NEW RIVER STRAIN:
LOCATING THE AUTHOR AND THE NARRATOR IN DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS' MIRAMICHI TRILOGY

by

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For Amy,

who helped in every way.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exposition of the discourse on regionalism in David Adams Richards' Miramichi trilogy. It examines the connection between the author's personal attachment to the rural community he fictionalizes, and the increasingly self-reflexive narrative voice he employs in his series of novels. The Introduction presents various critical approaches to Canadian 'regional literature,' and, more specifically, to Richards' work. Proceeding chronologically, in terms of both Richards' publications and his fictional time frame, this study devotes one chapter to each of the books in the trilogy: *Nights Below Station Street* (1988), *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* (1991), and *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* (1993). A number of Richards' characters are interpreted as storyteller figures whose versions of events raise questions about loyalty, accuracy, objectivity, authority, and authenticity -- questions which the author makes relevant to his own role as an artist. The novelist's perspective is seen to evolve in order to represent a culture which is no longer identifiable as 'rural' according to standard tropes of the pastoral. This thesis concludes with the suggestion that Richards' vision is finally 'post-regional.'

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I'm riding on that new river train
I'm riding on that new river train
It's the same old train that brought me here
Is gonna take me back again

Darlin', you can't love one
Darlin', you can't love one
You can't love one and have any fun
Darlin', you can't love one

Darlin', you can't love but two
Darlin', you can't love but two
You can't love two and still be true
Darlin', you can't love but two

from the traditional American song "*New River Train*"

INTRODUCTION

Locating Richards:

The Reputation of a Miramichi Regionalist

One of the main sources of artistic tension in the work of David Adams Richards is the novelist's loyalty to the community he fictionalizes. Most of Richards' stories are set squarely in the rural Miramichi region of New Brunswick where he was born and raised. As a writer, he can indulge neither nostalgia nor cynicism, for he has remained an insider. Though he will not admit to accepting the role of spokesperson for the region of his childhood, he is sensitive to critical claims that he has misrepresented this region or betrayed the people who live there. He says that people who debate the accuracy of his representations of the Miramichi are "arguing about something that doesn't even exist." Insisting upon the universality of his rural settings, he says,

> [In] a sense all my work is outside the Miramichi. . . . Not only that, but also it's my own rivers, my own places, and in so many instances it doesn't have that much to do with the real Miramichi. . . . A lot of times [critics] don't know what to put their finger on in my work, and so they say, "he must be a regionalist." Another thing they say is "he must be a social realist because he's saying stuff that doesn't happen to us but only happens in the Maritimes, so he must be a social realist regionalist because this is what happens down there," but that's really not true because, and I say this without batting an eye, what happens to Arnold, in *Road to the Stilt House*, happens to everyone, and that's why I wrote about Arnold. I didn't write about Arnold because it only happened in this little house in the centre of nowhere, but because it also happens to people on Bloor Street in Toronto.
> ("He Must Be" 159-60)

But a novel like *Road to the Stilt House*, perhaps the most grim of Richards' works, is almost excruciatingly specific, describing the abject lives of characters whose marginalization is partially a function of their geographical isolation; the characters in this book are, emphatically, situated in a small community, on a bleak road that cuts through the New Brunswick woods. The universal themes underlying the action in all of Richards' texts are powerful, but there is an atmosphere, particularly in his early works, of direct experience. The ambiguities of 'realism' have always presented complex questions about the reception and interpretation of his novels.

Richards' personal attachment to his fictional world is still obvious. In an essay written after the completion of his recent trilogy, he discusses the importance of his childhood experiences in determining his vocation, stating, "I had a need to write about and remember my terrible youth" ("The Turtle" 71). He laments the "maligning of intent" by critics who claimed "that I wrote bad things about my river and my people" (72). It is because of this loyalty that the term 'regional writer' is useful in discussions of Richards' work. The label should not refer to the scope or even to the style of his fiction, but only to the milieu Richards represents, which is his own. In a way, the writer embraces the label in his recent trilogy by tackling problems surrounding regionalism. And in doing so he proves beyond any doubt that he is not limited in thematic breadth, artistic imagination, or intellectual rigour. Richards ultimately refuses to submit to the tyranny of post-modernism which critics

like Donna Pennee and David Creelman seem to endorse; he questions his own powers of representation, but he will not fully relinquish his personal connection to a real world -- a connection which is, after all, the source of his moral concern for such matters.

Richards has demonstrated artistic courage partly by seeming to dare the critic to call his work anachronistic. He has renewed the controversy about regionalism, which was a topic of considerable critical discourse even before he was born. In 1945, the influential literary critic Desmond Pacey lamented the preponderance of historical and romance novels among the works of fiction being produced in Canada. He called for a national literature which would accurately reflect "life as it is lived here and now," and which would represent, without sentimentality, the concerns of real people:

> What is needed, then, is not merely more novels which treat the contemporary Canadian scene, but more novels which treat it in a realistic and critical spirit. We need to see the festering sores in our social body, as well as its areas of healthy tissue. ("The Novel in Canada" 161-62)

In the following year, Hugh MacLennan penned an essay demanding that Canadian authors "stop writing regional novels . . . and permit themselves only universal themes." MacLennan asked rhetorically if Canadian literature might be "doomed to lie half stagnant in the backwaters of regionalism" (qtd. in Lynes, Wyile 119). These two perspectives represent the terms of a debate about literature in Canada which has carried on throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and which is not yet resolved.

When David Adams Richards attained sudden prominence in 1974, with his first novel, *The Coming of Winter*, he cannot have been unaware of this ongoing dialogue about 'regionalism' and real people in Canadian literature -- particularly since he himself had recently come to Fredericton from his hometown in the Miramichi. Studying Arts at Saint Thomas University, Richards must have gained some sense of intellectual and academic attitudes toward communities like the one where he had grown up. While the decision to set his fiction in the Miramichi was not reactionary, it was surely a choice made with an understanding of its critical and commercial implications. When Richards won the 1988 Governor General's Award for his fifth novel, *Nights Below Station Street*, many journalistic accounts focused on the fact that this writer was still living in New Brunswick, was still writing about the people of the Miramichi, and had somehow, through perseverance, proved a point by 'beating' Margaret Atwood to the prestigious prize.

Of course, critical dissent arose in the form of reviews such as one by Donna Pennee titled "Still More Social Realism," which called Richards' novel "a regional fictive documentary," and, like MacLennan's essay, bewailed the state of Canadian literature in general:

> Readers accustomed to some degree of self-consciousness in fiction today will find little, if anything, to interest them in *Nights Below Station Street*. . . . Despite the soon-to-be-mythic proportions of his local reputation (within the sort of mythos that regionalism in Canadian letters continues to be capable of fostering), the New Brunswick writer falls short of being a major voice that early reviewers repeatedly predicted. (41)

Pennee's review is fascinating because it presumes Richards is incapable of grasping the issues surrounding the 'regionalist' label -- issues which had been widely discussed

for over forty years. It will be argued in the first chapter of this study that Richards was, at this time, already critically engaged with ideas of universality and specificity, the difficulties of "local reputation," and the problems of representational accuracy and "social realism." He had already taken a variety of different approaches to showing a society's "festering sores," as Pacey had recommended so long before, and he had demonstrated some concern about the possibility of artistic stagnation which MacLennan had warned against. *Nights Below Station Street* was not "still more" of anything but thematic and stylistic innovation, and it proved to be a turning point for Richards, commencing a dynamic trilogy which stands as a sophisticated and conscientious statement of a 'regional' writer's beliefs about his home and his vocation.

One of Pennee's main criticisms is that an apparently realistic narrative like Richards' presumes to speak with the authority of an 'authentic' voice. She makes a valid point, but is perhaps uncharitable in assuming that the same thought has never occurred to the author, as she pronounces: "*All* discourse is enculturated -- the academic and the socially real" (44). Pennee concedes that the "documentary" quality of *Nights Below Station Street* raises important moral questions about detachment and objectivity, sympathy and repulsion, tolerance and self-righteousness; she suggests that the text both seduces and rebukes the reader, "forcing the question, 'why am I continuing to read/view this?' -- while simultaneously drawing our attention" (43). But Pennee is unwilling to give the author credit for this subtle moral commentary. What the following examination of Richards' trilogy will attempt to show is that this

novelist fully intends to challenge the reader's assumptions about realistic representation and to question the validity of his own role as a representative of, and for, his region.

Pennee is almost prophetic in her irony when she remarks facetiously that Richards' reputation for integrity may be a ploy: "[Perhaps] this is the ultimate literary enterprise -- the apex of self-consciousness after all, though carried on outside the text -- mythologizing one's own status as authoritative social realist . . ." (41-42). In fact, Richards demonstrates an increasing self-consciousness in his authorial voice over the course of the trilogy. The second novel in the sequence, *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, contains plainer instances of self-reflexivity which critique the powers wielded by storyteller, narrator, and author, revealing the complicity of a gullible or passive listener/reader. The concluding book, *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, destabilizes all narrative authority by employing an assortment of subjective voices which supply incomplete and contradictory versions of 'the truth.' Any attempt to represent and interpret reality is seen to be inadequate because of the limitations and biases of individual perspectives; thus the 'realism' of the text as a whole is dubious, and its author drops all claims to authenticity. Richards has often been damned with the faint praise of those who would validate him as a 'genuine' regionalist possessing some degree of artistic integrity. In his more recent works, he has subverted the reputation that was assigned him, and he has addressed the question of what happens when the storyteller is mythologized.

In her 1987 book, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*, Janice Kulyk Keefer examines Richards' early novels as representative of a distinct "Maritime identity" which exists in opposition to centralist concepts of Canadian culture. Keefer says that Maritime fiction has always tended not to address a scholarly audience, and has most often employed commercially popular genres considered by contemporary critics to be outmoded: "the idyll, historical romance, and that current literary leper -- the realist or representational novel" (6). Keefer suggests that realism is not just a genre, but an aspect of the Maritime mentality, a general outlook evident in fiction which reveals "a confidence foreign to modernist and post-modernist alike, a belief in the reality and significance of the accessible world of human experience common to reader and writer" (6). Borrowing A.D. Nutall's critical terms, Keefer proposes a "transparent" rather than an "opaque" reading of Maritime realist fictions, claiming a willingness to enter a writer's vision and to examine this vision in relation to reality, as she assumes the writer intended.

Keefer's approach certainly leads to some valid observations on Richards' social commentary. She discusses the memorable Packet Terri from the 1981 novel *Lives of Short Duration* (also briefly mentioned as Adele's cousin in *Wounded*) as an archetypal Maritime character, a toughened and insightful rural figure who critiques the urban world's "industrial, monopoly-capitalist ethos which is foreign to the economy of the Maritimes and increasingly destructive of its society" (17). Indeed, economic disparity and the decay of community are prominent features of Richards' fictional milieu, and the political impact of asserting such realities is probably part of

the reason 'regionalism' has become a derogatory term; texts like Richards' are easily perceived or construed as unpatriotic. But Keefer's approach to realism is problematic because it strives so hard to explain and understand the Canadian *Other*; she suggests that Maritimers write gritty representational novels "to help us read the lives of the inarticulate and impoverished; to comprehend and indeed, value them" (161).

It becomes increasingly obvious in Richards' trilogy that the author is distrustful of those who are confident that they can "comprehend" his characters, since this confidence is so often accompanied by a desire to 'fix' them. Even to "value" Richards' disadvantaged characters is potentially to aestheticize them as quaint and quirky figures of rural authenticity, as objects of pity or morbid fascination, as tragic heroes or martyrs. Insofar as his characters are representatives of 'the real,' Richards would have the reader accept them without judgement. But the metafictional structure of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* emphasizes the fact that the author may be no more capable than the reader of apprehending 'the real.' Richards demonstrates an awareness that all narratives are, as Pennee says, enculturated, and that all serve some agenda. Thus, in his novels, authenticity remains an abstract -- an unrepresentable value.

Keefer concludes with generous condescension that Richards is "no *idiot savant* of the Miramichi, bludgeoning the life around him into novel-sized chunks, but an artist distanced enough from his material to find an authentic shape for its disjointed, discontinuous nature" (172). The fact that the critic feels compelled to clarify this is an indication of the precarious balance between native integrity and artistic integrity

which the regional writer must maintain. What Keefer means by "authentic" here is not apparent; the word may apply to Richards' respect for novelistic convention, or to his faithfulness in representing the realities of Miramichi life.

Sheldon Currie interprets Richards' work with greater subtlety, but he cannot avoid this same conflict. Writing after the completion of the trilogy, Currie calls Richards "a master of the novel as social history" (72), and he aptly identifies some of the causes of disempowerment in the Miramichi:

> No writer more clearly delineates the terrible consequences that follow when people are deprived of power, economic power essentially, but quickly followed by political and personal power. Few writers understand so well the comic/tragic postures of the people who inhabit the disenfranchised frontiers of the country. Indeed, is there any writer who so adequately illustrates the details of the side shows that play in the provinces while Quebec and Ontario occupy the main stage contesting for whatever power defaults from our European, Asian and North American neighbours[?] (74)

But Currie goes on to discuss the emotional response which Richards' art evokes, stating that the reader weeps "not for the sadness of it all, not for the waste of human and natural resources, not for the pain of loss, but for the beauty of it all, the tragic and comic beauty. The beauty of the language" (75). This is true, but it is paradoxical in ways that Currie does not acknowledge -- in ways that Richards attempts to make apparent in *Evening Snow*, and plainer yet in *Wounded*. We do not weep for the beauty of real suffering in the world; if we care about things, or if we experience suffering, we weep for the sadness, for the pain, and for the loss. We weep for beauty when we can afford *not* to care about things, and this is a privilege most often contrived through artifice. If we are responding emotionally to artifice, it

may be impossible for us to respond to real suffering -- much as we would like to believe that we can do both simultaneously, and much as we might wish to give the artist credit for producing this effect in us.

Realism comes into conflict with the aesthetic because it is an approach to art which seeks to deny or disguise authorship. The idea of realism suggests that representation is possible without artifice, and that the truth may be represented *as* the truth. In a dissertation on Maritime realist novelists, David Creelman examines ways in which realism also comes into conflict with the political. Citing Georg Lukàcs and Erich Auerbach, Creelman traces the realist tradition as it is informed by the assumptions of historicism; the realist novel attempts "to ground the characters in a specific social and historical context, and . . . to search out logical and probable causes for events" (Creelman 36-37). Creelman finds that Richards' work is influenced, more specifically, by the tenets of naturalism:

> As one of the sub-genres of realism arising in the late nineteenth century, naturalism took the historicist impulse to its logical conclusion, claiming that characters are irrevocably caught in a web of cause and effect dictated by environmental forces and internal stresses over which they can exercise little if any control. Expanding on Darwin's theories of biological determinism, naturalism rejects the possibility that subjects can operate apart from the psychological and socioeconomic forces which surround them. Throughout his literary career, Richards has employed some naturalist techniques as he meticulously constructs the familial and social contexts within which his protagonists move. (113-14)

In Creelman's analysis, the artist's faith in his ability to represent a real system of causes tends to conflict with his ideological positions -- in Richards' case, liberal values such as individual freedom. Interpreting the character of Jerry Bines as a heroic representative of these values in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*,

Creelman argues that the novelist reverts to romance patterns -- the very conventions which realism reacted against -- in order to maintain this character's status as "a pure embodiment of individual liberty" (258).

Creelman's discussion of the paradox Richards finds himself in is very useful, but his theory about a desperate and hypocritical resolution of this paradox is overly restrictive in holding Richards to the principles and techniques of realism. Richards' individualism is indeed apparent in his decision "to focus on the marginalized figures whom previous writers have ignored -- . . . those characters who have been isolated from the mainstream of society by their poverty, their violence, or their inability to communicate effectively" (229). And it is problematic that a faithful representation of such characters will place them in their social environment -- an environment which limits their freedom in many ways. It is true that there is "an increasing sense of anxiety about this problem of freedom" in Richards' more recent novels (214). But the author does not slip, as if by accident, from realism to romanticism in order to elevate a protagonist above the constraints of determinism. Creelman, like Donna Pennee, refuses to give Richards credit for any degree of self-reflexivity.

One of the more prominent critics who has examined Richards' work closely is Frank Davey. In his study titled *Post-National Arguments*, Davey objects to the sense of determinism created by what he perceives to be a naturalistic vision in *Nights Below Station Street*. Davey questions the orthodox assumption that there is a unified and coherent "national literature," examining novels written since 1967 from a cool "post-centennial" perspective in order to reveal the fractures in the English-Canadian

polity (5-6). Not surprisingly, he finds that the representations of power -- and the lack thereof -- in Richards' novel "virtually prevent any sense of Canada as an active polity within the text" (79). But again, Davey does not treat this political perspective as part of the author's intent. Rather, he sees Richards as a detached observer who exercises analytic powers which his characters can never possess; the condescending novelist, privileged with education, thus belongs to the forces of centralist oppression, granting the status of rural authenticity only to those who are, according to their natures, disempowered. Like Keefer, Davey is perhaps overly concerned with defining a 'Maritime identity.' And it is ironic that he should strive to do so in the service of a "post-national" thesis which is, in fact, part of the centralist critical discourse of 'Can-Lit.' Still, some of his observations about the apparently deterministic narrative voice in *Nights* are valid, and actually demonstrate the necessity of Richards' engagement with the problem of narrative authority in the two subsequent novels.

A commentator like Davey might do well to reassess Richards, taking into account the evolution of the novelist's perspective over the course of his trilogy. In *Evening Snow*, Richards deals with the detachment of the storyteller and of the listener/reader. In *Wounded*, he presents a radical deconstruction of all narrative positions, including his own authorial stance. He thus situates himself on new creative ground, while retaining his fundamental commitments. Richards asserts that conscientious art must be openly concerned with the location of its agency, and that it is, in this era, increasingly difficult to identify and articulate location.

CHAPTER ONE

Determinism and Determination:

Nights Below Station Street

One of the pivotal scenes in Nights *Below Station Street* -- and one of the most poignant -- occurs when Joe Walsh comes home at night with a bloody gash in his head, and his teenage daughter Adele tends to the wound. Unable to do physical labour because of a nagging back injury, Joe has lost his sense of dignity, and feels that he does not deserve the respect of Adele and his wife, Rita. He is represented as a stoic, enduring humiliation and physical pain, struggling to overcome alcoholism, and deciding finally that he must carry on with his life, "whether or not he had the sympathy of the one person he loved more than all the others -- Adele" (196). Only when he is struck with a claw hammer in a robbery attempt do Adele and Rita learn that Joe has taken a job as a bouncer at the local tavern. Though she is normally squeamish, and has, throughout the book, exhibited cruelty and contempt toward her father, Adele is moved:

> Everyone assumed that Adele would faint -- because she had often fainted when she saw a speck of blood. . . . But at this moment her face filled with the compassion that always brings out beauty.
>
> "Joe," she said, tears welling in her eyes. "Oh god -- Joe." And, without knowing that she would ever be able to do something like this, she took away the face-cloth to look at the wound. (199)

The metaphorical wound that Adele acknowledges is, of course, Joe's pride, and his unreciprocated fatherly love. But Joe's life is very much grounded in his body, which, though injured, is still tremendously strong; it is important that Adele accepts

Joe in his raw physicality. Weeping for her father's unspoken emotional and bodily pain, Adele achieves the beauty and grace she has awkwardly and self-consciously sought in her adolescent experimentation with various fashionable identities and ideologies. This is the aesthetic vision of *Nights Below Station Street*; authenticity does not reside in rural landscapes or traditional lifestyles, but in genuine compassion, which can only be spontaneous.

Frank Davey condemns Richards for endorsing the powerlessness and fatalism of the characters in *Nights*, claiming that the narrator of the book possesses a superiority of vision and analytic power which creates "a wide political gap in the text" (78). Davey suggests that an attitude of condescension may be an inevitable flaw in any literature which promotes "pastoral ideologies," since any intellectual or artistic assertion of rural authenticity is essentially self-contradictory (78). While it is true that Richards' omniscient narrative occasionally seems almost arrogant in its description of characters' arbitrary or misguided actions, it is not the case that this narrative validates powerlessness itself. It is ironic that Davey sees Joe as a representative of Maritime regional identity whose integrity depends upon his renunciation of power (80), for Richards satirizes those who define themselves and others according to the politics of identity. The novel demonstrates that rigid adherence to ideologies is often self-defeating; there is hope for change and growth, but only through conflict and compromise between old and new, rural and urban. It is in times of crisis, such as the moment Adele sees Joe's gushing wound, that characters act with true humanity, foregoing articulation and rationalization of their

response. Certainly it can be a treacherous business for a writer to speak on behalf of those who are apparently powerless, particularly when characters who seem to be valorized as 'natural' are denied agency and assertiveness. But Richards demonstrates an awareness that this problem is, as Davey indicates, a constant hazard for the 'regional' writer. It may be a stretch to call *Nights Below Station Street* a metafictional novel, but the dynamics of stories and storytellers within the text demonstrate that in the exercise of narrative power there is the potential for exploitation, betrayal, and self-delusion. The author's conscientious attitude toward his vocation is conveyed through his portrayal of characters who thus misuse narrative power in malice, in folly, or in naivety.

In *Nights Below Station Street*, Richards often associates the re-telling of past events with false expressions of sympathy or altruism. Stories are exchanged with the pretence of having some reconciliatory or corrective effect, when in fact they are being used in manipulative or aggressive ways. It is Joe's personal history which is most frequently dredged up to serve the purposes of various storytellers. Early in the novel it is made plain that Joe, a recovering alcoholic, is insecure about his role as father and husband, and is nearly paralysed with guilt about his irresponsible and abusive behaviour during the period when he was drinking heavily. Though Joe has attempted to compensate for his failings, and life in the household has, in fact, been restored to some degree of normalcy, Adele has not forgiven him, and she draws upon the past to account for her current phase of self-pity and discontent. With the air of a veteran, she tells her younger sister:

> "When I was your age Milly, . . . Joe was out drunk, roaring around in a god-damn fish-tailin car and slappin our mother's cheeks off every second night. So why do you think, Milly, that this place is so wonderful - h'm?" (37)

Joe has worked hard to establish a positive relationship with Milly, and Adele's story can have no function but to turn the young girl against her father. Similarly, Rita's friend Myhrra engages Joe in neighbourly chat, and ends by condemning him with a hurtful story:

> "You should take care of Rita, Joe," Myhrra said, as if she had worked herself up into being sad suddenly. . . .
>
> "Yes. She's had a hell of a time. When she was young she did floors for people," Myhrra said. "I mean, she still does, too. But this was down river. I used to have to stop people from stepping over her while she worked. I can vouch for that."
>
> Then Myhrra told the story about how she protected Rita, how Rita always looked up to her. It was always the same story. . . .
>
> "Anyways," Myhrra said, "it would have been just terrible if she left you, Joe -- when you were at your worst. Like a maniac." (41)

Though ostensibly an expression of concern for Rita's welfare, Myhrra's story serves mainly as an assertion of her superiority over Rita, and over Joe himself. Like the story Adele tells Milly, it is a weapon used in a personal attack. Elsewhere in the book, such stories serve more political ends.

Because she has had a lonely, isolated childhood, Adele is flattered by the attentions of a new group of friends who begin to take an interest in her personal history. These young people exploit the generosity and humility of Adele and her boyfriend Ralphie; unlike the awkward couple, they are "special and gifted people - gifted in the way [of] people who assume that they are doing all the right things - that is, socially gifted" (46). The members of this clique espouse doctrines of pacifism and feminism, and are quick to adopt fashionable social causes; they are

"dismayed at the right times about the right things" (48). Adele's disadvantaged background becomes a commodity which she uses to "ingratiate herself" to these new friends, for she associates their rhetoric with her own experience (48). She is accepted only as a symbolic victim, and is thus constantly trying in vain to match the abstract social model which is prescribed by the leaders of the group: "Adele had seen and heard more of all of the things that were becoming sanctioned as the concerns of the day, but she always measured herself against these people, and always found herself lacking" (48).

In the stories Adele tells about her upbringing, she exaggerates her disempowerment in order to conform to a conventional model of victimization. Eventually she is spurned by Ruby and Janet, the girls she has most desired to impress, and she realizes that she has betrayed her family and degraded herself by denigrating Joe and Rita. Having previously encouraged her to provide dramatic accounts of a dysfunctional and sordid domestic life, the girls now turn upon her and condemn her not only for the low status of her family, but for the very acts of betrayal they have demanded. Janet sneers, "Oh why don't you tell us some stories about your sick father and family" (89). Adele now protests, "I have a good family," but this is no longer a position she can defend:

> "Not the way you talk," Ruby said, as if this again was the major point in everything that had passed between them these last two months, even though these stories were told with the idea that she was becoming part of the group when she told them, and was doing everything everyone else did. (89)

Adele has lost her integrity, and is no longer even considered worthy of pity. Marking her as a traitor, the girls also accuse Adele of slandering them; they would

not accept Adele as she was, and they now refuse to accept her as one of them. Ultimately, Ruby silences her, decreeing, "You've said too much already" (89). The hypocrisy of this social cruelty is highlighted by the peace signs which Cindi, a fawning devotee of Ruby and Janet, has inscribed on her clothing in red magic marker. As in many instances throughout the book, the "affectation of concern" is seen to be tyrannical (48).

Adele's situation parallels that of the regional writer who lives and dies by the double-edged sword of artistic integrity. Centralized literary and critical communities have tremendous power in Canada, and ostensibly anti-authoritarian political movements can become hegemonic and exclusive, rejecting marginal works which are seen to be politically anachronistic or stylistically outmoded. The regional writer who wishes to represent the concerns of disadvantaged people with whom he/she has had direct contact may risk alienating or betraying the local community in order to be heard by a wider and more powerful audience -- and may still be dismissed by central authorities as a crude populist or an amateur. Richards has spoken with dismay and frustration about moralistic misreadings of his writing, stating that such interpretations are based on a mistaken assumption

> that there are demarcation lines of good and evil in my work, and that the men are generally bad and the women are generally good, and that what Dave Richards is trying to show is how evil a red-neck society like the Miramichi is, and how sensitive and caring only one or two male characters are, and the rest of course are sort of, you know, tobacco chewing deer-slayers. . . .
> ("He Must Be" 159)

The critical approach Richards describes treats the author not as a representative of his region, but as its victim -- a kind of literary defector who has somehow survived

under an oppressive regime, and is now granted artistic amnesty in exchange for his shocking accounts of a dark and threatening society. Richards says:

> I think I have been misinterpreted and misrepresented . . . by people who . . . believe that I'm trying to 'expose' something about my area, or that there is no one in my world to emulate. Both these ideas are inept. ("Face to Face" 40)

When judged in terms of loyalty, the writer has been similarly condemned from without and from within the region. As Richards notes, the 'regionalist' label carries "an implied idea that you are trying to cosy up to your 'superiors' by exposing the hinterland where you live" ("Violent River" 16).

In his statements about literature, and in his novels, Richards critiques the powers of centralization -- partly because the dominant culture is condescending toward rural societies, but also because the conventions of this culture, which do not accommodate or reflect the realities of rural life, are seductive to people living on the margins. Just as Adele believes that she can achieve popularity and empowerment by adopting the right set of beliefs, the regional author may find it difficult to resist the conventional visions of rural experience which are most likely to meet with critical approval. Richards says:

> The urban-centric view is one that so many rural writers try to copy, to the detriment of their writing. There are writers in New Brunswick, and elsewhere, who find it fashionable to talk about the hinterland in the same way a fashionable urban writer from Vancouver might. . . . [It] produces a kind of sameness -- an almost blatant lack of vision that passes for overall truth. ("Violent River" 16)

Though Richards denies that he has a role as a spokesperson for rural Maritime society, or, more specifically, for the Miramichi, he clearly recognizes that there is more at stake in this issue than the diversity and vitality of literature. Centralization

is a socially destructive force. While there is hardly a shade of the idyllic in Richards' work, and he rarely indulges in the rhetoric of conservatism, there is a remote sense of loss in a book like *Nights Below Station Street* -- a sense that people have been diminished by the encroachment of a generic culture, that bonds within families and among members of the community have been weakened, that humanity is increasingly dissociated from the natural world, and that there is no place for the individual whose personal expressions are primarily physical. Richards does not idealize a historical era or promote a return to the past, but he demands respect for tradition.

Whether revolutionary, like Dr. Savard's socialism and Vera's feminism, or traditionalist, like Nevin's agrarian aspirations and Ralphie's enthusiasm for Irish heritage, ideas which derive from a central culture do not acknowledge real and direct human experience. Richards' satirical voice does not deny the potential value of such ideas, but points to the fact that they are adopted for the wrong reasons, and in absurd detachment from their proper social contexts. Such ideas are manifestations of what Richards calls "notional knowledge." When presented with an attitude of superiority, they are insulting to people whose knowledge is derived from experience and suffering. In an essay about hunting -- a favourite controversial topic -- Richards critiques centralist literary representations of rural society:

> To know some of the men and women I have had the fortune to know, and then to listen to their lives being explained away by those who would never want to know them is something of a balancing act between two worlds. It's like listening to a woman who takes day trips up to the Miramichi to write about it, being called wise. It never quite fits, and never matters that it doesn't.

> That, in some ways, is the problem I've noticed with notional knowledge as opposed to actual experience. The general ignorance of notional knowledge has always carried moral presumptions actual experience does not need to. (*A Lad From Brantford* 72)

The fundamental contempt underlying much outside interest in rural society and regional issues is a point to which Richards often returns. It is this hidden contempt which can trap the regional writer, or the rural character, in what may be perceived as an act of betrayal.

Though she has had a difficult childhood, Adele is a strong and intelligent person. She is made to feel inferior to those who espouse progressive beliefs, though she has experienced real hardships and has overcome the very sorts of problems to which these people propose ideological solutions:

> Adele had been poor all of her life [so] she had seen more of life by the age of sixteen than a lot of these people -- or at least a lot of life some people coming from university had taken courses on and pretended to be dismayed about. (*Nights* 48)

Adele is confused and intimidated as she attempts to copy the contrived shabbiness of Vera's attire: "Since she had always been poor she didn't know anything about dressing to look poor" (94). Adele's experience is personal, not political. But she is encouraged to claim special status based on the fact that she has endured poverty and abuse. Inexpertly playing the scripted role of victim, she becomes a pathetic self-parody. Ultimately, the only status the text assigns Adele is that of survivor. She is neither a victim nor a figure of marginalized 'authenticity.'

Adele reaches a turning point when she realizes that her friends have manipulated her, and that they have no real respect or concern for her as an individual. She understands that she has degraded herself by villainizing her parents. As a storyteller, her motives have been vindictive and ambitious, and thus her stories have been readily used against her. Yet Adele is now able to reconsider the core of real experience in her stories:

> Like all teenagers, she believed her parents had tremendous faults. All of these faults were visible to her, yet now that she had told all about them, she looked upon them in a new light, as being inoffensive, and as if she, in the telling of these stories, had taken on responsibility for some of the very mistakes she bragged about her parents committing. (*Nights* 143)

Her experimentation with narrative detachment has allowed Adele to see the bonds created by shared experience; she now accepts ownership of the stories she has told. It is this process which eventually allows her to approach Joe with real compassion.

Adele's realization of the potentially destructive power of stories reflects Richards' own experience as a regional author. There is a danger of perpetuating stereotypes by describing the desperation of rural lives, yet the hard realities of such lives must be acknowledged. External pressure to produce literature which is titillating or political may reinforce a cathartic urge to express real experience in a raw and candid form. Though Richards stands by his early works, he admits that a book like *The Coming of Winter* was prone to misinterpretation. He tells that this novel was maligned by members of the local literary community who complained "that I wrote bad things about my river and my people" ("The Turtle" 72). Outside the region, the book was appropriated as a communist tract, though Richards says, "I'm

about as Marxist-Leninist as my dog" ("Universal Truths" 25). The stark realism of *The Coming of Winter* leaves inarticulate characters vulnerable to readers' moralistic judgements and misinterpretations; the author's presence is nowhere apparent in the text. Written when Richards was a mere twenty-two years old, this early effort is a part of the author's personal experience which he will not, and cannot, disown. Like Adele, Richards may have come to a greater understanding of the power of his narrative voice, and may have realized that he, as a storyteller, is implicated in his stories -- no matter how detached his narrative perspective. Since the early period of his career, Richards has become more passionate and articulate in his defence of characters like John, who is portrayed in *The Coming of Winter* as a young man with few redeeming qualities. Having created a character who is vulnerable to moralistic attack, the author seems to consider it his ongoing responsibility to speak on this character's behalf, insisting that John is no more "violent" and "manipulative" than more sophisticated characters in the book who behave "in socially acceptable ways" ("He Must Be" 162). As Joan Hall Hovey notes about the subject of her interview,

> Richards becomes . . . animated when discussing his characters, particularly when defending them against critics and interviewers who perceive [them] as inarticulate losers. It is as if he is talking about, not characters in a book at all, but dear friends who have been put down. ("A Promise" 19-20)

Nights Below Station Street incorporates the social responsibility of the storyteller in its narrative form. As a member of the society he fictionalizes, Richards asserts the dignity and humanity of individuals in this society, and defends the integrity of the community as a whole. As an author who objects to sociological

models which "explain away" the lives of people in his region, he satirizes abstracted modes of understanding, and provides an alternative vision, insisting upon the compassion which he saw lacking in some readers' responses to the characters in his early works. If *Nights Below Station Street* is less subtle than the early novels, this is because it is partly a response to Richards' experience as regional writer. *Nights* represents a departure for Richards because it is more explicit than his previous books in its construction of a moral order. Rejecting prescriptive and judgemental approaches to human conduct, the novel returns again and again to the theme of compassion, presenting genuine kindness, sympathy, and forgiveness, in contrast to superficial expressions of concern. Joe has learned to control his anger, and he is tortured by remorse, yet his violence looms darkly in the past throughout the book. Without downplaying the gravity of physical violence, the narrative puts Joe's failings in perspective by presenting social cruelty as a prevalent form of aggression which is not attributable to rural 'social problems,' and is often enacted under a pretence of sophistication or rectitude. Adele and Myhrra are merciless in belittling Joe, Ruby becomes savage toward Adele, Myhrra's son Byron is insulting and manipulative, and Janet torments Ralphie's neighbour Belinda, a single mother who is struggling to survive independently. But in addition to outright malice there are subtler forms of cruelty enacted through false expressions of kindness. Richards has said:

> I'm continually striving to show the underlying intentions behind surface action, and I think that's been implicit in all my work, which shows finally . . . that socialized altruism is not as good as the everyday common concern that Rita and Joe have. ("He Must Be" 168)

The narrative voice which Richards adopts in *Nights* stresses that conspicuous altruism, enacted publicly, often serves selfish or destructive motives.

Joe is humiliated by the people who curl with Rita, and insulted by the men who prey upon her with false pity:

> [They] *assumed* concern for her, because they could condescend to her husband. To make matters worse, they often pretended that they liked Joe, and that they wished to include him in what they did. (63)

The patronizing friendship which Vye offers Joe is based on the very forms of knowledge and experience which Vye holds in contempt:

> He was always friendly to Joe and always asked him how the hunting and fishing were going, things which he did not do himself. . . . [The] moment he saw Joe he would brighten up and exclaim something -- about things which both he and Myhrra had decided Joe must have an interest in. (102)

Vye makes the empty promise of a job, which Joe naively understands as a genuine commitment, and ultimately Joe is wounded when he learns that Vye considers him a fool and a nuisance (104).

Rita has a greater understanding of the hypocritical kindness and support that these people extend to her husband, but she is ensnared in their friendship:

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

Rita is expected to be grateful that she is included in this social network. She sees the condescension and malice of these people, but she cannot refuse their sympathy; if she stops curling, she will be labelled a willing victim -- a woman enslaved by her abusive

and oppressive husband. "Socialized" concern thus becomes a form of control -- a partisan enterprise which punishes disloyalty.

Myhrra receives a similar kind of sympathy from the local priest (Allain Garret's nephew) during a period when she is troubled about her painful divorce and her son's obnoxious behaviour. Father Garret's concern for Myhrra is primarily an expression of his personal allegiances:

> Using a measure of his sociology classes from university, and his own desire to be looked upon as understanding, along with his abundant dislike of the type of men on the river, especially men like his uncle and Joe Walsh, he gave Myhrra a sympathetic ear. (127)

Father Garret wields the double authority of being affiliated not only with the Catholic Church, but also with a liberating movement based on contemporary social sciences. Myhrra's public status is improved by her association with this priest; she is made to feel both pious and progressive. Because he belongs to "the 'new' church," which she considers "much more open," Myhrra reveals the details of her personal life to this man, and he adopts the role of a counsellor or a psychologist (127). Though based on the pretence of providing emotional support and empowerment for Myhrra, this relationship requires her submission; she is expected to give titillating accounts of her private affairs, and to align herself with Father Garret's personal prejudices. The priest has no malicious intent against Myhrra, but he lacks both the disposition for empathy and the shared experience that would allow him to offer real sympathy. He interprets Myhrra's problems in systematic terms, and he contrives a formulaic compassion. Like Adele, Myhrra eventually realizes that she has "over-emphasized all of her problems" in order to conform to the role of victim (128).

Narrative explications of false concern are complemented by the curmudgeonly voice of Dr. Hennessey, who disapproves of both universalized, conventional altruism and self-interested, individualistic compassion. When Nevin says that his relationship with Vera is based on "mutual" regard, the doctor protests: "Mutual -- I don't like mutual. Never did. It's all or nothing -- always was" (167). Dr. Hennessey pretends not to know that Vera and Nevin have signed a contract of shared responsibilities, and he comments offhandedly on the crassness of such formal agreements, quipping, "Not that anyone in their right mind would ever stoop so low - but it might happen" (167). The doctor is equally cynical about the volunteer program at the hospital, recognizing "an excitement caused by impending death" in those "voyeurs" who come to visit the terminally ill (179). He has seen that the volunteers are often "*selective*" in their altruism, choosing the objects of their compassion according to personal standards and objectives (179). Expressing his beliefs, as always, in negative terms, Dr. Hennessey defines true compassion as an expression of concern which is disinterested but not dispassionate, neither calculated nor principled.

It is the valorization of unspoken concern in *Nights Below Station Street* which requires a more analytical narrative voice than Richards used previously. The author credits acts of compassion performed by those who do not wish for or expect credit. Because such acts are not discussed or planned, they are made to stand out by contrast to strategic or derivative forms of social behaviour. The narrative often functions as a kind of moral memory, recalling acts of compassion performed without self-consciousness which may be forgotten even by their agents. Richards states:

> [Most] of the characters I know would feel embarrassed to expostulate. . . . [They] don't really expostulate about their sense of self. And I think it's the narrator's job to do that. ("He Must Be" 169)

Certainly Adele's exploitation by Ruby and Janet is too humiliating for her to talk about. But Adele is vindicated not so much by the narrative explanation of her naivety as by descriptions of her actions, many of which she herself might not consider remarkable.

When Joe is in the depths of alcoholism, and is sometimes found unconscious in snowbanks on the rural roads, it is the young Adele who becomes expert "at spotting his huge somewhat misshapen back against the long evening sky" (61). Even when on a binge, Joe realizes that Adele waits up for him, watching from her bedroom window to see that he returns safely:

> Sometimes . . . he would see that light burning at two or two-thirty in the morning as he came home through the old back lot, stumbling over the rocks. As soon as he would get halfway across the lot, he would see the light go out. It never failed. (69)

Most of Joe's memories of Adele are tinged with shame, for they reveal the extent to which his drinking determined the relationship between father and daughter:

> He remembered how Adele used to carry soup cans about in her dress pockets, and a big can opener, because she thought that's what was needed to cure his hangover, and she would hand it up to him when he came home. (76)

It is not the innocent ignorance of childhood which the narrative values, but the suspension of judgement indicating genuine concern. Adele still possesses this compassionate impulse. She is the one to offer assistance and comfort when Cindi has an epileptic seizure in the street, tenderly "kissing Cindi's albino eyelashes and petting

her" while Ruby and Janet hide behind a coat rack in a panic of embarrassment (52-53). This is the kind of incident that the girls do not discuss.

Kathleen Scherf argues against the claim other critics have made that the characters in *Nights Below Station Street* are inarticulate. She says that Adele's compassion for Joe, like most emotional contact among Richards' characters, is expressed through "a language of silence" ("He Must Be" 168). Even during the period of the book's action, when Adele is often verbally abusive toward Joe, her actions bespeak a tenderness of feeling which requires no explanation. When Joe is leaving to meet Rita at the curling club, and has no money, Adele gives him five dollars -- presumably to save her mother from humiliation. But Richards points to another possibility, stressing the significance of this act: "Or perhaps she didn't want him to embarrass himself. Whatever the reason, it was the first time she had given him any money - or anything else" (110). Joe has only recently mastered his drunken inclination to "give away money to people who had more money than he did in their pockets," and Adele is said to be "so stingy she squeaked" (110-11). In this scene Adele's uncharacteristic generosity indicates new faith in Joe's resolve and concern for his hard-won dignity. But Joe is only able to accept and appreciate the gesture because its meaning is not articulated. True compassion is not qualified, conditioned, or rationalized. Later, when she responds emotionally to the sight of Joe's wound, Adele does not attempt to describe her feelings. With Joe's pride at stake, her silent gaze into the wound is the most profound expression of empathy possible.

For the same reason, Rita is generally silent in her concern for Joe. In order to preserve the accustomed domestic climate, she continues to "growl at him for not taking his boots off, or leaving a set of cables on the seat of the truck" (98). Rita's compassion is only deliberate insofar as she attempts to disguise it. Understanding that Joe cannot bear pity, she tries -- unsuccessfully -- to avoid revealing her emotional response to his pain: "When he flinched or was sore she would sometimes look over at him, and then pretend she hadn't noticed it" (99). Similarly, Allain Garret does not speak of Joe's delicate condition, but is warm and responsive to his old friend, "smiling in gratitude and kindness" when Joe talks (99). Joe's dignity is so fragile, and his sensitivity to coddling so extreme, that he is even uneasy about such common forms of tenderness. He cannot accept his wife's subtle gesture of packing "something in his lunch that was special" without a tinge of discomfort (99).

Joe is not the hero of *Nights Below Station Street*; the book does not validate machismo, stoicism, or emotional suppression. It is the other characters' responses to Joe which contribute most to the moral order. Those who care for Joe accept the fact that he defines himself in terms of his capacity for work. Whatever his other limitations, Joe possesses useful technical skills and extraordinary physical strength. Explicit compassion only highlights his disability. Joe's physicality makes him vulnerable, and at times it makes communication with him difficult, but it is an aspect of his identity which must be accepted, and respected, by those who love him. Frustrated with his stubbornness, yet still sensitive to his vulnerability, Rita finally

expresses her concern for Joe without betraying a hint of pity, stating flatly, "If you don't get to the outpatients tomorrow, I'll kill you" (107).

The emphasis on genuine emotional response and disinterested benevolent action in *Nights* creates an atmosphere of determinism to which some critics have objected. Since characters who act well do not stand to gain by their actions, and do not control the circumstances in which they are morally distinguished, it is possible to misconstrue the book as a decree -- a primitivist celebration of simple people who act instinctively, and whose 'natural' morality is lost when they act with intent. Indeed, the paradigm which Frank Davey straps to the novel, and the title of his commentary on the book, is "Maritime Powerlessness" (*Post National Arguments* 67). Davey states that the characters' actions are not only futile, but apparently random, performed "without much awareness of causal relationships" (68). Despite the closeness in which they live, various individuals act "arbitrarily and impulsively . . . in moments that not only surprise others but surprise themselves" (68-69). Citing the favourable portrayal of characters who lack assertiveness and power, and the satirical portrayal of those who believe in 'progressive' movements, Davey argues that *Nights Below Station Street* "appears to foreclose the possibility of personal growth and significant change" (73), and that Richards condemns rural New Brunswick society to stagnation by presenting "a pastoral 'anti-change' view" of the region (77).

Davey is accurate in identifying powerlessness as a persistent condition for many characters, but it is a great leap to assume that this condition is represented as normal, desirable, or inherent. Perhaps the flatness of Richards' narrative tone has a

quality of the mundane which leads some readers to interpret books like *Nights* as a kind of sociological realism. But Richards does not invite or accommodate such 'slice of life' readings. His is a fictional world -- not primarily a 'regional' world -- in which extraordinary events and circumstances occur. He comments:

> I think that one of the problems some critics have had with my work in calling it depressing is they never got the fact that I'm dealing not with abnormal or subnormal or poor or poverty stricken human beings, but that I'm dealing with human beings at the moments of emotional or physical crisis. That has most interested me in the human dilemma. I don't think I'm unique in this. ("He Must Be" 163-64)

Like many novelists, Richards presents his characters in times of conflict, doubt, and transition, for it is in such extenuating circumstances that people are most interesting. The degradation of rural communities is implied as the social backdrop in *Nights*, but the challenges that characters face in the book do not result from 'social problems' peculiar to any particular region or class. Richards objects strenuously to interpretations of his work which fail to acknowledge the universality of weakness, suffering, and perversity. Asked about his penchant for defending the disempowered, he becomes exasperated:

> Shit, I know more alcoholics who are members of the legislature than I ever knew who didn't have a job. It's so bloody silly to assume that I'm writing about the working class as a class of oppressed people. . . . The problem is the *physical* aspect of their work. Certain critics are disgusted with the physical aspects of labour, they always have been, it has nothing to do with the working class or downtrodden people. I've hardly ever written about downtrodden people. ("He Must Be" 166)

It cannot be assumed that Richards depicts a type of person who is perpetually bewildered. Characters are portrayed in dramatic situations because, according to Richards' vision, desperation often brings out true humanity. People achieve grace

when required to act under duress or to respond to unexpected events, for noble impulses override conventional thought and behaviour. An irrational act may reveal what is best in a person; this neither proves that the person is fundamentally irrational nor validates irrationality as a general principle. As Sheldon Currie states, "Fiction in this tradition is about ordinary people, but not as they ordinarily are. It is about ordinary people in their extraordinary selves, their extraordinary humanity . . . " (70).

In explaining the importance of crises in his novels, Richards says: "The whole idea is that the underlying humanity of a person continually frees him: spontaneous action always frees you, and determined action never does" ("Face to Face" 40). By "determined action" Richards does not refer to events pre-ordained by the schemes of fate, but to actions which are controlled by adherence to a code -- actions which are judged 'right' in the abstract. In this sense, all conduct which is planned in accordance with an ideology is determined by an external system. When Adele is suddenly confronted with the sight of Joe bleeding, and later, when she goes into labour in the men's washroom at Vye and Myhrra's wedding reception, she is able to express love in a spontaneous and genuine manner.

Richards has spoken at length about the liberating and redemptive value of self-sacrifice, for Davey's comments exemplify a kind of resistance with which the author is often confronted -- a line of criticism which perhaps mistakes an aesthetic idea for a political ideal. In a discussion about *Nights Below Station Street*, the author states:

> Adele believes she has a horrible life, but comes to realize in the course of the novel that the only people who are really free are the people who give of themselves. . . . [She] comes to realize that Joe and Rita are independent and as free as anyone. . . . [They] have been doing things for others all their lives with no recognition of their deeds as being altruistic. ("A Promise Kept" 20)

Richards insists that characters like Joe and Rita be judged not by their empowerment, but by their humanity. The reader must accept the fact that Joe is an alcoholic, and also the fact that Rita must scrub the floors of her more affluent neighbours in order to support her numerous dependants. But the dramatic events in *Nights* do not condemn these characters to this set of conditions for perpetuity. Such characters simply have a realistic sense of what they can change without compromising their personal integrity.

It is partly Joe's guilt which often makes him seem resigned to failure. He feels that he is not worthy of Rita's love and respect. He is described as believing that those who suggest new treatments and remedies for his back "missed the entire crux of the problem -- which he alone knew" (107). That is, he feels he deserves to suffer for his mistakes. And in a sense Joe's fatalistic view reflects a social reality; it is not so much his personal limitations which restrict him, but the prejudice of others:

> It had . . . to do with whether or not Joe proved to them that he was the person they already assumed he was. And this was always, when it came down to it, what a person such as Joe had to prove, or disprove. (*Nights* 115)

In terms of public perception, Joe has a choice between being a failure as a socialite at the curling club, or being a failure as Joe the alcoholic labourer. Similarly, it is a foregone conclusion among the community gossips that Joe will either be abusive toward Rita, or will fail to wield the necessary authority in his household and will be

cuckolded. When Rita falls accidentally and blackens her eye, she doesn't want Joe to know about the injury, because he will take her to the hospital, and "people might think he had beaten her" (157). Thus even a considerate act on Joe's part will be misconstrued. And ultimately it seems to matter little what precautions are taken against public condemnation: "A rumour started that Joe had caught Rita at the club with Vye, and slapped Rita in the face, and would no longer allow her to curl" (158).

By contrast to Rita and Joe, Vera and Nevin are highly invested in personal development. Their concern with clothes, and with the decor of their house, indicates the superficiality and self-consciousness of their constructed identities. Richards does not oppose change, but he satirizes these characters who value change for its own sake. Vera has an inflated sense of her evolution as an enlightened individual, the corollary of which is a belief that those who have not altered their image in such obvious ways have in fact succumbed to personal stagnation. She says proudly to her brother, "I'm not like I used to be, am I Ralphie?" (92). And then, with condescension, "I suppose you are the same old person you always were" (93). Having successfully shocked her parents with the radical identity she adopted as a university student, she has continued to define herself in opposition to those she considers inferior.

Vera's ideas are largely derivative -- most notably her conceit of victimization, embraced despite the fact that she has had the benefits of a relatively privileged upbringing, and has had the luxury of exercising a great deal of choice about how to live her life. She does not speak with the authority of real experience and sacrifice.

This should not prevent her from living by her ideals, or from returning to the rural community of her childhood, but it is a condition she should acknowledge in her interactions with people who have been less fortunate than her, and with those who retain skills and traditions which may have some bearing on her "notional knowledge." Vera and Nevin are self-righteous and superior in their appropriation of an agrarian lifestyle. When the couple buy a local farm, Vera denigrates the previous owners, boasting that she will do a better job of maintaining the property; she fails to recognize that "everyone on the road . . . knew and liked this family" (131). When Nevin asks Joe to come and examine a horse he is thinking of buying, Joe arrives to find Nevin engaged in a drunken barnyard farce, determined to buy the sickly horse in contempt of Joe's expertise (164-65). These young neo-traditionalists consider their plan to build a windmill "totally innovative and new" (166).

The rural ideal which Vera and Nevin adopt is inconsistent because it does not accommodate the community; it is a dogmatic, reactionary expression of individualism. Denying that she is sick, Vera tries to "doctor herself" and gets pneumonia (166). Having already gone broke getting the old house repaired, Nevin does not want Joe to fix the plumbing, and assumes a posture of smug self-reliance, "as if nothing was wrong with his house, and in fact everything was the way he wanted it to be" (165). The couple's stubborn independence is a manifestation of their antagonism against community values. They are "cut off from everything" (159). When they become vulnerable and require help, however, a possibility for

meaningful interaction is opened. This occurs on a January day when Joe brings Dr. Hennessey, "by truck and then by Skidoo," to tend to the ailing Vera (161).

There are significant parallels between Vera and her cross old uncle, despite the fact that they express mutual contempt. Both choose to live on old homesteads, in a kind of isolation, but Richards suggests a proximity that is more than geographical: "The doctor's house was on the opposite side of the road, and from his upstairs he looked over the bay, a mile and a half away. He could see Vera's land from his window" (161). Vera abhors the conservatism which she believes the doctor represents; he is described as "an anachronistic thinker" (161). Yet when she is ill Vera is made to feel grateful for his "one old-fashioned trait which helped her out - he made house calls" (161). In the furnishings of Vera's house, the doctor sees a reflection of his own anachronistic outlook, and although he is generally scornful of such calculated lifestyle choices, he is now moved to compassion by Vera's earnestness and frugality. The two remain barely cordial, but a grudging mutual respect is established. In a comical example of the kind of unspoken concern which the text values, Richards' narrator reveals that the doctor, unbeknownst to Vera and Nevin, "had already sternly reprimanded two women from the Ladies Aid Society at the church for gossiping about [Nevin] and Vera, saying that [they] had every right to live exactly the way they chose" (181).

Dr. Hennessey is an important mediator in *Nights Below Station Street*. He represents continuity in the community. He has experienced the changes and upheavals of the century, so he carries the authority of historical conscience. Having

delivered most of the characters in the book, he possesses intimate knowledge of them, and he is responsible for their continued well-being. He is not, however, an embodiment of 'authenticity' in any meaningful sense. His resemblance to Vera extends to his anti-social, reactionary stubbornness. Having read something about men's dependence upon women's domestic skills, he takes a notion to be independent of his sister-in-law Clare; he is unable to express his love for Clare, and his irascible manner brings her anxiety and grief. In many ways he is hypocritical and socially inept.

The only authoritative representation of authenticity in the text is Dr. Hennessey's scepticism about all claims to authenticity. This is the perspective of Richards' narrator; there are obvious parallels between the physician's obstetrical role and the author's duty to his characters. Having "delivered them all" (181), Richards accepts the responsibility of defending them, though it is a daunting literary challenge to do so while retaining a consistent vision. This difficult balance of loyalties precludes any ideological definition of Maritime identity or rural authenticity.

Richards' evaluation of Dr. Hennessey's character may be read as a self-reflexive statement in defence of the anti-judgemental stance he himself takes as an author:

> [What] got the doctor into trouble was his feeling of a deeper reasoning under a surface reason in whatever people said. It sometimes made him cynical whenever anyone else was applauding someone's virtue, and at times it made him act kind toward those who had just done something that was considered disgraceful. His fault lay in his high moral tone when trying to protect anyone others condemned. (*Nights* 181)

Richards' tendency to portray villainized characters with sympathy, and to critique popular causes, has sometimes led to misreadings of his works and misunderstandings about his personal beliefs. Like the doctor, he has mistakenly been called "a misogynist" (179), and has been accused of holding "prejudiced" views (181). Taken out of context, his comments have been evaluated in strict political terms, and thus some readers have "simply assumed . . . that he was a bigot" (183).

In an absurd argument with Clare about Buddhists, the doctor touches upon issues that are central to the text:

> "They have no idea about moose and have never seen one -- yet chastise anyone for hunting them. They make a mockery of Remembrance Day because they know nothing about it, and it's the same way with their peace movement. In this they believe they are visionaries. That is, they see what is obvious and are visionaries while those who have suffered and loved more . . . get no credit at all." (183)

What angers the doctor is the contempt for real experience and sacrifice among those who cherish the conceit of a refined conscience. In his essay about hunting, Richards makes similar comments on the moral pretensions of animal welfare activists who present their narrow, urban perspective as a singularly elevated objectivity:

> They believe that no one has thought before what they now think. That what is needed is a raising of consciousness. That no hunter understands his soul as they do theirs. That, in fact, their souls are better. They leave out 1000 years of literature about the moral conflict in a person's soul over killing animals written by those who have killed.
>
> It is, in all its fury, a fundamentalist perception fostered through limited contact with that which they hate. (*A Lad From Brantford* 75)

The doctor is not necessarily in favour of hunting, nor is he in favour of war *per se*, but he objects to judgements made in self-righteous ignorance. This is a pervasive issue in *Nights Below Station Street*, and it is a concern Richards has expressed with

regard to the reception of his novels about rural society. Through his representation of Dr. Hennessey's passionate moral engagement, associated as it is with this character's shortcomings, Richards seems to request that the reader approach his work with an attitude of tolerance and a sense of humour -- for the sake of his characters, and also for the sake of the occasionally volatile author himself. After all, he shares the storyteller's penchant for diatribe and hyperbole with the good doctor, who responds to the suggestion that he join a cultural society by saying, "I'd rather be shot in the head or strangled in my sleep" (181).

Dr. Hennessey is satirized as much as characters in the novel who hold more liberal views, and positive change becomes possible in spite of his conservatism. Frank Davey overlooks or undervalues instances of genuine 'social progress' and personal development which are achieved through communication and compromise in the book; arguing that Richards' vision is one of chaos and despair, he states dismissively, "The only moments of even marginal contentment occur when Joe is at his camp, Dr. Hennessey is cooking smelts, or Vera and Allain Garret are sitting on a rail fence at his woodlot" (*Post-National Arguments* 77). As Davey notes, Joe and Allain are privileged as characters "linked with older rural activities and knowledges -- hunting, woodlore, and subsistence farming" (76). But it is in their interactions with younger characters -- not as examples of an ideal life -- that they contribute to a hopeful future.

While Vera is not instantly transformed by the suffering and fear which accompany a life-threatening illness, her esoteric rigidity is tempered with a new sense

of collectivity and tradition. Earlier, when Vera and Nevin are setting up their homestead based on their idealized notions of country life, Richards describes the spatial situation of their newly-acquired property, stating, "The trees that separated this farm from Allain Garret's were clear and hard" (165). In the scene Davey cites, Vera has recovered fully, and when she walks "up the road, and into the back lot of Allain Garret's," she experiences "a strange feeling, as if the woods would come over her" (184). The passage suggests that this is a feeling not of dread, but of union. Leaving the confines of her private domain, and undertaking the common, methodical labour of felling trees, Vera begins to bring down the barriers which separate her from representatives of heritage such as Allain. Vera has tried to make her rustic house a monument to her individual identity, but both the house and Vera herself have proved to be incongruous with the community. Allain is entirely "at home" in the woods, sitting on a fallen maple (there is no rail fence in sight), smoking and chatting as if he were in his kitchen (184). And Vera, having come to this place for entirely practical reasons, without expecting to be seen or to meet anyone, has a rare feeling of belonging here.

Allain tells about his unfortunate adventure with a truckload of hogs -- an incident which is sure to offend Vera's sensibilities. But the story is told without rhetoric or moralizing; it does not indicate who is to blame for the mistreatment of the pigs, or if in fact anyone is at fault. Allain is motivated only by the pleasure of companionship and his own desire to make sense of the event, for he is confused and saddened by the rift that has been created between himself and the friend from whom

he used to buy his chicks. The only obvious conclusion is that both the old men have been demeaned by their experience with the legal system. Vera finds Allain so honest and endearing that she cannot condemn him. And as an inflexible vegetarian she feel herself implicated in the arrogance of the judge, who is said to take advantage of "an excellent opportunity to show where he stood on the subject of cruelty to animals, which was popular" (185). The story serves to break down false ideological demarcations. Vera has a principled dislike of crude, uneducated men like Allain, but through direct contact she finds this person to be charming and trustworthy. Allain is the very embodiment of some of her rural ideals, but clearly he is in no way 'progressive.' As a member of the community, Vera will be confronted with conflicts of conscience and loyalty; she will be forced to reconcile personal and political concerns.

It would be unrealistic to present Vera and Allain as forming a profound and equitable relationship. In this scene, much of Vera's fascination with the old 'rustic' is aesthetic. What is important is the discovery of a shared concern; like Allain, Vera is seen to have a predisposition to physical labour and an affinity with the natural world. This is the common ground -- both literally and figuratively -- upon which the community's future may be built. Allain admires Vera's strength and endurance, and he tells her, "You work as good as your uncle, Dr. Hennessey. . . . I love that -- like Rita Walsh -- strong as a ox" (186). Vera would not normally see these comparisons as a compliment, but she has gained the perspective necessary for the appreciation of shared experience, and she is now flattered.

In a similarly *almost*-idyllic scene earlier in the book, Ralphie helps Vera pile firewood in the cellar of the old farmhouse. Vera seems affected when she tries to speak intimately with her brother, and Ralphie becomes embarrassed. But when the two work together in silence, sweating in the winter air, there is an atmosphere of closeness and harmony, and Richards' description of the countryside becomes lyrical: "The sun was pale, and there was the look of milk in the woods. The stream that ran down to the small pond was frozen, and the wood road was hard with snowy mud and sloughs" (135). In addition to the sense of connection with the natural world, there is a suggestion here that the bonds of family and community may supply the necessary link between past and future. Engaged in a form of cooperative outdoor labour that has been done seasonally for generations, Ralphie and Vera are properly located in a social landscape:

> Far across the bay on a clear day you could see the tip of one of the nearest islands. Above them, but still far away, there was the church -- one of the oldest Catholic churches in the province where Aunt Clare went to church every evening at seven o'clock. (134-35)

Like Dr. Hennessey's house, the church is distant, but within visible proximity; it represents the hope for cultural continuity. Such connections are not part of a plan for the future adopted consciously by any of the characters in *Nights Below Station Street*. The sense of integration in one's environment -- of being in one's proper milieu -- is not manifest as such. It is simply the contentment of wholeness. In spite of her dogma and her pretensions, it is Vera's physicality, and her affinity with the land, which bring her satisfaction and, occasionally, moments of elation: "She did not realize that she was feeling the greatness of the river that she was once again upon"

(134). This is the same feeling of being "at home" which Allain has always had, and it is the real source of empowerment which offers hope for Vera's future and the future of the community.

Like Allain, Joe defines himself largely through his physical interaction with the world. Joe has social limitations which he himself feels profoundly, but he is not doomed to alienation or stagnation. Joe's friendship with Allain is important because the old man respects his traditional knowledge -- knowledge acquired through real experience. When he is in the hospital, Allain asks Joe to check on his farm and his woodlot, and Joe is honoured, realizing that there is no one more worthy of Allain's trust than himself. Joe is restricted in his use of verbal communication, but he is fluent in the language of nature; interpreting the sights, sounds, and smells of the woods, he has a feeling of perfect competence and ease which he does not enjoy in social settings.

Joe is described as a man who "did not talk about himself at all" (99). He cannot articulate his identity because he is embarrassed about his stutter, and is prevented from speaking when he becomes nervous. But Richards makes it clear that Joe is not simply an instinctive being with no need for personal expression:

> Sometimes when he was out in the woods alone, he would go up to a tree and say: "Hello how are you, me name's Joe Walsh, boiler-maker, mechanic of sorts who lives with Rita and two kids," and would not stutter at all, and nod with conviction. (73)

It pains Joe that he can never replicate this verbal assertiveness in public, but his ability to communicate with the natural world is a significant consolation for him. He

does not suffer isolation, for the woods is also a social landscape, populated with memories of his father which preserve a link to the past (70).

In the present, Joe's role as a husband and father is immensely important to him. While he and Rita seem to share little meaningful discourse, Joe identifies the brook near the wood lot as a place where they come to fish for trout together. And perhaps most importantly, Joe shares his expertise with Milly, taking her on overnight hunting trips. In a careful but effortless manner combining practicality and tenderness, Joe makes a shelter for his young daughter, feeds her soup and hot chocolate, speaks to her about the animals, and constructs a basket so that he can carry her on his back when he is tracking deer. The scene is not an idealized pastoral, but a fusion of old and new; in a moving and comical passage of dialogue, Joe responds with interest and respect as Milly tells him "stories" about "Scoobie Doo" and "Star Trek" (117). Joe achieves dignity as he brings his traditional skills to his role as a parent, and he invests hope in a different and better future -- a future which will still bear the currents of cultural heritage.

Frank Davey takes issue with the apparently fated repetition of domestic history in *Nights Below Station Street*, arguing that characters like Ralphie and Adele are doomed to a life of downtrodden regional 'authenticity,' as they follow wearily in the footsteps of Joe and Rita. The critic's distaste for the kind of future the novel offers to the younger generation reveals the very form of elitism which Richards so disdains -- a contempt for physicality and kinship, and an exclusive, conventional view of empowerment.

Rita is not a model of ambition, but she is a dignified and honourable character. She is charitable toward Myhrra and Belinda -- women who may have no fewer material resources than herself, but who clearly lack her vigour. Rita may be taken advantage of by people who use her house as a free daycare service, but it is not within anyone's power to oppress her; she is, as Allain says, "strong as a ox." According to conventional measures of success, based on prestige and prosperity, Rita's decision not to complete teacher's college represents a failed life. But if victim status is not imposed upon this character, her role as educator and surrogate mother may be seen as valuable and personally fulfilling, exemplifying the kind of community integration which is its own reward, and which 'empowered' but isolated figures such as Vera must work to achieve. Davey sees Adele's unplanned pregnancy as an indication that she is fated to follow the pattern of her mother's life, particularly since this biological burden seems to counter the disdain for motherhood and the ambition of going west which the adolescent Adele has professed so loudly. But Adele is no more a victim than Rita, and she has a disposition to learning and growth which is grounded in the hard experience of her childhood. Richards critiques the conventional prescription of empowerment-through-freedom which devalues motherhood. In *Nights Below Station Street*, personal responsibilities cannot simply be equated with entrapment.

Similarly, Ralphie's choice to work in the mines seems to follow the pattern of Joe's life. Richards insists, however, that physical labour, like child-rearing, is potentially gratifying, and that the decision to undertake such forms of work does not

indicate self-loathing or resignation. Joe is not a defeated man. Richards says, "[The] one person who is really trying to be a new human being is Joe, who, with no promises, no guarantees, is giving up his old life, his drinking, his drinking friends" ("Violent River" 10). In the course of the novel, Joe takes steps to improve himself, and to compensate for his past wrongs. His new routine involves doing housework, caring for his young daughter, attending AA meetings to control his alcoholism, and studying math and English for an adult education course. Like Joe, Ralphie seems to be an unchanging figure, but his constancy is steadfast rather than conservative. Just as Adele's abhorrence of alcohol is a response to her direct experience, Ralphie is opposed to violence because he has been "beaten up" in the past (46). His emotional response to Vera's illness is powerful, and he determines to establish a more genuine relationship with his sister (170). Balancing loyalties within Adele's family and his own, he is a compassionate mediator; he is said to be "one of the people others relied on to listen to them, because [he] always somehow sided with them" (194). Ralphie is in fact an agent of the kind of positive change which incorporates tradition and community. Joe appreciates Ralphie's respect, but he recognizes the phase of "self-delight" in the young man's adoption of a rugged proletarian image (194-95). Ralphie derives genuine satisfaction from his new job, and earning a wage in the mines may prove to be a meaningful way for him to accept the responsibilities of a father, but he is by no means fated to repeat Joe's mistakes. As a miner who brings home ore samples to examine under his microscope, he represents a balance of the physical and the intellectual -- of stoicism and aspiration.

As Davey notes, the conclusion of *Nights Below Station Street* is heavy with determinism. The final chapter of the book begins: "If Vye had taken any other road he would have been safe" (212). As the newlyweds drive away from the community centre, and eventually wander into the woods in separate directions, the narrative repeatedly stresses the randomness of their actions. And Joe likewise has "no idea" why he is headed for his camp instead of the hospital, and continues to proceed on "impulse" (222). The narrative states emphatically: "He had every intention of going up to see his child and grandchild - and to be with them - and yet at every point on his journey he was doing other things" (222). Joe's practical knowledge of the natural world is contrasted with the incompetence of Vye and Myhrra, yet it is plain that neither Joe nor Allain is actually searching for the missing couple, and that both rescues occur largely through serendipity.

While the repeated references to Joe's lack of volition and foresight in this last section are a bit ponderous, Davey's interpretation of the accidental rescues is perhaps too literal. The critic reads this conclusion as a final endorsement of ignorance and passivity for 'natural' rural people. But Richards' depiction of these events differs in tone from the rest of the novel; there is something of magic realism in the dreamy calmness with which characters respond to unexpected events. Rather than evaluate Joe's actual skill and agency, an allegorical reading might stress his symbolic role as a parent. Vye and Myhrra -- both generally juvenile in their conceits, grudges, and insecurities -- become positively childish by the end of their wedding reception, when they are quite drunk. Myhrra nearly begs Joe to give her

his blessings, looking as if she is "about to cry" when she asks if he and Rita approve of the marriage, and suggesting hopefully that the four of them will "get together and be a family" (209-10). Having been helped to their car by wedding guests, Vye and Myhrra laugh foolishly as they careen through the snow. When the car gets stuck and Vye sets off to get help, Myhrra tells him, "Bring me back something to eat" (214), and soon afterwards she decides she must go out into the blizzard "to have a pee" (216). Walking in the snow, both of them are frightened by sounds and shadows, fearing that they may be surrounded by animals. In his drunken anxiety and disorientation, Vye is seized by the memory of Belinda holding Maggie on her hip, and he ponders the "essential fact" that "though men were stronger they could not carry children with the ease and dexterity of women" (215). And as Vye trudges on through the snow, his awkward, aimless steps create "an indistinct track, as if children had played there a long time ago" (215).

Vye and Myhrra are saved because both of them, in their child-like wanderings, intersect the brook -- an important symbolic landmark for Joe, because it is where he and Milly camped, and is thus associated with the parental role he has reclaimed (223). Joe finds Vye "at a place about fifty feet from the brook, . . . huddled up against a stump with his hands up over his face" (225). Richards writes:

> Vye looked up at Joe at that second and said, "I lost my gloves, Joe." And he smiled, as if losing his gloves would be what Joe would be most concerned about. And then he seemed to drift back to sleep. (225)

Just as he carried his young daughter through the woods, Joe now carries this helpless grown man "on his back," feeling the pain of his old injury "only slightly" (225). As

a symbolic parent to Vye, Joe acts with a natural concern which is unmeasured, unconditional, and indeed almost unconscious. Vye has treated Joe badly, and has held him in contempt, but he is now entirely dependent upon this figure of physical strength and traditional knowledge. It is Joe who knows from experience how to follow the brook through the woods; having been lost himself, he now brings Vye back home to the river -- the locus of community which is a substantial place and also a continuous cultural current flowing from the past to the future.

Though the final section of the book dwells on the apparent magnitude of Joe's physical actions, the theme is not fatherhood specifically, but parenthood and kinship in general. The subtextual events which occur in this time frame are at least as important as the rescues in the woods, and in fact have more bearing on the lives of the central characters; as the snowstorm rages outside, Adele is in the hospital birthing her first child, and Rita is at hand to assist her daughter and to welcome her grandchild into the family. Vye's memory of Belinda emphasizes the power of the maternal bond which is felt but not seen in these concluding passages. And the narrative's glance to another remote yet intimate location shows that Ralphie, "at that same moment," is "a mile under the earth" in the mine, "tucked up in a dark hole, with his light out, . . . covered in ore" (219-20). Curled snugly in the darkness, feeling secure and serene, "hearing water drip," and pondering ontological questions, Ralphie is decidedly foetus-like. Though he is unaware of his new status as a father, his situation is powerfully suggestive of conception, as he is described "tucked up in a

hole under the surface, with his feet on an old piece of pipe - that may have been left there seven months ago or longer - smoking a cigarette that he had rolled" (220).

Ralphie ponders, "[How] does a person get to where he is from where he has been?" (220). The answer he produces to reconcile himself with destiny is interpreted by Davey as a final statement of fatalism determining the tone of the novel's conclusion. Crouching in the mine, Ralphie reflects, "An object falls, it has no idea where it will land, but at every moment of its descent it is exactly where it is supposed to be" (220). Davey says that this statement is another instance of many in which "the narrator emphasizes the powerlessness of the character vis à vis that of the invisible teleology that directs him" (*Post-National Arguments* 76). But in fact the narrator is not manipulative or condescending in interpreting Ralphie's thoughts here. Empowered with education and rationality, Ralphie perceives the question of fate and will as "a calculus problem" (220). His naturalistic perspective is not the resignation of a defeated man, but the peace of mind earned through reasonable and moral conduct. Ralphie is perhaps the least capricious of the main characters in the novel; in deciding to accept his current situation, he trusts the intuition which only *rarely* guides his actions. While his calm and contented thoughts are consciously directed to the matter of a job which he never "intended" to accept, they signify an approach to fatherhood which is entirely in keeping with his emotional and conscientious nature: "[All] of this made him feel special, why he did not know, and since he had grown into it, it was something he would do" (220). Only by viewing the book as a regional manifesto is Davey able to conclude that Richards endorses powerlessness and

fatalism. In human terms -- the only terms the author himself accepts -- Nights *Below Station Street* values the rewards and responsibilities of family and the bonds which preserve humanity and coherence in a community.

Davey's criticism of Richards' condescending tone in *Nights* is based on the perceived incongruity of an omniscient narration which uses simple language and syntax. Davey interprets the narrative voice as a reflection of the "halting consciousness" of inarticulate characters such as Joe, and he finds it problematic that this voice is consistent even when it focuses on more sophisticated figures like Vera (*Post-National Arguments* 67-68). He is even more uncomfortable with the fact that this same voice is used "almost entirely to indicate the narrator's own 'wise' observations" (68). Davey argues that the narrator's critical analysis of characters' actions is an insulting and exploitative form of miming; he states, somewhat confusingly:

> [The] narrator's persistent use of what it implies is its character's oral syntax, even though it is not its own syntax, operates as a kind of parody, which both mocks and patronizes its characters. (70)

The critic is overly restrictive in his classification of language as literate or non-literate. Though puzzled that the narrative does not modulate according to the discursive abilities of individual characters, he insists upon connecting this voice with a vernacular, dissecting its syntax, and citing an authority in the field of linguistics:

> As Walter J. Ong notes in *Orality and Literacy*, the use of "additive rather than analytic" (37-8) sentence constructions are major features of oral discourse and are particularly common in cultures which have not developed written language. (*Post-National Arguments* 68)

The suggestion here is that Richards assigns a primitive "halting consciousness" not only to selected characters, but to his region in general, which, by whopping extrapolation in the 'post- national' thesis, represents the entire Maritime region of Canada. Davey argues that the novelist holds himself at a superior remove not only from his characters, but from the general population of his province.

Obviously the narrative of *Nights Below Station Street*, like all written language, is based on oral discourse, and certainly there are characters in the book who have limited powers of speech. But it may not be necessary or possible to establish a definite connection between these two facts. The narrative is more Richards' voice than some reflection of the language used by his characters. In an interview, the author says:

> I'm very comfortable with third person, writing third person with sort of an overseeing narration, which allows the characters to move about as freely as I can get them to move. So often the narrative voice has nothing to do with character. ("He Must Be" 163)

Richards uses much the same syntax in the essays collected in *A Lad From Brantford*, where he cannot be said to imitate any speech but his own.

Davey faults Richards for hiding or denying "the source of the discursive power" which he controls through his narrator (70). He seems to question the author's authority as an 'authentic' commentator who has the perspective and the aptitude necessary to criticize affectation and conformity:

> Indeed, the narration offers considerable material to suggest that human beings may construct themselves out of an array of scripts which are available to the culture; but what it does not offer is how its own discourse and command of semiosis can stand outside such an array. (*Post-National Arguments* 72)

Davey shifts to connect the narrator of *Nights* directly with its author, implying that Richards, as a successful writer from the Miramichi, is hypocritical in his endorsement of rural culture. Relying upon his perception that the book is fundamentally opposed to change and ambition in rural societies, Davey condemns the author for promoting an ideology which would have prevented Richards himself from seeking and achieving artistic fulfilment in the early '70's (*Post-National Arguments* 70).

Employing a highly reductive interpretation of 'progress,' Davey denounces Richards as a false Luddite:

> The text which suggests that New Brunswick culture would have been better without the arrival of tractors and universities and the impinging of Russian and mainstream culture also suggests a New Brunswick which could not have produced *Nights Below Station Street*. It also implies that the power to produce such a text had best remain where it is, away from the confused and unknowing of Station Street, and safe with the text's concealed elite. (78)

While Richards reveals traces of pessimism about the current condition of rural society, and is critical of ideologies which promote the exercise of choice as the height of human achievement, he is neither so cynical nor so dogmatic as to dictate limitations on the aspirations of rural people. There is nothing in his text to indicate an objection to technology or institutionalized education *per se*, but there is an assertion that such commodities are generally accompanied by inhumane and socially destructive orthodoxies -- such as the belief that physical work is essentially degrading.

Nights Below Station Street favours a moderate view of progress which may allow a community some degree of self-determination, and which is in fact less fatalistic than Davey's 'all or nothing' model. Richards' vision is neither nostalgic nor utopian. It does suggest that many undesirable social conditions are merely exacerbated by 'solutions' introduced from outside the region, but this stance is grounded more in emotion than in politics. The ironic signal Richards' narration employs in its occasionally sardonic commentary is the adverb "suddenly" -- as in the description of Vera becoming "suddenly Acadian" (159). The adoption of commodified identities or beliefs is seen to be part of a misguided desire for efficient and painless change. The book indicates that social progress and personal development, while possible, are not achieved "suddenly," through systematic action. Meaningful change cannot be prescribed; it can only come about through humility and emotional honesty -- mental states often induced spontaneously by unexpected events.

Richards' literary career represents an attempt to broaden artistic horizons while remaining faithful to the values which contribute to a creative conscience. The superior analytic power of the narrator in *Nights* is a common novelistic convention, but it is problematic in this text because none of the characters is granted comparable insight. This "political gap," as Davey calls it, occurs because Richards strives to prevent misinterpretation while avoiding overt didacticism; the author thus refuses to canonize Joe as a figure of authenticity, or, alternately, to create an intellectual 'hero' endowed with an artist's perspective. Richards finally chooses a variation on this latter course in *Hope in the Desperate Hour*, addressing the problem of literary

detachment in a regional context. *Nights Below Station Street* gestures toward self-reflexivity by demonstrating the powers and weaknesses of the storyteller. Davey's misgivings about the "source" of narrative authority in this book suggest that it will eventually become necessary for Richards to pursue this question further.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cruci-fiction:

Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace

Nights Below Station Street was the first of David Adams Richards' novels to undergo significant editing. The author himself admits that the draft he submitted to publishers was unwieldy: "I had two books in one" ("He Must Be" 162). Thus the second novel of his projected trilogy was partly assembled from extraneous elements of the original story. *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* focuses on events which occur six years after the main action of the previous book. Richards says that he likes to reintroduce characters in new contexts so that he can "work with them in different phases of their lives" ("He Must Be" 162). And indeed, the portrayal of a character like Adele in *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* is fascinating for its subtle demonstration of the changes that have occurred in this person between 1973 and 1979. However, as Robert Attridge observes in his review, this second instalment in the trilogy "is not what most people would consider a sequel" ("Richards' Inferno" 118). It is concerned primarily with the lives of Cindi and Ivan -- peripheral characters from *Nights* -- and it ignores figures like Joe and Rita, about whom a reader of the previous book might be curious.

Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace is a continuation of *Nights* mainly in terms of style and vision. Some themes are dealt with again: social aggression, emotional voyeurism, manipulation through false concern, and victim identity -- both

imposed and self--professed. But this text takes a different approach to the idea of community, presenting collectivity less as an ideal than as an inescapable fate. The structure of the book emphasizes this interconnectedness; Richards' apparently random shifts of focus create a sense of the organic quality of humanity -- a sense that the same things are happening everywhere. The narrative voice explains the conflicts which occur with social change, articulating urban/rural distinctions which were only implied in *Nights*. But this analytic narrative rarely judges characters, and tends more to stress the universality of 'regional' conflict and fatalism. Richard's accountability as an artist is acknowledged in comments about the morbidity of both personal and literary interest in the "unfortunate" people of rural society. The tone of *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* is finally dramatic rather than sociological. The text is less like a 'realist' work than the preceding novel, for it contains more comedy and, in its conclusion, far more tragedy. But Richards does not 'elevate' his characters to universality; he demonstrates the banality of real human drama. Sharing ice cream with the abortionist, or dying "unceremoniously" in a bog, his characters experience crises which are hardly acknowledged. Like Auden's Old Masters, Richards is never wrong about suffering, for he understands so well "Its human position; how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." Burning or drowning, the obscure figure becomes tragic. The artist transcends morbidity by showing the inadequate response to suffering: "how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster" ("Musee des Beaux Arts").

In *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, the social dynamic of false sympathy functions much as it does in *Nights Below Station Street*. Like Rita Walsh in the earlier book, Cindi is manipulated by those who presume to help her. But while Rita is a strong and perceptive woman who understands her predicament, Cindi, with a feeble intellect and delicate mental health, is in fact vulnerable. Ruby speaks of Cindi as a helpless victim, and insists that this disempowered young woman can gain control of her life by choosing to have an abortion. Unaccustomed to such attention, Cindi is flattered: "The outrage of others made her feel important" (*Evening Snow* 47). Ultimately the support offered to Cindi has nothing to do with freedom of choice, though this is the unstated political pretence. Ruby makes it plain that she will withdraw from the situation entirely if Cindi does not agree to have the abortion: "And then we won't be able to help you any more. . . . I mean, it would make me some kind of Jesus laughing-stock now, wouldn't it -- keeping care of Ivan's baby" (133). Ruby is "attracted" to the idea of abortion because she sees it as something "new" and "irreverent"; she feels "not so much that it would be right, but that it would be rebellious and gain attention" (144-34). Earnie's proposal to assist Cindi by marrying her is certainly misguided, but it is no less sincere than Ruby's approach, and perhaps more generous. Jealous of her control over Cindi, Ruby is "furious over this intrusion into what was 'her concern,'" and contemptuous of altruism on the part of "someone as 'ignorant' as Earnie" (135). As in *Nights Below Station Street*, it is Dr. Hennessey who recognizes the falseness of politicized compassion: "There's lots of ways people hide bigotry from themselves. . . . Today's way is progressive

concern" (166). Cindi's situation thus exemplifies not only the new manifestations of social change in the community, but also the tendency toward prejudice and self-delusion which is a universal flaw in human nature.

Richards critiques the assumption that the weak must be victims. A character like Cindi is merely prone to victimization. In a sense, victim identification is a self-fulfilling prophecy; even well-intentioned involvement in Cindi's life can become exploitative. Richards' narrator comments: "[The] people who rushed in and out of her life at this time . . . had no idea that they partook in humiliating her" (48). There is gratification in the expression of pity, for the object of pity is an object of morbid fascination. Though just a summer visitor temporarily drawn into the affair, Eugene speaks of Cindi's predicament "as if he suddenly knew all the particulars of Cindi's unfortunate life -- which all of them, being concerned, could describe as unfortunate" (91). Ruby is the leader of this meddling group. Though she has "never lacked good-heartedness," she is an incurable emotional voyeur; while remaining comfortably detached and satisfied in the knowledge that she is "beautiful and vital and alive," she wallows in the misfortune of others, deriving a perverse pleasure in their suffering (105).

There is a self-reflexive element in Richards' treatment of this fascination with misfortune. He alludes to the complex relationship, and occasional confusion, between representation and reality:

> Cindi's life this summer was like a movie, where all her friends were tantalized by and hoping secretly for more stories to come out of the affair, while telling each other they were not . . . . Everyone . . . was listening and waiting, wondering what was going to happen -- as if she were not a person but a character in a movie they were watching. Often, when it ran down a little, they were impatient for something more to happen -- and something more had to happen to continue watching. (131)

Because of his style and his subject matter, Richards must concern himself with the problem of narrative detachment. He has been subject to the criticism that he is indulging an appetite -- his own and his readers' -- for stories of a sordid underworld. His characters are so plausible that it would seem almost unethical to 'make' them suffer gratuitously -- whether for the sake of diversion, vicarious emotional experience, or aesthetic satisfaction. But melodramatic momentum is surely a powerful force, and the impulse to contrive "tantalizing" narratives is a temptation of the storyteller.

As the behaviour of Cindi's friends demonstrates, fascination with story precludes real human concern, for people become mere characters -- pawns in a narrative game. Though there is a tragic element in this novel, it is driven not by dramatic force, but by characterization: personalities and desires, strengths and weaknesses. Richards has said that plot is secondary in his writing process: "[If] the characters are any good, they're going to tell you what to do. . . . Once the characters take over, that's where the novel comes from" ("He Must Be" 164). One interviewer comments on the author's loyalty and attachment to the people in his fictional community:

> What animates Dave Richards is the inner life of his characters, their motives, their secrets, their spiritual aspirations and failures. He has a curious way of talking about them, as if you and he were talking about Joe Walsh down the street and not Joe Walsh in a novel. He uses first names, tells you things about them (traits, habits, events in their lives) that aren't written down in any book (Fredericton poet Robert Gibbs calls this "extending the text"), laughs about them, pities them. (Glover, "Violent River" 10)

With this personal attachment to his characters as his primary commitment, Richards does not orchestrate theatrical effect; as a conscientious dramatist, he is guided by the psychological, emotional, and moral credibility of his characters. In *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, the treachery of manipulation is a constant risk. There is a 'conflict of interest' among the people who are briefly fascinated with the drama of Cindi's life; while they wish to help her, they cannot resist "pushing" her toward disaster so that she may ultimately be "crucified for them" (131). Richards' representation of this social dynamic implicates both writer and reader in the moral question of how literature should be approached and apprehended. To be preoccupied with plot, or seduced by the flow of narrative, is to detach oneself from human suffering. Like gossip, literary representation is a source of pleasure and entertainment for both disseminator and receiver, and may thus preclude compassion for its real or imagined subjects. The impulse to distance oneself, in art as in life, is seen to be potentially destructive.

As in the previous novel, subtle or unintentional social violence is contrasted with physical aggression. Like Joe Walsh, Ivan Basterache is burdened with a legacy of violence. While Ivan is indeed prone to savage outbursts, the alleged incident of spousal abuse around which the plot focuses is in fact his perverse expression of

hostility toward materialism and greed. Frustrated that his father seems determined to bankrupt him, Ivan wields the shotgun only for the purpose of destroying an oak cabinet which represents his precarious solvency. Similarly, he tears up the money because he is angry that Antony's financial problems have debased his marriage to Cindi: "Ivan could not stand that he had started this argument over something so shallow" (14).

Like his uneven temper, Ivan's misogynous vulgarity is essentially banal. He has accepted the label of "Dangerous" -- tattooed on his wrist since his wild teenage years -- but the word is an empty signifier, and Ivan himself is, for the most part, benign. For Ivan, language is just language. This has nothing to do with intelligence, which he has in abundance. What Ivan lacks is ideological ammunition. The concept that language and ideas can be "dangerous" is foreign to him. While he senses that Ruby is trying to turn Cindi against him, he does not fully understand "that some people used words like shotgun blasts in the dark" (13). As Vera lectures him on sexual politics, he catches only a glimpse of "the hidden world where certain ethics were at war" (13). Ivan recognizes and asserts the truth or falseness of words, but he cannot see the surreptitious violence of language, and is thus defenceless in this respect.

On the second page of *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, Richards links Ivan to the period of the previous novel, describing the first time Ralphie met this bizarre character, "on Christmas night in 1972" (4). Ivan is enthralled with Ralphie's singing, and is not ashamed to show his veneration. Following Ralphie and Adele

home, he finds an opportunity to prove his devotion; Ralphie has forgotten the key to the apartment, and Ivan demonstrates a talent for breaking and entering. With his irrepressible smile, Ivan is described as somehow beatific: "the air seeming to lay against him in a perennial sort of winter delight, and glittering snow . . . on his hat" (5). In *Nights Below Station Street*, it is made plain that the friendship between Ralphie and Ivan begins when Ralphie is mourning for his father, but the development of this relationship is not explained or discussed (45). Ivan only appears once, in what is perhaps the most comical scene in the book. When Thelma arrives at the apartment to visit her son, Ivan engages her in conversation until Ralphie comes home. Wishing to exhibit suitable hospitality, Ivan rushes out to steal some tea, and returns to tell his disconcerted guest, "We'll just have a little secret about where this tea comes from -- or else we'll both be in a big jackpot" (*Nights* 153). Smiling "angelically," and frightening Thelma in his frenzy of servility, Ivan seems an obscure and outlandish figure in *Nights*. But his immediate introduction as a central character in *Evening Snow* denotes the existence of a complex social network in the community -- a system of powers and alliances, and of shared knowledge and experience, which is never represented directly.

Jay Ruzesky observes aptly that the novel "spreads out like birdshot" from a single incident; Richards "introduces five characters in the first paragraph of chapter one and uses them to describe a community" (109-10). Other reviewers use the metaphor of a pebble dropped in water. But while it is true that the

reverberative effects of events and actions seem to continue endlessly, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this community is a still pool. Hilary Turner states:

> Each carelessly malicious thought or remark can . . . be traced through a series of incremental adjustments in the perceptions of a whole community -- re-activating, as it makes its way through the network, old prejudices, anxieties, and defenses. ("Test of Time" 174)

But in fact the reader cannot trace all the connections which are implied in the novel. Richards creates a powerful sense of this network, and perhaps he challenges the reader to attempt a mapping out of the causal links, but ultimately there is much that cannot be represented. This is not standing water, but a vital and dynamic river.

Richards does not fully account for the changes that have occurred between 1973 and 1979. Robert Attridge notes, "Much has happened in the interim, but a great deal of what has happened remains unexplained and apparently inconsequential as the focus shifts to Ivan Basterache and his estranged wife, Cindi" ("Richards' Inferno" 118). The author does not allow readers the easy satisfaction of following a linear narrative. Rita and Joe are not reduced to characters in a soap opera from whose lives we may derive some titillation; what one carries from the previous book is not an unfinished account of their personal affairs, but a sense of the way they view their world. Of course, the focus of *Evening Snow* is not entirely random. As Richards has stressed, he deals with significant incidents which reveal human potential. But the structure of the narrative is somehow arbitrary, and this conveys the organic quality of the community and its status as a self-contained reality.

Marni Jackson comments:

> Without a fresh memory of *Nights Below Station Street*, the tangle of intricate relationships between neighbours, friends, and families is difficult to unravel, especially given the author's partisan, taciturn refusal to elaborate on his world. In this story of outsiders the reader is pointedly made to feel like the *real* outsider, the inauthentic one. ("Dignity Intact" 38)

In fact, all the details provided in the earlier book will not be enough to complete the picture. In *Nights* we are told that Joe is "cutting for a small mill in Renous" (98), and that Ivan is fed up with Belinda because she is "from Bellefond" (152). A close examination of Vera and Nevin's pump reveals that the plumbing has been done poorly by "someone from down river" (165). These cues have specific meanings which are not explained for the reader. The shared knowledge of these people is an inheritance which cannot simply be transferred. The scale of the community is conveyed brilliantly in a description of the guests at Vye and Myhrra's wedding: "There were people there from New Jersey -- that patch of wood down river -- where Myhrra's relatives had come from" (204).

Jackson admits to being frustrated about Richards' exclusion of the reader from the confined world depicted in *Evening Snow*: "Ironic and illuminating as it may be to have the tables turned like this, it sometimes works against the charm of the story" (38). But subverting 'the charm of story' is surely part of Richards' purpose. In this respect, the novels in the trilogy are narrative pap by comparison to earlier works. A denser text like *Lives of Short Duration* seems almost aggressive in distancing the reader with obscure details and convoluted descriptions of action. In an essay on Richards' narrative structure, Philip Milner describes this effect:

> The reader overhears the action, and is given few clues as to what is happening. . . . Past and present, Catholic and Protestant, upriver and downriver, as well as French, Indian, and English materials are randomly juxtaposed. . . . Richards' method makes the reader's job difficult. Scenes are not set and characters are not introduced in any usual way. Just as the reader catches on to what is happening in one scene, he finds himself thrown into a different one. . . . There is no single focus. We look at a confusing world and try to make sense of it. . . . Richards presents the colours of reality. (207-9)

Beginning with *Nights Below Station Street*, the author brings us closer to his reality. Having been misinterpreted and attacked for walling his characters in with obscure and confusing narrative, he clarifies and explains community dynamics which an observer cannot know. Still, the reader remains an outsider who will not be allowed to take a simple vicarious pleasure in the book's plot. Richards demands compassion for his characters, and true compassion must be disinterested. This is, as Jackson observes, a partisan approach to story -- and unabashedly so.

In *Nights Below Station Street*, Dr. Hennessey is heard to say "Things out there . . . are getting worse and worse" (175-76). The social distinctions seen and felt by this character represent the separate reality of the community, though it is increasingly difficult to identify this community as a coherent culture.
Dr. Hennessey's insularism is satirized, but he has a fairly accurate perception of the conflicts between tradition and novelty, the rural and the urban. In *Evening Snow*, Richards' narrative is more explicit in making these distinctions. An extended passage of analytic commentary indicates that there are no simple terms with which to define the changes and divisions in the community:

> Now they were barbecuing down by the shed, where Allain used to smoke salmon. He did not smoke salmon any more. Just as, twenty years before, three-quarters of the traffic on the river had to do with work -- fishing boats, scows, and pulp boats -- now three-quarters of the traffic were people with inboard motor boats and sailboats. It was to this second group that Ruby and her cousin Eugene belonged, while [Ivan] and Cindi, because of their natures, belonged to the first group, and would always belong to it. Just as Ruby's father, Clay Everette, with over half a million dollars in the bank, would always belong to the first group. And just as Vera and Nevin tried desperately to belong to the first group, they could not by the very way they perceived things belong. At times these groups became blurred and infused, and there was no way to separate them if one did not know what it was to look for. Money had nothing to do with it, nor did age. But still the groups could be defined. Education might be the key -- but that was not true either, although people who wished to make simplistic judgements would use the criteria of money, age, and education to accredit the difference. (115-16)

These divisions are real and apparent not only to Dr. Hennessey, a veteran of river life, but also to Ivan, who is only twenty-two years old. The perspective of such characters is part of a reality not fully accessible to the reader. In an essay titled "War of the Worlds: David Adams Richards and Modern Times," Frances MacDonald discusses this urban/rural distinction. MacDonald argues that the author achieves the desired effect of "unsettling" the reader -- specifically the urban reader -- by presenting a world where the barriers that divide society are not 'social problems,' but conditions of human reality:

> We would like to think that if only we could devise the right programs, and find the money to implement them, all of our people could take their place in the modern world (and what other world is there?). Those who don't fit in can be taught, or coerced, to fit in. Richards seems to be saying, 'tain't necessarily so. (19)

The urban world is partly responsible for the kinds of conflict, degradation, and tragedy which Richards depicts, but the differences in perspective make reconciliation and reparation virtually impossible.

The suave Montrealer nicknamed Dorval Gene is truly out of place on the river, and local people recognize the superficiality of his sophisticated image. Richards' narrator makes a straightforward generalization: "Eugene, like many people from large cities, grew up without much understanding of the outside world" (88). When Ivan pulls up to Thelma's house in his beat-up car, there is a similar designation of foreignness: "It was as if he had come out of another world entirely and entered theirs through some other, heated atmosphere" (71). Eugene himself is conscious of playing a false role, and Ruby and her friends ingratiate themselves with him despite the fact that they see through his stereotypical urban refinement. Thelma insists that she does not know Ivan, though she has met him on two occasions, and she clings to this lie even as the man stands in her hallway saying, "Dontcha member the time I came for the weddin" (72). This kind of deliberate forgetting -- this denial of the past -- exemplifies the way power is exercised in the endorsement of social change. Even those who recognize the prejudice and snobbery of urban or 'progressive' postures accept the dominance of such perspectives.

As in *Nights Below Station Street*, this submissiveness to pretence becomes a kind of resignation. Ivan's fatalism, like Joe's, represents an understanding of the tremendous power of 'enlightened' prejudice; whatever feelings of inadequacy Ivan has are largely the result of judgemental forces in the community. Having told Ralphie that he is not worthy to be Cindi's husband, Ivan says angrily, "Everyone wants me to say that, and won't be satisfied until it is said" (6). The stereotype of the violently abusive man begs the question of guilt. Though Ivan knows that he is

innocent of the alleged crime, he falsely incriminates himself, conceding, "If I ever see her again, I'll kill her. . . . So I better not" (7). Initially he attempts to submit to the authority which condemns him. Eventually he realizes that he can neither defend himself nor earn forgiveness, for the drama that is unfolding has very little to do with his actions as an individual: "Ivan knew that he was in a terrible position. . . . He knew very well that, no matter his own part, he had become a scapegoat in some larger affair that he had no control over, until it ran its course" (161). Though hardly a submissive character by nature, Ivan accepts the fact that he is powerless, understanding that he is entirely alone in this matter: "He couldn't rely on anyone at the moment -- and his perception had always served him well" (161).

While the narrative verifies the accuracy of Ivan's perception, it does not endorse powerlessness as the proper condition of the rural figure. Frank Davey argued that the narrator of *Nights Below Station Street* equated powerlessness with authenticity, but the same criticism cannot be made of Richards' narrative stance in *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*. In the latter book, the narrator states repeatedly and emphatically that expressions of fatalism reflect universal human failings as well as specific regional realities. In the opening passage of the novel, Ivan is confused and agitated about his marriage problems, and he rambles the town pondering his predicament. The narrator comments: "He had no idea where he was going, and seemed to be moving in circles" (3). This statement is in keeping with the tone of *Nights*, and in fact echoes the concluding section of that book, where Joe wanders aimlessly, Vye stumbles through the woods in circles, and Ralphie, though

inert, has "no idea" how or why he has arrived at this point in his life (*Nights* 220). But the narrative explanation of Ivan's disoriented state continues: "Of course you don't always know where you are going -- but for some reason all movements happen because they were meant to" (*Evening Snow* 4). This is a comment on the human condition: we are not always in control of our lives, and we tend to resort to determinist rationalizations in order to reconcile ourselves to our fates.

Kathleen Scherf misinterprets this shift in narrative perspective. A passage from her article "Underlying Currents" reveals that she has misunderstood Richards' use of pronouns and tenses:

> He attained a wonderful balance of voice in *Nights*, but has gone too far, has become too removed from his characters, in *Evening Snow*. Richards, who has always staunchly defended his identification with his characters, seems to team up with the reader of this novel; the omniscient narrator regularly directly addresses her as "you," creating a noticeable distinction between *us* and *them*, the characters. (76)

Scherf cites the following narrative statement, which refers to the pretence of helpfulness inferred as Antony and Ruby descend upon Cindi's apartment:

> Something happens, and you think you are the one making it happen -- that if you decide to go somewhere, you are responsible enough to understand why, and so on. But the people in this room were a perfect example that this was not the way things happened to anyone. (*Evening Snow* 105)

The narrator's "you" is not personal, but hypothetical. The reader is not addressed exclusively, but is implicated in a general statement about self-delusion. Richards is saying that what happens to these people happens to everyone, regardless of education, affluence, urbanity, intellect, politics, or conscience. This kind of narrative comment warns us that we should not remove ourselves from these characters. While Ruby and

Antony may be extreme examples, they demonstrate the general truth that autonomy and self-knowledge are often mere conceits. The universality of this statement would perhaps be clearer if it were expressed in the present tense: "that this *is* not the way things *happen* to anyone."

Throughout the novel, Richards asserts that while his characters may act strangely in their moments of crisis, the underlying patterns of their thought and behaviour are not at all unusual. When Ivan is anxious about receiving a call from Cindi, his condition is described in terms of a general psychological observation:

> He was in a state that so many people get into when they have their minds set on something happening. He had trained his mind for the inevitable to happen, and now he perversely desired it to happen. (11)

This is not only a credible description of a common phenomenon; it also explains how fatalism can be a destructive force -- in any social milieu.

It is ironic that Scherf objects to the mention of people who do not exist within the narrative. She sees Richards' tendency to 'step out' of the story as a kind of betrayal: "The highlighted narrative identification with the reader conveys the impression that the narrative voice sits in judgement of the characters" ("Underlying Currents" 76). The author's intent is actually quite the opposite. As Jay Ruzesky observes, "Richards is rarely judgemental and, if he is, his criticism seems aimed at his audience" (109). The reader is left outside the unique regional reality, but is drawn into the moral equation with general statements about perception and motives; Richards forbids the superior stance which views rural culture as an aberration.

The author even uses this kind of commentary in the defence of Antony, who might otherwise be an easy target for the reader's contempt and condemnation. This character often speaks and acts in ways that are hurtful and apparently treacherous, but the narrative explains that he does so spontaneously; he is not so much malicious as petty. Antony cannot be seen as a scheming villain because "he, like all of us, never knew one moment what was going to happen the next" (98). Again, Richards suggests that we are deceiving ourselves if we believe that we have far more freedom and volition than his characters. This is not an entirely cynical position; while our limited vision may restrict our ability to do good in the world, it also restricts our capacity for evil.

Perhaps Richards' greatest challenge in a text like *Evening Snow* is the creation of a balance between the specific and the universal -- between a 'closed' subjectivity and an analytic, 'objective' detachment. The range of critical responses to the book's narrative perspective suggests that such a balance may always be precarious. Sheldon Currie describes two equal allegiances:

> Richards' work is characterized by the author's unwavering loyalty to his characters, which . . . works in tandem with his respect for his readers. He seldom tells his characters what to think, and they speak for themselves; nor does he try to explain his characters or tell the reader what to make of them. (70)

But Russell Perkin, like Kathleen Scherf, argues that the new perspective in *Evening Snow* represents too great a swing of the narrative pendulum:

> In his earlier work, Richards depicts characters with an immediacy -- whether of physical sensation or of rendering of interior emotions -- which forces the most unsympathetic reader to empathize with them. But the weakness of *Evening Snow* is that in place of this immediacy Richards too often relies on overt commentary. . . . Instead of allowing the character of Ivan to speak for himself, Richards loads the dice by repeated editorializing in his authorial voice. . . . [The author] has abandoned the intense inwardness of the earlier works for a more detached and communal perspective. But he needs to find a way of dramatizing his own sympathies and beliefs without resorting to smartly ironical stereotypes and overt moralizing. (11)

It is true, as Perkin implies, that the earlier texts had a kind of directness which the books in this trilogy lack. But Richards has made this shift deliberately; surely he intends that the reader feel some discomfort or aggravation with his narrative 'intrusions.' This more challenging voice questions our capacity for genuine empathy. Sacrificing some of the 'charm' of the story, the author forces us to ask how much of our attraction to his characters is merely patronizing. He is not content to express "his own sympathies."

In *Evening Snow*, an authentic voice of the Miramichi is an impossibility. Neither realist nor romantic vision will allow the reader direct access to this world. The title of the book seems ironic in its poetic cadence and its promise of tranquillity. Similarly, the words of Missle Ryan represent the loss of innocence and lyricism; weeping with pure emotion, he tells Ruby, "I love you as the grass is green" -- and he dies two days later (54). Near the end of the novel, Ruby is in a depressed and nihilistic state, and she repeats the words of her dead lover "to no one, it seemed, but the horse's rump" (218). A pastoral aesthetic may have been meaningful at some point in the past, but the current reality is one of change and conflict. Richards does not present a simplistic opposition between old and new. Some characters are quick

to embrace change for its own sake, and others, "because of their natures," have a sense of tradition (115). If statements about the hypocrisy and elitism of "liberal thinkers" (48) sound stereotypical, it is perhaps because 'progressive' judgements of rural people are often based on stereotypes, and cannot be assigned greater credibility than they warrant. The main characters in the book are complex and dynamic. They belong to a world which the urban reader cannot fully apprehend, but their actions convey a sense of the social upheaval which is their reality.

Ivan is not a heroic figure in *Evening Snow*, but over the course of the novel he is redeemed as a benevolent character who has been judged harshly. His propensity for physical work and his affinity with animals suggest that he is a representative of tradition. Of course, Ivan does not feel nostalgic about his childhood of abuse and neglect; he has never been 'at home' in the community. When he is publicly condemned, he first seeks refuge in a wild environment, staying out "in the woods for a number of days," and travelling "along well-worn deer trails and back pastures" (12). Ivan is in a state of limbo, for he has not been charged with a crime, but is not entirely free. With no place to go, he retreats into the past: "Finally, after five days, Ivan went back to the apartment and packed his clothes, took his buck knife and rifle, and moved onto his grandfather's old lobster boat" (14-15). This boat represents the heritage he has been denied. Ivan now devotes himself to repairing the vessel. While aboard, he seems to enjoy a harmonious domestic comfort:

> Ivan turned and went out through the cuddy door into the sunlight. He went to the end of the boat and threw a bucket of potato peels into the water, and stood watching the black tide against the tar planking. (68)

The diction and imagery of this passage suggest that Ivan is immersed in traditional knowledge. There is even less of the idyllic in *Evening Snow* than in the previous book, and this scene is one of the few which convey a sense of cultural wholeness -- of belonging in a social milieu. Elsewhere in the text, it is revealed that Ivan was once a kind of Miramichi minstrel with an authentic regional voice. Without pretension or ambition, he composed and performed songs reflecting a sense of place and a quirky rural vision:

> "Pining for You in Pineville" and "Desperato Kid," and one which he could never sing on the river without getting into trouble was called "Why Bigtooled Darlins Fight." There were songs called "Newcastle June" and "My Chatham Park." He wrote songs about Loggieville and Burnt Church, Bartibog and as far upriver as Storeytown. (92)

Though he seems to possess little knowledge of the past, or of the world beyond the Miramichi, Ivan has a capacity to make sense of direct and specific experience. He embraces this experience as his own, and does not presume to evaluate it in a worldly context. Ivan retains dignity and integrity because he does not construct an identity based on abstractions; he judges himself according to the real effects of his conduct.

Antony, on the other hand, is constantly trying to interpret and rationalize his individual experience as part of some grander scheme. Ivan is quick to recognize the absurdity of his father's victimization complex:

> Ivan had noticed that Antony had gotten into what Ivan called "The World War Two Factor," and he would occasionally blame his lot in life on the fact that there was a bias against him because he was French. (23)

Though they have far more education than most people in the community, Vera and Nevin are so naive that they admire Antony as a figure of authenticity. As Frances

MacDonald notes, these quasi-intellectual 'back-to-the-landers' "have picked up a mishmash of popular or controversial notions, . . . But they have no capacity for critical thought, and lack even the most basic sense of history -- they are the only ones gullible enough to believe Antony Garrett when he claims to be a WWII veteran" (21). Antony's lies about his heroic conduct in battles against "the Dieppenamese" represent a ridiculous and pathetic attempt to appropriate meaningful experience (23, 38).

In contrast to Ivan's songs, which are based on the authority of real knowledge, Antony's stories are born of hearsay, cliché, and desperate egotism. Professing moral outrage at his son's behaviour, he boasts to Vera and Nevin,

> "I told him, yer diggin yer own grave, making yer own bed, if you're going to hear the music you have to pay for the tune, there's more than one way to skin a cat, and lie down with dogs you'll wake up with fleas -- but he listens to nothing." (38)

With his preposterous claims to folk wisdom, Antony makes himself a parody of the rustic character. His false representations of traditional knowledge are a commodity which Vera and Nevin gladly consume. Antony is a con artist; attempting to pass off his old Belgian as a quarterhorse (27), convincing Nevin to buy goats (90), or "trying to sell a stuffed beaver to the tourists" (105), he bastardizes rural culture for quick profit. Vera and Nevin hire him "to pick up their garbage and bring them mackerel," because he has slandered the people in the community who normally provide these services (39). Antony even pays lip service to progressive concerns, condemning a local man whom he claims "has a dump filled with chemicals and all of that that is killin us all off" (39). While it seems somehow appropriate that Antony should take

advantage of these ignorant neo-traditionalists, this exploitation goes well beyond comedy and poetic justice. There is finally a pathos in Nevin's emulation of a false figure of authenticity; he tells Vera earnestly, "I drank Hermit wine and joined Antony" (118). He boasts of a money-making scheme which sounds ecologically and economically inauspicious: "We're going to get a big hose and suck every clam alive into it and sell them and make a million dollars" (118). Anyone who will adopt Antony as a role model is not only lost, but also potentially destructive.

There is an aspect of self-reflexivity in Richards' representation of Antony as an irresponsible storyteller who becomes a sham spokesperson for the local culture. Some of the most humorous passages in the book depict Antony giving his account of past events -- always including some kernel of truth, but always misconstruing his personal involvement as noble and virtuous. An evening spent drinking in the graveyard thus becomes a consultation with the priest (39), and Antony's own role as the instigator of the alcoholic debauch is transferred to Ivan (50). Though he is a keen participant in the rumour-mongering about his son, Antony represents himself as a brave defender of Ivan's innocence (68), and is actually able to "convince himself that he had only Ivan's interest at heart" (164). The narrator explains: "Antony's story was the same one at all times. It was just presented differently, with an indefinable self-deception and a lasting hope that the best points in it were true" (184). The power of narrative is so seductive that the storyteller may ultimately believe his own fictions, denying, even to himself, the conceit and self-interest which inform his perspective.

This kind of self-deception also occurs in the fictionalizing of one's own life. The logic of narrative becomes a way of rationalizing any dishonourable conduct. Antony tells Nevin, "I went through all my life with no one to help me out" (40). Having repeated this often enough, he comes to believe it, though he is plainly dependent upon the goodwill of his elderly parents. Antony has an amazing capacity for emotional onanism; he is often moved to tears by his own stories of hardship and suffering. He cherishes a bitterness against one of his sisters who "stole" his mother's love for the other children (121), and he claims self-righteously that he "sacrificed" his marriage when he refused to betray Ivan (108). Similarly, Gloria absolves herself of any responsibility for her family, sighing wearily, "I've sacrificed enough" (42). This conceit of martyrdom is a fiction which Antony and his ex-wife recite to each other every time they meet. In her melodramatic drunkenness, Gloria reassures Antony, "[We] tried -- and we tried until we got tired of trying -- and then . . . we tried some more. But with you and I not getting along -- and the money not coming in. Well . . . no matter how we tried, it was out of our hands" (63). Gloria's self-pitying regret is described as "false and meaningless"; it is part of a standard biographical script derived from "television sets and nights in bars" (63-64).

Richards' vigilance about his motives and responsibilities as a writer are seen in his treatment of this scripted fatalism. Just as one may distance oneself from others by thinking of their lives in terms of narrative, one may embrace a tragic vision of one's own life, relinquishing the burden of free will. Often this has little to do with real disempowerment. Dr. Savard initially rationalizes his flirtation with Ruby as a

necessary escape, but he realizes that entrapment has become an orthodoxy: "[He] believed the reason he was free was because he was trapped. If he wasn't trapped by his marriage, then he couldn't possibly show how he was broad-minded enough to be free" (151). Richards parallels marital infidelity with the issue of abortion, critiquing political or self-conscious expressions of liberty which are largely reactionary. When a conventional victim identity is assigned or assumed, the ostensibly powerless individual is relieved of accountability, and any means to freedom may be considered justifiable. This conceit of victimization may be collective as well as personal; once aestheticized as a downtrodden society, a community may begin to accept its fictional identity. The regional writer could thus be responsible for aggravating or endorsing a social climate of hopelessness and desperation. In a sparsely populated rural area which is seldom represented in fiction, the power of the author is highly concentrated. In *Evening Snow*, Richards acknowledges his awareness of this power.

When Thelma complains to Ralphie about "drunks and dope addicts" like Ivan, she launches into a diatribe against the kind of regional literature that perpetuates stereotypes of rural culture:

> "People like to always talk about those people as being from here. People even write dirty books about them. So when we go anywhere, it's always those people who've given us a terrible reputation -- poachers and murderers and criminals -- so we have to lock our doors at night." (74)

As Kathleen Scherf observes, "Thelma is the mouthpiece for the snobbish attitude Richards finds in so many of his critics" ("Underlying Currents" 76). In this respect, the passage may lack subtlety. But Thelma's invective is not, as Scherf suggests, merely a gratuitous "snide comment" on the critical reception of the author's novels.

Thelma is a three-dimensional character, and this hilarious section of dialogue lends insight into her personality and her relationship with Ralphie. She admonishes her son: "[You] like those people -- I see. And I've seen them before, greasy-looking people, you know, with big muscles, always going out of their way to kill somebody. I thought you belonged to the Kinsmen" (74). Scherf assumes that a figure like Thelma stands outside of the regional reality, but in fact this character is very much a part of the ideological conflict which pervades rural culture. Thelma is situated within the region represented; she accuses writers of betrayal. With her concern for superficial respectability and her contempt for physical labour, she represents a real force in the social dynamic of change and discontent. Significantly, Thelma's belief that she now has to lock her doors at night is associated not only with the reality of violence, but with the representation of this reality. She blames fiction for jeopardizing both her regional identity and her personal safety. There is a sense here that narrative can have a profound affect on the real conditions of life. When perception and reality are so closely linked, the responsibilities of the writer are weighty indeed.

The metafictional value of this passage involving Thelma is better understood in light of another incident which is concerned even more directly with regional texts. While Ivan is a master of the generous act, Ralphie often feels he has little to offer in return, and at one point he gives his devoted friend "a book that was written by one of the local writers," thinking that this is the kind of literature Ivan will enjoy (81).

There is poignancy in Ralphie's misjudgment of Ivan's taste, and in Ivan's misinterpretation of the gesture:

> In the end, he thought Ralphie was making fun of him. Why would a writer put swearing in a book, he'd asked Ralphie. He felt a book was sacred -- even though he never read one -- and you didn't put swear words in it. He did not understand why Ralphie thought he would like that book. Secretly he felt it was because he himself cursed and would therefore never understand a book that didn't have those words. (81)

Richards' representation of a prudish reaction to regional literature is balanced by his treatment of a non-literate response. Because both these perspectives exist within the community, it may be impossible for the author to convey loyalty to his home region. Of course, Thelma's disgust also signifies a critical perspective, while Ivan's feelings of hurt and confusion represent a direct social response. Richards' parodic treatment of the former, and his more sympathetic representation of the latter, indicate the direction of his commitment.

The fictionalizing of one's own life is a foreign concept to Ivan. Though he does not always act well, and sometimes struggles to understand his own behaviour, he always accepts responsibility for his conduct; unlike other characters, he does not detach himself from the drama of his personal experience. Ivan correctly perceives that his voice has been appropriated in regional literature. Whatever the motive of this appropriation, it does not represent the concerns of Ivan himself, who stands outside the sphere of literary thought and expression. The narrative states: "Ivan felt unequal to words and writing, to books and knowledge of that kind, but he had a tremendous respect for it. In such ways he was left out of life . . ." (81).

This representation of a non-literary perspective is perhaps an acknowledgement of Richards' superior "command of semiosis" -- the authority of discursive power which Frank Davey found problematic in *Nights Below Station Street* (*Post-National Arguments* 72). An author's use of profanity in a novel means something very different from the actual utterance of "swear words" by a person on the Miramichi, just as the literary representation of abjection and violence entails a distancing from those who actually suffer. The power of literary production entails many responsibilities; the writer must be aware of the exclusivity of this power, and must also recognize the limitations of literature. Richards' portrayal of Ivan is a representational paradox. Part of what makes this character convincing is his sense of immediate reality -- an outlook which prevents more literate characters from empathizing with him. Because of Ivan's belief that he cannot be a subject or an object of art, it may be logically impossible to characterize him faithfully in fiction. However much he may seem an embodiment of 'the real,' he can only exist in the text as Richards' literary falsification. In representing the speech of a character like Ivan, the authorial voice is privileged with irony and pathos, and may only be indulging the middle-class conceit of decadence. If Ivan were a real person, he would indeed be "unequal" to literature, but he would not be "left out of life"; he would be very much *in* life, and literature would necessarily exclude him. Ralphie's inadequacy as a friend is Richards' inadequacy as a regional author. This incident in a difficult relationship between two characters with different backgrounds emphasizes the artifice of

narrative, the unrepresentability of a person like Ivan, and the potentially destructive effects of a regional text within the society it fictionalizes.

Leaping through time to focus 'arbitrarily' on the events of one summer, the second book in Richards' trilogy leaves much unsaid. A story with so many missing pieces requires a charitable, non-judgemental attitude on the part of the reader. Richards occasionally makes remote allusions to past events which have had lasting effects, and which would surely influence our understanding of the current situation. The community is thus a dynamic entity not only in the sense that new developments are unfolding, but also in the sense that the past may be revealed more clearly and interpreted differently. In 1979, there seems to be almost nothing about Antony that is genuine, but a brief and apparently incongruous narrative passage suggests that he actually possesses some meaningful authentic knowledge:

> On the wharf there was nothing Antony saw that he did not know, and there was no swell of wave or sound or shade of light that he did not feel or expect. And this was seen in spite of being away from fishing for twenty years. (122)

Though tenuous, this link with tradition represents a form of cultural integrity which is not entirely lost. Thus Ivan's interest in his grandfather's boat does not signify a despairing regression, but a reasonable desire for continuity.

When Antony comes down to the dock to see Ivan, the narrative takes an unusual tangent, retrieving the story of a stormy night at sea when Antony injured his left hand. In this account of a remote past, Antony and his uncle, finally returning to the wharf safely, decide to head back into the storm to rescue the helpless fishermen -- including Antony's father and his older brother -- aboard two foundering boats:

> "Let's go after them," Antony said, his left hand already broken and swollen and burning, so he hid it from his uncle. (124)

Three times, at intervals throughout the telling of this story, the narrative repeats, "Most of this was forgotten" (123-24). In the past, fishing was a co-operative task which held the family together; now the knowledge and memory of this obsolete way of life are part of a forsaken heritage.

As this "forgotten" story is revealed, new light is shed upon the relationship between Antony and Ivan, about which little has been said beyond a blunt statement early in the novel: "He had beaten the snot out of him, and now Ivan was a man. They did not know one another" (28). Now it becomes plain that Ivan knows more of the past than we at first presumed: "Ivan knew why Antony continually licked his big sapphire ring and took it off and put it on a while later. It was because his left hand ached continually, but he never mentioned why" (124-25). When Antony is introduced, it seems inconsequential that he has "arthritis in his left arm," and that the pain bothers him most in winter, forcing him to "use a small butane lighter to warm his left hand" (22). Now this minor affliction becomes emblematic of a past which Ivan must respect -- a lost time when Antony had a capacity for meaningful work, for real sacrifice, and perhaps even for heroism. However foolish Antony's claims to martyrdom, Ivan cannot question the significance of this unspoken pain, for it is perhaps the most profound suffering which one cannot express.

In a recent autobiographical essay, Richards describes his own physical handicap: a partial paralysis which has caused painful arthritis in his left hand ("The Turtle" 69). Another effect of this condition is a lack of sensation and control in the

afflicted hand, which makes it difficult for Richards to know if his muscular grip is causing injury to himself or others. The author explains how this handicap has affected his personal life, and how it has informed his anti-judgemental perspective:

> I have bruised my son half a dozen times by accident, and have been brought to tears seeing the black bruises that he does not complain about, that my fingers have left on his arm.
>
> I share this affliction with others. . . .
>
> A sailor I know fell from the top of the Angus MacDonald Bridge in Halifax. When he hit the water it sounded like a .303, and he now has no use of his left arm. He too wraps it in the winter, sometimes heats it with a small butane lighter and burns himself.
>
> When once I asked him about this, about my left hand aching now all winter long, he nodded:
>
> "Ache -- oh ya -- it'll always ache -- no problem there." And he smiled his toothless smile.
>
> He tries to drink it, and other things, away. So for seventeen years did I.
>
> I visited him in jail one time. He had picked his bedridden wife up from the bed and hurt her. The cops were called.
>
> "With my bad hand - I never know how much pressure is on something. I didn't mean to," he said. "I didn't."
>
> Others didn't believe him; I had no right not to. (72-73)

In light of this testimony, Richards' characterization of Antony must be interpreted as sympathetic, and this character's role as storyteller must be considered significant. It might be easy to judge Antony harshly, but Ivan, who has suffered the most wrong at his hands, is infinitely tolerant. This is surely the attitude Richards demands of his readers. Ivan forgives his father because of what he knows about this man's past, and because of what he does not know. The reader acquires some sense of Antony's experience, but there is much that cannot be understood by an outsider. Antony may be viewed as a broken man, or perhaps as a lost man. But the reader has no authority to absolve or to condemn him.

Following the story of the rescue at sea, and the description of Antony's painful injury, Richards situates this character in the only cultural milieu now available. The scene resembles the quasi-idyllic landscapes of *Nights Below Station Street*, but is more a parody of rural tranquillity. The man who stands displaced in this setting seems truly pathetic:

> Antony, now years later, and thirty pounds heavier, with sad eyes and big red ears, was sweating and pale. His breath was irregular as he puffed on his cigarette. He moved his shoes back and forth and looked out the cuddy window at the night. Every time his breath came up short it was as if he was about to speak. But he did not.
>
> There were lights twinkling out there under the stars, so peaceful, and there were lights on in the houses as well, and the church with its cross lighted up the night sky, and the sounds of honking horns on the main highway, and now and then someone breaking glass, and screeching tires. (125)

With this portrait, Richards locates Antony in an ailing body, on a disused fishing boat, alienated from his family and from his community. The regional reality which has determined the direction of this man's life is a world of change and upheaval, where stable values and traditions are constantly juxtaposed -- or combined -- with vulgarity and noise. The cohesive structure of the local culture is in disarray, yet there must be some larger community to which Antony belongs. This elemental setting on the landscape, and under the stars, resembles the stage of a universal human theatre. There is an existential tension here between individuality and collectivity -- a tension which informs social change in the rural world, and which is in fact the fundamental paradox of all human society. With a compassionate view of this character, the reader recognizes common human responses to change.

The grave marker which stands at the end of this text indicates the universality of Richards' tragic vision; Ivan Basterache is simply commemorated as "A Man" (226). This vision also encompasses Adele's response to the monument: "Her lips trembled, and then she shrugged" (226). Like his wife Cindi, Ivan is briefly famous, and is then "forgotten altogether" (226). Having teased the reader's fascination with this drama, Richards now presents the challenge to remember after catharsis is achieved. For the shrug is part of this tragedy. If we forget the suffering of a person like Ivan, we have taken our gratification for free, and we are guilty of complicity in the cruci-fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

Outside of Life:

For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down

In one of many meta-narrative passages in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, the account of an incident from Jerry Bines' childhood is ascribed to an unnamed character about whom the reader knows very little. Richards' narrator frames this story by introducing the speaker, who in turn introduces his anecdote and provides some intimation of his rhetorical purpose:

> The man told this story:
>
> > Jerry had never known the truth, but he had conceived it himself like some great men conceive of truth and chisel it into the world. And it was his and no one else's.
> >
> > He was like some great soul cast out and trying to find shelter in the storm. (79-79)

According to this storyteller, "the truth" about Jerry Bines is embodied in a significant memory of Bines' father. A single, powerful image of Digger Bines is presented to evoke the legacy of psychological, emotional, and physical suffering now manifest in the enigmatic figure of his son. Drunk at the end of a church picnic, walking home along the road with the young boy, Digger is tormented and intimidated by some other men, including the menacing Gary Percy Rils. The scene creates a sense of the contradictions which make up the character of Richards' protagonist -- aggression and tenderness, courage and vulnerability:

> His father would stand with his shirt out weaving back and forth, his right fist cocked a little, back against the wall, and the dry earth, the smell of hay, tumbling with the crickets and smell of summer and all the world jostling in trumpets of song -- a mentally unfit melancholy man along a road with a little boy by the hand. . . .
>
> Down by the brook with tall delicate sweet grass along the borders, the flies flick out at the last of an August evening.
>
> A cow bellows somewhere off aways. I love you all I love you all.
> "Grrr," he says, with the rock in his hand. . . .
> "I have my little boy -- Jerry -- is just a little boy."
> In the dark, by the ditch, with the crooked brook, going home.
> I love you all I love you all. (79-81)

But this passage is also a parody of the pastoral vision. A child's perceptions of the natural world are evoked in the manner of Dylan Thomas, then juxtaposed against the harsh social realities of Jerry Bines' upbringing. If lyricism is an impossibility in *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, it represents a warning in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*; in this, the concluding novel in Richards' trilogy, various versions of "the truth" are presented to serve many different agendas, and the aesthetic is as suspect as the political.

For all its pathos and its powerful imagery, the story of Digger Bines attempting to protect his son is a didactic narrative, addressed with condescension to a boy named Andrew. The storyteller, who is eventually identified as the "boyfriend" of Andrew's mother, tries to explain the nature of subjectivity. He suggests that there are moments of painful clarity which reveal the essential drama of human life, and that this incident in Jerry's childhood determined his unique, inexpressible vision: "Then you know truth. . . . You don't know it before then. (This is what he could not tell Vera, of course.)" (79). This speaker is insightful and sympathetic, and he might be seen as a cover for Richards' own 'wise' narrative commentary. But in the context

of this book, the reader must question the authority of an anonymous figure who claims to have access to the memory and mentality of Jerry Bines. And a commentator who elevates Bines to heroic status, ranking him among "great men," must be seen as occupying an extreme position on the spectrum of response. For this novel is, as Robert Attridge argues, "a work of metafiction" ("More Sinned Against Than Sinning" 151). It represents the processes by which two characters, Vera and Andrew, construct their respective versions of Jerry Bines' story, and it makes it plain that neither the politicized academic approach nor the naive romantic approach can be "fair and objective" (24). Various oral and written sources supply fragments of narrative which prove to be inconsistent and highly subjective. The novel is a self-conscious pursuit of truth; it adopts a tone of inquiry, deconstructing the mythology surrounding its protagonist, emphasizing the artifice of all narrative, and demonstrating that any single version of a story will be incomplete and unreliable. With his structural innovations in this text, Richards takes a final step away from the self-contained, linear, realist narrative. Acknowledging that any work of literature is as much a representation of its author as a representation of its human subjects, he foregrounds his own concerns as a regional writer.

David Creelman cites *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* as a realist text which ultimately reverts to romance conventions in order to support "Richards' ideological commitment to individual liberty" (42). Creelman assumes that "the style and action of the text fit within the discourses of realism" (257), and he argues

that Jerry Bines "emerges as a romance hero" (258) -- a character who "embodies the values of independence and complete liberty" (260), and who thus cannot be contained within a historicist vision of this rural society. Both Creelman's premise and his conclusion are problematic. The genre classification of realism is an inappropriate starting point, for it is plain, even in the opening passages, that this text represents a departure from the realist style Richards employed in the two preceding novels. Just a few pages into this book's prologue, Richards' narrator establishes an atmosphere of uncertainty about the possibility of interpreting the Jerry Bines mythology, challenging the reader to participate in this inquiry: "His smile was so infectious that it was like a lamp going on. How was this?" (4). The prologue concludes with a statement in the passive voice: "By 1989 Jerry began to be seen again in town" (6). This is a narrative of dubious authority; it emphasizes differences in perception, never making reality directly accessible to the reader. Its first tack, in Chapter One, is a contextualization of one person's perspective on Bines: "The boy Andrew met him in a hunting camp" (7). Though his characters repeatedly attempt direct, chronological tellings of Jerry Bines' story, Richards himself has clearly rejected this approach to fiction.

Creelman states that all realist texts are characterized by "the adherence to historical context, and the absence of self-reflexivity" (34). A realist narrative looks to the past to find "logical and probable causes for events," and it conveys a constant faith in this rational form of documentation:

> [The] realist text ultimately keeps the role of language, and questions about its own fictionality, in the background. . . . Unlike postmodern fictions which are by definition self-referential, realist fictions treat language as a natural medium and a simple tool of communication. (37)

Creelman argues that the multi-voiced narrative structure of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* "does not indicate a shift on Richards' part into the discourse of postmodernism" (262). The text as a whole is finally seamless and monumental, because "each event, however extraordinary in itself, seems completely probable when placed within its proper context" (257). In Creelman's analysis, the elusive, enigmatic Jerry Bines does not destabilize the narrative, for this figure is elevated as a hero when his "role as an admirable representation of independence and freedom begins to take precedence over his formal role as a realistic character" (258). Creelman concedes that Bines is ultimately "an unknowable character," but rather than reading this element of unrepresentability as a comment on the limitations of language and fiction, he concludes that this Miramichi maverick is pushed "so far into the discourse of romance that he becomes a distinctly mythic figure" (263).

It matters little whether this novel is classified as a postmodern fiction. Definitions of the genre are either orthodox or esoteric, and the requisite characteristics can be found, to varying degrees, in many works which also function within other conventions. What is more important, and what Creelman fails to acknowledge, is that this book not only reveals the social dynamics which create and perpetuate mythology, but also represents the opposition between realism and romance as an open dialogue within the text. Richards demonstrates an acute awareness of the limitations and pitfalls of fictional representation, and he shows the tension between different narrative modes as a social reality as well as a literary problem. Richards' style might be considered essentially realist because "it rarely calls attention to itself"

(Creelman 37), but his characters are concerned with the moral and philosophical issues surrounding the construction of narrative, and the credibility of the novel as a whole only adds to the significance of this self-reflexive critical engagement.

The story of Jerry's father wielding a rock to protect him is paralleled with "the story about how his father had made him fight in the pulpyard against men when he was thirteen" (*Wounded* 132). This anecdote about Digger Bines forcing the boy to fight "for a quart of wine" (129) is repeated often, with minor variations, sometimes as hearsay and sometimes as historical truth. These two evocative images of Jerry's father stand as opposing archetypes, one signifying the possibility of redemption for an isolated, damaged individual, the other representing the legacy of cruelty and manipulation. Both are invoked as 'the key' to Jerry's life. The former is relayed to Andrew as an explanation for Jerry's heroic independence, and the latter is reported in a local newspaper as evidence that Jerry is perhaps "more sinned against than sinning" (132). These stories are powerful because they reduce humanity to primal behaviours, and because narratives with this elemental, mythic simplicity are perpetuated through oral dissemination. Both stories are apparently based on incidents of violence which actually occurred, but they have been lifted from their respective 'realist' contexts; in different tellings, altered details are insignificant, and claims to accuracy are irrelevant, for each narrative is primarily a representation of an ideological position. Such competing ideologies are professed and debated throughout Richards' text as his characters dispute the validity of various stories about Jerry Bines.

The fundamental opposition in the book is demonstrated in a disagreement between Andrew and his uncle (who is, like the boyfriend of Andrew's mother, an unnamed character). Andrew's reasoning is described as "romantic," for he interprets events according to the assumption that "Jerry was trying to save everyone" (193). The boy contrives moral justifications for Jerry's actions, excusing all sins and crimes as attempts "to atone for" those who have been wronged (193). This passage draws attention to the appeal of a story with a hero. Andrew clings to any version of Jerry's life which ascribes nobility and self-sacrifice to his conduct. The idea that Jerry tried to protect Joe Walsh is comforting: "It seemed a nice thought to the boy" (194). Andrew's uncle is described as "far more cynical" in his interpretation of the Jerry Bines mythology (193). He believes that Bines schemed to create alibis and sympathies, and that this manipulative behaviour was "part of his histrionics" (193). Andrew's uncle is determined to resist the seduction of a romanticized version of events; he is not "fascinated" by the account which credits Jerry with loyalty (194). He concludes the discussion with a rhetorical flourish: "The idea that Jerry Bines was protecting someone like Joe is a good story -- the truth is always somewhere else" (194).

Readers of Richards' novel, and the characters within the text, are warned not to succumb to romantic visions. Yet the anti-romantic stance is seen to be equally treacherous. Andrew's uncle seems perceptive in his statement about the power of narrative and the transience of truth, but he himself is arrogant in promoting a "theory" which appears to be highly speculative. He believes that he can assemble a

complete account of historical facts and an accurate psychological profile of Jerry Bines. Like Andrew, he is actively engaged in the construction of a story; his sophisticated, "cynical" attitude is just another subjective approach. The idea that Jerry is more sinister than he appears is part of an alternative mythology. A story involving intrigue and betrayal has its own appeal. Considering the significance of "histrionics" among Cindi's friends in *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, it seems valid to suggest, as Andrew's uncle does, that Jerry's ability to control people is partly a theatrical power. But this is only one of several possibilities offered in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*. Some characters believe that Jerry is an instinctive creature, and others believe that he has a great degree of self-awareness. The uncle's anti-romantic position is closely related to Vera's doctrine that a man like Jerry is a product of his environment; both attempt to transcend the mythology, but ultimately impose alternative narratives. Richards demonstrates that a 'realist' vision, whether grounded in cynicism or historicism, will always be inadequate.

Initially it is Andrew who embodies the romantic perspective in the book, and this outlook is associated with childish naivety. It is easy to account for Andrew's fascination with the idea of Jerry as a martyr:

> [The] boy, who was only nine, was drawn to this quality, as boys generally are, infatuated with it, as boys generally are, and romanticized this man immediately as being the kind of man he would like to be himself. (8)

Andrew is described as having a special capacity for sympathy "because he was young and not given to all the froth and worry of the men . . ." (9). There is a kind of half-

irony in references to Andrew's immaturity and inexperience. It is perhaps true that the boy's innocence allows him to indulge in hero worship, but there is a sense here that the men are affecting a jaded posture when they dismiss Andrew's views because he is "only a child" (10). Andrew is immune to the feelings of insecurity which Jerry's presence arouses in the men, and is thus able to reconcile the myth, the persona, and the human reality. Andrew recognizes and accepts Jerry's suffering. Whether based on ignorance, sentimentality, compassion, or penetrating vision, Andrew's perspective is no more or less valid than the views of the men. His unique capacity for response is something "none of the men knew" (9). This is the balance Richards maintains throughout the text. The romantic view may be irrational, but it is humane and sincere, and it occasionally reveals truths which are inaccessible to the cynic. Though conventional narrative structures may falsify human experience, they are based on universal patterns of thought and feeling. The reader should resist the seductive power of story, but must acknowledge the romantic impulses which make heroism and tragedy so appealing.

Creelman finds that the character of Jerry Bines is "excessively significant," and that Richards conveys no sense of irony as he constructs this "mythic, redemptive, and even archetypal romance figure" (264). The critic laments the absence in the text of any self-referential gestures which might question "the central assumption that there really is a 'Jerry Bines' at the heart of the novel" (262). However, virtually everything the reader learns about this figure is part of the Jerry Bines mystique, and many perceptions tend toward the supernatural. Andrew cherishes a memory of his

hero "walking into the gloom of the trees and looking back over his left shoulder and then becoming a spot in the globes of fog that seemed to surface from the road" (10). It is possible that this ghostly image is just an aspect of the boy's fantasy. On another occasion, Richards' ostensibly omniscient narrator reinforces this sense of the supernatural, describing Bines as emerging in the open briefly, and then disappearing "back into the trees again, so anyone standing far away . . . would have believed he was an apparition at the edge of the cedar swamp" (13). Such images of Jerry Bines are illusory, yet the text provides little else; the reader is always "standing far away," catching glimpses of this figure -- and is thus subject to the tricks of perception. The "apparition" of Jerry Bines does not occur in a context of 'the real.' It is the product of a text in which no voice is entirely credible. Jerry Bines is created through an imaginative collaboration among characters, reader, and author.

Ralphie and Adele have considerably more self-awareness than Andrew, but they are not immune to the romantic myth. Like Ivan in the previous novel, Jerry arrives in Ralphie's shop unexpectedly, seeking assistance. And like Ivan, Jerry appears to Ralphie almost as a holy vision. Looking up to see this figure caught in a shaft of light, Ralphie is immediately "reminded of things far away and almost forgotten," and the aura of Jerry's quasi-spiritual power is felt in this moment:

> The window trembled slightly in the wind -- a few leaves blew upwards in the yard and became still again while the sun made an effort to regain the cloud. Suddenly the man looked over and smiled, sunlight on his cheek. (17)

Like a saint, Jerry has a smile which seems "kind and even wonderful," and he affects Ralphie with "a kind of euphoria" (18). Ralphie initially finds Jerry irresistible, but

he is suspicious of this powerful attraction. He is described as feeling uncomfortable with his own fascination: "[He] was pleased, as if he had been filled with a kind of grace, and this made him agitated" (19). Ralphie senses that he has not really experienced an epiphany -- that in fact Bines remains "unapproachable," and is only interesting because he is "famous and wild" (18). But it is hard for him to admit that he is affected so powerfully by celebrity, and that his fascination with Bines is largely voyeuristic.

Adele sees most clearly the falseness of her husband's admiration for Jerry, and she feels it will be "dangerous" for Ralphie to become familiar with her wild cousin (26). She sees that Jerry's charisma inspires "a kind of devotion" in people like Ralphie, who know "nothing about him" (26). Adele's struggle with conflicting loyalties is analogous to that of the regional writer. She recognizes her power as a storyteller -- and the limitations of this power. It is said that she knows "a good deal of things she would not tell anyone about Jerry" (24). She feels an obligation to dispel the illusions of those who are fascinated with her cousin, but she is unwilling to betray Jerry by revealing facts about his past. She is frustrated because she cannot tell the whole story: "She knew too many things that she couldn't say" (25). Adele seems to have more knowledge of Jerry than anyone else, but she will not attempt to explain or justify this man's life, for she realizes it is impossible to articulate 'the truth' in a way that others will understand. Despite her caution and insight, Adele herself is affected by the myth of Jerry Bines. She knows she is prone to the same infatuation she warns Ralphie against, and she is "frightened of this" (26).

Eventually Adele's vulnerability to romantic visions is confirmed when she sees Jerry in her bedroom at night:

> And like someone seeing an apparition, she was uncertain if he were there or if she were deluded by night terrors in the form of shadows playing upon objects in a room.
>
> Later she thought he had whispered something but she could never be certain. Everything had the vague substance of a dream. . . . (186-87)

Adele is affected not by the power of the man, but by the power of the myth. At this point she has no illusions of apprehending 'the truth' about Jerry Bines, but she is concerned with the unreliability of her own perception. It is possible that this image of a figure in her room has been a product of her imagination, and if this is the case, what knowledge she has of Jerry may be called into doubt. Adele's approach to Jerry's story seems to be more firmly grounded in reality than anyone else's, and she is adamant that this notorious character should not be elevated to mythic status, yet she finds herself entertaining a ghostly vision. Ironically, the incident, which may amount to nothing more than the fiction of a dream, is recounted as factual evidence in a debate about 'the truth' behind the Jerry Bines myth. This "apparition" is considered highly significant; it is introduced as "the strangest event of all" (186). As a self-reflexive comment on the role of the storyteller, Richards' treatment of Adele's perspective suggests that an awareness of one's own subjectivity does not make one objective – that narrative is a power wielded by and upon the storyteller, making detachment impossible. The appeal of romance is not, as Creelman suggests, a temptation the author fails to resist; it is a process which Richards examines critically by employing a metafictional structure in this novel.

Near the conclusion of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, there is a descriptive passage in which Richards seems to parody the romanticism of his own particular literary vision. Jerry's murder is heavily foreshadowed over the course of the novel, and when an account of this tragic death is finally provided, the scene is set with great melodrama. As in the depiction of Digger Bines brandishing a rock, there is exaggerated lyricism and imagery here, but Richards' self-reflexive comment is now more explicit. The tension builds in Loretta's house as Gary Percy Rils waits impatiently for Jerry to finish setting up the Christmas tree, and Pachelbel's *Canon* plays incongruously on the radio:

> And faintly the sound of music entered the room, filling all the shades of darkness and light, the pink curtains turning in the twilight, and snow seeping and sifting along the outside of the windows and through the hard spruces at the property's edge. Everything was so still.
>
> The air was still, and darkness coming, and music played, complementing the way classical music does complement the idea of parkas and toques and hands that have been battered most of their lives by work. Does complement the mills and the frost into the earth rather than the sophisticates who would snigger at a failed colleague in a room. (208)

In an essay on Richards' novels titled "The Semiotics of Working-Class Masculinity," Clint Burnham discusses the mixture of signifiers in this passage. Burnham notes that "classical music and parkas and toques are, in bourgeois discourse, untenable opposites" (23). He argues that Richards contrives this "utopian synthesis" of signifiers in order to "break that contradiction" (23). It is true that "the fluidity of class relations" (23) is an issue in this novel, but this fluidity often serves to emphasize inequalities. Burnham fails to identify Richards' acknowledgement of his

authorial power -- a power which necessarily distances him from his working class characters.

Nevin awkwardly attempts to appropriate the trappings of working class masculinity. When he goes to Alvin's house, he wears "a pair of gumboots over his pants" (*Wounded* 67), and he sits at the table rolling a cigarette by hand, "being very officious about doing this" (63). Burnham recognizes that Nevin "wants more than anything . . . to fit into the working-class male environment in which Jerry Bines is a local hero" (23). But it is also significant that Nevin is attracted to this figure because of his class identity.

Nevin is a failed back-to-the-lander who has always been foolish in his adoption of class markers and his emulation of men whom he believes possess authenticity. Nevin has an almost fetishistic obsession with Bines' parka; he wants "desperately" to wear this signifying garment, and eventually Jerry must physically prevent him from taking it (*Wounded* 65-66). In light of Nevin's truly hopeless romanticism, one must read self-reflexive irony in the narrative passage which romanticizes "the idea of parkas and toques and hands that have been battered most of their lives by work." This is, after all, only the idea -- the abstraction which the middle class embraces as a representation of authentic, rural, working-class maleness. Despite his efforts to display the appropriate markers, Nevin often gets it wrong; smoking imported tobacco (63), buying a bottle of wine with a cork (65), and wearing his hair in a ponytail (69), he is easily identifiable as a poseur. Nevin cannot hide his own class status, and perhaps he cannot resist the signifying 'slip-ups' which reveal

his relatively privileged background. Nevin is portrayed sympathetically; he is a pathetic figure, and his wish to be accepted in an 'authentic' social milieu is understandable. He is a weak man, and he envies those who have been toughened by real experience. But because he desires both equality *and* superiority, he is engaged in 'slumming,' and it is the hypocrisy and cynicism of this position which Richards exposes. The author is self-consciously condescending as he sets the stage for Jerry's death, elevating a grim scene to high drama by including a musical score which would be foreign to the characters involved.

Like his citation of a Chekhov story (183), Richards' reference to "the sophisticates who would snigger at a failed colleague in a room" functions in part as an acknowledgement of the privileged position of a writer. The author deliberately betrays the source of his discursive power, emphasizing the fact that he does not write from within the milieu he is depicting. Though he has done much to resist this distancing, Richards must admit that he is now probably closer to "the sophisticates" than he is to the wearers of "parkas and toques" on the Miramichi. He seems to suggest that there is some validity in the criticism that he has been 'slumming' throughout his career. This is the risk he has taken. His representation of Nevin's hit-and-miss image-making shows that the cigarettes and parkas which recur in his work are just signifiers -- tools of the literary trade. This does not discount his depiction of a character like Jerry Bines, and it does not constitute an apology for such portrayals. There is an element of genuine tragedy in Jerry Bines' demise, but it becomes painfully obvious that Jerry Bines exists only in the text, and that his death is

a fiction orchestrated for dramatic effect. The artificiality of this character is in fact part of his tragedy. If Jerry Bines were a real person, Richards would not be capable of representing him accurately, for he would be liable to romanticize such a figure -- with the naive earnestness of Andrew, or with the cynicism of Nevin (or, one might argue, with the irony and convolution of the post-modernist). In his earlier novels, Richards may have been 'guilty' of using a realist style to romantic effect. That is, he structured his aestheticized versions of character and culture in such a way that they may have been mistaken for mimetic representations of an actual society. There is no irony in his representation of Joe Walsh as a simple, kind-hearted man who has a special affinity with the natural world. In *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, the author acknowledges that there is perhaps an inevitable element of exploitation in fiction -- and, indeed, in any literature -- which chooses the rural working class as its subject matter.

In an essay called "Road From the Stilt House," Tony Tremblay examines the evolution of Richards' formal technique, finding that *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* is the author's "most sophisticated stylistic achievement to date" (116). The critic does not employ the terms of postmodernism, but he proposes, with a nod to Marshall McLuhan, that "the medium of this novel is certainly its most important message" (119). Tremblay states that the narrative process in this text is "a subterfuge of rumour, myth, and exaggerated idolatry that is constantly twisting back on itself to reveal its shaky provenance" (119). The reader is forced to piece together

a story "by fragment and innuendo, with prejudice and bias, moving roughly over the exposed seams of omniscient, intrusive, impersonal, and limited perspectives" (119). Like the characters in the book, the reader stalks Jerry Bines ruthlessly, attempting "to pin down this turbid character . . . to *freeze* him as still-life" (119). A sympathetic approach to Bines does not exonerate the reader from implication in an act of violence; there is no moral high ground to be found in this text.

As the murder scene approaches, Richards' narrator states, "Jerry was not a good man, make no mistake" (196). The warning rings with irony, for at this point it is plain that many mistakes have been made by various observers and commentators, and the reader has but little faith in the authority of any voice in the text. The question of whether or not Jerry is "a good man" has been beaten nearly to death -- not by the text as a whole, but by individual characters. The men in the camp, for example, are not rhetorical pawns in the book's moral scheme; they engage in open debate about "the severity of Bines' actions in comparison with other men who led respectable lives" (10). Nevin makes a similar comparison as he contemplates his own conduct: "Why did he feel more guilty about the sins he had done in his life than Jerry felt about what he had done. Why was this?" (67). The question of moral relativism is, "of course, the ageless argument" (10), and of course it is also a central concern running through Richards' trilogy. In the first two novels, Richards contrasts the moral sensibilities of Joe Walsh and Ivan Basterache with the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of other characters. But in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, the author problematizes this kind of comparison. Robert Attridge notes:

> Jerry Bines is repeatedly judged in the novel: in law courts, by other characters, by himself, and even by the narrative voice; however each of these judgements is flawed at best, and none is the definitive view. . . . ("More Sinned Against Than Sinning" 152)

The reader cannot accept judgements against Bines *or* judgements in his favour. For the "ageless argument" is now about factuality and representation as much as morality. Anyone who claims to know the truth about Jerry's actions and thoughts and feelings is bound to be making a "mistake," so even relative moral judgements are meaningless.

Just as Richards' narrator attempts to form an alliance with the reader by cautioning against deception, the man in the camp tells Andrew, "Don't be misinformed," and he condescendingly warns the boy not to "be fooled" by unreliable storytellers (60). The tone of personal confidence actually reveals the subjectivity of voices which assume authority. When this man tells Andrew that Jerry's son has leukemia, he is "smiling delightedly at himself" (8). He endorses the rumour of Digger Bines' cruelty as "a certainty which he delighted in" (9). There is a distinctly morbid pleasure in the self-righteous telling of "*his* story about Jerry Bines" (49, italics added). Little is known about this man other than the fact that he went to university with Nevin (58). This provides some indication of the man's bias, and of his detachment from Jerry Bines' world, but it is not nearly sufficient to account for his perspective.

There are many other dubious claims to authority in the text. Breaking off a description of Jerry and Rils arguing, the narrator, with ironic irrelevance, cites a medical explanation for the crisis: "The various prison psychiatric reports on both men

suggested paranoid megalomania" (198). Another official version of the truth cited in fragments is "the final police report" (62), but the process through which this document is constructed suggests a great degree of subjectivity and inaccuracy. The transcription of Rils' testimony includes the police interrogation, and parenthetical explanations are inserted where this account differs from the convict's "first statement" -- a version which is never revealed to the reader (189-90). Lucy Savoie's police statement is alluded to, but not cited (179). Loretta's statement is obviously edited; Constable Petrie's questions are paraphrased or excised from the text entirely, and numerous omissions are marked with the parenthetical refrain, "Her statement continued" (202-12).

It would be impossible to interpret all perspectives, for it is often difficult just to determine who is narrating. What at first appears to be a 'first-hand' account may be exposed as an oral narrative many times removed from perception. Various subjectivities are framed this way, often in a vague or confusing manner. An account of Jerry's failed boxing career is anonymous until the final sentence, which contains the words, "the man said" (107). Lucy Savoie's memories are contained within a story told to Andrew's mother (39), and Adele's personal response to Jerry is incorporated in an explanation of events addressed to Andrew. In these instances, "the man" speaks in a tone of unquestionable omniscience. At other times, this storyteller's deductive process is represented, and gaps in his knowledge are revealed:

> [The] man said . . . [Jerry] was responsible for a number of things which he did not tell Vera about and a number of things which he did.
>
> But surely Adele knew. And this is why, concerned for Ralphie, she finally drove up to see Bines.
>
> The man wasn't sure when this was. It could have been as late as the third week in December.
>
> . . . If it had been the third week in December the shotgun hole in the wall would have been made -- so it had to be that late. Because Adele asked him about it. (107)

It is not clear what it is that Adele knows; she has more knowledge of Jerry's past than anyone else, but she is not aware of his present circumstances, so there is an element of dramatic irony in this scene. The storyteller mentions the shotgun hole in the wall as if this were a significant and well-known clue, and perhaps Jerry conveys an adequate explanation to Adele, but the reader is only given an account of the destructive act much later (168). Throughout the text there is a sense of incompleteness, and even if objectivity were possible, one could never decode the different narratives to assemble a valid version of the truth. As Robert Attridge states, the novel as a whole is "just another version" ("More Sinned" 152).

Like the man in the camp, Vera indulges the conceit of wisdom and objectivity, believing that she has access to all the relevant facts, and that she can make meaningful generalizations based on her perceptions of Jerry's life. Her rhetorical purpose is blatantly obvious, but as a character she is more than a parody of the ambitious ideologue. Her exploitation of Jerry Bines is an example of the way orthodoxy and self-interest determine the construction of narrative; she conceives of Jerry almost as if he were a fictional character, and her impulse to make meaning

closely resembles that of the reader. Despite the pretence of rationality in her decision to interview Bines and "to write his story" (22), she is unable to remove herself from the mythology.

Jerry is useful for Vera's project "because he had become famous" (23). His notoriety makes him a valuable exhibit. Vera accepts his public reputation as a premise, and thus perpetuates his fame. For the political storyteller, as for any other, sordid or titillating details about Jerry's life are commodities; Vera seems almost greedy for anecdotes, and she becomes excited when Adele supplies vague accounts of Jerry's violent tendencies:

> "Well this is just what I'm after," Vera said delightedly. . . .
> "That's just what I want. . . . I want all of that." (25)

Of course, what Vera wants is a story that fits the social "pattern" to which she subscribes, and since her initial interest is based on sensational hearsay, she clings to the mythology (22). She actually assumes the authority to 'correct' Jerry when his testimony does not coincide with information she has obtained from other sources: "After getting Bines to talk, at one point she interrupted him rudely, saying: 'Well, that can't be right . . .'" (33). Vera will not believe Jerry when he insists that he did not hate his father (182). She assumes that hatred is the only explanation for the circumstances of Jerry's life, and that his denial is symptomatic of some phenomenon which is common, identifiable, and -- to someone with the proper expertise -- fully comprehensible. She says condescendingly:

> "That's a natural reaction. . . . What you want to protect . . . is the male line, that's all. But when the truth gets said it's always painful. . . . It's natural now to feel guilt." (182-83)

This "truth" is Vera's version of the story; she is the one imposing "guilt" on Jerry, using her chosen evidence to condemn him in her own court.

Vera has an exaggerated sense of her power to effect positive change, and a limited understanding of her power to manipulate and exploit others. Though Jerry has been thinking "for months" about the idea of changing his son's name, Vera assumes that this initiative is the direct result of "her positive influence over him" (168). There is painful irony in her hackneyed psychological explanation for Jerry's decision; she tells him "You want to stop the bleeding" (183). She does not know that the matter has become more urgent to Jerry because of Rils' imminent arrival in the community, nor is she aware that Jerry is "bleeding in his left lung" as he sits before her (185). Similarly ironic are Vera's frequent references to "emotional violence," for she assumes that she herself is incapable of such a crime (33). She speaks "calmly" about having divorced Nevin "for mental and emotional cruelty," and about "her refusal to let Nevin see their child" (22). She will not acknowledge her own ruthlessness.

Adele is reluctant to speak about Jerry because she does not "like" him; she is sceptical about Vera's project because she feels that there is nothing to be gained by studying a person whom one holds in contempt -- and that to "use" a person this way is a form of "cheating" (23). Vera suggests that "it's probably preferable not to like him," and she assures Adele that this cold detachment is compatible with a "fair and objective" approach to Jerry's story (23-24). Eventually, Jerry comes to believe that Vera has "a great affection for him" because she has "asked him about his life" (184).

Like Cindi in *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, he mistakenly assumes that anyone who shows such an interest must care about him, and he is emotionally wounded when he realizes that Vera has manipulated him with false kindness. This is the warning and the challenge which Richards presents to the reader; he proposes that self-serving or even dispassionate interest in a story may constitute a form of deceit. In *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* it is impossible for the reader to remain a detached observer, for there is no single linear narrative to follow. As a participant in the construction of narrative, one is forced to confront conflicting desires; while selecting versions of the truth which seem to depict Jerry as a representation of 'the real,' one feels the impulse to lift him above Vera's political concerns -- to elevate him as a larger-than-life romance figure. Richards questions the sincerity and the humanity of either approach to this fictional character.

The man in the camp facetiously dismisses Vera's book as an act of vengeance against Nevin "for the whole emotional violence thing" (51). This is certainly the easy response to Vera. And some critics have felt that the author makes it too easy to scorn this stereotypical figure. Sharon Fraser states:

> David [Adams Richards] clearly believes that to examine childhoods and social conditions in order to seek explanations for behaviour is a new-fangled infringement on the rights of his oppressed characters and somehow diminishes what he sees as the nobility in their burdened lives. . . . [He] contemptuously rejects the notion that we need to develop an awareness about the 'why' of Bines's behaviour. . . . Why else would he have created Vera as such an unpleasant, self-centred, one-dimensional creature, interested only in fitting Jerry into a preconceived sociological profile -- even though she's the only character in the book who shows any interest in why Jerry turned out the way he did? (8)

It is true that the representation of this arrogant and manipulative 'feminist' seems almost savage at times. But perhaps this may be seen as an indication that Vera, like Bines, is constructed through various subjectivities. In the first two novels of the trilogy, she is a flawed character with redeeming qualities. In *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, a metafictional text, she becomes a part of the Jerry Bines mythology. And like the subject of her book, she herself is the subject of rumour and prejudice; she is both romanticized and villainized. By assigning an attitude of contempt to "the man" in the camp, Richards warns the reader to be suspicious of such a facile explanation for Vera's actions. No stereotype contained within the text can be taken at face value.

Ellison Robertson examines Richards' apparent disdain for privileged forms of expertise -- academic or literary -- and proposes that the author's depiction of a character like Vera may be at least partly self-referential:

> I do not think . . . that this bias is rooted in any simplistic anti-intellectualism in Richards, who takes evident pride in his own literate knowledge. Instead, I wonder if his tendency to two-dimensional portrayal of anyone with an institutional affiliation to the 'outside' reveals an instinct to mock his own situation as an 'intellectual' scribe to a community for which he will not abandon either his sense of belonging or of responsibility. While acknowledging various critical perspectives of his occasionally narrow fictional characterizations, . . . we can also recognize these as suggestive of the persistent impulse to refuse the priority of any version of his community -- his own as much as any other's. . . . (28-29)

Indeed, Richards' trade is not so very different from Vera's. Fictional representations may be more concerned with the 'why' of things than their aesthetic form acknowledges, and sociological discourse is generally less altruistic than it purports to be. It is no secret in the community that Jerry is, to some extent, the 'product' of

child abuse. This obvious fact hardly needs to be supported by research and theory. It is also known that Digger Bines made a great sacrifice as a soldier, and suffered mental damage as a result of his injuries. As Jerry himself says: "My old man was wounded in Korea and had a plate in his head that was as big as a saucer" (190). "He sometimes couldn't help what he did" (35). Vera's documentation of the case does nothing to "stop the bleeding," for it is not inspired by compassion. Richards' text acknowledges the impulse to find causes, and it functions as a lament for the ultimate futility of language -- rhetorical or artistic.

Andrew is disappointed that the title of Vera's book is not "Jerry Bines," but "*The Victims of Patriarchy (and Its Inevitable Social Results)*" (50-51). The book does not promote change, for it focuses on victimization and inevitability. And because it uses ostentatious jargon, it is inaccessible to the very people with whom it is concerned. The impressionable Andrew, who is being initiated into adult masculinity through his contact with the men in the hunting camp, is confused and alienated by the language Vera uses, so the book has no effect on him.

The book is even less meaningful to Jerry. When Vera offers to let him read the manuscript before it is published, he says, "Then it better not have any big words on it -- cause I don't read so good" (29). Of course, it is plain from the start that the book will be rife with "big words" which will be intimidating and incomprehensible to a person like Jerry Bines: "words like 'sexual deviance,' and 'malfunction,' and 'dysfunctional,' 'hereditary masculine reaction,' 'empowering,' 'cross-addictive personality,' and 'impacting'" (51). Adele is moved when she sees how Jerry's

limited vocabulary makes him vulnerable; when he asks her what disease his son is suffering from, she is momentarily shocked by his ignorance, and then she understands: "It was not that he did not know -- it was that he was struggling with the word" (30). Jerry has trouble pronouncing "leukemia," and there is much else that he knows, but cannot articulate. Language is his Achilles' heel, and a literary representation of his life amounts to an attack upon this point of weakness.

Jerry's silence is considered by many to be a significant aspect of his identity. He is described as an aloof observer at the AA meetings:

> He wouldn't speak himself, and at the end of the night he would have a coffee in a styrofoam cup, before he left, alone. Now and then he would glance at someone coming in, or someone leaving whom he perhaps had confrontations with in his past, but he wouldn't say anything. (3)

This appearance of detachment becomes part of the Jerry Bines mythology, but it is interpreted in different ways. One of the popular romantic notions about Jerry is that he is a stoic. Richards' narrator states, "If he was down on his luck he didn't say so" (7). The nurses in the hospital are in awe of Jerry, but he is apparently oblivious to attention: "He didn't even seem to notice what people said about him, or that people were gushing over him or that people were amazed by him" (126). Because Jerry does not articulate his identity, he is perceived by some as a selfless being -- a man with an infinite capacity for generosity and sacrifice. Alternately, he is viewed as a selfish and egotistical being with "an unfathomable sense of self . . . that always in some important way disregards others" (109). This more cynical view, which coincides with the psychiatric diagnosis of megalomania, is based on the idea that Jerry is wrapped up in his own mythology:

> [People] had always said he was exceptional and Bines had always taken himself to be, and as with most men and women who have the belief that they are exceptional there is a certain inability to feel as much for others as they do for themselves. (131-32)

In this analysis, Jerry's egotism may be seen to resemble Vera's. The important difference is that Vera uses language to construct herself as a political saviour, while the mostly silent and scarcely literate Jerry Bines is largely restricted to actions, and is thus constructed by others according to their individual biases and desires.

Richards' text offers no resolution as to Jerry's self-awareness. This ambiguity is fundamental to the author's position on the problem of authenticity in *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*. In the preceding novels, there was perhaps an element of primitivism in Richards' characterization of Joe Walsh and Ivan Basterache as natural or instinctive rural figures who did not conceive of their lives in terms of narrative. In the third book, the representation of Jerry Bines as a mythologized figure functions in part as a deconstruction of the desire to identify or create icons of authenticity. There is considerable slippage between romanticization and contempt. Illiteracy is a virtue of the 'natural' being whose experience of the world is immediate and unmediated, but it is also a sign of inferiority. Thus Nevin, who emulates Jerry for a period of time, is quick to attack his weak point, teasing him mercilessly:

> "What in hell did you ever learn? You can't even read very well -- that's what Ralphie told me. He laughs about it at his shop -- all the time. . . . Can't even read. . . . So Vera feels sorry for you -- just like she feels sorry for Lucy -- and all those people." (113)

Jerry is not actually illiterate, but, like Ivan, he thinks of literacy as a power possessed by others -- a power for *good* which is somehow beyond his own abilities.

He becomes infatuated with Vera because he admires her discursive skill and her self-confidence, and his feelings greatly influence the written account of his life which he submits to her:

> Vera took the time, over three hours, to explain to him exactly where she thought he had come from.
>
> Bines sat listening to this. Yes, it was all true, in a way. And he had never met a person like Vera before, who was so sure of herself when it came to someone else. He was only certain that in a way it was true.
>
> And it was at this time that Bines, who was beset by pain in his left side, which he tried to hide even from himself, wrote his own story. (168)

The idea that Jerry is seduced and manipulated by Vera would suggest that he is an innocent figure of authenticity. Vera's misinterpretation of his story according to "the prominent lexicon of progressive thought" seems a horrible betrayal (171). And when Vera assures him that she is not trying to "steal" his story, his response indicates that the commodification of narrative is a foreign concept to him: "Why in fuck would anyone want to do something like that?" (181-82).

Richards never precludes the possibility, however, that Jerry strategically uses a pose of naivety to control others. Adele has reason to suspect that Jerry traps people by winning their sympathy and loyalty. Clearly Jerry is attracted to the Pillars because they have money and power. And he has at least enough self-awareness to be concerned about the way he is represented in Vera's book. David Creelman is particularly critical of the scene in the novel which has Jerry telling his son a story. He cites Jerry's premonition of martyrdom as an instance of the excessively romantic heroism which finally outweighs the realistic credibility of this character:

> Like a Christ figure self-consciously approaching his own Golgotha, Bines tells his son the parable/story of the wise old deer who sacrifices his own life in order to drown a determined hunter and save his young doe and fawn. (Creelman 265)

But with Ralphie in the room listening, Jerry may be actively engaged in the construction of his personal mythology, exploiting every opportunity to improve his image. His dramatic telling of this "passed-down story" may be the narration of a well-rehearsed rustic sage (*Wounded* 94). In this text, the self-interest of the storyteller cannot be underestimated; the protagonist himself is no more objective than anyone else. Jerry's attempts to impress Ralphie are often misguided. He refrains from shooting a moose which is in his sights, he buys wheelchairs for the children's hospital, and he intimidates a civil servant in Moncton (98-99). But the reader may be fooled in thinking these gestures merely quaint. At one point Richards' narrator states, "There was nothing that was not calculated in Jerry Bines" (98). It is possible that authenticity is a sham -- a fraud in which the rural figure may be either the devious perpetrator or the duped victim.

Part of the unreality of Jerry Bines is the absence of a cultural context in which he may be understood -- and which he himself may understand. Andrew's perception that this notorious figure is "*outside* of life" is perhaps accurate (9). Jerry exists within a mythology, and he cannot anchor himself to lived experience. Unlike Joe and Ivan, he has no link to a tradition which he may reclaim. These characters from the preceding novels found solace or refuge in the woods, but Jerry has no such comfort. He is a skilled and knowledgable hunter (12), but for him there is an almost

dismal gravity in the pursuit of prey, for he identifies with the quarry. It is primarily to Jerry, of course, that Richards' title refers. This character is known to possess the peculiar strength of the fugitive: "He had enemies everywhere, and like most of the wounded he had always kept himself physically fit to ward off those who might come against him" (108). In this sense, the myth is self-perpetuating -- and, for Jerry, inescapable.

In *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down* there are no genuine representatives of tradition, and Jerry Bines becomes a symbol of lost heritage. He is associated with the past not through his own memories, but in spirit. It is said that he belongs "to another age and another time, an age that was being swept away and replaced by a new age" (161). When he appears to Adele as "an apparition," he is clearly displaced and tormented by the realities of the late twentieth century:

> It was as if he were a shadow from some other space and time, which had come back from the past, and was looking in upon a future where he did not belong, dismayed at being cast out. . . . (186)

Jerry is an anachronism. In the midst of a snowstorm in the winter of 1963, the drunken Digger Bines brings his wife across the frozen river in a horse-drawn sleigh, meeting Dr. Hennessey at the bridge, and Jerry is born in this sleigh (16). The bridge at the site of his birth represents an intersection of old and new -- the barrier of modernity which Jerry can never successfully cross.

Jerry is never securely located in a social environment or a natural environment. When he appears on the landscape, he is not seen to be contained within the forest, but is glimpsed on the margins, "at the edge of the chopdown" -- at

the site of violence, where there are "many gorged and pitiless humps of soil and torn, thrashed roots" (12-13). In his interaction with characters like Vera and Ralphie, he attempts to cross the frontiers of class, but he remains an alien. The men from the hunting camp discuss the idea that "Bines had somehow reached toward another world, . . . and had for a moment tried to divorce himself from the world he was in" (74). As he attempts to make Vera understand his life, Jerry tries in vain "to find a common ground" (34). Ultimately his strength and his charm are insufficient to break down social divisions.

Richards' *bridge* motif offers an irresistible pun: the physical structure which crosses the river and links separate worlds is homonymous -- and symbolically equivalent -- to the card game played by Ralphie and his friends. In a painful scene of social discomfort, Jerry conveys only the faintest hope of entering a different group, suggesting,

> "I bet you could teach me to play, Ralphie -- I could learn. . . . I could come down to see you on Thursday night -- and learn to play bridge -- and meet yer other friends. I never learned much -- I hear it's a good pastime." (96)

Later, Jerry adopts an attitude of contempt toward Ralphie's more sophisticated and privileged acquaintances, saying, "Ya, bridge -- well -- they'd never do nothin for ya" (173). Significantly, one of the people Ralphie plays cards with is the storyteller from the hunting camp -- "the man who took out Andrew's mother" (173). So this man's exercise of narrative power reinforces the barriers that have limited Jerry's social mobility.

In Richards' fictional world, leisure activities represent cultural and economic changes which have made rural traditions obsolete. In *Nights Below Station Street*, Joe cannot go curling because of his bad back. Recreation does not make sense to characters like Joe and Jerry, yet they are made to feel excluded when they cannot participate in status-oriented 'pastimes.' In *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace*, this kind of social change is seen on the river, where most of the "fishing boats, scows, and pulp boats" have been replaced by "inboard motor boats and sailboats" (115). Ivan speaks with absurd defiance to an old, sick, injured draught horse: "I'm not going back to you -- so you don't have to look in this direction, because I'm on my way to Sudbury" (215). Of course, there is no "going back" to traditional forms of subsistence. Nor is it possible for a character like Ivan to go forward. Ivan fails to save the trapped horse, and he fails to escape from a restrictive rural community. The horse has fallen into the swamp while hauling a sleigh loaded with Dr. Hennessey's lumber. Both horse and man are killed when the flaming bridge collapses upon them, crushing or burning them beneath the blazing lumber and the useless, incongruous sleigh. This bridge, like the one which is impassable on the night of Jerry Bines' birth, signifies the false pretence of social equality. The economic and technological changes of the twentieth century were supposed to lessen hardship and break down class divisions, but have often had the opposite effect in rural communities, and have debased the worker's physical interaction with the natural

world, making it virtually impossible to 'go back.' For a character like Jerry Bines, there is no rural world, and the 'post-rural' world which other characters inhabit is inaccessible.

For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down is by far the least 'plot-driven' of the novels in Richards' trilogy. The book's metafictional structure makes it "both visionary and moral" (Tremblay, "Road From" 119). Like the characters in the text, the reader is forced to consider the ethical and political issues surrounding language and representation. With so many conflicting narratives and dubious claims to authority, the story of Jerry Bines is, as Andrew finds, "one darkness pitted against another" (*Wounded* 198). The idea that a complete account can be "pieced together little by little" is plainly a folly (227). As Robert Attridge notes, all the details provided in the text cannot be sufficient to tell the whole story about Jerry Bines, for this character has another fictional existence in *Road to the Stilt House*; Andrew's knowledge is restricted to one textual world ("More Sinned" 153).

Literary representations are necessarily incomplete, so they demand imaginative participation. The fictional personage of Jerry Bines is particularly seductive. He offers to become a romantic myth of rural authenticity, or a holy martyr willing to atone for a society which has forsaken its history. Inevitably the reader imposes some role upon him, and is thus implicated in murderous fictional exploitation when this protagonist is dispatched as advertised. Adele perceives that narrative may be a form of violence; she cannot bring herself to read Vera's book about Jerry because

"Something about it made her think of it as wounding someone in the heart, hunting someone who was wounded down" (224). It is this kind of conscientious objection which necessitates Richards' metafictional structuring of the final book in his trilogy. The first two novels are plainly sympathetic toward 'the wounded.' Joe endures pain from a back injury sustained while fighting a forest fire, and Ivan bleeds profusely after falling out of a tree and being bitten by a coyote. In the concluding text, Richards examines the terms of sympathy, suggesting that literary representation may be part of a discourse which excludes or degrades his protagonists. In fiction, such characters are contrived as figures of redemption or tragedy, and real suffering is never represented accurately. The text itself is thus an instrument of violence. Of course, Richards does not believe in innocence or renunciation. He gives this novel "a title that is also a dedication and an act of forgiveness" (Attridge, "More Sinned" 153). And having drawn the reader into this fiction, the author himself is hardly innocent. Like Richards himself, the hunter in Jerry's fable has "a bad hand" (*Wounded* 92). So we are all hunters, and the book is for us; it would be deceitful to suggest that it is for Jerry Bines, or for some equivalent figure outside the realm of fiction.

CONCLUSION

The End of Regionalism:

Hitch Your Horse To This 'Post'

Richards maintains his integrity as a novelist by refusing to create idealistic heroes or cynical anti-heroes. Ironically, it may be this skill and discipline in characterization which has led many critics to treat the author as an 'instinctive' realist, and to withhold from him any credit for artistry or self-awareness. Though Richards is not so concerned with his academic reputation as to 'answer' his critics, he demonstrates, over the course of his trilogy, an increasing concern with the moral implications of narratives which have the tone of reality, the ring of truth, or any authoritative claim to authenticity.

Jerry Bines, the hero Richards constructs so self-consciously in the concluding novel, is forced to exist in a vacuum. His past is shadowy at best, and Richards critiques the academic historicism which seeks to explain him according to the environment of which he is assumed to be a product. Bines is neither grounded in tradition nor associated with the contemporary milieu. He does not understand the appeal of television or of sports (*Wounded* 97), and he has never heard of the Woodstock festival which is, pathetically, an important memory for Nevin (121).

In such ways, Jerry seems innocent. Yet the only heritage he can claim is a childhood of isolation and abuse, so he remains, despite his strength, a neutral figure -- almost an emptiness. Jerry is thus an infinitely malleable character, made available to play a part in any mythology, to serve any agenda. Only in the abstract does this figure signify a regional reality; narrative is just one of many forms of exploitation to which a rural culture is vulnerable if it has no memory and no voice, and as a fictional(ized) personage, Jerry embodies this vulnerability.

The character in the trilogy most closely aligned with Richards' own vision is Adele, who is neither empowered nor disempowered. In *Evening Snow*, Adele becomes aware of the potential for exploitation and hypocrisy in all discourse, and at one point she refuses to speak about Cindi and Ivan, believing that silence may be the only tenable moral position. She tells Ralphie that she will say nothing even if a satellite crashes through the roof: "I'd sooner let us all die for openin my gob about it. I'd just go out and pick blueberries and forget it even happened -- 'cause I'm no good to talk to" (126). Of course, Adele is a brilliantly comical and insightful speaker, but she is disgusted by the ways in which power is exercised through narrative. Wishing to wash her hands of the matter, but knowing that such detachment is impossible, she announces, "No one profits from this" (127). As a figure of humility, conscience, and genuine compassion, Adele possesses moral and emotional authenticity -- the only forms of authenticity that Richards does not ironize. Though she is not demonstrative, Adele is the only character who is capable of "absolute love for people" (*Wounded* 225).

For a time, Adele wishes to escape from the region of her childhood. Like Ivan, she feels trapped. But entrapment is not a result of regional disempowerment in Richards' texts, and the idea of 'escaping' is always illusory. The experience of entrapment is a universal condition, and in the contemporary rural world the demarcations of 'the trap' are increasingly difficult to identify. As one critic notes, escape is not a solution for Richards' characters because "the regions of the country they might escape to are the sources of their own region's decline" (Connor 274-75). There is double irony in the scene which finds Ivan in a bog, surrounded by fire, telling his horse, "If I had half an I.Q., I'd be on my way to Sudbury," and then yelling, "Sudbury, Sudbury, Sudbury -- where you can't find me to get you out of fuckin scrapes like this here" (220). Of course, there is no reason to believe that life in Sudbury will be any better than life in rural New Brunswick, or even significantly different.

It is in this sense that Richards' fictional world becomes 'post-regional.' It is decidedly not urban, yet it is scarcely identifiable as rural by any tropes of the pastoral. Far from being the stereotypically insular 'inbred' society, it is crossbred; in terms of politics, ideology, economy, technology, social structure, and landscape, it is a mongrel culture. As Dr. Hennessey says, "Everything is happening on this river today" (*Evening Snow* 166). Significantly, Gary Percy Rils is a hybrid figure; attired in "industrial leather mittens, soft shoes, and suit pants from some city somewhere," he is "a patchwork of two different worlds" (*Wounded* 197). It is not difference which poses a threat, but the absence of commitments. Of course, none of Richards'

characters is immune to this mixing of traditions and innovations, but some are more adaptable than others. Ralphie can make a home for himself in the community, but Ivan cannot. And it is not stupidity that prevents Ivan from leaving, but a special sensibility which is crushed as it is made obsolete.

Frank Davey cites Richards' regional vision to support his "post-national" thesis, but it may be more accurate to view the *end* of 'regionalism' as evidence of a fragmented Canadian identity. Like the concept of wilderness, the concept of rural life has always been part of the national culture. But one of Richards' minor characters is heard to say, "The country is more or less a ghost now. . . . More or less useless as a country now" (*Wounded* 148). And in one of his final absurd gestures, Ivan attempts to straighten his horse's blinkers, which are decorated with little Canadian flags: "Ivan, tears still in his eyes, laughed when he looked at the flags . . ." (*Evening Snow* 221). Post-regionalism does not simply create a uniform nationalism. The idea of patriotic identity is ridiculous if it is not grounded in a more local and direct sense of belonging.

Differentiating Richards from earlier Maritime writers like Ernest Buckler,[1] David Creelman notes that rural novelists of the late twentieth century are deprived even of nostalgia:

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[1]Creelman (272-73) and Keefer (221-31) discuss Buckler's decision to settle permanently in the region of Nova Scotia where he was born and raised, and the anti-urban perspective conveyed in his fictional representations of this community. Cook (1-21) deals with the problems of loyalty and local reception which the novelist felt profoundly.

> Unlike the more conservative Buckler, who mourned the disintegration of his beloved valley traditions, Richards is aware that the Miramichi's rural communities had been devitalized and their populations had migrated to the urban centres before he was even a teenager. (228-29)

But this does not mean that Richards is immune to "the longing for past securities," as Creelman suggests (229). It is because of the vagueness of his sense of loss, and because of the artistic risks of indulging this feeling, that Richards finally makes Jerry Bines a mythical figure, adopting a metafictional style to foreground the construction of this mythology.

In his most recent novel, *Hope in the Desperate Hour*, Richards leaves behind the characters from his trilogy, creating a new fictional world which is the least 'rural' of all his literary settings to date. Though still set in New Brunswick, this new text can hardly be identified as 'regional,' for much of its action takes place in a university town, and it prominently features literary and academic characters, including one who has a reputation as a regional writer. The character named Emile Dexter is the author of novels which represent rural society with an authentic -- and ultimately prophetic -- vision. Perhaps not surprisingly, Dexter is dead in the time frame of Richards' novel, and is thus not represented directly. Once again, the storyteller is mythologized.

Emile Dexter is subject to criticisms closely resembling those Richards himself has grown accustomed to over the course of his literary career, but Richards denies that the character is a self-portrait. Richards mentions other models for the artist figure, but clearly the most significant is a regional novelist:

> I thought of . . . a friend of mine I got to know before his death, Ernest Buckler. I think of the shots Buckler took from people in the Annapolis Valley -- and you know, I'm not criticizing them, but he did, when he wrote *The Mountain and the Valley*. I think of him as kind of their protector. He was Beth's protector and little Effie's protector and David's protector. I mean, he umbrellaed them with compassion. And yet, even though he was their protector, he was ostracized. He was almost entirely alone for the last thirty years of his life. No-one darkened his door. So in a way Dexter is like Buckler. ("Beyond the Miramichi" 3)

But *Hope in the Desperate Hour* is not simply a defence of the maligned writer. The previous novels show that sympathy and advocacy are hazardous literary objectives. As Richards' comments about Buckler reveal, what is intended as 'protection' may be perceived very differently -- both by those the author desires to protect, and by those against whom he believes he is defending them. In the above quotation, Richards casually speaks of fictional characters as analogous to members of a real rural community; in his writing, he has rejected any such faith in realism, demonstrating a critical suspicion of all forms of representation.

While it seems probable that Richards still feels an insider's loyalty to the Miramichi, and perhaps to rural culture in general, he has, with his latest novel, resolutely situated his fictional world outside this milieu. Creatively, he has left the river, and will never be able to return again on the same terms. Having previously used symbolism and structure to examine self-reflexively the problems of literature and authorship, he now deals with these issues more directly, in the content of his novel. It remains to be seen how Richards will fare in what is clearly a new phase in his artistic career. All his writings about the people of rural New Brunswick have, of course, entailed a detached stance of some kind. But he has always been adamant

about his status as outsider in scholarly circles, and his sympathies have rarely been directed toward such privileged social groups. To write with compassion from the perspective of the professional classes may require something of an empathetic leap.

Close readings of *Hope in the Desperate Hour*, and of forthcoming novels, will perhaps reveal a new approach to questions of language and narrative informed by the perspectives of characters who possess considerably more discursive power -- not to mention economic and political power -- than Joe Walsh, Ivan Basterache, or Jerry Bines. Ellison Robertson suggests that Richards is now in a position to address the questions of a "politics of interpretation" as posed in the critical theory of Edward Said: "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?" ("Motivations of Great Duration" 18). The commercial and critical reception of the works in this new phase may indicate whether the 'regionalist' label can be shed or transformed, and whether Richards' status as an artist will be recognized as extending far beyond concepts of authenticity.

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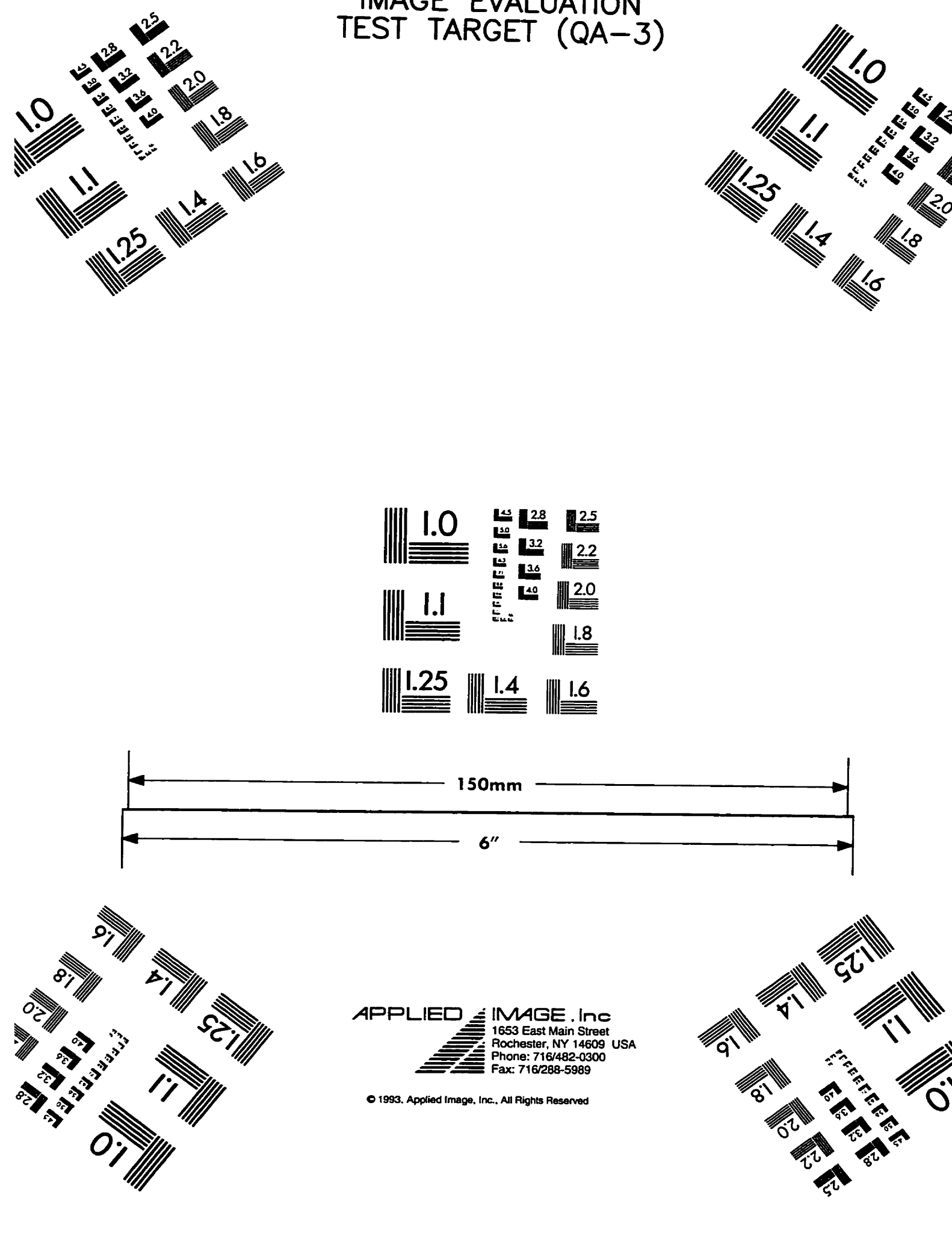
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