PURITANISM IN CANADIAN PRAIRIE FICTION

by

DORIS MARGARET CAMERON

B.A., The University of Manitoba, 1961

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

April, 1966
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of ENGLISH

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date APRIL, 1966.
ABSTRACT

Although it is generally acknowledged that Puritanism has been a major influence in Canadian society, little has been done to trace that influence in the literature. It is the aim of this thesis to discuss the place of Puritanism within some of the best Canadian prairie fiction. The broadly historical approach is avoided in order to make possible a detailed study of a few significant novels.

Five novelists were chosen for consideration: Arthur Stringer, Robert J. C. Stead, Martha Ostenso, Frederick Philip Grove, and Sinclair Ross. Three novels by Arthur Stringer, The Prairie Wife, The Prairie Mother, and The Prairie Child, are included because together they form one complete work, and three by Frederick Philip Grove, Settlers of the Marsh, Our Daily Bread, and Fruits of the Earth, because of his relatively large output of significant fiction. Only one novel by each of the other novelists is discussed: Robert J. C. Stead's Grain, Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, and Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House.

The selection of the novelists was governed by a desire to examine only fiction worthy of critical examination and yet to represent as many attitudes towards Puritanism as possible. Arthur Stringer, the least important in terms of artistic achievement, is included because of his attempt to replace Puritanism with the American myth of innocence. Robert J. C. Stead and Martha Ostenso represent, respectively, the extremes of acceptance and rejection. Frederick Philip Grove, a more complicated figure, accepts many of the Puritan values, but points to the breakdown of those values in the society. Sinclair Ross presents the most comprehensive and articulate
description of Puritanism. Although he is critical of it, and, like Grove, sees the weakening of its hold on the society, he is nevertheless able to maintain a positive attitude towards it.

The Introduction states the need for a comparative and thematic approach to Canadian literature and suggests some of the pre-suppositions of this study. In order that the main emphasis be placed on the literature, the definition of Puritanism is given within the discussion of the specific works under consideration. Canadian Puritanism is obviously not the same as the original Puritanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but neither is it simply the rigid and narrow-minded morality which represents the worst form of its later historical development. It is best approached with an awareness of both its original form and its later perversions. The five main chapters are devoted to separate studies of the five novelists. The emphasis is placed on the attitudes towards Puritanism reflected in the novels. For each novel, the major themes are examined, a discussion of symbolism and imagery is included whenever possible, and comparisons with the other novels are made where relevant.

The Conclusion draws more specific comparisons and defines more fully the three themes common to all the novels: the problem of man's relationship with the soil, the problem of woman, and the problem of authority. The land, like the Puritan God, is the arbitrary master, controlling the seasons and the outcome of the crops, and demanding obedience and co-operation of man. The rigorous nature of farm life and the need for children encourages the Puritan attitude that the proper role of woman is that of a hard working wife and mother rather than that of an intellectual or sexual companion. Because the farm is an independent and self-sufficient unit, the main authority figure is the father, and because the work is so time-consuming the father often becomes, to his family, as aloof and arbitrary as the Puritan God. Prairie Puritanism may appear inordinately harsh, but the harshness is the result of the Puritan's awareness
of sin which forces him to face his situation realistically. Any realization of love and forgiveness, when it comes, is achieved after all the facts have been faced and the temptation to romanticize has been resisted. With the movement away from the land and the gradual improvement in working conditions, the characteristic themes and settings of prairie life, and with them, the explicit Puritan doctrines, may disappear, but it is to be hoped that the tough-minded and realistic approach to life which is basic to Puritanism, will not be lost.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ARTHUR STRINGER</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. ROBERT J. C. STEAD</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. MARTHA OSTENSO</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SINCLAIR ROSS</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

Introduction

Criticism of Canadian literature has generally been confined either to historical surveys or to the examination of the works of one author. The historical surveys are so broad in scope that the discussion of individual authors and their works is limited to biographical information, brief plot outlines, and one or two critical remarks. Specific criticism of individual authors, found mostly in periodical literature and only occasionally in book form, is usually limited so completely to the one author that there is no comparison with other authors who might be expressing similar themes and problems. Obviously neither the broadly historical nor the narrowly specific approach is invalid, but the absence of the comparative and thematic approach is surely significant.

This absence is a reflection of a basic lack of trust in the worth of the literature. Until very recently most of even the best of the older literature was out of print. This situation, illustrative of a grave lack of interest on the part of the reading public, seemed to present the critic with only two alternatives. He could try to convince the public that a body of Canadian literature actually does exist by doing little more than listing titles and providing plot outlines or he could appeal to the few scholarly souls who are content to burrow around in dusty libraries to find forgotten Canadian literature by displaying his own acquaintance with, for example, every one of Robert Stead's novels.1 To assume a knowledge of the literature on the part of the general public and to proceed from there to exercise criticism's function of delineation and comparison of common themes and underlying myths would somehow be too presumptuous.

1A. T. Elder, "Western Panorama: Settings and Themes in Robert J. C. Stead," Canadian Literature, No. 17 (Summer, 1963), 44-56. Again this is not to imply that such criticism is not interesting and useful. This example is used simply because it is obviously the extreme opposite of the broad historical approach.
Another aspect of the critic's problem, related to the incredible ignorance of the reading public, is the feeling which is prevalent in varying degrees in the whole of Canadian society that Canada has not yet truly attained a unique identity of its own. The feeling that there is, therefore, no uniquely Canadian literature is widespread and is strengthened by the inevitable comparison of Canadian literature with American literature. Aside from the size factor which has obviously been partly responsible for the greater level of achievement in American literature, it is clear that the United States has managed to establish unique and characteristic literary traditions which are more easily recognized and certainly more fully discussed than are Canadian literary traditions. The United States was founded by much more fervent Puritans and in a much more dramatic fashion than was Canada. Because of this it produced not only a more explicitly Puritan-influenced literature but a greater eventual reaction against British traditions and Puritanism. American Transcendentalism, the result of this reaction, furnished the writers with new and exciting possibilities for uniquely American myths and the clash between the two traditions kept the issues alive and led to a fairly high level of articulation of both positions.\(^2\)

No such reaction occurred in Canada. Canadian society was much more willing to retain its ties with Great Britain in both the political and cultural realms. In the literary field writers were content to work within established English traditions. The literature that was produced was, quite naturally, usually a poor imitation of the literature of the "mother" country. Even the most talented writers often did not seem able to extricate themselves from the imitation mentality. This imitative tradition, both in politics and art, was far more responsible for the slowness on Canada's part in

\(^2\) The ideas expressed here owe their origin specifically to R. W. B. Lewis's work, *The American Adam* (Chicago, 1955), but almost any history of American ideas or literature will support this interpretation.
achieving a unique identity than was the regional character of the country which is often blamed for the same phenomenon. The United States is supremely regional in character, investing much more political power in its individual states than Canada does in her provinces, and the literature which is also regional expresses by that very fact one of the unique characteristics of the society. The problem with the individual regions in Canada was that they were too often content to imitate those traditions in English literature which seemed most applicable to the region. The Maritimes had the sea and its literary heritage. Ontario's landscape and the patterns of society which developed were similar enough to the situation in England to prevent any violent sense of a need to reject tradition, and this was most unfortunate because Ontario quickly became the center of power and population, providing the norm for what "Canadianism" there was to be seen. Quebec presented a more complicated problem, but for the English-speaking writer it provided, with its history and different culture, a useful setting for works written within established historical or romantic traditions. The wilderness of British Columbia absorbed many of the more restless and rebellious spirits in the country and was perhaps because of this slightly more prone to be influenced by American frontier literary traditions. This outline is obviously stated in rather too simple a form and exceptions come easily to mind, but as an indication of a general tendency it is adequate.

The Canadian prairie region has not been included in this outline of imitative tendencies because it was the region in Canada which had the most difficulty in finding an easily adaptable tradition. The geography and agricultural conditions were completely unlike anything in Britain. The settlement was motivated so much by a desire for stability and a settled agricultural way of life that American frontier traditions were not applicable and American literature had not itself produced a significant enough body of prairie literature to be copied. There were of course many Canadian prairie writers who were nothing but imitative, but the lack of an easily adaptable tradition meant that the poor writers were more easily seen as only
poor and imitative and the more talented writers were forced to come to terms with the actual situation because they realized the inadequacies of many of their imported traditions.

Desmond Pacey expresses a somewhat similar idea in his discussion of the prairie novelists:

It is a strange fact that almost all of Canadian realistic fiction, until very recent years at any rate, has been set on the prairies. It was in novels of the prairies, such as those of Grove, Stead and Ostenso, that Canadian realism began, and to this day one can be fairly confident in predicting that a novel about Saskatchewan, say, will be more in touch with reality than a novel about Ontario. One can only speculate about the reasons for this: perhaps it is that the West, having less history behind it, has not had the time to develop the inhibitions which seem to beset writers from the eastern parts of Canada; the influence of American realists, most of whom came from or dealt with the mid-west, may be another factor; perhaps the relative harshness of life on the prairies obrudes itself so powerfully on the writers of that region that they cannot ignore it. Whatever the reason, the fact remains.3

Pacey's reasons are not convincing. The influence of American writers, especially in the early period, was very slight and at one time almost every area in Canada has suffered from a harshness of life and a lack of history. Surely the inhibitions of eastern Canada were imported rather than developed. The uniqueness of the landscape and way of life and the resultant lack of easily adaptable traditions were undoubtedly more responsible for prairie realism than lack of history or harshness of life.

The fact that the best prairie writers were forced to come to terms with the actual situation on the prairies and seemed, therefore, more "in touch with reality" means that the literature not only describes the authentic outward characteristics of prairie life but also reflects the myths or attitudes towards life of the people of the region. This is especially true of the fiction. Poetry may be

3Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto, 1961), pp. 223-224.
extremely esoteric, but the story almost inevitably reflects the way in which a society understands itself. R. W. B. Lewis speaks of the necessity of looking beyond the explicit ideas of the rational discussion of a society to "the images and the 'story' that animate the ideas and are their imaginative and usually more compelling equivalent". The society's comprehensive view of life is reflected in the fiction "in a recurring pattern of images—ways of seeing and sensing experience—and in a certain habitual story, an assumed dramatic design for the representative life". Lewis is speaking of the lively intellectual debate in the United States during the second quarter of the nineteenth century and as a result places fairly strong emphasis on the conscious and deliberate nature of the attempts by the artists to give expression to this debate:

When the results of rational enquiry are transformed into conscious and coherent narrative by the best-attuned artists of the time, the culture has finally yielded up its own special and identifying "myth."

Canada has had no lively debate comparable to the American one, so that the literary process of myth formation has not been as conscious as it was in the United States, but it is valid to assume that the fiction reflects the society's attitudes and "the ideas that preoccupy it" even on the unconscious level. By examining the recurring themes and "stories" it is possible to discover and to define in rational and intellectual terms the characteristic myth of the society. The process, however, is never completely one-sided. Although less consciously articulated than the American experience, the Canadian myth has been recognized and identified both by the historian and the artist. The critic who approaches the literature by way of the

---

4 The American Adam, p. 3.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
The comparative and thematic method does so with this recognition in mind. The comprehensive view of life which is expressed in Canadian prairie fiction is that of Puritanism. In an attempt to avoid unnecessary repetition and to assure the primacy of the literary rather than the philosophical approach, the definition of this Puritanism and the proof of the existence of its influence will be given within the discussion of the specific works under consideration in this study. Some preliminary remarks may be helpful, however, to indicate the problems involved in speaking of Puritanism and the resultant difficulty of presenting a rational and theological definition.

Puritanism is, of course, not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon. It has its roots in quite definite historical events in England in the sixteenth century, in the history of the settlement of the United States, and in the history of Calvinism with which it is always linked and often equated. The history of Canada has contributed nothing to the actual historical formation of the Puritan doctrines. Again, a comparison of the Canadian situation with the American is helpful. The original Puritan settlement in the United States was very much a part of the history of English Puritanism and was a very deliberate and religiously motivated series of events. The explicit nature of the settlement and the fervency of it meant that doctrinal statements of Puritanism were plentiful during the early periods of American history. Contemporary efforts to define Puritanism naturally use the early literature as basic source material. Although Puritanism was imported into the United States, and indeed this was one of the reasons for the eventual reaction against it, it was also a very integral part of the uniquely American experience. Definitions of Puritanism may be formed by the use of American statements almost as easily as by the use of British sources.

The Canadian situation was very different. The settlement of Anglo-Saxon Canada occurred long after the early period of the Puritan

---

Perry Miller's excellent work on the nature of Puritanism, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Boston, 1961), originally published in 1939, is one of the best examples of this.
impulse in England and the United States. There was no deliberate Puritan settlement of the American type and no comparable body of doctrinal statement. Yet the Puritan ethic is, nevertheless, or has been until very recently, the predominant influence in Canadian society. This is a much more difficult statement to prove than a similar one about the United States would be, simply because of the less explicit nature of the Canadian settlement. Certainly in the formative period of the society the majority of immigrants could have claimed a background in English or Scottish Puritan traditions. Statistics, however, are not necessarily reliable. Even in the areas of Canada where non-Anglo-Saxons outnumber Anglo-Saxons the prevailing tone is still usually set by the Anglo-Saxons. Non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant literature in Canada describes, almost without exception, different aspects of the struggle on the part of these immigrants to adjust themselves to the Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture. The difficulty of finding explicitly stated support for the statement that Canada is predominantly Puritan makes even more necessary the kind of assumption that Perry Miller claims to make in his interpretation of the American scene:

In order that a beginning may be made, even though by main force, I have taken Puritanism for granted, and starting from the fact of its existence, however it may have come into being, have sought to discover what it held, what spirit and what thoughts inspired it and to what it aspired, what combinations it made of older ideas and what it added of its own, and what finally, in the broadest terms, it can be said to have meant or still to mean as a living force. I assume that Puritanism was one of the major expressions of the Western intellect, that it achieved an organized synthesis of concepts which are fundamental to our culture, and that therefore it calls for the most serious examination.  

As Miller points out, the assumption of the existence of Puritanism must be followed by a discussion of its content. Here, too, the Canadian situation requires a slightly different type of

approach. Miller claims to be discussing only the original form of American Puritanism and suggests that after the second decade of the eighteenth century it was somehow no longer Puritanism:

I have limited the field to the seventeenth century and not overstepped the second decade of the eighteenth, which seems to me the furthest extent to which one may say that the original system of Puritanism survived without drastic alteration.\(^\text{10}\)

He expresses this concern to limit himself to "pure" Puritanism even more strongly in a slightly different context:

When Puritans begin to content themselves with pious works, arguing from an ability to perform them the certainty of their election, and neglect to make certain of the regeneration itself, when they become good citizens and churchmen without a previous "experimental knowledge" of an intoxicating and ravishing faith, they do in truth become moralists whose philosophy is based upon social and economic considerations. But by that time they have ceased to be Puritans.\(^\text{11}\)

It is impossible to make the historical distinction expressed in Miller's first statement in a discussion of Puritanism in Canada simply because of the dates he chooses, but his assumption that later alterations or perversions are not Puritanism is in itself questionable. Surely any definition of Puritanism must include a discussion of its development and the changes and perversions to which it has been subject.

The danger inherent in a willingness to include later changes in the definition is that the perversions and the superficial elements may become the basis of that definition. This tendency is evident in the emphasis which Alan Simpson in his work, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, places on the inevitable degeneration of the Puritan spirit:

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. vii.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 53.
The early history of Massachusetts . . . is the story of men who shared an ideal, left the Old World to realize it in the New, only to discover when the work of planting was done that the spirit had evaporated. Frustration was the fate which awaited every Puritan.  

He claims that Puritanism was a force of immense energy "which everywhere subsided from an ecstasy of zeal into standardized patterns of behaviour." That too often the standardized and lifeless patterns of behaviour have been seen as the essence of Puritanism is illustrated by the narrow and derogatory sense in which the term "Puritan" is now used. Certainly the superficialities and perversions are part of Puritanism, but they are by no means all of it.

Another approach to the phenomenon of Puritanism begins from the point of view that it is an expression of a universal attitude rather than the result of very specific historical events. Ralph Bronkema's definition in The Essence of Puritanism is a good example of this attitude:

Puritanism understood as a religious phenomenon cannot be limited to one particular age, nor even to the English people. It began before there were Puritans, and it extends even to the present time. The Puritans are long dead, but the Puritan spirit lives on.

He sees the roots of Puritanism in the English character:

This treatise contends that the specific characteristics of Puritanism can be traced back beyond Calvinism, beyond all systems of thought to the English character itself.

This approach seems much more applicable to the Canadian situation because it allows for a comparison of any situation with the

---

13 Ibid., p. 39.
14 (Goes, Holland, [c.1929]), p. 2.
15 Ibid., p. 3.
explicit historical expressions of the Puritan character, but it exhibits the same tendency, seen in Perry Miller's approach, to be concerned only with the "essence" or pure form of Puritanism.

The most sensible approach to Canadian Puritanism, especially as it is reflected in the literature, lies in a combination of these three methods. It is possible to see expressed in the literature themes and ideas which have their origin in the specific historical doctrines of Puritanism and in the general characteristics of the English mind. It is also possible to see in the recurrence of some themes, in the omission of others, and in the peculiar differences from historical Puritanism something that may be said to be a uniquely Canadian form of Puritanism.

It is time that criticism exercised its function of recognizing the myths by which Canadian society understands itself and of pointing to the expression of these myths in the literature. Only in that way will the existence of an authentic and unique body of Canadian literature be recognized and the artists enabled to proceed with the sense of writing from within a real tradition instead of suffering under the illusion that they are writing in a vacuum. It is also time that some of the best Canadian fiction is deemed worthy of detailed critical examination from the point of view of a thematic approach rather than from a chronological or isolated standpoint. For this reason the following discussion is not a general history of the influence of Puritanism on all of prairie fiction, but rather an examination and comparison of enough of the best fiction to justify an attempt to speak of a tradition and yet not so much as to eliminate the possibility of detailed examination.
CHAPTER II
ARTHUR STRINGER

The earliest literary products of the Canadian prairie were similar to those of other frontier regions. The inevitable diaries and journals were followed by works of fiction which were either only poorly disguised histories and travelogs or adventure stories which depended for their success on an ignorance of the actual nature of the region. As McCourt says of the early novelists: "Their novels are forgotten now, and it is well that they should be." They are interesting only as illustrations of a necessary stage in the development of literature in a new society. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are rarely discussed in any detail.

There is one aspect of this early stage, however, which has not received the attention it merits. The amazing fact about the history of Canadian prairie fiction is the brevity of this transitional period. Nowhere else in Canada were the characteristic subject matter and setting of the fiction established so quickly as they were on the prairie. That this had little to do with any superior artistic ability on the part of the writers is fairly obvious. The significant factor was more probably the nature and the speed of the prairie settlement. Almost the only motive behind the movement to the prairie was that of agricultural settlement. The geography of the region did not attract that part of the population which was in flight from settlement and community life. Lionel Stevenson claims that British Columbia attracted the restless spirits:

"Establishing homesteads has never been the primary object of the inhabitants. Ever since gold-rush days, British Columbia has been the rallying-ground of those who feel the irresistible westward impulse,"

---

1 Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto, 1949), p. 16.
those roving spirits to whom settled life is intolerable.  

The prairie was left to the homesteader and in a very short time it was transformed from the sparsely settled land of the Indian, hunter, and Hudson's Bay man into the relatively stable and community-oriented world of the farmer.

It might be said that the task of the writer of prairie fiction was therefore easier than that of the writer in other parts of Canada. Certainly, as has been noted, the prairie has been recognized as the place where realistic fiction began, and the fact that the central figure was so clearly the farmer and the appropriate setting so obviously the farm may have helped to shorten what is usually a long period of searching for authentic regional characteristics. It would be naive to assume, however, that ease in choosing subject matter and setting would necessarily result in good fiction. Such was obviously not the case for prairie fiction. What did happen, perhaps, was that this aspect of prairie life resulted in the early establishment of a recognizable tradition or main stream within the fiction. Thus even the works of the poorest writers often gained in significance because they could be seen to be participating in and contributing to a generally significant and characteristic tradition.

Arthur Stringer is a good example of this. He is invariably criticized for a lack of any talent worthy of serious consideration. Desmond Pacey dismisses his best work, the prairie trilogy, The Prairie Wife, The Prairie Mother, and The Prairie Child, because he is "appalled by their triviality, facetiousness and flippancy." Roy W. Meyer claims that because Stringer was nothing but a popular and prolific writer "one may seriously doubt whether these novels are to

---

2Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto, 1926), p. 257.

3See Chapter One, pp. 4-5.

4Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto, 1961), p.103.
be regarded as valid expressions of a point of view toward the farm." Yet in spite of this lack of ability Stringer is always mentioned in histories of the literature and McCourt chooses to discuss the trilogy at some length. The very choice of the setting and subject matter gives it immediate significance.

Much the same sort of qualification must be made in a consideration of the validity of including Stringer's work within the more specific discussion of the influence of Puritanism on prairie fiction. There are so many points of view and themes presented in the trilogy that it seems doubtful at times whether Stringer could have had any clear idea of what he was trying to do when he wrote the novels. It is obvious, however, that he quite consciously chose an examination of Puritanism as one of his themes, and for this reason he cannot be ignored.

There are indications, especially in the first novel of the trilogy, The Prairie Wife, that Stringer's original intention may have been to compare Canadian Puritanism, in the figure of Duncan McKail, with American 'Adamism', in the figure of Chaddie McKail. Chaddie's point of view is predominant because she is the narrator and central character of the story, and is also usually taken to be Stringer's basic point of view. Meyer claims that Stringer "offers his readers a sort of romantic primitivism in his books Prairie Wife (1915) and Prairie Mother (1920), which appear superficially to represent the affirmative view of farm life." This affirmative view, of which Chaddie is a representative, is a familiar theme in American literature. R. W. B. Lewis calls it the myth of the American Adam, the myth of innocence and optimism, and discusses the beginnings and development of the myth in nineteenth-century American literature.
William Wasserstrom has analyzed its relevance for specifically western fiction. He claims that the movement west was motivated partly by the rejection of New England Puritanism which took place in the United States. The migrants "were led by an image of Western fertility which, historically, had animated the European imagination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: America was a new Eden." Thus the girls who went west by the wagonload "were drawn by an image of domesticity with a healthy Adam which old myths had created and a new literature proclaimed, by the hope that life in the West would be freer and riper than life elsewhere." 

Chaddie McKail begins her life in the trilogy as an American Eve. She suddenly finds herself cut off from her own past and from the rest of the world and beginning a completely new life with a man she seems to know as little about as the original Eve knew about the man to whom she was given. As she says:

Out here, there's no object in being anything but one's self. Life is so simple and honest, so back to first principles! There's joy in the thought of getting rid of all the sublimated junk of city life. I'm just a woman; and Dinky-Dunk is just a man.

She insists that she is a wild, primitive woman and proceeds to illustrate this by shooting at Duncan when caught bathing naked, by savagely killing a hen-hawk, and by single-handedly capturing a murderer.

Her pre-fallen state is perhaps best illustrated in her attitude towards sex. She claims to revel in the joy and animality of it:

But, oh, isn't it wonderful to wake love in a man, in a strong man? To be able to sweep him off, that way, on a tidal wave that leaves him rather white and shaky in the

---

9 *Heiress of all the Ages* (Minneapolis, 1959), p. 39.
10 Ibid., p. 41.
voice and trembly in the fingers, and seems to light a little luminous fire at the back of his eyeballs so that you can see the pupils glow, the same as an animal's when your motor head-lights hit them.12

And again:

After meals we push away the dishes and sit side by side, with our arms across each other's shoulders, full of the joy of life, satisfied, happy, healthy-minded, now and then a little Rabelaisian in our talk, meandering innocent-eyed through those earthier intimacies which most married couples seem to face without shame, so long as the facing is done in secret.13

Chaddie seems to believe in the essential goodness of creation. A healthy and natural attitude towards sex is possible in a life which gets back to "first principles".

There is something about this attitude, however, which implies an ignorance of the force and meaning of the sexual urge. Chaddie is almost too innocent at times. At one point she refuses to admit of the possibility of adultery in the kind of life which she and Duncan share:

As for the other man's wife, prairie-life would soon knock that nonsense out of people. There isn't much room for the Triangle in a two-by-four shack... You want your own wife, and want her so bad you're satisfied. Not that Dinky-Dunk and I are so goody-goody! We're just healthy and human, that's all, and we'd never do for fiction.14

One might wonder if the plots of the two later novels were the result of Stringer's realization of the truth of this last statement, but certainly, in the light of later events, the irony involved here only serves to emphasize Chaddie's basic naivety. Even when she thinks

12 Ibid., p. 15.
13 Ibid., p. 120.
14 Ibid., pp. 119-120.
that Duncan might fall in love with Olga, the hired girl, she does so because she feels that Olga would perhaps be a better representative of the innocent, wild Eve, and a more appropriate prairie wife, than she is. She does not see the problem of adultery in moral terms.

Chaddie's attitude towards her first pregnancy is also significant. For someone who enjoys sharing intimacies with her husband, she acts very strangely, never once admitting to anyone that she is pregnant. After the baby is born she implies that one of her reasons for this was her fear that it would be born with her uncle's receding chin or with the hired man's split nose. It is not natural for an Eve to fear inherited characteristics from the past. This is much more a Puritan fear and her silence perhaps represents an instinctive reaction against coming to terms with her sexuality and the consequence of it. The fall has often been interpreted as the result of man's becoming aware of his sexuality. Chaddie, by avoiding this, preserves her pre-fallen state. At the end of The Prairie Wife she is still an innocent Eve figure.

Duncan McKail is obviously intended to be a contrast to Chaddie. He is the Scotch-Canadian Puritan. Chaddie says of him:

"He's got the soul of a Scotch Calvinist tangled up in him somewhere, and after the storm he's very apt to grow pious and a bit preachy. But he has feelings, only he's ashamed of them. I think I'm taking a little of the ice-crust off his emotions. He's a stiff clay that needs to be well stirred up and turned over before it can mellow."  

There are many examples of this in American fiction. Isabel Archer, one of Henry James' innocent American heroines shows the same kind of innocence and ignorance of sex as Chaddie does. At one point we are told that she has had a child that died (The Portrait of a Lady, Boston, 1956, p. 323), but nowhere in the rest of the novel does the fact seem to have any influence on her. It is unlike James to introduce details which later seem irrelevant, and he may be implying that her silence about it is a reflection of her avoidance of sexuality.

The Prairie Wife, pp. 78-79.
Duncan does not make a new start in life in the same way that Chaddie does. He takes her to the place where he has his roots and his history and it soon becomes evident that parts of the history are rather sombre. Chaddie claims that he is "nothing but a broken-down civil engineer who's taken up farming in the Northwest."\(^{17}\) This is all that is said about his pre-farming days, but it hints at a previous failure. Also, Duncan has obtained his land because the previous owner of one part of it got drunk and froze to death and the previous owner of the other part was ruined by fire because he had been too lazy to build a fire-guard. He enters the scene with a much more shady past than Chaddie. He is also much more involved in the outside world because of his business interests.

Duncan's attitude towards sex is not as clearly defined as is Chaddie's, but he is certainly more Puritanical. Chaddie recognizes the fact that he has inhibitions and tries to break them down. His little sermon on the enormity of love and the small amount of it he is able to express is a good illustration of his moral solemnity.\(^{18}\) He rejects the charms of sheer animality and wild primitivism when he replies to Chaddie's question as to whether or not he could fall in love with Olga: "With that cow?"\(^{19}\) He is obviously aware of the power of sex and much more motivated by suspicions and ideas of "proper morality." Thus he immediately suspects something when Chaddie is forced to stay over-night at Percy's even though he finds her sleeping outside under the wagon. Chaddie says: "I thought, for a moment, that I saw distrust on Dinky-Dunk's face, for the first time."\(^{20}\)

These examples point to the fact that Duncan's Puritanism is often only hinted at in this first novel and is usually presented rather superficially. In fact the main weakness of the novel is its failure to get beyond trivialities to anything of significance. A

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 5.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 82-83.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 219.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 148.
good example of this is Chaddie's discussion of rag-time music. She is very fond of it, and says of Duncan: "Sometimes, too, I resent the over-solemn streak in his mental make-up. He abominates rag-time...." Her reaction is typical:

And the knowledge that he'd like to forbid me singing rag seems to give a zest to it. So I go about flashing my saber of independence:
"Ol' Eph'r'm Johnson was a deacon of de church in Tennessee, An' of course it was ag'inst de rules t'sing rag-time melodée!"

The tension caused by this disagreement is soon eased. Duncan apologizes for his grumpiness and Chaddie is satisfied although she still feels compelled to insist: "I shall always fight for my elbow-room." Both Duncan's Puritan morality and Chaddie's innocent joy and spirit of independence are implied here. The tension is presented in such trivial terms, however, and resolved so easily that there seems to be little significance in the event. Indeed most of the events in the novel seem to be on much the same level. Thus while it is fair to say that Stringer is more or less consistent in his portrayal of Chaddie's and Duncan's personalities, he never allows the basic conflict to go beyond the superficial level. Nothing ever really happens in the novel and the lasting impression is that of a shallow treatment of the early married life of two people who may have a few differences but who always manage to work them out easily.

In the second and third novels of the trilogy, Stringer begins to deal with more significant problems. Chaddie becomes involved in the responsibilities of motherhood, Duncan begins committing adultery, and the problems of authority, constancy, flight, and reward become very real.

Chaddie's attitude towards sex remains much the same throughout the trilogy. She never loses the pre-sexual type of innocence which

---

21 Ibid., p. 86.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 87.
allows her to be aware of her influence on men and yet somehow
totally ignorant of the possible consequences of it. The picture of
her stitching a red heart into Gershom Sinks' underwear would be
completely unbelievable if it was not already obvious that she did
not really know what she was doing. It is this same naivety which
explains her lack of concern about "appearances" when she is nursing
Percy through his pneumonia, her trust in Peter Ketley's good faith,
and her ability to take advantage of the innocent aspects of their
companionship for so long.

In The Prairie Wife, Chaddie would not admit the possibility
of adultery. In The Prairie Mother and The Prairie Child she is
unable to face up to and understand her husband's unfaithfulness.
When Duncan confesses that his affair with Lady Alicia was motivated
by his desire to salvage some of his lost fortune, her reaction is
one of distaste for the pettiness of it all. Instead of seeing the
problem in moral terms she is preoccupied with the thought that he
has simply been a passive agent who has not even had the satisfaction
of "the glory of conquest or the tang of triumph."24 Her reaction to
his affair with the school teacher, Alsina Teeswater, is much the
same:

I did my best to believe it wasn't so much that Duncan
Argyll McKail had stooped to make advances to this
bandy-legged she-teacher whom I'd so charitably housed
at Casa Grande since the beginning of the year--
for I'd long since learned not to swallow the antique
claim that of all terrestrial carnivora only man and
the lion are truly monogamous—but more the fact it
had been made such a back-stairs affair with no
solitary redeeming touch of dignity.25

She refuses to grant Duncan any stature and never sees any depth
to his sin. After one of his outbursts she thinks:

24Arthur Stringer, The Prairie Mother (New York, 1920),
p. 355.
25Arthur Stringer, The Prairie Child (New York, 1922),
p. 4.
It seemed to bring with it the impression that Duncan was still a small boy who might some day grow out of his badness.26

What Chaddie never seems to realize is that she is only a small girl who shows little promise of ever growing out of her innocence. Peter Ketley shows an instinctive realization of this when he tells her not to be worried about being too old to begin again with him because as he says: "'It'll be a good ten years before you've even grown up.'"27 He expresses the essence of her character when he goes on to say:

"That's what I love about you . . . your imperishable youthfulness, your eternal never-ending eternity-defying golden-tinted girlishness!"28

Duncan's attitude towards sex is not presented any more clearly in the second and third novels of the trilogy than it was in the first, in spite of the fact that his sexual sin is one of the most important factors in the development of the story. In fact, in some ways, he becomes less and less Puritan. His attitude towards his own infidelity is the best example of this vagueness and inconsistency. For a man who could be so upset at the mere idea of his wife being unfaithful, he shows very little concern about his own lapses from constancy. He answers Chaddie's questions about his affair with the schoolteacher by rather flippantly launching into a discussion about the delicious taste of birds' nests in spite of their appearance, and in another scene begins to make efforts at appeasement by announcing: '"I'm afraid I've got a peach-stain on my reputation!'"29 For the Puritan, sexual sin is very serious because it represents a disastrous immersion in the world of flesh and a rejection of the world of the spirit. In these two scenes Duncan

26 Ibid., p. 236.
27 Ibid., p. 375.
28 Ibid., p. 376.
29 Ibid., p. 88.
does not seem to be very typically Puritan.

It is by indirect hints and implications, however, that Duncan's Puritanism is best illustrated. There is, for example, a psychological accuracy in Stringer's choice of the way in which Duncan's weakness of character is expressed. Thus, although he may seem rather un-Puritan in his attitude towards his own infidelity, the fact that his sin is a sexual sin is appropriately Puritan. There is also a reflection of his Puritanism in his choice of mistresses. He is not tempted by the primitive and innocent Olga, but is attracted to both Lady Alicia and Alsina Teeswater. His affair with Lady Alicia is never satisfactorily explained, but it is clear that one of her attractions is her ability to give a man at least the illusion of mastery and authority. Alsina, although only barely existing as a character, seems to be essentially a very serious and morally earnest type—a much more appropriate companion for a Puritan to sin with than a primitive type like Olga who would probably not appreciate the significance of the sin.

When Duncan tries to explain the reasons for his infidelity to Chaddie, he also reflects an implicitly Puritan outlook. He feels that she has edged him out of her life because of her total preoccupation with the children, has denied him the sexual aspect of marriage, and has refused to allow him any authority either in their relationship or in the raising of the children.

Leslie Fielder says of Puritanism:

The original Puritan impulse had represented an extreme revulsion from Mariolatry, an absolute refusal to give the female principle its due; the world view of Puritanism is resolutely patriarchal, postulating a Father God, who presides over a church of fathers, and finding women only the occasions for temptation and sin. Women are perhaps temptresses, but by marrying them, men can channel and sanctify their sexual impulses:

Where the Mother of God is rejected as an image, the

---

notion of love sanctified by marriage, of the wife as a secular madonna, takes over the special authority.\textsuperscript{31}

If woman is a temptress she should be so only within the legal bonds of marriage and if she refuses to face up to her sexual obligations she may lose her husband. Duncan's infidelity is partly explained by Chaddie's failure in this respect: "Then Dinky-Dunk, right before the blushing Gershom, accused me of being a love-piker."\textsuperscript{32}

Not only is Duncan denied his sexual privileges, but he is also deprived of his authority:

"The children! That's just the root of the whole intolerable situation. This hasn't been a home for the last three or four years; it's been nothing but a nursery. . . . I'm an accident, of course, an intruder to be faced with fortitude and borne with patience."\textsuperscript{33}

He believes that his loss of authority is harmful to the family:

"And I could stand being deliberately shut out of your life, and shut out of their lives as far as you can manage it, but I can't see that it's doing either them or you any particular good."\textsuperscript{34}

Chaddie recognizes Duncan's need for authority but is unsympathetic:

And never once since Pee-Wee went, have I actually punished either of my children. . . . Their father, I know, will never agree with me on this matter. He will always insist on mastery, open and undisputed mastery, in his own house. He is the head of this Clan McKail, the sovereign of this little circle. For we can say what we will about democracy, but when a child is born unto a man that man unconsciously puts on

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 27.

\textsuperscript{32} The Prairie Child, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 19.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 20.
the purple. He becomes the ruler and sits on the throne of authority. He even seeks to cloak his weakness and his mistakes in that threadbare old fabrication about the divine right of kings.\(^35\)

The root of the problem, as Duncan sees it, is that Chaddie insists on appropriating his authority.

From the beginning there was something in Chaddie that rebelled against authority. This was evident in *The Prairie Wife* where Stringer was concerned with presenting her free and independent spirit. It is not until she becomes a mother, however, that she insists on taking over the authority herself. The whole problem of motherhood quickly becomes the dominant theme in the last two novels of the trilogy, and in a sense the theme of the Puritan versus the American is absorbed into it. It is clear that Duncan's reaction to Chaddie's motherhood is characteristically Puritan. The question is, however, whether Stringer manages to keep Chaddie consistent in her role as the American Eve. Is the myth as applicable to the prairie mother as it was to the prairie wife?

In so far as Eve is the mother of the race the application of the myth might be expected to be successful. Stringer certainly attempts to link the idea of maternity with the image of the fruitful and overflowing Garden of Eden. This is most noticeable in Chaddie's attitude towards the prairie. For her, the prairie is a symbolic equivalent of both the idea of motherhood and of the garden:

But the prairie brings a great peace to my soul. It is so rich, so maternal, so generous. It seems to brood under a passion to give, to yield up, to surrender all that is asked of it. And it is so tranquil. It seems like a bosom breathed on by the breath of God.\(^36\)

This linking of maternity with the image of the garden is perhaps also reflected in Chaddie's preoccupation with milk as "one of the

\(^{35}\)Ibid., pp. 51-52.

\(^{36}\) *The Prairie Wife*, p. 251.
most important issues of motherhood."\(^{37}\)

The idea of Eve as Mother is also implicit in Chaddie's unwillingness to let her children grow up. Duncan tells her that eventually they must lead their own lives, but she is instinctively afraid of this. After the death of one of the children she refuses to punish the other two. In fact she fights like a wild animal to keep them from having to face any of the terror and evil in the world, attacking Duncan when he tries to teach Dinkie to swim and even being willing to shoot him when he attempts to punish the boy. She does not want her children to fall and would keep them in the garden (on the farm) with her for as long as possible.

There is still much of the innocent, independent spirit in Chaddie after she becomes a mother, but it gradually becomes clear that the Eve imagery is less and less relevant. When Duncan goes to be Lady Alicia's hired man she is still able to assert:

"I intend," I cried out with a quaver in my voice, "since you're not able to fill the bill, to be head of this household myself."\(^{38}\)

She then proceeds to give a fairly convincing proof of her ability to take charge of all the practical aspects of farm life. But as Duncan has predicted, life begins to tame her. Dinkie gets lost, partly as a result of her attempt to be both father and mother, and she is forced to send for Duncan. Suddenly her crop is destroyed by a hail storm. The terror and the destructiveness inherent in nature come to the surface and she is defeated. The prairie no longer seems like the fruitful and generous garden paradise. The fact that she has been forced to bow to the forces of nature causes her to bow before the fact of her husband's authority:

I was a down-and-outer now, and at his mercy. He could

\(^{37}\)The Prairie Mother, p. 10.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., pp. 109-110.
have his way with me, without any promise of protest. And whatever he might have done, or might yet do, it was ordained that I in my meekness should bow to the yoke. All that I must remember was that he stood my lord and master. I had made my foolish little struggle to be mistress of my own destiny, and now that I had failed, and failed utterly, I must bend to whatever might be given to me.\textsuperscript{39}

This statement reflects much of the spirit of Puritanism, and Chaddie seems to realize that she is admitting the victory of Duncan's point of view. Indeed, Duncan has returned partly because he feels that he may now be able to assume his rightful place in the family.

Chaddie does not consistently steer the course of submission from this point on. It is after this scene that she makes her most violent attempts to prevent Duncan from asserting his authority over the children, and she still attempts to reduce Duncan's stature by mothering him. Thus, after he has pneumonia, she states:

My Diddums himself, of late, had appealed more to me in his weakness and his unhappiness than in his earlier strength and triumph. There was a time, in fact, when I had almost grown to hate his successes.\textsuperscript{40}

It gradually becomes clear, however, that Chaddie cannot manage to maintain the spirit with which she began. She finds it increasingly difficult to be the captain of her soul.\textsuperscript{41} It also seems plain that her attempt to apply this spirit to her conceptions of motherhood and authority in the family is not successful. Although there is no indication that Duncan's pessimistic predictions about the results of Chaddie's treatment of the children will come true, it is obvious that her rebellion against Duncan and her attempts to mother him have been partly responsible for the break-up of the family.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 269.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 342.

\textsuperscript{41} See Ibid., p. 63, where she states that she intends to be just this.
In spite of these indications of failure on Chaddie's part, however, the situation at the end of *The Prairie Child* suggests that Stringer gives the victory to Chaddie and to the spirit which she has represented throughout most of the trilogy. She remains true to Duncan until his attempts to assert his authority become too demonic and until he is actually beginning divorce proceedings against her. She is then given her reward in the form of Peter Ketley and allowed to go off and begin a new life in what promises to be another Garden of Eden situation.

The solution is unconvincing, partly because Chaddie's spirit has failed her and partly because of another aspect of Chaddie's personality which Stringer has insisted upon throughout the trilogy—her constancy. This constancy theme is never linked to the theme of the American Eve. Constancy is a concept much more easily understood and illustrated by the Puritan because its meaning is made significant only where there is the possibility of inconstancy. It is fair to say, for example, that there is little significance in Chaddie's sexual fidelity. She is almost completely untouched by sexual temptation. Even in the scene with Peter at the windmill when she comes closest to being unfaithful to Duncan she seems to be craving companionship and affection more than anything else. Because she is untouched she does not understand her husband's infidelity. Her constancy, therefore, is meaningless because it is so easy. Although the idea is never developed, there are hints that Alsina Teeswater's constancy is more significant because she is more aware of the meaning of it.

Stringer does, perhaps, make some attempt to explain Chaddie's constancy in terms of the rest of her personality. She is obviously motivated at times by a stubborn determination to prove that her point of view is right and always hates to admit defeat in anything:

I'm still the captain of my soul. I'm still at the wheel, no matter if we are rolling a bit. And life, in some way,

---

42 See Ibid., pp. 245-246.
is still going to be good, still well worth the living!\(^{43}\)

Her attitude towards the land is also expressed in terms of fidelity:

But it's a feeling like loyalty, loyalty to the land that's given us what we have. And it's also a feeling of disliking to see one old rule repeating itself: what has once been a crusade becoming merely a business.\(^{44}\)

This loyalty is also linked with her love for the adventurous. She goes on to say that one of the reasons for her loyalty to the prairie is that "it keeps its spirit of the adventurous."\(^{45}\)

The shallowness of this loyalty is perhaps best illustrated in the scene where she rejects the image of the Lamb of God because lambs are unintelligent and self-centred, and substitutes the idea that God is "a dog, the loving and faithful Watch-Dog of His universe!"\(^{46}\) Duncan immediately calls her blasphemous, but the interesting aspect of her theory is that she seems totally ignorant of the concept of sacrifice and suffering associated with the lamb, and prefers the idea of a blind, rather child-like and optimistic trust. This is why her statement that "whatever it costs, I'm going to make my husband recognize me as a patient and long-suffering Penelope,"\(^{47}\) sounds more like cruelty motivated by a desire to wound than a realization of the real power and meaning of constancy. There is surely nothing convincing, therefore, about her belief that "whatever I may be, or whatever I may have done, I feel that I can still cleanse my heart by sacrifice."\(^{48}\)

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 63.
\(^{44}\)The Prairie Child, p. 44.
\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 45.
\(^{46}\)The Prairie Mother, p. 101.
\(^{47}\)The Prairie Child, p. 274.
\(^{48}\)Ibid., p. 315.
The final proof, however, of the inadequacy of Chaddie's constancy, and of Stringer's inability to relate it to the other themes in the trilogy, is contained in Chaddie's decision to switch her allegiance to Peter. The final scene with Peter is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. The decision is not an easy one for Chaddie. She still hates to give up and admit defeat with Duncan, yet she realizes that her experiences have destroyed many of her ideas of independence and freedom. She is skeptical about the possibility of starting a new life, even insinuating that she will no longer be able to be a symbol of undying youthfulness because she has met with sin and has been left with a tainted past. Her attitudes towards divorce and promiscuity are indications that the fallen world has impinged on her, although she does not seem to think that she herself has fallen. In spite of all this she decides to go with Peter to find a new Eden. The wheel has come full circle and she is starting again: "A wind came out of the North, cool and sweet and balsamic with hope." The implication is that she will be successful this time because she will be with a man who appreciates her spirit and who will not try to assert any of Duncan's Puritanical type of authority over her.

Stringer has obviously failed in his presentation of the Edenic myth as the valid one for prairie life. Chaddie is neither able to preserve her spirit nor prove that it is right in her life with Duncan and she does not seem to be entirely convinced that she will be able to do so with Peter. There are at least two reasons for Stringer's failure: the difficulty of applying the myth to a woman, and the difficulty of applying it to prairie farm life. R. W. B. Lewis, in his discussions of the myth, calls it the myth of the American Adam and rarely mentions Eve. Lewis claims that one of the main characteristics of the hero as Adam is that he is the "hero in space":

First, the hero seems to take his start outside time, or

\[49\text{Ibid.}, \text{ pp. 381-382.}\]
on the very outer edges of it, so that his location is essentially in space alone; and, second, his initial habitat is space as spaciousness, as the unbounded, the area of total possibility.50

Both a quality of timelessness and rootlessness are essential. This may have been possible for man, and perhaps even for woman in the first migratory and adventurous stages of pioneering, but it could hardly be possible for the prairie farm mother. As Chaddie says:

Yet, when all is said and done, I am one of a family. I am not a free agent. I am chained to the oar of our own Ego to remember.51

The myth is not applicable to either men or women who are involved in a situation where the conscious search for roots and the motive of settlement is predominant. The notion of the American Adam could never be too meaningful to the Canadian prairie farmer. Cooper could perhaps use the prairie as a symbol of the empty space where the American Adam could thrive, but he could only do so by displaying contempt for the man who wanted to settle down and farm on it.52 Stringer was bound to have difficulties when he chose as his setting the prairie farm, and his characters the people who wanted to settle down on it. It is significant that his was both the first and last serious attempt to present this myth as a valid one for the Canadian prairie.

Stringer seems unaware of the inadequacy of this myth at this point, although it is interesting that in a later novel, Intruders in Eden, he realizes it. In the trilogy, however, it is the only point of view he is willing to present charitably. His treatment of Puritanism is so superficial and so prejudiced that it is never given

50 The American Adam, p. 91.
51 The Prairie Child, p. 260.
52 See, for example, the figure of Ishmael Bush in The Prairie.
the chance to become an alternative myth. The deterioration of Duncan's character is shown in ludicrous and exaggerrated terms and it is clear that Stringer was anything but sympathetic towards him. McCourt notices this and agrees with Stringer:

The final picture of a grossly fat Duncan McKail smoking an expensive cigar and swilling alcohol before going down to the office where his paramour is waiting for him, leaving Chaddie to return by herself to the farm—where Peter is waiting for her—is so crudely melodramatic as to outrage the sensibilities of all but the most insensitive reader. But the picture is not without an element of poetic justice. After all, what end could be more appropriate for a tousle-headed six-footer who permits his wife to call him Dinky-Dunk?53

It is possible, however, to feel more charitable than this towards Duncan, especially when the inadequacies in Chaddie's character become obvious. A feeling at the end of the trilogy that the resolution would have been more satisfactory had Chaddie learned a few lessons from Duncan's Puritanical sermons would be natural. So would a feeling that despite Duncan's end, his predictions and analyses of the situation are closer to the truth than are Chaddie's. But these are only deductions and feelings. It is only in later Canadian prairie fiction that the Puritan myth is treated with more sympathy and understanding.

53 The Canadian West in Fiction, p. 81.
CHAPTER III

ROBERT J. C. STEAD

Arthur Stringer could be said to have made a significant contribution to prairie fiction in his attempt to portray the life of the prairie farmer, but to go directly from his trilogy to Robert J. C. Stead's best novel, Grain, is to enter a world which makes Stringer's look like an imaginary fairy-land in comparison. Grain is a novel which is almost completely based on the actual details and activities of farm life. Stringer had perhaps been wise enough to choose the characteristic setting, but Stead gave that setting the place of primary importance in his novel and, in describing it, gave it an authentic reality and life never before evident in prairie fiction. Indeed, with Grain, Canadian prairie fiction suddenly took an enormous step towards maturity.¹

Much the same kind of development can be seen in a comparison of Stead's six earlier novels with Grain. None of the six was worthy of much consideration or gave any hint that Stead was capable of writing a novel like Grain. Saunders attempts an explanation of the sudden improvement in Stead's talent:

It is possible that for years before he started on the manuscript of Grain he had determined to try his hand

¹It is impossible to speak of development here in chronological terms or to imply that Stead began a movement towards maturity. Grain was published in 1926, a year after the publication of Ostenso's Wild Geese and Grove's Settlers of the Marsh, and although Thomas Saunders argues that internal evidence indicates that Stead wrote Grain well before 1925 (Introduction to Grain, New Canadian Library No. 36, Toronto, 1963, p. vii), the fact is that all three novels were produced quite independently of each other, and each represented a movement towards maturity. Stead is placed first in this discussion because the theme of Puritanism in his novel is less consciously or articulately dealt with than it is in Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh.
at a novel of permanent value, and because the farm life of
his boyhood was the life he knew most intimately, it was a
novel in this setting that he had in mind... 
Grain, then, is significant not only for what it is in itself but
for the act of courage that it involved. It meant Stead's
turning his back on the easy success he had already achieved
and venturing on something more satisfying to him personally,
in which no success—critical or popular—was guaranteed.2

It is dangerous to assume that Stead was not really serious
when he wrote his first six novels. It is true that they are not
good novels, but they do not indicate a lack of seriousness. They
do illustrate a common failure of early writers in a new society, a
failure to know the situation well and to have faith in it. Stead's
greatest contribution in Grain was his intimate knowledge of the
farm, and his act of courage, if there was one, was perhaps more
involved in his willingness to believe that farm life contained
elements which could produce interesting and serious fiction. He
may have been aware that he was risking the loss of most of his
readership by writing Grain, but it is more significant that he
could believe that a description of ordinary farm life could be "a
novel of permanent value."

Whatever the reasons for the writing of Grain, the novel was
certainly significantly different from previous prairie fiction. The
most obvious difference, the sense of reality and authenticity, has
been noted. This seems to have been achieved by a decision on Stead's
part to limit himself severely. In a sense Grain is a much less
"ambitious" novel than Stringer's trilogy or Stead's own previous work.
Instead of choosing a wide canvas or a wide variety of character types,
he limited himself to a description of an ordinary situation and very
ordinary people.3 This limitation is also reflected in his style.

2 Introduction to Grain, New Canadian Library No. 36 (Toronto,

3 The fact that Stead felt it necessary, towards the end of Grain,
to introduce a set of less ordinary characters from another novel,
The Smoking Flax, indicates what a difficult task such a limitation
could be and also indicates perhaps that Stead was not entirely sure
of its validity.
The characters neither speak nor think in a manner inappropriate to their general level of education and experience and there is little evidence of the omnipotent author imposing theories or insisting upon articulate expression in a situation where it could hardly be expected. Any problems presented or solutions suggested are expressed in the inarticulate and indirect fashion suitable to the characters.

Stead must have been aware of the dangers of such a limitation. The novel might easily seem trite and insignificant. He was trying to deal with serious and significant themes, and yet the "ordinariness" of the situation would prevent any suggestion of high tragedy or deeply profound conflicts and resolutions. Perhaps it was a realization of this problem which caused him to introduce an element of humour into the novel. This humour prevents the tone from becoming too serious but does not prevent Stead from dealing with serious themes.

The more specific problem of the place and treatment of Puritanism in the novel must also be approached with an awareness of Stead's particular method of presentation. Thus, although the Stakes are representative of an ordinary kind of Puritanism and Stead often uses humour to convey the fact that they are neither very articulate nor concerned with some aspects of their religious life, there are many indications in the novel that it has a serious and significant influence on their lives. As a character from another of Stead's novels states:

Any philosophy which accepts the principle that the great, over-shadowing events of life are subject to an intelligent controlling influence must of necessity grant that the same principle applies to the most commonplace and everyday experiences.⁴

Stead establishes the fact that the Stakes are Puritan, and that he, himself, has a similar background, in a few humourous

scenes at the beginning of the novel. He betrays his own biblical and religious orientation in his reference to Gander's instinctive grasp of the creation story, and in his statement about Gander's mother: "The promise (or threat?) of Genesis 3:16, postponed in the case of Susie Stake, was now being fulfilled." The religion of the Stake family is first illustrated by their practice of saying a blessing before meals and by the scene in which Gander is christened. Of the blessing Stead says:

It was Jackson Stake's practice to ask a blessing before meals—a commendable hangover from his Puritan ancestry. The exact purport of this ceremony Gander had never been able to learn as his father always confided in his plate, rattling the words off in a great hurry, as though in fear of being caught at it. It was Gander's belief that the purpose of the blessing was to give everyone an equal start.

The christening scene is marked by Gander's surprise at hearing an audible blessing, his anger at not being given a chicken leg, and his indignation at being washed again.

These scenes do much to define the inarticulate nature of the Stakes' religion, but they also serve to prepare the reader for a later realization of the force that such a religion can exert. Stead is laughing at the frills, but preparing the way for the deeper implications. He explicitly mentions these deeper implications only very rarely. At one point he states of Gander:


6Ibid., p. 38: To the woman he said,
"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

7Ibid., p. 21.

8Ibid., pp. 20-22.
Gander, whatever his faults, was a believer in the truth. Generations of Puritan ancestry had woven a fibre into his character that still held taut on most of the fundamentals.9

These fundamentals are described in more detail in an earlier passage:

There had been no great show of religious teaching among the Stakes, yet religion, and with it a code of strict moral ethics, was the unwritten background of their existence. Just as they hid their sentiment from each other and held it a weakness to show any sign of family affection, so also they concealed their religious life, still and deep, behind a mask of matter-of-factness. Yet they knew good from evil, and no Stake had ever called evil good.10

Thus, both in his humour and his explicit statements, Stead indicates the place of Puritanism in Grain. Although it may be occasionally laughed at and concealed behind "a mask of matter-of-factness," it is nevertheless an important force in the novel. An examination of some of the main themes reveals its influence. This influence is itself "still and deep," often only implied, but always present.

One of the most important themes in Grain is the problem of authority. This problem is especially important for Gander and his brother Jackie and their different reactions to it reflect some of the basic tensions and attitudes within Puritanism. A brief discussion of the traditional Puritan doctrine of authority will make this clear.

The original Puritan revolt was a revolt against the kind of authority found in the Roman Catholic Church. It was noted in the previous chapter that this involved a revolt against Mariolatry and a return to a patriarchal type of authority, but the rebellion went deeper than that. William Haller traces its origins to the social

9 Ibid., p. 157.
10 Ibid., p. 63.
and political consciousness of the time:

The dynamic Pauline doctrine of faith, with its insistence on the overruling power of God, on the equality of man before God, and on the immanence of God in the individual soul, had long appealed to the English mind, and the struggle of the English people to secure their independence from foreign power as symbolized to them by the papacy had confirmed that appeal.\(^\text{11}\)

The revolt was essentially a revolt against an imposed authority which seemed to give little freedom or responsibility to the people upon which it was imposed. In their attempt to lessen the authority of the Church the Puritans emphasized the authority of scripture.

The Puritan doctrine of God, with its emphasis on his supreme and omnipotent will, is a complicated one, related as it is to the doctrines of sin, predestination, and the elect. For the problem of authority, however, it is perhaps enough to say that the Puritan stood alone before God and that no one could presume to understand the divine providence completely or to tell any other man exactly what God intended for him. The individual was to be judged solely by God. Authority was transferred from the hands of the Church to the inner conscience of man.

The Puritans placed more emphasis on the authority of scripture by insisting that it was "the word of God from one end to the other, a complete body of laws, an absolute code in everything it touched upon."\(^\text{12}\) They did this partly because of their resentment of the Catholic belief that the Bible should be interpreted to the people by the Church and partly because of their emphasis on sin which led them to distrust man's reason. Since man's reasoning powers were imperfect:

God must draw up for man in black and white an exhaustive and authoritative code of laws, where he can find them in


The difficulties in this solution, especially in terms of the problem of authority, were soon evident. This attitude towards the Bible not only resulted in the establishment of a strict moral code and rigid biblical authority, but inevitably led back to a reliance on the authority of the Church. The fact that the Bible would always have to be interpreted by experts could not be escaped, and because they had placed even more emphasis on the Bible, the Puritans ended up placing even more authority in the hands of the expert.

The tensions within these doctrines can now be seen more clearly. On the one hand, there is a rejection of authority and a belief in the right of the individual to stand alone before God and to be judged solely by him. On the other hand, there is an insistence on the authority of the moral law and the scripture and on the necessity for an authority which can define and impose the law. The Puritan is both a rebel and a slave.

Gander Stake reflects all these attitudes and tensions in his life. First of all, his independence is insisted upon: "It was born in Gander's blood to take orders from none . . . . The obeying of orders clashed with his sense of independence." This independence of Gander's seems to stem more from a fear of an imposed authority from something outside his experience than from a fear of authority itself. The only time he really rejects authority and asserts his independence is when he refuses to join the army. To begin with, the war seems totally unreal to him:

After all, the war was away in Belgium or some such place, which was in Europe or Asia or some such place. Gander was not very sure of his geography, but of this much he was sure, that the

13 Ibid., p. 52.
14 Grain, p. 59.
Atlantic Ocean lay between, and the British Navy ruled the Atlantic Ocean, so what was there to worry about? \(^{15}\)

Secondly, he cannot see any sense in army discipline:

So this was war? Strutting about on a vacant lot, like a flock of mating prairie chickens! Being told you don't know one foot from another—and proving it! \(^{16}\)

He explains to Jo Burge that he has "too much spirit to be a soldier," \(^{17}\) and she taunts him:

"So that's it?" she said, at length. "You're too good to take orders? Too big a man to be told what to do? If everybody was like you, who'd stop the Germans?" \(^{18}\)

He replies:

"Well, I guess I could stop my share, if it came to that, an' without doin' a square dance in front o' them." \(^{19}\)

The point is not that Gander will not submit to authority, but that he will only submit to an authority that makes sense to him and that does not destroy his dignity and freedom. He reflects the same spirit that caused the original Puritans to cast off a foreign and alien authority and yet substitute an equally difficult and demanding one in its place. For in spite of all his protests, Gander is represented as bowing to authority in almost every aspect of his life. The best

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 106.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 125.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 131.

\(^{18}\)Ibid.

\(^{19}\)Ibid.
examples of his submission are found in his relationship with the land, his relationship with his father, and attitudes towards work and sex.

Gander's ultimate authority is the land. In a sense it almost seems to have created him, and it is from the land that he takes his life and being. "This was his native environment; he was no more lonely on these prairies than is the coyote or the badger." What is significant for this discussion is the fact that Gander's God is a benevolent one. Gander, like one of the elect, is at peace with God and is spared the terrible, stern, and judgmental aspects of his nature. That Stead is much like Gander in this respect is hinted at by A. T. Elder in a discussion of Stead's realism:

Although Stead has been praised by all his critics for his realism, a reading of his seven novels proves that it is a limited realism. The details are accurate, but carefully selected, and despite occasional references to the hardship of life on the prairies, the privations of the settlers are submerged in a generally buoyant tone.

Although the land is basically benevolent in *Grain*, it is not benevolent in the sense that Stringer had tried to imply that it was. There is no suggestion that it is overflowing with milk and honey which are there for anyone to take. Stead seems to imply that it is benevolent in a more Puritan sense, that if it is obeyed it will ultimately reward. Thus he does not completely ignore the harsher aspects of the land and even seems to suggest at times that they are necessary. This attitude is perhaps best illustrated in the symbolic meaning of the grain in the novel. In the threshing operation the result is "chaff and straw and dirt—and some grain!

---

20 Ibid., p. 56.

21 "Western Panorama: Settings and Themes in Robert J. C. Stead," *Canadian Literature*, No. 17 (Summer, 1963), p. 48. This is also reminiscent of Ralph Connor's type of Puritanism, with its emphasis on a benevolent God and the possibility of salvation for everyone.

22 *Grain*, p. 103.
It is Minnie who gives the symbolic meaning when she states:

"I have often thought life is like a thresher, pouring out its cloud of straw and chaff and dust, and a little grain. A little hard, yellow, golden grain, that has in it the essence of life, Gander!"^23

The grain is what is most important and worthwhile but it is not gleaned easily nor without waste. The ultimate reward may be gained only imperfectly or after hardship, but the vision of it makes less important the harsher side of the struggle.

Another example of this attitude is found in the scenes connected with the first rain-storm in the novel. Gander's closeness to the land and its primary importance to him is reflected in his joy at the thought of rain and in its ability to put even the thought of his love for Jo Burge out of his mind:

Yet for the moment he was happy, and Jo was not uppermost in his thoughts. Here was rain, rain! Rain, the first love of every farmer, the bride of every dry, thirsty field, the mother of every crop that grows! Gander was a farmer. All his instincts were rooted deep in the soil.^24

The rain stops, however. Gander's God does not bestow his grace automatically:

Gander's jaw was grim and set. There was something fearful and majestic about him as he gazed defiantly at the empty sky, defiantly, perhaps, at God.^25

But his God does not in the end, let him down. Later that night the rain comes in the midst of a lightning storm. Again the reward is not given without condition. Minnie is seriously frightened because the lightning is so close and there is a suggestion of a real

^23Ibid., p. 204.
^24Ibid., p. 79.
^25Ibid.
danger that Mr. Fyfe could be killed by it. Gander, however, is serene, thinking only of the healing quality of the rain and quite willing to accept the accompanying danger and inherent destructiveness of the storm. Salvation comes through submission and acceptance.

Gander displays a similar attitude in his relationship with his father. Stead makes this even clearer by comparing Gander with his older brother Jackie. Jackie is never fully developed as a character in the novel, but his most important act is his rejection of his father's authority. He announces one day: "'Dad, I'm doing a man's work and I think I ought to get a man's pay.'" He feels that because he works for his father and does not get paid for it he has no independence. He must ask for every cent that he ever receives. Jackson Senior cannot understand his attitude, since he gets every cent he asks for and because "'there's more ways of payin' than writin' a cheque . . . . I been payin' instalments on you ever since you was born, Jackie, an' before.'" Jackie, ought therefore to be content to work on the farm and to submit to the work and discipline gladly, thereby submitting to the fact of his dependence on his father. He cannot do this, however, and leaves home.

Gander, on the other hand, is quite content. "'True, Gander did not get the thirty dollars a month—nor did he expect it.'" He never demands anything of his father and never seems even to consider rebelling. When he is asked to work for Bill Powers he consults his father first, and even when he has been paid he does not immediately assume that the money will be his. He seems prepared to argue for it, but does not indicate that he would ever leave home over it.

The difference between the two boys' relationship with their father is related to their attitude towards work. Jackie seems to see work only as a means of making money. By working for his father he has no independence because he has no money of his own. It does

26 Ibid., p. 42.
27 Ibid., p. 43.
28 Ibid., p. 42.
not seem to matter to him what kind of work he does. Gander, however, is more concerned with the work and less interested in money. His natural environment is the farm and just as he feels that by obeying the land it will yield its rewards, so he seems to feel that it is only by working on the farm, and submitting to his father and his father's work, that he will really achieve independence. "He was working for his father and with his father, and that was enough."\textsuperscript{29} Gander is quite content to go about his father's business, and since his father's business is the business of his God, the work is meaningful and the relationship between father and son one of co-operation:

Gander reacted toward his father perfectly. They were friends and chums together.\textsuperscript{30}

His relationship with his father is like his relationship with the land. Because Gander loves the work and is willing to submit to its discipline of long hours and physical strain, his father rewards him by being a benevolent authority.

Gander instinctively finds the ideal Puritan solution to the problem of authority and freedom. He realizes that the supreme authority is not malevolent, that the divine plan is good, and that by submitting to that authority and working with it he can find meaning and purpose in life. Although the plan may not always be perfectly clear, there is no sense in protesting against it. By co-operating with it the meaning will gradually become clearer. Man is somewhat like the colt, Jim, which Stead describes, only given more ability to understand:

Jim's first glimpse of the serious side of life had been in the fall ploughing. There he bent a surprised and protesting shoulder into his collar, marvelling the while at the strange turn in events which had taken him from the freedom of the pasture field to the irksome monotony of dragging a

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 59.
Jackie kicks over the traces and refuses to play the game, but Gander has "some glimmering of life's plan" and submits himself to it.

Similar problems and solutions are found in another important theme in the novel, the attitude towards sex. Again there is an attempt at a comparison between Gander and Jackie. Jackie's rebellion against the farm and his father leads him into a rebellion against Puritan sexual morality also. The consequences of Jackie's rebellion are never developed fully and even the few indications of their seriousness are obscured by the introduction of the sentimental Cal Beach-Reed plot. Jackie has fathered an illegitimate son, a fact that would perhaps have had more significance if Stead had not been forced to emphasize the happy ending to Reed's story. It is clear, however, that Jackie's character gradually deteriorates throughout the novel until his life seems completely ruined.

Jackie's original rebellion was at least understandable and presented fairly sympathetically. Even his father admits that he

31 Ibid., p. 118. Nellie McClung expresses this attitude more articulately than Gander ever does in her story of her wounded dog. She strikes out at the cruel and mysterious ways of God but, by thinking of her mother and the work of the farm, works her way through to an understanding of his purpose:

Mother's face looked heavenly to me. I couldn't put it into words, but some glimmering of life's plan swept across my mind. Sorrow and joy, pain and gladness, triumph and defeat were in that plan, just as day and night; winter and summer, cold and heat, tears and laughter. We couldn't refuse it, we must go on. We couldn't go and sulk in a corner and say we wouldn't play.

Work! That was life's remedy. Not philosophy or explanations. There was no formula, no answer for the old problems. But we could go on. We had to go on. We were like horses on horse power engines, travelling in circles, not knowing why we were doing it, but just as they were accomplishing something, maybe we were too (Clearing in the West, Toronto, 1964, pp. 143-144).
had always done his share of the work. When he finally returns to the farm, admitting rather flippantly that he is the prodigal son, he submits to his father's ultimatum that he can only stay if he is willing to work. He cannot escape his past, however. It is not only present with him in the form of his son but it affects his attitude towards the farm. Thus his deterioration shows itself in his attempt to blackmail Cal and his refusal to do any work: "Young Jackson still stayed about the farm but took little part in its labour; in spite of the conditions laid down by his father he spent most of his time fishing in the lake, shooting gophers, or roaming over the prairie." Though it is implied at the end of the novel that he repents, he is last seen rather ignominiously hopping a freight train and fleeing again. His sexual misconduct prevents him from achieving peace within himself.

Jackie's attitude towards sex is never mentioned in the novel, but Stead surely implies that his failure lies partly in his rejection of Puritan sexual morality. Gander's attitude is explained much more fully and he differs from his brother in never swerving from the Puritan standards. Again he seems to find the solutions almost instinctively, although he has much more of a struggle with this problem than he ever did with the problems of authority and work.

The Stake family is typically Puritan in its reluctance to give Gander any explicit instruction in the facts of life or in details of the appropriate moral standards. His first learning experiences come through the farm and his schoolmates:

Life on a mixed farm where stock-raising is combined with grain-growing is lived close to the fundamentals. Gander, from his own observations and from the conversation bandied about among the farmers' boys at school, had long since outgrown that uninformed condition sometimes described as innocence. His mind was groping into new experiences, instinctively, but blindly, instinctively because he was a healthy human being and blindly because those who should have guided him were restrained by shyness from turning a single

\[32\textit{Grain}, \text{p. 184.}\]
ray of light upon his path. 33

At this point he comes under the influence of the hired man, Bill, who holds principles opposed to Puritanism: "Here was a man who opened to him a life which, although it shocked his principles, had the appeal of fascinating adventure." 34 Bill is responsible for beginning the struggle within Gander between his instinctive Puritan standards and his desire to insist upon the fulfillment of his sexuality. When Bill leaves, Gander's struggle becomes clear:

Gander had been sorry to see him go, and yet he was conscious in his own heart that the man's influence over him had been evil. . . . His whole viewpoint on life had changed. 35

In a sense, he has fallen, for he thinks that only his shyness prevents him from sinning boldly. Stead seems to imply, however, that his moral sense is just as responsible for saving him from sin:

It seemed strange to Gander that he had never discussed Jo. . . . And in this simple distinction, without knowing it, he belied all Bill's theories. Jo he kept to himself, held apart, as one different, superior. Jo was for him, for no one else. And he had not the courage to assert his right. That was why he despised himself as he turned black furrows in his father's field, and blacker thoughts in his own mind. 36

What bothers Gander most is that he is incapable of choosing either good or evil. His shyness, his principles, and external circumstances seem to be forcing virtue upon him without any decision on his part. Thus when he thinks that a strange boy is going to prevent him from being alone with Jo he is angry at his powerlessness in the situation:

33 Ibid., p. 63.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., p. 68.
36 Ibid.
Virtue was being thrust upon him, intolerably thrust upon him. From somewhere it came into Gander's mind that forces which he did not understand persisted in overriding him. His independence was being challenged.\(^{37}\)

Even when the strange boy turns out to be Jo he misses his opportunity because of his shyness. He goes home that night ashamed because he was too shy and yet still not convinced that he should yield to temptation.

The answer comes later that night in the midst of the rain storm. The rain is a symbol of God's grace being poured out on the prairie and the trust and faith of his sister gives him the reasons for choosing virtue:

When Gander left school and threw himself into the work of the farm the girl Jo had occupied only a small part of his thoughts until the hired man Bill had kindled his imagination along new and dangerous lines. That spark had been quenched, or at least subdued, by his curious reaction to the trust and hero-worship of his sister Minnie during the storm that night when they were alone in the house together. Gander was not a deep psychologist, but he had been unable to escape the conclusion that Jo was Tommy's sister, just as Minnie was his sister.\(^{38}\)

The answer that is given to Gander is a typically Puritan one. He realizes that he will never really achieve independence and dignity by insistence on his own selfish interests. Just as he felt most a man when he was submitting to his duty to protect his sister, and in answering the door, choosing to do something he did not want to do, and indeed was afraid to do, so he realizes that he would really deny his manhood if he were only to use Jo. His relationship with her would then be a destructive one. In the storm scene he is given the vision that only by choosing to submit himself to the authority of his moral code will he be truly independent, just as he has always realized instinctively that by acknowledging his dependence on

\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 73.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., p. 104.
the land and submitting to the authority of work he has been able to gain independence.

The truth of this realization is presented very vividly in the scene later in the novel where he tries to explain to Jo why he did not join the army. Gander has never been quite certain about the rightness of his rejection of the army. Even when he is most pleased with himself for taunting the Sergeant, he reflects:

But that was all on the surface. Down underneath was a gnawing sense—a sense that he was running away from something, that he was a fugitive, taking refuge on the farm! 39

In the scene with Jo he feels that his reasons have also failed to convince her, and he can finally express them only by attacking her, forcing her to prance around like the soldiers, and then chasing her with a sudden upsurge of sexual passion. He is trying to assert his independence from the authority of the army and also seems to be making one last attempt to free himself from the authority of his sexual principles. The lesson he had learned during the storm is brought home to him in dramatic terms. He learns finally that brute mastery and surrender to his own selfish interests will not work, for he loses Jo completely because of his actions during this scene. By linking the sexual theme with the army theme, here, Stead also implies that Gander's rejection of the army has been basically wrong.

This suggestion of Gander's failure is re-inforced in the last scene in the novel where once again Gander is tempted to take advantage of Jo's situation in order to fulfill his need for love and sex. Again he realizes that this is not a valid answer, and in doing so, also seems to realize that neither was his rejection of the army. He thinks of the night of the storm again:

How he had counted himself a coward, until Minnie had praised him for his bravery. How she had crawled into his arms for

39 Ibid., p. 126.
comfort and protection.  

Then, "for the first time in his life he looked Gander Stake in the face," reflecting:

"You haven't made much of it, Gander, have you?" he demanded bitterly. "Not very much of it. You wouldn't take discipline—I think that's what they call it, that 'Form fours' stuff—and here you are. . . . Here you are."

"Gander," he said at length, "now you will take your medicine, and you will take it from yourself. Form fours!"

He leaves for the city.

The way in which Gander chooses to take his medicine and submits to discipline has been criticized. Thomas Saunders says:

Young people, of course, leave the farm for the city all the time. But all we have learned of Gander Stake up to this final denouement would lead us to believe that he would not be one of them. If ever a character belonged on the farm, it was he.

This is true and the ending of the novel is weakened by just this fact. We must remember, however, that Gander also loves machines and that he is going to be a mechanic. Also, Stead implies that since Gander has decided to punish himself, part of this punishment will lie in his renunciation of the farm life which he loves so much. Although this seems partly valid because the theme of renunciation has been so strong in the novel, it points to the basic weakness in the final resolution, the attempt to link the renunciation with the idea of flight.

Flight is never really a satisfactory solution for a Puritan and Stead has certainly given indication earlier in the novel that he also sees it as a weakness. Jackie's flight from the farm was in a sense his original sin from which all his others followed. Gander's

---

40 Ibid., p. 206.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., pp. 206-207.
uneasiness about not joining the army seemed to stem from a feeling that he was running away from something, that he was a fugitive. Suddenly, at the end of the novel, however, flight is the only solution for Gander. One of the reasons for this appears to have been the difficulty which Stead encountered in trying to connect Gander's story with the story of the characters he had rather artificially introduced from *The Smoking Flax* and with the character, Jerry Chandsley.

Jerry is perhaps intended to be Gander's reward for doing the right thing as far as the sexual problem is concerned. Just as Gander has been rewarded for obeying the discipline of the land, his work, and his father, so he must be rewarded for obeying the Puritan sexual standards. Stead is perhaps doing the same thing here as he did in *Dennison Grant* when he rewarded Dennison for giving up Zen by giving him a second chance with Phyllis Bruce. Gander, however, has to go to the city to find Jerry again. He is forced to leave the farm, the only place where he would ever seem likely to find a meaningful reward.

It is in the story of Cal Beach and Reed and of the older Jackie that the problems are most acute. This sub-plot is never developed well nor convincingly integrated into the main plot of the novel. Thus, Jackie's final flight, although intended to be motivated by honourable intentions, is unconvincing, and Cal's flight from the farm is never explained entirely satisfactorily either. Minnie draws all these themes together when she tries to persuade Gander to leave. She says of Jackie:

> That night he disappeared. I think he had seen things in their true light, and for Reed's sake he disappeared. Just as, for Reed's sake, Cal left here, that the secret might be safe.45

And Gander draws the moral: "Sometimes it is the brave man that

---

43 Introduction to *Grain*, p. ix.
44 *Grain*, p. 126.
runs away, isn't it?"  

The moral is unconvincing because if Gander has learned anything it is that finally you cannot run away. The brave man renounces his own interests and faces up to discipline and authority. Certainly this renunciation is intended to be the basic factor in Gander's decision to leave, but the flight seems to suggest more of an escape from the problem than a facing up to it. Minnie says:

"If I were you, I would get out, Gander. The world is big. If you get out you may forget—at least, you will get away from the edge of the precipice. If you stay here you will always be in danger of slipping over."

The Puritan would certainly answer here that meaningful action can only take place when man wrestles with the precipice and finds his salvation in a decision not to slip over. Failure lies in letting yourself slip, but success does not lie in simply avoiding or ignoring the problems. Life must be lived on the edge of the precipice so that the danger of slipping over gives meaning to the achievement of not slipping.

The weak ending, caused by the introduction of unnecessary characters and the difficulty involved in trying to present flight as a solution, weakens the impact of the whole novel. This is especially true when Stead's stylistic techniques are considered. For example, one of Stead's original intentions seems to have been to begin with the more humourous and superficial aspects of Puritanism and to gradually probe deeper and deeper into the more basic and influential aspects of it. This is perhaps why the humour fades more and more into the background as the story progresses. By faltering

46Ibid.
48That this is Stead's basic position is emphasized in the endings of two of his other novels. Thus, in The Homesteaders, Gardener's final failure is symbolized by "the marks cut by a horse's feet sliding over the precipice" (Toronto, 1916, p. 346; italics Stead's), and Dennison Grant's achievement of wisdom is symbolized in his remark to Phyllis:
at the climax, however, and leaving questions in the reader's mind, Stead lessens the impact of this development which should have culminated in a final and satisfying vision.

Another of Stead's intentions may have been to organize the novel along biblical parallels. Gander's story is divided into three sections roughly corresponding to the Creation, the Fall, and Salvation. In the first few scenes there are explicit, if humorous, references to Genesis, and Gander's discovery of the world in which he has suddenly found himself is outlined. With puberty, and with the hired man, Bill, comes his Fall. The rain storm which God gives to the prairie, just like the saviour which God gave the world, brings the possibility of salvation. The rest of the story is the working out of the meaning of this salvation for Gander. The plot from The Smoking Flax does not fit into this framework and indeed obscures it. Without this sub-plot Grain would have been a much more consistent and stronger novel, and the place of Puritanism within it would have been more significant.

The novel might also be criticized for the type of Puritanism it presents. Stead makes it sound too easy by concentrating on the benevolent and optimistic aspects of it. His picture of the prairie is too one-sided. There are no terrible hail-storms that destroy crops, blizzards that kill men, nor droughts that destroy their souls. Gander's God is particularly easy on him. Similarly, Gander's struggles are sometimes fairly meaningless because he seems to be one of the elect, destined to succeed, just as his brother Jackie seems to be one of the damned, doomed to failure. Perhaps if Stead had developed Jackie's story more and explored the differences between him and Gander more fully, the picture would have been less one-sided.

Stead says at the beginning of the novel: "there was in Gander

that: 

"Little Willie christened me The Man-on-the-Hill . . . . I have tried to live on the hill, but I need you to keep me from falling off!" (Dennison Grant, Toronto, 1920, p. 387).
Stake little of that quality which is associated with the clash of righteous steel or the impact of noble purposes.\(^\text{49}\) He was essentially an ordinary farmer and an ordinary Puritan. But while the Puritanism in Grain is fairly ordinary, it is not thereby shallow. As Stead goes on to say of Gander: "yet that he was without heroic fibre I will not admit."\(^\text{50}\) Stead's greatest achievement is that he has managed to portray the heroic in the ordinary and the profound in what often looks like the superficial.

\(^\text{49}\) Grain, p. 15.

\(^\text{50}\) Ibid.
In subject matter and setting Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* is similar to Stead's *Grain*. The chief characters in both novels are the members of farm families. *Wild Geese* is set in a northern Manitoban farm community and *Grain* in a southwestern one. Nature seems a bit more harsh in *Wild Geese* and the community slightly newer and less settled than in *Grain*, but the Gares and the Stakes are at much the same stage in the development of their farms and Caleb Gare is just as materially successful at farming as Jackson Stake. To all outward appearances the two farms are quite similar.

Yet the land which yields its rewards to both families is loved by Gander Stake and hated by the members of the Gare family. Working on the land gives Gander's life meaning and purpose, but seems to destroy the souls of the Gare children. A rain storm brings salvation to Gander and nothing but fear and hatred to the Gares. In *Grain*, Gander's plunge through the ice in winter time is followed by help and a warm bed; in *Wild Geese*, two men are killed by a blizzard because Caleb Gare will not help them. The isolation which is an inevitable part of man's life on the prairie does not cause Gander to be lonely. In *Wild Geese*, isolation is an overwhelming and terrifying force. The neighbours who should be able to lessen the sense of isolation either help the Stakes or are helped by them. In *Wild Geese* they are avoided and plotted against. The family in *Grain* has its defects but is basically close and supportive. In *Wild Geese* family relationships are destructive and filled with fear and hatred.

Stead and Ostenso are both writing about similar aspects of prairie life, but they do so from two completely different points of view or concepts of reality. The basic difference seems to stem from the two different doctrines of God which are found in the two.
novels. Stead's God is the benevolent and fairly approachable God of optimistic Puritanism. The God that is presented in *Wild Geese* is just the opposite—cruel, tyrannical, mysterious, and ultimately unapproachable. This God might be closer to what Jackie Stake's conception of God would have been had Stead developed his character more fully. Stead, however, avoided the harsher aspects of God and concentrated on the areas that have traditionally brought comfort and hope to the Puritan. The God in *Wild Geese* may seem to bear no resemblance to the God in *Grain* but he is just as much a Puritan God as is Stead's.

Puritanism, with its emphasis on the sinfulness of man and on an all-powerful God who works out his plan for the universe regardless of what the universe thinks about it, or tries to do about it, carries within itself the danger that the omnipotence of God will become too overwhelming for man:

Finally, in its anxiety to avoid the excesses made possible by the medieval theory of salvation through good works, Calvinism 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. This approach to the problem of evil, although it conformed to a literal interpretation of the story of Adam's fall, made necessary the concept of a God so all-powerful and so arbitrary in the working out of His will as to seem inhuman in His remoteness and inaccessible by any ordinary means of prayer or intercession.\(^1\)

The Puritan may easily begin to feel that he is being forced to be a slave to a completely tyrannical and cruel master.

The problems involved in this doctrine of God were traditionally solved by an appeal to nature and to the scriptures, and by an emphasis on the fact that because God sent Christ his motive must have been love and his ultimate plan must be good:

Calvin's theological system is based on acceptance of the complete sovereignty of God, and of the ultimate inability of man to comprehend His true nature. Yet, since knowledge of God, and of himself is man's highest duty, he must constantly strive, through the lessons of nature and the revealed word of God in the Bible to achieve some measure of understanding. God is the source of all good, and obedience to God's will is to be absolute. Before the Fall, man was good, and capable of obeying God's will, but since then he has been incapable of goodness, or of influencing to the slightest degree by good works his election or reprobation. From this state of depravity some men are undeservedly rescued by the death of Christ on the cross; and since the sending of Christ into the world was a free act on God's part, it is thus an evidence of his love toward mankind.  

Nature seems to teach Gander Stake all the right lessons. Partly as a result of his relationship to the land he learns the value of obedience. The benevolence of nature seems to give him an instinctive awareness of the benevolence of God. Gander is one of the elect, "undeservedly rescued" from sin and granted a life filled with grace and meaning. Stead believes in the God he presents in Grain and is confident that man can at least partially understand his plan and co-operate with him in working it out.

Martha Ostenso seems to have come to the conclusion that the Puritan God is indeed too inaccessible ever to be understood by man. She thinks that ultimately man stands alone facing an unfathomable mystery and that any attempts that he makes to understand this mystery will only reveal the arbitrariness and cruelty of it. She attempts to prove, although she is not always consistent in this, that Nature teaches man more about his essential loneliness, revealing a God who is not concerned about man's welfare and who often seems intent on destroying him. She does not believe that man can find meaning by obeying and co-operating with this God and tries to present her own solution to man's predicament.

---

2 Ibid., p. 19.
The method by which Ostenso presents this basic position in *Wild Geese* is quite clear. She makes a very conscious and purposeful use of symbol and character. The wild geese, as the title indicates, are the central symbol in the novel. The references to them form a refrain which is woven through the story in an almost liturgical fashion, deepening the significance of separate incidents and connecting them with the basic theme of isolation.

Twice this refrain is given almost identical phrasing. Near the beginning Ostenso says:

> Lind heard the trailing clangour of the wild geese. Their cry smote upon the heart like the loneliness of the universe... a magnificent seeking through solitude—an endless quest. ³

The last words of the novel are:

> Far overhead, in the night sky sounded the honking of the wild geese, going south now... a remote, trailing shadow... a magnificent seeking through solitude... an endless quest...²

The geese are a symbol both of man's endless quest for understanding and of the final mystery at the end of the quest. They represent something that is completely beyond human experience and understanding:

> Far overhead sounded a voluminous prolonged cry, like a great trumpet call. Wild geese flying still farther north, to a region beyond human warmth... beyond even, human isolation...²

The coldness and inhumanity at the end of the quest bring no comfort or understanding to man. Lind thinks of the geese:


⁴Ibid., p. 239.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.
"There was an infinite cold passion in their flight, like the passion of the universe, a proud mystery never to be solved."  

Man is alone in his search for meaning, his search for God, and the lesson he learns from his search is that man's basic condition is loneliness. No explanations are given, only deeper and deeper mysteries. Mathias Bjarnasson has learned the lesson:

He had lived much in communion with solitude, and had come to know that there is an unmeasurable Alone surrounding each soul, and that nameless and undreamed are the forms that drift within that region.

The wild geese, when looked at as a symbol of man's search, are certainly representative of the Puritan belief in man's inability to comprehend the nature of God. When looked at as a symbol of the nature of God, however, they are representative of a failure to believe in another Puritan doctrine, that man can still know something of God. While the Puritan claims that man can never know God through his own efforts at understanding, he still believes that God is active in the world and chooses to reveal something of Himself to man in different ways. The wild geese point to a God who is not active in the world. They are in no way an active force in the novel nor do they reveal anything of the mystery of which they are the symbol. Ostenso believes in the search, but her search seems to have brought her to a conviction that:

God, the force, the power, the life of the universe, must remain to men hidden, unknowable, and unpredictable. He is the ultimate secret, the awful mystery. His essence "is capable properly of no definition."

There is a tension within the symbolism here, and within the entire novel, between a basic Puritan orientation to the problems of man and a rejection of or a failure to believe in the traditional

---

6Ibid., p. 239.
7Ibid., pp. 46-47.
solutions and doctrines of Puritanism. Ostenso is a Puritan who cannot escape from her background and yet who wants to reject its content. This becomes even clearer in her presentation of the meaning of the land.

On the simplest level, the land has the same symbolic meaning as the wild geese. The emptiness and barrenness of the prairie "flat and new looking, as though hills had not yet been dreamt of by its Creator,"\(^9\) brings man an awareness of his essential loneliness. As Judith says: "here was the prairie sparse as an empty platter—no, there was the solitary figure of a man upon it, like a meagre offering of earth to heaven."\(^10\) Mark Jordan tries to analyze this loneliness:

> The austerity of nature reduces the outward expression in life, simply, I think, because there is not such an abundance of natural objects for the spirit to react to. We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment. Life here at Oeland, even, may seem a negation but it's only a reflection from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown inward upon themselves, their passions stored up, they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression — no releasing gesture.\(^11\)

If this were all that is said of the land it would indeed symbolize nothing more than do the wild geese. Man is alone on the prairie and the prairie is so empty of content that it reveals nothing of the nature of God. Mark says of a region even farther north than Oeland:

> 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.\(^12\)

---

\(^9\)Wild Geese, pp. 48-49.

\(^10\)Ibid., p. 112.

\(^11\)Ibid., p. 78.

\(^12\)Ibid.
Yet while Ostenso may hint at times that the land is so austere that it reveals nothing, at other times she betrays a very Puritan tendency to see nature as an active force which does reveal God to man. As Perry Miller says: "Should human beings be required to contemplate forever an incomprehensible essence, their religious life or it could be said 'their whole life' might become an anarchic surrender to ineffable impulses, and no result was further from Puritan intentions." Therefore: "As long as he lives at all, as long as he is able to sustain his existence and deduce one thing from another, man must be able to apprehend some of the invisible things of God from the visible world." Traditionally, the lessons that were to be learned from nature were such as to convince man of God's love and goodness. There was always the possibility, however, that the Puritan could experience the world in such a way as to remain unconvinced:

Since God was not bound by any logic that man could discover, He generally appeared in these contacts to be exceedingly arbitrary, and the speculative certainty that God was good became secondary to the pragmatic certainty that He was sovereign.

Indeed, the arbitrariness and sovereignty could seem malicious and man could begin to lose sight of God's goodness. Ostenso is apparently convinced of the cruelty of the Puritan God and tries to prove this by an appeal to nature.

Lind Archer senses the force which works through the land:

And then in a moment, she was overwhelmed by her helplessness against the intangible thing that held them [the Gares] there, slaves to the land. It extended farther back than Caleb, this power, although it worked through him.

---

14. Ibid., p. 211.
15. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
This power is seen as basically cruel and harsh:

Judith began to fear that there was a sinisterly passive influence in the soil tying her to it hand and foot even while she was planning to escape.17

Somehow the land destroys the people who live on it. Mark Jordan says:

Think of the difference there would be in the outward characters of these people if the land didn't sap all their passion and sentiment.18

And Lind Archer echoes his statement: "There's no feeling left after the soil and the livestock have taken their share."19

There is little sense of joy in labour that was found in Grain. Work seems meaningless and deadening:

Work did not destroy the loneliness; work was only a fog in which they moved so that they might not see the loneliness of each other.

Days came when the loam was black and rich with rain. Judith and Martin, being the strongest of the workers under Caleb Gare, carried the soil's heaviest burden. Judith mounted the seeder and wove like a great dumb shuttle back and forth, across the rough tapestry of the land. In the adjacent field Martin worked with the bowed, unquestioning resignation of an old unfruitful man.20

The rewards of the land are not appreciated and the joys of the seasons are not felt. As Fusi Aronson says:

Here the spirit feels only what the land can bring to the mouth. In the spring we know only that there is coming a winter.21

17 Ibid., p. 97.
18 Ibid., p. 78.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 33.
Ostenso makes an even more explicit attempt to present the land as a symbol of the harshness of God when she discusses Caleb Gare's relationship to it. Lind Archer defines him:

Caleb, who could not be characterized in the terms of human virtue or human vice—a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence.22

On one level, the land is Caleb's God. Judith claims that he hates her "because she hated the things that were God to him - the crops, the raising of animals, the rough produce of the land."23 Caleb's flax is the main symbol of the power the land has over him:

Articles on its cultivation had become to him the Word of God. The rye grass would grow abundantly without a thought, and he would sell it well, but the flax was a thing to pray over.24

It is never clearly stated just why Caleb chooses the flax as his ultimate concern, but the implication is that it is the most unpredictable and demanding crop on the farm and hence the most god-like:

Before him glimmered the silver grey sheet of the flax—rich, beautiful, strong. All unto itself, complete, demanding everything, and in turn yielding everything—growth of the earth, the only thing on the earth worthy of respect, of homage.25

There is almost a suggestion of benevolence here, a note rarely found

21Ibid., p. 31.
22Ibid., p. 33.
23Ibid., p. 174.
25Ibid., pp. 126-127.
in the novel, but the harshness is primary. As Caleb has said earlier of the flax:

"It was more exacting, even, than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him, but the evil, and the indifference."  

The contradiction involved in the attempt to claim that the land is so barren that it reveals nothing and yet that its harshness reveals something of the nature of God is understandable because it is representative of the difficulty the Puritan has always had to face in dealing with an unknowable God who must somehow be made known. Ostenso's treatment of the land, however, contains other less understandable contradictions. At times the land itself is not really harsh and destructive but man's actions make it appear so. At other times it reveals things which are inconsistent with the idea of a cruel God.

The work on the Gare farm is soul-destroying not because of the land, but because Caleb makes it so. Martin wonders why Caleb will not take on extra help at haying time: "It was his idea, apparently, to blind them all with work—an extra man would give them time for thinking, and dreaming." What kills Fusi Aronson's brothers is not the blizzard, which is a part of the cruelty of nature, but the fact that Caleb refuses to give them shelter. The rain storm is made even more frightening because of Caleb's attitude towards it. Judith says:

"There's goin' to be either a cyclone or hail, or both—and he thinks that by his not letting it come, it won't come. So he leaves the lambs in the pasture."  

26 Ibid., p. 119.
27 Ibid., p. 142.
28 Ibid., p. 130.
Part of the difficulty here is explained by Ostenso's presentation of the character of Caleb. She claims that the land is his God and that he is God to his family. The God that reveals himself in the land is the same God that Caleb reveals to the family. Caleb, however, becomes so god-like that he thinks he can also control nature by preventing the hail or the cyclone. He begins to see himself as the Lord of his entire universe:

He could hold all this, and more—add to it year after year—add to his herd of pure-bred Holsteins and his drove of horses—raise more sheep—experiment with turkey and goose for the winter markets in the south—all this as long as he held the whip hand over Amelia.  

More will be said later of Caleb's role as God, but Ostenso's attempt to see him as both man and God has surely led her into inconsistency in her treatment of the land.

There are other instances, however, not connected with Caleb, which also detract from the idea that it is the land that is cruel and harsh. It is not really the storm on the lake which kills the two Bjarnassons but the fact that they had quarrelled and been foolish enough to take their quarrel onto the lake. The fire that results in Caleb's death might be a symbol of the ultimate cruelty of the land for as Mark Jordan says: "Strange the way it worked out—the only thing he really cared for claimed him in the end." The fire, however, was started by the human hands of Fusi Aronson who finally, even if unwittingly, claims his revenge on Caleb for the death of his brothers.

All the previous examples contain at least a hint of terror and cruelty in the land, but sometimes the land seems nothing but benevolent. Caleb's crops are too successful to give the impression

29 Ibid., p. 19.
30 Ibid., p. 239.
that the land is completely cruel. Lind Archer notices the beauty of the land and responds to it, even loving the rain which falls. Mark Jordan is sent to work on the land to cure his nervous troubles and as a result finds not only health but love. In the scene where Judith takes off her clothes and presses herself against the earth, the suggestion is one of warmth and freedom.

Ostenso's attitude towards the land is inconsistent and confused and she obviously has artistic difficulties in relating the land to the various themes and characters in the novel. Her primary intention is clear, however. She wants to prove that the land is a symbol of an arbitrary and tyrannical God and she wants to make it clear that she cannot love either the land or the God which it represents. Her basic Puritan orientation leads her to present nature as a revelation of God, and her rejection of the content of the revelation explains some of the other different attitudes which she introduces. When she turns to the task of delineating Caleb Gare's relationship to his family most of the inconsistencies disappear because she concentrates solely on a condemnation of the kind of God which Caleb represents.

With Caleb's relationship to his family there is no question of the impossibility of knowledge or the problem of indirect revelation. He is the Puritan God, as seen by Ostenso, translated into a human figure for all to understand. He cannot be "characterized in the terms of human virtue or human vice" because he represents God, but his inhuman or god-like attributes are revealed directly through his actions. His motives are never clear in a human sense, but are always based in a passion to control:

And Caleb went about with the fixed, unreadable face of an old satyr, superficially indifferent to what went on, unconscious of those about him; underneath, holding taut the reins of power, alert, jealous of every gesture in the life within which he moved and governed.31

---

31Ibid., p. 34.
Carlyle King attempts to show that Caleb "may seem only a monster of hypocrisy, petty meanness, and ugly tyranny" but that he also "has his human pathos."\(^{32}\) He sees this especially in Caleb's reaction to the fact that Amelia will never love him:

Caleb had long ago been hurt permanently in his young blood, knowing that his wife's heart was always with her dead lover and that he could never possess her. So he has worked in a very insanity of power lust—to own land, to make money, to dominate his family and his neighbours—in order to deaden his pain and to avenge himself on life that has done him an eternal wrong.\(^ {33}\)

Caleb's reaction is not really human, however. There is no indication in the novel that he ever made the least attempt to gain his wife's love. He has always wanted to control her, to possess her. Although he indicates that once he would have liked to possess her differently, which probably means sexually, his key words are "possession," "weapon," and "control":

Amelia had loved the boy's father, that he knew. The knowledge had eaten bitterly into his being when he was a younger man and had sought to possess Amelia in a manner different from the way in which he possessed her now. In that earlier passion of the blood he had found himself eternally frustrated. The man who had been gored to death by a bull on his own farm in the distant south had taken Amelia's soul with him, and had unwittingly left her bearing in her body the weapon which Caleb now so adroitly used against her. His control over her, being one of the brain only, although it achieved his ends, also at moments galled him with the reminder that the spirit of her had ever eluded him.\(^ {34}\)

What worries Caleb most is the fact that part of Amelia is not amenable to control and that this threatens his power. The main reason why she cannot be completely controlled is because basically

\(^{32}\) Introduction to *Wild Geese*, p. x.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) *Wild Geese*, p. 20.
she feels very little guilt about her love for Mark Jordan's father which resulted in an illegitimate child.

Like the Puritan God, Caleb gains his control over his world because of its sinfulness and guilt. His most important weapon is Amelia's sin in producing an illegitimate child. The original sin has been committed and there is no way that Amelia can blot it out or make up for it herself. Before the Fall, man was free, but by sinning, he relinquished his freedom and placed himself completely in God's power. If Amelia had not sinned, Caleb would not have had control over her and over her children who share in that sin; if she had felt more guilty about her sin, his control would have been more complete.

If Bjorn Aronson had not been dishonest, Caleb would not have been able to force his brother to sell the piece of timber land, and if Thorvald Thorvaldson had not sinned by stealing fish from the Bjarnassons, Caleb would not have been able to force him to sell his land. The emphasis on the innate depravity of man is so strong in Puritanism that God becomes almost too dependent on it. It is because of man's sinfulness and guilt that His control is assured:

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 force of this conclusion gave the Puritan cry for deliverance through the grace of God its urgency and its poignance.\textsuperscript{35}

If the God who finds himself in control of the universe is a benevolent one, the answer to the cry for deliverance may be in the form of just and reasonable punishment for sin and a final gift of grace and forgiveness. If the God is like Caleb Gare, however, the response will seem unreasonable and cruel. By taking

\textsuperscript{35}The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 25.
advantage of man’s sinfulness for his own selfish purposes Caleb becomes a god-figure who shows no concern for the welfare of his creatures. The Puritan doctrines concerning God's actions and man's appropriate response to them appear in a twisted and meaningless form. Ostenso illustrates this in her portrayal of the individual members of the Care family.

Charlie Care is a perverted example of one of the elect. Through no action on his part he is favoured by Caleb and "pampered and played against the others." Caleb brings him a deck of playing cards from town, but refuses to bring even necessary items like shoes for the rest of the family. When Charlie abuses the mare, Caleb does not punish him even though he seemed ready to kill Judith when he thought she was responsible. Caleb "elects" Charlie and in doing so reminds the rest of the family even more vividly that they have been selected for reprobation. Charlie's election does not cause him to act the part of one of God's chosen saints, however. It only serves to make him self-centered and confident that he can get away with anything:

As Caleb had always made a favourite of him, and was amused by his heedlessness, he had nothing but contempt for his sisters who had been trained never to disobey their father or to speak impudently to him.

Gander Stake's elevation into the company of the elect gave him a sense of responsibility and an appreciation of the freedom which comes through submission. Charlie's election brings only irresponsibility and license.

Ellen is an example of the submissive approach to God. Even if man cannot fully understand the will of God, he must submit himself to it and act on the assumption that it is good. The Puritan must say to himself:

Thus I finde the Lord hath set it downe, thus hee hath

36 Wild Geese, p. 33.

37 Ibid., p. 40.
expressed himselfe in his Word, such is his pleasure;
and therefore it is reason, and just, such against which
there can be no exception.\textsuperscript{38}

Ellen does exactly what she is told to do simply because Caleb
tells her to:

The contorted sense of loyalty that had been inbred in
Ellen had overrun every other instinct like a choking
tangle of weeds. She reasoned only as Caleb had
taught her to reason, in terms of advantage to the land
and to him.\textsuperscript{39}

She also displays an instinctive obedience to all the Puritan
standards of behaviour. She rejects her lover partly because he
has Indian blood. "Prim to the point of agony,"\textsuperscript{40} she condemns
Judith for "'going off that way on a Sunday to visit a strange man
with no older person along .... And father not home,!'"\textsuperscript{41} and
claims that she "'wouldn't sneak around getting fun.'"\textsuperscript{42} Her mother
realizes that "Ellen, out of her high tower of self-righteousness,
if she learned the truth, would be the first to condemn her ...."\textsuperscript{43}

Ellen's suffering, which is a result of her instinctive
obedience, is presented as meaningless. The Puritan could endure
much suffering because he believed that God gave it for a purpose
and that through it he would be strengthened in his faith:

The basic certainty was that no adversity could be so immense
as to cause complete despair. ... Whatever their sufferings

\textsuperscript{38}John Preston, cited in \textit{The New England Mind: The Seventeenth
Century}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Wild Geese}, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 97.
or however painful their ordeals, Puritans could take heart through the darkest moments in the confidence that all things are ordered after the best manner, that serene and inviolate above the clouds of man's distress shines the sun of a glorious harmony.44

Judith says of Ellen: "She loves to suffer. And loves to see everybody else doing it."45 Her suffering serves no purpose, however, and only makes her bitter, resentful, and incapable of feeling joy. At the end of the novel she receives, "morosely, with secret indignation,"46 the news that Judith and Sven are happy and that the Cares are to have a New House. Judith sees no sense in Ellen's suffering because she seems determined to bring it upon herself:

There was nothing admirable in Ellen's suffering. Before the return of Malcolm Judith had pitied Ellen and would have done much to spare her from duties that were too heavy for her. Now she felt that anything that befell Ellen was her just due. She had had her choice.47

Ellen is destroyed because she submits herself blindly to a God who will not grant meaning and deeper insight. Her poor eye-sight is a symbol of her mistake:

Ellen wore silver-rimmed glasses that were not originally prescribed for her. As a result the pupils of her eyes were always dilated and strained, the lids reddish and moist.48

Ellen does not see the world correctly and by putting on the spectacles which represent Caleb Care's standards, she is given further discomfort rather than better sight. Ostenso is pointing

45Wild Geese, p. 82.
46Ibid., p. 238.
47Ibid., p. 163.
48Ibid., p. 12.
out the folly of submitting to Caleb in her presentation of Ellen, and in doing so, is implying that he is the wrong kind of God.

Martin is a more complicated figure than Ellen. He wavers between submission and resistance. At times he refuses to obey Caleb's orders, such as the one to fish in Bjarnasson's lake, and at other times he tries to stand up to Caleb on Judith's behalf. He cannot, however, completely rebel:

There was no rebellion in Martin's soul—only a sort of passive resentment that did not often rise above the hard, surrounding shell of endurance in which he had grown. Had he been asked he could not have told why he endured—the fact was that he did not even recognize the state in which he lived as endurance. And yet he understood Judith better than he did Ellen. The subjected manhood in him admired Judith, although it never found expression toward her. 49

He is neither as blind as Ellen, realizing at one point that "they were all closed pea-pods, not daring to open," 50 nor as free as Judith. Most of the time he is caught in an insoluble dilemma.

There is an implication in the novel, however, that Ostenso also intended him to represent a positive, almost Christ-like force. He is a carpenter "always building in his spare time." 51 Judith sense his Christ-like spirit:

She watched him drive nails into the boards after he had fitted them, and saw how gentle his face was in the doing of the mean task. Why had she never seen these things in Martin before? Tears came into her eyes as they dwelt on him, and she could have rushed to him and thrown her arms about him from a sudden sheer realization of what he was. 52

Martin's dream is to build a New House for the Gares, 53 built with

49 Ibid., p. 124.
50 Ibid., p. 143.
51 Ibid., p. 91.
52 Ibid.
53 It is significant that Ostenso capitalizes the words 'New House' throughout the novel.
love and generosity and bringing peace:

The dream grew to a desire that crept into his hands. His hands grasped the good, enduring lumber, the plaster, the fine laths, the shingles, the panes of glass, the stones for the foundation and the chimney of the New House. It would be painted brown, a rich, dark brown . . . . and he would plant an acorn on either side of the road that in years to come would be a great spreading oak tree. . . .

Caleb Gare, however, will not allow the house to be built. As long as he lives, the spirit of Christ will be denied the world. The God in Grain sent the rain which was a symbol for Gander of the same spirit represented for Martin by the house. The God in Wild Geese will not allow healing and reconciling love in the lives of his creatures.

Amelia is the main instrument which Caleb uses to impose his will on the world. She is almost completely under his power as a result of her sexual sin. Caleb forces her to help him control the children by threatening to expose the fact that Mark Jordan is her son. All her time must be spent trying to appease this God who is angry at what she has done and trying to make the children obey him so that he will not reveal the full extent of his wrath. Nothing she ever does, however, begins to satisfy him.

The actions he forces upon her as an expiation for her sins are too distorted and cruel and almost destroy her. In her desire to save Mark Jordan she becomes almost as hard as Caleb:

She would break under Caleb rather than have him know, Caleb's children could wither and fall like rotten plants after frost—everything could fall into dissolution. He was his father's son, Mark Jordan, the son of the only man she had ever loved. Ellen, Martin, Judith, and Charlie, they were only the offspring of Caleb Gare, they could be the sacrifice. She would bend and inure them to the land like implements, just as

---

54 Wild Geese, p. 92.
Caleb wished her to do. She would not intercede in their behalf hereafter. 55

Amelia cannot be completely destroyed, however, because she represents something that Caleb cannot touch. She has experienced a world of light and love and carries within herself a spirit which, if allowed to come out, could be a force for good rather than for evil. If Caleb's will had been benevolent she could have been a Christ-like figure able to manifest a desire that all men should be saved. She is willing to sacrifice herself for her son and shows that she would like to minister to the sick and the weak in the scene where she helps Klovacz and his family:

Amelia hurried about, talking and laughing with the children, a feeling of tremendous, free warmth coming over her. It seemed that this little act of kindness was making up for all the meanness of the past years. 56

Caleb, however, will no more allow Amelia to show love to anyone than he will allow Martin to build the New House. He is a God who would rather send cruelty into the world than Christ.

Judith is the only member of the family who is basically untouched by Caleb. She represents another way of living in a world which has a God like Caleb, the way of total rejection. Ostenso implies that she is a pagan, without a God. Judith says of Caleb:

He had a special hatred for her, she knew it—had always known it. It was because she hated the things that were God to him—the crops, the raising of animals, the rough produce of the land. 57

What she really hates is Caleb himself. She is given a special

55 Ibid., p. 88.
56 Ibid., p. 151.
57 Ibid., p. 174.
relationship with the land in the scene where she takes her clothes off and presses herself against it:

Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden here in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no tenderness, she knew. 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.58

Judith wants to be free, free of all Gods and all constrictions. She cannot stand the thought of any sort of prison:

Prison—a place where you were confined to a tiny cell and never saw the sky, or felt the wind on your face—a wretched place, worse perhaps, than this farm.59

She is like an animal, stopping to watch the bull calves at play, "feeling dismayed that she should be so attracted by the young beasts"60 and wrestling with Sven with the same animal-like violence. Being a pagan and an animal she has no sense of sin or guilt and Caleb cannot control her. She is proud of the child that she has conceived out of wedlock. When in a fit of passion she tries to kill her father, she is not so much filled with remorse about it afterwards as with a fear that she will lose her freedom. She escapes from Caleb in the end because she has never been tied to him in spirit. Escape could not be a meaningful solution for the rest of the family because they are Puritan enough themselves to be tied to Caleb by more than physical bonds.

Judith represents one solution to the predicament of man which is presented in the novel, but it is a fairly meaningless solution because it depends on an initial freedom from the predicament.

---

58 Ibid., p. 53.
59 Ibid., p. 174.
60 Ibid., p. 54.
It will work only for someone who does not have a God to wrestle with. Ostenso presents two other solutions, both of which are a reaction to a real predicament but neither of which is convincing.

The solution for the Gare family lies in Caleb's death. Ostenso seems to think that since there is no way of living meaningfully with the kind of God Caleb represents, He must be killed. Lind says:

"I wonder just what the mystery was at the Gares' . . . It seemed to vanish with Caleb." 61

After Caleb's death the New House can be built and Amelia can find rest and make her neighbours feel welcome when they come to visit. The suggestion that everything will be fine after Caleb is removed is not convincing, however. His influence has been too strong and what he represents has been too much a part of the lives of his family for the problem to be solved so simply. Caleb Gare is still as real to Ellen after his death as before it and the picture of Amelia serving imported coffee to Mrs Sandbo who reacts by thinking "it is almost indecent of Amelia to put on airs so soon"62 suggests pathos more than victory. The Puritan may react against his God and see only the distorted and cruel aspects of that God, but he cannot easily kill him. Ostenso has tried to condemn this God and to get rid of him, but his influence on her has been too strong for her to be successful.

The other solution which Ostenso presents indicates that she has not succeeded in her attempt to connect the symbolism of the wild geese, the land, and Caleb Gare into a meaningful unity. Having removed Caleb from the scene, she is still left with the wild geese and the problem of isolation. She suggests that the only way in which man can keep this mystery from becoming too overwhelming is to band together in human warmth and trust. The marriage of Lind Archer and Mark Jordan symbolizes this solution:

61 Ibid., p. 239.
62 Ibid., p. 238.
Lind felt humble as she heard the wild geese go over. There was an infinite cold passion in their flight, like the passion of the universe, a proud mystery never to be solved. She knew in her heart that Mark Jordan was like them—that he stood inevitably alone. But because of the human need in him, he had come to her. It warmed her to dwell on the thought.\textsuperscript{63}

Although the warmth makes life possible it can never conquer the basic facts of coldness and isolation.

The same solution is presented earlier in the novel. Ostenso sees Caleb's attempt to repeat the preacher's sermon as meaningless. The sermon was, in short:

"So must we, who dwell in this lonely land and strive to live Christian lives on the acres the Lord hath given us, cling together for warmth and for good reward for our labour."\textsuperscript{64}

Caleb's world is, however, cold and hypocritical. He wants his family to stay together only to further his own ends. The sermon is meaningfully illustrated by the Bjarnasson family. The scene shifts from the cold, dark home of the Gares to the warm, light one of the Bjarnassons:

Like a welcome, its western windows were aflame with light from a red sun . . . . The immaculate kitchen had a warm, good smell, like cinnamon. The floor was white as bread. On it were round, braided rag mats of bright, clear colours.\textsuperscript{65}

In this house Mathias Bjarnasson gives the only meaningful interpretation of the sermon possible for Ostenso once she has rejected the God which Caleb symbolizes:

He had lived much in communion with solitude, and had come to know that there is an unmeasurable Alone

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p. 239.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., p. 44.
surrounding each soul, and that nameless and undreamed are the forms that drift within that region. So that it was well for the members of a great family to cleave together and so ward off the menaces and the dreads of the great Alone.66

By rejecting Caleb Gare, Ostenso has rejected the God which she has known, but she has been unable to find another God to put in Caleb's place. She might have found the answer in the spirit which Martin and Amelia represent if she had not been so convinced that the Puritan God inevitably crushes this spirit and that the harshness of life will not allow it to have any real force in the world. She can see no solution but a vague trust in the ability of man to find solace in sharing his misery with others.

66Ibid., pp. 46-47.
CHAPTER V

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

The careers of Robert Stead and Martha Ostenso are examples of a phenomenon that occurs within the early periods of any literature. Most of their work is derivative, popular, and generally not worthy of critical consideration, but they were each able to produce one novel which was based firmly in the life of the region and which was an expression of authentic and characteristic experience. Both Grain and Wild Geese give the impression that they were novels that had to be written. Not only do they seem to spring directly from personal experience, but they reflect a personal involvement on the part of the authors which renders them almost autobiographical. It is this element of involvement which gives them their sense of reality. When forced to go beyond what was immediately real to them, and to create characters and plots with which they were less involved, neither Stead nor Ostenso were successful. Much of Canadian fiction illustrates this inability to progress beyond the personal stage to a more objective and deliberate attempt to create a body of fiction which would "give artistic expression to a distinctive regional spirit."¹

Frederick Philip Grove consciously set himself the task of expressing the life on the prairie in fictional form. Although he spent many years on the prairie, he remained somewhat of an outsider all his life. This, plus his rather philosophical temperament, enabled him to be more detached and articulate than Stead and Ostenso. McCourt recognizes both the strengths and limitations of this kind of approach:

¹Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto, 1949), p. 56. For other examples of this in western Canadian fiction, compare Ralph Connor's Glengarry novels with his work on the west, Frederick Niven's Justice of the Peace with his western Canadian trilogy, and Nellie McClung's Clearing in the West with her fiction.
His view of man is philosophic; but in order to impose his view upon his readers he is impelled to see man not as an individual but as a symbol; and symbols, no matter how ingeniously created, are in the end lifeless things.²

Grove's characters may not be as life-like as are Stead's and Ostenso's, but his novels "reflect a maturity of intellect lacking in most of our fiction."³ His greatest contribution lies in the fact that he brought this intellect to bear upon the prairie scene and attempted to present not only its unique characteristics but the meaning and significance of these characteristics. A literature cannot reach maturity until its writers are able to interpret myths and forces which had previously been expressed only indirectly or unconsciously. Grove brought western Canadian fiction a step closer to maturity with his attempt at interpretation.

Grove's three best prairie novels, Settlers of the Marsh, Our Daily Bread and Fruits of the Earth illustrate both his basic philosophical position and a development within that position. Settlers of the Marsh will be discussed in terms of Grove's attitude towards sex, a basically Puritan attitude which never changed throughout his career. Our Daily Bread and Fruits of the Earth are significant for their treatment of the problem of authority and human responsibility. While the problem is seen in Puritan terms in both novels, there is a development towards a pessimism concerning the force and validity of the Puritan myth in men's lives.

Although Settlers of the Marsh is set within the framework of pioneer settlement in the west, its main concern is not so much with the details of pioneer life as with the universal problem of sex. Thomas Saunders sees it as one of the novels which replaced rural romanticism with authentic realism, but the realism is associated with the treatment of sex. "For a people long fed on sentimental pap, Settlers of the Marsh was pretty strong meat."⁴

²The Canadian West in Fiction, p. 65.
³Ibid., p. 70.
In fact the publication of the novel caused considerable furor in the country. "In puritanical Canada it was damned as obscene"⁵ despite the fact that Grove himself was so puritanical in his presentation of the problem as to seem at times to be delivering a sermon on the dangers of sex rather than writing a "frank" novel about it.

The two central characters in the novel are Niels Lindstedt and Ellen Amundsen. Both Niels and Ellen have a sexual problem which affects their entire attitude towards life. The novel is concerned mainly with how they come to terms with their sexuality and with the decisions they make as to how it should be expressed. Grove makes a very explicit attempt to relate Ellen's problem to the pioneer situation, but Niels' struggle is a much more universal one which has little to do with the environment in which man finds himself.

Niels is a pioneer, but he has no difficulty in achieving his material ambitions. Pacey claims that "it is in his spiritual quest, for a satisfying human partnership"⁶ that the central conflict lies and this conflict is made more acute because "he is, in matters of sex, almost incredibly naive."⁷ Niels' naivety and innocence have been overstressed, however. A misreading of the kind of innocence he represents has caused the critics undue concern. Isabel Skelton finds it difficult to believe that he could be so stupid.

Again, he has been delineated as an alert, wide-awake young workman, who has good natural ability—he mastered English easily by spending a winter in the neighbouring town. It has been pointed out how much his insight and understanding have been increased by the fact that he has migrated and adapted himself to a new land. Yet this is the man we are to believe married the notorious woman of the settlement, Mrs. Vogel, who had been known to him since his first Sunday there.⁸

---

⁵Desmond Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto, 1945), p. 18.
⁶Ibid., p. 39.
⁷Ibid.
Niels is neither stupid nor completely innocent. He is an example of a rather extreme Puritan approach to sex. In many ways he is similar to Gander Stake, who, although he grew up on a farm, listened to conversations, and soon outgrew "that uninformed condition sometimes described as innocence,"9 is basically ignorant of many things because of his family's silence on the subject and his own Puritan standards of morality. Both Niels and Gander are well aware of the fact of sex in the world and the force which it exerts upon them, but both have strong moral standards and idealistic attitudes towards it which prevent them from gaining too much worldly knowledge and experience. A comparison of Gander and Niels with Chaddie McKail illustrates the basic difference here. Chaddie is the truly naive and innocent one in spite of all her sophisticated and worldly talk. She is innocent because she never understands the real meaning and force of the sexual urge. She is neither as much affected by sex nor preoccupied with it as are Gander and Niels.

Niels is ignorant of many sexual details, but his ignorance is at least partly a result of a decision on his part to be so. He has a fairly clear personal philosophy about it. The sexual urge can be satisfied if it is subsumed under the larger duty of settling down and raising a family with an appropriate wife. The things of this world are not sinful in themselves; it is the way men use them that determine their sinfulness:

Sin lies not in them, but in a sinful use of them, in employing what God designed for the relief of natural

8"Frederick Philip Grove," Dalhousie Review, XIX (1939), 155. Grove, himself, has been partly responsible for this emphasis on Niels' naivety. In describing the incident which prompted his conception of this character he states that he once met a young Swede, who, "up to the day of his recent marriage, . . . had not known of the essential difference between male and female" (cited in Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 40). It is dangerous to read too much into this description, however, because Grove has obviously presented a much more subtle problem than this in his final delineation of Niels' character.

wants merely for their pleasurableness, in eating not to maintain life but solely for the savor of the food, in loving not for procreation but for sensuous gratification, in ruling not to benefit society but from a lust of power. Actions are never sinful simply because they are enjoyable; if their felicity remains subordinate to their utility, they are beyond criticism; they become reprehensible the moment they are practiced for their delectability alone.  

Niels has his appropriate goal. He must first build a farm and then settle down on it:

Yet, material success was not enough. . . . The picture which he saw, of himself and a woman in a cozy room, with the homely light of a lamp shed over their shoulders, while the winter winds stalked and howled outside and while from above the pitter-patter of children's feet sounded down, took more and more definite form. . . .

Two women present themselves as possible partners for Niels: Ellen Amundsen and Mrs. Vogel. Niels, in spite of his ignorance as to all the details of Mrs. Vogel's life, knows only too well which woman he should choose. Ellen is the woman who could become the proper kind of wife, who could sanctify his physical desires by helping him to raise a family. Mrs. Vogel could satisfy his desires, but could give no meaning to them: "One of these women had seemed to demand; the other, to give. Yet one was competent; the other, helpless. One was a mate; the other, a toy . . . ." He can see Ellen as the mother of his children and even think of her sexually without feeling guilty:

Yes, finally, with a realization that made his very body tremble and shake, that sent his blood red-hot to his brain, he became conscious of the ultimate, supreme,

---


11 Frederick Philip Grove, Settlers of the Marsh (Toronto, 1925), p. 61.

12 Ibid., p. 80.
physical desire; he wanted to feel her head sinking on his shoulder, her body yielding to his embrace. . . .

Ellen is the woman he sees himself with in the picture of the cosy room.

He thinks of Mrs. Vogel in a completely different way. She is not the kind who could ever be a mother and a help-mate:

But whenever he had been dreaming of her and his thought then reverted to Ellen, he felt guilty; he felt defiled as if he had given in to sin. Her appeal was to something in him which was lower, which was not worthy of the man who had seen Ellen. . . .

His instinctive reaction to Mrs. Vogel's charms is one of flight:

"Flee, Niels' genius seemed to whisper. Flee from temptation! . . . His chastity felt attacked." When he thinks of her, the vision he has had of domestic bliss with Ellen changes into a nightmare of coldness and meaninglessness:

There arose in him the vision again of that room where he sat with a woman, his wife. But no pitter-patter of little children's feet sounded down from above, nor were they sitting on opposite sides of a table in front of a fire-place. He was crouching on a low stool in front of the woman's seat; and he was leaning his head on her.

Ellen, however, rejects Niels, and in his frustration and weakness he allows Mrs. Vogel to seduce him. Because of his moral principles, he assumes that he must marry her. The marriage is

---

13 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
14 Ibid., p. 62.
15 Ibid., p. 72.
16 Ibid., p. 79.
17 The idea that sex is permissible only within marriage is so strong in Puritanism that it often overshadows every other consideration. Indeed, any kind of physical contact or commitment is seen to be strong
doomed to failure exactly because of these moral principles. Immediately after the marriage Niels thinks: "Already this marriage seemed to him almost an indecency." His sexual relationship with his wife is destructive because it is never intended to produce children and is based simply on a principle of pleasure:

Distasteful though they were, he satisfied her strange, ardent, erratic desires. Often she awakened him in the middle of the night, in the early morning hours, just before daylight; often she robbed him of his sleep in the evening, keeping him up till midnight and later. She herself slept much in the daytime. He bore up under the additional fatigue . . .

Niels believes that "lust was the defiling of an instinct of nature: it was sin." enough to create a bond between two people which can never be broken. Inconstancy is one of the worst sins within marriage or without because it implies that the pleasure principle is predominant. Thus Abe Spaulding in Fruits of the Earth can say that had his daughter's seducer been unmarried he would have forced them to marry, regardless of the obvious depravity of the man. Len Sterner in The Yoke of Life feels inescapably bound to Lydia simply because he has yielded to her physically for a moment, and Gander Stake feels that he is being unfaithful to Jo simply by being attracted to another woman even though Jo is married to someone else.

18 Settlers of the Marsh, p. 189.

19 Ibid., p. 192. This Puritan attitude is expressed not only in Niels' attitude towards the sexual relationship he has with his wife, but in his attitude towards her physical appearance. Artificial physical adornment for the purpose of arousing pleasure is also sinful: "Not only the colour of her hair was artificial, but the colour of the face as well. Niels knew, of course, that she used powder; even that he did not understand nor approve of" (ibid., p. 202). A similar attitude is expressed in Fruits of the Earth: "Girls wore silk stockings, silk underwear, silk dresses; and nothing destroys modesty and sexual morality in a girl more quickly than the consciousness that suddenly she wears attractive dessous" (New Canadian Library No. 49, Toronto, 1965, p. 223).

Through his relationship with Mrs. Vogel, the problem of responsibility, guilt, and atonement becomes very real for Niels. Earlier in the novel he had been puzzled over whether he was simply being swept along by forces beyond his control or whether he actually had any responsibility. One moment he felt that "he was a leaf borne along in the wind, a prey to things beyond his control, a fragment swept away by torrents." But then he came to realize that:

The torrent which swept him away, the wind that bore him whither it listed came from his innermost self. If, for what had happened to him, anybody was to blame at all, it was he . . .

Pacey claims that there is an "essential ambivalence" in Grove's attitude towards human responsibility in this novel, but Grove places more emphasis on man's responsibility than Pacey suggests. The problem is a very real one for the Puritan who believes in an all-powerful God and in the innate depravity of man, but Puritanism was never willing to say that because of this man is not to blame for what he is and does. Niels knows that he is responsible for his choice of Mrs. Vogel.

The disastrous marriage resulting from that choice intensifies the problem to the point where Niels can see no solution. He is tempted to blame his wife for his predicament but sees that this will not help because she will not admit that she is to blame:

Judging her guilty, he demanded repentance and atonement. But [sic] he could not demand anything of her because she did not acknowledge his right to demand: he had no authority over her.

---

21 Ibid., p. 78.

22 Ibid., p. 79.

23 Frederick Philip Grove, p. 44.

24 Settlers of the Marsh, p. 246.
He is forced to conclude that he must be the guilty one, but the realization of guilt cannot resolve the problem: "So it all came back to this that he should not have fallen... But suppose a man had fallen, what was he to do?" He feels himself slipping further and further into sin. After his wife returns from the city he waits for her to show physical desires. "Even he, having tasted of the forbidden fruit, was conscious of them." He does not know what to do. "He had sinned. He saw no atonement. None, nowhere." The situation in the household deteriorates until his wife becomes a prostitute again. When Niels finally learns the truth about her, he kills her in a fit of rage.

The murder is representative of Niels' inevitable descent into bestiality as a result of his sin, but it is also representative of another danger within Puritanism. The Puritan who is so terribly aware of the sinfulness of man may become too dependent on a strict and rigorous moral law. Man's responsibility may seem to lie in strict obedience to this law and the possibility of forgiveness may be completely neglected. Sexual sin is too abhorrent and too much a sign of the devil to be tolerated. It must be either avoided or destroyed. Just as Len Sterner in The Yoke of Life knows that he can never forgive Lydia and so forces her to commit suicide with him, so Niels feels forced to kill this woman who, to him, represents the devil. There can be no place for forgiveness because it would mean admitting weakness and a complete lack of responsibility. Perry Miller speaks of this tendency within Puritanism to become too rigorous:

It showed no mercy to the spiritually lame and the intellectually halt; everybody had to advance at the double-quick under full pack. It demanded unblinking perception of the facts, though they should slay us... It could permit no distinctions between venial and mortal sins; the slightest of them was

---

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 215.
27 Ibid., p. 248.
"against the Great God, can that be a little Evil?" It was all or nothing, white or black, God or the Devil.\textsuperscript{28}

Niels echoes this:

He saw clearly now that nobody, in this relationship of marriage, can ever make the best of a bad bargain. It is all or nothing. Give all and take all. If you cannot do that, stand back and refrain.\textsuperscript{29}

When he kills his wife, Niels is caught in this terrible dilemma of Puritanism and the reader can feel the horror and tragedy of it. Grove, however, allows him to go to prison and find atonement for his crime and then finally rewards him with a union with Ellen. The solution is too easy after the way in which the problem has been presented. In spite of its melodrama, the suicide at the end of \textit{The Yoke of Life} is a more convincing outcome of Grove's presentation of the problem. Niels' reward does not ring true.

Ellen Amundsen's problem is also a sexual one. She rejects the idea of marriage, sex, and children because she has seen what can happen to a woman in a pioneer situation who tries to fulfill her role in the proper Puritan manner. Her mother, who submitted to her husband's demands and inevitably became pregnant, solved the problem by deliberately causing miscarriages. In doing so she fell prey to guilt feelings, ruined her health and died miserably. Ellen, who was aware of this, refuses to contemplate marriage because of it. It is interesting that both she and Mrs. Vogel refuse to be mother figures, but for completely different reasons and in completely different ways. Mrs. Vogel rejects motherhood, but accepts the pleasurable aspects of sex. Ellen rejects motherhood and sex out of a neurotic fear and horror of what she has seen, and decides in

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Settlers of the Marsh}, pp. 247-248.
favour of complete asceticism.

Ellen is a more understandable figure for the Puritan, and her solution is certainly more acceptable than Mrs. Vogel's. Puritans, however, did not see asceticism as a valid approach to life either:

They may not be useless monks or unnatural celibates, for they were appointed by God to fulfill the plan of creation by doing the tasks assigned them and raising their families.30

Ellen feels that by submitting to a man she will be committing a sin and destroying herself, and yet by rejecting Niels she helps to cause his fall which entraps him in sin. For Puritan man, marriage may be a way of loving the world with "'weaned affections'", of being "completely in it, but not of it,"31 but for woman the dilemma seems insoluble. Indeed the whole problem seems insoluble:

The irony of man's predicament is that in his present condition he is not released from natural necessities, and yet he is incapable of satisfying them without adding to the enormity of his sin.32

Ellen, however, comes to the proper Puritan solution at the end of the novel when she states:

"For, Niels, I knew then as I know now that it is my destiny and my greatest need to have children, children . . . And I knew then as I know now that there is no man living on earth from whom I could accept them if not you . . . I thought I could live my life as a protest against the life my mother had lived. I had loved her and she was dead . . . I should have known . . . ."33

---


31Ibid., p. 42.

32Ibid.

Grove gives his interpretation of the final solution in even more explicit Puritan terms:

These two have been parted; and parting has opened their eyes. They have suffered; suffering has made them sweet, not made them bitter. Life has involved them in guilt; regret and repentance have led them together; they know that never again must they part. It is not passion that will unite them; what will unite them is love. . . .

This is indeed a perfect Puritan solution, but it is arrived at when both Niels and Ellen are middle-aged and when time has already solved the problem. Grove is remarkably perceptive in his presentation of the difficulties and tensions in man's sexual problems, but his solution is rather unconvincing. He is, finally, too Puritan in his own attitude to be able to honestly face the weakness inherent in the Puritan attitude towards sex. Whenever he speaks of sex he loses the objectivity and rationality which is reflected in his best writing.

In *Our Daily Bread* and *Fruits of the Earth* Grove turns to the problem of authority, a theme which has been present in each of the novels discussed hitherto. The theological problem of man's proper response to a God who is a distant and all-powerful authority has found artistic expression in prairie fiction in the themes of man's relationship to his family and to the land. Duncan McKail, the Puritan, tries to insist upon being the arbitrary and sovereign authority in his family, but fails largely because his wife will not respect his kind of authority. Gander Stake finds that it is possible to submit to the authority of his father and the land, and in so doing, comes to the realization that the ultimate authority is not working against him but for his own good if he will only co-operate. Caleb Care tries to be a completely harsh and arbitrary God to his

---

34 Ibid., p. 339.
family and fails because man cannot understand nor tolerate such a distorted and one-sided picture of the Puritan God. Stringer's presentation of the character of Duncan McKail is too sketchy and superficial to contribute much to an understanding of the problem of authority. Both Stead and Ostenso present the problem in much more detail and depth but both are rather one-sided in their attitude towards it. Stead is too convinced of the possibility of an easy solution and Ostenso is too harsh in her total rejection of the possibility of any meaningful solution. Grove sees the tensions and difficulties from a much more objective point of view and is able to present both the strengths and weaknesses of the Puritan approach to the problem. His final pessimism carries much more weight than Ostenso's because it is a result of careful consideration rather than violent emotional reaction.

John Elliot, in *Our Daily Bread*, has found most of his own life meaningful and feels that he has more or less managed to come to terms with his God. He has concentrated on farming, growing the daily bread for himself and for the family which it has been his duty and privilege to raise. He expresses this Puritan attitude towards life in Old Testament imagery:

> His old dream, that of raising a large family honourably, had been replaced, slowly and imperceptibly, by a new one: that of seeing his children settled about him as the children of the patriarchs of Israel were settled about their fathers.

His relationship with his land is a symbol of his relationship with God:

---

35 The Old Testament provides a very fruitful source of imagery for Puritanism because it depicts a harsh, stern, and all-powerful God. D. C. Jones, in his article, "The Sleeping Giant: Or the Uncreated Conscience of the Race," discusses the predominance of Old Testament imagery in Canadian literature: "If we were looking for a single large or archetypal pattern in terms of which Canadian literature could be placed in perspective, the pattern of the Old Testament might serve us best"... (*Canadian Literature*, No. 26, Autumn, 1965, 5). He also suggests, speaking of the poetry, that "God, if he appears, becomes a God of Vengeance rather than a God of Love" (ibid., p. 4). It is somewhat surprising that Jones makes no attempt to link his
Empires rose and fell: kings and high priests strove with each other; wars were fought: ripples on the sea of life. Underneath, deep down, that life itself went on as it had gone on in Abraham's time: the land was tilled to grow our daily bread. And this life, the life of the vast majority of men on earth, was the essential life of all mankind. . . . He had lived and multiplied; he had grown, created, not acquired his and his children's daily bread: he had served God.37

The land symbolizes the stern, all-powerful, but just Old Testament God. John Elliot knows, as did Gander Stake, that the land must be obeyed. Man does not have the power to use it as he wishes. Elliot's maxim is "You can't fool the land!"38 and he refuses to take advantage of it in the hope of making quick money as he sees his children trying to do. He recognizes the need of bowing before a force and an authority which he cannot control but upon which he is dependent. As a farmer he is successful and he feels that because of his right relationship with his land and his God he is allowed to be fruitful and multiply, to realize his dream of family life which is what gives him his purpose in life.

That single purpose had coordinated all things for him, had justified them, had seemed to transform his whole life with all its ramifications into a single, organic whole with a clear and unmistakable meaning. In that purpose he and his wife had been one; and so they had been fruitful and had multiplied. It was the children's duty to conform, to become like them; and, therefore, to obey them in all things, so as to multiply the seed themselves one day; so as not to let the strand thus created perish. To live honourably, to till the land, and to hand on life from generation to generation; that was man's duty; that, to him, in spite of all doubts, had meant and still meant serving God. Doubt had existed only as to details: it had never gnawed at the root of the fundamentals.39

---

37 Ibid., p. 190.
38 Ibid., p. 4.
39 Ibid., p. 189.
Elliot tries to be the same kind of God to his family as his God is to him. At one point Grove states explicitly that this God is a Puritan one:

Since, in that dim past, he [Elliot] had always, either before or after, justified his every action, at the stern tribunal of his puritanical conscience, by a reference to the ultimate welfare of his family, he was now, in retrospection, able to discount the part which temper and natural disposition had undoubtedly played in his conduct.

Elliot has been able to satisfy himself that his God makes life meaningful and that his response to his God has been correct. To his family, however, he is the symbol of the stern Puritan God whose actions seem to stem more from "temper and natural disposition" than from a concern for their "ultimate welfare."

All the Elliot children are afraid of their father and seem unable to have a meaningful relationship with him:

Yes, we are afraid of you. We, your children. You've been a stern father to us when we were still at home. I don't say that I blame you. We have much to be thankful for, I suppose. We are honest and clean.

Elliot has managed to instil some of the Puritan virtues into his children, but they have rejected his view of authority both in relationship to the land and to the family. As a result their lives are meaningless and Elliot interprets their actions:

Grove illustrates the fact that to the family, the father is the God-figure in a scene from *Two Generations*:

"'Honour the Lord thy God!' George said in booming pulpit tones. 'That's not what it says,' Tom threw in slowly from behind. . . . But Henry had turned around. 'Well,' he asked, 'What does it say, you little imp?'

'It says, Honour thy father and thy mother.'

'Isn't that what I said?' George asked.

'No, you didn't.'

'I did so. At least it amounts to the same thing'" (Toronto, 1939, pp. 9-10).
He had failed in the achievement of the second dream of his life. Half the purpose of his whole existence was gone. His children were scattered over two provinces of this country; they had freed themselves of the paternal rule; they were rebels in the house of their father; their aims were not what his aims had been. Their lives were evil; their lives were chaos; and through their lives, his own was chaos.

The children refuse to go about their father's business and as Fiedler states: "the original sin . . . , the first Fall of the bourgeois-Protestant world is the refusal to go into the father's business." 44

Grove states, in very clear terms, the central conflict between the stern puritanical father whose own life has been successful and meaningful and the rebellious children who reject his authority and cause his dream to collapse. He does not, however, present the reasons for and the background to the conflict clearly enough. Although Elliot's children claim that he has been too stern and forbidding, his mean and petty actions in the novel are the result of the break-up of his family and little is said about how he acted before he began to feel that his world was falling apart. The children have already rebelled or are in the process of doing so when the novel begins. Grove never makes it very clear just why they rebel so violently and make such a mess of their lives, although he is obviously trying to indicate that harsh and stern authority cannot succeed.

One of the ways in which Grove does attempt to present reasons for Elliot's failure is his deliberate contrast of the personalities of John Elliot and his wife. Elliot symbolizes the Old Testament aspects of the Puritan God and his wife is representative of a more New Testament spirit:

41 Our Daily Bread, p. 188.
42 Ibid., p. 288.
43 Ibid., p. 191.
Nobody could doubt, nobody who knew her did doubt that she was an incarnation of the peculiarly Christian virtues. As later, one by one, her children had arrived, she had learned to rule her household serenely without seeming herself to count for anything in her scheme of life. She had never quarrelled; she had always observed all the forms prescribed by the church; she had given alms, prayed, kept the sabbath, communed.  

And yet she had always enjoyed life and taught her children to enjoy it too: "She had given them freedom beyond her husband’s wishes. She had been as worldly as she had been religious." Elliot has always been suspicious of the fact that his wife is so different from him: "so different that only his great love for her could induce him even to tolerate it," but he has also recognized what her spirit was capable of:

Many trifles flitted up before his mind, examples of how she had been able to exact obedience from the children, by a word, a look, a smile, when all he could extract from them, by commands which were the result of careful thinking, was an evasion of his orders or a concealment of their wishes and of the actions which conformed to their desires.

After Mrs. Elliot dies, John Elliot Jr. reflects upon the fact that it was his mother’s spirit which really kept the family together:

Only a year ago things went smoothly! Why? Because mother was living. She held the whole family together. By the mere fact that she was there, she kept all evil passions under control.

There is an obvious attempt on Grove’s part to present Mrs. Elliot’s spirit as being more influential and successful than her husband’s. John Elliot’s Puritanism is too stern and harsh.

---

45 *Our Daily Bread*, p. 10.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
It does not make room for the Christ-like love which wins men's allegiance much more easily than cold authority ever does. Perry Miller comments on this tendency within Puritanism to become too rigorous:

They [the Puritans] went as far as mortals could go in removing intermediaries between God and man: the church, the priest, the magical sacraments, the saints and the Virgin; they even minimized the role of the Savior in their glorification of the sovereignty of the Father.\(^50\)

Grove is criticizing this tendency in his presentation of John Elliot but he fails to be entirely consistent in the reasons he gives for the collapse of Mrs. Elliot's influence. Amelia Gare could have been what Mrs. Elliot was, but her spirit was deliberately crushed by Caleb's will. Grove does not show John Elliot trying to crush his wife's spirit and indeed claims that Mrs. Elliot's death is really the cause of the catastrophe which befalls the family. By allowing her influence to be lost because of the cancer which kills her rather than because of her husband's will, Grove falls short of presenting the conflict as meaningfully as he might have done.

*Fruits of the Earth* is a much more profound study of the problem of authority and human responsibility. Abe Spaulding is a man, much like John Elliot, who wants to establish a good farm, raise a family and pass the farm on to them. Grove, however, has done two significant things with the character of Abe which he failed to do with John Elliot. Firstly, he has made Abe a tragic figure by pointing out that his failure comes at least partly from a flaw within himself and by allowing him to come to a realization of this. John Elliot is more pathetic than tragic because he never doubts that he is right and because the consequences of his actions are out of all

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 11.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 145.

\(^{50}\) *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, p. 45.
proportion to any wrong that he has done. At times he seems to be more a victim of inexplicable circumstances than a man who has caused his own downfall. Secondly, Grove has attempted to show that Abe's problems are intensified by the very nature of his occupation. The fact that he is a pioneer makes some of the dangers and tensions within the Puritan approach to life more real. There is no attempt to see any relationship between John Elliot's failure and his occupation.

Abe's stated philosophy is very similar to John Elliot's:

He began to have glimpses of the truth that his dream of economic success involved another dream: that of a family life on the great estate which he was building up.51

This dream is what makes his work meaningful:

You said you didn't know what the work was for. That's it. To build up a place any man can be proud of, a place to leave to my children for them to be proud of.52

Abe does not succeed in keeping his children with him on the farm. He, too, fails to realize the second part of his dream. Grove points to the hopelessness of the wish in the scene where Abe offers his son, Jim, the farm and Jim replies: "If I cared for a farm, I'd take up a homestead myself, to build a place of my own."53 Abe reflects: "That was the way he had felt himself."54

In choosing to start out on his own as a pioneer, Abe had rebelled against his own parental home. How can he expect his children to stay with him when he himself has rejected the same kind of authority which they reject? This problem of the pioneer is representative of a problem within the basic foundations of Puritanism.

51 Fruits of the Earth, p. 50.
52 Ibid., p. 48.
53 Ibid., p. 222.
54 Ibid.
Puritanism began by rejecting authority and was then faced with the problem of trying to hold its members. Alan Simpson comments on this difficulty in terms of the problem of reason, but it is applicable to every aspect of Puritanism:

Could reason, which had begun by abdicating its authority, reassert itself so as to insure that one true discipline which was God's design for men—or even to insure any society at all? The whole history of Puritanism is a commentary on its failure to satisfy the cravings which its preaching had aroused. It was forever producing rebellions against its own teachers.55

Grove's perception of the inevitable failure of the patriarchal father-figure in pioneer society is remarkably acute.

Grove also recognizes that another aspect of pioneer life inevitably leads to a break-down of the power and authority of the father. The amount of work required of a man in order for him to be a successful pioneer forces him to ignore his family and to lose sight of the necessity for love and understanding in the world. Abe is so absorbed in his farming that he never gets to know his children and he helps to crush his wife's spirit by never taking the time to try to understand her. He becomes a symbol of the God who is completely absorbed in the working out of great plans and completely removed from humanity. To Mrs. Grappentin he seems "silent and haughty. . . , looking over the land as if he owned the world."56 Mr. Grappentin asks: "Would you mind, Mr. Stepson, telling me why the great lord is always alone and does not mix with the rest of us as other Christian people do?"57 And Hilmer replies: "Because . . . he thinks greater thoughts and aims higher than all the rest of us do."58 In his relationship with his family he becomes so removed that his authority has no force.

Grove does not suggest, however, that Abe's failure lies

56 Fruits of the Earth, p. 87.
57 Ibid., p. 88.
58 Ibid.
entirely within the nature of his occupation. It is also clear that Abe does not have the proper attitude towards it. He places too much reliance on his own ability:

But this immense and utter loneliness merely aroused him to protest and contradiction: he would change the prairie, would impose himself upon it, would conquer its spirit. 59

In this respect Abe is more like Caleb Gare than John Elliot who knows that you can't fool the land. He is too obsessed with power, too eager for success and too materialistic. When Nicoll tries to speak of the philosophical problem of death Abe shies away. "He had a definite aim in life: to be the most successful farmer of a district yet to be created; he was a materialist and felt uncomfortable when facing fundamentals." 60

Grove feels that this materialism is wrong and even makes Abe vaguely aware of its inadequacies:

Rarely, during the first years of his life on the prairie, had he given the landscape any thought. It had offered a "clear proposition," unimpeded by bluffs of trees or irregularities in the conformation of the ground; the trees he wanted he had planted where he wanted them. But when Nicoll spoke as he had done, Abe felt something uncanny in that landscape. Nicoll's words impressed him as though they were the utterance of that very landscape itself; as though Nicoll were the true son of the prairie, and he, Abe, a mere interloper. 61

Abe's materialism is representative of the same lack of faith that John Elliot saw in his children. Another of Abe's neighbours points out his basic mistake:

"When I look at you, I see myself as I used to be. I thought I could force things. I've learned to trust in the Lord. That's what's wrong with us all; we have

59 Ibid., p. 23.
60 Ibid., p. 40.
61 Ibid.
lost our faith. You are going to have that crop or to lose it; and if you're to lose it, nothing that you can do will save it for you."\textsuperscript{62}

Abe may be too convinced of his own ability, but he points out the basic tension between the power of God and the responsibility of man in his reply: "That may be,' he said. 'But it may also be that God helps them that helps themselves.'\textsuperscript{63}

This tension is basically the same as the tension which was noted in the discussion of the problem of sex in \textit{Settlers of the Marsh} and it is a very characteristically Puritan one. How does one live and act in the world in a responsible manner and yet at the same time believe in a God who is working things out in his own way? How can one be in the world but not of it? Man is required to work in the world to the best of his ability:

Adam was required to tend the garden; the fall has made man's task more arduous, but it has not altered the requirement. "God sent you not into this world as into a Play-house, but a Work-house." All labour, no matter how homely or hazardous, is a worship of God provided it is done in the proper frame of mind.\textsuperscript{64}

And yet this can only too easily lead to excesses. Puritanism has always displayed

a recognition of the world, an awareness of a trait in human nature, a witness to the devious ways in which men can pervert the fruits of the earth and the creatures of the world and cause them to minister to their vices. Puritanism found the natural man invariably running into excess or intemperance, and saw in such abuses an affront to God, who had made all things to be used according to their natures.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 100.

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p. 100.

\textsuperscript{64}\textit{The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century}, p. 44; italics
Abe is too materialistic and he learns too late that too much concern with material things is futile because they inevitably pass away. Abe's materialism explains his obsession with decay. "The moment a work of man was finished, nature sets to work to take it down again." If he had not placed all his pride in his new house, he would not have been so dismayed at seeing it begin to crumble. Finally, however, he learns his lesson:

His old preoccupations had suddenly seemed futile. When all a man's gifts have been bent on the realization of material and realizable ends, the time is bound to come, unless he fails, when he will turn his spiritual powers against himself and scoff at his own achievements.  

Abe fails in his relationship with his land and his family partly because of the nature of his occupation and partly because of a flaw within his own personality. Grove has presented a very clear picture of the seriousness of the predicament in which Puritan pioneer man finds himself and has come to the conclusion that the problem is almost completely insoluble. At this point in the novel Abe's life has lost all purpose and meaning. If Grove had ended the story here his development towards pessimism would have been logical, consistent and understandable. He proceeds, however, to allow Abe to find a solution in another area of life, that of social morality and municipal government.

Abe decides to involve himself in community affairs in order to prevent any more of the moral degeneration which he sees occurring in his world. He has always believed that man has a real responsibility to obey the moral law. His wife recognizes this in him when she is involved in the problem of what to do about the man who has seduced her daughter:

---

65 Ibid., p. 42; italics added.
66 Fruits of the Earth, p. 134.
67 Ibid., p. 132.
Like Abe she had been urged on by the fundamental revolt against injustice: by the age-old desire to replace the blind flow of events and the yielding to impulse by something conformable to human reason; by the need to make a moral order prevail where chaos had ruled.68

To the Puritan who feels crushed by the force and arbitrary power of God and who cannot understand his purposes, the moral order represents a real solution:

If the life of man begins in darkness and ends in darkness, the lesson is to cling all the more passionately to the feeling that there is some kind of order behind the mystery and that this order reveals itself most clearly in the moral sense.69

Thus when the rest of Abe's life becomes meaningless he grasps at morality and bows to its authority, accepting a lesser place in life than that to which he has been accustomed:

True resignation meant accepting one's destiny; to him, it meant accepting the burden of leadership; and the moment he saw that, he felt at one with the district, with his brother-in-law who had told him his story, with Ruth in her sorrow, and, strangely, with himself; for here was something to do once more: the gang would vanish into thin air. His own life had been wrong, or all this would not have happened. He had lived to himself and had had to learn that it could not be done...70

Abe's final solution is a very Puritan one and is obviously a reflection of Grove's own position. The ending to the novel is unsatisfactory precisely because Grove never manages to see beyond his

68Ibid., p. 253.
69Puritanism in Old and New England, p. 102.
70Fruits of the Earth, p. 264; italics added.
own Puritanism in matters of sexual morality. Thus although he can present the break-down of the force and validity of the Puritan myth for the pioneer in terms of his relationship to his family and the land, he is too emotionally involved in the obvious break-down of morality in society to be able to see the problem clearly. In his treatment of the land and the family, however, he has given to prairie fiction a profound expression of both the strengths and weaknesses of Puritanism. He refuses to be as cheerfully optimistic as Stead but avoids the course of violent reaction which entrapped Ostenso. He recognizes the force which Puritanism exerts in the life of the people he is writing about and is extremely sympathetic towards it. His sympathy is most evident in his treatment of John Elliot but it is also evident in his portrait of Abe Spaulding. Despite his sympathy, however, he is too perceptive not to see that Puritanism is losing its grip on the prairie. He is a prophet who weeps over his prophecy but cannot refrain from uttering it.
Although all four of the novelists discussed thus far have been influenced by Puritanism and have incorporated Puritanism into their novels with differing degrees of awareness, none of them could be said to have consciously given Puritanism the central place in his or her work. Sinclair Ross has done exactly this in his novel, *As For Me and My House*, and in doing so has produced the most complete literary definition of Puritanism in Canadian prairie fiction. *As For Me and My House* is a classic in the sense that it provides the explicit statement which illuminates and reveals the implicit presuppositions in the rest of the literature of the region. Without it, it would be possible to trace the influence of Puritanism on Canadian prairie fiction; with it, it is impossible to ignore that influence.

Ross's achievement in giving a mature and explicit literary expression to the authentic characteristics of the Canadian prairie can be more fully appreciated by comparing *As For Me and My House* with Arthur Stringer's trilogy. On a superficial level the similarities are numerous. Both works are written in the form of a woman's diary. Both women are cultured and well-educated and seem somewhat out of place in their environment. Both have husbands who commit adultery and both form an innocent relationship with another man. Both authors are more concerned with the exploration and exposition of myths than are the other novelists in this study. Here, however, the resemblance ends. Stringer's attempt to compare Puritanism with American Adamism and to illustrate the advantages of the latter failed not only because of his inadequate understanding of Puritanism but also because of the general irrelevance of the American myth for that Canadian situation. Ross was perceptive enough to realize that Puritanism was the relevant myth and his understanding of it was profound enough to enable him to work
out the conflicts and tensions in the story from within the framework of Puritanism. Stringer used his two central characters as representatives of two opposing world views. Ross used his two central characters to represent two different aspects of Puritanism, two different reactions to it. Philip Bentley is the Puritan who finds faith impossible; Mrs. Bentley is the Puritan who finds a meaningful and positive faith. In recognition of the many possibilities of reaction to a force such as Puritanism, Ross also, in his portrait of the townspeople, presents the Puritan who is content to believe in a superficial and hypocritical manner. To complete the picture he includes the world of the ranch on which the Bentleys spend their holiday, a world which has not yet come under the full force of the Puritan influence.

In his presentation of the superficiality and hypocrisy of the townspeople, Ross deals with an aspect of Puritanism which received little attention in the other novels under discussion. Although the Puritan distrust of the town by the farmer is an element common to all the other novels and although the authors imply that this distrust is based on a belief that the towns people have a much looser hold on the fundamentals of the faith than the farmer, there is no attempt to present any reasons for the laxity of the town. Duncan McKail's moral degeneration is related to his connections with the city and is speeded up considerably when he begins to live there. To the Stake family the town was the place where men could get drunk and, as such, was to be avoided. Caleb Care was extremely averse to letting his family go to town, claiming that it was a bad influence. For Caleb the real danger of the town was the danger that it might open his children's eyes and weaken his power and authority, but the implication is that in the town it is possible to escape from or ignore God or authority more easily. John Elliot's distrust of the town seems rooted in much the same fear. Niels Lindstedt and Abe Spaulding distrust the town because they fear the consequences of sexual freedom and Abe dislikes sending his children to school in town because he knows that it lessens the authority of the family.
Because Ross is not primarily concerned with presenting the town through the eyes of the farmer he does not deal specifically with the problems outlined above. He is, however, concerned with the problem of faith, and his presentation of and reasons for the superficiality and hypocrisy of the town and his distinction between town and country point to the reasons for the distrust in the other novels.

Philip Bentley's town congregation is superficial and very careful of appearances. They practice the forms of their religion but are hypocritical because they do so for the wrong reasons. Theirs is essentially an easy and selfish faith. Mrs. Bentley sets the tone at the beginning of the novel:

I could use the pliers and hammer twice as well myself, with none of his [Philip's] mutterings or smashed-up fingers either, but in the parsonage, on calling days, it simply isn't done. In return for their thousand dollars a year they expect a genteel kind of piety, a well-bred Christianity that will serve as an example to the little sons and daughters of the town.1

The formal dinner which Mrs. Finley gives to welcome them is "a kind of rite, at which we preside as priest and priestess— an offering, not for us, but through us, to the exacting small town gods Propriety and Parity."2 Any meaning the doctrine of the rejection of the flesh might have is degraded to the level of parson manners:

They're difficult things at the dinner table anyway, eating with a heartiness that compliments your hostess, at the same time with a reluctance that attests your absorption in the things of the spirit.3

The choir of the town congregation is "a particularly bad one:"4

---

1 Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House*, New Canadian Library No. 4 (Toronto, 1957), p. 3.

2 Ibid., p. 6.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 11.
They were four matrons, middle-aged and on, Miss Twill, a shy, white-faced young woman called Judith West, three baritones who sang the soprano part right through the hymns, and several young couples with no voices at all but who came to feel important.  

All this superficiality and hypocrisy is symbolized by the false fronts of the town buildings. Mrs. Bentley says of one of Philip's drawings of a prairie town Main Street:

It's like all the rest, a single row of smug, false-fronted stores, a loiterer or two, in the distance the prairie again. And like all the rest there's something about it that hurts. False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied. They're such outlandish things, the front of a store built up to look like a second storey. They ought always to be seen that way, pretentious, ridiculous...

The country congregation is presented as sincere and strong in its faith. The pretence of the town is lacking. The dinner which Mrs. Lawson gives the Bentleys is completely different from that given by Mrs. Finley:

"Joe's such a farmer," she kept saying at the table. "Town folks, Joe, don't pitch in themselves and eat. They take encouragement!" And then round she would come to fill our plates herself, and ask in exasperation couldn't he let his own stomach wait just once.

The farmers form a "sober, work-roughened congregation." Their singing is also contrasted with that of the town congregation. "There was strength in their voices when they sang, like the strength and darkness of the soil." This strength gives the farmers a real

---

5 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
6 Ibid., p. 4.
7 Ibid., p. 20.
8 Ibid., p. 19.
9 Ibid.
dignity and depth of understanding. The suffering which Joe Lawson undergoes as a result of the sickness and death of his son seems to make him stronger and is an effective contrast with the pretentiousness of Mrs. Finley's concern for her children. These people are faced with incredible hardship, and although occasionally they stoop to complaining, they are still able to show pity and understanding. The woman who complains to Philip about his relative prosperity touches Philip so deeply that he is unable to say anything to comfort her. She, however, "saw how it was with him and said, 'You never mind—I'd no right saying such things anyway.' Then she put her hand on his sleeve as if he were a boy in trouble, and without looking up again hurried off to her democrat."¹⁰

The country congregation represents everything positive in the faith. Mrs. Bentley realizes this as she looks at Philip's drawing of a country schoolhouse:

Faith, ideals, reason—all the things that really are humanity—like Paul you feel them there, their stand against the implacable blunderings of Nature—and suddenly like Paul you begin to think poetry, and strive to utter eloquence.¹¹

Another of Philip's drawings prompts her to make an explicit comparison between country and town:

Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set solid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle.

But the town in contrast has an upstart, mean complacency. The false fronts haven't seen the prairie. Instead they stare at each other across the street as into mirrors of themselves, absorbed in their own reflections.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 113.
¹¹Ibid., p. 80.
¹²Ibid., p. 69.
Ross is both pointing to the dangers of Puritanism and displaying his own puritanical viewpoint in his contrast of the town and the farm. There is something within the very nature of Puritanism itself which almost assures its eventual degeneration into empty forms and hypocritical actions. The insistence on the importance of the energy and zeal released by the experience of conversion means that man is required to live in a state of ecstasy which is almost impossible to sustain. Alan Simpson sees this energy as the most distinctive characteristic of the Puritan and points to the difficulty of maintaining it:

It is the thesis of this book that Puritans were elect spirits, segregated from the mass of mankind by an experience of conversion, fired by the sense that God was using them to revolutionize human history, and committed to the execution of his Will. As such, they formed a crusading force of immense energy. . . . But it was . . . an energy which everywhere subsided from an ecstasy of zeal into standardized patterns of behaviour, as successive waves of enthusiasm were broken on the resistant forces of human nature and as men who had dreamed of a holy community found themselves simply administrators of a Puritan tradition.13

Furthermore, the demands placed on the Puritan by the basic doctrines of Puritanism were difficult enough to carry out even if the zeal was maintained. To the weak, they imposed an intolerable burden. Perry Miller says of Puritanism:

Its peculiar ferocity came from its absolutism, its refusal to make allowances for circumstance and weakness, from its judging by the highest possible standard, its unremitting measurement of the human by the divine. Its requirement that men disregard all advantages to be gained from truth in order to follow truth itself was both majestic and pathetic; it was both the strength and the limitation of Puritanism that it permitted no discharge in the holy war.14

Miller's remark about the decline of Puritan zeal in America points straight to the Puritan dilemma:

When the belief and temper which the first settlers brought to America is examined, when the piety is estimated on the emotional and non-theological level, it seems obvious that the reason later generations ceased marching to the Puritan beat was simply that they could no longer stand the pace.15

Ross has indeed painted a fine picture of the superficiality and hypocrisy which results when zeal is lost, and in his condemnation of it has betrayed his own Puritan orientation:

"Deadness of heart" was the most insupportable curse the Puritan was called upon to bear. . . . Dullness, coldness, emptiness were more to be lamented than any specific sin.16

Not only does he present the deadness of heart in the town, but he attempts an explanation of why he believes that the town is more liable to suffer from it than is the country. His explanation illuminates many of the presuppositions behind the distrust of the town displayed in the other novels in this study.

Ross believes that the town's deadness results partly from their lack of contact with nature. "The false fronts haven't seen the prairie."17 The farmer who is forced into close and immediate contact with the forces of nature cannot ignore God easily. The very harshness and cruelty of the prairie preserves man's sense of standing alone before an incomprehensible God. Mrs. Bentley says of the farmers:

Five years in succession now they've been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was as if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance.18


15Ibid., p. 59.

16Ibid., p. 58.

17As For Me and My House, p. 69.
Donald Stephens points to this aspect of the prairie when he states that Ross's "simplicity of style and intricacy of mood create a prairie so immense that it virtually stuns the mind." In the face of this immensity man must come to terms with the obvious fact of his own insignificance. Paul says:

Man can't bear to admit his insignificance. If you've ever seen a hailstorm, or watched a crop dry up—his helplessness, the way he's ignored—well, it was just such helplessness in the beginning that set him discovering gods who could control the storms and seasons. Powerful, friendly gods—on his side. And if they were more powerful than the storms, and if they were concerned with him above all things, then it followed that he was really more powerful and important than the storms, too. So he felt better—gratefully became a reverent and religious creature. That was what you heard this morning—pagans singing Christian hymns... pagan, you know, originally that's exactly what it meant, country dweller.

Paul's theory is not stated in explicitly Puritan terms, but it describes an attitude which is basic to Puritanism. The Puritan must begin with an awareness that he stands alone and insignificant before a God whose plans cannot be fully understood. Without a vivid sense of the reality and presence of this God there can be no possibility of a zealous faith. Mrs. Bentley says of the farmers:

Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken—a very great faith, or a very foolish one.

What that faith continues to assert is that in spite of appearances the deity is not indifferent. The townspeople are removed from close contact with nature. By erecting false fronts between themselves

---

18 Ibid., p. 19.

19 "Wind, Sun and Dust," Canadian Literature, No. 23 (Winter, 1965), 18.

20 As For Me and My House, p. 19.

21 Ibid., p. 84.
and their God, they lose their sense of the immediate presence of the deity. They find it easier to escape from and ignore this demanding God.

Ross's criticism of the town also springs from another Puritan attitude which is related to the belief that closeness to the soil preserves faith, but which takes a slightly different form. For the Puritan, the work of the farmer is more honourable and worthwhile than the work of the townspeople. The belief of the farmer that his work has a special dignity because he is producing the food for mankind is an age-old one, but Puritanism could give that belief a theological justification. Although man has a duty to work in this world, and Puritans claim that "all labor, no matter how homely or hazardous, is a worship of God," that labour must be done "in the proper frame of mind" and be seen as "tending to publique good." "The Puritan must be 'serviceable' to the worldly community, to the family, the church, and the commonwealth," He could avoid the danger of becoming completely immersed in the world if his work could be seen as a real service to mankind and not simply as an occupation for his own profit.

The farmer has no difficulty in seeing his work as essentially a service. Although in theory, the prairie town exists to serve the farmer, the service seems fairly indirect, and indeed to the farmer often seems to be lacking completely. Sinclair Lewis voices this feeling very explicitly in his novel, Main Street:

Carol saw the fact that the prairie towns no more exist to serve the farmers who are their reason of existence than do the great capitals; they exist to fatten on the farmers, to provide for the townsfolk large motors and social preferment; and, unlike the capitals, they do not give to the district in return for usury a stately and permanent center, but only this ragged camp. It is a "parasitic Greek civilization"—minus the civilization.

---

22 The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 44.
23 Ibid.
24 Cited in Ibid.
This attitude seems to lie behind the words of the woman in Philip's farm congregation who "said it was well to be a preacher, money to spend, not much to do, a car to drive round the country in." Paul expresses his distrust of the meaning of work in the town in his remarks about bringing up children:

"It's no place in here to bring up a boy," he went on to caution me. "They don't have enough to do—don't take enough responsibility. Long before I was Steve's age I looked after my horse—days I wasn't at school I rode fence and herded cattle— It was good for me—toughened me up, taught me self-reliance." 

In comparison with the country, the town seems concerned with trivialities and inessentials. Mrs. Bentley's response to Philip's drawing of Joe Lawson is one of shame:

The hands are mostly what you notice. Such big, disillusioned, steadfast hands, so faithful to the earth and seasons that betray them. I didn't know before what drought was really like, watching a crop dry up, going on again. I didn't know that Philip knew either. It makes me feel in contrast fussy and contemptible. There comes over me a kind of urge to do something strong and steadfast too. For what it's worth I sit vowing that I'll never complain about my clothes and furniture again.

The townspeople seem to be incapable of doing anything strong or steadfast. When Mrs. Bentley feels that the town should be removed from another of Philip's drawings she expresses this criticism in the strongest form:

The town shouldn't be there. It stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves.

---

27 As For Me and My House, p. 113.
28 Ibid., p. 70.
29 Ibid., p. 139.
Despite all the criticism, however, Ross does not completely reject the town. Although he would obviously like to get rid of some of its characteristics, he is not so naive as to think that it could simply be smudged out. He is also Puritan enough himself to believe that for all its hypocrisy it may still be preferable to a place where there is no faith. The ranch on which the Bentleys spend their holiday is such a place and Ross seems to imply that it is no answer.

Both the ranch and the ranch town to which the Bentleys go for the dance are characterized by an absence of moral standards and religious values. Philip, as preacher, seems completely out of place:

I must admit that Philip isn't showing up to advantage here. He can't make the cowboys forget he's a preacher, and at mealtimes they all look awkward and uncomfortable.\(^{31}\)

The main difference seems to be in the realm of sexual freedom. Paul's sister, Laura, is suspected of having rather loose morals and Annie, the half-breed servant girl, has been sleeping with her fiance. At the dance it is implied that the cowboys are there for only one reason. Paul asks Mrs. Bentley:

After a long, celibate week on the range just what did I think brought the cowboys to town on Saturday night?\(^ {32}\)

Mrs. Bentley's bedroom in Horizon has wallpaper with "little bright pink roses that stare at you like eyes" and which seem to be there "to report to Mrs. Finley if the minister isn't careful always first to say his prayers."\(^ {33}\) Over her bed at the ranch there is the picture of a Hereford bull, Gallant Lad the Third, whose son Priapus the First is on the ranch.

In spite of the fact that the ranch served a purpose in helping the Bentleys to see themselves more clearly and in making

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 69.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 93.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 98.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 12.
Philip seem bigger and freer, Mrs. Bentley realizes that it is not the place for her. The sexual freedom does not seem to apply to her. She is forced to sleep apart from Philip and her experience with the young cowboy at the dance is all innocence. She sees her Hereford more as an amiable guardian than as a symbol of sexual freedom.

Ross implies that superficial and hypocritical as Horizon may be and however debased the Puritan ethic may become, a simple rejection of it is not valid because there is nothing to put in its place. The removal of all the Horizon standards frightens Mrs. Bentley:

The close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made—it was as if I were entering dead forbidden country, approaching the lair of terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls.34

She interprets this feeling more fully:

We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it first the night I walked alone along the river bank—a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of existence, so snug, compact, that here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude—we think a force or presence into it—even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us—for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all.35

There is no escape from the Puritan ethic for one who has been brought up in it:

I speak or laugh, and suddenly in my voice catch a hint of the benediction. It just means, I suppose, that all these years the Horizons have been working their will

---

34 Ibid., p. 95.
on me. My heresy, perhaps, is less than I sometimes think.\textsuperscript{36}

Neither, Ross implies, is there the possibility of avoiding the Puritan influence in western Canadian society. Laura has been tamed, Annie finally gets married, and the wild town is destined to be subdued until it has a sign in the poolroom like that of Horizon: "The language that your mother used is good enough for here."\textsuperscript{37} And despite the fact that the town may not be all that it should be, its existence is inevitable and it does have some redeeming features:

Last Friday they had a farewell supper for us in the basement of the church, made speeches, sang \textit{God Be With You Till We Meet Again}, presented us with a handsome silver flower basket. It's the way of a little Main Street town—sometimes a rather nice way.\textsuperscript{38}

The distinctions that Ross makes between the worlds of the town, the ranch and the farm are repeated, with slight variations, in his portrayal of the two central characters in the novel. Philip Bentley, in his role as preacher, represents another aspect of hypocrisy. Whereas the townspeople think that they believe, but act in ways that indicate their lack of faith, Philip, as preacher, is forced to act as if he believes while privately he thinks he does not. As artist, Philip is identified more with the ranch than with the town. Mrs. Bentley is clearly aligned with the world of the farm. She is the Puritan who finds a meaningful faith.

Philip Bentley was an illegitimate child who was subjected to ridicule and ostracized by the people of the small town in which he was born. As a result, he grew to hate everything they stood for. "They could deplore his bastardy no more than he despised their Main Street minds."\textsuperscript{39} His reaction was a completely natural one.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 93.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 96.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 164.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 31.
He found, however, that the only way he could escape from this town and receive an education was by entering the Church:

It was a hard acceptance. This Church that had tolerated him, that stood for the respectable, self-righteous part of the town, that all these years he had pitted himself against; he was to turn to it now, be humble to it, pull a grateful face.  

Although originally he intended to leave the Church as soon as possible, years later he is still working for it, partly because he has married and had to face his financial responsibilities. Consequently he is continually reminded of his hypocrisy as he preaches what he does not believe, utters pious remarks while visiting, or smokes in the privacy of his house. Mrs. Bentley sees his dilemma in a dream:

I seemed to see him in the pulpit, turning through the pages of the Bible. The church was filled. I was sitting tense, dreading something, all my muscles tight and aching. It seemed hours that he kept on, searching vainly for his text; and then with a laugh he seized the Bible suddenly, and hurled it crashing down among the pews.

Philip, however, has a problem which goes deeper than the difficulty involved in trying to act a role in which he cannot believe. His problem is that he does believe more than he is willing to admit. He, also, is a Puritan whose heresy is less than he sometimes thinks. Perhaps the best sign of this is the feeling of guilt about his hypocrisy. A man who had totally rejected the faith in which he was brought up might hate the hypocrisy into which circumstances had forced him, but he would be unlikely to feel guilty about it. Philip has tried to reject and has succeeded to a large extent, but he cannot help feeling that he should believe. Mrs. Bentley says of his attempt to get out of the Church:

---

40 Ibid., p. 32.
41 Ibid., p. 15.
42 See above, footnote 36.
But having failed he's not a strong or great man, just a guilty one. There are plenty of others to whom the Church means just bread and butter, who at best assert an easy, untried faith, but that's no solution for him. His guilt is that emphatically he does not believe. His disbelief amounts to an achievement.43

His reason prompts his disbelief, but his emotions tell him that he cannot escape from God:

And there's the strange part—he tries to be so sane and rational, yet all the time keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him. He's cold and skeptical towards religion. He tries to measure life with intellect and reason, insists to himself that he is satisfied with what they prove for him; yet here there persists this conviction of a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life to make certain it will be spent in a wind-swept, sun-burned little Horizon.

It isn't an attitude either that he's encouraged just as an excuse for himself. He's not the kind to shift the blame for his failure to an Almighty. It's just that with something deeper than his intellect he believes that Horizon is his due.44

Because he cannot believe whole-heartedly, because he knows he has compromised himself and acted hypocritically, his God seems to possess only the harshest, most arbitrary and vindictive attribute of the Puritan God:

He made a compromise once, with himself, his conscience, his ideals; and now he believes that by some retributive justice he is paying for it.45

In many ways his guilt feelings about his disbelief and hypocrisy seem to be more responsible for his inability to leave the Church

43 As For Me and My House, p. 18.
44 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
than his financial insecurity: "for he's the kind that keeps his hypocrisy beside him the way a guilty monk would keep his scourge." Believing that Horizon is his due, he remains in the Church because he believes he should be punished.

Hypocrisy is especially to be feared by the Puritan. Puritanism claims that the experience of election results in visible sainthood. One of the ways in which inward sanctification can be seen to exist is through its outward manifestation in man's actions. The actions are important, but unless they spring from a real experience of faith they have no value:

The chief value of a Puritan's actions in his own eyes was symbolical; they were emblems of his election rather than ethically commendable deeds.

This emphasis on the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith rather than by works means that the Puritan is required to scrutinize his motives very carefully. "Guilt or innocence consisted not in what was done but in what was intended." Indeed, if the Puritan recognizes that his actions do not spring from faith, and are in that sense hypocritical, he is forced to conclude that he is probably not one of the elect, but one of the damned. This close relationship between hypocrisy and damnation naturally heightens the fear of hypocrisy. Philip who "handicaps himself with a guilty feeling that he ought to mean everything he says," is very much a Puritan in this respect.

At times Philip's guilt goes beyond his concern for his unbelief and hypocrisy to a guilt which results from his sense of being involved in actions which he himself sees as sinful. This is especially apparent in his attitude towards sex. He tries to reject

---

46 Ibid., p. 79.
48 Ibid.
49 As For Me and My House, p. 4.
the stigma attached to his illegitimacy by deciding to be proud of it, and by making a hero out of his father, but the shame and ridicule to which he is exposed affects him deeply and becomes a part of his character. He is still sensitive about it when he decides to marry:

Before we were married he told me who he was and what he came from, his head set defiant, his voice quick and hard, warning me, asking nothing.  

His guilt is even more pronounced in his feelings towards his act of adultery. Roy Daniells calls him "the righteous fornicator against whom the clamors of his own conscience obscurely rage." Done partly as an act of rebellion and protest against his intolerable situation, and perhaps partly to convince himself that he does not care, his adultery nevertheless causes him to feel guilt both because he preaches against it and thinks he does not believe his preaching and because at bottom he does believe it is a sin. When Philip accuses Mrs. Bentley of being too concerned about Paul, she wonders if the remarks are caused by a guilt feeling:

And still I keep wondering is it a sense of guilt that drove him to it. Unknown to himself even, deeper than his consciousness. Does it mean that I'm becoming a reproach? Guilty himself, is his impulse to find me guilty too?  

When she thinks of the difficulty of achieving reconciliation between them she asserts: "It's his own verdict of guilty that stands between us, not mine."  

In his presentation of Philip as preacher, Ross has done a fine job of describing the Puritan who can neither believe nor reject. His presentation of Philip as artist, however, is not so consistent.

---

50 Ibid., p. 29.
51 Introduction to Ibid., p. vii.
52 As For Me and My House, p. 135.
53 Ibid.
Philip's art is intended to represent his freedom from Puritanism and the problems of conscience into which it has forced him:

Sermon and drawing together, they're a kind of symbol, a summing up. The small-town preacher and the artist—what he is and he nearly was... 54

In Horizon he draws in secret, never displaying his pictures. On the ranch he paints in the open air and even makes a public presentation of a painting to Laura. The implication is that he cannot fulfill himself as an artist while he remains within the puritanical atmosphere of the Church.

There are many conflicting theories about the extent of the Puritan suspicion of art, but it must at least be said that the Puritan thinks that art must somehow serve a religious or moral purpose if it is to be considered worthwhile. Lawrence Sasek describes the Puritan theory of style as "a notion of the proper way to achieve the ideal of instructing and motivating the hearers and readers" 55 and states:

One can almost see developing a tradition of literary fame comparable to the secular. The main difference seems to be that whenever the comment is extended, the immortality ascribed to the author becomes dependent on the religious value of his work, with his personality and style only subsidiary considerations. 56

Philip seems to reject this theory, insisting that the value of art lies in its form, not in the feelings it arouses in the spectator:

According to Philip it's form that's important in a picture, not the subject or the associations that the subject calls to mind; the pattern you see, not the literary emotion you feel. 57

54 Ibid., p. 4.

55 The Literary Temper of the English Puritans (Baton Rouge, La.,
Or as he says at another point:

A good way to test a picture is to turn it upside down. That knocks all the sentiment out of it, leaves you with just the design and form.58

Again, however, Philip's practice seems to contradict his theories. Almost every time Mrs. Bentley looks at one of his drawings she draws an appropriately Puritan moral from it. That this points to her own puritanical outlook is obvious, but she usually seems justified in her interpretation. Furthermore, Philip is not entirely consistent in his theories. In his comparison of religion and art, he sounds suspiciously Puritan:

"Religion and art," he says, "are almost the same thing anyway. Just different ways of taking a man out of himself, bringing him to the emotional pitch that we call ecstasy or rapture. They're both a rejection of the material, common sense world for one that's illusory, yet somehow more important."59

It is not clear where Ross stands in regard to Philip's art. There is no indication in the novel that Philip has real ability aside from Mrs. Bentley's belief in him, and no indication as to which theory of art is correct in Ross's opinion. This is due, perhaps, to Ross's personal involvement in the problem and the tension which he himself feels between the two theories.


56Ibid., p. 28.

57As For Me and My House, p. 80.

58Ibid., p. 154.

59Ibid., p. 112.
A similar tension is presented in Ross's portrayal of the society's attitude towards art. Philip hides his art from his congregation and the only time they recognize it and see any use for it is when they ask him to make posters for the Church. Mrs. Bentley, who has real musical talent, has been reduced to playing hymns for the church service, imitating organ chimes for visitors, and performing Liszt on a poor piano to help fill in time between the acts of a badly acted play put on by the Ladies Aid. Philip, as a rule, refuses to compromise by catering to these attitudes which are a caricature of the Puritan theory of art. Mrs. Bentley is willing to compromise because she has rejected a musical career in order to marry Philip. Here Ross is presenting a very real predicament of the Canadian artist. If he is completely true to himself, he will very likely receive no recognition. If he compromises, he may be successful, but will then be tormented by his hypocrisy. John Matthews points to this predicament in his discussion of Mrs. Moodie's fiction:

When writing her novels, however, Mrs. Moodie is speaking in a different language, and she felt bound to follow an elaborate ritual which smothered her lively personality. We have already seen some of the reasons for this—the conservative puritanism which emphasized the spartan virtues of hard work coupled with moral righteousness, and which tended to regard the reading of fiction as a waste of time, and hence morally evil. But the ingrained human love of a story could not be suppressed. In Canada it was channelled into a mould that fitted the prejudices of society. If the novel had to exist, then at least it could meet certain conditions; and as society was based on unyielding moral values, so the novel was to be judged by the same inflexible criteria. 60

Ross personally has refused to compromise by using this different language, but like Philip, he has achieved only a Pyrrhic victory. And since in almost every other respect, Mrs. Bentley seems to represent the proper attitude towards life, her attitude towards her music may

---

point to an unconscious feeling on Ross's part that perhaps art should be used for moral and instructive purposes. Certainly part of the Canadian artist's problem has been with his own Puritan background as well as with that of the society.

While Ross shows some ambivalence in his attitude towards Puritanism in his portrayal of Philip as artist, his depiction of Mrs. Bentley as a Puritan who finds a meaningful faith never falters. As Roy Daniells says: "She is pure gold and wholly credible." She is not only consistently and thoroughly Puritan, but she represents all the best and most positive aspects of Puritanism.

Unlike Philip, Mrs. Bentley has a very firm and deep faith. In typical Puritan fashion, this faith seems to have been given to her. Puritanism claims that because of man's sin faith must be a gift of God rather than an achievement of man. "Grace must pursue the soul, forcibly seize upon it, violently reverse the will." Mrs. Bentley, in remarking upon the faith of the farm congregation states:

Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken—a very great faith, or a very foolish one. Paul and I are tied on it.

Somehow she feels that she has been grasped by it. This inward sanctification is visibly manifested in her motives and actions. Faced with just as much temptation to commit adultery as Philip, she refrains because of her love for him and her desire to be faithful to him. Although she is unable to fulfill her role as woman by having a child, she is willing to adopt Steve and finally even Philip's own illegitimate child. In doing this she goes far beyond the ordinary requirements of Puritanism. Ellen Amundsen, in Grove's Settlers of the Marsh finally accepts the Puritan idea that

---

61 Introduction to As For Me and My House, p. vii.
63 As For Me and My House, p. 84.
that it is woman's duty to raise children. Mrs. Bentley is willing to give Philip a son at the cost of incredible sacrifice on her part.

Mrs. Bentley's basic experience of faith by no means makes her consequent actions easy to perform. The criticism that might be levelled at Gander Stake's almost automatically correct responses does not apply to her. The Puritan saint is not allowed to rest on the assurance of his sanctification:

In this life the regenerated man is not at once made perfect; he still retains his body and sensual desires; his sin is not expelled, but grace is given to him to resist it and defeat it. The struggle is a hard one, sin is not vanquished in a day or in a month.  

This belief makes even more urgent the demand for constant self-scrutiny mentioned earlier in connection with the testing of the authenticity of the outward signs of grace. Men are truly required "continually to cast up their accounts." Mrs. Bentley does exactly this. One of the most obvious differences between her diary and Chaddie McKail's is her habit of introspection.

Mrs. Bentley's introspection does reveal her sin. She realizes that she has been too possessive towards Philip and has, in fact, been partly to blame for his inability to get out of his predicament in the Church:

Of course I've been wrong. Sitting her quiet and tired now I understand things better. All these years I've been trying to possess him, to absorb his life into mine ...  

She found it difficult originally to prompt him to ask her to marry him and later wonders if she should have tried at all:

65 Ibid., p. 53.
66 As For Me and My House, p. 64.
It's hard to feel yourself a hindrance, to stand back watching a whole life go to waste. Sometimes Philip himself seems to know what I feel, and in his awkward way tries to make me understand it's not his wife that keeps him a small-town preacher, but the limitations of his hand and eye. Only I'm not so sure about that either. Sometimes I wish I could be.67

Daniell's remark that Mrs. Bentley is "Eve comforting Adam after a fall in which she has played no contributory part"68 must be incorrect. Even if Philip has no artistic talent and has largely himself to blame for his failure, Mrs. Bentley is surely correct in seeing her motives as wrong and in realizing that she also has hindered Philip.

The comfort which she offers would be meaningless without her awareness of her own sin. The Puritan belief that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God means that man cannot judge his fellow man. Mrs. Bentley tries her utmost to understand the reason for Philip's adultery and refuses to judge him: "I wish I could tell him that there's no guilty or not guilty but just the two of us as we've always been."69 This is a very different kind of reaction to adultery than Chaddie McKail's. Chaddie was never capable of understanding her husband because she was not aware of sin in herself. She was also incapable, therefore, of real forgiveness. The Puritan believes, however, that God is a loving God who grants the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation to his sinful creatures. Philip knows only the harsh side of this God; Mrs. Bentley tries to convince him of the existence of the other side:

Once he tried to write, the second year we were married, and all through his clumsy manuscript I read himself. That was what spoiled it, himself, the painful, sometimes bitter, reality. Even I might have done better. There's another reality, kindlier, that he's never seen or understood.70

---

67 Ibid., p. 33.

68 Introduction to Ibid., p. vii; italics added.

69 As For Me and My House, p. 135.
Because he does not understand this kindlier reality, he cannot understand Mrs. Bentley's offer of forgiveness:

If I try to let him know that Judith now is behind us both he'll think it just a gesture of smug self-righteousness, will shrink away uneasy, and for having been forgiven will never forgive.\(^1\)

The solution for Philip at the end of the story is flight to the city. It is essentially an escape, and Mrs. Bentley realizes that it is no real answer.

Deep inside I know that a thousand dollars and getting away from Horizon isn't nearly so important as I'm pretending to believe. Not so far as I'm concerned, anyway. It will make him think more of himself maybe, but it won't make him think any more of me.\(^2\)

The only possible meaningful solution for her is her forgiveness of Philip and the acceptance of his child. As Daniells remarks: "in her the principle of self-sacrifice out of love and a desire for reconciliation shines in all its pristine Puritan beauty."\(^3\) Whether or not her act will redeem Philip and bring about a reconciliation between them is an unanswered question at the end of the novel. It cannot be denied, however, that her resolution is a vivid and convincing illustration of the real existence of a kindlier reality.

Ross has presented the most detailed picture of Puritanism to be found in western Canadian fiction. His most significant contribution is his assertion that the spirit of love is the most important reality and that this spirit ultimately triumphs. What Robert Stead takes for granted in *Grain*, Ross affirms "after torments too long for any but the Puritan to endure."\(^4\) What Ostenso cannot find and what Grove sees being inevitably defeated, Ross sees existing at the heart of western Canadian society. This affirmation is the most difficult affirmation for a Puritan to make and yet if he cannot make

\(^{70}\)Ibid., p. 29.
\(^{71}\)Ibid., p. 136.
it his faith is meaningless. Faced with a terrible awareness of the sinfulness of man, and confronted by an incomprehensible and all-powerful God, the Puritan must cry out in spite of all appearances to the contrary, that God is good and God is love. For if God is not love, then where is man?

72 Ibid., p. 130.
73 Introduction to Ibid., p. vii.
74 Ibid.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

The variety of attitudes towards Puritanism reflected in the novels under consideration in this study testifies to the pervasiveness and complexity of the Puritan influence in the prairie region. Arthur Stringer's rejection of the Puritan ethic is not convincing because of his superficial and inadequate understanding of its meaning and force, but his recognition of its existence is significant. Martha Ostenso's rejection is more impressive because it springs from a real awareness of the dangers inherent in the Puritan doctrine of a supreme and arbitrarily omnipotent God. Frederick Philip Grove presents characters to whom a meaningful Puritan faith is possible but points to a future in which this faith, in its pure form at least, will be unable to exist. Robert Stead is unique in his unqualified affirmation of the Puritan values and in his optimism regarding their relevance. Sinclair Ross also affirms, but he recognizes the existence of the dangers to which Ostenso points and the possibility of the breakdown of Puritan values which Grove predicts.

With the exception of Grain, all these novels illustrate the futility of attempting to escape from Puritanism or of putting anything in its place, and Grain is only an exception because to Stead the question does not arise. The myth of American innocence in Stringer's prairie trilogy is clearly not applicable to the situation described. The Gare family in Wild Geese cannot escape completely from Caleb's influence after his death and the alternative way of life hinted at by Ostenso has little or no meaningful content. The problem of sex is presented from a Puritan point of view in Settlers of the Marsh and Ellen Amundsen gradually comes to realize the necessity of submitting herself to the Puritan code and of accepting her role as wife and mother. John Elliot's children in
Our Daily Bread are unable to find meaning in their father’s faith and can find nothing to put in its place. At the end of Fruits of the Earth, Abe Spaulding finds himself trying to act responsibly in a society which is rejecting the standards in which he believes and he can do nothing more than attempt to force these standards on the young people of his district. Philip Bentley, in As For Me and My House, is the best example of the Puritan who rebels and rejects and yet in doing so, still remains a Puritan at heart.

American literature has benefited immensely from the reaction against Puritanism in American society and from the myths of innocence and hopefulness which were substituted for it. Not only were the myths more consciously articulated but the tensions and conflicts established by the clash of two opposing attitudes towards life provided vital images and dramatic forms for the artists. The fact that no alternative to Puritanism has been found in the Canadian prairie region has meant that the novelists have been forced to find their dramatic conflicts and tensions within Puritanism itself. These tensions have found expression, in Canadian prairie fiction, in three major themes: the problem of man's relationship to the soil, the problem of woman, and the problem of authority.

The characteristic attitude towards the soil on the prairie is one of obedience and faithfulness. Gander Stake, John Elliot, the farmers in As For Me and My House, even Caleb Cane, recognize that in the rhythm of the climate and the stages of growth a process is going on quite independently of anything they may do. Grove is most insistent on the necessity of this attitude of obedience. John Elliot is clearly right in his contention that you cannot fool the land. His own success and the failure of his son, who tries to abuse the land for selfish purposes, provide proof of this. Part of the reason for Abe Spaulding's failure lies in his attempt to be master over the land. Because it is agricultural land and because most of it does not even need to be cleared, the prairie simply lies there,
depending on man to plant the seed and make his feeble efforts to tend the fields, but nevertheless calmly and mysteriously ordering the seasons and providing (or not providing) the crops. Man does not fight nature on the prairie as he does in other parts of Canada. The most he can do is to co-operate with it. The prairie, however, remains the master; the type of co-operation is not that possible where the soil is thought of in terms of garden-like imagery. The barrenness and spaciousness of the land and the ever present possibility of crop failure provide a constant reminder of man's insignificance and lack of control.

The prairie climate and soil are a fertile setting for the Puritan doctrine of God. The farmer, aware of his own insignificance, is yet convinced that his hard work is both necessary and rewarding. He must believe that the land is fruitful, that its essential nature is to produce food, and yet because of its size and the arbitrariness of rain, hail, storm, and drought, he must often assert its basic goodness in the face of evidence quite to the contrary. As Mrs. Bentley says:

> Even the dry years yield a little wheat; even the little means livelihood for some. I know a town where once it rained all June, and that fall the grain lay in piles outside full granaries. It's an old town now, shabby and decrepit like the others, but it, too, persists. It knows only two years: the year it rained all June, and next year.¹

Standing alone before the unpredictable, unknowable forces of nature, the farmer can easily believe that the god to whom he prays for rain is the stern, demanding and mysterious Puritan God.

The role of woman is another common preoccupation in prairie fiction. There is a tendency to see women either as temptresses or as wives and mothers. *Settlers of the Marsh* provides the crudest example of this in the contrast of Ellen Amundsen and Mrs. Vogel, and there are suggestions of it in Stringer's trilogy. When the two

different aspects of woman are embodied in two different women the
problem is fairly straightforward. Stead and Ross present the
problem in its most troublesome form by depicting women whose characters
contain both elements. Jo Burge is a temptress to Gander, but she
is also his idea of a perfect wife; as Jo Claus she is again a
temptress to Gander, but is then someone else's perfect wife. Stead
is interested in describing the problem from Gander's point of view.
Ross presents the woman's side of it. Mrs. Bentley is aware that
she has tempted Philip, into marriage it is true, but she has
nevertheless had to work hard at wearing down his resistance. She also
realizes that part of the attraction of her relationship with Philip
lies in her desire for sexual enjoyment. She is especially defensive
about this because of her guilt feelings concerning her inability to
bear a child.

This whole problem is deeply rooted in the doctrines of
Puritanism. Sex for the sake of enjoyment only is to be regarded
with suspicion. The woman who is unwilling or unable to subordinate
her sexual desires to the more noble and sacrificial aspects of
wifehood and motherhood is, if not actually evil, at least morally lax.
Perhaps the reason for the predominance of this attitude in the
fiction and for the tendency to express it in rather black and white
terms is again due to the nature of life on the prairie. The necessity
for hard labour, and for children to help with the chores, makes it
even more important that the woman who is to be the wife be
essentially a mother and a good worker rather than a romantic or sexual
companion. The woman as intellectual companion or as a lovely but
useless ornament has no place. Chaddie McKail's attempts to be an
intellectual are useless. The city girl in Grain seems to have
slightly suspicious moral standards, but just as important is the fact
that her hands are not made for rough work as are Jo Burge's. Judith
Gare may be a representative of sexual freedom, but she can do any of
the work on the farm. Mrs. Vogel is condemned because of her inability
to work and because her sexual demands tire Niels and prevent him from
working properly. Abe Spaulding's wife is considered unfit to be a farm wife because her background has not prepared her for the task. Mrs. Bentley, although not a farm wife, has absorbed some of these attitudes. She has tried to be an intellectual companion to Philip, but at the time when she writes her diary she has come to the conclusion that the only positive thing she can do for him is to provide him with a son. Ironically, the son is Philip's own, an illegitimate child whose mother, Judith West, rebelled against the Puritan attitudes towards woman. The son, however, cannot be acknowledged or accepted unless he is adopted legally into the family.

The fact that woman's role on the prairie is a limited and difficult one is also reflected in the absence of the gentle and mediating feminine principle in the fiction. Except for Mrs. Elliot, whose character is scarcely developed, and Mrs. Bentley, who is not a farm wife, the spirit of woman is crushed and defeated. The necessity for hard, spirit-crushing work is partly responsible but so is the fact that the father's authority is so absolute that the mother is often ignored. The relationships within the farm family reflect the tendency within Puritanism to subdue the mediating and loving aspects of God and to emphasize his masculine, harsh and authoritarian characteristics.

The problem of authority is the most predominant theme in the fiction under discussion. Although the woman is required to work, the man does the tilling of the soil, and since this is the most important work, he is the most important figure on the farm. The amount of time required for his work inevitably means that he will seem aloof from the rest of the family, but since the farm is a little community of its own whose only unit is the family, the authority is vested in the man in his capacity as father. Naturally a representative of the type of authority invested in the deity, the prairie father represents the harshest aspects of the Puritan God. Duncan McKail is extremely anxious to be the unquestioned and all-powerful master of his family and Chaddie smarts under the arbitrariness of his
of his demands. Caleb Gare is a perverted and unsympathetic authority figure, lacking even the redeeming feature of a sense of justice. John Elliot and Abe Spaulding fear the consequences of the loss of control over their children. Jackson Stake learns from his experiences with his oldest son that he must assert a somewhat subtler form of authority over Gander if he wants to keep him on the farm, but he allows his wife little freedom and tenderness.

In Settlers of the Marsh and in As For Me and My House the problem is presented in terms of a search for authority. Niels Lindstedt feels that his struggle to establish himself would be meaningless if he could not finally achieve the status of husband and father. Philip Bentley is a man in search of both fatherhood and a father. The fact that he is illegitimate has influenced his attitude towards authority. Warren Tallman, speaking of the comfort of family life, says of Philip:

Philip Bentley has this comfort stolen from him even before it is provided when his unmarried father, a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, dies before Philip is born. That the son is cast by this deprivation into the limbo of an uncreated childhood becomes evident when he emerges into adult life also a divinity student, turned atheist, turned artist, struggling without success to discover the father he did not know while married to a woman who is all too obviously more a mother to him than she is a wife.²

Knowing only the make-believe authority of an imaginary father in his youth, he is unable, as an adult, to accept either the authority of the Church or the responsibilities of fatherhood. His relationship with his wife is ambiguous because he is unable to assert his own mastery and yet unwilling to relinquish it to her. Philip's father, as unknowable as the Puritan God, has, nevertheless, by creating him,

ordained his path and posed for him, for the rest of his life, the problem of the difficulty of responsible and free action.

Although Puritanism has been especially adaptable to conditions on the Canadian prairie, the question as to whether it will be as relevant in the future is becoming more and more pressing. Grove prophesies the breakdown of Puritanism in the society and relates it to the disappearance of those characteristics of farm life which originally encouraged the Puritan doctrines. Increasing mechanization and the movement towards the town and city are removing the people from their close contact with the land. Consequently the concept of God is either changed or ignored more easily. As farm life becomes easier, and again, as the farmers move into the towns, the role of woman becomes further complicated. No longer forced to work long hours in isolated conditions, the woman finds herself with free time on her hands and with the possibility of more social life. Sexual standards become looser and more confused. The family is no longer the main unit of authority. Other authorities make demands and the whole problem becomes diffuse instead of being concentrated in the figure of the father.

It is not clear as yet what style of life and what myths will develop as a result of these changes. Grove sees a sudden breakdown of the Puritan values and is pessimistic about the possibility of a positive alternative. Ross is also concerned with the disappearance of the energizing spirit of Puritanism, but his picture suggests a transitional stage rather than a sudden break. His presentation of the character of Mrs. Bentley may indicate the possibility of moving in a meaningful direction in spite of the disappearance of hitherto relevant doctrines.

It is obvious that whatever view replaces Puritanism on the prairie, the Puritan influence will never be completely lost. If nothing remains but the characteristically Puritan manner of viewing existence, the heritage will still have been an extremely valuable one. Miller and Johnson suggest that the strength of Puritanism lies in its ability to face facts:
The strength of Puritanism was its realism. If we may borrow William James’s frequently misleading division of the human race into the two types of the ‘tough-minded’ and the ‘tender-minded,’ and apply it with caution, it may serve our purposes. . . . The Puritan mind was one of the toughest the world has ever had to deal with.³

Mrs. Bentley is one of the best examples in Canadian Prairie fiction of the tough-minded Puritan. Whatever the future may hold for her she will face it realistically and unflinchingly. "She has a capacity to see and comprehend a whole situation; she can criticize, objectify, and finally accept, even if her acceptance is often darkened with grave doubts."⁴ Sinclair Ross is like Mrs. Bentley in his ability to face all the facts and yet to refuse to become completely disillusioned. He is a good example of the type of tough-minded artist that the country needs. In fact, Miller and Johnson claim that the tough-minded approach is becoming more and more relevant:

'Science' tells us of a world of stark determinism, in which heredity and environmental conditioning usurp the function of the Puritan God in predestining man to ineluctable fates. It is, indeed, true that the sense of things being ordered by blind forces presents a different series of problems than does the conception of determination by a divine being; no matter how unintelligible the world might seem to the Puritan, he never lost confidence that ultimately it was directed by an intelligence. Yet even with this momentous difference in our imagination of the controlling power, the human problem today has more in common with the Puritan understanding of it than at any time for two centuries: how can men live by the lights of humanity in a universe that appears indifferent or even hostile to them? We are terribly aware, once more, thanks to the revelation of psychologists and the events of recent political history, that men are not perfect or essentially good. The Puritan description of them, we have


⁴Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," Canadian Literature, No. 23 (Winter, 1965), 21-22.
been reluctantly compelled to admit, is closer to what we have witnessed than the description given in Jeffersonian democracy or in transcendentalism. The Puritan accounted for these qualities by the theory of original sin; he took the story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden for scientific, historical explanation of these observable facts. The value of his literature today cannot be for us in his explanation; if there is any it must rest in the accuracy of his observations.  

Canadian prairie fiction has established a tradition that is based on accuracy of observation. The specific doctrines of Puritanism may disappear, and the artists may discover new and dramatic myths, but it is to be hoped that the tough-minded and realistic Puritan approach to life will continue to exert its influence on the life and literature of the future.

---

5Ibid., p. 63.
WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES


_____. Settlers of the Marsh. Toronto: Ryerson, 1925.


SECONDARY SOURCES


Dennison, Grant. Toronto: Musson, 1920.


The Smoking Flax. New York: George H. Doran, 1924.


