"THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD":
DISCOURSE IN ETHEL WILSON'S NOVELS

by

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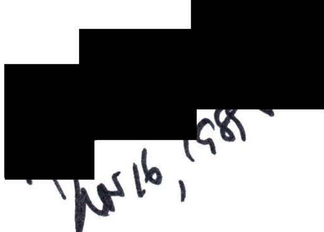

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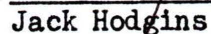

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ABSTRACT

Criticism of Ethel Wilson's fiction has focussed primarily on characterization and theme, and has been mainly interpretative in nature. Current literary theory has to date had little influence on the study of her work. Because discourse plays a prominent role in Wilson's writing, this thesis undertakes to analyze the effects of discourse in Swamp Angel and The Equations of Love.

At the level of story, a character's discourse reflects his or her world view. Characters' use of performative language, their silences, their fictionalizations, are examined in order to discover how these elements of discourse generate the events in each story.

This thesis defines "plot" as that part of the narrator's discourse which presents the story. At this level, names of characters are shown to constitute a language of their own; they, along with religious, military, and other discourses contribute to the multi-voicedness of these texts. As well, commentary on the plot is a prominent feature of Wilson's writing. The final chapter addresses --and refutes--the generally accepted views that the narration in Swamp Angel and The Equations of Love is "third-person omniscient," and that passages of commentary frequently intrude on the plots.

This study of discourse employs methodology proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Gérard Genette; it leads to the conclusion that Wilson's writing presages the development of postmodernism in Canadian Fiction.

Examiners:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title

Abstract ii

Table of Contents iii

Acknowledgements iv

Introduction 1

Chapter One .. Story: Speaking People and Their Discourse 8

Chapter Two ..Telling Words: The Discourse of Plot 39

Chapter Three..Narration: Assessing the Speech of Others 84

Conclusion 117

Notes 119

Works Cited 121

Additional Bibliography 124

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Introduction

> Conversation is a book of knowledge concerning people.
> Ethel Wilson, "A Cat Among the Falcons"

> The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the _speaking person and his discourse_.
> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

Ethel Wilson's novels are demonstrably concerned with the effects of discourse: the discourse of the characters and of the narrators. Criticism of her work, which has been greater in volume than her own output, has nevertheless focussed mainly on aspects of narrative other than discourse. In _Canadian Writers and Their Works_, Beverley Mitchell gives a summary of the criticism of Wilson's fiction published up to 1982. Most articles are concerned with recurrent themes

> or distinctive elements of style, structure, and character development--and most make at least passing reference to the moral-philosophical climate of the fiction. (1985, 99)

Other critics compare Wilson's novels with those of other writers, or relate her themes and moral stance to her education and upbringing. When her use of language is referred to, it is in generalities: "a certain _froideur_ in the narrative voice" (Stouck, 1977, 74); "a variety of prose styles, each exquisitely appropriate to its subject" (Mitchell 1985, 228). Such criticism both originates from and perpetuates a view of the novel as a mirror image of reality rather than as a work of art constructed of language.

At the conclusion of the "Ethel Wilson Symposium," held at the University of Ottawa in 1981, W.H. New noted the tendency of Wilson's critics to "equate the physical world with the fictional one," and outlined work that remained to be done.

> our fundamental concern as critics is with the language, the text, and the world (moral, companionable, serious, cruel, joyous, violent) that the text creates. We need yet . . . to look more closely at the text--to hear its voices, to elucidate its structures, to appreciate its social syntax--and we need to be able to criticize as well as to praise. (1982, 144)

Since that time, Mary-Ann Stouck and Reingard Nischik have applied structural theory to two of Wilson's novels, while Mitchell and Brent Thompson have touched on the narrat ng voices in her texts. Heather Murray has met New's challenge directly with an essay on "Metaphor and Metonymy, Language and Land in Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel."[1]

Murray's attempt to cover a great deal of ground in a small space and her extended discussion of "Christian typology and symbolism" leave little room for examination of metonymy and metaphor, yet she does approach Wilson's fiction from a fresh theoretical perspective. Her analysis of Swamp Angel, based on Tzvetan Todorov's two levels of the speech act--"discourse" and "narrative"--points to the need for more examination of Wilson's writing in the light of current literary theory.

In this thesis, I intend to study Wilson's Swamp Angel and the two novellas in The Equations of Love from a previously unexamined perspective, namely the interaction of the various levels of

discourse in the text. Mikhail Baktin's dialogic model of the novel is of particular relevance to my approach. Bakhtin sees languages as being "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words" (291). A novel, then, is perceived as an artistic representation of the intermingling and colliding of discourses, i.e. world views. Modernism's concern with comprehension --or the lack of it--of one given world, is opened up by this postmodernist focus on the boundaries between worlds.

Although Ethel Wilson was a contemporary of the modernists, we can detect in her fiction what contemporaries might define as a postmodernist interest in the ways in which discourses combine and collide. In one of her first letters to her editor at Macmillan Publishers, Wilson quotes V.S. Pritchett, whose criticism she admires, as saying that writers should be encouraged "not to write what is called good prose, but to record talk or conversation which often has the complexity of a personal style in it." She says she finds this advice "quite cheering" (Stouck 1987, 121). There is evidence in her texts of her efforts to follow Pritchett's advice, it is indeed "the speaking man and his discourse" which gives her writing its distinctive style.

Discourse, according to Emile Benveniste, is "the manifestation of language in living communication," language being "an ensemble of formal signs . . . combined in structures and systems" (110). Discourse, then, is the use of language for the purpose of communication, including that communication which one carries on silently with oneself. Bakhtin, stressing the need to combine the "formal"

approach--the study of language merely as a system of signs--with the "ideological" approach--the study of a message's cultural and historical content--asserts:

> Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. (259)

Based on this concept, my analysis of the discourse in Wilson's texts will consider the relationship between form and content as well as the relationships between the speaker, the discourse and the receiver. In a novel, the discourse of the characters and the events of the narrative itself are presented by means of the narrator's discourse. In a less direct sense, the text as a whole is a form of discourse which the author--or implied author--"speaks" to the reader, and to which the reader replies in the dialogic act of reading. There are obviously several levels of discourse in a novel, and, in order to examine them more closely, it is necessary to separate the text into layers; for that purpose, I have used the narratological approach suggested by Gérard Genette.

I have selected Genette's study, entitled Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method, because it foregrounds the act of narrating. Wilson's narrators comment freely on their plots, making mandatory an approach which allows examination of their commentary. Genette's work does not cover every point I wish to treat in Wilson's writing, and so I have referred to the work of other theorists wherever it contributes insight. In his critique of Genette's work, Todorov

argues that it constitutes criticism rather than theory; he points out a feature that I value. In that Genette's theory derives from work with specific texts--mainly Proust's Recherche du temps perdu--, he provides concrete examples which have helped me to see different ways of reading Wilson's writing. For example, I use Genette's definitions of "narrative" as a means of distinguishing among the different layers of discourse in Wilson's texts.

Genette notes that the word "narrative" signifies three distinct concepts. It can mean "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events," which Genette terms récit. Because this discourse is given structure and order by a narrator, I am calling this aspect of the text "plot."[2] "Narrative" may also mean "the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse" (1980, 25; emphasis added). Genette labels this usage histoire; I shall call it "story." Finally, "narrative may also refer to "the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself" (26), which Genette designates as narration, and which I, too, will refer to as "narration."

In brief, then, I will discuss three levels of discourse in Wilson's writing: at the level of story, the discourse of the characters; at the level of plot, the discourse in which the narrator recounts the story, and, in a separate chapter, those passages of narration in which the narrator comments upon the plot.

In the first chapter, on "story," I will discuss the characters'

discourse in "Tuesday and Wednesday," "Lilly's Story," and Swamp Angel. I will show how Wilson has taken care to give her characters individuality through their discourse, in keeping with Bakhtin's contention that

> [t]he language used by characters in the novel, how they speak, is verbally and semantically autonomous; each character's speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another's language. (315)

One of the most important elements of these texts is the effect which each character's discourse has on the others. In this chapter, then, I will indicate how a character's discourse determines the events of the story, showing that they are "linguistically constructed" in two different senses. Of the many types of discourse present, I will focus on the effects of performative language, of silence as a form of discourse, and of the fictionalization in which most characters engage.

The next two chapters will focus on the narrators' discourse in the three texts. Chapter Two will deal with the plot, the telling of the story. I will attempt to show how the names of the characters form a subtext that is one of the many "languages" at work in the text. Choosing from the many instances available, I will analyze the effects on the plot of several discourses "colliding" or intermingling. Finally, I will re-examine the fictionalization mentioned in the previous chapter, this time in its role as second-degree narration embedded in the plot.

The third chapter will focus on the passages of commentary which form a significant portion of the narrators' discourse in

Wilson's texts. I will address the accusations of intrusiveness that have been levelled at Wilson's narrators, and point up various restrictions on the narrators' supposed omniscience. I will then explore the subjectivity of each narrator, and the extent to which narrators and characters merge in the process of narrating. A brief concluding statement will follow this chapter.

Through this discourse analysis, I hope, then, to demonstrate that Ethel Wilson's writing is primarily, in Bakhtin's words, "[t]he transmission and assessment of the speech of others, the discourse of another, . . . one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech" (337). Her stories are about speaking people and their discourse, and the plot and narration are, of course, products of discourse. A study of the discourse in these texts relocates Wilson in Canadian literary tradition; although she is generally thought of as a modernist, her subject matter and her approach to it many, in many respects, be termed postmodernist.

Chapter One

Story: Speaking People and Their Discourse

In an essay describing the difficulty of answering questions about her writing, Ethel Wilson refers to "the great ceaselessly vocal world known as 'the social world,' where conversation never stops" (Stouck 108). Her stories are mainly about that world of conversation, exploring how people's discourse affects their own and each others' lives. "Story" is what Gerard Genette calls "the signified or narrative content "even if this content turns out, in a given case, to be low in dramatic intensity or fullness of incident)" (1980, 27). In _The Equations of Love_ and _Swamp Angel_, then, speech acts must be considered as the primary constituent of the narrative content. Much of the dialogue in "Lilly's Story" and _Swamp Angel_, moreover, takes place "in the mind alone"; instances of inner discourse must also be considered as events. "Language, when in _means_," in Bakhtin's view, "is somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone else is one's own inner addressee" (Holquist xxi). Every speech act, then,--internal or external--is part of a dialogue.

In this chapter, then, I want to demonstrate how the events of the stories in _The Equations of Love_ and _Swamp Angel_ are determined by the characters' discourse. After discussing its role, I intend to focus on performative utterances and silence, two of the many "languages" colliding there. One character's silence invites another to fill the gap with fictionalizing, and I will consider

instances of this use of discourse in all three texts. Initially, I plan to show how each character's parole--the unique acts of speech which, taken collectively, form his or her discourse--functions at the level of story.

In all of her characterization, Wilson takes pains with idiosyncracies of grammar and diction. Much of the surprise, the humour, and the complexity of her novels springs from the characters' discourse rather than from their actions. As Emile Benveniste observes, "It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of a man" (224); within Wilson's fictional world, each character's parole reveals aspects of his/her personality.

In "Tuesday and Wednesday," for example, the grammatical errors of Mort and Myrtle Johnson, Vicky Tritt--"'They was a man . . . they was two men'"--and other characters reflect the speakers' relative lack of education, and indicate that they are in a lower social class than their employers, who use standard English (albeit peppered with adjectives and italics). The paroles of these educationally limited characters contrast sharply with that of Mrs. H.Y. Dunkerley and Mrs. H.X. Lemoyne, revealing what W.H. New calls "a far greater sense of a Canadian class structure in these novels than we usually admit" (1982, 143).

Along with indicating social standing, each character's parole reflects qualities of personality and attitude. Myrtle, attempting to determine the sex of a kitten, is assertive: "'And a party told

me . . . that if it's a she, they's a place shaped like a violet under its tail....'"' Mort's reply is self-deprecating: "'That don't look to me like no violet, but I wouldn't know.' 'Then it's a tom ... that's certny no violet'" (61). These few lines of discourse reflect both their relationship to each other and their respective world views.

Similarly, the careless grammar of Myrtle's Aunt Emblem works against her carefully arranged appearance--and her supposedly "emblematic" role--, while her voluptuousness expresses itself in hyperbole:

> You should have heard Mr. Thorsteinsen! Say, that man's a scream! Him and me were partners and did we have all the cards. Once I went two spades and Mr. Thorsteinsen went straight up to seven and I had to play it ! I nearly died! (22)

This speech, coming from "the jewel in the dark ear of the Ethiope" (19), places her in an ironic light from her first appearance.

Another characteristic of Mrs. Emblem's discourse is her ability to turn others' remarks to their disadvantage:

> "Don't be silly, Myrtle Hopwood. You act like a chile. Mort should certny take a stick to you." "I'd like to see Mort Johnson take a stick to me!" "That's what I said," Mrs. Emblem would say, pleasantly. "I'd like to see it too." (26)

Mrs. Emblem interprets Myrtle's antithetic figure literally, setting up an irony that is repeated in the narrator's discourse at the level of plot. This verbal skill makes her the one character Myrtle's eyelids--almost characters in themselves--cannot intimidate. Myrtle, Mort, and Vicky Tritt all respond strongly to Mrs. Emblem, revealing in the process qualities of their own

Most characters in "Tuesday and Wednesday" remain unaware of the ability of language to signify more than one meaning; Mr. Dunkerley, for example, reacts violently to Mort's use of the phrase "working man," and Mort himself wonders "Who the devil's Colin?" when Mr. Mottle advises, "'Tell Mrs. Johnson to flush the colin'" (103). The humour of Mr. Mottle's authoritative misuse of medical terms--a delight to the reader--is lost on Mort.

The characters' direct speech--discourse recorded verbatim--is foregrounded by its relatively rare occurrence in Wilson's texts. Much of their dialogue, such as that between Myrtle and the policemen reporting Mort's death, is reported indirectly by the narrator. This feature both undermines and supports the delineation of character through _parole_. On the one hand, the reader must rely on the narrator for characterization; on the other, when characters do speak directly, their remarks have greater impact. Vicky Tritt's outburst to Myrtle regarding the nature of Mort's death is the more dramatic because she says almost nothing directly ("Something came into her throat as it often did when she was especially nervous" (76)) until that moment. The contrast between her habitual awkward silence and her fluency on that one occasion dramatizes both the importance of other instances of direct speech and the effort it costs her to speak. The narrator further emphasizes the uniqueness of Vicky's utterance: "she had never used up so much breath in one speech before in her life" (122). As her emotion subsides, Vicky again lapses into silence at the level of both story and plot; her discourse is reported indirectly

save for a few words she stutters in response to society's demands.

Whereas the characters in "Tuesday and Wednesday" appear to be largely unaware of the social significance of the use of language, "Lilly's Story," by contrast, may be said to be _about_ _parole_ and its relationship to social standing. After Lilly becomes aware of the difference between her own speech and manner of living and that of "folks," she is determined that her grammatical errors will not reflect badly on her daughter: "Ilve got to watch and study to be quiet so she'll never be ashamed" (196). Lilly's silence, then, in contrast to Vicky's is self-imposed. Unable to change her _parole_--the "very definition" of her, according to Benveniste--she censors herself in order to avoid the "little pitfalls of speech and observance." At the level of plot, the narrator reinforces this censorship: like Vicky Tritt's, most of Lilly's discourse is reported indirectly, with the exception of several key speeches. Lilly's efforts are successful; thanks to the influence of Mrs. Butler, for whom Lilly works as a maid, her daughter Eleanor develops both the elegant diction and aesthetic sensitivity which she herself lacks.

Once Lilly has left behind the sordid surroundings of her youth, most of the people with whom she has contact speak in standard English, providing a good example for Eleanor but forcing Lilly to continue her self-imposed censorship. Lilly restricts her discourse until she meets Miss Larue, the Toronto hairdresser who "styles" her, and Mr. Sprockett, who asks her to marry him. Their colourful--but for the most part grammatically correct--speech

serves as a bridge linking the linguistic world of Lilly's past where she had to be silent, to her present environment in which she may "speak frankly."

An altogether more complex text than "Lilly's Story" or "Tuesday and Wednesday" is Swamp Angel; here, differences in parole depend upon qualities of diction and pronunciation rather than of grammar. Edward Vardoe's crude shallowness is expressed by his sloppy tongue and open vowels: "'If you gointa show people reel estate,' he said, 'you gotta have the right car'" (17). The double "ee" in "reel estate" is echoed in "Ireen" (the name of the woman with whom Vardoe replaces Maggie), phonetically linking both of them to other long-e words such as "cheap," "sleazy," and "mean." Vardoe's and Ireen's discourse, according to Bakhtin's argument, reveals their world views. Both of them are materialistic and concerned with surface appearances, attitudes which Maggie Lloyd is fleeing.

Edward Vardoe's diction, like Aunty Emblem's aforementioned hyperbolic discourse, echoes in the breathless monologue of the woman who is Maggie's seatmate on the bus, and in the suggestive questioning of the man who warns Maggie, "'I wanna tell you that I haven't one pure thought in my head'" (61). The paroles of these characters represent the last intrusion of city values into Maggie's quest for reaffirmation of her identity in the wilderness.

Maggie herself and the people closest to her--Nell, Hilda, Haldar, Vera--use standard English with few slurrings of diction. The individuality of their discourses lies in the emotions and

attitudes revealed rather than in form. Maggie's habitual calm and inclination to silence enables her to rescue Mr. Cunningham from nearly drowning with a minimum of fuss:

> "... did I thank you ...?" asked Mr. Cunningham uncertainly.
> "I don't really know," said Maggie with her special smile, with her rats tails. "Yes, I'm sure you did."
> . . . "I'm sure, Mrs. Lloyd," began the small man in the bed, but Maggie, saying "I'll be back," was out of the door. (136-7)

Her cheerful equanimity contrasts sharply with Vera Gunnarsen's fretful, repetitive nagging: "What are we going to do if you strain that hip worse than it is! You look worn out! You're crazy!" (93). Their respective discourses shape their lives demonstrating the power of the speech act to colour, and even re-create, reality.

Discourse also determines events in "Tuesday and Wednesday" and in "Lilly's Story." Mort and Myrtle Johnson are buffeted back and forth by discourse. Mort waits anxiously for Myrtle's first word to see what kind of day it will be; her slovenly housekeeping and personal uncleanliness carry less impact than her *parole*. Mort's dependence on another's use of language to construct his day is Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in action. Rejecting the monologic belief that "a single truth is contained in a single institution . . . object . . . or identity" (Clark 348), Bakhtin

> conceives of otherness as the ground of all existence and of dialogue as the primal structure of any particular existence . . . . The self/other distinction is thus the primary opposition on which all other differences are based. (65)

Mort's perception of himself is determined by how his "other" sees

him; dialogue with Myrtle becomes the foundation of his life. Since Myrtle's views also shift in response to others' discourse, Mort's self-image proves to be a shaky structure.

Myrtle's relatively cheerful mood is destroyed by Aunty Emblem's suggestion for home improvement:

> Say, Myrtle honey, why don't you have a good scrub-up and get a pot of paint and paint that table and the chairs and the floor, too. And there's some stuff down at Woodward's that'd make you nice bright curtains . . . and cover them cushions--I'll help--and the place'd look decent. But I guess if Mort hasn't been doing so good . . . (22)

Myrtle's withering reply that they have plenty of money and that Mort would do anything for her merely elicits the unruffled response, "Well, I'm glad you know that Mort's a good husband. Last time I was here you weren't talking that way" (23). Once more, Mrs. Emblem has turned Myrtle's words to her disadvantage.

The women's dialogue both conceals and reveals the gap between the room's dingy condition and the possibilities it holds. Myrtle's acknowledgement that the place is a "dump," moreover, attaches its grimy dreariness to her character, just as Aunty Emblem's pink and ruffled abode is an extension of her own "luxurious" personality. Each woman's home functions as a form of non-verbal discourse which reflects her attitudes toward herself and her relationship to society. In this text, the characters' physical surroundings form part of the "heteroglossia" of which Bakhtin speaks: the many "languages" which intersect each other in a novel--or in reality--and which reflect "ways of conceptualizing the world" (292).

The conversation about the room determines the next action; Myrtle's frustration at not being able to intimidate her aunt gives rise to her invitation to Vicky Tritt to come in. And it is that invitation, given "with something like heartiness," which sends Vicky scuttling down the stairs and back into her "timorous world." Myrtle's "tenderness" and Mort's "kind and joking word" in their discourse with Vicky mask their seedy shabbiness in her eyes, causing her to see them as "kindly, chivalrous, handsome, elegant and an ideal couple" (25). At the conclusion of the story, Vicky--"transformed beyond herself by death . . . and by her own compassion" (120)--transcends her fear of engaging in dialogue and speaks openly.

At first, Vicky tells only the truth about what she knows of Mort's death. "Congenitally honest" herself, she is shocked when Myrtle rejects her statement that Mort was not drunk. Her determination to achieve justice for Mort leads her to invent for him a "hero's death." Her lie about his effort to save Eddie Hansen is actually closer to the truth than the misinformation delivered by the policemen, and it enables Myrtle to retain both her pride and a loving memory of her husband. Vicky's own memory of her impassioned speech warms her "by the contemplation" of it, and renders Mrs. Emblem, for once in her life, speechless. "So great is the power of the spoken word" (123) that discourse has the power to re-create Mort's life in the eyes of those whose lives continue on. The reality of his death is of less significance than what is said about it; his life and death become a linguistic construct at the story level as

well as in the plot.

Reality also undergoes linguistic reconstruction in "Lilly's Story." Lilly's youthful experience with discourse has been mainly at the level of performative language: accepting or repelling favours, taking or giving orders, avoiding punishment. Then, pregnant with her daughter, she overhears a conversation in a store:

> Mother asked me to ask you if you have any more of that Indian chutney. Daddy adores it. It simply makes a curry.
>
> Indian chutney. Daddy adores it. It simply makes a curry. What was she talking about? This was a language unknown to Lilly. . . . she was conscious of something bright and sure which these girls had and which she had not . . . . Lilly suddenly felt cheap and dusty. (166)

Lilly knows neither of chutney nor of the rhetorical possibilities of language; she falls into what Genette calls "the tiny but vertiginous space that opens up between two words having the same meaning, two meanings of the same word: two languages in the same language" (1982, 59). Lilly does understand that this is a daughter speaking of her mother, and suddenly her eyes are opened to future possibilities.

Although uneducated, Lilly intuits the power of language over reality, sensing Bakhtin's argument that different languages are "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values""(291). She wants for her unborn child the invulnerability which the girl's discourse represents to her. Unlike Myrtle Johnson, who attempts to mask reality with language, and who is not motivated to change either one, Lilly

determines to reinvent her life so that Baby may enjoy both the linguistic and material advantages of a higher social position. She believes that if she can appear respectable and her child can be taught to speak properly, others will perceive the child as belonging to a higher social class. Her undertaking reflects the observations of Emile Benveniste on the role of discourse in shaping personality:

> Through the sole fact of addressing another, the one who is speaking of himself installs the other in himself, and thereby apprehends himself, confronts himself, and establishes himself as he aspires to be, and finally historicizes himself in this incomplete or falsified history. . . . The subject's language provides the instrument of a discourse in which his personality is released and creates itself, reaches out to the other and makes itself be recognized by him. (67)

Lilly wishes to re-historicize herself and to give her child a language which will generate a perception of respectability and elevated social standing. In order to do this, she must repress her current self and replace it with a "falsified history."

From this point on, Lilly Waller is concealed by silence; the gap is filled by "Mrs. Walter Highes," a linguistic construct which becomes Lilly's present and future reality. Through her new discourse--a mixture of silence and fiction, she is perceived by others as being respectable, and she succeeds in constructing a world in which her daughter Eleanor is raised to be "better than folks." Satisfied with respectability for herself, Lilly remains silently on the margin of that world, listening and watching.

Years later in Comox, Lilly overhears another conversation, in

which Eleanor is referred to as "the maid's child" (195). This dialogue, in which Lilly participates only internally, motivates her to leave her position of service with the Butlers and seek independence as a hospital housekeeper. As Eleanor grows up, Lilly keeps watch over her discourse: "'What's the good of me bringing you here and you playing with the other kids if you're going to speak common'" (211). When Mr. Sprockett proposes marriage, Lilly's first fear is that her _parole_ will make him ashamed of her. Even when she is reassured, she still does not divulge the gap between Lilly Waller and "Mrs. Walter Hughes." Lilly Waller remains absent, and the "power of the spoken word" looms as large in her story as it does in "Tuesday and Wednesday."

In _Swamp Angel_, the story also centers on the characters' discourse. Maggie leaves Edward Vardoe without telling him she is going, because she could not have borne the

> small scenes and the big scenes and the pursuit and the shoutings if she had quite faced him. She had borne the humiliations that she had borne, but she could not endure the other. (36)

The last word in this passage refers to Edward Vardoe's verbal haranguing, the "other" of Maggie's silence. He is her "other" in other senses as well: prim where she is expansive, mean where she is generous, blustering where she is self-contained. Maggie has spent much of her time alone, and silence is a significant part of her body of language; she endures his sexual assaults, but cannot allow her silence to be violated by his language. Edward has dominated her both sexually and verbally, but it is the latter molestation which forces her silent departure.

Elsewhere in the novel, Nell Severance, Maggie's "kindred spirit," ruminates on the effect of discourse on different people--"I could say these silly things for forty years, and Philip paid no attention"--yet her daughter, Hilda, could "be galled so easily" (65) by her mother's flippant remarks. Mrs. Severance herself is affected by what is said to her. She has no wish to accompany Hilda on her trip to Vancouver Island but admits, "I do adore being asked" (66). Her delight is echoed in Maggie's response to Mr. Cunningham's job offer. "'Of course I won't go--not unless you want me to--but how lovely to be asked!'" (139). Both women want and need the recognition of themselves by the "other" whom they are addressing. As Benveniste explains,

> Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a you in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of person, for it implies that reciprocally I becomes you in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as I. (224)

Dialogue is constitutive of self psychologically as well as linguistically, as Bakhtin has pointed out, and Nell draws from Hilda's invitation a sense of her own individual importance and self-worth. During their significant final visit, Nell asserts to Maggie, "'I exist here ... and here' . . . touch[ing] her heart and her head. 'Everything of any importance happens indoors ...'" (149). Since she has been discussing fresh air, one might assume that she is comparing the inside of a dwelling with the outdoors; the gesture of her hands, however, signifies that she is referring to the inner self. Nell's insistence on the primacy of the interior life relates to

Benveniste's perception of the position of language, which he says is "in the nature of man. . . . and provides the very definition of man" (224). In Ethel Wilson's stories, discourse--the use of language to "release" personality--is shown to be one of the most powerful determinants of human behaviour.

Maggie disputes Nell's insistence on the supremacy of the internal state, but events at Three Loon Lake attest to its veracity. On the surface, the wilderness location is perfect, the fishing lodge is running smoothly, the business is growing. Underneath, however, there is growing tension between Maggie and Vera Gunnarsen, a tension generated by discourse. "(Partnership'--Maggie Lloyd was talking pretty big, wasn't she, Vera thought resentfully)" (85). As Wallace Martin points out in a discussion of Bakhtin's dialogism, "the way in which things are said becomes as visible an object of contention as the subject of dispute" (149). "Talking big" is more disturbing to Vera than the idea of sharing--or even losing--the lodge.

If Vera had expressed her resentment of Maggie's remarks immediately, the conflict--and the story--might have ended there; she chooses, however, to conceal and delay her reaction, allowing her jealousy to fester and grow. Her silence thus ensures that the narrative will continue. Like Lilly's overheard conversations and Mrs. Emblem's housekeeping hints, it is the characters' position with regard to language which determines the shape of events in this text. Pain at Haldar's inviting Maggie to live with them for the winter finally causes Vera to express her thoughts aloud. "You think you

pretty well run this place now, don't you? Just about own it" (89).
Maggie is goaded into responding: "You little damn fool. You should go down on your knees and be thankful. You <u>still</u> have your husband and your child, haven't you?" (89). Maggie's explosive pejoratives feed Vera's resentment at the same time as the implications of the last sentence move her to compassion. Vera restrains herself for a time, but she is an inveterate nagger, and it is her continued discourse that finally drives Maggie to leave Three Loon Lake:

> You're getting insufferable, giving your orders round here. Every day I hear you ordering my husband and my son about and I've kept silent. Ever since you got that china it's gone to your head. You think you own the place. You've got beyond yourself. (141)

Vera's objection to Maggie's giving orders is complex. She is concerned with possessiveness: "my husband and my son"; "your orders," "your" china. She has drawn a boundary around herself and she feels that Maggie has overstepped that line by ordering "her" possessions about. Moreover, Vera's verbal and emotional outburst emphasizes the importance as well as the effects of Maggie's performative language by indicating that Maggie does not have the right to give orders because she dows not "own the place." Someone who orders, or promises, must be in a position to perform such an act, as J.L. Austin, who introduced the term "performative," warns.

> The performative must be issued in a situation appropriate in all respects for the act in question: if the speaker is not in the conditions required for its performance (and there are many such conditions), then his utterance will be, as we call it in general, 'unhappy'. (23)

Some of the conditions Austin refers to are social position, rank,

kinship, and ownership. Because Maggie is not an owner of the lodge, but an employee, Vera regards her giving of orders as an "unhappy" utterance.

Other instances of performative speech in Wilson's texts encourage re-examination of Austin's definition. After setting up his premise that, unlike a constative one, a performative utterance must be an act and cannot be true or false, Austin himself concedes that the line between performative and constative speech is blurred, and calls for "a new doctrine, both complete and general, of _what one is doing in saying something_ . . . of what I call the speech-act" (33). I would define performative speech as an utterance designed, not to supply or to seek information, but to "modify the situation of an individual."[3] Acts of promising, ordering, naming, do exactly that, but there are other kinds of utterance in Wilson's texts whose purpose is also to "perform a modification." Vicky Tritt, having discovered that Myrtle rejects her constative utterance in regard to Mort's death, tells a lie. Vicky's act, performed in order to modify Myrtle's attitude, in my view constitutes a performative utterance. Lilly Waller fictionalizes her past in order to change people's perception of her daughter's social status; her discourse with Mr. Meeker is an act in all senses of the word. And, in the example directly above, Vera's outburst to Maggie is designed to "bring her down a peg or two." Accusing and fictionalizing are two speech acts which function performatively throughout these texts.

Two of the most effective performative utterances in _Swamp_

Angel are Nell Severance's letters to Edward Vardoe and Albert Cousins to summon them to her: "something imperious in her letter had made Edward leave the office early" (46). The crested writing paper she uses for her letter to Cousins functions as a non-linguistic signifier of authority and intrigue, it is intended to convey to its recipient the assurance that Hilda comes from a good family. The message conveyed by the paper itself--as much a fiction as Vicky's and Lilly's--is a part of Nell's discourse, along with her brief request for advice, made, not because she wants advice, but because she wishes to see Albert Cousins. Nell has employed letters to control other people's lives before: "She was now on familiar and pleasant ground. He will be enticed, she said, with her usual satisfaction" (81).

Where Nell stretches the truth with the subtlety of elegant paper, in "Tuesday and Wednesday," Mort and Myrtle abandon it entirely in order to justify themselves to their respective employers. Mort, a day and a half late for work, plays on his boss's sympathies:

> "Sawry I'm late, Mrs. Dunkerley," confessed Mort frankly. "Fact is, the wife was sick this morning. I done what I could for her (I'm as good as a woman around a sick bed) and I done up the house and left the house and made her promise she wouldn't stir." (14)

Mort's "confession" is performative in a second sense: the "facts" which he offers as support are untrue, making his "act" a genuine piece of theatre. The unrehearsed similarity between Mort's and Myrtle's stories to their respective employers suggests that they, too, have conducted these performances before:

> "I'm not feeling so good this morning," said Myrtle. "I don't know how long I'll be able to stay. Mr. Johnson brought me some tea this morning. When he saw how I looked he begged me not to come. . . . He wanted to stay home with me but I made him go because he's got a big contracting job up in West Vancouver, but he sure didn't want me to come . . . . He doesn't like me going out, and him getting good money. He thinks it reflects." (11)

Myrtle's "bit of drama," performed to reduce Mrs. H.X. Lemoyne to guilty apologies, "reflects" the compatibility of her and Mort's discourses. Because Myrtle speaks to intimidate and Mort to please, their discourse is both performative and fictionalizing in nature. Such use of language affects their interactions with other characters, helping to shape the events of their story.

As mentioned above, another character whose performative discourse modifies the story is Vicky Tritt. For the most part, Vicky speaks only to maintain minimal social contact. When polite greetings and a refusal of further hospitality have been "sufficiently well said," she flees. Her climactic speech to Myrtle at Mort's death is therefore the more dramatic. Vicky begins with a constative statement that Mort was not drunk when he died. When she sees that Myrtle is not pleased with the information, her long-held admiration for "handsome, chivalrous" Mort pushes her to describe his attempts to save Eddie Hansen as heroic. Fuelled by unfamiliar emotion and the constant fiction-making of her interior life, the step from constative reporting to performative fictionalizing is easy. And, like Mort, who "could believe himself any moment that he wanted to" (14), Vicky herself is moved by her own performance, strengthening its persuasiveness with her tears. Her one brief linguistic act

takes on a form of immortality by raising Mort in the general memory, by enhancing Myrtle's image, at least in her own eyes, and by warming Vicky's own silent and solitary evenings with the memory of its glow.

That silence itself becomes a form of discourse for Vicky, as well as for other characters in the three texts. When her neighbour asks her if she enjoyed the show, all Vicky can mumble is "'It ... I ... oh ... yes ...'" (129). Two of her words are pronouns, "substitutes," while the third is an interjection of uncertain meaning and the fourth signifies acquiescence. The spaces between the four words, and the silence which surrounds her as she flees upstairs, are what truly articulate Vicky's inability to cope with unexpected linguistic encounters. Her fear of direct speech appears to stem from her childhood; she has experienced the power of the speech act to humiliate and to inflict pain. Mrs. Emblem's loquaciousness contrasts sharply with Vicky's silence, yet even Aunty Emblem does not know what to say to comfort someone whose husband has died drunk, "and so she continue[s] to hold Myrtle in silence" (124). Aunty Emblem's is the silence of consolation, and it is brief; like Vicky's, Lilly Waller's is habitual, and functions as a shield.

Lilly's fears stem from the same source as Vicky's: the inability to sound "like folks." Lilly "[knows] that there [are] great gaps in her knowledge, and that in these gaps of inexperience she might fall, taking Baby with her" (174). It is ironic that Lilly masks these gaps with her silence, wheareas Maggie Lloyd's

silence creates gaps which others fill with their own discourse. Lilly is like Maggie, however, in that she uses silence not only for protection but also as a form of communication. "She . . . found that she would not marry Mr. Meakins and that she could make that apparent to Mr. Meakins as easy as easy without making talk" (216). One may interpret "making talk" in two ways as "generating gossip" and/or as "discourse." Lilly has no further dialogue with Mr. Meakins, and yet he is perfectly aware that the relationship will go no farther. Lilly, much in the way that Nell Severance expresses herself non-verbally with crested writing paper, occasionally increases the power of her silent communication with tears, "round, dewy and slow" (188). Silence and the language of the body are frequently combined in the discourse which Wilson's characters employ.

Maggie Lloyd's silence has been a part of her discourse from her early years. "Maggie, brought up from childhood by a man, with men, ha[s] never learned the peculiarly but not wholly feminine joys of communication" (SA 32). "Her pleasures [are] very few, and [are] not communicable . . . of the sort that costs nothing but an extension of the imagination" (24). Like another only child, Alan Gunnarsen, Maggie has developed an active interior dialogue. Her response to Edward Vardoe's verbal onslaughts is to become more and more silent, avoiding verbal confrontation at all costs. By concealing her plans to leave him, she also protects her friends Nell and Hilda Severance from his anger. When Vardoe does confront them, Nell herself uses silence in concert with the spinning of the Swamp Angel to calm and intimidate him. In her brief letter acknowledging her departure,

Maggie explains: "'It's easier for you both and easier for me if I don't tell you where I've gone. . . . I won't talk about "feelings"'" (41).

That Maggie has clothed her feelings in silence for some time is evidenced in the brief chapter describing her early years, after the deaths of her husband and daughter, "Mrs. Lloyd went about as if she were made of stone" (52). Only gradually has "her cruel loss and misery . . . receded within her and lay still" (58), enabling her to look at, and talk to, a little girl who reminds her of her daughter.

Not only is silence a natural part of Maggie's character, but it also acts as a restorative. Her three days of solitude by the Similkameen River enable her to deal with her feelings about leaving Edward Vardoe and ready her for the next stage in her life. Each time, moreover, that she is forced to endure a verbal barrage from Vera, she flees to the lake for solace. There, "without human relations, Courtesy Week, or a flame thrower" (100), the silent rhythms of the seasons restore her equanimity. These instances give credence to her contention that she left her husband without warning because she could not endure the arguments and scenes that he would have created. It is silence, not speech, which "provides the very definition" of Maggie.

Maggie's use of silence as a form of discourse is not always successful; like Edward Vardoe, her voluble seatmate on the bus natters on obliviously. When Maggie explains her wish for silence,

the other woman is offended and becomes "loudly silent," obviously not a natural state for her. With Vera, as well, Maggie hopes to forestall conflict by remaining silent in the face of growing hostility; it is not to be. Vera is unable to incorporate silence effectively into her discourse. When Haldar clasps her hand on the way down from the lake, she thinks,

> Can I speak now while he's gentle like this? She [thinks] Is this my chance to speak? She [thinks] (but not long enough) and then she [says] in her folly "I wish I never had to see this place again." (112)

Vera's words fling up a wall between herself and her husband that is not to be dismantled within the text. Similarly, she cannot restrain herself from spilling out her jealousy to Maggie.

Seeing that confrontation is inevitable, Maggie meets it straightforwardly: "If words have to be spoken, let them be spoken now" (88). She stops Vera's flood of venom with the impact of one word: "'You still have your husband and your child, haven't you?'" Without referring directly to herself, she discloses the huge gap in her life; "still" turns the "you" of her discourse into "I." Her overt silence regarding the loss of her family continues until Henry Corder points out that it has allowed gossip to fill the space. She then tells her story as simply as possible, with a conspicuous--to the reader[4]--silence in regard to Edward Vardoe.

After Vera's attempted suicide, Maggie, like Aunty Emblem in "Tuesday and Wednesday," faces a situation where consolation is required but words fail her. In contrast to Mrs. Emblem, whose natural medium is speech but who remains silent, Maggie, the silent

one, feels compelled to speak, and croons the meaningless but comforting phrases of a mother hushing a troubled child, "'There then . . . there then ... there then ...'" (147) Like Nell's stationery, like Vicky's folded hands and Lilly's tears, Maggie's strong arms must carry the rest of her message non-verbally.

Silences, whether voluntary or involuntary, invite Wilson's characters to fill them with fictions. Linda Hutcheon, in her study of The French Lieutenant's Woman in Narcissistic Narrative, observes that everyone "constantly fictionalizes his own life, that the act of making fictions is a natural and 'vital' human function" (58). In a sense, the fiction-makers in Wilson's novels are acting out the creative process by which the novelist generates the novel itself. In that same sense, The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel may be seen as postmodern metafictional texts, interested in the process of their own production. (Further evidence to support this contention will emerge in the chapter on the narrators' commentary.)

Fiction-making plays a prominent role in The Equations of Love. In "Lilly's Story," the fabrication of a husband changes the direction of Lilly's entire life. In "Tuesday and Wednesday," Vicky's lie about Mort's death is simply the last of the many fictions with which the characters fill their days. Myrtle and Mort invent stories about each other to suit the needs of the moment. Like all their constructed narratives, their fictional illnesses or "contracting jobs" are responses to a desire, in these cases, to a desire for sympathy or prestige.

The fictionalization in which Aunty Emblem and Vicky Tritt indulge fulfils the desire for a richer life. The aridity of Vidky's life is clearly delineated, and, regardless of the effulgent descriptions of Mrs. Emblem's "golden popularity," she has for companionship one friend, a reluctant niece, and an aging beau who, in the words of Mr. Mottle, is "okay for an evening, but for marriage, he's too flash" (101). Both women fill in the empty evenings by immersing themselves in the society pages and classified columns of the newspapers. Vicky

> meets, marries and discards three or four men in turn in the course of the evening, but without desire or envy. She takes--and leaves--several positions. She loses herself in the funnies. She goes to bed. Her routine is successful, and prevents her from too often being aware of the desert of loneliness in which she dwells. (73)

Like Sarah Woodruff in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Vicky exists in "another world, as an imaginative construct, a fiction of her own making" (Hutcheon 67). Vicky, too, frees herself through her fictions from the suffering in her real world, and her lie about Mort's heroism derives in part from "the newspapers which [are] her fairy tales" (122).

Mrs. Emblem's imaginary romancing provides ironic comment on her allegedly full social life. She replaces Mr. Thorsteinsen with a "Scandinavian gentlemen well fixed, [desiring] to meet widow fond of dancing and shows, object companionship and natrimony no triflers" (55). Not recognizing the irony of her criticism, she discards him, reasoning that anyone who must depend on the personal columns for

companionship must have something wrong with him. That observation does not prevent her from reading the other ads:

> She lives through each of these mysterious romances each night, weighs them and sometimes makes her selection. They are real life. But she would never dare . . . these things happen in the mind alone, only the body acts, and Mrs. Emblem will never write to the English gentleman. (55)

Mrs. Emblem does not realize that the writers of the ads are creating their own fictions, or that the demarcation between the imagination and "real life" is not as distinct as she would make it. Vicky Tritt provides proof that occasionally the most timid mind overcomes its fears and causes the body to act in unexpected ways. That Vicky acts and Mrs. Emblem does not problematizes the opposition set up between Vicky's "inadequacy" and Mrs. Emblem's "human success." Beverley Mitchell, David Stouck and other critics accept the narrator's assertion that "Vicky Tritt does not know what it feels like to be a woman. Mrs. Emblem knows nothing else" (56), agreeing with Desmond Pacey's contention that the two women "make excellent foils for one another" (1967, 105). In my view, the parallel ways in which they alleviate their loneliness with vicarious newspaper lives undo much of the supposed contrast.

Lilly Waller also uses newspapers to add vicarious experiences to her work- and baby-bound days, but her most important fictions are generated, like Mort's and Myrtle's, to enhance her position in society, and these are the ones which determine events in her story. Linda Hutcheon observes that "fiction-making is a freedom-inducing act" (64); indeed, reinventing her past does free Lilly from the

dreary life a woman of her background could be expected to endure. Lilly moves in a direction opposite to that which Sarah Woodruff takes. toward social acceptance rather than away from it. "Mr. Walter Hughes," the respectable husband of Lilly's imagination, provides her with support as she starts out in her new life with her baby. Unlike Vicky and Mrs. Emblem and their imaginary mates, "Lilly [does] not exactly discard him" when his usefulness fades; "he might someday be needed again" (184). She indeed resurrects him in "the Valley" and in Toronto, to establish herself as a respectable widow. When Mr. Sprockett asks Lilly to marry him, the place of Walter Hughes is as last filled by a real husband. Leaving the gap between her real and her imaginary past unexplored, she admits only to the superficial falsity of wearing a wig--no, an "Adaptation"-- "I couldn't ever wear a wig" (280). Lilly's "confession" to Mr. Sprockett is, like Vicky Tritt's eulogy for Mort, more fiction than fact. Vicky is unlikely to be found out, but the possibility that Lilly's lies may return to haunt her gives her story an open-endedness lacking in "Tuesday and Wednesday."

The same subtlety found at the level of parole distinguishes the fictionalizing in Swamp Angel from that in The Equations of Love. The lives of Maggie, Nell, or Hilda are not as empty as those of the characters in the latter text; they construct their fictions for more complex purposes. As long as Nell is able to fondle the Swamp Angel, she can entertain the illusion that she is still young, beautiful, and in control of her life--and of Hilda's. "She [has] almost forgotten that the Angel was a gun" (79) until bystanders point out its true

identity after her fall. For Nell, it is a fall <u>into</u> grace, for as she relinquishes the Swamp Angel and the fictions surrounding it, she gives Hilda the freedom to live her own life in her own way. Hilda is then able to let go of the painful memories of her loveless childhood (the fictionalizing which the Swamp Angel generates for her), and give and accept love in the present. For Nell and Hilda, it is the <u>cessation</u> of fiction-making which shapes their stories.

Vera Gunnarsen's fictionalization appears to stem from the same source as Hilda's: "my mother never loved me ... and now ... look! no, I never had a break" (113). Unlike Vicky or Lilly, whose fictionalized lives are an improvement on reality, Vera invents problems where none exist. Her fictions, like Lilly's, change the direction of her life, but not for the better. Occasionally, she sees herself "frighteningly, and for a moment, as a jealous woman, and for nothing at all," (113), but that moment is brief, and the fear that Maggie is robbing her of Haldar's and Alan's affections persists. Her querulous discourse becomes the dominant element in the story: she " [spreads] dissension in her own heart and [irritates] everybody" (140). When Haldar accuses her of "making life impossible", she seeks oblivion in the lake, but the "clarifying wet cold" of the water forces her to realize that Maggie, her enemy in her fictionalized world, is, in reality, her only hope for salvation. Vera's discourse loses its hold over the story at that point; whether she can achieve balance between fiction and reality remains an unanswered question.

When the reader first meets Maggie, she herself is involved in

fiction-making. The birds flying past her window catch her attention for a moment and then she is "drawn back into the close fabric of her preoccupations" (13). She has imagined the moment of her departure from Edward Vardoe over and over again--"How many scores of times, as her hands lay still, she [has] packed these little bags" (16),--and this process has enabled her to endure living with him until she has enough money saved to be able to leave. Paradoxically, her fiction-making has both prolonged and terminated their marriage. Maggie's fiction-making is an internal discourse; it is the inner side of her placid silence. Edward Vardoe has assumed that there is no gap between her appearance and her feelings, and is shocked to discover one: "'If there was anything wrong, why didn't she say so? If she ... if there's a man ...'" (32). Immediately, he attempts to fill that gap with some fictionalization of his own. He, whose discourse comprises continual chatter and evidences little introspection, feels compelled to fill the silences created by less talkative characters.

Yet Maggie herself does fictionalize verbally on occasion. She tells Mr. Spencer at the sport shop that her name is Lloyd, turns a taxi-driver whom she barely knows into "a new friend," and then creates a fictional future in which they are partners in "a certain kind of business" (27). This is one of the few examples of fiction-making in these stories which concerns another person's future rather than the speaker's past. "Fiction-making as a potential mode of control," says Hutcheon (65), is condemned in The French Lieutenant's Woman in epigraphs from Marx and in Sarah's refusal to

marry Charles. Although articulating it less clearly, Wilson's writing takes the same position. Mort Johnson gets into trouble when his fictionalizing involves Mr. Dunkerley; Mrs. Emblem will not submit herself to forming a connection with the writer of a personal advertisement. When Lilly Waller uses fiction as a weapon to win a place with the Butlers, the narrator observes, "Performance of a duty . . . with what <u>appears</u> to be affection . . . generates a responsibility" (199; emphasis added), and criticizes Lilly for "discarding" the Butlers without concern. Joey's reply to Maggie's proposal of a future partnership is understandably evasive, and the arrangement does not come to pass. And part of Vera's hostility towards Maggie is generated by the latter's verbal painting of

> a picture of Three Loon Lake lodge, expanding, running smoothly as it well might, with Joey's strength and activity and--perhaps--adaptability, his car, and a stake in the place. (85)

Vera feels that Maggie has "gone beyond herself" in her fiction-making as she has in giving orders. Rightly or wrongly, she rejects fiction-making that "does not respect the integrity of the protagonist" (Huteheon 64).

Maggie's most notable fictionalization is appropriately silent: the omission of her marriage to Edward Vardoe from the story of her past. "That was as if it had not been" (117). Since it <u>has</u> been, and is the reason for her arrival at Three Loon Lake, not mentioning it is a fiction of considerable significance. In Julia Kristeva's terms, Maggie absents herself as "Mrs. Edward Vardoe" in order to re-create herself as "Mrs. Tom Lloyd." The "text" that emerges fulfils its function:

> to lift the repression that weighs heavily on this moment of struggle, one that particularly threatens or dissolves the bond between subject and society, but simultaneously creates the conditions for its renewal. (Kristeva 208)

According to Kristeva's argument, Maggie "Lloyd" is able to break the bonds of her marriage to Edward Vardoe, a socially approved relationship. Even as she does so, she is "creating the conditions for [the] renewal" of her relationship with society. Where Lilly Waller invents a husband, Maggie conceals one, but the result is the same: each woman's fictionalized, linguistically constructed position is an improvement on the reality it masks.

Maggie's story, like Vicky's and Lilly's, ends with fiction-making. When Henry Corder wonders if she can help Haldar and Vera to become reconciled, she replies, "'I can't, Henry. Maybe Alan can without ever knowing it. Perhaps there's a way. I think there might be a way'" (153-54). Her language is reminiscent of her assertion to Joey the taxi-driver, "'I know what I want. I've worked it all out and I know I can do it'" (27). In between, however, Maggie has learned from Nell Severance that "'You know nothing about it. You don't know what will happen'" (149); that understanding has caused Maggie to change her verb from "I know" to "I think." That shift indicates Maggie's realization that she is a participant in the interweaving of the future, rather than the author of it. While still making fiction about someone else's future, she now acknowledges the gap between language and reality, between "things happening in the mind" and "the body acting." Within that gap lie Vera's lack of philosophy, Haldar's indifference towards

Vera, and Maggie's own desire to have a lodge of her own. Maggie has concealed the past and has tossed a symbol of it--the Swamp Angel--into the lake, but the question remains as to whether fiction-making will free her of its influence.

The stories which Ethel Wilson tells are primarily about "speaking persons and their ideological worlds" (Bakhtin 365). The lives of Maggie, Lilly, Vicky, and other characters are influenced, even created, by their utterances. Each is given her own unique style of speaking, her individual parole, which reveals elements of personality and a world view. Each one's discourse smooths or roughens her daily path, and causes that path to turn at sudden angles. To highlight or conceal certain aspects of her life, she generates her own fictions. When she is silent, others attempt to fill the space with their own discourse, enhancing or worsening reality. The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel meet Bakhtin's definition of a novel as "a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262). The artistic organization of these various discourses is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Telling Words: The Discourse of Plot

The plot of a novel is constituted by the discourse which tells about the characters and events. This same discourse also shapes the reader's response to character, action and theme. Genette says of plot that, as narrative, "it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it" (1980, 29). As the "recounter" of the story, the narrator orders its events, compresses or extends periods of time, controls the perspective(s) from which the story is viewed. Her[5] decisions in these areas shape her discourse, and her discourse contains "the signs by which literature draws attention to itself as literature and points out its mask" (Genette 1982, 29). There are many such signs in Wilson's texts: the personification of objects, the objectification of persons, figures such as repetition and oxymoron, allusions, ironies. Many of these words and phrases "'taste'," in Bakhtin's words, "of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation" (293). In other words, there are many "languages" present in the plot, a condition which Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia," and here I will discuss the significance of this aspect of Wilson's texts.

In the heteroglossic context of her fiction, the names which Wilson chooses for her characters are so rich in meaning that they constitute a subtext which comments on the plot. Originating in a variety of national languages, they could be said to represent a

language of their own, one which I will examine in its relation to the plot. I will also study the effects on the narrators' discourse of the discourses associated with religion, the military, birth, and classified advertising. I have selected these examples from a range of possibilities, some because they are found in all three texts, and others for their unique influence on a particular plot. The final section of this chapter will focus on the relationship of the characters' own narratives to the plot; Bakhtin suggests that since the characters' discourse is "the speech of another in another's language," it may "refract authorial intentions, and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second language for the author" (315). My intention, then, is to demonstrate the considerable degree in which The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel bear out Bakhtin's contention that, in a true novel, " t he plot itself is subordinated to the task of coordinating and exposing languages to each other" (365).

Names are the foundation of any language, and Wilson's writings reveal a particular interest in and knowledge of names.[6] Some of the most polysemic signifiers her narrators employ are the names of their characters. In "Tuesday and Wednesday" in particular, a character's name performs several functions. "Mortimer," according to the Dictionary of Given Names, signifies "(dweller by the) still water," an ironic choice of name for Mortimer Johnson in view of the nature of his death (Lougheed 80). And, as David Stouck has pointed out, Mortimer's nickname, Mort, is a play on the French word for

death, <u>mort</u> (1977, 79). The components of Mor-time-r, then, reveal two of the novella's themes: death and time. Mort's time has run out; his name forecasts his death from the first page of text. Adding to the sense of other-worldliness is the introduction of Mort's angel on the same page. Working against that idea, however, is the description of the sensuous pleasure Mort experiences from the rubbing of his woolen underwear against his skin; he is physical and very much alive. As we saw in the discussion of Mrs. Emblem and Vicky Tritt in Chapter One, friction between one discourse and another complicates much of the characterization in "Tuesday and Wednesday."

Mort and Myrtle employ similar kinds of discourse; the similarities begin with their names. With the changing of a phoneme, "Mort" becomes "Myrt." At this level, the only difference between them is a sound. And "Myrtle" is also a double signifier; it is the name of a plant which is related to death: "myrtle" is said to originate from the same root as "myrrh," the name of an aromatic gum used in biblical times for embalming (Weidenham 310). The herb myrtle, moreover, is noted for its astringent qualities (Dobelis 235), making the name appropriate for a woman who "controls and also aggravates her husband" (<u>EL</u> 7). These associations make a comment on Mort and Myrtle's lives; it is an ironic comment, for it is shared between the narrator and the reader outside the world of the characters.

Myrtle's aunt, Mrs. Emblem, is given a name which is also a sign of her function in the text. She is what Genette describes

frequently-used poetic figures to be: "pure emblem: a standard, above the troop of words and phrases, on which one may read not only 'here, a ship', but also 'here, poetry'" (1982,58), or, in Aunty Emblem's case, "here, femininity." She represents all that is wanting in Myrtle and her cousin Vicky: she is sexually attractive, an excellent cook, a good housekeeper and a warm friend. Her function is so much more important than her individual self that she is not given a Christian name. There is tarnish on this golden emblem of womanhood, however: "she is perhaps too fat, now, to be beautiful" (EL 51), and, as her vicarious newspaper life indicates, being a symbol can be lonely. In that respect, Mrs. Emblem is more like than unlike Victoria May Tritt.

Myrtle's cousin--on the other side of the family from Aunty Emblem--has been given a name that is too large for her. Redolent of flowers and femininity, permeated with the dignity of the late queen, Victoria May's name totters on her as unsteadily as she herself minces along the sidewalk. It also evokes the ethos of imperial ambition and repressed sensuality of the Victorian era, making it an ironic name for a woman as devoid of power and as fearful of human contact as she. In "Tritt," by contrast, there is the echo of "trite," meaning "worn out," "devoid of freshness or novelty" (OED). The tension and unease in Vicky's life is presaged by the tension between the two halves of her name.

Other names in "Tuesday and Wednesday" worthy of mention are "Mrs. H.Y. Dunkerley" and "Mrs. H.X. Lemoyne," the interchangeable upper-class employers of Mort and Myrtle, who enjoy an "initial"

position on the social ladder (but whose second initials are those used to signify "an unknown" in mathematics). There is "Maybelle Slazenger," a delightful blend of delicacy and sleaze, making its possessor a fitting friend for Aunty Emblem. There is also the "male gossip" Mr. Mottle, whom Mort approaches for a job in a nursery, and whose name connects him by means of consonance to Mr. Meeker, another "male gossip" in "Lilly's Story," and to Mr. Meakins, one of Lilly's would-be suitors who is, ironically, terrified of gossip. One comes to read Wilson's writing with the expectation that characters' names will add another layer of meaning to the events of her plots.

Two characters who are nameless but who nevertheless enrich the texture of "Tuesday and Wednesday" are Mort's and Myrtle's angels. Critical response to them varies from Paul Comeau's perception that "their ineffectuality points up the uncertain moral condition of the chaotic world to which their hosts must somehow adapt" (30), to W.H. New's retort that, as a means of revealing personality, they are "contrived, and though witty, are too obvious to succeed" (1972, 74).

As noted above, reference to Mort's angel is one of the textual features which presages his death; the manner of the angel's introduction makes its relationship to him ambiguous. The angel is said to know "its host (or charge) very well indeed" (4), yet is it guardian, or guest, or even parasite of the human being with whom it is associated? Both angels are ineffectual in motivating their human subjects toward Christian virtues; particularly so is Myrtle's, which is mentioned individually only once. Their presence neverthe-

less gives the text a spiritual flavour, which is intensified by the many references to classical mythology that Beverley Mitchell points up in her essay, "Ulysses in Vancouver." Mitchell sees the novella as a parody of both Joyce's Ulysses and Homer's Odyssey; perhaps the angels are scaled-down versions of the gods and goddesses who follow the wanderings of Homer's hero. The one example of direct discourse attributed to Mort's angel is, however, distinctly unheavenly: "For God's sake why do you have to make up things like that? Isn't the truth good enough for you?" (101). The obvious answer to the angel's question is "No," as the discussion of fiction-making in the previous chapter suggests. Mort's and Myrtle's are the only angels discussed by the narrator, although the generalizing expression, "a man's angel," indicates that other characters have them, too. Although they do not interact with their hosts (or charges) at a conscious level, they partake of the characters' world.

The other nameless but significant character in "Tuesday and Wednesday" is the kitten, a deus ex machina from under the sink, which brings innocent pleasure into Mort's and Myrtle's lives and repeats their daily journeys on a smaller scale.

In "Lilly's Story," Eleanor's kitten does have a name, "Nigger," after "the best cat the Warspite ever had" (187), but the most polysemic name in this text is Lilly's own. "Lilly" has connections to "Lilith," said to mean "graceful walker" (Long 107); frequently throughout the text, Lilly is described as moving "easily and well." "Lilith," according to Long, was also the name of the snake in Talmudian legend which

> was transformed into a wife for Adam . . . and that because her offspring turned out snakes also, she was superseded . . . and that it was in jealousy that she resumed the serpent's form and tempted Eve to fall. (107)

Another interpretation of that legend describes Lilith as "Adam's first wife, created simultaneously with Adam and therefore his equal. Unwilling to take an inferior role, she left Adam and was expelled from Eden" (Barnhart 2463). In earlier Babylonian tradition, according to this source, Lilith is a demon of waste places, who roams the night and is dangerous to children and to women in childbirth. In spite of carrying all of that baggage, "Lilly" is also said to mean "symbol of purity" (Lougheed 184).

Lilly Waller's character contains elements of all of these meanings. She is certainly a temptress in her youth, although her daughter is not at all snake-like. She has done her share of roaming in the night, although rather than becoming a danger to motherhood she sacrifices herself to it. The idea of Lilith being unwilling to accept a position inferior to Adam's finds its echo in the explanation given for Lilly's remaining single: "Eleanor, and the desire that Lilly [has] to possess herself" (EL 271). Finally, while Lilly's existence prior to the birth of her daughter cannot be said to exemplify purity, the life she leads as "Mrs. Walter Hughes"--having replaced her name with that of a husband--leads the hospital matron to see her as "a puritan." Lilly's surname is probably that of one of Wilson's distant relatives, a descendant of Edmund Waller, the poet, who, in Wilson's words, is "not a reliable character" ("Reflections in a Pool" 69). "Hughes" is probably chosen as a replace-

ment because, according to Charles Bardsley,

> It would be impossible to overestimate the influence of Hugh on our English nomenclature. Thousands of people owe their nominal existence to it. (406)

Lilly could hardly find a more suitable name with which to begin her campaign to be "like folks." In naming Lilly's real husband-to-be "Mr. Sprockett," Wilson draws her one step closer to being "folks": a "sprocket" is a "projection from the rim of a wheel, engaging with the links of a chain" (OED). Mr. Sprockett's function, like that of Mrs. Emblem, is underlined by his lack of a Christian name. Through him, Lilly is placed in the position of, while not being one of the links in the social chain, having the potential to engage with it at her will.

So significant is the act of naming in this text that it is a part of Lilly's discourse as well as of the narrator's. Lilly names her baby "Eleanor" after one of the "superior beings" she has seen in the store in Nanaimo, seeing it as "the highest honour that it had been in her slight power to bestow" (237). Although Lilly is probably unaware that the name derives from "Helen," meaning "light" (Lougheed 169), Eleanor does become the beacon which leads her toward respectability. Lilly places her daughter on a level above herself and sacrifices her own pleasures to keep her there. Significantly enough, Lilly's final verbal act is also that of naming; when Mr. Sprockett asks her which church she would like to be married in, she replies, "'United'," a choice whose irony is shared at the level of both story and plot.

In Swamp Angel, it is the changing of names which is of the

greatest significance. Maggie, beginning the process of separating herself from Edward Vardoe, tells the man to whom she sells her fishing flies that her name is "Mrs. Lloyd." At the level of plot, however, she is still "Mrs. Vardoe" until dinner is served on page 18. The period during which her husband scolds her for wearing her good suit and she washes dishes, waiting for the time of departure to arrive, is one of transition in which she is textually referred to only as "she." Once she is safe in the taxi, and has "escaped away from her discarded but still lawful husband, E. Thompson Vardoe" (21), she is called "Mrs. Lloyd." Maggie's act of distancing herself from her husband is foregrounded by the change in name at the levels of both story and plot. Near the mid-point of the text, the significance of the renaming act is again confirmed by Nell Severance, who, upon receipt of a letter signed "Maggie Lloyd," observes, "'Then it's final. Excellent'" (61).

Mrs. Severance's own name, like that of Aunty Emblem, signals her function in the novel. Nell's struggle throughout the text is to sever herself from her past glories and to accept, and live in, the present. And, as W.J Keith points out, for Maggie, too, "separation . . . is essential in her own interests; the burden of the immediate past has become intolerable, and she must cut all connections" (84). "Severance," then, is what Nell and Maggie both must achieve. The ultimate act which signifies Nell's achievement of this goal is the sending of the Swamp Angel to Maggie. By doing this, she separates herself from the past and also frees Hilda from the tyranny of childhood memories. Nell's action is also foregrounded

by the changing of her name: Mrs. Spink, who is caring for Nell after her fall, mispronounces her name as "Mrs. Severing," changing it from a passive noun to a more active verbal form, and thus bringing the process of inner separation to the surface of the text.

Just as naming is a significant act for Lilly Waller, Nell uses names to illustrate her theory of coincidence. The two Mrs. Robert Wards, whose first names were Marietta and whose husbands called them "Peg," and the second Philip Severance who also lived in Burma, demonstrate for Nell the likelihood of coincidence. Given the importance of names and the act of naming in Wilson's plots, the choice of these examples is probably not coincidental.

Like Mr. Mottle, Mr. Meeker and Mr. Meakins in The Equations of Love, there are two characters whose similar names indicate their similar--and opposing--roles in Swamp Angel. "Alberto Cosco" is Nell Severance's exotic friend; exotic because he is Italian, speaks with an accent, is younger than she, and is entertainingly funny. "Albert Cousins" is Hilda's chosen husband, the conservative "other" of Cosco as Hilda is the conservative "other" of her mother. The men share a sense of humour and of devotion to their respective women. They each fill the space created in the women's lives when Hilda moves away from home. Alberto and Nell buy a dog, a further indication of their unconventional relationship, while Albert and Hilda have the traditional baby boy. The change of Hilda's name by marriage from "Severance" to "Cousins" represents her change in role from discontented daughter to joyful mother. She leaves behind the name which points up the distance and tension in her relationship with

Nell and also, perhaps, the fact that Nell and Philip Severance were never married. "Cousins" emphasizes the comfortable similarity and family-centered relationship which Hilda and Albert share. This name change functions as a kind of mise en abyme of the change in Hilda's life.

The changes in Edward Vardoe's name occur mainly at the level of plot. One exception is his own effort to elevate himself as a burgeoning realtor by calling himself "E. Thompson Vardoe"; it is ironic that "Edward," as Lougheed says, means "guardian of property" (45). Edward employs his first initial to add mystery and to connect him to the "J.B's" (and "H.Y.'s") of the business class. He hopes to use a surname as a Christian name in the same way that Lilly Waller uses "Hughes": to signify a non-existent social station. Unlike Lilly, he is not successful, and is not named again in that form. That marriage to Maggie has given him the only real status he has ever had is suggested by the treatment of his name in the brief summary of Maggie's past in Chapter 11: he is called by the diminutive "Eddie" until the point where the marriage of "Mr. and Mrs. Edward Vardoe" is mentioned. Maggie herself always refers to him as "Edward," with the exception of one disparaging moment:

> As she stirred the gravy she knew what Edward was doing. He was putting his topcoat on its hanger . . . the good topcoat and the respectable hat of Eddie Vardoe--E. Thompson Vardoe. It's a good thing I'm going now, she thought as she stirred the gravy. I'm always unfair, now, to Edward. I hate everything he does. (17)

All of his names are here regarded through the reductive lens of Maggie's dislike. In the scene in which Nell Severance offers him

"salvation," he is again reduced to the insecurity of boyhood when she orders him to entertain: "'Who'll I entertain?' [asks] Eddie Vardoe. Mrs. Severance [finds] the question shocking in its simplicity and its need" (48). From that point onward, he is always referred to as "Edward Vardoe," even in Maggie's dream of his appearance at Three Loon Lake. This repetition of his formal name, particularly in the brief chapters revealing his life after Maggie's departure, serves to objectify him and to distance him from the sympathy of both the narrator and the reader. Working against this formality is the content of each chapter, beginning with self-conscious courtliness and ending with the final summation by Ireen. "Eyes of a dog, and a dog's wages" (130). The rhyme accompanying the name of "Edward in the Dictionary of Given Names is startlingly applicable. "He loveth peace yet ever is at strife,/ No foe disarms him till he takes a wife" (Lougheed 846). At this point, Edward Vardoe vanishes from the plot, damned to his own peculiar form of "salvation."

"Edward" and the other names in these texts serve to underline qualities which their holders possess, or to suggest particular properties which they do not have. In Wilson's fiction, the naming act functions as a kind of speech act which contributes to the shaping of the plot, thus enriching characterization and setting up ironies.

Another "social language" which appears in each of the texts is that of the Personal Column of the newspaper. In the previous

chapter, I looked at the advertisements which Vicky and Mrs. Emblem read, and discussed their reactions to them. The advertisement which Edward Vardoe places, asking to meet "sincere lady in same age group" (124), follows the same pattern. The discourse is that of a communication being paid for by the word; as a result, articles and verbs are largely absent and abbreviations are used where "poss." Applicants, striving to attract the highest quality of attention, describe themselves as "refined" and/or "well fixed"; respondents must be "sincere"--"no triflers." "Matrimony" is "possible" but not as "essential" as a "good figure." Expectations are described in metonymic language: "shows" and "drives" are but a part of the hoped-for relationship. Used in relation to Edward Vardoe, the flattering adjectives are ironic: his depth of refinement, sincerity, and "well-fixedness" has been probed early in the text. The statement, "Good figure essential" bears traces of Maggie's "large easy curves" (14), and allows the reader to apply to Maggie the current psychological theory that many obese women become so as a means of repelling unwanted sexual advances. Maggie's flight from the "nightly humiliations" is indirectly responsible for Edward Vardoe's placement of the personal advertisement.

The language of advertisements in these texts is a form of shorthand which points up the shallowness and emptiness of characters' lives without the narrator stating it explicitly. As Bakhtin suggests,

> it is the speech of another in another's language; thus it may also refract authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree

constitute a second language for the author. (315)

In "Tuesday and Wednesday," where advertisements are quoted in the process of narrating, they also appear to constitute a second language for the narrator.

The language of the Personal Column is but one of many incorporated into the narrators' discourses in Wilson's writing. These employ the language of religious and military institutions, as well as that associated with birth. And, in common with many of their characters, they also make use of silence in ways that are worthy of examination. In Swamp Angel and The Equations of Love, the language most frequently used is that of religion.

Mort and Myrtle's angels notwithstanding, there is relatively little concern with spiritual matters in "Tuesday and Wednesday." Vicky Tritt attends church twice a week, but only as a change from reading the newspaper or going to a show. The insertion of a chapter telling of her Wednesday evening visit between the chapter describing Eddie Hansen's arrival in Vancouver and the one recount-in Mort's day serves a structural purpose. it builds tension by postponing the revelation of what happens to Mort and Eddie, tension already generated by the statement that Mort never returns to his home. It also explains Vicky's presence on the street at the moment of their meeting. While the placement of the chapter creates tension, its language, with its serene rhythms, works against it: "Seven small shining lamps hang suspended, their length of suspension forming pleasing curves which the eye follows gratefully and again follows" (94) There is music and ceremony, a sharp contrast to the

scene on the street outside.

The alternation between tension and peace is also repeated in Vicky's thoughts. Rejecting the priest's message that the "meek" are "blessed," because of her "poor opinion of meekness (so near it was to herself)" (94), she by turns dreams--gazing at the lights and listening to the music--or thinks with concern of Mort and Eddie. The pattern works itself out in the warmth Vicky draws from the priest's handshake and the shock with which she learns "that Mort Johnson is dead." The narrator uses the scene in the church partly to reveal a side of Vicky's character not seen previously, but mainly as a plot device which points both toward and away from Mort's impending death. It concretizes the world view suggested by the presence of the angels. Religious discourse here is less complex than that in Swamp Angel or "Lilly's Story."

Because "Lilly's Story" is a story of re-creation, it is not surprising that religious references are pervasive. The use of biblical language is ironic, however, because Lilly does not undergo a moral conversion; her "reborn" self is a fiction of her own invention, projected onto her world to gain respectability for her child. The narrator's use of this rhetoric, then, produces two contrasting effects: it reduces Lilly's efforts to overcome her past even as it gives them a patina of legitimacy. It also marks "Lilly's Story" as parody, implying, by this use of scriptural language, "at one and the same time, authority and transgression" (Hutcheon 1985, 69). Hutcheon points out further that "the paradox of its authorized transgression of norms" (74) is one of the fundamental principles of

parody, for "[e]ven in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence" (75). Comparing Lilly's reinvention of her past with the creation of the world thus gives a nod of respect to the original Story at the same time as it borrows its discourse for less exalted purposes.

In this context, the choice of the words "superior beings" and the name "Mr. Soal" turn Lilly's observation of the two fashionable girls in the store into an epiphany. "Beings" is repeated several times, emphasizing the gap "as of continents and centuries" (165) which Lilly sees between herself and the other girls. To add to the sense of spiritual revelation, Lilly is described as becoming conscious of "something bright and sure" (166) towards which she yearns. From that point onward, the narrator depicts Lilly's efforts to become respectable in religious terms. Lilly becomes reborn, "a new person," and to bring that about, she re-baptizes herself with a new name, "Mrs. Walter Hughes." The narrator focusses on the "important inner life of Mrs. Walter Hughes" (168) which, like the firmament in the Book of Genesis, is "coming into being" (169). Some of the biblical parody even infects Lilly's own discourse: after trying her fiction on Mr. Meeker, "There, thought Lilly, and it was good" (176)--an echo of Genesis 1.10, 12, and 18. The language of creation mingles with that of death and resurrection in "the dead but newly created Mr. Hughes [who] is now Lilly's protector" and who is "well known to her." This "hybrid" discourse, to use Bakhtin's

term, dignifies and lends credence to Lilly's struggle to provide a better life for herself and her child.

The first battle of that struggle occurs on Lilly's arrival at the Butlers'; to tell about it, the narrator draws upon military discourse:

> The door was soon opened by a woman who, Lilly felt, was a commander, but not, she thought, the commander of the house whom she had come to see. (177)

Esther soon reveals herself as an adversary, and Lilly seizes upon the word "Madam" as "a strong weapon that she will use to win this house from Esther for baby." When she decides that Mrs. Butler would be a good influence on her baby, Lilly determines, "I'll make her. I'll fight for this job. I'll beat that Esther" (180). She does so, and martial discourse disappears from the plot until Lilly's departure from the Butlers. A wise tactician knows when to withdraw, and when Lilly feels it is time to leave the Butlers, she decides not to fight: "it'd be all words, . . . and they'd fight to keep me here for their own comfort. I'll not argue. I'll just say "It's time to go'" (199). The narrator employs military rhetoric once more when she reports Lilly's response to the possibility of marrying Mr. Meakins: "disposing her forces like a general" (217), Lilly decides against it, and conveys that information to her suitor with the tact of a consummate strategist.

In telling of Eleanor's early years, the narrator reintroduces religious language to the plot. "By the time Eleanor was six years old she had three gods and her mother. . . . Eleanor's gods were Major and Mrs. Butler and Leo, the big dog" (185), who "suffered her"

as she caressed his ears, a phrase reminiscent of St. Mark 10.14. Eleanor's trinity converges into Major Butler, "her number one god" (186), and a description follows of her Eden-like childhood. Phrases such as "cobwebs in the church" and "grasses eternally blowing" place Eleanor in the natural order of things and explain why she would one day

> be aware of the incorporeal presence in air, and light, and dark, and earth, and sea, and sky, and in herself, of something unexpressed and inexpressible, that transcends and heightens ordinary life, and is its complement. (194)

For the most part, however, the narrator restricts religious discourse to its parodic role of charting Lilly's development as a "new person."

When she inadvertently sees Eleanor greet her new husband, Paul, at the end of a day, Lilly has a second epiphany:

> She sees Eleanor come up to her husband with her face raised, and on her face a revealed look that Lilly has never seen on Eleanor's face nor on any face. Eleanor's face is changed and radiant. (239)

The words "raised," "revealed," "radiant" make Eleanor's face appear to be lifted in worship. The exalted language in which human love is depicted foregrounds the want of such love in Lilly's life. That language, together with the pattern of seeing and reacting, reminds the reader of the passage in which Lilly watches the girls in the Nanaimo store; like that first glimpse of difference, this scene of revelation signals the next stage in her growth.

Religious language surrounds Lilly's decision in Toronto to change her appearance so that she may safely return to visit Eleanor.

With the assistance of a most unlikely midwife, beautician Miss Larue, Lilly is reborn as "a free woman" (255). Being "born again" leads her to Mr. Sprockett, her connection, not with heaven, but with society. Religious discourse in the mouth of Mr. Sprockett seems to have a doubly parodic effect: while it continues the ironic tracking of Lilly's course, it also satirizes the reduction of itself to the level of cliché. The Mr. Sprockett who tells Lilly, "'You sacrificed yourself on the altar of ... You're a very very lovely woman, Mrs. Hughes'" (271), is the same Mr. Sprockett who exults, "Oh, this perfect perfect woman! She's like a little girl!" as Lilly wipes away her tears after making her "confession" (281). His tendency to overstatement lessens the power of the words "perfect," "lovely," and "sacrificed," There is, nevertheless, a degree of sacrifice in the life that Lilly has led, and, like all meaning parodied, Mr. Sprockett's discourse contains an element of the message of the original Text. Lilly's "rebirth" allows her to receive and give love in a relationship that promises more than she has ever aspired to. Bakhtin states that the purpose of parody is "to force men to experience . . . a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them" (59). The plot of "Lilly's Story" is given another layer of meaning by the religious discourse which permeates it.

The use of religious discourse in Swamp Angel is once again more complex than that in The Equations of Love. Two critics, Paul Comeau and Brent Thompson, examine it in some detail. Comeau sees Wilson as

having moved "out of the classical frame of reference into the realm of Christian mythology" (32). In saying so, he ignores the references to household gods and avatars and Maggie rising "with bubbles," a phrase which Thompson says is an echo "of the goddess born of the sea" (23), and which connects Maggie to Greek mythology. Thompson, while acknowledging references to a variety of mythologies, states that Swamp Angel is primarily a quest narrative, the object of Maggie's quest being "a proper awareness of the mythological in her life" (24), as represented by the union of man and nature. In my view, Comeau's perception of a wholly Christian mythos is unacceptably narrow, and, while I find Thompson's analysis useful, I believe that there is more to be said about the religious references in Swamp Angel and their relationship to the discourse at the level of plot.

Like "Lilly's Story," Swamp Angel is concerned with a woman's "rebirth." Instead of parodying the story of creation, the narrator develops this theme through figurative language. In a passage which emphasizes the distance between the city and the countryside, the narrator likens Maggie's flight from Vancouver to a journey down the birth canal. Alone at last, Maggie is "as if she [has] just been born (as perhaps she [has] after much anguish)" (34). The imagery continues:

> she saw through the cabin windows the tops of tall firs moving slowly in a small arc, and back, against the starred sky. Slowly they moved, obliterating stars, and then revealing them. . . . The cabin was a safe small world enclosing her. She put out a hand, groped on the stand beside her bed, took up the small yellow bowl, ran her thumb

> round its smooth glaze like a drowsy child feeling its toy. (34)

The "small arc," the "safe small world" enclosed by the cabin and the fir trees forms a figurative womb in which Maggie can redevelop herself. She is both small child and woman, reaching for her "household god" to support her effort.

The language of this chapter imparts an innocence to Maggie's actions, obscuring the fact that she has broken her marriage vows and left her husband without any warning. The movement of the fir trees mimics the action of the narrator's discourse throughout the plot, as it both conceals and reveals meaning. At the conclusion of the novel, for example, the narrator portrays Maggie's satisfaction at working with Angus: "Things were falling into place; thus and so they should be. This was Maggie's own sphere" (156). "Falling into place" reminds the reader of the plan that Maggie reveals to Joey before she leaves the city: "I want to have a certain kind of business" (27). "Maggie's own sphere" implies that running a lodge is the work at which she is most competent, yet "own" also suggests the possession of property. Perhaps Three Loon Lake will be Maggie's, perhaps not. The narrator's discourse, like the swaying firs, both discloses and masks its significance.

The narrator follows the chapter on Maggie's "rebirth" with one in which, says Beverley Mitchell, "Maggie is 'buried' for the biblical 'three days' beside the Similkameen and experiences a sort of 'resurrection'" (1985, 225). Maggie is indeed pierced by "the thin cruel thought" of how she has hurt Edward Vardoe, but the passage as a whole continues the theme of rebirth. Her spiritual

"death" is of fleeting duration, and the surrounding discourse focusses on life. The chapter begins with a history of the village of Hope, Maggie's point of departure and return for her journey to the river. The passage places Maggie's action in the perspective of all human endeavour; the name "Hope" itself reminds the reader of faith and charity. An expectation of redemption therefore precedes the depiction of her anguish.

The narrator's discourse draws in other religions besides Christianity in her presentation of Maggie's renewal. Maggie is washed, not by the blood of the Lamb, but by "Spring . . . pouring in over the whole countryside" (40), evocative of Shinto kami, or nature spirits, and of other forms of pantheism. She "[drinks] and [drinks] again the scent of fir and pines and juniper," (38), which links her to the native Indians who "consume" the power of natural objects as a part of their coming-of-age rites. Losing her self-awareness, that quality which distinguishes humans from other species (Thompson 29), Maggie becomes one with the natural world. "No thought, no memories occupied her" (38). Her flyfishing, the next event in the plot, concretizes that reintegration.

The narrator closes the chapter with a comparison of Maggie's journey to that of the soul after death, in language which again blends elements of Christianity with those of other beliefs. There is a reference to reincarnation in her mention of the need to "accustom the ages of the soul and its multiplied senses to something new, which is still fondly familiar" (40). Like Maggie's Chinese bowl, which is both grail and household god, the suggestion that the

soul has many lives is evocative of Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist beliefs. Paul Comeau's contention that Maggie's journey "in detail symbolically parallels Christian doctrine" (32) is an oversimplification of the spiritual framework of the narrator's discourse.

Nell Severance, Maggie's "friend of the spirit," is also the focus of spiritual discourse in this plot. Early in the text, Nell is presented as a god-figure, offering, rather than requiring, redemption. Naturally enough, much of the religious language in this section is hers, rather than the narrator's. Nell offers redemption through discourse, and she summons Edward Vardoe to a linguistic encounter: "I am going to bring you salvation if you want it" (47). Her language in speaking to him is biblical in rhythm: "'Compose yourself, Mr. Vardoe, and I will do you good'" echoes "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Ma. 11.28). Nell precedes her succour, however, with an ironic warning of her omniscient vision:

> you have another drink and you get to wishing murder, and if she came in at the door.... Listen. I know all about you." (She does, thought Edward, with unhappy eyes.) (48)

Nell takes Edward Vardoe on a linguistically constructed journey similar to Maggie's: from suffering, through the purging "flames licking up and up " (48), to the threshold of a new life. Nell's reaction to her success at "playing God" is both mocking and self-satisfied: "[Edward Vardoe is] an unpleasant object but worth salvation I suppose. . . . I'm exhausted I tell you. Saving souls. Very tiring" (49). The narrator reveals that her response is actually

more complex: "She smiled a faint smile but her face was not happy because she saw Edward Vardoe in his helplessness and his meanness and his stupidity and she thought again that life is unfair" (49).

After showing that Nell's "omniscience" is blended with compassion, the narrator says little more about her behaviour. It is Hilda who silently reduces her mother's power by making tea in place of the requested cocoa. It is she, too, who points out her mother's human vulnerability to error when Nell laughs at Albert Cousins' name. "'Why is "Albert Cousins" funny and "Alberto Cosco" not funny? . . . Mother, you are so used to playing God and playing so cleverly that you make gross mistakes'" (65). Nell has assumed a relationship between "Albert Cousins" and "conventionality" that is not necessarily there; Hilda accuses her mother of misreading. This passage, in which Nell is reminded of her fallibility, sets the secne for her actual fall.

Even after the awareness that Nell gains from her accident, she cannot resist summoning Albert Cousins to her with godlike authority. The narrator reveals that the difference between this act and her handling of Edward Vardoe lies in her motivation:

> The little dramas that she had played, sitting there in her chair, for years enough, now, had not sprung from any inner need but from the interested occupation of her amused intelligence. The play that she might play this afternoon, on the simple stage which she would set, differed, and was of importance, for it concerned Hilda's happiness. (82)

The last sentences emphasizes that Nell has been _playing_ God. With the Swamp Angel goes much of her power; Nell acknowledges her desire

to see Hilda happy, and also her own mortality: "life and the evening were closing in (83).

The cross-over of the Swamp Angel seems to signal another form of chiasmus. References to godlike qualities pass from Nell to Maggie, continuing the feminization of the god-figure which occurs in this text. Opening the chapter often referred to as "The Swimmer," Maggie reflects on her new life in terms of Christian brotherhood: "it's nice . . . serving other people as I did years ago with Father." Her next statement, however, works against that sense of community: "but now I am alone, and like a swimmer, I have to make my way on my own power; . . . I will swim past obstacles (Vera is sometimes an obstacle) because I am a strong swimmer" (99). Then follows a sentence that may belong either to Maggie or the narrator: "Swimming is like living, it is done alone." The rhetoric of fellowship falls away in the face of that portraying Maggie's willful isolation. Maggie's voice merges with the narrator's, which either strengthens her own argument or indicates the narrator's reluctance to take a stand. In either case, Maggie's isolation from humanity translates into communion with the natural world.

There, Maggie appears to feel the same godlike power that Nell enjoys during her manipulation of Edward Vardoe. As she enters the water, she is enclosed as she was in the cabin among the fir trees, and the language again suggests rebirth:

> She is contained by the sparkling surface of the lake and the pine tree shores and the low hills, and is covered by the sky. She dives off the deck, down into the lake. She rises, with bubbles, shakes her head vigorously, and strikes out. (99)

The womb image here is earth-sized; the effect, as Thompson observes, "is to expand Maggie. . . . Her movements are grandiose, hugely important" (23). In the water, she becomes more than woman:

> Her avatar tells her that she is one with her brothers the seal and the porpoise. . . and as she splashes and cleaves through the fresh water she is one with them. . . . and then, quite suddenly, she turns on her back and floats. She is contented. She is not a seal. She is a god floating there with the sun beating down on her face with fatal beneficent warmth. . . . Turning like a seal, like a god, Maggie swims slowly back to the shore and climbs up the dock ladder. The drops of water rain off her and she feels very fine but she is not a god any more. (100)

Rhetorically, Maggie metamorphoses from the Christian paradigm of womanhood, a servant of her Father, into a pagan "Lady of the Beasts."[7] The lake is her realm, the source and the arena of her power. When she returns to land, she "makes haste, and changes" for, in contrast to Nell, she does not try to be a god in her human relations; she enjoys that power only when she is alone in the water, free of other people.

The spiritual discourse surrounding her swimming foregrounds and dramatizes Maggie's love of isolation, placing in question the assertion that she has "found her place with other people again" (99). The narrator's attitude is equally ambiguous; to whom does one finally attribute the statement, "Swimming is like living, it is done alone"? As a study of the later religious references will reveal, that ambiguity continues throughout the final pages of the text.

Vera Gunnarsen's attempted suicide forces Maggie to come to terms with her desire to isolate herself from the pitfalls of human

relations. Her act of kneeling before Vera and "[rubbing] her legs roughly with a towel" (146) is reminiscent of Christ's washing of feet. Promptly, the narrator undoes that parallel with the revelation that Maggie is silent because "her spirit [is] very sore and sad within her, and angry" (147). Hers is not, after all, an act of humility. Vera's tumbling words do move Maggie to compassion, but she is "helpless" in the face of "the Evil One." Maggie is far from being the "Christ figure who redeems through love and self-sacrifice" that Paul Comeau sees (33). By deciding to stay and help Vera, she gains her "own sphere," and the text leaves open the question of whether Vera will be "redeemed" at all.

The different kinds of religious discourse in the novel are brought together once more in Maggie's meeting with Nell Severance. Nell, sitting atop her "little mound of years," has "a certain similarity," according to Thompson, "to the fire-breathing, aloof creature of myth who sits upon his mound of treasure" (30). From her vantage point of age, Nell sees

> the miraculous interweaving of creation ... the everlasting web ... and I see a stone and a word and this stub . . . and the man who made it, joined to the bounds of creation--has creation any bounds, Maggie?--and I see God everywhere. (150)

Nell finally avers that "faith in God is her support"; she has come full circle from playing God to believing in Him. Her profession of faith would be a fitting conclusion to the Christian quest motif which Comeau and David Stouck see in the novel, but the complexity of the passage resists that. The joining of man with the physical universe through the "miraculous interweaving of creation" takes

Nell's thought beyond Christianity to Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shintoism, those religions which perceive man as a part of the natural world, rather than as having dominion over it.

Nell also regards language as a part of that "everlasting web," rather than seeing it as a system with which man has overlaid reality.[8] Acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of man with the world of signs and stones is not, however, shown to be a solution to the difficulties of human relations. Nell repeats Maggie's prior observation, that "it takes God Himself to be fair to two different people at once" (151). This last reference to God in the text works against the sense of brotherhood that Nell's quotation of Donne's "No Man is an Iland" suggests.

On the last page, Maggie is again alone on the lake. While she throws away the Swamp Angel, symbol of the past and therefore of her isolation, and while she says she must hurry back to prepare lunch for Angus, she is still out on the lake, with the fish which "[resume] their way." She pays linguistic tribute to involvement in mankind, but it is likely that Maggie also will resume her way, involved in the natural world and more at home there than in human society, where "fairness is next to impossible."

The function of spiritual discourse in the plot of Swamp Angel has been interpreted in various ways. As I have indicated, Comeau sees a pervasive Christian mythos; Thompson reads a warning that too much mythologizing is a dangerous thing. Heather Murray acknowledges the "oriental references," but states that they "counterpoint, but do not threaten to supplant, the Christian" (247). I think that the

languages of various religions are blended rather than counter-pointed, and that some usages obscure meaning in the plot while others provide a link with the natural world. Because the discourse is not directly quoted, there is not the same sense of parody as there is in "Lilly's Story," but its presence does acknowledge the systems of belief from which it comes, as well as deepen the significance of Nell's and Maggie's spiritual growth. Finally, the narrator's use of religious discourse both foregrounds and wraps in ambiguity the conflict between isolation and community around which the plot is structured.

Another feature of the narrator's discourse which contributes to ambiguity, and also invites the reader's involvement in the making of the plot, is silence. David Stouck sees Wilson's writing as being "full of stylistic quirks--curious repetitions, illogical statements, ellipses, lacunae--which arrest our attention, direct us to something unspoken, covert" (1977,74). "Ellipses," "lacunae," "something unspoken" are ways of referring to the silent spaces which occur in all three plots.

The silence which fills Aunty Emblem's and Vicky's rooms in "Tuesday and Wednesday" also surrounds the subject of their loneliness at the level of plot. At the end of a long paragraph describing the feminine coziness of Mrs. Emblem's rooms are two sentences which clash: "She is undeniably a home-maker. No one has seen Mrs. Emblem lying luxuriously there; but I see her now, and she looks so nice, she makes me feel good" (49). While the first sentence presents her

as a paradigm of womanhood, the second reveals that she is very much alone. She is so alone, in fact, that the narrator feels it necessary to insist personally on her attractiveness. And even the narrator relates to her as an object who "makes me feel good" rather than a subject who "feels good" herself. Two pages later, another occasion of silence affirms Mrs. Emblem's loneliness, this time by denying it: "Mrs. Emblem is not lonely--exactly" (51). In the space between "lonely" and "exactly" there is room for many empty evenings.

Seen by David Stouck and others to be the opposite of Aunty Emblem, Vicky Tritt is overtly shown to be lonely. The details of her private life such as "the light which hangs small and naked in the middle of the room" (67) illustrate the aridity of the "desert of loneliness in which she dwells" (73). At the same time, the narrator asserts that "[h]er routine is successful, and prevents her from too often being aware" of that desert. Other details,--"if she has to buy some aspirin . . . that week" (72)--silently indicate the level of stress under which Vicky lives, and question the success of her efforts to stave off loneliness. Her fearful withdrawal from Wolfenden, the old man who watches the seagulls near her, is sadly ironic; his question, "'Why do you come here?'" asked "because he wishes to know" (71), indicates that he is the one person she encounters who is interested in her as a thinking subject, rather than as an object to be brushed aside.

Vicky's loneliness is both the cause and the effect of her isolation from society; loneliness and isolation are themes in all three texts. Through what is not said about the way in which the

women read newspapers, the narrators show that Mrs. Emblem, Vicky and Lilly Waller all share in the isolation with which Maggie Lloyd struggles openly. Aunty Emblem sees the front page of the newspaper as "the least important page," for it deals with "countries who [sic] do not seem to be able to get on together and have no particular bearing on her life (or so she really seems to think)" (53). Mrs. Emblem's assessment of the relative value of news items indicates the narrowness of her vision and her lack of a sense of being "involved in Mankinde." Behind the word "really," one can see the narrator shaking her head, believing that Mrs. Emblem is sadly mistaken. The narrator says of Vicky, "It does not matter that the paper is old because she is not interested in the news, but she does enjoy the advertisements" (73). Silently, the narrator is pointing up Vicky's greater interest in <u>things</u> than in people.

Lilly, too, dwells "chiefly on the advertisements":

> The world outside [does] not exist for her, or if it [does], it [is] of no interest or significance to her. . . . inter-national or political or ar artistic events . . . have no validity at all. (209)

Behind these flat statements concerning Vicky's and Lilly's reading tastes rests the same judgement that has been laid on Mrs. Emblem. In both of these lonely lives, the acts which the narrator sees as triumphs are those which involve interaction with other people: Vicky's defence of Mort, and Lilly's decision to marry Mr. Sprockett. Vicky is portrayed as "an awkward little prize-fighter," who has "achieved" something of "virtue" that will warm her solitude for the rest of her life. Lilly is prepared to "look after" and "guard" Mr.

Sprockett, even though she will "share a ménage à trois with Bessy Sprockett and her husband" (277). That both of these acts are based on deceit is a point on which the narrators are silent, being "united" is more important than confessing all. The narrator's attitude towards isolation in Swamp Angel, as I noted in the discussion on religious discourse, is of a more ambiguous nature.

The most interesting use of silence in Swamp Angel surrounds the ten remarkably short chapters which reveal the new life that Edward Vardoe begins at Nell Severance's recommentation. The first of these chapters contains Vardoe's advertisement in a Personal Column, the language of which has been considered earlier. The advertisement, states the narrator, allows Edward Vardoe to "[enter] his dream world" (124). Nothing more is said; there follows a space in which the reader is free to imagine the nature of those dreams. In that space, the ad is answered and a "sincere lady" selected; the narrator's opinion of Vardoe's choice is indicated only by the fact that the lady is always objectified as "the blonde." Previous discussion of names would suggest that she is seen as a function, rather than as an individual, and as being too unworthy of the narrator's notice to rate even a surname. The narrator distances the reader from the characters with formal and cautious description: "The two people [seem] to be nervous or perhaps they [do] not know each other very well" (124). "Perhaps" is ironic. the context leaves little doubt that they are strangers. This effort to be neutral and non-judgemental reflects the narrator's silent disapproval of their

behaviour. The disapproval becomes overt in the phrases "hopping about" and "[h]ow ingratiating he [is]."

The narrator further undermines Edward Vardoe's saccarine tone in the next chapter by revealing that, while praising the blonde, he is "thinking also of Ireen" (125), a revelation which confirms the superficiality of his "dream world." Short phrases showing the two of them "thinking," "turning," "looking," are the only indication that a narrator stands between the reader and the characters' dialogue; for the most part, Edward Vardoe and his blonde speak for themselves. Their fragile harmony quickly turns to discord. The reader may fill the silences between the next three chapters with arguments and haranguing and "nightly assaults." And this time it is Edward Vardoe who leaves. "He [thinks] he [will] try Ireen once more" (126). This sentence contains several possible meanings: Try to reach Ireen? Try to entice her to go out with him? Try to bear living with her? Ireen herself remains as silent as the narrator.

In the final three chapters, a reversal of power between Vardoe and his lady is evident. Ireen's "light green look" dominates his "spaniel eyes," and her contempt turns his most ingratiating language against him. The silence following her final insult tells the reader all he needs to know about Vardoe's domestic future.

Vardoe's "helplessness and his meanness and his stupidity" are shown rather than narrated. These short chapters are akin to lyric poetry in that they focus on the emotions of the subjects, relegating action and commentary to the spaces between them. Their cryptic language forces the reader to interact with the text and develop his

own interpretation of it. The participle-adverb sequence repeated at the end of chapters 30 to 32 reinforces the sense of poetic rhythm; in chapters 33 to 35, the three- or four-beat final phrases are also strongly rhythmic. The physical appearance of this section foregrounds its function, that of taking short, sharp jabs at the Maggie-Severance plot-line. In a sense, it is a parody of the struggle towards "finding her place with other people again" that Maggie undertakes, an inverted mise en abyme of the main plot. Here, the narrator's ambiguity recedes into silence, this silence allows--or forces--the reader to take part in the narrating process. Such involvement generates an energy not present in sections of the text where the narrator guides the reading process. Moreover, the narrator cannot be "blamed" for the conclusions which the reader may draw from his between-the-chapters fictionalization. Elsewhere in all three texts, other narrators, as well, share in the structuring of the plot.

Just as the fictions of Wilson's characters shape their lives, their narratives exert influence at the level of plot. Gérard Genette terms these narratives-within-the-narrative "second degree" (1980, 228). Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan--whose study Narrative Fiction is in many ways a useful companion to Genette's--list three main functions which second-degree narratives perform within the plot: explanatory (of the plot itself); thematic, and actional, when the act of telling fulfils a purpose. This three-fold function of second-degree narrating exemplifies Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia.

Bakhtin states that the two voices of the narrator and the character "know about each other; . . . it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other" (325). Their discourses, then, collide or interact, carrying out the functions noted above, and also, in Wilson's texts, illuminating the characters of their narrators and developing irony. To determine their respective function in the plots, I will examine second-degree narratives in all three texts.

In "Tuesday and Wednesday," the story most often retold is that of Mort's death. The narrator is first to describe how it happened.

> And he throws the end of the rope and it misses, and he leans far down and takes a good purchase on it and throws it again to poor old Eddie . . . but I don't have to jump in do I. . . . And the rope because it is not attached and has no purchase runs smoothly out and falls into the sea, and so because Mort has no real purchase, he falls into the sea, and Eddie who is strong, and is dying, and does not wish to die, seizes hold of Mort, and the empty water slides through Mort's fingers. (113-4)

Mort's reluctance to jump in to save his friend is clearly stated; he falls in because he "has no purchase." This phrase bears traces of the "no purpose" which Mort has in life, and which frequently allows him to fall into and out of jobs, or into a visit to the beer parlour with an old friend, and subsequently out of favour with Myrtle. The water slides through Mort's fingers just as his relatively empty life has done, day by day and now finally and irrevocably. Because the narrator uses similar language to narrate both Mort's life and his death, this version of the event rings true to the reader.

The second version of the drowning is put together by the

gathering crowd, which

> discussed and elicited and exchanged information and opinions until facts seemed to be established and passed around that two men had been drowned and one was Mortimer Johnson who was a Vancouver man and lived up there off Powell Street and the other was a big fellow who looked like a logger and that they were drunk. (115)

This passage concretizes heteroglossia in the text, many voices are colliding within the story. The last detail is contributed by someone who has seen Mort and Eddie "wrastling" and assumes that they are both in Eddie's condition. The sentence structure, a string of clauses joined by "ands," materializes the way in which gossip moves from one person to another, adding details as it travels.

The night watchman is able to contribute more information which corroborates the version presented by the narrator.

> although he hadn't exactly seen them go onto the dock, [he] had heard something, and he went out, and listened, and there was someone shouting and shouting, and he was sure he saw someone at the very end of the whar, and he ran back and got his torch, and he went down the wharf, and no one was there but there was something happening in the water and he moved his torch light about over the water and there was a hat; and a rope that he had meant to put away had gone; and he got scared and took out the rowboat but he couldn't find anything but the hat--that was the watchman's story. (115)

Much of the watchman's discourse contains traces of language used earlier in the text. We know that he "hadn't exactly seen them go onto the dock" because he "had gone into the lavatory for a moment" (110). The watchman's use of the word "exactly" indicates his awareness--and his reluctance to admit--that had he not gone into the washroom, he might have been able to prevent the drowning. The

fact that he had "meant to put away" the rope further strengthens the coincidental aspect of Mort's death. The reference to Mort's hat brings back details of his life: the way he put it on "at the debonair angle that always gave him such an air" (7), and the rare image of Mort "digging steadily, sometimes removing his hat and mopping his brow" (14). The hat floats in the gap between Mort and mort, bearing traces of his life and mute testimony to his death. This second-degree narrative, then, holds a mirror to the language of the narrator's first telling of the event.

Each telling lends credence to the details that are repeated, and allows the reader to perceive the event from a different point of view. Each thus performs an explanatory function in the plot. The crowd's version is also an example of metadiscourse--discourse talking about itself--which gives the text an element of self-reflexivity.

The final re-telling of Mort's death belongs to Vicky Tritt. Horrified to discover that Myrtle prefers to believe that Mort was drunk, Vicky is determined to make her mourn him properly:

> "They was a man . . . they was two men and they was talking to some people on the corner of Cordova when I come out of church and I heard them say Mortimer Johnson and I stopped and listened and one of the men--I'd know him again--was telling them how he was coming off work and he heard someone shouting and he ran and before he got to the end of the wharf he seen a man and it was Morty and Morty took a dive off of the end of the wharf. He put his hands like So," said Vicky, living in her invention, and putting her two palms together as she seemed to remember divers seem to do, "and he took and dove right in after Eddie Hansen. And the man said He sure died a hero's death and all the people he was talking to said so too." (123)

Vicky's long compound sentences repeat the pattern of the other three narratives, and also materialize her unaccustomed loquaciousness. One feels her intensity in the phrases piling up on each other. Her recounting of the men talking is a composite of the narrator's and the crowd's stories; when she departs from all fact and describes Mort's diving, her fictionalization is signaled by the repetition of "seemed/seem." A tension is created between Vicky's lying and her intense desire to be believed. That tension is compounded by the irony set up between the narrator's report of events and Vicky's version. The reader knows that Mort's death is purely accidental, but everyone in the story is so eager to believe that he is a hero that Vicky's fiction takes over the rest of the text. Along with developing irony, this second-degree narrative performs both an actional and a thematic function. Vicky's fiction-making itself provides a dramatic ending to the plot, and its content reflects on the relationship between truth and fiction that is one of the themes in The Equations of Love.

In "Lilly's Story," the most significant example of second-degree narrative is, of course, Lilly's fabrication about a non-existent husband. It, too, creates dramatic irony, between what the reader knows of Lilly Waller's past and what other characters are told about her. Lilly first tells her story aloud to Mr. Meeker, who is driving her to see the Butlers for the first time. Mr. Walter Hughes, of good New Brunswick family, has been kicked by a horse on the prairie farm he and Lilly were trying to run. Lilly

does not wish to return to live with her married sister because the sister had disapproved of Lilly's marriage. Her tale wins the heart of Mr. Meeker, who hurries over to the store to retell it. Lilly adds some flattering details in the version she relates to Mrs. Butler, and her narrative act secures her a home for the next seven years. Her fiction-making therefore fulfils an actional function: it is the telling itself which affects the plot.

Lilly performs this act again when she re-establishes herself in the Fraser Valley. At the level of plot, she does not re-tell her story, it is reported from the point of view of her narratees:

> People noticed that little Eleanor Hughes with her shy yet responsive smile was a lovely child and not, somehow, like her mother's daughter. But--it was generally understood--her father, the late Mr. Walter Hughes, had been a man of very good family, from--vaguely--the Maritimes. . . . No doubt the child resembled her father and his family. (205)

This reported response allows the narrator to develop a double irony: that between Lilly's true background and the story she has invented, and that generated by the gap between Eleanor's true parentage and people's assumption that she must resemble her father's family. Within that gap rests the unacknowledged quality of Lilly's mothering--and the power of her speech act.

When Matron, in re-telling the story to Eleanor, praises Lilly for her parental devotion--"'Don't mind that I said this, Eleanor, will you, but ... well, your mother's a puritan'" (232)--the narrator cannot resist commenting on it with reductive irony. "(oh Yow oh Ranny)." The way in which Eleanor tells Paul about her mother's life also generates irony: "She could have married again, but

she had been to devoted to the memory of Eleanor's father. She could hardly bring herself to speak his name" (235). This passage is truly "double-voiced" in a Bakhtinian sense: the narrator adopts Eleanor's own language to report her conversation, a technique that I will examine in detail in the next chapter. When Eleanor speaks, she thinks of "Mr. Walter Hughes," but it is Ranny who appears in the phrase "Eleanor's father," accompanied by the narrator's ironic smile.

Lilly's fictional past relates to the plot in the same way as does Vicky's tale of Mort's heroism: only the character, the narrator, and the reader know the "truth," and the irony remains at the level of plot, never affecting the story. It involves the reader in the relationship between the narrator and the character. In a sense, it adds the reader's voice to the heteroglossia of the text; his awareness of the irony becomes a running commentary which accompanies the plot.

The narrator heightens tension by leading the reader to believe that Lilly, when she is struggling with her need to tell Mr. Sprockett "something else," is about to reveal the gap between her real past and her fictional one. Mr. Sprockett's own fictionalizing during Lilly's silence confirms the fear that he would reject her if he knew the truth. When Lilly confesses that she is wearing an "Adaptation," the exclusivity of the narrator/reader's ironic view is preserved, and a new layer is added: Lilly's wig is not her own hair, either. Lilly's last act of narrating keeps intact the irony at

the level of plot and narration. That the irony is never revealed in the story enables the text to resist closure; a gap remains which may or may not be filled. Lilly's story, then, does not end; obscured by the word "United," there remain many unanswered questions about her future.

An uncertain future is a feature of the human condition, according to Nell Severance. In Swamp Angel, Nell's reflections are just some of the numerous second-degree narratives. The first instance of such second-degree narrating, that of Maggie's seatmate on the bus relating her domestic woes, is akin to the classic example of the actional function both Genette and Rimmon-Kenan cite: The Thousand and One Nights. Just as it is Scheherezade's nightly narrating which keeps her alive, it is the woman's act of narration which interferes with Maggie's appreciation of the natural beauties of the trip. The incident mirrors Maggie's marriage to, and separation from, Edward Vardoe; her request for silence underlines the choice she has made between urban chatter and communication with nature. Maggie's second seatmate's narrative contributes to the theme of integration into the natural world. His recounting of his efforts to sell encyclopedias in the city supports her decision to return to the wilderness.

Elsewhere in the text, Nell Severance's narratives add thematic and other material to the plot. The stories of "coincidence" which she tells Albert Cousins and Maggie support the contention that "'You don't know *what* will happen. . . . Everything happens again and it's

never the same'" (149-50). Nell's ironic view of history is similar to Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as "repetition with difference" (1985, 32). Nell's exchange of letters with Maggie concerning Hilda's wedding adds more ironic humour to the plot, provides information about the event itself, and also contributes to thematic content its reflections on conventionality, love and "swimming around obstacles." Nell's description of her juggling act brings a taste of the circus--another of Bakhtin's "social languages"--, into the text, provides information about her past life, and also reveals the degree to which she clings to past glories. Here, the narrator refers to one of the reasons why narrating is omnipresent in and outside of the text. "Each time that Mrs. Severance recalled this scene, it sparkled fresh into her mind and she savoured it as one might savour an old wine, fresh at each tasting" (64).

Hilda's inner response to her mother's reminisence, and her own earlier narrative, offer a point of view which contrasts with Nell's and an opportunity for the reader to experience the past as present. The energy of direct speech makes Hilda's old pain current. "'Isn't it a scream, her mother's a juggler!'" (51). At the end of the novel, Hilda's letter informing Maggie of Nell's death, along with being the means of providing that information, points up how motherhood has moved Hilda towards happiness and towards acceptance of her own mother.

> I feel Maggie that I ought to say some of the sad conventional things about Mother it seems only right but I can't because Mother's life was complete and to say anything else would be phony and that's

> one thing she couldn't bear. (154)

Hilda's own discourse corroborates Nell's earlier statement that she appears to be coming to terms with her life. Throughout the text, their narratives--each "the speech of another in another's language" (Bakhtin 315)--reflect differing points of view with greater power than the narrator's single discourse could generate.

One second-degree act of narration which is actually reported by the narrator is Maggie's telling of her life story to Henry Corder and the Gunnarsens. Here, as with the woman on the bus, it is the act more than its content which affects the plot. It temporarily lessens the tension created by Vera's mounting jealousy; more importantly, it both narrows and widens the gap between the reader's and the characters' levels of knowledge. Maggie outlines her background, but fails to mention her marriage to Edward Vardoe. As well as increasing irony, her incomplete narrative illuminates both her character and the theme of separation from the past. And it is a reminder that, like Lilly Waller's marriage to Mr. Sprockett, Maggie's "happy marriage" with Three Loon Lake is predicated on concealment.

Another second-degree narrative which generates irony is Vera's version of her final confrontation with Maggie; it differs considerably from the narrator's:

> "I hardly said a word and she told me to get out of my own kitchen! You should have heard her! Really, now, Haldar...." (I must sound reasonable, she thought, oh, I must sound reasonable.) "Ever since she got that china ..." (143)

Since it is Vera's words which have pushed Maggie to the limit of

tolerance, she alters the narrative in her own favour. This shifting of focus links her to Vicky Tritt and to Lilly Waller, although Lilly's narrative is pure fiction. By trying to "sound" as if she has acted reasonably, Vera acknowledges that she has not done so, the irony is apparent at the level of both plot and story: "'You did it,' [says] Haldar miserably, ignoring her words." Haldar responds to the act of narration rather than to its content; what was intended by Vera to become a constative explanation of Maggie's impossible behaviour has become a performative speech which alienates her from her husband. We have once again a second-degree narrative which "[advances] the action of the first narrative by the sheer fact of being narrated" (Rimmon-Kenan 92).

Swamp Angel, with a variety of narrators contributing to the plot, with its silences and evasions and its complex interweaving of discourses as diverse as those of the Bible and the newspaper, comes closer to being postmodernist fiction that do the two novellas in The Equations of Love. All three of Wilson's texts, however, contain elements--be it irony of tone, intertextual parody, or polysemic naming--that prefigure postmodernism. Each of these elements may be identified as a different form of discourse or language usage. The intermingling of the characters' discourses with the narrators' and the interweaving of a variety of languages within the narrator's discourses demonstrate the heteroglossia which Bakhtin identifies with a novel. Brent Thompson asserts that Swamp Angel is "literature about literature" (20); I would like to widen that assertion by

suggesting that all three texts are primarily concerned with the "transmission and assessment of the speech of others" which Bakhtin sees as the principal task of a novel (337). It is with the assessment, or commentary, in the narrators' discourse that the final chapter will concern itself.

Chapter Three

Narration: Assessing the Speech of Others

Most critics of Ethel Wilson's writing concern themselves at some point with narrative voice. For all of her works--except Hetty Dorval--Wilson uses what Beverley Mitchell calls "the comfortable and reassuring third-person narrator" (1985, 209). Desmond Pacey concurs that

> Her stories are almost always told in straightforward chronological order by an omniscient narrator, a narrator who is not above commenting occasionally, in a very old-fashioned way, on the persons and events he is narrating. (16)

W.H. New finds "some of these authorial passages . . . to be intrusive *in context*" (1982, 144). Helen Sontoff disagrees.

> Such reflections or comments counterpoint the plot rhythm, broaden the range, keep imaginative space open for the observer, for me. They are not directive or omniscient. They are freely, unabashedly individual. (1982, 99)

Offering a third perspective, Heather Murray speaks of passages in Swamp Angel "which seem attributable to no person and which move us away from the idea of narrative 'voices' altogether" (242). These critics appear to agree on only one point: that the narrator in all but one of Wilson's novels is omniscient. With the exception of Murray's essay, I have found no analysis of Wilson's use of language which would support or refute the argument that the narrator's commentary is intrusive. In this chapter, then, I will examine the barrator's discourse in The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel to see

whether the narrators are as unequivocally omniscient as has been suggested, and whether their commentaries on the stories can justifiably be called intrusions into the plot. Because they also bear on the narrator's relationship to the plot, I will consider the effects of personification of the narrator and of the use of "free indirect speech," a manifestation of Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse.

In each text, there are features of the narrator's discourse which work against the "unrestricted" omniscience Mitchell and other critics see. An omniscient narrator, according to Rimmon-Kenan, possesses several characteristic qualities:

> familiarity, in principle, with the characters' innermost thoughts and feelings; knowledge of past, present and future; presence in locations where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied . . . and knowledge of what happens in several places at the same time. (95)

While Wilson's narrators demonstrate the latter two characteristics, their knowledge of "innermost thoughts and feelings" and "past, present, and future" is not always complete. Even in "Tuesday and Wednesday," where the narrator's field of vision is sufficiently wide to allow her to see and hear the actions and discourse of angels, there are situations in which she is not all-seeing. Perhaps that is because, as she herself says, "People are very deceiving and you never can tell" (31). Of Wolfenden, and his affinity for the sea-gulls, the narrator states, "It is improbable that he knows and recognizes them," yet the next sentence but one asserts, "He would like to be one, he would indeed" (69). Since she is aware of his

other thoughts, the narrator herself appears to restrict her view of Wolfenden's recognition skills. A lack of definitive knowledge of his ability allows her to express a judgement while still holding the door open to another possibility.

This kind of incomplete omniscience occurs elsewhere in the text with the similar aim of presenting more than one opinion. Rather than stating the reason why Mrs. Emblem has not married for a fourth time, the narrator offers a range of possibilities:

> Perhaps she is growing indolent; perhaps she does not wish at her age to submit herself to a new elderly marriage whose intimacy youth no longer sanctions and makes charming; perhaps she has discovered the joys of privacy and does not wish to lose them, for at least she now owns herself. (51)

Elsewhere, the narrator reads the aunt's thoughts without hesitation: "Why, she thought, can't Myrtle fix her place up nice like Maybelle's. There's no reason. If it's a mess like it was last time I'll just have to speak" (21). As we will see below, the text presents two views of Myrtle's aunt as an emblem of femininity: one in the details contributing to Mrs. Emblem's characterization and another in the narrator's dialogic exchange with the narratee. In this passage, by presenting a number of hypotheses as to why Mrs. Emblem has not remarried, she opens the way for the narratee to make his own choice or to add to the list himself; he might consider the additional hypothesis that "perhaps no one has asked Mrs. Emblem to marry again." This restriction of the field of omniscience, like the previous example, enables the narrator to allow unfavourable commentary on Mrs. Emblem without seeming to offer it herself.

In "Lilly's Story," the first indication that the narrator is not

truly omniscient concerns Yow, the Chinese cook who buys Lilly's attentions with stolen lingerie. With the exception of the description of his "three passions," the narrative discourse concerning Yow focusses on his external appearance and behaviour. Moreover, his passions--for gambling, his employer, and Lilly--are made known in reported, rather than direct, speech. Yow's past is presented only through his reported admission that, "in China, he had killed two men, one slowly, one quickly. He also said that he had been beaten to within an inch of his life. All this may have been true" (134). The implication of the last sentence is that, from outward appearances, Yow is a person to whom these things may have happened; since the narrator is not privy to his "innermost thoughts and feelings," there is no way of knowing whether he is telling the truth. He is thereby contrasted to Lilly, whose lies are transparent to the narrator. Yow is the racial, cultural Other of both Lilly and the narrator, who describes his life as " a different world, a Chinese world" (135); that difference restricts narrative omniscience in this instance.

This narrator does not focus on any character's feelings to the extent that the narrator in "Tuesday and Wednesday" does; in "Lilly's Story," the emphasis is on attitudes and the discourse and behaviour generated by them. Silent Lilly must suppress her feelings in order to achieve her goals for Eleanor; in the narrator's discourse, like restrictions on omniscience occur concerning the feelings of Lilly and other characters. We find a cluster of such examples near the mid-point of the text.

In saying goodbye to Mr. Meakins, Lilly looks at him in a way that says "Goodbye and perhaps a little more" (216; emphasis added). Had Lilly spoken, there would have been less room for interpretation, her look is a sign that even the narrator cannot interpret with certainty. Lilly's devotion to her child and to her work arouses the Matron's "protection and, perhaps, her curiosity" (219, emphasis added). This "perhaps" indicates that any curiosity the Matron may feel is not obvious in her behaviour. The suggestion that it may be there, however, adds balance to the highly laudatory characterization which the narrator has just given her. The Matron herself admits to "meddling" but, since the narrator says only "perhaps," the reader may judge for himself. Shifting her gaze to Lilly, the narrator sees her as having

> settled into a life of custom and, perhaps, security again as year followed year, [and then she allows] her cloak of self-protection to drop from her. What influences or arts contrive to make men and women lose their hearts and their heads? Perhaps it is the weather. (220; emphases added)

Here, the speculation does not concern Lilly's feelings--"She fell unbearably in love"--but the possible causes of them. This passage is similar in tone to one of Wilson's essays, in which she observes "the instability and suggestibility of emotion and behaviour," and states that "[t]here is an amazing irrationality of cause and effect in ordinary behaviour, private, public and international" (Stouck 1987, 88).

To confirm that Lilly and Eleanor love each other, yet will be happier apart, the narrator calls in the assistance of "a wandering god" (234), much in the same way that the narrator of "Tuesday and

Wednesday" sets out to utilize the angels. This god has the ability to examine the women's feelings, a skill that the narrator chooses to relinquish. When Lilly accepts Mr. Sprockett's proposal of marriage, the narrator speculates once again about her feelings: "Perhaps what she chiefly feels is gratitude but she does not enquire of herself" (277). Neither does the narrator inquire of Lilly; her gaze is focussed on the minds, rather than on the hearts, of the characters in this text.

It is, to be sure, a feeling--the desire for respectability--which motivates Lilly's decision to "become a new woman"; from that point onward, however, the plot turns not on her emotions, but on her rational decisions. Even her discovery that she can love Mr. Sprockett is made at the mental rather than the emotional level. The restricted field of the narrator's omniscience with regard to feelings parallels her presentation of discourse as the determining force in the lives of these characters. The distinction between emotional and mental processes is present not only at the level of plot but also in the narrating itself.

Haldar Gunnarsen's feelings are also outside the scope of the narrator of Swamp Angel. Vera accuses Haldar, "'You love this place better'n you love me,'" and the narrator acknowledges, "Perhaps what she said was true" (93). This indeterminate observation has two effects: it complicates Vera's reaction by giving it a possible validity, and, by not revealing Haldar's emotional response, it aligns him with Maggie, who says,"'I won't talk about "feelings"'" (41). Vera, controlled by her self-pity and jealousy, is contrasted to

Haldar and Maggie, who live by rational thought and dogged determination. Later, when Vera tells Haldar that Maggie is leaving, the narrator presents two possible explanations of Haldar's response to Vera. "He forgot--or did not know--that he had once cared for her and then had become cruel" (143). Here, the restricted view is not of his past feelings themselves, but of his present thoughts about them. This instance paradoxically points out both the restriction and the superiority of the narrator's omniscience. although the narrator is uncertain of Haldar's current recall of his feelings for Vera, she knows what they have been, and he may not. She appears to have restricted her own field of vision to dramatize the wall of silence with which Haldar shuts out Vera. Revealing the knowledge that she does have serves to remind the reader that Haldar is not by nature uncaring and that it is Vera's nagging which has eroded his affection for her.

Whether Vera may learn to control her jealousy is a question about which the narrator is not omniscient, and this gap contributes to the open-endedness of this novel. The question is posed midway through the text, and remains unanswered at the conclusion. After Vera's first outburst to Maggie, and the latter's anquished response ("You still have your husband and your child, haven't you?"), the narrator suggests that Vera may change: "Festering flesh does not heal at once; but sometimes it does heal" (89). The potential for healing is strengthened by the suggestion, in the "beautiful action" passage (91), that Maggie herself may be able to help Vera overcome her jealousy.

Vera continues to struggle, and the narrator's exploration of the nature of jealousy situates her discourse in the present and directs it to the narratee:

> Jealousy, how potent it is, the very agent of destruction, a seed that grows. No, a poison that spreads and infests every part. No, the worm that consumes and never consumes. How shall a mind be purged? (113)

Searching for a metaphor to express the power of jealousy, the narrator here reveals the search for the appropriate sign that is part of the narrating process, and underlines the complexity of the problem under discussion. In Genette's words, "The multiplicity of contradictory hypotheses suggests much more the insolubility of the problem, and at the very least the incapacity of the narrator to resolve it" (1980, 204). And, although Maggie thinks "there might be a way," the problem is not resolved, leaving the text open to continued speculation.

As noted above, several critics of Ethel Wilson's work find her philosophical and evaluative commentary intrusive. Dorothy Livesay, for example, writes in a letter to Wilson regarding The Equations of Love, "Only objections are to the presence of Omniscient Author--a creature who I feel simply does not belong to this age" (n.p.). Livesay appears to confuse--or equate--author with narrator; other diction in her letter supports this interpretation. In any case, she is disturbed by the freedom with which the narrators comment on the plots of the novellas. "How we feel about generalizing commentary will depend partly on the fashions of the moment," acknowledges Wayne Booth, who believes that commentary should rather

be judged mainly "on the author's skill in suiting its quality to the quality of his dramatic portions" (199). In a novel of exploration such as Swamp Angel, a guiding commentary would seem to be an appropriate and necessary part of the text, regardless of fashion. "[T]he artist has a moral obligation . . . to do all that is possible in any given instance to realize his world as he intends it," avers Booth (388). In a text in which meaning cannot be expressed solely through the characters' discourse and action, it is the narrator's responsibility to provide clarifying commentary. Booth reiterates that "the means of communication are not shameful intrusions unless they are made with shameful ineptitude" (397). Passages of a narrator's commentary, rather than being dismissed as intrusive by definition, may be evaluated on their compatibility to the plot and their usefulness in making it accessible to the narratee.

The following passage serves as an example of "generalizing commentary" in Swamp Angel:

> A first meeting. A meeting in the desert, a meeting at sea, meeting in the city, meeting at night, meeting at a grave, meeting in the sunshine beside the forest, beside water. Human beings meet, yet the meetings are not the same. Meeting partakes in its very essence not only of the persons but of the place of meeting. And that essence of place remains, and colours, faintly, the association, perhaps for ever. (75)

Taken in isolation, the passage might appear to be unconnected to the story, but it is not. The meeting between Maggie and the Gunnarsens is a first meeting, a meeting which, significantly enough, occurs "in the sunshine beside the forest, beside water." Their relationship, which dominates the plot for the remainder of the

book, is indeed coloured by their encounter in this place. Maggie loves what she sees, and her relationship with Three Loon Lake becomes "like a happy marriage" (84), a substitute for the one she has just escaped, and more like the one ended by the death of Tom Lloyd. Place assumes the role of a character in its relationship to Maggie. Her response to the place further divides Maggie from Vera, who is already harbouring an uneasy "feeling that the woman [is] beautiful." Vera, who "[hugs] hopes of failure and a retreat back to Kamloops" (84), hears with dismay Maggie say, "'I've lived like this most of my life, and this is what I like'" (75). Adding fuel to Vera's easily-ignited jealousy, it is to Haldar that Maggie turns and says, "'Your place is grand, Mr. Gunnarsen.'" Maggie's response to the lodge changes Haldar's response to Maggie from the view that "she [seems] strong and plain and sensible" to "My she's a lovely-looking woman!" The essence of Three Loon Lake colours the association of these three people, closely tying the commentary to the "dramatic portions" of <u>Swamp Angel</u>.

A second passage of commentary is one of the most-frequently quoted portions of the novel:

> There is a beautiful action. It has an operative grace. It is when one, seeing some uneasy sleeper cold and without a cover, goes away, finds and brings a blanket, bends down, and covers the sleeper because the sleeper is a living being and is cold. He then returns to his work, forgetting that he has performed this small act of compassion. He will receive neither praise nor thanks. It does not matter who the sleeper may be. That is a beautiful action which is divine and human in posture and intention and self-forgetfulness. Maggie was compassionate and perhaps she would be able to serve

> Vera Gunnarsen in this way, forgetting that she did so, and expecting neither praise nor thanks--or perhaps she would not. (91)

Heather Murray suggests that the lack of a clear subject for the verbs in this passage, and the use of the pronoun "he," distances it from the story, but observes that

> Since the difficulty of applying rules to individuals is the very subject matter not only of this passage but of much of the narration, this provides an excellent example of the grammatical reinforcement such statements in Swamp Angel receive. (248)

While I would agree that characters in all of Wilson's stories break the rules generally applied to individuals, I do not see that concept as dominating the narrative discourse of this or the other texts. I do see, however, both linguistic and dramatic connections justifying the inclusion of this passage in this novel.

The repetition of a number of words, phrases, and concepts ties the passage to the remainder of the text. The phrase "living being" is a reminder of the "plane, full of invisible beings" (38), which Maggie sees at the beginning of her stay in the wilderness. That the narrator has used "living" rather than "human" connects the thought expressed here to the theme of integration with the natural world, and hence to the discourse of the eastern religions laced throughout the text. The idea of self-forgetfulness resurfaces in the description of Maggie's state of mind after she has told Vera she is leaving: "Her thought went first to others, not to herself" (142). "Compassion" is the emotion which led Maggie into her marriage to Edward Vardoe; it moves her to stay and try to help Vera Gunnarsen deal with her jealousy. Maggie is the embodiment of compassion in

this text, that word signifies her presence in the passage before her name is mentioned.

The image of the sleeper connects this section dramatically to several scenes in the novel. After Maggie has lain awake many nights during her marriage to Edward Vardoe, she finally falls deeply asleep in the little cabin surrounded by protective firs. Nell, who earlier has fallen asleep after her "very tiring" interview with Vardoe, drifts in and out of a drugged, "uneasy" sleep after her fall. On the night of her dream of Edward Vardoe, Maggie is the uneasy sleeper. And Mr. Cunningham falls into a restorative sleep at the end of the scene in which the "beautiful action" becomes individualized.

With "operative grace," Maggie rescues the exhausted Mr. Cunningham and his boat, heedless of the storm or the danger to her own life. She warms him and nourishes him and covers him up and then forgets about the incident. She is later pleasantly surprised by his gift of appreciation and offer of a job. The "perhaps" which leaves Maggie's ability to serve Vera an open question is repeated at the end of the novel. "'Perhaps there's a way'" (154). The language and dramatic content of this passage, then, rather than being intrusive into the plot, are connected to the discourse of both plot and story.

Along with self-imposed restrictions on their omniscience and the propensity to comment, another notable feature of Wilson's narrators is the way that they shift from third person to the use of "I" or "you," drawing attention to the "person" of the narrator and

the narratee. As Genette states,

> Insofar as the narrator can at any instant intervene as <u>such</u> in the narrative, every narrating is, by definition, to all intents and purposes presented in the first person. . . . The real question is whether or not the narrator can use the first person to designate <u>one of his characters</u>. (244)

In his own analysis, nevertheless, he passes over texts in which the narrator is outside the story being told, asserting "Absence is absolute, but presence has degrees" (245). By contrast, Booth maintains that the manner in which even an absent narrator designates herself influences the reader:

> In fiction, as soon as we encounter an "I," we are conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of the experience will come between us and the event. When there is no such "I," . . . the inexperienced reader may make the mistake of thinking that the story comes to him unmediated. But no such mistake can be made from the moment that the author explicitly places a narrator into the tale, even if he is given no personal characteristics whatever. (151-52)

Booth's argument makes clear that absence also has degrees, as we noted in the previous chapter, even stating that "the blonde said" reveals the intervention of a narrator between the characters and the reader.[9] In many places in Wilson's writing, her narrators situate themselves as the subject of her fictional discourse, the effects of their emergence vary from instance to instance.

The narrator speaks as "<u>I</u>" numerous times in "Tuesday and Wednesday"; at times, the other to whom she speaks is only implied by the "I"; at others, she addresses the narratee directly:

> A man's angel, after a long residence within or around a man, knows its host (or charge) very well indeed; far better than <u>you or I</u>, who, looking, see perhaps only a stocky middle-aged man, strong but now flabby,

> frowsty at the moment but when his face has been washed and shaved and his hair parted on the side and brushed back (as it will be in an hour's time), and his shirt and suit and socks and boots pulled on, and his hat put on, too, at a debonair angle, are justified in believing that this is Mr. Johnson who is coming to do the garden, and seems a very nice man and _you_ hope _you_'ll get a little satisfaction at last. _You_ are inclined to believe this, because Mort turns upon _you_ his kind brown eyes and tells _you_ that he is a gardener. (4, emphases added)

The use of apostrophe in this passage has many ramifications. In its first appearance, "you" is both connected to and separated from the "I" by "or." The conjunction "or" implies both an alternative and an equivalence: the narrator places herself and the narratee on the same lower level of cognition in relation to the angel, while at the same time leaving room for an epistemological difference between narrator and narratee that "you _and_ I" would not have provided. The perceptions of all three "characters" contribute to the characterization of Mort; along with the narrator's and the angel's knowledge of him, the apostrophe brings him face to face with the reader and invites a third point of view. The narrator has slipped dexterously out of the scene during the description of Mort's morning ritual; his pleasant appearance and apparent ability to give satisfaction appeal directly to the narratee. This direct encounter renders more striking the angel's revelation that Mort fictionalizes his expertise, that he does so frequently, and that the "poor thing" taken in by his fiction is "you." By making the assumption that Mort is "your" gardener, the narrator also aligns the narratee/reader with Mrs. H.Y. Dunkerley, for whom Mort actually does undertake to "do the garden." These, and similar, shifts, problematize the text for the

reader who wishes to separate himself from the foolishness of Mrs. Dunkerley and her overanxious double, Mrs. H.X. Lemoyne.

The narrator emerges frequently as subject when characterizing Aunty Emblem: "No one has seen Mrs. Emblem lying luxuriously there, but I see her now, and she looks so nice, she makes me feel good" (49). At this point, the narrator, who has been only a voice, becomes a "person" who sees and feels. In Booth's terms, not only her experiencing mind, but also her emotions, "come between us and the text." The narrator's emotional response to the appearance of Mrs. Emblem--like the one assigned to the narratee in the previous passage--signals a change of tone. It concludes a rosy, if slightly tongue-in-cheek, description of Mrs. Emblem's room, in the following paragraph, the descriptive process continues, but there is an edge to the discourse. Chairs are "repulsively ornate," upholstered in a material "which might be rose-coloured plush, but is not," a screen placed with "seeming" casualness hides "various things" (49). The appearance of the narrator as subject of the discourse paves the way for the revelation that Mrs. Emblem, not the perfect opposite of Myrtle's lack of domestic skill after all, actually shares in her lack of taste. Another effect of the narrator's intrusion into the story in this passage is to point out the fictional quality of the text: within the world of the story, none of Mrs. Emblem's friends sees her lying in her bed, but the narrator, who is outside that world, does see her. By stepping across the gap between story and narration, the narrator renders it clearly visible.

In both of these passages, the narrator commits what Genette

terms "metalepsis": "the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation" (1980, 234). According to Genette, this crossing over demonstrates the importance of the boundary between the "world *in* which one tells" and "the world *of* which one tells" (emphasis added). Pulling the narratee into the story, as the narrator does in the first passage of "Tuesday and Wednesday" examined, or stepping in herself, as happens above, give rise to the concern, in Genette's words, "that the narrator and his narratees--you and I--perhaps belong to some narrative" (236).

Metalepsis, a recurring device in Wilson's fiction, has become, according to Brian McHale, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism. In his study, *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale concludes that the dominant concern, in contrast to the epistemological focus dominant in modernist fiction, is ontological; in other words, postmodernism is concerned not with how to interpret a known world, but with how worlds are structured and how they interrelate. Metalepsis, then, is one means of deliberately "foregrounding the hierarchy of ontological levels" (120) by crossing Genette's "sacred frontier between two worlds." Postmodernism, as McHale observes, reflects the "very general tendency in the intellectual life of our time toward viewing reality as *constructed* in and through our languages, discourses and semiotic systems" (165). Such a view of reality dispels the discomfort with metalepsis of which Genette speaks, because it does away with the lingering notion that fictive texts mirror a real world and are not to be intruded upon. One of Wilson's concerns is the border-

line between fiction and reality, metalepsis foregrounds the evanescent nature of that boundary.

The world of the characters is linked with that of the narratee in another passage concerning Mrs. Emblem, this time by the common experience of reading the comics:

> Little Orphan Annie, the eternal little girl who never grows up, is profoundly identified with [Mrs. Emblem]. Annie is the normal person, always right in motive and performance and endearingly young, the little monster. Who would not be Annie? Things are not made too difficult for those who read about Annie. Look at the new character who makes his abrupt appearance in the picture. You know exactly where you are: would that one's own acquaintance were so marked. The line of his jaw invites your apprehension or your confidence; but beneath it all, you do not worry. Annie will be all right. (54)

This passage is immediately complicated by drawing "those who read about Annie" into the comparison of the "beautiful old baby" and the "eternal little girl who never grows up." Suddenly it is the narratee/reader's response to Little Orphan Annie which is under analysis. The narrator's confidence that the black-and-white world of the comics holds equal appeal for the reader makes it difficult for him to maintain a condescending attitude to Mrs. Emblem's escapist reading. In this passage, it is the comic which crosses from the story to the narratee's world; it pulls them together by implying that the response to the comic in both worlds is the same. The narrator's account of Mrs. Emblem's response warns the reader not to equate the text with the comic: characters in the plot do not "at once disclose good or evil," and even those presented as fundamentally good may not "be all right." At the level of plot,

the presence of the narrator as subject signals the same dis-ease as it does in earlier passages, as a narrating technique, it again foregrounds the boundary between literature and "reality."

Several passages in "Tuesday and Wednesday" problematize the foregrounding of the narrator. As Aunty Emblem sits puffing luxuriously in Myrtle's rocker, the narrator enthuses, "What a beautiful golden woman she was! What a beautiful gay soft-eyed girl she had been! That was your thought as you looked admiringly at Mrs. Emblem" (19). This use of apostrophe is troublesome to the reader, it stretches the narrator's credibility too far to suggest that the narratee not only is present in Myrtle's kitchen, but also has known Mrs. Emblem as a girl. Perhaps she uses the second person in the sense of "one"; in other words, she addresses herself, reflecting on her own reaction to Aunty Emblem's appearance. She may also be projecting her own response to Mrs. Emblem onto the narratee, although details discussed below cast doubt upon this interpretation. "You" is employed twice more on this page, reinforcing the feeling that the reader is being brought close to Mrs. Emblem as he was to Mort. Perhaps the problem with this passage is that the narratee is assigned too strong a value judgement--"beautiful," "golden," "gay," "admiringly"--leading to the desire to resist it. The narrator's insistence that Mrs. Emblem is "admirable" is undercut by the image of artificiality built up by such phrases as "She had decided to keep her hair a warm gold," and "No amount of lipstick could alter the fact that her mouth was well-shaped and gay" (19). The narrator, pinpointing Mrs. Emblem's artificiality while insisting that the narratee find

her irresistible, reduces the narratee's quality of judgement to a level below her own. By the end of the passage, resistance to the character is so strong that it is difficult to give credence to Beverley Mitchell's statement that the narrator "is very fond of Aunty Emblem" (1978, 114).

This pattern repeats itself later in the text.

> She is hardly aware of the poignant communications of sky, of birds, of ocean, forest, and mountain, although she thinks Vancouver is a nice place. She does not see around or beyond the tangible male or female human form and its appearance and peculiar requirements. I think , in order to be perfectly happy, she still needs to look after someone. You cannot help liking Mrs. Emblem. She is so nice, she is perhaps too fat, now, to be beautiful, but she is--to Mr. Thorsteinsen, to Maybelle, to Mortimer Johnson and to me--alluring, and so she had been to the two sod cases and the divorce. (51)

Again, the narrator is overly insistent that the narratee like Mrs. Emblem while she herself admits to seeing "a certain vacuity" in the aunt. In each of Wilson's novels, awareness of "the incorporeal presence in air, and light, and dark, and earth, and sea, and sky" (EL 194) is an essential quality of the most highly-valued characters.[10] Aunty Emblem, however, thinks of Vancouver merely as "a nice place," a reductive expression which is echoed in her being described herself as "so nice." As in the previous passage, the discourse characterizing Mrs. Emblem works against the apostrophe to the reader--"You cannot help liking Mrs. Emblem"--whose response tends to be, "Oh, yes I can."

Here, the two languages whose conflict marks "the collision between differing points of view on the world" (Bakhtin360) are not

found in two different discourses, but are both at work in the discourse of the narrator. Because one of these languages is addressed to the narratee, he is drawn into the dialogue. In contrast to the passage concerning Mort and his angel, in which the narrator and narratee are brought together in the phrase "you or I," in the passages concerning Mrs. Emblem, the narrator's discourse with the narratee serves to distance them from each other. Rather than being "flattered," as Mitchell suggests, "by being taken into the confidence of a wise, witty and compassionate raconteur" (1978, 115), the reader is being patronized by the narrator. Is this discourse "intrusive" or a clever method of eliciting sympathy for Vicky Tritt, who is presented as Mrs. Emblem's opposite (and whose presentation as such is also complicated, as we saw in a previous chapter)?

Elsewhere in "Tuesday and Wednesday," the narrator's emergence as "I" again presents opposing views and also confirms her existence as storyteller. In portraying Mr. Mottle, she reiterates that "[h]e was a friendly man, and, as I say, a male gossip" (100), this subjectivity may be a deliberate foregrounding of Mr. Mottle's propensity to gossip--a trait that Wilson was said to view as "evil, stupid, and destructive" (Mitchell 1976, 44). Because of Mort's death, Mr. Mottle's gossip has no opportunity to do him harm, in "Lilly's Story," however, it is the gossip of Mr. Mottle's counterpart, Mr. Meeker, which causes Lilly's sudden departure from the Butlers' home, robbing them of "present security and comfort" (197). Perhaps the importance of the message is seen as sufficient reason for the narrator to speak directly to the narratee.

"I/you" narration can present opposing positions, emphasize certain points, and, most significantly, demonstrate the importance of the boundary between fiction and reality. Examples in the closing pages of "Tuesday and Wednesday" perform all of these functions. In telling of the meeting between Mort and Eddie, the narrator focusses the narratee's attention:

> Mort, I wish you to understand, was very very kind to Eddie, and almost gentle with him, if anyone can be gentle with a high-rigger who measures over six feet and is drunk.
>
> By the time they reached the place at which you turn off to go down to the dock--and their progress had been slow--the street lights were all on, and there is nothing like street lights for announcing the arrival of night. (110)

The narrator foregrounds the kindness of Mort's treatment of Eddie in a direct plea to the narratee. There is an echo here of Mort's grumbling agreement to go and prepare a box of dirt for the kitten, but the emphasis on the quality of Mort's action is much stronger. At the same time, the tone of this passage and of the surrounding context is complex. Mort's ultimate ineffectuality as a caretaker is foreshadowed with the ironic observation, "goodness knows what would have happened to Eddie the old fool crossing the street if Morty hadn't been along to take care of him" (110). As the drowning is neared, Mort's language gradually takes over the narrator's discourse; the narrowing of the distance between them heightens tension. The assumption that the narratee is familiar with the area--"the place at which you turn off to go down to the dock"--pulls him into the scene, too. Paradoxically, it also distances him from the event by reminding him that the narrator is acting as an intermediary

between the story and its reception. Distance disappears as Mort is struggling in the water, the narrator merges with him and the narration becomes free indirect speech. For those few terrifying moments, the distance between Mort and the narratee is reduced to its lowest possible amount. The narrator then returns to the position of observer, and the passage closes with a form of apostrophe which reminds the reader that this is literature, not reality. "Woe for Mort. Woe for Mort's angel speeding away with an inaudible cry" (114).

The narratee is again addressed as the narrator observes Myrtle's appearance just before Vicky Tritt's arrival.

> You could not see her eyes, but you saw on her fine eyelids--swollen and purplish now--not sorrow, but rage and scorn. You saw rage and scorn and hate as plainly on those dropped eyelids as if Myrtle had looked up at you with rage and scorn and hate in her pale eyes... It had been like this. (118)

The apostrophe and the repetition serve to foreground Myrtle's reaction to the news of the death of her husband. There is also bitter humour in the reminder that Myrtle's eyelids are her most expressive feature; recall of their past performances further distances the reader from Myrtle's response and moves him to sympathize with Vicky's grief. In this passage, again, the apostrophe places the narratee in a dual position. he is both in the story and with the narrator, hearing the story which has "been like this." The distance between the narratee and the story cannot be fixed, for it shifts continuously between the two positions. On the one hand, the reminder of the fictionality of the story helps to

further distance the reader from the horror of Mort's death; on the other, confronting Myrtle's implacable "rage and scorn and hate" prepares him to accept and support Vicky's lie.

The narrator speaks directly once again when Vicky brings Myrtle her condolences. When Myrtle rebuffs her sympathy and pours out her bitterness over Mort's being drunk, Vicky is horrified.

> Vicky's eyes grew darker and larger and her look changed as she listened. You would not have known her, I think.
> "Stop it, Myrtle Hopwood," she said sharply, "you stop it. What you're saying isn't true . . ." (121)

Here, the apostrophe does constitute an intrusion into the dramatic scene, weakening the energy of Vicky's reaction. If the first sentence, describing Vicky's changing demeanour, is not sufficient to demonstrate her rush of emotion, the fact that she spoke "sharply" to Myrtle is. Even more intrusive than the fact of the "I/you" discourse is its ending with the qualifying statement "I think," which weakens the impact of the change in Vicky's appearance and behaviour. Perhaps Wilson has this instance in mind when she says of "Tuesday and Wednesday," "[I] introduced my own voice too much into the proceedings. The intrusion is not fatal, but it is a flaw in writing" (Stouck 1987, 88).

The narrator's presence manifests itself in quite a different way in "Lilly's Story." There are no "I/you" dialogues, instead, the presence of the storyteller confirms itself in the fairytale-like discourse which frames the beginning of several sections. In the opening sentences of the text, there is the trace of "Once upon a

time":

> In the early part of this century there lived in the young city of Vancouver in British Columbia a large family by the name of Hastings. The head of this family was old Mrs. Hastings who was a widow, a saint and a mystic. (133)

Moving gradually away from this formulaic language, the narration introduces one, and then another, detail, thus marking both the telling of a realistic story and Wilson's incremental style. Miss Edgeworth is introduced as Mrs. Hastings's "younger, elderly sister," one of the many examples of oxymoron found in Wilson's writing. Miss Edgeworth's bicycle, depicted as being "too heavy, sexless in spite of its sex, conspicuous for its bulky accessories of bright metal," becomes available "to unauthorized people who might wish to ride it at night, and, at last, an unauthorized person does " (134). The formality of the framework and the anonymity of such phrases as "an unauthorized person" set the tone for the narrator's observance of Lilly's performance rather than of her thoughts and emotions.

The same pattern introduces Lilly and Eleanor's time with the Butlers:

> Before the latter part of the last century, the well-wooded and watered area on Vancouver Island known as Comox was inhabited by the Comox Indians. Since then the white man has come, and there have been wars in the distant world which have, a little, fretted the peace of Comox. Navy and Air Force have visited these shores, and changed them. But when Lilly arrived at Comox in the guise of Mrs. Walter Hughes, wearing her innocent black and carrying in her arms her pretty baby, the small village lay hidden and scattered along the green and wooded contours of land that slope down to the Salt Chuck--to the sea . . . . Into the estuary swarmed the great spring salmon that fought their way in their thousands up the Courtenay River. Afterwards, Lilly

> remembered--but not often--that in the grey of cold dawnings she had gone with Major Butler in his rowboat. (170)

Like the account of Hope given in Swamp Angel, this discourse situates Lilly's life against the backdrop of human and natural history. The historical discourse gradually blends with memories Lilly and the Butlers hold of their lives in Comox, until Lilly is shown driving along the road with Mr. Meeker, and the story moves forward again.

The temporal references and qualifying adjectives--"little," "innocent"--in the introduction also signify the presence of the narrator, who is constructing a plot from the material of the story and commenting upon its content. At the beginning of the next section, she invites the narratee to share in that process: "Picture then Lilly and the child in the small cottage situated behind the little two-storeyed Valley Hospital" (206). The imperative apostrophe performs the same functions as does the fairytale framework: it marks a major section of the plot, and it implies the subjectivity of the narrator, this time by means of her address to the narratee. The narrator's opinion is also implicit in such adjectives as "ruthless," "tricky," and "elegant," and such phrases as "[i]t was a wonder" (225). The evaluative language and the framing discourse are features of the literary "mask" that "Lilly's Story" dons. Thematically, as W.H.New has rightly observed, "'Lilly's Story' seems in some ways to have been a trial run for Swamp Angel" (1972, 76); the similar kinds of discourse used are another connecting link.

In Swamp Angel, according to Brent Thompson, the narrator, "by

virtue of the guise of third person omniscience, has become almost invisible" (20). Analysis reveals that numerous instances of apostrophe actually foreground the presence of the narrator. These addresses to the narratee, all related to place, occur early in the novel: "You can drive from Vancouver to New Westminster along a highway bright with motor hotels" (21), "that section of Pender Street which shows you by the kind of buildings which you pass . . . that, unmistakably, you are approaching Chinatown" (24), "Make no mistake, when you have reached Hope and the roads that divide there you have quite left Vancouver and the Pacific Ocean" (36). The recurrence of "you" reminds the reader of the existence of the "I" speaking to him; there is certainly no question of the absence of narrator in this text. The apostrophe concretizes the unspoken dialogue which goes on in any novel between the narrator and the narratee. Foregrounding that dialogue here involves the narratee/reader in the process, in Bakhtin's words, "of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own belief system in someone else's system" (365). At this point in the plot, Maggie is making choices, the places discussed represent those choices. Apostrophizing the reader invites him to become involved, and, in so doing, to come to know better his own language and beliefs.

In the first example, "you" may choose between garish urban development or the illusory wilderness of the river road. (Appropriately, in view of Maggie's attempt to attain balance, the road she takes has properties of each.) These apostrophes foreground the

"otherness" of places and persons--the Chinese community in Vancouver, the interior of the province--which both complicates and assists the selection process.

The last address to the narratee in this cluster brings him to Three Loon Lake.

> For the last five miles, you drive among trees. The higher sage hills are, by some authority of nature, clothed with spruce and aspen and lodge-pole pines. You cannot see a gleam, even, of the water of the lake until you are nearing the lodge. But, as soon as you hear the occasional wild and lonely cry of the loon clattering through trees, you know that you are near some water. (67)

The language generates anticipation by withholding the view of the water, there is a sense of nearing a destination, and the reader is eager to arrive. The lake represents the goal of Maggie's--and the reader's--quest; the choices have been made, and the result is at hand. As in the recounting of Mort Johnson's drowning, the use of apostrophe in these examples brings the reader closer to the plot even as it underlines the existence of a mediating narrator.

Apostrophizing the reader brings him directly into the text; wherever Wilson uses "free indirect speech" as a narrative technique, the reader's imagination is challenged in a subtler manner. Genette observes that

> in free indirect speech, the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then merged. (1980, 175)

This merging can create a double confusion, he says, "[f]irst, between uttered speech and inner speech. . . . Next, and especially, confusion

between the speech (uttered or inner) of the character and that of the narrator" (172). Wallace Martin disagrees, asserting that instances of free indirect speech "do not bother us at all. . . . Because of our competence as readers of literature, we understand the passage without any consciousness of the conventions on which it is based" (138). At the risk of generating confusion by examining some of these conventions, I want to conclude this study by considering the use of this technique in Wilson's writing and its effects on the plot and narration.

The double-voicedness of free indirect speech in "Lilly's Story" is usually not difficult to distinguish. Lilly's habitual silence and solitude indicate that hers is an inner discourse, and because of the differences in grammar between her speech and the narrator's there is no doubt as to whose parole is whose. One such example occurs as the narrator reflects on Lilly's creation of "Mr. Walter Hughes":

> All this Lilly did alone with planned duplicity and in ruthless self-defence. She did it in the solitude and courage and emptimess and experience and inexperience of her tricky mind. Well, a girl's gotta live, hasn't she? What I mean is, a girl's gotta live. If you don't help yourself. . . . I guess I got a right to be like folks. My kid's gotta right to have a chance hasn't he. He's got his rights like any other kid. (169)

The switch from the narrator's to Lilly's voice is obvious, and serves to reveal the desire which backs Lilly's determination to change her life. Here, Lilly's discourse takes over the narrator's, defending her against the narrator's accusation of ruthlessness. Bakhtin speaks of the way in which characters' speech may "refract

authorial intentions" (315); here, Lilly's speech appears to refract the narrator's intentions. The combined result may point to the author's story, which Bakhtin insists must be recognized in order to "understand the work."

As the narrator is discussing Lilly's attraction to Paddy Wilkes, Lilly's voice again bursts through.

> Thus, since her birth, the child Eleanor, all unknowing, had guarded her mother and had made her the blameless and silent woman that she had become, who now was crushing out her love. (But a girl's gotta right to live, hasn't she? Sure she's got a right. No, said Lilly's austerity, she has no rights at all. None.) (222)

In the attempt to "crush out her love," the re-emergence of the girl's voice indicates how close to the surface Lilly's past is and how difficult is that effort to suppress it. In the last sentence, although the reply comes from within Lilly, the exactness of grammar indicates that the narrator remains in command of the narration.

Near the end of the text, grammar contributes to ambiguity. Having decided to allow Miss Larue to "style" her, "Lilly knew that she was committed, that she was glad, and that there would be no turning back. But will it change me? Shall I be safe? I think so" (255). Here, the "I" signals the merging of Lilly's voice with the narrator's. The use of "shall" as the simple future tense, however, problematizes the second question. It is unlikely that Lilly would use such elevated diction, yet there is no doubt that she is the "I" who desires to be safe. Lilly appears to be speaking in the narrator's language, an interesting reversal of the usual usage of this narrative technique.

The most notable instance of free indirect discourse in "Tuesday and Wednesday," the account of Mort's drowning, has already been mentioned. There is no doubt that the "I" who speaks in this passage is Mort, rather than the narrator, but, because he has been shouting, there is some question as to whether his speech is uttered or inner:

> he shouts and shouts and looks wildly around and runs wildly around and comes back for anything. Is that a rope yes it is a coiled rope. And he throws the end of the rope and it misses, and he leans far down and takes a good purchase on it and throws it again to poor old Eddie Mort Eddie who is going to drown sure if Mort doesn't do something quickly but I don't have to jump in do I Myrtle do I Eddie no no I don't have to jump in do I; and he sees again the ghastly face above the water. (114)

The merging of character and narrator in this passage is actually threefold, for, when Mort sees Eddie's face in the water "he is Eddie, struggling there" (emphasis added). Just as Mort experiences Eddie's drowning vicariously before falling in himself, the narrator uses Mort's discourse in the third person just before it takes over the narrating: "poor old Eddie Mort Eddie who is going to drown sure if Mort doesn't do something quickly." The "I" and the "eye" in this passage are Mort's; the voice shifts back and forth between him and the narrator. The lack of punctuation, as well as increasing the sense of urgency, blurs the distinction between Mort's and the narrator's voices. For these few seconds, the narratee experiences Mort's anguish directly without the distancing mediation of the narrator. Gradually, then, the narrator disentangles the two discourses and, with the thud of the phrase, "became both of them drowned men," rises again to the surface of the text.

In Swamp Angel, instances of free indirect speech are more frequent and tend to create confusion as to who actually speaks. After Maggie has ordered Vera out of her kitchen, the narrator reveals Maggie's despair.

> It was of the past that she thought. With all her fine talk and with all her high thinking she had not been able to cope with one unhappy human being. I wish Nell Severance were here with her acid good sense. Oh to be with old Nell where no one has to act or pretend or swim around. Human relations ... how they defeat us. Yes, I am defeated. She did not know how long she sat with her head in her hands. (142)

As in the scene of Mort's drowning, the narrator introduces Maggie's discourse gradually. The first sentence occurs in the narrator's language. In the second sentence, the narrator uses Maggie's expressions--"fine talk" and "high thinking"--while still speaking of her in the third person. Maggie takes over as subject of the discourse in the third and fourth sentences. What follows--"Human relations ... how they defeat us"--remains ambiguous. It may be Maggie addressing herself, or it may be the narrator sympathizing with Maggie in direct dialogue. In either case, it is Maggie who concurs in her response, and the passage concludes with the narrator again watching Maggie from a distance. This use of free indirect speech appears to relate to the narrator's lack of omniscience in regard to Maggie's feelings. At this moment of high emotion, the narrator merges with Maggie and allows her to speak for herself, expressing the pain of her failure in her own words.

A second instance also combines the openness of a restricted field of omniscience with ambiguity of voice. At the beginning of

the final chapter, Maggie is urging Haldar to wait until Vera indicates she is ready before he takes her up to the lake. The narrator interjects:

> (And could Vera bear to view that scene again? And could she bear that Maggie knows what she knows? What can Vera do? Oh, what can I do! Something has changed in me and I am lost.) (153)

The questions belong to the narrator; because of the repetition of the "what can ___ do?" structure, one assumes that it is Vera who answers them. Because it is Maggie who next speaks, however, and because she suggests some things that they can all do to help Vera, the reader could argue that the response is Maggie's. If one sees Maggie, as Marjorie Beresford-Howe does, as being "rather ruthless" in her treatment of Vera, one might also see her as the one who has changed and has lost something of herself. There is also the possibility, moreover, that the words are Haldar's; something--his love for Vera--has changed in him and has been lost. In the final analysis, I believe that this example of discourse does indeed belong to Vera; she is the character who, in her suicide attempt and its aftermath, indicates a sense of loss. The ambiguity colours and deepens the poignancy of the lament. Working against the sense of finality produced by the casting of the Swamp Angel into the lake, the passage also intensifies the absence of closure which distinguishes _Swamp Angel_'s plot. Haldar is to wait until Vera "_says_" she wants to go" (emphasis added) before returning with her to the lake; she may do that, or decide to remain in Kamloops, or reattempt suicide. It is her discourse--her "saying"--which will,

in any case, continue to shape the lives associated with Three Loon Lake.

Free indirect speech contributes to the double-voicedness of the narrator's discourse and to the heteroglossia present in Swamp Angel and The Equations of Love. In each text, the narrator's commentary plays a prominent role, and the degree of her perceptivity ranges from covert to overtly subjective. At times, there is considerable distance between the narrator and the characters, at others their discourses merge. The narrator's field of omniscience also varies from passage to passage within each text. What my study has shown is that the narrating process in Wilson's writing is complex and variable; it reveals a self-reflexivity and concern with boundaries characteristic of contemporary postmodern fiction.

Conclusion

Speaking about the source of her fiction, Ethel Wilson reflects:

> There is a general proposition, I think, that serious fiction--and mine is serious even when it is funny (for serious fiction may be funny fiction)--is probably the result of conflict within the writer. (Stouck 1987, 82)

This conflict, the inner collision between the self and the other, is dramatized in Wilson's fiction by the different levels of dialogic discourse of characters and narrators. I have tried to show that an analysis of The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel from a dialogic perspective reveals how Wilson presents "the speaking person and his discourse" in her writing.

The dialogues in which Wilson's characters engage shape their lives; they create themselves and each other through their discourse. The stories of The Equations of Love and Swamp Angel illustrate how fiction-making can influence, and even replace, reality. In so doing, they mirror the novelist's act of creating the text.

At the level of plot, the narrators' discourse constructs the story worlds and their inhabitants. The semantic implications of selected names, the parodying of other texts, the blending of a variety of languages into the characters' and narrators' discourses all contribute to the complexity underlying the surface simplicity of the texts. Viewpoints are further multiplied by allowing the characters to share in the narrating process.

Wilson's narrators comment freely upon their plots, engaging in

dialogue with their narratees, passages of commentary become another of the discourses operating in the texts. These narrators stand on a middle plane between the story and the narratee, observing on the one hand and presenting on the other. They both generate, and originate from, dialogue.

Wilson's texts acknowledge and explore the inevitable tensions which the self/other dichotomy generates: jealousies, clashing world-views, and the desire for isolation set against the definitive need for communication. Her writing explores the differences between voices, between viewpoints, between worlds. Analysis of discourse in Swamp Angel and The Equations of Love reveals a particular interest in the shifting boundaries between fiction and reality, and in the power of the speech act to structure reality. Ethel Wilson's fiction, then, presages the development of postmodernism in Canadian fiction.

Notes

[1] These works are documented under "Critical Sources" in "Works Cited" or "Additional Bibliography."

[2] Lewin translates *récit* as "narrative", to eliminate confusion (mine) between "narrative" and "narration," I choose instead to use "plot."

[3] I have borrowed this phrase from Emile Benveniste, who actually uses it to define what a performative utterance is *not* (237). In my opinion, Benveniste, in excluding even the imperative mode from his definition, makes it much too narrow. As Austin points out, "Come here!" contains within it the statement "I order you to come here," which Benveniste insists is the only acceptable linguistic model for a performative utterance. I have found my dialogic definition to be more functional in analyzing the discourses in these texts.

[4] Since the narratee and implied reader in these texts appear to be one and the same, I use these terms interchangeably.

[5] Other than the implication of David Stouck's remark in his introduction to the New Canadian Library Classic edition of *Swamp Angel* that it is "peopled largely by strong, forceful women and weak men" (8), I can find no proof in Wilson's texts that her narrators are female. I am arbitrarily assigning "she/her" to the narrator and "he/his" to the narratee/reader.

[6] In a letter to Desmond Pacey, Wilson writes of the name "Ethel". "What had been a princely Saxon name had become quasi-fashionable then merely respectable, and now no more. There's something inescapably conventional about the name, something to live down, but it cannot be avoided by the possessor who must make the best of it, pro or con" (Stouck 1987, 236).

[7] Many ancient mythologies involve a goddess who begat, nurtured, and had power over, the animal kingdom. One such is Fauna, the "mother of Wild Creatures" (Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, San Francisco. Harper & Row, 1983) 306.

[8] Nell's view of language anticipates bpNichol's, who says, "I wanted a writing that . . . would not pretend to an omniscience of authority it didn't have and could, therefore, partake of the real world" (Roy Miki, ed., Tracing the Paths, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988) 295.

[9] See Seymour Chatman's study of "Covert Versus Overt Narrators," which provides a useful list of the degrees of perceptibility of narrators. (196-262)

[10] With the exceptions of Maggie Lloyd and of Ellen Cuppy in Love and Salt Water, however, it is not a quality found in the protagonists of the novels or novellas.

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