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Canada

The Narrative Function of Time and Place
in the novels of Matt Cohen

Presented as partial requirement for a
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by

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One. The Disinherited page 6

Chapter Two. The Colours of War page 41

Chapter Three. The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone
page 63

Chapter Four. Flowers of Darkness page 84

Conclusion page 109

Endnotes page 116

Bibliography page 124

Abstract

Matt Cohen has written four works of fiction which have roughly the same geographical setting, and in which the fictive time is approximately the present. Through modifications in the place and atmosphere, and through variations on temporal elements, Cohen has created four novels unique in form. Each novel explores different functions of the narrative elements of time and place. A chapter is devoted to each novel: The Disinherited, The Colours of War, The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, and Flowers of Darkness.

Place is broadly defined as the physical, spiritual, mental, moral, social, and emotional conditions through which the people in the narratives move. Each of the novels possesses a strong sense of place. The land itself provides security and roots for some characters; for others it is an unwelcome bond which is difficult to cast off. Some characters are able to fit into their landscapes and feel "at home"; while others are permanently alienated. The physical setting usually reflects inner landscapes, and thus is used allegorically. Occasionally it is used as a foil, or an antagonist, often a negative and allegorical use. Land may be a symbol of a way of life and/or the possibilities of life. It reflects and amplifies themes and is used as a correlative of human behaviour and emotions. The form of each novel is dependent to a large extent on the correlation between the landscapes in which the minds of the characters and the bodies of the characters act.

Time is discussed on a number of levels: as tense, as definite periods, as significant moments, as structure within which events are organized. Time is a linear manifestation of the destiny of events but its continuum in the human mind is often interrupted by memories and flashbacks. This happens in the novels as well, and the arrangement of such flashbacks often determines the emphasis Cohen wants. Time exerts enormous pressures on characters and often forces them to act before allotted periods of time run out. As well, the genealogical imperative, or the awareness of one's place in a genealogical continuum, forces reaction; Cohen uses cyclical and rhythmical patterns of time to provide one way of coming to terms with the pessimistic implications of the direction of time toward death. Time is usually presented as a neutral force - a source of both good and evil, birth and death. For Cohen, the time of inner awareness measures the intensity of human experience, not its order of succession. His organization of the world of inner awareness and that of external events can create very different effects.

The form of each novel is different and they could be broadly classified as follows: The Disinherited, a dynastic chronicle, The Colours of War, a futuristic, anti-utopian narrative, The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, a rural idyll, and Flowers of Darkness, a gothic romance. Each examines the extent to which characters fit into their time and place. The variety of view points contributes to Cohen's larger thematic vision.

Introduction

Matt Cohen is a major contemporary writer. George Woodcock¹ says that he is "one of the most interesting and versatile among the younger generation of Canadian novelists". Cohen has published nine novels, five books of short stories and a book of poetry since 1969. A number of his novels have been in reprint series. Although his work routinely receives good press, very little serious criticism has been done on his writing and there has been virtually no work done on Cohen's unique style and form.

One of the most striking things about his novels is their sense of place. Just as William Faulkner has created Yoknapatawpha County, or Margaret Laurence has made Manawaka a very real place to her readers, Cohen has made the rocky farm land of Eastern Ontario vivid in his reader's imaginations. Cohen writes about this rural landscape from a variety of points of view: philosophical, geographical, and especially temporal. The regional setting shapes the lives and minds of the characters in his fiction, and also shapes the form of his novels. Each novel is developed in a singular way in terms of form and technique, as well as narrative content. In each book, Cohen manipulates his setting to produce very different effects. This thesis will explore the narrative function of both place and time in four of his novels which share a common setting.

Because both 'time' and 'place' are fairly pedestrian words, it is necessary to define how they will be used in this thesis. Here 'place' will mean setting: the physical, spiritual, mental, moral, social, and emotional conditions through which the people in the narratives move. 'Time' refers to the period between events, or during which something happens. It is a measure or measurable interval, a duration in which things are considered as happening in the past, present, or future. 'Time' is also the point at which something has happened, is happening, or will happen. It is my purpose to articulate the significance of both time and place as they relate to all the other elements in the novels and emerge as part of the form. The term 'form', as I will be using it, refers to the relationship between the dramatic, thematic, and structural elements which results in the total effect. Form defines the boundaries of a work; it declares where it begins and ends, and how all the elements are organized. This thesis will point out the significance of the details of time and place as they relate to the total structure of each novel.

The Disinherited introduces Cohen's readers to the Salem countryside and its characters, some of whom continue to appear in the later novels. In this way it is the base of the succeeding novels. The Disinherited focuses on a family farm and chronicles lives which stretch from the present owner back to the pioneers who first settled the land. The past is recovered by mental journeys, flashbacks, memories and diaries. The men of each generation are seen as keenly aware of the narrow pattern of

behaviour that the land which they have had in common imposes on them. They are aware as well of the strong sense of security and the roots their land provides. The novel manifests the workings of this place, as well as time, on their bodies and souls. The result is a dynastic narrative which is presented in a non-traditional form.

The temporal setting of the second novel, The Colours of War is in the near future. The conflicts suggested as present between generations in The Disinherited have become a general condition in Theodore Beam's world. He is physically alienated from his former home, Salem, the locale of The Disinherited (there unnamed) and the plot revolves around his return there. The actual journey back to his birthplace parallels his search for a meaningful future.

The tone of the third novel, The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone is quite different from that of the two preceeding, although again the primary setting and many of the characters are the same. The disparity is due largely to the peculiar way which Cohen has varied the setting and handled the temporal elements. In this novel the setting constantly stresses the elemental nature of life which counterpoints the character's struggles to obtain a second chance at happiness. The form the novel assumes is dependent on the arrangement Cohen makes of the conflicts of the past and present and their relationship to a future which the character's are trying to shape in a grey and decaying landscape.

In Flowers of Darkness Cohen transforms Salem into a gothic setting which contains an atmosphere of brooding evil and unknown fear. The physical arrangement of the town provides a model for polarities developed in the novel. The organization of events within a prescribed time gives this novel its sense of impending doom as well as a form quite distinct from any of the others.

Although Cohen uses the same geographical location in each novel, his variations on social, moral, mental, and emotional conditions provide new ways of seeing the area and the characters. Each novel is a unique examination of how its characters fit in their time and place. The decision by Cohen to rework the same region in four novels allows him to explore different possibilities. The place serves the function of sustaining a locale in which the structure of the novels is anchored. The strong sense of place which is present in all of the novels is a kind of constant. While Cohen constructs various themes, stories, and characters, the common ground provides a structure for all the variables. An unusual aspect of Cohen's repeated use of this place is that aspects of the constant itself change in each book. This paradoxical statement can be explained by examining each novel and articulating the meaningfulness of the details of time and place which become fully apparent only as the total structure emerges.

Although each novel may be enjoyed alone, or in any order, a chronological examination provides a structure in which to study Cohen's variety of viewpoints. In this thesis I will

examine the four "Salem novels" to discover what patterns emerge and to decide if there is some specific development or if each book is a separate facet of Cohen's vision.

The Disinherited - The Base

"In a few years only rich city people will be able to afford to live on this kind of farm."¹

The farm which provides the central focus for Cohen's novel is situated somewhere north of Kingston, Ontario. It was homesteaded by a Thomas and has been the center of that family physically, psychologically, and philosophically for four generations. Most of the Thomas men never journeyed very far away from the farm, except Erik, the sole scion of the fourth generation who has spent the last eight years in Toronto. However, on or off it, the men seem to retain the farm as a touchstone for all their attitudes and decisions. While the actual time span of the fictional present in this novel is about two months, Cohen uses flashbacks, memories, and diaries so that the hopes, loves, and frustrations of the past generations are counterpointed with those of the present generation. Through this method of using place as the constant and time as the variable, Cohen arrives at a form which is eminently suitable to reflect the characters and themes which he presents.

In his book on Canadian prairie fiction, Laurence Ricou states that "setting, in itself, does not fundamentally alter the theme of fiction. Man's consideration of his own nature in the universe and his formulation of a personal philosophy to deal with the emptiness - emotional, cultural, intellectual - that is so much a part of his world is, of course, a universal theme."² Ricou goes

on to point out that prairie fiction writers tend to use the landscape familiar to them as the basic image from which to explore these questions. In a similar fashion Matt Cohen uses the rocky farmland of Eastern Ontario as an image through which he probes the fundamental issues of human experience. The gradual decay of the quality of the land and the decline of the viability of a small family farm mirrors the experiences of each generation of Thomases. The present of the novel, in which the continuity of the family farm is uncertain, reflects the uncertainty and bewilderment of Erik and his generation. Erik must wrestle with the problem of accepting his inheritance and all its restrictions as well as the security it offers, or rejecting it and forging a new path for himself. The external and internal landscapes which Cohen presents complement each other. The farm is the microcosm which reflects truths about the relationship of all human beings to their landscape, to time, to themselves, and to other people.

To provide a point of view from which to explore universal issues, Cohen begins his narrative near the end of the life of Richard Thomas, Erik's father, and the bulk of the book is centered on Richard, his memories, and his relationship with his son. Richard dies near the end of the narrative but not before suffering a heart attack and a stroke and spending six to eight weeks in the hospital. While he is waiting to die his rich memories call up the past generations and reveal that the decline of the land has paralleled the erosion of feelings of purpose and security in the people who lived on it. The details of this family

history are presented gradually and by bits so that by the time the novel is completed there is a presentation of a spectrum of four generations and of their attitudes toward the land, themselves, and life in general.

The homesteading ancestor was Richard S. Thomas, who was a settler, defined by Margaret Atwood as "a man who attempts to clear a place for himself out of the land".³ His experience is "a primal encounter with the land".⁴ Atwood describes this activity as "trying to fit a straight line into a curved space"⁵, with the pioneer trying to change nature's order into the shape of human civilization. Richard S. Thomas met this challenge with vigor. Although he had to work extremely hard, in a comparatively short time he did carve out from the wilderness a workable farm. The material rewards of hard physical labour were satisfying. In the estimation of the settlers themselves it was an admirable achievement to have created farms and inheritances, which they were then able to pass on to their sons. Because of this effort and attitude the physical place which was developed from the wilderness acquired great significance, symbolically as well as actually.

The farm and the work it entailed was an end in itself, sufficient reason to live. This attitude is voiced by Richard S. Thomas's son, Simon, whose pre-meal grace was, "Accept the homage of us your humble servants for you have given us this earth that we may feed and love you" (p. 50). But by the

end of the third generation, that of Richard, there are definite signs that the idea of the possession of the land being a God-given right, is beginning to wane. Richard was warned by his father that "the farm was different then than now, it was important to know that his physical universe was not a constant but an artifact that could only be bought with time and blood" (p. 53). Although Richard had cut short his stay in Toronto at university to return to the farm because "it was the right thing for him to do" (p. 41), Richard's confidence in his youthful decision is often uncertain. This is articulated once to his friend Pat Frank: "There's always someone to say that this land isn't meant for farming or that it should never have been cleared, or that the only future for it is some sort of park, for city people" (p. 158). Richard vigorously denies this position but his thoughts disclose that he does harbour doubts. It has been impressed on him so strongly that the effort of his ancestors was worthy and his sense of duty is so strong that he represses his own thoughts about the practicality and reasonableness of devoting his life to the continuation of their efforts. He has to keep convincing himself that it is the "right thing to do".

Cohen reveals the attitudes of the first settler and his descendants toward the land very gradually. Because of this, the impact of the historical details becomes cumulatively compelling. Although Richard Simon Thomas is a rather shadowy figure in the novel, his attitude toward his immigration to Canada and the

land which he came to claim is clear. In Butterfly on Rock,

Douglas G. Jones says:

For a time at least the pioneer must feel a certain sense of exile in the new world to which he has come. But from the very beginning there has been a real question as to the intentions of many who came here toward the land which is Canada. ⁶

Cohen never uncovers any trace of a sense of exile in Richard Simon, although this attitude is true of his colourful cousin William. Richard Simon's attitudes toward the land appear not to have been ambiguous. His cousin's diary describes him in this way: "He cares for nothing but money. His body has been removed from God and it makes his wife suffer" (p.61). Earlier the narration states succinctly: "This first Richard Thomas had built the house, married, built the barns, cleared some fields. When he was too old to work, he passed the farm to Simon" (p. 53). This original settler appears, through the memories of his son and grandson, to have been completely successful in the way described by Henry Kreisel who says that, "to conquer a piece of the continent, to put one's imprint upon virgin land, to say "Here I am, for that I came" is as much a way of defining oneself, or proving one's existence, as is Decartes' "Cogito, ergo sum'." ⁷

So for Richard Simon, the ordering of his place was an end in itself, his raison d'etre. This attitude is modified in his son and grandson, while the land itself gradually loses its original fertility.

Although Richard did conquer a parcel of land, he also paid a price. Kreisel says further that:

Into the attempted conquest, whether ultimately successful or not, men pour an awesome, concentrated passion. The breaking of the land becomes a kind of rape, a passionate seduction. The earth is at once a willing and unwilling mistress, accepting and rejecting her seducer, the cause of his frustration and fulfilment and either way the shaper and controller of his mind exacting servitude. 8

Although Cohen never allows the reader to enter Richard S. Thomas' mind, one discovers through William's diaries and Simon's recollections that Richard Simon's relationship with his wife Elizabeth was damaged because of his dedication to the conquest of the land. Richard Simon's neglect of her, enabled Elizabeth to have an affair with the poet William. This sort of adultery is compounded in future generations to the point that Simon Thomas and his son Richard share a mistress for a time. In the narrative present of the novel, Richard and Miranda have a fairly good marital relationship, despite the past. The ability to relate to women appears to improve as the men's devotion to the farm lessens. Erik is the exception, although there are hints that he may be able to have a meaningful relationship with a woman when he is totally free of the land of his ancestors.

In addition to revealing the levels of dedication to the land, Cohen also deals with the appropriateness of the attitudes of both the settlers and their descendents toward the land which they attempt to possess. In Patterns of Isolation, John Moss says

of the immigrants that "they have come with their memories and have tried to reconstruct the past, an alien past, as it should have been rather than as it was, and often they have done so without regard to the Canadian place where they have relocated."⁹ Although there is little evidence of this being accurate for the Thomases Cohen embodies this attitude in some of their neighbours. Henry Beckwith sits on his doorstep imagining "the young people, former pupils become Prime Ministers and explorers, school girls out for a ride between lessons, men of his own age already dressed for the day and tapping their way along with silver-tipped canes, "silver on stone" (p. 114). There is a hint of this inappropriate response to the actual situation in the attitude of Simon Thomas who wanted Richard to be educated as a "gentleman". By the time Richard is ready to pass the farm to his son, Erik is aware that the life styles of his grandfather and father are impossible, financially and philosophically for him. So the attitude has come full circle. Richard Simon Thomas saw the land as the key to his success, but Erik sees it as an impediment to his vision of life.

In a discussion of the colonial effect in Canadian fiction, Moss says that it is found "in the superimposition of responses to an alien or alternative reality upon indigenous experience. The alien alternative in this duality is distant in space and usually in time. Exile from it is in the sense of irretrievable loss imposed by the separation."¹⁰ Cohen gives this sort of mentality to William, the romantic, rather mystical poet and it

is through his diaries that the colonial and immigrant mentalities merge and are revealed. Cohen creates William to serve as a foil which reflects diametrically opposite responses to the land to those of his cousin. William did not come to Canada as a settler but as a refugee from poverty and the law. He was taken in by his cousin but never came to terms with the new landscape which was just too far removed from his inner landscape: "and the poet, alone and trying to fit his forms and language to a landscape they could not contain ..." (p. 57). His poetry is never cited but long passages are quoted from his diaries which reveal to the reader the picture of an extremely lonely and isolated man. The first passage quoted indicates the extent to which his emotional state of depression is related to his inability to accept or relate to the landscape:

The snow all went two weeks ago and now the land and forest demands all or would drown me. What a vast infertile wilderness. Panorama of attack and flowers. God has betrayed man here and he will betray Him also (p. 59).

William believed that all land was God's and that the idea of owning land was absurd:

God has said that the land is His and can belong to no man and therefore how can one man give what is not his to another man who cannot possess it (p. 138)..

The most lengthy passages of the diary are quoted near the end of the novel when they are read by Erik, who is presented as a kind of doppelgänger of the poet. Like the poet, Erik has

not been able to respond appropriately to this same landscape with which both are inadvertently associated. The poet's diary reveals that his feelings toward immigration were negative from the start and that he looked on the voyage to Canada as being disinherited by the old world and "forced to seek a new world" (p. 220). The poet never does come to terms with the new land and eventually declines into madness. In a like manner, his great-great nephew Erik is alienated and unable to integrate his life with that of the farm. Cohen's method of presenting this experience of alienation from both the immigrant point of view and from that of a contemporary man, having established bonds of blood and inclination between the two, is a most effective one. The theme initiated by the title, is enriched by the layers of significance Cohen gives it by revealing similar conflicts in the two men of different generations.

The madness of William Thomas is significant also. In her chapter, "The Paralyzed Artist", Atwood discusses the plight, in Canadian fiction, of serious artists. She describes these as people who have been mutilated, deprived of cultural tradition and audience. The mutilation which best fits William Thomas is: "As if part of your brain has been removed and you are an idiot or an amnesiac".¹¹ As a result of such mutilation, Atwood concludes, the artist is unable to produce any credible art because he has suffered "emotional and artistic death at the hands of an indifferent or hostile audience".¹² There may be reason to argue

that Rev. W. Thomas was quite mad before he ever came to Canada, but certainly, after his arrival he became increasingly unstable. After Elizabeth, the one person to whom he could relate, dies, he quickly declines: "They say he even forgot how to talk" (P. 190). Surely this is the worst penance for a man who once responded to life with poetry. The final years of his life were spent out of doors with his idiot son, Frederick. Even in death he was isolated from the community in which he had spent many years: "They buried him away from the Thomas Family plot, finally rid of him, off in a corner of the cemetery that was mostly weeds and rocks" (p. 191). The son is described as having "collapsed into the landscape" (p. 192) and is so alien that he is placed in a 'special place' - an asylum. While he is alive the people don't talk about him, but after his burial, "off to one side, his dead geography to be the same as his live geography" (p. 192), they felt that "his exile was over" (p. 192). By presenting the community reaction to William and Frederick, and their reactions to the landscape, Cohen weaves a theme of alienation and isolation which blends into the overall tapestry of the novel.

Although the family farm and time are the controlling principles of the Thomas men in the narrative, it is the men themselves on whom Cohen focuses. It is the consciousness of Richard Thomas which provides the perimeters of the novel and most of the memories of past generations; many observations of the present generation are from his point of view. In Richard's

mind the family is a continuum and while he lives one is conscious of the pressures to preserve and improve on the gifts of the past as well as extend this legacy into the future. The burden of responsibility of being the inheritor of the farm was felt early by Richard who toyed with the possibility of an alternative life style. He went to University in Toronto, but returned to the farm after an experience which became a family legend: "It came upon me suddenly, I felt out of place in those crazy clothes, sitting in a metal machine running down a piece of pavement" (p. 41).. But the choice was much more than selecting a career. Richard is conscious of the fact that his ancestors had devoted their lives so he might have the legacy of the farm and the onus is on him to develop it and pass it on to succeeding generation. After the reading of his father's will, Richard began to realize the full impact of his inheritance:

"He did his duty," Herman White had said of Simon, as if it were for him to say, and now unlikely as it was, Richard Thomas would have his turn to do his, it being left unclear whether there was any larger possible purpose or simply the holy mission of colonizing the earth (p. 143).

Although the novel never portrays Richard as religious in the traditional sense, his perceptions of the role of 'farmer' do have religious overtones. Ricou noticed this response to the land in prairie fiction: "The bond to the land, unarticulated, emotional, even spiritual, is also, in a sense religious". The passage quoted above which uses the phrase, "holy mission" goes

on to compare Richard and Miranda with Abraham and Sarah and by extension, the deed to the land is similar to Yahweh's promise to Abraham to make him the father of a nation and steward of the land of Israel. Richard perceives that the blessing of the inheritance is a mixed one and it epitomizes the conflict that is a central tension in the novel:

...like Abraham and Sarah in their new possession of this land they would be able to have children or else be condemned to a purposeless self-preservation, to milk the land every year enough to fill their bellies and their bank balance, nothing more, a straight trade, body for earth, three generations of bones to feed the land like so many fallen trees, animals (p. 143).

Cohen's ironic tone is clear here and the comparison of Richard to an archetype like Abraham calls up valences of sacrifice, ritual, and the importance of patrilinear primogeniture.

Richard is able to accept the inheritance of the farm and allows it to shape his life in a relatively satisfactory way, and he finds it extremely disappointing that his son Erik is unwilling to receive the same gift from him. The farm, to Richard, is something which has given meaning to his life and he sees that Erik needs something similar to give his life meaning. When Erik broaches the problem and tells his father to leave the farm to Miranda and "quit worrying about it", Richard replies, "I'm not worried about it, I'm worried about you. He couldn't help staring at Erik, wondering if he would ever come alive, what would it take?" (p. 144). It is important to Richard that Erik take over

the running of the farm rather than his much better-suited adopted son, Brian, because Richard senses the vacuum in Erik's life, which he hopes the farm might fill. Erik rejects the gift and tells his father that "No one has destinies anymore. They live in apartments and breed goldfish" (p. 146).

All occupations and careers impose a certain routine on life, but farming dictates a particularly rhythmic one because its activities follow the pattern of the seasons and the life cycle of nature. A farmer is enslaved to this cyclical aspect of time. The forces of nature demand obedience and impose a rhythm of work and renewal. Moss says that "it is a closed world, rigidly structured, an extension of apparently natural processes."¹⁴ It is a constant struggle which Richard perceived could not be relaxed: "as if in one moment of doubt all the energy that kept him able to impose the farm on the land might be dissipated and the land return to its own chaotic intentions" (p. 99). In this way the farmer is constantly struggling to control, if not master, the forces of time. Moss concludes that because of the rigid structuring, "inevitably the family farm is also seething with sexual tension and with violence just beneath the surface waiting only for provocation to erupt."¹⁵ Violent physical reactions have taken place on the Thomas farm in each generation. In fact, the regularity with which they occur seems to suggest that they are related to the natural cycle of life. Near the end of the novel, from the poet's diary, we learn that Rev. William Thomas

suffered violence on his journey to Canada: "my back was already covered with scars, scars up and down the length of my back that were old and black and scars that were new criss-crossed with my ribs from my shoulders to my waist" (p. 223).

This scene is repeated under very different circumstances four generations later. Brian attacks Erik after their father's funeral and the following morning when Erik tries to lift his arms

"he could feel the cuts along his back and shoulders, see where the skin had been turning away from itself, like riverbanks,

peeling away and thickening at the edges, leaving new unprotected snakes of blood" (p. 231). These outbursts of violence are

subtly connected to the vigor and wildness of the land itself. In past generations brawling and physical violence were considered part of a way of life. In contemporary times the land has been

leached and in like manner the vigor of the men, especially that of Erik, has been sapped. Richard observes this from his hospital

bed: "When Erik and Brian were there Richard could see how they were defeated by each other, nothing between them except automatic and sterile violence" (p. 88). Brian, in his outbursts, reacts

instinctively and passionately. Erik on the other hand is too enervated by his education and sophistication to react in such a basic way. Thus the land, the farm, provides a parallel for the

condition of the men. Cohen is able to make statements about the lives of the men by mirroring their conditions in those of the

land. Erik is out of synchronization with the natural rhythms; his energies have been polluted by the urban environment, the

same one which threatens to break up the farm into cottage lots.

In Butterfly on Rock, Jones says that "the land is both condition and reflection, both mirror and fact. Particularly in literature it comes to symbolize elements of our inner life. As these elements are ignored or repressed, the land becomes a symbol of the unconscious, the irrational in the lives of the characters."¹⁶ This statement may be related to Erik in an attempt to understand his inner life. He intuitively knows that he does not want to possess the land of his fathers. Erik's dilemma is that after he leaves the farm and goes to Toronto where "he had tried to swallow the city whole but it still lay undigested in him" (p. 113); he still uses the farm as reference for much of his thinking. As he looks at Valerie across the restaurant table, he imagines her working in his mother's garden. Erik is never at home in the city but when he returns for visits to the farm he is also out of place there, "He was resentful of the feeling of familiarity, or relief almost, of the way Richard and Miranda, and Brian still claimed him for their own, as easily and thoughtlessly as the land" (p. 13). Erik has felt the pressure of the farm all his life and has rejected his inheritance, but the city which is the alternative at the end of the novel is similarly unsatisfactory. The city environment does not provide meaning, and its routines are just as monotonous and unrewarding as those of the farm:

The sounds of traffic and people in the street, talking and arguing in foreign languages, endlessly climbing in and out of cars, sitting in the street playing radios and waiting for the heat to dissipate, walking up and down from house to house, street to street, waiting for something to happen, trying to justify another day gone by, have something happen to make it worth going through again" (p. 234).

Erik's quest is a fundamental one - to come to terms with his relationship to the universe, to find his 'place'. Jones, speaking of Canadian poetry, says that "anything may happen, but whatever it may be it will continue to reflect the past." ¹⁷ This is the reality which Erik must grip at the end of the novel when he is forced to consider life after Richard. Ricou says that "in both rural and urban fiction the prevalent landscape is empty and nightmarish, peopled by bewildered, frightened men. Man finds himself "sticking out." ¹⁸ Cohen's novel manages to be both rural and urban, and sharply conveys this image of people utterly alone in a landscape, life devoid of meaning or pattern.

While the Thomas men view the family farm as their destiny, the thing which gives shape and meaning to their lives, or as in Erik's case, a touchstone for other experiences, Cohen reveals that the women are affected in different ways by this place. Moss says that, "fictional women draw a different form of power from the association with the earth than do men, or, as is the case with so many farm wives in literature, they blend into it, crushed or simply nullified. Where land is in some ways the mistress of men, in apposition to their marital roles, it is an

aggressive symbol of fertility for many women." ¹⁹ The first Thomas woman, Elizabeth, had an affair and an illegitimate child by her husband's cousin, the poet. In this way she seems to have protested her husband's preoccupation with the land and his subsequent neglect of her. The women of the succeeding generations, Leah and Miranda, are both described as thin, infertile women who never really meld with the rhythms of the land. Leah considered herself worthy of a more refined role than that of a farmer's wife, but she failed to overcome her fate so retired to her bed as an invalid rather than cope with the confinements of the landscape. Miranda makes a much more satisfactory adjustment to life on the farm, although she retains the image of a barren woman, producing only one child, after considerable effort. Her husband, on several occasions, seeks extra-marital fulfillment with the earth-mother figure, Katherine Malone.

In Man and the Landscape, Paul Shepard states that, "that land is female is more than allegorical." ²⁰ He goes on to explain the background which provides this convention:

In the genesis of the gods, the earth has been predominately female, the sky male. The Great Mother is the spirit of generation and nutrition. The garden is the threshold of her mystery, of birth, death, the place of giving and taking life. ²¹

In The Disinherited, Cohen accepts this convention and makes a subtle connection between sexual fulfillment and the working out of a relationship to one's environment. While some of the women are thin and sterile, those who are warm and closely connected

to the cycles of the land are sought out by the men who attempt to work the farm.

Katherine is the warm, earthy woman of the novel. Her relationship with Simon and his son Richard is further complicated by the fact that Katherine is the heir of a rich farm and is closely identified with the fertility of the earth. To Simon she is everything that his wife, Leah, is not and when he is with Katherine he can renew his youth, forget his responsibilities as landowner, husband, and father. Ironically, although she helps him forget these things she also makes him more at one with the fertility and routines necessary for a successful farm. When Simon discovers that Katherine is also the mistress of his son, he relinquishes claims on both her and his farm. There is a violent fight and afterward Richard assumes control of both the land and Katherine. Later, as a retired farmer, Simon openly takes a mistress and lives in the town - an act of defiance against the mores that were imposed on him by the rural setting.

To Richard, Katherine meant many of the same things as she did to his father. Moss states that for Richard, "only Katherine seems able to help him escape the burden of being a Thomas."²² By the possession of Katherine, Richard prevails over Simon, and at the same time totally loses himself in sexual human relationship.

Her hands moving on him like tiny scalpels
 exorcising as they kill, springing open cells and
 floating them in this river of blood he has become,
 his body gone and now he has become her, woven
 into her darkness that is stamped in silhouette
 against the window, he knows that he is absolutely
 with her (p. 101).

But this escape is temporary and Richard never seriously considers
 marrying Katherine.

Erik's relationship to Rose has some similarities with
 that of his grandfather and father to Katherine. Both women are
 described as 'fey' and have skills associated with witchcraft,
 an ancient art long associated with making the land productive.

Part of the attraction of Rose for Erik is her elusiveness:

"Erik, even when he was with her, had known that what made it
 possible for them was the knowledge that he would leave" (p. 27).

This is analogous to Erik's relationship to the farm: it has
 strong attractions for him but the positive aspects are ruined
 by the possibility of inheriting it. At the end of the novel,

Erik meets an unnamed, pregnant girl who also temporarily takes
 him out of himself, but with whom no binding arrangements need

be feared. George Woodcock summarizes Erik in this way: "In
 all his actions he shows himself taken up in the essential
 loneliness, the unrelenting alienation of modern man." 23

The strong undertone of sexuality which runs through the
 novel is in rhythm with the other patterns imposed by place.

A long passage which describes Katherine trudging through the
 spring mud to meet Richard makes their union seem as inevitable
 as the spring flowers:

... and took her feet out of her boots - let them sink in the tiny surface puddles hot from the sun... the other hand coming out of the mud, palm towards the sun, the liquid breaking apart into thousands of tiny fertile bubbles (p. 110).

In one humorous passage we learn that often sex is dictated by the routine of the farm. Simon told his son Richard, "the best time to have a woman is in the morning, in winter, before or after the milking, it doesn't matter" (p. 87). The extent to which men are able to relate sexually to women is closely related to the extent to which they relate to their environments.

Consistent with the concept of the earth being female and the garden the place of giving and taking life, is the statement by Woodcock that "the women play the potent roles of reconciling the irreconcilables."²⁴ Miranda is the only real link between Erik and his father. Rose Garnett influences both Miranda and Erik in curious ways. Katherine bears sons to both Simon and Richard, as did Elizabeth to her husband and his cousin. The ring which the poet acquired on his voyage to Canada is rejected by Katherine as an engagement ring from Simon, but later Erik put it on the finger of an anonymous girl and thus establishes a link between the generations. The acceptance by Erik of a possible relationship with this "disoriented" girl predicts that he may also eventually come to terms with his landscape. In these diverse ways the women act as reconciling forces.

Novelists position characters in a time, place, and sets of circumstances which they cannot change. Cohen's characters

find themselves in a world which tends not to grant what they need and desire. Moss says of Richard that "all he loves most and needs, the farm, the family, he is imprisoned by,"²⁵ In this rather negative atmosphere, the setting can be seen as assuming the role of an antagonist. Wesley Kort, in Narrative Elements and Religious Meanings, discusses this function of setting and concludes that:

Before an identifiable and human antagonist a character can actualize his potential, but an indefinite, pervasive and unalterable set of severely limiting conditions tends to reduce human life and even threaten its worth and viability.²⁶

The farm, to the pioneer men, was limiting but definite and they tended to be able to pursue its potentialities. Later generations find the land even more restricting. The men fight with their fathers and brothers, but are more severely limited in their response to the land which they are committed to conquering and making a *raison d'etre*. Erik has a vision at his father's funeral which reveals the land as having beaten its would-be-conquerors: "His father's presence was still alive in these mourners - who knew what had died with him, knew it in their bodies that had bent and been broken by machines which already lay resting and obsolete" (p. 227).

The negative atmosphere is also utilized by Cohen in a rhetorical way. Through the use of the regional, rural setting, Cohen creates between the implied author and implied reader a

sense that they share a set of circumstances and have, consequently, something in common. From the beginning of the novel when Richard thinks of the real-estate man trying to persuade him to sell his land, the reader senses a threat of loss, not only of this particular piece of land, but of an entire way of life. By his use of setting in this way, Cohen encourages the reader's identification with the characters. Life near the end of the twentieth century is risky, stressful, and threatening. Erik is the character with whom the contemporary reader most readily identifies; he lives in our world. When he returns to Toronto after Richard's death, even previously familiar territory is not comforting: "The apartment seemed to belong to a previous existence. He felt uncomfortable in it, didn't want to stay... he felt trapped in his own space" (p. 217). But Erik is so averse to being secured by any place that a dream shows him as completely removed and unattached to anyone or anything: "Woke up in the middle of the night, dreaming he was the perfect man, floating through space in a glass ball" (p. 169). Kort summarizes this rhetorical use of atmosphere and setting as antagonist in this way:

The mimetic consequence of the image of atmosphere in modern literature is not so much to reflect specific conditions in our world - violence, immoral society or disunification - but rather, to reflect a more general quality of human life, namely that it is limited. The collective image of atmosphere in recent narratives is of a general otherness which marks the boundaries, awareness of which helps to define human life. 27

Cohen uses the setting also to amplify and reflect themes of the novel. One of its main themes is that the traditional nineteenth and early twentieth century way of life is decaying and disintegrating. Throughout the novel details are assembled which suggest decay. "The barn roof needs fixing. The beams are starting to rot" (p. 11). Cohen uses the condition of the barn and the house in a symbolic way to reflect the external life-style of the farm and the internal lives of the characters. While amassing a myriad of details which have to do with death, dying, and decay, Cohen presents these facts as a natural condition. In a discussion of the geophysical imagination in Canadian fiction, Moss states that such a natural process is "not a moral state, no more than natural corruption-aging, death, decay - is a moral state. Both are conditions of existence. In this process of nature, neither life nor death is wasted, except in the eyes of the beholder; neither life nor death is astonishing, except in the eyes of the beholder. The possibility of joy or tragedy is contained by both." ²⁸ In the eyes of Richard, his world and that of his father and grandfather is disintegrating. Erik's stasis is caused by the fact that he can't decide which possibilities the changes may offer. But Cohen deftly draws this correspondence between the geophysical and human conditions in a manner which embellishes this theme.

In Techniques in Fiction, Robie Macauley says that "place as character means that the setting affects the people in a story

as much as they affect one another." ²⁹ Cohen treats place in this way and thus adds to the dimensions of place as something much more than setting. In this novel the place encompasses the story. It is the rural setting in which his characters live and it is the quality of their lives. It is their speech and the philosophy of life they communicate in their speech. It is their manners, taboos, and spirituality. While in Cohen's work place is never used solely for decoration or ornamentation, his use of detail is copious. His botanical knowledge of the area is precise: "ground fit only for juniper seeds and sumac trees - elm trees which rose three hundred feet into the air and maple trees which could give three hundred gallons a day of sap" (p. 99), but it is always fully integrated into the fiction and "often presented as correlatives of human behaviour and emotion." ³⁰ Even the most familiar of farm details never becomes cliché, a tribute to Cohen's ability to select details which relate to all other parts of the narrative.

So far I have discussed how Cohen uses place in a variety of ways to produce various effects. If one tries to visualize a shape for this novel, one might see the place as the constant, a rectangle which does not change in shape or size, but does vary in consistency and quality. Although there is the ever present tension that "the farm was only a decal that could be blown off easily by wind and time" (p. 99), its position is fixed and with it as the warp, Cohen weaves the woof of time backwards and forwards and create patterns which make the form of this novel so

compelling and appropriate. Neither men's imagination nor Cohen's story is ruled by clock and calendar. Cohen discloses moments from the past which are intimately involved in the present. Moss states that "Cohen has a marvelous capacity to move amongst the years rather than through them."³¹ Cohen then, manipulates time as well as place to influence the form of the novel.

The narrative traces the fate of the family and is broadly structured by the place and events which determine the lives of some of the individuals in the family. However, by its nature the family is bound up with time. The characters may be sustained because the family confers identity, but paradoxically it obscures the individual within his lineage. As mentioned earlier, the novel records a historical event - the end of an era. The generations of Richard and Erik embody the two worlds - that of the past and that of the unknown future. The private relationship of the father and son mirrors the clash between the two worlds as one becomes obsolete and a second new one is emerging. On one level the novel works as a document which chronicles the disinheritance process and Richard and Erik's dialogue records the history of the time as much as it does their personal internal crises. While this sense of history controls the broad outlines of the story, the powers of memory and flashback dictate the intricate time scheme of the narrative.

If a writer simply announces that he wishes to return to some bygone period, he appears to be arbitrary. It is in his

best interests to persuade the reader that the excursion is natural, even inevitable in terms of the present story. Cohen does this in a most convincing way by going from the external scene and entering into the consciousness of the character who is providing the point of view. He discretely draws the reader's attention away from the present scene to something subjective. This subjectivity arises from what has just been happening and almost before we know it, one finds that the abstract statement has led into another period of time and another scene where it applies equally. A passage from the novel illustrates how Cohen handles the time shift:

He stopped to look at the sugar house. It hadn't been used for over ten years, since Erik left. The arch had caved in but the building was still solid. Light came in through the cracks of the roof and stood in the air like thin white sheets. He lit a cigarette again and blew the smoke towards the roof, watching it appear and disappear in the strips of light. He always did that, every time he came there. His father had shown it to him one spring, fifty years ago. "Here," Simon Thomas had said, handing Richard his cigar, "you try it." That, Richard realized, was the time when the problem had begun, the first time he could remember the feeling of ripe discontent in his stomach (p. 4-5).

In this brief paragraph Richard is described as in the present and his attention is drawn to an object which takes his mind to the past and the transition is so smooth that the reader can make it almost as easily as Richard does. The passage covers a minute or two in Richard's life but during this time we are referred, not only to the events of these few moments but to

Richard's remembered life and his expectations of the future, which lie with his son.

The farm is redolent with associations and memories and Cohen uses every object and corner encountered there as a means of directing Richard's thoughts backwards and forwards in time. The farm functions as an anchor for Richard's wondering reflections as he zigzags from the present into his childhood, his love affairs, and to the future in which Erik must find a niche where he can come alive and be happy.

In an article on the development of Canadian fiction entitled "Possessing the Land", George Woodcock asserts that:

Novelists have become concerned less with making thinly disguised policy statements than with the more basic functions of returning over time, of examining the foundations of history, of exorcising ancient guilts and celebrating ancient heroisms, of giving spirit to the land. Novels such as Rudy Wiebe's The Temptations of Big Bear (1975), M. Cohen's The Disinherited (1974), and R. Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man (1969) ... introduce for us a new sense of history merging into myth, of theme coming out of a perception of the land, of geography as a source of art. In the process they break time down into the nonlinear patterns of authentic memory at the same time as they break down actuality and recreate it in terms of the kind of nonliteral rationality that belongs to dreams. 32

Such patterns are evident when one studies the attitudes of members of the four generations in their attempts to possess time. Cohen uses characters' consciousnesses of time to differentiate between the generations. Each man's perception of time to a great extent shapes his life and his attitudes toward the land, as well as his

sense of belonging or not belonging in a historical time sequence.

Cohen gradually discloses how the representative of each generation perceives time and this revelation gives the reader a variety of perceptions from which to assess personal values and perspectives.

Richard Simon Thomas saw time as a continuum consistent with that of the farm. He perceived it as a casual pattern unfolding in a straight line. He was able to preserve the linear march of time and it was this vision which gave his life meaning. Erik, whose perspective of the family is quite different, rejects his ancestors' views of time. As he looks at his father in the hospital bed it "reminded him that his past would eventually be reduced to remembered deaths" (p. 33). Erik has to struggle to escape the past which he longs to cast off so he can 'come alive'.

Richard's imprint still on him. "Do you find the present so disgusting?" Valerie had asked him as if he must be fixed on some other time, some immense single conglomerate complaint from his past that was supposed to be his excuse, and some equally compelling fantasy of the future in which everything would finally come right (p. 172).

It is between the polarized positions of Richard Simon and Erik that the views of Simon and Richard are placed. Robert Lecker notes this, in stating that "The Disinherited presents us with four distinct views of time, four conflicting points of view, and four narrative lines." 33

The first generation placed its faith in God and in the

concept of what Lecker calls "eternal time".³⁴ In William's diaries is the record of a man who wanted men to live with a vision of divine or eternal time which would make the distinctions between past, present and future meaningless. His vision was one which perceived unity and wholeness in eternity: "only death can bring us into the garden" (p. 60). In an antithetical, yet curiously similar way his cousin Richard Simon's view of time was also eternal, but continuing on earth, not in heaven: "when he was too old to work, he passed the farm to Simon who, in turn married and had children. The first child was male and named Richard, after the grandfather" (p. 53). From Richard Simon's perspective this was the proper unfolding of life, the meaning of actions in and through time.

Simon Thomas, the patriarch of the second generation also saw himself as responsible for continuing the Thomas line, but he experienced some degree of freedom from the restrictions of his history. After bequeathing the farm to his son Richard, he accommodates both the past and present by moving to the city and living common-law with his housekeeper, where he rebinds the diaries of Rev. William Thomas and attends meetings of the local historical society. Lecker observes that while Simon faces up to the present as well as the past, "his view of time is still restricted to the movement between the two tenses. He does not live for the future, nor does he place his faith in eternal time".³⁵

Simon's son Richard, to whom we are introduced near the end of his life, wants to resurrect the past as a bastion against the threatening present. As he lies in the hospital bed he attempts to join with the past through memory. The more grave his condition becomes, the further back into memory he reaches. When he first experiences the heart attack, he fights the pain and temptation to lie down because he "felt unfinished, unready to die" (p. 5). He resists admitting that his condition is terminal because he equates the preservation of his life with the preservation of his way of life. This becomes increasingly difficult as "pain had made everything false and instantly fitted him into a new history" (p. 46). Even as a nurse gives him medication he desperately concentrates on the past: "The sentence dissolved his present, and left him standing on a Toronto street corner with Miranda" (p. 46-47). Richard is terrified of dying without guaranteeing that the Thomas lineage will continue as in the past and also that, "some sort of instant senility would progressively shorten his memory span from hours to minutes to seconds to nothing at all" (p. 139). Richard is trying to sustain a temporal world view in which life unfolds in an orderly progression from the past. It is Richard's consciousness which connects all the disrupted memories which are presented as fragmented flashbacks or dreams.

The fourth generation is represented by Erik and Brian. Each copes with the facts of the present in a totally different way because each has a very different vision of the future.

Brian struggles to discover his identity. Although he looks and behaves much more like Richard than does the natural son, Erik, we are constantly aware that Richard does not consider him the rightful heir to the farm because that would mean a break in the bloodline. It is apparent also that Brian is very conscious of his lesser state and desperately needs to feel connected with history and tradition. As a child, left alone by his natural mother, Brian spent his days trying to reconstruct skeletons from bones found in a deserted house. Lecker points out that "the children's failure to reconstruct the actual elephant points to a broader inability to resurrect the past and life."³⁶ Brian is never able to actually construct a past, but he concentrates on imitating Richard as much as possible. Unfortunately he never has the time or the inclination to develop a vision of his own; he tries to cling to Richard's vision and thus his beliefs can only reflect Richard's faith in past time and the continuity of the farm. When Brian talks to Richard in the hospital their conversation deals with the routine of the farm, although both wonder "if it was worth the bother to farm this land with modern machinery" (p. 166). In spite of these suspicions, which neither articulates, both father and adopted son insist on extending the past into the future.

Because he is so aware of his father's vision and since his father is so vulnerable during the actual present of the narrative, Erik is very reticent about revealing his vision of the future.

However, through the access Cohen provides to Erik's thoughts, associations, and memories we become cognisant of the fact that Erik's vision is totally different from that of his ancestors and from Brian's. From the opening paragraph one is aware that Erik is a different kind of Thomas, one whose hands have "fingers slender and defined", unlike his father's which "were like battered sausages, covered with calluses and scars" (p. 2). Erik attempted to escape from his past by immersing himself in the city but there he is portrayed as being out of touch with both the past and the present. When he returns to visit his father in the hospital, his body is "thin and unbroken, cut off from anything that grew, his sleeves rolled up carelessly, floating about his elbows, virginal bony arms that could belong to a senile old priest, rattling in their sockets, denying everything: (p. 138). Erik is introduced in this state but the return to the farm and the confrontation with the past provides him with an opportunity to become stronger physically and to gain the strength to reflect on the past, accept the present and consider the future.

After a few days on the farm, Richard notices that Erik's hands "were getting marked with blisters and cuts" (p. 143). Erik soon abandons helping Brian and becomes the "guardian of the lawn and builds a patio out back" (p. 163). As the physical activity begins to condition "the body that has been violated by atrophy and smoke and time" (p. 163), Erik also begins to form decisions which will affect his future. A patient in the hospital,

Mr. Zellar, articulates Erik's dilemma: "The father is dying and the young son pines away, afraid to take what is his" (p. 181). But Erik does decide finally to throw off the burden of his history. Richard had known that his name "would be the last" (p. 182) on the family tombstone and when Erik looks at it after the funeral, he considers the future when "one day he would take his own children to see this grave and they would wonder how someone related to them had come to be buried here, whether this meant that it was true that their father had been born on a farm" (p. 231). As soon as the funeral is over, Erik returns to the city. Lecker says that this decision to return to the city "signified his final rejection of history, while his plans for going to Edmonton are an indication of his new found faith in the future." ³⁷

In the early chapters of the book there are numerous references to, and scenes involving Richard Simon, Simon, and Richard Thomas but it is not until more than fifty pages into the novel that the exact chronology is given. The reader tends to confuse the characters at first because their names are so similar and repetitive. This is, of course, deliberate, a reinforcement of the notion that history is repeating itself. Then there is Erik a Scandanavian name, completely different from those of his family, as Erik himself is unique. His doppleganger is William, the poet, whose views of time and history and place were not cyclical. At the end of the novel, Erik has left the farm and is reading excerpts from the poet's diary. Like William, who saw himself

and the other immigrants "like an army of the dispossessed ... disinherited and forced to seek out a new world" (p. 220), Erik is now disassociated with the past and "as rootless and committed to an unknown future as his eccentric predecessor." ³⁸

With Richard's death, there is a distinct sense of the fullness of time. This is not in an apocalyptic sense such as William might have interpreted it but in the sense of the end of a cycle. From Richard's funeral, time stretches in a linear fashion into the future. The novel ends on what Lecker calls "a vision of the future." ³⁹ The past is exorcised, and Erik confronts the future.

Cohen uses his main character's perceptions of time to connect all the flashbacks and memories in a very smooth manner. Moss notes that Cohen:

...replicating the mental processes of rumination, employs striking non-sequiturs and often confounds temporal barriers kaleidoscopically, turning bits and pieces of experience into designs before the single lens of a character's mind. ⁴⁰

One occasion, for example, occurs as a nurse 'times' Richard's pulse and he is drifting into sleep and he remembers the time that Erik and Brian attempted to steal tomatoes when they were children. In the very next paragraph the same incident is presented from Erik's point of view, in the present tense! It is clear that it is not the actual narrative present, but by this technique Cohen makes the past seen as immediate as the present. This is how Richard experiences time, and it is the reader's experience also

as he identifies with Richard's consciousness. The transitions are smooth and highly credible. This fact makes the experience of reading the novel similar to the thought patterns interspersed with actual events familiar to everyone's experience.

In The Appropriate Form, Barbara Hardy states that "the novelist, whoever he is and wherever he is writing is giving form to his particular experience of sensations, people, places, and society." ⁴¹ In The Disinherited, Matt Cohen gives form to his story by presenting the viewpoints of four generations from the same geographical location. Each man experiences unique reactions to that place and each life is greatly influenced by the pressures and expectations exerted by the landscape. In 1926 A. J. M. Smith commented that "Canadian poetry is altogether too self-conscious of its environment, of its position in space and scarcely conscious of its position in time." ⁴² Fifty years later, Cohen has written a novel at which Smith's criticism could not be leveled. In this novel, Cohen has presented a situation in a Canadian environment in which human decisions are made in the context of time - the past, present, and future. The vision at the end is of a "new beginning" (p. 240), perhaps not better, but at least different. The vision is in part a reaction to the landscape, but it is not a "Canadian" experience - it is a universal one and Cohen's ability to use a precise location and specific times to express universal human experiences places him among the best of our writers.

Chapter 2

While the time period of The Disinherited extends through the memories of several generations, in The Colours of War the time setting is restricted to the memory of one person. The geographical setting of the earlier novel is also modified. The unnamed location of The Disinherited is near Kingston, Ontario. In The Colours of War the protagonist is far removed from this area, but it is present in his consciousness and he spends most of the time span of the novel trying to return there, in order to regain all the securities that it represents. The plot concerns the physical journey from Vancouver to this locale that is now called Salem, in such a way as to fuse, almost inextricably, time and place.

The first chapter of The Colours of War begins at the end of the events described in the succeeding chapters. It serves to state the narrator's perspective: "This is how it is. And this is how it was - ." Thus from the first line, "I have to tell you this story" (p. 9),¹ the reader is aware of the extent to which time will be an organizing factor in the narrative. In Time and the Novel, Adam A. Mendilow, speaking of the utopian novel, mentions that it presents special difficulties, for the implied writing of it is even further in the future than the action described, so that the events occur in the relative past of the pseudo-writer, though in

the future of the reader.² While The Colours of War is not a utopian novel, although it has anti-utopian aspects, it is set in the future. This presents a problem because readers have difficulty making an imaginary transfer of the past tense into the chronological future and feeling it imaginatively as a fictive present. Mendilow speculates that because the full illusion of the future is rarely conveyed, "perhaps that is why so many of these novels start off from the contemporary scene and recur finally to it at the climax of the narrative."³ This is the structure which Cohen chose for The Colours of War.

Patricia Tobin, in her book also called Time and the Novel, states that "time exerts a double pressure on the realistic novel: as form it is largely silent and unobtrusive, but as process it is noisy and ubiquitous."⁴ In The Colours of War time functions as both form and process. Cohen presents the time setting in the near future. This allows him freedom to set up the details of government and social structures to suit his purposes and at the same time allow them to appear to be realistic. Some of the characters and places which occur in this novel are recognizable because they are familiar to us from the 1970 world of The Disinherited. Between the fine line of realistic details such as the place, Salem, and memorable characters such as Pat Frank and Katherine Malone, Cohen is able to narrate, through Theodore Beam, a credible story for which time is a fundamental organizing principle.

The second paragraph of the novel begins with these words: "My story begins in different places in the times of my life that were special" (p. 9). From this initial glimpse of Theodore, the reader is ready to concede temporal process, whereby time is the local index to the daily happenings of what Edward M. Forster calls, "life in time"⁵. From this opening point on, all the elements of the novel fluctuate in significance because the chronological process becomes informed with the process of cause and effect and Beam is seen as progressing through a jumble of disjointed events to some knowledge at the culmination of the novel. Theodore tells the reader at the beginning that he has found what he calls his "voice: the sound of the past and future singing through my bones" (p. 10). In this way Cohen fixes from the outset the notion that Beam has arrived, after much struggling, at some glimpse of meaning gained from his experiences through time and space.

Tobin argues in her book that time is a linear unity which binds the traditional novel securely to our common sense of life and that because a novel structures experience in the same way we do "What is essential to the illusion of reality is not what happens but how it happens."⁶ So when the operations of memory and mind are translated into the past tense of novelistic narration, the historical actual, the geographically lifelike, and the artistically plausible become indistinguishable. Tobin says that then, "Time as the shaping form becomes invisible."⁷ In The Disinherited Cohen equated temporal form with the dynastic line

that unites generations. In The Colours of War, he utilizes a similar linear structure, but here he is less concerned with tracing genealogical lineage than with an understanding that time is a linear manifestation of the destiny of events. This explains why Chapter one begins at the "end" of the story. It is clear that the narrative structure is to proceed in some linear fashion and will eventually unite the last with the first and produce a satisfying unity. The reader is assured that the first person narrator will make sense of the story to follow because in the 'present' Beam is "in the attic of an old stone building, an old church that stands near the village of Salem" (p. 10).

The idea of time as a line is peculiar to Western civilizations, whereas the Eastern philosophies tend to view time as cyclical. This may be partly explained by the influence of the West on Hebrew and Christian views of time which were generally linear. Cohen uses the concept of time as a line in the conventional, Western way yet he seizes opportunities to use it creatively to suit his purposes. The train journey from Vancouver to Salem provides a framework for the first three-quarters of the novel. During what seems like an interminable journey, Beam is able to reflect on his personal past and by the time he arrives in Salem the reader has become acquainted with the essentials of his history. The time line then, of the passage from Vancouver to North Bay is a constant from which there are many digressions through dreams and reveries. The train is a variation of the familiar metaphor of the stream or river of life. In literature

this image is used to convey the idea that time as experienced has the quality of 'flowing' and that this quality is an enduring element within the constantly changing and successive moments of time. By the choice of a train journey, Cohen has superimposed a quality of duration upon continuous change.

In her essay, "An Approach Through Time", Eleanor Hutchens states that:

In a novel, things happen when it is time for them to happen. For this reason, the genre accommodates coincidence and the unprepared event much more comfortably than does any other. Time brings them; they are time at work. Time will bring many things before the end. Ripeness is all; and ripeness arrives when time and the will of the characters have fought out the matter between them and time is seen to have prevailed.⁸

In The Colours of War, Theodore announces that he is going to tell about, "the times of my life that were special and stuck up like sharp mountains through the comfortable dream of lies, the dream of everyday" (p. 9). This is a most realistic approach. Even one who keeps a daily journal does not record all the events of every day but selects only the most significant ones. Since the train journey and the events which bring him to the abandoned church mentioned in the first chapter provide an effect of continuity, Cohen is able to flash various dramatic scenes of particular meaning to Theodore, without disturbing the balance and sense of proportion in the novel.

Cohen delivers in a single or series of flashbacks, what Beam calls 'special times', when expository material is required for

the understanding of the main issue in the present of the novel. These memories are triggered by some event in the narrative present and are presented through Beam's recollections. In Time in Literature Hans Meyerhoff submits that:

The quest for disclosing some sense of continuity, identity, and unity within the context of the personal past of the individual has engaged great literature everywhere.⁹

He goes on to state that "the key to this quest has been memory - its function in human experience, on the one hand, and its place within the objective succession and order of time on the other."¹⁰ The past is recorded in the mind and it is often through the memories that we learn of significant events which have shaped Theodore's life. Since these memories are usually called up by seemingly random associations, the plot is not a simple chronicle of uninteresting successiveness.

In The Sense of an Ending, Frank Kermode uses the Greek words 'chronos' and 'karios' to distinguish between the two types of time. He explains them in this way:

Chronos is 'passing time' or 'waiting time' - that which, according to Revelation, 'shall be no more' - and 'karios' is the reason, a point in time filled with significance, charged with meaning derived from its relation to the end.¹¹

In Time and the Novel, Mendilow uses yet another terminology. he asserts that:

The hero arrives at the trysting place by chronological time - time by the clock which is the same for everybody. He waits impatiently for what seems years by psychological time - his own private clock that measures time by values and intensity.¹²

Using a first person narrator, Cohen has Beam present the significant events in his psychological time, or kairos, and these form the shape of the work. As the train journey proceeds, the reader gradually learns, from Theodore's memories, of the major events which have influenced his life. The accumulation of these kairotic events increases our understanding of the character of Beam and indicate a sense of direction - these recollections of important times are leading somewhere - time will solve any mysteries.

The series of trenchant events chronicled by Beam are initiated by a violent happening. Theodore is assaulted in his own apartment by policemen:

Without further warning, his fist shot out like a thick piston. I twisted slightly, but as I went down the breath popped out of my lungs with a loud snapping sound (p. 21).

This sudden and apparently senseless act awakens Beam to his rather meaningless and lonely life in Vancouver and to the lack of moral dimensions in his personal universe. In Sex and Violence in Canadian Literature, Moss states that "violence permeates novels which attempt to comprehend or resolve opposing realities on a moral plane."¹³ The Colours of War is certainly permeated by violence. The time line of the journey is marked by very violent incidents, all of which help Theodore to hone his sense of personal awareness and integrity while shaping his moral integrity. While it is normal to remember dramatic incidents more easily than to recall the pedestrian ones, it seems that there must be another reason for Beam to remember mainly the violent events. Most of

the events which shape the present and those which shaped the past are violent, as are the times in which the narrative present of the plot is set.

A knife attack in the Vancouver Train station leads Beam to become involved in a revolutionary movement which controls the train on which he travels East. There are a series of incidents and Beam is actually wounded. A climax to these frantic incidents occurs in Regina. A local farmer, Harry, who had voted, at a public meeting against joining the revolutionary movement the previous evening, is executed the next morning by a firing squad. Beam is shocked by this experience into a knowledge of the seriousness of the situation in the country and of the necessity of being able to rely on oneself rather than on society or government. Theodore had felt a relationship with Harry, "his voice reminded me of some of the farmers who lived around Salem" (p. 128), and from the execution onward in the novel, Beam's moral identity is inseparable from his personal awareness and integrity. Theodore had attended the public meeting and after it, in innocence, had felt good that "we were now all comrades, joined by a common cause" (p. 129). After he sees the firing squad kill Harry, Theodore feels "as if some part of me had died and I had been hurled into the future - my past demolished" (p. 131). Lisa feels the exact opposite and 'comforts' him by saying that, "History catches up to people" (p. 132). Felipa, wife of the revolutionary leader Peristrello, has yet another perception of the event: "it is a great moment; nothing like this has ever happened" (p. 137). These three reactions present three interpretations

of kairos occurring in chronos. In this way Cohen emphasises the importance of significant times on individuals and on the way events will unfold chronologically. Time is a powerful influence not only on individuals but on their futures and on the form of this novel.

Beam's story is told from the first person point of view and because of this, the narrative exhibits the same structure of human temporality as does any history. Our reading of the story provides an experience very similar to our life experience of participating in and understanding time. William Dilthey has stated that:

Autobiography is the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life confronts us. Here is the outward, phenomenal course of a life which forms the basis of understanding what has produced it within a certain environment.¹⁴

Cohen has Beam narrate his story in an autobiographical style. By beginning at the end of his story, Theodore informs us that he is analyzing time in retrospect. He has lived through the events he will narrate but now at the end of the sequence he can shape the sequence by careful selection. Knowing that Beam speaks from the perspective of the end, the reader can have the security of knowing there will be a completeness but he doesn't know what is to come. J. Hillis Miller describes this process, when the narrator and protagonist are one.

The protagonists live their lives in ignorance of the future. The narrator speaks from the perspective of the end. The reader enjoys both these points of view at once. He experiences the novel

as the reaching out of the protagonist's point of view, as if at some vanishing point they might coincide.

This reaching out toward completeness, in which the circle of time will be drawn closed, is the essence of human temporality ... The narrator of a first-person novel returns eventually back through his past to himself in the present, but at a higher level of comprehension, it may be, than he had when he began the story. ¹⁵

By using what Miller calls the 'circle of time' Cohen fosters a sense of meaningful continuity in the book although the events may appear to be disordered and discontinuous at times.

At the end of The Disinherited, Erik rejects his inheritance and sets out to face the future, having done his best to bury the past. This attitude is one which appears not infrequently in literature of the second half of the Twentieth Century. Tobin says that: "the disappearance of God, the end of history, the demise of man, the death of the novel, the murder of the father - these are the apocalyptic phases by which we now measure the passage of our culture through time." ¹⁶ But in The Colours of War Cohen reverses this process and the plot concerns the protagonist's attempt to recover his past, get to know his father and understand what his grandfather may mean to his life. At the end of the narration Beam realizes: "Old worlds flood through me. This hand records them - my hand, my father's hand" (p. 234). Tobin says that in spite of the current trend to discard what she calls the 'genealogical imperative' that:

there are, of course many willful postmodern novelists who prefer to keep father around - half-alive, deformed, ridiculous - for the purpose of parody, parody directed less at the family as a social institution and more toward the frustration of the reader's comfortable expectations regarding the genealogical structure itself.¹⁷

There is evidence which might support an argument that Cohen indeed does parody the traditional father figure. This is a recollection by Theodore of his father:

"Jacob enjoyed sitting in his backyard, in a striped nylon lawn chair, absorbing the sun in his undershirt and baggy pants, reading old books and drinking from an endless supply of beer he'd keep in the shade of his chair" (p. 30).

But Beam, unlike Erik accepts the 'genealogical imperative' and in fact seeks to achieve what he can now see as a state of serenity at which his father had already arrived.

As the novel progresses it appears that Cohen, while he might have early entertained the idea of parodying the ideal of a father, mellows and it is part of the narrator's vision as well as the closure of the novel that he arranges an understanding and mutual acceptance between father and son. This dialogue is rather lengthy but is a seminal passage which emphasises the importance of the continuity genealogy provides, particularly in disjointed and uncertain times.

"And no matter what happens there will be people, ordinary people like you and I trying to survive, trying to love." He put his hand over mine.
"Theodore you have to believe in something, especially in times like these." ...

"Jacob," I said. Even my voice sounded like his. The room was filled with echos, past and present.

"We were only human," he said. His eyes wide open: My eyes, my grandfather's eyes, the family blood jumping down the corridor of generations (p. 209).

- Because of this ending I would argue that Cohen's intentions in this novel are to indicate the necessity of accepting the genealogical imperative rather than rejecting it. In Theory of the Novel, George Lukacs suggests that:

Alienated man senses that it is only Time that separates meaning from existence, and it is in time that the fullness of life may be revealed through the struggle manifested in the human search for significance. Because of time, the movement from homelessness to homecoming is experienced as a rounded action that effects the unity of the personality and the world. 18

Cohen, in The Colours of War ascribes to this notion. Perhaps he demythologizes the father but the genealogical imperative is still the informing narrative structure.

As mentioned above, there is nothing in this novel like the elaborate family genealogy of The Disinherited, but Cohen does include as one of Theodore's significant memories, a recollection of his ancient, orthodox Jewish grandfather. Theodore describes it as his "first long memory" (p. 152). Although he was only five years old at the time, Theodore understood immediately that "we were each different versions of the same person" (p. 153). The grandfather gave Theodore, his namesake, a thin gold pocket watch - a gift of time. This experience forced Theodore to be conscious of tradition, continuity, and his genealogical legacy.

Now that he was dead I was the sole carrier of the eyes; everything had to be registered and recorded

by me until I found someone to pass them onto. The way he had passed them on to me. The way he had given me his watch (p. 155).

While time is one of the aspects with which Cohen has unified this novel, another is place. A journey has been a time frame for stories ever since the time of Homer. A journey is nearly always begun with a destination or end in mind. The Bible provides this familiar model. Genesis begins "at the beginning: and therefore assumes an end. The last book, Revelation, is a vision of the end, the Apocalypse. This tradition remains strong in modern times. Kermode states that "the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world."¹⁹ Although The Colours of War can hardly be labeled as apocalyptic literature, it does contain a sense of crisis and one is conscious from the beginning of Theodore's every increasing desire to reach Salem, where he feels he will be able to grasp some sanity and meaning for his life. This quest of Beam's, both the actual physical journey and once there, the psychological struggles to come to grips with his roots, provides structure to the narrative.

In a 1981 interview, Matt Cohen was asked if he thought that people crave generational continuum. This is his reply:

No, I think it's more the physical presence of the landscape. The crucial experience for a lot of my characters is that they try to get too much from other people. When they try to get less, it's better. They have to relate to other people through the landscape, not at the cost of it.²⁰

In The Colours of War, Cohen uses the landscape as a metaphor for Theodore's journey of self-discovery. Like Erik in The Disinherited,

Theodore must come to understand what it means to be alive and to come to terms with a natural landscape that is harsh and sometimes alien but also may be a source of sustenance; and may provide a constant in a time which is uncertain and fragmentary.

In this novel, the dispossessing process of The Disinherited has continued to the point of anarchy and people are flocking from the cities seeking refuge in rural retreats where they have a better chance to be self-sufficient. Theodore's story begins in Vancouver and although he has been there for ten years he says, "it was familiar to me but it wasn't mine" (p. 16). He observes that the West Coast landscape has been raped: "Now there was no wood and the harbours were polluted. Outside the city the game had been hunted out and torn up for airports, subdivisions, and industrial parks" (p. 23). Cohen is very clear about where the moral responsibility of this disastrous condition lies: "this continent rode out the century like a fat eunuch king on a velvet pillow" (p. 10). The feelings of alienation and the unprepossessing landscape reinforce the notion, planted in Theodore's head by a phone call from his father, to return to Salem. He remembers his boyhood home as a place where "with all the farms there would be enough food" (p. 37). In addition to all the emotional reasons there is this purely practical one for seeking his former home.

Before he leaves Vancouver, his landlady gives Theodore her blessing: "It's good to go home" (p. 26). The acceptance of this value is consistent throughout the novel. The actual and symbolic seeking of his home and roots reflects a central theme of

the novel which George Woodcock articulates: "that all the promises of the future are illusory in comparison with the discovery of roots." ²¹ After the ten years in Vancouver it is a rather pitiful fact that the person to whom Theodore feels closest is a tiny Japanese child, Mona Oh No. He feels that the mountains are "foreign", and that "they're too busy being themselves and don't care about people" (p. 30). Theodore seeks to find a satisfying relationship to his environment, such as his father has found in Salem where, "he would sit there in the evening, rooted, as stuck to his yard as my landlady was to hers, as if the grass growing into his bare feet had secret ways of feeding him" (p. 30).

On the train Theodore recalls events from his childhood. One significant occasion was the first time his father took him inside a synagogue. He remembers the old men who "each faced towards his own Jerusalem: (p. 46). From this reference one might theorize that the destination of Salem, a truncation of Jerusalem, has religious significance. I think this would be unwarranted, but the destination certainly does have spiritual significance, for clearly Theodore seeks his personal "city of peace".

As the train passes through the prairies, Theodore experiences yet another type of alien landscape. Here his response is classic, as stated by Ricou in the opening sentence of his study:

Man on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined especially by two things: exposure and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness. ²²

Here Theodore feels even less at home than in the mountains. One of the terrorist leaders articulates the response to the prairie when he points outside the window and says, "Look, space. Empty space. Last summer grain grew there. In twenty years it could be a desert, a coal mine, a city state, a prison camp (p. 61). This vision effects consciousness of the hollowness of their lives and makes them consider the void beyond which is death. "The prospect of death is meaningless" (p. 62). Life here is seen only as survival and this philosophy is certainly consistent with events, because Theodore and Perestrello are both shot at, attacked, and eventually Perestrello is killed.

While crossing this flat land the situation reflects a description of prairie writing by Margaret Laurence in her introduction to The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories:

The outer situation always mirrors the interior. The emptiness of the landscape, the bleakness of the land, reflect the inability of these people to touch another with assurance and gentleness. 23

This observation applies to the relationship between Theodore and Lise, the woman who insists they do not make love until they have known each other a week. She eventually weakens in this resolve but not until she is mellowed by studying the map with Theodore, on which they locate "that forgotten and useless region which surrounds the town of Salem" (p. 73), and make plans to go there together. Both anticipate flocks of people "migrating" to that area but decide that, "by the time they got to the church (where they plan to live), we'd have blended into the landscape" (p. 74). Having shared this vision of a promised land,

Lise allows Theodore to make love to her. The bleakness of the prairie landscape was softened by the hope of Salem.

When Theodore meets Dr. Fine in Regina, an opportunity is provided for Cohen to reflect on a definition of "home" and all that word implies. Theodore observes that:

"despite everything he (Dr. Fine) had a home.
Where was mine? Vancouver? Salem? The train?
Or was it only this body I lived in ... Home, yes,
we're all so stupid that we'd give up anything to
attain it, to convince ourselves that this place,
any place, is somehow where we belong" (p. 102).

The concept of "home" is explored on various levels. Perestrello discloses that his ancestors had literally been forced out of their European homes and had to seek a home in Canada where they soon realized that, "the new world had already become the old" and that "the future was only the past in disguise" (p. 158). This may be read as suggestive of the North American experience in general, where for several generations after emigration, 'home' is still somewhere in Europe. Theodore recognizes as the journey proceeds that part of his father's legacy to him has been a geographical location to which he can relate: "If in his small town he had tried to escape, at least he had given me a home" (p. 161). This concept of a home has special meaning for the Jewish immigrant, but Cohen does not elaborate on that aspect.

In spite of physical deprivations and danger during the train ride, Theodore increasingly is able to revel in the landscape and he is able to use this experience in the process of coming to

terms with himself and his life:

If I couldn't believe in myself, at least I could believe in all this water, in the giant rock cliffs with the Indian legends scratched on them so deeply they couldn't be touched by thousands of years of winds and storms (p.161).

The landscape provides a solid base in a precarious social and political environment.

• In the interview with Alan Twigg, Cohen reflected that for some people the right thing is to leave home but, "for other people it's almost inevitable to go away and come back. I think I undersand those people who come back better than those who go away".²⁴ In the light of this comment it is interesting to note the reactions of Cohen's characters. As the train moves into the rolling Ontario bushland, Theodore becomes extremely excited about arriving "home" and even he is surprised at the degree of his own reaction. He anticipates that Salem will somehow fuse the loose ends of time and place which he has been experiencing for the last ten years:

With each passing minute my feeling of home, its closeness, my desire to get there, was growing stronger; and I couldn't help thinking that this is what I had wanted for years, that by being thousands of miles away I had only been shutting myself off from myself, like a sullen and sulky child (p.163).

At this point Salem seems to Theodore, in Woodcock's words, "to project an eccentric sanity in a world of collective madness." ²⁵

One of Beam's first experiences at home occurs while they are in a tavern washroom and Pat Frank, a local character, recites this poem which he spontaneously created for the occasion, to Theodore:

Theodore Beam
 Theodore Beam
 Where have you been?
 What have you seen?
 And where are you now, Theodore Beam, (p. 184).

This summarizes succinctly all the questions Theodore must answer for himself. By the multiple references, Cohen has focused on the concept of "home" in such a way that Salem assumes symbolic value. The symbol which Salem gradually becomes is by no means a simple one. On the one hand it is home, a place of peace, but it is also a human landscape, and thus an expanding symbol.

Cohen uses the place, Salem as a way of saying that rural people tend to know who they are. The people may be rather ridiculous, certainly full of human imperfections but their deep sense of identity appears to be closely related to their sense of roots and landscape. When he arrives back in Salem, Theodore on seeing his father, immediately observes that, "Time had been cruel to him" (p. 181). The same is true of Salem, where "the town had run riot" (p. 182). In this way the setting is correlative with the characters. Beam barely recognizes his parents' house and furnishings, but he feels warm and comfortable there and he luxuriates in "sleeping in a room that has found its permanent place on this planet" (p. 189). Salem seems "a town set apart from the rest of the world" (p. 188), because there is no news of

the war there; but Beam knows of it first hand and must come to terms with it as well as the other questions. The war does come to Salem with Felipa and the story ends violently with Theodore killing a soldier who tries to prevent his rescuing Jacob from a burning house.

The last few chapters of the book reiterate references which confirm the symbolic stature of Salem. Theodore and Lise visit Katherine Malone and discover that "her whole life has been focused in this house her father built" (p. 196). The implication is that this sort of focus makes for a stable, peaceful life. Lise and Theodore decide to emulate a rural life by renting an abandoned stone church. When they go to view it, they find that "it looked more sheltered than ever, as if it had spent all this time getting ready to be our home" (p. 196). Theodore sees his father's print shop as a "fortress, a sturdy time machine that nothing could touch" (p. 107). The old houses in the residential streets are "still lived in by the children of the men who built them" (p. 217). Lise decides to leave Salem with Felipa but Theodore is determined to remain, "to begin my life again" (p. 226). At the close of the novel, Theodore has completely surrendered to his roots and is living in the church trying to be self-sufficient but managing only a bare subsistence. However, he believes that "the earth will try to feed us no matter how foolish we are" (p. 233). Here Theodore has arrived home, a place in which he sees that he is very like his grandfather and father, and a place in which time has become meaningful.

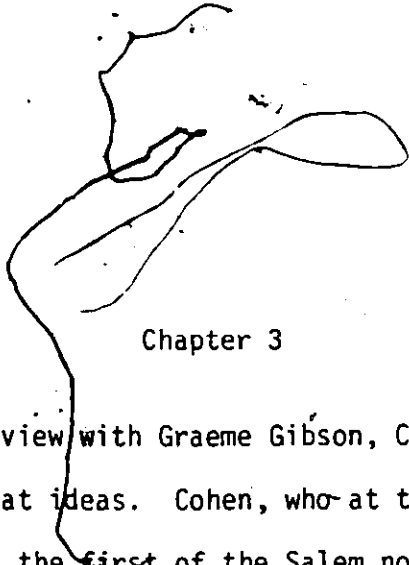
At the beginning of the narrative Theodore speaks of "this strange time in my life; it seemed as if the past and the future hardly existed" (p. 17); and he views his birthday as a reminder of "another year to be measured and forgotten" (p. 16). But time has moved as a creative element in experiences at the end of which Theodore knows that he wants "to live in the world, any world, even a world like this" (p. 14). The simple passage of time has enabled Theodore to reconcile himself to his own time and place. Meyerhoff notes that:

In Aristotelian terminology the permanent condition for converting becoming into being, potentiality into actuality, imperfection into perfection, is time. The direction of time becomes the condition under which we cling to belief in the realization of hopes and aspirations, in the opportunity for creation and progress, in effort and striving as a means for personal and salvation.²⁶

Theodore has, through time, arrived at his place where he has received almost a second chance at life. This is a very positive way of coping with the rather frightening idea of the transitoriness of life.

Throughout the novel Cohen keeps the reader aware of Theodore's psychological growth in time. Through flashbacks and memories, Theodore's experiences are related against the background of the succession of temporal moments and changes constituting his biography. Meyerhoff points out that because time is constantly changing, man is a victim of temporal succession and change; so that "the question, what is man, therefore invariably refers to the question of what is time?"²⁷ This is the question which

Cohen poses in the novel and with which Theodore must come to grips. At the end of the novel, established firmly in the stone church in Salem, the indications are that he can now begin to answer the question, "where are you now, Theodore Beam?" because "the sound of the past and the future" (p. 10), are singing through his bones.



Chapter 3

In a 1972 interview with Graeme Gibson, Cohen was asked about his tendency to repeat ideas. Cohen, who at that time had just begun to think about the first of the Salem novels, agreed that he did like to return to a statement, theme, or place and work out things in a slightly different way. Cohen said that the scene "will be different when it's repeated, because meanwhile other things have happened which have made it different ... I think I'm just fascinated by the idea of coming back to the same point, and what it means to come back to the same point."¹ In The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone Cohen returns to Salem and everything is quite different than it was in The Disinherited or The Colours of War. Again Cohen presents his characters on the lands of their ancestors, full of memories and with an indomitable sense of survival. But in this novel, time and place reflect the dualities of life much more than in the earlier two. The place of this novel is decrepit and shoddy, yet it is the setting of great loves and long-lasting relationships. Time is a source of both good and evil. The novel presents trenchant moments in the lives of very ordinary people in an anti-romantic setting and it gives these moments pattern and significance. Cohen structures the seemingly antithetical details and the mutually antagonistic principles by time, so that the succession of related episodes defines the form of the work.

One of the dualities articulated in the novel is evident in a passage which occurs early in the text. There is a description of a typical Friday night at the Salem Garage and General Repair, where Pat Frank is employed:

Standing in the bare front office, looking out the big picture window to the dirt yard where the gas pumps sat, flooded by white neon lights, they would pass the brandy back and forth. And gradually, to the rhythm of the bottle slapping down on the arborite counter, the working days would drain away; until after a few drinks they might even make a trip to the No-Tell Motel to view the spring's entertainment sensation - a green-bosomed singer in a plastic green grass skirt (p. 13). 2

In this most unattractive setting, Pat and Charlie experience true fellowship and camaraderie. The imagery of spring with all its green hopefulness is represented by a sleazy singer in a plastic green outfit. Yet this interplay of bleak, sterile places with warm relationships works, and Cohen uses these contrasts for dramatic and forceful effects.

Another setting, the formerly prosperous farm of Pat and Mark Frank, provides an analogy for the world in which most of the action of the novel occurs. The original house had burned and an old pig barn was converted to their present dwelling. Their home is described in this way:

This new house was flanked by the two remaining barns which sat in front of it like twin warnings of disaster. Between them, leading away from the house to the highway, was a hundred-yard driveway littered on either side with dead vehicles and spare parts (p. 42).

Gone are the former structures of agricultural order around which previous generations based their lives. The disintegration has been gradual but this is the present state of the Frank homestead. Yet in this squalid home live the twin brothers in a kind of harmony not often found between forty-nine-year-old men living together.

This type of setting reflects the kind of modern irony which Alan Wilde discusses in Horizons of Assent. He states that modern irony is concerned with the awareness and acceptance of the fact of disorder and chaos in our world. He sees a dilemma in that the writer "must situate himself in the world and at the same time confer meaning on it."³ Wilde uses the term 'postmodern' to describe a world almost beyond repair. Cohen's description of Salem in this novel is, in this sense, post modern. Throughout the novel the imagery is of decay, aging, and dishelvement. Ironically, the diction simultaneously suggests life, hope, and love, and it is this contrast and tension which gives the novel much of its texture. In a seemingly chaotic world the characters are able to confer a meaning on it and consequently to their lives.

This ability to accept and enjoy the conditions of life into which one has been born is an extension of the situation introduced in Colours of War. In that novel Theodore Beam sought and found the place where his grandfather and father had been able to earn reasonable livings and lead contented lives. At the conclusion of Colours of War there are intimations that Theodore will survive and cope. In The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone

we see a world in which unemployment, poverty, and physical weakness are rampant. Here characters find fulfillment because they accept their fates, and because they are "at home".

At the beginning of the novel, Pat, drunk, muses about how his life might have been, but eventually, "he almost laughed with the idea that he might have done different. Different? NO. Everything had to be as it was" (p. 7). This fatalistic view is consistent with that of the modern ironist who is unable to change the nature of things in any fundamental way. But Cohen's vision is that this is not necessarily negative. It is the acceptance of this fact which makes these unattractive, unhealthy, middle-aged people enviable.

The novel repeats the idea prevalent in The Colours of War of 'home' being a place in which one has roots and where one can feel complete. After Kitty has left her husband, Randy, and their home in Toronto, she meets Pat at her grandfather's farm. She tells him:

"I didn't want to leave him, but I needed to be here."
 "It grows on you," Pat said. In his tone was the twist he used to have, the voice he put on for customers and tourists.
 "Don't laugh at me."
 "No." (p. 36).

Using only logic, the reader wonders if Pat isn't teasing her because there appears to be little to return to in Salem. However, Cohen is not concerned with materialistic items, 'pretty' areas, or idealized people. Kitty returns realizing the value of the familiar and the natural. At the end of the narrative there is a strong sense that everyone is "at home". Randy Junior, who had

never fitted into Salem, has returned to Toronto to live with his father. The reader is confident that Ellen is content: "I'm going to Heaven," Ellen whispered "and it feels so good: (p. 170). Sadie and Charlie finally have the homestead to themselves; Mark will marry the Widow Kincaid; and Lynn has a home with her now-married parents, Kitty and Pat.

The Salem of this novel is quite unlike the clearly described small town in The Colours of War or that of Flowers of Darkness. In each of these novels the reader is given a graphic description of the layout of the town. In this novel the only buildings described are those of the Frank and Malone farms and the garage. There is no mention of any institutions such as a church, or school only the No-Tell Motel. There is a kind of floating quality to the Salem of this novel. It is a microcosm, a world which exists on its own and is little influenced by outside forces. The detailed descriptions which are given here, all tend to give the reader a picture of a dilapidated, run-down, back-woods setting. Because the novel proceeds to show the intrinsic worth of the people who live here, whom an outsider might judge to be "worthless", the presentation of the area seems to be the one which an outsider with an objective view would get at first glance. The descriptive details are of those things a stranger might perceive as a "shrunk Kingdom" in which the inhabitants should be depressed or bitter. Cohen shows, again and again through the novel that the converse is true. In this way he uses the setting as a foil, and again the dichotomies of life are reflected.

Dualities are often clarified by two descriptions of the same scene, from different points of view. Looking out at the front of the Frank farmhouse, the scene is described by an omniscient narrator as, "a cornucopia of ancient and rusting cars and trucks" (p. 42). Cohen presents the same view from Mark's point of view which is coloured by his personal reaction to it. Mark,

could feel he had forged his own project in this life ... he was a true scientist and explorer. Because he alone had kept up with the times; its dead metal history filled his yard and in its few acres he had re-invented his father's farm without the labour (p. 43).

Such an attitude reveals a man who is able to take pride from a situation in which few could find any source of satisfaction. His contentment is not based on any material prosperity, but on the acceptance of the situation and his place in it.

The rural setting of Salem is contrasted with the urban environment of downtown Toronto when Kitty describes her life there and when Pat visits the city to hunt down Randy Blair who had wilfully injured Charlie Malone. Pat is unsure of what he will do to Randy: "there was a place in the future where his imagination went blank" (p. 115). He knows only that he must confront him. He has a car accident on the way, but both he and the car survive. On a suburban parking lot the old black Ford "looked as bizarre and out-of-place as it had looked natural in the dirt driveway of his own home" (p. 133). Pat too is out of place and after being lost for hours in the city, he finds Randy who beats him severely and throws him out on the street. Kitty

also found the city inhospitable when she went there to get away from Pat. When she left it to return to Salem, she "couldn't feel anything except relief at being away from her husband, from their crazy fights, from the city where she could find no place in herself that knew how to respond" (p. 25). Back in Salem, Kitty felt at home. After he had been beaten up, Pat is troubled by the thought of how "grateful" he felt, rather than revengeful when he was curled up on the floor, "trying to get away from their city shoes: (p. 212). Back in Salem he is whole again. One evening while Pat and Mark are drunkenly walking to their home, Cohen describes Pat's reactions to the bush on their home farm in this way:

Where on the road they had been stumbling and bumping into one another, they now moved quickly, each step balanced and absorbed in the soft earth, every dip or twist in the path, every branch anticipated and known, built into the flow of their motion as if this path, these trees and bushes and the ground they grew out of were part of their bodies (p. 214).

The contrast between this "oneness" with the local area and the alienation of the city helps to reflect another dualism in the novel - an urban versus a rural environment.

Cohen allows the reader a few insights into what might be called "personal landscapes", inner places which are intensely private. These often mirror, or occasionally contrast with the external landscape. Ironically, it is Mark, with only one functional eye, who has a unique perception: "Mark perceived a secret landscape hidden behind the everyday, a terrain of opportunities for turning metal into cash" (p. 114). While Mark's

inner landscape is related to a special skill, Kitty's is less tangible:

The sun had now deposited a small window of light at the foot of the covers. This warmth she received, wishing it towards her center, towards that mythical confirmation of her own ridiculous existence, towards that place Randy and Pat fought so hard to get themselves into (p. 155).

The youngest character of the novel, Lynn, also has a secret place and hers relates the spatial and the temporal because her place is in the future:

Lynn was dreaming of the place where no one went ... She was walking north. She wasn't looking for Randy or Kitty or even Mark. She was past the place where the wolves and blackflies come from, past the places where anyone lived (p. 206).

When such inner landscapes are presented adjacent to physical ones, another series of possible interactions between the two facets is set up. This is a sort of psychological dualism which Cohen explores - the correlation between the landscapes in which the minds of men and the bodies of men act.

Cohen's focus in this novel is not on what happens to the characters. It is rather on the way a character responds to his environment; the real subject is man's way of living his life. This is a subject matter which focuses on the individual's values and sensibilities. The character, Pat Frank, embodies a duality which is universal, as are his reactions. Pat has experienced failure -- failure to compete in a materialistic, opportunistic world where this is the only measure of a man, and failure to maintain his being, regardless of external defeat:

After forty-nine years of trying to grow up it seemed that he had now collapsed, that he wanted to cry every time someone smiled at him, wanted to explode with love and tenderness as if these long waking nights were making him soft in the head (p. 10).

Here is the conflict -- to respond as he perceives the external world expects him to or as he feels he must from his inner being. At the end of the novel Pat assumes several new roles. He decides to marry Kitty, hold a steady job, and to be a father to Lynn. But Cohen does not present this as a traditional reform or success story. Pat is not a model of what man, in spite of life's vicissitudes and frustrations, can be; rather Cohen presents a man who emerges with confidence in himself after he has encountered the vicissitudes, frustrations, and anxieties of life. Cohen suggests no preconceptions of developing the self; rather he expresses a confidence in the basic nature of man. In particular, man caught in the dehumanizing forces of mid-twentieth century existence. Pat is a man involved in living life, one whose convictions are "discovered" by himself in the process of encountering and responding to his daily existence. A large part of Pat's attractiveness as a character is his ability to reconcile the inability to alter in any way the nature of things, with the necessity to confer meaning on his world.

The reconciling force which runs from the opening paragraph to the last is love. In an ironic way, this novel is very romantic, yet it is never sentimental. In the first lines, Pat feels, "the promise of summer ahead ... edging into the coming warmth" (p. 7). At the end of the novel Pat exclaims, "Family

life, it's the latest thing" (p. 233). The anti-heroic characters which Cohen has created find a structure for their lives through love which imposes a meaning on the entire community. The combined funeral and wedding feast at the end is most appropriate as a celebration of their joy in living. It celebrates life and death - a reconciliation of two of the most dramatic of the dualities of life.

The death of Ellen reinforces the importance of the genealogical imperative which is strong in the novels of Cohen. In this novel the Malone ancestry forms the essential background to the strange romance of middle-aged Kitty and decrepit Pat. During the post-funeral festivities Kitty reminisces while sitting on the couch on which she was born. The Frank brothers also are very conscious of the legacy, especially of the land, which their father left them. All the characters possess a consciousness of place not only on the land but in historical time. This novel presents events thoroughly rooted in time as well as place.

The main characters in this novel are middle-aged and starting to look back over their lifetimes which have been spent as a succession of fragmented, isolated moments of experience. It is customary to remember vivid times and events from the past but often they lack continuity or meaning. In The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone Cohen has attempted to overcome such fragmentization by choosing and arranging significant memories and incidents from the lives of his characters which show that even the chaotic stream of life and time and experience contains certain qualities of

duration, continuity and unity in terms of which some concept of the self may be saved.

Cohen's novel is a record of lives in motion, of lives which are experienced not merely in the space which they inhabit, but also in time. In his study Modern Fiction, William J. Handy postulates that:

Works of fiction express man's capacity to formulate his world in concrete presentations which render the full unabstracted bodiness or texture of the experience. As well, fiction, unlike poetry, expresses man's capacity to experience his experience, not merely in moments, but in time. The novelist whose focus is on man in his experiencing of his world in time, whether inner or outer, possesses the same characteristic concrete vision as the poet. Both see the world's concrete constitution and both wish to celebrate precisely that aspect of its nature.

The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone has this kind of poetic quality in that Cohen makes use of flashbacks and memory as devices which allow his characters to re-experience the experiences from the past as well as integrate those former events with new meanings from the present. An example is the description of the recollection that overtakes Pat on his drive to Toronto. It is a very vivid scene from the past when Pat as a boy, was checking his father's trap lines in winter and his two dogs were attacked by wolves. Pat had been helpless to assist the dogs and they were torn apart. This is a long passage in the novel and it is strategically placed because in the narrative present, thirty-five years later, Pat is able to act, to avenge his good friend, Charlie Malone, who was attacked by Kitty's son, Randy Blair.

The above example shows also that the time of human consciousness is never merely the time of the chronology of events. There is also a time of inner awareness which is an equally real aspect of human experience. For Cohen, the time of inner awareness measures the intensity of human experience, not its order of succession. The placing of Pat's memory of the scene with the wolves, not only re-examines a vivid event, it reveals one of the distinctive features of this novel: the way in which Cohen literally collapses time. The journey to Toronto was initiated by an event which made time almost stop for Pat. He recognizes immediately that something very significant had happened. "Pat had known that everything had changed, that he had stopped drinking and was now focused on the hunting down of Randy Blair" (p. 113). As he drives down Highway 401 his vehicle has a sudden tire blow out and the passage concludes, "in the air he heard a curious sound, the screeching alarm of thousands of birds, as if this crazy flip-flop dying was throwing him through heaven's walls and all the doves were going crazy" (p. 122). Instead of informing the reader whether Pat has survived the accident or not, Cohen keeps him in suspense for nine pages while Pat's memory of the wolf scene is narrated. In this way the novel circles back on itself, integrating the present events with those of the past, and suggesting the impact of both on the future. In the past, Pat had been unable to act; in the present he is doing something, although he is not sure what; in the future he will be able to have more control over the shaping of his life because he will know that he can take

action at strategic times. Cohen works with chronological and inner time and recognizes that the human consciousness is by nature two-fold: it can acknowledge simultaneously the world of inner awareness and that of external events. The order of events in chronological time is very different from that of inner time. Cohen's presentation of sequential events interspersed with past events still vivid in memory, creates suspense along with various other effects.

This ability to experience life by chronological and psychological time simultaneously is common to almost all people, fictional or actual. However, both people and characters have private clocks which measure time by values and intensity. When Cohen's character, Pat travels to Toronto the trip is not long but the chronological duration is extended because it is elongated with the recollections of various happenings which led up to the actual journey. These acts of memory are not mechanical reconstructions or recapitulations of the past as it was, but are emotionally charged re-interpretations of the events. Pat, the interpreter, reveals how he has been altered by time and his memories indicate the impact which past events have had on him, not only at the time they happened but also in the present as he remembers and re-interprets time. Because Cohen unfolds actual events and memories in this overlapping way, both assume a cumulative force which interact to affect the future. Mendilow describes the importance of past and present events on the future in this way:

Finally the hero greets his beloved with the pressure of all his past on the moment of his present which is modified by a purposiveness that thrusts toward a future big with hope. ⁴

Although in Cohen's text Pat is not going to meet his 'beloved' in Toronto, but rather Randy, his adversary, the essence of Mendilow's observation is true. The long recollection of the encounter with the wolves reminds Pat of earlier failures. In Toronto Pat has an experience of Karios, a significant time which was to have far-reaching influence on his life: "he had known something irretrievable had happened. Although it was not the first time in his life he had lost a fight, or even the worst beating he had taken, this one had crossed a new line" (p. 208). Actually the event moves Pat to take a new approach to life. By the arrangement then, of memories with actual events, Cohen uses time in this novel in a way that is very consistent with the way human consciousness deals with the dual experience of time.

The novel has an unusually strong emphasis on the irreversibility of the movement of time towards death. Meyerhoff notes that this theme, the transitoriness of our lives, is "without doubt, the most significant aspect of time in human experience, because the prospect of death thus enters, as an integral and ineradicable part, into the life of man." ⁵ The very first sentence of the novel focuses attention on time. "Friday ... and it was late" (p. 7). Then Cohen introduces Pat who is very aware that much of his allotted time has already passed: "Forty-nine years exposure to water and snow had taken the skin from a soft baby's pink to a

calloused and abrasive hide" (p. 8). Many of the details which follow describing Kitty's illness and Pat's shrinking brain reinforce the idea that time is running out for them. But as the novel opens, in the fictive present, Pat is experiencing new feelings, and he is, "haunted by the boy he had been, haunted by memories he had long ago discarded" (p. 14). At the same time he is afraid of what may happen to Kitty at the hospital and is "wishing what was ahead was already past" (p. 65). Cohen uses these paradoxical aspects of time to create tensions in the narrative. The contrast between the inevitability of death and the flood of past memories tends to make existence in the present a struggle to balance both extremes of time.

The title of the novel is given added impact by the suggestion in it of being past one's prime, which makes a second chance for summer so sweet. Pat's twin brother Mark articulates this theme: "The truth is it sometimes seemed that everyone around here was getting older, even the chickens were starting to die right in the middle of spring" (p. 99). Mark is worried "about how out-of-season they all were, him and Pat and Charlie, to be still drinking and fighting and fucking like teenagers" (p. 105). After Pat had gone to Toronto Mark, at home alone, feels that his life is "narrowing down; and for just a moment as he sucked in the smoke he could hear a faint rushing noise, as if her were a tunnel and time was hissing past" (p. 110). At this point in the novel, Mark views the passage of time as something negative and threatening.

Ironically it is Ellen Malone, the oldest character in novel

and the only one who actually dies, who has the most positive attitude toward the transitoriness of life. While Pat is lying beaten-up in an alley, and Kitty is dozing under the influence of painkillers, "for Ellen, fear and pain had never been further" (p. 144). This is the beginning of the end, literally for Ellen, and of an extraordinary account of her feelings as she arrives at the end of her life. She is keenly aware and accepting of the fullness of time:

It came to Ellen Malone that the time had arrived for her too, that this long silvery night was the last she would be spending in this kitchen where she had mewled, cooked, then mewled again, her last night in this house. It was time, she thought, to be like that old ice cream scoop of a moon, time for her to be moving on" (p. 145).

In his study of time in literature, Meyerhoff states that, "the movement of time towards death is also the condition of birth and rebirth. Thus from Heraclitus to Bergson, time is identical with 'becoming'." ⁶ This is exactly the experience of Ellen. After sitting in her wicker chair alone all night, "she decided she was going to leave this house once and for all, and as she sat she let this knowledge swell up in her like a baby getting ready to be born" (p. 151).

Although there is little evidence that Ellen had any religious faith which might explain her optimistic attitude, she does definitely look forward to the promise of something beyond death. As she leaves the farm she knows that she will never again see the familiar landmarks but she is unconcerned: "they were like the rooms where she had spent too much time; old places that could no

longer promise her anything" (p. 153). Sitting by Kitty's hospital bed, Ellen has a vision which reveals to her the meaning of her entire life:

Because there was a way to die, a high highway, a whole beautiful surge of dying that was built into a person, an inner fantastic flower that took a whole lifetime to seed and grow and then burst into violent exploding bloom ... to burst out and take her sliding off the roof and up to heaven in one last great long-stemmed, rosy-petalled leap" (p. 167).

To his credit, Cohen never allows such flamboyant visions to be sentimental, for in the next paragraph he phrases the succeeding step in Ellen's experience rather differently: "she realized that she - Ellen Malone, eighty-two years old and an old wrinkled-skin bag of shit, was headed straight for heaven" (p. 167). Part of Ellen's elation stems from the fact that she now understands that she has spent her life waiting to be freed from the bonds of time. Her timeless and imperishable soul will enter a sacred realm where human time loses its meaning. Cohen appears to be saying here that death is not simply a hazard of existence, it is a condition of life itself and should be accepted as such. Through Ellen's eyes death is perceived to be an ordinary human event, and by reducing its portentousness, Cohen paradoxically affirms the value of living. There is an element of tragedy in the fact that Ellen didn't comprehend the meaning of her life until its very end but again, this is a typically human experience. Death certainly triumphs here but it is not a meaningless ending "signifying nothing". It is a joyous event for Ellen and those left living celebrate it with great gusto.

Ellen has escaped from the dimension of time, and the future ceases to have meaning for her. This is not true of those left living, and at the end of the novel it is a vision of the future which dominates. The sugar bush provides a paradigm for what Pat sees as the three time periods of his life:

The memory of it - trees straight, competing underbrush and poplars cleared away ... was so strong that Pat Frank seldom saw the bush as it was now ... Tonight Pat's perception was different ... he saw bursts of spring leaves ... it was growing again (p. 216).

As the dawning sun streams over the horizon, Pat "saw it blinding white and bursting with pure waves of life, life translucent waiting to be formed" (p. 217). The novel ends at the beginning of summer and images of the cyclical nature of life abound everywhere. Pat relates this pattern to some of his personal questions:

Who was going to be a boy without looking forward?
Or grow old without looking back ... look at that yellow sun burning itself to oblivion just to push the green grass up every summer, shining its heart out for grass that six months later would cripple and freeze, drive itself back onto the earth. Jesus, who ever heard of anything so crazy as the same seasons happening over and over again forever? (p. 226).

Pat is angry because he knows so little about himself and he has the sensation that life is passing very quickly. All he really knows is that "once he had been a boy who wanted to be a man, and that now he was a man, an aging man past his prime with one rib cracked, his hair lost, a new wife, and with no better dream than that of being a boy again" (p. 228). But he does look out at the "rising sun" and go off to work. Kitty watches knowing that

"there would be other seasons but now, one more time, she was standing straight, ready to live out the warm endless summer ahead" (p. 233)..

By giving these insights into the views of both Ellen and Pat toward aging and death, Cohen uses the cycle of time as one way of coming to terms with the pessimistic implications of the direction of time toward death. The fact that time appears to be cyclical provides a way of envisaging a timeless dimension outside and beyond the historical march of time. While Cohen presents both the negative and positive aspects of time, these opposites are somewhat reconciled by the cyclical view. It is a neutral response toward the temporal world. In The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone it is clear that "time has always been a source of both good and evil".⁷ The novel implies that time will always be such a neutral source. The acceptance of this philosophy by the narrator and by the fictional characters lends an air of serenity to the setting, in spite of the fact that often violent incidents are taking place.

In a discussion of the trend in the modern world and in modern literature in particular, to measure the value of time by what is produced and consumed, Meyerhoff uses the term, 'social meaning of time'.⁸ He explains that this means that the "self is of purely instrumental, technological value, just like any other commodity." As a modern writer, Cohen reacts to this concept in this novel. Pat and Mark both feel anxious and uneasy, and occasionally see the moments of their lives as an accumulation of worn-

out pieces in a junk yard. Their reinterpretations of the significance of the time they have spent living motivates both men to enter into meaningful personal relationships. It is the assumption that human beings have intrinsic worth and that they are capable of entering into commitments for reasons other than material ones, which motivates Pat to marry Kitty, and Mark to consider marrying the Widow Kincaid. At the age of forty-nine, both men perceive that their lives have been fragmented and both feel the pressure of time to reconstruct their individual lives according to a coherent, intelligible, and significant pattern which will impose a sense of continuity, duration, and identity through time. This experience of the characters is analogous to the style of the novel. Cohen has presented fragments from the past and present and arranged these in a meaningful form.

In this novel Cohen presents a series of dualities, often reflected in the attitudes of the characters toward place and time. His reconciliation of seemingly paradoxical views, often within a single character, makes for a very satisfying ending. It is an ending very different from those of the novels discussed earlier. The words of George Woodcock summarize the contrast:

While The Disinherited shows somewhat despairingly the flow of modernism that is dislocating the decaying agrarian culture of Canada and disinheriting its inhabitants, and The Colours of War shows a future where rampant progress has gone into retreat and men seek refuge in a defensive nostalgia, The Sweet-Second Summer of Kitty Malone reaches, through its creation of an intensely living present, a brilliantly and rightly positive conclusion. 8

Cohen uses time and place to present the dualities of life; he employs the same elements to indicate how the dualities may be satisfactorily reconciled.

Chapter 4

In a paper entitled "The Regional Novel: Borderline Art", which he delivered in 1978 at a conference of the Canadian novel, Eli Mandel stated that "familiar territory assumes strange shapes".¹ He was speaking about Frederick Philip Grove in particular but about Canadian novelists in general. His words are certainly apt when applied to Flowers of Darkness, the fourth and last of Cohen's Salem novels.

Cohen acknowledges the link, in an author's note, between this novel and the preceding ones: "Flowers of Darkness is the fourth novel that I have set in or near the fictional town of Salem".²

While the Salem area is distinct in each book, it is very different in this one. In The Disinherited a particular farm and its immediate surroundings was the setting which provided such deep roots for the characters. In The Colours of War and The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone Salem has qualities which reflect its root meaning, 'city of peace', but in Flowers of Darkness Cohen has transformed the formerly innocuous town into a gothic setting where violent passions which have been just below the surface for generations eventually erupt and the town seems much more like the Salem of Nathaniel Hawthorne than that of Pat Frank or Jacob Beam.

Gothic literature has always relied heavily on setting for the creation of an atmosphere of brooding terror. Traditional gothic

castles were set apart from the surrounding countryside and modern gothic places reflect a similar impression of alienation and isolation. The use of storms and deep abysses to portray actual and figurative situations is well known in the gothic genre. Gothic settings are usually occupied by demonic or grotesque characters which possess unusual powers over others. All the aspects of place which are utilized to reflect terror and evil are synchronized the time sequences which are closely linked to an acute awareness of danger or death. The struggles between good and evil are often dramatized by a consciousness of the swift passage of time. It is within these conventions that Cohen has written Flowers of Darkness.

At the beginning of the novel the setting seems most familiar as George Mandowski drives by "the old Beckwith farm and the stone church" and one almost expects him to encounter either Katherine Malone or Theodore Beam. This town is dominated physically by the spire of the Church of the New Age. It is situated at the end of one of the two main streets and although it has changed denominations and paint colour over the years, "what stayed constant was the church's meaning, because it was placed at the edge of the stores as if to say "corruption - this far and no farther (p. 59). At the other end of town is the town hotel and tavern. The polarization of the two areas is made clear in the narrative: "Between the poles of tavern and church Salem's inhabitants swayed or sometimes staggered" (p. 59). Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, in The Gothic Imagination, points out that the "gothic landscape plunges from extreme to extreme." ³ Such is the condition of this Salem. There is an

intermediate spot on the street - Mandowski's General Store which "in proximity was closer to the hotel, but otherwise it was considered neutral by the town, food being neither salvation nor sin" (p. 78). This passage indicates that the town's people are aware of the sharp distinction.

The analogy between the physical layout of the town and the action in the narrative is evident in an incident which happens late in the novel. After Allen has asked Annabelle to give up her lover, she goes out "to walk toward the church" (p. 174). While she feels that if she can make this journey she might redeem herself, she is aware that this is a simplistic solution:

What a wonderful game, a marvelous six-year-old's game, this whole town laid out like a board of Snakes and Ladders, a game of Heaven and Hell for her to march about, each movement towards the angels accompanied by a tug from the devil (p. 175).

Annabelle meets Jacob Beam during this walk and after a talk with him, begins "to walk home" (p. 177). This is a sort of turning point which seems to have symbolic significance, because from this point on in the story, Annabelle resigns herself to a conventional life.

In the early chapters of the novel, Allen and Annabelle Jamieson appear to be a typical young couple who live in "exactly the house she had dreamed of as a child" (p. 86). Their move to Salem from Ottawa, had been to escape publicity about some bribery in which Allen had been involved. The move was expected to end all problems: "Allen was crazy about nature; he seemed to think it

some mysterious balm that would heal all their wounds" (p. 21). Annabelle has doubts about this wholesale remedy. When she visits Donna, a neighbour who had lived in Salem all her life, Annabelle feels that she is "just a city woman out of her element, an alien and a fool who would never be able to survive in Salem" (p. 22). Such a feeling of alienation is consistent with gothic tradition. While early gothic novelists set their plots in isolated medieval castles, the contemporary setting used by Cohen brings the depicted estrangement to the reader's own time. Elizabeth McAndrew, in The Gothic Tradition in Fiction states that the characters of gothic novelists,

are not natural inhabitants of the settings in which they are placed because the very purpose of the setting is to create an isolated environment in which to show eighteenth century readers figures they can recognize and accept as showing what they and all mankind are like.⁴

Annabelle and Allen's house is near the center of town and to the passerby it appears comfortable and pleasant but we soon learn that it is a place from which Annabelle must often flee as if it is indeed a kind of prison. Later in the novel we learn that it can be visited by nightmares and ghosts.

As in The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, Cohen uses the small town setting to create ironic and dramatic contrasts. The landscape appears to be serene, but in fact it is not. The novel is permeated from the beginning with "an atmosphere of brooding and unknown terror".⁵ Early in the work we discover that Annabelle feels like an outsider. One might expect the local clergyman to

be a character who would assist newcomers to feel at home but as soon as he is introduced, the reader is aware of Finch's unusual and sinister powers. When he touches Annabelle the impact is quite peculiar: "on her belly burnt right through her modest suit, was the imprint of Finch's hand" (p. 28). Figurative or not, such a result is alarming.

Cohen, like others writing in the gothic tradition, often uses storms to create special effects. Actual storms usually are concurrent with the emotional or spiritual crises. Although the device of pathetic fallacy is often trite in pulp fiction, it is particularly apt for the gothic style, and Cohen's use of it produces very dramatic results.

While working in her garden, Annabelle is caught by a violent thunderstorm. She is terrified.

There was a second flash of lightning. This one was much brighter, illuminating the dark sky and disappearing in a jagged line behind the steeple of the church. When the thunder came it seemed to explode upward from the ground, jolting the whole lawn as if it intended to search her out and knock her over (p. 84).

After she has sought shelter of her house, Annabelle watches the storm outside:

The lightning was dancing about the church, as if Annabelle thought, it was pointing at Finch: Finch, as demonic as the lightning. Finch: Standing in his pulpit his arms spread wide, needing only a cape to be a giant Dracula ready to ravish the entire congregation (p. 85).

This first storm makes the reader aware of Annabelle's phobia and it foreshadows that evil will be associated with Finch

A short time after this storm, Finch does in fact 'ravish' Annabelle and their encounter takes place in another fierce storm. All the sexual trysts occur outside the town, almost as if they would be impossible within sight of the steeple of the church; but the same storms smite both town and country. Once Annabelle and Finch are sitting on a cliff top by the lake when a storm hits. Irrational with fear, Annabelle runs for the shelter of the woods. Finch comes to her and there is a syncopation between the storm and their lovemaking:

Annabelle felt his teeth on her skin; then there was another explosion of thunder and in her terror she pressed her throat into Finch's mouth, wanting to be simultaneously penetrated and torn open, nailed by lightning into the wet ground (p. 138).

Annabelle has the sensation that the storm is dissolving the barrier inside her which enables her to live "a civilized and ironical life". The climax takes place at the height of the storm:

She wrapped her legs around Finch, gathered him to her until her thighs cramped with pain: finally her skin, electric with fear and lightning, joined to the grass and the earth, and they were all writhing together under Finch's crazy pumping" (p. 139).

Later when Donna confronts Annabelle about the affair, Annabelle explains how it started on the day she watched Finch assist the delivery of a calf: "Birth; the violent energy had been a storm, forcing them together, joining them: (p. 159). The storms, then, are literal as well as figural, and these aspects complement each other.

Such contrasts as those cited above are found throughout this genre because they somehow magnify reality. Besides making sure there are few dull moments, stark contrasts have psychological effects on both the fictional characters and the readers. Bayer-Berenbaum states that:

The constant presence of polar opposites prevents us from mistaking any single dimension for the whole, and with respect to density, as opposed to scope, the mind is unable to tolerate extremes for very long. We either avoid, or forget, the unbearable or become accustomed to it, yet persistent contrast discourages adjustment, because in the clash between two states we can adjust to neither, and thus any dulling of the senses is averted. Whether by superficial colour contrasts or more basic emotional and thematic juxtapositions, the Gothic novel sustains unmitigated sensitivity. 6

Cohen certainly is aware of this effect because the novel abounds in contrasts, not only in setting, but in characterization and themes as well.

In addition to storms, it is common for gothic novelists to incorporate abysses as an integral part of the setting. MacAndrew explains that the abyss is used as a metaphor throughout the gothic tradition "to make manifest the effects and sometimes the cause of evil in the mind of man ... while the heavens rent by terrible storms contrive to express human torment and rage, at the most intense moment of moral danger, there appears in the landscape the terrible abyss of damnation." 7 In a severe thunderstorm, Annabelle and Finch fall over the metaphorical cliff while meeting on an actual one.

Annabelle had visited this lakeside cliff before she met Finch

there. It was a favourite spot of hers from which to escape the town. Once, while out there she recalls an elaborate story about a young French woman who had her lovers leap off a cliff to prove their love. Annabelle is fascinated by the place and while she always thought the story was a lesson, "to those who would swim out of season" (p. 105); standing on the cliff, she "felt exactly in-season herself, exactly ripe and ready" (p. 105). This pun hints as to how easy it will be for Annabelle to "go over the cliff" with Finch.

Their first sexual encounter takes place near the edge of this precipice and it becomes a favourite place for subsequent rendezvous. Towards the end of summer, when the afternoon meetings are very regular, Annabelle reinterprets the story of the lover's leap:

When Finch emerged from the woods Annabelle's blood would start to race and she felt as if she herself, running towards him, was making the great lover's leap" (p. 141).

Certainly she is aware that she has fallen into an abyss of sin, because just before the above passage, Cohen informs the reader that "her conscience was hurting these days" (p. 140). When Allen discloses that he knows about Annabelle's affair with Finch, she swoons and later when she wakes and realizes that she has missed a rendezvous with Finch, she wonders, "Had he waited? Had he leapt despairingly into the lake?" (p. 164). After Finch's death, Annabelle returns once more to the lake and is reminded of the leaps both she and Finch had taken:

The lake hissed and shimmered with light. In the story the lover had leapt and proved his love. Now the girl was looking regretfully at the mouth that had swallowed him up (p. 248).

Cohen's use of the physical setting combined with the associated meanings of the old legend, creates an atmosphere in which choices are definite and their results far-reaching.

In The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction, Margot Northey uses the term 'gothic' to refer "to a subjective view of the dark side of life, seen through the distorting mirror of the self, with its submerged levels of psychic and spiritual experiences."⁸ This idea that the gothic tale is itself a mirror showing the reader his mind is another gloss on the more basic meaning of the reflection of the landscape, houses, and weather surrounding the fictional characters. MacAndrew also, points out that "actual mirrors or works of art that throw back an image of at least the outer person serve a variety of functions as smaller mirrors within the larger mirror of the overall work ... from fairly simple reflectors they become mirrors in which tormented characters catch glimpses of that inner self they struggle with but do not understand."⁹ Cohen uses mirrors, photographs and works of art, all facets of the character's individual places, to add richness to the novel, as well as to create dramatic effects.

There is a great emphasis on the beauty of Maureen Finch. Often she is pictured brushing her hair in front of a mirror. Her mirror is a three-panelled one which her grandmother had brought

from Ireland and it reminds Maureen of her patrician ancestors who lived lives which are in contrast to the humble one she leads at the present. She also has, on a wall in her room, "a rogue's gallery of her ancestors and the houses they had lived in: (p. 31). Both the portraits and the mirror tell Maureen that her beauty is fading and she herself does not understand why she enjoys looking at both: "It was strange that people so loved to see themselves" (p. 32). Even the day she kills her husband, Mandowski, and herself, Maureen "looked at herself in the mirror. Then she took her silver-backed brushes and began pulling them through her hair, a hundred strokes from the roots, like her mother, her grandmother, her great-grandmother had before her" (p. 235). The continuity of life is suggested here because Maureen has willed the brushes to her daughter, Valerie, who also has copper hair and fair skin. Cohen suggests here that one is to some extent a reflection of one's ancestors and that one may attain a form of immortality through one's progeny.

The reflectors which mirror Annabelle's face and soul weave a slightly different motif. Annabelle had spent "the last summer of her university years having her face photographed" (p. 19). Part of this experience was an affair with the photographer, which was the beginning of several such involvements. These incidents appear to be included in the narrative to show that Annabelle is not totally pure, but her sins do seem venial in contrast to the mortal ones of the villains. Annabelle's background is in contrast to that of Maureen whose creamy white skin is symbolic of her

chaste life, which she was able to preserve even through a seven-year engagement. Annabelle's reflections reveal both to herself and to the reader that she is not a strong character but is one who allows herself to be greatly and easily influenced by others.

After being a model, Annabelle became an artist. Her medium is clay and on one hand she moulds vases and dinnerware, but her more creative flair is to form figures from clay. In this endeavour she imagines herself similar to God who moulded Adam out of clay. Her work, in the fictional present, is to make sketches of people from Salem, then model their figures from clay and assemble these "against backgrounds that would eventually fit together to form a gigantic mosaic" (p.55). Her concept is not a modest one:

This mosaic would, she explained wryly to her husband, would be made up of panels that would depict the human condition, the agony and the ecstasy, the glorious suffering, wonderful ordeal and history of mankind, etcetera (p. 55).

Annabelle calls this mosaic "my Guernica", although she thought of it "as something entirely different, not Guernica or Spanish or foreign at all, but as the town of Salem" (p. 55). This mosaic, which reflects one thing to Annabelle, is interpreted differently by others. She has to explain and justify it to her mother and husband. She wonders if the people represented "would all think, if they knew, that she was practising voodoo against them?" (p. 100). Annabelle explains her work to her neighbour Donna, as "just like therapy, because everything fits in" (p. 101). In this created world the figures go and stay where they belong and each has his own place. This is in contrast to the actual town in which

Annabelle feels very much an outsider and a misfit. The narrator leads the reader into the closed world of a small town and presents Annabelle alienated psychologically and socially from the other townspeople. She is isolated in her picturesque stone house, actually a recognizable gothic 'castle' and her work is the medium through which she opens herself, having closed herself off from the town.

After Allen has been told, by Finch of his wife's unfaithfulness, Annabelle feels "like one of the figures in her mosaic: a pawn for Donna's mischievous plans; a stranger for Maureen to hate; a city woman to titillate Finch; a desperate wife for Allen to manipulate" (p. 164). She has become recognizable in relation to her own artistic creation. Previously Annabelle had felt somewhat in control but now the situation is different. Her earlier creative vision is mocked by her mother whose reaction to seeing her daughter's creation is: "Good God, Annabelle, is this what you do all day? What happened to all those lovely dishes you used to make?" (p. 209). Finally, after the sermon in which Finch publically confesses his 'sins', Annabelle loses control of her emotions. She begins to smash the figures. In a very violent scene, Allen first tries to stop her and then finishes up by destroying what she had not already broken. The imagery of this scene reinforces the gothic idea that mirrors and works of art are reflections of the soul. There is a parallel here to Wilde's Dorian Grey. In a way similar to that of Dorian Grey who stabs his portrait and thus releases his soul from it to shine forth again,

the destruction of Annabelle's mosaic, symbolically, is the end of her relationship with Finch and a possible new start for her and Allen.

The violent scene described above is one of the last times Annabelle appears until the very end, where the motif of mirrors and portraits is presented as the finale of the novel and is tied in with the title of the book. Allen and Annabelle have made their peace, she is making dishes again, but she wakes up with what seems like a visitation of Finch's ghost. Even his ghost can arouse Annabelle sexually, a situation which Allen takes advantage of, and while he makes love to her she has a macabre vision which amalgamates the major characters and motifs in a truly gothic scene. Allen's shadow is:

swinging with the grim executioner's rhythm ... his face melted into a row of grinning masks; for a moment they danced like the toy angels in her own elaborate but useless mosaic, like the flowers she had saved from the lightning storm, like the ghostly white face of Maureen Finch - and then for the last time they dissolved as her body got its moment of reprieve, its own release, which was absolutely private and removed, carrying her into darkness (p. 251).

This final horrifying transportation which occurs, ironically and coincidentally, with a moment of intense intimacy reinforces Cohen's theme of alienation which has been mentioned before. While none of the characters is isolated in a gloomy, haunted mansion, each is terribly alone, in spite of the warmth and attractiveness of the town and its people. Annabelle feels that she can "never survive in Salem.. When she visits Finch in the cow barn she realizes that "she had never seen him except in the most formal of circumstances. She liked him better here, at his own place" (p. 110).

Irony is heavy here of course, because Finch is actually in torment in his own home and seeks escape whenever possible. After they begin their affair, Annabelle rationalizes that it is a "harmless affair that had finally moved her from the city to the country" (p. 140). None of the main characters feels that he is 'in his own place'.

In Cohen's earlier novels, the characters often relate to their landscapes only through effective sexual relationships. This idea is presented again in Flowers of Darkness. Finch sees Annabelle as "a part of himself, a secret twin who was beyond understanding; a secret fact of nature as opaque to him as was his own inner self" (p. 196). At their final meeting, as Annabelle experiences orgasm, "she changed suddenly from the city woman who was out of place in this town to an extension of his own shadowed self" (p. 201). Finch feels that he is swimming "the river of all the women who had given themselves to him" and that "all he wanted was that his body and hers join with the spirit of the river" all he wanted was that the river finally find his soul and release him from the life he had been condemned to" (p. 201). This fatalistic sentiment is shortly fulfilled by his death which is linked in a very medieval way with sexual fulfillment.

Another character who is portrayed partly through mirror imagery is Finch. His reflections in the novel show him to be demonic. His own daughter draws him in art class and presents her father with this result - "it was a picture of Finch standing in front of the house. He was wearing his coveralls and bulging

from his head were two horns. In one hand he held a pitchfork, in the other a red bushy tail" (p. 121). This representation had been inspired by a remark of Maureen's who stares at Finch "as if he was the most evil man on earth, as if he was truly the devil his daughter had drawn" (p. 127). Such reflections add new perspectives of the main characters. Finch and the others are shown by all the trappings of their physical settings - their houses, portraits, and mirrors. The mirror is an especially rich device because it frequently flashes glimpses which the reader may recognize as part of his own nature. Salem is the common mirror in which all the characters are reflected. In general, the vision is one of evil.

Finch, who is perceived by his daughter as a devil, epitomizes the sense of evil which pervades the setting and atmosphere of the novel. Margot Northey states that this preoccupation with evil is a "basic motif of gothicism".¹⁰ Cohen accomplishes the task of infusing an innocuous small town with a sense of evil mainly through the revelation of Finch's character and his effect on others. Once after dreaming about Finch, Annabelle awakes to feel, "Evil; this night was so dark and heavy that a person could almost believe they had been possessed" (p. 173). Later, after his death, Annabelle reminisces about Finch beside the lake where they had met so often:

Finch danced here, Annabelle thought. He danced on this cliff and the thunder rumbled down at him, and he was alive and dancing like a devil in the rain (p. 245).

Other characters also provide glimpses of some of the many facets of

evil. In the opening pages of the novel the reader learns of Mandowski's "hidden demon, raging with hunger and frustration" (p. 13). Gordon Finch's father was a minister, whose profession was to preach the gospel of 'good news'. However, Bob Finch's sermons had never concentrated on the loving, caring aspects of Christianity but emphasized the evil side of life:

With his voice literally creeping into their ears he told them of the pits of biting snakes that await the covetous, the leprous diseases that invaded the hands and arms of thieves; the snapping turtles that hung from the genitalia of fornicators; the rabid bats that attacked the tongues of gossips until they swelled up like mushrooms and split open their skulls (p. 40).

This sort of sermon revels in the dark, horrible side of life.

Some of the characters reflect on the dual nature of man, and Annabelle once had a conversation with Jacob Beam on the topic. She confides to him that she thinks about, "the good and bad of things ... Evil" (p. 177). Beam tries to reassure her that there is no such thing as evil: "Just us," Jacob Beam said, "though in the long run, who knows, maybe that's worse" (p. 177). Although Cohen, through flashbacks, provides psychological rationale for the terrible wrongs in the novel, there is still a sense of a mysterious darkness at the roots of the human condition.

Another aspect of evil which is presented as part of the setting and atmosphere in Flowers of Darkness is that of the pernicious force of the human will. The overpowering force of a grotesque character over other weaker individuals has long been a feature of the gothic literature. This sort of invincibility also adds a structural element to the narrative. Indeed, Northey maintains that

"the dominance of one human being over another is a prime contribution to the final gloom or destructive action of the story." ¹¹

Finch is able to exert such powers over several women. Annabelle feels his force from the beginning of their relationship when "his voice was curiously deep, almost hypnotic; she could feel herself being drawn to him, wanting the pressure of his body against her own" (p. 66). This appears as a contemporary version of the gothic tradition where the victim is often paralyzed by his attraction to his tormentor. Bayer-Berenbaum points out that as a result of his fascination, "the victim becomes even more passive, thus increasing the contrast between victim and villain." ¹² In the past Finch had exerted a similar force over Maureen who renounced her family, Catholicism, and a vocation in the church to marry him. Maureen's transformation from fascination to loathing is an interesting psychological process which results in the victim becoming the villain. When the forces of good and evil are at war, and compromise is impossible, total victory and defeat are the only alternatives.

Finch's powers can be exercised over large groups of people as well as individuals. After his public confession from the pulpit, he asks the congregation to forgive him and "the voices began to chime in, one after another, first mostly women and then reluctantly, their men, until the whole church rumbled with cries and shouts of forgiveness" (p. 220). Finch is not, however the only character who exhibits an evil force of human will over another. Allen, knowing Annabelle's weaknesses, manipulates her so at the end of the novel, she is beholden to him because he is willing to protect her and her

child. Bernice Lever finds that "the Allen Jamisons of this world are far more frightening than the Finches; calm spiders who watch the action, accepting any means to get their desired ends." ¹³

The pervasive atmosphere of fear and evil inherent in the setting of the novel contributes to what probably is the most basic of all gothic motifs - the awareness of death. Northey suggests that, "twentieth century works are apt to emphasize psychological or spiritual rather than corporal death." ¹⁴ Flowers of Darkness contains all three, and they all overlap in the town of Salem.

Maureen Finch, once a devout Catholic, always attends the Church of the New Age when her husband preaches. Once, while there, she thinks, "Finch the lady-killer: well, he had killed her and what could anyone think of that?" (p. 35). There is evidence that Maureen is 'dead' in a variety of ways because she appears to be quite frigid sexually: "Her voice in heat, but her body frozen in the convent" (p. 74). The traumatic experiences of her life culminate in her being able to cold-bloodedly plan to murder her husband. When Mandowski agrees to bring her a gun, she can already see "blood like a fine rain on the walls" (p. 192).

Finch suffers a kind of death when he says goodbye to Annabelle. As he walked home he feels that his heart may be broken and he can feel "his bleeding heart emptying into and filling the red lake of his own dying" (p. 205). This is a foreshadowing of his actual corporeal death which is particularly gruesome and bloody.

Perhaps one of the saddest 'deaths' in the novel is that of Annabelle. At the end of the novel she is resigned to a "civilized

and ironical: life, having renounced that part of her mind that "had burned so intensely" and now was just a "sleepy place" (p. 205). It is apparent that she will sacrifice her personal will in the future to accommodate the nurture of her child who, "like herself, would be an only child, born to parents who were afraid of her" (p. 249).

The physical decrepitude of Maureen and Mandowski, the moral decay of Finch and Allen, and the intellectual wasteland of Annabelle's mother all emphasize a temporal, physical world in decline. These details also indicate the limitless power of nature over human beings. Bayer-Berenbaum asserts that,

Death and sickness lead us to acknowledge the extent of the forces which control us, and in the face of death we recognize the omnipotence of time and try to confront our own annihilation.¹⁵

This consciousness of time is one of the devices by which the novel achieves its sense of impending gloom.

A cyclical view of time is consistent throughout the novel. This is a common perspective in Cohen's novels as already discussed in earlier chapters, but in Flowers of Darkness it is more closely connected to the idea of evil being cyclical and embraces the biblical idea of "the sins of the fathers being visited on their children." This is important to the psychological insights as well as to the structural unity of the novel. Maureen especially is aware of her "original sin". Her father told her that she was "born to sin" (p. 46). In the confession booth the sound of the priest's voice became "not merely a voice, but the walls of the church, the weight of all men's voices: shutting out all light,

closing her in, pressing her down and into the stone" (p. 46).

The priest warns her that she is going to hell. At the close of the narrative, the reader wonders what else Maureen has passed on to her daughters besides the heirloom silver hair-brushes.

Finch is conscious of the curse of his heredity. Maureen articulated her perception of the relationship between Finch and his father soon after she had met Gordon. She tells him,

Your father wants to destroy you ... with one half his being and with the other half he wants you to be more than his match, so that when he dies he can be sure you're strong enough to survive (p. 42).

Much of gothic fiction is fascinated "with the dark persistence of the past in sublime ruin, haunted relic, and hereditary curse." 16

Certainly Finch is visited by his father's legacy. We learn that Bob Finch enjoyed the same sexual license that his son does, from Mike Taggart who tells Gordon,

Your Dad and I, we used to go here and we used to go there, but he always paid before he played. Otherwise, it's them goddamn carrying charges that get you in the end (p. 78).

These prophetic words prove true in several ways before the end of the narrative. After Maureen had killed Finch she wondered momentarily, if she were in anyway responsible for Finch's behaviour, but her pride triumphs and she finds strength in the thought that, "even Gordon Finch, who they said, was turning into the very image of his father, even Gordon Finch hadn't been able to bring her down" (p. 235). Of course Maureen's interpretation of this thought is very distorted because in almost every aspect except pride, Finch

did in fact, break her.

The temporal theme of the hereditary visitation of sin is interesting structurally, thematically, and certainly psychologically and morally. In this study of 'darkness', Cohen confronts his readers with the question of moral responsibility. Finch's father was his role model. Maureen's religious upbringing appears to have made her a frigid adult who finally resorts to "the substitution of death for sexuality", ¹⁷ a tendency which according to Leslie A. Fiedler, is dominant in gothic fiction in America. Because of his method of presenting Gordon and Maureen, Cohen has allowed the reader to imaginatively inhabit their tortured minds and to see the potential for such evil in all minds, and in all places, even picturesque little towns. After understanding some of the psychological causes for their behaviour it is difficult to look on evil or good as absolute, or as forces outside the human psyche. Cohen makes his reader aware, constantly, of human frailty and suffering and this modifies our condemnation of the villains and makes absolute moral judgement impossible.

The narrative present of the novel is approximately the 1980's, although there are degrees of 'pastness' in the work. When the narrator describes the thoughts of Annabelle, Finch, or Maureen the past is revealed as present in the consciousness of those characters. There are few time-shifts, but several flashbacks, usually memories, which always reveal significant times or events in the lives of the main characters. For example, we learn a bit about an affair Annabelle had with Issac, but very little of her

childhood. The furtherest flashbacks are those of Maureen when she recalls her strict Catholic upbringing. The material retrieved in memories has a bearing on our understanding of the present behaviour, morality, or psychology of the characters.

The shape of this novel is based to a large extent on the consciousness of both the characters and the readers of a clock ticking off hours and days while disaster approaches. The novel opens with the scene of Nellie Tillson being ravished by Gordon Finch and we soon learn that this event resulted in a conception. The main complication of the plot occurs because this act was witnessed by George Mandowski and from this incident onwards, Finch is confronted with the necessity of doing something before time runs out. As the action progresses, first Maureen and then Annabelle learn of Nellie's pregnancy. The fact that this birth is imminent gives past, present, and future actions a highly charged significance in much the same way that each move in a tightly contested game gains importance in the waning moments. In Time and English Fiction, D.L. Higdon calls this precise time span during which certain tasks must be performed or dire consequences will result, "barrier time".¹⁸ Cohen uses this device, very recognizable to anyone who watches contemporary television, to reinforce the sense of approaching doomsday. The time span of the novel is almost nine months - the term of a normal pregnancy and the normal excitement of an impending birth is supercharged under the circumstances of this plot.

Maureen Finch knew intuitively that her husband had been involved with Nellie because when she greeted Nellie one day after service, Maureen "felt Finch's hand tighten on her shoulder; and at the same time Nellie's lower lip trembled and her face turned to Finch. Maureen watching this, felt a familiar panic" (p. 48). From this point on, Maureen is alerted to the situation. When Mike Taggart, Nellie's uncle, confronts Finch he does not mince words: "Well, boy, either you deliver ten thousand dollars to me at this address one week from today, or I'm going to have her slap a paternity suit on you" (p. 77). This ultimatum brings about one of the first physically violent scenes of the novel. Finch faces Mandowski who is prepared to swear that he had seen Finch and Nellie in the church. After bullying him does not work, Finch punches Mandowski on the jaw. The scuffle ends with Mandowski firing a gun over Finch's head, but the issue is unresolved.

When Finch is forced to tell Maureen about the paternity suit she advises him to "resign, before you drag the church through the mud with you" (p. 127). He rejects this suggestion and she asks him to swear on the Bible that he is innocent. When he decides to do so the narrator comments: "the point of no return had passed without his seeing it" (p. 127). From this precise moment it is obvious that something momentous will happen and that time is running out for Rev. Finch. After this the reader follows Finch toward an inevitable, fixed end. In this way, barrier time, provides a time structure for the narrative.

In between the carefully constructed march of Finch's confrontations with Maureen, is woven the story of his affair with Annabelle. The Tillison girl has a peripheral effect on their relationship. The day that Annabelle notices Nellie's pregnancy, Finch orders her never to go into Mandowski's store again. This order enrages Annabelle who strikes her lover, publically, and thus announces to the town that something serious exists between them. Later a neighbour asks Annabelle, "What's he going to do about Nellie Tillson?" (p. 160). After this Annabelle as well as Maureen is poised, with the reader, waiting for Finch's resolution of the problem. This use of barrier time stresses an all-important moment, but it is a moment of finality rather than a moment of transformation and each reference to passing time increases the suspense.

After a second discussion about the suit with her husband, Maureen decides, "No. I don't want it to go to court. It can't" (p. 183). This is the point at which she decides to kill Finch because she immediately arranges with Mandowski to obtain a gun. Before she is able to carry out her plan, Maureen has to endure her husband's sermon in which he confesses to failing to withstand the temptations of Nellie's flesh. However, as soon as their daughters go back to school in September, Maureen in an icily deliberate way murders Finch, Mandowski, and then kills herself. These are the dire consequences which the reader suspected might come ever since the beginning when events had been initiated by the dramatic scene in the stone church. The pressures of time force the events of the plot.

At the end of the novel, Nellie and her problems are never mentioned, although it is near Christmas and her baby is almost due - that's another story. In a curious juxtaposition though, Annabelle is now pregnant and there is a good chance that Finch was the father of the expected child. Annabelle reflects that "it was almost a year now since they had moved to Salem: only a year, but a whole second life had been lived" (p. 250). The time period is over, Finch is dead, but Annabelle faces the rest of her life. There is strong emphasis on the cyclical nature of life and time at the end. As in the preceding novels, this awareness of the cycle of time produces a neutralizing effect. Time has brought good as well as evil. At the end of the narrative the villains are dead, and there is a new baby expected. Will this child be "visited with the sins of its fathers"? Probably there will be more evil as well as good, but time itself is neutral.

In this "last of the Salem novels", Cohen has focused on a brief period in the life of the town of Salem. The town, with its polarities reflects the dualities in the hearts of people. The struggle of good and evil is dramatic and moves quickly to an inevitable end. The words of George Woodcock summarize the impact of the novel:

Salem, with its perfect stone facades provides a theatrical backdrop for the characters to move around. Essentially what is acted out is a drama of sin and retribution, with destiny arranged as inexorably as it ever was in the plays of Aeschylus or Sophocles.¹⁹

Conclusion

The four novels which Cohen has set in or near the fictional town of Salem provide an unique opportunity to study an author's use of time and place as narrative devices. Having explored the functions of these elements in each of his novels, it is now possible to draw some conclusions. My study reveals that while there are variations and repetitions there is no particular development through the works, but rather a presentation of four different facets of the author's vision.

The setting of Salem has provided Cohen with a base on which to build, imaginatively, in four directions. In any story the place is the necessary ground of the action and the characters the necessary agent. The narrative movement with its strong temporal flow and its stress on causal sequence may compel full attention, but the shifts from figure to ground provide limitless dramatic possibilities. Cohen has capitalized on this fact by allowing his imagination to form four separate novels on virtually the same ground.

In the first novel, The Disinherited, Cohen portrays a family farm which has provided not merely a living, but also a rewarding reason to live for the men of three generations. Cohen presents the settlers and their descendents responding to the land as a God-given place of which they are stewards. Such a concept of

mission produces a devotion to the land which made human relationships difficult. When the fourth-generation inheritor of the farm is unconvinced of its importance, and is physically and psychologically unsuited to working it, he experiences a great sense of alienation and has the monumental task of finding a meaningful reason for existence, divorced from the farm. Cohen portrays this sense of losing one's birthright and of the eroding of old orders in a rhetorical way which makes readers share the sense of frustration of someone trying to find his place in the world. In former days the seasons and work on the farm provided a rhythm which is difficult to replace in the contemporary world. Cohen uses the farm and the land allegorically as well. As the Thomas men respond to the land, their responses to women are affected. Cohen shows Erik as unable to have satisfactory relationships with either the land or women. At the end of the novel there is hope that if Erik can free himself from the past, he may be able to find himself and relate better to others and to the world.

In this novel, Cohen confers identity on characters through genealogy, yet the same genealogy tends to obscure the individuals. Richard, from one generation, returns through memory to his grandfather, Richard, to examine his history and to exorcise ancient guilts. Cohen uses nonlinear patterns of memory which break down the actual and then recreates it or integrates it with the present. Time is a powerful force in the novel, especially past time. There is a sense, articulated by Richard Thomas, that the continuum of life is dependent on the continuum of the farm.

Cohen examines the implications of breaking such continuity by presenting Erik who is trying to construct a life separate from his ancestors and their farm. Throughout the novel Cohen presents time as a continuum, but there is also a strong sense of the end of an era or a fullness of time with the death of Richard, the last member of the Thomas family to live on and work the family farm. In addition to these general forces of time, each main character either possesses or occupies an individual concept of time which greatly influences his approach to life. Both time and place exert enormous pressures on the characters in this novel, a fact made dramatic by Erik's efforts to free himself from both elements.

Time is very important to the structure of The Colours of War. This novel is set in a politically unstable and physically threatening future, but the reader is assured of closure and unity because the story begins at the end of the events to be narrated. Here time is a linear manifestation of the destiny of events. The framework for the events is a journey which allows for a quality of flowing and imposes a sense of duration on continuous change. Cohen emphasises, in this novel, the difference between two kinds of time, *kiros* and *chronos*. The memories presented are of significant events which have shaped Theodore's life. Although the events presented may appear disordered and discontinuous they are given meaningful continuity through the structure of Theodore's journey from Vancouver to Salem.

The geneological imperative which is so strong in The Disinherited is much less imposing in The Colours of War, but it still informs the narrative structure. One legacy of the past which Theodore's father has given him is the place Salem. When he feels totally displaced and alienated in Vancouver Theodore attempts to return to Salem which he perceives, not as a Utopia, but as a place where people tend to know who they are. The trip east is fraught with many violent occurrences, but Cohen is clear that these happenings are man-made rather than natural. When he reaches Salem, Theodore is far from secure, physically, but he comes to terms with the landscape which is harsh but which can provide sustenance and a constant in a time which is uncertain and fragmentary. The novel reinforces the value that "it is good to go home". Salem becomes a symbol of a place in which time can become meaningful.

In The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, Cohen uses time and place to reflect the dualities of life. Salem, in this novel, is past its prime, quite dilapidated yet it is a place where its inhabitants feel at home and fulfilled. The cycles of time bring good and evil and the acceptance of this fact leads to serenity.

The Salem of this novel has a curious detachment from the rest of the world around it. In the novel it appears to exist as a microcosm which is independent of surrounding geography, although it is contrasted sharply and favourably with urban Toronto. This place reflects a modern irony which is concerned with the awareness and acceptance of disorder and chaos in the world. Cohen also uses place to explore a psychological dualism which is concerned with the

correlation between the landscapes in which the minds of men and the bodies of men act. As well, place provides a paradigm for the characters places in time: a sugar bush is presented in its former productiveness, through memory, in its present state of decay, and in a vision of future fruitfulness.

As in the first two novels, Cohen, in The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, works with chronological and inner time, recognizing that the human consciousness experiences both simultaneously. The private clocks of characters measure time by value and intensity. Through memory, the reconstruction of past events become emotionally charged re-interpretations. The present of the novel balances the contrast between the flood of past memories and the inevitability of future death. There is great emphasis on the irreversible movement of time towards death, but this is ameliorated by the fact that time is a neutral force. In this novel Cohen uses time and place to present the dualities of life as well as to reconcile them.

There are many gothic elements in the first three novels, but it is the fourth, Flowers of Darkness, which is truly gothic in form. The setting creates both ironic and dramatic contrasts. The picturesque town of Salem appears to be serene, superficially, but it is soon apparent that it possesses an atmosphere of brooding terror and is inhabited by demonic people. The violent summer storms are concurrent with emotional and spiritual crises in the inhabitants of Salem. The small town is a closed world which mirrors the reflections of its people. Annabelle and Finch are psychologically and socially alienated and neither is able to fit

in or to feel at home. Both are able to find a temporary sense of belonging in their sexual relationship, but even in that intimacy there is a strong awareness of the fleetingness of the moment. Cohen uses the abyss as a metaphor for the effects and sometimes the cause of evil and damnation. The physical setting and its atmosphere evoke a strong awareness of death - psychological, spiritual corporal.

The foreboding atmosphere is enhanced by Cohen's use of time as a device to create suspense in this novel. Time ticks away with a strong sense of impending doom. This great pressure gives every action a highly charged significance. As the characters are forced into various actions by time, it is clear that the all-important moment will be one of finality rather than of transformation.

There are fewer flashbacks and memories incorporated into the narrative of Flowers of Darkness than in the other novels, because of the explosiveness of the present. The ones which Cohen does relate provide understanding of the present conditions of the main characters. References to the past also reinforce Cohen's recurrent theme that time and life are by nature cyclical. There is a consciousness of the power of the past, particularly that of hereditary legacy in this novel, but the main emphasis is that time brings both good and evil in each generation.

In the four novels discussed in this thesis, Cohen has examined Salem from four different vantage points. In each one he uses time and place differently. All the novels are concerned with the problems of inheritance and disinheritance, with the continuity and disruption of time. All the characters are trying to understand

how they fit in their time and place. Cohen's characters and their problems are set in a Canadian landscape, but they are as universal as comedy and tragedy. Cohen's development of four novels on roughly the same ground provides an opportunity to study how subtle differences in time and place influence the form of the works. A study of the novels together shows how Cohen has explored man's relationships with the land, with time, and with himself from four different perspectives. The result is four novels distinctive in content as well as in form which, taken together, contribute to a larger vision.

Endnotes

Chapter One

¹ Matt Cohen, The Disinherited, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 41. All further references to this work appear in the text.

² Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. xi.

³ Margaret Atwood, Survival, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), p. 113.

⁴ Ibid, p. 113.

⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁶ D.G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 35.

⁷ Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind", in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. E. Mandel, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 260.

⁸ Ibid, p. 261

⁹ John Moss, Patterns of Isolation, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 80.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 55.

¹¹ Atwood, p. 184.

¹² Ibid, p. 185

- 13 Ricou, p. 7.
- 14 John Moss, Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel,
(Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 187.
- 15 Ibid, p. 187.
- 16 Jones, p. 37.
- 17 Jones, p. 164.
- 18 Ricou, p. 112.
- 19 Moss, Sex, p. 188.
- 20 Paul Shepard, Man and the Landscape, (New York: Alfred
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- 22 Moss, Sex, p. 192.
- 23 George Woodcock, The World of Canadian Writing, (Seattle:
University of Washington Press, 1980.), p. 137.
- 24 Ibid, p. 136.
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34 Ibid, p. 96.

35 Ibid, p. 103.

36 Ibid, p. 105.

37 Ibid, p. 107.

38 Moss, Sex, p. 194.

39 Lecker, p. 108.

40 Moss, Sex, p. 190.

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- 42 A.M.J. Smith, "Contemporary Poetry" in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, ed. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, (Toronto: McGraw, 1967), p. 33.

Chapter Two

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2 A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel, (London: Peter Nevill Limited, 1952), p. 90.

3 Ibid, p. 90.

4 Patricia Tobin, Time and the Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 4.

5 E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1954), p. 66.

6 Tobin, p. 6

7 Tobin, p. 6.

8 Eleanor H. Hutchens, "An Approach Through Time", in Towards a Poetic Fiction by M. Spilks, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 57.

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10 Ibid, p. 42.

11 Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 47.

12 Mendilow, p. 31.

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3 Alan Wilde, Horizons of Assent, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 136.

4 William Handy, Modern Fiction: A Formalist Approach, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 8.

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- 12 Bayer-Berenbaum, p. 30.
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- 17 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel,
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- 18 D.L. Higdon, Time and English Fiction, (London: MacMillan
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