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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
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Graceful Communities, Eventually
An Exploration of the Relationship between Community and Grace in
The Double Hook, Fugitive Pieces, The Shipping News, and Crackpot

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Marya Moore

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Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree in
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Department of English
Graduate Studies
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ABSTRACT

Within the communities of *The Double Hook*, *Fugitive Pieces*, *The Shipping News*, and *Crackpot*, unexplainable and incomprehensible phenomena identify and define grace. Chapter one examines *The Double Hook*; analyzing the community's decimated state at the opening of the novel, it proceeds to an understanding of the role of grace within the community's recuperation of wholeness. Chapter two, focusing on *Fugitive Pieces*, examines an individual's responsibility in receiving grace and the manner in which grace expands when it is actively present in a community. Chapter three explores issues of incest, adultery, and death, which confront the community in *The Shipping News*. Rather than being destroyed by disaster, the community, consistently through the grace it receives, extends grace to those who most need it. Finally, chapter four reveals a community reconfigured by grace from a place of exclusion into a place of inclusion and restoration in *Crackpot*. The different perspective that each novel presents on the relationship between community and grace offers further insight into the incomprehensibility of grace and its consistent presence in Canadian literature.

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to my husband, Gregory, who has given me a greater understanding of it,
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: <i>The Double Hook</i> : Grace Unmerited.....	8
Chapter 2: <i>Fugitive Pieces</i> : Grace Expanded.....	39
Chapter 3: <i>The Shipping News</i> : Grace Extended.....	83
Chapter 4: <i>Crackpot</i> : Grace Received.....	115
Conclusion.....	141
Works Cited.....	146

Introduction

Ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in.

- Leonard Cohen

Although Flannery O'Connor persuasively argues that "for the last few centuries we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface, that there is no ultimate divine source, that the things of the world do not pour forth from God," there is, nevertheless, consistently embedded within literature a distinct yet elusive expression of what can only be defined as the grace of God (157). While it can be argued that "in twentieth century fiction it increasingly happens that a meaningless, absurd world impinges on the sacred consciousness of author and character" and that "author and character seldom now go out to explore and penetrate a world in which the sacred is reflected" (O'Connor 158), the sacred persists within literature, for as Shusaku Endo states, "there is something in the human unconscious that searches for God" (qtd. in Updike 5). This search for God plays out both consciously and unconsciously within literature, for grace is everywhere evident in humanity; it only needs to be recognized for what it is. While O'Connor argues that society has lost the ability to recognize "the Divine" because "the moral sense has been bred out of certain sections of the population, like the wings have been bred off certain chickens to produce more white meat on them," society's inability or refusal

to recognize the Divine does not in any way diminish the presence of the Divine within the world (qtd. in Hawkins 1). O'Connor's frustrated statement that "this is the generation of wingless chickens, which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said God was dead" rings true, yet it only applies to humanity's *conscious* understanding of the moral, of God (qtd. in Hawkins 1). What O'Connor's statement does not address is the enduring presence of the Divine regardless of man's understanding or recognition. The four novelists under exploration in this thesis are not wingless chickens, nor overtly religious writers; they are, through their novels, whether intentionally or not, chroniclers of grace, for a distinct sense of Divine grace permeates each of the communities within their novels. Through an intensive study of four novels, three by Canadian authors and one by an American author with a Canadian heritage, this M.A. thesis examines the relationship between grace and literary representations of Canadian communities: community revived through grace unmerited in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959), community remembered through grace expanded in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), community returned to through grace extended in Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News* (1993; though written by an American, this novel is set in a Canadian community), and community as restorative resting place through grace received in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot* (1974).

Canadian literature has always been interested in the subject of community, for "it is an elemental fact of our experience that the substance of our happiness—or of our misery—in this life is made up of the personal relationships into which we are born or which we form" (Mackey 39). Because community relationships are "the significant portion of all human achievement," it is paramount that we "understand them, how they come about, how they

grow, how they die,” and how they play a part in grace (Mackey 39). According to Bernard Lonergan, community

is not just a number of men [and women] within a geographical frontier. It is an achievement of common meaning. . . . [which] is realized by will, especially by permanent dedication, in the love that makes families, in the loyalty that makes states, in the faith that makes religions. Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgement, common commitments begin and end. (226)

The size or location of community does not matter; a community, like a family, can be as small as two individuals or as large as a nation state; what matters is its unity and cohesiveness. Canadian literature has been interested in issues of community not primarily because accepting or refusing a role within community is a form of individualistic expression, but because in Canada our response to community has often been a question of survival: life or death.

According to John Moss, “nothing else in human experience reaches across space and through time like literature to draw the species together in communities of human consciousness and conscience. . . . Novels are neither documents nor messages, but visions of reality from fixed perspectives” (*Sex* 5). Moss outlines three distinct properties of literature: literature is timeless; it draws humanity together into community with each other; and it offers perspective, a distinctive view of reality. Therefore, if novels are visions of reality and if grace is repeatedly present within them, then grace is a part of that reality. Grace is timeless; it too draws humanity into community with each other and with God. Attesting to a larger reality, it points to God’s presence in our midst. While secular society may refuse to acknowledge God as the source of grace and may prefer that moments of grace remain regulated to the world of happenstance, grace is more than coincidence. Grace is an

undeserved gift from God, yet “grace does not partition our lives into religious moments and non-religious moments; nor does it divide mankind into religious souls and non-religious temperaments. Our human life in its entirety is borne along by it and energized” (Fransen 340). In this view, grace is active in humanity whether it is consciously recognized or not. Its sometimes subtle and other times deliberate expression in literature is a result of humanity’s relationship to grace—we can’t live without it.

Even though grace is not easily defined outside of religion, it often finds expression in secular literature. While the primary Christian interpretation of grace, according to Charles C. Ryrie, “is the unmerited favour of God shown to man primarily in the person and work of Jesus Christ,” the literary presentation of grace is closer to the concept of common or sufficient grace (244). As Louis Berkhof observes,

the distinction between common and special grace is not one that applies to grace as an attribute in God. There are no two kinds of grace in God, but only one. It is that perfection of God in virtue of which He shows unmerited and even forfeited favor to man. This one grace of God manifests itself, however, in different gifts and operations. The richest manifestation of it is seen in those gracious operations of God, which aim at, and result in, the removal of the guilt, the pollution, and the punishment of sin, and the ultimate salvation of sinners. But while this is the crowning work of the grace of God, it is not its only manifestation. *It [grace] appears also in the natural blessings which God showers upon man in the present life, in spite of the fact that man has forfeited them and lies under the sentence of death. It is seen in all that God does to restrain the devastating influence and development of sin in the world, and to maintain and enrich and develop the natural life of mankind in general and of those individuals who constitute the human race.* (emphasis added 435)

This thesis does not, by citing the Reformed perspective on common grace, adhere itself to Reformed theology nor does it assume to unravel the theoretical complexities of the doctrine

of grace; rather, the use of Berkhof's definition of common grace must be read only as an initiatory attempt to situate a base from which to understand this thesis' use of grace as it will be applied to the novels under study. This thesis does not concern itself with the theological intricacies of the debate on grace (of which there are many); rather, it is concerned with the attempt to both discern and understand the presence of grace in literature and its subsequent connection to community. Within the communities of these four novels, unexplainable and incomprehensible phenomena identify and define grace: the unmerited healing of something long broken, the survival of one in the midst of the destruction of hundreds of thousands, the sudden return of something thought lost forever, or the ability to accept that which was not chosen or deserved.

Each of the four novels is set in a distinct region of Canada and was chosen in order to represent a mosaic of Canadian community, ensuring that the relationship between grace and community is not simply a regional effect. *The Double Hook* is set in the foothills of British Columbia. *Fugitive Pieces*, shifts from the horrors of the Second World War in Europe to Toronto. *The Shipping News* moves from the United States to the harsh starkness of a Newfoundland outport, and *Crackpot* plays out within the Jewish community of Winnipeg during the years spanning the First and Second World Wars.¹ The authors, one with a Catholic belief system, two with a Jewish heritage, and a fourth with "little religion" in her life, provide yet another diversified sampling, ensuring that the relationship between grace and community is not simply the result of shared religious beliefs (Campbell 3).

Though each novel arguably offers a central protagonist, it is actually the community that functions within each as both protagonist and life-source of the story. Too often, critics

¹ The full justification for the choice of including Proulx, who is American, is given in the chapter on *The Shipping News*.

tend to focus on the individual when they should be focusing on the story of the community. Thus the following chapters consider the ways in which these four novels answer the following questions: What makes a community a community? What happens when it ceases to be one? How can a community be revitalized? Most importantly, the thesis as a whole answers this question: Is community the vehicle through which grace is meted out in Canadian literature?

According to William Harmon and Hugh Holman, “Cleanth Brooks uses the term ‘functional metaphor’ to describe the way in which the metaphor is able to have ‘referential’ and ‘emotive’ characteristics” which move beyond the initial referent of the metaphor to “become a direct means in itself of representing a truth incommunicable by any other means” (316). Harmon and Holman note that when this happens “clearly . . . [the metaphor] is behaving as a symbol” (316). To explain this metaphorical transformation into symbol, they cite W. M. Urban’s argument that “the metaphor becomes a symbol when by means of it we embody an ideal content not otherwise expressible” (507). This thesis examines how this metaphorical transformation occurs within the novels, and how the symbolic, functional metaphor of community represents intentionally, and at other times unintentionally, the truth or inexpressibility of grace, which “is incommunicable by any other means” (316).

The first chapter of the thesis looks at the central role community plays in Shelina Watson’s novel, *The Double Hook*. The chapter analyzes the community’s decimated state at the opening of the novel and proceeds to an understanding of the role of grace within the community’s recuperation of wholeness. The second chapter is devoted to *Fugitive Pieces*, and it examines an individual’s responsibility in receiving grace and the manner in which grace expands when it is actively present in a community. Chapter three explores issues of

incest, adultery, deception, and death, which confront the community in *The Shipping News*. Rather than being destroyed by disaster, the community functions as a force of resilience that allows individuals to triumph in impossible circumstances, for it consistently through the grace it receives extends grace to those who most need it. Finally, chapter four reveals a community reconfigured by grace from a place of fragmentation into a place of rediscovery, restoration, and redemption, in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*.

Conventional religion may be mainly absent or on the periphery of these four novels, yet grace is not. What are the reasons for this and how can grace be interpreted in novels that do not overtly acknowledge their reliance upon it? The novels seem to reveal that the acceptance found in a community begins within family and moves outwards into the larger society. Is this how grace works as well? Such questions, along with others about the connections between grace and community in four Canadian novels, guide the exploration of this study.

Chapter One:

The Double Hook: Grace Unmerited

The Double Hook's power and endurance as “the watershed of contemporary Canadian fiction” and its resonance with its readers arises not out of its ability to escape definition as a modernist or postmodernist novel but out of its connection to simple truth (Bowering 187). Sheila Watson recognizes what so many other Canadian writers writing both before and after her have recognized: the presence and importance of the small town in the Canadian psyche. Canada is a nation of small towns strung out across a vast distance of land with each town struggling both for connection to and independence from the country as a whole. Canadian literature often reflects this condition, for it flirts with the schizophrenic desires emanating from within Canada's connection to the small town, revealing that Canadians harbour within themselves equal desires for both a return to and an escape from the small town. The novels that engage the image of the small town do so in order to struggle with the questions of relevancy, permanence, and artistic stagnancy that exist in the small town atmosphere, which is linked so closely to the Canadian mindset. The debate surges back and forth between whether places like D.C. Scott's Viger and Stephen Leacock's Mariposa still exist or whether they have been swallowed up in the cynicism of city life and are only attainable and valid in memory. Analyzing the ubiquitous presence of the small town in Canadian literature reveals a simpler issue: the innate desire within humanity for community. The small town has become a staple in Canadian literature to the point where a solid definition of what constitutes a small town is elusive. Yet fictions that use the archetype of the small town

represent the desire for reconnection with or escape from community at the heart of their depictions of small town life. Therefore, a sense of community is integral to the small town. Rather than hedging the desire for community under the traditional trappings of small town idiosyncrasy where it can get overlooked, Sheila Watson pairs her quintessential image of the small town down to a twelve-person community. In *The Double Hook*, Watson opens up the body of the small town, strips the flesh from its skeletal frame, and then counts the ribs, revealing what makes a community a community, what happens when it ceases to be what it is, and how to return it to what it should be. *The Double Hook* is a novel that weaves the complexity of grace in and out of the simplified truth of our need for community, for Watson resurrects the body and soul of a community long-dead in order to reveal her vision of the double hook—the darkness and light—of life lived individually and communally.

In a rare public discussion on her novel, Watson explained that “there was something I wanted to say: about how people are driven, how if they have no art, how if they have no tradition, how if they have no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensibility” (“What” 15). To have no art, tradition, or ritual is synonymous with isolation, for art, tradition, and ritual grow out of community. Community and tradition are interdependent, because “society, in order to maintain its identity, indeed in order to exist at all, needs a tradition,” for “tradition shapes and is in turn shaped by a community” (Mackey 107, 111). Watson herself comes from a community steeped in tradition and ritual, for she was raised Catholic. According to Steven Scobie, “the religious element is seldom obtrusive in Watson’s writing—certainly, *The Double Hook* is in no way a narrowly dogmatic novel—but it is always undeniably present” (262). Because of its complexity and wealth of allusions, Watson’s novel escapes being pigeonholed as a

traditional “Catholic novel”; however, elements of Flannery O’Connor’s definition of a Catholic novel resonate throughout the work:

The Catholic novel can’t be categorized by subject matter, but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality. It cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace. And it will see this grace as working through nature, but as entirely transcending it, so that a door is always open to possibility and the unexpected in the human soul. Its center of meaning will be Christ; its center of destruction will be the devil. No matter how this view of life may be fleshed out, these assumptions form its skeleton. (O’Connor 197)

Yet, though O’Conner’s definition applies to *The Double Hook*, Watson’s writing transcends the limits of religious genre fiction, for “Watson does not preach in her works, but neither does she avoid the implications of her beliefs” (Scobie 262). There is a reverence with which Watson treats Christian allusion in her work and a beauty in the images that she creates. She does not use Christian allusions contemptuously or with mockery; rather, she respects the images she uses. This respect allows her to engage classical, biblical, and native allusions in her text without creating a sense of appropriation or manipulation.

When Watson was asked if she still “embraced the Catholic faith,” she replied, “like Pascal, groaning” (Lang 471).¹ This groaning echoes in her writing. It is not a groaning of disinterest, reluctance, or forced practice but a groaning coming out of her struggle to understand her faith. *The Double Hook* emits such a groaning, like that wrenched out of the wrestle between Jacob and God (*NIV Bible*, Gen. 32.22.30). Watson seems to have wrestled with God in the writing of her novel, for the faith that emerges is a hard won, gritty faith

¹ Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote the “Provincials,” which deals with “grace and human liberty”, and “the ‘Pensees’, [which] are an unfinished work”: an apology for Christianity (Giroux 1,2). He also created Pascal’s Wager. Pascal’s statement: “man is an incomprehensible monster at once sovereign greatness and sovereign misery” is echoed by Robert Kroetsch’s belief that Sheila Watson’s work attempts to “tell the sacredness and profanity of existence” (Kroetsch 215; Giroux 3).

carried by a sometimes seemingly incompatible grace. While none of Watson's characters are "totally depraved," they are "incomplete" in themselves and "prone to evil," yet at the same time they are consistently "redeemable when [their] own efforts are assisted by grace" (O'Connor 197). This seeming disjunction, where evil is redeemed undeservedly by grace, produces a novel that grapples and groans with the realities of life and death and forces its readers to grapple with the complexity of unmerited grace.

In order to create a community in need of grace, Watson very carefully constructs within the first few lines of the novel a skeletal community bereft of true community. The opening list in which she chronicles the inhabitants of the "folds of the hills" reveals through its form and its language that the characters within the work are "individuals, alone, living together. Together, living alone" (*Hook* 11; Kroestch 215). Each grouping of people is set off from the group preceding and following it through the repetition of the word "lived" (*Hook* 11). Though "lived" is repeated six times it does not connote life; rather, with each repetition, the word's impact is deadened until it becomes merely a listed description. The irony here is important to the tone of the novel, for the people in the folds of the hills at the opening of the novel should not be described as people who live, but as people who cower.

Margaret Atwood argues that the old woman, Mrs. Potter, "haunts the living characters as a ghost or death goddess. While still "alive," she has in fact been dead; she has dominated those around her and has denied them life, their own existence" (202). Though she is correct to argue that Mrs. Potter has dominated those around her and has denied them life, Atwood fails to explain how or why the old woman is able to dominate so many people, especially those outside of her own house. The answer, though simple, is crucial for understanding the novel. What makes the old woman so powerful is her ability to deny community interaction.

It is not their existence separately as individuals that the old woman denies, but their existence as the community that she inhibits.

Though the old woman is really just a ghost when the community sees her fishing in their individual ponds, their reactions reveal that her trespasses and her lack of communication with them are common occurrences. Her furtive slipping between the fences is not an action promoting communal integration, for her intentions are not communally based; instead, they are selfish. She never shares the fish that she catches nor does she speak to anyone. Ara complains, “I might as well be dead for all of her. . . . Passing her own son’s house and never offering a fry even today when he’s off and gone with the post” (12). Instead of breaking down the walls of alienation, the old woman’s actions encourage the re-enforcement of boundaries. Felix and Heinrich’s immediate response when they see the old woman fishing in their ponds is a resolve to put up fences or to mend them. Felix muses, “someday I’ll put a catcher on the fence and catch her for once and all,” while Heinrich angrily declares to his sister and mother, “I’m going down to put a fence right across the creek . . . so James Potter’s mother can’t go up and down here any more” (15, 18). The phrases “once and for all” and “can’t go up and down here any more” reveal insight into the daily life of the community. Mrs. Potter, recalling Satan’s actions in the book of Job, has been going “up and down” the creek fishing on the properties of the community even before people start seeing her ghost (*NIV Bible*, Job 1.7).² Her secretive fishing has perverted the symbol of the creek, which should be a unifying symbol as it flows from one household to the next, into a symbol of division. The creek is drying up, and what is left of it has been fragmented by the fences that the community erects in order to keep Mrs. Potter out.

² “The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the Lord, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it’” (*NIV Bible*, Job 1.7).

Because people do not know what she fishes for so determinedly, they grow suspicious. Her haunting presence stagnates the community with fear, throwing them into the isolation in which they now live.

Coyote, Kip, and Mrs. Potter repeatedly appear and disappear from the community's vision throughout the novel. Their elusive presence is linked with a secretive search for "the glory." They form a type of corrupted trinity in which they each represent a different faction of the fear of death. Coyote, who "[makes] the land his pastime," represents a perverted God figure full of deception who cannot be relied upon for provision or guidance (*Hook* 13). Coyote's numerous deceptions are life-threatening for the community, for each of them has experienced "Coyote reaching out reflected glory. Like fire to warm. Then shoving the brand between a man's teeth right into his belly's pit" (13, 50). Coyote cannot create the glory; he can only "reflect" it, deceptively. Because the community is so divided, they cannot discern the true glory, and therefore Coyote's reflections appear authentic.

Kip, Coyote's "servant," can be compared to the Holy Spirit of the trinity, for he is Coyote's messenger within the community (26). However, his messages are doubly deceptive. He carries Coyote's words of deception, which he perverts further for his own purpose because he is trying to catch the glory for himself. Because of this, his messages bring only miscommunication, which results in a fear of communication within the community. No one wants to talk to Kip or to receive his messages, and this drives the characters even further apart. When Kip comes looking for Lenchen, Heinrich tells him: "Get out of here. . . . Wherever you are there's trouble. If a man is breaking a horse when you come round it hangs itself on the halter, or throws itself, or gets out and back on the range. Take your message back where it came from" (18). Heinrich, as well as the rest of the

community, knows that Kip, as he carries out Coyote's calling and seeks to satisfy his own greed, is "fear making mischief, laying traps for men," and therefore no one trusts him or his motives (50).

At least twice in the novel, Mrs. Potter's name is synonymous with fear. The narrator tells us that "since the fury of the morning [James] had not been able to act. He'd thrown fear as a horse balks" (33). This can be read as a metaphor referring directly to the murder of Mrs. Potter, whom James has thrown down the stairs. Later, while reflecting on Coyote and his servants, Kip makes an allusion to Mrs. Potter's ghostly haunting of the community: "fear skulking round. Fear walking in the living shape of the dead. No stone was big enough, no pile of stones, to weigh down fear" (50). Because Mrs. Potter defies her own death through haunting the community, she fulfills the third part of the inverted trinity. Death cannot weigh her down or restrict her, and thus she functions as an "anti-Christ" figure (see Northey 90). Her fishing in the ponds of each household becomes the final embodiment of that three-fold fear that grips the whole community. The fear she represents is an irrational yet grounded fear. Because the community lives in a harsh and unforgiving landscape where drought threatens them with starvation and thirst, fear of death through starvation is constant and paramount. Watching the old woman fish, never sharing in her catch, the members of the community have learned that they must turn elsewhere for help. When she sees Mrs. Potter, the widow Wagner asks herself "what does she want? So old, so wicked, fishing the fish of others. Slipping her line under our fence before my boy can get the fish on his hook" (16). When the community members see the old woman fishing in their ponds, they see her as not only trying to take what is not her own but as actively limiting their own chances of survival, and when one's survival is so openly threatened, fear of death becomes pervasive.

Fish are significant on many levels in the novel. Margot Northey points out that “the recurrent play upon fish and fishing illustrates Watson’s deliberate use of a single symbol for multiple effects as opposed to two contrasting symbols”; however, though Northey recognizes fish/fishing as a Christian symbol, she does not make any mention of *why* Watson uses it as the unifying symbol of the novel (90). If O’Connor’s definition of a Catholic novel can be applied to Watson’s novel, then perhaps Watson’s choice of fish and fishing can be understood through O’Connor’s statement that in “a Catholic novel” the “center of meaning will always be Christ” and the “center of destruction will be the devil” (197). Fish are a central image in Christianity, recalling not only such events as Christ’s miracle of the loaves and fishes and his command to his disciples to be fishers of men but also the persecution of the early church, when drawing the fish symbol revealed whether or not one was part of the community of believers.³ Because of its many associations to Christ and Christian community, Watson’s choice of fish/fishing as the central symbol of the novel, which is concerned with the concepts of community and grace, is highly appropriate. However, just as Christianity is often perverted through false practice, Watson chooses to pervert one of its central symbols through making it the domain of the old woman, Mrs. Potter. In the novel, fish/fishing remains associated with Christianity because of the strength of the traditional association, yet, because it is paired with a character who is representative of evil, the symbol also becomes associated with evil. Therefore, Watson’s center of meaning and center of destruction for the community are intricately connected, making neither good nor evil simple constructs but a complex double hook. Initially Watson’s purpose in subverting a

³ When two strangers met, if one was a Christian he/she drew the symbol of a fish in the sand, and since it represented the anagram for Jesus Christ Son of God, it acted as a symbol of identification for believers. Symbols of fish were also painted on the walls of the catacombs to direct Christians to their secret places of worship.

traditional Christian symbol is unclear; however, by the end of the novel, the single symbol, which has been paired with both evil and good, is redeemed in a dramatic triumph of grace over evil.

In order to highlight the schism between good and evil, Watson carefully attaches the Christian associations of fish/fishing to characters and settings that are representative of evil. The ability of evil to subvert something, a thing, which is symbolically good, reveals the power of the evil. When Mrs. Potter fails to share her fish, she rejects the community, and Northey observes in an interpretation of this failing that “Mrs. Potter is repeatedly seen by the other characters, fishing in the dried-up stream, but her catch, unlike Christ’s, never feeds the multitude of her neighbours. Rather, Mrs. Potter in her fishing is a kind of death symbol and anti-Christ, who ‘throws her line’ against God and against any loving relationship with her family” or neighbours. (90). While Northey’s interpretation is appropriate, it ends too soon, for Mrs. Potter is symbolically representative of an anti-Christ figure not simply because she “would throw her line against [God]” but because she actively leads the group of “twelve” into isolation and silence. Though she is, in a sense, resurrected, her haunting presence within the community only breeds hate (*Hook* 12). Even though Mrs. Potter assumes the symbols of Christ (fish and disciples), her actions are the opposite of everything Christ-like. She does not teach her community, her disciples, to love and serve one another, but to fear and distrust each other. Mrs. Potter’s neighbours and even her own immediate family interpret her actions as hostile and aggressive, and this attitude spreads throughout the community. The neighbours become suspicious not just of her but of each other, and Angel’s description of Theophil becomes true of the atmosphere of the whole community: “when suspicion buzzes on a mind . . . the maggots eat right in” (102).

Watson works subtly to signal that the people of *The Double Hook* are a people isolated from each other, living in the presence of death. The first action of the story is the preparation of breakfast juxtaposed with murder: “Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James’s voice. . . . James walking away. The old lady falling. . . . Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James’s will. By James’s hand. By James’s word” (11). By allowing the mundane preparation of breakfast to swallow up a murder, Watson reveals how skewed the community is at the opening of the novel. She works with both form and content to communicate the chaos of isolation and indifference in which the community lives. Structurally, chaos is introduced when the climax of the novel occurs on the first page with James’s murder of his mother. However, to make the events even more obscure, the murder is not fully realized or fleshed out until later in the book when the old woman’s ghost is returned to her body as Greta speaks the words anchoring spirit to flesh: “Ma’s lying dead in her bed” (37). By choosing to remain silent for as long as they can about the death of the old woman, Greta and James not only allow fear and misunderstanding to rule, they encourage it, for silence is completely antagonistic to community.

For a community to survive, there must be communication. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, communication defines the very nature of being human, which is of course dependent upon community: “the very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means *to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered” (287). Terrance Doody defines community as “a moral relationship that implies mutual personal responsibility” (6). Doody continues this definition by citing Ferdinand Toennies’ theory that the centre of community “is

understanding . . . based upon intimate knowledge of each other in so far as this is conditioned and advanced by direct interest of one being in the life of the other, and readiness to take part in his joy and sorrow” (Doody 12). From the start of *The Double Hook* there is an absence of intimate knowledge among the community members. One of the major obstacles separating the community from itself is its pervading attitude of indifference, which dominates the relationships of the characters. The Widow Wagner and Heinrich display profound indifference towards Lenchen’s pregnancy and her request for help: “You’ve got to take me, the girl said to the boy. Why don’t you just go? He said” (17). Heinrich casts Lenchen out of the house because he does not want to take the emotional risk of truly listening to her; he does not want to hear her plight, let alone recognize her condition or remember his responsibility to her as a brother. It is easier to be harsh and dismissive. Margaret Morriss explains that in the world of *The Double Hook* “ignorance is not only passively accepted, it is actively imposed” (83). She cites Coyote’s call, “In my mouth is forgetting/ In my darkness is rest,” as an example of the atmosphere of “repression” and apathy (*Hook* 20; Morriss 83). In a conversation between Lenchen and the Widow Wagner, Lenchen tries to overcome the indifference, yet she fails. The Widow Wagner is too self-absorbed with her own woes to want to understand someone else’s needs:

The shame. A fat pig of a girl, Almighty Father. Who would want such a girl?

I could tell you, the girl said.

You can tell me nothing, the Widow said. Go. Go. I hear nothing. I see nothing. Men don’t ask for what they’ve already taken. . . . You want to go, she said. Go. Don’t keep asking. Go. (20)

Through the Widow Wagner’s steadfast declaration, where she chooses to “hear nothing . . . [to] see nothing” (*Hook* 20), Watson echoes God’s accusation against the people of Israel in the book of Ezekiel 12.1: “They have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not

hear, for they are a rebellious people”(NIV Bible). This allusion to the rebellious house of Israel surfaces less subtly again later in the novel; however, at this point, the allusion works as an echo to underscore the tone of indifference in the community’s attitude, and it builds subconsciously towards the impact of the later reference.

The man who should be the spiritual leader of the people is also completely indifferent to the events around him: “Felix saw the old lady. . . . He thought: I’ll chase her out. But he sat, tipped back in his rocking chair, his belly bulging his bibbed overalls, while the old lady fished, while the thistles thrust his potato plants aside and the potatoes baked in the shallow soil” (15). This image recalls the Biblical parable of the Sower and the Seeds: “some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants” (NIV Bible, Matt.13.5-7). Felix is a character who holds a key to renewal for the community. Felix knows the traditions and rituals of the faith, but he has cloaked himself in forgetfulness. He has become completely insensible to the predicament of the community. Felix is the embodiment of the shallow soil and the soil mixed with thorns. He has heard the word, yet he does not cultivate it. In the verses following the parable, Jesus tells his disciples: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them” (NIV Bible, Matt. 13.14-15). The accusation of refusing to see, hear, and understand is repeated throughout the novel, emphasizing that the community has chosen to have callous hearts. Felix’ apathy affects not

only himself but is repeated in nature. The crops are baking and rotting in the fields because he does not care to harvest them. In community, everything is interdependent; one person's actions affect the rest. Just as Felix neglects his role as spiritual leader, he lets his harvest go to waste because he cares only about his own needs. Mackey argues, "we too often overlook the fact that communities are not formed in depth by the needs for food and shelter and safety or for physical facilities of any kind. The force that really forms human communities is . . . the force of spiritual tradition" (22). Because Felix no longer keeps the spiritual tradition alive within his community, the community itself falls apart, and the need for food becomes an individual pursuit. The parable of the Sower and the Seeds warns that those who hear the message but refuse it are vulnerable to the evil one who "snatches away" the seed (*NIV Bible*, Matt. 13.19). Felix' position as the spiritual leader and as the keeper of tradition in the community is destroyed by his own apathy, and this allows both Coyote and the old woman to terrorize the community, snatching away their hope.

The most astonishing show of indifference comes from Greta and James. In a conversation between William and Ara, Watson communicates the depraved indifference of Greta and James:

She wasn't in her bed, William said. She was laying on the floor, her rod broke beside her and the line tangled in the hook.

And Greta below stairs drinking tea with Angel, Ara said.

And James with his horse saddled about to go off. . . .

But Greta knew, Ara said.

There's no telling, William said, how a person will act. A man would be hard pressed to know what a person would do. James did nothing, he said. He just let her lie. He wouldn't move to put a hand on her. And Greta, he said, trying to send me off before I'd ever looked. You've no notion, he said to Ara, how curious a person can be. (42)

James and Greta's house is a moral vacuum where a son and daughter can act as if all is normal, while their mother lies dead in the room above them. Watson has created a setting devoid of meaningful ritual and tradition, where violence and insensibility have set in. The characters of *The Double Hook* anticipate violence. They see it in the elements and in the landscape, they feel it in themselves, and then they act upon the perverse sensations. The violence spreads from James's murderous act, to Kip's blinding, to the beating of Lenchen and Greta, and it culminates in the burning suicide of Greta.

The community lives in a land of the inverse where things are the opposite of what they should be. A son and daughter refuse to mourn the death of a mother; instead they are implicated in it. Light is feared while darkness is sought out: "He had tried to hold darkness to him, but it grew thin and formless and took shape as something else. He could keep his eyes shut after the night, but it would be light he knew" (34). Water, which should be a symbol of life and renewal, is a symbol of death. When Ara watches the old woman fish, an action that has already been established as conventionally being associated with sustaining life and with Christian community, she does not feel a sense of provision or security; rather, she "felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin" (13). Ara, who is barren, sees water as sterilizing; it deadens the very generative centre of a human being—the loins. Nature as a force is destructive rather than healing. The breaking of a storm is interpreted by Ara as an action of suffocation not as an act bringing relief from the drought: "Ara looked up too. For a minute she saw the light. Then only the raw skin of the sky drawn over them like a sack" (26). The desperately needed rain "swung into the mouth of the valley like a web. Strand added to strand. The sky, Ara thought, filled with adder tongues. With lariats. With bull-whips" (26). The imagery used to

describe the rain is associated with poison from the tongue of snakes and is consistent with Satanic imagery. Ara is not alone in her interpretation of the storm as something emanating from darkness, for Lenchen also believes that “in the sky above evil had gathered strength. It took body writhing and twisting under the high arch. Lenchen could hear the breath of it in the pause. The swift indrawing. The silence of the contracting muscle. The head drop for the wild plunge and hoof beat of it” (31). The language used to describe the breaking storm echoes language used to describe a birth; however, the storm is not described as the birthing of life-giving water; instead, it sounds like the birthing of evil. Because the community has been so “plagued” by Coyote and his servants, because they have continually reached out for his “reflected glory” only to be burned by his “fire,” their vision is clouded, and they readily mistake evil for good (50). Coyote has successfully blinded them to true glory, which here is revealed in the gracious gift of the much-needed rain, and as a result, all they see in the breaking of the storm is a manifestation of tyranny.

Most ironically, or perversely, isolation is a prevalent reality within the geographic closeness of the twelve-person community. Everywhere there are fences and doors shutting people out. Felix lives completely alone, his only company his animals. Absorbed in his growing isolation and insensibility, Felix is prepared even for his dogs to walk off and leave him just as Angel already has: “If they walked out of his gate like Angel, he would not ask if they had hay to lie on” (15). Even the land displays indifference: “If a man lost the road in the land round William Potter’s he couldn’t find his way by keeping to the creek bottom for the creek flowed this way and that at the land’s whim” (14). God’s landscape of rugged “hills and clefts” is described as clothes having “been dropped carelessly wrinkled on the bare floor of the world” (14).

The strongest and most ominous example of the dominance and consequences of isolation plays out in the character of Greta. People keep coming to her house trying to interact with her, but she repeatedly refuses their offerings. She tells Ara when Ara asks after the old woman that “you’ve been seeing things, Ara. . . . Like everyone else round here. You’ve been looking into other people’s affairs. Noticing this. Remarking that. Seeing too much. Hearing too much” (27). Greta chooses to read Ara’s concern as meddling and as gossip, even though Ara figuratively fills the role of a prophet within the community. Ara is willing to see and hear, and she tries to share the vision with the others, yet she too is controlled by fear and often fails to deliver her message or even to believe in it: “She had to talk to some living person. She had to tell someone what she felt about the old lady and the water. It couldn’t rise William would say. . . . There was no use telling Greta. Greta wouldn’t listen” (24). When Greta tells Ara that she’s been “seeing too much. Hearing too much” (27), both the parable of the Sower and the message from Ezekiel, to which the Widow Wagner’s grumblings already alluded, are reiterated as Watson emphasizes the point that this community is a rebellious house. Greta is full of bitterness and fear, which paralyse her, inhibiting her from functioning within the community. Through all the action of the novel, Greta never once leaves her house. She is afraid of what lies outside because “outside was floorless, roofless, wall-less” (55). Greta’s final act is to shut out those who are trying to save her from her own insanity. Greta becomes her house: “She felt hands on the knob. She felt hands twisting her ribs. Plucking the flowers on her housecoat and bruising them. Stripping off the leaves until her branch lay naked as a bone on the dusty floor” (73).

Throughout the passages leading up to her suicide, Greta is described in terms of vegetation and flowers: “Yet Greta stood almost full in the doorway like a tangle of wild

flowers grown up between them. All green and gold and purple. . . . Fat clinging clumps of purple flowers. Honey-tongued. Bursting from their green stems. Crowding against green leaves. . . . Lenchen. . . . shut her eyes against the tumult of branch and leaf” (52). Margaret Atwood’s observation regarding Greta’s appearance seems to argue that the use of the tree, vine, and flower imagery in Greta’s description is another example of inversion. She states: “Greta poses as Venus, in a flowered dressing gown. . . . But beneath all this lush vegetation she is really the destructive barren ice-goddess” (Atwood 41). Though Atwood’s observation is interesting, she does not follow through on whether or not the idea of Greta as “ice goddess” holds any relevancy to the rest of the work. In contrast to the vision of Greta postulating as Venus, but existing as ice-goddess, is this command in Ezekiel 17. 24: “All of the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it” (*NIV Bible*). Watson has been working with commands and images from the book of Ezekiel. Therefore, it is plausible to read Greta as the green tree that claims ascendancy and as a result is dried up by the hand of God. Both Lenchen and Ara can be read as representative of the low, dry tree that is made tall. Lenchen is representative of the low tree, for at the start of the novel, both her mother and Greta harangue her because she is pregnant. She is also beaten and abandoned by James; however, by the end of the novel she holds a celebrated position when she gives birth to her child in the center of a supportive community. As well, Ara, who is depicted as ugly and barren, ends the novel in a position of power, for she is the final human figure of the novel. This reading expands into the rest of the novel, for through it, the community can be understood as an example of the dry tree that is made to flourish once again by the grace of God.

Greta believes that power comes through independence. Her mother chose to seek answers to life on her own rather than through communal efforts, and Greta chooses to do the same. When the death of the old woman is discovered, the instinct of the rest of the community is towards a coming together. Greta, however, retreats further inside herself, hovering among insanity, fear, and aggression. From the moment that she realizes the old woman is dead, Greta sets herself up as a tall tree towering over the rest of the people. She claims the now vacant position of power, telling the community: "Get out. . . . Go away. This is my house. Now Ma's lying dead in her bed I give the orders here" (37). Greta rejects the community, believing that because "she [sits] in her mother's chair, the folds of the housecoat falling between her knees," she will be able to rule as forcefully as her mother had (33). She issues ultimatums, telling James to "send them away. . . . Drive them off the place" (53). Though Greta grasps at power, she is governed by two contrasting emotions: pride and fear. Neither one allows her to break out of her self-made prison to help others or even to accept help for herself. She tells Ara and Angel, "I don't want you coming Ara. I don't want anything from William. My post I'll come for myself. James'll come for it. . . . I'll come along and get my catalogue myself. I don't want anyone coming here disturbing James and me. . . . I want this house to myself" (32). Greta's complete rejection of community places her in a position of self-imposed isolation where, though she feels powerful, she is pathetic. Yet even in the face of her cruelty towards Ara and her rejection of the pregnant Lenchen, Greta evokes sympathy.⁴ Within the span of a page, Greta's voice changes from that of a ruthless bystander, who by her own confession is implicated in murder—"I heard her breath stop. . . . And the cold setting her flesh"—to that of a frightened victim: "He'll kill me

⁴ Recall O'Connor's observations that in a Catholic novel the characters are never "totally depraved"; they may be "incomplete" in themselves and "prone to evil" but are always "redeemable" (197).

too. . . . He'll shove me down for standing in his way" (55). When Lenchen petitions Greta woman to woman, offering her the grace of forgiveness, even then Greta rejects community and, consequently, her last chance for grace. Greta's pride, greed for power, and fear allow her to be cut down and destroyed like a tall tree brought low.

Though an atmosphere filled with fear, violence, indifference, and isolation dominates the community, there is a subtle working towards community growing throughout the novel. In the midst of voicing their fear, the characters betray urges within themselves, which propel them to seek each other out. Through this movement that simultaneously rejects and seeks out community, Watson reveals the central desire within humanity: the simultaneous fear of and need for connection with others. Lenchen, though she talks of leaving, first tries to share her fears with her family. It is only when she is rejected that she leaves. Kip fills the role of messenger, and though he perverts the messages he brings and though the community tries to ignore him and his messages, his imperfection and self-serving attitude somehow still achieve the central purpose of initiating communication within the community. William is a mailman, and his deliveries are the actual embodiment of communication even if Greta tries to refuse them. It is William who sends Angel to Greta, recognizing that Greta is isolated, "getting played out doing for Ma . . . She thinks nobody cares" (22). Ara feels an urge to get away from her house, and it brings her to her mother-in-law's house. Despite knowing how much Greta hates her and the cruelty of Greta, Ara arrives in Greta's kitchen because "she had to talk to some living person" (24). Lenchen goes to Felix, and her presence awakens him from his slumber, forcing him to remember in a moment of epiphany his role in the community as spiritual head. Heinrich, too, comes to James's house to deliver his message. Each of these examples reveals that in the midst of despair and in the desert of isolation,

even there, the urge towards community exists; however, on its own, the urge—the attempt to grasp the glory—fails.

It is not difficult to establish that the community of *The Double Hook* is a physical and emotional wasteland, for Watson clearly and vividly projects this vision into her setting and characters; what is more elusive is determining what allows the change to occur in the community and what or who is the catalyst. Ostensibly John Lennox is correct when he argues that *The Double Hook* appears to “articulate the dilemma of a fragmented personality in search of some healing reconciliation,” yet it would be a mistake to limit the identity of that personality to James, as Lennox does (47). The fragmented personality in search of healing reconciliation is the community as a whole and the catalyst that initiates the search is grace. Watson “manipulates reality. . . . she bends the mundane, the temporal, to a more fundamental and universal reality than they inherently imply” as she moves the story from that of a fragmented individual to that of a fragmented community (Moss, *Patterns* 167). The story is not a simple story of one man’s redemption, as most critics tend to think. The story reaches beyond the individual to reveal a truth about every individual: humanity has an inherent need for community and for grace. Thus there is no one action or individual that can be accredited with the salvation of the community of *The Double Hook*, for each hesitant action without its completion and complement would be dead unto itself just as the community members are in their isolation. What is important is not necessarily any single action, but rather the community’s redemption and the manner through which it comes about.

The first movement towards change in the community comes when James murders his mother. Margaret Morriss claims that “the regeneration of the wasteland from an elemental

to a transcendental universe is accomplished in terms of a quest for value initiated by James and accomplished by community participation” (89). However, her argument places James in a position of power and insight that the novel does not support, and it regulates the community to the subsidiary position of mere setting or stage for James’s individual change. Morriss is closer to the truth earlier in her argument when she notes that James’s “act of revolt was not an affirmation of the new life, but just an impulsive, essentially an irrational rejection of the old” (84). James had “thrown fear as a horse balks. Then he’d frozen on the trail. He was afraid to act” (*Hook* 33). James is not on a quest for value; rather, “he wanted only one thing. To get away. To bolt noisily and violently out of the present. To leave the valley. To attach himself to another life which moved at a different rhythm” (*Hook* 79). James makes no claims of a higher motivation, such as a quest, to explain his actions; instead, he realizes that “all he’d done was scum rolled up to the top of a pot by the boiling motion beneath. Now the fire was out” (86). The novel does not offer any explanation for why James murders his mother except that it was an enactment of the turbulence within him.

When James descends into the town, he passes through various layers of community neglect. The first site that James rides through is the Indian reservation. It is imaged as a place forgotten and forsaken. Death lurks in the fragmentation of the community. Everything James sees as he rides through is incomplete or broken: “Wheels without wagons. Wagons without wheels. Bits of harness. Rags and tatters of clothing strung like fish greyed over with death. He saw the bone-thin dogs. Waiting. Heard them yelping. Saw them running. . . . Snarling. Twisting. Tumbling away” (79). The image of clothing compared to fish greyed over with death reveals the absence of life, for the only fish to be found are simply tattered clothes hanging on a line. Because there is no human community, the only inhabitants are

starving dogs. Next, James rides through an area of “fenced-off land. Signs of habitation. . . . [yet] still he had seen no one” (79). As James draws closer to the town, he starts to see people, but he cannot distinguish their faces: “he saw only the circle of their hats” (79). James has to cross over a river to get into the town below, and the crossing signifies a descent into another inversion, into “a separate reality” (Moss, *Patterns* 179). When James sees his mother standing in the river below the bridge, it becomes clear that he prefers deception to truth. He knows that his mother is dead, yet he allows himself to believe in something that is not there. As he crosses the bridge, he closes his eyes and allows his horse to lead him across (*Hook* 80). James enters into the town with his eyes closed, signifying his refusal to see truth. He is always seeing but never perceiving. He remains controlled by the rebellious attitude of his community both on his descent into the town and, still, on his ascent out of the town, for both times he stubbornly chooses to keep his eyes closed (*Hook* 80,107).

Most critics of *The Double Hook* tend to emphasize the role played by either James or Felix, or by another individual as the vehicle through which redemption comes to the community.⁵ However, though James ostensibly appears to be the redemptive figure, he is essentially the same as the rest of the community members. They all have stirrings within themselves that push them towards redemption and understanding, yet each time they reach out for the glory on their own, they fail. Though it does seem that regeneration comes for James through his experience in the town, what happens in the town is only the beginning of

⁵ “Through James and Felix, however, a new way of life is made possible for the future” (Corbett 115). “Although Felix Prosper is the affirmation of *The Double Hook*, it is James Potter who is generally considered to be the central figure” (Mitchell 111). “The hero, James, comes to represent suffering humanity as well as its deliverer” (Grube 78).

his awakening. James is just starting to catch up to what has been happening to the other members of his community. His epiphany that he has been “freed . . . from freedom” is the same as Felix’s slow remembrance of the liturgy and as Ara’s sudden vision of “a great multitude of fish, each fish springing arched through the slanting light” (*Hook* 106, 100). James’s regeneration does not happen in the town; it only begins there. James realizes, when he is in the town, that “out of his corruption life had leafed and he’d stepped on it as carelessly as a man steps on spring shoots” (111). James did not have to leave the community to bring redemption back to it because it was already starting before he left in the form of Lenchen’s pregnancy. Out of his own arrogance and misunderstanding, James exiled himself. His flight costs him everything he has materialistically, yet his experience in the town, where it is truly every man for himself, forces him to see the depressing truth of a place run by individualistic urges. But even when he finally begins to, James cannot face the truth on his own: “Daylight called on him to look. To say what he had done. Yet he could see, he told himself, only as far as his eyes looked. Only as far as the land lay flat before him. . . . He could, too, he knew, look into his own heart as he could look into the guts of a deer when he slit the white underbelly. He held memory like a knife in his hand. But he clasped it shut and rode on” (111). Like the other characters, James has the beginning of knowledge, yet on his own he lacks the strength of character to face his mistakes. He knows that “he could not think of what he’d done. He couldn’t think of what he’d do. He would simply come back as he’d gone. He’d stand silent in their cry of hate. Whatever the world said, whatever the girl said, he’d find her” (111). James knows somehow, intrinsically, that his only hope lies in a return to the community. In the midst of community, he can face his sins, but alone he can’t even think of what he’d done. He is able only to obey the urge within

himself to return. He does not dare look into his own darkness or around him, and therefore he keeps his eyes closed as he leaves the town. His regeneration does not come only from within himself. He cannot hook the glory nor the darkness on his own. It is only within the community that anyone has the strength to reel in such a catch.

Though James' animalistic instinct cannot be credited with something as noble as a quest for value, Watson does use James's flight to create another larger example of the inverse, the unnatural. The chapters on James's flight seem to be completely opposite to the rest of the novel. The tone, the character descriptions, the setting, and the town itself are an inverse of what Watson has created in the other chapters. When James chooses to flee from the community rather than to be a part of the community, Watson makes the place he runs to a hell worse than the one he left behind. The course of the novel works to establish the community in the fold of the hills as a rebellious house that is given the gift of grace. The community, though nearly dead, slowly goes through the process of regeneration. It has a prophet, Ara, who hears the message: "The words of the Lord came, saying: Say now to the rebellious house, Know you not what these things mean?" (*Hook* 99). This direct quote from Ezekiel 17.12, in conjunction with the other passages that Watson has alluded to earlier, reveals that there is hope within the community. There remains a chance to turn and be healed because the statement comes in the form of a question, and as a question, it signifies that there is still time to learn what the devastation means, and time to change.

The opposite is true of the town to which James flees. John Grube points out that the small "town James visits has no name. Its bank, hotel, bar, and brothel could be made of cardboard" (80). Grube suggests that Watson has done this deliberately. He argues that "it is as though the author had said: 'Take any town. Call it X'" (80). George Bowering picks up

this argument and furthers it, arguing that through the representation of the town, “the book becomes the western abjured by Watson in her Edmonton talk. Landscape becomes something against which the people are clearly marked. And the wicked humour of the earlier writing is replaced by comic visitors from another more common kind of book or movie—a conniving whore, a notorious parrot (ironist instead of trickster) a town schemer [Traff] whose name is fart sounded backward” (196). The inhabitants are defined by their occupations. Only those with jobs are given recognition in the town’s list of inhabitants, which is a parody of the list at the start of the novel. There is the bartender, the game warden, the manager of the General Store, the bank manager, his clerk and “ten score other souls” (*Hook* 80). Through the description of the town’s occupations, the town is configured as a place for drinking, hunting, eating, whoring, spending money, and nothing more. The people are cruel and unhappy. There is no sense of community. Knowing “there’s no future in it,” they spend their days “drinking and crying” (93). The fish symbol reappears in this town as well, yet the fish that James is offered are described as a “mess of picked [sic] fish,” symbolizing that the town is a mess of false appearances (93; see Moss, *Patterns* 169). The room that Traff takes James to is “tainted with the damp smell . . . [of] dead fish” because the fish are not fresh, just pickled, preserved (*Hook* 91). The people are not really living; they too are metaphorically preserved, presented as alive but really just embalmed in their own isolation. Watson creates this inversion of the main town to underscore the hope that exists for the community to which James returns. The grace that is unfolding in the community of the hills becomes even more inexplicable, more glorious in contrast to the depression of the town, which James leaves behind him.

Grace is the inexplicable gift of redemption for an undeserving world. Somehow, for some reason, the community, in the midst of its destruction, has new life breathed into it, and it begins to act upon the urge to connect with the other members of the community. Though it seems as if the community only comes to life when James is gone, James's absence cannot be used as an explanation for the change because no one knows that he is gone. They only hear hoof beats in the night, and each attributes the sound to something other than James. Throughout the morning following James's departure, the community begins to act. Kip, though now physically blind, sees truly for the first time and chooses to seek out Felix and forgiveness rather than attempting to grab the glory for himself. William and Ara speak truth to each other, telling themselves "there's a sort of dryness settled on us like dust" (64). They recognize that they have been blind, "seeing things only in flashes" (65). William tells Ara, "it's best to be trusting and loving," and they decide to go to James and Greta because Ara has "a feeling that perhaps we're wanted" (67). Once the change begins, it is rapid: "Before Ara and William had shut the door of their house behind them, Felix Prosper arrived at Theophil's" (67). Felix humbles himself. Though "he could feel the sweat trickling down the furrows of his cheeks," he says, "Angel . . . I need you" (68). Angel challenges him for his earlier failings but ultimately responds positively when she goes with him to help both him and Kip. That same morning at the home of the Wagner's, the Widow Wagner suddenly says to her son, "Go out and bring back Lenchen. . . . Then together we will think what to do" (69). Heinrich encounters William and Ara on the road, and when Heinrich asks why they are going to James's, William tells him, "What would be more natural? . . . James and Greta are in trouble. . . . And it's my trouble too" (71). Heinrich, too, chooses to speak truth instead of remaining silent. Though William tells him he doesn't have to answer when Ara asks him

why he is going to James's house, Heinrich replies, "If I can't tell her, who can I tell? She might make things straight somehow. Can a man speak to no one because he's a man. Who says so? Those who want to be sheltered by his silence. I've held my tongue, he said, when I should have used my voice like an axe to cut down the walls between us" (71).⁶ Suddenly from nowhere, for no reason, Heinrich has the courage to speak the truth. He tells Ara, "you must know what my business with James is. Everyone in the creek must know and no one has turned a hand to help. I don't know what to do" (72). The vulnerability with which Heinrich turns to William and Ara is an indication of the change, of the redemptive process at work so subtly within the characters. There is no reason for Heinrich's change of character nor for the other characters' attitude changes except for the presence of an "unobtrusive God" who is bestowing grace on the people (Moss, *Patterns* 166).

Set in the midst of the change occurring within the characters is Greta's horrific suicide. Though William, Ara, and Heinrich attempt to reach out to Greta and to help her, she chooses death, and the death she chooses is by fire. Because she feels so betrayed by James and by her mother, Greta's death wish is "to cram the empty space with hate" (74). The consequence of following the old woman's example of hate, rather than turning to the community, is self-betrayal. Greta is deceived by a false, reflected glory. Instead of inheriting her mother's position of power in the house and over James, Greta, following the old woman's death, "inherited destruction like a section surveyed and fenced. She . . . lived no longer than the old lady's shadow left its stain on the ground" (99). As the community begins to awaken from its slumber, there is no longer any room within it for any form of hatred or bitterness. Neither the stain of the old woman's death nor Greta's death is allowed

⁶ The phrase "I should have used my voice like an axe to cut down the walls between us" recalls the earlier argument pairing Ezekiel 17.24 and the image of Greta as a tall tree needing to be cut down and made low.

to linger; instead, Greta's death becomes symbolically redemptive. Greta's death by fire works like a purification rite, for through the fire, the ground is cleansed of the old woman's evil, and the house that harbours the evil is destroyed.

In groups of twos and threes the community arrives at Felix's home in time for the birth of Lenchen's child. It is not the birth that culminates the change in the community, but rather the culmination of the change is that everyone is assembled to mark the child's entrance into the community.⁷ It is not an isolated birth; it is a celebrated birth because everyone is there. The crowd of people signifies a new beginning. Watson is careful to ensure that the new beginning is not naïve; the characters recognize that the child will have to "carry round what the world will load on his shoulders" (117). However, by talking together and looking ahead to the future, the characters reveal that there has been a change in the attitude of the community. The fullness of the change from a wasteland of indifference, isolation, fear, and violence to an interdependent community is revealed by a conversation between Kip and Felix:

Felix stood at the edge of his own brown pool. Kip sat on the bank beside him.

When a house is full of women, Kip said, and one of them is Angel, it's best for a man to take his rest among the willows.

When a house is full of women and children, Felix said, a man has to get something for their mouths. (117)

Following the birth of the baby, the first difference signalling the fullness of the change is that Felix and Kip are both sitting together on the edge of Felix' pond. There is no need for trespassing and no sense of hostility. The scene is conveyed in a manner that makes Kip and Felix sound like two old friends. The second and most significant difference is that Felix is

⁷ Repeatedly within the four novels under discussion, and especially in *The Shipping News*, significant events, such as Lenchen's child's birth or Quoye's "baptism," indicate rather than precipitate change that has occurred within the community.

fishing for someone other than himself. In place of the old woman fishing for fear, Felix casts his line responsibly taking up the role of provider. He will bring the fish that he catches into the house, and together, with the rest of the community, they will clean and eat his catch. Watson has delicately yet dramatically returned the symbol of fishing to its positive, even sacramental, associations, for Felix, who has been revealed to be the spiritual head of the community, is now the one depicted fishing.

John Moss argues that “duality, as suggested by the title . . . is the keynote of *The Double Hook*. Somewhere between the glory and darkness, hope and fear, spiritual essence and corporeal being, is the natural condition of man” (*Patterns* 170). Sheila Watson subtly suggests throughout story of *The Double Hook* that the natural condition of man is the double hook of the consuming desire for both connection to and escape from community and its responsibilities.⁸ She quietly yet boldly indicates that grace is the only thing that can navigate us through such a schizoid human condition. The grace that can be attributed with the successful move from darkness into light in the novel is an unmerited and inexplicable gift from what Moss terms “the unobtrusive God” hovering over the novel (*Patterns* 166). This God is not Coyote, nor the God which the Old Widow defies, nor the God whom William and Ara discuss; rather, it is the God with whom Watson herself seems to wrestle. Because Watson seeks to create an understanding of the double hook of life, her novel is not spared from darkness, yet despite the darkness, Watson’s novel rests in grace. As Moss observes, “the fact that the community is, in a sense, eventually healed, reconciled to the darkness, with hope for the glory, is in itself the mark of grace” (*Patterns* 172).

⁸ According to Mackey: “Man wants community . . . but he wants it very much on his own terms; not as a creation of force or as a matter of expediency, not as something that in any way manipulates him, but as something that realizes his highest personal values and exercises his free personal conviction and commitment” (19).

This chapter has argued implicitly that the enigmatic “glory” of *The Double Hook* (and its epigraph), the counterpoint of “darkness” and “fear,” is the presence of grace in the world, which is impossible to “hook,” for “you can’t catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it . . . when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too . . . if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear” (50). Grace can be neither grabbed nor earned, for “no grace, be it the most intimate, the most exalted mystical gift, is given as a *private* possession. Grace can never be a ‘thing possessed,’ simply because it is a life unceasingly flowing out from God and returning to God” (Fransen 58). Grace is an unmerited, uncontrollable, unexplainable gift that refuses to conform to man’s understanding or rules. Grace can even sometimes appear to be cloaked in darkness; however, inside of community, distinguishing between the glory (grace) and the darkness becomes possible. Inside of community grace can be received, borne, and extended, if not fully understood or explained. Outside of community, grace is easily perverted by individualistic greed. Yet even outside of community or inside of a broken community, God’s grace still brings wholeness, for “it is the role of grace to restore and consolidate the natural unity of the human race driven apart by sin” (Fransen 59). Watson’s regeneration of a human wasteland demonstrates the triumph of grace and its divine source. Watson chooses to redeem an entire community rather than a single individual, because in an individual, irrational change can sometimes be dismissed as coincidence, but a whole community brought irrationally from the brink of death into life is undeniably a demonstration of God’s grace. In pondering her own writing, Watson muses in her personal diary that “the people of the D.H. like the bas-fonds are below the margin of grace. . . . The problem is insoluble in human terms” (qtd. in Willmott).⁹ Through this insight, Watson herself confirms that the central problem of *The Double Hook*—the

⁹ Thanks to Glenn Willmott who provided this excerpt from Watson’s diary on his handout for his conference paper “Watson and Cosmopolitan Modernism” delivered at The Canadian Modernists Meet: a Symposium, University of Ottawa, 9-11 May 2003.

seemingly incongruent redemption of a rebellious house—can only be dissolved through an understanding of the irrationality of God and His grace. Morriss argues that “irrationality . . . is an important part of this world,” and that is exactly what Watson reveals in *The Double Hook*, for grace is not always comprehensible to limited human intellect, though it always remains an important part of this world (84).

Chapter Two:

Fugitive Pieces: Grace Expanded

In an interview with Douglas Fetherling, Anne Michaels relates that she wrote *Fugitive Pieces* partly because she felt an “obligation to establish some relationship” with “the largest and most devastating reality . . . of the century” (“Narrative” 18). In the novel, Michaels not only succeeds in creating a relationship between herself and what happened in the Holocaust, but also succeeds in creating a place of communion for herself, her characters, and her readers.¹ Because she is extremely conscious of both the emotional weight of her subject and the responsibilities she assumes through translating it into narrative, she does not hesitate to acknowledge that she is attempting to “speak of events . . . that one has not witnessed, that one has not lived through personally but has absorbed through the culture, through the family, through the home” (“Narrative” 16; see also Bentley 2).² According to Lisa Jardine (Chair of Judges for the Orange Prize), Michaels “speaks of her . . . relationship to her subject matter with typical discretion: ‘I think the best way I could put it is that war was in our house, and, in fact, for someone of my generation, no matter what their cultural background, I think that’s true to varying degrees. Children soak up a lot of stories, whether

¹ The conception of the novel as a place of communication and community between herself and her readers is very important to Michaels. The idea surfaces repeatedly in interviews: “Thought requires time and a novel allows you to be with the reader long enough to let time and thought enter the equation. The concept of communicating over time and moving with the reader through time is very intriguing to me” (qtd. in O’Neill 2). In another interview with Mary Ann Grossman, Michaels clarifies her idea of *Fugitive Pieces* existing as a place of communal experience: “the book goes into some questions that are quite difficult, and I wanted to be a companion to the reader throughout the entire book” (1).

² Grossman notes that though Michaels is very protective of her “privacy and doesn’t talk much about her family . . . she did tell a British publication that her father was born in small village on the border of Poland and Russia and immigrated to Canada in 1931. Many of his family who remained in Poland died at the hands of the Nazis” (1).

in the home or outside it, and whether they choose to be buried or brought out later in life or remembered or forgotten or abandoned or confronted, these stories take root in us” (2).³

From these two statements, it becomes clear that though Michaels did not live through the Holocaust herself, she has a distinct connection with the effects of the Holocaust through both her “intersubjective community” (family), and through her generational connection (Lonergan 109).

Bernard Lonergan’s theory of community offers a mode of understanding both Michaels’ relationship to the Holocaust and her need to create a communal approach to understanding it. Lonergan posits that there are “three levels of community” (109). The first level is the “intersubjective community. Its basis is spontaneous tendency. Its manifestation is an elemental feeling of belonging together. Its nucleus is the family. Its expansion is the clan, the tribe, the nation” (109). Therefore Michael’s connection to the Holocaust can be understood as stemming initially from her immediate family and extending through her identity as a Jewish Canadian woman into a connection with the whole of the Jewish people. Her Jewish heritage creates the base “elemental feeling of belonging” which she pursues beyond the perimeters of her familial connection into an understanding of her connection to the Holocaust simply as a member of humanity (Lonergan 109). Because Michaels understands that her connection to the Holocaust moves through so many different layers of community (familial, cultural, generational, and universal), she places the search for community centrally in her novel, for she realizes its utmost importance. Ultimately, as a result of remembering and rebuilding community, and out of Michaels’ self-professed urge ““to understand how one emerges” from an experience as “horrendous” as the Holocaust with both a propensity for “faith” and an inexorable desire to “move towards a place of love

³ Anne Michaels’s novel *Fugitive Pieces* won the 1997 Orange Prize for fiction (Moragianis 2).

in the world” comes Michaels’ perhaps unintentional yet vividly striking portrayal of grace at work in a chaotic universe (“Narratives” 18; see also Bentley 2).

D.M.R. Bentley argues that “as a work of poetic knowing . . . whose principal character . . . discover[s] . . . the redemptive power of memory and poetry, *Fugitive Pieces* not only defies [Theodore] Adorno’s 1955 pronouncement that ‘[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,’ . . . but also provides an affirmative answer to his subsequent ‘cultural question [of] whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living’” (Bentley 3).

Bentley’s argument that *Fugitive Pieces* offers an affirmative answer to the question of whether or not one may continue to live “who by rights should have been killed” needs to be extended to explain not only why “one may go on living” but why, according to *Fugitive Pieces*, one is called to go on living. Bentley argues that it is because of the power of memory and poetry that *Fugitive Pieces* defies Adorno’s pronouncement; however, poetry and memory do not provide the “why” of why one is called to continue to live. They only provide part of the “how” by which one can continue to live. We value poetry and memory because they help connect us to each other, to our communities, which are an essential aspect in our humanity. However, poetry and memory are only sub-functions within community, and for this reason it is the fullness of “community” itself, not just poetry or memory, which has been viewed traditionally as “the human element in the means of salvation,” which is essentially grace (Mackey 123). The “why” of why one is called to continue to live when by rights one should be dead, comes out of an understanding of the intricate relationship between community and grace. Being found alive when by rights one should be dead is an act of grace, and with grace comes responsibility, for grace is never

granted to just one person alone. One is called to continue to live because only then can one fulfill the responsibility s/he has been given when s/he received grace. *Fugitive Pieces* reveals the nature of this responsibility through the progression of grace in the lives of its characters.

Through the numerous characters in the novel directly affected by Jakob's positive response to grace we see that grace is a communal gift. The fullness of Jakob's story shows that the issue is not a question of whether or not "one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, *may* go on living"; instead, his story illustrates that there is no question (Bentley 13, emphasis added). One is simply *called* to go on living in order that the out-pouring of grace that s/he has been granted continues in the life of another individual and ultimately expands into an even greater portion of grace within the community. Humanity's need for community comes out of our need for grace, which dictates our survival. Michaels' initial question regarding how one emerges from the horror, not just to live, but to love as well, is answered through understanding Jakob's responsibility and subsequent response to grace. Jakob fulfills his responsibility to grace through living, and communicating through memory and poetry, which connect him to his community and allow him to pass on the grace he has been granted. As he fulfills his responsibility to grace, he is given the gift of being able to love again.

Ostensibly, the main characters in *Fugitive Pieces* are Jakob and Ben. Their centrality comes into play because they are the narrators. Jakob narrates the first two-thirds of the novel and Ben the final section. However, though they appear to have the defining voices, they are not simply telling their own stories, but instead are relaying the story of their community. Jakob's voice is the vehicle through which the central character of the novel is

revealed, for as Jakob lives out his life, he pieces together the identity of his community, which, though elusive, is the governing figure in the novel. Everything that happens within the novel happens in relation to Jakob's search for community. *Fugitive Pieces* seems to reflect a secularized understanding of Mackey's earlier noted argument that "community . . . was the guardian of the sacred tradition and the human element in the means of salvation," for Jakob's actions reveal that he is determined that his salvation lies in recovering the community he has lost (123).⁴ Because of this belief, all of his actions can be traced to his effort of remembering and then rebuilding community. Jakob exhibits what Mackey describes as "man's natural impulse to record, communicate, and interpret experiences that have an all-compelling and unique significance for him" (123). What Jakob chooses to record, communicate, and interpret forms a collection of stories from which he is able to reformulate his lost community. His new or rediscovered community gains its identity from the stories and memories of the Jewish people who lived and died during the Holocaust, his individual story, and ultimately, and perhaps unintentionally, the story of grace at work within humanity.

If *Fugitive Pieces* were only concerned with Jakob's story or memoirs, the novel would end with Jakob's conclusion; however, the narrative form of the novel seems to be distinctly designed to reflect on the continuing progression of grace within community. Michaels explains that without her unconventional structure "the book would have been entirely different and the meaning entirely different if the story had ended after the first half" (qtd. in O'Neill 1). Instead, because the first story moves into the second and is completed by it, we reach an understanding of how an individual's experience of grace can spread outwards through communal interactions into an entire community. Michaels defends the carry-over

⁴ Use of the word 'salvation' here refers to personal survival: emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual.

of Jakob's story into Ben's this way: "Ben is, in a sense, Jakob's heir. So Jakob has one heir although he has no children. There's a kind of hope to that . . . a hope that many who lost their families could experience . . . a hope for those who have no one to remember them" (qtd. in O'Neill 1). Her explanation reveals the trajectory line of expanded grace, for Ben becomes the heir to Jakob's grace and, through his very existence as such, continues the expansion of grace into a hope for those who, like Jakob, have lost their families. Grace first creates and then completes the relationship between Jakob and Ben, who are nearly strangers but for their communal connection with the Holocaust. Through their community connection—Ben is a part of the community of Holocaust survivors, a community which Jakob, at the end of his life, is just beginning to fully comprehend—grace is infused into the chaos of their lives. Not only their survival but also the moments of beauty in their survival must be attributed to grace, for there is no other explanation for the fullness of their stories.

Jakob's story, centred on a search for community, stands out as an expression of the main story of human existence, for humanity is everywhere engaged in building community and subsequently in expanding grace. The central story of *Fugitive Pieces* is thematically similar to the story of *The Double Hook*, for the story in *Fugitive Pieces* grows out of a disruption of community and follows the process by which rebuilding and remembering community becomes a vehicle of grace. Yet at the same time that the novels reveal that community is integral to grace, both novels uniquely demonstrate that grace is a free, unmerited gift, and not something which can be orchestrated or created by man.

A shared principle between the Christian, the Jewish, and secularized society's understanding of grace is that we receive it despite ourselves. Israel Abrahams, in addressing Biblical theodicy in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, notes that Jeremiah 12.1 asks: "Why does the

way of the wicked prosper?” (648). Though this question is central to understanding the seemingly disjunctive grace in *The Double Hook*, it also sheds light on *Fugitive Pieces*. Abrahams explains that the “biblical answer [to Jeremiah’s question] appears to point to the limitations of man’s experience and understanding. History is long, but individual life is short. Hence the human view is fragmentary . . . the person concerned does not always live to see the denouement” (*Judaica* 648). While writing his memoirs, Jakob has no idea that Ben will be the one to complete them. Jakob’s death, introduced at the beginning of the novel, seems unbearably cruel and unnecessary, yet because Jakob dies with his work unfinished, the task falls to Ben.⁵ Because we, as readers, are able to read the full story from beginning to end, we are able to discern the denouement of Jakob’s story, which is Ben’s completion of Jakob’s memoirs and subsequent entrance into grace. However, in reality the complexity of God’s grace is often difficult to ascertain, and we are left asking hard questions such as: Why would one survive when so many others die, and how is love possible after so much pain? Abrahams argues that, “the brevity of man’s years is further complicated by his lack of insight. God’s purpose is beyond his comprehension: ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’ (Isa. 55.9)” (*Judaica* 648).⁶ The pieces, the fragments of grace that do not make sense are part of the mystery and beauty of grace.

Though God’s thoughts are so much higher than man, God still longs for man to enter into communion with Him, for as Abrahams points out, God is “merciful and gracious, slow

⁵ “Poet Jakob Beer, who was also a translator of posthumous writing from the war, was struck and killed by a car in Athens in the spring of 1993, at age sixty. His wife had been standing with him on the sidewalk; she survived her husband by two days. . . . Shortly before his death, Beer had begun to write his memoirs” (*Fugitive Prelude*).

⁶ Recall Watson’s statement quoted in the conclusion to the chapter on *The Double Hook*: “the problem is insoluble in human terms,” meaning that there are some things in life that are unfathomable to the human mind, and those things are the things of God, such as grace (qtd. in Willmott 1).

to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Ex. 34.6-7)" (*Judaica* 650). Both Israel Abrahams and Peter Fransen interpret grace as the tangible manifestation of communication between God and man. Abrahams explains that, "the bridge between God and man—is grace" (*Judaica* 650), and Fransen asserts: "Grace unites God and man. More exactly, grace is *God's way of meeting* man whom He came in search of and found lost in the solitude of an earthly sinful nature. In this meeting, God's love takes to itself man as he is, the whole of him. . . Grace is the marvellous point of contact between the two worlds: the world of the triune infinitude, and that of the utter nothingness, which is man" (2). If grace is a "bridge" or "point of contact" signalling communication between God and man and if communication between God and man is the essence of successful community, then grace can be said to be foundational to community

In *Fugitive Pieces*, though Athos's character is depicted as not believing in God, the way in which Jakob, as a child, perceives Athos, can be understood in relation to Mackey's statement that "in the religious tradition, the fellowship of God with man and the fellowship of man with man are offered together, and they must be accepted together" (23).⁷ Regarding his childhood vision of Athos, Jakob writes: "Late at night, while he worked—a solid concentration that put me to sleep—his arm dangled like a plumb line. I was soothed by the smells of bindings and pipe tobacco and the weight of his safe, heavy hand on my head. His left arm reaching down to earth, his right arm reaching up, palm to heaven" (21). Here, theology and literary imagery merge together, for both purport that community between men

⁷ The *Judaica* asserts a similar principle: "it is a corollary of the love of God. . . . [that] 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19.18)" (Abrahams 651).

is connected to community between God and man.⁸ In Jakob's young eyes, Athos is able to negotiate the connection between earth and heaven, and therefore, despite himself, Athos instils in Jakob an understanding of the necessity of communication between the two worlds.

According to Mackey, full community between men is a reflection or a promise of the community that can be reached between God and man. Mackey explains that full community comes through knowledge of the other: "to know something, or someone, is quite literally to make that person or thing . . . part of ourselves, while leaving it its full autonomy and integrity. Only knowledge achieves union of persons without destroying either of them—that means *communion*—and in that way breaks down the endemic isolation of individual existence" (51). The relationship between Jakob and Athos, which is a relationship of full communion, becomes, without Athos intending it, the foundation from which Jakob views God's gracious intervention in the world. Jakob asserts that Athos's stories "only confirmed what I already believed: that Zakynthians were under the protection of an unseen hand" (84).

Athos's stories of the beauty and grace in geology teach Jakob about man's nature and the need for balance between independence and community. They also reveal an understanding of the longevity of grief and the growth process by which grief can sometimes slowly change into recognition and acceptance of grace: "I listened to Athos's story of the origins of islands, how the mainland can stretch until it breaks at the weakest points, and those weaknesses are called faults. Each island represented a victory and a defeat: it had either pulled itself free or pulled too hard and found itself alone. Later as these islands grew

⁸Jakob's sense of the presence of God, which he gains an awareness of through his relationship with Athos, can be understood in terms of Mackey's argument that "the forming of a personal relationship with God is inseparable from the forming of personal relationships between men who are mutually dependent on each other for the grace of God's presence. Thus in Christianity, as in any religion, there are two great commandments of the law. One, the love of the neighbour, is not an extrinsic bonus to, or a peripheral test of, the other, the love of God. The two loves are twins because the same process gives birth to both, simultaneously" (128).

older, they turned their misfortune into virtue. . . . They acquired grace—some grass, a beach smoothed by tides” (30). Consistently, Athos’ stories seek to awaken in Jakob an awareness of the longing within the land for healing and for connection. As Jakob grows into an understanding of his own loss, he begins to realize “grief requires time. If a chip of stone radiates its self, its breath, so long, how stubborn might be the soul. If sound waves carry on to infinity, where are the screams now? I imagine them somewhere in the galaxy, moving forever towards the psalms” (54). Christianity teaches that this longing of the earth is reflective of God’s longing for His creation and His creation’s longing for Him: “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (*NIV Bible*, Romans 8.19-22). God longs to enter into community with man, and man longs intrinsically to enter into community with God. It is to satisfy this longing, Fransen explains, that “we can and must work out with Christ the salvation of the world. It does not follow, though, that in this cooperation—or in any other capacity—we take up our stand next to Christ as His equals, as associates on a par with Him” (342). Instead, Fransen points out, “we are allowed to work *with* Christ for the salvation of the world as far as we let ourselves be borne along and used by the One *Saviour* to bring all men unto Him” (342). Fransen’s Catholic theology parallels the literary analogy, which reads community as the vehicle for grace.

The image of Athos as a plumb line between heaven and earth illustrates the way in which man can act as a conduit of grace for his fellow man. Christian theology asserts that

man is an empty vessel needing to be filled by the knowledge and grace of God in order to fulfill God's purposes. Similarly, novels such as *The Double Hook* and *Fugitive Pieces* suggest that a community functions like a vehicle, which is simply an empty shell needing some guiding force, something or someone directing it towards its purpose, and until that occurs, the community remains ineffectual. The initial problem within the community of *The Double Hook* is that its residents are at the point where their idea of community is simply a dried-out empty shell. Mackey warns that community must not be thought of simply as a "group of people united in a particular place for purposes of communal sustenance (at the material level) and common defence" (22). Instead, "a community is only a community when the majority of its members are making the transition from 'the community for myself' to 'myself for the community'" (Vanier 5). Until the characters within *The Double Hook* move outside of their own sphere of existence, as Felix finally does following his epiphany, the community is on its way to complete annihilation.

According to Fransen's Catholic theology, "everyman, on receiving grace, has this duty [of sharing or passing on grace] imposed upon him. And this holds true for him who would receive grace outside of the Church. . . . No grace, not even the most intimately personal one, is granted to the individual for him alone" (342). The grace that is granted to Jakob, when his hiding place inside the wall remains undiscovered, expands into the grace, which directs him to Athos in the pits of Biskupin. From there, it grows, allowing them both to sneak across the border. Though it almost seems like a punishment that Jakob survives when his entire family perishes, his survival is still a gift of grace. Grace is unmerited and unrestrained by man's sense of fairness, yet it can still be rejected by man: "man may destroy [grace] entirely as a result of his behaviour or may, on the other hand, develop it until it is perfected in the after-

life” (Mackey 81). Jakob could have chosen to remain where he was and to reject the gift of his life, yet instead he chooses to live. Though his flight into the woods can be described as an immediate reflex stemming out of an instinct of self-preservation, the rest of Jakob’s life is an intentional attempt to use his gift. The grace which saves Jakob translates into the grace that saves Athos from the fate of his colleagues: “Soon after Athos made the decision to take me home with him, Biskupin was overrun by soldiers. . . . [T]hey shot five of Athos’s colleagues in the surrounding forest. The others were sent to Dachau. And that is one of the reasons Athos believed we saved each other” (*Fugitive* 51). The grace implicit in the salvation of first Jakob and then Athos has more meaning than simply preserving their lives and this becomes evident as the novel unfolds.

Jakob and Athos’s reactions to the grace inherent in their survival fall into line with Fransen’s argument. Through the story of their lives, we, the readers, understand that the grace of survival is not a personal gift for the survivor to hoard for himself; instead, the gift of life in the face of death extends beyond the individual. Grace, when accepted and shared, creates a ripple effect. Its consequences expand beyond the initial outpouring and continue virtually unseen. Because Athos saves Jakob, he himself is saved. He is then able to save Jakob a second time, for he saves Jakob spiritually through teaching him about the longevity of grief, the necessity of memory, and the depth of love. Because Jakob is saved, he is able to save Athos and then, through his writing and recording of forgotten memories, he is able to save parts of the lost community of the Jewish people. Ultimately, without his direct physical involvement, Jakob is also part of Ben’s salvation, as Ben is of his. Both Jakob and Athos, by accepting the grace that they have been given, pass it on to their community

through their interactions with their friends and through their literary work, which seeks to maintain, teach, and preserve the truth.

While an initial inclination might be to dismiss Fransen's arguments (which read grace as a communal gift both in the dispensing of it and in the reception of it) as only pertaining to Christian theology and its understanding of the great commission, his point can be used to explain both the ubiquity and purpose of community in contemporary Canadian literature. Much contemporary literature focuses on community, not simply because it provides a diverse grouping of people with interesting relationships and stories, but because it provides a window into understanding how grace (that element in our survival which is too often unrecognized for what it is) is dispensed. Emil Brunner argues that, "it is not possible to define man in the concrete, in his actual existential circumstances, without including grace in the definition" (Mackey 43). Community provides a means by which to understand grace within reality; our literature, whether intentionally or not, recognizes this fact through its repeated merging of grace and community. The representations of community in *The Double Hook* and *Fugitive Pieces* create a map by which to trace the process of grace. Though community does not create grace, it does disperse it and provides a way to conceptualize grace, which because of its divine origins and elusive qualities remains otherwise inexpressible. According to the Bible and to Christian theology, our lives are to be imitations of Christ's life, and we, as part of humanity, are to love our neighbours as ourselves. Therefore, if, as Christianity teaches, Christ is the personification of grace in the world, then as imitators of Christ, we, and by extension our communities, when functioning as intended, can be understood as an extension of His grace. Fransen asserts that "God has decreed that redemption and thus grace should come to man through the cooperation of other men,

[for]... Christ's great mercy has willed that no man should be saved without the cooperation of other men" (342). Therefore according to Christian theology, community, which is based upon the cooperation of men and women with each other, is a locus for grace. Christianity teaches that community among men is both a reflection of the more perfect community that awaits us in a relationship with God and a means through which God dispenses His grace. Canadian literature, as represented here by *The Double Hook* and *Fugitive Pieces*, repeatedly presents community as both the locus for and vehicle of grace.

The idea that community disperses grace is not exclusively Christian. Dr. Martinez-Brawly, a prominent sociologist, argues that sociology recognizes "that citizens are engaged in an often frantic search for meaningful community. This search fulfils psychotherapeutic as well as social needs. In personal terms, people are looking for the intimate community to relieve the external pressures of their complicated lives. Anomie can only be combated by a strong sense of interdependence" (9). By acknowledging the existence of this inherent need for community within man, Martinez-Brawley echoes the Christian principle of humanity's need for community. Martinez-Brawley's argument that community fulfils psychotherapeutic and social needs, and relieves external worldly pressures is comparable to the statement that community functions as a place of healing grace. Therefore, both secular and Christian understandings of community indicate that our need for community grows out of our desperate need for grace, the communal grace which is at the root of any healing, restoration, survival, acceptance, and connection we experience in our daily lives.

A shared theme of grace and community fundamentally connects *The Double Hook* and *Fugitive Pieces*; both explore what happens to a disrupted community, and both reveal the prevalence of grace in the midst of social disorder. While disruption comes from within the

community in *The Double Hook*, the disruption of the community in *Fugitive Pieces* is the result of a direct attack by outsiders. Through the desecration and attempted destruction of its community, the mourning and haunting of it, the remembering and unearthing of it, and ultimately the rebuilding and rediscovery of it, *Fugitive Pieces* reiterates the intricate metaphorical relationship between community and grace.

Fugitive Pieces provides a key to understanding the identity of its protagonist, which is the lost community, through the meaning of the words in its title. The title's first word *Fugitive* denotes "something elusive or hard to find," something "likely to vanish suddenly," something "not fixed or lasting" (*Webster's*). Even though initially the definition of the second word, *Pieces*, seems hardly to merit attention because of its commonality, unearthing the fullness of its definition reveals an implicit connection necessary for understanding the community of the novel and the full meaning locked within the title. "Piece," in the singular, is defined as "a part of a whole," a "fragment," or "one of a group, set, or mass" (*Webster's*). Though piece is pluralized in Michael's title, fragmentation and associations of separation and isolation echo from it, for pieces are the opposite of wholeness, denoting brokenness or a shattering. Conversely, at the same time that the word "pieces" associatively represents brokenness and separation, it also calls forth an association with wholeness. For in order for there to be pieces, there must first be a unity of form from which the pieces have broken off. Therefore, paradoxically, the novel promises to speak simultaneously to both brokenness and wholeness. In order to understand how this paradox is possible, we can turn again to the paradox of grace.

Christian grace speaks simultaneously to brokenness and wholeness: Christ is the personification of grace, for he is at once perfection, complete wholeness, and yet, at the

same time, he contains brokenness. In what Christianity terms God's most demonstrative act of grace, which is the crucifixion, Christ, who is wholeness, absorbs brokenness into himself as he takes on the sins of the entire world. In the novel, Jakob writes that we must "find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful" (*Fugitive* 44). This plea illustrates the intricacies of grace, for grace makes brokenness whole and reveals wholeness to contain brokenness. Grace absorbs brokenness, rendering it whole. Grace is only possible in the presence of brokenness, yet grace is complete wholeness. Therefore, determining that moment of grace between the presence of absolute brokenness, which is the need for grace, and the granting of it, which is the transformation to wholeness, becomes extremely difficult.

Because she recognizes the mysteriousness inherent in the workings of grace, Michaels provides elusive fragmentary visions of it throughout the novel, revealing grace to be beautiful, though at times difficult and painful to accept. It is only through community that the "gradual instant" of grace can be accepted, absorbed, and ultimately shared, yet community alone is not enough (*Fugitive* 79). Accepting grace is an act of faith. Michaels explains through the words of Jakob: "at that moment of utmost degradation, in that twisted reef, is the most obscene testament of grace. For can anyone tell with absolute certainty the difference between the sounds of those who are in despair and the sounds of those who want desperately to believe? The moment when our faith in man is forced to change, anatomically – mercilessly – into faith" (*Fugitive* 168). There is only a fraction, a second separating the two moments between being outside of grace and within it, between believing and denying. Jakob writes that "every moment is two moments," and this is true of grace, for it is brokenness and wholeness merged in God (139).

Repeatedly throughout the novel, Michaels creates within each of the characters - Jakob, Athos, Kostas, Alex, Maurice, Michaela, Ben, and Naomi - a respect and fascination with the many layers of language and the intricacies of individual words. Therefore analyzing the meaning and association of the words in the title remains true to the tone of the novel. In order to unlock the novel, we must understand that the title functions on a number of different levels. The title works associatively with the novel's textual design strategy, for interspersed throughout the novel is a collection or a gathering together of fugitive—likely to vanish—hidden stories and memories which are mere pieces of individual life stories. The stories and memories are presented as having been gleaned from unknown individuals who lived or died during the Holocaust. These stories are interwoven with pieces of memories from the two narrators' own experiences and that of their families during the Holocaust. The narrative within the novel expresses, through the struggles of its community of characters, the difficulty in unearthing memories that have been hidden or destroyed. Not only Jakob, but also Athos, Ben, Ben's parents, Naomi, and by extension, we, the readers, struggle throughout the novel to absorb and process the haunting memories of the Holocaust which are excavated by Jakob in his search for truth.

The very nature of memory is that it is elusive and fugitive-like: "History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. History is the Totenbuch, The Book of the Dead, kept by the administrators of the camps. Memory is the Memorbucher, the names of those to be mourned, read aloud in the synagogue. History and memory share events . . . they share time and space. Every moment is two moments" (*Fugitive* 138). Distinguishing memory from history and history from memory is a delicate task. When the "countless manuscripts—

diaries, memoirs” of the Holocaust are unearthed and rescued from their hiding places beneath the earthen floors of kitchens, yards, and even mass graves, the pain that shrouds them is heavy and deeply rooted (*Fugitive* 1). Michaels uses poetic narrative to evoke within her readers the emotions that are released within her characters as their memories are excavated. In the haunting, poetic voice of Jakob, who is the finder and recorder of the stories, the trauma of the process of recovery surfaces. We, the readers, enter into a ritual of communion where we partake in the sacrament of memory. Through this communion with Jakob and his dead and living community, Michaels ensures that the lost are heard, recognized, and remembered (Bakhtin 287). Through Jakob’s painful imagery, the dead are not only remembered but reconnected to the living:

when the prisoners were forced to dig up mass graves, the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation. Their arms were into death up to the elbows, but not only into death—into music, into memory of the way a husband or son leaned over his dinner, a wife’s expression as she watched her child in the bath; into beliefs, mathematical formulas, dreams. As they felt another man’s and another’s blood-soaked hair through their fingers, the diggers begged forgiveness. And those lost lives made molecular passage into their hands. How can one man take on the memories of even one other man, let alone five or a thousand or ten thousand; how can they be sanctified each? (52)

Michaels, through Jakob’s story, slowly expresses the impossibility of one man taking on the memories of even one other man, if he does it alone. It is only through community—through an act of a communal remembering—that the murdered memories can be carried forward. Athos whispers one of the essential truths of humanity into the delirious ears of Jakob, as he spirits him across the borders from Germany to Greece: “we must carry each other. If we don’t have this, what are we?” (14). In order for community to be lasting and strong, it has to

be based on more than location and common goals. It has to be based on selfless love, on the carrying of each other, on the goodness of grace. Unless recorded and then read and listened to in a community setting, the memories will be “likely to vanish” for they are fugitive pieces of identity (*Webster’s*). By reading Michael’s novel, the readers enter into a form of communication with Michaels and with her characters, creating a place of communion and subsequently community, allowing the story of the Holocaust to move beyond the perimeters of memory into the territory of life.

The second manner through which the title is embodied in the meanings of the novel is through its expression in the characters themselves. The two most obvious fugitive pieces are Jakob and Ben. Both men, as children, are haunted by the memories of their community’s desecration. Jakob, the only remaining fragment of his family, is a piece or a part of a whole. When the Nazi soldiers enter his home and brutally murder his family, leaving him behind as the last “piece” of his intersubjective community, he becomes a broken fragment, a bleeding shard. Hidden behind the wall, as his parents are murdered, he is able only to listen. The sounds ring in his ears: “noises never heard before, torn from my father’s mouth. Then silence . . . the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor. . . . the spray of buttons, little white teeth” (*Fugitive* 7). When Jakob emerges from the wall, he wants to “go to [his] parents, to touch them. But [he] couldn’t, unless [he] stepped on their blood” (7). The narrative that evolves out of Jakob’s entrance into fragmentation is a narrative of a traumatized, fugitive child: “I learned to tolerate images rising in me like bruises. But in my continuous expectation of the burst door, the taste of blood that filled my mouth suddenly many times a day, I couldn’t conceive of any feeling stronger than fear. What is stronger than fear; Athos, who is stronger than fear? . . . I spent the day writing my letter to the dead

and was answered at night in my sleep” (19). Though Athos doesn’t answer Jakob’s question, the implied responses are love and God, and as the novel progresses, this becomes more explicit.

The first night that he is in the forest, Jakob is mesmerized with a vision of the dead: “I watched darkness turn to purple-orange light above the town; the colour of flesh transforming to spirit. They flew up. The dead passed above me, weird haloes and arcs smothering the stars” (7). In this moment, during this vision, Jakob’s life-struggle negotiating between the dead and the living begins to take form: “The ground tilted and I didn’t hold on. I strained to join them, to rise with them, to peel from the ground like paper ungluing at its edges. . . . I stayed where I was. Clammy with cold, stuck to the ground. I begged: If I can’t rise, then let me sink, sink into the forest floor like a seal into wax” (8). Jakob, completely alone and lost in the forest, devoid of human connection, instinctively attempts to remain connected to his family even though they are dead. His frightened response is to bury himself alive with them. Slowly, as the novel unfolds, we are given glimpses of Jakob’s struggle between attempting to remember his family and attempting to escape the memories of what has happened to them. When Athos rescues him, Jakob is “numb against [Athos’s] solid body, a blister tight with fear” (*Fugitive* 13). As they travel, Jakob, acutely aware of the violence with which his family, his community, have been taken from him, describes the feeling of separation as though “they were yanked right through my scalp” (13). But he is determined to remain holding on to someone, and though Athos is taking him out of the place of trauma, Jakob allows Bella to stay with him: “But Bella clung. We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me” (14). Jakob’s determination to hold onto his community, and his shame at having forgotten Bella once already, allows Bella’s

ghost to possess him, trapping him in a world outside of reality.⁹ Because Jakob, as a child, is unable to regulate between the negative power of memory and guilt, the destructive power of the dead unfurls slowly, and it eats away his good memories. Since the deaths he witnessed were so violent and without any resolution, he is unable to negotiate between the terrifying images, which invade his dreams, the guilt he feels for having survived, and the memories with which he should shield himself. The competing memories jostle for dominance in his mind and his emotions, instilling in him a longing to “disappear simply by stillness” (*Fugitive* 18).

Unable to reach the balance between memory and remembering, Jakob hangs suspended between the world of the living and that of the dead:

They waited until I was asleep, then roused themselves, exhausted as swimmers . . . Their hair in tufts, open sores where ears used to be, grubs twisting from their chests. The grotesque remains of incomplete lives, the embodied complexity of desires eternally denied. They floated until they grew heavier, and began to walk, heaving into humanness; until they grew more human than phantom and through their effort began to sweat. Their strain poured from my skin, until I awoke dripping with their deaths. (24)

Jakob is aware that his memories are becoming a controlling force in his life, but he cannot resist calling them forth. However, it is only when he is alone that he engages his darkest memories. He separates his life with Athos from his life with the dead. The memories grip him with a consuming power, which he cannot break, even though he recognizes “the possibility that it was as painful for them to be remembered as it was for me to remember them” (25). Jakob writes, “I was haunting my parents and Bella with my calling, startling

⁹ Alone in the woods, as darkness falls, Jakob suddenly feels “the worst shame of my life: I was pierced with hunger. And suddenly I realized, my throat aching without sound – Bella” (*Fugitive* 9).

them awake in their black beds” (25). Athos recognizes the battle going on inside Jakob, and he knows that the only way for Jakob to survive is to open himself and the memories up, to let them be absorbed, accepted, and healed within the community. If he continues to carry the memories alone, they will consume him. Athos tells Jakob: “sometimes I can’t look you in the eye; you’re like a building that’s burned out inside, with the outer wall still standing” (30). Athos gently warns: “If you hurt yourself, Jakob, I will have to hurt myself. You will have proven to me my love for you is useless. . . . I can’t save a boy from a burning building. Instead he must save me from the attempt; he must jump to earth” (45). However, despite Athos’ loving warnings, Jakob continues to straddle the two worlds of life and death, for he is unable to commit fully to either one.

As Jakob repeatedly engages the presence of Bella, he changes her into something almost akin to a demonic power. It begins innocently with Jakob inviting Bella into his loneliness to play with him: “As I hesitated in the doorway . . . I was letting Bella enter ahead of me, making sure she was not left behind. I paused when I ate, singing a silent incantation: A bite for me, a bite for you, an extra bite for Bella” (31). But as Bella becomes more and more dominant in Jakob’s life, Jakob begins to struggle with a fear of her, which makes him even more guilt-ridden: “Awake at night, I’d hear her breathing or singing next to me in the dark, half comforted, half terrified that my ear was pressed against the thin wall between the living and the dead, that vibrating membrane between them was so fragile” (31). As Jakob continues to court Bella’s ghost, she no longer remains in his dreams but invades his daylight hours as well: “I felt her presence everywhere, in daylight, in rooms that I knew weren’t empty. I felt her touch on my back, on my shoulders, my hair” (31).

While Jakob and Athos live out their fugitive existence, stories of the fate of Jews across Europe and even in the village below them drift up to their hidden retreat, and they are overwhelmed by the details. Jakob sinks further into his world of guilt and memory, for he understands the connection between his lost family and the loss of the community of the Jewish people: “At night I choked against Bella’s round face, a doll’s face, immobile, inanimate, her hair floating behind her. These nightmares, in which my parents and my sister drowned with the Jews of Crete, continued for years, continued long after we’d moved to Toronto” (44).

When Jakob and Athos emerge from their four years of hiding, Jakob realizes that when “Athos put his arm around my shoulders . . . his touch felt natural to me, though all else was like a dream. And it was his touch that kept me from falling into myself too far. It was on that journey from Zakynthos to Athens, on those crumbling roads and in those dry hills, that I realized what I felt: not that I owed Athos everything but that I loved him” (60). Mackey offers an explanation of “the origins and conditions of individual relationships” and their connection to communal relationships:

the unique bond of love between two unique individuals answers to man’s deepest need. It and it alone can satisfy his insatiable desire for unity. It alone can prevent the frustration he suffers when his interest and his energy is dissipated over the whole range of things and people that forms his environment, since it alone offers him a focal point in life, a centre to which all his activity can be referred and which lends a deep and unified meaning to it all. (113)

Though Mackey is referring to the love relationship between a man and woman in marriage, his comments explain the influence of the sustained love relationships within Jakob’s life. As a child, Jakob shared a unique bond of love with Bella. He loved her fiercely and worshipped her. She gave his universe a centre. The stories that Jakob remembers of Bella

and her Beethoven speak to the magic of Bella, her effect upon her family, and the adoration with which they loved her. Yet when Jakob is stripped of his family, his sense of unity is destroyed. The delicate balance is skewered, and suddenly nothing in his life has meaning except his attempt to recapture Bella's spirit. However, Jakob's ability to love is slowly repaired by the unconditional and un-compromised love that he receives from the community which begins with Athos. Jakob writes that "to share a hiding place, physical or psychological, is as intimate as love" (*Fugitive* 20). Athos tempers Jakob's need to hold on to Bella, and he pushes him to release his death grip. Together Athos and Jakob form a type of community. Their relationship replaces the lost relationship of Jakob's family community. Yet at the same time, Athos recognizes that Jakob's survival depends upon his reconnection to the Jewish community and his ability to let himself love again.

According to Dr. Martinez-Brawley, "community is an identity-giving entity, a personally meaningful sociological unit that relies heavily on the primary interaction of its members" (8). Typically the term community is applied to town-sized groupings of people; however, community is not about size, and it does not entail a minimum number of people. Martinez-Brawley cites the views of R.M. MacIver: "life is essentially and always communal life. Every living thing is born into community and owes its life to community.

. . . Community is sentiment" (85). R. Keyes states that "an ideal community would be like a good family: the group from which one can't be expelled" (Martinez-Brawdley 109). Jakob and Athos are the first members of their new community, which is a community forged first out of necessity and then out of love. The size of their community is limited at first to two people because of the danger of its formation. Later, after the war, it grows to include Kostas and Daphne, and then in Toronto Jakob notes, "we were strays and gathered other strays

around us” (*Fugitive* 96). Jakob and Athos’s community is constantly growing and expanding in the same manner as the initial act of grace, which they first shared.

During the war, Jakob, like other Jews in hiding, is, in the eyes of the state, a non-being because he is Jewish: “Nazi policy was beyond racism, it was anti-matter, for Jews were not considered human. An old trick of language, used often in the course of history. Non-Aryans were never to be referred to as human, but as ‘figuren’” (*Fugitive* 165). Athos’s covenanted entering into community with Jakob is a rejection of the corrupted communal viewpoint of the reigning “civil community,” and is a return to the “nucleus” community of the family (Lonergan 109). As Jakob and Athos’s relationship unfolds, it becomes clear that the two men are part of a larger, hidden community. All over Europe, people like Jakob and Athos are bonding together into the small cells of a larger community intent on defying the German incentive aimed at destroying the Jewish community:

The Gestapo ordered Mayor Karrer to write down the name and profession of every Jew. Karrer took the list to Archbishop Chrysostomos. The archbishop said: ‘Burn the list.’ That’s when they sent the warning to the Zudecha. Almost everyone managed to escape the night we came to you. The next day, the streets were empty In the daylight, it seemed impossible that hundreds of people could have disappeared so quickly. (*Fugitive* 41)

Though Jakob feels that his hiding place doesn’t compare with the horrendous conditions of the rest of Europe’s Jews who are in hiding, he is a part of their community: “While I hid in the luxury of a room, thousands were stuffed into baking stoves, sewers, garbage bins. In the crawlspaces of double ceilings, in stables, pigsties, chicken coops” (45). The grace which spares Jakob the fate of the “boy [his] age” who “hid in a crate” and who after “ten months . . . was blind and mute” connects him to that boy (45). Learning to accept the grace of his own survival transforms Jakob into the voice and the eyes of the boy, for he tells the boy’s

story. When Jakob learns of the horrors of the Holocaust, he contrasts his experience with the sufferings of his absent community:

I didn't know that Jews were being hanged from their thumbs in public squares. I didn't know that when there were too many for the ovens, corpses were burned in open pits, flames ladled with human fat. I didn't know that while I listened to stories of explorers in the clean places of the world . . . and slept in a clean place, men were untangling limbs, the flesh of friends and neighbours, wives and daughters, coming off in their hands. (46)

The contrast between Jakob's experience and the experiences he catalogues throughout the novel underscore the enormity of grace in Jakob's life. The questions of why he survives when so many others perish, why "while [he] hid in the radiant light of Athos's island, thousands suffocated in darkness," can only be understood as an act of grace, which he is called to respond to by extending it to others (45). There is no other explanation for his survival. Yet his survival is almost a grace that he longs to reject when he learns of the fate of his community. Comparing one person's salvation to another's can reveal an enormous and nearly irreconcilable imbalance in the distribution of grace; however, grace is never granted to one individual for him or herself alone (Fransen 342). Where there are discrepancies in grace, it is because the grace has not finished being fully distributed. Because Jakob receives such an outpouring of grace, his responsibilities are even greater. Only through truly becoming a part of his community is he able to reconcile himself to the imbalance of his experience versus that of others – such as Bella. Because Jakob is on Zakynthos and not in a crawl space, Athos is able to instil within Jakob an awareness of the world outside of himself. Athos teaches Jakob the art of excavation, preparing him for the task of excavating the horrors of the Holocaust. The reason Jakob "was . . . learning Greek and English, learning geology, geography, and poetry, [while] Jews were filling the corners

and cracks of Europe, every available space” is initially unclear, yet as the novel progresses, Jakob begins to understand the grace he has been granted and his responsibility to it (45).

When Jakob and Athos move to Toronto, Jakob becomes aware of the larger community in which he finds himself: “it’s a city where almost everyone has come from elsewhere—a market, a caravansary—bringing with them their different ways of dying and marrying, their kitchens and songs. A city of forsaken worlds; language a kind of farewell” (*Fugitive* 89). It is a city where, though they are not connected to the traditional Greek community, they still feel a form of connection to the other communities building up around them (97). Jakob notes, on their walks through the city, as they slowly turn it into their home: “I could temporarily shrug off my strangeness because, the way Athos saw the world, every human was a newcomer” (103). Occasionally, through a gift of simple grace, Jakob feels the connection between himself and the city of immigrants. One night, while he is alone, walking up

Grace Street. . . . suddenly an overheard word fastened onto a melody; a song of my mother’s. . . . The words stumbled out of my mouth, a whisper, then louder, until I was mumbling whatever I remembered. . . . I looked around. The houses were dark, the street safely empty. I raised my voice. . . . I whimpered; my spirit shape finally in familiar clothes and with abandon, flinging its arms to the stars. . . . But the street wasn’t empty as I thought. Startled, I saw that the blackness was perforated with dozens of faces. A forest of eyes, of Italian and Portuguese and Greek ears; whole families sitting silently on lawnchairs and front steps. On dark verandahs, a huge invisible audience. . . . There was nothing for it but to raise my foreign song and feel understood. (109-10)

Though Jakob seems to escape at times from the negative control of his memories and to begin to live within the world of reality, the respite is brief. Even though he tries “to bury images, to cover them with the Greek and English words, with Athos’s stories, with all the

geologic eras,” he continues his relationship with the world of the dead: “at night, my mother, my father, Bella, Mones, simply rose, shook the earth from their clothes, and waited” (93). Though he is rebuilding community, Jakob remains paralysed by the belief that

my life could not be stored in any language but only in silence; the moment I looked into the room and took in only what was visible, not vanished. The moment I failed to see Bella had disappeared. But I did not know how to seek by way of silence. So I lived a breath apart, a touch-typist who holds his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless, garbled. Bella and I inches apart, the wall between us. (111)

Jakob’s need for atonement and for reconnection with the community he fears he has lost is so deep that it becomes his obsession: “I seek out the horror, which, like history itself, can’t be stanchd. I read everything I can. My eagerness for details is offensive” (139). As he enters adolescence, his need for someone, other than Athos, to divert or guide his unrestrained imagination and desires grows, for he is becoming imbalanced by the obsessive quality of his memories. It is not just his own memories that he haunts but those of people he does not even know: “In Birkenau, a woman carried the faces of her husband and daughter, torn from a photograph, under her tongue so their images wouldn’t be taken from her. . . . Night after night, I endlessly follow Bella’s path from the front door of my parents’ house. In order to give her death a place. This becomes my task. I collect facts, trying to reconstruct events in minute detail” (*Fugitive* 139). Jakob’s instincts are well intentioned, but because he relies on his own efforts, he fails. He still does not understand that he can’t remain with the old nor can he completely expel it. Instead his dead community must be remembered through the eyes of a new community, which will help to carry its memories. By himself, he is unable to control the darkness.

In his marriage to Alex, the world of the dead and the world of reality collide: “Alex’s hairbrush propped on the sink: Bella’s brush. Alex’s bobby pins: Bella’s hairclips. . . . Bella writing on my back: Alex’s touch during the night. Alex whispering goodnight against my shoulder: Bella reminding me that even Beethoven never stayed up past ten o’clock” (140). Though Alex’s presence in Jakob’s life initially acts as “a finger of light” which “floods the clearing[.]. . . . gradually through no fault of Alex’s, the finger of light poke[s] down, cold as bone, illuminating nothing, not even the white point of contrast that burned away the ground it touched” (*Fugitive* 139). Because Alex and Jakob are both wounded people, and because they have not reached a point of trust where they can share their wounds honestly and unconditionally together, they are unable to form any basis of community through which they can together, unified as one, approach the darkness of Jakob’s past. Alex is not a part of the communal friendship that Jakob has with Maurice and Irena; instead, she is a threat to it. In the chaos of Jakob’s marriage to Alex, Bella is free to invade his dreams. His guilt at having forgotten her in that moment of utmost importance refuses to allow him to be with another woman. He cannot escape the nightmares for “nothing releases the dreamer; not death in the dream, not waking” (*Fugitive* 141).

When Athos dies and when Alex leaves him, Jakob abandons himself to the community of the dead that he has been steadily gathering around himself: “I heard the cries and they grew louder, filled my head. I moved closer inside myself, didn’t turn away. I clutched the sides of the desk and was pulled down into the blueness. I lost myself, discovered the world could disappear” (157). In the midst of his self-imposed isolation and growing despair, Jakob compares himself to the psalmist, David, who calls out to God as his enemies surround him

(*Fugitive* 156).¹⁰ By aligning his pain with the misery expressed by David in the Psalms, Jakob achieves two ends: he connects himself to the history of the Jewish people, and he finds a way to express his grief. Raising his cry of desperation with that of David, Jakob reinserts himself into the Jewish tradition. The Jews of Europe were forcibly identified during the war by wearing a yellow Star of David. Because Jakob was in hiding, he did not wear this community identifying marker, yet by merging his voice and pain with David, Jakob chooses to begin building himself back into the Jewish community. The lamentation of the Psalmist that Jakob quotes begins with a tone of hopelessness: “Grief has eaten up my life, groans have eaten away years . . . those who know me are afraid when they hear my name. I have been forgotten like a dead man who is not considered, like a pot that is broken” (ellipsis intact, *Fugitive* 156). Jakob’s quotation then moves into a description of the physical threats faced by the Psalmist: “My strength has dried like the baked earth . . . there are dogs around me, I am cut off by a crowd of wicked men. They have torn my hands and feet. . . . They will divide my clothes between them” (ellipsis intact 156-7).¹¹ The Psalmist’s suffering is vast, and death seems imminent, yet Jakob finishes his quotation with hope: “On the day of evil he will take me into his house, he will hide me in his tent, he will lift me unto high rock” (ellipsis intact 157).¹²

The first two quotations seem reflective of the Jewish experience during the war. As Hitler and the Nazis cut the Jewish community off from the rest of society, dividing the spoils of confiscated Jewish possessions amongst themselves, Jewish names became unspeakable and friendships between Jew and Gentile were forgotten as the Jews were

¹⁰ In the acknowledgements at the end of *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels notes that the “quotations from *The Psalms* are from the translation by Peter Levi” (*Fugitive Acknowledgements*).

¹¹ The source of this Psalm seems to be first *Psalm* 31.10-13 and then *Psalm* 22.15-18 (*NIV Bible*).

¹² The source of this Psalm seems to be *Psalm* 27.5-6 (*NIV Bible*).

beaten, deported, and killed. Yet the final part of Jakob's quotation clearly aligns with Jakob's individual experience, for "on the day of evil," which can be defined as the day Jakob's parents are killed, Jakob is taken into Athos's house (157). He is hidden inside the tent of Athos's garment, and he is taken up onto a high rock, the island of Zakynthos, where he is hidden from the wicked men. These parallels support the reading that Jakob has been saved by God's grace, and they identify Athos as a vehicle of God's grace. However, not only do the quotations align with the Jews' experiences during the war and with the grace-directed relationship between Jakob and Athos, but they are also traditionally interpreted within Christian theology as references to Christ. The line "they will divide my clothes between them" echoes Psalm 22 verse 18 ("They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" [*NIV Bible*]). The meaning of this verse, among Christian theologians, is established as a prophecy referring to Christ's crucifixion. In accordance with this reading, the line "They have torn my hands and feet" which echoes Psalm 22 verse 16 ("They have pierced my hands and my feet") also evokes Christ's crucifixion, for His hands and feet were pierced when He was nailed to the cross (*NIV Bible*). Directly pairing these two images by connecting them through the use of ellipsis acts as a reference to Christ. Whether or not Michaels was specifically evoking a comparison between Jakob and Christ is unclear and unimportant; what is important is that the comparison exists and, for that reason, merits attention. The comparison can be understood by recognizing that, according to Christian theology, just as Christ is the human embodiment of grace in the world, Jakob is a human vehicle for grace in his community. Casting Jakob as a Christ-figure evokes the associations of grace traditionally linked to Christ and transfers them to Jakob, underscoring and strengthening his characterization as a vehicle of grace within his community. Yet, though

Jakob is responsible for the resurrection of the forgotten and hidden memories of his community, he himself is unable to extend absolution or the grace of forgiveness, for he believes, in a seeming echo of Adorno's infamous pronouncement, "nothing erases the immoral act. Not forgiveness. Not confession. And even if an act could be forgiven, no one could bear the responsibility of forgiveness on behalf of the dead. No act of violence is ever resolved. When one who can no longer forgive, can no longer speak, there is only silence" (*Fugitive* 161). However, despite Jakob's professed belief that there is only silence from those who are dead, unable to speak, and unable to extend forgiveness, Jakob's voice, though it is not extending forgiveness for the dead, is speaking for them through making their hidden stories known and remembered. Through his writing, Jakob, though he does not recognize it at the time, is responsible for beginning the healing process. By exposing the atrocities, he is opening up the hidden, re-engaging the truth, making room for communication and eventually for confession and possible forgiveness.

There are other instances throughout the novel where this reference to Jakob as a Christ figure is repeated. Jakob compares himself to the "new Adam," which is another name for Christ (*Fugitive* 167). Jakob writes, "we look for the spirit precisely in the places of greatest degradation. It's from there that the new Adam must raise himself, must begin again. I want to remain close to Bella. I read. I rip the black alphabet to shreds, but there's no answer there. At night, at Athos's old desk, I stare at photos of strangers. . . . I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining" (167).¹³ When Jakob finally allows himself to move beyond the memories of Bella into the reality of imagining her death – "that moment

¹³ Just as Christ had to descend to the place of greatest degradation—hell—in order to defeat death and to be able to offer hope to humanity, Jakob has to descend to his place of greatest degradation, to the hell of imagining Bella's death in order to be able to enter fully into life and to be able to offer hope and grace to those around him.

of utmost degradation” – he imagines Bella in the gas chamber (167). Because he moves so deeply inside the image and because his memories have been steadily building towards the reality of it, while imagining this image Jakob himself experiences, if in a lesser degree than those who actually waited in the gas chamber for someone to save them, the gruesome realization that faith in man is not enough. Up until the moment when the doors are closed, it is possible to continue to believe that someone will come and stop the insanity of what is happening, but then suddenly the doors close, and the truth that no one is coming sets in. In that absence, where faith in man is no longer possible, man desperately, reaches out for something to fill the void. In the void created by man’s failure, the only saviour left is God.

To the man who has until that moment rejected faith in anything outside of himself, God’s steadfast presence in the darkest, most humanly isolated place is what Michaels calls “the most obscene testament of grace” (*Fugitive* 167). To come to a discovery of God’s grace only because everything else has fallen away is an obscenely painful revelation. In the absence of everything, in the void of complete isolation, when one realizes the fragility of man, “faith in man is forced to change, anatomically—mercilessly—into faith.” (*Fugitive* 168). Jakob, by forcing himself to imagine Bella’s death, is torn between the despair of admitting to himself that she is dead and the desperation of wanting to believe that she is alive. In that moment of desperation, Jakob’s faith in man, in himself, alone, is changed simply into faith because the consequences of his imagining are too much for him to carry on his own. There is no other outlet but faith; everything else has fallen away. In this moment of transformation, Jakob is aware of the presence of the moonlight: “It occupies the darkness, erasing everything it touches” (*Fugitive* 169). His description of it echoes a central promise of Christianity: “the light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not over come

it” (*NIV Bible*, John 1.5). Jakob realizes that it has taken him years to reach this epiphany of “pure belief” that man, of himself, alone, is not enough, and that when man fails all that remains is faith (*Fugitive* 169). Michaels explains “the events of the second World War are so horrific that, as a human being, I felt my faith – in the broadest sense of the word ‘faith’ – threatened. And so it seemed to me personally very important to try and earn a faith, or try and discover that faith in humanity is possible after those historical events”(“Interview Michaels”1-2). Michaels, through writing Jakob’s story, reveals that faith in humanity only survives when it is coupled with faith in its purest unadulterated form. Faith in the unseen, which is God, allows darkness to be erased by light and allows one to trust and believe that “the small individual act can be incredibly powerful” (“Interview Michaels” 2).

Surrounded by this community of the dead, Jakob suddenly understands: “*Bella, my brokenness has kept you broken*” (169). With this understanding that out of his own strength he has been unable to heal Bella, comes the knowledge that “*to remain with the dead is to abandon them*. All the years I felt Bella entreating me, filled with her loneliness, I was mistaken. I have misunderstood her signals. Like other ghosts, she whispers; not for me to join her, but so that, when I’m close enough, she can push me back into the world” (170). As Athos said, “the great mystery of wood is not that it burns, but that it floats,” and the great mystery of life is not that we die but that we survive, and then are called to live (28). The balance between the world of the dead and the world of the living is precarious, yet Jakob slowly achieves it when he releases himself from the community of the dead and seeks life among the living.

The character of Michaela completes Athos’s teachings on love. Jakob describes his encounter with Michaela as an encounter with grace: “Sometimes the world disrobes, slips

its dress off a shoulder, stops time for a beat. If we look up at that moment, it's not due to an ability of ours to pierce the darkness, it's the world's briefest bestowal. The catastrophe of grace" (175). Michaela transforms Jakob, providing the final transition from death into life: "Instead of the dead inhaling my breath with their closeness, I am deafened by the buzzing drone of Michaela's body, the power lines of blood, blue threads under her skin" (180). Through loving Michaela, Jakob gains a freedom to love his past instead of being controlled by it. Released into a renewed sense of unadulterated faith, Jakob is able to rediscover his faith in humanity through loving and being loved by Michaela. The community that has existed parallel to Jakob's community of the living is allowed expression and receives absolution, for it is heard, recognized, and remembered by Michaela (Bakhtin 287). Without Jakob even saying anything, Michaela hears Bella's voice and weeps for her (*Fugitive* 182). Bella's ghost's dominance is exorcised, and what remains are the good, life-affirming memories of Bella, which Michaela heightens.

The narrative voice, at this point in the novel, signals change in Jakob. He directly addresses his audience, claiming his purpose and his understanding of his responsibility: "Each morning I write these words for you all. For Bella and Athos, for Alex, for Maurice and Irena, for Michaela. Here on Idhra, in this summer of 1992, I try to set down the past in the cramped space of a prayer" (191). By comparing his memoirs, his writing, to a prayer, Jakob recalls Mackey's argument that "the fellowship of God with man and the fellowship of man with man are offered together, and they must be accepted together" (23). As well, the comparison signals that Jakob does understand that his writings, his rememberings, are a form of petition. He, like Christ, is the intermediary between his people and God. However, Jakob himself cannot forgive, nor can he heal anyone out of his own powers, nor is the grace

he is a part of created by him; he is only the vehicle, the voice rising in prayer. Jakob finally understands and accepts that “there’s no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence. Memory dies unless it is given a use” (*Fugitive* 193). With this understanding, and with his new faith, he is no longer “afraid when harvesting darkness” but is able to begin writing his memoirs (193).¹⁴ Jakob’s obsession with the horrific stories of the Holocaust is transformed from an obsession into a reconstruction of community. By grace, Jakob’s anguished searching and his near self-burial in a graveyard of memory become instead acts of the deepest communion, for his harvesting of the memories ensures that they do not go “unheard, unrecognized, [or] unremembered” (Bakhtin 287). Through writing down the memories, Jakob both firmly embeds his community with permanence and avails them with the key to their survival. As people both inside and outside of his community read his writing, his community gains strength through the recognition and remembrance of others. The act of writing is always communal. By its very nature writing, to become fully realized as writing, demands a reader. Until someone reads writing, it is incomplete, but once a piece of writing is read, it moves beyond an act of isolated composition to become a conduit of communication.

The sudden shift of the narrative voice from Jakob to Ben in Part II: *The Drowned City*, though initially confusing, remains loyal to the structural design, purpose, and theme of the novel. Part two opens by describing the buried kitchenware in the banks of the Humber River and by doing so it echoes the novel’s recurring image of hidden narratives that are

¹⁴ Athos’s prophesy has come true: “‘Write to save yourself,’ Athos said, ‘and someday you’ll write because you’ve been saved . . . You will feel terrible shame for this. Let your humility grow larger than your shame’” (165).

“buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors” (*Fugitive* 1). The reference subconsciously returns the reader to the opening page where the image originates. There, the reader rediscovers Jakob’s death and understands that the first section of the novel is a compilation of Jakob’s memoirs, rather than his active voice (1). As well, the description of buried objects recalls Jakob’s emergence from the archaeological pits of Biskupin, signalling that there is connection between Jakob and the new narrative voice of Ben. The first section of the novel, which is Jakob’s story, becomes an unfinished piece, a section of memory that is remembered and rediscovered by Ben. Ben performs the triple act of memory when he unearths Jakob’s memoirs, which is in itself an unearthing of the hidden stories of those who perished in the Holocaust. Through continuing Jakob’s story in the voice and life of Ben, Michaels reiterates her earlier statement that it is impossible emotionally for “one man to take on the memories of even one other man, let alone five or ten or a thousand or ten thousand” (*Fugitive* 52). The act of carrying memory has passed from Athos to Jakob and now on to Ben.¹⁵ Jakob completes “Bearing False Witness,” which is Athos’s life work, and Ben is the one to complete Jakob’s memoirs, demonstrating that only through the arms of a community can the memories be lifted and carried. By weaving Jakob’s story into Ben’s story and Ben’s story into Jakob’s story, Michaels ensures that the community experience of grace becomes even more obvious.

Ben, like Jakob, can be called a fugitive piece but for different reasons. Because of the fear under which his parents live, Ben is emotionally fragmented from them. His parents are too afraid to claim him, because they are afraid that if they do, he will be taken from them,

¹⁵ Athos is the one who introduced Jakob to the necessity of memory and to man’s responsibility to memory. Athos searched for Jakob’s family when Jakob was unable to do so (*Fugitive* 59). Athos also made sure that the lies of Nazi archeology were exposed for he “started documenting immediately after the war, as soon as information began to flow,” and Jakob ensured that Athos’s life work was completed (*Fugitive* 118).

so they do not even give him a real name. His name does not come from Benjamin; instead, it is “merely ‘ben’ —the Hebrew word for son” (*Fugitive* 253). The Holocaust fragmented Ben’s parents’ original nuclear family and so, not wanting to tempt fate a second time, his parents never allow their family to become whole again. The horror they have lived through and the fear of repetition cripples nearly every aspect of their lives. Ben is loved but not in completeness, for he is never told about the missing members of his own immediate family. He does not even know that his brother Paul or his sister Hannah ever existed: “There was no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements, and we were forever whispering into a strong wind. My parents and I waded through a damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking” (*Fugitive* 204). Though Ben is born in Canada and raised by his natural parents, his experience is distinctly similar to Jakob’s experience. He, too, is haunted by memory and loss: “I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. . . . I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief” (233).

Ben’s parents, like Jakob as a child, lack an understanding of how to navigate through the pain of their memories. Because of this lack, they attempt to cut themselves off from the memories of the Holocaust and the time before. They believe that what happened to them and what they lost are too awful even to speak of to each other or to their son. However, memory is nearly impossible to completely erase, for “[t]he memories we elude catch up to us, overtake us like a shadow” (*Fugitive* 213). When memory is repressed and not dealt with directly, it can surface in seemingly harmless habits, which are subconsciously fear-induced. When that happens, those actions, which are meant to safeguard the person from the pain of

the horrific memories, become the conduit by which the memories are relived again and again. The suitcase that Ben's mother keeps in her closet and changes the contents of every year represents the threat that it could happen again and becomes a controlling fear in Ben as a child (250). The photos of the camps that Ben's father repeatedly thrusts at Ben confuse him, yet their messages are "clear. You are not too young. There were hundreds of thousands younger than you" (219). Ben gains his knowledge of the Holocaust in fugitive pieces of memories that slip out as warnings and fears: "Instead of hearing about ogres, trolls, witches, I heard disjointed references to kapos, haftlings, 'Ess Ess' dark woods; a pyre of dark words" (217). The only "details" of his parents' past that he is allowed to know come in secret revelations from his mother, with the strict understanding that he must not let his father know that he knows (222). Webs of silence and secrecy, woven out of fear, entangle Ben's relationship with his parents, and obscure the grace that they have all been granted.

Ben's parents are broken because not only their external community but also the very nucleus of their family, that which should be wholly impenetrable, has been found to be vulnerable. Ben's parents have been so traumatized by the evil in the world that they cannot find their way out from under it and into complete healing.¹⁶ Because they cannot make themselves forget, they will always be vulnerable. They have experienced the evil of man, and have learned that they, of themselves, are powerless to deny it. They are overwhelmed and devastated. Ben's family does not understand that the way to reach grace, to hold onto it and to help it continue, to protect it, is to pass it on. Ben is a gift of grace, not a replacement

¹⁶ D.M.R. Bentley argues that Ben's parents have "won through their darkness to sunlight"(5). Yet, Ben's mother's distrust of her own son, her inability to tell him about his dead siblings, and Ben's father's suicide, which is an act of desperation, despair, and loneliness, reveal that the darkness is still very much present in their lives and is still a separating force between them and their son and any larger community outside of their marriage relationship.

for the loss of their first children, but rather a new beginning. Yet because they are so afraid, they do not read the gift of Ben in that manner. Instead, they see Ben as an invitation for history to repeat itself. They “prayed that the birth of their third child would go unnoticed,” for as Ben’s mother told him: “Who dares to believe he will be saved twice?” (253, 247).

Because Ben’s parents blame their connection to the Jewish community for their suffering, they resolve to remove themselves from it: “When my parents came to Toronto, they saw most of their fellow immigrants settled in the same downtown district . . . My father would not make the same mistake. ‘They wouldn’t even have the trouble of rounding us up’” (243). Yet instead of seeking out a new community, they withdraw completely from community: “Our neighbours soon understood my parents wanted privacy. . . . My father was a man who had erased himself as much as possible within the legal limits of citizenship” (243, 232). Ben’s family demonstrates the inept response to grace; rather than extending the grace they have received to their community, they become afraid of both grace and community. They stifle grace. They fear that if they enter into community once more, they will be open targets. They do not see the strength to be gained in community; instead they see only weakness. They choose to isolate themselves from any outside contact, and it almost causes their death on the night of Hurricane Hazel when their house is washed away. Yet, though they reject community, it still reaches out to them and they are again saved. Ben’s parents’ story demonstrates that essentially grace is not dependent upon man’s actions; grace can be borne along and extended by man, but man does not create it nor does it fail because of man. Grace is unmerited, and it is a gift. God extends it to those as He sees fit.

Ben's section of the narrative follows linear time; however, interjected into his narration are moments of reflection regarding his childhood and his parents. These moments of reflection sound almost like acts of confession. As Ben's narrative progresses, it becomes clearer that he is, in his writing, directly responding to Jakob's memoirs and is, in fact, addressing Jakob. Through living in Jakob's house and through slowly searching through it, Ben is reacquainted with love, and taught how to recognize it. Yet he almost loses what he has been absorbing when he has an affair with Petra. Ben, surrounded by evidence of the "happiness" of Jakob and Michaela's marriage, chooses, in response to his own unhappiness, to attach himself to a woman who is completely unconnected to him or his past and who thus demands nothing from him emotionally (*Fugitive* 269). Though Ben's obsession with Petra is completely different than Jakob's obsession with Bella, there are distinct echoes of the one within the other. Petra's black hair, Bentley notes, is a "repetition of Bella's 'black hair,'" and Petra, like Bella's ghost, is an indulgence, with dangerously destructive powers (7). In what can be seen as an attempt to affirm himself in his selfishness, Ben casts his affair with Petra in such a way as to echo the sexual relationship between Jakob and his young Michaela, yet there is darkness connected with Petra. Ben's claim that "I know her body, every smoothness, every line . . . every shape," a statement which recalls Jakob's descriptions of Michaela's body, is not a testament of love but of lust (*Fugitive* 276). Only when Petra desecrates the sacredness of Jakob's library does Ben recognize her for what she is: a threat to everything good and pure. Yet through Petra's "rampage," Jakob's memoirs are discovered (283). Somehow in the same manner by which James discovers in *The Double Hook* that "out of his corruption life had leafed" (*Hook* 111), Ben discovers from his mistake the answer to his searching. In compiling Jakob's memoirs and through responding

to them with his own, Ben enters into a form of communion with Jakob. In this act of communion, Ben learns to hear, recognize, and remember not only his parents' story but his own as well, for he breaks the codes of silence (Bakhtin 287). In writing out his pain, Ben remembers that "when we married, Naomi said: 'Sometimes we need both hands to climb out of a place. Sometimes there are steep places, where one has to walk ahead of the other. If I can't find you, I'll look deeper in myself. If I can't keep up, if you're far ahead, look back. Look back'" (292). As Ben begins to look back and rediscover his life and that of Jakob, he suddenly sees that "I must give what I most need" (294).

The final images in Jakob's narrative and then in Ben's are images of reinterpretation. Jakob's last address is to his unborn child. Though it sounds like he is addressing Bella, his sister, he is addressing his son or daughter. His words are not a confession, but instead must be read as an appropriation of hope. He writes: "My son, my daughter: May you never be deaf to love. Bela, Bella: Once I was lost in a forest. I was so afraid. My blood pounded in my chest and I knew my heart's strength would soon be exhausted. I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name"(195). Jakob is choosing to tell his child that the promise of his or her existence is what gave him the hope to live. He is rewriting his past but in a way that acknowledges hope instead of despair. Originally, in the forest, in his moment of "utmost degradation" Jakob replaced his heartbeat with Bella's name; he chose faith in "man" (168). He focused on Bella, his sister, on her absence, and he tried to hold on to her. Though Bella initially saved Jakob, giving him the purpose of remembering her, she soon became too powerful in his life. Instead of saving him, her presence became a destructive life-draining force. When Jakob imagined Bella in the gas chambers, he realized that faith in man is not enough. Man will

fail, does fail. With his new-found hope in faith, Jakob's final statement can be understood as a testament to his child that he has chosen to reread those moments in the forest. His message to his son or daughter tells him or her that when he replaced his heartbeat with the name Bella/Bela, it was a moment of extreme faith made in hope for the future. For his words tell his child that he was anticipating his or her arrival, rather than attempting to stay in the past.

In a similar vein, the very final image of *Fugitive Pieces* created out of one of Ben's memories is an image of love and grace where, though brokenness abounds, there is wholeness. As Ben's airplane circles for landing, Ben remembers how "once," as a child, "I saw my father sitting in . . . the kitchen . . . I came downstairs in the middle of the night . . . My father was sitting at the table, eating. I was transfixed by his face. This was the first time I had seen food make my father cry" (294). Yet now through the eyes of grace, as he remembers this image, Ben sees "something else" inside of that traumatic memory (294). Instead of seeing only his father's brokenness, Ben suddenly sees that, "my mother stands behind my father and his head leans against her. As he eats, she strokes his hair. Like a miraculous circuit, each draws strength from the other" (294). Though Ben's parents were unable to reach out beyond their relationship to those around them, they were together in their pain and within that covenantal marriage community they were able to be grace for each other. Ben's newfound ability to see beauty in a relationship in which he saw nothing but brokenness as a child, and his ability to learn from this new insight, is an act of grace. Through sharing in Jakob's grace, Ben is able retroactively to extend grace into his own home. Both Jakob and Ben, at the end of their narratives, are able to see within their own stories something that before was unseen: their own parallel narratives of grace.

Early on in the novel, when Jakob writes about emerging from hiding, he observes that: “To survive was to escape fate,” and then in a pragmatic continuation to this observation, he proleptically asks, “But if you escape your fate, whose life do you then step into?” (48). The answer to this question is never directly stated in the novel; rather it is implied throughout, for the novel itself supersedes a direct or simple answer. According to the progression of Jakob’s life, which is so intricately connected to the lives of those around him, when you escape your fate, the life you step into belongs to someone else. By stepping into someone else’s life, as both Jakob and Ben do, you both accept the call to live and assume the responsibility of passing on grace to the individual with whom you are now sharing life, and from there grace expands into community. The process is cyclical: grace propels community interaction and community interaction propels grace.

Chapter Three:

The Shipping News: Grace Extended

In the preface to *Survival*, Margaret Atwood includes this excerpt from Germaine

Warkentin's "An Image in a Mirror":

Searchers for a Canadian identity have failed to realize that you can only have an identification with something you can see or recognize. You need, if nothing else, an image in a mirror. No other country cares enough about us to give us back an image of ourselves that we can even resent. And apparently we can't do it for ourselves, because so far our attempts to do so have resembled those of the three blind men trying to describe the elephant. Some of the descriptions have been worth something, but what they add up to is fragmented, indecipherable. With what are we to identify ourselves? (qtd. in Atwood 9)

While Atwood was using this excerpt as a rallying cry to encourage Canadian readers, critics, and writers towards a study of Canadian literature, the excerpt's applicability can now be shifted. Warkentin's observation, in the context in which Atwood quotes it, provides the framework for the present argument, which seeks to include Annie Proulx's novel *The Shipping News* in a literary study of Canadian communities. Though we, as a nation, have grown competent in identifying ourselves in the absence of a mirror, our neighbour to the south, whose indifference towards us is an accepted though resented fact, has in the person of Annie Proulx presented a writer who "cares enough about us to give us back an image of ourselves" (qtd. in Atwood 9).¹ For once, America is reflecting us rather than the other way around.

¹ The full quotation argues that we don't have "an image of ourselves that we can *even resent*" (9, emphasis added). Some would argue that *The Shipping News* provides a resentful image. In an interview with Proulx, when Aida Edemariam addresses the fact that "many Newfoundlanders" were "angered" by the "incest and

Proulx's presentation of Newfoundland is not a patronizing glimpse of rustic maritime Canada; rather, it is the product/creation of her deep fascination with the place:

"Newfoundland is different from any other place. Maine does not look like Newfoundland . . . I don't think I'd been on the island for seven or eight minutes when I was struck viscerally. It was this real, physical force. I liked this harsh, bony, bare, empty, cruel, and beautiful place so much I could not bear it" (Edemariam 1). Proulx's portrayal of a distinctly Canadian community can be included in a study of Canadian communities because it balances and completes the vision we have created of ourselves. It is a useful, even necessary, reflection. Yet at the same time, Proulx is not writing entirely from the position of outsider; her reflection is informed by experience. Part of her heritage is Canadian: her "father was a textile businessman of French-Canadian descent who reinvented himself as a Yankee in New England at a time when French Canadians were looked down on locally" (Campbell 2). She has also lived in Montreal where she completed her M.A. at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia), and she also "spends a few weeks each year in Newfoundland. She has a house there, on the Great Northern Peninsula" (Edemariam 2). Though Proulx may be American by citizenship, she is able to reflect, understand, and reproduce a community that is distinctly Canadian and which by its very nature of coming out of the "other" is extremely valuable when it is compared with our own representations of community. Because grace and community function in the same relationship in Proulx's novel as in the other novels under discussion, the outsider's view becomes a type of "plimsoll line" by which to measure the consistency of the connection between grace and

sexual abuse" which "loom large" in her book, Proulx responded: "They didn't like the fact that an outsider was writing about it . . . [but] I have not had any complaints from people that the facts are distorted or that what I wrote about simply could not happen"(3). Therefore, regardless of whether or not the image is resentful, what is important is that it is an image of ourselves from outside, and because of this, it is useful in evaluating our own visions of ourselves.

community (*Shipping* 229).² Even though the relationship as presented from the “other” point of view will be different, it must also, if it really exists, be essentially the same as those of native Canadian writers. However, at the same time, the primary differences of plot, location, and regional culture which separate *The Double Hook*, *Fugitive Pieces*, *The Shipping News*, and *Crackpot* ensure that the consistency of the relationship between community and grace is not simply the result of imitation. Because the community depicted in *The Shipping News* offers a different yet similar perspective on the previously established relationship between grace and community in my select Canadian novels, the metaphor, which reads the ubiquitous presence of community in Canadian literature as a vehicle for grace in otherwise secular novels, is confirmed, or at least rendered more tenable. In *The Double Hook*, as the community reconstitutes itself grace is released; in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob learns how to remember the community he has lost and through the process expands the grace he receives; in *The Shipping News*, Quoye returns to a community he has never known but which knows him and, in the process of his resurrection, learns to receive the grace it extends towards him.

Northrop Frye’s observation that “memory is the key to resurrection” offers a starting point from which to open up a reading of community and grace in *The Shipping News* (qtd. in Powe D8).³ The statement, though it sounds definitively simple, is ambiguous in its

² Plimsoll lines are the topic of one of Quoye’s pieces written for the *Gammy Bird*. Plimsoll lines or “loading marks” indicate the “safe load each ship can carry” (*Shipping* 229). Each ship has a “painted load line” which must be “distinctly visible” when the ship leaves port (229). If the line is submerged, the boat is too heavy and must unload or it will sink. Proulx’s novel becomes analogous to a Plimsoll line when it is used in its capacity as an “other’s” fiction to measure the relationship between community and grace in native Canadian novels. If the other three novels “line up with” Proulx’s novel, which in its position as “outsider” offers a type of unbiased second opinion, then my thesis floats.

³ Since Northrop Frye’s *Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts: Collected Works*, Vol. 13, which is the original source of this quotation, has just been published, it is currently unavailable in bookstores and libraries; therefore, I have referenced the quotation to the review of the book by B. W. Powe published in the *Globe and Mail* “Books” section of Saturday July 26.

meaning, and this is what helps make it so powerful. Frye's observation seems to purport that in order to understand resurrection, in order to unlock its meaning—to make it possible—we must understand humanity's relationship to memory. Is memory the key to resurrection because only when memory is exorcised is one able to truly live? Or is memory the key because only when memory is embraced and understood is full identity possible? Or does Frye's observation pertain to more than just personal memory? Does resurrection rely on the memory of others? Must someone remember you, must someone be able to testify to your existence, in order for you to be brought back to full life? Or is memory the key to life because it tells us who we are and where we came from, and that we don't exist as fully human without that knowledge? Each of these questions is implicit in Frye's observation, yet none of them on their own contains the single definitive meaning of the statement; rather the answer to each question is a part of the meaning.

Memory and resurrection are about return, for both constitute recourse to a previous state of being or time. Both memory and resurrection are contingent upon the relationship between grace and community, for whether memory is painful or celebratory, our ability to access, obtain, or exorcise it is strongest within a communal setting, and resurrection, as the religious associations of the word suggest, is always a gift of grace.⁴ For these reasons, Frye's statement provides a key to understanding Quoye's resurrection in *The Shipping News*, for answers to the questions posed earlier pertaining to Frye's observation are each part of Quoye's resurrection. In order for Quoye to begin living, he must first return to life. Quoye's resurrection, his return to life, is dependent upon both absorbing and exorcizing

⁴ *Webster's Dictionary* defines resurrection as "the rising of Christ from the dead." In the chapter on *Fugitive Pieces*, reference is made to the belief that, in Christian theology, Christ's death and resurrection are recognized as the ultimate demonstration of God's grace freely given to man.

memory and upon the grace that he receives inside of a community that not only teaches him to hear but to recognize and remember himself and those around him (Bakhtin 287).

Quoyale, the novel's self-proclaimed central figure, is in desperate need of resurrection.⁵ Ironically, he has never truly been alive, for he is a character who exists in a vacuum of recognition.⁶ His family sees him as ugly and unacceptable—a complete failure: “from his youngest son's failure to dog-paddle the father saw other failures multiply like an explosion of virulent cells . . . and brother Dick, the father's favorite, pretended to throw up when Quoyale came into a room, hissed ‘Lardass, Snot-face, Ugly Pig, Warthog, Stupid . . .’ pummelled and kicked until Quoyale curled, hands over head, snivelling, on the linoleum. All stemmed from Quoyale's chief failure, a failure of normal appearance” (16). Because the only recognition he receives from his family comes in the expression of their hatred and disgust for his physical form, Quoyale is unable to recognize himself as a valuable human being: “hand clapped over his chin, he camouflaged torment with smiles and silence . . . his earliest sense of self was as a distant figure: there in the foreground was his family; here, at the limit of the far view, was he” (15,16). Quoyale's sense of self-worth is completely annihilated by his family's abusive treatment of him as a child. He aches for recognition and connection, so he comforts himself by imagining that “he had been given to the wrong family, that somewhere his real people, saddled with the changeling of the Quoyales, longed for him” (16). Because his family is so dysfunctional, he has no true sense of a family narrative, and thus he has no sense of himself until he discovers “a box of excursion mementos,” in which

⁵ The first sentence of the novel names Quoyale as the protagonist: “here is an account of a few years in the life of Quoyale, born in Brooklyn and raised in a shuffle of dreary upstate towns” (15). However, though Quoyale is set out as the central figure, the community of which he becomes a part slowly gets integrated into who he is, for the community is what finally gives him his identity.

⁶ Recall Bakhtin's statement: “Absolute death (non being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered” (287).

he finds “photographs of his father beside brothers and sisters at a ship’s rail” (16).⁷ Only through the photographs, in what are essentially discovered memories, does “Quoyale recognize[] himself”(17). However, it is only a bodily recognition, a confirmation of a source for his physical form, for in the photographs, he sees “himself in their hair, legs, and arms” (17). This recognition dissolves Quoyale’s hope that the alienation he feels from his family is simply because he is a changeling and forces him to acknowledge their indiscriminate hatred of him, which he internalizes. Throughout his adolescent life and on into university, Quoyale remains outside of community: “at the university he took courses he couldn’t understand, humped back and forth without speaking to anyone, went home for weekends of excoriation. At last he dropped out of school and looked for a job, kept his hand over his chin” (17). Even though Quoyale has never known community, he desires it: “Quoyale was a failure at loneliness, yearned to be gregarious, to know his company was a pleasure to others” (18). His brief friendship with Partridge awakens him to the possibilities of the fullness of life, and even when Partridge leaves and Quoyale is once again utterly alone, he continues to hope for a way out of his isolation: “He wrote his pieces, lived in his rented trailer watching television. Sometimes he dreamed of love . . . He got in the habit of walking around the trailer and asking aloud, ‘Who knows?’ He said, ‘Who knows?’ For no one knew. He meant, anything could happen” (25, 26). Proulx’s characterization of Quoyale in the first few chapters of the novel depicts him as a learned pacifist or rather a persistent victim. He expects nothing from life, yet he hopes for something better, though he does nothing himself beyond hoping.

⁷ Quoyale does know some of the stories of his family history, yet they are incomplete and untrue. He knows that his grandfather died while sealing, yet he doesn’t know that his grandfather was only twelve years old or that his grandmother was his grandfather’s sister (*Shipping* 40).

Because Quoyly's sense of self-worth is so low, he is completely vulnerable. He works nearly for free for Punch: "the salary was pathetic, but Quoyly didn't know" (20). He has no understanding of self-respect because he has never received any respect from others, so he allows himself to suffer the humiliation of being fired and rehired in accordance with the availability of college writers. His last name, Quoyly, aptly means a "coil of rope" and is associated, in the epigraph to the first chapter of the novel, with "a Flemish flake [which] is a spiral coil of one layer only. It is made on deck, so that it may be walked on if necessary" (*Shipping* 15). Karen Rood argues that Quoyly's "lack of confidence seems to guarantee his failure at everything he tries. He embarks on each new venture with the conviction that he is incapable of success and thus predisposes his every failure" (62). However, essentially it is not his lack of confidence but his lack of community that causes his failure. Apart from Partridge, Quoyly has no one who believes in him, no one who encourages him, and no one who sets an example for him; because of this, he has no confidence in his own abilities. He lacks the skills to build a community around himself because he does not know what to look for in people. When Petal snidely tells him, "you want to marry me, don't you," Quoyly obediently falls in love, or into what he believes to be love (28). Because Quoyly lives his life as an object expecting to be "walked on," he never asserts his rights, and this is what allows him to be so cruelly abused by Petal (*Shipping* 15). Never having experienced true love, Quoyly, out of his necessity to be loved, believes that abuse constitutes love. He lives in a world organized on "a series of illusions, some harmless, some ultimately destructive" (Rood 63). In order to maintain the illusions, especially his marriage to Petal, he daily sacrifices what little dignity he has. Quoyly's desperation becomes clear when he lies awake in his bed and does nothing to stop his wife who is having sex with a stranger on their living

room pullout couch. Because of his fear of rejection, Quoye, in response to Petal's cruelties, "struggled to deaden his feelings, to behave well . . . But the circumstances enclosed him like the six sides of a metal case" (*Shipping* 32). Quoye's life with Petal is not life but a slow suffocation in a coffin hammered together by his own helplessness.

In contrast to *Fugitive Pieces* where Jakob, though violently stripped of his own parents, is given a family through Athos, Quoye has no one, outside of his children, who really loves him. When Quoye's father calls him and leaves a suicide message on Quoye's phone, he tells Quoye the only reason he is calling is because Quoye's brother doesn't have a phone. In the suicide message, rather than telling his youngest son that he loves him, the father says: "You'll have to make your own way. I had to make my own way in a tough world ever since I came to this country. Nobody ever gave me nothing," and then he berates Quoye for not doing "much with his chances" (34). When Quoye phones his brother to tell him of their parents' death, his brother calls him "Lardass" and "Barfbag" and tells him to send him his share of whatever the parents have left behind. Because his family community is so self-centred and emotionally absent, Quoye is robbed of any understanding of what family should be. Consequently, he can't recognize the destructive nature of his relationship with Petal or the hollowness of his "family." When Petal sells the children into pornography and then dies in a car crash, Quoye's illusionary community is destroyed, and he has to face reality, though he tries to turn from it, angrily declaring that he won't believe Petal sold the children (*Shipping* 40). Yet faced with the bleakness and loneliness of his situation, he latches on to the only family he has left, his aunt whom he barely knows. For Quoye, family is something painful, something to be endured, and its only good quality is that it is one step away from nothing. For this reason, when his life with Petal is over, though he "hat[es] the

thought of an incestuous, fit-prone, seal-killing child for a grandfather,” he agrees to go to Newfoundland, the land which will remember him (*Shipping* 41). Athos’s advice to Jakob, “to be buried in land that remembers you,” is echoed in Quoyale’s return to Newfoundland: “the land that had generated his ancestors” (*Fugitive* 76; *Shipping* 15). In Quoyale’s mind, “there [is] no choice” because “the mysteries of unknown family” are better than nothing, better than isolation (41). Because Quoyale returns to the land of his family in a state of emotional distress, what he finds will either annihilate him completely or cause his resurrection.

Karen Rood argues that “Proulx’s characters sometimes become what may be called secular versions of [Flannery] O’Connor’s grotesques” (12). Yet, though she makes the connection between Proulx’s and O’Connor’s writing styles, Rood does not pursue the shared results of what they write. Even though Proulx “says there has been little religion in her life,” her writing functions in the same manner as O’Connor’s, for it reintroduces the existence of grace in a chaotic and sometimes grotesque world (Campbell 3). Even though Proulx does not adhere to the same religious vision as O’Connor, it is still possible and important to point out how Proulx’s writing embodies much of what O’Connor is talking about. O’Connor argues that “in trying to make stories ‘work’ . . . what is needed is an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable” and “this is always an action which indicates that grace has been offered. And frequently it is an action in which the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace” (118). The deaths of both Quoyale’s parents and Petal are the first of many examples in the novel where this figurative devil has become the unwilling instrument of grace. Both Guy and Petal are representations of evil and the figureheads of negative communities: Guy is the patriarch of the extended Quoyale family,

and Petal is the demon matriarch dominating Quoye and the girls. Their deaths, which are the consequences of their own selfishness, are what bring Quoye and the aunt together.

Whether intentionally or not, Proulx has orchestrated an event that distinctly echoes O'Connor's theory of writing and that can only be defined and explained as an offering of grace: through the deaths of Petal and Guy, she has shown how even negative, dysfunctional communities can become instruments of transforming grace. According to O'Connor, "there is a moment in every great story in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected, even though the reader may not recognize the moment" (118). When Quoye, "in the teeth of trouble," asks the aunt to stay with him and the girls and when she nods yes and asks him to join her in her return to Newfoundland, it is that moment where "the presence of grace can be felt" (*Shipping* 42; O'Connor 118). Because Quoye and Agnis choose to stay together, they unconsciously accept this grace, which brought them to one another. Their choice is the first step in their return to community and towards full acceptance of grace and resurrection.

Through Agnis, Quoye is offered a family narrative, a history, and a starting place—a grounding from which to rebuild himself. Through Quoye, Agnis is offered support as she returns to the place of her abuse and, ultimately, recognition for her suffering and the wrongs she endured. Ironically, the family memories Quoye is offered seem almost more grotesque and frightening than the family he knew as a child or the one he built around Petal, and the idea that Agnis's return and healing should unfold through her connection to the son of her rapist seems hardly like a gift of grace. However, grace is not dependent upon man's terms or understanding; grace can be painful, for "the mysterious life-transforming process of loss

and discovery, of death and the possibility of rebirth,” which is “grace” often requires loss before discovery and death before rebirth (Hawkins 4).

Paradoxically, Quoye’s discovery of his family narrative is both a loss and a gain. Though his ancestors are known as pirates and as outcasts, they are, nevertheless, known and they are a part of the lore of the community. Therefore, when Quoye and his family return to Newfoundland, though they come as outsiders, they are known and accepted, primarily because of their ancestry. Jack and the others at the *Gammy Bird* anticipate that Quoye will be some kind of “big, wild booger” like his ancestors, yet because Partridge tells Jack that Quoye is “as good as gold, [and] didn’t rave nor murder,” Jack and the others are willing to give Quoye a chance (182). For the first time in his life, Quoye is recognized, which is important to his own sense of himself even if it is a recognition that comes out of the tarnished reputation of his ancestors. As Quoye discovers the truth about his father’s family, he must loosen his connection to them and establish his own identity.

As Quoye becomes familiar with the people of Killick-Claw, he starts to learn the stories of his people. Skipper Alfred tells him: “I remember the Quoyes and their trouble. They was a savage pack. In the olden days they say Quoyes nailed a man to a tree by ‘is ears, cut off ‘is nose for the scent of blood to draw the nippers and flies that devoured ‘im alive” (158). Later from Billy Pretty, the gossip writer for the *Gammy Bird*, Quoye learns that Nolan, one of the old Quoyes, is still alive and that “he’s got it worked up in his head that the house belongs to him” (181). Nolan, Billy warns Quoye, is the “old style of Quoye, stealthy in the night. They say there’s a smell that comes off him like rot and cold clay. They say he slept with his wife when she was dead and you can smell the desecration coming off

him” (182).⁸ When Quoyale protests that he doesn’t know what Billy means by “old style of Quoyale” and that he doesn’t “know the stories,” Billy tells him, “better you don’t” (182). Yet despite this, Billy continues telling Quoyale the history of the Quoyales: “Omaloore Bay is called after Quoyales. Loonies. They was wild and inbred, half-wits and murders. Half of them was low-minded” (182). When Billy takes Quoyale to Gaze Island, he shows him the cemetery of his ancestors and tells him the rest of their story: “they were wrackers . . . come to Gaze Island centuries ago and made it their evil lair. Pirate men and women that lured ships on to the rocks” (192).

According to Billy, the Quoyales were eventually kicked off of Gaze Island and expelled from the community: they dragged their “green house miles and miles across the ice, fifty men, a crowd of Quoyales and their cunny kin pulling on the ropes . . . with a wrangle-gangle mob of islanders behind them”(182, 192). Ultimately, Billy explains, it wasn’t the pirating of shipwrecks that caused the community to chase the Quoyales away, for “there was many, many people [who] . . . depended on shipwrecks to improve their lots” (193). Rather, it was the Quoyales’ “disinclination to attend Pentecostal services,” which was a major affront to communal life since “religion got a strong grip on Gaze Island in that time” (192). By rejecting the church, which was ensconced in the identity of the community, the Quoyales were essentially rejecting the community. Because survival was so dependent upon community on Gaze Island, those who refused to be part of the community by refusing to adhere to its most basic rules of conduct were seen as a threat.

Though the stories and rumours Quoyale hears seem exaggerated, they serve a distinct purpose in the community. In order for Quoyale to understand the people of Newfoundland

⁸ Nolan’s character recalls the character of the Old Woman in *The Double Hook*. Both are associated with evil. Both haunt and frighten their relatives, and both are fishermen who trespass on other’s property. Both seek to destroy community rather than to affirm it, and both nearly succeed in driving their families apart.

and his place in the community, he must first necessarily understand his family's history and the unwritten but communally understood codes that they violated. It was not the violence or the savagery of the Quoyles that caused them to be expelled by the community, for even Jack Buggit admits that his "great-great grandfather had to go to cannibalism to stay alive"; it was their outright rejection of the community's social and moral values that brought about their isolation (80). The seemingly disjunctive morality of the community on Gaze Island, which allows for piracy but not for church to be ignored, can be understood by Northrop Frye's definition of a "garrison mentality" (Frye 73).⁹ According to Frye, "a garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter" (74). In an environment as fraught with disaster as Gaze Island, there was no room for deserters, for the community could only carry and would only be responsible for those who adhered to its core values.

Despite the evil of his ancestors, Quoye is welcomed into the community of Killick-Claw. By warning Quoye about the "old style of Quoye," Billy acknowledges that there is a difference in the new style of Quoye and that Quoye and his family have a chance to reinvent and redeem themselves (182). Even though he believes and spreads the evil rumours about Nolan, Billy tries to teach Quoye to see the good in Nolan as well as the bad, for this is a necessary ability in the community: He "does everything the old way. Won't take unemployment. A good fisherman but lives very poor. Keeps to himself. I doubt he can

⁹ A further explanation of garrison mentality: "small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier,' separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctly human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting—such communities are bound to develop . . . a garrison mentality" (Frye 73).

read or write. He's one of your crowd, some kind of fork kin from the old days. You ought to go down to his wee house for a visit" (181). Through telling Quoye to look in on Nolan, Billy incorporates Quoye into the code of the Killick-Claw community. Despite evil, despite poverty, everyone owes a duty to his neighbour and should carry it out regardless of the circumstances, for "a community is not about perfect people. It is about people who are bound to each other, each of whom is their own mixture of good and bad, darkness and light, love and hate" (Vanier 15).¹⁰ The story of Billy's family's life on Gaze Island reveals the means by which a community survives even in the harshest of environments: "if it was hard times, they shared, they helped their neighbour. No, they didn't have any money, the sea was dangerous and men were lost, but it was a satisfying life in a way people today do not understand. There was a joinery of lives all worked together, smooth in places, or lumpy, but joined. The work and the living you did was the same things, not separated out like today" (*Shipping* 189).

Though Billy believes that the community values of Gaze Island are disappearing, the story of Nunny Bag Cove, which Wavey relates to Quoye, reaffirms their existence: "The town burned down. Everybody built a new house with the insurance. There were some families didn't have insurance, five or six I guess, the others shared along with them so it all came out to a new house for everybody. Uncle Al and Auntie Evvie didn't need such a big house as the old one, so they all chipped in" (258). Community life in Killick-Claw and the outlying areas is not rigidly moral, and yet it is inherently moral, for though it seems rife with stories of sexual abuse, it is dependent upon the "golden rule": "love your neighbour as

¹⁰ Recall the conclusion to the chapter on the *The Double Hook*: inside of community, the darkness doesn't disappear, but it is easier to distinguish from the light.

yourself,” which it adheres to despite everything else (*NIV* Matt. 22.39).¹¹ The ubiquitous nature of the sexual abuse stories reported by Nutbeem regarding the Killick-Claw area communities testifies to the existence of grace within those communities, for the very ubiquity of the abuse should tear the communities apart. However, somehow, perhaps because of the brokenness, the community’s sense of responsibility is even stronger.

Through his relationships with Agnis and Nolan, Quoye starts to understand that responsibility to one’s kin is a foundational rule of community. Despite the malice that Nolan openly expresses towards Quoye and his family, Dennis tells Quoye: “Beety says we ought to take a look in at Old Nolan . . . Dad or somebody usually goes over early part of the winter to see if he’s got enough wood and food . . . Beety makes him a cake and some bread”(305). Quoye is ashamed when both he and Dennis see how miserably Nolan has been living: “burning the walls of his house . . . too weak or befuddled to get to the outhouse. A skeleton”(305). Dennis tells him that Beety will know who to call and what to do because she and Wavey are responsible for starting “Saving Grace,” a place that takes care of teenage mothers and abused women (306). Within Killick-Claw, survival is a gift of grace extended by community, and isolation, like that of Nolan, leads only to madness.¹²

The kindnesses of the various altruistic characters like Beety, Wavey, and Jack reveal the truth that “community life is by definition a life a life of cooperation and responsibility” (Berry 121). Yet at the same time, though the novel “speaks of the necessity of finding one’s

¹¹ “Love your neighbour as yourself” which is generally deemed the “golden rule” has almost become a cliché; however, it is not really the “golden rule.” When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” (*NIV* Matt. 22. 37-39). Mackey’s argument, quoted in the chapter on *Fugitive Pieces*, which argues that “in the religious tradition, the fellowship of God with man and the fellowship of man with man are offered together, and they must be accepted together” is simply a reflection of the greatest commandment (23).

¹² Nolan is a character who through his self-chosen isolation goes crazy: “the old man was mad, the gears of his mind stripped long ago to clashing discs edged with the stubs of broken cogs. Mad with loneliness or lovelessness, . . . or the flooding betrayal that all hermits suffer” (288).

roots, of embedding oneself within a set of community values,” community life in Newfoundland “eschews . . . sentimentality” (Stewart 62). In the same manner that the “*Gammy Bird* was a hard bite. Looked life right in its shifty, bloodshot eye,” so does its community (*Shipping* 79). The grace that abounds in Killick-Claw is not a grace of sweetness and gentility; rather, it is a grace of hard necessity.

Both Quoyale and Agnis are running from memory: Quoyale from the memory of Petal and Agnis from memories of abuse at the hands of her brother—Quoyale’s father—Guy. However, in their desperation to escape memory, both of them run towards it, and both of them need grace in order to be able to address the memories that stalk them. Quoyale, trying to escape memories of Petal and her death, finds himself responsible for reporting and photographing the grizzly details of car wrecks. Agnis feels drawn to Newfoundland, the place of her birth and the place of her greatest trauma. According to Martinez-Brawley, “the search for community . . . is a personal search for emotional support, cohesive networks, and fullness of life. The community people seek is not a place that stands out because of external attributes; it is the place where they have found a spot, the place to which they are pulled by their emotions” (38). Despite all her accomplishments, Agnis still needs healing. Her emotions, though repressed, are still raw, and they are what draw her back home. Together Quoyale and Agnis form the family connection both have been missing, and in the process they create a community between themselves and Quoyale’s children where memory can be faced, endured, absorbed, or exorcised.

Though initially Agnis thinks of the children as undisciplined brats and questions how long Quoyale will go on “wallowing in the dead woman’s grave,” as she begins to invest

more of herself in the family, her attitude changes (89).¹³ When Quoyale questions his ability to cover car wrecks, Agnis tells him: "Of course you can do the job. We face up to awful things because we can't go around them, or forget them. The sooner you get it over with, the sooner you say 'Yes, it happened, and there's nothing I can do about it,' the sooner you can get on with your own life. . . .What we have to get over, somehow we do. Even the worst things"(88). However, though Agnis's advice is what Quoyale needs to hear at that moment, and though it is what has enabled her to survive her life, there is something missing in her statement and that is what has driven her back to Newfoundland, though she does not realize it. Agnis does not understand that, along with facing up to the awful things in life, there needs to be a communal acknowledgement of the loss, of the awfulness of the situation. When the perpetrator can no longer confess a wrong that has remained hidden and unforgiven, it becomes the community's responsibility to acknowledge the wrong and to ask forgiveness for the perpetrator. Without acknowledgement of his or her loss, it is nearly impossible for a victim to fully release the wrong, and to begin to recover. In *Fugitive Pieces*, it is Jakob's responsibility to make the atrocities known and through acknowledging them to begin the dialogue of healing. In *The Shipping News*, Agnis's abuse as a child has been hidden and repressed. Even though the community, in the form of her Uncle Nolan and his wife, knew of it, nothing was done to stop it, and it was never formally acknowledged as wrong. Therefore, the crime does not exist except in Agnis's own private hell. Even though Agnis has learned to repress the memories, they continue to have a haunting power, for whenever she looks at the girls, she remembers. For these reasons, it is contingent upon

¹³ Agnis is the first to defend Bunny when Bunny is suspended from school. She hops on a plane back to Killick-Claw and sets up an appointment with the principal, herself, Quoyale, and Bunny in order to set things straight (326).

Quoyale as representative of the family and, ironically, of his father to acknowledge the wrong and subsequently the suffering she endured.

Because of the depth of her pain, Agnis is unable to tell Quoyale what happened to her as a child. When Quoyale questions her about Nolan and the stories he has heard about the old Quoyales, she replies out of fear for her secret: “Half those stories are a pack of lies. I imagine the Quoyales was as decent as anybody. And I’m sure I don’t know who that fellow you’re talking about could be” (209). Though it seems perverse—because how could learning that your father raped your aunt when she was just a young girl bring any sort of goodness?—it is a form of grace that Quoyale learns the truth about his father and about what happened to Agnis, without Agnis having to tell him. If Nolan didn’t experience his moment of lucidity during which he tells Quoyale about Agnis and Guy (recall O’Connor’s argument that grace is ensconced in “an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable”), Agnis’s secret would remain a secret and would retain its power (*Shipping* 322; O’Connor 118). For as Agnis comes closer to her repressed memories, out of the instinct of having been hurt before, she begins to pull away from community: “the aunt’s interest in fixing up slowed, veered to something private in her own room where she lay on the bed staring at the ceiling for as long as an hour”(207). Yet because Quoyale learns the truth, her regression is stopped. After the green house is destroyed, symbolically signifying that negative memories can be uprooted and torn down, that even the strongest of chains can be broken, Quoyale addresses the aunt’s secret.¹⁴ When Quoyale tells Agnis that he knows what his father did to her, it is an

¹⁴ In all four novels, houses that are places of isolation are destroyed. In *The Double Hook* Greta’s home, which separates her from her neighbours because she refuses to leave it, is destroyed by fire. In *Fugitive Pieces* Ben’s parents’ home, which acts as a hiding place and barrier against communal interaction, is destroyed by the flooding Humber River. In *The Shipping News* the green house, which symbolizes both the sexual abuse of Agnis and the expulsion of the Quoyales from the community, is destroyed in a winter storm. In *Crackpot*, Hoda’s home, which is a symbol of her family’s marginalization and of the indifference with which the community treats them, is slowly uprooted by a tree whose roots have grown under the verandah.

acknowledgement of her suffering, which she has never received and which has been the “secret of her whole life” (349). Quoyale’s acknowledgment of what his father did acts as a release valve on Agnis’s emotions: “The aunt hauled in her breath . . . didn’t know what to say, so she laughed. Or something like it. Then sobbed into her palms while the nephew said there, there, patting her shoulder as if she were Bunny or Sunshine” (349). The pain of the little girl, which has been repressed since Agnis was first abused, is finally being released and acknowledged. Though Quoyale doesn’t realize it, patting the aunt’s shoulder with the same tenderness with which he comforts his children is exactly what the aunt needs. Though Quoyale’s patting of the aunt’s shoulder seems contrite and insignificant, the passage is infused with emotional power. The dynamics of the family have been changing; the strong are learning to be vulnerable, the vulnerable strong. Quoyale and Agnis’s relationship illustrates John Vanier’s theory of community: “the more a community deepens, the weaker and the more sensitive its members become” (18). Yet at the same time, “as their trust in each other grows, they . . . grow stronger . . . but this doesn’t dispel the fragility and sensitivity which are at the root of a new grace and which mean that people are becoming in some way more dependent on each other . . . the cement of unity is interdependence” (Vanier 19). Though Agnis quickly withdraws from the situation and though she plans to live separately from the nephew because “who knew what he knew,” she remains connected to him because he is family and he has heard, recognized, and remembered her pain (*Shipping* 350). Though Agnis is immediately “way out front and running” in terms of making plans for the future for her and Quoyale and the children, her carefully constructed rules of emotional restraint have been broken. By declaring that she will get a house in town, she

reveals that grace, in its complexity, has pulled her out of emotional isolation and into the fullness of community.

Agnis's experience mirrors much of what is occurring within Quoye; however, Quoye's experience is more distinctly a resurrection. While the aunt does change by coming face to face with memory through the person of Quoye and through the physicality of returning to Newfoundland, Quoye's confrontation with memory takes place on many different levels and results in full resurrection. Obviously, Quoye must reconcile himself to the memory of his ancestors, which he inherits when he inhabits their home and community. As well he must reconcile himself to memory through banishing the power of the "fragments of Petal" that haunt him "in every hour of the night," and he must see beyond Petal's presence in the faces and movements of his children (*Shipping* 70). To cleanse himself of Petal, he must exorcise the memory of his definition of what constitutes love, so that he can come to an understanding of why he is in need of new life, of why he needs resurrection. He must remember or understand why he was "dead" in order to enter fully into life.

Proulx works carefully to configure Quoye's resurrection in connection with his integration into the community. Outside of community, in the first chapters of the novel Quoye is beleaguered and befuddled by life, for he is not an active participant in it. On his first day on the job as a reporter for the *Gammy Bird*, he has "the feeling of standing on a playground watching others play games whose rules he didn't know" (79). However, as he listens to the advice of those around him, he is able inside of community to find his voice. Yet when he acts solely on his own, he fails. Though Quoye listens to the advice that he should buy a boat, he fails to buy the right kind of boat because he buys the boat alone. His inability to follow advice stems from his inability to separate advice from criticism. He can't

differentiate the two because all he has ever received is criticism. He has come to expect that his efforts will always be regarded as a failure, and this precipitates his attitude of negativity. In response to the ribbing he receives about his purchase of a “wallowing cockeyed bastard” of a boat, Quoye simply tells himself: “Stupid Man Does Wrong Thing Once More” (106). However, as the community continues to reach out to him, Quoye begins to respond. When he follows the advice of the harbour master and takes Billy Pretty with him to view the boat *Tough Baby*, he is integrating the community with his actions. Therefore, when he sits down to write the piece on his own, “the words fell out as fast as he could type. He had a sense of writing well” (161). His piece succeeds because he starts in a community setting and moves outwards into expressing his own perspective. When Jack responds well to Quoye’s piece, telling him “we’ll order your computer,” Quoye realizes that “this was the first time anybody ever said he’d done it right” (163). The revelation that he is capable of success fuels his confidence and leads to his future success of standing up to Tert Card, and ultimately to his promotion to managing editor of the *Gammy Bird*.

Following his most triumphant moment, where he asserts his own self-worth through telling off Tert Card and then actively ensuring that it doesn’t happen again by phoning Jack and informing him of the problem, Quoye nearly drowns in a boating accident. The significance of the events leading up to Quoye’s boating accident, the accident itself, and Quoye’s rescue can be understood through an analogy to baptism. According to Charles C. Ryrie, “baptism is not *for* the purpose of the forgiveness of sins but *because* of the forgiveness” (389). It “is the initiatory rite into a believing community” (Ryrie 490). Baptism, therefore, is not what creates the change within an individual but the sign signifying that a change has taken place. Quoye’s “baptism” isn’t what changes him; it is

only the physical rite culminating the changes that have already been unfolding within his character. His baptism publicly marks his passage from death into life. Immersion baptism, which Quoye's near-drowning can most closely be compared to, is the visual sign of the transformation that has occurred within the individual being baptized, for going down into the water symbolizes "death to the old life," and coming back up out of it symbolizes "resurrection to the new" (Ryrie 491). Baptism is an important part of the Christian identity, for it "incorporates [the baptized] into the Christian community and into the body of Christ" (Fortman 63). Ultimately baptism is a promise which specifies that "the person baptized . . . [is] destined for resurrection" (Fortman 63).

The events leading up to Quoye's baptism are important for they foreshadow or prepare the reader for the changes that are about to be revealed within Quoye. Before Quoye capsizes, while he is out on a walk, he sees a body trapped below a cliff in a shallow cove of water, and his immediate reaction is to "tell someone" (*Shipping* 232). This is the first indication that he has internalized what the community has been teaching him. He realizes not only that he is capable of doing something but also that it is his responsibility to do something and that whatever he does must be an act, which involves the community. However, in his haste to alert the community to the tragedy, he chooses to take his boat to get to town and miscalculates the roughness of the waters, putting himself in peril. Just before he capsizes, he sees one of the knotted strings made by Nolan. Nolan has been secretly leaving these knots in strategic spots around the house and even in the rooms of the children. The knotted string is meant to harm Quoye, and Quoye's discovery of it just before he capsizes is meant to underscore the power of Nolan's curse. However, because Quoye survives, it is possible to read Quoye's capsizing as a necessary rite of baptism

rather than as a fulfilled curse. Once again, evil is transformed by grace, for Quoyale's near death ironically becomes a symbol of his coming resurrection.

During Quoyale's actual "baptism," while he is immersed in the cold water, the changes that have been slowly happening within him come to a climax, spurring him into action instead of submission. "In fifteen terrifying seconds," he suddenly learns to swim, overcoming his earlier "failure to dog-paddle" (233; 16). Though he berates himself for not wearing a life jacket and figures that it is "stupid to drown with the children so small," he chooses to assert himself rather than to succumb to the hopelessness of the situation (233). He acts decisively and does not wallow in self-pity; instead, he grasps the floating cooler and holds on. According to Edmond Fortman, "grace . . . as it appears in man, . . . seems like a new quality moulding the soul inwardly" (64). It is "understood . . . as the passage from a state of sin to one of justice. . . . In other words, it constitutes the 'new creature'" (64). Quoyale's immersion is that final place of "moulding" where the work that was begun in him by the community is completed. In his moment of grace, his baptism, he symbolically moves from an attitude of death into an attitude of life (64). He emerges from the water as a "new creature" who fights for life (64).

While defining the presence of "grace in this world," Peter Fransen observes that "grace sometimes erupts palpably into our impious world when God works miracles. Looking at miracles with the eyes of simple faith, we understand that, according to the well worn tag, 'the exceptions confirm the rule.' For miracles . . . are . . . signs of the divine presence and thus also signs of divine grace" (331). Jack's rescue of Quoyale is not a coincidence but a miracle—a sign of grace, which is symbolically carried out through the arms of community. Jack, through his position as owner of the *Gammy Bird*, is symbolically the head of the

Killick-Claw community (235). Once Jack “wrenches” Quoye up out of the water and back into life, Quoye’s position as a full member of community is confirmed, for he is now counted among the “many Jack has saved” (235). Just as baptism symbolizes God’s grace to man, Quoye’s rescue, when it is read as an analogy of baptism, or even when it is just recognized as miraculous, symbolizes the presence of grace in Quoye’s life.

Jack fills the role of community saviour in other ways that are more figurative. Jack has “an uncanny sense about assignments,” for as Nutbeem observes: “he gives you a beat that plays on your private inner fears” (244). Quoye has to cover car wrecks in order to get over his memories of Petal’s car accident. Billy who has never married has to cover the woman’s home page. Nutbeem has to cover sexual assaults and with “each one . . . relive his own childhood” (244). Yet Jack does the same thing to himself, through making himself continue fishing even though “the sea . . . claimed his father and grandfather, two brothers, the oldest son and nearly got the youngest” (244-5). Though Jack’s assignments seem insensitive, they are another form of grotesque grace, for as Quoye reasons: reliving the events through Jack’s assignments, “dulls . . . the pain . . . because you see your condition is not unique, that other people suffer as you suffer” (245). Quoye’s understanding of Jack’s assignments explains some of the philosophy behind the *Gammy Bird*. Though some of the reasons for the prolific stories of sexual abuse and car wrecks in the *Gammy Bird* come out of pure sensationalism, underneath the public’s desire to be scandalized is that human need to know that in our suffering we are not alone.

Shortly after Quoye discovers that he is not alone in his suffering, he concludes that “if life was an arc of light that began in darkness, ended in darkness, the first part of his life had happened in an ordinary glare. Here it was as though he had found a polarized lens that

deepened and intensified all seen through it. Thought of his stupid self in Mockingburg, taking whatever came at him. No wonder love had shot him through the heart and lungs, caused internal bleeding” (265). Quoyale has changed, yet still at this point in the novel he retains his misconceptions about love. Quoyale and Wavey’s relationship is one of the sweetest graces in *The Shipping News*. The delicate process by which it unfolds follows the codes and rhythms of community life and ultimately reveals again the connection between grace and community. The first time that Quoyale gives Wavey a ride in his car is a result of Billy Pretty’s advice. Even though Wavey is walking in the opposite direction from which they are driving, Billy tells Quoyale to turn around and pick her up. They pick her up, and Quoyale drives back over the way he has just driven to bring her home. From then on, because it is part of the social code, Quoyale feels uninhibited from offering Wavey rides, and for the same reason she is able to accept them without thinking too closely about what it means.

As their relationship progresses, Quoyale is forced to rethink his definition of love. He begins by comparing Wavey to Petal. When he drops her off at school, he waits and watches her “just to see the way she walked, a tall woman who walked miles. And Petal had never walked if she could ride. Or lie down” (148). Wavey does the same thing as Quoyale; when they go berry picking, Wavey uses the memory of her dead husband, Herold, as a defence against Quoyale’s sexual advances. In response to her rejection of him, Quoyale wonders, “and what of Petal’s essence riding under his skin like an injected vaccine against the plague of love?” (217). Because Quoyale’s marriage with Petal was so diseased, Quoyale’s definition of love is corrupted. When he thinks of his relationship with Wavey, he knows that “their silence” is “comfortable” and that “something” is “unfolding” (256). Yet he tells himself that

it's "not love, which wrenched and wounded. Not love, which came only once" (256). When Quoye and Wavey exchange gifts and Wavey gives Quoye the sweater she has knitted, Quoye chooses to remember and romanticize Petal's only gift to him: two raw eggs. Quoye remembers how he "thought it a tender, wonderful thing to do. She had given him something, the eggs, after all, only a symbol, but they had come from her hands as a gift. To him. It didn't matter that he'd bought them himself at the supermarket the day before. He imagined she understood him, that she had to love him to know that it was the outstretched hands, the giving, that mattered" (304). Both Quoye and Wavey romanticize the depth of their lost love. If it were up to the two of them, their relationship would remain stalled by their mutual fear and secrecy.

When Alvin Yark asks Quoye when he is going to "do the deed" with Wavey, Quoye wonders, "how to say it? That he loved Petal, not Wavey, that all the capacity for love in him had burned up in one fast go. The moment had come and the spark ignited, and for some it never went out. For Quoye, who equated misery with love. All he felt with Wavey was comfort and a modest joy" (329). By himself, Quoye cannot make the transition from connecting love and pain to connecting love and joy. Like Agnis, Quoye needs someone to acknowledge that what Petal did was wrong and that it wasn't love but abuse; only then will he be able to change his definition of love. However, because Quoye has romanticized his love for Petal, no one knows the full truth of their relationship. In another complex form of grace enacted within community, Quoye receives his freedom from Petal through learning the truth about Wavey's Herold. The community—as represented this time by Wavey's uncle, Alvin—performs the necessary gracious intervention needed to awaken Quoye to the truth. Yark candidly tells Quoye: "There was a sigh of relief went up in some places when

[Herold] was lost . . . He sprinkled his bastards up and down the coast. . . . It was like a parlour game . . . to take a squint at babies . . . see if they looked like ‘Erold . . . Far as keeping ‘Erold’s memory green and sacred goes, of course ‘e turned into a tragic figure. What else could she do?” (329). Armed with the truth about Wavey’s heartache and with the security of her love demonstrated by the generosity of her spontaneous gift of a seal pie, Quoye breaches his own codes of secrecy. As he tells Wavey the truth about Petal, Wavey unlocks her secrets about Herold: he “was a womanizer. He treated me body like a trough. Come and swill and slobber in me after them. I felt like he was casting vomit in me when he come to his climax. And I never told that but to you” (333).

Significantly, it’s not just Quoye who tells his dirty secrets but Wavey too. Rather than letting the truth isolate them, through the grace of shared suffering they are brought closer together. In the security of their intimacy, Quoye himself finally articulates the change that has been occurring within him: “I know something now I didn’t know a year ago . . . Petal wasn’t any good. And I think maybe that is why I loved her” (333). Wavey completes his thoughts, symbolizing the continuing role of community in changing his perspective and, ultimately, his life: “It’s like you feel to yourself that’s all you deserve. And the worse it gets the more it seems true, that you’ve got it coming to you or it wouldn’t be that way” (333). Wavey’s words confront Quoye with the truth of his negative self-image, and they set him fully free, for “in community life we discover our own deepest wound and learn to accept it. So our rebirth can begin. It is from this very wound that we are born” (Vanier 2). Because of his family’s treatment of him, Quoye has never felt worthy to be loved, and because of this feeling, he has never allowed himself to experience love. The only “love” he has known has been a perverse emotion, which has wounded him immensely. Once he hears himself in

Wavey's words, he remembers himself as he was with Petal, and because of all that has happened, he can recognize himself as changed.

Because of his job, his new role of responsibility within his family, his therapeutic release of Petal, and his relationship with Wavey, Quolye finally understands that he deserves respect and that he is worthy of love. According to John Vanier, "if we are accepted with our limitations as well as our abilities, community gradually becomes a place of liberation. Discovering that we are accepted and loved by others, we are better able to love ourselves. So community is the place where we can be ourselves without fear or constraint. Community life deepens through mutual trust among all its members" (2). Because Quoye fully trusts Wavey and tells her the truth about Petal, he is liberated from Petal's grip. He is able to love himself when he discovers through Wavey that he is lovable. Demonstrating his full understanding of the necessity of community, he acts on his love for Wavey within a communal setting. In the middle of the crowd gathered to welcome the aunt back home from St. John's, Quoye kisses Wavey. The response from the crowd "is a roar and clapping at this public intimacy," which is "as good as an announcement" (342). The morning following his public demonstration, Quoye rightly feels "spasms of joy" (346). Proulx describes his mindset in words indicating a return to life: "he felt he was just learning to breathe" (346). While Quoye himself is unaware of why he feels like he is "just learning to breathe," it is obvious to the reader at this point that he has fully completed his resurrection (346). He has, through the grace extended to him in the arms of his community, negotiated through memory to find his place as head of his family, his role within the community, and his ability to love and be loved.

According to Robert Stewart, while Quoyale's name refers first to a Flemish coil of rope as noted in the *Ashley Book of Knots*, it "can also be pronounced—perhaps mispronounced?—as 'quayle,' a small game bird similar to partridge" (60). Based on this observation, Stewart makes the argument that "Quoyale's name implicitly refers both to knots and to birds and we are led to the communitarian claim that human happiness will only be found in a freedom that is bound somehow within a commitment to something larger and outside of self—to something such as community" (60). But Stewart has it only half right with his claim that human happiness, and ultimately human survival, is "found in a freedom . . . bound . . . within a commitment to something larger and outside of self." That "something" is not solely community, for community alone by its very human nature is defective. It cyclically falls prey to human vices such as fear, greed, hatred, and lust, as was shown in the discussion of community in *The Double Hook*. Forced to rely on its own resources, human community is helpless: without grace man can do nothing; with grace anything is possible. The most obvious fusion of grace in *The Shipping News* comes when Jack is miraculously resurrected at his wake in the full presence of his community. Jack's resurrection is important because of the way in which it differs from Quoyale's resurrection. Quoyale's is a slow process that unfolds over the span of the novel, while Jack's resurrection is completely spontaneous. The community is directly involved in Quoyale's spiritual and emotional awakening, but Jack's resurrection lacks any community involvement other than community witnesses. Dennis pulls Jack out of the water but Jack is already drowned when his body is recovered; therefore Dennis is not responsible for "waking" him up. Jack's resurrection is solely the work of, as John Moss said for *The Double Hook*, "the unobtrusive God" who has been hovering and working through the community for the whole novel;

however, in Jack's case, God sheds His unobtrusive character and dramatically intrudes, causing Jack's miraculous resurrection (*Patterns* 166).

While some might argue that Quoye's resurrection is eclipsed by Jack's resurrection, Jack's return from the dead only heightens Quoye's resurrection and clarifies the relationship between grace and the community. Though the community is not what causes Jack's resurrection, it is significant that Jack is resurrected in the midst of a crowd of community witnesses. Depending on its own resources, community is powerless and inept, yet when grace flows through a community, the community becomes both the embodiment of grace, as in Quoye's experience, and the locus of grace, as in Jack's experience. The differences and similarities between Jack's and Quoye's resurrections confirm that grace is not contingent upon community, but that there is a strong relationship between the two. Thus Quoye's resurrection is a gift of grace extended to him through the arms of community, and Jack's resurrection is a startling reminder of God's unalloyed grace. Both resurrections, when paired as foils of each other, demonstrate that grace does not necessarily conform to the needs of community, but that community with all its idiosyncrasies, by the grace of God, sometimes conforms to, carries, and hosts the miracle of grace, which works according to God's directive, not man's.

In the final paragraph of the novel, Proulx, through the internal voice of Quoye, addresses a question to her reader and gnomically suggests its answer:

If Jack Buggit could escape from the pickle jar, if a bird with a broken neck could fly away, what else might be possible? Water may be older than light, diamonds crack in hot goat's blood, moutaintops give off cold fire, forests appear in mid-ocean, it may happen that a crab is caught with the shadow of a hand on its back, that the wind be imprisoned in a bit of knotted string. And it may be that love sometimes occurs without pain or misery. (364)

These final images invoke a sense of the mysterious, the magical, and the miraculous. Through the course of the novel, Proulx has created scenarios where some of these possibilities have become realities, yet she does not explicitly state how they have occurred. She just whispers that they have happened—that they are possible. With these whispers, she speaks grace into definition. For what are these occurrences and what are their consequences if not expressions of grace? Even the magical knotting of string, which is tied with intentions of evil, somehow results in good. The storm that destroys the green house is suggested as being a result of what “the old cousin . . . had conjured up with wind knots” (345). However, though Nolan’s intentions are evil, the destruction of the house completes the move of both Quoyles and the aunt into the centre of the community, for they move into town. As well, the destruction of the house symbolically represents the erasure of the negative presence of the Old Quoyles and brings about the freedom Agnis gains from the memories of sexual abuse that she endured in the house.

Some critics have read the final passage as a “happy ending,” a term which Proulx has tried to undercut by arguing that the ending is “ironic” because it is “one hell of a happiness” in which “a lack of misery” is made to “seem like blinding happiness” (Bolick 4). Regardless of what Proulx herself says about the ending of *The Shipping News*, it recalls the ending of *The Double Hook*. Like Watson who is unafraid of “writing darkly,” Proulx maintains that her writing is reflective of her belief that “I [am] not and never [will] be in a world that [is] reasonable or just,” yet she also recognizes, again similarly to Watson, that “I am not immune to the flashes of humor and intense moments of joy that illuminate our lives” (“Interview Proulx” 89-90). In both novels there is a sense of an almost palpable presence of grace mixed in with the harsh realities of life, and for this reason, the ending is realistically

joy-filled and hopeful. The reader's hope for humanity is renewed at the conclusion of both novels, not because of humanity's romanticized greatness but because the novels have revealed that it is possible for grace to pierce humanity's ugliness and to transform the human community into a vehicle of goodness. Both novels show that we have reason to have joy because we have reason to hope for the infinite possibilities of grace.

Chapter Four:

Crackpot: Grace Received

A.M. Laurin encapsulates the central purpose of Adele Wiseman's writing when she argues: "Wiseman writes in order to teach people how to live—particularly in communion with others. All her writing radiates immense compassion for human beings, but especially for the dispossessed. Her writing is a plea to reject hierarchal structures in society—structures which divide people into 'haves' and 'have-nots'" (2). While Laurin's statement is meant to summarize the whole corpus of Wiseman's work, it can be applied specifically to *Crackpot* through the ways in which Wiseman, within the novel, deconstructs binaries and re-creates a new vision of community. Inarguably *Crackpot's* central figure is Hoda; however, Hoda exists only in connection to the whole community of characters within the narrative.¹ Unfolding Hoda's character is dependent upon unfolding the characters by whom she is shaped. *Crackpot's* story, which is Hoda's story, which can also be read as Wiseman's story,² as the story of the Jewish people, and even as humanity's story, is the story of the struggle for communion.³ Wiseman's self-ascribed primary "object in writing has always

¹ While this argument may seem repetitive, it is purposefully so, for within this thesis I am attempting through repetition to recast critical literary vision. Instead of instinctively looking to a single individual as the protagonist in a novel, it is important to look first at the community as protagonist. From that vantage point, discerning the why of what happens becomes more accessible, as I argued in the chapter on *The Double Hook*.

² In an interview, Wiseman explains, "the name Hoda is a variation of my own name. I really felt her pushing out of me" (Meyer 159). According to Ruth Panofsky, Wiseman was most likely "referring to her Yiddish name" which Panofsky has "assumed to be Oodle (pronounced udle), a definite variation of Hoda, Hodele, or Hodel" ("Email").

³ One of the common definitions of communion is the "Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consumed as the substance or symbols of Christ's body and blood in commemoration of the death of Christ" (*Webster's*); however, Martin Buber's definition of the "I—Thou" relationship between God and man is an alternative definition of "deep-rooted spiritual communion" (Abrahams 650). The use of communion in this thesis, though informed by these associations, refers to the definition of communion as representative of the deepest form of "intimate fellowship or rapport," which is at the root of true community (*Webster's*).

been to produce a corrective version to what continues to prevail with respect to what Jews are”; however, in the pursuit of this end, she has also produced a corrective version of the vision of humanity towards itself (qtd. in Watchel 8). Wiseman declares in numerous interviews, “the reason I wanted to be a writer was to save the Jews, of course. Because I had learned so much from the stories my parents told me, I figured the only reason people are so bad to us is because they don’t know. If I were to explain it to them, they would understand, so that by the time my life is finished, everything would be perfect” (qtd. in Watchel 8). *Crackpot* is the tangible working out of this life purpose. By using a fragment from the Kabbalistic myth of creation for her epigraph and opening the novel with the genealogy of Hoda (an echo of the Bible’s first chapters), Wiseman purposely merges her writing with a discourse of creation. This invocation of creation stories signals that *Crackpot* is an attempt at re-creation or *Tikkun*, which is a Kabbalistic term for a repairing of the world. Wiseman, through storytelling, creates for her readers a new worldview where the ultimate good is compassion and the ultimate evil, indifference. Indifference is often the malaise of community.⁴ Within Wiseman’s worldview everyone is revealed to be in some way a “have not,” isolated from communion and in need of grace.⁵ Each character within *Crackpot* is an outsider, struggling to commune--to connect with those around him/her in order to take part

⁴ Recall Ferdinand Toennies’ theory that the centre of community “is understanding . . . based upon intimate knowledge of each other in so far as this is conditioned and advanced by direct interest in the life of the other, and readiness to take part in his joy and sorrow” (Doody 12).

⁵ Though I have been working with predominantly Christian associations and interpretations of grace, Christian grace originates in Judaism, which is the root of Christianity. *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* notes: “the divine nature is composed of both justice and love. The Bible recognizes that without justice love itself becomes a form of injustice; but in itself justice is not enough. It can only serve as a foundation; the superstructure—the bridge between God and man—is grace” (Abrahams 650). I have been using the concept of common grace throughout the thesis, which is part of both the Christian and Jewish conception of grace. Both religions recognize that God reveals Himself in His merciful grace to believers and unbelievers alike: “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. . . . The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (*NIV Bible*, Psalm 145. 8-9. 14-16).

in both the joy and sorrow of his/her neighbour. While the bulk of Hoda's life can be read as a self-governed attempt to ensure that she is heard, recognized, and remembered, Hoda's triumphant emergence into communion and subsequently into the fullness of life can best be read as an act of grace bestowed within the cracked vessel of community.⁶

Though community is an ideal seldom realized in the world, there are moments when a community forgets its preoccupations with itself and functions ideally. In those moments, even the most reprehensible community becomes transformed by grace beyond its own limiting humanity into a cracked yet sturdy vessel delivering the goodness of grace, which is defined here as unmerited restoration and communion.⁷ *Crackpot* is a novel that captures and reveals through the process of its telling one of these transfiguring moments. Though Hoda is ultimately successful in entering into communion with others, individually Hoda's fantastic storytelling, obesity, and whoring, which ensure on a superficial level that she will never be "unheard, unrecognized, [and] unremembered," fail of their own accord to be true forms of communion (Bakhtin 287). Though Hoda is heard, her stories are met not with acceptance but with disbelief and laughter. Though everyone recognizes her, she is not recognized because of her humanity but, ironically, because of her obesity, and though she is remembered within her community, it is not for her goodness but because of her role as the town prostitute. However, as Hoda lives out her life and the transforming of both her identity

⁶ Recall that according to Bakhtin, communication defines the very nature of being human, which is of course dependent upon community: "the very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means *to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered" (287).

⁷ My use of the word "vessel" instead of my earlier "vehicle," which I use in the other chapters to describe the nature of community, stems from Wiseman's Kabbalistic epigraph to *Crackpot*: "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" (8). The full importance of the epigraph will be discussed later in this chapter; however, it is important to note that community, despite its brokenness, is very much a vessel of God's divine light, for when grace unfolds, it becomes clear that community is indeed "permeated with sparks" of God's presence.

and that of the community occurs, she is restored to full communion. Full communion, which is a form of grace, is a gift that is rarely bestowed and seemingly inexplicable outside of religious reasoning; however, it is sometimes recognizable in compassion and sacrifice. A complete reading of the process involved in entering into communion illustrates that, as Bakhtin argues, “justification cannot be *self*-justification, recognition cannot be *self*-recognition . . . to be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself” (287). Through writing, Wiseman creates a community of characters who become her means to justification and recognition. Of course, Wiseman does not directly justify or recognise herself; instead, she indirectly recognizes both herself and her Jewish community through her compassionate recognition and justification of Hoda’s community; as well, Wiseman makes it possible for others, as they read her novel, to recognize her and her community. Wiseman understands that full recognition must be a unified achievement; we as members of humanity need both to be recognized individually by ourselves (as Quoye needed to learn to do), and to be recognized and accepted by our communities. Communion, Wiseman seems to argue, develops not out of an individual’s own broken efforts, but out of a unity of compassion, sacrifice, and grace bestowed when it is least expected or deserved.

Within the world of *Crackpot*, divisionary binaries are first undercut and then eradicated in the mind of the reader when the communal fragmentation of each character is revealed. Superficially some characters appear to be materialistic “haves” while others seem to be spiritual “haves,” yet Wiseman reveals that all are lacking and in need of compassion and grace. Though spiritually Hoda and Danile seem much more whole than any of the others, they too are in need of healing. There is no difference in brokenness. A number of critics have read *Crackpot* as a “revisionist” feminist text that, as Ruth Panofsky argues,

“attempts to recover a place for women within Judaism and fiction” (55). Panofsky’s thesis purports that “*Crackpot* is written against *The Sacrifice* as a critique where community and connectedness are the end of the female quest not death” (55). However, Panofsky is only partially correct, for *Crackpot* cannot be read only as a feminist text. The novel should not be distorted into binaries, for it is not just about women, or Jews, or Jewish women. Instead, it is simply about people and their need for community. Panofsky is correct in recognizing that community and connectedness are the end of the quest. However, she is wrong to attribute the quest solely to women. The need for community is not a need of women alone; rather, it is a desperate need of each character within the book—and transcendently so for Wiseman and her readers.

Though Hoda’s Uncle Nate initially seems to be a character solely concerned with his reputation, it becomes clear as the novel progresses that he is just another fragmented individual attempting to connect with those around him. His efforts are misguided and his desire corrupted, yet as the reader continues to encounter him in Danile and Hoda’s kitchen, seeking their praise, it becomes clear how desperate he is to find some means of connection. Consistently throughout the novel, both Hoda and Danile act as vessels delivering undeserved grace for Uncle Nate. Though Uncle Nate is partly responsible for their near starvation, and though he selfishly attempts to separate them for his own gains, they continually welcome him into their home, offering him love and compassion. Despite their kindness to him, Uncle Nate is unable fully to reciprocate their compassion. He is ruled by a fear of being unheard, unrecognized, and unremembered, and this fear distorts his efforts at achieving communion. Because he is completely self-centred, any move he makes towards his community comes out of his selfish ambitions. When his own children abandon him in

the Gentile nursing home, he feels the full effect of being cut off from his community. He is no longer proud of the distinction between himself and the rest of the Jewish community; instead when Hoda and Danile visit him, he “[weeps] and [begs] them pathetically to take him home” (373). Even the most loathsome characters, such as Hoda’s Aunt Gusia, who is dominated by her greed for money, are upon closer investigation revealed with their various vices to be masking their hunger for connection and communion. When Gusia is surrounded by the women of her community at Rahel’s funeral and suddenly finds herself welcomed and accepted in a moment of grace (it’s a moment of grace because her acceptance is undeserved), she responds in turn and accepts the women that she usually disdains. Just as the grace experienced by Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* expands through a ripple effect, so the grace within *Crackpot*, as it is released within the community, begins to expand. Though the moment of pure communal interaction quickly fades, its presence testifies to the desire for it in both Gusia and the other women. The extreme hunger for connection, though perverted in this instance, can also be read in Limprig’s sexual abuse of the little girls. As detestable as the abuse is, it is still a distorted attempt at connection, showing once again that the hunger within humanity for community is insatiable. Ironically, even those characters whose actions destroy or retard community are desperate for it.

When the natural need for community is unfulfilled, perverse forms of community become commonplace and are sometimes even celebrated. Because she has no other form of community and is more accustomed to being rejected than wanted, Hoda convinces herself that “there was nothing wrong with being a whore and being handy when they wanted you; for your allotted moments you were most precious, like a secret idol in a religious rite, yeh, a private ritual men performed to insure their public well being. That was Hoda all right, one

of those big, fat idols, all smiles and warm tummy rolls. But afterwards? Everybody knows that idols aren't real" (309). Only for "allotted moments" in "secret" is Hoda "precious" and even then she exists outside of community for she is used to insure "*their*" public well being, which implies that she is not a part of the public well being (309). Hoda is fully aware that outside of the "religious rite" of the sex act, she does not exist (309). Even during the sex act, she, as a person with her own feelings and needs, is unimportant. Though she thinks of her clients as her community—as her friends— because she genuinely treats them with respect and cares about them, the feeling is not reciprocated: "she had gradually learned never to draw attention while she was paying attention, never to demand comfort while she was giving comfort" (409). She is more like a religious icon than an idol, for her clients are not devoted to her; they only use her to achieve their own well being, and then she is discarded.

Crackpot establishes both that the distortion of the hunger for community and the actuality of being outside of community mean isolation and death, regardless of sex or race. Ruth Panofsky's argument, that it is specifically women who find community and connectedness in *Crackpot*, is defeated by an examination of the lives of the female characters within the work. The lives of Rahel, Seraphina, Mrs. Limprig, and Gusia all end in death. These women die, not because they are *women* who do not have a place in fiction or Judaism, but because they are *people* outside of community. Rahel cannot leave her family alone, and because she has no one to turn to for aid, she ignores her stomach tumour until it kills her. She is an outcast because she is a crippled charwoman, and as such, her condition is conveniently invisible (37-38). Even when she dies, her death is treated as an inconvenience by her uncle (69). Seraphina, driven by her hunger for attention and affection,

allows herself to be violently abused by her pimp. There is no one, outside of Hoda, who attempts to stop her destruction, and for this reason “nobody seems to know or care” when she disappears (293). Mrs. Limprig, who is also already an outcast because of her physical disabilities, suffers further marginalization when it is discovered that her husband is a child molester. Her only recourse, because she lacks the community connection to help her carry the pain of her situation, is suicide (283). Because Gusia has completely isolated herself from any form of compassion or community interaction, she is consumed by bitterness and greed, which lead ultimately to her dropping dead at her husband’s feet in a fit of rage (266, 373).⁸ Though it seems from these examples to be predominantly women who die, the men and women alike first die spiritually and then physically because they lack the life-affirming support of a community. Hoda’s uncle’s life ends in isolation and ultimately, after his children remove him from the community atmosphere of Hoda and Danile’s company, in death. David dies spiritually because he is without family and without community. Even though Hoda tries to give him both, and though it seems that he has found his place when he begins praying with the men in the synagogue, David fails to establish himself as a consistent part of the community. As well, the numerous clients that Hoda services exemplify the brokenness at the core of the community. Hoda’s married clients indicate that the family units within the community are infected with deceit and are places of shattered communion. Through the community of broken characters that she presents, Wiseman reveals the necessity of grace, for only through grace which leads to integration with others and to building and being a part of community is survival—and, by extension, life—possible.

⁸ Gusia is very similar to Greta from *The Double Hook*: both women are domineering and controlling. Because they refuse to see or understand the pain in the lives of others, focusing only on their own desires, they are incapable of compassion and are alienated from their family’s needs.

The numerous instances throughout the novel when various characters are ignored, unrecognized, and unremembered reveal that Wiseman is deliberately creating an atmosphere—a community—of need. When Danile rushes Rahel to the hospital and the child Hoda is left behind, Hoda experiences for the first time the pain and fear of being unheard, unrecognized, and unremembered. Left alone in the dark house, she cries out for someone to hear her, remember her, and come to her, but no one comes. In the grip of fear, she runs to her bed and tries to crawl under it for protection, but she ends up hurting and scaring herself even more. Pinned beneath the bed frame, her writhing and sobbing only serve to increase her pain and fear until, exhausted, she suddenly realizes that “the bar didn’t hurt so much when she lay still” (66). This episode illustrates the message of the book as a whole, for Hoda, by trying through her own efforts to save herself, entangles herself further. She imagines her predicament to be of life or death proportions: “no one came. No one would come. Forever she was stuck forever. She would die here. They would kill her, they, it, all of them” (66). However, in reality, she is just a little girl whose “twin rounds of great soft, rosy, vulnerable, innocent bum” lie peeking out from beneath a bed (66). Because Hoda is alone and there is no one there to help her, her efforts at self-rescue are heroic; however, despite her heroics, her own efforts are insufficient. Hoda’s rescue is dependent upon her father hearing her, recognizing her, and remembering her. She is saved when he, blind to her condition, but hearing her need, recognizing her person, and remembering her place in his life, extends his hands to her and helps her up.

Throughout the novel, because of the failure of the community to see beyond itself, Hoda is left to try to save herself and her father. While she mistakenly believes her situation is one of life or death when she is hiding under the bed, Hoda’s situation after her mother

dies truly does become one of life or death. To combat her growing isolation and impending starvation, Hoda continually attempts to reach out to her community. First, she tries to reach her classmates by telling them her father's story of her "miraculous" birth. She believes in the ultimate goodness of her classmates and reasons that if they only know how special she is (as she believes herself to be, because of the gift of her father's stories), they will accept her. She believes "she owed them the opportunity to know, all those kids and the teacher who were even now waiting expectantly, with no idea of what they were to hear, owed them at least the opportunity to trade unqualified love for love at last" (*Crackpot* 133). Hoda knows that love qualified by suffering is stronger and more valuable than love untested, yet the community because of its weakness in character is unable to receive her love or to extend love back to her: "it was not easy for Hoda to endear herself to people, though she tried. There was, perhaps, too much naked hope in her glance. People recoiled, and sought and quickly found, in her looks and manner, justification for their uneasiness" (122). Instead of believing as Hoda does that "each new human being was an open possibility, and yesterday's people too, though inexplicably unfriendly, were renewed possibilities today," the community chooses to be hypercritical of those it marginalizes.

The community surrounding Hoda, yet simultaneously excluding her, is made up of people who are completely self-obsessed. They conduct their lives according to mores and values that have become corrupted by materialism, self-gain, and ultimately fear. Miss Boltholmsup is afraid of Hoda and the other students and this fear imprisons her capacity for

compassion.⁹ Instead of recognizing that Hoda can't afford a new tunic, Miss. Boltholmsup sees Hoda's short tunic as a deliberate attempt at lewdness: "But 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. You know as well as I do that the school board regulations specify your tunic length must be no more than six inches above the ankle. Well, look at yourself. What is one to think of a girl who wears her tunic almost as short as her knickers?" (144). Numerous other characters within the community choose to turn a blind eye to Hoda and Danile's predicament, because they do not want to have their own comfort zones violated.¹⁰ The women for whom Hoda cleans house are aware of Hoda's needs and some of them are even aware of the growing sexual nature of Hoda's reputation, yet they do nothing more than reprimand her for her weight and whisper innuendoes of misconduct to Danile. Because of the community's pervasive attitude of selfishness, it is rife with division, cruelty, gossip, and callousness. When people are closed to the needs of others within their own community, they become so self-obsessed that their notions of right and wrong become rigidly self-centred. The people who should be protecting Hoda, self-righteously judge her without realizing their own complicity in her situation.

In the face of rejection, Hoda turns elsewhere and tries even harder to connect with those around her. By becoming the town's whore, she attempts communion with the men of the community; however, her position as a prostitute, which allows her entrance to the

⁹ Although, as Moss contends, *Crackpot* sometimes slips into burlesque and suffers from the "glibness" of some of its characters' names, such as "Limprig and Boltholmsup, nicknamed Limpprick and Bottoms-up" and though the names are at times "destructive of any realistic mood," *Crackpot* still achieves its end purpose, for it is, as Moss concedes, "moving in its own right" (Moss, *Sex* 46). Moreover, such fictional flaws can themselves be viewed as part of the meaning of a novel that embraces the emotionally damaged and the structurally cracked.

¹⁰ They refuse to acknowledge their responsibility to Danile and Hoda. Though Danile and Hoda "are not wards of the town" because, as Danile notes, they "are wards of the One Above," they are still "entrusted to the town" and in this regard the town, as a community, has a responsibility to them (31).

community only while lying on her back, creates a false community where, though she claims “to be the part-time wife to the whole damn world,” she is in reality no one’s wife (405). Critics have read Hoda’s whoring as a response to the prudery of Protestant Canada, and indeed it may be so. They have championed Hoda’s liberalism and tolerance, which give her the ability to accept everyone without judging. In the abstract, in isolation, these traits are indeed something to be championed; however, those who champion Hoda for these reasons also often simultaneously champion her prostitution, and in doing so they often fail to recognize that Hoda’s whoring is not restorative or redemptive for Hoda herself or the community.¹¹ Though Hoda does seem to revel in her rebellion against the status quo, laughing and chortling while she services half the town, there is a ring of hollowness in her laughter that begins to echo more distinctly as the novel progresses. As Hoda grows older, she reveals both to herself and to the reader that, though she has met her circumstances with laughter, her life has been a life of pain where *her* needs have been repeatedly unheard, unrecognized, and unremembered. When she weeps in despair over her sexual encounter with her son David, Danile tells her, naively and prophetically, “Hodaleh, . . . don’t worry your time will come. Your destined one will come. Believe me, I know. . . . He’ll come” (359).¹² Yet the promise is old and seems unrealistic to Hoda. In her mind, she responds with bitterness and cynicism to Danile’s promise of grace: “*Oh sure he’ll come, Daddy! They’ll all come! In a glass slipper they’ll come, up your elbow, in your armpit; blow your nose and*

¹¹ Gabriella Morisco fails to understand that the choice of prostitution for Hoda is not really a choice. Morisco demonstrates that she does not understand the pain that exists in conjunction with the joy in Hoda’s life when she argues, “Hoda never cheats herself and only does what she wants to. An example of this is her joyful laugh when she loses her virginity—an attitude which is totally opposed to the frightened, hypocritical one our Western society has created about female virginity” (138). Morisco seems unaware that Hoda told Morgan, “No” (*Crackpot* 148).

¹² Danile’s words of comfort invoke Isaiah 35.3-4 (entitled *The Joy of the Redeemed*): “Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance and with divine retribution He will come to save you’” (*NIV Bible*).

they'll think you're making room" (359). There are very few moments where the wounded reality of her life bleeds through because Hoda, ever the optimist, always finds a way to laugh at the situation: "'Who needs him?' That much burst out of her. 'Who wants him? I wish they'd all leave me alone!' Which was a laugh, considering, and she gave a little laugh in spite of herself" (259).¹³ Though the moments of despair are short, they are undeniable and do not disappear no matter how Hoda's gregarious whoring is championed.

Hoda's whoring is comparable to the bed episode discussed earlier because it is the only response available in circumstances where no one will actively hear, recognize, or remember her need. Yet though it can be argued that it is possible to read Hoda's whoring heroically because it is the act of a little girl, done for reasons of self-preservation, it also must be read as something that should not have had to happen. Although her whoring puts food on the table for both her and her blind father and gives her a semblance of "love" and connection, it doesn't really save Hoda; it only makes her position more painful and at the same time undermines the core unity of the families of the community.¹⁴ A.M. Laurin argues that Wiseman forces her readers, through the life experiences of Hoda, "to acknowledge the complexity of all moral decisions, and the consequential inadequacy of societal mores" (117). While I agree with Laurin that the complexity of Hoda's circumstances more than acknowledge the complexity of moral decisions, I disagree with Laurin's statement that

¹³ When Hoda, in a fantasy, contemplates telling the truth about David to the community, her pain at being treated as merely a "vested memory" rather than as a person is revealed. She wonders at the reaction she would receive: "Would they go on drinking and chatting and offering tea? No, that was more like every day, when you screamed silently and unheard among them" (400, 311). The emotionally charged phrase "screamed silently and unheard" reveals the depth of Hoda's pain, which stems both from the events themselves and from the community's response, which is one of indifference. Hoda's pain is a pain carried in secrecy: "though [Hoda] still wept in secret over the particulars of her life, she scorned to repudiate the configuration of her existence" (401).

¹⁴ "She and her father were at least managing, like other living things that must survive on very little during the season of muffled life, to remain alive" (172). Hoda's life as a prostitute is a "season of muffled life" where she is able to "remain alive" but not to flourish because she lacks true community and love.

Wiseman “succeeds in making the reader identify--even approve--of Hoda’s choices” (118). When her circumstances are considered, it becomes clear that Hoda never really had a choice: she was starving. When Hoda recognizes her father’s anger and despair regarding the story of Limprig’s sexual abuse of the orphans and comprehends the fullness of what Yankl the butcher did to her, the pain she has kept buried deep inside her jolts through her like an “electrocution,” indicating that Wiseman wants her reader to be aware of the wrongness of the situation (*Crackpot* 277). Laurin argues that “Wiseman’s novel reminds readers that the strict moral designations of Judeo-Christian society are inherently dubious given humans’ limited perception” (116). However, I think Wiseman’s objective is not as simple as Laurin postulates. Hoda’s story does reveal the complexity of morality, and it does break boundaries; it does so, however, not to rule out the absolutes of morality but to rule out the corruption of morality and to re-create a new understanding which takes the context of a choice into account. Right and wrong still very much exist within *Crackpot*; Wiseman simply argues for a more careful evaluation of the circumstances that affect our understanding or judging of morality: Hoda “has a very strong value system, but it is a very different value system. In terms of what proper morality is, she has to come to it in the most primal way possible and the most difficult way possible” (Wiseman qtd. in Meyer 153). Ultimately, Wiseman does not condemn or celebrate Hoda for prostituting herself, for Wiseman believes that “truth likes a context. Strip the context to try to capture truth in bare fact, and you’re apt to end up with a very diminished truth indeed” (Wiseman qtd. in Bennett 112). Wiseman can be understood to be creating a compassionate understanding of Hoda’s situation, and to be simultaneously condemning the attitude that allows a community to be so deficient in providing for the needs of its members.

The transition from a community that is deficient in its responsibilities to a community that meets the needs of its people can be understood only through an acceptance of the incomprehensibility of grace. Because Wiseman is writing about a Jewish community and because she is writing from the perspective of a Jewish author, it is important to explore how the Jewish conception of grace informs the grace that occurs within the novel. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “though inconceivable, God is portrayed throughout the Bible as a person in contradiction to idols, who are dead, He is called the living God (11 Kings 19.4, 16). He is neither inanimate nor a philosophical abstraction; He is the living source of all life” (Abrahams 650). He is also the source of all grace and mercy: He is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex.34.6-7 qtd. in Abrahams 650). As noted earlier, “the divine nature is composed of both justice and love. The Bible recognizes that without justice love itself becomes a form of injustice; but in itself justice is not enough. It can only serve as a foundation; the superstructure—the bridge between God and man is grace” (Abrahams 650). The Jewish notion of grace can be understood as a mixture of divine justice and love. In God’s relationship with His people “there is a rhythm of rebellion and retribution, of oppression and redemption, of repentance and grace” (Abrahams 645). The Book of Nehemiah discusses this mixing of divine justice and love in the all-enduring grace of God, which is demonstrated by God’s constant compassion and mercy for His people. Though God punishes the wrongs of man, when man cries out to God, God always hears from heaven and in compassion delivers His people again and again (Nehemiah 9.28). David Novak explains, “both Judaism and Christianity affirm that redemption, like revelation, is ultimately dependent on God’s grace, not man’s

works. Works are commanded as a faithful response to the grace of revelation and the grace of redemption hoped for” (89).

The grace that is at work throughout Hoda’s life and throughout the life of her community is a grace that is reflective of both Christian and Judaic principles, for Hoda’s restoration and the community’s redemption are “ultimately dependent on God’s grace, not on man’s works” (Novak 89).¹⁵ When Hoda realizes that she will not go insane, following the revelation that she has just committed incest with her son and that she must do it again, it is a form of grotesque grace similar to that experienced by Quoyale and Agnis. Instead of the numbness of insanity, Hoda finds solace through returning to her father’s stories, understanding for the first time that the stories are a form of grace, for they “held you with wonder and the feeling that they were true, and the truth had a terrible tenderness in it as though it were holding in fierce but incredible compassionate hands all the aching fragments of all the aching lives, not because it was going to heal them . . . but to reveal them to you, so that knowing nothing really, you could still for a moment know a compassion and dignity beyond your pain” (*Crackpot* 360). Through Danile’s stories, Hoda experiences a loving justice that recognizes her circumstances rather than an accusatory justice that blames her for them. Danile’s stories elevate Hoda beyond the pain of life into the dignity of belonging. Within the stories, Hoda is important to the life of her community. She is recognized and remembered. Her life has meaning to others outside of her family and her presence

¹⁵ Though one may be tempted to define Danile’s stories as “man’s works” that are responsible for saving Hoda, without grace, the stories would not exist. Danile’s stories are not grace in and of themselves; rather, they are “a faithful response to the grace of revelation and the grace of redemption hoped for” (Novak 89). Without the revelation of grace that allows Danile to see the events as he tells them, the stories would remain locked in darkness, yet because the grace in his life has been revealed to him, Danile is able to tell the stories in the light of grace. Danile tells his stories to Hoda and to the community at large in response to the hope of redemption for which he awaits. He tells his stories in obedience to the grace of revelation that he has received regarding them. He knows they are powerful and that they will play a part in both his and Hoda’s redemption, and so he continues to tell them to anyone and everyone. It is only through the grace of revelation that Hoda, as an adult, becomes fully aware of their full beauty and of the redemptive power working through them.

matters.¹⁶ In this way, Danile's stories become a re-creation of community within which Hoda can participate in full communion, for "the essence of community is a sense of belonging" (Vanier 3). Danile re-interprets the horrible aspects of his marriage, creating a beautiful story belonging both to Hoda and to him.¹⁷ He chooses to "be for another" despite the pain it might cause him (Bakhtin 287). His ability to do this is an example of grace made tangible. He has in essence become a vessel of grace for Hoda. Even though Hoda pleads; "*If I'm broken, why hasn't all feeling leaked away? If I'm broken at least let me be empty,*" Danile's sacrifice, his stories, allow Hoda in the midst of her suffering and anguish to be comforted:

She simply felt the old stories, felt her emptiness filled with resonance, transformed to resonance. She saw the old stories, saw beyond the old stories to what the man her father was and what the woman her mother must have been; she heard the stories and knew them all, and gathered them back into herself and knew herself as well as she flowed in the sequence of her days. And when she returned to the contemplation of her immediate existence, that restless human impulse which will not hold still any more than time holds still, conceived for her the notion that somehow the boy, protected though he must be from personal knowledge, must learn what was important in the stories still. (362)

¹⁶ Even as a child Hoda recognizes the power of Danile's stories: "These were real life, not yes and no and hush and shame shame say sorry. Daddy told her who she was and where she came from and what had happened. Real things" (13). Recall the earlier discussion of Frye's statement in the chapter on *The Shipping News*: "Memory is the key to resurrection," for memory tells us who we are and where we came from and without that knowledge we don't exist (Powe D8).

¹⁷ Recall both Jakob's and Ben's acts of reinterpretation or re-memory, as discussed in the conclusion to the chapter on *Fugitive Pieces*, which are assertions of grace. Jakob, Ben, and Danile are visionaries who have the courage to see and acknowledge the work of grace in their lives. Danile tells his family: "You wouldn't believe our luck, for on the surface aren't we the unluckiest people in the world? But study things, study and you'll see. God only seems to punish. . . . God blinded me for reasons of His own, and the loss is nothing to the gain. For if I had not been blind and your mother had not been a little crooked many wonderful things would not have happened and you would probably never have been born" (13-14). God's grace is often not what we would have chosen, but we begin to see the beauty in it when we chose to understand and see His grace in our circumstances.

Hoda cannot be empty even though she desires it, because, though she is broken, she is also mended and refilled by the grace transferred to her from her father's stories and her father's love. A further explanation for her mending comes out of Wiseman's understanding of Kabbalistic theology, upon which she structures her novel.

Wiseman, through using a Kabbalistic epigraph, distinctly signals that her novel will speak to the brokenness and hunger for restoration within humanity. In a letter to Margaret Laurence, Wiseman explains how the leading Kabbalistic scholars, when she was struggling to authenticate the origins of her epigraph, told her: "make up your own version. There are thousands of interpretations. That's how they came to be. And attribute it to the Kabbalah: Legends of Creation" (Laurence, 246). With this maxim as a license to creative freedom, Wiseman sets out to uproot the divisionary barriers in the way of complete communion, for she argues, "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" (qtd. in Laurin 240). In the same way that the Biblical flood cleared God's canvas for re-creation, Wiseman, through *Crackpot*, attempts to shake up the bifurcated worldview of Western thought. By breaking social taboos, she tries to return to a basic understanding of good and evil, to truth stripped of social stipulations. In one of the many interviews on *Crackpot*, Wiseman explains that "there were a lot of things, moral questions among others, that I was putting to the test just to see where the boundaries were and what happened at the boundaries" (qtd. in Butovsky12). In order to achieve the naked truth of the distinctiveness of good and evil, Wiseman blurs the border between what is humanly possible and socially permissible. Asking what "is the best

possible reason for the worst possible deed?" (Butovsky 13), Wiseman presents the story of Hoda, and in the process creates for her readers a new double question: Why was this extreme form of border-blurring necessary, and what does it accomplish?

Michael Greenstein suggests that the border disruption in *Crackpot* is indicative of the theories of feminism, postmodernism, and post-colonialism. The foundation of his argument rests on Patricia Waugh's claim that "both feminism and postmodernism celebrate liminality, the disruption of boundaries, the confounding of traditional markers of 'difference' [and] the undermining of the authorial security of the egotistical sublime" (qtd. in Greenstein 177). Greenstein supports his argument with reference to Linda Hutcheon's observation that "post-colonialism destabilizes the fixity of borders and centres" (177). While *Crackpot* undeniably breaches the borders of what is socially permissible with Hoda's act of incest with David, the purpose of the radically disruptive action is not simply to enable Wiseman to "criticize traditional hierarchies in Canadian society" (Greenstein 178). Rather, the border-blurring incestuous act must be read in two different ways, which together create the unity of her story. The first reading of Hoda and David's encounter is as an act of erasure, and the second reading is as an act of compassionate sacrifice. The two readings together constitute a whole reading, and such an understanding allows Wiseman to enter into the role of literary "re-creator." If Wiseman's purpose is to re-create our understanding of good and evil, humanity, and community, she must tear down conventional foundations. By deconstructing the rules and momentarily eradicating the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour, she creates a space or void for something new to take place.

In an essay on Lurianic myth, Kenneth Sherman explains that in Kabbalistic theory the "creation myth is divided into three major experiences: *Tsimtsum*—the self-limitation or

exile of God; *Shevirah*—the breaking of the vessels; *Tikkun*—the harmonious correction and mending of the flaw” (168). *Tsimtsum*, which happens when God exiles Himself from Himself, creates the moment when creation becomes possible. According to Sherman, “the keynote to the Lurianic experience [is] the exile of the self from the self” (171). When God exiles Himself from Himself, He leaves an empty or primordial space, which leaves room for something other than God (Sherman 168). From this removed position, “the *Shekhinah* (God’s visage, His radiance) sends forth its ray of light into the primordial space where creation takes place” (Sherman 168). God’s creation takes different forms, one of which is the form of Primordial Man. However, man cannot contain the holiness of God, and upon the impact of God’s radiance on man, the vessels are shattered, resulting in alienation and a need for redemption (Sherman 168). Sherman explains that, “after this crisis [the shattering], nothing remains as it was. Everything is somewhere else. But a being not in its proper place is in exile. Thus all being is in need of redemption” (169). In Kabbalistic theory, as well as in the worldview espoused by *Crackpot*, “all being,” or in other words everyone, is a fragmented “have-not” in need of communion.

By creating an experience where the most instinctive rules no longer apply and where it is possible to do the worst possible thing for the best possible reason, Wiseman creates a type of *Tsimtsum*. Wiseman’s readers, at the point of absorbing and absolving Hoda’s incestuous act with her son, are in a position where they find the impermissible permissible. The readers’ world, though configured according to seemingly solid rules, is shaken. Claude Levi-Strauss’ argument that (according to his anthropological research) “the incest-taboo is universal within human cultures, indeed defines human culture” is challenged when the readers find themselves agreeing that in this instant incest is permitted (Foucault 1480). In

this fragmented moment, when one rule falters then falls, the self is thrown into exile from the self, for it finds itself permitting that which it cannot permit. In that hesitancy of self within the reader, Wiseman creates an empty or primordial space, which leaves room for the creation of a new worldview.

What is shocking and revolutionary about *Crackpot*'s worldview is not the worldview itself but rather its mode of introduction. Wiseman's reason for going to such lengths as eradicating the incest taboo lies at the heart of her purpose. A consideration of the following statement reveals that Wiseman's self-set task is to overcome anti-Semitism, which remains dangerous in its subtle yet consistent presence:

To be a Jew in Western society you have to be more aware, more conscious. You have to have one foot on the sidewalk and one foot on the road ready to run. My object in writing has always been to produce a corrective version to what continues to prevail with respect to what Jews are . . . The reason I wanted to be a writer was to save the Jews, of course. (qtd. in Watchel 8)

Wiseman, through *Crackpot*, is saying that the only way to defeat preconceived ideas of prejudice is to begin fresh. The only way to begin fresh is to make people question their most fundamental beliefs. If there are instances where the most universal of rules or beliefs can be overturned, then maybe prejudices and lies can also be overturned. If our vision regarding the incest taboo can be altered, then there can be different ways of looking at other aspects of life. Rather than looking at life as a place of binaries, we need to look at it as a place of equality in humanity. If everyone is fractured in some way, then there is a common humanity, and the distinctions among peoples are no longer loomingly important. What becomes more important is how compassion, sacrifice, and ultimately grace lead to redemption for all. Wiseman's vision of the world is that it is a place of fragmentation that needs to be returned to wholeness. Good and evil grow out of compassion and indifference,

for according to Laurin, “the basic opposition in all of Wiseman’s work is between caring and callousness” (241). Wiseman’s characters reveal that though society judges people according to categories of “haves” and “have nots,” of beautiful people and ugly people, rich and poor, immigrant and established, whores and virgins, we are all creatures of fragmentation in need of compassion, struggling towards communion in community.

Each character in the novel is fragmented, yet each contains shards of what Wiseman calls “Holy Radiance” or “the Divine” (*Crackpot* 1). According to *Crackpot*, it is these shards of the Divine that cause us to gravitate towards communion with each other, for communion or rather community offers a chance at wholeness. Wiseman’s arguments are very similar to Mackey’s arguments referred to in the earlier chapters, and part of this is due to precepts shared by Christianity and Judaism, for both are “deeply rooted in biblical thought” (Abrahams 652). However, the full reason for the similarities between not just Wiseman’s and Mackey’s observations but between the four novels studied in this thesis lies in man’s insatiable longing for wholeness which, as Christianity and Judaism teach, comes through relationship to God. Not only Christianity, Judaism, and Kabbalistic thought, but also secular literature seems to support the view that we are created with an internal insatiable longing which causes us to be drawn towards communion with each other. This thesis offers the argument that this longing for communion can be understood as having its roots in a longing for God. Yet because of the very nature of our fragmentation, the source of our longing has been nearly forgotten and replaced by so many other conflicting desires. However, our longing for God finds its most consistent outlet in our longing for communion with one another for communion among men and women is a reflection or promise of the joy of communion with God. Yet because our communion with each other is so muddled and

incomplete, it is constantly frustrated and sometimes even rejected. Through grace, which works through our fragmentation, moments of grace-full communion and redemption occur. It is these moments of grace, which are so often reflected yet so often unexplainable within our literature, that point to God as the primary source of our insatiable longing for community and communion.

Wiseman's characters, through their fragmentation, refuse categorization; they both succeed and fail simultaneously. They are everything and nothing at once. Hoda is obese but attractive, huge but graceful, virtuous yet scandalous. Danile disrupts the most black-and-white binary of the blind and the sighted. He refuses to be neither one nor the other. He is physically blind, yet he sees more spiritually than those with perfect eyesight. He is blind to his daughter's whoring, but his hands can see to make beautiful baskets. Lazar is scarred and broken, but he understands that to be whole one needs to be accepted within a community. He quietly and patiently teaches Hoda that "solitude and community belong together; each requires the other as do the centre and circumference of a circle. Solitude without community leads to loneliness and despair, but community without solitude hurls us into a void of words and feelings" (Bonhoeffer qtd. in Vanier 121). Though at times *Crackpot* can seem, because of its immensity, like a "void of words and feelings," Wiseman's story creates for her readers a new understanding of humanity (Vanier 21). Her act of recreation consistently, yet gently, reveals the fragmentary nature of each character, and by doing so she reveals his/her humanity and evokes the humanity of the reader.

By the end of the novel, Hoda's experience of community is completely changed. She has finally begun to understand the movements of grace within her life. The moments when grace is at work in the novel have been building steadily as Wiseman orchestrates her vision

of re-creation. As she changes the community surrounding Hoda, Wiseman subtly changes the worldview of her reader. Hoda moves from seeking acceptance in a community of authority figures divorced from their own understanding of fragmentation to being pursued by a community of individuals who are broken but, because of their understanding of their brokenness, are on the way to becoming whole. Lazar illustrates the difference in the community, for he seeks Hoda out. He hears, recognizes, and remembers her for who she is. When Lazar asks her to marry him, Hoda thinks back on how the men with whom she had sex ““didn’t come to hear her troubles. . . . nobody really wanted to know her . . . nobody did know her, not really, not who she was, underneath, not nearly as well as she knew them, even though they talked about her and laughed at her and looked down on her” (409). Though Hoda has shared her love with those around her, no one has loved her. As a child, in her desperation to be loved by someone outside her family, and because she genuinely loves those around her, Hoda believes that Morgan means it when he says he loves her as he has sex with her. Hoda’s understanding of love is skewed by her need to be loved. Though she has loved others, she herself has not experienced love from someone outside of her family, and thus she does not understand that

love is neither a sentimental nor a passing emotion. It is an attraction to others, which gradually becomes commitment, the recognition of a covenant, of a mutual belonging. It is listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them. It means answering their call and their deepest needs. It means feeling and suffering with them—weeping when they weep, rejoicing when they rejoice. Loving people means being happy when they are there, sad when they are not. It is living in each other, taking refuge in each other. (Vanier 6)

Weighing Lazar’s proposal, Hoda remembers how “there had been times when she wanted desperately for some particular person to cross over to her no man’s land, to give her some

sign that he would like to come closer, so that she could draw him to her heart” (409). Yet she also remembers that whenever she attempted to let someone in, “it never led to anything in the end, though the guy was always glad to get it for free” (409). Though Hoda has received pleasure from sex, she has never received love. When Lazar asks her to marry him, she feels threatened because she doesn’t understand what it means. Like Quoyale in *The Shipping News*, she is afraid of the vulnerability and pain involved in allowing herself to be fully loved. Yet when Lazar tells her “just be with me,” the complexity of her life’s struggle to belong, to be wanted is suddenly simplified (422).

Hoda’s triumphant emergence into communion comes when she least expects it. Following her compassionate sacrifice for David, she is able to understand and to return to loving her father’s stories. When this happens her entrance into communion is nearly complete for “she occupies her past; she inhabits her life” (427). When she lies still and allows Lazar to love her, we can read grace at work. Initially Hoda’s own efforts at ingratiating herself within a community fail to create the communion that will allow her to be truly heard, recognized, and remembered; however, the concluding image of a magic circle surrounding Hoda, Lazar, Danile, and David promises communion for it reveals that a unity of compassion, sacrifice, and grace has just occurred. Wiseman, through the cracked yet mended vessels of Hoda and her community, has demonstrated that in order to live in community we must make every effort for communion, but we need to be ready to accept that it is not our own efforts that will bring it about; rather, communion and community are primarily gifts of grace, which we must be humble enough to accept. According to Martin Buber, “full mutuality is not inherent in men’s life together. It is a grace, for which one must always be ready and which one never gains as an assured possession” (131). Full mutuality

or rather full communion, because it is so elusive and so sought after, becomes when it occurs within literature a distinct mark of grace. Buber explains further:

the Thou meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking (11), [for] God . . . enters into a direct relation with us . . . in creative, revealing and redeeming acts, and thus makes it possible for us to enter into a direct relation with him (135).¹⁸ . . . God gives personal life, he makes us as persons become capable of meeting with him and with one another. But no limitation can come upon him as the absolute Person, either from us or from our relations with one another; in fact we can dedicate to him not merely our persons but also our relations to one another. The man who turns to him therefore need not turn away from any other *I-Thou* relation; but he properly brings them to him and lets them be fulfilled ‘in the face of God.’ (136)

When we understand this balance between human community and divine grace, we can live with the hope of restoration, eagerly awaiting the gift of *Tikkun*: God’s grace-filled harmonious mending of our flaws (see Sherman 168).

¹⁸ Buber does not use upper case for personal pronouns referring to God.

Conclusion

According to O'Connor, "when the physical fact is separated from the spiritual reality, the dissolution of belief is inevitable" (162). In response to the pervasive attitude of religious disbelief within our culture, this thesis has sought to rejoin the physical fact of community with the spiritual reality of grace in order to reawaken an understanding of the presence of God in our world. O'Connor argues further that "at best our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily," for "today's audience is one in which religious feeling has become, if not atrophied, at least vaporous and sentimental (159, 161).¹ This thesis has focused on manifestations of common grace rather than special grace, not in an effort to be sentimental nor to be politically acceptable, but because common grace is what exists within these novels. When recognized for what it is, common grace becomes the most tangible and universally comprehensive representation of the presence of God in our world, for it comes to all peoples alike: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (*NIV Bible*, Matt. 5.44). Though "we live in an unbelieving age," the presence of common grace indicates that God has not abandoned us; instead He declares: I "will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, will show mercy on whom I will show mercy"

¹ Though O'Connor was writing in the 1960s, her words are even more pertinent in 2003, for though spirituality is recognized and claimed by society, it is now generally recognized as a concept outside of any distinct faith. People will more readily define themselves as spiritual than as believing in any particular faith; for this reason O'Connor refers to her age as "an unbelieving age but one which is markedly and lopsidedly spiritual" (159). Though the concept of common grace is in danger of being watered-down like the concept of spirituality and made simply to signify any goodness within society, my thesis has consistently returned grace to a context that recognizes it as a distinct gift of God that cannot be manufactured by man.

(O'Connor 159; *New Jerusalem Bible*, Ex. 33.19). A deconstructionist critic might disparagingly label my use of grace a "metaphysical signifier," and though I concede that I have used the concept of grace to explain that which is inexplicable, I contend that that is precisely what grace mostly is, inexplicable, part of *the* mystery. Conceptually, it is outside of the confines of human rationalism; it does, however, become more tangible in its manifestations in fiction, such as through its relationship to the imagined communities of these four novels.

The ability to form community and to be healed through community is a gift of grace. The healing power of community does not come out of community itself; although community does function as a vehicle for grace, it in no way exists as a succinct entity capable of creating grace. More often than not, community itself is in desperate need of grace, as each of the four novels has demonstrated. Initially, in each of the novels the communities are themselves in need of healing and restoration. Fear controls the community in the opening of *The Double Hook*; at the start of *Fugitive Pieces*, obliteration all but defines Jakob's community; when *The Shipping News* opens, the community Quoye inherits harbours secrets of sexual abuse; and finally, fragmentation and selfishness fill *Crackpot's* initial community. These communities only become vehicles or vessels of grace when they themselves are receiving grace.

As the characters within *The Double Hook* receive grace individually, it propels them out of their individual spheres of existence back into being a community where the grace they have received becomes a part of the grace of their neighbour. It all happens simultaneously: as they begin to function as community ideally should, the grace they receive is given room to expand. Because community, at its purest form, is in itself a form of

grace, grace exists at its conception and at its resurrection. Yet grace, like community, can be rejected. It is, according to Josiah Royce, “only the consciously united community,” the community which is itself experiencing grace, that “can offer salvation to distracted humanity and can calm the otherwise insatiable greed and longing of the natural individual man” (qtd. in Martinez-Brawley 113). The relationship between full community and grace is so intricately woven that it is often difficult to distinguish between them. While the ultimate source of grace is God, community, when it has been restored to itself through grace, becomes a locus of grace to which fragmented individuals gravitate, for (as mentioned earlier) “it is the role of grace to restore and consolidate the natural unity of the human race” (Fransen 59).

In *Fugitive Pieces*, when Jakob through grace is given a new community in his relationship to Athos, he is able to expand the grace he has been given into the growing community in which he discovers himself. As Jakob’s community expands, so his grace expands, reaching more and more people. In *The Shipping News*, as Quoye receives offerings of grace, he enters into community which continues to manifest grace in his life, enabling his triumphant resurrection. In *Crackpot*, Hoda repeatedly tries to create community, but because grace cannot be manufactured, she fails. It is only when she stops trying that she finds grace and community enveloping her.

Discovering grace unmerited, expanded, extended, and received within four novels focused on representations of Canadian communities establishes that grace is very much present and real within contemporary Canadian literature. Yet what is the purpose of its presence? Theologically speaking, the presence, or, rather, the gift of God’s grace in this world is an invitation from God to His creation, entreating it to enter into communion with

Him. The daily grace that we as members of humanity receive is only a small sampling of the fullness of grace that is available when we enter into communion with God. But what are we to make of the presence of grace within these novels? Is it here because the novelists have somehow unconsciously tapped into the idea that nothing in this world occurs without the intervention of God's grace? Or is it here because grace is a part of reality, so that any novelist who accurately represents his/her vision of reality cannot help but reflect grace? Or do these moments of grace exist simply as an internal message from God himself who cannot help but permeate every aspect of His creation with His invitation to communion? Regardless of the answer one chooses to make, the presence of grace within these novels is a fictional fact. Community, with all of its flaws and cracks, when redeemed by grace, is our most recognizable reflection of the promise of graceful communion with God.

Recognizing that community, in rare moments of lucidity, transforms into a symbolic functional metaphor for grace provides a way of understanding the healing or restoration that so frequently occurs within community as well as its ubiquitous presence in our literature. It would be interesting to expand this thesis into a larger study exploring how the link between community and grace is configured within other Canadian novels from different periods. Representations of struggling or deficient Canadian communities that sometimes succeed and sometimes fail in reaching the grace of full communion are constant within Canadian literature, from such early long poems as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, through modern novels such as Frederick Phillio Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* and Sinclair Ross' *As for Me and My House*, to Rudy Wiebe's first novel of Mennonite community, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and continuing into more contemporary novels such as those studied in this thesis. Are the resolutions at the end of these novels marks of grace? Do the communities

within these novels ever manage to break out of the shell of their own insularity to become places and vehicles of grace? Though *As for Me and My House* seemingly ends with the failure of community, for Phillip and Mrs. Bentley are leaving Horizon as the novel concludes, they are leaving with their own family community more intact than ever before. They have, through a grace, which seems to be a form of almost grotesque grace like that experienced by Quoye in *The Shipping News*, merely been given a new start. When a novel manifests moments of grace, it does not mean that the darkness has been completely expelled; it just means that it has been repelled, pushed back into the shadows. Graceful communities are not indicative of sentimental whitewashing; rather, they are indicative of the author's vision of reality. Though *The Double Hook* rests in grace, and though its community is triumphant because it has endured, it is far from perfect, far from achieving ideal community. Its journey has only just begun, for the people of the restored community within it have just begun living. They must follow through on their initial coming together and make it a part of their everyday. James must face up to what he has done to Kip and to his responsibilities to Lenchen and the child. The same can be said of the other three novels, for each of them ends with an awareness of the grace found within the connection to community, yet each also ends with the harsh realities of the darkness yet to be faced. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben upon his return to Naomi must choose whether or not he will confess his affair with Petra. In *The Shipping News*, Quoye, though he has found love, must now learn how to live in its embrace. And in *Crackpot*, Hoda must find a way to make her dream a part of real life. Grace, something like the titular double hook, is elusive if we attempt to hold onto it selfishly, yet enduring if we enter into it as part of a community, for we must give and receive and share it if God's grace of full communion is ever to be experienced.

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