The Catholic Ethos in the Novels of John Buell

by

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ABSTRACT

A paradigm of transcendence pervades Buell's novels, imaginatively conceived from within a Catholic consciousness of God's grace in effecting redemption. Safeguarding the Real Presence from invidious sacrilege, Elizabeth Lucy in *The Pyx* achieves heroic sanctity, losing her life to gain glory as a martyr to her faith. The Eucharist also has centrality in the lives of Stan Hagen and Martin Lacey in *A Lot To Make Up For* as they share in the sacrificial oblation at mass. In *Four Days*, sacred love suffuses profane love, the sanctity of human love being yet another manifestation of God's presence in the world, only to be tragically subverted by deception and self-interest.

Buell's Catholic consciousness is also noticeably present in his thematic development of redemptive suffering. In *Playground*, the narrative reveals that suffering is itself the path to healing. The novel details Spence Morisons's suffering toward what he trusts will be his deliverance, his redemption taking the form of his conversion to a new self-realization about the nature of his humanity. In *The Shrewsdale Exit*, on the other hand, the need for conversion becomes apparent when Joe Hagen surrenders to a desire for murderous vengeance. A resolution is effected when Joe forsakes revenge, finding deliverance in the assurance that justice will prevail.
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Examining the relationship between faith and fiction can be as problematic as determining whether cultural formation occurs by nature or nurture. If explaining why faith contextualized in fiction is a question for the psychologist, detailing how faith functions in fiction is the proper purview of literary criticism. This study seeks to establish how identifiable features of Buell's Catholic faith are manifested in his novels. Overall, Buell's fiction demonstrates a preferential option for the poor in spirit, for the outcast, and for those relatively marginalized, such as the apostate, prostitute, alcoholic, occultist, homosexual, drug addict, renegade fugitive and even the compulsively efficient technocrat. For each, some form of redemption is accessible, either being saved through self-realization in order to achieve some perfectibility as a person or, in a distinctively Catholic manner, through the efficacy of regenerating sanctifying grace leading to reconciliation with others and with God. Buell's focus in his novels is upon the restoration of broken humanity. How this is represented in fiction from within the perspective of a Catholic consciousness is the subject of this paper.

In order to minimize clutter when documenting sources, the titles of Buell's novels have been shortened: *The Pyx = Pyx, Four Days = FD, The Shrewsdale Exit = SE, Playground = Plgd, and A Lot To Make Up For = Lot.*
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The Catholic Ethos in the Novels of John Buell

The Catholic Writer

In John Buell's novels, a Catholic perspective permeates the fiction, functioning as an ambient vision for the exercise of the writer's imagination. A lifelong Catholic, fully aware of and committed to the faith and tradition of the Church, Buell incorporates within his fiction a focus upon both the social and spiritual dimensions of Catholic thought and belief. Within the totality of this perspective, Buell's fiction directs attention to an examination of the moral crises affecting those who do not ordinarily live in conformity with the law nor necessarily within conventional codes of social propriety. Buell empathizes with those apparent losers in life who must struggle towards redemption while contending with the vicissitudes of a seemingly hostile world, employing a narrative perspective which permits the restoration of human dignity and a state of grace to those troubled, marginalized characters who are the principal figures in his fiction, an outlook which is at the same time at the core of the social gospel of his Church.

For Buell's fictional addicts, whores, delinquents, and other social outcasts, there is indeed much suffering. However, in his novels the operation of grace, frequently mediated through the Church, brings liberation to those who are receptive to its restorative power. This supernatural gift
results in growth in moral and spiritual perfection, exceeding even the degree to which a character grows by suffering or denying himself. Such suffering and self-renunciation are consistent themes in Buell's novels. But it is the revelation of eventual or ultimate freedom from personal or from social evils that imbues his novels with hope. Buell's achievement, then, has been to create an imaginative context in which the human struggle is portrayed in a context in which the controlling influence of the incarnational promise of redemption is paramount. At those points in his fiction when the fractured lives of his principal characters experience a mediating resolution to their suffering by means of sacramental grace, Buell's fiction becomes distinctively Catholic.

Buell's Catholic background has provided him with a spiritual locus that he has utilized as an integral part of his narratives. His personal experience within the Church has been wide-ranging, not only in his religious practice but also in his professional, cultural, and social life. Buell's upbringing in Montreal, where he was born July 31, 1927, provided both the cultural environment and the opportunities for Catholic formation which would continue to influence the values and attitudes of his maturity. Raised in a Catholic home, the son of an Anglophone father, Thomas Buell, and a Francophone mother, Antonia Durocher, Buell became fluently bilingual in English and French. Within the family household, he acquired the rudiments of his Catholic faith; on the other hand, he gained his first
insights into social and economic reality on the streets of East End Montreal.

In his youth he absorbed the habits and attitudes of his working class district where he grew up. While Buell disavows that his fiction incorporates any particular events of his childhood and youth, the social and economic milieu of his own childhood was later to provide him with a body of memorable impressions upon which he would later draw as a writer:

My own experience as a boy was in the East End of Montreal, the French Sector, which was not quite as economically depressed as St. Henri but quite similar. So that it was second nature for me to describe the atmosphere and places and people and the type of rip-off outlook that some of those kids would have. This was because I grew up in the East End and this was second nature with me....I was trying to describe the experience of this kind in *Four Days*... (Drolet, "Conversation" 64).

At times, he has said, he knew well enough the rough-and-tumble escapades of a venturesome youth. Yet even in these exploits he would find a redeeming quality in someone such as the neighborhood policeman. Years later, Buell recalled that

I must confess that, as a teenager on the verge of all kinds of trouble, one of the people with whom I made contact was a cop. This was very ironic because this particular friend of mine and I were planning to do
certain things that this cop would not have approved of. He kind of sensed that we were heading that way....and we'd talk with him and he'd talk to us, the way people imagine fathers talk to sons. (Drolet, "Conversation" 65).

The interest and care demonstrated by the police constable left a permanent impression upon Buell, so much so that the "friendly local cop" becomes a consistent figure in Buell's later fiction. Gilbert Drolet, for example, had occasion to point out to Buell that

There's Henderson in The Pyx, and the guys in Four Days and Sparrs in Shrewsdale. These people are very sympathetic, very understanding, perhaps too much so. You seem to have a soft spot in your heart for these people ("Conversation" 65).

If adverse social conditions have the effect of stultifying human growth in goodness, there are always those in the world, as Buell would later show in his fiction, whose compassion for the plight of others would exhibit goodness and be seen to assist in the possibility of redemption after sin and suffering.

As a Catholic raised in Montreal's East End, Buell was able both consciously and unconsciously to absorb throughout his formative years the distinctive practice of the Catholic faith as it was exercised in Quebec throughout the thirties and forties. The fact of Buell's upbringing in a predominantly Catholic milieu in Quebec never placed him in an adversarial
position where he had to be a defender of the faith. Unlike Flannery O'Connor, whose Catholicism in America's Bible Belt was anomalous, Buell came by his Catholic faith and tradition unimpeded by sectarian attacks on the faith. Moreover, unlike a number of English Catholic writers, of whom several brought writing by Catholics into the fore in the twentieth century, Buell never had to experience the critical decision of becoming a Catholic convert. For Buell a Catholic environment was normative in all aspects of life: religious catechesis, education, political values, justice, health care, and even one's vocation in life. Such a realization of the Catholic experience as very ordinary and usual appears to be a significant trait in Buell's religious formation, for an accustomed religiosity will later characterize the unabashed Catholicism of several of the central characters in his novels, his fiction presenting a Catholicism with which characters, sinful as they may be, are perfectly at ease.

The Catholic environment that was a part of Buell's experience in Montreal's East End gained an added dimension when he began his post-secondary schooling in the late 1940s at Loyola College, then operated by the Jesuits, and later to be merged with Sir George Williams College as a part of Concordia University. Buell's writing career began at the same time, not however as a novelist but as a writer for Sunday night radio 

...turning out a dozen minor radio dramas that were performed on local radio station CJAD. Buell, who was
not paid for his radio work, called the writing of the radio plays "my apprenticeship" (Dunn 110).

He soon developed what was to become an abiding interest in the theatre, initially, as he has explained, as a writer and performer:

...in those radio days I did the odd one-act theatrical play largely under college auspices. Two of them won festivals...but I felt I didn’t want to go into the business of being a full-scale playwright. I’d done summer stock theatre...but I realized that theatre [in the 50s] was slowly becoming a dead end (Garebian, "Religion" 70).

Upon his graduation from Loyola with a B.A. in 1950, he was immediately hired as an instructor in Loyola’s English department. With this assurance of some financial stability, Buell married Audrey Smith in 1952. In the ensuing years, their four children would be born in Montreal. But at the time of his marriage, when any future prospects in writing for the theatre appeared unpromising, Buell was enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Montreal where he received his M.A. in 1954, having completed a graduate thesis on Eugene O’Neill as an Artist. His interest in drama becoming more academic, Buell increasingly considered the novel as a more promising form for contemporary creative expression:

“This just happened. There was really no choice involved,” Buell commented in 1980. “The theater was
getting less pertinent. Radio had disappeared. So my writing was simply another way of telling stories” (Dunn 110).

He returned to the University of Montreal, completing the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in 1961, his research having been focused upon his doctoral thesis on *Form and Craft in Shakespeare*. One influential member of Buell’s thesis advisory committee was Gerald MacGuigan, S.J., chairman of the English department at Loyola College, whom Buell acknowledged in his thesis preface for a “spirit of inquiry I hope to have modestly imitated in these pages” (iii). MacGuigan remained a lifelong friend and mentor to Buell, a friendship recognized in the dedication of his second novel, *Four Days*.

At this time Buell was also involved with an activist Catholic group working out of Benedict Labre House in Montreal’s skid row. Under the patronage of the nineteenth-century beggar-pilgrim, St. Benedict Labre, this mission for the poor, the marginalized, and the dispossessed had been formed in the early 1950s, following the vision and guidance of Tony Walsh. Inspired by what he knew of Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement in New York, Walsh dedicated himself to a life of radical volunteer poverty, a calling to poverty, as Buell has remarked, that was not just being poor; it meant renouncing all possessions and making oneself totally dependent on God’s providence. It wasn’t argument or preacherment. It
was an action, a deed, which had its own clarity and simplicity.... [One] faced genuine hardship, poor food, poor housing, the Montreal winter, illness...criticism and hostility (Buell, "Walsh" 16). Walsh’s Labre House soon involved up to 500 people working with Montreal’s poor. But the community activity at Labre House was more than just an outreach program:

What it was is difficult to state; it can only be pointed at like something on the move or felt as known. To call it spirituality would be misleading...though it was that. Devotion, yes, but that sounds too pious...It was never stated. It was simply centred on Christ and on what followed from that. It was something to do and meditate on, not talk about. Once...Tony said, “A community should be built around the Eucharist.” It was simply a given (Buell, "Walsh" 17).

The work at Labre House was another important component in the development of Buell’s Catholic experience, his particular contribution in this Catholic apostolate being his work on the community’s tabloid-size activist monthly paper, Unity, which he edited from 1955 to 1965.

First hand experience with the Catholic community at Labre House and with Walsh’s life of voluntary poverty evidently created a lasting impression upon Buell, Walsh being a model of selfless Christian commitment:
A quiet, sane and soft-spoken man...[he] had chosen to own nothing and live in the slums and help the poor. He ate donated food and wore donated clothing. And he was doing it as a Christian, as a Catholic, to live in accord with what Christ said his followers should do...And no one who knew him considered him a crackpot: there was something real there (Buell, "Walsh" 16-17).

Being a witness to this manifestation of basic Christian values in action enriched Buell's own Catholic experience to an extent that what he sensed and felt finds expression throughout his fiction. Many features that flowed from Tony Walsh's life of self-deprivation emerged in Buell's novel, Playground, where Spence Morison, unlike Walsh, is forced into a sudden state of involuntary poverty, an experience wherein he learns that a reliance on the things of the world--its money, its systems, its regimentation of time--detracts from a clear perception of the true nature of a person. Like Walsh, Buell's fictional Morison experienced the totality of impoverishment, having to endure without the necessities of life being made readily available to him. It is through this forced experience that Morison eventually realizes that it is in the fulness of humanity itself, rather than in things and systems, that meaningful reality is found. When Morison's life-threatening adventure is resolved, he possesses a heightened awareness of the same conviction that Walsh himself had gleaned from the gospel: one
saves oneself in recognizing and identifying with the humanity of others.

The social and spiritual activism that Buell knew as a participant in the Labre House community becomes transformed in his fiction into his depiction of characters who are redeemed by their selfless actions on behalf of others. The moral imperative that one must be one's brother's keeper and support another person in his suffering finds repeated expression in Buell's novels. In *The Pyx*, for example, Elizabeth Lucy demonstrates this moral coonsciousness in her supportive care of Sandra and Jim. Moreover, it is this kind of solicitude that initiates Stan Hagan's search for Adele Symons in *A Lot To Make Up For*. In *Playground* as well, a comparable focus on human goodness is reiterated as well in the Indian rescuer's reply to Morisons's expression of appreciation:

"I want to thank you for everything."

"That's all right, it could've been anybody."

"Maybe. But it was you. I owe you my life."

"O-o-oh," he said doubtfully, "doesn't everybody owe somebody that."

Spence had to think it over. And he laughed (*Playground* 241-42).

For John Sweetree who finds Spence in extremis three weeks after his north country airplane crash, life has meaning insofar as one shares in the responsibility for the well-being of another.

Buell's fiction, then, has a clear moral emphasis, not in
obtrusive sermonizing or didactic imperatives, but in its evocation of compassion for those who suffer and are afflicted. The very human crises of those who are sexually and emotionally exploited, as well as of those victimized by the effects of addiction, are subject to detailed examination in several novels. But Buell's narratives do not focus merely upon the social image of a prostitute, sexual deviant, recovering alcoholic, workaholic, or drug addict. His narratives are developed to lead to an appreciation of the dynamics of simply being human even though he perceives this from a Catholic point of view. For Buell, "the fact that a story is good...has everything to do with the humanity of it" (Drolet, "Conversation" 69).

Buell has been fully sensitive to the problematic expectations made upon the practising Catholic who writes novels. Actively engaged in the Church, Buell was well acquainted with the moral responsibility incumbent upon a Catholic artist. While the Church has rarely formulated anything approaching an official view on the arts, the Fathers at Vatican Council II did reflect upon the validity of the arts as a part of Catholic experience:

Literature and the arts are...of great importance to the life of the Church. For they strive to probe the unique nature of man, his problems, and his experiences as he struggles to know and perfect both himself and the world. They are preoccupied with
revealing man's place in history and in the world, with illustrating his miseries and joys, his needs and strengths, and with foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life as it is expressed in manifold forms, depending on time and place (Abbott 269).

For the Catholic writer, the act of creation, insofar as it is a manifestation of the spirit of God, is imbued with moral significance both for the creator and for his creation. To be a Catholic writer is to be like no other. Personally, he is morally accountable for what he creates; moreover, the work that he produces is open to the judgment of the Church itself.

Certainly, consideration of the role and responsibility of the Catholic writer has engaged Buell's attention, just as it has elicited detailed analyses from other Catholic writers. While Buell observes that "I didn't want to be known as a 'Catholic' writer" (Drolet, "Conversation" 63), his statement is not a disclaimer against the religion to which he is committed but a defence against any suggestion of literary parochialism. In defining his sense of being a Catholic writer to Gilbert Drolet in the mid-1970s, Buell indicated that he was not partial to what this labelling implied (Drolet 63). From his perspective his fiction is inclusive not exclusive, his audience comprising all readers not simply Catholics. His writing focuses upon the human condition, rather than upon specifically Catholic dilemmas, and he would expect his work to be valued primarily on
the basis of its literary merit rather than on its subject matter or ideological content. Nevertheless, when Buell as a Catholic writer privileges the humanity of the characters in his fiction, he does so out of the conviction that, in addition to the physical dimension of the characters he has created, there exists a spiritual nature possessing the potential to be receptive to divine grace. This is what is apparent in Buell's novels when he provides his principal characters with significant moments of spiritual resolution to human problems. In this respect his writing finds a context which he has appropriately called "a Christian tradition in a cultural sense" (Garebian, "Religion" 81), a literary tradition which maintains that human fulfillment is attainable, if not always physically, then at least spiritually.

For the novelist, Buell believes, the reality of human fulfillment will be most effectively envisaged through the exercise of the imagination. As Buell has remarked:

...all art proceeds from the imagination....the whole purpose of imagining things is to introduce one to reality. Which is quite true. Someone reading Shakespeare...will somehow get closer to reality. So that is to me...the purpose of the imagination. One must dream of reality (Garebian, "Religion" 78).

The creative process commences in an act of will as the writer conceives his narrative and determines to bring it into being. The creative act, says Buell, requires that
you bring yourself to the possibility of writing this whole story out....And you're going to stay with it. That's will....what you are doing by will is allowing a certain something to grow which cannot grow by anybody's will (Garebian, "Religion" 77).

This moment of invention, as sudden and surprising as it may be, activates the imagination as contextual narrative possibilities suggest themselves:

Once having created that context of stay-with-it-ness..., within that you are responding to story needs and making decisions about this dialogue, how long, what pacing, etc. (Garebian, "Religion" 77).

In this context, narrative gestation occurs as the imaginative faculty governs the development of the several components of the fiction. The imagination gives form to the artist's vision. In Buell's case, it finds its source in a Catholic mind from which it emerges to give his fiction a Catholic moral orientation. The purpose of the imagination in literature, Buell argues, is to bring one closer to reality by holding a mirror up to nature:

...I think it is humanly important to have that imaginative exercise that Aristotle called mimesis, and I think where our artists in any genre or art provide us with that highly refined, genuinely done set of mimetics, then we are more and more in touch with reality.... It is the artist...who indeed senses these things and has the articulate gift of mimesis.
It is important for him to structure that mimesis, important for himself and important for other people....this whole business of being able to create....is extremely important. It does...bring us to reality (Garebian, "Religion" 81-2).

The reality that Buell presents, defined by the principles of his Catholic faith, is predisposed to goodness. This was his conviction when he had occasion to explain the difference between his view of reality as opposed to Graham Greene's Jansenistic Catholicism:

I would subscribe to a much more basic Christian view that all reality is good except for the exceptions created by the willed evil on the part of human beings (Drolet, "Conversation" 67).

This, then, is the Catholic dimension of Buell's fiction. Reality is more than a temporal perception of things, more than a psychological sense of actuality. Buell's depiction of reality, as demonstrated in his fiction, is predicated on the total reality of God, an incarnational reality which enlarges life and, in the long view, achieves the eschatological summation of ultimate goodness.

Buell's fiction incorporates spiritual insights that he has found in the tradition of the Church. He encountered such philosophic foundations as those presented in the works of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, insights that have been an enduring legacy of the Church. Buell was especially impressed by
Their sense of human limitations—which limitations can undo reality or deflect us from reality—and, of course, their ultimate definition of reality is that whole totality which traditionally we call God (Garebian, "Religion" 75).

He acknowledges that it is the nature of humanity to fall short of perfection by permitting itself to be governed by its limitations.

Chief among these limitations are those deflections from reality which are portrayed as wholly illusory, such as a personal decision to commit oneself to evil or an absolute certitude in human knowledge. Each of these illusory paths receives detailed examination in Buell’s fiction. Philosophically, Buell has found within the Catholic tradition ample resources for the basis of his understanding of the philosophical and even experiential unreality of evil. There, he came to realize,

...evil is regarded as purely negative....It’s regarded as an unfulfillment. Where people, for instance, consciously or mistakenly pursue something evil, what they’re pursuing is something that has no reality to it. It ultimately exhausts itself. In my mind, although it could be devastating, evil is a relatively minor human enterprise. Although it is very engulfing, it passes because it leads nowhere (Garebian, "Religion" 76).
From Aquinas, Buell learned that "evil is a negation of the perfection due to a nature or to a being" (Jolivet, 665). This principle of negativity, operating to diminish or lessen the integrity or perfection of its subject, underlies Buell's sense of the existence of evil. Drawing upon the tradition of Catholic thought, systematized by Aquinas, Buell's implicit expression of moral values in his novels follows from the argument that

...evil does not consist in simple negation; otherwise, for example, it would be evil for an animal to be without reason. Rather it consists in a privation, i.e., in the fact that a certain being lacks a good it requires to enjoy the integrity of its nature. While this implies that evil is non-being, it does not signify that evil is nonexistent. Far from being illusory, evil is overwhelmingly real. Yet when we say that evil "is" or "exists," the predicate does not signify being: it means simply the reality of a lack or a defect. To say that "Peter is blind" is not to attribute blindness to him as a thing possessed, but rather as the absence (by privation) of vision.

It follows, then, that evil can exist only in a subject or in a being that, as such, is good. Evil presupposes good, both in the subject that it affects and as the perfection that it negates. From this point of view, evil can never be total or absolute (Jolivet 665).
How these attributes of evil are integrated into the philosophical underpinning of Buell's fiction becomes dramatically clear, for example, in the climactic scene in *The Pyx* when the Satanic Keerson is shot and killed by detective Henderson. In his final moments Keerson, who has allowed the power of evil under the guise of demonic influence to possess him, is inexplicably grateful to Henderson for relieving him from the vacuous meaninglessness of his illusory obsession. Gratitude of any kind is foreign to Keerson's nature, but in one final, fleeting moment his expression of thankfulness to Henderson reveals a moral consciousness, indeed even an inherent goodness within, long diminished by his proclivity for evil. With the death of Keerson, the recognition of a loss, not of innocence but of goodness, registers in Henderson as he "knelt beside him, trembling; and as his tension subsided, he realized he had been weeping" (*Pyx* 172).

In all of Buell's fiction there is a dark side to reality, but no matter how devious or even satanic the operation of evil may be in the novels, Buell affirms a countervailing balance of goodness that is also efficaciously present:

>[P]eople who ultimately grow are people who grow because of a reality they have discovered, and evil is an unreality in that philosophical sense. It does nobody any good to pursue something that's going to wind up as a nothing, as a purely negative thing (Garebian, "Religion" 76).

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Evil in Buell's fiction is ultimately an unfulfilling and passing epistemological illusion. A comparable illusory obstruction to the perception of reality is the subjective sense, as Buell has said, that "we feel we control everything and yet underneath us, the ground is shaking" (Garebian 76). As opposed to the conviction of the secular humanist that humanity can save itself on the basis of the resources of its own intellect and physical prowess, Buell has argued that anyone...

...who today assumes that our technological civilization is the acme of the evolutionary development and that people should be happy with this, is making a serious mistake. There the illusion of knowledge is almost absolute... That kind of knowledge is illusion. That kind of certitude is treachery.... We do have a way of assuming that our knowledge is absolute, and this is not to be. There one cuts off reality (Garebian, "Religion" 76).

Such self-deception, engendered by pride in a salvific reliance on human knowledge, precludes that human fulfillment which can be achieved in what Buell defines as the "whole totality... we call God." From a strictly human point of view, the tragedies in Buell's novels involve certain characters who are in situations where they become victims of their own self-contained illusions. But Buell's narratives take on full meaning as he presents his victimized characters arriving at a crisis of realization when illusions disappear:
To me, either one perceives reality or one perceives a self-created reality. And the self-perceived reality will eventually break down. When people think then that all reality is gone, that is the moment of truth, the moment of discovery (Garebian, "Religion" 77).

The perception of the totality of reality, experienced in Buell’s narratives, reveals a spiritual dimension of some significance. The human condition must not be without hope, for the possibility of finding liberation beyond illusory limitations is always an available option.

For Buell, freedom from misleading illusions that lead to a spiritual void can be effectively realized through the recognition that humanity possesses an essential predilection for goodness. In this sense, Buell's Catholicism, he felt, would lead the reader to a fuller sense of reality than might otherwise come about:

What is the total reality involved in being a human being?...on the postulate of God...a whole long-range fulfillment is, indeed, possible. You make a few extra postulates...that goodness exists and is worthwhile; that truth exists and can be discovered; that the human mind—however weak—is nonetheless a valid instrument; that the human heart is a valid, perceiving totality (Garebian, "Religion" 75).

Both the states of fulfillment and unfulfillment respectively reflect the outcomes of human moral choices, whether for virtue
or vice, good or evil, redemption or loss, reality or illusion. Spiritual perfection is attainable and ultimately that which is good will prevail, just as that imperfection to be found in a state of unfulfillment will implode of its own accord into nothingness. To be fully human is to cooperate with the presence of goodness and thus to be allied with the reality of God:

One thing I learned out of this whole tradition is that one must remain, in a sense, loyal to these basic goodnesses, these basic realities....this is true in human relationships, this is true in whatever social accomplishments, as communities, people try to do. It’s true in education, it’s true in art....the greatest art over the centuries has always presumed that background of goodness (Garebian, "Religion" 75). All creative acts, in life and in art, take on meaning in their commitment to “these basic goodnesses, these basic realities” which are found not only in the reality of God but also in humanity itself.

For an artist who conceives of human crises in temporal terms, the conviction that good will prevail in God’s grand design would appear to subvert the artistic possibility of any totally tragic action in literature. Asked whether a writer can indeed possess a truly tragic vision, Buell replied:

Yes, you can from a human point of view. From a reality point of view, I would imagine no, in the sense that no amount of human tragedy will undo the
Then, considering the implications in literature, Buell noted that in traditional drama, the mere fact of dying has come to be tragic...which is certainly not the point of Shakespeare....[F]rom an obvious Christian tradition, could Shakespeare’s plays be considered ultimately as tragedies? Well, it seems to me that that is asking whether one can turn reality inside out and have an all bad reality. Admittedly, there are pessimistic philosophers who would say yes. But I say no (Garebian, "Religion" 75).

This outlook becomes important when responding to Buell’s novels. Understanding the ramifications of Elizabeth Lucy’s death in The Pyx, for example, requires an appreciation not only of why she was murdered but also of her particular victory. A similar positive attitude towards death, an outlook which indicates that dying is a beginning as well as an end, appears in several other novels. The death of the boy called Tom in Four Days as well as that of the homosexual Ritch who befriends him have meanings beyond what the world ordinarily perceives, as the Catholic priest indicates in his reflection in the epilogue. And Stan Hagan knows that he has become the heir to a spiritual heritage of belief when his friend and surrogate father, Martin Lacey, dies in A Lot to Make Up For. This incorporation of the action of the spiritual life within the human reflects Buell’s
sense of the reality of the unseen in the world.

In Buell's fiction, the good person is under siege, for moral goodness is not secure in itself. Goodness, says Buell, attracts evil. This concept takes narrative form, of course, when the consciously good quality of a character serves as a lure to attract the evil designs of another. Of this tendency, Buell has observed that

...if you really look at your own human experience and you come across a good person, and I mean this in the most literal, basic way, you will also come across someone who wants to destroy that goodness....[I]n the WASP ethic, one assumes that if a person is good, then a person is untouchable but...the truth of the matter is that if a person is good, he is good by decision. He will attract evil. He will attract enemies (Drolet, "Conversation" 66).

What Buell regards as a fact of life serves as a dynamic tension in the relationship of his protagonists to others with whom they are engaged. Goodness will and must be maintained as an act of free will. Buell's characters may be found in a state of moral siege, but by consciously and repeatedly making a choice for virtue and enduring with forbearance the presence of evil, they will retain the integrity, if not of a state of grace, at least of a decided orientation towards goodness.

Conceptually, the good character, even an innocent character, confronted by evil, must respond. The manner of the
response has been of some interest to Buell, especially insofar as he has sought to define the moral centre of his own fiction relative to the moral ambience in the Catholic novels of Graham Greene. For Buell, a postulate of a Greene novel is the existence of "a sort of menacing atmosphere of evil that nobody can avoid and that people who are in that atmosphere are simply bad people..." (Drolet, "Conversation" 66). The consequence of the general pervasiveness of evil that Buell sees in Greene's novels is that Greene's "characters feel guilty about the ill that might befall them" (Drolet 66). Buell's response to Greene's depiction of character is simply that

...there is much more to that human being than his circumstances, atmosphere, etc.... I wouldn't be as generalist as Greene in saying that the man's atmosphere of sleazy evil is therefore universal. I wouldn't say that. I'd say it doesn't mean anything just because the guy's sleazy. It means he's sleazy and it ends there (Drolet, "Conversation" 66-7).

In considering his own fiction, Buell insists that no encompassing evil lessens the goodness of his characters; nor may it result in a sense of personal guilt. On the contrary, Buell is convinced that "it's perfectly possible for someone who is innocent to be in tragic circumstances and not feel guilty and still suffer out these tragic circumstances" (Drolet 66). In the confrontation with evil, individual choice and decision are imperative, not simply a general sense of being victimized by an
invasive evil or a bad atmosphere which is more powerful than one can forebear:

...such atmospheres, if they exist, exist because there are bad persons and bad people exist because they have made decisions toward their own evil and one can combat this only up to a certain point and the way to combat it is not to murder them. One must suffer out the evil that other people impose on us without feeling guilty (Drolet, "Conversation" 66).

Forbearance here is an act of Christian fortitude. Moreover, inherent goodness, though blighted by interior sin or oppressed by external evil, can be activated to human fulfillment at all levels of one's being. The potential for human fulfillment in Buell's fiction is always greater than the circumstances in which a character finds himself. The fact of sin is just that: a fact about being human. But sin does not immobilize Buell's protagonists into a state of moral paralysis. Unlike the powers and presences with which they must contend, they can choose virtue.

While Buell differentiates the spirituality in his fiction from that found in Greene's novels, he readily acknowledges that Greene's craftsmanship as a writer has been instructive, finding that "Greene, as an artist, is lovely. You can read this from start to finish and its good stuff" (Drolet 66). The quality of Greene's well-crafted novels, had served as a model of narrative excellence. As a writer who holds to the truism that the novel
is "a medium of literary effects" (Drolet 62), Buell’s essential interest in the novel as a form of expression has been in how he, too, can most effectively master what he prefers to call his craft. In this respect, many writers who had impressed him with their work were those whose distinctive writing techniques demonstrated their own propensity for producing compelling fiction. These were writers from very different orientations, each of whom left a lasting impact upon him, particularly writers

Such as Graham Greene, and Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett and Barnett and James M. Cain and a lot of other people. And of course all the people who were writing in the pulp magazines when I was a teenager. These things stay with you. If you are really impressed as a young man, this becomes your goal. You want to write something as strong as Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler wrote. So that by the time I turned to the print medium I must have absorbed a great deal of what I’d been reading (Drolet, "Conversation" 62).

This eclectic mix of masters of detective fiction and psychological intrigue, in addition to the mainstays of contemporary American fiction such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald, comprised Buell’s teachers in the art of fiction. For Buell, such eminently successful writers were for a young writer “the models...against whom he measures his skills, his desires"
What interested Buell in the work of these writers whom he admired was not the particular form of their fiction but the mastery of their technique. Appreciating their workmanship in their respective narrative traditions, he developed an understanding of the craft of writing that aided him in setting new fictional goals for himself. From the time he had stopped writing plays and turned to fiction, his essential focus was upon the story itself, the narrative rooted in the imagination that he felt confident he could invent. The story itself, expressing the possibilities of human experience, became the narrative matrix within which he would strive to perfect his craftsmanship in developing his story and in attaining the effect he wished to achieve. For Buell, a writer’s skill is not dependent upon influences emanating from a national culture or region:

...you don’t learn an art by belonging to a province, or a country or a continent. You learn it by studying the artists in that craft and that’s it. Now I studied the writings of British, American,...Canadian people, as a matter of fact, just to learn the craft (Drolet, "Conversation" 70).

But as a student of fiction, Buell was not a slavish imitator of the techniques of other contemporary writers. A cursory reading of Buell, particularly of The Pyx and Four Days, might create the impression that his early novels generally conform to the
conventions of detective or crime fiction. On the surface, there are certain similarities: police officers and detectives function with efficiency, violent action is central to the narrative, and the development of the story contains elements of suspense. The operation of these features in the novels, which is to say the purposes served and the effects achieved by these staples of popular crime fiction, had a compelling attraction for Buell. He came to realize that

In the traditional and good detective story—à la Chandler, etc.—you have a crime committed, you have an investigator investigating, etc. The problem became—because of the genre of the whodunit—...that at the end the investigator...must give about five, six, ten pages of explanation (Garebian, "Religion" 79).

The explanation at the end of the story directs attention back to some past action. But Buell was interested in expressing present action, looking into the real lives and current experiences of his characters. In some of Chandler's detective fiction, Buell recognized that the acknowledged master of the genre had tried to obviate the requisite explanation at the end of the story by directly involving his investigator in the action. Moreover, the problem for the writer, as Buell saw it, was to keep the participating investigating agent from becoming removed from reality itself, especially insofar as he might acquire an authoritative persona of mythic proportions. To
create a sense of actuality and to move detective or crime
fiction closer to psychological realism, Buell was convinced
that crime fiction should be realigned to engage the
investigating agent in the present action of the story rather
than providing a solution to a tragic occurrence that happened
in the past. In reworking the strategy of detective fiction
Buell wanted to create a sense of dramatic immediacy:

You will notice in The Pyx that both past and present
narratives proceed in the story’s present time. No
explanations are needed [at the end]. Four Days is in
the story’s present time; Shrewsdale is in the story’s
present time; and Playground is in the story’s present
time....Now this is something that Shakespeare
does...not something the Greeks do. The Greeks
investigate the past....So that business of having a
story take place in the active present is [a] craft
achievement...[and] because of that I see, on an
artistic level or a craft level, no difference between
the suspensefulness of The Pyx or Four Days or
Shrewsdale or Playground (Garebian, "Religion" 79).

Buell’s interest was in taking the principal element of
puzzlement out of detective fiction, that is, of removing the
formulaic exposition by a super sleuth, thereby resolving a
mystery that had its origin in the past. Instead, Buell strove
to move the focus of action from external to internal crisis:

I felt that if there were any way of using the
detective story form to write a novel that was not really a detective story, then one would have to probe into the causes and events that were indeed tragic in the lives of the people involved. In other words, you can't present the reader with a corpse, you've got to present him with someone living who becomes a corpse because of tragic circumstances (Drolet, "Conversation" 62).

This insight, in conjunction with the flashback technique which created a strategy for narrative action in the present time, was implemented in Buell's first novel *The Pyx*. The effect of creating a sense of immediacy in the novel results from the coalescing of two actions and thereby integrating both cause and effect into the present time. The role of the sympathetic investigator is to focus upon why an action occurred and no longer, as in conventional detective fiction, upon how it happened. At the same time, the victim is now presented not simply as a corpse whose past death appears inexplicable and puzzling but as an active protagonist seeking a resolution for conflicting inner values. In order to create this sense of present reality, Buell has explained that in the process of determining the method by which he would create a sense of immediacy in *The Pyx* he realized that

...I could be telling two stories at once: the police investigation and then flashing backward telling, as though it were here and now, the story of the victim.
The reader would be in the present time all along and it would not be a straight whodunit. Then one could look at the meaning of the lives of these people and this is what I attempted to do....So I wrote that story that way. It meant a great deal to me because it was not a straight detective story. It had a deeper meaning....I was trying to get away from the detective story (Drolet, "Conversation" 62-3).

In structuring and developing the components of his narrative to reveal the meaning to found within the totality of the physical and spiritual dimensions of the human condition, Buell wrote novels that took on a distinctive feature of Catholic fiction. He found much to admire in conventional crime fiction, especially the craft and ingenuity of some of the master writers of the genre, but his own work is imbued with a Catholic spirituality that exceeds by far the intention of crime fiction, thereby bringing to the reader that "behavioral, emotional, moral and spiritual information that people couldn't obtain elsewhere" (Gilman 7).

Craft and the meaning that follows from exacting standards of creativity are essential attributes of a Buell novel, the artistry of the novel being defined by Buell as the "right way of doing something" (Garebian, "Religion" 73). What this means is that

consciously you know what you're doing within your own limits, that things are done at least
deliberately....So craft in that sense [means] that first of all you are controlling the story....It goes all the way down to choice of word, sentence structure, pacing, when to have dialogue, what kind of dialogue, the whole business. That is what I mean by craft: that nothing is done sloppily, nothing is done, say, without having been thought out artistically....And yet all on the level of feeling. It's not a question of having theory. It's a question of working a thing...till...it's done. Craft in that sense (Garebian, "Religion" 73-4).

But one should not infer from this principle of creative responsibility that meaning is consciously injected by the writer into his narrative. The end of fiction should not be confused, Buell insists, with the literature of ideas in which on overriding central meaning is apparent. The novel, by the nature of its multi-faceted composition, is the source of any number of meanings, many of which are unknown to the writer himself:

You see, one of the things I go by is if a story is a good story, is a validly good story by which I would understand something that takes place on the level of human action, that you are not philosophizing, you are not writing an essay. If that story is any good and you as a craftsman are doing that story well, there will be many, many meanings accruing to it that you
are not at present seeing though you may be seeing them vaguely. And reader A may get meaning A, reader B may get meaning B, etc. Which would indicate to me a certain symbolic wealth there but not injected into it and not consciously put in (Garebian, "Religion" 73).

This artistic credo also determines to some extent the function of criticism:

...one of the roles of criticism [being] to bring out all of these meanings that the author cannot possibly be conscious of. But because he is true to his craft, the meanings can be there (Garebian, "Religion" 73).

Such a traditional interpretive role of criticism also accords well with an appreciation of Buell's novels as Catholic fiction, replete with spiritual meaning that appropriately places his work among the ranks of modern religious novelists. To some, the spirituality peculiar to the Catholicism inherent in his novels might present an ideological obstacle. Nevertheless, it is requisite that

...criticism of the works of Catholic novelists (and of all novelists for that matter) should be based on how they use their artistic vision....All novelists imbue their works with a moral vision from which we can discern some value statements on the human condition....Hence the work of the critic is not to attack ideology but to assess the manner in which it has been artfully presented (Fraser xiv).
Buell's artistic vision is Catholic but not doctrinaire. As Elizabeth Zimmer noted: "Buell does not moralize, he observes" (92). Probing the interaction of nature and grace, he shows that to be fully human is not to be alone and self-dependent. Those characters in Buell's fiction with whom the reader can identify are not self-sufficient masters of their own destiny. What does pervade Buell's work is a redemptive metaphysic of incarnational grace existing as a countervailing balance to the effect of evil in the world.

It has been observed that before the late 1950s, when Buell began writing novels, two approaches had dominated the contemporary novel:

the naturalist [tradition,] writing so-called objective accounts of material facts, and the expressionist [tradition,] presenting actuality, as modified by [the writer's] own personality plus an intellectual conception, in a stream of consciousness. These two seemingly antagonistic tendencies--the extroversion of realism and the introversion of expressionism--are two sides of the same coin, inasmuch as one focuses upon the material universe, the macrocosm, and the other upon man, the microcosm (Antush 276).

What Buell perceived in the late 1950s was what one essayist of the time sensed as

...the faint stirrings of a new revolution in literary
thinking...[involving a] search for deeper, more serious, and more lasting values...toward a Christian complexity and fullness, rather than toward an unchristian simplification and attenuation (Antush 276-7).

Herein lay an alternative, both to the objective realism of naturalist fiction and to the subjectivity of expressionism. In the 1950s, Buell was aware that the Catholic novel—that "novel with a metaphysic"—presented old ideas in a new form, being set ...in a secular tradition which, generally speaking, [had] not yet come to grips with the basic human problems of sin, evil and suffering (Antush 277).

Publication of The Pyx in 1959 was Buell's first contribution to the Catholic novel, which had established a place for itself in the twentieth century in writers like Greene, Waugh, Flannery O'Connor, and François Mauriac.
In *The Pyx*, Buell envisions a self-contained, urban underworld dominated by the controlling presence of systemic evil. This is the world of...

...the specialty houses, the private-movie making, the breaking in of newly hooked kids whose value was high for a brief time only: a world where the turnover was as fast as the arrests, the breakdowns, the suicides (*Pyx* 119).

Here, vice in all of its manifold forms of depravity and perversion victimizes and ultimately destroys any whom it totally controls. To convey a sense of the inherently destructive and debilitating effect of the evil that is present in this sub-stratum of society, Buell integrates into his narrative a pattern of physical breakdown and collapse. At the beginning of the novel when Elizabeth Lucy is first introduced into the narrative, she is on her way to a psychiatric hospital to visit Sandra, the young prostitute targeted by Keerson for erotic exploitation during a Black Mass. She is now broken in spirit and her treatment for heavy drug addiction has resulted in a regression to infantile helplessness. Later, Elizabeth befriends Jim Rande, the college homosexual who explains that he had experienced a nervous breakdown after he had "drifted into that strange netherworld where types like me go" (*Pyx* 95).
Having just been demeaned in "some fancy place" as an object of derision by a man with whom he has been sexually involved, Jim, again on the verge of another breakdown, explains to Elizabeth that he "ran out of the place. It was like running out of hell" (Pyx 95). Elizabeth, too, is fully aware that the disordered thoughts that "stay in the mind like a frenzied cosmos" may inevitably lead to her own total collapse and breakdown (Pyx 56). Finally, at the end of the novel, Keerson's desire to share in the exercise of satanic power inevitably results in his own complete physical and mental disintegration.

Buell's oppressive netherworld, as Jim calls it, is a vicious parody of every semblance of a world animated by goodness. As Linda Hutcheon has observed, such urban novels as The Pyx function on two levels as "both realistic accounts of the corroding violence and alienation of the modern city and symbolic representations of the infernal "Unreal City" of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1538). This sense of an evil unreality characterizes Elizabeth Lucy's nightmare images when she dreams of "a vast wasteland that seemed to heave with the heat of the setting sun" in which she cries desperately for help but couldn't hear herself calling any more as the dark rocky wasteland grew into the sounds of frightful combat and the agonizing screams of perpetual defeat" (Pyx 126). In this "semi-civilized and part-psychotic fringe underworld" of moral depravity (Pyx 108), the negativity of evil is absolute. Paradoxically, here in the urban core of Montreal, the
superficial allure of bright lights and luxury which suggests
the presence of an "accessible paradise" (Pyx 23) belies the
hidden reality of treachery and violence.

For the cruising taxi driver Jack Trudel the rich allure of
expensive apartments and the beguiling bright lights offers a
seductive attraction as he fantasizes about the hidden
satisfaction associated with the affluence and luxury along a
fashionable Montreal Street. For him, they are "full of massive
pleasures" (Pyx 3), offering "something real about which to
dream" (Pyx 4). But a sudden shock of reality grips him the
moment he witnesses a young woman's deadly fall to the street
directly in front of his vehicle. Roused from his reverie,
Trudel's "dream had vanished forever" (Pyx 5). As he later
examines the site of the victim's death, he is seized by the
reality of the situation:

the image he had of ease and pleasant power had now
acquired a background of horror....Real violence was
too much for him;...Already he was beginning to
dismiss it as outside the real course of life (Pyx 13-4).

The event is a reality check for Trudel as it reveals subversive
violence functioning within a society that he otherwise finds
desirable and attactive. While he is ignorant of the underlying
cause of this eruption of violence, he does know that Elizabeth
Lucy's death is a sudden and inexplicable manifestation of a
certain evil in the world.
Trudel's sudden realization of the very present reality of imperfection in paradise is paralleled by that of Cerini, an investigative policeman dispatched to the scene of the woman's deadly fall from an adjacent building. In the city, Cerini notices how

the lights...preened themselves in gay patterns, they blinked on and off,...they flared in bright obvious colors announcing either business or pleasure (Pyx 23).

But, after surveying the investigative site, Cerini finds that

Now, the lights were just lights, a little out of place, like a lonely waiter announcing a last call for dinner on an empty moving train (Pyx 23).

Beguiling fantasy is a sham, Cerini realizes. The tragedy in human life demands a recognition of a reality too often obscured by illusion. From past experience, both Cerini and his investigative partner Henderson

...knew the meaning of the night's events. They were used to the swirl of the city in a way, a desperate way, like a man would get used to drowning if he could repeat the process. They knew the pattern; they had only to wait to see it emerge, to watch for the rarely original features of evil (Pyx 23).

Like Jack Trudel, Cerini and Henderson are aware that violent events are signs. They know that the presence of Elizabeth Lucy's body, veiled in a white dress and with her once radiant
beauty diminished in death, is another daily manifestation of evil in the world. In this instance, the death of Elizabeth Lucy is the signal event from which Buell develops his perspective on human lives ensnared by evil, a maliciously violent presence given dramatic intensity through Buell's portrayal of the demonic possession of Keerson, the obdurate physical nemesis of Elizabeth Lucy.

Giving fictional credibility to the embodiment of evil adds considerable complexity to the process of a writer's invention. At the outset, one might question if the transformation of invisible agents into the visible world is even appropriate in realistic fiction. Aside from sensationalized fantasy, there are few representations of embodied evil in the English literary tradition. In a radically different context, Milton had created a demonology in which a charismatic Satan created artistic problems which are not easily resolved. But a far greater problem than demonic portrayal is the extent of suspended disbelief that the novelist can expect from his readers. For some of these readers, demonic possession is fully explicable in terms of psychic disorder; for others, Satan exists as an ever present metaphysical reality whose illusory deceptions dislodge the moral equilibrium of the human will. For Buell, the writer's artistic intuition must permit a credible representation of evil which maximizes the meaning of the novel according to the respective sensibilities of his readers. It is understandable, then, that some readers will find the novel accessible as a work
of fanciful myth or fantasy; others will have a sense of Keerson’s disordered psyche; and readers possessing some familiarity with Catholic spirituality should be able to appreciate the full dimensions of Buell’s representation of evil in the world.

Buell’s fictional evocation of evil and of demonic possession conforms to a traditional Catholic belief in which Satan and his minions are identified as evil spirits which... tempt men to sin, sometimes injure them in body, and even infest them.... Possession takes place when the evil spirit assumes control of the body from within, using it as his own; and obsession is the attacking or infesting of men from without (Religion III, 392-3).

As pure spirit, the evil being, commonly referred to as Satan or the devil, is a real and powerful agent of external subterfuge and internal control. What Buell represents in The Pyx is the sense of the conflict in which the Evil One intends to bring about a demonic victory over the person of God who is present in the consecrated host. Conceptually, the metaphysical dimension of Buell’s novel encompasses the cosmic conflict of the power of Evil in opposition to the grace of God. It is within the totality of this metaphysical reality that the crises in the respective spiritual destinies of Elizabeth Lucy and of Keerson are presented.

Buell’s narrative represents these spiritual realities in
demonstrably human terms, the decisions and actions of his characters having moral as well as social significance. This *modus operandi*, as the Catholic theologian Charles Curran has stated, is a central conviction of Catholic belief in which

...the divine [is] mediated through the human....[T]he natural law well illustrates this mediation. How do we discern and know what God wants us to do? Do we go immediately to God to find out? No. Human reason reflecting on human nature tells us what God asks of us or what has been called the eternal law. The eternal law is the plan for all creation in the mind of God. The natural law is the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature....In Catholic understanding, the church is a visible human community with human leaders and members. God does not come immediately and invisibly to the individual person. Rather the saving gift of God is present and mediated in and through the visible human community with its human-divine structure called the church (14).

Consequently, Buell's depiction of sin, suffering, and salvation has its subjective basis in human life itself, not in an objective orchestration of the human condition wherein "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods" (Lear 4.1.38-9). In the Catholic consciousness, the grace of God, or the lack thereof, is manifested in every human thought, word, and deed. More importantly, the presence of God in the world is enabled through
human beings, whether it be the incarnational presence initiated by Mary's cooperation, the sacramental incarnation through sacerdotal mediation in the Eucharist, or the operation of the Holy Spirit in and among the faithful. To a Catholic, God is manifested through the sacraments and is present among people through the operation of spiritually empowering grace. The normative Catholic perception is that God is continuously breaking through into the world, preeminently through the sacraments but also within the lives of the people of God.

This commonplace Catholic conviction is very much at the centre of Buell's fiction and is directly apparent in his earliest novels. God is present wherever human goodness and love exist. This manifestation of God's saving grace is apparent not only in the lives of the faithful but also among the faithless, for it is among those who have fallen victims to sin and the evils of the world that regenerative grace operates not to restore a lost innocence but to subvert sin through goodness. Promptings of love and acts of goodness are possible and do function from within the context of the most sinful orientation. From a Catholic perspective, the potential for a spiritually activating infusion of grace which enables good works is always, and sometimes surprisingly, present. Elizabeth Lucy's lost innocence does not deprive her of the capacity for goodness as she reaches out compassionately to Sandra and Jim Rande and affectionately to her father. What her good actions demonstrate, though they arise from within the context of a life of sin, is
that Elizabeth possesses within herself a predisposition for goodness which has not been displaced by a life of sin but which has the potential, if need be, to be realized more fully and completely in a decisive act of supererogation.

Throughout *The Pyx*, Buell's principal focus is upon nascent goodness. For Elizabeth, the love of God ultimately conquers all; for Henderson, the redeeming quality of Elizabeth's life is found in actions that reveal a residual goodness in her character. Recognizing that there is no place in a mundane investigative report for an account of Elizabeth's meritorious victory through her death, he can reflect upon the positive message of hope that he will forward to Elizabeth's father: "He grimaced with irony as the thought that the news he had to tell the Colonel was, after all, good" (*Pyx* 174). While the evil which is so graphically represented and which effectively arrests the reader's attention has a compelling and affective appeal, Buell's intention in the novel is to develop a narrative in which there is an even more dramatic transformation from physical, moral, and metaphysical evil to goodness. To that end, Buell's framework for his story reflects a fundamental principle of divine Providence; namely, that "God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil..." (*Catechism* 84). God's mandate, therefore, necessitates that goodness should be the proper condition and ultimate end of all humanity who desire it. On his own initiative, there is nothing that mankind can do to achieve this end. However, through
receptivity to the transforming spiritual power of God's free gift of grace, moral goodness can be attained. In Buell's Catholic tradition, Augustine of Hippo had long ago formulated a rationale for this process of transformation, reasoning that

... grace is necessary to heal and liberate the freedom (Lat., libertas) that is at the core of the human person. Grace is the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit that releases one from the bondage of sin, illuminates the mind, and provides a new delight in the good (Encyclopedia of Catholicism 578).

This indwelling of the Holy Spirit permits believers actually to become "participants in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) so that the essential reality of life entails spiritual incorporation into the mystical Body of Christ. Within this context of the divinization of man, sacramental support, preeminently through the Eucharist, sustains and augments personal sanctification. Nowhere in Buell's fiction is the reality of the saving action of this sanctifying grace more significantly represented then when Elizabeth Lucy, in a selfless act of love, receives the Body of Christ in the consecrated host.

This redemptive moment in Elizabeth's life is a certain revelation of God's power over sin. For Elizabeth, the critical decision of her life rests in the free exercise of her will. The means by which she can determine her human and spiritual destiny and divest herself of the evil which afflicts her entire being becomes the deciding moment which defines the efficacy of her
tragic death. Had she died without an activating infusion of divine grace, she would be little more than a pitiful loser in life, without any redeeming quality. That she chose to act decisively and irrevocably for an infinitely greater cause than any other, imbues her character with the mark of personal heroism and imbues her soul with sanctity. What Buell presents fictionally is patterned on the motif of the fallen woman who is redeemed; indeed, Elizabeth Lucy is also "the woman...who was a sinner" whom Jesus forgave for she had "shown great love" (Luke 7:37-48).

Elizabeth is as accustomed to sin as to her regular injection of heroin. As a heroin addict who serves her addiction by working in a high class prostitution ring, she is entirely under the control of the self-serving "old-time operator" Meg Latimer, who works the sex trade and keeps her supplied with narcotics. Elizabeth has no illusions about Meg. She is an agent of human degradation whose role is seared into her consciousness:

...the image of Meg Latimer arose, a smile, fixed at first then growing, the false teeth grew grey like steel but alive like tired reptiles, and became a wriggling trap like rich, damp, sickly swamp vegetation, in the center of which was whiteness, a whiteness that shattered into fine powder, dissolved in the dampness and was about to give her peace but a monstrous needle replaced it all and changed into a
black icicle held in a frozen hand... (Pyx 43).

It has been five years since Elizabeth first chose to work for Meg and her experience has led to an increased realization not only of the meaninglessness of her existence but also of her own helplessness. From the quality of her life, she would appear to be completely resistant to the operation of grace. She is in every sense a lost soul whose depravity in serving the ends of Meg Latimer has left her without peace or hope:

I have nothing now, I'm empty. I can't even choose, I'm caught, I can't be anything but what I am now, right now. There's no choosing, there's no doing. All that's left is knowing. I know. I know that damnation is a part of me (Pyx 45).

Another "part" of Elizabeth, of course, is receptive to grace, for while she is fully aware of the evil in her soul, she still possesses a capacity for goodness. Herein lies the positive orientation of grace that St. Paul recognized when he observed that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). Yet so invasive is the operation of the effects of sin that even the self-realization of goodness can be obscured. Elizabeth can find no good in or for herself. For the most part, she feels spiritually deadened by a sense of hopeless despair and considerable foreboding about the future. However, what she cannot realize in herself she does effect in the lives of others.

If Elizabeth, as she says, finds both her life and herself
intolerable (Pyx 54), the self-hate that she directs inwards is replaced by exemplary manifestations of love for others who suffer. In this regard, the effort to restore Sandra's well-being is particularly significant. While Elizabeth can hope for no escape for herself from the encompassing evil around her, she secretly provides the means by which Sandra can be liberated from the cycle of prostitution and drug addiction in which they are both engaged. What Elizabeth believes she cannot be, Sandra will become. In undertaking this act of selfless charity, Elizabeth places herself in a situation of extreme danger. Elizabeth herself is controlled by Meg Latimer and Meg serves as an accomplice to Keerson. From Keerson's criminal syndicate, no one gets out alive, as both Meg Latimer and Herby Lefram were to discover when each was found to be ineffective as agents of Keerson's satanic schemes. Keerson's control is absolute, with a network of informants employed to follow and report about the activity of anyone deviating from the authorized routine. So Elizabeth's initiative in rescuing Sandra is more than an act of friendly assistance since by this act she is risking her life for another. The result of Elizabeth's particular saving action is presented at the beginning of the novel when she visits Sandra who is undergoing drug withdrawal therapy in the psychiatric hospital. Later, a comparable saving action, but of infinitely more significance, occurs at the end of the novel when Elizabeth first meets Keerson at his penthouse and learns about his intended sacrilege. While she succeeds in safeguarding
the consecrated host on that occasion, the fact of her murder that evening underscores the tragic irony of Elizabeth's life: she who gives protection cannot provide it for herself. At this point in the novel, as Harold Gardiner has noted, an even greater irony exists thematically when "the One whom she is finally called on to protect is the One who comes to suffering humanity in a pyx" (Gardiner 772-3).

Throughout the novel, Elizabeth's actions are notably unrelated to her avowed involvement with prostitution or drug addiction. Consequently, the narrative focus on Elizabeth's activities brings to the foreground a sequence of very positive events that occur during the last days of her life: she visits Sandra, rests for a few moments during mass at the cathedral, drives past her former home in the country where her father lives, places all of her assets in a trust fund for Sandra, meets momentarily with a compassionate priest who blesses her, and finally confronts Keerson as he prepares his sacrilegious rites. What Buell shows here is that the orientation of these actions is a positive outgrowth of Elizabeth's developing moral consciousness as it contends with an oppressively sinful nature. By developing a characterization based upon such a sequence of positive actions, Buell shows quite clearly that, despite the sinful context of her life, Elizabeth is engaged in actions revealing the promptings of grace working from within.

By attributing to Elizabeth a residual action of grace, which manifests itself in the practice of good works, Buell
again draws upon Catholic theology to support these actions in his narrative. Unlike others who hold that "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not from our own works or deservings" (Common Prayer 702-3), Catholicism maintains that good works are meritorious and, given the appropriate nature of the actions, necessary for salvation (Cath.Dict.252-3). Specifically, it is not the operation of the actual works themselves that are efficacious; rather, in Catholic belief salvific merit is derived from the empowering divine grace operative in the manifestations of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In Elizabeth's case, however, any salvific merit accruing from her actions would appear to be precluded by her sense of spiritual despair, her acknowledged state of sin, and her hesitancy at opportune moments to be sacramentally reconciled with God. Nevertheless, what Buell does indicate through her characterization is that the good that she performs arises not from any personal worth of her own but from her receptivity to a freely operating gift of divine grace that is always available to her. Such a stirring of grace can lead, as it clearly does in Buell's narrative, to effecting those good works which are caused by grace and are not simply manifestations of its presence. Elizabeth is indeed an instrument of love to ease the afflictions of Sandra and Jim Rande. Even Meg Latimer, the devious arbiter of the trade in sex and drugs, could be accounted as a friend had their respective
roles in life been different. Elizabeth's show of love and the consequent results that follow from it reveal not simply the traces of goodness in a sinful nature but, more significantly, God's action within the sinner that will move her towards redemption. When Elizabeth chooses to safeguard the eucharistic sacrament from Keerson's evil plan, she does so, not as a chance happening, but as the result of spiritual growth which can be observed in the several good works of her past life. There should be little surprise when she receives the host rather than permit Keerson's intended act of desecration, for this final act of love is not so much climactic as it is cumulative, the end result of the Spirit continuing to break through to bring Elizabeth to salvation.

In *The Pyx*, Buell has not left the reader unprepared for the spiritual efficacy of the final act of Elizabeth Lucy's life. Despite the depravity of her past and the encompassing evil presently around her, Buell shows that she possesses the capacity to know goodness and to act upon it. That realization of goodness is not negated by the oppressive immorality of a life of sin. Rather, in it lies the operation of the grace of God which will not be suppressed. Implicit in goodness, at least from a Catholic perspective, is the nature of goodness itself. Where there is goodness, there is the presence of God, this being the thrust of Father Superior's pidgin sermon in Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case*:

...because Yazu made you, he is in you. When you love
it is Yazu who loves, when you are merciful it is Yazu
who is merciful....Yazu made love, he made
mercy....Only remember that the love you feel and the
mercy you show were made in you by God (85-6).

God is with Elizabeth Lucy.

However, the irony of her situation is that she is not
personally conscious of the extent to which the love of God is
present in her life, giving her both an active and passive moral
orientation. Actively, she is impelled to good works of charity.
Passively, she is given the grace to know the reality of her
sinful separation from the God who loves her. Preeminent
ly a realist, Elizabeth harbours no illusions. Her father, for
example, remembers that "she could always face things" (Pyx 134)
and Jim Rande affirms that "she knew exactly where she stood
with life....She faced it" (Pyx 98). The absence of any
semblance of denial in her life as well as being devoid of any
attempt at rationalization of her sinfulness later signals to
the priest who is dispatched to her by Sister Hildebrand that
her helplessness and pain were not irremediable but that she
must activate grace into action on her own volition:

"You've heard the others...justify themselves... about
a phoney innocence....You're not doing it....You can
look right at it. Some people don't even get that far.
Don't you think that kind of clarity could be a
grace?" (Pyx 122)

But Elizabeth, caught in a crisis of uncertainty, cannot at that
moment identify the means to bring about a transformation in her life. The priest dissuades her of any notion that simply going off drugs will lead to a change in her life. What she needs, he suggests somewhat obliquely, is to be controlled by her inmost being, the dictate of her soul, the rule of her conscience, a decisive act of will. It is she and she alone who matters, he insists, and it is she who in the end will make a difference in her life. She will be able to determine the value of her life and will not be subject to external control. What will make the difference in her life, he tells her, is "You...It's your life: you'll know at one point" (Pyx 122). Elizabeth's response is simply that at that moment she is still incapable of exercising the will to determine her destiny. "I'm not there yet," she explains, indicating that she will find the inner resources or the grace for resolution at some future point in time. Her indication of what is yet to come, a moment when she will find fulfillment in her life, holds some promise for the priest who, as he departs, "raised his hand in benediction after her as though blessing the night"(Pyx 122). By the grace of this blessing, Buell suggests, the remaining darkness in Elizabeth's soul may be dispelled.

Elizabeth's moment of truth occurs the next evening. From the first moment in which she had learned that Keerson had identified her as a participant in his undefined but ominous "party," Elizabeth has been filled with foreboding: "Fear tried to define the future, to put a shape on the huge nothingness of
evil confronting her" (Pyx 59). She is ignorant of the details of the event to take place and Meg Latimer, who has some familiarity with Keerson's world, will not give her any information. Likewise, Herby Lefram, who must be assured that Elizabeth is even more highly narcoticized, gives her no information. She must encounter the night's dark deeds of Keerson's invention alone and unsupported, knowing that there was no alternative and yet wishing it were otherwise:

She felt the longing and the fear of action that comes with great pain; all the power possible to a human, concentrated into one screamingly desired wish, the wish to be something else, the need, all this she knew to be the measure of her impotence: the great longing and the great impossibility (Pyx 106).

Compelled to surrender her will to that of Keerson, Elizabeth arrives at the Cross, for there is, indeed, the suggestion of a Christological dimension in Buell's narrative of the Good Friday death and Easter life underlying the experience leading to her sacrifice at Keerson's penthouse wherein her Cross in the darkness does not portend the hope of an easy Easter. Betrayed by Meg, Elizabeth moves inexorably towards an event not of her choosing and from which there is no turning back. With her will and power of determination for herself totally suspended, she can only face the unknown:

She was past the point where caring can do any good. Her fear had lost its edge and become dull like a sort
of peace: it stayed on as an unfeeling preoccupation, empty of real content, and ready for a greater void (Pyx 150-1).

It is only when Keerson leaves her alone with the pyx, bearing the Body of Christ, that Elizabeth can respond freely to God who now comes to her sacramentally. In a soft whisper, she says: "I...didn't think...You...," (Pyx 158) thereby reciprocating the invitation to Love manifested to her. In the realization of the mystical love of God for suffering humanity, Elizabeth receives the Real Presence in an act of selfless love. Redeemed from the world's evil and her sanctification assured through a sacramental infusion of grace, Elizabeth, in keeping with the practice of heroic virtue, becomes a martyr to Divine Love when Keerson, discovering that she has received the host, throws her to her death from the penthouse balcony.

Elizabeth's victory over death is the culminating act in the drama of her redemption. It is the desirable outcome of a soul that had longed for the peace of death but of one, said Jim Rande, who "thought she couldn't die well" (Pyx 93). However, in meeting Christ sacramentally and giving herself as His protector from sacrilege, she has indeed died well and found lasting peace in new life. Elizabeth's redemption is enabled preeminently through the grace of the sacrament. But, in presenting the dying moments of Keerson on the other hand, Buell indicates that the mercy and grace of God extend not only to those who have sought Him but to those who have hated Him as well.
There is little doubt that Keerson is evil incarnate, that he is obsessed in seeking demonic power in his life to increase the control which extends through his syndicate: "I thought I had the power," he tells Henderson, "it felt as if I was ruling" (Pyx 169). But Elizabeth's action in preserving the host from the desecration of his sacrilegious intentions has made him the impotent victim of his own evil machinations. She who was powerless has by her saving action revealed the power of goodness: "She," says Keerson, "she was the one who was stronger" (Pyx 170). Frustrated in the sacrifice he intended to offer, he has become the victim of the evil power he sought. For many readers, his agony would appear to be just punishment for his evil infidelity: he should suffer everlasting torment for the evil he brought into the world. He who has no mercy towards others should receive none in return. But this is not Buell's resolution. Immediately after Henderson has had to shoot and kill Keerson in self defence, Buell's last word about Keerson reveals a nascent presence dwelling within:

When Henderson reached him finally, Keerson's mouth was forming words that he never spoke, and his eyes had a look, perhaps of gratitude, that seemed to come from the depths of his personality. Henderson knelt beside him, trembling; and as his tension subsided, he realized he had been weeping (Pyx 171-2).

For Buell, the grace of God, operating with redemptive power within the most abject sinner, knows no limits.

56
Four Days

The traditional Catholic view of the interdependence of nature and grace, which Buell implied throughout The Pyx, is made explicit in Four Days: for all humanity the source and end of love is God. To frustrate this love from attaining its proper end is the utmost spiritual tragedy, the operation of grace then being short-circuited, resulting in the deprivation of the knowledge of God in and through humanity. The exploitation of the grace of God, insofar as it is expressed in the love of one person for another, epitomizes the ironic tragedy depicted in the life of the Tom, Buell's protagonist in Four Days. Instead of finding acceptance through his love, Tom is unwittingly manipulated and deceived, first by his self-absorbed brother Milt and later by the sexual predator Ritch who has befriended him. Loving but unloved, Tom's unfulfilled quest for meaning through human love is the central irony in a novel in which, as F.W. Watt observed,

[t]here are submerged fragments of an admirable theme: a young boy is denied his rights to childhood innocence by a degenerate background, and at every turn when he looks for love he meets forms of the same denial. His criminal older brother whom he worships uses him in a bank-robbery; Ritch, the homosexual older man who might even then have saved the fugitive boy, meets his love only with an attempt at seduction;
the old priest is too late, or too ineffectual, though
his love—charity—is true enough (398).

The twelve year old Tom longs to find security in the peace of a
loving relationship. However, he is under no illusions about the
primary object of his affection: Milt is no idealized older
brother. Tom knows, for example, that

Milt wanted money and women, but that was the ugly
Milt, the Milt something happened to when he was near
these things. He faced the painful images: the
assertive egoist, the man transformed with sexual
desire—and the calm worker who managed a home and his
job well (Four Days 45).

Regardless of the priority of his brother's needs, Tom
unreservedly accepts and loves the human presence of Milt with
all his perceived faults:"But they all formed one man
nevertheless, and the boy accepted him fully"(FD 45). It is this
dedicated act of faith and trust in the person of Milt and later
in the perpetuation of Milt's memory that gives purpose and
meaning to Tom's life.

It is this love which sustains Tom even after the one whom
he has loved no longer lives. For Tom, Milt must live in order
that his love can live. His own life derives its meaning from
and is sustained by the power of this love. The selfless love of
Tom for his brother gives meaning to his entire life, being
presented as an abiding expression of Tom's sense of security
and stability, principally realized in critical moments of
crisis and fear. Fearful, for example, that Milt might be discovered as an accomplice in certain residential thefts along his paper route, Tom's immediate consciousness of his physical surroundings with their "well-kept lawns, carefully primmed houses, a clean unbroken pavement, trees that looked washed, the general play of color that seemed to him like a minor paradise" (FD 5), is displaced by the greater reality of a brother whose "importance and authority...justified anything" (FD 6). Unsettled by the thought that Milt might somehow be apprehended for criminal involvement, Tom "forgot to notice his paradise" (FD 9) and searched within his mind for a more pacifying image that engendered greater peace and satisfaction:

he stared as if he were trying to see reality somewhere. And beyond the trance of vague fear was the well-known and loved reality called Milt, a warm area at the heart of things that gave substance to existence (FD 9-10).

Later, suspecting imminent dislocation implied in Milt's plans for the way he was "gonna change all this (FD 24)," a newly aroused fear in Tom again threatens to upset the equilibrium of his life:

He felt a generalized fear for Milt, and this threatened to disturb his whole world: Milt was these rooms, the food, the habits of home, the person in whose life he could live; he was so aware of all this that a fear for Milt was a fear for himself (FD 25).
With his own sense of well-being anchored in Milt's existence, Tom finds purpose and meaning in the totality of his love for his brother. The dreary tediousness of his everyday existence gives little satisfaction to Tom. Likewise, the violent and disordered actuality of Milt's life fails to dislodge his overriding love for his brother. His eventual waiting in Val Laurent for Milt's arrival as a fulfillment of their plan is a valid expectation which gives purpose to his existence. Anything that detracts from the promise to which he is committed, such as newspaper coverage of Milt's death, must be denied and rationalized since it endangers the trust and faith he has invested in his love for Milt. That this trust has been misplaced and that the loved one, as he has known him, will no longer be physically present in his life would be a refutation of "that well-known and loved reality...at the heart of things that gave substance to existence" to which he had completely given himself. For Tom, any possibility that his faith and love centered in Milt is a lie and that the loved one will not come to him as planned is a potentially soul-destroying spiritual agony that threatens life itself:

Somewhere in the unfaced depths of his soul he realized quite clearly that he was trying to alter a fact that would be a fact no matter what he willed or how strongly. But his whole person screamed with the effort to do it, it was his only hold on existence; and when the plan ran out and erased all traces of
Milt, his hold would go with it (FD 124).

To be so totally accepting of Milt does not come without considerable inner conflict for Tom since his own expectation of acceptance does not happen to coincide with Milt's casual insensitivity towards him. As Milt focuses upon the strategies involved in his plans for a bank robbery, Tom initially despairs at his own lack of inclusion in Milt's planning, feeling himself increasingly isolated from his brother's attention:

Things were slipping away from him, especially Milt, despite his feelings: all Milt's arrangements were for tomorrow, not for after tomorrow....(FD 47).

That Milt expects to survive the planned bank robbery gives Tom some certainty that the object of his affection will remain as a living presence in his life. But the possibility that this presence will prove unresponsive to his love devastates him. Milt may indeed survive the bank robbery but, Tom believes, Milt's future life may be one

...that so easily excluded him. The boy felt reality getting out of control, it was tumbling into some unknown destructiveness, something bigger than even Milt. All he could do was drift with it and cling blindly until it stopped somewhere (FD 47-8).

For Tom, the corollary of love is a double edged fear. He is conscious that he may not be worthy enough to gain Milt's love; moreover, the only physical reality he knows will cease to exist if he loses Milt. These fears and the tension they induce are
considerably lessened when Milt presents Tom with the plan of action to be played out after the robbery, for it is towards the fulfillment of this plan, which is effectively an imaginative extension of Milt himself, that Tom can totally commit himself:

> Reality was now this plan; he didn't question its source or judge it or choose; it was there, and it offered a continued existence with Milt, an alternative to nothingness, like finding a light switch in the dark (FD 52).

The love that Tom bears his brother will not be withheld. Its expression is inclusive and substitutive, whether it enjoins the physical reality of Milt or survives conceptually in Milt's plan for a future reunion. It incorporates the fictitious uncle for whom Tom pretends to be waiting and then transfers Milt's reality to Ritch as he is momentarily perceived as a surrogate brother. Ultimately, the spirit of the beloved Milt continues to prevail as Tom swims along the lake at Val Laurent on the first stage of his final journey back to the home he had left. His goal is clear and the Milt of his dreams is lovingly envisioned as Tom swims "reaching out in strokes...far into the comforting wetness, back into something as familiar as an ancient dream...[in which] they were laughing together" (FD 224).

From the perspective of Catholic spirituality, there is no ambiguity in Buell's representation of Tom's love for his brother, the spiritual dimension of Tom's love having its objective correlative in the words of the parish priest while
addressing a congregation of nuns on retreat at Ste. Marie. Here the priest's reflections on divine love, overheard but scarcely comprehended by Tom, counterpoint the narrative in which Tom's unconditional love of his brother Milt is the raison d'être of the central action in the narrative. Standing at the rear of the church, Tom hears fragments of the priest's conference and, while they are consciously meaningless to Tom, the priest's words give a spiritual dimension to that love which is the controlling influence in Tom's life. In his exposition, the priest considers the operation of both love and hate within the encompassing framework of good and evil (FD 151). Evil, says the priest, is a mystery: no one "knows the purpose of evil, what role it plays in the development of mankind, what role it played in Christ's life...." But the purpose and end of goodness is apparent to all: "Anyone can know the purpose of goodness: simply to love." Some, he says, are made virtuously strong by strongly hating evil: "Hate seems to carry our strength." However, he continues, "there in no hate with Christ, there is anger, yes, and hurt, and disappointment, even a sort of despair, but no hate. All his emotion seems compatible with love, especially his painful emotions...." The negation in hating evil is narrow, restrictive, and exclusive. But the positive love given to God by loving those He loves attains its proper end. Here the true end and means of love is established:

"--what does God want with our petty hatreds? He wants our love, petty as that is, but our love given to Him
through the people we love, not an exclusive love of Him through the persons and things we hate in His name. And our weakness? To love is to love with Christ...." (FD 151)

This love, within a secular context, might simply be considered psychologically obsessive, perhaps even dysfunctional. To Mr. Haroldson, the social worker, Tom's relationship to Milt is viewed in clinical terms: "The boy was very attached, neurotically so," probably rendering him "psychotic" (FD 107-8). But in Four Days Buell works with a concept of love that reveals the divine presence in human love. The priest's conference on love that Tom overheard at the nun's retreat as well as the priest's epilogue which concludes the novel portray human love within a spiritual context which is recognizably Catholic in the sense that it is not a manifestation of eros, implying sexual love, or philos, suggesting friendship, but of caritas, the love of God and of one person for another in imitation of the love of Christ.

When the priest tells the congregation of nuns, as Tom looks on uncomprehendingly from the rear of the church, that "God... wants our love...given to Him through the people we love (FD 151)," he is reminding them that caritas is "the highest form of Christian love, whose originating source and ultimate end is God" (Wojda 300). This is the most totally encompassing love, involving God and man:

Although charity in its principal sense is the love we
direct towards God—a whole-hearted love awakened, sustained, and fortified by God's own prevenient love for us—it stands as well for the love of neighbour as ourselves, continuously informed and nourished by that love (Wojda 300).

Caritas, then, as the priest had insisted in his talk to the nuns, is wholly inclusive, subsuming all human actions within its moral compass:

...it comprises in its most fundamental sense the love of God bestowed through Christ and the Holy Spirit upon humankind, as well as the love required of human beings for both God and one another (Wojda 301).

The conviction that in loving others one is loving God has a long tradition in Catholic thought and practice, receiving a succinct summation in Thomas Aquinas' observation that caritas meant that

[t]hough its formal object and final end is God, charity reaches out to the neighbour as well, including even the enemy and the sinner who are loved for God's sake (Wojda 301).

It is in the nature of Tom's love not to be deflected by appearance but realistically to accept the loved one as a person who happens to be a sinner. While Tom acknowledges the weaknesses in Milt's character, his love for his brother remains steadfast despite any of Milt's failings whether they be moral, social, psychological, or even religious. Unwavering constancy
characterizes Tom's love. Prefigured by the love of Christ, it is unimpeded by conventional attitudes. This is uppermost in Tom's mind when, immediately after receiving the Eucharist while serving at Sunday mass, he reflects upon the singular nature of his love, which he knows others may neither appreciate nor understand:

He had always wondered about the other people, the good people, who looked so at home at the communion rail: cleaned, composed, untroubled by what was called sin. He didn't feel like one of them, they were lucky enough to be that way, and he was content to let them be. He simply knew that none of them would like to know what he knew, their goodness would regard his goodness as bad: they wouldn't love Milt, or him even, no, they couldn't even try (FD 46).

Tom justifies his particular goodness in his love of a flawed brother. In this, as he realizes, there exists a high risk potential reflecting more the love of Christ than that envisioned by modern Pharisees or social workers. At no time has this child of a prostitute mother who was raised in foster homes known the love of family or friends. The self-giving love that Milt receives has its origin in no acquired human experience. The reality of his love, as he knows it, is not defined by social mores or clinical psychology; rather, it arises from "a depth somewhere in his soul" (FD 67) which gives him certainty "at some high peak in his soul" (FD 224) even in the hour of his
The love that the nameless protagonist called Tom manifests is extraordinary, especially within the depersonalized context of mid-twentieth century east-end Montreal where he is known to everyone simply as "the kid." This is a love in which one lives for the other, finding self-fulfillment outside of oneself. It is a dependent love in which peace and security come not from one's own efforts but are reciprocated by the solicitous response of the loved one. Moreover, the corollary of this love involves suffering derived from a perception of one's own inadequacy as well as from a sense of the loved one's absence. *Four Days* is essentially a radical love story with its fictional basis suffused with Catholic spirituality. The kid-called-Tom is no modern mystic, but in Buell's presentation of the power of love he draws upon those features of a Catholic spiritual tradition in which the writer, as John Wyllie has noted, "makes his reader see behind the print to the many subtle inferences he injects into his work; inferences which add an exciting third dimension" (6).

As a writer well-versed in Catholic spirituality, Buell imaginatively represents images and motifs evoking this "third dimension" in his work. In certain respects, these are comparable to dream-like emanations from the collectivity of unconscious spiritual experience. To this end, the rather singular love story at the narrative centre of Buell's novel exemplifies the experience of mystical love. Jungian dream
theory maintains that unconscious psychic experience can be variously symbolized in images representing a psychic denotative reality (Hall 19). A Jungian theorist might well identify Buell's Milt as a transformed God image to Tom, an imaginative representation which is rationally absurd but affectively meaningful insofar as Milt, who creates order in Tom's experience, becomes the object of a type of transcendent love. To the extent that order, transcendence, and meaning comprise God's gift to humanity, these qualities also define Milt to Tom. The suggestion of aspects of mystical love underlying the distinctive and enduring love of Tom for his brother Milt is indicative of the dual operation of the Catholic imagination. The writer may unconsciously evoke a familiar pattern of spiritual experience which he incorporates or represents in his fiction. At the same time, the characters that the writer creates act in a manner that is consistent with the informing spirituality. In *Four Days* Buell draws upon the familiar Catholic realization of the experience of transcendental love, that love first epitomized by the love of Christ for the Father and imitated in the spiritual aspirations of many of the Church's saints and visionaries. This is the deep structure of the novel or, as Wyllie has indicated, "an exciting third dimension," the evocation of this spirituality being represented in the particular sustaining love of Tom for Milt.

While this love can be appreciated from various perspectives, its spiritual nature suggests an affinity with
that particular spiritual analogue, not unknown in Catholic devotion, experienced in the Dark Night of the Soul. Tom's anguish about Milt, Buell repeatedly points out, is centered in his soul. In his disordered dreams his "soul pressed the question" of Milt's death (FD 137), just as earlier he had known "from a depth somewhere in his soul what it all meant" (FD 67). Later, as Tom languishes in the water of the lake in his dying moments, Buell presents the dissipation of the physical darkness of the night as a correlative to Tom's newly realized certainty that he will live again with the loved one in the home he has always longed for:

Things were so swift and simple, all the barriers were disappearing, inside, and even the night was less dark. At some high peak in his soul, he giggled: he was sure he was going to make it; he'd be back home soon... (FD 224).

As the water closes over him, Tom asks the envisioned loved one only "can I stay, stay, now that--," his truncated plea for an enduring and stable peace uttered prayerfully for that which in a spiritual context would be tantamount to beatitude.

Before Buell presents Tom's final moments of heightened consciousness, described in terms of a "far" return "back" to the reaches of a dream within (FD 224), he evokes certain elements of the Catholic mystical tradition which enhance the fictional representation of Tom's love. Within this spiritual experience which is both "the central experience of the journey
of faith and the journey of love" (Doohan 228), a deeper union with God is found through stages of seeking, satisfaction, disorientation, and readjustment. Drawn into a type of mystical union, Tom longs for the satisfaction to be found in the surrogate divine presence, arriving at a "very religiously satisfying period that believers often resent leaving behind" (Doohan 228). Paradoxically, it is within this stage of contentment that "the believer discovers that God is not the God one thought God was and that God does not act in the way we expect God to act" (Doohan 228). Seeking a resolution to this impasse, the lover undergoes "an experience of God based on knowledge but permeated by love [which] leads to a transformation of one's way of experiencing God" (Doohan 228). But this realization does not come without a certain anguish, a pain resulting "from lack of understanding of what is happening to oneself in the contemplative experience, resentment of the loss of the former satisfying religious experience, and a feeling that friends and even God have abandoned one" (Doohan 228). In Four Days, these features of Catholic devotional practice in the mystical tradition with which Buell is familiar comprise an effective imitative paradigm of spiritual love.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Buell informs the novel with evocative features characteristic of this Dark Night of the Soul experience. The love story of Tom is not a systematic point-by-point representation of this devotional experience; nevertheless, the analogical pattern of a tortuous
spiritual quest suggests itself throughout the rather singular love story in *Four Days*. Buell situates Tom in infancy and early childhood in a context without love or stability. He is the child of a prostitute who abandoned him, passed on from one loveless foster home to another, seeking the stability of the home of which he has been deprived and a love that he has never known. His love does not develop from any external social or familial experience. He does not learn to love. Rather, Tom's love is a soulful self-giving in which he seeks to live in and for his brother Milt, the one preeminent reality of his life. Milt is the quintessential being of his existence, the one person who sustains him, enabling him to experience moments of heightened awareness in which "the excitement of being alive" is like being "on a high-wire, looking up. But the high wire had a base: home. And home was Milt" (*FD* 11). To live and to be with Milt had been his determined goal in recent years and for a short period of time the attainment of that goal has been totally satisfying. In the midst of his contentment, however, his interior vision of Milt as exemplar and protector challenges the external social reality of a brother who is distant in his affections and basically preoccupied with fulfilling his own plans for the future. Tom "wished Milt had been really what he seemed. But reality was elsewhere" (*FD* 61). In reality, Milt is not quite the person Tom had envisioned. As this realization develops, Tom transposes his love for Milt from the actual person to the image or spirit of Milt, and it is this single-
minded devotion, emanating from the soul, that sustains Tom in his new life in Val Laurent, lived according to Milt's plan, after he has experienced the inconsolable abandonment and loss of the loved one. Undeterred by the physical loss of Milt, Tom "couldn't let the idea take hold" (FD 68). Resolute in his faith, Tom knows even after the police had shot Milt during the bank robbery, that

...he had orders to obey, a purpose, a plan, Milt's going to make things turn out alright....he'll find me, but-- He heard the shooting again and saw Milt on the pavement.... He felt as though his sense of fact were pulling at him physically to force him to acknowledge what he really knew, but he fought it by...clinging resolutely to the plan. The plan was something that had to be done if at the end of four days he were to meet Milt (FD 69).

Milt has been removed as a physical reality in Tom's life, but Milt's plan becomes the envisioned reality tantamount to a leap of faith by which the attainment of union with the loved one can be achieved.

The dramatic irony of Tom's life is that he is not as fully aware, as the reader is, that his God-given love makes him vulnerable to exploitation. Culturally, Tom is a street-wise kid, naïvely manipulated as an accessory in a succession of Milt's criminal exploits. His service for Milt is not sustained by the full consent of his will. He does not understand the
moral, let alone the criminal, dimensions of leading boys to pornographic sexual degradation (FD 28) any more than he understands his role in the residential theft scheme or the heist at the bank. From a social perspective, Buell places Tom in a milieu which has all the potential for stunting his social development. Marginalized economically as well as victimized socially, the sub-culture that Tom knows may well subvert his legitimate growth and development as a person of good character. That one's attitude and behavior can be undermined by the effects of false social values and economic inequity is a threat that Tom, on the threshold of maturity, is only beginning to comprehend. Culturally and socially, Tom is a person at risk.

While Tom's attitudes and behavior are subject to Milt's manipulation, he does possess a moral integrity which is sustained sacramentally and which finds expression in his loving trust first of Milt and eventually of Ritch, the Milt alter ego he meets in Val Laurent. Tom prays, serves as altar boy at mass, receives the Eucharist, and finds reconciliation through sacramental forgiveness during confession just prior to his death. In spite of all the disruption that unsettles his life, he is spiritually in a state of grace, ironically thanks in no small measure to Milt's use of the practice of religion as a socially acceptable front or cover to enhance his own reputation. The gift of grace is central to Tom's character. He can love Milt as a person yet question his values and practices. Similarly, he trusts Ritch as a person with the nascent love of
a brother yet totally rejects to the death a sinful assault not only upon his person but also upon his soul. In the hands of Ritch, Tom is not only physically but spiritually at risk.

What Buell differentiates in Four Days is the nature of love from its aberrations. Tom's love for Milt is unconditional, revealing the graced presence of God in humanity. Moreover, Tom's developing love for Ritch incorporates the same spirit of openness and trust. In Milt's case, however, love is displaced by greed which is characteristically exploitive insofar as it takes, but it does not give. Within the moral compass of Four Days, centered in Tom's goodness, Milt dies as a victim of the violence he has initiated. A comparable fate also awaits Ritch who assumes the role of a surrogate brother to Tom. A former teacher, he befriends Tom, proffers considerable generosity and kindness towards him, and even takes the initiative in making arrangements to avenge those who are plotting against Tom at Val Laurent. To Tom, Ritch's companionship and hospitality merit trust and confidence. But Ritch's hidden agenda perverts his display of warmth and affection, revealing a pedophile's intrusive and exploitive sexuality. Conscious of the moral degradation of the intended assault upon him, Tom realizes that he has been betrayed

... by someone he had needed so deeply he had begun to love him as he had loved Milt, someone who could have held him while he looked at Milt's death: it was worse than Milt's dying, it was as if he had been knowingly
abandoned. He looked at his facts anyway now; he had moved past his old pain. Milt's dead, you know, the fact choked its way to his eyes, yeah, I know, and he felt the man's lips pressuring to remove his last strand of self-possession (FD 197-8).

Tom would have wished that his relationship with Ritch might have been different. In his friendship and affection, Ritch fulfilled the expectation of sharing and trust Tom had longed to find in Milt. Ritch's intrusive assault, however, necessitated an immoral submission which negated the meaning of love. Once again, as Tom later explains to the parish priest at Val Laurent, he feels as abandoned by Ritch, the surrogate brother, as he was by the death of Milt himself on the street in Montreal:

There was nobody, and he was gonna be like somebody, I was counting on-- then all he wanted to do was screw me (FD 213).

For Tom, this was the ultimate debasement of the purity of love.

The Catholic priest in whom Tom confides at Ste. Marie provides a spiritual centre in Four Days. Removed from the central narrative action of the novel, his is the classical prophetic voice which proclaims the truth about what things are. During his first appearance in the novel, he presents an objective correlative to Tom's love for Milt, thereby establishing a spiritual context for love while maintaining that the quintessential nature of God is love and that God exists in
and through all human love. Quite simply, where love exists, there will be found the presence of God. The same prophetic voice returns in Buell's epilogue to the novel when the priest reflects upon the morality of Ritch's sexual orientation. To Tom, of course, Ritch's homogential act is a perversion of sexuality which is to be totally resisted. From the spiritual perspective of the priest, the action of the pedophile, as Tom knew perfectly well, is morally defective in its exploitation. Nevertheless, what the priest does recognize is that the nature of this grave sin lies in the human perversion of divine grace. In retrospect, the priest recalls: "You were close to the boy...You were the only one who could be" (FD 231). In Ritch's very human, self-giving to another person, there is a fundamental goodness, as Tom had overheard when the priest was telling the nuns on retreat that

"...anyone can know the purpose of goodness: simply to love. Yet sometimes even love can—" The boy moved to the back of the last pew and stood still. "—for our love carries with it our own weaknesses...." (FD 151)

What is understood after the elision following "sometimes even love can—" is that this same love can be obstructed, turned aside, or negated, especially insofar as "our love carries with it our own weaknesses." Despite this human tendency to obstruct a graced gift to humanity, what God really wants is "our love given to him through the people we love" (FD 151). Ritch's sin was to pervert God's gift in order to serve his own ends.
Nevertheless, God's love for Ritch is not extinguished. While Ritch suffers the grievous temporal loss of his life, God's mercy facilitates redemption, as the priest observes to himself when praying for Ritch's departed soul:

"requiem aeternam dona ei—" ....he has paid for his love, Lord, have mercy on him, You know the worst about him, and that's a circumstance for forgiveness, it was that way when You were on earth— (FD 231).

Like Tom, Ritch has also been a person at risk. Whatever may be the "worst" that occasioned Ritch's death, a "worst" that is known only to God, there is salvific merit in the degree to which the love he shared with Tom approximated the love of God. This is the redemptive hope of the priest, acknowledging that Ritch, "the only one who could be...close to the boy," was also an instrument or channel of God's love. To that end, the priest prays, lies Ritch's salvation: "whatever sort of love you had, may it help save you, even if it did destroy you" (FD 231).
The Later Novels

The Shrewsdale Exit

The spiritual malaise that pervades The Pyx and Four Days recurs with dramatic intensity in The Shrewsdale Exit. Joe Grant's response to the evil which has beset both him and his family activates the focused narrative of Buell's third novel in which the plight of an individual, reduced to impotence in a seemingly hostile world, demands resolution. Subverted by an act of sudden brute violence, the equanimity of Joe's family life is destroyed. Like Job, he experiences the abrupt reversal of good fortune of which the proximate cause—the rape and murder of his wife and daughter by bikers during a roadside ambush—leaves him ravaged in mind and spirit. Unlike Job, however, Joe determines to become the master of his own destiny:

...his life has no purpose without his family, and the only meaningful course left open to him, the only way of asserting his very existence, seems to be to punish those who were guilty of the crime. But Mr. Buell does not allow us to be blinded by emotional logic; for he shows how in pursuing the killers, Joe becomes as brutal, calculating and inhuman as they are (Rosengarten 93).

The alienation of Joe Grant from the conventional values of middle class conformity marginalizes him just as effectively as it does the bikers, each living beyond the law as social and
moral outcasts. What distinguishes the one from the other, however, is the possibility of redemption. Buell's bikers are irrevocably degenerate, representing a brutish and depraved commitment to evil. To some degree, Joe is drawn into their moral dysfunction: his need to kill the bikers consciously evolves as a determined plan of action after the loss of his family. However, as purposeful as he is in his determination to be avenged, Joe's impulse to kill is momentarily inhibited a few days after the bikers' highway assault upon him and his family when, during a nighttime ambush, he seeks to be revenged upon the same bikers who had initially attacked him and murdered his wife and daughter:

...he could see figures dashing for cover....He shot steadily at the moving forms....one tough was trying to get back to his bike, and Grant held on the moving target, seeing him clearly, and somehow unable to pull the trigger (Shrewsdale Exit 144).

In this moment of truth, Joe's restraint reveals that the potential exists within him for lost goodness to be regained. Unlike the bikers whose actions are unrestrainedly evil, Joe shows at least in one moment of hesitation that he possesses a fundamental moral sense. Herein lies the potential capacity for his conversion.

That "somehow" which renders Joe Grant incapable of pulling the trigger to kill his murderous adversary reflects latent values and a human response which cannot be entirely
rationalized or suppressed. Joe can shoot out the lights on the bikers' motorcycles, he can shoot at the indistinguishable "moving forms" of his assailants, but he cannot shoot a clearly discernible human target. In this instance, to spare the life of a human being is a particular act of grace. From a Catholic perspective, the "somehow" is indicative of a moral consciousness which, at critical moments of human experience, is derived from the presence of divine grace in one's life. Although the context of The Shrewsdale Exit is not demonstrably Catholic, one cannot fail to appreciate that the spiritual values with which Buell himself is familiar suggest themselves throughout his fiction, whether represented in a novel with many Catholic associations or in the demonstrably secular context of The Shrewsdale Exit.

Behind Joe Grant's decision to kill the bikers had been a deep-seated sense that he had failed to withstand effectively the bikers' onslaught which had resulted in the deaths of his wife and daughter, the loss of their lives being the foundation of his own guilt arising from what he believes was his inability to protect them. Filled with feelings of self-recrimination, he determines, after having spoken to the sympathetic investigating detective, Captain Sparrs, to kill the bikers himself in retribution for the loss of familial love they have destroyed. Joe will act on his own, having become frustrated by what appears to be the ineffectual investigative procedures of the police. If the legal system cannot prevail against a self-
evident evil, he will confront it himself:

"Maybe that's the answer....They're there, Captain, right there, and the law can't touch them, and you can't touch them. But I can touch them. Let 'em gang up. Maybe you'll get them for killing me."

Grant spoke with animal ferocity, emotions that took self-sacrifice for granted, deeper than self, raw with basic love, dangerous....It was an answer, all right, it answered Grant's feelings. No argument could reach it (SE 120).

Joe arrives at his "answer" after a week of anguish in which he has increasingly felt more guilty. He had already moved out of the family home, feeling a "guilt engulfing him as though he were abandoning them, collaborating with the hated event" (SE 84-5). Now, after speaking to Sparrs, he finds that

The exchange...had cleared his mind, clarified his feelings....The day was taking on a meaning for him. It was showing him his own remorse, a guilt that was the other side of love. With bitter clarity, he was saying inside himself, I was the only one who could have saved them, and I didn't, no one else, me. It seemed like an immense truth, and it was strangely calming (SE 121).

Overwhelmed by his acute sense of guilt, Joe compensates for his own powerlessness in having been unable to bring the bikers to justice by determining to hunt them down and kill them himself.
To accomplish this mission, he buys a gun and spends a day perfecting his shooting skills. Like other tragic figures with whom one can sympathize in the intensity of their suffering, Joe makes a decision which is fundamentally flawed insofar as the very evil which he seeks to vanquish subverts the otherwise balanced moral equilibrium of his life.

Joe's determination to undertake a revenge killing may be an attempt to resolve the anguish and unresolved guilt of his loss. However, his "answer," which comprises the central narrative action of the novel, is a portrayal of how not to deal with suffering. There is no doubt that the evil which has deprived Joe of the love and stability of his family also leaves him floundering in a state of moral dissociation as he seeks to assuage his pain. Buell evokes the nature of his encompassing grief as a "buffeting" (SE 78 ff.) in which each of the "images and ideas that necessarily came to mind" affirms Joe's realization that suffering is an inherent part of one's humanity: "no one is too old not to suffer a little more, or too young to begin" (SE 78). What one seeks in this situation is, as Joe conceives it, a "shelter" from the emotional "buffeting" and from the "winds" that can leave one "helplessly tossed about by the circumstances" (SE 88). As Joe navigates through the emotional upheaval of the totality of his loss, he seeks a safe haven which eludes him as he unsuccessfully continues to resolve the tension between what he knows and how he feels:

All of it was still with him, a fixed conscious
knowing, always present, and charged with feeling like an obsession.... The facts were there, the feelings were there, both real, it all fit together in a tight bind, one giving strength to the other (SE 90).

Increasingly, Joe grows disenchanted in his expectation of justice from within a legal system which appears to serve subjective human needs rather than the objectivity of the law. For Joe, satisfaction and compensation for the loss which he has suffered can only be achieved by his own violent means, this decision revealing the tragic flaw in Joe's character insofar as it perpetuates the loss he has already experienced. He believes that killing the bikers, albeit as an act of vigilante justice, will free him from the sense of guilt which sustains his suffering. In reality, he will become the greater victim, losing freedom rather than gaining it.

Revenge, which ultimately victimizes the victim, is a morally inappropriate answer to human suffering. This is Buell's theme as he develops the narrative to that moment of transformation and resolution at the end of the novel when Joe knew that "everything was different" and that the "cold readiness for killing was being replaced by human realities, and by another kind of struggle to keep them existing" (SE 278-9). At the end of the novel, Joe is on the threshold of a new life, having been saved through the mediation of Sparrs from the corrosive struggle to seek revenge, a struggle which can now be more positively transformed into the maintenance of those "human
realities" newly found in the familial love for Ellen Shefford, her daughter Henrietta and her boys Tim and Bert, the surrogate family epitomizing the family he had lost in the bikers' attack. Until Sparrs provides the assurance at the end of the novel that justice does and will prevail over any self-indulgent exercise of revenge, Joe's life had been blighted by the intensity of his personal agony. Suffering has mastered him, but as the "cold readiness for killing" ceases to be the determining motive in his life Joe finds salvation in mastering suffering. Assuredly, the long hours of laborious but purposeful farm work in which he becomes engaged after his escape from prison give Joe a sense that forbearance and endurance of the sort of pain of everyday suffering resulting from hard work is as much a part of the work experience as the work itself. As he grows in the realization that suffering and hardship are integral to human experience and must be borne with a certain dignity and fortitude, he develops a more intimate relationship with Ellen Shefford who has herself suffered and agonized over her own reversals of fortune--the death of her young husband, crop failure, financial setbacks--but always in the expectation that future prospects will be better and that ultimately all will work out for the best.

Joe's transformation, distilled in large measure from his laborious and sometimes frustrating work experience in the country as well as from his increasingly intimate relationship with Ellen Shefford, delivers him from his alienation as a fugitive, releasing him from the self-reliant disposition which
supported the need for the vengeful action which he believed was the sole means by which he could be satisfied for the loss of his family. That conviction, that he would be his own arbiter of justice, led to his confinement in prison. Later, as a fugitive having escaped from prison, he experienced a new found freedom on the land and among the people in the community near Wareby off the Shrewsdale exit, liberating him from the perverse mental set and marginalized physical isolation of his relatively solitary life. Here Joe finds solace in unrestrained reflection while working at harvesting Ellen's crop of wheat:

He gave himself to the present and the long perimeters became shorter and shorter. His skill grew with every go-around and he didn't have to watch the paths so closely, his eyes did the seeing for him, and he allowed himself to think unguardedly and dwell on things freely, daydreaming like a man without a care (SE 255).

Even the intrusion into this reverie of the thought of his determined and continuing plan eventually to kill the bikers no longer governs his thinking as it had done in the past:

Then his plans came back to him and he became grim for a while, but that was soon lost in the effort of work and his awareness of the living fields (SE 255).

To be able "to think unguardedly and dwell on things freely" without any prolonged and obsessive dwelling on his "plans" which "the effort of work" has displaced is indicative of the
salutary effect experienced beyond the Shrewsdale exit of a new reality found in working the land as well as in Ellen Shefford's own life of quiet desperation.

Buell's central narrative motif is focused upon Joe Grant's suffering and redemption. Unmerited suffering, occasioned by the kind of sudden and traumatic event over which he has no control, does not accord with the otherwise satisfying middle class lifestyle and experience of a young engineer. The challenge for Joe is to know how to suffer, but for this he is ill prepared. Self-serving revenge provides him with an instinctive impetus to do what institutional justice would appear to be incapable of achieving. Buell's narrative makes clear, however, that individual initiative which attempts to confront one evil with another presupposes a personal moral authority, as Joe's action indicates, which does not really exist. The moral imperative in Buell's narrative requires deliverance from the presumption that one can save himself from whatever personal affliction besets him. In the most simplistic terms, Joe does not recognize the truism of the axiom that man proposes and God disposes. Joe Grant needs others in the same way that one possessed of spiritual convictions needs God. Ultimately, Buell indicates, it is through others that one can initiate and bring about a change of purpose in life and regain the principled morality which has been lost. To this end, Joe needs Sparrs who has worked effectively within the law and who mediates the promise of compensatory justice to Joe when urging him to give himself up
and conform to the law. He also needs Ellen Shefford and her family who become a substitutive compensation for the family he had lost to the assault of the bikers. Underlying this pattern of dependencies, a characteristically Catholic perspective on the nature of human suffering and what it means informs the narrative. While Joe Grant has an arm's length association with Catholicism—his late wife and her family are Catholics—he manifests no overt expression of Catholic sensibility or spirituality himself, other than at the funeral mass for his wife and daughter when

...the ritual spoke of them, boldly presuming God, as if they were still in existence and somehow happy, and for the moment this met Grant's feelings and his aching desires. He wasn't getting religion, he was acknowledging a gesture that was more than just nice and that was also seriously intended (SE 79).

Despite Joe's non-religious bent, Buell does inform the narrative of Joe's destiny through suffering to redemption with a pattern of experience reflecting a Catholic perspective of the spiritual dimension of human suffering.

Suffering in itself is an evil which is the common experience of all humanity but viewed from the context of Catholic spirituality suffering ultimately becomes paradoxically efficacious insofar as it reveals the nexus between the humanity of Christ and all human experience. In Catholic consciousness, the faithful believer accepts, both in the sacrifice of the mass
as well as in other forms of spiritual expression, that the redemptive and salvific Easter event exists only through the Good Friday agony. The crucifix is not only emblematic of Catholic identity; it also emphasizes that the suffering Christ allies one most intimately with God, not at a point of greatest strength but of weakness:

The crucifix is, indeed, a sign of contradiction. It captures, we profess, the most perfectly fulfilled human being who ever lived at the moment of his greatest triumph, conquering through his impotence (O'Malley 102).

Herein lies the central paradox of Christian experience, as Pope John Paul II recently observed in his encyclical Salvifici Doloris:

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the
working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ. In Him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self (46-7).

Suffering not only has meaning but is a means of redemption. From the Catholic point of view this applies to all humanity which shares in the divine nature by participating in

...the greatness of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering of Christ. The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ (Salvifici Doloris 39).

Suffering is not a solitary experience in Catholic theology. Nor is one left on one's own to find justice in taking an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. To be identified with and share in the suffering of others is to suffer with Christ himself in his mystical body. Spiritually, incorporated into the Body of
Christ, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, such as Joe Grant as well as his wife and daughter, share collectively in all human suffering:

In this Body, Christ wishes to be united with every individual, and in a special way he is united with those who suffer....In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings--in any part of the world and at any time in history--to that extent he in his own way completes the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world....the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering. In this dimension--the dimension of love--the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished (Salvifici Doloris 49-50).

In this distinctively Catholic view, suffering humanity shares intimately at all times, in all places, and with all persons in the suffering of Christ who was prompted by love to satisfy divine justice. This conviction, not at all unknown to Buell, provides the informing impetus to the transformation of Joe Grant at the end of the novel. At the same time that Joe has been spiritually and morally ravaged, the means of redemption has also been available to him, only to be fully realized in the new found love he finds in the "human realities" which Ellen Shefford and her family represent. What Buell wants us to see is
that redeeming love is the other side of revenge. All the familial love that Joe had formerly known with Sue and Patty, a love which is at the basis of those "human realities" which he wants to recapture, is replicated on the farm in the household of Ellen Shefford. In this lies Joe's salvation as a human being and, if one wishes to view this from a Catholic perspective, his victory over suffering. The suffering of Christ remains the model for Buell, showing

...in an undeniably dramatic way how to face unmerited suffering, an example of dignity, trust, and love—even in the face of despair. He endured His passion simply to show us that's the way things are. Suffering is inevitable in human life....What Calvary is saying is that there is no way to enrichment of the human soul other than through surmounting unwelcome challenges (O'Malley 118).

Joe Grant may not be consciously aware of his way of the Cross that has brought him to new life on Ellen Shefford's farm. Nevertheless, the analogue to Joe's deliverance and transformation derives from a Catholic view of redemptive suffering, this being a part of Catholic experience which Buell brings to his fiction to provide a philosophical foundation giving a meaningful spiritual frame of reference to the narrative.

The Catholic spirituality which permeates and fortifies Buell's fiction is further enhanced by the incorporation within
the text of consistent patterns of evocative images which, in turn, owe much of their form to the Catholic consciousness behind Buell's writing. Joe Grant's narrative quest is to find an effective resolution to the consequent suffering he experiences after the loss of his family to the ravaging bikers. To this end the remembrance of the night of the highway ambush motivates his ensuing actions arising out of his grief and pain:

The white bodies under his flashlight, the discovered horror, untouchable by police or law, all this was central, everything derived from it, his feelings, his actions, the desire—perhaps impossible—to set it right. It all came together in him, and only him. It was part of his person. So much living reality, so much good had been destroyed, he had to keep something of it in existence, in himself, he couldn't let it slip, unfought for, into a final nothingness (SE 156).

However, Joe's determination to rectify a wrong in order to preserve something of lost goodness is subverted—or, on a moral plane, perverted—when he willfully decides to kill the bikers himself. This misdirected exercise of his will to seek revenge for the deaths of his wife and daughter by killing their killers is tantamount to a fall from grace. While Buell does not explicitly characterize Joe's malaise in spiritual terms, the implicit sense of Joe's killer response to the evil which has beset him is that he is very much spiritually at risk. Like any Catholic who obdurately perseveres in a state of unrepentant
mortal sin, Joe's obsessive will to be revenged renders him implacable to the operation of sanctifying grace. This does not mean, however, that Joe is forever lost to redemption. On the contrary, Joe can find (and ultimately does find) regeneration in a new life of reconciliation when he becomes responsive to the operation of divine grace in himself and in the world around him. Indeed, while planning to ambush the killers, as well as during the weeks during his incarceration and his later escape beyond the Shrewdale exit, Joe is intermittently affected by the moral sense, emanating from within and most often from sources outside his consciousness, that his commitment to death-dealing vengeance is wrong, even as he all the while rationalizes a personal justification for his actions. With considerable subtlety, Buell infuses his text with seemingly non-religious stratagems that do in effect recall a particular Catholic view of reality. Chief among these are Buell's "presences" which enrich the imaginative effect of the fiction by evoking a spiritual dimension of reality which has an effect upon the moral disposition of Joe Grant.

The Communion of Saints as a singularly Catholic concept of spiritual life postulates the unity and interaction of all creation both physical and metaphysical. From this venerable and pious *communio sanctorum*—the interaction of holy things and of holy ones—Buell develops the notion of bonding between Joe and the presence of Sue and Patty. Immediately after their murders, Joe looks with a sense of unreality upon the site of the ambush
where a state trooper redirects the arriving police "away from the marked-off space as if it were sacred and not to be entered without privilege or purification" (SE 23). This image of the murder site as a sanctuary not only suggests that this is a spiritual domain but it also implies that the deaths of Patty and Sue represent a sacrificial oblation. Therefore, one can conceive of Patty and Sue as taking on a spiritual nature even, assuming one wants to take the suggested image of a holy place to an imaginative conclusion, with the possibility of possessing a spiritual power or influence that can be efficacious in effecting the redemption of a spiritually and physically broken and battered Joe Grant.

The site of the murders is to all outward appearances an ordinary embankment beside the highway but when Joe revisits this location on the day following the murders, it again has a compelling spiritual effect upon this rather ordinary secular man who looks at the earthen spot seeing

>[j]ust what was there, and it was all there was: late-afternoon sunshine and countryside and traffic on the road and something like the echo of a prayer in some region of himself, a desire embracing he knew not what. They [Patty and Sue] were at a place called Doyle's [mortuary], he knew, but they were here more than anywhere else. Presence, memory, love, a part of him, always (SE 62).

As the image of the death scene as a sanctuary is transformed
into that of a shrine, Joe concludes his visit to this one place in the world with a sacral meaning which engages him spiritually in "something like the echo of a prayer in some region of himself." This is the place where he could be closest to the presence of Patty and Sue:

He walked all over the area as if he had to bring presence to it and slowly went back to the car and sat in it with the door open looking at nothing in particular (SE 62).

This same sense of Patty and Sue as living and abiding present realities in his life becomes more intensely focused when Joe makes his one last visit to the family home two days after the murders:

They were there in every way except actually. At every move he could hear them, at every turn he could see them, reminders at this elbow, presences just over his shoulder, the haunting patterns of the brain, the involving fullness of family that could never be undone, it could only be left to be, left in part behind (SE 84).

While Joe's sense of "presences just over his shoulder" might be thought to be only a manifestation of a heightened romantic imagination, Buell later provides a spiritual dimension for these presences at a critical time for Joe near the end of the novel when his continuing will to be avenged must be considered within the context of other spiritual and psychological
variables which have become meaningful to him since taking the
turnoff at the Shrewsdale exit. Ellen Shefford and her young
family engender a rebirth of love and shared familial ties which
has the effect of restoring a sense of family values that Joe
had known with Sue and Patty. While laboring in the fields, the
reality of the sanctifying presence of Sue and Patty, imaged as
accessible patron saints, becomes apparent to Joe, thereby
enabling the love that he knew with them to be fulfilled anew in
Ellen Shefford and her family:

...he allowed himself to think unguardedly and dwell
on things freely....He was alone in the open....And he
dwelled on Sue and Patty, and spoke out loud about
them, and to them, factually, without breaking, his
pain undiminished, but somewhat at peace, for they too
were present, a part of him always, and they were a
sort of benediction to the place where he was, as
though all he did was for them. And in a way it was
ture (SE 255).

The efficacy of the grace effected in a moment of any "sort of
benediction" foreshadows spiritual deliverance in a Buell novel.
Elizabeth Lucy in The Pyx is sustained by such an infusion of
grace when, even unbeknown to her, the priest with whom she had
been meeting "raised his hand in benediction after her as though
blessing the night" (122). This ritual action is not wasted.
Within hours Elizabeth is transformed from a sinner to a saint
through her heroic action in safeguarding the Body of Christ.
For Joe Grant, the quest for a just resolution to the murders of his wife and daughter is fulfilled shortly after he has experienced in a moment of heightened devotion their "sort of benediction" which has put him "somewhat at peace" and consequently newly disposed to replace his intention of killing the bikers by beginning a new life with Ellen Shefford and her family.

A further appeal to a romantic sensibility, yet one operating just as effectively as a paradigm for spiritual enhancement of the fiction, finds expression in Buell's depiction of nature. The difference between the country and the city is classically represented in Buell's fiction as the difference between good and evil. The Pyx is an urban novel seething with a pervasive evil. In Four Days young Tom is redeemed from the evils that encompass him in the slums of Montreal only after he has left the city and begins walking in the countryside towards Val Laurent. In one incidental scene, Buell describes Tom leaving the highway and mounting a roadside hill where amid the "strange noises" of a bird, the movement of branches, and the sound of bees

[his attention expanded with the scenery and he caught more distant sounds far and away....A small breeze nudged the hot leaves....He watched the clouds puffing themselves lazily on the horizon; little by little his surroundings lost their initial strangeness but not enough to leave him at the mercy of his

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thoughts, and he found himself less unwilling to stay and prolong a precarious moment of peace (FD 92).

This interlude wherein nature is an instrument of peace typifies the spiritually enlivening role of nature in Buell's fiction, a function that is indicative of "the sacramental dimension of Catholicism, the impulse that sees all creation as a potential revelation of God" (Allen 20). Tom's turning aside from the highway and finding a "precarious moment of peace" at the top of a small hill is a microcosm of the narrative pattern and spiritual direction found in The Shrewsdale Exit. Leaving the fast lanes of the highway behind him, Joe Grant becomes enveloped by a rural environment, where he seeks refuge distantly removed from urban influences. Having escaped from the regimentation of mind and body in the state prison, he experiences in a new found country area what is tantamount to a conversion experience and certainly a new life of positive moral purpose.

Buell signals that a new life experience is ahead for Joe the first morning after he has taken the Shrewsdale exit to drive Townley Miller to his farm. Evoking a sense of a rite of passage, Buell's narrative depicts Joe in the early morning light "which intensified the greenery" making his way...

...past the barn looking at the unfolding scenery. A fenced-off cow trail led downhill and stopped at a timber bridge over a noisy brook. On the other side was chewed-down pasture land spotted with animal
leavings and tough bushes, its distant ridges looked as smooth as a golf course. Inexplicably it made him remember the city with fear. But he kept looking at the fresh hills and he perceived them as they were, no cars or flagpoles or people, just warming light on the greenness of the countryside (SE 228).

In this bucolic setting, suffused with greenness, a life of new hope begins with an ablution, washing away, as it were, yesterday's blemishes in preparation for a new day in a fresh environment:

On impulse he knelt down and drank from his cupped hands. Morning sun and clear water and cold on his face, shirt wet, knees hurting on the rock, he was no place he knew, and yet it was not alien. Something reached within him, something welcome. A moment of sheer forgetfulness....he stripped to the waist and washed and soaked his face and went through a smarting routine of shaving an unsoftened beard by feel....He rinsed and splashed....It was all silly. And good (SE 228).

This cleansing experience in the midst of "the warming light of the greenness of the countryside," evoking the grace of baptism, does not signal instant conversion from the hatred and revenge which compensates for his suffering, just as baptism itself is not instrumental in perpetuating a life of continued virtue. While redemption in Buell's fiction might be dramatically
realized in a particular moment or through a significant event, it is preceded by a process of renewal in which one becomes incrementally responsive to the operation of grace which is mediated through all creation. Consequently, the action in a Buell novel tends to develop gradually, thereby allowing a central character to be affected and influenced by people and places around him. The living nature that Joe discovers beyond the Shrewdale exit is itself a particular influence, healing and gradually assuaging those defects of character which inhibit growth and development in the highest and best morality.

Still determined to exact his own justice upon the bikers, Joe initially views "the countryside from another aspect. It was like being on vacation, the idleness, the scenery... (SE 234). For Joe, the landscape remains an environment that lacks reality: "For him it was only an illusion, strong enough to be enjoyable, and it soon passed" (SE 234). Nature is not dead and distant. Rather, it is, as Buell repeatedly mentions, "alive" (SE 238) in the "living fields" (SE 255) where it was "good to be" (SE 274). It is not long, however, before he realizes while working on Charles Fraser's farm that those, like old Charles himself, who are close to nature as they work and contend with its life-giving and productive presence are also formed by it:

The outdoors wasn't merely scenery, it meant blistering work. It was alive, it changed daily, and it grew constantly...and would grow wild in one season if left untouched. But the old man tended it, and made
it tame, as it had him, and it delivered for him (SE 239).

As if to expunge whatever demons are within, Joe devotes himself to long days of laborious work, driven by his work in the fields seemingly to fight suffering with suffering.

The reciprocal experience of taming and being tamed by nature increasingly affects Joe as his exhausting work and closeness to the land tempers his outlook and draws him to Ellen Shefford. In the early morning, as he approaches Ellen's farm, he begins to see, in a Wordsworthian sense, into the heart of things:

The roads weren't yet dusty and the clear air let him see the surrounding hills, he watched them as he drove. They were always an unfolding discovery, they had lost their vacation look and he regarded them with hard-earned respect (SE 250).

What nature induces in Joe's life is a degree of order and regularity that he had lost when he decided to be a law unto himself with all of the disruption that had ensued in the chase, the trial, imprisonment and in his unsettled life as an escaped convict. It is not necessary, Buell indicates, to contend with nature but to harmonize one's engagement with it to accord with its benefits and demands. The taming process for Joe, developed during the time spent working on the farms, recalls at least one other principle derived from Wordsworth's pantheism: Let Nature be your teacher. Joe is no pantheist but he does experience
nature as a mediator of moral development. What Joe eventually experiences, then, is a "sense of inner being that had come to him in the last weeks" (SE 269). For Joe Grant this means growth chiefly in conforming to the cardinal virtue of fortitude when confronted by suffering.

Near the end of Buell's narrative, Joe meets momentarily with his former father-in-law at a rest area alongside the state highway. Returning once again to the natural surroundings off the Shrewdale exit which have increasingly become his natural habitat, Joe experiences the pervasive effect that the environment has had upon him. From the narrator's point of view, the promptings from Joe's soul will be enlivened as he becomes responsive to the spirit within:

At last he got started and drove hurriedly to the Shrewsdale exit. Once into the countryside he felt easier and freer, time and place once more within him, as if his soul were his own. There were messages from this, but he wasn't listening (SE 272).

Restoration of Joe's soul is not going to be effected simply through his conscious realization. Rather, at the appropriate moment of spiritual readiness, the vitality of nature will be absorbed and internalized in his soul where "messages" can influence his moral being.

The influence of the messages from nature, the presences and special benediction of Sue and Patty, the exemplary fortitude of Ellen Shefford who bears her losses with quiet
dignity and forbearance, and the mediation of Sparrs which enables Joe to look forward to a new life: each of these works effectively upon Joe to save him from the evil which he had sought to destroy. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Buell develops a positive resolution to Joe's moral crisis, enabling him to embark upon the transformation which Claire Miller anticipates when she first meets Joe after he has arrived with her husband Townley at the Miller farm near the Shrewsdale exit:

"Towny tells me your wife died."
"Yes, she did."
"That's too bad. You're young though, got plenty of time for a new life" (SE 230).

That new life, however, will be radically different from the lone wolf renegade fugitive existence that Joe has lived since his wife's death. Having arrived at the Miller farm, Joe sleeps outside in Townley's truck overnight and, having readied himself for the day while still outside next morning, he tells Claire:

"I didn't want to bother anybody" to which she observes: "A-ah! That's no attitude. Livin' is bothering somebody, generally everybody" (SE 229), a truism which reiterates the remark of the escaping convict the previous night that "A loner is a loser, ain't you heard" (SE 216)? In Joe's new life, he will indeed be assisted by Sparrs into realizing that he cannot deliver himself from the moral quagmire effected by his intention to kill the bikers. Joe is not going to be his own saviour. He will need Sparrs' help just as he will need Ellen Shefford to bring him
into a life of new found "human realities."

Throughout the novel, however, Buell elicits considerable empathy for a loner who is very much a loser. Indeed, were it not that Joe Grant only experiences his reformation in the last lines of the novel, one might otherwise expect that Buell's protagonist is somehow justified in becoming a law unto himself: the killers who remain at large are pathological sadists, the loss of his family is devastating, and the legal system is ineffectual. While Joe must endure the innuendo of the coroner implicating him in the deaths of Sue and Patty as well as submit to his lawyer's recommendation that he plead guilty to his attack upon his attackers, the bikers remain free, indulging themselves in the psychotic pleasure of a job well done. Victimized by the restraint and seeming permissiveness of the law as well as by the pain of his loss and the necessity to reconstitute the elements of his life, Joe's grief evokes a sympathetic reader response which Buell maintains throughout the narrative. This empathetic identification with Joe's suffering—we can feel his pain—seems acceptable and justifiable according to the cultural mores of our time. What Buell's artistry accomplishes in this narrative is the alignment of the reader's sympathy with the smouldering angst of the protagonist in this revenge drama so that the reader may also vicariously experience the intensity of what conventional wisdom, found in the art and social reality of popular secular culture, insists is the right way to act. Reflecting this widely held opinion, one
contemporary journalist observes at the beginning of his interpretive report:

Like millions of parents, I have always known this: If any man deliberately hurt any of my children, I'd go after him. I'd get him eventually. And I'd hurt him badly.

I don't know whether I would act coldly or in a rage but it would be clear afterward that I did it with much planning and premeditation.

Hell, I would announce beforehand that I was coming for him so that he couldn't have a single moment free of the fear of me, just as I would never be free of the anguish he had caused (Province A14).

If this is not Joe's voice, it is an approximation of his attitude and his personal sense of moral outrage. Like the populist journalist, he will be satisfied. Violence will exacerbate his hurt. However, as the development and conclusion of Buell's narrative shows, such an approach to the presence of evil is self-defeating. When Joe's moral sensibility is more positively affected after he takes the Shrewdale exit into a new life, he as well as the reader who has identified with him both arrive at a new understanding exemplified in the passion of Christ that the evil that is suffering can lead to a greater good.

Buell's protagonists are ultimately shown to be affected not only by their physical but also by their spiritual natures.
More than simply experiencing personal and psychological development, the lives of Buell's characters have meaning to the extent that they are spiritually revitalized by the incursion of grace, sometimes mediated sacramentally, sometimes activated through love. This spiritual presence or intervention does not exist in the fiction because Buell's characters are always Catholic or even demonstrably religious. Rather, it forms a spiritual paradigm within the novel, analogously extending the sense of the fiction by means of spiritual realities peculiar to Catholic doctrine, theology, or cultural tradition. As such, the Catholic spirituality in a Buell novel is not merely a contrived or superficial overlay but exists as an integral part of character development and ultimately determines the moral sense of the novel itself. Central to any Buell novel is the symbiotic causal relationship between the externalization expressed in a character's actions which are occasioned by internal spiritual promptings found in Catholic faith and practice. In his earliest novels, Buell had shown in *The Pyx*, for example, how Elizabeth Lucy, whose life was blighted by evil, attained sudden and unanticipated heroic sanctity as she was impelled to safeguard the sacramental Body of Christ. In *Four Days* as well, the kid-called-Tom, prompted to confess to the priest his defensive killing of Ritch, experiences the grace of penitential satisfaction before continuing his tragic quest for a life of fulfilled love. Joe Grant's characterization similarly reflects a narrative pattern of development from buffeting to blessing.
The turmoil of Joe's post traumatic dysfunction has destroyed him much more than it has led to the destruction of the bikers whom he seeks to kill. What Buell establishes in Joe's characterization as an obsessed renegade fugitive is that he is as much a victim of the bikers' evil as were his wife and daughter. His renunciation of his determination to kill the bikers will, as the conclusion to the novel indicates, enable him to recover some part of what he had lost to the bikers. Insofar as Joe "somehow...had managed not to choose for death" (SE 279), he has achieved new life in which, having gained some insight into human suffering, he will cease to be victimized by the bikers' gratuitous evil as he forsakes death dealing vengeance for the love and fulfillment to be found in the "human realities" of Ellen Shefford and her family.

In order to convey the differing attitudes of Joe Grant and Detective Sparrs as they confront the unconscionable evil wrought by the bikers upon Joe's family, Buell juxtaposes Joe's intuitive, affective response to the violence as a countervailing balance to Sparrs' more reasoned detailing of the case which will establish legal culpability predicated on principles of justice. From the outset, Joe focuses upon the bikers themselves as perpetrators of an arbitrary evil which has deprived him of the love and stability of a family. Joe reacts immediately and subjectively, directing his demand for retributive justice against the bikers who are responsible for the murders. The fact that they have no charges laid against
them and that they are free from any accountability for their actions only exacerbates Joe's sense of moral outrage. He wants justice, he wants it immediately, and therefore commits himself to a course of revenge which he believes will rectify the imbalance he has experienced of the power of evil over good. For Joe, justice can best be served by the elimination of the perpetrators of evil in order to eradicate the presence of evil itself.

Of course Joe is not alone in his quest for justice. Sparrs is equally concerned that the bikers be held responsible for their evil actions which they have unleashed in the community but his strategy in confronting this evil and his ensuing response to it are radically different from Joe's subjective reaction. Sparrs' outlook, by the nature of his position, is determined by his role as an officer of the law. He needs facts and evidence which will objectively define the evil assault that has taken place. His is a long range plan for confronting evil, making it requisite that any action in opposition to evil be gauged in relation to the authority of the law. For Joe, authority rests within the individual, thus justifying personal retaliatory revenge without being held accountable to any moral code other than his own. Consequently, he is frustrated by legal strategies, "feeling that somehow the human couldn't count, it was outside the law" (SE 151). Although Joe Grant has been suddenly and savagely engulfed by the ravaging presence of evil, Sparrs' everyday existence is pervaded by evil, even extending
to the precincts of his local police station, which he remembers, used to be the "safest place in the world, some people think." In fact, Sparrs tells Joe, "It never was...not in this country" (SE 93). The ever present reality of evil which is commonplace for Sparrs is far removed from "the secure casual life of less than a week ago" (SE 119) that Joe had enjoyed. Only after his encounter with the bikers while anticipating a happy family vacation does Joe sense the new reality of "a vaguely hostile universe" (SE 119), long familiar to Sparrs but a traumatic revelation to Joe. In confronting this hostile universe, Sparrs counsels forbearance, urging Joe to restrain, if not forsake, his determination to personally confront the perpetrators of evil simply on a human level and without recourse to the law:

"I shouldn't be telling you this," said Sparrs. "Why not let it rest?"

"No. It happened. I want the whole picture."

"Why bother? There's no point to it."

"Leave it behind, Joe. Go back to your job."

"I'm on vacation."

Sparrs sighed and sat back as if there was nothing more to say (SE 95).

The irreconcilable difference in principles and outlook between Joe and Captain Sparrs becomes the narrative crux from which Joe will pursue his human response to confront and eliminate those bikers whose evil presence victimizes him just as it victimized
his wife and daughter. Sparrs meanwhile regards the present evil from a moral perspective predicated on the expectation that good will prevail after the ever present reality of evil, which confronts both himself as well as Joe, self-destructs of its own accord. This strategy of forbearance, as Buell develops it, ultimately proves to be the right course of action.

As a foil to Joe Grant, Sparrs is a particularly significant figure in the novel exemplifying a positive moral stance in relation to the presence of evil. If there is any doubt that Joe's determination to eradicate the evil in their midst through an act of retributive revenge is wrong headed and ill advised, let alone morally reprehensible, Sparrs provides a countervailing balance by upholding principles of justice and by working within the legal system. At the same time, there is an ambivalence in Sparrs' approach. While he upholds the rule of law, he also understands the frailty of human nature. He knows why Joe undertakes his plan of action against the bikers. Nevertheless, Sparrs himself maintains a commitment to a just course of conduct: he can sympathize with Joe's actions but he cannot condone them. He tells Joe: "You never can tell. We keep working on it, and waiting, that's basic to police work" (SE 101). Working and waiting define endurance. However, in recognizing the human proclivity to find satisfaction in immediate retribution, such a principled approach to the containment of evil in the world that Sparrs advocates presents a challenge to one's firm purpose of commitment to the highest
and best morality. As the narrator explains after Sparrs has detailed his investigation into the bikers' actions: "He spoke like a man trying to keep a faith" (SE 101). This tension between maintaining order and due process while humanly sympathizing with Joe's moral frustration is reflected as well in the narrator's interpretation of the ambivalent nature of the conduct of Sparrs and his fellow agents: "On the record they were professionals, off the record they were themselves" (SE 151).

More than just a character foil to Joe Grant, Sparrs signifies a presence in the novel of a steadfastness arising from a solid moral foundation. His values are not only the best but also, as the end of the novel indicates, the most effective. Sparrs' visit to Joe on Ellen's farm, albeit somewhat in the manner of a deus ex machina, is the proximate cause of Joe's redemption. While Joe's restoration has been prepared for by a new found reality of persons and places beyond the Shrewsdale exit, the controlling impetus in his life, right up to the moment of Sparrs' visit, continues to be his plan to kill the bikers. In his last but climactic encounter with Joe, Sparrs details how the bikers' evil has redounded upon them, their own violence being the means of their own defeat. This has been Sparrs' vision throughout the trajectory of his role in the narrative: evil is self-destructive; justice and goodness will ultimately prevail. The moral efficacy of his conviction has meaning not only in reference to the demise of the bikers but
also for the destiny of Joe Grant who is immediately rehabilitated:

Joe watched him as he went down the slope. Diminishing figure, dust, the settling of it, and nothing, as if he had not come. But everything was different (SE 278).

In making "everything...different" for Joe, Sparrs maintains the integrity of his principles while at the same time following a strategy which has subverted the principal reason for Joe's revenge. Long-suffering but vigilant forbearance has over the long term proved efficacious; justice has been served; and the death-dealing bikers have become victims of their own violence. Being solely responsible for this resolution of the problem of confronting evil, Sparrs represents a conflation of several attributes of justice and mercy. He upholds justice, he works within the context of the law, and, as the conclusion of the novel reveals, he was consistently right in his approach to forestalling evil. Yet on a human level he understands why Joe would abrogate the moral as well as civil law in his violent quest for vengeance. Sparrs' outlook may reflect the ideals of justice but he is understanding and compassionate enough on a human level to know that a good cause such as the love of one's family may also serve a bad end such as death-dealing revenge.

If Joe forsakes Sparrs, Sparrs does not give up on him. Rather, he continues working on the case against the bikers to Joe's eventual advantage. In his final meeting with Joe he
vindicates the way in which he has dealt with the evil which has affected their lives. At the same time, he can envision a freedom for Joe which will enable him to replace "the cold readiness for killing" with the possibility of realizing those future "human realities" which will require "another kind of struggle to keep them existing" (SE 279). Effective in his role as one who facilitates a new life for the fugitive Joe Grant, Sparrs takes on a representational dimension incorporating both compassion and moral rectitude. Buell's colleague, Gilbert Drolet, once mentioned to him that the policemen in his novels were "very sympathetic, very understanding, perhaps too much so....you seem to stress the compassion of these people" (Conversation 65). Certainly a good part of this affection has been transferred into the character of Sparrs which represents as much the priest as the policeman, effective in his role as one who loves the sinner but hates the sin. Dismayed by Joe's acts of revenge, Sparrs remains consistently solicitous for Joe in his adversity as he struggles morally and psychologically with the sudden and unexpected incursion of evil into his life. Sparrs' insight into the nature of moral debility takes on the quality of mercy in the closing moments of his off the record visit to Joe at Ellen Shefford's farm. Forgiveness, Sparrs tells Joe, is a real probability if Joe will avail himself of the means to attain it. The wheels of justice may grind exceedingly slowly but it is only because Sparrs has persevered in his quest for justice that Joe can anticipate a future in which so much
goodness that has been lost can be restored if not regained. From being a prisoner and fugitive, Joe can look forward to freedom; what he has lost to the evil which has deprived him of Sue and Patty he can hope to regain in the goodness of Ellen Shefford, Henrietta and her brothers; in place of the corrosive angst of revenge, he can be assured that the bikers have themselves become victims of the evil they bore to others. Sparrs' role ensures that such justice and goodness will prevail. While he epitomizes all that is best in one who seeks for justice, he also represents a position of moral persuasiveness and leadership offsetting all manner of vice by upholding virtue. Indications of adherence to institutionalized religion are of minor significance in the novel, but the institution of law, order, and justice which Sparrs serves evokes a sense of personal responsibility and accountability in its secular context analogously approximating the role of the spiritual mission of the Church itself. Both exist as corporate entities, the one upholding the laws of man, the other the laws of God; each is empowered by the exercise of justice and mercy; and both work to ensure that ultimately good will prevail over evil. As the instrument of Joe's redemption, Sparrs himself is the compassionate yet principled mediator who bears a compelling message to Joe of the prospects for forgiveness with the ensuing promise of new life. Set against a world still subject to the deprivation occasioned by evil, Sparrs, in the manner of Christ himself, had urged Joe Grant to conform to virtue and avoid
vice. While Joe falls from grace, forgiveness and redemption become accessible to him only through the mediation of Sparrs.

Having created a moral crisis in the narrative by setting a misguided Joe Grant in opposition to the law as well as to the perpetrators of unconscionable evil, Buell's narrative engages the reader imaginatively in the experience of Joe's struggle against evil. If *The Shrewsdale Exit* were simply another fiction adhering to standard conventions of the thriller genre, the vengeful act and the murderous intent epitomized in Joe's actions might satisfy a taste for mere sensation. However, while exploiting the sensation of vengeance, Buell has an implicit moral end in view towards which he leads the reader who has throughout the narrative imaginatively identified himself with the compelling but nevertheless morally misdirected actions of Joe Grant. Having been sympathetically partial to the apparent justice of Joe's moral dislocation, the reader, like the fictional protagonist himself, should realize, as Sparrs does, that the possibility exists for the conversion of anyone who is well disposed, no matter how grievous the fault. Through this realization, Buell's novel, as Rosengarten has observed, works...at the level of moral fable as well as of action and suspense. The author's intention is to take us beyond the external manifestations of violence to the effects of such violence upon an ordinary, "decent" member of society who becomes tainted by the very evil he wishes to destroy....(94)
It had been Joe's conviction that an act of personal vengeance would mitigate suffering and that all he needed to do to be satisfied according to his own sense of justice would be to kill the killers. However, in the last few words of the novel after Joe has been assured by Sparrs that the surviving bikers are under surveillance and that there is a strong possibility that Joe will be exculpated, Buell presents an explicitly different response to the conventional need to find satisfaction through revenge. Here, Joe reflects upon the vacuity of his life since the bikers' onslaught on the highway. His desire for revenge has been self-defeating, resulting in his own victimization. Joe has been imprisoned not only externally by the law but also internally by his misguided obsessive compulsion to seek his own kind of justice. He is aware that his vengeful attempts to eradicate the evil that has adversely affected so much of his life may eventually defeat him as well, assuredly as much in body as it has already done in spirit. Restored to the same familial love which he seemingly lost with Patty and Sue on the highway and which at the end of the novel is reactivated through his engagement within the surrogate family of Ellen Shefford and her three young children, Joe forsakes his dehumanizing determination to seek out and kill the bikers:

Grief and danger and flight were over as things past, the grief never to go fully, and the strain, though still present, had lost its roots. The cold readiness for killing was being replaced by human realities, and
by another kind of struggle to keep them existing....Somehow he had managed not to choose for death (SE 278-9).

As this resolution at the end of the novel indicates, Joe made the wrong decision in his attempt to seek retributive justice to satisfy the suffering and loss he had experienced after the bikers had killed Patty and Sue. Revenge, Buell makes clear, is a morally bankrupt response, the corollary being that a moral corrective exists of a more ennobling and spiritually fulfilling nature. Such a moral touchstone against which Joe's deviant decision and consequent actions can be measured forms an integral part of a Catholic perception of the spiritual meaning of human suffering. It is by drawing upon this Catholic consciousness of the role of suffering in human life that Buell can portray a Joe Grant who is saved from himself to share once again in those "human realities" of shared suffering and love that had been destroyed by the bikers. The assurance given by Captain Sparrs at the conclusion of the novel that the courts will prosecute the surviving bikers for their crimes and that Joe himself will most probably be exonerated promises legal and social redemption. Prior to this, however, Joe had already begun to experience "the sense of inner being that had come to him in the last weeks" (SE 269) and it is this interior restoration, the apparent realization that life not death, love not hate, living for others and not to oneself, that produces the new man who, in the last line of the novel, with the determination to
reveal to Ellen Shefford the "discovery of who he was" (*SE* 279),
has regained that hope for the future that had been lost in
violence one dark night beside the highway.
Survival is not the only game in *Playground*. As a means to an end, Spence Morison's determined will to live after his float plane had crash landed in a wilderness lake in northern Quebec initially sustains him in his expectation of an anticipated rescue by his friends whom he had preceded into the area to prepare for a vacation fishing holiday in this "sportsman's paradise" (*Playground* 14). However, while he might survive in the wilderness outside the catchment area of a rescue station, he has little hope of being rescued unless he initiates a strategy that will work towards his deliverance. Salvation, then, is what Morison really needs. He is lost, faces imminent death, and everything he has done to assist in any rescue attempt appears futile. The crisis in Morison's life requires more than survival in order to effect a resolution, the crash of his plane into the wind swept depths of a woodland lake epitomizing the disintegration in mid-life of long held principles and practices which had given meaning and purpose to his life:

The plane had carried all his immediate needs and more. It summarized his resources and skills and plans, his status, the capacity to be and do, as though it were his very self. And in a way it was (*Plgd* 45).

Lost in the Quebec wilderness, Morison must be saved not only
from a paradise lost but also from himself.

As a stereotype of the organization man, Morison has a determined sense of purpose. An event or activity has had meaning for him only according to its effectiveness in attaining a predetermined end. For example, while driving in the "white-collar traffic" to Quebec City, he thinks that "[i]f he'd been on a business trip he would have stayed in the traffic, or, having pulled out, would have wanted to get back in. But now [on vacation] he was regarding it as something to get out of, something he shouldn't have been in at all" (Plgd 8-9). What he now perceives as a depersonalized "stampede of horsepower" makes him feel "uncomfortable, it was sudden and new, so it seemed, and there was something wrong. I once liked this. Whatever made me think that I liked it?" (Plgd 9). A true believer in a culture predicated on efficiency, Morison is committed to the principle that "[t]hings are done consciously and efficiently. He tried to run his life, life, that way" (Plgd 7). He is equally insistent on the efficient use of time "as if time were a thing and had an ideal use" (Plgd 10). While driving to the north country, he opted out of his prearranged driving schedule for about two hours and "chose to see the sights of Quebec City. It was a small private, subjective rebellion, nothing dramatic, a mild assertion of freedom, a willfulness perhaps, an insignificant shuffling of plans, his own plans at that" (Plgd 10). But the willful nonconformity of the city tour, much as he desired it, does not satisfy:"he thought of it as having lost
time, deliberately, and by choice, yes, but lost..." (Plgd 10). The same sense of obligation to satisfy a commitment to his professional career as an engineer undermines what would otherwise be a restful stopover for a night in St. Felicien:

"It didn't feel right not having to phone somebody, or read reports, or go to a meeting, or see people over lunch.... He was in a vacuum of unoccupied time.... He regretted stopping. And having stopped on the way. There had been no reason for it, no purpose. It didn't accomplish anything, he hadn't really enjoyed it, and it left him in a motel with nothing to do" (Plgd 11).

Morison is aware that his own "scheduling had been a way of avoiding this. Avoiding what?--he ducked from the inquiry by getting up and going out" (Plgd 11-2). What Morison seeks to avoid is any conscious realization that he has suppressed the better part of his human values beneath an acquired, rigorously disciplined and ordered persona of the market place. Left to his own inclinations, such as a non-scheduled tour or an unplanned overnight stay in a motel, Morison becomes dissatisfied and bored, guilt-ridden at the loss of time which could have been used without any alteration or deviation in more effectively achieving the objective realization of his goals and plans. Morison is no hollow man. However, he is at a juncture in his life where his intuitive self-knowledge of what it means to be unabashedly human and not a technocrat is beginning to subvert the order and efficiency of a very regulated existence.
What Morison seeks to avoid in his commitment to controlling demands of time and place is what he will eventually realize more fully through his ordeal in the Quebec wilderness: the primacy of the subjective reality of his inner life, not the objective cultural facade of power and control. Even before his flight into the wilderness, Morison is conscious of a cultural detachment which isolates him from others. The central irony of his life is that he knows that another and better reality exists but that it is the one goal that he is incapable of attaining. Having arrived in Chibougamau, he is received with accustomed deference by the guide and outdoorsman Henri Tétrault:

He had tried to get Henri to call him Spence, but the relationship stayed at Henri-and-Mister-Morison. They were in different worlds, as they both knew, not bridgeable merely by an interest in fishing. Henri's way of life was Morison's recreation, one man's work was the other man's sport, a pastime that took as much capital as a small business. No resentment, just the difference. And Henri had no way of knowing how much Morison admired the enterprise and achievement of these men (Plgd 15).

In Henri, Morison admires the "real person" that Henri fails to perceive behind Morison's cultural demeanor, just as Morison himself cannot identify with any familiarity the "real person" in any of the business executives with whom he works:

He could drink with them, they all drank, but with
their social faces on, always in work roles even at play, using their personalities as instruments in getting and keeping position or authority or power, always alert for advantage, constantly simulating genuiness the way people once had to feign moral goodness, the real persons submerged perhaps forever under a way of life that dictated everything they did, as rigid as an ancient priestly caste (Plgd 17).

In the company of his executive associates, Morison recognizes his own dilemma: he would be a "real person" like Henri Tétrault but his own social pretense, like that of his fellow executives, inhibits the attainment of this reality. Pretense and social hypocrisy in others as well as in himself precludes the fulfillment of the unrealized desire for a new life of human responsiveness and engagement which would replace the artifice of social posturing.

Such a hope of attaining an alternate reality dominates Morison's thinking as he prepares for a late evening meal after his arrival in Chibougamau:

He ordered the steak dinner and two draft beers, something he wouldn't do in Montreal, at least not in a working man's tavern.... He sipped then drank from one of the glasses, placed it on the table with a definite air of contentment...and told himself that he was here in real country at last....yeah, this is it. But his mind wouldn't let go, it seemed to insist on
things. He felt it forming a query, a doubt, what is this it?—a sort of gentle pressure from reality, as if desire stood briefly still and could be seen, a frozen frame in an already familiar replay... He looked around again to reaffirm his contentment. Yes, he said to himself with emphatically clear meaning, I want this (Plgd 16-7).

Morison can clearly envisage the hidden reality of his desire. From within his technologically conditioned consciousness this is "the frozen frame in an already familiar replay." What he needs is deliverance from the same technocratic artifice of his present life, a moribund and desensitized reality of pretense and simulation. Failing to achieve this integrity in his own person, he must suffer inwardly and in silence like the old sweeper at the Chibougamau tavern who also endures, working and drinking his way through each day:

You drink too much, old man, maybe I should tell you that, as if you didn't know it, maybe we could have a sensibility session. Yeah, maybe. It's a sophisticated way of faking genuiness, you tell the other guy what you really think of him, always bad, and he tells you, and the ensuing hatred passes off as honesty. But the guys in this room are simple, they'd spot the hatred, and it'd come to fists, not venom choked back, and swallowed and distilled into a special kind of smile. If I told you anything, old man, I'd tell you that I
like you, I like the way you suffer, yes, suffer, and yes, like, that's something you don't know, and it would be something good to know (Plgd 18).

In the old sweeper Morison finds the flawed but simple character of a worker who suffers with quiet dignity, a foreshadowing of that grace under pressure which Morison later emulates when he is lost in the woods. To Morison, there is a human dimension in the sweeper's suffering, not the hypocrisy of the clinical artifice experienced by those engaged in his extrapolated scenario of a sensitivity session. It is not the controlled deception of such popularized psychology that is good for suffering humanity. Real goodness derives from the knowledge that one is loved regardless of one's helplessness and imperfection.

The old sweeper is irretrievably and existentially lost in a cycle of mindless work and an alcoholic stupor. In him Morison clearly recognizes much of himself for he, too, not only knows the dehumanizing effect of his own daily striving for technical efficiency but also finds a social anodyne in the case of Bell's Scotch whiskey which was to be his most highly prized and privileged companionable possession on his vacation but which in fact betrays him by contributing to his very literal downfall when he crashes the float plane he has rented into the submerged rocks of a wilderness lake. Given his own proclivity for indulging himself in heavy drinking as well as his social and psychological malaise, there is much in his personal life from
which Spence Morison would be saved. Even at home his domestic life is characterized by a comfortable banality. As he prepares to depart for his holiday, he avoids disturbing his wife who sleeps in a different bed, proceeds through "the constant domestic debris" (Plgd 3) in the living-room, and succeeds in avoiding any of the "domestic barbed wire" (Plgd 6) that might restrict his scheduled departure from the house. He had hoped that his son Tom would accompany him but resigns himself to Tom's lack of interest: "There had been no quarrel, just his expectation and his son's apparent indifference, a subtle pain. But he was used to it, he thought" (Plgd 5). From within the context of familial "debris," "barbed wire," and "subtle pain," Morison finds some deliverance in his long-planned dream of a "playground" holiday.

Buell's narrative motif takes its pattern from the progress towards rescue and deliverance of a secular technocrat who after enduring a time of trial comes to know a reality predicated upon human needs rather than upon those of concepts and systems. Morison's dream has been to fulfill himself, as least so far as his summer vacation is concerned, with all the goods that an affluent life style can provide. The woodland "playground" of northern Quebec forest and lakes holds the promise of indulgent recreational pleasure. However, instead of certain joy, Morison's best laid plans change dramatically into a quest for rescue after he survives the crash of his plane. He then initiates a course of action that he hopes will lead to his
rescue principally by walking seventy miles southwards to what he believes will be the search area. Despite this, all of his planning does not culminate in his being rescued by the friends who he believes are searching for him. At the point of death, his fortuitous rescue is effected by a group of native people who revive him and transport him to a forest outpost where he can recuperate before returning to Montreal, albeit with a radically changed perception of reality.

Essentially, the narrative pattern in *Playground* focuses upon the inner life and conversion of an organization man. The desire for change is evident throughout Morison's interior dialogue as he reflects upon an earlier reality than that which presently exists for him. After the crash of his plane, he is immersed in the water of the lake but rises to experience the tribulation of his quest for deliverance which ends when he is saved by those who live most intimately in harmony with nature. Whether consciously or not, Buell has structured a narrative which envisions the spiritual analogue of a lost soul seeking salvation. As a secular man of the world who manages his life with efficiency, Spence Morison's life is largely a pretense. Certainly after the crash he is very lost indeed, both physically and spiritually. While he rises from the water of the lake to a new life, it is a life lived in the wilderness where he hopes to be saved as he prepares himself for deliverance. Eventually salvation comes to Morison from a most unexpected yet compassionate source and it is only then that he can articulate
to his wife who has come to meet him some expression of what his experience has meant:

"It's a good thing they came....There were moments of... I can't quite say it yet. I'm still out there.... I've...come to know...things. I'll tell you about it when I'm ready. If I ever can."

"What sort of things?" She sounded worried for him.

"Not now. Things...."

She looked at him, knowing a depth, and didn't ask for a meaning....Reentry was beginning (Plgd 246).

Within the context of the narrative, these unidentified "things" constitute the insights of Morison's new life after his near death experience. As Bauer has observed:

It seems fair to say...that some of those things have to do with what has been reported to us tellingly--the play of mind for all the chips in this wilderness playground--that the pithy philosophic insights uttered internally under the duress of primal danger have application and value to those of us who have never quite been derailed from our delusory sure routes and routines (78).

On the narrative level, Morison is rescued in order that he may live again. More than that, however, his wilderness experience suggests a spiritual transformation wherein he symbolically dies to himself and is born again in order to realize a more abundant new life. From this spiritual perspective, the quest of Spence
Morison is more than an adventure story of a lost technocrat who is fortuitously rescued. Insofar as the spiritual analogue evoked by the novel embodies many of the principal characteristics of Catholic justification and redemption, Morison's assertion that he has "come to know...things" resonates in several ways: Morison himself experiences a profound change within himself; his wife perceives the depth of this transformation but does not know what it signifies; and the responsive reader can discern a spiritual analogy arising from the patterned structure of the narrative which suggests a transcendental meaning. Arising out of the narrative motif of a cleansing baptism followed by a period of purgative suffering and transforming salvation, the parallel of Spence Morison's wilderness quest approximates the fundamental progress towards salvation intrinsic to Catholic faith. Morison may be unaware after his rescue of any spiritual dimension in his heightened consciousness as well as in his newly realized insight into things. Nevertheless, after observing Morison's progress throughout the narrative one senses that whatever he has come to know is comparable to the efficacy of a religious experience, approximating as it does a demonstrably Catholic pattern of justification, suffering, and redemption.

From a Catholic perspective, justification is a spiritual continuum to which all the features of a life of faith are related. In general terms, justification is "the act by which a person is accepted by God or made worthy of salvation" (Nevins
317). More specifically, in a Catholic context it is the spiritual experience generated by faith, sacramentally fulfilled in baptism and reactivated throughout one's life by sacramental reconciliation. For the Catholic believer, justification begins in baptism by means of the infusion of divine grace which sanctifies the soul and makes it holy and pleasing to God. After the reception of the saving grace of baptism, sanctification can be perpetuated in two ways: through meritorious engagement in works of virtue and charity and, whenever required, through contrite restoration by means of the sacrament of penance. This Catholic view of the place of justification in the economy of salvation envisions the spiritual progress of the soul by means of growth in perfection, growth which can be halted by diminishing the effect of sanctifying grace through sin. Nevertheless, the divine grace which justifies also remains freely available in order to find a restoration to holiness within the Church which is the Body of Christ.

Implicit in this process of a Catholic progress to spiritual perfection is the absence of any presumption upon the mercy of God. Ultimately, salvation is attained in the trust that the soul may become wholly pleasing to God. The path of spiritual perfection, determined before death, may assure a salvation such as that which the Church recognizes in its saints. In the Catholic view, the salvation of souls is not a fait accompli of assurance during one's lifetime on earth. Quite simply, it is not a known certainty. Given the spiritual life
enlivened by grace mediated sacramentally, the Catholic believer desires salvation, anticipates salvation, and has faith that he is justified in his salvation, a deliverance which cannot be achieved on his own accord but only through the merciful love of God who wills that all can be saved. Such an overview of the quest for spiritual perfection following upon the grace of justification and leading to salvation is the foundation of Catholic faith, informing the Catholic consciousness and providing the basis of meaning in Catholic spiritual life. This pattern of spiritual rebirth through baptism, growth in perfection and deliverance into a new life is not only at the core of Catholic faith; it is also an enduring source of patterns of creative expression. It is within this context that Buell can be seen infusing his narrative with the motif of the loss and recovery of a mid-twentieth century Everyman in a spiritual evocation which both shapes the narrative and gives credibility to Spence Morison's having "come to know...things" at the end of the novel.

As similitudes, all analogies leak. Nowhere is this more apparent than in stories where the literal narrative is symbolically enriched or augmented by more abstract correspondences of a philosophical or spiritual nature, either by implication or evocative suggestion. A point by point analogy would result in allegory and that is not what Buell achieves in Playground. What is perceived in the novel by the evocation of a spiritual dimension analogous to Spence Morison's experience is
the realization that his quest is more than a superficial outdoors saga. The structure of Buell's narrative enables one to sense that significant moments in Morison's experience have a dimension which evoke at least certain aspects of Catholic spirituality, especially those relating to progress towards salvation. At the outset, Morison's entry into his experiential playground occurs after a period of soul searching. His life is generally blighted by the lie of pretense, the false face which masks and inhibits the truth both about himself and his relationship with others. He has some latent expectation and faith in a newer and better reality, as revealed in his inner dialogue, but his thoughts have not been externalized in action. His lifestyle is predicated upon a resolute commitment to a mechanistic efficiency which gives order to his life, the preparation for his vacation on Lac des Grises being a logistical operation undertaken with a view to replicating familiar urban comfort and stability in a wilderness setting. While he possesses the capacity to escape from this pattern of predetermined regularity as in his side trip around Quebec city or in his digression to view Lake Mistassini from the preordained flight path, his decisions result either in guilt for having wasted time or in a disastrous consequence. He knows there are alternatives to his restrictive outlook: he would extract himself from the dehumanized daily stampede of horsepower during his working day, forsake the artifice of pretense, be more openly responsive to people, regain the love
that used to exist within his family, and release himself from
the discipline of a managed life. As his intermittent attempts
at nonconformity indicate, he is prepared to be open to other
possibilities for fulfillment in life. At the juncture in his
life when he enters upon his annual vacation, Spence Morison is
disposed towards a change in his life, a conversion from the way
things are towards a realignment of thought and action which is
comparable to spiritual renewal.

As he pilots his airplane over the Quebec wilderness,
Morison's sense of personal freedom expands within him just as
the vast area of the land below him becomes more expansive:

He felt more and more let out, almost completely
released. He sensed that it was a slightly negative
feeling, and for an instant almost dwelt on what he
was being released from. Free is better. Free then.
And the feeling was made more positive by the horizon
expanding on all sides, a thing of his own doing,
riding the apex of a huge and growing cone of vision
and awareness (Plgd 25).

He has confidence in himself and trust in others, such as Henri
Tétrault and the workers at Chibougamau who have assisted him
with his flight plans. Aside from the immediate sense of
psychological openness and release, Morison has grown into what
is tantamount to a faith experience. He increasingly believes in
other people including the old sweeper, his local guide Gus
Benoit, as well as Henri Tétrault: "all of them good men" (Plgd
26). Moreover, he can affirm a value system radically different from that which has informed so much of his past life. The spiritual analogue to this state of preparedness suggests that intimation or grasp of faith which leads to baptism and prompts the soul to undertake a quest for spiritual perfection and sanctification leading to redemption. As Buell's narrative develops, the story and its implied religious meaning counterpoint one another with the events in Morison's life, incrementally taking on greater significance as he grows in insight towards that transformation in which he will "come to know...things" (Plgd 246). Unbeknown to himself, Morison's experience is essentially spiritual. He is dissatisfied with his past, finds increasing satisfaction in his present, and will undergo a wilderness experience that will enable him to see into the heart of things. By drawing upon the schema of justification which is at the core of Catholic consciousness, Buell broadens the imaginative sense of the narrative to include a plausible and notably Catholic spiritual rationale underlying Morison's insight into himself, an inner realignment of consciousness which is intensified after his crash into the wilderness lake. Following upon this symbolic baptism, Morison enters upon his wilderness experience, a challenge of a type not unknown to Jesus himself after being led into his wilderness after his own baptism.

As a rite of initiation, baptism generates new life in the soul. For Morison, from the moment he floats to the shore of the
lake from the site of the plane crash, his life will never again be the same. Such an epochal event, literally to rise from the water of the lake in order to live again, is portrayed not as an end in itself but a beginning. Just as baptism is a Catholic point of departure for growth and perfectibility in spiritual sanctity, so Morison's rising from the waters of a Quebec wilderness lake becomes the first stage in the life of a new man who develops a new consciousness through his philosophic insights into himself and his place in the world. In Catholicism, a fundamental tenet of belief holds that the spiritual life after baptism is a pilgrimage of faith. Having been justified through the incursion of grace at baptism, the soul becomes engaged in the process of spiritual perfection throughout one's life. This is not a complacent time of security in the absolute certainty arising from imputed justification assuring salvation. Rather, the path to spiritual perfection is beset by all the trials and tribulations of human life which are manifestations of the suffering that defines the human condition, a theme that pervades all of Buell's fiction. In addition to knowing that type of suffering which Spence Morison had recognized earlier in the old sweeper, spiritual development that enables one to "come to know...things" is predicated upon keeping the faith, discerning the will of God and endeavoring to conform to it. In Buell's narrative, God is not manifestly present to Morison. However, by drawing upon the Catholic view of the process of redemption which involves suffering towards a
greater good, Buell suggests a spiritual matrix within which Spence Morison's ordeal can be understood.

Ultimately, Morison's deliverance is hard won, the portrayal of his wilderness experience registering on several levels of associative meaning. The survival story relates Morison's isolation in the wilderness where he is lost and incapable of being rescued by a search team. Psychologically, Morison responds to the challenge of his environment as he develops a plan whereby he can be rescued. His only comfort is the inner voice of his alter ego which serves as a reality check on his thoughts, feelings, and actions. In addition to behavioral insights into Morison's adventure, the structure of the narrative evokes a mystical quest. After being washed clean and left naked at the side of the lake, his search in the wilderness is as much for meaning as it is for survival and discovery insofar as what he undergoes in the wilderness is a spiritual exercise which produces a new man whose consciousness has been raised to a new level of perception. It is not his survival from being in the lake which was his salvation. Rather, he must work out the means which can lead to deliverance, a motif which suggests comparison with the Catholic process leading to redemption. Baptism justifies but in addition to this grace Catholic belief holds firmly to the conviction that human action, fides formata not sola fides, is meritorious in attaining salvation. The structure of Buell's narrative, then, traces the analogous Catholic perception of a progress from
faith enlivened conversion followed by the grace of baptism through the ensuing human drama leading to salvation, with the tension and conflicts of the drama itself forming the principal part of the novel. The wilderness experience is the real ground for the play of life in which the actor is disciplined by the action of the play itself, a playground not only capable of being exploited for human pleasure but also one in which Morison's penchant for efficiency focuses his mind upon the most effective means by which deliverance can be achieved.

Throughout the narrative, this Catholic schema of salvation functions effectively insofar as it extrapolates the significant moments in Morison's progress, infusing them with a spiritual dimension. This is especially important for the final scenario in the wilderness at the moment when Morison is rescued by John Sweetgrass and his companions, the rescue itself not only physically saving Morison from certain death but also imaginatively suggesting an act of salvation. This conceptual salvation occurs not through Morison's own means but gratuitously through the compassionate action of one who is native to the region where Morison lay dying. By his own means Morison cannot effect the rescue which will be his salvation. This depends upon the good will of John Sweetgrass just as in Christian belief a saving action is always initiated by God.

Such a narrative action of deliverance, not by one's own means but through the intervention of another, recalls a similar event in The Shrewsdale Exit when Joe Grant is saved from his
misguided life by the intervention of Captain Sparrs. In both novels, the climactic moment of deliverance evokes an integral tenet of Christian faith: man cannot save himself, one being entirely dependent upon another for that type of rescue which signifies salvation. In both The Shrewsdale Exit as well as in Playground, the protagonist depends at a critical moment at the very end of the novel upon another person who is the instrument of his deliverance, a narrative technique that apparently proves problematic for some readers. For example, the Kirkus Reviews reader noted that in Playground "[t]he fortuitous rescue is perhaps a concession..." (21). Similar reservations have been raised about the ending of The Shrewsdale Exit which the reviewer for Publisher's Weekly judged "not altogether satisfactory" (74) and which caused Roger Baker to believe that "the golden rays of hope with which the saga ends seem contrived and, in fact, render suspect the hitherto fairly rigid and consistently critical view of society projected" (102). However, the analogous Catholic spirituality that pervades both novels imaginatively infuses the climactic narrative moment of liberation and deliverance with a comparable spiritual state of salvation which enhances and enriches the meaning of the narrative event itself. If the deliverance of the protagonist at the end of each of the novels was not enabled and accomplished through the ministry of a Captain Sparrs or John Sweetgrass, the evocation of spiritual meaning would be confounded by a lack of resolution. In Playground, as in The Shrewsdale Exit, the
suffering of the protagonist, which comprises a large part of the respective novels, has meaning only if there is something worth suffering for. Spence Morison's trial in the wilderness is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a purifying experience which leads not simply to survival but to his rescue and it is towards this rescue, as gratuitous as it may be in the narrative, that the protagonist strives. Spence Morison is victimized by an indifferent natural environment in Playground, just as Joe Grant loses out to the seeming indifference of a bureaucratic legal system in The Shrewsdale Exit. For each of these protagonists, however, the real struggle involves the resolution of a conflict between past misguided values and attitudes and the prospect of liberation and deliverance in a new life.

For Morison, his rescue is a vindication of his determination arising out of his wilderness experience to choose life over death. Prior to this he had been a rather ordinary figure, the "well-heeled, well-organized fortyish Citified Everyman" that Guidry has described, whose bravado and recklessness had almost resulted in his death after crashing into the lake. He had been, in Drolet's terms, "a successful man, capable, efficient almost to the point of arrogance. The organization man ready for all contingencies" ("Bush" 127). The one contingency for which he was not prepared was the crash of his float plane in a desolate northern Quebec lake while on vacation. Initially, Morison, the survivor on the edge of the lake, fulfills his role as the efficient organization man. He
builds a shelter for himself, searches for something to eat, finds that he can make it edible by cooking it, and builds a smoke signal at the right moment for any passing rescue aircraft to notice. He is momentarily safe in the security of his survivor's camp. Time and the wilderness experience soon make him aware, however, of the cruel paradox that all the certainties of life are illusory: the best made plans become only false expectations, hope is wishful thinking, even the seeming permanence of life is subverted by death. As he attempts to walk out of the wilderness to a point where rescue would be a real possibility, he thinks back to his first six days of survival:

For a moment he longed for the lake and its certainties: water, and landmarks, and food such as it was, and knowing where south was, and...nothing else, it wasn't enough, it had been a closed system, a self-contained illusion, a routine that would be deadly in the long run. Like life.

"Life?"

Yes, life. That's what brought you here in the first place.

"Yeah, I guess it did."

He shook off the idea and looked up at the sky.

"It'll come up, it has to."

There at least was a certainty, a real one (Plgd 181)

The personal and professional life that Morison had known before
his crash landing approximates the quality of life in his first shelter, it too having been the same "closed system" and "self-contained illusion" that was equally "deadly." While he might wistfully long for the security of the "self-contained illusion" on the edge of the lake, he knows that "it wasn't enough." In the wilderness, Morison has "come to know...things," principally his realization that life has meaning through engagement with reality, as evidenced in his determination to hike seventy miles through the forest and along the rivers in the hope that he will be rescued. Without any illusions, he can now accept his place in the erstwhile playground with the same realism that the old sweeper gave to his job in Chibougamau:

The stillness of endurance, the harsh identity of suffering, a self who seemed to have no ego. He couldn't complain to the forest or the water or the sky, the playground had no manager, no fun-maker paid to sell litter, nature had no wastes, not even me. More than new experience. It was a new way of experiencing. He could only accept. And ask. The low point was a high point. It would get lower (Plgd 195).

Ironically, Morison learns to value the "new way of experiencing" life just as he is possibly about to lose it: the thought of dying within a few days, to rephrase Samuel Johnson's memorable dictum, concentrates the mind wonderfully. Facing the reality of death, Morison perseveres even when all of his hope has been seemingly unfulfilled and all of his determination to
live has been subverted by the possibility of the imminence of death. He accepts the death he believes to be inevitable, nevertheless agonizing at his final stopping place at the prospect of losing the life that he had sought to preserve:

...he had already spent himself....He managed to move away from the fire and he crawled more and more into nothingness....He...drifted into vague dreams, memories he couldn't be sure of....He kept slipping in and out of consciousness....The waking told him he was still alive. The other kept arriving like nothing. At any moment it would stay.

"I--won't--know."

But somewhere within himself he thought he did (Plgd 230-1)

In the "new way of experiencing," Morison has had to acknowledge that on the playground of life the new reality exists of losing out to death. In what he anticipates as the hour of his death, his certainty that he has the capability to preserve his life is continually undermined as he intermittently loses consciousness. Increasingly, all of his self-knowledge has been reduced to nothing. "Somewhere within himself" he knows that he will not know, that he will have no knowledge about the effectiveness of his strategy to maintain life nor will he know that the seeming nothingness of death will have replaced the reality of his life. All that he can do is to accept the reality of death as his destiny. However, the restoration of life facilitated by John
Sweetgrass challenges Morison's conviction that the only certainty that exists is death. Through Sweetgrass's ministration, new life is the new reality.

In the bonding that exists between Morison and John Sweetgrass after his rescue, Morison affirms Sweetgrass's life-giving reality. Engaged on a mission directed towards the preservation of the traditions of indigenous life lived in harmony and balance with nature, Sweetgrass had found and rescued Morison. The life that Sweetgrass is fostering has nothing in common with the work of the bureaucrats at the wilderness outpost, the anthropologist who, as Sweetgrass explains, is "studying Indians. Concepts of community land tenure. He'll get it all wrong" nor with the civil servant who is "government in some way. Grants and contracts..." (Plgd 240). While the government workers are irrelevant to Sweetgrass, such concepts and contracts on which they are working are symptomatic of the highly systematized life that Morison had known in which Things were done consciously and efficiently. He tried to run his life, life, that way. Even [his] holiday had been planned logistically, with three friends...to remove themselves from the complex pressures of their work and lives (Plgd 7).

However, the logistics of the organization man have been considerably purged during Morison's wilderness experience to the extent that he, too, quietly dissociates himself from the social scientists, mentally aligning himself with Sweetgrass and
his companions who gauge the world about them in terms of human values and not according to concepts and logistics. Humanly, Sweetgrass knows that he can live in harmony with nature by means of his own capability, maintaining his human needs in balance with his natural environment. This is efficiency in the natural order which can hardly fail to impress Morison, the professional man who had been a model of planning and urban efficiency but who would not have survived in the wilderness without the help of Sweetgrass. Ultimately, Sweetgrass's engagement with nature incorporates human nature as well. He is committed to the preservation of a balanced life in nature for his fellow Cree and for Morison, a stranger in their midst, he is the mediator of new life:

"Mr. Sweetree," said Spence,...I want to thank you for everything."

"That's all right, it could've been anybody."

"Maybe. But it was you. I owe you my life."

"O-o-oh," he said doubtfully,"doesn't everybody owe somebody that" (Plgd 241-2)?

The ambiguity of "somebody" in Sweetgrass's seemingly rhetorical retort puzzles Morison momentarily as he "had to think it over." The primary sense of "somebody" may well be parental. However, if "somebody" means some other person, then Sweetgrass is referring to the interdependence within the human family wherein each person shares responsibility for another. Moreover, if "somebody" signifies some one person in a more restrictive
sense, the implicit suggestion is that everybody is collectively indebted to One who gives life, a somewhat oblique reference to Christ, the quintessential man for others. The paradox of either a social or, on the other hand, a more profound spiritual sense to Sweetgrass's observation is not lost on Morison who after a brief hesitation, cannot help but laugh in knowing recognition at the essential social as well as possibly spiritual truth of human indebtedness for life. Among other insights, this fundamental perception of the truth about indebtedness for life should find its place among the "things" that Morison has "come to know."

Buell envisions Morison's destiny and ultimate gift of restored life from a Catholic perspective. This does not require superimposing upon the narrative a Catholic outlook. Buell's faith experience is already the reality in which his imagination is rooted. What is manifested in the fiction mirrors, as it were, an imagination impregnated with a Catholic world view, an awareness and consequent expression arising from his consciousness of the way things are. In the narrative, Morison does not appear to be a Catholic nor does he manifest any particular religiosity other than on one occasion to mark the day of the week two days after his crash: "He remembered it was Sunday and wondered about God" (Plgd 150). This rather quizzical reflection passes very quickly, the presence of God no longer being a point of reference in his interior dialogue in the wilderness. Aside from this single mention of God in the novel,
there are intermittent religious images, more or less Catholic, that appear throughout the narrative. For example, Morison considers the observance of social propriety "as rigid as an ancient priestly caste" (*Plgd* 17); his nighttime watchfulness is depicted as a "vigil" (*Plgd* 146, 150); the maintenance of a beacon of fire becomes "a ritual, no more, performed in hope" (*Plgd* 211). On his way to Chibougamau, Morison drives past the Portes de L'Enfer (*Plgd* 10), a site that would appear to be an ominous and portentous evocation of prospective loss, a suggestion that fails to materialize, however, when Morison's wilderness experience becomes a purgation rather than a condemnation. So far as Catholic imagery is concerned, Buell himself has made clear that it was not his intention to establish a "lovely mythological line" which would form a coherent pattern of imagery within the novel (Garebian, "Religion" 80).

Textually, the Catholicity inherent in *Playground* will not be discerned from any figurative representation in the text. Rather, it is from the pattern of action, either in the expression of the protagonist's inner thoughts or in his observable behavior, that one gleans thematic strands imbued with aspects of Catholic spirituality. What one seeks to identify, then, are patterns of such Catholic evocations as stripping away, struggle, sin, suffering, and salvation. Buell's imaginative vision consistently develops in *Playground*, as in the other novels, a certain asceticism which strips or deprives
a character of material dependency and even, as Bauer observes (129), of the stability of place or locality. Moreover, the direction of Morison's destiny is determined throughout by an intensive internal struggle in which he makes decisions, sometimes productive, sometimes disastrous, that eventually bring him to the point of rescue, a progress not at all unlike that which characterizes the Catholic doctrine of justification in which salvation is progressively worked out through the decisions that one makes, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. One can identify a Catholic consciousness as well in the act of distancing oneself from God and from the presence of God in other persons, thereby producing a sinful separation. Given his single-minded adherence to technology, Morison had estranged himself socially and psychologically from almost every one around him. Only when he is saved by John Sweetgrass does he finally understand that we are our brother's keeper, this central truth of the human condition presumably becoming one of the things, as he tells his wife, that he has "come to know." Ultimately, according to Catholic doctrine regarding the economy of salvation, redemption is available as the gratuitous gift of God, freely given to all who merit salvation. Thematically, this becomes Morison's quest, an expectation fulfilled when he is saved by John Sweetgrass. Incapable of saving himself, Morison needs Sweetgrass, the rescuer to whom he must forever remain indebted for his life. Such an evocation of the joy of redemption does not make a Catholic out of Spence Morison, but
it does indicate how it and the other features imbued with a spiritual basis and which are related to the survival theme in this novel resonate with a spirituality originating in Buell's Catholicism.
A Lot To Make Up For

The hope of a broken humanity lies in reconciliation, both with others and with God. Individually and communally, the need to assuage guilt, to make amends, and to seek forgiveness heals the ruptures that occur in personal and interpersonal relationships. This is Buell's focus in A Lot To Make Up For, principally in detailing Stan Hagen's quest to be reconciled with Adele Symons because of his violent and abusive actions during a period of mutual narcotic addiction two years earlier, a quest resulting from his desire to be at peace with God. However, Adele also bears the personal burden of her own guilt, her infant daughter being predisposed to addiction throughout her life because of her mother's previous narcotic self-abuse. Even Evalynn Roussel, the unsuspecting wife of a sexual predator, also seeks to heal the injury suffered by those in the town of Ashton, including Adele, who have been adversely affected and blackmailed by her depraved husband's exploitive strategies. Socially, the interconnected healing process that takes place in Ashton is not effected in isolation. As the Kirkus Reviews reader noted: "the key to recovery [from past mistakes] seems to be responsible interaction with good-hearted individuals" (446). To this end, those seeking to atone for past and present injuries in Buell's narrative receive both communal and moral support from persons of good will who assist them in their endeavor to make amends.
With the exception of the Hampton Journal editor Mr. Holling who rebuffs him contemptibly with bureaucratic indifference, Stan receives considerable small town support from several Ashton people who directly and indirectly assist him both in his rehabilitation and in his search for Adele Symons. The local Alcoholics Anonymous contact person helpfully directs him to a meeting centre in town; the Ashton Elementary School principal recognizes his frustration in trying to find Adele and shares privileged information with him; Mr. Lennox has contacts all over town whom he calls upon to discretely search local records; and Kay Saunders not only remains alert for information pertaining to Adele which will assist Stan but also is instrumental in reuniting them. Each of these supportive persons contributes towards the building of communal sharing and partnership. They have nothing to gain for themselves; their selfless assistance, as they help Stan achieve a goal about which they have little or no knowledge, reflects a fundamental human contribution that individuals can personally make towards alleviating distress and suffering.

Stan is not alone, of course, in receiving this kind of assistance from the community. Adele is also supported by friends and acquaintances who have made and continue to make a positive contribution to her well-being: Sister Elizabeth Stevens, after whom Adele gratefully names her daughter Betty in a gesture of appreciation and gratitude, was the nun who had directed the program of rehabilitation for Adele's drug
addiction; Claudia Poole takes the initiative in justifying Adele's innocence after she has been blackmailed by one of her employers; and Adele's other employers, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Melling, are keen to have her working for them again after she had been defamed. Moreover, Martin Lacey whose immediate family has grown increasingly remote, receives companionable and friendly support after his heart attack from his neighbors Phil and Marge Baines. This pattern of social interdependence which Buell establishes in the novel becomes even more focused in the affectionate relationship which develops between Lacey and Stan Hagen, a bonding of old age and youth established on the basis of mutual assistance which soon develops into a heightened rapport which transforms their relationship from the merely social into a profoundly spiritual experience realized near the end of the novel through their common sharing in the Eucharist.

The associative pattern of community support affecting Stan, Adele, and Martin is important for narrative cohesion. More than that, the integral sense of community which exists in Ashton leads to an understanding of what Martin and Stan experience within the context of sacramental communion. The vision of community as a theological construct pervades Catholic consciousness. Community is Catholic, for unlike the focus of other theologies which privilege the individual, Catholicism is a collectivity in its faith and worship:

...the nature of the Church is [realized] as a community rooted in, and expressive of, the communal
life of the triune God.... "Communion" is a translation from the Greek term koinonia...to indicate sharing, fellowship, or close association.... Christians, through the Holy Spirit, enjoy communion with the triune God and are also "in communion" with other baptized Christians. Communion therefore has a vertical dimension (contact with God) and a horizontal dimension (bonding with other Christians) (Fahey 337). This concept of the communion found in the Church finds its most complete expression and totality of meaning during the liturgical celebration of the mass in which "[s]haring in the body and blood of Christ in Eucharist at the celebration of the Lord's Supper is regarded as a special moment in the Church's celebration of its life" so that "the reception of the Eucharist [is] seen as a high point in sharing the gifts of God" and, more broadly, sharing in the Pauline sense of "communio, societas, participatio, or communicatio" (Fahey 337). In A Lot To Make Up For, Buell finds an effective application of this Catholic sense of communion when Martin Lacey attends the late Saturday afternoon vigil mass in Ashton where he is surprised to find Stan Hagen, this Eucharistic celebration being a significant catalyst both socially and spiritually in the lives of Martin and Stan. Knowing of one another's sharing in this vigil mass, both Martin and Stan experience an affinity resulting in the enrichment of their friendship and an appreciation of the spiritual reality of their life in Christ.
Stan Hagen's determination to atone for a violent and injurious past has been essentially activated by a deepening understanding of his Catholic faith. Stan's is as much a spiritual journey which will ultimately bring him closer to God as it is a quest for psychological satisfaction. In this novel, the cure of souls, as Buell repeatedly indicates, requires the priest, not the psychiatrist. In large measure Stan's undertaking is penitential: he must contritely abjure the drugs, alcohol, and unlicensed concupiscence of the past and commit himself to the reconstruction of a new life. Such a new life, however, is integrated with a spiritual regeneration which complements and strengthens his social renewal. During his period of recovery and rehabilitation, Stan had become conscious of the need for spiritual direction in his life which would support and sustain him as he began to reclaim his social life. Gerry Damer, a recovering alcoholic priest himself, had informally guided Stan through a spiritual awakening. On one memorable occasion, as Stan later recalled,

we got to talking about it, trying to talk about it, a higher power, God, and he said to me we can't know—and he really came down on that word, "know"—we can't know, not the way we think knowing is knowing, he's too different for that, we have to believe (Lot 169). In order to grasp the reality of God, Stan asks: "What must I do to believe?" Damer's response is a simple "Ask," a reassuring request since, as Stan realizes, "when you're asking, really
asking, you're asking someone. You can take it that he's simply there, and that asking is always possible" (Lot 169). In this "asking," as Martin Lacey later points out, lies the source of spiritual restoration: "at times, not always, but at times, the prayer you're making will change you as you're making it" (Lot 170). Faith, prayer, and change is the spiritually transforming process that complements Stan's search for Adele. He has sought reconciliation with God and lives in the expectation that he will be reconciled to the young woman he had abusively violated.

Stan's spiritual restoration had begun almost two years before he met Martin. Like Martin, he had been aware of his separation from the rest of humanity, becoming increasingly more fully aware of his own mortality:

...he was alone. With himself.

He and nothing else. He had been stripped, no, that was putting it on somebody else, no, no, somehow he had become stripped of—everything. He had no friends, no money, no place, no work, no clothes....This, after the soaring happiness of drugs....Deeper and deeper into that desert, the ego having its way, a mirage of lushness, green with promise. All gone now, into some kind of nothing. He felt himself picked clean, bones drying in the dusty wind, the glare fearsome.... He wondered if death were like that. The self he thought he knew was just not there.... He was discovering, like expecting bottom and finding none,
that he did not, could not, know himself....he...could know other things, but not the heart of his own person. That was in existence by a different warrant. That was given. His to accept, to choose, to do, however weakly. And if given, oh, possible, if given, is this the desert where you meet the giver? (Lot 97-8)

Recapitulating his "desert" experience later to Martin, he tells him that his self-destructive lifestyle had resulted in "having everything come to nothing. And I mean everything, all of it" (Lot 151). As he and Martin reflect upon the nature of this experience, Stan explains:

"There was nothing left of me, Mr. Lacey, except me. And even that I can't recognize."

In the quiet that followed, Martin said: "They used to call it--dying to oneself."

"I've heard it used. It's true."

"It's not a matter for therapy."

"No, I found that out." (Lot 151)

Since this period of spiritual emptiness experienced two years earlier, Stan had committed himself to the Alcoholics Anonymous program in which he has found both sobriety and a revitalized faith. The outgrowth of his spiritual development has been the recent quest to find Adele in order to make amends. From "nothing" Stan has found something in his gradual spiritual awakening which has made him aware that there is a lot to make
up for, both in love of God as well as in seeking to heal the rupture with Adele. Gerry Damer had provided significant spiritual direction. Martin Lacey becomes equally instrumental in responding to Stan's spiritual quest. At the juncture in their lives when Martin and Stan meet, there exists an inverse relationship between them in the pattern of Buell's depiction of the respective stages of their spiritual preparedness: Stan has been striving to repossess what he had lost, advancing from the time two years previously when he was reduced to "nothing"; Martin is increasingly conscious of the gradual need to be able to dispossess himself of what he has gained throughout his life. Stan's spiritual life is one of reconstruction; Martin's, of increasing self-abnegation. In this narrative construct between youth and old age, growth and decline, getting and losing, self-sacrifice is the common experience of both Stan and Martin. Each is in a state of crisis. Each is experiencing spiritual growth after having acknowledged the necessity of depriving oneself of impediments to a life of grace.

Stan has only arrived at his present stage of character development after having made a firm determination to deny himself those addictive pleasures which were at the centre of his life. Fortified by exemplary self-discipline, he has forsaken the illusory narcotic and alcohol induced pleasures of the past and has become increasingly engaged socially in his search for Adele. Martin, however, has been experiencing a falling away of the many meaningful parts of his life, leaving
him isolated and alone: the recent death of his wife, the psychological and geographical distancing of his children, and the debilitating effect of his recent life-threatening heart attack which has left him incapable of effectively maintaining his small farm. After a lifetime of working, raising a family, and anticipating a fulfilling future with his wife after retirement, he is very much alone as he accepts the gradual downsizing which has beset him and which has left him more introspective as he reflects upon his future. The gradual disappearance of so many temporal joys has increasingly distanced him from any sense of belonging. As he looks out on the property around his country house, he knows at certain existential moments that he is "seeing it real. And in that moment, those moments, it all ceased being his" (Lot 84). He knows, of course, that he has legal title to ownership and all which that entails:

...but despite that, in those moments of insight, he could feel no ownership, and, more sharply, no familiarity. The lane and the trees and the land, the house, fences, all of it, like the sky, not his.... it was seeing it in its own context, not his, past the mental baggage of habit and culture and use. And seen that way it simply left him. And he was there, emphasized, alone, moved to his very self, feeling something close to fear, yet, strangely, not upset. It felt like discovery. What held that held him (Lot 84).
Increasingly dispossessed of so many things he had valued during the past thirty years, Martin is dismayed by the brevity of one's stewardship as he thinks back over the past: "What struck home was that the very place which had represented so much human promise had now come to symbolize a real emptiness, a sort of human desert" (Lot 85). Increasingly more alone and deprived even of the humanizing presence of his children who are distant or indifferent, Martin accepts his diminished life with resignation:

No complaints, no blame to lay, no one held responsible. It was time and nature and the way we live. But it was more than a letting go, it was also a falling off. Something that should be was not there. And that, for it was too subtle to give voice to, had to be accepted in silence. The beginning of the desert (Lot 85-6).

Detached from relationships which had connected him to past cultural realities, Martin experiences a "falling off" approximating the meaningless state of "having come to nothing" that young Stan Hagen had known two years earlier. For Martin, as for a disillusioned Macbeth, life has increasingly become full of sound and fury signifying nothing:

All the experience, the work, the know-how, the loyalty, the hard-won knowledge, the human roles, the almost forced-upon-him-wisdom, all that went for nothing. It just didn't exist—a blank and a gap so
huge as to remove identity from him. He was culturally disreputable. Just another old guy.... Another wilderness (Lot 86).

Stan, too, reflecting upon his own identity, believes that he would be perceived around Ashton

...not as a resident, not living anywhere, another stranger, drifting, with city written all over him, no roots, no loyalties, nobody to know, no one to know him, the ideal of the twentieth century, alone, god-like, a joke in the universe, about as self-sufficient as a bug without a plant to chew on (Lot 28).

When Stan's quest for Adele indirectly brings him to Martin's country farm, both youth and old age are respectively at a point of transition from the uncertainty experienced in the "desert" of their recent lives to the certainty of God's healing presence which has made the "desert" bearable, an elusive spiritual reality which is difficult to articulate as Stan finds when he asks Martin:

"Nobody talks much about it, do they?"

"No. We've lost the words. A lot of talk, about how to feel good, no words."

"It's all desert, isn't it, Mr. Lacey?"

"You could say that."

"And one well."

"Those are very old words."

"Not for me" (Lot 168)
Each in his own way has known the "desert" experience. Each has been living in a "wilderness" of uncertainty. Each has experienced a crisis of identity. Each, as Stan remembers, has been marginalized (Lot 124).

In contrast to the isolation and solitude of the "desert" experience with which both Martin and Stan are familiar, Martin's household garden offsets the loneliness of the spiritual desert with shared experience and mutual engagement. From the "desert," Martin and Stan are quite literally united in their engagement in the garden, the one place, as Martin knows, where in contrast to the "desert" the vitality of creation and of the creator can be experienced in nature:

...the garden...was an extra.... A convenience, not a necessity. Such it was, seen from the outside. But for him it was almost a way of life. It brought him close to things, and their source. His hands set his heart free.... He was discovering the beginning (Lot 109).

After Martin's heart attack, his garden experience that brought him so close to the source of things becomes one more part of his life that comprises the "falling off," a sacrifice to the exigencies of time and age and, rather significantly, to spiritual perfection. Moreover, this "falling off" and "letting go" of something as good as the "earth and living things and work that acknowledges creation" (Lot 167) can provide the efficacious means whereby one effectively serves another. In the midst of his prayer at mass, Martin is consoled by the
realization that what is lost to him has been found by young Stan Hagen:

And then it was back, with a youth and energy not mine, back surely not for me, I had let it go, not mine at all, returned, found still forgone, my lost luggage serving—isn't that it?—serving as luggage for someone else on his way (Lot 167).

Having provided the means by which Stan can develop spiritually through being "brought close to things, and their source" by becoming engaged in the garden experience that "acknowledges creation," Martin knows that for himself he must accept the dispossession even of a good thing, recognizing it only as "something on the way" that "you have to pass...to get further, closer, free of lost baggage, hurt as it may to lose" (167). The desire "to get further," uttered within the context of a prayer after receiving the Eucharist, underscores a latent Catholic predeliction for asceticism. With evocative metaphors found in the narrative accounts of both Stan and Martin of the "desert," the "wilderness," and the reduction of identity and one's self-concept to "nothing," it is apparent that Buell is drawing upon images from the Catholic tradition of the ascetic life, thereby conveying a sense that the desire to attain spiritual perfection becomes more intensified as one leaves the "desert" in order to drink, as Stan Hagen knows, at the "one well." In its most positive sense, Catholic asceticism replicates, as Campbell notes, the essential qualities found in
the life of Christ: "This imitation of Christ generally proceeds along three main lines, viz.: mortification of the senses, unworldliness, and detachment from family ties." Each of these practices has a scriptural basis aligning it closely with Christ's own practice:

Thus we have, as regards mortification, the words of St. Paul, who says: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should be cast away" (1 Cor., ix, 27); while Our Lord Himself says: "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matt., x, 38). Commending unworldliness, we have: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John, xviii, 36); approving detachment there is the text, not to cite others: "if any man come to Me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke, xiv, 26)..."hate" [here] indicating a greater love for God than for all things together.

Moreover, the reason for committing oneself to self-sacrificing acts of mortification and detachment defines the quality of the ascetic life. Here, a negative motive, prompted by the desire not to sin, is outweighed by the positive motive to imitate and live the life of Christ. Consequently, there are degrees of perfection in asceticism, levels of perfection which St.
Ignatius termed "the three degrees of humility" consisting of the beginners, the proficient, and the perfect:

In the first place a man may serve God in such a way that he is willing to make any sacrifice rather than commit a grievous sin. This disposition of the soul, which is the lowest in the spiritual life, is necessary for salvation. Again, he may be willing to make such sacrifices rather than offend God by venial sin. Lastly he may, when this is not question of sin at all, be eager to do whatever will make his life harmonize with that of Christ. It is this last motive which the highest kind of asceticism adopts....[these] are the three steps in the elimination of self, and consequently three great advances towards union with God, who enters the soul in proportion as self is expelled. It is the spiritual state of St. Paul...when he says:"And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" Gal.,ii,20 (Campbell).

These stages comprise what have also been traditionally termed the purgative, illuminative, and unitive states in the spiritual life. In whole or even in part they influence the motives and practice associated with Catholic spirituality. That they find expression in Buell's narrative is indicative of the pervasive effect that features of the ascetic and penitential life have upon Catholic consciousness.

To a greater or lesser degree, each of the principal characters in the narrative conforms to the traditional pattern
of spiritual development. Stan and Adele are respectively engaged in lives of renunciation, attempting to make satisfaction for the social and moral dysfunction of their lives two years earlier, Stan by searching for Adele and Adele by nurturing her infant daughter and by protecting her from any form of abuse. In their past experience, each of them had become victims of the painful pursuit of pleasure:

What had once been choice was now habit and need, pleasures now joyless that they couldn't stop pursuing. The less the return, the stronger the pursuit, the greater the misery. It was always worse after, after the sex, after the days of booze, after the ecstasy of cocaine, something still hungry, and still empty, and even more demanding, the letdown that told you you'd never be happy, but that you'd try again, and again, addicted to pleasure that now mocked you (Lot 41).

Having broken out of this cycle, both Stan and Adele have been engaged for two years in developing their respective defenses against their addictive past. In order to avoid the injurious effect of drugs upon her pregnancy, Adele undertook a program of withdrawal, but not soon enough to prevent the development of a future proclivity for addiction in her daughter Betty. This event in itself made Adele even more determined to protect Betty from further harm. When the opportunity to renege upon her commitment occurs, Adele remains resolute in her determination
to follow her program of rehabilitation. Refusing any suggestion to pacify Betty, she rejects Mr. Roussell's offer of a lump sum payment in order to gratify his erotic fantasies. In this instance, Adele is tested and she holds firm to her commitment. It is clear not only what Adele is against but also from what she has disengaged herself. While her progress to recovery seems assured, Adele is primarily concerned with avoiding the drugs and depravity of the recent past. This in itself reflects a moral realignment and a redirection of her purpose in life. If there is some degree of spiritual renewal in Adele's life, it is suggested by her desire to make a return visit to the mother house of her religious community of nuns who had helped her: "She longed to go back there, to visit, to hear them singing their office, as they call it, but she denied herself that" (Lot 43). Aside from this suggestion of the attraction of devotional life, Adele remains in a state of renunciation, continuing to abjure the past while uncertain about the future. In terms of ascetic spirituality, Adele is still at the purgative stage.

If Adele is more disposed to avoid confrontation, the proactive pattern of Stan's coming to terms with his past is manifested both spiritually as well as socially. Like Martin, he knows the meaning of "letting go," as he realizes after his first visit with Adele:

He knew where she was...he'd seen her and talked with her. He marvelled at it. The months of not knowing...were nothing compared to the fact of it.
They were now the past, already being forgotten....He simply dwelt on all this as true, staying in the present, letting go (Lot 182).

Fully aware of his responsibility for his past actions, Stan's reformation had begun by renouncing his addiction to drugs and alcohol and seeking both human and divine reconciliation. His spiritual journey began when the police had found him naked in a laundromat, the symbolic sense of having tried to climb into a washer while in a drunken stupor in order to cleanse himself not being lost on Stan. He soon realized that he "could know other things, but not the heart of his own person" (Lot 98). That "heart," which is the central life-giving agent of his existence, was "in existence by a different warrant. That was given." In discovering the reality of his spiritual nature which he acknowledges as a "given," Stan begins seeking the "giver" in the midst of his state of loss and isolation: "If given...is this the desert when you meet the giver" (Lot 98)? This is Stan's first intimation that what he possesses "in the heart of his own person" is sanctioned or justified by the "giver." The laundromat experience of intended cleansing remains with Stan throughout his ensuing rehabilitation in the Alcoholics Anonymous program:

It was there while he was detoxifying and withdrawing and staying sober, and he kept accepting it and came to understand that he was touching something real. It was never without some twinge of fear, like a child
swinging too high, and also never without a hint of
freedom and even, at brief moments, of joy (Lot 98).
Stan's rehabilitation not only restores his body but also his
soul. What he is able to accomplish physically through the
Alcoholics Anonymous program is complemented by his continuing
spiritual quest to know God and the vitality of the God-given
spirit within himself. Within the context of this spiritual
regeneration, Stan realizes the need for repentance and
reconciliation when it becomes clear to him that he has "a lot
to make up for" after his debilitating relationship with Adele
Symons. What impels Stan to compensate for his abusive past does
not serve only social necessity, nor does he seek out Adele for
her sake alone. While renewing their relationship and
recognizing his responsibility towards his new found daughter,
what he accomplishes is more for the good of his soul.

For two years Stan has been engaged in the process of
redemption in a search for God and for divine forgiveness, a
quest that is later transmuted into the motive for his human
search for Adele, striving in each case to establish a more
intensely meaningful relationship. The degree to which he has
developed spiritually is revealed after he encounters Martin at
the weekend mass just before he meets Adele. Attendance at this
mass, even though Stan admits that "I'm still new at it" (Lot
167), is a significant moment—one might fairly say a
consummation--of revitalized spiritual life since by his
participation in the liturgy he affirms the representation made
in the mass comprising "a gift to God that effects communion and moves one out of sin" (Tambasco 781). In both senses—that of "'giving' or offering of self in a quest for union or reunion" as well as that of atonement "understood as expiating or removing sin by being reconciled or becoming 'at-one' with a merciful God" (Tambasco 782)—Stan Hagen engaged himself spiritually at the vigil mass in his encounter with the Redeemer, the "one well" that provides life-giving water for a life that had been "all desert" (Lot 168). This is one well that does not run dry, for the One who provides the water, Stan knows, makes more available for the asking: "when you're asking, really asking, you're asking someone. You can take it that he's simply there, and that asking is always possible" (Lot 169). Ultimately, Stan believes that "with him there, and you there, asking doesn't seem as important as just knowing it's so" (Lot 170). This knowing acceptance substantiates Stan's faith. He has found the source of forgiveness and expiation for sin and is empowered by his knowing to make amends in this world as well. Having moved beyond the purgative state of spiritual transformation, Stan exemplifies the seeker who has entered that illuminative stage in spiritual development that has brought him increasingly closer to God. Accepting that God remains present and accessible to him even after his abusive past, Stan is resolute in his determination to reform his life and to seek to be reconciled with Adele for the past injuries he inflicted upon her as a consequence of his misguided drug and alcohol
addiction. Through self-deprivation of those former pleasures which he now knows meant only illusory satisfaction, he continues to advance in his program of rehabilitation as he matures in his spiritual development.

While Stan is actively forsaking past evils, Martin has been experiencing an increasing deprivation of what might generally be considered the good things in life: his good health, his wife who recently died, his children who have moved away, the meaning of a home, and his ability to work and do things. Not only is he confronted by "the hollowness of being alone" (Lot 109) but he is increasingly unable to find fulfillment even in tending the small garden that "was almost a way of life...[that] brought him close to things" (Lot 143). Unlike Stan, Martin has no apparent need for self-deprivation. He has no wrongs for which he must atone. If he would be reconciled with anyone, it could only be with the "not found son" with whom he has lost contact. Martin is essentially a good person who has experienced profound satisfaction from all that he has received in life. When so much is intermittently being taken away--his health, family, physical capability--then the central questions for Martin would appear to be: Why do so many seemingly bad things happen to good people? How does one respond to the vicissitudes of later life? As Martin learns, one responds with resignation and submission to the way things are, accepting the reality of his situation in life and continuing to go on "seeing it real" in the expectation that whatever he endures
will bring him closer to God. Indeed, all of his losses, all of the things in his life that have "fallen off," bring him closer to the one central reality of his life, namely that he is in physical and spiritual communion within the Body of Christ. This he knows when, after all his losses, he is conjoined with Christ in the sacrifice of the mass:

The priest...took bread, and wine, and words not his. Martin watched and listened. For him the actions being done and what they meant had taken on a clarity he could only look upon: too physical to be simplified any further, too factual to be altered, free of any fantasy. "Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted..." Seeing, hearing, presence asserted, done, now there.... I am with you. Always. "The body of Christ."

"Yes."

Silence, echoing with other silences, brief, and gone. Let it be, don't reach, you can be sure of him. What's conscious is yours, and he is more than what you're knowing. A time to be, just be, it'll do (Lot 166-67).

This demonstrably Catholic experience of participating physically and spiritually in Christ's redemptive sacrifice forms the spiritual and narrative climax of the novel making even Stan's reunion with Adele a proximate result of Martin's prayer: "Oh, that young, young man, pained, paining, to make your heart break, I ask for him. I ask" (Lot 167). In this
prayer Martin replicates the essential nature of the mass itself, namely that through self-sacrifice one can effect the salvation of others. This was the redemptive action of Christ on the cross insofar as

the power of Christ's own sacrifice [is] made present through the Church's remembrance of the Paschal mystery. The Church's engagement, itself in remembrance of the death and Resurrection of the Lord, is made possible by that very mystery, which makes itself present through the Church's action and assumes that action unto itself so that the Church's offering is ultimately Christ's offering of himself through and with the self-offering of the members of the ecclesial body (Strynkowski 1151).

The intention of Martin's Eucharistic prayer is that the very human pain in Stan's life will find substitutive resolution within the sacrificial offering of Christ himself. As the narrative development of the novel shows, this prayer does not lack efficacy. Within three days after Stan and Martin have shared in the Eucharistic presence at mass, Stan locates Adele at Mrs. Poole's house where he is finally able to confess that "what I did to you, was awful bad—and I had to acknowledge it for what it was...and tell you how sorry I am that it happened. That's why, part of why, I was looking for you" (Lot 180). While Stan admits that he has a lot to make up for, Adele explains that "sorry doesn't undo it...it just can't be undone."
Nevertheless, Stan does find in his meeting with Adele "Not forgiveness, [I] didn't expect that, but peace" (Lot 181). From a human perspective, such peace is found in his act of healing reconciliation. Spiritually, Stan's peace is found in that "one well" where those lost in the "desert" find relief from their thirst.

As Stan is focussed upon rebuilding his life, Martin perseveres in his acceptance of the increasing physical and material privations of which he has become increasingly more aware. Like his friend Phil Barnes, Martin is wise in the knowledge that the pursuit of happiness will not cure suffering any more than it guarantees physical immortality (Lot 49). He acknowledges the reality of the privations that are his lot in life, all the while striving to conform his will in order to accept them. Acceptance of the losses which have marked his life in recent years is a constant preoccupation that he seeks to resolve. The debilitating loss of health and consequent heightened consciousness of his own mortality, his inability to maintain himself as he had done in the past, the death of his wife, his separation from his immediate family: each of these detract from and diminish the stature of his humanity by making him less connected to others and less able to fulfill himself. A satisfying response to these apparent vicissitudes would be to rationalize them, but the inherent fallacy of this illusory self-deception would contravene his principled adherence to "seeing it real" (Lot 84). Martin's acceptance of the diminution
of so much that had given meaning to his life has its source in a spiritual sense of reality, realized in moments of heightened perception, which discerns the concrete from the abstract, truth from fantasy and illusion.

For Martin, "seeing it real" defines a basic perception in his spirituality. When he participates in the Eucharistic celebration at mass, he recognizes and affirms ultimate reality, namely the sacramental, enabling presence of God, "seeing it real," always present and readily accessible in the Body and Blood of Christ:

He was aware of his belief, aware that it was belief, faith, as given as existence, as inexpressive as anything that lives inside, real to the point of making all else real (Lot 166).

This, Martin knows, is the divine reality, physically and spiritually available to those who, like Martin himself, "ask" (Lot 167). To ask is to pray, and when Martin asks for God's solicitous care for the well-being of those such as the son who is lost to him and for the anguished Stan Hagen, he is asking for their gain out of a sense of acceptance of his own loss. In this petition lies the conviction that the sacrifice which is the offering to God of his loss may be offered as an expiation for their benefit. A sense of this spiritual transference of the past good that he has known, thereby becoming a goodness that can benefit another person, is the impetus for his Communion prayer for Stan that he might know the
goodness that has existed even in Martin's country garden, a
goodness that had

...slipped away, good as it is. It is only as good as
it is, something in the way, you have to pass it to
get further, closer, free of lost baggage, hurt as it
may to lose (Lot 167).

In the light of Martin's exercise of Catholic spirituality, an
acceptance of loss, even depriving oneself of worldly goodness,
can be efficacious for others. Beyond all temporal losses, one
may go "further" by means of such ascetic discipline and get
"closer" to the reality of God and the equity of divine
justice. The ascetic nature of this self-sacrifice of one's own
good for the good of another is a distinctive feature in
Catholic practice, perhaps most readily apparent, aside from the
piety of individual devotion, in the tradition of Latin rite
priests who deny themselves the goodness inherent in the
married state as well as of professed religious who voluntarily
sacrifice affluence, sexuality, and power for poverty, chastity,
and obedience.

To Martin's daughter, he is "[l]iving like a hermit in the
country" with just "enough to get by" (Lot 57-8). For his part,
Stan can identify with Martin's "quiet way" (Lot 202). Unlike
Stan who retrospectively resolved to amend his life, Martin's
focus is upon the future, spiritually moving "forward" and
"closer" as he increasingly becomes dispossessed of what he
terms the "baggage" of the world. In this, Martin epitomizes the
abiding Catholic consciousness that progress towards holy dying grows out of holy living which necessitates, as one Catholic writer has observed, downsizing for the spiritual journey:

...what we really become attached to and begin unhealthily to store is not so much the material stuff. Almost imperceptibly...we also begin to store other baggage. This kind of baggage, much more so than the material things we accumulated, makes it hard for us to move, especially to move gracefully into [the] final chapter of our lives....

We all carry a lot more baggage...and this makes travel difficult, especially the travel that is asked of us as we grow old, namely, the journey to...let go of life.

Julian of Norwich states that we all cling to God only when we no longer cling to everything else. Richard Rohr expresses it this way: As we get older...the real task of life, both in terms of human growth and God, is to begin to shed things, to carry less and less baggage, to slim down spiritually and psychologically (Rolheiser 11).

With increasing focus upon how he can best serve God, Martin approaches that stage of perfectibility of the ascetic life in which his own will is united in acceptance to the will of God. He is alone when he dies, Stan having driven into town to resolve his own long quest in his first meeting after two years
with Adele. Late in the afternoon, Martin's heart weakens after unduly exerting himself while working in the woods. At the first intimation that his heart is failing, Martin has no illusions about what is happening, accepting as he has done in the past, the reality before him: "He got himself to the floor and, quite sure now, accepting, he lost consciousness" (Lot 192). If Stan could not be physically with him in the hour of his death, he is fittingly united with him in spirit as, after his meeting with Adele, he arrives halfway through the Saturday vigil mass in Ashton:

The priest was offering the bread and wine. He sat at the very back trying to heed the words at the altar, but again and again he found himself looking the people over systematically. It was too late for Martin to be merely late.... He had hoped to see him there and to sit with him this time (Lot 196-7).

Separated by space, Stan and Martin nevertheless are conjoined in time, respectively experiencing the reality of God.
The Catholic Ethos

Catholic spirituality pervades Buell's fiction, embuing the novels with a significant dimension of meaning. The moral and transcendental depth of his fiction received immediate critical attention after the publication of The Pyx in 1959 when Catholic periodical reviewers in particular focused upon the informing aspects of Catholicism that were inherent in the novel. Among the first reviewers, the Paulist Fathers soon recognized Buell as "a young Catholic novelist of promise" (58). Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., the veteran literary editor of America, thought that "Buell's study of good and evil [was] oblique in its Catholic statement," The Pyx being a "really tensely written detective story" that "will puzzle many readers" although it is "a splendid first novel from a young Canadian writer who should not be dismayed if his choice of theme draws the carping of critics who confuse matter and manner" (772-3). John Traynor, also reviewing The Pyx for a Catholic periodical, identified "the theme of sacrilege" in a novel that was "more profound than you would suspect" in its depiction of a "call-girl...ensnared in demoniacal machinations...which center about the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament. A tremendous actual grace inspires her to revolt against the scheme, and this leads to her death, a kind of martyrdom and perhaps, also, her own salvation" (6). In the Critic, Cuneo acknowledged "the Christian realism" in a novel that dealt "with the clash between the forces of good and
evil on a serious level" (33) and in *Commonweal* Donegan noted that Buell was "aware that evil contains, in its complexities, the seeds of goodness," even though he had treated "the two subjects separately, with a tidiness inconsistent with the intertangling of human motives" (82). The review by Rev. John Grant, associate editor of *The Pilot* (Boston), that appeared in *Ave Maria* placed Buell within the context of other writers of Catholic fiction:

Some of the best-known novelists today are those who have managed to treat the theological theme of good and evil with skill and delicacy. Mauriac, Bernanos, Waugh and Greene, to mention but a few, have demonstrated such literary ability. Mr. Buell may be a newcomer to this field, but his first effort stamps him as one who can produce a topflight novel with specific and startling Catholic implications (27).

William Hill, S.J., in his review for *Best Sellers* similarly sought to position Buell among his peers based upon the central theme of *The Pyx*:

Graham Greene and, at times, Bruce Marshall have felt keenly the struggle for goodness in the hearts of men pushed into evil by circumstances; in order to dramatize that struggle, they have concocted weird plots and bizarre situations. Such a method is comparatively easy but it never manages to achieve the profundity for which the novelist should strive. Mr.
Buell has talent, as he has shown in this novel by his delineation of the world of organized vice, actually existing all around us in its unrelieved, relentless horror. With this talent, he should be able to step out of the Greene-Marshall path and create reality out of the stuff of life (224).

Other ostensibly non-Catholic reviewers had mixed critical responses to the novel. Nevertheless, they recognized that Catholicism in *The Pyx* was an essential component both as a moral foundation in the narrative and for establishing the relationships existing among the characters. The *Saturday Night* reviewer classified the novel as "a psychological whodunit" which was "concerned with evil as quality" and in which "the morality...is clear-cut" (55). Watt, on the other hand, in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, regarded this "religio-sexual thriller" as an auspicious first novel but found its chief failure...in the absence of a sustained Catholic religious aura throughout the chain of events bringing murderer and victim together. The intense relevance of Catholicism to Elizabeth is too latent or too belated to be entirely convincing, and the clear explanation of Keerson's psychology...is anti-climactic (468-9).

Regardless of the reviewer's qualified judgments on the craft of *The Pyx*, the presence of Catholic spirituality as an essential part of the novel received widespread recognition even though there was limited acknowledgment of the functional centrality of
a sacramental theology in the novel.

After the publication of *The Pyx*, critical response appearing in the periodical press continued to recognize the moral and sometimes, though infrequently, the spiritual conflicts and resolutions in Buell's novels. In his review of *Four Days*, for example, F.W. Watt in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* recalled: "As his first novel, *The Pyx*, amply suggested, Buell has the qualities of an interesting "Catholic novelist" (399). However, almost overlooked in the general reviews of these novels is the identification of the specific role that Catholicism plays in the novels, especially its sacramental character represented in aspects of the sacrament of reconciliation in *Four Days*, *The Shrewsdale Exit*, and *A Lot to Make Up For*, of the Eucharist in *A Lot To Make Up For*, and in the theme of redemption which appears throughout Buell's fiction. Harris situates Buell with Greene, briefly detailing apparent links between these Catholic writers:

As you read this compelling and upsetting thriller, echoes of Graham Greene nudge at your mind, and the resemblance is reinforced by the occasional appearance of an actual priest. The mysteries of love and evil, of loyalty and treachery and the cold description of the awful things that people do to one another--in short religious questions [are] discussed in the framework of the crime story (37).

The *Saturday Night* reviewer of *Four Days*, retrospectively
recalling The Pyx, observed a developing consistency in Buell who had earlier showed himself master of the crime story with serious overtones. He offered the same blend of suspense, vivid setting, sex and Catholic conscience that brought Graham Greene success. In Four Days he has done it again. In an atmosphere of brooding evil...a boy...is not aware of what he is doing.... No other Canadian writer, not even Brian Moore in his pseudonymous paperbacks, has done anything quite like it. It brings to mind the work of people like Duerrenmatt or Simenon (39-40).

In reviewing Four Days in America, Gardiner noted that "there is a subtle comparison that comments silently on the razor edge that divides guilty complicity from thoughtless co-operation" (25), all of which highlights the inferred attitude of the narrator but which says nothing about the nature of the love which engages Tom's cooperation, thoughtless though his blind love for Milt may be. In Commonweal, Curley's extended review judged the novel to be "a valid book, honestly imagined and boldly executed," noting the essential morality in the fiction found in Tom's character: "His life is not only poor in the cultural, social sense; it is also rich in innocence and loyalty to the only love he knows. If one were writing his epitaph, one might say this: he lived clean" (625). Like Curley, Martin Levin in the New York Times Book Review also recognized that "]t]he
basic innocence of his hero...is realized by Mr. Buell with
stunning effectiveness as the boy is carried farther and farther
away from his small dreams" (30).

In Buell's later novels, reader response continues to
acknowledge spiritual qualities that, if they are not
demonstrably Catholic, are appropriate to a consciousness formed
in the Catholic tradition. Rudick, in the annual fiction review
in the University of Toronto Quarterly notes a "Job-like
tragedy" in The Shrewsdale Exit when Joe Grant is criminalized
as a result of his way of seeking justice but is ultimately
recompensed as in "that other part of Job where he got all the
goods back double-fold" (346). In Canadian Literature,
Rosengarten considers The Shrewdale Exit a "moral fable" in
which it is Buell's intention "to take us beyond the external
manifestations of violence to the effects of such violence upon
an ordinary, "decent" member of society, who becomes tainted by
the very evil he wishes to destroy" (94). In more religious
terms, Jones considered the novel as an "illumination regarding
the violence of our times" in which "Grant's redemption--the
healing not only of the wounds of his loss, but of his rage as
well--is the essence of the story," just as Baker also focused
upon "how the insider becomes the outsider" in a "fairly
sickening picture of a man utterly frustrated by the formal
mechanics of an organised society" who eventually finds "re-
birth through an assertion of simple human values: not the
highly organized structures of society, but the wholesomeness of

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a rural farming community" (102). William Hill, a Jesuit writing in Best Sellers, similarly pointed out that

[t]he most important thing about this new John Buell book is that it is a combination of deep human insights and a rare gift of expression. It begins with a horrible and brutal crime and goes on with a theme of vengeance; but the vengeful attitude tends to break down under a corrosive warmth of a man whose mind has received a seemingly mortal wound.... Through an objective, clear presentation of a mind confronted with deadly and unreasoning violence [Buell] has made us look at something that is far from new but which has taken on new aspects in our time--innocence opposed to brutal and unjust strength" (258).

Despite the recognition Buell received for The Pyx in Catholic periodicals, much of which anticipated a future writing career filled with promise, the response to his novels and to the meaningful Catholic spirituality to be found in them, became more muted, albeit non-existent, after the publication of Playground in 1976. If the absence of a manifest Catholic presence in Playground did not attract Catholic reviewers, at least the human challenge depicted in one man's survival to find new life and to live for another day elicited a thoughtful response from other sources. In the Christian Science Monitor, Guidry regarded Playground as "a tribute to human courage, ingenuity, and persistence, and it should send a shiver of

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gratitude through the well-sheltered, well-fed reader, cozy in a familiar world," unfortunately not indicating to whom or to what one should express one's gratitude (27). Gary Bogart also viewed the novel as an existential representation of one person being "forced to fight for survival equipped only with his own ingenuity.... And if the protagonist's struggle to survive is somewhat less than heroic, it will evoke a responsive chord in a generation brought up with the knowledge that to persevere is to survive" (698), presumably without anyone like John Sweetgrass to effect a rescue. The existential nature of Playground was also the basis of Philip Di Febo's review in which he positions the novel in relation to the "extreme fiction" of another Catholic writer, Joseph Conrad, and his "idea of nature as an ambivalent force." During Morison's wilderness experience, nature was indifferent to his plight; after his rescue, nature could be viewed in retrospect as being purgative, having healed him of his earlier disposition: "Thus Morrison [sic], during his ordeal and after his rescue, is forced to confront the realities of his plight, to understand the changes he undergoes, and to accept the proximity of death" (Di Febo 35). Di Febo, however, is indifferent to the notion of purgation insofar as it has a Catholic orientation, a motif not at all unfamiliar in Buell's later novels.

If purgation is very much a part of Playground, then atonement, as Lawrence Rungren has pointed out, is the operative motive in A Lot To Make Up For (111). For Konkel, the challenge
of Stan Hagen is that "he must expunge the burdens of guilt and remorse he has been carrying for years in his private hell" (Cl6); for another reviewer, "healing is [Stan's] goal" in his "quest to resurrect a relationship destroyed by alcohol and drugs" (104). However, the spiritual nature of the process of atonement and healing in the novel and particularly the sacramental efficacy of the Eucharist in promoting healing is noticeably absent throughout the range of reviews. To the professional readers, Buell's Catholicism and how it affects his fiction, which was so evident in The Pyx, appears to have disappeared from most reviews as a characteristic feature deserving of recognition in his more recent fiction.

If there has been a tendency by reviewers and critics alike to neglect or disregard the effects of Buell's Catholicism upon his fiction, this deficiency has in part been offset by the appearance of incisive critical analyses which have focused upon the significance of the underlying spirituality in the novels. Keith Garebian's examination of The Pyx, Four Days, and The Shrewsdale Exit establishes a general metaphysical pattern in Buell's fiction rather than one which is distinctively Catholic. Predicated upon the perception that "Buell's vision is metaphysical rather than merely "escapist," much as is the case in Graham Greene's vision," Garebian examines how Buell's novels demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between the real and the unreal, good and evil, innocence and guilt, deception and self-knowledge. Buell traces
quests for soul-satisfaction made by his main characters past a line of no-return, and he is less interested in solving a crime than he is in exploring the mystery of an inexorably decaying world ("Real Course" 74).

Garebian takes his cue from Jack Trudel, the taxi driver in The Pyx, who is traumatized by the psychic dissociation between his fanciful imagination and the reality of having seen Elizabeth Lucy's body fall from the heights of an apartment block to the sidewalk below, an external, violent physical actuality which challenged his internal conviction that ease, pleasure and happiness should be the assumed end of his sexual fantasies about beautiful women and "ease and pleasant power" (Pyx 13). The overwhelming unreality of the manifest reality before him was too disconcerting for Trudel who found that he had "to dismiss [the actual thing] as outside the real course of life" (Pyx 14). The real course of life, Garebian believes, characterizes that duality or interplay between the outer world and the inner world which produces the kind of psychic tension that afflicts Buell's protagonists. Within the outer world or milieu is where

> [g]ood and evil—with all their attendant complications—grow within the "real course of life", and Buell's interest lies in observing the tensions between good and evil within the controls of a milieu. Buell's vision is informed with a sense that the
mutable decay of milieux impinges upon the inner world of man, thereby creating confusion and emphasizing human limitations ("Real Course" 75).

In this interplay or conflict between milieu and character, Garebian does not see "a conclusion...achieved through a dé rigeur resolution of iniquity." What Buell obliges the reader to do is "to follow the protagonist's involvement with reality until such time as a line of no-return has been crossed. What survives...is the "real course of life," that is, a measure of self-knowledge for the protagonist trapped in a decaying world ("Real Course" 75). There is, then, a breakthrough for Buell's protagonists as they go beyond a line of no-return into the reality—the real course of life—of "a measure of self-knowledge" in which the protagonist experiences "soul-satisfaction."

At this point, Garebian hesitates to extend the realization of what he terms the quest after peace and soul-satisfaction ("Real Course" 82) in order to place it within the context of Catholic spirituality. For Garebian, Buell's novels exhibit "no leap to God, no tortuous discovery of faith in the Greene cachet. However, salvation is sought--not in religious terms but in a metaphysical sense of harmony" ("Real Course" 83). Garebian gives little indication, if any, of the meaningful contribution of Buell's Catholicism in his novels. For Garebian, Elizabeth Lucy's spirituality in The Pyx is consistently termed a "flirtation" with Catholicism. Nor does Elizabeth fare much
better in the climactic moment of receiving the Host when "in so
doing she expresses her fundamental goodness" ("Real Course"
83). If there is more to Elizabeth's action than some
"fundamental goodness," there is considerably more to the action
of divine grace in and upon Buell's protagonists. Garebian does
not quite know what to do with grace, placing the word in
quotation marks each time he uses it, thereby suggesting that
this grace really has nothing to do with actual or sanctifying
grace but is something, perhaps some inner resource, which leads
to, in Garebian's word, "soul-satisfaction" ("Real Course" 74 et
seq.). Garebian's schema of Buell's vision is predicated upon a
metaphysic which lacks a sacramental dimension. As such, his
perception of what the fiction ultimately means is truncated by
the absence of any spiritual significance beyond the characters
experiencing self-knowledge and some New Age soul-satisfaction.

A clearer exposition, even a celebration of the Catholic
presence in Buell's fiction, appears in Harry J. Cargas's 1968
overview of Buell's first two novels. Earlier, Edmund Wilson,
who had recognized Buell in The New Yorker as "[o]ne of the most
interesting younger Canadian novelists" (115), could not fail to
notice the anomaly of Buell as a writer:

He is in the curious position, probably possible only
for a Canadian, of writing in the English language
excellent novels which he regards as essentially
French but which are published in New York and Paris
and little known in either French or British Canada
Also wondering why Buell's fiction had not received more widespread critical attention, Cargas further points out that in *The Pyx* and *Four Days* we come to realize that the main characters are saved because of their personal innocence in a world where innocence has no place. John Buell writes more than mysteries—he writes about human love absorbed by Divine Love. This seems unlikely, given the violence which his characters are subject, but the violence which these people suffer is truly purgative. They are purified in the totally Christian sense (28).

This Christian and characteristically Catholic sense is central to the action in *The Pyx*:

Elizabeth...who earlier had refused to go to confession, kneels before the stolen Host when she sees it and, in an awful moment, consumes it....Keerson murders Elizabeth, but the author will have us know that this very troubled woman has at last found true peace in God's love (28).

For Cargas, the spiritual destiny of Elizabeth is a microcosm of an eschatological truth:

Elizabeth's greatness is her abandoning herself completely and recklessly for God. Keerson's evilness is in his having been completely overwhelmed by Satan. In one sense, a woman did crush this serpent's head
In *Four Days* as well, Cargas identified what we recognize as the redemptive progress of Tom after he has killed Ritch:

The twelve year old runs away and accidentally meets a priest. He pours his heart out, unwittingly under the confessional seal. Soon after, he drowns, but this act of confession, along with his own basic innocence, leads to his salvation (29).

Buell, Cargas notes, "is a man whose compassion extends to antagonists as well" (29) for after all the sacrilegious and murderous havoc Keerson has incited, "even this evil man conquers evil" (29). Similarly, Ritch in *Four Days* can be seen "in the light of ultimate charity" (29).

Almost twenty years after Cargas's Catholic reading of Buell's early novels, Buell's longtime friend and onetime teacher, Gerald MacGuigan, S.J., consolidated his response to Buell's fiction, seeing in it, as he told Barbara Black, "a progression...which has a clearly religious dimension." In Buell's first four novels, he saw a developing pattern:

They're slightly out of sequence. Take the second novel, *Four Days*, first. It's about a total innocent, a boy surrounded by evil and overcome by it. Then there's *The Pyx*, in which a sinner (the call-girl with the heroin addiction) is nearly done in by the evil around her, but she's saved at the last moment by refusing to take part in the black mass... Then you've
got *The Shrewsdale Exit*, in which a man seeking vengeance is redeemed and reconciled by contact with nature. And finally, *Playground*, in which an individual finds salvation in nature by stripping himself of everything unnecessary" (J9).

Such a pattern of loss, gain, redemption, and salvation can even be extended to Buell's fifth novel, *A Lot To Make Up For*, in which the presence of God's love in the world, realized sacramentally in the sacrifice of the mass, restores and heals broken humanity.

In the forty years since his first novel was published, Buell has received considerable if not primary recognition as a master of the psychological thriller, an identification which has tended to obscure what has been apparent to some readers, namely that Buell's novels successfully manifest a number of distinctive features of Catholic writing. In this respect, Buell has acknowledged that upon the publication of *The Pyx* he had some awareness regarding who his readers were, explaining to Gilbert Drolet: "I was writing in a fairly conscious religious and Catholic context" ("Conversation" 68). However, on occasion Buell has disclaimed recognition as a "Catholic writer," at least whenever this designation has been qualified by being placed within quotation marks. One would expect, then, that it is from the image of some type of stereotypical Catholic writer that Buell would want to distance himself, presumably a writer in the moralistic, didactic, intellectually polemical tradition.
of Catholic writing, sometimes parochial in point of view, often
an instrument of evangelical outreach, that had characterized
some Catholic fiction until the mid-twentieth century when Buell
began writing his first novel. This tradition, if it still
exists, has no relationship to Buell's writing. On the contrary,
the Catholicism of his novels is simply a reflection of a
reality which is as accessible to those who are indifferent to
Catholicism as it is to believers. From a secular point of view,
such demonstrably Catholic realities as justification, the
operation of grace, and the concomitant transcendental
breakthrough of God into the world through the sacraments remain
accessible within the context of myth; to Catholics, however,
the portrayal in fiction of the centrality of the Real Presence,
the efficacy of the sacraments, and the salvific operation of
grace through suffering and redemption evokes a spiritual
response corresponding to what Buell has called in another
context a "more real reality" ("Bread and Wine" 14). Insofar as
a paradigm of transcendence exists in Buell's novels, it is
present as a reality which has an effect upon the dynamics
within the fiction. Elizabeth Lucy's reception of the Host in
The Pyx; Tom, the altar boy from Montreal, finding consolation
at Val Laurent in his confession to the local priest in Four
Days; Joe Grant's urge for vengeance offset by work, the healing
of nature, and the love of Ellen Shefford in The Shrewsdale
Exit; Spence Morison in Playground being purged of his notion
that technological efficiency is the proper end of mankind; Stan
Hagen and Martin Lacey in *A Lot To Make Up For* finding not just presence but the Real Presence as the fountain of grace: each protagonist's life becomes meaningful, portrayed either as Catholics accessing the sacramental life of the Church, or as non-Catholics like Joe Grant in *The Shrewsdale Exit* and Spence Morison in *Playground* who experience the purifying effect of God's presence throughout creation.

Reconciliation, redemption, and ultimately salvation can only exist, of course, in the belief, or for some on the assumption, that God is well-disposed towards humanity, for it is only on this basis that there is hope for all who are lost. God's love for all that he has created, which is communicated to mankind as divine grace, heals broken humanity. In Buell's novels, spiritual healing, sometimes expressed in terms of an efficacious blessing or benediction, is represented as an integral part of the process of redemption. The action of the rehabilitated messenger priest who "raised his hand in benediction" (*Pyx* 122) over the departing Elizabeth Lacy is not a meaningless or an idle gesture. Blessings reclaim creation for God, and in *The Pyx* the effect of this reclamation upon Elizabeth is realized just hours later when she safeguards the Blessed Sacrament from demonic sacrilege. At the end of *Four Days*, Tom and Ritch are similarly commended to God in the priest's prayers for the dead. In *The Shrewsdale Exit*, the late wife and daughter of Joe Hagen were "a sort of benediction to the place where he was" (*SE* 255), out in the fields harvesting
the crop for Ellen Shefford, thereby consecrating those fields beyond the Shrewsdale exit to become the appropriate setting within a few days for Joe's transformation. One finds, too, that in *Playground*, John Sweetgrass' ministration to Spence Morison replicates the nature of a blessing, thereby heightening Morison's consciousness of what his humanity means. In much the same way, Martin Lacey in *A Lot To Make Up For*, himself an instrument of grace, prays that God will bless Stan Hagen in his new found peace and reconciliation.

Intrinsic to each of these portrayals of redemption in Buell's novels is the action of Divine Love which forgives and seeks to restore those marginalized by sin. Grace abounds in Buell's novels, a grace which in addition to healing is in a particularly Catholic way an "empowerment to live humanly and enter interpersonal communion with God eternally" (Duffy 349). This is the grace which facilitates human self-realization as well as being the grace which elevates humanity to its rightful destiny as heirs to the kingdom of God. It is the grace explicitly available sacramentally to Elizabeth Lucy and Martin Lacey in particular and implicitly to those protagonists who seek the grace of redemption of their own free will. To the extent that Buell's fiction either directly or indirectly manifests the action of grace, it becomes more meaningful Catholic fiction representing the "more real reality" which is the essential Catholic ethos of his novels. In this, Buell is not alone among Catholic novelists, at least on the basis of the
definition of an essential quality of a great Catholic novel proposed by George Weigel who has suggested that the principal element which makes a Catholic novel great is the way in which it represents the operation of grace:

A novel is both great and Catholic if the author believes—and conveys with literary skill—the truth at the end of George Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest*: "Grace is everywhere."

A great Catholic novel is filled with a sacramental sensibility. The old *Baltimore Catechism* helps here. A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by God to give grace. Translate that into a worldview and you get a sacramental sensibility: the extraordinary is not located in some alternative universe; the extraordinary is just over there, on the other side of the ordinary. Everyday things and ordinary people become vessels of grace, not by magical transformation but by being what and who they are (9).

Vessels of grace are not difficult to find in Buell's novels, their presence testifying to his sacramental vision. Such a perspective, especially when it is imaginatively extrapolated in fiction, is conducive to the creation of protagonists about whom there is something more, one might say, than meets the eye. All of Buell's protagonists experience some form of temporal or spiritual transformation; however, in order to make clear the nature of that transformation, one subordinate
character in the novel serves as a mediator to the protagonist, his role being to give spiritual or sometimes psychological and social meaning to the protagonist's actions. In his early novels, Buell employs a time honored technique from the theatre, establishing one character who can justify or explain what would otherwise be unresolved. This exposition occurs in the epilogue to the novel, from which perspective the apologist can retrospectively tell "something more" about the protagonist whom he has encountered in the central action of the narrative. This is the role, then, of detective Henderson in The Pyx. Only he knows who and what brought Elizabeth Lucy to her death. Only he can point to "something more" about Elizabeth when he is reflecting upon how he can advise her father of her death: "He grimaced with irony as he thought that the news he had to tell the Colonel was, after all, good" (Pyx 174). Such a conclusion to the novel, charged with spiritual truth, typifies the functioning of an imagination informed by a sacramental sensibility that looks beyond the appearance of one of life's losers to find a vessel of grace. The same expository technique also appears even more formally in the epilogue to Four Days where the priest from Ste. Marie becomes the moral and spiritual apologist for Tom and Ritch. To the police investigating the Montreal bank robbery as well as to the press, Tom is just another loser, a street kid who has been an accessory to a crime. Ritch, too, is perceived around Val Laurent as being an easy going layabout, a resident lounge lizard who is tainted and
teased about the nature of his sexuality even by his self-styled friend in the underworld. After the deaths of Tom and Ritch, the priest focuses not upon the corruption that affected them but upon the manifestation of human goodness that was present in their lives. Only the priest can convey their spiritual reality, namely that Tom and Ritch may possess God's love more fully than in any way that they experienced human love.

In Buell's later novels, the role of the observant interpreter of the hidden grace within the protagonists, such as those who have died in The Pyx and Four Days, is replaced by the presence in the narrative of a new found friend of the protagonist who, albeit at arm's length, facilitates the transforming process in which the protagonist is engaged. In The Shrewsdale Exit, detective Sparrs is instrumental in saving Joe Grant from taking the law into his own hands; in Playground, John Sweetgrass literally saves Spence Morison, thereby enabling Morison to realize his humanity more fully in the future; and in A Lot To Make Up For Martin Lacey provides the appropriate environment to nurture Stan Hagen as Stan distances himself from a ruinous and illusory life of drugs and alcohol in order to deepen his faith in the reality of God's grace made available to those, such as Stan himself, who seek it. As subordinate characters in the novels, detective Sparrs, John Sweetgrass and Martin Lacey are of particular importance insofar as their ministrations to the respective protagonists assist the protagonists towards their transformation. In this sense, these
facilitators become surrogate priests, like those earlier priests who blessed and were a blessing to Elizabeth Lucy in *The Pyx* and Tom and Ritch in *Four Days*. Consequently, in *The Shrewsdale Exit*, Sparrs is a mediator of grace to Joe Grant, providing him with a viable option of reconciliation which will restore the fugitive to the community at large and in particular to a lasting presence within the family of Ellen Shefford. In *Playground*, John Sweetgrass knows how to live in balance and harmony with the same environment that presented an almost insuperable challenge to Spence Morison. Even in his brief encounter with Sweetgrass, Morison is imbued with a heightened sense of some of the best attributes of human nature: a disregard of pretence, an understanding of the natural world in which one lives, and the foregone conclusion that one is always one's brother's keeper. There is a special grace in John Sweetgrass to which Morison responds, thereby deepening a spiritual bond which develops between them. While Morison never reveals all of the things that he says he has come to know as a result of his wilderness experience, what he has experienced in the presence of Sweetgrass apparently contributes substantially to those insights, namely those "things" that he tells his wife he has come to know. The image of priestly ministration also continues in *A Lot To Make Up For* where Martin Lacey, who, like Sweetgrass, is himself a quiet presence living close to nature in the country, asks before the Real Presence at mass to be an instrument of grace for Stan Hagen's spiritual restoration.
The incorporation of God directly into the narrative as a real and physical presence on the altar at the Ashton church marks a culmination in the exercise of Buell's sacramental imagination. In earlier novels, the narrative presence of God is more muted. He enters rather surreptitiously into the action of The Pyx, suddenly becoming accessible to Elizabeth Lucy in one momentous salvific moment. In Four Days, God is sacramentally present to Tom at mass and in his confession but Tom is more focused upon the nature of human love than being noticeably responsive to the love of God. God is not a narrative reality in The Shrewsdale Exit and is present only as a passing thought in Spence Morison's mind in Playground. In these novels, if God is present at all, He is shown to be momentarily instrumental in a narrative action but then recedes from direct view only to be realized indirectly through words of blessing, the ministrations of priests, and the manifestation of grace in nature. However, sacramentality has a dual nature. While it is in the nature of a sacrament to be a sign that denotes a sacred reality, it is at the same time, as Buell has said, a "more real reality" insofar as God marvelously breaks through into the time and space of our world. Ultimately, the sacramental imagination, in addition to suggesting another reality, seeks to portray the living presence of God in the world, a presence which becomes privileged for Catholics in the Eucharist. In A Lot To Make Up For, the sacramental presence of God is manifestly real on the altar at Ashton church, a presence which Lacey affirms is "real to the
point of making all else real" (Lot 218). For two years, Stan has been seeking God after abjuring his abusive youth; Martin, newly conscious of his mortality, is preparing to be received by God. Physically, they share a common goal in the work to be done on Martin's small farm; spiritually, they seek to conform their lives to their faith. While they have occasion to talk philosophically about their experiences, each is hesitant to acknowledge or affirm the meaning of any spiritual influence in his life, at least until after the end of the first week of working together when Stan and Martin, unaware of each other's plans, encounter one another in the Ashton congregation while attending mass. What Buell has envisioned in this characteristically Catholic scenario is the spiritual union Stan and Martin come to realize, not just between themselves but conjointly with the sacramental presence of God, the centrality of which has a dual importance. Here is the fountain of all sanctifying grace or, to use Stan Hagen's metaphor, the "one well" (Lot 168) from which those who spiritually thirst can draw life giving water. Moreover, the Real Presence is the eucharistic banquet available to all, uniting those who share it in the community of God's people. In this evocation of the centrality of sacrament in the lives of Stan and Martin, Buell has incorporated within his narrative a fundamental tenet of Catholicism. Insofar as such Catholic practice is appropriate to the dynamics of the fiction, the Catholicism is not intrusive but exists as an essential component in the narrative. Buell has
readily employed many perspectives derived from his Catholic background such as those relating to the nature of reality, the influence of evil, and the role of the sacraments. These in turn are appropriately employed in the development of his themes of reconciliation and redemption. To the extent that Buell has created an effective integration of aspects of faith and fiction in his novels, his work continues to merit critical attention, both as compelling, masterfully crafted novels and as portraying the "more real reality" of mature Catholic fiction.
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