

RELOCATING THE NEW ANCESTORS

Robert A. Lecker

I am not interested in adjusting your gunsights," says a voice from *The New Ancestors*;¹ "the eyes you were born with are clouded by sand." We may be blind, but no more than this arrogant sharpshooter who insists that perception might be adjusted towards a single vision of the truth. Unlike this particular character, Dave Godfrey suggests that every point of view must be accounted for. He presents the world as the sum total of human experience. At one point, Godfrey's Michael Burdener might well speak for his creator's own approach to the world of his novel:

I tend to conceive of the multiplicity of the world as infinitely patterned, infinitely purposive, with no iota of neutral territory. Within this construction, I sway and flicker from action to contemplation, from hatred to vast love, from confidence to paranoia. (p. 85)

The book becomes an inventory of contradictory perspectives left for us to accept, reject, and order. This experience of structuring and restructuring the narrative in which *The New Ancestors* encourages the reader to partake is directly related to the experiences of the multiple narrators of the novel — they too must constantly reformulate their perceptions as new information is acquired. Caught in "the litter of the co-mingled world" (p. 23), they must deal with more data than they can absorb, with memory lapses, with prejudices, with their physical placement at a scene, and with a host of other narrative complexities. In a novel comprised of interrelated stories which are ceaselessly retold and called into question, the concept of an orderly unfolding plot becomes as absurd as the notion of truth. Godfrey directs us to nonlinear processes of perception, to the idea that all telling modifies what is being told, and to the fact that what is told is always the telling. The juxtapositional quality of Godfrey's work has its roots in Henry James' million-windowed house of fiction and in what Erich Auerbach, when speaking of Virginia Woolf's novels, has termed a "multipersonal representation of consciousness." But *The New Ancestors* is more closely aligned with the *nouveau roman* movement in France and with a number of modern schools of French thought. Godfrey also practices a form of mythopoeia which ties his approach to the concerns of writers such as Faulkner, Frye, and Joyce. What follows is an attempt at seeing *The New Ancestors* within some of these interrelated contexts.

Roland Barthes' *S/Z* and *The New Ancestors* share more than the same publication date — Godfrey is practicing in fiction the pluralistic methods that Barthes seeks to employ in criticism. At every turn in *The New*

¹Dave Godfrey, *The New Ancestors* (Toronto: new press, 1970), p. 341. Subsequent page references to the novel will be given in the text.

Ancestors, we are told, in one way or another, that "lectures begin, or perhaps stories" (p. 315). Godfrey is emphasizing that all verbal utterances are texts united through language. The Lost Coast world of the novel and the universe at large are gigantic sets of texts which can never be completely assimilated or completed, for man continues to alter the text so long as he interprets it. The situation becomes increasingly complex as we realize that the "I" which confronts the text (the reader, the character, the author) is itself a conglomeration of other texts, of codes which are, in Barthes' words, "infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)."² For Godfrey, everything in the text of *his* lost coast is significant; everything possesses infinite meaning-giving potential. Plurality is recognized as the primary fact of life.

If *The New Ancestors* seems confusing, the reason is that its narrative codes are constantly colliding. Burdener carries within him the voices of many conflicting cultures, he hears the past in the words of his present, and he sees his life as one set of values but knows it as another. Gamaliel Harding is simultaneously the "defender of Lost Coast against invective" (p. 59) and a perverted drummer who "deserved nothing better than to be murdered" (p. 10). The beat of Harding's drum dies with him early in the novel, yet paradoxically it continues to live. Its rhythm is unstable — partly in tune with American Coca-Cola culture, partly tainted by politics, partly obsessed with freedom. Ama Burdener actually blends her voice with that of Mercredi, a childhood friend. Moreover, Ama is a synthesis of the child and the lover: to the Awotchi innocence of her youth she adds the "burden" of her married life. It is not only the voices comprising each character which intermingle ceaselessly; *The New Ancestors* is a vast mélange of religious, aesthetic, legal, symbolic, and cultural voices, each calling to each. Together these voices form a literary language which assumes the status of a myth.

In an early work entitled *Mythologies*, Barthes asserted that myth is a form of speech which serves to distort history and to indoctrinate the masses into a prevailing bourgeois ideology. He insisted upon the need for mythologists who would expose the underlying ideology and demystify language, thereby returning it (and society) to a prior state of freedom. In *The New Ancestors* Godfrey acts as the mythologist who attempts to transcend the language of the present by restating and recapturing those voices which have been threatened with extinction. On one level, this explains the inclusion of phrases in dialects entirely foreign to most of us. By disrupting the traditional linguistic sequence, Godfrey prompts us to search with him for all that has been lost. It is no coincidence that most of the action takes place within the boundaries of Lost Coast. Metaphorically, Godfrey suggests that we have lost sight of that land where language is associated with our origins. To rediscover Lost Coast is to rediscover ourselves in our history. As a mythologist, Godfrey's function is revolutionary and political; only by destroying an orderly sense of language can he find the source and reinstate the original text, the uninhibited tribal chant not imposed from without but born from deep within us. To this end Godfrey consciously subjects us to an information overload, to an onslaught of propaganda in the form of newspaper articles, speeches, doctors' reports, school lessons, letters, diaries, draw-

²Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 10. The French edition was published in 1970.

ings, and photographs. The effect forces us to question the information until we reject the messages and become aware of the medium's actual politicality.

Barthes has said that in creating and extracting meaning we repeat patterns and participate in structures which have existed since the beginning of time. To discover such structures is in itself a meaning-giving process. Throughout *The New Ancestors*, Godfrey remains aware of "an ancient pattern of patterns, of the universe revealed" (p. 315). He is constantly examining the governing principles, the rituals, the written and unwritten laws, which combine to define our milieu. *The New Ancestors* is a paradigm for the literary analysis of social systems. It is remarkable for the number of organizations to which it introduces us: tribes, cities, governments, subversive factions, churches, restaurants, schools, market-places — the list is impressive. Yet it is important to realize that Godfrey is not seeking answers or statistics so much as he is formulating questions. He aims to interrogate the world, not to name it. The novel will retain its plurality and its momentum only so long as questions are posed, only so long as Godfrey can provide us with a potential equation such as " $(X = \frac{k}{2m} + a + b)$ " only to kill the answer before the question is posed by telling us that "this is not it" (p. 362). Burdener leaves his students with this important message: "... the key is always questioning. If you learn this then your very innocence, your very ignorance will be beneficial" (p. 132).

The questioning of and the quest for universal laws and patterns extend beyond structuralism into anthropology. Godfrey has said that "*The New Ancestors* is full of borrowings from anthropologists,"³ and two names come to mind immediately: Claude Levi-Strauss, because his brand of anthropology throws new light on the structural concerns we have discerned in Godfrey's novel, and Mircea Eliade, because her *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* brings us to the realm of myth and archetype so central to the mythopoetic vision.

Again, we may take our cue from Burdener, who advises his students (and we are among them) to "look for laws. Trace the animal inwards" (p. 134). Levi-Strauss was also searching for laws — those which governed the relations between people and people and between people and things. When he focused his attention on myths dealing with food, he discovered that the introduction of cooking marked a decisive step in man's passage from nature into culture. In a similar manner, Godfrey insists that the approach to foodstuffs is an important indication of culture, or, more accurately, of "culturalization." Thus the anthropological perspective also has political significance. In an earlier book, *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, Godfrey uses the name of the beverage as a metaphor for a whole set of unspoken cultural codes. In *The New Ancestors* the dominant drink is Fanta Orange. Without belabouring the point that Fanta is, as the company so proudly proclaims, "a product of the Coca-Cola Ltd.," we must still note the deep associations which Godfrey is making between drink, place, time, and politics: "There's no bottle of Club to be bought in all of Dierra"; "Kruman can't even make beer, they say here. And who would drink Star?" (p. 185) The whisky bottle is also revealing. The Dugan brand "showed a black man in a kilt on the label" (p. 211). Milk is transformed into "the peace offering of Carnation cans" (p. 292). The

³Graeme Gibson, "Interview with Dave Godfrey," in *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 173.

story of what people consume in *The New Ancestors* (not to mention the never-ending consumption of drugs) is simultaneously a story of oppression, of scarcity, of imperialism, of diplomacy, and of ruin. To extend this kind of analysis briefly, we might also look at the kinds of play which take place in the novel, for, as anthropologists also tell us, play is an indication of cultural development. Never do we see an African game. The country is beset by chess, cricket, basketball, and gymnastics. Needless to say, these games indicate the presence of the same foreign domination implied by Godfrey's use of brand-name foods.

Although Godfrey can distinguish a society by its foods and "sport," he is more interested in uniting what appear to be diverse social orders by revealing, in the structural anthropologist's sense, "a picture of the world already inscribed in the architecture"⁴ of the human mind. Godfrey finds that the mental patterns of the contemporary man are much like those of his neolithic ancestor. Magic and science are presented as forces derived from a profound sense of logic. Both are seen as parallel modes of acquiring knowledge. Mathematics, chemistry, physics, zoology are all rituals with their own laws, gods, and ancestors. Burdener's lectures on science are equally political, but to his students they are also magical. The world to which he introduces them remains as mysterious and as unexplained as any fantastic kingdom. His abstract equations align themselves with the great unknown. The teacher is perfectly interchangeable with the prophet, and the psychoanalyst is but a witch doctor, an exorcist who speaks on behalf of his patients to unseen potent gods. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Godfrey's "treatment" of Delicacy Harding. Delicacy's "confession" to Dr. Champs represents for her another *abisa* with the *obosomfo*. The "good reaction" she experiences with "intravenous amylal and methedrine" is a purification of her soul, a *nohyira*. By refusing to separate witchcraft from medicine and by seeing possession and purification as forces present throughout time, Godfrey asserts the timeless dimension of his story. Levi-Strauss has noted that the end of primitivism may be marked by a growing consciousness of time. Indeed, the Redeemer of Lost Coast advises his followers that to progress they must "advance one hundred years in ten" (p. 134). Godfrey, it would seem, is not in entire agreement with the Redeemer; for by distorting chronology he tries to make us abandon the traditional search for progress, sequence, place, and date.

Eliade says that modern man (like Kruman the Redeemer) "sees in the history that precedes him a purely human work and, more especially, believes that he has the power to continue and perfect it indefinitely."⁵ In contrast, "for the man of traditional societies everything [is] significant — that is everything creative and powerful that has ever happened took place *in the beginning*, in the Time of the myths."⁶ Only through a process of initiation do men become conscious of those myths which combine to form a certain conception of the world, a sacred history or mythology which is exemplary and paradigmatic. By having his characters confront a variety of myths, Godfrey hopes to present his new ancestors to us in the course of their initiation.

⁴Claude Levi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit* (Paris: Plon, 1964), p. 346.

⁵Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. xi.

⁶Eliade, p. xi.

Too often, however, the mythology to which Godfrey's characters are introduced is all but exemplary. Early in his youth, Michael Burdener is initiated into manhood via the myth of rape. He remembers how Sister Marcella walked far afield with him in the spring, "far beyond the war, far beyond the weeping of children in the night" (p. 23). But the garden is destroyed. Foreigners "sodden in their strange French" brutalized the woman and "took their pleasure in the destruction of her garnered purity" (p. 25). Burdener is never to forget the rape: "... I do remember most clearly and always shall that instant when the small boy was dropped to the earth as the men shifted, and fell, once and eternally among those unknown odours, his own manhood surging into existence" (p. 26). Later, the rape scene which coloured his childhood is transferred to Africa itself. For him the country is a treasure which has been plundered, a purity which has been defiled. The French who subdued Sister Marcella reappear again as Germans, Americans, British, and Chinese, all of them cruel imposters. The myth repeats itself. As the rapists gazed at Sister Marcella, so these men would gaze at Africa, "not lecherously, but as though something could be possessed quickly that had not been possessed before" (p. 24).

Not only Burdener, but also Gamaliel Harding comes to know the myth of rape: "the whitemen came to Africa," he tells us, "... tearing families apart like paper, and plundering the land, and robbing it of its gold and human flower" (p. 208). Kwame Bird Lady Day (Gamaliel's son) bears the usual signs which mark his initiation into African manhood: "Ribbed. With scars. *Carte d'identité abstraite*" (p. 79). Yet to be a man in Lost Coast, one must learn a new myth — the myth of Unity, the arguments in favour of "Ode ye Ado. The Redeemer." As Kwame mouths his catechisms, we realize that an important aspect of initiation is the introduction to a knowledge of the gods and religious behaviour. The Redeemer is seen by his followers as a kind of Christ, but he also represents the power of any mythical god. Similarly, the African religious rites echo those of Christianity. The *obosomfo* is the priest who hears confession (*abisa*) and makes purification (*nohyira*) possible. The preliminary bath of purification at the Ntforo Shrine is a form of baptismal drowning.

Initiation often involves a kind of ritual death followed by resurrection. Such a death provides the novice with a means of joining his ancestors; it is a means of returning to history. *The New Ancestors* opens with Harding's death, yet he returns to life. Burdener is initially deported, but much of the Lost Coast story is his, or resurrected by him. Clearly, what we encounter in the novel is the birth, death, and rebirth of a number of *textual* bodies. As readers, our own initiation involves us in an encounter with *The New Ancestors* itself as both a myth and an oracle. To "come of age" we not only must hear the stories it contains, but also must participate in its narrative cycles. Indeed, the mythical world can only be narrated, for it is actually a form of storytelling which has its origins in the fabulous, in those folk tales, fairy tales, and fantasies which contain the forgotten language of childhood. To create a fiction is to participate in the mythmaking process itself. It is to rejoin our youth, as well as to refashion our ancestral fables.

In his recent study entitled *The Secular Scripture*, Northrop Frye re-emphasizes his belief that literary structures are modelled on patterns established in the Bible and mythology. The tendency of *The New Ancestors* is to support the kind of mythopoeic connections of which Frye makes use.

Through his characters and through the very format of his novel, Godfrey insists that "I can carry only so much within my narrative. . . . You too must prepare your secular scriptures" (p. 372). One thing Frye stresses is that by participating in stories we become creators — in fact that "we are the creators"⁷ of the scriptures we live. *The New Ancestors* is full of creations (poems, jewellery, fabrics, music), but it also contains its share of creators. Every character is a narrator and the author of his own experience. With any one of those characters, we might well ask, "But where is the connection in their reports?" (p. 391). One reason that we find the data offered to us by the text in perpetual contradiction is that each narrator operates according to a different story, each story being, of course, nothing less than the creation of "his-story." There is no reason to suppose a correlation between the tales other than that they are "cogitative nodes" thrown together by coincidence. Yet each story has the capacity to become someone else's. Ama's tale tells us more about Michael than it does about herself — his story invades hers. Dr. Champs' case history of Delicacy is but a self-analysis. To this effect Burdener notes: "Which of your own fantasies are recorded in this process, which of your own needs and fears? My rational man. My good doctor" (p. 78). Burdener's "Agada Notebook" is a form of confession which shows him to be an equally disembodied soul. His voice is enslaved to recalling the attitudes and energies of others.

Frye observes that "creation is essentially a recollection of memory," a "return to the beginning"⁸ in the Proustian sense of creative repetition, a *recherche*. Recreation plays an important part in *The New Ancestors*, and, frequently, Godfrey provides his characters with memory tokens which, like Marcel's Madeleine, trigger a recollective vision so powerful that the past becomes the present. There is a constant tension between immanence and permanence. In the "Child of Delicacy" section, a set of plastic dishes, some kapok pillows, a dusty radio phonograph, and "the long-word sentences of Warden's *History of Lost Coast*" are the keys which allow Ama to enter into a fragile world of memories and dreams relived. From event to event and consistently for pages, Ama reinvents and re-experiences the stories of her past in which ". . . each incident, each memory, seemed always the wide tip of some immense wave rolling forward and sideways in attack at the same instant, always threatening to inundate [sic] the mere incident with a mass of other memories and then smash it all up on the beach in a perfect tumble" (p. 93). Sometimes the *recherche* takes the form of an obsession. Burdener cannot see a child without returning to the death scene of his own son, Cricket. And that scene, in turn, repeatedly calls forth Burdener's own childhood, a memory of youth destroyed. It is a "bump backwards in darkness towards darkness" (p. 30).

Beyond the activities of its characters, *The New Ancestors* recreates its textual self. Previous narrative sequences return to intrude upon the moment, or a momentary vision suddenly submerges a description of the past. Such regressions and progressions transform the creative repetitions of the novel into patterns of circularity and cyclicity. Although the internal chronology is subjected to the greatest distortions, a simple examination of the most prominently dated sections reveals two things: the simultaneity of events and the circularity of action. Concentrating for the moment on the latter, we can see that the narrative movement begins with

⁷Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 157.

⁸Frye, p. 175.

the "Prologue" (February 5, 1966), backtracks to the "London Notebook" (Summer 1965), and then still farther back to Delicacy's case history (1964), only to return in "A Child of Delicacy" to the original date — February 5, 1966. Then the return begins anew, so that "Freedom People's Party" spans the year 1965 and the first two months of 1966. With the final notebook, we rearrive at 1966, not only close to the beginning of the narrative, but also near its middle. We leave Burdener as he returns to start his life "afresh in fear and fantasy" (p. 392). The same kind of movement takes place in Proust. As Frye notes, part of the recreative act involves the fact that "the narrator comes to the beginning of his book at the point where the reader comes to the end of it."⁹

In *The New Ancestors* the presence of creative cycles implies a search for the father as the original creator and the source. There is an irony in these related quests: the revolutionary, random, and disordered activities which involve the narrators lead ultimately to a vision of patriarchal stability. In the midst of oscillating memories, Ama sees her life pattern as that of the "orphan woman" who searches for her father, "a rock in the surf" (p. 96). Delicacy Harding, as she raves and dances, still has made the pilgrimage to the *obosomfo*, an authority figure who will reinstate an equilibrium which has been lost. Her cry for her real father, for "m'agya, m'agya," is repeated two generations later by Kwame Bird Lady Day. Gamaliel Harding's own paternal needs have been focused on the Redeemer who, in Gamaliel's eyes, is the father *par excellence* — a god leading his believers towards the promised land through knowledge, love, and power. As a child, well before the onset of his fluctuating neuroses, Burdener is reminded by his father that he is not only a son, but also "first and foremost a son of God" (p. 18). Later, he carefully restates this fundamental lesson in the presence of Cricket: "I am the son of god and you are the son of god and god is the son of god, so that we will all be well, all will be well, we are all in his hands, we live in his hands, if we do not know what we are doing he does and it is for good . . ." (p. 31).

In the mythological universe of *The New Ancestors*, the quest for the father represents one aspect of the search for archetypes, or for what James Reaney has called the "secret alphabet or iconography or language of symbols and myths."¹⁰ Towards the end of the novel, the boatman emerges as a prominent archetypal figure continuing the voyage begun by Odysseus. Because we have actually met the figure not once but recurrently in literature, we can quite honestly be told that Ali Tartari is "the honest boatman we have been informed of long before now" (p. 342). Predictably, he leads his passengers up the Niger river in a metaphorical search for meaning, and thus the voyage has an epistemological significance. As in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the navigation of the Niger in *The New Ancestors* becomes an existential errand, an excursion into the realms of knowledge and action. Through this process, we see "Jung-deep mysteries of the Nile itself finally revealed clearly, as clearly as algebraic equalities" (p. 389). In the sense that it is a perceptual expedition, or a search for new stories and texts, variations upon the boatman theme appear throughout the novel: taxi drivers carry us through the streets of Agada, or chauffeurs drive us onto Lost Coast roads that wind through city and country. Godfrey also provides us with several narrators who act as boatmen, each guiding us along some new route towards some different

⁹Frye, p. 174.

¹⁰James Reaney, "Editorial," *Alphabet*, No. 1 (September 1960).

worldview. The book comes complete with introductory maps. Actual roadways are cluttered with signs and symbols, "yellow lines, circled bumps, and squared depressions" (p. 2). As readers, we too must interpret the map, decide what paths into the narrative we will follow, reject those signals which seem to point us wrongly. Conversely, we must experience every way, participating in a ceaseless journey over all space and through all time. As we are told, ". . . think only of the voyage which awaits you, which searches for you, which lusts for you, and yet which possesses you tomorrow as it possesses you yesterday as it possesses you today" (p. 375).

The myth of the perpetual voyage introduces a complementary archetype — that of the wanderer. As "a seafarer who lacks a sea," Burdener can announce that he is "ready at last for the desert" (p. 85). Like Joyce's Bloom, all of the characters in *The New Ancestors* are searching for more than a homeland; they are obsessed with the usurper in their home. Cast out of his house, the Lost Coast wanderer can return home only when the imperialist ceases to bid for the body of Africa with his promises, his gifts, or his propaganda. As he moves through the streets or ventures up the river, the wanderer comes into symbolic contact with a multiplicity of signs related to the world at large. His surroundings assume the status of the universal and become a microcosmic image of the whole. The marketplace to which Godfrey frequently refers us serves the same purpose as Dublin or Yoknapatawpha. All of Lost Coast is seen as a market where ideas, products, and people are bartered, bribed, sold, fought over, born, made love to, and buried. Godfrey's analysis of "the social complexities of the market in various decades" (p. 371) is more broadly the social history of a changing African state.

During the course of his voyage, the wanderer does not always proceed in a linear or even a circular fashion. Sometimes he heads straight downwards. Frye reminds us that part of the "recovery of myth" involves a descent into a lower world of cruelty and isolation. *The New Ancestors* takes us on this journey as well. Aside from the obvious red light districts, the entire novel presents us with a vision of a physical and emotional hell, a *basa-basa* world filled with fire, torture, disease, nightmares, depravity, and the like. To complete his picture, Godfrey adds an excremental dimension. From the stains and stench of dysentery, we move to corroding "cruds of shit," on to "putrefaction," and then to vomiting at the sight of a dead man. The presence of excrement is symptomatic of a more pervasive sense of decay and sickness. We know that we have entered a world of conflict because of a simple fact: "Disease does not enter the peaceful man" (p. 320). But in *The New Ancestors* the bodies of men go bad. Rusk is left for the flies in the heat of the desert sun; a poisoned lover writhes as his limbs contort in pain; Burdener is filled with such sickness that "even the bones of his legs were hollow" (p. 379). Like Lowry's decaying consul, Burdener himself knows that "into nothing less than this could he disintegrate. No matter what tortures" (p. 378).

Not only man, but also the physical world is falling apart, rusting and returning to the earth. On this form of descent Burdener comments: "We live in the Iron Age and are approaching an age of Rust. Or of Rust and Dust . . ." (p. 385). Lorry after lorry is consigned to the junkyard, vehicles lie in ditches, and engines cease to run. The connection between men and phenomena becomes increasingly important. Burdener may not be "enough of a phenomenologist to escape two decades of analytic training" (p. 58), but it would appear that Godfrey is. He grants to objects a

particular status which allows them to define themselves through the very fact of their presence. Man does not organize the physical world around himself. Rather, men and phenomena situate each other as mutually immanent.

It is precisely this treatment of objects which links Godfrey's novel to the experimental *nouveau roman*. In *The New Ancestors*, as in the French New Novel, the objects presented are actually the contents of a series of consciousnesses — those of the various narrators. We are not given the narrators or the objects in themselves, but the narrators-seeing-them. Thus an object is significant only insofar as it becomes part of the consciousness which perceives it. Frequently the consciousness itself is approached as an object to be held up for inspection: "the observed mind is my mind" (p. 24). Because the visible world appears in constant flux, the narrators cannot possibly record reality. Instead, they set out to invent it. Thus the novel becomes a dramatization of the creative process itself. If we are deceived, the reason is that the narrator has deceived himself: "A difficult explanation of why I am perhaps about to lie to you? If I lie to you I lie to myself" (p. 24). Godfrey invites us to make the comparison between his approach to fiction and Robbe-Grillet's. He writes of a character who sees himself "as though I were a human Leica, turning and snapping, zooming and focusing, although in actual fact I did not turn my head once, all things appeared in front of me, as though my world had become this *jalousie*" (p. 57). *La Jalousie*, of course, is not only one of Robbe-Grillet's novels; it is his word for a perceptual standpoint. Godfrey's characters are frequently voyeurs who force us to peep with them through a keyhole. If the action becomes obscured, the voyeur substitutes his own fantasies and obsessions and imposes them upon us. The novel actually scrutinizes a series of cognitive encounters between subjective and objective experience. The narrator comments not only on what or who is seen but also on how he sees himself seeing. Hence the repeated notion that "one can see one's mind imagining," or "one can regard one's mind observing" (p. 304), is central to the book at large. Speaking of his own attempt to bridge the gap between the perceiver and the perceived, Burdener refers to himself in the second person: "You were creating your camera and could not yet become both cameraman and subject" (p. 382). At another point, he sees his past self as a foreign being placed beside the "I" of his present: "He replaced the netting. I replaced the netting. He left his son. I left my son" (p. 32). Every narrator in *The New Ancestors* is a cameraman experiencing this problem, producing movies of his own mind and photographs of his surroundings which can never be perfectly synchronized. Instead, we find a constant oscillation between subjective and objective poles.

Cinematically, the corollary of the return or recreation is the replay. The character watches himself act in his own film. Burdener becomes the viewer and says, "I see myself running" (p. 51). As readers, we ourselves "have already seen the scratchy rather incomplete movie" (p. 337) of the novel, or, as we are informed in another context, "we have heard this many times" (p. 336). Godfrey keeps his meaning plural by showing us every picture regardless of its quality — everything is permitted. Photographs which record the same event in contradictory and mutually suspicious images form an important part of the text. The juxtaposed photographs are successful to the extent that they suggest as many interpretations as the model itself does. One narrator is fanatically preoccupied with magnifying numerical details. He produces a close-up of a mutilated corpse which

shows "seven flies on the left eye, all of them in minor motion; four on the right eye, all but one in minor motion; three about the mouth. Fourteen fly about the left leg at the amputation point; six others have landed or are resting. Seven have taken positions at various points on the right leg, including three in a concentration about the open sores of the right toe-stubs" (p. 373). Another cameraman precisely records the compositional relation between forms. For him, "the deeply recessed square window" is nothing until he situates it "2.7 meters to the right of the low doorway" (p. 323). Sometimes, the photographer is negligent, or an amateur. If he forgets to wind the film, we get a superimposition; if he shoots into the sun we see a blackened landscape; if he refuses to change positions, we must console ourselves with his single point of view. The preface to a descriptive passage may read "this photograph is blurred" (p. 327). Or we may be told that "Effez's photographs show a recurrent failure of the automatic light meter on his East German 35mm 'averages' for the whole area [its field of vision]" (p. 371).

Godfrey is pointing out the inadequacies of our own perceptual apparatus. We cannot see everything in perspective — our vision is framed by history and culture. These limitations apply equally to the author. Godfrey appears to share Michel Butor's view of the novelist's predicament. As he writes, the author gains new insights which he feels compelled to make part of his work. But this integration, once completed, only results in the production of added insights which in turn must be incorporated in the creative process again and again. Like the best of the *nouveau romans*, *The New Ancestors* can be read as a story about the complexities of telling stories. The discovery of each new outlook reminds the author that the whole is constituted by a vast field of convergent individual perspectives. Moreover, each character's own viewpoint is a ceaselessly shifting composite of all the truths he has ever known. The effect of this is to throw the whole concept of self into question. Ama realizes that because the self is always changing it can never really be found: "We don't know who we are . . . Because the moviemind that dreams the dreams changes the you that goes seeking after those dreams, so that when that very you catches them, if it does, it has a different moviemind now and the screen goes black just when the colours are brightest" (p. 114). Burdener states the problem in terms of physics, but the message is the same: "Once the observer becomes a part of the system which he observes, his every measurement distorts that system slightly and renders his data invalid for a second point of time, a second determination of energy or mass" (p. 320).

While situations such as these might prompt the narrator-as-cameraman to maintain that he is "only responsible for the moment" (p. 371), the author knows that he is responsible for a great deal more. Somehow he must produce a "photo album" which organizes or at least collects a series of random moments. He spills the snapshots onto the table and invites us to help him discover when they were taken, how they are ordered, and why they came to be. This implied demand for logic reminds us of the paradox we noted earlier: the need to achieve a plural meaning that is fragmented and constantly evolving actually indicates a traditional desire for stability and reason. Thus the relationship between the movable and the fixed assumes a dialectical format. The new ancestor acknowledges the universe as a great drama of motion, but in so doing often pictures himself as the spectator who remains constant before the action. To understand real order, however, it becomes essential to

recognize the meaning of chaos. What Ama refers to as the "law of constant constants" is always set beside an unspoken law of the fleeting instant. The new ancestor does not achieve stability, but neither does he abandon himself to the absolute uncertainty of flux. He remains a divided spirit who seeks to become whole. The *Bhagavad Gita* passage which introduces the "Fifth City" section is most appropriate to this ideal. It speaks of the "infinite joy of union" man will achieve when "he sees himself in the heart of all beings and sees all being in his heart" (p. 303). What drives each of Godfrey's characters on is a remnant of this belief in unity. Burdener is the modern man whose physical disintegration parallels the decay of personal identity. To reconstruct himself, Burdener looks for continuity and the sense of his own evolution. His lessons concerning the origins of the species are really directed inwards. By analyzing the stages of his own development, he hopes to see himself as a product of the natural unfolding of time. Gamaliel Harding argues for collective unity. The divided individual becomes a divided country in need of solidarity. As the Redeemer's spokesman, Harding favours an authoritarian regime which will respond to the heritage of Lost Coast: "In Lost Coast, we recognize and love our President, our State, and our God. These three elements form ONE ENTITY in our lives, and there is NO DIFFERENCE" (p. 209). By unity Harding means that there must be "ONE ENTITY" in the present, but also "NO DIFFERENCE" throughout time. This view of progress is really no view of progress. Harding is actually describing an ideal picture of primitive constancy which makes no distinction between beginning and end. He speaks for tribal stability. Ama Burdener's words are above all a plea for emotional security. She lives in a perpetual dream of bygone friendship and love. Only by rejoining Michael can she awaken to present reality and the possibilities of future experience.

Godfrey's deepest themes are all connected with Ama's search. *The New Ancestors* is actually a series of awakenings and discoveries. As we have seen, Godfrey is most concerned with resuscitating time. He suggests that by bringing the past to life through memory, archetype, and myth, man can find the stable patterns that will guide him in the present and provide a basic framework through which he can approach an uncertain future. In fact, modern man cannot help but become an ancestor as he is succeeded by others in time. If the continuum can be relocated, so can our sense of identity. As Godfrey's characters are initiated into the past, they simultaneously become self-aware. This is the most important part of the voyage which Godfrey describes: to be self-aware in *The New Ancestors* means also to be receptive to the totality of human experience, not only in terms of the individual but also in relation to all mankind. Godfrey's attempt to synthesize several perspectives complements his effort to combine a number of historical (and by implication ancestral) worldviews. He becomes involved in the quest for awareness implied by his own creation. He partakes in the search for a more harmonious state whose precise location remains unknown.