Wilson opposes life to ever-present death as a force which lies just below the "surface" of life. If Topaz is considered as a character with psychological depth, she fails miserably. However, if she is considered figuratively as a life force outside the barriers of time, one which can be opposed to mortality, her portrayal succeeds. This is especially

apparent as Topaz approaches death in old age.

When she is "over eighty" (238), Topaz is described during one of her regular Friday visits to Rose. Like many of the other accounts which revolve around Topaz in The Innocent Traveller, the description of this visit is comical and the humour depends on the voice of Aunt Topaz which rattles on endlessly. Her "powerful and carrying voice" (237) dominates the visit and, despite her shrinking size, her presence "fills the house from the front door to the back" (238). Topaz does not listen to Rose, and as the narrator points out,

She seldom listens. She enjoys speaking.(237)

Topaz hardly pauses as Rose leaves to play tennis, but instead urges her to "Charm, charm! Sparkle, sparkle! Scintillate, scintillate!" (242), words which could be described as the maxim by which Topaz lives.

The humour and vitality in the presentation of the voice of Topaz, and the way it dominates the visit to Rose, are opposed to yet another concluding reference to mortality, at the end of the chapter recounting this visit. The chapter is called "Aunty Spends the Day" and the strategy is employed to ensure that the voice of Topaz, and the vitality it engenders, is placed against the forces of mutability and time. "Aunty" finally leaves Rose and, "ancient, important, a delight and disturbance to her family, still talking, goes home". Straight after this, the chapter closes with the following:

The day is over. The earth turns, and seven times turning brings Friday again. The weeks hasten by. Where are the weeks? They are lost in the years. Aunty's long life inscribes no sweeping curves upon the moving curtain of Time. She inscribes no significant design. Just small bright dots of colour, sparkling dots of life.(243)

Shortly before this description, Topaz is described as someone for whom "everything is new under the sun" (242). As the day of life closes into evening, the "sparkling dots of life" suggested in the figure of a woman in old age are opposed to an image of time evoking Ecclesiastes 9:11 where there is nothing "new under the sun", but "time and chance" happen to all. Against the changes of life, Wilson places the irrepressible Topaz and suggests through her a figure who embraces life to the end. In the humour of her presentation, Wilson affirms and celebrates life even into old age and approaching death and supports a way of dealing with the finite nature of life described in Ecclesiastes 8:15:

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

As the environment of Topaz shrinks in old age, her voice and vitality remain undiminished. In her eighties, Topaz is in control. Now living alone in her own apartment, she "reign[s]" (234) and "rule[s] ... over her whole world" (236). At the age of ninety-three she still lives in this apartment, now with a housekeeper, but still "vigorous, vibrating, [and] still talking". As the narrator points out, "She has talked for ninety years" and

She is the Great-Aunt. She is the Great-Great-Aunt. She is important.(244)

At ninety-three "Aunty" still savours new words and phrases like "Old Rip" and while at "cocktails" in her apartment with Rose and another friend, comments on the lack of men present and "still speaking ... not ceas[ing] speaking" remarks that she would call them "hen-tails" (247) and quickly demands to be served one. Again, the humorous presentation of this old woman affirms life and the reaching for it with "Gusto", as the name of the chapter containing this incident implies.

As Topaz approaches one hundred years of age, her joy in life persists. She is "too much occupied in living" (258) to be affected by the onset of the Second World War. This historical event does not change her world; what does are the constrictions imposed by progressive age. As her life closes down, Topaz still continues to sally forth. Again, humour is the essence of her final venture, at the age of one hundred, into the outside world. In this last expedition, Topaz insists on going out to buy icecream, only to be impeded on the journey home by her falling knickers. Topaz is unperturbed by the incident and just relieved to find she is not paralysed. The joy and verve she draws from the incident are apparent and, at its conclusion, the narrator comments:

Because Great-Aunt Topaz is a hundred years old and is still little Topaz Edgeworth with a strong infusion of *grande dame*, she is invincible. Small and great lapses from convention do not dismay her. Why should they? They entertain her. She is impatient of illness but not at all dismayed by death, which now can almost be heard approaching, it is so near.(271)

In advanced old age, Topaz is aware of the approach of death and accepts it as part of the journey of life. As her world closes down to one room, down to a "point of departure" she is still described as "gay [and] volatile". However, now one hundred years old, she is also described as a "poor volatile bird" uneasily waiting for some form of "affirmation or release" (275). In the final chapter of The Innocent Traveller, Wilson suggests a likeness between the final "migration" of Topaz and that of the massive bird migrations of the Argentinian plains, especially the waiting restlessness of "the most volatile species" and that of the last bird of that species waiting to go, waiting for "something" (274). As the last of her generation, Topaz approaches death with confidence in this final "adventure" of life and when she dies the narrator remarks, "Something remained and something was ended" (275). The suggestive "something" that hovers over the death of Topaz lingers from the vitality she has manifested in life and, when she dies, the wind is used as an aspiring image to be opposed to mortality.

After the funeral of Topaz, the image of the wind suggests the form of release that Topaz has longed for as she approached death in old age. Seagulls are described as flying "high overhead on account of the wind" and Wilson quotes from the Eighteenth Devotion of John Donne which concludes the novel with the following words,

We are ... transported, our dust blowne away with prophane dust, with every wind. (277)

Alongside this seriousness, Wilson continues the zest and humour she has used to portray the life and old age of a woman who "live[s] for a hundred years". Even after death, the figure of Topaz is at the centre of one of life's fiascos. Her funeral flowers are described as being sent to the wrong place and one cannot help but think it would have been a send-off that "Aunty" would have relished.

Just as Topaz approaches life with "gusto", so too does Daddy Sherry in W.O. Mitchell's The Kite (1962). In this novel, the image of the wind is also used as an aspiring image, one which again incorporates the breath, spirit and "silent" word of God that Mitchell portrays in Who Has Seen the Wind (1947) and that Wilson suggests by her use of wind imagery in The Innocent Traveller. In Who Has Seen the Wind the incident with old Saint Sammy, his piano box and the voice of God in the wind presents another example of an energised figure in old age who is linked with the possibilities of another dimension. Like Sammy, both Topaz and Daddy are portrayed not only as being associated with a spiritual or religious dimension, but also as feisty characters in extreme old age. Daddy lives to be one-hundred-and-eleven years old. He contemplates marriage at the age of ninety-eight and goes on a goose-hunt at the age of a hundred. Like the kite that Daddy flies on his one-hundred-and-eleventh birthday, Daddy "flies" at the age of one-hundred-and-seven as the "acerobat" Alfredo dela Monterey dela Sherry. As he points out, "Don't ever hear of any acerobats a hundred an' seven years old" (50). When he is

about to fly on his broomstick trapeze in Bailey's barn, Daddy yells out that he is "ay-bout to take death fearlessly by thee face" (59) and his vitality is figuratively opposed to the proximity of his own mortality.

As with The Innocent Traveller, the themes of time, mutability and mortality are present from the opening pages of The Kite. In these pages a thirty-nine-year-old journalist, David Lang, travels towards his first meeting with Daddy and en route contemplates the "fleeting nature" of his work and the "breathlessly small" amount of time he has on earth (2). Mitchell has commented on the theme of man's mortality and its centrality to The Kite in an interview with Patricia Barclay:

The idea of a kite, a lively thing held by a thin thread of life, is comparable to man and his mortality, and the novel is a study in mortality, and the awareness of the shortness of man's day's upon the earth(Barclay,55)

The profundity and seriousness of the theme of mortality is dealt with by Mitchell in a funny, almost farcical novel in which the "lively" image of the kite and the spiritual potential it entails, is also held in the "lively" characterisation of an extremely old man. Daddy's vitality is apparent from the first time he appears in the novel when, with "white hair electric", it looks to David "as though Mr. Sherry speared directly from the floor beneath, through the bed and straight up" (31).

Like the "sparkling dots of life" (243) found in Topaz, the vitality in Daddy is associated with a "life force" which "sparkles" (80) in him. Daddy also resembles Topaz in his approach to life; he "comes to everything as though it were fresh and new - like a

poet" (136). Such vitality and "wild exuberance" were noted by Margaret Laurence in "Holy Terror", her review of The Kite published in 1963 and presumably written during the writing of The Stone Angel which was published in 1964. Laurence felt The Kite was a successful novel because of its aged protagonist, "this one old man, who strikes me as a genuine holy terror". However, Laurence also notes Daddy's "spells of morbidity" which are opposed to his vitality and "his non-existent sense of history" (76-77). If what she sees in the novel is taken one step further, Daddy, like Topaz, becomes the figurative expression of a vital force in old age. Topaz does not concern herself with history either. She lives through both World Wars, but does not bother herself about them, being "too much occupied with living" (258) to contemplate events in the passing world of time. In both novels, vitality and mortality are constantly opposed in figures which are defined not by the historical events they have lived through, but by a forward impetus which goes with them into the extreme edges of a long life.

In the early pages of The Kite, as David Lang approaches Daddy's home town of Shelby, Alberta, he searches for a theme for his article on Daddy and makes the common connection between a long-lived life and the historical events associated with such a life:

Longevity - obviously - a living record of the limits of human life - the old Parr of the foothills - the one unbroken thread of flesh and spirit unravelling vulnerably from the year eighteen forty-nine. The California gold rush - twelve years old when Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States, sixteen when the president had been assassinated in Ford's Theatre.(7)

Here Mitchell uses what looks like a routine thought association not only to introduce subtly the imagery later associated with the kite and the wind, but also to link this with the Canadian tendency to find meaning and historical significance in events and figures outside Canada. In other words, to express the lack of a Canadian voice that is also Wilson's concern in The Innocent Traveller. By comparing Daddy to the English "old Parr" and associating phases of his life with American history, this Canadian "foothills" figure becomes analogous with the amorphous figures in the history of the long life of Topaz, figures who could be lost if, as has been noted in Yow's remarks, "Canadian people no savee nothing." Like Wilson, Mitchell is also aware of the need for the voice of a collective past and expresses this through the words of Shelby's local barber, Mr. Spicer:

Printed word lasts. History - man like Daddy Sherry - way I see it - he's history - he has historical importance. All our old-timers dying off makes him even more historically important because they're the living pages of our history - Canadian history. Pages - fluttering away - unrecorded - lots of them unread.(23)

David has come to Shelby to record the long life of Daddy Sherry. As a child, he was given the set of Berkley's Masters and Scholars Encyclopedia that had belonged to the family boarder who replaced Lon Burke, creator of a kite for David which was prevented from flying by Lon's death. Through these books, David becomes aware that words are "a sort of legacy from Lon, not a kite but something almost as wonderful" (19). A curious connection between the kite's silence and the world of words is established here

and anticipates the connection David will eventually make between Daddy who is "too immersed in living to build historical significance out of his days" (124) and the kite which he flies on the wind in the face of death. Daddy's kite is a symbol of the spirit of human life lived to its furthest reach; Shelby's minister, Donald Finlay, describes Daddy as living a long life "fully - intuitively" (152). Mitchell's use of the wind and the kite is analogous to the "silent" word of God that Wilson subtly evokes in her use of wind imagery in the portrayal of Topaz.

Both Topaz and Daddy live life to its limits and just as Wilson suggests in her portrait of Topaz a "something" outside the boundaries of time, so too does Mitchell suggest in his portrait of a character in extreme old age "something old and elemental", words which are used to describe David's response to preparations in Shelby for Daddy's birthday party:

David had the feeling that he was in touch with something old and elemental; all shared a synthesizing insight such as drops over a congregation at the taking of communion or holy sacrament; all made their obeisance to the eternal ancestors of a mythological past when man was ageless; they planned a party for Methuselah.(71)

Methuselah is a sacred equivalent to old Parr and Mitchell links Daddy with both ancient figures as well as another "old and elemental" figure, the traditionally long-lived turtle. Daddy is described as moving with "turtle slowness" (31) when David first meets him and as also having "turtle eyes" (79). The latter description occurs when Daddy contemplates a fall goose-hunt and confrontation with yet another "[e]xtremely old" (75) creature, the

"shaman goose" with "the great sickle wings" (89), Old Bull Frog Croaker.⁴ In addition, Daddy is also connected to the "old and elemental" world that shamans and witches represent. He is described in David's thoughts as having for the community of Shelby

the set-apart magic of a tribal shaman; in him reposed the extra spiritual power of the witches of old. No wonder they were traditionally old ... for their age was just more proof of their special power over the immutable laws of death.(70)

Time, mutability and death and "something old and elemental" are also linked with the long-lived Daddy when Mitchell repeatedly associates him with the tombs of ancient Egypt; Daddy's house has a pyramidal roof (28,37,95) and Daddy claims to have at "Hundred an' eleven - Egypt in my bones" (33). Daddy's "special power" is further suggested in the analogy made by Mr. Spicer between Daddy and a seed found in a pharaoh's tomb which when brought to light germinated after thousands of years (28).

By associating Daddy with the powers of an ancient past, Mitchell links him with a force outside the limits of man's mortality. This force is tied to the spiritual power of the wind and Mitchell suggests through this imagery the possibilities of a different language beyond time. This idea is also apparent at the conclusion of Who Has Seen the Wind when an "endless silence" is described over prairie grave-stones. The soil in this instance is described as "rich" (300) and suggests a wordless language beyond death, one to be opposed to the impermanence of words on tombstones that Ethel Wilson describes. In his creation of the character of Daddy, Mitchell composes a figure who comes to life

through language, through the voices and stories of the townspeople of Shelby. As with Topaz, this pattern of voices creates and sustains the portrait of a "lively" figure in extreme old age. However, in contrast to Topaz, Daddy is associated from the beginning of his portrayal with the "silence" of another language. Daddy is first seen when David goes to interview him in his house and what follows parodies the typical interview of an extremely old person, one which inevitably seeks the "secret" of a long life. Beneath David's attempt to conduct a routine interview lies the voice of silence, one which is described as possessing another sound:

the silence of the bedroom had borrowed a harsh edge, at first an almost imperceptible and placeless sound; it strengthened and lost its ventriloquial quality(31-2)

The enigmatic sound of a different voice is also suggested by Mitchell in his portrayal of another old man, the seventy-six-year-old Kenneth Lyon in Ladybug, Ladybug ... (1988).

Through retrospect, Lyon remembers

discover[ing] the wind to be a fine ventriloquist; although you could feel the general direction it was coming from, you couldn't really pin it down, and it had so many voices(65)

Mitchell links Daddy's voice directly to that of the wind in the first words that Daddy speaks, affirmative words from an extremely old man who, at this point, appears so close to death. Daddy affirms life with his "Yeh-yeh-yeh-yeh-yeh" and the narrator comments,

Autumn wind through dead leaves might have whispered so: breathy
affirmation of nothing(32)

Daddy's links with autumn and decay are carefully juxtaposed with the image of the wind and the promise of a different affirmative voice in the face of death.

As Daddy himself later comments, "fall" is the "time to square off" for his "fight with winter", to oppose his vitality to its threat of mortality. As he explains to Doctor Richardson, he'd like to turn back time "[w]hilst the old fellah wasn't lookin'." The "old fellah" is Death, the only "old fellah" Daddy feels he "can call old an' get away with it" (77). As the winter of death approaches, Daddy anticipates his meeting with Old Croaker, the goose not only distinguished by great age, but also by the sound of his "squawk box". Old Croaker lacks the normal two-note call of a goose, but has instead a "deep unfinished croak - as though he'd begun to call and was interrupted in mid-call ..." (75). Daddy completes this call in a scene just prior to the goose-hunt when he mimics Old Croaker and with his voice provides the high second note that Old Croaker lacks. When he does this, Daddy anticipates the ultimate fulfilment contained in the laughter "in unison" of the "two old ganders" at the end of the goose-hunt when

They laughed at the doctor.
They laughed at the minister.
They laughed at the undertaker.(90)

Laughter as a means for elderly people to "take greater control of their life experience" is discussed by William F. Fry Jr. in "Humor, Physiology, and the Aging Process" (89). Mitchell's artistic strategy gives Daddy and Old Croaker control of a situation that suggests Daddy's death and burial. As he laughs, Daddy is described as "half-resurrected", having lifted "the bright green grave grass" of the hunting blind "over his shoulders like a shawl" (90). When Daddy is outside with Old Croaker he is comfortable with the fact of death. In his story of the goose-hunt Doctor Richardson describes Daddy as sitting on a bed of specially warmed rocks, "rocker-snug in his warm nest" (87) of undertaker's grave grass, with grave blankets forming a bonnet for his head. A "swaddled Daddy" has literally been "buried" in the "great ditch" dug for him by the doctor, the minister and the undertaker and the "long black hearse" (86) of the undertaker has taken the soil away so that death and the "grave" are obscured from sight. Daddy draws attention to death as a part of life when he emerges from this burial pit and, through an action that echoes his apparent "spear[ing]" (31) through from the floor when David first attempts to interview him, suggests a life force to penetrate the limits of mortality and a way to face approaching death.

Later in the novel, Daddy illustrates another way of dealing with the proximity of death in old age. He shuts himself up in his room with the casket catalogue from Ollie Pringle's funeral home. What makes him leave his room and the images of death in the catalogue is the timeless vitality of continuing life and its constant opposition to the approach of death. David suggests this juxtaposition when he and Daddy's friend, the young boy, Keith MacLean, visit Daddy and David tells Daddy of their lack of interest

"[i]n your black tasselled coffin and your red granite tombstone. We'll take summer fallow steaming under the sun with the killdeer crying behind the drill - over your black broadcloth - the crocuses in Paradise Valley say a lot more for us than the longest epitaph in the undertaker's book - your two-ton stone isn't worth one single pussy-willow bud"(161)

Daddy interrupts and demands the window in his room be opened and through this action once again joins the life outside. Mitchell employs a similar artistic strategy earlier in his short story "But As Yesterday" (1942) when he describes an old man of eighty sitting in his rocker by the window of his room. This old man affirms his connection with the life outside by keeping his window "always open" (132). Both this old man and Daddy face death by embracing it as part of life, as does the grandmother in Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind (1947) who invites death by having her window opened. In a similar way, Topaz defeats her physically limited existence in old age with her eagerness for death as part of another experience of life.

Such possibilities are also dealt with by David Waltner-Toews in his short story, "A Sunny Day in Canada". As noted in Chapter One, this story takes place within the limited confines of a nursing home. Like Daddy, the narrator of the story is linked with something "old and elemental". His opening words make the connection:

Fourscore and ten years have I lived, as the ancients would have said. They loved euphemisms. I am ancient and my bones ache.(14)

Further, just as Daddy is wrapped and "buried" in the hunting blind, this old man describes himself as a "skeleton wrapped in parchment" an "archaeological artifact ... tucked into a cave of white sheets and woollen blankets" (15). From this restricted physical position he anticipates "spearing up" like Daddy and entering a new space, one with the positive implications of a "sunny day". Again, as with Daddy, the image of the kite is used to explore these aspirations. The old narrator remarks that his eighty-nine-year-old wife "floats, jerkily" in her movements "like a paper doll suspended by a string" and he goes on to comment,

But her lightness, that is what I love. One morning she will lift up through the window like a kite, up, up, growing smaller and smaller in to the blue prairie sky. I shall be holding the string. When she arrives up there, she will give a little tug, and I too will be pulled loose. I shall float up after her, unstuck from earth.(15)

The story, like Hagar's final "And then -" (308), is incomplete. After the death of his wife this old man mentally composes an unfinished letter and ends it with a sentence without a full stop:

Dear, dear Rachel, my lovely kite, I am coming (24)

The image of the kite flying on the wind and the suggestion of resurrection are both factors associated with Mitchell's portrayal of Daddy. Further, like the stories of Topaz, Hagar and the ninety-year-old protagonist of "A Sunny Day in Canada", Daddy's

story is incomplete. His final "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah" (210) at the conclusion of The Kite leaves his story open-ended. The conclusion of the novel follows an act of defiance by Daddy, one which resembles Hagar's defiant "wrest[ing]" of the glass of water she is given into her own hands just before her final words. Daddy expresses his defiance when he "yank[s] violently" on the string of the birthday kite Keith has given him and exclaims, "Loop-the-loop you weavin' son of a hunyack!" (210) before handing the stick of the flying kite over to Keith. Much of Daddy's vitality, like that of Topaz, is expressed through vivid language. Janette Turner Hospital uses a similar strategy in her short story, "Morgan Morgan". Here the voice of an old man expresses his vitality and is described with imagery that suggests the intangible promise of the kite. When this old man yodels, he does "something mysterious in his throat and his yodel ... unfurl[s] itself like a silk ribbon" (Isobars,12).

The kite is Daddy's preferred birthday gift, one which he gladly accepts after his violent rejection of the "chaste and puritan clock" (196) which the people of Shelby give him. This clock is "shrouded" (203) in the limitations of time and mortality. Daddy aggressively opposes his vitality to these limitations when he attacks the clock with his cane and shatters its "age-dry case [which] burst[s] apart with the multiple, cracking explosion of an entire package of fire-crackers ignited all together" (206). Daddy does not need a clock to remind him of his mortality. He has always lived with an intensity related to his awareness of death and this is the legacy he passes on to David who finally realises

the astonishingly simple thing the old man had to say - and had said

through the hundred and eleven years of his life - between the personal deeds of his birth and his death, knowing always that the string was thin - that it could be dropped - that it could be snapped. He had lived always with the awareness of his own mortality.(209)

An approach to death which breaks through the limitations of mortality and time is also expressed in the figure of another "Old Man" at the conclusion of a novel which also places its elderly protagonist at the centre of a town's voices. Like Daddy, he is also given a timepiece by the people of his town, Upward, Saskatchewan. This is the seventy-five-year-old Doc Hunter of Sinclair Ross's Sawbones Memorial (1974). Doc's thoughts as he approaches death reflect not only his equanimity, but also the sense of new possibilities and different beginnings:

So relax Old Man, go home and sleep. It's all over and it's all beginning, there's nothing more required of you. April and the smell of April, just as it was all beginning that day too (139)

Doc's response is similar to that described when Daddy "commune[s] with his dead" in Paradise Valley near "Wolf Willah Crick" (166-7). Here also, it is "smell" which collapses time and brings the past into the present, suggesting the different "something" that Wilson is aware of with her "strangely moving curtain of Time" and that Laurence evokes with her portrayal of Hagar in the cemetery at the opening of The Stone Angel when a "disrespectful wind" stirs up the "smell of things that grew untended and had grown always".⁵

For Doc, Daddy and Hagar, the elusive nature of life and death is evoked by the enigmatic nature of smell. This quality is, however, linked in all these instances to an all-important voice in old age which expresses a belief in life as death is approached. The vitality of this voice opposes the finite nature of mortality and suggests the possibilities of a different journey to be made at the end of life. This journey is one which is linked with a voice which lives and speaks outside the novel, a voice which suggests being in touch with something at the extreme edge of life which will persist for the generations that are to come. As Topaz approaches the age of a hundred, Rose is described as she walks down Granville Street in Vancouver. The seagulls which will be linked with the wind and with the final journey of Topaz after death fly above Rose at this point and suggest a voice to be heard as death is approached. This voice can be heard across generations, but as Wilson suggests in The Innocent Traveller:

Someone, not everyone, hears the voice above the crowd.(261)

A voice which cannot always be heard suggests the existence of other realities which can be looked forward to after death. In English-Canadian fiction, traditional markers of reality are often challenged in the depiction of old age and a new sense of alternative realities is frequently implied. This is especially apparent when the fictional portrayal of old age is linked with the possibilities of resurrection and it is this process which will be considered in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 5

Old Age and Resurrection: Another Look at Reality

It was not that Grandfather lived in the past, though naturally he did a little. Rather it was that he saw the present with such experienced eyes that he often seemed to be living in the future, which would become real only after he was dead.(148)

*Conrad Dehmel in Hugh MacLennan's
Voices in Time (1980)*

Conrad Dehmel speaks the above as an old man. In old age he recalls his Grandfather's sense of time as "simply a feeling that the present moment is unreal because it is a product of the past and a transition into the future" (148). Such a breakdown of the conventional parameters of what we think of as "reality" is also evident in the aged Dehmel's recollection:

[Grandfather] used to talk sometimes of rebirth and I thought he meant the resurrection of the body but after a while I knew he was talking of something larger than that.(152)

Dehmel recalls that, as his Grandfather approached death, he sensed that "he had gone away from us into what was left of himself" (152). In the fiction of old age many other elderly protagonists also take an inward journey, one which attempts to see with the mind's eye what is possible beyond the limits of mortality. In Voices in Time, MacLennan presents a shattered world, one destroyed by a nuclear explosion, a world in which survivors search for meaning. Survivors into old age also exist in a fragmented world. As the end of life is approached, loss of friends and family and failure of bodily functions can trigger a quest for different forms of reality.

In English-Canadian fiction, the exploration of alternative realities is especially apparent in the work of Jack Hodgins and, in particular, his numerous portrayals of characters in old age. Hodgins lives and writes in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, a place which he describes in his introduction to The West Coast Experience (1976) as giving one the sense of not only "living at the edge of the continent", but also at "the extreme frontier of the world" where "[o]ld realities can be thought of as left behind ...and new realities can take their place" (2). The search for "new realities" is a central theme in Hodgins' work and this chapter will explore its connection with his elderly protagonists by looking at his work in chronological order, from the stationary Mrs. Bested in Spit Delaney's Island (1976) to the itinerant Geoffrey Crane in The Honorary Patron (1987). Hodgins' attitude to "reality" is expressed in comments published in Canadian Writers at

Work: Interviews with Geoff Hancock (1987):

What you and I call the ocean is to me only a metaphor. All those trees, for instance, are metaphors; the reality lies beyond them. The act of writing to me is an attempt to shine a light on that ocean and those trees so bright that we see right through them to the reality that is constant.(Hancock,62)

Hodgins' attempt to portray another kind of reality in his fiction is indebted to the work of Gabriel García Márquez whose influence is acknowledged by Hodgins earlier in the same interview with Hancock. A cornerstone in the fiction of magic realism was the publication in 1970 of the English translation of García Márquez' Cien Años de Soledad (1967) as One Hundred Years of Solitude with its village of Macondo where nobody has died and with characters like the aged Melquiades who returns from the dead. As noted above, Hodgins' first major work of fiction, Spit Delaney's Island, was published in 1976. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the aspects of magic realism in Hodgins' work and how it relates to an attitude to death expressed in the portrayal of his elderly protagonists. In "Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction", Geoff Hancock remarks that "British Columbia is less a state of nature than a state of mind" (32). Working out of British Columbia, Hodgins presents the possibilities of an altered "state of mind" in old age, one that leads to a different reality and which suggests a new way of interpreting the concept of "resurrection".

The journey forward towards the final frontier of life in old age and the accompanying awareness of the concept of another reality have been noted in literature,

sociological studies and autobiographical reflections. For example, such is the "untravelling world" that waits to reveal itself beyond the arch of experience that Tennyson's aged and questing Ulysses has known on life's journey. Further, in The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America (1992), Thomas R. Cole notes the process of change in the long-standing metaphor of the journey of life, one which can be seen in works such as "Ulysses":

As with Matthew Arnold and Alfred Tennyson in the late nineteenth century, the value of life's journey is increasingly sought in the actual process of discovery rather than in the traditional pattern of Christian teleology. The various impulses to move toward something as one grows older - a unity of understanding, God, expiation of guilt, renewal of innocence, or restoration of self - have become more manifest.(242)

In a final example, Carl Jung comments on the natural connection between this forward journey and old age in "On Life after Death", the penultimate chapter of his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections (1961):

From the psychological point of view, life in the hereafter would seem to be a logical continuation of the psychic life of old age. With increasing age, contemplation and reflection, the inner images naturally play an ever greater part in man's life In old age one begins to let memories unroll before the mind's eye and, musing, to recognize oneself in the inner and outer images of the past. This is like a preparation for an existence in the hereafter(320)

Jung's concern with "the hereafter" is expressed earlier in the same chapter when he states,

"A man should be able to say he has done his best to form a conception of life after death" (302). Jung's personal attempt to do this is acknowledged when he states, "I try to see the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again" (320). Jung was in his early eighties when he began work on his autobiography and it was published in 1961, Jung's eighty-sixth year and the year of his death.

An imaginative journey forward beyond the known world is particularly appropriate to the study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. In The Bush Garden (1971), Northrop Frye comments on "the position of the frontier in the Canadian imagination" and remarks:

One wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it.(220)

As Hodgins' elderly protagonists reach the final frontier of life, they are often depicted as looking at death and seeking new forms of reality from the edge of existence. Most of this searching takes place in fictional towns "on the edge of the world" in British Columbia. Such is the case in two of Hodgins' short stories contained in Spit Delaney's Island (1976).

In "Spit Delaney's Island", the title story, a middle-aged Spit takes a room in

a motel which lies "on the edge" of a village, "right on the beach" (171). His only two visitors are "Old Marsten" and "Old Mrs. Bested" who sit on his bed and debate the reality of inner vision. Mrs. Bested, the owner of the motel and a woman who has been presumably "bested" by life, argues that "The important thing is to see" and that "It takes more than just opening your eyes to do that." In this old woman's words, "Vision is a thing of the heart ... [a] person could be as blind as a bat and have vision clear as glass" (172). Old Mrs. Bested is described by Spit as having

eyelids that never open, the kind that would have to have been slit by a doctor's knife when she was born. She tilts back when there's something that has to be seen, but usually only stares into the insides of those lids
....(172)

The emphasis on seeing in the presentation of this old woman is also evident in that of Spit's mother-in-law in "Separating", another short story in Spit Delaney's Island. As an old woman "who had gone on past movement and caring and even speech" she is especially good at "[w]atching" and appears "as if she were trying with the sheer force of those eyes to make things stay put" (11). It is this staring old woman who supports her daughter's assertion that what is real is beyond what people can "touch" or "wreck" (20). Spit challenges her affirmation and she initially withdraws, but soon lashes out again with a message from the viewpoint of the very old, one which comments on what she sees as "the joke" of what Spit considers to be "[r]eal things" (20):

The old woman pulled back, alarmed. Her big eyes filled with tears, her hands dug into the folds of her dress. The lips moved, muttered, mumbled things at the window, at the door, at her own pointed knees. Then suddenly she leaned ahead again, seared a scowl into him. "All a mirage!" she shrieked, and looked frightened by her own words. She drew back, swallowed, gathered courage again. "Blink your eyes and it's gone or moved!"(20)

The stasis of this old woman is in contrast to the "quick flashing movements of people" (4) on Spit's beach and to the quickly passing nature of what we call "reality". In old age, Spit's mother-in-law is frightened by her awareness of the ephemeral nature of daily life and her inability to see and hold onto any sense of permanent reality. The focus on "seeing" and "watching" in the portrayal of both old women suggests a correlation with the emphasis on vision in Spit's search for the answer to his two questions, "*Where is the dividing line? ... And what does it take to see it?*" (10-11).

Spit's anguished search for "the dividing line" can only be answered by another question, "Between what and what?" (7). In the interview with Geoff Hancock in Canadian Writers at Work in which Hodgins discusses his attitude to reality, he also refers to the writing of "Spit Delaney's Island" and its connection with "the whole idea of the difference between the temporary and the lasting", the "separation" (Hancock,70) between one reality and another. Hodgins frequently makes his point through images and in "Spit Delaney's Island" he uses the image of a dead seal lying at the edge of the ocean to suggest the approach to another reality in old age. In Spit's words:

I got up and went down to the edge of the water in my undershorts and

there was this body of a seal rolling there at the edge, rolling and rolling as each wave slapped it up against gravel. It was all wrapped around in strips of seaweed and kelp and bits of bark. Poor old seal's eyes were open, dull and brown, he wasn't the first that I'd ever seen like that, I don't know what happened to him, it could have been only old age, his coat was all scratched and ragged and torn.(185)

Hodgins' placing of the tattered old seal next to the edge of the ocean is analogous to Margaret Laurence's portrayal of the dishevelled Hagar in the abandoned fish cannery which lies right on the edge of the ocean at Shadow Point. In both instances, old age is portrayed as a time when the physical contours of the body lose their definition as the unknown shape of a different reality is approached. As Constance Rooke has pointed out in "Old Age in Contemporary Fiction":

[The image of water] represents the universal unknown from which life came and toward which life flows once more as the end approaches. Water, if it expresses dissolution, also may express "solution" - an inclusive and transformative embrace. Over water, finally, we venture out into death or parts unknown.(255)

Like the old dead seal and Laurence's Hagar, another of Hodgins' elderly protagonists is repeatedly placed next to the image of water. In Hodgins' first published novel, The Invention of the World (1977), "sour old skinny Julius Champney" (11) is mostly described as standing "at the very end" (52) of a float which lies near the wharf of the defunct Revelations Colony of Truth, or as walking along the pathway at the edge of the town's harbour. Like Old Mrs. Bested and Spit's mother-in-law, Julius is no longer on

the move, but searches for another reality within. He derides as "ridiculous" the plans of the middle-aged Maggie Kyle for "*rising*" and "*seeing*", as if she believed, still, that there was somewhere, ultimately, to go, something to see that would make some real sense of it all" (230). Further, when he meets a harried young man on a hill overlooking the town harbour he again comments on the futility of physical searching and looking. He answers his own question, "Do you ... do you believe in a God of any kind?" with the following:

But then you must ... or at least hope to, or you wouldn't be on the move.
You'd be satisfied to sit, somewhere, forever.(233)

Like the young man, Julius has spent his earlier life "on the move", looking and searching, "chasing after something" (230). In old age, this search is no longer one of far-ranging movements throughout the world, but is an interior one which seeks the "voices" (219,221) of the imagination.

Julius is aware of the language and possibilities of other realities, but his approach to them as a younger man has always ended in defeat. In one instance during his travels, he witnesses the momentary "transformation" of an old woman sleeping next to him on a plane. The "perfect white hair" and "creased skin" of this old woman are transformed by the rising sun and Julius sees her as entering "for only a moment, [a] goddess state" before she becomes "real again" (228). Any promise in the moment of transcendence associated with this old woman, is soon shattered when Julius seeks her out at a false address. A similar association of momentary transcendence with old age is also

seen in the transformation which occurs at the end of P.K. Page's poem, "Evening Dance of the Grey Flies":

as once your face
 grey with illness and with age -
 a silverpoint against the pillow's white

shone suddenly like the sun
 before you died.(36)

Both Page and Hodgins use imagery to imbue the figure of old age and incumbent death with an aura of other realities.¹

The journey towards alternative realities is suggested by the strange figure of Becker the ferryman introduced to the reader in the opening words of The Invention of the World. Unshaven and dressed in clothes that "look as if they'd come out from the bottom of a garbage dump" (244-5), Becker lives in a cabin "near the water's edge" (x). Though not old himself, the figure of Becker recalls Hodgins' use of the image of the old seal in "Spit Delaney's Island" and anticipates his portrayal of the old, tattered figure of Joseph Bourne who lives in a broken-down shack near the water's edge in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne: or, A Word or Two on Those Port Annie Miracles (1979). Becker's resemblance to Charon, the old man who ferried the spirits of the dead in Greek mythology, not only suggests a ferrying between different realities, but also again suggests the transformative possibilities associated with the image of water. In his final picture of Julius and in one of the initial descriptions of Bourne, Hodgins portrays two old men

frustrated with the limits of life and unable to cross over into alternative realities.

The last image of Julius is that of an old man standing on the edge of the line between land and water. In his interview with Hancock, Hodgins expresses his awareness of "the line between water and land as a kind of separation between one kind of reality and another" (Hancock,70). Julius is described as he stands alone, leaning on a railing that suggests a metaphorical division between the reality of everyday life as we know it and the unknown and frightening possibilities of life in the dark, uncertain other reality of death. Standing at the line which separates the two, the "old wrinkled yellow face" of Julius Champney goes "out of control" (239) and the picture drawn is analogous to that of Bourne who, when faced with the "ageing old-body decay that scare[s] him", breaks down into "soundless weeping" (20) with his face pressed against the window of his shack on the edge of the inlet of Port Annie. In old age, both men are up against the limits of a progressively disintegrating reality.

When Joseph Bourne first appears in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne he is described as "a old sour cramp of a man terrified on the brink of eternity" (34). The description resembles that of "sour old" Julius. Like Julius, Bourne has travelled and searched for something all his life and now in old age finds himself on "the edge of nothingness" (100). Bourne lives on the outskirts of the town of Port Annie which Hodgins locates at the far western edge of the Canadian land mass. As he moves back and forth through this town, Bourne is linked with an aura of bodily decay. His "robes and rags" flap around him and the townspeople of Port Annie are aware of an "old man" who "stain[s] the air around him" (8). Inside his "tattered rain-soaked kimonos and robes" and

a plastic cape which "ripple[s]" and "flap[s]" around him, Bourne is described as "an indefinable shape - perhaps as lumpy as a potato, perhaps as thin as a wire" (7). The human body is no longer of any use as a means of describing Bourne. The constantly moving, "tattered" coat of old age suggests a change in parameters towards the different dress of the soul as another reality is approached.²

The image of Bourne in his ragged clothing is part of the technique Hodgins uses to explore the transcendence of the physical through the imagination. Such a journey of the mind towards other realities is suggested in one of the epigraphs to The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne taken by Hodgins from David Malouf's An Imaginary Life (1978):

What else should our lives be but a continual series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become, except in dreams

Hodgins directly links Bourne to one of the dreamers in the Bible, the Joseph and his "coat of many colours" described in Genesis 37:3. Bourne's tattered clothing beats around his legs "in an uproar of colours" (7) and when Port Annie's librarian, Larry Bowman, researches Bourne's life he is reminded of "Joseph Somebody-else in the Bible ... who never gave up no matter what happened" (57). The biblical Joseph's coat is taken from him and he is thrown in a pit to die, but he is "resurrected" and, though sold into slavery, begins a new life in the land of Egypt. Both Josephs learn to live with a new reality, one

that exists beyond the shell of outer garments and one that is suggested in 2 Corinthians 4:16: "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day".

Death of the flesh is not only suggested by the deteriorating clothing of Bourne, but is also represented in the figure of "the old death-whore herself" (29), Fat Annie Fartenburg. Fat Annie is described by one of Port Annie's inhabitants as being

the same to everyone. Flesh. Something you could get your hands on, flesh and earth and good old solid matter.(200)

This "good old solid matter" shrinks down to a "dry shrivelled-up vegetable root", a "lifeless root" (245,247) which spends its last days in a rocking chair above the "Kick-and-Kill", Port Annie's beer parlour. Sitting in this chair, Fat Annie is described as having a "shrivelled parsnip head and tiny legs that [don't] reach the floor" (244). Fat Annie's description is a reminder of the inability of mortal flesh to take a step into another dimension. As Bourne weeps and waits at the window looking out on the inlet, he tears "pieces of clothing to shreds" (20) and metaphorically suggests the same limitations of the physical body that the image of Fat Annie represents.

Bourne steps away from a consciousness linked with the physical body when he is confronted with Raimey and the transformative possibilities associated with this girl "from the sea", a "seabird" whose most remarkable characteristic is her "incredible walk", her "marvellous walk" (1). In the opening paragraph of The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne, this walk is linked with the resurrection of an old man. Old Magnus Dexter

collapses at the sight of the girl who emerges from the wreckage of the Peruvian freighter and walks through Port Annie. He is ready to die at this moment, but somehow finds "the strength to raise himself" for a "final peek" at the "walking miracle" (1) he has just witnessed. The seabird's walk is in direct contrast with the frenetic movement of Bourne as he flaps up and down from the inlet in the opening segment of the novel. Between the descriptions of the two contrasting walks is that of an old broken-down trailer that had once been used as a church. It is now boarded up and the key lost. Raimey offers Bourne the "key" to another reality by showing him the way to step beyond the reality of this life towards that which Old Magnus is only allowed to glimpse.

Bourne sees his own death and its transformative possibilities during a radio interview with Raimey in his studio. As they both approach the radio station, Raimey takes Bourne's "old man's hand" into hers (30) and begins the journey towards another reality. A similar construct is used in "I Saw Three Ships", one of the short stories in Janette Turner Hospital's *Isobars* (1990). Here, Old Gabe meets a girl, like Raimey, who appears to come from another dimension. This girl comes down "out of her concrete sky" (84) while Old Gabe stands fishing on Collaroy Beach in Australia. She leads him into an awareness of "that shimmering nowhere" and an "underwater luminousness" (91) which resembles the "underwater brilliance" (7) that the town of Port Annie experiences with the appearance of Raimey. Inside the studio, Raimey walks Bourne along the unplumbed depths of his mind and opens it into an awareness as to what lies below the surface of what Hodgins has called, in his interview with Hancock, "this imitation reality that we are too often contented with" (Hancock,61). The "seabird" Raimey enables Bourne to see beyond

the disintegrating world of an old man towards an "underwater" transformation in death such as that suggested by Ariel's song in The Tempest:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.(I,ii,397-402)

Skulls, death and change are what Bourne confronts in the studio with Raimy, and Hodgins uses imagery which recalls the graveyard scene in Hamlet and the song of a grave-digging clown just before he tosses up some earth with a skull in it:

But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me into the land
As if I had never been such.(V,i,71-74)

Bourne sees skulls on the black felt of the table between Raimy and himself and looks at the reality of death, hooking his fingers into the eyes of the skulls. By choosing names like "Spit" and "Bourne" Hodgins suggests the need to travel beyond what is known of death towards other realities. A "spit" is a narrow point of land which extends out into the moving borders of the water which surrounds it. The "Bourne" in Joseph's name also suggests a journey out into the unknown, such as that recognised by Hamlet, who sees death as "The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns" (III,i,78-9).

Raimey takes Bourne into this country and then brings this "dead man back to life" (46). She is described as possessing "some other quality that [makes] her capable of raising up Bourne" (130).

Before the appearance of Raimey, Bourne is described as living in fear on the inlet of his own nightmares, just a mile away from the unknown frontiers suggested by a limitless ocean. He spends his time "perched on the steep side of a narrow inlet" (3) next to this ocean,

on the ragged green edge of the world just out of [the ocean's] sight, and could only imagine what terror there would be in looking directly into the infinite expanse of its grey face.(20)

Raimey leads Bourne towards the intangible "grey" frontiers of the mind, towards the moment when he must do "the most terrifying thing of all ... turn his own vision back, until he [is] forced to see his own life, his own soul, his - " (35). When Bourne looks into his mind and at his own death, it is as if "the thick grey mist which had separated him" from life is finally removed. Until now he has run away from the prospect of death, but with the guidance of Raimey, he crosses the dividing line into another reality, away from the surface movements of physical daily living into the depths of a "sudden overwhelming vision" (35), one which is associated with his actual death, "*the death of Bourne*" (35). Bourne finds in death what the staring eyes of old Mrs. Bested and Spit's mother-in-law seek.

Bourne dies as an "Old Man" (37) and is resurrected as a "New Man" (145) in

a town located in the title of the novel's first section as on "The Ragged Green Edge of the World". Before his death, he constantly searches for "home" (15) in the known world and laments his inability to find the roots in this earth that this concept entails.³ The "vision" associated with his death enables him to raise himself up and to move himself towards the new reality of another world, one which he describes to Larry Bowman, Port Annie's librarian:

Our roots grow somewhere else, Larry Bowman, and that's a fact. Our real roots grow upward, no one could ever find a home on *this* mountainside, or under those flimsy roofs. We aren't trees, that anchor themselves in earth.(142)

Bourne's words are spoken before the apocalyptic slide of Port Annie into the inlet and just as he returns from the dead. Through a change in awareness he is able to ferry the people of Port Annie towards another dimension, so that even the erratic Mayor Wiens can "spring back to life from the ashes of disaster" (265) after the mudslide.

When Bourne returns to the community after his death, his resurrected self is no longer consumed by fear and dread, but animatedly pointing out a different view of reality. He is described as "Bourne the restored, Bourne the newly raised",

alive and moving in just as much of a hurry as he'd always done whenever he'd come up from the inlet to do his show at the radio station in the hotel. In a hurry, but something was different: he was using that stick to stir up the air, to test the walls of the buildings, to poke at the drowning grass and prod the drooping shrubs that grew beside the gravel ramp to the dock. No ragged kimonos flapped around his knees; wool tweed pants were stuffed

inside his rubber boots, and sweater on top of sweater bulged beneath that plastic cape.(141)

Bourne's action and dress reflect his confidence in the new reality he has found within himself, very much like the "shaggy old man on Tolstoy's ferry" (55) with whom Hodgins compares him in the early pages of the novel. Tolstoy's old man on the ferry appears in Resurrection (1899) written when Tolstoy was seventy-one and undergoing his own moral and spiritual dilemmas as death approached. Like Hodgins' portrayal of Bourne and Julius pressing up against the edge of existence, Tolstoy describes this old man as "nearest to the rail" on the ferry. The old man's comments not only reveal the different dimension that he has found within himself, but also bespeak the same dilemma that Hodgins' old men found in their youth:

When I used to believe in other men I wandered about like I was in a swamp. I got so lost, I never thought I'd find me way out. But I don't give meself no name. Renounced everything, I 'ave: got no name, no home, no country - no nothing. I am just me.(535-6)

Later, in jail, this "tattered" old man's "emaciated" body is described in direct contrast to his face which is "even more concentratedly serious and animated than on the ferry" (558), suggesting the confidence of an inner personal vision.

Hodgins links Tolstoy's old man and Bourne with Melchizedek (55), described in the Bible as "priest of the most high God" (Genesis 14:18) and through this association anticipates the "[l]ove and perfect vision" (270) that Bourne becomes aware of and is

subsequently able to convey to the community of Port Annie. When Bourne comes back into town he looks at reality differently. The new reality he sees is one which depends on the biblical vision suggested in Corinthians 4:18:

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

What is "not seen" relies upon the inner vision of the mind's eye. Bourne can only "poke at the drowning grass and prod the drooping shrubs" of mortality with equanimity when he journeys in the mind towards the "eternal" nature of the "constant" reality that Hodgins speaks of in his interview with Hancock (Hancock,62).⁴

Bourne's mental journey depends upon the powers of the imagination to cope with the fact of death. This task becomes essential at the end of life, when its full physical gamut has almost been run and only the possibilities of the imagination remain. As noted earlier, Hodgins is familiar with David Malouf's An Imaginary Life, and quotes from this in one of the epigraphs to The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne. In Malouf's novel, the elderly Ovid, like Bourne, undergoes a quest for the meaning of life, having come as an old man "to the very edge of things, where Nothing begins" (27). Transcendence and transformation are suggested in An Imaginary Life by an old Ovid who comes to realise that "our further selves are contained within us, as the leaves and blossoms are in the tree" (64) and that

[w]e are not bound by the laws of our nature but by the ways we can imagine ourselves breaking out of those laws without doing violence to our essential being. We are free to transcend ourselves. If we have the imagination for it.(67)

Ovid journeys towards the awareness of "a life that stretches beyond the limits of measureable time" (144). As the Child that leads him crosses the last frontier, the old man's mind is fully "open" to the possibilities of the imagination and he is transformed by it at the moment of death:

[The Child] is walking on the water's light. And as I watch, he takes the first step off it, moving slowly away now into the deepest distance, above the earth, above the water, on air.

It is summer. It is spring. I am immeasurably, unbearably happy. I am three years old. I am sixty. I am six.

I am there.(152)

Just like Raimey with Bourne, the Child leads Ovid towards death and, through the imagination, to a path which continues into a future beyond death. Like Bourne, Ovid steps into a final sense of "home" after death, one which is found not in the resurrection of the body, but in new realities to be discovered in the mind.

In a later work, "The Sumo Revisions", one of the stories contained in The Barclay Family Theatre (1981), Hodgins creates the image of an old Japanese cyclist who epitomizes the race against time in old age and the desperate need for new realities. The portrayal of this old man has been compared earlier with that of Grove's Sam Clark in The Master of the Mill. However, it also reflects the awareness of Bourne and Julius that

time passes quickly and with it go the old realities. Bourne is described as having a sense of "the maddening progress of this unstoppable time" (20) and Julius is portrayed as being aware that in old age "time seemed determined to fly past, leaving you breathless" (219). The "ancient cyclist" (214) in "The Sumo Revisions" pedals furiously in circles around the edge of the imperial palace moat. He is described by his grand-daughter as seeing "Nothing!" (207). The life expectancy of the Japanese cyclist is limited and Hodgins inserts the image of this old man into a story where the protagonists are acutely aware of the ageing process. In this story, Port Annie's Mayor Wiens visits Japan. His life as a mayor has been lost with the mudslide that destroyed the town and he is depicted as feeling his age. He is now sixty-one, the same age as the sumo wrestler described in the story who works beyond his time and is "considered a freak to have lived so long" (241). The image of the old cyclist expresses the need of all three men to get out of the rut of repetitive daily realities and move towards the possibilities of new realities as death is approached.

When Hodgins portrays the elderly Jeffrey Crane in a later work, The Honorary Patron (1987), he portrays a man who makes the mistake of attempting to step away physically from the reality of time and old age. Crane attempts to escape the ageing process by fleeing from the sense of precariousness it invokes, an instability reflected back to him by his hometown in British Columbia. He finds a sense of "order" and a "less humiliating old age" (15) in the neutral country of Switzerland. In Hodgins' earlier short story, "The Plague Children", published in The Barclay Family Theatre (1981), the elderly Dennis Macken is described as having a "dizzy head" from the "incredible speed" of time and questions, "Why has it gone so fast?" and "[I]s this what they like to call life?" (274).

At the age of sixty-three, Macken's solution is to attempt, like Crane, "to find some way of stopping clocks or step outside of time" (279).

Hodgins begins The Honorary Patron with the image of another old man, like Julius, literally and metaphorically up against the finishing line of life. Hodgins depicts the aged Crane in a rooftop cafe as he sits next to the railing waiting for his former lover, Elizabeth Argent. As he waits, Crane is described as a "lean old white-haired man", with "his running shoes parked beneath his chair ... look[ing] as though he might decide to escape at any moment" (7). Unlike the sixty-five-year-old Eva that Constance Beresford-Howe portrays in The Book of Eve (1984) as buying sneakers and stepping out to meet old age, Crane is afraid to put his "frightened soles" out "onto its turf" (272) and tries to run away from it. After Elizabeth meets him and the two "[o]ld lovers ... confront one another's old age" (10), she comments:

You're only sixty-six years old. Why do you act as if you've already stepped outside of life and don't have to do anything any more but wait? Such dedication to the task of being old - a person would have to be absolutely terrified of something.(28)

Like Julius and Bourne, Crane is afraid of the finality of approaching death. Hodgins depicts Crane, like the other two old men, as having attempted to find some form of meaningful reality in far-ranging movements throughout the world. Crane is described as having "some sense of freedom, even of control" (21) in movements as a younger man. Now, up against the dividing line between life and death, he waits anxiously for the

unknown. The fear of what lies beyond the dividing line is expressed by Hodgins at the end of "Three Women of the Country", one of the short stories in Spit Delaney's Island. Here, old Mrs. Wright approaches the line between life and death when she runs "to the edge" of the darkness which contains the body of her dead neighbour and screams, "What is it? What is it?" (68).

What it is, for Hodgins, is somehow connected with a journey of the mind in old age, one which explores a different reality at the end of life by searching for a new form of birth or resurrection. Crane is not only described as an "old man who seeks to redeem his childhood" (61), but is also described by a friend as on

A mythic journey! An old man in search of his dream children, deep into the caverns beneath the unfabled city at the edge of the western world!(55)

In a similar fashion, Hodgins describes old Madmother Thomas in The Invention of the World as riding in her manure-spreader all over Vancouver Island "like someone in an ancient book, [who] was looking for the place where she'd been born" (15). Further, Hodgins literally depicts Joseph Bourne as being reborn in the studio with Raimy when he is described as feeling as if "[h]is whole body [was] being torn open, pieces of him pushing to be born" (34).⁵ For Crane, like Bourne, the need for new forms of reality is urgent. As an old man stepping naked from the shower, what Crane is aware of reflects the clothing metaphor that Hodgins uses earlier in his work to describe Bourne, the "disconcerting suggestion that all that he was seeing had been hung from his skeleton with

no expectation of permanence: a topcoat hanging on a restaurant rack" (226).

Hodgins' attitude to death is closely tied to his use of the clothing metaphor and his employment of magic realism as an artistic strategy. Most of his elderly protagonists are depicted as constantly searching for an appropriate response to approaching death. The origin of this search is described by old Lily Heyworth in The Invention of the World and her words link the concept of magic with the decline of the clothing of the body in old age:

[The need for magic] comes from the shock of discovering the limits that are placed on us by this sack of bones we call ourselves, we go looking for some sort of magic to count on.(244)

Such a search is also triggered in contemporary secular society because it can no longer find a satisfactory response to mortality through the traditional pathways of religion. In "On Life After Death", the penultimate chapter of Memories, Dreams, Reflections referred to earlier, Jung speaks of this age as one in which "man has been robbed of transcendence by the short-sightedness of super-intellectuals" (326).

By associating his elderly protagonists with other concepts of reality, Hodgins revivifies the concept of transcendence and suggests a view beyond the limitations of mortality. Rudy Wiebe also does this in the resurrection of the eighty-five-year-old

grandmother at the conclusion of My Lovely Enemy (1983). Both views depend on the expansion of consciousness that is associated with the techniques of magic realism. In an unpublished interview with Hancock, one quoted by Hancock in Magic Realism: An Anthology (1980),

Hodgins has commented: "This thing called 'magic realism' is not magic at all. It's real. I don't write anything unreal or unbelievable or even improbable."(10)

As Hancock points out in his introduction to the anthology from which the above quotation is taken, magic realism "pulls away from mimetic realism and points towards the imaginative unknown which still remains in a recognizable place" (Magic Realism,14). Hodgins illustrates the "real" aspect of magic realism when he describes the response of the community of Port Annie to a resurrected Joseph Bourne. He is seen as someone with whom "the marvellous seemed to be perfectly natural" (Resurrection,262).

Through the portrayal of his elderly protagonists Hodgins encourages an expanded perspective, one which attempts to include strange new realities. As he suggests throughout The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne, there is "lots of room for new ways of looking at things" (205) and "the things that aren't seen never end". The latter words conclude the novel and are linked with an image of resurrection, "a clumsy chorus line of salvaged bones" (271). When looking at the possibilities of resurrection in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne, one of the figures Hodgins employs is that of an old Jamaican woman who is linked with what Hancock has called one of the most important

aspects of magic realism, "prefiguration" or "prophesying the future" (Hancock, Magic Realism, 46). Like Spit's mother-in-law this old woman is past movement and yet has the ability to foresee where Bourne will be at the end of his travels. Hodgins' portrayal of this "beautiful old brown-skinned healing lady" (32) suggests yet again a different way of looking across the limits of mortality into an alternative reality after death. Perhaps a strange blending of future realities offers one way of looking at the disappearance of the resurrected Bourne from the final pages of the novel. Bourne steps out of the novel across a dividing line and into a new form of reality; boundaries of the mind are crossed and the future becomes the present in an act of magic which Hodgins makes no attempt to portray in words.

W.J. Keith has noted Hodgins' efforts to expand the way we look at reality. In An Independent Stance: Essays on English-Canadian Criticism and Fiction (1991), Keith comments:

Hodgins's strategy is to undercut the now conventional view of a meaningless world with disturbing intimations of mystery and purpose. (264)

When Hodgins employs this strategy he depends a lot upon the use of eye imagery in an effort to see what lies near the line which divides fantasy from reality. In this respect his work resembles Margaret Atwood's poetic portrayal of Susanna Moodie in old age in The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970) Atwood places a similar emphasis on seeing and this is particularly evident in the opening lines of her poem, "Resurrection", where a change

in vision and form is suggested in the words, "I see now I see/now I cannot see" (58). Hodgins' artistic strategy also resembles that of Robert Kroetsch whose work is discussed by Robert Rawdon Wilson in his article, "On the Boundary of The Magic and The Real: Notes on Inter-American Fiction" (1979). Wilson comments on Kroetsch's efforts to discover a different reality beneath the surface of Albertan culture and notes Kroetsch's use of eyes as literary paradigms. Wilson feels that, for Kroetsch, "literature opens to the uninitiated the vision of aspects of experience that have been unnoted" (39). Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man (1969) provides an example of an old woman who, like Hodgins' old Jamaican woman, is capable of seeing into another dimension. Old Lady Espheter is portrayed by Kroetsch as "hover[ing] constantly in the shadowy rooms beyond" (121). She is blind and variously described as a "witch" or a "poltergeist" (120). One of the cornerstones of magic realism is the presence of beings who return resurrected from the dead. In this instance, blind Old Lady Espheter is associated with a view beyond death. Just as in Hodgins' portrayal of Mrs. Bested and Spit's mother-in-law, Kroetsch's Old Lady Espheter is associated with the possibilities of the inner vision of the mind's eye, a vision which sees into chambers of the mind "beyond" the rooms of everyday reality.

Hodgins also looks at the unexplored chambers of the mind and, like Kroetsch, does this by presenting an image of elderly protagonists linked with "shadowy rooms beyond". In The Honorary Patron, Crane and two elderly counterparts are depicted as they look into the gaping dark hole that was once Crane's childhood home on Vancouver Island. These three old people look into an apparently bottomless pit with its suggestion of unknown myriad connections to a network of subterranean tunnels. Confronting this

black hole, Crane responds with a comment that echoes Lily Hayworth's recognition of the need for "magic" in the face of death:

I can almost imagine these tunnels populated by a race of people living in the past, decorating the walls with pictures of a frightening world they hope to get some sort of magical control over(310)

In "On Life after Death" Jung also uses the imagery of death as a dark hole and comments on the need for other realities in the face of death. His words suggest a similar attitude to death such as that expressed by Crane and Lily Hayworth. As Jung points out:

[Man] ought to have a myth about death for reason shows him nothing but the dark pit into which he is descending. Myth, however, can conjure up other images for him, helpful and enriching pictures of life in the land of the dead.(306)

Images "of life in the land of the dead" are also conjured up by Hodgins in the dance of Jenny Chambers at the conclusion of The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne. As noted earlier, this dance raises up not only a "chorus line of salvaged bones", but also the possibility that "the things that aren't seen never end" (271). Jenny dances "as if she were charged with dancing life back into things" (270) and the "chambers" of the mind that the dance suggests offer the hope of other dimensions in the mind.⁶ As noted in Chapter Two, such alternative "chambers" are also evoked in an attitude to death expressed in the final words of the elderly Jeremy Monk at the conclusion of Morley Callaghan's A Wild Old

Man On The Road (1988) published when Callaghan was eighty-five:

don't worry. It's just like opening a door into another room.(181)

In P.K. Page's short story, "Birthday" (1985), an old woman sits alone in her room as death approaches. The description of her recalls Page's imagery noted earlier in "Evening Dance of the Grey Flies" and is analogous to the moment of transcendence associated with Hodgins' portrayal of the elderly woman next to Bourne on the plane in The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne:

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, shone brightly in the sun and there she rested, burnished too, and the glitter of her rings transformed the morning.(Page,"Birthday",17)

On what appears to be the last day of her life, this old woman acknowledges the "secondary" role of deteriorating flesh and is aware of reassembling into "something other than her body" (18). In "Spinning the 'Globe of Memory': Metaphor, Literature, and Aging" (1991), Gerald Manning notes the "fragmentation/reassembly" (49) dichotomy expressed in the story and this is illustrated by Page through techniques of magic realism which illuminate Hodgins' strategy. The fragile body of Page's old woman develops a sensitivity between the shoulder blades which is associated with "brilliant images" of transcendence and transformation, "Butterfly; bird; man; angel" (18). As death approaches, the "fragmenter or prism" in the mind of this old woman reverses direction towards a

unified vision:

[T]his same reversal made possible the contraction of all her particles as if in preparation for rising - a spacecraft taking off. And through one supra sense she heard the rush of air, and through that same sense - upstream of the five [senses] now left behind in a fractured world - she felt the exquisite movement of its currents stirring the small down on her incredible wings.(21)

Just as this old woman's body transforms and reassembles at the moment of death, so too does the tattered body of Joseph Bourne change with death and resurrection. After death, the torn and flapping element of his clothing vanishes, suggesting the possibilities of other realities to be found in the "incredible wings" of a journey in the mind.⁷

Conclusion

This study of old age in English-Canadian fiction argues for the presence of a liberating process in the minds of the aged as death draws near. Elderly protagonists are first discussed as existing in a state of progressive confinement in the house of the ageing body. Faced with deteriorating bodies, some are then shown as beginning to explore the contents of the attic of the mind. In some cases, this begins a journey out and away from the body and into a new form of ordering found in memories of the past. When old protagonists make this retrospective journey, some are portrayed as weaving what they learn into a form of wisdom in old age. Part of this wisdom is growing awareness of the way to face approaching death. As the body becomes less important, the spirit emerges and alternative realities become apparent. In English-Canadian fiction the state of old age is a positive one, a beginning rather than an end.

In the last chapter, I quoted the comment of one author which substantiates what I have traced in the body of this thesis. In his interview with Geoff Hancock, Jack Hodgins comments on “the reality that is constant”, one which lies behind simple, almost dead metaphors such as that of the ocean (see p.164 above). In his writing, Hodgins attempts to approach this other reality by revivifying old metaphors, and challenges the reader to find in these more complicated meanings. Much the same, I would argue, can be said about the other authors I have discussed. What appears to be realistic detail

becomes as well a complex metaphor for the condition of old age. When the reader looks closely at a text, what could initially be seen as merely the repetition of a certain image becomes something else as well.

When this study was first planned, there was some concern about the quantity of material available for a study of old age in English-Canadian fiction. This fear proved groundless and the problem became one of selection from a large array of works on the subject. Because I decided to concentrate on full-length fiction, only a few short stories which focus on old age could be discussed. Many others might have been cited. For example, in Guy Vanderhaeghe's short story collection, Things As They Are? (1992), four of the ten stories have elderly protagonists and a fifth, "Man on Horseback", concerns the relationship between an old man, his son and grandson. Further, although two of Alice Munro's short stories are mentioned in Chapter One, many of her other stories, such as "Dance of the Happy Shades", consider the condition of old age in depth, and her portrayal of the ageing Flo in the short-story collection Who Do You Think You Are? (1978) is also worthy of further study.

Munro's portrayal of the old is intellectually demanding and this is also the case with two other writers well-known for their short stories, Mavis Gallant and Hugh Hood. In Gallant's "Irina", for instance, Irina writes to one of her sons and comments on the inchoate nature of her thoughts in old age:

To him she now confided that she longed for her own childhood sometimes, in order to avoid having to judge herself. She was homesick for a time when nothing had crystallized and mistakes were allowed. Now, in

old age, she had no excuse for errors. Every thought had a long meaning; every motive had angles and corners, and could be measured. And yet whatever she saw and thought and attempted was still fluid and vague. The shape of a table against afternoon light still held a mystery, awaited a final explanation. You looked for clarity, she wrote, and the answer you had was paleness, the flat white cast that a snowy sky throws across a room.(55)

As can be seen from the above, Gallant is concerned to express the inexpressible dimensions of old age, a sense of mystery that even the person who experiences it cannot clarify. Similarly, in his short story, "Looking Down from Above", Hugh Hood describes his narrator as seeing an old woman going up a hill being "pregnant with unstated meaning" (83). Hood's novel, *Reservoir Ravine* (1979), also portrays another old woman "climbing up [a] rather steep incline" with "none of the pathos of the very old about her" (213), though later in their subsequent conversation she claims to be "as old as God" (216). Both Gallant and Hood suggest the paradoxical, enigmatic nature of other realities which can be experienced in old age.

There are still other aspects of old age in English-Canadian fiction which remain to be explored. This study has focused on how old age is portrayed in certain novels and seeks to find a connection between that portrayal and the reality of ageing in everyday life. Other areas of interest suggested themselves during research. First, there are questions which involve the author. Work still needs to be done on what difference the age of the author makes to the portrayal of an elderly protagonist. Do young writers become at all predictable in their assumptions about old age? What is the difference when the author is approaching old age or is old at the time of writing? Because of an increase

in the number of ageing authors, a study of the ageing of authors as a group and their concern with ageing characters could be included in such research. The question also arises as to whether the ageing and death of an author's parents has any impact on the writer's work. For example, Robertson Davies' father, Rupert, died in 1967 and, as Judith Skelton Grant notes in her biography, Robertson Davies: Man of Myth (1994), this death had an effect on Davies' writing. In her discussion of The Manticore (1972) Grant comments:

While Rupert was still living, Davies felt inhibited from writing things that might have hurt him, or even from expressing views that might have offended him. But now that both parents were dead, Davies felt that he could express his thoughts with candour. It was the complex feeling and thoughts stirred by Rupert's death that drove the book's powerful opening section.(489)

Davies was in his fifty-ninth year when his father died at the age of eighty-seven. As Grant points out earlier, The Manticore is "haunted by a father" (487). In a similar fashion, Michael Ignatieff's Scar Tissue (1993), the fictional tale of an old woman who succumbs to Alzheimer's, is "haunted" by the author's experience with his own mother.

Similarly, readers with experience of tending ageing parents may, like Ignatieff, find their reading of a novel like The Stone Angel correspondingly enriched. Moreover, further questions arise concerning the readership of novels. Do the "young-old", "middle-old" and "old-old" respond differently to texts about old age at different stages of their own ageing process? Does the reader response vary from country to country? A clear

example of varying responses occurs in Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth: a memoir (1989) when Laurence describes the reception of The Stone Angel:

the novel was reviewed in England as a study of an old person and in America as the story of a strong pioneer woman - but in Canada, Hagar was, and still is, seen as everybody's grandmother or great-grandmother.(166)

A study of the variety of reader response could also include what happens to this response when the author attempts to control it from beyond the grave. Work in this area has been initiated by Michael Millgate in Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy (1992). Millgate's aim, as he describes it, is "to examine the ways in which writers famous in their own time have sought in old age to exert some degree of posthumous control over their personal and literary reputations" (2).

As the writing of this thesis progressed, another aspect suggested itself as worthy of further study. The voice of old age has been discussed in Chapter Four, where elderly protagonists such as Topaz and Daddy Sherry are described as telling their own stories. However, the storytelling aspect within the voice of old age could also be considered. The recounting of a story through the voice of old age is evident in such works as Jane Urquhart's Away (1993). Here, the voice of eighty-two-year-old Esther O'Malley Robertson presents a story from her past. As a child of twelve, Esther was told the story by her grandmother, Eileen and "[now], as an old woman, she wants to tell this story to herself" (3):

Esther knows exactly what she is doing as she lies awake in the night. She is recomposing, reaffirming a lengthy, told story, recalling it; calling it back. She also knows that by giving her this story all these years ago her grandmother Eileen had caused one circle of experience to edge into the territory of another.(133)

Similarly, in Jane Rule's After The Fire (1989), the voice of the aged teacher, Miss James, recounts "told stor[ies]" through the poetry she recites in a "flat, loud voice" (41), its "only true country [being] great old age, a flat and windy plain" (27).

Further study of the voice of old age would need to consider the more complicated uses of first-person narrative. There are subtler ways of using this artistic technique other than just having the elderly protagonist tell a story in retrospect. One example is the modern use of the tape-recorder in such instances as Lily Hayworth telling her story into Becker's tape-recorder in Jack Hodgins' The Invention of the World (1977). The cranky ninety-five-year-old Billy Farthing in Richard Wright's Farthing's Fortunes (1976) also tells his story into a tape recorder and an ostensible *Publisher's Foreword* muddies the seemingly clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction by assuring the reader that what is about to be read is his "actual words" (xiii). From his home in Sunset Manor, it is Farthing who "lives to tell the tale ... the adventures of a colorful old Canadian" (xiv). In The Cunning Man (1994), Robertson Davies employs another specialised version of first-person narrative. In this novel, old Dr. Jonathan Hullah looks back over seven decades of his life. His first-person narrative is contained within an old Case Book, one "which forms so much of the underpinning of [his] life"

(49). In the “privacy” (216) and “secrecy” (265) of this Case Book, Hullah not only explores the past stages of his life, but also resolves to adopt a “somewhat mirthful approach to whatever of life still remained” (378) and to “so far as possible, enjoy old age” (379).

All the above aspects and more remain to be studied not only in English-Canadian fiction, but also in other areas such as poetry, theatre, folklore and the literature of French-Canadian and native peoples. The popularity of two French-Canadian plays about old age suggests the possibilities of research into the theatrical presentation of ageing. The Quebec playwright and actor Gratien Gélinas wrote La Passion de Narcisse Mondoux (1989) for his wife when he was in his late seventies and she was almost seventy. The play has been performed hundreds of times in French and English. Antonine Maillet's La Sagouine (1971), a series of sixteen monologues spoken by a seventy-two-year-old Acadian washerwoman, is yet another example of the work in this area that deserves detailed study. In English-Canadian theatre, Carol Shields' play, Thirteen Hands (1995), reflects a growing theatrical interest in the portrayal of old age. The play presents a bridge game which covers four generations over a period of seventy-three years.

Finally, possibilities exist for a comparative study between the fiction of old age and the way old age is presented in film. Mary Meigs' reflections on the making of the Canadian film The Company of Strangers (1990) are suggestive in this area. At the age of seventy-one, Meigs portrays herself as an old woman in this film and in her book, In The Company of Strangers (1991), she notes the film's use of the metaphor of the house and the “mutual need” of the old women in the film to tell their stories, “to be heard, to hear”

(52), aspects which have been noted in Chapter Two.

This study of old age in English-Canadian fiction has built upon the research of earlier scholars, and has attempted to extend their findings. It is to be hoped that the foregoing chapters provide an additional framework from which others, in turn, can develop the subject still further.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1

The awareness of the imminence of death in old age is suggested in the words of Miss Jean Taylor, aged eighty-two and resident of the Maud Long Medical Ward in Muriel Spark's Memento Mori (England,1959). This old woman comments: "being over seventy is like being engaged in a war. All our friends are going or gone and we survive amongst the dead and dying as on a battlefield" (37).

2

The image of confinement and restraint which opens "Dancing Bear" is also seen elsewhere in contemporary literature. In the opening scenes of Iris Murdoch's Bruno's Dream (England,1969) and Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm (Australia,1973) the ninety-year-old Bruno and the old and dying Elizabeth Hunter are respectively described as they lie confined by old age to their beds. Similarly, in Marcel Proust's Swann's Way: Remembrance of Things Past (A la recherche du temps perdu, France,1913), old Aunt Léonie is described as "gradually declin[ing] to leave, first Combray, then her house in Combray, then her bedroom, and finally her bed" (53).

3

Confinement in a nursing home is similarly described in May Sarton's As We Are

Now(United States,1973). Here the seventy-six-year old Caroline Spencer describes the condition of herself and the other old residents of "Twin Elms" nursing home as resembling that of "caged animals" with "keepers" (34).

4

Room One of The Hospital of St Christopher and St Jude in Elizabeth Jolley's Mr. Scobie's Riddle (Australia,1983), contains three old men in their eighties. The room is described in the following words: "There was not enough space in Room One for three people, not even when they were to be people with scarcely any possessions and one of them would spend most of his time confined to bed" (10).

5

This distinction is also apparent elsewhere in contemporary fiction. For example, in Stella Gibbons' Cold Comfort Farm (England,1932), a work which parodies the art of the novel, the seventy-nine-year-old Great Aunt Ada Doom is described by the narrator as the "Dominant Grandmother Theme" (57). This old woman confines herself to her room, emerging only periodically on random family "Counting Days". By these means she attempts to intimidate her family into staying near her and thus have some sort of control over change in her life. In contrast, the "fierce" seventy-two-year-old James L. Page in John Gardner's October Light(United States,1976) "confront[s]" the chaos of life "head on, with the eyes locked open and spectacles in place" and "tak[es] it in stride; better, anyway, than the man sealed off in his clean green suburb in Florida" (10-11).

6

Like Hagar and John Elliot, old Jolyon in John Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga (England, completed 1922) finds his sense of self in his "property". At the age of eighty, he is described as "the representative of moderation, of order, and love of property" (42) and his identity is closely tied to his house at Stanhope Gate.

7

Just as Aggie opens a room in the mind, so eventually does the elderly Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' Great Expectations (1860-61). Miss Havisham lives confined to a wheelchair, spending most of her time within the limits of the room which holds the decayed remains of her abandoned wedding feast. Towards the end of the novel, she moves out of this room to a larger room and this change reflects an accompanying change in her psyche. Dickens uses a similar technique earlier in Little Dorrit(1857) in his portrayal of Mrs. Clennam. This old woman confines herself to one "airless" room in her home and is first seen sitting on a "black bier-like sofa". Her face is described as "immovable ... as stiff as the folds of her stony head-dress [and] her being beyond the reach of the seasons seemed but a fit sequence to her being beyond the reach of all changing emotions" (73-4). Again, towards the end of the novel, she too moves out of her room and is described as she looks out of a window in Little Dorrit's house in the Marshalsea Prison as "bewildered, looking down into this prison as it were out of her own different prison" (857).

8

In Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler's Planet (United States,1969)the "seventy-plus" (3) Mr. Sammler comments, "Perhaps the best is to have some order within oneself. Better than what

many call love. Perhaps it *is* love" (228). At the end of the novel, this order is suggested in Mr. Sammler's interior monologue when he acknowledges that his old friend, Elya Gruner, died with an "aware[ness] that he must meet, and he did meet - through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding - he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows" (313).

Chapter 2

1

In "Mr. Scobie's Riddle and the Contemporary Vollendungsroman", Constance Rooke points out that the "untrodden paths" in the novel suggest "that there are other destinations, other ways to grow" (189).

2

Edward's words resemble those of the "wearish old man: Krapp"(9) in Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape (France,1957) who constantly ponders which sections of his life should be replayed.

3

This perspective is commented upon by the eighty-year-old narrator in Rodney Hall's Captivity Captive (Australia,1988) who describes himself as constantly living "down shafts of memory ... a region offering room for hope, time for seeing every least thing as completely as human eyes can see" (56).

4

A similar structural device is used by Kazuo Ishiguro in The Remains of the Day (England,1989). Here, an ageing butler, Stevens, motors "further and further" away from his place of employment into unfamiliar territory which is "beyond all previous boundaries". When Stevens makes his first stop, he steps out of the car on the edge of a "steep" hill (23-25).

5

Hagar's movements from one room to another and from one building to another are analogous to the movements of old Thomas Wilcher through the rooms of Tolbrook in Joyce Cary's To Be a Pilgrim (England,1942). In "Reminiscence and the Life Review", Kathleen Woodward points out that when Wilcher walks through these rooms, "he makes his way through the course of his life" (153).

Chapter 3

1

In Tillie Olson's "Tell Me a Riddle" (United States, 1956), it is the voice of the grand-daughter, Jeannie, who acknowledges that her grandmother has found the child within. In the concluding paragraph of the story, Jeannie urges her grandfather to help his wife's "poor body to die" while they celebrate the grandmother's return to "the little girl on the road of the village where she was born" (132).

2

Kathleen Woodward remarks on this in "Master Songs of Meditation". Nell's focus on the "stone", the "word" and the "stub" is analogous to what Woodward sees in Wallace Stevens' "To an Old Philosopher in Rome". Woodward points out that, for this old man who lies dying, "it is not intellectual speculation on a fiction which grants happiness and peace, but absorption in the particulars of this constricted environment - the smell of medicine, 'the particles', as [Stevens] puts it of 'nether-do' " (190).

3

In Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (England, 1925), Clarissa Dalloway associates a visionary moment with an old lady that she can see in a room opposite. For Clarissa, the "supreme mystery" appears held for a moment in the fact that "here was one room there another" (113-4). The image suggests the insight possible in the indoors "room" of an old woman.

4

"Bodily decrepitude is wisdom", Yeats writes in "After Long Silence".

5

Gerald Manning notes two instances of the connection between the elderly protagonist and the child in Muriel Spark's Memento Mori (England, 1959) and Elizabeth Jolley's Mr. Scobie's Riddle (Australia, 1983). Manning comments on this in "Sunsets and Sunrises: Nursing Home as Microcosm in Memento Mori and Mr. Scobie's Riddle" (41). Both Manning and Constance Rooke have also noted this imagery in David Malouf's An Imaginary Life (Australia, 1978).

6

In Rodney Hall's Captivity Captive (Australia,1988), the eighty-year-old narrator comments on his difficulties with one of his peers, an old man who sees the past just as he did when he was young and has never achieved "the gift of wisdom, having never made the past his own" (56).

7

In the conclusion to George Eliot's Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe (England,1861), the "burden" on old Silas's back is lifted through his relationship with the child, Eppie, a relationship which is central to the novel and the focus of the epigraph from Wordsworth's poem "Michael", yet another story about the relationship between an old and a young person.

Chapter 4

1

Similar opposing forces are also present in Saul Bellow's portrayal of the alienated and dispossessed Mr. Sammler in Mr. Sammler's Planet (United States,1969). Mr. Sammler is described in his seventies as experiencing "the utmost joy" of a "Life Force working, trying to start again" (224-5).

2

Similarly, in At Seventy: A Journal (United States,1984), May Sarton describes

herself on her seventieth birthday as "a person still on her way" and comments, "I suppose real old age begins when one looks backward rather than forward" (10).

3

A recent example of this technique is Sybille Bedford's Jigsaw (England,1989) described in the frontispiece as "A Biographical Novel" and in which an elderly protagonist orders her life in retrospect, recalling incidents and people who are drawn from Bedford's life. As in The Innocent Traveller, the boundaries of fiction and memoir overlap.

4

Hemingway's The Old Man and The Sea (United States,1952) is another example of an old man linked to "something old and elemental". The image of the old man with the marlin is analogous to that of Daddy with Old Croaker.

5

In Wolf Willow (United States,1962), Mitchell's contemporary and friend, Wallace Stegner, evokes his plains boyhood through the smell of wolf willow and through this feels "[a] contact has been made, a mystery touched" (19).

Chapter 5

1

A rising sun is linked to "the silver sun set in the rosewood bed" (23) of the aged

and dying Elizabeth Hunter in Patrick White's The Eye of the Storm (Australia,1973). As this old woman approaches death she is also at times transformed and appears to possess an aura which is "as redemptive as water, as clear as morning light" (13).

2

The "tattered" clothing of Hodgins' Bourne is analogous to that of Yeats' old man in the second stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium":

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress(217)

3

The wanderings of Bourne have literary antecedents in such figures as Sophocles' Oedipus in Oedipus at Colonus (completed when Sophocles was eighty-nine), Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Wordsworth's Old Cumberland Beggar and Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle.

4

In Wallace E. Knight's short story, "The Resurrection Man" (United States,1974), an old man plans to blow himself up in a self-prepared grave. He aborts the plan and struggles from the grave back into life and a new sense of the eternal nature of things.

5

The birth of new mental landscapes in old age is also evident in Jessica Anderson's Tirra Lirra by the River (Australia,1978). Here, an old woman, Nora Porteous, returns to her

childhood home in Australia after spending a lifetime escaping from it. It is here that she takes a final journey into the landscape of her mind "where infinite expansion is possible" (9).

6

Towards the conclusion of Elizabeth Jolley's Mr. Scobie's Riddle (Australia, 1983), old Miss Hailey dances a similarly explicit dance in celebration of "transfiguration" and "new life" (221-2).

7

A similar transformation occurs in Wallace Stevens' poem, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome", when "blown banners change to wings" in a region "beyond the eye,/Not of its sphere, and yet not far beyond" (371).

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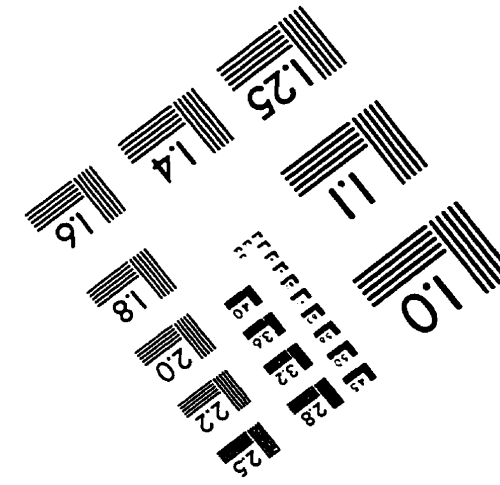
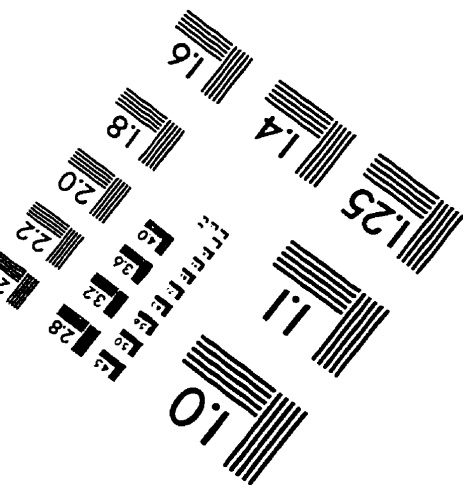
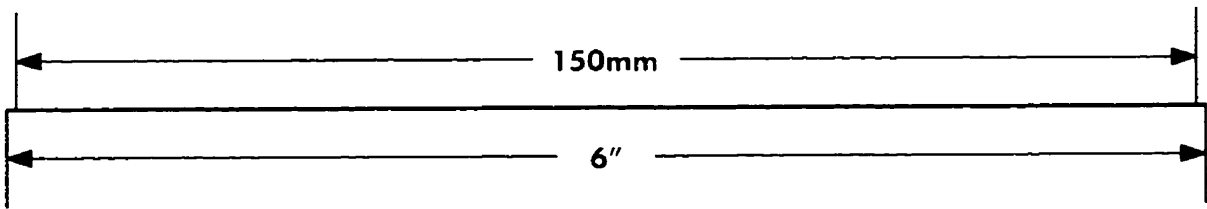
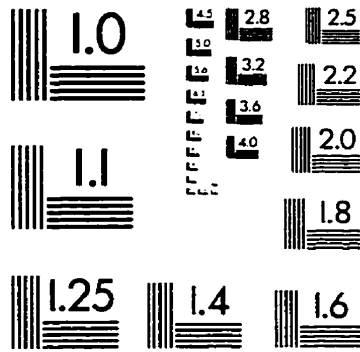
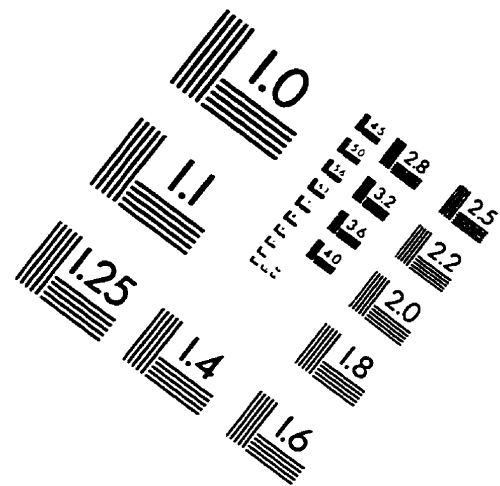
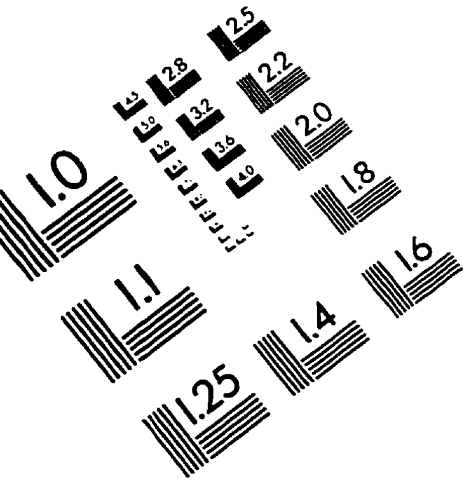
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