

The Short Fiction of Desmond Pacey

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Between January 1937, the year before he graduated from Victoria College of the University of Toronto with his Bachelor of Arts Degree, and 1972, when he won the Lorne Pierce Medal, Desmond Pacey published thirty short stories.¹ The first one, "Homecoming," appeared in *Acta Victoriana*² in January 1937, and the second, "And the Gods Laughed," in the same journal sixteen months later, April 1938, a few weeks away from his graduation. Twenty-eight were published in nine magazines, reviews, and journals: one in *Farmer's Magazine*, three in *Queen's Quarterly*, one in the *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, one in *Hilltop*,³ four in *Canadian Forum*, one in *Northern Review*, one in *Dalhousie Review*, thirteen in the *Atlantic Advocate*, and one in *The Fiddlehead*; one was broadcast in the "Canadian Short Stories" series by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and later printed in his first anthology *The Picnic and Other Short Stories*, and one was published for the first time in this same anthology. A second anthology, *Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay: Selected Stories of Desmond Pacey*, was published in 1974. Stories have been selected for inclusion in *Atlantic Anthology*, *Beckoning Trails*, and *Stories with John Drainie*, and some stories have been translated into German.⁴

The quality of Pacey's literary work is also substantial. It is interesting to observe that his published stories do not contain experimentation, but follow the traditional mode of storytelling without flashback, montage, or stream of consciousness, devices that he was very knowledgeable about, and that were popular during the thirty-five year period in which he created his stories; his skill with the traditional method so absorbs the reader that the question of innovation does not arise.

His plots are simple: all contain a single central incident through which the protagonist experiences a change in fortune, a modification in his character through his external behavior, or a shift in character as a result of his thought

¹A complete list of Pacey's short fiction appears on page 15.

²The Undergraduate publication of Victoria College, University of Toronto.

³*Hilltop* is published by Port Perry High School in Port Perry, Ontario. The periodical began in April 1948 and is continuing.

⁴This is a significant output considering that other demands on Desmond Pacey's time included his extensive academic development; study and reading; other creative writing: poems, children's verses, and a play; literary criticism: books, editing, sections of books, over sixty-seven articles, ten encyclopedia contributions, and miscellaneous critical letters; administration: chairman of the Department of English at the University of New Brunswick, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Vice-President of the University.

processes.⁵ Pacey has seven stories that are *Plots of Fortune*: three are Action, and four are Pathetic plots. The Action plots, the "what-happens-next" type with little character development, thought, intellectual, and moral emphasis, are "When She Comes Over," "The Ghost of Reddleman Lane," and "The First Date": light, suspenseful, surprising, and humorous; these stories are delightful reading. The four Pathetic plots, "That Day in the Bush," "The Brothers," "Parade," and "And the Gods Laughed," focus on sympathetic protagonists who experience misfortune and suffering that is the result of factors beyond their control: these four stories are the closest that Pacey's fiction approaches to naturalism; our fears for the characters materialize as we acknowledge human frailty, and experience sorrow and pity.

The second major category, *Plots of Character*, has eight stories: two are Maturing, five are Testing, and one is Degeneration. "The Mirror," and "A Summer Afternoon," have sympathetic protagonists who tend to be weak-willed, too self-conscious, but who receive necessary direction for growth. The reader feels pity for the character combined with satisfaction that the story ends happily for him in the present and—now that he has experienced maturity in this particular area of his life—will continue into the future a wiser person. The other five stories in this group have plots involving a test of the protagonist: "On the Roman Road," "The Test," "The Candidate," "A Moment of Love," and "The Lost Girl." All protagonists are sympathetic, strong persons, who are purposeful, but faced with a major challenge that causes the reader to wonder if the right choice will be made, the challenge met, and the character remain steadfast. (The high quality of Pacey's art is indicated by the fact that all succeed in a realistic manner without the aid of a *deus ex machina*.) The third category, Degeneration, has only one story, and it is the first story that Pacey wrote, "Homecoming," and the only story of the canon that has a protagonist who is selfish, unsympathetic, and excessively proud: all of his other characters are the opposite.

The third and final group, *Plots of Thought*, contains fifteen stories, half of the total: four are Education plots, nine are Revelation, and two are Affective. Education plots—"No Young Man," "The Field of Oats," "Aunt Polly," and "The Weasel"—employ sympathetic protagonists who change for the better in terms of their conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, after being faced with a threat. There is relief and satisfaction for the reader when the protagonist, after appearing inadequate, overcomes the threat and emerges a new, and better person. The second subdivision, Revelation, has nine stories: "The Picnic," "The Black House," "The Misses York," "The Hired Man," "The Odour of Incense," "Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay," "The Boat," "The Life and Death of Morning Star," and "A

⁵Norman Friedman's division of plots into fourteen categories, (intended primarily as a critical tool in the analysis of novels), is useful in this study because it permits sharp distinctions among the rich variety of experiences in these thirty stories. For the definition of his terms see "Forms of the Plot," *Journal of General Education*, 7 (1955), 241-53. Professor Friedman divides plots into three main types *Fortune*, *Character*, and *Thought*. *Fortune* "refers to the protagonist's honor, status, and reputation, his goals, loved ones, health, and well being. 'Fortune' is revealed in what happens to him—happiness or misery—and to his plans—success or failure. 'Character' refers to the protagonist's motives, purposes, and goals, his habits, behavior, and will, and may be noble or base, good or bad, sympathetic or unsympathetic, complete or incomplete, mature or immature. 'Character' is revealed when he decides voluntarily to pursue or abandon a course of action and whether he can indeed put his decision into effect. And 'Thought' refers to the protagonist's states of mind, attitudes, reasonings, emotions, beliefs, conceptions, and knowledge. 'Thought' is revealed either omnisciently, as in many novels, or in what the character says when stating a general proposition, arguing a particular point or explaining his view of a situation." *Fortune* has six categories: Action plots, Pathetic plots, Tragic, Punitive, Sentimental, and Admiration; *Character* has four: Maturing, Reform, Testing, and Degeneration; and *Thought* has Education, Revelation, Affective, and plots of Disillusionment. Professor Friedman defines these with great care and points out significant differences between each.

Fellow of Christchurch." In each story there is a sympathetic protagonist who evolves out of ignorance—the degree varies with each story—to knowledge by the discovery of some truth that leads him to make a favorable decision, or to rest content in the acquired knowledge. The stories in the Affective mode, "The Silo" and "The Trespasser," end the canon. Both contain sympathetic protagonists who—to their own surprise—change their view of the antagonist by discovering a truth that has been hidden to them.

This brief categorization reveals some interesting points about what Pacey includes in his plot structures, and what he excludes. Under *Plots of Fortune* Pacey uses only two of a possible six: Action plots and Pathetic plots; the former has character change for the better, and the latter reveals a sympathetic protagonist who is trapped by forces largely beyond his control. There are no Tragic plots, in which a strong-willed hero suffers misfortunes as a result of his own decision—as in "Othello," no Punitive plots in which an unsympathetic, satanic or Machiavellian protagonist meets his deserved end and we are happy that he does; nor Sentimental plots in which the hero is a suffering victim whose hopes materialize, and there is joyous relief that virtue receives its reward; and finally, in the *Plots of Fortune* category, there are no Admiration plots in which the sympathetic protagonist rises out of a repressive condition to better fortune through unexpected effort, and therefore receives respect, honor, and admiration. Thus, *Plots of Fortune* are limited to simple action and adventure, and pathetic heroes who experience undeserved misfortunes.

Of the four divisions under *Plots of Character* Pacey uses the positive Maturing and Testing plots, and avoids the negative Reform mode, whose protagonist is a pious hypocrite, imposter, or charlatan. The final mode, Degeneration, has a strong, purposeful character in the Degeneration plot who suffers a crucial loss, and makes a decision that reveals him to be unregenerative. Of the eight *Plots of Character* stories two are Maturing and five are Testing plots in which the hero meets a challenge and triumphs: only his first published story is in the Degenerative mode and expresses a negative attitude, an important indication of authorial attitude.

The final category, *Plots of Thought*, is half the canon, and all stories contain sympathetic protagonists who experience crises, make difficult decisions, and achieve new, significant knowledge and growth. The plot of Disillusionment is not found among any stories: the hero, who in his full bloom of faith and ideals, is threatened, cannot meet the challenge, and falls into disillusionment and despair. The created vision in the thirty stories has sympathetic characters at its center, who are innocent, strong, but gentle people; they experience difficulties, overcome them, and grow in knowledge and wisdom.

Within this tapestry, however, there is another noteworthy division of the stories into a group of twenty-six and a group of four. This distinction is significant because of the difference in tone and the effect of plot between each group. The first, the dominant group, places a character, usually an economic, and often a socially disadvantaged person, in a position where he is tested, and the protagonist *always* rises to meet the challenge. There are no two challenges identical, or even similar in plotting: but the effects form a pattern that suggests the importance of positive action regardless of odds or outcome. Sometimes the characters succeed—to their surprise—and sometimes they do not, but the growth resulting from the effort elevates the protagonist to new self-awareness and confidence. These twenty-six stories are similar in their single revealing incident, and deeply serious tone.

The second group comprises four stories that differ from the first because of their light, humorous incidents, and playful tones: they are "When She Comes Over," "The Ghost of Reddleman Lane," "The Odour of Incense," and "Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay." The plots of the first three produce comic surprise and shock for the protagonists, while the last has multiple humorous incidents in a classroom setting.

Pacey's plots in the twenty-six stories, however, are deep and significant. Two stories, "The Test," and "Silo," are about married couples who experience economic difficulties and struggle against forces beyond their control, that—ironically—draw them together, and they go forward with better understanding of themselves, and of each other, and with renewed love. Most of the stories, however, contain a plot that focuses on one person. The well-intentioned father in "The Picnic" is shocked to learn how he, by luck, has avoided a serious automobile accident, while another man, in similar circumstances, is in prison pending his trial for manslaughter: an irony of fate. The tired professor in "No Young Man" unexpectedly learns about death through a movie film in a theater; a lonely, alienated, impoverished farmer in "The Candidate" surprises himself, and his neighbors, by running for election: he loses, but raises his self-esteem, and his image in the community.

A few incidents focus on the moment of death: "The Life and Death of Morning Star," is a parable, flowing out of the memory of the protagonist at the time of death of his favorite horse, and the valuable work done by the animal throughout its life—work that gave meaning to its having existed; and "Aunt Polly," which highlights the unusual charity and gentleness of a poor aunt. Both stories stress the importance and value of life, and the need to accept the death of someone you love as a natural event, and to get on with the responsibility of living.

The plots frequently contain boys or youths as protagonists. Of the thirty stories, ten involve boys of elementary school age, three of high school age, three concern university students, eleven are about individual men and women, two focus on married couples, and one on a kind old man. The most successful stories are short, and there are twenty-eight of these; long stories, like "A Fellow of Christchurch," and "A Summer Afternoon," tend to contain ruminations on the trappings of the settings, and dilute and dispel the potential energy and intensity of the stories: they are burdened with extraneous material. Pacey is at his best in short work. Fortunately, he was brief in twenty-eight of his stories. The two longest works also contain protagonists who are professors, and academic backgrounds as integral elements of plotting, and these particular characters and settings are his least satisfying *as stories*; they have appeal to those of us who are teachers of English, because of the many literary references, settings and academic atmospheres; but the experience is more one of being at home than it is of reading a fresh work of art. These two plots tend to be less real, more superficial and casual, than deep and permanent.

Pacey generally uses setting externally as background, and atmosphere to reinforce his themes. Seldom is it used internally, but when it is, as will be seen, it is done quite successfully. His stories are set in two countries: ten in England and twenty in Canada. Four of the English group are set in Cambridge, three in Oxford, one in the small Midland town of Collingham, one in the village of Girton, and one in Nottingham. The Canadian settings are predominantly rural, with fifteen on farms in Ontario and five spread across the country from a "small raw Western Canadian Town," to Toronto, to Winnipeg, to a busy beach on Prince Edward Island, and finally to Halifax.

Pacey's choice of setting is a particularly important aspect in the ultimate achievement of his stories. He has refined powers of observation, and almost always selects appropriate touches of detail that he integrates artistically into his work to express his themes. But, as with most writers, he achieves more success with some settings than with others. The strongest are his Canadian, and especially his rural Ontario settings, where nature, the farm, the family, the school, the neighbors, adults, children, and young people, blend naturally and smoothly into the fabric of his work: the details are natural, intrinsic, and dynamic. Perhaps it could be speculated, with some assurance, that this success with setting is the result of his having lived in rural Ontario during the most sensitive, impressionable, and formative periods of his life: as a young boy and teenager—his elementary and high school years—and these form the major portion of his stories. A few examples will suggest his touch; in "That Day in the Bush," a story involving a father and young son who plan to cut some trees in the bush—with unexpected, pitiful results—the brief, accurate detail produces mood and empathy: the boy awoke in the cold farmhouse early on the morning of New Year's Eve, "dressed quickly in his overalls, workshirt and sweater, and went downstairs. His father had already lit the kitchen stove and the boy sat close to it as he put on his shoes. Then, slipping on his cap and mackinaw coat, he went out to the barn." The reality of the setting—the cold, the clothes, the stove, the boy enjoying the comfort of the warm kitchen stove, and finally putting on his mackinaw and having to leave this warmth for the cold—is given in sparse, perfect details to produce the early morning atmosphere and mood. These details are enhanced by the description, and smells, of the warm barn: "The barn was warm and moist with the breath of horses and cattle, and full of a predominantly pleasant odour made up of the mingled scent of hay, ensilage, and straw." The comfort and security of both of these settings are reinforced by the familiarity of the machine shed, and trance-like quality of the beautiful morning:

After breakfast he and his father collected the cross-cut saw and two axes in the machine shed and headed for the bush. It was a perfect morning for cutting wood. The air was crisp and clear, there was no wind, and the temperature was well above zero. The snow was fresh but not deep enough to be a nuisance: about two inches had fallen in the night and made a loose brilliant covering over the three or four inches of more closely-packed old snow beneath.

The youth and the man trudged silently down the lane, each deep in his own thoughts. It seemed to the boy that the farm had never looked so beautiful. The branches of the hickory, maple, and elm trees beside the lane and along the fences in the fields were powdered with the light snow. The dark grey barns of the next farm stood out in vivid outline against the white background of the surrounding fields. Here and there were clumps of bush, a dull blue-grey against the brighter and lighter blue of the sky.

There was a trance-like quality in the whole scene. They alone moved; they alone made a sound as their boots crunched softly in the snow. The fence-posts, like sentinels, kept watch over the silent fields.

The boy is enclosed in the security of his home, his barn, his shed, the company of his father, and the joy of comforting and consoling nature: even the fence posts serve as guards and suggest protection and security. The routine, rhythmic movement of the cross-cut saw is enhanced by the "sweet scent of the sawdust":

His father chopped a wedge out of one side of the tree, and then they picked up the cross-cut saw and began to pull it back and forth against the other side. Pull, let slide, pull, let slide, pull, let slide—the slow rhythm of the saw seemed to blend with and even to enhance the dream-like atmosphere of the day. The light yellow sawdust dribbled out of the cut as he pulled his saw back, dribbled out in firm serrated fragments which gradually formed a dark yellow stain as they mingled with the snow. The fresh sweet scent of the sawdust was pungent in his nostrils.

This setting, especially that of nature, affects an unguarded, lulled, lax attitude in the boy—a silent web which traps him—so that even the dust “reddish brown . . . stain on the snow . . . almost the colour of blood . . . its odour . . . musty and decayed,” does not trigger a warning of nature’s fickleness and treachery. Pacey’s setting here, and elsewhere in the fifteen rural Ontario stories, becomes more than background: it functions as a persona performing an essential act in the stories, and his writing frequently achieves, as it does here, a poetic level; Pacey is at his best when setting is integrated dynamically into the story.⁶ The boy in “That Day in the Bush” must learn the lesson that emerges repeatedly in Pacey’s stories: the cold, hard, indifference of nature to mankind; the irony of blind fate intruding callously into man’s life and plans; it is man who *must* learn to adapt to the laws of nature, of living, and dying.

Setting in the remaining fourteen rural Ontario stories functions most often as an active participant, and occasionally as passive background-creating atmosphere, environment, and mood. In “Silo” a sudden and violent tornado, hitting at the end of the equally ravishing depression of the 1930s, destroys a much needed silo, and ironically changes a failing marriage into a successful one. In another story, “The Field of Oats,” a boy, in an act of pride, challenges nature to emerge a brief victor, but loses, ironically, much more than he had agreed to wager. The tragic death of the hired man in “The Boat” is the result of the natural setting, and the power and hidden destructive potential of nature, which was incorrectly calculated: again man did not adapt to his environment. When Pacey uses the natural setting as an active character there is usually a clash between man and setting—a test—the survival of the fittest, and man invariably loses to nature, but ironically, in some stories, achieves ends, and successes unhopd for, and in some instances, unthought of. Nature as participant is also dynamically evident in “The Test,” and “The Weasel.”

Setting as place and atmosphere is artistically used in the remaining nine rural stories with such stages as a picnic ground, farmers’ fields, schools, villages, churches, houses, barns, stables, and countrysides. In each instance, Pacey’s deep knowledge of the setting, and the degree to which a protagonist would, or should, be aware of his surroundings, is artistically employed to present a background of proper proportion with other ingredients of the story to assist his protagonist work out his destiny to the pleasure of the reader. But this high degree of success is not uniformly achieved when his protagonists are adults in urban surroundings, and especially—strangely enough—as was seen above, when his central characters are professors. Four of the remaining five Canadian stories take place in urban settings: Winnipeg, a small Western town, Toronto, and Halifax. In the first two of these the setting is passive: Winnipeg streets, a restaurant and a movie theater in the first, and a living room in the second: both are frameworks for the struggling protagonists, and neither has the vibrance of the rural settings, even when they are simple stages for the actors. The urban

⁶Allowing for obvious differences, this active participation of nature reminds the reader of nature’s involvement in some of Sinclair Ross’s stories of farm life in Western Canada: see for example “The Lamp at Noon,” and “The Painted Door.”

settings seem weak, artificial, as though they were not deeply pressed, and integrated into Pacey's psyche with the same love and affection, or even hate and discord, found in the rural settings; this weakness is true of the protagonists as well and will be discussed below under characterization.

The Halifax and Prince Edward Island settings return to the quality of the Ontario background. Again, the success is partly due to an affinity and empathy that Pacey must have had with the type of person he is writing about: a boy in the first, and a kind old man in the second. "The Odor of Incense" is set in a strange house—as perceived by a twelve-year-old boy—who, with his mother, has just arrived in Canada and is searching for accommodation. The house participates in an active, eerie, frightening way; the building is well calculated to slowly engross the reader, and convince him of the reality of the boy's apprehension.

The final story in the Canadian group is "The Lost Girl." The setting—a crowded beach in a National Park on Prince Edward Island on a hot summer afternoon—is artistically integrated into the fabric to present a microscopic view of a wide and varied collection of humanity from which Pacey selects and contrasts three levels of sensitivity: callousness, indifference, and kindness; the result reinforces the general view of human relations and morality in Pacey's stories.

The English setting that forms the second group of stories supports both the strong and weak, active and passive settings, discussed thus far: but there is a new element as well. The ten stories may be divided by general setting into four at Cambridge, three at Oxford, and three in small nonacademic communities.

There is a significant difference in the degree of success with the use of setting among the Cambridge group. "On the Roman Road" is impressionistic, reflecting the changing psychological states of a young father who has just received a telegram informing him that his mother has died. He continues with plans to take his wife and children on a picnic, and to prevent spoiling it, has not revealed the contents of the telegram to them. The momentum of the story, and the slow mutation of the father's mood to a calm, clear, adaptation to the incredibility of death, and a new appreciation of the joy of living, is created by his children whose joyful experience of the setting is juxtaposed to his own. The setting is totally integrated into the fabric of this story, as it is in "That Day in the Bush": a pleasure to read for both theme and technique.

The second and third stories in the Cambridge group make excessive, self-conscious use of the university grounds, buildings, and literary references, in a manner that is, perhaps, as was discussed above, interesting to the academic, and especially to the professor of English, but is intrusive for the expression of the themes: the result is lack of intensity. The protagonist is a professor of English from Canada who is entranced by the Cambridge trappings. The first paragraph of "A Summer Afternoon," for example, contains a reference to "E. M. Forster," the second, to "Byron's Pool," the third, to "Chaucer's mill," the fourth, to "The Reeves Tale" and to Jonathan Odell in Fredericton; these references continue, and are added to, with "Yeats' 'Leda'," an eight line quotation from Donne's "Exstasie," eleven lines from "The Reeves Tale," a comment on *Howard's End*, Rupert Brooke, and finally, an association of the female character's appearance in "The Wife Of Bath's" tale. These references are decorative rather than organic, and tend to form a significant barrier to the expressions of the theme. They seem—I hesitate to say because the quality of the majority of Pacey's stories is so high—pretentious, even ostentatious, and therefore detract greatly from the quality of the story.

This slight stumble in Pacey's short fiction is a hazard that catches many writers: a natural unconscious nostalgia that carries the writer back to some meaningful place, associated with some significant time, or event, in his life; although it is vital to the writer's life, it is only of passing interest to the reader: this is the problem in "A Summer Afternoon," and "A Fellow of Christchurch." Pacey's personal experience at Cambridge University, his attachment to the surroundings with their enchanting academic qualities and cultural traditions—and his love for literature—are understandable and perhaps shared by many of us, but they are overworked and extraneous in these stories. The central themes are slight, and are vehicles to carry the nostalgia.

These two stories, it is interesting to note, are the longest in the canon—especially "A Fellow of Christchurch," which is three times the length of any other story, and replete with detail about the University, academia, professors, students, and especially about Christchurch. The themes of both stories are worthy of expression in short fiction if the excess were trimmed from these settings.

The final story in this group of four involving Cambridge University, is a delightful revelation of how two persons can slip into an affair without, perhaps, being fully conscious that it is happening. It is humorous and charming, short and intense. Cambridge University is mentioned once and dropped. The setting is the house of a young Irish couple from whom the student wants to rent a flat in preparation for the arrival of his future wife. The young Irish landlady is very attractive, anxious to please, hospitable and companionable. The student is lonely. The landlady's husband is a traveling salesman away from home all week. These traditional ingredients are handled with charm and integrated smoothly into the setting of house and bedroom.

The three stories comprising the Oxford group make passing reference to the university and concentrate on three integrated settings, each of which is a private home. The first, "The Trespasser," is an upper-class pretentious home belonging to a woman who is a snob and a gossip. The young boy protagonist, who is from a modest working-class home, is blinded by the glitter of upper-class life, and inflated that he has been invited to the home: the result is humiliation and embarrassment. "The Misses York," and "The Black House," are set in working-class houses in which fear of death in the first, and old age and loneliness in the second, are the central motifs. Each story uses the house setting effectively.

The final two stories of the English group are set in a village and a small town: "Aunt Polly" is the first, and "The Ghost of Reddleman Lane" the second. The first takes place in a warm, friendly home, reflecting the personality of an especially kind, personable woman, Aunt Polly; the second moves from a home during a heavy, dark, rainstorm at night, into an eerie lane: settings most appropriate for the appearance of a ghost. The ten stories comprising those set in England make effective use of setting with the two noted exceptions, "A Summer Afternoon," and "A Fellow of Christchurch."

Pacey's narrative style may be divided into two principal groups with subdivisions within each group. The first is the dominant type containing twenty stories, all of them third person, neutral, omniscient, with scenic details, and usually told from the point of view of one of the protagonists. The tone is warm and sympathetic. Nine of the twenty are related from the viewpoint of adults in a variety of occupations, five of boys, two teenagers, one university student, and three university professors.

The second group contains ten stories, and all are first-person dramatic voice, with only one from the center of consciousness of an adult, but five from the perspective of boys, one teenager, two university students, and one that follows a time frame from early life through adulthood.

The dominant narrative perspective from which Pacey writes is that of adults with thirteen stories in all. Their differences in voice, and quality, however, demand a subdivision into ten about adults in various vocations, and three concerning professors: the latter are the weaker of the two groups.

Stories told by boys and teenagers are generally his best; there are fourteen of these, and his most successful mode with them is first-person dramatic voice: they are most alive, most distant from the author, most believable, and most absorbing; a few examples will indicate the empathy they project to the reader.

In the title story of *Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay*, the first-person narrator, and dramatic participant, is an adult looking back at his school days in a small village school. Dramatic participation is produced through the eyes of the boy at the age of eight. He talks about three teachers, and their interaction with the school rowdy, Archie, who is a mature twelve years of age: far more mature and bold than the teacher can handle. The artistic success of this delightful story is largely the result of the narrator's naive dramatic implication in all situations, and most significant, his perception of teachers, students, authorities, and school. The charm of the story is his unique perceptual "window," or his view of life, which is colored by his age, limited experience, naivete, respect and fear of teachers, Archie, the principal, and the parents—and his natural curiosity about sex. It is interesting that narrative summary and scenic details are used for over half the story before dialogue is employed. Summary of this length in a short story—or in a novel—is testing reader interest; but Pacey is able to maintain a continuous high level of empathy *because* of the boy's perceptual view.

This same intensity of reader participation is produced by "Aunt Polly." An adult recalls this sensitive, warm woman, through the eyes of a seven-year-old boy. His natural response to her love is immediately engaging, and his profound sorrow at her death is deeply shared. The openness of the innocent boy allows the qualities of Aunt Polly to reach the reader without adult distortions of jealousy, prejudice, or other perceptual handicaps that are prevalent among other characters in the story: the work, therefore, is partly a contrast between the closed hardness of adults, and the open innocence of boyhood.

The remaining first-person dramatic narrative stories are startling revelations to the protagonist of the ironies of fate. The shock through sudden awareness of reversal of fortune is conveyed to the reader through powerful immediacy. The events in these and all of his stories are revealed as they occur without use of stream of consciousness, flashback, or montage. The effect of Pacey's method—the oldest and most familiar style of storytelling—is a naturalness that draws the reader readily into a framework of reality and truth. Roy Daniells's helpful "Introduction" to Pacey's *The Picnic and Other Stories*⁷ places his narrative technique in the tradition of Canadian short story writers from the earliest found in the *Library Garland* through to Sinclair Ross. He also points to Katherine Mansfield as having had a dominant effect on Pacey's style and themes.

The central communication in all of his stories is warmth, understanding, and sympathy for his protagonists. In fact, characterization, and the portrayal of

⁷Desmond Pacey, *The Picnic and Other Stories* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1958), pp. v-ix.

particular types of historical people, is the primary motivation and aim of his stories. This was conveyed clearly to me in a letter received from him during preparation of his collection *Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay* for publication: "One of the chief purposes of all my stories is to bring back to life characters I have known,"⁸ and I feel certain this is what he has done. From this resource he conveys a realism, and integrity of characterization, that largely contributes to his success.

The range is wide and the portrayal is deep. All major stages of life are included: childhood, youth, early manhood, middle-age, and senior citizen: and there are an abundance of activities and occupations including students, teachers, professors, parents, farmers, doctors, lawyers, business people, politicians, and church ministers.

Of the five age groups, the first involves ten stories of boys of elementary school age: one is a story of a boy actually in school, three are visiting the homes and surroundings of friends and relatives; two are working on their family farms; three are in farm surroundings, and one is with his mother in a boarding house in a strange city. The second age group contains three stories about youth of high school age: one is on his first date, a second conveys the conflicting experience between high school exams and planting a field of oats; and one has just graduated from high school. Pacey's diversification continues with a third group: three stories about Canadian university students studying at Oxford and Cambridge. A fourth group contains thirteen stories about adult men and women, three of whom are farmers and their wives struggling with extreme poverty; three are professors in academic pursuits; three are family men who confront challenging personal problems, and two are single men in urban settings. The fifth and final category is a simple story about an "old man" on a crowded beach in Prince Edward Island.

These five age groupings, and vocational patterns—along with the geographical settings—closely follow the life experiences of Pacey himself. The young boy and his mother emigrating to Canada, arriving in Halifax and renting a room in a boarding house, "The Odour of Incense," is an imaginative re-creation—or perhaps a factual representation—of one of Pacey's first experiences in Canada. The eight-year-old boy in elementary school in "Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay" is typical of an Ontario rural school, an experience that Pacey would have had. The five stories concerning boys living and working on Ontario farms—similarly with the three high-school students—all reflect his Ontario experience. The three university students at Oxford and Cambridge, the three farmers, and two married farm couples, the three professors—two in England and one in Winnipeg—the three fathers, the two single men, and the old man on the beach in Prince Edward Island—all, as he said in the letter, are people and places he has known; the result of this bringing "back to life characters I have known" is a realistic source upon which his imagination worked artistically to a smooth and pleasing finale.

The protagonists are intelligent, uncomplicated, open, honest, perceptive, loving persons, who, because of these very positive traits, expose themselves to life experiences that are often pleasant, sometimes bitter, and always maturing. Naivete and vulnerability are major factors in the learning experiences in the ten stories about boys. The eight-year-old protagonist in "Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay"—a superior student—allies himself with eight-year-old, cursing, swearing Archie, the toughest "kid" in the school, and "I just didn't fancy getting beaten

⁸An unpublished letter to Frank M. Tierney of October 17, 1972.

up by such a tough little bastard, so I went along with him. When he cracked a joke, I laughed. It was as simple as that." Under Archie's tutorship in the village school, the protagonist evolves from an intelligent, naive six-year-old, to an intelligent, worldly twelve-year-old.

Under various circumstances his boy characters learn about the complexities of life: unselfishness in "The Hired Man," violence in "That Day in the Bush," treason is "The Weasel," friendship in "A Moment of Love," kindness in "The Boat," truth of the intuition in "The Odour of Incense," mystery in "The Ghost of Reddleman Lane," hypocrisy in "The Trespasser," and love in "Aunt Polly."

Diverse experiences test and mature high-school students whose ideals are significantly tempered by reality: embarrassment is experienced in "First Date," pride in "The Field of Oats," and humility in "The Brothers." The unique characteristics of the three university students are less vividly drawn than those of the preceding two groups, but the enlargement of their experiences in their excursions along the road of life are no less important. As we are introduced to them we learn that their lives thus far have shaped certain assumptions, and perceptual handicaps, that are suddenly exposed to them; their knowledge of life, of people—and themselves—is broadened and deepened. Old age and loneliness pricks the sensibilities of the student in "The Black House," another experiences the reality of premonitions of death in "The Misses York," and finally the invisible web of seduction in "When She Comes Over."

Pacey published thirteen stories about people in the middle, or working years, of their lives. Each of the stories, in different ways, and with varying intensities, expresses the frailty of human beings, the challenges presented by fate, the limitations of human knowledge, and the resonance of the human spirit to accept truth, and setbacks, and to rise up and continue to meet life's revelations and hurdles with positive action. These challenges manifest themselves in multiple ways, as in political failure in "The Candidate," the sudden revelation of the transience of life and finality of death in "The Life and Death of Morning Star" and "On the Roman Road," the frustrating struggle against a cruel nature, and subsistence farming, for a farmer and his wife in "Silo" and "The Test," the accident of fate that causes one man to be destroyed and another to escape unscathed in "The Picnic," the inability to face life at all in "And the Gods Laughed," the injustice of society in "Parade," the pride, hypocrisy, and jealousy in the "Homecoming," and loneliness, in an aging professor of Oxford in "A fellow of Christchurch," insecurity of aging and loneliness of a fifty-year-old Canadian professor visiting Oxford in "A Summer Afternoon," and the sudden realization of the reality and importance of death in "No Young Man."

The final story, "The Lost Girl," presents to the observer the assumptions, prejudices, misconceptions and ungratefulness of a woman and her husband whose lost child has been found and cared for by an elderly gentleman: the kindness and gentle wisdom of the old man is contrasted with the selfishness and cold ignorance of the couple, and the theme made manifest.

Pacey's protagonists, throughout his thirty stories, are drawn with successful contours and complexities, and convincing histories and motives. They are all-around characters that have the incalculability of life about them, that move us emotionally in worlds that are diverse and abundant. They are drawn in differing degrees of depth and vitality; but his boy and youth characters are his best: they are fresh, dynamic, vital, responding to their world in ways that surprise, even shock, the reader and their epiphanies are drawn clearly and sharply, and remain, therefore, alive and meaningful. The three stories about university professors,

however, do not contain character impact equal to the other twenty-seven stories, nor do they have the same universal appeal. The protagonists are certainly real professors who portray the roles of their profession, but their experience is not expressed in a manner that is made either deeply moving, or essential to their lives. These three stories are not failures however; they contain interesting plots, colorful settings, pleasurable undulating tones, and appropriate narrative styles. But there is in the two Oxford stories, for example, such a heavy emphasis on literary detail, as was discussed above under setting, that characterization tends to become sidetracked; but these three are notable because of their minority: the twenty-seven are successful, pleasurable, character portrayals.

The antagonists in the stories are fate, war, hypocrisy, death, ghosts, politicians, fear, pride, and excessive self-interest. The most common antagonists are selfishness and pride, an inordinate attachment to worldly things that unbalances the protagonist, causing spiritual blindness and vulnerability to error and misfortune.

Background characters are well chosen in each story to support the protagonist and theme. The variety is surprising: husbands, wives, children, parents, sisters, brothers, teachers, professors, farmers, politicians, house guests, holiday-makers, boys, girls, and friends. They are well-designed flat characters who are representative of a single idea or quality, are easily recognized people who step out and strike their ideas quickly, are unchanged by circumstances, and after serving their brief but important roles, move silently back into the fabric of the story. They are simple, static characters as in the stories about farming, and complex, social, urban people in the remaining works.

Short stories seldom lend themselves to the effective use of card characters,⁹ being limited by length and singleness of plot and characterization, but Pacey has two that are larger than life, and ends in themselves: Archie, in "Waken, Lords and Ladies Gay," and the aging "Fellow of Christchurch." Archie and the Professor are essentially comic characters who have no self-consciousness, no shame, and would repeat their bold behavior and outrageous acts without hesitation: they represent—especially Archie—the incorrigible in each of us. They are not simple characters however: Archie is treacherous and sinister; the "Fellow" is comic and pathetic. They are tonics in their simpleness, in their vivaciousness, and enjoyable ends in themselves, as well as essential to the revelation of the protagonist.

Nine stories have the additional dimension of employing ficelle,¹⁰ or loader characters: those who are more fully drawn than background characters, more sharply individualized, who exist to serve as a means to an end, and are functional beyond simple background roles; the unfortunate truck driver in "The Picnic" represents that segment of humanity who is victimized by fate, while many of us—who are equally guilty—escape; the aging husband and wife in "The Black House" convey the message of the old and lonely, who are silently waiting and hoping for communication with the general stream of society—or better—with their family; the perceptive guest in "The Mirror" serves as a reflection for the egocentric and self-conscious condition of humanity; the hospitable "Aunt Polly"

⁹A useful term employed by Henry James, and used effectively by W. J. Harvey, to isolate that type of character who is "larger than life," changeless, simple or complex, comic and sinister or comic and pathetic, vivacious, "triumphantly himself," and an end in himself. This kind of background character is found for example throughout the works of Charles Dickens: see W. J. Harvey's *Character and the Novel*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965).

¹⁰Harvey, *Character and the Novel*. A touchstone for character analysis by Henry James, it is developed as an effective tool by W. J. Harvey for critical analysis of character in fiction.

represents the loving person who welcomes you into her home openly and contrasts with the selfish and the greedy; the wise neighbor in "The Candidate" who encourages and motivates people to growth and fulfillment; the humble youth in "The Brothers" who silently sacrifices his future for his brother; the apparent friend in "The Weasel" whose betrayal has universal and archetypal significance; the transient worker in "The Hired Man" represents wandering, lost people who suffer like a "homeless dog that's been whipped by somebody and doesn't know why"; the hired man in "The Boat" suggests those generous, kind, sensitive persons who befriend their fellows, and are later coldly deserted: both hired men express the sad condition of the outsider, the loneliness of not really belonging to a home and family, and the pain of being rejected. Pacey has caught and focused splendidly on this isolation, and loneliness and despair.

These nine ficelle characters reveal much about the moral base of Pacey's stories, and a great deal about his perception of people and life. They represent the underdogs, the underprivileged, the humble, the loving, the lonely, the desperate, the gentle, and the kind people in the community: they are also the most attractive. They are mirrors, by contrast, to selfishness, hypocrisy, greed, power, and pride in the protagonists, or in characters being observed by the central figure in the stories.

The completed tapestry of Pacey's short fiction has at its center a moral design around which is woven, a deep understanding of people, a rich, positive charity, a sincere tolerance for humanity in our fallen, vulnerable condition, and—in spite of our weaknesses and failures—strong optimism for our future.

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