Image, Symbol, and the Life of the Imagination in the Works of Sinclair Ross

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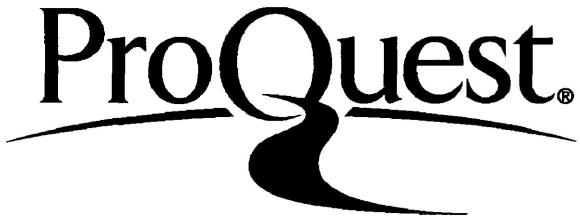

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Dedication

To my grandfathers,

one for playing horse, the other for liking books.

Acknowledgements

Thanks, mum, dad and the kids, for appreciating my work.

Thanks, Sharon, for never asking if it was finished yet.

Thank you, Dr. Heath, for being a thorough, conscientious reader.

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Abstract

Until very recently, studies of the works of Sinclair Ross have over-looked his literary artistry to focus on his place among those writers whose time and place is the Canadian prairie during the Depression. Ross's importance as a literary artist goes beyond this restricted time period. His imagery and symbolism explicate a view of life which is timeless. This thesis examines, in particular, the imagery and symbolism of the horse and the wind as representative of the polarized but co-existing elements of benevolence and destruction in the world. In chapter one--a discussion of Ross's short stories about childhood--the horse, as symbol of the creative, benevolent side of life, dominates. The wind, symbol of destruction and malevolence, dominates the lives of Ross's adult characters, as shown in chapter two. However, neither symbol can exist exclusive of the other. As a result, the duality of Ross's vision of life is shown more fully by the interplay of the horse and wind symbols in the novels discussed in chapter three. This study concludes with an examination of the horse and wind symbolism in Ross's final novel which re-inforces and solidifies his view of the human condition into a single image illustrating the co-existence of the benevolent and malevolent elements of life.

Introduction

Sinclair Ross published his first novel, As For Me and My House, in 1941. The novel was similar in style, theme and content to the short stories which had appeared regularly, usually in Queen's Quarterly, beginning in 1935. As For Me and My House was considered a realistic novel in contrast to the "romantic idyllicism"[1] of other prairie writers:

> He has contrived with amazing success to be both local and universal, to write a book which is, within its narrow limits, a realistic representation of a community and a way of living, and no less an insight into powerful and permanent emotions.[2]

Although the protagonist's intensity and moodiness bothered some critics, the novel was generally highly praised and expected to be a commercial success. Unfortunately, the book sold poorly, but it remains a critical success today, considered "a minor masterpiece"[3] in Canadian literature. The novel has become the standard by which the rest of Ross's work is measured.

Lorraine McMullen, commenting on Ross's work nearly forty years after As For Me and My House was reviewed for Canadian Forum, gives an indication of the complexity and richness of Ross as a literary artist, a recognition which is absent from the earlier criticism:

> Ross deals with universal concerns--alienation and loneliness, the everpresentness of the past, the artistic and imaginative struggle, human compassion, love and courage. At the same time, he roots these concerns in a particular and vividly realized place and time--his own fictionalized or mythic prairie. Ross's powerful stories and novels of the impact of the landscape on the human spirit and on human relationships are located in the kind of prairie homestead and prairie town which formed him.[4]

Still at the core of her remarks is the significance of the prairie setting. However, Ross's accurate local setting of "a community and a way of living" is expanded to a "mythic prairie" where his characters search for meaning in life. Only recently has Ross received a place of eminence in Canadian literature as a literary artist on the basis of this "mythic prairie", having finally been recognized as more than a realistic portrayor of the dustbowl prairie:

> His regionalism places Ross in the mainstream of Canadian literature. The firm rooting of his fiction in a particular time and place is characteristic of such major Canadian writers as Hugh MacLennan, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, Alice Munro, Ernest Buckler, and Robertson Davies.[5]

Until recently, Ross's reputation rested solely on his first novel and the short stories published about the same time. The stories were also praised for their realism, and the connection between character and environment found in criticism of prairie fiction in general is also evident:

> . . . "The Painted Door" is an admirable study of the effect of environment on character, and particularly on a man and wife who have spent seven years on a Western farm where the wind blows incessantly and one bad crop season follows another with inexorable persistency.[6]

Ross's reputation as a short story writer, rather than a

novelist, grew during the years between The Well and Whir of Gold; his last story was published in 1972. In 1968, a collection of short stories set on the prairies during the Depression appeared under the title The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories. The book was considered a return by Ross to the high technical and thematic standard of As For Me and My House.

Ross's second novel, The Well, published in 1958, compared unfavorably with the short stories and As For Me and My House. The sociological theme of a criminal rejuvenated by the prairie was considered by some critics to be a concession to public tastes.[7] One reviewer sums up the general feeling toward this book when he looks forward to Ross's next novel. Unfortunately, Ross's third novel, Whir of Gold, published in 1971 after the short story collection, is subsequently read with the stories in mind, as The Well was judged against As For Me and My House:

> [H]e [Ross] is primarily a short story stylist. The whole concept of this novel is oriented to the form of the short story. The plot is simple, the moment is elemental, and the time is of the short fluid moment.[8]

However, Whir of Gold is recognized as a novel superior to The Well, though inferior to As For Me and My House.

To this point, only The Well is considered a critical failure, but none of Ross's novels or short stories have ever sold at best seller proportions. As a result, his reputation as a writer continued to rest on As For Me and My House, until the appearance of Sawbones Memorial in 1974. Reviewers of this novel are interested in its experimental form, but,

more significantly, the novel is seen as the gathering and ordering of the themes from all of Ross's other works into one concise statement about his view of life.

Though close to four decades separate the Canadian Forum review from McMullen's comments, the critical focus on the importance of the landscape is still sharp, to the neglect of the literary aspects of Ross's writing. This emphasis on the prairie runs through the bulk of Ross criticism in two connected strains of thought. In the first instance, Ross's work, usually As For Me and My House, is discussed by critics as one example of several ways in which the prairie environment has shaped character. In the second strain of criticism, an outgrowth of the study of the environment, Ross receives more individual critical attention. Roy Daniells is the first commentator to recognize the Puritan conscience in Ross's characters, and subsequent critics expand on his remarks to move Ross criticism toward more purely literary considerations and away from concentration solely on the role of the landscape. Finally, William New makes the discussion of the environment a secondary issue by focusing on Ross's view of life as it emerges from the work itself. Critics such as McMullen and Chambers continue to study Ross's work primarily on the basis of its literary merit. As a result, Ross receives recognition as a literary artist.

Studies of the effect of the prairie dominate critical

considerations of Ross's writing. Often, he is included as part of a discussion of prairie literature in general. For example, Henry Kreisel, in "The Prairie: A State of Mind," shows the two different effects the land can have:

> Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, form the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie.[9]

F. P. Grove's writing, according to Kreisel, illustrates the giant-conqueror polarity, while Ross's work shows man as an insignificant being constantly threatened by defeat. As a result of this constant threat, the prairie mirrors all fears caused by that knowledge of insignificance:

> [T]he knowledge of the vast space outside brings to the surface anxieties that have their roots elsewhere and thus sharpens and crystallizes a state of mind. In As For Me and My House Mrs. Bentley uses the prairie constantly as a mirror of her own fears, frustrations and helplessness. . . .[10]

However, Lawrence Ricou, in his book Vertical Man/Horizontal World, separates Ross from the body of writers of prairie fiction for a place of special distinction:

> . . . Ross is the first writer in Canada to show a profound awareness of the metaphorical possibilities of the prairie landscape. More particularly, and hence the term "internalization" is appropriate, Ross introduces the landscape as a metaphor for man's mind, his soul perhaps, in a more thorough and subtle way than any previous writer.[11]

Ricou brings together the threads of earlier criticism, which emphasize the significance of the prairie setting, into a specific discussion of Ross's work, rather than using Ross as one example in a more general discussion of the role of

environment in prairie literature.

The few dissertations which deal with Ross are, by and large, footnotes to the works by those critics who concentrate on the importance of the prairie setting to Ross's work. The impact of the prairie environment on character and Ross's place in the larger context of literature about the Depression are the usual concerns of such theses.[12] A notable departure from this trend is W. B. Moores' thesis on Ross's short stories. Without the usual reference to As For Me and My House, he traces the theme of perseverance and struggle through the stories linking narrative techniques, symbols and themes. Most importantly, he shows that Ross expresses his view of life as a hopeful struggle through these literary aspects, not merely through his use of the prairie setting.

The second branch of Ross criticism also has its roots in the recognition of the role of the environment in prairie literature. Roy Daniells' remarks, in his introduction to the 1957 edition of As For Me and My House, illustrate the consciousness created by such an environment:

> The book is, among other things, an exposition of the Puritan conscience, in one of its manifold shapes. . . . The familiar furnishings of the Puritan soul materialize in these pages: standards, struggle, bleakness and tenacity, the horror of hypocrisy and of sexual sin, jealousy, the will of a jealous God, failure, the problem of fighting or flight, inexorable conscience, the slow realization of forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation after torments too long for any but the Puritan to endure.[13]

This will to endure against all odds and to achieve salvation or the realization of self is at the center of Sandra Djwa's

critical commentary. She sees an Old Testament mythic pattern in As For Me and My House with Philip as a wandering Israelite in the land of the pagans:

> [T]he novel presents a world in which the outward representations of Christianity are without real meaning--simply empty forms without spirit--and in which characters must learn to reject the false gods without before it is possible to find the true God within and, as a sign of this, an authentic sense of direction.[14]

Djwa follows this search for the right way through the short stories, as well as in As For Me and My House, although this pattern is most obvious in the novel. According to Djwa, the rejection of false gods means for Philip "the growth of the god-like spirit or psyche within the individual, a growth which is synonymous with self-realisation."[15] As a result,

> the individual has the possibility of winning through to the true spirit which can inform the flesh which the now lifeless convention has denied.[16]

However, the prairie, the repressive force which shows man his own insignificance, is for the Puritan conscience also a motivating force; the prairie produces in the Puritan soul

> . . . an exuberance which flares up like matches in the wind and struggles to survive, a counter-impulse . . . by which life attempts to defeat the defeat.[17]

This exuberance, called "inspiration"[18] by Ricou, is the way in which the prairie environment, its isolation and repression, can be successfully dealt with to end the spiritual quest for the meaning in life.

Critics such as Warren Tallman, William New, Keath

Fraser and Sandra Djwa have chosen to discuss one aspect of Ross's work without specific reference to his place among other prairie writers; Tallman's article, though, does discuss Ross in conjunction with other Canadian novelists. Although such individual consideration is an advance, the criticism to this point is focused on As For Me and My House with occasional reference to some of the short stories. Ross's later work, The Well and Whir of Gold, is not dealt with. In addition, both focuses for criticism, the environment and the Puritan conscience, grow out of the recognition of Ross as a prairie writer and echo the early reviews which applaud his realistic portrayal of the dustbowl prairie.

William New, in his article "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," published in 1969, sees Ross creating his own vision of reality which happens to have a prairie setting but which also exists independent of it. Again dealing with As For Me and My House, New disputes the straight line progression from search for self to finding self of the Puritan conscience. He acknowledges a cyclical pattern in Ross's themes, a pattern of hope, frustration, renewed hope, but he would dispute Djwa's polarities of true gods/false gods. His essay begins as a discussion of whether Mrs. Bentley's manipulation of Philip to escape Horizon is either good or bad, whether her planning will ensure a hopeful future or prolong their oppressive relationship. His conclusion is that Ross is not "affirming polarities of good and bad,

but . . . exploring what is real in the world."[19] As a result, the "dream of fruition"[20] or Djwa's idea of finding the right way is, in the end, impossible. Reality is somewhere between success and failure and more complex than the two polarities of the Puritan conscience suggest. New's article, therefore, accounts for the endings in Ross's short stories and the later novels, The Well and Whir of Gold. The individual works are seen as a part of a continuing life cycle with both despair and flashes of hope; there are no completely happy or entirely devastating endings in Ross.

Robert Chambers' book, Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler, published in 1975, is one of the first critical works to go beyond the general remarks of book reviewers and surveys to focus on the literary aspects of Ross's work. Like other critics, he is aware of the pattern of frustrated hope followed by renewed hope in Ross's novels and short stories and recognizes the recurring theme of "practical responsibility coming in conflict with aesthetic impulse."[21] However, Chambers is more aware than previous critics of Ross's use of image and symbol. For instance, he traces Ross's repeated use of music and the colour gold to symbolize the beauty of life which is often absent from the prairie environment. The role of horses in Ross's writing has also attracted Chambers' attention. He comments that "some of Ross's best writing has been concerned with the relationship of boy and horse."[22] He cites many of the boy-horse relationships in the short stories

and Chris Rowe's relationship with Larson's horses in The Well as examples of the role horses play in Ross's work. Chambers stops just short of pronouncing the horse a symbol:

> This high-spirited and quiet unpredictable mare [Isabel] . . . provides Ross with a useful way of conveying the quality of Sonny's youth. Isabel seems to have been the one thing which in the course of everyday prairie farm life eagerly excited his developing imagination and sense of beauty. . . .[23]

Chambers is also one of the first critics to discuss Ross's novels The Well and Whir of Gold in an attempt to place them in context with the earlier work and to show a continuation, though not a development, in Ross's writing:

> Once removed from his native prairie setting, and stimulated by the fresh experiences of war and life in a great metropolitan city, the focus of his art begins to shift. His keen psychological insight, so obvious in the portrayal of Mrs. Bentley, continues to dominate his writing, but in the postwar period he starts to exercise it on rather different types of characters: outcasts, misfits, criminals.[24]

He goes on to state that, although Ross explores these themes, he remains associated with "the elemental prairie world of the short stories . . . a world to which Ross remains emotionally and imaginatively bound."[25] The chief merit of Chambers' book is his discussion of the whole body of Ross's writing up to 1970 and his concern with the more literary aspects of that work.

Lorraine McMullen's book, Sinclair Ross, published in 1979, also explores Ross's fictional world in dealing with all of Ross's novels, including Sawbones Memorial, and some of the short stories. Her book is a gathering and arranging

of the ideas of previous criticism as well as a fresh consideration of The Well and Whir of Gold. McMullen reiterates earlier judgments of Ross's prairie as a "region of the mind"[26] which mirrors the characters' inner feelings. What Daniells called "the furnishings of the Puritan soul"[27] are still viewed as a product of the austere landscape:

> . . . the sense of entrapment; the restrained, unemotional personalities of those who must brace themselves to accept disappointment, poverty, grinding fatigue, disaster. . . .[28]

However, the book also departs from this usual study of the role of landscape in determining character. As complete a biography of Ross as is possible at this time is added to the body of criticism. This addition shows that, although Ross attempts to maintain "the simple prairie boy image,"[29] his life has been focused on literary and artistic interests. McMullen reveals that Ross first began writing as a child, took music lessons, tried painting, took advantage of theatre performances and concerts in wartime London, and continues all of these interests with his main emphasis on literature: "It is obvious that Sinclair Ross is himself very perceptive, widely read, and very conscious of contemporary literary developments."[30] Though Ross criticism is pre-occupied with the prairie environment, obviously Ross's interest is more purely literary. McMullen moves toward a recognition of this direction by considering recurring imagery throughout the body of Ross's work: the lamp as a symbol of hope, the colour gold as a symbol of beauty, the importance of music as

an alternative to experiential reality, the mirrors, false fronts and the house in As For Me and My House as symbols of the Bentleys' hypocrisy and the flicker in Whir of Gold as a symbol of beauty. The book also contains the most complete recognition of the role of horses in Ross's work to date. McMullen's book, though still largely a survey of Ross's work, serves as a good introduction to Ross the literary artist.

Later critics such as Chambers and McMullen deal with a larger range of symbols than the earlier critics; however, no critic of Ross's work has yet undertaken a complete study of the imagery and symbolism and of how they contribute to the meaning of Ross's fiction. This present study will examine a portion of this neglected area: the imagery and symbolism of the horse and the wind and how they illuminate Ross's concept of the life of the imagination. Horses are naturally a part of the prairie farm setting during the period about which Ross writes. During and before the Depression, horses were the main form of transportation and, more importantly, pulled the farm implements necessary to grow crops. The ever-present wind is perhaps the one element which distinguishes prairie literature from all other writing. It is not surprising that the wind takes on a symbolic role as in, for example, Who Has Seen The Wind? as a benevolent symbol for the mysteries of life. In "The Wind Our Enemy," by Marriot, the wind is a singularly destructive force defeating life and hope. These elements of benevolence and destruction exist

together in Ross's fictional world in conflicting but dependent pairs of values: hope and despair, life and death, creativity and destruction. From these opposing sides of the mystery of life emerge two symbols which run consistently through Ross's work to represent the appearance of creativity and beauty, on the one hand, and destruction and ugliness, on the other. Horses, like Pegasus, the creator of the fountain of poetic inspiration, represent the illuminated, hopeful, creative side of life where dreams come true and happiness dominates. Opposing this symbol and destructive to its manifestations is the wind, the symbol of destruction and despair. Horses and the wind are both an intrinsic part of the experiential reality of the prairie environment, but their use in similar situations, in relation to creativity and destruction, in Ross's fiction make them symbols of the opposing sides of the mystery of life.

Excluded from this study are the short stories "Barrack Room Fiddle Tune", "Jug and Bottle", "Saturday Night", "Spike", and "The Flowers That Killed Him". Only one of these stories, "Saturday Night", has a prairie setting, but as with the others, neither horses nor the wind have any part in the story. These stories are character portraits, "concerned with merely eccentric and isolated characters or situations,"[31] without relation to life as perceived by the majority of Ross's characters. These five stories, whose main characters Moores calls misfits, lie outside the well-developed prairie

world of the body of Ross's work and have no direct bearing on the view of life which emerges from the central core of his writing.

Ross's work falls into three groups according to the dominance of the horse or wind symbol: the childhood stories, the adult reality stories, and the novels. Each of these groups will be dealt with in a separate chapter. In the childhood stories to be discussed in chapter one--"A Day with Pegasus", "Circus in Town", "Cornet at Night", "The Outlaw", and "One's a Heifer"--the children involved share with the horses flights into the dimension of the imagination, a world other than reality which was previously unknown to them. The children gain greater awareness of the perfection, beauty, and hope that life can offer them. Only in "The Outlaw" and "One's a Heifer" do the children face a more complete awareness of the mystery of life when they are confronted by both the light and dark, imaginative and destructive sides of the unknown.

The second group of stories, dealt with in chapter two, explores a world dominated by the destructive, rather than the life-sustaining, side of life. In "Summer Thunder", "September Snow", "The Lamp at Noon", "The Painted Door", "No Other Way", "Nell", and "A Field of Wheat", the dark, destructive realm of grinding reality constricts the luminous side of life. The future for these families does not hold a broad range of possibilities; all dreams are reduced to the

hope for a splendid harvest. The horse is no longer inspirator of hope for the possibilities of the future. The values of this creative force allied against destruction, such as human compassion, happiness and hope, are sacrificed to the struggle for the crop. The dream never comes true under the dominance of the wind, and the manifestations of the dark side of the unknown, despair, death and desolation, are exposed. With the destruction of the dream for the future, their lives are refocused to the present, away from the single dream of the crop, back to an awareness of the slight manifestations of the creative side of life--human compassion. Although, for most of the characters in these reality-based stories, hope is still dim, they begin again with renewed vigor to pursue the dream of a brighter future.

The basic quest for both children and adults in these stories is the search for a fuller life which comes through greater awareness of the duality of the mystery of life. The children's search is dominated by flights in the creative dimension and the adult perspective is bound by the destructive side of life; however, Ross's novels, to be discussed in chapter three, affirm that life is more complex than either group of stories suggests. In The Well, Whir of Gold and As For Me and My House, the protagonists must deal with a two-edged existence over which they have some control by allying themselves with the creative, fulfilling, life-sustaining side of the mystery, against the opposing,

destructive forces. In The Well, in association with horses, the symbol of the creative half of life, Chris Rowe develops his emotional and spiritual inner potential to combat the forces of death and destruction by accepting responsibility for his life and fighting against destruction, rather than being pushed through life by wind forces. Although Whir of Gold concerns an artist's grappling with the two opposing sides of life, the novel has in common with The Well a horse as motivator for the protagonist to commit himself to the creative side of life. In Whir of Gold, Sonny McAlpine is urged by the spirit of his horse, Isabel, to begin again his pursuit of the dimension of the imagination through music. Neither Chris nor Sonny is shown successfully maintaining the dimension of the imagination, but, as in both groups of short stories, the continued struggle toward that goal gives life meaning and purpose.

As For Me and My House is also about an artist who seeks fulfilment through his art. Philip Bentley has no creative spirit, no Pegasus, to restore his dream of becoming an artist. Unable to struggle against the destructive wind forces, he accepts the futility of his existence and his creativity turns inward to the turmoil and defeat of his life. His art mirrors the destructive dimension of life instead of the creative side. In this novel, the wind, not a horse as in the other novels, becomes the major motivator for Mrs. Bentley to seek freedom and escape from their oppressive

lives, to allow Philip to pursue his dream of being an artist.

The pattern of futility first established in the stories about farm reality continues to be prominent in these novels; however, the novels have an optimism, a hope in the second chance the main characters are given, which is absent from the stories. This additional optimism is not a development in Ross's writing but stems from the fact that in the novels, the elements of creativity and human compassion are not submerged by the forces of destruction as in the earlier stories. The novels deal with longer periods of time so that the characters are aware of the conflict between the dimension of the imagination and the dimension of destruction, while the farm reality stories depict the farmers and their families at the moment that they are confronted with destruction. These novels add the element of renewed hope for the future, not just perseverance, to the struggle and defeat of the stories.

The stories are individual incidents which show the characters under the influence of the wind, but in Sawbones Memorial, Ross's latest novel, the unfulfilled dreams, struggle, despair, and renewed hope are seen over generations. For each generation, even though hopes and dreams never come true and the dimension of the imagination is never maintained against destructive reality, hope never completely disappears. The horse and wind symbols exist more obviously as halves of the whole. Sawbones Memorial, to be considered in chapter

four, is Ross's most optimistic novel and, more significantly, the culmination in one work of his themes and view of the human condition, which have been obvious concerns from the beginning of his literary career. Ross's philosophy of life is rounded out by this last novel and the horse and wind symbols remain representative of the basic creativity-destruction, light-darkness, hope-despair duality of life.

Introduction

Notes

[1]J. R. MacGillivray, Rev. of As For Me and My House, by Sinclair Ross, University of Toronto Quarterly, 11 (April 1942), p. 298.

[2]E. K. Brown, Rev. of As For Me and My House, Canadian Forum, No. 21 (July 1941), p. 124.

[3]John Moss, Rev. of Whir of Gold, Fiddlehead Review, No. 90 (Summer 1970), p. 126.

[4]Lorraine McMullen, Sinclair Ross (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 145.

[5]McMullen, p. 146.

[6]E. A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1949), p. 97.

[7]Robert D. Chambers, Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975), p. 43.

[8]Donald Stephens, "Fluid Time," Rev. of Whir of Gold, by Sinclair Ross, Canadian Literature, No. 48 (Spring 1971), p. 93.

[9]Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 256.

[10]Kreisel, p. 260.

[11]Laurence Ricou, "The Prairie Internalized: The Fiction of Sinclair Ross," in Vertical Man/Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 82.

[12]For example, Irene L. Fowlie, "The Significance of Landscape in the Works of Sinclair Ross," Diss. University of Calgary, 1977 and Shirley Jane Paustian, "The Literature about the Depression, 1929-1939, in the Prairie Provinces of Canada," Diss. University of Alberta, 1975.

[13]Roy Daniells, Introd., As For Me and My House, by Sinclair Ross (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. vii.

[14]Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," Canadian Literature, No. 47 (Winter 1971), p. 54.

[15]Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 1, No. 4 (Fall 1972), p. 50.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow: Four Windows onto Landscapes," Canadian Literature, No. 6 (Summer 1960), p. 16.

[18]Ricou, p. 90.

[19]William New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," Canadian Literature, No. 40 (Spring 1960), p. 28.

[20]New, p. 29.

[21]Chambers, p. 20.

[22]Chambers, p. 15.

[23]Chambers, pp. 50-1.

[24]Chambers, p. 46.

[25]Chambers, p. 40.

[26]McMullen, p. 145.

[27]Daniells, p. vii.

[28]McMullen, p. 146.

[29]McMullen, p. 21.

[30]McMullen, p. 22.

[31]W. B. Moores, "The Valiant Struggle: A Study of the Short Stories of Sinclair Ross," Diss. University of Newfoundland, 1977, p. 85.

Chapter 1

"the dash and spirit of the horses"

In the works of Sinclair Ross, horses are recognized by recent critics as more than realistic props in the dust-bowl prairie setting. As Lorraine McMullen comments:

> The horse is a recurrent image in Ross's works. . . . For his children it is linked to the imaginative life--Peter Parker's colt becomes his Pegasus, and Jenny's old roan, Billie, is transformed into a young, fleet-footed circus horse. For the adolescent Peter McAlpine, the young mare, Isabel, associated with his initiation into manhood, has qualities linking her with sexuality and imagination. To the adult Peter in Whir of Gold, Isabel functions as a link to his past and a continuing reminder of his own talent and superiority.[1]

The sensitive reader is immediately aware of a special relationship between Ross's children and their horses. This closeness gives horses such as Peter Parker's colt, Tommy Dickson's Rock and Peter McAlpine's Isabel personalities of their own. However, the horses are independent of the children and initiate experiences which go beyond the normal child-horse relationship. The horse, which is more than the peripheral link to the imagination that McMullen sees, is the enspiriting essence of the imagination. Without these horses, the children are at a loss to discover the dimension of the imagination which awakens their dreams of fulfillment, creativity, and happiness for the future.

Each horse becomes a Pegasus, soaring above everyday reality to a light-filled dimension of perfection and beauty.

In Greek mythology, Pegasus, the white, winged horse born from the blood of the beheaded Medusa, created the fountain of Hippocrene, which was sacred to the Muses as the source of poetic inspiration. The only man to ride this magical horse was Perseus, who captured and gently tamed him with a golden bridle provided by Athena. He successfully rode Pegasus to kill the Chimera, but when he pridefully attempted to join the gods on Olympus, Pegasus threw him back to earth, where Perseus remained, while Pegasus became the thunder and lightning bearer of Zeus.

In "A Day with Pegasus," "Cornet at Night," and "Circus in Town," children are propelled into flights of the imagination by the artistic spirit in the form of a horse. These stories provide the basic pattern for the flight with the spirit of the imagination which leads to new awareness of the world. Peter Parker's new colt, in "A Day with Pegasus," is the Pegasus which inspires his flights of the imagination. Like Perseus with his golden bridle, Peter learns to tame his imagination and channel it into artistic creation in the form of a story. However, Peter, unlike Perseus, does manage a glimpse of the dimension of perfection and divinity. Furthermore, by combining this imaginative experience with everyday reality, he achieves a new awareness, a new way of seeing the world around him. In "Cornet at Night," Tommy Dickson becomes aware of the dimension of the imagination through music rather than a horse. He soars into the realm

of the imagination under the influence of Philip Coleman's cornet. Unlike Peter's experience, reality and imagination are not smoothly combined for Tommy, and his new awareness is bittersweet. Jenny, in "Circus in Town," reacts excitedly and fancifully to a bit of coloured poster which her brother brings from town. She too soars into the dimension of the imagination to create her own perfect circus, untouched by conflicting reality. Although these flights into the imaginative dimension are momentary, and these children might, like Perseus, be thrown back to earth forever, all learn about the possibilities of life from these imaginative experiences.

A sense of soaring into a world of light and beauty above earthly reality characterizes all of these flights into the dimension of the imagination, whether inspired by a horse or by another earthly manifestation of the spirit of the imagination. For example, Tommy's flight into the realm of the imagination in "Cornet at Night" is described in the same terms as Peter's experience in "A Day with Pegasus":

> There was a state of mind . . . in which one could skim along this curve of prairie floor, and gathering momentum from the downward swing, glide up again and soar away from earth. He succeeded now. Borne by a white-limbed steed again, but smoothly, as if their passage were a flight. . . .[2]

> They [the notes] floated up against the night, and each for a moment hung there clear and visible. Sometimes they mounted poignant and sheer. Sometimes they soared and then, like a bird alighting, fell and brushed earth again.[3]

In "A Day with Pegasus," the spirit of the imagination is a winged horse; in "Cornet at Night," the cornet notes, manifestations of the same spirit, are also winged, soaring and diving like birds. The same overall effect, of flying above reality, is achieved. Specific elements associated with the dimension of the imagination recur in these stories. Extreme clarity of vision is possible in this dimension, beauty and light are the prominent sense impressions, and a sense of timelessness is experienced. More importantly, all the children are aware of having seen an other-worldly dimension, of having captured a "glimpse of the unknown." (49)

"A Day with Pegasus", published in 1935, is the prototype for Ross's use of the horse as symbol of the spirit of the imagination. Biddy's new colt fires Peter's imagination after its birth, as the dream of it possessed him before its birth; but his imagination is stretched and enlarged under its influence. The colt's essence intensifies to produce a full-grown dream horse of exquisite speed and beauty to carry him out of earthly reality into a dimension of perfection and beauty. This same spirit prompts him to attempt to share his joy and excitement in the form of an imaginative story. Even though Peter's flights with the spirit of the imagination are ridiculed by adults, he is able to take flight once more, at the end of the story, with the awareness that he has discovered the unlimited possibilities of a life informed by the spirit of the imagination.

With the birth of the colt, Peter discovers the tangibility of dreams:

> It was a strange, almost unbearable moment. The horse that for five months had served the extravagances of his imagination, that he had lived with, gloried in, and, underneath it all, never quite expected to come true--it was a reality now--alive, warm and breathing--two white stockings and a star.[4]

Because this incredible dream has come true, Peter is transported by degrees into a world of pure imagination, where anything is possible. The newborn colt quickly outstrips even Peter's dreams of its speed:

> The colt ran with him, more swiftly now than it had ever run before. With no earth beneath their feet they leaped across the garden and around the house--around the house and across the garden--then back to stand a moment eager and irresolute before the stable door. (143)

Soon the spirit of the dream possesses him, kindling his imagination further:

> His colt, grown fleet of limb, possessed a fire and beauty that enslaved him now, that he could not abandon for the blear-eyed reality in Biddy's stall. (143-44)

Peter's vision expands yet again. His colt becomes the Pegasus which carries him into the world of the imagination:

> But it was a mile to school, and the reality could not last so far. The white-stockinged legs began to flash more quickly, the long limp neck to arch, the stubbly tail to flow. Then suddenly as if by magic he was mounted, and the still May morning sprang in whistling wind around his ears. Field after field reeled up and fell away. The earth resounded thundering, then dimmed and dropped until it seemed they cleaved their way through flashing light. Until at last he stood quite still, impaled with a kind of wonder-fear that life should yield him such divinity, while the sun poured blazing, and the road stretched white and dusty through the fields of early wheat. (145)

Peter is no longer conscious of the material colt; he rides a spirited, mystical horse through the barrier separating earth-bound reality and imagination. A flash of light, a feeling of wonderment and a sense of timelessness mark the transition, as earthly reality fades. Peter has been transported into a new dimension above earthly reality where he sees divinity, perfection, and purity.

This expanded vision is accompanied by the passage through a definite barrier between the dimension of reality and the dimension of the imagination. However, the dimension perceived under the influence of the spirit of the imagination is no less "real" than earthly reality. Peter discovers an alternate reality, a new awareness or way of seeing life. Therefore, Peter's ride is not, as claimed by McMullen, merely an "escape from the dreary and restricted routine of [his] limited world . . . [to a] world of unknown possibilities."[5] Until the birth of the colt, which enables him to see the dimension of the imagination, Peter did not know that such a world existed. He is born into the world of the imagination with the birth of the spirit of the imagination into his life.

Peter insists on a name for his horse which will reflect the inner spirit which so affects him. He considers the name "Tony" after a cowboy's fiery horse:

> A white and sorrel skewbald: two round patches on his hips that shone like copper in the sun, eyes with a blaze through the rakish forelock to confirm the

> cowboy's stories of an outlaw sire--. . . . (146)

However, this name is rejected because

> [I]t lacked that indefinable quality of reverence which in his smile Dan [Peter's brother] had expressed before even the helplessness of the blear-eyed colt. (147)

The cowboy's horse expends all its energy on its outward appearance. Though the Parkers' horses are Clydesdales, huge draft horses bred for farm work, not for racing or the rodeo, they exhibit "twice the dash and spirit of the horses he knew on other farms." (142) This spirit goes beyond the rodeo horse's superficial flashiness to defy subduing reality: "Even after twenty years of foal-bearing and the plow she herself [Biddy] always pranced a little as they led her out of the stable." (142) Such horses represent a sensitive and daring inner spirit which is defiant of earthly routine.

Like Perseus', Peter's flight is abruptly grounded by earth-bound reality. First, his farm chores break the spell of his imagination:

> It was the colt, the colt he had raced with before breakfast across the garden, that made the feeding of the calves this morning such a humiliation. . . . Nigger--Daisy--Dot--as stupid and silly as their names, gurgling and blowing at him until there was no colt left at all--until for beginnings again he had to steal back to the stable, and pay another visit to the box-stall. (144-45)

However, such incidents cannot submerge the spirit stimulated by his colt. He is reprimanded by Miss Kinley, his teacher, when he attempts to share his excitement with his friends, but her anger is lost on him. Possessed by the spirit of

his new colt, he is involuntarily pulled out of the classroom reality into the dimension of his earlier flight:

> Hammer of mortification--of despairing foreknowledge that he would never solve the [arithmetic] problem--and gradually at last of galloping hooves. . . . The rhythm persisted, was stronger than his will, than his embarrassment, stronger even that [sic] the implacability of Miss Kinley's tapping ruler. . . . Gradually the class-room fell away from him. The light flashed golden in his eyes again. The fields sped reeling young and green. (146)

Peter's friends, untouched by the spirit of the imagination embodied by the colt, are firmly rooted in reality also:

> His announcement could suggest to them no more than a heap of blear-eyed helplessness not very different from the reality in Biddy's stall before which even he this morning had stood rather critical and unimpressed; . . . Their indifference . . . seemed deliberate, a conspiracy to belittle his colt. (149)

However, he defends the colt from their insults, and his faith in its intangible spirit is strengthened:

> The colt, now that he had actually championed it, seemed more real, more dependable--seemed even reaching out to assure him that the flights of his imagination this morning had been something more than mere fantasy. (151)

Peter is unable to convey to others the tangibility of the spirit of the imagination; however, at the same time, this spirit prevents him from descending completely into reality. His short, but actual, friendship with a cowboy named Slim and his sensitized imagination combine into a day-dream over which he has little control. Imagination overpowers reality and an improbable fantasy results:

> . . . Slim must have another name, and fancifully it began to grow in Peter's mind that some day he

> might take horse and ride out seeking him again. . . . Then on again all four of them--unequal, yet in total virtue equalling: himself on the horse that was to be called whatever Slim's real name was--and a great cowboy riding Tony. (147)

Later, the spirit of the imagination works in him so that he is consciously able to unite imagination and reality in a composition for Miss Kinley. He thinks of his colt and is again transported above the earth to the dimension of the imagination:

> [T]here was a moment's stillness round him, clear and isolating like a globe of magic crystal; and then suddenly he was writing. As he had never written before. With the glow and enthusiasm of sheer inspiration. (151-52)

Rather than reproduce the Saturday which he considers "a limbo of unworthy dullness" (151), "he transformed it--redeemed it with an inner, potential reality--rose suddenly like a master above the limitations of mere time and distance." (152) Now for the first time, Peter reproduces in a controlled manner the experience of his flight above the earth. He gives his Saturday the freedom of possibility, pushing his experience in the sheer joy of being alive into the timeless, universal sphere of perfection.

Miss Kinley, like Peter's friends, demands pure earth-bound reality. She insists that he write a completely accurate account of how he spent his Saturday and destroys the imaginative one, filled with possibility, hope for the future, and excitement. In confusion and frustration, Peter seeks renewal from his colt, the embodiment of the spirit of

the imagination: "all his pride in a peerless horse had become a humble need to see again and draw comfort from a wobbly-legged one." (154) He enters Biddy's stall "in fearful hope of what awaited him" (155) but the spirit of the imagination is still strong: "There was the same hush, the same solemnity," (155) which he had felt on first discovering the colt. In addition, as he seeks renewal from the material horse, his dream expands once more from being merely a childish wish for a fast horse to become a dream of understanding, seeing and knowing the mysteries which life offers.

Peter slips into the hay loft to interpret the awakening which has been inspired by the birth of his colt. Instinctively, he senses that this moment is the beginning of the fulfillment of his own destiny. With the birth of the colt which inspired the birth of his imagination, Peter was born anew: "It was imperative to be alone a few minutes, to feel his way through and beyond this mystery of beginning." (155) As he looks out over the prairie from the stable loft, Peter is able to describe this new awareness:

> There was a state of mind, a mood, a restfulness, in which one could skim along this curve of prairie floor, and gathering momentum from the downward swing, glide up again and soar away from earth. He succeeded now. Borne by a white-limbed steed again, but smoothly, as if their passage were a flight: no rush of wind, no beat of thundering hooves. And in the flight the mystery was not solved, but gradually absorbed, a mystery still but intimate, a heartening gleam upon the roof of life to let him see its vault and spaciousness. (155-56)

He laments the fact that he has only just awakened to the possibilities of his future and has wasted time, unlike his colt who is "[a]ble to go into and explore a whole new waiting world. . . . It seemed a pity that a boy was never born that way." (156)

As Peter's awareness of the power of the imagination grows and he gains control over its influence, he becomes an artist uniting reality and imagination in a new way of perceiving the world around him. The earthly horse acts as a Muse, the spirit in its purest form, to inspire in Peter recognition of "an inner, potential reality," (152) an awareness of the numberless possibilities life holds. Since Biddy's colt lived up to his expectations, the spirit of the imagination suggests that his hopes for the future are also possible. These hopes include those dreams he now has and those he will have. However, Peter's awareness advances one step further to make him an artist. Pegasus transports the boy, involuntarily at first, into a dimension of crystal clarity, light, divinity, and beauty, until he can finally soar by himself into the state of consciousness in which the mystery of life is internalized. Pegasus is a symbol of all that is light-filled, hopeful, beautiful and perfect in life, those experiences and sights which are inspired by the spirit of the imagination.

The presence of extraordinary horses makes the stable in Ross's stories a natural setting for spiritual awakenings

such as Peter's. The stables are holy places where sensitivity is heightened to the degree of spiritual experience by the influence of the spirit of the imagination. This motif of stable as shrine recurs in many of Ross's stories. For example, Peter's stable is the scene of a personal and intimate experience suggesting a chapel setting:

> The stable with its gloom and rustling mangerfuls of hay had subdued his excitement to a breathless sense of solemnity--a solemnity that was personally, intimately his own--that he knew others would misunderstand and mar. (141)

The stable description in "Circus in Town" suggests a larger cathedral atmosphere, where the world is audible but not threatening:

> It was a big, solemn loft, with gloom and fragrance and sparrows chattering against its vault of silence like boys flinging pebbles at a wall. And there, in its dim, high stillness, she had her circus.[6]

In "The Lamp at Noon," a monastic retreat is evoked. The individual is overwhelmed by the stillness and solitude of a cell-like sanctuary and is protected from outside reality:

> There was a deep hollow calm within, a vast darkness engulfed beneath the tides of moaning wind. He stood breathless a moment, . . . It was a long, far-reaching stillness. The first dim stalls and rafters led the way into a cavern-like obscurity, into vaults and recesses that extended far beyond the stable walls. Nor in these first quiet moments did he forbid the illusion, the sense of release from a harsh, familiar world into one of peace and darkness.[7]

At the same time, the stable can be a pagan shrine of sensuousness, as in "The Outlaw," rather than one with Christian overtones:

> There were moments when I felt the whole stable charged with her, as if she were the priestess of her kind, in communion with her diety [sic].[8]

In all cases, the stable becomes the setting for new awareness.

In "Cornet at Night," the same spirit which leads Peter Parker to commune with the mystery of life enlivens Tommy's appreciation of music. In this story, the musical composition, Sons of Liberty, is Tommy's counterpart to Peter's cowboy-adventure story. The spirit of this music, unfortunately, is not yet under Tommy's control:

> There was a fine swing and vigor in this piece, but it was hard. Hard because it was so alive, so full of youth and head-high rhythm. It was a march, and it did march. I couldn't take time to practise the hard spots slowly till I got them right, for I had to march too. I had to let my fingers sometimes miss a note or strike one wrong. Again and again this afternoon I started carefully, resolving to count right through, the way Miss Wiggins did, and as often I sprang ahead to lead my march a moment or two all dash and fire, and then fall stumbling in the bitter dust of dissonance.[9]

A stranger with a cornet shows Tommy the advantages of control while under the influence of the artistic spirit. However, the farm horse, Rock, also responds to Philip's music and is, actually, Tommy's source of assurance that the dimension of the imagination exists. Philip's music takes Tommy into a realm of beauty, light and perfection, for a glimpse of a side of life which he was previously unable to attain.

In a departure from the usual farm routine, Tommy's father proposes to send him to town to hire a hand for the harvest. However, Tommy does not confront life with Peter's

vigor, and cautious of hoping for too much, he will not submit himself entirely to the sheer joy of this new opportunity:

> For while it was always my way to exploit the future, I liked to do it rationally, within the limits of the sane and probable. On my way to the cows I wanted to live the trip to town tomorrow many times, with variations, but only on the explicit understanding that tomorrow there was to be a trip to town. I have always been tethered to reality, always compelled by an unfortunate kind of probity in my nature to prefer a barefaced disappointment to the luxury of a future I have no just claims upon. (38)

At this point, the spirit of Pegasus is a disruptive force in Tommy's life. He is not a dreamer on the possibilities of life, even though he has been touched by the spirit of the imagination through his music.

Significantly, Tommy is sent to town in the care of an old farm horse named Rock, which is outwardly not of the race of Pegasus. However, with Rock, Tommy knows the feeling of control, confidence and superiority which a horse inspires. Like Peter Parker riding his dream horse in rodeos with Slim, Tommy and Rock together are a match for the world, and Tommy is awakened to his own capabilities and potential:

> Alone with himself and his horse he [a boy] cuts a fine figure. He is the measure of the universe. He foresees a great many encounters with life, and in them all acquits himself a little more than creditably. He is fearless, resourceful, a bit of a brag. His horse never contradicts. (40)

Tommy must use this confidence to convince the shop-keeper that he is not a child and has taken the responsibility for seeing that his mother's instructions are followed. Like

Peter under the scrutiny of his friends, Tommy successfully defends himself but must seek renewal from his horse:

> After the way the town had treated me it was comforting and peaceful to stand with my fingers in his mane, hearing him munch. It brought me a sense of place again in life. It made me feel almost as important as before. (41)

Therefore, even stolid Rock belongs to the spirit of the imagination for helping Tommy experience if only momentarily how his life could be.

In his attitude of inferiority and under Rock's influence, Tommy is attracted to a man whose presence proclaims that he is the measure of the universe:

> His hands were slender, almost a girl's hands, yet vaguely with their shapely quietness they troubled me, because, however slender and smooth, they were yet hands to be reckoned with, strong with a strength that was different from the rugged labour-strength I knew. (42)

Drawn by this inner strength, which he does not possess, Tommy hires Philip Coleman knowing he is unacceptable for harvest work. He is suitable, however, for Tommy's purpose:

> . . . to settle scores with Main Street. I wanted to capture some of old Rock's disdain and unconcern; I wanted to know what it felt like to take young men with yellow shoes in my stride, to be preoccupied, to forget them the moment that we separated. And I did. (44)

In Philip's company, Tommy regains the confidence he had with Rock; he feels himself capable of anything, of experiencing life to the fullest. However, unlike Peter Parker, Tommy does not know instinctively how to control or reproduce his flights of feeling and thinks it better to subdue them:

> It [the music] keeps pulling you along the way it really ought to go until you're all mixed up and have to start at the beginning again. I know I'd do better if I didn't feel that way, and could keep slow and steady like Miss Wiggins. (45-46)

Philip, however, corrects this impression by explaining that Tommy's spirited horse, Clipper, without speed and unpredictability would be like Rock, harnessed, subdued and dull. Tommy shrinks from such possibilities, preferring, as he mentioned earlier, the safety of probability.

Philip's illustration of Rock as subdued and plodding is not quite accurate. "[O]nly one fragment of a note" (46) from the cornet "like pure and mellow gold" (46) is necessary to transform the plodding Rock into a spirited Pegasus. At this briefest sound from the cornet, Rock leaves the road, carrying the wagon on a jolting gallop across the open prairie. Although his flight never becomes airborne like Pegasus', Rock responds to the spirit of the imagination and breaks out of routine reality. For Tommy also, the stranger's cornet is the agent of the imaginative spirit which lifts him out of earthly reality, expanding his limited understanding of life, for new awareness:

> And I was right: when they came the notes were piercing, golden as the cornet itself, and they gave life expanse that it had never known before. (49)

Tommy feels the influence, not only of having found a kindred spirit, but of the spirit of the imagination ordering his life and giving him a destiny:

> . . . I could still feel the cornet's presence as if

> it were a living thing. Somehow its gold and shapeliness persisted, transfiguring the day, quickening the dusty harvest fields to a gleam and lustre like its own. And I felt assured, involved. Suddenly there was a force in life, a current, an inevitability, carrying me along too. (47)

Tommy need only internalize this experience to bridle and control Pegasus and equal Peter's level of awareness. He seems on the verge of this discovery as he listens to Philip play a march in which he has harnessed and controlled, but not subdued, the spirit of the imagination:

> . . . the notes came flashing gallant through the night until the two of us went swinging along in step with them a hundred thousand strong. For this was another march that did march. It marched us miles. It made the feet eager and the heart brave. It said that life was worth the living and bright as morning shone ahead to show the way. (49)

This is how Peter Parker felt at the end of "A Day with Pegasus." He knew the way; he was awake to explore and know the world. Now the awakened artistic or imaginative spirit in Tommy has a purpose; he is ready to take advantage of the possibilities life offers him other than those granted by meagre farm reality.

Philip has awakened the Dickson family to the recognition that reality is not the only dimension in life, but this awakening makes life more difficult:

> It was helplessness, though, not anger. Helplessness to escape . . . wheat when wheat was not enough, when something more than wheat had just revealed itself. (50)

Philip and the cornet are special, but because of the necessities of the harvest, reality's hold keeps Tommy's

parents earth-bound. Tommy "want[s] to rebel against what was happening, against the clumsiness and crudity of life, . . ." (51) when Philip must leave the farm, but there is the implication that, like his parents, he cannot. He knows that life on a farm dictates that artistry like Philip's is insignificant, making Philip's visit a meaningless, futile intrusion of imagination into reality.

Apparently, Tommy and his parents are left with only the memory of Philip and his kind: "A harvest, however lean, is certain every year; but a cornet at night is golden only once." (51) This conclusion is ambivalent, and Ross's revisions of this story indicate that he meant it to be so. As McMullen comments, ". . . Ross eliminated the lines which specifically indicate that Tommy now sees he too must be a musician--or at least an artist."[10] On the one hand, this beautiful, mellow cornet may have played for the first and only time before Tommy is harnessed and held earth-bound by the necessities of other harvests. If he cannot reproduce the imaginative dimension without Philip, his awakening is then hollow, serving no purpose but to taint his life with discontent and bitterness. On the other hand, the cornet, played once, sparks the imaginative spirit in Tommy, helping him to choose his priorities, as Rock had gained "a better understanding of important things," (42) and giving him "tentative self-knowledge."[11] However, if Peter Parker's experience is an indication of the tenacity of the spirit of

the imagination that once awakened can never be subdued, the progress toward a new understanding will continue for Tommy.

A similar atmosphere of hopelessness and futility pervades "Circus in Town." A torn poster advertising a circus transports Jenny from the reality of bickering parents into a flight of imagination. In her "white eagerness,"[12] the poster has the same effect upon Jenny as the new colt and the cornet have upon their observers. She is touched by the spirit of the imagination.

> The bit of poster had spun a new world before her, excited her, given wild, soaring impetus to her imagination; and now, without in the least understanding herself, she wanted the excitement and the soaring, even though it might stab and rack her, rather than the barren satisfaction of believing that in life there was nothing better, nothing more vivid or dramatic than her own stableyard. (68)

In a much condensed period of time, Jenny has become aware of the numerous possibilities life holds for excitement.

Jenny does not translate this wish into an articulate dream for the future. Like Tommy she is satisfied with the immediate feeling of soaring, but like the artist in Peter she wants to share her exciting discovery and be responded to. Only the "skittish old roan," (69) Billie reacts; he shies with excitement at the fluttering poster. No one in Jenny's family reacts favourably--with excitement and enthusiasm--at the idea of the circus. Unaware that Jenny is not interested in this circus, they pity her because the material circus is beyond her reach. She craves the emotion and intensity generated by the idea of a circus and despises their

pity: "If only they would just keep quiet and leave her alone--join her, if they liked, to see the circus." (70-71) Ironically, if they would join her in seeing her circus, the actual circus would be meaningless and disappointing, since Jenny's circus is not bounded by the real world. This circus offers an alternate understanding of life where tenderness, emotion and warmth, rather than the scramble for material wealth empty of feeling, dominate.

Jenny's awareness of life's possibilities grows from her initial wish merely to prolong the wonder of her dream circus. Like Peter who wants to absorb the mystery of such a moment, Jenny wants the feeling of the circus to be lasting against the crush of reality. From this experience, she sees life going in two directions:

> This sudden dilation of life--it was like a bubble blown vast and fragile. In time it might subside, slowly, safely, or it might even remain full-blown, gradually strengthening itself, gradually building up the filmy tissues to make its vastness durable, but tonight she was afraid. Afraid that before the hack of her mother's voice it might burst and crumple. (71)

To prevent the bubble from bursting, she retreats from the world to the stable-shrine:

> It was a big, solemn loft, with gloom and fragrance and sparrows chattering against its vault of silence like boys flinging pebbles at a wall. And there, in its dim, high stillness, she had her circus. . . . [T]he splendid, matchless circus of a little girl who had never seen one. (71)

The only farm creature to enter her dream is Billie, but he is a brother to Pegasus:

> A young, fleet-footed Billie. Caparisoned in blue

> and gold and scarlet, silver bells on reins and bridle--neck arched proudly to the music of the band. (72)

Jenny remains untouched by reality in her imaginative reverie:

> [F]or once the threats of what would happen next time failed to touch her. The circus went on. All night long she wore her new purple tights and went riding Billie round and round the pasture in them. (73)

However, this story, like "Cornet at Night" is ambivalent. While Jenny's dream-circus seems unforgettable, it also appears to be only a momentary escape from the bickering and unhappiness of her family life rather than a permanent one leading to fulfilment outside the farm. Like Tommy Dickson, Jenny's insight into the possibilities of life is not as complete as the awareness of Peter Parker.

Peter Parker, Tommy Dickson and Jenny experience the same flight into the dimension of the imagination, but only Peter is able to meld his imagination with reality. His story, even though Miss Kinley destroys it, combines the excitement and ecstasy of the imaginative flight with events possible in reality. Tommy Dickson's halting experiments with the dimension of the imagination through his music fail because, until Philip's appearance, Tommy remains too cautiously tied to reality. His flights are jolting and mostly earth-bound, like Rock's runaway, while Philip's ascent to the dimension of the imagination is smooth, pure and soaring like Peter Parker's. Finally, Jenny's flight gives her a world as expansive and illuminated as either of the boys' experiences; however, her circus is completely

separate from reality. She produces a fantasy, like Peter's day-dream about riding with Slim, for the purpose of escaping her unhappy family. Of the three stories, "Circus in Town" has the least evidence that the child will absorb the experience in the realm of the imagination into her own life. As a result, the spirit of the imagination separated from reality is unable to provide any direction in the life of one who seeks only escape.

In the previous stories, the children involved have discovered the dimension of the imagination and have been held spell-bound by its spirit. Jenny and Tommy Dickson wander in their imagination-states, enjoying the freedom and emotional intensity, but have no concrete goals for their flights of imagination. However, Peter Parker is able to articulate what he has learned from his flight with Pegasus. He is an artist, able to synthesize the dimension of earthly reality and the dimension of the imagination to explore the world.

Peter McAlpine, in "The Outlaw," is thirteen, and he is the first child to articulate earthly dreams for his future. Although he learns that these dreams can come true, his perception of life is not completed in the artistic way which Peter Parker discovers. Peter Parker feels the inner, potential reality of the mystery of life; Peter McAlpine sees only that his dream of riding Isabel has come true and that by his parents' reaction he is no longer a child because he

has taken responsibility for his own actions. He gains self-confidence, takes responsibility for his "horsemanship," and leaves the goals of childhood for long-term, mature hopes.

Peter McAlpine and Isabel and Peter Parker and his new colt have much in common. Both boys ride exquisitely beautiful and spirited horses into the dimension of the imagination. The imagery used to describe their flights connotes a realm of pristine beauty, crystal clarity, absolute timelessness and an aura of the magical or mystical. In "The Outlaw", the horse, Isabel, is Pegasus incarnate and Peter McAlpine is her Perseus. Isabel is the voice of the artistic spirit leading him to a better understanding of his destiny, by teaching him not only about beauty and imagination, but about moral responsibility for a more complete view of life than Peter Parker gained. Though he is not as insightful as Peter Parker, Peter McAlpine is equally as enthusiastic about his newfound freedom.

Isabel is by far the most exciting horse in any of Ross's stories and much more complex than the purely spiritual Pegasus inspired by Peter Parker's colt. Initially, she is described as "beautiful but dangerous,"[13] a killer which no one expects the thirteen year old Peter to ride, but soon other dimensions are added. She is kindred to the destructive elements of the prairie environment:

> [S]he was a captive, pining her heart away. Week after

> week she stamped and pawed, nosed the hay out of her manger contemptuously, flung up her head and poured out wild, despairing neighs into the prairie winds and blizzards streaming past. (24)

For Peter, she is the composite of equine beauty and spirit:

> She was one horse, and she was all horses. Thundering battle chargers, fleet Arabians, untamed mustangs--sitting beside her on her manger I knew and rode them all. There was a history in her shapely head and burning eyes. I charged with her at Balaklava, Waterloo, scoured the deserts of Africa and the steppes of the Ukraine. Conquest and carnage, trumpets and glory--she understood, and carried me triumphantly. (25)

Isabel embodies all time and all experience. She understands and transmits to Peter the mystery of life, its potential and its dreams:

> To approach her was to be enlarged, transported. She was coal-black, gleaming, queenly. Her mane had a ripple and her neck an arch. And somehow, softly and mysteriously, she was always burning. The reflection on her glossy hide, whether of winter sunshine or yellow lantern light, seemed the glow of some fierce, secret passion. There were moments when I felt the whole stable charged with her, as if she were the priestess of her kind, in communion with her diety [sic]. (25)

Isabel glows golden like Philip's cornet, but much more sensually. She too has a presence of her own, an electrical charge, "a force in life, a current, an inevitability. . . ."[14] Isabel's personality adds another dimension to the imaginative spirit. Peter must fight the temptation to ride Isabel because her reputation is tainted with evil, not just disobedience. In a scene which, according to McMullen, echoes the temptation of Christ by Satan,[15] Isabel shows how association with her could raise him to a respected position among his peers:

> And then, temptress, she bore me off to the mountain top of my vanity, and with all the world spread out before my gaze, talked guilefully of prestige and acclaim.
>
> Over there, three miles away, was the school house. What a sensation to come galloping up on her, the notorious outlaw, instead of jogging along as usual on bandy-legged old Pete. . . . How sweet to wipe out all the ignominy of my past, to be deferred to by the older boys, to bask in Millie's smiles of favour.
>
> Over there, seven miles away . . . was town. Where fairs were sometimes held, and races run. On such a horse I naturally would win. . . . (26)

Peter childishly attempts to keep the boundary between good and evil sharply defined, while Isabel would blur the focus because true awareness of the mystery of life requires experience with both. As a result, Peter is confronted with a two-sided reality. Isabel <u>is</u> a killer, but, because she is so dangerous, she can provide the self-respect which Peter so desires. She <u>is</u> a temptress, coaxing him toward disobeying his parents' order not to ride her, but she also offers knowledge of the unknown. In describing Isabel as "one horse, and . . . all horses," (25) Peter unwittingly acknowledges this duality. He has ridden Isabel in wars, situations of life and death, carnage and glory, where destinies are decided. In addition, Isabel in her very essence, burning with sensual devotion to her deity, combining sensuality and spirituality, is not, according to W. H. New, "affirming polarities of good and bad, but . . . exploring what is real in the world."[16] True understanding of the mystery of life is gained from knowledge of both good and evil, of the dimension of the imagination and of destruction.

Pride plays a large role in the outcome of the duel of wits between horse and boy. Isabel is by nature proud and imperious, but Peter's lack of self-confidence, while he does see the advantages of riding Isabel, prevents him from answering her challenge in case he reaps only further humiliation. However, Isabel's pride is at stake and she will not be conquered once she has been challenged by Peter's timidity:

> With the first coaxing nuzzle of her lips she had committed herself to the struggle, and that as a male I was still at such a rudimentary stage made it doubly imperative that she emerge the victor. Defeat by a man would have been defeat, bitter but endurable. Defeat by a boy, on the other hand, would have been sheer humiliation. (26-27)

Peter's resistance is strong, and without witnesses to see him shrink from Isabel's challenge, they remain at a stalemate. Millie Dickson, the girl Peter wants to impress, articulates Isabel's wish in a manner which forces Peter either to ride the outlaw or face further damage to his reputation. In his mind, the rewards from each are parallel. Isabel has promised him a world where the potential future is inviting, where "the delights of fantasy and dream were but as shadows beside the exhilarations of reality." (25) With Millie will be "established a sense of intimacy and good will that made me confident my past was all forgotten, my future rosy and secure." (28) Though Millie is no match for Isabel and the future she offers to Peter, all he must do to bring both promises to fruition is to ride Isabel.

Millie and Isabel differ in their motives for insisting that Peter go for a ride. Millie is motivated by coy self-interest: what Peter will do to prove his worthiness to her. Thus, she reduces the magnitude of Peter's ride. She sees only the material horse, a posed, static, framed example of conventional beauty, "just like a picture." (28) Millie's request seems a small favour. However, Isabel is much more than the beautiful, black horse which the eye of reality perceives. As Peter knows, she is the burning essence of life and imagination. As the imaginative spirit, her motive for Peter's ride is to share with him the secrets of her deity. Peter senses this when he is "overcome by a feeling of fright and commitment" (29): by riding Isabel, he will see the unknown. Since Isabel represents all experience in the potential inner reality of life, Peter must conclude that life will bring his worst fears as well as his most desired dreams to fruition. By resisting the material Isabel, Peter remains a child, resisting the dark side of the mystery of life.

As Isabel had promised, the actual ride is more spectacular than Peter has ever imagined:

> And it was true: the wind cut sharp and bitter like a knife, the snow slipped past like water. Only in her motion there was a difference. She was like a rocket, not a rocking chair. (29)

Initially, Peter is merely proud that he is riding the outlaw, but Isabel becomes Pegasus, the flying horse:

> She didn't drop to a trot or walk as an ordinary horse would have done, but instead, with a clean grace and precision of a bird alighting on a branch, came smoothly to a halt. (30)

She shows him beauty he has never seen before, a deeper awareness of the landscape not possible without the influence of the spirit of the imagination:

> And I too, responsive to her bidding, was aware as never before of its austere, unrelenting beauty. There were the white fields and the blue, metallic sky; the little splashes here and there of yellow strawstack, luminous and clear as drops of gum on fresh pine lumber; the scattered farmsteads brave and wistful in their isolation; the gleam of the sun and snow. (30)

All the elements of Peter Parker's dimension of the imagination are here, but Isabel adds more. She insists Peter see the world as it really is, two-sided:

> Look, she said firmly, while it's here before you, so that to the last detail it will remain clear. For you, too, some day there may be stalls and halters, and it will be a good memory. (30)

Isabel directs his awareness to the future, but just as Peter suspected, not only do dreams come true, but also fears and a harsher reality. At those times, such a moment of perception, beauty, and hope can serve to soften the hardship by proof of a better time. The world, as Isabel knows, is both "the sting of cold" (30) and an 'exhilaration' of freedom and beauty.

Isabel heightens this cruel, dark, fear-inspiring side of the mystery on the return ride:

> She disdained and rebelled against her stall, but the way she whipped the wind around my ears you would have thought she had suddenly conceived a great affection for it. It was a strong wind, fierce and cold. . . .

> Her mane blew back and lashed my face. Before the steady blast of wind my forehead felt as if the bone were wearing thin. (30)

Within one experience, Isabel shows Peter both sides of the mystery of life. Now Peter must assume responsibility for the direction he wants his life to take. As Pegasus, she naturally explains this through the metaphor of horsemanship:

> From the bottom of her heart she hoped I wouldn't be so unfortunate another time. So far as she was concerned, however, she could make no promises. There had been one fall, she explained to Millie, and there might easily be another. The future was entirely up to me. She couldn't be responsible for my horsemanship. (31)

Peter's frozen ears are both his punishment and reward for riding the outlaw. His swollen, painful ears keep him from escaping his father's notice and, expecting punishment, he reacts childishly to this threat: ". . . I would ride away on Isabel and be lost to them [his parents] forever." (32) However, he soon realizes that his parents are proud that he has acted maturely and taken charge of his own life:

> Pride--that was what it amounted to--pride even greater than mine had been before I landed in the snowdrift. It sent me soaring a minute, took my breath away, but it also brought a little shiver of embarrassment and shame. How long, then, had I kept them waiting? (33)

At this moment of soaring awareness, Peter finally understands what Isabel has been trying to tell him. He accepts both the good and fearful halves of life and can dream of riding Isabel to school without the bitter fear of humiliation:

> . . . it had never been a prospect at all, but only a fantasy, something to be thought about wishfully, like blackening both Johnny Olsen's eyes at once, or

> having five dollars to spend. Now, though, everything was going to be different. . . . Isabel and the future were all mine. Isabel and Millie Dickson. (34)

Peter is now perceptive of both dimensions--imagination through Isabel and reality through Millie. He has not, as McMullen suggests, "move[d] from the fantasy world of the child into the real world of the adult,"[17] but has linked the two for a new awareness of life. Peter's flights of imagination on Isabel, symbol of the imaginative spirit, are not left behind or replaced by tangible, realistic dreams of impressing Millie and his friends at school, as if the tangible reality were superior to the artistic one. Even though Isabel shows him the calm beauty of the landscape from the Pegasus point of view and qualifies this insight with: "Someday there may be stalls and halters, and it will be a good memory," (30) at adulthood, the dimension of the imagination need not recede to let reality dominate. However, the adults in Ross' works do tend to divide into two groups: those who have lost the spirit of the imagination and live earth-bound in a dark, sometimes despairing reality with only sparks of beauty with which to relieve reality, or those who, inspired by the spirit of the imagination, seek to re-capture or reproduce beauty in the reality around them. These, like Peter, leave behind an immature or incomplete vision of life as a single-sided mystery. Their transformation and maturation occur when they accept the challenge to encounter both facets of life.

In "One's a Heifer," an unnamed boy faces the dark dimension of life alone, but he shares parallel experiences with Peter McAlpine. Like Peter, he is thirteen and takes a horseback ride which changes his awareness of life. In "The Outlaw," Isabel rewards Peter with a glimpse of exquisite beauty when he takes charge of his own life by doing a thing forbidden by parents who think he is still a child. The boy in "One's a Heifer" voluntarily takes on the adult duty of searching for lost calves, but rather than ascending to a lofty vision of perfection and beauty, he descends to a dark, hellish atmosphere which, nevertheless, accords him a new awareness. Both boys are passive participants in this growth toward insight; neither boy voluntarily looks at the unknown. Peter is forced to appreciate the beauty of the landscape by Isabel, and the boy in "One's a Heifer" is drawn involuntarily and fearfully to the dark mystery in the boxstall by an uncontrollable urge. Both forces, light and dark, beauty and terror, seem equally strong as manifestations of the unknown.

While the boys' visions expand in opposite directions, one toward light and the other toward darkness, the role of the horse, in "One's a Heifer," remains constant. When the boy and his horse, Tim, leave the farm in search of two lost calves, the landscape, though cold and uninviting, is at least pretty:

> After the storm the drifts lay clean and unbroken to the horizon. Distant farm-buildings stood out distinct against the prairie as if the thin sharp atmosphere were a magnifying glass.[18]

Perception is clear here and the prominent farm-buildings are warm sanctuaries which the cold environment robs of warmth: ". . . Aunt Ellen peered cautiously out of the door a moment through a cloud of steam. . . ." (119) Tim is like Isabel in the sense that he is connected with this warmth, clarity and light. Naturally, he becomes disheartened as the cold gradually takes his warmth:

> . . . despite the cold his flanks and shoulders soon were steaming. He walked with his head down, and sometimes, taking my sympathy for granted, drew up a minute for breath. (120)

Manifestations of the spirit of the imagination, the cornet for example, emitted a warm, glowing presence which excited their observers; the cold, disheartening presence has the opposite effect:

> My spirits, too, began to flag. The deadly cold and the flat white silent miles of prairie asserted themselves like a disapproving presence. The cattle round the straw-stacks stared when we rode up as if we were intruders. The fields stared, and the sky stared. People shivered in their doorways, and said they'd seen no strays.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Still no one had seen them, still it was cold, still Tim protested what a fool I was. (120)

Finally, all signs of warmth and comfort are extinguished:

> A thin white sheet of cloud spread across the sky, and though there had been no warmth in the sun the fields looked colder and bleaker without the glitter on the snow. (120)

Tim and the boy have wandered into a cold, bleak, lonely environment where the disapproving presence has taken on the guises of a "nagging wind" (120), baying dogs and howling coyotes. This hostile place is the complete opposite of the

light-filled dimension of the imagination.

At this point, the story trades the interplay of warmth and cold for light and darkness. The boy follows his calves to "a poor, shiftless-looking place," (121) which is devoid of light and comfort: "Darkness was beginning to close in, but there was no light in the windows." (121) The man who lives here is threatening. He is dressed in black and has the look of a hunted animal:

> The muscles of his face were drawn together threateningly, but close to him like this and looking straight into his eyes I felt that for all their fierce look there was something about them wavering and uneasy. (121)

Vickers' barn is not a stable-shrine, as in previous stories, but a place of concentrated darkness and evil where Vickers' appearance becomes Satanic:

> His smoky lantern threw great swaying shadows over us; and the deep clefts and triangles of shadow on his face sent a chill through me, and made me think what a dark and evil face it was. (123)

Vickers' unlit barn has a presence which seems the essence of darkness and evil:

> Behind the light from his lantern the darkness hovered vast and sinister. It seemed to hold its breath, to watch and listen. . . . My eyes were fixed on him so intently that he seemed to lose substance, to loom up close a moment, then recede. At last he disappeared completely, and there was only the lantern like a hard hypnotic eye. (123)

This looming and receding movement has been experienced by the children associated with the bright side of the mystery as their focus on reality weakened or dilated and they were overcome by the quiet, timeless clarity of the dimension of

the imagination. Rather than an expanded vision, however, the oppressive, dark presence has focused the boy's awareness onto the lantern, a yellow glow, which is almost defeated by the darkness: "It held me. It held me rooted against my will." (123) Peter Parker is also unable to shake off his imaginative vision, but this boy's glimpse at the unknown has a sinister quality from which he wishes to escape:

> I wanted to run from the stable, but I wanted even more to see inside the stall. Wanting to see and yet afraid of seeing. (123)

This mystery is not carefree and prolonged with enthusiasm; the boy willingly escapes when Vickers offers an excuse to leave the box-stall uninvestigated.

Light, like the glow of Philip's cornet, is connected with Vickers while he is in his house away from the barn's dark presence. His eyes are lit by a "wavering light," (123) a light nearly extinguished by the darkness in which he lives. Once he and the boy are in his shack, with the lamp lit, the boy decides that Vickers is not evil-looking, just guilty. The house is in chaos, nothing is in its proper place, but the most disconcerting aspect is a broken-winged owl sitting in one corner. Vickers is like this owl. As the owl is displaced from its proper environment, Vickers is not suited to the hard, lonely life of the farm. The boy's fears are calmed somewhat when Vickers is kind to him, but the crafty, devilish look returns when the boy attempts to leave the house to feed his horse in the barn. Though forced

to stay in the house, he feels "a vague feeling of relief." (126) Like his horse, he is essentially a creature of warmth and light in opposition to the cold and sinister darkness associated with Vickers.

During the evening, as Vickers and the boy play checkers and talk about Vickers' former housekeeper, the boy's attention is drawn again and again to the owl, which watches him as Vickers does. When the wind rises, the fire dies and the dark presence from the barn invades the house, the boy re-experiences the feeling he had in the barn:

> And I felt the same illogical fear, the same powerlessness to move. It was the way his voice had sunk, the glassy, cold look in his eyes. The rest of his face disappeared; all I could see were his eyes. And they filled me with a vague and overpowering dread. (128)

When the boy goes to bed, Vickers stays awake playing checkers with himself. The owl and the boy sleep fitfully:

> The owl kept wakening too. It was down in the corner still where the lamplight scarcely reached, and I could see its eyes go on and off like yellow light bulbs. (128-29)

The owl's eyes are watchful from the darkness as Vickers' are. Their inconstant light is like Vickers' vacillation between wanting the boy to stay with him to relieve his loneliness and wanting to be rid of him before he learns the contents of the stall.

Vickers, meanwhile, listens to the wind buffet the house, his eyes nightmarishly fixed on the window or staring owlishly at an invisible partner over a checker game. He is strongly identified with the crippled bird:

> . . . there was a sharp, metallic glitter in his eyes. I lay transfixed, unbreathing. His eyes as I watched seemed to dilate, to brighten, to harden like a bird's. (129)

He is the hunter-bird preparing to capture his prey:

> For a long time he sat contracted, motionless, as if gathering himself to strike, then furtively he slid his hand an inch or two along the table towards some checkers. . . . It was as if he were reaching for a weapon, as if his invisible partner were an enemy. . . . His movements were sure, stealthy, silent like a cat's. . . . . [A]nd then suddenly wrenching himself to action he hurled the checkers with such a vicious fury that they struck the wall and clattered back across the room. (129-30)

Vickers "kills" his prey and falls asleep. However, the boy can still only dream about making himself rise and go to the stable to look in the stall:

> There was a bright light suddenly and the owl was sitting over the door with his yellow eyes like a pair of lanterns. The calves, he told me, were in the other stall with the sick colt. I looked and they were there all right, but Tim came up and said it might be better not to start for home till morning. . . . I agreed, realizing now it wasn't the calves I was looking for after all, and that I still had to see inside the stall that was guarded by the owl. (130)

The owl is Vickers. His eyes have seen the secret contents of the box-stall and he guards others from such knowledge. In the dream, the boy realizes that this knowledge, not the calves, is what he searches for.

In the morning, Vickers is no longer friendly but is eager to get the boy out of his way. Similarly, the owl is now an actual predator, feeding on raw rabbit, not the bright-eyed truth-teller of his dream. Despite this dream, the boy still believes the calves are hidden in the box-stall.

When he goes to the barn to get Tim, he uses a nervous horse as a diversion to distract Vickers long enough to look into the stall. As he tries to open the door, he comes to realize his desire to see inside has nothing to do with the calves or Vickers. His search is now focused on knowledge of the essence of darkness:

> Terrified of the stall though, not of Vickers. Terrified of the stall, yet compelled by a frantic need to get inside. For the moment I had forgotten Vickers, forgotten even the danger of his catching me. I worked blindly, helplessly, as if I were confined and smothering. For a moment I yielded to panic. . . . Then, collected again, I forced back the lower bolt, and picking up the whiffle-tree tried to pry the door out a little at the bottom. (132-33)

Vickers strikes him but, rather than fear a beating, the boy fears "the fierce, wild light in his eyes." (133) He escapes but returns home cold, exhausted and emotionally distraught. The calves, he learns, had returned shortly after he had set out. The boy is stunned to silence by the realization that the secret Vickers guarded was that he had murdered his housekeeper and hidden her body in the stall. Though the boy has not actually seen into the stall, he has glimpsed at this dark "divinity" through his experiences with Vickers.

The other children, Peter Parker, Jenny, and Tommy Dickson, experience flights to the light-filled imaginative realm, the opposite dimension to the one experienced by this boy. As with Peter McAlpine, in "The Outlaw," who faced the destructive dimension by making his own decision to ride Isabel, the boy in "One's a Heifer," by searching for the

calves, also comes into contact with the potentially dangerous side of life. However, for both boys, the urge to experience both sides of the mystery, the light and the dark, is strong. Rather than grow increasingly more frightened the longer he stays with Vickers, the boy becomes more and more determined to look into the box-stall. When an initially pride-inspiring ride becomes its opposite, the dimension of destruction and the dimension of the imagination are linked in one experience. The boy becomes disturbingly aware that a mature understanding of life includes knowledge of both light and darkness, that elements of both sides make up the true essence of life.

Chapter 1

Notes

[1]Lorraine McMullen, Sinclair Ross (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 91.

[2]Sinclair Ross, "A Day with Pegasus," Queen's Quarterly, XLV, No. 2 (Summer, 1938), pp. 155-156. This version makes explicit what is merely implicit in the version in Rudy Weibe's Stories From Western Canada (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972).

[3]Sinclair Ross, "Cornet at Night," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 49. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[4]Ross, "A Day with Pegasus," p. 143. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[5]McMullen, p. 35.

[6]Sinclair Ross, "Circus in Town," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 71.

[7]Sinclair Ross, "The Lamp at Noon," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 19.

[8]Sinclair Ross, "The Outlaw," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 25.

[9]Ross, "Cornet at Night," p. 38. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[10]McMullen, p. 40.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ross, "Circus in Town," p. 68. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[13]Ross, "The Outlaw," p. 24. Subsequent page references

to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[14]Ross, "Cornet at Night," p. 47.

[15]McMullen, p. 42.

[16]W. H. New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," Canadian Literature, No. 40 (Spring 1960), p. 28.

[17]McMullen, p. 43.

[18]Sinclair Ross, "One's a Heifer," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 119. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

Chapter 2

"And always the wind"

In stories where the main characters are adults, "Nell," "No Other Way," "The Lamp at Noon," "Summer Thunder," "September Snow," and "The Painted Door," the destructive spirit becomes the dominant life force. In these stories, the horse, as symbol of the imaginative spirit, is confined and restricted by the demands of the farm. The nurturing of the wheat crop reduces everything else to secondary importance. Amid the desperation for a good yield, which would grant a reprieve from debt, despair and lack of hope for the future for another season, the horse becomes the symbol of a happier carefree past or of a hopeful, prosperous future in which the hardship of the present is absent. Consequently, adult imaginations are reduced and restricted because their potential reality is tied to the wheat and never extends to dreams beyond the farm or fulfilment through any means other than the wheat. In addition, as Dick Harrison suggests,

> The overtones of a waste land barren through the sins of the people haunt some of Ross's stories, and there does seem to be a need for some kind of sacrifice . . .[1]

In all of these stories, the sacrifice is unending labour on the land, the deliverer of future hope. The farmers' grim determination to succeed against all odds, despite suffering and hardship, replaces the self-fulfilling dreams of childhood

as the means to provide life with purpose. However, the land continually tests this faith and never rewards it. Furthermore, punishment for even momentary loss of faith is prompt and severe.

The wind is the dominant symbol in these stories. Seldom gentle and pleasant, the wind is violent and destructive, stirring sand, snow, hail and sometimes human nature to its service. Whereas in the childhood stories, light, beauty and a feeling of well-being dominates the children's lives through their flights of imagination, here, the destructive wind force restricts the spirit of the imagination to the happiness derived from human relationships. The wind creates a swirling, chaotic, horizonless void in which a character is isolated from any of the warmth, emotion and tenderness of a human relationship. Under these conditions and at the mercy of the wind, the character involved usually gains some awareness of life beyond the reality of farm drudgery. However, such awareness is not encouraging and hopeful because it is revealed by the symbol of destruction, the wind. In addition, doubt or loss of faith in the promise of a happy future through the land is punished, at the most by death, at the least by a re-focusing on the reality of the present by destruction of the crop. The characters react to the destructive force in one of two ways. By the end of the story, the character has moved from despair in life to hope for the future, or from despair to simple, mindless

perseverance in a life of repetitive, unrewarded labour.

In the childhood stories, the spirit of the imagination focuses children's hopes on the future, enabling them to strive for an expanded understanding of life. Such dreams, or potential realities, captured by this widened focus are not escapist fantasies, but the first signs of the clear awareness of an artist's insight, which unites reality and imagination. Focus on the future is good. However, the adults who focus their lives on the future and hope for material rewards to ease the present despair, reduce the insight of the child's hope for the future to an escapism which ignores any creative elements in the present situation. Obviously, the demands of the land are enough to restrict divine flights of the imagination, but this constant focus on the future to the detriment of the meager creative elements of the present is in itself a destructive force. Usually, the wife loses the vision of the future which gives life meaning, while the husband clings blindly to the dream of the future, unaware that the present is unbearable for his wife. Ultimately, the clash of the faithful and the faithless, imagination and reality, future and present re-focuses awareness to the reality of the present and its creative aspects--human love and compassion. Unfortunately, this insight usually comes too late to result in a happy change in the pattern of destruction and despair.

The importance of the land, usually implicit in these

adult stories, is explained in "Summer Thunder," the first story in the two-part "Not By Rain Alone." As evident in the childhood stories, for instance "Cornet at Night," the wheat is of primary importance: everything else is sacrificed to it. Will, the main character in "Summer Thunder," is in transition between the childhood identification with the hopeful spirit of the imagination and awareness of the grimness of adult reality:

> He was young still, brawny, sunburned. So young that . . . his eyes were quick with a kind of anger and resentment. The submissive quiet that at last the seasons teach, the acceptance and belief--here it was still in conflict with the impetuousness of youth.[2]

The child in him searches for justice and fair play in life. He is angry and resentful that the crop over which he toils is slowly being burned by drought. The adult accepts these wasteful, futile circumstances, still believing the land will provide justice, a reward for labour. At the centre of this conflict is the wheat:

> [H]e had lived with it [the wheat] now so many weeks in a kind of pitted sympathy, sensitive to every change in wind and sky, that today, before the bitter scorch of such a sun, it was as if he himself could feel the whole field slowly sear. (52)

Will lives vicariously, through the crop. As soon as the wheat has been planted, he relinquishes control of his life to the forces which govern the wheat. The responsibilities of getting a living from the land mean that Will cannot act for himself; he must faithfully and helplessly wait for rain, suffering with the wheat at the mercy of the heat and the

whirlwinds. He is helpless to act on his wish to marry Eleanor, unless he can achieve this through the wheat. To bring the promise of the wheat to reality is to prove his love for her: "Struggle, sacrifice--that was what he wanted now, some way to prove himself, prove to her how much he cared." (53)

This crop, the reward for Will's labour and the means by which he can gain some measure of happiness by marrying Eleanor, is only a teasing promise that his fortunes will eventually brighten. In addition, Will must show "acceptance and belief" (52), the code of faith in the land which is a pre-requisite for success. Unfortunately, the disparity between what Will must believe and what he sees is too great. His faith is forsaken and his labour is wasted:

> It wasn't worth it, two hours more in such a sun. There was a listlessness in all his movements now that seemed to be there by resolve, a deliberate apathy, as if for the moment his mind were mastering his deeper, earth-steeped instincts of persistence. To the horses he repeated, 'It isn't worth it--next year's crop will go like this one anyway. . . .' (53)

Furthermore, Will views his wasted labour as part of the continuing pattern of his parents' lives. For these people, the future never arrives and their labour is never rewarded, because the land bears rocks instead of wheat:

> The pump had fallen to her [his mother] because his father once, clearing the land of stones, had torn himself on one beyond his strength. There were always stones--like the pump and the mortgage--even after twenty years. Each spring the frost and thaw heaved another litter from the bitch-like earth. They pried and made heaps of them, pried and made heaps of them--always there were more. (53-54)

This cycle is apparently endless and begins, not with a doubtful harvest, but with faith in the land. Even with rain and respite from the heat and dusty whirlwinds, Will's life will continue to follow the pattern of his parents' lives:

> But there was no escape. It was the paper now, cracked and sagging, long brown streaks across it where the rain kept beating through the roof. He remembered the spring they put it on--the winter and fall before the spring--right from the time the crop was threshed--how she had to beg and storm for it--the welt of bitterness it left across their lives. (56)

Will clearly understands what his future will be like, governed and dominated by the wheat. However, faith in the promise of the wheat returns involuntarily. He is unable to subdue "his deeper, earth-steeped instincts of persistence" and break away from the tyranny of the crop:

> And then something within him stronger than he knew took him outside again to see if in the west yet there were signs of rain.
>
> And there were, like yesterday and the day before--the same slow piling-up of thunder clouds, the same hushed boding of a storm. He stood motionless, his lips and eyes strained suddenly with eagerness again, forgetful that he had resolved this time to spare himself. For it couldn't be deliberate, a storm. It couldn't always pass him by. . . . Just an hour or two of rain--perhaps tonight he'd be asking her after all. (57)

Will is like the flies which become entangled in his bread and syrup. He wants the sweetness that the land offers, but once he is involved with it, he is overwhelmed and entrapped; the desire to possess its sweetness becomes a desperate, futile struggle to the death to escape. He has no alternative but to persist in this struggle with the land:

> At best they [Will and Eleanor] would grub along painfully, grow tired and bitter, indifferent to each other.

> It was the way of the land. For a farmer like him there could be no other way. (57)

In contrast to this hopeless, futile existence is the Pegasus spirit of Will's mare, Bess. Her spirit is not tamed by farm reality:

> Bess had imagination. Every day for these uncurbed minutes she was really free; and despite her weariness, despite the heavy harness clanking at her sides, she plunged across the yard to savour and exploit them. Neck arching a moment, slim body rearing in illusion of release, she dashed a hundred yards along the road; another reckless plunge and whirl--then back spent and depressed, to let him lead her to her stall. (54)

Like Isabel, she knows that life is full of "stalls and halters" and that momentary freedoms are all that can be hoped for. However, to Will, this spirit is a reproach rather than a triumph. Toil on the land has ruined the outward appearance which once matched the spirit:

> This was the second year she had worked on the land. It was to have been for a week while another mare had her foal; but the other mare had died in labour, and there was only Bess to carry on.
>
> Her belly was starting to sag a little now. The sleekness of her coat was gone; her hip-bones stood up angular. Only her gestures were the same: the imperious way she pawed if absent-mindedly he fed the others first, the dainty, startled prick-up of her ears when, finding life too dull, she tried to liven it by shying at her own shadow or the harrowcart. He stood with his hand in her mane a moment, remembering the day he brought her home an unbroken three-year old. . . . (54)

The horse becomes a symbol of shrunken freedoms and blighted, hopeless dreams, rather than expanded freedom and hope, altered to a negative symbol by the overwhelming visible evidence that release and reward for hardship do not exist. In addition, Bess's moment of freedom is more than he gives

himself and more than he could hope to offer Eleanor.

Unlike most couples in Ross's works, Eleanor and Will share their disappointments and hopes as the possibility of rain fades. Will is resigned to the farmer's lot:

> He was still choked and blinded by his disappointment, struggling against a sense of futility that his youth could not accept, that yet seemed sprung from a lot he knew to be inevitable. (59)

However, Eleanor offers hope to feed his youthful dreams. Not only does she insist that the rain will not pass over him forever, she agrees to marry him regardless of the outcome of the crop. She can forget the necessity of the wheat because she does not depend on it for life; therefore, she does not rely on the wheat to prove her love and fulfill her dreams. Eleanor temporarily foils the soul-destroying drought which would kill the wheat and Will's future. Love and understanding are the vestiges of the restricted creative spirit which will give Will and Eleanor hope.

"Summer Thunder" concludes hopefully, with Will and Eleanor planning their future together. Ironically, though farmers like Will pin their hopes on their wheat, it is only human love which will give them happiness and fulfilment. In "Summer Thunder," the mare, Bess, is symbol of this side of life; she can enjoy moments of freedom, unfettered by the land. For farmers who place all their hope for happiness in the wheat, their lives are at the mercy of the wind--the force which would destroy their crop. Their alliance with the wheat instead of their human commitments strengthens this

destructive force until the creative side of their lives is also threatened. For example, Will's horse is sacrificed to the demands of the wheat and though her spirit is invincible, she is being physically destroyed. More importantly, Eleanor, whose compassion brought him happiness, will fall victim to the wind when Will ignores her fear in favour of the necessities of the farm. The next three stories, "September Snow," "The Lamp at Noon," and "The Painted Door," show the result of devotion to the land instead of human relationships, the creative element in an existence dominated by the wind, the symbol of the dark, destructive side of the mystery of life.

In "September Snow," the rain so desperately needed in "Summer Thunder" comes in the form of an early blizzard. Like the brown stain left by the rain on Will's mother's crisp, clean wallpaper, this moisture will scar Will's dreams of hope which would give life meaning. The blizzard has hardly begun before Will mentally catalogues the damage it could do. Eleanor too is torn between keeping him with her and allowing him to answer the dictates of the farm. She attributes her fear to the wind and Will's long absence in town, and he leaves to search for the cattle. Symbolically, Eleanor has every reason to fear the wind. She has become dissatisfied with the life which the land provides and wants more of Will's attention than the land will allow. She has also, in the previous story, over-ruled the forces which

control life through the wheat. The darkness of destruction remains balanced by the light of hope as long as Will's dedication to the land is balanced by his concern for his wife:

> And flare after flare of lightning lit the clouds, yellow and soft like the flickerings of a lamp; and they saw what dark and threatening clouds they were, yet how they still hung in the distance, as if at a pause, uncertain of their way. (60)

When the farm takes priority over Eleanor's fear and uncertainty, she is isolated from human compassion, the creative force which softens the effect of the destructive force. Outside the house, the wind's domain, the atmosphere has become a black abyss. Will becomes a snowflake tossed in the wind once he steps through the door:

> The thick swift flakes made a lace across the shaft of light from the doorway. By contrast the blackness that they flashed out of and that swallowed them again gaped sinister and engulfing.[3]

Once Will steps into the blizzard, it will not relinquish its hold until the process of destruction begun in the previous story is complete. Eleanor is alone at the mercy of a vengeful wind, the same wind which will destroy Will's youthful impetuousness and teach perseverance.

Certain elements of this story and the atmosphere are reminiscent of "One's a Heifer," in which the boy enters a cold, hostile world to learn about the destructive spirit of life. Like the boy in "One's a Heifer," Will has the sensation of riding into a void, away from all that is familiar and secure, as he leaves his farmyard riding Bess:

> [T]he snow beneath and around him made it seem he was riding on top of a cloud. For a while he had the sensation that at every step Bess was about to drop headlong into space. (62)

Parallel to the staring, threatening owl in "One's a Heifer," the wind assaults Will as a bird of prey attacks its quarry: "The wind was high; the wet snow slapped on his face like soft, strong wings, clogging his eyes and nostrils." (62) Like Tim, in "One's a Heifer," Bess quickly loses heart in the cold search. When Will angrily strikes her, she throws him and returns home leaving Will alone and completely exposed to the wind, which buffets and pushes him stumbling toward a strawstack where the violent void disappears:

> The wind fell away abruptly; there was a sudden calm, the whistle of the storm remote. . . .
>
> He lay a long time in a kind of stupor. Out of the wind it was not cold, and after his struggle with the storm, the hush and ease of shelter brought a sense of physical contentment that lulled like a drug. With the relaxing of his will and muscles all his resistance left him. . . . Nothing mattered except to prolong the languor of windlessness and warmth. (64)

However, the thought of Eleanor, frantic over his delay, draws him out of his languor:

> And all at once panic-stricken at the thought, he crawled out of the straw and struck into the blizzard. But the wind was like a needled wall. . . . [A]nd with an instinctive recoil, as if from a whip, [he] retreated despite himself to the shelter of the stack. (64-65)

A wall of wind now separates him from Eleanor, whereas in "Summer Thunder," Eleanor's promise to marry him had kept him immune from the forces of destruction. Here, human love and concern are useless. By separating Will and Eleanor, the

wind can punish her for disrupting the ageless pattern which is wind-controlled.

In the morning, the wind is calm, but there still exists an atmosphere of void and emptiness. The wind creates an atmosphere which is closed and restricts vision and awareness, in contrast to the expanded vision granted by Pegasus:

> The snow-swept landscape lay horizonless, merging into a low, shaggy sky, colourless and blank, without balance or orientation.
> . . . . . .
> The buildings were only a mile away, suspended in the empty blur of sky and snow with an aloof, unfamiliar detachment that chilled and dispirited him. . . . The field was wrinkled with sharp, furrow-like drifts that sometimes supported him and sometimes gave way unexpectedly. In the sluggish dawn there were no shadows; the drifts ended and began invisibly; he tripped over them, reeled off their brittle crests. (65)

The wind, using the snow, has created a landscape that Will does not know. The horizonless and shadowless world leaves Will with no orienting reference points with which to explore and become familiar with his new surroundings. The farm buildings do not reassure him because they have become part of the hostile landscape. He can only stumble toward them, unsure of his footing and disoriented in his own field. This horizonless expanse has also invaded his house, Eleanor's sanctuary against the storm:

> The snow was mounded right across the kitchen, curled up like a wave against the far wall, piled on table and chairs. Even on the stove--the fire must have been out for hours. . . . There was a dingy chill that he had not felt in the open air. The familiarity of the kitchen was distorted, unfamiliar; it gaped at

> him in the grey light as if resentful of his intrusion. (66)

The destructive force of the wind changes the fields that Will knows into an unknown, disorienting void. His house, which should have been a refuge from the wind, is less safe than a strawstack. At the mercy of the combined effects of childbirth and the wind, Eleanor becomes ghoulish, a creature of the destructive force:

> She was on the bed, half-undressed, her face twisted into a kind of grin, the forehead shining as if the skullbones were trying to burst through the skin. (66)

Will's happy future disappears with the distortion of the creative elements of his life by the wind--those elements which would provide warmth, comfort and sanctuary.

From this scene of destruction and despair, nature metamorphoses. The wind is absent and signs of the light, warmth and beauty of the imaginative dimension appear:

> It was like a spring day, warm and drowsy, with a listless drip from the roof. In front of him, the oat stacks made a golden splash against the snow. There was a hushed, breathless silence, as if sky and snow and sunlight were selfconsciously poised, afraid to wrinkle or dishevel their serenity. (67)

Will is amazed that a world so violent and destructive one moment can be soft and spring-like the next. He listens to the quiet of the landscape as he listened to the thunder clouds in "Summer Thunder" promise rain:

> He broke off one [stalk of wheat] to examine it and count how many kernels were destroyed, then with a sudden whiteness underneath his tan glanced up again towards the clouds. But there was no answer. (58)

Neither is an explanation for such destruction to be found in

"September Snow," but Eleanor's baby signifies that life does continue, though along the same futile path of its parents' existence:

> . . . a faint, jagged little saw of sound, the baby started to cry. He [Will] felt a twinge of recognition. He seemed to be listening to the same plaintiveness and protest that had been in Eleanor's voice of late. (67)

The final lines of this story are ambiguous. Will has by now been cured of his youthful impetuousness by experiencing the bitter reality of the destructive, death-dealing side of life. He has either been broken by his wife's horrible death and cannot go on or, subdued by "deeper, earth-steeped instincts of persistence," will continue doggedly because he sees no alternative. In either case, the wind has destroyed the creative force in Will's life. His concern about the cattle instead of his frightened wife symbolically opens the door for the invasion of the destructive force. As Warren Tallman points out, this pattern recurs in many of Ross's stories: "When creative power is thwarted, destructive power emerges."[4]

Under the domination of the wind, Will has explored a side of life which is opposite in every way to the dimension of the imagination. Darkness, restricted vision and disorienting visual effects replace the illuminated clarity of vision of the imagination. A sensation of anxious isolation is substituted for the joyful suspension of time in the imaginative realm. The destructive force keeps happiness and hope at an impossible distance, while the imaginative spirit

gives life unlimited potential. However, the creative, illuminated dimension of the imagination where vision is expanded and the dark, fear-inspiring dimension where vision is restricted to the horror of destruction and death have the metaphor of flight in common. The imagination is symbolized by a winged horse, while the death and desolation carried by the wind is often described as a bird of prey. In "September Snow," the wind remains a part of the storm, though the beginnings of the separate, sinister presence of the wind in "The Lamp at Noon" and "The Painted Door" is evident.

In "The Lamp at Noon," the main characters are a husband and wife in conflict over their future on the land. Paul fights Ellen's suggestions that the land is really a desert with no future for them. He believes that the land will again be fertile and grant prosperity in the future. Paul's faith in the land and his dreams for the future are pitted against Ellen's faithless, but realistic view. Ironically, by the end of the story, the wind has switched their perceptions: Paul sees the desert, the reality of the land, and Ellen, in her madness, captures his former dream.

In this story, the wind is responsible for driving Ellen mad. Earlier in the day she had argued with her husband, Paul, about leaving this dust-choked, hopeless farm. She now repents of her words because "it was only the dust and wind that had driven her."[5] However, a "[d]emented wind" (13)--violent, insane, perhaps demoniac--has changed the world

outside her house into a chaos and left her isolated and alone, at the mercy of this destructive force:

> In dim, fitful outline the stable and oat granary still were visible; beyond, obscuring fields and landmarks, the lower of dust clouds made the farmyard seem an isolated acre, poised aloft above a sombre void. At each blast of wind it shook, as if to topple and spin hurtling with the dust-reel into space. (13)

The wind does send Ellen's mind reeling into space, but poised on the edge of insanity, she sees most clearly. Her eyes become like those of the staring owl in "One's a Heifer," which had seen the deity of death:

> Her eyes all the while were fixed and wide with a curious immobility. It was the window. Standing at it, she had let her forehead press against the pane until the eyes were strained apart and rigid. Wide like that they had looked out to the deepening ruin of the storm. Now she could not close them. (13)

Ellen's vision is enlarged in the opposite direction from the children's visions of calm perfection. She is engulfed by growing darkness, not by the flash of golden light experienced by the children. Like the dim, yellow lights of fading hope and sanity in "One's a Heifer" and "Summer Thunder," a flickering lamp on the kitchen table keeps the darkness at bay for the moment. Even the sun is overwhelmed by wind-induced darkness:

> [F]or a moment through the tattered clouds the sun raced like a wizened orange. It shed a soft, diffused light, dim and yellow as if it were the light from the lamp reaching out through the open window. (13)

While the lamp reaches out to aid the sun's light, the house is a refuge of hope and safety. When the lamp is finally extinguished, all hope and happiness, elements of the creative

dimension, are completely destroyed for Ellen and her family.

In this unnatural wind-created darkness, the wind becomes a material presence, a predatory bird which pursues its prey with the dedication of the Furies:

> There were two winds: the wind in flight, and the wind that pursued. The one sought refuge in the eaves, whimpering, in fear; the other assailed it there, and shook the eaves apart to make it flee again. Once as she listened this first wind sprang inside the room, distraught like a bird that has felt the graze of talons on its wing; while furious the other wind shook the walls, and thudded tumbleweeds against the window till its quarry glanced away again in fright. But only to return--to return and quake among the feeble eaves, as if in all this dust-mad wilderness it knew no other sanctuary. (14)

The flight and search for sanctuary is endless, hopeless and frantic. Ellen is like this wind: "I'm so caged--if I could only break away and run." (18-19) She is emotionally distraught, panic-stricken at the thought of being alone listening to the wind, even though she is safe in the house: "The eyes were glazed now, distended a little as if with the intensity of her dread and pleading." (18) She shares the hopelessness of escape with the wind in flight. These staring eyes have seen the wind's destructive power and such knowledge brings her into conflict with Paul, who sees a different vision:

> '. . . Look at the sky--what's happening. Are you blind? Thistles and tumbleweeds--it's a desert. You won't have a straw left this fall. . . .'
> . . . . . .
> 'We'll have crops again,' he persisted. 'Good crops--the land will come back. It's worth waiting for.' (16)

Paul still pictures the land as a fertile garden. Dry, wind-

blown desert is only a temporary state.

Life is not easy for either Ellen or Paul, but Paul focuses on the future and, while Ellen has been broken by hardship, he has been strengthened at the expense of his youthful, imaginative qualities:

> Dust and drought, earth that betrayed alike his labour and his faith, to him the struggle had given sternness, an impassive courage. Beneath the whip of sand his youth had been effaced. Youth, zest, exuberance--there remained only a harsh and clenched virility that yet became him, that seemed at the cost of more engaging qualities to be fulfilment of his inmost and essential nature. Whereas to her the same debts and poverty had brought a plaintive indignation, a nervous dread of what was still to come. (15)

Paul retains his faith in the justice of the land, while any faith Ellen had has been slowly eroded until she sees only the bitter reality that, like herself, the land is exhausted:

> 'Will you never see? It's the land itself--the soil. You've plowed and harrowed it until there's not a root or fibre left to hold it down. That's why the soil drifts--that's why in a year or two, there'll be nothing left but the bare clay. If in the first place you farmers had taken care of your land--if you hadn't been so greedy for wheat every year--' (17)

Paul's destructive and greedy use of the land and his failure to understand Ellen's despair destroy all hope in their lives. He utterly rejects her proposal to move to town with her parents, foiling the life-sustaining hope in Ellen's life and preparing for destruction.

To escape his wife's reproaches, Paul takes refuge in the stable, seeking comfort, as do many of Ross's farmers, from his horses. Paul's horses are outwardly not the spirited animals of the childhood stories. Their "rib-grooved sides,

and high, protruding hipbones" (19-20) are evidence that his dreams are waning and his labour wasted; he cannot feed his horses or his dreams. However, the stable remains the shrine of the spirit of the imagination, a place of comfort where the cares of the farm and Paul's growing doubt under Ellen's logic dissipate:

> The contentious mood that his stand against Ellen had roused him to, his tenacity and clenched despair before the ravages of the wind, it was ebbing now, losing itself in the cover of darkness. Ellen and the wheat seemed remote, unimportant. At a whinny from the bay mare, Bess, he went forward and into her stall. She seemed grateful for his presence, and thrust her nose deep between his arm and body. They stood a long time motionless, comforting and assuring each other. (19)

This horse is a creative spirit, healing Paul's doubt, as Rock comforted Tommy in "Cornet at Night." More importantly, the stable remains a place of insight, gradually changing from a sanctuary from the storm into a place of true vision into the heart of the destructive dimension. At this point, Paul experiences the destructive power of the wind with the same intensity that Ellen has:

> For soon again the first deep sense of quiet and peace was shrunken to the battered shelter of the stable. Instead of release or escape from the assaulting wind, the walls were but a feeble stand against it. They creaked and sawed as if the fingers of a giant hand were tightening to collapse them; the empty loft sustained a pipelike cry that rose and fell but never ended. He saw the dust-black sky again, and his fields blown smooth with drifted soil. (19)

At the mercy of the wind, as Ellen is in the house, Paul now understands her pleas to leave the land:

> She looked forward to no future. She had no faith or dream with which to make the dust and poverty less

> real. He understood suddenly. He saw her face again as only a few minutes ago it had begged him not to leave her. The darkness round him now was as a slate on which her lonely terror limned itself. (20)

In this intense state of mind, the force of destruction brings him a vision as terrifying as the spirit of the imagination's visions are glorious:

> And always the wind, the creak of walls, the wild lipless wailing through the loft. Until at last he stood there, staring into the livid face before him, it seemed that this scream of wind was a cry from her parched and frantic lips. He knew it couldn't be, he knew she was safe within the house, but still the wind persisted as a woman's cry. The cry of a woman with the eyes like those that watched him through the dark. Eyes that were mad now--lips that even as they cried still pleaded, 'See, Paul--I stand like this all day. I just stand still--so caged! If I could only run!' (20)

Paul is forced by the realism of this vision to see if Ellen and the baby are safe. However, Paul's loyalty is to his land, so he is "[c]areful, despite his concern, not to reveal a fear or weakness that she might think capitulation to her wishes" (20-21) to leave the farm. As a result, he sees the remedy for her fear in the land and hopes she can share his dream:

> It was she who had told him to grow fibrous crops, who had called him an ignorant fool because he kept on with summer fallow and wheat. Now she might be gratified to find him acknowledging her wisdom. Perhaps she would begin to feel the power and steadfastness of the land, to take pride in it, to understand that he was not a fool, but working for her future and their son's. (21)

Ironically, as Paul's dream re-shapes and re-affirms itself, he suddenly sees the land as Ellen sees it:

> Suddenly he emerged from the numbness; suddenly the

> fields before him struck his eyes to comprehension. They lay black, naked. Beaten and mounded smooth with dust as if a sea in gentle swell had turned to stone. And though he had tried to prepare himself for such a scene, though he had known since yesterday that not a blade would last the storm, still now, before the utter waste confronting him, he sickened and stood cold. Suddenly like the fields he was naked. Everything that had sheathed him a little from the realities of existence: vision and purpose, faith in the land, in the future, in himself--it was all rent now, stripped away. 'Desert,' he heard her voice begin to sob. 'Desert, you fool--the lamp lit at noon!' (22)

Still Paul's faith in the land and his hope for the future remains firm, despite the scene before him:

> For so deep were his instincts of loyalty to the land that still, even with the images of his betrayal stark upon his mind, his concern was how to withstand her, how to go on again and justify himself. (22)

Paul need no longer justify his continued faith to Ellen. As he had predicted earlier, the dust storm has calmed: "Tonight, though, you'll see it go down. This is the third day." (15) For Ellen, a resurrection has occurred. Like the wind in flight, she has fled the house to escape the wind in pursuit and has found refuge in madness. She is now one of the faithful:

> 'You were right, Paul. . . .' Her voice came whispering, as if she too could feel the hush. 'You said tonight we'd see the storm go down. So still now, and a red sky--it means tomorrow will be fine.' (23)

Paul's newly regenerated faith in the land mocks him. The wind has killed his wheat and his son and driven his wife mad, destroying the future and the dreams his faith should have assured. Although the destructive wind force graphically shows him the reality of his land and his wife's state of

mind, he refuses to see. The kitchen lamp which flickered against the darkness at the beginning of the story is extinguished now, symbolic not only, as McMullen suggests, of "Ellen's hope, her capitulation to despair,"[6] but also of Paul's neglect of the elements of warmth and beauty in his life provided by the creative side of life. Rather than preserve this flicker, even after the wind affords him the foreshadowing vision of Ellen's madness, Paul remains blindly faithful to the land, and, therefore, at the mercy of the destructive forces which devastate it.

There is evidence that the wind has re-focused Paul's awareness to the present and the human relationship which is the creative force in his life. Paul's dreams for future success had left him unfeeling and inconsiderate of his troubled wife. Now, aware of the present, Paul finally comforts her: "'Such strong arms, Paul--and I was so tired carrying him. . . .'" (23) Unfortunately, such actions are too late. Paul has sacrificed the creative elements in his life, his family, for single-minded loyalty to his land. This choice places him at the mercy of the wind.

The wind in "The Painted Door" is also a living presence pursuing a woman who has lost hope in the future and faith in the land to provide it. Like all of Ross's farm wives, Ann competes with the land for her husband's attention because, in her husband's understanding, her happiness and love depend on his devotion to the land:

> He never saw their lives objectively. To him it was not what he actually accomplished by means of the sacrifice that mattered, but the sacrifice itself, the gesture--something done for her sake.[7]

He is like Will, in "Summer Thunder," and Paul, in "The Lamp at Noon," who express their love through work on the land. However, as Ann knows, the land takes more from John than it gives to him:

> Sometimes, because with the best of crops it was going to take so long to pay off anyway, she wondered whether they mightn't better let the mortgage wait a little. Before they were worn out, before their best years were gone. It was something of life she wanted, not just a house and furniture; something of John, not pretty clothes when she would be too old to wear them. But John of course couldn't understand. To him it seemed only right that she should have the clothes--only right that he, fit for nothing else, should slave away fifteen hours a day to give them to her. . . . By dint of his drudgery he saved a few month's wages, added a few dollars more each fall to his payments on the mortgage: but the only real difference that it all made was to deprive her of his companionship, to make him a little duller, older, uglier than he might otherwise have been. (103)

Eventually, love, the purpose for this labour, is dissolved and lost in the toil and hardship itself, in what Ann calls "work-instinct" (104):

> It [winter] was the time to relax, to indulge and enjoy themselves; but instead, fretful and impatient, they kept on waiting for the spring. They were compelled now, not by labour, but by the spirit of labour. A spirit that pervaded their lives and brought with idleness a sense of guilt. (104)

Like Ellen, Ann sees endless struggle and unrewarded labour as her bitter future, until John's friend, Steven, offers a break from the routine of her life. Steven represents to Ann a dimension of life beyond the bare physical necessities which

John and the farm can provide, and which is available now, not merely as a vague hope for the future.

The conflict between the wife's despair at the destructive course of life and the husband's faith in the land is the same in "The Painted Door" as in the previous stories. Ann sees the imaginative side of life, respite from unrewarded work and excitement, being overpowered and destroyed by John's fidelity to the land. The two men in Ann's life represent the polarized values of the two sides of the mystery of life: John is allied with warmth and beauty, while Steven is cold and destructive. However, this division is not as clear between the horse and wind symbols, which tend to mingle in this story. As a result, knowledge of both sides of the mystery of life, which completes the awareness of Peter Parker, Peter McAlpine and the boy in "One's a Heifer," struggles to complete itself here. Ann's experience with the cold, unfeeling Steven shows her the dark, destructive side of life. By the end of the story, she realizes that John is the embodiment of love and compassion which gives life meaning. Unfortunately, by this point, the shifting turmoil of the conflict between the horse and wind symbols has also been decided. John is frozen in the blizzard by Ann's capitulation, though temporary, to the power of cold, darkness and death.

Ann's fortunes centre around the two men in the story. John is associated with warmth, his horses and faith in the

future--the creative spirit. Steven is the blizzard's destructive wind in human form--the destructive spirit. He is cold, calculating and realistic, with no vision of the future, only the present. While John is home, the bitter cold remains outside the house and Ann is allied with that warmth. However, John decides to leave her alone while he checks his father's farm and her voice turns cold, "as if the words were chilled by their contact with the frosted pane" (99). The forces of warmth and cold, creativity and destruction, come into conflict because Ann is discontent with the life John can provide. Her loss of faith in John to provide the kind of life she wants follows the pattern of the previous stories. When the imaginative spirit is weakened, the destructive spirit gains strength.

The cold, an element of the destructive realm, already dominates the scene before Ann:

> The sun was risen above the frost mists now, so keen and hard a glitter on the snow that instead of warmth its rays seemed shedding cold. One of the two-year-old colts that had cantered away when John turned the horses out for water stood covered with rime at the stable door again, head down and body hunched, each breath a little plume against the frosty air. She shivered, but did not turn. In the clear, bitter light the long white miles of prairie landscape seemed a region alien to life. Even the distant farmsteads she could see served only to intensify a sense of isolation. Scattered across the face of so vast and bleak a wilderness it was difficult to conceive them as a testimony of human hardihood and endurance. Rather they seemed futile, lost, to cower before the implacibility [sic] of snow-swept earth and clear pale sun-chilled sky. (100)

In this environment, no warmth exists; even the sun is cold.

As in the childhood stories, the horse, a creature of warmth, is quickly chilled by the harsh weather. John, like his horse, will return to his home literally frozen, when the warmth of Ann's love and faith in the future are withdrawn. The little man-made pockets of warmth which defy the cold actually emphasize its strength by their pitiful resistance, signalling the defeat of the forces of warmth and hope. Ann becomes one of these isolated, threatened patches of warmth, striving to maintain a hold against the encroaching cold. Not only is she isolated from John, from warmth, but the sinister and oppressive nature of the cold and silence becomes as threatening as the screaming wind in "The Lamp at Noon:"

> From the bedroom window she watched him nearly a mile along the road. The fire had gone down when at last she turned away, and already through the house there was an encroaching chill. A blaze sprang up again when the draughts were opened, but as she went on clearing the table her movements were furtive and constrained. It was the silence weighing upon her--the frozen silence of the bitter fields and sun-chilled sky--lurking outside as if alive, relentlessly in wait, mile-deep between her now and John. (101-2)

To combat this presence, she begins painting the kitchen doorframe leading to the bedroom, an activity which only momentarily puts up "a screen between herself and the surrounding snow and silence." (102) Her actions are futile; the paint will peel and crack from the cold as it dries. Stealthily, the cold silence encroaches upon her until her initially cheerful thoughts reverse their course, causing her to separate herself from John still further by her bitter dissatisfaction with the work-oriented cycle of their lives:

> But now, alone with herself in the winter silence, she saw the spring for what it really was. The spring--next spring--all the springs and summers still to come. While they grew old, while their bodies warped, while their minds kept shrivelling dry and empty like their lives. (105)

However, while Ann's attitude toward the farm is the opposite of John's dedication, she does seem to understand her situation:

> It [her self pity] was just an effort to convince herself that she did have a grievance, to justify her rebellious thoughts, to prove John responsible for her unhappiness. She was young still, eager for excitement and distractions; and John's steadfastness rebuked her vanity, made her complaints seem weak and trivial. (106)

However, it is not enough that she recognize both sides of this conflict. By merely doubting that the land will bring the future to pass, Ann has already invoked the force of destruction.

Ann again builds up the fire against the cold, but the warmth is ineffective as the cold is now strengthened by the wind:

> The silence now seemed more intense than ever, seemed to have reached a pitch where it faintly moaned. She began to pace on tiptoe, listening, her shoulders drawn together, not realising for a while that it was the wind she heard, thin-strained and whimpering through the eaves. (105)

The landscape is no longer still and silent but is made violent by the wind:

> Across the drifts sped swift and snakelike little tongues of snow. She could not follow them, where they sprang from, or where they disappeared. It was as if all across the yard the snow were shivering awake--roused by the warnings of the wind to hold itself in readiness for the impending storm. . . . (105)

The wind-motivated "snakelike tongues of snow" is a sinister and violent image which was not evident before John left. As in an earlier scene, Ann had watched John's two-year-old colt return to the stable after a short gallop of freedom, she now watches snow-horses whipped by the wind:

> Before her as she watched a mane of powdery snow reared up breast-high against the darker background of the stable, tossed for a moment angrily, and then subsided again as if whipped down to obedience and restraint. But another followed, more reckless and impatient than the first. Another reeled and dashed itself against the window where she watched. Then ominously for a while there were only angry little snakes of snow. (105-6)

As the storm rises in intensity, the snow-horses become uncontrollable, threatening destruction as they dash madly at the window. John's stable is completely hidden and Ann is totally isolated from all aspects of his warming presence:

> All round her it was gathering; already in its press and whimpering there strummed a boding of eventual fury. Again she saw a mane of snow spring up, so dense and high this time that all the sheds and stables were obscured. Then others followed, whirling fiercely out of hand; and, when at last they cleared, the stables seemed in dimmer outline than before. It was the snow beginning, long lancet shafts of it, straight from the north, borne almost level by the straining wind. (106)

Ann becomes an instrument of the wind which distorts John's life into futility and purposelessness by her discontent. His life is centred on his horses and his farm implements. However, because Ann does not see the same purpose and meaning in John's endless toil, the horses with which he is allied cease to be creatures of gentleness, devotion, warmth and hope. They become snow-horses, violent

and uncontrollable, crashing against the window attempting to break into the house and blocking her view of the stable. John will also change from a representative of warmth and life into cold and death. The creative image of the childhood stories becomes a destructive image because of Ann's basic loss of faith in the land and the future.

Ann is caught between these opposing forces. Her doubt has stimulated destruction, but she still attempts to go to the stable to feed John's livestock, an act which associates her with the creative force which John represents. Just before she ventures out of the house, Ann shares with Ellen, in "The Lamp at Noon," the sense of being poised on the edge of chaos:

> The slow dimming of the light clutched her with an illogical sense of abandonment. It was like the covert withdrawal of an ally, leaving the alien miles unleashed and unrestrained. Watching the hurricane of writhing snow rage past the little house she forced herself, 'They'll never stand the night unless I get them fed. It's nearly dark already, and I've work to last an hour.' (108)

The ally who has withdrawn is John, so Ann is poised on the edge of the destructive dimension. Her attempt to reach the stable and gain some of John's calm and certainty from the building is thwarted by the wind. It handles her as it subdues Will in his fight to return to Eleanor:

> A gust of wind spun her forward a few yards, then plunged her headlong against a drift that in the dense white whirl lay invisible across her path. For nearly a minute she huddled still, breathless and dazed. The snow was in her mouth and nostrils, inside her scarf and up her sleeves. As she tried to straighten a

> smothering scud flung itself against her face, cutting off her breath a second time. The wind struck from all sides, blustering and furious. It was as if the storm had discovered her, as if all its forces were concentrated upon her extinction. (108)

Steven, unafraid of the storm and calmly self-confident, soothes her fear and tends the stable for her. However, Steven is the storm in human form invading John's house and stable. He lacks John's idealism and warmth:

> He [John] always stood before her helpless, a kind of humility and wonderment in his attitude. And Steven now smiled on her appraisingly with the worldly-wise assurance of one for whom a woman holds neither mystery nor illusion. (110)

Steven, his life based on stark realism, is the destructive counterforce to all that John believes in. Like the attraction of the boxstall in "One's a Heifer," Steven excites and repels Ann simultaneously:

> For his presumption, his misunderstanding of what had been only momentary weakness, instead of angering quickened her, roused from latency and long disuse all the instincts and resources of her femininity. She felt eager, challenged. Something was at hand that hitherto had always eluded her, even in the early days with John, something vital, beckoning, meaningful. She didn't understand, but she knew. The texture of the moment was satisfyingly dreamlike: an incredibility perceived as such, yet acquiesced in. (110)

Ann resists his advance, knowing that John will return, but she is as powerless to assert herself in Steven's presence as she was in the wind which "held her numb and swaying in its vise." (109) Ann's efforts to avoid this menace are as futile as her battle against the storm. The fire crackles and the clock ticks, advancing time to its inevitable end:

> [D]espite herself, she raised her head and met his

> eyes again.
>
> Intending that it should be for only an instant, just to breathe again, to ease the tension that had grown unbearable--but in his smile now, instead of the insolent appraisal that she feared, there seemed a kind of warmth and sympathy. An understanding that quickened and encouraged her--that made her wonder why but a moment ago she had been afraid. It was as if the storm had lulled, as if she had suddenly found calm and shelter. (113-14)

Ann relaxes as she did when flung into the snow by the wind. She interprets her decision to be unfaithful to John as an awakening: "She who, in the long, wind-creaked silence, had emerged from the increment of codes and loyalties to her real unfettered self." (114) However, from the moment John left the house, warmth has turned to cold; Ann's interpretation will also be revised.

Exposure to the wind, spirit of the destructive dimension, through Steven has given Ann insight into the real John. She sees him with his facade of humility stripped away to expose the bare qualities of endurance which allow him to survive against the power of destruction. In Steven, Ann hoped to find the passion, hope, excitement and warmth absent in her life with John, but John was thereby exposed to the cold and destructive elements governed by the wind to become the opposite of his former warmth and gentleness:

> [T]he shadow was John. Interminably he advanced. The whips of light still flickered and coiled, but now suddenly they were the swift little snakes that this afternoon she had watched twist and shiver across the snow. And they too were advancing. They writhed and vanished and came again. She lay still, paralysed. He was over her now, so close that she could have touched him. Already it seemed that

a deadly tightening hand was on her throat. (115)

Ann believes her guilt and her fear of John's return have produced the nightmare, but she also senses John's presence still in the room and gains understanding of her husband from the dream:

> The face that had watched her from the darkness with its stonelike sorrow--the face that was really John--John more than his features of mere flesh and bone could ever be. (115)

> She remembered the shadow that was John. She saw him bent towards her, then retreating, his features pale and overcast with unaccusing grief. She re-lived their seven years together and, in retrospect, found them to be years of worth and dignity. (116)

She now sees Steven for what he really is:

> Looking down at him [Steven] as he slept, half-smiling still, his lips relaxed in the conscienceless complacency of his achievement, she understood that thus he was revealed in his entirety--all there ever was or ever could be. John was the man. With him lay all the future. (117-18)

Ann's new awareness of her life with John comes too late to make her subsequent atonement effective. Her betrayal of John has nullified man's only weapon against the wind. Eleanor and Paul, who ignore the dictates of the wheat and marry without a harvest, foil the destructive force, which would have blighted the crop and their future, with human love and compassion. Such a creative force protects them from the wind until in "September Snow" the farm gains priority. Eleanor's fear goes uncomforted and the creative force is weakened, giving destruction strength. Similarly, by ignoring John's love, Ann denies the creative force which points to

the future and gives strength to destruction. Ann's misdirected love of Steven makes her a betrayer of the creative force, as Paul and Will are. The betrayed suffer helplessly at the hands of the destructive force without the weapons of love or persistence.

Like Paul's snow-filled house, Ann's house, despite her awakening, is not free of the destructive presence. The house has not become a sanctuary against the wind where her faith and integrity can be re-built, even though she now rejects Steven:

> Earlier in the evening, with the lamp lit and the fire crackling, the house had seemed a stand against the wilderness, a refuge of feeble walls wherein persisted the elements of human meaning and survival Now, in the cold, creaking darkness, it was strangely extinct, looted by the storm and abandoned again. (116)

In pointless atonement for succumbing to this cold, destructive force, Ann stands in the coldest part of the room, where the wind sounds "like a wolf in howling flight," (116) but the house is permanently looted of warmth and future hope because John, knowing of Ann's infidelity, passively allows the storm to kill him. Ann's awakening and atonement are futile. However, John is not blameless in this tragedy, because his focus on the dream of the future defeats the creative force of Ann's love in the present. For Ann's part, the withdrawal of her love for John results in a strengthening of the opposite force, death. In these last three stories, the victims of this destructive force are those for whom love and concern, the creative forces, have been withheld. Destruction

and death gain strength from this imbalance and the wind symbol dominates.

Only two stories, "No Other Way" and "Nell," show characters who, although love has been withdrawn from or denied them, have kept faith with the land. The future is no longer a promise of release from hardship and deprivation: their lives focus instead on past happiness. Like the rest of Ross's farmers, the two women in these stories, Hatty and Nell, have an innate sense that the land will justify and reward their struggle. A desperate, stubborn resolution not to be defeated, an inability to admit defeat and a hopeless dream of a return to a more fulfilling past, keep these women on their land. However, the withdrawal of their husbands' love makes the imaginative, hope-filled side of life powerless against destructive elements in their lives. As a result, the wind is the dominant symbol in these stories, but it is not the vicious, evil wind of "The Lamp at Noon." Instead, the wind is a cold, nagging reminder of the bitter disappointments of their lives, which they endure with sheer determination knowing no change is possible. Still they cling to the desperate hope that their labour on the land will be rewarded by their husbands' love.

Hatty Glen, the central character in "No Other Way," is encumbered by the promise of the land as Will, Paul and John are in the previously discussed stories. Like these farmers, she has become part of the land, to the extent that

her physical appearance has been eroded by long exposure to the wind:

> [H]er body was hunched against the wind, and her head thrust forward. She was a thin woman, starting to stoop; the old felt hat she wore was tilted down so that her nose stood out like a beak. The wind whipped her light print skirt close around her legs, and the tattered sleeves of Dan's old sweater flapped crazily in the wind.[8]

Yet, she struggles against this destructive force. Unthinkingly and without enthusiasm, she labours feverishly against the wind to harvest her turnips before "a tang of snow in the wind" (16) destroys her crop. The image of the night drawn reluctantly from the sunset by the wind describes the state of Hatty's life: "Out of a sprawling sunset, ragged and unkempt, as if in a sullen mood it had grown careless of itself, the October wind dragged a clamping, resolute night." (16) Hatty's life, dominated by the destructive power of the wind, moves inevitably and ploddingly through this cycle from the joyful, love-filled sunlight of morning toward bitter, resentful darkness:

> [S]he was looking past the turnips, and the glint of shrewdness in her eyes was become a fitful, moody light, glowing dully through a shadow of bitterness and brooding. In the same eyes, twenty years before, there had been a gleam and lustre that had made a handsome country boy pledge lifelong, and rather foolishly ardent, devotion; but to-day it was the festered, smouldering fire of a struggle that burned them.
>
> An old struggle, for years now an inseparable part of her life. . . . A useless, wearying struggle, making her harsh and sour and old, and always ending just where it had begun. . . . And then, after she was worked up to a white heat, after she had spat out her venom, there was still the work to be done, and only herself to do it. . . . (16)

Unlike her shiftless husband, Dan, Hatty cannot disengage herself from her struggle with the land or from her marriage. Therefore, like a laboratory rat, she continually rushes through the maze which life sets before her, only to find no prize or reward at the end:

> The dozen oat stacks, built in a square, with only narrow runways between them, formed a labyrinth where the cows dodged in and out and from side to side, indifferent to her screams and yells. The bristly butts of sheaves as she squeezed her way among them were like needles on her face and hands. The dust rose in dense, choking clouds, stinging her eyes, and forming on her lips in little larvae-like clots of mud. She was tired and excited, and the persistent way the cows doubled back on her each time she thought she had them started for the pasture kept her in a blind temper. (80)

Such unrewarding, punishing action is repeated every day of Hatty's life, like the daily cycle of sunrise and sunset, emphasizing the futility of any action at all. The destructive spirit makes all her labour meaningless and empty: "It was dark now, the wind whistled through the stacks desolately." (80) Also like Will, Paul and John, Hatty's labour is a sacrifice to one whose love, or even acknowledgement, would give purpose to her life and ease the influence of destruction.

Unlike the laboratory rat, Hatty is able to articulate why she puts herself through such anguish:

> With the sight of Dan shaving there had come a sharp, revealing flash that awakened her. This snarling and storming was no use. It was going to mean a fight. She had not thought out her sudden resolution. It was just instinct--foolish, illogical, because a dozen times a day she told herself that she hated Dan like poison anyway--but gripping her so that she saw life reduced to a single, compelling purpose. (80)

If Dan would react to Hatty's labour with the appreciation he showed in the past, her labour and sacrifice would become worthwhile:

> [T]here had risen before her a memory that dispelled the consciousness of her own rags and dirt, and sent a new rhythm of life tingling to her finger-tips. The memory of herself as she used to be--the woman Dan had loved. (80)

But this dream can never be regained; Hatty is not the woman she was. Although she and Dan originally shared a common purpose, Dan has lost the driving persistence which motivates her. He now lives for the present. Her help in the past counts for nothing:

> All very fine for Dan to play the gentleman, but if she hadn't been behind him with the cows to help him out of the scrape that his first land deal got him into, how far would his scheming and smartness have taken him? He never talked about the early days now, or the mortgage she paid off. (81)

The withdrawal of Dan's love and Hatty's illogical devotion to him are also wind forces in her life, but rather than defeat her, this opposition feeds her determination to persist.

The farm is Hatty's element, while the colour and excitement of a trip to town is Dan's environment. Here, Hatty is trapped in a new maze, a gauntlet she must run:

> Lights, laughter, colour--it was all a merry-go-round, spinning dizzily. And then with a jolt everything came to a standstill, and she remembered that she had come away without milking the cows. . . . [W]ith a sensation as if she were walking a tightrope, with a sea of faces upturned to watch her, Hatty started towards an impatient beckoning hand at the far side of the room. As she walked the eyes on every side seemed laughing at the shabbiness of her dress, and tauntingly there rose before her the rough, wind-chapped face that had looked back at her from her mirror. (81)

With hands "wrinkled and red, like forked carrots grown in lumpy soil," (81) Hatty herself recognizes that she is misplaced in this atmosphere "fetid with perfume and cosmetics." (81) The lights, laughter and excitement of this outing are an earthly parallel to the light and happiness found in the dimension of the imagination, but this scene is not an uplifting experience for Hatty. These surroundings are a childish dream from the past, impossibly out of place in the present:

> There was a smother of faces and dresses--and then, among all the others, one dress so beautiful that she choked. Red satin, flashing through black lace like points of fire. When she was a little girl she had dreamed about growing up to be a fine, handsome lady, and wearing just such a dress; and the sudden distortion of her old dream into an aloof, mocking reality, made her flustered and stupid. (81)

Hatty's dream is distorted--someone else wears her dress and has the love and respect her husband denies her. Mrs. Bird and Dan, who detach themselves from the farm, are allied with the wind as forces destructive to Hatty's happiness, robbing what she values of meaning and making her labour and dreams silly and futile. Hatty, like Ross's other farmers, seeks refuge from the power of destruction in the stable, but not among horses:

> She closed the door after her, and stood still a minute, soothed by the warm, drowsy quiet. Behind the soft, yellow light spread by her lantern the shadows hung massive and restful. The air was clean with cattle and hay. . . . She clicked the cows to their feet and began to milk, her fingers gripping the udders with firm, capable intimacy. Her tight muscles relaxed; gradually the turmoil within her quietened.

> She was home again, relieved. This was where she belonged. (82)

Once Hatty returns to the house, her mood of bitterness and contempt returns, but memories of a happier past also return to taunt and reproach her for the present state of her life. Hatty's view of life has been cruelly re-focused from the past to the reality of the present:

> [S]he loved him--always had, and would never be able to help herself--and since she was now just an old, repulsive woman, with her place in his life lost hopelessly, she would just have to go on slaving and fighting, loving him all the time, and knowing that every day was taking him farther from her. (82)

The next morning continues the pattern of all other days but now, without dreams or illusions to soften its hardness, the day begins with despair rather than determination. Her love for a husband who hates her is like a wind with snow in it, threatening to destroy everything she has worked for.

In despair, Hatty is drawn to the well, by "an exact recurrence of something in the past." (82) The well brings memories of hard work, but also of a fulfillment now absent from her life:

> And yet, that had been the vital, solid time of her life. The work had a purpose behind it; there had been something to look forward to. It used to seem that a windmill, and a big house with carpets and a gramophone, were all that was needed to make life perfect; and now after all the old wishes had been realized, here she was, back at the well. (82)

The well and its memories are not rejuvenative; they are a reproach to the meaningless life she now has. Hatty contemplates suicide, first from self-pity, then because she is

overwhelmed by the reality of the situation:

> It would be too hard now, to be near him, and all the time feel how hopelessly they were separated. . . . [T]heir whole lives were smothered in a tangle of harshness and misunderstanding. To-day she could see the tangle, but it was too late to start unraveling. (82)

However, as she is about to throw herself down the well, for the triumph of the destructive force, the dog's bark warns that the cows are in the garden. She battles the cows in the turnips as she had driven them from the oats the day before. Destruction is, therefore, held at bay:

> She glanced over her shoulder and saw the half-chewed turnips being slobbered into the dirt. December--January--a pail a day.
>
> And then in a flash she was clutching a broom and swooping into the garden. . . .
>
> Butter twenty-five cents a pound. There was no other way. (84)

Hatty's life, because of her determination to survive and her loyalty to the land, remains in stasis, on the border between destruction and creativity. As in the previous stories, love, from Dan, could firmly ally her with the imaginative side of life.

For Hatty, the well is, as Lorraine McMullen notes, a creative "symbol of vital, purposeful activity and of shared love--and . . . a link between past and present, between illusion and reality."[9] This same creative force, which puts Hatty's life into perspective, is at work in "Nell" through the symbol of the ketchup bottles. Nell's acceptance of the present state of her life and the decision to continue is more calmly achieved than Hatty's, but her search for love

to give the struggle meaning is no less determined. Like Hatty, Nell is married to a handsome man who is indifferent to her. Indeed, he may never have loved her, but married her because she owned a farm. There is tension between them of a different sort than the outwardly bitter strife between Hatty and Dan. For George, Nell barely exists, while Nell constantly attempts to revive their relationship with small kindnesses. Since she must force her way into his life, her concern causes, rather than alleviates, George's aloofness:

> But at least George wouldn't be able to stay till all hours throwing his money away. She was doing that much for him. It was selfish maybe staying at home.[10]

The present is a bitter, distorted version of the happier past. Nell tries to recapture her memories of trips to town when they were first married, but her trip to town this time lacks any of the enjoyment and excitement she remembers from the past. Instead, the store's neon sign and the slow progress of time hold Nell in a meaningless, impotent existence of waiting. She repeatedly glances at the clock, waiting for the moment when George will remember her and Tommy and appear to take them home. Others wait as well, but their husbands arrive; George goes home without them. Nell is left waiting for his attention as she does every day of her life. She realizes that all of her gestures toward him are as meaningless as dressing up to go to town:

> Her shoes pinched. She promised her self [sic] that as soon as they were clear of town she would take them off and walk home barefoot. (40)

However, this new acceptance does not destroy her love for George. Her unnoticed gestures of kindness will continue. She remembers ketchup for his meals and carries a bottle home with her while the other provisions wait until next week.

For both these women, the most destructive wind-force is within themselves and tied to the selfless devotion they show their husbands. Their love is similar to the faithful belief in the land's ultimate righteousness held by the farmers in Ross's adult stories. Hatty, through her toil on the farm which she and Dan built, struggles to regain Dan's love. She works incessantly, through curses and bitterness, for even the smallest recognition from him. Nell, with small tokens of kindness, hopes to win George's love. However, for both women their struggle is fruitless. Their husbands do not love them and this fact alone, like the wind which destroys crops and the promise of the land, dashes any hope for change in their lives. They can only persist in the pattern, struggling against the inevitable. However, by merely acknowledging this futility and thereby reconciling the future with the past, the forces of destruction and the forces of hope and happiness are set at a stalemate. Nell and Hatty are able to continue their lives with a new honesty, which focuses on the present not the past, and a resignation to the pattern their lives will take.

"A Field of Wheat" begins without the haunting tone

of impending destruction which marks Ross's other stories focusing on adults. John and Martha's story begins hopefully, with an eagerness for change and confidence in the future. Their wheat has grown to maturity and is almost ready for harvest. Consequently, their lives are on the verge of fulfillment; their labour on the land will be rewarded and the cycle of drudgery and hardship will be ended. In no other story, except those about the spirit of the imagination, are the imaginative elements of hope and happiness so strong. In addition, Martha's relationship with her husband has not reached the breaking point, as have Hatty and Nell's marriages. Martha's love seems to have remained quietly constant or suspended, rather than to have died or twisted into nagging bitterness toward John. She does have moments of resentment because the wheat takes the love she should have; however, as for Hatty, John is Martha's land and she must keep faith:

> She had loved John, for these sixteen years had stood close watching while he died--slowly, tantalizingly, as the parched wheat died. He had grown unkempt, ugly, morose. His voice was gruff, contentious, never broke into the deep, strong laughter that used to make her feel she was living at the heart of things. John was gone, love was gone; there was only wheat.[11]

Now, the crop which has sapped the elements of John's personality associated with the imaginative spirit, such as laughter, has the power to give it all back to him and restore the happier past:

> Theirs--all of it. Three hundred acres ready to give

> perhaps a little of what it had taken from her--
> John, his love, his lips unclenched. (74)

Finally, unlike the other women, Martha attempts to understand the mystery of life beyond the reality of farm life. The other women focus on the unrelenting pattern of unrelenting drudgery with their hopes of reward for that labour unfulfilled. Martha, however, sees two sides to life, not just destruction and death but also beauty and happiness. Perhaps because of her recognition, however cursory, of the imaginative side of life, she does not ask why misfortune strikes, but rather why the beauty, hope and happiness of life are so often overwhelmed by hardship, destruction and despair: "Why did the beauty flash and the bony stalks remain?" (76) As a result, Martha is better equipped to deal with the imminent destruction of the wheat because she has awareness of the creative forces in her life. She shares John's faith in the land to provide for their future, but in the present, her persistent love checks the hatred and bitterness which rob the other women of any happiness. Finally, Martha's awareness of the duality of life means that she can never totally lose hope as other women do; she knows that beauty will sometime flash again.

The field of wheat is a dream come true, a vision of perfection and beauty, calm and clarity, such as Peter Parker sees riding Pegasus:

> It was the best crop of wheat John had ever grown;
> sturdy, higher than the knee, the heads long and filling

> well; a still, heat-hushed mile of it, undulating into a shimmer of summer-colts and crushed horizon blue. (73)

This crop, according to Martha, should be the long-awaited justification and reward for John's labour on and faith in the land. The wheat also holds them bound by the destructive side of life and continues the pattern of hope, struggle, destruction, and perseverance which all of Ross's farmers face:

> [T]he quickest aches of life, travail, heartbrokenness, they had never wrung as the wheat wrung. For the wheat allowed no respite. Wasting and unending it was struggle, struggle against the wind and insects, drought and weeds. Not an heroic struggle to give a man courage and resolve, but a frantic, unavailing one. They were only poor, taunted, driven things; it was the wheat that was invincible. They only dreaded, built bright futures; waited for the first glint of green, watched timorous and eager while it thickened, merged, and at last leaned bravely to a ripple in the wind; then followed every slip of cloud into the horizon, turned to the wheat and away again. And it died tantalizingly sometimes, slowly: there would be a cool day, a pittance of rain.
>
> Or perhaps it lived, perhaps the rain came, June, July, even August, hope climbing, wish-patterns painted on the future. And then one day a clench and tremble to John's hand; his voice faltering, dull. Grasshoppers perhaps, sawflies or rust; no matter, they would grovel for a while, stand back helpless, then go on again. Go on in bitterness and cowardice, because there was nothing else but going-on. (74)

Martha's daughter's poppy is similar to the wheat--beautiful, delicate and destructible. As a child, she responds to its outward beauty, but she also articulates Martha's unspoken observation about life:

> Sitting down on the doorstep to admire the gaudy petals, she complained to herself, 'They go so fast--the first little winds blows [sic] them all away.' On her face, lengthening it, was bitten deeply the enigma of the flowers and the naked seed-pods. Why did the beauty

flash and the bony stalks remain? (76)

Annabelle's meditation also foreshadows the destruction of the wheat's beauty and Martha's hopes. The wind stealthily gathers its forces, in this case, hail and darkness, to overpower beauty and hope, the creative side of life once again.

Destruction, as in the previous stories, has a presence of its own:

> All at once she turned away from the stove and stood strained, inert. The silence seemed to gather itself, hold its breath. . . . [T]he hush over everything was like a raised finger, forbidding her. (76-77)

Martha is, at first, held by this presence, as Ann is held vice-like by the wind in "The Painted Door," at the edge of chaos:

> To the west there was no sky, only a gulf of blackness, so black that the landscape seemed slipping down the neck of a funnel. Above, almost overhead, a heavy, hard-lined bank of cloud swept its way across the sun-white blue in august, impassive fury. (77)

From this familiar black chaos, violence and destruction quell hope and the future:

> In front of her the blackness split--an abrupt, unforked gash of light as if angry hands had snatched to seal the rent.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Deep in the funnel shaggy thunder rolled, emerged and shook itself, then with hurtling strides leaped up to drum and burst itself on the advancing peak of cloud.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There it was--the hail again--the same twisting little cloud against the black one--just as she had seen it four years ago. (77)

As in "September Snow," "The Painted Door," and "The Lamp at Noon," destruction of the wheat is not enough; the wind invades the house to complete its destruction:

> Then the window broke, and Joe and the pillow tumbled off the table before the howling inrush of the storm. . . . The wind whisked pots and kettles off their hooks, tugged at and whirled the sodden curtains, crashed down a shelf of lamps and crockery. . . . The window she [Annabelle] had been holding was broken too; and she had run away without closing the bedroom door, leaving a wild tide of wind upstairs to rage unchecked. It was rocking the whole house, straining at the walls. (79)

The wheat is still foremost in John and Martha's minds in spite of its destruction:

> Both of them wanted to speak, to break the atmosphere of calamity that hung over them, but the words they could find were too small for the sparkling serenity of wasted field. Even as waste it was indomitable. It tethered them to itself, so that they could not feel or comprehend. It had come and gone, that was all; before its tremendousness and havoc they were prostrate. They had not yet risen to cry out or protest. (80)

Yet, this destruction brings John and Martha together, as Martha had hoped the harvested crop would. She is strengthened by John's restricted attempt to comfort her to go on as if the wheat had not promised hope and wind had not dashed it:

> Mounting within her was a resolve, a bravery. It was the warming sunlight, the strength and nearness of John, a feeling of mattering, belonging. Swung far upwards by the rush and swell of recaptured life, she was suddenly as far above the desolation of the storm as a little while ago she had been abject below it. (80)

However, this moment, like the beauty of the poppy, flashes and dies, leaving the dominant reality exposed: life will not change and their labour and hopes will be wasted. Unlike the other women, Martha understands from the beginning that John is not to blame for her unhappiness:

> Not that she failed to understand what John was going through. It was just rebellion. Rebellion because their wheat was beaten into the ground, because there

> was this brutal, callous finish to everything she had planned, because she had will and needs and flesh, because she was alive. Rebellion, not John at all--but how rebel against a summer storm, how find the throat of a cloud? (81)

Still, Martha does seek John to vent her anger, to "unloose the fury that clawed her, [to] strike back a blow for the one that flattened her." (81) Like all of Ross's farm couples, they communicate through the land, but Martha and John also differ from previous couples. Their distress over the wheat occurs simultaneously--the faith of both is damaged so that unlike the others, their visions of life are not conflicting. They remain tentatively allied with the harmony and calm which dominates the imaginative dimension.

John's stable is the hushed stable-shrine of the childhood stories where children seek to expand their imaginations. Martha enters the stable and "before its quietness her anger subsided, took time for breath." (81) John has also been released from oppressive anger in the stable, but Martha is shocked to see his emotional state:

> John sobbing there, against the horse. It was the strangest, most frightening moment of her life. He had always been so strong and grim; had just kept on as if he couldn't feel, as if there were a bull's hide over him, and now he was beaten. (81-82)

Finding that John shares her hopelessness and despair at the disregard shown for their lives, Martha is "stricken with guilty shame as if it were she who had been caught broken and afraid." (82) She realizes what John's despair means to all of them:

> [H]e might never be able to get a grip of himself again. He might not want to keep on working, not if he were really beaten. If he lost heart, if he didn't care about Joe and Annabelle any more. Weeds and pests, drought and hail--it took so much fight for a man to hold his own against them all, just to hold his own, let alone make headway. (82)

Martha leaves the stable with the awareness that the link with the land, through John and his labour, must survive. Without the land, their lives are meaningless and no future exists.

The clouds, which moments before had destroyed the crop, flash with beauty like Annabelle's poppy:

> Withdrawn now in the eastern sky the storm clouds towered, gold-capped and flashed in the late sunlight, high still pyramids of snowiness and shadow. And one that Annabelle pointed to, apart, the farthest away from them all, this one in bronzed slow splendour spread up mountains high to a vast, plateau-like summit. (82)

This beauty, a momentary display between prolonged periods of "bony stalks," reassures Martha that hardship, despair and drudgery is not the only reality. She recognizes, at the same time, what lies ahead of her: "This winter they wouldn't have so much as an onion or potato." (82) Martha may also have been a part of a moment of beauty when she encountered John in the stable. He is not unfeeling and devoid of emotion as she had earlier thought, robbed of human qualities by the land. For her part, Martha's compassion for her broken husband, strengthens her to renew her struggle against the destructive power. In a more meaningful, purposeful way than Hatty and Nell, Martha accepts the pattern of her life and enters into a silent partnership with her husband. She is

not destroyed like Eleanor and Ellen but will do what she can to counteract the wind's destructive power with love and kindness. For today, John will have a good supper, with peas, his favorite vegetable: "Lucky that they picked them when they did." (82) For both John and Martha, their lives are focused from the future to the present. For Martha this re-focusing means she helps produce what beauty and relief she can. Although struggle and labour on the land will continue, Martha's awareness of the duality of life, the importance of the land, and her love for John make her invincible in the face of the wind.

Of Ross's short stories, those which focus on the adult perception of life are much less hopeful and more negative in tone than his stories dealing with children. As Lorraine McMullen notes, these farm stories

> dramatize man's struggle with the grim and desperate prairie world of the dust bowl, and explore with compassion and understanding the effect of their struggles on individuals and on human relations.[12]

However, characters who shelter their human relationships from the effects of the struggle with the land are not overwhelmed by the destructive forces in life but keep some portion of the childhood awareness of the dimension of the imagination. Eleanor, in "September Snow," Ellen, in "The Lamp at Noon," and John, in "The Painted Door," lose the creative relationships which provide hope for the future and are destroyed by the demands of the land. For other characters, the struggle with the land is eased somewhat by the creative element of

love. Whether acknowledged or not, compassion and understanding ensure, as Margaret Laurence points out, that "[h]ope never quite vanishes. In counterpoint to desolation runs the theme of renewal."[13] In "No Other Way" and "Nell," Hatty and Nell's love for their husbands allows them to persevere in their struggle with the land. In "Summer Thunder" and "A Field of Wheat," the characters involved gain renewed strength to continue with hope for the future from their relationships. In these stories concerning the realities of farm life, as in the childhood stories, those characters with a complete awareness of the duality of life are best prepared to withstand the dominant elements of destruction.

Chapter 2

Notes

[1]Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 127.

[2]Sinclair Ross, "Summer Thunder," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), pp. 52-53. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[3]Sinclair Ross, "September Snow," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 61. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[4]Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow: Four Windows onto Landscapes," Canadian Literature, No. 5 (Summer 1960), p. 16.

[5]Sinclair Ross, "The Lamp at Noon," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 14. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[6]Lorraine McMullen, Sinclair Ross (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 33.

[7]Sinclair Ross, "The Painted Door," The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 104. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[8]Sinclair Ross, "No Other Way," Nash's Pall-Mall (October, 1934), p. 16. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[9]McMullen, p. 26.

[10]Sinclair Ross, "Nell," Manitoba Arts Review, II, No. 4 (Winter 1941), p. 36. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[11]Sinclair Ross, "A Field of Wheat," The Lamp at Noon

and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 74. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[12]McMullen, p. 134.

[13]Margaret Laurence, Introd., The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 12.

Chapter 3

"this mystery of beginning"

Sinclair Ross has published four novels during his writing career: As For Me and My House in 1941, The Well in 1958, Whir of Gold in 1970, and Sawbones Memorial in 1974. These novels, like his short stories, explore the duality of the mystery of life. The characters who can temper their disappointed, unfulfilled lives with glimpses of the hopeful, light-filled dimension of the imagination achieve a fuller, more mature vision of life which allows them to overcome the periods dominated by destructive wind-forces. In two of these novels, Whir of Gold and As For Me and My House, Ross deals with artists who seek the creative dimension amid oppressive reality to produce art. In The Well, the forces of the illuminated dimension and the powers of the destructive dimension compete in the life of Chris Rowe. Finally, in Sawbones Memorial, Ross traces the interplay of the creative force with the destructive force over generations, as seen through the eyes of Doc Hunter. Ross concludes that the cycle of hope followed by despair, and flashes of beauty amid ruin and destruction, is the essence of life. Yet hope and happiness can be prolonged by the creative forces of human love, compassion and concern. The characters who perceive both forces in their lives have the most balanced and mature

vision of life.

In The Well, published in 1958, Chris Rowe, a petty criminal from Montreal, seeks refuge in Campkin, Saskatchewan after shooting a man in a robbery. The novel shows the breakdown of his restrictive Boyle Street mentality, the destructive side of his life, and his gradual acceptance of responsibility for his actions, the creative aspect of his life. Chris begins firmly entrenched in his Boyle Street background, but the life-sustaining side of life, represented by Larson's horses, soon gains equal importance until he must choose which half will dominate his life. He chooses life and freedom and, like the horses, has the strength to survive the vicissitudes of life.

Chris Rowe arrives on the prairie with his Boyle Street attitudes to life intact. He is tough, self-confident, sure of his superiority and careful to maintain his independence. His lack of respect toward the townspeople links him to the Boyle Street environment, where loyalties are bought and money provides the power for the advantageous manipulation of others. On Boyle Street, Chris had power and independence because others depended on him. On the prairie, the opposite is true. When he encounters the alien prairie environment without his Boyle Street supports, he enters a new and hostile world where he must adjust to the "antithesis"[1] of Boyle Street, a world in which he does not know the rules:

> The austere serenity of the landscape was lost on him. Roads, telephone poles, fields with men and

> horses working--the foreground at least was to human scale, but his imagination, fixed in its alley-doorway patterns, shrank from the stark, sky-and-earth immensity. It seemed desert-like and sinister.
>
> And again, as on the train, he felt lost, cut-off. The prairie was closing behind him. He would never find his way back. Grasshoppers flew up and dashed themselves against the windshield with crunching little plops. A black whirlwind twisted viciously across the road in front of them, and then, like a crazed reptile, sped teetering into the adjoining field.[2]

In this world, Chris is not in control of his life; he is dependent on Larson to help him cope; but, cut off from his city life which held him confined in alleyways, Chris also has the opportunity to expand his consciousness. Chris is faced with the "paradox of freedom and exposure"[3] upon his arrival on the prairie. As a result, the novel becomes a consideration of the renewal of the emotional and spiritual potential of Chris's personality.

Larson, the farmer who befriends Chris, tends to think of him as a surrogate son and hopes that Chris will stay with him in that role. Chris stalwartly keeps up his Boyle Street toughness rather than trust Larson's good will. Larson's horses, however, are the catalysts in Chris's changing attitude toward life. He has already admitted that he wanted more from life than Boyle Street could offer. He had only his fastidious appearance to set him apart from the Boyle Street gang, as "proof that the larger life he dreamed of was in reality his due." (33) Chris's aim is independence and freedom, which he begins to learn through respect and responsibility for the horses.

Ned, Larson's oldest horse, represents the decay and dissolution of Larson's past, but Larson's tolerance also shows a respect for life which is absent from Chris's Boyle Street attitudes:

> Ned was a gaunt, rangy bay. His ribs showed; his hide was rubbed and worn in places like the elbows of an old fur coat. 'Can't fatten him up--poor teeth. Lately he's been doing better on mash, but I don't think he'll last till spring.'
>
> Ned gave a wheezy sigh, swung his head till it met Larson's shoulder, then let it rest there. 'Had him from a colt--back to Cora's time and the sod stable. Deaf and blind both, but like I say I can't shoot him. . . .' (38-39)

Fanny, another of Larson's horses, also gets momentary notice from Chris, all that her appearance merits. However, Larson values her beyond this:

> Fanny was a few stalls farther along, an old, rusty-black mare, dejected-looking, rheumy-eyed, her belly distended so enormously that to Chris it seemed ready to burst. 'Good colts,' Larson said, 'but she's getting too old--nearly up to Ned. This one'll be sixteen--I figure it's her last.' He scratched her affectionately between the ears, then looked in her manger to see whether she had been eating. 'No sense to it--eight or nine horses just loafing round the pasture already. But that's what I built the barn for. I like seeing them around, and I like coming out to talk to them.' (40)

Chris listens apathetically to Larson talk about the horses until he sees Minnie:

> Chris's face lit. He met a fine, curious nose turned towards him with his fingertips, and then, to redeem the timidity of his approach to the greys, stood motionless while she rubbed her head against his sleeve.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Now Chris saw himself astride her. And though it was a strange, unexpected picture, it pleased him. Somehow it fitted in. (39)

However, it is the beautiful and dangerous stallion, North,

which captures Chris's imagination:

> . . . Chris drew closer, slowly raising and extending his hand till only a few inches separated his fingers from the outthrust nose. His face was white and tense, fear mingled with wonder. It was as if he were compelled, as if here were something--an imperiousness, a brute beauty--to which he could respond, yield unstinted admiration.
>
> 'Careful,' Larson warned again, seizing the stallion's halter with both hands. 'You're asking for trouble. He's no time for strangers.'
>
> But Chris's hand came closer, trembling with the strain like a compass needle, till at last it reached the stallion's nose. There was a little snort of consternation--feigned, exaggerated--and then indulgently the thick black lips began nuzzling Chris's fingers.
>
> Chris shivered, flushed. Recklessly he stepped forward and drew North's muzzle against his cheek, while with the other hand he reached up and stroked his neck. (41)

A kinship exists between Chris and this horse, as between Isabel and Tommy McAlpine, but this closeness goes far beyond their common "vanity, high spirits, and a need to show off."[4] North is the symbol of the same indomitable spirit striving for freedom from earth-bound reality which Isabel embodies:

> [A]s if to reward Chris's admiration, North was a model of good behavior. The snorting and stamping were pure showmanship. He champed, pawed, nosed them as they [Larson and Chris] entered; then, suddenly aloof, flung up his head and neighed again. Chris quailed a moment--the neigh was like a trumpet, the walls reeled before it--but his vanity, the need to live up to Larson's praise, regained control swiftly. The sleek magnificence of the brute, the dramatic listening pose he had struck, head high, ears pricked forward, straining for an answer to the challenge of his neigh--Chris rose to it, awed, and yet fearless, with a conviction that he had imposed himself. (41-42)

As Isabel challenges Tommy McAlpine to mature by seeking awareness of both halves of life, North's challenge to Chris

is to be open to the spirit he represents, the spirit of the illuminated, life-sustaining side of life. In his Boyle Street mind-set, Chris sees North as a challenge to his superiority. The horse quickly corrects this impression:

> He circled North a time or two, then laid a hand on his shoulder, confident and familiar. Too familiar: ignoring him a moment, North pealed out another neigh, establishing the proper distance between them; then, swift and accurate as a beak pecking a bug from a leaf, he caught Chris's sleeve with his teeth and ripped it from shoulder to elbow. (42)

Like Isabel, and all the farm horses that dash and caper despite their harness or that comfort their discouraged masters, North cannot be manipulated under control. He cannot be robbed of the self-respect and independence of his spirit as Chris has been by the Boyle Street code:

> He had moved there a timid boy, and for the first few weeks the other boys had made his life a torment. It was not very different from the street where he had lived before, but there he had been known, taken for what he was, jeered at briefly or ignored, while here he was pounced on as a newcomer, a diversion.
>
> Then there was the day he learned to spend, to buy--the sudden awakening to what the world was really like, the determination never to be helpless or exposed again. But it was more than that. With time something was added. He not only wanted to be safe, to have money in his pocket as a kind of street and playground insurance; because of the bullying and humiliation he had already endured--perhaps because of the money itself, what it implied--he also wanted to stand out and dominate. An itch to get even developed, a taste for power. (151-52)

The urge to dominate and control has cheapened and twisted the spirit of freedom and independence which Chris shares with North. As a result, Chris's Boyle Street toughness brings him into conflict with Larson, whose

relationships with others are based on mutual respect and co-operation. For example, his Boyle Street conditioning prevents Chris from understanding why Larson refuses to insist on payment for North's stud services:

> 'But there are other stallions. I get tough and they just take their mares somewhere else. I lose what they do pay, and turn them against me besides. They say I'm mean and crazy as it is. They're sore because I've done better, got more land.'
>
> 'So what have you got to lose? Put the screws on--they'll be eating out of your hand.' The scorn in Chris's voice now had a faintly protective edge, as if he despised Larson for being so soft and easy, and at the same time felt it his duty to wise him up to what the world was really like.
>
> 'Maybe that's how I'd feel if I had the boy behind me. But when you're alone and starting to get on you need your neighbours. It gives you a feeling, just knowing they're there. Sylvia hasn't worked out. Thinking about the boy the way I do--that doesn't always work out either.'
>
> He shrugged disconsolately. 'Got to think about North, too. How'd he like it if they started taking their mares somewhere else? Never near enough for him anyway.' (44)

To Chris, Larson is a fool not to take advantage of the monetary possibilities. However, Larson breeds the spirit of life and goodwill with North in both a figurative and an actual sense. The horse is Larson's only reason for contact with other people and his easy terms allow him to remain in a peaceable relationship, based on mutual respect, with his neighbours. Symbolically, North's offspring embody the spirit of the imagination which affirms life and human relationships. To Chris, however, Larson's live-and-let-live attitude is foolish and dangerous because it leaves him vulnerable to his neighbours' whims. Boyle Street holds Chris imprisoned

in the idea of self-preservation, unable to experience the life-sustaining side of the mystery: freedom, respect and independence.

Chris is also unwilling to accept Larson's friendship and fatherly concern. The unsettling freedom of a relationship based on mutual respect, not manipulated advantage, makes Chris vulnerable because he will no longer be in control of his life. As a result, to a Boyle Street mentality, the friendship is not a creative force, but a negative power which restricts his selfish, childish independence:

> [I]t was also a threat to his self-reliance, to the tough hard strength in which he took such pride. He half yielded a moment, then thrust it away scornfully. (48)

Chris immaturely demands the advantages of the relationship without the responsibilities.

Through contact with Larson's horses, Chris begins to develop the respect for life which dominates Larson's existence. The first step in this process is re-building his own self-respect and independence crushed by the manipulation and domination of Boyle Street. Chris naturally still measures himself by Boyle Street and, therefore, in his imagination re-creates the farm to impress his old buddies:

> Rickie and the Boyle Street boys were still necessary; to keep them impressed he brought about changes swiftly, with style. The farm became a ranch, pulled up its fences and rolled back to the horizon. The fleet, graceful Minnie multiplied into a stableful of saddle horses, a herd of broncos. . . .
>
> For himself, he chose silver-studded chaps, dark blue shirt and scarlet bandanna. Minnie served him

> briefly; then he rode a hot-eyed, jet black stallion that no one else had ever dared to ride. Fierce, untamed--to mount him was to provide a spectacle of outlaw fury and consummate horsemanship. Watching him, even Rickie sometimes blanched. (51-52)

While he regularly acts with Boyle Street in mind, he occasionally acts innocently, without Boyle Street as a reference point. Playing dangerously with North, Chris exercises the spirit he shares with North which respects life:

> When North nipped at his shirt, he would come back with a light cuff, or tweak his forelock, or smack him on the belly with the flat of his hand, and then leap out of the way across the stall; and North in turn, ears flat, teeth bared, feinting an attack, would rear up or lunge at him with a squeal of rage. There were moments when Chris sickened as the hooves hung over him, then slashed past his face with a little swish of wind, but he always stood his ground. And North, for his part, enjoyed the fun too much to spoil it. (52-53)

Chris also uses such incidents with North as a levelling tool "to settle old scores" (53) and to set himself above Boyle Street for a more realistic picture of his former life:

> For there were humiliations behind him that still rankled, even fifteen hundred miles away. The ones that had talked tough and tried to throw their weight around--up against North they showed themselves for what they really were. One snap of his teeth and away they went, fighting and falling over one another to get out of the door. (53)

Occasionally, he forgets Boyle Street completely, becoming as innocent and trusting as Larson's horses are and as he had been as a child:

> It was a kind of therapy: sometimes, now, he did drop his guard. The edges of the old patterns were blurring. He was beginning to work, not even minding,

> forgetting himself sufficiently at times to play. Belatedly, growth was setting in.
>
> The horses were a part of it. They were responsive and affectionate. They looked to and sometimes needed him, imposed a sense of responsibility. In return he was safe with them, could trust them. (53-54)

In addition, away from Boyle Street, he can admit he was not happy with his situation: "There was a soft streak, even a gentleness. He wanted some of the things that he despised." (56)

With the horses his new life begins to crystallize and complete itself:

> And now, with doddering old Ned, it was beginning to come out. He would stand minutes at a time, stroking and talking to him, pretending not to notice that he had stopped again. It was a kind of respect. Bad years and debts, survival, the struggle with the earth and seasons--all that was part of him--and the farm itself began to take shape in his mind as something more than a long-drawn money-making deal.
>
> The same with the old mare Fanny, so repellently bloated with foal, so prompt with her sociable little whinny when he came to feed or curry her. There was respect here too--it slipped up on him imperceptibly--respect such as he had never felt for a woman. Sixteen colts, twenty-five years on the wagon and the plow; now, at the end of it, grateful for her oats and a friendly word. There was a serenity and fulfilment that disturbed him. At times it was almost as if he were missing something, had all along been wrong. (56)

For the first time, his thoughts are independent of Boyle Street; he is free of the control Boyle Street had over his life:

> As it suited him he could gather his old crowd round him, or leave them half a continent away where they belonged. For on Boyle Street even his thoughts had never been quite his own. There was always the need to think and do according to the expectations of the gang. Because he existed only in the reflections they gave back, he was at their mercy, even while he went among them, assured and slickly superior. But here he

> could relax, slip a little, and it concerned no one but himself. No mirrors, no reflections--it was almost freedom. (56-57)

The only problem from the past which will not fade or come under his control is the possibility that the man he shot during the robbery has died and that he will be captured and tried for murder. However, even his reaction to moments of anxiety such as this show emotional growth away from the confinement of Boyle Street. Rather than project a perpetually hard, calm exterior, Chris can now admit that he is afraid:

> There were bad moments when Baxter died, when the world refused to accept what he had done as an accident or himself as a wayward boy who needed only help and sympathy. Moments when he was simply frightened, when he broke and buried his face in Minnie's shoulder. But each time, when the crisis was past, he felt relieved, a little steadier. It was the beginning of a new kind of self-sufficiency. Each time Boyle Street dimmed a little, seemed farther off. (57)

Chris is developing a new kind of self-esteem which grows outward from inner strength. His life is his own now, not dependent on Boyle Street approval. The farm acknowledges Chris as valuable simply because he exists; in turn, the farm becomes important to him because of the generosity of the spirit of life which pervades it. In short, by learning self-respect, he gains respect for all life. Chris is now aware of the elements of the creative side of life. His most important lesson, which he has learned from the horses, is respect for life. However, though he is now aware of both sides of life, he is an untried innocent, a counterpart to the boy in "One's

a Heifer," until he has again faced the dark, destructive realm and emerged to a new maturity.

The conflict between the creative, life-sustaining side and the destructive side of life occurs not only in Chris himself as the values of respect and compassion clash with the manipulation and power respected on Boyle Street, but "[t]he struggle for Chris between Larson and Sylvia is the external expression of Chris' internal struggle."[5] With Sylvia, Larson's wife, he is certain about where he stands. She is a substitute for Boyle Street's Rickie, an older, tougher boy, who promised to get Chris involved in more prosperous criminal activities. The growing father-son relationship with Larson is more difficult for Chris to acknowledge because he must accept the responsibilities of a son, to love and respect his father, values foreign to Chris's Boyle Street understanding of life.

Sylvia initially treats Chris with contempt, but carefully manipulates him into being her conspirator by implying that she too has something to hide:

> 'If that's your story, Chris, then you keep right on sticking to it.' She smiled again and leaned slightly forward. He wasn't fooling her, but he had nothing to fear. 'If we didn't stick to our stories we'd get nowhere. That goes for all of us.' (50)

Sylvia brings out his Boyle Street instinct when she initiates their affair and illustrates her affinity with Boyle Street when she plans their clandestine meetings as if plotting a crime. Eventually, she reveals her plan to murder Larson and

make it appear that he has jumped a freight and left her. She offers to share the farm with Chris; however, he has been moving away from his Boyle Street way of life and hesitates to agree to her plan. At the same time that Sylvia gives Chris this opportunity, Larson, perhaps despite himself, is relinquishing his hold on his dead son and accepting Chris as a substitute. He asks Chris to stay on over the winter and offers him sanctuary:

> 'You're safe here,' he said hesitantly after a moment, 'whatever it is you're running away from. Just try and not worry too much. Stay as long as it suits you. . . .' (106)

However, just as Larson recognizes the double edge of accepting Chris as his son, Chris also resists committing himself to Larson:

> It was what he wanted--someone older and stronger than himself to lean on, someone to take over, assume responsibility. For a moment his sense of relief was so deep that he failed to realize the implications of what Larson had just said. And then he wavered. He was still relieved, but he was also resentful. It meant that Larson had the upper hand, that the moment there was trouble he could crack the whip. It meant living under a perpetual obligation, owing him perpetual gratitude. There was one impulse to respond, and another to flare up and ask him what he meant. They neutralized each other. (106)

The same situation exists in his relationship with Sylvia as she also presses to commit him to her cause. He will be tied perpetually to her should he help kill Larson, but he will be free of responsibility; if he rejects Sylvia, choosing life, he will be expected to accept a son's responsibilities. As a result, Chris fluctuates between two poles of influence,

between the forces of destruction and creativity in his life, between Boyle Street and farm values, between Sylvia's scheme and Larson's acceptance of him as his son. Rather than risk his pride to gain Larson's confidence by telling him the truth about his past, or take responsibility for his desire to triumph over Larson by committing himself to Sylvia's scheme, Chris attempts to balance the two sides:

> [H]e continued to keep on good terms with Sylvia. It was almost exactly the same as the time before: what Larson suspected, how easy it would be to get rid of him now. But Chris was prepared, and instead of making protests or denials he went with her, sympathizing, agreeing, delaying. He didn't commit himself. He expressed just enough resentment of Larson, just enough uneasiness about the future, to convince her that he was coming around.
>
> It was a good night. It made him look forward to others like it. He was doing all right, handling both of them. Just watch himself, take things smooth and easy--there was nothing to worry about unless he fumbled, lost his nerve. (203)

The old mare, Fanny, becomes Chris's guiding spirit to relieve this situation. Chris's Boyle Street instincts never surface in his treatment of the horses; he is independent of any influences except his own feelings and thoughts. When he finds Fanny having her foal, his reaction is spontaneous, without reference to the farm or city values he is exposed to:

> It was the most loathsome thing he had ever seen. The colt was half-born; entangled in the placenta, it seemed lifeless. But recognizably a colt--that was what sickened him. Not just a slimy mass of flesh and skin, some kind of growth or mutilation, but Minnie and North in miniature. He could see an eye, the small neat teeth bared in a grimace of ancient, deathlike strain. It was as if life itself, by such a revelation of itself, were affronting him. It was an intrusion of something elemental and ugly that he shrank from,

> protested. He felt no concern or excitement, only revulsion, a vague sense of outrage. (205-6)

Poised halfway between life and death, the colt shows characteristics of both states. It is recognizeably a horse with the potential for life and beauty, but the colt's face shows signs of death, not life. Its struggles are "like the tremor of something dying rather than being born." (206) Chris must decide if he will help Fanny give birth and turn death into life or turn away from the revolting sight and take no responsibility for the outcome. He looks to Sylvia to help him decide what to do, but she refuses to become involved and, thereby, allies herself on the side of death: "'Fanny's twenty-five if she's a day, so supposing she doesn't make it?'" (207). He returns to the barn where "[n]othing had happened since he left" (208), as if time has stood still, waiting for him to make his decision for life or against it. With "his responsibility pressed on him" (208), Chris at first timidly, then firmly helps the colt be born:

> It was easier than he had expected. Once his hands had actually touched it, felt its wet, slimy warmth, the worst was over. But it was hard to get a good grip, and he was afraid of dislocating the neck. Fanny heaved and strained again, as if doing her utmost to co-operate. To take advantage of her effort he dropped to one knee, seized the body with both arms in a kind of hug, and then, bracing his foot against the slight elevation of the stall floor, leaned back with all his strength. (208)

The result is a horse as beautiful and enspiriting as Peter Parker's Pegasus:

> It was incredible. The wobbly little head was already held high; the white star on its forehead gave it a

> look of poise and self-sufficiency, just the right finishing touch. As he watched, the filmy eyes seemed to brighten, to show awareness and curiosity. (209)

Chris is also new-born after being part of this experience; the shrewdness and wariness of Boyle Street disappear:

> Then like a child he suddenly laughed, and dropping to his knees put his arms around it. It was his--no matter what Larson said. Only for him it would never have been born. (210)

Chris is committed to life and the responsibility which the farm community values, and disassociated from Boyle Street:

> [N]ow he saw her [Fanny] as part of the farm community, the essence of its growth and strength, just as he had already learned to see old Ned. As she turned away she brushed her nose amicably on his sleeve, and he felt accepted, that he now was part of the community too. (210-11)

This moment of birth and awakening for Chris is overshadowed by the death of Larson's nephew, also named Chris. At the funeral, Chris thinks about Mrs. Paynter's remark that they wanted this dying child "to meet his Maker pure." (215) Chris reflects on his own life and how his innocence died:

> Seven was easy. He could have met his Maker pure then too, held his own with the best of them. Tired, this fellow [the minister] was saying--every so often He wanted somebody young and innocent because He got tired of so much sin. Jesus! Who didn't? If it was what you called it: the jobs you didn't have the guts for, the big-time act you tried to fool yourself with, the people you knew that you wanted to spit on--the only ones you <u>could</u> know--the unwantedness, the envy. Jesus! Did they think you planned your life that way? Did they think it was what you wanted? (216)

Chris, for the first time, takes stock of his life and realizes that he has a choice in how his life will proceed. Accepting Boyle Street values had not taken any self-reliance or responsibility and had, therefore, also been a type of

innocence. A new maturity suddenly grips Chris: he does have the power to make his life as he wants it. As a result, he sees his past, "[e]verything he was, had taken pride in being" (216), become meaningless in view of the maturity he wants; he calls the loss "a good ruin." (216)

Chris's respect for life, now extends to Larson. The funeral has reminded Larson of his own son. As Chris helps him back to the car, Larson cruelly tells him that he knows he is not his real son. Chris wonders if Larson means that he knows about the robbery and really is the sly, crazy old man that Sylvia says he is. However, Chris is no longer a product of Boyle Street. He treats Larson with compassion and tenderness as he helps him into bed:

> Then he slipped Larson's suit on a hanger so that it would dry in shape, smoothed out some of the wrinkles in his trousers and laid them across the back of a chair. He liked it this way. It was the first time he had ever tried looking after someone, and it gave him a feeling of contentment and importance. Then, with the instinct of a tenement dweller, he turned to the window and drew the blind--there was not another window that could have looked in on them within at least a mile--and stood listening to the soft steady murmur of the rain. With the dark and wet shut out, the room looked sane and peaceful. Alone with the old man, doing little things for him, he felt safe, free to relax. As he put his shoes away it came to him that now Sylvia was the one in the way. Mentally eliminating her, he thought what a good winter he and Larson could have alone. (221)

When Sylvia suggests that now is the best opportunity they will have to get rid of him, Chris attempts to avoid a decision. He decides the solution is to ask Larson for his wages and leave, but, as with the birth of the colt, he will

not be able to avoid his responsibilities.

Sylvia puts her murder plan into action, but, by bringing the situation to a head, she also brings Chris and Larson closer together. She is a force even more sinister and calculating than Boyle Street. She is not only externally hard but genuinely destructive to life. When she realizes that Chris will not murder Larson, she shoots him herself. Chris is at last free of the innocence which allowed him to let others make his decisions after this test:

> [A]s the realization burst upon him that he was not the one [who had pulled the trigger], he stared at Larson a moment without even seeing him, dazed a second time by the lightning of release. He was free--there was room for nothing else. He had been living under a spell--of what he was, always had been, always must be, a doom of Boyle Street cheapness and frustration--and now the spell was broken. He had not obeyed. Even with the gun in his hand, he had not done it. (235-36)

Unfortunately, this freedom is momentary as Chris's past taints his present: "For a moment he had been free; all at once life had opened before him, clear to the skyline; and he clung hard to the memory." (237) However, this memory is reinforced when Larson accepts Chris as his heir before he dies:

> [F]or a moment he felt safe. Safe enough to let the meaning of what Larson had written sink in, to wonder a little at his trust and acceptance, to hold up the thought of possession, inheritance. (243)

Trust, acceptance and inheritance had eluded Chris throughout his pursuit of them on Boyle Street. Now with the hard exterior of Boyle Street stripped away and his pride subdued, the traits which Boyle Street demanded, Chris receives respect

for what he has given up.

Chris is not ready yet to trust the rest of the world. Therefore, he feels forced to follow Sylvia's instructions to dispose of the body. Chris sees himself as a prisoner caught between his past and a future of Sylvia's manipulation. Escape is no longer an option. He decides to take responsibility by confronting his past:

> 'I shot Baxter, but I didn't kill him.' It was less an answer than an attempt to feel his way forward, to come to terms with his situation and his chances. Ever since it happened he had let his mind look only to the escape side of his future. The other side, for the simple reason that he refused to look at it--the side of arrest, trial, conviction--had taken on terrors of the unthinkable and unknown. It had filled half his sky, had piled up behind him like a thunder cloud. But now he turned and met it squarely. (252-53)

Sylvia also becomes aware of his decision:

> 'What you really mean,' she said slowly, 'you'd take the rope rather than me. It's not being scared, or thinking about the well--it's me. . . .' (256)

Sylvia and the destruction and death she stands for are now more repugnant than the thought of his own death. Chris has developed the maturity and self-reliance to accept fully his place in the community to which the horses belong. They too suffered willingly for the values of the land, respect, honesty and trust. Now, for Chris, light and darkness, life and death exist together, making a choice necessary. Chris's final decision to resist Sylvia is like his unconscious decision to help the unborn colt, which was a vision of life and death, to be born. In choosing this side of life and not Boyle Street, Chris has gained maturity. His sky is no

longer half-filled.

Whir of Gold and As For Me and My House also deal with characters attempting to align their lives with the light, life-fulfilling side of the mystery of life. However, Sonny McAlpine in Whir of Gold and Philip Bentley in As For Me and My House are artists who are concerned with recreating the dimension of the imagination, Sonny in music, and Philip, in his pictorial art. Although Philip's sketches do not reflect the bright, illuminated dimension, but the darkness and despair of the destructive side of life, the same creative spirit inspires him as inspires Sonny. The horse remains the symbol of the spirit of the imagination, as both men strive against the pressures of everyday reality, the destructive force in their lives, to re-create the imaginative dimension in earthly terms and to make their dreams of artistic recognition come true.

Sonny McAlpine, in Whir of Gold, published in 1970, is the Tommy McAlpine in an earlier short story, "The Outlaw," where he learned, through a spirited, haughty horse, to take chances to pursue his dream of becoming a musician. Isabel, the spirited Pegasus, shows Tommy a world of stillness and beauty which surpasses reality and sets him on the path to recreate that world through music. Isabel is important also in the novel. Sonny's memories of her and the effect of her spirit on his present life keep him on course with his dream.

Sonny McAlpine's dream of being a well-known musician

is very different from the dreams of Ross's farmers. Their dreams are tied to the land; a good yield to pay the mortgage and a little cash to pay for extras cannot be denied them forever. Sonny is an artist, a musician. His dreams are as alien to the land as the children's flights of imagination are to the reality of labour on the land. Although Sonny's mother encourages him in his piano lessons, his creativity is restricted by the work instinct dictated by the land. Sonny's music lessons have only a tentative role in the farm community, but improvisations, Sonny's fledgling attempts at creativity, are an affront to those values because they mean time wasted away from practice. Sonny, however, senses that experimentation is necessary to his musical spirit:

> [L]ike a cat trying the furniture for the right texture to scratch on, to ease the itch in its claws, I would leave off practising and for a few minutes go exploring on my own.[6]

Because just practising makes Sonny guilty of not doing his share of work on the land, he is careful with his dream and does not pursue it with determination:

> As a youngster on the farm I had planned escape and built fine futures for myself, but always with restraint--almost a sense of propriety--careful never to overdo it and run wild. The farmer in me: you hoped for a sixty-bushel to the acre crop, even when the rain was holding off, and experience told you that with luck you'd harvest twenty-five. You knew your land, though, and never hoped for a <u>hundred</u> and sixty. (44-45)

The restriction of his creative spirit by land values prevents Sonny from dreaming of the possibilities of his life.

Restraints of small town propriety and Sonny's own caution, follow him from his past to his present situation. He has gone first to Toronto and finally to Montreal looking for the break which will allow him to reach his dream; however, in Montreal he has merely encountered different hindrances. The city environment, his poverty and unemployment have robbed him of his self-respect and the determination to pursue his dream:

> If you could only know: see a here-and-now for what it was, how it fitted in, its place in the terrain of your existence: a slough-bottom on the prairie--as little as that--or a dip to a lost valley, descent of no return.
>
> Back on the prairie, riding Isabel and out for hawks and rabbits with my .22, I had been so sure where I was going, what I would find. . . . And now a room on Ste. Famille Street. If you could only wipe the glass and see: blob-faced foetus of a dream run out before its time that never had a chance, or the first gasp for breath, the pain and choke and rawness of beginning. (26)

The only antidote to Sonny's regret, uncertainty, and depression is music and he seeks comfort from his clarinet as he sought comfort from Isabel when he was a boy. With Isabel, Sonny was invincible and sure of his future. Music has the same effect:

> [T]he piano came through the window with a cool slap and spangle and a raw, tender horn complained as if inconstancy were something new.
>
> I stood listening a minute, playing with them, my name in lights again. The old Sonny and a little over. My blood had spangles in it too, and the night was snowing stars. (10)

These lights are Sonny's imaginative dimension, which has the sparkle and spangle of Jenny's mind-circus in "Circus in

Town," the feeling of exhilaration and the flash of lights of Peter Parker's ride in "A Day with Pegasus," with the freedom, release and soaring uplift associated with all flights of the imagination.

Sonny's goal is to maintain this heightened feeling, permanently to maintain the lights, an ambition which is impeded by his relationship with Mad, a happy-go-lucky woman whom he has met in a bar. Sonny, according to Mad, is her 'right one,' the man of her dreams, and she will gladly support him until his luck changes. However, if Sonny were to fit into Mad's dream--be a 'right one,' settle down and open a restaurant--his pursuit of a musical career would be hindered. Mad's devotion, while she does enable him to practice and go for auditions, also has the negative, soul-destroying effect of further damaging his self-respect, because he feels guilty about using her. As a result, Sonny's spirit of the imagination is again restricted:

> I . . . started fiddling with the lights again. Not bad: I was still Sonny McAlpine. I still had purpose, identity. Things had gone wrong but only because of miscalculation, unlucky breaks. At the worst, cocksureness, too big an opinion of myself. A Main Street head. Within myself, though, I was still intact. Damage temporary. Still a long way from the point of no return.
>
> But the dollar she [Mad] had left--my hand so ready, unconcerned. A flash of panic as I caught myself, a sudden lost feeling, as if a lever had been pulled, a trap sprung. . . .
>
> The dollar, the tin of soup, the radio: in sudden defiance I put my clarinet to my lips. Top form: notes silver-clean through the squalor--both the world and I restored. Where to? Roads in all directions. I had only to choose.

> Briefly, though, and then reality bore down. Even uglier and more insistent than before, as if angered that I had tried to rub it out. Determined on a showdown, once and for all to put me in my place. [P]anic still there. And nothing now to allay it but the clarinet--the real one. No other way to hold myself together, go on sanely. (53)

Occasionally, the lights must be forced on artificially: "A shot of scotch or rye to pull the switch and put the lights on. Another shot to keep them on." (53) Above all, there is the fear of failure or even of compromise which will tinge his future with remorse and guilt:

> For you don't get away with a couple of bad days, a single wrench of renunciation. The ghost of a might-have-been goes with you all the way, clinging to your back like an Old Man of the Sea, sneering at the deal you made. (124)

However, Sonny remains truly an artist, under the spell of the creative spirit, and able to make the lights:

> Improvise--let go, yield to what you feel, project it--wasn't that the way to make good jazz? To be away out and at the same time in control--an elastic round your neck letting you lean out eighty-nine degrees but always pulling you back to vertical? I had the discipline--a <u>feeling</u> for it, right to the marrow of my inner-directed Presbyterian bones--and wasn't there a vagrant streak as well? All my prairie common sense and caution notwithstanding, hadn't I picked up and taken to the road. And here at Ste. Famille Street, grubby inside and out--for all my protests was I minding very much? Permission granted, wouldn't I be right at home? There was a voice nattering about decency and self-respect, about amounting to something, but farther in--my own room and the door closed-- was I listening? Right now--wasn't it a way perhaps, to thumb my nose at the rules I had always lived by? No need to go home. I belonged to the world around me after all. Dissonance and drift--they weren't alien. I had come a long way and I was going a long way farther. You did what you could, put your feet where there was firm footing. The ground varied, smooth and rocky, bog and sand. The feet were always yours. (127)

Unfortunately, Sonny's feet are not on firm enough footing[7] to allow him to create with this talent, but, as Isabel had pushed a timid boy toward his dream, others will augment her spirit to push Sonny inevitably toward the dream he is seeking.

Isabel, in "The Outlaw," has a two-sided personality. The one side is bright and good, showing Sonny the possibility of the future, while the other, darker side has an aura of evil. In order to give the boy a glimpse of the imaginative dimension, she must entice him into a daring gallop across the prairie. However, Sonny gains a mature awareness of the beautiful and the destructive sides of life. In Whir of Gold, Isabel has two allies: Mad, who represents the good but complacent side of life, and Charlie, the petty criminal, who entices Sonny into a robbery. Both Mad and Charlie offer Sonny their lifestyles, but like Isabel, who embodies elements of both for a higher awareness, Sonny eventually takes what he needs from both Charlie and Mad and chooses to pursue the creative spirit.

Sonny meets Mad in a club, an atmosphere where he seeks comfort because it is a "clean, brave, honest world, where men and clarinets alike receive their due." (10) Almost immediately he notices Mad looking at him. She reminds him of Isabel:

> And then the hair again. Not fluffy at all when you looked a second time, but shining and smooth and silkily compact--something the way Isabel used to shine

> after I'd rubbed her down with buttermilk. Somehow, though, a fluffy look--so much of it, perhaps, and the way she laughed and tossed her head. (11)

Sonny takes her back to his room but treats her with the same detachment he showed Millie Dickson during their first sexual encounter. As McMullen notes, "in neither relationship is there any indication of genuine affection on his part."[8] Mad is merely a part of the squalor that Sonny would escape from by creating lights. But Mad, like Isabel, is also a redeemer, a restorer of Sonny's spirit:

> No revelation this time either, but a strange sense of being one. For I could see her now, catch glimpses of the eyes, shining and blind, and it was as if I too were something coming true, coming towards her, incredible and unknown, with a swing of light around my shoulders. A swan, a bull, a shower of gold. (31)

Perseus, the only mortal to ride Pegasus, was conceived when Zeus came to his mother disguised as a shower of gold. In very practical ways, Mad helps Sonny closer to his dream of riding with the spirit of the imagination to create music. Her financial support allows him to stay in Montreal, close to a job. She also, in the same determined and uncomprehending manner of his mother, encourages him to practise the clarinet. In addition, Mad's optimism and determined search for the 'right one' should be an example to Sonny, who is in danger of losing his dream of being a musician. Both have been foiled by circumstances, but Mad continues to search for another man like Bill, her first lover. She "finds" him in a succession of men of whom Sonny is the latest. Mad never loses faith in her dream and remains allied with the creative

dimension as a result:

> [She had a] three-layer smile: first the triumph, the invincibility; then a wistful little pull, regret that things could never work out the way she wanted them; and finally, just the corners showing, a furtive, irrepressible little hope that some day, despite the odds, they would. (71)

Her dream comes true but is not constant. Each man is a part or flash of the whole dream. Mad recognizes this pattern in her life but still does not lose hope. She should be an inspiration to Sonny who also glimpses flashes of his dream, but cannot maintain the vision. Sonny is discouraged; Mad never gives up hope.

Mad has compromised her dreams about the one 'right one.' She takes her 'right one' in bits and pieces, whatever little portion of the dream is offered, with joy and enthusiasm and a hope for more:

> '. . . [S]ure I'm crazy--but I'm getting something I'd never have got if I always watched and played it careful. And who knows?' A little pause, eyes shining again as if she were holding up more diamonds. 'Maybe we'll both stay in Montreal and every so often you'll say to yourself not much doing tonight--might as well give the Fish [Mad] a ring. See how she's doing--maybe we can flip fins a while and have a nice cup of coffee.' (77)

Sonny believes that he must keep his present dream whole and complete. To continue to compromise will make his dream less than a shadow of the original lofty goal of being a concert pianist. He recalls his music teacher's inspirational speech about his unique musical talent with bitterness:

> Yes, Sonny--who knows? An insane fish--perhaps that's what started <u>us</u> on our way. One that wouldn't

> stay in the sea where it belonged and insisted on climbing up the rocks and onto the shore. Insisted--and succeeded. Did the impossible--got there. Made a new body for itself--lungs that could breathe feet that could walk. You see, don't you, the magnificence of such a delusion? (72)

The fish's magnificent delusion is believing it could survive outside its natural environment. Sonny's bitterness arises from the fact that he grew legs for his new environment too easily, losing his original shape and essence. Mad, on the other hand, has kept her fins, remained true and faithful to her dream and the life she wants, while Sonny has compromised his original dream until he has lost the essence of who and what he is:

> It was almost as if I were standing apart, looking on, and the Sonny McAlpine making his way up Bleury Street was not the real one. As if I didn't believe him, didn't take his distress signals seriously.
>
> And yet I was getting scared. The bad moments--when the real Sonny and the twisted image ran together, blurred--were coming faster now, and the bus fare home was just a nod to myself that I understood what was happening, as promise that something would be done. (57)

Even the clarinet fails to revive his spirit and restore his faith in himself. The clarinet is tired too after its stay in the pawn shop, with company equal to Sonny's human acquaintances:

> It was to greet the clarinet that I had taken it from the case, to charge and restore myself, not to check on its identity; but when I lifted it there was no response, as if it lived on touch and had been left alone too long. I rubbed it a little, turned it to the light: like a patina or tarnish the old man's smile persisted. Rubbed it again--only rubbed it in.
>
> And now as I walked up the hill it was still listless in my hand, still sullen and reproachful.

> Not ready yet to forget either neglect or the company--the lamps and accordians, the drums and roasting pans. I huddled in a doorway, watching cars and buses churning up the dirty snow, and wondered what the company was doing to me. (56)

Mad's presence in his life reminds Sonny of how far from his goal he has strayed; he is in danger of being absorbed into the squalor around him. He views Mad as a soul-destroying force in his life, because her generosity and his guilty acceptance of it undermines his self-respect: "Living off a woman--it was the sound of it I didn't like. Not the taste of blood: the sight of feathers sticking to my chops." (58) Sonny's desperation to avoid becoming a part of Mad's plan and to escape Ste. Famille Street poverty make him a prime target for his neighbour, Charlie, who would help him gain his dream in a different way. He tries to convince Sonny that the robbery he is planning would give Sonny "a push and a leg-up" (60) to the big time. Charlie is active in making his own future, not learning to compromise with circumstances as Mad is. This control appeals to Sonny, who has now lost control of his life. However, Charlie's life in petty crime is a more dangerous step away from his dream of becoming a musician than is Mad's plan. Like his clarinet, Sonny has also been affected by the company he keeps.

Charlie, more so than Mad, is associated with the spirited Isabel. Sonny often compares Charlie to a horse. As Charlie tries to coax Sonny into joining his schemes, Sonny is reminded of how he used to tempt Isabel:

> Watching to see if I was following--the way I used to walk in front of Isabel shaking a tin of oats to bring her from the pasture to her stall. (6)

Charlie's fawning manner is compared to Isabel wheedling treats from Sonny: "A slight hitch forward, like a muzzle working its way into your hand in search of sugar." (59) A cutting remark from Mad sends Charlie "Out of control a moment, his mouth working as if there were a bit in it and a rough hand on the reins." (44) Sonny sees through Charlie's story of his initiation into crime because "He floundered in it like a horse in a snowbank." (64) In the childhood stories, horses are a symbol of the purity and goodness of the artistic imagination. In association with Charlie, an ingratiating small-time hood, the symbol seems tainted by a petty evil. However, Isabel was not above tricks and deceptions either to lure Sonny into riding her against his parents' wishes. Therefore, Charlie, like Isabel, represents and nurtures in Sonny that part of his imagination which is willing to risk desperate chances to win his goal. Charlie's distaste for Mad is parallel to Isabel's condescension toward Larry Turnbull, who taught Sonny to play the clarinet and gave him a place in the town band. Isabel and Charlie know that Sonny would settle for second best if left to his own resources. He will continue to compromise until his dream is destroyed. Turnbull offers a clarinet in a dance band; Mad offers a restaurant in Nova Scotia. Isabel encourages him to pursue the original, lofty dream to create music:

> Isabel, in contrast, was wily, hard--the disdain and intolerance of a thoroughbred. 'Larry Turnbull Number Two? It's entirely up to you. But if you have other plans, get on with them. The bigger the better--nothing half way. . . .' (82)

Isabel and Charlie combine in an effort to dislodge Sonny from inactivity and satiety. Charlie takes Mad and Sonny to a restaurant for supper and during the course of the evening forces Sonny to see what he is becoming and how distant is his dream:

> Waving him away blithely, she took a fresh grip of my arm. 'Sonny'll be in the papers all right, and it won't be you he'll need to write the story.'
>
> But for me it was exactly what he intended. Arm in arm along the street and up the stairs--doors opening, eyes peering out; accidentally, or did all the house know now? Then inside the room and posing for the camera he had turned on us, re-writing the captions for the pictures. There we were, domesticity itself. The bed with pillows and blankets still in a state of any-time-at-all upheaval, the old cracked dishes, the milk bottle on the window. <u>They Make Their Dreams Come True--Prairie Farm to Ste. Famille Street</u>--(94)

At this moment of Sonny's most realistic awareness of his situation, Isabel, the Pegasus, whose hooves created the fountain of poetic inspiration, appears to re-awaken the creative spirit in Sonny:

> All the fine beginnings, all the big dreams--time now to make the final gesture, lay them out like corpses in a morgue.
>
> But I had forgotten Isabel. . . . Two or three times around--touching the waxy faces, making sure they were all in place, spitting on myself for what I had done to them--and suddenly there she was, hell-bent for leather, tossing years and corpses as she had many times tossed me. For she, too, had been in on the beginnings and, whatever or whomever else I was laying out, I wasn't laying out her. A witch of a horse: from the rock her hoof had struck there

> would always flow a clear bright stream, never the bitter waters of remorse and failure. They had been good, brave beginnings, and that was what they would always be. The wind through her mane would always have a sting of sky and wonder. (94-95)

The vision of Isabel awakens Sonny's killer instinct, the ruthless determination needed to achieve his goals. This relentlessness is usually associated with the destructive power of the wind, as in "The Lamp at Noon." However, like Isabel, Sonny must use elements of both sides of life to achieve his dream. As a result, Isabel is the impetus which rouses the passive Sonny to action, as in the past, when he raced Isabel at the fair against his parents' wishes. Here, she urges him again to take a chance on the forbidden for possible gain: "Shake it all off, make a fresh start--it was more than time. Anything, anybody--at least listen to Charlie, hear him through." (103) Over the next few days, Sonny does consider how to start over, and since Charlie, who "relieved the drabness, added drama" (6) represents the daring and defiance, the motivating elements in Isabel's spirit, Sonny turns to him to resume the quest for his dream.

In exchange for release from poverty and hopelessness, Sonny must compromise himself again:

> [S]omething had rubbed off--something warped, ugly, sour--and I walked on feeling soiled, contaminated, . . . All evening--like getting something sticky on your fingers, honey, glue, then picking up the clarinet--the smear of his grinning face persisted, clung. (108-9)

As he succumbed to Isabel's tricks and rode her against his

parents' wishes and raced her at the fair when it had been forbidden so that he could take advantage of the possibilities of his life, Sonny agrees to be Charlie's partner in a jewel robbery. He tries to discern the motive for accepting Charlie's scheme when he stands to lose so much if he is caught:

> Circles. I don't know. Perhaps in every lapse there is a step, blind and unwilling, that springs the trap. Perhaps no man, the tangle of his fears and hungers bared, is guilty. But the old Presbyterian streak survives, and I don't get away with that one either. Non-responsibility stands up to it like a cotton shirt to a prairie blizzard. Morally, I take my medicine. (114)

Like his escapades with Isabel, he knows his actions are wrong, but the possibility of escape from inactivity and renewed interest in pursuing his goal justify his alliance with Charlie. The day of the robbery, Sonny watches the snow and practises his clarinet. On this day, Sonny is more musically free than he has ever been:

> . . . I practised. Carefully and conscientiously at first, keeping time with a hidden metronome; then lapsed into flourishes and flutters, exploratory, as if I were trying out the clarinet for the first time, discovering what it could do; and from there to idling along with bits and tunes of my own invention, sometimes a little show-off cadenza, sometimes just a note or two hung on, wavered--what it pleased me to to [sic] call "improvising"; the same sort of thing that in the old days would bring my mother banging in from the kitchen with an indignant, 'Enough of that! Either do it properly or go out and help your father.' (125)

However, he is not bound and limited imaginatively by the rules and restrictions represented by farm work instincts here. Though the robbery is actually dangerous to his career

and future, the exhilaration and drama of breaking free stimulate his musical imagination to creativity:

> Now, though--today of all days--I felt released, exhilaration. I was good. Half a dozen notes came out and hung together--made something. I worked them over a time or two, shaped them--took pencil and paper and wrote them down. Back at the window I hummed them silently, watching the little spurts of snow. Then, taking up the clarinet, I played them again, tossed them to the piano, listened approvingly to what it did, repeated them on the clarinet with variation, shared another variation with the drums. (126)

As he thinks of his role in the robbery, his self-confidence rises and he creates again:

> Tonight--with Charlie--that was going to take guts, wasn't it?
>
> I gulped a second, as if a snowball had caught me with my mouth open, then began to play again.
>
> Another tune out of nowhere, smooth and brisk this time with the reckless lilt of the disinherited. Just a snippet of a tune, just a shrug, a couple of phrases, but something could be done with it. A tune worth listening to. Out of nowhere. Out of me. (127)

Sonny is now confident of his direction. It is "towards the door marked Charlie" (45), which has given him the inspiration to create. Most importantly, Isabel, the spirit of the imagination,

> would approve--just as she had approved when I took the law into my own hands, heedless of warnings, and saddled and rode her. (127)

Sonny is riding free in the adult equivalent of the dimension of the imagination:

> It was as if my recklessness in joining Charlie had cleared a course, washed out restraints and obstacles. As I played, as skips and runs turned into tunes, as tunes did tricks, idled and bounced, ran backwards, on their heads, I felt dilated, sure. Like a bronco that has jumped the bars of its corral--good, firm earth

> beneath him, the road open to the sky. Tonight--what lay ahead--that was only an incident in the landscape, a bush, a rock, a badger-hole, to be taken with a snort, a flash of heels. (127)

The robbery, with its potential danger and because it is opposed to the values of Sonny's prairie background, feeds and nurtures his artistic spirit. He is on the threshold of a new beginning toward the fulfilment of his dream:

> But it was time I was on my way. High time. I wouldn't even come back. Just leave Mad something and pay Mrs. Painter--just for my clarinet. Shake the dust off, blow the stench out of my nostrils. The stench of squalor--on my hands, in my hair and clothes. Tomorrow I would strip to the skin. (128)

Sonny's meeting with Charlie before the robbery does not confirm his assumption that the robbery will be a clean beginning. He learns from Charlie's behaviour and attitude that he will not emerge from this experience unscathed. The daring and courage needed for the robbery which sparked Sonny's creative imagination, the same elements which are needed to create music, are not without a dark side. Tonight, Charlie is a hunter and warns Sonny that he must be a predator too:

> 'Just the way I want you--because you're still a little on the soft side and that could mean messing up the job. Ugly and mean--so you'll run to catch and kill.' (129)

Charlie, however, is in control of his killer instincts. His final instructions to Sonny are not to play dirty by taking the jeweller's keys: Charlie is "a good hunter--kills only what he can eat." (136) Sonny, however, is not this type of hunter. He metaphorically preys on the weak and helpless,

watching for an easy kill: "For someone like me she [Mad] was a gift--a hen for a coyote. Silly hens that went wandering--wasn't that how coyotes lived?" (57)

Sonny sees the robbery through the single-sided innocence of the childhood imaginative dimension only. As a result, he is detached and uninvolved in the reality of the situation:

> It went like the performance of a well-rehearsed play in which I was a last-minute substitute. I had been told the action, given my lines, and now I walked on blindly, dazed, to find every movement expected and responded to. It wasn't quite real; I didn't quite believe it. Therefore I felt no particular concern about the outcome. It was only a role; therefore there was no danger. The trouble was the role itself; it wasn't right for me, and I was certain to handle it badly. (138)

Initially, the robbery goes well and Sonny begins to enjoy the power and control he has over the jeweller who saw him as an easy mark: "I was abrupt, brutally, on Charlie's side. <u>With it</u>. In for the kill." (140) Greedily he thinks about his half of the take. However, at this peak of pride he is brought back to the reality of the situation as quickly as he was when Isabel threw him in "The Outlaw" for his pride. In a moment of delay at the door, the old jeweller shoots Sonny in the heel, injuring one of the feet that Sonny had believed so firmly planted in the right direction.[9]

Now Sonny becomes the hunted, driven by the sight of his own blood. He now seeks darkness and a place to hide, like a wounded animal. The light-filled, free world of the imagination has disappeared:

> I ran--just ran. For a long time mindlessly, as probably a wounded animal runs, concentrated on flight, escape, to the exclusion even of fear or hope of safety. And yet, at the same time, on another level, aware. The alley was not dark--I had been wrong before--but white and dim, with only blocks and bars of heavy shadow, like an intricate, haphazard scaffolding; and as I ran I leaped and veered to keep on shadow, as warily alert as if my life depended on it--one false step and I would go plunging. (143)

As if for protection from this dark reality, Sonny retreats into a childhood memory:

> . . . I lifted my foot, slowly extending and wringing it so that the drops fell on clean snow, as lost and absorbed as if I were off alone somewhere, miles deep in prairie. . . . There was a rabbit once that I shot with my .22 and fascinated by the vividness of blood and snow I held it by the feet and made patterns with the scarlet drip; square, circle, cross; until at last, my arm tiring and the blood beginning to clot, I dipped the nose to give the last tip to a star. (144-45)

When a siren sends him into hiding, "flapping up the alley like a wounded crow," (145) the snow engulfs him with deadly protection:

> Struggling and not wanting to struggle--spitting, groping--reminding myself that the siren could have been an ambulance or a fire, that if it was a patrol car they wouldn't have announced themselves. . . . Safe here, safe and still--the siren faint now, gone. Just snow and dark and shelter--starting to turn warm. (145)

He is roused by the memory of Millie and Isabel as in "The Outlaw" after his fall, to face the consequences of what he has done.

Sonny's pride and self-assurance are destroyed by this return to reality once the robbery is over. As when he fell from Isabel, his imagination is restricted. He can only

watch the snow whirl and soar, not go with it: "lights and neon signs and snow all spinning around me, spiralling up to the centre of the sky." (151) He is at the bottom of the vortex, experiencing the clinging reality of the robbery, not the momentary triumph of self-assurance:

> Sonny McAlpine's hands: I had been there. Not remorse or guilt, just awareness. I had been there. The feel of the things in his pockets--the coins, faintly sticky and warm, the handkerchief damp as if he had just cleared his throat. Sonny McAlpine's hands: they would remember. (151)

As in "The Outlaw" Sonny is again the fallen Perseus whose pride is rewarded with earthbound reality.

Sonny has not been a good hunter, as Charlie had advised. Since a good hunter takes only what is necessary for survival, Sonny should have used the robbery and its elements of adventure as inspiration to create. Instead, he uses the robbery to bolster his self-respect. As on his ride with Isabel, in "The Outlaw," the moment he forgets to see the imaginative landscape and thinks pridefully of the feat he has accomplished in riding the outlaw, he is hurled to the ground. Such impatience and pride is an obstacle to Sonny's attaining his dream of being a famous musician. For example, a few days before the robbery, Sonny goes to a club which is decorated like the tropics for an audition:

> The ceiling was festooned with green and yellow streamers. Two palm trees stood at the side of the stage, with big gilt stars suspended over them. (80)

The manager has no place for him in his band, but he tells Sonny about a club he has plans to open on his own, where he

will need a clarinet. Unlike Mad, Sonny is not heartened by this flash of hope; he will not settle for pieces of the dream. He is rude to the manager and loses this faint hope, the chance to play in even an artificial paradise of warmth and beauty, because of pride. He refuses to consider the imaginative landscape in which he would have the opportunity to create. Instead, he focuses on the necessity of a job to give him back his self-respect. Again, after the robbery, which was to restore his self-esteem, he is not admitted to another paradise:

> And flowers: suddenly at my side a windowful of them, blood-dark carnations and white and yellow roses, inches away, flawless and cool like flowers in paradise. I halted and rubbed my hands against the glass, then pressed my forehead on it, soaking up the cold. There was an impulse to smash the window and enter, protest exclusion; but it was muffled and dull, like a bell under water; and weariness collapsed it. (151)

Sonny has excluded himself from this paradise, the dimension of the imagination, because he is a greedy, uncontrolled hunter of his dream. He attempts to make the sensation, not the awareness, of the imaginative dimension permanent and lasting in reality. For Sonny, creation of music, riding the Pegasus, is not enough. He wants to possess the feeling of exhilaration and self-esteem that creation gives him. Like Perseus, he wants to live in the paradise of purity, light, perfection and beauty with the gods, with the spirit of the imagination. Unfortunately, Sonny is not a god and must live in the imperfect earthly sphere, where the spirit

of the imagination can exist only through such earthly manifestations as art and music.

After the robbery, during the delirium of his infection, Sonny's mind drifts between memories of his childhood and the events of the past few weeks. Through these fluctuating recollections, Sonny comes to a new understanding of life--that it is two-edged. The idea of the robbery, which had previously raised Sonny's self-esteem because courage and daring were required of him, had fired his imagination and inspired him to create music. The robbery itself seemed a dream from which he was safely detached. Now the memory of the robbery is destructive to the artistic spirit which its elements of excitement had stimulated:

> Strictly Sonny's relief. A gopher whisked down its burrow with a snap of teeth just inches from its tail. No more than that. No understanding yet of what I had done to him, no inkling of the implications. If anything, he was less victim than I. I sickened at the memory of my hands going over him--it even seemed that the smell of his clothes, sweaty, slightly acid, still clung to them--but there, at my own frontier, the shame was halted. Not what I had done to him; what I had done to Sonny McAlpine. The smirch; the finger. For Sonny's name now, even up in lights, would always be a dirty name.
>
> Charlie, I sensed vaguely, had come off better. For him, the old man was a real victim. There had been a relationship. He had committed himself, as a fighter commits himself to his opponent, as a hunter to his quarry. He had planned the job, staked and risked himself, accepted the challenge. But I had only handled a body, emptied pockets and drawers. (157)

Charlie, as disgusting and despicable as he is, does have the hunter's instinct. He is committed to his goal: he is not aimless, dependent on chance, as Sonny is. He shares this

commitment and determination with Isabel; she resolved to make Sonny ride her and succeeded. Sonny participated in the robbery without such commitment; it was a dream to him, without substance and consequence. He would have money to spend when it was over and his pride would be restored, but he never considered at what cost. Outwardly, his act was courageous and daring; inwardly, it was as cowardly and purposeless as his trapping of the flicker in his childhood:

> It was May, and for a week or more I had been catching glimpses of it flashing like a whir of gold, a gust of feathered light; and gradually wonder had become a need to see and verify.
>
> Not cruelty--just need. Desire that was at once innocent and unspeakable. To run the miracle to earth, lay hands on it, for all time make it mine.
>
> So far so good--what better quarry than a whir of gold? But oh, Sonny McAlpine--of all things to use a gopher trap!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> So it was to catch, not to kill--to possess and delight in, not to maim. The words are always there, always on the alert. At the drop of a feather they spring to their defence positions, like soldiers at the sound of a bugle. To catch, not to kill. I didn't know what it would be like. I didn't think--I just wanted.
>
> It was a clear, sunny morning, unwrinkled, still. A first-morning-of-the-world stillness, sky and earth in conspiracy, up to something good. Blackbirds and meadowlarks, the smell of crocuses and willow--every step you paused to breathe it in and listen, to feel if it would bear your weight.
>
> And then the flicker again, the sudden arrow-dazzle of its wings, splintering the morning like a glass, leaving behind it ruin and and [sic] desire.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> A kind of make-believe--perhaps that would explain it. The trap was all I had, all I could think of. I no more expected to catch the flicker than a dog, bursting from a farmyard in furious pursuit, expects to catch a passing car.
>
> But half an hour later there it was. Head down, suspended by the chain, its leg mangled, its wings

> flapping feebly, ruffled and bruised. And the eye, just about level with mine, and unsparing, snake-hard little drill of hate.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Awake and not quite awake: the eye kept shining through the darkness and at the same time burning hot within me like a coal. 'Catch and kill--cheap cheap cheap. Big-time Sonny and his name in lights--no more roses, no more gold--' (162-63)

In the same way that Sonny wanted the flicker, he desires the robbery. The robbery gives him uplifting confidence and freedom; he is able to create. This is the miracle he needs to possess this feeling, but he goes too far. He should be satisfied with the glimpse of the bird free and alive and with the pre-robbery feeling of control over his creative spirit. Instead, Sonny is a greedy predator. Rather than recognize the paradisal morning, topped off by the appearance of the flicker, and his success at improvisation before the robbery as the ultimate in artistic experience, the most Sonny could have of the world of the imagination, he insists on more. Possession of the flicker and participation in the robbery are intended to maintain the artistic dimension for longer than a flash of time. Sonny's means to preserve these experiences, the gopher trap and the robbery, twist and pervert and eventually kill the spirit of the experience, changing life into death and courage into cowardice, and excluding him from the paradise of the creative dimension.

Once again, Sonny has failed to achieve his dream and his role in the robbery may have destroyed it forever. He plays his clarinet to reassure himself:

> . . . I started playing the clarinet, first anxiously, with a sense of urgency, as if time were running out and one more idle morning might cost me a career, and then with elation and surprise, a sudden conviction that I was playing extraordinarily well, improvising as no one had ever improvised before. (166)

As Charlie was present to offer a new beginning, the doctor who comes to cure Sonny's blood-poisoning puts him in touch with a bandleader for a job, and miraculously, gives Sonny his saxophone. Sonny does not approach this chance with the same caution, suspicion and non-commitment that he took the opportunity that Charlie offered. He has finally developed the hunter's instinct needed to accept the challenge which the artistic spirit offers:

> [A]s I played I made a leap and soared over him [the doctor], straight to the big-time Sonny, the lights and the applause. An old trick--an escape hatch I had discovered riding Isabel. The long empty hours and the long empty miles--you soared in desperation, dreamed in defiance of the monotony. And if you were going to soar, why not do it right, with style, a flourish? Why hedgehop over ways and means?
>
> In the old days, of course, it had been a different kind of applause, for a different kind of performance; and now, even as I played and soared, there was a taste of bitterness and guilt to remind me. (177)

Sonny will play saxophone in a jazz band, not be a concert pianist, but he will be a musician still able to soar. He has had to accept the hindrances and misfortunes which keep him from possessing his dream, but as the robbery and the flicker have taught him, he must be satisfied with glimpses of the spirit of the imagination, which can survive in reality only as music or art.

Ross's artists are hunters, constantly stalking the

spirit of the imagination to capture it in art for display in the world of reality. The dimension of the imagination and the dimension of reality are mutually exclusive worlds, linked only through art. At the end of the novel, Sonny has a fresh chance to be the link between these opposite worlds. If he is a good hunter, he will take only what he needs from the dimension of the imagination in flashes and flickers of lights to soar above the poverty and disillusionment. If he attempts to fly with the spirit of the imagination with no awareness of reality, without the awareness to make sensible compromises with his pride and to keep his essence intact, he will again crash to the reality below. As McMullen points out, "To catch a glimpse from time to time of this 'whir of gold' [the creative dimension] is all one can expect in this world."[10]

In Whir of Gold and The Well, the wind as symbol of the destructive side of the mystery of life does not appear. In fact, the lack of weather descriptions sets these novels apart from the rest of Ross's work. Instead, people and situations are the soul-destroying forces which overwhelm creativity, beauty, human happiness and faith in the future. Sonny, in Whir of Gold, and Chris, in The Well, both have dreams of fuller lives. Sonny is temporarily stymied in his desire to be a musician until the spirit of the imagination inspires him to re-direct his energies away from the hopeless-

ness of crime toward music. Chris Rowe, in The Well, is not an artist, but he knows that life is more hopeful and beautiful than his repressive, controlled existence in petty crime on Boyle Street. Through contact with Larson's horses, he learns respect, compassion and responsibility for life. Chris and Sonny's lives are re-focused toward a more fulfilled and mature existence.

Philip Bentley and his wife, in As For Me and My House, have stopped hoping for a fulfilling future; however, it is again people and circumstances, not the destructive power of the wind itself, as in the adult reality stories, which has caused the Bentleys' despair. The wind in As For Me and My House is still the death-laden scourge which destroys crops and lives in such stories as "The Lamp at Noon" and "September Snow," creating a desert from once fertile and productive wheat land, but the Bentleys are not involved with this aspect. However, as for Hatty Glenn, in "No Other Way," the wind is a constant, nagging companion for Mrs. Bentley. For both women, refused their husbands' love, life is wind-dominated, cold, barren and dry, like the wind-swept prairie. Philip also shares an affinity with the wind. The despair and hopelessness carried by the wind's destructive power is compatible with his perception of life. Philip, the artist, has made a fatal compromise with his pure, creative spirit by entering the ministry in order to be educated to pursue his artistic career. Now, he is wracked by guilt for his

hypocrisy of pretending to be a devout man of God, whose art is only a hobby. He is untrue to the people to whom he must give hope and inspiration, but, worst of all, he is unfaithful to his art. Trapped by the compromise that was to be his artistic fulfilment, he avoids contact with the world which only reminds him of his failure, withdrawing alone to his study to sketch "cold little ghosts of his dream that are stronger than their uselessness."[11] The Bentleys' lives are held in stasis by their inactivity. Both are prepared to continue life as it is, but the wind, rather than further cripple creativity and stifle freedom, acts as a motivator promoting freedom and creativity.

The wind becomes Mrs. Bentley's constant companion. While she works out her own and Philip's escape from the town of Horizon, the wind echoes and intensifies her emotions, sympathizes with her turmoil, reflects Philip's thoughts and, most importantly, motivates her actions. She is not frightened or driven by the wind, as is Ellen in "The Lamp at Noon," but the wind is as persistent in making itself heard:

> It's the most nerve-wracking wind I've ever listened to. Sometimes it sinks a little, as if spent and out of breath, then comes high, shrill and importunate again. Sometimes it's blustering and rough, sometimes silent and sustained. Sometimes it's wind, sometimes frightened hands that shake the doors and windows. Sometimes it makes the little room and its smug, familiar furniture a dramatic inconsistency, sometimes a relief. (39)

The vision of the furniture as inconsistent with the flux and unpredictability of the wind is representative of life away

from the safe and familiar, but oppressive, atmosphere of Horizon. The wind urges her, as Isabel motivates Tommy McAlpine, to take this option, to pursue with determination her plan to save enough money to leave Horizon for an environment suitable to foster Philip's dream of being an artist.

The wind also forces Mrs. Bentley to see the emptiness of her life, the hollow distorted fulfilment which this existence affords her:

> He's a failure now, a preacher instead of a painter, and every minute of the day he's mindful of it. I'm a failure too, a small-town preacher's wife instead of what I so faithfully set out to be--but I have to stop deliberately like this to remember. To have him notice me, speak to me as if I really mattered in his life, after twelve years with him that's all I want or need. It arranges my world for me, strengthens and quickens it, makes it immune to all other worlds. (16)

The wind emphasizes the purposelessness of this life and intensifies the barrenness of such an existence until she must act to change her contracted, diminished sphere of experience, as Sandra Djwa says, to "an expanding horizon."[12] In a departure from the role of the wind in the short stories, the wind here becomes a beneficial force, a motivator, pushing Mrs. Bentley inexorably toward the decision to leave Horizon. As a result, the wind is associated with the force which gives life vigor and hope.

Philip, as an artist, should be allied with the illuminated, hopeful side of life, the dimension of the imagination. Unfortunately, Philip's artistic spirit has

been restricted and oppressed by factors in his life until his art has become totally reflective of the darkness and despair of the destructive dimension:

> Something has happened to his drawing this last year or two. There used to be feeling and humanity in it. It was warm and positive and forthright; but now everything is distorted, intensified, alive with thin, cold, bitter life. (17)

Philip is pure--an artist with little aptitude for anything else: "He has the hands for a brush or pencil, not a hammer." (7) Philip wants more than the reality of everyday life. From childhood, he has rejected this life for something more, according to the example of his father, an apparently pure seeker of higher awareness:

> When a lad still, Philip discovered his father's ambition to paint, that he had been as alien to the town and Philip's mother as was Philip now himself. The books were difficult and bewildering, more of them on art and literature than theology; but only half-understood, beyond his reach, they added to the stature of the man who owned and read them.
>
> And because he made a hero of his father, and in lonely, childish defiance of his surroundings, resolved to be another like him. (30)

However, Philip is continually disappointed and disillusioned because the truth and perfection he expects is not possible in earthly reality:

> The new life around him, that he spent all his life hungering for, he was no more a part of it than he had been of the old. He had expected too much. In the little town he had been alone with his books, no one to pace himself against, and in an effort to prepare himself for what he imagined the standards of the outside world to be, he had attained an intellectual maturity that in college isolated him from his fellow-students.
>
> . . . . . .

> He was forever being disillusioned, forever finding people out and withdrawing into himself with a sense of hurt and grievance. The only artistic life he could make contact with was genteel and amateurish. It wasn't what he expected or needed; he went on studying alone. (32-33)

Philip's final attempt to attain this perfection is to enter the church for the education which will allow him to pursue his dream of being an artist. Instead, this action has compromised his self-esteem because he has compromised his art. He must live a lie, the opposite of the purity of truth to which he had dedicated his life:

> He made a compromise once, with himself, his conscience, his ideals; and now he believes that by some retributive justice he is paying for it. A kind of Nemesis. He pays in Main Streets--this one, the last one, the Main Streets still to come. (18)

Time has not faded Philip's failures, but has instead intensified them until he no longer seeks the pure dimension of perfection so desired in his youth. His life is a wind-swept prairie desert with no sign of the rejuvenating warmth of the dimension of the imagination:

> He tries to measure life with intellect and reason, insists to himself that he is satisfied with what they prove for him; yet here there persists this conviction of a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life to make certain it will be spent in a wind-swept, sun-burned little Horizon. (17)

The struggle of creation is all that gives meaning to Philip's life:

> That's the part about him that hurts, the way he does wrestle, the way he throws himself into his drawing, his fierce absorption till what he's doing turns out right. It doesn't mean that he just has skill with a pencil. Even though the drawings are only torn up or

> put away to fill more boxes when we move, even though no one ever gets a glimpse of them but me, still they're for him the only part of life that's real or genuine. (24-25)

However, Philip is not liberated from Horizon to experience the expanded, brightened world of the imagination sought by its seers in "A Day with Pegasus," "Circus in Town," "The Outlaw," and Whir of Gold. Even the horse, symbol of the dimension of the imagination, stimulated as are Isabel and the snow-horses in "The Painted Door" by the wind, shows a vision of condemnation and death:

> The horses pawed and stamped as if they, too, felt something ominous in the day. One after another the democrats and buggies rolled away with a whir of wheels like pebbly thunder. From the top of Partridge Hill where the schoolhouse stands we could see the prairie smoking with dust as if it had just been swept by fire. A frightened, wavering hum fled blind within the telephone wires. The wind struck in hard, clenched little blows; and even as we watched each other the dust formed in veins and wrinkles round our eyes. (38)

The wind has scourged the prairie, the hum through the telephone wires is like a lament and the dust brings signs of age and death to their faces. Philip's soul is as barren of hope and as windswept as the drought-stricken prairie. His world of the imagination is bitter, despairing and turned inward to reflect this state of mind. Since, as Laurence Ricou notes,

> [t]he physical emptiness [of the prairie] is an imaginative vacuum which must be filled and which offers new freedom to the artist to choose what he may to fill it,[13]

Philip chooses to portray futile struggle, loneliness and a sense of imminent destruction in his sketches. He identifies

with the false fronts of Main Street which expect their mascarade as solid second stories to be momentarily exposed:

> [T]here was a little Main Street sketched. It's like all the rest, a single row of smug, false-fronted stores, a loiterer or two, in the distance the prairie again. And like all the rest there's something about it that hurts. False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied. . . . They ought always to be seen that way, pretentious, ridiculous, never as Philip sees them, stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility. (4)

He sketches a rural schoolhouse about to be engulfed by desert:

> He had been drawing again, and under his papers I found a sketch of a little country schoolhouse. A trim, white, neat-gabled little schoolhouse, just like Partridge Hill. . . . It stands up lonely and defiant on a landscape like a desert. Almost a lunar desert, with queer, fantastic pits and drifts of sand encroaching right to the doorstep. . . . The distorted, barren landscape makes you feel the meaning of its persistence there. . . . [I]t's Humanity in Microcosm. Faith, ideals, reason--all things that really are humanity-- . . . you feel them there, their stand against the implacable blunderings of Nature-- . . . (80)

A series of sketches, done on the ranch, portray the landscape, not only man-made elements, under the threat of destruction:

> There were half a dozen [sketches] that he grumbled at and crumpled up and then smoothed out again. Just the hills, the driftwood logs, and stunted trees--but brooding over and pervading everything the same conviction of approaching dissolution that made it cold sometimes this morning out in the blazing sun. (101)

Rather than reach upward for insight and release to a clear, light-filled dimension of the imagination to fill this artistic vacuum, Philip's artistic spirit pulls him into an equally vivid awareness of the opposite side of life, toward a telescoped, concentrated perception of disappointment and suffering. Philip captures the torment of the despairing

imagination as skilfully as other artists, such as Peter Parker, capture the joyful imagination. So, Philip is unique among Ross's artists. His creativity is not stifled by the soul-destroying forces in his situation; he is stimulated to depict the dark, unchanging, rather than the expanded, life created by these forces.

Philip and his wife are also destructive forces in each other's lives. Ironically, Mrs. Bentley's music, when music is usually a creative force, is the wind-force which began this vicious soul-destroying pattern of their lives long before the action of the book begins. Philip has not always retreated to his study when she plays. Her music once brought him out of his withdrawal:

> He came to a recital once to hear me play it, this same rhapsody, and because he was there I played it well. The desire to reach him, make him really aware of me, it put something into my hands that had never been there before. And I succeeded. He stood waiting for me afterwards, erect and white-lipped with a pride he couldn't conceal. And that was the night he asked me to marry him. (141)

However, the marriage prevented him from becoming an artist. Music is, therefore, a reminder to Philip of his compromise with his art and becomes a weapon in Mrs. Bentley's control:

> . . . I need the garden. My fingers want to feel the earth, dig in it, burrow away till the town is out of sight and mind. The house huddles me. I need a tussle with the wind to make me straight again.
> . . . . . .
> My present problem, though, is to get the digging done. . . . Philip will have to do it. . . . Even if I have to drive him to it playing the piano. (44)

As a result, only in connection with Philip, when her music

is most harmful to him, is she most brilliant. She attempts to revive the night of their engagement at a Ladies' Aid play, but the experience is depressing, rather than positive in effect. Her music cannot restore life and hope to either of them. Such music, with such an effect, is far away and out of reach for them:

> The wind's from that direction, not quite so strong as it has been lately. From the garden I can hear a saxophone, and underneath it every now and then the throbbing of a drum.
>
> For more than an hour I stood out in the back yard listening to it. Through the darkness the saxophone was wavering and slender like a fine thread of light. It was far enough away to be poignant and mellow; and in the drum throb there was zest and urgency.
>
> I imagined the couples moving round the floor, the atmosphere of carefree excitement and enthusiasm. And there was a remoteness about it that made me feel shut away from life, too old, forgotten. It was like standing in the darkness, hidden yourself, watching figures round a fire. (48)

This faint sound of vital life, far beyond their limited lives, echoes the musical dimensions of the imagination experienced by Tommy Dickson in "Cornet at Night." Both respond to this manifestation of the imaginative realm, but they do not act to gain this world. Both seem satisfied to continue life together as it is: Mrs. Bentley straining toward Philip, protecting him from the town, Philip rejecting her and retreating to his study to draw sketches mirroring his moods and inner turmoil.

Philip is resigned to the hypocrisy and small-mindedness of towns like Horizon, but his sketches show that he feels trapped by these dark, endless false fronts and

wishes for escape:

> [H]e's been drawing again. A cold, hopeless little thing--just the night as he left it at the front door. The solitary street lamp, pitted feebly and uselessly against the overhanging darkness. A little false-fronted store, still and blank and white--another--another--in retreating, steplike sequence--a stairway into the night. The insolent patch of the store is unabashed by the loom of darkness over it. The dark windows are like sockets of unlidded eyes, letting more of the night gape through. Farther on is a single figure, bent low, hurrying, almost away. One second more and the little street will be deserted. (16-17)

Philip identifies with the street lamp struggling against overwhelming darkness. The false-fronted stores of this and past towns point the way of Philip's life; he climbs a staircase to endless darkness where his fading hopes of artistic fulfilment are completely extinguished. He is the solitary figure who would hurry away from this situation.

Mrs. Bentley's reaction to their new parish is not so calm and rational. She feels lost and buffeted in forces beyond her control:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it. The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind. Close to the parsonage is the church, black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it. There's a soft steady swish of rain on the roof, and a gurgle of eaves troughs running over. Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned. (5)

As in Philip's drawing, Mrs. Bentley's sense of engulfing darkness is very strong. She recognizes the wind as a

threatening natural force against which the town huddles for safety, as she, a stranger, warily deals with the new, smug environment of Horizon, where one false move will bring severe disapproval. The wind, "indifferent, liplessly mournful" intensifies her anxiety and loneliness; she must deal with Philip's parishioners on a personal and daily basis, while Philip retreats to the protection of his study to draw. Furthermore, although the soft rain sounds are a comforting presence in contrast to the wheeling wind, they become a reminder of the repetitiveness of life. There is none of the hope and expectation usually associated with a new beginning during their first days in Horizon:

> The rain has kept on all day, a thin, disheartening drizzle. The leak in the roof is worse. The dark sodden stain has crept across the ceiling and down the wall right to the floor. Now a steady drip has set in. I've put out a pail to catch it, and every few minutes I find myself waiting and listening for the splash. The hollow little clink emphasizes the inert and chilly stillness that has locked the room, gives it a kind of rhythm, makes it insistent, aggressive. (7)

The water drop is like a clock ticking off the seconds of her wasted life, as the same ugly hopelessness spreads like the stain on the wallpaper. In essence, both Philip and his wife want the same thing: escape from Horizon and shelter from the wind and darkness.

The general tone of the Bentleys' lives is overwhelming despair and disappointment. However, the wind, the destructive force, does not engulf and destroy them, as in such short stories as "September Snow" or "The Lamp at Noon." Instead,

Mrs. Bentley gains strength and tranquility from contact with the wind. For example, after an argument about their poverty, she sits in the kitchen watching the lamp burn down and listening to the leak from the ceiling drop in the pail; Philip is in his study waiting for her to go to bed. Rather than stay sheltered in the house with the light, Mrs. Bentley goes into the night "to walk [her] spirits back." (27) The tension of the argument is released by this walk in the wind and rain, and she returns to the house where she and Philip reconcile. By morning, the rain has turned to snow and the world is an expansive image of wholeness and completeness, as well as of beauty and purity:

> Reality had given way to the white lineless blend of sky and earth. Across the street we could see the walls of the houses, and a little higher the chimneys; but between them were the white rooftops, merging scarless into the white air; and know what we would, the eye was not to be told that chimneys and walls belonged to one another. (28)

Together they walk up the railway tracks and see the opposite of this still, silent calm:

> We came at last to a sudden deep ravine. There was a hoarse little torrent at the bottom, with a shaggy, tumbling swiftness that we listened to a while. . . . The flakes came whirling out of the whiteness, spun against the stream a moment, vanishing at its touch. (28-29)

Here the wind shows the Bentleys' position in life, between the world of completion and fulfilment and a rushing flow threatening them with destruction. Their only escape is pointed out to them, "like a finger raised", (28) as if the

purpose of this walk was to show them this lesson:

> Then the bridge over us picked up the coming of a train. It was there even while the silence was still intact. At last we heard a distant whistle-blade, then a single point of sound, like one drop of water in a whole sky. It dilated, spread. The sky and silence began imperceptibly to fill with it. We steeled ourselves a little, feeling the pounding onrush in the trestle of the bridge. It quickened, gathered, shook the earth, then swept in an iron roar above us, thundering and dark. (29)

The train has meant escape to a better life for Philip since his childhood and Mrs. Bentley's walks along the tracks show that she too sees the train as their way out of Horizon. Today, they choose to interpret the train as a reminder of their failed dreams; however, the wind and snow have shown a new direction for their lives if only they will take action.

Paul Kirby, Horizon's schoolteacher, is also bound by the pressures of the town. However, he has a release not available to the Bentleys in his horse, Harlequin, a spirited Pegasus much like the cowboy's skewbald, Tony, which sparks Peter Parker's imagination in "A Day with Pegasus":

> Paul rode round this afternoon to let me see his skewbald bronco Harlequin. A temperamental, knowing little beast, that plunged hysterically halfway across the street at sight of me, and then, after all his histrionic dash had been displayed, came back the best of friends to slaver on my dress and hear me say to Paul how handsome and astonishing he was. (40)

As a result, Paul is transformed by Harlequin into more than a small-town schoolteacher:

> I noticed that he was not without a certain histrionic dash himself today, rigged out in all his cowboy togs, boots, leather chaps, a bright red spotted handkerchief, and giving the temperamental Harlequin just rein enough to make a good display of horsemanship. (40)

Paul thinks of himself throughout the novel as a misplaced farmboy who does not fit into town life and, because of his education, he no longer belongs to the farm either. With Harlequin, Paul is free to fit into neither world and, therefore, inhabits a world where he is in control.

Harlequin indirectly influences the Bentleys' lives also. He attracts Steve Kulanich with his showing off and, mysteriously, Steve attracts Philip. Now with Steve and Philip present, the wind stimulates the horse, but to near disastrous results:

> All four of us for a minute were intent on Harlequin. I ignored Philip, and Philip ignored me. A blast of dusty wind struck suddenly, and we blinked and screened our eyes, and stood uneasily a moment listening to the moan of it across the town.
>
> Then a tumbleweed came bouncing up the street, and veering suddenly struck Harlequin across the flank. With a snort he reared and bolted down the street a little way; then as Paul drew hard on the reins reared a second time, and for a moment hung in mid-air almost motionless.
>
> There was no dash or showmanship this time. They both looked ashamed when they came back, Harlequin's sides jerking in and out as if they were going to burst, Paul leaning over to pat his shoulder, doing his best to be nonchalant. (41)

Symbolically, Philip, Mrs. Bentley, Steve and Paul see Harlequin as the embodiment of all their dreams of a fuller life. Only Paul and occasionally Steve actually ride the horse; the moaning, dusty wind to which they listen anxiously is the state of the Bentleys' lives, uninterrupted as Steve and Paul's are by rides with Pegasus. All four are initially motionless, their eyes fixed on their dream until the wind

excites the animal to dangerous action. Steve's reaction to Harlequin's display is one of excitement, but not of fear. Paul apologizes for his strength in trying to control the horse, but Steve accepts the challenge of riding Harlequin without attempting to curb his spirit:

> 'I'd like to be on him when he jumps like that,' Steve spoke up unexpectedly. 'And I wouldn't fall off either.'
>
> He spoke the last sentence with a little flare of defiance in his voice, as if it were Paul's way to be somewhat skeptical of his horsemanship; and then turning round and looking up at Philip, 'I do go riding--and I don't fall off.' (41)

Paul restrains himself and does not dare to dream so that he will not be disillusioned. Steve, on the other hand, is willing to let his dreams take him where they will, whatever the danger. The Bentleys can only stand and watch, paralysed, like Harlequin in mid-air, while all around the wind produces movement and action. By resisting this stimulus, they are like Paul and Harlequin, ashamed and defeated.

Philip, because he wants a son and because Steve is treated by the town as Philip was in his youth, is attracted to the boy. The wind indicates to Mrs. Bentley that Steve will mean a change in her life and her relationship to Philip:

> . . . I could feel them [Philip and Steve] standing there, unaware of us [Mrs. Bentley and Paul], complete for the moment in themselves. I don't know what came over me--maybe just the wind, the plaintive way it whined. I seemed to feel myself vaguely threatened. (42)

She has become like the moths in her kitchen, which flutter mindlessly about the lamp which means their death:

> There are dusty, gray-winged moths tonight, that

> thud on the chimney of the lamp and glance away again with such incessant regularity that you think at last they must be worked on little springs or wires. There are six of them, and one that flew too low through the shaft of heat above the flame, and fluttered away to the floor somewhere with singed and crippled wings. (49)

The moths illustrate the mechanical, repetitious rhythm of her life as she hovers over Philip waiting for his attention. The addition of Steve to their family upsets this repetitiveness. Mrs. Bentley, who previously sat passively listening to the wind, now attempts to quiet its effects. The wind becomes an agitator, lending a new vitality, a state of flux, to her life:

> It's eleven now, and the wind has settled to a steady blow. The walls are creaking with the heave of it. To stop the rattling I've wadded rags along the windows, but on the roof there's a shingle working loose, and every few seconds it gives a buzz and stutter. The room is filled with a haze of dust like smoke, and it sways and heaves a little with the vibrations of the walls. The bells of the fuchsia sway a little too. (42)

Since Steve's arrival, she cannot ignore the wind or quiet its effects.

A sketch that Philip has been working on has an aura of strength, movement and defiance about it also, unlike earlier sketches of false fronts:

> It's a street again tonight, false-fronted stores, a pool hall and a wind. You feel the wind, its drive and bluster, the way it sets itself against the town. The false fronts that other times stand up so flat and vacant are buckled down in desperation for their lives. They lean a little forward, better to hold their ground against the onslaughts of the wind. Some of them cower before the flail of dust and sand. Some of them wince as if the strain were torture. And yet you feel no sympathy, somehow can't be on their side. Instead you

wait patiently for the wind to work its will. (43)

The false fronts here are in danger of being blown down and desperately struggle against all hope to remain standing. Mrs. Bentley's battle against the wind and Philip's straining false fronts are evidence that the wind, because of Steve's inspiriting presence, is working to arouse them from their inactivity and resignation, which keeps them locked into Main Street hypocrisy. At this point, the Bentleys resist the sweeping change which would destroy false fronts, but Mrs. Bentley decides to plant a garden:

> So I'm going to have a garden. The way the wind keeps on, and all the signs for drought, it isn't likely anything will grow, but I'd rather be out in the wind fighting it than in here listening to it creak the walls. It's so hollow and mournful when there's nothing to do but listen. You get so morbid and depressed. (43)

She senses that, like the false fronts which reflect each other in some of Philip's drawings, she needs the struggle and stimulation of the wind to keep her active, to keep her from dwelling on herself. The garden also brings change for Philip:

> It's dug. He didn't say much either, almost as if he understood. The fork has given him blisters on his hands, but he's better for the sun and wind. He looks browner, ruggeder. The unaccustomed exercise has tired him out, and made his muscles stiff and sore, but after supper we talked a while, and he's more relaxed than usual in his mind. . . . It makes me wish I had a garden for him every day, or a horse to ride, and a hat and chaps like Paul's. (45)

However, she can only provide this inspiriting "horse" influence for Philip by taking Steve in when his father abandons him.

Mrs. Bentley accepts Steve more for Philip's sake than

for his own, because she knows Steve will replace her in Philip's life. She also resents the sacrifices that Philip makes for Steve that he never made for her:

> I was bitter. He had never asked for money for me. He had let me skimp and deny myself, and wear shabby, humiliating old clothes. I thought of the way I had borne it, pitying him, admiring him. It was because he was sensitive, fine-grained, I always said, because the hypocrisy hurt him, because beneath it all he was a genuine man. And I threw it all at him. . . . I called him a hypocrite again, and a poor contemptible coward. (86)

At the same time that Steve's presence demoralizes Mrs. Bentley, Philip is rejuvenated, his hope and faith in the future re-kindled:

> This unexpected advent of a son, I must admit, has brought a little life and enthusiasm to his face, taken some of the sag out of his shoulders. He kept pacing up and down when he was out here, and his step for the first time in years had a ring. There was eagerness and vitality radiating from him to make me aware how young he still is, how handsome and tall and broad-shouldered. (50-51)

Although Mrs. Bentley predicts Philip's dream-come-true will be short-lived, for now Steve is Philip's Pegasus:

> He hasn't seen him with his eyes yet, just his pity and imagination. An unwanted, derided little outcast, exactly what he used to be himself. . . . As he starts in to dream and plan for the boy it's his own life over again. Steve is to carry on where he left off. Steve is to do the things he tried to do and failed.
>
> For Philip's a born dreamer, and the last few years what with the Church and the Main Streets and me, he hasn't had much chance to dream. That's what has been wrong with him. He hasn't been able to get above reality. . . .
>
> Which explains, perhaps, why Steve is so important. Philip has taken him for Pegasus, and gone off to the clouds again.
>
> So instead of resenting Steve I ought really to be sorry for him. When their ride's over and they're back

> on earth he'll have scant pasturage from Philip. After a while the pity and imagination are going to run out; and there's going to be left just an ordinary, uninspiring boy. (53)

For the second time, nature, the domain of the wind, urges Mrs. Bentley to act on the oppressive forces, the town and the church, which keep her and Philip imprisoned in unfulfilled lives. An atmospheric effect again places her at the center of the action:

> [O]verhead it [the dust] was thin still, like a film of fog or smoke, and the light came through it filtered, mild and tawny.
>
> It was as if there were a lantern hung above you in a darkened and enormous room; or as if the day had turned out all its other lights, waiting for the actors to appear, and you by accident had found your way into the spotlight, like a little ant or beetle on the stage. (59)

She looks back toward the town and sees in the scene the essence of Philip's sketches, "the same tension, the same vivid immobility, and behind it all somewhere the same sense of transience." (59) However, she does not believe, by the example of her life, that Horizon is transient. For the Bentleys, past and future Horizons permanently order and arrange their lives. A train rushes by, but, resigned to her fate, she "start[s] in spending the forty dollars again" (59), continuing to plan life in Horizon. However, dust clouds provide an ominous display of Horizon's impermanence:

> The dust clouds behind the town kept darkening and thinning and swaying, a furtive tirelessness about the way they wavered and merged with one another that reminded me of northern lights in winter. It was like a quivering backdrop, before which was about to be enacted some grim, primeval tragedy. The little town cowered closer to earth as if to hide itself. (59)

The town is stationary but all around is movement, change and activity, the dominant feature of the wind. Life for the Bentleys does not have to remain governed by the town; change and movement could be the dominant force in their lives also.

The wind has pointed to escape twice, through atmospheric effects in connection with the train, to signal change. In addition, Mrs. Bentley's garden, which was intended to keep her out of Philip's way, is victim to the sun and windy heat; it would be only a temporary relief to their entrapment, not the permanent improvement that the wind recommends. She works in the garden, clearing dust away from the new shoots and carrying water, but "the wind day after day keeps dry and deadly, like the current of heat that rises from a fire." (67) Rather than leave Horizon with the train, as the wind advocates, she works at cross-purposes, prolonging their imprisonment. When she and Philip are called before the church board to answer for Steve's fist-fight with one of the Finley twins, she acts to prevent Philip from provoking the crisis, by resigning, to change their lives for the best:

> . . . Philip stood up. He spoke with difficulty, trying to be cool and logical so that he might make a better case for Steve; his knuckles white, the veins out purple on his forehead.
>
> He seemed broadening, growing taller. In his tightened, half-closed eyes I could see a little flash that came and went with every breath. His voice was shaking out, hardening. I could feel the hot throb of all the years he has curbed and hidden and choked himself--felt it gather, break, the sudden reckless stumble for release--and before it was too late, before

> he could do what he should have done twelve years ago, I interrupted.
>
> I took my place beside him, and as he groped for words began explaining the situation as it really was.
>
> I was cool and logical enough. I succeeded in making a good case for Steve. Alone now, watching the little dusty moths go thudding round the lamp, listening to the wind, and the creak and saw of the eaves. I'm thinking what a fool I was. If I had only kept still we might be starting in to worry now about the future. We might be making plans, shaking the dust off us, finding our way back to life. (72-73)

As a result, the wind and dust must intensify their efforts to motivate her.

The way she defends herself against wind-brought change becomes an accomplishment:

> The sand and dust drifts everywhere. It's in the food, the bedclothes, a film on the book you're reading before you can turn the page. In the morning it's half an inch deep on the window sills. Half an inch again by noon. Half an inch again by evening. It begins to make an important place for itself in the routine of the day. I watch the little drifts form. If at dusting time they're not quite high enough I'm disappointed, put off the dusting sometimes half an hour to let them grow. But if the wind has been high and they have outdrifted themselves, then I look at them incredulous, and feel a strange kind of satisfaction, as if such height were an achievement for which credit was coming to me. (73)

She would rather the house were a shelter from the movement and activity of the wind, so she lets the sand drifts grow to prove to herself that she can withstand change by wiping it out. The sand could also change the texture of her life, in association with the wind, but she opts to maintain the routine of Horizon. However, she is eventually forced to recognize the wind's strength:

> A while ago the wind and the crunch of sand on the floor used to put an itch in my fingers. I wanted to tear and shake and crush something. But it's

> different now. I sit quiet, listening, looking at the fuchsia till it's disappeared. In the last week I seem to have realized that the wind is master. (74)

The fuchsia is linked to the garden's temporary relief; the wind insists on a more permanent change. A sketch of Philip's expresses this same feeling of being at the mercy of the wind:

> [T]he town is seen from a distance, a lost little clutter on the long sweep of prairie. High above it dust clouds wheel and wrestle heedlessly. Here, too, the wind is master. (74)

Philip's sketches are usually close-ups of false fronts withstanding the wind. In this drawing, the movement and power of the dust clouds is the focal point. Since Steve came to live with them, Philip is not alone against the town. Now in his sketches, he identifies with the wind, the force against the town, rather than with the false fronts attempting to prevent their own annihilation. Philip's sketch reflects a wider vision of life, not only the restricted, hopeless struggle against Horizon, but an understanding that the wind is master and, therefore, the restriction of Horizon is not inviolable.

In the first of Philip's sketches to contain a horse, though the horse is old and broken-down, some of the flux and motion of the surrounding environment is evident:

> Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle. (69)

This sketch suggests a cyclical pattern of life from death. Philip's dying dream of artistic fulfilment, like the old horse, is part of the cycle of renewal, which is contrary to the static existence of the town. Steve has been the Pegasus, the creative spirit, which has provided renewal for Philip and expanded his vision of life beyond the town to encompass the prairie, the wider realm of the wind. Steve is also a positive force in Mrs. Bentley's life, returning to her a part of her lost identity:

> . . . I went sentimental for a minute, and he let me. I didn't know anything like that could happen to me. It was as if once, twelve years ago, I had heard the beginning of a piece of music, and then a door had closed. But within me, in my mind and blood, the music had kept on, and when at last they opened the door again I was at the right place, had held the rhythm all the way. (69)

Neither Philip nor Mrs. Bentley, as yet, act upon their growing hope for the future to extend their awareness of life beyond Horizon. Mrs. Bentley passively continues to believe that the future depends upon Philip and his art:

> I've been sure right from the beginning--sure that there's some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him, so blind and helpless still it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself. But it will some day. All in their own time things like that work out. (80)

Meanwhile, Philip does seem inclined toward aggressive action to stop the endless repetitive purposelessness of his life:

> There's almost no wind tonight. It's hot and stuffy, and the moths are fluttering thick around the lamps. As I stood beside him he trapped one in his hand, made a puckered face and squeezed it, and then with a quick, revolted gesture tossed it into the flame. (79-80)

However, Philip does not act to change their lives, and the bitter sterility of their existence increases. Mrs. Bentley has confronted Philip about writing their past parishes for money in back wages for Steve's sake when he would not do as much for her. The town's disapproval of their adoption of Steve is obvious. A crisis seems imminent when Mrs. Bentley realizes that Judith, whom she fears as a rival, is in love with Philip. Their vacation to Paul's brother's ranch is a temporary relief from the smothering heat and gathering crisis.

For Steve and Philip, the ranch gives them an opportunity to choose a horse for Steve. Paul has suggested that a horse will give Steve back his self-esteem:

> 'The horse means a lot to him. They've baited him so much he seldom fights back now, just tries to slip away by himself. . . . The horse is good for him. Good for his self-respect. You can't ride a horse and feel altogether worthless, or be altogether convinced that society's little world is the last word. If I had a boy of my own that's what he'd do. There's no better way to grow a mind.' (36)

However, Philip, according to his wife, sees a horse as an instrument which will keep Steve close to him:

> 'A horse,' he keeps saying, 'next month we'll have a horse for him.'
>
> Perhaps it's a kind of jealousy. Perhaps instinctively he knows that this way will keep Steve alone too, that Steve, in consequence, will have need of him. Perhaps he's trying to harden him, trying to assure his success in life at whatever cost, as a kind of compensation for his own failure.
>
> It makes me realize how alone he has been all his life, even the last twelve years, the way he reaches out for Steve's companionship, tries to shape him, put years on him, so that companionship will be possible. . . . Just once I suggested he ought to be out with the other boys, getting fresh air and exercise, but Philip frowned, and said to wait until we get the horse. (75)

However, "the same Main Street slight and condescension that put a cloud over Philip for life" (94) does not affect Steve. Evidently, it is Philip, not Steve, who needs a horse, an inspiriting, creative force to expand his restricted view of the possibilities of his life. For example, in choosing the horse, both Steve and Philip would initially have a spirited young horse. When this animal throws Steve, they instead buy Minnie, a quiet mare which seems to satisfy Steve. Philip, seeking the purity of the creative dimension which has eluded him all his life, quickly loses interest in the horse:

> Minnie was cantering brisk and dainty-footed, ears pricked up as if in amused consternation at the spectacle of such a town; but still she was just a middle-aged mare, a pot to her belly from too many foals, and none of the other horse's dash or devil-blood to seize a man and strike sparks from his imagination. Philip hasn't even given her another name. In an hour or two the sorrel would have been Sleipner or Pegasus anyway, but for a mere mare plain Minnie has to do. (106)

Philip insists on an impossible perfection, unlike Steve, for whom Minnie is sufficient. Philip's single-mindedness leads to disappointment in life, while life is kinder to Steve because he expects less from it:

> Life has proved bitter and deceptive to Philip because of the artist in him, because he has kept seeking a beauty and significance that isn't life's to give; but Steve is a shrewd little realist, who, given the opportunity to meet life on its own terms, ought to make a fair success of it. (94)

The ranch does bring Philip closer to the dimension of perfection than he can hope to get in Horizon. As Lorraine McMullen comments, "The locale itself suggests an opening out,

in contrast to the repression and entrapment of Horizon."[14] Here, Philip's artistic spirit stretches and expands beyond the desperate sketches he draws in Horizon. He paints Laura's buckskin stallion, which, as McMullen says, is "a symbol of the excitement and passion missing in her life,"[15] but he incorporates that vitality into the painting. His sketches normally emphasize the despair and dejection produced by the lack of happiness. In addition, he turns his expression outward, away from his usual self-absorption, to paint for Laura, not himself. Also, with Steve for companionship, not his wife, Philip soars to the pure dimension of the imagination, which is usually beyond his reach:

> It's been one of Philip's hard days, when the artist in him gets the upper hand. Reality as the rest of us know it, disappears from him. It isn't that he sits daydreaming or lost in the clouds--at such times there's actually a vitality about him that you're relieved to get away from--but rather as if he pierces this workaday reality of ours, half scales it off, sees hidden behind it another. More important, more significant than ours, but that he understands only vaguely. He tries to solve it, give it expression, and doesn't quite succeed. (101)

On the ranch, Philip is able to disregard the narrow creativity allowed by his kinship with the destructive dimension to capture the essence of the bright spirit of the imagination and meld it with earthly reality. Still, the majority of Philip's drawings reflect the destructive realm, although his awareness of change and flux in life is also stronger here than in Horizon:

> There were half a dozen [sketches] that he grumbled at and crumpled up and then smoothed out again. Just

> the hills, the driftwood logs, and stunted trees--but brooding over and pervading everything that same conviction of approaching dissolution that made it cold sometimes this morning out in the blazing sun. (100-1)

The Bentleys are even more aware of this need for change, for the dissolution of the present situation, once they return to Horizon. Mrs. Bentley, at least, seems ready to put this life to an end. One poppy has bloomed in her garden, while she was away. She breaks the pod and scatters the seeds. Philip sees this act as an acknowledgement of the futility of planting the garden, but she says the seeds are obsequies, the last rites for the dead. Mrs. Bentley buries the garden, a temporary relief from her hopelessness. Instead of planting the seeds again, she opts for a permanent escape. She has decided on the ranch to save a thousand dollars, buy a bookstore in the city and leave Horizon. Philip refuses to believe in this plan and is determined to continue life as before. However, since Mrs. Bentley has given up her temporary escape for a permanent one, Philip must relinquish his hold on Steve, who is also only a temporary release:

> There's been a tension between them all week. Philip is nervous and unsettled. He can't bear Steve to be alone with me. He watches to see whether he rides out to the country or stops in town. He doesn't say anything, does his best not to let either of us see, but his silence is an alert, vigilant one that Steve resents. They're both on edge. Each meal is a little harder than the one before it.
>
> There's the same tension in the heat tonight. It's been gathering and tightening now for weeks, and this has been the hottest, stillest day of all. It's like watching an inflated, ever-distending balloon, waiting with baited breath for it to burst. Even the thud of

> moth wings on the lamp--through the dense, clotted heat tonight it's like a drum. (114)

When Steve is finally taken from them, Philip attempts to mourn his loss silently and alone. However, the wind prevents him from continuing as in the past. As if an omen, the wind drives Philip and his wife together. Mrs. Bentley, not Steve, can provide the change Philip seeks:

> A wind sprang up first, whirling the curtains and rocking the pictures till I could run and shut the windows. Then there was such an ear-splitting clap of thunder that it seemed for a minute the roof was coming down, and in a fright I burst into Philip's study.
>
> He let me huddle against him a minute, then gave a shaky laugh and said that rain was such an event we had better go and watch it. (117)

Philip continues to resist wind-brought change when he substitutes Judith as his Pegasus in Steve's place. Judith has left the safety of her parents' farm to make her fortune in the city. Although she has not been unsuccessful, she has answered the challenge and accepted the danger of pursuing a dream. Philip, who leaves the room when Mrs. Bentley plays the piano, is affected by Judith's voice, responding to the quality in her voice produced by her determination to escape Horizon and explore life's possibilities. He attempts to draw Judith's portrait, but she is wraith-like, not of this world, and he is unable to capture her essence:

> It's Judith tonight he's drawing. Or rather, trying to draw, for the swift whiteness of her face eludes him. The floor is littered with torn-up, crumpled sketches. He's out of himself, wrestling. There's a formidable wrinkle across his forehead, and in his eyes tense moments of immobile glare. (24)

The "swift whiteness" of Judith's face allies her with the illumination of the dimension of the imagination. As a result, she is able to outsing the wind because she has maintained the determination and purity of purpose necessary to attain her dream:

> The wind was too strong for Philip or the choir, but Judith scaled it when she sang alone again before the closing hymn.
> The rest of us, I think, were vaguely and secretly a little afraid. The strum and whimper were wearing on our nerves. But Judith seemed to respond to it, ride up with it, feel it the way a singer feels an orchestra. There was something feral in her voice, that even the pace and staidness of her hymn could not restrain. (38)

For Judith, the wind stimulates her creative power as it inspired Harlequin on Main Street. The horse's flight is held earthbound by his rider, but Judith "ride[s] up with" (38) the wind to the dimension of creation.

Judith is not, like Steve before her, a permanent inspiration for Philip's art. After their affair, his sketches are not infused with the elements of the light-filled dimension: "He's drawing again, another little Main Street, bleaker, older, lonelier than ever." (127) Although he has drawn

> . . . a string of galloping broncos, done with such a light, deft touch that you can feel space and air and freedom, and hear the ring of their hooves, (128)

he is uninterested in completing it. Philip is "back now exactly where he was before Steve came." (132) Mrs. Bentley's position seems once again secure.

Although she is extremely upset by Philip's affair

with Judith, Mrs. Bentley recognizes, as she listens to the wind, that this is a possible turning point in her life:

> There's a high wind, and the rain beats down in hissing scuds against the windows. Like one of the clinks of drip from the ceiling into the pail, as sudden and clear and cold and meaningless, it comes into my mind that what has happened is adultery--that he's been unfaithful to me, that I have a right now to be free. (123-24)

Her choice is easy: she will continue to save the thousand dollars to leave Horizon, to write the letters Philip will no longer write to the other parishes, and to explain Judith and Philip's affair as another proof of Philip's struggling artistic spirit:

> [S]he was there, that was all. I know I'm right. The man I see in the pulpit every Sunday isn't Philip. Not the real Philip. However staidly and prosily he lives he's still the artist. He's racked still with the passion of the artist, for seeking, creating, adventuring. (126)

This potentially devastating event has had the positive effect of forcing Mrs. Bentley to look at her part in preventing change in their lives:

> Comfort and routine were the last things he needed. Instead he ought to have been out mingling with his own kind. He ought to have whetted himself against them, then gone off to fight it out alone. He ought to have had the opportunity to live, to be reckless, spendthrift, bawdy, anything but what he is, what I've made him. (103)

Her new role in Philip's life will be to undo, to some extent, the damage she has done, by getting him out of Horizon:

> It doesn't follow that the sensitive qualities that make an artist are accompanied by the unflinching, stubborn ones that make a man of action and success. (103)

Her resolve to save enough money to leave Horizon is renewed by a potentially destructive force, making Judith an ally of the wind at the same time that her angelic face allies her with the opposite force.

Mrs. Bentley is again pushed toward change during a walk alone on the prairie. This is the domain of the wind which has shown her the direction of escape before. She is back at centre stage, ready for a message from this activating force:

> The stars looked bright and close, like pictures you see of tropical stars, yet the sky itself was cold and northern. Everything seemed aware of me. Usually when a moonlit winter night is aware of you it's a bitter, implacable awareness, but tonight it was only curious and wondering. It gave me a lost elemental feeling, as if I were the first of my kind ever to venture there. (148)

On this night, both mysteries of life exist together, the bright, warm tropics of the imagination and the dark, cold arctic of destruction. This night, an image of completeness, is also a time for new beginning; Mrs. Bentley sees herself at an undiscovered frontier. She will embark on an enterprise which she has not attempted before. An image like an omen links her with El Greco, their pampered wolfhound, and his escape to the life in which he belonged. His predatory determination, necessary to his escape, will encourage Mrs. Bentley:

> . . . I perched for a few minutes on a fence post that stood up about a foot above the snow. I sat so still that a rabbit sprinted past not twenty feet in front of me, and a minute later, right at my feet,

> there was the breathlike shadow of a pursuing owl. I had been climbing a little all the time I walked, so that I could see the dark straggle of Horizon now below me like an island in the snow. A rocky treacherous island, I told myself, that had to have five lighthouses. (148)

In this moment of heightened awareness, because she is above the town, Mrs. Bentley, like El Greco, is ready to pursue her dream of leaving Horizon with predatory determination, even though the outcome of her decision is unknown and uncertain:

> It's getting to be an obsession with me, this thousand dollars that I'm trying to save, but at least it steadies a little, gives me focus and direction. It's like being lost, and coming on an old wagon trail. You don't know where it leads, how long or why it's been abandoned, but at least it's a trail. (151)

The activating effect of the wind temporarily ceases when Mrs. Bentley learns that Judith is pregnant. She feels very keenly the injustice of Philip's hope for a son coming true only to exclude her. The intense cold invades the house despite her efforts against it, as in "September Snow" and "The Painted Door," reflecting her inability to deal with the threat of Judith and the baby to destroy her and Philip's escape:

> And week after week, without respite, it keeps cold. Even the sun seems cold, frost in its glitter instead of warmth. I wad up all the windows, hang coats and blankets round the doors, and still the drafts creep in. We have to keep such fires on in the heater that the ashpan's running over twice a day. After supper to save a little I let the fire go out, and in the morning even after Philip has it going again, I put on a pair of woolen gloves to handle the breakfast things. You see frost glistening everywhere on pans and tins, and if I forget to bring in the water pail at night it's frozen solid to the bottom. (150)

Philip also identifies with the intense cold, as his sketches show:

> [Y]esterday he saw two horses frozen on their feet. They had drifted against a fence and perished there, too spent to turn again and face the wind.
>
> Last night he made a sketch of them, and today I persuaded him to try it again in oils. The light went before he could finish, even working out here in the living room, but he's doing a good job. The way the poor brutes stand with their hindquarters huddled up and their heads thrust over the wire, the tug and swirl of the blizzard, the fence lost in it, only a post or two away--a good job, if it's good in a picture to make you feel terror and pity and desolation. (153)

Philip is like these horses, frozen, inactive and dead to the effects of the creative spirit.

Steve, Judith and the ranch have been only temporary relief from the soul-destroying force created by his entrapment in the church. However, the flashes of hope inspired by these temporary escapes encourage Mrs. Bentley that her decision to seek permanent change is correct:

> All he needed was something to live for, something to waken and challenge him. Then it would be as before. He would want to paint again.
>
> Steve, I remembered, had nearly brought him back. There were days when he seemed to rouse and shake himself, when his head was high, and his step forthright. I had to ask myself what he might do if it were a son of his own.
>
> Because I still believe in him. I still believe that he's finer and stronger and truer than the run of men. I think for his son's sake he will be worthy of himself. (155)

At risk to her own self-respect, she suggests that they adopt Judith's baby. Philip is immediately receptive to the idea, but his enthusiasm, naturally, has the opposite effect on his wife:

> It hurts, of course, seeing the change, and knowing the reason, but it's no use mooning over that. After all that's what I did it for, to make him change. I should be satisfied. (157)

Finally, Philip takes the initiative to change his situation. He writes to the city to find a bookstore for them to buy and makes payment agreements with his past parishes. Both finally look to the future, rather than dwell on the stifling routine of the present.

Mrs. Bentley now takes stock of her life. She sees it as a rushing wind leaving her behind:

> I stood against the south wall of the elevator, letting the wind nail me there. It was dark, deep wind; like a great blind tide it poured to the north again. The earth where I stood was like a solitary rock in it. I cowered with a sense of being unheeded, abandoned.
>
> I've felt that way so many times in a wind, that it's rushing past me, away from me, that it's leaving me lost and isolated. Back at my table staring into the lamp I think how the winds and tides of life have left me just the same, poured over me, round me, swept north, south, then back again. And I think of Paul, and wonder might it have been different if we had known each other earlier. Then the currents, might have taken and fulfilled me. I might not still be nailed by them against a heedless wall. (159-60)

The dominant feature of this wind is its vitality and motion. She has remained stationary and unfulfilled amid the movement and change of wind-stimulated life. However, she has, in her encounters with the wind, taken on some of its intensity and moved closer to the day of escape from the stagnant, unchanging environment of Main Street past and present. Motivated by the relentless wind, Mrs. Bentley has taken control and found release from a life of hopelessness. The day Philip returns from the city, the wind blows down Horizon's false fronts and

the final barrier preventing a change in the Bentleys' marriage is also destroyed. Philip finally confronts his wife with his suspicions about her relationship with Paul, and she finally tells him that she knows the baby is his. Having faced the truth, she is strangely afraid and flees from the house up the railway tracks. However, the sight of a railwayman's lamp blown out by the wind sends her back to the house, to Philip and the baby. Formerly, she had passively watched her kitchen lamp burn down unable and unwilling to act to change the darkness which overwhelmed her life. Now her escape is secure; Philip's future is hopeful and the brightly burning lamp must become the dominant symbol of her life. She returns home to keep the light of hope alive.

Mrs. Bentley plans to name the baby Philip, a name which means "lover of horses." (162) Philip comments, "Two of us in the same house you'll get mixed up. Sometimes you won't know which of us is which." (165) Philip is a lover of horses because of his artistic ability and his connection with the horse as the spirit of the imagination. His son will also be a lover of horses because his future will be a freer one with a better opportunity for fulfilment than his father had. Mrs. Bentley is also free to begin again. She senses that a cycle, one of the rhythms she felt in her life, is ending:

> . . . I keep thinking what an eventful year it's been, what a wide wheel it's run.
>
> We were hanging out our shingle that night, and now we're taking it in. For a few minutes after church tonight I sat talking to Philip about it, staring at the lamp and in the pauses trying to grasp how much

the change is going to mean. . . . (164)

As For Me and My House ends on a note of optimism and hope as do The Well and Whir of Gold. The main characters in these novels overcome the circumstances life has placed before them with their own, or in Philip's case, his wife's determination and stubbornness that their struggle with life should have a reward or, at least, a period of ease from the struggle. Here, the novels differ from the stories about farm reality where labour is never rewarded. The next story to be discussed, "The Runaway," and the novel, Sawbones Memorial, deal with the problem of justice and emphasize the struggle with life and the importance of acquitting oneself well through love and compassion for others.

Chapter 3

Notes

[1]Lorraine McMullen, Sinclair Ross (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 88.

[2]Sinclair Ross, The Well (Toronto: MacMillan, 1958), p. 13. Subsequent page references to this novel appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[3]Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 10.

[4]McMullen, p. 91.

[5]McMullen, p. 93.

[6]Sinclair Ross, Whir of Gold (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 126. Subsequent page references to this novel appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[7]McMullen, p. 109.

[8]McMullen, p. 105.

[9]McMullen, p. 109.

[10]McMullen, p. 117.

[11]Sinclair Ross, As For Me and My House (1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. 33. Subsequent page references to this novel appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[12]Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," Canadian Literature, No. 47 (Winter 1971), p. 62.

[13]Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 8.

[14]McMullen, p. 67.

[15]McMullen, p. 68.

Conclusion

One apparently unanswerable question is asked by all of Ross's characters, children, adults and artists alike: why is beauty in life so seldom visible while ugliness and the signs of death are everywhere? Even in the stories about children's flights of imagination, the beautiful world of the imaginative dimension clashes with the dominant world of disenchanting reality. In the adult stories, where the childhood light-filled dimension is reduced to the hope for a good crop, farmers and their families struggle against the malicious, destructive force, the wind, which threatens and usually succeeds in destroying their hope for the future. The artists, who seek the dimension of the imagination as the children do in the stories of childhood flights of imagination, suffer disappointment and disillusionment in their failure to reach their dreams of becoming artists. Hardship, disappointment and despair become the dominant characteristics of life. None of the children can maintain their flights of imagination, nor can they communicate their new awareness to adults. None of the farmers ever harvest the crop which makes their dreams for the future come true. Even the artists do not have their dreams fulfilled. In all cases, for both adults and children, the continued conflict between the dimension of the imagination and the dimension of reality, between hope for the future and

despair in the present means, essentially, that the most any of them can hope for is another chance to renew pursuit of their dreams. If constant struggle for scant and fading hope against a destructive, soul-destroying force is the pattern of life for Ross's characters, what is the reward for this struggle except continued hardship for the farmers and disappointment and frustration for the artists?

In "The Runaway," a good man is finally rewarded for his righteousness in a life of struggle. For the first and only time in Ross's work, the creative side of life, symbolized by the horse, triumphs over destruction. As a result, if despair, darkness and frustration mark the short stories where the destructive dimension dominates, the elements of the dimension of the imagination, light, happiness and hope, should dominate here. When the beauty of the creative realm flashes through the dominant reality of ugliness and ruin in the stories of farm reality, the positive, hopeful aspects of life are recalled and reinforced amid the destruction. However, the sustained creative dimension in "The Runaway" lacks both the stunning brilliance and perfect beauty of the intermittent flashes of the imaginative dimension and the joy and hopefulness which accompanies flights of the imagination. In addition, because his reward is gained through the punishment of guilty and innocent alike, the good man has difficulty accepting such judgment as affirmation of his righteousness and reward for his perseverance. The boundary between good

and evil is not so easily drawn, and the ability of good to become evil, of the triumph of the creative dimension to become destructive, emphasizes the fallacy of man's attempt to separate the two sides of the mystery of life. The good man, finally in possession of his beautiful horses, embodiments of the spirit of the imagination, is potentially a minion of the spirit of destruction. His triumph over their evil, previous owner becomes a tainted, distasteful reward.

In "The Runaway," Luke Taylor has prospered and gained material wealth at the expense of his honest neighbours. Despite his dishonesty, he is the owner of horses which rival Pegasus in their spirit and beauty:

> [A]ll, whatever their breed, possessed a flawless beauty, a radiance of pride and spirit, that quickened the pulse and brought a spark of wonder to the dullest eye. When they passed you turned from what you were doing and stood motionless, transfixed. When you met them on the road you instinctively gave them the right of way. And it didn't wear off. The hundredth time was no different from the first.[1]

The narrator's father, a practical farmer attracted by the imaginative spirit they share with horses like Isabel, rather impractically trades four steers for two of these beautiful horses. The horses transport the narrator's parents out of their unrewarded life to the happier past by the infusion of beauty into their lives:

> . . . I understood why they didn't want me with them. My father, driving up to the door with a reckless flourish of the whip, was so jaunty and important, and above the pebbly whirl of wheels as the Diamonds plunged away there was such a girlish peal of laughter from my mother! They were young again. My father had

> a team of Diamonds, and my mother had something that his envious passion for them had taken from her twenty years ago. Walking over to the potato patch I realized that they couldn't possibly have taken me with them. Today's events, properly understood, were all before my time. (86)

These horses should embody the creative spirit of the imagination, which brings this dream from the past into the present because the horse is a creature of warmth and beauty, but, like the snow-horses in "The Painted Door," under the influence of the wind, the symbol becomes one of violence and destruction. In Taylor's possession, the Diamonds' beauty has been twisted from a life-giving force to a humiliating and destructive spirit: the horses are balky. The parents are humiliated when they reach for joy and freedom, re-affirming the general feeling among Ross's farmers that life holds no justice, no reward for faith and honesty:

> For years he [the narrator's father] had been weakened and confused by a conflict, on the one hand resentment at what Luke had done and got away with, on the other sincere convictions imposing patience and restraint: but through it all he had been sustained by the belief that scores were being kept, and that he would live to see a Day of Reckoning. Now, though, he wasn't sure. You could see in his glance and frown that he was beginning to wonder which he really was: the upright, God-fearing man that he had always believed himself to be, or a simple, credulous dupe. (88)

When the Diamonds balk a second time, not only is the father's faith disparaged, but he becomes like Taylor: "the contagion had spread . . . his real nature, too, was paralysed and darkened." (93) He acts on Taylor's advice to light an actual fire under the horses to make them start.

This degradation of character should cancel the father's right to reward, but instead he sets in motion the events which prove to be Taylor's retribution. The straw on the hay rack ignites from the fire lit beneath the horses and, terrified, they bolt for home, their former home, Taylor's farm. The animals are not spirits of the imagination, but spirits of destruction. Their flight is to a fiery hell, not to the creative divinity:

> [T]he Diamonds were going home. Terror in their hearts, hitched to a load of fire. Through the clatter of wheels their hoof-beats sounded sharp and rhythmic like an urgent drum. Telephone poles leaped up startled and pale as we tore along, and an instant later flicked out again into the dark. (94)

The Diamonds carry the fire to the open loft of Taylor's barn, which burns "as if blown . . . by a giant forge," (96) preparing for wicked Taylor's arrival:

> The same moment that he disappeared [into the barn] the floor of the loft collapsed. It was as if when running through the door he had sprung a trap, the way the great, billowy masses of burning hay plunged down behind him. There were tons and tons of it. The air caught it as it fell, and it blazed up throbbing like a furnace. (97)

For the narrator's mother, justice is done by Taylor's death; the forces of destruction, to her mind, are destroyed and good triumphs. The father, mindful that Taylor's beautiful horses also died in the blaze, is not so sure:

> There was a troubled, old look in his eyes, and I knew that for him it was not so simple to rule off a man's account and show it balanced. . . . What kind of reckoning was it that exacted life and innocence for an old man's petty greed? Why, if it was retribution, had it struck so clumsily? (97-98)

The father's questions remain unanswered, and his victory, taken at the price of innocence and beauty, is troublesome. However, the thought of the foals which the last two Diamonds will provide softens his confusion. Even here his compensation is hollow because the Diamonds have been changed in the absence of evil:

> [A]t the first click of the reins they trotted off obediently. Obediently and dully, like a team of reliable old ploughhorses. Riding along beside them, listening to the soft creak and jingle of the harness, I had the feeling that we, too had lost our Diamonds. (97)

In the victory over wicked Taylor, the father has been robbed of the spirit of beauty and imagination, a much more valuable possession than justice. As a result, any justice in Taylor's death comes from human interpretation of the destructive force coinciding with the events of his death.

This story does not answer why beauty is a fleeting quality of life and destruction is a permanent one, but it does suggest that they co-exist. Beauty in association with evil is at its most dazzling. For example, as Isabel's beauty comes from a smouldering inner essence which is tainted with evil, Taylor's Diamonds are most spirited under his control and influence. Also evident, however, is the potential for good to become evil, and destructive to the imagination. At the end of "The Runaway," after contemplating the dubious justice given Luke Taylor, this farmer shows he has the potential to become as prideful and greedy as Taylor has been:

> 'But you'll raise colts,' my mother said quickly . . . 'and there'll be nothing wrong with them. Five or six years--why, you'll have a stableful.' [M]y mother's words had caught. Even as he spoke his face was brightening, and it was plain that he too, now, was thinking of the colts. (98)

If this man is to become another Luke Taylor, then Taylor's retribution is meaningless since it punishes one man only to produce another just like him. Even if this farmer does not become greedy like Taylor, there is still the problem of the innocent, beautiful horses being destroyed along with the guilty man. Ultimately, there is no answer here to why beauty flashes briefly in the dominant destructive reality. Since nothing man can do will change this pattern to let goodness, life, fulfilment and happiness dominate, the idea of reward and justice cannot apply. Only in human relationships does the dimension of the imagination appear in reality for Ross's characters. This is the dominant theme of Sawbones Memorial. Man must make his own justice, a force which is allied with the imaginative side of life.

Sawbones Memorial is an account of Doc Hunter's combined birthday-farewell party held in the newly-built hospital. After forty-five years as doctor to the inhabitants of Upward, on his seventy-fifth birthday, Doc is retiring from his practice. By using characters' memories of the past, comments on the present and expressions of hope for the future in the narrative technique of this novel, Ross collects the elements which have been present in his work from the beginning of his literary career for a final statement of his vision of

life. The characters involved are the survivors of the lives of hardship and sacrifice described in As For Me and My House and the adult reality stories, such as "The Lamp at Noon," "Summer Thunder," and "A Field of Wheat": Sarah Gillespie and her mother, Ida Robinson, married farmers who stayed on the land through the drought; the bustling Ladies' Aid members, like those who sponsor the tea and the play in As For Me and My House, prepare the party here; Miss Carmichael, the school teacher, is an outsider as Paul Kirby is; the townspeople disparage Nick, as Horizon treated Steve; and Reverend and Mrs. Grimble are even more defeated than Philip and Mrs. Bentley. Yet these characters are as full of expectation for the future as those who hoped for a bumper crop to provide for their families during the Depression. Symbolically, these people came to the prairie in search of "more sky,"[2] the dimension where soaring dreams of hope, freedom and happiness come true. Unfortunately, they found only "hard, wasted lives." (61)

Many characters in Ross's short stories are cut off by total defeat and hopeless routine from the flow of hope and dreams to another generation. Hatty and Dan, in "No Other Way," live together in hatred and bitterness without hope. Ellen and Paul, rendered childless in "The Lamp at Noon," and Will, with Eleanor's death in "September Snow," are severed from continuation in the next generation. These characters, shown at the moment of their ruin, are naturally aware of the

destructive side of life. Those characters, such as Martha, in "A Field of Wheat," Ann, in "The Painted Door," Mrs. Bentley, Sonny and Chris in the novels, shown over a wider experience, are aware of the duality of life. In their experience, all see in their own lives the creative side of the mystery of life amid the destruction. Added to the pattern of defeated hope, which is so prominent in Ross's work, is a recognition and interpretation in Sawbones Memorial of the harder past producing the easier present:

> '. . . [T]he hospital's a milestone, we've turned a corner. How does he put it--'It's a red-letter day for Upward and it's also a very sad day. There's pride in our hearts, a sense of achievement, new faith in the future, and there's also the tug of memories--' And then something about a kind of loneliness, a hollow place, as we think of all we've lost, all the good, brave years that lie behind us.' (60)

Furthermore, this hope of renewal extends beyond one lifetime, as is usually not the case in the short stories and novels such as The Well and Whir of Gold. In Sawbones Memorial, the characters are aware of the cycle of continuing hope which the farmers in the reality stories were unable to see in their despair. Caroline Gillespie, for example, came to Upward full of hope about her future:

> '. . . You say I must have had courage but on the contrary I was afraid--of both Saskatchewan and myself. Terribly afraid. Would I ever be able to adjust to things? Would it be fair to Duncan to say yes and then fail? And at the same time I wanted so much to be a part of it. A big new country, a country of beginnings. I wanted so much to be a pioneer and do my share.' (28)

Caroline's dreams are, in effect, a continuation of Ida

Robinson's life:

> '. . . [Doc Hunter] and Grandmother Robinson--the stories [of your lives] began to haunt me, until suddenly one day it was clear, and I said to myself that's what I want too.' (28)

Caroline's dreams are postponed also, not by drought and depression, but by a life which is generally routine and reality-bound with little space for dreams and excitement:

> '. . . As to the brave new world I was looking for, the country of beginnings, of pioneers--well, last week it was my turn to invite the Ladies' Aid for their weekly meeting. . . .' (28)

Caroline compromises her dreams of making her pampered, "rather useless life" (28) meaningful and postpones them to her son's generation. Duncan and Caroline Gillespie will work to send their son to college to assure his future:

> 'Duncan didn't make it; he had the store and his mother and brother; and like all good fathers he now has plans and dreams for Robbie. To do what he couldn't do--and so I understand my role.' (29)

No one is more aware of this flow of dreams from one generation to the next than Doc Hunter. His own life has not been without personal disappointment and, like the citizens of Upward, he has had to live the life he has been given, not the life he would choose: "'. . . I've just been hanging on, sticking it out--same I suppose as most of us are doing.'" (16) However, Doc is also outside this sphere of experience. While he admires those who could take what life gave out, for example, Ida Robinson, who "came through with her head up, telling a joke on herself, ready for more," (30) he also does

what he can to off-set the power of the destructive side of life with compassion for those who are nearly defeated by the lack of hope in their lives. Since life and living "always just seemed to make sense," (127) he uses his role as doctor to provide renewed life for the dreams of others destroyed by the grinding reality of a life which leaves no hope for even postponed fulfillment.

In several instances during his career, Doc has been faced with the opportunity of playing God in order to sustain this flow of dreams, by providing his patients with a chance for a new beginning. By over-ruling society's justice, which would cut short the pursuit of dreams, he sustains the cycle of renewed hope, not only from generation to generation, but within an individual life. An overdose of morphine for a dying woman prevents her suffering and lifts the emotional and financial burden from her family, allowing them to continue to struggle for the elusive bumper crop:

> '. . . The hospital would have meant spinning it out, spinning out the pain too. They wouldn't have given her enough morphine--and a bill for him of maybe two or three hundred dollars. And that was part of the decision. He had enough on his hands--. . .' (117)

He gives a man who stabbed his neighbour with a pitchfork for attempting to rape his daughter a chance to continue his life by falsifying the death certificate:

> '. . . The other neighbours weren't in danger--he wasn't the killer type--and he had his family. Early August, just about time to cut the crop--' (118)

He gives a young woman an abortion, in defiance of society's

mores, to give her another chance at a full life. Her present situation is evidence to Doc that he was right:

> 'You should see her now--big farm on the other side of Comet, four or five boys. The size of all outdoors--arms like hams--and at the time she looked so scared and wispy. Eyes bigger than all the rest of her. Misery piled on misery. . . .' (119)

Again, when a man who admits to committing incest comes to Doc for help, Doc's non-judgmental compassion re-inforces his connection with hope: he provides a second chance for those involved to embark on the search for fulfilment. He understands that life for these farm people is sacrifice to the land. In many cases, this struggle is enough. He helps to alleviate additional hardships to enable them to continue on the land in pursuit of hope for the future.

Not only does this doctor heal physical wounds, but mental, spiritual and emotional ones as well, by simply providing his patients with a new beginning, a chance to remain part of the cycle of constantly renewing hope. However, Doc's compassion and consideration for those who make mistakes which could destroy their happiness and haunt them all their lives have occasionally failed him. He doubts his judgment in refusing one woman an abortion:

> 'Well, if I hadn't got riled, I might have listened.'
> 'You mean there were special circumstances? Something over and above the usual story of innocence betrayed?'
> 'Special circumstances, Dan, can sometimes be just the thickness of the skin. The bossy tone that irritated me--if I'd listened I might have understood that hers was dangerously thin.'
> . . . . . .

> 'Yes, she suffered and eventually she cracked. And along the way she made others suffer too.' (121-22)

However, this decision was two-edged, with a bright side as well:

> 'Well, the child was born. . . . Life for him hasn't been a bed of roses either. You could make a case easy enough that it would have been better, and yet I'm sort of glad he's around.' (122)

This child is Benny Fox, who seeks fulfilment in the dimension of the imagination through his music. Again, Doc's decision places him on the side of continued hope, with the vital, continuous flow of dreams toward fulfilment. In a general sense, Doc is on the side of life and continuance. For the people he helps, he is like a Pegasus, lifting them out of the realm of hopelessness and destruction, enabling them to glimpse life's beauty and promise.

The patients to whom Doc Hunter has given a second chance and those he has refused to help are confronted with the duality of life. In Ross's work, characters who experience both sides of the mystery of life reach a mature awareness of the meaning of their own lives. For example, Martha, in "A Field of Wheat," even though the wheat is destroyed, can continue to pursue the dream of reward from the land because she knows that beauty and peace exist in her love for her husband. Mrs. Bentley's life is renewed when she actively seeks the creative environment which Philip needs in <u>As For Me and My House</u>. Chris, in <u>The Well</u>, sees the potential of life when he confronts this duality and sides with the

dimension of light and truth. When Sonny, in Whir of Gold, releases his grip on the world of the imagination to accept responsibility for a life based in earth-bound reality, his chances of attaining his goal of being a musician increase. Only characters who are overwhelmed by one half of the mystery of life, either the destructive side, as in the farm reality stories, or the imaginative side, as in the childhood stories, are destined to be defeated by life.

Even Doc Hunter, who functions as a Pegasus for some of his patients, is not immune from the cycle of defeated hope which cuts some of Ross's characters out of the flow of dreams from generation to generation. Doc's pride, as with farmers such as Will, in "September Snow," Paul, in "The Lamp at Noon," and George, in "Nell," who can not acknowledge another's distress with compassion, has prevented him from recognizing the potential for suffering, which he is usually willing to avert, in a personal instance. He has treated his frigid wife cruelly, without compassion. Instead of the fresh beginning he has given some of his patients, Edith receives only perpetual condemnation:

> [I]f that's how it is then there are other rooms, yes, other bodies too, you'll see, affronted dignity tight like a towel around my loins . . . Night of the moon, the night I saw, and not another word until the day she died, just the weather and the roast, if there are any calls you can tell them I'll be back by three. . . (115)

Although Doc's desire for a child is not as detailed in Sawbones Memorial as Philip's is in As For Me and My House, a

son is obviously Doc's dream for the future. Edith's rejection of him destroys this hope until Anna, the scorned Ukrainian washer-woman, gives his dream a second chance. As his son's mother, she is Doc's Pegasus, providing him with the dream to make his life meaningful:

> Like a horse, a Doukhobor, you could have hitched her up and plowed. . . . Head up and striding--out of my way! Blue eyes--. . .--very strong eyes, hard, white-blue, looking you over like a bird. Nick had them too, she passed them on. (139)

Like the flicker in Whir of Gold, Sonny's motivating glimpse of beauty, Anna provides Doc with the flash of hope, the possibility of flight above the disappointment of his marriage, a possibility which will keep his dream alive. As Anna's eyes are focused firmly on her goal, Doc watches Nick growing up and sees the promise of a bright hopeful future in his son: "Ah-ha, my Cossack boy, just wait--you'll have your horse, you'll ride the steppes one day!" (141) He provides the opportunity for Nick to escape the oppressive atmosphere of Upward so that his future too is hopeful. Now Doc arranges the last step in his nurturing of Nick, a return to Upward for

> Four or five years, just long enough to lay the ghosts, see them for what they are, at times perhaps even pity them, and then, all the little pricks and stings forgotten, healed. . . (143)

As Doc has been a soul-sustaining force for others who have lost hope, Anna and Nick do as much for Doc, providing his life also with continuance for another generation.

During his years as doctor to Upward, and in view of

the events of his own life, Doc has had time to consider and form his own philosophy of life. Not surprisingly, his observations are compatible with the overall pattern of life exhibited in Ross's novels and short stories. Doc comes to his conclusions about reality during his calls to country sickbeds in his horse-drawn carriage. Several characters in the novel mention Doc's fondness for his horses and, apparently, rides with horses enabled him to see above earthly reality and put together a view of the overall pattern of man's existence.

Reverend Grimble asks Doc "'. . . when you look at life and death rationally, what do you make of them?'" (127) Doc is at first reluctant to speak, as if he has not considered such a question, but in fact he does have a very full, considered understanding of life. Both he and the minister agree that life is important, but from this base their ideas diverge. Grimble finds meaning in a life which is guided and controlled by an Intelligence with a plan for mankind. For Doc, life has significance apart from that Intelligence, "'[t]he value and importance we give it. . . .'" (128) Grimble sees a contradiction in Doc's view of the Intelligence because he cannot separate the Intelligence from the plan. Doc recognizes the signs of the Intelligence, but does not take them as proof of the existence of a plan:

> '. . . What I'm trying to say is there seems so much intelligence--the evidence is everywhere--and at the same time such a lack of it. So many miracles--' (128)

Doc sees both halves of the whole, the miracles and the lack of them, the Intelligence and creation, and the waste and destruction. He is also bothered by the lack of direction and progress or improvement in the miracles: "'Ourselves, for instance. And where are we off to?'" (129) Grimble sees progress from primitive to civilized man:

> 'And yet the horrors have taught us something. We do have the capacity to learn, to improve. And after all, humanity is greater than a handful of butchers or the miseries and exigencies of a war.' (129)

Doc has a more expansive view of mankind, which encompasses more than the material progress of a man's lifetime:

> 'What about a handful of saints? Doesn't humanity do a pretty good job of holding its own against them too? Taking the long view, after two thousand years--' (129)

The farmers who watched their wheat grow only to be burned by the sun or blown and destroyed by wind or hail would agree with Doc's understanding of life. The children whose dreams of the future are belittled and pushed aside by the realities of farm life feel this lack of progress in their lives. The artists and musicians in Whir of Gold, As For Me and My House and Sawbones Memorial are also at the mercy of this continuing aimlessness. Dreams are formulated only to be dashed. Each group of characters strives to see its part of the dimension of the imagination, connected with creation, the saints Doc speaks of, and progress. The children have exciting dreams for their lives, the farmers have hopes of a good harvest and the artists hope to recreate in their art

the pure dimension of beauty. The horse is the symbol of this dimension and the earthly inspiration to reach for this light-filled, creative, life-sustaining side of life. However, in none of Ross's works do these dreams come true. The wind is the symbol of this dimension of reality. As the wind destroys the farmer's crop and his family's hope for the future, a similar force dries up the dreams of children and artists. However, life can never be completely creative and imaginative or destructive and reality-bound:

> '. . . The Great Mother and the Evil Mother, maybe one and the same, creating life only to turn and destroy it. . . . As if the potter got his wheel going and then couldn't stop it--and not knowing what to do with all the jugs and bottles piling up, no storage space, no markets, had to rig up another machine to grind them into dust again.' (130)

This is Doc's metaphor to explain why life continues without change or progression, to explain the miracles and beauty and the lack of miracles and destruction.

Although to Grimble Doc's view of life is mechanical and without hope, Doc is encouraged that the world might be an experiment because there is room for completion and improvement:

> '. . . [N]othing working for us but a few traces of intelligence, maybe a little dust and sweat rubbed off from the original contact. But just supposing in spite of everything we could hang on a while, learn to use the intelligence, spread it round--'
> . . . . . .
> 'No help and no interference either. Strictly on our own--sink or swim in our infested, mud-bottomed little Here and Now. The odds, I suppose, not very good, but still you never know. . . . And for that matter it might even be part of the experiment--' (132)

These "traces of intelligence" are what mankind has for a weapon against the Great Mother-Evil Mother force which both creates and destroys. This intelligence, which will allow mankind to survive in the "Here and Now", provides hope in a different form for each group of Ross's characters. For the children, the intelligence gives them hope that they can "swim" above reality as in the flights of imagination to relieve the harshness of reality. For the farmers, the intelligence helps them accept the creative-destructive cycle of their lives so that they can re-focus their awareness away from the elusive dream of the wheat toward compassion and concern for their families, which will make the present bearable. From this base of human love, the farm families find the strength to pursue anew the dream of the future. For the artist, the "traces of intelligence" supply the sense of control that Ross's artists need to pursue their goals of creativity against the destructive counterforce of reality. In all cases, this intelligence would balance the destructive wind-forces which threaten the peace and beauty of the horse symbol.

Doc answers the unspoken question: why is beauty, happiness and creativity momentary and so often dominated by ugliness, hardship and destruction? Because Doc believes life is a miracle, he blames man for further submerging what beauty life offers between periods of destruction, for ruining the miracle of life:

> '. . . [O]ne of the things I'll remember, and will probably be puzzling over as long as I'm able to puzzle, is the damfool way you keep spoiling life for yourselves, bringing out the worst in one another. There's so much good here, and you keep throwing it away. . . .' (134)

The universal weapon that mankind has against the Great Mother-Evil Mother cycle, which would prolong the periods of beauty, is compassion:

> '[O]ne of the things that has always impressed me is the enormous amount of sympathy and goodwill that springs up the moment someone is in trouble. . . . But then the trouble passes, . . . and this little burst of spontaneous kindness, instead of helping to establish new relationships, make the town an easier, happier place to live in, sputters out in the old bitterness and spite. . . . Your lives are yours, it's all behind me now, but I can't help saying what a pity, what a waste. . . .' (134-35)

In Sawbones Memorial, then, the threads of image and symbol, which recur throughout Ross's work, are woven into the complete fabric of his perception of life. The horse as symbol of the dimension of the imagination and the wind as symbol of the realm of destruction expand and fuse into the image of the creative and destructive potter found in this novel. In this single image, Ross crystallizes his vision of the duality of life, in which creativity and destruction are inextricably linked. Although the destructive surface of life is dominant, the potential for creativity, with man's allegiance to love and compassion, is equally strong. This perception is suggested in much of Ross's earlier work; however, in Sawbones Memorial this vision is widened in scope to surpass the hopes and disappointments of an individual's

life. The individual struggle and search for meaning amid the shifting dominance of destruction and creativity are placed within the larger context of the generations of mankind who repeat the cycle of defeated hope/renewed hope.

Doc Hunter, who speaks for Ross in this final novel, uses a two-fold image to express the duality of life. Initially, he expresses the two-sidedness in a primitive earthy image--"The Great Mother and the Evil Mother"--to establish a link with the birth and life, suffering and death experienced by humanity. In the subsequent, and principal, image the idea is more pristine and abstract. The duality of life is like a potter who finds no market for his creations and must grind them to dust again, in order to continue creating. The creation, by this potter, of beautiful jars and pots corresponds to the more vital image of the benevolent Mother, while the potter who reduces his creations to dust corresponds to the malevolent Mother. However, also a vital part of this potter image is the understanding that from the dust of the ruined pottery, beautiful and perfect vessels can again be moulded by the potter: "[c]reation one day, destruction the next." (130)

Ross uses the potter image only once in the course of his writing career, in Sawbones Memorial. Most often the duality of life is captured in the shifting pattern of horse and wind imagery. The horse symbolizes the segment of life in which the potter designs, forms, glazes and fires his creations.

His completed piece is like a Pegasus-inspired flight into the creative dimension and the consequent sharing of the expanded awareness received there in art and music. In stories such as "A Day with Pegasus," "Circus in Town," and "Cornet at Night," children discover this creative world. Peter Parker's colt, Jennie's Billie, and Tommy Dickson's Rock transport them out of earthly reality into the dimension of light, perfection, beauty and hope, where the potter does his creative work. The wind symbolizes life at another stage of the potter's work. Just as the potter grinds his creations back to dust, the wind transforms rich crop land into scourged deserts and human lives are lived in the sterility and ruin of the dust pile in the potter's work shop. The characters in stories such as "The Lamp at Noon," "September Snow," "No Other Way," and "Nell" are aware only of the death-ridden, destructive side of life, where the potter's beautiful, useful vessels are mere dust. However, contrary to the image of the potter in which creation and destruction are indissolubly linked, the children, whose lives are dominated by the imaginative dimension, and the farmers, who are oppressed by the dimension of destruction, are isolated at the poles of life's experience. The image of the potter creating and destroying to create again, as the metaphor of the duality of life, is not completely represented by such an isolated, separate view of horse and wind symbolism.

The interplay between the horse and wind images

illustrates the complexity of the duality of the mystery of life. Occasionally, one image takes on the characteristics of the other, blurring the lines of division between the two stages of the potter image. For example, the horse Isabel, in "The Outlaw," is not complete without the aura of evil and the potential for danger, usually associated with the creative spirit, which she embodies. Isabel becomes at once representative of two realities: creativity and destruction. The horses in "The Runaway," without association with the destructive elements of Luke Taylor's personality are reduced in beauty and spirit, characteristics associated with the dimension of the imagination. Isabel is also stimulated by winter blizzards and Tommy's horse Clipper, in "Cornet at Night," hears a wind "tanged with freedom and departure" (36) and longs for a ride with it. Also, in As For Me and My House, Paul Kirby's horse, Harlequin, symbol of the freedom and beauty of the imaginative dimension, is stimulated by the wind to become potentially destructive. Also in this novel, the wind, usually a depressive force, is Mrs. Bentley's motivator, becoming representative of the creative dimension. However, the most startling coalescence of images is found in "The Painted Door," where Ann watches the warmth and beauty of John's colt transformed before her eyes into a destructive, violent snow-horse. The horse image in "The Painted Door" vividly illustrates the closeness of the two elements forming the horse-wind duality and the potter image.

In the childhood stories and the adult reality stories, one side of the mystery of life is subordinate, causing the characters involved to have a one-sided, incomplete awareness of life. Such characters are familiar only with a portion of the potter's work cycle. In the childhood stories, flights to the world of the imagination dominate everyday reality, while the destructive power of the wind oppresses the imagination in the adult stories. Although the children in all of Ross's childhood stories are faced with the intrusion of destructive forces, to some degree, into their world of the imagination, only the children in "The Outlaw" and "One's a Heifer" are most powerfully confronted with the duality of the mystery of life. Even though one experience is exhilarating and the other is frightening, both characters become fully aware of both sides of life. As a result of their awareness of the interplay between destruction and creation, these children cannot be completely disillusioned when their imaginative world is shattered by destruction or naively hopeful when destruction is momentarily eclipsed by creativity. The reality of life is somewhere between these poles of awareness because destruction and creativity are part of the same whole.

Similarly, in the stories dealing with the realities of farm life during the drought the characters who can glimpse the opposite dimension are not plunged into despair, but maintain some hope for the future. Paul, in "The Lamp at Noon,"

Will, in "September Snow," and John, in "A Field of Wheat," turn to their horses for even the slightest inspiration to persist in the midst of dominant destruction. However, characters such as Martha, in "A Field of Wheat," Eleanor, in "Summer Thunder," Hatty, in "No Other Way," and Nell, in "Nell," find a purpose in life which enables them to continue to struggle, some with renewed hope, against the forces which threaten to grind them to dust. For these characters, their dedication to the relationships they have formed, the love and compassion they have for their husbands and families, round out the two-sidedness of life. This same weapon, "sympathy and goodwill" (135) and "spontaneous kindness," (135) is advocated by Doc Hunter in Sawbones Memorial to counterpoint the destructive side of life for renewed hope and continuance. The potter's wheel may turn out beauty and perfection more slowly, in that life awards only brief flashes of the dimension of the imagination, but, at the same time, the pots are also ground to dust less ruthlessly.

The potter image, of life created to be destroyed and created again, also informs Ross's novels. While the short stories tend to depict either creativity and flights with Pegasus or destruction and the scourge of the wind in dominance, the novels show a continuous interplay between the horse and wind symbols. For instance, Chris Rowe, in The Well, arrives on the prairie a product of Boyle Street and allied with destruction. In keeping with the potter image, he is

dust. In association with Larson and the horses, under the influence of the creative side of life, he is re-shaped, to become a product of the potter's wheel. Chris can be swept back into dust by his soul-destroying association with Sylvia, the wind force in his life, or he can respond with compassion for Larson, in light of his awareness of the duality of life, and transform destruction into renewal and continuance, as he does at the birth of Fanny's colt. His connection with the creativity of the horse symbol, because of this quality of compassion, means that the destructive forces are held in check and Chris's hopes for the future are not reduced to dust.

Ross's artists, Sonny McAlpine and Philip Bentley, are also subject to the potter. Sonny, the main character in Whir of Gold, is like a flawed piece of pottery which is constantly being reduced to dust to be re-moulded. As an artist, he repeatedly soars to the dimension of the imagination, but he childishly ignores the duality of life by refusing to temper imagination with the necessities of reality. As a result, he is thrown back to earthly reality where his hopes of becoming a musician are nearly destroyed. His dream must be constantly rejuvenated by the spirit of the imagination incarnate in Isabel. Sonny is finally salvaged from the dust of his defeat by a compassionate doctor who gives him renewed hope and another chance to attain his dream.

In As For Me and My House, Philip Bentley's spirit

has been neglected on the dust heap in the potter's workshop for so long that, aware only of such destruction, he creates in that dust. Philip's sketches and paintings are wind-swept and dust-filled landscapes mirroring his vision of the sterility and darkness of the dimension of destruction as fully as other artists portray the perfection and purity of the dimension of the imagination. Philip's life is devoid of the spirited Pegasus which would lift him out of the destructive realm for awareness of both halves of the mystery of life. Mrs. Bentley, herself a musician, remembers the opposite, creative side of life which Philip has forgotten. For her, the wind is the motivating Pegasus which inspires her to seek an environment in which Philip can discover the dimension of the imagination and reproduce it in his art. With awareness of the fluctuating influence of the horse and the wind, of the complete cycle of the potter's process, of creativity and destruction, Philip, like many of Ross's characters, is renewed to continue pursuit of his dreams.

Though suffering, destruction and unhappiness are common in Ross's stories and novels, actually very few of his characters--only Eleanor, in "September Snow," Ellen, in "The Lamp at Noon," and John, in "The Painted Door"--succumb to destruction. The others continue with some degree of hope, having attained some understanding of the duality of life and the need for compassion and understanding to offset destruction. Ross's characters never see their dreams

fulfilled; the most humanity can hope for is continuation. Ross's vision, which runs through the body of his work and culminates in Sawbones Memorial, shows that only by acknowledging the duality of the mystery of life and tempering the dominant destructive side with compassion can life continue. This duality of hope and despair, light and darkness, creativity and destruction, and life and death, symbolized by the horse and the wind, is fused in this final novel in the single image of the potter. Ross's vision of the human condition is not only two-sided, but cyclical and, therefore, ultimately hopeful as well. Doc Hunter can end his forty-five years in Upward knowing that the cycle, which encompasses the coalescing horse and wind forces, is beginning anew for another generation:

> 'It's all over and it's all beginning, there's nothing more required of you. April and the smell of April, just as it was all beginning that day too. . . .' (143)

Conclusion

Notes

[1]Sinclair Ross, "The Runaway," in The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 83. Subsequent page references to this story appear in parentheses following the quotation.

[2]Sinclair Ross, Sawbones Memorial (1974; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 60. Subsequent page references to this novel appear in parentheses following the quotation.

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