GEOGRAPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN STORIES BY CLARK BLAISE

by

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ABSTRACT

The principal intention of this thesis is to explain the psychological significance of the geographical metaphors and symbols that feature prominently in the short stories of Clark Blaise. After a brief review of the work of three critics who have touched on this aspect of Blaise's writing and of Blaise's background in earth sciences, eleven stories are discussed. These stories fall into linked groups, each of which presents a psychological phenomenon that is analyzed in terms of its geographical references. These phenomena are all traced to Blaise's concern with "the frailty of identity", a phrase used in "He Raises Me Up" which may be taken as the cornerstone of this thesis.

In the first group of four stories the protagonists are all seen to be suffering the dilemmas of split personality. In each story Blaise's technique of working from a single exfoliating geographical symbol is demonstrated.

Two stories in which geography serves as an agent of psychological warfare are discussed in the second group. Geography, while continuing to provide metaphors, is also shown to function actively in the psychological division of society as well as the individual.

The third group shows how the awareness of disorientation among Blaise's characters develops into a major preoccupation with psycho-navigation, the significance of such devices as a map and a surveyor's transit in resolving Oedipal conflicts is discussed.

Other issues which cut across group divisions are considered. These include the significance of characters' names, the "parenting" effect of bodies of water on Blaise's imagination, and the recurrence of alter egos. Throughout the stories young people are shown to have a greater concern for and a stronger grasp on their sense of identity than adults, the indifference of the latter being traceable most often to the frequency of their uprooting and resettlement all over North America. The device which serves to distinguish Blaise from most other writers who work through references to geography, the subversion of his geographical metaphors, is discussed in a number of stories.

The thesis ends with a discussion of the story that is Blaise's most comprehensive statement of the interaction between psychology and geographical metaphor, "A North American Education".

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INTRODUCTION

Clark Blaise, who published his first book of short fiction, A North American Education, in 1973, has received relatively little critical attention, despite recognition by Robert Lecker as one of Canada's foremost short story writers ("Murals Deep in Nature" 11).

One of the few to have written on Blaise, and the first to attempt an overview of his work, is Frank Davey, whose 1976 essay not only provided helpful insights into how Blaise's work should be approached but also served to generate enough controversy to develop some degree of momentum in Blaise studies. In his consideration of the stories in A North American Education and Tribal Justice Davey makes a number of provocative points. He dismisses the idea that Blaise's writing should be considered primarily as "exile" literature (New 259), claiming that to view these stories as parables "about rootlessness, homelessness" (Davey 73) is to generalize and miss Blaise's fundamental concern. Davey promotes characterization as "the most important element" (74) in the stories, stating that there is "no doubt" it is the writer's "central intent". His most controversial claims, however, are that "In none of Blaise's story [sic] are there any overt uses of symbolism, metaphor, or non-factual imagery" (65) and that "The necessary basis for a thematic interpretation of Blaise's stories lies in [an] innocent narrator, in the meanderings of his narratives, and in his impressionable realism" (72-73).

Davey's elevation of the narrator stems from his conviction that Blaise is attempting to deflect attention away from his stories "as ecriture and away from the author as writer" (65), and must necessarily ignore "symbolism, metaphor, [and] non-factual imagery" in his efforts "to render invisible the linguistic surface of the writing". Here Davey becomes more wilful than provocative, seemingly inviting Lecker's "alternative response" that "Blaise is a writer determined to turn towards his stories as ecriture and towards the author as writer, to pursue his own visibility in language through a highly developed use of symbolism and metaphor, to revel in his narrative complexity..." ("An Other I" 93). Like Lecker I wish to take issue with Davey's dismissal of symbolism and metaphor in Blaise's writing. In this thesis I contend that Blaise works conscientiously with these devices, and that one kind in particular dominates his thinking. When Davey observes of one young narrator that he is "puzzled by the scale...of the adult world" (70), and elsewhere that protagonists' "narratives lack direction" (68) he himself resorts to the group of metaphors that occurs most frequently in Blaise's writing, the geographical.

The second major issue raised by Davey that I wish to expand on is the role of psychology in Blaise's stories. Having indirectly shown the place of geography in these stories, Davey goes on to imply a connection between geography and psychology when he notes the emotional effects of a

"father's wanderings from job to job and his tearing of the boy from every new environment before he can gain the knowledge to deal with it" (69). Anticipating Blaise's essays on unhousement, Davey shrewdly notes that the sense of place in Blaise's stories, their "peculiar multi-cultural ambience" (73), depends on endowing his characters with "an insecure sense of self".

A more extensive overview of Blaise's stories is provided by Lecker's essay "Murals Deep in Nature". In this commentary on A North American Education and Tribal Justice, published in 1982, Lecker is already intimating his opposition to Davey's main point. Responding to his own opening question "How does a Clark Blaise story feel?" (17) Lecker notes that "Blaise's characters are inseparable from the things they touch – gooey, sticky, dirty, infested things", but cautions that if his stories are read merely for raw sensation the "metaphor seeps by us". Commenting on what he calls the "raw/cooked tension [that] informs many of Blaise's best stories" (18), Lecker claims a significant place for metaphor in Blaise's work.

In the discussion of the stories that follows Lecker notes the integral part played by psychology in Blaise's writing.

> Why are so many of Blaise's characters voyeurs, watching from a distance, wanting sex, death, art? Psychologists would have a lengthy answer. (34)

Of the compulsive movement around North America that is characteristic of Blaise's protagonists Lecker comments tnat "they are perpetually in search of an affirmation which can no longer be found" (19).

Like Davey, Lecker links psychology to geography. From the twelve vignettes that constitute "Extractions and Contractions" in A North American Education he chooses "Student Power", which, like the other eleven, "develops a central metaphor" (25), in this case "winter's first seizure of claustrophobia". Of the novella "Snow People", from the same collection, he observes "we are confronted with a nest of connotation..." (35) and that "The jungle, of course, is metaphoric". Lecker also notes the importance of geography to Blaise's narrators; confronted by what they perceive as inimical environments they typically hope for "Refuge...in history, geography" (29).

Like Lecker, Barry Cameron is at odds with Davey's early assessment of Blaise's work, stating inter alia that Davey is "erroneous" ("Clark Blaise" 13) in his remarks about Blaise's avoidance of "metaphor, simile and romantic imagery" and in his claim that "There is very little reliance on symbolism or imagery".

Also like Lecker, Cameron notes the intimate relationship between geography and psychology in Blaise's stories; commenting on "Extractions and Contractions" he states "Winter is a bleak psychological landscape" (31).

Elsewhere he draws attention to the general psychological basis of Blaise's writing in his comments on the arrangement of the stories in A North American Education and Tribal Justice. In the former he notes that the stories are arranged in reverse chronological order, beginning with the adult world of the Montreal Stories and ending with the stories of Frankie Thibidault's childhood. This arrangement, coupled with the frequent anonymity of the adult narrators, suggests to Cameron that the underlying theme of the collection is man's progressive loss of certainty in his own identity and his compulsive reaching back to the greater certainty of identity in childhood. Cameron's choice of metaphor in his encapsulating statement, like Davey's, helps to confirm the central position of geography in Blaise's writing: "A Northern American Education thus maps out 'a man's life' from the present...backwards into the past" (15). Although the arrangement of the stories in Tribal Justice inverts this order, with the three groups moving from childhood to adulthood, from "unqualified hope...to...utter pessimism" (39), the eight stories from this volume that I consider illustrate individually Blaise's concern with the loss of the sense of identity in geographical contexts.

Commenting on "A Class of New Canadians" Cameron notes that "The themes, images, and major metaphors that run throughout the book [i.e. A North American Education] are all basically deployed here..." (15). When he identifies an

inanimate mannequin in a clothing-store window as the protagonist's "alter ego" and one of the minor characters as his "Doppelganger" (19) this claim can be extended to some of the stories in Tribal Justice. "At the Lake", "Grids and Doglegs" and "He Raises Me Up", as will be shown, all depend on these devices.

Cameron begins his essay by quoting Blaise on himself:

> I'm a kind of tropical tree with an awful lot of shallow roots and I can easily be blown over. On the other hand, I can survive a lot of changes. I adapt very easily to just about anything around me. (Hancock 46,48)

In this reference to the migratory existence imposed on him by his parents when he was a child, Blaise reflexively relates his psychological development to climate, weather and vegetation, and his psychological survival to his ability to adapt to new environments. When Blaise writes that he could "easily be blown over" he uses a vigorous geographical metaphor for psychological disorientation. After each such gust (thirty moves before he reached grade eight) Blaise resorted to the road maps of North America to navigate his family to their next temporary destination. During this geographical reorientation Blaise achieved a psychological reorientation, deriving from the constant journeying, as he puts it, a sense of "my own identity, such as it is, through the places I absorbed" (Resident Alien 2). Even during the short pauses between journeys, "There was only one book in my life, at least up to the age of twelve, and that was the

Atlas" ("The Book that Changed my Life" 34). Blaise's observations on the links between his own geographical and psychological reorientation are developed in his stories, in which not merely maps but an array of navigational devices are deployed for disoriented protagonists metaphorically to re-establish their bearings.

Initially Blaise trained as a geologist, a course of studies that provided him with a particular appreciation for "subsoil and substructure and determinants from weather and from rainfall and from things like that" (Hancock 50). In switching to creative writing Blaise did not lose the earth scientist's cast of mind. On the contrary, geology became the substructure of his writing, with physical geography providing the metaphors for the psychological predicaments endured by his protagonists. Speaking of himself and his writing, Blaise frequently has recourse to geographical metaphor: of prize-winning stories written when he was an undergraduate he remarks that they were "so swampy they should have been sprayed" (Mentors" 37); of his liking for the discursive tradition represented by Thomas Mann he observes to Cameron that "I still prefer things that have a kind of sponginess to them.... The high ground is nice, austerity is attractive, but I guess I'm a swamp-dweller" ("A Conversation with Clark Blaise" 13).

The overlap of geography and psychology in Blaise's mind is most palpable in his references to his family life. His

parents, he says, were "the heavens and the landscape of my imagination, the indispensable maps leading north and south into French [sic] and the Prairies and even to Europe" ("A North American Memoir: Revenge" 58). The intimacy of the connection between geography and psychology to Blaise is such that as his parents became geography, so geography became a parent to the writer: "Bodies of fresh water in Florida and Canada have had a parenting effect on my imagination". In relating the trauma he experienced when his parents divorced he resorts to the vocabulary of earth science. The event, he says, was a "cataclysm", a word frequently used in geology for events in the earth's evolution involving incomprehensible force, and which in the original Greek means "deluge" in the sense of an obliterating wave.

Psychological division is a frequently recurring feature of Blaise's stories, and one that can be linked to the separation of his parents. It is a condition expressed through numerous striking metaphors, none larger than the division of North America into Canada and the United States. The geographical differences between the two countries, with their corresponding psychological reverberations, impinge on the reader's awareness throughout Blaise's work. When Blaise refers to Canadians as "long-suffering spouses" in Resident Alien (174) and Winnipeg as "mother's city" (168), Canada is established as the female in a divided union, while the US,

associated with his "probably not entirely sane father", is cast as the male.

Despite Blaise's claims that he has only ever written of three characters, his parents and himself (Hancock 60), it would be erroneous to assume that his stories are no more than autobiography. Admittedly, significant elements of Blaise's life, such as his job and his movements around North America, are duplicated in the lives of many of his protagonists, yet none of the stories can be construed merely as thinly disguised retelling of actual events. Beyond the variation of characters' names, itself by no means an arbitrary, mechanical procedure, Blaise's use of irony indicates that the label of autobiography is inappropriately restrictive when applied to his stories. Although irony and autobiography are certainly not mutually exclusive, irony serves Blaise as a link between geography and psychology, and not to provide clues to his personality.

This is particularly noticeable in the endings of Blaise's stories. Davey, having noted that the stories lack the traditional climax (65), fails to detect their movement toward a completion that is at least as satisfying, namely, the moment of subversive irony. Most of Blaise's stories depend on metaphor and symbol drawn from geography, a scientific discipline concerned with bringing order to the scrutiny of the character of the earth; yet in Blaise's hands geography becomes the expression of psychological disorder.

As will be seen in the discussion of the stories that follows, Blaise sets geography and psychology at odds in numerous ways: exact knowledge of one's fixed place in space leads to detachment and drift between societal groupings; attempts to integrate with the environment end in split personality; wild fluctuations in sea level are juxtaposed with unvarying racial attitudes.

By creating situations like these Blaise shows that autobiography is only one element in his fiction. Legitimate questions may be put regarding the extent of autobiography in his stories, to which no absolute answers can be given. As Gerald Gordon is left to grapple with Ohio's fluctuating borders in "How I Became a Jew", the reader of Blaise's stories is left to face the impossibility of drawing a dividing line between the events of the author's life and the fictions that may, or may not, have been inspired by them.

One of Blaise's subversive ironies serves to define character. This is the predicament of constant unhousement that besets a number of his protagonists. In Blaise's world people commonly achieve their sense of who they are by recognizing that home is no fixed abode; psychologically they are "at home" with themselves only when they are not at home. To rely on such a fixity as home would be to deny their characters, since unhousement is their only fixity. Ultimately the only place that can be called home is the continent of North America, which in Blaise's hands becomes

as much a state of mind as a land mass, an expression of the family split between maternal north and paternal south. (It is interesting that south is the only compass point whose connotations for Blaise are entirely negative.)

Unhousement is an important issue in studying Blaise's writing for at least two major reasons. Firstly, it does much to separate Blaise from other writers who work through geographical metaphor; with it he expresses the unreliability of place, not its fixity, and thus establishes himself as a geographical subversive in the practice of his art. Secondly, it does much to establish character as a significant element in the stories. Although Davey claims too much for character, Cameron, admittedly quoting Blaise himself, errs too much in the opposite direction. With Blaise's remarks that "The centre of my stories is not in my characters" (Hancock 59) Davey's sweeping claim can be dismissed; however, when Cameron quotes Blaise's comment that character is merely "that force which tries to maintain balance [between the] delicate interplays of action and description" ("Clark Blaise" 9) critic and author underestimate the vigour with which Blaise's protagonists emerge as strongly-etched individuals whose distinctiveness can often be traced to their constant unhousement.

Davey, Lecker and Cameron all note the interaction of geography and psychology that is typical of much of Blaise's writing. Owing to restrictions of space, however, they are

unable to amplify this connection by detailed reference to more than one or two individual stories. To show the relationship between geography and psychology in Blaise's writing I have selected eleven stories, which I consider in four groups. In the first I deal with the issue of the central exfoliating geographical metaphor, symbol or image that represents the force undermining the individual's certainty in his own identity. In the second I attempt to show the force that the landscape has in Blaise's hands for creating psychological divisions. In the third I comment on the frequency with which navigational instruments appear in Blaise's stories for the reorientation of psychologically confused characters. I end with some remarks on "A North American Education", the story which I consider most compellingly brings together these three issues.

CHAPTER I

In this section four stories from Tribal Justice are discussed in terms of the psychological significance of their central geographical metaphors and symbols.

The predicament of the narrator of "He Raises Me Up" originates in a paella dinner with Haitian friends. Geographically, the story is set in Montreal in winter, but at that city's antipodes in the narrator's mind. Before leaving his home he has so firmly conceptualized balmy climatic conditions from the social elements of the evening to come, the warmth of Caribbean friendship and Mediterranean food, that he is betrayed into the folly of dressing lightly. Having allowed fancy to displace reality he is ill-prepared, both mentally and physically, to withstand the crisis precipitated by automobile breakdown. As the narrator sees himself "prowl the vacant city in a cashmere coat, doubling back over a deserted bridge" (210) we are impressed by the slenderness of his resources; lacking warmth in cashmere, he also lacks the mere cash for a tow, an inversion that Blaise invites with the phrase "doubling back".

Stranded on the urban cloverleaf the narrator reflects on his teeth and his new car. These, he concludes, are the "Inseparable indices of the inner man" (213), the alliteration emphasizing the degree to which he is internalizing the concept. Linking the "inner damage" (209)

suffered by his mouth and car he becomes, as Lecker notes, metaphysically sensitized ("Murals Deep in Nature" 56) to "the frailty of identity" (214). He is stimulated to this sensitivity in the first place, however, by climatic conditions; with the breakdown geographical reality reasserts itself, dispelling the tropical warmth that he has psychologically manufactured for himself before leaving home.

The simultaneous existence of two climatic regimes in the mind of one man suggests a divided personality. When he emerges from the car the narrator establishes this incipient loss of certainty in his identity by juxtaposing another kind of climatic division with a personality split:

> Flagging at cars that spray your shoes with a gray pasty slime. Clown, you tell yourself. (210)

Here the narrator significantly refrains from using obvious words like "slush", that would merely confirm the snow as snow; instead he conceives of it as a variety of wet cement. Simultaneously he visualizes himself as one of the characters from the film world frequently seen in the vicinity of wet cement, the clown. These parallel splits in the narrator's mind, the geographical (snow/cement) and the psychological (narrator/clown), are emphasized by a reference to the item that is most commonly seen in wet cement in clown films, a hat; the clown, who traditionally wears two faces, laughing and crying, is seen here also to wear two hats, the bowler or the skimmer.

As the narrator's sense of identity begins to slip he simultaneously begins to lose his sense of where he is. The undermining of Montreal as a city fixed in place and time can be seen in his observation of "mercury lamps" (209), suggesting other worlds, and in the resemblance he perceives between light standards and the "saurian" (214) creatures of primeval landscapes.

Division of identity continues in the narrator's mind. Recalling his previous divine posture towards his freshmen students he slips into a priestly persona, bestowing benediction, adopting pulpit cadences. When he intones "Blessed are the carless" (210) and "Fortunate too are the tinkerers" we can also see at work the irony by which the narrator is attempting, in Davey's phrase, to maintain "some minimal equanimity" (69); the carless in this story are cursed, their purportedly blessed condition subverted by the invited slant-rhyme, "careless".

Recent assaults on the narrator's sense of his identity are revealed. A projected course of dental treatment that will involve loss of "muscle-memory" (212) threatens a return to the tabula rasa condition of a new-born. By suppressing the "urge of lecture", the dentist who prescribes this treatment registers designs on his patient's job, one of the major elements by which the narrator identifies himself. Under the stress of his predicament on the cloverleaf the narrator's certainty in his identity is eroded to the extent

that he is puzzled by his children's continued recognition of him as their father; the seven-year old still "hasn't seen through [him]" (213).

The final stage in the disintegration of the narrator's sense of his identity comes in the negotiations with Max, the tow truck operator. Here, in a crushing irony, an impostor is shown to have the power to reject multiple proof of the narrator's authentic identity. Furthermore, the only means of payment acceptable to Max, a credit card, implies a requirement that the narrator identify himself by producing the merely numerical identity imposed on him by the bank; the cipher, not the person, must be produced. Viewed psychologically, the "organizing idiocy" (210) of wealth is thus ironically exposed as a centrifugal force, with the narrator asserting his identity in the only way that registers on an impersonal banking system, by getting into debt, by becoming less than zero.

The absolute authority of Max's fake bank-card stamp over legitimate identity raises the wider question of the power of corrupt regimes to strip the individual of his identity, even to deny his existence as a person. Having misrepresented the nature of his service, Max then asserts his right to do so by commenting on the illegality of his client's presence in a towed vehicle. Such detachment is the essence of tyranny.

By raising the narrator under the spire of his tow truck Max reveals himself, in the narrator's geographically conditioned perceptions of the moment, as his saviour. But Max is obviously not divine. He takes money under a false front, and is quite indifferent to his client's predicament. Yet he strongly recalls somebody. His truck bears no name, and it is by no means certain that his name is Max. Who else in this story has at one time assumed a divine guise, registered indifference to his clients, and been anonymous throughout? The narrator. And when we recall the fate of his students' papers in the garbage of his van we can see that he is as much a fraud as a teacher as Max is as a purveyor of sporting goods.

Is Max the narrator's alter ego? At the beginning we were invited to see the comedy in the situation, and having been thus forewarned we have no choice but to register the comedy that is staged at the end. Clearly unentitled to divine status, the two are nevertheless united and interchangeable in another role. No sooner has the narrator identified Max as "a grim little Lou Costello" (213) than he is being addressed by him as the other half of the famous comedy act, "Buddy". Having developed the notion of a dual identity by building up a priestly persona for the narrator, Blaise collapses it with the irony of a single name and confirms the narrator's earlier apprehension of his divided personality: the "Abbott" is a clown.

His judgement of climate having been subverted by psychology at the outset, the narrator now finds psychology subverted by climate: argument with the unprincipled is a seasonal matter, "important...on a summer night" (214), much less so on a winter's night.

Both Cameron and Lecker note the importance of irony in this story. The former comments that the narrator, ostensibly raised by Max, actually descends by losing control of the car ("Clark Blaise" 48). Lecker, who does not connect his remarks about comedy to the Abbott and Costello situation, observes instead that the claim on comedy is ironic since the narrator suffers a far from amusing defeat. To these must be added the geographical setting of the story on which the frailty of identity is exposed, the unlucky urban cloverleaf.

Max, in one shape or another, recurs throughout Blaise's fiction. A "gypsy" (214) in this particular story, Max is one of the numerous persons whose geographical detachment symbolizes a specific psychological aberration, namely, an indifference to authentic identity, either their own or anybody else's. Like the constantly unhoused Jean-Louis Thibidault, who also acquiesces in the adoption and manufacture of fake identities, Max displays a kind of "geographical immunity" that symbolizes his capacity for easy psychological adaptation to constantly changing environments; as Jean-Louis is immune to the hookworms of the south, Max,

"coatless, in overalls" (213), is immune to the freezing cold of the north. People who have a securer grasp on their identity, like young Frankie Thibidault, do not readily have this capacity.

Another character willing to become all things to all people, even at the cost of losing his sense of identity, is the much-travelled title figure of "The Fabulous Eddie Brewster". Eddie's psychological predicament is symbolized by his Panama hat, which indicates his urge to occupy the "middle ground" while committing himself to neither side. As a young soldier in the war Etienne-Eddie moves between the armies of Canada and America in his role as interpreter; in Hartley he functions as the intermediary between the town investors in the Rustique project and his brother; and once this enterprise has been established he functions as the traditional middleman in show business, the impresario, bringing Cubans and Bahamians to entertain a largely Yankee clientele in his Floridian middle ground. In his role of parent his inclination to geographical non-commitment even finds expression as part of his procreative instinct:

> After the war, Etienne had stayed in France as an interpreter for the Americans. Finally he married, [and] fathered an intemperate New World brood of children. (27)

Instead of staying in Canada, like his brother, to father New World children in the New World he remains in the Old World to father a brood conspicuously not of the Old World.

The easy response to Etienne's habit of locating himself in psychological middle ground would be to dismiss him as a fence-sitter. But by referring to the "Eye trouble" (27) afflicting Etienne's brother Blaise does not permit this. The pun highlights not only the problem of self-identification, the central issue of the story, but also the faulty vision which impairs the judgement of those who observe Etienne's conduct.

Etienne's "I" problem develops during his mayoralty in a town in Vichy France shortly after his brother's eye problem has conveniently exempted him from military service and the risk of exposure to Etienne's predicament. In this crisis the middle ground of compromise is denied Etienne, and he perforce must commit himself to the Nazis. His response to the German occupation of his town, and to the reaction of those who observe him, leaves him with a divided view of himself: is he a collaborator corrupted by Nazism, the judgement of those exempted from involvement in the affairs of wartime Verneuil-le-Chetif, or is he the saviour of that community, his own judgement of the situation? This issue will be replayed for further consideration in Florida.

Before his arrival in America, however, Etienne is granted a view of his psychological habitat from a reverse perspective. Middle ground voluntarily chosen may be freedom from commitment, but when forcibly imposed it becomes limbo, a zone Eddie later ironically salutes with the importation of

Caribbean limbo dancers. Disowned as a collaborator by France after the War, Etienne remains unclaimed by Canada in a Displaced Persons' camp. Caught here in a dead-zone between countries, Etienne is haunted by the prospect of statelessness, unhousement from the political map of the world itself, as every day he watches "the Russians and the Germans and the British identifying refugees and taking them back — if they want[ed] to go or not" (29). As the narrator of the previous story was denied his identity, so Etienne is apparently to be denied official acknowledgement of his existence in this one, his plight emphasized by the overt irony of official refusal to repatriate a willing native among so many less than willing.

In the camp Etienne is impressed by the demonstrated frailty of his identity. Even when reprieved from the fate of statelessness he remains aware of his vulnerability to possible arbitrary cancellation of his identity. The apparatus of immigrant sponsorship, visas, stamps and permits on his suitcases all proclaim the revocable nature of his status. One infringement of the terms of his visa, even perhaps by making an investment in his adopted country, could lead to its cancellation and his return to limbo. Ironically Etienne proceeds to subvert the system upon arrival in the States by transferring his vulnerability onto Louis's family; the former displaced person displaces his nephew from his room and his financial cares onto the boy's parents.

On his arrival in Hartley Etienne re-experiences the years of Nazi rule in Verneuil-le-Chetif. Similar in size, the two towns are both under fascist control during his residence, the Nazis having been replaced in Hartley by the Sheriff's office and the Klan. A third power broker is Hartley's radio host, Fred Peachum, the man who renames Etienne Broussard and thereby initiates his new identity. Fred Peachum's power, however, is more deep-seated than his influence as a mere corrupter in the mould of his namesake in The Beggar's Opera. Eponymous with an entire fruit-growing area of Florida, he is the people as well as their mobilizing voice. Once more Etienne bows before irresistible power and assumes the persona forced on him. Eddie collaborates with Peachum in the imposition of his false identity, since resistance would be to no avail, as his sister-in-law discovers when she opposes the tyrannies she perceives. She is Hartley's casualty, a victim with no counterpart in wartime Verneuil-le-Chetif.

In Hartley the ironies multiply as the story moves to its conclusion. While being corrupted Eddie simultaneously becomes Hartley's economic saviour by institutionalizing gambling, prostitution and related service industries. In stimulating the economic development promised in the twenties and never delivered, Eddie can claim a measure of vindication for his posture in both Verneuil-the-Cowardly and Hartley-the-Corruptible; simplistic judgements of right and wrong,

the specialty of jurors with "eye problems", are inadequate for the complexities imposed by immediate realities. Carefully considered, Eddie is neither collaborator nor saviour in either town. Although he may be considered as both, the most accurate judgement that can be delivered on him in the context is that he is an inhabitant of a psychological Panama, the narrow middle ground between blocs of right and wrong.

The far from fabulous Eddie stays in Hartley and joins the corrupt power structure through the recruitment of a son to the sheriff's office. With the arrival of sons Gaspar and Gerard from Indo-China and another relative, Gervaise, from New England, the Broussard clan comes together, the sense of gathering implicit in the repeated initials. In this way Blaise achieves one of his most bitingly subversive endings: the corrupt, whose identities have disintegrated, consolidate, while the integrated family, secure in its identity, is separated by incorruptibility.

Like chameleons both Eddie and Gene Doe change colour according to their background, quickly becoming the required southern brown in Florida. Linguistically speaking, too, they are chameleons, adopting whatever accent is required by their host communities. The most obvious sign of their indifference to their identity, however, is provided by their names: the false translations of Etienne to Eddie, not Stephen, and Jean to Gene instead of John, are matters of no

consequence to them at all. By accepting T.B. Doe Jean-Louis sacrifices the last trace of individuality in his identity and is half-way to becoming the universal American, John Doe.

By contrast, the child, Lacroix, in "I'm Dreaming of Rocket Richard", finds the assumption of a new identity and a new name impossible. Lacking the inherent chameleon qualities necessary to effect these changes he can only approach the problem ineffectually, from the outside, by assuming a Boston Bruins' hockey shirt. His failure to become anyone but himself is predictable; apart from having the greater certainty of identity typical of Blaise's younger characters, he is rooted in Montreal, his acquaintance with foreign parts restricted to various ethnic quarters of the city. Despite dressing in a Boston shirt and snarling colourfully at the home-team supporters, he cannot shed Montreal, where, as can be seen when Richard scores, his heart really lies. Outward trappings fail to alter inner allegiances.

The boy's perverse identification with a team that, like all others, usually loses at the Forum represents his geographical approach to solving a deep-seated psychological problem. In front of thousands he attempts to become Anglo-American, even to the extent of making the journey to the "Away" game in Montreal in his mind. This attempt to reject Montreal can be traced to his subliminal rejection of his

father, who provides little for his son to admire or emulate. An alcoholic, he is also crude, physically unattractive and socially awkward. Denial of his father must include his father's totems; hence the donning of the Boston shirt to eliminate his father's tattoo of Montreal's Maurice Richard. Ironically, the boy's hopes of being mistaken for a Bostonian move him psychologically closer to his father, who acquired the tattoo also hoping to be mistaken for somebody he wasn't, a soldier. External application of a shirt cannot, it transpires, eradicate his father's tribal marking nor his own genetic tattooing through his father. The boy's apprehension that his cousins are waiting for him to take off his shirt and expose a scaled-down version of the tattoo conveys strongly his awareness of the difficulties involved in attempting to shed his father; noting that the tattoo "was as long as my twelve-year-old hand" (69) he instinctively relates himself to his progenitor.

Repelled by his father, he seeks to identify with his mother. Convent education, which Lacroix senior blames for the alienation of his wife, serves to bind mother and son, her '"Curette" - "Little Priest"'(64). Such is her influence that games at the Forum are transformed into "evangelical" experiences "dans la cenacle" (66). Even in economics mother and son share religious characteristics, she telling off family finances "like beads on a rosary" (72), he insinuating that his scrounging at the bus garage is a form of tithing.

The father's status as a mere bead is made clear in Florida where, his application for a job with the Schmitzes rejected, he is also "told off" (71).

The boy seeks to shed his father finally by changing another external. Denying the common identity implied by a shared name, he seizes on his mother's maiden name, Deschênes, as a replacement for Lacroix. This psychological reorientation turns geographical with the boy's isolation of the sch in the middle of this name and its usurpation in his mind by the first letters of his uncle's name, Schmitz; by transferring a common letter cluster from one name to the other the boy attempts to replace his Quebecois identity with one from the Anglo world of the States, ironically becoming part German in the process.

Both attempts at a new identity fail. First the shirt unravels; "hornet colored" (66), with the power to sting its wearer, it had in any case been the suspect gift of the malicious cousin who later stings his Canadian relative with chili. Then the boy acknowledges that a claim on an American identity based on a group of letters will not work either since they form a "clot" (67) which merely obscures the hoped-for "link with [the] American world" instead of confirming it.

Intimations of divided personality develop. Growing up as a Catholic only child in a prolific Catholic part of Montreal in the early fifties, young Lacroix is something of

an oddity, "An only child [being] scarcer than twins, maybe triplets" (63). Having no brother to hold up a common genetic mirror in which he can identify himself, the boy has no means of consolidating his sense of who he is; only relatives distant in terms of geography as well as family are available to serve as the basis of his "genetic speculations" (67). And reference to them only leaves him feeling divided, "refracted...into second and third cousins several times removed" (67).

This sense of a psychological void arising from the deprivation of sibling complementation finds geographical expression in "the incompleteness of all the signs" (68) in the States. Here the English-only policy leaves the boy staring at the void he perceives next to the "Merry Christmas" sprayed on a window instead of the hoped-for equivalence of "Joyeux Noel". Having anticipated fulfillment of his genetic speculations in the States he instead experiences emptiness symbolized "all the way down" (68) to Florida by the absence of French on all the signs, a duplication of the void he has been attempting to create for himself in Montreal by shedding his father and anglicizing his mother.

Young Lacroix returns to Montreal, and saves his identity. Gerald Gordon, his coeval in "How I Became a Jew", however, has no prospects of returning to Georgia, nor of settling in Cincinnati, only of continued movement, and

consequently faces an escalating identity crisis. Considerations of location are the expression of the question of identity posed in this story. The setting is a junior high school in Cincinnati, named in honour of a Jew but now dominated by black enrolment. Here two black students, the Goldberg twins, have a Jewish name, while Gerald's namesake, Morris Gordon, is a Jew, despite the principal's correct assumption that Gerald's family name is not Jewish. Ohio, the state in which they reside, is itself experiencing shifting demographic patterns, which render its sense of identity in the Union less certain.

Gerald's fate in his new environment is heralded by the results of university tests which locate him as a "borderline genius" (108). This psychological evaluation confirms what Gerald has already proved spatially on the softball diamond of his previous school in Georgia, where he displayed a talent for striking "lofted fly balls tightly down the line [i.e. paralleling the borderline] and over the fence" (111). On first entering his new classroom in Cincinnati, however, Gerald discovers that the conceptual borderlines that he is familiar with have suddenly materialized as tangible barriers of exclusion; the students link arms at the front of each row, forcing him to maintain the geographical equivalent of his accustomed psychological position. Willing to live in the narrow zone between genius and the masses, he is altogether less comfortable about living between the student

body and the staff of Leonard Sachs Junior High School. Like Eddie Brewster, Gerald finds the middle zone comfortable only when freely accepted; imposed, like his residence in Ohio, it becomes limbo.

Logical pursuit of the criteria for membership in one of the two social groups at the school will be unavailing, since they overlap capriciously, blurring the boundary between them. The preferred "A" group consists of the Jews and three Negroes, namely, Henry Moore and the Goldberg twins. The twins are displaced from the black "B" group not only by race but also by their given names, Orville and Wilbur; named after the Wright brothers, these two obviously belong at the back among the "B" group aviators floating paper planes out of the window.

Since the divisions between the groups are unreliable Gerald has to turn to the adults for direction. Their directions, however, can only be unreliable too since they are as confused about their identities as the Goldberg twins. The Terleski who meets the exigencies of the classroom situation as a humiliating tyrant becomes a pal to Gerald on the street. Spiro is even more confused. Not only is he an Englishman in transit through America, he is also a Jew, sufficiently orthodox to have been to <u>shul</u> yet one whose speech has the nervous tic of highly inappropriate German tags. Unhoused, his destination unclear, he is both geographically and psychologically adrift, his rootlessness

the symptom of his identity problem. As points of reference Gerald's parents are equally unreliable, their attention focused on their dissatisfaction with the new environment, and not on ways to help their son adapt to it.

Psychologically adrift and confused about the location of group boundaries, Gerald is denied the metaphorical means to rectify these conditions by Spiro's disregard for professional responsibility. Instead of teaching geometry at the required time, he holds forth on history and sociology. Geometry, which delineates logically with conceptual rays, could clarify Gerald's situation; instead it is confused further by Cincinnati, which demarcates with solid barriers whose illogical function is to exclude. References to geometry, which would also demonstrate the technique for Gerald to locate himself at C by reference to points A and B, abound in this story: the nurse's "hexagonal" (116) spectacles, the "rigid rectangle" (115) formed by a teacher's hands, the concentric semicircles formed by his students, a baseball diamond, and a class bisected by a grading line that runs from (point) A to (point) B. Denied the necessary instruction, Gerald flounders, his situation confirmed outside the school, where conceptual delineations are replaced by impenetrable barriers around the Jews and the blacks; iron bars around the synagogue symbolize his exclusion from the former group, while those around the

statue of Lincoln, the emancipator, show his exclusion from the latter.

Fated to belong to no group, Gerald is captivated by the picture of Israel that Spiro paints. Its appeal is understandable since it depicts a society in which everyone qualifies as a member of a universal family, where the children are all "brothers and sisters, and...belong equally to every parent in the kibbutz" (115).

Adrift between the Jews and the blacks, Gerald is also adrift between industrial north and agricultural south. This is Ohio's predicament too. The border line between these two regions falls somewhere within the state, but it shifts and is not easily discernible. Viewed from this perspective Ohio resembles Gerald's classroom, its residents, like Gerald, unsure of which community to apply to for membership.

Unsure of its identity, the state is increasingly inhabited by rootless and opportunistic transients like Grady, a condition that represents a neat extension of the Jean-Louis Thibidault syndrome: in this story not only the individual loses his grasp on his identity through constant movement around the continent, but also the state through which he moves. This uncertainty of identity is expressed in terms of the inhabitants' ignorance about their borders, a fact established by Terleski:

> "And <u>now</u>, maybe the rest of you can tell me the states that border on Ohio. Does <u>anything</u> border on Ohio?"

> No one answered while I waved my hand. I cared desperately that my classmates learn where Ohio was. (110)

In Georgia Gerald had been clear about borderlines and secure in his identity; now, ironically, his certainty about Ohio's borders only produces psychological insecurity. Group membership depends on ignorance and abandoning attachment to borderlines. Hence the boy's desperation, for as long as the boundaries of the state shift in the minds of its people he will be unable to fix his position, and will remain prone to such errors as mistaking himself for a Jew. By undermining the fixity of boundaries Blaise undermines Gerald's sense of his identity, and ultimately produces, as the title promises, a divided personality.

Once again names are used to indicate a personality split into two (or more) parts: first the team of Abbott and Costello, then Etienne-Eddie, then Lacroix-Deschênes-Schmitz, and finally Morris-Gerald Gordon, as divided in halves as the century by the year of these events, 1950.

As young Lacroix received only false directions from the compass logo of his Boston shirt, so Gerald also risks further undermining by reliance on geography:

> "Israel," I said aloud, letting it buzz; "Israel," and it replaced Mozambique as my favorite word; Israel, Israel, Israel, and the dread of the days to come lifted, the days I would learn once and for all if Israel could be really real. (119)

With so many repetitions and emphases the pronunciation of his new most favoured state inevitably becomes the demotic

"Isreal", and then, in light of the final redundancy, the interrogative "Is real?" This question from contemporary geopolitics reflects the dubiety of Gerald's new psychological orientation.

CHAPTER II

Two stories from Tribal Justice, "Relief" and "At the Lake", depict man at war with the landscape, his confrontation with nature in both cases marked by psychological division. Geography continues to serve as a metaphor for psychological states, but in these stories it also plays an active role in the disintegration of identities, the group's as well as the individual's.

The enigmatically spare title "Relief" is a strong indication of Blaise's preoccupation with the interplay between geography and psychology, alluding to the contours of both physical and mental landscapes. In this story Lester, the young protagonist, is settled in the Lake Oshacola area and therefore shows no signs of a fragmented identity. In fact, as can be seen in the references to hollows, Lester is strongly identified with the area. As a resident of Camp Hollow he will see all the depressions around him fill with water during the storm, an occurrence foreshadowed earlier in the day when, because of the heat, "sweat collected in the hollow of my spine" (18). Landforms, which so clearly convey the idea of separation, here symbolize divisions within society, not the individual.

The story is set in the swamps around the lake, an area not only isolated from the outside world but also one dotted with patches of higher, habitable land whose separateness in

human terms is emphasized by Blaise's reference to them as "enclaves" (16), specifically "sandy" and therefore vulnerable to erosion. Here live Lester and his parents, "separated from nearly everyone by the impenetrable channels of the lake" (16), on a peninsula liable to be turned into an island by rising water. Blaise emphasizes the isolation of this settlement by a concluding reference to "a promontory, threatened by swamps" (26), its exposed vulnerability by a comparison to a "neck of land" (16). The only neighbours here are further separated in the deeper swamps by the tracks of the Florida Central Railway.

These physical divisions correspond with psychological divisions in a highly class- and colour-conscious society. Among their neighbours Lester's family makes clear distinctions between migrant moss-pickers, Seminole Indians and blacks. The local public school, despite its small enrolment, segregates its students by race into different shanty cars, so that Lester's Caucasian group only senses the presence of black and native Indian children, never seeing them even though they are close by. The separation of society into four groups is reflected in Lester's mind by the separation of the alphabet into four groups, a lifelong division ostensibly the result of the inadequate blackboard space available to his teacher, Miss Hewitt, for writing it out. Divided into unrelated groups both society and the alphabet lose coherence, and the risk of misplacing one or

more of these groups arises. This is the fate of the negroes and Indians, who have to all intents disappeared, creating lacunae in society; by depriving the classroom of necessary resources Camp Hollow lives up to its name by threatening its students with linguistic lacunae too. Once more names work to further Blaise's meaning: "Hollow" refers to both landform and the psychological condition of society, while "Lake", from the Latin "lacus", indicates lacunae.

In her roles as teacher and welfare officer, and in her freshness before the wilting climate, Miss Hewitt is the embodiment of geographical and psychological relief. It is ironic, however, that as the instrument of relief in the classroom she unwittingly confirms societal division in her presentation of the alphabet, while in her role as local welfare officer she achieves a negative kind of integration. Having rescued twelve coloured children, from amongst dozens who were lost, she receives approval from neither Lester's mother nor the migrant family's father, who, perversely, come together on this issue; the moss-picker reports with satisfaction that he "'Musta killed one them sons-a-bitches'" as they were approaching him during the night while Lester's mother nods, "a smile broadening around the lip of the cup." (24) The myopic nature of this kind of racial hatred is borne out by the earlier reference to the town children who "gathered" (15) to pelt negro clean-up crews with kumquats, symbolically staining them the same orange as the dye that

Lester's father must remove after a day's work at the Hartley orange packing plant. The community of feeling between Lester's family and the migrants, however, will only be temporary; like the kerosene oil and water which Lester's father grudgingly donates during the night, the two groups will never mix.

The danger of this kind of separation lies in its potential for violence. The geographical storm that separates the two Yankee outsiders from the community kills them, while the psychological turbulence of racism dictates the carrying of a butcher-knife to answer a knock on the door. The death of the black child claimed by the migrant, if, indeed, it happened, would be the predictable end to such ethnic obsessions. During the storm perceptions of vulnerability, to the elements and ethnic tensions, have been heightened. An attitude of military preparedness becomes apparent as the water drops and logs are revealed that "guarded" (19) the "arm of the ocean" (16) which "we commanded". Even when the storms are not blowing naval vigilance is maintained, the shanty cars which constitute Lester's school having been joined to one another in a self-protecting "convoy of tin chimneys" (17). Looking to the land the people of Lake Oshacola see themselves besieged by alligators and wildcats, which vividly demonstrate monstrous powers by respectively making off with family dogs and slashing laundry on the line. Since nobody, however, has

actually seen a dog being dragged away, and since no mauling of humans has occurred, it is apparent that these creatures prey not so much on the lives of the inhabitants as on their minds. In much the same way, the threats posed by the non-Caucasian groups exist only in the minds of people without ever being substantiated; they are "Negroes and Seminole kids...whom we sensed behind us in the swamps and never saw" (17).

As his parents are alert to threats from the neighbours Lester's mind is alert to the unseen natural horrors of his environment. Fishing in a shallow lake among the cypress trees he hears, but never actually sees, the larger creatures "walking in the water, whacking their tails" (19), thus leaving in doubt their existence beyond the realm of his imagination. As the storm rises he runs home, afraid of a vague "something more powerful than...curiosity" (21). Only when he almost stumbles over the two alligators by the track is dreadfulness actually revealed to him, and yet, despite its proximity, he remains unmolested. Clearly these monsters represent the racial bogeys that teem within the imaginations of the swamp-dwellers.

Blaise underlines the sense of the exposed neck's vulnerability by contrasting the frailty of the separated swamp-dwellers with the strength of the united town-dwellers. Warned in advance by their radios the townspeople have time to prepare themselves psychologically for a hurricane;

lacking radios the swamp-dwellers have no chance to acclimatize themselves psychologically. Linked by radio townspeople draw closer together; without it people in the swamps remain scattered. The foolishness of this refusal to come together can be sensed in the frailty of the measures taken against the storm in the rural area, where migrants unroll mere "burlap for protection" (21); townspeople, on the other hand, nail down shutters When "Errant hurricanes... [chance] across the state" (15) town-dwellers engage in friendly games of chance, and "feel akin for a day to the blizzard-struck residents of upper New York" (15); swamp-dwellers stay apart, thus taking chances that are not part of a game.

Primitive though their lives and attitudes are, the swamp-dwellers still put their trust in burlap and kerosene lamps, items that indicate some degree of reliance on sophisticated urban centres like Miami. Neither entirely rural nor urban, the inhabitants of Lake Oshacola, especially the migrant workers, are displaced persons living between two worlds. As tentative in their responses to the storm as in their enforced contacts among themselves, they attempt to compromise between these two worlds and as a result merely expose their vulnerability. The swamp that they inhabit, neither land nor water but a clogging combination of both, truly reflects the nature of this compromise as well as their general psychological condition. The genuine rural

equivalent of the sophisticated city-dwellers is Leon Sellers, the one swamp-dweller who does not hesitate to integrate. "Going native", he sits out the storm "Seminole-fashion" (25), in his boat deep in the swamp, and survives as satisfactorily as the city-dwellers. Racially integrated with a black mistress, Leon now rides out the storm without unnecessary stress by practising psychological community with the Indians, an expression of communal solidarity as effective as any practised in the cities. Belonging to neither world, the swamp-dwellers, by their fearful responses to the storm and to each other, show only the insecurity of their societal identity.

The perversity of the inhabitants of Lake Oshacola is reflected in the unnatural fluctuations of temperature before and during the storm. During the calm before the storm ripples around a boat on the inlet "froze...on the surface" (18). This example of temperature inversion gives fresh emphasis to the apparent cliche "I froze" (21) when Lester's return home is impeded by alligators in his path. Here the notion of freezing during a sub-tropical summer storm is reinforced by the clever wordplay of "dashed numbly" (21), in which conventional nimbleness is replaced by nightmarish anaesthesia through an invitation to a slant-rhyme. Blaise sustains the confused perceptions of temperature as a metaphor of muddled social psychology in a query put by Lester's mother. Anxious about the possibility that the

supports of her home may crumble if they are flooded she asks "'can them cinder blocks melt?'" (22) Out of context this would merely represent authentic inarticulateness; in this context her use of "melt" when temperatures are, if anything, dropping is the climatic expression of her confused social perceptions. Sheer perversity prevails on a micro-climatic scale in Lester's shanty car school room, where "winter or spring...the peat-burning stove which was never banked" (17) maintains permanent high summer conditions.

During the storm the lake is considerably drained, revealing such detritus as "boats...long sunk" (19). Redefined by fluctuations in sea-level, the lake temporarily demands a new relief map, one that shows its shrinkage "to the outline of its deepest depressions" (19). Similarly, the storm has drained the community psyche so that its lower depths, with their detritus and depressions, are revealed. The waters return, however, and an unappreciated revelation is lost to view. The storm provides the opportunity for a logical restructuring of society and attitudes, but when the migrants reject the explanation of the causes of the tides that revealed the depths of their lake the failure of logic is inevitable. The residents of Lake Oshacola could have felt "akin" with one another, like their counterparts in upstate New York, yet even such a tenuous claim to kinship as the sharing of a school bus by a migrant child and Lester is rejected by the latter's father.

Only the family is brought together as rising water forces Lester and his parents onto one bed. As man's element, land, is reduced, he stays apart; as the element of the fish, water, is reduced, they form "congregations" (19). In this context Leon Sellers' observation that the water creatures are "kindly squeezed together more" (20) works not only as authentic colloquial speech, but also as a reminder of the tendency of kind to associate with kind and the conspicuous absence of human kindliness in this story.

Blaise does not use dramatic fluctuations in a theoretically unvarying sea level to show similar psychological fluctuations; on the contrary, he subverts his geographical device by displaying the constancy of human perversity no matter how wildly circumstances alter. The geographical siege by water is relieved, but no psychological relief for the inhabitants of Lake Oshacola will follow. They, like Lester, even in years to come, will perceive themselves "threatened by swamps" (26), rather than by their refusal to adapt to them by first adapting, like Leon Sellers, to each other.

The "parenting effect" of bodies of water on Blaise's imagination is well illustrated by "Relief" and the story that will be discussed next, "At the Lake". In both stories a lake serves as a metaphor for the subconscious, which, like a lake, is only rarely plumbed to any great depth. At Lake Oshacola the communal subconscious is fully revealed

only under freakish geographical conditions, while a traumatic experience with the leeches of Lac Bibitte is required for the narrator's divided personality to be exposed. Since he is young, Lester suffers no damage to his sense of identity, experiencing only a vague feeling of disorientation at the changed shape of the refilled lake; the older man at Lac Bibitte, on the other hand, suffers severe psychological damage as a result of his explorations below the surface.

Apart from Lac Bibitte (Biting Fly), the narrator of "At the Lake" mentions Lac Têtard (Tadpole) and Lac Sangsue (Leech). These Laurentian lakes take their names not merely from their shapes, as the narrator is assured in the beginning by the unscrupulous Serge, but from the actual presence of these "pests" (199); Lac Bibitte, it transpires, has all three. Registering only shape, the narrator fails to discern what it connotes, and thus establishes a framework of inappropriate expectations. Having been deluded by Serge, he learns that landscape and maps, unlike man, do not dissemble.

Serge's careful sales strategy is helped by the narrator's tendency to psychological dislocation, which is first manifested in his dreams. In the beginning the dream is no more than a cliché referring to the desire to own a summer cabin in the country, but soon it becomes clear that this dream must also be seen as a statement of his heightened sense of unreality about country life. This emerges during

the first drive to the property, when he refers to the unnaturally sharp clarity of vision frequently associated with dreams: "the air was clear and the colors pure, as though I'd just awakened from a nap" (201). Towards the end of the story, after the destruction of his property has disabused him of his fanciful notions of country living, he refers to the known reality of winter at Lac Bibitte during his absence, the hellish noise of Ski-doo rallies, as "dreaming" (206), a bitterly ironic comment on his earlier disorientation. Here the snow, packed down on the lake "hard as concrete", represents the hard corrective to previous airy delusions.

The inappropriate expectations that the narrator brings to the landscape at the lake can be attributed in large part to his job. An instructor in literature, he is not so naive as to seek the novelist's world made real at Lac Bibitte; he does, however, strive to integrate literature as part of daily living there. His idealization of country life extends to the imposition of his own bookish identity on the permanent residents of the area: he sees hardware dealers as readers of the classics, when the reality is that they see readers of the classics as purchasers of rural millstones and a source of hourly remuneration. Driving to the lake for the first time he is eager to sight gros gibier, and, failing to do so, later consummates his search instead in simile, seeing the German residents of the cliffs behaving, to his mind,

"like mountain goats" (200). His intuitive identification of these sure-footed creatures, certain of their position at all times, is a first indication of the uncertain psychological ground he occupies.

The gap between pre-purchase idyll and the daily reality of life at the lake grows with the gaps between the boards of his dock. Although this separation works over a period of months the narrator does not have to wait long for a preview of the psychological distance between preconception and reality in the diving display of his German neighbour:

> Beer can in hand, laughter clapping over the water, he raises his arms in a diving motion but releases his empty can instead and sends it spiraling to the water. Then he crumples from the board — it's serious and competent he is — straightening in time and cutting the water like a missile. (200)

As sound lags behind sight and reality behind appearance, what is first perceived as laughter turns out to be self-applause, the crumple perfection. The disjointed sequence of events in this passage is further evidence of the dislocation of the observer's senses; the crumple is seen as competent even before the diver straightens, the sound of applause registers before completion.

Far from aiding self-deception, the landscape provides evidence of significant realities, over which the narrator drapes his delusions. Approaching the lake he is given notice that the country has the urban taint of slums in the form of tar-paper cabins primitively repaired with aluminum

foil. Corresponding with Serge's "complicated directions" (201), the precipitous road "snake[s]" and forks twice, the geographical expression of the vendor's deviousness. The lake itself bubbles beneath the narrator's boat in bookish warning of confidence trickery, its depths, like his mind, as yet "unsounded" (200).

The identity the narrator initially imposes on the environment, that of preserver and provider, proves to be false. The residents who have succeeded here, the Germans and a few Canadians, are those who have come to terms with nature in explicitly military fashion. The strategies of war are much in evidence: residents "who've blasted the granite and erected A-frame bunkers on girders sunk in into [sic] the bare rock face" (200), one feels, should fly the flag of the corps of engineers beside the "twin flag-standards" of the Bundesrepublik and Canada. These people are psychologically and geographically armed with the necessary "granite resolve" (201) that the narrator knows he lacks. His terrain is swampy indecision; wanting to put an end to the flies in his marsh he refuses to adopt the necessary means, the military lance of pesticides. Such irresolution invites being "invaded" (205) which, in turn, causes the narrator to be displaced form his cabin; purchased as "a northern retreat" (200), it is now the starting point of a military retreat from the north. The German diver entering the water "like a missile" embodies the required military mindset, forming a

strong contrast with the narrator, who wallows on the other side in his homely snorkel. Even viewed from a seasonal perspective Lac Bibitte remains a battleground on which the unprepared will be exposed to a "stabbing summer green, the blood-red autumn, the pure white death of winter" (206).

Some consolation for his final retreat may later be derived from consideration of the psychological price of victory in the northern war. The need to blast "crannies" (200) into the cliffs makes clear that the success of the German sappers is won by sacrificing the restorative sense of psychological expansiveness that is meant to be urban man's reason for country living. The high bluffs they occupy punningly illustrate their expensive self-delusion and the essentially Pyrrhic quality of their victory.

When Serge quells doubts about the lake's pest-free condition by the delicate manipulation of a preposition, he shows an intuitive grasp of the narrator's professional regard for words. With equal delicacy and intuition he proceeds to enhance the environment so that it conforms with both strands of the identity that his client has imposed on it, the geographical as well as the literary. With the twin lures of Troyat's life of Tolstoi and trout caught on trolling rods on display, the narrator is duly enchanted, seeing life and literature integrating in the harmony of the sounds of these interchangeable pairs of words: Troyat, trout; Tolstoi, troll. Serge's fish, however, serve to

restate the gap noted between airy dream blowing through a car window and the later nightmare of concrete reality; here the gap lies between the narrator's dream of trout and the reality of carp. Furthermore, it soon becomes clear that the carp actually represent the narrator inasmuch as they are attracted to the cabin's sewage in the same way the narrator is drawn to the dilapidated property, and are violated from mouth to anus as he is bodily "invaded" by the wrecking of his cabin. This last point is made clear by his choice of the personal pronoun when recording the experience: "I'd never been invaded [before]" (205) not "my property had never been invaded before." The narrator indicates a tendency to inverted perspectives with his comment on the seasonal character of city and country: "winter's excess" (205) in the city is to be remedied by "sensible summers" in the country, where the rule is summer excess to sustain life over sensible (i.e. lean) winters. The invasion he suffers can therefore be reasonably labelled "Environment rapes man."

Stars that resemble sugar in a velvety sky and the sugar that crunches underfoot in the wreckage of his cabin show how the narrator's high hopes are brought down to earth. Notions about nature's role as preserver and provider and his own complementary role in keeping things as they always have been disappear as he is confronted by damage that is not only indistinguishable from urban vandalism but is also reparable only by using what man, not nature, has provided; his

incinerator is to be protected by old bed frames, his broken window by planks split from an old blistered dresser.

On his return to the lake on July 1st his relief at finding things disturbed no further is expressed in juxtaposed references to rural and urban savagery which implicitly convey his realization that city and country are essentially the same, geographical alter egos, in fact: "no famished bears, wolverines, caches of dynamite, mutilated corpses, no terrorists playing cards" (207). Staring down at the "Cities of tadpoles!" (207) in the lake he is forcibly struck by a metaphoric insight into the futility of his attempt to shed the city. A tadpole from the city himself, he has found that the country does not stimulate the kind of growth that he desires, but merely duplicates his urban sense of dwarfed manhood in rural impressions of being a Boy Scout.

During what is to be his last visit to the cabin the narrator expresses a contented sense of wholeness for the first time:

> The deep exaggerated breathing through the snorkel was the sound of summers on Lac Bibitte. It was my own breath universalized; it was my collective body that drifted over the underwater swarms of tadpoles that rose from the mossy branches. (207)

This unprecedented moment of satisfaction, conspicuous only by its modesty, serves merely to intensify the lifelong disillusionment that the narrator is about to suffer. Traumatized by the discovery of the leeches, his persona

splits in two, so that he is "somewhere outside the man with leeches" (208). "I" becomes two people: "I watched, I pitied, I screamed and cried" (208). The "I" with the blistered back, like the similarly blistered and split planks of the dresser, remains in the cabin, the other leaves.

The intensity of this reaction can be traced to the narrator's realization that the fulfillment of a dream has demanded the reality of displacement. From the time that he first arrives at the lake in his shabby vehicle with his shining ideals to dwell among the owners of shining vehicles and shabby ideals, he is out of place. Geographically, his displacement is expressed by his isolation in a low swamp on the opposite side of the lake to the German settlement on the heights. Floating face down over the lake he sees into himself for the first time, with the clarity he experienced externally while first driving to the lake, and acknowledges the divided feelings he has always had towards the countryside. In his mind city dwellers are matched with tadpoles, terrorists with bears, and distant logging trucks with nearby mosquitoes, impressions that show how the city constantly moulds and intrudes upon his perception of the countryside. Having become aware of the dichotomy within himself, the force of the realization apparent in the italics, the narrator is primed for psychological division, which, when it happens, registers in characteristic urban-rural terms, leeches "hanging from my waist like a cartridge

belt" (208) being equated with the trappings of gunmen. His self-delusion ended, the narrator flees, leaving his displaced rural persona in the cabin for good.

The return to the city is precipitated by the forced abandonment of the compromise that the narrator attempts to strike between his urban and rural wants. But behind lies a more fundamental compromise about nature itself. Is nature a psychological concept that he imposes on the Bibitte area, a bookish notion? Or is it a geographical reality that will offer his young son opportunities to ski, swim, fish and hunt, "to grow up with nature" (201)? The confusion is most pronounced in his ambiguous recollection of his youthful torture of the carp: "I wanted to save my son from that kind of nature" (203). Juxtaposed to the previous quotation, the question "What kind of nature?" arises. Garbage fish, the geographical kind? Or the senseless destruction of life characteristic of human nature, the psychological kind? The ambiguity strongly indicates the overlap of the two types in the narrator's mind, and goes far to explain his vacillating attitude to the cabin.

Lecker draws attention to a related psychological aspect of nature when he comments on the narrator's "battle" (201) to keep up with it: "what he is really battling is himself" ("Murals Deep in Nature" 55). Viewed along these lines the unending, self-imposed labour involved in maintaining the property assumes the proportions of a form of expiation,

accompanied by a marked tendency to self-punishment: on discovering the damage to the cabin he pounds the table "Hoping almost to hurt myself" (205); on entering the water he experiences "the essence of all I wanted from a place in the woods. Pain, astonishment,..." (207); and as the fourth leech falls "I dropped the coffee, perhaps I deliberately poured it over my feet" (208).

The final personality split is foreshadowed by the narrator's labours, which become so obsessive that the cabin and he become images of each other: "I had come to see myself mirrored in my property" (205). Here Blaise uses a traditional device to show psychological division. But in addition the unrelenting, unrewarding labour provides some examples of what Lecker calls Blaise's "skill in isolating the ironies inherent in daily life" ("Murals Deep in Nature" 54). For example, determined to dispense with boat motor and electricity, the narrator still imports much of the city into his cabin. A more fundamental irony lies in the narrator's initial admiration of Serge's addition of "cubits to his lands" (200), for while admiring he also suppresses his subconscious awareness of the effort involved. Blaise's use of "cubits" indicates that Serge's labours at the lake seemingly go back to time immemorial, an impression which the narrator submerges in recollections of his own "immemorial torpor" (201). Serge "hadn't missed a weekend at the cabin in fifteen years" (200) and when the narrator finds out why,

CHAPTER III

In three of the six stories considered so far, displaced characters have discerned the need for orientation and navigation strategies of one kind or another. In "He Raises Me Up", the narrator surrenders his steering wheel to his ersatz saviour, Max; in "I'm Dreaming of Rocket Richard", young Lacroix consults the compass-cum-steering wheel device on his Boston Bruins sweater and orients on the States; and in "How I Became a Jew", Gerald Gordon searches for firm state boundary lines from which he can geometrically project his position. Immediately the difference between Blaise's navigators becomes apparent: his young protagonists actively pursue the search to consolidate their identities, while his older characters are less tenacious, or, like Etienne Broussard, even totally indifferent.

In the south Lester, the young protagonist of "Relief", turns in "all directions" (21), finally locating his home by orienting himself on the trails left by alligators, while in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark" an alligator illustrates the penalty for failure to orient oneself; displaced on a road he is crushed in much the same way as the compulsively wandering Gene Lister.

"Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark", as yet unpublished, is one of Blaise's earliest stories, a fact which invests its themes with more than usual interest. One of the most

conspicuous, psychological navigation, will recur in "Grids and Doglegs", "Identity" and "Notes Beyond a History". In all these stories displaced persons resort to orientation devices in a metaphoric attempt to fix their psychological positions.

Frankie Lister, the young protagonist of "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark", like Frankie Broussard and Frankie Thibidault, is the only child of a stable northern mother and a volatile, unhoused father, his family name a strong indication of the latter's instability. The boy's preference for his mother, signalled by his yearning for the northern climate, is strongly Oedipal, the giant turtles of the title clearly the sexual monsters gliding in his subconscious. Navigational devices are needed to clarify his orientation on his mother, and thus distance his father and the offensive south.

Frankie's predicament is stated in the location of his home:

> But for the clearing, the trailer and the chicken-coop and the narrow trail connecting them to the highway, the woods covered everything like a cave, filled with noises you couldn't see, and swarming with things you couldn't hear. (5-6)

The darkness is overwhelming, the path out of it tenuous. The cave-like woods are a source of sensory disorientation, producing sounds that should be seen and sights that should be heard. The importance to the boy of finding the way out of the darkness is clear in the repetition of

"trailer...trail". The hopelessness of the search for trails is stated at the family furniture factory, where the clearest of all possible trails, runways for aircraft, are shown as "dying out in the woods" (20).

The first time Frankie attempts to break out of his psychological darkness is at the Virginia Caverns, a location that recalls the woods of home. The guide conducting the tour group here is obviously unsuitable for Frankie's purposes since his resemblance to Pew, a villain in Stevenson's Treasure Island, renders him metaphorically blind.

Dubbed "Skipper" by "Pew", Frankie navigates to "Silver" Springs, where such unreliable guides as "Pew", Long John Silver, and the Hartley baseball "Pirates" can be abandoned, as buried anxieties are assuaged by revealed treasure. This consists of the several means for Frankie to orient himself psychologically. The first of these is a proliferation of trails. Blind Pew is replaced by a guide called Trailways, his stature and reliability attested to by the experience implicit in his vast age; then Yankee tourists symbolically open routes to the north by trailing their hands in the water, "as cold and blue as Canada" (18), while their boat moves over the springs.

Frankie is also given a lens to clear his vision, as spectacles do for his mother, in the form of the boat's glass bottom. Through this he discerns the creatures of the deep,

the open waterways piloted by Trailways illuminated to the bottom by the sun. The creatures of his sexual anxieties at home are monsters:

> often, at night when his parents were asleep, he thought he heard the grunts and hisses of turtles, nudging each other in the rivers just under his bed. (19)

At the Springs these turtles are revealed as inoffensive creatures, comfortable in northern-cold water. Looking through the lens Frankie sees submarine woods in the form of ferns being blown aside by the springs, which create clearings and allow darkness to be dispelled. Like his mother, Frankie fears the disintegration of his aid to clearer vision, expecting the force of the springs to shatter the bottom of the boat. This, with the revelation of his psychic depths, prompts him to clap his hands over his eyes.

Endless movement through the towns of the south has contributed to Frankie's disorientation, of the towns comprising an eight-team baseball league he has lived in six, with the result that his awareness of Hartley's location is no more precise than that given by his radio dial, that is, somewhere between Montreal and Moscow. Clearly a map is required, and this is what he receives at the springs. Appropriately, it is a hydrographical map, given by a guide who emphasizes the underground locations of the state's waterways; with the aid of this map Frankie will be able to trace his own subconscious streams.

Like Frankie, the central figure in "Grids and Doglegs", Norman Dyer, needs a lens to aid his inner vision and as a means to orient himself. By his own assessment a "kinky" person, he feels the need to be "straightened out" (55) in much the same way that urban geographers hope that dogleg roads will eventually be straightened out to conform with a grid street pattern and all its inherent efficiencies.

Much of Norman's psychological state is expressed geographically in the story's opening sentence:

> When I was sixteen I could spend whole evenings with a straightedge, a pencil, and a few sheets of unlined construction paper, and with those tools I would lay out imaginary cities along twisting rivers or ragged coastlines. (47)

Here the "unlined" paper, like his adolescent psyche, awaits the imposition of an organizing grid, a framework of meridians and parallels for facilitating the plotting of the course of his life and fixing his current position. The use of his "straightedge" in the geographical context of "twisting rivers" and "ragged coastlines" indicates the psychological conflict between kinkiness and his knowledge of a need to straighten his course. In his desire for a straight course Norman anticipates Sutherland, the narrator of "Notes Beyond a History", and in his reliance on cartography he recalls Frankie and the hydrographic map of Florida in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark". The need for a grid becomes clear when Norman notes of his drawing "My cities were tangles" (47); with too many doglegs they

resemble not only his home town, Pittsburgh, but also the state of his mind.

Norman's perversity, his dogleg kinkiness, is apparent throughout the story. His learning of the Lord's Prayer backwards and the Russian pledge are pranks that have an heretic edge when traditional American sensibilities about church and state are recalled. Heavy-breathing phone-calls to the object of his desires are obviously a perversely indirect means of communication. At the Arthur Murray dance studio his conversation with Almajean is devious, his shuffling steps matching the shuffled truth of his claim to be a mere delivery boy for a clothes store when in reality he is the owner's son. Aware of the need to expand, he deliberately contracts when invited to lead his class in the daily Bible reading, his "Om", offered as a statement of universality, impressing only as a meaningless fragment.

Norman's course through life veers. His distribution to the student body of the broadsheet accusing teachers of "incompetence and Lesbianism" (52) confirms the change of his course from Yale to Penn State brought about by the collapse of his parents' finances. Change of course can also be self-determined, as is seen when Norman decides to go through life thin instead of fat, becoming near-mesomorphic after consulting a pill-peddling doctor on Squirrel Hill. (Blaise's choice of place-name here is, of course, a

reference to the future psychological home of twitchy amphetamine addicts not so much "rewired" (53) as unwired.)

Friendship with Keith Godwin provides no course correction. In terms of psycho-navigation, Keith's moon-face, its symbolic significance underlined by the addition of lunar freckles and dimples, is a shifting reflector of light, not a fixed source, and therefore useless to Norman. Keith's ability to conceptualize positions "blindfold" on the grid of a chessboard does not extend to any larger psychological structuring; a cynic whose attempts to straighten an atheistic course lead him to a Presbyterian seminary, he ultimately becomes a leader of "crackpot drives" (48). More serious is his incestuous horseplay with his sister. Witnessing this, Norman receives a distorted image of her as she is reflected by her brother, and to begin with he desires her as a sister, too. Eventually he is able to straighten this kink, and learns to desire her as a wife and, finally, as a lover. While he grapples with the problems of establishing a mature relationship with a young woman at the Prom. his friend, Keith, maintains his adolescent course, ogling the strippers at the Casino-burlesque.

Given his extremes of intellectual precocity and social retardation, Norman's disorientation is not unexpected. Conscious of the need to reconcile these two extremes, he is beset by conflicting forces that show the potential for split personality; conforming to accepted standards of social

behaviour in the Godwin home, then succumbing to the lure of the perverse in his obscene phone-calls, Norman begins to emerge as another of Stevenson's characters, Jekyll and Hyde. His name signals his condition: "Dyer", indicating a chameleon-like capacity for changing colour as background dictates, is juxtaposed with the given name most expressive of conventional behaviour, "Norm". Personality splits are alluded to on a number of occasions: going on a diet Norman conceives of himself as two people, a slim, hard person encased by a flabby, overweight one (an image that is the human equivalent of the perfect lens he grinds from a piece of glass); at one time in the story he is reading a book called I Led Three Lives; at the planetarium he identifies several alter egos among the chubby girls from a local Jewish high school; and in the classroom he identifies his "alphabetical shadow" (51), a boy named Dykes.

Setting a secure course between extremes requires the abandonment of the moon and reorientation on fixed "points of light" (49). By taking up astronomy Norman simultaneously elevates his vision and submits to the stars, in the same way he raises his gaze from Sheila Cohen's back and submits patiently to the labour of grinding his lens. His realization that one can aspire to higher relationships than those he has been engaged in is eloquently indicated in his description of astronomy as a "courtly" (49) science, that

is, one characterized by dignity and measured motion, and bearing overtones of courtesy, courtly love, and courtship.

The dance floor once again becomes an arena of evasiveness, this time at the College Prom., when Norman effects another dogleg to avoid prominent exposure among his peers, in this instance by sabotaging his date's certain selection as "Queen". Once more Norman is seen as a twisting river, or ragged coastline, with Cyndy, the reasonable social "norm", as the straightedge by which he should regulate himself. These roles are maintained to the end, with Norman's final dogleg, the impulsiveness of his reference to the fire hydrant, rectified by Cyndy's uncomplicated understanding. In lens grinding the introduction of "a single fleck of a coarser grade would have plundered [Norman's] mirror like a meteorite" (49), the precise astronomical equivalent of his coarseness towards Cyndy. By her response she suggests the greater tolerance of humanity over astronomy, and that Norman's course lies between the low of his perversity and the impossible high of the stars.

In Blaise's writing orientation occurs in time as well as space. Commenting on "The other book of my childhood and adolescence", Collier's Encyclopedia, Blaise recalls how biographies supplemented the Atlas:

> I was especially interested in calculating how old famous people had been when they died. I remember thinking that I, born in 1940, would probably live to see the next century, but that my parents, born in 1903 and 1905, would

> not.... I compared myself with others born in 1840 — would I be a burn-out before the century turned? (Resident Alien 11)

In "Notes Beyond a History" it is clear that the uncovering of genealogies is the chief means by which the narrator establishes his psychological position. Like the events in all the stories considered so far, Sutherland's exploration of the history of Florida and one of its families is pegged to geography, its inspiration to his own psychology.

In his adult role as historian Sutherland draws up a "family tree" for Theodora Rourke, displaying the details of her genealogy as they appear to the general viewer lacking both geographical and historical perspectives. Of the five "facts" that pertain specifically to Theodora four are doubts, only one, her death date, a certainty:

> Facts: Theodora (?) parents unknown; birthplace (presumed), Oshacola County, Florida, 1840 (c.).d. 1937. (98)

To achieve his greater certainty about Theodora, Sutherland has to go back in time, uncovering tracks, exposing roots, gaining perspective.

Initial indications of the remoteness of Theodora's roots are her great age, and the specifically Spanish strain of oranges, Valencias, that she planted as a young woman. For anybody involved in the untangling of Spanish roots in the latter half of the twentieth century the task has become more difficult with the integration of cultures that is evident in the arrangement of references to "a Cuban and negro

ghetto,...a few used-car lots, casas del alimiento, laundromats, and tavernas" (94). The danger, as well as the complexity, of untangling is indicated by the "clusters of snakes threshing mightily on Theodora Rourke's warm sand beach" (93). As the two brothers pursue the priest, the difficulty is expressed in terms of vision, with thickly tangled mangroves and cypresses obscuring the shore to the same effect as the "matted" (91) vegetation covering Theodora's beach. At her plantation the pure Spanish strain of Valencias is now intermingled with the native species of the forest, cypress (symbolizing death) and "live" (91) oak, as human strains have undergone miscegenation elsewhere, some flourishing, others dying.

The trails that lead to the two oldest residences on Lake Oshacola, the Sutherlands' as well as the Rourkes', are vulnerable to obliteration by "flooding or sifting" (92), forces which have worked just as effectively to obscure access to the past. "Flooding" calls up the picture of the priest poling his way along the watery trail to the roots of Theodora's family tree, a route so vague as to make a guide indispensable to all others. "Sifting" at one level simply indicates the settling of dust over clear tracks, but at a deeper level refers to the evolution of the Rourke family. When Lillian first appears to the young Sutherland she is "black behind the ancient screen" (95), while at the canal her relations, "children, all the color of dirty sand, and darker

adults" (103), appear genetically speaking, to have been sifted through this mesh, lightening with each generation. When Theodora pays young Sutherland for her newspaper delivery with ancient coins of immense value and they fall into the sand, standing half-buried but also half-revealed, her past starts to reveal itself too. Sutherland's obsession with her commences here, a fact which she confirms when she remarks, "'Boy, I done paid you for the rest of your life'" (96).

Vegetation also serves to obscure the clear places of geography and genealogy. Man's clearings and cleared trails disappear as natural growth reasserts itself; aquatic vegetation blunts clear definition of shorelines. In the Modern Era the trend is to reverse this process, but the result is the same; during All Time nature crept up on man's clearings, now man's cities creep up on nature's clearings, so that Theodora's birthplace has become overgrown with Hartley's expansion. Blaise emphasizes this point by reference to Bernard Rourke's paintings, executed in 1857. These are populated by creatures that are animated by the clear space around them, which results in a vitality that finds no counterpart in the paintings favoured by Sutherland's father, productions that are all human impress and no clear space. "...Murky, quasi-fabulous" (97) efforts by dilettantes, they represent the limitations of viewing shorelines from the water; failing to penetrate behind the

shore these painters have had to substitute fancy for the more startling reality that the two boys in a boat will discover.

Sifting trails, the primordial richness of vegetation, and vision restricted by inadequate perspectives all symbolize the difficulties of gaining access to Theodora's identity. So old that she seemingly "[came] with the place" (92), her features eroded and rounded as if by exposure to the elements, her root system extensive and obscure, she represents "All Time".

As trails provide access to places they may also lead to the past. Staring down at Theodora young Sutherland observes the "brownish-pink swath" (95) that has been cut through the "cottony hair" of her scalp, vegetation that immediately evokes plantations and slavery. Clearly, this is a genealogical trail to be followed. As an adult, Sutherland recalls the benefit of this aerial perspective, conjecturing that the view from a helicopter may reveal Theodora's birthplace, concealed now by Hartley's encroaching concrete jungle. From the air one may be able to discern another "cut" through the vegetation, the old Trans-Florida canal, the trail to Theodora's roots. Stretching "straight as an avenue " (101), its modern equivalent is the avenue of the Interstate freeway, which "slices west...in an unbroken line to the Gulf" (93) in a geographical expression of Theodora's lineage. Having arrived at Oshacola ahead of her neighbours "by such a gulf" (92) of time, Theodora may be viewed as one of the

canal's terminals. During his adult years Sutherland consolidates these aerial perspectives in his office, eight stories up, above the permanent haze of pollution emanating from the local juice factory.

"Swath", "cut" and "slice" are all suggestive of separation and scarring. At a geographical level the canal was intended to separate Florida, detaching the (relatively) enlightened north from the backward south. Once turned into an island, it was proposed, the old peninsula could be used as a prison, the sub-tropical version of Siberia, an idea as ugly as the scar that would be required to make it. This idea never came to pass, but the canal endured instead as a symbol of a cleft society. Southern racial attitudes that required separation of black and white then persist in the shape of Theodora's brier hedge and the four days it takes black-white communication to cover sixty yards. The narrator's obsession with the canal, however, suggests a more personal involvement with the issue of detachment than the broadly geographical or sociological. Construction of the canal, cynically calculated as a means to contain in one homeland all Florida's unhealthy swamps and freed slaves, possibly in conjunction with a giant penal colony, can be seen as the intention to concentrate what, for Blaise, is the essence of the south. If the motive for building the canal, then, was to create an ultra-south, a "Souther-land", the concern of the narrator, his name a pun on this intended regional development, can be understood. To

avoid diluting the significance of this name Blaise refers to his protagonist by no other during the story.

Discovering the canal as a child, Sutherland misses most of its significance, but in retrospect a number of features stand out for him. The most important of these is the cypress tree at the mouth of the canal, yellow-flagged to signify quarantine, its roots fully exposed. This is the Rourke family tree, Theodora's place of origin, geographical and genealogical journey's end. Sharing a curve of Lake Oshacola with Theodora, Sutherland has travelled to find her descendants on another curve, one made conspicuous by being in an otherwise straight canal. This replication of locations suggests that both the canal and Theodora will figure as permanent fixtures in his future. Flight from either will be impossible, since the canal assumes the proportions of the prison it was once intended to create: the trail into the past becomes narrower and more confining; U-turns are impossible; the albinos drop their nets, pinning the ends to the ground in a gesture of entrapment; the "chain" (98) of lakes that apparently invited canalization now assumes the aspect of a shackle.

"Reeling" (102) from the canal in reverse, the boys become disoriented, as if in a time warp, to be viewed, perhaps, as characters in a rewinding film; having gone forward to the past they must now retreat to the future. In their choice of careers the boys will attempt to remedy this

disorientation, Tom by devoting himself to space and the future, his brother by turning to the past. For the moment, having been impressed so powerfully by the distorted image of the Rourke women conveyed by his mother, Sutherland is without psychological co-ordinates. Furthermore, his inability to redirect himself by means of a U-turn later registers as the dilemma of the majority of Hartley's population, eighty thousand displaced Yankees, none of whom are permitted to reorient themselves by making U-turns in their cars. Sutherland, Rourke's descendants and Yankees in exile, it appears, are all "a lost people" (103).

Discovery of the canal leads ultimately to compilation of the Rourkes' genealogy, which is conspicuous for the hauntingly parallel careers of Bernard Rourke, senior, and Sutherland, senior, both judges, both senators. Given the unusual nature of the boy's relationship with his father, a man twice married and nearer the age of a grandfather, genealogical speculation by young Sutherland is inevitable. This establishes him in a group of characters that includes the boy Lacroix, in "I'm Dreaming of Rocket Richard" and, as will be seen, Phil Porter in "Identity". In this case, however, the issue is neither sibling complementation of identity nor paternity; rather it is to be related to what will be seen to preoccupy Frankie Thibidault in "A North American Education", namely, the matter of a missing generation, a gap in the family tree.

Like Lacroix, the Catholic only child in Montreal, and like Thibidault, the oldest child on the block in Cincinnati, Sutherland is conscious of family circumstances that make his position unusual, an awareness that inevitably draws him into close analysis of family history. In "Notes Beyond a History" this urge to determine position in time is stimulated by the tantalizing possibility of a connection between the Rourkes and the Sutherlands. Apart from the similarity between the careers of each pater familias and the senior Sutherland's enigmatic assurance that his boys "need never answer for anything he did" (93), this connection never materializes. This, however, is not the main point. What is significant is that Sutherland is prompted to extend his knowledge of his relationship with Theodora from the geographical, "on the same curve of the lake" (91), to an appreciation of his relationship with the Rourkes in the dimension of time, too. Spurred to this course by the existence of gaps in time in the Rourke family tree which correspond with a perceived gap in his own, Sutherland, to some extent, resembles Norman Dyer in "Grids and Doglegs", whose maps of his subconscious were also characterized by gaps, in his case in space.

For Sutherland the key questions must inevitably concern Bernard, Jr and John Ryan. Where is their suspected issue? If it exists, does it fill such a gap as exists between Sutherland and his elderly father? While questions like these remain unsettled, images of separation will persist in

Sutherland's mind. Is he, like peninsular Florida, detached from a family mainland?

Like Sutherland, Phil Porter, in the story aptly named "Identity", is uncertain of his exact relationship to his family, and resorts to geography to establish his psychological position. The vagueness of his relationship is announced at the opening of the story:

> Porter, Reg and Hennie. My parents for several years. Mysteries to me, to each other. Gone now even in name. (61)

Has Phil had other parents? Later he refers to "things I couldn't have noticed in my mother or in my secretive parents" (68), indicating that three people can claim him as a son. When Reg's other marriages are revealed the question of Phil's position in an extended family is raised. Does he have half-siblings who could help him consolidate his sense of who he is, family extensions to hold up the kind of genetic mirror young Lacroix yearns for in "I'm Dreaming of Rocket Richard"? As part of the general policy of secrecy adopted by his parents, Phil has been kept in the dark on this matter, learning of the possibility only by accident; "conceivably" (69), he notes, other Porters exist in New England, the <u>double entendre</u> underlining the nature of his concern.

Uncertainty in his relationship inevitably creates impressions of detachment and drift. Geographically these impressions are expressed in terms of bleak helplessness,

with friends and family separated from Phil as if on ice-floes. Psychologically they are expressed in numerous references to fractures; in maturity Phil recalls childhood as a time of broken bones, symbols of painful separations, and his continual unhousement as their geographical equivalent. ("Let more bones break, more moves be made" (63).) With the final fracture of the story, the snapping of the Pennsylvania licence plate, Phil is not only separated from the States but also forced to break with the only identity he has ever known.

As his identity is finally revealed to him a powerful sense of disorientation sets in. At the international border the boy's discovery that "Phil Porter" never existed and that his real name is Carrier is accompanied by the realization that his true identity has been disclosed to him only as a last resort to conceal his false identity. Simultaneously a sense of the widening gulf between Phil and his family becomes apparent. Having asked what his new name is he is told by his mother "'You can be anything you want to be'" (75), which is not so much a restatement of the popular American credo about the freedom to fulfill one's potential as an abandonment of a child to psychological limbo. The initiative for establishing his identity is laid on Phil, his mother's use of the impersonal "anything" clearly indicating her emotional withdrawal as a point of reference in his life.

Phil's feelings of disorientation extend to anxieties about his sexual development, which places him beside Frankie Lister in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark". His impressions of the psychological precariousness of his position and the danger of disorientation are obvious in the image he has of himself standing at the tip of a funnel discharging the sum of American sexual knowledge. His friend, Peter, illustrates the consequences of dislodgement, transvestism, an incestuous posture towards his mother, loss of his own sense of identity, and dismissal of hers.

The family television indicates the source of Phil's identity problems. "Snow" that yields "furry" (64) images on the screen, corresponding with Reg's "dense, white chest hair" (69), another kind of furry snow, symbolizes the blurred image of his father available to Phil. Identification of his mother is also stated in terms of hair and image resolution, except in her case hair serves to focus her features. When full resolution of her image comes at the end of the story she is dressed in men's clothing, and Phil's Oedipal orientation is made clear.

Having revealed the nature of his disorientation, the television offers the means of correction. Radio broadcasts of baseball games helped Frankie Lister to orient himself on Philadelphia in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark"; in "Identity" television broadcasts serve a similar function, the three-part division of the baseball transmission in the

former indicating the technique that is to be applied in the latter. "Identity" is a story based on triangles. First there is Phil's broken arm, which mends in deformity a degree or two out of true, making of his forearm a "slow hypotenuse" (61). Then Blaise creates an "eternal triangle" with the incident of the babysitter and her two lovers. With a tricycle for "wheeling" and the Tri-state weather forecasts the geographical intent of these triangles emerges. As a tracker can home in on the source of a broadcast by triangulation, a surveyor is able to establish his own position as the third point of a triangle by reference to two fixed points and an angle. Norman Dyer, seeking fixed points through his telescope, and Gerald Gordon, searching for firm baselines, both grope towards this technique. Now Phil Porter also tries to locate himself like a surveyor. With the roof of his apartment building serving as a plane-table, he executes his transit, fixing his position by reference to pairs of broadcasting stations: Steubenville and Wheeling, Altoona and Huntington, Cleveland and Chambersburg, and even faraway Detroit and Buffalo. The geographical point where these pairs of signals converge is called Pittsburgh, but psychologically speaking they define the space occupied by Phil Porter.

Flatly stated, the first words of the story, quoted above, also appear to be a pair of fixed points. When Phil later repeats these bearings this would seem to be confirmed:

> My parents: Reg and Hennie Porter.
> My name is Philip. Phil Porter. (69)

As focus on a TV has to be fine-tuned, here Phil's identity assumes sharper definition by his precise manipulation of a psychological antenna directed at his parents. The fact that his sense of his identity ultimately collapses is attributable to the phantom signals they have generated for so long. Blaise prepares the ground for their revelation as phantoms in the call letters of a Pittsburgh broadcast outlet, WIIC, a pun on the double-you and double-I personalities that Phil will eventually see.

The role of the TV in locating identity is underlined by reference to a contrasting personality, Peter Humphries. His set is broken, and he is psychologically adrift. The implication is that he will stay adrift until it is repaired.

Despite all his efforts, his excitement at having "the right connections" (64), Phil's attempts to establish his identity are in vain, its ultimate frailty foreshadowed by the frailty of the equipment he has at his disposal. "...The frail set of rabbit-ears" (63), moreover, is joined to the TV by double copper wire coated with "opaque plastic", the seal of final obscurity. In the car at the border broadcasts cease to serve as a means of orientation altogether, providing only unrecognizable signals in music as well as language. With fine-tuning to no avail Phil senses that his identity is losing definition, now only partially resolved in the homely phonetics of a new name, "Carry-A".

In each of the four stories of this section the protagonists strive for psychological illumination, the dimness of their inner vision represented by geographical metaphor: the darkness of caves in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark", the darkness of outer space in "Grids and Doglegs", impenetrable vegetation along shorelines in "Notes Beyond a History", and snow in "Identity". In each of the stories Blaise equips his characters with navigational devices such as a map and a telescope, and has them engage in strategies like surveying and genealogy in their attempts to clear their vision and fix their psychological positions. In two of the stories these devices are brought to bear on Oedipal problems, in the other two on problems arising from divided personality and a restlessness rooted in an awareness of a lost generation.

These stories also illustrate other aspects of Blaise's writing. Probably the most important of these is his handling of the age of his narrators. All the navigators in this group are young, the intensity of their search an indication of their youth. Like all the young narrators in the stories discussed so far the protagonists in this group are all named, in contrast to the anonymity and false name adopted by their adult counterparts in the others. By itself this strategy would underline the passivity of the adult narrators when faced with identity problems, but Blaise also chooses names that relate directly to their bearers'

predicaments. Frankie Lister leans towards his mother; Phil Porter/Carrier bears two identities across the U.S.-Canada border; Sutherland is eponymous with his home region, peninsular Florida, and Norman Dyer seeks a norm against which to regulate himself.

Finally, the two rural stories in this group continue to reflect the "parenting effect" of bodies of water on Blaise's writing. Like the stories in the previous section, "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark" and "Notes Beyond a History" both use water as a metaphor for the subconscious: Frankie Lister gains psychological insight as he peers to the bottom of Silver Springs, and Sutherland experiences the blind promptings of his subconscious as unseen things knock against his boat floating on the waters of the swamp.

CHAPTER IV

In what is probably his best-known story, "A North American Education", Blaise weaves together all of the most prominent strands in the stories considered so far: uncertainty in identity, personality metaphorically divided by geography, unhousement, orientation, and irony.

From the beginning of the story it is clear that the narrator's determination of his location in both time and space will be a major issue:

> Eleven years after the death of Napoleon, in the presidency of Andrew Jackson, my grandfather, Boniface Thibidault, was born. For most of his life he was a journalier, a day laborer, with a few years off for wars and buccaneering. Then at the age of fifty, a father and a widower, he left Paris and came alone to the New World and settled in Sorel, a few miles down river from Montreal. (162)

Here Blaise touches on the place of origin of the central character, Frankie Thibidault, his genealogical orientation on his grandfather, and the divided worlds of the old Europe and the new North America that will compete for the boy's allegiance.

The reason for clarifying positions in time and place soon becomes evident; Frankie is afflicted by a sense of geographical and historical dislocation, which, in turn, indicates an awareness of severe psychological dislocation, thus establishing this story in a group with such others as "He Raises Me Up" and "How I Became a Jew". In its overall

structure, as well as in its contributory details, the story expresses the theme of dislocation in time. Beginning logically with the family history it moves to its chronologically final episode, the Princess Hi-Yalla incident, at the mid-point of the narrative, then fills in the events that lead up to this. Time out of joint is matched by confusing changes of location for Frankie as well; from his father's birthplace in Sorel, Quebec, he is uprooted and removed to Hartley, Florida, then Cincinnati, Ohio, and finally Venice, Florida. The consequent cultural reorientation, to say nothing of psychological adjustment, is swift. Only four days after leaving Montreal Thibidault et fils are photographed on a beach in Daytona, Florida, the English translation of this caption separated by a mere semi-colon. Such is the abruptness of the boy's cultural reorientation. To this incident Frankie traces his career

> As a reader of back issues, as a collector of cancelled stamps (the inkier the better), as a student and teacher of languages, (165)

that is, as one accustomed to retrospection and the deciphering of heavily-overlaid ("franked") markers of places of origin, and as one who will make his living by attempting to inculcate an appreciation of biculturalism. In his hobbies Frankie begins to establish himself as a person intent on discovering origins in time and place, as well as one divided between Old and New Worlds.

Frankie's sense of being misplaced in time is expressed in terms of faulty synchronization. Posing for the photograph on Daytona Beach the five-year old Frankie tries to conceal his genitals, made prominent by the wet and clinging underwear that has been serving as swimming trunks, but because he "was late, or the picture early" (165) he appears instead to be drawing the viewer's attention to them. A fraction of a second is all that is required to strip him of his modesty and give him the appearance of an exhibitionist. The picture is notable also for the lack of synchronicity between physical growth and the psychological development of both father and son: Jean-Louis at forty-two appears to be a youth, while his son, thirty-seven years younger, appears psychologically fully formed, "already the man [he] was destined to be" (164).

Frankie remains sharply aware of situations made incongruous by mis-matched ages. As his father appeared youthfully mature in the Daytona picture, so the new brides in Cincinnati appear "maturely youthful" (173) to Frankie. Here the entire Thibidault family are chronologically out of step with their neighbours, twenty years older with an only child the eldest of eighty on the block. But for Frankie the most important chronological disjointure is that which he perceives between his parents; despite their being the same age he perceives "somewhere between them...a missing generation" (166), which stimulates him, like Sutherland, to

genealogical reorientation. The strength of Frankie's impressions of a missing generation derives from family history; his grandfather, Boniface, was a septuagenarian, his grandmother, Lise, approximately thirty-eight, when his father was born.

Dislocations in time correspond with geographical displacements. The move from Quebec to Florida leaves Frankie climatically disoriented, pondering the desynchronization of the seasons that occurred in the four days separating Montreal and the budless trees of winter from Florida and its summery beaches. A sense of displacement is especially strong at the end of the story when Frankie's request that the priest in Sorel permit the reburial of Jean-Louis' remains in his birthplace is refused, thereby effectively condemning his father to permanent exile-in-death. Here Frankie's reference to the priest as "prêtre-vicaire" draws attention to Jean-Louis' native tongue, which serves to emphasize the unhousement, even in death, of his spirit in Anglo-Florida. Such is the penalty for the opportunistic assumption of the false Anglo name of "Gene Doe", America's unknown citizen, the person with no identity.

Landscape, in the form of Florida's constantly fluctuating coastline, demonstrates how unpredictable one's claim to a place in space, in life or even death, can be. As the inhabitant of Venice in the Old World is confronted by the prospect of inundation, so, in the New World, the threat

has been reversed, with Venice, Florida, occupying land reclaimed from the sea. By contrast, Fort Lauderdale, once well inland, now stands on the coast. The relocation of settlement wrought by such rapid geomorphological change serves to intensify perceptions of psychological displacement. Part of the torment Frankie experiences over the resting place of his father's remains, neither on land nor at sea, in some indeterminate limbo, is due to his perception of his life as a child always between places, belonging wholly to none. Expressed psychologically, Frankie is aware of occupying space between insanity and contented fulfillment, conscious of his exclusion from both of these inner worlds. As in "Relief", fluctuations in water-level transcend mere eustatic considerations.

Once more Blaise uses climate as a metaphor for divisions within the family. Like a chameleon, Jean-Louis quickly changes his name and accent, and, under the southern sun, the colour of his skin. Proof of his adaptation to the south is provided by his immunity to its pest, the hook-worm. Failing to adapt similarly, at first, Frankie finds his feet infested with worms. Sympathetically, the local doctor applies a "northern" treatment, freezing, which predictably proves ineffectual in the southern environment. A product of a hot climate, worms must be treated with heat, in this case the burn of carbolic acid and alcohol. His feet, like his father's, the required brown after treatment,

Frankie is not only cured but also rendered immune. Far from bonding him to the south, however, this experience sets up a psychological conflict, for although the southern heat treatment worked, his inclination is towards the "northern" treatment ("the ice was pleasant" (166)), administered to the accompaniment of his Canadian mother's alluring tales of the freshness of winter in her home province of Saskatchewan. Choosing between southern heat and northern cool, as in "Giant Turtles, Gliding in the Dark", once again means choosing between parents. With the freezing of his foot frost forms on the sole, and in it he scrapes his initials, creating another kind of stamp, or franking device, one with which he can impress his chosen northern identity on the hostile southern landscape. By contrast, the barefoot Princess at the Boone County Fair, representative of the shoddy, sweaty south, leaves featureless, anonymous footprints on her dusty stage.

Among the adolescent characters of Blaise's short fiction, Frankie Thibidault displays the most deeply disturbed personality, the worm that corrupted his foot in Florida having metaphorically undermined his psycho-sexual development too. Unguided by his parents, who distance themselves from the duty of intimate instruction, Frankie becomes sexually disoriented, his confusion to be confirmed for life by the Princess Hi-Yalla:

> Sex, despite my dreams of something better, something nobler, still smells of

> the circus tent, of something raw and murderous. (173)

Figuratively feeding a worm that is devouring him from the inside, Frankie becomes obsessively hungry. Of his numerous references to feeding the most telling are those he makes at the wall separating him from the object of his sexual obsession, Annette, in the adjacent duplex. Here he imagines himself devouring the wall to get to her and later cleaning up the crumbs of plaster that drop from the hole he makes. At the Boone County Fair he notes "the smell of furtiveness, rural slaughter and unquenchable famine" (169) around the Princess, impressions that reflect not only the hunger of the southern worm but also the manner of his North American education. All hungers, of course, point back to Jean-Louis, who

> As was the custom,...was sent to the monastery as soon as he could walk, and remained with the Brothers for a dozen years, taking his meals and instruction as an apprentice. (162)

Having fed on the teachings of monastic celibates, Jean-Louis becomes "a Quebec Catholic of the nineteenth century" (173), the inhibited antithesis of a liberated father, communicating the unquenchable famine of his adolescence to his son.

Feeding that compensates for sexual experience turns Frankie fat, a development that introduces the psychological division so common in one form or another in many of Blaise's stories. Acquiring the pornography with which to feed his

appetite, he reveals two personae, the outwardly respectable and inwardly furtive, while the accumulating tension leads him to speculate about the number of mad mutilators lying encased within fat teenagers, all the time sensing his own closeness to madness. Disturbing references to cutting proliferate, most notably in his slitting of the used razor-blade slot and observation of how pipes "cut jaggedly" (177) through the wall between the duplexes. In these he transfers some of the mad slashing of his fantasies to the means of gaining access to Annette. With the order of her neat home on one side and his mental chaos on the other the house begins to assume the character of Frankie's personality, split into two chambers by the wall.

The sexual disorientation evident in Frankie's obsessions with feeding and cutting, as well as the division of his personality, are brought together and confirmed during the Princess's act. Staged in a tent remote from the main activities of the fair, the performer isolated and at a distance from the crowd, this is to be an extension of Frankie's unsentimental North American education by textbook. With genitals that resemble a mouth, simulating pain as if being cut by her "slice" (170) of gum, the Princess sets the stage for Jean-Louis to effect the permanent split in his son's personality. Having watched her create two personae with her pair of mouths, those of ventriloquist and dummy,

Frankie is ready. With his son at the most vulnerable psychological moment of his life, Jean-Louis cleaves:

> "'Here I take you to something I thought you'd like, something any <u>normal</u> boy would like, and — .'" (172)

Confirmed in his sense of his abnormality, Frankie is left to reflect on the gulf between the Old World and the New. From this crucial moment he orients himself on Paris and the past, his grandfather and the Sentimental Education.

Frankie's manoeuvres around the duplexes, which merely seem to locate him comically in the wrong places at the wrong times, actually serve as a miniature geographical prelude to his realization after the fair that he is psychologically in the wrong place (North America) at the wrong time (not the nineteenth century). Amusing as they may seem, his efforts to achieve the correct perspective at the duplex wall produce a serious irony in that, once gained, the peephole reveals not Annette, but through her his father.

Consideration of "A North American Education" is the most appropriate way to end this discussion of Blaise's short stories since it deals with both the major psychological predicaments that have emerged so far. Frankie Thibidault, like Sutherland, is preoccupied with the idea of a missing generation, and like the protagonists of the other nine stories he is also psychologically divided, his swift humiliation at the fair revealing once again "the frailty of identity". Working from a central image of division, the

Princess as both ventriloquist and dummy, Blaise gradually reveals the full extent of the split in his young narrator's personality.

The Princess is also a central geographical image in the story. Her name a statement of southern pigmentation and a virtual replication of the traditional southern greeting, the Princess is the embodiment of the south. Blaise emphasizes the geographical roots of Frankie's psychological deterioration by pointedly setting the fair a few miles over the Ohio river in Kentucky, thereby making the occasion indisputably "southern and shoddy" (168).

Because he is young Frankie cares enough about the damage done to his identity to resort to psycho-navigation, abandoning the squalor of his father's south for the fancied grace of his grandfather's north. For the brutal southern sexual experience Frankie substitutes a Parisian <u>deniasement</u>, and for the southern climate, which spawns only corruption, he substitutes the invigoration of the cold day in Quebec when the one photograph he has seen of Boniface was taken:

> I have seen one picture of my grandfather, taken on a ferry between Quebec and Levis in 1895. He looks strangely like Sigmund Freud: bearded, straw-hatted, buttoned against the river breezes. It must have been a cold day — the vapor from the nearby horses steams in the background. (164)

In this short passage Blaise sets down the main terms of reference for all the short stories discussed in this thesis. By locating Frankie's grandfather so exactly in time and

place, and by giving prominence to climate and the river, Blaise makes clear the importance of geography in his writing. By comparing the old man to Freud he makes clear the need to interpret it through psychology.

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