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THE EVOLUTION OF ADELE WISEMAN'S
CREATIVE VISION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE ARTS
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The Canadian literary canon contains few writers of such diversity as Adele Wiseman. Although she is chiefly remembered for her two novels, her canon extends well beyond the fiction for which she is chiefly remembered. In fact, Wiseman was a skilled practitioner of numerous genres including drama, the essay, the short story, and the memoir. To discern the creative vision underlying Wiseman's *oeuvre*, this thesis devotes one chapter to each of her major works: The Sacrifice (ch. 1); The Lovebound (ch. 2); Crackpot (ch. 3); Testimonial Dinner (ch. 4); Old Woman at Play (ch. 5); and Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays and "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" (ch. 6).

While existing criticism of Wiseman's writing generally concentrates on single dimensions of her personhood (i.e. faith, gender, nationality), this thesis suggests that a more valid analysis of Wiseman's *oeuvre* would acknowledge its hybridity. The diversity apparent in Wiseman's canon should be seen as a reflection of her triply marginalized subject position as a Jewish Canadian female writer. As such, the thesis draws on feminist theory, post-colonial theory and Jewish hermeneutics to elucidate Wiseman's creative vision. By combining these three theoretical perspectives, one can ascertain how Wiseman's faith, gender and nationality intersected to create the unique canon she left behind.

Because Wiseman was such an astute critic of her own work, this thesis relies heavily upon her own statements about her craft. The Adele Wiseman Fonds at the W. B. Scott Library, York University was an invaluable source for such information. Of particular importance was Wiseman's thirty-year correspondence with Margaret Laurence, her best friend, and Malcolm Ross, her mentor. These letters provide readers with a rare opportunity to assess Wiseman's creative vision. They confirm that Wiseman's stylistic experimentation was an outgrowth of her peripheral status in mainstream society. Her need to question and reevaluate existing literary conventions reflected her belief that such conventions were restrictive and exclusionary.

Despite the heterogeneity apparent in Wiseman's work, it is nonetheless united by a single underlying vision: Wiseman writes in order to teach people how to live--particularly in communion with others. All of her writing radiates immense compassion for human beings, but especially the dispossessed. Her writing is a plea to reject hierarchical structures in society--structures which divide people into "haves" and "have-nots." She presents readers with an alternative, salutary vision of a world where such divisions are obliterated in favour of heterogeneity and an accompanying awareness of each individual's unique contribution to the whole.

INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that this thesis, which is meant to pay homage to Adele Wiseman's writing, would likely invoke distrust from the author herself. Adele Wiseman was wary of educators and academics. She disapproved of their penchant for neat categories, their desire to organize all things rationally. Teachers, she acknowledges at the end of Old Woman at Play, train humans to see things in a like manner. "We are," she states, "wistfully attached to the idea of 'reason,' of a logically sequential, consciously controlled linear existence in time" (128). Those children who adamantly refuse to abide by their educators' demands retain their creativity by maintaining "sloppy margins for unlearning, o'erleaping and transforming" (24).

Not surprisingly, Wiseman's writing conforms to the above statement. More than anything else, her writing is notable for its tremendous variety and innovation. She is, of course, a master of many genres: the novel, the memoir, the essay, and drama, to name only a few. Sometimes she rejects the conventions of genre outright, preferring to create her own generic forms. This is particularly evident in her later works, Old Woman at Play and Testimonial Dinner. The tone of Wiseman's work is

equally varied. The Sacrifice, for instance, is the tragic story of Abraham, whose maladjustment to the realities of the New World leads to his murdering of a provocative younger woman, Laiah. Crackpot, by contrast, is a ribald portrayal of the life of an urban ghetto prostitute, Hoda. Abraham's melancholic mourning for a lost world in The Sacrifice gives way to Hoda's comical glorification of her marginalization and difference. Given such a 'disparity' in Wiseman's work, it is hardly surprising that critics have found it difficult to grasp a unified vision in it.

The earliest critics of Wiseman's work dealt almost exclusively with the Jewish dimensions within it. Undoubtedly the most important critic on this subject is Michael Greenstein, who has written most extensively upon it. His monograph, Adele Wiseman and Her Work, (Toronto: ECW, 1985), views The Sacrifice and Crackpot as a pastiche of four historical stages:

"(1) biblical background; (2) Eastern Europe; (3) immigrant transition; [and] (4) North American acculturation" (10). This monograph was followed by another book, Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature (1989), in which Greenstein adopts a deconstructionist reading of seminal Jewish-Canadian works. He contends that a deconstructive approach is appropriate for an analysis of Jewish-Canadian writing given the preponderance of indeterminate meaning or "negative dialectics" within it (3). This indeterminate meaning,

Greenstein states, is apparent in its "recurrent attempts to mediate between tradition and modernism, home and exile, Jewish-Canadian particularism and universal significance" (3). While Greenstein has been the most prolific writer on elements of the Jewish tradition within Wiseman's work, other critics have written cogent articles on particular dimensions of Judaism within it. Both Kenneth Sherman and Francis Zichy, for instance, have explored evidence of the Kabbalah within Crackpot, while Alan Weiss has examined undercurrents of a Yiddish tradition within The Sacrifice and Crackpot.¹

More recent criticism has tended to focus on two additional dimensions of Wiseman's subject position: her nationality and her gender. In a radio interview with Michael Enright, Wiseman comments that Canadian society was both colonial and patriarchal at the time she was growing up. She acknowledges that the pressure to give up her Jewish identity was enormous within her schooling: immigrants were expected to assimilate British values in order to become model citizens. She comments that this acculturation was exacerbated by gender prejudice: 'good' girls were expected to be passive and compliant--values encouraged by Jewish and gentile society alike. Wiseman's perceptions of the Canadian society of her childhood are replicated in Crackpot. Hoda, like the author who created her, continually struggles with her peripheral status--a status determined by her faith and

gender. Michael Greenstein has written an engaging article on these hierarchical dimensions of Canadian society as reflected in Crackpot. Adopting a feminist and post-colonial interpretation, Greenstein illustrates how Hoda negotiates a place for herself in a society which has written her off to the margins. While Greenstein is the only critic to have explored Wiseman's work from a post-colonial perspective, feminist interpretations of her work have been plentiful. Laura McLauchlan, for instance, analyzes Old Woman at Play as an example of life-writing, and Ruth Panofsky examines the critical importance of Wiseman's friendship with Margaret Laurence. Much of the most recent criticism has been compiled in a special issue of Room of One's Own devoted to Adele Wiseman's writing.²

As one can see, criticism of Wiseman's work has been disparate, focusing as it has upon on single components of Wiseman's subject position as a Jewish Canadian female writer.³ A more valid analysis of Wiseman's corpus, I contend, would acknowledge the hybridity of her subject position. Directing attention to particular aspects of Wiseman's personhood, such as her gender and faith, invites misleading interpretations of her work, since Wiseman's vision issues from multiple sources. It is my belief that a hybrid subject logically requires a variety of approaches for apt reading. In a way consistent with that conviction, my thesis will combine post colonial with feminist

theory and Jewish hermeneutics to elucidate Wiseman's oeuvre. Combining these theoretical perspectives will serve to illustrate how Wiseman's faith, gender and nationality intersect to create the unique corpus of lively writings she has left for us to read--and to profit from.

The above statement is not meant to imply that Wiseman's vision is static. Indeed, Wiseman's works illustrate her evolving interests; and each work is indicative of Wiseman's particular interests at the time of its composition. In her earliest work, The Sacrifice (1956) and The Lovebound: a Tragi-Comedy (1960), the elucidation of her Jewish faith and culture appears to have been her primary interest. By contrast, in her later works, Crackpot (1974) and Old Woman at Play (1978), Wiseman primarily focuses on the issue of gender. In the years between the production of these two works, Wiseman wrote a play, Testimonial Dinner (1978), which expresses, even betrays, her fervent interest in the origins of Canadian nationalism and its consequences. Meanwhile, the essays compiled in her Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood (1987), which were written over a period of many years, illustrate her perennial interests in gender, Judaism, and nationalism.

In order to be as truthful as I can possibly be to Wiseman's vision for each particular work, I will tailor my theoretical analysis to the unique vision suggested by the work itself.

Consequently, the initial two chapters highlight Jewish hermeneutics, while later chapters rely more heavily on post-colonial and feminist analyses. Wherever possible, however, I look for common links between these theoretical perspectives, in order to indicate how facets of Wiseman's vision coalesced to produce her unique perspective.

While Wiseman emphasizes different issues through the course of her career, this thesis relies on the premise that there is a definitive vision underlying Wiseman's work. I agree with the testimony of Wiseman's friend, the Canadian poet Miriam Waddington, who wrote that she believed that Wiseman "always was trying to find new ways to say what she had to say" (18). At the same time, however, I hope to illustrate that many aspects of Wiseman's writing can be related to all three facets of her subject position.

An examination of Wiseman's major works illustrates four dominant features in her writing: (1) a distaste for inflexible mores; (2) the necessity of finding a personal value system (and an accompanying personal mythology and linguistic system); (3) the paradoxical importance of ancestral traditions; (4) and the ultimate redemptive feature of non-judgemental compassion for others. Despite the differences among her works, each one manifests these issues stylistically and thematically.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of Wiseman's work

is her manifest distrust of orthodox values. This wariness manifests itself in the subject matter of Wiseman's work, much of which focuses on the destructive effects of inflexible mores. In The Sacrifice, for instance, Abraham's madness is caused by his inability to reconcile his Old World values within a new environment which operates according to different values. Such rigidity is likewise the cause of Herzl and Hitzig's suffering in The Lovebound. These siblings are both duped by an unwillingness and/or inability to recognize the contrasting values of the gentiles surrounding them. Finally, in Crackpot, Hoda's suffering is a direct result of a society which shuns those who deviate from an 'acceptable' lifestyle.

In the later stages of her writing career, Wiseman displayed her distrust of orthodoxy in another manner: stylistic innovation. That is, the experimental features of her later works reflect her distrust of prescribed values. The probing essays in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood, the generically undefined work Old Woman at Play, and the experimental drama Testimonial Dinner, are stylistic testimonies reinforcing Wiseman's distrust of orthodoxy: these three works challenge classification through their dismissal of generic conventions.

At least in part, one may attribute Wiseman's distrust of absolute values to her Jewish faith. As already mentioned, Michael Greenstein believes that Jewish Canadian writing is

characterized by "negative dialectics." Greenstein attributes this characteristic feature to Jewish sacred writings and talmudic pilpul. Specifically, he postulates that this negation is a semitic characteristic stemming from prohibitions in the Mosaic Code, especially the second commandment's anti-representational injunction which led scholars like Erich Auerbach to characterize the Old Testament as mysterious, obscure, "fraught with background" that constantly demands interpretation.⁴ (8)

Greenstein's remarks suggest that Jews are imbued with a way of viewing the world which is considerably different from that of Christians. Both their sacred writings and the rabbinical scholarship which accompanies it encourage continual speculation, rather than certainty. Judaism is a religion which hinges on the exposition and reexposition of sacred texts. For instance, one of the early fathers, Rabbi Ben Bag-Bag states that continual examination of the Torah provides humans with an ever present source of wisdom. Indeed, in verse 5.25 of Ethics of the Fathers, Bag-Bag is recounted as saying, "Study the Torah again and again, for everything is contained in it; constantly examine it, grow old and gray over it, and swerve not from it, for there is nothing more excellent than it" (Birnbaum 524).

Wiseman's nationality and gender may equally contribute to her wariness of absolutes. Indeed, such distrust is often

manifest in post-colonial and feminist literature, much of which focuses upon the questioning of mainstream values. The editors of The Post-Colonial Studies Reader explain how these two discourses operate:

Feminist and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominant, and early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, was concerned with inverting the structures of domination, substituting, for instance, a female tradition or traditions for a male-dominated canon. But like post-colonial criticism, feminist theory has rejected such simple inversions in favour of a more general questioning of forms and modes, and the unmasking of the spuriously author/itative on which such canonical constructions are founded. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 249)

Yet, despite the shared ground linking these two theoretical constructs, editors Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin attribute societal domination to different ideological constructs: while post-colonial critics highlight the stultifying effects of imperialism, feminist critics focus on the stultifying effects of patriarchy. Nonetheless, all these theorists see rebellion against mainstream values as the primary means by which marginalized individuals assert themselves within these

constructs.

Wiseman's writing certainly fits the typical features of Jewish, feminist and post-colonial writing described above. Her writing is rife with reevaluations: all societal truths are subject to microscopic investigation. In The Sacrifice, Wiseman probes the values underlying the biblical prototype, The Binding of Isaac. In The Lovebound, gentile and Jewish values alike come under rigorous scrutiny. Of foremost concern in this work is the origin of radical evil, which she attributes (in part) to the egocentrism inherent in the Romantic conception of the poet. Wiseman's questioning of societal values persists in Crackpot: Hoda's meandering word-play and myth-making are indicative of Wiseman's disregard of the status quo. Generic experimentation likewise figures as a preoccupation within Wiseman's later works, Testimonial Dinner, Old Woman at Play, and Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays, once again emphasizing her wariness of convention. In these later works, Wiseman expresses her distrust of absolutes within the stylistic components of her works. Specifically, she forgoes generic conventions to assert contrasting values; she explores the multiple connotations and denotations of words through fervent word-play; and she suggests the erroneous assumptions of canonical literature by creating alternative stories, an activity I have designated as 'myth-making' within this thesis.

While Wiseman questions the nature of truth, she does not negate the value of ancestral traditions. Wiseman's conviction in the necessity of tradition sets her apart from the ever questioning tone of the postmodern writer, thus indicating why a deconstructive reading of her work is inappropriate. She sees traditions as guiding principles for human beings, which provide meaning in their lives. While one must be wary of too much rigidity in one's value system, one can nonetheless build upon these principles and adapt them to the reality of one's given circumstances. This view is expressed in all of her work. Certainly, it is a central concern of The Sacrifice: if Abraham is too rigid in his values, Isaac's ever-questioning nature contributes to indecision and despair. Yet his son Moses finds peace by once again returning to his grandfather for guidance on Mad Mountain. In The Lovebound ancestral traditions enable Yesh to persevere despite persecution. Even Hoda, the rebellious protagonist of Crackpot, ultimately chooses to listen to her father's stories at the end of the novel. Having spent most of her adulthood shunning them, she finally recognizes their necessity.⁵ It is likewise a central subject of her later works. In Testimonial Dinner, for instance, Wiseman considers how ancestry affects identity by looking at two varying accounts of the North West Rebellion, that of John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel. Her parallel narrative about Loksh's family illustrates how

neglecting the past hinders individual development. Wiseman adopts a more personal approach to the role of tradition in Old Woman at Play. In this book, Wiseman examines the connection between her mother's doll-making, her own writing, and her daughter's artwork. She indicates how each of their artistic credos has been shaped by their Jewish female identities.

Yet, despite Wiseman's veneration of tradition, her writing also displays a concern about women's absence within western and Jewish culture. Much of her work explores how patriarchal culture diminishes women through their recurrent absence within it. The female characters in her work frequently appear lost in a patriarchal society which ignores their views and needs: both Sarah and Ruth in The Sacrifice are passive victims of Abraham's rigidity; the women in The Lovebound are treated like chess pieces in an enterprise which plays with the fate of their lives; and Hoda's pregnancy in Crackpot is a pitiful consequence of a society which neglects to inform women about reproduction and contraception.

In the latter part of her career, Wiseman began discussing the impact of female traditions upon women. Indeed, this subject is central to her last two works, Old Woman at Play and Memoirs of a Book-Molesting Childhood. In the former, Wiseman evaluates how her writing has been affected by her mother's doll-making. In the latter, Wiseman considers how the western canonical

tradition socializes women to suit a patriarchal construct, while an alternative literary tradition has been nurtured by Canadian female writers.⁶ Obviously, in these later works, Wiseman expands her consideration of tradition to include female traditions--a subject which she neglected in her earlier works.

Wiseman's conviction in the values of tradition and ancestral lineage undoubtedly has its origin in her Jewish background. As the noted scholar William Foxwell Albright has stated, the Israelites emphasized lineage in "an unusually clear picture of simple beginnings, of complex migrations, and extreme vicissitudes" (qtd. in Abraham xlii). In its presentation of such complex lineage, the Hebrew Bible highlights its supreme importance to Jews. That Wiseman was aware of the biblical prototype seems undeniable. As Michael Greenstein has commented, she adopts this biblical structure and its emphasis on ancestry in her epigraph⁷ to the first chapter of Crackpot (Adele Wiseman 20). Choosing such a quotation suggests that Wiseman shares her culture's belief in the supreme importance of familial traditions and ancestral lineage.

Wiseman's interest in female traditions, on the other hand, is indicative of her later feminist leanings. Her interest parallels a growing preoccupation with the recuperation of female traditions among feminist scholars. For instance, the introduction of the new generic category, life-writing, has

enabled feminist scholars to recover previously neglected work by female writers.⁹ Like these feminist scholars, Wiseman expands the parameters of art worthy of scholarship with her memoir on her mother's doll-making.

Likewise, Wiseman's critique of patriarchal culture in The Sacrifice, The Lovebound, and Crackpot highlights her desire to alter existing constructs to make them more equitable to women. Her critique of her Jewish culture's patriarchal orientation firmly places her in the tradition of much feminist writing, particularly Jewish feminist writing. As Susan Weidman Schneider has commented in her book, Jewish and Female, the confluence of ethnic pride after the Six-Day War in 1967 and a growing feminist awareness "spurred Jewish women . . . to bring a Jewish dimension to some of women's issues and to look at Jewish life through a feminist filter" (19). It is, of course, this feminist orientation which enables Wiseman to question orthodox Judaism's treatment of women within her later work.⁹

According to Wiseman, proper ethical behaviour remains the most important directive of ancestral traditions. All of Wiseman's work stresses the necessity of actions which promote compassion for others, and ultimately, life. In The Sacrifice, Abraham acknowledges his mistake in killing Laiah, and reiterates the value of compassion to his grandson Moses. Similarly, Abel's decision to disembark with Marina is symptomatic of his moral

growth in The Lovebound: he grows to see that tolerance must be followed by an act which reinforces his beliefs. Ironically, Hoda, the urban ghetto prostitute, is Wiseman's most moral character. Her goodness, as Wiseman indicates, stems from her non-judgemental compassion for others. She even succeeds in making Hoda's most heinous crime, incest with her son, a positively moral act, since it is solely motivated by an altruistic desire to help him.

Once again, Wiseman's concern with proper ethical behaviour can be attributed to her faith, and the upbringing which nurtured it. Compassion for others and a reverence for life are things that have been carefully nurtured by her Jewish heritage--specifically, her parents' example. These are precisely the values expressed so lovingly in Wiseman's memoir about her mother, Old Woman at Play. Her mother's doll-making, for instance, is directed by no other intention than, as her mother puts it, "'to please the children'"(2). Wiseman links this compassion to a reverence for life implicit within her faith. As she states in an interview with Roslyn Belkin, "The Judaism I know, the Judaism I was taught, is a Judaism which is life-oriented, which celebrates life, because it's all we've got, because beyond life is somebody else's responsibility" (153). She goes on to say that such an emphasis on life is a feature which distinguishes Judaism from Christianity, which is "death-

oriented and directed towards an afterlife" (Belkin 153). To celebrate life, Judaism teaches its followers to make the most of the here and now through proper ethical behaviour. As Wiseman puts it in an article on the subject, "Jewishness, as Menschlichkeit, as the supreme development of the art of being a human being, was of prime importance [in my upbringing]".¹⁰

. . .

The thesis will examine Wiseman's major works in chronological sequence. One chapter will be devoted to each major work as follows: chapter 1 - The Sacrifice; chapter 2 - The Lovebound; chapter 3 - Crackpot; chapter 4 - Testimonial Dinner; chapter 5 - Old Woman at Play; chapter 6 - Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." Such a chronological approach, while enabling the reader to trace the evolution of Wiseman's craft over time, will also invite the reader to consider similarities among various works.¹¹

As much as possible, I have attempted to verify my interpretation of Wiseman's work with her own statements on her values and beliefs. As Elizabeth Greene has commented, Adele Wiseman is "still the best critic of her own work," because "she knew what she wanted to do as a writer and she did it" (224). In the later part of her life, Wiseman granted several very important interviews to literary scholars.¹² As such, I have also relied on numerous radio and typescript interviews to

understand Wiseman's vision. Since I was above all determined to provide readers with an authentic depiction of Wiseman's moral vision and her accompanying artistic credo, I felt privileged to have access to such candid interviews. My study was further abetted by my access to the Adele Wiseman Fonds in the W. B. Scott Library (Archives & Special Collections) at York University. Among these papers are an extensive collection of letters. Wiseman's lengthy correspondence with Margaret Laurence is particularly illuminating because these two women were best friends and their letters provide readers with a candid view on their perceptions on creativity. Given my privileged access to Wiseman's papers, I have relied extensively on Wiseman's own statements on her craft in order to substantiate my analysis of her work.

Where I have used post-colonial and feminist theory to elucidate Wiseman's writing, I have looked for autobiographical evidence that substantiates the interpretation of these scholars. Because Wiseman remains the best critic of her own work, her views are paramount in any fruitful discussion of it. This being the case, I do not wish to impose a scaffold of theoretical constructs upon Wiseman's work, since I risk distorting Wiseman's own intended meaning for it. Theory should illumine the discussion of Wiseman's work, not distort it.

Likewise, I have not emphasized those features of Judaism to

which Wiseman had little exposure. Wiseman was quite secularized and has stated that she did not observe many facets of Judaism.¹³ Here again, I have relied on Wiseman's own statements about her Jewish background to guide me in the understanding of her writing.

Given the tremendous diversity of Wiseman's corpus, it may appear that her writing is unamenable to the analysis set forth in this thesis. Yet it is precisely this variety which provides the key to understanding Wiseman's creative vision. Her compulsion to engage in such experimentation flaunts her distrust of orthodoxy. This wariness, in turn, is a reflection of Wiseman's marginalization within mainstream society. It is hoped that readers will gain a greater sense of the unified creative vision at the base of Wiseman's work, a vision which transcends its apparent fragmentation.

Notes

1. Their criticism will be explored more fully within subsequent chapters of this thesis.
2. Ruth Panofsky ed., Room of One's Own, Special issue on Adele Wiseman, 16.3 (September 1993): 20-32.
3. In this thesis, I will use the term "subject position" to describe Wiseman's heterogeneous identity, derived as it is from her triply marginalized position as a Jewish Canadian female writer.
4. Given Greenstein's brevity concerning Erich Auerbach's comments on the Old Testament [Hebrew Bible], I will elucidate Auerbach's views more thoroughly. In the first chapter of Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, Auerbach compares the construction of reality in Homeric epic to that of the Old Testament. Specifically, he compares Odysseus' return home (book 19 of the Odyssey) to the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1). In the former work, Auerbach describes the reaction of Odysseus's housekeeper, Euryclea, as she recognizes Odysseus by virtue of his scar. Auerbach emphasizes that everything is externalized in this scene, "visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (6). In the latter work, Auerbach describes the Sacrifice of Isaac. He notes that the stylistic depiction of this narrative within the Old Testament is diametrically opposed to the Homeric style: only the decisive points of narrative are included, "time and place are undefined...; [and] thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed" (11).
5. See chapter 1 of this thesis for more elucidation on this point.
6. See the following essays in Memoirs of a Book-Molesting Childhood: "What Price the Heroine?" and "The Writer and Canadian Literature."
7. The epigraph of chapter 1 is as follows: "Out of Shem Berl and Golda came Rahel. Out of Malka and Benyamin came Danile. Out of Danile and Rahel came Hoda. Out of Hoda, Pipick came, Pipick born in secrecy and mystery and terror, for what did Hoda know?" (7)
8. See Marlene Kadar, ed., Essays in Life-Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice (Toronto: UTP, 1992).
9. See the following article on the subject: Ruth Panofsky, "From Complicity to Subversion: The Female Subject in Adele Wiseman's Novels," Canadian Literature 137 (1993): 41-48.

10. This quotation is from an article entitled, "Jewishness: What it means to me" (n.p.), which I found among her papers at the W.B. Scott Library, York University, Toronto.

11. As the bibliography of this thesis indicates, Wiseman also published two children's books, Kenji and the Cricket and Puccini and the Prowlers, several poems and short stories. I have not included analysis of the two children's books as I did not think they added to a deeper understanding of Wiseman's moral vision. I did not deal with analysis of her poetry because so little of her poetry has been published, and I did not know whether it was representative of her entire corpus of poetry. The remainder of her poetry can be found in the Adele Wiseman Fonds, York University. This thesis will not examine this poetry for two reasons: (1) Much of the poetry within these papers appeared to be work-in-progress. Since I could not be sure which poems Wiseman deemed complete, I felt my analysis of it would be unjustified. (2) Wiseman did not publish these poems herself, an action which would have justified their analysis within this thesis because I would then be sure of their "public" intention. Of Wiseman's short stories, I have chosen to analyze only one story, "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." This story, unlike her others, seems to suggest dimensions of Wiseman's mature moral vision, something which necessitated its analysis within this thesis.

12. Adele Wiseman's interviews with Mervin Butovsky and Roslyn Belkin were particularly insightful and seminal to the development of this thesis.

13. In her interview with Mervin Butovsky, Wiseman states that her family was not religious: While they kept kosher when Wiseman was a young child, there was gradually a falling off of external rituals within their household (6). Yet despite this erosion, Wiseman concedes that moral and ethical dimensions of Judaism had a large impact upon her psychological development. Wiseman states similar sentiments in her interview with Harry and Mildred Gutkin, an interview published in their book on notable Jewish Canadians, The Best of Times, The Worst of Times (1987).

CHAPTER 1

The Sacrifice:

Questioning the Canon

For those individuals familiar with the Hebrew Bible, The Sacrifice (1956) undoubtedly evokes a sense of déjà-vu. Wiseman's novel centers on Abraham, whose maladjustment to the New World leads to his murdering of a provocative young woman, Laiah. A brief plot synopsis, as well as the title, should suggest a connection between the novel and its biblical prototype, the Binding of Isaac. Both stories, of course, concern the issue of sacrifice; and both stories concern the relationship between a Jewish father and his son, Abraham and Isaac. Yet a striking difference separates these two narratives: while God intervenes to prevent Isaac's sacrifice at the hands of his father within the biblical story, no such intervention occurs in The Sacrifice. As a result of this difference, Wiseman's novel is imbued with a tragic tone completely absent from the biblical narrative.¹ As this chapter will illustrate, Wiseman's revision of the Binding of Isaac must be seen in relation to her subject position; the values implied by Wiseman's revisions of this biblical story are entirely appropriate for a Jew of the diaspora.

Wiseman's imaginative revision of the biblical narrative may

appear odd to those accustomed to originality in modern literature. Yet, in fact, such borrowing is a staple feature of much writing by North American Jewish writers. As Michael Greenstein has noted, the use of biblical narrative "remains one of the most significant methods of interpreting modern experience for secular Jewish writers in North America" (Adele Wiseman 4). It is quite possible that the popularity of biblical reinterpretation is encouraged by the stylistic features intrinsic within the stories themselves. As stated in the introduction, the Hebrew Bible is constructed so as to encourage continual speculation and interpretation (Greenstein, Third Solitudes 8). In each generation, rabbinic scholarship has engaged sacred text in a dialogue of interpretation. As such, these biblical stories have been subject to extensive rabbinical scholarship (or talmudic pilpul) (Greenstein, Third Solitudes 8). Given the nature of Jewish hermeneutics, it is understandable that Jews of the diaspora would turn to these stories for guidance: their Judaic culture has taught them to subject biblical stories to continual interpretation and exegesis.

There is another reason quite apart from the instant engagement encouraged by the stories themselves which incites such biblical interpretations among Jewish writers; namely, the reality of being a stranger in an alien environment. Given that the Hebrew Bible is the sacred text which links Jews together as

a community, it is to be expected that Jewish writers of the diaspora would draw upon these religious writings for guidance in the New World.² By subjecting the values implicit within the Hebrew Bible to rigorous scrutiny, these immigrants determine if the text's ethical premises remain viable for survival in new surroundings.

However, it would be misleading to see such interpretation as a phenomenon unique to Jewish writers, since the revision of canonical literature is a feature common to all people living in unfamiliar environments. This activity is induced by the realization (conscious or not) that the values implied by these canonical texts are those which bind a nation's citizens together. Benedict Anderson, a historian who has written on the origins of the nation-state, explains that the modern nation-state creates an "imagined community" among its citizens, largely through novels and newspapers (30-32). These literary texts give the illusion of a "deep, horizontal comradeship" among the disparate members of the nation-state (16). Questioning the values implicit within these canonical texts remains a dominant means by which marginalized individuals assert their identity within these nation-states. Certainly, it is a staple feature of post-colonial discourse. As Linda Hutcheon explains in her "Circling the Downspout of Empire," colonial writers frequently question the values of the imperial state by ironic references

and parody of canonical texts (170-172).

The preceding analysis suggests reasons why Wiseman engages in biblical revisionism. Put simply, she desires to question the viability of the Hebrew Bible's values within an alien New World setting. The remainder of the chapter will consider what values Wiseman ultimately espouses within The Sacrifice.

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The Sacrifice highlights Wiseman's concern that Jews of the diaspora risk forgetting the primacy of proper ethical behaviour within their faith. Too frequently, Jews misconstrue the essence of Judaism, believing that it can be reduced to an obedience of prescribed rules. Jews living in alien surroundings are particularly apt to adhere to this erroneous belief, since religious observance may provide the only stability in their lives. Unfortunately, an obsession with religious laws can lead people to neglect the moral basis of their faith, and promote to moral wrong-doing. In The Sacrifice, for instance, Abraham's downfall can be attributed to his rigid adherence to his beliefs, and his corollary neglect of the ethical dimension of his faith. In the end, the novel confirms Joseph Telushkin's statement that Judaism is above all concerned that "people act ethically" in accordance with God's will (Jewish Literacy 30).

Wiseman likely chose Abraham as the protagonist of The Sacrifice because he symbolizes the ethical dimension of Judaism.

Given that Abraham is the central consciousness of the novel, it is useful to understand Abraham's place within the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, ascertaining his biblical role greatly aids one's understanding of the implied values within The Sacrifice. Abraham's legacy to Judaism has been elucidated by Joseph Telushkin in his compendium on Jewish sacred writings, Jewish Literacy. According to Telushkin, Abraham, one of the founding fathers of Judaism, was the first person to question the polytheistic faith of his forbears: when his father, Terakh, was absent from his shop, Abraham smashed all the idols except one (30). Yet another story highlights Abraham's association with moral rectitude. When God vowed to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham told Him that he wanted to be destroyed too, if other human lives were to be destroyed (30). Together these stories lead Joseph Telushkin to claim that Abraham's legacy to orthodox Judaism is "ethical monotheism, the belief that there is one God over mankind, and that His primary concern is that people act ethically" (Jewish Literacy 30).

Yet the Abraham-Isaac story has been subject to more ambiguous interpretations. Most scholars believe that the story, like that regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, highlights the primacy of human life within Judaism, and God's desire that Jews recognize this primacy as such (Jewish Literacy 30).³ In this story, God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son,

Isaac, and Abraham meekly accepts His command. He sets out on a three-day journey to the site of the upcoming sacrifice, Mount Moriah. Just as Abraham raises his hands to kill Isaac, an angel of the Lord tells him not to do anything to harm his son. At that moment, a ram appears close by, and is sacrificed in the son's place. Of course, the execution of God's command by Abraham would have been contrary to God's subsequent statement about the sanctity of human life. The story, therefore, suggests that blind obedience to religious tenets is secondary to the principle tenet regarding the sanctity of human life. Joseph Telushkin concludes that the story emphasizes that Abraham's adherence to God's commandment "*is not to be emulated*" (Jewish Literacy 30). Abraham, like future readers, learns that human life is sacrosanct, which message readers should likewise derive from the text. Yet other Jews have interpreted the story in a different way (Telushkin, Jewish Literacy 30): they believe that Abraham is justified in obeying God's commandment, and they stress that this is affirmed by his son's ultimate survival: that is, Abraham is rewarded with his son's survival, because of his obedience to God's command. However, Telushkin dismisses this interpretation because it ignores the fact that Isaac was saved because he was a human being, not because his father obeyed God's initial command.

As this chapter will illustrate, The Sacrifice examines the

same conundrum: it questions whether Jews should obey God's commandments unquestioningly or whether they should recognize the primacy of life above all else. Wiseman interprets the story to suggest the latter. As Donna Bennett comments, God does not "stay the sword" in Wiseman's novel (70). This alteration of the biblical narrative indicates that humans must recognize the primacy of human life or face the tragic consequences of not doing so. Abraham's tragedy is incurred by his unwavering obedience to his faith's commandments and his corresponding neglect of Judaism's foremost commandment, the sanctity of life. Wiseman's novel is, therefore, a warning to those Jews who believe that obedience to religious tenets is more important than non-judgemental compassion for others. Abraham's tragedy within The Sacrifice is testimony to this error. As the following analysis will illustrate, Abraham's undue reliance on his own views, and his corollary neglect of the non-judgemental compassion at the essence of his faith lead to his downfall.

Wiseman's characterization within The Sacrifice further bolsters the validity of this interpretation of the novel. Firstly, she exploits the ambiguity of this narrative's meaning within her characterization of Abraham. It is Abraham's unwavering belief in his own value system that leads to his increasing difficulties in the New World. Like his biblical prototype, Abraham is an extremely devout man, and he reconciles

all conflict with his enduring belief in God's word. Yet, as Wiseman suggests, such faith must always be preceded by human decisions which place the sanctity of human life at the forefront of human values. Of course, for the exiled Jew, undue reliance on one's faith is to be expected: people naturally rely upon the only values they know when bombarded with the unfamiliar. Nonetheless, while this is a typical response, it is a dangerous one. Individuals risk becoming unthinking 'automatons' who cease to consider alternate views, blinded as they are by the conviction of their own values.

The Jewish immigrant experience is one which severely tests the "ethical monotheism" of Judaism, since the dilemma of being dislocated in another culture naturally makes people unsure of their step, unsure even of the benefit of adhering to their previously accepted values. These values seem meaningless in a new culture, where others neither understand nor accept them. As Tamara Palmer has stated, the price for such dislocation is "generally envisioned [for first generation writers] as perpetual loneliness and loss of what might have been"(99). From the outset of the novel, Abraham reacts independently, since he remains alienated from the world around him. This is first manifested linguistically, when Abraham asks the conductor where he is, and the conductor understands none of the four languages in which the questions are asked. His decision to disembark

appears to be invoked an acute awareness that no one can understand him, and indeed no one does, except his family. In fact, his own inner thoughts suggest that his decision has been motivated by a sense of undue dislocation: "Enough! With a sudden rush of indignation . . . it came to Abraham that they had fled far enough. The thought took hold in his mind like a command" (3). Abraham attributes this decision to the only value system he knows, that of his faith. He proudly tells Isaac that his decision was one aided by the will of God: "'You see, your father has not lost his common sense. In fact, it's a wise decision I have made with God's help'" (5). One can already see the potential weakness in Abraham's character--his blind reliance on his faith's tenets rather than his own decision making.'

Ironically, Abraham's absolute trust in his faith is initially beneficial, because it enables him to accept the many heretical beliefs which he encounters in the New World. Frequently, these are beliefs expressed by his own son, Isaac. When Isaac begins talking about evolution, and the relation of human beings to apes, his father is at first aghast, and even "threaten[s] . . . to throw Isaac and his atheistical books out of the house together" (77). Then, however, he reconciles himself to his son's beliefs by postulating that Isaac had not meant that the ape was the "ancestor" to human beings, but merely "man's closest relative" (78), which bit of linguistic sophistry

enables him to make his son's heretical beliefs more palatable. In another instance, Isaac tells his father that he will be quitting school to become a tailor. This declaration is at first very upsetting to Abraham, who has had such high scholarly expectations for his son. Nonetheless, he eventually reconciles himself to Isaac's decision by noting that other scholars of "the Chassidim . . . [also] had to work at other crafts while they studied" (47). So long as Abraham can adapt anything new and contrary to his values with other dimensions of Judaic culture and faith, all remains tranquil.

When it seems impossible to reconcile others' beliefs with his own, he sometimes merely reserves judgement as God would finally dictate. Such is the case with Laiah, when he first encounters her. Upon first meeting Laiah, he is able to remain jocund about her lifestyle while Mrs. Plopler rushes to condemn her. When Mrs. Plopler asks him what type of lady Laiah is, for instance, he teases her by saying she is "[a] type . . . that likes corned beef, pastrami, lamb chops, chuck" (25). He further mocks her gossip by saying that the first time he saw Laiah "she awakened desire in [him]" (25). Abraham feels that he has no right to judge Laiah, since God demands tolerance of others. As the following quotation illustrates, Abraham is able to reconcile himself to Laiah's dubious morals through attention to God's word:

What could she have to do with them, with her body that seemed to have difficulty keeping still inside of the luxurious fur coat, and her hoarse, low voice with its persistent animal call? She was what she was. The world was still the same. There were those that felt that, with God's mercy, if they stretched their bodies and their souls and created and built, and grew, who knew what heights they, or their sons, or the son of their sons might not reach? And there were those who preferred to go through life in other postures. It was not for him to laugh at her because she had chosen to live another life--not especially, while he could still understand the animal call. No, it was an unworthy thing. A man may choose the sunlight, but he has no right to pass casual judgment on the shadows. (26)

Yet, despite such a semblance of tolerance, Abraham never really understands Laiah because he chooses to remain emotionally detached from her. Nonetheless, his ethical principles dictate that he must not make judgements about her actions.

However, by observing his coping mechanisms, one can pinpoint those problems which Abraham risks encountering within the New World. To begin with, Abraham's faith does not allow him readily to accept other value systems. When he argues with Isaac, for instance, he often relies on sophistry to reconcile

Isaac's beliefs with his own. As already noted, Isaac is excused for his interest in Darwinian evolution, and these beliefs are made to be compatible with Judaism. Likewise, Abraham's acceptance of Laiah at the outset of the novel is dubious, because he can only accept her by maintaining distance from her. Put simply, Abraham fails by not being open-minded. That is, his tragic flaw is his inflexible adherence to what he perceives to be Judaism's tenets, and his obliviousness to all other value systems.

Problems arise when Abraham can in no way reconcile others' ideas with his own. This becomes most evident when he encounters Ruth, since her Canadian values are irreconcilable with his own, and, since she lives with him, he cannot ignore these values because they have a direct impact on his own life. Initially, she is "adopted" into his own family as his own daughter, and she easily fulfils her role of the dutiful daughter-in-law. When she loses her position at work, Abraham assures her she is needed at home, and she silently acquiesces (108). She does not aspire to independence, and she even wishes that her husband might someday treat her "as though she were made of glass" (134).

Unfortunately, conflict eventually occurs when her values become incompatible with those of her father-in-law. At these points, the reader can see how Abraham's absolute values make him stubborn to the point of obtuseness. He seems unable to make

concessions to anything which goes against his own interpretation of Talmudic law. Most of these conflicts first arise when Ruth manages the household, since her Canadian values act as a bulwark against his own. The first of a series of conflicts arise around the issue of Abraham's grandson, Moses. When Ruth and Isaac decide to have the child in the hospital, Abraham remains determined to change her mind as the following quotation illustrates:

Abraham was determined to convince Ruth of her folly. She was a spirited girl, right enough, and he was inclined to be proud of her because of this . . . But to be so willful, and to lead Isaac with her, and their grandson, no. (124)

Reluctantly, however, he gives up his effort to get his way, conceding that "[t]he baby was the important thing" (127-128). Things come to a head, however, when she decides to open a dry-goods store, and he feels that his point of view is irrelevant in her decision-making. At this point, Abraham ceases to be reasonable and begins attacking her verbally, accusing her of multiple sins. Above all else, Ruth's apparent independence seems to be a serious misdemeanour in Abraham's eyes:

It dawned on him again that she lived a life that was utterly unknown to him when she set off every morning to the heights to work. She dressed, she went away,

she met other people. When Isaac had been alive there had been no need to think about the separate thoughts of each one of them. Except for the questions that he and Isaac argued about--and that was different--they had all been together as one whole, one unit, whose purpose was in all important respects the same. But now what did Ruth think about? Could it be true, what Laiah had said, that someday Ruth might start to think not of Isaac but of her own loneliness? Look at her now, all rosy and enthusiastic over some idea that a Harry had put into her head. (267)

Ruth's actions become very significant when they have possible consequences for the patriarchal power structure, especially when it has a direct bearing on the running of her family.⁵

Abraham begins to use words as weapons rather than as a bridging mechanism, when Ruth's views are in no way reconcilable with his own. He fails to listen and starts lashing out at her by accusing her of multiple wrongs. Most significantly, he begins to use words as vehicles for transmitting hatred, breaking down communication instead of building it. Even Abraham seems stunned by his own viciousness towards Ruth: "Was this it? Was this the only communication they could make with each other, tearing like beasts at the raw entrails and the naked heart?" (287) Even worse, Abraham thoughts suggest that he takes

perverse pleasure from this viciousness: "Somewhere at the back of his mind there was a horrified admiration for the way he could rip her words from his wounds and with a twist send them, like knives, whistling back at her" (289). Marco Loverso has commented on Abraham's growing insensibility within his article, "The Circle of Conversation in The Sacrifice." He contends that Abraham's tragedy is "linked to [his] growing alienation from the circle of conversation" (172). This alienation is caused by Abraham's pride, that is, by a growing conviction of his own righteousness (171). Unlike Loverso, however, I can find no evidence that Abraham could ever properly communicate because his unwavering beliefs have perennially made others' viewpoints necessarily deficient.

Another victim of Abraham's orthodoxy is Laiah. Like Ruth, she errs--in Abraham's eyes--by not complying with his value system. Initially, he ignores her, since she does not hamper his dreams for the future. Yet this tolerance disappears when Ruth accuses him of causing Isaac's death with his high expectations (292). This tolerance is immediately overshadowed by a desire to blame her for his own evil. She becomes the symbol of barren fruit, which has prevented the flowering of his own life. Wandering about aimlessly, he begins transferring his own feelings of culpability to her by noting that "she lurked always in the shadow of their new life in the city" (293). All the

negative images previously associated with her begin to take on dire consequences. Where Abraham could once ignore or at best tolerate her, he now hates her. She is, he believes, "the other part of him--that was empty, unbelieving, the negation of life, the womb of death, the black shadow that yet was clothed in the warm, tantalizing flesh of life" (300). Because she is literally made the scapegoat of his own wrongful actions, he murders her in a fit of disassociation.

Another aspect of Abraham's faith which hampers his moral development is his overwhelming pride. Abraham seems to believe that his children are superior to others, chosen individuals who will ensure the continuance of the Jewish people. Yet, such pride contradicts Jewish tenets. According to Joseph Telushkin, being a member of the Jewish community, God's Chosen People, should not arouse pride so much as a larger sense of one's responsibility to the surrounding community (Jewish Wisdom 300). Rather than denoting racial superiority, it is a covenant "to make God and His moral law known to the world" (300). Unfortunately, Wiseman's Abraham seems more interested in using his son to preen his feathers than in making God's moral law known to others. In mourning his sons, for instance, he boasts that his sons were "such seed as could have uplifted the human race" (19). After his elder sons' deaths, he places all his expectations on Isaac, believing he, too, is superior. At the

outset of the novel, Abraham proudly acknowledges that "the boy was young, the boy was blessed, the boy would grow" (6). Yet, at the same time, Abraham's pride forbids him from accepting anything which would contradict his exalted expectations for his son. In fact, Abraham uses sophistry to justify any dissent from his perspective. When Isaac saves the Torah, for example, he refuses to concede that Isaac saved it for any other reason than a devout belief in the Holy Word. So, when Isaac admits that he does not know why he saved the Torah, Abraham shrugs off this lack of conviction by making a joke about the boys' apparent agnosticism (202).

Unfortunately, this pride has particularly horrific consequences for Isaac. He is psychologically wounded by all the pressure placed upon him. This manifests itself in multiple ways, but primarily in extreme passivity. Early on, Isaac feels burdened by the sense that his ideas cannot mesh with his father's:

Why couldn't he be like his father, keeping his eyes fixed somewhere, at a point, so that everything he saw had to mould itself to his perspective? His wavered from point to point, and nothing remained fixed under his stare but, moving, changed and revealed itself as something new. (68)

Eventually, Isaac suffers from horrible, recurrent nightmares

where he is trapped naked inside a plastic bubble which threatens to crush him as he exerts pressure from the inside. As Stanley Mullins explains,

the plastic [bubble] represents the old religious ideas which he sees through because of his new reading but which must exert such a great influence on him because of his father and because of his surroundings. (291)

In the end, Ruth accuses Abraham of killing her husband, and, in a sense, she is right. Isaac's attempts to satisfy his father did strain him mentally and probably contributed to his death. Wiseman succeeds in developing the reader's sympathy for Isaac, since he is shown to be a blameless victim of his father's unreasonable expectations.

Indeed, Isaac is a more admirable character than his father, because he is willing to acknowledge the limitations of his own perspective. Unlike Abraham, Isaac is always willing to consider the views of others, and attempts to reconcile his own with those views. In one instance, for example, he asks himself whether his evolutionary theories are actually irreconcilable with his father's notions:

"I may think that he's stubborn and narrow-minded and old-fashioned. I may feel that he's living in a world that's not the real world, but I don't know. Do I really see things he doesn't see, or does he just see

them in a different perspective?" (79)

In other instances, Isaac seeks out the perspectives of others to test the validity of his own, and to find answers to questions which disturb him. When he is unable to reconcile his Old World values with the New World, for instance, he seeks new perspectives in English books (62).

Yet, Isaac's manner of dealing with the New World should not be seen as Wiseman's ideal, since he remains haunted by doubts regarding the usefulness of old traditions. Despite Isaac's thoughtfulness, he longs for stable traditions to anchor his life. Isaac's despondency suggests that Wiseman recognizes the necessity of traditions, all the while recognizing the danger of too much dogmatism. In essence, Wiseman appears to advocate a fine balance of maintaining traditions, while adapting them to the unique realities of personal experience. Traditions, Wiseman believes, should provide guidance, but should not prevent individuals from individual decision-making, and should certainly not detract from the ethical dimension of one's faith.

The above-stated values have a direct consequence upon the manner in which Wiseman revises the biblical prototype, the Binding of Isaac, for her novel. Since Wiseman believes strongly belief in the importance of human decision-making, it is hardly surprising that she dismisses a deus ex machina to deliver her characters from tragedy within The Sacrifice. As already noted,

God does not intervene to prevent Laiah's murder in The Sacrifice. Whereas the biblical story is usually portrayed as "one of triumph, of the union between God's domain and man's of the principle of divine mercy" (Bennett 71), this is certainly not the case in Wiseman's novel. Rather, The Sacrifice indicates that the consequences of all actions are solely determined by personal choice. Wiseman's conviction in the supreme importance of ethical decision-making should be seen as an outgrowth of her faith. Indeed, as she explains in one essay, such ethical choice is central to Judaism:

The Jewishness I understand not only allows for but is premised on the possibility of enlarged and exploratory consciousness co-existent with clearly defined ethical moral principles. What hurts people, what hurts living things, is bad.⁶

As already pointed out, the Abraham-Isaac story is subject to several ambiguous interpretations, one of which highlights the emphasis of divine mercy. Wiseman clarifies this ambiguity by removing the element of divine mercy in her story. Faith, she concedes, will get humans nowhere, unless it is preceded by strong ethical principles--especially those stressing non-judgemental compassion for others. Ultimately, it is this wisdom that is passed down to Moses when he visits his grandfather on Mad Mountain.

Wiseman's conception of sacrifice, with its clear absence of divine mercy, bothered some of the novel's critics, especially Malcolm Ross. When Ross reviewed the book upon Wiseman's request, he discussed his concerns in four separate letters to Wiseman.⁷ In his first letter dated simply August, Ross explains why Wiseman's portrayal of Laiah's 'sacrifice' bothers him:

The Abraham-Isaac theme has inescapable theological implications, of course. And it is the type of the Hebraic-Christian sense of sacrifice. The killing of Laiah is a reversal--an annihilation of the basic symbol [of sacrifice in the Hebraic-Christian sense]. The tradition is suddenly drained of meaning. What carries through to the boy at the end is merely familial--the tradition, if you like, shorn of the supernatural (and therefore really destroyed). Is this meant as an irony--the supernatural sacrificed to the natural? I felt the killing of the woman was insufficiently motivated. As an ironic symbolic reversal the thing might stand. But I feel (this is my bias) that what is needed is fulfilment--not reversal.

Of course, interpreting Ross's letter requires some speculation given that he does not qualify his statements. What does he mean, for instance, when he states that "[t]he killing of Laiah is a reversal--an annihilation of the basic symbol"? One might

suppose that he views the Binding of Isaac story as a story emphasizing divine love, and God's mercy for humans. Yet Wiseman refuses to grant such clemency to the Abraham within her novel: no God can save him from his ill-thought actions.⁸ Nonetheless, Wiseman's emphasis on the supreme importance of human decision-making seemed to irk Ross. In another letter, dated August 15[th], he makes it clear that what bothers him is Wiseman's rejection of her religious roots and her secular interest in psychology. He states that by destroying the "myth," she may be "taking [herself] into a cultural vacuum, a negation."

As Ross's comments indicate, The Sacrifice does indeed deviate from the biblical prototype. However, Wiseman does not stray from the essential values of her Jewish faith within her novel. Like the original biblical prototype, Wiseman's novel stresses the supreme importance of non-judgemental compassion for others. Yet, her story, unlike the biblical predecessor, emphasizes that the capacity for moral righteousness stems from human decision-making alone, and cannot be supplanted by God's mercy.

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Ruth Panofsky, Patricia Morley, and Donna Pennee contend that The Sacrifice is particularly insensitive to women, even misogynist. All three writers speculate that this misogyny is indicative of a misogyny inherent within Judaic culture.⁹

According to Ruth Panofsky, The Sacrifice explores the tragic consequences women face when they exceed the traditional roles of wife and mother in Judaic culture. Panofsky concedes that there are really only two options for women in the Jewish society--accepting the status quo or death. This, she states, is totally in keeping with many nineteenth century novels, where women who exceed their societal boundaries die. Panofsky ends her article by noting that Wiseman's "complicity with patriarchy" is signalled by the fact that it is a male-centred text whose prevailing consciousness is that of Abraham (41). Similarly, Donna Pennee concedes that Laiah's femicide was an instrument by which "the patriarchal structure and community" was renewed (3).

Yet another very different reading of the novel may be gained by precisely this last point. Abraham is the prevailing consciousness of the novel and for this reason the reader must be consistently dubious of his judgements. His judgements are marred by his obtuse reliance on his faith. Indeed, it is precisely his stubbornness, stimulated by his pride and his orthodox faith, that Wiseman criticizes throughout the novel. If Abraham is scathingly critical of Ruth and Laiah's behaviour at certain points in the text, this is a reflection of his faulty perceptions, not theirs. An examination of each of these main characters illustrates the limitations placed on women within this patriarchal culture.

Sarah's characterization in The Sacrifice presents the reader with a critique of the traditional Jewish marriage. She remains a shadowy figure in the novel, one who is only sketchily developed. True to her cultural expectations, Sarah remains the dutiful wife. When they first rent the room at the Plopler's house, for example, Sarah immediately sets out to "[make] a home of their room" (16). When the family decides to move to another home, Sarah bids to "mak[e] [Mrs. Plopler] a partner in the decision" (45) by inviting her to view the new home before they move. Yet Abraham always remains in the head of the household, and plans all major changes without Sarah's input. His actions suggest that he views his role as independent decision maker within the household. For instance, he decides to buy seats in the synagogue and the new home without consulting her.¹⁰ His consultation with his son on the latter issue is instructive. When he goes to visit the household with his wife and son, he turns to Isaac and asks, "what do you think, Isaac? Shall we take it?", all the while ignoring his wife's opinion (45). Moreover, when Chaim Knopp complains to Abraham that his wife disapproves of his working for Polsky as a shoichet, Abraham agrees that ignoring her wishes and proceeding as desired is the best route to take. After thinking it over, he concedes that "the shoichet had taken the wisest course possible in not arguing the point with his wife but quietly going his own way" (31).

Given Abraham's attitude towards women, it should hardly be surprising that Sarah retreats so often into the past, and grieves her sons alone. Since she cannot share her grief openly with her husband, she has little other choice but to retreat within herself.

In fact, Wiseman appears to be pointing out yet another inconsistency in orthodox Judaic religion. Joseph Telushkin explains that there is a particularly puzzling contradiction in Jewish culture in regard to the treatment of women. Implicit within Judaism is "conflict between biblical law and biblical narrative" (Jewish Wisdom 104). On the one hand, the narrative portrays "women as operating on a level of relative domestic equality"(104). In Genesis 21:12, for instance, God tells Abraham, "whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice" (104). Yet, the Bible's laws clearly favour men. Only men, for instance, are allowed to initiate divorce, and, in most cases, only men can inherit (104). Wiseman seems to reject talmudic law in favour of the essence of the biblical narrative. Of course, Wiseman's perspective is understandable given her suspicion of orthodox societal rules.

Interestingly, Ruth's relationship with Isaac appears to be much more in keeping with the message of the biblical narrative. This is undoubtedly due to Isaac's more egalitarian notion of marriage. Isaac actively disagrees with his father's perception

of women and marriage. In a conversation they have regarding men's and women's roles, for instance, Isaac dismisses his father's view that women and men are innately different by pointing out their relative equality:

" . . . Nowadays a woman can think about the same things that a man thinks about. She can go out and make a living too. We don't think about women as our inferiors anymore. Marriage is a partnership. Each one gives what he can." (110-111)

Isaac's marriage with Ruth reflects these egalitarian values. As such, Isaac treats Ruth as an equal partner in all decision-making. When Ruth is pregnant, for example, they both discuss their respective preferences regarding the upcoming birth of their child. Their marriage can be seen as a healthy alternative to the traditional patriarchal Jewish marriages so prevalent among orthodox Jewish immigrants. Perhaps Isaac and Ruth's marriage is more in keeping with the more egalitarian marriages portrayed in biblical narrative. In any case, Wiseman's presentation of these two contrasting visions of marriage, suggests that she favours the latter, more egalitarian institution.

Ruth's relationship with Abraham, however, is much more troubled than the one with her husband. As already noted, Abraham is initially very accepting of Ruth, but problems occur

when she begins to assert herself. Yet rather than this signifying that she has failed her duties in this culture, as Ruth Panofsky believes, this seems more like a concession that the culture has failed her. After all, it is Abraham, not Ruth, who seems to be the irrational party in their argument regarding the dry goods store. It is Abraham who becomes unnecessarily enraged when she states that she and Harry have made plans to open a store. Abraham's assumption that she must be romantically involved with Harry shows his unnecessary preoccupation with his authoritative role in the family. In essence, his desire to be at the helm of the household circumvents any desire to see her happy and content. Rather than seeing this novel as a concession that Ruth has somehow failed, I believe that The Sacrifice is a criticism of the society which limits the freedom of women so blatantly.

The few instances where the reader does gain access to Ruth's mind merely confirm this interpretation. In Abraham's first confrontation with Ruth, he seems remarkably childish. When Ruth tells of her plans to open the store, he seems oblivious to the financial worries that would motivate Ruth to such an action. Instead, he focuses on her relationship with Harry. His complete insensitivity to her very real financial concerns make such remarks remarkably puerile. The reader's sympathy for Ruth is heightened when she at last voices her

discontent in Chapter 15. In a cataclysmic argument with Abraham, she laments the fact that she neglected to name her child after her dead parents, but silently acquiesced to Abraham's desire that she name her son after his dead sons. The reader cannot help but feel sympathy for Ruth, a victim of a society which disallows her self-expression.

Similarly, Laiah is portrayed as a victim. As both Panofsky and Morley have pointed out, Laiah receives none of the celebratory resonance accorded to Hoda (the prostitute) in Crackpot. Rather, Laiah remains an assemblage of body parts to the men around her. But Wiseman succeeds in making the reader sympathetic to Laiah, by highlighting the distorted perceptions of the individuals around her. Specifically, Wiseman emphasizes Abraham's misconceptions--thus making his perceptions of Laiah suspect. At the outset, he more or less ignores her, as he does her lifestyle. He does not attempt to judge her character, believing such judgments to be morally wrong. As he comments so poetically, "A man may choose the sunlight, but he has no right to pass casual judgment on the shadows" (26). Unfortunately, it is Abraham's lack of desire to understand differing points of view which limits his capacity to see her as anything other than a "shadow."

Because Abraham never allows himself to understand Laiah as a human being, she soon becomes the target of his misdirected

anger. When he is accused of 'killing' Isaac, he begins to see Laiah as the incarnation of evil. This transference begins when Abraham retreats inward in a bid to seek a cause for his suffering. Soon he associates Laiah with his suffering: "[H]adn't she lurked always in the shadow of their new life in the city?" (293). In an effort to find a scapegoat for his pain, Abraham begins associating Laiah with evil--her sin being her barren womb. This accusation of infertility begins somewhat earlier in the novel, when he ponders that "[s]he was like a great overripe fruit without seed, which hung now, long past its season, on the bough . . . She had denied creation, and to deny is to annihilate" (261). In a remarkable leap of logic, Abraham blames her for his lack of success in the New World. She becomes the evil force that denied life to Abraham. When she shows an attraction towards him in Chapter 15, he believes she is tempting him to embrace the annihilation at the core of his soul. He questions her motives: "Did he come at last to accept the shadow, to embrace the emptiness, to acknowledge his oneness with the fruit without seed, with death, his other self?" (300) Such unmerited transference merely shows Abraham's pride, his inability to accept culpability for his own wrongdoing. It also shows the misogyny inherent within orthodox Judaic culture--a culture which has traditionally accepted only two roles for women, wife and child bearer. Rather than providing the reader

with a scathing glimpse of a prostitute, it is a severe critique of the narrow orthodox culture's response to women's diversity.

While Laiah is by no means sympathetically portrayed, her encounters with Abraham make her appear more reasonable than he is. While Abraham remains limited by his own preconceived ideas about Laiah, she seems to be motivated by a desire to love, as distorted as her love may seem. Moreover, her adult occupation can easily be understood when one considers her victimized past. Since Laiah was sexually abused by her employer as a young adolescent, it is to be expected that she would resume a victimized position as an adult--a role to which she is so accustomed. Having never known male respect, Laiah does not demand respect as an adult. It is true that, in the end, Laiah becomes the structural component in the narrative through which Abraham is forced to realize that "he shares in human guilt, that 'the womb of death, festering,' is in him as it was in the killers of his sons" (Morley, "Engel" 157).¹¹ Yet Laiah should not be forgotten as the victim here. In the end, Abraham is the flawed character to be criticized, not Laiah.

In many ways, The Sacrifice is the traditional novel which Ruth Panofsky, Donna Palmateer Pennee, and Patricia Morley claim it to be. For instance, both Alan Weiss and Michael Greenstein have analyzed the novel's place within a Yiddish and literary folk tradition.¹² Weiss's article illustrates that Wiseman

mirrors this tradition in her "use of point of view and language and in her methods of characterization" (397). These comments are confirmed by Wiseman's own statements about the book. In one interview, she acknowledges that The Sacrifice is a much more naive and orthodox novel than Crackpot, because at the time she wrote her first novel she felt compelled to follow traditional generic conventions regarding the novel form (Butovsky 12).¹³ In the same interview, she comments that her writing was influenced by Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish writers whose stories her father recounted to her as a child (Butovsky 7). Yet, in spite of Wiseman's remarks, what she does with these characters is quite new. By narrating the story from Abraham's flawed but noble perspective, Wiseman shows the reader how his attitudes limit women and their happiness. The constraining roles placed upon Laiah, Ruth, and Sarah lead to their unhappiness, and (in one case) death. While The Sacrifice contains the stereotypical female characters seen in much western literature, Wiseman subtly subverts these stereotypes by showing the constraints placed upon these women.

. . .

Ultimately, Abraham recognizes his own culpability in not recognizing the sanctity of human life. As he tells Moses,

"I took what was not mine to take . . . what was given to me to hold gently in my hands, to look at

with wonder, Moishe . . . When a human being cries out to you, no matter who it is, don't judge him, don't harm him, or you turn away God Himself. In her voice there were the voices of children. Do not harm her, lest you hear them weeping." (344)

Is this recognition too radical an about-face to be believable? I do not think so, since Abraham's actions suggest a sincere--if misguided--attempt to reconcile his views with those of others at the outset of the novel. Although his means of reconciling differing views were necessarily deficient, he was nonetheless trying to be tolerant of others. It is only lamentable--and tragic--that he forgot this premise, and became blinded by his absolute beliefs.

By the end of the novel, Abraham has learned from his error, and he is able to pass his newfound wisdom down to Moses, his grandson. As such, Moses becomes the recipient of the ethical beliefs basic to Wiseman's value system. It is a message which reinforces Wiseman's distrust of authoritative laws, and her correspondent belief in non-judgemental compassion for all human beings. Her decision to make Moses the ultimate bearer of her ethical beliefs is appropriate given that his biblical prototype is likewise the purveyor of wisdom regarding man's ethical responsibilities. It is, after all, the prophet Moses who carries the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Above all

else, these Commandments emphasize non-judgemental compassion for others. As Joseph Telushkin states

[t]he law that Moses transmits to the Jews in the Torah embraces far more than the Ten Commandments. In addition to many ritual regulations, the Jews are instructed to love God as well as be in awe of Him, to love their neighbours as themselves, and to love the stranger--that is, the non-Jew living among them--as themselves as well. (Jewish Literacy 45-46)

Evidently, choosing Moses as the spokesperson of these values is a better choice than Abraham would have ultimately been, because of the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the Abraham-Isaac story.

It is also significant that Moses is neither a believing nor practising Jew. Wiseman disassociates ethical values from the Jewish faith, because she perceives that obedience to religious tenets may in fact detract from the ethical basis of the faith. By divorcing the ethical underpinning of Judaism from its religious observances through a character who is areligious, Wiseman chooses to highlight the ethical underpinnings of her own faith. She implies that an over-reliance on laws and divine obedience can be a hindrance rather than an aid to one's development. Yet Wiseman also disapproves of a complete rejection of traditions, since these traditions provide necessary

direction in people's lives. It is Moses's grandfather, after all, who passes his lifelong wisdom to his agnostic grandson. Evidently, Wiseman wants individuals to remember the ethical values underlying traditions, not the trappings of religious observance.

. . .

The values implicit within The Sacrifice are clearly less orthodox than may be evident on a first reading. In essence, as this chapter illustrates, Wiseman "talks back" to her own culture, interpreting Judaic values and revising the Jewish stories which have permeated her life. This novel, like all of Wiseman's work, illustrates her disdain of orthodoxy. Wiseman is particularly wary of the strict adherence to religious laws, especially when they detract from the ethical dimension of an individual's faith. Nonetheless, Wiseman recognizes the value and necessity of traditions for the guidance of individual lives. In essence, Wiseman simultaneously reveres traditions and questions them. Perhaps even more accurately, one might say that she advocates a fine balance between the two: in Wiseman's estimation, individuals should seek guidance from traditions all the while remembering the primacy of non-judgemental compassion for others. Abraham's tragedy in The Sacrifice is meant to serve as an exemplary warning to others: his inability to reconcile his Old World beliefs with the realities of a New World makes him

forget the ethical premises so central to Judaism.

Wiseman's views are indicative of her particular subject position, that is, of a Jewish female in exile. As a post-colonial writer attempting to forge an identity within an alien land through the revision of canonical texts, she questions the canonical text of her culture, the Hebrew Bible, in order to assert her own identity and to find values appropriate to her new surroundings. Ultimately, The Sacrifice advocates a balance between the maintenance of traditions and their abolition.

Notes

1. For a more complete discussion of these differences, see the following article: Donna Bennett, "Adele Wiseman," Profiles in Canadian Literature, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath, vol. 4 (Toronto: Dundern, 1982) 69-76.
2. In fact, the modern nation-state used the Hebrew Bible as a model for developing national cohesiveness amongst its citizens. The historian Alfred Kohn claims that the modern nation-state adopted three features of the Old Testament (i.e. Hebrew Bible): the idea of a common people, the emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and hopes for the future, and finally national messianism. See Timothy Brennan's article, "The National Longing of Form" in Homi Bhaba's Nation and Narration for more detail.
3. In Jewish Literacy, Joseph Telushkin notes that God's disavowal of Isaac's sacrifice is, in fact, the first attack on child sacrifice in any literature (37).
4. Michael Greenstein examines Abraham's notable association with blindness in this novel. See his monograph, Adele Wiseman and Her Works (page 10), for more detail.
5. A more thorough examination of this issue will follow in the following section in this chapter.
6. This quotation is taken from an unpublished essay found at the W. B. Scott library, York University entitled, "Jewishness: What it Means to Me."
7. The four letters are dated: Aug. 1955, August 15th [1956], August 30th [1956], and September 18th, 1956. No year is provided on the second and third letters in this sequence, but the other letters indicate they were published in the same year as the other two letters.
8. Donna Palmateer Pennee states that Laiah's death is "a femicide . . . specifically for the purpose of renewing a patriarchal structure and community, a femicide recast in the criticism as a necessary part of ethnic, national, and universal tragic traditions" (3). Viewing Laiah's murder in this light, however, neglects the fact that Abraham's motivations and actions are presented so unfavourably, at least as I perceive them. Wiseman, I contend, does not present Laiah's murder as morally justifiable, so Pennee's contention that her death sparks renewal is incorrect. Rather, it is Abraham's recognition of moral wrongdoing which allows for renewal. The role of women within The

Sacrifice will be examined more thoroughly in the following section of the chapter.

9. See Patricia Morley, "Engel, Wiseman, Laurence: Women Writers, Women's Lives," World Literature Written in English 17.1 (April 1978): 154-64; Ruth Panofsky, "From Complicity to Subversion: The Female Subject in Adele Wiseman's Novels," Canadian Literature 137 (Summer 1993): 41-48; and Donna Palmateer Pennee, "'The Hand of a Murderer, Hero, Artist, the Hand of a Man': Rereading Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice," Essays in Canadian Writing 58 (Spring 1996): 1-14.

10. According to Joseph Telushkin, it is traditional practice for the men to buy seats in orthodox synagogues. Evidently, Wiseman is obliquely criticizing this reality by showing readers the damaging psychological effects of these cultural practices upon women like Sarah and Ruth.

11. See Donna Palmateer Pennee's article for another view on the structural role of Laiah's murder within The Sacrifice.

12. See the following two articles for elucidation on the Yiddish dimensions within Wiseman's work: (1) Alan Weiss, "Adele Wiseman's Techniques and the Yiddish Tradition," World Literature Written in English 24 (1984): 397-407; (2) Michael Greenstein, Adele Wiseman and Her Works, (Toronto: ECW, 1985). Further background information on Sholom Aleichem (and the Yiddish tradition of which he is part) may be found in the two following books: (1) Hillel Halkin, Introduction, Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories, by Sholom Aleichem, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1987) ix-xii (2) Irving Howe and Ruth R. Wisse, introduction, The Best of Sholom Aleichem, by Sholom Aleichem, eds. Irving Howe and Ruth Wisse (Washington: New Republican Books, 1979) vii-xxvii.

13. Wiseman's comments to Mervin Butovsky are quoted extensively within the conclusion of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

The Lovebound: Phoenix from the Ashes

Adele Wiseman's second literary endeavour, a play called The Love bound: a Tragi-comedy (1964), is a fictional account of an actual historical event--the attempted emigration of 937 Jews from Europe to Cuba in May 1939. Concerned as it is with Nazi Germany during the Second World War, the play belongs to a long tradition of literature written by Jewish writers about the Holocaust.¹ At least in part, the play is a critique of those facets of western society which enabled the Holocaust to happen in the first place. Wiseman's conclusions are similar to those expressed in her earlier work, The Sacrifice. Once again, Wiseman warns of the danger of inflexible mores. In particular, she critiques the limitations underlying the philosophies of literary Romanticism and the Enlightenment, because these value systems encourage solipsism rather than the social interaction she esteems so highly.

For those individuals unfamiliar with the particular historical episode underlying Wiseman's play, a brief summary is useful. The Lovebound responds to the twentieth century's most

horrific fascist regime--Adolf Hitler's Germany. As already mentioned, her play revolves around one episode in this period, that regarding the attempted emigration of more than 900 Jews to Cuba, aboard a vessel called the *St. Louis*. In May 1939, the 'would-be' emigrants set sail, desperate to escape the escalating intolerance towards Jews in Germany.² Almost all the emigrants had purchased entry visas for Cuba. Yet, while en route, the government in Cuba changed hands, and the new government refused to accept their visas. Urgent pleas to other countries resulted in further denials of entry. Finally, several European countries, England, Belgium, Holland and France agreed to accept them (Telushkin, Literacy 353). However, the damage caused by the world's apathy was complete--Hitler was given unofficial sanction to do as he wished with the Jews. As Irving Abella and Harold Troper explain so poignantly in their book on Canada's immigration policy towards Jews during this period,

The Nazis had early on signalled their intent if not their methods. Yet no nation interceded on behalf of those doomed--not for lack of opportunity but for lack of will. With no states prepared to take Jews, the Nazis could only conclude that none cared. As the world turned its back, the Nazis understood that they had a free hand to dispense with the Jews as they wished. (280)

By the time Hitler was finally defeated by the Allied forces, it is estimated that six million Jews had been murdered in concentration camps.

Yet Wiseman refuses to focus on the inhumanity so rampant during this historical period, preferring to focus on those survival mechanisms which helped the passengers withstand the inhumane treatment to which they were subjected. Wiseman's perspective is apparent in her decision to rename the *St. Louis*, the *Lovebound*, a name which highlights the social interactions which helped sustain the passengers' spirits. The play revolves around the numerous liaisons amongst the passengers: Hitzig Komish looks out for his brother and sister-in-law, Herzl and Hannah Komish; Dora Moon falls in love with Hitzig; Marina and Abel Green form an intimate relationship; and Hannah remains loving and loyal to her husband, Herzl. All of these relationships help the passengers maintain a semblance of normalcy in a world bereft of humanity. They also gave the passengers a sense of hope when they recognized the likelihood of their return to Germany. When their arrival was imminent, each individual sought to save the life of his/her dearest: Dora bartered for Hitzig's life and vice versa (2.4.189); Abel attempted to marry Marina, in order to save her from a return to Germany; and, Hannah and Herzl planned to save their newborn's life by presenting him as a wedding present to Marina and Abel.

Evidently, Wiseman chooses to celebrate survival, rather than the barbarism of genocide. Consequently, The Lovebound deviates from the conventions of most western tragedy: the high-seriousness which prevails in most tragedy (and tragi-comedy) is replaced with a comical tone dependent on parody; the pensive soliloquies on death, which are so central to tragedy in the western tradition, give way to images which celebrate life. This is not to suggest that Wiseman ignored the horrific realities of the passengers' persecution at the hands of the crew members. Obviously, the caricatures of Cass and Nix suggest the imminence of the evil within their lives. Overall, however, the power of this evil is diminished by the undeniable vitality of the passengers.

To understand Wiseman's perspective on this topic, the play must be examined within the tradition of Holocaust literature to which it belongs. Jews have perennially shared "the reality of living as a despised, rejected, discriminated against . . . people" (Chapman 1vv). This reality, however, was compounded by their experience in the death camps during the Nazi period. According to Terrence des Pres, author of Survivor: Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps, the mind set of twentieth-century Jews has irrevocably been altered by this experience. In response to barbaric treatment designed to break their human spirit, Holocaust survivors relied on instinct to preserve their

humanity. des Pres concludes that their attitude towards adversity differs substantially from that of western society at large. Whereas western culture venerates heroism until death, Holocaust writing esteems persistence and survival (7). People living in extremity maintain human dignity and spirit through the maintenance of their most basic bodily routines, like eating and grooming (189). This focus on bodily functions differs from the emphasis on spiritual resistance within western literature. Lastly, Holocaust literature highlights the imminence of evil within this world, unnerving those accustomed to the western literary tradition which places evil in far-away symbolic realms, like Hell (189).

Perhaps because the play is so unusual to those accustomed to the western tradition of tragic drama, it was not well received by critics. On the back cover of her privately published play, Wiseman recalls her frustration with the negative response of critics and resigns herself to "the plaudits of posterity" (n.pag.). It is my belief that the play has encountered much unjust criticism because its readers have either dismissed conventions of Holocaust literature or they are unfamiliar with them. The differing responses of Wiseman's dear friends, Malcolm Ross and Margaret Laurence, are worth considering at length, since they provided Wiseman with the most detailed analyses of the play. In many ways, their views are

diametrically opposed to one another: whereas Ross is critical of the play's characterization and prevailing tone, Laurence is exultingly positive.

Given the length of the play, it is understandable why many readers, including Malcolm Ross, questioned Wiseman's choice of genre. Many felt that the play was too long to be produced, and therefore felt that the genre was impractical.³ In a letter to Wiseman on this issue, Malcolm Ross suggests that the play be "re-done in novelistic or documentary form" (Sept. 8 [1964]). From a practical standpoint, Ross's comments seem entirely valid: it is difficult to conceive a production of The Lovebound given that the manuscript is 219 pages long.⁴ Yet Wiseman's decision to write The Lovebound as a drama was carefully considered and her intentions were specific. As she explained in a letter to Malcolm Ross, she expected the play to "constitute a significant event in people's lives, even if only in the lives of a small group of people" (Aug. 5, 1964). She goes on to explain that the play is an "Epiform," rather than "Dramatic." Of course, Wiseman's association of The Lovebound with epic implies the grand dimensions of this genre with its accompanying length and exalted subject matter. Undoubtedly, Wiseman felt that the visual and oral components of the play would have a greater impact on viewers than would its expression in any other genre.

Wiseman's desire to inform people about the Holocaust is a

signature feature of twentieth-century Jewry. Their collective memory of an unprecedented genocide has provoked a corollary need to inform others about their horrific experience (des Pres 33). Terrence des Pres postulates that this was their manner of affirming their existence in a world which sought to deny it. Other historians, like Alfred Kazin, believe that this response is the only option left for such individuals. As Kazin explains, "There are experiences so extreme that, after living them, one can do nothing with them *but* put them into words" (592). Still other historians, like Abraham Chapman, provide a more hopeful reason for such testimonials. Chapman comments that Jews see radical evil as caused by a failure of human understanding. In examining events, Jews seek to prevent such horrors from ever happening again: "[B]y shedding illusions and deceptions, by continuing to grope for understanding, by facing the core of evil in the world . . . [Jews] muster the strength and understanding and compassion to be human" (xlviii). In presenting the world with memories of their own experience, Jews add to existing histories and subject previous perspectives to rigorous scrutiny.

Wiseman appears to desire above all to rectify the fallacies of history. More specifically, she seeks to critique the stereotypes of the gentile world about Jews. As she explains in an interview with Mervin Butovsky, "it has always seemed to be the mission of most Jews in the diaspora . . . to correct the

vision of the gentiles of the world"(5). A two-page commentary on the play, which I found within a file at the York University Archives, confirms that such a mission directed Wiseman's writing of The Lovebound. While Wiseman's intention for the commentary remains unknown, it nonetheless makes her reasons for writing the play abundantly obvious. In it, she discusses how historians have glorified the Second World War, and hints at her desire to rewrite history more objectively:

. . . [T]he field of battle is left to historians and novelists the poets and the detractors, and the glorifiers. Heroes are made, statues erected, blunders justified, emphasis shifted, corpses are embalmed, masks are gilded and the field of carnage, bones picked clean and austere gleaning rubble rearranged with the after effects for picturesque effect, has become the glorious past. Not so glorious. Not so past. Haunting, it rides the future. Will we be again what we once were? Or can we flush, and exorcise the clamorous dead? (n.pag.)

Obviously, Wiseman desires to rewrite history from a less glamorous perspective. She exposes the censored parts of history in order to shake the complacency of a world which seeks to ignore the ignominy of the past.

The response of the Jewish community towards The Lovebound

varied tremendously, and appeared to be dependent upon how comfortable they felt among gentile society. The opinion of the prominent Jewish-American literary critic, Leslie Fiedler, is instructive. In a letter to Margaret Laurence, Wiseman recounts meeting Fiedler at a conference at which he delivered a paper on the ideological function of the novel (Feb. 23, 1965). In his paper, Wiseman recounts, Fiedler called the novel a minority form, which enabled minorities to assert their unique identities in counter distinction to mainstream culture--something he viewed very positively. Given Fiedler's interest in marginal perspectives, Wiseman was surprised that he disapproved of her writing about the Holocaust in The Lovebound. Upon hearing about her play, he told her that his first reaction was that he wished "she hadn't done" it. Wiseman felt justifiably upset by the remark, so much so that she wrote to Margaret Laurence to discuss the incident. She finally reconciled herself to Fiedler's reaction by suggesting that it was indicative of his marginal perspective. That is, she viewed Fiedler's disquietude as a signal that even marginalized people were unwilling to accept counter-images which questioned the authority of those of the majority. As Wiseman explains in her letter to Laurence,

The implications of [Fiedler's] reaction are that the counter-image is not even acceptable to many of the minority, as long as it is possible to achieve

comfort within the majority terms. So "I wish you hadn't" it is to be. (Feb. 23, 1965)

Perhaps Wiseman's and Fiedler's respective views on this subject matter reflect their differing feelings towards their nations of origin, Canada and the United States respectively. As Michael Greenstein has commented, whereas American Jews have traditionally been assimilated by the "melting pot" of American culture, the Canadian mosaic encouraged a sense of otherness among Canadian Jews (Third Solitudes 5). Seen in this light, Fiedler's response can be seen as typical of a Jewish individual who feels part of the American mainstream. As such, he has no desire to see art which highlights Jewish difference from mainstream perspectives.

Some members of the Christian community felt equally uncomfortable about Wiseman's play. Malcolm Ross, for instance, felt uneasy with Wiseman's depiction of gentiles within the play. As he explains in a letter to Wiseman, "I suspect what worries me most is the gentile captain & crew--with only Abel . . . standing apart from the incredible hypocrisy & brutality of the rest" (August 25 [1964]). Ross's views seem valid to a point: Wiseman does portray the gentile crew members disparagingly. With the characterization of Nix, for instance, Wiseman presents readers with an uncompromizing image of evil incarnate. The symbolism within the name itself makes this clear. Ross fails, however, in

his assessment of The Lovebound, by neglecting the Holocaust literary tradition to which the play belongs. Informing himself about this tradition would have certainly made his criticism more valid.

Indeed, within Holocaust literature, such unflinching glimpses of evil are the rule. The conventional manner in which evil is portrayed within western literature does not suit Holocaust writing. As Terrence des Pres explains, evil is almost always relegated to symbolic realms, like Hell, within western literature (176). For survivors of the Holocaust, however, hell no longer exists in the nether world, but takes its place in the here and now. As des Pres puts it, "[m]an's interior drama, the height and depth of spiritual experience, has been writ large in the world" (176). For those critics unaccustomed to evil portrayed in this manner, Wiseman's play must seem deficient.

Just as Ross disliked the portrayal of the crew members within the play, he was likewise critical of the characterization of several of the passengers. In particular, he felt uneasy with Hitzig's characterization, which he called "Bob-Hopeish" (letter to Wiseman August 25 [1964]). He believed that Hitzig's wisecracks prevented Wiseman from facing evil--"from looking clear into the abyss--and beneath it and beyond it" (August 25 [1964]). Abel's motivations for leaving with Marina were also deemed insufficient. Rather than being motivated by morality, he

is merely driven by sexual attraction. As Ross explains to Wiseman:

I was saddened . . . that the only good "guy" was "good" not because of principle or ideas or art or ordinary humanity, but because of sexual attraction . . . The resolution is so reduced to elementary biology. And the theme doesn't allow such a resolution . . . The situation suggests profound human tragedy to be resolved in something greater than tribal and biological terms. (August 25 [1964])

Clearly, Ross is disturbed by what he considers the lack of solemnity within the play. Such reticence is to be expected from an individual accustomed to the high-seriousness of tragedy within the western tradition, Hitzig's wisecracks and Abel's base impulses must appear to be lacking the necessary dignity of the genre.

These characteristics of the play can likewise be explained through an analysis of writing about the Holocaust. Robert Alter explains that Jewish writers frequently use humour as a defence mechanism to deal with the horrific realities of constant persecution. As he puts it, "a shrewdly ironic humor became a source of necessary inner strength, a mode of survival" (155). Margaret Laurence seems to concur with Alter's comments. In a letter to Wiseman, Laurence responds to Ross's criticism by

commenting on the necessity of humour in the modern age. In a century where a genocide of such unfathomable dimensions became a reality, writers have few ways to adequately express their horror. As she puts it:

My feeling was that [Ross's] remarks seemed . . . dated. I thought--yes, that's the way people might have reacted at one time but not now. Not, I would have thought, now that (if nothing else) the whole mainstream of American (including Canadian) writing has been forced to express through bitter wisecracks some things which are too terrifying to be done justice to in any other way. We cannot risk, at this point, sentimentality--the situation is too serious for that. (October 2, 1964)

Unlike Laurence, Ross cannot seem to recognize that Hitzig's jokes are a veneer used to cope with the horror surrounding him. So accustomed is Ross to the western tradition of tragedy that the frivolity apparent in Wiseman's play seems scurrilous to him.

Another means by which individuals survive extremity is through the preservation of the most basic activities which make them human. Prisoners in the death camps had no time to engage in philosophical speculations. Instead, as Terrence des Pres illustrates so poignantly, survivors focused immense attention on the fulfilment of bodily functions, like eating and grooming

(65). They also displayed kindness and caring towards the other prisoners, recognizing that such altruism ensured their own survival. They were astute in recognizing that others were more likely to help them, if they had received like treatment. des Pres hypothesizes that these actions enabled them to preserve their humanity in a world designed to negate it (65). A parallel situation exists aboard The Lovebound. As the reality of their certain death becomes clear, the passengers focus on fundamental activities which could ensure their survival. For someone living in such extreme conditions, Abel Green's motivations for following Marina are entirely realistic. His relationship with Marina enables him to withstand the horrors around him. While this motivation may seem inadequate to those accustomed to conventions of western tragedy, his reasons are justifiable given a better understanding of Holocaust writing.

. . .

Just as Wiseman focuses on those qualities necessary for survival in extremity, she likewise examines those qualities which are life-denying. The play's characters serve as symbolic representations of particular dimensions of western society which Wiseman found detrimental to the well-being of community. Ultimately, she affirms value systems which promote social interaction, especially non-judgemental compassion amongst individuals.

Moral themes dominate The Lovebound, just as they do The Sacrifice. In this second work, Wiseman examines how an apparently sophisticated and civilized German society can be reconciled with its perpetration of mass genocide. Certainly, this seems to have preoccupied Wiseman while she wrote the play. In a typewritten commentary on the play, Wiseman explores this conundrum:

[L]et us not flatter the Germans and absolve them by postulating total estrangement from sanity in the normal sense of the word insanity. In many cases they managed excellently intellectually. They placed their intellects in the service of their criminality . . . The frame of mind which the Germans were able to develop in order to conceive and carry out the project of mass genocide was a precedent in the history of man. There are, it would appear, negative as well as positive frontiers in the field of human possibility. Nor can any man escape the implication regarding his own humanity, of an action by his fellows.⁵

As this commentary suggests, The Lovebound seeks to transcend merely an insular look at the Jewish situation. Put simply, it is a play that explores evil in all its dimensions: its origin, its maintenance, and its perpetuation.

Why engage in such an exercise? Because to understand is,

hopefully, to prevent its recurrence. As Wiseman explains with her commentary on the play, people must be vigilant of the limits of appropriate behaviour:

The fact is there are limits [to acceptable behaviour].

If we choose or are forced to exceed them we can no longer refer to the touchstones which define them.

We have entered chaos. Living is a process of defining oneself. (n.pag.)

As the above statement indicates, the didactic dimension of the play is at the forefront of Wiseman's intentions, just as it was in The Sacrifice.

Wiseman's characterization within The Lovebound likewise reflects a desire to educate her audience about western values and their consequences. The principal characters within the play, gentile and Jewish alike, are symbolic: they are used dispassionately to 'diagnose' those attributes of western society which enabled the Holocaust to come to its fruition. As such, Wiseman focuses on those facets of society which she considers particularly damaging to society's well-being: Cass can be seen as the quintessential Romantic artist whose values dominate the western perception of art and its relationship to the outside world; Nix is symbolic of the insidious evil perpetually preying on society and instigating chaos; and Abel Green is reminiscent of Everyman, who is subject to all these forces.⁶ She also

depicts some Jewish characters in symbolic terms: Hitzig Komish represents the New World American-Jew with an overwhelming faith in prevailing justice, while Herzl Komish represents the Old World Jew who is initially naively hoodwinked into believing in the ultimate goodness of human beings.⁷

It would be wrong, however, to view these characters uniquely in symbolic terms since Wiseman takes great pains to give the principal characters a flesh-and-blood reality. In fact, Margaret Laurence saw these two facets of Wiseman's characters as the play's most memorable feature. In a letter dated 12 September 1964, she states that she is struck by "the beautiful way in which each character came across on both levels--i.e. the symbolic and philosophical, plus the human individual flesh-and-blood levels."

Despite this realism, however, Wiseman engages in extensive parody to mock certain characteristics of western society. Cass Mananagorse, the quintessential parody of the Romantic artist, is a case in point. According to Linda Hutcheon, writers from marginalized cultures frequently use parody and irony in order to mock the aspects of the prevailing culture. Parody, she states, is a means of rejecting the values implicit within the mainstream culture, and a means of asserting counter values (Hutcheon, "Circling" 171). Closely associated with parody is irony. Frequently, the parodic characters in texts are unaware of their

own inadequacies which are nonetheless abundantly evident to readers. The use of such dramatic irony is an ideal means of criticizing the values implied by these characters. As Linda Hutcheon puts it,

as a double-talking forked tongued address, irony becomes a popular rhetorical strategy: for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time. (172)

In effect, Wiseman "talks back" to Western culture in The Lovebound by mocking its cultural values through the extensive use of parody and irony.

At the forefront of Wiseman's criticism is her rejection of the Romantic conception of the artist. With the advent of the Romantic movement in English literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the artist's social responsibility became unclear. Romantic poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley viewed the artist's task as an isolated one, spurred by genius and nurtured by solitude. Shelley's manifesto, In Defence of Poetry (1821), clearly articulates this exalted conception of the artist. As Shelley explains, "[a] poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not" (781). The modern perception of the artist starving in a garret while creating his divinely inspired art stems from this period. Within such a conception of

creativity, the artist need not engage with the world around him, because his/her inspiration is nurtured by solitude, not the exterior world. Cass Mananagorse is quite obviously a parodic prototype of such an artist. Although he does not write in a garret, he writes in his ship's cabin. Isolated within, he attempts to capture his genius in the form of funeral epitaphs. It is in such a genre, he feels, where he can find lasting immortality. As Nix explains to Hitzig Komish, "Cassimir has a theory that the gravestone is the key to professional eternity for the poet. 'Practical immortality,' he calls it" (1.1.28). In conveniently creating memorial tributes to the dead, he at once lends solemnity to death and ensures his own immortality through his "art."

Yet, while such a figure may appear absurdly comical, his approach to art has other sinister dimensions to it. To begin with, such artistic beliefs encourage solipsism. Since the artist remains isolated from others in the creation of his art, he can quickly lose empathy for the outside world. In fact, sometimes the exterior world merely becomes fodder for the artist's inspiration--direct contact is not needed. This is certainly evident in Cass's attitude towards the misfortune of his passengers. When an elderly lady dies aboard the ship, for instance, Cass cares nothing about the actuality of her death. Instead, he merely sees her death as an opportunity to inspire

his own creativity. As he explains to Nix:

Dying in the sense that an old lady dies is merely to be expected, a logical conclusion to living, particularly when she has undertaken a journey of a certain amount of unavoidable hardship. I'm concerned with death as a philosophical concept, the nature of death as it were. (1.2.40)

Such heartlessness typifies the self-centred nature of the Romantic artist.

Worse than such indifference, however, is the manner in which it contributes to the perpetuation of suffering among human beings. This is abundantly evident in The Lovebound. For instance, when Abel walks out of Cass's cabin incensed by his colleagues' disinterest with the passengers' suffering, Cass remains indifferent to the passengers' plight, and solely laments the effect of Abel's anger on his art. Turning to Nix after Abel's departure, Cass complains: "I can't create. It's so depressing. I hate depressing things. I like things to be on a high plane. Did you see the way he looked, Nix? Secretly, he's blaming me" (2.2.142). Of course, Cass had an alternative: he could have chosen to stand up to the indifference of the world by making his art a vehicle for moral good. Yet his narcissism makes such empathy and activism impossible. Hannah Komish mockingly points out the impotence of Cass's art in her remarks

at the end of the play: "Tell me, why couldn't he have been moved to inspiration before, and melted the hearts of the rest of the world?" (2.3.178). Evidently, the social function of the artist is completely undermined by the cultivated isolation of the Romantic artist.

At his worst, such an artist may deliberately distort reality and actively harm other human beings. Since the sole interest of the narcissistic Romantic artist is the maintenance of his/her own well-being, s/he may deliberately fabricate things to ease any discomfort. When it becomes apparent that no country wishes to accept the passengers, for instance, Cass asserts that they are exaggerating Hitler's danger to the Jews. He mocks the passengers fear of returning to Germany, even insinuating that they are responsible for their own predicament. As he explains to Abel:

. . . [the German officials] will frown on . . . [the returning Jewish passengers]. But active harm?
Nonsense! Hysteria. Guilt. I know what you're going to say. Yes we've a few passengers the Gestapo chastised a little. And they may be criminals for all we know. Remember, we've been getting one-sided stories. Hitler isn't here to defend himself. I'm not defending him either. I'm merely advocating objectivity . . .
(2.2.132)

Whatever shallow compassion Cass exhibited at the outset of the play is completely absent by the end of the play. Likewise, the Romantic artist's compassion for others is easily swayed by his own discomfort.

By portraying Cass in such odious terms, Wiseman succeeds in rejecting this conception of the artist. Later on in her career, Wiseman explains her views explicitly in her manifesto on creativity, Old Woman at Play (1978).³ In essence, the views expressed in this manifesto on the function and nature of creativity are directly opposite to those exhibited by Cass Mananagorse. Wiseman perceives her mother's doll-making as the ideal expression of what an artist should be. Wiseman defines art as a community act, whereby the artist conceives his or her art to share his or her unique perception of the world with others. In so doing, the artist enriches the lives of others. Art is not divinely inspired, but intimately connected to the surrounding world. An artist does not seek immortality, but dialogue with others.

Another western concept which Wiseman questions within The Lovebound is the belief that people are inherently good. Jewish people are reminded by the Hebrew Bible that this is not the case. A passage in Genesis 8.21 states that "[t]he tendency of man's heart is towards evil from his youth" (Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom 207). Therefore, the Jewish faith believes that it is

necessary to educate and command people to behave ethically, in order to counter their naturally selfish inclinations. Put another way, "evil and selfishness are more natural to people than goodness and altruism" (Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom 207). However, this view of human beings conflicts with the Enlightenment view of human nature, which perceives human beings as intrinsically good. Gradually, this Enlightenment view of human nature has taken precedence. As Joseph Telushkin explains:

. . . the biblical belief that evil comes from within human beings has largely been rejected in favour of the Enlightenment view that human beings are born good and corrupted by society (Jewish Wisdom 207)

Wiseman's play, on the other hand, rejects this prevalent view: The Lovebound reiterates Wiseman's belief, that the morally untutored human being will perpetuate evil until educated to do otherwise.

Wiseman's play suggests that twentieth-century Jewry have been hoodwinked by the belief in human beings' inherent virtue. Indeed, at least one Jewish passenger, Herzl Komish, suffers dire repercussions for such faith. Despite the fact that Herzl's life is governed by his Judaic convictions, he is nonetheless duped by a belief in human goodness. His horrific experience within the concentration camp suggests the error of such confidence. Early on in the play, Hitzig mocks Herzl for staying in Germany when

Nazi atrocities were becoming apparent. Herzl indignantly defends his action by stating: "I'm not sorry [for staying in Germany] . . . Whatever they [i.e. the Nazis] did . . . I'm not sorry I believed in what a human being should be" (1.5.63). Although Herzl's conviction may seem essentially admirable, the results of his refusal to leave Germany are outward proof of his error. Herzl just misses being killed when a soldier throws him into a mass grave. In hindsight, Herzl solemnly recalls the barbarism of the soldier's behaviour. As he bitterly comments to his brother, even an insect would receive more considerate treatment, since "[an] insect you respect at least enough to crush it. I was too . . . reduced" (1.5.64). Upon seeing Herzl's broken spirit, the reader is left to ponder the error of his judgement.

It is likely that the world's apathy towards the plight of the Jews during the Nazi period was partly a consequence of a similar unwillingness to acknowledge Germany's barbaric intentions. Their refusal to accept the possibility of genocide left Jews stranded in their dire predicament. The passengers on the Lovebound soon learn that they cannot rely on the justice of other nations. Hitzig Komish's growing cynicism is testimony of this fact. This comical American passenger who helps free his brother and sister-in-law from the clutches of Hitler's Germany begins the journey with abundant conviction that the United

States will correct the iniquities of Germany. He frequently consults his government manuals seeking solutions to the passengers' predicaments. As he proudly tells Hannah and Herzl,

All secrets are written down. What we need is concentration, dedication, patience, understanding, and a good system of cross reference to help us thread our way undismayed through the maze of apparently contradictory testimony. (1.5.70)

In the end, however, Hitzig's conviction that the United States will help the passengers proves naive: not one country, including the United States, offers to help the stranded passengers, so they are forced to return to Germany where they face certain death. Wiseman's play suggests that these governments, like their citizens, are weakened by their unwillingness to acknowledge the genocide of the Jews. Like Herzl Komish, they disregard the possibility of such human depravity.

Judaism's dour perspective on human nature is reflected within its laws on charity. As Joseph Telushkin explains, Judaism is sceptical that people would consistently engage in charitable behaviour without being commanded to do so. To ensure that Jews participate in charitable activity, Judaism ritualizes it in the form of tzedaka (Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom 11). To observe tzedaka, Jews must donate a portion of their wealth to those who are needy. This ensures that donations are not subject

to the whims of people's shifting conscience. As Telushkin comments, this ritualized version of charity is quite different from Christian perceptions of charity, since Christianity does not believe that charitable behaviour can be enforced by rules or laws: Christians believe that genuine charity is based on a free movement of the will.

Wiseman's play confirms the need for ritualized charity to counteract human beings' natural tendency towards evil. Cassimir Mananagorse perfectly illustrates the weaknesses apparent in non-ritualized charity. From the outset, the sincerity of his concern for the Jews seems superficial and suspect. On the one hand, he is eager to criticize Nix about his greedy intentions, and he asserts that his charitable intentions are motivated by his faith:

I wish you and Hans had never persuaded me to take
this job on. You and your easy profits. It's had a
bad effect on everyone. And don't knock my conscience,
Nix, don't knock my religion. A man needs something to
guide his life when all else fails. (2.2.150)

Yet despite Cass's stated religious conviction, he becomes quite selfish when he encounters difficulties. As soon as things become difficult, he begins retracting his charity. When Cuba refuses to accept the passengers, for instance, he whimpers about his supposed victimization at the hands of the passengers:

. . . I'm as much a victim as any man aboard.

Suddenly they're all washing their hands and Cassimir Mananagorse is left holding the baby, he whose name should come kissing from humanity's lips, the rescuer, is now despised, not because he has committed the crime, but because out of the goodness of his heart he remained the last on the scene and tried to give succour. (2.2.133)

As Cass's comments illustrate, individuals risk becoming proud when they bestow charity upon others. Since charity is not a choice but a command for Jews, such self-adulation need not arise. The Jewish perception of charity ensures that charity is not subject to the whims of people's fluctuating generosity, and eliminates self-adulation on the part of the donor.

When individuals voluntarily engage in charitable activities, their altruism may easily be dismissed when they encounter difficulties. Such is the case with Cassimir. When the provisions have diminished and his passengers appear to be on the brink of mutiny, he becomes vulnerable to inhumane solutions to settle disputes. At one point, he half-heartedly agrees with Nix's proposal that the passengers be sold into slavery, commenting that "slavery's a way of life too" (2.2.145). Obviously, Cassimir easily becomes prey to Nix's sinister suggestions. Upon Nix's instigation, for instance, he fantasizes

about murdering the Jews, although he finally retreats from this as a viable option. Nevertheless, Cassimir's fluctuating altruism suggests that he does not feel obligated to fulfill his charitable duties. His benevolence is entirely dependent on the continuation of benevolent feelings within himself.

At least one character, Abel Green, grows to share Wiseman's perspective on the moral character of human beings. As his last name symbolically suggests, Abel is an inexperienced young man who begins the voyage with a belief in the inherent goodness of human beings. He even believes that Nix is a decent person. When Marina begins criticizing Nix, for instance, he defends him by saying, "Nix isn't such a bad guy. He's no holy angel but hell . . . he's been around" (1.3.50). Yet Abel's convictions are rewarded by the crew's indifference to the passengers' plight. As the play progresses, Abel loses his innocence and acknowledges his own impotence to change things. At one point, Nix and Cass put him in charge of responding to the passengers' questions, a move which forces him to acknowledge his own powerlessness. As he tells Hitzig,

There's simply nothing I can do. Look, how would you feel if you saw a man drowning, out there, and you couldn't save him, and instead of coming up his allotted three times and disappearing forever he kept coming up and up and wouldn't sink, just kept

drowning . . . Drown already, damn you,
drown! (2.3.184)

By the middle of the play, Abel begins doubting the veracity of his previous convictions. Of course, the analogy between his own situation and that of a drowning person emphasizes his feelings of powerlessness and of frustration.

As the play progresses, Abel's docile temperament is replaced by frustrated anger, and he begins snapping at the passengers. When Hitzig asks Abel whether Yesh could become a ship-hand to avoid returning to Germany, for instance, he heartlessly responds: "Tell the kid I know what he's up to and he'd better forget it . . . Tell him he won't find any hidey hole this time" (2.3.183). At this point, Abel's generosity is completely replaced by animosity--an animosity which he had previously limited to the crew of the Lovebound.

However, Abel's complete transformation occurs when Hannah gives him her newborn son as a wedding present in a desperate attempt to save the child's life. When she puts the child in his arms, he feels completely overwhelmed, and nearly throws the child overboard. This is a turning point for Abel, since it forces him to acknowledge his own capacity for evil. From this point onward, he attempts to counter this evil potential with moral goodness. Ultimately, it propels him towards his greatest sacrifice--his decision to forfeit his life along with Marina.

This action is an outward manifestation of his decision to counter evil with goodness. Since Abel loves Marina, he is willing to die for her. He has replaced the pseudo-charity of the other crew members with the ultimate self-sacrifice, his life. As Margaret Laurence states, this sacrifice proves Abel's humanity:

Abel dies among the Jews in order to earn the man, the state of being a man. There is in the end no symbolic redemption and no Messiah . . . only individual men earning their humanity, as Abel earns it, and as Hitzig also earns it. Humanity, like freedom, like salvation, isn't really transferable-- either you discover it for yourself or you don't.

(September 12, 1964)

In Wiseman's and Laurence's estimation, true charity stems from an acknowledgement of our capacity to do otherwise, and it is a choice to counteract our natural tendency to be selfish. The Lovebound is a metaphorical voyage which traces Abel Green's moral understanding of the true nature of charity.

Nonetheless, while Wiseman appears to be critical of non-ritualized charity, she does not see the Judaic notion of tzedaka as ideal. Rather, she believes that it is preferable for people to acknowledge their own moral weaknesses, in order to counter this capacity for evil with its opposite, love. Such ideal

behaviour is demonstrated by Abel who freely chooses to counter his selfishness with an action which counters this human tendency. Indeed, Margaret Laurence recognized this ideal in her analysis of Abel's character. In a letter to Wiseman, she writes:

[Abel's] dual nature has to be accepted, but he is portrayed as a being who possesses free will. He can choose. He cannot help containing within himself the component parts of good and evil . . . but he can help what he does. (September 12, 1964)

As Laurence comments suggest, Abel's growth is dependent upon his conscious choice to guide his behavior with moral conviction.

Because Wiseman believes that human decision-making is so crucial, she belittles the efficacy of divine intervention within the play. In fact, The Lovebound begins with the passengers' 'divine vision.' In this opening scene, several passengers discuss a vision of God which they saw during a particularly severe storm, and they take this as a sign that He is guiding them. As it turns out, they have merely seen the skeletal Herzl walking on the upper deck. Wiseman's mockery of their convictions implies her strong belief that no deus ex machina can aid human beings. Unfortunately, the scene offended Malcolm Ross who felt her portrayal of these passengers' beliefs was unnecessarily harsh. In a letter to Wiseman, he gently

castigates her by saying that "the fantasy vision at the beginning is handled rather cruelly. The play, while it presents a situation that calls for compassion, is not written with compassion large enough to evoke compassion" (August 25, 1964). One can suppose that Ross's critique of this portion of the play illustrates his very different perception of human behaviour. As a Christian, Ross believes in the possibility of redemption by God, and the possibility of change through prayer. As such, he cannot identify with Wiseman's conviction that people must rely upon themselves (rather than God) to alter their lives.³

For Wiseman, the human ability to love unconditionally is what overcomes evil in the world. Such love enables humans to overcome intolerance towards others. It is understandable why love is what ultimately causes the about-face at the end of the play. In essence, Abel's decision to substitute himself for Yesh in the death-car stems from his attachment to Marina. Abel's recognition of his own capacity for evil triggers his decision to counter this evil with goodness. Evidently, by following Marina, he justifies his love for her. As already noted, Malcolm Ross finds Abel's sexual attraction for Marina a flimsy motivation for such ethical behaviour. Yet, Ross's interpretation is too simplistic. Abel's action is only initiated by sexual attraction. His final choice to follow Marina to the death car is incurred by mature reflection on his own moral actions. Put

another way, his self-sacrifice is initiated by an understanding of his own weaknesses.

Malcolm Ross also seems to miss Hitzig's most admirable trait--his compassion for others. As already stated, Ross dislikes what he calls the "Bob-Hopeish" character of Hitzig, because his wisecracks prevent Wiseman from examining the horror of the situation with any sincerity. Yet, as previously mentioned, Hitzig's comic dimensions have very serious origins. Put simply, humour enables him to deal with the horrific realities surrounding him. Although Ross misses this dimension of Hitzig's character, Margaret Laurence did not. In a letter to Wiseman, she writes that she sees Hitzig as a representative, contemporary Jew who is "cynical, ironic, and yet in the end with a compassion hidden under wisecracks and a kind of bitter wisdom" (12 Sept. 1964). As Laurence realizes, Hitzig only appears superficial. He is, in reality, a very sensitive and caring individual. After all, it is Hitzig who attempts to save his brother and sister-in-law with his elaborate scheme to get Herzl out of the concentration camp; and, it is likewise Hitzig who risks his life with the passengers when he has the chance to disembark in the United States.

By the end of the play, Hitzig also becomes less ironic and more sincere. His abundant love for Dora makes Ross's comments all the more obviously short-sighted. The image of him pleading

for Dora's life remains among the play's most memorable. In fact, it was this scene which touched Margaret Laurence most profoundly. As she confessed in her letter to Wiseman,

In the end, what moves me the most is Hitzig seeing that there isn't any way out, and he and Dora trying to bargain for the others life--this is utterly convincing; they don't do it because it is right or because they ought to--only because they cannot bear to see the other person cease to be; but in the end everyone can bear everything because what else is there to do? (September 12, 1964)

Seen in this light, Ross's comments on Hitzig's character indicate a lack of awareness into the motivations behind his apparent irreverence.

Ultimately, Wiseman's faith in love caused her to name the play The Lovebound. Although a paper at the York University Archives listed two dozen possibilities for the play's title, her final choice highlights the primacy of love in her value system. On the other hand, the word "bound" seems to resonate with different meanings. Margaret Laurence explores two such interpretations:

In the end, it is only love . . . which binds men to life. "Lovebound", [sic] finally, seems to me to convey the sense of the word "bound" in two senses--"bound" in

the sense of moving towards; and "bound" in the sense of being anchored by and even being tied and confined by. [underlining hers] (September 12, 1964)

As Laurence indicates, by adding the word 'bound' to the title Wiseman indicates that it is love which enables humans to resist evil and to move towards a better self. Looking at the central characters in the play, it becomes apparent that it is precisely this quality which precipitates their heroic actions.

. . .

As one can see upon closer examination of The Lovebound, Wiseman's second literary oeuvre is, in fact, a natural outgrowth of those ideas expressed in The Sacrifice. Wiseman once again examines the values of western society, particularly the manner in which these values influence the relationship between Jews and Christians. These values reflect her Jewish background. As in The Sacrifice, she once again places primacy on love, tolerance, and community. Her critique of Cass Mananagorse, the quintessential Romantic artist, confirms her abiding conviction that artists must be active members of the community, who create their art for the community and in dialogue with it. Wiseman also questions the prevalent belief that people are essentially good. Above all, Wiseman suggests that is the recognition of one's capacity for evil which enables individuals to love others.

Notes

1. For a sampling of such writing see the following anthology: Lawrence L. Langer, ed., Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology (New York: OUP, 1995).
2. In Jewish Literacy, Joseph Telushkin notes that the departure of the St. Louis for Cuba was precipitated by increasing violence towards Jews in Germany after Hitler's election as Chancellor. Some six months prior to the St. Louis's departure, Jews experienced Kristallnacht: on this "night of the broken glass," ninety-one Jews were murdered. . .[and] thousand were arrested and sent to concentration camps" (352). Hundreds of synagogues were destroyed in full view of the German populace.
3. This is mentioned in a letter Margaret Laurence wrote to Adele Wiseman on September 12, 1964.
4. The play is divided into two parts: Part 1 is 81 pages long; Part 2 is 136 pages long. It is designed to include one or two intermissions: the first intermission occurs after Part 1, and the second intermission (if desired) occurs mid-way through Part 2.
5. This commentary may be found in the Adele Wiseman Papers, Archives and Special Collections, York University.
6. The symbolic dimension of these characters is, of course, quite evident in the symbolism of their names. The name, Nix, suggests his negation--that is, his antithesis of life. The name, Abel Green, by contrast, suggests both goodness (as does Abel in the Hebrew Bible) and innocence.
7. Herzl Komish's name could likewise be symbolic. It may hearken back to Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), one of the foremost proponents of Zionism, and the man responsible for making it into an international movement. It is tempting to think that Wiseman viewed Herzl Komish's suffering as a symbolic justification for the formation of the state of Israel.
8. See chapter 5 of this thesis for further discussion of Wiseman's view of the artist.
9. Ross's belief in Christianity is apparent in many of his letters to Wiseman, especially in those in which he discusses the religious dimensions of The Sacrifice and The Lovebound. Ross's letters to Wiseman regarding the issue of sacrifice in The Sacrifice (e.g. August 1956, August 15, 1956, August 30 1956, and

September 18, 1956) and charity in The Lovebound (e.g. August 25, 1964) imply that Ross was a deeply religious man devoted to the tenets of Christianity.

CHAPTER 3

Crackpot: Beyond Sacrifice

As the last two chapters illustrate, several defining features predominate in Adele Wiseman's early writing. Both The Sacrifice and The Lovebound focus on Jewish individuals attempting to adjust to the alien world surrounding them. Their difficulty in adapting their own values in the face of contrasting values leaves them feeling powerless. Consequently, a sense of malaise predominates in both works. Where humour surfaces in The Lovebound, it merely reinforces the characters' helplessness, since their laughter is solely a means of coping with the extremity of their suffering.

With the publication of Crackpot in 1974, Adele Wiseman enters a new phase of her writing career. Hoda, the gregarious protagonist of Wiseman's second novel, is a substantial departure from any of Wiseman's previous creations. The protagonists of her earlier work generally cope through compromise: they do not seek to alter the societal construct. Hoda, on the other hand, is a rebel. When she cannot abide by the strictures of the prevailing norms, she creates her own. She is the neighbourhood whore, who feels proud of her role as "'part-time wife to the whole damn world'" (285). She is also a word-play artist extraordinaire. Above all, Hoda is a humane individual in a

world which quite obviously lacks such humanity. Just as Hoda forges ahead always believing in the intuitions of her own feelings, she also adamantly rejects an outer world which lacks such flexibility.

The changes apparent in Wiseman's writing reflect a growing awareness and maturation of her beliefs. When Wiseman began writing The Sacrifice, she was a young adult in the last year of university. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, her writing was governed by the conventions of the novel form (Butovsky 12). During the fifteen years which intervened between her two novel, a gradual change occurred in her writing. By the time she wrote Crackpot, the orthodox novel form no longer suited her needs. As she explains to Butovsky,

Between the two novels there was a long play that I wrote, and a good deal of time during which I realized that to really be true to what I knew I had to venture beyond the well-constructed novel, and that there was more possible. (12)

No longer feeling restricted by the conventions of genre, Wiseman sought a stylistic form more appropriate for developing the novel's protagonist, Hoda. Realizing that Hoda's probing and meandering mind was ill-suited to concision, Wiseman opted for a purposeful verbosity. As she told Kildare Dobbs in a radio interview, "What I was trying to follow was the feeling of her

life, and this required a kind of slowness, a certain kind of redundancy of expression . . . [I]t was just the way she felt to me that I was trying to get down" (November 2, 1974).

Consequently, the book is voluminous, expanding (like its obese protagonist) to three hundred pages. The ingenious manner in which Wiseman captures the essence of Hoda's mind through language greatly enhances the realism of her characterization.

This realism is also enhanced by Wiseman's kinship with Hoda. With the publication of Crackpot, Wiseman creates a character whose subject position mirrors her own, and moves away from the male protagonists who dominate her earlier work. A letter which Wiseman wrote to Laurence indicates that she felt an affinity with Hoda--a connection she felt with no other character. In her letter, she comments that she feels Crackpot is a "better, more mature" work than her previous novel, and surmises that this is because "it's closer" to her own reality (June 26, 1968). Of course, such a connection is to be expected given their shared marginalization as Jewish women growing up in the Dominion of Canada. Both Wiseman and Hoda suffer the consequences of being Jewish and female in a colonial and patriarchal society. They are also alike in the manner in which they pursue their respective careers in spite of the fact that they depart from the norm. Just as Hoda's prostitution boldly challenges her society's norms of acceptable behavior, Wiseman's

decision to pursue a writing career was blatantly unorthodox within a Canadian writing establishment unaccustomed to Jewish women writers.¹

To analyze the novel more effectively, it is necessary to consider the relationship between Wiseman's subject position and the structure and theme of the novel. The novel's critique of patriarchy and imperialism undoubtedly issues forth from Wiseman's marginalization within these societal constructs. Of course, these are precisely the concerns one would expect from someone of Wiseman's background. Post-colonial and feminist theories provide a means of understanding writing written from this perspective.²

. . .

Much post-colonial theory speculates upon the manner in which imperial nations maintain their cultural influence over colonial nations. In order to maintain their colonial links with their satellite nations, they must ensure that colonial citizens feel a natural affinity and harmonious unity with their culture and values. Generally speaking, state-run education and cultural institutions are the primary means by which imperial cultures instill their values within colonial cultures. Much post-colonial theory examines the means by which colonial cultures assert their unique identities in spite of this imperial endeavour. Further elucidation of these issues will provide

readers with necessary information for a more fruitful examination of Crackpot.

Several essays contained within Homi Bhabha's study on nationalism, Nations and Narration, focus on how nations maintain their authority through the cultivation of common memories and myth. Ernest Renan's translated article, "What is a nation?", for instance, describes the nation as essentially a "soul or spiritual principle"(19) maintained by two abiding principles:

One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (19)

This "rich legacy of memory" overrides differences in language and race by neutralizing them (19). Timothy Brennan concurs with Renan. In "The National Longing for Form," he explains that nations are dependent upon myths, which establish traditions within colonial cultures. These myths create a bond amongst citizens through the creation of a common past (45). He reiterates Tom Nairns' statement³ that the most important effect of this national bond is its ability "to rouse unlike peoples in dramatically unlike conditions in an impassioned chorus of voluntary co-operation and sacrifice" (45). According to Ernest Renan, people are more affected by the notion of common suffering

than common triumph. Such memories encourage more self-sacrifice to redress past suffering (19).

The question remains: how do nations inculcate these myths within their citizens' minds? Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, the authors of The Empire Writes Back, focus on the manner in which British English suppressed colonial cultures and impressed its British values within Commonwealth nations. Literature, therefore, was a crucial means by which Britain disseminated its cultural values. The imperial nation's attempt to make citizens literate through education was an insidious way of initiating a new type of consciousness "which might be characterized as 'historical'" (81). By emphasizing the superiority of the written word over the spoken, the imperial culture "allow[ed] scrutiny of a fixed past" (81). Yet, not all memories were deemed equally legitimate: oral history was considered less important and legitimate than the written history of the nation. Historical texts fixed a homogenous past in citizens' minds and implied the illegitimacy of other historical accounts.

To sum up, imperial cultures attempted to control cultural values through their control of language and memory. This was because diverse points of view threatened the continued harmony amongst heterogeneous members of the nation, particularly a colonial one tenuously dependent on the alien culture and

language of an imperial nation. In essence, diverse points of view were censored in these colonial nations, because stability depended upon a common set of memories.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, many feminist theorists believe that patriarchy functions in essentially the same way as imperialism. Like colonial subjects, they believe that women are subject to imposed cultural values and language. However, feminists see patriarchy as the overriding ideological structure suppressing women, not imperialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen, Post-Colonial Studies 249). They believe that this marginalization supercedes that determined by nationality, colour or creed. Feminists seek to alter the status quo through a radical questioning of society's constructs and ideology in the same manner as do post-colonial theorists. In other words, both post-colonial and feminist theory focus on the reevaluation of existing structures and the underlying premise of their authority.

These theorists also hold similar views on the manner by which marginalized individuals assert their difference within these constructs. Language remains a foremost means by which writers assert their difference from the mainstream. To illustrate the similarity between post-colonial and feminist projects, the comments of two notable theorists, one post-colonial, the other feminist will be compared. Barbara Godard, a

leading Canadian feminist scholar, sees word play as an essential means for acknowledging difference. As she puts it, "[the] punning and spinning of metaphors . . . is not just 'icing on the cake' but cognitive activity central to the forging of new (conceptual) worlds" ("Redrawing" 170). These comments are virtually identical to comments made by the writers of The Empire Writes Back. Like Barbara Godard, they see word-play as a dominant means by which post-colonial writers assert their difference from mainstream culture which rejects such individuation. As they explain:

Worlds exist by means of languages, their horizons extending as far as the processes of neologism, innovation, tropes, and imaginative usage generally will allow the horizons of the language itself to be extended. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 44)

Of course, the manner in which post-colonial and feminist writers "play" with language varies tremendously. These differences, however, do not negate the fact that language remains a seminal means (if not the seminal means) by which they assert their unique identities in a culture (e.g. patriarchal and/or colonial) which aspires to homogeneity.

Along with persistent word-play, writers frequently engage in myth-making. Not surprisingly, parody is a common feature of post-colonial and feminist writing (Hutcheon, "Colonialism" 9).

By rewriting and/or parodying canonical myths, writers question the authority of these myths and highlight facets of their identity and culture. Feminist writers usually question the social and cultural institutions which constrain women's freedom through the revision of western, canonical literature. In Writing Beyond the Ending, for instance, Rachel Blau Du Plessis examines how nineteenth-century women writers refashioned the romance genre. As she illustrates, these writers revised this genre to dovetail the female quest (bildung) for personal fulfilment within the constraints of marriage, the hallmark of the romance novel. Post-colonial writers are equally innovative in their reinterpretation of canonical texts and myths. As the editors of The Empire Writes Back explain, these writers usually question the imperial version(s) of history within their texts (82). Commonwealth writers, for instance, might question the centrality of the monarchy within their own society, and point out the propaganda used to perpetuate this royal institution.

Sometimes writers go beyond the reinterpretation of canonical myths, and choose instead to create and/or articulate myths of central importance to their own identity and culture. Jewish writers, for instance, would likely rely upon the canonical texts of their faith, the Talmud and Torah, as the underlying structure of their work. One Jewish Canadian writer, A. M. Klein, does precisely this in his novel, The Second Scroll.

On the other hand, as Susan Weidman Schneider explains in her book, Jewish and Female, Jewish women may be particularly intent on reevaluating Jewish sacred writings to find a place for women "in a religious and social system that has often used religious structures as an excuse for limiting women's participation and recognition" (21). And, like all feminists, they look to alternate writings of particular importance to the feminist movement for guidance--such works as Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own or Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women.

. . .

As the following analysis will illustrate, Crackpot engages with many issues prominent within post-colonial and feminist theory. Wiseman's triply marginalized position as a Jewish Canadian female writer is a key to understanding this novel. It is significant that Wiseman chooses to write about a character whose marginalization mirrors her own. Indeed, Wiseman acknowledged a feeling of affinity with Hoda which overrode any attachment to her other characters. Furthermore, this affinity stems from her affinity with Hoda's subject position. In any case, as the following analysis will illustrate, Wiseman employs strategies noted by many post-colonial and feminist theorists. Specifically, she questions the authority of western society's language and myths, proposes alternate myths, and engages in

fervent word-play.

In the first part of the novel, Wiseman presents her readers with a scathing critique of the Canadian educational system during the years of the Depression. Hoda's education in the North Winnipeg Jewish ghetto is one of rampant racism and British propaganda. Yet while this propaganda is pervasive, much of it seems relatively innocuous. Elementary students, for instance, must sing "God Save the King" each morning, and listen to people like Miss Flake who discuss The Royal Family ad infinitum. At its worst, however, the students must deal with outright hatred, stimulated by assertions that all cultures and people are not equal: precious few are lucky enough to be born under the auspices of the British Empire. Early on, Hoda notes the startling contrast between her English and Yiddish schools:

English school was quite different [from Yiddish schul]. Here you daren't talk, and the teachers had doughty faces and crisp, unloving voices that told proudly how westerners had beaten down the wild Indians and crushed the treacherous half-breeds and made the great new continent a place fit to live in. (31)

This racism, however, extends beyond that expressed towards Indians. Many of Hoda's teachers find new immigrants particularly burdensome. Hoda intuitively perceives this

distaste for immigrants in her teacher's expression:

There was that subtle something in her teacher's expression that Hoda had learned to know so well, a certain sucking in and holding away of the self which showed, more clearly than words, that some immigrant children imposed a considerable strain on western hospitality. (32)

Hoda's decision to quit school was likely precipitated by this institutionalized racism. The entire educational system ensures that outsiders remain peripheral, since it is structured to emphasize individual differentiation and stratification.

In order to conform to this rigidly stratified society, Hoda must also learn and use a new language. Hoda quickly learns that the values implicit within the outside world are very different than those within her Jewish culture. Generally speaking, the gentile world favours words which emphasize homogeneous solidarity and patriotism, while her Yiddish vocabulary illustrates a preference for private family values. Even as a young child in elementary school, Hoda recognizes these distinctions:

Hoda had discovered that "duty" and "honour of your country" were the things you said that made you feel patriotic and just like everybody else in English. In Yiddish the words that felt right when you talked of

wars and soldiers were, "When will they stop killing each other like wild animals and come home and look after their families?" (34)

It is uncanny that Hoda sees English culture as nation-oriented, because such observations confirm the comments of many post-colonial theorists. As I noted in the preceding section of this chapter, colonial cultures are bombarded with propaganda designed to create a sense of harmonious solidarity among people of diverse backgrounds. Most important, as Ernest Renan points out, the notion of having suffered together creates a powerful uniting impulse among the heterogeneous citizens of nations (19).

Crackpot also explores how oral history is denigrated within Canadian culture. Once again, this conforms to the observations of many post-colonial theorists. As the editors comments in The Empire Writes Back, the superiority granted to written texts is a powerful means by which imperial cultures ensure a "fixed past" amongst colonial subjects (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 81). These observations concur with Ernest Renan's assertion that the security of a nation is dependent upon its citizens' perception of a common past (19). Hoda's experience at school reinforces the validity of these theoretical claims. When she desires to share her father's stories with her classmates during an oral presentation, her teacher abruptly stops her from finishing what she considers a discussion about "primitive times" and "curious

rites" (98). At the end of the class, she admonishes Hoda for overstepping the boundaries of propriety in her address to the class. She lectures the class on propriety, saying, "the main thing I want to stress is fitness. If you want to fit in with people what you say should fit the occasion and the audience" (99). The teacher's response baffles Hoda, who has been innocent of such societal protocol to this point. It is at this juncture within the text that Hoda learns her most difficult lesson: her culture is not valued, and, indeed, it is best forgotten in the New World. Her thoughts illustrate the deep pain caused by this awareness:

[W]hat was it that had happened? . . . She [Miss Boltholmsup] had just, simply, thrown it all away, dismissed it as though it meant nothing, had been trying to hint that it had never been, or if it had that it had been something unclear and uncivilized and best forgotten by those who wanted to sing, "The Maple Leaf Forever." (100)

Wiseman's novel obliterates the notion that Canada is a place where cultural diversity has historically flourished in a tolerant environment. In fact, Crackpot suggests that Canadian society was rigidly stratified, and overwhelmingly favoured those individuals of British ancestry.

It is also a society, Wiseman illustrates, where sexual

prudery reigned supreme. It is not merely oral history which is discouraged in colonial societies, but particular subject matter. Above all else, this New World remains strict about its censorship of sexuality and the mores of 'decent' women. For instance, Miss Boltholmsup abruptly halts Hoda's oral presentation because she is scandalized by Hoda's description of her parents' marriage. The teacher conjures up a pornographic image of

the wretched couple of cripples copulating in the graveyard while a bearded, black-robed, fierce-eyed rabbi stood over them, uttering God knows what blasphemies and unholy incantations . . . Miss Boltholmsup was positively sick to the stomach with the vividness of it. (97)

Such queasiness is a perfect illustration of both the prudery inherent within British culture, and the subsequent restrictions it placed upon women's freedom. This latter point suggests the novel's feminist underpinnings. Crackpot novel points out the inequities of a patriarchal society, which views the private realm as subject to censorship. One feminist critic, Barbara Godard, traces the roots of this sexism as far back as Plato. As she explains,

Plato . . . excluded women from full participation in politics and intellectual activity because their

private household speech lacked form and could not be considered truth . . . With Plato originates the segregation of women's speech in the private sphere away from the seat in government and formal utterances, a separation that has led to power over the former.

("Redrawing" 166)

Whether or not one agrees with Godard's assessment, it is nonetheless true that the public realm carefully censors those aspects of private life deemed inappropriate.

So how are marginalized individuals to deal with these restrictions? One manner, Wiseman suggests, is to assimilate, that is, to forget one's distinct cultural values and beliefs. Hoda's uncle does exactly this. Through his astute business acumen, he succeeds in rising to the upper economic echelon of Canadian society, all the while camouflaging his Jewish background. Yet Uncle, as Hoda calls him, remains a profoundly unhappy individual. Subconsciously, he desires to maintain his roots. Consequently, he befriends Hoda and her father in spite of his wife's displeasure. When his wife complains about his fraternization with these poor relatives, he vehemently defends his choice and, at the same time, complains about his children's shallow materialism. His comments give readers a clear sense of his tortured psyche:

"They're mine, dammit, I don't give a goddam what you

say, they're mine!" There was unexpected pain in it, but it was true. They were his in a way his sons no longer were. Sons! To get a few appreciative words out of them you had to buy them a golf course. (187)

Wiseman's comments to Michael Enright on CBC Radio indicate that she faced similar pressure to assimilate as a child. Growing up in Winnipeg, she recalls that "the pressure to give up an identity" was fierce within Canadian society (Oct. 4, 1974). While the pressure to assimilate was enormous, she clearly sees such assimilation as unfortunate. As Hoda's uncle illustrates, giving up one's origins ultimately leaves one wanting in tradition and, consequently, meaning in one's life.

An alternative means of coping is outright rebellion. This is clearly the tactic chosen by Hoda. In the earliest sections of the novel (i.e. Chapters 1 to 4), Hoda desires very much to fit in, and fully believes that conforming to the alien ways of the society around her is possible. So, despite the continual taunting by other children, Hoda remains optimistic. As the narrator points out, "for Hoda each new human being was an open possibility, and yesterday's people too, though inexplicably unfriendly, were renewed possibilities today" (86). Yet Hoda's faith in the essential goodness of human beings is abruptly tested when Miss Boltholmsup prevents her from sharing the story about how her parents "'saved the whole village from the

plague'"(94). To Hoda, this rejection is particularly devastating, since the story was essential to her identity. Indeed, it was so important to her, that its rejection stimulated a new attitude within Hoda. From Chapter 5 onward, Hoda officially rejects the status quo, preferring to forge new life choices which suit her unique identity. She quits school and sets up her "business" as the local whore. In so doing, she effectively solves the dilemma of being an outsider by choosing to make her marginal existence her centre.

Frequently, Hoda reinterprets gentile myths to suit her personal needs. Such myth-making is, of course, an essential feature of post-colonial and feminist writing. The reinterpretation of so-called 'master texts' enables marginalized individuals to create myths which speak to their own realities, rather than to those of others. Even as a child, Hoda comforts herself by merging fact with fiction to suit her marginalized position. The Prince of Wales, she thinks, will marry her because he would see through "the spell of fat she couldn't escape and sloppiness she couldn't control, like the Frog Princess and Beauty and the Beast and the Ugly Duckling and Cinderella too" (36). As this quotation indicates, Hoda uses fairy tales as a means of dealing with an inhumane world and its cruel hierarchies. Later on in the novel, she even imagines her multiple sexual partners as possible 'princes in disguise,' who

helped conceive her illegitimate child, Pipick. She goes so far as to posit that he may be the coming Messiah. This fantastic merging of various myths is evident in the confusing note she leaves at the orphanage with her illegitimate child: "TAKE GOOD CARE. A PRINCE IN DISGUISE CAN MAKE A PIECE OF PRINCE, TO SAVE THE JEWS. HE'S PAID FOR" (154). Hoda succeeds in merging her religious beliefs about the coming of the Messiah with her fascination with Royal family.

Sometimes, Hoda does more than reinterpret these myths by rejecting them outright. In these instances, she prefers to emphasize the validity of her own ancestry through the creation and/or articulation of a personal mythology. Such myth-making is, of course, an issue central to post-colonial and feminist theory. At the beginning of the novel, the reader sees Hoda listening intently to her father's stories about her parents' marriage in the graveyard. The prominence allocated to these stories within Crackpot suggests their critical importance to Hoda's identity. Despite their importance, however, Hoda quickly learns to keep them secret after Miss Boltholmsup admonishes her for recounting them to her schoolmates. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, Hoda once again desires to listen to her father's stories for personal comfort (253-256). She also longs to transmit this oral history to her son to "protect him and help him avoid all those traps that she knew were waiting for him in

life" (256). Just as Hoda begins to recognize the importance of her own traditions, the history of mainstream culture begins to lose its power and significance. Her attraction to the Royal Family wanes accordingly:

[Hoda] nurtured no illusions about the royal couple, and had indeed lost interest in them to the extent that she didn't even think about her old idol and his wife unless they thrust themselves on her attention by appearing in the newspapers of illustrated magazines. (282-283)

Evidently, Hoda's rejection of the central myths of gentile culture mirrors the gradual affirmation of her own mythical past. Such a desire to embrace her past reinforces Wiseman's conviction in the supreme importance of familial traditions.

Just as Hoda questions the myths of her society, so does Wiseman. It is significant that Wiseman chooses her epigraph from the Kabbalah.⁴ Firstly, this choice is testimony of Wiseman's rejection of the canonical texts of western society. Obviously, using an epigraph from the Kabbalah affirms that Wiseman's values are derived from her Jewish faith, rather than those of the Christian society surrounding her. Furthermore, since the Kabbalah is a mystical text outside the mainstream Jewish canon, Wiseman chooses to align herself with the marginal components of her faith. Certainly, Wiseman's use of the

Kabbalah is in keeping with Susan Weidman Schneider's contention that Jewish women are "rediscovering aspects of Jewish life that they can feel connected to as women . . . [by] examining source texts for women's input" (29). Perhaps Wiseman's choice implies a sense of alienation from traditional and orthodox Judaism, which favours female passivity. Certainly, this is the view of Judaism described by Ruth Panofsky in her article on Wiseman's female characters, "From Complicity to Subversion: The Female Subject in Adele Wiseman's Novels."⁵

Moreover, the roundabout fashion by which Wiseman conceived the epigraph illustrates her belief in the necessity of a personal mythology. In a letter Wiseman wrote to Margaret Laurence on May 8, 1968, she recalls scouring libraries in search of a quotation by Isaac Luria which she recalled hearing on a radio show. After a lengthy and fruitless search, Wiseman decided to create her own quotation based upon her recollections of it. Her decision to do so illustrates the need for individuals to forge their own myths. Of course, there is an added benefit to such myth-making: by engaging in such activity individuals contribute to their own culture's traditions. Certainly, this is how Wiseman perceived the creation of this epigraph. As she joked in a letter to Margaret Laurence, "'I'm trying to figure out whether I've just become a serious contributor to tradition as well as a frivolous writer of

fiction'" (May 8, 1968).

The Kabbalistic underpinnings within Crackpot reinforce another prominent theme within the novel: the complexity of all decision-making, and the corollary need to recognize this complexity through non-judgemental tolerance of others' choices. From a Kabbalistic point of view, the universe contains sparks of divinity within it. According to Isaac Luria, the universe was created in three distinct parts: "Tsimtsum - the self-limitation or exile of God; Shivirah - the breaking of the vessels; Tikkun - harmonious correction and mending of the flaw" (Sherman 6). When the so-called vessels broke, God's divinity was mixed with the imperfect world. All the qualities one associates with God--as wholeness, omnipotence, omniscience and goodness--mix within the imperfect world. Just as the universe became a broken vessel, so did its inhabitants. Consequently, the Kabbalah suggests that humans lack the insight to make the best decisions, since their judgement is clouded within their imperfect, "leaky vessels." Wiseman's novel reminds readers that the strict moral designations of Judeo-Christian society are inherently dubious given humans' limited perception. Certainly, this is confirmed by Danile's speculations within Crackpot. Danile, whom Patricia Morley calls a "holy idiot of the mystical tradition," excuses human beings' intellectual frailties with a metaphor which is clearly reminiscent of the epigraph ("Wiseman's Fiction" 46):

"There seems to be something not quite altogether between time and place and feelings and events. The pieces don't match up; they won't hold still, the right time, the right place in life, the right feeling, the right length and strength for each . . . [T]here are just too many pieces, each reaching for others, and each being swept along in a different direction. You can't blame people. They don't know enough to be able to piece it all together." (21)

The remainder of Wiseman's novel confirms the validity of Danile's statement. The most obvious confirmation is, of course, provided by the example of Hoda's life. Indeed, most of Hoda's choices are based on partial (and insufficient) knowledge: she erringly believes in the societal myth of Prince Charming; her understanding of human reproduction is innovative, but utterly false; and she conducts 'business' with a client who she later discovers is her own son. By observing Hoda's life, the novel's readers are forced to acknowledge the complexity of all moral decisions, and the consequential inadequacy of societal mores.

Wiseman's novel also examines the negative impact of inflexible social mores upon the lives of women. Given Wiseman's fervent belief in the complexity of moral choices and the corollary need for non-judgemental compassion, it should hardly be surprising that she rejects the restrictions placed upon women

in her society. She believes that, since women are subject to a multitude of circumstances, a society has no right to affirm or discourage particular lifestyles. The societal belief that all unmarried women should be chaste, for example, ignores the fact that such modesty depends on favourable circumstances. In this manner, Wiseman succeeds in making Hoda's choice of profession appear to be a moral one. She also succeeds in pointing out the heartlessness of the surrounding community. The cruelty which Miss Boltholmsup exhibits towards Hoda is particularly effective in arousing the readers' sympathy for Hoda. At same time as Miss Boltholmsup criticizes her about the inappropriateness of her oral presentation, for instance, she also berates the girl about the indecency of her clothing:

" . . . just look at you. When you got up in front of the class I was appalled, yes I was, and embarrassed, for your sake. Look at your tunic . . . What is one to think of a girl who wears her tunic almost as short as her knickers?" (101)

Rather than agreeing with the teacher's sentiments, Wiseman succeeds in making the reader aware of this society's cruelty and barbarism. She also succeeds in making the reader identify--even approve--of Hoda's choices. By displaying Miss Boltholmsup's heartlessness, Wiseman makes the reader sympathetic to even Hoda's most heretical choices, such as her prostitution and

engagement in incest.

Indeed, Wiseman uses the Kabbalah to point out yet another deficiency within western society--its sexual prudery. The Kabbalah affirms the necessity of sexuality within its narrative. As Kenneth Sherman points out, another facet of the Lurianic tragedy is that "the *Shekhinah* which is thought of as feminine, is torn from the Godhead, *Ze'ir*, which is masculine" (9). This dimension of Kabbalistic belief suggests that female and male components must unite in order to mend the broken vessel. One manner of accomplishing this task is marriage, and the sexuality which accompanies such a union. Indeed, the value of such a union is evident in two symbolic actions within the novel: Rahel and Danile's marriage in the graveyard, which purportedly made the 'plague go away'; and Hoda's marriage to Lazar at the end of the novel. Like her parents before her, Hoda also ensures the continuity of life through her union with Lazar. The physical dimension of their relationship is stressed by Hoda's dream of acquiring a wall-to-wall mattress upon their marriage.

Yet, Wiseman rejects more than the sexual prudery of Canadian society within this novel: she also criticizes the manner in which Jewish culture treats women. As Ruth Panofsky points out, Wiseman rejects the constraints placed upon Jewish women by creating a novel which celebrates female rebellion. In doing so, her novel presents readers with a view of women which

is completely opposite to that within The Sacrifice:

Demanding to be seen and heard she [Hoda] rejects the silence of Sarah in favour of garrulity and, unlike Ruth who toils respectably for years, Hoda achieves an economic success which exceeds her initial expectations. Moreover, unlike Laiah, Hoda publicly embraces her work. ("From Complicity" 44)

This is not to say that Wiseman condoned female passivity in her earlier work. Yet Wiseman's critique of patriarchy is more overt in this later novel. She wholly rejects the restricted roles allocated to women by creating a character who flaunts her individuality. Furthermore, Hoda is in no way ashamed of her work. Rather, she views herself as an astute businesswoman offering a necessary service to her community. As she acknowledges to herself and others, her hard work had "enabled them [she and her father] to turn the inside of a shack into such a pretty home" (214). Her self-respect is also apparent in her terminology: she calls herself a "sexual worker," rather than some of the more common epithets.

The crucial manner in which Hoda affirms her own identity is through word play. Above all else, Crackpot illustrates how language maintains societal values. Early on, Hoda finds herself alienated from others through her naive use of language. When the church ladies come to visit Hoda and her father, for instance,

Hoda unknowingly alienates them with her attempt at sophistication. When they ask her a question, she innocently responds, "'Oh hell, no!'" (66). Rather than putting them at ease, her blasphemy shocks her company, and they quickly leave. With maturation, Hoda begins to recognize the connotations of words, and she is chastened by the manner in which they mask reality with their multiple dimensions. As she ponders at one point,

[w]ords and their threaded links were merely a pretty game compared to real knowing. And yet that was how you spent your whole life, diddling with trinkets and sniffing around the edges of what really was. (193)

As an adult, Hoda sees language as a straightjacket which attempts to control societal mores through designations of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate.'

In order to overcome the power which language possesses, Hoda becomes a skilful word-artist. As such, she rejects the rigid language of the society around her, preferring to assert her unique identity through carefully chosen words. As already mentioned, post-colonial and feminist theorists see such ludic activity as a crucial means by which marginalized individuals reject dominant discourse and assert their unique identities. The most striking example of Hoda's word-play is her translation of the City Motto--"Commerce, Prudence, Industry"--to her bawdy

reinterpretation, "condoms," "prurience," and "incestry" (300). Hoda's dialogue with words enables her to make language a personal and effective means of articulating her unique identity. In the instance of the City Motto, Hoda repudiates the staid values of her society, particularly its sexual prudery, with her lewd translation. At the same time, she suggests alternative values to those of mainstream society. As Michael Greenstein states, "[w]ith the simplest language Hoda's pastiche or bricolage unsettles categories and assumptions; her own mottos supplant the established ones" ("The Fissure Queene" 23).

The ending of the novel asserts Hoda's supreme achievement: she has succeeded in establishing her own identity through rejection of mainstream norms. While Hoda remains an outcast for much of the novel, her refusal to abide by the dictates of society is finally rewarded with the unconditional love of one man--Lazar (Panofsky, "From Complicity" 47). More important than the marriage itself, however, is the fact that Hoda succeeded in forming this union while rejecting the norms which normally reward women with this institution. It is fitting that the dream sequence at the end of the novel emphasizes Hoda's control over her surroundings. Her dream of buying a wall-to-wall mattress with her future husband once again flaunts her private life to the outer world. She also dreams of drawing a circle around the important male figures around her: Pipick, Danile, and Lazar. In

so doing, she assumes an active and central role in a world which encourages female passivity and marginalization. In essence, Hoda undertakes what Barbara Godard views as a feminist project. As she explains,

[feminist writers'] project is to be the cartographers of new realms. Like cultural nationalists, they reject the map made for them by denying their difference is marginal or peripheral. Placing the point of the compass where they are, they redraw the circle. (169)

It seems uncanny that Godard's metaphor is the very image with which Crackpot ends. Wiseman's project seems to wholly endorse the statements of both post-colonial and feminist theorists.

. . .

On a first reading, Crackpot may appear to be at odds with Wiseman's previous works. Yet, a closer reading reveals that its underlying values are very close to those expressed in her earlier work. As in previous work, she once again illustrates the tyranny of orthodoxy. Both Crackpot and The Sacrifice illustrate the dangers of inflexible moral standards. In The Sacrifice, Abraham's tragic encounter with Laiah is caused by his inability to reconcile his strict moral values with Laiah's flagrant disregard of acceptable moral conduct. Abraham acknowledges the error of his orthodoxy in his conversation with

Moses at the end of the book. Crackpot confirms Wiseman's distaste for inflexible moral standards. To begin with, she successfully makes readers sympathetic even to Hoda's most heretical actions, such as her practice of prostitution and incest. To accomplish this feat, Wiseman makes the readers realize that Hoda's choices were severely curtailed by her particular circumstances. As such, Hoda's choices may appear unorthodox, but readers recognize that they were necessary ones. Wiseman suggests that humans frequently remain innocent of moral wrongdoing by virtue of their partial understanding of all events. Hoda, for instance, cannot be held accountable for the many choices she makes in a realm of ignorance. Lastly, Wiseman increases the reader's sympathy for Hoda by focussing on her ill-treatment at the hands of characters of supposed moral rectitude, like Miss Boltholmsup.

However, Wiseman does not advocate arbitrary mores: she still emphasizes the importance of guiding, familial traditions. Such traditions anchor individuals by providing them with meaningful values to direct their lives. As an adolescent, Hoda silenced her father in a bid to fit in with those around her. Yet, as an adult, Hoda wishes to hear her father's stories, and dreams that her son might also hear them eventually. Having been battered by the cruelties of an impersonal world, she once again seeks comfort in the mythical wisdom of her father's stories.

The epigraph of the first chapter reiterates the value of this ancestry and tradition:

Out of Shem Berl and Golda came Rahel. Out of Malka and Benjamin came Danile. Out of Danile and Rahel came Hoda. Out of Hoda, Pipick came, Pipick born in secrecy and mystery and terror, for what did Hoda know? (7)⁶

Such an emphasis on the importance of traditions can also be seen in The Sacrifice. Isaac's alienation from his Judaic roots leads to continual indecision and confusion. Lacking direction, he flails about making little forward movement. At the end of the novel, redemption occurs when Abraham's grandson, Moses, comes to terms with his grandfather, his traditions, and his values. Hoda achieves a similar equilibrium when she finally returns to listen to her father's stories.

Finally, as in her previous two works, Wiseman presents non-judgemental compassion as the ultimate redeeming force among human beings. Hoda is able to put the tragic occurrences of her life behind her when she marries Lazar. Her love for Lazar enables her to turn to the future after mourning the past. In Wiseman's value system, love enables individuals to live in harmony with others, and it is exhibited through actions of compassion and tolerance. Certainly, Hoda's most endearing trait is her acceptance of all people and their accompanying imperfections. In The Sacrifice, Abraham's growth is likewise

initiated by his realization that his religion has made him intolerant of others. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, it is precisely this message of non-judgemental love for others that Abraham passes on to his grandson, Moses. Love likewise initiates the most poignant actions in The Lovebound: Abel's ultimate sacrificial act, for instance, is encouraged by his love for Mariana.

Yet despite the abundant similarities between these works, critics and publishers did not generally see them. The response of three prominent Canadian literary critics--George Woodcock, John Gray (the president at Viking Press), and Malcolm Ross--is useful for illustrating the manner in which the novel's underlying vision has been misinterpreted.

By far the most critical comments surrounding Crackpot concerned its prolixity. For instance, George Woodcock compared it unfavourably to Sinclair Ross's Sawbones Memorial, stating that Crackpot lacked its "tightness and clarity," and that it was "shapeless" (110). He postulated that the novel's structure mimicked Hoda's expansiveness, but he did not view this positively. Kildare Dobbs also felt that the novel had an "obesity" like Hoda's, yet he viewed the novel's length positively: he acknowledged the likelihood that Wiseman's verbosity was intended to help readers understand Hoda. In fact, this is precisely the case. As Wiseman comments in her interview

with Dobbs, the novel's prolixity was meant to mirror Hoda's own struggling thoughts, and the meandering manner in which she discovered truths during her life. As previously stated, Wiseman is fascinated with the ambiguities and multiple dimensions inherent within words: the continual word-play within this text is testimony to this abiding interest. Obviously, Crackpot illustrates the connection between language and perception through its purposeful verbosity. Put another way, Wiseman uses this stylistic feature to illustrate her theme more effectively.

Another critic, John Gray, felt that the novel lacked contemporary idiom. Once again, this criticism suggests a misinterpretation of Wiseman's thematic intentions for the book. Wiseman's writing is composed of many layers: while she is motivated by a desire to create fully-realized individuals within her writing, she is also interested in the underlying mythical structures which guide people's lives. In the case of Crackpot, the Lurianic Kabbalah informs the story. Wiseman uses the epigraph as a metaphor to illustrate and expose her view of the universe. Indeed, if the language within Crackpot fails to be 'contemporary,' it is intentionally so: it is meant to harken back to the epigraph and resonate in readers' minds. Margaret Laurence understood the complexity of Wiseman's writing, and emphatically criticized John Gray's obtuse comments. In a letter dated 3 Sept. 1968, she writes: "OF COURSE you are not writing in

a totally contemporary idiom--you never have. SOME WRITING IS DATELESS AND UNDATABLE. IT DOESN'T SPEAK TO ONE AGE ABOUT ITSELF. IT SPEAKS TO MAN ABOUT HIMSELF." John Gray's criticism of the novel's diction suggests his incomprehension of the novel's metaphorical underpinnings.

Another facet of the novel which bothered some critics was what they considered its undue focus upon Hoda's sexuality. Even Malcolm Ross, who was generally very impressed by the novel, felt uneasy with Wiseman's focus on Hoda's sexuality. After reading Wiseman's manuscript, he wrote:

I must . . . confess to feeling, two-thirds of the way through, that the author must hate sex--a dull business for the most part and at its best damn dirty (the constant association of sex with images of excretion seemed to be overdone unless the book insisted on a degradation of the sexual act for thematic reasons, and I couldn't be quite sure of the author's intention--although I swear you are not moralizing on the theme of the fallen woman!) [1968]

While Ross is extremely diplomatic in his criticism of Wiseman's work, even acknowledging his own "over-fastidious" taste and "Puritan" temper,⁷ his comments represent the prevailing opinion regarding the novel. Yet, as I hope this chapter has illustrated, such an opinion contradicts Wiseman's opinion of

Hoda. Clearly, Hoda is meant to be an admirable individual: her choice to pursue prostitution gives her the means to live independently in a world which shuns her very existence. The overt flaunting of her sexuality within Crackpot highlights the manner in which Hoda survives her alienation--that is, through overt rejection of the prevailing norms. As for Ross's comment that the novel contains unnecessary associations of sexuality with images of excretion, one should once again look to the epigraph for elucidation. As Michael Greenstein states in his article "The Fissure Queen," the constant references to in/out and up/down once again relate back to the shattered vessels of the universe, where all divisions have become obliterated. All things in this world are topsy-turvy: all human beings live in a universe characterized by fragmentation in its multiple forms. Ross is therefore correct in positing that this imagery pertains to the author's thematic intentions.

John Gray went one step further than Ross calling the characters in the novel "grotesque." This comment was particularly upsetting to Wiseman, since she could in no way identify with this criticism. As she explains in a letter to Margaret Laurence,

I am not incapable of responding to someone whose judgment I respect, but nothing I read in the reports or John's letter aroused anything by the way of

respect. I am still stunned, for instance, to find
that my characters are grotesque. (June 12, 1969)

Indeed, it seems evident that Gray was unaware of the metaphorical undercurrents within the novel. The characters are frequently called "leaky vessels," a figuration which should alert the careful reader to the passage in the epigraph about the Divine Vessel. Wiseman sees human imperfection as an inevitable reality not to be shunned but accepted as a universal fact. The epigraph makes this inevitability clear: it is a metaphor meant to provide solace to individuals by legitimizing their imperfection. Moreover, Wiseman makes these imperfect people heroic in their efforts to overcome their limitations and in their eventual acceptance of them. To call these characters grotesque is to negate their heroism.

George Woodcock went so far as to designate the novel a 'picaresque' without any clear moral. In a radio interview with Kildare Dobbs, Wiseman vehemently denies this label, pointing out that while a picaresque is designed around "loosely strung together episodes," her novel has a "moral and spiritual preoccupation at its base" (November 2, 1974). In Wiseman's estimation, the novel's episodes are closely linked by the Kabbalistic metaphor at its base. This metaphor is recurrent within all facets of the novel: its diction, its characterization, and its theme. Evidently, the novel's meaning

seems to have been misinterpreted by those critics who have overlooked the epigraph.

As this chapter illustrates, Crackpot is both a continuance and a departure from Wiseman's oeuvre. Like her previous works, it recognizes the complexity of moral choices, and it warns of the danger of an orthodox morality which occludes this complexity. Yet Wiseman does not condone a relative morality, but a morality which highlights the necessity of non-judgemental compassion. She also reinforces the need for guiding traditions in people's lives, since they act as metaphorical homing devices at once guiding individuals' moral choices and encouraging them to make their own decisions. Hoda, like the author who created her, is both a freethinker and a traditionalist. Sustained by her father's stories, Hoda nonetheless makes unorthodox choices which suit her particular circumstances. While Wiseman reiterates the same values in her work, she goes one step further in Crackpot by boldly experimenting with stylistic form to illustrate her views. This novel uses its voluminous length and prolixity to question the language and myths of mainstream Canadian culture. In doing so, Wiseman unintentionally places herself within the tradition of many post-colonial and feminist writers.

Notes

1. Indeed, only one other Jewish Canadian female writer contemporary with Wiseman achieved her stature within the Canadian literary community--Miriam Waddington. Moreover, Wiseman's writing remains much more challenging for the Canadian writing establishment than does Waddington's writing, because her works (unlike that of Waddington) focus entirely on Jewish characters and their environment.
2. I do not mean to suggest that Wiseman was at all familiar with either post-colonial or feminist theories. However, these theories provide a means of understanding writing, like that of Wiseman, which addresses issues of imperialism and patriarchy within it.
3. Tom Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, (London: New Left Books, 1977).
4. The epigraph of Crackpot is as follows:
He stored the Divine Light in a Vessel,
but the Vessel, unable to contain the
Holy Radiance, burst, and its shards,
permeated with sparks of the Divine,
scattered through the Universe.
5. See the first chapter for more elucidation of Panofsky's argument.
6. Diane Mew, an editorial consultant Wiseman hired to critique Crackpot, advised Wiseman to delete this epigraph since "she already [had] a dedication and an epigraph." Wiseman declined in a letter to Mrs. Mew dated March 5, 1974, saying that she wanted "to retain the biblical-style bit at the head of the chapter, [because] [i]t set precisely the tone" she wanted. Evidently, Wiseman clearly wanted her readers to be aware of the religious roots at the base of the novel.
7. Ross ascribes his reservations about the novel's overt sexuality to his own temperament in a letter he wrote to Wiseman on March 6, 1969.

CHAPTER 4

Testimonial Dinner:

Debunking the Canadian Dream

Testimonial Dinner, Adele Wiseman's second play, was registered for copyright in August 1974, the same year Crackpot was published. The play, like the novel which preceded it, explores the nature of nationalism, albeit more overtly so than does Crackpot. The inclusion of a recurrent motif involving John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel within the play boldly illustrates the manner in which nations and their governors dismiss marginalized cultures in their attempts to create a cohesive society. As in Crackpot, Wiseman once again asserts her distrust of homogeneity through rigorous stylistic experimentation. Just as Crackpot resists the conventions of the novel genre, Testimonial Dinner dismisses many of the the conventions of drama. Given the play's many unorthodox features, it should hardly be surprising that Testimonial Dinner drew the same unfavourable criticism which Crackpot received before it.¹

The main plot concerns a Jewish Canadian family that has been brought together by the illness of the family patriarch, Loksh. His two successful sons, Freddie and Hank, are planning a

testimonial dinner to celebrate their father's life. Yet Loksh secretly wishes to repent for his acquisitory nature, which made him rich at the expense of others' fortunes. As a real estate mogul, he became wealthy by listening to his instincts which told him where to invest his money. In hindsight, Loksh realizes that not everyone was as fortunate in capital enterprises. As such, he wants his sons and grandson (Kent) to understand the dangers inherent in capitalism and to recognize the corollary importance of their heritage. Meanwhile, Hank and Freddie have renounced much of their Jewish heritage in order to succeed in the New World. This serious narrative is balanced by a humorous subplot concerning Kent (Loksh's grandson) and Ellen, who are seeking to marry before the birth of their child. The entire narrative is overlaid by a leitmotif of dialogue and mime between two characters, Louis Riel and John A. MacDonald. It focuses on one historical event: Riel's hanging. At times, the inclusion of this leitmotif within Testimonial Dinner is quite jarring, because it is chronologically at odds with the rest of the play. Wiseman's decision to juxtapose the play's narrative and the leitmotif within the same spatial unit makes the play's structure even more awkward. It is up to the reader/viewer to determine why these two divergent narratives are being merged together.

Recognizing the complexity of this structural feature, Wiseman appended introductory remarks to the play² in which she

explained the rationale behind the structure. Wiseman states that the confluence of the two narratives is meant to reinforce a prominent theme of the play. The play's structure, she states, represents her

attempt to express graphically [her] feeling not only of how much the past influences the present but of the fact that it is alive and functioning in the present, and active in determining the decisions which shape the future of the country and the individual destinies of our people. (n.pag.)

She further explains that she views John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel as "pivotal characters in Canadian history," who reenact "the confrontations of clashing 'dreams' for the future of this country" within the play (n.pag.). As the introduction indicates, Wiseman's play confronts the effects of nationalism upon the historical development of the nation, particularly its effects upon marginalized people. Both the play's plot and leitmotif reinforce the limitations of imperialism, and the recurring problems it initiates.

Because readers were so perplexed by the play's unorthodox structure, Wiseman's introduction was useful for understanding the play. Ruth Panofsky claims that the established publishing houses, Press Porcupine and McClelland and Stewart, felt that the play was "dull and disliked its rhetorical dialogue, lack of

direction and control" (Annotated Bibliography xv). Despite this criticism, Wiseman was unwilling to change the play and resigned herself to the likelihood of its prolonged obscurity. As she states on the back cover of the play's text, she was prepared to wait "in patience once again, perhaps even for the longest wait of all, and for the most coveted booby prize, the plaudits of posterity" (n.pag.).

To understand the play's stylistic features and themes more fully, it is once again fruitful to examine the play in relation to Wiseman's subject position. As a Jewish Canadian female, Wiseman lived a life very different from the vast majority of individuals around her. This upbringing evidently coloured her perspective on writing. In essence, she describes her vision as a revisionary one: to correct the vision of gentiles through presentation of an alternate reality. In an interview with Roslyn Belkin, she states:

My consciousness is Jewish; it's a Jewish consciousness and I think I'm a flower in somebody else's garden. I'm a different flower and my "otherness" I sing about, because everybody else is busy singing about theirs, and unfortunately they appear to have a great need to make theirs better by setting up some kind of unreal contrast with mine. (152)

Because Wiseman felt that mainstream culture distorted her own,

she felt compelled to question the assumptions and authority of the status quo. Her experimentation with genre and her critique of colonialism both stem from a need to subject prevailing norms to scrutiny.

Wiseman's comments indicate how appropriate a post-colonial interpretation of her writing is. Post-colonial literature like Wiseman's writing, is preoccupied with redressing the inaccuracies and absences within prevalent colonial understanding. As the writers of The Empire Writes Back explain

[Post-colonial literatures] emerged in the present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. [underlining mine] (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2)

Wiseman's interview with Roslyn Belkin affirm that Wiseman's intentions are synonymous with those stated above. Like all post-colonial writers, Wiseman seeks to redress the views of the imperial majority.

The validity of a post-colonial reading is strengthened by analysis of the play's characterization. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the play's leitmotif concerns characters who are the quintessential embodiment of the colonial conflict: John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel. Wiseman views Canadian history as perennially divided by their two divergent

visions of the country. As she explains in her introduction to the play, MacDonald and Riel are "pivotal characters in Canadian history," whose respective dreams have shaped the Canadian nation to this day. John A. MacDonald, or 'Sir John' as Wiseman calls him, is representative of the imperial endeavour. As Norah Story points out in The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, John A. MacDonald's role as Canada's first Prime Minister was "to make a reality of the union so precariously arrived at and to lay a foundation on which his successors could build a nation" (128). MacDonald believed that fulfilling this mandate necessitated a strong centralized government (128). Through the creation of a national railway, he believed, the nation would be geographically and symbolically united. At the same time, he was a fervent imperialist who was against reciprocity with the United States. Indeed, Norah Story claims that one of John A. MacDonald's favourite expressions was, "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die" (481). Nevertheless, MacDonald's vision of a united Canada loyal to Britain was somewhat foiled by the Metis. His attempt to consolidate the west was seriously compromised by his failure to "consider the rights and opinions of the people already settled in the west" (Story 128). Two uprisings led by Louis Riel, the River Rebellion in 1869 and the North West Rebellion in 1885, occurred over a sixteen year period (Story 128). Finally, Riel

was hanged on 16 November 1885.

Yet Riel's vision of a nation tolerant of other cultures could not be expunged by his death. In fact, as Wiseman's play indicates, Riel's legacy of disenchantment continues to this day. Testimonial Dinner illustrates that new immigrants to Canada face the same discrimination as did their predecessors, the Metis. Just as the Metis' views were ignored by the Canadian government, immigrants were (and are) forced to renounce their culture to succeed in the New World. Wiseman views this loss with trepidation. As she states in the introduction, "There is much which may be of great value which [the immigrant] may have to discard as useless here, including the language of his previous thoughts and dreams, and the moral song of his being" (n.pag.). Within Testimonial Dinner, Riel's legacy of disenchantment persists within the mind of Loksh, the Jewish patriarch. He mourns his children's assimilation, the loss of the Yiddish language, and of his Jewish culture.

One can interpret Wiseman's sympathy for Louis Riel as a sympathy borne from her identification with the Metis' marginalization within Canadian society. This identification can be seen in the very structure of the play: the two narratives, the first involving the Jewish family and the other concerning the Louis Riel/John A. MacDonald conflict, are juxtaposed so as to emphasize the similarities between Jewish and Metis cultures.

While the juxtaposition of these two chronologically separate events may initially appear bizarre, the play's structure fulfills a very obvious role. Like native people, Jewish immigrants have been treated with wariness and disdain by the Canadian government. Such books as Irving Abella's None is too Many make this abundantly evident. As Abella points out, a virulent anti-Semitism, which severely curtailed the number of Jews who emigrated to Canada, persisted in Canada during the Second World War:

folk wisdom understood Jews as clannish, aggressive and cosmopolitan Jews, many concluded, "did not fit in," their political sensitivities were suspect, their loyalty forever in doubt, their religion based on their continued rejection of Christ, their sole preoccupation, making and hoarding money. (28)

In other words, whereas 'exemplary' immigrants assimilated by willingly relinquishing their Old World values for those deemed appropriate for the New World, it was believed that Jews generally did not do so. As a result, Canadian immigration authorities viewed Jewish immigrants as a bad risk. Similarly, the Metis were deemed suspect by virtue of their refusal to assimilate. Their unwillingness to cooperate with the federal government ultimately led to the Red River Rebellion and Riel's subsequent hanging. Wiseman sees these two groups as analagous

given their treatment by Canadian society. Historically, both groups have been harassed minorities struggling to assert their identities in a culture which demanded their conformity.

By putting the historical reality of Riel's madness to creative use, Wiseman further bolsters the connection between Jews and Metis. In a delusionary episode within Act 3, Riel begins claiming a connection to other oppressed peoples, including Jews. Ranting aloud, he states

I am David Mordecai . . . My name is David Mordecai. I
am a Jew, a Jew! . . . David Mordecai . . . From
Marseilles . . . Yes . . . Marseilles [. . .] They
brought me . . . David . . . See, the blood of my
Indian ancestors, Jewish blood in my veins. (1.3.20)

Wiseman deftly exploits the reality of Riel's madness to make a connection between the marginalization of Jews and Metis more evident. As well as overtly calling himself "a Jew," Riel also calls himself David. Of course, this symbolically connects him to King David, the second King of Israel mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. From this episode, the astute reader/viewer can discern a connection between Riel and Loksh's family. Evidently, Wiseman wanted to insinuate their shared marginalization within Canadian society.

. . . .

Many of the issues raised within the play have previously

been explored within in Crackpot. To a large extent, Testimonial Dinner focuses on the manner in which Canada attempts to create a homogeneous cultural identity despite the multifarious cultures which compose it. Both the play's plot and structure display features prevalent within post-colonial writing. As such, many of the play's features can be understood through consideration of post-colonial theory.

As stated in the last chapter, Homi Bhabha's Nation and Narration posits that nationalism is an artificial construct sustained by myth. Key to the maintenance of the nation is "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" (Renan 19). One manner by which nations disseminate these memories is through imaginative literature, particularly novels (Brennan 49). Yet, as many post-colonial theorists have pointed out, the longevity of nations is continually threatened by competing visions of national history. Homi Bhabha recognizes the tenuousness of the national construct within his opening comments to this anthology: "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eyes" (1).

A colonial nation presents significantly more challenge to governors attempting to maintain its national integrity, since they must attempt to make colonial citizens loyal to a Mother Country with whom they have no shared memories. They must also

attempt to make the diverse peoples within the nation feel a common loyalty to the nation in spite of their different origins. As such, diverse memories must be quashed in favour of one common cultural history. Once colonial cultures had time to assess the impact of imperialism upon their literature(s), post-colonial theory emerged. As explained in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, post-colonial theory gradually developed

[o]nce colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience . . .

(Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1)

Wiseman's play is a good example of the manner in which post-colonial writers assess the impact of imperialism upon colonial cultures. In Testimonial Dinner, Wiseman uses the MacDonald-Riel conflict to reinforce the tenuousness of the Canadian union. The very different visions of the nation posited by John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel seem irreconcilable. On the one hand, there is the deliberately expansionist policy of MacDonald. In creating a national railway from "sea to sea," he attempts to unite Canadians geographically and spiritually. As he saw it, Canadians would no longer be a heterogeneous people, but one people linked by the railroad. MacDonald felt that, bolstered by a strong central government, a nation could be built

"from the self-centred provinces that had been brought into precarious union" (Story 481). But, as mentioned earlier, this vision of a united Canada was made considerably more difficult by the Metis, and their leader, Louis Riel. Riel's continual ranting about his Metis origins foiled MacDonald's dream of a people joined by one common myth. In hanging Riel, MacDonald attempted to quash his rebel spirit--a spirit which threatened to disrupt the cohesiveness of the nation itself.

Wiseman is not the first writer to recognize John A. MacDonald's crucial importance to the creation of a national vision. Two prominent Canadian poets, E. J. Pratt and F. R. Scott, have written poems on MacDonald. Their creative impressions regarding the construction of the national railway illustrate their differing perspectives on the nation as a political construct. E. J. Pratt's epic poem, Towards the Last Spike (1952), attempts to memorialize the tremendous accomplishment of the railway's construction. It is also, Norah Story asserts, "a tribute to the Scotsmen whose vision, resourcefulness, and determination bound the country with the steel line of the Canadian Pacific Railway" (661). Yet Pratt's version of history is vehemently contested by F. R. Scott's satiric poem, "All the Spikes but the Last" (1957). Scott points out that Pratt, like most historians, has denied the disgraceful racism which was so instrumental to the construction of the

national railway. Scott's poem implies that the absence of any reference to the many Chinese immigrants who died making the railway within "Towards the Last Spike" is testimony of this deeply engrained racism at the heart of Canadian culture:

Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?

Where are the thousands from China who swung
their picks with bare hands at forty below?

Between the first and the million other spikes
they drove, and the dressed-up act of
Donald Smith, who has sung their story?

Did they fare so well in the land they helped to
unite? Did they get one of the 25,000,000 CPR acres?

Is all Canada has to say to them written in the Chinese
Immigration Act? (277)

F. R. Scott's reference to the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 reminds people that history is anything but objective: history reconstructs the past by carefully selecting details and omitting others which detract from notions of an exalted past. While E.J. Pratt venerates the construction of the national railroad, he ignores the fact that the Chinese were subsequently prohibited from entering Canada by the Chinese Immigration Act. "All the

"Spikes but the Last" is a good illustration of the manner in which post-colonial literatures question authoritative versions of history, and rewrite canonical texts to assert realities which were previously denied.

In essence, Testimonial Dinner occupies the same revisionary place as Scott's poem. It is likewise a reevaluation of Canadian history which points out absences within other versions. Wiseman's play focuses on the manner in which Canada's treatment of native peoples is replicated in the nation's subsequent treatment of immigrants. The play suggests that Canada neglects marginalized people at its peril. Despite his execution, Riel's unsettled spirit continues to haunt future generations. First, it haunts MacDonald, who must carry Riel's spirit on his back, as he literally does twice within the play.³ Or, as Wiseman states in the introduction, MacDonald carries on his "spiritual back . . . the intuition that perhaps those gifts . . . might have found a different fruition in a different setting" (2). Moreover, Riel's legacy carries on to affect future generations, especially those of new immigrants. Loksh, the Jewish real-estate mogul, is haunted by the same conflict which burdened his predecessor, John A. MacDonald. He feels that he betrayed the spirit of his Jewish roots in his zeal to acquire money. As he tells the Poet Rose, "[it] [k]eeps coming to my mind, maybe we weren't meant to hack and wrench and tear that earth" (2.1.27).

Likewise, Loksh's son, Hank, regrets the dismissal of his Jewish lineage, and he renounces his philandering ways by reuniting with his divorced wife, Clair. As both Loksh and Hank begin to realize, by assimilating they must renounce their moral principles for the grasping, fortune-building ethos of the New World. In the end, it is too great a price for both of these characters, and they reject their materialistic values. So, what goes round, comes around. MacDonald's quest to unite Canadians with a common set of values is rejected by successive generations who desire to maintain their own values.

Wiseman structures the entire play to highlight its theme concerning the inevitability of recurrence. In her introduction, Wiseman comments that her writing must "have . . . a certain textural density before [it] approximate[s] [my] sense of a real world" (1). As such, Testimonial Dinner is composed of many layers which bolster the connection between the past and the present. Seemingly irrelevant details are used to reinforce the theme. In the opening scene, for instance, Kent is leaning over a grave jokingly asking for advice from the dead: "Oh mightily dead, would that we could pluck wisdom from your lives as easily as we twitch these blooms from your graves" (1.1.1). While this scene primarily serves as an introduction to Kent and Ellen, his mocking appeal to the dead alerts viewers to the importance of the past in the present. The theme is also apparent in Odessa

Yarker's fib about Ellen's genealogy. Odessa claims that she was impregnated by Loksh, whose daughter was impregnated by Hank, whose daughter was in turn impregnated by Kent. Ultimately, she exclaims: "I don't know what I did to you, Loksh, all your boys should bang all my girls" (1.3.15). At first, Odessa's lie seems to be a structural means to maintain the play's frivolous tone. Yet, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this joke is likewise a means of highlighting the theme regarding the recurrence of past events in future endeavours.

Not everything is cloaked in humour, however. The play does contain a more serious examination of the origins of imperialism. Specifically, Wiseman illustrates how capitalism perpetuates imperialism. The play suggests that immigrants renounce their culture because they are driven by a quest for wealth. In order to succeed in the New World, immigrants soon learn that they must assimilate, lest they remain outsiders to potential wealth. For instance, Loksh persists with his land speculation because the monetary rewards are so great. As he tells Hank, "I didn't want to sit at the machine all my life. And my sons after me, counting pennies in the pay packet. It was something I could do" (2.1.26). His sons, Freddie and Hank, are also motivated by wealth, and both excel financially, as a professor and politician respectively. Yet their motivations are more egocentric than are Loksh's motivations. Unlike their father, they do not care about

their families' well-being, but merely their own financial success. In fact, when their Jewish ancestry is a hindrance to their advancement, they reject their familial roots altogether. For instance, they both renounce their Hebrew names (Froikeh and Hillel) in favour of English names (Freddie and Hank). Hank goes even further than this, divorcing his wife (Clair) when she assumes a demeanour which he considers too Jewish. As he explains to Clair,

I felt silly. I never knew how far you'd go. My own mother never . . . I expected to come home to find you'd shaved your hair off and were hanging up your wig beside the bed like my great-grandmother. (2.2.30)

Such an overreaction merely reinforces the depth of Hank's shame regarding his Jewish background. When he feels that his career is at all hampered by his background, he quickly renounces it. Indeed, it is no accident that Hank is a politician; he is symbolically linked to John A. MacDonald, his imperial predecessor.

Wiseman presents Clair as a strong contrast to the male characters' materialistic ways. A convert to the Jewish faith, Clair embodies the familial emphasis of Judaism.⁴ Spurred on by familial loyalty, she takes care of Loksh, even though she is divorced from his son. Jewish women who remain outside mainstream culture's materialism by virtue of their gender

continue to espouse the important communal values at the heart of their faith. This is not the first time Wiseman has emphasized the importance of communal values; nor is it the first time she has accorded these values to female characters within her work. In many ways, Clair can be seen as a successor of Hoda, who takes care of her father and remains loyal to her Uncle, in spite of his ill-treatment of her. In any case, those individuals who recognize the supreme value of community are always accorded high moral status in Wiseman's novels.

While the play is preoccupied with illustrating the manner in which imperial nations maintain their power over their colonies, it is also concerned with the manner in which colonial citizens assert their unique identities in spite of these limitations--a tension recognized by many post-colonial theorists. The need to assert one's unique history in spite of an official, "legitimate" history is a recurrent motif in virtually all post-colonial theory.⁵

One manner by which colonial citizens reject the legitimacy of written historical accounts is through the rejection of the official language of its culture. Indeed, this is the central issue discussed in The Empire Writes Back. This book shows how Commonwealth writers asserted their own identity through the rejection of British English in favour of 'english'--a term the book's authors use to distinguish colonial English from standard

English. By subjecting the language of the imperial culture to rigorous scrutiny, the authority accorded to this language is severely diminished.

Word-play is one means by which the authority of language is diminished, and a means by which colonial cultures personalize language to suit their unique identities. By exploring word meaning through continual punning, writers metaphorically create new worlds, outside the power of all governing units. The authors of The Empire Write Back describe the impact of such word-play within their discussion of Derek Walcott's research on this phenomenon in Caribbean poetry. Derek Walcott, they state, proposes an Adamic celebration of language, invoking the poet's excitement in establishing 'original relations' with his 'new' universe, the newness qualified of course by the prior experiences of the old. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 51)

At least two characters, Loksh and Kent, engage in precisely such ludic activity in Testimonial Dinner. When Loksh first arrives in Canada, he recalls a need to express his feelings through bawdy rhyme. As explains to Kent, he expressed his sexual identity through crude word-play in English:

I wanted to hear the contented purr from the
throat of the world as I slithered boldly into the
guts of life . . . I couldn't bring myself to write

such stuff in Yiddish. I explored my lust in
 the English tongue . . . A man assimilates himself
 quickly to the language in which he expresses his seed.
 (1.2.9)

Loksh's grandson, Kent, also plays with words to establish his identity in the New World. At the outset of the play, Kent is a confused adolescent who questions his grandfather's desire to maintain the Yiddish paper,--a move which he considers divisive to the young and old generation alike. At the same time, he advocates adapting to the English language of the majority. As such, Kent is continually making rhymes and puns in an effort, he tells Ellen, "to get to the poetry of things" (1.1.1). Just as his grandfather played with words to express his identity upon arrival in Canada, so does Kent. Both see language as a means of finding equilibrium in alien environments.

Sometimes post-colonial writers purposely reject the official language of the nation by reverting to their mother tongue to preserve their culture. This type of rebellion resonates throughout Testimonial Dinner. Both Louis Riel and Loksh see the preservation of their native language as paramount. When Riel feels persecuted, for instance, he lapses into French Christian prayer as if to remind his persecutors of his alien religion and tongue (1.2.8). Likewise, Loksh publishes his newspaper, 'Nayeh Blatt,'⁶ to preserve the Yiddish language in a

culture antipathetic to its preservation. As he explains to his grandson Kent, "I founded 'Nahyeh Blatt' to help preserve our ways, to maintain the precious links between us, our thought, our feelings, our tongue" (1.2.8). Loksh's comments imply, of course, that the preservation of language goes beyond merely preserving specific foreign words and linguistic structures: language also expresses a culture's central values within its very structure.

Loksh's newspaper also alerts the astute reader to another key feature prevalent within post-colonial cultures: their rejection of the imperial literary canon in favour of their own literature. As noted in The Empire Writes Back, Britain introduced writing in Commonwealth nations in an attempt to diminish the collective memories generated by oral mythology (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 81). In turn, colonial cultures disrupted this process through their appropriation of the means of communication. As the editors of The Empire Writes Back state,

[t]he seizing of the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word become crucial features of the process of self-assertion and the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process. (82)

Seen in this context, Loksh's seemingly insignificant newspaper takes on a much more significant role than one might initially suppose. While Loksh assimilates the materialistic values of the New World by becoming a wealthy businessman, he secretly rebels against these values with his Yiddish paper.

As one can see, the plot of Testimonial Dinner is abundantly suitable for a post-colonial interpretation. Wiseman tackles issues which are perennial within post-colonial writing. Specifically, Wiseman focuses on the inevitable tension between those governing and those governed. Imperial cultures discourage diversity, in order to create a sense of unity amongst the diverse members of their communities. The MacDonald-Riel motif at the heart of this play reiterates the dire consequences of neglecting the views of others: MacDonald remains burdened by the weight of Riel's neglected dreams. Riel's disaffected spirit also haunts future generations, once again proclaiming the need for change.

. . .

While it is clear that the subject matter of Testimonial Dinner suits a post-colonial analysis, it may be less evident that the play's stylistic features suit such an interpretation. Yet a closer look at the book's structural features indicates the appropriateness of such a theoretical approach. At the heart of post-colonial writing is a persistent questioning of European

claims regarding the "universal." By questioning such claims, all dimensions of European culture are scrutinized and questioned. As mentioned in The Empire Writes Back,

European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of the 'the universal.' Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 11)

Such persistent questioning is abundantly evident within Testimonial Dinner, as the following analysis will illustrate.

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of Testimonial Dinner is its unusual mixture of fact and fiction. Obviously, the play's plot is a conglomeration of factual and fictional events; the plot refers to Canadian historical events involving John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel, on the one hand, and an imaginary Jewish family's trials and tribulations, on the other. What is particularly original, however, is Wiseman's use of both fact and fiction in her account of the MacDonald/Riel conflict. For the most part, she creates imaginary dialogue as dramatists generally do. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Wiseman departs from the status quo by including actual statements made by Louis Riel and John A. MacDonald--statements

she found in two biographies on these individuals: The Collected Writings of Louis Riel by George F. G. Stanley and John A. MacDonald by Donald Creighton.⁷ When Wiseman quotes actual speech made by the two men, she marks the passages with an asterisk so as to alert the reader to this dialogue's historical veracity. Of course, the inclusion of recorded dialogue within a play is highly unusual, because it disrupts the conventional wisdom that creative writing should be wholly imaginative.

Wiseman's unorthodox approach is stimulated by a conviction that writers should be directed by a personal vision, rather than convention. Such a quest for originality is, as already mentioned, a characteristic feature of post-colonial writing--a quest indicative of the attempts of post-colonial writers to differentiate themselves from imperial models. It is also a means by which Wiseman emphasizes the themes within her play. Wiseman explains her rationale for deviating from conventional dramatic form within the play's introduction. She desires, she states, to express her feelings that "the past influences the present" and that "it is alive and functioning in the present, and active in determining the decisions which shape the future of the country and the individual destinies of our people" (n.pag.). In other words, by including actual dialogue, Wiseman highlights her belief about the inevitable recurrence of the past; evidently, the past lives on in her own writing.

She also uses recorded dialogue as a rebuttal to authoritative versions of history. As already discussed, imperial cultures use written history as a means of 'fixing' it in people's minds, and to imply the illegitimacy of other historical accounts. Wiseman disrupts the "historical consciousness" sanctioned by official written versions of history. In a sense, she "writes back" to the empire by questioning the authority of the written word. By taking written historical accounts and casting them in a different context, the reader is given a new perspective from which to evaluate them.

Certainly, Wiseman seems to have been aware of the play's revisionary properties when she wrote it. Such intentions are suggested by the comments she made on index cards while reading the biographies of John A. MacDonald and Louis Riel. For instance, she copied the following quotations from page 438-439 of Donald Creighton's John A. MacDonald: "And then [the] sprung trap gave & Riel dropped to his extinction" (n.pag.). Immediately below this quotation, Wiseman wrote: "No, not his extinction, Mr. Creighton" (n.pag.). The play reinforces the validity of this latter comment, since Louis Riel's spirit lives on within the play in two ways: his spirit is evident in future generations who follow after his death--that is, in the Jewish family portrayed within Testimonial Dinner; and Riel's spirit lives on in the production of the play itself. In effect, his

spirit sparked and sustained Wiseman's creation.

The play is also unusual in its refusal to follow a fixed chronology. As stated in the last section, Wiseman frequently superimposes two chronologically separate and unrelated narratives within the play: the first recounts Loksh's testimonial dinner; the other concerns Riel's hanging. This experimentation testifies to Wiseman's conviction that writers should be directed by a personal vision, rather than others' conventions. In this play, as in all her work, Wiseman experiments with style in order to reinforce the theme of the work. Upon analysis, it becomes evident that the two plot lines are thematically related. Loksh can be seen as a reincarnation of the spirit of John A. MacDonald, since both characters share an acquisitive and expansive quest for land. Yet both characters are haunted by misgivings. Neither feels wholly content with his selfish desire to acquire land at all cost. While MacDonald is literally burdened by Riel's corpse slung over his back, Loksh is mentally burdened by thoughts of wrongdoing. While the above analysis seems straightforward, it is by no means evident to a viewer of the play. Wiseman intuited this fact, and wrote the "(brief introduction for the unwary reader)" to elucidate the meaning behind the play's complex design.

That Wiseman was aware of the play's originality is substantiated by her own remarks: she states as much on the back

cover of Testimonial Dinner. In articulating the reasons why she chose to publish the play privately, she comments:

Theatrical ideas I had developed most painstakingly here have begun to be used by others who cannot deny knowledge of the prior existence of my play . . . If the end results of a great deal of effort on my part are beginning to be treated as common property, I cannot deny the public the right to first-hand knowledge of the seminal source. If my work, unheard, is beginning to be echoed, surely the public deserves to know the true yodeller. (n.pag.)

As the above quotation indicates, Wiseman clearly sees the structure of her play as original. In this passage, she even acknowledges that she is the inventor of such a structure, and admits to publishing the play as a means of "patenting" the structure as her own.

The play's ribald tone is yet another means by which Wiseman debunks convention. The sexual innuendo which permeates the play bothered critics, even those most loyal to Wiseman. Malcolm Ross, for instance, felt somewhat uneasy by the overt sexual innuendo within the play, all the while praising the play's strengths. In a letter to Wiseman dated November 9th, 1976, he states:

. . . It is a powerful piece of work of many

dimensions. The Riel-MacDonald counterpoint is an effective symbolic device, helping to deliver your meaning with force and depth. As an old granddaddy of "the genteel school" of letters I do boggle now and then at the explicit sexual allusion. It is too late for me to be really "with it."

While Ross remains diplomatic in his criticism of the play's sexual innuendo, others were undoubtedly more severe in their criticism. One must remember that the play is roughly contemporary with Crackpot, which was rejected for the same reason by many publishers. Critics disliked the many gratuitous references to sex, especially those involving incest. The play, like Crackpot, is full of sexual innuendo, even that involving such taboo topics as incest.³ Once again, Wiseman chooses to forego mainstream values in favour of her own.

By including such ribaldry within Testimonial Dinner, Wiseman flaunts her own culture's literary conventions in counter distinction to those of the mainstream. Indeed, the bawdiness so prevalent within Crackpot is conventional within Yiddish writing. As Alan Weiss explains within his article on Yiddish writing, "Jewish humour often displays a healthy attitude towards physical pleasures, and sex and eating are the subjects of many jokes" (402). This is certainly the case within Testimonial Dinner. Much of the play's humour is derived from Odessa Yarker's crass

humour. Odessa shocks Loksh and Kent, for instance, when she states that Ellen might be her distant relative--a relationship instigated by her own adulterous affair with Loksh many years before. Her matter-of-fact tone further accentuates the play's humour because it is so shocking. Within Yiddish literature, Odessa represents a specific type of character: as the quintessential busy-body, she is the typical yente figure seen in Yiddish literature for centuries (Weiss 404). By including conventional characters from a Yiddish literary tradition within Testimonial Dinner, Wiseman rejects the generic conventions of western literature, firmly placing herself on the periphery of its culture.

As one can see, Wiseman dismisses the conventions of genre as a means of asserting her own identity in contrast to the prevailing norms of Canadian culture. Such innovations are in keeping with the message at the heart of Testimonial Dinner. Above all, Wiseman wishes her readers to recognize the value of flexibility and the dangers implicit within orthodoxy. These convictions are apparent within the plot and stylistic features of the play.

. . .

As in her previous work, Wiseman focuses on the destructive effects of inflexible values within Testimonial Dinner. Wiseman illustrates how such inflexibility can undermine the stability of

both individuals and a nation. John A. MacDonald's unwillingness to compromise his dream of a nation from "sea to sea" creates civil unrest within Canada--an unrest exemplified by Louis Riel's continual unrest within the play. His discontent undermines both MacDonald's security and the stability of the nation for generations to come. It persists in alienating new immigrants, as Loksh's spiritual unrest indicates. In some ways, MacDonald can be seen as a successor of Abraham in The Sacrifice: both characters are inhibited by their inability to reconcile their values with those of others.

As a corollary to this criticism, Wiseman highlights the virtue of compassion and compromise within the play. Loksh, for instance, is able to find peace when he recognizes his moral culpability in neglecting the fortune of others within his real estate speculation. Hank finds similar contentment when he renounces his philandering, and reunites with his ex-wife, Clair. In this play, as in all of Wiseman's works, love and tolerance are paramount values. Indeed, Riel reiterates this point when he reminds MacDonald that Canada could have otherwise been constructed: "We could have built together had you recognized our right to exist. In our way, as equals"(1.3.17). Riel's recognition that the conflict could have been averted through compromise could serve as a refrain for much of Wiseman's work. In The Sacrifice, for instance, Abraham could have avoided

murdering Laiah, if he had been more accepting of her contrasting values. Likewise, in Crackpot, Hoda might have avoided much heartache, if her society had accepted her idiosyncrasies, instead of shunning her.

Moreover, like Wiseman's earlier work, Testimonial Dinner suggests that compassion is frequently thwarted by rampant economic greed. In the selfish quest for money, compassion is obsolete, and sometimes counterproductive. MacDonald's quest to unite Canada by a national railway later translates into Loksh's real estate ambitions. His quest to unite the country with a national symbol gives way to expansionism for selfish greed. This is not the first time Wiseman has illustrated the corrupting influence of materialism. One need only recall Hoda's uncle in Crackpot for another such instance: Uncle, like Loksh, is left spiritually bereft by his quest for wealth.

Obviously, Testimonial Dinner presents readers with identical values to those espoused within Wiseman's earlier work. However, the stylistic features of the play remain to be considered. As expected, a close examination the play's stylistic features illustrates the play's similarities to Wiseman's other work.

The hallmark of the play is its rejection of the conventions of genre. Wiseman disrupts the reader's sense of expectation by refusing to adhere to the conventions of dramatic form: she mixes

two entirely unrelated chronological narratives within the same spatial units (i.e., scenes); she mixes fact and fiction in her dialogues; and she shuns western tragic conventions in favour of those from a Yiddish folk tradition. Of course, such experimentation has been seen before--most obviously, in Crackpot. Lest readers question the efficacy of such experimentation, they need only consider the prevalent concerns present in all of Wiseman's work. Given Wiseman's distrust of orthodoxy, it would be wholly inappropriate for Wiseman to adhere to generic conventions. For a writer who espouses flexibility, such experimentation is essential.

. . .

As I hope this chapter illustrates, Testimonial Dinner can be seen as a natural continuation within Wiseman's canon. In this play, like the novel which preceded it, Wiseman continues her search for a written form which adequately represents the values at the heart of her writing. In the early part of her career, Wiseman generally focused on expressing her values within standard literary forms. Hence, The Sacrifice and The Lovebound both emphasize the horrific consequences of inflexible moral codes within traditional generic forms. In Crackpot and Testimonial Dinner, on the other hand, Wiseman goes one step further than she does in her earlier works. As a writer who criticizes inflexible moral codes, she seeks a form which

embraces her fervent belief in flexibility. Through outright rejection of the generic conventions which constrain writers, Wiseman highlights her own values. From a writer such as Wiseman, who is so fervently committed to humanistic values, one could expect no less.

Notes

1. After many futile attempts to have the play published, Wiseman resorted to publishing the play privately in 1978. She describes her efforts to have the play published on the back cover of her manuscript privately published by Prototype Press.
2. This introduction was written on October 17, 1978 and entitled ('a brief introduction for the unwary reader'). It occupies the first couple of pages within the manuscript published by Prototype Press.
3. Riel burdens MacDonald's back in Act 2. Scene 1 (page 28) and Act 3. Scene 1 (page 45).
4. Abraham Chapman notes the importance of ancestry to Jews in the introduction of his anthology, Jewish-American Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Autobiography, and Criticism (New York: New American Library, 1974) xii.
5. For further elucidation on this facet of post-colonialism see Homi Bhabha's Nation and Narration and Bill Ashcroft's The Empire Writes Back.
6. 'Nayeh Blatt' means 'New Leaf' in English.
7. These two books are recorded in Wiseman's papers at the York University Archives. Wiseman wrote quotations from both texts on numerous index cards.
8. This reference to incest is peripheral to the narrative in Testimonial Dinner, but nonetheless mentioned within it: Odessa implies that Kent could be Ellen's half-sister by virtue of Odessa's sexual encounter with Loksh many years before.

CHAPTER 5

Old Woman at Play:

Celebrating Life

As explained in earlier chapters, the striking variety and innovation so notable in Adele Wiseman's writing are evidence of Wiseman's refusal to be contained by conventional subject matter and genre. Old Woman at Play fits comfortably into this schema. It is, for instance, difficult to classify generically because its subject matter is so diffuse. While ostensibly a tribute to her mother's doll-making, it is likewise a history of the Waisman¹ family and an informal manifesto on the origin, nature, and function of creativity. This latter subject is of particular importance because it confirms that Wiseman's writing must be seen as an outgrowth of her faith and gender.

While Old Woman at Play predominantly concerns Wiseman's mother, it is also about Wiseman herself. Wiseman structures the book in such a way as to establish a connection between her own creative philosophy and that of her mother, who of course shares the same faith and gender as herself. She achieves this union by rejecting the role of objective biographer in Old Woman at Play: alongside sections which record Chaika Wiseman's statements about her biography and doll-making are other essay-like sections where

Wiseman expounds upon her own philosophy of creativity. This parallel structure effectively establishes the connection between the creative visions of both mother and daughter. On the final pages of Old Woman at Play, Wiseman openly acknowledges this debt when she states,

Obviously, this book is about me too, about why I write and about my sources and my roots and the complexities of identity. It's true, the thought has more than once occurred to me, that in that last moment, as I lie dying, my mother's life will flash before my eyes. (146)

As astute as Wiseman's comments are, I would go beyond Wiseman's appraisal and suggest that her writing can be placed within an even larger tradition of Jewish female artists.

The creative vision expressed within Old Woman at Play is quite different from traditional western perceptions of creativity. Patricia Morley outlines these differences in her commentary on the book. As she explains, the artist is generally perceived as

a solitary figure, attic-bound, impoverished, gallantly if somewhat narcissistically dedicated to the creation of immortal works. In the popular stereotype, the artist is concerned with beauty and truth but not with love, community, sharing, or social

responsibility. ("Artist at Play" 104)

Morley goes on to illustrate how Chaika Waisman's doll-making is that of the receptive-expressive type. Rather than creating art primarily for personal fulfilment, Chaika Waisman views art as a social act with specific aims of "communication, mediation, and sharing" (Morley, "Artist at Play" 105).

A close-reading of Old Woman at Play illustrates the validity of Morley's analysis. When Adele Wiseman asks her mother why she makes her dolls, her mother simply responds, "to please the children" (2). Her daughter goes on to comment that her mother always makes her dolls in pairs, "except for the fluffy ones which are meant to partner very small children" (97). In pairing dolls, she explains, her mother desires "to banish loneliness from the earth" (97). Furthermore, an essay which Adele Wiseman wrote in 1965 makes it clear that her own writing was governed by similar principles. As she explains in her essay, "Art and the Artist in the Atomic Age," an artist is above all "a social creature," since "all art is an attempt to communicate, and communication requires subject & object" (n.pag.).² Like her mother, Adele Wiseman felt that art should encourage cohesion among individuals, that it should serve a communal function. Their shared conviction in art's social function implies that Chaika Waisman's doll-making had a crucial impact on the development of her daughter's writing.

Yet, while Patricia Morley is accurate in her analysis of Chaika Waisman's art, she does not attempt to explain the reasons why Chaika views art in this way, nor does she observe a connection between Chaika's perspective and that of her daughter. Further examination of the creative philosophy will explore how this philosophy connects with these two women's faith and gender.

. . .

Wiseman focuses a great deal of attention upon the manner in which the natural world has inspired her mother's art. Quotations like the following continually reinforce the connection between her mother's craft and the natural world:

There is something of nature's prodigality, nature's spontaneity, nature's generosity in [my mother's] output, and nature's sometimes hit-and-miss experimentalism too. Indeed, existing in complete harmony with her Judaism, is an utter faith in and submission to nature, "Die Natoor," as she calls it, and she calls upon it frequently as a touchstone of what is. (40)

The sheer number of times the word "nature" appears within the book--34 times--is further testimony of its crucial importance within Chaika Waisman's mind set. Wiseman devotes the remainder of the text to a more precise articulation of how the natural world affects her mother's creativity.

Wiseman's comments in Old Woman at Play suggest that she believes that some aspects of creativity are universal to all human beings. Hence, Wiseman assumes that her observations of her mother's art can be used to establish notions about creativity. For instance, she believes that creativity is an innate human impulse whereby individuals attempt imaginatively to make sense of their surroundings. Yet while all human beings are born with the creative instinct, few take advantage of it. As she explains at the outset of Old Woman at Play:

Creativity is a natural human attribute, which we all share, to some degree, and of which too few of us ever get to know the pleasure, in ourselves or in others like us. (10)

Wiseman tries to unravel why the creative impulse has persisted in her mother's psyche and not in others, and attempts to identify the traits that characterize all creativity.

Wiseman's creative vision has invariably been determined by her position within the world. I contend that the prominence accorded to nature within Old Woman at Play must be seen in the context of Adele Wiseman and Chaika Waisman's lives as Jewish Canadian women. As triply marginalized individuals within a colonial, Christian and patriarchal society, they must continually confront their vulnerability within this larger society. Both Adele Wiseman and her mother nurture a connection

with the natural world as a means of coping with social injustice. Put another way, a submission to the ways of the natural world enables them to rise above their marginalization. Furthermore, this submission to nature is assisted by their affinity with the natural world as females. The validity of this hypothesis may be understood through reference to other academics whose views concur with my own.

Given the biological and sociological realities of being female, it is understandable why women manifest a subservience to nature. From a purely biological point of view, being female frequently entails maternity, which necessarily involves the subordination of one's needs to those of a child. All women who have experienced pregnancy must acknowledge that they are essentially a receptacle for life: ultimately, another's life is not theirs to control. Moreover, since women must concede each child's separate identity from their own, they quickly perceive their inability to control the lives of their children. In "Beyond a Woman's Poetics," Josephine Donovan calls this attitude one of "holding." As she defines it,

Holding is an essentially preservative attitude of "keeping" rather than "acquiring," of conserving the fragile, of maintaining whatever is at hand and necessary to the child's life. (103)

She goes on to say that female creativity frequently manifests a

similar view of nature. Concurring with Sara Ruddick, she calls this "an ethic of humility," which she defines as "a kind of reverential respect for the process of life and realization that much is beyond one's control" (103). One could go beyond Donovan's comments and hypothesize that women's subordination to the natural world also stems from sociological sources. As marginalized members within patriarchal society, women may cope with their marginalization by asserting an affinity with the natural world. That is, through observation of the natural world, women find a means of rising above the fray of social injustice.

Linda Hutcheon also recognizes the centrality of maternity in her article, "'Shape Shifters': Canadian Women Novelists and the Challenge to Tradition." In her survey of several Canadian female novelists, she examines Audrey Thomas's Intertidal Life. She notes that Thomas believes that "for biological and social reasons, women have had a different relationship to creation and being an artist than men" (220). Specifically, Hutcheon explores the prevalence of natural and birth imagery in the writing of Thomas and others, and posits an affinity between women's childbearing ability and their connection with the natural world. Women's notion of time is also affected by their experience of motherhood, since the maternal experience forces women to cope with continual interruption. Women must constantly shift their

attention to serve the needs of their offspring. In the process, they must readily adapt to continual change, as they subordinate their own needs to those of others. Josephine Donovan describes this facet of motherhood as one of "interruptibility" (100). She goes on to say that this phenomenon has a direct impact on their artistic labour. As Donovan explains:

This phenomenon ("interruptibility") contributes to the structure of women's artistic labour just as it does to their household labour, and it also contributes to a consciousness that is aware of contingency, that perceives itself bound to chance, not in total control.

(102)

Donovan goes on to say that some prevalent stylistic features within women's writing stem from this mind-set. As individuals accustomed to continual change, women feel less compulsion to accept blindly the conventions of genre. Since women feel freer to experiment, they frequently deviate from conventional genres, preferring to create generic hybrids that express their own experience as women more accurately. For instance, Marlene Kadar has noted that much female writing displays a hybrid generic form of fiction and autobiography which she terms "life-writing." This unabashedly autobiographical form dismisses the conventional belief that the artist should be absent from his/her text. As she defines it, "[l]ife-writing comprises texts that are written

by an author who does not continuously write about someone else, and who also does not pretend to be absent from the [black, brown, or white] text himself/herself" (10). Once again, one can attribute such experimentalism to the social reality of women's lives.

Like women, Jews have traditionally risen above the frey of social injustice by viewing their lives in a larger context: the outside, natural world. That is, they master detachment by viewing themselves as part of a larger natural order which subsumes any social divisions in their daily lives. As Abraham Heschel explains, Jews adhere to the notion that the world is a mixture of good and evil, and that the former ultimately subsumes or negates the other.³ Consequently, many Jews expend energy attempting to understand how the natural world works. As Heschel comments in his commentary on the philosophy of Judaism, "[t]he dreadful confusion, the fact that there is nothing in this world that is not a mixture of good and evil, of holy and unholy, of silver and dross, is, according to Jewish mysticism, the central problem of history and the ultimate issue of redemption" (510). Heschel also states that finding redemption involves a probing of the world for evidence of God's "attentiveness to man" (499). Abraham Chapman's assessment of Jewish-American writing confirms this speculation. He sees this writing as above all preoccupied with finding hope within a world permeated with evil:

Ultimately what emerges from the most searching and profound of Jewish-American writers is not a mere catalogue of suffering or alibis for alienation, but somehow a sense of hope, an ability to live by shedding illusions and deceptions, by continuing to grope for understanding, by facing the core of evil in the world, and in these ways they muster the strength and understanding and compassion to be human. (xlviii)

One can conclude, then, that Jews accord a great deal of power to the natural order which dominates their existence, because of their historical persecution at the hands of others. That is, they deal with anti-semitism through intellectual probing of the outside world.

Therefore, since Jews have perennially been aware of the inherent mixture of good and evil within the world, they view life hopefully: through understanding, they believe, humans can find redemption in this world. They adhere to the belief that evil is balanced by good, and that this balance can be perceived through intellectual probing. In turn, this perspective is manifest in their art. Alfred Kazin, for instance, sees this perception as the predominant characteristic of Jewish-American writing. As he explains:

People to whom existence has often been a consciously fearful matter, who have lived at the crossroads

between the cultures and on the threshold between life and death, naturally see existence as tension, issue, and drama, woven out of so many contradictions that only a work of art may appear to *hold* these conflicts, to compose them, to allow the human will some detachment. (591)

By balancing both good and evil within their writing, Jewish writers maintain hope in the face of and despite their persecution.

. . .

The dominant themes and stylistic innovations notable within Old Woman at Play confirm Chaika Waisman's affinity with the natural world. In order to emphasize this connection, Adele Wiseman foregrounds her analysis of her mother's art with a continual emphasis upon its connection with nature. As the following section will illustrate, five dominant themes within Old Woman at Play confirm the connection between Chaika Waisman's doll-making and her affinity with nature: her eschewal of a reasoned approach to creativity; her emphasis on the impermanence of all creation; her vision of life as an indelible mixture of pain and joy; her refusal to govern her creation by set rules about creativity; and her fervent belief in the social function of art. As the following discussion will illustrate, the vision underlying Chaika Waisman's doll-making is a manifestation of her

faith and gender as is the vision manifest in her daughter's writing.

In order to emphasize her mother's attachment to the natural world, Wiseman begins Old Woman at Play by commenting on her mother's instinctual approach to art. This instinctual dimension first becomes apparent in recorded conversations between mother and daughter. When Adele Wiseman poses questions to her mother about why she creates her dolls, her mother seems unable to articulate a response. Consequently, her daughter continually rephrases questions in the attempt to gain more complete responses. Yet, despite her efforts, answers always seem to elude her mother. Indeed, as the following quotation illustrates, her mother's responses are reminiscent of those of a Delphic oracle:

But mama, what are you really doing when you make
your dolls? What does it mean to you?
> I don't like to sit with empty hands. So I think,
'Maybe I'll give a child some pleasure.'
> What about the button pictures then, and all the
other things you make up out of your head?
> When I get tired of making dolls, I think, 'Maybe
I'll try something else for a change.' (2)

Just as Adele Wiseman begins to understand her mother's elliptical responses, the reader begins to understand the reason

behind her mother's brevity. It becomes evident that her mother is unable to respond to her daughter's probing questions, because her approach to art is wholly instinctual. For Wiseman's mother, body and mind are one: it is up to the artist to surrender to what her mind and hands tell her to do. As Wiseman puts it, "[s]he doesn't know that you're not expected to feel with your mind, nor think with your hands" (40). Since no preconceived ideas govern her creativity, responding to questions which presuppose such abstract considerations is impossible.

In fact, observing her mother's creativity, Wiseman becomes pessimistic about the usefulness of education for creative development. Whereas education is usually considered a hallmark of intellectually advanced societies, Wiseman asserts a heretical view about its positive contribution to creativity. She believes that western education is overly preoccupied with conformity and rules. Such pedagogy, she asserts, negates the creative process, which is dependent on instinctive and reflective development in relation to the outside world. As a result, creativity dies under the tutelage of the western educational system. As she puts it, "[as] a part of the very process by which we civilize and educate him, society also sets about pruning the bright, joyous shoots of what it sees as wayward growth" (11).

Wiseman likewise dismisses the prevalent notion that good art is everlasting. For an individual like Chaika Waisman, who

lives in harmonious union with nature, such a notion of permanence is unnatural. In fact, such permanence negates the very essence of life itself. As Wiseman explains in Old Woman at Play,

the idea of permanence for her dolls, or herself, their persistence for some unspecified "ever," would be . . . puzzling to her, as contradicting what she knows to be true, that it's not nature's way. (7)

She goes on to explain the "very medium [in which she works] is fragile and impermanent" (7). Wiseman attributes her mother's perspective to her deeply felt submission to the natural world.

As already mentioned, Adele Wiseman attributes many of her mother's unconventional views to her inherent affinity with nature. More importantly, however, she observes a correlation between Chaika Waisman's gender and this affinity. Early on within the book, Wiseman alludes to this connection:

The point of interaction between all worlds, is, for my mother, the natural world, which, I suppose, is not too surprising, since her history has been a woman's history. Her experience has been the experience of wet hands and working fingers and the incredible earthquakes of birth, and cradled arms and swollen, running breasts, and telling time by when the baby finally stopped crying, and knowing pain as she knew

joy, not only within the limits of her own physical being, but as she apprehended them in all of us, the extensions of her being. (40)

It goes without saying that Wiseman's analysis bears an uncanny resemblance to the statements made by Josephine Donovan.

Wiseman's mother displays that "ethic of humility"--the submission to things beyond one's control--which Donovan felt was so critical to women's attitude towards creativity.

Yet it would be a distortion to attribute Chaika Waisman's perspective uniquely to her gender, since this neglects the critical importance of her faith. Just as Chaika's submission to the natural world can be attributed to her gender, it can likewise be attributed to her Jewish experience. Given that Wiseman devotes a considerable portion of the memoir to an account of her parents' experience of strife in the Ukraine and their subsequent escape from this persecution to the New World, it is quite clear that she felt this experience was seminal to the development of her mother's creative vision. These memories indicate that her mother's world view was forever changed by her exposure to persecution and the reality of human evil. As Wiseman explains near the end of Old Woman at Play, "[i]t is understandable that a society under constant siege should recognize most acutely that [humans] are not in any sense in [their] own hands" (68).

Another hallmark feature of Old Woman at Play is the indeterminacy of the subject matter within it. The reader becomes aware of this fact early on, since the book contains no chapters or divisions of any sort within it. The subject matter can roughly be divided into four categories: Chaika Waisman's doll-making; Chaika Waisman's history in the Old World; Adele Wiseman's autobiography; and her manifesto on the origin and function of creativity. The style of Old Woman at Play is similarly diverse. While writing the book, Wiseman refused to be constrained by the dictates of genre. Consequently, critics have been stumped in their attempts to classify the book. Rather than adhering to the conventions of one genre, Old Woman at Play contains elements of essay, interview, autobiography, and biography.⁴

While reading the memoir, it becomes clear that the book's structure emulates her mother's doll-making. Like her daughter's writing, Chaika Waisman's doll-making is radically innovative in form. For instance, she uses a veritable cornucopia of materials--generally things which would be considered trash by others. Such items as fish bones, hospital bracelets, cherry stems, and spark plugs make their way into her pictures and dolls. Wiseman even recalls how her mother incorporated her Governor General's medal into a drawing in order (as Chaika tells her daughter) that it does not "just lie around the house" (39).

As her daughter concedes, she is a "[r]edeemer of waste, champion of leftovers, saviour of biodegradable, [and] apostle of continuous creation" (38). Evidently, Adele Wiseman seeks to be as diffuse as her mother within this 'memoir.' Like her mother, Wiseman chooses to incorporate a multitude of 'material' within her writing in as original a form as possible.

Of course, Adele Wiseman's recognition that her writing mirrors Chaika Waisman's doll-making effectively places her writing in a female creative tradition. In fact, other theorists have made the same connection, albeit in a theoretical way. Laura McLauchlan, for instance, sees Old Woman at Play as a good example of life-writing, a generic hybrid particularly attractive to female writers. As already noted, life-writing "comprises texts that are written by an author who does not pretend to be absent from the text himself/herself" (Kadar 35). Of course, the presence of the author within these texts rejects the traditional wisdom that the author should remain outside his/her creation. Wiseman is insistently present within the text, and the text itself is notable for its generic hybridity, thus making it an ideal representation of life-writing. Many feminists see such newly defined categories as a means of redeeming art which has previously been neglected due to its unconventional form. As Helen Buss states, the naming of this type of writing will undoubtedly "facilitate the serious consideration of varieties of

writing, including many women's writings, that have been especially marginalized because of its 'unabashedly' autobiographical nature and its ambiguous generic placement" (42).

While Marlene Kadar sees life-writing as a generic form particularly attractive to female writers, she does not examine why this is the case. Yet, Josephine Donovan's statements, suggest reasons why women engage in such generic experimentation. As Donovan states, women's lives are frequently characterized by "interruptibility"--that is, the realization that all things are subject to flux. As caregivers, women quickly learn that their time is not their own but contingent upon the fulfilment of others' needs. In turn, this lifestyle affects their creativity. Since women are used to change and chance, they are less rigidly attached to generic conventions. That is, instead of feeling bound by generic rules, they frequently experiment with genre and, in the process, they forge new generic forms. Life-writing is but one example of such a generic hybrid.

If these ideas seem far-fetched, one need only consider the comments of Adele Wiseman and Margaret Laurence on the subject. Both writers frequently commiserated with one another about the difficulties attendant on trying to balance both a career and motherhood. In the early years of their friendship, it was Laurence who did most of this complaining, since she married and

bore children long before Wiseman did. Laurence's letters to Wiseman frequently express frustration with her multiple roles, and occasionally she expresses envy of her colleague's freedom. For instance, in a letter she wrote on 12 June 1957, she writes:

[S]ometimes I envy you the freedom of mind--I've got too damn much on mine, in the way of practical concerns like what's-for-dinner and when am I going to get this week's ironing done.

In another letter written several years later, she complains that she always feels "that [her] writing is stolen time, in a way" (July 21, 1960). When Wiseman married Dmitry Stone and bore her daughter, Tamara, in 1969, she began to understand Lawrence's sentiments through first-hand experience of motherhood in her own life. In one letter, for instance, she acknowledges being continually distracted by her daughter's antics while writing Crackpot. Rather than resenting these distractions, however, she acknowledges feeling privileged to watch her daughter develop. Wiseman clearly viewed motherhood as her utmost priority in life, as the following letter to Laurence indicates:

Let's face it, [Tamara] is pre-eminent. What other writing-mother has the privilege of watching leaps & fouetes & plies while she works? We tend to be fearful of losing the precious word; actually what we (at least I) have to say is not playing footsy [sic] with me,

coyly eager to disappear at the least disturbance.
It's rather a lusty type, only unpleasant when
misrepresented. It goes on kicking to come out right.
So that I look on myself at the moment, not as a victim
of the impositions attendant, supposedly, on
motherhood, but as the lucky recipient of multiple
gratifications. (December 6, 1972)

Given the continual exchanges between Lawrence and Wiseman regarding their efforts to balance family and career responsibilities, it is hard to imagine that their writing careers were not deeply affected by their gender. Seen in this light, Donovan's statements about "interruptibility" take on new legitimacy.

Nonetheless, a question remains unanswered: what motivates such stylistic experimentation among female writers? One might suppose that female writers engage in generic experimentation as a means of better articulating their own experience. That is, when traditional generic forms fail adequately to express the reality which they are striving to convey within their work, they seek new forms which do so. Certainly, Wiseman seems to engage in stylistic experimentation as a means of conveying her themes most effectively. The conglomeration of genres within this book appears to have been a serious and purposeful consideration for Wiseman. She views the mixture of media--

pictures and texts--as particularly innovative. In her preliminary notes on Old Woman at Play, she explains that she wants neither medium to dominate⁵. She discusses the importance of a balance between the two media at some length. The following excerpt which I found on a scrap piece of paper within the Adele Wiseman Fonds illustrates the depth of this concern:

1) [Mixing media is a] unique concept in a picture book in that normally, one or another, text or pictures, dominates. Either pictures simply illustrate text or text describes & gives some infor[mation] about pictures. Here--text & pictures are of equal value. It is set up so that

a) you can treat it as an essay-story which you read through, picking info[rmation] from them in the text, or

b) you can treat it as an essay-story which you read through, picking up the illustration on the way.

But in fact, text & pictures are designed to work together on the mind & heart & imagination of the reader. They are meant to play off each other, in such a way as to open & reinforce each other as the book progresses, toward a kind of total experience--an experience which will be understood by eye & mind & heart. (n.pag.)

As the above comments make clear, the generic indeterminacy and use of multi-media within Old Woman at Play are entirely purposeful. Wiseman refuses to be constrained by empty convention, preferring to focus on the ideal means of transmitting her art to others.

If Wiseman sought a stylistic means of making her message more poignant, she seems to have succeeded. Her friend, Margaret Laurence, seemed particularly impressed by the book's structure. In fact, when Laurence first read Old Woman at Play, she wrote a letter to Wiseman marvelling about its complexity. In a poetical description of the book, she writes:

Echoes . . . echoes. The book, like all works that really touch the heart of things, is like a stone skipped across water, making many ripples and shimmering in individual hearts. (Dec. 29, 78)

As Laurence's letter implies, Wiseman encourages the reader to make his/her own imaginative connections between these different subjects, much the same way she used the Louis Riel/John A. MacDonald motif to reflect upon the main plot in Testimonial Dinner. In this book, Wiseman actively encourages her readers to perceive a link between her own view of creativity and that of her mother's doll-making.

However, the message that the reader finally teases out of Old Woman at Play is by no means an entirely jubilant one.

Wiseman refuses to shy away from presenting her readers with the sordid realities of life itself. Like all her work, this memoir is brutally honest. As such, the tragedy implicit within human existence is frequently at the forefront of both her own writing and her mother's doll-making. No one, for instance, would deny Wiseman's uncompromising portrayal of Hoda's pain in Crackpot; nor could they accuse Wiseman of shying away from the life's tragedies. Wiseman's mother is equally frank about the tragedy implicit in life. For instance, Wiseman describes her shock at being shown her mother's "thalidomide dolls" with their shortened stump-like arms and legs (122).

Yet while both women boldly face tragedy within their work, they do so as a means of finally affirming the beauty implicit in life itself. Both artists strive to emphasize the inner beauty of their individual creations. By emphasizing the flesh-and-blood reality of these individuals, they illustrate how they maintain a triumphant spirit in spite of the adversity they face. Nature, they articulate, is an uncompromising mixture of happiness and tragedy, but even the most downtrodden must be recognized for the beauty within them. Chaika Waisman's thalidomide dolls are a perfect illustration of this philosophy. In pairing the thalidomide dolls together, Chaika affirms the beauty of their existence. As she explains to her daughter, "they grew up all right, you see they're dressed so nicely, all

modern" (122). Chaika goes on to explain that she tries to emulate die Natoon in her work by affirming the beautiful spirit in all aspects of life. As she explains to her daughter in her halting English, "I think of it [tragedy] and I hope life should improve and these things shouldn't happen because I hate to see life suffering" (124).

Wiseman attributes this curious mixture of tragedy and celebration to her mother's Judaism. Early on in Old Woman at Play, Wiseman acknowledges that her mother deals with suffering by looking for any goodness apparent in life itself. As Wiseman explains, because of the historical reality of their persecution, Jews recognize "that [they] are not in any sense in [their] own hands" (68). However, rather than making Jews bitter and morose, it makes them value life more. They celebrate the beauty in life as a means of defying the potential for evil within it. As Wiseman states at the end of Old Woman at Play, "it is wasteful to pre-mourn. So we celebrate everyday, for life still flows strongly in fragile vessels" (137-138).⁶

Jewish artists, moreover, feel that their creation must serve a useful social function. Early on within Old Woman at Play, Wiseman comments that her mother paired the dolls so as to "banish loneliness from the world" (4). Later on within her memoir, she explains that Judaism is a faith which stresses community involvement. Most importantly, it is a faith driven by

a commitment to life. As she explains in Old Woman at Play, Jews are not expected to emulate the perfection of gods as they are in unspecified religions (i.e. Christianity) (52); instead, she states, Jews are merely expected to behave "as good human beings who love and respect life and the living" (52). Wiseman sees this approach to life as superior to the former since it "has the merit of not being doctrinally doomed to failure" (52).

Evidently, her mother is committed to this element of Judaism. To illustrate this facet of her mother, Wiseman recalls how her mother once sat listening to her adult daughter, Miriam, complaining about her never-ending responsibilities at home and work. Instead of commiserating with her frustrations, her mother sat patiently and then enquired gently, "'And what are you doing for the community?'" (96) Wiseman's memory of this humorous anecdote merely confirms her mother's commitment towards life and community.

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As this chapter illustrates, Old Woman at Play marks a new stage in Wiseman's critical awareness of her craft. Up to this point in her career, Wiseman never ventured to consider how her gender affected her creative vision. Instead, she largely viewed her writing as a manifestation of her Jewish heritage. With the publication of Old Woman at Play, she celebrates an affiliation between her art and her mother's doll-making, and she attributes

their shared creative vision--at least in part--to their gender. For the remainder of her life, Wiseman would continue to explore her writing as part of a larger female tradition. In a letter to Malcolm Ross, for instance, she confided an intention to write a book on her daughter's childhood drawings, in order, as she told Malcolm Ross, "to trace the development of an intelligent, expressive child,--and perhaps compare the 'innocent' art of a child to that of a mature person" (April 11, 1983). Evidently, Wiseman wished to expand her awareness about female creativity by observing how her daughter's art fit into her own familial tradition.

Critics were equally aware of the book's affiliation with other writing on female creativity. Roslyn Belkin, for instance, was struck by the memoir's similarity to Tillie Olsen's book on female creativity, Silences.⁷ In fact, she desired to write an analysis on both books, since she viewed these two books as amply suited to such an analysis. In a letter to Wiseman, she recounts Olsen's admiration for the book, and even recounts Olsen's comment that the book was "'one of the most important books written in this century'" (letter to Wiseman December 24, 1978). When Belkin mentioned her desire to write a joint critique on Silences and Old Woman at Play, Olsen responded with wholehearted enthusiasm. Belkin relayed Olsen's enthusiastic response in a letter to Wiseman:

[w]hen I told her that I had intended to write about Silences and Old Woman together, she remarked that the two books belong together and that she would be thrilled to be, as it were, co-joined with a writer of your stature. (Dec. 24, 1978)

The critical opinions of both Belkin and Olsen reinforce the appropriateness of studying Old Woman at Play from a feminist perspective.

In other ways, the memoir illustrates a continuity with Wiseman's previous work. Old Woman at Play contains all those aspects of Wiseman's writing that we have come to expect from Wiseman--namely, an individualistic approach to both subject matter and style within her work. Likewise, she affirms a love for community, and acknowledges the importance of her Jewish roots. Above all, however, Old Woman at Play presents readers with a creative vision which affirms and celebrates life despite its inherent injustice.

Notes

1. The earliest spelling of the Wiseman family was Waisman, the spelling maintained by Adele Wiseman's mother, Chaika Waisman.
2. This essay can be found in the Adele Wiseman Papers at the W. B. Scott Library (Archives & Special Collections). The essay was written for a symposium on Jewish writers which occurred on January 15, 1965.
3. This perspective is equally apparent in that text of Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah. See two books by Harold Bloom on this subject: The Breaking of the Vessels (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982); and Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: Seabury P, 1975).
4. Laura McLauchlan discusses some of these reviews in her article on the book. See "The Scrap Toward Knowing in Old Woman at Play: Adele Wiseman's Life Writing," Room of One's Own 16.3 (September 1993): 33-40.
5. These notes are contained in the Adele Wiseman Fonds at the W. B. Scott Library (Archives & Special Collections), York University.
6. Of course, this statement hearkens back to the recurrent Kabbalistic image of the broken vessel within Crackpot. Evidently, Wiseman's vision seems to mirror almost exactly the vision expressed within the Kabbalah, to repair the world (Tikkun olam).
7. Roslyn Belkin wrote a letter to Wiseman on this subject on December 24, 1978. This letter is contained in the Adele Wiseman fonds, York University.

CHAPTER 6

Contextualizing Truth:

Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays ¹

and "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables"

Although Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood was published by Oxford University Press in 1986, only two of the essays were written specifically for this compilation. Indeed, half of the ten essays had been previously published: "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood" was published in Canadian Forum (April 1986); "Old Markets, New World" was an excerpt from a book of the same title (1964); "Word Power: Woman and Prose in Canada Today"² was published in Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'etudes canadiennes (1981); "What Price the Heroine?" was published in International Journal of Women's Studies (1981); and, finally, "How to Go to China: (Core Sample of a Continuous Journey)"³ was an excerpt from Chinada: Memoirs of the Gang of Seven (1982).⁴ Several of the remaining essays, moreover, were adaptations of speeches Wiseman delivered during the 1980s: "And the Forest?" was adapted from a paper Wiseman delivered at a conference entitled "Man and the Forest" in October 1986; "The King and the Queen Had Two Sons" was initially a speech delivered to Chinese

writers visiting the Banff Centre in the late 1980s; and, "The Writer and Canadian Literature" was adapted from a speech presented at a conference on cultural differences between Canada and the United States.⁵ The remaining two essays, "Lucky Mom: On Suffering" and "Civic Strife in the Peaceable Kingdom," were written expressly for this book.

Just as the publication date is deceptive, so is the title of the volume itself. As the title indicates, Wiseman views the compilation as a group of essays. Yet a quick perusal of the volume would suggest otherwise. "The King and Queen Had Two Sons," for instance, is clearly a fable. Other essays, like "How to Go to China" and "And the Forest?", are so far removed any possible conception of the essay, that one can hardly consider them essays at all. Like much of Wiseman's work, the "essays" contained in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood seem generically undefined. Once again, Wiseman foregoes convention to create strikingly innovative work.

In the decade since this book's publication, very little criticism has been written upon it, perhaps because critics are unsure about how to account for its stylistic innovations. In fact, only one critical article has been written on Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood, an article by Donna Bennett called "'Let me get it right': Adele Wiseman as Essayist." Bennett's essay concerns the issue of truth, which she sees as a recurring

motif in this compilation. She states that for Wiseman,
truth is born of contradictions, of the interplay
between ideas and experience, imaginary or real, and it
resides as much in imaginative reality as in physical
experience.(54)

Bennett's analysis is important in that it affirms a prominent idea in this thesis: Wiseman's conviction in the relativity of truth to each individual's circumstance. Yet Bennett never ventures to suggest the origins of Wiseman's beliefs, nor does she examine how Wiseman's vision is manifest in the essays' stylistic features.

As I hope this chapter illustrates, Wiseman's preoccupation with the relativity of truth can be seen as an outgrowth of her subject position as a Jewish Canadian female writer. To explore this viewpoint most fully, I will examine how Wiseman uses the chronology of these essays to establish the origin of her vision. Specifically, I will examine the manner in which Wiseman orders her essays to highlight the connection between her Jewish Canadian female background and her perception of the world. In the subsequent section, I will illustrate how Wiseman's perceptions of the outside world manifest themselves in the stylistic features of these essays. In both sections, I will likewise indicate the manner in which Wiseman's writing conforms

to post-colonial and feminist perspectives.

. . .

As stated in the preceding section, Wiseman carefully orders the essays within Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood to reinforce the prevailing theme of this compilation: the necessity of recognizing the unique circumstances of all individuals prior to making any claims regarding right and wrong, truth and untruth. The first six essays focus on the heterogeneity of human experience through consideration of such issues as gender, faith, and nationality. They also illustrate how existing societal institutions (e.g. cultural, educational, and judicial) deny this multiplicity and discriminate against marginalized people. These essays naturally lead to the focus of the last four essays--the imperative for society to create structures which are more inclusive and accepting of multiplicity. In the penultimate essay, Wiseman presents her mother as the ideal embodiment of the spiritual generosity necessary for the creation and sustenance of a more tolerant society.

What is striking about the first six essays in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood is the sheer number of times in which Wiseman projects herself as marginalized Other within them. By comparing her experience as a Jewish Canadian female writer to that of the mainstream culture around her (i.e. Christian, colonial and patriarchal), Wiseman affirms the uniqueness of her

own experience. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the first six essays revolve around one or more dimensions of Wiseman's personhood: her faith, her gender, her nationality, and/or her profession. Specifically, the essays can be classified as follows: "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood" and "Old Markets, New World" concentrate on issues of Jewish identity in the New World; "What Price the Heroine?" concerns the issue of gender and writing; "The Writer and Canadian Literature" and "How to Go to China" focus on nationality and cultural identity; and, finally, "Word Power" considers the relationship between gender, writing, and nationality. At the same time as she affirms these dimensions of her being, Wiseman also looks at the manner in which societal institutions discriminate against marginalized people through illustration of the injustices perpetuated by existing societal structures. Ultimately, Wiseman's essays affirm the necessity of developing a more tolerant, inclusive society.

Wiseman's manner of dealing with her subject matter--that is, her tendency to focus on dichotomy--is a typical feature of post-colonial and feminist writing. As many post-colonial and feminist theorists have pointed out, marginalized individuals within patriarchal and/or imperial cultures assert their alienated subjectivity by contrasting their culture to that of the mainstream (Godard 165; Hutcheon, "Shape Shifters" 219;

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, The Empire 11).⁶ Certainly, Wiseman achieves this aim within her essays. By exposing the reader to alternative realities, Wiseman obliterates the notion of a readily identifiable Canadian identity.

What characterizes Wiseman's first essay, "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," is the focus on dichotomy, the dislocated bifurcation of the immigrant caught between old and new worlds. Near the end of this essay, Wiseman sums up the reality of the immigrant as one of exposure to multiplicity and difference:

Those of us who have lived in more than one language
have experienced not only different words, but
different attitudes, different clusters of feeling,
different nuances, different worlds. (18

The entire essay illustrates the validity of the above statement: it is structured around the apparent differences between Wiseman's values and those of the world around her. She discusses her exposure to Yiddish literature as well as that of western culture (3); she compares Grimm's fairy tales to the positive stories of her upbringing (3); and she acknowledges the relative importance of the written word to Jews as compared to gentiles (15).

As implied above, one dimension of gentile and Jewish culture which Wiseman explores within her essays is their respective literatures. Wiseman acknowledges feeling at odds

with the "cruelty" of the fairy tales of "the Grimm variety," which were "the standard fare of many of [her] contemporaries" (3). She speculates that Jewish literature is less preoccupied with such visions of cruelty, because of the historical persecution they have experienced. As she explains,

When you have real ogres hanging ever more oppressively over your childhood, you perhaps have less need to flirt with their veiled versions in fiction. (3)

Wiseman grew up viewing the writer as a teacher who might "redeem the entire world" with her wisdom (7). The writer's duty was not to emphasize the sordidness of reality (as does much western literature), but "to help you to choose to be the best you could become" (7). Her desire, she states, is to give others the ability "to cope, to need to read what disturbs [them] most, when and because [they] have recognized that it can bring [them] most, an enlarged existence" (26-27). Such a statement reinforces the validity of the thematic approach to Wiseman's work as presented in this thesis.

She also explores another difference between Jews and Christians: the reverence Jews share for the written word. As she states near the beginning of this essay, "the written word is highly valued" (15) to Jews; this reverence, she believes, may be attributed to Jewish scholarship which subjects words in the Holy Books "to millennia of examination and interpretation" (15). She

validates her statements by describing her own perception of words as a young girl. She recalls being daunted by the myriad of connotations and denotations held by specific words. As a child she remembers that she was

never able to divorce [her]self from the emotional content of words and word combinations, the suggestion, the overtones, the balances, the ambiguities, the implications, the contradictions, as well as the direct, naked thrusts of meaning that drew blood in infinite varieties of comprehending protest, pain, and pleasure. (6)

By exposing the reader to these perceptions, Wiseman succeeds in expanding the reader's awareness of each human being's unique perspective of the world.

Wiseman further expands upon this heterogeneity within the second essay, "Old Markets, New Worlds." Like the first essay, it is constructed to emphasize dichotomy, the difference between the Old and New World. Of course, the first indication of this bifurcated reality is present within the title of the essay itself. However, the title seems to be deceiving given the structure of the essay; two-thirds of the essay is devoted to a discussion of 'old world' markets, while only the last third of the essay discusses 'new world' commercialism. Yet Wiseman makes the contrast between these two worlds the central issue of this

essay: she contrasts the communal focus of the old markets to the antiseptic atmosphere of the new supermarkets (36 and 42); and, she compares the large product waste involved in old-world markets to the efficiency and profit of new-world business (38-44).

Having illustrated some of the divergent experiences and perceptions of Jews and Christians, Wiseman begins to discuss the apparent differences between male and female realities in the third essay, "Word Power." Specifically, she explores the reason why writing by women has flourished in Canada since the Second World War. Wiseman begins her essay by recalling Robert Kroetsch's statement that the "heroic men [in Canadian literature] are women" (45), and proceeds to offer sociological factors which made this so. She notes that Canadian female writers started writing in large numbers after the Second World War because their necessary entrance into the workforce gave them exposure to new experiences, and gave them the financial means to write. They also had the opportunity to travel internationally, something that was not done previously (54). Unlike men who participated in the War, their lives had not been stalled by such participation. Instead, they gained from exposure to these men's experiences upon their return to Canada after the War (50).

However, while women's writing has flourished for these sociological reasons, Wiseman makes it clear that women faced

(and continue to face) many obstacles which make a writing career more challenging than for a man. This is the subject of Wiseman's fifth essay, "The Writer and Canadian Literature." Wiseman acknowledges that writing as a woman is more difficult than it is for a man, because of the sociological realities of women's daily lives. Since women are traditionally the caretakers of kith and kin, they do not have the freedom to write freely as do men supported by wives. As she puts it,

In choosing to make the same assumptions as male writers . . . women set themselves a truly more heroic task than do our men, for few of us have 'wives' and secretaries or even the comfort of existing in a setting where it is considered acceptable to try to ease our multiple day-by-day burdens in order to enable ourselves to be free simply to write. (53-54)

She reinforces her point of view with hypothetical statistics culled from her knowledge of the lives of fellow Canadian writers. In her description of their marital situations, she concentrates upon the numerous burdens which women face in their attempts to balance a marriage, family, and career.

Another facet of Wiseman's self which she explores within her essays is her Canadian identity. Three of her essays explore how nationalism manifests itself in the cultural output of its citizens: "Word Power," "The Writer and Canadian Literature," and

"How to Go to China." As in her earlier essays, Wiseman once again illustrates her views through dichotomy. Specifically, she compares the Canadian identity to that of the British, the American, and the Chinese. In "Word Power," Wiseman examines the historical, cultural, and geographical elements which make Canadian writing different from that of Americans and the British. As a result of these distinctions, she states, Canadians are coming "of age to a different set of premises, a different set of priorities, a different set of self-deceptions, perhaps, or ideal projections on which to base our myths" (85). In "The Writer and Canadian Literature," by contrast, Wiseman examines why female writers flourish in Canadian letters more so than they do in the literature of other nations. Lastly, "How to Go to China" explores the differences between Canadian and Chinese writing, and observes how these differences are related to the historical realities of these two countries. To the Chinese, Canadian writers lack the collectivist underpinnings so evident in their own writing. As a result, Chinese writers view Canadian writers as exhibiting "selfish coterie individualism, the subjective, neurotic, pessimistic, art for art's sake, the elitist concept of art for the few" (104).

As the preceding paragraphs illustrate, these essays are predominantly concerned with articulating Wiseman's experience as a Jewish Canadian female writer. Yet Wiseman has another equally

important concern: to expose the roots of intolerance in Canadian society. She makes it clear that Canadian society was by no means tolerant of individuals outside the mainstream. In fact, many of these essays describe a society rife with intolerance. In "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," for instance, she describes how librarians at the St. John's Library in Winnipeg's North End prevented her learning as "[they] were not inclined to recognize legitimate book lust in the scruffier, sloppier, cheekier, and clearly foreign among the young" (4). Just as Jews are regarded suspiciously, so are women who disregard the roles generally associated with their sex--namely, marriage and motherhood. Wiseman discusses this at length in "Word Power." She comments that women writers are frequently beset by doubts since "[t]he writer who . . . avoids the prescribed course of marriage and motherhood is . . . [regarded as a] . . . suspicious object" (54).

Several of Wiseman's essays observe the manner in which literature contributes to societal intolerance. One such essay is "What Place the Heroine?", an essay in which Wiseman explores how Henry James's Portrait of a Lady is constructed to legitimize specific roles for women. Wiseman explores the manner in which James manipulates the reader's attitude towards the protagonist, Isabel Archer. Her acquiescent suffering within her marriage is made to appear virtuous and logical given the circumstances. As

Wiseman explains,

Isabel will validate the domestic structure with her life, affirm its institutions with her pain. She will show what women are by what a woman can be. She will hold the domestic world together. After all, that's women's work. (79)

Wiseman examines how the novel is carefully structured to affirm the above conclusion in the reader's mind. She concentrates on foil characters, and illustrates how their choices are made to appear deficient to the reader. Isabel Archer's choice is made to appear inevitable and courageous by comparison with these other characters. This essay, while formidable in its own right, also suggests Wiseman's feminist orientation, and supports the application of feminist approaches to her own writing.

Similarly, in "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," Wiseman observes how English literature perpetuates anti-Semitism through stereotypes about Jews. As a child, Wiseman often read books in which Jews were maligned. She recalls her pain and bewilderment as she read these works:

Even in the middle of really good stories they lied about Jews and what we did and why we did it and how we lived and what we were like. That bad feeling that gentiles so often squirted out at you when you were near them, when you hadn't even done anything, spoiled

a lot of their books too, even books that had nothing to do with Jews really. (7)

In the same essays, she notes with irony how many of these classic books which children are encouraged to read are the most rampant with "racism, sexism and classicism⁷," while others are subject to radical censorship (15).

Having been exposed to such intolerance within "great books" of the western canon, Wiseman decided early on to tackle these fallacies in her own writing. In "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," she recalls recognizing a need to redress the anti-Semitic fallacies that she saw in so much gentile writing. As she explains,

I knew very early that someone had to tell the other important stories, to provide the antidote to the poisonous errors, lest the whole glorious writing enterprise founder forever short of fulfilment. (8)

Of course, Wiseman's explicit desire to challenge the status quo is an ambition of many post-colonial and feminist writers. As Linda Hutcheon notes in "Circling the Downspout of Empire," the primary goal of post-colonial writing is to "assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" by challenging existing literature through the inclusion of new perspectives (220).

Because of Wiseman's experience as a marginalized individual, she is necessarily preoccupied with issues of

tolerance. It is hardly surprising, then, that this is the recurrent theme of the last four essays. Wiseman affirms a need to recognize the heterogeneity of human experience and a corresponding need to be flexible and tolerant. The necessity of allowing for such diversity is the recurrent theme of three of the final essays: "And the Forest?", "The King and Queen Had Two Sons," and "Civic Strife and the Peaceable Kingdom." In "And the Forest?", for instance, Wiseman finds that she is unable to write an academic paper which adequately sums up human beings' connection to the natural world. Realizing her inability to accomplish the task, she decides to forego such an ambition in order to expose divergent views on the subject, deeming such an approach more valid. She decides to utilize the opinions of many of her friends and acquaintances, which she jestingly calls her "living footnotes." In the following essay, a fable called "The King and Queen Had Two Sons," Wiseman once again illustrates the error in maintaining inflexible beliefs: both the King's sons suffer because of their rigid adherence to their specific hobby horses, tradition and technology, respectively. Likewise, the last essay, "Civic Strife and the Peaceable Kingdom," illustrates the stupidity of civic laws which disregard the personal circumstances of individual citizens.

The penultimate essay, "Lucky Mom: On Suffering" provides readers with an antidote to the intolerance so prevalent within

society. Wiseman presents her mother as the ideal embodiment of the tolerant and flexible individual whom others should emulate. This generosity of spirit seems to be generated from Chaika Waisman's deep-seated belief in a natural order beyond rational understanding. Given her belief in its inaccessibility to human understanding, she does not attempt to master it, but (instead) acquiesces to its control over her. When her body changes, for instance, she merely accepts the changes by recognizing her place within a natural order beyond her control. Her typical response to her body's failings displays this graceful acquiescence to the natural order. She merely thinks, as she tells her daughter, "'Ah, so this happens too'" (159). Wiseman clearly perceives her mother's attitude towards life as an ideal one worth emulating. Such acquiescence would go a long way towards rectifying the intolerance so prevalent in today's society.

Evidently, Wiseman has carefully structured her compilation to affirm the message so critical to this book. The first six essays, which focus on dimensions of Wiseman's identity, naturally lead to the recurring focus of the last four essays-- the necessity for recognizing the individual circumstances of individuals before making judgements of right and wrong, truth and untruth. As an individual accustomed to her marginalization within mainstream culture, Wiseman seeks societal structures which celebrate heterogeneity through tolerance and flexibility.

Such inclusion is attained through acceptance of one's place within the larger natural world, and a correspondent realization that attempting to dominate others is wrong. This attitude towards life is most clearly manifested by her mother, Chaika Waisman, whose most striking trait is her generosity of spirit.

. . .

While most of the essays in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood are notable for their striking stylistic innovation, critics have yet to examine this feature in detail. No one, for instance, has observed a connection between the book's theme and its style. It is precisely this connection which I will analyze in this section. As remarked in the last section, Wiseman is above all preoccupied with recognizing the heterogeneity of human experience. To reinforce her conviction more effectively, she seeks a style which conforms to this desire.

Underlying many of Wiseman's essays is a criticism of the manner in which the twentieth century has denigrated the personal essay. As the Romantic scholar, Carl R. Woodring, has pointed out, the essay genre encompasses many stylistic variations from the informal, familiar style of essayists like William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb to the statistic-laden articles of many twentieth century essayists (xv). The twentieth century, however, has been disparaging of the familiar essay (xv). The spirit of the age no longer allows for the leisurely pace of

earlier essayists:

A sense of haste swept away the genteel tradition of urbanity. Increase in specialization scorned the tentative informality of the amateur. The periodical essay lost its reserved seat to the factual article and the statistic-laden survey. (Woodring xv)

Wiseman's essays reject this movement away from the informal essay, and, sometimes, overtly criticize the twentieth century's preoccupation with fact and truth. Frequently, Wiseman makes cynical references to scholars who view the world through a limited assortment of facts.³ For instance, in the book's first essay, "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," Wiseman recalls her persecution at the hands of teachers who judged her abilities via "countless short-term memory hurdles over the unmemorable" (2). Her essay's are an outright dismissal of such standards. Wiseman flaunts her disregard of generic rules by adopting an essay form which is decidedly personal, and lacks decisive facts to discern any conclusion.

Looking at the essays, it becomes obvious that Wiseman rejects the essay structure which she was expected to master throughout her academic career. The traditional tripartite structure of the academic essay (e.g. introduction, body, and conclusion) is replaced by a more relaxed informal structure. Wiseman seeks an essay structure which is more inclusive of

diverse points of view. Her use of words also demonstrates a similar desire for inclusivity: Wiseman is quick to observe the multiple connotations of words, to use multiple words to expand meaning, and even willing to create new words to better express a particular idea or sentiment. Lastly, the sentence structure of her essays demonstrate her intention to be inclusive. Wiseman frequently creates complex sentences with multiple subordinate clauses to suggest the complexity of issues and viewpoints.

In the introductory paragraph of "The Writer and Canadian Literature," Wiseman begins with a preamble asserting her belief in the relativity of all truths:

My theory is that truth likes a context. Strip the context to try to capture truth in a bare fact, and you're apt to end up with a very diminished truth indeed. (81)

In order to express her vision more emphatically, Wiseman seeks an essay structure which affirms this belief in relative truth. She strives to find an essay structure which can balance many heterogeneous points of view within it. As a result, in many of the essays, she rejects the linear tripartite structure of scholarly essays (e.g. introduction, body, conclusion): she frequently foregoes to offer a thesis at the outset of her essay; she includes divergent viewpoints which prevent the articulation of a clearly defined linear argument; and, she offers readers

tentative conclusions or no conclusion at all.

In fact, Wiseman's project can be viewed as both post-colonial and feminist in orientation, since her goals conform to both of these frameworks. Both post-colonial and feminist writers assert their alienated subjectivity by dismantling existing cultural practices which deny their presence. By questioning literary conventions, these writers enable the reader to view alternative realities which are eclipsed or distorted by existing cultural practices. Many post-colonial and feminist theorists analyze this writing to observe the manner in which these writers reject prevailing literary conventions within their writing. In Writing Beyond the Ending: Nineteenth Century Women Novelists, for example, Rachel Blau Du Plessis examines the manner in which nineteenth-century women novelists attack "elements of narrative that repeat, sustain, or embody the values" of patriarchal culture (34). Similarly, the writers of The Empire Writes Back examine the manner in which Commonwealth writers affirm their subjectivity through the rejection of standard English within their writing. Like these other theorists, I wish to examine the manner in which Wiseman rejects literary conventions within her essays to affirm her unique subjectivity.

The scholarly essay--as it is taught nowadays--begins with a thesis which the writer proceeds to develop within the body of

the essay. Evidently, in order to create a thesis, the writer must believe that some identifiable and valid truth can be deduced through reasoning. Given Wiseman's belief in the seminal importance of context, it should hardly be surprising that she finds it difficult to organize her essay around a readily identifiable thesis statement. This difficulty is perhaps most apparent in "And the Forest?", Wiseman's essay on human beings' relationship to the forest. Upon embarking on the writing of this conference paper, Wiseman soon realizes that she cannot produce a scholarly paper. As she explains,

[The scholar] can look at a few books and find a theme to wrap a paper round, carefully limited, unified, a tidbit nicely gummed into the appropriate shape. There are well-trod paths in the scholar's woods. I entered dense bush. (118)

Because Wiseman is unable (and/or unwilling) to create such a unified essay, she creates a structure which allows for open-ended conclusions. She begins by dividing the essay into three sections: Wilderness I, Wilderness II, and Wilderness III. In each section, she discusses one particular memory about her experience with the forest.

A similar structure is evident in "How to Go to China." Once again, Wiseman foregoes a thesis at the outset of her essay. While this essay is ostensibly about Wiseman's trip to China with

some fellow Canadian writers, it is by no means a straightforward account of the trip. Wiseman begins the essay with her earliest perceptions of China and then describes an earlier trip to China in 1960. Only after initiating the reader into her lifelong curiosity about China does Wiseman recount her last trip in any detail. By combining her childhood fantasies about China with memories of her first trip to China in 1960, Wiseman illustrates how imagination and memory altered her perception of her last trip. In fact, her past memories colored her last trip so much so that these three facets of the mind (the present, the imagination, and memory) created an entirely new subjective reality. Of course, this essay merely confirms Wiseman's belief in the relativity of truth to each person's unique experience.

When Wiseman does include a thesis statement within her essays, it is frequently stated with a reticence which betrays her distrust of absolute truths. The words she chooses to affirm her opinions and observations suggest tentativeness rather than conclusiveness. Wiseman begins many of her essays with statements which suggest that her essay will be an exploratory exercise, whereby she searches for truths. Of course, this is considerably different from the conventional wisdom that one should begin an essay with a firm thesis in mind. At the beginning of "Word Power: Women and Prose in Canada Today," for instance, Wiseman writes:

I will ask you to bear with me while I establish some premises, after which I will give you a rather personal account of the world in which I was able to evolve as a writer. (45)

Similarly, at the beginning of "The Writer and Canadian Literature," she writes, "I will attempt . . . to evoke in you something of the feeling of being a Canadian writer . . . as I experience it" (81) [underlining mine]. Wiseman devotes the first few pages to a discussion of her experience as a young writer and her relationship with Margaret Laurence. It is only on the fourth page of the essay that Wiseman postulates a thesis. Having discussed her personal experience at length, she states, "I would like to put forward a thesis on a slightly more serious note" (84).

Occasionally, the sentence structure within her essays also suggests her tentative approach to her subject matter. Many of her essays contain multiple subordinate clauses which suggest a building-up towards the declarative statement contained within the main clause. Consider the following sentence from the second paragraph of "How to Go to China":

What we dream, what we want, what we conceive as possible, what we attempt but fail to achieve, what engages us, where we direct our hearts and our minds, all these have their own authority too, and in the

course of a lifetime may be seen to have weakened and perhaps even, in places, broken the barriers between the impossible, the possible, and the actual. (91)

In addition to being an extraordinarily long sentence, the structure forces the reader to wait for delayed meaning as the main clause is left to the end of the sentence. The full meaning of the sentence can only be understood after reading the rest of the essay. One can surmise that Wiseman uses the structure of her sentence to illustrate her exploratory approach to her subject matter; that is, her desire to approach topics in an open-minded way.

The manner in which she composes conclusions seems equally haphazard. As her essays progress, Wiseman frequently appears to fall upon realizations and conclusions quite by chance. It really appears as if Wiseman is unfettered by conclusions while writing her essays. Midway through "Memoirs of a Book-Molesting Childhood," for instance, Wiseman begins to understand what she has been attempting all along within the essay, and offers the reader a tentative conclusion:

Looking back on what I have written here I can see that I have been searching through my early life as a reader for clues to the formation of my particular standards of taste and concepts of excellence. (28)

Other essays are even less decisive and offer the reader no

conclusion. Wiseman ends "Word Power," for instance, with excerpts from her old diary, in order, she states, "to give [the reader] some idea of what it was like in those early days when I was in the process of becoming a Canadian writer" (59). In this essay, then, Wiseman prefers to withhold her conclusions to enable the reader to establish his/her own.

Wiseman's most daring move, however, was undoubtedly to include the fable "The King and Queen Had Two Sons" within this compilation, since its inclusion reflects a flagrant disregard of the book's title. Evidently, "The King and Queen had two Sons" is out of place within a volume which purports to be a compilation of essays. However, given Wiseman's unorthodox approach to essay writing, it should hardly be surprising that she goes one step further and disregards the essay genre itself.

Since many claims to absolute truth are based on references to factual data, Wiseman is particularly intent on illustrating the inadequacy of such data. In "Word Power," for instance, Wiseman uses "statistics" of a

fictional baker's dozen of female writers . . . and
the same number of imaginary male writers . . . [to
compare] the kinds of personal and marital histories
they would likely have had. (54)

She then proceeds to elaborate extensively upon the particularities of each individual's marital situation. As Donna

Bennett states in her article on this book, Wiseman's choice to elaborate on these pseudo-statistics suggests how much information is left out of numerical statistics (51). Wiseman highlights the need to consider the particular context of each individual's life before drawing conclusions. Her distrust of facts can also be seen in "And the Forest?". As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Wiseman begins by lamenting her inability to create a proper scholarly essay as academics do. Not incidently, Wiseman's essay is diametrically opposite of this ideal; it is meandering and formless. Rather than relying on scholarly footnotes, her essay revolves around "living footnotes." Each "living footnote" refers to a statement or opinion of one of Wiseman's friends. She constructs her essay so that she discusses what one person's comments within one section and another person's comments in another. As such, she opens up many different avenues from which a reader might approach the topic "man and the forest." At the same time, no statement is highlighted as the definitive one. Rather, the reader can browse the essay, and consider any idea at will. She thus indicates the inadequacies of scholarly arguments with their carefully chosen and skewed factual data.

Wiseman also focuses on the manner in which words distort each individual's unique experience. The complexity of word meaning is a recurring topic within these essays. As mentioned

earlier in this chapter, Wiseman recalls

feeling awed by the multi-dimensional aspects of words-
the suggestion, the overtones, the balances, the
ambiguities, the implications, the contradictions, as
well as the direct, naked thrusts of meaning that
drewblood in infinite varieties of comprehending
protest, pain, and pleasure. ("Memoirs of a Book
Molesting Childhood" 6)

In her quest to find precisely the right word, Wiseman often resorts to using multiple words where one is insufficient. In "The Writer and Canadian Literature," she acknowledges that she is "apt to be long-winded" as a result of this quest for accuracy (81). Immediately after making this comment, Wiseman mocks this prolixity with a brilliant example of it. In the introduction to this essay, she states that she will

try to do . . . a kind of word-dance around the topic,
in which I will attempt, through a judicious blend of
various steps, pirouettes, fouettes, arabesques, little
darts, and sudden leaps, to evoke in [the reader]
something of the feeling of being a Canadian writer
vis-a-vis the United States, as I experience it. (81)

Of course, while Wiseman humorously reinforces her point, she also illustrates a marked preoccupation with words and their meanings.

Wiseman is just as likely to create new words where other words fail to capture accurately a precise feeling or action. Such word-play is a prominent feature of post-colonial and feminist writing. As the feminist writer, Barbara Godard comments, "this punning and spinning of metaphors, . . . is not just 'icing on the cake' but cognitive activity central to the forging of new (conceptual) worlds" ("Redrawing" 170). Wiseman's first essay, "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," is instrumental in reinforcing the validity of Godard's statement. Wiseman recalls her childhood as a book-lover, calling herself a "printinjester" and "book-molester" (1). Such terms conjure up precisely the feelings which Wiseman wishes the reader to associate with this activity: the fulfilling of appetites, almost sexual and/or gustatory in their urgency for fulfilment. The term "book-molester" also conjures up the notion of society's disapproval of people's unrestrained satiation of such an appetite. What should be encouraged by the librarians is instead viewed suspiciously by these authority figures: they control these young bibliophiles by forbidding their access to adult books and their borrowing of materials more than once a day. In using the unusual term, "book-molester," Wiseman opens up all these associations to her reader.

When one considers these essays in relation to the book's themes, the meaning underlying the stylistic experimentation

becomes clear. Wiseman rejects the academic essay form, because its linear structure cannot accommodate dissenting opinions within it. She clearly views scholarly argument as artful deception, since it gives the illusion of inclusiveness. Therefore, Wiseman disrupts this structure in order to present readers with multiple, even contradictory, points of view. This heterogeneity is most apparent in the absence of clearly defined theses and conclusions in many of the essays. In addition, Wiseman generally supports her view through reference to her own experience rather than to scholarly sources and statistics which she considers deceptive. In this way, she highlights the importance of context in determining truth and dismisses the notion of objective truth. Finally, Wiseman focuses on the multiple meanings implied by words themselves, once again highlighting the connection between word meaning and personal experience. Her word-play is a means of wrestling with the complexity of word meaning and a means of finding words which precisely articulate a particular feeling or idea. All these stylistic innovations, therefore, stem from Wiseman's preoccupation with the relativity of truth.

Evidently, the essays in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood fit comfortably into the schema set out in this thesis. As in all her other work, Wiseman foregrounds her writing in the reality of her own experience as a Jewish Canadian female writer.

By illustrating the particularity of her own experience in relation to mainstream culture, Wiseman affirms the inadequacy of societal structures which neglect this heterogeneity. These essays call for a more tolerant and generous society, a spirit best exemplified by Wiseman's mother in "Lucky Mom: On Suffering." To further reinforce her perspective, Wiseman engages in stylistic experimentation to validate her belief in the relativity of all truth: she creates essays which emphasize multiple viewpoints, tentative theses and conclusions; she relies on personal experience by foregoing academic sources and statistics which deviate from her own experience; and, she engages in fervent word-play, in order to illustrate the multiple connotations of words and the connection between word meaning and personal experience. Most of all, Wiseman's tolerant and generous spirit resonates throughout these essays as it does in all of her earlier work.

. . . .

It seems apt to end this chapter with an examination of "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," a short story published only a few months prior to Wiseman's death,⁹ because more than any other single work written by Wiseman this story expresses her mature vision most completely. While much of Wiseman's early work dealt with the marginalization of Jews within gentile society, her later work considered the effects of marginalization

on all dispossessed individuals (Greene 223). Certainly, this is evident in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," a story about society's most marginalized humans--the mentally and physically challenged. The story is set in a hospice and focuses on the lives of three irrepressibly charming adolescents: Lucinda, an angelic, feisty and physically disabled social activist; Josh, a creative genius who deals with his uncooperative limbs by weaving imaginary worlds in his mind; and, Gordon (a.k.a. Goon), a hydrocephalic boy with an infectious grin and zest for life. By giving a central voice to these self-described "aliens," Wiseman affirms the values so central to all of her work. She illustrates the inhumanity generated by abstract labels; she explores the necessity of ancestral traditions and the creation of traditions for those lacking them; and, she highlights the primacy of non-judgemental compassion among all human beings. This section will examine the moral vision underlying "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" and consider its relationship to previous works by Wiseman.

As Elizabeth Greene has perceptively pointed out, the basic opposition within all of Wiseman's work concerns "caring and callousness"--the latter leading to "blindness and prejudice, erasure and destruction" (223). In "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," Wiseman indicates that callousness stems from intellectual abstractions--that is, human beings' preconceived

ideas about others. Most of the caretakers within the hospice are morally weakened by their penchant for labelling. As such, they are unable to see beyond the physical and/or mental limitations of their charges. Rather than viewing the adolescents as unique individuals with complex feelings and ideas, they centre on their limitations. This inability to see beyond the medical conditions of the children is especially disturbing to Josh, who finds that his medical files "nothingified him, stripped him from himself" (20). The adolescents' insignificance is also notable in the unfeeling language which the caretakers adopt in discussions about their welfare. At one Board meeting, for instance, the governors discuss the pros and cons of their societal integration, finally deciding against it, because they were "by no means convinced that the subjects themselves even wanted all this, or were capable of coping with it" (20). The bureaucratic tone of the above passage brilliantly suggests the depersonalized approach of the administrators towards their charges--an approach which effectively dismisses their humanity.

Other works by Wiseman display an equal concern about the effects of labelling. Indeed, the most reprehensible characters within all of Wiseman's work are those who catagorize individuals. In Crackpot, for instance, Miss Boltholmsup is unable to see beyond the immigrant status of her students,

viewing them instead as a group of "wild, dangerous young animals" (90) to be placated with a heightened mental alertness which involved

interpreting signs, picking up motions, working out new tactics, forestalling, soothing, guarding, doubling back, retreating, making plans, keeping them busy, keeping them diverted, above all keeping them under control. (90)

Similarly, Cass Mananagorse (of The Lovebound) is unable to view the passengers as separate individuals with differing needs: rather than identifying with their suffering as a fellow human being, he distances himself by conceding that they are being deceptive. At one point, he goes so far as to suggest that they fabricated the Holocaust, and he defends the Germans by exclaiming "Hitler isn't [here] to defend himself" (2.2.132).

As the above examples suggest, labelling hinges on classification--on the division of individuals into "haves" and "have-nots." Wiseman explores the psychology behind such divisions in an unpublished/untitled essay on racism which may be found at the York University Archives. Wiseman notes that racism--which hinges on such divisions--has the effect of

uniting the pack. It defines *us* by defining otherness, *them*. Racism is a kind of psychological territorialism. It defines *them* as whatever we don't

want to be, don't like. It is a geography of identity which annexes for the group or race, the most desirable inner space, the most elevated moral nature, simply by naming it so. [n.pag.]

"Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," like much of Wiseman's fiction, examines the devastating psychological consequences of such divisions. Since the children are viewed solely in terms of their physical and/or mental limitations, they are denied the basic human rights granted to so-called "normal" individuals. Most disturbing among these deprivations is the caretakers' denial of their privacy and freedom of movement: the adolescents are not allowed to bathe with the doors closed or shut the doors to their bedrooms (19 and 14). When the adolescents knowingly or unknowingly blur the boundaries between themselves and mainstream society, this disruption causes acute discomfort. For instance, when Josh disrupts societal protocol by walking down the street and eating at a restaurant, he must contend with the gawking stares of those around him (42-43).

Nor is "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" the first work to explore the consequences of such classification. In "Lucky Mom: On Suffering," the penultimate essay in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood, Wiseman also concentrates on the mistreatment of debilitated people. She illustrates these concerns by recalling her terminally ill mother's final days. As

her mother became increasingly weak, Wiseman recounts the unjust manner in which the medical community gradually denied and/or retracted basic services to her mother. When cancer spread to her womb, for instance, one doctor decided on a plan of treatment without properly consulting her (163). As her health continued to decline, services were gradually retracted by insurance companies. Wiseman recalls with dismay how a hospital bed and bathing equipment were eventually deemed unnecessary (173). Through this memoir of her mother's dying days, Wiseman reminds readers how unjust society can be towards those whom it has deemed peripheral.

In the worst cases, however, the consequences of divisions are more dire: dehumanization actually leads to death. That is, humans are deemed so peripheral, they are deemed expendable--as the title of the short story currently being addressed indicates. The director of the hospice, for instance, calls the children "lousy little leftovers" (10), and, when Goon breaks a rule, he tells him that he will send him to "'the pickle house' . . . on a stretcher, covered up'" (10). A parallel case is evident in The Lovebound. By the end of the play, Cass has been so influenced by Nix's invective that he contemplates selling the passengers into slavery and even imagines shooting them (2.2.144-147).

Wiseman's writing, however, is more than merely a litany of human injustice. Much of her writing focuses on the manner in

which marginalized individuals sustain their dignity and humanity in spite of dehumanizing conditions. This is undoubtedly most evident in The Lovebound, a play which celebrates survival amidst catastrophe. But it is also evident in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." In this story, the predominant means by which the adolescents maintain their dignity is through an awareness of their family ties. Parental love helps the adolescents withstand the dehumanizing hospital environment. When Lucinda is prevented from attending high school outside the hospital, for instance, it is her mother who finally succeeds in securing this right for her daughter. She is also assured of her value when her mother visits her, and watches over her when ill (26). Josh and Goon, on the other hand, are left with a vulnerability stemming from an awareness of their abandonment. Such dynamics of security and alienation have been seen before--particularly in Crackpot: while Hoda is comforted by an awareness of her father's love, Pipick is haunted by an awareness of his abandonment. Clearly, Wiseman views family ties as a bulwark against an impersonal, callous world.

For those individuals without family, Wiseman emphasizes the necessity of creating a personal mythology to counteract a sense of alienation. Such myth-making, of course, lies at the heart of "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." Josh comforts both himself and his fellow "aliens" by fabricating elaborate stories

to give them a sense of their importance in a world which has nullified their value. He tells Goon, for instance, that he is actually the Moon's child, who was dropped in the garbage when his mother attempted to scratch her belly (12). This gives Goon a new sense of worth, and he repeatedly asserts this connection to others by repeatedly 'mooning' the moon (12). In yet another instance, Josh tells Goon that the children of the hospice are extraterrestrial aliens with superior mental and physical capacities who will one day overthrow their terrestrial counterparts (5). While Josh comforts others, he also comforts himself through this myth-making. Feeling that his parents abandoned him when they sent him to the hospice, he conjures up a story to validate his importance. As he explains to Goon,

"It is the tradition of the upper classes that the noblest children are sent away to be educated in special schools . . . Now we, Goonie, you and I, according to un-im-pea-cha-bly au-thor-i-ta-tive sources, are even now in such a school. Hence, we specials will un-doubt-ed-ly emerge as the a-ris-to-crats of the system, its tit-u-lar leaders, the flowers of the race." (22)

All these stories, of course, reverse established hierarchies by granting marginalized individuals a sense of their worth--even superiority--within an inhumane world.

The value of such myth-making has, of course, been asserted before. In Crackpot, for instance, Hoda asserts her importance in numerous quests of her imagination. When the children taunt her in the schoolyard, and push her off the snow heap, she climbs on top of the snow heap and claims that she is "'QUEEN OF THE CASTLE'" (35). Hoda creates numerous stories which assert her connection with the Monarchy. She dreams of marrying the Prince of Wales, a possibility encouraged by her memories of the Ugly Duckling and Cinderella. In another instance, she imagines that her illegitimate son, Pipick, is the Messiah whose father is the Prince of Wales (154). In this case, Hoda merges two traditions--that of the Hebrew Bible and that surrounding the Royal Family--to gain a sense of her own worth. Like Josh in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," Hoda overcomes her marginalization by creating stories which reject her subordinate status.

However, Wiseman suggests that the most effective means of overcoming marginalization is through the dispersal of the intolerance at the basis of society itself. The most moral beings in all of Wiseman's writing are those humans who love others indiscriminately, who comfort the dispossessed by recognition of their inherent worth as human beings. In Crackpot, for instance, Hoda ignores her own pain and commits incest with her son, because she recognizes that his sense of self-worth is dependent on this very act (249); in "Goon of the

Moon and the Expendables," Miss Nomer (a.k.a. The Dragon¹⁰) treats her charges with a similar love and dignity. She refuses to treat the children disparagingly and encourages their self-respect. In the end, it is Miss Nomer who encourages Josh to escape in order to find independence in the outside world (38).

In a utopian world, Wiseman's writing suggests, there would be no hierarchical divisions separating the 'haves' from the 'have-nots.' Instead, society would recognize the uniqueness of all individuals and acknowledge their contribution to the whole. Such a vision is presented at the end of "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." Having escaped the soul-deadening restrictions of the hospice, Josh is able to recognize the artificiality of societal divisions and dreams of a world where such divisions are obliterated. He imagines a world where the "expendables" are no longer expendable, but "indispensables" like all living things (44). In this utopian world, every person would be recognized and blessed for his/her individuality. The universe would be, in fact, a multiverse recognizing this heterogeneity:

. . . the maimed, the incomplete, the scattered, the mistaken, even those who had had every promise broken in the molecule, retained the dream of particle and multiverse. It stirred in him [Josh] even now, irrepressibly, straining against his loneliness and misery, the dream of a life of great beauty. (44)

As this vision suggests, Josh has dismissed the term "expendable" from his vocabulary, since he now recognizes the error of such dismissive terms. He replaces this bifurcated vision of the world with a more inclusive vision--one which recognizes the uniqueness of all individuals.

Several of Wiseman's works end with similar assertions. On the last page of Crackpot, for instance, Hoda dreams of drawing a circle around those whom she loves--her fellow marginalized friends--Pipick, Lazar and her father. This vision suggests that Hoda is no longer willing to accept her marginalized status, recognizing instead her central place within the world around her (300). The same wisdom is passed down to Moses at the end of The Sacrifice. Having committed murder, his grandfather gains an understanding of his own error, that is, judging individuals instead of loving them as fellow human beings. It is this recognition of the sanctity of all human life which Abraham passes down to Moses (344).

As one can see, "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" is completely in keeping with the moral vision present in all of Wiseman's work. Most significantly, it illustrates Wiseman's compassion for all marginalized people. Wiseman wholly rejects abstract labels which define people in terms of "haves" and "have nots." She illustrates the artificiality of such divisions by focusing on the humanity of those deemed peripheral. Her works

illustrate a desire that such hierarchical divisions be dismissed in favour of a heterogeneity--a world where each individual would be valued for his/her uniqueness. Wiseman perceives non-judgemental compassion for others as the highest of all moral values, since it is the means by which hierarchical divisions can ultimately be obliterated.

Notes

1. Henceforth I shall refer to this book as Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood.
2. Henceforth I shall refer to this essay as "Word Power."
3. Henceforth I shall refer to this essay as "How to Go to China."
4. For more complete bibliographical information, please see the bibliography of this thesis.
5. The factual information regarding the date and whereabouts upon which these speeches were delivered is derived from Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays (pages 82, 145, and 118).
6. See the introduction of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of this topic.
7. From subsequent comments made in this essay, Wiseman seems to associate classicism with class difference.
8. See page 2, 81, and 118 of Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood for instances of Wiseman's critique of such practices.
9. "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" was published in the March 1992 issue of Malahat Review. Adele Wiseman died on June 1, 1992, only three months after its publication.
10. Of course, Wiseman indicates the inappropriateness of Miss Nomer's nickname, the Dragon, by calling her Miss Nomer. Evidently, her kind temperament is incongruous with such a venomous name. As an adult, Josh, who coined this nickname, also recognizes the inappropriateness of the name, and sheepishly apologizes to Miss Nomer by commenting that "'You were one of us all along. I had you all wrong'" (42).

CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Greene suggests that Adele Wiseman has remained an unjustly neglected writer because critics have been daunted by the sheer diversity of her writing, by the fact that Wiseman never "stepped in the same river twice" (220). It is undoubtedly true that Wiseman's multifarious works have made it difficult for critics to find a uniform dimension to her writing. Yet despite this multiplicity, a clearly definable creative vision remains at its base. It is a vision governed by Wiseman's belief in the necessity of tolerance and compassion among human beings--compassion nurtured by an awareness of the complex psychology governing individual action and behaviour. That Wiseman's writing was directed by these values is undeniable given that these values are reiterated in several interviews she granted, particularly those with Roslyn Belkin, Mervin Butovsky, and Harry Gutkin. Since Wiseman is such an articulate critic of her own writing, I will preface each section of this conclusion with Wiseman's own comments so as to reinforce the validity of my own assessment of her work.

. . .

"My consciousness is Jewish; it's a Jewish consciousness and I think I'm a flower in somebody else's garden. I'm a different flower and my selfhood and my 'otherness' I sing about, because everybody else is busy singing about theirs, and unfortunately, in order to sing about theirs, they appear to have a great need to make theirs better by setting up some kind of unreal contrast with mine" (Belkin 152)

As the above quotation indicates, Wiseman's writing is above all grounded in her subject position--most obviously in her Jewish roots. But Judaism affected her writing in ways which transcended religious observance. Indeed, the foremost legacy of her upbringing, as she notes in her interview with Mervin Butovsky, was "[the] very strong moral and ethical standpoint from which everything was judged" (6). Wiseman's writing is grounded in the moral tenets she derived from this upbringing. In essence, it is a vision which celebrates life, and the human behaviour which nurtures and perpetuates it. Undoubtedly, Wiseman's Jewish roots likewise deepened her awareness of the sanctity of life. Like all Jews, Wiseman was keenly aware of the persecution they have perennially suffered at the hands of others. Since she was continually reminded of life's fragility, she wanted society to foster values promoting harmony rather than division.

As a Ukrainian immigrant growing up in a British Commonwealth country, Wiseman was further reminded of her 'otherness.' Indeed, Canada's links with Britain were perpetually reinforced within its educational system and literature. Wiseman's descriptions of Canadian schooling within Crackpot, and her evocation of Hoda's suffering within this system, are probably derived from Wiseman's own educational experience. Wiseman's writing betrays her awareness of the injustices wrought by nationalism. Her sympathy for those

marginalized by the dominant cultural ideology is evident in both Crackpot and Testimonial Dinner. Both these works focus on the unjust treatment of the marginalized--in these cases, the marginalization of Jews and aboriginal people by the Canadian government.

A third dimension of Wiseman's subject position contributed to her outlook: her gender. As the letters between Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman indicate, it was difficult for women to assume a literary career within Canada in the time in which they were writing. Wiseman's difficulties in finding a niche within the Canadian literary establishment reinforced her sympathy for the difficulties faced by all women within patriarchal structures. This was deepened by her awareness of women's peripheral status within Judaism. Wiseman's critique of Judaism is most apparent within The Sacrifice where the female characters are expected to accept passively and without question their allotted place. As Wiseman matured, she became more active in her dissent regarding such sexism. In Crackpot, for instance, Wiseman refuses to accept this passive role for women by presenting Hoda as a rebel who denies her peripheral status within society. Women's peripheral role is also denied by the publication of Old Woman at Play, a memoir which celebrates female creativity through the example of Chaika Waisman's doll-making.

Obviously, to understand Wiseman's writing it is necessary to see it in conjunction to her subject position as a Jewish

Canadian female writer. As a triply marginalized individual, Wiseman was keenly aware of the stifling effects of marginalization, and her writing shows compassion for all humans who share in this experience. By the end of her career, as "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables" indicates, Wiseman's writing expands to encompass "the general experience of marginalization" (Greene 223). By promoting values which encourage community rather than division, Wiseman encourages her readers to subvert the hierarchical structure at the essence of existing societies.

. . .

"A society's mores become rigid and meaningless when you follow them without question. They become chains, prisons. An act which breaks the mores forces you to redefine them. It seems to me that one really learns truth at the point where the possible transgresses the permissible, at the edge of what society allows" (Gutkin 205)

As the above comment indicates, Wiseman is particularly critical of societal mores, because they deny the unique circumstances which govern people's actions. In Wiseman's moral system, evil stems from closed-mindedness--that is, when people maintain rigid notions of right and wrong. Wiseman advocates tolerance towards others. When individuals maintain preconceived notions about other human beings, they lose sight of people's humanity and their inherent worth as fellow human beings. Labelling others, therefore, limits compassion for them. This, of course, is the lesson Abraham learns after killing Laiah: his preconceived views about Laiah, his inability to see her as a fellow human being,

lead to her murder. And, as has been noted in each chapter, the injustices wrought by preconceptions are likewise the focus of The Lovebound, Crackpot, Testimonial Dinner, and "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables."

As mentioned in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the "basic opposition in all of Wiseman's work is between caring and callousness. Caring blossoms into understanding and love, callousness hardens into blindness and prejudice, erasure and destruction" (Greene 223). The most moral characters in Wiseman's work are those who love living things for their inherent value--those who ignore preconceived, divisive abstractions. The most morally reprehensible characters, on the other hand, are those characters who lose sight of the humanity of others by virtue of their close-mindedness.

Ironically, the most moral character within Wiseman's work is a lowly ghetto prostitute, Hoda. Of all Wiseman's major characters, only Hoda is completely open-minded, the character least tainted by a tendency to label others. Hoda betrays an expansive compassion for others--a compassion nurtured by her indiscriminate love of all human beings. Several other less developed characters within Wiseman's work display similar, nonjudgemental compassion for others; most notably, Miss Nomer in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," and Mrs. Tize, the nurse who comforts Pipick in Crackpot. It becomes evident while reading Old Woman at Play that the role model for all these characters was Wiseman's mother, Chaika Waisman, a woman whose

own doll-making exemplified the same altruistic compassion present in her daughter's writing.

On a slightly lower moral plane are those characters who are initially tainted by a tendency to label others, but who eventually realize their error and are reformed because of it. The most obvious example of such a reformed character is Abraham in The Sacrifice. While he is initially tainted by his inflexible beliefs and attitudes towards others, he learns the danger of such rigidity after murdering Laiah. At the end of the novel, Abraham is regretful of his intolerance, and passes his newfound wisdom down to his grandson, Moses.

At the other extreme are those characters who remain callous to the emotional needs of others, blinded as they are by their preconceived notions about them. Of course, the most obvious example of such an evil character is Nix in The Lovebound. Nix is unable to view the Jews as fellow human beings, since he is blinded by his preconceived notions about them. Because he loses sight of their humanity, they merely become fodder to satisfy his whims. His sophistry succeeds in tainting Cass Mananagorse's perceptions about the passengers as well. In the end, Cass is just as willing to return the passengers to Germany as is Nix. Gorp, the director of the hospice in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables," treats the adolescents with the same deplorable callousness as does Nix. A third, minor character who displays a similar inability to transcend abstractions is Miss Boltholsup in Crackpot.

. . .

" . . . I wonder whether the kind of moral quality of a lot of Jewish stories isn't somewhere in the background because what I am aware of is that in my own reading, in the early stories that I read, I was not reading to find out practical, sensible knowledge . . . but to find out how things work. I saw stories really as parables, as morality plays. The writer is telling me this to show me how to think, to show me what happens if; to show me how to live, essentially." (Butovsky 8)

Growing up, Adele Wiseman was acutely aware of the value of literature as a disseminator of values. In her interview with Mervin Butovsky, Wiseman mentions that stories were critical to her moral development and sense of identity. This should hardly be surprising given that Jews regard the written word so highly. But its importance for Wiseman was further compounded by her sense of marginalization within Canadian society: in a world which deemed her peripheral, stories provided Wiseman with a sense of her own value, and a set of personal values to which she could adhere. Not surprisingly, ancestral traditions and the stories which maintain them are paramount in all of Wiseman's work.

Wiseman's characters tend to fall into two camps: those with strong family ties and those without. The luckiest characters throughout Wiseman's work are those who have maintained strong ancestral traditions. Hoda and Yesh (of The Lovebound) both withstand persecution in part by remembering family ties, particularly the oral stories that remind them of their roots. Those characters who lack family traditions--and there are many such characters in Wiseman's work--flail about like boats without

rudders. They seem lost and perpetually in search of guidance. The most obvious examples of such alienated characters are Isaac in The Sacrifice and Pipick in Crackpot.

For those who lack ancestral traditions to guide their lives, or those whose traditions are incompatible with survival in the immediate environment, Wiseman offers a solution: myth-making. Hoda uses this in Crackpot, as does Josh in "Goon of the Moon and the Expendables." In a world which has deemed them peripheral, both these characters survive by inverting the societal hierarchy; that is, by asserting their primacy where others have deemed them expendable. Sometimes this myth-making extends to word-play. Both Hoda and Josh, for instance, create words to assert their values. Neologisms enable the characters to reject the conventional mores of the world around them by critiquing the mores implied by language itself.

. . .

"Remember when I wrote The Sacrifice I was in my last year at university and I was still held by all the academic strictures about what you can or cannot do. So in one sense, The Sacrifice is a much more naive novel, an orthodox novel because I was close to what I could do. I did not at that point know--nor at that point had I dealt with myself to the extent, that I did later on--the thing that you can do. Between the two novels there was a long play that I wrote, and a good deal of time during which I realized that to really be true to what I knew I had to venture beyond the well-constructed novel, and that there was more possible." (Butovsky 12)

While all of Wiseman's work shares the same moral values, the sheer diversity in her work is equally striking. Her

writing, which began as an examination of Jews on the periphery of society, gradually expanded to include consideration of many marginalized groups. By the end of her career, Wiseman's work had examined the injustices faced by women, the mentally and physically challenged ("Goon the Moon and the Expendables"), the mentally ill ("On Wings of Tongue"), and the Metis (in Testimonial Dinner). Just as striking as the diversity in subject matter, however, is the generic experimentation so evident in her later work. As Wiseman matured, she became dissatisfied with traditional generic forms because they failed to capture the essence of her moral vision. In time, Wiseman began to express her distaste of orthodoxy through rejection of generic conventions. Instead of abiding by the strictures of genre, Wiseman sought stylistic forms which fit her particular vision for each work.

Wiseman's second novel, Crackpot, is controlled by the Kabbalistic metaphor at its base. As the epigraph by Isaac Luria suggests, human comprehension is forever compromised by people's inability to ascertain everything through reasoning. Consequently, Hoda, like all human beings, is marred by an incomplete understanding the world around her: her meandering mind reflects her continual attempts to clarify her perceptions of the events which occurred in her life. Hence, Wiseman sought to make her novel a mirror image of Hoda's probing mind. One of the means by which Hoda reasserts her presence amid a society which has sought to repress her is through fervent word-play. As

such, the novel is voluminous, expanding as it does to three hundred pages.

Like Wiseman's second novel, Testimonial Dinner is experimental. In this play, Wiseman mixes factual history with fictional narrative in order to illustrate the ever-pervasive effect of past history on present events: the ill treatment of the Metis by the Canadian government under John A. MacDonald is replicated by future generations of Canadians. By giving a voice to Louis Riel, Wiseman reinterprets authoritative versions of Canadian history in order to give a voice to those who have traditionally been marginalized. The play also suggests Wiseman's qualms with written history, particularly its tendency to neglect the reflections of those peripheral to the mainstream.

Wiseman's memoir about her mother's doll-making, Old Woman at Play, is likewise constructed to reinforce the message of this work. Chaika Waisman's art is governed by her understanding of "die Nattoor." As such, her mother is keenly aware of her inability to control nature, and she is reminded of life's impermanence. Her dolls reflect this subservience to nature--her acceptance that life's mysteries, its pain and joy, cannot be understood through reason. Instead, she accepts life's multiplicity, intuitively attempting to make harmony out of fragmentation through her dolls. Old Woman at Play is constructed to suggest a human being's fragmented perception of the world. The absence of any chapter divisions within this book indicates that her mother's understanding is partial and

tentative. Chaika Waisman arrives at truths in a haphazard fashion, following the intuition of her hands.

The essays in Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood, most of which were published in the 1980s, display the same characteristic experimentation present in much of Wiseman's later writing. Wiseman once again rejects the conventions of genre, preferring to create essays which embody her values within their stylistic components. As such, Wiseman's essays are exploratory exercises filled with tentative theses and conclusions. This style reinforces Wiseman's belief that truth is contextual.

. . .

The Canadian literary canon contains few writers of such diversity as Adele Wiseman. As this thesis indicates, Wiseman's corpus extends well beyond the fiction for which she is chiefly remembered. To remain true to her moral vision, Wiseman needed to engage in a multiplicity of genres. Her distrust of orthodoxy, in turn, compelled her to alter existing generic conventions in order to express her personal vision for each work. Such radical experimentation must be seen as an outgrowth of her complex subject position. As a Jewish Canadian female, Wiseman was keenly aware of her peripheral position in mainstream society. Her need to question and reevaluate existing literary conventions reflected her belief that such conventions were restrictive and exclusionary.

Despite the heterogeneity apparent in Wiseman's work, it is nonetheless united by a single underlying vision: Wiseman writes

in order to teach people how to live--especially in communion with others. All of her writing radiates immense compassion for human beings, but particularly the dispossessed. Her writing is a plea to reject hierarchical structures in society--structures which divide people into "haves" and "have-nots." She presents readers with an alternative, salutary vision of a world where such divisions are obliterated in favour of heterogeneity and an accompanying awareness of each individual's unique contribution to the whole.

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