MARTHA OSTENSO'S NOVELS

A Study of Three Dominant Themes

by

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B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1964

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December, 1970
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This thesis is an examination of a group of central themes which run through Martha Ostenso's novels; it focuses upon three major problems in human relationship, observed within the context of her fictional families. Ostenso's characters are usually seen as victims of tyrannical forces that exert destructive pressure upon normal family life. The examples of domestic dissension in the novels are generally familiar, consisting as they do of problems arising from incompatibility, narrow dogmatism, and resentful isolation, caused by a suppressed fear of retribution, in one form or another. Even though the greater part of her work involves agricultural communities of North America, there is a distinct universality about her novels that recommends her as a suitable subject for serious research.

In the Introduction, I have outlined the thematic concerns of this study. In doing so, I have suggested that effective evaluation of an artist, such as Martha Ostenso, can occur only following an examination of the total output of work. Ostenso's canon contains material for numerous specialized studies; however, it was decided to concentrate upon tracing three characteristic elements, which owe their origin to her first novel, *Wild Geese*. This novel is used as a base in order to illustrate Ostenso's apparent determination to exploit certain of its more successful aspects.

Chapter Two is a discussion of the problems arising between members of her fictional families. The pattern of abrasive relationships between parents and children is followed from her first novel to her last. There is discernible evidence that Ostenso's treatment of this subject reveals a growing sense of psychological insight. Similarly, other kinds of family strife receive an increasingly sensitive handling, indicative of her apparent desire to capitalize upon an expanding awareness of human tensions.
Chapter Three, in continuing the discussion of Ostenso's central themes, traces the delineation of the authority figure, from the elemental, caricature-like Caleb Gare to the wholly credible figure of Luke Darr. It is concluded that Ostenso's ultimate goal is the regeneration of such individuals who place themselves outside the pale of human sympathy. Chapter Four examines the spiritual desolation and self-torture seen as one of the more common conditions of the human predicament in Ostenso's novels. This aspect of her work reveals the least evidence of development. On occasion it becomes awkwardly incredible.

The study concludes with an examination of Ostenso's impact upon literary criticism in North America. It is clear that she is overshadowed by many of the contemporary practitioners of "realism" in America; however, in terms of Canadian fiction she has made a contribution that will rank always as a major landmark on our journey to a mature literature.
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Chapter One

Introduction

This study, of the novels of Martha Ostenso, is an attempt to explore three salient features, characteristic of her art. It becomes apparent that her concern is with human relationships, when viewed within the context of the family. The intention is to show that a pre-occupation with the subject begins with her first novel and dominates her subsequent work. In that first novel, *Wild Geese*, she examines several sources of family tension, including incompatibility, religious tyranny, and isolation resulting from a numbing sense of dread. As a result of a discussion of these distinctive features of her novels, it is hoped that a better understanding of Martha Ostenso's aesthetic will be possible.

Appreciation of most forms of art is dependent upon a recognition of pattern, and the knowledge that pattern is idiosyncratic is a further aid to comprehension. It is through the manipulation of characteristic effects that the artist achieves a personal statement of balance and harmony. So it must be assumed that a conscious determination to assert his individuality develops from an intellectual recognition of what Susanne Langer means when she says that "thinking begins with seeing; not necessarily through the eye, but with some basic formulations of sense perception." What the artist feels will be conveyed in his work in varying degrees of intensity, emphasizing the fact that

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certain stylistic features result from the conscious employment of characteristic patterns. Thus, it could be said that the artist is showing dependence upon a formula, when he makes use of a certain cluster of characteristics to clothe his inspiration in a concrete reality.

An artist is often quite dependent upon receiving a continuing assessment of the effect he is creating. Art does not flourish in a vacuum, and it is reasonable to assume that the sensitive artist exercises an awareness of his own distinctive style, remaining conscious of the necessity to perpetuate its fundamental features, while at the same time experimenting within it. This requires an intuitive recognition, by the artist, of the infinitude of possibilities residing in the deployment of familiar factors within a novel framework. In the visual arts this is often quite apparent, especially in the work of highly competent artists where there is an effective repetition of aspects which are idiosyncratically distinctive. It is as though the formula established by the artist, confident in the truth of his own vision, is a currency supported by more than adequate reserves of wealth. It serves to generate a relationship mutually satisfactory for the artist and his audience, and permits a ready association of the artist's formula with patterns of human experience.

The artist who remains sensitive to the plight of human existence tends to embody in his work an intuitive apprehension of formal relationships. He recognizes that human existence is organized in patterns and tries to involve his audience in an active participation in the conception of the design. In this study of Martha Ostenso's fifteen novels, it is hoped to demonstrate that the author is keenly aware of certain patterns of human behaviour and realizes that the significance of a piece of work lies in its formal organization. She would agree with Herbert Read that a "work of art . . . is a logical structure
corresponding to the pattern of sentience."³

In considering a work of art in terms of form and pattern, it is certainly not inappropriate to take note of Aaron Berkman's remarks concerning the difficulties experienced in distinguishing coherent factors when confronted by a highly complex work of art. It is hard, he says, "to isolate any one element . . . from the other elements, for they are all interlocked into a unity".⁴ In spite of that difficulty, he explains that, "as one may select one theme in a Bach fugue and delight in its study", it is possible to select a single element at a time and "unravel it from the intricacies" of an involved composition. What must be understood from his analogy is that, in discussing the work of an artist such as Martha Ostenso, it is well to remember that embodied in the work one is likely to discover a number of contrapuntal devices or themes to which the artist returns periodically.

Because of the artist's pre-occupation with a particular cluster of themes, it becomes necessary to take "one theme at a time . . . and delight in its study" before proceeding to a consideration of the next. The presence of a number of contrapuntal elements in her work makes it imperative that the study be limited, and for that reason certain selection criteria are being employed for the sake of balance and harmony. Human behaviour characteristics, as discerned in Martha Ostenso's novels, could lead the investigation into a variety of specialized areas. For example, her interest in adolescence provides ample material for an engrossing topic involving rebellion, frustration, and sexual experience. The incidence of spinsters, too, merits a study of its own. Significantly, Wild Geese has already attracted the attention of scholars

³Herbert Read, "Susanne Langer", The Tenth Muse: essays in criticism, (New York, 1958), 247

⁴Aaron Berkman, The Functional Line in Painting, (New York, 1957), 74
researching the adolescent\(^5\) and the spinster\(^6\) in American fiction. In addition, ten of her novels are connected with farm life, qualifying through that reason for specialized attention.\(^7\) These examples represent just a few of the possible themes and testify to the necessity for placing limitations upon the scope of the study. Thus, it has been decided to concentrate upon three elements of human relationship, dominant in Martha Ostenso's first novel and which can be detected, as contrapuntal entities, throughout the rest of her work.

Ostenso's devotion to aspects of her original pattern indicates that she made a determined analysis of her first work in order to isolate, and develop, those features which bear her own individual stamp. It appears that she relied upon an instinctive talent in writing her first novel, because she said in an interview:

\[
\text{I'll have to work hard all my life now.} \\
\text{I don't know how I wrote that novel. I'll have to learn how to write, so I can write another.}^8
\]

As she proceeds "to learn how to write" it becomes evident that she wishes "to record and interpret the processes of ordinary life".\(^9\) Undeniably, domestic problems are a familiar part of those "processes of ordinary life", and a prime example of dissension can be seen in the frequently abrasive relationship between parent and child. Ostenso's observation of this problem receives

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \(^6\)Dorothy Yost Deegan, The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels, (New York, 1951).
\item \(^7\)Roy W. Meyer, The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century, (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965).
\item \(^8\)Morris Colman, "Martha Ostenso, Prize Novelist", Maclean's Magazine, (January 1, 1925),56-58.
\item \(^9\)Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, (Toronto, 1964),203.
\end{itemize}}
corroborative support in the statement:

Since farm parents thus become severe taskmasters as well as guardians of behavior, there are more possible areas for family maladjustment on the farm than in small town or city.\(^1^0\)

A convincing level of credibility can be found in the various features of incompatibility in *Wild Geese*, especially in the conflict between Caleb and his daughter Judith. The impulse of the life-force, so powerful within her, makes her "the only one of her father's children with spirit and strength enough to fight back against his cruel domination".\(^1^1\) Carla of *The Waters Under the Earth*\(^1^2\) shares with Judith a common commitment to the life-force. In this respect, they differ from their siblings who, through negation of that force, expose themselves to criticism. Their frequent mute acquiescence is indicative of a moral capitulation, as can be seen in the case of Carla's youngest brother, Tom, whose "identity seemed to have receded . . . from him, like a vanishing point of light on a dark plain".\(^1^3\)

The suppression of natural human responses, is part of the toll exacted by society when indicating to its members how order may be achieved in family relationships. The Welland children, from Sophie who is "only half present at any time, anywhere, and then only when some sensory impression disturbed her",\(^1^4\) to Carla, who is peculiarly aware of the fact that she is "remote from them", are all guilty of denying themselves a healthy outlet for the rancour that festers within them. The three elements of the Ostenso

\(^1^0\)Witham, 97.
\(^1^1\)Witham, 91.
\(^1^3\)op.cit., 74.
\(^1^4\)op.cit., 159.
pattern come together at this point. In the focus upon family conflict are found the parallel concerns of religious prejudice and the psychological paralysis common to many Ostenso characters. All three elements contribute to a state of alienation developed as an important aspect in many novels, and achieving particular emphasis in her final novel. In this story the author, intent upon the eventual integration of the central character, examines different aspects of loneliness within a grown-up family. The efforts by the father "to assert his mastery lead to deterioration of the family until the suicide of Mark . . . brings the others to their senses." Following the tragedy, Luke, the father, "comes to recognize that his sons have the right to live lives of their own". A healthy communication is made possible, in a manner which contrasts with the smouldering anguish of Ellen in Wild Geese, Marcia in The Young May Moon, or of many of Matt Welland's children in The Waters Under the Earth.

The problems resulting from conflict between parent and child are paralleled in Ostenso's work by those originating in marital discord. Like many observed characteristics of her art, the earliest examples of this source of tension can be found in Wild Geese. The central conflict involving Caleb's tyranny of Amelia tends to overshadow Mrs. Sandbo's sentiments when she says, "I vass a dog under him. Now I live good, not much money, but no dirt from him, t'ank God." There is a suggestion of equivocation in the full recital of Mrs. Sandbo's feelings concerning her late husband, but there is no mistaking Ostenso's description of "the vixen's hell which Dora Brund offers daily to her

16 Meyer, 226.
17 loc.cit.
18 Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese, (Toronto, 1961, reprinted 1967), 17. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
The brief visit to the Brund cabin is more than adequate for the author's purposes. The situation in the Thorvaldson household is made quite apparent with even fewer words. After describing Thorvaldson's farm as "a fragment of neglect" in consequence of there being "nine girls, and no boys," Ostenso gives a glimpse of the pregnant wife "struggling with the cattle in the milk yard", being "pushed and jostled about by the unmanageable animals." Her position is similar to Amelia's in that her husband fails to accord her any respect as a human being. Thorvaldson, in talking about her, employs terminology usually reserved for descriptions of farm beasts.

Refusal to grant another person his basic rights is seminal to many of Ostenso's fictional marital disasters. Sometimes it is a central concern, as in The Dark Dawn, but at other times it is a peripheral matter, such as the marriage of Nigel Prince in Milk Route. He "rarely uttered a word in the presence of his wife" and succeeds in withdrawing himself completely to a fantasy life. Abdication of responsibility can generally be discerned as the underlying cause of many marriage difficulties, whereas success is predicated upon a mutual preservation of self-respect. This fact emerges from the number of happy unions existing in the novels, or projected at their close. Lind and Mark, in Wild Geese, display an instinctive awareness of the basic requirement. It is quite apparent, too, that when Judith puts Sven to the test spiritually, and physically, she is

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20 Wild Geese, 47.

21 op. cit., 80.

22 Martha Ostenso, Milk Route, (New York, 1948), 219.

23 Wild Geese, 74.

24 op. cit., 86.
assuring herself as to his fitness. The trial is not a prolonged affair in *Wild Geese*, but in later novels, such as *The Stone Field*, *The White Reef* and *Prologue to Love*, it receives greater emphasis.

A denial of inalienable rights characterizes the gulf Ostenso's authority figures create in their human relationships. The total concept of the patriarchal tyrant commences with the rudimentary Caleb in *Wild Geese*, and proceeds to the far more complex Luke Darr in *A Man Had Tall Sons*. In this, her last novel, she allows the tyrant to synthesize hitherto disparate aspects of life into a unity of comprehensive tolerance. That opportunity is denied to others in Caleb's line of literary descent. There is, it is true, an abortive attempt to effect a regeneration for Caleb when "sanity came back to him, the cold clear sanity that had been gone from him during the years of his hatred."

But by then it is too late, and the threat to his avarice is about to become manifest. The fire guard, he tries to plough, is symbolic of the isolation he has always effected in his human relationships. It is also prophetic of the arrogance which insulates other authority figures from their fellows.

As a central focus the authority figure becomes a point of reference, used to inform the rest of the novel. Operating as a perverted concept of what is normal, he makes excessive demands upon the good nature of other people, succeeding in achieving power far more effectively than if he were to use brute force. Ostenso makes good use of her visual imagination to convey a sense of gloomy repression in her portraits of the tyrants, often relying upon contrasting patterns of light and shade. These patterns complement the vital spiritual distinctions between her characters. In the atmosphere of the landscape they frequently become expressive of either inner tension or harmony. The opening pages of *Wild Geese* are revelatory in this regard. The fading daylight,

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25 *op.cit.*, 233.
accompanied by growing apprehension, at Caleb's approach, is balanced by a
developing sense of Judith's wholesome qualities. A pre-occupation with
cleaning lamps, by Amelia, and an habitual practice of turning down the wick,
by Caleb, reveals a symbolic struggle between the forces of light and dark.
His behaviour is a manifestation of the way in which the Puritan mistakenly
challenges light, narrowly distrustful of its broadening effects. Matt Welland's
suspicion of education provides a further instance of the characteristic hostil-
ity to light. By means of directing attention to darkness the tyrant is able
to create that sense of guilt and isolation essential to his ends.

An overpowering sense of guilt provides the basis of the third theme
to be discussed. It is responsible for the incubus of dread afflicting so many
of the characters and interfering with healthy rationalization of their difficul-
ties. Despite exaggeration in some of the circumstances, there is a certain
fidelity to life experience which preserves a sense of credibility concerning
the behaviour of particular characters. It is a common experience to imagine
ogres of retribution waiting for a false move. The ability to imagine the incu-
bus necessitates a sensitivity to possibilities affecting one's own comfort and
often that of others. Where there is a readily understood cause for the guilt
feeling, sympathy is not hard to find. But where the cause is vague in origin
then the reader's response to a character's sufferings is one of irritation.
The device, as an element of her pattern, is first used by Ostenso in Wild Geese.
Amelia's main concern hinges upon the fear of social chaos for her children,
should Caleb divulge what he knows. Used as a regular feature throughout her

26 op.cit., 13.
27 op.cit., 159-161.
28 The Waters Under the Earth, 58.
29 Wild Geese, 99.
novels, the phantasy is at times a very contrived structure. This is the case in one story where a girl leaves home in the belief that her dying father is a murderer. She learns the truth only after enduring twelve years of self-effacement and fear.\textsuperscript{30} In contrast, there is an amazing fidelity to life shown in the sufferings of the victim of the "man-eating" farm wife who seduces him because of her husband's impotence.\textsuperscript{31}

Where she avoids placing too severe a strain upon credibility, Martha Ostenso is successful in her use of these three characteristic concerns of her art. The pattern she uses is that of life itself and, although this study represents an attempt to isolate three distinct elements, their very inter-connectedness tends to obscure the original intent. Ostenso herself emphasizes this point when she describes the conversation between Bill Clifford and Colin Trale. In recalling an earlier statement he makes, that one is "born to a pattern" which is inescapable, Bill explains that by means of dissecting the pattern he can arrive at the formula:

"You see how simple - "
"What's wrong with it? It cover the pattern doesn't it?"
"Only a part of it - and a very small part at that," Colin said, and looked at his watch.\textsuperscript{32}

In dealing with the work of any creative artist, certain conclusions may result from an examination of what seems to be a distinct feature. None of these conclusions, however, would have any validity unless viewed within the context of that artist's total production of work.

\textsuperscript{30}Martha Ostenso, \textit{Love Passed this Way}, (New York, 1942).
\textsuperscript{31}Martha Ostenso, \textit{The Mandrake Root}, (New York, 1938).
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Milk Route}, 180.
Chapter Two

Patterns of compatibility

An example of what Martha Ostenso recognizes as a characteristic element in life can be seen in her frequent fictional use of a strained family atmosphere resulting from friction between a parent and child.¹ Possessiveness is a common factor in the majority of these conflicts in Ostenso's novels. It can be safely inferred that her analysis of the Care family in Wild Geese gave her enormous confidence in the effectiveness of the device of creating a state of domestic tension. Caleb, the travesty of a father in her first novel, inspires her to include repressive parents in her subsequent stories. She makes an abortive attempt in The Dark Dawn with Agatha Dorrit, who never really emerges from the flat background and is hardly encountered in the novel. In The Young May Moon, however, Dorcas Gunther hobbles about as an obvious re-incarnation of Caleb. Matt Welland, in The Waters Under the Earth, continues the line, followed by Jarvis Dean in Prologue to Love, Magdali Vinge in O River, Remember!, and Luke Darr in A Man Had Tall Sons. There is a gradual development of the character from the point where the melodramatic Caleb, forever brushing the right hand side of his moustache with his left hand,² and plotting some unsavoury act of retribution, gives way to the much more reasonable Luke Darr, whose "nose twitched uneasily."³ Luke Darr, like Caleb, is afflicted by a sense of injustice, but he exhibits distinct possibilities as a character capable of regeneration. He seeks to possess his children with love rather than hate. Caleb frustrates

¹Witham, 71.

²Wild Geese, Examples of Caleb's habit may be found on pages 154, 160, 165, and elsewhere.

³A Man Had Tall Sons, 40.
the desires of his children through his fear that he will lose their services on
the farm. Ellen's dream of a relationship with Malcolm is successfully
shattered, but Caleb has to reckon with a far more tenacious opponent in Judith.
This pattern of restriction, based upon credible economic reasons and a certain
degree of prejudice, proves very attractive to Martha Ostenso, because she
employs the motif in a number of her subsequent novels. The formula invariably
calls for a Caleb-type parent who tyrannizes the family while his mate remains
isolated, and helpless to protest:

Then suddenly the old fear of
him swept upon her like a torrent
of icy water, beads of sweat
broke out about her lips, her
hands shook.

The tyrant, who appears to have complete control over his family, is invariably
drawn as an extreme figure in terms of Ostenso's creative faculties. Like Caleb,
each one occupies a very central position, and by dint of forcefulness and self-
interest exerts more than a fair share of influence over other people. Where
Caleb and Judith are concerned, the relationship has already deteriorated into
selfish bullying, on the part of the father, which turns his daughter's face into
a "naked image of hate." The father, sitting at the centre of a dark web of
intrigue, is motivated by a consuming avarice and hatred. His daughter, in
responding to the inner stirrings of life, sees that her only hope for satis-
factory fulfillment lies in a definite break with her family, and with the
community. She rejects the idea that she is "an animal to be driven and tied

4Witham, 96.
5Especially true of Magdali Vinge in O River, Remember! (New York, 1943).
6Wild Geese, 100.
7op.cit., 13.
and tended for the value of her plodding strength."³ Judith has an instinctive knowledge of things belonging to a world other than the drudgery of Oeland. Her degree of self-realization is in remarkable contrast to the mental attitude of the twins, Ellen and Martin. Judith responds to the natural rhythms in a frankly pagan way,⁹ whereas her brother and sister exhibit pathetic, atrophied reactions to youth's urgings. Like some spirited mythological creature, Judith selects the fittest partner, physically and spiritually when, "locked in furious embrace" with Sven, she "fought with insane abandon to any hurt he might inflict, or he would have mastered her at once."¹⁰

The relationship between Judith and Sven develops into a passion that cannot be contained, and pregnancy results. It becomes apparent that they must leave Oeland, because Amelia is unable to intercede with Caleb on her daughter's behalf. The elopement, like most events in the story, is geared to the season of growth and projected for the close of harvest. The incident with the axe threatens to interfere with their plans, but the escape does occur. On the night of the harvest celebration, Judith leaves with her lover, "urging the horses on and looking back now and then to see that they were not being followed."¹¹

The pattern created by Caleb's frustration of his children is picked up as a theme in other Ostenso novels. As in Wild Geese, one parent is an active force of obstruction, while the other has a passive, non-assertive role.¹² The inclusion of love as a factor becomes increasingly a matter for

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³ op.cit., 188.
⁹ Witham, 60.
¹⁰ Wild Geese, 86.
¹¹ op.cit., 229.
¹² Good examples of this may be found in The Waters Under the Earth and The River, Remember!
intellectual curiosity on the author's part, allowing her to display a developing faculty for psychological insight. In *Wild Geese* there is an atmosphere of melodramatic incredibility where the relations between Judith and her father are concerned, but the mutual repugnance emerges as a distinct possibility. The attitudes revealed at the end seem fairly plausible, too. Judith is intent only upon leaving a place where she has been victimized, while her father is enraged at losing a sturdy work animal. The absence of mutual love or respect makes the novelist's task so much simpler. A clean severance is possible because there is no affection in Judith to cause an aching desire to mollify her father. Extremely self-willed antagonists re-appear in Ostenso's work but undergo significant modifications. For example, Matt Welland of *The Waters Under the Earth* is a notable development of the Caleb figure but has been subjected to a number of changes. He is an obstinately puritanical business failure, who maintains a relentless grip upon his family of seven adult children. Neither his children nor his wife openly defy his wishes, and he relies upon his constant presence in the home, functioning as a mirror of devout propriety. The characterization is credible enough, permitting a much more subtle psychological intercourse than *Wild Geese* allows. Judith's counterpart is Matt's daughter Carlotta, "a true pagan". Committee to a programme of quiet self-involvement, she determines to ignore her father's narrowly prejudiced views concerning both the man he thinks would be suitable for her, and the man whose radical views he cannot tolerate. Carlotta presents an interesting development in the Judith pattern because she relies most decidedly upon cool, rational intellectualization and succeeds in stepping adroitly out of her father's web of self-righteous restrictiveness. Her siblings are not so fortunate, or possibly

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13 *The Waters Under the Earth*, 166.

14 *op.cit.*, 317.
they are more sensitive to the sentimental appeal of their father. The eldest
daughter Sophie mourns for a lover, missing in the war, which ended twelve years
previously. Her father had disapproved of him and succeeds in effectively
discouraging any subsequent male admirers. She continues to play the role of
a docile spinster until her accidental death. Another study of the spinster is
provided by her sister, Jenny, an interesting example of a thwarted artist who
prostitutes her talent by decorating china and, in so doing, undergoes a
personality change. This change is further complicated by a serious disability,
incurred in a car accident, after the pangs of conscience cause her to regret her
elopement with the man she loves. Confined, thereafter to a wheelchair, she
becomes an acid echo of her father's moral narrowness and a reminder of Ellen's
perverse sense of loyalty to Caleb, a factor which helps maintain the abrasive
state of affairs in the earlier novel and this one, too.

The mood of gloom in Wild Geese helps equip the portrait of Judith
with the requisite amount of smouldering injustice, and provides a suitably
stark background for the contest between father and daughter. In The Waters
Under the Earth Ostenso reduces the tension, but in so doing allows the heroine
to emerge in a somewhat equivocal light. Judith is treated harshly and her
conduct is perfectly justified, but Carlotta Welland is, if anything, a rather
indulged young person who leaves a number of questions unanswered concerning
her moral values. After all, she does lock Clint Proles in the cellar of his
house. Even though she does not know that Ruth is going to burn the house,
thinking Clint is in town, she allows her father to believe that Ruth is fully
responsible for the tragedy. Ruth and Carlotta were present when Sophie met
her death:

15op.cit., 53.

Jenny represents an example of the "lost musician," a feature in a number of
the novels.
"I mean just what I say, You would stop at nothing," Ruth whispered, "I don't believe Sophie fell."\(^{17}\)

These two instances are evidence of the development of an important part of the Ostenso design. Carlotta is recognizably Judith, but has an innate worldliness, which preserves her from those blunders of youth that obsess Judith; however, Judith, the earth goddess, makes a more immediate appeal in terms of moral wholesomeness. Caleb is under no delusion as to Judith's opinion of him. She is as honest in her hatred as she in her love. Carlotta knows that, in spite of his narrow possessiveness, her father actually loves her, but she can neither return his love, nor embark upon a reasonable discussion of her own point of view. The tyranny of non-communication marks the relationship of Matt Welland and his daughter. It has an influence, too, upon the principal characters, Jarvis Dean and his daughter, in Prologue to Love.

The heroine of this novel, Autumn Dean, is a blend of Judith Gare and Lind Archer. She has a great deal of Judith's independence and, by virtue of her education and travels, the sophistication of the teacher who came to Oeland. Also, like several of Ostenso's heroines, Autumn Dean shows that depth of sentiment which allows demonstrations of sympathy for the tyrant. The author, herself, is not averse to saying that, when the "wind moved in his (Caleb's) scrag of hair ... in the invisible touch was a gesture of infinite pity."\(^{18}\) It is not surprising to read that Jenny, in The Waters Under the Earth, is drawn home by the vision of "her father's face, his gentle, lost eyes, the tears falling unrestrainedly down the withered ruddiness of his cheeks."\(^{19}\) Therefore, when father and daughter have a dispute in Prologue to Love, it is

\(^{17}\)The Waters Under the Earth, 282.  
\(^{18}\)Wild Geese, 59.  
\(^{19}\)The Waters Under the Earth, 144.
to be expected that Autumn will feel that:

. . . her own frame of mind had been
too desolate to make the task easy.
She was sorry for him, inexpressibly so.20

The conflict, depicted in *Prologue to Love*, is related to the problems found
in the other two novels, in that the father is a thwarting influence upon the
daughter. Caleb's motives are unabashedly selfish, while Matt Welland's are
caused by prejudice which Carlotta has no difficulty in recognizing. To her
father's narrowness she can "shut her eyes delicately,"21 or regard it in a
detached way "as though looking on at a curious drama in which she had no
part."22 Autumn Dean, because she is an only child, cannot withdraw in that
way. She is obliged to acknowledge her own involvement in her father's reason
for crumpling "back into his chair, his chin fallen forward on his breast, his
gaunt frame heaving convulsively,"23 after she announces her intention of
marrying Bruce Landor. The reasons behind Jarvis Dean's collapse, and his
strangled "You - you can't marry him,"24 are patently improbable but, never­
theless, Autumn, after a fitful night.

. . . awoke to a thin, gray daylight, to find
that her face was wet with tears. In the
reality of her dream, she turned over on her
pillow and gave herself up to despondent
weeping.25

The conflict in the story develops out of Autumn's desire to respect her father's
wishes, but in attempting to suppress her love for Bruce Landon she offends

21The Waters Under the Earth, 105.
22op.cit., 299.
23Prologue to Love, 96.
24loc.cit.
Jarvis Dean's concept of propriety. To her credit, she is capable of facing her father on these matters, explaining that he is "carrying on quite unnecessarily," but nothing much is gained, owing to his ability to seem "to have gone suddenly feeble, defeated." The death of Autumn's mother twenty years earlier, is a circumstance related to Jarvis Dean's unwillingness to bless his daughter's marital ambition. The dead wife exerts a powerful influence upon events in the story, and is responsible for much of the unhappiness and discord marking the main plot. Yet, in spite of her importance in the novel, she fails to register the impression Agatha Darr makes in *A Man Had Tall Sons*. Autumn's mother remains a shade of an improbably romantic sophisticate. There is a decided atmosphere of unreality in the picture of her given by Jarvis Dean, when he says that she "was a siren and an angel." Her vague insubstantiality is sharply contrasted by Agatha Darr, who is an almost palpable presence in Ostenso's final novel. Here the author reveals an understanding of the intimate relationship often sensed between dead persons and objects, with which they have been familiar during life. The furniture, which Mark is asked to remove from the room his mother had shared with Luke, her dahlia bed, and other aspects of the property which had been hers, all stare back at the boy with a poignant immediacy which the reader cannot escape.

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26 *op.cit.*, 157.
27 *op.cit.*, 159.
28 *This factor is discussed in Chapter Four.*
29 *Prologue to Love*, 100.
Even now there was something of her present in this room, as though the mirror, having borne her image through so many years, still held a part of her living spirit and was loath to give it up.

In expanding the focus on love to include the boy's love for his dead mother, Ostenso is exploiting a contrapuntal potential to a degree that she has not tried before. Mark's sensibilities are outraged by his father's decision to remarry within a year of his mother's death, and he feels a smouldering resentment against his father's efforts to erase all reminders of Agatha.

There is a symbolic force to this novel that is a tribute to Ostenso's improvement in technique. Mark's bonfire of the bedroom furniture, redundant owing to its silent reproach, is balanced by the decision to immolate himself in the church his father wishes to replace. Further symbolic force resides in the fact it is the same church in which Margot suffers her fatal accident. Paradoxically, however, it is his suicide by means of fire which cleanses his father's heart and helps to reveal the broader rewards possible from a less narrow approach to life. The symbolic fires in the story are further balanced by the opening and closing descriptions of the abodes of those recently dead. In the case of Mark, the removal of the old furniture from his mother's room serves to lay bare the wound of her passing, but his father's experience in the cabin is quite different:

30 A Man Had Tall Sons, 2.

31 op.cit., 5.
He put out a hand and again 
picked up the dahlia bulb he 
had cast aside. He pressed it 
again and found it firm and full 
of life straining for a new birth. 
He folded it warmly for a moment 
in his palm and seemed to feel 
the stir of life deep within it.

Mark's death succeeds in expanding his awareness of God in all his manifesta-
tions; it helps him to break out of the confines of narrow orthodoxy. In his 
gentle grip of the bulb, he is making his peace with Agatha, as well as Mark, 
because he is acknowledging the integrity and broad charity of a philosophic 
outlook he has hitherto repudiated.

Luke Darr's awakening, at the end of the novel, recalls a similar 
ocurrence towards the conclusion of Wild Geese. After realizing that his 
brutal beating of Amelia has not produced any worthwhile effect, Caleb rushes 
out with the knowledge that Amelia "had broken him . . . in the crisis."33 
His chance for regeneration comes too late. He has spent far too long harbour-
ing a resentment against his wife because in the "earlier passion of the blood 
he had found himself externally frustrated."34 Amelia had loved the father of 
her first child and Caleb realizes that in marrying him she has made use of 
an expedient. The knowledge that he has never "possessed" Amelia corrodes 
Caleb's values to the extent that he becomes a sadistic monster both in his 
own home and in the community at large. But it is in his own household that 
his activities seem most reprehensible. Except for one or two instances of 
sharp business practice, his prime concern is to maintain a "balance of 
contrariness" in his own family.35 In believing that he is "the betrayed and

32 op.cit., 367.
33 Wild Geese, 233.
34 op.cit., 20.
35 op.cit., 172.
cheated victim in a triangle,"\textsuperscript{36} Caleb feels perfectly justified in behaving with callous malevolence towards his wife and children:

\begin{quote}
His sensibilities were crystallized in the belief that life had done him an eternal wrong, which no deed of his own could over-avenge.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The device of marital discord, resulting from a sense of having been cheated, can be detected in several of the novels. It can be found sometimes as the central theme, and at other times as a subsidiary, but nonetheless vital, consideration. In \textit{Wild Geese}, Mrs. Sandbo's daughter, Dora Brund, sits in slovenly contemplation of the four walls of the shack, "sighing over the romances of her past," with the patrons of the lunch counter where she once worked.\textsuperscript{38} She allows her feeling, of having been cheated, to dominate her entire horizon. It is not surprising to read in Ostenso's next novel "that William Dorrit was cheated out of life itself the day he married."\textsuperscript{39} The fate of Lucian Dorrit is to be, for a time, similar to that of his father. He marries a very determined woman, Hattie Murker, who "seemed much more than four years older than Lucian"\textsuperscript{40} and "he felt helplessly young, inexpressibly callow and unfit".\textsuperscript{41} Unlike Dora Brund, Lucian Dorrit has "a really quite unusual mind,"\textsuperscript{42} and is able, eventually, to establish an equilibrium in his life leading to the prospects of a more congenial relationship with the young neighbour, Karen Strand.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36}op.cit., 102.
\item \textsuperscript{37}loc.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{38}Wild Geese, 106.
\item \textsuperscript{39}Martha Ostenso, \textit{The Dark Dawn}, (New York, 1926), 25.
\item \textsuperscript{40}op.cit., 90.
\item \textsuperscript{41}op.cit., 91.
\item \textsuperscript{42}op.cit., 100.
\end{itemize}
The discord, in Lucian Dorrit's married life, is largely the result of a mis-match, and its origin can be seen even in the marriage of the Gares. Caleb's jealousy of Amelia's first lover and, his consuming self pity are not the only causes for the failure of that marriage. There are sound reasons to suppose the fact that "Amelia had been Roman Catholic before her marriage," must have contributed further cause for friction in their relationship. Caleb is not averse to referring to Anton Klovacz as an "infidel", and in the matter of the problem of interring a Roman Catholic in a Protestant cemetery he tells Mark "I'd be glad as the next one to do all I could, even for a heathen," but there is, of course, "the sanctity o' the church and its grounds . . . to be considered." Ostenso's use of religious prejudice occurs again in Matt Welland's opposition to his son Paget's desire to marry "Dorie Mayhew - the daughter of Sam Mayhew, a Roman Catholic, a man who had been charged with smuggling liquor across the Canadian border." The root cause of incompatibility in marriage is, in most cases, the failure of one partner to make adequate concessions to the dignity of the other. This would be particularly true of the marriage of Dora Brund. Her heart and soul lay with the cheap glitter of a waitress's life, surrounded by "guys" who were "stuck" on her. Her patient, oxlike husband, hardworking and inarticulate, cannot compensate in any respect for the glamour, out of which she feels she is being cheated.

The Dora Brund figure appears again in other novels by Martha Ostenso. Elevated from the position of a minor figure she often becomes a vital component

43Wild Geese, 35.
44op.cit., 160.
45op.cit., 203.
46The Waters Under the Earth, 40.
47Wild Geese, 106.
of the structure. In *Wild Geese*, the stage is filled with characters, and the domestic tragedy of Joel Brund receives scant attention. But later on the concept of the dissatisfaction which the city-oriented person can feel for a rural existence is brought well to the fore as a reason for a marriage becoming sour. The differences are always quite apparent. It is a matter of no surprise to read that Corinne Meader, a banker's daughter, is "small and exquisitely formed, with negligible trinkets of feet, and a scantily hatted little head"\(^48\) when she arrives at Roddy Willard's farm following her marriage. Similarly, Teresa Jaffey, also a banker's daughter whose "bosom rose into two little abrupt cones,"\(^49\) is intended to present an anomalous appearance, emerging from a stable with:

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. . . her hands in the pockets of her yellow linen
dress while she pointed her high-heeled slippers
out one after the other in a pretty half dancing step.\(^50\)
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These two females are grossly unsuitable for life on the farm, and they are replaced, after much tribulation, by ladies who have all the necessary qualifications, or are willing to adapt themselves to the exigencies of agricultural environments.

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The clean-cut profile under the rather shabby hat,
the country-colored throat and cheek . . . . Whoever
she was, she had the same sturdy set to her
shoulders, the same proud lift to her head, the
same resolute walk.\(^51\)
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Down to earth girls, such as Jo Porte and Silver Grenoble, who "had fed those pigs on buttermilk and bran mash and had grown to love their tight, blue-black

\(^{48}\)Martha Ostenso, *There's Always Another Year*, (New York, 1933), 72.


\(^{50}\)op. cit., 196.

\(^{51}\)op. cit., 128.
bodies**, are quite incapable of behaving like Teresa, who:

... flashed erect and confronted him with shrill, articulate venom.
"Yes - I know why. You fool - you dumb farmer! You've never been anything else and you never will be .... Stay here with your muck - that's where you belong."**

Her behaviour to her husband, Royce, is paralleled by the incident in which Corinne tells Roddy:

"You're evidently too much of a clod - born and bred - to have any ambition beyond grovelling in a corn-patch .... You want to make a slattern out of me. All right - I'll do my best to be one!"

The farm wife has to be of a vastly different calibre in order to succeed. In *O River, Remember!* Magdali Vinge is the dominant partner and there are echoes of Hattie Murker in her portrayal. Her ambition and hard work ensure the kind of comfort that Hattie desires. She is her husband's senior by two years, another parallel with Hattie Murker, who is four years older than Lucian, and also with Agatha Darr, who "had been older than he (Luke) by almost five years", and has a similar grasp on affairs. Magdali and Ivar never actually quarrel in the normally accepted meaning of the term. Most of Ivar's indignation is quite inarticulate, and to all intents and purposes ineffective. Her early land speculation fills him with horror. He realizes that she and her brother, Roald, are being quite heartless in tempting Charlie Endicott with ready cash for property which is bound to become a great deal more valuable. **

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52 *There's Always Another Year*, 168.
53 *The Stone Field*, 270.
54 *There's Always Another Year*, 212.
55 *A Man Had Tall Sons*, 12.
56 *O River, Remember!* 122.
an air of blandness, impervious to Ivar's rare expressions of annoyance. This
is even the case when, following her intervention in their son's romance, she
hears her husband's "voice blare out like thunder."^7

Marital discord of a somewhat different kind is observable in Milk
Route and The Waters Under the Earth. There is a similarity in setting; both
stories are set in small towns, and one is conscious of there being a distinct
resemblance between Ruth Welland and Molly Clifford, both physically and
emotionally. Ruth is certainly not a beauty, with "eyes . . . prominent because
of a thyroid condition" and "red, excessive lips,"^8 and Molly is "thin below
the knees, and shaped like a sausage all the way up from there."^9 The
difficulties between Ruth and her husband, Clint Proles, are aggravated by the
fact that "she just wants to get away from home . . . so she took the first guy
who asked her"^10 and within a comparatively short period she returns home, shrill-
ing:

Do you know what it is for a man to come
in drunk every night and outrage his wife
- and bring children into the world that smell
to heaven of alcohol?^11

The situation she describes is far too specialized for her audience, the saintly
Matt Welland, and his family. The immediate response is to feel she requires
"a cup of hot tea".^^ Ruth's marriage is a tragic affair due to her father's
opposition to most of her admirers and the fairly well realized motive she has

57 op.cit., 324.
58 The Waters Under the Earth, 28.
59 Milk Route, 41.
60 The Waters Under the Earth, 17.
61 op.cit., 45.
62 op.cit., 46.
for marrying Clint Proles, "a lout of a farmer" as Sophie described him. When Carlotta "looked it up in the dictionary . . . sure enough, that was exactly what Clint Proles was." 63 Molly Clifford, presumably, has none of these problems. Her marriage to Bill Clifford took place before the war and, apart from the fact that she "used to drink too much when he first married her, but he fixed that," 64 their childless union has not seemed unsuccessful. The war, however, makes a drastic difference. Returning from active service, as a Navy flier, Clifford finds adjustment to normal life very difficult, and discovers he is completely out of sympathy with Molly's connubial expectations:

"I wasn't asleep - nor the night after that, when you sat up for hours by yourself, hoping I'd be asleep before you came to bed. What do you think I'm made of, anyhow? If you've got another woman somewhere --- " 65

Molly's frustration has its origin in previous Ostenso novels. Hattie becomes furious with Lucian for a similar reason

"So that's it!" She flung at him "I don't look right to you. I don't appeal to you any more . . . . All these years I've lived with a man who married me so he could live off me - I who might have married a man, took you - - you . . . . " 66

The sexual frustration, evident in the reaction of Hattie to Lucian's frigid conduct, and later in Molly's abuse of Bill, can be seen also in Marcia Gunther's appeal to her husband Rolf:

63 op.cit., 9.
64 Milk Route, 39.
65 op.cit., 112-113.
66 The Dark Dawn, 234.
"A man's wife! I'm not made to be
that kind of wife, Rolf! I'm tired of
being a saint. I want to be loved -
to have a lover, Rolf. I want you
to be my lover."

Marcia is unsuccessful in this attempt to stir her husband into romantic activity. The incident is so unnerving for him that he goes away and drowns himself, leaving Marcia to spend a number of years in lonely expiation before she decides to marry again. Marcia's criticism was directed towards the quality of his lovemaking rather than the quantity, one would suppose, because well within the respectable limits of the gestation period she gives birth to a son, whom she names after his father. That Lydie Clarence has a different problem to deal with cannot be denied. The morning after seducing Eric Stene, during her husband's enforced absence, she tells him:

"I've known for some time that my marriage would never give me a child . . . .
But during the past year it has become an obsession with me - I have thought of nothing else, Eric. I know I can bear a child . . . ."  

Lydie felt very confident that her planning was flawless, but did not count upon arousing an emotional storm in the breast of her victim. His subsequent behaviour leads to the discovery of the truth by Andrew, the husband, who promptly shoots himself in a torment of misery. Andrew learns the truth and finds the knowledge quite unbearable, but in The Mad Carews Elsa suffers the miseries of suspecting that her husband is a profligate. This suspicion delays the consummation of their marriage for the greater part of the novel, causing mutual unhappiness:


She went with him into the bedroom and took her things out of the bag while Bayliss gathered some articles of his own and carried them to the outer room. When she was alone again she felt once more that sense of piercing, incomprehensible reproach.69

Elsa presents an interesting example of the total Ostenso formula at work. She is a credible figure, portrayed as a young woman who aspires to marriage with a scion of the most important family in the district; she has a lot in common with Jo Porte, in *The Stone Field*, in this respect. In terms of human behaviour her conduct is plausible enough, and the pattern seems to be familiar. The desire for a virtuous partner and the imbalance of pride, which can interpose itself, stifling the natural expression of married love, has been seen before in Caleb and can be detected in Judith to a certain extent.70 It is a contrapuntal element, of Martha Ostenso's writing, which does not seem at all strange. Stubborn blindness and folly are part of the common lot.

Elsa's partial blindness, in her relations with Bayliss Carew, is part of a conventional pattern of behaviour. Ostenso is recording the operation of a system of sliding values, with which most readers are familiar. When observing characteristic human behaviour, one needs to remember that the point of view is significantly different for each actor in the scene, and certainly vastly different for the detached onlooker. Ostenso remains generally aware of that phenomenon, as far as this aspect of her writing is concerned. Human beings are wholly or partly blind in many respects and it should not surprise a reader to discover this fact in novels dealing with family relationships.

Elsa must be allowed a certain latitude in terms of the amount of blindness she can be permitted in the novel. This is because she is subject

70 *Wild Geese*, 74.
to the debilitating effects of the two other main themes selected for this study. While it is true that she is not the victim of a tyrannical figure, she is, nevertheless, exposed to a pervasive climate of Puritanism which transforms her into a victim of her own prejudice. On a modified scale, she becomes a tyrant to Bayliss. In withholding her connubial gifts she is imitating the behaviour of the unforgiving authoritarian figures who slam the bedroom door on reprobate human nature. The ogre of jealous suspicion, haunting her, is an example of the incubus of dread which interferes drastically with her ability to communicate rationally with her husband. The hiatus of non-communication and lack of understanding will be seen as a significant factor in the portrayal of the majority of Ostenso's authority figures.
In the majority of Ostenso's portraits of the authority figures, or Puritans, the immediate impression is of motionless stability. The authoritarian is a fixed centre around which the action takes place. Ostenso makes a point of saying that "Caleb was the clock by which the family slept, woke, ate and moved"\(^1\) in order to emphasize the centrality of his role in the story. It is as though he were being established as an unfailing point of reference. Care is taken to treat authority figures similarly in other novels. Stress is laid upon an universal pre-occupation with time, particularly where it affects the design of life, of which the authoritarian is the centre. The concern with time, however, is entirely selfish and restrictive, reflecting merely a denial of life, characteristic of the narrow doctrine by which the Puritan governs his own affairs, and those of others. He prefers to take "a stationary form, as if the vital impulse were too weak to risk the adventure of motion."\(^2\) The "vital impulse" is held in check until it is stunted and confined in patterns of sombre negation. The "adventure of motion" is to be feared, because it may reveal the existence of other points of view. Time, thought, and progress are denied by clamping controls, constricting the life stream and acting as factors of impediment when members of the Puritan's family try to escape "bravely into the endless risks of thought."\(^3\)

The nature of the Puritan's control is what occupies Ostenso in a number of her works. It becomes apparent that she allows a kind of creative

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3. Durant, 346.
evolution, in the Bergsonian sense, to occur in the portrayal of the authority figure. Her examination moves from Caleb in *Wild Geese* to Luke Darr in *A Man Had Tall Sons*, a process occupying more than 30 years, and resulting in an optimistic note of regeneration. The destruction of that concept of a severe, unyielding, central authority assumed to be the nature of God, is the literary goal to which Martha Ostenso strives. Her aim is to arrive at a point where the Puritan can comprehend that a:

... persistently creative life, of which every individual and every species is an experiment, is what we mean by God; God and Life are one.\(^4\)

The constrictions imposed by an omnipotent, limited God, who makes arbitrary decisions concerning election and reprobation, and promotes a way of life in which man prepares for the best but expects the worst, can lead only to atrophy and self-destruction. The central authoritarian, the unknowable tyrant, is a pattern relatively simple to follow, requiring basically the ability to deny the indivisibility of God and Life. By turning his back on life, the petty tyrant rejects all evidence of development and flux. Matt Welland, of *The Waters Under the Earth*, in speaking to the minister in his usual opinionated, and unexamined, way, says:

I can't think that other days differed so very much from our own ... . In the sight of God, eternity is but a day. Our times are in his hands. ... All Times are in his hands. Evil today is evil tomorrow, as it was evil yesterday.\(^5\)

The doctrine of stable values in the matter of time and evil as pronounced by this particular authoritarian, is Matt's way of identifying with the theory which:

\(^4\)loc.cit.

\(^5\)The Waters Under the Earth, 276.
. . . had located the principle of evil squarely in the heart of man, and at the same time had insisted on his utter inability to alter his predestined election or reprobation.

Nothing could change the inevitable facts. Time, the infinitesimal property in the grip of the awful tyrant is useful only as a measure of man's evil. It is the secret of God's control and the source of His power over mankind.

The relationship of man to God is not the main thesis of Ostenso's first novel, but it undoubtedly occupies her mind as a substantial consideration in so far as the differentiation of characters is concerned. There are clear indications, as to the extent of her concern, in the frequent references made by individuals in regard to such a relationship. Quite typical is the comment made by Mark Jordan:

If there's a God, I imagine that's where he sits and does his thinking. The silence is awful. You feel immense things going on, invisibly.

Mark's attitude is quite different from the Puritans' belief. In fact, he is so far removed from the restrictive principles of their doctrine that the vital concerns of Puritanism fail to register. Life is an all-important fact for him and God, in so far as he may exist, is assumed to be integral with life, part of the "immense things going on." In this respect, Judith's naked communion with nature has echoes of Mark's thought:

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7 *Wild Geese*, 78.
But here was something forbiddenly beautiful, secret as one's own body. And there was something beyond this. She could feel it in the freeness of the air, in the depth of the earth... The marvellous confusion and complexity of all the world had singled her out...

Judith senses the vast chain of relationships refuted by the Puritan. The pantheistic rhapsody, to which she willingly responds, is the throbbing pulse of life, the exciting rhythm of the dance, whose existence the petty tyrant denies. Locked inside walls of prejudice, he finds nothing but evil in the mere suggestion. Mankind is held in suspension by "the awful mystery," but remains culpable for his conduct:

The edge of the doctrine of innate depravity was made sharp on the whetstone of human responsibility. It was obvious that men had contrived to bring upon themselves all the anguish they suffered; it was still more obvious that neither this awareness nor the anguish itself liberated them from the trammels of perversity. A being who brought such a destiny upon himself could hardly expect to find within himself the power to master it.

The "trammels of perversity" act then as the constricting force upon people willing to accept the belief that they "had contrived to bring upon themselves all the anguish they suffered". It becomes the salient point of Ostenso's first novel, but is used in a way suggestive of a parody of the Puritan principle, rather than as a serious examination of a fundamental doctrinal disability.

Ostenso becomes more concerned with the religious tyrant in her later novels. In Wild Geese she is affected by the contemporary desire to pillory

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8 op. cit., 53.
10 op. cit., 25.
"Puritanism" and it is not inconceivable that her career-long interest in the subject had its genesis in a popular campaign waged against certain superficial manifestations of the stern tyranny. Luccock describes it as "the revolt from Puritanism", and he writes that it:

... provided a new devil - the theological devil had expired - leaving a hiatus. In "Puritanism" a new devil was discovered, a fixed point against which all one's rage could be discharged, a new root of all evil.11

There is a strong possibility that the very popularity of the trend was responsible for the exaggeration of the portrait of Caleb. The "root of all evil" is certainly exploited in this character, who is presented in many ways as the epitome of malignity. But he corresponds to the concept of Puritanical repression, based upon the model of the Puritan God with whom Ostenso wishes to confuse Caleb Gare. Caleb is desirous of complete power and control in his family and in the community, and like the Puritan God, he gains his control over others through their sinfulness and guilt. It is more correct to describe the treatment of the Puritan in this novel as a parody, because Caleb is not actually a religious person. He uses the appearance of piety in order to further his own ends, and it is the absurdity, but at the same time cruelty, of his conduct which is the target of Ostenso's satire:

Better live here like we are, poor but content, than to seek the world and all its vices for enlargement of our worldly wealth. That, Jude, is for you to think of, careful, and for you, Ellen and Martin, and like as not, for you, Charlie. 'For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow!' but woe hear me woe to him that is alone when he falleth: Do they understand the lesson, Amelia?12


12Wild Geese, 42.
Caleb's hypocritical manipulation of the sermon is calculated to supplement his weapon of control over Amelia and, through her, his children. He has succeeded, in maintaining some power over Amelia, by constantly reminding her that she has committed an original sin which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child. The necessity for ensuring that the children remain on the farm, as cheap labour, becomes his passion, and through the goading influence of the constant reminder of her sin, Caleb feels he can guarantee Amelia's complicity. The children are to be sacrificed to his material ambitions, and one way to control them, besides intimidating their mother, is to inhibit them through a fear of the outside world and all its vices.

The outside world is to be denied. It represents motion and creativity, the giving of one's own thoughts and abilities to a creative flux in which a determined selfhood is possible. Time must remain static, the pattern of days and seasons to be regulated by the demands of Caleb, and evolution is to be permanently arrested:

Ellen was like a pea-pod that had ripened brittle, but could not burst open. Then he realized that he, too, was a closed pea-pod - they were all closed pea-pods, not daring to open.13

Martin's moment of reflection reveals something of the gross inhumanity of the system under which they are living. A moment later Martin's "mind closed again", like the pea-pod he has imagined, and his awareness is swallowed up in the arid pattern of fruitlessness in which his parents are confining him. Amelia sees quite clearly what she is doing to her children in expiation of her sinfulness:

13 _op. cit._, 143.
She would see them dry and fade into fruitlessness and grow old long before their time... and there would be no pity in her for the destruction of their youth.\textsuperscript{14}

The implacable Caleb's desires must be met. The fate of the children is predestined owing to the nature of the compact she is forced to make with Caleb, and the apparent impossibility of changing the situation. The constricting power of Caleb and his knowledge of her guilt are sufficient to deny her children freedom and life.

The immediately apparent difference between Amelia and Caleb is one of an understanding of time. Amelia's notion of time is continuing. Her children's destiny is still in the future; her choice remains somewhat removed, and the intervening space can yet be filled with love, sufficient to cushion the effects of their ultimate fate. Caleb, on the other hand, in thinking about his children, uses the past tense. His children were"

... twisted and gnarled and stunted as the growth on the bush land he owned, and barren as had been his acres.\textsuperscript{15}

In his view, their destruction as life impulses has been accomplished. The blank void of his relationship with them can admit no love. He is merely a gaoler, omniscient and omnipotent, offering only labour as a relief from the tormenting desires to break free of the brittle pea-pods of their lives. His role is certainly a denial of the popular concept of a pious and wholesome man and, in considering this, there arises a question to which a study of some of Ostenso's later novels may provide an answer. The question concerns Ostenso's own position in terms of established religion. The Puritan re-appears a number of times in her work and, while it may be true that the creation of

\textsuperscript{14}op.cit., 88.

\textsuperscript{15}op.cit., 59.
Caleb Gare is in response to a popular trend, the later portraits of the type reveal a depth of sympathetic handling denied to the parodic proto-type. He is in all ways too unequivocally negative in terms of religious ethics, while the descriptions of Amelia in the story admit of a warm flood of spiritual reassurance. Significant is the statement that "Amelia had been Roman Catholic before her marriage" which reveals what may be a vital factor in any consideration of Martha Ostenso's works. Amelia's venial sin has placed her in the power of an unforgiving tyrant whom she identifies as a hypocrite, repeatedly, in the novel but it is, in actuality, her own sense of spiritual failure which permits the full exploitation by Caleb. It is as though she has accepted the notion of guilt and understands the need to make some expiation. The sufferings of her children are identical with her own. In sacrificing them she is sacrificing herself, and in this way possibly reflects the feelings of the author concerning moral purgation and a need for the church itself to submit to a process of cleansing and re-building.

Now in the power of a satanic master, the Gare family's plight is akin to that of the church, fallen upon evil days through loss of true leadership. The house is not their true home, as is shown by Martin's constant urge to build a New House, a replacement for the scene of humiliation and tyranny. A new and hopeful horizon presents itself to the family after Caleb, swallowed up by the earth, is symbolically cast into hell, accompanied by the licking tongues of fire.

Fire is important in *Wild Geese* as a cleansing agent, removing Caleb and his baleful influence from Oeland and preparing the way for the erection of the New House amid the "profound silence, as if somewhere a hand had been raised

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16 *op.cit.*., 35.
commanding reverence." The fire has done a necessary work of purification and it becomes a formulaic concern in Ostenso's other works. In *Dark Dawn*, "Mons Torson had burned those willows out last spring," in an anguished attempt to purge his conscience, and in *Stone Field* Phineas Baggott resorts to arson as a punishment for the spoliating lumber company. But the connection between fire and order goes ahead in a number of ways in the novels. Matt's daughter, Ruth, ignites her home as an act of vengeance against her husband, unaware that she is destroying both the scene of her unhappiness and the cause:

> I waited till I saw it - like a torch - like an old straw stack - like a furnace - like hell! [19]

The pyre she has created, unwittingly, for her husband is to become a source of hell for her when the full circumstances are known by her authoritarian father. Fire and damnation are complementary terms for the Puritan mind, and this fact provides a source of wry amusement for Ostenso. It is not unusual to encounter burned-out churches in her novels:

> She continued to gaze down the street, down along the deep elm shadows to the end, where the charred ruin of the First Methodist church stood. [20]

Again, in a later novel, as though an act of angry retribution needs to be recorded, Ostenso writes:

> There was no trace left of the frame church that had stood here once, and had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground more than twenty years ago. [21]

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17 *op.cit.*, 238.
18 *The Dark Dawn*, 75.
19 *The Waters Under the Earth*, 98.
20 *op.cit.*, 13.
21 *River, Remember!*, 211.
And Mark Darr's method of destroying himself, when he decides to seek through death the peace which life has denied him, is by self-immolation. There are certain ironic aspects present in his decision to commit suicide in the local church:

... but at last there came a rushing noise behind him and he knew the flames had mounted the stairway. In another minute the building would be a flaming torch lighting the whole village.22

This destructive fire balances the fire he made of his mother's mortal effects at the beginning of the novel, and it bears a strong symbolic relationship to that incident. But the main artistic value lies in its purifying influence upon his father, leading to the regeneration of the Puritan figure. The church fire represents not only the death of his son, whose philosophy of life was alien and mysterious, but the ashes of the church symbolize the consumption of his pride, leaving him ready "to risk the adventure of motion."

Caleb's death is caused by fire. The threat to his beloved flax is sufficient to lead him into a vain contest with the forces of retribution. The fire has ambivalent values for the entire Gare family, but its main effect is similar to the thought which goes through the mind of Bess, following the news of the Minter fire, before she knows what has happened to Mark:

What mattered it that an old church had gone up in flames? Somewhere she had read something about a strange bird that rose from its ashes stronger and more beautiful than ever. It was a silly story that bore no semblance of truth, and yet it had its meaning, if she could but grasp and hold it.23

The "strange bird", the phoenix, symbolic of regeneration and echoic of resurrection and re-birth represents hope for the Gares, too. The New House

22A Man Had Tall Sons, 333.

23op. cit., 337-8.
is their optimistic thrust into the future as Caleb's pattern of immobility disappears into the swamp with his mortal remains.

Caleb's death breaks the spell on the family and although Ellen remains Puritanically severe, being both physically and spiritually myopic, the others are freed of their penance and released "into the endless risks of thought." But there is a suggestion that the simple portrait of malignity has not been entirely satisfactory for Ostenso. Almost as though she has had a number of superstitious reservations about her own role in satirizing conventional Puritanism, she permits herself to soften the outline occasionally. This is apparent when "Caleb's head slipped down until his chin touched his chest" and the soft wind touched his hair with "a gesture of infinite pity." The timid attempt to show sympathy for Caleb suggests that Ostenso is hopeful of regeneration rather than destruction. The combination of age:

You must not cross him or be cheeky to him, Jude. You know he's getting old . . . .

and periodic glimpses of the authoritarian looking "most human and likable when he was lathering his face" or "hustling the children jovially into the wagon," are recurrent aspects of Caleb, typical of other Ostenso Puritans, and indicative of her charitable desire to save them from damnation. Occasional acts of humanity, and apparent differences in age are not necessarily qualifications for salvation, but they do admit shafts of sentiment that act as a relief in portraits of sombre severity.

The age difference between the tyrant and the others in his immediate

24 *Wild Geese*, 59.
25 *op.cit.*, 38.
26 *op.cit.*, 35.
27 *op.cit.*, 226.
circle always receives due mention by Ostenso. The two other main authority figures, Matt Welland in *The Waters Under the Earth* and Luke Darr in *A Man Had Tall Sons*, are both significantly older than the rest of their families. Matt's age is always emphasized through Ostenso's description of him rather than through actual revelations of his age:

> . . . on his white, hollowed face there was not a glimmer of expression. Carla . . . thought that he was like a dead child who had somehow aged appallingly after he had died.28

Matt's appearance accentuates his patriarchal remoteness and the narrow stultification of his religious position. His age provides him with an aura of protection behind which he is paradoxically both weak and tyrannically powerful, at one and the same time. The age of Luke Darr is revealed in *A Man Had Tall Sons* in order to emphasize a disparity in age:

> In the rear seat of the gray Ford, Luke Darr, fifty-two, sat with his twenty-five-year-old bride . . . .29

The paragraph continues with the information that he is short, and there is a reminder that he had been both shorter and younger than his first wife. The other male tyrants, in Ostenso's novels, are also inclined to be short, but whether their behaviour is a result of compensatory assertiveness is not made apparent.

That they are assertive there is no doubt. Reference has already been made to Caleb's function as a "clock" in his family, and he shows that "by keeping supper waiting"30 he is aware of the value of time and ceremony as a means of controlling others. Pre-occupation with routine is shared by other

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29 *A Man Had Tall Sons*, 10.
30 *Wild Geese*, 12.
authoritarians, particularly Matt Welland, who felt that:

... punctuality at meal time was an expression of respect for the family. It implied a considerateness for others which would leave its mark upon character. It was one of those good, old-fashioned, sound principles of self-discipline which people nowadays were forgetting, and with lamentable consequences.\(^3\)

Matt's concern for the inert form of an empty ceremony to which all must report on time is not confined to mealtimes:

Matt held uncompromisingly to the rule that the children should be at home, if not in bed, by ten o'clock. There was no logical excuse for their being out after that hour.\(^3\)

Latecomers could expect a chastisement from the tired, incredulous voice, and a reminder that "the clock doesn't lie, my son, the clock doesn't lie." The feeling of guilt, the important factor in the Puritan's power over his family, requires constant cultivation, and Matt succeeds by leaving "the culprit" feeling "desolate and futile, sensing something askew within himself." His victims are constrained by a combination of guilt and their own good nature, which allows them to accept his remonstrances without challenging him directly to his face:

There was a timid light on his face that hurt something within her which had never been touched before. She could see a day when he would be out of touch with all reality, when his strength would lie in his appeal to their pity. In him was finality. And that finality of all life was reaching out, inexorably, to gather them all in.\(^3\)

Carla, the youngest daughter, enjoys an insulation from the full effects of

\(^3\)The Waters Under the Earth, 38-9.

\(^3\)op. cit., 64.

\(^3\)op. cit., 243.
Matt's petulant authoritarianism, but is not unaware of the vortex which his centrality represents. His denial of life affects his family in a manner similar to that of a whirlpool upon objects within its influence. The closer they come to the centre, the more apparent is the effect of the negating pattern. The centre is a "finality", a rejection of the vaster rhythms to which, like Judith, Carla wishes to respond. She has her own fundamental sense of rhythm and mobility which reaches far beyond the confining grasp of her father's possessive tyranny. Thus, she can sing: *My soul to my God and my body to the sea/And the dark blue waves a-rolling over me* . . .

and avoid making an issue of her own philosophy.

She prefers, rather, to skip around on the periphery of the family concerns, occupying herself "with the adventure of motion". She senses her difference in the way that Judith does and determines to turn her face boldly outwards, away from the centre, tyrannized as it is by time held in suspense over an abyss of oblivion.

By turning away, Carla is withdrawing from active participation in Matt's regeneration. Her philosophy of life is, in actuality, the only one which could offer hope to Matt. But it is a philosophy of self-determination which he would distrust. Matt is quite prepared to say that "Happiness is the result of wisdom" and the reader is willing to agree with him, but when he proceeds to talk about his father giving him:

... what he considered adequate education to meet the demands of this life. Beyond that, he always contended, lay vicious prying into what was none of our business . . . .

then he loses the reader's sympathy, through his failure to come to terms with the significance of what time is. His expressionless gaze cannot understand

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34 *op.cit.*, 105.

35 *op.cit.*, 58.
anything of the pattern for which Carla is striving, and as a result he is totally unaware of her eccentric motion; it is completely beyond his apprehension. The "adequate education to meet the demands of . . . life" confines him in a destructive myopia. The flitting, fragmentary patterns made by the other children affect him only when they intrude directly upon his consciousness, admitting more light than he can comfortably stand.

Spiritual and physical discomfort result from any contact with a genuine artistic expression. In this regard Matt has something in common with other Puritan figures in the Ostenso novels. The creative process contravenes their sense of order and decorum, suggestive as it is of idolatry and the making of graven images. Matt's treatment of Jenny's materials, after he has found her painting a nude study of Carla behind the woodshed, provides a clear enough example of the Puritan's characteristic response to the artist:

Matt had come slowly around from behind the woodshed, his face white and lifted against the pitiless sky, his hands clenched before him as though he were handcuffed.  

Then he had stood back, his face without a flicker of expression, and had watched the pile burn.

In destroying her painting materials, Matt has contributed to the effective destruction of Jenny's individual vitality. She "had never been the same after that," and her later espousal of painting on china is a sorry substitute for what Matt has decided is too sinful to be allowed to continue. There are other painters in Ostenso novels, including Matt's brother Felix, Jason in

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36 op.cit., 42.

37 loc.cit.
There's Always Another Year, and Oliver Whittle in The Sunset Tree, but they are spared direct confrontation with Puritanical disapproval. There is, however, a distinct problem for the musically inclined and there are at least four separate examples of Puritanical interference with them. Dorcas Gunther, in The Young May Moon, resents her daughter-in-law giving music lessons to the young child of a woman whom the town has decided "is a case" and effectively discourages the child from coming again:

In the distance, almost as far as Lundy's corner, a little figure was moving slowly down the street, the wind making a long pennant of a scarf that fluttered from her neck.

The disappearing figure has a symbolic value, in that it represents the lost musician motif that has a contrapuntal value in certain Ostenso novels. Marcia, herself, arouses the ire of Dorcas Gunther who objects to the principle of allowing secular music to be performed in church. And it is the playing by Mark Darr of "a plaintive yet paganly wild air that Luke . . . always abominated" which causes his removal to the cabin, and is contributory to the chain of circumstances resulting in his tragic death. The death, by burning, of Mark Darr recalls, too, the fate of the gifted young violinist Freddie when his parents' home burns in Milk Route. Through the Puritanical machinations of Magdali Vinge in O River, Remember! the young teacher and musician, Kate Shaleen, is lost to the novel. The creative spirit is to be denied in

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39The Young May Moon, 78.
40op.cit., 93.
41op.cit., 181.
42A Man Had Tall Sons, 60.
43Milk Route, 167.
44O River, Remember!, 208.
whatever form it is encountered because it defies strict control and Magdali's "retreat to the moving leaf shadows as the river bank" at the approach of "old-Fiddler Luke" illustrates the characteristic Puritan reaction. Against a backdrop of less active Puritanism, in *The White Reef*, Ostenso allows young Si, with the "gift for music," to drown "on the Reef." The loss of the young musician, the illegitimate child of Nona and Quentin, is calculated to bring the parents together. This marks a movement into the light, where individual strengths and weaknesses can be evaluated, and a fresh purchase can be made upon life.

The retreat into the shadows is the Puritan's method of obscuring the reality of life, in the way that Matt does when he states that his education has been adequate. He scuttles away from any opportunity of expanding his mind, preferring the stagnant reaches of unctuous virtue, from which he can draw all the wisdom necessary for himself and his family. His illusion of self-sufficiency is maintained for him by his family, who refrain from the task of dispelling it, for a variety of reasons, including pity for him and a sense also of their own inadequacies. Like Caleb, Matt is allowed to carry on his affairs, relatively unhindered by direct confrontations. His wife explains:

> I might have succeeded myself, Carla, if I had begun early enough to assert myself . . . . I hoped that things would somehow come out right after all. I thought my children would have it in them to live their lives in spite of everything. That was where I failed.46

The failure of the family members to assert themselves individually, and energetically demonstrate self-hood and dedication to life can be posited as a very strong reason for Matt's lack of regeneration. His blind descent into the vortex, created for him by the narrow religion of his father, is permitted

45op.cit., 179.

46*The Waters Under the Earth*, 287.
by a family which is possibly too conscious of his misguided nature and possessive love for them. His tyranny is not one of malign severity, such as Caleb's, but rather one of unwholesome frustration, which succeeds in blocking the natural outlet of most of his children and prevents his own full development.

Unlike Matt Welland, Luke Darr is provided with the opportunity for regeneration, and after a great deal of torment "is able to read Walt Whitman's lines: Then we burst forth, we float, /In Time and Space O Soul" to discover the inseparableness of God and Life.

*We burst forth* - that was it! A brighter light than he had ever known broke over Luke, dispelling all darkness.47

The circumstances of Luke's regeneration owe much to the difference between his family and that of Matt. For a start, Luke re-marries, as the novel opens, after having been widowed for a short time. His reasons for re-marrying so quickly are connected with his desire to realize certain aspects of sovereignty which had been denied him in his first marriage. Agatha, who "had been older than he by almost five years, and noticeably taller",48 represented something of a tyrant in Luke's mind. He had a distinct feeling of deprivation, beginning with his frustrated ambition of entering the ministry49 and his lack of any "sense of proprietorship", either in the land, which her father had left her, or in the upbringing of their three sons:

... to say that Agatha had given him sons would be little more than a manner of speaking. She had given him sons and had taken them away.50

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47 *A Man Had Tall Sons*, 367.

48 *op.cit.*, 12.

49 *op.cit.*, 13.

50 *op.cit.*, 14.
Agatha's function is to bring about Luke's regeneration and this becomes possible only through the withholding of his sons, until they can offer bold patterns to him, and through her own death, which allows him to assume a greater stature. It is almost as though he is being permitted to undergo his test after having been protected for a number of years. His main struggle is with himself. In Luke's estimation Agatha had "few religious convictions of her own" and in his Puritanical isolation he has developed a disabling self-righteousness which must be overcome before effective integration can occur. His increase in stature begins with his marriage to the diminutive Bess, so much his junior in age, and with the knowledge that he now has complete control over the property. "Down the years he had felt himself somewhat less a man every time he had to go to his wife on a question that had in any way to do with the placid acres upon which he lavished his vigor that they might bear fruit." Sovereignty is not to be easy for Luke because of his belief that it entails the automatic recognition of his patriarchal authority in a family which has flourished in a manner quite eccentric to his own narrow concept of life.

His three sons are Agatha's gift to him, in spite of his petulant belief that she has withdrawn them from him completely. It was rather that she had intended him to obtain a perspective upon humanity which would allow him to recognize the fact that there can be no uniform type of man. The individuality of each son has to be recognized, and the artistic device of posing them as large men, in comparison with the father, is particularly effective because it permits credible relationships to be observed between their physical size and the exaggerated characteristic each one represents. Luke is able to discern that differences do exist between his sons, and in his Puritanical way finds

51 op.cit., 27.

as much to deplore as to applaud.

Three broad categories are represented by the sons. The eldest, John, is patently an Olympian. He "had always faced life seriously" and had never given his father "a troubled moment" in regard to his conduct. His function in the novel is to reflect cool, rational attitudes while maintaining sweeping perspectives, and a respect for the dignity of his fellow human beings. The second son, Matt, approximates to the idea of the Dionysian and, because life for him is a series of spontaneous pleasures, Luke's efforts to obtain sovereignty often dwindle into defeat. After Matt has spent the night with a woman in town, Luke attempts to chastise him verbally as a "drunkard - a fornicator - a blackguard," and when the matter becomes an issue of daring to show his face in the house, Luke receives a reminder that his Puritanical concept of the authority figure is not finding general acceptance. Matt tells him sharply:

... don't get any foolish ideas
... little man. This is where I belong, and this is where I'm staying.

Clearly, Luke is not impressing his own pattern on Matt, whose function in the novel is that of a rough diamond. Luke himself has to recognize the many qualities of good-natured dependability in his wayward son and he learns eventually to understand that "Matt in his escapades grasping for any shield against his loneliness" is symbolic of the human predicament, the "ineffable fear of being forever done." Luke's third son, Mark, represents the artist, the "lost musician," in terms of his role in the novel, and he becomes the third

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53 op.cit., 28.
54 op.cit., 120.
55 op.cit., 121.
56 op.cit., 365.
part of the total pattern that Luke must begin to comprehend before his regeneration can commence.

Mark maintains an agonized fidelity to the memory of his mother, and through his unswerving desire to perpetuate her memory and influence he arouses the wrath of his father who senses in his behaviour a contempt for the Puritanical centrality he so much desires. Mark is the only son to actively despise Luke and it is not because he is ungenerous, but merely because he recognizes the extent of his father's lack of integration and the depth of his delusion. The test for Luke includes a serious examination of his pride, which has grown round a "vision" of rebuilding the Minter church. It is the familiar Ostenso dream of the New House but it is to be a monument to Luke as much as a house of God:

He had set himself to lead the way toward building a new church, an ambition that bore the taint of vanity . . . .

There is a lesson for Luke in the fact that his enthusiasm for the building of a new church fails to impress the other members of the board, and he is forced to accept the bitterness of defeat in his plan for self-aggrandizement:

It couldn't have gone worse. . . . They were all against me. I'm licked. And I have only myself to blame.

It is at this point that Luke's power of perception expands to the point where he can see himself clearly, bereft of his vision, and realizes that "a man has to be whole to be a man at all." He is beginning to recognize the lack of integration, but is not yet able to put the puzzle together. He does know that

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57 op.cit., 299.
58 op.cit., 325.
59 op.cit., 326.
Mark is somehow connected with his feeling of incompleteness:

I've wanted to go to him a thousand times and tell him I was wrong. But I've been too proud, too full of my own conceit to go to him. And now he has turned his back on me. Sometimes I feel as if God himself has turned his back on me. 60

The connection between Mark and God indicates a new departure for Luke. His vision of a New House for God has blinded him to the realities of the spiritual needs of his own family, the true abode of God. It has taken the humiliating experience of rejection by the board to open his eyes to the fact that he has been rejecting his family, and the pattern of integration so necessary for him. But his eventual regeneration is going to demand a complete self-examination and destruction of the edifice of pride, the false structure he has built, and which he had once felt was the measure of God's faithful servants.

Luke's false vision is consumed by the fire which destroys Minter church. It bears away the soul of Mark who, in the ashes of his mortal remains, provides his father with the basis of the true vision he has lacked. Mark's death, ironically, makes the new church necessary, but Luke's part in the rebuilding can never be what he had once imagined. God and Life have moved into the unity which Luke's Puritanical prejudice has so long denied. The primitive understanding of God so clear to Mark 61 is Agatha's chief gift to Luke, the most precious because it is life itself:

All at once the very air about him seemed to expand, the enclosing walls to move outward and away into limitless space. Life's brief hour blended into eternity. 62

Luke has been more fortunate than Caleb or Matt Welland. The dark heritage of

60 loc. cit.
61 A Man Had Tall Sons, 83.
Puritanical immobility has been exposed to a strong, relentless light which, as though by photo-synthesis, has forced the dormant seed to grow and seek the purer regions where the creative spirit may flourish.
Chapter Four

The Plot Phantasm

Characteristic patterns in Ostenso's writing are revealed frequently through her concept of plot structure. Her stylistic preferences appear to lean heavily upon particular combinations of events and characters, suggesting that possibly her vision could not achieve complete liberation from factors dominating her own life and thought. The Puritan motif can be detected as a contrapuntal device, both as a major feature, as in The Waters Under the Earth or A Man Had Tall Sons, for example, or as a pervasive undercurrent, as in The Young May Moon. The presence of Puritanism, in so many of her works, indicates a pre-occupation stemming, no doubt, from her own background and religious upbringing. A feature of her novels, such as the recurrent bank manager, who is an economic tyrant, unfeeling as the Puritan God, may also indicate biographical possibilities which must remain conjectural. The same thing must be true of the banker's daughter, who appears several times. She is invariably impractical and treacherous, but her treachery is always instrumental in achieving the sentimental integration of the plot. While it is true that religion, money, and human relationships are familiar factors in literature, Ostenso's reliance upon stock figures to illustrate something of her own views upon those matters reveals, perhaps, some of her limitations as a novelist. The reader is usually alerted quite early in the story and the eventual outcome is no great surprise:

Corinne had pouted prettily over her own ignorance concerning all farm lore, and Roddy, tickled, indulgent, had laughed. Sophronia ... would never forget how Corinne's eyes had roamed over the place, scanning the floors, the walls, the furniture.  

1There's Always Another Year, 15.
There is no doubt that Corinne Meader is never going to be sincerely reconciled to life in a farm house. But, besides the inevitable characteristics of the stock figures, and the generally predictable conclusions to her stores, there is another device upon which Ostenso leans quite heavily. She demonstrates extreme dependence upon the generation of an atmosphere of dread, arising from the possibility that retribution of some kind will follow the disclosure of a closely guarded secret. Usually, social disgrace is the basis of the fear.

In her first novel she achieves resolution through the fire, the cause of Caleb's death when trying to save his beloved flax field. The tyrant's death permits an easing of the tension, equivalent to a dramatic change in the weather, after a period of sultry oppression. The dominant tone becomes one of placid calm, keyed to the change of season. The Oeland farm itself reflects "the languid peace of Indian summer." References to Amelia's serenity set the tone and indicate that the ogres of fear have been put to flight. The fire has been a cleansing agent in several ways, but its prime achievement has been the dispersal of Amelia's fear of Caleb and the phantasm of moral censure, which she has fabricated from his constant threats concerning her part. A certain ambiguity must be admitted in assessing the full effects of the fire at Oeland. After all, a human life was lost, but the resolution of the plot, through the action of the fire, brings abundant dividends. It can be said that the fire functions in *Wild Geese* as financial ruin does in other stories by Martha Ostenso. In the same way that benefits are predicated upon the fire in *Wild Geese*, so might it be said that the collapse of the family fortune in *The Mad Carews* succeeds in establishing the basis of a happy relationship for Elsa and Bayliss. They participate in the financial disaster of the Carew family, but it is in their decision to flout the tradition of going "from disaster to new

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2 *Wild Geese*, 238.
success,"\(^3\) that they indicate possession of a personal integrity not shared with the other members of the family. Similarly, the Hilyard fortunes decline in *The Stone Field*, and it is again a matter of achieving serenity, through an ability to discern the true values in life, which allows Jo Porte to proffer the inevitable consolation to Royce, when he sits alone in the Stone Field with "eyes steadfast and burningly clear".\(^4\) His integration is possible because, like Bayliss Carew, he has allowed the financial disaster to act as a purging influence, revealing to him the extent of his fundamental commitment to the land. He manages also to rid himself of his wife Teresa, the banker's daughter, leaving the way clear for the union anticipated when "... for the brief moment while he stood and looked at her it was if only two people were there in the living room."\(^5\) Resolution of the plot through the use of a disaster as a catalyst is seen again in *Prologue to Love*. The concept of fidelity to a natural life is manifest in this novel, as it is elsewhere in Ostenso's work. Autumn Dean is thwarted in her desire to remain on her father's ranch, until the old man is killed in an accident with a flock of sheep.\(^6\) Through her father's death, the daughter is able to identify completely with the land, free of the spectre which has threatened to drive her away. Again, in *The White Reef* it is financial ruin which lies behind the movement to integration but, in addition, a series of natural disasters aid the hero to come to that degree of serenity concomitant with regeneration.

The impoverishment of the Wingates is the initial factor instrumental in Quentin's struggle for integration. The tension in the story arises from his determination to overcome his physical and moral cowardice, and to arrive

\(^3\) *The Mad Carews*, 339.
\(^4\) *The Stone Field*, 310.
\(^5\) *Prologue to Love*, 45.
\(^6\) *Prologue to Love*, 219.
at the knowledge that "a man can never be shaken from the purpose that was written alongside his name when he came into the world." The spectre or phantasm afflicting Quentin Wingate is nothing like the fear which haunts Amelia, and he is able to achieve a certain balance in reviewing his difficulties. He can perceive:

... that all around him he was fighting shadows: a shadow in Eunice, who was an unguessable threat; a shadow in Nora, whom he loved in spite of her cold contempt for him; a shadow in the drowned boy whom he had never seen; a shadow in the inimical Cove...

His ultimate success in dealing with the shadows is closely connected with his desire to identify with the Cove once again, and to make restitution to the girl he had wronged seven years before. As in The Stone Field, a rich and highly-sexed wife is rejected as part of the regenerative process. The extent of Quentin's serenity is apparent to his sister, Nancy, who summarizes some of the mishaps which have marked his stay in the Cove:

... it's strange. First your boat goes on the rocks - then your house burns to the ground - and you probably haven't a penny in your pocket! Nevertheless you act as if it didn't matter a bit.

The climate has undergone a change for him as it so often does for the major figures in Ostenso's novels. The regenerative force is associated with a particular place, in this case the Cove, and it emphasizes Quentin's ability to harmonize with his environment. In other novels, such as Love Passed This Way, The Sunset Tree, and There's Always Another Year, there is a similar dependence upon the therapeutic properties of specific locations in the dispersal of phantasms affecting the lives of Ostenso's characters.

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8 op. cit., 234.
9 op. cit., 250.
A prime example of the connection, between a character's phantasm and a particular place, exists in the story of Minella Hanks in Love Passed This Way. The renewal of her connections with the environment she knew as a child acts very positively upon her sense of perspective, helping to create a climate conducive to the eventual discovery of her father's innocence. The self-torture, which she endures for so many years, is reminiscent of the difficulties which Esther Clarke experiences in adjusting to life following the death of her father. Esther's response, to circumstances in The Sunset Tree, is one of callous self-interest. Her first love Danny O'Rourke disengages himself when he realizes the seriousness of her adolescent regard and warns her "he was a rover and couldn't be depended upon in anything touching the heart." Consequently, she assumes the role of a shallow coquette, following a path studded with illicit amours and frequent tragedies. In time she makes a successful marriage, but is widowed with a grown-up daughter when the story opens. Pressures similar to those affecting Amelia in Wild Geese help to direct Esther's philosophy. She is determined that the story of her previous life will be kept from her daughter, Ellen. Because of this determination it is when her brother makes periodic visits that "her nerves were stripped raw with fear that in his whimsical cups he might reveal . . . some juncture of her . . . past" to her daughter. The therapeutic outcome of a visit to her old hometown is probably greatly exaggerated, but it appears to be responsible for the dispersal of the phantasm generated by her daughter's desire to marry the son of one of the men from her past. Encouraged by a painter friend, she puts the phantasm to flight by deciding to face the matter boldly, after

11op.cit., 125.
12op.cit., 241.
13op.cit., 255.
realizing "that all the world may change about us, but somewhere down inside us we remain the same."\(^{14}\) The thesis is that it is possible to make the journey back to the state of natural innocence, and in doing so to retrieve something of lasting value, a source of strength with which to begin the task of relating the actual to the ideal. Something of that nature lies behind the story of Silver Grenoble in *There's Always Another Year*. She returns to the farm after living an artificial life in Chicago with her gambler father. In her complete involvement with the land and the weather she finds a source of wholesome pleasure. The rain sorely needed by the land "washed away all drought and hunger and defeat; it washed all error from the human heart and wrong thinking from the human mind."\(^{15}\) The environment makes her over, and the banishment of the phantasm which afflicts Roddy is implicit in the "rainbow above the land" which she sees "across his shoulder."\(^{16}\)

There is a reassuring note of optimism in the conclusion to *There's Always Another Year*, as there is in the majority of Ostenso's novels; but there is little doubt that, in the stories cited so far, the adverse conditions could return, in spite of the assurance that an apparent solution is achieved at the point in time where the story ends. For example, Amelia's fears could conceivably return again, even though Caleb is no more. He only \textit{seems} to be the key to her unhappiness. The knowledge which she wishes to conceal could still become public property at some future date; the only factor missing will be Caleb and his reasons for torturing her with threats of public shame. For the purposes of the plot, the solution appears to be satisfactory, but in terms of the vast field of speculation, which exists after a conflict has been tidily

\(^{14}\)op.

\(^{15}\)There's Always Another Year, 265.

\(^{16}\)op.

resolved, the potential psychological factors can quite easily persist and become even more acute. Nevertheless, it is the life within the novel which is of immediate concern, and the temptation to speculate must be suppressed, even though it develops from a candid appraisal of some contrived aspects of Ostenso's plots.

The author is dealing with the immediate present and this fact gives particular relevance to David Welland's soliloquy concerning his marriage to the termagent Seena, whose wedding portion "has been keeping the Wellands alive." 17 Her dowry has been absorbed by the ailing printing business, which David struggles to keep solvent, in order that the entire family may live. Enslaved both to the shrew and the floundering business, David begins to realize that he has surrendered his autonomy through his inability to break the pattern of thought which has dictated his conscious life:

Inertia - by God! A sinister inertia bred in the bone, and fostered through a childhood of fear of reality, of reverence for the phantasms of caution and respectability. 18

The Puritan heritage becomes clear to his understanding, but he knows that it will continue to manacle him to his unenviable position. His recognition of the flaw provides a convenient insight into the spiritual paralysis afflicting so many of Ostenso's characters. David's failure to take a decisive step in the matter of his miserable marriage, or his father's bungling interference with the printing business, is a situation that becomes familiar in Ostenso's novels. It is certainly true of Wild Geese and echoes of its use as a literary device continue through the years, but on a significantly diminishing scale. In The Dark Dawn Lucian realizes, when thinking about Hattie, that:

17 The Waters Under the Earth, 76.
18 op. cit., 79.
... after four years of living with her, every thought of her made him feel contemptibly her inferior. A mere gesture on her part, a look of the eye, could humiliate him exquisitely.\textsuperscript{19}

Like David Welland, he is hoist with his own petard in that he has chosen for a wife a woman he has grown to hate and is obliged to follow a way of life that has become repugnant to him. As late as \textit{O River, Remember!} Ivar Vinge reflects how:

\begin{quote}
... the familiar heart-hunger had struck him like an obscure pain that would not be stilled. But Magdali had brought him to see the foolishness of that.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

For both of these characters, the twin phantasms of caution and respectability shape the moment, and successfully block off aspiration and hope. Eventually, the philosophic poise of Ivar transcends his marital problems in a way quite impossible for Lucian Dorrit. A dominant theme becomes a minor chord, but it is not suggested that Ostenso decides against examining resentful inactivity as a valid example of human behaviour. It might rather be said that the eventual goal, the achievement of spiritual integration, represents a more desirable literary concern, as can be seen in \textit{A Man Had Tall Sons}. The effect of Luke Darr's tyranny is so vastly different from Caleb Gare's because Luke is intent upon achieving family unity through a definable love, rather than through the generation of a cloud of menace.

The fear which Caleb keeps alive in Amelia's mind must remain essentially vague, to equate in formlessness with Caleb's weapon of tyranny. He uses the phantasm of respectability as a spiritual whip to scourge his wife and family into complying with his evil design. Luke, on the other hand, employs his understanding of respectability as a precept, rather than a goad,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{The Dark Dawn}, 185.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20}\textit{O River, Remember!}, 179.
\end{flushright}
and eventually attains knowledge of its true meaning as a basis for effective human intercourse. With Caleb, human relationships are of concern only in so far as they will yield him more control over other people. His interest is to entangle others in an insidious web, similar to the one which holds David Welland in sullen immobility. The "childhood fear of reality, of reverence for the phantasms of caution and respectability," which David diagnoses as the cause of his tormented inactivity, operates in favour of Caleb and is responsible for the power he wields in Oeland. In a manner which becomes familiar, the phantasms inhibit their victims, defeating their dreams while substituting, especially in the earlier novels, emotional or economic nightmares, which assume the formless identity of clouds of retribution. These clouds expand to fill the void created when rational processes are suspended and chaos displaces order.

The preservation of the seeming order of Oeland, the maintenance of the status quo, is Amelia's immediate way of dealing with her phantasm of fear that chaos will enter the lives of her children and herself. Thoughts of the phantasm prevent her from exercising a rational approach to Caleb's threats. She does not appear to have considered the full implications of Caleb's weapon of retribution. The threat to the happiness of her illegitimate son, and the marriage prospects of her daughters, traps her in the web of inertia. Ostenso's account of Amelia's "little folly" seems credible enough, but it requires an effort of imagination to come to any kind of understanding of Caleb's behaviour, even though a certain air of verisimilitude cloaks the situation at Oeland. Moral attitudes are invariably censorious, and it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that Ostenso feels that Amelia's secret is a viable factor in her plot structure; but how long it could remain stable in a realistic setting is

21 Wild Geese, 20.
certainly arguable. It is true that, in a conventional sense, Amelia could be criticized for her initial moral lapse, and the illegitimate birth, and should, quite rightly, be haunted by guilt; however, the concept of guilt is not a powerful element in Amelia's mind, in spite of what Caleb likes to think. His reliance upon Puritanical mores is blunted by the fact that Amelia's spirit has "ever eluded him."22 In cleaving to the memory of her first lover, she saves herself from the extremes of spiritual desolation and, paradoxically, it is Amelia's love which emerges as Caleb's major support. Her reverence for the memory of Mark Jordan's father ensures her obedience to Caleb, because respectability seems to be so necessary for the professional well-being of her first son, and ultimately the social acceptability of her daughters. The vague, intangible power of public opinion and its malign influence upon the future lives of innocent persons is the real phantasm in this story. It is a Pandora's Box, wholly ambivalent for Caleb, and one which he does not desire to open, because he has some understanding of the likely result if his perfidious threat were to be executed. He is shrewd enough to know that events "would run along smoothly only as long as he kept a balance of contrariness"23 and continues in the part of the arbitrary Puritan authority figure.

It is precisely an understanding of either latent or active Puritanism, as the negating influence in a remote community, upon which Ostenso is relying in delineating the situation in Oeland. It supports the concept of a spiritual hiatus in the lives of the reprobate members of a group, because it is essentially a mood of brooding isolation which assists Caleb's designs. Amelia's co-operation is assured by Caleb's provision of "assiduous reporting"

22 loc.cit.

23 Wild Geese, 172.
by the veterinary surgeon, "in the town where Caleb is unable to do his own spying." The constant reminder that he is capable of initiating a move which could jeopardize Mark Jordan's career secures Amelia's compliance for Caleb. The phantasm, the spectre generated by Caleb's threats, widens the break in normal existence and contributes to the pattern of sombre alienation where the "adventure of motion" is stilled into that spiritless inertia of which David Welland complains. If it were possible to ignore the phantasm, then life would be vastly different, but the polarities of order and chaos are fundamental to human understanding. They assist in channelling the mind into back-waters of stagnant inactivity where the expedient choice appears to produce an illusion of order. In remaining still, the victim feel that chaos is held in check; inactivity and order become synonymous concepts and the phantasm, though not dispelled, is kept at bay. The major threat to security appears, then, to reside in the kind of false move which could upset the balance and, through disrupting order, could precipitate chaos into the life of the victim, and the objects of his love.

Although Amelia receives the maximum attention as the victim of a phantasm, it must not be overlooked that other characters in *Wild Geese* are also afflicted by spectres of their own, or Caleb's, devising. Fusi Aronson is placed upon a spiritual wrack when Caleb reveals that the big Icelander's brother has been embezzling church funds. Caleb's purpose in telling Fusi is to blackmail him into a land deal, through which Caleb exchanges the "bottomless and foul . . . muskeg" for "the neck of timber held by Fusi Aronson." The spectre of family disgrace in the community is adequate to

24 *op. cit.*, 20.

25 *op. cit.*, 59.

26 *op. cit.*, 19.
ensure successful completion of the deal for Caleb, but a certain irony can be detected in the fact that it is the muskeg which claims him in the end, when he attempts to fight the fire that results from Fusi's willow burning. Like a drowning man Caleb sees "images . . . pass before him" of people he has victimized in Oeland. He knows that Fusi will derive some satisfaction from his death, and has a sardonic picture of "Thorvaldson, rejoicing when he heard of what had happened to him." Thorvaldson, another target of Caleb's malign cupidity, has been forced to sell a half-section of land to prevent the consequences of the Bjarnassons learning that he has fished in the lake. In seeing "the ax buried in the rotten wood of the barn wall" Caleb recalls Judith's abortive attack upon him, and the phantasm of legal proceedings which would lead to her being sent to "a place where you were confined to a tiny cell and never saw the sky, or felt the wind." To Judith, like the others, the phantasm becomes a vivid evocation of how fragmentation can affect current existence through sending rationality flying into a void, whose main characteristic is fear. This device of major and minor emphases can be seen in other works by Ostenso, and the problems that afflict Ruth Welland, in *The Waters Under the Earth*, provide a clear enough example.

Ruth is obliged to acknowledge a spectre similar to the one which haunts Judith as a result of the episode in the barn. Following the act of

27 *op. cit.*, 237.
28 *op. cit.*, 236.
29 *op. cit.*, 147.
30 *op. cit.*, 237.
31 *op. cit.*, 174.
32 *op. cit.*, 166.
incendiaryism, through which her husband dies, Ruth has been living in her parent's home, subject to Matt's surveillance and frustrated in her aspirations to achieve an independent life. When she meets Andrew, who works in a shoe store, there is a distinct possibility that the happy solution to her problems can be found through marriage to him. But in spite of Andrew's apparent wholesomeness, he fails to receive Matt Welland's approval, and there is recourse to a ploy which Matt uses unsuccessfully when the full details of the fire are discovered. He tells his daughter that she must "go to the marshall" or he will be brought to the house. Recognizing the full implications of such a move, Ruth responds with a counter-phantasm, for which her father is unprepared.

"All right - I'll go. I'll have that distinction - anyway." It was an unusual word for the simple spoken Ruth. "I'll be the first of the Wellands in jail."33

Her choice of expression proves to be eminently suitable for the occasion, and succeeds in suppressing Matt's legal scruples. Matt discovers an extremely sensitive spot on the surface of respectability and withdraws from an unequal contest. But his obsession with sin and restitution will not allow the matter to fade from his memory, and he holds the balance with his knowledge of Ruth's complicity:

It was curious, she thought dully, seated with her hands in her lap, that Matt could so conveniently juggle with ghosts, laying them or resurrecting them as he saw fit.34

Ruth's quandary, like her brother David's, defies solution on the surface level. Caught in the toils of inertia they both refrain from boldly confronting their problems and simplifying their difficulties through candid evaluation. Instead, they permit circumstances to lure them into patently unsatisfactory sexual

33 The Waters Under the Earth, 112.
34 op.cit., 251-2.
solutions. Ruth becomes Andrew's mistress, and David is drawn into the embraces of Adeline Greenleaf, who "came toward him swinging her silky and aggressive hips" while "one hand caressed a marcelled puff of her hair." The sexual gratification which David and Ruth obtain through these illicit means can lead only to a complication of their individual phantasms, although there is a possibility that the very complexity could assist in the development of self-critical faculties. David is able to articulate his state, but the burden of responsibilities will continue to subject him to the twin "phantasms of caution and respectability." Ruth can wait "for father to die," but even then there is some doubt implicit in the book that she will ever actually marry Andrew. The inertia, to which she has become accustomed, appears at times to have perverted her judgment to the point where she develops phantasms that clutter her view of even the more positive aspects of her relationship with Andrew. She has, like Matt, the ability to "juggle with ghosts," having a marked predilection for "resurrecting them." Rather like Ellen of Wild Geese, she is a potential champion of her father and is likely to respond "with secret indignation" to criticism of him from other members of the family.

Affection for a parent and circumstances which produce an emotional resurrection of a phantasm are characteristics, too, of Prologue to Love. Similarly to Wild Geese and The Waters Under the Earth, the basic causes reside in events of the past. Again, the spectre of guilt looms up large, and out of all proportion, and like Love Passed This Way there is extreme dependence placed by the author upon the transfer of guilt from the parent to the child. The

35 op.cit., 278.
36 op.cit., 171.
37 op.cit., 298.
38 Wild Geese, 238.
ramifications of the phantasm demand a kind of loyalty, which effectively blocks the way to lucid thinking, on the part of the heroine, until the end of the book. In *Prologue to Love*, Autumn Dean's return to the B. C. Interior from a prolonged stay in Europe, and her subsequent involvement with Bruce Landor, lead to circumstances where the assumption of the phantasm, by the girl, threatens the love affair with disaster. Her father is haunted by the recriminating spectres emanating from his complicity in the death of Bruce's father. The events, the accidental death of Landor and the death by fever of Autumn's mother, occurred twenty years earlier, but the knowledge that he has concealed details of the accident continues to disturb Jarvis Dean's composure:

> It was not enough for him that he robbed me of my wife's love. He laid upon me the responsibility of his own death. I have never recovered from that, Autumn, I have borne it all these years in secret. And now you tell me you want to marry the son of the man. It will kill me.39

Autumn finds it difficult to synthesize matters unemotionally and allows her sense of filial allegiance to take precedence over her affection for Bruce. The usual state of anguished inertia keeps the lovers apart until Jarvis dies, after which the phantasm disperses, and the two families are finally united through the children.

The phantasm of guilt arising from the death of another person is a device employed elsewhere by Ostenso. In *The Young May Moon* and *Love Passed This Way* key figures are obliged to suffer lengthy periods of distress, on account of their assumption of moral responsibility for the deaths of other people. Marcia Gunther's husband drowns himself and, in so doing, condemns her to a protracted period of self-condemnation, dominated by the spectre of

39 *Prologue to Love*, 107.
guilty responsibility in which "fear persecuted her."\textsuperscript{40} There are sexual overtones to Marcia's difficulties, reminiscent of \textit{The Mandrake Root}, where the burden of guilt develops from the adultery between Lydie and Eric. Marcia Gunther's reproaches to her husband Rolf include a threat to establish an extramarital liaison with another man. Rolf is so overcome with despair that he ends his life, leaving Marcia a legacy of remorse until such time as she can "get free at last from . . . damned flimsy ghosts."\textsuperscript{41} The phantasm of self-accusation does not overly disturb Lydie Clarence, in \textit{The Mandrake Root}, even though her behaviour has such far-reaching results for two other people in the story, her husband, Andrew, and her victim, Eric Stene. In simple terms, she is determined to fulfill her role as a woman by having the child which her husband's impotence denies her. Ostenso emphasizes her sexuality to the point where she resembles a plant awaiting Nature's somewhat haphazard method of fertilization. Her first meeting with Eric in the store has distinct symbolic connotations, in that they engage in a minor struggle over an egg plant which both of them desire.\textsuperscript{42} She is described like an inviting flower, from "the pollen-rough sweetness of her voice"\textsuperscript{43} to the "velvety warm blurr in the upward glance", she gives Eric from "eyes laughing out like dark flowers."\textsuperscript{44} Having accomplished her purpose, Lydie is quite prepared to abandon her victim to the torment of sexual arousal, and debilitating guilt, which the seduction causes in him. Andrew's decision to commit suicide, following his discovery of the betrayal of his trust, does not release Eric

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{The Young May Moon}, 49.  
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{op. cit.}, 294.  
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Milk Route}, 69-70.  
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{op. cit.}, 113.  
\textsuperscript{44}\textit{op. cit.}, 134.
from his misery. Rather, it serves to re-double the phantasmic horrors of the attraction and repulsion which characterize his state of "sinister inertia," typical of the Ostenso novels. Eric is "left alone in a dark silence that was awful with its burden of unuttered sounds," and he ponders in his mind "that old saw about a guilty conscience building ogres." The predicament, in which he finds himself, is entirely credible, because he is sufficiently imaginative to realize, at every step, what the consequences are likely to be. Besides the child in Lydie's body, he has fathered a phantasm which grows immediately uncontrollable.

If sympathy can be directed to Eric Stene, it is because of his human fallibility, in a situation which exploits his male vulnerability. With Minella Hanks in *Love Passed This Way*, and Elsa Bowers in *The Mad Carews*, there is considerably more difficulty in maintaining a sympathetic attitude. The formula is strained to its utmost in these two stories, and there is a temptation to feel impatient with both heroines, especially Elsa. In Minella's case the phantasm is less painful, and it fits more neatly into the "caution and respectability" aspects of Ostenso's pattern. Her dying father believes that he has killed Kellogg, the banker who has foreclosed on his farm:

> Get away from here tonight . . . . The bank has taken everything. Kellogg told me this afternoon. I - I hit him on the head with a chair. He's dead.

Minella dutifully disappears, and under an assumed name becomes a successful writer, but continues to allow the phantasm to dominate her life. It is not until many years after her father's death that she and York Clifford, the sweetheart of her childhood, still unmarried and apparently morally immaculate like herself, eventually achieve the union anticipated at the outset. The

\[^{45}\text{op.cit., 269.}\]
\[^{46}\text{Love Passed This Way, 90.}\]
sacrificial theme, begun in *Wild Geese* and employed in varying guises afterwards, is a marked feature of Minella's behaviour. When the phantasm of guilt is finally dispersed York tells her that "somewhere tonight the gods are having a good laugh to themselves." The daughter's concept of filial duty has certainly been carried to the extreme, and possibly indicates a remnant of a Puritanical code governing the obligations of the child to the parent. In any event, the true facts of the banker's death, the result of a cyclone, are intended to make all the difference to Minella's outlook. She has pursued a very active writing career, but has maintained an attitude of inertia as far as her home town is concerned. Now armed with a palatable truth, she can assert her claim to respectability, an infinitely more important factor in life than love for her parent, or so it would appear. The highly improbable circumstances of Minella's continuing ignorance of the truth of what occurred, when the cyclone struck the town, make enormous demands upon one's patience with her as a credible fictional character. Her facility in closing her mind to the events of her childhood, and adolescence, is in contrast to Elsa Bower's ability to activate "the gaunt fear that was stirring within her," effectively placing a barrier between Bayliss and herself. The phantasms of caution and respectability conspire to immobilize her to the place where consummation of her marriage is prevented, through an inability to communicate with her husband:

She heard his step again, passing along the hall to his own room. The blood pounded back into her heart, crushing out her breath. Hunger renewed its gnawing in the depths of her body.

Elsa's inertia parallels Minella's, to a certain extent, except for the extreme

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47 *op.cit.*, 216.
48 *The Mad Carews*, 233.
49 *op.cit.*, 245.
sense of sexual deprivation Elsa feels. It is essential, in Elsa's mind, for Bayliss to achieve some measure of regeneration before conjugal rights can be granted. Fortunately for Bayliss, the economic collapse of his family allows him to reveal his essential commitment to "the Hollow," the humble environment from which Elsa came, and through being able to demonstrate his spiritual empathy with the soil he dispels her suspicions concerning his moral integrity.

The integration with the land, considered so urgent in The Mad Carews, is reminiscent of the phantasm in There's Always Another Year. The guilt pattern so dominant in Love Passed This Way, and seminal to The Mad Carews, is not exploited in this story, but there is a familiar ring to the manner in which one person acts as a brake upon progress, until auctorial dispensation is provided, and a happy resolution is achieved. The banker's highly sophisticated, and eminently untrustworthy daughter plays her usual part in the story, proving to the young hard working farmer that heretofore it had not seemed:

... quite possible to him that anyone could be so selfish, so petty, so lacking in personal integrity - and worst of all, in any ordinary sense of proportion.51

In spite of her deficiencies, Corinne is not the direct cause of Roddy Willard's phantasm. His principal fear is that Silver Grenoble will sell her "land to a cash buyer," and thus deprive him of the use of a considerable addition to his own farm. As Sophronia tells Silver:

"It's just that he's tilled your section with his dad's until he feels that it's his own."52

Roddy's sense of proprietorship is challenged by Silver's feeling that she "needed this land that held the very roots of her being - she needed it to

50op.cit., 343.
51There's Always Another Year, 211-212.
52op.cit., 31.
obliterate forever the dread and insecurity and violence of that other life."\(^{53}\) What might seem to be an impasse is resolved by a plague of locusts and the elopement of Roddy's wife with a profligate gambler. The "staggering blow", which the loss of the land would represent is happily averted, and the indubitable rewards for those who keep troth with the land are plainly manifest. There are quite obvious parallels with *The Stone Field* in regards to the reliance placed upon the banker's daughter to bring about the sentimental integration of the plot, and also the suggestion that fidelity to the land has certain correspondences to successful marriage prospects. Ostenso has frequent recourse to the matter of fidelity and she reveals her belief in the complete identification of interests as being the basic necessity for compatibility and mutual respect.

It is precisely because of the absence of the vital factors for marital success that the partnerships in several novels end in a severance of the ties. The suggestion is, of course, that the dissolution of the marriage is for the good of all concerned, but Ostenso also makes use of an inhibiting sense of impropriety in the matter of extra-marital affairs in order to exploit the guilt feelings to their fullest extent. A thick veil of recriminating spectres must intrude between the lovers before the happy resolution is achieved. The sense of impropriety is introduced as a persistent phantasm which imposes curbs upon instinctive self-determination. David Welland realizes this fact in *The Waters Under the Earth*, and it is apparent in *There's Always Another Year*.\(^{54}\) And in *The Dark Dawn*, Lucian, who harbours what seems to be a hopeless passion for Karen Strand, is tormented by the guilt feelings which invade his mind and cause his "heart to beat with sickening thuds,

\(^{53}\) op.cit., 59.

\(^{54}\) op.cit., 241-3.
wrapped about by pain."\textsuperscript{55} Severe critics of Lucian are likely to be mollified by the knowledge that Hattie Murker deceives him into marrying her. Bert Murker, Lucian's half-witted brother-in-law blurts out the story behind Hattie's selection of a husband:

\begin{quote}
I watched 'em - her an' Mons - when they didn't know it . . . . He had her there one night . . . . But he wouldn't marry her . . . . An' she married you to get even with him . . . . She told him she did . . . . \textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

This disclosure, although it assists Lucian to obtain a new perspective, does not free him from the bonds of matrimony, and it is not until Hattie's convenient demise from a heart ailment\textsuperscript{57} that the curbs are removed and:

\begin{quote}
At the sight of his face, the doctor knew that some strange alchemy unknown to Muller's profession had effected a change within him.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

The burden of guilt and despair has been lifted from Lucian's shoulders by the death of Hattie, providing the kind of relief from a phantasm which Ostenso employs in \textit{Wild Geese}, where Caleb's death resolved the difficulties posed by his threats. Although by the time Caleb dies, the lovers have taken matters into their own hands, there is a release from tension on their behalf. A sense of relief is felt by Marcia when Dorcas Gunther dies in \textit{The Young May Moon},\textsuperscript{59} allowing the heroine to "tell herself that she would never be lonely again, she would be enchanted forever - aloof from existence as she had known it once."\textsuperscript{60} The fatal accident to Jarvis Dean, in \textit{Prologue to Love}, achieves the

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{The Dark Dawn}, 231.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{op.cit.}, 239.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{op.cit.}, 291.

\textsuperscript{58}\textit{op.cit.}, 294.

\textsuperscript{59}\textit{The Young May Moon}, 246.

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{op.cit.}, 247.
same general effect for his daughter. The guilt problems, arising from a
conjunction of marriage difficulties and conventional attitudes, disperse
in a climate conducive only to the flowering of love between fully compatible
persons.

The achievement of conditions suitable for the prosecution of a love
affair that is not to be emasculated by social pressures depends occasionally
upon the stock figure of the rich man's daughter. There are several of them in
Ostenso's novels and they tend to conform in terms of general characteristics.
Corinne Meade, who marries Roddy Willard in There's Always Another Year, obliges
everyone by becoming involved with the "rotter", Gerald Lucas, thus making it
somewhat more respectable to sympathize when Silver Grenoble leans over the
fence, realizing that:

... seeing Roddy at work in the intimate task
of fertilizing his corn had been like looking
into his very heart, like counting the beat of
his life's blood.61

Corinne is quite unconscious of the development of this triangle, owing to the
one she is constructing for herself. Her departure62 signals the arrival of
the rain, a beneficent conclusion to the physical and spiritual drought, and a
symbolic means of washing away the phantasm which has afflicted Roddy Willard.
The circumstances in There's Always Another Year are quite similar to those in
The Stone Field as far as the behaviour of the stock figure is concerned. The
indulged young wife tires of a rather prosaic husband and seeks excitement
elsewhere, eventually leaving altogether, in search of a divorce which will
enable the hero and heroine to face the respectable world with unblemished
consciences. Teresa, the wife in The Stone Field, has a certain amount in
common with Eunice Wingate of The White Reef, as far as sexuality is concerned,

61 There's Always Another Year, 240.
62 op.cit., 265.
but Eunice appears to have a slight advantage in terms of moral integrity. All
three women, Corinne, Teresa, and Eunice, fully appreciate the destructive
effects of a scene:

Her smothered scream filled him with sudden
all but uncontrollable rage . . . the cumulative
effect upon him of all her supine malice and
calculated hysterics in times past.

Ostenso's purpose in revealing characters, of this type, in such an unflatter-
ing light is to emphasize the extent of the illusion, another dimension to the
concept of the phanatasm. The women all have the advantages of beauty and
wealth, factors which make them extremely attractive on the superficial level.
But to offset the apparent desirability is a marked lack of substance. In
this regard, they differ quite radically from the women who are destined to be
the true consorts for her heroes.

Ostenso's heroines must be truly representative of the soil to which
the heroes reveal their commitment. In Wild Geese the idea is quite tentative,
but in subsequent novels it becomes more and more apparent that the concept of
dedication to natural values takes hold and produces roots which spread through
the remainder of her novels. She establishes a dichotomy between the city and
the country that reveals the extent of her own allegiance; but she also reveals
something else that indicates her sensitivity to life values that transcend the
psychological overcast which obscures the light from the truly unregenerate.
The attraction to the city seems valid enough in Wild Geese, because Caleb
succeeds in proliferating the menace until the countryside is redolent of the
taint. The movement to the city seems like a logical escape from chaos to
order. There is a suggestion of the same thing happening in The Dark Dawn:

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63 op. cit., 211-15.

64 The Stone Field, 268-71.

65 The White Reef, 255.
Karen goes to the city and it seems apparent that Lucian will follow her after he "has turned over the whole Murker farm to Bert." Following that novel, Ostenso seems to have reached a decision concerning the city and the country, and she is inclined to locate the focal point securely in a more or less rural environment. The women who receive Ostenso's commendation are the ones who are capable of understanding the urban predicament and interpreting its seeming order as unnecessary chaos. The farm becomes an adequate microcosm for the exercise of their philosophic propensities, and they are capable of understanding their usefulness in a sphere which can be comprehended physically, but which is fathomless in a spiritual sense. It is here that they, like Luke Darr, can learn to develop an intuitive awareness of God's pattern in the minutest details of their environment.

So, in placing an emphasis upon the regenerative properties of the rural environment, for those who are willing to seek a pattern of spiritual fulfillment, Ostenso is showing some measure of agreement with the aphorism: "God made the country and the devil made the town." Her fidelity to realism, however, can be discerned in the fact that these broad distinctions, representing virtue and vice, could be employed as polarities that are completely interchangeable. The rural environment has no premium on pure, untarnished souls, as far as her novels are concerned, and by the same token it would be impossible to dismiss as vicious all the town dwellers shown in her work. The age-old conflict between virtue and vice can be waged anywhere, and Ostenso is not so naive as to state unequivocally that the country possesses mythical properties denied to the town. It is rather that the countryside provides, for the majority of her sympathetic characters, opportunities to eventually recognize and choose a pattern of decisiveness that will have a material affect upon subsequent ability to cope with psychological pressures.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

In stating that "It was prairie writers such as . . . Martha Ostenson . . . who began the systematic transformation of Canadian fiction from romance to realism," Carl F. Klinck attempts to place her literary contribution in perspective. This is a common practice among our literary commentators. Thomas Saunders says practically the same thing in his introduction to Grain where he lays stress upon the significance of the fact that Wild Geese "helped introduce a new dimension into Canadian fiction which . . . has influenced every serious Canadian novelist since." His assertion, that "Canadian realism began" with the novels of a small group of writers, is supported by Pacey, who says that "It was in novels of the prairies, such as those of Grove, Stead and Ostenson, that Canadian realism began." That a "transformation of Canadian fiction" appeared to be necessary during the early twenties is made clear by Carlyle King when he writes about "the Sunshine School of Canadian fiction" which flourished at that time:

In a novel of the Sunshine School, human nature is fundamentally noble and rotarian morality always triumphs. The main characters are basically nice people. Nobody ever suffers long or gets really hurt or says "damn" . . . and most of the characters live virtuously ever after.4

As King says, this "dishonest tradition . . . was of no use to a novelist who proposed to make the chief female character" behave in the way that Judith does.

2Thomas Saunders, Introduction to Grain, by Robert J. C. Stead, (Toronto, 1963), x.
3Pacey, 223.
4Carlyle King, Introduction to Wild Geese, v.
He also points to the fact that Ostenso's literary antecedents in Canada could have been of little help to her, but does acknowledge that her possible influences were from the pens of Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis and Willa Cather. They represented "the high point of American fictional realism" at the time when *Wild Geese* was coming into being, and King's suggestion receives support from Pacey, who refers to "the influence of American realists, most of whom came from or dealt with the mid-west." 

Martha Ostenso, then, must be regarded primarily as a reflection of a literary attitude, which had gained a foothold in America, but had not made a significant impression upon Canadian fiction. It is true that the topic of realism in Canadian Fiction was beginning to receive a certain amount of attention. Francis Dickie wrote:

> Canadian fiction as yet has not enough artistic balance, without which no great literature is possible. That artistic balance will come with the advent of realism.7

The widespread concern with the desire for a national identity and a national literature appears over and over again in the pages of *Canadian Bookman* during the early twenties. It becomes obvious that an ingenuous belief existed that a formula could be devised to provide a national literature. The aspiring writer received copious advice on the way in which the Canadian image could be projected,8 and attempts were made to show how critical and commercial standards could also be satisfied. Thus, it was with something approaching wild excitement that W. E. MacLellan wrote his article in *The Dalhousie Review*, hailing

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5Carlyle King, Introduction to *Wild Geese*, vii.

6Pacey, 223.


the advent of real Canadian literature with the appearance of *Wild Geese*. Armed with inaccurate facts, relating to Martha Ostenso's background, and showing a determination to change most of the characters to Swedes or Russians he nevertheless insisted that the United States could "boast of nothing to equal" *Wild Geese* at that date.\(^9\) His emphasis upon Ostenso's Canadian qualifications indicates, too, the fact that a particular need was being satisfied by her first novel.

> Truthfulness is the distinguishing characteristic of the book. There is not an incident in it which might not have happened in the surroundings, not a character introduced which might not have been a logical product or part of the conditions.\(^10\)

These criteria were considered mandatory for a work of realistic fiction, making *Wild Geese* "Canada's foremost contribution to English literature."

The conditions which *Wild Geese* met in finding acceptance as a work of Canadian realism can be found as a vital part of the discussion in American works dealing with the literary trends of that time. The myths which the Sunshine School perpetuated in Canadian literature had been subjected to an earlier scrutiny in America, and, as Luccock noticed, the emergence of a critical spirit finding expression in American literature, following the war, was a development of a trend already in progress.\(^11\) The post-war disillusionment provided acceleration for the attitudes that arose from a recognition of the threadbare fabric of three cherished myths of the American people. Luccock suggests that the rejection of these myths took the form of revolt in the novels of writers who exhibited the growth of realism and a sense of futility. The

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\(^10\) *op. cit.*, 22.

characteristic revolts were against the village, Puritanism, and the sanctified optimism in the economic world. The incoming tide of uncertainty began to isolate, rather more definitely, the traditional concepts of society. Maybe they were not yet placed in perspective, but their limitations were being revealed:

The war startled us out of pleasant places of thought into horrified awareness of the maladjustments of political society, and the peace thrust us into an era of rebellion against the smugness which had accepted the pre-war world as something to rejoice in.  

If the "smugness" which Canby refers to can be understood to subsume fidélité to the myths of the village, Puritanism and economic stability, then there appears to be a measure of critical agreement as to the climate of the period when Martha Ostenso launched herself into a writing career.

The claim that she was one of those instrumental in the "transformation of Canadian fiction from romance to realism" is supported by the fact that elements of the three revolts, cited by Luccock, can be detected in varying degrees of clarity in her work. There are, too, quite close parallels between those revolts and the three contrapuntal themes already examined in this paper. This would suggest that there was a recognition by Ostenso of the importance of becoming sensitive to contemporary concerns, and assuming responsibility for making an artistic contribution through her writing.

She was quite obviously examining the traditional concept of the village in *Wild Geese* and other works, such as *The Waters Under the Earth*, and *A Man Had Tall Sons*. The concern with the family is quite clearly an extension of the village myth, because Ostenso is intent upon showing the fallacy of subscribing to the traditional deceptions relating to the wholesomeness and purity of the family. The pattern for the utopian village and the myth of

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innocence is the roseate image of the family, living in harmony, and observing
decent respect for the hierarchical conditions of man.

Writing on the theme of national identity, Lawrence Burpee provides
a good example of the attitude of mind against which Ostenso offers obvious
criticism in *Wild Geese*. Burpee writes that the "true" national note:

... is found in books that, in whatever way,
teach Canadians that their fathers have left
them a heritage they can afford neither to forget
nor to dishonor - the heritage of a land of splendid
possibilities, and the memory of honest and manly
achievement.\(^{13}\)

Burpee merely echoed what most of Ostenso's fellow writers in Canada earnestly
believed. To offer the public an experience of Caleb Gare and his family, in
the same year that the president of the Canadian Authors' Association was
defining the "national" family that novelists should honour, suggests something
of what King calls the "measure of Martha Ostenso's pioneering achievement in
Canadian fiction."\(^{14}\)

The fact that the pattern of the community was derived from the
imaginery pattern of the family made it impossible, at one time, to accept
anything other than romanticized accounts of life. Indeed, "truth was ruinous
to long-cherished illusions"\(^{15}\) and Ostenso must acknowledge her debt to an
artist such as Edgar Lee Masters who set out to destroy the myth of the
village. When he has finished his tour of the Spoon River cemetery "the
village has been laid bare" and he has exposed:

\(^{13}\)Lawrence J. Burpee, "The National Note in Canadian Literature," *The

\(^{14}\)Carlyle King, Introduction to *Wild Geese*, v.

. . . the good in those whom the citizens condemned, the evil in the hearts of the righteous, and . . . despair over a life so stale and so barren of joy or nobility, so pitifully mean and cruel.16

The utopian village, symbol of idyllic contentment, was being relegated to its true role as an unattainable ideal, because human nature, as seen in the context of the family, could never begin to approximate to the myth.

A determination to examine the family in realistic terms is quite apparent in a number of Martha Ostenso's novels. It indicates that she recognized, sooner than many of her fellow Canadian writers, the redundancy of certain conventional attitudes. These attitudes were the result of allegiance to "two terms which later became quaintly synonymous, Puritanism and Victorianism."17 Hatcher feels that the "articles of faith" which these terms represented were under strong criticism by the American disciples of "modernism." From their pens came attacks upon:

. . . the sanctity of marriage, the heavenly origin of the moral code, the infallibility of St. Paul . . . the utopian life of an American village, the altruism of big business, the superiority of the male to the female. . . . the good life on a Mid-western farm. . . .

It will be agreed that a fairly active correspondence exists between aspects of what Hatcher has to say and the eventual pattern that derives from Ostenso's analysis of \textit{Wild Geese}. The criticism to which she resorts is usually implied rather than stated. Nevertheless, it is clear that she is conscious of a personal commitment to contest for herself a number of the concepts on Hatcher's list.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{16} op.cit., 113-114.
\bibitem{17} op.cit., 10.
\bibitem{18} loc.cit.
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Her involvement with the spirit of the attack is evident in the ample use she makes of the marriage motif. Marriage itself, so traditionally a myth and reflecting the insubstantiality of the utopian innocence of the village, serves Ostenso as a means of commenting upon the kind of naive attitude expressed by Burpee, and so representative of the state of Canadian literature at that time. And because marriage symbolizes the nucleus of the family, Ostenso is aiming directly at the centre of the pompous verbiage which strove to perpetuate the unrealistic goals of Canadian literature. Marriage and literature have in common the need to be founded upon perceptive discussion, that does not shrink from a feature of human nature merely because it does not accord with some spurious set of values completely at odds with reality. Where a marriage in an Ostenso novel is a complete disaster, it is because there has been a perverse blindness shown to the basic requirements for a wholesome relationship. The young farmer and the banker's daughter illustrate this aspect quite lucidly, but they are merely continuations of the formulaic device arising from an analysis of the marriage of Amelia and Caleb, or that of Joel Brund and Mrs. Sandbo's sluttish daughter. The Sunshine School of literature would have fabricated dramatic regeneration structures to ensure that our noble heritage remained untarnished, but Ostenso's dedication to stark honesty prevents such an occurrence. This dedication to truth ensures her place in Canadian literature as an early practitioner in realistic fiction.

In pursuing her aim to produce realistic fiction, Ostenso manages to keep marriage central to her view. All her stories involve marriage as the vital goal, the crowning achievement for characters who have to undergo a series of trials before attaining a state of blissful union. Marriage to the true partner is equivalent to discovering the "village" for the first time. The recalcitrants have been expelled, and the future extends into an infinity of harmonic pleasure. Ostenso, in satisfying the sentimental
expectations, is not being altogether unrealistic, because she is making the premise that compatible individuals can expect to live happily together. Therefore, because marriage is the eventual goal of her sympathetic characters, it will be agreed that an undeniable correspondence can be seen between it and the three elements of human behaviour discussed in this paper. Unhappiness is an integral part of the experience facing almost every character before the final resolution is reached. It is a painfully familiar fact of life that relationships within the domestic circle are a frequent cause of misery. Conflicts between parents and children, or between marriage partners, are matters which are fundamental to the human condition and, as in *Wild Geese*, the different aspects of family dispute are often closely inter-related. Similarly, the authoritarian figure is seen at his best in a family setting, because the victims of his tyranny are usually unable to escape, either by day or night. The tyrant's marriage partner is often overwhelmed by factors of moral or spiritual impediment and rendered incapable of producing a counter-balancing influence which can integrate the home into an effective harmony. The fragmentation which results from the tyrants domination, whereby each member of the family becomes a separate island, has the result of hedging each one within intangible clouds of dread. The tyrant's effect is one of paralysis and he succeeds in rooting his victims to the spot both physically and spiritually, until a resolution is brought about.

The state of inertia experienced by Martha Ostenso's characters is not always the result of the activities of one of her Puritanical tyrants. Royce Hilyard, unhappily married to Teresa, the banker's daughter, is exposed to a period of despair, arising from a variety of causes connected with items on Hatcher's list. His wife has despoiled their marriage, his brother has betrayed his trust, and that of the "village", big business interests are ruining the countryside and the "villager's" livelihood, and now he has
betrayed his own integrity, and that of Jo Porte, by having sexual intercourse with her. He finds that the outside world:

... seemed to him now unfamiliar and alien. Was this, he wondered bleakly, what happened to a man after he had done an irreparable wrong? Did every physical object with which his life had been inseparably joined suddenly recoil from him, reject his existence as though he had never been?¹⁹

The Puritan noose is placed about his neck and he is disposed to tighten it himself, as he regards the landscape, vague and rejecting, symbolizing universal disapproval. The incubus of dread defies his attempts to create a palpable shape out of the factors afflicting him with a spiritual paralysis. His inertia prevents him from directly confronting his troubles. He knows that:

... he had faltered ... until it was too late. What Teresa revealed ... was more than he could beat. To face Ashbrooke ... was unthinkable ... . He pressed his hands hard against his eyes ... .²⁰

And in pressing "his hands hard against his eyes" Royce Hilyard is confining himself within the toils of the phantasm which has grown out of his feelings of guilt, degradation and moral inertia. He epitomizes the plight of many of Ostenso's characters and illustrates how the characteristic elements function as resonant entities, each separate one contributing to the total unity in its own way. The demands of the fugue are satisfied by the introduction of dominant concerns that are developed to a certain pitch of intensity and are then subordinated to the demands of an ultimate harmony.

In developing an involvement with some of the objectives of the "modernist" writers of America Ostenso laid herself open to the categorizing

¹⁹The Stone Field, 274.
²⁰op.cit., 276-7.
activities of literary commentators. When searching for her place in the total pattern there is a certain amount of assistance to be gained from Fred Lewis Pattee's appraisal of her value as a writer.\textsuperscript{21} He recognizes her awareness of the requirements for success and is prepared to suggest that a formula could be detected in the type of work produced by Ostenso, and other prize-winning novelists contemporary with her. He says that in considering "such novels as those winning the distinctive prizes . . . one is able to say that the elements conducive to winning are six in number."\textsuperscript{22} He identifies these elements as: originality; realism; an absence of plot, i.e., "no artificial ordering of episodes to a culmination at the end"; characterization; subservience of background to characterization and action; and finally, "good workmanship, or - as the workers themselves prefer to term it - artistry."\textsuperscript{23} It is apparent that Pattee does not allow himself to be swept off his feet by Ostenso, and neither does Meyer, who is one of the few contemporary scholars to comment upon her work. In rejecting her as a true farm novelist, he feels that "the best that can be said for the work of Martha Ostenso is that it is an excellent example of popular fiction."\textsuperscript{24}

The evaluations by Pattee and Meyer are perfectly valid in view of the size of the impact Martha Ostenso makes upon the American literary "pool". It is, however, in remembering the size of its Canadian counterpart, in the middle twenties, that full appreciation can be paid to Martha Ostenso. There is very little comparison between a literary awareness such as the Americans


\textsuperscript{22}\textit{op. cit.}, 465.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{op. cit.}, 466.

\textsuperscript{24}Meyer, 151.
could boast at that time and the meagre, uncritical state of Canadian letters in the year when *Wild Geese* was published. It is futile to pursue a discussion of the parallels in American and Canadian literature at the dawn of Canadian realism. Ostenso's contribution was, and remains, an unique break with a cloying tradition and will always represent a determined step in the direction of a genuine Canadian literature.
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