

THE INDIVIDUAL IS EVERYTHING OR THE WORLD IS NOTHING:
MORALITY AND REGIONALISM IN THE NOVELS OF DAVID ADAMS
RICHARDS

By

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B.A., Mount Allison University, 2000

Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts (English)

Acadia University
Fall Convocation 2001

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0-612-62338-6

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Abstract

In response to those who have been content to apply the terms “regional” and “regionalist” to David Adams Richards’s fiction, this study is intended to demonstrate how the misuse of such terms leads to a reductive interpretation of Richards’s works. In the course of demonstrating how Richards does and does not fit the description of a regionalist, the study outlines how he is primarily interested in the conveyance of a simple, universal sense of morality. The thesis brings out this moral standpoint by examining his representation of families, nature, and social institutions. It is argued that Richards’s regionalism grows from his moral standpoint.

This study focuses upon three novels, *Blood Ties* (1976), *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* (1993), and *Mercy Among the Children* (2000). These texts provide a representative sample of Richards’s published works to date. This study uses these texts to outline a progression by which Richards moves from a brand of regional association built upon a connection to the region’s geography and culture to a form of association determined by the political separation of the region from that which surrounds and influences it. Directly connected to this movement from one brand of regionalism to another are the shifts from subjectivity to objectivity in narration, as well as the shift from generality to specificity of regional detail. Despite these shifts, a simple form of morality remains paramount in Richards’s works. Moreover, in an age when such concepts as nationalism and even regionalism are being questioned, Richards appears as a new voice, which calls for a movement forward by prescribing a lifestyle guided by a “Golden Rule” approach to existence.

Acknowledgments

First, and foremost, I wish to thank my family. Without their ongoing support, I shudder to think where I would be. I would also like to thank Jeremy DeVito, Hamid Yazdi, and Kristina Michaud for being “in the same boat,” and for always offering an encouraging word. I owe a great debt to Dr. Patricia Rigg, Dr. Robert Morrison, Dr. Lisa Narbeshuber, and Dr. David Baron for making the school year 2000-01 the most challenging and rewarding I have yet experienced. Special thanks to Dr. Richard Davies and Ivy Peckford for creating such a comfortable environment in which to work and socialize. Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Anne Quema. I am grateful for her patience, her criticism, her encouragement, and for the amount of time and energy she devoted to my study. She helped instill in me the sort of work ethic needed to complete this project. To each of these people, I extend my sincerest thanks.

Introduction

The fiction of David Adams Richards shows a strong connection to a single region: the Miramichi river valley in northeastern New Brunswick. Based upon this fact, critics and scholars have habitually used the terms “regional writer” and “regionalist” to describe Richards and his works. An anonymous reviewer of Richards’s *Hope in the Desperate Hour* (1996) observes that

As far as the literary establishment and the mainstream media are concerned, David Adams Richards is the quintessential regionalist: a gruff, intense, woodsy guy recording the tragic lives of people so much more real (so much poorer, so much less educated, so much further away from Toronto) than the rest of us. (np)

Richards reacts against such labels and the sentiment behind them, arguing that these terms are reductive, and therefore injurious to his work. He feels that the terms “regional” and “regionalist” suggest a high degree of specificity, and a confining connection to the geography and society from which he writes: “As regional writers, we are supposedly limited not by the bounds of our human understanding, or human experience, but by the bounds of our garden or gate” (“My Miramichi Trilogy” 74-5). In interviews, conferences, essays, and also in his novels, Richards contends that his “human understanding” is far greater than his critics have recognized. He goes as far as to champion the universality of his novels: “All my books are based in the human heart” (qtd. in Procenko np). We see that, in the debate over Richards’s regionalism (or lack thereof), the terms “universal” and “regionalist” are placed at odds with each other. Some critics, however, have championed the universal nature of Richards’s novels; for

example, Fred Cogswell praises Richards for his use of a specific setting to voice universal themes (200).

Aligning myself somewhat with Cogswell, I intend to demonstrate that Richards is, in many ways, a regionalist, but that he is primarily a moralist (if we must apply a single term to Richards's works). Although Richards's novels are rooted in a specific region and a specific culture, the morality of Richards's works lends them a degree of universality that has often been overlooked by critics and scholars. My study focuses upon Richards's presentation of nature, family, and social institutions to outline the relationship between regionalism and morality in Richards's fiction. I argue that Richards favors family values and that he connects these values with the nature of his region. Throughout his work, family and nature are contrasted with social institutions, which Richards presents in a negative light. By discussing Richards's representation of nature, family, and social institutions, I will demonstrate how, in Richards's early work, his regionalism stems from the landscape and the culture of the region in which he has been raised. This regionalism (or regional association, for these terms are synonymous) is the foundation for a form of morality that carries few, if any, political implications. In these early novels, Richards's morality upholds family values and the natural surroundings of his region, and he favors these values over the social institutions within his region, which he sees as ineffectual and artificial. The subject matter of these novels is more universal than that of Richards's later works, in that these earlier novels focus upon such topics as family relationships, coming of age, finding love, and growing old. As Richards's career progresses, the same universal morality becomes the basis for a brand of relational regional association, whereby Richards begins to place the positive

moral values that appear to stem from the region's natural surroundings in contrast to the urban influences that increasingly enter the region. The novels Richards writes at this point in his career show that his sense of region grows from the region itself, but also in relation to that which lies outside it. The morality and regionalism of Richards's later works exhibit a much more political flavor. These novels suggest that Richards defines the region not only from within, but also in relation to specific cultural and political centers such as Hollywood, Toronto, and Ottawa. In these texts, Richards's morality becomes the foundation for a specific, political flavor of regionalism; however, beneath this political regionalism, we find the same universal morality that has been present in Richards's earlier works. Throughout his career, Richards maintains a distinction between nature and family on the one hand, and social institutions on the other; however, as his career progresses, social institutions are often linked to political and cultural centers, such as the Canadian government, the Canadian literary canon, and the powerful United States, which is seen as a form of empire. Thus, regionalism and morality are constants in Richards's work, though their significance changes as his career progresses.

My study is shaped in such a way as to make clear the changing significance of Richards's regionalism and morality throughout his career. Chapter 1 is devoted to a discussion of regionalism. Specifically, this chapter outlines the shift from nationalism to regionalism in Canada. It also provides multiple viewpoints on the implications of regionalism in Canadian politics and literature. The terms "regional" and "regionalist" have been given multiple definitions by those who participate in regionalist discourse, and so this chapter also explains the various definitions of the terms involved in such a way that these terms can be applied to Richards's work. Finally, through a conceptual

discussion of Richard's regionalism in relation to his morality, this chapter outlines how the chapters that follow will place Richards in relation to regionalist discourse.

Chapters two through four focus upon three of Richards's novels: *Blood Ties* (1976), *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* (1993), and *Mercy Among the Children* (2000). These texts span a twenty-four-year period, and so an examination of these three novels will allow me to outline a progression in Richards's writing in terms of regionalism and morality. *Blood Ties* is Richards's second novel, and I have chosen to work on this text for multiple reasons. Firstly and most importantly, *Blood Ties* offers a more complex discussion of the relationship between nature, family, and social institutions than do Richards's other early novels, *The Coming of Winter* (1974) and *Lives of Short Duration* (1981). I discuss *Blood Ties* as a sort of *bildungsroman* in which the young characters are coming of age under the influences of nature, family and social institutions. I will show how Richards's sense of morality is associated with all that is natural and spontaneous, as opposed to that which is cultural/artificial and determined. Here, Richards's morality and his regionalism do not take on relational or political implications, since the spontaneous action associated with the region's nature is not set in opposition to the determined action of any outside influence. The abundance (and nature) of the critical attention paid to *Blood Ties* is a second reason for its inclusion in my study. Critical response to *The Coming of Winter* was, for the most part, favorable, but it did not reach the depth needed in this study. As William Connor points out,

Although most reviewers found more to praise in Richards' first novel than to object to, they generally felt it necessary to qualify their praise. Most saw his perceptions of the world as both callow (Richards was only twenty-three at the time) and narrow. Most also approached *The Coming of Winter* as thematically limited realism—the work of a somewhat naïve,

albeit talented, observer of a regional setting who dealt mainly in surfaces. This initial tendency to place Richards in the important Canadian tradition of regional realism was natural in view of his talent for capturing the details of life in his region, yet it is unfortunate that Richards' success in depicting the surfaces of his characters' restricted lives should have caused so many critics to miss the psychological and symbolic depth beneath these surfaces. ("Coming of Winter" 31-2)

Blood Ties displays much greater psychological and symbolic depth concerning Richards's characters. Moreover, the growing amount of scholarly writing dedicated to *Blood Ties* has elicited a variety of responses from Richards himself, in the form of interviews and conference papers, as well as through written responses in his later novels. These responses to *Blood Ties* criticism in his later novels were an important factor in my selection of *Blood Ties* for this study. Furthermore, I believe this novel to be more definitive of Richards's early work than any other text.

For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down is the third book in what has come to be known as Richards's "Miramichi Trilogy." Its two predecessors are *Nights Below Station Street* (1988) and *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (1990). Scholars have often chosen to examine these three texts together; however, the size of this study does not allow a detailed discussion of all three texts. I have chosen to look at *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* because it contains the culmination of all the themes and subject matter presented in the earlier novels of the trilogy: heroism, social outcasts, and the comparison between the urban mindset and rural moral values. More importantly, in *Wounded*, as in *Blood Ties*, Richards presents nature, family, and social institutions in a way that is seminal to the sense of morality he conveys. Richards's morality is increasingly critical of social institutions, and it shows a growing historical and political awareness. In turn, this increasing historical and political awareness marks Richards's

placement of his rural region in relation to the urban forces it encounters. In doing so, Richards's morality has become the foundation for an element of relational regionalism as he compares his region's values with those that enter it from the outside. This novel is representative of the work that comes from the middle portion of Richards's career to date.

Mercy Among the Children is Richards's most recent novel. *Mercy* is characterized by a form of regionalism that is more specific and political in temperament than that of any earlier novel, and so this text exhibits the continuance of the changes in Richards's regionalism. In this text, the sense of morality Richards conveys places the region, with its positive moral values, in contrast to the negative influences of cultural and political centers, such as Toronto and Ottawa. Richards also compares the region with the United States, which he presents as an imperial center. Because of such comparisons, *Mercy's* regionalism adopts the language of postcolonial discourse. I will be discussing this text as an example of Richards's later work, in which his sense of morality becomes the foundation for a form of political regionalism. However, despite the political nature of these later texts, it will be seen that at the heart of Richards's novels is a universal form of morality that transcends boundaries, be they regional or otherwise.

Chapter 1: Richards and Canadian Literary Regionalism

...the terms regionalism and region have too often been used as conclusive rather than inclusive descriptions – the death knell, one might say – of various texts. Too often the terms are used as if they were self-explanatory – for example, “This is a work of regionalism” or “This is a regional novel” – and in a way that suggests regional writers (whoever they are) write like a chicken lays eggs (and, of course, some are lucky enough to lay golden ones); they just somehow, simply, absorb and produce.

(Herb Wyile np)

The ideological debate over regionalism in Canada has become increasingly popular over the last thirty years, both in politics and literature. This chapter is intended to provide a better understanding of regionalist discourse, the origins of regionalism, and the various viewpoints in this debate. After supplying an understanding of regionalism as it applies to politics and literature, it will be possible to place David Adams Richards’s work into this discourse. George Woodcock, in “The Meeting of Time and Space” (1987), outlines how the concept of regionalism has been present in what is now Canada since before Confederation:

The process by which the regions of this country have emerged into historical-cultural reality has of course been coterminous with the process of the making of Canada. In fact, region making and nation making are aspects of the same process, since the special character of Canada as a nation is that of a symbiotic union of regions, as organic as a coral reef, rather than a centralized state constructed according to abstract political concepts. The emergence of regional consciousness among English-Canadians, and its expression in literature, proceeds historically from east to west. (31)

The birth of regionalism, as Woodcock describes it, coincided with early settlers’ encounter with and response to the “organic” geographical features of the land. This

relationship with a specific time and place, Woodcock explains, when coupled with a common history, results in a sense of community (21). This sense of community predates Confederation, so it can be said that, in forming Canada, each region involved chose to enter into this “federation of regions” for reasons having to do with the region itself.

Provincialism, which came about with Confederation, is not the same as regionalism, since provincial boundaries are defined arbitrarily, not necessarily along natural, geographical divisions. It is a mistake to confuse the region with the province, since within any given province exists the potential for multiple regions. For example, Cape Breton is a region of Nova Scotia, just as inland British Columbia remains in many ways distinct from the coastal region. The Maritime region became defined, as its name suggests, by a common connection to the sea. Historically, this relationship with the sea meant that trade overseas and along the Atlantic seaboard was more lucrative than continental trade. As Ernest R. Forbes notes, even the continental railway failed to bridge the geographical separation – which fostered political separation – between the Atlantic region and central Canada:

In the period 1917-23, with the integration of the Intercolonial Railroad with the bankrupt Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk in what became the Canadian National Railways, the federal government drastically increased freight rates, thus cutting off Maritime producers from the markets which they had developed in Western Canada. The long-standing commitment that Halifax and Saint John would become Canada’s winter ports seemed irrevocably lost as the federal government “inherited,” with the Grand Trunk Railway, extensive harbour facilities at Portland. (*Maritime Regionalism* 13)

Cities in central Canada became places of opportunity and economic diversification, developing international north-south trade, while the Maritime region remained largely

dependent upon “industries of primary production,” such as lumber, fish, and coal (Forbes, *Maritime Regionalism* 3). Maritimers often attribute their relative economic failure to the federal government, which did not do enough to ensure economic prosperity on the East Coast.

Indeed, all regions in Canada have had their own needs and complaints. The discontent of the various regions and provinces within Canada, coupled with the strength of the United States to the south, brought much fear to the newly-formed Canadian government, which recognized that Canada’s survival as a political entity was at stake. After Confederation, politicians and writers alike worked to establish a sense of Canadian nationalism by attempting to define a common experience. George Woodcock points out that such works as Hugh MacLennan’s *Barometer Rising* (1941) demonstrate attempts to define and uphold this sense of “Canadianness” (*Canadian Fiction* 9). Woodcock goes on to say that Canada’s involvement in the two world wars resulted in a growth in Canadian nationalism, which the federal government attempted to sustain in the postwar years (12). Canadian nationalism culminated in 1967 with the centennial celebrations.

Out of the height of nationalism comes George Grant’s *Lament for a Nation* (1965), which describes how Canada, having gained independence from Britain, is now losing its sovereignty to the United States. Grant identifies the installation of American branch plants as the point of no return for Canada as a sovereign nation (40). Margaret Atwood’s definition of a colony as “a place from which a profit is made, but *not by the people who live there*” (35-6), supports Grant’s statement. Grant voices the concern that, because the Canadian economy is so dependent upon the United States, Canada’s history

(i.e. its success in two world wars) is not enough to sustain the country as a political entity:

Diefenbaker saw his destiny as revivifying the Canadian nation. But what did he think that nation was? Certainly he had a profound—if romantic—sense of historical continuity. But a nation does not remain a nation only because it has roots in the past. Memory is never enough to guarantee that a nation can articulate itself in the present. (12)

Grant's fear of American control over Canada's economy and culture has been all but realized; however, a major flaw exists in his discussion. Grant tends to oversimplify Canadian culture by assuming that all Canadians possessed strong national loyalties at the outset. In making this assumption, Grant virtually homogenizes the experience of all Canadians. While he acknowledges the "two solitudes" brand of difference between the English and French inhabitants of the country, he makes generalizations about the nation as a whole. For example, he states that "in Canada outside of Quebec, there is no deeply rooted culture" (43). In order to lament the loss of the nation, Grant has first assumed that the nation-state had been made up of the same national, what he calls "local" (88), loyalties that had been advocated by nationalists.

Up until the 1970s, the tendency to focus upon the country as a whole, and to create an imagined sense of national community, was vastly popular in Canadian politics and literature alike. This sense of nationalism began to fade after 1967, and Woodcock suggests that Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972) is one of the last texts in a tradition that sought to define "Canadianness" in Canadian literature ("Time and Space" 9). In *Survival*, Atwood suggests that Canadian writing is unified by a common theme:

I'd like to begin with a sweeping generalization and argue that every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core. ... The symbol, then – be it a word, phrase, idea, image, or all of these – functions like a system of beliefs (it *is* a system of beliefs, though not always a formal one) which holds the country together and helps the people in it to co-operate for common ends. (31)

Atwood identifies survival/victimization as the unifying theme of Canadian writing. She makes reference to explorers and settlers struggling to survive against a harsh wilderness and the region's native inhabitants. She also discusses the survival of the individual following a crisis or a disaster; cultural survival, such as the endurance of the French language; and the survival of Canada as a nation-state (32). While it is hardly debatable that survival has been *one* dominant theme in Canadian writing, Atwood's argument has grown outdated for several reasons. For example, in the first sentence of the above passage, she appears to equate the words "country" and "culture." I have already discussed how Canada came to be, and in doing so I have shown that the country is made up of multiple regions, each containing cultural divisions. Despite her constant qualifications of such "sweeping generalizations," Atwood fails to acknowledge fully the diversity of cultures in Canada. Certainly, in what is upheld as a multicultural mosaic, minority and regional writers who do not discuss survival cannot be considered un-Canadian. Perhaps another reason why Atwood's argument has not endured can be found by examining the following passage:

[Canadian literature is] a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as *our* literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (18-9)

Atwood's suggestion that all Canadian literature is somehow "ours" ignores the fact that not every individual in Canada can relate to everything he/she reads, be it Canadian or otherwise. Since *Survival*, scholars have begun to lose faith in the shared knowledge of Canada as a unity. Many have begun to direct their discussion toward building a shared knowledge – or appreciation – of difference. In order better to appreciate this difference, critical focus has been shifted away from the canonical center of the country. This shift in focus has allowed for greater representation to be given to the outlying areas: the "regions."

Debate is ongoing as to whether this change of focus necessarily means the weakening of the country as a whole. During the age of nationalism, the popular belief was that the strengthening of regional ties equated to the undermining of the country's integrity. More recently, scholars have come to different conclusions. Roderick Haig-Brown states that no individual "becomes a great patriot without first learning the closer loyalties and learning them well: loyalty to the family, to the place he calls home, to his province or state or country" (qtd. in Woodcock "Time and Space" 23). Northrop Frye, in a discussion with Robert Fulford, takes a similar stance, suggesting that the Canadian tendency toward regionalism is but one necessary stage in the country's maturation process ("Nationalism to Regionalism" 9). He also suggests that the diversity of cultures in Canada is worth celebrating:

I think it's been of an immense benefit to Canada first that it went from a pre-national phase to a post-national phase without ever quite becoming a nation, and second that it never tried to be homogeneous, culturally speaking, and I think that is of tremendous benefit to the variety of our culture. (9)

Here Frye's use of the word "nation" is similar to Atwood's "country," which suggests a political entity made up of people who share a common experience and culture. Canada, Frye suggests, was never such an entity. He praises the fact that, although nationalists worked to establish a common "Canadian" experience, Canada has never pushed for cultural homogeneity. Frye's suggestion, then, is that if Canadians do not feel a strong sense of communality as a nation, the government should not attempt to force such a sentiment upon them. George Woodcock, in "The Meeting of Time and Space," aligns himself with Frye when he suggests that if Canada is a confederation of regions, its politics and its literature should reflect this (43). If Canada has never pushed for cultural homogeneity, why then did Canadian literature attempt to achieve homogeneity, thematic or otherwise? It is arguable that, as the population of central Canada grew, the power of the English Canadian literary canon developed in Ontario; thus, the attempts to achieve homogeneity in Canadian writing reflect the nationalist discourse that was popular in central Canada. It is not surprising that, as the political focus shifts from nationalism to regionalism, the literary focus does the same.

Since the 1970s, critics have begun to study Canadian literature as the sum of all the diverse texts written in Canada. They have also begun to place more focus upon minority and regional texts – that is, texts that come from a region other than the metropolitan – considering how these texts reflect a sense of loyalty or community to the region from whence they come. This marks the beginning of regionalism as a critical ideology. Recent studies in regionalism, such as Christian Riegel and Herb Wylie's *A Sense of Place* (1997), recognize that regionalism has become an important, if not central,

paradigm within which to view writers and their work (Riegel et al. x). Though regionalism has lately appeared as a suitable substitute for nationalism, regionalism itself remains problematic – Jonathan Hart warns that a cult of regionalism is still a cult (116). Many of the problems in regionalist discourse arise because of the varied use and misuse of the terms involved in this debate. Within the discourse of regionalism, one finds the terms “region,” “regional,” and “regionalist” used almost interchangeably. Moreover, each of these terms carries multiple connotations. This accounts for much disagreement regarding the causes and implications of regionalism. Riegel and Wyile acknowledge that “regionalism” has come to refer to

the unifying principle of a corpus of literary texts (that is, a regional literature), the attachment of a writer to a particular place, the diversity of writing within the larger body of a national literature, or a kind of ideological consciousness or discourse. (x)

The multiple definitions of this term complicate any discussion of regionalism; thus, it is essential to my study to identify the overlap between “regional” and “regionalist.” The terms “regional” and “regionalist” can both be used to imply a connection to a region. Alison Calder, in “Reassessing Prairie Realism” (1997), indicates that a popular approach to regionalism defines literature as “regional” if it has a connection to the land. By this approach, the value of regional literature lies in its ability to mirror a specific environment and show what “real” life is like in a limited and peculiar environment (55). She goes on to say that

regional writing lives a curious double life. On the one hand, it must convey the individual and the particular. On the other hand, it must be homogenizing, reporting on the general life of the region, smoothing over any internal conflicts to present a unified view of life “in its typical

expressions.” There is no point, after all, in regional writing if it takes apart the region it is supposed to be creating. (54)

According to this definition, a text is “regional” if it discusses a given region, reporting on the “general life” of the region. My study draws upon this definition of regional literature, and, by the same token, I define a regional writer as one who shows an attachment to a particular place, and who writes about the “general life” of this place.

Marjorie Pryse, in “Writing out of the Gap: Regionalism, Resistance, and Relational Reading” (1997), points out further complexities of the terms involved in regionalist discourse. She offers a feasible explanation for the parochial connotations that have been given to the word “region:”

The very etymology of the word *region* reminds us that regions exist within, and are subordinated by, some other rule. *Region* derives from the Latin root, *regere*, to rule—as do the words *rex* and *realm*, those rhetorical and political entities that perform the act of subjugation on the region. (22)

Thus, though the sense of region may stem from an individual or group’s experience with a common geography, implications of inferiority or subjugation factor into the discussion as soon as the word “region” is applied to this geography. Such negative connotations are absent from the terms “place” and “area”; however, even “locality” has taken on a pejorative connotation. David Martin indicates that the term “local colour” implies a view of regional life from the ‘out-side’ and an attitude of condescension toward it, while ‘regionalism’ implies a view of regional life from the ‘inside’ and an attitude of sympathy toward it” (36). I agree with this definition, since it is true that “local colour” has become a term of condescension. I also wish to use Martin’s definition of “regionalism,” since it

places this term as a synonym for “regional association.” In this sense, “regionalism” refers to the same sort of connection to the land as does “regional.” A source of much debate over regionalism is that this term has also come to be used to describe those who take part in a discourse that is often political. This more political definition of regionalism refers to the practice of defining differences between regions or between a given region and a cultural or political center. One does not need to have a regional affiliation to take part in regionalism by this definition, since the act of comparing regions along social or political lines – from any standpoint – equates to a form of regionalism.

We find, then, that the definitions of the term “regionalism” can be arranged into a sort of spectrum. On one side of this spectrum are those who feel that regionalism can develop from factors internal to the region, such as the individual’s relationship with geography. George Woodcock, for example, voices a “confederal” description of regionalism when he suggests that the multiple regions of Canada are constructed as groups of individuals find a sense of community through their common experience with a specific geographical space at a given time. He feels that regions constructed in this way are “organic as coral reef” (“Time and Space” 31). Toward the middle of the spectrum we find more recent participants in regionalist discourse, who have come to place more emphasis on the cultural aspect of regional formation. For example, Marjorie Pryse upholds that both a region’s geography and the culture found therein play important roles in creating a sense of region. She argues that the landscape reflects the society that inhabits it in the same way that humans reflect the landscape in which they live (19). While time and place play seminal roles in the shaping of a given culture, that culture’s

interaction with nature alters the landscape which, in turn, continues to define the region's society. The cycle that Pryse defines places culture as an important aspect of regional identity; however, Pryse remains close to the confederal side of the spectrum because, by her definition, one can obtain regional consciousness – regionalism – from the culture and geography *within* the region. Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes* (1987) also exhibits a similar confederal approach:

‘Maritime writers’ [are] those artists whose work reveals a strong imaginative involvement with and commitment to the region. The minds of such writers are either saturated (as in the case of Buckler, Raddall, Richards) or ironically gripped (as with MacLennan and MacLeod) by the Maritimes – their work reveals the kind of eyes the region gives to a writer; the kind of things those eyes are compelled to notice and to represent. (5)

She continues to say that a Maritime writer engages in “making [the reader] ‘see’ – selecting, out of the welter of phenomena, impressions, actions, and events, those things that have a peculiar resonance for the writer and have been habitually overlooked by the reader” (7). Keefer's definition of Maritime writers does not involve a form of opposition or anti-centrism; therefore, we see that those who gravitate toward this side of the regionalism spectrum uphold a definition of regionalism that does not involve comparing the region to a cultural or political center. The “confederal” model of regionalism, then, refers to a brand of regional association that stems from the individual's experience with a specific time and place.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find the “relational” and political definitions of regionalism. Herb Wylie, in “Regionalism, Post-Nationalism, and Post-Colonialism: The Case of Canadian Literature(s)” (1998), suggests that more recent approaches to

regionalism, “influenced by poststructuralist theories of marginality and difference, tend to emphasize the delineation of region in relation to what lies outside it” (np). Members of this camp posit that regionalism comes into being only in relation to larger ideological debates, such as nationalism or anti-nationalism, post colonialism, and globalization. According to Riegel and Wyile,

in the last twenty years, economic, political and cultural developments have prompted a renewed focus on regionalism. Decentralization, regional consciousness, and a growing suspicion of institutional nationalism, combined with the development of a global economy and a more eclectic international culture, have undermined the cohesion of the nation-state. The rationalizing effects of a global market economy have put pressures on local economies and cultures, throwing increasing attention on culture and politics at the regional level, and forcing a redefinition of the notion of community. (xii)

Here, Riegel and Wyile suggest that the region is defined *in relation to* larger, political forces, and that the “renewed focus on regionalism” has indirectly “undermined the cohesion of the nation-state.” Nonetheless, they hold onto the notion that a region is “a more organic alternative to the nation-state with its arbitrary borders” (x). E. R. Forbes, in *Challenging the Regional Stereotype* (1989), also takes on a “center vs. margin” tone, as he describes how popular culture has perpetuated Maritime stereotypes:

Both popular and scholarly literature has tended to seek explanations for the [Maritime] region’s economic difficulties in deficiencies in the local people and their institutions – the “blame the victim” syndrome as the late David Alexander often called it. Explanations suggesting lack of an entrepreneurial spirit, a lazy and poorly educated work-force and an excessively timid business community have drawn more from the myth of regional conservatism than from any serious study of the history of the region. (10)

Forbes goes on to suggest that stereotyping is a large factor in regionalist debate, and that regionalist writing usually calls for a breaking down of regional stereotypes in an attempt to improve external conceptions of the region (12). According to Forbes, then, regionalist writing carries a political weight.

Frank Davey, in his essay, "Toward the Ends of Regionalism" (1997), goes even further toward the political end of the spectrum as he suggests that regionalists purposely place themselves *in opposition to* larger forces:

Regionalisms develop the appearance of having "natural" boundaries – an inside and outside – as if these boundaries were beyond culture. Appeals are constructed to the landscape and climate to explain cultural forms and customs. What is often obscured in these various constructions are the politically oppositional aspects of regionalism: that regionalism is cultural rather than geographic, and represents not geography itself but a strategically resistant mapping of geography in which historic and economic factors play large but largely unacknowledged parts. (4)

According to Davey, regions are like nation-states in that they are cultural, political constructs. Although Davey recognizes that Canada is more separated regionally than any other country (2), he does not attribute this regional separation to geographic diversity; instead, he feels that the geography is used as a sign to conceal ideology (3). He goes on to explain that the sense of regional community, especially when used in a political fashion, comes at the expense of the differences existing within the region (i.e. ethnic, religious, differences in age and sex). This recalls Alison Calder's indication that regional literature "smooth[es] over any internal conflicts to present a unified view of life 'in its typical expressions'" (54). Likewise, Jonathan Hart notes that the attempt to define a sense of local community at the regional level is often guilty of re-inscribing stereotypes of women, blacks, and natives (115). Thus, we see that the region has

recently received the same criticism as did the nation for assuming a sense of community among its inhabitants. Linda Hutcheon, on the other hand, suggests that the growth of regionalism in the postmodern context has highlighted divisions within regions:

The postmodern has ... translated the existing emphasis on regionalism in literature, for example, into a concern for the different, the local, the particular – in opposition to the uniform, the universal, the centralized. The emphasis is the same, but the terms of reference and context have changed. (19)

As Hutcheon indicates, the shift from nationalism to regionalism continues. Participants in this discourse have come to focus not only upon marginalized regions, but also marginalized people within these regions. Davey suggests that regionalists have traditionally tended to ignore such differences within the region in order to create the appearance of a united front when addressing the nation-state: the region's "other" (4).

We see that those who focus upon regionalism as ideology tend to use such terms as "other," "center," and "margin" in their discourse:

the major characteristic that regionalisms share with colonies is the sense that power over them resides and is wielded elsewhere. In all the large Canadian regionalisms can be found strong resentments toward what the regionalist advocates perceive as the oppositional other, whether this be the Atlantic belief that "Ottawa" has mismanaged Atlantic fishstocks, a Maritime belief that strangers have taken over Maritime cities and their commercial institutions ... (Davey, "Toward the Ends of Regionalism" 11)

Davey's identification of Ottawa as the target of Maritime regionalist sentiment shows that the extreme cases of relational and political regionalism share much in common with postcolonialism. Wyile identifies how the term "postcolonial" can be applied to recent Canadian literature:

In most parts of the world, multinational corporations, through direct investment, indirect (and direct) influence on policy, and the sale of consumer products, exert a control analogous to that of Europe during high colonialism, and even in a middle power like Canada, one effect of an international corporate culture that privileges the bottom line has been decreasing government funding and enthusiasm for arts and culture and increasing reliance on corporate sponsorship -- thus further fraying the national affiliation of artists and writers... (np)

Here, one sees that postcolonialism and regionalism are related through their common lack of national affiliation. Wyile goes on to define the difference between regionalist texts and postcolonial writing:

To assert a direct equation between regionalist and postcolonial writing and criticism is a dubious gesture, since the larger political, economic, historical, and cultural contexts in which that writing occurs are substantially different. Though writers such as David Adams Richards, Jack Hodgins, and Robert Kroetsch may foreground the marginality and the sense of political and cultural difference of the respective regions of which they write, their work is certainly of a different order from, say, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Colin Johnson's *Dr. Wooreddy*, or, for that matter, Timothy Findley's *The Wars*. Despite the anticentrism of much so-called regionalist writing, regionalism, at least in Canada, hardly constitutes the kind of political, historical, and cultural deconstructive project in which most critics see postcolonial writing as engaging centre-margin relationships. (np)

According to Wyile, only in its most extreme examples does regionalism equate to postcolonialism.

Thus far, I have discussed the notion of regionalism in largely abstract terms. I would now like to outline the position Richards occupies in the discourse of regionalism. As I will discuss in greater detail in the following three chapters, Richards's early work is characterized by a sort of confederal regionalism, as defined by Woodcock, Pryse and Kulyk Keefer. By this model, one sees that the region does not have to be created in

relation to the nation state, or any larger discourse such as post-colonialism or globalization. In Chapter 2, I use *Blood Ties* to demonstrate that the region's geography and culture play a large role in Richards's early novels, and that the sense of regional identity, or "saturat[ion]" (to borrow Keefer's word), in *Blood Ties* comes from within the region, and not from the practice of comparing the region with the world that lies outside it. In this novel, Richards's characters appear to have little knowledge of the outside world, just as his narrators take a similar position, existing within, yet on the margins of the society of which they are a part. Although, in *Blood Ties*, Richards discusses a single region, he does not include specific details of place. By avoiding such details, Richards maintains a great deal of universality. Instead of focusing upon specific details and issues within the region, Richards focuses upon the consciousnesses of his characters. The subjectivity of this narrative will be seen to combine with such universal themes as growing old, finding love, and fitting in, to produce a novel that fits the confederal model of regionalism, but that is primarily interested in the conveyance of a universal brand of morality.

In Chapter 3, I use *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* as an example of a transitional text, to show how, as Richards's career progresses, his regionalism begins to involve an increasing awareness of outside influences. Here, Richards's narrator and his characters are more aware of their relationship to the world outside the region. The subject matter of this text is less universal, since details of place are more frequently introduced. The references to places outside the region, and to the forces that govern the region, indicate a form of relational regionalism. By the same token, Richards has shifted from his earlier subjective approach to a more objective narrative stance. While the

subjectivity of *Blood Ties* allows a greater focus on the individual as an active subject in society, the objective stance in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* places increasing focus on the specific social conditions under which Richards's characters live. Richards's objective approach presents the characters as objects that are affected by specific social conditions. The increased specificity of place and time in *Wounded* produces a less universal tone, as the region becomes more defined in terms of what surrounds it.

In Chapter 4, my discussion of *Mercy Among the Children* outlines how, in his most recent text, Richards displays a form of political regionalism, which at times takes on a postcolonial flavor. Although Richards employs a first person narrator in this novel, we see that the shift from subjectivity to objectivity has continued, and has brought about an increasing focus upon the specific social and political conditions under which the characters live. Often, in his later novels, when Richards criticizes certain institutions or cultural centers, he does so as a response to those who have misinterpreted his earlier texts. Ironically, then, Richards takes part in the ideological/political brand of regionalism through his act of resisting his classification as a regionalist. However, despite the political nature of Richards's more recent novels, it will be seen that the same universal brand of morality found in *Blood Ties* is at work in *Mercy*.

Having outlined how I plan to classify Richards as a regionalist, I would like to clarify my argument by saying that Richards is not *primarily* a regionalist. I disagree with Wyile's suggestion that Richards "foreground[s] the marginality and the sense of political and cultural difference" (np) of his region. Certainly, political and cultural differences are evident, especially in Richards's later works; however, I argue these

differences are not Richards's primary interest. Instead, I will show that Richards foregrounds a sense of morality. In "Firing the Literary Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency and David Adams Richards's Miramichi Trilogy" (1997), Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile define the morality of Richards's works by suggesting that his novels "place under suspicion reason, causality, and larger complexes of social meaning, privileging instead spontaneity, chance and un-self-consciousness" (6). My discussion of Richards's morality focuses upon three recurring themes, or subjects: social institutions, family, and nature. Specifically, I will be looking at these three elements in relationship to the moral concepts of "spontaneous" and "determined" action. Richards insists that the "whole idea [in his novels] is that the underlying humanity of a human being continually frees him, and that determined action never does" (qtd. in Scherf, "Interview" 160). Armstrong and Wyile elaborate on this division between determined and spontaneous action:

Such a philosophical world-view obviously discounts the possibility that "determined action" – which appears to include not only personal machination but also social reform and state planning – can be a force for good in society. (np)

In Richards's works, social institutions are guilty of "determined action," because they are founded upon such things as progress, economics, and state control, while families are founded upon natural, biological connections, and are more associated with "spontaneous" acts of love, selflessness, and compassion. Nature, because of its a-social qualities, can be seen as a neutral force; however, because of nature's absence of social signifiers – its "naturalness" – Richards associates positive morals with the natural world. He appears to suggest that the individual's potential for goodness, even heroism, is

greatest when he/she is outside (i.e. marginalized from) popular, “trendy,” culture. For Richards’s characters, then, nature provides an escape from culture, or an alternative thereto, just as the region’s connection to nature, though waning, continues to foster in many characters what Richards calls a “rural sensibility.” At the risk of making a mistake common among Richards’s critics – that of reducing his work to structured binaries –I will show that, as Richards’s career progresses, the notion of spontaneous vs. determined action becomes aligned with other binary pairs that Richards introduces. In his early works, the notion of spontaneous action is tied to the natural world, while determined action is associated with the negative influences of culture. Richards’s region is praised for its rural, conservative connection to nature. In Richards’s later works, he increasingly draws the contrast between the conservative, rural region and the progressive urban influences it encounters. This contrast, in its most extreme circumstances, borders upon the sort of margin vs. center division one finds in postcolonial discourse. Thus, it can be said that the morality in Richards’s work has a “universal” flavor, but that, as his career progresses, it becomes increasingly tied to his regionalism.

Scholars and critics often see Richards’s moralist writing as an example of conservatism. Armstrong and Wyile suggest that Richards’s trilogy (*Nights Below Station Street* [1988], *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* [1990], and *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* [1993]) is deliberately out of step with prevailing social thought and literary taste. Arguably, a certain amount of conservatism is to be expected in the literature of this region, considering the region’s remaining roots in simple economics: farms, fish, and trees. Alden Nowlan explains:

The twentieth century came very late for rural Maritimes. In the 1930s my native place couldn't have been much different from what it was in the 1880s, except that the ships had vanished long ago and the lumbering was petering out, so that most people were poorer than their grand-parents had been. We had no telephone, no electricity, no central heating and no plumbing except a primitive kitchen sink. (qtd. in Kulyk Keefer 10)

Perhaps the Maritime region *has* traditionally been “behind” other parts of Canada, in terms of technology and economy; however, Richards does not see this as a problem. In many ways, he sees this as worth celebrating, since it creates an existence less controlled by what he sees as shallow, progressive thought. George Woodcock sees this “stubbornness” as a trait that has allowed this region to hold onto its literary culture better than any other region, save for Quebec (“Time and Space” 36).

Chapter 2: *Blood Ties* (1976)

“I’m not sure what a definitive work of mine would be. I’d probably have to fall back on *Blood Ties*, I probably would, and say that’s a good place to start.”

- David Adams Richards (qtd. in Sherf, “Interview” 158)

Blood Ties, a definitive example of Richards’s early work, displays a form of confederal regionalism, or a sense of regional association that is constructed from the individual’s experience within a given region. In this novel, the consciousness of Richards’s characters and his narrator does not extend beyond regional boundaries, and their association with the region stems from their interaction with the region’s geography (nature) and culture at a given time. Because of this, *Blood Ties* does not exhibit the sort of political didacticism that arises when comparing one’s region to another region, or to a cultural or political center. Instead, I will show that this novel primarily conveys a search for moral values that can be best outlined by examining nature, family, and social institutions in relation to the moral division between the notions of spontaneous and determined action, as defined in the previous chapter.

In many ways, *Blood Ties* is about change. The novel revolves around the members of the MacDurmot family, Maufat, Irene, Orville, Cathy and Leah. These characters deal with the universal changes of life: growing old, losing loved ones, coming-of-age, leaving home, finding love, and forging a place for themselves in their society. We are often made to follow the story backwards in time, as various characters remember and relive moments from their past, or as the narrator provides exposition in the form of a retrospective digression. Sometimes these “flashbacks” are set apart by italics, but often they are not. This leads to confusion on the part of the reader, who must

determine which pronouns refer to which characters, and which paragraphs are in the present and which are part of a flashback. The overall result is a retrospective and fragmented narrative, which, I argue, is modernist for its representation of a society that is breaking down and losing its sense of center. According to Michael Levenson, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), “figures of nihilism, of degeneration and despair” (4-5) are common in modernist art, as are representations of lost faith and the groundlessness of value (5). *Blood Ties* is particularly modernist for its depiction of a place in which something (though we are never told specifically what) has gone wrong to bring about a fall, or, as Philip Milner puts it, the “disintegration” (201) of the society. Furthermore, Richards shows that, in this society, it has become difficult for humans to find real “goodness” or “heroism,” since the standards by which this heroism might be judged do not exist, or, if they do exist, they are no longer respected. By comparing the past with the present, in terms of the changing role of family moral values, the changing relationship between humankind and nature, and the changing position of social institutions in the life of the individual, one can see how Richards praises selfless, spontaneous goodness, and hope. All of these are becoming increasingly difficult to find. The past, then, becomes a romanticized time – a golden age – characterized by a stronger, more centered society, a more traditional family, more idealized natural surroundings, and a stronger sense of morality.

Richards also depicts such changes as waning economic prosperity and shrinking population. Richards’s critics, upon encountering discussion of unemployment and despair among the characters of Richards’s novels, have assumed that Richards is voicing typical politically regionalist sentiment on behalf of his region. William Connor, in

“Coming of Winter, Coming of Age: The Autumnal Vision of David Adams Richards’s First Novel” (1984), notes that among critics of Richards’s early work,

The prevailing view is that Richards’ primary aim is social criticism of his native region and that he accomplishes this end by depicting it as a soul-killing cultural backwater. While his success in depicting the limitations of the Miramichi Region is generally admitted, most critics suggest that his art is limited by his subject matter and intention. (32)

One may infer that the region’s relative poverty and sense of hopelessness have come about with decreasing trade by sea, exhaustion of natural resources, and the waning role of the railroad, which once represented lucrative trade with central Canada. Perhaps critics have assumed Richards to be a politically charged voice because he writes about a region that has long been active in relational/political forms of regionalism. As E. R. Forbes suggests,

Maritimers have sometimes worked together effectively to defend their interests while at others their failure to do so was a factor in the reverses suffered. An example of success in this regard was their sustained drive to change the Canadian constitution to better accommodate their interests – a drive apparent in the regional protest agitation early in the century and maintained, with a few lapses, through until the introduction of the “reasonable comparable” clause of the Constitution in 1982. (*Regional Stereotype* 11)

In the previous chapter, I cited Frank Davey, who makes note of the long-standing Maritime concern that Ottawa has mismanaged Atlantic Canada’s fishstocks (“Toward the Ends of Regionalism” 11). It can be said, then, that the Maritimes do take part in a margin-center sort of “regionalism;” in fact, Maritime regionalism has become clichéd in such a way that many expect regionalist messages to come from the literature written in this region. Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests that, in fiction, cultural “expressions of

regional ‘spheres of consciousness’ usually go hand in hand with demands for economic justice or a degree of autonomy” (23), and that the regional writer is a politically charged voice for the “inarticulate and impoverished” (161). Richards would have been conscious of movements for Maritime rights; however, in his early work, he does not allow a great deal of political commentary to enter into his novels. He never goes as far as to imply causes for the decline of the region.

Although Richards depicts a region that is decaying and/or becoming de-centered, the novel is not meant to be a socioeconomic study of the region. Instead, the story focuses upon the individuals who exist within this society. Linda Hutcheon, in *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988), explains how a writer’s focus on the individual necessarily extends to include the society of which he/she is a part:

But it is a truism of the novel as a mimetic genre that it is set in a particular place and time. Given that, what novel would not be regional in some way? The density of realistic social and geographical detail in David Adams Richards’ Faulknerian novels about the Maritimes have earned those works the label of regionalist. ... But surely the very specifically rooted Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence, like those of Richards, transcend geography—as do the novels of Joyce, Dickens, and Balzac. In the novel form, it is difficult to write about the individual without placing her in a geographical and social setting, and thus writing about an entire society, with its communal history and values. (195)

This statement answers those critics who assume that the region takes primary focus in Richards’s early writing. Along these same lines, Keefer argues that “all art is, in a sense, regional – owing its energy and authenticity to the particular physical, cultural, and social context which ‘authors’ it” (30). The use of Miramichi life in Richards’s novels allows him to deal with familiar characters acting under familiar conditions. Especially in his earlier novels, Richards uses this fictionalized region as a vehicle through which he

voices his *moral* views. He does not depict the region as a mistreated society in order to reveal the nature and results of a troubled political relationship between the federal government and the Atlantic Provinces.

Having argued that Richards' early work has more focus upon the individual than upon the region, I should also explain how some critics (those whom Richards favors) see Richards's works taking on a certain "universal" flavor. In an interview with Sandra Martin (2000), Richards describes the universality of his novels:

"I think [Thomas Hardy] is one of the great novelists of the last century and, of course, he sold dick-all in his own life," Richards says. "But so did many of the people I admire. So did Conrad, so did Emily Brontë. The reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were so condescending and snobby, and when you read that book, it is absolutely friggin' brilliant," he says. What Richards admires about classic writers like Hardy, Conrad and Tolstoy is the same quality that illuminates his own work: storytelling that imbues desperate people in small communities with universal significance. His characters are the poor and the downtrodden of his native Miramichi, the dreary misfits and ne'er-do-wells of modern social-welfare files. Yet his compassion and his love elevate them from the pitiable to the iconic. (Martin np)

Frances Macdonald, in "War of the Worlds: David Adams Richards and Modern Times," supports such statements by Richards and Martin. She argues that Richards's characters are "certainly locals, they either grow out of the landscape or stand out from it, but by exploring and making manifest their humanity, he universalizes them" (18). Likewise, in "Some Notes on the Development of Regional Fiction in the Maritimes" (1985), Fred Cogswell praises Richards for his use of a regional setting to voice universal concerns:

Richards' novels, using techniques perfected by William Faulkner, explore with increasing range and depth the inner lives and characters of men and women of all ages comprising a society of semi-outcasts to be found on the banks of the Miramichi River in New Brunswick. Through

his imagination, compassion, and honesty displayed over a milieu that he knows and loves, and because he seems completely free from the solipsism that jarred in Buckler's work, Richards in literary and human terms has already equalled the achievement of many of his predecessors, and I predict with perfect confidence that ultimately he will be regarded as the Maritimes' greatest writer. He ... has proved that regional experience, if expressed rightly, is as valid an equation with universal experience as are many others. (200)

In opposition to such statements by Cogswell, Pryse suggests that the specificity of regional literature necessarily detracts from its universality (19). The passage quoted from Cogswell was written in 1985, before Richards had shifted (as I will demonstrate) from a confederal brand of regionalism to his more recent relational or political sense of region.

I would argue that, in his early work, Richards does achieve the sort of universality Cogswell describes. For this reason, I wish to align myself with MacDonald and Cogswell to suggest that, in *Blood Ties*, the changes taking place in the region should be considered as secondary to the individual, more "universal" changes Richards discusses in the text: birth, coming of age, finding (and keeping) love, and death. Each major character in the novel is involved in the everyday struggle to find, or maintain, a place for him/herself while being pulled upon by what I see as three major areas of influence: social institutions, family, and nature. Specifically, Richards associates positive family morals and spontaneous action with the region's nature, and he distinguishes between the positive influence of family and the negative influence of social institutions, which are not connected to the region's nature. We find examples of the influence of social institutions in *Blood Ties* as Richards describes the local church and the school, but Richards also presents more generic social influences, such as social

expectations and codes of conduct. I must now qualify the distinction I have drawn between the family and society, since it is true that the family is ultimately a social institution – society’s “most important institution,” according to Susan McDaniel and Wendy Mitchinson’s “Canadian Family Fictions and Realities: Past and Present” (1988) (12). I will show that Richards frequently aligns the family with nature in such a way that family values conflict with the influences of society. The very title of the novel raises the question of whether the *natural* blood ties uniting the family are enough to withstand the *social* influences that increasingly pull the family apart.

Having outlined such an opposition between nature/family and society, I should mention what I see as the common mistake among critics of *Blood Ties*. Frequently, critics oversimplify the novel by reducing it to structured binary pairs or opposites. For example, George Byrne’s article, “The Blood Hardened and the Blood Running: The Character of Orville in *Blood Ties*” (1982), focuses primarily upon the divisions between men and women, and good and evil in the novel. Richards sees this sort of division as the “most deplorable way of all” to approach his writing (qtd. in Scherf, “Interview” 159). William Connor’s response to Byrne’s article (1983) identifies the flaws in Byrne’s reading of the text:

Byrne builds his argument for Orville’s centrality on unfounded assumptions that implicitly diminish the novel. For example, he takes for granted that most of the main characters can readily be tagged “good” or “evil,” which tends to deny their psychological complexity. (142)

Yet even Connor is guilty of oversimplifying Richards’s works. In “The River in the Blood: Escape and Entrapment in the Fiction of David Adams Richards” (1986), Connor reminds us once more that “the characters are more complex psychologically than has

generally been allowed, even though their true-to-life inarticulateness tends to disguise this complexity” (270); however, he still tends to divide the characters into two groups: those who leave the region, and those who “cannot bring themselves to go” (273). Looking more closely at *Blood Ties*, one sees that the narrative strategy of the novel creates a great deal of ambiguity as to what Richards sees as “good” and what he sees as “bad,” or “evil,” and this ambiguity makes such structured readings of the text difficult.

In *Blood Ties*, the narrator is remarkable for the position he takes in relation to the characters. This narrator stands outside of the story and has access to the thoughts of the characters, but, at the same time, remains attached to them in such a way that the narrator’s sphere of consciousness is only as large as theirs is. This limited omniscience allows for the appearance of passivity in the narrator’s telling of the tale, since much of the narrative is made up of the thoughts of the characters. In an interview with Ellison Robertson, Richards outlines a trend in his writing career by which he shifts from a subjective to an analytical style:

Blood Ties was quite subjective, and lyrical I suppose you could say. The last three or four books have been more analytical, with a narrative overview that is more objective. I suppose that’s the biggest change, and I think most writers experience that when they get older: they become more objective, tend to have more narrative or more of a narrative overview, so that’s probably the only change. Philosophically, I haven’t changed very much in my view of things. (np)

Richards suggests that his “view of things” has not changed “very much.” This is in line with my argument since I will show that Richards’s moral views do not appear to change throughout his career. Furthermore, the subjectivity of Richards’s early works suggests that Richards is more concerned with the psychology of his characters, and their moral

values, than with the region in which these characters live. This helps to maintain a high level of universality, since the reader is able to associate with the characters who have experiences that are not necessarily unique to a given region. The novel is virtually free of political didacticism (as I will show); however, a sense of morality remains. It is important that the characters seem to take an active role, not only in telling the story, but also in passing judgment upon the moral issues of the novel. By making his characters – not his narrator – take such an active role in passing judgment, Richards avoids the appearance of preaching. His own moral views are filtered through, and distorted by, his characters and his narrator in such a way that he becomes detached from the issues of the novel.

A dominant issue in the novel is the change that has occurred in the region. Richards constantly provides evidence of this change by comparing the present disintegration of the region with the more prosperous past. Many glimpses of this former time come through the character of Annie. Annie is connected to an age in which the Church played a more meaningful, idealized role in the life of her family: “*When Annie used to come they rented their pews; Annie had the pew closest on the left*” (86). Furthermore, Annie remembers a time when the relationship between society and nature fostered economic prosperity in the region: “You know, I’ve lived to see long rafts on this river—I’ve lived to see long logs on this river—I’ve lived to see pulp drives on this river—and now I’ve lived to see nothin on this river” (256). The remnants of her family’s barns only remind the young generations of their region’s former prosperity: “Now there was nothing but the remainder of the roof, and the grass that grew about it greener than the rest. The roof looking smaller than it had when they climbed upon it ...”

(78). Finally, Annie's larger home represents what used to be a thriving, happy family: "[T]he quiet soundless porch emptied of all that used to be there, emptied of the vases and chairs and tables and the life those objects gave" (10). The more prosperous age to which these quotations refer has long passed by the time the novel's primary action begins, but by scattering glimpses of the region's heyday throughout the novel, Richards is able better to outline the decline that has come to pass. The narrator's sense of history in the novel extends only as far as Annie remembers the past. Because the consciousness of the narrator and the characters alike is limited to a single time and a single place, a form of confederal regional association characterizes the novel. Richards's later texts will exhibit an awareness of the region in relation to exterior influences, as well as a greater understanding of the history of this region, and this will equate to relational, and later political, brands of regionalism.

The young generation of the novel is the greatest victim of the change that has taken place within the region. Indeed, children are often the focus of Richards's novels, and *Blood Ties* is no exception, since it centers on Cathy and Orville MacDurmot, Annie's grandchildren, who are coming of age. I wish to consider *Blood Ties* as an example of a *bildungsroman*, with Cathy and Orville as its central figures. Much of the novel's conflict stems from their attempts to define places for themselves in a region that, because of the disintegration that has occurred, does not offer them many positive role models, or opportunities to excel. The struggle in which Cathy and Orville are a part – the central conflict of the novel – is essentially that of development and of holding onto goodness in the face of the surrounding social forces that make this difficult. Specifically, I will show that this society has changed in such a way that family values

have begun to disintegrate; social institutions fail to take the place of the family; and society, as a whole, has shrunk, leaving few opportunities for the region's youth.

We most often view the region through Cathy's eyes, and much of the novel revolves around her relationship with her boyfriend, John, and her desire to leave the region. It can be argued that Cathy is the protagonist of the novel; however, for the purpose of my study, I will focus more upon Orville, for the following reasons: Firstly, Orville, at thirteen, is younger than Cathy, so he is now dealing with many of the issues that she has already experienced. This is to say that Orville struggles with the influences of society, family, and nature more than any other character (including Cathy). Secondly, the fact that Orville is a male character who is misunderstood by those around him gives him much in common with Jerry Bines and Lyle Henderson, the central figures of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* and *Mercy Among the Children* respectively. My focus upon Orville will, therefore, allow me to make stronger connections between the three novels of my study. Finally, Orville is more characteristic of a *bildungsroman* character simply because, in the course of the novel, he undergoes more changes than any other character, including Cathy. Though I will focus upon Orville, one can see that the two characters react in similar ways to the influences they encounter from their society and from their family.

Positive moral values come to Cathy and Orville primarily through their mother, Irene, the embodiment of all that is good in the family as an institution. Her selflessness and love are evident throughout the novel as she takes care of her own children, her old and dying mother, and her grandchild. The scene that best defines Irene as the central figure of the family comes early in the novel as she takes Cathy with her to Annie's

house. In this episode, Irene plays the role of the mother to both Cathy and Annie, who has reached a second infancy. (Irene changes and washes Annie, and feeds her baby food.) Here Irene's positive influence can be seen reflected in the actions of her daughter, Cathy:

“How are you today?” [Cathy] asked.
She knew that there would be no answer. When was the last real answer given she couldn't remember. But she knew that she must say something, or even without knowing it at all spoke, perhaps through kindness not for the woman but for her mother or herself. But she knew that there could be no answer, not more than the face lifting, tilting slightly sideways at their entrance as if jerking her head upwards at something completely unexpected. The sad human face jerking and bobbing, the radio on the windowsill and she in the chair with cushions by the stove. (11)

Richards demonstrates how Irene's caring has been passed on to Cathy, and he also makes a particular effort to connect these three characters as three generations of one family. Instead of referring to the three characters by name, he often refers to Annie as “the old one” (18) in such a way as to suggest that the three women are differentiated only by age. George Byrne points to the white moles above the eyelids of Annie, Irene, and Leah as a signifier of such a familial connection (60), and I suggest that Richards's reference to Cathy's first menstrual period further connects the women in the family:

“What's wrong?”
“I need a bandage I guess.”
And then Irene was frightened of something—of herself. Then she said:
“Come here, I'll get you something, okay?”
And Cathy said “Okay” and her mother never watched her with her eyes, kept avoiding her altogether. But they both knew what it was, how it would be hereafter. Then the next day there was a small pamphlet on her bed. (13-4)

I list the menstrual cycle as being among the novel's many instances of blood ties, since Richards uses this cycle to unite the women of the novel on a biological level. In doing so, he establishes the matrilineal family as the most natural of social institutions.

The role of the family is somewhat more complicated in Orville's self-definition than it is in Cathy's. As George Byrne suggests,

A closer reading of this highly poetic novel reveals that the only hope for the community (as it is presented) lies with Orville. There is hope in his discovery of himself, of his place, and of his true feelings, and most of all, in his discovery of the importance of blood ties, which is really what the novel is about. (55)

While it is perhaps hyperbolic to view Orville as the "the only hope for the community," Orville's discovery of blood ties is significant, since it is one of the few instances of hope in what becomes a rather bleak conclusion to the novel. Orville's discovery of the importance of blood ties is a difficult one, and it takes the entire length of the story, possibly because, as Richards presents it, Orville's society is opposed to family values in many ways. For example, Richards shows that, while Irene is a good mother to Orville, his relationship to her is antithetical to his acceptance by his society:

When he went along the path in the darkness he began to run, hearing his own breathing, hearing the woods, hearing the car as it traveled the shore road. He clutched his red trunks with his right hand. Then he thought of his eye and stopped running. *Irene said: "You watch that eye," when he was playing with the knife on the lawn with Edmund. Irene said: "You watch that eye," when he was going fishing with Edmund and Jerard: Irene said: "You watch that eye; it's the only one you got, you know that now." Then she said: "Edmund, you be careful of Orville; will you be careful of Orville?" And Edmund said: "Yes" that way and he said: "I ain't goin fishin," and went back inside with Irene saying: "why aren't you gonna go—go on, why aren't ya gonna go? and Jerard and Edmund waiting just outside the door. (60)*

Orville was born with a bad eye and has worn a patch his whole life. This symbol of difference appears to be responsible for Orville's difficulty in society. Furthermore, episodes like the one quoted immediately above, which have come about because of Orville's patch, may be responsible for Orville's desire to separate himself from his family. He often locks himself in his room and finds escape through burning candles and listening to the radio. Despite what appear to be loving ties between Orville and his family, we see evidence of alienation between them.

This same alienation exists between all of the family members. For example, while Irene and Cathy share a common understanding ("they both knew what it was, how it would be hereafter" [14]), they do not communicate their understanding in words ("...the next day there was a small pamphlet on her bed" [14]). Similarly, Annie has grown so old and feeble that she cannot communicate at all. The alienation that Richards illustrates within the household suggests that the role of the family in society has decreased. I argue that Richards laments this loss and wishes to reaffirm the family's importance as a social institution. Frances MacDonald, in "War of the Worlds: David Adams Richards and Modern Times," accurately describes Richards's use of the family in his novels:

Although we have to admit that families are not always the best protectors of the interests of all their members, most of us still believe that by and large they are, and it is difficult to find evidence of any widespread superiority of other institutions, state or church, in providing a safe and caring place for children to thrive. For all the weaknesses and faults of the system, it seems that we take better care of our own than we do of strangers, or than strangers do of us. Even if the ways of our family don't make sense to outsiders, more often than not, they prove to be better for us than the ways of another family not our own, or of a public institution that takes on the role of the family. (22)

To take MacDonald's reading one step further, I argue that Richards sees public institutions as having specific social agendas that are based upon economic and political foundations, and are often dedicated to change, while families are founded upon biology, and *good* families are founded on love. In Richards's later work, social institutions play a more prominent role, as we see examples of jails, hospitals, courts, police departments, universities, social workers, and governmental agencies. Here, however, Richards does not talk extensively about such organizations. Perhaps this is because they are not a large part of his experience as he writes this novel. It appears that, when Richards wrote *Blood Ties*, he had not yet become as cynical concerning these aspects of society as he had by the time he was writing *For Those who Hunt the Wounded Down*, for example.

In *Blood Ties*, we do find Richards using churches and schools as examples of social influences that pale by comparison to the positive influence of the family. We see the shortcomings of social institutions when we examine Orville's and Cathy's experiences with organized religion and with their school. Both of these institutions are representative of the negative change, if not the disintegration, that has come to pass in the region. For example, the Church no longer functions as a centering force because it has lost its connection to pure religion. As Cathy and Orville grow, they begin to see that the Church, as an institution, fails to provide them with positive values:

It was so strange. Even to himself he couldn't admit that at one time he had wanted to be on the altar. That being on the altar seemed to him the greatest possible thing—and every Sunday he would go into the vestry after mass. First he would kneel by the altar railing and say, "Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord be with Thee." Then he would genuflect, light a candle below the statue of Mary and Joseph with the little Christ. He would be hoping the priest would be watching—and then he would climb the stairs to the vestry, the stairs and the vestry smelling older than any other place, filled of the taste of the brown wood. The altar boys

themselves towered over him—and it seemed to him at the time that being one of them was the greatest thing in the world, as if nothing else was better—as if being one of them (the way they took off their sneakers and threw them in the wooden sneaker boxes, and pushed each other about, and undid their surplices and soutanes and hung them lazily)—that being one of them was the most important thing he could do. Because Irene said, when they wore the red garments, “Don’t they look good!” (157)

This passage exhibits Orville’s views on the Church as they change throughout the novel. We see that his desire for approval from his mother and from the priest was what originally led him to become an altar boy; however, as he grows, he begins to see through the shiny exterior of the priest:

The priest grunted and coughed, took a handkerchief from his sleeve and spit into it. His face was yellowed and wrinkled and tired. He mumbled something to Orville but Orville didn’t hear him. Then he mumbled again.

“What?” Orville said.

“I said—after the next storm, you’d think someone would come down here and shovel out my walk—instead of me having to wade up to my knees to get over here.” (158)

The priest’s yellow skin is stained like the “piss yellow” (245) ice of the bay. This symbolizes the priest’s impurity and draws attention to the disparity between religious beliefs and the role of the Church, especially when compared to the pure white candles Orville steals from the church to burn in his room. These candles are symbolic of the unstained religion that Orville saw in his youth. As Orville comes to see the shortcomings of the Church, he uses the candles to create a substitute for organized religion in his room. Here, he might find his own sense of faith, free from the Church’s pressures and dogmas. When Father Lacey catches Orville stealing the candles, he bans Orville from his church. As George Byrne suggests, the priest’s failure to forgive is

exceptionally un-Christian (59), and I suggest that his equation of stealing from the church to stealing from the Lord only raises the question as to whether the Church can be synonymous with God.

While Orville is just now coming to recognize the darker side of the priest, Cathy has already grown to see the cracks in the Church's veneer. The very sight of the local church reminds Cathy of the hypocrisy it represents:

They said the foundation was hard stone and it took a year to dig under it deep enough to lay it out, where the charred bones of Indians were found, that the workers threw up the stone and dirt and shale, the bone no more a part of anything but of the dirt itself, no more than the shale itself. Sometimes a bursted skull that the workers found. And the priest then, which was a hundred years ago or more, blessed the workers as they dug, yet blessed nothing of the bone because the bone was more shale and dirt that they threw with their picks and shovels than anything else in existence. "Yet it was their sorta church before it was our church," Leah said. (83-4)

The ultimate statement Richards makes is that the Church can be a self-glorifying social institution, characterized by what Richards calls "determined action." In Richards's novels, selflessness and charity, which should be associated with a true Christian, are rarely attributed to any figure connected to the Church.

Richards makes a similar statement about the school that Cathy and Orville attend, showing how it does not play for them the role that it should:

"If ya can do as good as Cathy in school then ya'll be doin something," Irene said. "So she might like school cause I don't like school," Orville said. "Well ya could do good too," Irene said: "I don't like school," Cathy said. "I used to like it when I was yer age but I don't like school any more." "Well ya do good," Maufat said. "Ya didn't fail a year—ya never failed—Orville's gonna fail." "He's not gonna fail—now put that into his head that he's gonna fail, all ya need ta do is put that into his head that he's gonna fail!" (143)

The question may come to mind as to whether failing at school equates to failing at life, and in this case, the school appears to be unrelated to the sorts of lives Orville and Cathy wish to live. The schoolteacher, as representative of the school as a whole, is like the priest in that he is a figure of scorn:

“If x equals a to the fifth power,” he said. “Is that what you call the fifth problem?”

“No, but I didn’t feel good,” she said quickly.

“Most mornings I don’t feel good either—most mornings I have to come in here and look at people the likes of you,” he said. “But I get my work done—it would be too bad for me if I didn’t.” (147)

Cathy has not completed her homework because her menstrual period has made her ill. Because the social expectations of the school are in direct opposition to the natural demands of Cathy’s body, this scene brings into question the value of the school’s role in the individual’s life. The school is no place for Cathy to be when she is sick, since it is a social place, based upon outward appearances, rather than the natural or biological:

She would not go to the sick room—she would go home, because you had to lie down, and the teacher would ask questions about it and then he would give you aspirin and make you lie down. He’d stand in the hallways and look back. The door would be open so that all the noise came in, all the noise and the smell of the janitor-polish in the hallway. He’d look at you to make sure you were lying down, that you were really sick. And when the students passed changing class, or at noon hour they’d look in, they’d say: “What’s wrong now—eh, eh, what’s wrong now?” She would go home—if she was sick she’d go home! (143)

Home is a place of comfort for Cathy because the family is built upon deeper, loving connections, as opposed to superficial social connections. Irene, as the head of the family, is then an ideal role model for Cathy. George Byrne asserts that she is more

Christian than the priest (59), and the same can be said about her role as an educator, when compared to Cathy's schoolteacher.

Cathy finds herself virtually surrounded by powerful, admirable female role models, in the form of Leah, Karen, and Mary – who have strength enough to leave – and Irene, who is ultimately in power of her family. These influences on Cathy make her struggle less difficult than that of Orville, who has no such positive role model in his life. Orville finds himself under the influence of more “old school” male influences, as represented by hunting, fighting, and other displays of machismo. His weakness (his patch) often makes it difficult for him to live up to society's expectations of male behavior, and it becomes a hindrance to his acceptance by his peers. For example, when Orville leaves the house with Edmund and Jerard, Irene draws attention to Orville's patch in such a way that he loses the desire to go fishing, which is, stereotypically, a social practice of young boys. Later, when Orville and his friend, Rance, go to the church picnic, Orville's lack of depth perception prevents him from winning a ring-toss game, while Rance proves his manliness by drinking liquor (Orville never drinks), winning the game, and, finally, putting Orville down: “‘Can't ya do nothin?’ Rance said. ‘Can'tcha do nothin?’” (87).

Orville's experiences with guns – phallic symbols of male power – also show how he does not fit into the roles prescribed for him. In one scene, Orville has taken his father's gun without asking, and when he attempts to hide it under his clothing, he injures his body and embarrasses himself in front of his sister and his love interest, Karen.

He moved a little farther into the drain, trying to put the rifle in now so fast that the sight gouged at his thin right leg. “Oh fuck it fuck it I don't care.” He put the rifle in and the rifle stock beneath his shirt. The car was

coming alongside him and he was doing up his pants, his flesh thin and glaring like bone. It seemed he was bleeding on the leg. "Oh fuck it fuck it I don't care." He could only see the car at the corner of his eye. Cathy was running up, her woman body with the woman motion running. And he was trying to pull up his pants. (57)

Here, the father's gun fails as a symbol of male power for Orville. These passages suggest that maleness is something to be displayed through superficial demonstrations of "manly" behavior. This tendency for the region's men to value superficial signifiers of maleness ultimately draws a divide between actions and characters that are "manly" and those who are not. This leads to a sense of alienation between members of the society because those who are "manly" wish to show their dominance over those who are not. George Byrne goes as far as to say that the men in *Blood Ties* "destroy the community with their drinking, their inability to communicate, and their attempts to conform to a standard of male behavior ... [while] the women are left to pick up the pieces as best they can, or leave" (55). I disagree with this statement, and I wish to argue that men, rather than destroying their society, are *victims* of the changes that have occurred in this society through no fault of their own. The loss of economic prosperity has made it difficult for those who are not well educated to find jobs and assert their power as manly breadwinner figures. The traditional male roles are breaking down, and while this may be one of the novel's only examples of positive change, sadly, the male characters are not adapting to this change.

Orville, as a young male in this society, sees that the men in his life are not ideal role models for him. Apart from the priest (mentioned above), the major male influences upon Orville come from his father, Maufat, his uncle, Cecil, and John Delano. Because of their inability to adapt to changes in society, these men have essentially negative

influences upon Orville; however, even the characters Byrne offers as representations of evil (Cecil and John) have their good qualities. Perhaps the most obvious male influence upon Orville comes from his father. We see that Maufat's role in the family is the "manly" position of the breadwinner. Since he spends most of his time drinking beer (another stereotypical display of "manliness"), he appears to have little to do with the goings-on of his household, and even less to do with the society that surrounds him. His inability to afford an automobile throughout much of the novel is similar to Orville's patch, in that it is indicative of his lack of power in his society, and it often makes him a pathetic figure:

When the bus stopped Maufat stood back until the rest of them were on.

"Mind if I come up with ya, Ramsey?" he said.

He didn't take a seat; he stood just above the door, his hand on the bar. ...

"I'm gonna haveta get myself a car," Maufat said.

He lurched unsteadily with the bus, with the grating of gears and the sluggish movement, his large tight fist on the bar. When others entered he'd move closer to it. "Excuse me," he'd say. "Excuse me." He could have taken a seat if he'd wanted, yet he stood, once in a while almost falling when the bus lurched forward again, his lunch bucket placed at the top of the steps, it too tilting. "Ya got your lessons done?" he'd say and then look to Ramsey and wink.

"I'll haveta get myself a car," he said.

Ramsey didn't answer. (139-40)

As a figure of *pathos*, Maufat is not an ideal male role model for Orville: "Orville said: 'Ya always say yer getting a car and ya never get one'" (145). Maufat's inability to afford a car shows his lack of social power; however, I suggest that Orville's refusal to enter any vehicle throughout the novel shows that he does not wish to conform to society's codes of male behavior, as embodied by John and Andy. For these boys, the car

is symbolic of sexual potency, as they drink alcohol and take Cathy and Julie driving: *“Cecil would say: ‘Ya well she got into it; she got into it, she got into the goddamn thing, her own goddam fault with a bunch of fuckers from up town all liquored up—drivin—”* (63). Andy will later die in a motorcycle accident. Accidents involving motor vehicles are, in fact, the most frequent cause of death in Richards’s novels; thus, cars become, at best, ambiguous symbols. At the end of the novel, Maufat finally does buy a car, and this shows that he has gained power in society, and he has made Irene happy: *“...she threw her arms around his neck and at first she was laughing and then she was crying, feeling herself sink against him. He put his arms around her. She was shaking and crying”* (268). Nevertheless, considering the many negative connotations of cars, we can see Maufat’s purchase of a car as a shallow victory, if it is a victory at all.

This mixture of good and bad qualities is characteristic of Maufat, and indeed many of the characters of the novel. In some cases Maufat is a good father, and in some cases he is not. By means of example, when Orville is caught stealing candles, Maufat’s first impulse is to beat him:

*“I hoped ya kicked his arse for it,” Lorne said.
“Oh, I was gonna—don’t ya worry, I slapped him and I was gonna, but Irene stopped me from doing it—she’s always stoppin’ me from something,” Maufat laughed. (190)*

Again Richards displays the positive role that Irene plays in the household, and we see that Maufat is not an ideal father. In another scene, however, Maufat goes to Leah’s and Cecil’s house to talk to Cecil after he has thrown Ronnie against the stove and threatened to kill himself. Here, Maufat embodies the family working the way it should, caring for its members. Leah is not even Maufat’s real daughter, but his concern for her suggests

that he cares for her as if she were. Thus, we see that Maufat, as a role model for Orville, is less than ideal; however, he does have redeeming qualities that have often been overlooked by critics and scholars.

The same can be said for Cecil, though such a statement is especially unpopular among critics. Many of Richards's critics, Byrne included, place Cecil as the epitome of the negative stereotypes people (mostly those who know little of the region) have attributed to the Miramichi: drinking, fighting, child abuse, and unemployment. In much of Richards's early work, we see examples of lazy, poorly educated workers, and other stereotypes, including the bootlegger figure and the abusive husband. In these novels, Richards, writing primarily in the vein of realism, presents society as he sees it, and does not attempt to break down stereotypes for any regionalist purpose. Realism, according to Janice Kulyk Keefer, is another quality that connects Richards with other Maritime writers (161). In fact, Richards often deals with the above-mentioned regional stereotypes, as well as those of the bureaucrat, the corrupt priest and the wealthy, arrogant American, in order to voice his moral concerns. Because Richards's early novels do not appear to break down stereotypes, Richards received a great deal of criticism from within his region. By the same token, those outside of the region, upon recognizing such stereotypes as the unemployed man and the pregnant teenager, suggest that Richards's work is an example of a politically regionalist voice, which lashes out against the central government, blaming Ottawa for the condition of this region. When one looks more carefully, one sees that even the most obviously stereotypical characters in the novel are actually more complex than they first appear. Cecil's character is

perhaps the most overlooked, because he, at first, appears to fit into the abusive, callous father type, due to one act he has committed:

“Against the stove as if he were a goddamn dog,” Leah said. Her voice was breaking out, her fingernails still scratching at the label, her face twisted down sadly. “As if he were a goddamn dog!” Her voice was broken now but it was not pathetic, it came out strong and harsh and through her teeth that way, came out as if she were trying to hold it in, hold back. (29)

Cecil has been immediately characterized by what he does, and not by who he is. The reader automatically assumes that Cecil is a dangerous, evil character. Since this is how the family tends to look at him, he becomes another negative influence on Orville.

Looking more closely at Cecil, we find that Richards treats him much more sympathetically in the later chapters of the novel. When Leah is about to leave him, he recalls the night that he and his friend, Sheldon, were involved in a car accident that killed a mother and her baby. The night of the accident, Cecil’s thoughts turned to his own wife and child: “What time was it? Leah would be at Mass and then Lorne would drive her home after Mass, and the snowfall” (241), “He did not know why—but he was smiling and conscious of smiling the way Ronnie sometimes smiled when he was afraid” (243); thus, Leah’s decision to leave Cecil takes on a greater intensity as it is combined with the accidental death of the mother and child. The death of the child on Christmas Eve carries an even greater significance, since it suggests a failed redemption, or a sense of hopelessness for Cecil’s future.

Cecil, for the first time, realized that the baby was dead—that what he had felt so much like some tiny animal in his arms was a limp dead child. He stared straight into the snow blinding his eyes, and held it and held it—as if to keep it warm until the ambulance came. (243)

But even as Leah leaves him, something – perhaps his newfound appreciation of family or of the home – remains to give him hope: “Tonight he sat in the dark house his large fists closing and opening on the white table. At moments the wind blew so heavily and the rain came so fiercely that he felt sheltered and warm” (244). Richards, himself, defends Cecil’s redeeming qualities, in response to such articles as Byrne’s:

Some became greatly annoyed with me later on when, after my second novel *Blood Ties* was published, I began to defend Cecil, the drunkard, bully and husband of one of my favorite characters, Leah McDermot. I defended him, because not only in the context of the novel was he forgiven by Leah, and finally by himself, but Leah would be the first to defend him to the death—as he would her. Neither did my critics seem to understand that the reason they loved Leah so deeply was because of Cecil continually recognizing for us why she should be loved. (“My Miramichi Trilogy” 78)

Sadly, many readers and critics will pass an early judgment upon Cecil in the novel’s second chapter. These readers will fail to acknowledge Cecil’s redeeming qualities when they appear later in the novel.

While Cecil and Maufat represent the sort of man Orville may become, the character to which Orville is most directly connected is John Delano. Like Orville, John is a young man who is growing up in a disintegrating region. John, however, has not held onto the same sense of morality that Orville has. In their first encounter, John and Orville are said to be “even in height” (59), but the most obvious connection between the two boys comes through their relationships with Cathy. John’s relationship with Cathy is a social one and a sexual one. This relationship can be seen as being counter to family values, since John refuses to enter the household through most of the novel: ““No, no I’ll

wait here.’ He was eyeing past her into the kitchen where her mother ironed with her head down” (91), and because he pollutes her blood through the sexually transmitted disease she catches from him. While John’s recklessness and his treatment of Cathy are bad influences on Orville, he is not, as Byrne suggests, “the local version of the embodiment of complete evil” (56). The fact that Richards allows the reader a view into John’s head, and even into his dreams, suggests that the reader should extend him a certain amount of sympathy. Furthermore, it is possible that John is a composite of people Richards once knew:

Richards profiled some of his boyhood friends in *Hockey Dreams*. ... He wrote about them, partly because they were “poor little bastards who never got out of Newcastle” and partly because now they’re gone. Tobias hanged himself and Michael was killed in a car wreck. Other kids he knew are also gone. More hangings, a drowning and murders. Richards lost count somewhere after 15. The ones who didn’t make it into *Hockey Dreams* or *Lines on the Water* are in his fiction, bits of them in one character or another, and he writes about them with profound compassion. He hasn’t forgotten them. He can’t. (Randolph 102)

Considering this passage, John may be a form of elegiac reminder of Richards’s lost friends. John, we will see, is actually somewhat of a hopeful character, since even he is given a second chance. As the fortune-teller informs him, his life is merely on the wrong track:

“... you have to decide because you will travel in your life and you will have money sometimes and then sometimes you will not have money but mostly you will have enough money and friends though you will be sad in your life also, depending on the road you will live long or not long but there are things you have to know and decide and one road you will be married and have children and one road you will not marry though you are young now and uncertain and have to decide.” (103)

The palm-reader tells him that he has control over his own fate, and that he need only make the right choices to improve his condition.

Orville, too, must make the same sorts of decisions in his process of self-definition. Throughout the novel, we see that Orville is more solidly rooted in the family than John is. Orville's relationship to his sister is important to him, though he fails to express this. An example of this failure to communicate is provided when Cathy tries to bring him cotton candy from the fair and he slams her hand in his bedroom door: "'Understand,' he yelled again; crying because she was crying, because Irene was out of bed, saying: 'What did you do Orville—what did you do?' And he couldn't answer because he didn't know why" (116). It seems that Cathy *does* understand Orville better than any other character in the novel, but they are not able to bridge the communication gap. This distance between Cathy and Orville ultimately shows how Orville is not altogether different from John: "*he could hit her, he could punch her, because she thought: her hair at her neck and her blouse tucked in that way because she thought: that John came down here only when he was drunk and she didn't know*" (109). Richards suggests that Orville is capable of the same violent behavior that John exhibits, and that he must reject this violent side of him in order to find a place for himself in society.

If the major male influences in Orville's life are, for the most part, negative, it is nature that teaches Orville what is truly important to him. In nature, such notions as manliness and social expectations do not exist; nor does any proof of the disintegration that has taken place in his society. This freedom from society makes nature an ideal place. In one episode, Orville leaves the house altogether and goes into nature, the a-social space, in order to detach himself completely from his society: "I'm buildin' a

goddamn fort in the woods so as I won't havta come back here again" (69). Nature's role in Orville's struggle is best seen in the first chapter of the February 1968 section, when Orville finds himself lost at night. Here nature helps Orville situate himself in relation to the major influences of his life: those of faith, family, school, and society as a whole. First, we see Orville come upon a rabbit, caught in the snare he has set. The rabbit sits perfectly still, waiting to be saved, and Orville's instinct tells him to set the creature free; however, something in his social conditioning makes him kill it:

"I'll let *you* go, rabbit – I'll let *you* go." He watched it for a long time, it unmoved —the day quiet. ... Then suddenly he grabbed up its ears and held it; it kicking out, before he cut through its throat, the clear blood spurting and receding. "Hello rabbit," he said. "Hello."

There was something in this darkness as he ran along the lane, the sky and the earth and the sound of his boots. It was like the blood hardened and the blood running, the exposed slits along the throat and the pulse and vein. (110)

Orville's hesitation before killing the rabbit suggests an internal conflict whereby his social conditioning directly opposes his instinct to protect. In a parallel passage, Cathy describes Orville's killing of a small bird:

Irene bent over and took the hands slowly off the cushion that lay across the woman's [Annie's] lap and the woman started, bobbed her head up and opened her mouth a little, looked around from one side of her to the other. Her face was narrowed and with her mouth opened that way, frightened. Frightened like the bird that day falling from its nest and Orville, instead of putting it back when Cathy asked him, ran and got his gun and shot it in the naked back with a pellet. Between the bone joints of the wings, and the bird turned its head around and looked at them that way, its beak opened. Frightened. And Cathy yelled, "Put it back up, Orville, put it up," but instead he took a rock and threw it on the bird and the bird threw its naked wings out and burst at the naked belly. (17)

In one sense, the connection Richards makes between Annie and the bird draws attention to the blood ties that exist between humans and animals. In another sense, Kathleen Scherf suggests that

we have here a clear statement that, confronted with fear, the instinct of the female characters is to nurture, while that of the males is to inflict harm. It is worth noting also that Orville doubly rejects the concept of nurturing, because it is a baby bird, fallen out of the (maternal) nest, which he kills. (*Blood Ties: Essentially Women* 31)

Given Orville's hesitation before killing the rabbit, I wish to suggest that Orville's inclination to kill is a result of social conditioning, which has shown him that a boy should display his manliness by killing. At one point we see him bragging about the animals he has killed: "'Rance, he never caught one rabbit all last winter ... Guess how many I caught,' Orville said. 'I caught seventeen'" (270). This symbol of prowess among young men is directly opposed to the more positive family impulse to protect, as represented by Irene's care of Annie, and Cathy's pleas to save the bird. In the following chapters I will address how Richards shows that humans are instinctively merciful, but that society ultimately changes them as they grow.

After Orville kills this rabbit, he appears to feel regret, and Richard draws many connections between Orville and the rabbit. The references to the blood hardened and the blood running are the first signs of this connection: "He couldn't tell if there was blood running or blood hardened on his knee" (115). A further significance of the blood running and the blood hardened is that the blood that runs represents life, while the hardened blood connotes death. As Orville sits in the cold, thoughts of life, death, and the "immense desolate expanse of bay" (111) combine to make him feel insignificant.

He asks himself, “if he were out there now, in it how far out? Where would he be?” (111), and he is reminded of his schoolteacher’s explanation of infinity. In one sense, the infinity to which Richards refers is the infinity of an afternoon at school: “He shuddered in his seat—the linoleum floor, the quietness of the place, the afternoon, the ticking of the heat. The snow reminded him of supper—the taste of going home” (112); however, this infinity is also evident in the vastness of a chaotic, possibly godless, universe.

This scene shares much in common with the tempest scenes of *King Lear*: specifically, we see that Orville is blinded — “...his eye blurred by the freezing...”(116) — and he cannot find his way. Like Lear, he finds himself surrounded by a bleak landscape. Richards describes this landscape as a cold, empty void: “Nothing was here. Nothing” (113). In this void, Orville sees nothing but “a distant invisible blackness” (117). Like Lear, Orville feels that he has been wronged by the god in which he has invested his faith: “‘Christ, he yelled.’ ‘You think you’re so fuckin good,’ he yelled” (115-6). We know that Richards is familiar with *King Lear* because, in *Mercy Among the Children*, Sydney Henderson quotes the lines from this play, (IV, i. 38-39): “As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;/ They kill us for their sport” (119). This quotation is an apt thematic summary of Orville’s momentary ordeal in the fields at night, since the Orville-rabbit relationship is directly connected to the god(s)-Orville relationship. Just as the rabbit waited patiently for its fate, which is in Orville’s hands, now Orville finds himself wondering whether God will save him if he chooses to wait. Unlike the rabbit, Orville chooses not to wait for some divine intervention: “He wanted to go home. He would not wait. *Build a fire so that the smoke is away from your face and sit—if it’s night don’t move*” (118). On the one hand, Orville’s pushing-on through the snow

signifies that he takes his fate into his own hands; yet, on the other hand, Orville's later decision to remain in the region equates to a different form of waiting, which Richards treats more ambiguously. (For example, Cathy's choice to leave the region is positive in that she escapes John and is expected to find a better life; however, by leaving, she brings about some of her family's fragmentation.) Further ambiguity in Orville's choice not to wait for help comes at the end of the chapter, as Richards implies a form of divine intervention in Orville's discovery of the way home:

Then a light snapped on in the porch. ... And the night black as it was had the goodness of the shed and house. "Christ, he said. "Christ."
He knew where he was now—down at least a mile from the lane. It was the wrong one—the wrong field he had circled to. He was laughing now, running along the highway, the night and smoke and the vicious wind shouting at him, and him laughing and it shouting at him. "Christ," he said. "Christ." (119)

Despite the ambiguities of this scene, it is possible to see that this experience teaches Orville what is important to him. This ordeal is directly linked to his experience at school, since both situations remind Orville of the importance of family – in both cases, he only wants to go home.

As a result of this ordeal, Orville comes to achieve a better appreciation of his family. We see this newfound sense of family best in the novel's final scene, as Orville stands his ground against his doppelganger, John, and displays his position as a protector of his family.

[Cathy] heard Orville on the stairs coming down and she felt weak. Bruce tried to grab the bottle from [John] but he held it away, and then Orville was in the kitchen.

It was because he was drunk—it was because of that.

Orville was in the kitchen; she didn't remember. He was in the kitchen and Orville said:

“Get the fuck outa my house.”

John looked at him and set the bottle down.

Orville said:

“You go on out of my house—leave my sister alone, leave my sister alone, you go on out of my house and leave her alone.”

... Then they were on the porch and Bruce was holding John and Orville was crying. She heard Orville crying out in the yard and he kept saying: “You get out of here, you get out of here and leave my sister alone.” (278)

Orville's decision to stand up for Cathy shows that his family ties are the strongest part of his character; thus, it can be said that he is a figure of hope for the family and for the region. Orville's actions at the end of the novel, which uphold the value of family, represent the sort of positive morality that Richards conveys throughout his novels.

Other elements of the novel's conclusion are less hopeful: Annie has died; Cathy and Leah have left home; Irene has been left to look after Leah's son, Ronald, who wants to become an altar boy; and Betty is unhappily pregnant at the age of forty-four. Maufat and Irene are left to look back at the Edenic existence they once briefly lived:

There was a sparrow and it was on a limb of spruce that grew solid in the ground. When she was a young girl it was the spruce smell that she loved in the spring because the air carried the smell along the bog road. And now the poignance of its smell came when he drew his hands on her, and a trembling came upon her—as if she was the bird cherries on the hedges and the moss sloping limbless on the trees ...

They lay in the grass above the shale pit, the afternoon sky a wide and brilliant blue—timelessness of space and motion. (264)

At this point in the past, the two lovers were at one with nature, free from the whole of society; thus, for an afternoon Maufat and Irene existed just as did Adam and Eve did before the original sin. Such a moment cannot be sustained, so just as Orville could not

permanently remove himself to nature, Irene and Maufat can only temporarily escape the influences of society that invade their family and gradually pull it apart. As Lorne sells Annie's house to an American couple, he assures them: "'Oh, we care up here for sure ... There's neighbors up here that'll care when something goes wrong—we're like one big family up here'" (259). Lorne's comment is painfully ironic, since, though he is Irene's brother, he has not inherited the sense of family that she has. Lorne does not notice the negative changes — the disintegration — that takes place all around him. By depicting these changes, Richards calls for a return to the moral values he associates with the past.

Thus far, I have discussed the sort of change and struggle that takes place within the region, showing how Richards avoids taking a political stance by focusing upon the day-to-day lives of individuals who have a very limited sphere of consciousness. Even the narrator shares this limited sphere of consciousness in such a way that the world outside the region almost appears not to exist for the better part of the novel. For example, Maufat works for the railway, but in a sedentary job, and no mention is made of where the train goes until Leah leaves to go west—an idealized place that promises employment. We see the further isolation of the region when Richards describes the bay to the east as a distinct border ("The wall of the bay behind them spread out blue" [85]), and the rest of the world comes only in fragments: "[Maufat] knew a girl once when he was Orville's age—Eleanor; and she had become a nurse in London during the second war, and now she lived somewhere else. Somewhere else, he thought" (257). To Maufat, London is merely a place name. London is not compared with the region in any way – it is merely somewhere else. This lack of awareness of the world surrounding the region characterizes a confederal form of regionalism.

Only at the end of the novel does Richards make the reader especially conscious of the world outside the region, and how it relates to his region's inhabitants. Here, Richards provides a glimpse of the sort of relational regionalism that will become more evident in his later texts. The introduction of the American couple who buy Annie's house represents the forces exterior to the region that bring about change. Americans purchasing land along the Miramichi is a popular issue among Miramichi writers, and in *Blood Ties*, the American couple is an obvious symbol of forces that move into the region and bring about change. They represent everything the region's society (at least stereotypically) is not: They are politically conscious (they have left the United States in part because of the Vietnam war), well-traveled (they have been to Leningrad), well educated (the man was a university professor and the woman is a professional artist), and they do not drink alcohol. Richards does not suggest that this couple is any better or worse than, for example, Maufat and Irene. They are simply very different; thus, they also represent the growing diversity of the region that comes from the increasing influence of popular culture. The growing influence of outside forces (as I will discuss in the following chapters) brings about change that breaks down a sense of regional consciousness.

Perhaps one display of a sort of political regionalism comes when Richards describes the visit of the prime minister to their town:

At the town hall the Prime Minister stood with the flag above him and everyone was cheering and screaming, and Maufat said, "I thought he was gonna be taller or something," and Cathy said, "Oh Daddy—he's tall enough," and Maufat said, "No now, I thought he was gonna be taller or something," and Cathy laughed and she was Irene laughing long ago. (259)

Richards does not go as far as to represent the Prime Minister negatively, as a symbol of nationalism or central control over the region. Instead, the Prime Minister and the flag are shown to be of little consequence to the region or to Maufat, whose allegiance is to his family. The introduction of the Prime Minister and the American couple at the end of the novel is but a hint of the relational and political regionalism that is to come. The ambiguous presentation of the American couple and the Prime Minister demonstrates Richards's refusal, in his early work, to pass judgment or make a political commentary. His later texts prove to be much more deliberate in their criticism.

We have seen that, in *Blood Ties*, the sense of morality Richards advocates appears to stem from the division between spontaneous and determined action. The use of a subjective narrative style allows for an increased focus upon the psychology of the characters involved and, by extension, a decreased focus upon the political conditions in which the characters live. This, combined with the abstraction of place and time, helps to create a text that is able to use a single region to convey universal themes. I have stated that *Blood Ties* is representative of Richards's early work; however, having said this, it is also arguable that *Lives of Short Duration* (1981) does not appear to fit my description of Richards's work from this period. *Lives* exhibits an awareness of outside influences upon the region. Images of popular culture surface throughout the text, and the characters' consciousnesses expand beyond regional boundaries. This can be said to represent a relational brand of regionalism, since comparisons between the region and that which lies outside it are implicit. At the same time, however, this text features a subjective, stream-of-consciousness narrative style. This high level of subjectivity places the focus upon the characters' psychology instead of upon the implications of this outside influence. The

negative representation of such outside influences does not appear to uphold the region over the outlying forces that invade it. Instead, these external forces appear as influences upon the individual who searches for happiness for him/herself in a modern world. The subjective representation of this universal search for happiness in a modern world makes *Lives* similar to *Blood Ties*, even if its regionalism is more typical of such later novels as *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*.

Chapter 3: *For Those Who Hunt The Wounded Down* (1993)

In a way it was a trilogy that was dangerous for a writer to embark upon because I was saying that in each work, separate from each other, that critics do not understand the world as a writer understands the world, and a writer's job, as Browning maintained, was to overcome the misapprehensions of the age. And only a writer willing to take on the age, was able to overcome it, and what better writer to overcome it than those who had been always held in suspicion by it, who had appropriated or gained little by belonging to it—a writer who was frozen out—a regionalist.

This was not an entirely conscious throwing down of the glove, for if it had been it would not have worked as literature, but in a way, in my life, the glove had been thrown down since childhood, since those days I was pained by hidden motive and manipulation as opposed to the feeling significant joy in the truth and courage of spontaneous action.

(Richards, "My Miramichi Trilogy" 80)

By comparing *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* with *Blood Ties*, one can begin to outline Richards's shift from a confederal form of regionalism to a relational brand thereof. In *Wounded*, Richards's narrator and some of his characters have consciousnesses that extend beyond regional boundaries. We can also trace the shift from subjectivity to objectivity in Richards's writing, and this suggests that the psychology of his characters is less important in *Wounded* than it was in *Blood Ties*, and that the social conditions in which these characters exist are becoming increasingly important. This increasing focus on society marks Richards's shift from more abstract subject matter to a more specific commentary. *Wounded* demonstrates a sort of maturation and a growing awareness of the social and literary worlds in which Richards writes; however, his critique of this society still takes on an essentially moral, as opposed to political, stance. It will be seen that the morality of this later text is essentially the same as that of *Blood Ties*; however, where it is difficult to identify the objects of

Richards' favor and scorn in *Blood Ties*, the morality of *Wounded* is more explicit and accusatory. Nature, family, and social institutions play similar roles here as they did in Richards's earlier work; however, in this text, Richards points even more obviously to social institutions, such as churches, hospitals, and academia, as perpetrators of "determined action."

To look more closely at the nature of Richards's moral didacticism in *Wounded*, I turn to Sheldon Currie, who suggests that "Richards' fiction is all about the wounded in a wounded world" (71). Drawing from this statement, I posit that the reader's experience in reading the novel ultimately equates to a series of judgments which place all of the characters in the story on a sort of moral spectrum. At one end of this spectrum are characters who are mostly wounded by society, and on the other end, we see those who primarily inflict wounds. On the *wounding* end of the spectrum, we find characters like Vera Pillar, who are more representative of social institutions and trendy thought, which Richards scorns. Jerry Bines is on the *wounded* end of this spectrum, since he is often a victim of these social institutions, while he himself is more representative of family values, more connected to nature, and more characterized by spontaneous action than any other character in the novel.

Directly connected to this moral division between spontaneous and determined action is Richards's division between the conservative mindset of his region and the liberal/progressive way of thinking that comes to the region from outside influences. We also find Richards outlining the contrast between rural and urban consciousnesses. Such contrasts represent a relational form of regionalism, since Richards compares his region with what lies outside it. Again, it should be noted that it is dangerous to define such

clear divisions in Richards's works, since a certain amount of ambiguity always figures into his novels. At the same time, however, we see that, as Richards's career progresses, he virtually invites these sorts of readings. For example, the relational separation of the rural from the urban is the beginning of the more political separation of margin from center, which surfaces in *Mercy Among the Children*.

The increasing political flavor of Richards's work appears to reflect an increasing political awareness on the part of Richards himself. In 1995, just two years after the publication of *Wounded*, when asked to discuss what Canada means to him, Richards wrote:

To me, Canada is a kind of understated sense of justice and fair play – and a sense of place. This was brought home to me when I was in Spain with my wife and son, working on my next novel, during the turbot war. We were there when the whole thing blew up, and I felt very strongly Canadian, very proud that Canada had finally done something. Of course, this is an East Coast issue and perhaps the people of Central Canada don't know how much it had bothered us over the last 20 years: the disappearance of the fish stocks on the Grand Banks and along the Atlantic seaboard. I was very happy Canada did something. And certainly, for the first time in a long time, Canada was a distinct entity—a distinct place—to Europeans. (“Reflections on Nationhood” np)

This passage exhibits Richards's growing political and historical awareness: not only does he compare his region with Canada as a whole, he also defines a place for Canada on a global scale. On a smaller scale, Richards acknowledges that the debate over turbot fishing rights has been “an East Coast issue.” Such statements show that the east coast region has come together in the face of foreign adversaries in the turbot war. On a larger scale, this form of regionalism is also seen to grow in such a way that it envelops the whole country in a form of nationalism. While Richards's sense of Canadian nationalism

may seem at odds with my discussion of Richards's regionalism, it is notable that his "sense of place" is not "brought home" to him until he goes to Spain and is able to compare his homeland to what lies outside its borders.

As Richards's description of what Canada means to him continues, we find at work a brand of relational regionalism:

That is part of the problem with Canada: you cannot be a distinctive place if you are not a distinctive place to others. If you're just a blob of pink on a map, then it is hard to define yourself. But it's a gamble. You need moral courage to assert yourself as a country. And I think we did that with the fisheries for the first time in our lives. In the larger community, we have been too polite. I think that is partly a result of seeing the smacking kind of shallowness that comes from parading oneself too much: Americans like to parade themselves, and Canadians smell a rat in that kind of thing. (np)

In this paragraph, Richards all but describes Canadian identity as being built upon the concept of "not American." Such a comparison shows that Richards's nationalism is, to some extent, built upon a form of relational regionalism on a larger scale. The final paragraph of Richards's thoughts on Canada shows that, to Richards, the concept of Canada involves a certain amount of internal division, or regionalism:

But just as Canadians have been generally ignored by the outside world for their contribution to that world, Maritimers have been ignored by Canada. That has shaped our feelings towards Canada. Also, there have been a lot of times when people have spoken on television and on the radio about what Canada's consciousness is, and they have generally been talking about an urban consciousness. They weren't talking about my consciousness. I come from a very rural sensibility. For instance, I know very well why people want guns, and it's not to go rob banks. I can understand why people are upset about the gun legislation, because, while there is crime down here, we think of guns as things to use when we're hunting, or around the farm when we're trying to get rid of predators. It's part of the tradition of being a rural Canadian. (np)

Richards states that Canada's tendency to ignore the Maritime region has "shaped our feelings towards Canada." By extension, it is obvious that this same (mis)treatment is an important element in Richards's definition of his region. Apart from indicating that Richards's Maritimes is becoming increasingly determined by political factors, he also clearly defines the division between the urban consciousness of Canada as a whole and the rural consciousness of the Maritime region.

Given that *Wounded* was written within two years of such statements, it is not surprising that *Wounded* exhibits traces of the political awareness of the region, and also shows a clear distinction between rural and urban. In this text, Richards's morality is interlaced with a discussion of the disparity between rural and urban. The rural setting of Richards's region, specifically its connection to nature, appears to foster a more positive sense of morals. In contrast to this, Richards demonstrates that an urban consciousness, which he connects to determined action, does not foster a positive sense of morality. This is not to generalize by saying that the rural region is morally good, while the urban centers are morally evil, since even the best of rural characters appear to have their flaws. At the same time, however, we see that the moral weaknesses of the characters in Richards's region are often connected to outside influences. The very awareness of such outside influences indicates a certain relational brand of regionalism, whereby the region is compared to the places from which it receives these influences. This awareness also cultivates a form of morality that is more explicit in targeting specific, and sometimes political, targets.

Richards's position as a moralist at the end of the twentieth century is a complicated one. Frances MacDonald, in a typical reading of Richards's fiction,

indicates the sort of abstract and indefinable ideas around which Richards's novels revolve:

What is hard work, is getting through life with enough integrity to keep our *humanity* recognizable, and with luck, a few shreds of *dignity* to cover our nakedness. The people Richards concentrates on are the ones who succeed at that, and it is these people who make his books memorable, and who make reading them uplifting. He renews our faith in the power of the *human spirit* to work out its own redemption. And he does not let us forget the forces that oppose the *human spirit*; from the *de-humanizing* demands of modern industry... (20, italics added)

The postmodern mode of this age, with its metafictional and self-reflexive qualities, and its tendency to deconstruct "Truth," hardly seems a suitable means through which to discuss "humanity" and the "human spirit." Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wylie describe the paradoxical position into which Richards places himself, as a moralist in the postmodern context:

Richards's trilogy seems almost deliberately out of step with prevailing social thought and literary taste; his work reflects the concerns of traditional formal realism – "character, action, morality, representation of reality" (Hutcheon 11)¹ – and in a literary environment increasingly characterized by postmodern innovations that disrupt those concerns in various ways, allowing Richards the actuality of his fictional world may be too big a concession, particularly because of the overt editorializing and didacticism of the trilogy. (np)

Armstrong and Wylie also suggest that the didacticism of the trilogy "combined with its traditional realist aesthetic, closes the reader out of the narrative, a problematical effect when viewed in relation to current postmodern interests in the reader's creative role in the construction of the text" (9). It is quite possible that Richards generally stays away from the postmodern mode both because he wishes to voice moral messages that are out of

place in the postmodern style of writing, and because he consciously wishes not to appear trendy. However, contrary to what Armstrong and Wylie suggest, Richards does not close the reader out of his novel. While the morality and realism of this novel make it atypical of a postmodernist text, Richards does show an awareness of postmodernism in *Wounded*. Linda Hutcheon notes that, "Canadian writers ... may be primed for the paradoxes of the postmodern by their history, as Leonard Cohen saw in *Beautiful Losers*, and also by their split sense of identity, both regional and national" (4). We saw this split between regional and national in Richards's description of what Canada means to him, and so it can be said that the elements of postmodernism do exist in Richards himself. Hutcheon goes on to say that in postmodern literature, "Truth has been replaced by truths, uncapitalized and in the plural" (ix). In *Wounded*, Richards breaks down his narrative into a series of truths, which are often contradictory. At the same time, paradoxically, Richards intends to convey a single sense of morality, which discusses, as MacDonald suggests, such abstraction as humanity and the human spirit. I suggest that the multiple truths Richards presents in his novel as a nod to postmodernism also serve to disguise the morality that hides behind them. Through this disguise, Richards avoids an obviously didactic stance.

More specifically, Richards avoids a didactic stance by manipulating the narrative in such a way that the reader draws comparisons between the characters to establish their own sense of morality. Through these comparisons, the moral worth of one character is determined primarily in relation to the others, instead of in relation to a preexisting, transcendental morality. Two of the novel's characters, however, are exempt from such classification. Ralphie and Andrew serve as stand-ins for the reader, since they too must

interpret the various “truths” to which they are exposed in order to pass judgment upon the other characters – specifically the central figure, Jerry Bines. They experience Jerry’s goodness first-hand early in the novel, and are then subjected to various rumors and stories which contradict what they already know about him. Ralphie meets Jerry and finds him to be an amicable person, but Ralphie’s conversation with his wife, Adele (Jerry’s cousin), tells him things about Jerry that Ralphie cannot completely defend:

“...who fingered the tractor-trailer?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who was Daddy trying to sober up?”

Ralphie didn’t answer.

“Jerry – who everyone told him not to trust – who knew Dad had to pick up 120 thousand dollars’ worth of cigarettes – who knew he was going to go to Saint John.”

Ralphie lit a cigarette and looked out the window as if he were very interested in something outside. (143)

Ralphie responds to this interrogation with a series of questions of his own, and these questions make it difficult for Adele to maintain her former opinion of Jerry:

“...Whose family is the only family on the river ever to love him?”

Adele didn’t answer.

There was a long silence....

“Because he is their own. And he’s come home not – asking forgiveness –”

There was another silence.

“Looking for shelter.”

There was another silence. Then Ralphie whispered:

“Tired of being hunted down.” (144)

Ralphie wishes to see Jerry in a positive light, but the information he learns from those around him makes it impossible for him to be certain as to Jerry’s virtue. By the same token, Adele wishes to see Jerry as primarily a bad person, because he is partially

responsible for the death of her father; however, she is constantly introduced to information that contradicts what she already knows. Andrew's experience is the same:

This is the theory that had surfaced in the last few months. That Jerry tried desperately to get off the hook because Rita was ill. It seemed a nice thought to the boy.

His uncle countered this by saying that Jerry had a more perfect solution. Take no responsibility for it – pay no money for it, refuse to help move it, until Joe Walsh was charged with it, and they would be home free...

“The idea that Jerry was protecting someone like Joe is a good story – the truth is always somewhere else.” (194)

In this passage, Richards describes the reader's role in the novel. Through the character of the uncle, Richards suggests that the reader is looking for “a good story,” and that he/she will create one from the available information. The good story, as the uncle suggests, is that in which Jerry is a genuinely good man who is persecuted because he is misunderstood. In the epigraph to this chapter, Richards acknowledges the balance between throwing down the glove and writing a text that works as literature. Directly connected to this balance is the notion that a reader who privileges the “good story” of *Wounded* can downplay the didacticism that lies beneath it.

Perhaps it is easiest to focus upon Jerry's “good story” when we examine his relationship with his family. Family, throughout Richards's fiction, remains the most universal theme, and, as in *Blood Ties*, Richards uses representations of family in *Wounded* to represent positive moral values. William Connor, in his article “The Unlikely Heroes of David Adams Richards's Second Trilogy” (1998), describes how Richards connects these positive family values to his region by tying them to the rural landscape in which his characters have grown:

The idea of an older culture in conflict with a newer set of ideas brought into the area through university education and mass media is central in the second trilogy, and, as outsiders lacking formal education, the three central characters are linked to the indigenous culture. All three shy away from the sorts of superficial relationships that pass for friendship among many of the minor characters, and prefer to retreat from the town, where they are outsiders, to the woods where they are more at home. This affinity for the wilderness points to their connection with the more primitive, more traditional life in the Miramichi Region, where lumbering has always been the primary industry and where, not long ago, hunting and fishing were important sources of food. In traditional local society people relied more on neighbors for assistance than on social institutions, and although they are outsiders, Joe, Ivan, and Jerry all show an old fashioned willingness to help anyone in need. (“Unlikely Heroes” 75)

The significance of this passage is twofold: firstly, Connor reaffirms that the narrator of the trilogy shows a greater awareness of history than that of *Blood Ties*. Frank Davey makes a similar observation in relation to *Nights Below Station Street*:

The unspecified narrator of the novel ... not only is privy to the concerns of all these characters, but is able to relate them in the past tense, apparently in possession of a sense of history which the characters – who in effect live only in the present tense – lack. (*Post-National Arguments* 69)

Sheldon Currie, in “David Adams Richards: The People on the Roadway” (1994), goes further to say that “Richards is a master of the novel as social history” (72). This increasing awareness of history marks the beginnings of the shift from a confederal to a relational form of regionalism. Secondly, with respect to the notion of family, Connor’s above passage suggests that Richards makes the distinction between more traditional “old fashioned willingness to help” and the social institutions that have come to replace it. He goes on to outline how this willingness to help is connected to a rural existence. We see, then, that family values are tied to the nature of the region, and that families and nature

are united in opposition to social institutions, just as they were in *Blood Ties*. In *Wounded*, however, Richards places family values in conflict with more specific influences, such as academia and government agencies, which are depicted as outside influences. This also marks the beginning of a more relational form of regionalism.

When one examines the families of *Wounded* in relation to those of *Blood Ties*, one sees that Richards's representation of the family is changing along with the shifting views on the family, not only in the Miramichi region, but also throughout Canada:

Two themes seem important to mention at the outset in characterizing Canadian families of the 1980s. The first is that there is no longer, if there ever was, a single family form. The second is that family membership is less a cornerstone of Canadian society than it used to be, but family remains more important to most Canadians than any other aspect of their lives. (McDaniel & Mitchinson 19)

Wounded presents multiple forms of the family, including single-parent, adopted, and extended, but despite the changing shape of the family, Richards still upholds family as the best of social institutions, and he exhibits this most clearly through the character of Jerry, to whom family matters above all. William Connor points out that, although "Jerry shows little regard for either law or social proprieties, his sense of the more fundamental human responsibility for family is strong" (73). From his first appearance in the text, in which he speaks to his uncle, Joe Walsh, we see Jerry's great sense of family:

Then he asked about Joe's family. And then he paused, as if trying to think of something to say.

"Your daughter Adele's got herself a good lad now," Jerry said innocently. "Ralphie Pillar, right – I like Adele – always have," he said. "When I first went to Kingsclear – she was the only one to write – only one." He glanced away when he said this as if thinking of something....

"Don't blame those who didn't," he said. (2)

This passage not only shows that Jerry cares for his relatives, it also demonstrates that he is forgiving to those who have wronged him. The care Jerry shows for his family is something one does not find in a social institution. Love of one's family, and forgiveness, then, can be seen as two forms of spontaneous action, as well as defining traits of a good Christian. Jerry has not learned these qualities from the Church; thus, Jerry's care for his family can be likened to Orville's and Irene's in *Blood Ties*.

Jerry's sense of family is based upon love and sacrifice. Throughout the novel we see that, despite his wife's treatment of him, Jerry remains a good father: "[Loretta] also felt indebted to him because of the bone marrow. And he knew this and hated it. Did she not think he would do it in a heartbeat?" (136). Because of Jerry's love for his family, he does not want his son to grow up with the stigma of the Bines name attached to him:

His wife had left him and had taken the boy. He didn't mind any more. And he knew what was going to happen now, and, because of this, he had come to ask his wife a favour: "I think we should change his name."

"To what?"

"To your name – your name – it'd be better for the boy – better for William."

"Well, everyone on the river knows who he is."

"No, no – better for the boy," he added again, staring through her.

He didn't like this but he couldn't think of what else he could do at the moment. (14)

Perhaps Jerry's treatment of his relatives is most remarkable for the fact that his own upbringing did not foster such a positive sense of family. We know that his mother died when he was young, and that his father beat him. Despite these factors, Jerry's devotion to his family remains a prime example of spontaneous action:

"In September of 1970 I went to live with my father again."

“Why did you feel you had to do this – was there pressure from him?”

“No – no pressure. He was drunk as an arse down-town sitting in front of Lounsbury’s with people stepping over him. I was on my way home from school – from school and went and helped him. I sat down by him, to keep passersby from bothering him – you know, bothering him – I stayed there three hours – three hours keeping an eye on him.”

“I see,” Vera whispered. “Did you feel obligated to do this? I mean, why did you feel you had to?”

Bines did not understand these questions.

“Obligated – no – not so much. He was my father.” (35)

The narrator’s insistence that Jerry “did not understand these questions” further demonstrates the innocence (alluded to above) to which Jerry has clung, despite his mistreatment by nearly everyone in his life. This passage also makes clear the selflessness Jerry *always* displays in matters of his family. The following is another particularly notable example of Jerry’s sense of family, and his spontaneous generosity:

“...I’m trying to quit this smoking racket – I have this gum – it don’t do a thing for me – just makes my teeth numb.” And he smiled at her. “I also got a beeper – cost me a hundred dollars. You’re only spose to smoke during the beeps – I never figured it out.”

And he took it out of his pocket and showed it to her.

“That’s what I should get,” she said.

“Here,” he said, handing it to her immediately.

“I can’t take it,” she said.

“Go on – it’s yours – yours,” he said. “Quit smokin – it’s yours.”

Then he got up to get her tea.

“I don’t need any tea,” she said shyly.

“Well, you don’t drink – so I’ll make you some tea,” he said. And he went into the kitchen.

Always one act for Bines proved his ultimately generous nature, which in the common man would never be seen as anything more than civil. (107-8)

Jerry does not hesitate when he knows that he can help Adele. He gives her his device “immediately.”

Having considered these examples which more than prove Jerry's selflessness through his relationship with his family, it is possible to go even further to show how Richards's structuring of the novel often pairs Jerry's acts of goodness (which say a great deal about Jerry on their own) with similar acts on the part of other characters in such a way that Jerry's heroism appears greater. With regard to family, Richards draws particular connections between Jerry's family, the Savoie family, and the family of Vera and Nevin. In the case of the Savoies, Richards tells us that "Alvin was married to Jerry's aunt, Frances, and Bines cared for her – and therefore for Alvin – as best he could" (37). In direct contrast to Bines' care for his family, Richards presents Buddy Savoie as a terror to his brother's family:

...he would sit on the stairs with only his toes visible to the little children sitting in the room below, and say that everyone had betrayed him, he had a list – he would flash this list out over the stairwell – and he would get them all back, sooner or later. (41)

Jerry has a similar mental list, but he does not have the same sense of vengeance. Jerry remembers more vividly those who have helped him.

Jerry's love for his family and the sacrifice he makes for them connects him to nature, through the story of the deer. The phrase "the hunters always keep coming" (90) aligns Jerry with the buck, since Jerry is being literally hunted by Percy Rils and figuratively hunted by those who are guilty of determined action. In contrast to the hunter role, we find that of the protector. Like the buck, Jerry finally sacrifices himself for his mate and child. The protection of the family, especially the young, is a natural action for many species, but it is not something that one sees among the society that Jerry inhabits. The story of the deer makes Jerry's spontaneous, "natural" actions even more

noble, compared to the actions of, for example, Vera White and Buddy Savoie, who think of themselves first.

In another connection between Jerry and nature, Richards compares Jerry to the hunters in the hunting camp. These men apparently hunt for the sake of socializing, and they spend more time in the camp, gossiping and spreading rumors, than they do in the woods. According to Frances McDonald:

There will not be another generation of hunters, though hunting may survive as a form of golf, with those who can afford it paying handsome fees to be allowed to spend time doing something pointless in a constructed and maintained piece of artificial nature. (23)

We see the beginnings of the decline of hunting in *Wounded*, as the men's hunting is a social practice, not an act of providing sustenance. The hunting camp can be seen as a sign of society moving into nature – a trend we also saw in *Blood Ties*. Jerry's camp is "further away" (8) (i.e. further removed from town) than the camp in which the hunters stay. Also, unlike the hunters, who go to their camp to socialize, Jerry goes to his camp to escape society. In this sense, we see nature playing a similar role in Jerry's life as it did for Orville, Maufat and Irene in *Blood Ties*. It is a place that is free (or at the very least, more free) of social influences and signifiers. Jerry's burning of his camp is a turning point in the novel because, in destroying the camp, Jerry gives up his ability to escape society, even temporarily. It is no coincidence that when the camp blows up, Jerry is placed temporarily in the hospital – a social institution. On the whole, nature does not play as important a role in *Wounded* as it did in *Blood Ties*, and I suggest that this is reflective of the declining role that nature plays in the individual's life due to the increasing urban influences on the region. Despite this, nature does function in similar

ways in *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*, as a place of escape and as a representative of positive, family values.

Having examined how Jerry is connected to family values and nature, I will show how Richards places these concepts in opposition to social institutions. Social institutions generally represent a form of determined action, or a sort of artificiality that is opposed to the more natural role of the family. For example, the hospital to which Jerry takes his son does not show the same care for the individual as does the family institution: “They’re all frightened of taking responsibility for the boy. They didn’t even consider it was leukemia. At first they just thought it must’ve been me beating him” (139). Richards also treats the Church in a similar way in *Wounded* as he did in *Blood Ties*, satirizing it throughout the text. Early in the novel, we are introduced to Jerry’s wife, Loretta, a “fervently religious” woman (3), “a Pentecostal girl – from upriver” (88), who leaves Jerry “because of his terrible past” (5). The connection between Jerry, Loretta and the Church is best outlined as Loretta reads the newspaper article claiming Jerry’s virtue. “More sinned against than sinning,” she said, looking up at him again in consternation, and puzzlement, as the evening now smelled of snow and brown mud. It was as if she didn’t want to tell him. He looked at her and smiled” (133). She does not want to tell him what the article means because it indicates that she has been wrong about him. When she explains the piece of writing to him, he asks, “Is yer minister more sinned against than sinning?” (133). Her reply, “Of course” (133), leads the reader to question the true worth of her religion, as does the description Richards provides of Loretta’s two ministers:

...a father and son who looked identical (each weighed over two hundred pounds, and wore identical suits, and the boy's hair dyed to look like his father's), came one day to [Loretta's] house to visit, and ate pies and cakes sitting in the living room in the mid-after-noon.

Each looked very canoned, ministerial, as the cold snow froze in the puddles, and their cars, both Buick Regals, were pulled up bumper to bumper in the little drive outside her house. Each wore leather shoes that were pointed to make them look like they only had a couple of toes on each foot, each wore the same gold jewellery – watches and rings. (214)

Ironically, these men do not look “ministerial” at all. Their Buick *Regals* and their appearance suggest that they are more kingly than ministerial; in fact, in the above passage alone, Richards characterizes them in terms of two deadly sins: gluttony and vanity. In doing so, Richards voices the age-old criticism that the Church does not embody the virtues it preaches, and that the way to God is not through the Church. Loretta, in one of her few gestures of pure Christianity, quotes the following to Jerry: “I am the true vine – and my Father is the husbandman; no one comes to the Father except by me” (137). Here, the suggestion is that the Christian Church fails to reflect the virtues Christ embodies.

Jerry's “old fashioned willingness to help” shows that he is a better Christian than the preachers in *Wounded*. In many ways, Jerry embodies the positive moral values that Christ does; in fact, Richards draws direct comparisons between Jerry and Christ. The most obvious link comes through the young boy, Andrew: “Learning his catechism at Sunday school, and learning about the crucifixion, he was told that each drop of blood Christ shed was shed for a particular sin” (10). Though this idea comes to the young boy from a social institution, it makes reference to self-sacrifice, the most revered form of spontaneous action. When Andrew first sees Jerry, he sees “a smile which suggested that he would die in a second for whatever he believed in, in whatever place, no matter what”

(7-8). Jerry's genuine conviction is directly contrasted with Vera's superficial social activism and her assertion of her religious zeal. At the novel's end, when Jerry dies to protect his family (on Christmas, by a wound in his side, no less), he becomes a martyr, or, at the very least, he atones for his one major sin: the theft of the tractor-trailer. I identify this as Jerry's major sin because it is the cause of Rils's vendetta against Jerry, which ultimately results in Jerry's death, and because Adele blames this action for the death of her father, Joe Walsh. Although Jerry is only partially responsible, he feels guilty for this sin because it has been committed against a family member.

In contrast to Jerry's atonement for his sins at the end of the novel, Richards provides a scene involving Nevin White, who has opted to change his life by entering the Church. The similarities between the two men are obvious, since both have been mistreated by their wives and by society, and both men are arguably more sinned against than sinning. After Jerry's death, we see Nevin helping to finish the construction of a new church while the two "ministerial" preachers look on. As Nevin lifts the church's cross to the top of the steeple, he becomes a Christ figure, complete with a reference to stigmata: "Nevin's face was cut and his hands were torn. He bled from every knuckle" (220). Frank Davey, in reference to *Nights Below Station Street*, argues that

The characters who attempt to change their lives are mostly depicted as having merely the illusion that they are choosing to change; what is really happening to them is that they are being shaped, moulded and scripted by large social forces beyond their understanding. (*Post-National Arguments* 74)

While Nevin's acceptance of Christianity is meant to be a redeeming act, I argue that Davey's statement can be applied here. Nevin does make a new life for himself;

however, in joining the Church, he essentially trades one set of social rules for another. I make this point to demonstrate how Jerry's redemption is the greater of the two: Nevin chooses to find his salvation in the Church, while Jerry finds his within; and Nevin gives up his sex manuals, books of philosophy, cookbooks and comic books, while Jerry gives his life. With respect to such sacrifice, William Connor suggests that, in Richards's trilogy, "heroic acts are defined not by their consequences but by the quality of mind out of which they grow – by unselfishness of an individual's motives" ("Unlikely Heroes" 76). In *Wounded*, we see that Jerry's act of heroism has very few consequences, positive or negative. Jerry's first wife, who would have nothing to do with him, comes looking for money (226); Joe Walsh remains implicated in the theft of the tractor-trailer (226); and the gun that would have protected Jerry's household has been lent to one of the ministers, who uses it to hunt deer out of season (215). In a more ambiguous scene, Richards hints that Loretta Bines is to form a relationship with Nevin: "he felt he could easily mistake her for his first wife" (221). Loretta's final comment, "we're all as brave as we have to be ... and none of us are any braver," can be read as an act of true Christian forgiveness for Nevin's sins. At the same time, however, it shows that, like the rest of society, Loretta has forgotten that Jerry *was* braver than he had to be.

A comparison of Jerry and the Church shows how Richards's morality in *Wounded*, like that of *Blood Ties*, favors spontaneous action over determined action. When we go further to compare Jerry to members of academia, we see how this institution, as a representative of urban thought, wounds the individual – especially the rural individual – because it does not foster spontaneous action. Moreover, academia is represented as an external, urban influence on the region. Because Richards compares

the region to the influences that enter it, we see that his sense of morality and his regionalism are both relational in temperament. Such a relational flavor did not exist in *Blood Ties*. Richards provides Vera Pillar as the embodiment of (what he sees as) academia's trendy, determined methods of thought. As Armstrong and Wylie suggest, "Vera embodies a consistent theme in the trilogy: the questionable sincerity of those with an academic, liberal perspective" (np). We learn from her husband, Nevin, that her relationship with academia has given her the tendency to become involved in trendy issues, it seems, for the sake of being fashionable:

"I got mixed up in the Strax affair," Nevin said, "Vera and I."

"I don't know what that is," Bines said.

"It was a movement in the sixties at the university," Nevin said, and, screwing up his eyes and trying to think, he continued: "It was positive – it was a positive thing."

He told Jerry he went on protest marches, and burned the American flag – well, he did all the things the American children did. (122)

We see that Vera's motivations are generally self-serving. Early in *Wounded*, we learn of Vera's intention to write a book about Jerry:

It wasn't that his story interested her so much. But he fitted a pattern that she had concerned herself about over the past four or five years. And she had convinced herself that she could expose this pattern better than anyone else, show this kind of male violence, show the broader scope of such violence and how it "impacted" on children and women. "Impacted" being the new word of choice for her at this moment.

He was going to be one of the many people she would write about, but she felt that he would be at the centre of a long history of "maleness" and "patriarchy," which is how she described it, to her friends and devotees.

She felt that she too would become famous with this book, at least in a small way amongst a certain group. (22-3)

Her connection to trendy, pretentious methods of thought is especially evident because, not only does she *use* affected language, she *invents* it. She is not interested in telling Jerry's story for his sake; instead, she wishes to better her own position in life in relation to a "certain group" of people (academics) to which she belongs. Vera is, then, the epitome of determined action, but also of a liberal, or urban, consciousness.

Such methods of thought have taken over Vera's life in such a way that they have infected her family. Richards deliberately draws comparisons between her family and Jerry's to demonstrate this fact. Like Jerry, Vera wants to change her child's last name: "When Nevin got to the house he found out that Vera only wanted one thing ... she wanted to change Hadley's name to hers. Coldness always has its roots in sensible thought" (59). Jerry's wish to change his son's name stems from his love, while Vera's decision to change her daughter's name stems from coldness and sensible thought. This sensible thought, which Richards connects to the external and urban consciousness of academia, is poles apart from the spontaneity that he associates with the rural setting.

The interviews Vera conducts with Jerry further demonstrate that these characters come from two different worlds, and have completely different ways of thinking:

"You must have hated your dad very much," Vera said.

"Oh, no," he said, his eyes shining, "I never did."

But he knew at that moment that she simply did not believe him.

"I never did," he said. "Never did."

"That's a natural reaction," Vera said. "You just have to realize that he's no longer worth protecting."

Bines looked at her. It seemed as if the very things he had wanted to make her see had been mistaken or misconstrued. The chasm between them had grown not lessened.

"What you want to protect," she said, "is the male line, that's all. But when the truth gets said it's always painful – especially when you discover it does not agree with your former notions."

"I have no notions," Bines said.

“Well, you certainly have some idea that you told on someone – and you don’t like it. You probably always protected your father – your mother probably protected him as well. It’s natural now to feel guilt.”

Suddenly he realized he was being used for something much more complex than he ever realized. He never would understand this fully, and would go into the dark groping for it. (182)

Vera’s statement, “when the truth gets said it’s always painful – especially when you discover it does not agree with your former notions,” is ironic because, if a single truth does exist, it is obvious that Vera would not have access to it. According to Richards, “often truth finds itself buried under a trend” (“My Miramichi Trilogy” 78). Jerry and Vera’s conversation continues:

“Why do you want your boy’s name changed?” she said.

“I don’t know,” Bines said. “Seems like a good idea.”

“You want to get rid of your father’s name,” Vera said. “You want to stop the bleeding – that’s why –”

And she smiled that certain smile that was present one moment and gone the next. A smile that was always controlled and said the truth of the moment was to her the truth of all time.

All of her life Vera had gone from one religion to another asserting herself as its principle devotee. All his life Bines was searching for some notion of God, without ever having a concept of why he was. (183)

When one compares Jerry’s innocence with Vera’s conceit, Jerry becomes an even more pathetic victim because he does not fully understand his own victimization. Jerry is so far removed from such affected, trendy ways of thinking that he can hardly understand their falseness. We see this again through Jerry’s reverence of academia: “‘Mr. Pillar’s been to university,’ Jerry said, with an inflection of absolute respect, so that his son would also show it” (88), and also through his infatuation with Vera, whom he sees as “someone almost untouchable, a part of a world he would occasionally glimpse and

swipe at, like a cat at an ascending bird (182). In contrast to Vera's knowledge and liberal thought, Richards appears to favor the sort of innocence Jerry has maintained: "I have no notions." Armstrong and Wyile provide a similar reading of Richards's works, as they suggest that

In Richards's fictive world, voluntarist affirmations of social identity are the object of deep suspicion, even hostility. This suspicion is reflected particularly in the consistent disjunction between conscious intention and the act of speaking... This disjunction suggests that self-affirmation and premeditation are self-serving because meaning can never be grasped at the moment of utterance and is afterwards endorsed as if it were meant to be. Consequently, the characters receiving the most sympathetic treatment are those least able or least inclined to articulate their identities, their desires, their sense of what is right. (np)

If self-affirmation and premeditation are self-serving, then Richards's position as a writer who favors those who are inarticulate is somewhat paradoxical, since the act of writing is premeditative. This will be addressed further in the following chapter.

When we read *Wounded*, we seem to find a book about Jerry Bines within a book about Jerry Bines; however, Vera's book is not actually *about* Jerry:

...the book wasn't called "Jerry Bines" as the boy thought it would be. It was called: *The Victims of Patriarchy (and Its Inevitable Social Results)* ... the book was riddled with words like "sexual deviance," and "malfunction," and "dysfunctional," "hereditary masculine reaction," "empowering," "cross-addictive personality," and "impacting" – all of which the boy stumbled over and became bored with. The worst of it was, to the boy, the book had no life. It did not show how Jerry Bines shook your hand. (51)

Jerry never fully understands the motivations behind Vera's book, though he feels that he is being used for something "much more complex than he ever realized" (182). Unlike Vera's book, Richards's novel *is* about Jerry Bines, it *does* show how Jerry shakes your

hand, and it also goes further to attack all of the things for which people like Vera stand. Richards has become familiar with this sort of individual through his experience with critics:

... though the growth and sacrifice of the *inner man* and woman is evident in my novels, they have been looked upon with displeasure by my hometown, who see only the poor or broken people that the critics sometimes see...

My books in a sense have suffered the same fate as my characters. ("My Miramichi Trilogy 83-4, italics added)

Richards makes it clear that his novels are about the "inner man." Again, this is unpopular subject matter for the postmodern literature of the day. At times, Richards's response to critics' treatment of his writing appears to be directed toward very specific targets:

...since [Jerry] never mentioned the word "love," Vera took this to mean that his family didn't love – and that love was replaced by the violence of a domineering father. Which proved her case in a way about the things she at this moment believed – that the idea of love comes with being able to articulate love, which to Vera was part of the prominent lexicon of progressive thought. (170)

On its most basic level, this passage suggests that Richards is opposed to progress for the sheer sake of progress. On a more specific level, Richards's description of Vera's views on love is likely a reaction to such statements as George Byrne's identification of "emotional sterility" (55) in the male characters of *Blood Ties*. This sort of attack does not arise in *Blood Ties* because Richards had not, at that time, experienced as much criticism. We see that, just as Vera attempts to force Jerry into a mould that she has constructed, critics have attempted to pigeonhole Richards's novels according to their

own designs. With this connection between Jerry and Richards in mind, the reader can see how Adele's judgment of Vera's book confirms the significance of Richards's title. When she sees the book in the store, she sees it as "wounding someone in the heart, hunting someone who was wounded down" (224). *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* is written for, or more accurately, in retaliation to social institutions, who, through their "determined action" hunt down the wounded of the world. We have already seen that, for the most part, these social institutions represent urban thought, which Richards places in contrast to the rural consciousness of the region.

I have demonstrated how, throughout most of the novel, Richards establishes Jerry as a good man who demonstrates spontaneous action; however, it must be said that Jerry is by no means perfect. William Connor suggests that "In *Wounded*, the rumors, gossip, and lies ... become the main narrative device, and the real Jerry Bines remains partially hidden behind a reputation created by people who in some cases barely know him" ("Unlikely Heroes" 72). Richards purposely does not allow the reader to define a "real" Jerry Bines. For example, the narrator of *Wounded* does not display the sort of subjectivity that, in *Blood Ties*, gave redeeming qualities to even the most unsympathetic of characters. Near the end of Jerry's story (within the space of two pages), Ralphie, Andrew, and by extension, the reader, have similar revelations about the darker side of Jerry's character. Andrew is told a story in which Jerry exhibits his irrationality and dangerousness. Jerry offers to blow up the mill to please Ralphie, and after this encounter, Ralphie "had begun to see something, like the other side of a leaf, and the curious patterns therein" (172). When the story is finished, Andrew has a similar reaction: "Andrew did not care so much about this anecdote at first, but slowly, like all

anecdotes about Bines, it had a peculiar aspect to it which showed the total character” (174). A comparable revelation is made to the reader when Loretta Bines gives her statement to the police, and alleges that “Jerry always had cocaine” (204). This is the novel’s first and only reference to drugs in relation to Jerry, and Richards presents it with a great deal of ambiguity. On the hand, it is possible that Loretta is fabricating this information as an attempt to justify her treatment of Jerry throughout the novel. On the other hand, it is possible that Jerry did have cocaine, since, during this section of the novel, we also learn other things about Jerry that had not formerly come to the surface. For example, it is revealed that Jerry had another wife before the action of the novel begins.

Richards shows an awareness that his depiction of Jerry’s “total character” is manipulative:

It was strange, because all of his life Ralphie had reacted with aversion to this kind of *manipulation*. But now, within the sanctuary of it, it all seemed different. It seemed possible that all the things Jerry did were misconstrued, were even wonderful – (the story about him escaping from prison one time now seemed a *wonderful story*). And Ralphie also knew that within the government, within academic circles, the same kind of *manipulation* happened. But contemplating this was another bothersome feeling that perhaps no one, not even Adele knew. At first it wasn’t noticeable but lately it had become prevalent. (82-3, italics added)

In the above passage Richards uses the word “manipulation” twice, and this draws attention to his authorial presence in the novel. This brand of metafictional self-reflexivity is an example of Richards paying homage to the postmodernist mode. When Richards goes the extra step to compare this sort of manipulation to the rhetoric found in the government and within academic circles, he shows that he is aware of the

complicated position in which he writes. He wishes to avoid current trends and to keep away from the hypocrisy of cultural centers (i.e., the government and academia), but at the same time, he writes novels for a living and must therefore appeal to these same cultural centers to sell his works. Again, we see that Richards's writing of this text equates to his walking the line between "throwing down the glove" and creating a text that works as literature. Thus, Richards hides his didacticism – his manipulation of the novel, and his response to critics – beneath the "wonderful story" in which the reader finds him/herself an active participant. At the novel's end, we learn that Jerry has been keeping a lock of Andrew's hair next to his heart. Andrew remembers Jerry saying, "You come back and get it when you're seventy. It'll still be here – next to my heart" (229). By including this last piece of information, Richards allows the reader the wonderful ending to the wonderful story they desire; however, I argue that readers who subscribe totally to Jerry's goodness make the same mistake as do the characters that condemn him, though perhaps to a lesser degree.

Having stated earlier that *Wounded* has much to do with holding onto one's humanity and sense of "goodness" despite opposing forces, I posit that the act of reading the book is much like the act of growing and gaining knowledge, regardless of where (i.e., in which region) one grows. The reader is like an innocent child at the onset, sharing in Andrew's romantic views of Jerry. As the reader grows, by reading the novel, he/she gains experience, and it becomes difficult to hold onto such innocence. We have seen how Richards favors Jerry's innocence in certain matters, but we also know that a certain amount of experience is necessary to see the "total character" of the things (people, places, ideologies, novels) we encounter. This is to say that, if we deem Jerry to

be a totally virtuous man, we make the mistake of being too romantic and naïve. On the other hand, if we condemn Jerry, we make the mistake of submitting to the sort of manipulation we encounter as we grow. In the end, however, it does not matter whether we believe Jerry to be essentially good or bad, because the very act of judging Jerry leads the reader to implement Richard's own sense of morality. In *Wounded* we have seen that this morality is such that urban modes of thought are criticized when compared to rural ways of thinking. In Richards's later texts, we will see that this morality, and the regionalism that grows from it, go beyond the merely relational exercise of rural vs. urban. In these works, Richards voices a much more specific political commentary, which, in its most extreme examples, involves the contrast of the region with the political center. The specificity of regional detail in these later novels should not, however, be mistaken for a lost interest in the individual members of society. A brand of morality that functions upon an individual level remains paramount, even in Richards's most politically regionalist novels.

Chapter 4: *Mercy Among the Children* (2000)

“I’ve matured as a writer ... Now I am not terribly too concerned with pleasing the critics. I have enough things to say and I’m going to say them.”

(Richards, qtd. in Procenko np)

Through my discussion of *Blood Ties* and *Wounded* I have shown that, from 1976 to 1993, morality and regionalism have remained constants in Richards’s works. *Mercy Among the Children* (2000), an example of Richards’s later work, is like *Blood Ties* and *Wounded* in that it has, at its center, a strong sense of morality. In *Mercy*, as in his earlier works, Richards advocates a system of moral conduct which is based upon spontaneous action as opposed to determined action. Moreover, Richards continues to associate spontaneous action with the region’s nature. In *Blood Ties* we saw that the division between spontaneous and determined action places nature and family in opposition to social institutions within the region. Similarly, the regional association of *Blood Ties* was seen to stem from factors internal to the region, such as geography and the region’s society. Since this regional association did not come through comparing the region to any exterior regions or influences, *Blood Ties* is characterized by a confederal brand of regionalism. In my discussion of *Wounded*, I quoted William Connor, who connects Richards’s characters’ “old fashioned willingness to help” with the “primitive, more traditional life in the Miramichi Region” (“Unlikely Heroes” 75). In *Wounded*, when Richards places the spontaneous action of Jerry Bines in opposition to the determined action of general progressive, urban influences, we are able to see how Richards’s sense of morality fosters a brand of relational regionalism. By this relational form of regionalism, Richards defines his region in relation to non-specific outside influences.

In *Mercy*, Richards goes further to illustrate the distinction between the positive morality fostered by the region's nature and the amorality that exists in specific political and cultural centers, such as Toronto and Hollywood. Richards presents these places as being guilty of determined action, and so, in this text, we find that a specific, political commentary – a political form of regionalism – derives from the same universal division between spontaneous and determined action that we saw in works as early as *Blood Ties*. My discussion of *Mercy* focuses upon nature, family, and social institutions to demonstrate how Richards's regionalism is directly connected to this simple brand of morality. Specifically, it will be seen that the central family's connection with nature makes this institution the repository of positive moral values and strength, which promote spontaneous action. Through the course of the novel, Richards presents the growth and subsequent fragmentation of the Henderson family. By examining the members of this family, considering how they relate to each other, and by focusing upon the contrast between this family and other families in the novel, we see that Richards uses the Hendersons to convey a sense of morality. The positive morality of the Henderson family is contra-distinguished from the amorality that appears to come from political and cultural centers. Upon recognizing this distinction, one can clearly see how the same general morality of *Mercy* is the foundation for the political regionalism of this novel. In outlining the connection between the morality and regionalism of *Mercy*, I will also demonstrate how Richards appears to mask the didacticism of the novel beneath the disguise of fate.

Because Richards defines the Miramichi region by placing the positive morality that stems from the region's nature in contrast to the amorality of cultural and political

centers, it can be said that *Mercy* displays a political form of regionalism. In fact, in Richards's recent work, such as *Mercy and Hope in the Desperate Hour* (1996), his narrators, as well as some of his characters, show a much greater awareness of their region in relation to progressive forces, such as academia, government control, and American popular culture, which enter it from the outside. This awareness marks a regional consciousness – a regionalism – that is much more relational and political than that which we saw in *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*.

The political temperament of Richards's regionalism in *Mercy* is especially evident when one examines the narrative structure of the novel. One voice narrates the prologue and afterword, and another narrates the body of the text. Each of these voices exhibit forms of regionalism that are more political than those of Richards's earlier narrators. The frame narrator displays such regionalism as early as the novel's first page:

Terrieux lived in a small apartment on the fourth floor of a rooming house in the south end of Saint John, New Brunswick....

Terrieux's place was away from the city center, among the newly renovated waterfront buildings and down a half-hidden alleyway, in an area that smelled of the docks and Irving pulp mill. There was a smell of diesel, and a shapeless conglomerate of depressed buildings and houses that ran off around the corner, where there was posted a Pepsi sign over an old convenience store, faded cigarette advertisements, and a newer advertisement for sanitary napkins. The door was open and cold air hung at the entrance. (1)

From the novel's outset, we find Richards describing the Maritime region; however, we see that he does so in a more specific manner than he did in his earlier works. For example, Richards's reference to the Irving pulp mill in the above quotation is notable in that such an allusion carries a specific connotation for those familiar with the region, and therefore marks Richards's straying from the more universal subject matter of his earlier

works. (Again, we will see that the underlying morality of *Mercy* remains universal, despite its specific political temperament.) In *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*, Richards' region is disguised and abstracted by his avoidance of place names and specific regional issues. Such is not the case here, as Richards firmly locates this part of the story in Saint John in November of 1997, and the rest of the novel is set on the outskirts of Newcastle.² Richards's depiction of Saint John, with his use of the word "alleyway" and his description of the "shapeless conglomerate of depressed buildings" lends this city urban characteristics. Perhaps Richards is trying to break down stereotypes of the region as pastoral and rural by including these details. As E. R. Forbes suggested in a passage I quoted in Chapter 1, the call for the breaking down of stereotypes is characteristic of a relational form of regionalist writing (12). We see that Richards has now reached the sort of political regionalism defined by Forbes and Frank Davey.

Another sign of such political regionalism comes as the frame narrator exhibits a historical awareness of the region in relation to the political forces that surround it:

The Stumps was a tract of land in northeastern New Brunswick, along the great Miramichi River, which flowed out of the heavy forests into the Northumberland Strait, north of the western tip of Prince Edward Island. ... It had been settled first by Micmac Indians and then by displaced French, who hid during the British expulsion of the Acadians in 1756. The Irish – like Henderson – came half a century later, for some reason still loyal to a British crown that had pissed in their face. They worked the woods and cut the timber, and towns grew up along the great river that ran south and east almost to the top of the state of Maine. Its people were fiery, rough, and not without brilliance. It was the river where Terrieux had been a police officer years and years ago, when he himself was not only Lyle's age but in height and colour looked exceptionally like that young man.

For a moment Lyle stared out at the old wooden docks of this largest city in New Brunswick, part of the receding empire of British North America, quickly being swallowed by the more vigorous and certain empire to the south, so that the very name Empire Hotel took on a

splendid quaintness for the detached, very unsplendid building in the fog.
(3-4)

Using this passage as a basis of comparison between this narrator and those of *Blood Ties* and *Wounded* it is possible to outline the continuance of trends in Richards's writing. The narrator of *Blood Ties* seems to know no more about the world outside his region than do his characters. This represents a confederal brand of regionalism. In *Wounded*, the narrator is only slightly more knowledgeable about the world exterior to the Miramichi. This narrator's knowledge gave the regionalism of *Wounded* a relational temperament. In *Mercy*, we see further evidence of the movement from subjectivity to objectivity, as well as the continued shift from confederal to political regionalism. The above passage shows an objective narrative stance, as it focuses not upon the thoughts of the character involved, but upon the region's setting. The passage also shows that the narrator is endowed with a thorough knowledge of the region in relation to its surroundings, as well as a sense of sociopolitical history that is much more complex than in earlier works. More importantly, this narrator shows an opinion toward the region's history. According to the above passage, the people of British North America have been mistreated by England, and are now being "swallowed," or colonized by a "vigorous and certain empire": the United States. Thus, the narrator of *Mercy* appears to have specific views that he speaks in relational, political, and even postcolonial terms.

As the frame narrator continues, we see that many comments he makes bear semblance to similar politically regionalist statements made by Richards himself, in interviews and essays. In fact, the initial descriptions of Terrieux and Lyle border on self-portraiture:

Terrieux ... had been a naval officer for some seven years. Then, feeling betrayed in a way by Canada, or by the failure of his marriage that came about because of his position, he had resigned and drifted to the States, where he had worked in New Orleans on the docks and in the Gulf of Mexico on an oil rig...

Now at fifty-seven he stood between fathers and their children, parolees and the parole board, a buffer between out-of-fashion men and those who wished to change the life of those men. He knew the men, because he was one of them. He knew the lives they led, lives no better or worse than others he had dealt with. And he was cynical of change in a way most intelligent people tend to be. That is, he was not cynical of change so much as cynical of those who would in fashion conscience alone commit themselves to it.

Lyle Henderson had a story to tell, perhaps about this very thing, and was hoping Terrieux would listen. This was not an unusual request from the men that Terrieux knew, but was unusual for a boy of Lyle's age and demeanour. The demeanour was something seen only in youth, a kind of hopefulness in spite of it all. In spite of the blast of misfortune that would crumble lives into powder. It seemed as if Lyle understood this, without benefit of much in his life. Perhaps while standing here in the doorway of the Empire Hotel he understood how much the man he was talking to had himself suffered. Perhaps they were reflections of each other, in youth and middle age, a mirror into the past and future of rural men caught in the world's great new web. (1-2)

Richards's own views of the region come through in Terrieux's recognition that these people lead lives that are no better or worse than anyone else's. Also, Richards's position as a regional writer has made him, like Terrieux, a buffer between these "out of fashion" men and those who wish to change them. Like Terrieux, Richards is one of these individuals, since he has often made reference to his own "rural consciousness." Most importantly, Terrieux's position in relation to change, which places him between the progressive urban consciousness and the conservative rural sphere, bears liking to Richards's own position as one who is, as Armstrong and Wyile suggest, "out of step with prevailing social thought and literary taste" (np), but still a part of this same literary world. The reference to "those who would in fashion conscience alone commit

themselves to [change]” alludes to the type of person represented by *Wounded’s* Vera Pillar, who was obviously an object of Richards’s own scorn. Perhaps Terrieux’s sense of having been “betrayed in a way by Canada” is a reference to Richards’s position as a misunderstood writer in Canadian literature. Keeping in mind these similarities between Richards and Terrieux, we see that the further connection the frame narrator makes between Lyle and Terrieux, as “reflections of each other, in youth and middle age, a mirror into the past and future of rural men caught in the world’s great new web,” affirms the close relationship between Richards and these two characters. Indeed, they are parts of the same whole.

The connections between Richards and Lyle are especially important to my argument, since they outline how the brand of political regionalism Richards voices in interviews and essays pervades the whole of the text. The main body of the novel consists of Lyle’s first-person recounting of his “blast[s] of misfortune” to Terrieux. Any use of the first person narrative style raises questions as to the narrator’s relationship with the author, and here I argue that the gap between Richards and Lyle is narrow. Richards, in an interview with Chapters.ca, when asked to name the fictional characters to which he relates, answered, “I suppose I identify with Lyle from *Mercy Among the Children*” (“Off the Cuff With David Adams Richards”). It is not surprising to find Lyle displaying a brand of relational regionalism similar to that which Richards has exhibited in earlier interviews and essays. For example, Lyle shows his awareness of Canada’s relationship with the United States:

...video games, cable, and satellite dishes brought the world to our door – the great empire to our south. We drove American cars, played American music, dressed in American clothes, danced American dances under the

glitter globes, and yet there was a glass partition that kept us on the far side of the American experience. (160)

Here we find a tone similar to that in Richards's description of what Canada means to him, as quoted in the previous chapter. Furthermore, recalling Margaret Atwood's description of a colony as "a place from which a profit is made, but *not by the people who live there*" (36), such statements by Richards's narrator take on a postcolonial flavor. It appears that Lyle laments how the people of his region have lost their former fire and brilliance to the influences of American culture. In fact, the tone in this passage is similar to George Grant's fear of American influence in *Lament for a Nation*.

In a more politically regionalist passage, Richards describes the relationship between the progressive "national consciousness" and the people of his region:

Once or twice in their lives people from Mathew's background would have a moment where they would prick the national consciousness; they would be interviewed and condescended to, with such gaiety of dismissal it wasn't even registered by our more educated countrymen. Overall, men like Mathew were laughed at, ridiculed or feared most of their lives. If there was bigotry against First Nations they were accused of it (even though he had worked with First Nations men and women far more than those professors or writers who would accuse him). If there was intolerance they were accused, even though he had worked on roads and shared his bread with black men from Africville. Chauvinism they were accused of, even though he thought of Cynthia as his superior. (95)

The division between the national consciousness and the people of the Miramichi exemplifies a politically regionalist stance. In the above passage, Richards attacks academia as well as the media for their perpetuation of regional stereotypes. We find Richards making a similar attack on the media in the scene in which Lyle's grandfather is blamed for a riot he did not intend to cause:

All of this was documented by a local reporter. A picture was taken that day long ago. Unfortunately, standing on the hulking ruin of smouldering machinery, a half-crazed drunken smile on his face, was my grandfather. It made the front pages of the provincial papers. He had not exactly done what my father had advised him to do. In fact he looked like a vigilante from the deep south stomping the ruins of innocence. It was how *they* wanted him to look. (16, italics Richards's)

Richards's emphasis on the word "*they*" reinforces a relational form of commentary by which the powerless people of the region are victimized by the dominating press. Considering the above passages, we see that both the frame narrator and the character/narrator, Lyle Henderson, prove to be much more politically conscious and opinionated than any of Richards's earlier narrators. In fact, these two voices are very similar in their views. We have seen the frame narrator refer to the British treatment of the Irish by saying that the British "pissed in their face" (3). Later, Lyle's anger brings about similar statements – at one point he calls men in general "gutless pukes" (112). While this statement from Lyle does not carry regionalist sentiment, it shows that the tones of both narrators are similar. Richards's statement that he relates to Lyle seems to indicate that he is very closely connected to both the narrators of *Mercy*, most noticeably because, as we will see, they share a similar form of regionalism.

Thus far, I have demonstrated how the regionalism in *Mercy* is of a relational/political nature. In the previous chapters, I have outlined how the shift from confederal to relational regionalism directly aligns with the movement from subjectivity to objectivity as well as the shift from universal subject matter to specific issues. In reference to *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998), Janet MacNaughton

notes that Richards's later fiction continues these trends. She explains how Richards adopts "a storyteller's voice, telling readers not only what happened, but everything they should know about the characters" (41). She goes on to say that Richards's "flat narrative style jars at first, but it does throw characters into high relief, allowing Richards to explore moral issues in a stark way few modern authors would dare" (41). In saying this, MacNaughton identifies Richards's objectivity as being directly connected to his morality. I agree with this connection, but go further and argue that Richards's objectivity is also directly related to the political commentary of his novels. In *Mercy*, we find that a convoluted plot has essentially replaced Richards's earlier focus on the psychology of his characters. At first, the plot appears to revolve around the concepts of fate and tragedy; however, upon closer analysis, one sees that Richards's representation of fate or tragedy contains a moral criticism of the sociopolitical system of which Richards's characters are a part.

My argument is directed in response to critic John Bemrose, who, in two reviews of Richards's fiction, repeatedly uses the terms "fate," "doom" and "tragedy" to describe Richards's works:

Very few try – as Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner once did – to evoke the poetry and pathos of a doomed soul's descent. Irony, black humor, psychological realism and a dozen other approaches are much more in favor. Yet at least one Canadian writer has kept a connection to the tragic tradition. ("Harmed and Dangerous" np)

Critics and reviewers have constantly drawn comparisons between Richards and Hardy. In response to Bemrose's use of the phrase "the tragic tradition," it is worth mentioning that recent studies in Hardy's fiction have turned away from readings of

his novels in terms of tragedy. For example, Peter Widdowson, in *On Thomas Hardy* (1998), suggests that the discourses of tragedy and fate in Hardy's novels ultimately point to a form of social satire:

...while the satire of Hardy's fiction may be articulated by 'absurd' instances of chance, coincidence and contingency, these are not its cause; rather, they are the telling representation of an ideological artifice which ruins human lives from behind a screen 'realistically' depicting the unjust and predatory current social order as natural, inevitable and sanctified. (176)

I argue that the same can be said for *Mercy*, since much of this novel revolves around instances of chance, coincidence and contingency.¹ For example, the "tragedy" of the novel can be traced back to the episode in which it happens, by chance, that Lyle's grandfather, Roy Henderson, is caught jigging salmon. It is notable that this original act was committed to impress American businessmen. Furthermore, this episode of coincidence involves wardens, who represent a social institution. In this scene, as is infallibly the case, these representatives of a social institution do more harm than good. Furthermore, we see that the tragic vein of the novel is actually based upon Richards's moral critique of such institutions. In "The People on the Roadway" (1994), Sheldon Currie also suggests that social criticism is an important aspect of Richards's novels. Currie generalizes about the experience of Richards's characters, describing them as

people whose visions, through no fault of their own, are restricted by firm horizons, people who are intelligent and talented, but who realize too late, if at all, that somewhere in the past, because of a lack of opportunity, or a deficient gene, or because of bad luck or bad management by themselves or *by someone else*, they missed a grade, or a beat, or an experience, or a fundamental bit of advice at the

opportune moment, and what they missed was seminal; they missed getting to the part of the river of their lives that opens out into the ocean, and they are doomed until the grave, or some serendipitous luck, to an upriver existence. (68, italics added)

Richards's novels most often address the notion of bad management by "someone else." In my discussion of *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*, I identified social institutions as being guilty of mismanaging the protagonists of these novels. The same can be said for *Mercy* – we have seen that the legal system is a social institution that falls short of justice, and pales by comparison to Sydney's simple sense of morality. In this novel, however, we find that most often the "someone else" at whom Richards directs his moral commentary is clearly representative of an outside, often political, progressive influence. This is where common ground exists between Richards's political regionalism and his morality. In *Wounded*, the moral division between spontaneous and determined action is aligned with Richards's own more relational distinction between rural and urban consciousnesses. By the same token, *Mercy* contains both a general, moral commentary and a political commentary that stems from it. The remainder of this chapter is organized in terms of this division.

I now turn to provide an examination of nature, family, and social institutions, to demonstrate how *Mercy*'s morality serves as the basis for a specific political brand of regionalism. It will also be seen that Richards appears to hide the moral didacticism of the novel beneath the disguise of fate. On a simple, moral level, we see that the Hendersons' connection to nature appears to foster their positive family values. Such a brand of positive, natural morality is most apparent in Elly Henderson, one of the most unambiguously good characters in the novel:

“I will name one of my children Autumn,” Mother said, “for the wind has informed me I will have a daughter.”

...Diedre told my mother she could have a job in Fredericton far away from Sydney Henderson and my mother should count herself lucky. My mother did try to feel lucky, but could not. The road, the little leaves on the trees – all of this, the dusty quality of the clouds, all these *miracles* she would miss if she went away. (31-2)

This character’s positive family values appear to stem from her close connection to the nature in which she has grown. Elly’s daughter, Autumn, is also connected to nature, not merely by name. Autumn’s albino complexion represents her purity. In Lyle’s narrative, this natural whiteness is compared to the appearance of Penny Porier, who comes from a more prosperous family down the road:

Penny Porier was a little older than I was. Dressed in a white rabbit coat, with a white fur hat and muff and white leotards, she entered my life smelling of peppermint and tied up with a Christmas bow one December afternoon when I was eight or nine; to me the embodiment of perfection. (46)

Penny’s peppermint smell, her bow, and her fur clothing make her representative of a commercial Christmas. To a young Lyle, she is “the embodiment of perfection”; however, we will see that the superficiality of Penny’s store-bought whiteness is apparent when it is compared to the natural beauty of Autumn.

The naturalness of the Henderson family does not improve their condition in the society of which they are a part. Richards continually represents their poverty by describing in detail such things as the house in which they live, and Lyle’s hand-me-down clothes. Despite the Hendersons’ obvious poverty, when we compare the Henderson family to the Votour family down the road, we see that the Hendersons’

connection to nature saves them from the “poverty of spirit” (48) from which the Voteurs suffer. This poverty of spirit is related to the Votour children’s submission to popular culture:

[Darren Votour] kept to himself in a small attic room upstairs, listened to heavy rock music, grew his fingernails and hair long. He passed us by with a brooding look; his room was filled with posters of the band Megadeth. I realized that out of those airwaves of information that always tell the poor who they should be, he had chosen strange examples.

Cheryl had had a baby when she was fourteen she called Moo Moo. She had the same dreams of any girl her age from California, New York, or Toronto – she dreamed of being a model, of being like Madonna or Cyndi Lauper. She had her ears and nose pierced and read novels like *Love’s Light Anew*, *The Weekend Romance*, *The Tall Dark Stranger*, *Love Island*. They filled the small crooked bookshelf in the living room of the dank drab house. (218)

The Votour children have become poor of spirit in the same way as the original Irish settlers in the region – who were once “fiery, rough, and not without brilliance” (3) – and are now essentially colonized by the “vigorous and more certain empire to the south” (4). It can be said that the spirit to which Lyle’s family clings comes from their strong connection to nature, as opposed to the Voteurs’ connection to popular culture. Once more, Richards offers nature as the favorable alternative to culture. This use of nature, then, is important to both the morality and regionalism of *Mercy*, since Richards establishes the natural world of this region as a source for positive moral values. The above passage also contrasts this region with the American culture that enters into it. Thus, we see that even Richards’s comparison of two families within the region takes on an element of political regionalism.

Directly connected to the positive family morality that grows from the Hendersons' connection to nature is a form of natural faith to which Sydney and Elly hold fast:

For as Sydney told [Elly], no one owned the ice, or the sunlight spiraling down into it, or any other sunlight, nor crisp autumn days, and no one had authority over her enjoyment of the world. That was given to her by something – *someone* else. He told her that when he was a boy he had become convinced that nothing man did or said mattered *until* this was understood. (76)

As Lyle tells us, Sydney constantly displays a firm belief in a higher, moral form of justice. This belief comes to him after a childhood incident, in which he accidentally pushes another young boy, Connie Devlin, from the roof of the local church. Fearing the boy to be dead, Sydney makes a pact with God:

... he whispered that if the boy lived he would never raise his hand or his voice to another soul, that he would attend church every day. *Every damn day.* What is astounding is, as soon as he made this horrible pact, the boy stood up, wiped his face, laughed at him, and walked away. ...

What my father believed from the time his own father died was this: whatever pact you make with God, God *will* honour. You may not think He does, but then do you really know the pact you have actually made? Understand the pact you have made, and you will understand how God honours it. (22)

Sydney and Elly Henderson are connected to positive morality through their strong connection to nature, and a natural form of faith. Richards, in an interview with Sandra Martin, takes a similar stance on justice and morality. He explains that he himself has a belief in a higher form of justice: “in the end there is ... but it is a long time coming” (np). Such a statement carries with it the belief in the notion of

“blessed are the meek.” This is the sort of belief by which Sydney and Elly teach their family to live.

By looking at three scenes in the novel, I will demonstrate how Richards’s presentation of Sydney’s morality and faith makes it possible for the reader to see how the novel’s elements of fate are part of a moral criticism of society. In the first of these scenes, Constable Morris mocks Sydney Henderson’s philosophic nature, and challenges him to quote a line of poetry:

“...one damn line of any poem from anywhere at any moment that was ever written. Come now – you must know one – do you know one?”

“As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport,” Sydney said, staring almost in shame at the constable. (119)

I made reference to this quotation in my discussion of *Blood Ties*, to demonstrate how Orville’s ordeal in the fields at night made him feel momentarily that he was the victim of a malevolent God. Sydney, however, never loses his faith. Knowing that Sydney has faith in God’s justice, we should read his statement as a moral criticism of the social world in which he lives – not of his god. Richards clarifies this point in a second scene, when the clash between Morris and Sydney resurfaces:

Constable Morris spoke about how callous my father was when he came to the police station, and how Elly seemed to be mesmerized by him when he quoted a poem that, as Morris said, didn’t even *rhyme*. The courthouse crowd was amused, and giggled and turned their eyes on Sydney. (129)

Here, Richards obviously satirizes the police officer and the people in the courthouse, and so Sydney’s quotation becomes a clear statement of social commentary – not of

tragedy. In a third scene involving Lyle's young brother, Percy, one sees how a moral commentary lies beneath the novel's tragic tone:

Moths gathered under the streetlights in town and fell to the raining pools, bathing their powder in water. Percy picked one up, dried it with a touch, and released it into the night.

"There are millions of moths, Percy," I said scornfully as I watched it flutter in its zigzagged bafflement a few feet away.

"It doesn't know that, Lyle," Percy said, taking my hand to cross the highway. (288)

This passage expresses the idea that children are not naturally cruel, but merciful and good. Richards appears to suggest that society and, more specifically, social institutions, take away the innocence and natural goodness that exist in children. We have seen hints of this suggestion throughout *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*, most notably through the characters of Orville and Andrew, but here Richards demonstrates his point much more clearly.

We have seen that Sydney's knowledge of literature is a cause for other characters to ridicule him. The Hendersons' bookshelf takes a prominent place in their household; in fact, the acts of reading and writing are associated with the Henderson family in such a way that books referred to within the novel become a source of moral commentary. For example, in an act of kindness, Jay Beard, the Good Samaritan across the road, sells Sydney his first books for a paltry sum of money. These books are the catalyst in Sydney's decision to give up alcohol, and they also teach him a positive sense of morality:

"...you know what I have found out in books?" He smiled. ...

"I will say this once, and not to demean all the good they have tried to do for you. But I have found out, even before the death of my father,

that no one can do an injury to you without doing an injury to themselves.” The wind and rain battered the eaves of the shoebox-shaped house, as if to mock him. ...

“Those who scorn you taunt only themselves – I knew this without reading one word; because in reading one is reminded of the truth man is given at birth – by man I mean man and woman. My father never had to read a book to feel ashamed after he hit my mother or me.” (34-5)

The sense of morality Sydney describes in this passage is reminiscent of the morality in *Blood Ties* and *Wounded*, since Richards suggests, once more, that as children grow older, they are stripped of “the truth man is given at birth.” The title, *Mercy Among the Children*, is therefore thematic of the novel, since Richards idealizes the innocence and the simplicity of childhood, as we saw in the scene involving Percy and the moth.

In another example of the morality associated with literature, we find Lyle describing the aftermath of a meeting between Sydney Henderson and Dr. David Scone. In this scene, the reader is asked to take part in a moral assessment of Sydney, Lyle, and Professor Scone:

...[Sydney] felt that [Dr. Scone] had condescended to him. What surprised him was the fact that an educated man would *ever* do this. He had been innocent enough to assume that the educated had excised all prejudice from themselves and would never delight in injury to others – that is, he believed that they had easily attained the goal he himself was struggling toward. He did not know that this goal – which he considered the one truthful goal man should strive toward – was not even considered a goal by others, educated or not.

He had by that evening discovered his gross miscalculation. He was angry and decided to write a letter, and sat down in the kitchen and started to write to this professor, in pencil on an old lined sheet. But when the words came he realized a crime had taken place. (This is how he later described it to my mother.) The crime was that he had set out in a letter to injure someone else. He was ashamed of himself for this and burned the letter in the stove, sank on his bed with

his face to the wall. Later I came to hate that he did not send it, but it was noble. (20-21)

Sydney, like Jerry Bines in *Wounded*, is praised for his innocence and naiveté. In a later scene, Lyle explains, “My father did not understand what the courts did. Not in *that* way. (I use his gullibility to explain his greatness)” (41). Sydney feels that it is a crime for him to write the letter in response to Scone’s condescension, since this action marks his attempt to injure someone else. It is significant that Sydney’s would-be “crime” against Scone is an act of writing. Lyle’s stance on his father’s decision – “I came to hate that he did not send it, but it was noble” – points to Richards’s position as the author of the novel. Arguably, Richards is guilty of determined action, especially since his writing is a premeditated attack on the sort of people David Scone represents. Because of this, it is paradoxical that Richards would preach against determined action. The fact that *Mercy* shows such blatant moral criticism once again reflects Richard’s own assertion that he has “things to say” and is not afraid to say them, despite the paradoxical position in which he places himself when writing such novels. Just as Lyle hates his father’s noble actions, the very fact that Richards writes the moral and regionalist novels he does tells us that Richards feels that the David Scones of the world deserve the sort of responses he makes in his later work.

In *Mercy*, as in *Wounded*, the reader’s passing of moral judgment involves comparisons between characters. Such is especially the case with Lyle’s family, as Richards sets up deliberate comparisons between the Hendersons and the other families of the novel. These comparisons generally use the shortcomings of other

families to highlight the positive morality of the Henderson family. One of these other families is that of Mathew and Cynthia Pit. In one sense, the Pits and the Hendersons are united by their common alienation: “Across Arron Brook and beyond the dark spruce trees, on that day, as on all days, sat the Pit residence. The Pits’ and my father’s houses were the only two on this entire stretch” (33). The most notable point of contrast between the two families is that the Pit family does not possess the sort of morality that Sydney advocates to his family. For example, the various descriptions of Cynthia Pit portray her as opportunistic and manipulative:

She had been in trouble many times (once for biting a bride’s ear), and already her face had a chameleon-like changeability seen in those who have studied social opportunity more than they have studied themselves – a beautiful face, no doubt, wanton at times, at times hilarious, but always resolute, fixed on purposes beyond her present state, which was rural poor. (27)

Richards portrays Cynthia’s study of social opportunity as a moral defect, and he appears to criticize her for attempting to reach beyond her rural condition. This passage characterizes Cynthia in terms of determined action. In a similar passage, Richards goes further to attach a relationally regionalist message to this moral shortcoming:

Cynthia had been envious of the rich and powerful she saw as a child. Politicians and mavericks from all walks of life, some who owned cottages along the bay shore. Families from places like Montreal and Oshawa, Ottawa and Toronto. People so adept at dismissing these wide-eyed children in those small fishing houses. She wanted more than anything to be like them. (98)

According to Lyle, “There is no worse flaw in a man’s character than that of wanting to belong” (88). The above passages demonstrate that Cynthia is flawed in this way. More importantly, we see that Richards goes as far as to name cultural and political centers of society in his description of Cynthia’s desire to fit in. Thus, Richards not only offers the moral criticism of Cynthia’s envy, he also offers a regionalist criticism of the center. The above passage suggests that, although the region does not offer Cynthia the opportunity to improve her social condition, the wealth and power associated with cultural and political centers appear to bring about a loss of one’s humanity – such powerful people dismiss those who live in “those small fishing houses.”

Hitherto, I have explained how the Hendersons’ connection to nature has fostered their positive moral values, and I have demonstrated how families that align themselves with cultural centers possess what Richards calls “poverty of spirit.” Such a division between families indicates a simple moral division between natural and artificial; however, Richards’s moral approach in *Mercy* becomes much more complex when Lyle rebels against his father’s morals. At one point in the novel, Sydney is forced to leave the household to pay off his family’s debt by working in a logging camp:

[Sydney Henderson] was now penalized for not filing his income taxes during a three- or four-year period. It was done, as all things are done today, by computer from Ottawa. The local tax department had not even handled the case. (196).

This passage displays a great deal of regionalist sentiment for its suggestion that, just as Canada is separated from the United States, this region is alienated from central

Canada by government bureaucracy. More importantly, Sydney's absence carries a great deal of moral significance because, at this time, Lyle takes over as the head of the household. By this point in the novel, Lyle is disgusted with his father's sense of morality and his blind faith, and so he turns to Leo McVicer, the shrewd, self-made businessman. McVicer is everything Lyle's father is not. For example, Sydney has vowed never to injure another human being, while McVicer once made a living as a boxer. In contrast to Sydney's patient, meek sense of morality, we find the following advice from Leo McVicer:

“...Already you have to protect this girl here – this Autumn – and as she gets older the more you will have to – I know it won't be easy for you – life is never easy for McVicers or Hendersons. It wasn't meant to be easy – but grab life by the throat like a scrapping dog – and when it throws you on your back never hesitate to fight dirty, because it won't fight clean with you.” (59)

In his father's absence, Lyle does “fight dirty” – in response to those who have wronged his family, he turns to fighting, theft, and arson. He also begins to drink heavily and he becomes involved with drugs. In much the same way as Lyle wished that his father had sent the letter to David Scone, the reader is made to question the “rightness” of Lyle's active quests for retribution when compared to his father's humble passivity. This moral dilemma is a central aspect of *Mercy*. According to Richards, this debate is never settled:

You're left with this ambivalence as to who was morally right – his father or him. They're both morally right. I mean, hopefully people will ask these questions because that's why I wrote the book. I don't think I have any one answer. (qtd. in Randolph 104)

Here, Richards indicates that his purpose for writing *Mercy* is to engage the reader in a moral debate.

In *Wounded* we saw that Richards left a great deal of ambiguity as to the true nature of Jerry Bines, and that this ambiguity allowed the reader to play an active role in passing moral judgment upon the characters of the novel. The same can be said about *Mercy* since the reader is left with no sure answer as to whether Lyle's or Sydney's morality is the best way to live in their society. I argue that the reader, unable to place blame on Sydney or Lyle for the disintegration of their family, should instead place blame upon the novel's society. In fact, this censure of society appears to be a central aspect of the morality of the novel. Richards's political commentary is based upon this morality, since, by condemning political centers for their treatment of individuals within the region, both Richards and the reader take part in a political brand of regionalism. For example, the following moral statement by Sydney Henderson has a regionalist temperament, and it criticizes a large portion of society:

“The problem today is between two groups of people ...One group believes the world must change – and David Scone and Diedre might wish to *use* you to prove it. There is a second group, the group that you and I belong to. The group that says that in a man's heart is the only truth that matters. You cannot change a constant by changing how rules might be applied to this constant. Someday Diedre will see you are closer to the truth than she is, but it will be a long struggle.”
(35-6)

I have repeatedly stated that I do not wish to oversimplify Richards's novels by employing such a binary system of classification; however, it appears that, in this case, Richards calls for such a reading. It would be reductive to attempt to slot the novel's characters into categories of progressive vs. humanist; however, I argue that

the division Sydney describes directly aligns with the distinctions between spontaneous and determined action, urban and rural, and even center and margin. Furthermore, Sydney's division between "two groups of people" goes beyond relational, to take on political connotations. Deidre Whyne and David Scone, members of the second group, are representatives of social institutions, namely, academia and government agencies. We see, then, that Sydney's moral division between these two groups of people carries with it traces of politically regionalist commentary, as he outlines a form of "us vs. them" relationship between himself and the government.

Thus far, I have outlined how the institution of the family – specifically the Henderson family – is the source of positive moral values. I would now like to examine more closely Richards's presentation of social institutions to demonstrate two points: firstly, and on the most general level, Richards presents social institutions as immoral bodies. Secondly, on a more specific level, Richards exhibits a form of political regionalism by simultaneously aligning these institutions with a cultural or political center and by exposing the way these institutions lack the moral values associated with the more natural, traditional way of life in the Richards's region.

To begin with the institution of the Church, we see that the Catholic Church is satirized as a source of determined action and falseness. Lyle describes the Church's superficiality and irrelevance to his life by contrasting it with the nature of which he is a part:

In November the lights shone after seven o'clock on the stained glass windows. The windows show the crucifixion or one of the saints praying. The hills where those saints lived and dropped their blood

look soft, distant and blue; the roads wind like purple ribbons toward the Mount of Olives. It is so different from *real* nature with its roaring waters over valleys of harsh timber where I tore an inch and a half of skin from my calves. Or Miramichi bogs of cedar and tamarack and the pungent smell of wet moosehide as the wounded moose still bellows in dark wood. I often wanted to enter the world of the stained glass to find myself walking along the purple road, with the Mount of Olives behind me. I suppose because I wanted too to escape the obligation I had toward my own destiny, my family, my sister and brother who were more real to me than a herd of saints. (11)

Lyle's favoring of his siblings' realness over the Christian saints is similar to the scene in *Blood Ties* in which Maufat shows his allegiance to his family over the Prime Minister, who appears to have little relevance to Maufat's life. In fact, Richards's representation of the Church in *Mercy* has much in common with his treatment of this institution in *Blood Ties*. For example, the "white liver-spotted hands" (123) of the priest in *Mercy* recall the yellow skin of *Blood Ties*'s Father Lacey. Also, just as the first word in *Blood Ties* is "Mass" (5) the first lines of Lyle's narrative are:

The small Catholic churches here are all the same, white clapboard drenched with snow or blistering under a northern sun, their interiors smelling of confessionals and pale statues of the Madonna. Our mother, Elly Henderson, took us to them all along our tract of road – thinking solace would come. (11)

Elly's strong faith is set in contrast to the unsightly local churches in much the same way as Irene's goodness was set in contrast to Father Lacey's hypocrisy.

In *Blood Ties*, Richards presents the Church as an ineffectual institution. Similarly, in *Mercy*, we see that the Church is now being used toward superficial, social ends, as opposed to spiritual purposes:

The Pits were usually in attendance at mass, for Alvina insisted that Mathew take her so she could be seen receiving the Blessed Sacrament. It gave Mathew a certain grace, as a worldly, hard-bitten man who had had his share of difficulty now humble enough to be seen attending to his mother and to Christ Jesus. And for Cynthia as well, long considered a seducer of young men, to be seated in the pew with black skirt and gloves. (125)

In another scene, Lyle steals the chalice from his local church, and the question is raised as to the chalice's connection to God:

What happened to my soul because I stole the chalice? It began to shrink. Not because of the saints whose memories it housed in its circular hole, or not from any threat from the heavens. But because the Sheppards over time, a time when I was paralyzed about how to react, found out I had it.... I felt I had to ask *their* forgiveness. (225-6)

Lyle is not afraid of any "threat from the heavens" both because he (at this time) does not believe in God, and because his father has told him, "'Son, a priest is not the Church, and the Church is not the faith'" (103). Indeed, the priest and the Church are part of the same system of social institutions that Richards has scorned throughout his career:

...one day there was a falling-out, an "incident," and Father Porier's Pontiac never again came down the lane to deliver him home, nor did Father ever again trudge off to the rectory to clean the priest's boots. Nor did he know that his own father would take the priest's side and beat him one Sunday in front of most of the parishioners on the church steps. This became Father's first disobedience, not against anything but the structure of things. I have come to learn, however, that this is not at all a common disobedience. (12)

The "falling-out" to which the above passage refers is the priest's sexual molestation of Sydney Henderson and another boy, Connie Devlin. We see, then, that the

immorality of the priest shows his distance from the pure faith onto which Elly and Sydney cling.

At the end of the novel, through the character of Cynthia Pit, the distance between Church and faith is once more made clear. Cynthia experiences a religious epiphany, which comes to her from Vicka, a truly Christian figure, who is not a representative of the Church:

Cynthia looked at this young woman and went numb. It was a rather blunt and rural face, not unpretty, but far from sophisticated; she was dressed extremely plainly, and wore no makeup. Still never had Cynthia seen such a face – it was filled with joy. (357)

It is notable that this episode does not take place in the local church, but in the town's civic center. One gets the sense that Richards would not allow such an uplifting moment to take place in a church. Vicka represents all that Richards praises. She is not "sophisticated" (the word is related to the concepts of "trendy," "urbane," and "chic," which Richards scorns), she is dressed plainly, and she wears no makeup. Most importantly, she is a child – a *rural* child. She is the epitome of naturalness and pure religious faith: everything that, according to Richards, the Church is not.

Hitherto, we have seen how the Church relates to Richards's sense of morality. Upon closer examination, we find that Richards's representation of the Church is also directly connected to the political regionalism of *Mercy*. In the above passage, the word "rural" brings to mind Richards's relational division between the region's rural consciousness and the urban influences it encounters. Richards's presentation of the Church also goes further to take on a political temperament as he

aligns this social institution with external social institutions, such as the government and the media:

My father then spoke, softly, as if to himself. I was sitting near him, and saw his hands tremble as he talked. He said he had no knowledge of why he was abused as a boy, why he was born in such poverty, why he had faced what he had, when others who wrote for the paper and became members of the Legislature had never seen a day like he.

“But remember,” he said aloud, “we still have our faith in God that everything will turn out.” (103)

This passage connects the Church with the media and government institutions, which Richards presents as being ignorant of the region. We find, then, that the region’s nature, which fosters pure faith in Elly and Sydney, is directly opposed to external forces, such as the government and the media. Such a contrast is a prime example of how, in *Mercy*, Richards connects a relational/political form of regionalism even to such institutions as the Catholic Church.

Perhaps the most obviously satirized institution in *Mercy* is academia. By focusing upon this institution as I did the Church, I will show how Richards’s sense of moral values is the basis for his political commentary. Perhaps a good summation of Richards’s views on academia comes as Leo McVicer explains to Lyle, “Now I’m no Prof. David Scone or any of his ilk – *they who teach and don’t know* – I don’t care for learning – but I care for knowledge” (200). Richards himself is very well read, though he did not complete his undergraduate degree from the University of New Brunswick, and so he embodies the notion that one can be knowledgeable without being learned. *Mercy* demonstrates Richards’s extensive literary knowledge, since both Lyle and Sydney are very well read – we find countless references to such

writers as Flannery O'Connor, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Plato, Dante, Milton, Kant, Yeats, Marcus Aurelius, Brontë, Hardy, Fitzgerald, Camus, Hemingway, Dickens, and Arnold.ⁱⁱ Richards's establishment of Sydney, Autumn, and Lyle as being well read is perhaps a response to critics who claim that Richards writes about illiterate people. In interviews, he has voiced similar reactions: "But who are these critics to say that I write about illiterate, poor, and unhappy people? Few of my characters are illiterate – not that I think illiteracy would be an entirely unhappy circumstance" (qtd. in Vaughn np). Just as with Richards's discussion of the Church, his presentation of academia contains both moral implications and a political commentary that appears to stem from this sense of morality. In fact, academia is linked to the Church in *Mercy* – we learn that the head of the English department at the local University is "a rather rotund priest with thick downy cheeks and a bald spot on the top of his head" (20). We see these two forms of commentary best when examining Richards's satirical presentation of Professor David Scone:

Scone smiled, with a degree of naïve self-infatuation seen only in those with an academic education, shook his head at the silliness of academia, while knowing that his tenure was secure and every thought he had ever had was manifested as safe by someone else before him. My father never had such a luxury. There was a time my father would have been beaten by his own father if it was known that he read. Knowing this, tell me the courage of Dr. David Scone. (20)

This passage – in particular the final line – does not attempt to conceal its call for the passing of moral judgment upon this character. Some reviewers, such as John Bemrose, criticize Richards for the occasions upon which his criticism becomes blatant:

The novel [*Hope in the Desperate Hour*] has its flaws. The figure of Christopher Wheem, an academic and failed writer, is burdened with too many of Richards's pet dislikes (academia, fashions in literature) and sinks into caricature. Also, by treating such a wide variety of characters, the book never achieves the concentrated focus of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*. Yet by the time it climaxes in a tragic fire, *Hope in the Desperate Hour* has spun a beguiling tale. ("Beautiful Losers" np)

Bemrose criticizes Richards for exhibiting too many of his "pet dislikes," yet he simultaneously praises him for spinning "a beguiling tale." Thus, we see that Bemrose's reading of *Hope in the Desperate Hour* once more demonstrates the line Richards must walk, as a moralist and a politically conscious regionalist who writes for a popular audience.

Lyle's description of David Scone adds a sense of regionalism to the moral element of Richards's treatment of academia.

The professor, David Scone, a man who had gone to the University of Toronto, disliked the Maritimes while believing he knew of its difficulties and great diversity. Looking at my father sitting in his old bib overalls and heavy woolen shirt proved what he felt. And he commented that it might be better for Dad to find a trade. This was not at all contradictory to Dr. Scone's sense of himself as a champion of people just like Father. In fact, being a champion of them meant, in his mind, he knew them well enough to judge them. (19-20)

Here, Richards appears to be responding to the popular conception of regional writers. In doing so, Richards's criticism of academia goes beyond the idea that universities foster determined action and progress for the sake of progress. He points to the University of Toronto, a cultural and canonical center, showing how people from the center of Canada have prejudices against the Maritime region. This echoes

comments from a speech Richards delivered at the 6th International Literature of Region and Nation Conference:

As regional writers, we are supposedly limited not by the bounds of our human understanding, or human experience, but by the bounds of our garden or gate. However, this same discrepancy does not seem to apply to those who never move much beyond the confines of Yonge and Bloor, or Piccadilly Circus.

“Yes—he or she has gotten this just right,” they will exclaim, of our part of the world, at the same time maintaining, that they themselves have had little contact with it, or not much to do with it themselves. Heaven forbid. The one thing I have noticed almost constantly is the critics who applaud my work, will hesitate to embrace it as having much to do with them. (75)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how *Wounded* shows responses to criticism Richards has received. The same can be said for *Mercy*, since it appears, in the above passage, that Richards is attacking those critics who have oversimplified his work by giving him the label “regional.” Here, his response to such criticism draws him further into regionalist discourse in a relational fashion, as he compares writers from his region with those of more central locations: Toronto and London. Considering Richards’s disdain for those who claim to understand the region without having any personal connection to it, Lyle’s description of Highway 11 as “a highway only Maritimers could know” (11) becomes loaded with regionalist sentiment. Although such statements appear to defend a marginal region against a national or cultural center, Richards insists that he does not mount regionalist defenses on the part of his region. He explains, “There are all kinds of spokespeople in the writing community here. But I’m not one of them. My work only pertains to itself” (qtd. in Vaughn np). Despite such statements made by Richards, I argue that it is difficult for a writer to

Richards, I argue that it is difficult for a writer to discuss a particular setting without commenting upon it. Richards's novels associate this rural region with positive moral values, and by using these same novels to respond to critics of his works, Richards inevitably becomes a spokesperson. He is not, however, *primarily* a regionalist spokesperson. Sadly, many critics and reviewers have identified Richards as just that, and in doing so, they have overlooked the complexities of his novels. Very little, if any, critical writing has been published on *Mercy* to date, and so it will be interesting to see if critics will treat this novel as they have treated his earlier texts.

Conclusion

Each of my novels in certain ways, answers the problem I have witnessed since a child. That the individual is everything or the world is nothing... my work is not about the outside *them*; it is about all of *us*, and that the work and the struggles of my characters will in the end be at least somewhat vindicated. At any rate I can stand here without blushing, I have given my life to it. (Richards, "My Miramichi Trilogy" 83-4)

In each of the three texts I have examined, Richards's conception of moral values is anchored in families defined by their closeness to nature. The major development I have outlined between Richards's early work and his later two novels is based on the changing relationship between this morality and the concept of region. Richards's combination of morality and regionalism should have forged for him a unique place in Canadian literature; however, scholars and critics have often been too quick to categorize, and thereby oversimplify, his works.

In his early work, Richards's moral standpoint is outlined from within a single region, and so the regional framework for this morality is of a confederal nature. In *Blood Ties*, Richards uses his region in an apolitical manner to discuss such universal concerns as growing old, fitting in, and finding love. In this novel, Richards defines his own moral standpoint by placing the ties of the MacDurmot family in opposition to the determined action characterized by social institutions within the region. As his career progresses, Richards uses this same region in relational, political, even postcolonial terms, as he satirizes specific political and cultural centers such as Toronto, Ottawa, and the United States. My discussion of

Wounded and Mercy has demonstrated how the same division between family and social institutions found in *Blood Ties* can be aligned to involve a relational comparison between rural and urban. In *Mercy*, we find the most extreme manifestations of this comparison, as Richards places the region in relation– and even opposition – to political and cultural centers. The region, then, functions as a context within which Richards establishes meaning for his moral standpoint. Furthermore, this moral standpoint places emphasis upon the individual’s struggle in an age in which it is difficult to find a single truth around which to center one’s existence.

In the debate over regionalism, many have raised the question as to whether the change of focus from nation to region equates to the weakening of the country as a whole. Some forms of regionalism obviously do mean the undermining of the country – that of Quebec, for example. Richards’s form of regionalism does not have this political implication. In his description of what Canada means to him, Richards states that “Canada is a kind of understated sense of justice and fair play” (“Reflections on Nationhood” np). It is this fair play that Richards appears to value in his novels, but we see that fair play is not usually associated with the nation’s political and cultural centers. Richards’s morality is more prescriptive than deconstructive, because it calls for the reinstatement of such moral values. Even in *Mercy*, when Richards’s criticism is most obviously directed toward Ottawa and the United States, his satire remains moral. Because his regionalist statements are but a part of his morality, the ultimate message of *Mercy* – Richards’s most politically regionalist novel – works on an individual, moral level. The political message is

secondary. Certainly, to dub Richards a political novelist would be even more reductive than to concur with readings made by George Byrne, William Connor, John Bemrose, and all those who have been so quick to paint Richards with the broad “regionalist” brush. Had Richards chosen Toronto as his subject matter, perhaps critics would not have overlooked the universal morality that lies beneath his texts.

In order to avoid simplifying Richards’s (and other regionalist writers’) works, Herb Wyile suggests that

It is ... necessary to retain an open conception of regionalism, to recognize the ideological and critical continuities and conflicts behind its various applications, and to revive it in a more enabling and less dismissive way as a framework within which to discuss certain textual qualities or dynamics or strategies. (np)

We have seen that regionalism, in one of its “various applications,” can be efficiently used to convey a sense of morality that goes beyond regional boundaries. My discussion of regionalism outlined how Canadian nationalists failed to achieve a sense of community among Canadians, because of the differences that exist between the geographical and cultural regions of this expansive country. We have considered Christian Riegel’s and Herb Wyile’s suggestion that the region is “a more organic alternative to the nation-state with its arbitrary borders” (x), and we have also heard from Jonathan Hart, who warns that regionalism’s attempt to outline a sense of local community is often guilty of re-inscribing stereotypes of women, blacks, and natives (115). In response to such suggestions, I argue that Richards has gone one step further to identify an even more local sense of community, based upon positive morality at the family level. National and regional loyalties may have been too

difficult for individuals to form; however, the ties between family are much more natural and universal than those found in any other institution, be it a school, a church, or a nation. It can be said that in focusing upon the particular, Richards has encountered the universal again. Even the specific, politically regionalist commentary in *Mercy* aids in the conveyance of a universal brand of morality. The anger and frustration of Lyle's narrative – whether in response to big business, the Canadian government, or the bully down the road – calls for a change at the individual level.

It is appropriate now to re-assess Roderick Haig-Brown's statement that no individual "becomes a great patriot without first learning the closer loyalties and learning them well: loyalty to the family, to the place he calls home, to his province or state or country" (qtd. in Woodcock "Time and Space" 23). Richards's sense of morality begins by favoring these "closer loyalties," since they are the easiest ties to form. Such loyalties are the building blocks of a stronger society, if only individuals can extend these ties beyond the household, to the community, the region, the nation, and beyond. This restoration of a brand of simple morality may seem like mere conservatism; however, it is possible to see that Richards has actually gone *forward*, beyond regionalism, and perhaps beyond postmodernism. In an earlier passage, I quoted from Linda Hutcheon's *The Canadian Postmodern*. On the surface, Richards's novels discuss "the different, the local, the particular" of Hutcheon's description but beneath this, we have seen a sense of morality that is universal.

Given Richards's progression from confederal to relational regionalism, and how it relates to the morality of his work, it is important to consider why such a

change in Richards's writing occurred. It appears that, as Richards matures and grows more experienced, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the impersonal, trendy methods of thought by which many individuals seem to live. For example, the anger involved in Lyle's narrative in *Mercy* indicates a great deal of dissatisfaction with the social world in which he lives. When one considers Richards's acknowledgment that he associates with Lyle, one cannot help but transfer Lyle's disenchantment to Richards himself. The disenchantment Richards exhibits, combined with his continued focus upon children in the family context, may be indicative of a desire to return to a simpler, innocent time – that of youth – in which the pressures of society are significantly less. Throughout his works, Richards shows his growing scorn for these pressures by lashing out at specific targets: academia, organized religion, government bureaucracies, big business, and the media.

In the light of Richards's recent success (*Mercy Among the Children* has been awarded the Giller Prize (2000), and has been shortlisted for several others), one is also left to ask whether the popularity of Richards's moral approach is a sign of changing literary taste, or perhaps a sign of more profound social change. Richards's popularity may be attributable to a form of social change, which, by extension, affects literary taste. We find evidence of the return to a secular brand of morality when we consider the wide success of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* collections of anecdotes, the popularity of such films and television series as *Pay it Forward* and *Touched by an Angel*, and especially in the influence of the inspirational *Oprah* on North American culture. Each of the abovementioned is a source of a similar, for the most part secular, brand of morality which helps to improve the individual in the face

of a postmodern world that might otherwise appear chaotic. Having recognized the popularity of such morality in today's literature, television, and films, and after examining the implications of such subject matter in Richards's works, I believe it would prove rewarding to keep morality in mind when (re)examining the works of other contemporary "regional" and "regionalist" artists of all media. It is possible that such artists, under the conditions of a postmodernist society, share in Richards's skepticism toward social institutions as centering agents in today's world, and are aware that the reinforcement of moral values must begin at the individual level. Perhaps a renewed focus upon morality and individualism in art would help to loosen, if not dissolve, such constricting terms as "regionalist."

Notes

¹ Hutcheon, Linda. "‘Circling the Downspout of Empire’: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism." *Ariel* 20.4 (1989): 149-75.

¹ In *The Bay of Love and Sorrows* (1998), Richards goes as far as to include a map of the region of which he writes.

¹ Richards's treatment of coincidence in this novel may also stem from his friendship with Alden Nowlan, who discusses coincidence in a similar way in "What Happened When He Went to the Store for Bread."

¹ A personal favorite literary joke in *Mercy* comes from the scene in which Richards describes the beach party Sydney Henderson attends:

"My father drank a Coke at ten that evening. By this time Cynthia, bored with his conversation to her about Matthew Arnold (who wouldn't be at a beach party), had drifted away to one of the Sheppard boys – Danny" (28).

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